Chapter 5

Asian/Pacific American Literature: The Battle Over Authenticity

Sandra S. Yamate

Timing is everything, goes the old adage. Nowhere is that more true than in the context of literature, especially Asian/Pacific American literature. To truly appreciate literature, one needs to understand not only the time period of the setting but also the time period in which it was written and the contemporary issues and concerns, as well as societal norms and values, that may have influenced the author. The logic by which historiography reminds students of history—that a description of events and an analysis of the impact or ramifications of those events can differ dramatically, depending on whether the historian is a contemporary or not—is just as true for an analysis of literature. It is particularly true in the case of Asian/Pacific American literature, which continues to grapple with its own history and its perceptions of Asian/Pacific Americans' place in the United States. Indeed, Asian/Pacific American history is so intertwined with its literature that it is almost impossible to discuss the literature without the history.

Asian/Pacific American Beginnings

Any discussion about Asian/Pacific American literature in its historical context would logically begin at the beginning of that history. This

is easier said than done, however. Even if we exclude from consideration the theories of prehistoric Asian nomadic tribes crossing to the Americas by way of a land mass spanning the Bering Strait, or of Pacific Islander peoples who traveled in rafts to the coasts of Central and South America, it is not clear just how, when, or where we should identify the beginning of Asian/Pacific American history in the Americas, much less the United States. Asian/Pacific Americans are an ethnically diverse group. Some of these ethnic groups have been in the Americas for centuries, such as the Chinese, who settled in Mexico and Central America as early as the 17th century. This was a consequence of trade with Spain and its colonies, and the Chinese became indentured or contract laborers—commonly referred to as "coolies"—imported by the Spanish into Cuba to supplement the African slave labor force on the sugar plantations. Some have been in the United States for more than a century, with families whose roots as Americans stretch back five or six generations to times when those of Asian ancestry were denied the opportunity to become naturalized American citizens. Other ethnic groups are more recent arrivals, immigrants or refugees with strong emotional and psychological ties to their countries of origin, who may not yet view themselves as Americans, much less Asian/Pacific Americans. Can Asian/Pacific American history begin before everyone was present? Do all the members of the group have to accept the label before it is legitimate?

Even if we try to arbitrarily choose a beginning point—the first documented arrival in the United States of an Asian or Pacific Islander, the first American born of Asian or Pacific Islander ancestry, or the first citizen of Asian or Pacific Islander ancestry—other issues remain to be considered. As alluded to earlier, for many Asians and Pacific Islanders, their arrival in the United States does not translate into immediate self-identification as an American or even an Asian/Pacific American.

Furthermore, the very concept of a Pan–Asian/Pacific American identity is relatively new and remains controversial, particularly among those who are newer to the United States and those who already have been acculturated into "American culture." Even among those who have banded together under the banner "Asian/Pacific American," the concept is not always an easy one to accept. For some, the overriding concern is their own ethnic group's representation

within a multitude of ethnic groups, frequently for the sake of advancing the preeminence or superiority of their own ethnic group rather than promoting truly Pan–Asian/Pacific American ideals and goals for the benefit of Asian/Pacific Americans regardless of ethnicity. Consequently, what is Chinese American, for example, may not be accepted as Asian/Pacific American by a Filipino American or an Indian American. Many whose ancestors arrived from China, Japan, and Korea are reluctant to recognize a common racial or political bond with those of South Asian ancestry whose families arrived from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Something Pan–Asian/Pacific American may also not be accepted by someone to whom ethnicity is all important, or who perhaps rejects the idea as an invention of European Americans to neatly pigeonhole those who for so many years have been labeled neither White nor Black but "Other." Therefore, is the beginning of Pan–Asian/Pacific American history the time at which the concept first evolved? Or is it when it became (or becomes) the politically correct label for the majority of Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander ancestry? Will it be when the concept is more uniformly accepted and realized by Asian/Pacific Americans themselves? Or is there some other triggering mechanism?

In the interest of promoting Pan–Asian/Pacific American identity, despite the risk of offending or alienating those for whom an Asian/Pacific American context cannot possibly exist prior to the arrival of significant numbers of individuals from their own particular ethnic group, and without trying to emphasize one ethnic group over another, for our purposes the beginning will be defined as the mid-19th-century arrival of sojourners and immigrants from Asia and the Pacific to the United States. Their writings about their lives in, their thoughts and perceptions about, and their hopes for America provide the first body of literature of Asians and Pacific Islanders in this country.

A New Source of Labor: Asian/Pacific Americans in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries

In the aftermath of the War of 1812, as industrialization was revolutionizing the United States, and Americans were looking westward

toward their Manifest Destiny, American business found itself in need of cheap labor. Consequently, as Irish immigrants, followed by central and southern European immigrants, were used to operate the sweatshop factories of the East Coast, Chinese and other Asian laborers were brought in to provide labor for agriculture and industry in Hawaii and on the West Coast. Yet while the European immigrants gradually assimilated into the dominant American culture, their Asian counterparts had a far different experience. Indeed, as Professor Evelyn Hu-DeHart (1992) points out, of all the non-European groups in the United States, those of Asian ancestry come closest to conforming to the notion of being immigrants like the Europeans. The Africans who were brought to this country as slaves certainly came in a most involuntary fashion. Native Americans and Spanish-speaking peoples were already living in the West and Southwest. And although the Asians who migrated across the Pacific may not have all come voluntarily, they did not come as slaves and so their arrival most closely approximates the circumstances of immigrant Europeans.

Nevertheless, the reception and subsequent treatment of immigrants from Asia was grossly disparate from that received by European immigrants. Most European immigrants, within a generation or so, were able to physically blend into American society and assimilate. Asian immigrants had no such opportunity and could not obtain American citizenship. Alien land laws passed at various times prevented them from owning real estate. They were restricted in the types of occupations they could pursue. They were unwelcome, even if their labor was not unwanted.

> American opinion makers of the time—missionaries, diplomats, employers of Chinese workers—invariably portrayed them [Asian immigrants] as idolatrous and godless, politically servile, morally depraved, physically degenerate, loathsomely disease-ridden, savage, childlike, lustful, sensual, and, in sum, irredeemably backwards. Thus, Asians were judged ineligible for citizenship in this country. They were viewed as incapable of assimilating into an American society devoted to freedom and a cohesive nationalism. Indeed, seen in this context, the yellow masses were considered a peril to progress and the unity of this still young nation. (Hu-DeHart, 1992, p. 8)

Nevertheless, the mid-19th century saw a worldwide decline in the African slave trade. Labor was crucial to support the growing American economy. To satisfy the demand for labor, American business ransacked the world, particularly China, in a search for laborers. When gold was discovered in California in 1849, the United States stepped up its introduction of successive waves of mostly Chinese men as a cheap and docile labor force for the Western mines and railroads.

European immigrants came to resent the Chinese as unwelcome competitors. That was not surprising. Racial and ethnic intolerance and prejudice were quickly recognized as an effective means of controlling, manipulating, and subjugating laborers. In Hawaii, for example, where the Native Hawaiians were declining in number and even those willing to work were considered lazy and undisciplined, Chinese laborers were brought in to set an "example." Sugar plantation managers hoped the Hawaiians would be "naturally jealous" of the foreigners and "ambitious" to outdo them. They encouraged the Chinese to call the native workers "Wahine, wahine!" or "Woman, woman!" in Hawaiian (Takaki, 1989, p. 25). In this fashion an ethnically diverse work force was used by American business as a mechanism of control. Diversity was deliberately designed to break strikes and repress unions.

The growing Chinese labor force, however, made many European Americans uneasy. Consequently, in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the entry of any more Chinese laborers into the United States. This law was also interpreted to prohibit the entry of the wives of Chinese laborers who were already here. In 1888, the restriction was further tightened to prohibit a Chinese laborer in the United States from leaving and then returning to the United States and to make it unlawful for any Chinese person, except a merchant, to enter the country.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the United States initiated the importation of Japanese laborers. The Japanese labor force was intended to serve as a check upon the Chinese. By 1900, however, Japanese labor was perceived as growing too numerous, and this perception resulted in the 1908 Gentlemen's Agreement restricting Japanese immigration. Businesses scrambled for a new source of labor and looked to Korea. The Korean labor supply, however, was cut off in 1905, when the Korean government prohibited further emigration. In 1906, Filipino la-

bor began to be imported. Unlike the Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans, the Filipinos came from a United States territory and had the benefits of citizenship. Around 1909, Asian Indian laborers were introduced into the United States when a small colony of Sikhs began working in the vineyards around Fresno, California. By 1917, Congress had prohibited any further immigration from India, and Indian immigrants soon found themselves subjected to many of the same restrictions and prohibitions as Japanese Americans. In 1924, the National Origins Act was passed; this was designed to prohibit any further Japanese immigration, and, to prevent the development of families and communities of Asians in the midst of European America, it barred the entry of women from China, Japan, Korea, and India. Even Asian wives of United States citizens could not be brought into the country because they were classified as "aliens ineligible for citizenship." While the law did not apply to Filipino migration (since the Philippines were a U.S. territory), the 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act addressed this "oversight" by establishing Philippine independence and then limiting Filipino immigration to 50 persons a year. As long as they were cheap laborers, and in the absence of alternative labor sources, Asians were tolerated. But by the 1920s, when Mexico became the newest source of labor, Asians had become the first people to be specifically barred by law from entering the United States because of their race.

