



REPRESENTATIONS



Doing Asian American Rhetoric



EDITED BY

LuMing Mao & Morris Young

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edited by

LUMING MAO AND MORRIS YOUNG

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INTRODUCTION

Performing Asian American Rhetoric into the American Imaginary

LuMing Mao and Morris Young

In the fall of 2001, Morris Young was preparing a grant proposal for the National Endowment of the Humanities Summer Stipend competition. The project, “‘A Ready Tongue Is an Evil’: The Possibility and Predicament of Asian American Rhetoric,” looked to examine how Asian Americans use language as a resource to address their conditions in America, to understand why a “ready tongue” (a Chinese expression appropriated by Maxine Hong Kingston) becomes a necessity as they seek a way to respond to American culture. After the proposal was submitted for review at the university level and selected as the “junior faculty” nomination, Morris was provided with the reviewers’ comments. Aside from the expected questions asking for clarification about specific concepts and details of the argument, one reviewer expressed a clear skepticism about the value of examining *rhetoric* and about why rhetoric *mattered* to Asian Americans. And there was even some confusion about whether this was a project more suited to funding in the social sciences or education if the focus was on language *usage* by Asians.

In the summer of 2004, LuMing Mao, together with two other colleagues at Miami University, took a group of students, both graduate and undergraduate, to China. For three weeks they visited four universities in four different cities and had numerous conversations with students and faculty. During one conversation with a group of English majors at Beijing Jiaotong University about life in the United States, one of the students asked LuMing, “How do you negotiate speaking English and Chinese both in the U.S. and in China? Which of the two languages do you feel more comfortable speaking? Do you feel conflicted at all—linguistically and/or emotionally—when you speak one or the other language?” What ensued was one of the liveliest, most contested, discussions, conducted in both English and Chinese, on language and identity that LuMing had participated in for a long while.

While the reviewer's skepticism and the student's pointed questions might not be particularly expected on these two specific occasions, neither of us are strangers to them. Not only because they—the skepticism and the questions—directly draw attention to the dynamic, complex relationship between language use and identity formation, but also because they speak to some of the very issues we have been trying to address both professionally and in our everyday lives—issues that have also led us to undertake this project and to investigate specifically how Asian Americans use language and other forms of symbolic action to bring about necessary changes and to advance and complicate our understanding of the self, the other, and the world.

In the past decade we have seen tremendous growth in scholarship about Asian Americans and their cultural work, especially with regard to literary productions, visual arts, popular and mass culture, community and activist work, to name a few categories of examination. These and many other forms of discursive expression have significantly contributed to writing Asian Americans into the national American narrative. On the other hand, we have seen little work that focuses directly on how Asian Americans use the symbolic resources of language in social, cultural, and political arenas to disrupt and transform the dominant European American discourse and its representations of Asians and Asian Americans, thus re-presenting and reclaiming their identity and agency. Nor have we seen work that directly draws attention to, and thus draws out, those ambivalent and contradictory moments where Asian Americans *both* experience the performative or constitutive power attending each and every utterance *and* participate in reinforcing or reinscribing what Judith Butler calls “the historicity of force.” That is, commenting on the conditions or limits of developing a new and affirmative set of meanings for the word “queer,” Butler points out that discourse—of which words such as “queer” are an integral part—“has a history that not only precedes but conditions its contemporary usages, and that this history effectively decenters the presentist view of the subject as the exclusive origin or owner of what is said” (1993, 227). Therefore, any recuperative efforts, be they directed at “queer” or at any other demeaning term, may be constrained and compromised because of discourse's power to decenter or implicate its user. It is these moments of constraint and complicity in Asian American discursive experiences that we seek to confront and examine in the following pages.

It must be noted that work by writers and scholars such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Lisa Lowe, Kent Ono, and John Sloop has certainly drawn our attention to the importance of language use within the Asian American context and to the need to invent a “new American language” to represent Asian Americans and to create the literature of a new culture. For Kingston, this new American language “not only grants her characters full linguistic freedom to attempt a higher level of linguistic, racial and cultural assimilation into which Chinese immigrants’ distinctive language forms and cultural traditions are incorporated, but also begins an ideological debate on the linguistic rights and status of Chinese Americans” (Li 2004, 274). This new American language can also assist Asian Americans in their efforts to challenge Standard American English as the only language of knowledge and truth and to repudiate a cultural politics that “relies on the construction of sameness and the exclusion of differences” (Lowe 1991, 28). For Ono and Sloop (2002), this new American language can be located in both civic and vernacular discourses, both of which challenge existing social paradigms and hold promise for substantive social transformations. On the other hand, we have seen few systematic studies that focus on how Asian Americans use language to perform discursive acts and on how they develop persuasive and other rhetorical strategies to create knowledge and to effect social, political, and cultural transformations. Nor have we seen any concentrated efforts directed toward illuminating those conflicting, ambivalent moments that are central to Asian American discursive experiences. In short, there is not much work done on the making of Asian American rhetoric.

We define Asian American rhetoric as the systematic, effective use and development by Asian Americans of symbolic resources, including this new American language, in social, cultural, and political contexts. Because these contexts are regularly imbued with highly asymmetrical relations of power, such rhetoric creates a space for Asian Americans where they can resist social and economic injustice and reassert their discursive agency and authority in the dominant culture. In this sense, Asian American rhetoric is intimately tied to, and indeed constituted by, particularizing speech settings, specific communicative purposes, and situated discursive acts. Its uptake and its performative force bring about material and symbolic consequences that in turn destabilize the balance of power and privilege that exists between the majority and minority cultures.

