

Breaking Silence: Asian American Poetry In the Late 20th Century

Ava Chen

Philips Academy

Introduction

During a 1994 Tufts University presentation, Chinese American poet Marilyn Chin said, “Think of how many essays there are on Maxine Hong Kingston; then think of how few essays are devoted to the whole genre of Asian American poetry.”¹ With what Chin described as the “fear and loathing of poetry,” Asian American literary critics almost exclusively discussed the prose fiction, nonfiction, and even screenwriting of authors like Kingston in book-length studies and academic journals—but very rarely engaged with the work of Asian American poets. Even within the narrow field of Asian American critical literature, poetry remained disproportionately underrepresented, and thus underestimated in its role in history. Yet Asian American poetry of the late 20th century embodied a crucial component of Asian American justice and identity exploration.

A rapid influx of Asian immigrants caused the Asian American population in the United States to skyrocket from 880,000 in 1960 to 3.5 million in 1970, foregrounding social change.² Indeed, long suppressed by injustices ranging from Japanese internment and police violence to the pervasive ‘model minority’ myth, a collective desire for justice had been stirring in Asian American communities for decades. With the concurrent rise of anti-imperialism and movements for Black, Latinx, and other minorities’ rights, Asian

Americans unified to spur a newfound movement for Asian American equality in the early 1970s. Galvanized, Asian American poets authored fiery collections of poetry, enriching this movement with explorations of its anti-hegemonic sentiment and interracial alliances, as well as powerful deconstructions of historical oppression. They ultimately helped dismantle stereotyped Asian complacency in favor of establishing multifaceted conceptions of Asian American identity and culture.

Silence and Exploitation

At the end of World War II, the majority of Asian-centered literature promoted offensive and whitewashed Asian caricatures. Hollywood depictions of Asian characters like the villainous Fu Manchu tended towards “the ridiculous, the exotic, and the sinister,” as Joseph Bruchac, editor of *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, characterized.³ ‘Chinatown books’ like Lin Yutang’s 1948 *A Chinatown Family* and C. Y. Lee’s 1957 *Flower Drum Song* watered Chinese characters into a stereotyped docility.⁴ For instance, in *A Chinatown Family*, Yutang’s Chinese protagonist, Tom, repeatedly dismissed historical violence against 1800s Chinese American railroad workers as inconsequential in face of living in the shamelessly mythologized America.⁵ Upon waking in New York as a recent immigrant, Tom praised the city as “Wonderland,” gawking at “flying

[trains]" and characterizing them as "unbelievable" and a "miracle."⁶ Later, in face of financial crises, Tom resorted exclusively to working "long hours (heaven be thanked that there was no law against that!)"⁷ He cheerfully rationalized every hardship with the glory of the American Dream, playing into the complacency white narrators enforced upon Chinese Americans. Such representation grossly overinflated and oversimplified the desire to become American within Asian headspaces, to the extent of overwriting their heritage, generational trauma, and even sheer physical injury and illness.

Yutang's literature perpetuated the 'model minority' myth, or the myth that Asian Americans had achieved economic stability through hard work and "adaptation rather than confrontation," as an article in the Asian American periodical *Gidra* stated.⁸ These beliefs deprived Asian Americans of a coherent cultural identity by only upholding financial success on a pedestal, while neglecting any social and cultural losses sacrificed to achieve it. Similarly, prominent political figures like President Ronald Reagan praised Asian Americans on national television as "living up to the bedrock values that make us a good and worthy people," championing "tolerance, hard work, fiscal responsibility," and "[pointing] the way to a promising future."⁹ While ostensibly appreciating the efforts of Asian Americans, such rhetoric did, in part, perpetuate ultimately detrimental 'model minority' stereotypes. *Gidra* authors criticized Regan for exploiting Asian Americans as "a buffer by the Establishment in the confrontation between racial groups," which rendered them "a scapegoat upon which other minorities can vent their frustrations."¹⁰ Furthermore, widely perceived Asian American 'success' in America, however limited or

fabricated, delegitimized perceptions of Asian American oppression and thus their resistance against such oppression. For instance, in 1969, Professor Kitano from the University of California Los Angeles claimed that "the basic problems of the Orientals are much more subtle than the problems facing the Blacks and Chicanos."¹¹ Yet Kitano overlooked the vast swaths of injustices plaguing Asian Americans from when they first started immigrating to America—from the horrors of Japanese internment, to the constant robbery and maltreatment of Chinese Americans in the early 1900s.

This glorification of success through silence not only deprived Asian Americans of cultural agency, but also convinced some Asian Americans themselves that they should exclusively embody white culture. In the June 1969 issue of *Gidra*, Edward Long authored an article that entreated Asian Americans to assimilate to white ways of life. He claimed that any cross-ethnic Asian unification was impossible, "the American life is the only life that we can accept," and essentially, that Asians should reject their own heritage.¹² Moreover, in 1972, the Japanese American Citizens League reported that "more than 50% percent of Japanese American women were marrying outside their race and that the figure was rising annually," showing how the cultural erasure of Asian Americans jeopardized even intraethnic unity.¹³ In the introduction of *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, Asian American authors Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Inada, and Shawn Wong synthesized this self-rejection and disintegration as the "partly real and partly mythical silence [of Asian Americans] in American culture."¹⁴

Not only did whitewashed vehicles misrepresent Asian Americans as a whole, but

they also manipulated interethnic tensions to white benefit, further depriving Asian Americans of a united identity. Amidst the virulent anti-Japanese sentiment in America during WWII, Chinese Americans strove to separate themselves from the treasonous stereotyping associated with Japanese Americans, seeing how “Japanese America was indiscriminately linked in confusion with Chinese America,” as the curators of *Aiiiiieee!* noted.¹⁵ This widespread conflation of Asian ethnicities with each other underscored a deeper American apathy towards racial inclusion and education. Targeting this issue’s roots required long-term social justice initiatives that Asian Americans then lacked the time and luxury to jumpstart; instead, Chinese Americans could only resist in this self-sustaining but ultimately complacent manner. Yet generating anti-Japanese propaganda and championing themselves as patriotic citizens rendered Chinese Americans as “America’s pets...kept and groomed in kennels, while Japanese-Americans were the mad dogs who had to be locked up in pounds.”¹⁶

Furthermore, even within the sphere of Asian American literature, Western media racially stratified work into two similar factions: one encompassed the assimilation-related conflict of Japanese Americans, while the other painted docile family portraits, the aforementioned ‘Chinatown books,’ of Chinese Americans. Overall, white racism had subjugated and isolated Chinese and Japanese Americans from each other. Long had recognized this separation along ethnic lines, but as *Gidra* author R. Wu later rebutted, he failed to realize that such tactics were “out of dire necessity” for protection from white oppression.¹⁷ In the same article, Wu asserted: “the Orientals are regressing into White domination. It is about

time Orientals like Edward Long get off their apathetic ass.”¹⁸

The Movement

Youth Leadership

Fiery youth leadership characterized the nascent Asian American movement, powerfully deconstructing prior representations of Asian Americans as docile and obedient. A notable catalyst for the movement was the student strike of 1968-1969 at San Francisco State University, where strikers successfully protested for the establishment of a department of ethnic studies, which would focus on the culture, histories, and identities of Asian Americans and other students of color.¹⁹ In the same year, five Asian American students at the University of California Los Angeles started the newspaper *Gidra*, whose namesake came from a Japanese science fiction movie where the panic-stricken public christened a dragon-caterpillar monster terrorizing their town “*Gidra*.” In this sense, *Gidra*’s curators effectively created a loud and metaphorical beast that amplified genuine Asian American voices; they dedicated the periodical to “the honest expression of feeling or opinion, be it profound or profane, innocuous or insulting, from wretched to well-off.”²⁰ Furthermore, emphasizing unity, *Gidra* broke down ethnic, social, and economic hierarchies in favor of a holistic response against oppression. In an article covering the 1969 University of California Los Angeles’ protests for increasing the enrollment of racial minorities, an Asian American Student Alliance spokesman said, “If we do not unite, there will be no one else to look out for us—we will be on the bottom of the totem pole.”²¹ Here, the sheer need for cultural survival, in tandem with other social shifts, necessitated urgent change and solidarity within Asian

American communities. Echoing *Gidra's* confidence, a statement of purpose by the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) stated: "We Asian Americans realize that America was always and still is a White Racist Society...We Asian Americans refuse to cooperate with the White Racism in this society."²² These repetitions of "We Asian Americans" defied Asian disunity and spearheaded a crucial shift in public representation. Making silenced voices heard, whether it be through educational programs, journalism, literature, or physical protest, encompassed the core of the burgeoning Asian American movement.