The lives of these early Asian immigrants was not easy. Whether they worked on the sugar plantations of Hawaii or the railroads, mines, farms, or factories of the West Coast, they toiled for long hours and little pay. Consequently, if they did find time to pursue literary interests, their literature has generally not survived.[1] Still, by the first part of the 20th century, a rich and vibrant literature written by Asian/Pacific Americans was coming into existence, and modern students can rejoice over its survival.

One such cause for celebration is the work of Edith Maud Eaton. Eaton, who wrote under the pseudonym Sui Sin Far ("Water Lily" in Cantonese), was born in 1867 to a Chinese mother and an English father. Although she could pass for White, she chose to live and write as a Chinese American. She traveled back and forth across North America and produced a series of stories (1909) that give us the only contemporary view into the lives of late 19th-century Chinese Americans in the United States and Canada. For instance, her two-part short

story, "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese" and "Her Chinese Husband," is a compelling and poignant tale about an early interracial marriage, told with a matter-of-fact honesty, sensitivity, and calmness that make its ending all the more tragic. Another story, "Leaves From the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" is an insightful and candid examination of social mores and attitudes about race in turn-of-the-century America.

Less sophisticated, perhaps, but no less telling than Sui Sin Far's stories, are the anonymous poems of Angel Island. Angel Island, which lies in the middle of the San Francisco Bay, has sometimes been called the Ellis Island of the West. Between 1910 and 1940, when Chinese exclusion laws required immigrants to prove themselves to be related by blood to a current U.S. resident in order to gain entry, Chinese immigrants were detained at Angel Island and subjected to repeated interrogations by immigration officials—for periods that could stretch from a few weeks into months or even more than a year. Passing the grueling examinations meant taking a ferry ride to San Francisco to begin a new life. Failure meant permanent deportation back to China. The facilities were primitive at best, with little or no privacy and plenty of despair and frustration. On the walls of the wooden barracks where the detainees were held, these Chinese immigrants wrote poems and rhymes expressing their anger, frustration, despair, and fear; capturing their dreams, ambitions, and hopes; and preserving their views and impressions of this first taste of life in America. The poems show that Angel Island was not a euphoric gateway to Utopia for these Chinese immigrants, but

> a contradiction of the principles of liberty that testified to injustice ... [and] reveals an appreciation of the American principles of justice and democracy. They expected to be treated on that level and they believed that they should be accorded such rights. This was ... the first crude sign of their Americanization. (Chan, Chin, Inada, & Wong, 1991, p. 141)

Although the poems are written in colloquial Cantonese, Marlon K. Hom has translated many of them in "Immigration Blues" and "Lamentations of Stranded Sojourners" in *Songs of Gold Mountain* (1987). With great integrity and eloquence, Hom's translations capture the spirit of the poems as anonymous, and therefore more reveal-

ing, messages from the souls of the authors. They display the simplicity, earthiness, and humanity of those faceless voices as they first encounter the racism, prejudice, and biases that will influence their Americanization and their lives as Americans.

Americanization is further explored and articulated in a brilliant autobiographical novel, *America Is in the Heart* (1946) by Carlos Bulosan. Bulosan was a self-taught writer and union activist who was born in the Philippines in 1913 and immigrated to Seattle in 1930. *America Is in the Heart* tells the story of a young boy growing up in the Philippines, his immigration to the United States, and his experiences there. With fine brush strokes, Bulosan paints a picture of an America that many Americans never saw acknowledged but that nevertheless existed. His is one of the few detailed accounts of life in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s from an Asian immigrant's perspective. Bulosan's writing is unsympathetic, not sparing his reader any horror, outrage, or tragedy; it is also amazingly nonjudgmental, making for a compelling tale that carries the reader along. Bulosan wrote in a variety of literary genres, and much of his fiction was published during the 1940s in magazines like *The New Yorker* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Unfortunately, he died young, but despite his early death in 1956, his extraordinary talent guarantees his place in American literature.

American Citizens (Second Class): Asian/Pacific Americans, 1942–1965

On the eve of World War II, the children and grandchildren of the Asian immigrants who had managed to reach the United States despite exclusion laws and other restrictions upon Asian immigration were growing up as "typical" Americans. American-born citizens, they were educated as Americans, recited the Pledge of Allegiance in fluent English, and prepared to grow up and take their place among their fellow Americans. That their immigrant parents or grandparents were ineligible for American citizenship[2] and were "viewed as inherently incapable of Americanization" (Hu-DeHart, 1992, p. 8) was unfortunate, but surely no one would question the citizenship of a generation born on American soil. They would soon discover otherwise.

On February 19, 1942, came one of the defining moments in Asian/Pacific American history. On that date, after decades of rampant anti-

Asian sentiment in the United States, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which opened the way for the evacuation of approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast and their forced internment in 10 concentration camps. Almost three months earlier, the United States had suffered the bombing of Pearl Harbor and was now at war with Japan. Japanese Americans living on the West Coast—regardless of their citizenship, length of time in the United States, age, education, employment, political ideology, or infirmity—were forcibly evacuated from their homes and sent to live in isolated "camps," located in desolate areas of the country, behind barbed wire and under the watch of armed guards.

The reasons given for the internment ostensibly were military necessity and national security against the possibilities of sabotage. That these reasons were nothing more than contrivances becomes clear upon closer inspection. Japanese Americans were interned without any finding of guilt by any court and, like many Asian Americans before them, they found themselves subjected to grossly disparate treatment compared to their European Axis counterparts. German Americans and Italian Americans were not subjected to the same sort of wholesale imprisonment, even though the United States was also at war with Germany and Italy. The few German Americans and Italian Americans who were imprisoned had at least had the benefit of an administrative hearing on their internment. Furthermore, if the internment of Japanese Americans was truly to prevent the possibility of sabotage, there can still be no justification for interning the bedridden, the children, and the menial laborers who would have little or no opportunity to create sabotage, while not interning the much larger Japanese American population in Hawaii.

The history of the internment, however, goes beyond the imprisonment of American citizens who were denied the due process of law guaranteed by the Constitution. It also includes forcing internees to complete a poorly worded, insulting document called a "loyalty questionnaire," of which two questions required either a "yes-yes" or a "no-no" answer. "Yes-yes" meant that the person answering was agreeing to serve military combat duty and, without any insurance of postwar citizenship, would forswear any allegiance to a foreign country. There was no middle ground, no way to protest the internment while affirming loyalty, and no way to challenge their treatment as citizens while protecting themselves from being countryless.

The loyalty questionnaire paved the way for the creation of an entirely Japanese American regiment. The 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team, the most highly decorated unit in U.S. military history, was known as the "Purple Heart Battalion" because of the overwhelmingly high number of members who were killed or injured. In light of the number of casualties, the injustices endured by families and friends who were still interned, and the racist treatment to which the soldiers and their families had been subjected, the history of the 442nd RCT and its military successes in the face of almost insurmountable odds is particularly poignant.

The internment stands as a major scar on the collective psyche of Asian/Pacific Americans. It serves as a reminder that no matter how hard Asian/Pacific Americans may try to acculturate themselves and assimilate into American society, European American society has not been especially accepting or welcoming and may not ever be. Generations later, writers continue to grapple with it as a subject, as a setting, and as an influence upon contemporary Asian/Pacific America. It is no wonder that the internment was and continues to be frequently revisited in Asian/Pacific American literature.

Nisei Daughter (1979), Monica Sone's autobiographical novel, examines the state of the Japanese American community in prewar Seattle, the impact of the internment, and its ramifications for Seattle's Japanese American community. By describing her family's history from her father's arrival through her parents' marriage and her own and her siblings' births, from her childhood and adolescence through her family's internment at Minidoka, Idaho, Sone offers the reader a chance to stand in the place of a young Japanese American, to experience the schizophrenia of living a Japanese identity at home and an American identity outside while struggling to develop a unified and consistent self-view, and to begin to understand the internment and America's treatment of Japanese Americans from the perspective of someone who experienced it firsthand. Although the book is sometimes a bit chauvinist, that is more a reflection of the norms of the time in which Sone grew up than any intentional denigration of the roles and value of women. Nevertheless, for young adults, *Nisei Daughter* provides some thought-provoking insight into race relations during that era.

Better known—but lacking the degree of insight, introspection, and historical perspective of *Nisei Daughter*—is James and Jeanne

Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973). *Farewell to Manzanar* follows its protagonist as she and her family try to adjust to life after the war outside their internment camp. In an effort to illustrate the confusion the young girl faces as she tries to reconcile her new all-American life with her family's experience, there is, at times, too much focus on the petty and mundane and not enough on the emotional upheaval of the girl and her family.

