



# Revelasians

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## ABOUT THE AACC

Established in 1981, the Asian American Cultural Center explores the social and political experience of Asians and Asian Americans in the United States. The Center and its affiliated student organizations are committed to the intellectual, cultural, social, and political development of the Asian American student community at Yale.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Conflicting Voices.....	3
“Hello, My Name is _____” by Sue Li.....	4
Blood Relations by Hannah Leo.....	8
The Problem of Korean American Monotony by Stephen Kim.....	10
On Being Shanghainese by Jenny Dai.....	12
Race-ing Occupy Wallstreet by Tammy Kim.....	16
Disappearing Voices.....	19
The Lost Apprentice by Chris Kelly.....	20
Photographs by Cynthia Chan.....	22
Post Your Secret.....	23
“No”.....	24
Emerging Voices.....	25
Unrefined by Abhinav Gupta.....	26
Persistence of Memory by Andy Vo.....	27
Composition by Kerri Lu.....	28
Photographs by Madison Grinnell.....	30
Photographs by Cynthia Chan.....	34
Barriers: Author’s Note by Rehana Lew Mirza.....	36
The Circle by Chris Lapinig.....	38
Garden Dust by Kevin Chen.....	40
The Steps (Photograph) by Deandra Tan.....	43

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This semester, Revelasians brings you work from students, alumni, and guest authors to present a range of perspectives on the concept of the the Asian American Cultural Center’s exploration of Voice. This issue is broken up into three sections: Conflicting Voices, Disappearing Voices, and Emerging voices. I am a strong believer that each semester, Revelasians never fails to grow, but this issue particularly has taken leaps and bounds. Immerse yourself in the voices of your contemporaries; I hope you enjoy this magazine as much as I have in making it.

Austin Lan, Fall 2011

## CONFLICTING VOICES

We often come across conflicting voices, both internal and external. Sometimes, there is no right or wrong; it is a matter of perspective. These are stories of conflicting voices, either their own or those of others and how they have influenced each other, changed each other, or simply coexisted.



Sue Li

# HELLO, MY NAME IS \_\_\_\_\_

“My name is Sue.”

Did you catch that? Listen again, and you’ll hear it—the slight pause, the momentary change of inflection when I introduce myself. There is and has always been a gap between “is” and “Sue,” a fraction of a second in which some part of me hesitates, lacking full confidence in pronouncing the single syllable of my identity. When I am particularly self-conscious, I attempt to gloss over the pause by connecting the two words (“Hi, my name is-Sue”), fusing the S sounds together, allowing “is” to lead hurriedly and inevitably to “Sue.” But occasionally my pronunciation causes confusion (“Sill? Seoul?”), resulting in the need to repeat the words I never wanted to say in the first place.

My problem began on the first day of kindergarten when my teacher abruptly stopped in the middle of the roll call and looked around, searching for the only Chinese student in the classroom, the offending child whose name she could not pronounce.

“Li?” she questioned, without even making an attempt at my first name. She looked directly at me; I was terrified. I must have mumbled some form of affirmation because she nodded to herself and wrote something down on the attendance list.

“I’m going to call you ‘Sue’ from now on, okay?”

Five years old, I had no idea what I was getting into. I could hardly say no – I was too afraid to speak, and even if I could, I doubt she actually expected a response from me. Yet she never broke her promise; my Chinese name was eradicated and a euphonious English name took its place. I adopted my shiny new name on the first day of kindergarten, or rather, it adopted me. That was the day I became Sue Li; that was the day I was named.

I don’t remember my parents’ response when I went home and told them that I had been named, but one thing was clear: there was nothing to be done. I can hardly imagine Ma and Ba phoning my teacher the next morning demanding that my original name be restored – their Chinese submissiveness simply would not have permitted it. And so I stood back as my new name took root, curled its tendrils around the right-hand corners of my school assignments, left cursive blossoms on my birthday cards. I accepted my name, used it constantly outside of the house, and even cringed unexpectedly when my Chinese name made a guest appearance on the program of the Christmas pageant or on the roster of my first grade class. This name (which I have delayed writing but cannot avoid it any longer) is “Shu,” a word which, when pronounced by an American, is inescapably as-

sociated with footwear. Had I been born with a name that didn’t induce giggles from my first grade class, there would have been a possibility of keeping my identity. But after the initial shock of “Sue” wore off, I decided that “Shu Li” had no place in my new American life. I abandoned the name in the first grade, around the time I learned to be ashamed of my homemade dumplings and my parents’ English.

Yet I never grew accustomed to correcting my classmates and teachers when they innocently called me by my Chinese name; it was as if I had no right to correct them because “Sue” is not a name I can truly claim as my own. I have always been bothered by a feeling of unfamiliarity with my name. Perhaps it comes from the knowledge that my parents never held the baby “Sue Li” in their arms, never told their friends how they chose my name, never taught me to pronounce it correctly when I first learned to speak. But although my English name is somewhat foreign to me, I must admit that my Chinese name is an even worse approximation of my (American) self. This chasm, this crisis of identity, is what you hear in the barely audible gap between “is” and “Sue,” in that fleeting but inevitable moment of silence.

As I grew older, I realized that my two names, my dual identity, created new challenges for me, the most daunting of which I faced every year on the first day of school. In elementary school, the first day was only mildly horrifying – there was just one teacher, one briefly embarrassing name correction to deal with. On the first day of middle school, I went through six

CONFLICTING  
VOICES

Sue Li

periods of name changes for six different teachers; the fatal roll call that changed my name in kindergarten became a regular fixture in my life. I quickly noticed that some teachers would take a moment to write down my English name beside my printed one; I despaired when they didn't because it meant that the process of correcting my name would invariably repeat itself. Worst of all were substitute teachers, most of whom habitually said something along the lines of "I'm very sorry if I butcher your names" before proceeding to do so with complete indifference. One particular memory unfailingly comes to mind: a substitute for my sophomore English teacher attempted to pronounce my best friend's name but was unable to, ultimately calling her "Min. . . something or another," to my friend's disgust. In the presence of substitute teachers, my roll call anxiety peaked; my ears meticulously tracked the names being read while I tried to remember whose last name came directly before mine so that I could prepare for the embarrassment that followed.

