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碩士論文

亞裔美國圖像敘事中的刻板印象與身份認同

Stereotyping and Identity Formation in Asian American Graphic Narratives

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中文摘要

本文藉著分析四本圖像敘事：《美國早期漫畫中的華人》(1995)、《美生中國人》(2006)、《短處》(2007)及《秘密身份：亞裔美國超級英雄選集》(2009)來探討亞裔美國之刻板印象與身份認同。這四本圖像敘事不但反映出紮根在美國文化中的種族主義，也展現此意識形態對於亞裔美國人身份認同與主體性形成的深刻影響。

第一章簡介本文中心題旨、動機及圖像敘事之生成脈絡。文中檢視圖像敘事這一新興文類之重要性和侷限性，並探討此文類如何輔助亞裔美國文學研究。文中對圖像進行深入剖析，點出其特性與敘事運用手法與機制，藉此指出圖像與文字敘事相異之處。

第二章著重於解構種族刻板印象。通過檢視美國十九世紀流行之族裔諷刺畫，此篇提及刻板印象之行徑與戀物癖相似，兩者皆藉由戀物之方式緩和閹割焦慮。在移民頻繁的時代，刻板印象乃美國白人之「戀物」。通過刻板印象之塑造，美國白人得以維護其備受「種族他者」威脅之主體性與主導權。

第三章藉由分析《美生中國人》和《短處》來揭示亞裔美國人如何在種族主義下被建構成「永恆的他者」，同時也檢視此意識形態對於亞裔美國人身份認同與主體性之影響。文中揭示美國主體性之形成與種族主義之密切關係，故導致美國國家想像之排他主義。《美生中國人》及《短處》中則以種族閹割之形式來凸顯亞裔美國人在國家體系中之窘境。

本文以弗洛伊特臨床試驗作結尾，其對戀物癖之剖析不但強調母親陰莖之非存在性，還揭示母親之陰莖實為想像物。如刻板印象、甚至種族之概念乃與「戀物癖」屬同性質；同理，種族論述也應為人造之想像物。此類論述不但將身份以種族的方式本質化，還助長白人對亞裔美國人(與非白人)之象徵暴力，剝奪後者之身份認同與主體性。故此，亞裔美國圖像敘事提倡以異質性之架構審視身份與主體性之建構，呵責種族主義之身份二分法。

關鍵字：亞裔美國研究、圖像敘事、族裔諷刺畫、霍米・巴巴、刻板印象、戀物癖、身份認同、真理政權、種族主義、伊底帕斯情結、種族閹割、男子氣、異質性

Stereotyping and Identity Formation in Asian American Graphic Narratives

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Abstract

This thesis is an explication of Asian American stereotypes and identity formation. Focusing on four graphic narratives—*The Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese (1995)*, *American Born Chinese* (2006), *Shortcomings* (2007), and *Secret Identities: the Asian American Superhero Anthology* (2009)—my thesis intends to destabilize racism and the stereotypical representations of Asian American. By studying the graphic representation and experience of Asian Americans in these graphic narratives, I argue that racism is at the core of the American culture, poignantly impacting the identity formation of the Asian American subjects.

Chapter One is an introduction which reviews the significance of graphic narratives to justify how graphic narratives—as an emerging genre—contribute to the field of Asian American studies. In addition, the first chapter also provides the definition of "Asian American graphic narratives" as well as the perimeters and limitations of my thesis to justify my choice of texts. Chapter One then proceed to discuss the difference between the Saussurian "system of language" and "system of image," the characteristics of the image and how meaning is generated and contained in visual narratives.

Chapter Two aims to deconstruct ethnic stereotypes. By examining some of the earliest ethnic caricatures from the nineteenth-century American periodicals and newspapers, I argue that stereotypes are the fetishistic objects constructed to ensure the more general defense of a threatened Anglo-Saxon subjectivity in a time when immigration was profuse and to justify the white's dominance over the ethnic others.

Chapter Three examines how racism construes Asian people as the perpetual figure of *xenos* whilst exploring the impact of racism on the subjectivity and identity of the Asian American subject. Racism not only plays an important role in delineating the national space of the United States but it also enforces limitation and restriction on Asian Americans, thereby symbolically excluding them from the national imagination—as exemplified in *American Born Chinese* and *Shortcomings*.

The final chapter concludes this thesis with a discussion of Sigmund Freud's clinical picture of the fetish. By emphasizing that the mother's absent penis is merely a constructed object, I argue that stereotyping, racialized discourse, as well as the concept of race are manmade artifacts invented to reduce identity within the relation field of ethnic distinctions—white/non-white—and to impose symbolic violence on the ethnic others. It is only by situating them in multiple subject positions of a heterogeneous framework can Asian Americans reclaim their subjectivity and identity.

Key Words: Asian American Studies, Graphic Narratives, Ethnic Caricatures, Homi K. Bhabha, Ethnic Stereotypes, Fetishism, Castration Anxiety, Identity Formation, Regime of Truth, Racism, Oedipal Complex, Racial Castration, Masculinity, Heterogeneity

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Chapter I
Rhetoric of Asian American Graphic Narratives

Introduction

> *"…the picture-story, which critics disregard and scholars scarcely notice, has had great influence at all times, perhaps even more than written literature…"*
>
> --Rudolphe Töpffer (1799-1846)

> *Understanding comics is serious business.*
>
> --Scott McCloud

This thesis project attempts to explicate Asian American stereotypes and the identity formation. The formation of one's identity and subjectivity are intensely affected by one's perception of his self-image. Amid the process of identity-shaping, one draws on notions and perceptions that define his relationship with the milieu around him. Functioning primarily as an educational tool and a device of social networking, the mass media is replete with these social perceptions and notions that help us to make sense of ourselves and our relationships with others. It presents to one, from a seemingly normative point of view, the "necessary" and "neutral" information of a given society. Since it is deemed neutral, mass media is assumed to be unproblematic and often left unquestioned. Scholars like Benedict Anderson, however, observes that media creates an illusion of proximity which "may mask our actual lack of contextual knowledge and understanding of our material relationships with others" (3). Put differently, mass media is not intrinsically unbiased because film, television, radio, music, the Internet, newspaper, magazines, and advertisements are social products that teemed with dominant readings and interpretations. The mass media, which are saturated with dominant opinions, hence function as a controlling social power for the ruling class to gain control over the underclass.[1]

The practice of stereotyping is an example among all these notions and perceptions as it is a socially constructed artifact. The popular visual culture in our society is replete with the usage of stereotypes. Albeit a seemingly abstract perception, it is powerful enough to alter one's position in the society, not to mention his identity and subjectivity which are so heavily related to his surroundings. In view of how the popular visual culture is pervaded with stereotypes, I would like to adopt four graphic narratives as my entry point to delve into the problems I raised. Focusing on *The Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese (1995)*, *American Born Chinese* (2006), *Shortcomings* (2007), and *Secret Identities: the Asian American Superhero Anthology* (2009), my thesis attempts to destabilize racism and the stereotypical myth of Asian American. By studying the visual representation and experience of Asian Americans in these graphic narratives, my thesis then proceeds to explore the identity formation of Asian American and its subjectivity.

Theorizing Graphic Novels

A huge bombshell was dropped in the literary field with the publication of *Maus* in 1991, evoking a great resonance within. Though my rhetoric might be slightly exaggerated, there is no denying that more attention is henceforth shifted to the graphic narrative, "which critics [used to] disregard and scholars scarcely notice" before Art Spiegelman's masterpiece (McCloud 201). In his groundbreaking graphic novel, Spiegelman recounts his father's experience as a Holocaust survivor during World War II through the medium of comics. Despite tackling with the complex narrative form of memoir, neither Spiegelman's iconograph nor his narration has failed to present to his reader every possible detail and information. In addition, not only does the graphic novel lend itself well to the narrative form of memoir, but it is also suited for the use of autobiography, biography, nonfiction, travel, history, and even poetry including an ingenious adaptation of T.S. Elliot's *The Waste Land* (1999) by Martin Rawson.

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[1] The idea of how mass media functions as an ideological apparatus will be discussed extensively in the next chapter.

Yet, even though *Maus* is a major success and enjoys a world-wide reputation, graphic narrative is not a newly-invented genre. In fact, it can be dated back as early as the mid-nineteenth century with the creation of comic strip by Rudolphe Töpffer in 1827 and the publication of his seven graphic novels in the subsequent years. *The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbucks* (1837) was one of the Swiss cartoonist's graphic novels (and the most famous one) which contains one to six drawn panels with a caption of narration underneath. Nevertheless, Töpffer's graphic narrative was not read in the U.S. until 1842 when it was eventually translated into English. Comic books—superheroes comics in particular—emerge first in the 1930s and became the dominant genre of the form. The years before World War II saw the glorious days of comic book as it was the dominant medium of youth culture before the advent of television (Costello 3-5). The comic books industry later encountered several setbacks throughout the 1950s and the mid-1990s with economic depression and the invention of television, movies, and video games. Recently, comic books have however attracted new awareness and interest with successful film adaptations of comic books characters—especially that of the superheroes.[2] Today, comic books enjoy a wide readership, ranging from children to adults of both sexes. Whereas comics can be found usually in the form of comic strip in a newspaper, marketing strategy has decided to publish comics in a stand-alone storybook. In other words, a graphic novel is actually a comic book with longer story-length. Beverley Crocker suggests that "graphic novel" is a publisher's term as a mean "to counter the stigma of comic book," which has been regarded as a low-culture form (3).

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[2] For the development of my thesis, I have restricted the historical development of comic books only within the region of America. Also, I do not intend to go in depth to explain the historical development of graphic novels as I might spend pages rumbling on it and, worse yet, go sidetrack. For further information, please refer to Matthew J. Costello's book, *Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and the Unmasking of Cold War America* (2009).

Raymond Briggs's *The Snowman* (1978) and *When the Wind Blows* (1982) might be considered as the forerunners of graphic novels through which Briggs experiments with the genres of children's picture books and comics. Later, with the popular acceptance of *Maus* and Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (1986-1987), the market for graphic novels has grown rapidly. Despite decades has passed, the craze for graphic novels still remains, heralding the rise of other graphic novels such as *Persepolis* (2000), *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-time Indian* (2007), *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (2008), and *Anya's Ghost* (2011).[3]

Being regarded as a form of popular culture, the importance of graphic novels was trivialized in the past. Many scholars have argued that the graphic novel genre is underutilized, claiming that it carries deep socio-cultural allegory—which offers us an insightful window into the study of cultural change and the impact of this very alteration has on each social group (including that of Asian Americans). For example, Töpffer's cartoons present satirical views of the nineteenth century European society. Using Superman as his model, Umberto Eco has argued that the superhero comic is a very appropriate venue for cultural myths of late capitalism. The Walt Disney comic books,[4] according to Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, are an agent that helps disseminate the imperialist's ideology and culture.[5] By employing American superheroes comics as an entry point to study the socio-political relationship between U.S. and other countries during the Cold War, the graphic novel, according to Costello, "is highly responsive to cultural trends [and] provides a unique window into American popular culture" as it has been a widely circulative medium during most of its history (5). Spiegelman's *Maus* and Satrapi's *Persepolis*, in particular, have proven that the graphic novel is a representational mode capable of addressing salient political, social, cultural, and historical issues with an explicit, formal degree of self-awareness (Chute 769). The fact that many literary scholars consider *Maus* and *Persepolis* as valuable texts to access various issues such as the Holocaust and ethnic studies has confirmed that, like traditional literary genres, graphic novel is also "a form of expression" (McCloud 173). With the delicate combination of words and, mostly, images, to convey meaning, writers, according to Crocker, "finds that it offers opportunities to explore key issues through the interplay of word and image in an extended text through diverse narrative structures and encourages different points of view" (3). Given the exciting potential of the graphic novel and its literary value in shedding light on human condition, no wonder Crocker claims that graphic novel "is a format that is *at last* achieving mainstream recognition" (1, my emphasis).

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[3] The graphic novel, *Persepolis,* is illustrated by Marjane Satrapi and Sherman Alexie is the author of *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-time Indian* with Ellen Forney as its illustrator. *Tales from Outer Suburbia* and *Anya's Ghost* are respectively drawn by Shaun Tan and Vera Brosgol.

[4] Disney comics have a world-wide reception since 1940. *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* (since 1940) and *Uncle Scrooge* (since 1952) are the two most notable comics.

[5] See Umberto Eco's "The Myth of Superman" in *The Role of the Reader*, translated by Natalie

In accordance with this line of thoughts, *The Coming Man*, *American Born Chinese*, *Shortcomings*, and *Secret Identities: the Asian American Superhero Anthology* are selected because together they can serve as an alternative form to (re)examine Asian American immigrants' experience, as well as contribute to the politics of representation. Nonetheless, some important questions should be answered first before proceeding to discuss the preceding graphic novels, these questions include: What are Asian American graphic narratives and what qualify them to be one?

Chilton (Bllomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 124. As for Ariel Dorfman's and Armand Mattelart's argument, see *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (London: IG Editions, 1975).

What can graphic narratives tell us? And, finally, how can it as a genre contribute to the field of Asian American studies?

The Coming Man and Asian American Graphic Narratives

Generally speaking, my definition of Asian American graphic novels is graphic novels that are written and illustrated by American authors of Asian ethnicity. Particularly, the story of the novel should concern about Asian American experiences and characters. Without which, my thesis will lose a focal point in observing the impact of racial stereotypes has had in the identity formation and subjectivity of these Asian American characters. Under such definition, *American Born Chinese*, which narrates the story of Jin Wang—a second-generation American-born Chinese—clearly fits the bill of Asian American graphic novels. So are *Shortcomings* and *Secret Identities* with the former recounts the tale of a Japanese American couple whose relationship is at a crossroad, and the latter consists of short stories about superheroes of Asian descents and their life in U.S.

Because these graphic texts involve the negotiation of white hegemony, they not only operate as an experimental and revisionary narrative that serves as a meaningful site for examining the politics of culture, representations, as well as identity of past and present but, more importantly, they also challenge the prescriptive paradigms that sets Anglo-Saxon subject as normative whilst projects the burden of difference onto the body of the ethnic subjects. Despite the fact that it lacks of a storyline like the other graphic novels, *The Coming Man* is selected here inasmuch as it represents a peculiar kind of narrative in revealing the symbolic violence of racism. As a collaborative effort by three Asian Americans—Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom—*The Coming Man* is a compilation of editorial caricatures about

Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth-century United States through the eyes of the dominant white subject. Whilst most of the caricatures in *The Coming Man* limn Chinese immigrants as a derogatory race prone to vice and illegalities, the compilation turns to become a narrative strategy to resist and to question the generic scripts of white hegemonic force.

Rhetoric of Graphic Narratives

When dealing with graphic novels, it is instrumental to notice the three major characteristics of the genre: First of all, since graphic novels are teemed with and primarily use images, it is hence necessary to probe into the essential nature of visual images. Secondly, the graphic novel is categorized as one of the eight industries of mass media which transmitted via the medium of images.[6] Finally, it has grown to become a form of popular culture over the years for its massive success and public reception. I will discuss the first feature of the graphic novel in this chapter and resumes to discuss the rest in the next chapter respectively as I intend to employ them to expose the power relationship between the ruling elite and the ethnic minority. For instance, the media representations of "yellow peril,"[7] which were prevalent in the U.S. during the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, were promoted by dominant periodicals and newspapers such as *Puck*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, and *Harper's Weekly* to stir up public emotion to resist or even discriminate against Asian laborers. Particularly, the Chinese immigrants were presented in political caricatures as a debased, clannish, and deceitful race which lurks to overtake America from the hand of White folks.

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[6] Mass media can be classified into eight mass media industries: books, newspapers, magazines, recordings, radios, movies, televisions, and the Internet (Biagi 9-10).

[7] A large amount of Chinese and Japanese began immigrating to the U.S. in the mid-nineteenth century. Many of these immigrants worked as laborers on the transcontinental railroad. A surge in Asian immigration in the late nineteenth century gave rise to a fear that referred to as the "yellow peril." The phrase was commonly used in several newspapers, including *The San Francisco Examiner* and *The New York Journal*, in the mid-nineteenth century.

"The methodologies for interpreting the visual language of the comic book," remarks Costello, "remain relatively underdeveloped" (24). In fact, many tend to recourse to film theories when it comes to the study of the graphic novel as both appear to be visual and sequential art forms. Despite the theoretical discourse of film studies might shed light upon graphic novel studies, the graphic novel, nevertheless, has its unique and exclusive features and junctures that mark its difference from film and even animated cartoons. McCloud observes that "the basic difference is that animation is sequential in time but not spatially juxtaposed as comics are. Each successive frame of a movie is projected on exactly the same space—the screen—while each frame of comics must occupy a different space" (7-8). Hillary L. Chute and Marianne DeKoven go on to elaborate McCloud's observation, claiming that:

> The graphic narrative… differs from… film… because it is created from start to finish by a single author, and it releases its reader from the strictures of experiencing a work in time. While seminal feminist criticism has detailed the problem of the passive female spectator following and merging helplessly with the objectifying gaze of the camera, the reader of graphic narratives is not trapped in the dark space of the cinema. She may be *situated* in space by means of the machinations of the comics page, but she is not ensnared in time; rather, she must slow down enough to make the connections between image and text and from panel to panel, thus working, at least in part, outside of the mystification of representation that film… produces. (769-770)

Both film and graphic novel share similarities and differences. As visual mediums, both are able to provide visual pleasure to the audience and the reader, respectively, allowing them to obtain massive information in a short glimpse. One basic difference between graphic novel and film is that the graphic novel offers a reading experience—as in traditional reading—in which the reader manipulates the speed of perception and can linger and look back at will. Another distinction between graphic novel and film is that the graphic novel can accommodate reasonably long passages of narration, while film usually includes only dialogues or conversations between characters.

Additionally, whereas film directors are limited to the appearances of living actors available for necessary roles, a graphic novel illustrator can draw characters as he desires. Such attribute of the graphic novel, I argue, allows us to approach the problem of representation more effectively because the way in which a graphic novel deals with visibility as meaning is fundamentally transmitted through images and appearances in a graphic narrative. The mass media, as contended by scholars such as Stuart Hall and James Lull, is an influential tool which the dominant group employs to exert its social controlling power. Media representations in this sense are teemed with dominant ideology attempting to consolidate white authority whilst enforcing limitations and restrictions upon ethnic minority groups. Focusing on Asian American's images in the graphic novel can provoke us to rethink and reexamine racial representations as media construction or as part of the ruling elite's complex range of strategies to characterize and pigeonhole Asian American subject.

Since the graphic novel is a composition of written words and massive images, it conveys meaning by employing both words and illustrations. Let us first examine the mechanism of words in graphic novels. According to Costello, there are three types of written words in graphic novels: spoken dialogues; internal monologues; and narrations given by the editor, writer, or other third party (23). Reading a graphic novel require high levels of engagement to both images and words because the general relation between the two can affect, reinforce, alter, or even undermine the apparent meaning of the visual narrative. There is thus a set of rules—including the stylized renderings and drawings—that the reader needs to pay particular attention to in order to acquire a fundamental understanding towards the visual narrative. The mechanism of image functions somewhat irregularly in conveying meaning (a point I will explain later), when a reader fails to grasp the image, he has to resort to the words to make sense of the images he sees. The words, Roland Barthes notes, anchor the way the image is interpreted (33-40). At times, however, the denotative context of the narrative text is contrasted by the connotation of the visual text. In other words, the image may present a view of the text that differs from that conveyed by the word. Such phenomenon offers the reader a space of contention; this is why it is important to scrutinize the mechanism of image in a graphic novel.

Etymologically, the word image is linked to the root *imitari*.[8] According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, the Latin word, *imitari*, literally means to copy after, to imitate, to simulate, or to counterfeit. We, thus, find ourselves confronted with the problem of representation. If we draw a chair, other will know it is a chair we are drawing because of the similarity or the resemblance of the image we draw with the real chair. Differently put, we copy the image of the chair on a piece of paper. However, a chair is but an inanimate object, its external form takes up almost all of its representation. It is sufficient for one to recognize it is a chair just from the features of the sketches, even for a few simple lines. The external characteristics thus become the essential traits that give meaning to an illustration or an image because as soon as one sees the external attributes of a drawing, the visual image that is perceived by him is bound up with his empirical knowledge to determine or define what he sees. Let us draw something animate, say, a person. Some may draw a stick figure, which features a circle for the head and five strokes for the character's torso and limbs; some with excellent drawing skill might draw something even more realistic. In any case, due to our experience, we can immediately tell what the drawing on the paper is. Now, besides the human resemblance, what else can we tell judging from the drawing? Certainly one has no trouble in identifying the sketched character's gender (male or a female), stature (fat or skinny), and height (tall or short) by judging from the given information. These given information, albeit constitutes by lines, it nevertheless invokes empirical knowledge for the viewer to tell what the drawing represents. However, it requires a deeper knowledge or more information when the inner characteristic of this very character is enquired. Perhaps this time, a skillful artist is needed to complete this task because what is required has surpassed the scope of a few simple lines can manage. Even experts may possibly fail to meet up our expectations since we do not share the same experience. Invisible ideas such as sense, emotions, spirituality, and philosophy are hard to draw, or, conveyed by drawing. Indeed, one can simply distinguish whether a drawn character is happy or sad, afraid or secure, but, what if I ask for something more sophisticated? Even if the drawer meant to draw it, the viewer may still fail to make sense of the feelings of the character when being shown the drawing. Hence, some artist might resort to color, or even by drawing something extra, such as landscape at the background, to provide the extra information needed for his viewers to comprehend his intentionality. Nevertheless, as Roland Barthes has suggested, an image or illustration is polysemous and opens to all kinds of interpretations (37). Since visible traits transmit meanings and connotations much more directly in comparison with the abstract ideas and concepts, an illustration tends to show the visible as it speaks across the public domain and because the public shares the same empirical sense. However, images can be counterfeited. How so? Because an image is something that depends so immensely on external traits, simple and minor alterations can change its fundamental essence as well.

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[8] According to *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, *imitari* is the present active infinitive of *imitor*.

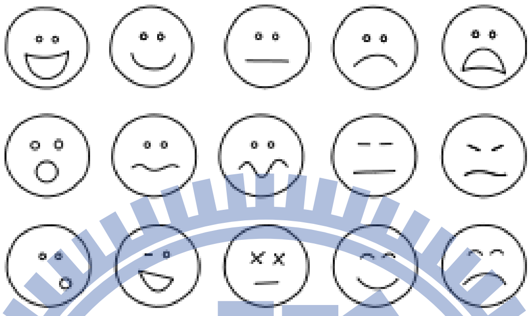

FIGURE I.1. A set of facial expressions.

Figure I.1 verifies my point. While the basic framework of circles enable us to identify them as human heads, and most probably of the same character, we also know that each one of them represents different sets of facial emotion as the lines within the circle clearly differ. Hence, it can be concluded that the lines within the circle govern the expressions or generate certain meanings of the character. Still, the images in graphic narratives are much more advanced and sophisticated than of figure I.1; how, then, do we perceive the intended meaning of an image? As mentioned, Barthes has observed that an image is polysemous. Its meaning is indefinite because it does not function as a Saussurian system of language (*la langue*). There is no verb, nor an obvious "subject," nor a grammar of tense in an image. "Image," as Christian Metz posits, "yields to receive a quantity of indefinite information, like statements but unlike words" (43). While the structures of written language and images are entirely different for Metz, how can we keep meaning from proliferating? Without an indicator to anchor the way the image is interpreted, a picture can lead its viewer to misreading.

This is particularly devastating for a visual narrative. Certainly, our empirical sense and knowledge give us the necessary instinct to interpret the sets of facial expression I enumerated above. And, indeed, the use of written words together with the visual image can possibly provide a much more luminous indicator to establish meaning(s) in comparison with sheer image. Such is the case of most graphic novels but, even so, there is still a risk as the meaning presented by the denotative context of the narrative text and the connotations of the visual image might be unparalleled. If the reader has to resort to written words in order to make sense of the image, caricatures would definitely appear to be nonsensical and meaningless as they are mostly depicted in sheer images. Can caricature still convey meaning or, more importantly, a stable narration? Jonathan Hunt asks a similar question, too: "Can a wordless narrative be literary?" To which he answers, "Despite the absence of words, a visual narrative can be evaluated for plot, character, setting, style, and theme" (425). While many scholars have acknowledged the fundamental difference between visual images and written language, I argue that the structure of image has its own systems of language as well; we may even call it a system of image.

