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Art in the Lives of Immigrant Communities in the United States



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Contents

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|---|-----|
| Acknowledgments | vii |
| 1 Introduction: The Diversity and Mobility of Immigrant Arts | 1 |
| <i>Paul DiMaggio and Patricia Fernández-Kelly</i> | |
| 2 Migrants and the Transformation of Philadelphia's Cultural Economy | 23 |
| <i>Mark J. Stern, Susan C. Seifert, and Domenic Vitello</i> | |
| 3 A Howl to the Heavens: Art in the Life of First- and Second-Generation Cuban Americans | 52 |
| <i>Patricia Fernández-Kelly</i> | |
| 4 Inside and Outside the Box: The Politics of Arab American Identity and Artistic Representations | 72 |
| <i>Amaney Jamal</i> | |
| 5 Desis in and out of the House: South Asian Youth Culture in the United States before and after 9/11 | 89 |
| <i>Sunaina Maira</i> | |
| 6 The Intimate Circle: Finding Common Ground in Mariachi and Norteño Music | 109 |
| <i>Clifford R. Murphy</i> | |
| 7 Gener Asians Learn Chinese: The Asian American Youth Generation and New Class Formations | 125 |
| <i>Deborah Wong</i> | |
| 8 Unfinished Journey: Mexican Migration through the Visual Arts | 155 |
| <i>Gilberto Cardenas</i> | |

educate listeners about the diverse national origins of the local Latino community while letting them know that mariachi and norteño music are common parts of the Latin American experience. Says Iraheta of that type of encounter:

They [Anglos, or "Americans"] make us feel like we're playing for Mexico. Yeah, sometimes it's really curious. They say, "What part of Mexico are you from?" And I'm like, "I'm not Mexican." And they're like, "How come you're doing this?" And it's like I just explained to you: the music isn't just Mexican, it's all over Latin America. So I grew up with this music. As a child [in El Salvador] I started listening to these songs, the older songs. That's how you start feeling the music, this typical style. That's how you start loving it. You can't stop doing it. It doesn't matter that you're not Mexican. So when anybody asks me, "Why [are] you doing this?" I don't feel offended or anything like that because I know it's hard to understand if you're from this country. But there's an explanation in the answer I just gave you: we grew up with this music, and we're lovin' it like any Mexican. It's the same thing. (Iraheta and Interiano 2008)

Anglo patrons at family-style restaurants featuring mariachi music are made to feel as if they are in Mexico, even when the performers are not necessarily from that country. And it is there, in the family-style setting, that the mariachis engender a performed multethnic inclusiveness that is powerfully intimate and symbolically meaningful. It is at venues like Tijuana's that the mariachi welcomes listeners—Latino, Anglo, and African American—into the circle of their magical performance.

NOTE

1. Gutiérrez is also known as "El Tapatio," a nickname derived from the name of a hot sauce (Tapatio Hot Sauce) used in many Mexican restaurants.

CHAPTER 7



GenerAsians Learn Chinese

THE ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTH GENERATION AND NEW CLASS FORMATIONS

Deborah Wong

Today's Asian American youth generation is still haunted by the immigrant experience, and its material conditions continue to shape Asian American youth.¹ As George Lipsitz has argued, the ideological dominance of the nation-state in area studies (including American studies) has "poorly prepared us for the ways in which culture functions as a social force or the ways in which aesthetic forms draw their affective and ideological power from their social location" (2001, 17).

In this chapter I try to connect the late capitalist phenomenon of Pacific Rim popular culture to the emergence of Asian American youth who may move across borders in some ways but reconfirm the power of citizenship in others. Because the spatial placement of Asian Americans is pressured by fantasies of a globalized Pacific Rim, some American youth of Asian descent are willing to accept a class-driven consumption model of culture, while others turn to more challenging popular spheres of race-based interethnic exchange.

Immigrant arrivals have everything to do with the specific conditions of nation-state relationships. The immigrant experience is thus always particular even as it is folded into the sweeping gestures of statecraft and legislation. Generation is a theoretical concept that has had to change in order to keep up with the circumstances driving its upsets. The first-, second-, and third-generation configuration of immigrant experience suggests shared conditions that obscure significant differences *within* the same generation. Even the supposed clarity of Japanese American generations has been problematized by Asian American studies: the Issei-Nisei-Sansei monolith is less clear when Shin Issei (new Issei), such as Japanese war brides, and Nisei Kibei, who were schooled in Japan, are considered (Wong 2006). The classic ethnic studies model for relative generation—that is, the first generation emigrated

to the United States, the second generation was born in the United States to immigrant parents, the third generation was the product of the U.S.-born second generation, and so forth—does not stand up well to the particularities of Asian American youth culture and the conditions of its emergence.

At the turn of the millennium, the North American youth generation of Asian descent locates itself within a globalized circuit of Pacific Rim exchange more than it does with the Asian American complex of the 1960s and 1970s.² I do not dismiss the importance of generation in relation to the experience and memory of immigration,³ but different waves of Asian immigration from many countries over several centuries have resulted in a wide range of Asian American generational distinctions. For instance, a second-generation Japanese American born in the 1920s was subject to markedly different legal and political pressures than a second-generation Korean American born in the 1980s to parents who emigrated following the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

David K. Yoo, the eminent historian of the Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans) argues both for and against the second generation as a meaningful Asian American category. He notes that Nisei who “came of age in California in the second quarter of the twentieth century” grew up in diverse home environments: some were completely bilingual, some had only nominal fluency in Japanese, and some were sent to Japan for schooling (Yoo 2000, ix). This resulted in a stronger Japanese than American cultural and language skills. Yoo, who is a second-generation Korean American scholar, writes, “As a child of immigrants, I often sensed an affinity with these older Nisei—an affinity that I attribute to some extent on a shared second-generation experience even while recognizing real differences” (xiii). For Asian Americans, then, second-generation identity is a dynamic category instantly subject to the vagaries of time and place even while inviting examination of how Asians become Asian Americans—and how Asians negotiate citizenship in the United States.

The watershed of 1965 looms large in American immigration studies. It Asianized the face of American immigration and forced new ways for thinking about generation.⁴ American ethnic studies responded to the realities of post-1965 immigrant communities by theorizing the 1.5 generation as a discrete formation, applicable to any immigrant group but in fact particularly characteristic of many Asian immigrant communities in which young people born in Korea, India, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, and beyond became impressively bicultural. Sandhya Shukla writes, “Diasporas simultaneously illumine and recreate vectors of time and space,” and she shows how South Asian immigrant generation is located precisely in the environment of post-1965 American legislation and millennial globalization (2003, 213).⁵

Mass-mediated youth culture on the West Coast has generated a uniquely Asian American youth profile that is unabashedly upwardly mobile; generally speaking, this stands in marked contrast to the class consciousness of hip-hop culture. I address the “GenerAsian” concept by focusing on West Coast Asian Americans and, concomitantly, offer a close reading of Jin the emcee, the

second-generation Chinese American hip-hop artist whose 2004 single “Learn Chinese” offers one line of response to early twenty-first-century (Asian) American pop culture.

In some ways, the old confusion between Asians and Asian Americans—the Asian American as eternal foreigner—is exacerbated by global corporate exchange.⁶ Dave, Nishime, and Oren ask, “How do we address the Asian American presence within our hyperglobalized mainstream culture?” (2005, 1). A strong twenty-first-century Asian American youth culture is defined (at least partly) by its consumption of Asian popular culture. Indeed, I am fascinated by this generation’s enactment of the globalized circuit of exchange. Sometimes this youth culture is marked by a hip, ironic reframing of materials that is powerfully agentive, but sometimes it reacts the slippage between the Asian and the Asian American. Often it hinges on the fact of post-1965 Asian immigration to the United States and a stepped-up transnational movement between the first worlds of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and the United States. Ahwa Ong’s influential work has modeled a dynamic set of relationships between subjects, nation-states, and political economies. She shifts analytical emphasis away from globalization per se and toward the ethnography of transnational practices and responses. She writes, “I prefer to use the term *transnationality*. *Trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something. Besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to the *transversal*, the *transactional*, the *translational*, and the *transgressive* aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism” (Ong 1999, 4).

The Asian American youth generation in question includes young people who move easily between the United States and an Asian home country, and others who are geographically based in the United States but who consume Asian popular culture, American popular culture, and Asian-disseminated American popular culture. Ong’s insistence on movement of many kinds, through different economies, varied desires, and across borders describes the ways that these youth negotiate and enjoy the embeddedness of lives that literally and figuratively move through interconnected cultural economies. I am thinking of my self-identified 2.0-generation Korean American undergraduate student Jessica who speaks to her parents in Korean, plays the *kayagum*,⁷ speaks English with no trace of a Korean accent, spends summers in Seoul, reads *Rolling Stone* and the *Source* from cover to cover every week, and watches the current Korean soap operas at home in Los Angeles. I am thinking of my 1.5-generation Taiwanese American undergraduate student Bonnie, who has Pokémon charms dangling from her backpack and J-pop ring tones on her cell phone. I am thinking of my 1.5-generation undergraduate student Jin Hee, who asks to be called “Gene” and argues in Korean with her mother about having non-Korean friends, and who chooses to spend her free time tutoring at-risk Latino and African American elementary students in Riverside. I am thinking of Edmund, a second-generation Filipino (not “Filipino American”) who parked his skateboard at my classroom door and gave his final presentation on game

music, in which he displayed an encyclopedic knowledge of Japanese videogames, anime, and manga.