Perhaps the most straightforward accounts of prewar life and the internment by someone who lived through it are those written by the prolific Yoshiko Uchida. Her books, such as *Journey to Topaz* (1971) and *Journey Home* (1978), are simple, straightforward accounts of Japanese American life during the mid-20th century. At times they are a trifle dry and reserved—perhaps in part because she based much of her writing on her own and her family's experiences, and perhaps because, like many Japanese Americans during that era, she may have unwittingly adopted some of the Japanese American community's own stereotypes of itself, such as uncomplaining strength, limitless patience, and steadfast self-reliance. Her chronological accounts, without the compelling narrative or psychological insight of storytellers like Monica Sone or Jade Snow Wong (see below), may lack somewhat in inspiration, but they nevertheless serve as an excellent introduction to the history of Japanese Americans for preteens and young adults.

Another author, Hisaye Yamamoto, published seven short stories between 1948 and 1961, and

> her modest body of fiction is remarkable for its range and gut understanding of Japanese America. The questions and themes of Asian American life are fresh. Growing up with foreign-born parents, mixing with white and non-white races, racial discrimination, growing old, the question of dual personality—all were explored in the seven stories of Hisaye Yamamoto. (Chan et al., 1991, p. 339)

Her writing is particularly noteworthy because it is the only known description of prewar rural Japanese American life in existence. Fortunately, her stories, poems, and essays have been collected and published in a single volume, *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories* (1988).

Japanese Canadians were also subjected to internment and Shizuye Takashima's book, *A Child in Prison Camp* (1991), written in diary form,

is a moving and masterful recounting of her and her family's life during the war that makes excellent reading for preteens and young adults. Unlike Yoshiko Uchida, Takashima seems more willing to delve into the "less-flattering" emotions of her family and the other internees, allowing them to express anger, frustration, despair, and fear and to be more three-dimensional.

In order to truly grasp the depth of emotion and conflict tapped by *No-No Boy* (1988), the landmark novel by John Okada—particularly the controversial loyalty questionnaire and the inner conflicts of the Japanese American community concerning it—a greater knowledge of Japanese American history is required than is commonly taught in American schools. Yet even for those who are not familiar with the history, Okada's moving tale about a young man who answered the crucial questions on the loyalty questionnaire with "no-no" is brilliant, tragic, and heroic. Okada and his hero, Ichiro, explore the internment of Seattle's Japanese American community and their pain, anger, guilt, bitterness, and depression in the aftermath of the war. Many contemporary Japanese Americans rejected this portrayal, however, and, consequently, the book. It very nearly became doomed to be forgotten but for its reprinting by an Asian American community resource project in 1971.

Anti-Asian sentiment and the resulting limited ethnic labor market was not the sole province of Japanese Americans; it was directed toward anyone of Asian ancestry. Although they did not suffer internment, Chinese Americans were also subjected to limitations based upon race. In Jade Snow Wong's autobiographical novel, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945), one of the earliest books to explore the tensions faced by young Asian/Pacific Americans as they struggle between an Asian or Pacific Islander identity and an American identity, the author describes growing up as a Chinese American before and during World War II. Although the life she describes is somewhat atypical for girls of the time, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* nevertheless provides a fascinating glimpse into the values and social mores of the Chinese community at that time. Jade Snow Wong had educational and employment opportunities unusual for a Chinese American girl or for any young woman from such a socioeconomic background at that time. Modern-day readers may find her pride in her accomplishments and the importance she attaches to them to be somewhat modest and quaint compared to

the opportunities now afforded women, but it is important to bear in mind that even the gains that women have now achieved may seem rather limited someday in hindsight.

Another glimpse into Asian/Pacific American life was preserved by Louis Chu in *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1986). In it, Chu examines Chinatown's bachelor society, which was the result of the exclusion laws that prevented the immigration of Chinese women and the establishment of Chinese American families. With affection and humor, *Eat a Bowl of Tea* is a somewhat satirical tale of adultery and retribution set in a Chinese American community close to the end of World War II. Chu captures the local community politics, its rivalries and repartee, and allows a modern reader to feel, however briefly, that he or she is sharing that life.

The Growth of an Asian/Pacific American Identity, 1965– the 1990s

The year 1965 was a significant turning point for Asian/Pacific Americans. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down the immigration quotas that were based on national origin. This opened the way for renewed immigration from Asia and the Pacific and led to a burgeoning Asian/Pacific American population. Indeed, in 1965, the population of Asian Americans was about one million, or less than 1% of the U.S. population. By 1985, it had grown to five million, or 2% of the population, making Asian/Pacific Americans the fastest growing minority group (percentage wise) in the United States.

The Vietnam War and subsequent conflicts in Southeast Asia created an added impetus to Asian immigration. With the fall of Saigon in 1975, the United States saw the beginning of an influx of refugee immigrants from many diverse backgrounds that continues to this day. There were Vietnamese, some well-educated and even moderately fluent in English, who were used to urban life and able to travel as a family unit, whereas others made up the hundreds of thousands of "boat people" who risked their lives in barely seaworthy boats against the threat of high seas, inadequate or no provisions, pirates, illness, and an uncertain future, and who, if they survived, were subjected to months or even years in squalid refugee camps before reset-

tling in countries like Australia, Canada, France, and the United States. There were refugees from Laos, some of whom were ethnic Lao, whereas others were Mien and Hmong, rural peoples from the highlands of Laos. The Hmong in particular have had to face enormous adjustments in the United States. Coming from a preliterate, agricultural society, few Hmong arrived in the United States with the skills to accept anything beyond the most menial work to begin building a new life. There were refugees from Cambodia, survivors of genocidal killings, mass starvation, and disease. Many of the Cambodian refugees are women rearing children alone; their husbands, fathers, brothers, and even older sons were killed by the Khmer Rouge. These refugees are a diverse group, but they have one thing in common: They had little or no time to psychologically or emotionally prepare to leave their homelands, and they are now seeking to build a new life because they cannot go home.

The late 1960s through the 1970s also saw the development of a Pan–Asian American, later Pan–Asian/Pacific American, identity among some second-, third-, and fourth-generation Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander ancestry. In some ways part of the Civil Rights Movement that shaped the United States of this era, and in other ways a logical stage in the growth of Asian and Pacific Islander communities in America, this identity manifested itself in the development of Asian American Studies programs at a growing number of colleges and universities across the country and related scholarly research into the many facets of the Asian/Pacific American community. It saw the establishment of a Pan–Asian/Pacific American media that offered newspapers and magazines with a multi-Asian and Pacific Islander ethnic focus rather than the single ethnic focus of earlier publications and community vernaculars. It spurred the creation of Pan–Asian/Pacific ethnic groups who joined together to promote political empowerment, professional support, social objectives, and educational goals.

Although pride in individual ethnicity was still encouraged and embraced, the reality of what was necessary to achieve political empowerment, survive increasing anti-Asian violence, and guarantee a place in American society—that is, an active, informed, and committed Pan–Asian/Pacific American community—allowed the different Asian and Pacific Islander ethnic groups to begin to share their histo-

ries and experiences with each other and the rest of the United States. In this fashion, the growing Pan–Asian/Pacific American movement underscored a renewed vigor in Asian/Pacific American literature. Whereas most earlier Asian/Pacific American writing had been autobiographical in nature, a number of second-, third-, and fourth-generation Asian/Pacific Americans were beginning not only to write about their own lives and experiences but also to revisit and reexamine the experiences of their parents and grandparents. They then coupled these experiences with imagination to create beautiful, magnificent stories, plays, poems, and essays that speak from the heart of Asian/Pacific America.

If the writings of authors like Carlos Bulosan, Louis Chu, John Okada, and Jade Wong can be considered the first flowering of Asian/Pacific American literature, then the mid-1970s surely saw Asian/Pacific American literature begin to take root and blossom. The year 1974 saw the publication of *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, truly a momentous occasion in the history of Asian/Pacific American literature. Republished in 1991 as *The Big Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, the book takes its name from the sound that European American culture had for so long presented as some all-purpose whine, shout, or scream by Asians. Editors Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong (1991) began to reclaim Asian America's portrayal and assert its legitimate presentation in American culture. Thus, Aiiieeeee! "is more than a whine, shout, or scream. It is fifty years of our whole voice" (Chan et al., 1991, p. x). *The Big Aiiieeeee!* was intended as an anthology of Asian American writers, and although it focused primarily upon American-born and -raised Chinese and Japanese Americans, who had grown up under the influence of an American culture that perpetuated and reinforced European and Christian prejudicial attitudes about people of Asian ancestry, it was nevertheless very Pan–Asian/American in its efforts to encourage readers to reexamine their attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about Asian Americans and their portrayal and place in American society. In other words, the editors of *The Big Aiiieeeee!* asked their readers to historiographically analyze Asian American literature—to question who was writing it, the societal influences upon the authors' reasoning, their analysis, and ultimately the stories they chose to write. This was a significant first in

Asian/Pacific American literature and has guaranteed *The Big Aiiieeeee!* a prominent place in the history of Asian/Pacific American literature.