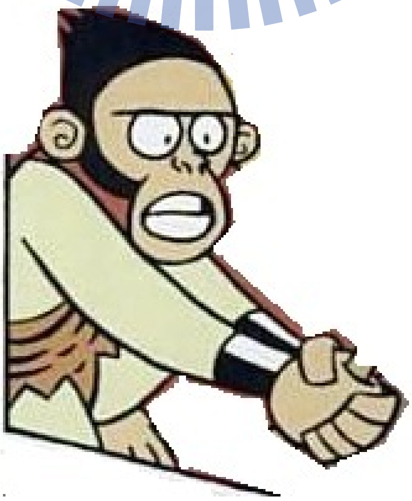

FIGURE I.2. A furious monkey? *American Born Chinese*. New York: Square Fish, 2006. 17.

According to Saussure, a linguistic sign, due to its arbitrary nature, can never fix or determine its own value without its comparison to other similar signs that stand “outside it” and “in opposition to it” (115). “In language,” Saussure stresses, “there are only differences *without positive terms*” (120); in other words, the precise meanings of words are relational and negatively comparative. For instance, in the sense of the signifier, *tree* is what it is because it is not *gree* or *dree*; and in the context of the signified, the designation of *tree* depends upon its negative relation to *sapling* or *shrub*. Whereas the Saussurian linguistic model is based on a binary opposition, the unity of the message in an image or picture can be acquired via juxtaposition. The signifying value of one single drawing is arbitrary; hence, it might suffer the possibility of being opaque because it does not have an indicator to anchor the way it should be interpreted. A viewer will be given more information if a drawing is juxtaposed with another. For example, figure I.2 shows a furious monkey (judging from his facial expression) interlocking his fingers, a viewer may simply fail to decipher more because he is given a very limited perspective.

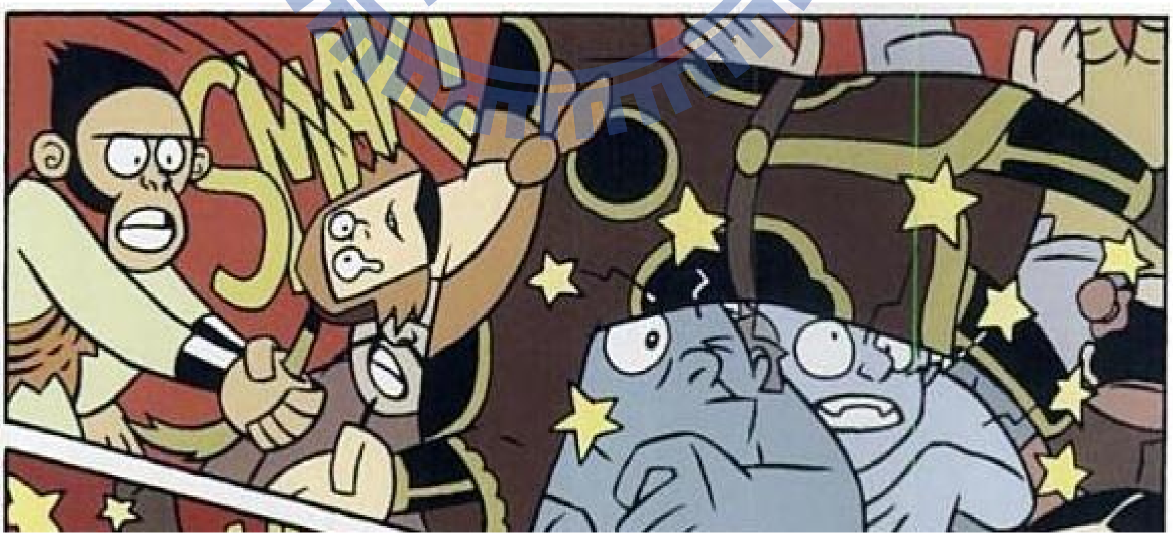

FIGURE I.3. A furious monkey is engaging in a fight. *American Born Chinese*. New York: Square Fish, 2006. 17.

However, if another sketching (figure I.3) is offered in juxtaposition with the angry monkey, a picture is immediately being conjured up in the viewer's mind. By merely looking at the drawing, he might offer a myriad of possible interpretations. A viewer will have a full comprehension (or, comprehend the intention of the artist) about the situation the moment he sees the entire picture. In other words, information, message, and meaning are generated through juxtaposition in an image.

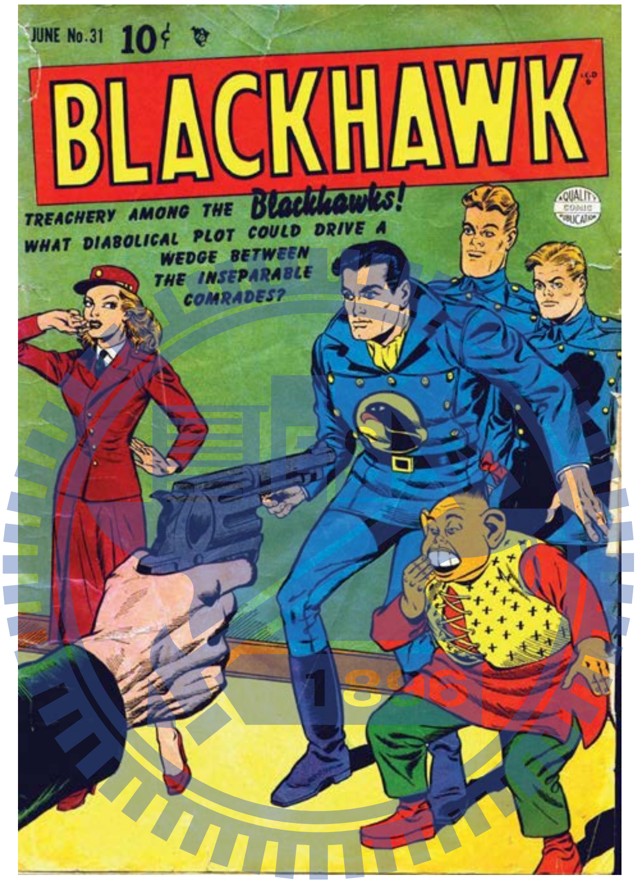
JUNE No.31
10¢
BLACKHAWK
TREACHERY AMONG THE Blackhawks!
WHAT DIABOLICAL PLOT COULD DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN THE INSEPARABLE COMRADES?
QUALITY COMIC

FIGURE I.4. The Blackhawk crews and their sidekick, Chop-Chop. *Blackhawk* #31, Jun, 1950.

With such notion in mind, let us look at another picture (figure I.4) from DC Comic's *Blackhawk*. The yellowish boy at the right bottom corner, whose name is Chop-Chop, demonstrates a strong sense of discordance in juxtaposition with other Caucasian characters in the picture. Chop-Chop's existence—his petite figure, comical haircut, and his motley Changshan—seems to be emphasizing his "otherness" in comparison with his charismatic teammates. Likewise, such discordance is exhibited in Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese* as in the case of Danny and Chin-Kee as well (figure I.5). Once again, the viewer finds it hard to identify with Chin-Kee because of his exotic figures—slanted eyes, buck teeth and queue. By presenting the Blackhawk and Danny as the normative characters, a core message is, thus, transmitted via these pictures, that is, the otherness and the exoticism of Chop-Chop and Chin-Kee.

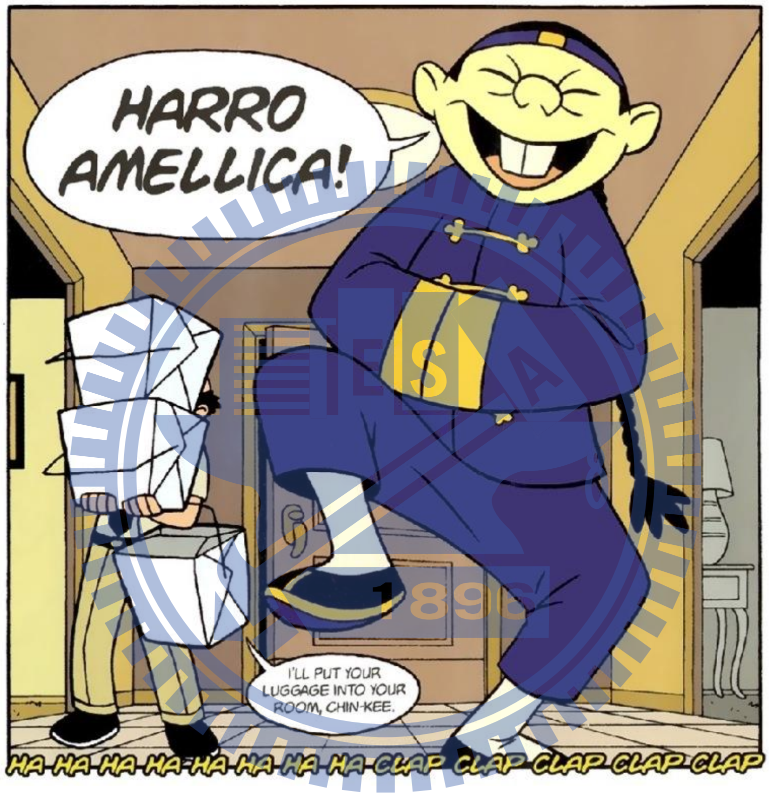
HARRO AMELLICA!
I'LL PUT YOUR LUGGAGE INTO YOUR ROOM, CHIN-KEE.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP

FIGURE I.5. Chin-Kee makes his appearance in *American Born Chinese*. *American Born Chinese*. New York: Square Fish, 2006. 48.

Until now, the approach of juxtaposition is being utilized within a single image; nevertheless, it is equivalently applicable on a larger scale. For example, an editorial caricature of a Chinese immigrant from then nineteenth century can be put in juxtaposition with a more recent illustration of a Chinese American man. By juxtaposing two entirely distinctive visual genres from different time periods, the outcome of such methodology can be both significant and informative in terms of their historical, socio-cultural backgrounds as well as the illustrators' views on the objects in question (a reflection of the public opinion). Juxtaposition in this sense is thus an effective and important way to study the graphic representations and sociocultural situations of Asian American throughout the ages.

The discussion of how meaning is generated in a picture does not simply end with the concept of juxtaposition. Consider again the two pictures I just enumerated; the mechanism of juxtaposition is made possible due to the vivid contrast between Chop-Chop/Chin-Kee and the Blackhawk/Danny in appearance. Similar to figure I.1 which represents different set facial emotions due to the distinctive lines within the circle, minor alteration on appearance generates different meanings in an image. In addressing to the difference between verbal and visual narratives, McCloud contends:

> "In the non-pictorial icons, meaning is fixed and absolute. Their appearance doesn't affect their meaning because they are invisible ideas. In pictures, however, meaning is fluid and variable according to appearance. They differ from 'real-life' appearance to varying degrees." (28)

McCloud's argument highlights yet another crucial feature of the image, that is, it is able to fabricate the essence of the object or entity it presents, imposing new meaning or new connotation upon it. As I have contended previously, an object's appearances control and define most of the meaning it presents. Almost at once, many are able to recognize a character as Asian as long as long as the character is distinctively featured with slanted eyes, buck teeth, and a flat nose without any statement. These visual representations of Asian and Asian American have ingrained so deeply in our empirical knowledge that most people consider it as a matter of course even if they are misleading and untrue. These visual representations, argue Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham, "register on the senses and in the mind, the collective and often repeated images… become part of memory, both individual and social… Through their repetition and power to educate audiences," Ono and Pham go a step further to suggest that these deceitful representations "may be reproduced across time unwittingly" (8). An image, in short, is able to simulate or counterfeit information, replacing or even transcending reality.

Chop-Chop's conspicuous miniature stature and Chin-Kee's bizarre portrayal immediately provokes the reader to associate them with deformity, inferiority, and other negative nuances. Both Chop-Chop and Chin-Kee are condemned to become subhuman because they are illustrated as so in order to convey a set of meanings. In accordance with this line of thought, one can immediately respond to the illustration below (figure I.6).

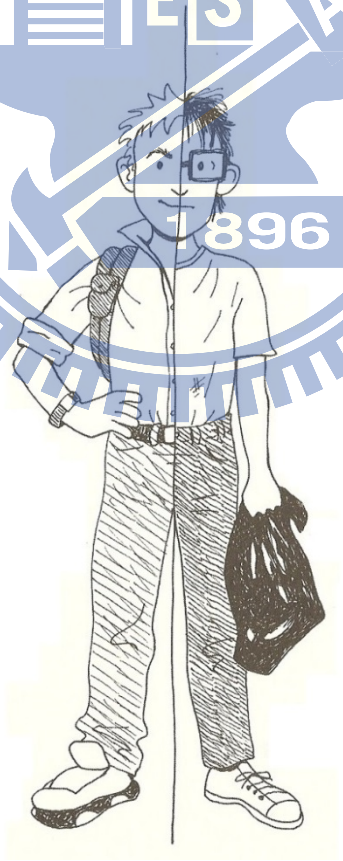

FIGURE I.6. An edited picture of *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-time Indian* . New York: Little, Brown Books for

Young Readers, 2007.

This picture, which I excerpted from *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-time Indian*, was originally captioned but I edited it for the purpose of demonstrating my point. Surely, one does not need me to point out that the boy in the right has a messy hair and wears a ragged T-shirt, whereas the boy in the left might be richer judging from his shirt, shoes, and wristwatch.

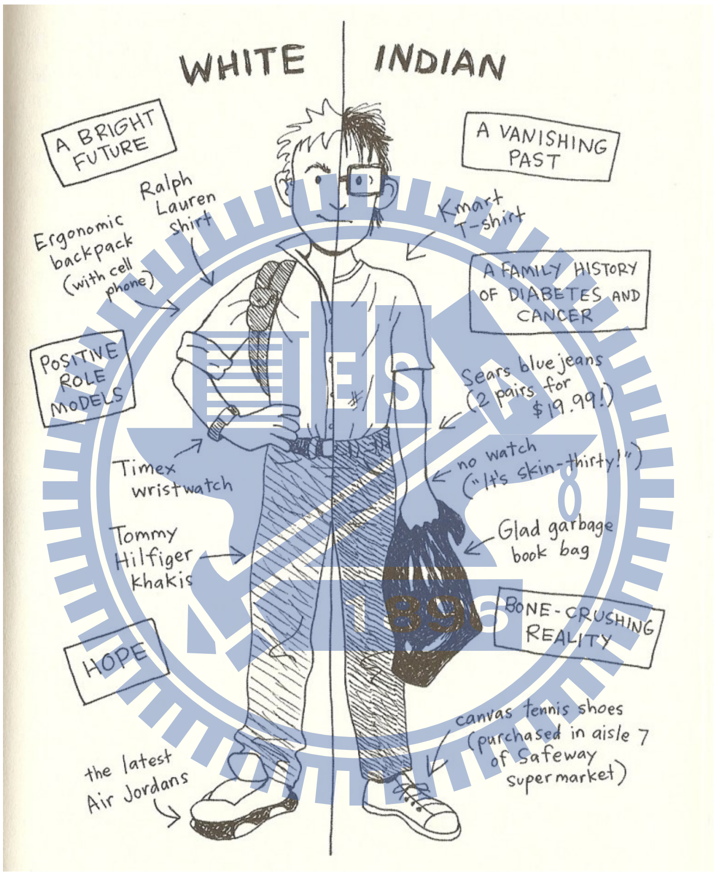
WHITE
INDIAN
A BRIGHT FUTURE
A VANISHING PAST
Ralph Lauren Shirt
Kmart T-shirt
Ergonomic backpack (with cell phone)
A FAMILY HISTORY OF DIABETES AND CANCER
POSITIVE ROLE MODELS
Sears blue jeans (2 pairs for $19.99!)
no watch ("It's skin-thirty!")
Timex wristwatch
Glad garbage book bag
Tommy Hilfiger khakis
BONE-CRUSHING REALITY
HOPE
canvas tennis shoes (purchased in aisle 7 of Safeway supermarket)
the latest Air Jordans

FIGURE I.7. The original illustration. *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-time Indian* . New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2007.

Figure I.7 is the original excerption; compare what you have thought regarding figure I.6 with the given captions. What you thought of figure I.6 must be close, if not exact, to these captions. External traits including skin color, stature, and facial contour not only turn out to be the indicator of the characters' identities but also who they are and, internally, as individuals as well.[9] The visibility of appearance has, therefore, become a medium through which invisible notions, thoughts, values, and perceptions are conveyed, propagating the ideology of White hegemony at the expense of the ethnic subject. I will go into further detail to discuss this in the next chapter.

What must be remembered that each of these pictures and texts (if any) is a part of a story. Hence, the relationship between one picture and another; one text and another; image and text; must be meditated within the framework of narrative. Only through which we can have a better understanding of the mechanism of graphic novel and the embedded meaning it carries.

The Organization of My Thesis Project

My thesis project consists of three chapters. Since the discussion on graphic novels is relatively new, a literary review regarding the impact of the graphic narrative on the literary field will be provided in the beginning chapter in order to justify, like other literary works, it is a form of expression and a "representational mode capable of addressing complex political and historical issues with an explicit, formal degree of self-awareness" (Chute 769). I will then define "Asian American graphic novels" and the criteria it must meet to qualify as one. Subsequently, I will advance to discuss the "system of image," including the characteristic of the image; its difference with Saussurian's *la langue*; and how meaning is generated and contained in pictures and graphic narratives.

Entitled "Drawing and Containing Anxiety: Ethnic Caricature, Stereotypes, and Anglo-Saxon Purity," chapter two will take on the challenge of deconstructing racial stereotypes. Evidently, the issue of racial stereotypes is at the core of *American Born Chinese* and *Secret Identities: The Anthology of Asian American Superhero* as both graphic narratives are reek with the usage of easily identified racist images of Asians and Asian Americans. Attaching humor to Chin-Kee's character and behavior, Gene Luen Yang juggles with the common misconceptions of Chinese and Chinese Americans that proliferate in both historical and contemporary discourses in the United States, including those rooted in American immigration history from the nineteenth century and more recent examples such as the model minority. Jeff Yang and his co-authors in *Secret Identities*, on the other hand, though somewhat inconsistent or cohesive, aim to exorcise old racial myths by empowering the Asian community with their creation of various Asian American superheroes. As acclaimed comics writer and artist Will Eisner has noted, "… the stereotype is a fact of life in the comics medium. It is an accursed necessity—a tool of communication that is an inescapable ingredient in most cartoons" (11).

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[9] Indeed, the mechanism of appearance is not limited only for the characters, a change in style, inking, perspective, location in panels, size and type of panels, arrangement of panels on the page, lettering, the use of line, the arrangement of panels on a page, and the presence or absence of a gutter, according to Costello, all has profound influence on the meaning of a narrative (23-24).

That being said, the approaches of ethnic stereotypes in a graphic novel format is worth exploring inasmuch as, historically, "the mediums of cartoons, comics, and comedy have been used to make fun of Asian Americans and to perpetuate stereotypes of corporeal, cultural, and social differences" (Cong-Hyugen 86). In studying the phylogeny of the comics-genre, Lan Dong writes:

> Emerging as a "distinct entertainment medium" in the 1930s, comic books continued to recycle racist stereotypes and to incorporate political propaganda, including strikingly racist portraits of Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese in comic books published during World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars. When the graphic novel emerged as a popular form in the 1970s, its creators borrowed many conventions from serial comics.

(242-243)

While Dong’s discovery points to the evident connection between graphic novels and editorial caricatures,[10] Yang further gestures toward this fact by having Danny attend Oliphant High School (109), an allusion to editorial cartoonist Pat Oliphant, who was occasionally accused for his racist caricatures, especially of Asian Americans. With the likes of Dong, Cong-Hyugen, and Hong all calling attention to the importance of editorial cartoons in the discussion of racial stereotypes, this article hence focuses on ethnic caricatures in the development of racial stereotypes. Here, it is worth mentioning that there are three significant stages that contributed to the creation of ethnic stereotypes in the United States: (1) the Reconstruction era following the American Civil War and the California Gold Rush; (2) the Cold War which spanned from the 1950s to the 1960s; and (3) the transnational stage. Chapter two will mainly focus on the first stage because Asians were first recruited as miners and railroad workers. In particular, the stage has spawned various Asian stereotypes and some of which has remained influential even until today.

Beginning with a brief introduction of Henry B. Wonham’s “ethnic caricature,” I explore the popularity of this graphic creation in American newspapers and periodicals during the nation’s imperial venture in the nineteenth century. Ostensibly functioning as ethnographic illustrations of the immigrants, caricatures of this variety magnified the racial others’ radical differences from the white race. By exaggerating their innate cultural and ethnic discrepancy, it declared the immigrants unfit for American citizenship whilst reminded white Americans of the immigrants’ menacing potential for sabotaging the necessary (ethnic and cultural) homogeneity of a country. With the national fantasy of racial purity under duress as a result of the influx of immigrants *en masse*, I argue that the nineteenth-century American was overshadowed by a collective anxiety that equivalent to that of the Freudian castration anxiety.

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[10] Editorial or political caricature is a combination of social critique that usually relates to current events or personalities with sequential artistic scenes (Petersen 32).

Such analysis further paves way for another psychoanalytic notion—that is, reading ethnic stereotype as an analogue of fetishism. Operating as a mode of defense to sustain the subject's original fantasy, fetishism offers a mediative effect between the subject and the disturbing other through the substitutions of condensation and displacement. By reducing and essentializing all the "knowledge" one needs to understand of the (racial) other as a whole in one single image, ethnic stereotypes become the "regime of truth" (or a *de facto* erudition) of the other whilst they are in effect "individualized" with unilateral assumptions—what stereotypes represent are not the beliefs based upon reality but ideas which reflect the distribution of power in society, if you will, an expression of ideology (Hall 259-261).

The deployment of stereotypes emphasizes the visible necessity in the exercise of power as a clearly visible part of the other—i.e. its body and skin—becomes the fetish object. One of the most critical narratives from *Secret Identities* reveals how the epidermal schema of body/skin becomes a "discursive site through which… [the] 'racialized knowledge' [is] produced and circulated" (Hall 244). But the fetishistic action can never definitely eradicate the realization of difference due to the ambivalent nature of the self and the other, according to Jacques Lacan in his discussion of the mirror stage. Ergo, the relief from anxiety is only short-lived before the fetishistic act must be carried out compulsively and repetitiously again. It is the element of irresolvability that gives a stereotype its currency—its ability to reproduce across mediums and time. Its endurance in popular culure—in contemporary comics culture, for instance—has indicated its lasting imprint in public memory; not to mention its function as a sign with meaning(s).[11]

The third chapter of my thesis explores how racism construes Asian people as the perpetual foreigners whilst examines the impact of racism on the subjectivity and identity of Asian American. Focusing on *American Born Chinese* and *Shortcomings*, I argue that racism not only plays a dominant role in delineating the national space of the United States but, more importantly, it also has a profound influence on the identities and subjectivities of the main characters. Structurally identical to Jin Wang's coming-of-age story, Yang's reimagining of the Monkey King's legend not only allegorizes the predicament of the Asian American community but also serves as a social critique towards the establishing symbolic violence of racism. In Yang's version of the Monkey King myth, the symbolic significance of the shoes is accentuated inasmuch as the footwear is the key signifier in the formation of identities and in delineating the subjective space of the immortals, according to the doorman: access is only granted to those with shoes whilst entry is denied to those without them. Likewise, the same is clearly true of the United States as the nation's legislation had legally prohibited the ethnic others from naturalization and immigration as a means not only to ensure the racial homogeneity of the nation and to safeguard the national space, thereby turning ethnic and cultural characteristics as the requisite of national legitimacy. The historical construction of people of Asian heritage as an "object of national prohibition" thus renders them as the perpetual figure of *xenos*.

The nation's form of citizenship and civil rights law were fundamentally reformed following a shift in the U.S.'s mode of capital to transnational capitalism during the 1960s. With America's agenda to maintain its "positional superiority" on the global economic market, former structural barriers such as the restrictive laws in citizenship were renounced, hence catalyzing the categorical birth of "Asian American" (Li 6-8). However, despite the state's commitment to formal equality to all races, Asian American citizen status remains marginalized on the cultural front where white cultural force still dominates. Due to the ambivalence status of the Asian subject, David Leiwei Li hence argues that "Asian American has been turned into an 'abject'"—as he is neither the total alien nor the full-fledged citizen (6).