We credit the emergence of Asian American rhetoric to a number of factors that have been converging in the recent past. First, Asian American rhetoric has both been mobilized by, and directly participates in, an ongoing dialogue that aims to reexamine and reconceptualize rhetoric's purposes and functions beyond the paradigm of western rhetoric. Such a dialogue not only problematizes the Rhetorical Tradition and its canonical ways of representation, but also makes it possible for Asian American rhetoric, or any other ethnic rhetoric, for that matter, to find its voice and to secure its uptake. As a minority discourse that has long been ignored, marginalized, and/or excluded, Asian American rhetoric becomes an integral, but no less distinctive, part of this complicated and dynamic American narrative.

Second, with the publication of such works as Robert Oliver's *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China* (1971) and Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (1977), we came to realize that rhetoric—the systematic and effective use of symbolic resources—was not an Anglo-American phenomenon only, and that the use and study of rhetoric existed in other communities and in other regions around the world. We also began to experience and consciously perform discursive acts whose rhetorical features and significances had hitherto gone unnoticed or unnamed. The emergence of Asian American rhetoric speaks to this desire to give voice to the voiceless and to accord long-overdue legitimacy to those ways of speaking that have long been the stuff that Asian Americans are made of. It further challenges the binary discourse that regularly views all other non-western rhetorics as the very antitheses to western rhetoric and as the “unruly borderlands” in want of exploration, cultivation, and conversion.

Third, thanks to the interpretative turn that the field of rhetoric and composition has now embraced, rhetoric is seen as more than just the art of discovering the available means of persuasion. Rather, it is part of the knowledge-making process that is situated in every specific occasion of language use and that is always socially and politically constructed. Such an understanding of rhetoric draws our much-needed attention to the temporal-spatial nature of language use and to its material and symbolic consequences. Asian American rhetoric serves as a compelling example of how Asian Americans have been using language to bring about changes that affect the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of their intended audience as well as their very own. It also presents students,

teachers, and scholars with new ways to approach rhetoric and to engage specific rhetorical situations and their formal features such as purpose, audience, and context.

While we very much want to claim that Asian American rhetoric commands a sense of unity or collective identity for its users, we want to note that such rhetoric cannot help but embody internal differences, ambivalences, and even contradictions as each and every specific communicative situation—where Asian American rhetoric is invoked, deployed, or developed—is informed and inflected by diverse contexts, by different relations of asymmetry, and by, most simply put, heterogeneous voices. As a minority discourse, Asian American rhetoric reflects and responds to existing social and cultural conditions and practices while gathering and disseminating the illocutionary force of past practices. Or in the words of James Paul Gee, “Words have *histories*. They have been in other people’s mouths and on other people’s pens. They have circulated other Discourses and within other institutions. They have been part of specific historical events and episodes. Words bring with them as *potential situated meanings* all the situated meanings they have picked up in history and in other settings and Discourses” (2005, 54; emphasis in the original).

However, as a performative, Asian American rhetoric also actively engages and impacts such conditions and practices. That is to say, as it reflects and responds to these conditions and practices, Asian American rhetoric creates its own illocutionary force, thus challenging or turning against “this constitutive historicity of force” (Butler 1993, 227). To the extent it does, Asian American rhetoric becomes a rhetoric of becoming: it is a rhetoric that participates in this generative process, yielding an identity that is Asian American and producing a transformative effect that is always occasioned by use.

As a rhetoric of becoming, Asian American rhetoric is also an example of hybridity. Operating in a space that is “crisscrossed with a variety of languages, experiences, and voices” and that “intermingles with the weight of particular histories that will not fit into the master narrative of a monolithic culture” (Giroux 1992, 209), Asian American rhetoric draws upon discursive practices *both* from the European American tradition *and* from Asian, as well as other ethnic and worldly, traditions. Its emergence and its identity are therefore very much tied to our present-day social-cultural, transnational tendencies marked in part by various forms of cultural and linguistic intertextuality. In addition, since Asian American rhetoric is being produced within the histories of highly asymmetrical relations of

power, its discursive fate can be quite indeterminate, if not perilous. Like Pratt's autoethnographic texts, it could experience miscomprehension, incomprehension, and/or simply a multitude of meanings (1991, 37). And it could be quickly appropriated or even stereotyped by the dominant tradition, thus losing its otherwise creative, invigorating energy. On the other hand, it is this state of becoming or indeterminacy that makes it possible for Asian Americans to be transformative, carving out new spaces for critical and productive engagement.

For Asian Americans, as with others often placed on the margins of culture, language provides the possibility to realize the rhetorical construction of identity and write oneself literally into the pages of history and culture. In fact, such discursive practices can create and indeed become topoi in the larger narrative of America. Rhetoric is also employed by Asian Americans to address specific occasions, whether responding to acts of racism, expressing culture, or forming community. These specific spaces that Asian Americans inhabit, where identities are constructed and negotiated and responses to particular conditions are generated, can be conceptualized as Asian American rhetorical space. In particular, spatial metaphors are especially important for Asian Americans as rhetorical devices to address travel and mobility, containment and community, and imagined or real geographies.

