



Global Identities, Local Voices: Amerasia Journal at 40 Years (Volume 1)

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CONTENT PREVIEW:

Excerpt of introduction to the volume by Russell C. Leong (Provided here in English as reference):

Contents

This first volume of *Global Identities: Local Voices* features scholars and writers who explore the following broad themes of

- A. History and Identity
- B. Writing and Literature
- C. Freedoms and Futures

■ Global Identities, Local Voices

This section aptly begins with the now "classic" article, "Yung Wing and the Americanization of China," written by Bill Lann Lee, the former assistant attorney general of the Justice Department of the United States under the Bill Clinton Administration. The essay was published in Vol. 1:1, 1971, in the very first issue of *Amerasia Journal*. Within this debut issue, Lee, then a student at Yale, explores the political context in which Yung Wing, the first Chinese student to graduate from an American university (Yale College in 1854) forms his westernized ideas around reforming China during the last years of the Qing dynasty. Here within the pages of *Amerasia* we can already discern the ideological and historical "linkages and boundaries" between two countries: China and the U.S. in the latter part of the 19th century which continue to the present. (See www.uschinamediabrief.com for a timeline of U.S.-China and Chinese American relations).

Essays by L. Ling-chi Wang, Sauling C. Wong, and photojournalist Shahidul Alam are featured. *Amerasia* recently devoted a 2007 tribute issue to the scholarship and activism of Wang: "L. Ling-Chi Wang: the Quintessential Scholar-Activist," and an essay from that edition--on the Chinese diaspora in America--is included here. Sauling C. Wong's "Denationalization Reconsidered" has perhaps been one of the most reprinted essays in the field of Asian American Studies, appearing in numerous textbooks during the past decade. Wong takes a nuanced approach to the often ambiguous notions of diaspora and post-national theories utilized in cultural studies in the U.S. Also in this section Shahidul Alam, a Bangladeshi photojournalist, urges us to adopt a broader, "majority world view" against the cultural and political

colonization of the West. Alam puts his ideas into practice: training working class youth to document their own lives and communities through the still and moving camera.

■ History Creates Historians

Adopting the view that History is determined, written and interpreted essentially from the "bottom up" by ordinary individuals and not from the "top down," this section profiles two historians—the "deans" in the field of Asian American Studies: Him Mark Lai and Yuji Ichioka. Him Mark Lai, in his autobiographical essay, "Musings of a Chinese American Historian" speaks about the Chinese American experience:

I personally feel also that by comparing the experiences of Chinese in other countries with that of Chinese in the United States, one can gain insights that are helpful for more in-depth interpretations of certain phenomena and issues in Chinese American history.

Yuji Ichioka, a professor and historian who was long associated with UCLA's Asian American Studies Center, in fact coined the term "Asian American." "A Historian by Happenstance" reveals how his scholarship, political beliefs, and life experiences converge within the field of Asian American Studies:

Although bilingual and bicultural, I identify myself as an American committed to politically changing our country for the better. At the same time, I believe in the old time practice of doing narrative history, of telling a story in ordinary language based on substantive research in primary sources.

(Note: Both Him Mark Lai and Yuji Ichioka were long-time members of *Amerasia Journal's* editorial board until their passing.)

■ Why Literature Matters

Wu Bing, director of the Chinese American Literature Research Center of Beijing Foreign Affairs University, has stated that in China, "Chinese American literature is introspective" for its Chinese readers, allowing them to view their own society with some measure of distance. Her essay is included in this section, together with writings by other scholars that allow us to see that literature can serve as a bridge across nations on both sides of the Pacific.

Elaine Kim is one of the earliest scholars who wrote about Chinese American writer Maxine Hong Kingston, who has now been read and translated across the world. Kim's essay "Visions and Fierce Dreams" discusses how immigrant and American-born Chinese "are reconciled in Kingston through their mutual claim on America." She states: "a future task is the bringing together of our men and women, in life and in the literature which reflects it."

In this section we also feature Dominika Ferens's essay, "A Pole with a Stake in Asian American Literature." Ferens has also done notable scholarship on Siu Sin Far, an early Chinese American writer. Gordon Chang, in his exploration of "The Many Sides of Happy Lim" provides a moving portrait of an earlier generation of Chinese American social activists and radical cultural workers. Happy Lim wrote for more than 50 years, "producing an extraordinary rich and unusual body of poetry and nonfiction writing, based loosely on his own difficult life as a poor service worker in San Francisco," according to Chang, who is based at Stanford University.