College has brought many changes. I enjoy the anonymity of giant lecture courses of over four hundred students, where roll calls have disappeared and substitute teachers are a rarity. But I often catch myself writing my English name on my assignments as I have done for so many years before realizing that it will only confuse the professors and TAs who only know me by the name

attached to my student ID. Writing "Shu Li" on paper is unnatural for me; my Chinese name belongs on official documents, not my calculus homework. Those five letters don't look good together – not in my handwriting.

Certainly I am not the only one who faces a crisis of cross-cultural identification. Countless friends of mine have abandoned their ethnic names in favor of English ones: "Hello, my name is Stephanie (please don't call me Ruoheng)." "Hello, my name is Jenny (I want you to forget that I am Yufei)." I am comforted that they share my anxiety when a substitute teacher walks into the

**This chasm, this crisis of identity, is what you hear in the barely audible gap between "is" and "Sue," in that fleeting but inevitable moment of silence.**

classroom; I am relieved that they, too, inwardly cringe when their Asian names resurface after being laid to rest. But most Asian-Americans have stories quite different from mine: they were given English names by their parents, or chose their names themselves. Some friends admit to having tried on English names like clothes; others lament the too-common names selected by their parents, names like Kevin, Michael, Jennifer, and Kathy that are always immediately followed by the person's last name to identify which of the Kevins or Michaels is being referred to.

In some ways I am lucky. Being named by my kindergarten teacher meant that I escaped becoming yet another Jennifer or Kathy Li. Yet I have encountered a number of people who ask me for the spelling of "Sue" or simply proceed to write it as "Su," or even "Tsu." I cannot

escape the irony that those who have not seen my name in writing often assume that my name is a Chinese "Su" instead of the three-letter English version I was given to replace my Chinese identity. Yet this mistake doesn't surprise me – most American women who share my name are blonde-haired and currently contemplating retirement. Indeed, according to data provided by the Social Security Administration, the name "Sue" reached its peak in popularity in the year 1946 (when it was the 61st most popular name for baby girls in the United States), dropped solidly out of the top 100 names by 1960, and has declined exponentially to the point where I am almost guaranteed never to encounter a Sue born in the 21st century. The only Sue I have ever met is my first grade teacher, Sue Ocker, a blonde woman now in her mid-fifties. For me, the name has been associated with her ever since.

After all these years, I still experience the slightest discomfort when I unexpectedly encounter my name, whether in a mystery novel or a math problem set ("Sue bought ten pairs of shoes. . ."). I have not yet managed to overcome the brief moment of discontinuity between seeing my name on paper and recognizing it as mine – the feeling is much like distantly hearing your name in the roll call when you aren't prepared to respond. Just the other day I stumbled across my name in a strip of the "Secret Asian Man" comic by Tak Toyoshima – this time "Sue" takes the shape of a cheerful, strawberry-blonde girl. The comic depicts three children at "Souvenir

World" (a store boasting the slogan "Something for everyone!"). A blonde boy grins and points at his nametag ("Billy") while holding up a lunchbox personalized with his name. Sue beams and points at her own nametag while waving a keychain engraved with her name. An Asian boy stands next to her, wearing a nametag that reads "Jiang." He looks dejectedly at a row of personalized name plates displaying the names James, Jerry, Jim, Joey, and John, disappointed that he cannot find a plate with his own name. If Jiang had instead adopted an English name, his chances of finding a personalized item certainly would have increased. Perhaps he would be holding up the plate with the name "James" instead, grinning alongside Billy and Sue, proudly pointing a finger at his own nametag.

Or consider this: perhaps he isn't smiling, he isn't proud. His nametag reads "James," he holds up his own name plate at Souvenir World, yet he wears the same disappointed expression, the same look of loneliness on his face.

Because he can't shake the feeling that some part of him is lost in translation.

# BLOOD RELATIONS

Hannah Leo

Our fingers hurt. All that pain for one measly drop of blood, the single drop of blood that has come to symbolize my struggle to express my identity. Some define themselves by their blood-relations. I do not. I am constantly battling the notion that a “real” family is one with the same bloodlines. I am a proud Chinese-American international adoptee and a by-product of the one-child policy. Understandably people are curious. The conversation is always the same.

“So, where are you from?” “Thompson, Connecticut.” “No, where are you really from. Where are your parents from?” “Well, they are both American.” “But I mean, where are they originally from?” “My mother is French-Canadian and Polish, and my father is Italian.”

My response is usually answered with a look of frustration because my shiny straight black hair and almond shaped eyes are attributes from neither of my parents. “Well, if you want to know where I was born, I was born in China. I’m adopted.” “Oh” is murmured. “So do you know your real parents?” “You must mean my birth parents. My adoptive parents are not “make-believe”. Believe me when I say, they really are real. And no, I do not.” “Oh, I see.” “Is your little sister your real sister?” “You mean, the often annoying younger female who I’m forced to live with, but whom I support and love to death? Yup, she surely is a very real little sister. Are we biologically related? No, but we are still related. Although blood may be thick, shared experience is much thicker.” Yet I was not always so solid in my beliefs. As a young child, I was easily influenced by society, and as a result my sister and I sought out a way to prove our sistership.

The salient stench of the doctor’s latex gloves filled my nostrils as I anxiously awaited the sharp piece of metal to pierce and break my skin. The nurse carefully wiped my finger with an alcohol wipe as I scrunched my eyes shut. My little sister squeezed my hand. “This will only hurt a bit,” the nurse said with a smile. I breathed in quickly because holding my breath would definitely dull the pain. Click. The nurse pinched my flesh until a little red bubble popped onto her glass slide. Before I knew it the band-aid was wrapped around my stubby finger, and my sister had replaced me on the crinkled paper. “It’s not that bad,” I lied, squeezing her hand as I tried to tame

the fear in her eyes. Being three years older I had to show bravery. Reflecting on my recent trauma, I didn’t tune in until we were back outside. My sister, only five, sobbed all the way to the car. With the taste of salty tears on our tongues, and both glad the trip to the doctor was finally over, we climbed into the backseat of our car. I sat examining my throbbing finger - my little battle wound. My eyes didn’t linger long, as I was soon drawn out of thought by the sound of sticky latex being ripped off young skin. My sister had torn off her band-aid and insisted that I did as well. “Hanny, take your band-aid off! Take it off!” I obliged, confused. “Now put your finger on mine.” I did, but with hesitation. With wide chocolate eyes and dimples near her ears, my sister said with pride, “Now we are blood related.” Blinking away tears, a smile broke out, exposing the holes in my mouth from which I had made a fortune off of. “Yes we are,” I thought to myself. “Now no one can say otherwise.”