Interracial Relations

Interracial solidarity embodied another critical component of the Asian American movement. The same AAPA statement affirmed solidarity in combating oppression alongside "oppressed peoples and their struggles for Liberation...We Asian Americans oppose the imperialistic policies being pursued by the American Government."²³ Using remarkably similar language, representatives of the Third World Liberation Front, a civil rights organization including Black, Latinx, Asian, and Native Americans, emphasized how "We have made a commitment—not only to our own people, but to Third World peoples, and we are willing to stand up against the injustices...to all people of color throughout the history of America."²⁴ Allyship with similarly frustrated communities helped jumpstart and continually magnify efforts for Asian American justice.

Specifically, ideologies of Black nationalism and anti-imperialism inspired Asian American activists. Historian Daryl Joji outlined how the Black Panther Party worked to expose the United

States as a fundamentally oppressive empire and emphasized national liberation and racial self-determination, which was a moral basis on which the Asian American movement developed.²⁵ In one parallel, Asian American activists sloganized Asian pride as "Yellow is Beautiful" after the Black Liberation Movement's "Black is Beautiful."²⁶ Furthermore, interracial protests like the San Francisco strike erupted across American college campuses, marking them hotspots for change and reinforcing the movement's emphasis on youth leadership. Another protest took place in 1968 on University of California Berkeley's campus, where the Black Student Union joined forces with the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action for educational reform efforts.²⁷ Later, in 1971, Asian American students at City College in New York led three hundred Black, Latino, and Asian American students in a protest that gained free admissions for Asian American students, an Asian American Studies program, and more.²⁸ Asian American activists even harbored overseas alliances, drawing upon the skyrocketing anti-imperialist opposition to U.S. military involvement in Indochina and decolonization movements in countries like Algeria, Ghana, Vietnam, and Cuba.²⁹ Common anti-oppressive ideologies transcended race and ethnicity to form powerful, symbiotic bonds.

Nonetheless, the unique history of Asian Americans differentiated them from Black Americans and other minorities, forcing Asian Americans to ultimately independently pursue self-determination. In 1972, Chinese American writer Bill Ling discussed how while "blacks have had a terrible time identifying with the African culture so they have developed a subculture in the United States," Asian Americans held nontrivial connections to homelands, lacking the necessary

blank slate to establish a novel “subculture” in face of social disintegration.³⁰ The turbulent rise of Black Power, rife with police violence, rampant incarceration, and other obstacles, also implied the strenuous extents Asian Americans needed to endure to define their collective identity. While Asian American activists harbored the same motivations as other movements, fundamental cultural differences engendered the need to ultimately carve out a wholly Asian American space in America. Literature, in particular, provided a crucial venue for such exploration.

Emerging Literature

In response to an early draft of *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Asian American Writers'* introduction, poet Lonny Kaneko referenced the dearth of Asian American literature prior to the 1970s, “I wonder if we seemed quiet only because there was no one around to hear...I think the words have always been there, so have the feelings and ideas behind the words.”³¹ Indeed, historically, the written voices of Asian Americans strained under their suppression. Chinese immigrants carved poems into the walls of Angel Island detention cells; Japanese Americans authored creative work in World War II internment camps.³²

From within the Asian American movement emerged opportunities for Asian Americans to author and share truly liberated creative literature, transforming what may have stayed covert individual rebellions into unified, impactful initiatives. Described by historian William Wei as the “archetypal grassroots organization,” the Basement Workshop was an Asian American arts organization that led programs like the Asian American Resource Center and the Amerasia Creative Arts Program.³³ Similarly, in 1970, with goals of increasing their direct impact on Asian

American communities, members of AAPA founded Everybody’s Bookstore.³⁴ In addition to providing Asian-centric media, embodying interracial solidarity, Everybody’s

Bookstore shared newspapers like the Puerto Rican *Palante* and *Black Panther News*. The diversity of such texts revealed how widespread the use of literature was across similar anti-oppressive movements, offering precedented legitimacy to Asian American literary initiatives. In terms of published literature, one representative work was the *Aiiiiiiii!* anthology, whose philosophy drew parallels to the fire of *Gidra* and AAPA.³⁵ Flipping the normally derogatory cry of Asian American men of “iiiiiiii!” when “wounded, sad or angry,” *Aiiiiiiii!*’s curators affirmed their anthology as “[Asia America’s] AIIIEEEEE!!! It is more than a whine, shout, or scream. It is fifty years of our whole voice.”³⁶ Such efforts marked the beginning of a literary Asian American revolution. Creative writing offered Asian Americans the freedom to explore and elaborate on their otherwise nebulous identity. In researching such literature, poetry stands out as one of the most rhetorically vibrant and popular mediums; its free-form structure and fluid liberties with language allowed explorations of Asian American identity, culture, and history to manifest in uniquely unfettered ways.

Exposing and Reframing Injustice

Notable themes emerged throughout late 20th century Asian American poetry, such as how recollections of Asian American history and explosive diction choices targeted anti-Asian injustices in assertions of literary, and thus cultural, independence.

Reclamations of Oppression

Many Asian American poets centered historical oppression against Asian Americans. For example, written in 1983, Marilyn Chin's poem "A Chinaman's Chance" detailed the dangerous conditions Chinese workers faced in the 1800s during the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad.³⁷ "The railroad killed your great-grandfather/His arms here, his legs there," Chin wrote, using her grandfather's dismembered limbs to describe the trauma inflicted upon Chinese Americans.³⁸ Then, Chin questioned, "Why does the earth move backwards/As we walk ahead. Why does mother's/Blood stain this hand-me-down shirt?"³⁹ Using visceral figurative language, Chin commented on the cyclical nature of anti-Asian oppression; though workers completed the Transcontinental Railroad nearly a century before Chin was born, similar discrimination still faced Asian Americans in the 1970s and 80s. Finally, Chin pivoted to action in her conclusion with assertions of change; "*How can we remake ourselves in his image?...We shall shatter this ancient marble, veined and glorious.*"⁴⁰ Here, Chin vowed to seek justice for her ancestors by championing for Asian American rights in the present, her "We shall" rhetoric bringing to mind AAPA's "We Asian Americans" statements.