In her essay "Of Gender and Rhetorical Space," Roxanne Mountford examines the function of space in rhetorical situations, focusing on the role of the pulpit as both a rhetorical and gendered space that has cultural and material consequences for both speaker and audience. Mountford defines "rhetorical space" as "the geography of a communicative event" that, like all landscapes, "may include both the cultural and material arrangement, whether intended or fortuitous, of space"; such spaces "carry the residue of history upon them, but perhaps, something else: a physical representation of relationships and ideas" (2001, 42). Her definition is particularly useful in considering the use of rhetoric by Asian Americans.

In the case of Asian Americans, the residue of history includes a legacy of U.S. racial ideology that has often placed Asians and Asian Americans in particular spaces, whether metaphorical or material. As Kandice Chuh argues: "Embedded in such terms as 'immigrant' and 'exile' and in the difference between 'native' or 'birthright' and 'naturalized' citizenship is this spatial logic. Theoretically, according to U.S. nationalism, departure from *there* and arrival *here* is a narrative whose

closure may be found in being made like one was native-born through naturalization. Positing the naturalness of the relationship between the native-born and the nation, such an ideology depends upon territoriality for coherence and, more specifically, upon a spatialized logic that holds as discretely and naturally distinct ‘here’ and ‘there’” (2003, 86–87).

Thus, functioning in contradictory ways, rhetorical space for Asian Americans is often constructed as both foreign and domestic, as a site of both containment and community. For example, while the early twentieth-century immigration detention center Angel Island acted to contain Chinese immigrants, keeping them from entering America, it also resulted in rhetorical action by these immigrants, who literally wrote their protests into the walls of their barracks (see Lai, Lim, and Yung 1991). Or, while the Japanese American internment camps of World War II held Japanese and Japanese Americans as threats to the nation without any other evidence than their race, these internees produced camp newspapers protesting their condition and composed *tanka* poetry expressing their frustration and resistance (see Mizuno 2001, 2003). What complicates Asian American rhetorical space is the apparent necessity, or imposition, of defining Asian America against the Nation rather than as constitutive of it. Thus, in conceptualizing Asian American rhetorical space there is a need to understand the ideological underpinnings that have imagined, and continue to imagine, Asians (whether in America or elsewhere) as Other, and as foreign against the domestic space of the United States.

While we were putting together this collection as our rhetorical response to this construction of Asian Americans as Other, we grew increasingly mindful of another response, which is to enact an Asian American cultural nationalism, a project of asserting a claim on America for those who imagine themselves fully as cultural if not national citizens of the United States. One example of such a claim that takes on an explicitly rhetorical dimension is the argument put forth by the editors of *AIIEEEEE!* and *The Big AIIEEEEE!*, two edited collections of Asian American writing that are often turned to as important early critical expressions about the cultural work of Asian American writing. In their introduction to *AIIEEEEE!*, “Fifty Years of Our Whole Voice,” Frank Chin, Jeffrey Chan, Lawson Inada, and Shawn Wong focus their critique on racist discourse by examining the requirements of language often placed on racially marked others. For them, the expectation of literacy in Standard English that has been often used to define “legitimacy”

(whether in literary production or cultural/national citizenship) also operates to construct Asian Americans as a particular type of subject:

The universality of the belief that correct English is the only language of American truth has made language an instrument of cultural imperialism. The minority experience does not yield itself to accurate or complete expression in white man's language. Yet, the minority writer, specifically the Asian American writer, is made to feel morally obligated to write in a language produced by an alien and hostile sensibility. His task, in terms of language alone, is to legitimize his, and by implication his people's orientation as white, to codify his experience in the form of prior symbols, clichés, linguistic mannerisms, and a sense of humor that appeals to whites because it celebrates Asian American self-contempt. (1991, 23)

For the *AIIEEEEE!* editors, the emphasis on language privileges a certain type of experience that reinforces a binary of "minority" and "model minority" (or in later manifestations of this argument, "real" and "fake").¹ Additionally, the *AIIEEEEE!* editors argue that this American rhetoric of orientalism also acts to feminize Asian American writing, to create foreign objects for domestic consumption that will maintain difference.

It must be noted that the *AIIEEEEE!* editors also offer what might be considered an early definition of Asian American rhetoric: "to legitimize the language, style, and syntax of his people's experience, to codify the experiences common to his people into symbols, clichés, linguistic mannerisms, and a sense of humor that emerges from an organic familiarity with the experience" (1991, 23). The emphasis we place on the use of symbolic recourses to reclaim discursive agency and authority as part of our definition of Asian American rhetoric bears some resemblance to their characterization here. For the *AIIEEEEE!* editors, then, the project of Asian American writing (or rhetoric for our purposes) becomes twofold. On the one hand, writing becomes an act of questioning what is "legitimate," to expand the boundaries of what are defined as American

1. In his essay in *The Big AIIEEEEE!*, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," Frank Chin further develops the binary of "minority" and "model minority" by arguing that the "real" experiences and sensibilities of Asian Americans (i.e., experiences and sensibilities that reflect racism and discrimination as well as culture and community) are often displaced by the "fake," representations of experience and culture that feed an orientalist desire by dominant white culture (1991). Thus, a writer like Maxine Hong Kingston, often a focus of Chin's criticism, is accused of straying from "authentic" Chinese culture and tradition and reimagining Chinese and Chinese American experiences that feed, reinforce, or create stereotypes that uninformed readers easily consume and accept as real.

cultural texts and of who can write those texts. On the other, the larger project is to overcome systematic oppression, to dismantle those structures that act to maintain cultural control either through discourses of dominance (such as explicit legal restrictions against Asians and Asian Americans) or through the more subtle hegemonic acts of educational and cultural production that define what it means to be a citizen.