CONFLICTING VOICES

Hannah Leo



## THE PROBLEM OF KOREAN-AMERICAN MONOTONY

Stephen Kim

In her article titled “Passing as Korean American,” Wendy Lee (a professor here in the Yale English Department!) writes, “Korean is something you are, but it must also be corroborated by what you do. Or in performative terms, the ‘acting out’ of cultural practices produces the ‘truth-effect’ of ethnic identity.”<sup>1</sup> Meditating on this one of many interesting points in Professor Lee’s article, I began to wonder what it meant to corroborate “my Korean-ness” or more accurately, “my Korean-American-ness” with my actions. Maybe it has to do with doing what Korean parents want you to do in college, like be pre-med, be pre-law, or prepare to go into finance, aim for those prestigious professions that end in “사” to bring honor to the family and money to the bank account.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be a doctor or wanting to be a lawyer, but there is something a little problematic when people assume that I am preparing to enter medicine, law, or finance because I am Korean-American. During the pre-orientation program Cultural Connections, we played a game bringing to attention stereotypes we may have based on how people look. For each person in the group, we had to guess things from “ethnicity” to “probable field of study.” It was actually a bit soul-crushing to stand up and have almost everyone in the room guess that I was pre-med. Just because I looked like the stereotypical Asian college freshman (glasses, short hair, somewhat on the leaner side, and the face of a high school sophomore), people assumed that I wanted to be a doctor.

What troubles me is that by saying I was doing DS instead of CHEM 118 or studying for the GRE instead of the MCAT, I was

deviating from this invisible standard people held in their heads of the “typical Korean-American male.” What is even more troubling is that this standard is not just held by people who are not Korean-American (most notably, the perpetrators of the model minority myth, a rather deplorable misconception), but by Korean-Americans themselves (I have collected many a strange look and incredulous response after telling Korean parents or fellow Korean-American students my course of study). I’d be lying if I said there never were times I felt like an anomaly or novelty, puzzling over passages describing Miltonic light or plodding through Kant’s analytic of the beautiful and the sublime. And I’d be lying if once in a while, I didn’t wish for the strong camaraderie that Korean-American premeds had when encouraging each other through Physics problem sets or memorizing reactions for an Orgo exam. Though I truly am grateful for the few friends who could sympathize, it’d be nice to have more people to talk to about the tensions that come up when I do feel that I am not “acting” Korean-American by picking Milton over Econ (or even over Chang-Rae Lee) or to discuss the initial feelings of weirdness when walking into a seminar room and discovering that you alone comprise all the ethnic diversity.

So what am I trying to say? What I’m definitely not trying to say is that it’s wrong to be pre-med or wrong to pursue law school. After watching many of my good friends struggle through pre-med or pre-law yet remain passionate about their future vocations, I’d be the last person to condemn them for mindlessly conforming or taking “the easy way out.” Part of what I want to say is that I don’t think it’s right that I’m labeled as anomalous

for being a Korean-American studying the humanities. Another part is that even though I don’t deal with cut-throat premed competition or complex regression models, studying literature or philosophy isn’t easy either.<sup>2</sup>

Here’s the biggest thing though: it is troubling that an already pigeonholed ethnic group pigeonholes itself. The fact that there is a mental double take when other Korean-Americans meet a Korean-American guy majoring in history is itself indicative of a limitation we place on ourselves as an ethnicity. As Korean-America (whatever that is) grows and develops, we need to constantly examine the conceptions we hold of what it means to be and act “Korean-American” and to take care that these conceptions are not disguised, self-inflicted limitations. If we want to demonstrate the vibrancy and multiplicity of Korean-America, we, as Korean-Americans, must rectify our own cultural self-consciousness. It is truly inspiring to see the Korean-American community become more and more vocal regarding Korean-American stereotypes. This amplification, in turn, makes it even more important that we are vocal against these stereotypes in our own communities. We can’t ask others to stop seeing us as a model minority consisting of to-be doctors, lawyers, and businessmen if we don’t disabuse ourselves of this notion first. As trite as it sounds, we must be the change we wish to see before we can expect others to follow.

<sup>1</sup> Wendy A. Lee, “Passing as Korean American,” in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, ed. David T. Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 282.

<sup>2</sup> Ironically, it’s painfully easy to spot BS in a philosophy paper, and the level of logical rigor and linguistic dexterity required in literary analysis is quite high. I’m sure anyone else majoring in the humanities would be at the very least miffed if someone disparaged their disciplines in comparison to more quantitative ones.



## ON BEING SHANGHAINESE

Jenny Dai

One bite into the sheng jian bao and I am tasting all of Shanghai- the savory soup rushes to fill my mouth just as the vigorous, albeit polluted, Huang Pu River courses through the city, giving rise to shiny skyscrapers that have come to symbolize new aspirations. But the bottom of the sheng jian bao is crunchy and coal black with a glimmer of grease, reminiscent of the wok it comes from - darkened with usage and gritty like the cai chang of old Shanghai.

The little diner that I am sitting in is typical of old Shanghai. A giant circular wok is parked out front, tempting passersby. In the back, the chefs move their flour-covered but dexterous hands swiftly, turning out snow white dough that will later be fried out front. In the small room in between, designated as the seating area, there are five long tables laid out cafeteria style, all of them sporting bald patches where the topcoat has flaked away. But there is a certain comfort in seeing the tin that holds the chopsticks. It features the familiar scheme of a white body with a royal blue rim, just like every other bowl and cup made from that era of industrialization after the cultural revolution. As I twist the filmy cover of the cheap chopsticks between my fingers and hear the honks from the traffic along with the yells

of the middle aged cashier lady, I know that I'm home.

