

**ASIAN AND ASIAN-AMERICAN TRADITIONS
IN LANGUAGE ARTS**

by

**PROFESSOR SHAWN WONG
AND
DR. NASEEM A. HINES**

Naseem Hines

Dr. Naseem Akhtar Hines received her PhD in Asian Languages and Literature from the University of Washington in Seattle. Her Dissertation focuses on the devotional literature of North India. The topic of her Master's Theses was "The Imagery of Wine in the Urdu Poetry." She received her undergraduate degree in English Literature from the University of Washington in Seattle, and from Hyderabad, Deccan, India. She taught at the University of Washington in Seattle, at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, at University of California at Berkeley and, in Autumn 2001, she joins the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Dr. Hines has traveled and participated in major national and international academic conferences. Her scholarly articles, fiction, and poetry have been published in several anthologies. Her work and travel experience have afforded her a deep insight into the literature, art, music and cultures of the world. Currently, she is working on an English translation of a fourteenth-century Indo-Sufi allegorical romance, *Chandayan*.

Shawn Wong

Professor Shawn Wong received his undergraduate degree in English at the University of California at Berkeley in 1971, and a Master's Degree in Creative Writing at San Francisco State University in 1974. He has taught at Mills College, University of California at Santa Cruz and San Francisco State University. Shawn Wong has served as Chairman of the Seattle Arts Commission, Coordinator of Seattle's Bumbershoot Festival Commission and as a consultant for public arts agencies, including the National Endowment for the Arts. He is presently an associate professor of American Ethnic Studies at the University of Washington. In addition to the publication of his poetry, fiction, essays and reviews in periodicals and anthologies, Shawn Wong was also the recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship.

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Introduction

Work on the Asian and Asian American Traditions in Language Arts Baseline Essay began in the early 1990's as part of an initiative by the Portland School District to recognize the contributions of Americans of Asian heritage in the fields of Art, Language Arts, Mathematics, Music, Science, and Social Science with a series of essays. Nearly a decade ago, although the rhetoric to promote and cherish the cultural diversity within the United States culture flourished, particularly in the higher education sector, little action was visible at the elementary/secondary level. To the authors' knowledge, the Portland (Oregon) School District was the first educational organization to actively demonstrate a commitment to promoting this diversity at the grade-school level. By funding this series of baseline essays dedicated to the study of the contributions of Asia and the Asian diaspora in the United States, the Portland School District has provided leadership among the school districts of the United States.

The main focus of this essay is to document the general history, culture(s), and contributions of the geocultural group defined as Asian-American and their contributions to American Literature. The essay begins with a brief overview of the folk and classical literatures of Asia. This section is meant only as an introduction to Asian-American literature, and is not meant as a comprehensive study of these literatures. The section on Asian literatures is followed by a section detailing the influence of Asian literatures on the literature of Asian America. We do not mean to imply, however, that Asian literature provides the sole influence on the literatures of Asian America. In fact, Asian-American literature has been influenced by all of the diverse sources which have influenced most American literature. The literatures of Asia do provide, however, specific source materials which have been explored by some, but not all Asian-American writers. While reading this essay, it is important to keep clear the distinction between Asian literature and Asian-American literature.

From its inception by co-author Professor Wong and his associates at the University of Washington, the Essay has undergone enhancements and has increased considerably in its scope. Nevertheless, it is by no means comprehensive and there may still be a need to provide a fuller treatment of the American literature that has been

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generated by the authors of Arab, Israeli, Turkish, Persian, and Afghani heritage. These concerns will need to be addressed in a separate volume in the future by scholars who specialize in the literature of the above-mentioned regions.

With reference to Asian names, attempts were made by the authors to standardize the transliteration of names and words in this text. However, many different systems are used to transliterate Asian languages. In this Essay and in each instance, the transliteration system used by the quoted scholar is applied. There may therefore be some residual inconsistencies.

The authors are certainly honored to acknowledge the help of many reviewers, consultants, and advisors. Among them are Wei Ming Daiotis, Pamela J. Oakes, and Cynthia Denning, all of the University of Washington, who supported Professor Wong at the early stages. Later, Ms. Anne Murphy provided extensive and valuable comments on the South Asia section. Dr. Ahmad Karimi Hakkak provided helpful comments and information concerning the status of Iranian literature in America. Other reviewers and advisors who contributed to making general changes and giving shape to the essay include: Professor Shirley Hume, Dr. Tracy Dillon, Dr. Mariam Baradar, Joseph Chang, Cynthia Denning, Wei Ming Daiotis, Bear Goodman, Dr. Daniel Kwok, Kanta Luthra, Carolyn M. Leonard, Vinh Nguyen, Dr. Joseph Nguyen, Pamela Oakes. Dr. Nesratollah Rassekh, Dr. Ganoon Parvar, and Dr. Minh Tran. If this Essay is found useful, a great deal of credit belongs to all the contributors. Any shortcomings remain solely the responsibility of the authors.

**Professor Shawn Wong
Dr. Naseem A. Hines**

Intercultural Currents in Asia

Covering nearly one third of the earth's land area and bearing close to three-fifths of its population, Asia, in both physical area and number of inhabitants, is the largest continent in the world. Asia contains the world's two most populous countries – India and China – as well as most of another large country: Russia (geographically both in Asia and Europe, though many atlases place Russia entirely in Asia). Simultaneously, Asia is home to some of the world's smallest countries, such as Bahrain, Singapore and the Maldives. Though the South Pacific Islands are not specifically geographically speaking part of the continent, both their culture and their history tie them closely to Asia.

Asia is historically both vast and complex. In order to provide a unifying theme for the discussion of the literatures of Asia, this essay presents a brief history of the cross-cultural influences, both subtle and overt, which have come to shape Asian-American literature. Trade and peaceful cultural exchange have spread specific texts, such as India's epic *Ramayana*, and religions such as Buddhism throughout the region. Colonialism has had a more aggressive impact: in the recent past, colonization by both Asian and European nations has altered the very structure of some languages. Though the literatures of Asia have developed in very independent forms throughout the region, each has been influenced by the many surrounding cultures, so that all display a coherent syncretic characteristic. Asian-American literature continues to reflect cross-cultural influences.

Colonialism in reality comprises but a brief segment of Asia's rich history, a history which cannot be expressed merely in terms of domination, Western or otherwise. A frequent error made in discussing both Asia and Asian America is to do so only in terms of Western history. The West cannot be used exclusively as the center from which to understand other cultures. In this essay, cultural domination, which has occurred throughout the history of Asia, which has continued as Asian Diasporas have evolved and of which Western colonialism is only one component, is discussed in order to trace the process by which cultures influence one another.

From the expansion of the Mongols across Asia and beyond, into Europe, the effects of imperialist policies on the part of both Asian and “Western”¹ nations have been a strong factor in the histories of those Asians who have joined the various Asian Diasporas and emigrated from their homelands. Japanese imperialism in Korea and China has contributed to this influence as well. The British Opium Wars in southern China (the Opium War, 1839-1842, and the Arrow War, 1857-1860)² contributed to the destabilization of that region and when natural disasters also struck, many southern Chinese felt compelled to search for livelihoods elsewhere. Thus, the majority of Chinese, coming to the U.S. before 1965, when U.S. Immigration Laws were changed, were from the southern region. The long history of Spanish and U.S. imperialism, and the short term Japanese influence in the Philippines is undoubtedly a factor in the development for Filipino-American literature.

The Spanish conquest of the Philippines in 1565, and the hundreds of years of occupation, imposed Spanish as the primary language of the islands. The status of the Philippines as a U.S. protectorate, from 1898 to the end of World War II, and beyond, has also had a profound impact on Filipino society, politics and culture. This impact is particularly noticeable on the educational system. The internal political and social situation and the “Opening” of Japan by Commodore Perry in 1853 also caused political destabilization leading to mass emigration. The colonization of India by Britain has led to emigration for many years--not only to Britain, but to the US as well. Canada, the Caribbean, Africa, and South and Central America have historically received a large number of immigrants from all regions of Asia.

America's earlier immigrants were predominantly from European countries. Because of this fact, it was not difficult for the subsequent immigrants of European descent to fit in to an already established culture. Later, mainly due to labor shortages, Asians were recruited to help with agricultural, transit and construction projects. A large

1 The term “Western” creates a binary oppositional dichotomy which constructs “Eastern” as its object and opposite. Though this oppositional structure is inherently false, the alternatives to this term are unwieldy, so it will be used, with some reservation, throughout this essay.

2 Opium was introduced to China by the British in the 16th or early 17th century to rectify a trade imbalance. While the British were very interested in Chinese silk and tea, China had little interest in British products, until the introduction, and enforcement, of the opium trade (O’Neill, Hugh B. *Companion to Chinese History*. Facts on File Publications, New York, 1987).

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number of Asian-Americans today are descendants of these early immigrants. Despite their considerable proportions and significant contributions, Asian-American history and culture are not commonly taught within the American educational system.

To a large extent, Asian-American literature has much in common with other American immigrant literature. However, in the early days of Asian immigration, American laws were racially discriminatory. Consequently, the experiences of early Asian immigrants were essentially different compared to the experiences of the people who came to America from European countries. Furthermore, the vast difference in appearance, cultural background and life style, encouraged the idea that the Asian-Americans could not assimilate into the larger American panorama. The notion that Asian-Americans are 'aliens' or 'different' became rooted. "The Language Arts Baseline Essay" endeavors to reexamine Asian-American literature within the larger framework of American literature.

The essay begins with a brief discussion of the popular folklore and the classical literature of Asia. American literature composed by Asian-American authors clearly reflects the influence of their literary traditions. An insight into the nature of this inherited literature provides the background information which is essential to understand where Asian-Americans are coming from. The American immigration laws and their impact on the first generation of Asian immigrants is explored next. In the following section, this essay focuses on contemporary Asian-American literature. A significant feature of this essay is the discussion of Asian-American children's literature. The concluding section of this essay incorporates some helpful hints for the teaching community of public school systems in terms of providing some caricatures which have been instrumental in the stereotypical portrayal of characters of Asian descent. Most importantly, this essay sincerely hopes to provide insight into our Asian-American literary heritage.

Language and Script

In preparation for discussing the languages of Asia, it should be understood that **language** and **script** are two separate issues. A script can be used and modified to document many languages. For example, the Roman writing system is modified and implemented to record English, Spanish, French, Turkic and many other languages. The diversity of the peoples and cultures in Asia is reflected in the large number of languages spoken there. Linguistic experts have classified the world's languages into several major families such as, Indo-European, African, Uralic, Altaic, Sino-Tibetan, etc. Most of the languages, except the African family of languages have wide use in Asia.

Colonization has had a profound impact upon the languages of Asia. For example, during the hundreds of years of Chinese occupation of Vietnam, Chinese was used by scholars and the upper classes, and was the language of formal poetry. A phonetic transcription system based on Chinese characters, known as the "nom," was used by the majority of the population. The script currently used for the national language of Vietnam, "quoc ngu," is a modified form of Roman script. In the 16th and the 17th centuries, this script was invented and developed by the French, Spanish and Portuguese missionaries, who found the "nom" too difficult. The "quoc ngu" was not widely used by the general population of Vietnam until the beginning of the 20th century, when it began to be used by the French-educated writers and scholars. The Philippines, due to their long occupation by Spain and later the U.S., also uses the Roman script to transcribe Tagalog and the other major languages and dialects of the islands. The Russian language is used in much of North and Central Asia. The writing system for the Russian language is based on the Cyrillic alphabet. Arabic script has been adapted to write the languages of many countries in the Central and Western regions of Asia.

The many languages of the Indian sub-continent owe their diversity to the confluence of multiple cultures. Sanskrit is the language brought into India by the Aryan peoples of Central Asia. It is transcribed in a writing system called the Devanagari. In

addition to being the language used to transmit much of India's classical literature, Sanskrit is also the basis for many contemporary Indo-Aryan languages, such as Hindi. The indigenous peoples of India, whose culture survives largely in the southern region of India, speak in various languages such as Tamil, Kannada and Telugu, which belong to the Dravidian group, unrelated to the Indo-Aryan languages.

Most countries in East Asia, such as China, Japan and Korea, use pictographs and characters, or a combination of a phonetic system and pictographs. The Japanese characters known as **kanji** are slightly adapted forms of the Chinese **hanzi** developed several thousand years ago. Some types of **kanji** and **hanzi** have retained their pictographic origins. In the 8th century, scholars adapted Chinese characters to record Korean language sounds in a system called **idu**. In 1446, King Sejong introduced the Korean alphabetic writing system still in common usage, **hangul**.

In most parts of Asia, calligraphy has long been considered a high art. Scholars are highly respected in these societies, and mastery of the written word in the form of calligraphy is an integral part of scholarship. It takes years of study and constant practice to become an accomplished calligrapher. Calligraphy is used in combination with other art forms, including painting and architecture, to create fully integrated cultural expressions.

Immigrants from Asia brought with them the cultures of their homelands in the form of both folklore and classical literature. Although a study of the contemporary literatures of Asia would be outside the scope of this essay, a brief overview of the folklore and classical literature which has affected the development of Asian-American literature will help in understanding the development of certain themes and forms of Asian-American literature.

Traditional Literatures of Asia

This section is divided into folk and classical literature, though, the distinction between these two forms is not always so easily delineated. In many cases, the folk literature or oral history of a people becomes, over time, canonized as classical literature. The classical literature of a culture can often be disseminated into myths, legends, heroic tales, fairy tales and fables. Folk literature communicates the values of cultures beyond the limits of the groups in which they were conceived. As various groups and individuals migrated and traveled as merchants, religious pilgrims and immigrants they heard the stories of other groups and embellished them with elements that better reflected their own homelands and cultures. Characters took on new names and places and were transformed into the familiar. Asian folk tales, in general, served to communicate the moral and social values of a people as well as to document their history. Indian folk and classical literatures have had a profound influence on the literatures of many cultures, so it is with this literature that we begin this study.

Folk Tales of India

Our discussion of the folk literature should begin with a classification of the various traditions: myths, legends, fairy tales and fables. The distinctions are as follows: 1) **myths** describe the creation of the world and natural beings; 2) **legends** contain some historical fact which has become the center for an anecdote about an individual; 3) **fairy tales** tell stories to instruct and entertain children; and 4) **fables** generally use allegories to instruct people in terms of morality.

As in Western tales, in Indian animal tales, the animals are also ranked according to their intelligence and habits (Chaudhury, 1974). For example, while the fox is characterized as sly, the cow is portrayed as gentle. Lions and tigers are represented as having majestic qualities, horses as sleek and intelligent. The tortoise is slow, yet purposeful, and the opposite might be the hare, who is swift, yet lazy. Monkeys are portrayed as both divine and most near to mankind and appear often in tales about

kingdoms and royalty. Even plants assume distinctive characteristics: large and sprawling trees are portrayed as god-like, while the foliage of the jungle is associated with thievery. The thick forest is often connected to characters who are unscrupulous or uncanny (Chaudhury, 1974).

On the one hand, the folk-tales provide a context and meaning of the narrative, on the other hand these stories answer questions of a more practical nature, such as explaining climatic conditions, weather patterns, astronomy, etc. In some cases, themes take on manifestations depending on the locale of origin. For instance, urban Indian folk tales may explore issues of human interaction and moral questions. The rural tales, in contrast, may emphasize the explanation of natural occurrences. Whatever the chosen theme, setting, or characters, folk tales in general are used primarily to instruct the young in the mores of their culture, just as classical literature often explores religious and cultural issues in more refined forms.

Classical Literature of India

While there are literally thousands of myths, legends, fables and fairy tales that make up the Indian folk tradition, there are several main classical literary collections that are commonly referred to and which have become a part of popular literature: *The Panchatantra* (*The Book of Five Headings*), *The Ramayana* (*The Adventures of Rama*), *The Mahabharata*, and *The Jatakas* (*The Book of Buddha's Birth Stories*). *The Panchatantra* is one of the oldest collections of stories in Indian literature. It is unknown how long these stories were related orally, but it was not until around 200 B.C.E. that they were written down. They were collected by a priest-scholar-teacher, named Bidpai, and were used to teach young princes how to understand a diversity of people, so that they might one day rule more wisely. By the silk road, *The Panchatantra* was transported to distant lands. Today scholars believe that this collection of stories is narrated in as many as fifty different languages; many traditions have borrowed stories from *The Panchatantra* (Wyndham, 1962).

This is also true of *The Jataka Tales*, which tell the birth stories of the Gautama Buddha, an Indian religious leader and the founder of the Buddhist faith. These tales,

narrated by the Buddha, describe his journey through his past lives as both animal and man, which eventually lead to his becoming the “enlightened one.” These 547 tales of the Buddha were remembered and recorded by his followers after his death. *The Jataka Tales* include a number of tales pertaining to the transformation of humans and animals through reincarnation. These animal tales are rooted in a time when the Indian people lived closer to nature and found function and life in all that surrounded them. Trees, for instance were embodiments of spirits. Animals, though at one time perceived as the forest-dwellers’ equals, became endowed with supernatural powers which elevated their status to that deserving of worship and respect. This is an explanation for the presence of speaking animals in many of these tales. *The Jatakas* present the past incarnations of the Buddha as a deer, a woodpecker and a tortoise. Stories from *The Jatakas* have been divided into tales which stand alone in present-day collections of Indian folk literature. Such titles include "The Woodpecker, Turtle and Deer," "The Cunning Wolf," "The Woodpecker and the Lion," and "How the Monkey Saved His Troop." These didactic tales teach lesson in morality such as the importance of cooperation, independent thinking, sacrifice, honesty, respect for the elderly, friendship, determination, perseverance, the power and consequences of evil, and much more.

The following tale entitled, “Once a Jackal Always a Jackal,” is a representative example of the Indian Folk Tales pertaining to animals. This story is taken from the *Panchatantra*, one of the oldest sources of Indian Folk Tales. It goes as follows: In a certain forest, there lived a jackal. One time, it so happened that the jackal ventured into a village nearby because he could not find any food in the jungle. Spotting the jackal, a pack of dogs in the village began to bark and chase it. Harassed by the dogs, the jackal took refuge in the first doorway he could see. This was a dyers house and a tub full of indigo solution was sitting right ahead. In the darkness, the hungry and frightened jackal fell into the tub and when he came out his body had already turned blue.

When the jackal found its way back into the forest, the rest of the wild beasts were afraid of this strange creature. The jackal then addressed them and asked them not to be afraid. He said, “when God realized that there was nobody to give protection to the animals of this jungle, he entrusted me to look after you all and dispatched me to

this forest. Now all of you must obey me and do as I say.” All the animals agreed. Thus, the jackal became the king of the jungle; he made the lion his Chief of State, and asked the fox to guard the palace. However, he banished all the jackals out of his kingdom.

One day when the jackal was sitting on his throne, he heard the howling of a pack of jackals. Hearing this sound his eyes welled up with tears of joy and he too began to howl loudly like the other jackals. As soon as the other animals witnessed this, they realized their king was only a jackal. Among themselves they decided that the jackal had tricked them and must be punished. The jackal tried to escape but the animals such as the elephant, the lion and the cheetah tore the jackal into pieces and killed him on the spot.

Originally written in the Sanskrit language, the *Panchatantra* stories are didactic in nature. Variations of this story may be found in other traditions. Interestingly, the lion gets a high position in the jackal’s court due to its essentially majestic and forceful characteristics, on the other hand the fox, known to be cunning, is asked to guard the gates. In many traditions, the characteristics associated with the above mentioned animals are reciprocated. Additionally, although the story can be symbolically interpreted on many levels, the main teachings, nevertheless remain close to the two proverbs, “A leopard cannot change its stripes,” and “one cannot fool all of the people all of the time.” Perhaps, within the Indic tradition, associations of certain animals with a specific set of inherent characteristics specifically attributed to them could be traced back to the set of folk tales collected in the *Panchatantra* and *Jataka* (stories of Buddha’s earlier births) stories. Later in this essay this topic will be discussed in more detail.

The *Mahabharata* is the longest of all scriptures and all poems. It is three times as long as the Bible and eight times as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together (Seeger, 1967: xi). While it is believed it was first placed into written record by the Sanskrit sage, Valmiki, around the 2nd century B.C.E., Indian scholars cannot agree if the poem in its oral state dates back to 3000 B.C.E. or to 1500 B.C.E. Western scholars believe it is somewhere between 1700 B.C.E. and 700 B.C.E. Regardless of which account is more accurate, both Indian and Western scholars indicate this could be the oldest example of literature originating in India. The *Mahabharata* is an epic

encompassing the dynastic struggles of two branches of one family. The basic story is simple: two clans, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, fight for the rich land near what is now the city of Delhi, but B.A. van Nooten, in his introduction to Buck's English translation of the *Mahabharata*, argues that "it should be understood as a re-enactment of a cosmic moral confrontation, not simply as an account of a battle" (Buck, 1973). This significance is exhibited primarily in the relationship between the god, Krishna, and the Pandava prince, Arjuna. The continuing significance of the *Mahabharata* for contemporary Indian and world culture is demonstrated by the use of stories from the *Mahabharata* in contemporary Indian and Indian Diaspora Literature.

The *Ramayana* is one of the most widely recognized and revered texts in India. It is also quite popular throughout Asia. B.A. van Nooten, introducing William Buck's *Ramayana*, says that "Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia and even the Philippines, to name only a few, are places where the Rama story was introduced and where it was accepted by the people and incorporated into their own cultures" (Buck, 1976). This 24,000 couplet poem is a romantic tale focusing on the ideal man and woman, Rama and Sita. In the tale, Rama is a multidimensional figure who teaches Indian boys about being perfect sons, brothers, husbands and kings. He is regarded as exemplary because, despite his exalted status, he is concerned about the daily life of the world and the question of how to fulfill one's duties in life. Sita embodies perfection as a wife and a woman. Tender, beautiful, and compassionate, she is a role model to Indian girls. To this day, the impact of the *Ramayana* is felt on the Indian politics, modern Indian literature, art and the daily lives of the people of India.

The history of Nepal is intimately connected with that of India. One of the legendary explanations for the name, "Nepal," demonstrates this close association. According to legend, two demon kings were oppressing the people of the Kathmandu Valley. These demons were vanquished by Pradyuma, Lord Krishna's son, who had traveled from India with his father. The victorious Pradyuma then married the daughter of a king. Before returning to India, they made obeisance to Lord Pasupatinah who gave them a favor that the Sage Nemi will be the protector of their land. Thus the postulation that "Nepal" means the land protected by the Sage Nemi (Sharma, 1992).