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[11] I have suggested previously in this chapter that information and meaning in a picture are encrypted visually. Deciphering these visual encryptions requires a reader to take extra heed of a (or more) character's facial contour, skin color, behavioral attributes, and so forth inasmuch as meaning is encoded within these visible identifiers—they inform the readers about what the illustrator intends to convey.

With identity continues to be made explicit through ethnic distinctions of white/non-white, Jin Wang's and Ben Tanaka's desire to fit in is thus severely impeded. Yet, their aspiration is in effect a socialized process to claim subjectivity; but their failure to do so not only renders the process incomplete but, worse yet, put their subjectivity in peril. Here, their threatened subjectivity is equivalent to the boy's castration anxiety depicted by Jacques Lacan in his psychoanalytic discourse of the Oedipal complex (Dor 111-19). Whereas the boy's castration anxiety or Oedipal aspiration can be ephemerally alleviated through the achievement of the paternal metaphor; the Asian American subject, on the other hand, is excluded by the Law,[12] and hence his Oedipal aspiration can never be fulfilled. Being put permanently in the state of castration, the Asian subject thus experiences what David Eng terms as a kind of "racial castration" (345-52).

As the topics of masculinity and manhood are central to both *American Born Chinese* and *Shortcomings*, Yang and Tomine graphically suggest that Asian Americans are symbolically emasculated. To list a few, Jin's aspiration to date Amelia Harris is violently put to an end by Greg and Ben's morbid infatuation towards white women has driven his girlfriend—Miko Hayashi—away from him. Regrettably, because of space constraint my thesis can only focus on the issue of Asian American masculinity and cannot go further into the discussion of Asian American women. Perhaps such limitation can be compensated in future research.

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[12] Briefly put, the Law is synonymous to Lacan's notion of the-Name-of-the-Father, the laws and restrictions that regulates the subject's desire and the rules of communication. I will further elaborate on the Lacanian Oedipal complex as well as his overall psychoanalytic model in Chapter III.

Confronting with social, cultural, and emotional rejections, Jin and Ben are both forced to develop coping mechanisms to manage their desires and fears as Asian American men. Whilst Ben attempts to cut lose his connection to his racial heritage, Jin otherwise fabricates a different person for himself—a Caucasian teenager named Danny. However, these coping mechanisms are not unproblematic as we see Ben is tormented with self-hatred and Danny is constantly haunted by the intrusion of his Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee, leaving their identity and subjectivity unresolved. Towards the end of Chapter 3, I contend that the Asian subject is torn between his ancestral heritage and his desire for assimilation, hence in need of a new perspective in reclaiming Asian American subjectivity.

Concluding Remarks

Graphic novels should be taken seriously *aesthetically* as well as *politically*. Whereas most graphic novels in the past have limited representation of minority groups, by the same token, the negative mass media portrayals and their damaging impact can be subverted and resisted with members of social minority groups establishing their own minority media; in this case, creating their own graphic novels. The establishment of individual media has been not only to fight against unjust treatment and attain social as well as political parity with the dominant groups in society; but also to achieve a sense of empowerment and cultural awareness for the minority groups. The genre of the graphic novel, as argued by McCloud, Lavin, Hunt, Christensen, and Boatright, not only has provided countless opportunities but has also initiated a new ground of expression and meaning, even Spiegelman asserts that, "graphic narratives, on the whole, have the potential to be powerful precisely because they intervene against a culture of invisibility by taking the risk of representation" (Chute 772). Following this line of thought, I see the publication of *American Born Chinese*, *Shortcomings*, and *Secret Identities: the Asian American Superhero Anthology* as an act of self-empowerment for Asian American as these four graphic novels might have provided them with the opportunity of self-representation. As such, Asian Americans are able to reclaim their subjectivity in visual media and challenge the ideology of White hegemony, which had long deprived of their autonomy to construct their own identity and self-representation. By studying Asian American graphic novels, the power relationship between social groups will be uncovered and questioned. Such inquiry will be made more effectively by scrutinizing the employment of images and narrative in graphic novels as they highlight the artificial nature of social groups, pop culture, and even racial stereotypes. The graphic novel is, thus, a subversive tool of cultural criticism and a counter-hegemonic force that empowers the minority groups to rise against the dominant elite and reclaim its subjectivity in the field of visual representation.

Chapter II
Drawing and Containing Anxiety:
Ethnic Caricatures, Stereotypes, and Anglo-Saxon Purity

This chapter enumerates some of the earliest ethnic caricatures from the more proletarian periodicals—*White and Bauer*, *Life*, and *Judge*, for example—to uncover ethnic stereotypes as a defensive mechanism of narcissism for an Anglo-Saxon subject in a time when immigration was profuse and as a primary mode to justify the white subject's dominance over the ethnic others.

Here I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Homi K. Bhaba's criticial essay, "The Other Question… the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse" (1983). Ethnic stereotypes are employed to rationalize oppression—oppression that fist materialized as a result of colonialism and colonial expansion—although Bhabha's writing seems to focus primarily on the colonial relations. Asian Americans' marginal status and invisibility in popular media have exemplified the continuation of colonial rule and colonial relations. By examining caricatures and graphic narratives, my essay shows that ethnic stereotypes actually reveal nothing about the other; *per contra*, they tell us a lot about the white people since they are used to reassure the reader of the safety of their opinions and prejudices.

Anthologizing cartoons and illustrations mostly from the more plebeian periodicals (such as *The Wasp, Puck, Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper's Weekly*), *Coming Man* (1995) is a compilation edited by Philip P. Choy *et al* about Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth-century United States. Irrespective of its aesthetic value, Choy's collection is highlighted by its potential to expose how racism is unfolded in graphic images, as modes of stereotypical discourse and of identification, within the unique political and racial climates of America.

In spite of the miscellaneous styles in drawing, most graphic caricatures collected in *Coming Man* have visualized Chinese people generally alike, characterizing them often as one with greenish yellow skin, squint eyes, bucktooth, and a queue hairstyle. In addition to their graphic similitude, they are visually delineated as a degenerated race prone to violence, anarchy, corruption, vice, and illegalities—such as prostitution, gambling, and opium smoking. Disturbing as they are, such ethnographic illustrations of (racial) otherness were surprisingly popular within the public domain of nineteenth-century United States.

Distinguished by its significant ethnic dimension, Henry B. Wonham addresses caricatured images of this variety as ethnic caricatures. Graphic caricatures of this sort, as exemplified by Choy's *Coming Man*, functioned to highlight the differences of the other and were undergirded by racial stereotypes.[13] The almost ethnographic mode of illustration—in physical appearance, in the foods, religion, and society of the people in question—often condemned the other as objectionable with dehumanized and dehumanizing associations; but, most importantly, Wonham sees the images on racial and cultural differences as a "graphic assault" on "groups perceived to be lacking in [the] essential components of American citizenship" (24). Whilst the "values of honest work, patriotism, common sense, and masculine authority" can be equivocal and abstract, American political identity was otherwise explicitly articulated in many of the ethnic caricatures. The evident lack of "American" qualities among non-white immigrants clearly indicated that they were unworthy of a citizen status, but, more specifically, it also connoted that American citizenship was racially exclusive to white men.

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[13] Stereotypes are often used as part of the language in graphic storytelling. According to Will Eisner, in comics there is little time or space "to develop a character. The image or caricature must [thus] settle the matter instantly" (12). Eisner's description has further indicated that stereotypes are representations of idealized character types that are not based on observation but on previous representations. Over time these ethnic stereotypes tend to become widely accepted standards of reference. Saturated with stereotypes, ethnic caricatures have functioned to deliver disgraceful racist images to the masses throughout history.

The Fear of Dispossession

If ethnic caricatures represent an assertion of Anglo-Saxon subjectification, such a racial prerogative must have been regarded as somehow threatening, to begin with. In his discussion of the U.S. citizenship, David Leiwei Li believes that the racial threat posed by the others must be understood in terms of their impact on the concept of nation (1-4). Whilst the unity of a nation was supposedly hinged on its racial and cultural homogeneity, America's imperial venture during the nineteenth century inevitably "[entailed] the unwelcome elements of difference" in its process of absorbing diverse lands and labor (3), hence risking to disrupt the nation's homogeneity.[14] Foreigners were brought into the nation whilst the U.S. exerted and expanded its economic, military, and cultural influence worldwide. In this context, foreigners were identified as a threat to the (idea of) nation as well as its ingredients of citizenry. Apart from disrupting the necessary homogeneity, they also "threatened to adulterate the *national fantasy of Anglo-Saxon purity*," thereby giving rise to a collective anxiety (1, my emphasis).

Wonham likewise perceives a growing tension within the nineteenth-century U.S. society. Emphatically describing the collective anxiety as a "sense of dispossession," he writes:

> …white middle-class anxieties were running unusually high at the close of the nineteenth century. As affluent Americans flocked to sanatoriums and medical resorts to express their sense of dispossession in nervous suffering, middle-class urban whites turned to the more affordable pages of *Harper's Weekly* or *Puck* for a different sort of medicine, one designed to codify

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[14] Interestingly, ethnic caricatures gained popularity in the U.S. during the same period.

social distinctions in an atmosphere of debilitating uncertainty. (25)

Interestingly, the thematic inspiration of many ethnic caricatures evinced a discursive consistency to Wonham's observation. Some collection of Choy's, for instance, vividly expresses the fear of "dispossession."[15]

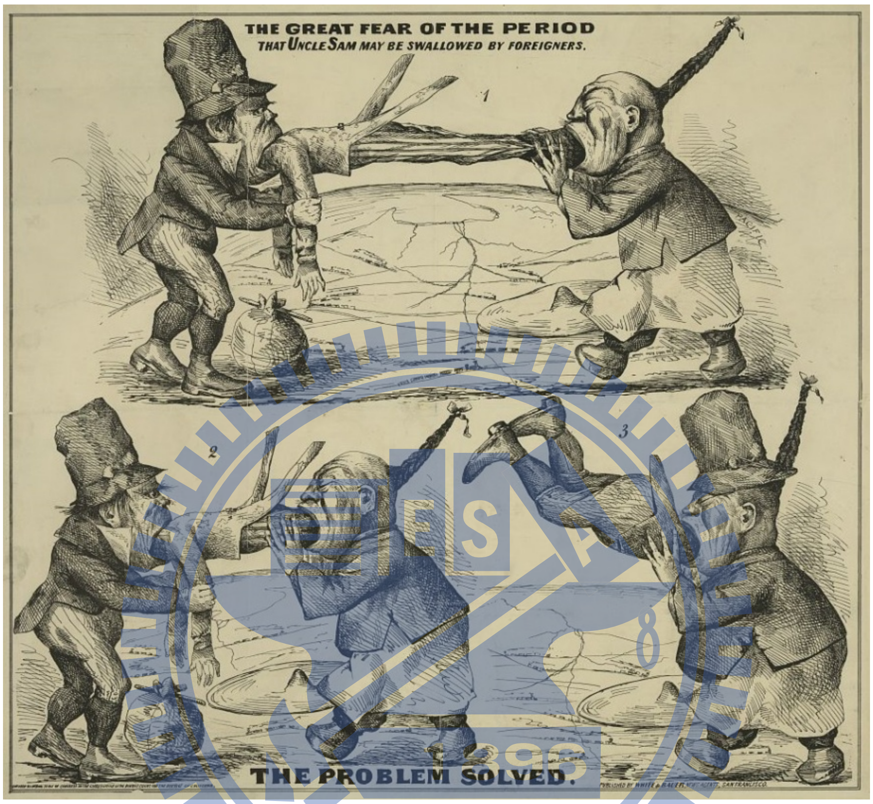
THE GREAT FEAR OF THE PERIOD
THAT UNCLE SAM MAY BE SWALLOWED BY FOREIGNERS.
1
2
3
THE PROBLEM SOLVED.

FIGURE II.1. The Great Fear of the Period that Uncle Sam may be swallowed by Foreigners: The Problem Solved. *San Fransico: White and Bauer*, between 1860 and 1869.

A representative lithograph from the 1860s explicitly visualizes such fervent anxiety with its unnerving caption and appalling illustration (figure II.1). Uncle Sam being devoured by an Irish peasant and a "Chinaman" is "the great fear of the period," as the first scene depicts that foreigners will gluttonously consume the history, heritage, and culture of Anglo-Saxon America represented by Uncle Sam. The cartoon further reveals that the Chinese is the worse of the two enemies as he eventually swallows his Irish counterpart, too. Whilst traces of Irish remain observable—the traditional Irish hat is now worn by the irrepressible "Heathen Chinee," indicating the preservation of a part of the Irish culture—there is nevertheless no evidence left of Uncle Sam, thus hinting at the massive in-flow of immigrants will result in the complete dispossession of Anglo-Saxon America.

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[15] See p. 134 and p. 135 for example.

With Asian immigrants swarming into America as a result of the mining boom during the California Gold Rush and the subsequent building of the transcontinental railroad system (Yin 12), the fear escalated and contributed to a height of anti-Sinicism.[16] The creation of "yellow peril" (or sometimes yellow terror),[17] a widely used expression in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century,[18] was driven exactly by this impulse—the fear of dispossession. According to Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham, the term generally refers to the irrational fear that East Asian societies would "take over, invade, or otherwise negatively Asianize the US nation and its society and culture" (25). Unsurprisingly, this racialized discourse was ubiquitous in contemporary popular culture as many addressed the issue through a number of topics—based upon my observation on the nineteenth-century ethnic caricatures—among them, the perceived competition with the white labor force from Asian workers; the supposed moral degeneracy of Asian people; the possible military invasions from Asia; and fears of potential genetic mixing (i.e. miscegenation) of Anglo-Saxons with Asians.

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[16] A massive migration to California from all over the world—including China—took place precipitately as soon as the discovery of gold at John Sutter's sawmill on January 24, 1848.

[17] The term was reportedly coined by King of Prussia—Kaiser Wilhelm II—in referring to Japan's sudden rise as a military and industrial force in the late nineteenth century; it took on a more general meaning embracing the whole of Asia. Gary Okihiro and Gina Marchetti otherwise suggest the notion may date back centuries earlier as Okihiro sees yellow peril as a way of thinking about the Persians by the Greek during the fifth century BC; whereas Marchetti thinks of the term as a reference to the medieval fears of the Mongolian invasion of Europe (Ono 25).

[18] Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham otherwise argue that the yellow peril is discursively entrenched and remains influential in the media representations of Asians and Asian Americans until today. For more information, read Ono's and Pham's *Asian Americans and the Media* (2009).

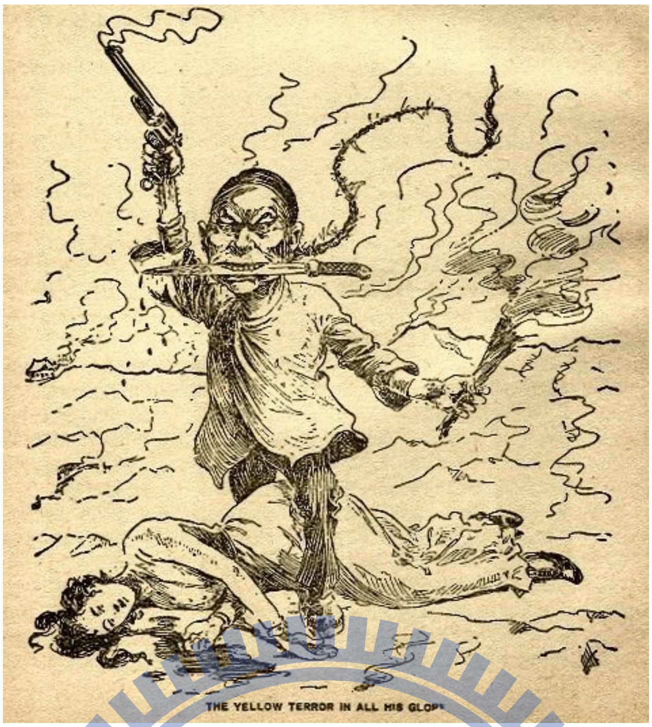
THE YELLOW TERROR IN ALL HIS GLORY

FIGURE II.2. The Yellow Terror in all its glory. 1899.

The yellow peril was noticeably personified in an apocalyptic image entitled "The Yellow Terror in all its glory" (figure II.2). Violently wielding a smoking gun and a burning torch, the illustration highlights the absolute alterity of the Chinese man—not only is he depicted as relentlessly pugnacious in nature but also an agent of anarchy who will incite chaos and disorder for the Western civilization. By holding him responsible for the death of a white women, another embodiment of America, the lithograph further connotes the Chinese is a mortal threat to the nation, as represented by the body lying on the ground. With blood streaming out of her lips, the gruesome scene cautions the public that the U.S. would share the lady's ghastly fate should the Chinese flock the nation.

The graphic representations of Uncle Sam and the white woman—notably their ethnicities—further articulate an underlying Anglo-Saxon selfhood.[19] As a common national personification of the U.S. in editorial cartoons, Uncle Sam's symbolic significance is highlighted by his portrayal as a collective self-image (as well as a self-identity) of the nation itself. Likewise a national representation, the lady instead symbolizes the chastity of the nation—i.e. its ethnic and cultural purity. The annihilation of Uncle Sam and the defilement of the white woman—both implicitly insinuates an imminent national dispossession—thus represent a kind of threat to the white's subjectivity. Socially valorized and loaded with narcissism, the significance of the Anglo-Saxon subjectivity is equivalent to that of a phallus, a point I will explain shortly, because it is the basis of a budding awareness of a collective (or national) identity which admits the subject to fantasize itself as a whole and singularly unified entity (i.e. the nationality). Given the narcissistic importance of the white's subjectivity, the concept of dispossession should thus be read in tandem with Sigmund Freud's notion of castration anxiety.

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[19] By Uncle Sam, I am referring to the previous figure II.1.

Freud theorizes the traumatic event of the little boy's confrontation with an anatomically distinctive female body—a body that lacks of a phallus—as fear-inspiring because it evidences the possibility of his being castrated. Functioning as a vehicle of pleasure, identity, and self-investment alike, the potential castration of the highly-valued phallus thus poses a narcissistic threat to the child's subjectivity (or ego, in the Freudian term) (Freud 9: 215-16). This extinction of subjectivity is greatly threatening to both the United States and the male child because, as Derek Hook points out:[20]

> …the stakes of loss involved here are seemingly catastrophic, at least from the perspective of the threatened subject, to whom the threat is that of the collapse of a narcissistic or solipsistic image of the world of me (or of others like me that reflect back my image), be that a world of masculinity or

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[20] I am greatly influenced by Hook as his article elaborates upon Bhabha's esoteric approach on racial stereotypes, fetishism, and racism, offering detailed explanations to these issues that are crucial in the buildup of my argument in this chapter.

> that of whiteness… (12)

Too great a fear to his existence, the boy hence disavows the traumatic impression to assuage the anxiety. Freud's observation suggests that this form of "disavowal" is contradictory in nature as it enables the co-existence of two mutually irreconcilable beliefs: the child retains the belief that the mother has a phallus whilst simultaneously accepting that she does not. As a compromise, he creates a fetish object as a replacement for the missing phallus to "[extend] the efficacy of disavowal." In other words, "the fetish is that thing or activity—or… both of these combination" that guarantees (or defends) the persistence of the subject's (original) fantasy (Hook 13). For the boy, the fetish object is a precious device as it alleviates the (castration) anxiety and protects the narcissistic selfhood of the child. Fetishism, in short, acts as a mode of defense.

Likewise, the discovery of ethnic and cultural diversity is equally frightening for the white subject. Despite giving ethnic and cultural difference recognition, the white subject remains cling to what Bhabha terms as "the myth of historical origination" (26)—that is, the notions of racial purity, the superiority of one race, and the degeneracy of another. The fetishistic act—ethnic stereotyping—is thus carried out to alleviate the discovery of (racial) otherness as, similar to the fetish object, it enables the white subject to preserve by ensuring the success of the more general defense of disavowal.

Difference, as a source of anxiety, needs to be disavowed. If graphically barring the immigrants from legal citizenship is an act of disavowal directed at the external reality of racial and cultural differences, then this form of denial is unrealistic and untenable. Just as the castration anxiety entails contradictions of attitudes, the fear of dispossession is likewise structured by two coexistent-yet-incompatible beliefs: one that recognizes the reality (of ethnic diversity) and another that disavows it. In other words, the disturbing reality (of ethnic diversity) is likely to sabotage the subject's fantasy (of racial purity) this form of racial disavowal sets off to ensure. With the narcissistic universe of me and mine under duress, a stand-in is thus imperative to domesticate (or "normalize," in Bhabha's terms) the difference and disturbance as well as to "enable the irrational defense of disavowal" (Hook 12).

Whereas the child's "recognition of sexual difference… is disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks that difference and restores an original presence," the reality of ethnic difference is mediated by and made bearable with the invention of ethnic stereotypes (Bhabha 26). By "[enabling] the more general defense of disavowal," the creation of stereotypes restores its (original) fantasy and mitigates the imminent extinction of subjectivity (Hook 13).

Despite it admits the prioritization of certain motifs—disavowal over recognition; the fantasy over the reality— fetishism is by no means a complete eradication of all traces of difference. The reality of his discovery of (sexual) difference cannot be simply undone, on the contrary. What the fetish offers, instead, is a mediative effect between the subject and the disturbing other. We should emphasize the functional qualities of the fetish if we are to properly understand its mediative purpose.

Whilst the confrontation with "the disturbing other who 'evidenced' the difference" can be immensely threatening, a recourse to the fetish item (or process) can be otherwise mitigative (Hook 23). By substituting the absence of the phallus with another part of the body or another object, the fetish, in turn, operates as a cover up or concealment to the difference that is experienced as threatening whilst taking on symbolic attributes of the phallus. Freud posits that objects that vaguely resemble the penis—either in appearance or part of its functioning—may well operate as the fetish, the fetishistic substitution thus operates through the psychoanalytic operations of displacement and condensation.

The process of displacement typically utilizes part-to-whole connections, whereby a distinctive part of something "stands in" for the whole. Requiring contiguity of meaning, such substitutive process is a "displacement by association" as one term is substituted for another with which it is closely related (Hook 15). By contrast, the operation of condensation compresses several figures and ideas into one image whilst allowing "substitution of an object from one category… for another" (Hook 25).

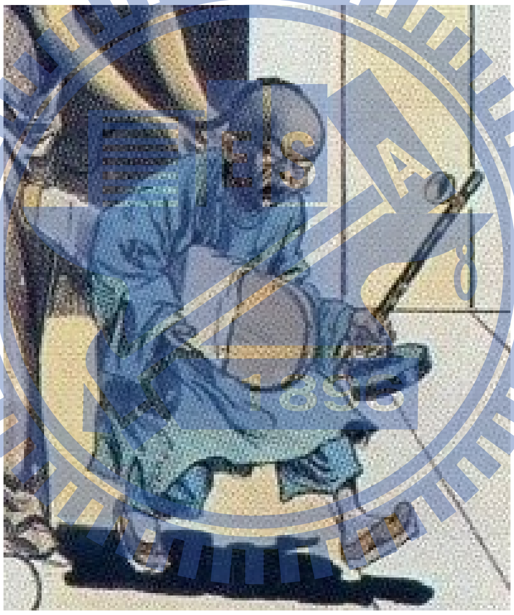

FIGURE II.3. The graphic representation of Chinese as tropes of fetishism. *Judge*, *circa* 1893.

In the substitutive process of part for the whole, certain distinctive qualities are emphasized beyond the diverse features of the object as a whole. Accordingly, the fetishized other is subjected to an extreme form of essentialization, by which its entire entity is displaced by mere objects, organs, or even portions of its body. Stereotyping also operates through concentration, condensing (or reducing) the ethnic other into a given set of characteristics. The period's rich discourse of ethnic representation is rife with tropes of fetishism as the racial others are reduced to what are taken to be their most essential features. For Chinese immigrants, as exemplified by the extracted illustration above, his individual identity is interchangeable with his pale yellow skin, slit eyes, buck teeth, queue, changshans, the opium pipe, and the ironing utensils he carries (figure II.3). These sets of characteristics, in turn, come to serve as a summary of the entire individual in a reductionist and essentializing manner.