The first home I have clear memory of was only a ten minute walk from this shop. Back then, I lived in a what was considered a modern building with elevators and eighteen stories, a triumph of modernism architecture among neighborhoods of six-floor apartment buildings. When I was six, the supermarket at the foot of my building was a novelty. My grandma distrusted their produce and still insisted on dragging me to shop with her at the local cai chang every morning of the summer. These produce markets were made up of vendors from the countryside who schlepped crops into the city before the first light of the day. They laid out the pride of their fields on sheets of frayed burlap along both sides of a grimy alleyway and crouched down next to their spread. I remembered trailing behind my grandma, my hand squirming in hers as she entered the indoor meat market. Even when I pinched my nose shut, I still felt the stench engulf me, penetrating my pores. Along every row of vendors, there were rickety fans spinning away tirelessly to shoo away the flies that seemed to be everywhere at once. The floor was always wet with a questionable gray substance mingling among stranded leaves of vegetables that were decomposing into the ground.

Now the place I call home every summer has a McDonald's and Starbucks on every corner. The first floor display windows of shopping malls boast the newest line of Hermes scarves and Louis Vuitton wallets. Magazines such as Harper's Bazaar line the newsstand kiosks. Boutiques that replaced old diners are home to

CONFLICTING VOICES

Jenny Dai



pieces from 3.1 Phillip Lim. I can no longer walk a full block without passing by a supermarket of some sort. In fact, calling them mere supermarkets would be an insult. These are shopping super centers - multi-floor giants with magnetic escalators so that one can travel up and down with one's cart. These glossy buildings are blooming in the rural areas too, in districts that have never even enjoyed a convenience store. My family currently lives in a neighborhood on the fringe of Shanghai, a region that was not even considered to be part of the city a decade ago. Now, there is a stately four-story building that flaunts the name of the French chain Carrefour and lures in kids as well as teenagers with the KFC on the first floor.

But when I settle down for summer and immerse myself in the city, I realize that Shanghai hasn't changed. Even with the shiny new Carrefour, the people in it are the very ones who shop in the alleyway *cai chang*. They still wear their flower printed pajamas and pitter patter through the automatic glass doors in their cracked plastic slippers. They flock to the Carrefour not only to purchase daily necessities but also to enjoy the complimentary air conditioning. In the evenings, young mothers chase after their rowdy boys through the aisles of milk or produce to finish feeding dinner. While the emergence of these super shopping centers and the popularization of imported goods signify rapidly rising standards of living and tremendous growth in the

wealth and culture of the city, seeing the practices of old Shanghai spill over into the context of shiny supermarkets makes me question if wealth and modernization are only superficial.

In 2010, Shanghai was the proud host of the World Expo, an impressive stretch of exhibitions featuring displays by a myriad of countries. The China Pavilion, structured to look like an emperor's crown, sat majestically atop granite steps. The building was painted a bold crimson, traditional yet vibrant. At night, most of the pavilions are glowing with lights that accentuate their unique figures. Behind them, the skyscrapers in Pu Dong

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glitter incandescently like a display of diamonds, sapphires, rubies, and emeralds against the black velvet of the sky.

But every Shanghainese knows that to make room for the Expo site, thousands of families that once lived in the legion of apartment buildings along the banks of the Huang Pu River had to be evicted to the outskirts of the city. Factories were demolished and moved elsewhere.

Upon the opening of the World Expo, *The Economist* ran an article trenchantly pointing out the fact that the city splurged twice the amount Beijing committed to the 2008 Olympics on an exposition that has long fallen into obscurity after the glorious days of the 1851 World's Fair in London. Looking up from the magazine, I realized (somewhat sourly) that there was a certain des-



peration in Shanghai's lavishness. The desire to show off Shanghai's growth spurt and current prosperity almost seemed pathetic. This is typical of Shanghai, I conceded. The new skyscrapers are superficially glitzy, just as the new shopping centers are shiny. But beneath the flamboyant Grand Opening banners, the people would keep to their habits of eating *shen jian bao* in pajamas in public.

On the other hand, maybe the Shanghai Expo is as much for the world as it is for the city itself. Similar to New York City, Shanghai is composed of several districts, some cosmopolitan while others are more peaceful and residential. Perhaps the Expo is for the common Shanghainese. The cartoon logo of the expo is something that every one from the corporate lawyer in the Hugo Boss suit to the middle-aged cleaning lady can identify with.

In the end, Shanghai is at once home to traditional delicacies still sold by the same places that made their name decades ago as well as the third and eleventh tallest buildings in the world. It balances these contradictions and thrives on its diversity, advancing without letting go of its customs, which leaves me in between taking pride for its rapid modernization but also troubled by the inconsistencies and superficiality of such growth. But I know that when I close my eyes, both the dazzling evening skyline featuring the glamour of nineteenth century buildings that lined the Bund alongside the kaleidoscopic lights of the newly developed districts in Pu Dong will be in the back of my eyelids.

CONFLICTING  
VOICES  
Jenny Dai

# RACE-ING OCCUPY WALLSTREET

Tammy Kim

Two weeks ago in *The American Prospect*, Kenyon Farrow wrote of “Occupy Wall Street’s Race Problem.” He attacked what he perceives to be a movement dominated by “white protesters” as well as the rhetoric used by white progressives, citing a protest sign that read “DEBT = SLAVERY” as well as a quote by writer-politico Naomi Wolf expressing her anger that she, a well-dressed white woman, could be arrested for simply standing on a street corner.

Farrow was evidently annoyed by the hyperbolic signage and Wolf’s lack of self-awareness, but it sounds like he hasn’t spent much time with OWS. In the early days of the movement, I might have echoed his easy criticism of privileged white grad students and limousine liberals, or punks and anarchists stinking up a park with bad hygiene and immature politics. But as I’ve learned through direct involvement, Farrow’s critique -- that Occupy Wall Street’s offensive rhetoric alienates African Americans and other people of color from the movement -- draws far too many conclusions from too little evidence.