Conveying similar messages, Mirikitani, a Japanese American poet, authored "Breaking Silence," the powerful namesake inspiration for the anthology in which it appears, *Breaking Silence*, which was published in 1983.⁴¹ Mirikitani interspersed her poem with right-aligned excerpts from her mother's testimony before the

Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Japanese American Civilians:

Mr. Commissioner...
...the U.S. Army Signal Corps confiscated

our property...it was subjected to vandalism
and ravage. All improvements we had made
before our incarceration was stolen
or destroyed...
I was coerced into signing documents
giving you the authority to take...
...to take
...to take.⁴²

Here, Mirikitani referenced the 1942 detainment of over 122,000 Japanese Americans in internment camps, whom the American government suspected of traitorous loyalties to Japan amidst fraught World War II tensions.⁴³ To protect the nation from sabotage, through Executive Order 9066, President Franklin Roosevelt had authorized the Secretary of War to "prescribe military areas...from which any or all persons may be excluded."⁴⁴ Such camps ostensibly preserved national security. Yet instead of conducting more intentional searches of Japanese connections, the U.S. government baselessly incarcerated everybody with Japanese ancestry, even if they held American citizenship and had lived in America their entire lives. As former detainee and second-generation Japanese American Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga recalled, "We thought we were American citizens, therefore we were protected."⁴⁵ Yet 70,000 of the 122,000 prisoners were American citizens. Inmates lived in barren, inhospitable environments, which Herzig-Yoshinaga described being "besieged by these dust storms day after day after day" and lacking sufficient food, water, and bedding.⁴⁶

With this dehumanizing history in mind, emotionally raw recollections like Mirikitani's painted humanizing portraits of imprisoned

Japanese Americans. Later in her poem, she reflected,

We were made to believe
our faces betrayed us.
Our bodies were loud
with yellow
screaming flesh
needing to be silenced
behind barbed wire.⁴⁷

Through a rhetorical focus on external appearance—faces, skin color, flesh—Mirikitani called out the social erasure of internment, while simultaneously rejecting this erasure through speaking out. To conclude her piece, like Chin, Mirikitani pivoted towards resistance. She quoted from her mother:

Mr. Commissioner...

So when you tell me I must limit testimony
to 5 minutes, when you tell me my time is up,

I tell you this:

Pride has kept my lips

pinned by nails

my rage confined.

But I exhume my past

to claim this time.⁴⁸

Here, Mirikitani '[broke] silence' by deconstructing Japanese Americans' silence as not inherent, but a choice necessitated by pragmatism and sensibility. Furthermore, testimonies like Mirikitani's mother's eventually led to the 1988 Civil Liberties Act, which awarded reparations to surviving internment camp victims.⁴⁹ Mirikitani herself

helped reclaim humanity and justice for Japanese Americans through such emotionally resonant poetry. In her own words, during a 1976 interview with *The Asian American Review*, Mirikitani emphasized the pervasive misrepresentation of Asian Americans: "Others are constantly trying to study, talk, *write* about us, resulting in distortions, myths, and lies about Third World people Even the well-meaning outside of the

Third World cannot express the soul of it because they have not "lived in the house," and do not speak the depth of the language."⁵⁰ Mirikitani's urgency for genuine representation effectively came across in both such rhetoric and the humanized accuracy of her poetry, grounded with real and achingly personal historical accounts.

While Chin and Mirikitani called out historical oppression through a retrospective lens, other writers targeted them through retelling the historical events themselves. For instance, Inada, a Japanese American poet, drew upon his experiences incarcerated in Japanese internment camps in his poem "Legends From Camp."⁵¹ In a subsection entitled "The Legend of Lost Boy," Inada detailed the tragic story of an anonymous fellow detainee:

Lost Boy was not his name.

He had another name, a given name—

at another, given time and place—

but those were taken away.

The road was taken away.

The dog was taken away.

The food was taken away.

The house was taken away.

The boy was taken away—

but he was not lost.

Oh, no—he knew exactly where he was.⁵²

Lost Boy was an archetype representing the millions of Japanese citizens stripped of their identities into nameless prisoners, the anaphoric numbness of “taken away” conveying the shock so many Japanese Americans felt during their capture. Furthermore, Inada molded his protagonist not only as an innocent child, but someone who had lived in America their whole life. This intentional characterization further bared the baselessness of Japanese detainment. Where was the anti-American spy in children who knew America’s streets by heart? Then, moving from being captured to living incarcerated, Inada’s speaker mourned the implied death of a fellow detainee named “Buddy”: “Buddy. His dreams, his visions. He simply disappeared.”⁵³ Such stark language bared the sinister violence and erasure of internment, as well as introducing another dimension to young characters—their extinguished future potential. Nonetheless, against their inhumane treatment, the innocence of children rendered them agents of freedom and even rebellion: “The soldiers shot, and between rounds, we dug in the dunes for bullets./It was great fun! They would aim at us, go ‘Pow!’ and we’d shout ‘Missed!’”⁵⁴ The children’s naïve thus powerful gamification of gunfire helped delegitimize the soldiers’ supremacy, and therefore white control over Japanese lives, emphasizing resilience in face of horrific conditions. The ways in which subjugated Asian Americans sought agency emerged prominently in intentionally crafted narratives like those of Inada’s.

Agency over oppression also emerged in explorations of more recent and enduring systems of anti-Asian discrimination. For example, an untitled poem by Laura Ho in *Gidra*’s June 1969

issue repeated “I am afraid” to rhetorically convey the racial terror Asian Americans felt.⁵⁵

Ho wrote,

I am afraid for the smiling children
who think the sky holds only sunlight
who cannot imagine guns beneath the clothes
of strangers

I am afraid within my chest
for the sirens of the night
come upon me sleeping

...

I am afraid
for the people who will die tonight
with closed lips

I am afraid that I will learn to live
without freedom
with blood on my mind⁵⁶

Ho’s mentions of violence—“guns beneath the clothes/of strangers,” “die tonight,” “blood on my mind”—referenced the pervasive gang violence, police brutality, and incarceration that plagued Asian American youth throughout the late 20th century. For instance, in the late 1960s, hundreds of Chinese and Chinese American youth regularly gathered in a pool hall on Jackson Street of San Francisco’s Chinatown; but local police frequently barged in, harassing and beating them for little to no valid reason, generating anti-police hostility among Chinese communities.⁵⁷ Yet the failure of law enforcement officials to recognize these crimes, Asian American reluctance to report such incidents, and more contributed to a scarcity of quantitative data surrounding anti-Asian hate crimes. Through this historical lens, Ho’s

discussions of silence not only referenced the physical and cultural silencing of Asian Americans, but their oppression's erasure on a legal level. Limited data, however, did show that Asian Americans suffered the highest per capita rate of hate crimes in cities like Philadelphia and Boston.⁵⁸ Anecdotal evidence compensated for the lack of quantitative; from guttural creative accounts like Ho's, to the widely publicized and brutal murder of Japanese American Vincent Chin by two white men in 1982.⁵⁹ Moreover, the assertive first-person focus on the poem's Asian subject paralleled powerful phrases like "We shall shatter..." in Chin's "A Chinaman's Chance" and "I exhume my past..." in Mirikitani's "Breaking Silence."

Overall, the active voice and unornamented phrasing of poets like Ho and Mirikitani established intimate connections between the Asian American subject and readers. With white authors long superseding Asian American perspectives, these first-person reclamations of Asian trauma reinvigorated literary focus on the thoughts and emotions of Asian Americans themselves.

Vulgar Language

The systemic suppression of Asian American voices also resulted in controversial topics and usage of vulgar language within their poetry. For instance, Japanese American poet Francis Oka's "Ronald" employed absurdist metaphors comparing President Ronald Reagan to "a reactionary paper tiger pissing in his pants...Ronald is Hitler's left ball castrated...Ronald is Donald Duck in 'Gone with the Wind'...Ronald is psychedelic fried Won Ton with pineapple sauce."⁶⁰ Here, Oka's "Ronald is" statements used comparisons with mainstream culture beyond the Asian American community to lambast white

dominance through the lens of America's president. As poet and professor Timothy Yu analyzed, Oka constructed a centrifugal amalgamation that identified and exposed "Ronald" as the abstract but sinister body of cultural forces that oppressed Asian Americans.