Functioning both as a stands in for the other and a point of concentration for what are taken to be their most essential qualities, ethnic stereotyping is thus a mediative process between the subject and the other because, according to Hook, "it is more easily controlled and manipulated than is the original disturbing (sexual or racial) other who 'evidenced' the difference that is experienced as threatening" (23). Yet, the reading of stereotypes as an analogue of fetishism also highlights the subject's fixation on the fetish item. Just as Freud argues that the (fetish) object offers a mollifying cover up for the sexual anomaly, the (Anglo-Saxon) subject is likewise fixated on ethnic stereotypes for reason alike. Put differently, the fetishistic substitution suggests the other is identified and comprehended only in terms of the stereotype as Hook points out that "the other will typically be mediated by the operation of the stereotype" (23). I will return in the final chapter to discuss the impacts of fetishistic substitution on the ethnic other.

"Regime of Truth": Racialized Knowledge and Practices

The fixation on ethnic stereotypes thus sees a ubiquitous circulation of racialized knowledge which "informs the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization" (Bhabha 19). By keeping difference within a circumscribed set of characteristics, the racialized knowledge hence produces the (ethnic and cultural) other as stable and reliably known. Generally look alike, as exemplified by Choy's collection of ethnic caricatures, their graphic similitude instantiates the consolidation or fixity of Chinese's identity and representation. Queue, opium, slit eyes, and other features become a fixed reality and all that is necessary to know about Chinese. These distinctive qualities, in turn, come to operate as an objective truth or a trustworthy source of knowledge despite they are essentially no more than caricatures.

But the nature of "knowledge" remains questionable and problematic for many scholars. Michel Foucault, in particular, introduces the term "regime of truth" to suggest that power is exerted through the process in which things are defined to be true. In his exploration of the historical developments of ethnic caricatures, Henry Wonham likewise discovers that:

> …editors were at first content to incorporate caricature less as a graphic technique than as a topic of analysis. Throughout the late 1880s and early 1890s, *Century* entertained readers with caricatured images disguised in the form of scholarship… (17-18)

Moreover, its association with the academic studies of ethnology and physiognomy further rationalizes the racialized knowledge as a *de facto* and unbiased erudition of exotic cultures and ethnicities, whilst it is, in effect, the notions of racial purity and cultural superiority that underlies the creation of such form of "scholarship" (Wonham 12-13). In this sense, the racialized knowledge is nothing but an instrument of power, established and employed by the (Anglo-Saxon) subject as a means of self-preservation (of its original fantasy)—whilst it nevertheless entails the formulation of a grid of ideological control and dominance over the (ethnic and cultural) others.

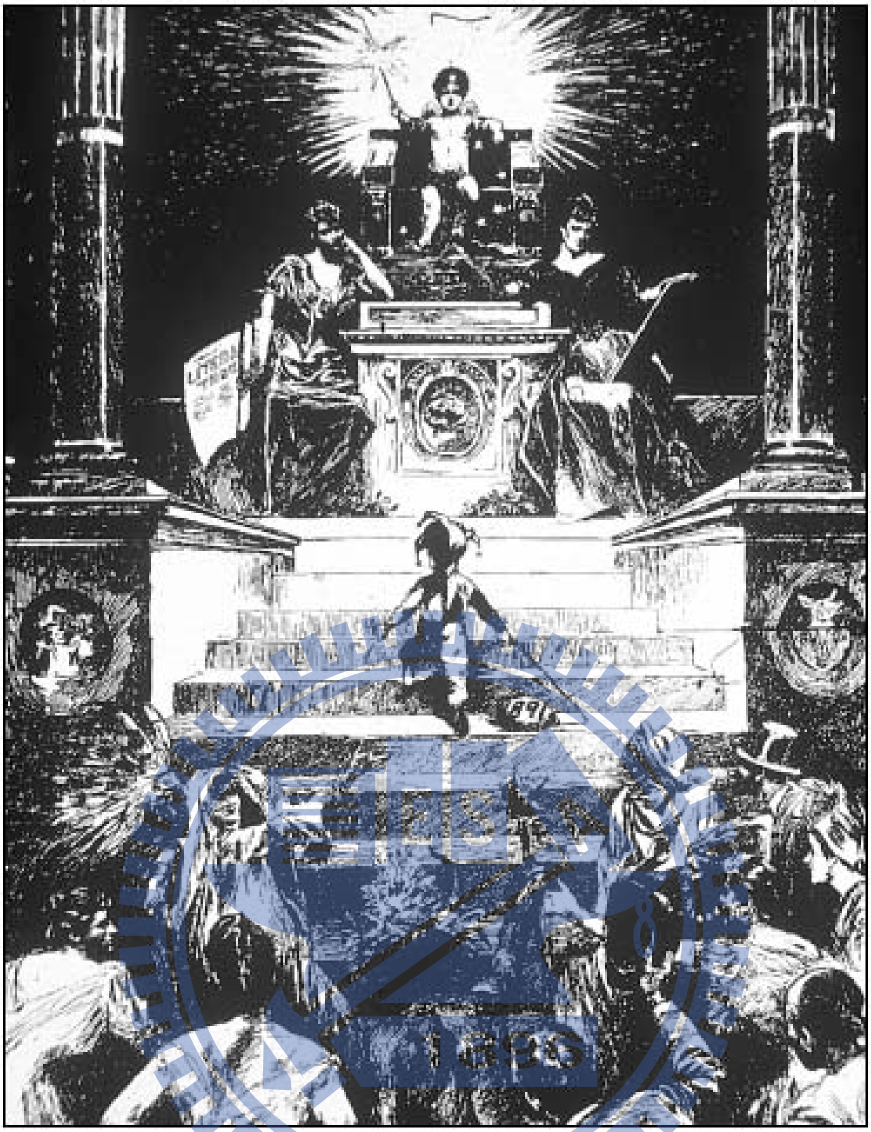

FIGURE II.4. *Life* Receives the New Year. *Life*, Jan. 1, 1891.

By construing the other as a fixed reality—both as a degenerated type and a radiant source of otherness—on the basis of racial purity, the racialized knowledge thus establishes an ethnic and cultural hierarchy where the Anglo-Saxon subject is placed at the top stratum, thereby justifying its necessary superiority and absolute authority over the other. Perhaps ethnic stereotypes, which are produced as an objective knowledge, can be best encapsulated by Wonham's own example of an 1891 illustration in *Life*—a lithograph which renders "an elfin monarch seated on a monumental throne, flanked by Art and Literature, who prepare to depict the racial and ethnic types assembled at the foot of the stairs" (25-26) (figure II.4). Being perched at each end of the image, the pyramidal positioning of the characters tactfully implies that, in comparison who the other ethnic groups who merely gather at the bottom of the stairs, it is the glorious Anglo-Saxon sovereign who reigns.

Yet, if ethnic stereotypes embody the subject's fantasy, then the operation of stereotyping surely involves a visible necessity; as Hook explains, "Freud typically approaches fantasies in the mode of 'scenes,' hence emphasizing their visual quality as scenarios through which desire is staged—that which is seen…" (17).[21] In fact, the visual element of racial difference has always been the key feature of ethnic caricature as well as graphic narrative. As exemplified by the illustration of the Chinese (figure II.3), the graphical focus on the Chinese' appearance—notably his body (and skin)—has provided the necessary visibility of the fetish in the exercise of power. The appearance of Asians was likewise problematic in American comics. Illustrated as clawed, fanged, and drooling, Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith observe that the Asian villains hardly appeared human and were often depicted as animal-like: "rats and snakes with slanted squinty eyes were popular. They were reduced to a form of vermin that it seemed only natural to *exterminate*" or domesticate (250, my emphasis) (figure II.5).

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[21] Frantz Fanon accentuates the visible—the seen—in his essay "The Fact of Blackness" by focusing on an occasion when "a white girl fixes [him] in a look and word as she turns to identify with her mother": "*Look*, a Negro… Mamma, *see* the Negro! I'm frightened. Frightened. Frightened" (258). Hook finds Bhabha's works is similar to that of Fanon as both demonstrate the site of fantasy and desire is related to the "sight" of subjectification and power.

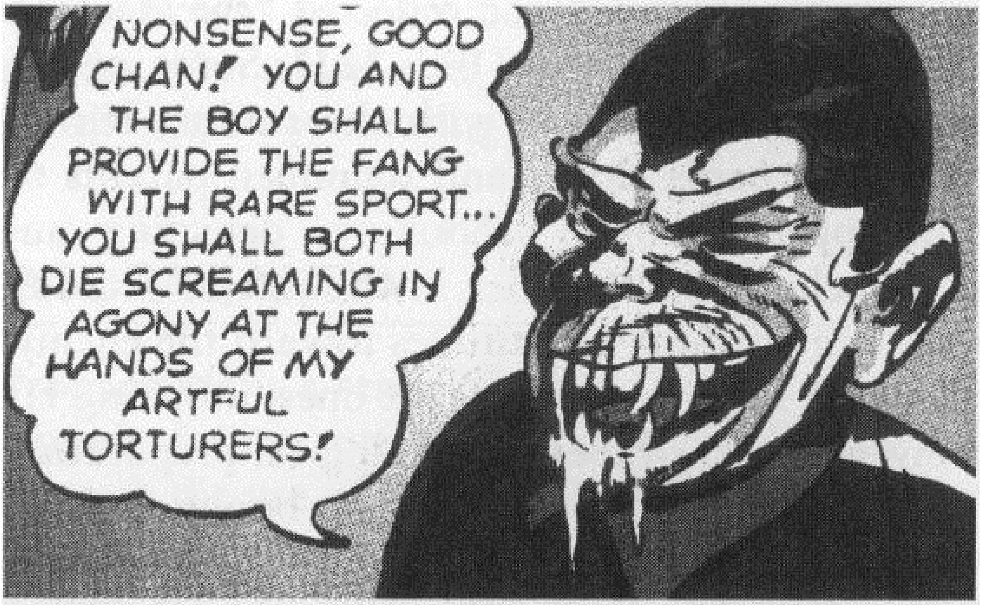
NONSENSE, GOOD CHAN! YOU AND THE BOY SHALL PROVIDE THE FANG WITH RARE SPORT... YOU SHALL BOTH DIE SCREAMING IN AGONY AT THE HANDS OF MY ARTFUL TORTURERS!

FIGURE II.5. Fang, one of the Asian villains of Captain America, was presented as subhuman. *Captain American Comics* #6, Sept, 1941.

Given the significance of the body's representation, Stuart Hall thus posits that:

> The body itself and its difference were visible for all to see, and thus provided "the inconvertible evidence" for…racial difference. The representation of "difference" through the body became the discursive site through which much of this "racialized knowledge" was produced and circulated. (244)

Bhabha likewise conceptualizes the skin as the "key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype… [and is] recognized as a "'common knowledge' in a range of cultural, political, historical discourses" (30). Ethnic stereotypes, according to Hall and Bhabha, can thus be understood as a construction of signs through the visible body/skin, a signifier which designates to "the signifieds of racial typology… ideologies of racial and cultural dominance or degeneration" (Bhabha 27). Hence "skin, as a signifier of discrimination, must be produced or processed as visible" (Bhabha 31).

The association between visibility and the production of racialized knowledge is especially emphasized in Jerry Ma’s and Jonathan Tsuei’s collaborative short piece entitled “9066” in *Secret Identities*. Named after the United States Executive Order 9066 signed and issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1942, this policy initiated the relocation of 120,000 Japanese American, over half of whom were Nisei and Sansei and many of whom had never been to Japan, into concentration camps and resulted in the constitutional discrimination against people of Japanese ancestry.[22] Setting in such historical and political juncture, “9066” depicts the story of a Nisei superhero who commits himself to a life of crime-fighting (25-28). Whilst his heroic feats had him accepted by other white superheroes, the war between the United States and Imperial Japan soon renders him just an enemy of the nation. Consequentially, not only do his friends have turned against him, but they even send him to Japanese internment camp.

Whilst it deftly points to the injustice experienced by this ethnic community, Ma’s and Tsuei’s productive tale also highlights the epidermal schema that brings about certain knowledge-effects that permit the institution of prejudicial practices, whether politically or culturally, as we see tropes of yellow peril is again employed to present Japanese as menacing in both reality and discourse. The construction of yellow peril is exactly a manifestation of the epidermal schema. Metaphorically alluding to the skin color of Asian people, Ono and Pham notice:

> [The discourse] shifts the public understanding and discussion of Asians and Asian Americans as a yellow peril whether or not it, or indeed any peril, exists. For instance, whilst no Japanese Americans was ever found guilty of treason, espionage, or spying, rumors and even official records at the time “imagined” Japanese Americans were Japan’s “fifth column” and were

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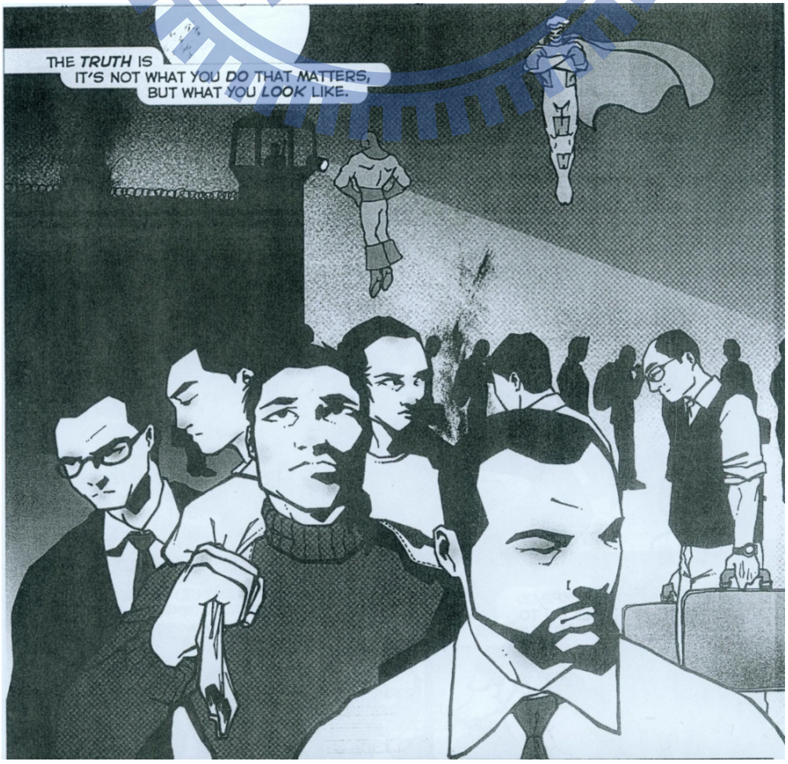
[22] The second- and third- generation Japanese Americans born in the United States.

attempting to help the enemy Japanese plan a mainland attack. (43)

The issue of the presidential Executive Order 9066 not only shows that the U.S. constructed the Japanese as enemy but also as a racial enemy during World War II; it stigmatized the Japanese, including those who are born and raised in the nation, as a threat to the national security—which, once again, was a boundary marked out on the subject's terms—that must be contained and kept under surveillance. Body/skin, as a "key signifier" and an "inconvertible evidence" of racial typology, is thus utilized as a point of surveillance.

Prior to the military strike conducted by the Imperial Japanese Navy on Pearl Harbor, the Nisei superhero thought he had been accepted among his American hero peers, believing it was his "actions" that defined him as a "hero, not what [he] wore or called [himself]" (25). "Even though [he] was just a Nisei kid flying by the seat of his pants," he was ravished with joy. Being accepted was emotionally rewarding to him because, as a racial other, the reception symbolizes a national admission that is granted not by one's ethnicity but by one's actions, values, beliefs, and thoughts.


THE TRUTH IS IT'S NOT WHAT YOU DO THAT MATTERS, BUT WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE.

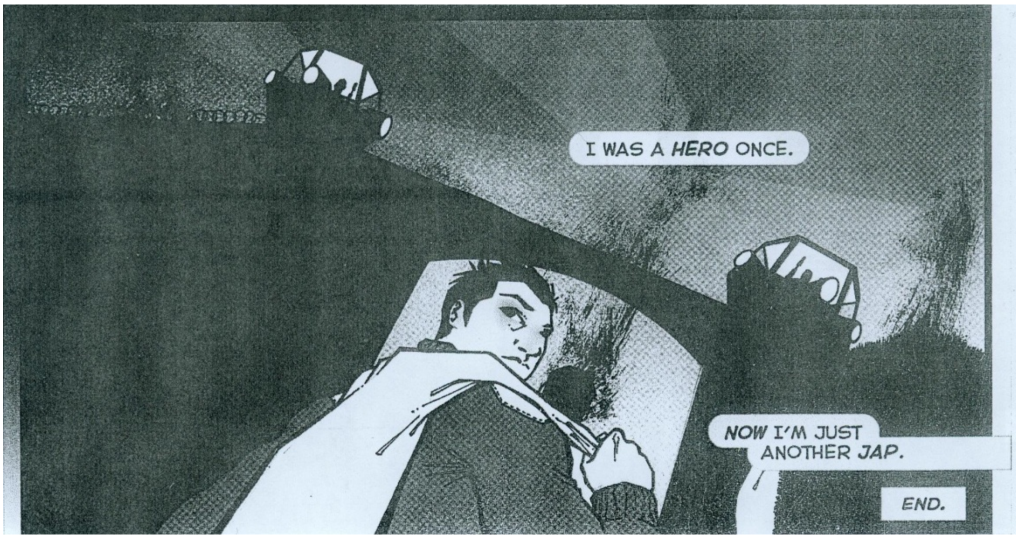

I WAS A HERO ONCE.
NOW I'M JUST ANOTHER JAP.
END.

FIGURE II.6 . The racial other is singled out for excessive surveillance. Jeff Yang *et al*. *Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology*. New York: The New Press, 2009. 28.

However, the truth soon turned out to be otherwise—his appearance still weighed more than his deeds—especially during the time of war when suspicions were high. With his vision shattered, he ultimately surrendered in frustration "to the very same people [he] thought had accepted [him]," sighing "The truth is it's not what you do that matters, but what you *look* like" (27-28, my emphasis) (figure II.6).

Body/skin is processed as necessarily visible for the purpose of surveillance. Being persecuted for his "look," the unjust treatment the protagonist suffered suggests the institution of forms of power comes from the invisible surveillance that deeply rooted in the (Anglo-Saxon) subject's fantasy and fetish. The signifier of the Japanese hero's body/skin precedes his individual identity that he had struggled to cultivate and, in turn, became his "natural identity" (Bhabha 32). To paraphrase Hall, his body/skin "became the discursive site through which [the] 'racialized knowledge' was produced and circulated," thereby justifying the subject's discrimination against him and "the others that look like [him]" (244). As a result of the epidermal schema that fixates him to his "look," he became "just another Jap" in the internment camp despite having proven his loyalties to the U.S. (27-28).

Interestingly, Ma's and Tsuei's last two panels hint at the excessive surveillance which the immigrants are subjected to. With a number of watchful (white) superheroes hovering in mid-air (above the "prisoners") and the silhouette of the watchtowers looming in the background, "9066" spotlights the visual element of the fetish, criticizing the invisible surveillance that the subject relies on to carry out its "strategies of objectification, normalization, and discipline" (Bhabha 35).

Yet, the production and exercise of power is paradoxical in nature. If a clearly visible part of the other (i.e. body/skin) is imperative in the operation of an invisible ideology that informs Anglo-Saxon subjectification (inasmuch as the epidermal schema marks the outer edges of an "American identity"), then it simultaneously reflects the necessity of otherness in subjective development. Put differently, a sense of subjectivity can only arise and be established through the symbolic relations with a significant "other."

Jacques Lacan introduces the mirror stage as a developmental phase of subjectivity when the infant recognizes himself in a mirror as a subject separated from his mother instead of her mere continuity. By viewing his reflection in the mirror, he realizes his body possesses a distinct shape, thus achieving a sense of mastery. The mirror stage marks a change in the infant development as he begins to negotiate the borders of himself, differentiating himself from the others. The stage is also marked by a sense of ambivalence which involves two contrary affects and impulses, nevertheless: the feeling of mastery—a stable coherent version of the self—is followed by the frustration of dependency as the infant realizes he still dependent upon an elder who holds him so he can actually see his mirror image. Briefly put, it enables a sense of mastery whilst simultaneously a feeling of dependency.

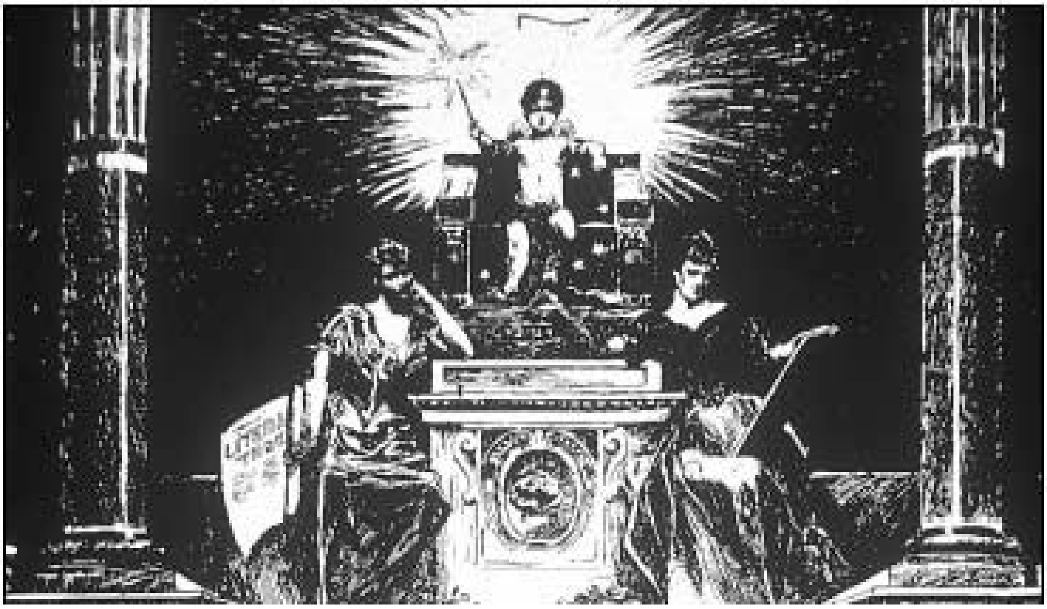


FIGURE II.7. An edited version of the original "*Life* Receives the New Year." *Life*, Jan. 1, 1891.

The Lacanian notion of subjectivity goes far beyond mere individual psyche as it is equally influential and fundamental to a larger, collective identity such as that of a nation's. In returning to the 1891 lithograph in *Life* in figure II.4, the cartoon effectively seizes the implication of racial otherness in the constitution of a national as well as an Anglo-Saxon subjectivity by depicting a radiant infantile monarch who overlooks the (ethnic) others on his monumental throne. Being perched at each end of the image, the disjunction of the childlike sovereign from the rest indicates that the American identity is defined "against an exaggerated representation of racial difference…" (Wonham 24). The edited illustration enumerated above further clarifies my contention (figure II.7). By deleting the bottom half of the original figure II.4, American identity—as represented by the lone Crown—becomes generic since it is hardly identifiable without the contrast of racial difference. Likewise, Étienne Balibar's and Immanuel Wallerstein's discourse on national formation has again verified the importance of the other in the constitution of a nation as they persuasively posit, an "imaginary unity" has to be instituted in real (and therefore in historical) time… *against* other possible unities" (49, original emphasis). In short, a subjective sense of the collective self—the Anglo-Saxon subjectivity—is thus impossible without the ethnic other. Following David Leiwei Li's argument, I have pointed out antecedently that American "imaginary unity" is hinged on its imagined ethnic and cultural homogeneity. Whilst Li's contention has suggested that the boundaries of self and other are established through ethnicity and culture, it also points out that difference is reduced to the stark contrasts of a Manichean dichotomy, a point I will further elaborate in Chapter 3.

The Many Faces of Chin-Kee: the Persistence of Ethnic Stereotypes

There is hence an element of irresolvability here in the Lacanian psychoanalytical notion of ambivalence. On the one hand, the ethnic other is imperative in the formation of American culture and social identities; whilst is also a source of anxiety that threatens to dispossess the Anglo-Saxon America, on the other. It is exactly this continual conflict between irreconcilable contraries that endows the stereotype its "currency" and also guarantees its repeatability across time.