As the reader may have already noticed, we have chosen “Asian American *rhetoric*” as our term in preference to “Asian American *rhetorics*” or “Asian American *rhetoric(s)*.”² The choice here, which embeds an apparent paradox, is a considered one. The use of the singular, rather than the plural noun “rhetoric” in “Asian American rhetoric” might appear to imply that Asian American rhetoric is monolithic, unified, or unaffected by shifting social and cultural forces. The appearance here, however, cannot be more deceiving. That is, Asian American rhetoric, like any other ethnic rhetoric, is infused with competing voices, internal contradictions, and shifting alliances at every given discursive moment, and it is necessarily *plural* in form and in meaning. Not to mention the fact that many separate national identities will inevitably inflect or intrude upon the making of Asian American rhetoric.

Why did we then decide to favor the singular at the risk of encoding something that defies reality? The answer is simple: We see our use of the singular “rhetoric” as an example of what Gayatri Spivak calls a “*strategic* use of positive essentialism” (1987, 205; emphasis in the original). Namely, we want to use “Asian American rhetoric” as a specific signifier to contest and complicate the dominance of European American rhetoric or even the broader definition of the Rhetorical Tradition. In so doing, we seek to articulate a distinctive rhetorical identity to celebrate differences and to challenge stereotypes—hence positive essentialism. At the same time, we are acutely aware of the internal complexities and multiplicities that inevitably attend the making of Asian American rhetoric or any other ethnic rhetoric, including, we might add, European American. As a matter of fact, our characterization of Asian American rhetoric as a performative occasioned by use and tied to each and every particularizing context speaks to this awareness, and the chapters that

2. Elaine B. Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson II use “African American rhetoric(s)” to describe “the study of culturally and discursively developed knowledge-forms, communicative practices and persuasive strategies rooted in freedom struggles by people of African ancestry in America” (2004, xiii). It is clear that by placing the plural form within parenthesis they want to acknowledge both the unity and diversity—a discursive move that has been practiced by many others.

follow amply demonstrate the rich and diverse nature of Asian American rhetoric. Our use of the singular in representing Asian American rhetoric is in part inspired by Lisa Lowe's characterization of "Asian American" as a specific signifier of ethnic identity that both disrupts the exclusionary discourse of the dominant culture and reveals their internal differences and even contradictions (1991, 40).

The paradox that accompanies the use of the singular also helps to give prominence to two major themes that run through this collection. First, the use of the singular highlights the tension or contradiction between the desire to claim a sense of unity or homogeneity for Asian Americans in America and elsewhere and the realization that our discursive practices are fraught with differences, defying any clear-cut, categorical characterization. Such a tension, we believe, permeates the rhetorical space for Asian Americans where identity, community, and memory are inflected with uneven historical relationships and vexing contemporary contradictions. Second and related, the use of the singular calls our attention to the ambivalence experienced by Asian Americans. That is, the making of Asian American rhetoric represents an example of members of a speech community inventing a mode of discourse to fulfill their discursive wants and dreams and to perform their claim on the American imaginary. At the same time, this desire to belong, to be part of America, is consistently tempered by a countervailing desire to cling to what sets them apart and what makes them *singularly* distinct. Such ambivalence becomes another important signifier for Asian Americans as they use their rhetoric to rewrite history, to reclaim their agency, and to reimagine the future for themselves and for *their* America.

To further foreground this tension or contradiction in our conceptualization of Asian American rhetoric, we appeal to the tropes of "translation" and "transformation." On the one hand, translation and transformation are employed in rhetorics of assimilation that assume the "foreignness" of Asian Americans and their language practices, confirming the critique of the *AIIEEEEE!* editors, who see Standard English as the language of empire and an attempt to transform Asians and Asian Americans into all-American subjects. Eric Cheyfitz argues that translation is an act of western imperialism that operates to make the Other accessible to the empire and also to maintain difference: "From its beginnings the imperialist mission is, in short, one of translation: the translation of the 'other' into the terms of the empire, the prime term which is 'barbarian,' or one of its variations such as 'savage,' which, ironically,

but not without a precise politics, also alienates the other from the empire” (1991, 112). On the other hand, translation and transformation become important tropes in the project of Asian Americans who play off the expectation and construction of Asians/Asian Americans as Other in order to perform their own transgressive acts of “translation.” Asian Americans are no longer the objects of translation and transformation; rather, they become the agents of translation and transformation as they make *their* claim on America through their rhetorical acts.

We have assembled fourteen chapters in this collection and grouped them into two major sections: “Performing Asian American Rhetoric in Context” and “‘Translating’ and ‘Transforming’ Asian American Identities.” By organizing the chapters in this collection this way, we are certainly not suggesting that there are no other valid ways in which they can be grouped. Rather, we want to use this kind of grouping to further foreground two major themes that have emerged from these chapters and that are so central to the understanding and development of Asian American rhetoric.