Furthermore, Asian-specific references like "fried Won Ton" helped characterize Oka's work as boldly Asian American. As poet and former professor Shirley Lim cautioned, however, insincere, oversimplified, or purely ornamental usage of ethnocentric content easily slipped into whitewashed misrepresentations of Asian identity.⁶¹ Literary exoticism rang empty at best, dehumanizing at worst, with characters like Fu Manchu and Tom from *A Chinatown Family*. Yutang had opened the first page of *A Chinatown Family* with Tom reflecting on eating "a Chinese lunch followed by a Chinese dinner," and giddy reflections of "the swallowing of mouthfuls of inexhaustible rice, oiled by rich gravy and voluptuous hunks of bean curd fried in fat."⁶² Contextualized by Yutang's 'model minority' ideations, ethnocentric food-related imagery only exacerbated the Asian objectification of Tom, as opposed to how Oka's fiery criticism of American politics saw similar referencing amplify the confidence of Oka's speaker. Authorial respect for Asian American identity, whether it be through celebration or criticism of injustice, underpinned the crucial delineation between the cultural elements of poets like Oka from authors like Yutang.

Also using controversial language, Inada's poem "Chinks" used anti-Asian slurs and stereotypical Asian-accented English:

When the War came,
they said "We Chinese!"

When we went away,
they made sukiyaki,
saying "Yellow all same,"
When the war closed,
they stoned the Japs' homes.⁶³

Inada wrote this poem in the 1980s, referencing the WWII demonization of Japanese Americans against the glorification—externally and self-imposed—of Chinese Americans as loyal patriots. Despite using typically racist vernacular, understood against this background, Inada's poem became a compelling satirization of how American xenophobia sowed disloyalty among Asian minorities. The glib dismissal of ethnic identification as mutable and convenient, instead of any inherent cultural identity, again showed white delegitimization of the intricacies of Asian American heritage. Inada took ownership of white-controlled stereotypes in a way that did not necessarily justify their harm, but exposed it and thus asserted Asian American agency.

Other Asian American poets used profanity in their work. In a poem called "Phases I, II & III," published in the June 1969 issue of *Gidra*, a writer with the pseudonym "Mary" wrote: "Though their mouths remain paralyzed/in hysterical grins/their eyes scream out/'Fuck you!'/Fuck you, white for your shit existence!"⁶⁴ "Mary"'s unsettling language effectively expressed the rage beneath silenced Asian American voices. All of these explosive stylistic choices effectively reversed stereotypes of Asian Americans as obedient and docile.

The Search for Identity

In addition to combating misrepresentation, Asian Americans needed to build new, authentic

representations in their place. Thus, wielding the newfound literary agency the movement afforded them, Asian American poets pivoted to a sweeping search for a collective identity, exploring interracial inspirations to establish Asian Americans as a legitimate and evolving cultural force in America. The uniquely creative freedom of poetry allowed poets to construct the unified Asian American identity their community lacked; to culturally innovate. As Mirikitani said of Japanese Americans in the 1976 *Asian American Review* interview,

Our experience in this White culture has GOT to be different from the White experience...For instance, I can't write haiku. And I feel that haikus written in English [are] a prostitution of the form, since it's a form specifically meant to be used in the Japanese language. But the feeling of the haiku—the cleanliness, the simplicity of the feeling, is something I can incorporate into MY language and MY style. Yet I have no desire to *copy* haiku. See what I mean?⁶⁵

Writers like Mirikitani employed reconstruction rather than mimicry, interweaving elements from homeland cultures with lived experiences to duly reflect the nuances of straddling and merging these disparate worlds. In unearthing, constructing, and ultimately claiming culture through literary means, Asian American laid bare the messiness, but also beauty, of Asian American identity. They laid bare hope.

As social sciences researcher Masako Ishii-Kuntz synthesized, anthropological studies showed that Asian Americans of the 1970s were more likely to live in three-generational households, maintain authoritarian and respectful parent-child relationships, and kinship support for the elderly than their white counterparts.⁶⁶ Such research

showed the prevalence of filial obligation within Asian American households. These retained Asian cultural emphases translated into the work of Asian American poets like Li-Young Lee and Chin, who explored connections between Asian American identity and their homelands.

Lee was born in 1957 in Indonesia.⁶⁷ His father's incarceration and conflicts with various federal governments, however, forced Lee's family to flee throughout Southeast Asia during his childhood, finally settling in Hong Kong and then America. Such displacement, as well as exposure to Chinese classical poems, shaped Lee's later poetry. In "I Ask My Mother to Sing," Lee created a lush scene of nature around images of his mother and grandmother singing:

She begins, and my grandmother joins her.

Mother and daughter sing like young girls.

If my father were alive, he would play

his accordion and sway like a boat.

I've never been in Peking, or the Summer palace

...

But I love to hear it sung:

how the waterlilies fill with rain until

they overturn, spilling water into water,

then rock back, and fill with more.

Both women have begun to cry.

But neither stops her song.⁶⁸

Contrasting how Chin lamented the cruel death of her Chinese laborer ancestors, here, Lee called upon his family—dead and alive—to sing together in a peaceful, hopeful manner. Though he never lived in China, Lee tied his identity to roots in his parents' homeland through these cultural parallels of generational respect. He acknowledged hardship through references to crying, yet

continued his "song" in a radiant representation of resilience. Like the lilies, his family's voices cyclically overflowed, emptied, then filled themselves again with conviction and emotion. As Gerald Stern wrote in his foreword to *Rose*, Lee's 1986 poetry collection in which "I Ask My Mother to Sing" appears, "a pursuit of certain Chinese ideas, or Chinese memories" characterized Lee's work, a sentiment echoed by Ling-chi Wang and Henry Yiheng Zhao, editors of the 1991 *Chinese American Poetry: An Anthology*.⁶⁹ Lee defined Asian American identity by preserving a cultural longevity from his homeland, in both his works' themes and the enduring poetry itself.

Similarly, in "Grandmother Poems" by Marilyn Chin, published in *Breaking Silence*, the speaker emphasized filial reverence, focusing on familial history as a core construction of her identity in America:

My grandmother is old, weathermauled

by five thousand years of love and torrential rain...

And I am a child of theirs, born, January,

to a man in black, king in dogs and Mah Jong,

who slapped the I-ching on the table.⁷⁰

Here, by having the poem's speaker define themselves as a child of Chinese heritage, Chin set up the poem's culture-focused development. In turn, later in "Grandmother Poems," responding to jeers by "cousins in blue jeans," she wrote, "Not love but hate brings you here./Not blood nor kin but envy."⁷¹ Here, speaking from pride, Chin lectured "cousins" who had forgotten their origin as driven by "hate," alluding to the corruption of American assimilation, while simultaneously implying that opposing forces of "love," "blood," and "kin" had brought proud Chinese descendants like Chin to

America. Overall, emphasizing connections to poets' homelands was one way Asian American poetry, representing Asian Americans as a whole, reaffirmed a tangible identity.