The fetish process/stereotype can never eradicate the recognition of difference in this sense (due to its ambivalent nature). With the fear of threatening difference can never be definitely eliminated, the fetishistic act must thus be implemented compulsively and repetitiously to compensate for the ephemeral relief from anxiety before it must be repeated again. As Bhabha says, "The same old stories… must be told (compulsively) again and afresh" (29).

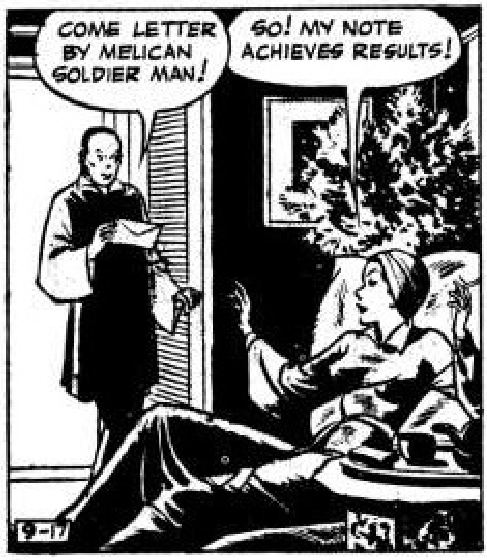

COME LETTER BY MELICAN SOLDIER MAN!
SO! MY NOTE ACHIEVES RESULTS!
9-17

FIGURE II.8. The scheming Dragon Lady and her fellow servant. *Terry and the Pirates*, Sept. 17, 1936.[23]

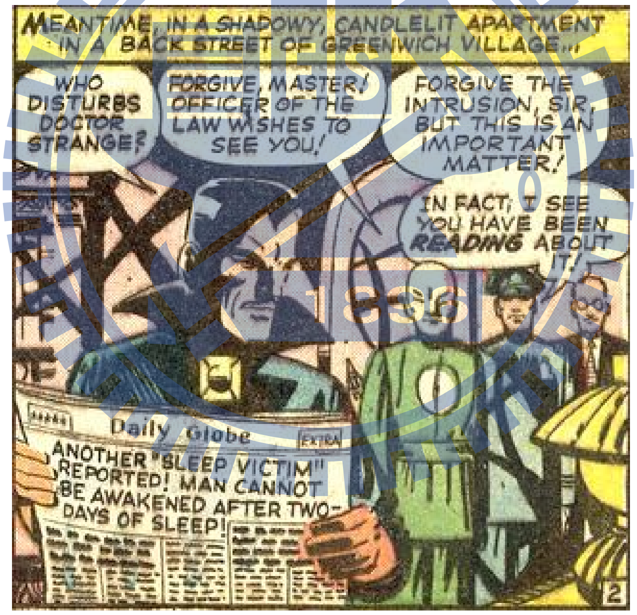

MEANTIME, IN A SHADOWY, CANDLELIT APARTMENT IN A BACK STREET OF GREENWICH VILLAGE...
WHO DISTURBS DOCTOR STRANGE?
FORGIVE, MASTER! OFFICER OF THE LAW WISHES TO SEE YOU!
FORGIVE THE INTRUSION, SIR, BUT THIS IS AN IMPORTANT MATTER!
IN FACT, I SEE YOU HAVE BEEN READING ABOUT IT!
Daily Globe
EXTRA
ANOTHER "SLEEP VICTIM" REPORTED! MAN CANNOT BE AWAKENED AFTER TWO-DAYS OF SLEEP!
2

FIGURE II.9. Doctor Strange and his loyal servant, Wong. *Strange Tales* #116, Jan, 1964.[24]

The repetitive quality of stereotypes can be observed in the illustrations enumerated above as these examples clearly instantiate a repetition of the stereotypical image of “Heathen Chinee”—an enduring graphic representation of Chinese, and by extension, all the Asian people (figures II.8 and II.9). Despite being depicted in different periods, the striking similitude shared among the (Chinese) characters reveals that the stereotype presented in caricatured image from the early days is inherited by the comic industry, continuing to serve as an archetypal template or a point of reference for the identity of this ethnic community even today.

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[23] The derogative image of "Chink" continues to make its appearance in comic strips such as *Terry and the Pirates*. In addition to the ostensible look-alike with his prototype, Dragon Lady's Chinese servant is given a voice, but only to reveal his comical mangling of English.

[24] Published three decades later after *Terry and the Pirates*, *Strange Tales* recycled the "Chink" stereotype through the character of Wong. In appearance wise, it remains observable that Wong still preserves remnants of his archetype. Unlike Dragon Lady's servant whose affiliation is with the evil force, Wong attends to Doctor Strange, the featuring superhero of *Strange Tales*, whilst being equally humble, loyal, and submissive to their respective "masters."

Yet, the compulsive repetition of the same caricatured figure indicates a restriction and dominance imposed upon the ethnic other. It restricts and eradicates the other from changes—a devastating notion which not only connotes the possibility of a further traumatic discovery of difference but it also puts the “truthfulness” of the racialized knowledge that contains the other in jeopardy. Simply put, the (Anglo-Saxon) subjectivity would be undermined should ethnic stereotypes cease to ensure repetition.

Following the Lacanian idea of fantasy, Dylan Evans highlights the significances of the repetitive quality of stereotypes—particularly both in staging desire and defending against castration—as he remarks:[25]

> Lacan compares the fantasy scene to a frozen image on a cinema screen; just as the film may be stopped at a certain point in order to avoid showing a traumatic scene which follows, so the fantasy scene is a defense against castration. (60)

If Lacan’s frozen image is a means of protection, then the same can be concluded about repetition—as a “frozen” example of representation and identity (hence the graphical consistency among Chinese in Choy’s *Coming Man* and its subsequent recurrence across time). The traumatic perception, or the source of anxiety—the racial otherness—is thus contained and stabilized through the continual and repetitious chain of a controlled set of features.

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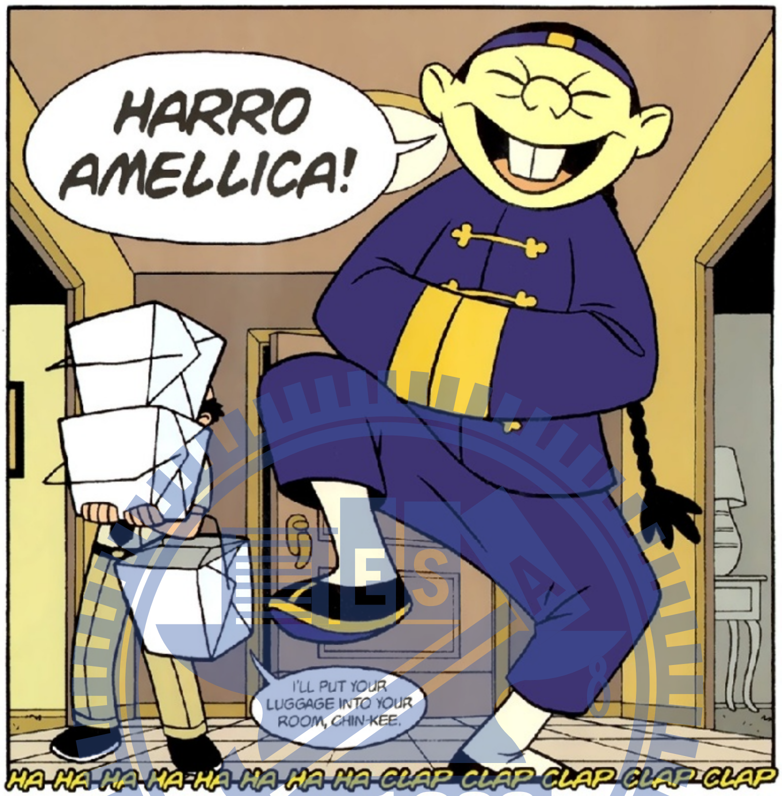
[25] Lacan elaborates upon the Freudian notion of fantasy, contending that the “scene” of fantasy not only works to stage desire as Freud had conceptualized but also as a defense against castration (Evans 60).


HARRO AMELLICA!
I'LL PUT YOUR LUGGAGE INTO YOUR ROOM, CHIN-KEE.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP

1896

FIGURE II.10. Chin-Kee's annual visit to Danny's house. Gene Luen Yang. *American Born Chinese*. New York: Square Fish, 2006. 48.

This explains why Chin-Kee—a specter of earlier era of the American popular imagination—continues to haunt Danny's (or Jin Wang's) psyche. Portrayed as a "normal" Caucasian teenage boy, Danny, in a television sitcom fashion, of the second story-line of Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* is the most visually uncomfortable to the readers. At the outset of the story, Danny asks Melanie out for a date. Whilst his beautiful blonde classmate is on the verge of accepting Danny's invitation, this romantic moment is abruptly interrupted by his mother's announcement that his cousin, Chin-Kee, has arrived from China for his annual visit.

Chin-Kee's arrival overwhelms Danny as his portrayal in a zoom-in frame immediately reminds the reader of the caricatured images of Chinese in immigration history from the nineteenth-century America (figure II.10). His squinty eyes, buckteeth, lengthy queue, along with his apparel, and fawning mannerism are a direct reference to the commonly recognizable racial stereotypes, including those of the past and the present; and "not to mention the fact that his name is apparently a play on the racist term 'chinky'" (Dong 241). To Danny's horror, his life is made miserable with his cousin's sojourn: he is mortified by Chin-Kee's exotic antics at school; and Melanie eventually ends Danny's chances with her (123).

Chin-Kee in this sense is associated with the repetitive quality of the stereotype as his repeated visit implies he keeps returning to haunt Danny. Such connection gains further significance particularly in referring to the Asian community as a whole after Danny is made known as an alter-ego of Jin Wang. For Yang, this form of repetition not only confines Asian people to a stationary representation and identity; worse yet, it also severely thwarts their development of an individual identity and masculinity, a point that I will elaborate in the next chapter. Briefly put, Asian Americans are condemned to iterate their predecessor's fate—as the other—if the cycle persists. As Yang has revealed in his graphic novel, Danny has to switch school every year because of Chin-Kee's annual visits, which always seem to occur just as Danny has "made some friends, gotten a handle on [his] schoolwork, even started talking to some of the ladies" (126). By the time Chin-Kee leaves, "[N]o one thinks of me as Danny anymore, I'm Chin-Kee's cousin" (127). Jin Wang can only come to terms with his identity—both as an Asian and an American—after he has beheaded Chin-Kee, the epitome of the vicious cycle of ethnic stereotypes (212). As a personification of ethnic stereotypes, Chin-Kee's decapitation not only symbolizes Jin's—and that of Asian

American as a whole—inner desire to be freed from the stationary and demeaning representations but also an effort to regain individuality and complex identity.

Conclusion: Ethnic Stereotypes and its Impacts on Asian American

Operates as a defensive mechanism of narcissism, the nineteenth-century rich discourse of ethnic (mis)representations explains Henry Wonham's critical observation on the proletarian vogue for ethnic caricatures in a time when American self-identity is at risk. What underlies the creation of ethnic caricatures, as exemplified by figure II.1, is the collective anxiety of dispossession; yet, it is also this very fear that constituted the *raison dêtre* of racial stereotypes: to contain the (ethnic and cultural) differences. Dubbing it as some "sort of medicine," Wonham identifies the fetishistic importance of ethnic stereotypes in terms of its therapeutic value for a perishing (national) identity because it helps "codify social distinctions" and "functions as a *strategic control* [that ensures] ethnic identities remain fixed and discernible in the bewildering flux of a multiethnic society" through the practices of identification and stereotyping—the former operates on a physical level whilst the latter, on an ideological one (25-26, my emphasis). By presenting "ethnic, cultural, or class 'characteristics' as determining features of identity" and bringing about the graphic practice of formulating immigrants into various ethnic 'types'—such as the stock stereotypes of "heathen Chinee," "yellow peril," and "coolie"—the deployment of stereotypes creates a sense of order and control by marking the outer edges of a so-called "American identity" (Wonham 19). However, the subject's narcissism is preserved at the expense of the ethnic other. Whilst the fetish object/stereotype is a "primary point of subjectification" for the white, Asian American otherwise becomes the perpetual symbol of degeneracy and inferiority, there is thus an imbalance of power relations between the two (Hall 27).

The final chapter of my thesis project will thus turn to investigate on how ethnic stereotypes affect Asian Americans, in terms of on their psyche, subjectivity, and representation. Moreover, I will also address the pervasive themes of symbolic emasculation and transformation in *American Born Chinese*, *Secret Identities*, and *Shortcomings*.

Chapter III
Journey in the West:
Racism, National Identity, and Asian American Masculinity

Focusing on Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* and Adrian Tomine's *Shortcomings*, my final chapter investigates how racism constructs Asian people as the perpetual figure of *xenos* whilst also examines the impact of such symbolic violence on the subjectivity and identity of Asian American. Racism not only plays a dominant role in shaping the nation' contour but, more importantly, it enforces limitation and restriction on the people of Asian descent, thereby symbolically excluding them from the national imagination.

Illustrated with full color palette, Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* is comprised of three seemingly separate yet parallel storylines that are intertwined. Concurrent with the coming-of-age plotlines of Jin Wang and Danny is the legend of the Monkey King—a celebrated character in Chinese folklore, literature, and media.[26] Traditionally perceived as an antiauthoritarian figure, he was born out of a rock and has mastered the skills of martial arts and shape-shifting. Enduringly popular, the Monkey King has been rewritten in various genres and forms in Asian and Asian American popular culture.[27] As Binbin Fu notes, "The legendary trickster figure has been repeatedly reimagined by Chinese American writers as a source of cultural strength, a symbol of subversion and resistance, and a metaphor for cross-cultural and interracial negotiation" (275).

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[26] Despite various cultural elements and sources have enriched the character of the Monkey King, the most important text that establishes this mythical hero's reputation is Wu Cheng'en's one-hundred-chapter novel, *Xi you ji* (*The Journey to the West*). Written and published in the sixteenth century, Wu's novel depicts the seventeen-year pilgrimage of the monk Xuanzang for Buddhist scriptures in India. Escorting Xuanzang in his expedition are his fellow disciples—Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, and Sha Wujing (commonly known as Monkey King, Pigsy, and Sandy). Although their fellowship is offered as atonement for their past sins, the Monkey King, Pigsy, and Sandy prove to be reliable and loyal allies in Xuanzang's mission especially in times of hardships. At the end, the pilgrims attain immortality and enlightenment. Spending seven chapters in accounting the story of the Monkey King, it is Wu Cheng'en who portrayed the stone-born monkey as the "real hero" of his comic adventure and defined this mythical hero "in terms of his spiritual detachment, his prankish humor, his restless energy, and his passionate devotion to his master" (Hsia 115-130).

[27] See Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989), for example.

American Born Chinese likewise retells the story of this mythic hero in a new light in terms of both its content and format. Focusing on the Monkey King's persistence to join the ranks of the immortal gods, the author offers the Monkey King's struggle as a "stand-in for Asian Americans and anyone else who has been the minority side of a minority-majority dynamic" (Yang 2008). By transplanting the heroic figure into a contemporary Chinese American context, Yang subtly allegorizes the plight of Asian American community and transforms the traditional folklore into a social critique against racialized discourse that has constructed Asian American as the perpetual figure of *xenos* on the basis of ethnic and cultural differences.

Whereas the Monkey King's quest is motivated by the search of Buddhist sūtras in Wu's original novel; Yang's adaptation is a *Bildungsroman* that depicts the Monkey King's odyssey in coming to terms with his simian identity, thus seeing him embarks on a journey of self-discovery, self-acceptance, and enlightenment alike. Interestingly, Yang's reimagining of the Monkey King myth not only reflects the historical formation of Asian American's identity in the United States but, more importantly, it also reveals that the nation's contour—including America's national formation, its ingredient of citizenry, policy, culture, as well as admission practices—is poignantly molded by racism.

A Shoeless Intruder

Perceiving that the heaven is hosting a dinner party where all the gods, the goddesses, the demons, and the spirits are invited, the Monkey King ascends to the heaven in great anticipation only to find out that his arrival is not welcome due to his lack of shoes (14). The conflict further escalated when the sentinel at the door insists, "You may be a king—you may even be a deity—but you are still a monkey" and denies his entry despite the Monkey King's defense (15). Feeling thoroughly embarrassed and enraged, the Monkey King storms across heaven, bashes up the doorman and deities, and sabotages the party before returning to Flower-Fruit Mountain, dejected.

Here, the shoes bizarrely become the focal point of the conflict. Trivial as it may be, the significance of the footwear is otherwise highlighted by its symbolic connotations. The fact that access is only granted to those with shoes whilst the shoeless is barred from the party has hinted at the shoes' functioning as the key signifier in the production of meanings and identities alike, and more importantly, it helps delineate the subjective boundary of the immortals, thereby securing a symbolic space (i.e. the party) which operates as a foundation of the immortals' collective identity.

But if the party is a symbolic space that signals the immortals' identity and subjectivity, then its value (to the doorman and the immortals alike) must be equivalent to the Freudian concept of the phallus. So highly prized, the purity of the space must be secured at all cost for the collapse of the space represents a kind of (collective) narcissistic extinction. The doorman's vigilance is thus an act of self-preservation, keeping the collective space intact through the inclusion of the desirable and the exclusion of the repulsive. Those with shoes are pleasantly welcome inasmuch as they reflect the solipsistic image that characterizes the space; the shoeless calls the frightening Freudian castration scene to mind on the contrary, hence a disturbing source of anxiety that must be discarded at once. Without shoes, the Monkey King not only epitomizes the most intimidating kind of difference for the doorman but his otherness is also a sign of impurity, marked by its menacing potential to disrupt the purity of the party space.

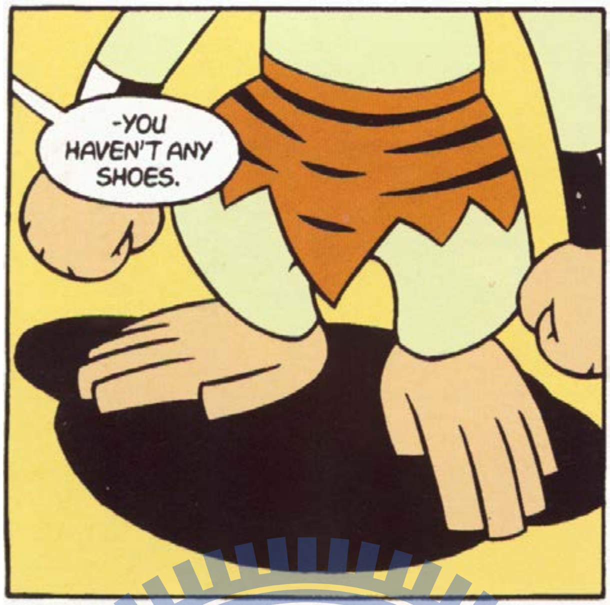
-YOU HAVEN'T ANY SHOES.

FIGURE III.1. The Monkey King's Bare feet. *American Born Chinese*. New York: Square Fish, 2006. 14.

Identities (of the Monkey King and the immortals) are thus closely tied to the material possession of the footwear. Gene Luen Yang in effect deliberately closes up on the Monkey King's bare feet in a panel to illustrate how his lack of shoes renders him as an inappropriate guest, pointing out that identities of the desirable "guests" and the objectionable "intruders" are simply a construct within the relational field of such material distinction—with/out shoes (figure III.1). Moreover, Yang's close-up image is further a visual device that implicitly criticizes the doorman's and the immortals' profound inability to think and identify outside the notion of materialism. The doorman's obsessive gaze on the Monkey King's feet not only implies that identity can only be defined materially but it is also an invention of the subject's fantasy to combat difference. By focusing solely on the footwear, it effectively contains (or denies) what Homi K. Bhabha calls "the play of difference" and reduces diversity to the material distinction of with/out shoes (28), thereby sheltering the subject from the disturbing effects of otherness.

However, such psychological disavowal (of difference) also brings about a problematic propensity to explain and shape the world (i.e. the reality)—including the subject's relationship to the others—from a pure materialistic aspect, within the realm of materiality inasmuch as it signals the doorman's and the immortals' subjectivity. Hence, the various identities of the Monkey King—as "the sovereign ruler of Flower-Fruit Mountain," "a deity," "a committed disciple of the arts of Kung-Fu," and "Master of the four major heavenly disciplines"—are blatantly neglected by the doorman (14); instead, his gaze are fixed on the Monkey King's feet, seeking for the sole object (that truly matters) to determine his viability upon entry.

The Making of the Other: Racism at work

The Monkey King's struggle for acceptance likewise echoes throughout the story of Jin Wang as the teenager is too denied a symbolic admission into the national space. Born into a family of Chinese immigrants, Jin Wang is a second-generation Chinese American who recently moves out from San Francisco Chinatown to begin a new life in an all-American residential community with his parents. However, Jin is having a tough time fitting in with his school life.

Enrolling in Mayflower Elementary, his first day at school is a disaster. Mrs. Greeder—Jin's teacher—not only mispronounces his name as "Jin Jang" but also treats him as someone who just "moved to [the] neighborhood all the way from China" whilst introducing him to the class (30). Jin is further isolated by his classmates as he is shown having his lunch alone whilst other children are having fun; but, worst of all, he is racially abused by one of the Caucasian boys who accuses him of eating dog meat (32-33). Jin's predicament again befalls on his friend—Wei-Chen Sun—when he arrives to his school two months later. Coincidentally, his teacher again falsely addresses Wei-Chen as “Chei-Chen Chun” and, like Mrs. Greeder, he has the same impression that Wei-Chen has “moved all the way from China” despite being corrected by Wei-Chen that he was originally from Taiwan (36). Albeit implicitly, the Freudian slips of Mrs. Greeder and her colleague are teemed with a sense of rejection as both subconsciously deem Jin and Wei-Chen as Chinese foreigners instead of their fellow countrymen. By assuming the newly enrolled has “moved all the way from China,” the teachers’ slips of tongue further reveal an underlying influence of “Atlantic Republicanism”—an ideology which has had a profound impact in the national formation of the United States, according to David Leiwei Li (2-3).

In conceptualizing the nation as a homogeneous unity in terms of culture and ethnicity, Li observes that the influx of Asian foreigners during the nineteenth century had given rise to a collective fear because not only would they disrupt the nation’s necessary homogeneity but the immigrants also “threatened to adulterate the national fantasy of Anglo-Saxon purity” (1). The potential debacle of the national space is frightening as it resembles an annihilation of a collective (national) subjectivity. But the growing tension was quickly alleviated with the enactment of related exclusion laws—including the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act targeting potential Chinese immigrants, the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” of 1908 barring Japanese immigration, the Immigration Act of 1917 creating the “Asiatic barred zone” that extended racial exclusion to exclusion by region, the Immigration Act of 1924 denying admission for permanent residence to persons ineligible for citizenship, the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 stripping Filipinos of their noncitizen American national status, and etc—which politically excluding and legally disenfranchising the Asian, thereby ensuring the unity of the nation.