Like the early literature of India, the early literature of Nepal was written in Sanskrit as well. The subsequent surviving literature is written in Nepali, also known as Gorkhali, Parbatiya, and Khas-kura, the Indo-Aryan language that has become over the last two centuries the national language of Nepal. Between 1769 and 1846 many of the great works of Sanskrit literature were translated including large sections of the *Mahabharata*, various *Puranas* and native histories and chronicles of dynastic lists, temple records and religious myths giving shape to an important branch of native historiography.

A Brahmin youth, Bhanubhakta (C.E. 1814-68), according to Riccardi (189: 444), is considered by most native critics to be the most important figure in Nepalese literary history and his *Ramayana*, written between 1841 and 1853, is the single most important poetic work in the language. Other authors continued this process of translation, making Sanskrit classics available to a wider readership. The 19th century writer Lalita Tripura Sundari Devi, the youngest wife of King Ranbahadun Shah, translated the *Rajdharna* into Nepali (Sharma, 1992).

Folk Tales of West Asia

West Asian literature can, for the purposes of this work, be divided into three major sections, namely: Arabic, Persian and Turkish. A more detailed examination of this literature is warranted, in a study exclusively devoted to this region. However, let us briefly examine some of the highlights of the literature of West Asia.

Persian folk tales have been linked to those of India. Asha Dhar (1978) suggests that a common heritage between the Indian and Persian languages indicates the two cultures may also have a common folk heritage. Used both to entertain and to pass on the morality of the culture, folk tales told in Persa carry the universal themes of good overcoming evil ("The Sultan and the Pious Baker" and "King Zohak and the Evil Spirit"), the price of greed ("The Lost Treasure" and "Lust for Gold"), and the perseverance of love. In Persian tales of love and romance, instances of forbidden or contended love are identified in stories such as "Fereidun and Ferida" and "Saleem and

Salma." In these stories, the titles themselves suggest that the two lovers were meant to be, and therefore must be, together.

In her collection of Persian folk tales, Forough Hekmat (*Folk Tales of Ancient Persia*, 1974) tells of her personal experience growing up in Iran where those who were unable to attend schools were tutored by storytellers. In Iran, storytellers were valued as transmitters of knowledge and they carried the folk tradition of Persia with them from city to city, educating children and families about the ways of the Persian world. Stories were based on political and social events from history and then fashioned into folk tradition. Such tales took on colorful dimensions to enhance their entertainment appeal, yet they still functioned to instruct Persians about their history and culture. Some examples of tales with a didactic and tutorial function are: "The Lion and the Donkey," historical "Cat-King and the Mice" and "Black Colt," and cultural lessons "Little Miss Ladybird" and "Little Miss Frog." Hekmat's work, *Folk Tales of Ancient Persia*, reflect her own effort to explore complex issues such as the individual's search for purpose in life, the absolute belief that the will of the individual succumbs to destiny, prejudice against women and the absurdity and conceit of war.

In terms of stories illustrating multiple cultural cross currents, the folk tradition of Afghanistan is just as rich as her northwesterly neighbors Persia and Turkey. Asha Dhar, in *Folk Tales of Afghanistan* (1982), notes that many Afghan folk tales are clearly adaptations of those told by their neighbors. For example, many tales from Afghanistan are grounded in Islam ("The Prophet and the Khalifa"), which emphasizes filial devotion, honesty, and humility as in "The Blind Rider." Tales from Afghanistan exploring these lessons could be adaptations from stories grounded in Buddhism or Confucianism found in Eastern Asia. Afghanistan, due to her geographical location, and being the historical seat of Buddhism, can be recognized for its bridging of the Asian and African folk tale traditions. One story which illustrates this integration is "Princess Liyan of Bakhtar." In this story, Chinese and Persian characters encounter a number of adventures, including traveling upon the classical Arabian magic carpet.

Classical Literatures of West Asia

The literature of this region has a long and distinguished history. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, first recorded four thousand years ago, is one of the true classics of world literature. Seen by many scholars as either verification of, or the source of the Biblical story of the Flood, this Babylonian epic was written on twelve large tablets containing some three thousand lines. The hero of the tale, Gilgamesh, is a combination of both god and man. His companion in adventure is the wild man, Engidu (or Enkidu). During their adventures, they are met by the goddess Ishtar, who falls in love with Gilgamesh. Spurning her advances, Gilgamesh inadvertently causes the death of Engidu, who has become like a brother to him. This exposure to mortality impels Gilgamesh on a quest for eternal life for the remainder of the text (*The Ancient World*). Sumaya Shabandar, in the introduction to his translation of the work, remarks that “the inevitability of death is the basic theme of the Epic” (Shabandar, 1994). The influence this text had had on the region is profound. Translations of this epic have been found throughout ancient Persia, Sumeria, Akkadia, Assyria and Anatolia (Turkey).

This region flourished both culturally and financially during the period known in Europe as the Early to Middle Medieval period. The wealth of royal patrons and the highly intellectual atmosphere combined with numerous scientific advances provided writers with an atmosphere conducive to the creation of masterpieces. A number of these are discussed below.

One of the masterpieces of Arabic prose, known as *The Road of Eloquence*, was compiled in the 10th century. *The Road of Eloquence* consists of the sayings of Ali, the prophet Muhammed's son-in-law, whose followers established a major division of Islam. Arabic poetic literature is particularly well developed. The 10th century saw the development of unfulfilled love as a major theme in the Arab narrative poetry. A good example of this is found in the anthology, *Book of Flowers*, compiled by Ibn Da'ud. Arab literary tradition is very rich and needs to be studied in greater detail to get an insight into Arab-American literature.

The simultaneous development of Persian literature is marked by many significant authors. The 9th century poet Nasr-ul din Abdurahman, who was called Jami

for having been born in the town of Jam, incorporated Sufi doctrine into his poetic composition *The Precious Pearl*. Even his romance, *Yusuf and Zuleikha*, incorporates the Sufi elements. This “romance” is fraught with frustration, as Zuleikha pursues Yusuf to the point of having him purchased and eventually imprisoned.

Hakim Sanai, who lived during the reign of Bahram Shah (C.E. 1118-1152), was a court poet who sought Sufi wisdom in *The Walled Garden of Truth*:

God is without cause
Why are you looking for causes?
The sun of truth rises unbidden
and with it sets the moon of learning.

This literary expression of religious devotion was not always appreciated at the time the writer lived. The 14th century poet Hafiz, for example, was critiqued by the orthodox religious groups of his time, but is now revered. In fact Hafiz was devoutly religious, as indicated by his pen name, Hafiz, which means “the memorizer” and refers to the fact that he memorized the Quran in its entirety.

Omar Khayyam, born in the latter half of the tenth century and who died before 1135, is famous in Europe and America for his *Rubaiyat* (translated into English by Edward Fitzgerald in 1859). He was considered of little consequence in Iran until recently because his religious convictions offended conservative religious groups. Harold Lamb, in the appendix to his historical novel, *Omar Khayyam: A Life*, believed him to be a court astrologer and mathematician (Lamb, 1934). His interest in astrology and astronomy is combined with his literary sensibilities in quatrain’s such as the following:

This Wheel of Heaven by which we are amazed
A Chinese lantern like to it we know--
The Sun, the candle; the universe, the shade,
And we like its unheeding shadow forms (Lamb’s translation, 1934).

Apparently his scientific views are precisely that which brought him “the antagonism of orthodox Islam” (Lamb, 1934).

Historical material was incorporated into the 11th century tales and legends, *Shahnamah*, written by the poet Abu al-Qasem Firdowsi. These tales include legends of Persian Kings and is considered a major work of literature and a national epic.

Perhaps the most significant in the development of Persian literature in general are the writings of Jalal al-Din Rumi, who lived in the early part of the thirteenth century. Rumi wrote in both Arabic and Persian, sometimes inserting Arabic into his Persian poetry, in order to achieve specific effects. Rumi’s works are widely available in English translation; most famous are translations by Nicholson and recently, by Baker. Born on September 30, 1207, Rumi was the son of a theology teacher. Upon his father’s death, Rumi assumed his father’s teaching responsibilities and his knowledge of religious literature is reflected in the many Quranic quotations and references to be found in his poetry and prose (Schimmel, 1992). Although this religious influence is significant, the most important factor in the development of Rumi’s poetic and literary inspiration seems to stem from his relationship with a man named Shamsuddin of Tabriz. Schimmel notes that “Jalaluddin [Rumi] and Shams[uddin] became inseparable; they spent days together and, according to tradition, survived for the space of months without the barest human necessities, transported as they were into the sphere of Divine Love.” In fact, his poetic references to Shamsuddin sound as though he is speaking of a being who provides divine inspiration. Rumi writes,

And when I write a letter
to my beloved friends,
The paper and the inkwell
the ink, the pen is he.
And when I write a poem
and seek a rhyming word--
The one who spreads the rhymes out
within my thought is he! (Schimmel, 1992).

The importance of this relationship, which seems to have ended swiftly due to pressures from Rumi's family and the community in which he was a religious teacher, cannot be overemphasized. It is at this time, particularly after the loss of Shamsuddin, that Rumi begins to truly blossom as a poet (Schimmel, 1992). The unstable socio-political climate due to the Mongol invasion of Persia and her neighboring countries contributed greatly to the migration of many scholars from Central Asia and Persia eastward.

E.G. Browne, in his *Cambridge History of Persian Literature* sums up the rich literary heritage of Persia in no less than four sumptuous volumes. Literary works of the post-revolutionary Iran are very rich as well, and has inspired many volumes of English translation from the Persian originals to make the Persian literature accessible to the Persian diaspora living in Europe, Canada and the United States. More on this subject will be discussed later in the essay.

Folk Tales of Korea, China and Japan

The great civilizations of Asia spread-out over immense areas, even so, they were separated one from the other by distance and slow communication. But, as has been seen their contacts were numerous and between them the cross-fertilization of ideas and culture was extensive. For this reason, close connections can be traced in the folk traditions of these countries, especially if located in geographical proximity, as are Korea, China and Japan.

Classical Korean literature has a rich and varied history. Korean script was invented in the 15th century, allowing literature to be written in the national language, rather than in classical Chinese. Until this time, most writers were scholars who wrote poetry, and most fiction was oral, and involved primarily adventure and romance stories. Because Korea has played a key role historically and geographically as the bridge between the continent of Asia and the islands of the Pacific, Korean folklore can be traced to a multiplicity of foreign lands, including China, Japan, India, Mongolia, Tibet, Manchuria and Siberia. Scholars have identified tales told in lands neighboring Korea as being very similar to those told in Korea.

Korean folk-tales are comprised of myths, legends, stories and fables which are very ancient and rich. These tales reflect the historical, political, religious and cultural background of the Korean people. However, scholars have only recently recognized the importance of these stories in the lives of the Korean people. As with the Indian tradition, Korean folk literature is a reflection of and is also an influence on, the daily lives of Korea's people. In a comprehensive analysis of Korean folklore, Zong In-Sob provides comparisons between Korean tales and those of Japan, China and other countries. For example, in Japanese tales, Buddhist monks or priests are honored and respected, and are thought to possess magical powers. In contrast, Korean tales do not treat Buddhist monks in this manner. Examples of this are found in such myths as "Three Stars" and the legends, "The Tiger Priest" and "The Two Brothers and the Magistrate" (Zong In-Sob, 1952). Indian tales largely reflect Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. In relation to the above, the Korean tales reflect a great number of religions and philosophies. Korean folklore has been influenced by six religious traditions: Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity and the Man-God religion. Those religions, more grounded in nature worship, such as Taoism and Shamanism, tend to dominate those myths explaining natural phenomenon (Zong In-Sob, 1952). Examples of stories in this component of Korean folklore are the myths "The Fire Dogs," "The Great Flood," and "The Seven Stars of the North." Prevalent themes in folklore are those connected to farming, which for thousands of years occupied 80 percent of the population (Zong In-Sob, 1952).

Buddhism arrived in Korea during the 4th century C.E. and lasted as the dominant principle in Korean political, cultural and religious behavior until the 14th century. Following the long reign of Buddhism, came a mixture of Confucianism, much more profound and lengthy in influence, and then Christianity prevailed. Tales referring to principles of behavior are likely to have arisen during the Confucian era. These would include specific themes dealing with motives of human life, principles of conduct, loyalty to the King, filial duty to one's parents, harmony between husband and wife, respect for elders and friendship. Tales referring to loyalty include the myth, "Dan-Gun, First King of Korea," and the legend, "Young Gim and the Robbers." A sample of Confucian tales that instruct one in filial duty to one's parents are the legends, "A Dutiful Son," and "Hong Do-Ryong, The Filial Tiger," and the fable, "The Aged Father." Those addressing

the principle of respecting one's elders include the myth, "The Deer, The Hare and The Toad." "The Story Spirits" and "Poisonous Persimmons" are fairy tales and fables addressing the same principle of respect for the elders.

By the middle of the 17th century, Christianity had been introduced in Korea. Scholars believe that the most apparent alterations to old stories, or the foundation for new ones, were inspired by the Korean Christians who had worked miracles. As noted earlier, the traditions mix and synthesize together different traditions. Scholars indicate that although the Korean life was altered with the introduction and adoption of Christianity, the Korean folk tradition which existed before Christianity, continued to dominate. "Although in later times Christianity became the most influential religion among educated people, it never produced folk tales of its own that could appeal to the Korean people in general" (Zong In-Sob, 1952: xxvii).

The animals in Korean tales, like those in other folk traditions, manifest supernatural powers and wisdom. For example, dragons, tortoises, dogs, bears, deer, hares, carp and toads are usually portrayed as having positive characteristics, while tigers, foxes, serpents and centipedes are depicted as having negative characteristics. Scholars believe that tigers must have been plentiful in the mountains of Korea, since they are often the protagonist of tales.

Transported and spread through the trade routes, Indian traditions and literature influenced many countries. The influence of Indian folk tales on the folk tales of other lands is documented. Tales and legends of Japan and China, for example, can be recognized as adaptations of the stories originally told in India. Scholars recognize that there are markings laced through the folklore which help indicate its modification as well as trace the place of origin. For example, those who have studied the Japanese tradition identify India as a main source from which tales, legends, fables and riddles arrived in Japan (Seki, 1963). Due to the profound influence of Korean culture on Japanese culture, one can trace those tales told in Japan which include the tiger to Korea, since the tiger is not found in Japan. Such Japanese tales use a modified name for "wolf" in place of tiger, but comparisons of the stories indicate they are otherwise identical. For example, according to scholars such as Zong In-Sob, the tiger in the

Korean tale, "The Tiger and the Persimmon," is equivalent to "Toraokame" ("tiger-wolf") which appears in stories markedly resembling those told in the Korean tradition about the tiger (Zong In-Sob, 1952: xx).

In 1940, Japanese cultural nationalists launched an enthusiastic campaign to promote Japanese culture. While scholars had earlier begun to collect and print tales and legends of Japan, one scholar, Kunio Yanagita, was commissioned by the government to pursue this study on a large scale. With no academic folklorists to turn to, Yanagita traveled to the rural mountains and remote villages to speak with farmers and fishermen to hear their tales. Like so many other traditions around the world, these stories were not found in books, nor taught in school. They reflected a body of knowledge passed on from the old to the young, generation after generation, in rice fields and fishing villages. Yanagita found that dozens of people he talked to could recount more than a hundred tales each. This local fieldwork uncovered most of those folk tales in print today. Such collections culminating from Yanagita's travels are *The Listening Ear Story Book* and thirteen volumes of *Zenkoku Mukashi-Banashi Kiroku* (*Records of Folk Tales*), published from 1942 to 1944.

Yanagita groups the various tales and legends according to their prominent themes. One such theme he labels "Caring for Unusual Children," under which would fall the popular Japanese tale, "Momotaro, The Peach Boy." Under the theme "Derived Folk Tales," Yanagita includes narratives of supernatural experiences, jokes and anecdotes featuring animal and plant characters. Popular animal tales include "The Wolf's Reward," "Kachi Kachi Mountain," and "The Monkey and the Crab." Those of Yanagita's supernatural theme include "The Woman who Came Down From Heaven," "The Fire Boy," and "The Girl without Arms."

Scholars who have studied the expansive assortment of folklore in Japan have appraised that between 80 and 90 percent of those tales told have been adapted from other countries. Many of the tales, however, reveal nuances marking them as uniquely Japanese. For example, over 90 percent of the tales told in Japan addresses conflicts between neighbors, an important issue in a crowded island nation such as "The Good Old Man and The Bad Old Man" (Seki, 1963). The Japanese folk tradition treats the

joke as a form of tale all its own. The joke particularly identifies Japanese peculiarities, since much of what is considered humorous is culturally rooted and guided. In other words, what is perceived as laughable in Japan may be inaccessible for those without that specific cultural heritage. As in India and Korea, Japan's folkloric history has, to some degree, been shaped by its religious and philosophical orientation, specifically that of Buddhism and Shintoism.

Chinese folk tales, like those of other lands, embrace a variety of source materials. Religious and philosophical influences are common in the tales, reflecting both indigenous and adopted beliefs. Legends including Chinese dragons, for example, often reflect Confucian morality. Chinese dragons symbolize royalty; a dragon with five claws (rather than only four) symbolizes the Emperor. Thus, stories about dragons generally reinforce (or subtly challenge) the Confucian hierarchy which places the emperor next to Heaven, and all others below him. This Confucianism is laid upon a basis of indigenous folk religion/philosophy. Tales which explore the origins of the universe, such as "The Origin of the World" and "The Goddess Nu Kua Creates Human Beings," reflect a different order to the universe. Nu Kua herself has generated a number of tales, such as "Nu Kua Mends the Sky" and "Nu Kua Marries Her Brother in the First Marriage."

"The Herd Boy and the Weaving Girl," also known as "The River of Stars," is a tale which anthropomorphizes natural phenomenon as a poetic metaphor. In telling the love story of the herder and the weaver, this tale explains the presence of the Milky Way--it is the river which separates the lovers all but one night a year. This tale is one of the seven great love stories of Chinese folklore, and is also important in Japan. Others include "The Snake Queen," and "The Fish Goddess," which both mix Taoist and Buddhist philosophies. There is a folk belief that animals which live for a very long time may eventually become magical and even take on human properties (such as the ability to speak).

Supernatural creatures--animals who can talk--are common in the folk tales of China. One of the most popular of these tales, related to the transmission of Buddhism to China, is "The Monkey King," whose story is told in full literary form in *The Journey to*

the West. the Monkey King is a mischievous monkey who possesses a boundless curiosity. Because of this, he leaves his home and his monkey family to discover the secrets of the monks living in the mountains. There, he becomes an apprentice of the martial arts. Monkey is known for the speed with which he can fly through the air, his magic pole which can shrink or grow large at his command, and the hundreds of tiny monkeys which can be created out of his hairs.

Other Chinese folk tales may be more historical in origin. Most of these chronicle the deeds of heroes, such as “Ching Wei Dams the Sea,” “K’ua-fu Races the Sun,” and “Hsing T’ien Dances with Shield and Battle Axe.” “The Ballad of Mulan,” for example, has as its basis a story which may have occurred at some point in Chinese history. Loving her father, a loyal daughter goes to war disguised as a man rather than allow her aging father to risk his life in battle. She proves herself a valiant warrior, the emperor’s favorite, and when the war is over, she returns to her parents’ home and once again dons feminine clothing. Other tales of masking gender also include a story about a girl who dresses as a boy in order to enter school. She falls in love with a poor boy she meets in school, but he is too poor for her to marry. The boy dies and the girl wails to Heaven. Finally her tears alert the Emperor of Heaven, who answers her pleas by opening the boy’s grave and allowing her to rest with him.

Classical Literatures of Korea, China and Japan

The classical literature of China is deeply rooted in her history. Although contemporary readers might look at such texts as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in terms of their narrative value, Chinese scholars regarded these works as histories, not as fiction. The Taoist/Buddhist influenced work, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, written by Tsao Hsueh-chin in the 18th century, was, when first written, regarded by its aristocratic author as a lower form. In the introduction to his 1958 translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Chi-chen Wang says that by virtue of being composed in prose, the 'novel' did not hold an elite position in the hierarchy of the literary genres. This phenomenon is by no means unique to the Chinese literature. Compared to prose, the poetic compositions have traditionally been considered scholarly achievement of a higher level. This is evident from the inclusion of *The Book of Poems*. It may be noted

here that *The Book of Music* was lost (or burned) under Shih Huang Ti's dynasty, except for one chapter, which was inserted in *The Book of Rites*. A set of nine books formed the fundamental materials used for scholarly education in China for hundreds of years. Additional texts in this set are: *The Book of History (Shu Ching)*, *The Book of Changes (I Ching--popular in the "West" since the 1960's)*, and *The Book of Rites (Li Chi)*. These texts are supplemented by other important books, both sets are critical to the study of classical literature. These books include: *The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu)*, *Great Learning (Ta Hsueh)*, *Doctrine of the Mean (Chung Yung)* and *The Book of Mencius (Meng Tzu)*. English translations (and explanations) are readily available for each of these texts, which have had a profound influence on the development of Chinese intellectual culture for hundreds of years. Chinese scholars who wished to be placed in government jobs had to sit for examinations (the system was meant to be a meritocracy) on these primary texts of classical literature. *The Book of Poetry* is probably the most accessible for those not educated in the classical tradition.

The most popular traditional Chinese text is the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It was compiled by Lo Kuan-chung circa C.E. 1368. Lo united stories from the period of the Three Kingdoms (221-265 C.E.), to create a work which is celebrated for its description of loyalty and bravery. The key figures of this novel--the brilliant General Ts'ao Ts'ao, the ruler Liu Pei, the strategist Chu-ko Liang, Chang Fei, the loyal blood brother of Liu Pei; and the noble general Kuan Yu--have all become integral parts of the popular culture of China. Chinese immigrants have brought these characters with them wherever they have traveled. The general Kuan Yu, for example, has been apotheosized as the Chinese God of War--Guan Gung, and statues and paintings of him can be found in many Chinatown businesses (as well as temples). All of the characters have found life in the Chinese opera.

Related to the fact that the women played an important role in the development of the Japanese Kano script, women's contributions in the development of the written Korean language is notable. Among these, the 16th century poet Hwang Chin, for example, is remembered for richly symbolic love poems such as *Taking Leave of Minister So Se-Yang*. The dramatic narrative, *A Woman's Sorrow*, by another 16th century poet, Ho Nansorhon, is another example of this tradition.