As we have suggested above, as a rhetoric of becoming, Asian American rhetoric engenders its own illocutionary or transformative meanings and effects at every discursive turn possible. In the process such a rhetoric challenges and extends what has been codified and privileged by the dominant rhetoric and culture. In other words, it is through participating in situated or contested occasions of use that Asian American rhetoric becomes constituted and that it effectively performs Asian American narratives into, and thus transforms, the larger American narrative in complex and dynamic ways.

The seven chapters in the first section of this book all center on the use of language and other symbolic recourses by Asian Americans in different speech communities and in different cultural sites and on how these discursive practices, involving both the present and the past, enrich and further complicate the making of Asian American rhetoric. In chapter 1, “Transnational Asian American Rhetoric as a Diasporic Practice,” Rory Ong begins this collective undertaking of ours by addressing the dilemma facing resident Asians in the United States, Pacific Islanders, and multigenerational Asian Americans and by theorizing how we can best respond to such a dilemma. That is to say, to participate in the national American narrative Asian Americans must rationalize their disparate (dis)placements or (dis)positions; in the process they cannot help but become implicated in defining an

American discourse. Using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to highlight "the material interlacing of daily life and human agency," Ong argues that Asian Americans practice "transnational Asian American rhetoric" to face "a hybridized and heterogeneous transnational and transcultural way of life" and to unveil and critique competing and asymmetrical power relations within the Asian diaspora. Such a rhetoric not only poses a direct challenge to the dominant European American discourse, but also serves to illustrate these historical, cultural, and economic moments of entanglement and contradiction.

In chapter 2, "Reexamining the Between-Worlds Trope in Cross-Cultural Composition Studies," Tomo Hattori and Stuart Ching pick up and further explore this transnational and transcultural theme developed by Ong. Situating their argument between composition studies and Asian American studies, Hattori and Ching seek to develop a discourse that can transcend the "caught-between-worlds" metaphor that not only signifies the existence of Asian Americans, but also prescribes for them "a position of subjection and subjugation." They specifically argue that such a metaphor falsely confines bilingual and bidialectical speakers to two linguistic worlds, thus failing to reflect how ethnic identity and citizenship can and should be imagined and constituted both within and beyond a nation-state. By advancing this argument, they develop an Asian American rhetoric that disrupts literacy's equation with national citizenship and that replaces the concept of nation as narration with transnation as narration. For them, the between-worlds trope becomes a misnomer because new immigrants' transfiguring culture of global movement subverts and transforms institutions of national pedagogy and scholarship.

Doing Asian American rhetoric, as we have been suggesting, involves engaging with the past as well as with the present. It further calls for remembering and restoring—another form of performance—Asian American experiences in the American imaginary. It is the role of rhetorical memory in the making of Asian American rhetoric that Haivan V. Hoang addresses in her chapter, "Asian American Rhetorical Memory and a 'Memory That is Only Sometimes Our Own.'"

During the 2000 presidential campaigns Senator John McCain used the racial epithet "gooks" to refer to his North Vietnamese prison guards, and Asian American activists in California protested his use as being bigoted and offensive. While he later apologized, Senator McCain continued to justify this use by appealing to his prisoner of war memory

as the objective basis for his representation of the past. However, the art of memory, argues Hoang, is necessarily rhetorical, because memory confers significance on signs, especially on those highly charged ones like “gook,” “jap,” or “chink,” in relation to changing Asian American racial formation and to their historical participation in the United States. Therefore, to remember rhetorically, for Asian Americans, is to investigate histories that are formed through the transnational ties among Asia and the United States, and to trace and stitch together memories of seemingly disparate moments and cultural sites. Doing so enables Asian Americans to control cultural production of memories and thus to claim agency and identity in the mainstream construction of who they are.

Central to our interest in the making of Asian American rhetoric is how Asian Americans use language and other symbolic resources to perform their identity in their own communities. Therefore, we have included in this section four chapters that focus on one or more specific Asian American communities and on how such communities practice Asian American rhetoric. In her chapter, “Listening for Legacies; or, How I Began to Hear Dorothy Laigo Cordova, the Pinay behind the Podium Known as FANHS,” Terese Guinsatao Monberg takes us to the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) and to its founder and executive director Dorothy Laigo Cordova. Drawing upon work by such feminist historiographers as Jacqueline Jones Royster, Malea Powell, and Krista Ratcliffe, and using “listening” as a distinctive methodological approach of feminist historiography, Monberg seeks to “recover” the rhetorical legacy of Cordova, who has often been hidden from traditional scholarly references to FANHS, and thus to help us better understand the rhetorical activities and significances of FANHS.

What makes Monberg’s work most exciting is how she uses “listening”—“rethinking interpretive frameworks, listening for patterns within an emerging tradition, and looking to other disciplines in a larger effort to understand the context in which words can mean”—to uncover the spatial metaphors and other pedagogical theories in Cordova’s work and to challenge the binary between rhetorical theory and practice that is so problematic for the making of Asian American rhetoric. She argues that Cordova’s vision of FANHS as a rhetorical space and what this space offers the Filipino American community would be largely invisible to a methodology that privileges the use of sight to navigate traditional maps and catalogs of knowledge. By uncovering a potentially lost legacy of

Cordova's work, Monberg demonstrates how Asian American feminist rhetoric depends on alternative forms of institutional or public memory, and how space, history, and memory intersect with one another to inform and constitute the articulation and performance of Asian American rhetoric.