The successful, affluent, transpacific Asian American is also one of the newest targets of xenophobic anxiety. He (and I use this gendered pronoun deliberately) stands in marked contrast to the brown tide of workers (undocumented and otherwise) who enter the United States from Mexico and below (I also use this above/below, top/bottom metaphor deliberately). Indeed, racialized class-based fear is the problem behind both anxieties. Whereas nineteenth-century yellow peril hysteria and twenty-first-century worries about undocumented workers focus(ed) on the working-class base of the American economy, the updated version of the model minority is the upper-middle class, a successful, transnational Asian American subject who conjoins race and class in worrisome ways. This Asian American subject is not only getting the highest SAT scores but also is not even categorically American. Ahwa Ong considers the late twentieth-century class of mobile ethnic Chinese and notes that the “flexibility” of Pacific Rim globalized capital and citizenship is celebrated by those who are most likely to benefit from it, such as “elite Hong Kong executives” (1999, 20). Attending to the class formations created by Pacific Rim corporate commerce is as important as theorizing its effects on ideologies of race and the nation. As Ong writes:

Among transnational Chinese subjects, those most able to benefit from their participation in global capitalism celebrate flexibility and mobility, which give rise to such figures as the multiple-passport holder; the multicultural manager with “flexible capital”; the “astronaut,” shuttling across borders on business; “parachute kids,” who can be dropped off in another country by parents on the trans-Pacific business commute; and so on. [...] Flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability. (19)

Etika Lee and Naoko Shibusawa suggest some critical strategies for thinking about Asian Americans as transnational subjects:

De-center the state, but do so without ignoring state power. Investigate migratory circuits and border crossings—not only across the Pacific but also across the Atlantic and within the Western hemisphere. Emphasize the mutual, interactive nature of cultural, institutional, and economic flows. In this respect, transnational histories are not merely comparative, looking at parallel developments across national borders. They seek as well to illuminate the connections that bind people and places to each other. (2005, x)

These critical handles address the mobile connections that inform, shape, obstruct, and construct Asian American identities and offer simple principles for theorizing Asian American presence in a less nation-bound and more connective manner. Any consideration of GenerAsian as a transnational youth culture will require these kinds of critical starting points.

Still, the rising Asian American upper-middle class has created new instabilities. Pensri Ho’s research focuses on 1.5 and second-generation Chinese American and Korean American professionals in southern California (twenty-five to thirty-five years old in 1995–1998) and their troubled relationship with race.⁸ Though some were eager to cite the model minority myth as the key to their success, they discovered that their Asianness was as likely to be held against them by non-Asian coworkers. The contradictions surrounding Asian American success thus highlight the deadly relationship between class and race in the United States: Asian Americans are a problem whether successfully working class or middle class. Ho writes that this professional class is the result of a complex set of conditions: many of the young professionals she interviewed had at least one professional parent, access to higher education, and had experienced transnational movement between the Asian home site and the United States. In Ho’s analysis, this young professional class discovered that they represented the Asian model minority once they entered the white-collar workforce even though many had “trivialized, suppressed, or denied” their ethnicity when younger (2003, 151). She focused on their ability to draw on multiple identifications as a key cultural resource: “Their resultant transpacific racialized American experiences were paired with their lifelong exposure to American and Asian mass media portrayals of the Asian ‘Other’ to create an Americanized Asian ‘Other’ cultural identity, which they mimetically exploit and embody for personal and professional gain” (150). Ho argues that the model minority myth is essentially a way to encourage Asian Americans to accept the terms of white American middle-class success and the glass ceiling that maintains Asian American marginality in the American racial hierarchy. She further shows how it is a means to simultaneously reward and contain Chinese American and Korean American professionals. As a result, such young professionals shift uneasily between “celebration and rejection of the self as the Asian Other,” simultaneously accepting and denying the terms of racial asymmetry (153).

Millennial second-generation Asian Americans have complex relationships with American racial regimes and globalization discourses. Yen Le Espiritu finds that second-generation middle class Filipinos in southern California negotiate assimilation and racism precisely because they are located at the intersection of race, class, and postcolonial self-awareness. American culture is familiar to them because they were born here *and* because their parents grew up with American cultural imperialism in the Philippines. They more likely live in white American suburbs than in Filipino ethnic “enclaves.” They are unavoidably aware of their racial difference:

The majority do not live in an ethnic neighborhood, attend school with other Filipino children, or belong to Filipino organizations. Thus, like later generation white ethnic groups, their ethnic behavior is largely symbolic, characterized by a nostalgic but unacquainted allegiance to an imagined past. However, there is a crucial difference; because Filipinos are dark-skinned, their ethnic/racial role is ascriptive rather than voluntary, and thus their ethnicity often

is politicized rather than just a leisure-time activity. The intersection of their race, class, and ethnicity means that these Filipinos simultaneously conform to the forces of acculturation and assimilation, challenge the U.S. model of multiculturalism, and construct a distinct new culture that is not simply an extension of the "original" or of the mainstream "American" culture.

(Espiritu 1992, 24)

The shaping force of race, class, transnational movement, and nation is thus pronounced even for a generation that has apparently assimilated. Similarly, Hung Cam Thai found that second-generation Vietnamese Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-seven described changing self-awareness between childhood and young adulthood. Most said that they had gone through a stage as children when they equated Americanness with whiteness and tried to act and view themselves as white American. One Vietnamese American interviewee referred to a process of "deprogramming the self" during her college years when she entered a period of ethnic "recovery" and "discovery" that was profoundly transformational (Thai 2001, 66). Most gravitated toward a stronger, explicit understanding of themselves as Vietnamese and as members of Vietnamese families; Thai refers to this as a "cultural ideology of collectivism" reinforced by trips to Vietnam (73–75). She argues that "ethnogenesis, or [a] 'collective identity shift,'" took place for her young interviewees as they entered young adulthood—as well as for second-generation Korean Americans and Chinese Americans, which she cites in related research (76).⁹

Mexican immigrants and their 1.5- and second-generation children stand in stark relief as an unruly labor class in relation to upwardly mobile, privileged transpacific Asian American youth. Contrast Ho's young Asian American professionals with the raucous Mexicans and Mexican Americans who protested against H.R. 4437 in the spring of 2006: Mexican flags were widely used in public protests for immigrant rights and were quickly replaced with American flags when the rhetoric of citizenship and allegiance was used against protesters. Yet young upwardly mobile Asian American professionals are just as likely to be cast as foreign, which challenges us to read class against race. My position is that neither generation nor "the immigrant experience" is generalizable and that the specific economic and legislative conditions of any given moment will fundamentally shape the specificities of generation—and especially the second generation. With this in mind, I turn to the matter of two early twenty-first century Asian American youth cultures.

GENERASIANS, AZN'S, AND OTHER SELF-IDENTIFICATIONS

The current generation of twenty-something West Coast Asian Americans has a distinctive profile. Most of its members were born after 1985. It is hip, playful, often aware of Asian American history, and closely in touch with certain forms of East Asian mass mediated culture (especially Japanese anime and Hong Kong martial arts films). Some of its members are involved in the street racing scene focused on

Japanese import cars, hip-hop (especially clothes and slang), and skateboard culture.¹⁰ It is marked by a blurring of generational formations: 1.5 and second-generation Asian Americans come together in some of its activities. It is often (though not always) decidedly middle class in its aspirations and access to disposable income.

Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou argue that "Asian American youth create and define an identity and culture of their own against the backdrop of contemporary immigration, continued racialization, and the rise of the new second generation (the U.S.-born of foreign-born parentage)" (Lee and Zhou 2004, 2). They also note that scholarly work on U.S. youth culture has almost entirely ignored the presence of young Asian Americans (9). Davé, Nishime, and Oren comment that Asian American popular culture—and the youth generation engaged with it—is only understandable if viewed in the context of "trans-Asian" contact, which is characterized by "counterflows" of culture and "porous boundaries between America and Asia" (2005, 4–5). They suggest that Asian American popular culture is not discretely *American* but is rather the result of inter-Asian American contact. This poses new theoretical problems even as it reactivates older ones. As Davé, Nishime, and Oren put it, "Paradoxically, this current visibility of global 'Asianness' renders the cultural presence of Asian Americans in mainstream American culture conceptually problematic: simultaneously hyper-visible and out of sight" (1).¹¹

Similarly, Sunaina Maira and Elisabeth Soep argue that youth cultures are shaped by the politics of globalization and transnationalism. Taking youth studies as a point of departure, they ask, "What might studying youth reveal about social identities being remade through transnational popular culture and new communication technologies in the context of debates about cultural authenticity, renewed nationalisms, and free-market relations?" (2005, xviii). Maira and Soep reposition youth as "key players" in the constitutive links between nation and globalization and note that the overlap between globalization studies and youth culture has long been critically "evaded" due to the historiographical and ideological assumptions driving each area (xix, xxi). They illuminate the disconnects, contradictions, and force between consumption and national identity, and the ways that youth emerge prominently in the very figuration of the nation-state, particularly the United States (xxiii–xxix). California emerges in their analysis as a site where many of these dynamics intersect due to intensified immigration into the state from both Asia and Latin America and to the "confluence of social, political, and economic factors" that have crystallized the cultural work done by youth (xxix).

The term "GenerAsian" is more and more widely used by members of this generation to self-identify. It was purportedly coined in 1998, when GenerAsian X was used to describe the target audience for *Shopping for Fangs* (1997), a low-budget independent film made by Quentin Lee and Justin Lin focused on Asian American post-college young people in southern California's Asian immigrant San Gabriel valley.¹² The X quickly vanished and GenerAsian was in general use by 1999–2000. GenerAsian is featured in Justin Lin's independent feature film *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2003), which follows several overachieving but deeply disaffected young Asian

American men through part of their senior year in a southern California high school. Since the release of *Better Luck Tomorrow* at the 2002 Sundance Festival, Lin has gone from Asian American independent filmmaking to directing Hollywood feature films.³ In *Better Luck Tomorrow*, his depiction of amoral upper middle-class Asian Americans in Orange County who rob, do drugs, and cheat on high school tests created a ripple of discussion among Asian American audiences and critics because the film's characters, by and large, are depicted as having no interest or investment in Asian American identity politics. Indeed, the film is not about Asian American identity, and it does not have a clearly articulated Asian American message. In an interview for *Mother Jones*, journalist and critic Oliver Wang asked Lin about this absence:

[OLIVER WANG]: What's striking about *Better Luck Tomorrow* is that it's not caught up in any "Who am I?" identity politics. The teens in the film might worry about their next heist but not existential questions about what it means to be Asian American.

[JUSTIN LIN]: I was talking to a filmmaker—he made one of the early Asian American films—and he literally thought they were going to go bankrupt. He figured if they were going to do that, they were going to put as many messages as they could into that film. That's the feeling—when you have the opportunity to speak, you're eager to get all of your messages across. Hopefully, with this film, there is a maturity to it. People don't want to sit there to have you explain why you need to exist. You just do, and people have to come along with it.