Even in the hands of male authors, the concerns of women were well represented by Korean writers. The longest Korean story *The Nine Cloud Dreams* was written by Kim Man-joong (1637-1692) to console and entertain his aging mother. *The Nine Cloud Dreams* depicts the lives of many women. Commenting on the story of a man's eight-wives, Richard Rutt writes in his introduction to *Virtuous Women: Three Masterpieces of Traditional Korean Literature*, "The ability of the eight women to live together is of greater concern than their relations with their husband." Written by an unknown author, *The History of Queen Inhyon* delivers a "heightened account" of court life, emphasizing the noble qualities of male characters, the Confucian virtues of the King, and purity and loyalty of the queen, in contrast to the scheming woman, Chang Huibin. The heroine of *The Song of the Faithful Wife, Ch'un-hyang* is a daughter of an aristocrat and a dancing girl, who is secretly married to an aristocrat's son. They are parted when her husband's father is reassigned to a different post. The new governor desires Ch'un-hyang, but she refuses him and is imprisoned. Her husband returns as an inspector, saves his wife and punishes the lecherous governor.

Prose became a major literary genre in Korea after 1598, introduced through a failed Japanese invasion. Ho Kyun's (1569-1618) novel, *The Tale of Hong Kiltong*, demonstrates a new literary awareness of social problems and the lives of non-aristocrats. Other authors, such as Kim Man-joong in *The Nine Cloud Dreams*, wrote in the Korean vernacular language known as **eunmoon**, making their literature much more accessible to the Korean people. *The Story of Hingbu and Nolbu* which combines the supernatural with traces of realism was also written in the **eunmoon**. Park Jiwoon (1737-1805) wrote satires such as *The Admonition of the Tiger* and *The Story of Yangban* in Chinese. These satires of human foibles constituted moral and intellectual treatises similar to the writings of Im Je (1549-1587) who wrote *The History of Flowers* and *The Annals of Soo Sung* (Chung, 1989).

The aristocratic tradition did continue for some time, however; the work of Lady Hong (1735-1815), a member of the court, is a primary example. Lady Hong was a diarist who recorded court life in her *Random Record in the Midst of Leisure*. She also contributed to the genre of travel writing in her *Diary of Sightseeing Tour of Kwanbok*.

Japanese literature has a strong poetic background. Some of the earliest examples of Japanese literature are poetic in nature. For example, the anthology *Manyo-Shu (Collection of Myriad Leaves)*, compiled around C. E. 759, contains more than 4,500 poems, some of which were originally written at least a century earlier.

In C.E. 905, four poets compiled and edited *The Kokin Waka-shu* by Imperial command. Three generations of poets are represented in this collection, which includes poems regaling the seasons, of parting, of traveling and many love songs. This collection of court poetry, composed largely for social occasions, such as birthdays, deaths and parties, is composed in **Tanaka**, a thirty-one syllable verse. This type of poetry was particularly useful in court life, as men and women were not allowed to directly address one another. Both men and women had to develop a high degree of competence in the Tanaka form in order to engage in romance and courtship (Honda, 1970).

Of equal importance to the *Manyo-shu* and the *Kokin Waka-shu*, is the anthology known as the *Shin Kokin-shu (New Kokin-shu)*, which was begun in C.E.1201 by Teika Fujiwara. This anthology of poetry is more religious in character than the previous two. Significant contributors include Priest Saigyō, Priest Jichen, Fujiwarano Yoshitune, Fujiwarano Toshinari, Princess Shikishi, Lady Izumi Saikibu and the Emperor Go-To Ba.

In addition to poetry, another characteristic genre of Japanese literature is the literary diary, an important example of this is the *Tosa nikki (Tosa Diary)*, by Tsurayuki. Reflective essays of Buddhist priests were also written, such as *The Ten Foot Square Hut*, tentatively ascribed to Kano-no-Chomei, which relates the reflections of a recluse retired from the chaos of the world. This religious meditation is balanced by more worldly concerns in *The Tales of the Heike*. The Heike had been a ruling clan and this tale documents their military exploits, adventures and eventual downfall. Eventually, the Heike clan was destroyed by the Minamoto family.

Perhaps the best known Japanese novel outside of Japan remains *The Tale of Genji* (C.E. 1010-21) written by Lady Murasaki (Murasaki Shikibu) who was born in C.E.

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978 during the Heian period. At this time, aristocratic women with literary acumen were highly sought after to be members of the court, and Lady Murasaki joined the entourage of Empress Akiko. After the early death of her husband, she turned to Buddhism for solace. *The Tale of Genji* is a biographical novel about Prince Hikaru Genji, an elegant, talented, and gallant courtier and philanderer. The novel describes court life, human emotions and the beauty of nature, but ultimately delivers a religious critique of the vanity of life and the illusory nature of the world.

Folk Traditions of Southeast Asia

Vietnamese tales are rich in conveying the spirit of the people who have spent hundreds of years struggling against invasions and colonizing powers. Prevalent themes found in Vietnamese folklore center around national identity, individual identity, politics and morality in human interactions (Sun, 1968). Scholars of the Vietnamese folk tradition believe that historical migrations of people moving into the Indochinese peninsula came from the northern mountains of China and Tibet. This resulted, of course, in conflict between invaders and residents. The histories of the Kingdom of Van Lang and Au Lac have become mythologized in Vietnam. Van Lang was founded circa 500 B.C.E. in North Vietnam. The 18th king of the Hong Bang family, which had ruled for many generations, eventually succumbed to King Thuc Phan in 257 B.C.E. Thuc Phan united the two kingdoms of the region and renamed it Au Lac. In 207 B.C.E. a Chinese invader, Trieu Da, conquered the region and renamed it Nam Viet. Nam Viet existed under direct Chinese rule from 111 B.C.E. to C.E. 939 *The Story of the Golden Turtle* is about the construction of a citadel in the 3rd century B.C.E. for which a supernatural golden turtle helped King An-Duong, also known as Thuc Phan, build his defense, during his war with Trieu Da.

Folk tales were often conveyed through songs. These songs that tell of the daily lives of urban dwellers as well as agriculturists, also describe “the social, economic and political environment of traditional Vietnam” (Nguyen, 1994). Other elements embedded within Vietnamese folklore reflect Confucianism (tales dealing with filial piety and the importance of the son), Taoism (legends and tales about the natural world) and Buddhism (tales reflecting religious and moral values). An emphasis on the importance

of nature and a romantic sensibility are also hallmarks of Vietnamese folk tales. The folk tale "Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh" (The Mountain Spirit and the Sea Spirit) is a romantic story. Both spirits wish to marry a princess. Though the water spirit is chosen as her husband, the mountain spirit, with the aid of the people, vanquishes him and triumphantly takes the princess as his bride. This personification of nature reflects the people's anxiety over annual flooding in the Red River Delta.

Other stories deal with the relationships between men and women, and with the genesis of the Vietnamese people. "The Sea-Dragon and the Immortal Fairy" is the story of how the King Sea-Dragon, Lac-long, married the Queen Immortal Fairy, Au-co. She then gave birth to a hundred sons. Citing their different races, the king leaves his wife, taking with him to the sea fifty of their sons. The Immortal Fairy, Au-co, took her fifty sons to the mountains where they developed agriculture.

Laotian literature has roots in India and China. The written language and Buddhist traditions, which are intimately connected, came from India via Sri Lanka (Ceylon). The Lao language is also closely related to that spoken in Thailand (Fincher and Kaigavongsa, 1993). Laos has been chiefly an agricultural society organized around **Wats** or temples. Some Lao folklore describes natural phenomenon with literary connections. Such a tale is the story "The Frog that Eats the Moon," which offers an explanation of the natural phenomenon of lunar eclipse, while incorporating a legend from the Indian *Upanishads*. Creation myths include those which describe the creation of humanity in general, for example, the tale "Trouble in the Kitchen" (Fincher, 1993). Others describe the beginnings of the Lao people in particular, as in the story of the mother of the Ai Lao, in which the nine brothers are considered to be the founders of the Lao people. Xieng Mieng is the supreme folk hero of Lao literature. Like the Chinese hero, the Monkey King, Xieng Mieng lived by his wits and the many stories involving him challenge the everyday common sense people take for granted.

The Khmer people of Cambodia have a rich culture which incorporates many elements of the surrounding nations. For example, the Indian epic, *The Ramayana*, is not only the subject of some of the sculptures at Angkor Wat (from the 12th century), but also the basis of one of the oldest known Khmer poems, *The Reamker* (17th century).

Buddhism was another important cultural influence from India. There is a body of poems known as *Chbap*, or Code of Behavior (Bosley, 1979). It is inspired by *The Vinaya Codes* or *The Subhashitas*. Indianization occurred in Cambodia over a period of a thousand years, before the creation of the Khmer kingdom in the 5th century C.E. India, Hinduism and the Sanskrit language became associated with the Cambodian courts, whereas, the Cambodian and the Khmer languages became associated with the villages of the common people and with folk religion (Chandler, 1983).

Like Korea, Hong Kong and Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia also experienced colonization. Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch. After a strong presence of the Portuguese, Malaysia also was colonized by the Dutch and the British. The history of the region is one of cultural mixing, which was at times forced. Hinduism and Buddhism were early cultural influences, which were combined with Muslim influence in the 13th century. Myanmar (previously known as Burma) shares a similar cultural heritage, having been colonized first by China in 1824, and more recently by Britain from 1886 until after the second world war.

Bali, although also situated in an area largely dominated by Muslim influence, has been primarily Hindu in terms of culture and literature, because the trade and cultural exchanges from India date back to the time before the arrival of Islam in Indonesia.

Some forms of Thai written literature developed from the oral stories of country people. Most early Thai literature incorporates religious mythology, particularly that of Buddhism and Hinduism. Thus, many Thai folk tales belong to the class of tales frequently recited during religious holy days on temple premises (*Essays on Thai Folklore*, Phya Anuman Rajadhon). Many of these are inspired by the Indian *Jataka Tales*, which tell of Buddha's many lives, focusing particularly on the ten most recent lives of Buddha. These are known in Thai as the *Chadok*. Indian religions and cultural traditions were passed on to Thailand through Burma.

Classical Literature of Southeast Asia

The classical literature of Vietnam was written in both classical Chinese and the national language “nom.” In the early years of Vietnamese classical literature, works were composed mostly in Chinese because the courtier and monk scholars were schooled in a formal Chinese education. Early Vietnamese Buddhist monks were prolific writers. These largely religious writings were matched by the more secular writings of kings and generals. For example, Tran Quang-Khai, (C.E. 1241-1294), a prince (3rd son of King Tran Thai Tong), wrote the *Return to the Capital*, to celebrate a military victory. Expressing great patriotism, Tran writes, “Peace is here: let’s strive further/To safe keep the Fatherland forever.”

Works composed in the “nom” script in the 13th century were destroyed during the 15th century by Chinese officials. Only the names of poets, and a few fragments of their work, survive. By the 15th century, however, the “nom” script was in frequent use, soon surpassing the use of classical Chinese. Many authors wrote in both languages. Nguyen Trai (C.E. 1388-1442), writing under the pen name Uc-trai, composed one hundred and five poems in Chinese and two hundred and fifty-four in Vietnamese.

A significant literary figure is King Le Thanh-Tong (C.E. 1440-1497). In addition to his own writings, the king is important because he established a poetic club known as “The Fountain (refinement) of Poetry,” consisting of twenty-eight members. Five members of the club were chosen to compile and edit *The Collected Leisure Books Under the Southern Skies*. This volume contained 100 books recording all regulatory laws, reports, literary materials, etc. But it was lost, except some collections of poems by Le Thanh Tong and members of his club. The king also commissioned the collection of three hundred poems in the national language, *The Hong-duc Anthology of Poems in the National Language*.

Nguyen Binh-Khiem (C.E. 1491-1585), known as “Trang Trinh” by the Vietnamese people, wrote by the pen name, the White Cloud Hermit. He was one of the first independent scholars not tied to the court. He wrote one thousand poems in Chinese and one hundred poems in Vietnamese, the latter of which are collected in *Bach Van's Poems in the National Language*.

Dao Duy-Tu (C.E. 1572-1634), unlike the previous authors, came from a family of actors rather than aristocrats. This probably influenced his writing both in form, content and style. He is known to have written a drama as well as poetry. He used the language of folk songs and sayings rather than relying on oft-repeated literary allusions.

Plaint of a Soldier's Wife, by Dang Tran Con (C.E. 1710-1745) is a ballad written in classical Chinese which appeals to a non-aristocratic audience. Written during a time when it seems that the government troops may have been hard on the common people, *Plaint of a Soldier's Wife* describes the tragedies of war and in particular the hardships that war imposed on the common people. Because of its poetic beauty and significance to this audience, most of whom could not read classical Chinese, several writers translated it. One such translator was Doan Thi Diem (C.E. 1705-1748). She translated the work into Vietnamese verse, thereby making it accessible to the people who then had access to it, in its oral form. Even those people who could not read, could hear the poem, and identify with the thoughts expressed in the composition. Although, war, suffering and separation were common themes for Chinese and Vietnamese poets, this particular translation in verse form has historically been the most popular.

It is very important to note the contribution of women writers to vernacular Vietnamese literature. Although women have been written about for centuries only a close examination of the authorship of vernacular literature provides testimonial to the role of women in the composition of creative vernacular literature in Vietnam.

The concerns of some Vietnamese women are expressed in the poem *A Plaint Inside the Royal Harem*. In this poem, Nguyen Gia-Thieu (C.E. 1741-1798) records the fate of thousands of royal concubines. Modern scholars view it as a vehement critique of the excesses of the ruling class. A female poet, Ho Xuan-huong (mid-18th-early-19th century), wrote honestly as well as humorously about the lives of concubines in Vietnam. The daughter of a bourgeois and the successive concubine of two government officials, she incorporated satire and social protest, particularly against the practice of polygamy. Nguyen Dinh Hoa writes that Ho's often ribald poetry is "considered as something new in Vietnamese literature both for the themes and for the original style in which she treated them." For example, she writes:

One gal lies under quilts, the other chills.
To share a husband--damn it, what a fate!
I'll settle for just ten, nay, five mere times.
But fancy, it's not even twice a month! (Nguyen, 1994).

The Tale of Kieu is a long poem by Nguyen Du (C.E. 1766-1820), who went to China once, as the head of a diplomatic delegation. The work contains references to a Chinese novel under the same title, and in this way, it also bears a testimonial to the author's scholarship of the Chinese literature. *The Tale of Kieu* is considered, by many scholars, to be the master piece of Vietnamese literature. It is read as an essential part of high school curriculum in Vietnam; many books have been written about it and it plays a central role in the Vietnamese literary repertoire. The main interest lies not in the story itself which Nguyen adapted from a Chinese story, but in his poetry which is sublime. Confucianism and Buddhism are mingled in the work which is a two part story about a woman named Kieu. The first part depicts her misfortune and degradation, while the second part is about her redemption and happiness. At the very end, Kieu is reunited with her lifelong love, Kim Trong, whom her sister, being actually his wife, urges her to marry. This narrative poem contains a myriad of emotions including the rich and diverse portrayal of love, both youthful and mature.

Cambodian classical literature, as mentioned earlier, combines the cultural influences of several nations with the drive and creativity of the Cambodian people. Both Khmer and Sanskrit were used in Cambodia in the 7th century C.E. Khmer prose was used to write largely about secular matters, while Sanskrit poetry was used to write of both religious and court matters.

In the post-Angkor era (C.E. 802-1431), the influence of both, Theravada Buddhism and Thai culture, increased in Cambodia. By the 17th century Cambodia was dominated by its powerful neighbors, Siam (Thailand) and Vietnam (Chandler, 1983). At this time, a local version of the Indian *Ramayana*, known as *The Reamker* (meaning the glory of Rama) became the most important piece of Cambodian classical literature. This epic poem contains only some of the Indian versions, both, altered to fit a Theravada Buddhist frame, and translated into Khmer. The story of Prince Ream (Rama), his wife

Sita, and his younger brother Leak (Laksmana) involves their adventures in the forest. The poem's episodes were performed by palace dancers and also acted out in village festivals in the countryside.

In the 17th century, Vietnamese intrusions developed into an annexation of Cambodia's maritime access, the city now known as Saigon was once known in Cambodian as Prey Nokor. The 18th and 19th centuries saw continuous invasions by, or influences from, Vietnam and Siam (Thailand). After a brief independence in the 1850s under King Duang, the French colonial period began. Cambodian literature of the nineteenth century incorporates many of the themes of the previous period. A verse chronicle composed to celebrate the restoration of Wat Baray in 1856 includes the thematic antithesis of the "wild" countryside as opposed to the "civilized" court. The lives of the characters follow patterns from *The Reamker* and from Buddhist ideology. The establishment of Cambodia as a French protectorate from 1863 until 1941 meant systemic colonialism. This was followed by a waning of French control until its end in 1953 (Chandler, 1983). This is an important informational piece in terms of contextualizing Vietnamese-American literature.

Thai literature was historically a court literature, written by princes, monks and courtiers. The thirteenth century saw the development of a Thai/Siamese alphabet by King Ram Kamhang. Descriptions of court life form a significant portion of the subject of traditional Thai literature. The remainder is largely on the topic of Buddhist morality. The main focus of the poetic literature of this time, i.e., the "journey poem" is basically travelogue-like in nature. Later Thai poetry, of the 18th and 19th centuries, provides the reader an insight into the daily lives of many classes of Thai society. The twentieth century has seen the expansion of education beyond the aristocracy, and subsequently, the concerns and experiences of the many peoples have become part of the literary tradition--including native Thai ethnic groups, Malay groups of different religious persuasions and ethnic Chinese, largely concentrated in urban areas. India, China and Portugal made very significant cultural impacts on Thailand. There are large populations of Chinese and Portuguese settled in Thailand. Additional influences include the Dutch, English, and French, who arrived in the mid-17th century, and the Americans who came in the 1820s.

The Romance of Khun Chang Khun Phan is a love story which is also a chronicle of beliefs and social customs before Western contact. It was composed explicitly for oral recitation. The story is of a love triangle which developed from popular stories about two men who compete for the love of a woman who once was their childhood playmate. The story ends with the death of the woman, who does not love either of her two suitors. Romantic literature in Thailand also owes a debt to Indian romantic literature, for the tales which consist of supernatural and heroic adventures. This type of poetry lends itself well to traditional Thai dramatic performances. The Indian *Ramayana* provides the basis for the Thai *Ramakian*, which nevertheless includes original episodes different from those in the Indian text. Despite the interest in *The Ramayana*, only a few scenes from the Indian *Mahabharata* were translated in Thailand. *The Romance of Inao* is adapted from a Javanese original epic involving the exploits of a Javanese hero-prince. The story known in Thai as *The Samkok* is an adaptation of the Chinese classic, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It was translated in the 18th century by a Thai poet-translator. *The Rajadhirat* is a translation of the Mon history of the war between the Mon King Rajadhirat and the Burmese King Farang Manggong. This history is written in the form of an historical romance.

A famous Thai court poet, Sunthorn Phu (C.E. 1786-1855), composed *The Phra Abhai Mani*. This romantic tale is about the adventures of a prince, who, upon leaving home, encounters many adventures. These adventures focus on multiple marriages, including marriage to the daughter of a giant, a sea-giantess, a mermaid as well as to European characters. There is some confusion over the authorship of the epic *Phra Law*. It was composed by either King Boromatrailok (C.E. 1463-1488) or King Narai (C.E. 1647-1688). This text combines both prose and verse to tell the tale of the hero Phra Law, a young, handsome and married king. Two princesses fall in love with him and use the magic of Pu Chao, a forest genie, to entice the hero away from his own lands, his mother and his wife into their kingdom. The three become lovers, much to the consternation of their parents, as the two kingdoms have long been enemies. After the death of the lovers, their parents make peace between the two lands.

King Narai and his court poet composed *The Phra Samthakhot*, which is inspired from the Indian *Jataka Tales*. Due to early influences of Indic religions and cultures,

Sanskrit poetry provides the basis for much of classical Thai literature, as in the case of *The Mahajat*, the story of the previous incarnation of Buddha, which was translated into Thai as *The Mahachat Kham Thet*.

Folk Tales of Central Asia

Turkish folklore scholar, Somnath Dhar (1978), submits that the oldest stories about gods, goddesses, evil and humanity originated in Turkey. Stories can be found on clay tablets dating back to the Hittite Empire (1700-1450 B.C.E.) dealing with gods of the Hittite pantheon, yet they are written in a linguistic amalgamation of Sanskrit, Greek and Latin, which indicates that there was cultural contact between the people who spoke these languages. Parallels to the contests between gods and goddesses documented by the Turks "The Bitter Bitten" can also be found in Greek, Thai, Indonesian and Indian mythology (Dhar, 1978). However, it should not be assumed that the folk literatures of the world are related and therefore be thought that "it is all the same story." Nations, cultures, peoples and their literatures are sufficiently different from each other to warrant individual study. When the panoramic picture which consists of these individual studies is put together, one may be in a better position to analyze the common features which connect the folk literature of many countries, as well as to examine those characteristics which lend the literature of a certain people its individuality and thus make it unique.

A number of tales told today in Turkey are familiar in theme and content to those found around the world: animals transforming into humans, *The Tailor and the Snake*, the pursuing of one's romantic desires, *The Three Lovers* and *The Lemon Girl*, the testing of one's loyalty to family and king, *The Youngest Prince*, and a childless couple magically receiving a supernatural child, which can be found as one of the most popular tales in Japan, *Momotaro, the Peach Boy*. Other tales are recognizably Turkish in particular elements. For example, a witch rides on a bottle, rather than on a broomstick; a wedding feast may continue for forty days and forty nights (forty is a significant number in much of the folk tradition in West Asia); and Arab genies make frequent appearances in Turkish folk tales. A particular marker of Turkish tales is the reference to Allah. Like the Indian *Jatakas*, which chronicle the life of Buddha, many

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Turkish tales were written by scholars well versed in religious traditions. These scholars often used teachings and images from the Koran to comprise their own tales.

The early written literature in the Mongolian language began in the 13th century, in a script borrowed from the Uighur Turks. The most outstanding classical work is *The Secret History* (1240), a legendary history of Chingis Khan. It was probably composed by an anonymous author soon after the death of Chingis Khan. This work was meant to be an official account of the origins of the ruling clan. For this reason the audience for this text was probably limited to the nobility. The text records the oral stories about Chingis as well as the family's personal poetry. The action of the text takes place in a geographical region which spans parts of the former Soviet Union, the Mongolian People's Republic, the People's Republic of China, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Khan 1984).