We follow Monberg's study with Subhasree Chakravarty's "Learning Authenticity: Pedagogies of Hindu Nationalism in North America." Chakravarty studies how some diasporic Hindu communities in North America develop discursive strategies to nurture and foreground national sentiments and to create narratives of cultural and religious identity. Taking into account how discursive formations inscribe subjects in the material contexts of their experiences, Chakravarty specifically focuses on the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangha (Hindu Volunteer Corps) and its other three affiliated organizations. She examines their various forms of pedagogic practices, ranging from regularly organized educational camps to meetings and publications of instructional books and pamphlets. Through some careful analysis, she argues that these organizations use "an exclusivist rhetoric" to invoke a transnational, yet "authentic," Hindu identity and to promote a religious ideology (authentic Hinduism) that incites religious nationalism and awakens the diasporic Hindu Indian Americans. Her study once again illustrates how Asian American communities enact particular forms of rhetoric to revisit history, to challenge or subvert the constructions of Asian Americans by the dominant culture, and to represent them discursively by drawing upon ideologies domestic or transported over from far afield.

Next, in "Relocating Authority: Coauthor(iz)ing a Japanese American Ethos of Resistance under Mass Incarceration," Mira Chieko Shimabukuro takes us back to World War II, to one internment camp in Heart Mountain, Wyoming, examining how a group of Japanese American internees in this community collaboratively wrote, published, and distributed bulletins that explicitly refused the military draft as long as members of the community were still "interned" against their will. Drawing upon the work of camp historians and using the theoretical frameworks of "minority discourse" and literacy sponsorship, Shimabukuro argues that these internees, who organized themselves into a committee called the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee (FPC), developed a resistant rhetoric that drew its discursive authority from sources both "friendly" and "hostile." Or to use her own terms, this resistant rhetoric was "coauthorized" by local and global agents of

both collective “damage” and collective “sponsorship.” For these local and global agents, she considers the role of the government-sponsored camp newspaper, the racist rhetoric of U.S. politicians and mainstream newspapers, Japanese cultural models of ideal behavior, the effects of pre-World War II Americanization initiatives, and the organizing efforts of camp Issei (first-generation immigrants). She further argues that the role of “historical location” matters in our conceptualization of resistant rhetoric, and she closes her chapter with a brief discussion of a contemporary Japanese American war resister and the lasting significance of the FPC’s writing as a “coauthoring” force of resistance for Asian Americans today.

We conclude this section with Robyn Tasaka’s “Rhetoric of the Asian American Self: Influences of Region and Social Class on Autobiographical Writing.” In this chapter Tasaka takes us to Hawai‘i to investigate how Asian American students use language to write themselves into the larger American autobiographical narrative. According to Tasaka, much of the literature on the autobiographical writing of Asian Americans and other people of color seems to suggest that members of these groups write in certain ways—which include, for example, displaying double consciousness, making social statements, and providing guided tours of their cultures. However, by studying the autobiographical writing of three Asian American English majors at the University of Hawai‘i, Tasaka demonstrates that these students write in ways that are markedly different from what has been attributed to them and to their community. Moreover and most noticeable, race is barely identifiable in their writing. She argues that this absence of race reflects the influences of region and social class on Asian American experience. That is, Asian Americans are a majority in Hawai‘i and some groups—including the Chinese and Japanese—tend to occupy higher socioeconomic status. In addition, race is also discussed quite differently in Hawai‘i than it is on the mainland. What her study illustrates is that we must consider factors like region and social class when discussing Asian American autobiographical writing and experiences and that the making of Asian American rhetoric must take into account, in our terms, where we are and where we have been.

If the first seven chapters are in one sense aimed at how Asian Americans invent, remember, and recover certain discursive practices to enact different forms of Asian American rhetoric, the next seven chapters direct their focus toward the issue of representation and

resistance or, more specifically, toward how Asian Americans use rhetoric to combat misrepresentations and stereotypes and to develop representations for their very own that are directly based upon their own experiences as Other and upon their own struggles for political, racial, and linguistic justice.

Given the overdetermination of racial, ethnic, and cultural categories, we want to suggest that representation constitutes a primary consideration in Asian American rhetorical practices. Asians and Asian Americans have long been constructed discursively in the United States. We see these representations through official discourses such as legislation and governmental policies that addressed immigration, naturalization, property rights, or national security in times of war. Popular discourses in mass media have also contributed to these representations because such discourses raised fears of a “yellow peril” during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, created “model minorities” in the 1970s and 1980s, or blamed economic hard times on Japanese carmakers and the rise of Asian technology industries. However, in recent years such representations constructed through dominant discourse have been challenged more vociferously and from a host of cultural sites and perspectives. In our second section, “‘Translating’ and ‘Transforming’ Asian American Identities,” we have gathered chapters that specifically illustrate how representations of Asians and Asian Americans by dominant discourses have been challenged and how Asian Americans have used rhetoric to create their own representations of identity, community, and culture. We chose “translating” and “transforming” for part of the title of this section in order to accentuate the importance of these two tropes we discussed earlier in representing Asian American identities and in the making of Asian American rhetoric.