Indeed, the impact of *Aiiieeeee!* cannot be overstated. As poet, novelist, and editor Jessica Hagedorn (1993) points out:

> The energy and interest sparked by *Aiiieeeee!* in the Seventies was essential to Asian American writers because it gave us visibility and credibility as creators of our own specific literature. We could not be ignored; suddenly, we were no longer silent. Like other writers of color in America, we were beginning to challenge the long-cherished concepts of a xenophobic literary canon dominated by white heterosexual males. Obviously, there was room for more than one voice and one vision in this ever-expanding arena. (p. xxvii)

The Big Aiiieeeee! may not be suitable for all preteens or even many young adults without adequate preparatory material or an introduction to Asian/Pacific American history. Most selections will be appropriate for high school students. In any event, teachers who wish to include Asian/Pacific American literature in their classes ought to consider this as a good grounding, particularly if they are unfamiliar with the Asian/Pacific American community and its history and literature.

An excerpt from *The Big Aiiieeeee!* was published as a novel by one of the editors, Shawn Wong. *Homebase* (1990), the story of a Chinese American boy struggling to grow up without a father and to define and accept an identity for himself, has become a landmark novel in Asian/Pacific American literature. With true insight into and familiarity with his subject matter, Wong leads his reader through the history—personal, familial, and communal—that has shaped each of us in a way that makes it new yet familiar, comfortable yet surprising, and simple yet complex. A young reader will not likely appreciate it and may even find it boring and cumbersome. But for a more mature reader—one who has left the shelter of childhood with its easier acceptance of authority figures and the direction they provide, one who is coming to terms with his or her own place in the world as a self-directed adult—*Homebase* speaks to the soul. It offers no easy solutions and does not claim to try. Instead, it serves to validate a quest for self and place and the serenity presumed to accompany the accomplishment of the quest.

The 1970s also saw the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's highly acclaimed book, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1975), and the beginning of a controversy that continues to challenge anyone studying Asian/Pacific American literature. The book takes its name from the subject of a Chinese childhood chant, "The Ballad of Mulan," which is based upon the legend of a woman named Fa Mulan. Her aged father was too infirm to answer the Khan's call to mount and lead his estate's army into a great war, and so Fa Mulan took her father's place. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston weaves a series of tales about her childhood with stories about her mother, fables, and mysticism from the China of her mother's youth. Her writing is clear and sharp. She tells her stories with touches of humor and plenty of drama, and she tells them well. High school students will find themselves carried along by Kingston's prose; if they reread it later in life, they will no doubt find deeper layers of meaning to fascinate them. It is no wonder that *The Woman Warrior* has become one of the pivotal books in Asian/Pacific American literature.

Not everyone, however, is enamored by *The Woman Warrior*. Author Frank Chin (Chan et al., 1991, pp. 2–6) claims that the Fa Mulan legend told by Kingston is a "fake." According to Chin, Kingston—as well as popular playwright David Henry Hwang and celebrated novelist Amy Tan—is faking Chinese literature by coloring it with modern-day sexism, injecting it with Christianity, and infusing it with a feminist spirit that distorts the underlying themes and messages of the tale so that it no longer resembles its original, authentic version. Instead it becomes a tool that reinforces both overt and subliminal European American racism toward those of Asian ancestry in everyone who reads it, including Asian Americans, and justifies this by suggesting that Chinese American immigrants lost touch with Chinese culture and that a faulty memory, combined with a new experience, produced new versions of these traditional stories.

For instance, Chin protests Kingston's version of Fa Mulan being painfully tattooed all over her back. According to Chin, the tattoos actually belong to a hero named Yue Fei, but Kingston has appropriated them for her version of Fa Mulan's tale to give credence to the European American image of Chinese culture as cruel to women. Chin argues that Kingston has deliberately set out to create an unjustifiably misogynist tale that is better suited to the sexism of the West. In his view it has no reality in China.

Some, however, think that Chin's criticism is misplaced at best and misogynist at worst. Elaine Kim, a professor of Asian American Studies at the University of California at Berkeley, and one of the leading lights in the field, comments:

> I read Asian American literature as a literature of protest and exile, a literature about place and displacement, a literature concerned with psychic and physical "home" or longing for a final "homecoming." I looked for unifying thematic threads and tidy resolutions that might ease the pain of displacement and heal the exile, heedless of what might be missing from this homogenizing approach and oblivious to the parallels between what I was doing and dominant culture attempts to reduce Asian American experiences to developmental narratives about the movement from "primitive," "Eastern," and foreign immigrant to "civilized," "Western," and "Americanized loyal citizen."
>
> The cultural nationalist defenses we constructed were anti-assimilationist. But while they opposed official nationalisms, the Asian American identity they allowed for was fixed, closed, and narrowly defined, dividing "Asian American" from "Asian" as sharply as possible, privileging race over gender and class, accepting compulsory heterosexuality as "natural," and constructing a hierarchy of authenticity to separate the "real" from the "fake." According to this definition, there were not many ways of being Asian American. (Hagedorn, 1993, p. ix)

Kim raises some interesting points. When does Asian become Asian American? Who is and is not qualified to write it and critique it? This raises a fundamental question of authenticity. The extreme examples of what Chin labels "fake" are easy to spot, like the children's "classics," *Five Chinese Brothers* and *Tikki Tikki Tembo*. In books like these there is little appreciation or understanding of people of Asian ancestry and their culture or heritage. But if, as Chin implies, it is important to accurately represent a culture and its heritage, is it possible to draw a line where the "fake" ends and creative license, individual experience, and subjective perception begin? The discussion that questions like these stimulate suggests that perhaps in the case of Chin and Kingston—like the loyalty questionnaire administered to the Japanese

Americans interned during World War II—there can be no "right" answer. All we can do is try to choose "better" over "worse." So while Chin is understandably irritated by the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the roots of Chinese American literature, Kingston as a writer must certainly be allowed a broad literary license to exercise her creativity to the fullest. The conflict comes from the lack of legitimate knowledge of, understanding of, insight into, and familiarity with the history, culture, and literary tradition of Asian/Pacific America. As a result most Americans, including Asian/Pacific Americans, are unable to recognize the liberties that an Amy Tan or Maxine Hong Kingston may choose to take with an old story or the influence that American education, values, or Christianity have had on these writers.

Another literary highpoint of the 1970s was an excerpt from *Aiiieeeee!* about the search for identity by a young Japanese American girl. In 1977, Wakako Yamauchi's "And the Soul Shall Dance" was developed into and presented as a play. With passion and precision, Yamauchi crafted one of the great works in Asian American theater. She delicately explores the tragedy of a couple trapped in an arranged marriage and the American-born generation's feelings of attraction, revulsion, and mystery for the immigrant generation. Set during the Great Depression, it offers an intriguing view of life through the eyes of two Japanese American families, which junior high and high school students alike should find easy to understand.

Mainland Asian/Pacific Americans were not the only writers emerging during the 1970s. Milton Murayama's *All I Asking for Is My Body* (1988) was first published in 1975. Set in Hawaii, where Murayama grew up, the book captures the unique pidgin dialect of the islands in a way that reveals yet another facet of the Asian/Pacific American experience. It is the Hawaii of an earlier day, with a different lifestyle and old-fashioned values, but the reader can already glimpse what will give way to modern Hawaii. Murayama's story successfully weaves a spell that for a little while allows us to nostalgically experience life in a less sophisticated Hawaii. The pidgin may not be easy for younger readers to grasp, but Murayama's talent makes it probable that most teens should be able to understand it.

Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps by Michi Weglyn was published in 1976, and it is significant not only

for its depth of research, textual clarity, and remarkable perception and analysis but also because it shaped history. Using primary documents to reconstruct the history that led to the internment, Weglyn was the first to grasp and explain the meaning of the Munson Report, a 25-page document by a special representative of the State Department, Curtis B. Munson, analyzing the degree of loyalty to be found among residents of Japanese descent on the West Coast and in Hawaii. Munson conducted his investigation during the fall of 1941 and corroborated almost a decade of U.S. intelligence work, when he determined that there was "a remarkable, even extraordinary degree of loyalty among this generally suspect group" (p. 34). Weglyn's research led her to enunciate the hostage-reprisal theory: Assuming that President Roosevelt accepted the Munson Report but perceived the racist character of the American public at the time, the internment of Japanese Americans was not merely a punitive action but one intended to create hostages, whose existence would ensure better treatment of American captives in the Pacific and who would be the subject of reprisals should America's fortunes at war suffer. Thanks to Weglyn's book, the Japanese American redress movement was launched, a milestone in Asian/Pacific American history.

Asian/Pacific American poetry began to bloom in the 1970s. Lawson Fusao Inada's *Before the War: Poems as They Happened* (1971) was the first book of poetry written by an Asian American to be published by a major publishing company. What makes this particularly remarkable is that Inada's poetry embraces his Japanese American heritage with a dignity and poignancy so honest that at times it is almost sublime. His later books, *Legends From Camp* (1993) and *drawing the line* (1997), continue to follow his life from Fresno, California, to Oregon and provide an insightful look into one man's life and his musings upon it. In *Camp Notes and Other Poems* (1976) by Mitsuye Yamada and *Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park* (1977) by Nellie Wong, both poets reflect on the past with an eye toward the future. Yamada in particular writes simply yet evokes an emotional response that reminds us what poetry really is.