One hears many such excuses, many distancing memes: it’s too white, those people are so privileged, they don’t speak for me. Even bracketing the illogic of

applying “privilege” to militant activists drenched in rain and freezing temperatures, these are flimsy apologies. Occupy Wall Street has already inserted itself into every conversation in America, and it’s this level of rhetoric -- we are the 99% -- not the odd poster, that should concern us. If you don’t agree with the messaging, it’s on you to change it. If you feel it’s not diverse enough, add your body to the mix. In this consensus-based process, participation is our most valuable critical faculty.

One should also recognize the instability of OWS as observable spectacle. It’s an evolving, self-made, messy space whose signs, statements, and local demographics change day to day, hour to hour. This is, on the one hand, a beautiful strength, a real chance for imaginative dialogue in what Slavoj Žižek rightly calls a deeply ideological time; on the other hand, as *The New Yorker*’s Hendrik Hertzberg cautions, we have yet to see whether this young, loosely organized movement will bear political or policy fruits. Each trip to Zuccotti Park means a new reveal: one day it’s a cacophony of agendas, yet overwhelmingly white; the next, it’s single message and as diverse as New York City itself. This was true at dawn on Friday, October 14, when tens of thousands of us gathered in Zuccotti Park to prevent New York City from evicting the occupiers under the guise of “cleaning.” It has also been true many Fridays since, the park “occupied” by South Asian activists protesting war and police brutality.

Racial-justice activists will be irritated by white leftists, who still seem to dominate the nightly General Assembly meetings. But all of us will be annoyed and offended by plenty of different people we encounter at

Hyphen readers:

Write to us from your own sites of occupation! Email stories, photos, drawings, and more to [tammy.kim@hyphenmagazine.com](mailto:tammy.kim@hyphenmagazine.com), and we’ll get you on the blog!



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VOICES

Tammy Kim



OWS. This is inherent to the jagged, sloppy process of horizontal movement-building, and it shouldn't be a dealbreaker. While I believe the space must be diverse to succeed, I also appreciate the white occupiers who, in a brave exercise of genetic prerogative, put themselves at the front lines of interactions with police and the wintry elements. To be sure, Zuccotti Park would have been wiped out a long time ago if the encampment were all brown and black radicals. More people of color need to lay claim to OWS, as do the immigrants' rights and anti-war movements -- and here we East Coasters can learn from Occupy Oakland -- but it's important to remember the real, disproportionate threat posed by law enforcement to racial minorities and non-U.S. citizens.

Moreover, the story of OWS cannot be told simply through what is seen. Among its many behind-the-curtain committees are a People of Color Working Group and an Immigrant Workers' Rights Solidarity group. Terrific, critical coverage of OWS is readily available at Racialicious and the infrontandcenter blog, and even the New York Times has noted the increased involvement of people of color, namely the critical intervention by South Asians for Justice to force revision of the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City. This rather dramatic episode, first recounted by Manissa Maharawal, meant vocalizing racial-justice concerns to a General Assembly crowd of 400. Thanu Yakupitiyage, who was present that night and is active in several OWS working groups, recalls, "Learning to articulate the nuances around our politics was really important, particularly in

a movement where lots of different people are getting involved. And communities of color need to be involved. You can't talk about the greed of corporations and financiers without talking about, for example, how the financial and housing crises specifically impact communities of color."

As Rinku Sen has written in *The Nation*, the question is really, "How can a racial analysis, and its consequent agenda, be woven into the fabric of the movement?" The answer begins with activists of color, whose participation at Zuccotti Park itself or in the less apparent, tireless gatherings animating OWS serves as the best retort to Farrow's critique. The Immigrant Workers' Rights Solidarity group, in which I've been active, has met many consecutive Tuesday nights. Our membership and attendance have grown at a rate any community organizer would envy -- and with little in the way of centralization. Ten minutes with this group should allay any skepticism about OWS's commitment to issues of difference. It is one of the most diverse, committed coalitions I've ever been a part of, and we are already injecting the movement with the concerns of immigrants and low-wage workers. Despite my cynical resistance to the hand signals sometimes used in consensus-based decision-making (and maligned brilliantly by Steven Colbert), I was enthused enough the other night to twinkle my fingers -- both in agreement and protest.

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## DISAPPEARING VOICES

Not every voice is heard equally: Personal, political, or historical. People cry out but are left unheard. Issues are swept under the rug. These are stories that are left untold, stories that can't or couldn't be told because of fear, suppression, or uncertainty.

I am the dusk that has for centuries been swept under the tatami,  
 Only to linger back to the surface when the world has fallen silent.  
 Half a century gone and the world has carried on, but I still carry the burdens of the past beneath my kimono.

Orange flashes, children's screams, scorching heat, and sounds of chaos slip into my dreams and haunt me,  
 Always taking the form of my lifeless Chichi.  
 Shoeless, I take to the desolate street and limp towards the sea,  
 Hoping to escape what is left of my village.  
 What is left of my home.

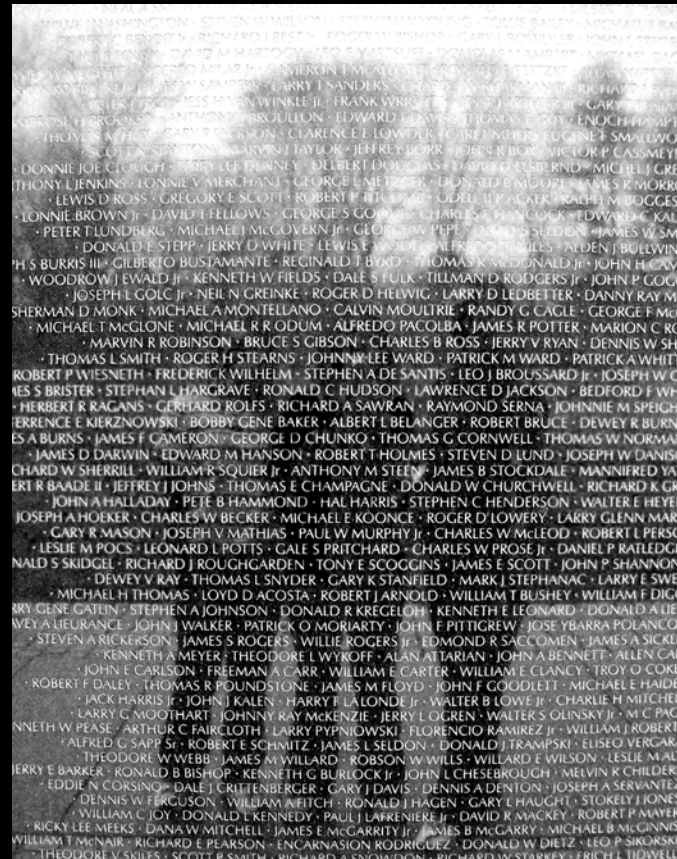
Shards of glass and Mokuzai debris litter the streets where my father once whispered to me,  
*An apprentice near the temple will recite the scriptures untaught.*