For example, in “‘Artful Bigotry and Kitsch’: A Study of Stereotype, Mimicry, and Satire in Asian American T-Shirt Rhetoric,” Vincent N. Pham and Kent A. Ono examine a specific case of representation and counterrepresentation and ideological tensions that frame the production and reception of images. Focusing on a line of Asian-themed T-shirts produced and distributed by clothing retailer Abercrombie and Fitch (A&F) in 2002, Pham and Ono unpack the use of the stereotypical yellow peril imagery of Asians and Asian Americans that resulted in a contemporary “spectacle of racism.” They also consider the response by the Asian American–owned clothing company Blacklava, which made its own T-shirt, employing satire to rework and refigure A&F’s original

racist imagery. Exploring Bourdieu's concept of symbolic domination and Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and mockery to document A&F's attempt at symbolic domination over Asian Americans, Pham and Ono argue that Blacklava's T-shirt—recirculated with A&F's images but substituting the words "Artful Bigotry & Kitsch" for "Abercrombie & Fitch"—is a counterrhetorical act that illustrates Asian American resistance to that domination. Further, Pham and Ono argue that wearers of the Blacklava T-shirt enact an embodied resistance that challenges A&F's symbolic violence, racism, and corporate mimicry and mockery. Their study, therefore, points to a new arena where Asian Americans engage in resistance work in creative and transformative ways.

Similarly, in "Beyond 'Asian American' and Back: Coalitional Rhetoric in Print and New Media," Jolivette Mecenas examines articulations of Asian American identities within the cultural contexts of two contemporary publications, the print and online versions of *Hyphen* and *Giant Robot*. Building on Judith Butler's theory of performativity, Mecenas examines the rhetorical force of identity claims in the public sphere through popular culture. By analyzing specific examples (including a blog dialogue in which participants clarify the differences between Hawaiian and Asian identities and a video podcast that parodies Asian stereotypes), Mecenas argues that descriptive rather than normative articulations of Asian American identities delimit what such an identity may mean, thereby engendering various possibilities for coalitional political agency across multiple identities of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality. Asian American identities and cultures thus are transformed when coalitions are created that focus not on articulating a shared identity as the end goal, but on making meaning through shared practices, such as engaging in pop culture, that may reshape the prevailing cultural ideology into one that nurtures coalitions of creative and nonracist people.

While Mecenas focuses on the production of Asian American texts that have a primarily Asian and Asian American audience, Mary Louise Buley-Meissner turns her attention to the reception of Asian American texts by largely white readers. In her chapter, "On the Road with P. T. Barnum's Traveling Chinese Museum: Rhetorics of Public Reception and Self-Resistance in the Emergence of Literature by Chinese American Women," Buley-Meissner investigates the rhetoric of public reception in popular reviews of three foundational Chinese American women writers: Sui Sin Far at the turn of the century, Jade Snow Wong in the 1950s,

and Maxine Hong Kingston in the 1970s. As mainstream reviewers influence public perceptions of how an emerging body of work by “minority” writers contributes (or is marginal) to “majority” literary interests, they reinforce dominant beliefs about who belongs in this country and why. Buley-Meissner echoes the argument of the *AIIEEEEE!* editors as she illustrates how reviewers consistently regard Chinese American women writers as Chinese rather than American, as if their foreignness is their most important qualification for being noticed. To counter these public receptions or these acts of public displacement, Buley-Meissner argues, these Chinese American women writers developed the rhetoric of self-resistance by articulating bicultural realities and by enacting the roles and responsibilities they were committed to fulfilling in their work. Across generations, these writers are not politically or historically innocent, but acutely aware of social conditions influencing response to their interpretations of identity, difference, and community.

These chapters together directly address issues of representation, responding to questions like: What are the representations of Asian Americans in dominant culture? What representations do Asian Americans create of themselves? At the same time, they also begin to suggest how Asian Americans develop strategies of resistance to construct their identities and culture. Chapters by Bo Wang, Jeffrey Carroll, Michaela Meyer, and Hyoejin Yoon examine how Asian Americans develop discourses of resistance and perform their identities and culture through different rhetorical acts, from journalistic and imaginative writing to stage comedy and musical virtuosity, from athletic feats to educational instruction.

While Burley-Meissner focuses on how Sui Sin Far, or Edith Eaton, together with the other two Chinese American women writers, has been received by popular discourses in the United States, Bo Wang, in “Rereading Sui Sin Far: A Rhetoric of Defiance,” vividly illustrates how she developed rhetorical strategies to create spaces for Chinese and other ethnic minorities and to resist and challenge social and cultural norms. Drawing on Kenneth Burke’s concept of rhetoric as identification and narrative criticism as major critical lenses, Wang argues that Sui’s works—she is recognized by literary scholars as the first Chinese American immigrant writer to depict the Chinese in America with empathy—should be considered not merely as aesthetic undertakings, but rather as rhetorical texts. That is, these imaginative writings reveal her personal struggles as a biracial writer, her inventive rhetorical strategies,

her breaking of the silences and invisibility of Chinese immigrants in North America, and her commitment to the change of that racist society. Wang also argues that Sui Sin Far explored rhetorical strategies such as the reshaping of literary genres, conventions, and character types that could facilitate efforts to challenge prejudice and racism. Marginalized writers, Wang suggests, can develop resistance to cultural norms when they have little access to political arenas. Through discursive practices they can create rhetorical spaces where marginalized social groups are able to challenge dominant ideologies, develop their own political and social beliefs, and have their voices heard.