Thousand Pieces of Gold (1981) by Ruthanne Lum McCunn marked the advent of the Asian/Pacific American biographical novel. In it McCunn tells the story of Lalu Nathoy, later called Polly Bemis, a Chinese pioneer woman in the American West. The story is fascinat-

ing, all the more so because the reader is aware that it is about an actual person. Yet McCunn's writing is uneven, sometimes smoothly flowing and tightly written and sometimes dull and cumbersome. For the most part, however, McCunn does a creditable job telling Lalu's story in a simple and straightforward fashion that most high school students can appreciate.

Certainly no discussion of Asian American literature for preteens, teens, and young adults would be complete without mentioning at least a few of the works of one of the most exceptional and perhaps undervalued Asian/Pacific American authors, Laurence Yep. Yep has extraordinary talent and deserves a special place in Asian/Pacific American literature. He writes for a variety of ages, from children's picture books to young adult novels, and in a variety of genres, from autobiography to historical fiction and science fiction. His works delve into so many facets of Asian/Pacific American life that it is clear he has moved beyond his thinly disguised autobiography to a level of creativity that is a joy to read. In *Dragonwings* (1975), Yep weaves a sensitive and inspirational tale about a turn-of-the-century Chinese immigrant who created a flying machine. In *Sweetwater* (1983), Yep demonstrates his talents with science fiction in a thought-provoking story about the balance between progress and tradition. In *Dragon's Gate* (1993), Yep displays a deft and sure touch with historical fiction as he creates a memorable story about a 19th-century Chinese immigrant who helps to build the transcontinental railroad. Yep puts himself into his mother's shoes in The *Star Fisher* (1991), a story about a Chinese girl growing up in rural West Virginia. In *Shadowlord* (1985), Yep tackles the *Star Trek* universe with a wonderful adventure story featuring Sulu, the character portrayed by George Takei, and Spock, Leonard Nimoy's character. In these and so many of his books, Yep consistently displays an uncanny ability to create complex and interesting characters, and he sets a standard of excellence for anyone writing about Asian/Pacific Americans.

Also notable is Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1982), the story of a Japanese Canadian girl and her family, their evacuation from British Columbia, and their internment in Alberta during World War II. A poet, Kogawa writes in a lyrical fashion that captures the depth of emotion and the complexity of the relationships between Asian immigrants and their children. *Obasan* is engaging reading, but it also marks the

beginning of Asian/Pacific America's reexamination of its own history. Kogawa was only a child when she was interned, so her perceptions differ from those who experienced internment as adults, such as Monica Sone and Yoshiko Uchida. *Obasan* is part of the continued attempt to understand the impact that internment had upon the Asian/Pacific American community.

With the influx of refugees from Southeast Asia that began during the 1970s, there was also a rise in what might be described as a subgenre of Asian/Pacific American literature: the refugee immigrant's tale of escape from Asia and resettlement in the United States. Among the best are Sook Nyul Choi's *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* (1991), Nina Vida's *Goodbye, Saigon* (1994), and *Eighth Moon* (1983) by Sansan as told to Bette Bao Lord. Perhaps worthy of special note is *Children of the River* (1989) by Linda Crew. Crew tells the story of Sundara, her escape from the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and her adjustment to life in the United States. While most books in this subgenre hold the reader's attention through the adventurous nature of the escape and the desire to see the protagonist survive, *Children of the River* is compelling because of its realistic portrayal of the Cambodian refugee community and the struggles its members face in adjusting to life in the United States. Teens in particular will enjoy reading about Sundara. As the book ends, the reader cannot help but wish that the story went on a little longer.

Asian American drama has also blossomed since the 1970s. David Henry Hwang, best known perhaps for *M. Butterfly*, offered America a variety of provocative and insightful views of Asian/Pacific Americans in such plays as *F.O.B.* and *Family Devotions* (1990). Ping Chong's *Nuit Blanche: A Select View of Earthlings* (1986) probes feelings of isolation, alienation, and the progression of human history. Then there is the brilliant Philip Kan Gotanda, among whose works are the poignant exploration of relationships in *The Wash* (1984) and the masterful classic, *Yankee Dawg You Die* (1991). His most recent work, *The Ballad of Yachiyo* (1996), is about a Japanese American woman living on the island of Kauai in 1919. Gotanda's plays are richly layered stories that introduce realistic and fascinating characters and situations that can provide the basis for a stimulating class discussion.

South Asian Americans also began to make their presence felt in literature during this era. One of the most exciting South Asian American writers is Bharati Mukherjee, whose writing is quite elegant and

eloquent. Each and every character is multifaceted and unique without being bizarre. She is a true Pan–Asian/Pacific American writer, introducing characters from a variety of Asian and Pacific backgrounds, yet developing each so as to be true to his or her ethnic heritage. Her collection of short stories, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), is a wonderfully rich combination of imagination and realism. Her novels are passionate and powerful, especially *Jasmine* (1991), in which a young woman from India builds a life in the United States, and *The Tiger's Daughter* (1996), in which an Indian woman who has been living in the United States returns to India and begins to see her family, friends, and culture in a different light. Mukherjee has the uncanny ability to write about the mundane and make it magnificent.

Assimilation and acculturation became very popular topics in Asian/Pacific American literature during the 1970s and 1980s. Bette Bao Lord addressed it in her middle readers' book, *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* (1984), which is about a young Chinese girl who immigrates to the United States in 1947 and her first year of life in New York. Although it occasionally relies on stereotypes, it is nevertheless a charming story that some junior high school students might enjoy.

The Next Generation of Asian/Pacific American Writers

Some might groan, moan, or worse. Yet to be fair, in any discussion of Asian/Pacific American literature, there is "pre–Amy Tan" and "post–Amy Tan." With the phenomenal success of her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), and on its heels, her second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1992), Tan forever changed the way that we think, write, and read about Asian/Pacific Americans. She is certainly not without her detractors. Frank Chin (Chan et al., 1991) criticizes her for opening *The Joy Luck Club* with a fake Chinese fairy tale about:

> a duck that wants to be a swan and a mother who dreams of her daughter being born in America, where she'll grow up speaking perfect English and no one will laugh at her and where a "woman's worth is [not] measured by the loudness of her husband's belch." . . . Ducks in the barnyard are not the subject of Chinese

> fairy tales except as food. Swans are not the symbols of physical female beauty, vanity, and promiscuity that they are in the West. . . . There is nothing in Chinese fairy tales to justify characterizing the Chinese as measuring a woman's worth by the loudness of her husband's belch. (pp. 2–3)

Chin pursues his crusade against the "fake" with the fervor of a religious zealot. It seems unfortunate that this campaign sometimes overshadows the fact that Chin himself is a gifted writer with a keen sense of who and what the Asian/Pacific American community is. His novels, such as *Donald Duk* (1991), are complex and clever commentaries on the Asian/Pacific American man. His works are at times thrilling and painful but never boring and never ordinary. They are certainly never fake. Fake or not, we must give credit where credit is due. Tan is an exceptional storyteller. She captures her reader's interest and sweeps them along right from the first paragraph, and one doesn't feel shortchanged at the end of the ride. And, fake or not, the success of *The Joy Luck Club* created an unprecedented interest in Asian/Pacific American writing.

Unfortunately, this increased interest has created a few blockbuster titles but ignores other excellent writers and their work. One of the more significant works that Tan's success may have overshadowed was Jessica Hagedorn's comprehensive anthology of Asian/Pacific American fiction, *Charlie Chan Is Dead* (1993). The collection compiled by Hagedorn is impressive for the diversity of its contributors and the wide-ranging perspectives they offer. At times it is uneven in terms of the quality of the selections, and it lacks background material on each piece and its author that *The Big Aiiieeeee!* provides, which allows the reader to better understand the context of the story. As a result, even older readers might find some pieces difficult. Nevertheless, *Charlie Chan Is Dead* stands as a milepost in Asian/Pacific American literature.

Another collection worthy of merit is *Into the Fire: Asian American Prose* (1996), edited by Sylvia Watanabe and Carol Bruchac. This is an exciting collection of contemporary writings that begins to illustrate the depth, breadth, and range of talent in Asian America. A nice photography and biographical section on each contributing author enhances the reader's ability to glean greater insights from each selection.

Returning a Borrowed Tongue (1995), edited by Nick Carbo, is an anthology of Filipino and Filipino American poetry. An impressive collection, it is a wonderful example of the blossoming talent of Asian/Pacific American writers.

Russell Leong's fiction and poetry also merits more attention. His book of poems, *In the Country of Dreams and Dust* (1993), is a magnificent testament to an appreciation of the human condition. Poet and playwright Dwight Okita is another Asian/Pacific American talent whose work is not yet as appreciated as it should be. His book of poetry, *Crossing Against the Light* (1992), is a wonderful collection displaying wit, humor, and warmth as Okita dissects the Asian/Pacific American experience. His plays—particularly *Hiroshima: The Light of 10,000 Suns* (1996), is a compelling discussion of the dropping of the first atomic bomb, and *The Salad Bowl Dance* (1993), an examination of the resettlement of Japanese Americans in Chicago after World War II—remind us that there are always new ways to look at "traditional" Asian/Pacific American subjects. *The Salad Bowl Dance* is particularly unusual because it deals with the Japanese American community's eastward expansion rather than its return to the West Coast.

