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18

Asian American 1960s

Colleen Lye

Within Asian American Studies and beyond, the late 1960s—technically 1968 to 1977 or so, which historians have identified as the period of the Asian American movement—are a topic of increasing historical fascination and recovery. How might Asian American literary studies be renewed by a reconsideration of the Asian American 1960s? This question may at first seem to be a perverse one, since it is generally more conventional to think of Asian American literary studies as having come into its own to the extent that it had managed to free itself from the political discourse of the Asian American 1960s. Indeed, what the Asian American 1960s had heretofore seemed to bequeath to Asian American literary studies was cultural nationalism, masculinism, and crude sociological ways of reading literature, an antidote to which was to be found in the intellectual resources provided by (British cultural studies-mediated) French theory. For a time, the provenance of the latter and their routes of transmission lent the impression that what was at stake in the conflicted maturation of Asian American Studies was a split between high theory and local practice, between new ivory tower sophisticates and older community-oriented activists, or, disciplinarily speaking, between a literature-based cultural studies and a history-based one.¹

Recent work on the world 1960s, however, suggests that it may be yet more accurate to think of both sides as linked strands of global Maoism, which was deeply influential on the cultural turn represented by poststructuralism in France and on Third World movements in the United States (Connery 2007: 77–107). As such, the deconstructive notion of the Asian American as a kind of non-identity that has proved difficult to translate into Asian American movement- and institution-building need not necessarily be thought of as a depoliticizing inevitability of academic cultural capital accumulation. The notion of the Asian American as a catachrestic subject represents one logical unfolding of a 1960s discourse of racial identity that, while by definition nationalist in form, was trans- or inter-nationalist in content. It is the abstract formalism of the cultural politics of post-identity discourse that obscures its own nationalist energies—a problem to the extent that Asian American politics today would likely benefit from a reckoning with the cultural nationalism of the Asian American 1960s rather than a disavowal of it. This was a cultural nationalism that imagined an identity that was by definition based on political affinity rather than on given ethnic descent, that was in potential and oft in practice inter-ethnic,

COLLEEN LYE

interracial, and feminist, animated by the achievements of revolutionary liberation movements abroad (see Fujino 2008: 127–69 and Maeda 2009). Today's return to the matter of the 1960s provides an opportunity, first, to remind ourselves of the radical content of the Asian American movement, and, second, to investigate the role of literature as a practical site of its historical memory.

Of these, the second, the task of conceptualizing literature as a site of historical memory of the Asian American 1960s—and therefore as a vehicle for carrying forward its political aims—is turning out to present the greater challenge.² A reconsideration of the *Aiiieeeee!* anthology clarifies that the publication most canonically identified with the activist period of Asian American literary discourse was actually from the beginning significant for defending the relative autonomy of art from politics (Chiang 2009: 145). Resituated alongside an array of other kinds of cultural practice that emerged around the time of the Asian American movement (street theater, spoken word poetry, performative rallies), *Aiiieeeee!* suggests the especial intransigence of literary ambition to agitprop purpose or collective protest. Perhaps for this very reason, the tension between aesthetics and politics is turning out to be a recurring preoccupation of literature about the Asian American 1960s. Indeed, this tension might be described as the principal contradiction of the Asian American subject. Just as racial *group* formation has been well understood to ensue from the dialectical interaction between racial projects of the state and of social movements, racial *subject* formation might be said to result from the dialectical interaction between individual and collective forms of performative action. Starting in 1968, the panethnic subject emerged as a product of the political organizations and creative groups that took actions in its name; in particular, the original use of the term “Asian American” has been traced to the founding of the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at UC Berkeley by Yuji Ichioka and Richard Aoki. In its treatment of the doubling and contradiction between the aesthetic and political registers of the Asian American subject, Asian American literature provides a historical description of the formation of the Asian American subject, or the 1960s genealogy of the identity.