In contrast, other works of Asian American poets defined their identities as independent from both white and Asian perspectives. For example, Alan Chong Lau's "my ship does not need a helmsman" contrasted the passionate polemics of other poets:

the young barbarians
urge me to protest
in a western style
...
they do not realize
i would rather
withdraw from what
i have never belonged to
than to embrace it⁷²

Here, Lau expressed a longing for stability, unharmed by discrimination but also uninterested in high-profile protest. He wrote this poem to convey the confusion of older first-generation Asian immigrants witnessing youth-led strikes like the San Francisco State University protest.⁷³ Moreover, in his 1980 book *Songs for Jadina*, Lau contextualized this poem's title in an epigraph: "a ship depends upon its helmsman for direction [as] the great ship china is guided by mao tse tung."⁷⁴ With this background in mind, Lau's poem served as a critique of radical Asian American groups associated with Mao Zedong's philosophy. At the end of his piece, pivoting from dismissing the radicals towards quieter, domestic hopes, Lau mused:

a ship does not need
a helmsman
only a woman
who strokes my brow
and laughs
at the moon
when it is full⁷⁵

Lau's emotional sincerity, which Asian American poet Garrett Hongo praised as "the most moving thing I'd yet read by anyone of my generation," showed how some Asian Americans, especially older immigrants, sought solace primarily in domestic life and family.⁷⁶ Lau's stark language, short lines, and lack of punctuation conveyed a sparse and meandering mindset embodied aptly in the scenery itself. His work highlighted key generational differences in the mindsets of Asian Americans, and in so doing, the expressive diversity of thought.

While Lau's rejection of defined culture stemmed primarily from social disconnection and a desire for peace, other poets, like Chin, carved independence through more assertive means. In Chin's witty and introspective "How I Got That Name," published in *Iowa Review's* Spring/Summer 1990 issue, she reflected on how she, quite literally, got her English name upon immigrating to America:

my father the paperson
in the late 1950s
obsessed with some bombshell blonde
transliterated "Mei Ling" to "Marilyn."
And nobody dared question
his initial impulse—for we all know

lust drove men to greatness,
not goodness, not decency.
And there I was, a wayward pink baby,
named after some tragic
white woman, swollen with gin and Nembutal.⁷⁷

Already, this forced Americanization of Chin's identity foreshadowed a stalwart rejection of Americanized Asian identity. Indeed, Chin later ridiculed American conceptions of Asian Americans: "the 'Model Minority' is a tease."⁷⁸ Furthermore, in addition to derogatorily framing her father as lustful and indecent, Chin later labeled him as "a gambler, a petty thug...Nobody dared question his integrity...as if filial piety were the standard/with which all earthly men were measured."⁷⁹ This sardonic ridicule of filial piety, as well as the derogatory characterization of a parental figure, contrasted the generational respect within Lee's poetry and Chin's other work "Grandmother Poems." Chin even detailed how her Chinese ancestor "Great Patriarch Chin" looked down upon her as "his least favorite"; a disgrace to her Chinese heritage.⁸⁰ These factors effectively alienated Chin from Chinese culture. Neither Asian nor American boxes fitted Chin's speaker, a nebulous identity that elicited both internal turmoil—"Oh god, where have we gone wrong?/We have no inner resources!"—and eventual acceptance, with Chin's concluding thoughts being "mesmerized/by all that

was lavished upon her/and all that was taken away."⁸¹ Summarily, "How I Got That Name" rejected both American and Chinese constructs, and embraced the ensuing cultural ambiguity and complexity.

Chin and Lau's poetry both untethered Asian American identity from compartmentalizations into Asia or white America. Rejecting 'model minority' constructs, along with acknowledging the limits of identifying with a culture generations and continents away, represented a fully independent search for identity, and thus hope and true cultural agency for Asian Americans.

Multicultural Constructions and Solidarities

Paying homage to the Asian American movement's intersectional birth, many Asian American poets also experimented with multilingual and multiracial elements in their work. Concurrent movements like Black Power not only offered Asian Americans allyship in denouncing common oppression, but provided rich cultural worlds for the novel identity search that so many Asian Americans' writing centered around. In lacking tethers to any one culture—whether it be American, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, or another group—Asian American poets flourished on multicultural exploration.

Some Asian American poets carved out their evolving identity through the vessel of linguistics, writing primarily in English but focusing on the complexities between Anglocentric and Asian languages. As anthropologists Shalini Shankar, Stacey Lee, and Angela Reyes analyzed, second- and third-generation Asian Americans in the late 20th century selectively drew from existing languages, heritage and Anglocentric, to create their own linguistic codes.⁸² Social and utilitarian assimilation necessitated learning English; retaining familial ties and cultural dignity rooted in Asia required literacy in homeland languages. Yet learning English, especially exclusively so, elicited negative associations with 'model minority' constructs and whitewashed complacency. Third-

and later generation immigrants, who often completely forewent learning their mother tongue, encountered significant generational clash.⁸³ These dynamic linguistic identities and struggles that Asian Americans experienced emerged prominently in the work of certain Asian American poets. Some figures, like Inada, directly addressed the hegemony of the English language. For instance, the speaker of Inada's 1971 poem "Kicking the Habit" described quitting their addiction to English, or from being an "Angloholic."⁸⁴ Inada wrote:

yes, I'm an Angloholic,
and I can't get along without the stuff:
it controls my life.
I was exhausted,
burned out,
by the habit.
And I decided to kick the habit cold turkey
And in so doing, I kicked
open the door of a cage
and stepped out from confinement
into the greater world.⁸⁵

Here, despite its necessity, subsisting on exclusively English physically drained Inada's speaker. In contrast, living and generating with multiple languages was uniquely liberating, as Inada's hopeful ending of "the greater world" alluded to. Moreover, as writing exclusively in English deprived Asian American poetry of non-Anglocentric linguistic culture, venturing into interlinguality further liberated identity exploration and "[pushed] the language to its limit and [broke] it open or apart," as author Catalina Cariaga mused.⁸⁶

Other poets, like Mirikitani, directly incorporated foreign language phrases into their work. For example, in her poem "Tansaku," published in 1971, Mirikitani wrote:

A time too worn
by ghosts
Sometimes I am that spectre
seeking a refracted self in language
Kotoba
Kagami—
soretomo tansaku ka...
Language to fracture or mend.
There is less of me now
than when I began.⁸⁷

Here, Mirikitani used ghostly language like "refracted" instead of reflected, along with Japanese fragments like "Kotoba" to represent the liminal, blurred spaces where the Asian American self resided. Such poetry directly represented the linguistic codes Asian Americans built for themselves, asserting agency over their use of language; both in everyday use and in creative work.

Another specific strategy saw Asian American poets drawing inspiration from similarly alienated demographics like African Americans, Native Americans, and more. They authored interethnically and interracial inspired pieces that tied into their movement's existing alliances. For instance, African American culture deeply informed Inada's work, as seen with an entire section in his 1993 collection *Legends From Camp*, "Jazz," dedicated to poems inspired by Black music.⁸⁸ In the namesake creative essay "Jazz," Inada mused how "Negro music...was something

we could share in common, like a 'lingua franca' in our 'colored' community."⁸⁹ Here, Inada asserted how artistic expression, from music to poetry, transcended linguistic and racial barriers as a "lingua franca" or common language. In the epigraphs of other poems in "Jazz," Inada dedicated them to various Black musicians, such as Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday. A specific example was "Blue Monk," inspired by Black pianist Theolonius Monk:

these huge, blue feelings
spaced and placed just so,
ascending,
these huge, blue feelings,
descending, just so.⁹⁰

Here, Inada employed a swingy, prosodic rhythm that imitated the musical characteristics of Monk. His work served as a literary manifestation of the aforementioned solidarities between marginalized communities; creatively and in general. Similarly, poet Jessica Hagedorn drew inspiration from Latino music, poet Arthur Sze from Native American culture, and poet Carolyn Lei-lanilau from Hawaiian history and language.⁹¹ As movements like Black Power influenced radical Asian American justice movements, cultural influences concurrently emerged in Asian American poetry. Historian Sucheng Chan summarized such Asian American literature as "[providing] artistic maps...to a new terrain that Asian Americans finally can claim as their very own."⁹² Figures like Inada amalgamated genres, cultures, and languages to construct their artistic and cultural identities.