I let out desperate screams of Okaa and Chichi,  
 But the deafening drone of silence is the only melody that lingers in my mind.  
 Bodies move and convulse violently like beached gobies,  
 And extend charred limbs along with inaudible pleas.  
 Among these voices is the whisper of my father,  
 Whose scorched, fragile hand caresses me gently as he attempts to speak.  
 Kyoto, Anata wa watashi no subetedesu.  
*Kyoto, you are my everything.*

This image wakes me every night,  
 And send me crawling into the arms of my beloved Otto.  
 He kisses my ruby stripes ever so gently,  
 Because he too shares the pain that lingers within me.  
 My legs are branded, my hands are seared, and I have beat leukemia three times.  
 I have walked alone in the valley of death with the souls of my ancestors by my side,  
 I have survived the unimaginable,  
 I have played the devil in Cho Han and won the wager,  
 And all I ask for is some recognition.  
 I am a walking artifact that carries the memory of a civilization that the world has so easily forgotten.  
 I am all that is left of Nagasaki:  
 A templeless apprentice reciting scriptures that are silenced by the wind.

And the government has turned its head to my requests.  
*History is history, they tell me,*  
*Japan has forgiven its Teki for their sins.*  
*The only way we can move forward as a nation is to let go of the past.*  
 They are the wind that muffles the voices of the voiceless,  
 The lost shadows that roam the streets at night.  
 I am just a shadow that deserves a second chance at life,  
 But unlike the others, I refuse to be silenced.

I am Kyoto.  
 The ruby child of Nagasaki.  
 A sole survivor of the most deadly day in history.  
 The apprentice who will carry on its legacy,  
 And bear the stripes of the past on my back for eternity  
 With the hope that one day the world will know  
 where I stood on the day they killed humanity.



Enclosed by four suffocating walls,  
one filled with words,  
I try to separate fact from fiction

Anonymous POST YOUR SECRET

- I wish everyone could get along.
- Loser.
- Fuck you.
- I fuck everyone.
- I fuck your momma.
- I like to sleep naked.
- I love him.
- I hate when anyone does anything better than me.
- My bruises aren't from being clumsy.
- I act when I'm offstage, too.
- I suck. Hard.
- They're fake.
- I like the smell of onions.
- This list is shit.
- This list is the shitz.
- Call me: 1800SUICIDE.
- I know something you don't know.
- I eat when I'm sad. I'm always sad.
- I kick puppies.
- I eat puppies.
- You must be Chinese.
- I saw someone die.
- I've been editing my report card since fourth grade.
- God doesn't exist.
- I make myself throw up.
- I cheated.
- I tried to kill my dad.
- I dream about girls. I'm not gay.
- I hate Harry Potter.
- I hate America.
- I have six toes.
- I'm scared to death of dying.
- I've gotten better at lying.

I sit with my pants around my ankles,  
reading your secrets  
I wish I could stop.

DISAPPEARING  
VOICES

Cynthia Chan  
Anonymous

“NO”

Anonymous

She was born a preemie.  
Bloody, ugly, and wrinkly.  
Small head, small eyes, small  
mouth.  
Expert diagnosis: “No chance.”

They painted da Vinci and van  
Gohn,  
framed and exhibited.  
She doodled with her eyes closed.  
They scoffed, “No talent.”

For her they picked out a place, a  
race,  
a track and a career.  
She chose Plan E, none of the above.  
They lamented, “No face.”

They sat in silence when the man  
with the Book  
asked for volunteers.  
Only she would not forever hold  
her peace.  
They gasped, “No shame.”

They forgot about her  
until the papers ran her eulogy  
and a photo of her gravestone.  
It read, “No regrets.”

## EMERGING VOICES

Speak up and speak loudly, but not necessarily with your mouth. This section is about voices coming out from hiding, being brought into being, or making a statement and moving more voices. It is about sparks that bring to light issues that need to be expressed.

This section of the magazine  
Is about speaking up, speaking out.  
But how can you speak,  
When your voice remains untrained?

When it remains coarse,  
And unrefined,  
Like sugar,  
That comes fresh-off-the-boat.

When it's stuck,  
Underneath a bottle cap,  
All fizzed-up,  
Even after you've shaken it, hundreds of times.

When you don't know,  
Right from wrong,  
Or left from right,  
Or right from privilege.

What if it's a squeak?  
And no one hears.  
Or a squawk,  
And no one doesn't?

But, what if it's the most  
Beautiful, melodious, lovely  
Thing  
The world has ever heard.

Wouldn't that be a shame,  
To keep it all to yourself?  
Unrefined sugar's still,  
Sweet.




I used to speak Vietnamese sorrows,  
And linger in Vietnamese laughter,  
Rewinding Paris by Night videos until I broke our VCR;  
Forwarding through the un-necessaries, the sub-par,  
The unintelligible—  
When I used to know it all.

I used to recap television episodes for her,  
Those Saturday morning cartoons while she was at Vietnamese school,  
And I immersed myself in the American.

I was once told  
That you have mastered a language when you have dreamt in its syntax,  
When you have fallen through the winding cracks  
Of all its scriptures and commandments.  
Does it still count then,  
When the language a dream manifests;  
When the language can only creep in  
Forming unbearable flashbacks, unwelcome nostalgia.

But if you wandered the dirty Saigon streets and found my Vietnamese soul,  
As if fortuitous spare change,  
I fear it to be weighted when flipped, hard put to expose itself;  
I fear it to be transparent in light, insecure from years of hiding;  
But most of all, I fear it to be grains of sand through my fingers, because I know it is  
there.