Lin's film attracted attention not only because Asian Americans were not idealized as the model minority but especially because Lin did not make a message film about Asian Americanness. Or did he? For some audiences, watching a cast of characters who "happen" to be of Asian descent was satisfying in itself; certainly this kind of spectatorship aligns with mainstream ideologies of multiculturalism that allow audiences to believe race does not matter. In other ways, of course, Lin was making a film about Asian Americans, or perhaps he was even making an Asian American film, and his previous work confirms his own position as an Asian American filmmaker. *Better Luck Tomorrow* opened the way for a wholly new Asian American youth identity politics in which it was no longer necessary to have to argue for presence or even for the right to middle-class citizenship and success.¹⁴

Oliver Wang—to whom I refer more than once in this chapter, since his work on Asian American music, film, and popular culture is far-reaching and critically adept—writes that the "new second generation of Asian Americans" is the "unlikely, unknowing, and sometimes unwilling heirs to the legacy of the [Asian American] movement" and its nationalist assumptions (2001, 456). He reminds us that the construct of the Asian American is still so recent that it is bound to change and perhaps to be continuously redefined, and he argues that music is one of many sites of cultural production where that work will be done. We have already entered a different historical moment (a "postmovement" era, as Wang calls it) in which

the political construct of Asian American pan-ethnicity is no longer the spark that ignites cultural production.¹⁵ Wang writes, "In contrast to the previous generation, who made music for, by, and about Asian Americans, many of the new artists seek to make music for an audience beyond their constituency. This doesn't equate to a rejection of an ethnic audience, but they're not seeking dialogue solely with that community. Their music is, as the cliché goes, 'for everyone'" (2001, 457).

GenerAsians are thus more focused on mainstream participation than on eking out a separate, nationalist foothold in North America. To summarize my argument at this point, GenerAsian youth have a distinctive profile for a host of reasons. Their generational distance from the 1960s era of the Asian American movement gives them a very different political profile. Their distance from the 1965 changes in immigration laws grants them a certain confidence in citizenship without cultural assimilation and a strong belief in the right to information technologies that grant them the ability to cut across geocultural space and to create virtual communities. GenerAsians are more apt to describe themselves as Chinese rather than Chinese American, and as Vietnamese rather than Vietnamese American, and they are also likely to view the Pacific Rim as an open arena of cultural exchange.

In short, there is a tight circuit of production between the *representation* of Asian American youth as beyond identity politics and the *construction* of a newly assertive postethnic identity for American youth of Asian descent. Some American Asians continue to assert ethnicity and race but—markedly—without the 1960s–1970s assertion of a pan-Asian American community. Rather, transnational movement, globalized economies, and the right to middle-class consumption mark this new kind of American Asian youth culture.

At this point, the term "GenerAsian" is in fairly wide circulation among young Asian Americans.¹⁶ It is strongly marked for age and Asian ethnicity but not for gender, class, immigrant generation, or sexuality. It does not seem to be used more by some Asian ethnicities than others; that is, Asian American youth of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese, and Filipina/o heritage are equally apt to self-identify in this way. Use of the term usually indicates some awareness of ethnic heritage and the political identifications that compel historicized awareness. The term has been around for long enough so that it not only includes high school and college-aged youth but also sometimes extends beyond, into post-grad twenty-something professionals (who are perhaps not yet ready to let go of the implied hipness that accompanies the identification) and even into pre-high school youth—that is, its demographic composition may be in the process of widening. Yet many twenty-something Asian Americans may have a stronger and more specific connection to AZN than to GenerAsian identity.¹⁷ Significantly, the term "GenerAsian" now has currency as a branding term. That is, the term is changing as corporations use it to identify emergent Asian-Pacific markets.¹⁸ Although the GenerAsian sensibility was generated by North American Asian youth, it is now in the process of being exported to Asia through mass-mediated popular culture.

But what exactly is exportable? In its emphasis on mediated community and its pleasure in information technologies, the GenerAsian aesthetic is similar to that of

the deracialized Gen X, but it also involves an awareness of Asianness as hip. That is, it draws on a specific form of Pacific Rim Asianness that is heavily based in J-cool popular culture and its widespread consumption through anime, Pokémon, Hello Kitty, and J-pop.

YOLK AND GIANT ROBOT

In 1994 two magazines focused on Asian American youth culture were founded, and each provided a certain view of GenerAsian political economy and aesthetics. I argue that, together, they emerged from and then synergistically generated the sustained terms for a GenerAsian transpacific youth culture.

Yolk magazine (1994–2003) was a formative site for GenerAsian style. It addressed Asian American culture from 1994 to 2000 and then underwent extensive redefinition in 2000.¹⁹ It had always covered Asian as well as Asian American style, fashion, and popular culture, but after 2000 its Asian popular culture coverage was much broader. The magazine title was also revised as *Yolk: GenerAsian Next 2.0*, and it proclaimed that it had “its sights set on becoming the definitive Asian American entertainment, lifestyle, and pop culture magazine.”²⁰ In short, its expanded Asian pop culture coverage and its self-proclaimed Asian American location were connected and simultaneous.

Most of the magazine’s cover images between 2000 and its demise in 2003 (thirteen out of fifteen) featured Asian American women in skin-baring glamour poses; many articles were devoted to Asian films, food, and music. The layout was punchy, bright, and self-consciously cutting edge. In short, the GenerAsian profile defined by *Yolk* was deeply hip, and its hipness was substantively informed by Asian popular culture: the message was that GenerAsian was in North America but in touch with Asian popular culture, or that it was an exemplary Pacific Rim consumer.

Giant Robot magazine, on the other hand, focused on Asian pop culture from its very first issue in 1994. Its subtitle is *Asian Pop Culture and Beyond*, and its readers are “half-Asian and half-not.”²¹ Its Web site explains its purpose and focus as follows:

From movie stars, musicians, and skateboarders to toys, technology, and history, *Giant Robot* magazine covers cool aspects of Asian and Asian-American pop culture. Paving the way for less knowledgeable media outlets, *Giant Robot* put the spotlight on Chow Yun Fat, Jackie Chan, and Jet Li years before they were in mainstream America’s vocabulary.

But *Giant Robot* is much more than idol worship. GR’s spirited reviews of canned coffee drinks, instant ramen packs, Japanese candies, Asian frozen desserts, and marinated bugs have spawned numerous copycat articles in other publications. GR’s historical pieces on the Yellow Power Movement, footbinding, Asian-American gangsters, and other savory topics have been cited by both academics and journalists. Other regular features include travel journals, art and design studies, and sex.

The magazine was founded in Los Angeles by two University of California–Los Angeles undergraduates, Eric Nakamura and Martin Wong, and was initially a stapled zine. Since then, it has expanded exponentially and includes stores in West Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York that carry Asian popular culture such as toys, clothing, books, comics, candy, and accessories. The magazine, now glossy and sold at Barnes and Noble and Tower Records, does not have an articulated political position or agenda but has featured some edgy Asian American content (including a historic 1998 issue on Asian American and African American activism in the 1960s). The founders/editors have an anti-exploitation philosophy and argue for supporting “quality” Asian products. They have a somewhat cynical attitude about the American commodification of Asian popular culture even though they are clearly on the cutting edge of that process. They claim that the difference is their selectiveness and connoisseurship.

Together, *Yolk* and *Giant Robot* offered a new kind of Asian American pan-ethnicity, modulated by an enthusiastic and sometimes ironically knowing consumption of globalized Asian popular culture.²²

Hard on the heels of such stepped-up celebrations of Pacific Rim exchange, the term “AZN” has crept into common use among GenerAsian members, and it is often paired with “AZN pride” or “pryde.”²³ Note the disappearance of “Asian American.” “AZN” or “azn” emerged out of hip-hop culture (i.e., its free play of slang and Ebonics) and cell phone and Internet chat room abbreviations and slang. It is especially used by high school students (and some college students) and was apparently generated on the West Coast before spreading more widely.²⁴ The Internet Urban Dictionary offers a troubling snapshot of how the term and, by extension, AZN/GenerAsian members are regarded by non-Asian Americans. Like Wikipedia, this dictionary is a compilation of slang definitions gathered through open submission. Here are samples of some of the definitions, along with the thumbs-up/thumbs-down votes submitted by readers who indicated their approval or disapproval of each definition:²⁵

AZN 🖱️ 1422 up, 666 down 🖱️
retarded form of “asian.”

immature children who’s eyes have not been open to the world who claim “asian pride,” usually high school/high school drop outs and under with bleached hair that spend their days at the local arcade playing DDR, also types “LyKe Dis On the INtErNeTzZzZz”

Azn 🖱️ 598 up, 264 down 🖱️

The younger asians or non asians that profess that they are better than everyone else (even though they are not). Signs of the “Asian retards” are:

(1) Typing in alternating CAPS and lowercase letters.

(2) Using words such as: dis, dat, sho, da, ETC.

- (3) Claiming that Asians are the best even though they don't know shit about their own heritage.
- (4) *sigh* I hoped it wouldn't come to this. The dreaded "Got Rice?" song . . .

AZN

☞ 383 up, 146 down ☞

- 1.) Shortened form of Asian.
- 2.) Today, commonly used by non-Asians to identify themselves as Asians. This can be contributed to the fact that most self-respecting Asians would not be caught dead doing some of the actions "AzN's" perform on the internet.

AzNpRyDe: *Mal Honda iz Fast!!!!!!!*

azn

☞ 251 up, 113 down ☞

Asians (mainly from California) who shame their race by bleaching their hair blonde and trying to develop the personality of a "ghetto" negro. Ironically, these azn's do nerdy things such as hang out in arcades playing Tekken and DDR, but they still uphold their "ghetto" persona online in chat rooms and blogs/xanga accounts.

azn: *look, my hair is blonde*

white guy: *you're not white*

azn: *yO nIGTM?*

black guy: *you ain't black*

azn: *got rice?*

asian guy: *you're not asian*

azn

☞ 89 up, 72 down ☞

Azn is another acronym for Asian. It's relation is usually related to young, mostly SouthEast Asian Americans, mainly from the hip hop generation.

In order to find their own identity, Azn youth often use upper and lower case letters in order to communicate in online-slang. While there are uneducated Azn out there acting up, there are those who are educated enough to identify Azn with their own pride and heritage.

Even though many of these youths are born in America and may not even speak their native tongue, using Azn slang to communicate is a way of finding their own identity in an American culture dominated by mainstream music such as hip hop, rap, pop, and rock.