Another, interesting work is a little book containing verses (a dialogue of a mother and her son) written on birch bark and discovered near the Volga river. *Altan Tobchi* or *The Golden Button*, a historical chronicle, was written in C.E. 1604. The classical works in the Mongolian language also include epic works. It should be noted that many people of Turkic origin are from Central Asia. Therefore, there is a distinction between the peoples of Turkey, the West Asian country, and the Turkic ethnic groups.

The Influence of Asian Myths, Legends and Heroic Literature on Asian-American Literature

So how does the literary folk tradition of Asia fit into the body of Asian-American literature? Literature which is influenced, either explicitly or implicitly, by the form and content of Asian folk literature, is a small but significant segment of the larger body of work known as Asian-American literature. Discussing the American literature written by South Asian-Americans, Roshni Rustomji-Kerns says that “[e]choes and influences from the classical and folk literatures of South Asia, from South Asian Islamic literature and from the flourishing traditions of South Asian oral literature appear in the writings of South Asian-Americans whether or not they are conscious of the connections” (Rustomji-Kerns 1995:3).

Like other immigrant groups, in adapting to the U.S., Asians have retained their cultural heritage, as well as modified them in accordance with their experiences in the U.S. Even translations of Asian folk literature are often modified for the American context. In his following statement published in *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese-American and Japanese-American Literature*, “Come All Ye Asian-American Writers of the Real and the Fake,” Frank Chin emphasizes the need among contemporary Asian-American writers to understand the folklore traditions of their heritage. These traditions are relevant to contemporary Asian-Americans because of the effect they have had on Asian-American history and philosophy.

Chin argues, for example, that Chinese folk traditions guided the actions of immigrants coming to America. After Chinese immigrants began coming to America in 1848, Chinatowns were established out of common experience and a yearning for social, ethnic, and cultural support among immigrants. This impetus to draw together was matched by social and even legal policies of the dominant society which segregated Chinese immigrants. Family and district associations, known popularly as “tongs,” arose to fulfill both the social and economic needs of Chinese-Americans who were denied services by the larger American community. Chin cites historical accounts to verify that not only did a folk tradition exist, having come with the Chinese to

America, but that it was so embedded within their cultural and ethnic identity that it became the foundation upon which the benevolent associations operated within Chinatown. One of the most powerful of such associations was the Lung Kong, an alliance of four families. In his examination of the bylaws establishing this association, Chin discovered the inspiration by and adaptation from the famous Chinese tale, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (c. 13th century). Codes of conduct for the coalition follow the directives of ethics and heroic traditions found in that tale.

In addition to exploring how Asian folk tradition played a functional role in the lives of Chinese-Americans throughout history, Chin also identifies the presence of elements of folk tales in Asian-American and Asian Diaspora literature. Several examples of early Asian- American writing incorporate folklore and traditional literary forms, not as a mere repetition of traditional forms and themes, but a reworking of those forms and themes within the context of America. Both Sam Wong's *An English-Chinese Phrasebook* (explored below) and the writings collected by Marlon Hom from the walls of the immigration detention facility at Angel Island in *Songs from Gold Mountain*, are markers for the beginning of contemporary Asian-American literary traditions. Shortly after the arrival of the first immigrants to America, several community newspapers began to circulate as early as 1854. In 1908, the *Chung Sai Yat Po* published historical writings, prose, fiction, poetry and the popular Cantonese vernacular rhymes known as *Gamsaan Go*, or Gold Mountain songs (Gold Mountain was the name the Chinese immigrants gave to America).

In *Songs from Gold Mountain*, Marlon Hom documents the poems carved into the walls of the Angel Island immigration detention station that operated in San Francisco Bay from 1911 to 1940. Angel Island is now a California State Park and the building and its 135 identifiable poems have been preserved. The frustrations and disillusion of those who were incarcerated come through the sometimes simple literary expression:

American laws, more ferocious than tigers:
Many are the people jailed inside wooden walls,
Detained, interrogated, tortured,

Like birds plunged into an open trap--
What suffering!

The use of figures of tigers and birds to illustrate the injustice of those in power and the victimization of those suffering under power is common in Chinese folklore; but here the tigers are not warlords and the birds are not suffering peasants. As immigrants (still in the immigration detention center), these men and women utilized their literary and cultural heritage to negotiate and understand their relationship to their new land. The stories and poems they created are, in turn, part of the vast mosaic which is the Asian-American literary heritage.

Three Chinese tales have been particularly significant in contemporary Asian-American literature: Lo Kuan Chung's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (c. 13th century); Shi Na'an's *The Water Margin* (a.k.a. *Outlaws of the Marsh*) (approx. 1550); and Wu Cheng En's *Journey to the West* (a.k.a. *The Monkey King*) (approx. 1592). These three texts are commonly excerpted as part of children's folk tale collections in Korea, Japan, China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. Contemporary Asian-Americans incorporate these Chinese tales into their own fiction. When referring to the fiction of Sui Sin Far, Diana Chang and Louis Chu. Chin writes, "The Chinese immigrants of America and England would think it strange for a Chinese from any part of the world not to know the heroic tradition (i.e., Ssu-ma Ch'ien; the strategy of Sun Tzu and Wu Chi; that life is war and all behavior is tactics and strategy)" (Chin, 1990: 34). Much of the philosophy guiding such tales is rooted in Confucianism. Themes include revenge, loyalty and balance, whether within oneself, towards one's spouse or parents or towards one's ruler.

Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) and Timothy Mo's novels *Sour Sweet* (1985) and *The Monkey King* (1979) are three examples of how Confucian ideology is renegotiated by Chinese immigrants in the context of their new homeland. In *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, Ben Loy, the protagonist, must decide between his father and the future of Chinese in America. Ben Loy's father Wah Gay, represents the old "bachelor society" in New York city's Chinatown, which has fostered and perpetuated a lifestyle absent of women and devoid of any real future or permanence in America. In order for Wah Gay,

and those like him, to be validated in their filial roles as sons, husbands and fathers, his son Ben Loy must carry out his own filial duty by following his father's example and leaving his wife back in China. If Ben Loy chooses to bring his wife to America, he paradoxically not only terminates his filial duty, but ultimately exposes and then extinguishes the bachelor society by (pro)creating the next generation.

The Monkey King is a popular element in Asian cultural productions. Hong Kong action movies, for example, make frequent use of the character of Monkey. He is also a popular figure in contemporary Asian-American literature. Laurence Yep, born in San Francisco in 1948 is a third generation Chinese-American. He is one of the most prolific writers of Asian-American children's literature. His *Dragonwings* received the Newberry Award. He specializes in literature for young adults. Although he does have several volumes of folk tale translations. *Tongues of Jade* (1991), *The Rainbow People* (1989) and his series of "fantasy" novels: *Dragon of the Lost Sea* (1982), *Dragon Steel* (1985), *Dragon Cauldron* (1991) and *Dragon War* (1992), incorporate folk tale elements in new and innovative forms. Yep's series is set in an unspecified time, but it incorporates elements of certain European folk traditions with Chinese traditions in a very contemporary way. His story of the dragon princess, Shimmer, and the peasant boy, Indigo reverses the common role of dragons as villains in English and Western European folk literature. The Monkey King's character dominates Yep's tales. Nevertheless, each of the other characters are allowed to maintain essentially their own separate individual personality. Consequently, the reader is struck by the freshness and distinctiveness of the various characters.

Maxine Hong Kingston's use of the legend of Fa Mulan, in her autobiography, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), is probably one of the best known uses of Asian folklore in contemporary Asian-American literature. It is also the most controversial, as Kingston has been critiqued by several scholars, both in America and Asia, for altering the traditional tale. On the other hand, she points out that traditions always change in useful ways over time and space. Of course these myths and legends are accurately passed on both in written and oral form, but each generation revitalizes these traditional literatures with their own retellings.

Like Chinese-American literature, Japanese-American literature also makes reference to tales originating in Japan, such as *Chushingura* and the classic children's folk tale, *Momotaro*. In the John Okada novel, *No-No Boy* (1957), Ichiro, the protagonist, is Momotaro to his mother. She believes Ichiro to have made his choice not to fight in WW II out of loyalty to her, and, moreover, to Japan. He is the "peach boy" who brings happiness into his aging parent's lives. This reference becomes the central irony to the novel.

Arab American Kahlil Gibran has inspired generations of American writers-Arab and otherwise-with his beautiful poetry and words of wisdom. Born in 1883 in Lebanon, Gibran moved to Boston at age twelve. His book of verse, *The Prophet* (1923), found in *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab American Poetry* is an all-time best-seller. Gibran did much to promote Arab American literature; in 1920, he organized a group of Syrian American writers called "The Pen League." His less popular, but more critically acclaimed works include *The Madman* (1918) and *Jesus the Son of Man* (1928). Gibran's poetry incorporates elements of Arabic literature and Syrian mythology. The images of animals, for example, often reflect this cultural heritage "The Fox" and "Love."

Contemporary Arab American writer, Eugene Paul Nasser, uses Arab folklore even more explicitly. His collection of prose poems, *Wind of the Land* (1979), both displays an interest in folklore, and incorporates images and sensibility drawn from Arab folk tales into a contemporary, second-generation Arab American chronicle. Nasser writes:

St. Maron, protect us from our humourless oppressors
Who don't know veal from mutton,
Forgive us, poor wayfarers,
Who left the meaningful, the holy land,
And play cards in our old age.
oof.
(from "East Utica" reprinted in *Grape Leaves*)

The Thai American science fiction writer, S.P. Somtow, perhaps because he writes science fiction and fantasy, incorporates ideas borrowed from mythological literature from many regions into his various works. Somtow Papinian Sucharitkul was born in 1952 in Bangkok. Raised in Europe, Somtow now lives in Los Angeles. His *Aquiliad Trilogy* (1983-1988) combines the mythology and history of Rome with those of American Indians. These satirical novels combine such elements as the American Indian Sasquatch with the Egyptian Sphinx. Somtow's novels *Starship and Haiku* (1984) and *Jasmine Nights* (1994) offer other elements of world culture combined into contemporary speculative fiction. In *Starship and Haiku*, for example, Somtow combines a Native Peoples' reverence for whales with characters which could have been drawn from classical Japanese Noh plays.

Vietnamese American writer Tran Dieu Hang, in the short story, "Zenith," (translated by Qui-Phiet Tran and published in *Asian America: Journal of Culture and the Arts*), incorporates traditional Vietnamese folklore into the beginning of a story about a woman coming to a certain self-understanding. The fairy tale, we realize as the story progresses, is not a myth at all, but rather the woman's life. In "Zenith," Tran writes, "At her most marriageable age, the woman in the story often thought of family life as a mystic religion and herself as its loyal follower. Many years later, however, she realized that she had only painted a beautiful picture full of unrealistic details that no longer remained on the canvas but disappeared entirely into the blackness of space."

The canvas of Asian-American literature especially Chinese-American literature, contains many details from Asian folk and classical literature. Through the use of the characters, themes, symbols and even forms, of folk and classical literature, contemporary Asian-American writers create new works reflecting both their rich heritage as well as the realities of their daily lives.

Types of Asian-American Literature

There are five major ways in which Asian-American writers negotiate the relationship between Asia and America in their literature, and within these basic forms can be found the majority of Asian-American literature. These five major groupings are:

1. Texts which focus entirely on Asia, without reference to the United States.
2. "Immigration literature," which focuses on the transition between Asia and America.
3. Literature which focuses primarily on life within the United States.
4. Texts which feature the "return" of protagonists from America to Asia as visitors or residents. The "return" may refer to a trip of a member or members of the second, third and other generations' to ancestral lands.
5. A small number of texts make no explicit reference to Asian-American experiences.

Salient Motifs in Asian-American Literature

Many scholars, such as Ramirez and Lee agree that the history of Asian-American literature began around the 1940s. American authors such as Pearl S. Buck introduced a different world, Asia, to Americans with her numerous critically acclaimed novels. C.Y. Lee was the first Asian-American author whose *Flower Drum* (1955) was made into a Broadway play by Rogers and Hammerstein, and a motion picture by 20th Century Fox. The American literature composed by those Americans who can trace their origins in Asia has been growing steadily. This section is meant to provide general themes which are often used to organize and understand Asian-American literature.

1. Asian-American cultures are part of a larger Asian diaspora which have evolved from diverse histories. Often these cultures show similar influences arising from their colonization, both by Asian colonizing forces and European colonialism. These similarities are matched by equally dramatic differences in experiences, as illustrated in Asian-American literature.
2. Asian-American literature reflects a global diversity.
3. The subject of Asian-American literature often involves the impact of Asian exclusion laws and other legal actions, such as the internment of Japanese-Americans, anti-miscegenation laws, alien land laws and others, on the everyday lives of Asian-Americans and their communities.

4. Asian-American literature reflects the origin, growth and development of specific ethnic enclaves. It also records the movement of individuals towards, within and away from these groups.
5. The impact of gender, class, national origin, time of immigration and generation on individual and community identity development are factors which are explored by Asian-American writers.
6. Asian-American literature explores the interaction between individuals of different genders, classes, national origins and generations, particularly as these differences are found within families and communities.
7. Contemporary Asian-American literature also reflects specifically American experiences, such as the adjustments, transitions and tensions involved in life in the United States.
8. The interaction between different ethnic groups and intra-Asian relations are recorded in Asian-American literature. This reflects the diversity of Asian communities in the United States in general and specifically within the modern American urban environment.
9. Literature by and about multiracial individuals and their interactions with their families and communities continues to be an important part of Asian-American literature.
10. The influence of both Asian folk and classical literatures on literature produced by Asian-Americans is often directly evident in literature produced by first generation authors, but is also clearly reflected in the works of subsequent generations.
11. There are both similarities and differences in how these themes are treated in Asian-American Literature across (and within) various Asian-American communities.

Critical Issues for Teachers

When reading Asian-American literature, it is important to maintain an awareness of the following issues:

1. The history of colonialism and conflict both within Asia, and between Europe and Asia, has contributed to the migration of Asian peoples throughout the world.
2. The development of Asian-American culture is inseparable from Asian-American history, and in particular the legacy of racially biased laws in the United States.
3. The stereotyping of Asians as perpetually “foreign” and “exotic” has influenced the literature of Asian-Americans. These ideas originated in the European travel literature of the Middle Ages and continues in contemporary media representations of Asians and Asian-Americans often to the effect of erasing the differences between people of different ethnicity, for example, Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Americans
4. Much of the richness of Asian-American literature is located not only in cultural specificity, but also in the large linguistic diversity among people of Asian ancestry. Asian-American literature often weaves English with Asian words, phrases and grammatical structures. This sometimes creates a whole new language, as in the written form of Hawaiian pidgin.

The Features of Asian-American Literature from 1875 to 2000

As mentioned previously, Asian-Americans, as a group are clearly difficult to define. In the past, Asian-Americans have been defined by what people generally thought was meant by the term “Oriental.” But this term itself has a confusing history and an indeterminate definition. Edward Said, in his landmark text of post-colonial literary theory, *Orientalism* (1979), writes, “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (1979:1). In the European context, the Orient was defined primarily in terms of West Asia. However, the definition changes with the change of context. Said writes, “The Americans will not feel quite the same about the Orient, which for them is much more likely to be associated very differently

with the Far East (China and Japan, mainly)." In other words, the term "the Orient" has no clear reference and, being so general, it is thus associated with vague and abstract images.

Many people consider that "the Orient" is a derogatory term by which the Occident differentiates the "other." During the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the term Asian-American, perhaps served to distinguish Asian-Americans as people who had their origins in Asia as opposed to Africa. Currently, some writers and cultural critics have begun to use the term Asian Pacific-American, which serves to be inclusive of Pacific Islanders. However, for many, this term does not include people whose origins are in the Indian sub-continent, Central Asia or West Asia, although these parts of the world are, geographically, situated in Asia. The geo-cultural scope of this essay therefore does include West Asia (Middle East and Central Asia), East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea), and South Asia (India, Nepal, and Southeast Asia). It should be noted that currently, in America, Asian-Americans maintain a strong presence in academic conferences, and in anthologies of Asian-American Literature. This essay aims to gain an insight into the vastly different backgrounds of Asian-Americans, and to learn about their rich literary heritage which may pave the way to improved mutual understanding and appreciation among the American people in general.

This section has been divided according to ethnicity only in order to provide an organizational and referential framework. We acknowledge the problems of this arrangement, one of which is that it does not account for authors of multiple ethnicities. In acknowledgment of this problematic, and partial solution, we have added a section which is marked not by ethnicity, but by geography. Because Hawai'i has a unique situation in the history of Asian-Americans, and has thus produced a unique and highly specific literature, a subsection devoted to it was deemed necessary. The subsections have been arranged in accordance with the historical development of the literatures in question. Thus, Chinese-American literature is placed first because a Chinese-American, Sui Sin Far (Edith Eaton), is believed to be the first Asian-American to

publish extensively in the United States. Later literatures, which have developed more or less simultaneously, are arranged in no particular order.

Although, the themes and structures of traditional Asian folklore and literature have held and continue to hold an important place in Asian-American literature, the development of Asian-American literature over the last hundred years owes just as much to the particular thrust of U.S. culture and history. It is particularly manifested in laws which affected each of the Asian-American groups. From the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the numerous anti-miscegenation laws in various states (rescinded by Federal Law in 1967), the Alien Land Law of 1913, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, and finally to the change in immigration law in 1965, legislation has always had a profound impact upon the distribution of Asian-American communities and thus on the literature which arises from these communities.

The additional influences of world literatures and the various ethnic literatures of the Americas has also shaped Asian-American literature. The specific realities of Asian-American life meet with the imagined realities of the body of fiction available to Asian-American writers. All writers are influenced by a combination of the "real" and the "literary," insofar as these two categories can be meaningfully separated. Indeed, it is more meaningful to discuss the ways in which they interconnect, because a writer's source of information regarding historical and sociological events and issues is often literary. But what the writer adds is the information which lies beyond the facts and figures of history. The writer provides creative inspiration, which paradoxically brings the reader closer to reality. Is this function more the realm of the ethnic writer? In reading the final section of this essay, we invite you to consider an argument made by Roshni Rustomji-Kerns in the introduction to *Living in America*:

After all, any literature can be read as ethnic literature. But it is usually only the dominant...literature...that escapes this designation as well as the limitations and the marginalization it often signifies for readers and critics not conversant with or interested in the cultures and histories of specific, nondominant, literatures (Rustomji-Kerns 1995:2).

As Rustomji-Kerns says, “any literature can be read as ethnic literature,” and thus the answer to the question of whether an ethnic writer is more responsible for history is “no,” because all writers should be so responsible. Equally important, however, is the implication in Rustomji-Kerns’ argument that it is the responsibility of the readers and critics of ethnic literature to read and analyze with a knowledge of specific histories and cultures.

Although strict definitions of any category are difficult to make, we define Asian-American literature, primarily, as literature written by and about Asian-Americans. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Asian-American literature may also include literature written by Asian-Americans which does not directly or indirectly address the lives of Asians in America. But who is an Asian-American and how does he fit in the over all picture of America, exclusively of any other region such as Canada or Mexico? Many people feel that an Asian-American's space within America is very difficult to define, and at best, it is a highly contested terrain. How is it to be defined? In the past, definitions have included only those who are American-born,³ and generally only those who are from East Asia count. Compared to the last few decades, the population of Asian-Americans in contemporary America is much more diverse, and it is difficult to determine which groups may not be included in these modern times. Asian-Americans inhabit urban, rural, agricultural and industrial sectors of the U.S. The people who came from Asia to the U.S. yesterday, and decided to call the U.S. “home,” are as much a part of the Asian-American population as those who have been in the U.S. for the last ten generations.

Today, migration is no longer unidirectional, Asian-Americans may travel regularly between the United States and Asia many times during the course of a single year. An Asian-American, today, may have relatives in various parts of Africa, South America, Australia, Europe and throughout North America. In other words, the progression and assimilation of the immigrants (the old “melting pot” theory) into the dominant culture of this nation has been a highly complex process. In this process, all the members who have become Americans, may influence one another, to varying degrees, mainly because they themselves are a product of their own cultural heritage.

3 See the introduction to *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, (1974).

In 1965, there were profound changes in the immigration laws of the United States. For example, for the large Chinese and Filipino communities, 1965 hastened the end of a largely “bachelor”⁴ society created by fourteen previous immigration laws (most notably The Chinese Exclusion Law of 1882) which had excluded women and/or set immigration quotas. The War Brides Act of 1947 had begun this shift as Asian-American soldiers were allowed to bring brides from Asia and thus begin to have families. Japanese-Americans had been partially protected from the “bachelor” society effect by the Gentleman’s Agreement (1907-8),⁵ thus they were able to establish families and communities. Many communities were changed by the internment camp experience, shifting power to the American born second generation, which many scholars use to explain the extremely high rate of exogamy (outmarriage) by Japanese-Americans.⁶ After immigration reform and the Refugee Acts of 1975 a new community of Asian immigrants grew in America, particularly from Southeast Asia. In contrast to the more established Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino communities mentioned above, these new immigrants often could not engage in the activities in which they had made their livings previously.

Earlier Chinese and Japanese immigrants, had often been farmers in their homelands. Many became successful farmers in the United States, and played an important-role in the development of California’s agricultural industry.⁷ The urban experience was suitable for Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong and Cambodian immigrants and refugees⁸ from the intellectual, military and merchant classes. However, for those who came from agriculturally based economy often suffered from being placed in

4 The term “bachelor” is essentially a misnomer, as many of these men did have wives and families who were restricted by contemporary immigration laws from entering the US.

5 The so-called Gentleman’s Agreement was that in exchange for the Japanese government refusing to issue any further passports to laborers bound for the US, the US government would allow the wives and families of the relatively few laborers resident to immigrate. This is in contrast to Chinese-Americans, who were restricted by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and subsequent Acts, from bringing in the wives and families of Chinese laborers already resident. The impact such acts would have on community construction is obvious.

6 See Amy Iwasaki Mass’ article, “Interracial Japanese-Americans: The Best of Both Worlds or the End of the Japanese-American Community?” in *Racially Mixed People in America*, Maria P.P. Root, ed. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992.

7 See Sucheng Chan’s *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910*, Berkeley: UC Press, 1986, for a detailed study of Chinese-American agricultural history.

8 Refugees should be seen as distinct from immigrants. Refugees often suffer from the traumatic causes of their exodus, and for that reason sometimes have greater difficulty in the acculturation process.