Conflicts Between Theories of Identity

The differing bodies of thought surrounding Asian American identity, however, clashed within literary spheres, emphasizing the non-monolithic nature of the Asian American experience. For instance, author and playwright Frank Ching's play *The Chickencoop Chinaman* drew a sharp contrast to Frank Chin's *Bridge*, a periodical of creative Asian American work from the 1970s-80s. *The Chickencoop Chinaman's* protagonist, Tam Lum, rejected connections to his Chinese homeland as well as Asian American stereotypes, quipping that "Chinamans do make lousy fathers. I know. I have one."⁹³ Like the Asian American youth who invented their own multilingual identities, "Tam is forced to invent a past, mythology, and traditions from the antiques and curios of his immediate experience," as the curators of *Aiiieeee!* analyzed.⁹⁴ Lum, bringing to mind the speakers of so many Asian American poems during the late 20th century, turned to self-invention within an alienated environment. Ching aimed to conceptualize Asian American identity as a freeform entity through his characterization. Frank Chin, on the other hand, helped curate *Bridge* in 1971 with a goal to 'bridge' the gap between first- and second-generation Asian American immigrants, which Americanization and linguistic barriers often widened, as discussed previously.⁹⁵ Thus, *Bridge* opposed Ching's stark delineation between Asian American and Asian culture with depoliticized poetry like Lau's "my ship does not need a helmsman."⁹⁶

In a collection of letters in the December 1972 issue of *Bridge*, "Who's Afraid of Frank Chin, or Is It Ching?" Frank Chin and Ching debated this ideological disparity between *Bridge* and *The Chickencoop Chinaman*.⁹⁷ Initially, Ching questioned Tam Lum's rejection of Chinese culture.⁹⁸ Chin responded by attacking *Bridge*:

Your notion behind BRIDGE to appeal to both the immigrants and the American-born leaves me cold...The writing is embarrassingly out of touch with any language any sensibility and wit...There's no excuse for bad writing...If the purpose of BRIDGE is to bind me to the immigrants, I'm not interested in being bound. If it is to acquaint me with immigrant thought, I find it dull and tediously working hard to be hip and/or intellectual/scholarly following white rules of language, argot, slang and grammar and, like Charlie Chan's Number One Son, fucking it all up badly and yet admirably.⁹⁹

Here, Chin viewed adopting white culture as disgraceful and undermining the Asian American movement's drive for cultural agency. He not only called out *Bridge's* misfocus on "tediously working hard" to sound accessible, moderate, and sophisticated, but also the audacity to disrespect Asian American culture in such a misrepresentative way. While Ching acknowledged *Bridge's* subpar content in response, he only cited the dearth of professional Asian writers as its cause: "I readily concede that much of *Bridge* can be dull and uninspiring.

That is because there are few professional Asian writers."¹⁰⁰ But in this superficial reply, Ching failed to rebut Chin's fundamental critique of *Bridge's* assimilatory ideology and its shameful adherence to "white rules of language," leaving the conflict uncompromised. Such debate symbolized the often staunch ideological dissonance within the Asian American movement, and simultaneously, the sheer diversity of thought in the Asian American search for identity—which effectively debunked misconceptions of their culture being monolithic. Moreover, the defensive fervor of figures like Chin in non-creative dialogue

showcased the genuine devotion of Asian American writers to the cultures they constructed, as well as authentic Asian American representation as a whole.

Reception

Many Americans responded to this blossoming poetic movement with admiration. Teri Lee from *The Asian American Review* praised Mirikitani's poetry as "[speaking] joyfully of unity in struggle of Third World People," aptly characterizing her work as embodying the collective anti-oppressive fire of the movement from which it emerged.¹⁰¹ Similarly, in the June 1969 issue of *Gidra*, Wimp Hiroto, editor of *Crossroads*, praised *Gidra's* poetry and journalism as "self-expression, hope, and action. A triumvirate sadly lacking in the Nisei [second-generation Japanese Americans] today. Clear the decks—the Sansei [third-generation Japanese Americans] are coming."¹⁰² By noting the stronger drive within younger Asian communities, Hiroto emphasized generational upward mobility and optimism for growing initiatives championing Asian American justice. Also in praise of *Gidra*, a psychology and sociology major at Pepperdine University wrote, "Keep up the good work. Let us hope that there can be meaningful and peaceful change in this society."¹⁰³ Clear themes of hope emerged throughout such reviews. Literary efforts not only served as reflections of the social change spurred within the Asian American movement, but helped enrich and catalyze such progress themselves.

Others, however, criticized Asian American poetry due to confusion caused by ignorance. Richard Elman for the *New York Times Book Review* harshly critiqued Chinese American poet John Yau's 1983 poetry collection, yet did not mention "Chinese" once in his review.¹⁰⁴ He lacked the necessary

cultural context to understand Yau's references. Clayton Eshleman for the *LA Times*, conversely, found it "to be the strongest book to appear in the Holt and Rinehart National Poets Series!"¹⁰⁵ Eshleman understood Yau's Chinese background and so could appreciate his ethnocentric allusions. Such mixed reviews raised the question: was it the Asian American author's responsibility to make their work accessible and jeopardize authenticity, or stay true to their avant-gardist aesthetic and risk alienating certain audiences? *Bridge's* muted aesthetic favored the former, while the vibrant poetry of Mirikitani and Marilyn Chin leaned towards the latter.

On the note of catering to audiences, many also criticized Asian American literature as too radical to more moderate readers. A student from University of California Los Angeles felt *Gidra* was "[coming] on too strong," bringing to mind the profanity and vulgarity in many of their articles.¹⁰⁶ Adopting a similar tone, Hongo, curator of the 1990 Asian American poetry collection *The Open Boat: Poems from Asian America*, caricatured the 1970s Asian American writer as someone who "eschewed traditional literary forms and diction in favor of innovation and an exclusively colloquial style; and, though celebrated in the Asian American 'movement,' his work was widely unrecognized by 'the mainstream.'"¹⁰⁷ This critique of excessive radicalism targeted avant-garde Asian American writers driven by independence—in particular, Frank Chin.¹⁰⁸ Hongo's satirical portrait of the radical, framing mainstream recognition as the standard of literary legitimacy, foreshadowed a temporary waning of otherwise fiery Asian American poetry towards the late 1990s. In *The Open Boat's* case, like *Bridge*, Hongo tried to appeal to all generations of Asian American immigrants by curating poetry that exclusively dealt with the Asian

immigration experience. Yet in a review of *The Open Boat*, Cariaga wrote: "I am afraid that a reader of *The Open Boat* anthology may come away from the poems thinking that Asian American literature springs from one homogeneous American 'Asianicity' reduced to variations on the 'immigrant trope.'"¹⁰⁹ Here, bodies of subdued diasporic work like *The Open Boat* started to come across as monolithic and even insincere to readers like Cariaga.

Notwithstanding such periods of stagnation, the poetry created within the Asian American movement had effectively crafted and bared the complexities of Asian American identity to the American public. Criticism inevitably emerged from more traditional audiences, as with any social movement—and here, the main concern surrounding the literature itself being that Asian American authors were too radical, or too strong, only served as further testimony to the fire of such writing. Additionally, Asian American poets helped pave a more open, confident culture in which problematic literature could be challenged, contextualized, and ultimately deconstructed, as opposed to the forced complacency of silenced Asian American communities earlier in the 20th century.

