

*Asian American Literature: Discourses and Pedagogies*  
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Twenty-eight years ago, Elaine Kim wrote in the preface to her groundbreaking *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context* that when the "sociohistorical and cultural contexts" of Asian American literature "are unfamiliar, the literature is likely to be misunderstood and unappreciated" (xv). The mission of this journal is to provide accessible peer-reviewed essays to teachers and students of Asian American literature so that works of Asian American literature can be understood in their cultural, sociohistorical, and artistic contexts. Mindful that a variety of sources are helpful and even necessary when teaching or learning about literature, we have sought out and accepted work in a range of forms from traditional literary analysis and explication to essays specifically detailing classroom pedagogy in relation to works of Asian American literature.

In this, our inaugural volume, we present eight peer-reviewed essays and an interview of author Karen Tei Yamashita. This year marks the twentieth year that Karen Tei Yamashita has been a published novelist and it also sees the publication of her fifth book, *The I Hotel*, named after what has been justifiably called "the epicenter of the Yellow Power Movement" (<http://www.coffeehousepress.org/ihotel.asp>). In honor of both Yamashita's newest work and that originating moment of Asian American collective consciousness, we asked artist Paul Michael Aguilar to design an original cover based on the International Hotel. In addition to my interview of Yamashita, we offer a review essay by Pamela Thoma detailing the way Yamashita scholarship has intersected with transnational studies. The third essay, by Eileen Fung, describes the pedagogical challenges and opportunities of teaching David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. We have paired this with Jeffrey Nishimura's historical overview of the development of Asian American drama. This is followed by our final pairing of essays on a single author: Pallavi Rastogi's pedagogical essay on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Mary Louise Buley-Meissner's bibliographic review of Divakaruni's oeuvre. The seventh and eighth essays both look at genre-confounding texts focusing on Asian American youth: Jonathan Doughty's analysis of Chinese transnational identity in Gene Luen Yang's graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*; and Nicole Miyoshi Rabin's exploration of the construction of racialized identities and bodies in Cynthia Kadohata's *In The Heart of the Valley of Love*. Our final essay brings us back to an originating moment of Asian American culture even earlier than the political movement formed around the I Hotel: Wei Ming Dariotis' discussion of pedagogical approaches to Edith Eaton/Sui Sin Far's work from the beginning of the twentieth century.

The idea for this journal originated in a project I began almost ten years ago. I was asked by a small press to produce a book on the teaching of Asian American literature to be a resource for teachers at both the college and high school levels. My co-editor on that project, Rowena Tomaneng, of De Anza College, and I were quite familiar with the teaching of Asian American literature at the college level from Freshman composition courses to graduate seminars, but we knew very little about what texts were being taught in high schools, nor how Asian American texts were being contextualized. We surveyed our own students and as many high school teachers as we could contact to ask, "What

Asian American text(s) did you read/assign in high school?" Both of the institutions we teach at are in Santa Clara County, California, which even ten years ago was over 25% Asian American, in contrast to the Asian American population nationwide, which is estimated to still be below 5% (the percentage of Santa Clara County residents with Asian backgrounds is now estimated to be over 30%, <http://factfinder.census.gov>). The students and teachers we were polling were also primarily from Santa Clara County, thus, it was not surprising that the data we received was fairly consistent. What was surprising for us was how few names we received in the responses. The most common response was overwhelmingly Amy Tan, with Pearl S. Buck garnering second place. Responses also included "Confucius" and "Japanese poetry" (in translation). While students can certainly learn a lot by examining European American constructions of Asia or the philosophical and literary traditions of the ancestral nations of Asian Americans, the tendency for both students and teachers to break apart the term "Asian American" into separate and seemingly unrelated words was disturbing. Clearly, there is a need for a greater understanding of the diverse texts and contexts of Asian American literature, even in areas such as Santa Clara County where Asian Americans make up a plurality of the population. Yet training in the contexts of this literature still lags behind at multiple levels – from high school classrooms to credential and masters programs. To see to the ever changing needs of teachers and students and to respond to newly produced works of Asian American literature and culture, the continually updatable aspect of a periodical is needed.

The members of the editorial board and I intend *Asian American Literature: Discourses & Pedagogies* to be a resource for teachers, students, and readers, even when they may not have access to the increasingly expensive journal databases subscribed to by most university libraries. We want to provide high quality peer-reviewed work even to those who may not have access to research beyond a simple internet search. We have focused on the idea of accessibility in all things, even in the reading process. We have sought out and encouraged the submission of essays that, while building on contemporary theoretical insights for their analyses, do not fall prey to the heavy use of jargon that sometimes mars the ability of academic work to speak to students as well as experts. We have asked for submissions on the shorter side of most journals (preferring 2,000 to 7,000 words) so that they can be read comfortably online (or easily printed). Thus, our focus on accessibility has affected every decision from attempting to separate our project from market economic forces and other factors limiting distribution as much as possible to what we ask from our contributors.

### **Acknowledgements**

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This issue is dedicated to Kai Sun,<sup>1</sup> born in the same year as this journal, and to all our children who remind us daily not only *how* education changes the world but *why* it *must* change the world. May they all benefit from a better informed and educated America.

---Noelle Brada-Williams  
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<sup>1</sup> Born March 23 to Karen Chow and George Sun.