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unfamiliar urban environments. The post 1965 Korean, Iranian and Indian⁹ immigrant came from tightly knit family structures. They probably missed their kinship groups and social life-style when they moved to the U.S.

⁹ Some early immigration by (Asian) Indian Americans followed a path similar to that of early Chinese and Japanese immigration--they were largely employed as agricultural workers.

Chronology of Events in Asian-American History

This chronology of events in Asian-American history is meant to provide readers of this baseline essay with historical reference points against which to read Asian-American literature. Many of these historical events are either the subject matter, or the background material, for many of the texts discussed in this essay.

The following is adapted and expanded from Sucheng Chan's *Asian-Americans: An Interpretive History*, with significant additions from Roshni Rustomji-Kerns' *Living in America: Poetry and Fiction by South Asian-American Writers*.

- 1763 Filipino "Manilamen" began to settle in Louisiana.
- 1830 Chinese are in Hawai'i and New York.
- 1848 Discovery of gold in California; beginnings of larger scale immigration from China.
- 1850 Imposition of Foreign Miner's Tax in California.
- 1851 Half a dozen Asian-Indians march in the Fourth of July parade in Salem, Massachusetts.
- 1854 *People vs. Hall* rules that Chinese cannot testify in court.
- 1858 California passes anti-Chinese and -Mongolian immigration law.
- 1865 Chinese recruited to build the Central Pacific Railroad Co.
- 1865 Hawaiian Board of Immigration examines the possibility of recruiting laborers from "East Indies."
- 1868 Burlingame-Seward Treaty recognizes the right of Chinese to emigrate to the US in exchange for allowing trade with China.
- 1878 Chinese ruled ineligible for naturalized citizenship.
- 1880 Treaty between the U.S. and China limits Chinese immigration; California institutes anti-miscegenation law prohibiting marriage between European Americans and "Mongolians, Negroes, mulattos, and persons of mixed blood."
- 1882 Chinese Exclusion Law limits the immigration of Chinese laborers and stunts the growth of Chinese-American communities by preventing the immigration of Chinese women except the wives and daughters of diplomats and merchants.

- 1886 Expulsion of Chinese from Tacoma, Seattle and many other towns and cities in the American West.
- 1888 Scott Act nullifies 20,000 Chinese reentry visas.
- 1892 Geary Law renews Chinese Exclusion Law for additional ten years.
- 1903 Korean workers arrive in Hawai'i; Filipino students (known as *pensionados*) arrive in the US for higher education.
- 1904 Chinese Exclusion made indefinite; Punjabi Sikhs begin to enter British Columbia and many later cross into the U.S.
- 1907 Gentleman's Agreement: Japan agrees to cease the issuance of passports to Japanese laborers wishing to emigrate to the U.S.
- 1907 Asian Exclusion League is formed in the United States.
- 1907 Bellingham riots in Washington State, Indian workers are run out of town by organized labor groups.
- 1908 Taraknath Das, a University of Washington student, starts publishing *Free Hindustan*.
- 1910 US Supreme Court, in *United States v. Balsara*, maintains that in terms of race, the Indians are Caucasian, therefore they cannot be excluded from citizenship based on race.
- 1913 California Alien Land Law prohibits the buying or leasing of land by "aliens ineligible for citizenship." This law, which is primarily focused against the Japanese-American Issei (first generation), becomes the model for similar laws passed by Arizona, Washington, Louisiana, New Mexico, Idaho, Montana and Oregon.
- 1913 The Gadar Movement, promoting freedom for India, starts among Asian Indians in San Francisco.
- 1914 Many Asian Indians leave for India to work there on Gadar Movement.
- 1917 Under pressure from the British government, the US government prosecutes and imprisons Gadar Movement members for their political activities.
- 1917 Arizona passes Alien Land Law; Immigration Law delineates a "barred zone" preventing immigration including that of Asian Indians.
- 1922 Cable Act strips citizenship from any US citizen who marries an alien ineligible for citizenship.

- 1923 US Supreme Court rules in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* that the term “white” in U.S. Immigration Law does not refer to the Caucasian race, but only to the European continent, therefore Indians cannot become U.S. citizens. Further, the Court rules that citizenship granted on the previous ruling are null and void.
- 1924 Immigration Act prohibits nearly all Asian immigration.
- 1930 Anti-Filipino riot breaks out in Watsonville, CA.
- 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act reduces Filipino immigration to fifty people a year.
- 1941 U.S. declares war against Japan following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Internment of Japanese-American community leaders in Hawai'i and on West Coast.
- 1942 Executive Order #9066 signed by President Roosevelt authorizes mass internment of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast in designated “camps.” Similar dispersal of Japanese from the “restricted zone” on the West Coast of Canada.
- 1943 Repeal of Chinese Exclusion Act. Chinese allowed to become naturalized citizens. Immigration quota set at 105 per country of presumed origin (i.e. 105 Chinese total).
- 1945 End of World War II
- 1947 India's Independence and the creation of Pakistan, which causes large-scale displacement of population.
- 1947 War Brides Act amended to allow Chinese-American veterans to bring foreign brides to the U.S., including brides from China. This revived Chinese-American communities.
- 1952 McCarran Walter Act grants naturalization and small immigration quota to Japanese.
- 1956 California repeals alien land laws; Judge Dalip Singh Saund elected to Congress from California.
- 1959 Hawai'i becomes 50th state; Hawai'i elects Daniel K. Inouye and Hiram Fong to Congress.
- 1962 Inouye becomes U.S. Senator; Spark Matsunaga becomes Congressman from Hawai'i.
- 1964 Patsy Takemoto Mink becomes first Asian-American Congresswoman, serving for Hawai'i.

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- 1965 Immigration Law abolishes the “national origins” basis for allocation of immigration quotas. This shifts annual immigration from Europe to Asia, Mexico and Latin America.
- 1966 Marks the beginning of the “model minority” myth.
- 1968-9 San Francisco College strike. The beginning of Asian-American Studies.
- 1970 Asian-American college students protest U.S. military actions in Vietnam.
- 1975 Refugees begin to arrive from Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos.
- 1980 Refugee Act and Orderly Departure Program facilitate the admission of refugees from Vietnam.
- 1982 The killing of Vincent Chin by two unemployed European American auto workers.
- 1987 U.S. House of Representatives votes to offer reparations of \$20,000 per survivor to redress the internment of Japanese-Americans.
- 1988 Redress is concurred by U.S. Senate; Amerasian Homecoming Act allows Vietnamese born children of U.S. fathers to emigrate.
- 1988 Greg Louganis wins Olympic Gold diving medal.
- 1990 Kristi Yamaguchi wins Olympic Gold ice skating medal.
- 1992 L.A. Uprising/Riots involve and generate media images of Korean Americans.
- 1998 Gary Locke elected Governor of Washington State.
- 1998 David Wu elected State Senator from Oregon.

Survey of the Asian-American Experience (1875-1999)

Chinese-American Literature

Chinese-Americans were the first Asian immigrant group to come to America in large numbers, beginning in the mid-19th century during the California gold rush and later to work on building the transcontinental railroad. (Other groups, like Filipinos, arrived earlier in smaller numbers, and communities were established early in the 19th century in Hawai'i before it was part of the United States). Chinese-American literature perhaps could have started as early as 1875 with the writings of a group only known as "Wong Sam and Assistants." Sam Wong and his assistants, wrote an intriguing book published by the Wells Fargo Company entitled simply, *An English-Chinese Phrase Book*. At first glance one might assume that this bilingual book of phrases served only to provide a way for a non-English speaking Chinese person to do business with or send telegrams through Wells Fargo offices, but this book is not organized like any Western reference text. It is not organized alphabetically by subject or given an index by which the user might quickly refer to an appropriate phrase. Instead, the user must read the entire book from cover to cover not only to use the book, but to understand the whole experience of being Chinese in America for the twenty-five-year period from 1850 to 1875. The book utilizes the traditional Chinese way of learning by memorization and recitation. Once Chinese readers have memorized the book, they also understand the strategies of living life in the very inhospitable American West. The excerpt that follows is a line-by-line sequence, excluding the written Chinese characters that precede each English sentence; it also includes the grammatical inconsistencies:

He was murdered by a thief.

He committed suicide.

He was choked to death with a lasso, by a robber.

He was strangled to death by a man.

He was starved to death in prison.

He was frozen to death in the snow.

He was going to drown himself in the bay.

After searching for several days they caught the

murderer.

Did they find anything in his possession?

They did.

He was killed by an assassin.

He tried to assassinate me.

He tried to kill me by assassination.

He is an assaulter.

He was suffocated in his room.

He was shot dead by his enemy.

He was poisoned to death by his friend.

He tries to kill me by poisoning.

Assault with the intention to do bodily injury.

He took the law in his own hand.

He tried to deprive me of my wages. (Chin, et al, 1991)

The book goes on to include phrases that describe everything from bargaining over the price of a pair of pants, going to court, settling disputes about having one's mining claim jumped to further descriptions of murder and imprisonment. In the end, the book is not so much a reference work as it is a story in dramatic dialogue, much like a play, through which the reader can infer the experience of Chinese living in the American West in 1875.

In the late 19th century and early 20th century Edith Maud Eaton (1867-1914), born to a Chinese mother and an English father, wrote under the pseudonym of Sui Sin Far. Eaton chose a Chinese-American identity at a time when America was in its heyday of anti-Chinese legislation. Her sister, Winnifred Eaton (1879-1930), born to the same parents, also wrote, yet chose a Japanese identity and wrote under the Japanese sounding pseudonym "Onoto Watanna." Japanese-Americans were the acceptable Asian minority of the time, due largely to their smaller numbers. At the time, her work, unlike that of Edith Eaton's, was received with critical acclaim, and she enjoyed a financially successful writing career in New York and Hollywood; Winnifred published fifteen novels and worked on several feature films between 1921 and 1930. Professor

S.E. Solberg speculates that Winnifred Eaton may have had a hand in writing Edith's obituary in the *New York Times* on the 9th of April 1914, as follows:

Edith Eaton, author, known in the East as Sui Sin Far, the "Chinese Lily," died on Tuesday at her home in Montreal, Canada. She was the daughter to Edward Eaton... [who] went to the Orient. He became fascinated with the East, and after a year married a Japanese noblewoman who had been adopted by Sir Hugh Matteson as a child and educated in England.

Proof of her Chinese ancestry is in Edith Eaton's own autobiographical essay, "Leaves of a Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," published in 1909:

When I look back over the years I see myself, a little child of scarcely four years of age, walking in front of my nurse, in a green English lane, and listening to her tell another of her kind that my mother is Chinese. "Oh Lord!" exclaims the informed. She turns me around and scans me curiously from head to foot. Then the two women whisper together. Tho[sic] the word *Chinese* conveys very little meaning to my mind, I feel that they are talking about my father and mother and my heart swells with indignation.

The two Eaton sisters chose to write about their multi-racial background. This is one of the dominant themes of their writing. Edith Eaton chose to write sensitive and accurate portrayals of Chinese in America at a time when Chinese-Americans, under the hysteria of movements to exclude Chinese and limit immigration, were considered the pariah race of America. She published stories in a variety of magazines particularly in the American West and in 1912, A.C. McClurg & Co. published a collection of her stories entitled *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. Newspapers and magazines depicted the Chinese as "rat eaters" and "low wage laborers" intent on crushing white labor and infesting America with disease. In the midst of all this Sui Sin Far's stories catered to neither side, and her portrayals were truthful and accurate. In her autobiographical essay, "Leaves From the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," published in the *Independent* magazine in 1909, she writes:

Why are we what we are? I and my brothers and sisters. Why did God make us to be hooted and stared at? Papa is English, Mamma is Chinese. Why couldn't we have been either one thing or the other? Why is my mother's race despised? I look into the faces of my father and mother. Is she not every bit as dear and good as he? Why? Why? She sings us songs she learned at her English school. She tells us tales of China....I do not confide in my father and mother. They would not understand. How could they? He is English, she is Chinese. I am different to both of them--a stranger, tho their only child. "What are we?" I ask my brother. "It doesn't matter, sissy," he responds. But it does.

Another Eurasian writer, Diana Chang, wrote about the issues of biraciality in a novel entitled *The Frontiers of Love* (1956). Chang was born in 1934 in New York City to an Eurasian mother and a Chinese father. Diana Chang writes of her father and mother, "My father was *real* Chinese, born and raised in China. He had a classical Chinese education, and then attended and graduated from Tsinghua University in Peking (as Beijing was called then). An architect, he earned his degree in architecture at Columbia University. My mother, on the other hand, was Eurasian, born and raised in the United States."

Chang is generally regarded as the first person born to Chinese-American parents to publish a novel in the United States. Her *Frontiers of Love* (1956; reissued by the University of Washington Press, 1994) set in the European compounds of Japanese-occupied Shanghai is a classic story of search for identity and conflict of culture. Chang is the author of five other novels, *A Woman of Thirty* (1959), *A Passion for Life* (1961), *The Only Game in Town* (1963), *Eye to Eye* (1974), *A Perfect Love* (1978) and three volumes of poetry, *The Horizon is Definitely Speaking* (1982), *What Matisse is After* (1984), and *Earth Water Light* (1991).

With the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which further limited immigration from Asia, America transformed the Chinese from a pariah race threatening the shores of America in the 19th century to a comical and stereotypical figure in the pulp fiction of the 1920s and 1930s. Characters such as Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu

were created, and a rash of popular songs were penned, Charlestons, and fox trots about “China boys” being stranded in America by the exclusion laws, such as “So Long Oolong (How Long You Gonna Be Gone)” and “Hong Kong Dream Girl.” Many early Chinese-American works, especially the autobiographies, attempted to celebrate the ability of Chinese to assimilate into American culture and be good Americans. Pardee Lowe’s autobiography, *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), includes a note on the cover stating that Lowe joined the army immediately after turning in the manuscript of his book, thus proving himself to be a “loyal minority.” In Jade Snow Wong’s autobiography, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950), Wong tells the story of her struggles to survive in two separate worlds. Her strict father represents the traditional Chinese society. At the same time she is born in America, goes to college, and works in the shipyards, building ships during the war. It seems that the Asian-Americans were supposed to provide proof of their loyalty to the country of their choice by helping with war activities.

More recent Chinese-American autobiographies have initiated a much more complex dialogue between the so-called “traditional” China and “modern” America. Maxine Hong Kingston’s memoir about her female Chinese ancestors, *The Woman Warrior--Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976) weaves a story of her family’s life in Stockton, California, where she was born in 1940, with the folk stories of China, particularly the story of Fa Mulan, the woman warrior. This text (which is deliberately not called a novel, although it is often both taught and read as such) deserves special note because it is one of the most anthologized works by a living Asian-American author. This text has often served to introduce Asian-American literature to both Asian-American and non-Asian-American readers alike. Kingston’s other texts include the highly historical *China Men* (1980), which is a companion piece to *The Woman Warrior* and tells the story of the men in Kingston’s family. One chapter of *China Men* called, “The Laws,” simply, but powerfully, lists the racist laws which targeted early Chinese immigrants to America.

As with autobiographies, Chinese-American fiction is concerned with the themes of community development and individual and family struggle. For example, Kingston’s highly stylized, post-modern novel, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1987), details

the struggles of Wittman Ah Sing during the 1960s in San Francisco. Wittman is a highly distinctive character, he is widely recognized as a superb caricature of Asian-American author and critic, Frank Chin, with whom Kingston has had an ongoing disagreement about the nature and function of Asian-American literature.¹⁰ Wittman Ah Sing is a quintessential American character in search of his identity in a multiracial nation, "[t]here were pictures of little Wittman in his disguises -- sumo wrestler, Injun with fringe, the Invisible Man (which he had worn only once because everybody felt bad for 'the poor burned boy'), and Opera monkey." From this passage, it is clear that even the persona which is most ethnically appropriate, the opera singer, is merely another disguise, just as false as the "Injun" stereotype. Ultimately, Wittman, like Kingston's novel itself, is an historically conscious amalgamation of all of these multiple cultural identities. Finally, *Tripmaster Monkey*, in recording the varied composition of this particular individual, emphasizes the need for the larger community of America to understand all of its cultural heritages within the historical context of this nation.

Frank Chin's play, *The Year of the Dragon* (1974), deals with the tensions of a family in transition within San Francisco's Chinatown. Chin's first novel, *Donald*, tells the story of an 11-year-old boy of Chinese descent, Donald Duk, who hates being Chinese. All he knows about growing up in San Francisco's Chinatown is that it hardly resembles "America" at all. The repeated exclusion of Chinese, coupled with restrictive real estate covenants, confined Chinese-Americans to Chinatowns. Although, the growth of this community ultimately provided a basis for political power, it simultaneously provided a sense of alienation on the part of the members of this community, from the mainstream American life. Contemporary Asian-American literature mirrors this experience of self-doubt

Like Frank Chin, Fae Myenne Ng, born in San Francisco in 1956, also writes about San Francisco's Chinatown. Her novel, *Bone* (1993), is set in the early '70s when the community was still showing the vestiges of a bachelor society caused by restrictive

10 As fascinating as this debate is, it will not be discussed in this text. See "Chinatown Cowboys and Warrior Women: Searching for a New Self-Image" in Elaine Kim, *Asian-American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1982).

immigration and anti-miscegenation laws. In spite of being long-time residents in America (the older generation sometimes refer to themselves as “longtime Californians”), the Immigration and Naturalization Service and their interrogations remain in the immigrant generation's recent memory and cause one of Ng's characters to note, "In this country, paper is more precious than blood," because restrictive immigration laws caused people to create “paper” identities--to become “paper sons,” in order to enter the country. The children born in America have more freedom than their parents--they go to college, they live outside of Chinatown, in short, they have a choice because their American citizenship is a fact of birth. As Leila notes: "Mah and Leon forced themselves to live through the humiliation in this country so that we could have it better. We know so little of the old country. We repeat the names of grandfathers and uncles, but they have always been strangers to us." *Bone* is not about the exterior of San Francisco's Chinatown, the neon lights and tourist shops, but rather is a narrative about the interior reality of a community.

Chinatown, Angel Island and the history of Chinese in California from the 19th century through four subsequent generations is the subject of Shawn Wong's first novel, *Homebase* (1979). As in *Bone*, Wong's novel attempts to legitimize the history of the Chinese in America. Wong tells the story of a fourth generation Chinese-American boy who looks back on the history of his ancestors in California. Wong's second novel, *American Knees* (1995), explores contemporary relationships between Asian-American men and women, intra-Asian and interracial relationships, gender and racial stereotyping, and contemporary arranged marriages.

Marilyn Chin's work displays a similar concern with the relationship of contemporary Asian-Americans to history and tradition in her two collections of poetry, *Dwarf Bamboo* (1987) and *The Phoenix Gone, The Terrace Empty* (1994). Chin is a natural storyteller whose wry sense of humor pushes the cultural boundaries of language, racial stereotyping, popular culture and national origins as in the poem “How I Got That Name”:

I am Marilyn Mei Ling Chin.
Oh, how I love the resoluteness

of that first person singular
followed by that stalwart indicative
of "be," without the uncertain i-n-g
of "becoming." Of course,
the name had been changed
somewhere between Angel Island and the sea,
when my father the paperson
in the late 1950's
obsessed with a bombshell blonde
transliterated "Mei Ling" to "Marilyn."

Marilyn Chin's contemporary, poet Li-Young Lee, was born to Chinese parents in Jakarta, Indonesia. Lee's father fled from Indonesia in 1959 after spending a year as a political prisoner during President Sukarno's regime. For the next five years the family traveled through Hong Kong, Macau and Japan and eventually arrived in America to settle in Pennsylvania. His first book of poetry, *Rose* (1986), won New York University's Delmore Schwartz Memorial Poetry Award. His second volume of poetry, *The City in Which I Love You* (1990), was the 1990 Lamont Poetry Selection of the Academy of American Poets. A memoir about his family entitled *The Winged Seed* was published in 1995.

In the poem "The Cleaving" from Lee's collection of poems, *The City in Which I Love You*, Lee focuses on his family's ancestral roots and the discovery and preservation of that knowledge which feeds the soul. This knowledge feeds the act of naming all those who came before him:

...this Jew, this Asian, this one
with the Cambodian face, Vietnamese face, this Chinese
I daily face,
this immigrant,
this man with my own face.

Russell Leong also explores the experience of the immigrant in his poetry. He made his literary debut with a short story entitled "Rough Notes for Mantos" (originally published under the pseudonym Wallace Lin in 1974 in *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*). It is a lyrical and moving story in two parts; the first part is a love story of sexual dislocation between two men and the second part is a story of generational dislocation between father and son. It is a pioneering and poignant work.

Just as "Rough Notes for Mantos" explored the dislocation between lovers and generations two decades ago, Leong's *The Country of Dreams and Dust* (1993), explores a kind of dislocation in the definitions of the imagined Asia vs. America. The long poem "The Country of Dreams and Dust" is more than a poem in the sense that it is a travelogue of the journey through the history of Chinese in America. The poem is a remarkable narrative of 19th century immigration ("Indentured to dreams/we imagine America/the soft breast of a green island/almost a mirage beyond our eyes.") white missionaries in San Francisco's Chinatown, and Chinese women sold into prostitution. From the 19th century the poem flows through the 20th century into racism and the story of a Chinese immigrant who is now a political refugee after the Tiananmen massacre ("Bent on escape, I bribe and bootleg/my way across the continent. Liquor, Levis and cigarettes/buy me the border/guards into Hong Kong.") And finally the poem displays the spirituality and contradiction of contemporary Asian-American life:

Inside the temple
a monk is chanting.
His sutras unlock doors,
release windows and walls,
sweep past wooden eaves
of the western house and alight
upon aloes in the yard.

I discard another layer
of my life. A friend tells me
that seven of his buddies
have died of AIDS.

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No one wants to know.

In Asian families, you just disappear.
Your family rents a small room for you.
They feed you lunch.
They feed you dinner.
Rice, fish, vegetables.