The first novel to periodize the Asian American 1960s was Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989), which inaugurated the historical novel of the Asian American 1960s, a genre that includes, most notably, *Gunga Din Highway* (1994), *The Gangster of Love* (1996), *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996), *American Woman* (2003), and *I-Hotel* (2010). The year that saw a transmutation in the Cold War from military rivalry between two world systems to economic rivalry within one world system—and a shift from a European center to an Asian one—also witnessed two landmark publishing events in Asian American literary history: Kingston's turn to a fully fictional form of long prose writing and Amy Tan's discovery of a blockbuster formula with *The Joy Luck Club*. Besides everything else, therefore, 1989 also marked the arrival of the Asian American novel, whose twin representatives demonstrated the divergent evolutionary possibilities of the narrative experiment initiated by *The Woman Warrior* (1976). Kingston's fictional autobiography or autobiographical fiction was notable for its presentation of the ethnic self as an open subject of fictionalization. However, insofar as its textual effect depended upon the (productive) confusion of author, narrator and protagonist, it was only with the arrival of the *kunstlerroman* and *Tripmaster Monkey's* distinct dissociation of narrator from

ASIAN AMERICAN 1960S

protagonist that the constructed ethnic self came to be mediated through the problem of art as an independent human activity rather than posited as the direct object of art-making. *Tripmaster Monkey's* aesthetic preoccupations, which are also built into the novel at a formal level—including an intrusive narrator, a meandering and unclosed plot, and a high degree of allusiveness—are not at all at the forefront of *The Joy Luck Club*. However, what *The Joy Luck Club* differently took from *The Woman Warrior* helps account for *The Joy Luck Club's* easy universalizability.

Published at the end of the U.S. war in Vietnam and in the year of Mao's death and the arrest of the Gang of Four, *The Woman Warrior* could not offer a historical reflection on the Asian American 1960s, but it was very much a historical product of the 1960s. This may account for its breakthrough quality as an intrinsically Asian American narrative. By "intrinsically Asian American" I mean that *The Woman Warrior's* Asian Americanness is a property of the text itself rather than a property of the frame within which readers locate specific ethnic texts, such as a course syllabus or a publisher's catalogue. *The Woman Warrior's* Asian Americanness does not have to do with indexing an array of ethnic Asian populations, an achievement of still few literary works, and perhaps none before the 1960s. *The Woman Warrior's* Asian Americanness has to do with Kingston's reworking of the characteristic form of intergenerational conflict narratives by earlier U.S. authors of Asian descent. Whereas earlier texts had tended to dichotomize immigrant and U.S.-born generations, *The Woman Warrior* mirrors as well as contrasts mother and daughter. Rather than representing a blocking figure that the youthful protagonist must leave or destroy (for example, as in *America is in the Heart* or *No-No Boy*), the mother here is a resource or space to which the daughter repeatedly returns. As such, youth's nonlinear path to maturity may seem to resemble the form of the failed bildungsroman critics have ascribed to earlier narratives, allegorizing the impossibility of assimilation (Chu 2000). But the circularity here differs in that it stems from a new weight accorded the immigrant perspective, now made into a fully internal aspect of the new Asian American subject. Even going so far as to romanticize the "voice of Asia," which represents not just a residual past to be left behind but a renewable resource for the future, *The Woman Warrior* shows the impact of the Asian American movement on the rise of ethnic cultural nationalism in general, for which an Asian figure of revolutionary militance was inspirational. "Sixties time was, in so many of its registers, a stand against given time, against capitalist time, against abstract time ... [It was] the temporality of the third-world revolutionary project that sought a bridge to liberatory nationhood, one not paced to the temporality of development or modernization" (Connery 2007: 88). In the intergenerational conflict narrative, where an Orientalized tradition once served as the static foil for the alien's never-ending process of becoming, now revolutionary time bound Asian and American into a new coequality, shifting the basis of generalized Asianness from something located within the cultural essence of invented traditions (such as "Confucian family values") to something located in the dynamism of modernity, including the powers of making history.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, while groups such as the Chinatown Red Guard were inspired by the Black Panthers, the revolutionary vision of Black Power itself drew upon the examples of the Vietnamese anti-imperialist guerilla and the insurgent youth of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Thus, though the Asian American

