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Foreword: Speaking Existence

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This special topic is not about phantoms; it is about concrete existence.

To make its idea clear, I want to start with a story, or, to be more specific, a history. According to a report in the *Dutch Flat Enquirer*, in the winter of 1866 the Chinese encampments along the western end of America's transcontinental railroad were engulfed by huge snowstorms. Normally, railroad workers should have been withdrawn. However, these Chinese laborers were forced by the railroad company to keep working through the winter. During Christmas, the snow fell so heavily that one whole camp was covered over.¹ Not until spring when the snow had melted were most of the missing bodies found, "still upright, their cold hands gripping shovels and picks and their mouths twisted in frozen terror" (Takaki 86).

These twisted mouths might be mute, but they are not silent. Instead, they are bespeaking a history of Asian America striving for survival but muffled by racial exploitation. This special topic of *Concentric* hopes then to bring to the surface these long-buried people and events, this Asian-American flow of life that has been relegated to hidden, marginal, spectral zones. Its task is to further examine the making and meaning of Asian America.

Begoña Simal-González's "Judging the Book by Its Cover: Phantom Asian America in Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*" looks at how adoptee characters are treated by Vietnamese-American author Truong as the phantasmatic Other of "true" Asian Americans, analyzes the deficiencies in essentialist arguments about Asian-American identity and instead places the kinship crisis that is central to the constitution of Asian America in a synaesthetic context. Hsiu-chuan Lee's "'Trafficking in Seeds': War Bride, Biopolitics, and Asian American Spectrality in Ruth Ozeki's *All Over Creation*" explores the representation of Japanese war brides as either "ghostly figures" or "random seedlings." By conceiving of a life-begetting

¹ Reprinted in the Sacramento *Union*, December 28, 1866; qtd. in Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy* 64.