Because I can feel the smooth comfort of its steel contours.  
Because I can grasp those metal fragments until they dig into my palms.  
Because I used to know it all.



Congratulations to Kerri Lu (Pierson '14), winner of our Semesterly Poetry Contest

# COMPOSITION

Kerri Lu

Disdain spoke the loudest;  
I was blind to the tones that came out of my Chinese  
classmates' smiling lips,  
new school, new city,  
finding myself in an old sense of being surrounded by a  
large Asian population  
and feeling lost.

I look away, hearing my own voice, triumphant and  
egotistical, Anglo-Saxon,  
over the intonations of ancestors, reflexive and instinc-  
tive, cultivated in mouths and homes of other first  
generation immigrant classmates,  
English as a second language began and ended in the one  
class I was exempt from,  
an anomaly, a present to the other white students, won-  
dering why the new Chinese kid took pains to speak  
their tongue,  
assimilate  
into their environment, spend heart-wrenching then  
joyful year and a half in an orthodox Jewish community,  
raised on chutzpah in the playground,  
Fred & Ginger in my landlady's 100 home-recorded  
video-cassettes,  
Hanukah with rice,  
Chinese New Year with Christmas carols.

Disdain finally spoke from me,  
clear English like I had been taught, like I thought had  
become me, not just a part, but the  
whole  
of me:  
"no, thank you"  
to diving back into my native language,  
yearned for in those long first months of differentiating  
f- and th- in giving gratitude,  
in learning basic words, in discerning the swears class-  
room bullies tried to fill me with.

yet I said no  
to speaking again the sounds of  
rainwater, inflected and crass and beautiful, drops  
of tears hitting English exercise books,  
of sweat, nervous at being fearless, enacting fearlessness  
when meeting anyone, everyone,  
in a world of new faces and strange sounds.

th-ank you  
not f-ank you  
th-ank you

th-ink about it

Disdain spoke but was no longer a part of me  
once it left my  
"touch your tongue to the edge between your teeth and  
your gums and"  
th- th- th-

thankful  
for this struggle of identity, of voices and noises,  
of a native part of me no longer foreign,  
of a foreign element that comprises most of me.

I am not  
Canadian nor  
Chinese in my entirety,  
that dash in the middle,  
that pause when friends ask me of my Chinese name,  
making all the difference,  
my voice subdivides  
like jazz Mozart, an experimentation composed of  
ethnicity and culture, a combination of tastes and cus-  
toms and syllables  
for which I am eternally  
grateful.

Disdain silenced, humility overcomes me in my pride,  
I speak to my classmates in broken Chinese,  
in the whole of my voice,  
pushing tongue to edge between teeth and gums, once  
again,  
thankful for finding home in opposing voices  
that reconciled  
in me.

EMERGING  
VOICES

Kerri Lu

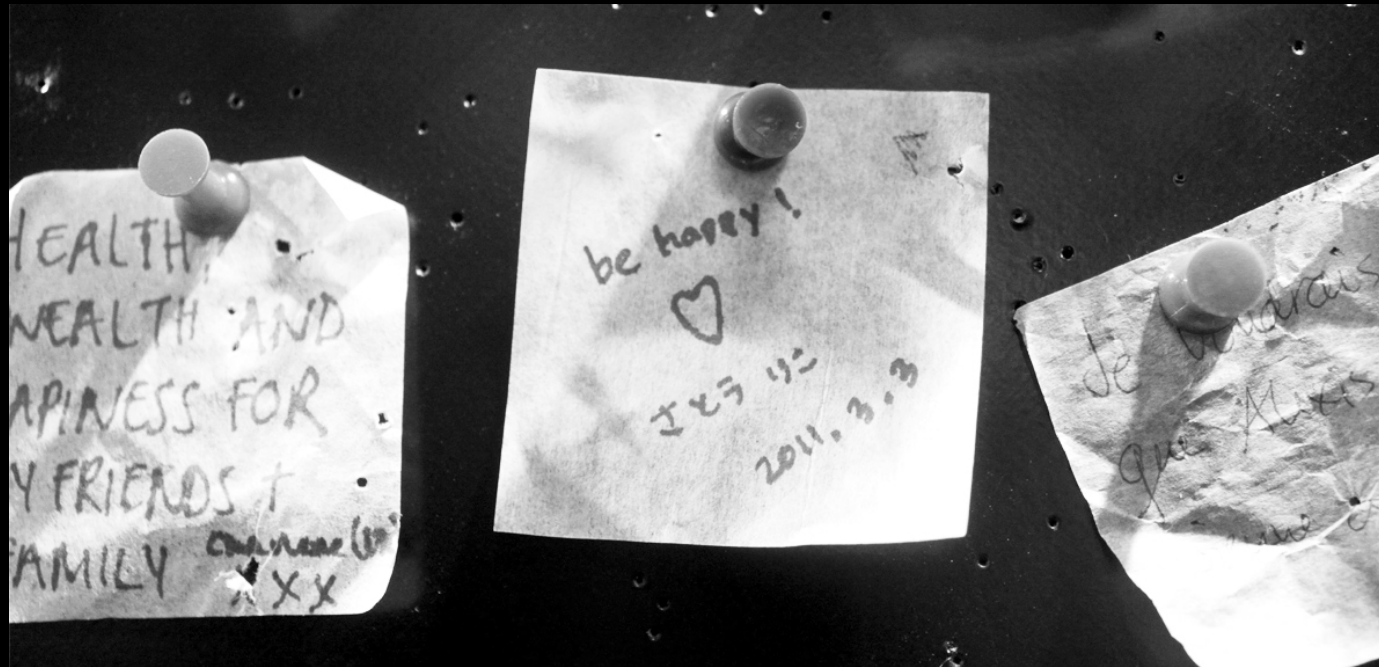






# WALL OF HOPES AND DREAMS

Cynthia Chan



EMERGING VOICES

Cynthia Chan



Rehana Lew Mirza is the Author of *Barriers*. Shortly after 9/11 Sunima returns to her New Jersey home from NYC to announce her pending engagement, but instead gets trapped in the family loss they never dealt with. Originally Mounted in 2002 at HERE Arts Center in New York and then in San Francisco and Los Angeles in 2003, *Barriers* is returne to HERE to look back on the ten-year anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy.