I have a nephew embedded in this culture. You would not be able to tell by the way he types on line that he is an A student who excel in sports. Having this Azn attitude is simply a way to push out the steam of realizing that you are born a minority and trying to find your own identity.

AzN *Pride !!*

GO+ *rice* *BiATCh*.

Clearly, the term "AZN" activates a range of responses, from pride to the most time-worn, stereotyped vilifications of Asians and Asian Americans. The posters' ethnicity is mostly unmarked, though more than a little apprehension over blackness is voiced, possibly by Asian Americans. If the term "AZN" is a site for Asian American identity work, then its location at the crossroads of interethnic media and information technology leaves it vulnerable to accusations of cultural inauthenticity (bleached blonde hair and "borrowed" African American culture), cultural arrogance and superiority, and socioeconomic privilege. The last entry above (last only here—there are many more entries on the Web site) offers a thoughtful, presumably "elder" Asian American perspective on the need for AZN identifications and the cultural work for which the term clears a way: the poster cites the absence of Asian Americans from mainstream American popular culture and the need to try out new, confrontational relationships—but relatively few readers "approved" this perspective.

That poster also refers to an online music video titled "Got Rice, Bitch?" by an artist named "AZN Pride" who swept the Internet in 2004.²⁶ The song pokes fun at AZN's "from within" and is satirically pro-Asian.²⁷ The lyrics assert that "we" got "brainz," "skillz," "carz," and "clothz"—that is, the lyrics play with Asian American stereotypes and trends:²⁸

If s the AZN better recognize

Got rice bitch, got rice

Got food, got soup, got spice

Got brainz like us, got skillz like us

Got carz, got clothz, got girlz like us

Whats sup we the shit we kill yall foolz

We got money in the banks from our family jewelz

Can we help it if we rain and corrupt the schoolz

If don't matta fuck the law shit we break the rules

We jack carz fuck games yo we got the toolz

Hoop it up break it down then we go shoot some pool

Fuck with me you fuck with all of us don't think its kool

1 on 1 fuck that it's 3 on 1, no duels

The song went viral and found its way onto Asian joke sites as well as Asian American chat lists. At this point, it is nearly ubiquitous: the song has been endlessly reposted and its lyrics retranscribed, so I have been unable trace it to any starting point. Its point of origin is perhaps less important than the fact that it attracted a lot of attention. "Got Rice, Bitch?" was endlessly recirculated, and reposting is the highest compliment on the Internet.

Though the AZN configuration is fraught in certain ways, its valence as young and hip led to its use as the name for a cable station on air from 2005 to 2008, "AZN Television: The Network for Asian America." The station's Web site featured a set of statistics arguing in market terms for its existence: according to them, "the Asian American market" is 4.8 percent of the U.S. population (14 million people);

85 percent speak English fluently, have \$397 billion in "buying power," have the "highest household income [and] education of any ethnic group in the U.S.," have a median income of \$56,000, and have a median age of thirty-one.²⁹ In short, the station was not directed toward the youngest GenerAsian that created the AZN profile, but instead toward an affluent post-college Asian American demographic.

To summarize, the AZN pride sensibility emerged around 2000, is a specifically youth stance, and has been ridiculed and satirized as much as it has served as a site of identification for young Asian American men. A Wikipedia stub notes that the term "Asian pride worldwide" is also common "to express an identity which extends beyond national borders to all people of Asian descent."³⁰ The term thus serves double duty as a source of young masculinized Asian American confidence on the one hand and ridicule on the other, and its arrival in "Got Rice, Bitch?" outsourced its effectiveness right back into longstanding tropes of xenophobic fear over Asian dominance. Its appearance at the helm of the (ultimately unsuccessful) AZN Television network suggests that it has been appropriated by corporate concerns. Its demographic base, which is older every day and more settled into its socioeconomic niche, has not articulated its own political presence as clearly as the Asian American movement generation did in the 1960s and 1970s. Without a defined minoritarian politics, the AZN generation's reliance on ethnic pride leaves it wide open to model minority accusations. GenerAsian and AZN Pryde suggest a new youth bloc that emerged from the ground up and was then redefined by marketers and the media as an upper middle-class configuration.³¹ The latter have little motivation to theorize the complex class bases of this demographic; indeed, GenerAsian has been reconstructed at least partly by marketers who focus on communities with disposable income. If the members of GenerAsian and AZN Pryde have been recast as privileged youth of color with access to the playground of transpacific capitalism, then clearly the work of asserting the diversity of Asian American communities is ongoing.

In contrast, the world of hip-hop addresses race and class all the time, and the presence of young Asian American men has always had the potential to create politicized interethnic configurations—but not without tension. The appearance of Jin the emcee suggests an alternative critical awareness to the GenerAsians, within the same age and ethnic group but with a working class awareness.

JIN IN YOUR FACE

In 2004, just a few months after Jin Au-Yeung released his hit single "Learn Chinese," I taught a course on Asian American music and asked my students to compare three Asian American emcees: Jin, the Mountain Brothers, and praCh Ly. Many but not all of the thirty undergraduates were Asian or Asian American, mostly 1.5 or second generation. They eventually agreed that praCh Ly, a self-produced Cambodian American rapper from Long Beach, had a well-articulated and principled political message but the weakest musical skills and lo-fi production; that the Mountain Brothers were right in the middle, with a polished but

decidedly "indie" sound, complex rhymes, and a now-you-see-it-now-you-don't Asian American sensibility; and that Jin was the most musically polished and highly produced but the least political.

I turn to Jin because he is a highly visible—and audible—second-generation Chinese American rapper whose hip-hop identifications offer important points of difference from GenerAsian practices. Jin is—famously, to date—the only Asian American rapper ever signed to a major recording label. The hip-hop world (from recording moguls to grassroots fans) presents real challenges and opportunities for non-African American participants, and Jin has developed rhetorical strategies for performing Chineseness. This second-generation child of Chinese immigrants has become a serious contender in conversations about race in interethnic environments. Jin is a mixture of denial, cooption, and assertive presence, and although I initially felt he had sold out, I have (in two short years) come to see him as a particularly effective figure who has managed to make it in the mainstream yet keep his message coming. Better still, he is young, so there is still much to come.

To my knowledge, Jin does not identify as "GenerAsian," "AZN," or even as Asian American. Over and over again he refers to himself as "Chinese" or "Asian" in his songs and interviews. Jin is increasingly involved in transpacific cultural production, though, from the perspective of the world of hip-hop. He focuses on how class, ethnicity, and talent are defined and positioned in that environment, and his career to date has contained seven events through which he has located his work in fascinating and sometimes contradictory ways: (1) his triumph over African American opponents as a freestyler (2002); (2) getting signed by a major recording label; (3) the release of his hit single "Learn Chinese" and first album, *The Rest Is History* (2004); (4) his response to "The Tsunami Song" (2005); (5) his decision to leave the Ruff Ryders recording label; (6) his reappearance as an independent artist and mentor in his second album, *The Emcee's Properganda* (2005); and (7) his album *ABC* (2007), which is mostly in Cantonese.

Jin Au-Yeung was born in Miami in 1982. His parents are Chinese immigrants who ran a less-than-successful Chinese restaurant during his childhood. Jin grew up in a working-class, interethnic environment in Miami and started freestyling with Latino and African American friends in middle school. He moved to New York City with his family in 2001 when he was nineteen and immediately got involved with the hip-hop scene, where he focused on freestyling. He hired a manager in 2001–2002 and got onto BET's "Freestyle Fridays" on 106 and Park in early 2002, where he earned fame by winning a series of freestyling battles. In these one-on-one three-minute matches, always up against African American emcees,³² Jin quickly became known not only for his improvisational rhyming skills but also for aggressively asserting his Chineseness rather than allowing opponents to use it against him as an insult (e.g., "Yeah I'm Chinese / Now you'll understand it / I'm the reason your little sis's eyes are slanted / If you make one more joke about Chinese food or karate / The NYPD will be searching Chinatown for your body."³³ After winning seven matches in a row by March 2002, he was something of a legend not only in the hip-hop world generally but especially among Asian

American hip-hop fans.³⁴ When he was inducted into 106 and Park's Hall of Fame, he announced that he had just signed with Ruff Ryders. As cultural critic Jeff Chang writes, "Across the country, Asian American teens traded CD-Rs of his TV battles and leaked tracks, lit up Internet boards, and downloaded his singles from AOL more than 500,000 times" (2005). From that point on, his career took off quickly. In 2003 he had a minor role as a mechanic in *2 Fast 2 Furious*, about the street racing scene in Miami. After much fanfare, his single "Learn Chinese" was produced by Wyclef Jean (formerly with The Fugees). *The Rest Is History* was finished in 2003, but Ruff Ryders delayed its release several times, and it eventually came out in November 2004.

Between 2002 and 2004, Jin's development was followed closely by Asian American hip-hop enthusiasts. As I have written elsewhere, Asian Americans have always found it difficult if not impossible to break into the American recording industry, and hip-hop poses special challenges due to the ways that Asianness is ambivalently positioned between whiteness and blackness (Wong 2004, 233–256). Asian American hip-hop artists are inevitably forced to make decisions and assertions about their racial position. At its best, the outcome is new, effective cross-ethnic formations. As Elle Hisama (2004) notes, "Hip hop provides brilliant opportunities for musical crosscurrents and affinities between ethnic communities of color. American hip hop since 1990 offers compelling examples of interaction and exchange between African and Asian diasporic communities, and demonstrates the overwhelming political and aesthetic power of the polycultural."