Although *The Country of Dreams and Dust* is his first collection of poetry, Leong's career as a writer has had an important impact on Asian-American cultural productions. He is the editor of *Amerasia Journal*, the leading Asian-American scholarly journal, and *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts* (1991), the first book on independent Asian-American filmmaking, and after receiving a MFA degree from UCLA's School of Film and Television, Leong produced two video documentaries, *Morning Begins Here* (1985) and *Why is Preparing Fish a Political Act?*

Amy Tan was born in Oakland, California in 1952 and was raised in Fresno, Oakland and Berkeley. Tan is the author of three best-selling novels, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) and *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995). *The Joy Luck Club* details the complex relationships between four sets of mothers and daughters. As the daughters delve into their mothers' histories, they begin to understand not only their mothers' lives, but also their own identities. Moving between the United States and China, Tan explores issues of gender roles and ethnic identity. *The Joy Luck Club* was made into a movie produced by Oliver Stone and directed by Wayne Wang (1993). Tan's second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, is located primarily in China, although Tan sets the frame of the tale in the United States. A mother and daughter who have never communicated well are finally united as the mother tells her difficult and painful story. *The Hundred Secret Senses* is a tale set in San Francisco and in a remote village of southern China. It is a story of proof of love between mother and daughter, among sisters, lovers and friends, told with wisdom, grace and humor. Tan is also the author of two children's books, *The Moon Lady* (1992) and *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994).

In the following excerpt from "Mother Tongue" (*Asian-American Literature*) Tan legitimizes Chinese-American English, the language spoken by her mother, as simply another American dialect and says that it should not be called "broken English."

...to me, my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It's my mother tongue. Her language, as I hear it, is vivid, direct, full of observation and imagery. That was the language that helped shape the way I saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world (Tan 1989).

Japanese-American Literature

About the same time Sui Sin Far was writing about the Chinese-Americans, Nagai Kafu, an established Japanese writer visiting America between October 1903 and the fall of 1904, while living in Tacoma, Washington, discovered the multifaceted lives of the Japanese in America. Kafu wrote about his American experiences in *American Tales (Amerika Monogatari, 1908)*. Translator Stephen W. Kohl of the University of Oregon writes in "An Early Account of Japanese Life in the Pacific Northwest: Writings of Nagai Kafu" (*Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, April 1979, pages 58-68):

In contrast to the immigrants he writes about, Kafu had good connections and an ample amount of money. Besides he never seriously considered staying in this country; for him it was only a trip.

Kafu describes the Seattle Japanese-American community:

As I entered one alley, I was startled to find it filled with Japanese people walking back and forth. There were archery stalls and ball-throwing games and eating places. These Japanese people had a composure and self-assurance which seemed to say, "We belong here."

Kafu's own words tend to disprove the popular theory that the first generation of Japanese immigrants came, like the Chinese to America as sojourners, to work and

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then return home. Instead, Seattle, Kafu observes, is a true settlement of stores, businesses and "skid road" hotels: "These narrow allies and these filthy wooden houses were the haunts of Chinese and Japanese people; but in addition to being an Oriental colony, the district was also populated by Caucasian laborers out of work and by blacks who suffered from poverty and oppression."

This description of the urban community of early Japanese-American immigrants is matched by the stories of rural Japanese-American farmers compiled by Toshio Mori in his work *Yokohama, California* (1949). This collection of short stories was slated to be published before the war but was delayed until 1949. Mori wrote and edited literary journals and magazines at Topaz, the War Relocation Authority camp in Utah. His stories remain the only collection of Japanese-American stories to faithfully describe the pre-World War II Japanese-American community nestled in the East Bay cities of Oakland and San Leandro, which Mori called "Yokohama, California." His stories speak of the bonds between neighbors and family members, or, as poet Lawson Fusao Inada describes in his introduction to the 1985 edition of *Yokohama, California*, the community is "an example of moral obligation, of mutual responsibility, mutual trust: the bargain of life works both ways....the unspoken understanding of the family, the community will continue to survive, intact." It is, of course, painfully ironic that *Yokohama, California* was published after the war when the Japanese-American community Mori described no longer existed.

Playwright Wakako Yamauchi is also well known for her writing on the early Japanese-American immigrants. A contemporary of Toshio Mori and Hisaye Yamamoto (discussed below), Wakako Yamauchi was born in Westmoreland, California in 1924. In 1942 Yamauchi and her family were interned at the concentration camp in Poston, Arizona. Her mother and father, both Issei (first generation immigrants from Japan), were farmers in California's Imperial Valley. Many of her stories and her first two plays, *And the Soul Shall Dance* and *The Music Lessons* are set in the same dusty, isolated settings. Her first play, *And the Soul Shall Dance*, adapted from her short story of the same title, was first performed at the East/West Players in Los Angeles and won the Los Angeles Critics' Circle Award for best new play of 1977 and was produced for

public television. A collection of her stories, *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, was published in 1994.

The Music Lessons, like her first play, explores the suffering and hardships of the first generation Issei women who came to America in the early part of the 1900s and had to adjust not only to their settlement in America but also to often bitter arranged marriages. Chizuko, the 38-year old widowed mother of three, explains, "When I left Japan I never knew it would be like this...Never thought my life would be so hard. I don't know what it is to be a...a woman anymore...to laugh...to be soft...to talk nice." The isolation of the agricultural landscape is metaphor for Chizuko who is isolated in marriage, within the family and obviously from Japan.

The Japanese-American first generation settlements in both rural and urban areas soon gave rise to a second generation born in America, the Nisei. Because of the Gentleman's Agreement (1907-8), Japanese-Americans had never been restricted from equal gender distribution in their communities (as had Chinese-Americans), and so, despite their initially smaller numbers, Japanese-Americans were much quicker to establish stable family structures. In 1919 Monica Sone, author of the autobiography *Nisei Daughter* (1953), was born (Kazuko Monica Itoi, then) in the Carrollton Hotel, in the skid road area of Seattle described by Kafu. Her book begins with her childhood and follows her family's life through World War II and their internment at Minidoka, a War Relocation Authority camp in Idaho. The Japanese district Kafu thought was filthy and frightening, Sone describes with familiarity and appreciation:

I thought the whole world consisted of two or three old hotels on every block. And that this population consisted of families like mine who lived in a corner of the hotels. And its other inhabitants were customers--fading, balding, watery-eyed men, rough-tough bearded men, and good men like Sam, Joe, Peter, and Montana who worked for father, all of whom lived in these hotels.

But the hard work which established stability in the midst of poverty was erased not only for Sone, but for all Japanese-Americans when President Roosevelt signed

Executive Order #9066 on March 18, 1942, allowing for the relocation of Japanese-Americans from the West Coast, and their internment in camps, under the argument that this was a military imperative after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Ironically, the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd RCT, which were composed entirely of Nisei, from both the mainland internment camps and the Japanese-Americans of Hawai'i, are still renowned for the heroism they displayed, fighting to defend America and her allies in Europe, during the second World War.

Given the unfortunate conditions under which the Japanese-Americans were interned, with inadequate shelter, clothing, sanitary conditions and food, it is perhaps a wonder that any were willing to volunteer to serve in the U.S. military. The draft was made possible by the highly dubious institution of a loyalty questionnaire which was supposed to distinguish the "trustworthy" from the "untrustworthy" internees in February, 1942. What was most problematic about this questionnaire were items 27 and 28. Item 27 asked if the internees--Issei and Nisei alike--would be willing to fight in the U.S. Armed Forces against the Japanese Army. Since the Issei were still Japanese citizens, because they had been denied U.S. citizenship, and many of the Nisei were still angry over their own nation's betrayal of their citizenship, inevitably many were inclined to answer "no." Item 28 asked if the respondents would rescind any allegiance to the Japanese government and swear unqualified allegiance to the U.S. government. Because the Issei were not allowed US citizenship, such an affirmation would have left them stateless. For the Nisei, the question posed a different problem. Would they be admitting they had an allegiance to the Japanese government if they forswore it? What about their parents' predicament? Those who answered "no" to either question were arrested and segregated to Tule Lake. They were called "no-no boys," and their story is described in John Okada's novel, *No No Boy* (1957).

Even for those who were not segregated from their families, the internment brought a rapid degradation of family life. Things as simple as the inadequate living quarters (with as many as four families sharing a small room) and the mess-hall style of eating, discouraged the family structure which had earlier been the strength of Japanese-American communities. The separate incarceration of many Issei men, combined with their loss of property, quickened the passage of power from one

generation to the next. Many of the Nisei, however, were still high school students or younger and were ill-equipped to be making decisions not only for themselves, but for their entire families, and indeed the community as a whole. The Nisei soon formed the Japanese-American Citizens League or JACL, in an attempt to exert some control over their own lives. It may be made clear here that the purpose of the above information is neither to hold on to the past nor to arouse pity for those Japanese-Americans who fought on the American side. Perhaps, when compared to what the Japanese troops did to the people of the countries they occupied, the treatment of the then American government towards the Nisei and Issei may even be considered mild. Nevertheless, in order to understand the Japanese-American way of thinking, it is best not to sweep the above information under the rug.

The end of internment was mandated by the War Department on December 17, 1944. The closing of the camps left Japanese-Americans with another dilemma. Most had lost all of their property--homes, farms, fishing boats, cars, everything--and even if they had not, they were discouraged from resettling in the areas in which they had formerly lived due to the racism which continued even after the end of the war. Families were further scattered and broken up as people went wherever they could find jobs, schools and housing that would take them--often in the Midwest or on the East Coast. Although the financial losses they suffered were great, the emotional losses were greater. The physical hardships of the camp life caused many untimely deaths; a few people had even been shot for walking too close to the fence, or for being in a crowd at the wrong time. The repercussions of these years continue to haunt even the generations not yet born during the experience. Many Sansei, or third-generation Japanese-Americans, did not learn about the hardship their parents and grandparents had seen until they were in college and saw a paragraph in a history textbook. Their families had been too ashamed to discuss the matter, or thought leaving the past behind was the best way to move into the future.

Not everyone was silent, however. Even at the time, writers like Hisaye Yamamoto recorded the psychological effects of camp life in poetry and prose. John Okada's *No-No Boy* was written in the 1950s. But these works were not widely accepted because of the political and social hostility towards racial difference at this

time. The social movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s provided the opportunity for individuals and the community as a whole to begin telling their stories. Michi Weglyn's sociological examination of the camps, *Years of Infamy* (1976), and Jeanne Wakastuki Houston's memoirs, *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973), appeared at this time. Although not "literature," Weglyn's sociological history of life in the internment camps is important to mention here because her analysis provided a larger overview of the political and sociological forces which caused such profound impact on individual lives. Houston's text, co-authored by her husband, author James Houston, was the first text popularly read account of the camps from a personal perspective. In *Farewell to Manzanar*, Houston recalls her childhood before the internment and the subsequent devastation to her family caused by camp life. The decimation of her father's pride and sense of self is a particular focus of her work. These texts have been followed by a rich outpouring of poetry and prose detailing almost every aspect of Japanese-American life before, during and after internment.

Seattle Japanese-American novelist John Okada, the author, *No-No Boy* (1957), was born in 1923 in the Merchants Hotel, less than a block away from Monica Sone's (*Nisei Daughter*) home in the Carrollton Hotel. His novel is considered "pioneering" because Okada found the courage to tell a story which does not project a perfect image of Japanese-Americans, at a time (soon after the end of WW II) when the image of Japanese-Americans was very fragile. In fact, Japanese-Americans rejected Okada's work for fear that the larger American society would be angered by a story in which the Japanese-American protagonist refused to fight for the government which had imprisoned his family. Ichiro Yamada returns to Seattle just after World War II. Ichiro has spent two years in an internment camp and two years in prison for refusing to enter the draft. He has answered "no-no" to the loyalty oath given to Japanese in the camps. The Seattle Japanese-American community Ichiro comes home to is fragmented, polarized and self-destructive. The novel reveals the void that existed between the Issei (first generation) and the Nisei (second generation, American-born) after the war as the Nisei began to separate themselves from their immigrant "alien" parents (who were prevented by law from becoming naturalized citizens of the U.S. until 1952). Death, hopelessness, tragedy and despair fill Ichiro's quest to find his place after the war.

The moral and spiritual distance after the war between the Issei and Nisei betrayed the compact between the two generations in the 1920s and 1930s. This compact between the generations is probably best revealed in Kazuo Miyamoto's autobiographical novel *Hawaii, End of the Rainbow* (1964). A young Nisei, Minoru Murayama, is a young student from Hawai'i working his way through Stanford University when he receives a call from a distant relative, Mr. Kawano. He learns that this distant relative, an Issei, needs his help to counteract the effects of California's recently passed Alien Land Law of 1920, which forbade the leasing of any farm land to a person ineligible for United States citizenship. Kawano and the other Issei Japanese farmers as immigrant aliens need to place their farms in Minoru's name. In return for this favor and for working on the farm, the farmers pay for his education.

With the outbreak of World War II and the internment of not only the alien Issei, but also the American-born Nisei, this bond between the generations dissolved. In the camps race prejudice and rejection of the Issei became camp policy. The use of Japanese language was banned in all public meetings and only English-language camp newspapers and magazines were published. Camp journals, literary magazines, newspapers, even private letters were controlled and censored by camp authorities. In spite of this, the Issei still continued to write in haiku, senryu, tanka, free verse, and prose. Many of their works would not be published until years later. One exception was *Citizen 13660* by Mine Okubo, an artist, whose book was published by Columbia University Press in 1946. *Citizen 13660*, republished in 1983, tells the poignant story of Okubo's internment in pictures and words.

Nisei writer Hisaye Yamamoto also developed her writing skills during internment. Yamamoto was born in Redondo Beach, California in 1921. She wrote and published short stories in 1950s and the 1960s. Yamamoto's work includes stories focusing on both agricultural life, such as "Yoneko's Earthquake," and multiracial urban environments, such as "Wilshire Bus." In 1986 the Before Columbus Foundation awarded Yamamoto a Lifetime Achievement Award even though she had not yet published a book in recognition of her pioneering vision of Japanese America. Yamamoto had published seven major short stories in a variety of magazines and anthologies including Martha Foley's annual *Best American Short Stories*, *Kenyon*

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Review, Carleton Miscellany, Partisan Review, Harper's Bazaar, and Furioso. The editors of *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese-American and Japanese-American Literature* (1991) note: "Her modest body of fiction is remarkable for its range and gut understanding of Japanese America. The questions and themes of Asian-American life are fresh. Growing up with foreign-born parents, mixing with white and nonwhite races, racial discrimination, growing old, the question of dual personality--all were explored.... Technically and stylistically, hers is among the most highly developed of Asian-American writing.... In her work we see how language adapts to new speakers, new experience, and becomes new language." In 1988 Hisaye Yamamoto finally published her prize-winning stories in one volume entitled *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories*.

Asian-American poets and writers coming of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s gravitated spiritually and politically toward the work of third-generation Japanese-American Sansei poet Janice Mirikitani. Mirikitani's poetry is all-inclusive and uncompromising in its ability to act as a tool to fight racism, sexism, injustice, war and poverty, across racial boundaries, across continents and across class differences. And where she worked--the Glide Foundation of San Francisco's Glide Memorial Methodist Church--was in itself a center, a staging ground, a stronghold and the high ground from which words might be hurled in order to heal and simply speak the truth. The Glide Foundation has an arts program and provides extensive outreach and services to the poor and homeless of San Francisco. In 1981 Mirikitani was elected President of the Glide Foundation. George Leong, editor of Mirikitani's first book of poetry, wrote:

From the eye of racist relocation fever which came about and plagued America during World War II, Janice Mirikitani grew/bloomed/fought as a desert flower behind barbed wire. She grew with that pain, of what it all represented; from multinational corporations to war from Korea to Vietnam to Latin America to Africa to Hunter's Point and Chinatown.

"Spoils of War," from her first collection of poetry and prose, *Awake in the River* (1978), has as its subject all wars against Asian people and how one woman challenges the racial and gender stereotyping, the haunting genocide and the

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oppressive memory of war. Janice Mirikitani, who takes on the history of all people in her poetry, was herself incarcerated as a child in an American internment camp in Rohwer, Arkansas, during World War II. She has published three collections of poetry, *Awake in the River* (1978), *Shedding Silence* (1987) and *We the Dangerous* (1995). Many Asian-American writers can trace their first published poem or story or their first public reading to a publication or an event that Janice Mirikitani directed or organized. She has served as editorial director, editor, or coeditor of numerous anthology projects including *AION* (1971), *Third World Women* (1972), *Time to Greez! Incantations from the Third World* (1975), *Ayumi: A Japanese-American Anthology* (1980), *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian-American Women* (1989), *I Have Something to Say About This Big Trouble: Children of the Tenderloin Speak Out* (1989) and *Watch Out, We're Talking: Speaking Out About Incest and Abuse* (1993).

The writings of Japanese-Americans are in many ways defined by World War II and the profound impact of mass incarceration. Even those authors who were born after the war cannot ignore its legacy in terms of how it has reshaped and directed Japanese-American culture and community life. R.A. Sasaki is a Sansei, a third-generation Japanese-American. She is the author of a collection of short stories, *The Loom and Other Stories* (1991). Her stories explore numerous issues, such as the coming-of-age of a young girl, a tragic death in a family and cultural conflicts between generations and within a generation. In one story a Nisei, a second-generation Japanese-American, character is described as:

wearing two faces of a second-generation child born of immigrant parents. The two faces never met; there was no common thread running through both worlds. The duality was unplanned and untaught.

The nine stories in her collection weave together the lives of three generations of Japanese-Americans; and in the process each generation is given a unique voice. These stories are not stories of acculturation and assimilation but, rather, of the reclamation of history and of self-determination through the auspices of community.

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How tradition and community affect identity are central issues to poet Kimiko Hahn who was born just outside of New York City in 1955, to a Japanese-American mother and German-American father. Her collections of poetry include: *We Stand Our Ground: Three Women, Their Vision, Their Poetry* with Gale Jackson and Susan Sherman (1988), *Air Pocket* (1989), *Earshot* (1992) and *The Unbearable Heart* (1995). Hahn's poetry is influenced by her study of classical Japanese literature, as well as American poetry, rock and roll, political work, and feminism. The poem, "Resistance: A Poem on Ikat Cloth" from her book, *Air Pocket* (1989), defines the lives of Asian women and calls for a multicultural voice rooted in one's native tongue, in slang, and in storytelling. The different voices are woven like fabric and given to Hahn's own daughter at the end of the poem as a symbol of how community can affect the identity of the individual.

Lawson Fusao Inada published his first book of poetry entitled *Before the War: Poems as They Happened* in 1971. It is the first collection of poetry composed by an Asian-American to be published by a major publishing firm, William and Morrow of New York. This event made Inada a celebrity. Since the publication of the book Inada has read his works and has composed 'poems for the occasion' at public schools, churches, parks, dedications, conferences, community festivals and pilgrimages. He has been asked by his community to be their voice and represent them. Inada has been invited to the White House to read his poems. An excerpt from his second volume of poems entitled *Legends from Camp* (1993) reads as follows:

One of the most gratifying things for me, as an artist, has been the development, the emergence of an *audience*. Various perceptions have changed or disappeared; various barriers have come down, brought down by demand, by downright need for access for creative, cultural expression. More and more, artist and audience are becoming one--for greater cause of community and mutuality....I began functioning as a *community* poet--with new people, places, and publications to work with. And it's a *privilege*, actually, to be asked to contribute, share, collaborate, participate, and to be granted a *functional, responsible* role in society.

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A Sansei, third generation Japanese-American, born in Fresno, California in 1938, Inada was interned in Japanese-American concentration camps in Arkansas and Colorado during World War II. Of this experience Inada writes, "Still there's a remoteness to history, and to simply know the facts is not always satisfactory. There's more to life than that. So you might say I've taken matters into my own hands...What did I find? What I *expected* to find: Aspects of humanity, the human condition" (*Legends From Camp*). Currently, Inada is a professor and resides in southern Oregon.

Filipino-American Literature

Filipino immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s lived under the same restrictive laws as Japanese-Americans, despite the fact that these early Filipino immigrants came when the Philippines were already a protectorate of the United States. Although they came as allies, and many had an American education in the Philippines, these immigrants were also refused citizenship by the United States. Carlos Bulosan was one of the first Filipino-American writers to document the harsh realities of working as migrant farm workers and cannery workers from the 1930s to the 1950s. His autobiography, *America is in the Heart* (1946), is not so much a chronicle of his own life in America, but rather of the lives of all Filipino men in America. He writes, "I am an exile in America...I feel like a criminal running away from a crime I did not commit. And this crime is that I am a Filipino in America." Bulosan documents the frustration of the Filipinos who tried to pursue the "American Dream." Bulosan was born in the Philippines in the town of Binalonan, Pangasinan in 1913. He came to America in 1930 at the age of seventeen. Like other immigrants, he was not immune to the American dream and the promises of security and wealth. In an essay entitled "My Education" Bulosan writes:

...now that I was in America I felt a vague desire to see what I had not seen in my country. I did not know how I would approach America. I only knew that there must be a common denominator which every immigrant or native American should look for in order to understand her, and be of service to her people. I felt like Columbus embarking upon a long and treacherous voyage. I felt like Icarus escaping from prison to freedom. I

did not know that I was coming closer to American *reality*. I worked for three months in an apple orchard in Sunnyside, in the state of Washington. The labor movement was under persecution and the minorities became the natural scapegoat. Toward the end I was disappointed. I had worked on a farm all my life in the Philippines, and now I was working on a farm again. I could not compromise my picture of America with the filthy bunkhouses in which we lived and the falling wooden houses in which the natives lived. This was not the America I wanted to see, but it was the first great lesson in my life.

The American dream, the fabled land of opportunity, would always remain only in the "heart" of the Filipino in America. In Bulosan's lifetime he would never see the Filipino accepted, even after they had proven their loyalty through distinguished armed service in World War II. Through his poetry, short stories and essays, Bulosan at least made his people visible in a country that did not want to see them. A worker himself from the first day he set foot in America, he dedicated himself to the lives of his fellow Filipino workers by organizing labor unions. In addition to *America is in the Heart*, Bulosan is also the author of *Letter From America* (1942), *The Voice of Bataan* (1943) and *Laughter of My Father* (1944). Having never returned to the Philippines, Bulosan died in Seattle in 1956.

In *Scent of Apples* (1979), Bienvenido Santos tells the story of a Filipino generation that came to America just before, during and after World War II. Despite having proven their loyalty to America during World War II, they remained isolated and ostracized from mainstream America. This new generation of men is unlike the migrant farmworkers or cannery workers of Carlos Bulosan's classic autobiography, *America is in the Heart* (1946). Instead, these Filipino immigrants are educated, urban, and professional. They work in Washington, D.C. and Chicago, yet remain as lonely and as rejected as the working-class generation which preceded them. Santos has had a long and distinguished writing career in America and the Philippines, beginning in 1955 with the publication of a collection of stories entitled *You Lovely People* followed by the publication of several short story collections, including *The Day the Dancers Came* (1979), *Scent of Apples* (1979), *Dwell in the Wilderness: Selected Short Stories 1931-*

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1941 (1985) and the novels, *Villa Magdalena* (1965), *Volcano* (1965), *The Praying Man* (1982), *The Man Who Thought He Looked Like Robert Taylor* (1983) and *What the Hell for You Left Your Heart in San Francisco* (1987).