Finally, N.V.M. Gonzalez in his essay "Even as the Mountain Speaks" refers to Mount Pinatubo, an active volcano on the island of Luzon, Philippines, and the Clark U.S. Air Force base, housed there until volcanic eruptions damaged the base. Gonzalez, a national artist of the Philippines, who taught at UCLA and other universities, asks provocatively:

In what way are volcanoes and the Filipino people involved with Columbus? Are the archipelagic configuration we call the Philippines, sprang out of primal volcanic forces millions of years ago, merely

shards off the continental shelf of Asia that become an Eden that raised in Columbus's vision a dream of Cathay?

■ The Writers' World

Literary writers help to chart a community's sensibilities, aspirations, and desires. This section explores the world of literary writers, essayists, and poets themselves—be they Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Samoan, or Cambodian American. The writers have chosen to share their observations through various genres—from essay, diary and account to poem or letter. This selection of course is a miniscule sampling of the riches—in more complete form which can be found in any data search of Asian American and Pacific Islander literature—consisting of novels, poetry collections, and fiction as well as creative non-fiction. We have chosen selections which for the most part have never been anthologized although they first appeared in *Amerasia Journal* during the past four decades.

Sefa Aina, in "Fai'a Samoa" brings us to understand that

In Samoa here are two markers of identity that everyone carries--name and village. Name and village are so closely tied that if you told someone your name, that person would be able to tell what village you come from... Now that we're here in the U.S., the two markers of name and village are still there, but a third is added and just as important (at least to some people): the Church.

Carlos Bulosan, in his lyrical poem "Letter in Exile" speaks for the exilic condition of all recent migrants to the U.S. where naive expectations are often destroyed to be replaced by existential loneliness. That experience is extended and re-drawn in knifelike, almost haiku form in Cambodian American Manhao Chhor's "Fish Poem." Irony remains a great tool for writers, and Hawaii-born Wing Tek Lum's rendition of literary sparring between Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston can be found in his "Taiqiquan/Push Hands" poems.

Here we also include two letters and two essays by four national awardwinning writers: Maxine Hong Kingston, Hisaye Yamamoto, Jessica Hagedorn, and Lawson Fusao Inada. While much of their awardwinning work has already been published in the form of novels, stories, essays, or poetry collections, their letters and essays have not, and thus reveal an informal, less measured dimension of their thought. According to Maxine Hong Kingston: "If I were twenty years old again, and could get into graduate school, I would write a thesis showing that American literature has always been inspired by Asia." Hisaye Yamamoto put it yet another way: "a writer proceeds from a compulsion to communicate a vision and he cannot afford to bother with what people in general think of him." Jessica Hagedorn brings us up to the present in her rendition of the aftermath of September 11, 2001 in Manhattan, where she lives, linking the human and material wreckage she observed to the abysmal conditions of Smokey Mountain, a large landfill and squatter slum in Manila, Philippines.

■ To Free the Future

Three writers in this section offer approaches to "freeing the future" from traditional class, psychological, geographic, and social oppressions. Glenn Omatsu, the former long-time associate editor of *Amerasia Journal*, introduces the ideas of "The Four Prisons and Liberation" in his essay which has been adopted as a mantra by Asian American student activists, theorists, and scholars nationwide:

According to a Persian philosopher, each person exists within four prisons. First is the prison imposed on us by history and geography; from this confinement, we can escape by gaining a knowledge of science and technology. Second is the prison of historical necessity; our freedom comes when we understand how historical forces operate. The third prison is the social and class structure; from this prison, only a revolutionary ideology can provide the way to liberation. The

final prison is the self. We are each composed of good and evil elements, and each person must choose between them.

E. San Juan, Jr., scholar/activist and poet, links the Filipino American writer Carlos Bulosan with what has happened to the U.S. after September 11, 2001 and America's subsequent war on terrorism with these prophetic words: "Behind the triumphalist invocation of a mythical "America" linger the unforgettable images of violence, panicked escape, horrible mutilation, death in Bulosan's works."

Finally, Pa Xiong, now a K-12 teacher who settled in the U.S. as a refugee together with her Hmong family, sees clearly that America has forgotten how to help or take responsibility "for all life." She says:

What my mother taught me is that helping each other is merely the act of having respect, as well as taking responsibility, for all life, as human beings....We must never forget, or give up, what we are--and that is a "free people"--culturally, historically, and spiritual.

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