While Hisama focuses on the points of possibility for interethnic connection, in practice Asian American emcees are frequently accused of being inauthentically black and few have been able to argue for an unmarked voice (where race does not matter), let alone for the value of an Asian American voice. A few have made their Asianness central to their message but—not coincidentally—have been unable to break into the industry and instead have become most well known on the college performance circuit.³⁵ Others have stayed within local environments, performing at live events within their ethnic community rather than trying to get signed.³⁶ On his DVD, Jin says, "But the key—the most important thing—is to remember where [hip-hop] started"—that is (presumably), to respect the urban African American roots of hip-hop.³⁷

Jin somehow managed to push past these problems, partly by putting his ethnicity right out front and partly by being very, very good at battling. Jeff Chang, a noted hip-hop historian and critic of Asian American popular culture, pinpoints the effectiveness of Jin's cultural and aesthetic location, suggesting that he manages to work against prevailing expectations and to surprise at the same time:

In fact, Jin does present something wholly new, not just in American but also global pop: an apologetically working-class, second-generation kid flowing in Cantonese and New York-inflected Ebonics with the same fluency. He's no pricey Hong Kong import, no sexless high-kicking martial arts expert in yellowface. By simply rapping in a black tee with a diamond-encrusted Ruff

Ryders pendant, he could have the most impact on the notion of an "authentic" Asian American masculinity since Bruce Lee. (Chang 2003)

Jin is decidedly *not* a GenerAsian in his orientation, but Chang identifies a key point of contact: for GenerAsians, Jin provides a politicized possibility that (at least then) was thoroughly embedded in the industry and the mainstream public sphere—a subject who is both authentically Asian American but not mired in the identity politics of the 1960s. As Chang writes, "For overeducated hip-hop-gen AZN cult-crits like me, Jin presents a subject worthy of our subjectivities, a voice that validates our own time in the wilderness" (2003). With this in mind, I turn to "Learn Chinese" to consider how things went a little wrong in 2003–2004.

"LEARN CHINESE"

Jin's most impressive skill is his ability to battle, and "Learn Chinese" is in the finest tradition of hip-hop braggadocio: it opens with the confrontational lines, "Yeah I'm Chinese, and what? / Yeah you know who this is, Jin, and let me just tell you this / The days of the pork fried rice and the chicken wings comin' to your house by me is over." The chorus says it all:

Ya'll gonna learn Chinese, ya'll gonna learn Chinese
 Ya'll gonna learn Chinese, when the pumps come out, you're gonna speak Chinese
 Ya'll gonna learn Chinese,
 Ya'll gonna be Chinese
 Ya'll gonna learn Chinese, when the pumps go off, ya'll gon' speak Chinese

In other words, "you" are going to come around to his way of thinking, being, and speaking—you are going to abide by his terms. Moreover, you are going to get there through fear and submission: the "pumps" are shotguns, and when they come out, you are going to be so frightened that you will spontaneously speak Chinese, no, *be* Chinese, because Jin is in charge. This chorus is heard three times in the course of the song. In footage taken from a live performance of the song in a New York City club, Jin performed on stage with three members of his crew, and the sight of him and these powerful-looking African American men—all taller than him, chanting his chorus in unison, arms raised, index fingers pointed at the audience—is an astonishing and convincing moment. You are going to *be* Chinese, whether you like it or not.

The recorded version of the song is a dense soundscape of Jin's voice alone, Jin's voice with his own voice layered over it, the three voices of his crew who chime in at the ends of many lines in unison with him, and a spare base line that includes a "Chinese-sounding" pentatonic melodic motive heard at the beginning of the song and then in each chorus. Along the way, the lyrics are constantly "interrupted," sometimes by Jin speaking Cantonese, sometimes by his crew responding in Cantonese, and sometimes by Wyclef. Wyclef mostly inserts shout-outs and

promotional phrases; for example, he inserts the word "Refugees," referring simultaneously to The Fugees (the group popular during the mid-1990s) and to the clothing line he introduced in 2005. Ruff Ryders is referenced a number of times by name and once as "Double-R." At one point, a sexy woman's voice—breathy, girlish, perhaps imitating the sound of Japanese teenaged pop stars—sings an "Oriental" melody and then croons, "Mr. Jin, you are the sexiest man / Mr. Jin, I love the way you do your thing."

The lyrics are a mixture of bragging, sexist claims about women, gangsta talk about guns, thugs, and hooligans (for which Ruff Ryders is famous), and edgy race commentary. Jin refers to himself as the "original chinky eyed MC" in an age-old strategy of reclaiming injurious language—but he is also referencing the fact that other (non-Asian) rappers have called themselves "chinky-eyed" when describing what their eyes look like after getting high on weed, and he's saying he's more authentically chinky-eyed since he is an actual "chink," so the reclamation has several clever layers. References to Chinese food and Chinatown abound, but Jin knows his history and is all too aware that blackness, whiteness, and Asianness are interconstitutive. He raps, "We should ride the train for free, we built the railroads / I ain't your 50 cent, I ain't your Eminem, I ain't your Jigga Man, I'm a CHINA man," and yet the bottom line is that he's a Chinatown gangsta who will blow you away—"I wish you would come to CHINA TOWN / Get lost in town, end up in the lost and found."

The music video is both brilliant and dismaying, and it defeats any attempt to pinpoint a projected audience. Its intended viewer could be any hip-hop fan, or any Asian American, or any mainstream viewer. Certainly it can be watched in several ways. (Indeed, it opens with a scene that tells us it is about spectatorship.) It works off an all-too-predictable mix of Orientalist imagery, yet it also walks a tightrope, simultaneously reifying and challenging stereotypes. It is a relentless series of tropes drawn from Asian cult cinema, or film noir, or *Year of the Dragon*. The setting is a dark and dangerous Chinatown straight out of any Hollywood feature film, and Jin struts around as a gangster, decked out in a suit and eye patch, surrounded by Chinese goons, looking stereotypically grim and dangerous. Scenes of a karate class are intercut for no apparent reason—it's Asian, so it's there. You're in a Chinese restaurant kitchen. Everyone's Chinese except for some of the women, and many of them are African American, sexy, on display as manikins, dancing, gyrating, and draping themselves over Jin given half the chance. Somewhere in there is a narrative about a beautiful Asian woman being held hostage—she's tied to a couch, and Jin comes and rescues her. It's parody and it's serious, and it fulfills expectations even as it winks at those expectations. It ends with a chase scene as Jin races through the karate dojo and tries to get away from the gangster Jin, only to wind up in a face to face confrontation that ends with "To Be Continued."

The most interesting part of the music video is the opening sequence that literally provides a narrative frame for the Orientalist "story."³⁸ A late-model car pulls up outside a house and Jin steps out, dressed pretty much like himself, carrying a plastic delivery bag. He's delivering Chinese takeout. He rubs a speck of dirt off a

side mirror and then swaggers up the path to the house. He's so full of attitude that you wonder—as you're supposed to—how long he's going to hold down this job. Cut to inside the house, where three African American guys are sitting around in a living room watching TV and talking. A big poster of Jin is on the wall, and one of the guys wears a Ruff Ryders sweatshirt. You're only several seconds into the sequence, but you already see that this is playfully ironic, and it's good. One of the guys says, "Have you heard about this new Ruff Ryders movie about the brothers Chin?" Another asks, "The one about the Chin Chin? Yeah, that's dope." The first answers, "I'm telling you, that Mr. Chin Chin is gangsta dope—they, there goes that joint right there!" and points to the TV. The guys turn their attention to the TV set, where Jin has appeared—and we get sucked into it as the camera zooms into the TV and we're suddenly watching/hearing Jin outside, climbing the steps up onto the porch and swaggering up to the door as we hear his voice declare, "Yeah, I'm Chinese . . . and what?" There's fast intercutting between Jin outside knocking on the door and the guys inside watching him and carrying on a spirited (unheard) conversation about him; Jin pounds on the door, but no one answers. As he raps "the days of the pork fried rice and chicken wings coming to your house are over," he throws the bag of takeout food at the foot of the door in disgust and swaggers away. As he goes down the front walk, he turns to the camera and looks the spectator right in the eye as he says, "Ya'll gon learn Chinese." This is no kowtowing delivery boy.³⁹

Then we're plunged into another world—out of the frame and into the song, where Jin is alternately seen out on the street as "himself," surrounded by an urban nighttime crowd of young African American men, women, and sleek sports cars, and we then see him embedded in the other narrative about him as a high-level Chinatown gangster. A curious aspect of the video is the moment, about halfway through, when Jin as himself confronts Jin the gangster: he forces his way through the restaurant kitchen, past cooks and goons, and faces the gangster at his table in the fancy restaurant, where he is surrounded by a bevy of women. But the threat that he suggests is immediately and confusingly disarmed when the gangster directs his women to get up. They rise from the table en masse and surround Jin/himself, waving scarves suggestively and overcoming him (apparently) with their sexiness. It's a weird extended moment (that coincides with the "Mr. Jin, you are the sexist man" lines) that overlays a harem trope with the tired old adage of the Asian man who isn't masculine enough to stand up to women.

In short, for this Asian American viewer, the video is both a playful send-up of Asian stereotypes and a disturbing mélange of old-fashioned Orientalia plus old-fashioned hip-hop misogyny. For fans and critics with a stake in the Asian American public sphere, this is perplexing and frustrating: shouldn't race consciousness preclude sexism, homophobia, and other social illnesses? Oliver Wang offers a ruthless assessment of these issues:⁴⁰

The video for "Learn Chinese" is rife with problems. One of the biggest and most obvious is Jin's gender politics—women figure in this video like they

figure in most rap videos: sex objects desired for nothing more than their bodies. Disappointing but generically so. The more complicated issue is how Jin positions a racialized class element—the second verse of his song is basically about how gangsta Chinese can be, especially in Chinatown and this is Jin's attempt at equating, if not outdoing, the trope of the Black Ghetto by offering Chinatown as an even more lurid competitor. He's glamorizing the ethnic enclave in the same way that African Americans have glorified the ghetto and projects, and Latinos talk about the barrio but Jin's approach to Chinatown is even less critical than these other examples.

[...]

Jin trades in one stack of stereotypes: kung fu fighters, take-out delivery men, etc. and just replaces them with another set of equally suspect images.

Wang's critique is dead on, but the one thing I wonder about is his attribution of Jin as the instigator and "author" of this narrative through these images. The interface between Jin's ideas, his efforts to sell his work, Wyclef Jean's role as producer, and Ruff Ryders's decisions about how to handle an Asian encee in their constructed gangsta black world is an interstice where I suspect Jin lost control over his product. At that level, everyone is guilty, and in fact Jin decided to leave Ruff Ryders less than two years later, in 2005, due to dissatisfactions with the promotion of his album. *The Rest Is History* reportedly sold only about 100,000 copies. Further, the album release was repeatedly delayed and then suffered because of lack of promotion despite guest appearances on the album by Kanye West, Wyclef, and Double R crew member Styles P. Some argue that the album simply was not very good.⁴¹ Whichever the case, Jin's relationship with Ruff Ryders changed in 2005. During the months leading up to the breakup, the tsunami hit South and Southeast Asia on December 2004, killing about 229,000 people, and a black-Asian controversy in New York showed a new side of Jin.