From a Three-Cornered World (1997) is a collection of poems by James Masao Mitsui that span childhood in an internment camp through life as an adult with elderly parents. His poems are brief but delicately honed reflections of the small things that make life significant. David Mura is another talent whose work may have been eclipsed, at least in part, by Tan. His book, *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei* (1991), about his first trip to Japan, spoke to the hearts of many third-generation Japanese American men. It provides an interesting glimpse into the psyche of a Japanese American man as he comes into contact with the country of his forebears. Mura's critical essays are lucid and convincing. His poetry, however, leaves something to be desired; he seems to spend an inordinate amount of time grappling with interracial sexual relationships.

Gish Jen's *Typical American* (1991) is yet another wonderful example of modern Asian/Pacific American literature. Jen's writing is a joy to read; it is lucid and lyrical with a well-constructed plot. Cynthia Kadohata's *The Floating World* (1989) is somewhat darker but no less fascinating. Here, Grandmother is not a kindly old lady but a sometimes (through her granddaughter's eyes) mean-spirited, manipula-

tive old woman. Kadohata's story is nevertheless a refreshing look at the grandmother-granddaughter relationship.

Bone (1993) by Fae Myenne Ng is another exceptional example of Asian/Pacific American literature for adults and older teens that may have been overshadowed by the commercial success of *The Joy Luck Club*. In her tightly written book, Ng shows the reader new aspects of Asian American relationships and raises issues that existing stereotypes would deny Asian/Pacific Americans much opportunity to confront in public.

Julie Shigekuni and Holly Uyemoto are two gifted, newer writers who do not yet have a huge body of published works, but they will certainly remedy that in time. Shigekuni's *A Bridge Between Us* (1995) follows four generations of Japanese American women and explores the ties that bind them together: love, tradition, and obligation. Shigekuni shatters some of the stereotypes about Japanese American women. Even though she creates what at times seems an atypical situation, the book never ceases to be an intriguing and multifaceted look at an Asian/Pacific American family.

Go (1995) by Holly Uyemoto delves into the life of Wil, a woman about to turn 21. Wil is in emotional and psychological turmoil as she tries to take stock of her life and her family, searching for truth and reality amid her family's personalities, mythology, and conflicts. While it may sound heavy or depressing, Uyemoto's writing lifts her story well above the predictable. Her writing is deftly woven with humor, the absurd, and a lucidity that makes every page enjoyable.

What the Scarecrow Said (1996) by Stewart David Ikeda is another first novel that showcases a bright and promising talent. Ikeda traces five generations of a Japanese American family from the immigrant Issei's arrival in the United States through pre–World War II promises, the devastation of the internment, and the rebuilding of lives in the aftermath of the war on the East Coast (a nice twist). Ikeda's writing is multifaceted. It is alternately humorous, tragic, surprising, and inspirational; throughout it is eloquent, passionate, and a joy to read. The description of the Japanese Americans being searched prior to their internment seems quite matter-of-fact until the unexpected and eye-opening punchline. As Ikeda tells us about the protagonist's mishaps during a visit by Eleanor Roosevelt, he is witty and hilarious. Truly this book is enjoyable to read.

Monkey Bridge (1997) by Lan Cao represents an exciting new voice in Asian/Pacific American literature. The protagonist, Mai Nguyen, is 13 years old when she and her mother are airlifted from Saigon just before that city's fall in 1975. The book traces Mai's attempts to adjust to life in "Little Saigon" in Virginia as she cares for her ailing mother. Cao beautifully depicts the evolving relationship between mother and daughter and deftly explores their feelings of guilt from having survived the war. This book moves beyond the refugee-escape-from-a-foreign-country mold into a genuine exploration of the conflicts and concerns in rebuilding a life.

Even if a reader is not well-versed in reading and understanding Hawaiian pidgin English, Lois-Ann Yamanaka's stories, written in Hawaiian and pidgin English, are occasionally sharp and biting but always original and honest. Yamanaka gives readers a glimpse of the people of Hawaii—their lives, their personalities, and their culture—from an insider's point of view. Pieces like *Empty Heart* (1993) evoke a Hawaii that few tourists will ever see but that residents will immediately recognize and appreciate.

Tropic of Orange (1997) by Karen Tei Yamashita is a compelling tale of avant-garde life and relationships in Los Angeles. With a remarkable sure-handedness, Yamashita probes the diversity of Los Angeles and the absurdity of the human condition. Younger students may not appreciate this book, but older readers will certainly find it thought-provoking.

M. Evelina Galang's *Her Wild American Self* (1996), a collection of short stories, is a captivating work. Galang writes with humorous insight and thought-provoking honesty about the experience of being a Filipina American. Older teens and adults will enjoy her commentaries on family, friends, and her own sense of identity as a young woman. Galang has a nice talent for dialogue and her writing conveys a wonderful sense of the joy in life.

Wang Ping's short stories in *American Visa* (1994) are fascinating and highly enjoyable. Using the first-person voice of a woman named Seaweed, Ping tells her tales with a compelling honesty, gracefulness, and insight that make her stories of life during China's Cultural Revolution and immigration to New York particularly expressive.

For young high school readers, Lensey Namioka has created some wonderful stories, such as *Yang the Youngest and His Terrible Ear* (1992), about a young Chinese American boy who lacks the musical talent

possessed by the rest of his family, and *Yang the Third and Her Impossible Family* (1995), about a Chinese American girl dealing with her family's Chinese customs. *April and the Dragon Lady* (1994) explores a young Chinese American girl's relationship with her manipulative grandmother, ringing true page after page. Again, though not as well known as Amy Tan, Namioka tells enjoyable stories that young high school students will enjoy reading.

Lauren Lee's *Stella: On the Edge of Popularity* (1994) is well-suited for junior high and high school students. She explores the tensions that many second-generation Asian/Pacific Americans face between cultural preservation and acculturation. At home, Stella's parents and grandmother expect her to conform to life as a good Korean girl, but at school Stella is wholly American, trying desperately to be herself, whoever that might be. The *Korean Central Daily News* proclaimed this to be *the* book that Korean American parents need to read to better understand their children. College-age readers of both sexes have been able to relate to this book.

Teens will particularly enjoy Marie G. Lee's writing. *If It Hadn't Been for Yoon Jun* (1993), which is about a Korean adoptee coming to terms with her identity as a Korean American, and *Finding My Voice* (1992), which is about a Korean American teen struggling to live up to her parents' expectations, are wonderful stories about Asian American girls coming-of-age. In her early 30s, Lee nevertheless clearly remains in touch with the feelings and concerns of 17- and 18-year-olds.

Children of Asian America (1996), edited by the Asian American Coalition, defies classification in terms of age appropriateness. A collection of original, contemporary Asian/Pacific American children's stories from 12 Asian ethnic communities, there are layers to each story and its insights that make the book suitable for preteens, teens, and young adults. Funny and poignant, its stories come straight from the heart of the Asian/Pacific American community. It is proving especially valuable in adult ESL classes for teachers looking for short, interesting children's stories that will not insult an adult's intelligence.

Teaching Strategies

The teacher who attempts to introduce Asian/Pacific American literature into his or her classroom should be prepared from the outset

to address the issues of the great diversity within this community. The U.S. Census Bureau has identified more than 50 different Asian and Pacific Islander ethnic groups within the United States. It is not possible, even in a class devoted solely to Asian/Pacific American literature, to present them all. It should also be explained that more writers are of Chinese and Japanese ancestry because these groups have had somewhat longer histories in the United States. As a result, we are just beginning to see a growth in the number of authors of Korean, Filipino, and Indian ancestry, and some of the newest groups, such as the Southeast Asian refugees, are still developing as writers, so their stories may currently be written by authors from other backgrounds.

Teachers also need to avoid falling into the trap of offering literature only from those Asian ethnic groups that are represented in their class, school, or school district. Such offerings may satisfy immediate interest, but this presents a grossly distorted view of Asian/Pacific American identity. It may be interesting, for instance, to discuss the diversity of this group and then read several stories sharing a common theme—such as escape from the home country and resettlement in the United States using books such as *The Year of Impossible Goodbyes* (Choi, 1991); *Goodbye, Saigon* (Vida, 1994); *Eighth Moon* (Lord, 1983); and *Children of the River* (Crew, 1989)—followed by a discussion about the similarities and differences based on time, contemporary politics, and world events.

Another possible theme might center on the tension between Asian identity and American identity. Discussions can focus on generational differences (immigrant versus American-born) and acculturation and assimilation of minority groups in this country, as well as contemporary social values, using books such as *Stella: On the Edge of Popularity* (Lee, 1994); *Yang the Third and Her Impossible Family* (Namioka, 1995); *Finding My Voice* (Lee, 1992); *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* (Lord, 1984); *Jasmine* (Mukherjee, 1991); and *No-No Boy* (Okada, 1988).