A number of students were lucky selected in an AACC lottery for *Barriers*. They traveled to New York to watch the play and Rehana, all funded by the AACC.

To learn more about AACC's Take A Trip Lotteries, tune into the AACC weekly word.

## BARRIERS: AUTHOR'S NOTE

Rehana Lew Mirza

When it came up that we should remount *Barriers* this year, I was hesitant. I originally wrote the play to depict bi-racial identity and to show Muslims in a humanistic light. I wanted to counter biased media reactions to 9/11 and to also explore what my own emotions during that time period was. Much of what I wrote was raw emotion poured out onto the page. And while it would be fitting to come full circle on the 10-year anniversary of 9/11 and our company, I've travelled far as a person and artist in the past ten years and it would be hard to put myself in the place where I was when first writing this play.

It was when the tragedy in Norway struck that I realized that, regardless of how far I may have come, this play opens an urgent dialogue. The realization didn't come from the knee-jerk "it was Muslims" reactions and headlines. Nor was it the later conversations conveying that a killer of Christian faith should not be considered a terrorist. It was the fact that many of the postings seemed to indicate that clearly this man was a lone crazy person. Why else would he kill innocent Norwegians and not those that he should have been after – Muslims, immigrants, etc? It made me sad to think that Muslims and immigrants clearly are not innocent. After ten years at war, who is the enemy? Who are the victims? And how do we move past this?

In revisiting *Barriers*, I sought to bring up these questions and more. I went back into the script and toned down some of the raw emotion while still keeping its intentions intact. I wanted to take a deeper look at how far we may or may not have come as a nation. Just by putting a grieving multi-cultural, Muslim-American family on the stage, I feel I have moved the conversation forward into a new place that often doesn't get seen. In a time of extreme politics, I feel like we may have forgotten what it is like to be human. Hopefully theater, and perhaps this play, can remind us.

EMERGING  
VOICES

Rehana Lew Mirza



# THE CIRCLE

Christopher Lapinig

I inhaled deeply as I stepped onto the empty stage. The theater lights blazed on, and a hush fell over the crowd. With the lights focused on me, I could barely make out any faces in the audience, but I began my monologue anyway. I confided in the anonymous audience, discussing the pangs of guilt I felt every time my family sent tattered hand-me-downs to our less fortunate relatives in the Philippines. Though I spoke only about my own experiences, I hoped that those listening saw pieces of themselves in my story.

This was my first performance for Jook Songs, an Asian American writing and performance group. I joined Jook Songs to reflect on my contributions to the Asian American community at Yale. By the time I joined Jook Songs in my junior year, I had devoted my college career to the Asian American community. I had expanded the on-campus presence of KASAMA: The Filipino Club at Yale, and I had led the Asian American Students Alliance, uniting seven disparate student groups around a

platform that celebrated our common bonds and shared interests. As rewarding as these experiences were, I had been moving at a breakneck pace. Jook Songs offered a respite where I could collect my thoughts and share them with others.

Jook Songs derives its name from the Cantonese word *juk sing*, or “hollow bamboo.” Chinese immigrants use *juk sing* as a derogatory description of their American-born children, who look Chinese on the outside but supposedly lack the substance within. As a pan-Asian student group, Jook Songs seeks to turn this slur on its head by exploring the many facets of the Asian American identity.

Though my entrée into Jook Songs began as an endeavor to learn more about myself, I left Jook Songs indebted to my fellow writers for all that they taught me. The other Jook Singers reaffirmed my faith in a pan-Asian identity. Our circle represented a microcosm of the broader Asian American community: queer, straight, Vietnamese, Indian, men and women. Like Asian America, we were an unlikely coalition: our immigrant parents hailed from disparate countries and spoke mutually unintelligible languages. Like the diverse ethnic organizations within the Asian American Students Alliance, our differing vantage points sometimes led to pointed disagreements. Nevertheless, these apparent dissimilarities among us made it even more poignant that we could so deeply sympathize with each other’s stories.

My time in Jook Songs helped me understand that the concept of Asian America carries hope not only for

Asian Americans, but for all Americans. Like the U.S. as a whole, Asian America is an imagined community, fractured at first glance by its diversity. Yet, if Asian Americans can overcome superficial differences to forge mutual understanding, then so too can all Americans. Our small circle of student-writers, I felt, offered a glimmer of hope for the future of our country.

It has been four years since I last wrote with “the circle,” and I have since moved onto law school. Yet I continue to carry the many lessons that Jook Songs taught me in my professional and personal pursuits. Jook Songs reaffirmed for me the value of open-mindedness and the importance of listening carefully to others. My time in the circle taught me that even the stories that seem most divergent from your own can share some nugget of commonality. And that even these most slender of threads can profoundly bind people together. As I embark on my legal career—working with clients who may have had vastly different life experiences—I hope that I can stay true to the spirit of the circle.

\* Chris Lapinig is a Yale alumni currently attending Yale Law School

EMERGING  
VOICES

Christopher Lapinig

sometimes the exploding petals of a singed hibiscus burst out my lungs  
and thrust their satin sleeves up through  
the charcoal walls of my larynx, banging against clenched  
molars as if to ricochet  
out my lips

But like swallowing a butterfly I press them closed  
lest the exquisiteness of those soul-washed petals escape me, leaving  
me  
blanched and naked  
for a stinging wasp

oh, but then I remember  
that wasps lose their freshness  
and so too do syllable-veined petals shrivel under a judgmental sun  
when adrift too far from the stem

so perhaps I will hold them and grow them  
out my fingertips and running soles  
like a moving garden that trembles with skips and grasps and flights  
dispersing bits of soul-pollen through action

And like so many powder specks popping in the air  
I too shall act vibrant and shed a gazillion thoughts through gestures  
and dance ideas across the human plane--  
wordless voices that will seep into the pores of an unfolded flower  
and sing



## Deandra Tan

The young mother's holding of the child's hand is a gentle gesture, full of love and support. Looking at this reminds me of my own relationship with my mother, and how it allowed me to find my own voice as I grew up.

EMERGING  
VOICESKevin Chen  
Deandra Tan*The End.*

Fall 2011



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