"THE TSUNAMI SONG" AND *THE EMCEE'S PROPERGANDA*

On January 18, 2005, three weeks after the Sumatra-Andaman earthquake, one of the most popular and successful hip-hop radio stations in New York City aired a parody song about the tsunami. Hot 97 WQHT-FM's show "Miss Jones in the Morning" played this song twice that morning, set to the melody of "We Are the World" but with a rather different message:

There was a time, when the sun was shining bright

So I went down to the beach to catch me a tan.

Then the next thing I knew, a wave 20 feet high

Came and washed your whole country away.

And all at once, you can hear the screaming chinks.

And no one was saved from the wave.

There were Africans drowning, little Chinamen swept away.

You can hear God laughing, "Swim you bitches swim."

[Chorus]

So now you're screwed. It's the tsunami,

You better run and kiss your ass away. Go find your mommy.

I just saw her float by, a tree went through her head.

And now your children will be sold. Child slavery.

Outrage ensued. The Asian American community mobilized, protests and demonstrations were mounted, and the radio station owner apologized and then suspended Miss Jones. On January 25, Jin released a rapped response that showed him at his best—in pure battle mode—but newly politicized.⁴² He freestyled as follows:

and tell the rest of your staff that they need to clean up their act

fuck the tsunami song and whoever thought of it

matter fact, fuck the engineer that recorded it

and the brains behind the scenes that applauded it

anything for ratings huh?

this shit is corporate

that little bullshit statement has gotta be, the worlds most half ass apology

thousands are still getting discovered each day

how dare you compare a life to a weeks pay

[...]

and its rare that I'm even rapping pissed

jin is far from a human rights activist

so dont take this in a political fashion

nope its just a good old lyrical bashing

in fact I'm making it a mission of mine

wont stop till every last petition is signed

hip hop is designed to unify the masses

and we demand that you be denied the access

radio is whack, yo somebody gotta say this

same five songs on every single playlist (god)

[...]

im juss sayin

dont let it be your peoples that they dissin next time

making fun of they tragedies just for a cheap laugh

and you sittin there like what the fuck

know what I'm saying

so keep them emails going through

keep them complaint letters goin out

keep them phones calls goin into the radio stations and the sponsors

tellin 'em how you feel

and what a fucked up move they made

let 'em know

let 'em know its about the people

This blistering critique is markedly different from Jin's cocky participation in the Chinatown gangster tropes of "Learn Chinese." Jin locates himself as the member of the broader Asian community and zeroes in on the corporate decisions that allowed the broadcast of the song, noting that the very structure of hip-hop radio creates a narrow (and in this case racist) channel. Knowing his frustrations around the release of his album, it seems likely that he was already thinking about the ways that race and corporate decision-making are related, but putting it into fighting words marked a turning point for him. On May 18, 2005, he publicly announced that he was putting his career on hold, but he reemerged in a matter of months as The Emcee and released his second album, *The Emcee's Properganda*, on October 25, 2005, not through Ruff Ryders but through CraftyPlugs/Draft Records, an indie label. That is, he made the radical decision to side-step one of the most highly regarded recording labels in the hip-hop industry.

Many fans agree that *The Emcee's Properganda* has a distinctively indie/underground sound that is distinctively different from *The Rest Is History*, and most also agree that the second album is much, much better. It was produced by African American deejay The Golden Child, and it features Asian American emcee Yung Mac and Chinese American rapper L.S. Jeff Yang (2006) writes,

The push to include, and the resistance against inclusion, could also be seen in the rise, fall and rebirth of Asian America's hip-hop hope, Jin Auyung, who went from beating all comers in rap battles to being signed by Ruff Ryders and releasing a much-anticipated but overwhelming and long-delayed debut album, *The Rest Is History*. Criticism, both from within and without the Asian community, prompted Jin to announce his retirement in May (on his MySpace site, no less). A few months later, he reemerged sans label and hype. Now calling himself simply The Emcee, he took home 50 grand in the Power Summit's annual rap battle in the Bahamas, and released a thumping indie sophomore album, *The Properganda*, that made his first one look like, well, history.

Though still officially under contract, Jin publicly accused Ruff Ryders of "not giving a damn" about him, or at least not knowing what to do with a player from a different game.

Jin's transpacific presence has accelerated since 2004. A documentary, *No Sleep til Shanghai* (2005),⁴⁹ chronicles his eight-city tour of Asia (including Shanghai, Tokyo, Taipei, and Singapore), focusing on Jin's place in the transnational world of hip-hop. His 2007 album, *ABC* (i.e., American-born Chinese), was almost entirely in Cantonese and was marketed on both sides of the Pacific (released first in the United States and then in Hong Kong). As Jennifer Jay notes, "ABC serves up vivid images of daily life in the typical Chinese American family of eating, dating, living in America and Hong Kong. Jin brings into focus overlapping worlds in ABC, restaurant culture in America, the distant cultural and glamorous world of Hong Kong, and his love of the hip-hop world. In some ways Hong Kong television

was an escape for him, and for his parents, and he integrated the two worlds with his rap lyrics in *ABC*" (2008, 388).

ABC closes the circuit in a way that could be construed as typical of GenerAsians, but in fact he creates an entirely new niche, offering testimony about the Chinese immigrant experience in Cantonese and about the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China. In doing so, he challenges any simple construct of intended audience. He moved to Hong Kong in 2008 and has signed with the conglomerate Universal Music Group Hong Kong. He is emblematic of a new kind of transpacific 1.5/second-generation performer whose fan base is literally on two continents.⁴⁴

It is far too soon to predict how Jin's career will proceed, but in a remarkably short time he has reformulated himself and his priorities. He has sharpened his approach to how race, the music industry, and emceeing interrelate. Jin does not use the term "Asian American" and is not trying to create Asian American community through his work. Rather, he has consistently worked in hip-hop environments that are interethnic and now transnational. He is still early in his career, but he has already gone from being a Chinese American interloper, to signing on with a major hip-hop label and releasing an album, to rejecting the industry and striking out on his own, to a new transpacific location. At the time of this writing, he is immersed in a deliberately multethnic and sometimes transnational circle of emcees and deejays. His reach includes but is not limited to the GenerAsian mainstream, as it were—he is not primarily directed toward an Asian American audience, but it is certainly one audience among others. He is essentially doing the hard work of making it in hip-hop without downplaying his Asianness. He is matter-of-fact about his ethnicity. He *had* to be when freestyling: his opponents inevitably used it against him, so he developed an effective, strongly preemptive approach that sometimes plays into stereotypes of Asian superiority and insulated arrogance. Missing from his narratives is any trace of what Davé, Nishime, and Oren call "the familiar representation-based models that emphasize victimization and alienation" (2005, 3). To date, Jin's work has proceeded along two separate but interrelated channels. His work with a major recording label resulted in commanding work that was (perhaps inevitably) laced through with Orientalist commentary even as it insisted that the listener come around to his subjectivity. His political work since then has been increasingly independent and confident.⁴⁵ In a few short years he has moved restlessly between asserting his Chineseness and putting it right out front even while working in a matter-of-factly interethnic milieu in which he collaborates and supports Asian American and African American emcees. Yet his most recent album addresses the Chinese American experience in Cantonese. He also rapped in English in Taiwanese American pop singer/producer Lee-Hom Wang's "Heroes of Earth," a song and music video released in 2006 that has attracted immense interest in Taiwan and among 1.5 and second-generation Mandarin-speakers in diaspora. In short, Jin is part of a broader transpacific pop music phenomenon that is still in its early stages but is deeply linked to second-generation Asian American identity.

Asian American youth cultures are proliferating, and class has emerged as a particularly salient parameter in their dissemination. Some Asian American youth who participate in hip-hop culture become part of a broader interethnic conversation about class and social justice; this pan-minority configuration carries tremendous political promise. However, the transpacific culture of northeast Asian cool relies on the dangerous neoliberal rhetoric of an open Pacific Rim and folds its participants into its troubling logic. These two youth cultures—GenerAsians and hip-hop—are distinct but not hermetically sealed: they have points of contact and overlap but in many ways represent contrasting identifications, and they illuminate emergent class formations. Hip-hop is not consumed by only the working class, even though its habitus is wrought in that environment.⁴⁶ Its dissemination is neither uncontrolled nor innocent: the entertainment industry establishes the terms for appropriation as the form has moved out from its point of origin. What happens, or could happen, when GenerAsians listen to Jin? While no ethnic minority should have to apologize for upward mobility, the need for an articulated racial politics of socioeconomic success and transnational connection is more urgent than ever. The difference between transnational opportunity and opportunism is not always clearly marked, and First World imperialisms are both the driving force and assumed outcome to Pacific Rim connections.

The rise and fall of *Yolk* magazine and Jin's comelike ascendance and then rejection of the hip-hop music industry suggest that new cultural formations are emerging that uneasily outline nascent ways for thinking about the Asian American generation. Indeed, my undergraduates in 2004, looking only at "Learn Chinese," felt that Jin was the least politicized of several Asian American emcees, though I am fairly certain they would now see him differently. Then again, "Learn Chinese" and "Got Rice, Bitch?" were both in their ears during 2004, so it was easy that year to get deafened by hip Orientalia.

As William Wei points out, college campuses remain the primary site for Asian American youth activism, but in different ways from the 1960s. Asian American youth are now more ethnically heterogeneous than they were in the 1960s and are more ready to accept the mainstream terms of social mobility. As Wei writes, "Indeed, they make no apologies for their middle-class aspirations and avidly pursue the so-called American dream" (2004, 310). This speaks to the deeper issue of how American race and class formations are linked. Some of these young people will discover that a glass ceiling is still solidly in place in American bureaucracies and corporations. As GenerAsians move into positions of greater power and responsibility, they will find that they need critical and political tools for addressing the carefully wrought links between race, class, nation, and capital. Those tools can be found in many places, from ethnic studies classes to Jin's asides. At a club in New York City, Jin raised his fist to an almost entirely Asian American crowd and shouted, "Where're my fuckin' Asians at?" and they shouted back, smiling, bobbing, dancing. My hopes lie in these moments when pleasure, consumption, and action converge in thinking subjects.