Gotanda's play, *Yankee Dawg You Die* (1991), is a wonderfully thought-provoking piece that can stimulate great discussion. It raises issues about how minorities are portrayed in the media and the arts, the lack of control that they have over these portrayals, their frustration over the situation, and the options open to them. The concept of stereotypes is a challenging theme to use to explore Asian/Pacific American literature. Older books like *Nisei Daughter* (Sone, 1979) and

Fifth Chinese Daughter (Wong, 1945) can be contrasted with *Bone* (Ng, 1993), *A Bridge Between Us* (Shigekuni, 1995), and *Go* (Uyemoto, 1995).

The controversy between the "real" and the "fake" can also be examined. The conflicting arguments of Frank Chin, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan can be used to show the diversity of opinions and philosophies within the Asian/Pacific American community and to combat the habit of treating minority groups as monolithic entities.

Effective teaching of Asian/Pacific American literature requires a historical context within which to understand it. This means that, as discomforting as it may be, racism toward Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States needs to be addressed with the class. Some individuals may want to deny that it exists or has ever existed, but underlying much of Asian/Pacific American literature is a feeling, or even a certainty, that it has existed and continues to exist. American society may find it more familiar and therefore more comfortable to discuss racism in terms of anti-Black sentiment or anti-Semitism, but to truly appreciate Asian/Pacific American literature and to understand it in its rightful context, students must be aware of the way that racism has shaped Asian/Pacific American history. Toward this end, subjects like the Japanese American internment should be discussed in the context of its complete and utter disregard for the civil rights of American citizens of Japanese ancestry and the racist attitudes from which it arose. It must be made clear to students that Pearl Harbor had nothing to do with it—these were, after all, Americans of Japanese ancestry, not Japanese; that national security could not possibly have been threatened by infants, children, the infirm, or the elderly, yet they too were interned; and that no comparison is being made with either the death camps of Nazi Germany or the enslavement of Africans. Each was wrong, and we accomplish nothing debating which was worse. All were evil, and it makes it no better that someone else suffered more, worse, or even the same. Wrong is wrong.

Any teacher planning to include Asian/Pacific American literature in his or her classroom should read a book like *Strangers From a Different Shore* (1989) by Ronald Takaki in order to give themselves greater familiarity with Asian/Pacific American history. *The Big Aiiieeeee!* (Chan et al., 1991), *Children of Asian America* (Asian American Coalition, 1996), and *Charlie Chan Is Dead* (Hagedorn, 1993) are other good background sources.

Summary

The literature of the Asian/Pacific American community has been greatly influenced by its history. Immigration restrictions and other manifestations of anti–Asian/Pacific Islander attitudes resulted in that history not only influencing how the literature was written but also sparking intense debate about who could or should write that literature, what was actually written, and why. The bulk of the literature was written in the last 25 to 50 years. Although Asian/Pacific American history has left us with a fairly condensed period of time during which this community has produced its own literature, the passions of a Frank Chin, the poise and elegance of a Bharati Mukherjee, the poignancy of a Philip Kan Gotanda, the inventiveness of a Laurence Yep, the popularity of an Amy Tan, and the promise of a Marie G. Lee give us reason for great optimism about the future of Asian/Pacific American literature.

Standard themes will continue to inspire. The immigrant experience will continue to be explored. Assimilation and acculturation versus the preservation of culture will still resurface throughout Asian/Pacific American literature. The significance and consequences of the internment will persist as a commentary on what many Asian/Pacific Americans fear may be reality; it will linger as proof that for those of Asian and Pacific Islander ethnicity, no matter what degree to which they acculturate, it may never be enough.

As these traditional themes continue to evolve, there is every indication that established writers—as well as newer or younger writers like Julie Shigekuni, Holly Uyemoto, Marie G. Lee, and Lan Cao—will offer new but still authentic perspectives on Asian/Pacific Americans. So, too, as Asian/Pacific American history progresses, it will continue to inspire these writers. Let us hope that more Americans will familiarize themselves with that history so that they can better appreciate the talents of these writers and the stories they tell.

Notes

1. One of the earliest examples of Asian/Pacific American literature is *An English-Chinese Phrase Book* by Wong Sam and Assistants. Published by Wells, Fargo in 1875, with a revised edition published

in 1887, there is no record of who Wong Sam was or who his assistants were. Although designed as a means of teaching useful English phrases, they are literary in their ability to create a picture of what life for an early Chinese American must have been like. *Phrase Book* offers more than just the phrases it teaches. Through these phrases, a reader can glean strategy and tactics for business, criminal law, and dealing with people of European ancestry and their sometimes subjective application of the law. Interestingly, the tactics and strategies offered do not include submission, acculturation, or assimilation.

2. This did not change until the 1952 passage of the McCarran-Walter Act, which nullified the 1790 naturalization law that prevented immigrant Asians from becoming United States citizens.

Reading List

Asian American Coalition. (Ed.). (1996). *Children of Asian America.* Chicago: Polychrome.

A thought-provoking and compelling anthology of original, contemporary short stories and poems about the experience of growing up as an Asian American from the Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Pakistani, Thai, Vietnamese, biracial, and Pan–Asian American communities.

Berson, M. (Ed.). (1990). *Between worlds: Contemporary Asian American plays.* New York: Theatre Communications Group.

A nice collection of classic Asian American plays.

Bulosan, C. (1946). *America is in the heart.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

This autobiographical novel by a Filipino immigrant is a masterful account of life as an Asian American in pre–World War II America. At times painfully brutal and tragic, it transcends mere storytelling with its unflinching honesty, directness, and insight into the condition of Asian Americans. A very special book.

Cao, L. (1997). *Monkey bridge.* New York: Viking.

A marvelously well-written story about rebuilding a life in America after the fall of Saigon.

Carbo, N. (Ed.). (1995). *Returning a borrowed tongue: An anthology of Filipino and Filipino American poetry.* Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.

An inspiring collection of poetry that only begins to tap the talent in the Filipino American community.

Cha, T. H. K. (1982). *Dictee.* New York: Tanam Press.

Sometimes fragmented and disjointed, it is no less powerful in its examination of a Korean immigrant's pain and frustration as she attempts to build an American life.

Chin, F. (1991). *Donald Duk.* Minneapolis: Coffee House Press.

Choi, S. N. (1991). *The year of impossible goodbyes.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

This story follows a Korean girl's life in post–World War II Korea and her escape from North Korea to Seoul. It has all the makings of a good story except that the most intriguing and exciting aspects about which the reader may be curious seem to have happened to older members of the girl's family or community, and it's not clear whether they simply didn't tell her the details of their experiences or if she chose not to relate them; in any event, they're not in the book.

Crew, L. (1989). *Children of the river.* New York: Dell.

This is one of the better tales of escape from an Asian country and the rebuilding of a life in the United States. In this tale, the heroine, Sundara, is a Cambodian refugee, and author Crew does an excellent job detailing the schizophrenic life of a refugee struggling to hold onto (and perhaps reclaim) something of the life from which she's been abruptly torn while also building a life in the United States. A really well-done story.

Far, S. S. (1912). *Mrs. Spring Fragrance.* New York: A.C. McClurg.

At times humorous, at times wretched, but always compelling. Although written at a time of different mores and values, contemporary readers will not have any difficulty appreciating this author's work.

Galang, E. (1996). *Her wild American self.* Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.

A wonderfully witty collection of short stories and personal accounts about life as a contemporary Filipina American. Thoroughly enjoyable reading.

Gotanda, P. K. (1984). *The wash.* New York: Dramatists Play Service.

Gotanda, P. K. (1991). *Yankee dawg you die.* New York: Dramatists Play Service.

Although *The Wash* is better-known, *Yankee Dawg You Die* is truly brilliant. Two Asian American actors from different generations trade barbs, impart criticisms of each other's choices and careers, offer justifications and rationalizations for those choices and their resultant careers, and rail against and celebrate the opportunities for Asian Americans in the performing arts. At times poignant, hilarious, and uplifting, this is a wonderful piece to stimulate classroom discussion about opportunities for minorities to succeed in the United States.

Hagedorn, J. (Ed.). (1993). *Charlie Chan is dead: An anthology of contemporary Asian American fiction.* New York: Penguin Books.

An eclectic collection of Asian American writing, it provides a wonderful overview of Asian American literature. More background about the authors and their writings might have made it a somewhat better tool for classroom use, but it is still an exciting and inspiring collection.

Houston, J. D. & Houston, J. W. (1973). *Farewell to Manzanar*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

One of the better known Japanese American internment stories, perhaps because it was one of the first published.

Hwang, H. D. (1990). *FOB and other plays*. New York: Plume.

Ikeda, S. D. (1996). *What the scarecrow said*. New York: HarperCollins.

This tale follows five generations of a Japanese American family. It is alternately witty and humorous and painful and poignant. The characters are exquisitely drawn and their experiences and perspectives honest and human. This is a three-dimensional look at the internment and is definitely one of the best.

Inada, L. (1971). *Before the War*. New York: Morrow.

Inada, L. F. (1993). *Legends from camp*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.

Inada, L. F. (1997). *drawing the line*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.

Kadohata, C. (1989). *The floating world*. New York: Viking Penguin.

Kingston, M. H. (1975). *The woman warrior*. New York: Knopf.

Frank Chin's criticisms aside, Kingston writes beautiful prose and tells an engaging and interesting story that is a pleasure to read.