For Li, the legal prohibition of Asian citizenship was a form of self-preservation as it helped "to cope with the looming heterogeneity of its peoplehood and contain the 'impurity' of its citizenry" that were likely to undermine the foundation of the nation's self-identity (3). But if America's unity is defined through the exclusion of the racially "repulsive," it then exemplifies the subjective dependence on the object of its hatred; Asian in this sense must thus be legally constructed as the most visible, most menacing kind of difference, as the Other to the European American self, and as the "object of national prohibition." As Li observes,

> …the acts of exclusion at once *secured the national space* of the United States by repelling its putative Asian invaders… The historical construction of the "Oriental" as the perpetual figure of *xenos*, as both antithetical and antagonistic to the United States, therefore reveals not only the spectral centrality of the Asian *in the determination of a formative European American ethnos*, but also ways in which the historical consanguinity between racial essence and national legitimacy has been cemented. (4, my emphasis)

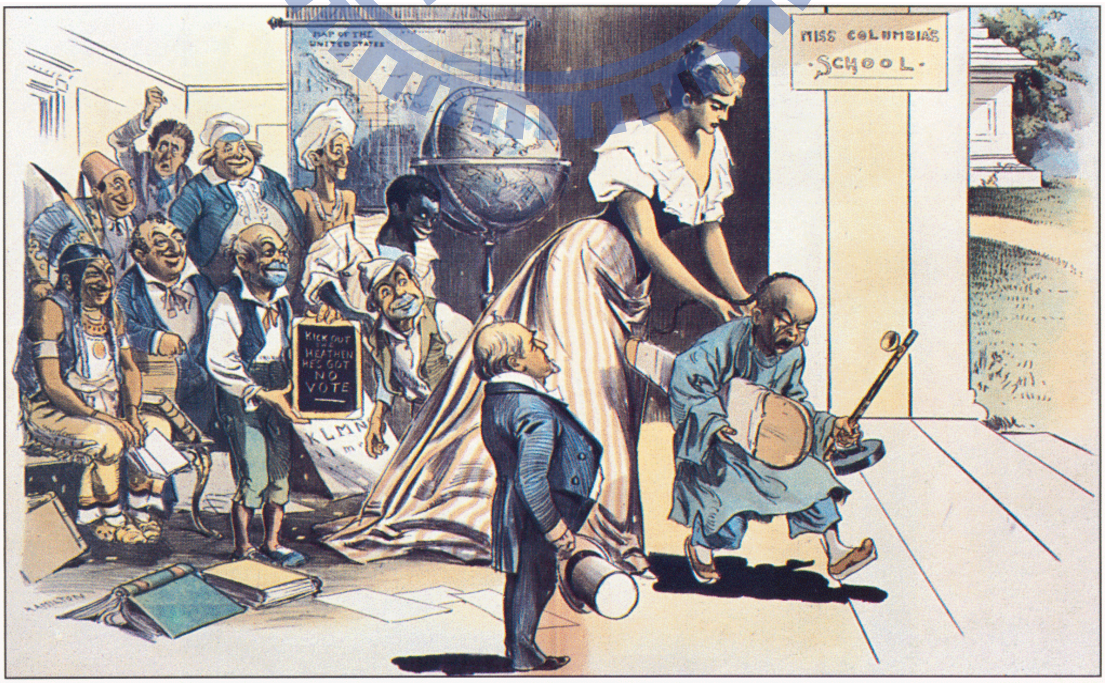
MAP OF THE UNITED STATES
MISS COLUMBIA'S SCHOOL
KICK OUT THE HEATHEN HE'S GOT NO VOTE
KLMN

FIGURE III.2. Miss Columbia expels a Chinese student from her school. *Judge, circa*

1893.

Figure III.2 shows a representative lithograph from the 1890s explicitly visualizes the significance of racial exclusion in the making of an American (national) identity by metaphorically presenting the nineteenth-century U.S. in a form of a school wherein Miss Columbia is the teacher to a class of multi-racial students. Despite the ethnic and cultural aspects are the main elements in the production of the caricature's meaning—including the characters' identities—what further set them apart is their disproportional statures as the pupils are illustrated as diminutive in size whereas Miss Columbia is depicted as relatively taller than the rests. Here, the representation of the students not only renders them as the "lesser men" who are unworthy of citizen status but their grotesque forms, in turn, also bring out Miss Columbia's distinctiveness as the idealistic "American (citizen)." In associating racial and cultural traits with heights, the political cartoon marks the outer edges of an American identity by emphatically declaring "American" is not Irish,[28] Native-Indian, Arabian, African, Hispanic, and certainly not the Chinese student who is being driven out of the premise by Miss Columbia.[29] As America personified, Miss Columbia epitomizes the nation's unity—a collective Anglo-Saxon selfhood—whose identity and subjectivity is defined against the exaggerated representation of racial difference.

Despite the national space is kept intact by the legitimatization of ethnic and

1896

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[28] As represented by the student who stands adjacent to Miss Columbia, though being regarded as an ethnic other (figure II.1), the "'Irish' became inclusively 'white'" to complete the dichotomous racialized discourse of white/non-white (Li 8).

[29] Despite Chinese immigrants were welcome as a source of cheap labor during the mid-nineteenth century, they were soon scapegoated as the main reason who were responsible for the whites' and other immigrants' joblessness during economic depression. Towards the end of nineteenth century, Chinese were depicted as "the worst of the worst" among immigrants. Being delineated as a corrupted race prone to violence, anarchy, vice, and illegalities—such as gambling and opium smoking (as exemplified by the opium pipe in the Chinese expellee's arm), they must be excluded at once from the United States (hence the propaganda "the Chinese must go"). Illustrated at the height of anti-Sinicism, figure III.2 suggests that a unity must be formed between the whites and other immigrants in securing their common interest. That being said, the immigrants' midget statures still signifies them as a radiant source of alterity and may be the next to go should any of them imperil the white's benefit.

cultural homogeneity, such an Atlantic republican practice of citizenship nevertheless turns “the ascriptive characteristics of one’s birth into the requisite of national legitimacy,” thereby cementing what Li calls the “consanguinity between racial essence and national legitimacy” (3-4). An evident sense of racism is thus embedded in the legislation of the nation’s admission practice and the creation of the (national) identity alike, as evinced by figure III.2 which presents ethnic and cultural characteristics as determining features of national identity. Whilst Miss Columbia’s (distinctive) statures is evidently tied to her ethnicity, her position as the teacher farther renders her as the dominating figure who has absolute authority in deciding her students’ “residency” in the classroom—a connotation indicating the Anglo-Saxon’s subjectification within the nation’s domain. By accentuating Miss Columbia’s whiteness, the nineteenth-century lithograph suggests that the Anglo-Saxon is the “authentic” citizen of the country whilst simultaneously depicts the students as mere sojourners of the States who will never be qualified for immigration nor naturalization. The boundaries of citizen and alien in this sense are made explicit through the racial distinction of white/non-white; identity is thus reduced to the stark contrast of such Manichean dichotomy—either he is white (citizen) or non-white (alien).

Before and After 1965: from Miss Columbia’s School to Mayflower Elementary

Interestingly, Jin Wang’s first day at school bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Miss Columbia’s School despite the two events took place in an interval of a century time. “[A] deliberate reference to the English pilgrim settlement in Massachusetts in 1620” according to Lan Dong (238), the fictional Mayflower Elementary is likewise a figurative portrayal of the United States, not to mention Jin is an outcast akin to his caricature counterpart as he is greeted with a sense of resentment by his teacher and classmates alike. The difference between *American Born Chinese* and the foregoing editorial cartoon however is the schoolteachers' handlings of the students in question. Whereas Miss Columbia's violent motion to force her Chinese student out of the premise explicitly highlights his alterity, Miss Greeder's slip of tongue otherwise illustrates a more subtle and implicit articulation of Jin's identity as the (ethnic) other. In both instances, the evident shift in their attitudes mirrors the dominant representations of the Asian subjects in their corresponding periods. If the Chinese expellee in the ethnic caricature is a personification of the aforementioned "object of prohibition" whose rights and existence are repudiated by the nation, Gene Luen Yang's protagonist then emblematizes what David Leiwei Li addresses as the "Asian abject." To paraphrase Li,

> … the Asian American has been turned into an "abject," into that which is neither radical enough for institutional enjoinment of the kind [before 1965] nor competent enough to enjoy the subject status of citizens in a registered and recognized participation of American democracy (6).

For Li, the two figures of representation are intricately tied to the U.S.'s modes of production and its forms of political culture. Prior to 1965, America's movement of national consolidation was contradicted by its monopoly capital and imperial ventures which brought about the massive influx of foreign laborers into the country; to secure its national space, Asian was legally constructed as the perpetual figure of *xenos*—an racial, civilization, geopolitical entity opposed to the national (white) subject. However, the fundamental shift in the nation's mode of capital during the 1960s has again revolutionized the U.S.'s form of citizenship and civil rights law. With the increasing availability of transnational structures, the need of maintaining American hegemony in the "free world" has resulted in the removal of former structural barriers (the restrictive laws in citizenship, for example), hence catalyzing the categorical birth of "Asian American."

Yet, the ethnic category of "Asian American" is marked by its own paradox as Li sees the inclusion of the Asian subject is more of a "strategy of the dominant culture to maintain its continuing 'positional superiority' by reforming alliances and managing ethnic consent" than a recognition of the Asian subject (8). By arguing that "a nation is composed of both the institutional and the imaginary, the political that regulates the juridical and territorial boundaries, and the cultural that defines origins and continuities, affiliations and belongings," Li further ascribes the paradox that renders "Asian American" as neither the total alien nor the full-fledged citizen of the nation to an "unprecedented clash" between law and culture; the institutional and the collective imaginary (6-7). Whereas law complicit with culture to secure the nation's ethnic and cultural homogeneity before the 1960s; the law otherwise undermines the dominant cultural argument for "inherent national inheritance" in the transnational capital era by licensing legal membership to the Asian subject in assuring America's economic prosperity and stability. Despite the law promises the contractual terms of citizenship in abstraction, Li otherwise sees the law has failed to transform "the psychocultural aspects of subject constitution; neither can it undo the historical epistemological structures or the structures of feeling, which continue to undermine the claims of Asian American subjectivity" (11). Differently put, Asian American's citizen status remains unjustifiable on the cultural front, where Anglo-Saxon is still the dominant influence.

But if Asian American subjectivity requires the acknowledgment from both law and culture, this implies that the collective imaginary is a political force capable of subverting the state's social arrangement either by nullifying or re-defining the constitutional consent of membership to the U.S.-born Asians, as Li points out:

> … the regulatory function of the law in defining citizens and aliens is increasingly subsumed by mass media and public education. As apparatuses of social and cultural reproduction, mass media and systems of education continue to secure the common sense of Asian Americans as aliens, thus both precluding their sense of national entitlement and inhibiting their American actualization. (6)

Sets in an academic institution—a site of cultural reproduction—Yang's coming-of-age story likewise highlights the significance of the collective imaginary in defining citizens and aliens. No longer the explicit Other to be disciplined and expelled like his caricature counterpart, what Jin has experienced is a reflection of Asian American's alterity as he remains principally external to America and American institutions. Despite being enrolled into the metaphoric Mayflower Elementary, Jin is never really a part of the school as he continues to be treated and portrayed as a (legal) alien in the eyes of his teacher and fellow classmates, hence an ambivalent "Asian abject"—a part of the U.S. that it willfully discards.[30]

The "Bastard Son" of America

Being denied a full acceptance by the dominant culture, the Asian subject is compelled to occupy an ambivalent space that deprives it of its (cultural) subjectivity. In his psychoanalytic discourse, Jacques Lacan theorizes the symbolic order (which we call culture) as the social world of linguistic communication, inter-subjective relations, knowledge of ideological conventions, and the acceptance of the law.

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[30] Julia Kristeva conceptualizes "the abject" as "the part of ourselves that we willfully discard" (3).

Claiming that the symbolic is only made possible with the child's acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father—the laws and restrictions that regulate its desire and the rules of communication—Lacan further emphasizes the Oedipal aspect of the symbolic. Originally a concept of Sigmund Freud's, Lacan uses his theory as a primary point of departure to explain the child's subjective development and socialization through the resolution of its Oedipal complex. Though focusing on the laborious struggle between the child and its parental figures like his predecessor, Lacan avoids the Freudian reification of the bourgeois nuclear family with a biological gendered female and male in lieu of the maternal and paternal Oedipal personas that can be potentially enacted by any possible individuals of various genders. Another significant difference in Lacan's version of the Oedipal complex is that he no longer refers to the penis as a biological organ; instead, Lacan re-defines the phallus as the focus of the mother's desire (or primal desire, in Lacanian terms).

That noted, the maternal figure in the Lacanian version of the Oedipal complex is an obscure omnipotent presence who is the source of all-important love for the child. But due to the combination of her obscurity and significance, the mother is likewise a source of deeply unsettling anxiety for her child as she threatens her offspring with being alternately too doting or too detached; too much or not enough. In its anguish to control the uncontrollable presence (or absence) of this indispensable maternal figure, the child hence devotes itself to fathom what the mother desires—so it can become the phallic-thing for her (Dor 115).

However, the boy's Oedipal aspiration is severely thwarted by the intervention of the father.[31] The discovery of the paternal figure in the family romance of the Oedipal social triangle at once compels the child to realize that the father is the sole solution to the mother's enigmatic desire, thereby leading it to liken "the paternal metaphor" to "the desire of the mother" (Dor 115-17). For Lacan, the traumatic realization is a form of castration inasmuch as the boy knows it is not the phallic-thing that gratifies the mother's desire; but the Oedipal child remains committed to its course to fulfill this desire, hence deeming the father as a threat or a rival to its dearest aspiration. At this point, Lacan associates the father-child conflict with the famous "struggle to the death for pure recognition" dramatized in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Whilst the child invariably loses in this struggle, this loss nevertheless results in the founding of a pact between both parties. The father in this sense introduces the Oedipal child to the symbolic by bringing it to bear the disciplinary and prohibitory features—which Lacan famously calls the Name-of-the-Father (or, simply, the Law)—of the socio-linguistic milieu (i.e. the symbolic order).

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[31] As Dor remarks, "the child comes to associate the absence of his mother with the presence of his father" (115).

Moreover, when the father intervenes, he does so not as a living individual but as a delegate body of social law which is also recognized by the mother; what the mother desires is thus not any physical feature of the father but her desire is ordered by the Name-of-the-Father that exceeds and tames it. If the father is the solution to the mother's enigmatic desire and that the Oedipal child's own desire is structured by its relationship with the maternal figure, then the child ever-lasting Oedipal aspiration is indeed a socialized process in which it attempts to achieve the paternal metaphor and be (a part of) the father—as exemplified by the Oedipal impulse to replace the paternal figure.

But if the subject's accession to the symbolic can only be made possible by its acceptance of the mutually recognized Law between the father and the son, the Asian subject is then perplexed by a sense of "lack" inasmuch as it is excluded by the Law. When Lacan talks about the Law, he does not exclusively refer to the legal citations;

instead, what he has in mind includes the cultural restriction(s) as well. Regarded as a "bastard" of the American culture, the Asian subject in this sense is barred from participating in the Oedipal father-son paradigm. Forsaken by the Name-of-the-Father, the consequence is a devastating one for the Asian subject inasmuch as this means that it can never achieve the paternal metaphor nor become the phallic-thing for the mother, thereby permanently being castrated—a concept which David Eng posits as "racial castration."

Racial Castration: Why does the "Cauc" matter?

Evidently, the issue of "racial castration" is at the core of Yang's and Tomine's graphic narratives. Among them, Adrian Tomine's *Shortcomings* even openly points towards the significance of virility by having a measuring scale deliberately printed at the bottom of his novel's inner cover (figure III.3). Here, the graphic design of the book's cover is a conspicuous hint to the ethnic stereotypes that overwhelm the protagonist. When questioned by his lesbian friend—Alice Kim—about the myth regarding the size of Asian men's penis, Ben Tanaka exclaims that "stereotypes don't just materialize out of thin air…" as he continues to tell her about a joke he once heard, "What's the main difference between Asian and Caucasian men?" "The Cauc." answered him frustratingly, as if the demeaning stereotype has a real substance (57).[32]

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[32] "The Cauc" is homophonous with "cock," a word play in reference to male's genital organ.

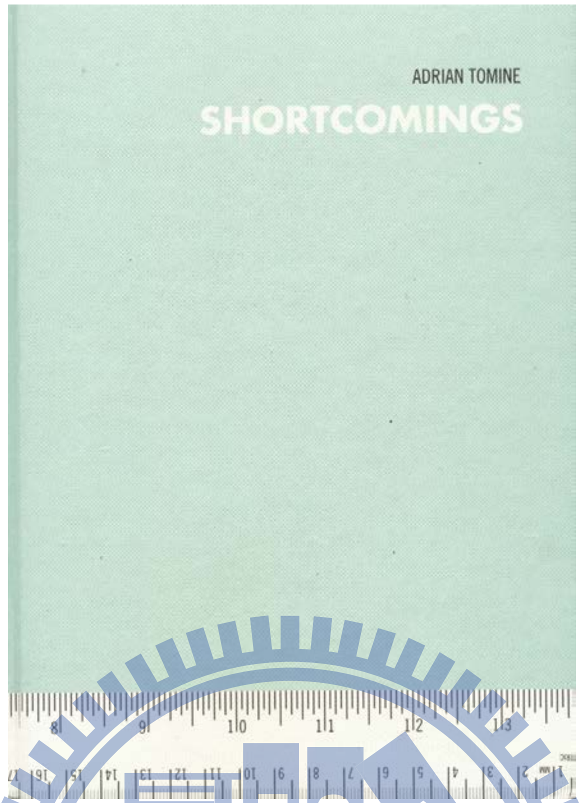

FIGURE III.3. Measuring Asian American men’s manhood. *Shortcomings*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2007. Cover.

In *American Born Chinese*, Jin Wang has a secret crush on his classmates—Amelia Harris. Too shy to articulate his love, Jin only dares to observe Amelia from afar and fantasizes about her. Noticing that Amelia shares a close relationship with Greg—a Caucasian guy with a blonde frizzy hair—Jin even goes so far as to perm his hair curly in hopes of drawing her attention. Acting clumsily and nervously whenever Amelia is nearby, Jin’s infatuation is soon noticed by his best friend Wei-chen, who encourages him to ask Amelia out. Despite Jin eventually succeeded in dating Amelia with Wei-chen’s help, his romance is however abruptly put to an end by Greg. In an encounter with Greg, Jin is asked “not to ask Amelia out again” because Greg “[wants] to make sure she makes good choices” (179). Though against his will, Jin nevertheless holds unto his promise and ceases to see Amelia again. His love unrequited, Jin’s masculinity is left in question.

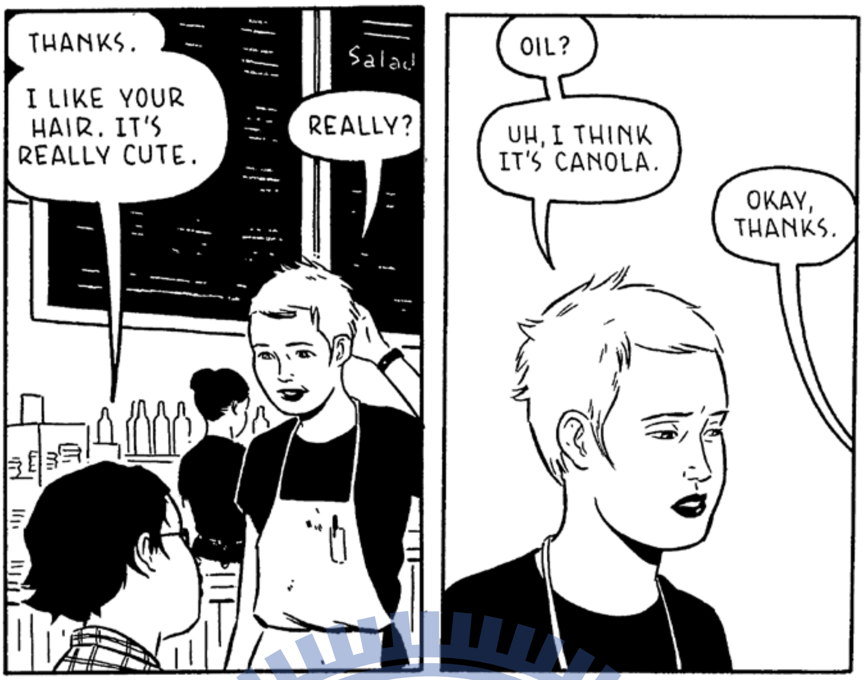
THANKS.
I LIKE YOUR HAIR. IT'S REALLY CUTE.
Salad
REALLY?
OIL?
UH, I THINK IT'S CANOLA.
OKAY, THANKS.

FIGURE III.4. The waitress is interested to hear what Alice has to say (left) whilst being completely indifferent to Ben (right). *Shortcomings*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2007. 14-15.

Shortcomings likewise depicts the story of an emasculated Japanese American man—Ben Tanaka. By portraying Alice Kim as a better womanizer than Ben, Tomine already hints at Ben's crisis to fulfill his male identity at the onset of his graphic narrative. Ben's awkward social skill is in stark contrast with Alice's eloquence in flirting with women. Whereas Alice has no trouble teasing the waitress into conversation when having lunch with Ben in a diner, the waitress is otherwise annoyed by Ben's dull question, as exemplified by her facial expressions towards them (figure III.4). Worse yet, Ben's relationship with his girlfriend—Miko Hayashi—is under duress by his pathological idolization of white women. For instance, he rather watches pornography that features white girls than having physical intimacy with her (28); and Miko even caught Ben "gawks" at white women on several occasion (29). Thoroughly frustrated with his morbid fixation "with the typical western media beauty ideal" and feels that he is merely settling for [her]" (29), Miko proposes a “time off” with Ben and embarks on her journey to New York in pursuing her career as an intern in the Asian American independent Film Institute. Meanwhile, Ben’s masculinity is further devastated by his failures to court either Autumn Phelps or Sasha Lenz. Despite trying very hard to impress them—including acting “like [he] loved [Autumn’s] ridiculous ‘art’” and “sat there and listened intently while [Sasha] droned on and on about grad school bullshit” (97)—the fact that neither of them have ended up with Ben has driven him into a state of despair as his desire for white women seems unlikely to realize. Whilst his affection is nonchalantly turned down by his colleague Autumn, Ben suffers yet another heavy blow from Sasha as she has chosen to break up with him and returns to her ex-girlfriend despite having a short-lived sexual romance with Ben. Dejected, Ben is farther troubled when Alice informs him about Miko’s modeling postcard. Suspicious, Ben arrives in New York only to discover his worst nightmare—that Miko is cheating on him. In an angry confrontation with her, Miko finally reveals to Ben that she can no longer deal with his “problem with depression and anger management… weird self-hatred issues… and just the relentless negativity…” and ends her relationship with Ben despite him begging Miko “don’t do this to [him]” (103), leaving his remaining manhood completely ravaged. Interestingly, Tomine’s *Shortcomings* again concludes with another comparison between Ben and Alice. Whereas Alice has made up her mind to stay in New York with her new girlfriend Meredith, Ben is otherwise depicted to be boarding on a plane alone. By juxtaposing Ben’s and Alice’s conditions, Ben’s impotency is again accentuated by Alice’s blossoming relationship with Meredith, thereby rendering Alice as more sexually potent than Ben whilst affirming the latter as an emasculated (Asian) man.

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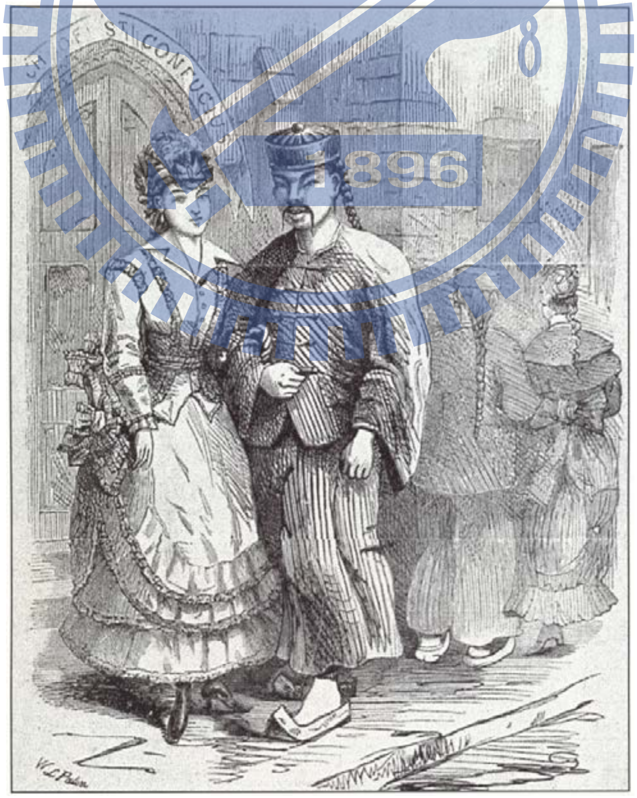
Symbolic Emasculation and the Fears of Miscegenation

Failed to obtain what they desire, Jin Wang's and Ben Tanaka's manhood is in peril. Yet, their dilemmas are not entirely sexual *per se*; instead, the threatening sense of castration that perplexes both the protagonists is a symbolic one, as Tasha G. Oren argues:

> … masculinity—even in its purely physical expression of power, speed, and size—functions as a complex signifier that… speaks to contemporary definitions of nation and citizenship… Cultural articulations of national identity and politics are often bound up in representations of masculinity as their fixation over lost and regained control consistently stage interrogations of race, masculinity, and difference. Here sexuality is not central to the signification process, rather, it stands in for the issues and grievances of the social, national, and cultural body. Thus, it is hardly surprising that most expressions of racial grievance in popular texts find their voice in male bodies. (343-44)

In this context, *American Born Chinese* and *Shortcomings* are what Oren calls as "racial grievances" as both texts present the emasculation of the Asian American men as a result of the symbolic violence of racism practiced by the U.S.'s social and cultural institutions. As critical responses to racism, Yang's and Tomine's graphic narratives center on the issue of ethnicity as both the protagonists are extremely self-conscious about their ethnic identity, even to the extent that Jin has transformed himself into a Caucasian teenager named Danny; and despite constantly denying he is "the guy who blamed all his problems on racism"(16), Ben's apathy to his racial heritage and his pathological obsession towards white women is clearly related to his self-resentment against his own ethnicity.