The colonial relation between the Philippines and the United States began to formally end in 1934, and this change in status combined with the 1965 change in U.S. immigration law has certainly altered the structure of contemporary Filipino-American communities. Thus the Filipino American voices which come a generation after Bulosan and Santos still record a tense dynamic between America and the Philippines. These writers are often more intensely involved in a Filipino Diasporic community--they are often able to travel to the Philippines and record life there as it is affected by the cultural imperialism of the United States and to make observations from the perspective of living in America. Two such writers are Jessica Hagedorn and Peter Bacho. Jessica Hagedorn was born in 1949, raised in the Philippines and arrived in San Francisco in 1962. She credits her literary education to the San Francisco literary scene in the early 1970s. In her book *Danger and Beauty* (1993), a compilation of her early published small press books (*Dangerous Music*, 1975 and *Pet Food & Tropical Apparitions*, 1981) and other writings, she describes the scene as:

Defiant, naive, and passionate, we are sprouting up all over the Bay Area--artists of color who write, perform, and collaborate with each other, borders be damned. We are *muralistas*, filmmakers, musicians, dancers, painters, printmakers, small press publishers, playwrights, poets, and more poets....San Francisco seems to be more a city of poets and musicians than anything else. Rock 'n' roll, R&B, the funk mystique of Oakland, the abstract seduction of jazz, and the glorious rants and chants of *loup garous*, gypsies, sympathetic cowboys, and water buffalo shamans.

Her novel entitled *Dogeaters* (1990) was nominated for the National Book Award. Hagedorn called the novel "a love letter to my motherland: fact and fiction born of rage, shame, pride...and most certainly, desire." The work is set in the Philippines. It is a

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surrealistic postcolonial work. It describes the perception of the dominance of the American culture over the Filipino culture and ways of thinking.

Peter Bacho's novel, *Cebu* (1991), records the story of Ben, a Filipino American priest from Seattle, as he visits his mother's former home in the region of Cebu. In Cebu Ben's faith in both home and religion are challenged by a variety of temptations. The remnants of Spanish colonialism, World War II, Filipino matriarchal society, and an unfamiliar fanatic Catholicism pull him farther from the familiar cultural roots of his home in America.

Hawaiian American Literature

The literature of Hawai'i deserves a separate section because of its unique sensibility. Asian-Americans first immigrated to Hawai'i in the 1830s. They came in successive waves recruited to work on the plantations. As each group began to achieve stability as a community, they also began to protest against the harsh working conditions. As they began to consolidate, plantation owners brought in other ethnic groups and attempted to pit them against the previous groups. Despite the extreme stratification brought on by this process, Hawaiian society has developed as an amalgamation of many cultures, including Native Hawaiians, Portuguese, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans and Chinese. This unique situation called for the development of a unique culture and language--one which combines all these many cultures. The unique language developed in Hawai'i is called "pidgin" and is used and explored extensively in both the literature and poetry of Hawai'i.

Literary scholar Stephen H. Sumida, author of *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of Hawai'i* (1991) describes Darrell H. Y. Lum (born in 1950 in Honolulu) as "a master of local symbols, especially his use of pidgin and Creole vernaculars." Lum's two collections of short stories, *Sun: Short Stories and Drama* (1979) and *Pass On, No Pass Back!* (1990), are remarkable stories mostly narrated in pidgin and faithful to the oral storytelling tradition of Hawai'i called "talk story." Sumida goes on to note:

Stories like Lum's are chock full of allusions to fads, significant uses of things, places, words, and activities known only to a child growing up in the particular times and places the stories are set; and they are characterized by references to much else that appears transitory. It is precisely this transience, however, that when skillfully treated implies the idyll's truth: "small keed time" is short and runs quickly away on its bare feet. At the same time, the pidgin used in some of the idylls is a powerful symbol of the past and a lost childhood....In Hawai'i still, outside the workplace, pidgin generally unites local generations and the various ethnic groups like the food heaped in generous, multicultural array on everyone's paper plate at a community potluck dinner in Hawai'i.

In a 1989 issue of *Manoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing*, Lum writes of his own stories, "So the stories here may not have that confrontational edge or be quite so trendy or pegged so easily into a theoretical hole. The characters may seem more circumspect because we've learned--we might be related; and you don't 'talk stink' about family. Listen carefully to the story our character's telling, pay attention to the silences. The guys who say only a little, often say the most. He might wind way around the back alleys and side streets to get where he wants to go. "It is kinda like getting around the congestion in Waikiki. He'll get there eventually (probably late), but he'll get there." The authenticity in the stories is grounded in Lum's ability to convert the oral tradition to the written page. Lum's concern with language betrays an almost poetic sensibility.

Milton Murayama's novel, *All I Asking For is My Body* (1959), is a classic treatment of the intricacies of pidgin language and plantation life from a Japanese-Hawaiian perspective. At least four different kinds of pidgin are used, depending on with whom the characters are speaking--closer to "proper" English for their teachers, closer to "proper" Japanese for their elders. The protagonist of the novel, Kiyoshi Oyama, is a young boy seeing his older brother, Tosh, come into conflict with their hardworking parents. Through this individual intergenerational conflict, larger issues stemming from conflict between generations are illustrated. Tosh's anger at his parents' adherence to traditional values, which seem to rob the children of their dreams, is the anger of a

whole generation, and it is inseparable from the feelings of the Nisei towards Japan during World War II. Even though Japanese-Hawaiians did not suffer from the mass incarcerations which swept the West Coast of the mainland, they still suffered from the anti-Japanese sentiment of the War years.

Japanese-Hawaiian American writer Sylvia Watanabe was born on the island of Maui in Hawai'i in 1952. Her collection of stories, *Talking to the Dead* (1992), won the Josephine Miles Award from the Oakland, California chapter of PEN. Watanabe coedited, with Carol Bruchac, two anthologies of Asian-American writing, *Home to Stay: Asian-American Women's Fiction* (1990) and *Into the Fire: Asian-American Traditions in the Making* (1995). The central issue in "A Spell of Kona Weather," a story from her collection *Talking to the Dead*, focuses on the intensity of place and the urgency to define oneself against the seemingly overpowering presence of Hawai'i and family. One sister, Lulu, fights both the very real currents in the ocean and the currents of tradition in an effort to define her identity.

R. Zamora Linmark delivers a pidgin tour de force in his postmodern collection of short stories, *Rolling the R's* (1995). This collection of short stories, some of which are as short as one page, incorporates the language and sensibility of Filipino-Hawaiians, Japanese-Hawaiians, Native-Hawaiians and the many other ethnic groups which comprise modern Hawaiian culture. The stories circle around Edgar Ramirez, a young gay Filipino-Hawaiian, his young friends, and the cultural icons of the late 1970s and the early 1980s, such as *Charlie's Angels* and Scott Baio.

As much as the varied culture and history of Hawai'i, the landscape affects Hawai'i's literature. In the poetry of Cathy Song, for example, the landscape of Hawai'i is a strong thematic. Cathy Song was born in Honolulu to a Chinese mother and Korean father in 1955. Song is the author of two collections of poetry; *Picture Bride* (1983), which won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award, and *Frameless Windows, Squares of Light* (1991). As with many writers from Hawai'i, Song's poetry is deeply rooted to the landscape of Hawai'i. Her poetry tells the story of three generations of her family from her immigrant Korean grandfather, who worked in the sugar cane fields in Hawai'i for

eighteen years, to her own birth. The imagery in "Tribe" connects and even suggests a kind of Christening of her birth by the Hawaiian landscape:

I don't remember
going there into the forest,
although you must have taken me
where the lilikoi vines
dripped sticky sap passionately,
their blossoms curling like bells or tongues.
I heard my first story there.

Korean-American Literature

According to S.E. Solberg the first Korean narrative work in English is So Chae-p'il's (Philip Jaison) self-published *Hansu's Journey* in 1921.¹¹ *Hansu's Journey* was followed by Il-Han New's *When I was a Boy in Korea* (1928). Then came the more well-known works of Younghill Kang, *The Grass Roof* (1931) and *East Goes West* (1937). *The Grass Roof* depicts life in rural Korea at the turn of the century which was followed by an exile in Canada in 1920. *East Goes West* details the life of a Korean intellectual immigrant in New York in the 1920s. Both novels follow a protagonist who rejects the old world represented by Korea and then embraces, with qualified acceptance, his new life in the U.S. No-yong Pak's autobiography, *Chinaman's Chance* (1940), tells the story of a Korean-born and Harvard-educated young man who pursues the American Dream: "Having shaken off most of the costly vices of civilized life, I now live, except during the three months a year when I have to make a living, a carefree life of leisure and freedom, go where I like and do what I will in ways that few men, save some millionaires and those who are on federal relief, can do." Young-ik Kim and Richard Kim wrote in the post-Korean war years. Contemporary Korean writers in America include Kichung Kim, Ty Pak and Kim Ronyoung (Gloria Hahn) and younger writers, such as Chang-rae Lee (*Native Speaker*, 1995). Among the poets, Jaihium Kim, the author of *Wall* (1968), Ko Won, the author of *The Turn of Zero* (1974), Chungmi Kim, the

11 "The Literature of Korean America," by S.E. Solberg, published in the *Seattle Review*, Spring/Summer 1988, special Asian-American issue entitled Blue Funnel Line, edited by Shawn Wong

composer of the *Selected Poems* (1982), Theresa Hak Kyung Cha of the postmodern work *Dictee* (1982) and contemporary Korean American poets Cathy Song, the author of the *Picture Bride* (1983), and Myung Mi Kim of *Under the Flag* (1991) are noteworthy.

Kim Ronyoung's *Clay Walls* (1987) is a novel about the original Korean immigrants to the West Coast of the U.S. Through the stories of Haesu, Chun and their daughter Faye, Kim's novel depicts the struggle of immigrants to relocate their hearts and minds, as well as their bodies, into the Los Angeles of the 1920s through the end of World War II. It is the story of a ship's captain who is a Korean born in Japan. In order to survive he had to adopt a Japanese name and deny his cultural heritage. Similarly, the family in Los Angeles had to sacrifice a certain amount of cultural heritage in order to assimilate. Ultimately, however, neither ruse is successful, the psychological damage of this self-betrayal is as destructive as the racism which is its original cause.

Kichung Kim and Ty Pak both deal with issues of exile in their writings. Ty Pak's *Guilt Payment* (1983), a collection of thirteen stories, deals with homeland, war and the ultimate divisions between people, both geographical as well as psychic. S.E. Solberg, in his essay, "The Literature of Korean America," notes that Pak's stories deal with, "The vulnerability of exile, the sense of loss, the impermanence of identity, as fragile and tentative as the ID card and photo that attests it, the ironic coincidence that confronts the present with the past, the past with the present."

Though a generation later than Ty Pak, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's postmodern meditation of prose and poetry, *Dictee* (1982), negotiates themes similar to the writers who came before her:

Why resurrect it all now. From the Past. History, the old wound. The past emotions all over again. To confess to relive the same folly. To name it now so as not to repeat history in oblivion. To extract each fragment by each fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion.

Born in Korea in 1964, Robert Ji-Song Ku moved with his family to Hawai'i in 1973 where he lived until he graduated from high school. Since that time, he has been living and working in California and New York. A short story, "Leda," published in *Amerasia Journal* in 1991, tells the story of the clash of Western mythology, Asian classicism, American popular culture and filial duty. Finally Ku attempts to redefine European and Korean culture within a contemporary Asian-American cultural vision.

Chang-rae Lee's novel, *Native Speaker* (1995) deals with complex issues of language and acculturation. Writing in the mode of a mystery or suspense novel, Lee explores the identity development of a Korean-American man. In addition to his relationship with his father, his interracial marriage and his involvement with local politics, the protagonist must also negotiate the traumatic memory of his son's death. Lee asks difficult questions about Korean American identity and does not provide easy answers. *Native Speaker* is multilayered both formally as well as in terms of content.

Poet Myung Mi Kim was born in Seoul, Korea, in 1957 and emigrated to the United States at age nine. Her first book of poetry, *Under Flag*, was published in 1991 and her second, *The Bounty*, was published in 1986. Her poetry pursues the loss of a sense of self and culture which can occur through immigration, naturalization and assimilation. In the process there is the dangerous potential for the denial of one's origins and language. In the poem "Into Such Assembly," Kim asks, "Who is the mother tongue, who is the father tongue?" Kim's work focuses on resistance to the internal colonization which can occur in the process of transplantation.

This theme of interracial mixing, and of the resulting multiracial children, exists against the background of anti-miscegenation laws which were not rescinded until as late as 1967. Painful struggles on the part of the protagonist, to relinquish his heritage and what was familiar and comfortable, to learn a new language and way of life, endeavor to appreciate a new system of values, address the issue of racial discrimination and finally to come to terms with one's roots and destiny, are some of the most common themes of the Asian-American literature and poetry. An increasing number of Asian-Americans are marrying outside of their ethnic groups. The U.S. economic and military control of some Asian countries, since the second world war, has

created, in Asia, a legacy of multiracial children many of whom, like multiracial Koreans, Japanese and Vietnamese, have come to live in the United States. It is estimated that, in the U.S., by the year 2000, enrollment of minority students will be anywhere from thirty five to fifty percent.

South Asian-American Literature

South Asian-American literature can generally be described as post-colonial in nature. The impact of over a hundred years of political and cultural occupation of the Indian subcontinent by Britain is often clearly visible. According to Rustomji-Kerns' introduction to *Living in America: Poetry and Fiction by South Asian-American Writers*, "[t]he poems and songs published in the Gadar Party (the Party of Revolt) weekly newspaper were most probably the first systematically published and widely read literary works by South Asians in America" (1-2). Contemporary writings from the South Asian Diaspora are best known through the talents of Ved Mehta, Meena Alexander, V.S. Naipaul, Sara Suleri, Vikram Seth, Chitra Divakaruni and Bharati Mukherjee to name just a few. Craig Tapping, in his essay, "South Asia Writes North America: Prose Fictions and Autobiographies from the Indian Diaspora," (*Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, 1992), argues that:

Like other ethnic literatures in North America, writings by immigrants from the Indian subcontinent are concerned with personal and communal identity, recollection of the homeland, and the active response to this 'new' world. Its forms are multiple and in many traditional and some newly created genres; but an autobiographical impulse--the desire to name experience and to create identity, to emerge from the dominant language and gaze of 'non-ethnic' America--impels even the shortest fictions, despite frequent disclaimers by the writers. Bharati Mukherjee, for example, argues that 'I am not at all an autobiographical writer, but my obsessions reveal themselves in metaphor and language.'

Bharati Mukherjee was born in Calcutta in 1940 and has lived in Toronto and Montreal. In 1961 she came to America to attend the University of Iowa where she

received an MFA degree and a Ph.D. in English. She became an American citizen in 1988. Mukherjee is the author of five books of fiction: *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *Darkness* (1985), *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) and two novels, *Jasmine* (1989) and *The Holder of the World* (1993). Mukherjee has also published two works of nonfiction with her husband, Clark Blaise, *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) and *The Sorrow and Terror* (1987).

"The Management of Grief," is a story by Mukherjee found in *The Middleman and Other Stories*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1989. Based on the actual 1985 terrorist bombing of an Air India flight, "The Management of Grief" explores the cultural gap between a Canadian social worker and Shaila Bhawe, the 36-year-old fictional narrator of the story who has been assigned to help the social worker with grieving Indian-Canadian immigrants who have lost relatives in the bombing. According to Mukherjee, (*The Literary Review* 1986), Indian-American literature is new and still in the process of becoming a tradition. She says, "I know the immigrant world well enough to know that each young writer is a doctor, accountant, or engineer lost; a bright hope, a bitter disappointment. I left India for the freedom to write and make my own life; I can imagine people somewhat like myself, but...it will take another ten years for the Indo-American writers to start making their mark."

In her book, *Reading Asian-American Literature* (1993), Sau-ling Wong writes, "Mukherjee is perhaps the first Asian-American writer to exhibit a full awareness of the global context of contemporary Asian immigration. She deconstructs cultural clichés, looks beyond the push-pull between two nations to acknowledge the reality of the world economic system, and sets her tales against a background of intertwined, transnational economic activities and mass uprootings caused by proxy wars in the Third World."

Another writer who explores these issues is Meena Alexander, a poet and novelist, born in India, now living in New York. She is the author of four books of poetry, *House of a Thousand Doors* (1988), *The Storm* (1989) and *Night Scene* (1992), a novel, *Nampally Road* (1991) and a memoir, *Fault Lines* (1993). A new work in-progress entitled "Manhattan Music" explores the multicultural, multiracial world of trendy New York and makes the statement that identity is often fleeting in America.

Perhaps the world of “Manhattan Music” is a 1990s version of the 1950s notion of the American “melting pot,” except the multiple identities and communities of the 1990s do not erase individual identity. Rather they force people to sharpen their knowledge of those around them.

Pakistani writer Sara Suleri is best known for her critical work, but her poignant memoirs, *Meatless Days* (1989), present a deft documentation of her life growing up in Pakistan, the child of a Pakistani father and an Irish mother. She presents not only her own dislocation on entering the Pakistani Diaspora, but also the dislocation her mother experiences on choosing to move from London to Lahore to be with the man she loves and even the experiences of her father earlier feeling “odd about living in London.” As a writer, Suleri is profoundly aware of the effect language can have on identity. Suleri notes, “Speaking in two languages may seem a relative affluence, but more often it entails the problems of maintaining a second establishment even though your body can only be in one place at a time.”

Bepsi Sidhwa is the author of several novels such as the *Ice Candy-Man*, *The Pakistani Bride* and *Cracking India*. She was born in Karachi and brought up in Lahore. She divides her time between the United States and Pakistan. *The Pakistani Bride* is the story of an orphan girl, Zaitoon, who is adopted by a man, Qasim. Qasim moved from the rural to the urban area. At the same time he is unhappy with urban living and is always nostalgic for the rural life he left behind, the girl grows up to be a big-city girl. When Zaitoon is old enough, Qasim arranges for Zaitoon to be married to a man who lives in the country. Zaitoon is horrified at the prospect of having to give up her civilized life style and to go and live in the rural area with her husband. She decides to run away even when she knows that under the tribal code of behavior, her punishment may be death. Sidhwa's critically acclaimed novel *Cracking India* is about the atrocities that occurred at the time of the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.

In the last decade, several bright stars have appeared on the horizon of the literature composed and/or presented by Americans from the Indian sub-continental heritage. The works of Amit Chaudhuri, Sara Suleri, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Sasham Bedi, Usha Nilsson, Meena Alexander, Agha Shahid Ali, Ved Mehta, and more

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recently, of Pramila Jayapal and Bharathi Kerschner, Chitra Divakaruni, and Padma Hedjmady, among others, are winning national acclaim and recognition. Some of these names have become household words in North America. This is indeed an encouraging start. Roshni Rustomji-Kerns and others like her who are writers and editors of anthologies of Asian-American authors works, are at once presenting the writings of the Indo-Pakistani writers in English and in translation from the original languages as well, thus making the works of the major authors of Indic origin available to those who may approach this literature primarily from the venue of English translation alone.

Iranian-American Literature

Iranian-American literature has often portrayed experiences of lonely suffering and pain, not without catastrophic consequences. Cases of dire poverty, subjection to discrimination and hatred, nervous breakdowns, chronic depressions, and even suicides, have not been infrequent. But there are also those who have survived the hardships, managed to make new beginnings, and moved on. The literature that has come out of this experience is the most exciting with possibilities of reconsideration of the past and discovery of new ideas.

Iranian-American author, Nahid Rachlin, has written several novels as well as a collection of short stories. These short stories were published in 1992 under the title *Veils: Short Stories*. Rachlin's work directly addresses the concerns of contemporary immigrants who often struggle to find a comfort zone between the culture of their ancestors, and the culture they have adopted. In the short story "Fanatics," letters cross the distance between Iran and the United States, but fail to bridge the cultural gap which has developed between the two friends living in different worlds. Writing of a friend who has been placed in jail on suspicion of subversive activities in Iran, the narrator says, "Neither of us had any specific idea what another world would encompass" (3). Conscious of her transnational experience, the narrator recognizes the necessity to translate information about life in Iran through a different point of view. Rachlin tries to remove the veil which hides the true face of one culture from the other. The title story of the volume, *Veils*, and the short story, "Fanatics," both focus on how

inaccurate, unimaginative and caricaturish our idea of the "other" can be. The anthology provides interesting images of Iranian women and Iranian politics. Juxtaposed against the often painful images Rachlin describes, these seemingly archetypal characters reveal themselves to be quite different and substantial. Some of these stories take place in Iran, others are set in the United States, but it seems that the author does not affiliate or identify with either country.

Rachlin's first novel, *Foreigner: A Novel of an Iranian Woman Caught Between Two Cultures*, was published in 1978. As with her short stories, Rachlin uses a title to set up a stereotypical image, only to reverse it. The novel begins with Feri, a young woman, returning to her father's home in Teheran. From the discordant interaction with a taxi driver, a child who throws pebbles at her and with her family, it is soon apparent that she is a foreigner in this place she once knew as home. Seeing Feri as a foreigner in Iran forces us to look beyond the images of Iranians as foreigners in America. The ambiguous position Feri maintains is best illustrated by her hesitation upon returning home for the first time since her departure, "I paused for a moment, afraid to cross the threshold." Interpersonal relations, though altered by differing social customs, remain essentially the same. Revelations of her mother's infidelity to her father meld with the contemplation of her own infidelity to her European-American husband.

Rachlin's second novel, *Married to a Stranger* (1983), might be read in some ways as a work which leads to her next work, *Foreigner*. Although *Married to a Stranger* is primarily concerned with gender issues in Iran, a strong sense of displacement and alienation experienced by the contemporary Iranian families pervades the work. As the main character, Minou, goes through the process of getting married in an attempt to find freedom, it is revealed that her brother Sohrab has been sent to study in America. Although Minou's marriage is of her own choice, she realizes that restrictions are a part of being a female in her society. She feels betrayed that the status of being a "married woman" does not bring her the kind of freedom she had envisaged before she was married. In this novel, Rachlin tells the story of Minou's attempt to escape the sorrow and frustration she sees in the lives of her mother and her aunts. She realizes that even though she is restricted by the dictates of her role as a wife, her husband also often seems equally frustrated. Finally, divorce and moving to America provide her with the

freedom for which she yearned. Minou, however, could easily be the same as Feri in *Foreigner*, who returns to Iran from her years in the U.S. only to realize that the love and the freedom to work which she sought in the US could, in many ways be equally frustrating, as the restrictions which had caused her to leave Iran. Finally, Minou realizes that neither the East nor the West holds the promise of utopia.