NOTES

I have learned much from Oliver Wang over the years. He generously provided detailed feedback on this chapter, which is really part of an ongoing conversation with him. My thanks to Scott Cook, Department of Chinese and Japanese, Grinnell College, who went out of his way to find a Web site for me that included translations of the Cantonese phrases in Jin's "Learn Chinese." I am grateful to Patricia Fernández-Kelly and Paul DiMaggio for inviting me to participate in their symposium at Princeton University, to Paul DiMaggio for extensive comments and suggestions, and to Cecelia Menjivar for offering a close reading as my discussant. The National Humanities Center provided the haven that allowed me to write this chapter.

1. In previous writings, I have used the term "Asian American" a bit too sweepingly to describe all Americans of Asian descent. Thinking about current Asian-based American youth culture has forced me to rethink this by attending more carefully to the specific historical conditions that created an Asian American sensibility to begin with. As will become clear in this chapter, I do not think that this sensibility is shared by all young American Asians.

2. I am referring to the Asian American movement that emerged alongside the Black Power movement, the Chicano movement, the American Indian movement, and the women's movement. The term "Asian American" was coined in the 1960s and was meant to (1) acknowledge the discrimination and racism experienced by many Americans of Asian descent and (2) reopinionalize the ways Asians have sometimes been regarded by other Americans as an underfettered racial group. Individuals who self-identify as Asian American (usually in addition to their specific ethnic heritage) are well aware of ethnic and national differences across Asian immigrant groups. Generally, Asian American self-identification signals a racialized understanding of the United States; it presupposes the shaping force of racism and its systemic effects on American society. My use of the term "Asian American" thus stems from a commitment to attend to difference by using the terminology and categories developed by scholars working in Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies.

The Third World Strikes at San Francisco State University and the University of California, Berkeley, in 1968–1969 were formative sites for the Asian American movement. Key events since then have reinforced identifications across Asian American political concerns. The struggle for reparations for the World War II Japanese American internment camps was cast as an example of how anti-Asian xenophobia affects all Asian Americans. Similarly, the hate murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin in 1982 prompted organized responses by many different Asian American groups. In short, the political construct of the Asian American is meant to enable conditions across different Asian ethnicities. William Wei (1993) is the authoritative source on the history of the Asian American movement.

3. The tight focus on relative generation that has traditionally served as a definitive model for ethnic studies reveals that discipline's roots in sociology.

4. According to Sucheng Chan, "The 1965 Immigration Act, which removed 'national origins' as the basis of American immigration legislation, has changed the pattern of immigration into the U.S. more profoundly than its architects ever expected. Until that year, the immigrant stream had been predominantly European, with sizable contributions from the western hemisphere, particularly Canada and Mexico, since the 1920s. But after the 1965 law went into effect, Asian immigration has increased so steadily that Asians now compose more than half of the total influx. While Mexico is the source of the largest number of immigrants, the next four most important sending countries are the Philippines, Korea, China (the People's Republic of China on the Asian mainland and the Republic of China in Taiwan each has its own quota), and Vietnam" (1991, 145). Pyong Gap Min (2002a, 2) notes that there were 1.5 million Asian Americans in 1970 and 11 million by 2000, and that the ethnic diversity of Asian Americans also expanded after 1965, including secondary immigration (e.g., Chinese and South Asian immigrants arriving in the United States from the Caribbean, Africa, and the United Kingdom).

5. I would argue that post-1965 immigration drove a number of changes, including the transformation of American studies from a field focused on (mostly) white American class-based history and culture into a vibrant interdisciplinary site that, by the 1980s, positioned

difference as central to American identity. See the first chapter of George Lipsitz's *American Studies at a Moment of Danger* (2001) for a much more nuanced historiographical argument for how American studies has gone through at least three stages of critical development, and how American studies scholarship in the 1980s–1990s was a response, broadly speaking, to the civil rights movement and related social movements of the 1960s. He cites immigration as a related impetus in his compelling overview of how the United States has become less white due to massive Asian and Latino immigration since 1965 (2001, 8–14). He argues that American studies has been responsive to these interrelated changes and that the “other” American studies has always been social movements that emerged from outside the academy. He writes, “The power of patriotism and patriarchy, of war and whiteness as cultural forces in the 1980s encouraged American studies scholars to see the price that previous movements for social change had paid by marginalizing issues of race, gender, and sexual identification” (25).

6. As Lisa Lowe puts it, “A national memory haunts the conception of the Asian American, persisting beyond the repeal of actual laws prohibiting Asians from actual citizenship and sustained by wars in Asia, in which the Asian is always seen as an immigrant, as the ‘foreigner within’, even when born in the United States and the descendant of generations born here before” (1996, 5–6).

7. A traditional Korean instrument with twelve strings and a repertoire that is several centuries old and quite extensive.

8. Within Asian American studies, research has shifted toward 1.5 and second-generation issues and away from an earlier emphasis on the immigrant generation. Indeed, more than a few Asian American studies scholars are themselves from these two postimmigration generations (Min 2002a, 3).

9. This generation is consistently characterized by an intriguing mixture of political awareness and a certain blindness to its own class location(s). Arar Han and John Han’s introduction to *Asian American X* (2004), a collection of writing by Asian American youth, is a case in point. The two editors, both undergraduates at the time of their writing, noted that the contributors were “primarily first- to third-generation Americans who are in college and hail from middle-class backgrounds. It is likely that these writers are a self-selecting sample of our generation of Asian Americans, since all are attending, have attended, or plan to attend college” (2004, 8). Han and Han cite their shared experiences, noting that “as the children of white-collar professionals in Silicon Valley, we grew up with the privileges of an upper-middle-class American lifestyle” (3). They argue for the continuing necessity of an Asian American political consciousness grounded in knowledge about Asian American history, but they rely on a liberal humanist argument that sets up Asian American “collective” experience against the trump card of the “individualistic” and an unnumbered search for the individualized self (3–4). In short, their awareness of class and the privileges of higher education is severely limited.

10. Soo Ah Kwon argues that, for instance, the import-car street-racing scene in California is marked by “new forms of pan-Asian identity among the current generation of Asian American youth,” in which car racing teams consist of young Asian American men from different ethnic groups who come together via a rhetoric of “Asian pride.” Kwon also notes that the cost of modifying cars means that the scene is dominated by middle- and upper-middle class youth (2004, 10, 11–12). See also Namkung (2004) on import car racing, Asian youth identity, and masculinity.

11. Lee and Zhou’s *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (2004) and Dave, Nishime, and Oren’s *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture* (2005) are foundational edited collections that laid the groundwork for studying Asian American youth culture. Both books explore the link between Asian American youth culture and mainstream U.S. popular culture, showing how youth culture upsets established understandings of race, nation, media, and mainstream versus oppositional cultures. Both posit that Asian ethnicity still matters but in new ways.

12. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generasian_X.

13. Including *Amnapolis* (2006) and *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (2006).

14. *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004) was in much the same vein: the film can be viewed as a comedy or as Asian American satire (though not written or directed by Asian Americans). Asian ethnicity does no apparent “work” for the plot.

15. The political and cultural concept of Asian American “pan-ethnicity” is from Yen Le Espiritu’s influential book *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (1992).

16. The Wellesley College Asian/Asian American magazine is titled *GenerAsians*. GenerAsians is a nonprofit, university-based organization that addresses Asian/non-Asian interactions in Canada. GenerAsians Together is a Toronto-based community-building organization for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Asian Pacific Canadians.

17. My thanks to Oliver Wang for this point. See Wang (2007, 66–67n64) for more on the term “AZN” and its place in rap and the Internet.

18. In 1998 and again in 2000, for instance, the New GenerAsians Survey was commissioned by the Cartoon Network and conducted by ACNielsen. In 2000, 7,752 Asia Pacific youth ages seven to eighteen were surveyed, including their attitudes, opinions, and buying habits (with an emphasis on fast food and snack preferences). The survey included youth in Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam—in short, the term “GenerAsian” in this case did not include the North American Asian diaspora. I would argue that the term is being absorbed into the corporate logic of a globalized Pacific Rim. For more information, see <http://www.acnielsen.com/nz/MI/pages.asp?MRID=14>.

19. Despite these changes, *Yolk* folded in 2003. As journalist William Wan wrote (Wan 2003), “Yolk, a pop culture magazine for Asian Americans, has folded after 10 years of scrambling to stay alive. The editors tried everything during the magazine’s 31-issue run. They tried humorous articles and serious pieces. And finally, hearing the death rattle, they tried sex, adopting the photo-laden formula of racy men’s magazines such as *Maxim* and *FHM*.” But the periodical never turned a profit, and now the Allamhra-based *Yolk* is the latest in a line of Asian American publications to fold. Like others before it, the magazine, which reached a circulation high of 50,000 in 2000, had trouble convincing advertisers about the worth of its readers: English-fluent, college-educated Asian Americans coming from vastly different cultures.

20. <http://yolk.com/about.html>.

21. <http://www.giantrobot.com/whatsgr/whatsgrindex.html>.

22. Oliver Wang offers a different assessment of the relationship between these two magazines. In a personal communication to me (May 2, 2006), he pointed out that *Yolk* positioned itself “as the younger, L.A. contrast to the slightly older (30-something), more affluent, New York-centric personality exuded by *A Magazine*,” and that both magazines then had to contend with the “spectacular popularity” of *Giant Robot*. Also, as Wang put it, “GR was far more ‘respected’ in terms of cultural cache than either *Yolk* or *A*.” He suggested that *Yolk* was also probably responding to the new paradigm of men’s magazines established by *Maxim* in the late 1990s when it became one of the most successful magazines in the publishing world. He argued that *Yolk* (a) followed rather than defined trends, (b) had a primarily southern California presence, and (c) that “far more Asian American youth would simply have read *Maxim*, *Stuff*, *FHM* or any of the other so-called ‘lad’ magazines that sprouted on newsstands around 2000” than *Yolk*.