What Yang and Tomine intend to emphasize is that the symbolic castration is a result of an acute frustration suffered by Asian American community as a whole as they have been permanently made a peripheral figure of the American culture. In returning to the Lacanian notion of Oedipal complex, the subject's acceptance of the-Name-of-the-Father and its subsequent entrance into the symbolic are both necessary and inevitable because the Oedipal aspiration can only be mitigated by its achievement of the paternal metaphor.[33] Whilst Jin's secret crush on Amelia has marked his yearning to enter the symbolic,[34] what comes to his horror is the fact that his entrance is hindered by the-Name-of-the Father as represented by Greg. If the U.S.'s is defined by its racial and cultural homogeneity, Jin's romance with Amelia otherwise poses a potential threat to the (American) symbolic order inasmuch as their possible union would adulterate the national fantasy of racial purity.



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[33] As the child discovers the mother's enigmatic desire is linked to the paternal metaphor, he thus assumes either he can have it like the father or be the phallic-thing in order to be desired.
[34] Courtship and dating alike are forms of inter-subjective relations.

FIGURE III.5. Two couples of Chinese men and white ladies are depicted to be strolling arm in arm on the street of the United States. *Harper's Weekly*, Jun. 12, 1869.

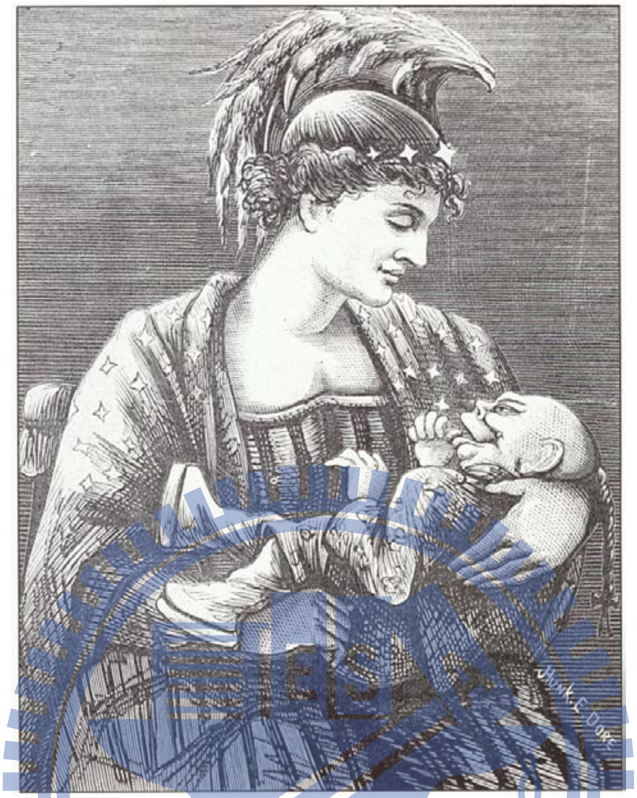

FIGURE III.6. A Chinese infant in Miss Columbia's arms. *Harper's Weekly*, *circa* 1870.

In fact, the fears of potential genetic mixing have been commonly expressed as early as the nineteenth century when immigration was profuse. In two depictive lithographs from the 1860s, one explicitly visualizes such anxiety by daringly hypothesizes the American streets would be crowded by couples of Chinese men and white ladies should no action were taken to prevent such "abomination" (figure III.5); whilst the other caricature, if not more, is equally unsettling as Miss Columbia is illustrated to be nursing a Chinese infant (figure III.6). Whereas the previous cartoon implies the physical and ideological invasions of the Oriental, the latter further suggests that the nation's future is in great danger as the Chinese infant would grow up to annihilate the history, culture, and heritage of Anglo-Saxon America. In this

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context, both caricatures communicates a cautionary message against miscegenation as they show interracial marriage can easily disrupt the stability of the symbolic order, and hence must be avoided at all cost.

In its attempt to secure the stability of the symbolic order, the-Name-of-the-Father intervenes through the legislative system as the enforcement of anti-miscegenation laws at once alleviated the fears of potential genetic mixing by banning the marriages of whites and non-white groups. In his observation of the earlier U.S. history, Jachinson Chan further affirms the profound impact of the-Name-of-the-Father has had on the Asian subject—including its social condition and representations—as he observes "the laws controlled the [Asian] men's sexual behavior and only a small number of Chinese men managed to marry Chinese women, as few women immigrated to America"(127).[35]

Whilst the advent of transnational capitalism has seen the (legal) repeal of former structural barriers including the miscegenation laws, the fact that the symbolic order has remained predominantly white means interracial marriage is still considered as a (cultural) taboo that vehemently prohibited by the-Name-of-the-Father. In *American Born Chinese*, Greg is the personification of the-Name-of-the-Father as his ambivalence towards Jin is in accord with the U.S.'s. On the one hand, Greg restrains his fellow friends from verbally abusing Jin when one of his friends is accusing Jin for eating dog meat (32); on the other hand, when things between Amelia and Jin are beginning to get serious, he comes to stand in between them, suggesting that their possible (interracial) union is not a "good choice" for Amelia nor the nation (179). By putting a stop to Jin's courtship, Greg's intervention not only denies Jin's (Oedipal) aspiration to enter the symbolic but, worse yet, he also prevents him from achieving the paternal metaphor, thereby forever emasculating him. Threatened by the "lack," Jin's masculinity and subjectivity are hanged in balance. The only way he can find consolation is to kiss Suzy Nakamura—Wei-Chen's girlfriend—to alleviate his perplexing (castration) anxiety (188), which is an act of betrayal against Wei-chen's trust and friendship.

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[35] The symbolic castration of the Asian men has given rise to stereotypical representations such as the sexual ambiguous Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan, who, despite married with children, is evidently lacked of any sexual attributes.

Likewise, Ben's irrational obsession with white women can be interpreted as an aspiration to be a part of the (American) symbolic. If masculinity is a metonym of national identity and politics—like what Oren has proposed—Ben's "white-girl envy" is then an epitome of what he desires the most: an accession into the symbolic and, more importantly, an opportunity to participate in the Oedipal father-son paradigm. Ben in effect has revealed the significance of being with a white girl when he finally succeeded in dating Sasha Lenz. When visiting an Asian convention with Sasha, he tells her about his "white-girl envy." "Now, if [another Asian man] had been with a white girl, too, we would've given each other the sign." said Ben. According to Ben, the sign is a "hand signal… like a covert 'high five,'" a gesture suggesting they have "made it" and become a part of the symbolic (68). Later, he even confesses to Meredith that his "attraction to white women is [is] a sublimated form of assimilation" (92). Given the symbolic significance of the white woman, Ben is willing to risk everything—including his relationship with Miko—to be with Sasha despite Alice has warned him numerously that Sasha is a bi-sexual "fence-sitter" (56).

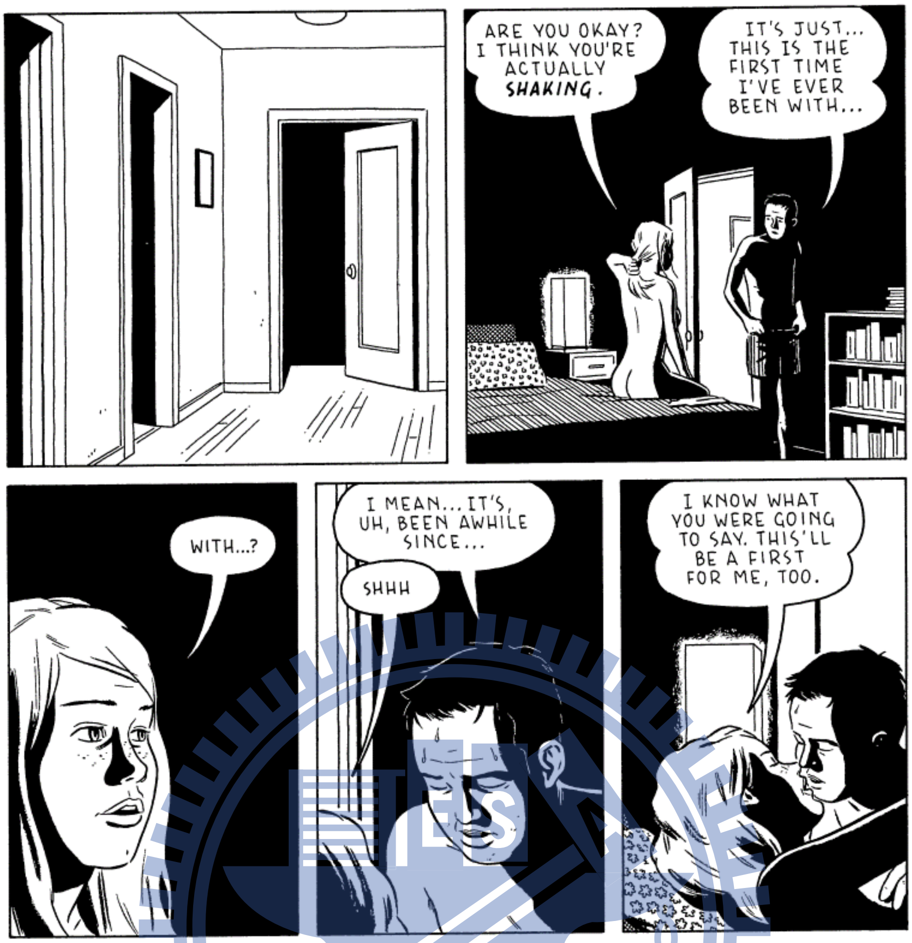
ARE YOU OKAY? I THINK YOU'RE ACTUALLY *SHAKING*.
IT'S JUST... THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER BEEN WITH...
WITH...?
I MEAN... IT'S, UH, BEEN AWHILE SINCE...
SHHH
I KNOW WHAT YOU WERE GOING TO SAY. THIS'LL BE A FIRST FOR ME, TOO.

FIGURE III.7. Ben experiences impotency just when he finally gets what he desires the most. *Shortcomings*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2007. 64.

Unfortunately, just when Ben finally gets what he desires the most, to his surprise, he experiences a sexual dysfunction amidst having sex with Sasha (figure III.7). Despite claiming “it’s… been awhile since [he last had sex]” (64), Ben is well-aware that his sexual issue is not biological but a psychological one, inasmuch as his miscegenation impulse remains culturally stigmatized—as if a child is caught performing something strictly prohibitive. Like Jin, Ben’s sexual impotence highlights the impact of the-Name-of-the-Father towards the Asian subjects as it continues to regulate their social as well as sexual life.

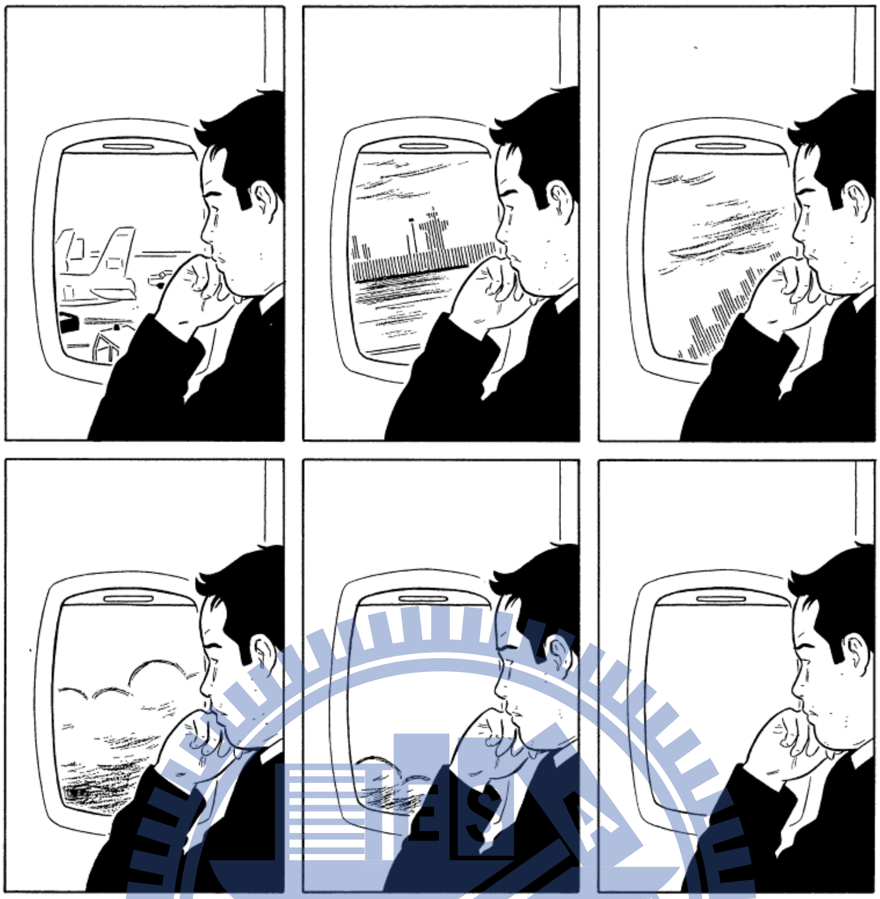

FIGURE III.8. Flying into oblivion. *Shortcomings*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2007. 108.

Ben's excessive internalization of the dominant ideology turns to expose his shortcomings. His idolatry towards a culture of racial exclusivism not only costs him his subjectivity but, worse yet, deprives him of his self-identity as well, thereby resulting in his self-loathing and inferiority complex. Unable to reconcile with his ethnic heritage and being excluded from the dominant culture, Ben finds his existence in limbo. As shown in the end of Tomine's graphic novel, the fading out of the scenery outside his window implicitly signifies that he is flying into oblivion.

Conclusion: Torn Between Danny and Chin-Kee

Confronting with social, cultural, and emotional rejections, Jin Wang and Ben

Tanaka are all compelled to develop coping strategies to manage their desires and fears as Asian American men. Whilst Ben refuses to become a victim of racism by intentionally distancing himself from his racial heritage, Jin on the other hand fabricates a "double" or an "alter ego" to ensure the integrity of his subjectivity (and manhood). In his renowned article "The 'Uncanny,'" Freud concurs with Otto Rank's notion that "'the double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of the death.'"[36] Besides its functioning as a form of self-preservation, Freud further notices identification has had a significant role in the formation of the alter ego, as he observes "the subject identifies himself with someone else" who it aspires to be ("The Uncanny" 940). Freud remarks,

> Identification is known to psycho-analysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person. It plays a part in the early history of the Oedipus complex. *A little boy will exhibit a special interest in his father; he would like to grow to like him and be like him*… (*Group* 105, my emphasis)

By accentuating the significance of the father in the subjective development, Freud's observation again highlights the Oedipal impulse of the subject to supersede or be the paternal metaphor. External to the Oedipal father-son paradigm, the Asian subject has no choice but can only fulfill its Oedipal aspiration by identifying with the dominant (white) figure—including subscribing to its ideology, culture, and politics—inasmuch as the American culture is predominantly white.

In this sense, Jin's fabrication of Danny is thus not only a means of self-preservation—in securing his threatened subjectivity and perishing masculinity—but, more importantly, his invention of the white character also facilitates his entrance into the symbolic. Being depicted as a Caucasian teenager who is excellent in sports and popular among girls, Danny conforms to every criterion to be the paternal metaphor. He is white, blonde, and “macho-ly” suave. Whereas Jin has trouble impressing Amelia, Danny is otherwise every girl’s fantasy. By donning the form of Danny, Jin is no longer the emasculated Asian man; instead, his “castration” anxiety is mitigated through the fabrication of his Caucasian alter ego, thereby restoring his threatened manhood and subjectivity.

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[36] Otto Rank (1884-1939) is an Austrian psychotherapist and a colleague of Freud's. His idea of the double is discussed extensively in *Der Doppelgänger* (1914).

Despite his castration anxiety is ephemerally relieved, Jin’s fabrication of an alter ego does not come without a cost. Instead, the development of a double requires the subjugation of his ancestral and racial heritage. Differently put, Jin’s fabrication of Danny can only be made possible with the repression of his Asian origin. Yet, this does not mean a complete eradication of his Asian roots; instead, they are banished into the unconscious realm. But what is repressed tends to reappear in the consciousness or behavior through the form of an unrecognizable “derivative of the unconscious”—a process which Freud famously addresses as “the return of the repressed” (“The Uncanny” 947-52). The character of Chin-Kee in this sense is thus an embodiment of “the return of the repressed” as his incomprehensible kinship with Danny at the onset of *American Born Chinese* is in effect a manifestation of Jin’s psyche (as well as the Asian subject as a whole). On the one hand, Danny resembles the ideal ego for Jin to fit in the symbolic; on the other hand, Jin finds it impossible to repress his ancestral and racial heritage as it is a part of his identity.

Like Jin, the Asian subject is perpetually torn between the personas of Danny and Chin-Kee, as Dolores de Manuel and Rocío G. Davis point out, the Asian American subject is, “pressured to remain faithful to ancestral heritage, while at the same time admonished to assimilate and become fully American will never give them full acceptance” (vi-vii). The personas of Danny and Chin-Kee thus reflect the inner-struggle of the Asian American subject, constantly in struggle about whether to forfeit his ancestral heritage to become fully Americanized or adhere to traditional and cultural roots, thereby risked being the perpetual outcast of the American culture. However, whether Danny or Chin-Kee, there is always in danger of losing a large part of the self, I will continue this discussion in my concluding chapter.

Conclusion:
Subverting White Fantasy and Reclaiming Asian American Subjectivity

In Gene Luen Yang's reimagining of the Monkey King's legend, the doorman's assumption to identify the Monkey King as an inadequate guest from a pure materialistic aspect is simply solipsistic, as Derek Hook points out:

> … one cannot in any simple transparent way simply "decode" the other, translate the symbols and signs of their world and culture into a set of accessible analogues that ensures a continuum of our and theirs, us and them. The very grid of intelligibility that would make such a reading possible is grounded in a cultural location that cannot but read what is outside through its own values; otherness would hence be "individualized" as the discovery of our own assumptions. (9)

Likewise, the same is clearly true of the white subject who turns ethnic and cultural characteristics into the requisite of national legitimacy, thereby giving rise to the ideology of racism. Yet, in spite of its ideological significance, racism is nevertheless a form of (psychological) disavowal that enables the co-existence of two incompatible beliefs: "attitudes which fit in with *current wishes/anxieties*, on the one hand, and attitudes which fit in *with reality*, on the other" (Hook 14, original emphasis). As such, the white subject remains cling to what Homi K. Bhabha terms as "the myth of historical origination" (26)—notions of racial purity, the superiority of one race, and the degeneracy of another—whilst simultaneously giving ethnic and cultural diversity recognition. But if racism is grounded on the original fantasy of Anglo-Saxon purity, the U.S.'s reality is then conditioned by such fantasy inasmuch as the ideology has had a profound influence in shaping the nation's contour. In associating fantasy with ideology, Slavoj Žižek argues that ideology is a projection of the fantasy that serves the function to support the construction of reality, as he theorizes:

> "Reality" is a fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire. It is exactly the same with ideology. Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel. (45)

Along with Žižek's argument, the ideology of racism is thus what Hook terms as a "contradiction-management" that focuses on the defense-attempt of disavowal as it seeks to impede a threatening reality in preserving the original fantasy of the subject (13).

However, disavowal is but an unrealistic mode of defense; instead, what truly facilitates the play of fantasy is the creation of various racialized discourses—especially that of ethnic stereotyping—as it ensures the success of the more general defense of disavowal by construing the ethnic other as a fixed reality—both as a degenerated type and a source of absolute alterity. Here, Bhabha offers fetishism as analogue of stereotyping: whereas the boy fantasizes the fetish object as a stand-in to the mother's absent penis, the white subject otherwise recourses to ethnic stereotypes to combat against (or "normalize," in Bhabha's terms) the disturbing effects of ethnic and cultural difference. In both instances, the fetish object/process help "[create] a sense of order and control in a frightening world at the same that it holds a set of ideological beliefs in place" (Hook 26), thereby securing a threatened narcissistic selfhood. In spite of its structural resemblance to that of fetishism, what Bhabha proposes is more than a psychoanalytical model of ethnic stereotyping but a critical outlet to question the existing structures of nationality, national formation, as well as racial categorizations.

In Sigmund Freud's account of the clinical picture, we recall again that the mother's penis does not actually exist. The fetish as the mother's missing penis is in effect a constructed object—it must be made and fantasized. The same can be said about ethnic stereotyping, which, according to Hook, "need have no 'realist' basis outside of the racial fantasy" (23-24). Ethnic stereotyping in this sense is thus the fantasmatic object—so as other racialized discourse—created as a means "to exercise certain fantasmastic control over the world" (Hook 25-26). Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein in particular have noticed the artificiality of ethnic and social categorizations, as they persuasively posit that "no nation, that is no nation state, has an ethnic base… except precisely in the sense of the product of a *fictive* ethnicity" (49, original emphasis).

That being said, racism remains deeply embedded in the U.S. dominant culture. Despite the nation's commitment to formal equality to all races, what we continue to see is a culture that continues to disseminate racist ideology, as exemplified by the graphic portrayals of people of Asian heritage in the nineteenth-century ethnic caricatures and in the more recent comics genre. Though primarily being deemed as a source of entertainment, Jachinson Chan otherwise sees graphic narrative as "medium for developing [White American's] fantasies" (106); inasmuch as it help consolidate white subjectification and Asian American subordination through the use of racialized discourses.

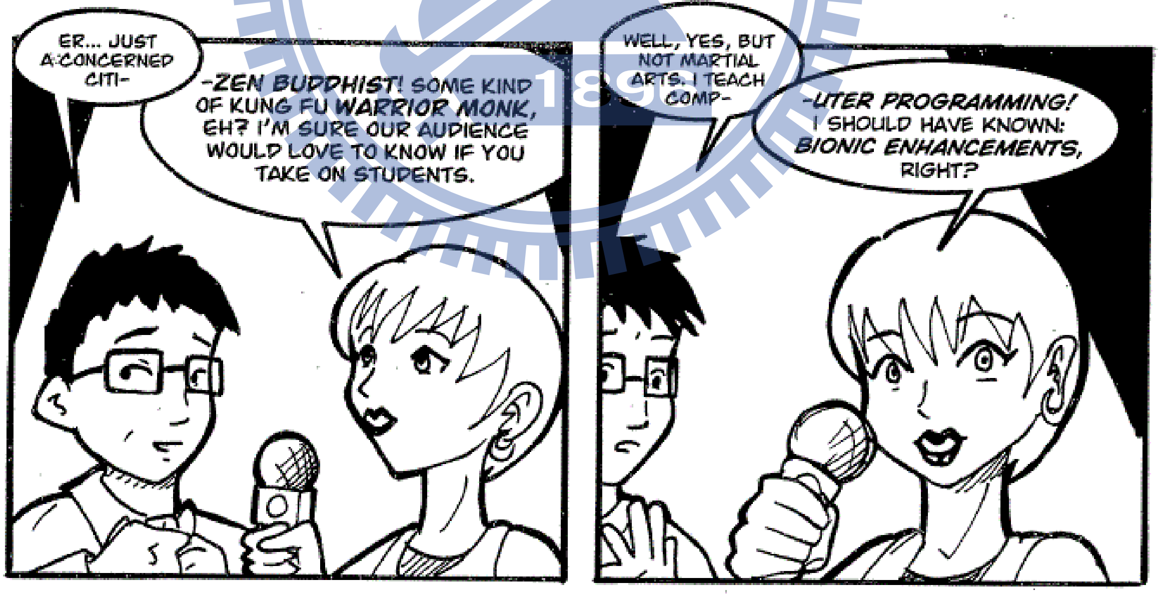
Whilst the introduction of Asian characters in the comics medium seem to embrace the inclusion of Asian Americans, the portrayals of these characters otherwise tell a different story: the depiction of Chop-Chop in DC's *Blackhawk*—his dwarfish stature, and comical appearance—for example, has rendered him more as a comic relief than a member of the heroic Blackhawk crew; Shang-Chi's relationship with his infamous father Dr. Fu Manchu continues to haunt him despite he pledges loyalty to the British Secret Intelligence Service MI-6; and Kato is given a secondary (not to mention emasculating) role as a sidekick/chauffeur to the charismatic Green Hornet. In these instances, we see the comics industry continues to recycle former stereotypical images to ensure the distancing and ultimate abnegation of Asian Americans. By forestalling the disturbing effects of difference into a fixated and endlessly repetitive mode of representation and identity, the persistence of stereotyping helps concretize the white's fantasy at the expense of the Asian subject, as Kent A. Ono and Vincent Pham notice, "it helps white viewers feel comfortable and simultaneously be at ease with something they understand to be *a diametrically oppositional other*, quintessentially alien and inscrutable," hence "the denial of Asian American subjectivity and complexity" (60, my emphasis).