Conclusion

In the late 20th century, despite facing a unique cultural disintegration with perpetuations of the 'model minority' myth and legacies of historical injustices, Asian American poets had created an electrifying body of work that asserted their voices as worthy of inclusion in American culture. The Asian American poetic movement underscored a larger loosening of white hegemony on mainstream literature, challenging and eventually helping weaken authorial instincts

for moderation and compromise. In reflecting on *Breaking Silence's* choice of title, Bruchac wrote: "[BREAKING SILENCE] exemplifies what I feel is happening with Asian American writers in the United States...They are adding to the literature and life of their nations and the world, breaking both silence and stereotypes with the affirmation of new songs."¹⁰ Indeed, poets like Mirikitani and Marilyn Chin 'broke silence' in helping lift poetry from an esoteric literary genre into a vessel for social redefinition and real-life justice—a genre whose underrepresentation in academic circles does not reflect its importance to cultural revival. Understanding how and why Asian American poetry first emerged on this notable scale contextualized Asian American justice for decades thereafter, and is still redefining what it means to be Asian American today.

Endnotes

- ¹ Juliana Chang, "Reading Asian American Poetry," *MELUS* 21, no. 1 (1996): 84, accessed July 28, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.2307/467808>. Maxine Hong Kingston was a notable Asian American prose author during the late 20th century.
- ² Peter S. Xenos et al., "11: Asian Americans: Growth and Change in the 1970s," *Center for Migration Studies* 5, no. 3 (May 1987): 252, accessed April 2, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2050-411X.1987.tb00963.x>.³ Joseph Bruchac, ed., *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Poets* (n.p.: The Greenfield Review Press, 1983), xiii-xv.
- ⁴ Frank Chin et al., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974), x-xiii.
- ⁵ Lin Yutang, *Chinatown Family* (New York: John Day, 1948), 8.
- ⁶ Yutang, *Chinatown Family*, 5.
- ⁷ Yutang, *Chinatown Family*, 8.
- ⁸ Alan Nishio, "The Oriental as a 'Middleman Minority,'" *Gidra* (Los Angeles, CA), May 1969, accessed July 23, 2023, <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-297-2/>.
- ⁹ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Meeting with Asian and Pacific-American Leaders," speech, National Archives, last modified February 23, 1984, accessed July 28, 2023, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-meeting-asian-and-pacific-american-leaders>.¹⁰ Nishio, "The Oriental."
- ¹¹ R. Wu, "Blind Reflections?," *Gidra* (Los Angeles, CA), July 1969, accessed July 23, 2023, <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-297-4/>.
- ¹² Edward Long, "Reflections in a Slanted Eye," *Gidra*, June 1969, accessed July 28, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/gidra-1969-06/page/n1/mode/2up>.
- ¹³ Frank Chin et al., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974), viii.
- ¹⁴ Chin et al., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology*, viii.¹⁵ Chin et al., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology*, xv. ¹⁶ Chin et al., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology*, xv. ¹⁷ Wu, "Blind Reflections?"
- ¹⁸ Wu, "Blind Reflections?"
- ¹⁹ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 75.
- ²⁰ Wimp Hiroto, "Crossroad to Somewhere," *Gidra*, June 1969, accessed July 28, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/gidra-1969-06/page/n1/mode/2up>.
- ²¹ "Asian American Student Alliance," *Gidra*, June 1969, accessed July 28, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/gidra-1969->

- 06/page/n1/mode/2up.
- ²² Daryl Joji Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 11, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/andover/detail.action?docID=958343>.
 - ²³ Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian*, 11.
 - ²⁴ Kanji, "A Response to Oppression," *Gidra* (Los Angeles, CA), April 1969, accessed July 23, 2023, <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-297-1/>.
 - ²⁵ Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian*, 5-6
 - ²⁶ Michael Liu et al., *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power in the Struggle for Social Justice, 1945-2000* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 63, digital file.
 - ²⁷ Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian*, 31.
 - ²⁸ Liu et al., *The Snake*, 71.
 - ²⁹ Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian*, 5-6.
 - ³⁰ Timothy Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry since 1965* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 76-77.
 - ³¹ Bruchac, *Breaking Silence*, xiii-xv.
 - ³² Garrett Kaoru Hongo, *The Open Boat: Poems from Asian America* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1993), xxv.
 - ³³ Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian*, 87.
 - ³⁴ Zhou Xiaojing, "Inheritance and Invention in Li-Young Lee's Poetry," *MELUS* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 19, accessed July 28, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/467810>.
 - ³⁵ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 94-95.
 - ³⁶ Chin et al., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology*, viii.
 - ³⁷ Marilyn Chin, "A Chinaman's Chance," in *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Poets*, ed. Joseph Bruchac (n.p.: The Greenfield Review Press, 1983), 32.
 - ³⁸ Chin, "A Chinaman's," in *Breaking Silence*, 32.⁴⁰
 - Chin, "A Chinaman's," in *Breaking Silence*, 32.
 - ⁴¹ Mirikitani, "Breaking Silence," in *Breaking Silence*, 189-191.
 - ⁴² Mirikitani, "Breaking Silence," in *Breaking Silence*, 189-191.
 - ⁴³ "Executive Order 9066: Resulting in Japanese-American Incarceration (1942)," National Archives, last modified Jan 24, 2022, accessed July 16, 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9066>.
 - ⁴⁴ Exec. Order No. 9066, 3 C.F.R. (1942). Accessed July 10, 2023. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5730250>.
 - ⁴⁵ Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, "Aiko Herzig Interview," by Emiko Omori and Chizuko Omori, *Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project*, last modified March 20, 1994, accessed July 16, 2023, <http://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1002-8-1/>.
 - ⁴⁶ Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, "Aiko Herzig Interview," by Emiko Omori and Chizuko Omori, *Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project*, last modified March 20, 1994, accessed July 16, 2023, <http://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1002-8-1/>.
 - ⁴⁷ Mirikitani, "Breaking Silence," in *Breaking Silence*, 189-191.
 - ⁴⁸ Mirikitani, "Breaking Silence," in *Breaking Silence*, 191.
 - ⁴⁹ Robert Grotjohn, "Remapping Internment: A Postcolonial Reading of Mitsuye Yamada, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Janice Mirikitani," *Western American Literature* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 266, accessed July 21, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43022258>.