Kogawa, J. (1982). *Obasan*. Boston: David R. Godine.

Lee, L. (1994). *Stella: On the edge of popularity*. Chicago: Polychrome.

Protagonist Stella Kim struggles to reconcile her family's pressure and expectation that she be a good traditional Korean girl with her classmates' expectations that she conform to and adopt American values. A sensitive and insightful story that delves into a conflict faced by many Asian American adolescents.

Lee, M. G. (1992). *Finding my voice.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Korean American Lee must surely be one of the most promising young Asian American writers. All her books present an honest look at the complexity of life for Asian American young adults. *Finding My Voice*, about a Korean American girl's senior year in high school, offers a glimpse into subjects like Asian parental pressures and expectations that may conflict with a teen's own dreams and ambitions.

Leong, R. (1993). *In the country of dreams and dust.* Albuquerque, NM: West End Press.

Lord, B. B. (1984). *In the year of the boar and Jackie Robinson.* New York: HarperTrophy.

Written for younger children, it's an interesting example of the values and messages stressed to an immigrant Chinese girl growing up in New York in the late 1940s.

Lord, B. B. (as told by Sansan). (1983). *Eighth moon.* New York: HarperCollins.

This is Lord's story of her younger sister's life in China during the Cultural Revolution and her subsequent escape to America.

McCunn, R. L. (1981). *Thousand pieces of gold.* Boston: Beacon Press.

This biographical novel about an early Chinese American pioneer woman, eventually known as Polly Bemis, illustrates how remarkable a woman Bemis was and recounts her fascinating life in a rather dry manner that does not do justice to Mrs. Bemis. The film (1991) is better.

Mitsui, J. M. (1997). *From a three-cornered world.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Mukherjee, B. (1988). *The middleman and other stories*. New York: Grove Press.

This collection of short stories clearly demonstrates why Mukherjee is one of the most celebrated Asian American authors. Her prose is beautiful. Her characters are each unique individuals. Each story is well-crafted and easily grabs and holds the reader's interest.

Mukherjee, B. (1991). *Jasmine*. New York: Fawcett.

Mukherjee, B. (1996). *The tiger's daughter*. New York: Fawcett.

Mura, D. (1991). *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

While many third-generation Japanese Americans say they could really relate to this book, others find it puerile and self-obsessed. Better than Mura's poetry, but not as good as some of his critical essays.

Murayama, M. (1988). *All I asking for is my body*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

Namioka, L. (1992). *Yang the youngest and his terrible ear*. Boston: Little Brown.

Namioka, L. (1994). *April and the dragon lady*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

This book didn't garner as much attention as Namioka's *Yang the Youngest and His Terrible Ear* or its companion book, *Yang the Third and Her Impossible Family*, but it is every bit as good, if not better. An interesting look at gender roles and expectations within a Chinese American family.

Namioka, L. (1995). *Yang the third and her impossible family*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Ng, F. M. (1993). *Bone*. New York: Hyperion.

Okada, J. (1988). *No-no boy*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

To really appreciate this book, one needs an understanding of the history of the Japanese American internment, the loyalty questionnaire, and the subsequent controversy over those who answered "no-no" that has yet to be completely resolved by the Japanese American community more than 50 years later. This is a painful, powerful, but ultimately liberating book that should not be overlooked.

Okita, D. (1992). *Crossing against the light*. Chicago, IL: Tia Chucha Press.

Ping, W. (1994). *American visa*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.

A beautifully written collection of short stories about a woman living in China during the Cultural Revolution and her eventual immigration to and attempt to build a life in New York.

Shigekuni, J. (1995). *A bridge between us*. New York: Doubleday.

A story following four generations of women in a Japanese American family, it is beautifully written although the characters are, at times, somewhat two-dimensional.

Sone, M. (1979). *Nisei daughter*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

This classic lacks the depth and complexity of more contemporary examinations of Japanese American family life and Japanese American young women, but it is interesting for its sheer sense of "normalcy." Compared to the troubled young women and the dysfunctional families presented in other books, *Nisei Daughter* is at times naive, ordinary, or old-fashioned, but it still manages to hold its own.

Tan, A. (1989). *The joy luck club*. New York: Putnam.

Takashima, S. (1991). *A child in prison camp.* Canada: Tundra Books.

Uchida, Y. (1971). *Journey to Topaz.* New York: Scribners.

Uchida, Y. (1978). *Journey home.* New York: Atheneum.

Uyemoto, H. *Go.* (1995). New York: Dutton.

Protagonist Wil is turning 21 and has already had a breakdown. It sounds depressing, and although one may sometimes wish that Wil would just take control of her own life, Uyemoto has such a gift with words that this book is still fascinating reading.

Vida, N. (1994). *Goodbye, Saigon.* New York: Crown.

A well-written and intriguing look into the Vietnamese American community as it rebuilds itself.

Watanabe, S., & Bruchac, C. (Eds.). (1996). *Into the fire: Asian American prose.* Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press.

This is a wonderful collection of writing from contemporary Asian American authors.

Wong, Jade S. (1945). *Fifth Chinese daughter.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Some of the values and attitudes seem rather too self-deprecating and self-sacrificing, but it is nevertheless an interesting look at life in a Chinese American family during the first half of the 20th century.

Wong, Janet S. (1994). *Good luck gold and other poems.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Korean/Chinese American poet Wong has a deft touch with words. Her poems are charming capsules of Asian American attitudes, values, and experiences.

Wong, Janet S. (1996). *A suitcase of seaweed.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Wong, N. (1977). *Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park*. Berkeley, CA: Kelsey Street Press.

Wong, S. (1995). *American knees*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Wong looks at Asian American sexuality and relationships in this realistic examination of a love affair.

Wong, S. (1990). *Homebase*. New York: Plume.

Yamada, M. (1976). *Camp notes and other poems*. San Francisco, CA: Shameless Hussy Press.

Yamada, M. (1988). *Desert run: Poems and stories*. Latham, NY: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

Yamamoto, H. (1988). *Seventeen syllables and other stories*. Latham, NY: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

Yamanaka, L. (1993). Empty heart. In J. Hagedorn (Ed.). *Charlie Chan is dead: An anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction*. New York: Penguin Books.

Yamashita, K. T. (1992). *Brazil-Maru*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.

Not all Asian American immigrants came to North America. In this captivating tale, Yamashita looks at the lives of Japanese Brazilians and their relationships.

Yamashita, K. T. (1990). *Through the arc of the rain forest*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.

Yamashita, K. T. (1997). *Tropic of orange*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.

Yamauchi, W. (1976). And the soul shall dance. In O. Guernesy (Ed.). *Burn Matel Theater Yearbook 1976–1977*. New York: Dodd Mead.

Yep, L. (1975). *Dragonwings*. New York: HarperCollins.

Yep, L. (1983). *Sweetwater*. New York: HarperTrophy.

Yep, L. (1985). *Shadowlord*. New York: Pocket.

Even if you're not a fan of *Star Trek*, Yep's foray into the *Star Trek* universe is a thoroughly enjoyable read. When the life of an alien prince is threatened, it's Sulu to the rescue!

Yep, L. (1991). *The star fisher*. New York: Morrow.

Yep, L. (1993). *Dragon's gate*. New York: HarperCollins.

A brilliant look at the life of a Chinese American immigrant working on the railroad during the 19th century.

Yep, L. (1994). *Child of the owl*. New York: HarperCollins.

Life in San Francisco's Chinatown through the eyes of a young girl.

Yep, L. (1995). *Thief of hearts*. New York: HarperCollins.

The sequel to *Child of the Owl*, a biracial Asian American girl and a Chinese immigrant girl come to terms with their Chinese American identities.

Parents and teachers often complain about how difficult it is to find Asian American titles beyond those most commercially successful. The following are wonderful resources from which to order these and other Asian American titles, and each offers a free and very comprehensive catalog:

Asia for Kids
4480 Lake Forest Drive, Suite 302
Cincinnati, OH 45242
(800) 765-5885
(513) 563-3100
Fax: (513) 563-3105

Multicultural Distributing Center
9440 Telstar Avenue, Unit #2
El Monte, CA 91731
(818) 859-3133
Fax: (818) 859-3136

Asian American Bookseller
37 St. Marks Place
New York, NY 10003
(212) 228-6718
Fax: (212) 228-7718

Shen's Books & Supplies
821 South First Avenue
Arcadia, CA 91006
(818) 445-6958
(800) 456-6660

References

Chan, J. P., Chin, F., Inada, L. F., & Wong, S. (Eds.). (1991). *The big aiiieeeee!* New York: Meridian.

Hom, M. (1987). *Songs of Gold Mountain.* Berkeley, CA: University of California.

Hu-DeHart, E. (1992). From Yellow peril to model minority: The Columbus legacy and Asians in America. *The New World.* Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute.

Takaki, R. (1989). *Strangers from a different shore.* Boston: Little, Brown.

Weglyn, M. (1976). *Years of infamy: The untold story of America's concentration camps.* New York: Morrow.

A Young adult novel about growing up Korean American. (1994, November 14). *Korean Central Daily News.*