A comparative view of Asian American print media subscription bases is also revealing. In 2000, a reporter for *AsianWeek* offered these figures (Gardner 2000):

Giant Robot is a Los Angeles–based magazine that takes a pop culture approach to the Asian American community. Founded in 1994 at 240 copies, *Robot* now claims a circulation of 25,000. “Last year it was at 20,000. Our magazine incrementally grows every issue . . . thousands are added,” said editor Eric Nakamura. Twenty-one years strong, *AsianWeek* has seen its circulation climb from 30,000 in 1997 to over 50,000 in 2000. Its offices now include Los Angeles as well as the San Francisco Bay Area.

And *A Magazine*, a lifestyle glossy based in New York City, touts a circulation increase of approximately 50 percent in just four years, from 125,000 to 180,000 readers between 1994 and 1998. According to former editor Angelo Regaza, the magazine, now enjoying its ten-year anniversary, has a circulation of 200,000.

23. "Pride" (slang for "pride") is used exclusively by and for Asian Americans, as far as I know. Toronto-based D Pryde (born 1993), for instance, is a Spanish-Filipino emcee who self-identifies as Asian, comparing himself to Jim.
24. See <http://www.hollafont.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-54687.html> for a fascinating Internet discussion of "azn pride." A poster named pinoyr87je asked,
- EVERY AZN TEEN IN DA STATES, (now also in Canada, United Kingdom, Australia) goes tru da AZN PRIDE STAGE in high school, suddenly he wants to have azn friends only, disses white boys, likes cars, go to azn party, build a website, post poems etc.
- BUT WHAT IS IT EXACTLY AND WHO CREATED IT?
HOW DID IT STARTED????

He received numerous responses, including one from xdlmz2, who wrote,

azn pride means knowing your roots, culture, not being ashamed of your culture, its not about stupid songs like that, its about knowing about your own culture, recognizing it for its value, you dont even gotta know that much history bout your own culture, just as long as you recognize it. I cant stand those fuckin asians who scream asian pride n shit but they dont even know who vincent chin is.

Similarly, B-GeNeRal wrote:

I REP ASIAN PRIDE!!

Cause i feel that more of us need to show pride in our roots . . . especially in the US there's different racial diversities; white, black, Hispanics . . . etc. Reppin' AP to me is basically rap-pin ya family, cause at some point of ya life different races and even ya own will insult ya fam and what you stand for. having AP doesn't mean that you're racist . . . you just proud of ya culture and heritage and you aint afraid to show it off, if anybody insults u, u won't be afraid to step up, cause you know you got ya fam behind ya back.

25. <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=azn>.

26. Found at <http://www.startupstevie.com/swf/Asian.html>, titled "AZN Pride," though it is now known more widely as "Got Rice, Bitch?"

27. My initial reading of this rap was that it was smugly anti-Asian, but Oliver Wang convinced me otherwise. He pointed out (pers. comm., May 2, 2006) that its bravado is a play on gangsta rap and that it was probably made by "a bunch of kids goofing around, half serious and half not."

28. The complete lyrics can be seen at http://www.asianjoke.com/pictures/got_rice.htm.

29. At http://aznrv.com/docs/AZN_Network_Overview.pdf. The channel competed in certain markets with laTV (ImaginAsian Television), launched in 2004, which is still on air at the time of this writing in 2009 (unlike AZN Television).

30. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian_pride.

31. See Zhou et al. (2008) for a searching ethnographic examination of how 1.5 and second-generation Vietnamese, Chinese, and Mexicans in Los Angeles perceive and negotiate social mobility and how it is "attained, deterred, or denied" (55). They consider a wide range of socioeconomic success based on a number of factors. As they conclude, "National origin matters. The Chinese arrive in the United States with strong parental human capital and advantageous family situations in terms of a two-parent family, high educational expectations for children, and prioritized investment in children's education. Vietnamese arrive as refugees with relatively weak human capital, but this disadvantage is offset by their strong family situations and favorable state and public receptions" (55).

They identify a complex set of determinants for successful upward mobility, including legal/citizenship status, middle-class cultural capital brought from the home country, and family educational expectations. Addressing the same data, Zhou and Lee ask, "Is the way that we, as scholars, define *success* and *mobility* analogous to the way that members of the second generation define these concepts? Correlatively, if we were to reconceptualize our definitions and reframe our analyses accordingly, would we reach different conclusions about mobility?" (2007, 194). They show that Filipino, Chinese, and Vietnamese children of immigrants demonstrate contrasting and uneven trajectories—including, sometimes, Filipino downward mobility

between the first and second generations—and suggest that "successful" incorporation into U.S. society is complex and inevitably reflects a wide range of possibility across ethnic groups, including intra-Asian ethnicities. They critique the accepted wisdom that "convergence to the middle class" is "the only outcome that remains socially acceptable" (193).

32. As Paul DiMaggio wrote to me, triumphing over African American opponents as a freestyler is a mythic step for nonblack rappers, with *8 Mile* as the *Rocky* of this myth (pers. comm., July 9, 2006). In contrast, Jin grew up among Latinos and African Americans and has worked in markedly interethnic hip-hop environments since the beginning of his career, though he has also mentored a number of Asian American emcees.

33. In his "Biography" on <http://jinsite.com>.

34. I first heard about Jin in 2002, a few weeks after his repeated appearances and wins on 106 *and Park*, when an Asian American undergraduate at Duke University told me I really ought to pay attention to him. Fan bases are inevitably hard to pin down, but it is clear that Jin's following includes Asian Americans and a broad non-Asian American listenership.

35. For instance, see the profile of Korean American rapper Jamez Chang (Ling 1999, 355–361).

36. For instance, see Oliver Wang's (2004) dissertation on Filipina/o American mobile crews in the Bay Area in the 1970s.

37. In the track titled "Hip Hop and Other Drops."

38. Similarly, Wang (2003) cites the promise of the frame sequence: "The opening is particularly interesting—the fact that the first image we see is of three Black men watching Jin's video (a video within a video) triggers me to want to think of what Laura Mulvey would say about this cross-racial, homo-social scopophilia but frankly, I don't want to bore you with cinematic psychoanalysis. What's interesting though is that I seem to think Jin is doing two things. . . he's both making a critique, i.e. 'this is how ignorant black people view us Asians' but it's also an attempt to connect with a BET audience by suggesting that if black folk in the video can dig on this video, the BET crowd can too. The black trio are strawmen, to be sure, but they actually help to validate Jin on some level too."

39. My thanks to Oliver Wang for this great line (pers. comm., May 2, 2006).

40. Posted to his Weblog on December 16, 2003, at http://www.o-dub.com/weblog/2003_12_14_archive.html#071610940115293.

41. For instance, one online column by critic Brian Kayser stated:

So Jin quit!!! One down, 25,000,000 more wack rappers to go. Granted, Jin didn't have it easy being an Asian MC, but he made wack career choices. He's not a Ruff Ryder. Why sign with a group that does nothing but rap about drugs and guns? If you're a battle MC, why sign? That's like Sage Francis signing to Swishahouse. What is it that's so dope about Sage Francis? Seriously. Someone tell me. Jin damn man you gave up quick. I think like 150,000 people bought that crap album, and you're gonna quit after that. You even sold out Asian culture on "Bridging the Gap" and got away with it. I remember hearin' stories about how you would harass mad people at shows and Fat Beats when Percée P used to be there to buy your CD. . . . I had mad respect for you. . . then you put out ass songs and killed your career. Honestly Jin, if I were you, stop taking people's advice and do you. If you're [sic] strengths are battling and punchlines, why you gonna make a video with you riding on top of a car? That shit is corny. "Senorita" and "Learn Chinese" killed your career. I guess no one's gonna buy that DVD "The Making of a Rap Star" now either. You ever see that shit in ads? Honestly Jin woulda been better on QN5. Damn Jin. (<http://www.hiphopgame.com/index2.php3?page=column31>)

42. The audio file of Jin's response was widely available on various Web sites (including his MySpace site) for quite a few months, but it is no longer posted anywhere, as far as I can tell.

43. *No Sleep til Shanghai* (2005), 70 mins., directed by Todd Ankrasuwann. <http://www.nosleepthanghai.com>.

44. Jin's latest Web site, <http://www.ayojin.com>, focuses on his Hong Kong base. Jin's Internet presence has reflected different aspects of his career to date. His official Ruff Ryders Web site (<http://www.ruffryders.com>, which stopped getting updates in December 2004) featured

public relations focused on *The Rest Is History*. For a few years, his emcee site (<http://www.theemcee.com>, no longer active) promoted his second album and then shifted toward his work as a mentor for younger hip-hop artists, several of them Asian American. At the time of this writing, his MySpace site (<http://www.myspace.com/therealjln>) is constantly updated and is self-consciously geared toward Jin's creation of an independent persona—and I mean that both in industry and performative terms. He also has an ABC page on MySpace.

45. For example, he has commented on Barack Obama's campaign, the Virginia Tech massacre, and Rosie O'Donnell's "ching chong" broadcast.

46. The hip-hop fan base of middle- and upper-middle class non-African American youth is well known.

CHAPTER 8



Unfinished Journey

MEXICAN MIGRATION THROUGH THE VISUAL ARTS

Gilberto Cardenas

In this chapter I focus on the visual record surrounding Mexican immigration to the United States, including photographs, posters, drawings, paintings, prints, installations, and performances. I draw primarily on work produced in the United States by Mexican and Chicano artists to construct a comprehensive account of the unique experience of Mexican migrants over the last century. Two objectives frame my efforts: to discern how the visual record lines up with the written account and to assess what can be learned about Mexican migration from its visual history and art.

On the basis of available data I show how immigration as an artistic theme evolved slowly over the course of more than a century, in parallel fashion to the casting of an immigrant identity, which was gradually shaped by social interactions at the local level but also, more significantly, by government policies. Early representations of Mexicans in what is now American domain antedate the 1848 U.S.-Mexico War, a conflict that resulted in the annexation of nearly half of Mexico's territory under the James K. Polk administration. From images of that period it is almost impossible to distinguish between residents with historical roots that antecede the war and those who arrived later. Photographs, paintings, and posters do not readily show when an immigrant identity began to take shape or when immigration began to be perceived as a separate phenomenon.

Similarly, art produced in the early part of the twentieth century, whether by artists in Mexico or Mexican-origin artists in the United States, rarely focuses on the immigrant experience. That is even true about Mexican muralism, one of the world's great aesthetic movements of the period. For reasons described later in this chapter, it is only after 1965 that immigration emerges as a significant subject in