Taghi Modarressi's novel, *The Book of Absent People* (1986), is set entirely in Iran, without reference to life in the United States. As such, it belongs to a small group of Asian-American novels which are located wholly in Asia. These novels attempt to explore the specific experience of life in Asia. *The Book of Absent People* charts the search of a young man, Rokni, for his older brother Zia. Ultimately, this search reveals their father's past military actions, but fails to bring the family together. Finally, Rokni himself sets off in a plane for an unknown destination. In this way, he too will become one of the absent people he had once hoped to locate.

Sattareh Farmanfarmaian with her works such as the *Travel Accounts* and *Other World Between* was already making her presence in the arena of Persian-American literature when her *Daughter of Persia*, written with Dona Munker, appeared in 1992. It is a remarkable story of a woman born in a noble family in Iran. She broke with tradition to journey alone across Iran, India and the Pacific in wartime, to reach America, where she became the first Persian to study at the University of Southern California, and earned an advanced degree in social work. She went back to Iran and for twenty years, worked to assist her poor and uneducated countrymen. After the collapse of the Shah's regime she was arrested and faced possible execution. Sattareh emigrated in 1979 to the United States. *Daughter of Persia* is an autobiography, written with dignity, honesty and sensitivity.

A number of American scholars and teachers of Asian heritage, particularly scholars from Iran, by making the Persian literature available in English translation, have taken the initiative to help the younger generation in maintaining their connection with their literary heritage. Authors such as Ahmed Karimi-Hakkak and Erik Nakjavani, among others, have recognized the need to translate modern Persian poetry and literature in English, to borrow Dr. Karimi-Hakkaki's words, "Primarily for those general

readers of Persian poetry, who may find it necessary to approach the original Persian texts through – or with the help of – English translations.” Titles such as, *Outlandia: Songs of Exile*, *Recasting Persian Poetry: Scenarios of Poetic Modernity in Iran*, and *Remembering the Flight* are glowing examples of the introduction to modern poetry in English translation. *The Journal of the Society for Iranian Studies* may also be considered a very good source of information concerning the recent scenarios in Persian-American literature.

Southeast Asian-American Literature

Since the fall of Saigon twenty years ago, Vietnamese-Americans have been expressing their experiences through literature. Much of the literature is highly experiential; it records the Vietnam War, refugee journeys to freedom, resettlement in a new country, and adaptation and acculturation in America. More recent works include issues of adaptation to American culture, as well as the experiences of those who arrived as young children and have lived most of their lives in the United States or were born in the U.S. There are various accounts of war, escape and eventual domicile in America. Vietnamese-American literature demonstrates a great variety of themes ultimately born of the life experience of the people, as all literature mirrors life to some degree

One aspect of Vietnamese-American literature deals with the experiences of immigrants in America. The anthology, *Once Upon a Dream: The Vietnamese-American Experience*, edited by De Tran, Andrew Lam and Hai Dai Nguyen, contains a variety of short stories, poems and essays. These works, some written in English, others originally composed in Vietnamese and translated, offer multiple perspectives about experiences in Vietnam both during the war and now, as people begin to return. The text also explores life in America, particularly issues such as the difficulty of acculturation, language use and the conflicts and disharmony between the generations.

The story, “Warmth in a Cold Land,” written by Nguyen Van Ba and translated by Luong Huynh, describes the reconciliation between a father and son who have been separated by the father’s abandonment of his family during the war. The father, now an

old man, travels from America to Canada to visit his son and two grandchildren for Christmas. "Legacies," written by Khoi T. Luu is a meditation on assimilation from the perspective of a father exploring his relationship with his step-son, Kyle. Also the father breaks traditional taboos by discussing sexual matters with his teenager. For this, some readers may find the writing to be very direct and honest as well as being humorous and poignant. Recalling his attempt to discuss sexual matters with his then teenage son over a Denny's breakfast, the narrator says:

I remember thinking: should I say it straight, using the breakfast bananas and doughnuts for visual aids?...The Vietnamese way would be more subtle, definitely more allegorical. I started to conjure up a fake legend, supposedly thousand of years old (Kyle wouldn't have known the difference) about some young Vietnamese lad who thought for sure he was ready to go exploring into this dark, wet, and mysterious cave--but he needed to bring along rubber raingear first.

Other stories and poems in the collection specifically address the lives of Vietnamese-American women. Khahn Vo's short story, "Madness," is written from the perspective of a boy trying to understand or come to terms with his mother's "madness." The story, although serious, is written with a wry sense of humor. Describing the first indication of his mother's state of mind, the narrator says, "She started screaming while stuffing a Zacky Farm hen in the kitchen and then proceeded to punch it violently. I watched in wonder, then horror. She was abusing our dinner." But this flippancy, which incorporates many references to American popular culture, masks a deep pain. He writes, "My family still does no talk about the time my mother went coccoo for cocoa puffs."

The poem, "Mother's Pearl's" by Bao-Long Chu, eloquently expresses the hidden history of Vietnamese women's lives. Chu writes,

Last summer in Washington
I saw the black wall
My shadow reflected

the names of faceless men.
I traced the ruins
carved in stone but did not find
Mother's name
or the names of other women
who stood against the wall of a temple
garden, parting leaves, weeping
napalm tears.

Chu's poem verges on elegy and subtly conveys the conflict of a Vietnamese-American, grateful, perhaps, for the aid of the American soldiers who lost their lives in the war and whose names are etched on a memorial monument in Washington. However, one can almost feel the force of the unshed tears for those whose lives were equally precious--the unknown heroes.

Poet Cao Tan expresses the frustrations of many of those who write from a position of exile, in the poem "Tomorrow I Will Be Home":

Tomorrow I will be home and someone will ask
What have you learned in the States?
If you want to know give me a broom
I'll tell you, I am a first class janitor

I wash dishes much faster than the best housewife
And do a vacuum job better than any child
Everyday I run like a madman in my brand new car
Every night I bury my head in my pillow and cry
(translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich in *War and Exile: A Vietnamese Anthology*)

These sentiments echo those of other Asian-Americans who have often been relegated to menial employment upon their immigration to America, despite their education and occupation in their native lands.

The literature of the second generation of Vietnamese-Americans just now coming into print will articulate a different Vietnamese-American perspective and identity. One such writer is Monique Thuy-Dung Truong, born in 1968 in Saigon, South Vietnam. She writes, "Both the city and the country have disappeared. My memories are the only things keeping them on your maps" (*Asian-American Literature*, 1995). Truong was raised in Boiling Spring, North Carolina; Centerville, Ohio; Houston, Texas; and New Haven, Connecticut. She writes, "I like to rattle off the names of the US cities that I have tried on like a dress that's always a bit over-sized."

Truong's short story, "Kelly," published in *Asian-American Literature*, is followed by her own autobiographical notes which focus attention on issues of place and language and examines how friendships "can often end or...begin at the boundaries of race, class, beauty and the components of power and powerlessness." In "Kelly," Truong recognizes the influence of US cultural imperialism on contemporary Vietnamese culture:

The United States for those who have been educated by the flicker of Hollywood is a very short book. No one in Saigon bothered to read the footnotes; they were too busy looking at the pictures.

Perhaps in a different category altogether is cultural critic, filmmaker and poet Trinh Minh-ha. She is a professor of Women's Studies and Film at UC Berkeley, and her academic position is reflected in the highly analytical nature of both her creative and her critical work. Her work negotiates a space for exploring post-colonial sensibilities and rewriting stereotypes outside of the strictures of genre and the expectations of form. Her films are post-modern, rather than narrative, in structure. They include: *Shoot for the Contents* (1991), *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), *Naked Spaces* (1985) and *Reassemblage* (1982). Her books include important critical works such as *Framer Framed* (1992), *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender & Cultural Politics* (1991), *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989); and a book of poetry, *En Miniscules* (1987).

All of Trinh's work is highly interconnected. Her films often provide a portion of the subject of her critical academic work, and these writings often read like poetry. Of her filmmaking, Trinh writes, "Some call it Documentary. i call it No Art, No Experiment, No Fiction, No Documentary. To say some thing, no thing, and allow reality to enter. Capture me. This, i feel, is no surrender. Contraries meet and mate and i work best at the limits of all categories" (Trinh, 1991, non-capitalization is deliberate). Her writing also directly addresses the question of what it means to be Asian-American. "What is Chinese in America?" Trinh writes, "An artistic event is often presented as thought, a feeling that has found its form in its formless nature. To paint is to continue painting. The becoming is not a becoming something; it remains active and intransitive" (Trinh, 1991). Trinh's understanding of the nature of Asian-American identity is informed by her artistic experience.

Another young emerging Southeast Asian-American writer is T.C. Huo. Huo writes about transitions from Laos to America, from past to present, and from generation to generation; transitions mirrored by the transitions of the author's names. Huo has published under a variety of pseudonyms, something the author explains:

For my American friends it's serious detective work to just keep track of my name(s). I have childhood nicknames, a Laotian/Thai name, a Chinese name (the same name, depending on the dialect you speak, undergoes a sonic transformation...). Huo becomes "Fork" in Cantonese, TonChi becomes TonKee.

T.C. Huo was born in Laos and emigrated to the United States in 1980. A short story, "Those Years," published in the Spring/Summer 1988 issue of the *Seattle Review* is from a work in-progress consisting of two novellas. Even though the young narrator of the story has emigrated to America, he understands that his identity is rooted to the family's former home in Laos and in the ancestors buried there. He says "Even if I become a ghost, I would rather wander than go back to my old home. Even if I cannot find a resting place, I will not go back." This determination to recognize a complex relationship to an "old home," and perhaps to "wander," is often a characteristic of Asian-American literature.

Survey of Asian-American Children's Literature

Most teachers agree that the best-known children's story about Chinese people is *The Five Chinese Brothers* (1938) by Claire Huchet Bishop and Kurt Wiese. This is a story that begins with the sentence, "Once upon a time there were Five Chinese Brothers and they all looked exactly alike." The brothers are not only "exactly alike," but also drawn with bright yellow faces. What is surprising is that in the 1990s this stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese is still defended by teachers, parents and librarians. Although children's literature and the portrayal of Asians have come a long way in recent years, the fixed idea that the Asians are inherently "foreign" in appearance is still an issue. Visual signs of this remains a part of much of the children's literature. Just as most stories about American Indians are set in a romanticized rural environment, and representations of both cultures are dominated by stories of folk tales and mythology rather than contemporary stories about everyday life. In the future, perhaps, attempts that accentuate the accomplishments of a people rather than their appearance should be encouraged by the public school educators, and publishing community, alike.

The following information is relevant to Asian-American children in the schools. Additionally, these stories inform the non-Asian children about contemporary Asian-American culture and retell more accurately the history of Asians in America.

Before one can begin a survey of Asian-American children's literature it is important to offer a guide to analyzing and critiquing books about Asian-Americans. Because children's literature often relies on simplified images--both visual and written--it is particularly critical to pay attention to the images presented in Asian-American children's literature. The fact that many people will acknowledge that *The Five Chinese Brothers* is a stereotypical work, for example, does not really set a baseline for judging other more contemporary works. Asian-Americans are people from distinct Asian cultures whose experience in the US has generated new and unique contemporary cultures. It would be preferable to use works that deal with the life styles of Asians in America. *Molly by Any Other Name* (1993) by Jean Davies Okimoto tells the story of an Asian teenager who was adopted as an infant by non-Asian parents and decided to

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search for her real mother. Laurence Yep in his book, *Child of the Owl* (1982), tells the story of Casey, a 12-year-old girl growing up in San Francisco's Chinatown, who decides to search for her roots after giving up her faith in her compulsive gambler father. Linda Crew, in *Children of the River* (1989), follows the story of a young girl and her family after they flee the terror of the Khmer Rouge in the mid-1970s and resettle in Oregon. Crew, though not Asian-American, has taken great care in addressing the Cambodian-American experience, which includes difficult issues like racial prejudice. Laurence Yep's novel, *The Star Fisher* (1991), fictionalizes his own mother's story of growing up Chinese-American in the West Virginia of the 1920s. *The Last Princess: The Story of Princess Ka'uilani of Hawai'i* (1995), by Fay Stanelly with illustrations by Diane Stanelly, is a nonfiction account about the reign of the last princess of Hawai'i and her desperate, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to prevent the annexation of Hawai'i by the United States.

What distinguishes these works from those which are more problematic is their authentic and well researched representation of setting, clothing, location, language, and events. For example, in *West Coast Chinese Boy* (1979), the author Sing Lim tells an accurate and humorous story of a Chinese boy growing up in Vancouver, Canada, in 1920s Chinatown. Therefore, if the story is about immigrants, then preferably, the story should be told from their perspective, as in *Southeast Asians* (1991), by William McGuire who tells a factual account of how more than one million refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have immigrated to America and have struggled to adapt to American ways while still maintaining their own heritage. Laurence Yep, in *Dragonwings* (1975), makes history come alive. Yep sets his story during the great San Francisco earthquake in 1906 and views that era through the eyes of a young Chinese-American boy and his father.

Books and stories with illustrations that are culturally accurate and consistent, and that include characters from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, are important to depict the diversity of contemporary Asian-American experience. In *A is for Aloha* (1985) by Stephanie Feeney, the alphabet is taught by using the people, places, culture, language and activities of Hawaiian children. Another book, *I Hate English* (1995) by Ellen Levine, tells the story of a young Hong Kong immigrant who struggles with the emotions of having to learn a new language to survive. In teaching children's

literature teachers need to beware of illustrations using appropriate tools to set the right tone, such as props like paper lanterns, chopsticks, dragons, etc., to define a culture. Scenes should include historically and culturally accurate portrayals of cultures, i.e. depictions of modern rather than ancient China, unless the narrative calls specifically for historical representations. In *Two Chinese Families* (1981) by Catherine Edwards Sadler, the author explores through words and photographs the everyday lives of two Chinese families in modern China. In one family the father is a construction foreman and the mother is a teacher and in the other family the father is a medical artist and the mother is a nurse.

Historically, people from Asia had to work extra hard to learn English which has a very different phonological and grammatical system from the languages of Asia. In the beginning, in order to survive, they pursued professions which they were good at. For example, the Japanese-Americans found that it was easier for them to get employment as gardeners or florists. Similarly, the Chinese-Americans recognized that their cuisine is a great asset to them. Later, many Asian-Americans opened businesses of their own. These businesses became successful because the entire family pitched in. A family owned business obviously gave greater flexibility to the work schedule of those family members who worked for it. Soon, these Asian-Americans were contributing to the American economy as tax-paying members of the community. This presents a very different picture than the picture that was presented to the American people during the early stages of Asian immigration, namely, the Asian workers and farmers are taking over the resources of America.

Cultural events such as the celebration of the Chinese New Year, for instance, may be considered an opportunity to speak more about the significance of that occasion. The members of the community may present the reason for the festival and the principles that are represented in rituals. Putting these rituals into perspective through depiction of other typical, everyday activities, would promote a better understanding. In general, the members of the Asian-American community will have to be actively involved to work towards creating and promoting literature which projects the Asian-American community in a positive light. This aim will be achieved, only if all those who are involved, approach it in a healthy spirit.

Reading these stories, books and novels from a historically informed perspective can rectify historical distortions and omissions. When addressing the subject of immigration patterns, it is critical to include historical information relating to the country of origin and the immigration policy of the US, including US anti-Asian legislation. For example, current history books must mention the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 or that agents representing US business interests actively recruited Chinese men to work the gold mines and railroads, and Japanese, Filipino and Korean workers to labor in the sugar cane and pineapple fields of Hawai'i. It must also be made clear that difficult conditions in countries of origin, conditions such as famine, severe poverty and floods, also forced the people to look for jobs elsewhere.

There are numerous excellent appropriate books for children on the Japanese-American internment experience. These include: *Baseball Saved Us* (1993) by Ken Mochizuki, *Journey: Japanese-Americans, Racism, and Renewal* (1990) by Sheila Hamanaka, *Journey Home* (1978) by Yoshiko Uchida, *Behind Barbed Wire: The Imprisonment of Japanese-Americans During World War II* (1982) by Daniel S. Davis and *Farewell to Manzanar* (1975) by Jeanne Wakastuki Houston and James D. Houston.

Stereotypes in Asian-American Literature

In this final section we attempt to provide guidelines for reading not only Asian-American literature, but all literatures which include Asian-American characters. Such historical events as World War II, the Cold War, the Vietnam War and more recently the Gulf War, have contributed to the stereotyping of Asian-Americans as perpetual foreigners, and particularly as suspect to the American people. This creates a great misunderstanding and those Americans who may fit the description feel that they are treated differently. For example, the anti-Iranian sentiment which erupted soon after the American Embassy take-over in Teheran, made the lives of those Asian-Americans who fit the physical description of an Iranian, difficult. It is no exaggeration that Islam is the most misunderstood religion, and the general public considers Muslims to be religious fanatics. The Chinese government is quickly associated with their image of a

country which commits human rights abuses. There are innumerable instances of this phenomenon; moreover, these images are fortified by the media constantly.

In reading Asian-American literature, readers should be appreciative of the fact that there is an increasing awareness of the status of women in contemporary American as well as in Asian communities. Like some other communities around the world, Asian-American communities are also working towards bringing a positive change in the status of women. It may be emphasized that the characteristics, such as docility, which are attributed to the women of Asian heritage are no longer universally applicable. Characterizations of older women often fall into either being very submissiveness or being overbearing and demanding--especially in regards to their children. These caricatures are only one dimensional and by no means unique to any one ethnic community. The focus should be that basically we are all human beings, created by one Maker and therefore, mutually, each of us must be treated with honor and dignity.

The overtly negative stereotypes of the early part of this century and the years around World War II gave way in the 1960s to the "Model Minority" myth. The term "Model Minority" implies that there is a model for other groups of color to emulate. However, the Asian-American experience in the U.S. which is interpreted as a "success" story, has a potential to be used as a political divide-and-conquer tactic against other people of color. When this occurs, it generates hard feelings between different ethnic groups. Nevertheless, one must sincerely hope that through hard work and by taking the initiative to assimilate in the greater American culture Asian-Americans can successfully work their way. In the last few years, many Asian-Americans have carved a niche for themselves, even in the political arena. Gary Locke of Seattle, Washington, John Lim and David Wu of Portland, Oregon and the authors and reviewers who have contributed towards the Asian-American Baseline Essay are a good example of such assimilation.

Accurate portrayals of Asian-Americans through photography and art reflect the ethnic diversity of Asian-Americans. Asian-Americans from different geographical areas have different appearances. Their physical characteristics such as the skin tone, height, shape of the eyes, bone structure, density of hair distribution etc. are very distinct.

Exaggerated features, such as slanted or closed eyes, buck teeth, huge horn-rimmed glasses, China doll or bowl haircuts, and stereotyped body language, such as bowed heads, shrunken posture or sheepish grins, are inaccurate, but all too common in depictions of Asians. Too often, a person in a head-scarf is associated as being Iranian, Iraqi or Kuwaiti in descent. A person in a saffron robe or sari is associated with the Indian sub-continent, and too often imagined to belong to an alien culture, both exotic and incomprehensible. Exotic appearance often implies trouble, putting one on guard because these images may be associated with terrorists (as seen with the Oklahoma City bombing, when the first suspects were Arabs) and their activities and desires are assumed to be threatening to American or western interests.

There are "loaded" words and images to look for in analyzing books about Asians and Asian-Americans. It may be emphasized that some characteristics, such as unquestioned obedience to husband, or parents or the elderly and docility on the part of women, were characteristics commonly attributed to women of Asian heritage. Such concepts are indeed very dated in today's world and may have to undergo a major change. In other words, in the not so distant past, there existed a general concept that the Asian woman is complacent by nature and training. This belief, to begin with, was very ambivalent. Moreover, with changing times, coupled with comparatively increasing opportunity for education and economical independence on the part of the Asian woman, everywhere in the world, the above belief system must be re-examined and revised. Similarly, previously the older women of Asian heritage were often visualized as being either self-sacrificing and submissive, or being extremely demanding and overbearing when it came to raising their children in a western society. These caricatures offer only a monolithic treatment to a society which is as richly diverse and fluid in essence as any other society in the world.

If examined objectively, we may realize that the traits of respecting the elderly and expecting the best from children are expectations hardly exclusive to Asian-American society. Indeed, stereotyping results from the tendency to associate certain behavioral patterns to define the Asian diaspora in general terms. This reduces the entire bloc of the Asian-American diaspora into a caricature and robs them of the opportunity to be honestly explored. One of the objectives of this essay is to acquaint the reader with information which qualifies them to re-examine, recognize and

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appreciate the contribution of the Asian-American communities and promote an exchange of mutual respect, honor and dignity.

In conclusion, the practice fusing certain adjectives and images to describe Asian-Americans perpetuating and reinforcing offensive stereotypes must be avoided. It is necessary to be sensitive and aware of "loaded" terms, images, and situations that may be unpleasant to an Asian-American person. A literary work cannot be isolated from the values and assumptions of its author's and/or illustrator's background and perspective. In fact it can be considered as a testimonial of the social climate in which the work is inspired and composed. While it may be expected that an Asian-American author is more likely to be sensitive to the problems and struggles of the people, it is not a guarantee that the work is going to portray its characters accurately. This change will establish itself with a constant and concentrated effort on the part of the educators, writers, illustrators, publishing community and above all the readers, who are the consumer group and can have a 'say' in what is, to them, pleasant and acceptable and what is not. The Asian-American Baseline Essay is but a small effort in this noble direction.

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time translations of several important Arab American authors whose work has previously been widely known only in the Arab world.

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- Seki, Keigo. *Folktales of Japan*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, 1969. -- Originally published in Japan as a collection of 240 tales, this book includes 63 of the most popular tales in Japanese folklore. The author provides an in-depth introduction to explain the collection and selection of these tales. The collection is organized into animal tales, ordinary tales, and jokes and anecdotes, and explains the distinction of each in the introduction. Popular tales included are: "Kachi Kachi Mountain," "Momotaro, The Peach Boy," and "The Man Who Made Flowers Bloom."
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