In his chapter, “Margaret Cho, Jake Shimabukuro, and Rhetorics in a Minor Key,” Jeffrey Carroll focuses on two entertainers, Margaret Cho and Jake Shimabukuro, who have managed, against industry odds or racial odds—or both—to create a particular sense of an Asian American rhetoric. This rhetoric and its position in relation to American culture are defined through an exploration of both entertainers’ performances. More specifically, Carroll sees their performances as recuperating the classical rhetorical canon of delivery or “the language of the body.” Further, such performances serve not to exclude what is surely a complex of relations that exist between Asian American performers and their material and audience, but to display a modality of that position that may, in fact, be a marker of what is possibly “Asian” about Asian American rhetoric. Carroll also argues that both performers move back and forth, and easily, from a rhetoric of collective or shared experience to the personal and sometimes startlingly rare art of encountering and recognizing a minor narrative of the personal, in which Asian identities are the explicit subject.

Michaela D. E. Meyer, in her chapter, “‘Maybe I Could Play a Hooker in Something! Asian American Identity, Gender, and Comedy in the Rhetoric of Margaret Cho,” also focuses on Margaret Cho but on different aspects of her performativity and its rhetorical effects. Meyer argues that Cho is rhetorically “playing” with her identity, representing herself as both an insider and an outsider in both Eastern and western contexts. For western audiences Margaret Cho is the “Other”—she looks Asian, but her knowledge and experience within American society coupled with fluency in a language familiar to western audiences simultaneously positions Cho as an “insider.” The ambiguity of Cho’s ethnic identity then lends itself to challenging the binary definition of race applied in American contexts. Thus, her Asian body, coupled with American social

mores, becomes the rhetorical site of embodiment, opening a space for a unique “cultural rhetoric” in her everyday performances.

To close off this section, we have included K. Hyoejin Yoon’s “Learning Asian American Affect.” In this chapter Yoon examines the relationship between affect and the racialized and gendered body. Building on discussions of model minority discourse, affect, and gender, Yoon theorizes the various pedagogical functions that the Asian American female body serves, from the performance of an Asian American cheerleader injured in a fall to explorations of her own position as an Asian American teacher whose performance fulfills different ideological purposes for a variety of audiences. In particular, Yoon illustrates how these performances through the Asian American body are both rhetorical and pedagogical and that the Asian American (gendered) body often is read in particular ways by dominant culture to fulfill desire, but is also rhetorical and pedagogical in the interests of Asian Americans. Her study, together with Carroll’s and Meyer’s, shows how Asian Americans can mobilize language and body to empower themselves and to effect social and cultural changes.

It has been seven years since that reviewer questioned the value of rhetoric for Asian Americans. It has been four years since the student from Beijing Jiaotong University raised those pointed questions. We think often of these two encounters because they keep reminding us of the need to perform a narrative where Asian Americans, or any other ethnic minorities, for that matter, can use a language that, in the words of Gloria Anzaldúa, “they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves” (1999, 77). We offer this collection as one such narrative, as our collective, but no less heterogeneously inflected, response to that reviewer’s skepticism and to that Chinese student’s questions. In short, we see this work as our effort to articulate and perform this language we call “Asian American rhetoric.”

As we are about to close this introduction, we must emphasize that this collective response of ours does not imply any claim on our part to uniqueness or coherence for Asian American rhetoric, because, as will be made clear in the next fourteen chapters, nothing of this sort can really be had. Rather, we want to claim that doing Asian American rhetoric is an act always situated in a space of linguistic, cultural, and transnational multiplicity and fraught with histories and memories of asymmetrical

relations of power and domination. Further, it is an act that not only resists and challenges the dominant representations that deny or subordinate our language and our rhetoric as the Other, but also openly engages the tension or contradiction that informs both the very naming of our discursive practices and the actual process of translating and transforming our experiences into the larger American imaginary.

As a rhetoric of becoming, Asian American rhetoric has also served us well. Not only has this rhetoric made it possible for us to complete this project, but it has also given rise to, and indeed served to constitute, a new space where we can engage in the work of performative transformation. To advance such work, we must further develop new theoretical models to systematically account for our discursive practices and their significances. While practices of resistance to dominant cultural and rhetorical norms by Asian Americans are aplenty, it is up to us to uncover and legitimate them. Moreover, it is no less imperative that we continue to discover and develop rhetorical strategies and genres that can help open up access to political and cultural arenas that have heretofore been denied to Asian Americans. Such efforts will lead us to focus more intently on specific, particularizing sites, on how Asian Americans in their respective communities use rhetoric to bring about positive changes and to shape new realities. Finally, as we have been arguing all along in this introduction, doing Asian American rhetoric entails conflict, contradiction, and ambivalence. Such an act becomes further entangled with the ever-present fluidity of culture, identity, and tradition, because we use Asian American rhetoric with a body that is already socially codified and thus predetermined, and because Asian American rhetoric can take on discursive features that are suggestive of other rhetorical traditions and/or are being appropriated by the dominant tradition. It is these moments of entanglement that call for further systematic investigations where boundaries of different cultures, traditions, and identities conflate, and where acts of conflict and interdependency abound.

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