Identities in this sense are not only made explicit within the relational field of racial distinctions—white/non-white—worse yet, racialized discourses further affix the other as "the ineradicable sign of *negative difference*" whilst presents the white subject as everything otherwise (Bhabha 28, original emphasis). The ethnic other is thus portrayed as derogatory, barbarous, backward, and illicit whilst the Anglo-Saxon subject appears to be superior, civilized, progressive, normative, and legitimate. Hence, for Hook:

> Ethnic stereotypes [understand] the "object" in question, the racial "other," *without actually engaging them* in the fullness of contradictory experience and diversity. The stereotype, in this sense, protects against contradictions

> and works as an endlessly repeated means of keeping diversity at bay, reducing difference to the stark contrasts of a Manichean dichotomy. (28, original emphasis)

Due to the significance of racism, we thus have a culture that cannot but think and identify outside the concept of ethnicity, the other must be forever examined in racial and cultural terms. The ethnic subject's skin/body hence comes to define most of its identity and is infinitely magnified because it provides the "inconvertible evidence" for racial difference that admits the exercise of a kind of "racialized knowledge" (Hall 244). For Bhabha, what is denied the ethnic other "is that form of negation which give access to the recognition of difference" inasmuch as "it is that possibility of difference and circulation which would liberate the signifier of skin/culture from the signifier of *skin/culture* from the signified of racial typology, the analytics of blood, ideologies of racial and cultural dominance or degeneration" (27-28, original emphasis).


ER... JUST A CONCERNED CITI-
-ZEN BUDDHIST! SOME KIND OF KUNG FU WARRIOR MONK, EH? I'M SURE OUR AUDIENCE WOULD LOVE TO KNOW IF YOU TAKE ON STUDENTS.
WELL, YES, BUT NOT MARTIAL ARTS. I TEACH COMP-
-UTER PROGRAMMING! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN: BIONIC ENHANCEMENTS, RIGHT?

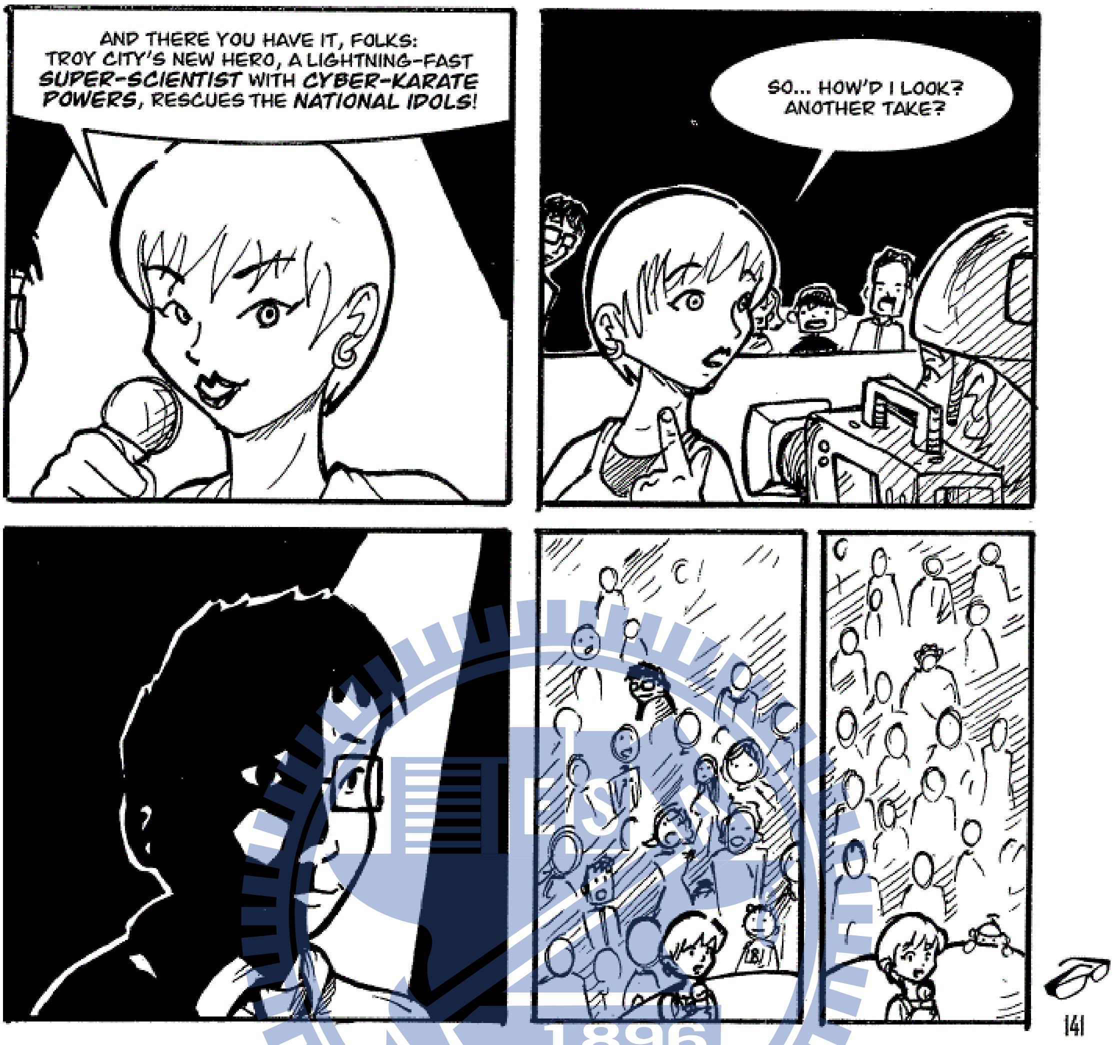

AND THERE YOU HAVE IT, FOLKS: TROY CITY'S NEW HERO, A LIGHTNING-FAST SUPER-SCIENTIST WITH CYBER-KARATE POWERS, RESCUES THE NATIONAL IDOLS!
SO... HOW'D I LOOK? ANOTHER TAKE?
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FIGURE IV.1 . A “Kung Fu Warrior Monk.” Jeff Yang *et al*. *Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology*. New York: The New Press, 2009. 141.

Secret Identities features the story of an anonymous superhero who works as a professor and combats crime as his side-gig in a short episode called “Just Ordinary” (figure IV.1). Similar to Jin Wang, the protagonist’s racial characteristics have become to the determining feature of his individual identity. As a person of Asian descent, he is presumed to be proficient in computers despite he is in effect an “untenured junior comparative literature professor” (138). One day after sending his cape to a laundry shop, the protagonist encounters a horrible incident where a famous celebrity is abducted by several masked bandits. Without his cape, he defeats these villains bare-handedly in front of a huge crowd and is subsequently interviewed by a reporter. Much to his disappointment, he is not given the opportunity to speak for himself as the female reporter continually interjects with her stereotypical cognition about Asians as a whole and is reluctant to identify him as an individual subject. Unable to complete a single sentence throughout the interview, the protagonist's self-representation is completely eradicated. In this case, what become the primary part of his individual identity are stereotypes such as "Zen Buddhist," "Kung Fu Warrior Monk," and "Computer Programming"—tropes that are assigned to the people of Asian heritage. At the end of the interview, the complexity of his individual identity was blatantly ignored and, worse yet, simplified into stereotypical platitudes to fit the cultural understanding of Asian people; as concluded by the reporter, he is nothing more than a "super-scientist with cyber-karate powers" (141). Eventually, the protagonist departs from the scene and vanishes silently into the throng as the two panels at the bottom right of the page have shown. Whilst his departure can be interpreted as a sign of frustration as the protagonist is constantly being defined in racial terms, his disappearance in the crowd further connotes a deprivation of both of his subjectivity and complexity—a predicament shared by the Asian American community beneath the symbolic violence of racism.

To reclaim Asian American's subjectivity and complexity, Lisa Lowe proposes that Asian Americans need to be situated in multiple subject positions of a heterogeneous framework as a means to be "part of a strategy to destabilize the dominant discursive construction and determination of Asian Americans as a homogeneous group" (67-68). Marking Asian American differences will not only resist essentializing cultural traits but, more importantly, reveal the complexities of identity constructions. In fact, *Secret Identities* and *American Born Chinese* have both exemplified that identities are not entirely dichotomous.

In another episode of *Secret Identities* entitled “The Blue Scorpion & Chung,” Gene Luen Yang collaborates with Sonny Liew to challenge the simplistic (racial) categorizations and generalizations. Evidently inspired by the renowned dynamic duo of Green Hornet and Kato, Blue Scorpion and Chung are however nothing like them. Whereas Green Hornet is charming and heroic, the Blue Scorpion is a narcissistic alcoholic and racist. Chung, on the other hand, is given a back story that adds to the complexity of his identity. In a crime-fighting mission with Chung, the Blue Scorpion is seen gulping down a bottle of beer whilst mumbling stereotypical tropes to his partner. Noticing the drug smugglers are of Korean descent, he facetiously asks Chung—who is also a Korean—to “talk to [his] people,” “tell’em they oughta have their green cards before they start acting like they own the place” (63). Having finished his sixth bottle of beer, he recklessly reveals himself in front of the drug smugglers without heeding Chung’s warning. Having caught the drug-smugglers by surprise, Blue Scorpion is able to knock them down easily before he is confronted by their boss—a bulky man who is evidently physically superior to him. Unmatched, Blue Scorpion quickly finds himself begging for mercy as he is brutally beaten up by the Boss. Fortunately, Chung appears in time to save him from further beating. Before Chung can deliver the final blow, Blue Scorpion abruptly orders Chung to “stand down” as he wants the last shot for vengeance, howling in anger that “[he’s] the friggin’ Blue Scorpion! [Chung’s a] friggin’ chauffeur!”

Chung’s back story is further unfolded in a flashback when he is driving the Boss to custody. In his flashback, it is revealed that Chung had once made up his mind to leave Blue Scorpion. Even with Blue Scorpion was severely hurt; Chung was adamant to settle down with his girlfriend before he was informed by a surgeon that Blue

Scorpion "was trying to save a child" but his failure to do so had led to the child's tragic death (73). Realizing that "the Blue Scorpion is justice and is bigger than him or [his partner]," Chung has decided to give up his relationship with his girlfriend to rejoin Blue Scorpion, thereby committing himself to a crime-fighting career.

With their unconventional representations of Blue Scorpion and Chung, Yang and Liew challenge the irrational beliefs of racial purity, the superiority of one race, and the degeneracy of another, thereby opening up a new possibility for the definition of identity. In their version of "Green Hornet and Kato," Chung is no longer the submissive servant and emasculated sidekick. Instead, his noble sense of self-sacrifice is highlighted by his willingness to forfeit his private life for a greater purpose—he has committed his loyalty to the idea of justice and not to the Blue Scorpion. By limning the Blue Scorpion as an unapologetic racist and egomania, the authors otherwise alienate the readers from this character, thereby demystifying the universalizing and prescriptive prerogative that sets the white male as normative subject.

1896

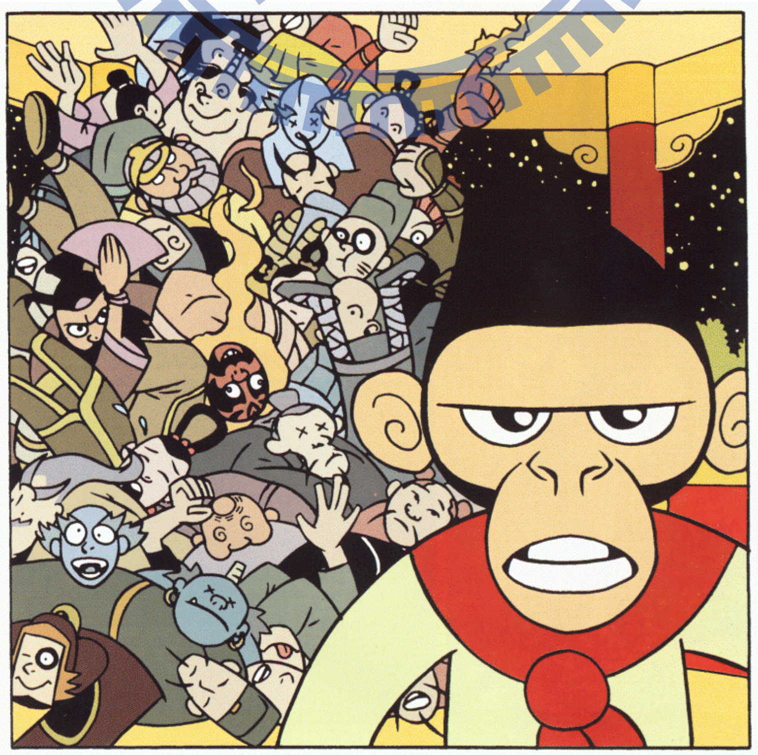

FIGURE IV.2. None of the deities is the same. Gene Luen Yang. *American Born Chinese*. New York: Square Fish, 2006. 14.

In *American Born Chinese*, Yang further hints at that the nation is far from a homogeneous unity. His colorful illustration and depictions of various immortals at the onset of the graphic narratives has already hinted at the heterogeneity of the heaven—every immortal is distinctive and unique—and their unity is hinged merely on their common possession of the shoes (figure IV.2). The sense of homogeneity is in effect artificial; to reiterate what Balibar and Wallerstein have conceptualized, an "imaginary unity has to be instituted… *against* other possible unities" (49, original emphasis). If the footwear comes to delineate the (imaginary) unity of the immortals and the (party) space, the same is clearly true of the concept of race as it has also function as the signifier in the production of meanings and identities alike but, more importantly, it helps delineate the subjective boundary of the Anglo-Saxon subject, thereby securing a symbolic (national) space which operates as a foundation of a collective identity. Racism is no less artificial than the shoes; and the collective unity of an American political identity is as fictive as the immortals'.

For Yang, racism is thus a symbolic bondage. Humiliated and full of self-loathing after his entry into the party is denied, the Monkey King returns to his kingdom of Flower-Fruit Mountain. In an attempt to remedy his humiliation, the Monkey King not only decides to wear shoes but also issues a decree to his subjects, ordering them to follow suit. By adopting the title of "The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven" after spending days in training and meditating, he officially declares that "[he is] not a monkey" (62). Whilst he is portrayed as visibly shorter than the deities and doorman in heaven, he appears to be more human-like, not only donning a pair of shoes but also being significantly taller than his subjects. His subsequent effort to introduce his newly adopted identity has caused a tremendous chaos in heaven; as a result, he is confined under a mountain of rocks for five hundred years.

Here, Yang suggests that the Monkey King’s decree does not make them a member of the immortals; instead, such mimicry is a misguided and harmful attempt to suppress their true nature and identity as monkeys. In this panel, several monkeys are depicted to have lost their ability to climb; and the majority of them looks overwhelmed and confused (55). The Monkey King himself is confined under a mountain of rocks and does not regain his freedom until five centuries later after he finally makes peace with his monkey identity and embarks on a pilgrimage to the West as one of Wong Lai-Tsao’s disciples.

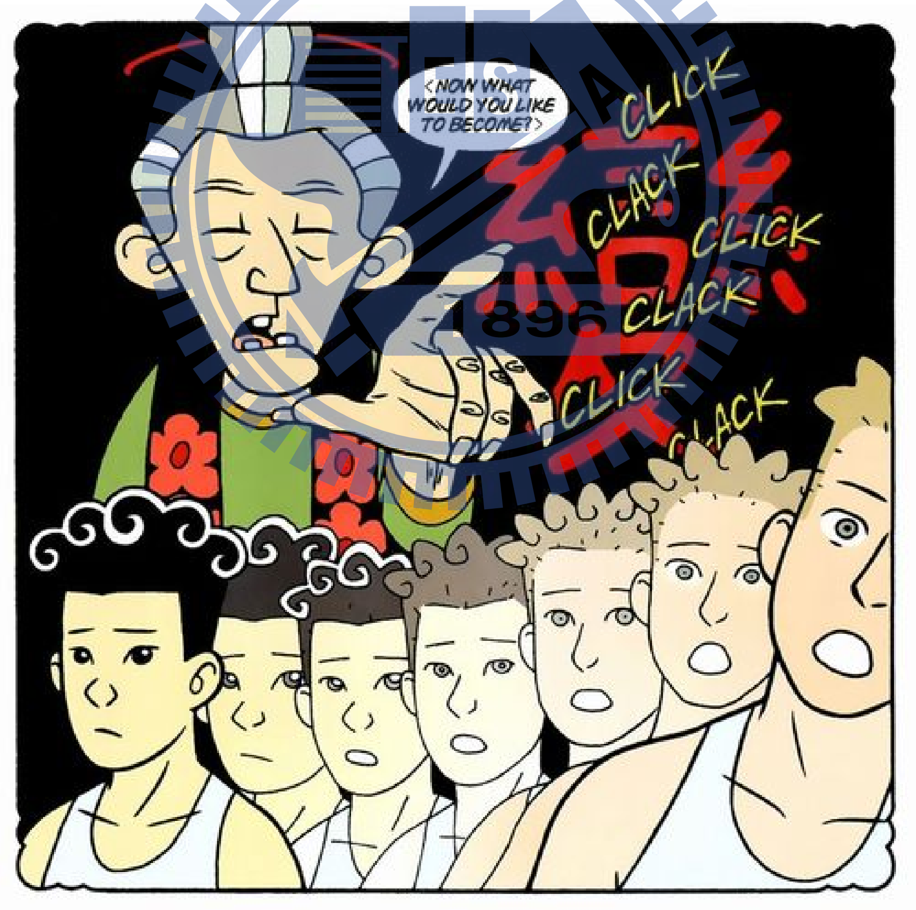

FIGURE IV.3. Jin’s transformation to Danny. Gene Luen Yang. *American Born Chinese*. New York: Square Fish, 2006. 194.

Similar to the Monkey King, Jin Wang is denied a symbolic admission into the American society due to his ethnicity. During his elementary years, Jin is teased and abused by his classmates due to his ethnic difference. Later, he has even decided to become a different person when he fails to court Amelia Harris. Yang in effect spends a large panel to limn Jin's transformation to Danny. With the traditional Chinese character *bian* (meaning "to transform") and the Chinatown herbalist's wife—a character who has cautioned Jin: "It's easy to become anything you wish… so long as you're willing to forfeit your soul" (29, my emphasis)."—as part of the visual representation, the panel illustrates Jin's transforming process from a yellow-skinned and black-haired boy to a Caucasian teenager with fair-skin and blonde-hair (figure IV.3). Despite Jin's wish is finally granted, the image of Chinatown herbalist's wife nonetheless reminds the reader of her warning. Just as wearing shoes and creating a new title do not help the Monkey King with his monkey identity, the all-American appearance and new name do not solve Jin's problem.

This is because Jin is forced to view the world—including his self-image—through the visions of the white subject. The characters of Danny and Chin-Kee in effect are reflections of the dominant ideology that encapsulates the diversity of the world within the either/or extremes: he can either only be white (Danny) or non-white (Chin-Kee). Jin in this sense is torn between the two characters. Their fight at the end of Yang's book is a manifestation of Jin's inner struggle as he is, according to Dolores de Manuel and Rocío Davis, "pressured to remain faithful to ancestral heritage whilst at the same time admonished to assimilate and become fully American" (vi-viii). After Danny beheads Chin-Kee with a punch on the face, the character Chin-Kee reveals himself to the Monkey King who has "[come] to serve as [his] conscience-as a signpost to [Jin's] soul" (221).

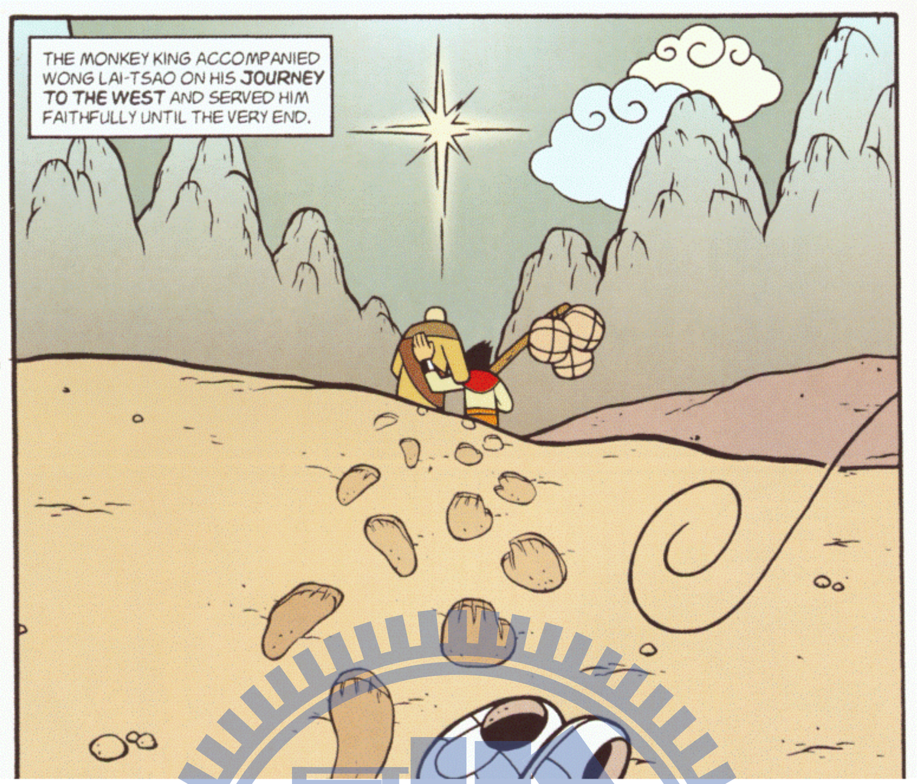
THE MONKEY KING ACCOMPANIED WONG LAI-TSAO ON HIS JOURNEY TO THE WEST AND SERVED HIM FAITHFULLY UNTIL THE VERY END.

FIGURE IV.4. The Monkey King leaves behind the bondage of materialism. *American Born Chinese*. New York: Square Fish, 2006. 160.

In one panel, the Monkey King and Wong Lai-Tsao are leaning on each other and walking side by side towards a bright star, leaving their bare footprints on the sand, with the shoes discarded in the foreground (figure IV.4). The image suggests that the Monkey King can only make peace with his true identity after discarding his shoes, a bondage that make identity explicit through the notion of materialism. Likewise, Jin can only come to terms with his true-identity once he ceases to see himself through the lens of white fantasy about racial superiority/inferiority. In the final analysis, as *American Born Chinese* and *Secret Identities* have both challenged the simplistic, unified, or dualistic map of the American society through visual media, highlighting that ethnicity itself is not a stable category and can be reinvented and reinterpreted.

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