- ⁵⁰ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 87.
- ⁵¹ Lawson Fusao Inada, *Legends from Camp* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1993), 7.
- ⁵² Inada, "Legends from," in *Legends from*, 7. ⁵³ Inada, "Legends from," in *Legends from*, 14. ⁵⁴ Inada, "Legends from," in *Legends from*, 25. ⁵⁵ Laura Ho, in *Gidra*, 3.
- ⁵⁶ Ho, in *Gidra*, 3.
- ⁵⁷ Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian*, 15-16.
- ⁵⁸ "Racial Violence against Asian Americans," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1927, accessed July 19, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1341790>.
- ⁵⁹ "Racial Violence," 1928.
- ⁶⁰ Francis Oka, "Ronald," in *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 81-83.
- ⁶¹ Shirley Lim, "Reconstructing Asian-American Poetry: A Case for Ethnopoetics," *MELUS* 14, no. 2 (1987): 52-53, accessed July 28, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/467352>.
- ⁶² Yutang, *Chinatown Family*, 3.
- ⁶³ Lawson Fusao Inada, "Chinks," in "Reconstructing Asian-American," 58.
- ⁶⁴ "Phases I, II, & III," in *Gidra*, 3.
- ⁶⁵ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 87.
- ⁶⁶ Masako Ishii-Kuntz, "Intergenerational Relationships among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans," *Family Relations* 46, no. 1 (January 1997): 24, accessed July 28, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/585603>.
- ⁶⁷ Xiaojing, "Inheritance and Invention," 115.
- ⁶⁸ Li-Young Lee, "I Ask My Mother to Sing," in *Rose* (New York: BOA Editions, 1986), 50.
- ⁶⁹ Xiaojing, "Inheritance and Invention," 113-114.
- ⁷⁰ Marilyn Chin, "Grandmother Poems," in *Breaking Silence*, 29.
- ⁷¹ Chin, "Grandmother Poems," in *Breaking Silence*, 29.
- ⁷² Alan Chong Lau, "my ship does not need a helmsman," in *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 96-98.
- ⁷³ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 96-98. ⁷⁴ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 96-98.
- ⁷⁵ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 96-98.
- ⁷⁶ Hongo, *The Open*, xxvii.
- ⁷⁷ Chin, "How I Got That."
- ⁷⁸ Chin, "How I Got That."
- ⁷⁹ Marilyn Chin, "How I Got That Name," *Iowa Review*, Spring/Summer 1990, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20153000>.
- ⁸⁰ Chin, "How I Got That."
- ⁸¹ Chin, "How I Got That."
- ⁸² Shalini Shankar, Stacey Lee, and Angela Reyes, "Asian American Youth Language Use: Perspectives across Schools and Communities," *Review of Research in Education* 35 (2011): 8, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41349010?seq=5>.
- ⁸³ Shankar, Lee, and Reyes, "Asian American," 1.
- ⁸⁴ Lawson Fusao Inada, "Kicking the Habit," in "Reading Asian," 92-93.
- ⁸⁵ Inada, "Kicking the," in "Reading Asian," 92-93.
- ⁸⁶ Chang, "Reading Asian," 92-93.
- ⁸⁷ Janice Mirikitani, "Tansaku," in *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 92.
- ⁸⁸ Inada, *Legends from*, 54.
- ⁸⁹ "Jazz," Inada, in *Legends from*, 57. ⁹⁰ "Jazz," Inada, in *Legends from*, 64. ⁹¹ Chang, "Reading Asian," 90.
- ⁹² Grotjohn, "Remapping Internment," 266.
- ⁹³ Frank Ching, *The Chickencoop Chinaman*, in

Aiiieeeee! An Anthology, xlvii.

- ⁹⁴ Ching, *The Chickencoop Chinaman*, in *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology*, xlvii.
- ⁹⁵ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 93.
- ⁹⁶ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 93.
- ⁹⁷ Frank Chin and Frank Ching, "Who's Afraid of Frank Chin, or Is It Ching?," *Bridge 2*, no. 2 (December 1972), in *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 94-95.
- ⁹⁸ Chin and Ching, "Who's Afraid," in *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 94-95. ⁹⁹ Chin and Ching, "Who's Afraid," in *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 94-95. ¹⁰⁰ Chin and Ching, "Who's Afraid," in *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 94-95. ¹⁰¹ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 87.
- ¹⁰² *Gidra*, 5.
- ¹⁰³ *Gidra*, 5.
- ¹⁰⁴ Lim, "Reconstructing Asian-American," 53-55.
- ¹⁰⁵ Clayton Eshleman, in "Reconstructing Asian-American," 53-55.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Gidra*, 5.
- ¹⁰⁷ Hongo, *The Open*, xxxi.
- ¹⁰⁸ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 99. ¹⁰⁹ Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde*, 87. ¹¹⁰ Bruchac, *Breaking Silence*, xv.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Bruchac, Joseph, ed. *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Poets*. N.p.: The Greenfield Review Press, 1983.
- Chin, Frank, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong. *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*. Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974.
- Chin, Marilyn. "How I Got That Name." *Iowa Review*, Spring/Summer 1990, 86-88. Accessed July 19, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20153000>.
- Exec. Order No. 9066, 3 C.F.R. (1942). Accessed July 10, 2023. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5730250>.
- *Gidra* (Los Angeles, CA), April 1969. Accessed July 23, 2023. <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-297-1/>. *Gidra* 1, no. 3 (June 1969). Accessed July 28, 2023.
- <https://archive.org/details/gidra-1969-06/page/n1/mode/2up>.
- Herzig-Yoshinaga, Aiko. "Aiko Herzig Interview." By Emiko Omori and Chizuko Omori. Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project. Last modified March 20, 1994. Accessed July 16, 2023. <http://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1002-8-1/>.
- Hongo, Garrett Kaoru. *The Open Boat: Poems from Asian America*. New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1993. Inada, Lawson Fusao. *Legends from Camp*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1993.
- Lee, Li-Young. "I Ask My Mother to Sing." In *Rose*. New York: BOA Editions, 1986.
- Nishio, Alan. "The Oriental as a 'Middleman Minority.'" *Gidra* (Los Angeles, CA), May 1969. Accessed July 23, 2023. <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-297-2/>.
- Reagan, Ronald. "Remarks at a Meeting with Asian and Pacific-American Leaders." Speech. National Archives. Last modified February 23, 1984. Accessed July 28, 2023. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-meeting-asian-and-pacific-american-leaders>
- .Wu, R. "Blind Reflections?" *Gidra* (Los Angeles, CA), July 1969. Accessed July 23, 2023. <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-297->

4/.

- Yutang, Lin. *Chinatown Family*. New York: John Day, 1948.

Secondary Sources

- Chang, Juliana. "Reading Asian American Poetry." *MELUS* 21, no. 1 (1996): 81. Accessed July 28, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/467808>.
- "Executive Order 9066: Resulting in Japanese-American Incarceration (1942)." National Archives. Last modified Jan 24, 2022. Accessed July 16, 2023. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9066>.
- Grotjohn, Robert. "Remapping Internment: A Postcolonial Reading of Mitsuye Yamada, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Janice Mirikitani." *Western American Literature* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 246-69. Accessed July 21, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4302258>.
- Ishii-Kuntz, Masako. "Intergenerational Relationships among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans." *Family Relations* 46, no. 1 (January 1997): 23-32. Accessed July 28, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/585603>.
- Lim, Shirley. "Reconstructing Asian-American Poetry: A Case for Ethnopoetics." *MELUS* 14, no. 2 (1987): 51-63. Accessed July 28, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/467352>.
- Liu, Michael, Kim Geron, Tracy Lim, and Tracy A. M. Lai. *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power in the Struggle for Social Justice, 1945-2000*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008.
- Maeda, Daryl Joji. *Rethinking the Asian American Movement*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/andover/detail.action?docID=958343>.
- "Racial Violence against Asian Americans." *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1926. Accessed July 19, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1341790>.
- Shankar, Shalini, Stacey Lee, and Angela Reyes. "Asian American Youth Language Use: Perspectives across Schools and Communities." *Review of Research in Education* 35 (2011): 1-28. Accessed July 15, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41349010?seq=5>.
- Xenos, Peter S., Robert W. Gardner, Herbert R. Barringer, and Michael J. Levin. "11: Asian Americans: Growth and Change in the 1970s." *Center for Migration Studies* 5, no. 3 (May 1987): 247-84. Accessed April 2, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2050-411X.1987.tb00963.x>.
- Xiaojing, Zhou. "Inheritance and Invention in Li-Young Lee's Poetry." *MELUS* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 113-32. Accessed July 28, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/467810>.
- Yu, Timothy. *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry since 1965*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009.