COLLEEN LYE

movement continually entailed an uphill struggle to establish the equal visibility of yellow oppression alongside that of black, red, and brown, it also indicated the centrality of a Vietnam War frame to the racial analogies between disparate kinds of minority oppression that formed the very premise of Third World coalition (Maeda 2009: 5). In this context, it makes sense that *The Woman Warrior* should imagine a mother whose talents for exorcism and storytelling bear more kinship to the super-powers of Mu Lan, and furthermore that she is the one to strike Third World comparisons with Mexican, Filipino, and Vietnamese female field workers rather than her Berkeley-in-the-1960s daughter (Kingston 1989: 206). No doubt this interpretation of *The Woman Warrior* along the lines of a revolutionary Third World feminism in place of the liberal multicultural feminism that once predominated its reception is facilitated by Yamashita's recent reworking of Kingston's trope in *I-Hotel*, where the woman warrior is a "gun-toting mama with a babe at her breast," embodied by the Leway Chinatown girls who work security for Black Panther boy-friends (2010: 202). In the spirit of Malcolm X's *Message to the Grass Roots*, the 1960s woman warrior was a traveling figure for the magical power of "black, brown, red or yellow" to overcome the technological superiority of Western imperialism.³

The Joy Luck Club doubles (or quadruples) down on Kingston's mother-daughter narrative not just by multiplying its number but by stabilizing it. Whereas there remains much that is agonistic in *The Woman Warrior*'s mother-daughter relation to negate the text's concluding proposition of translation's perfectability, *The Joy Luck Club*'s consumability no doubt owes much to its neat resolution of intergenerational misunderstanding. Most importantly the resolution occurs on the mother's territory, with Jin-mei Woo's visit to China, which is the telos of what was after all a drive to humanize the mother's alien perspective and apparently antic behaviors. Published in the same year that Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History" appeared in *The National Interest*, *The Joy Luck Club* sounded a similar argument: the triumph of liberal capitalism over any socialist alternative was strongly evidenced by the spread of consumer culture throughout East Asia, including the People's Republic of China. The Asian American "return" to China was fiction's wish for the restoration of the China that had been lost to the United States in 1949, and an allegorization of the meaning of 1989 in these terms. In 1976, which was after Nixon's visit but before normalization of state-to-state relations, *The Woman Warrior* offered the novel prospect of geopolitical rapprochement while conveying the persistent difficulty entailed in what was officially still a fantasy. The frictionlessness of perfect family reunion projected by *The Joy Luck Club* is of course also imaginary, but the point here is that the ideology of capitalist integration, in which Tan's novel partakes, suppresses contradiction, while historical novels about the Asian American 1960s linger upon it. As such, in addition to poststructuralism and Third Worldism, Asian American literature is also an important legatee of the Cultural Revolution unleashed by global Maoism.

Global Maoism

The concept of contradiction was elevated by Mao Zedong Thought over and above that of the negation of the negation or the transformation of quantity into quality.⁴

ASIAN AMERICAN 1960S

Less technically speaking, what this meant was that the presence of ongoing contradiction in all things was emphasized over the moment of dialectical resolution or transcendence. Mao's particular approach to contradiction associated his brand of dialectical materialism with the name of ceaseless or continuing revolution, though it had less of the negative—in the sense of “critical”—quality of Adorno's dialectic because Mao's interpretative emphasis was the unity of opposites. Pointing out the unity of opposites lay at the heart of Mao's break with the Soviet Union, which Mao alleged, despite the establishment of a socialist state, still manifested capitalist characteristics. It was of a piece with his charge that the bourgeoisie had “made its headquarters” within the Chinese Communist Party thereby requiring Cultural Revolution in the 1960s to prevent China going down the “rightist” path of the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin. Another aspect of Mao's concept of contradiction was the emphasis on contradiction's multiplicity. Multiplicity didn't necessarily mean an absence of order among operative contradictions—there always had to be a principal contradiction. Importantly, though, what was to be considered principal was situationally variable and not to be given in advance. Such implied critiques of theoretical abstraction had for a long time given Mao Zedong Thought the reputation of a pragmatically-driven theory or of being no theory at all rather than what it really was, which was a new theory of concrete practice. Indeed, allowing for the possibility that superstructural contradiction could take primacy reversed the economism associated with orthodox Marxism and helped inspire Althusser's formulation of the relative autonomy of ideology, which itself paved the way for the cultural materialism of the British New Left and opened the door to the anti-totalization consensus of French post-Marxism.⁵ In its historical influence on Marxist thinkers and on left social practice around the world in the 1960s, including in Japan, India, and the Philippines, Mao Zedong Thought represented an innovation in praxis. Given the internal diversity of global Maoism, whether this means, in the long run, Mao Zedong Thought will be judged to have extended or ended Marxism remains at present an open question, central to which has been the vexed relationship of nationalism to revolution, and of race and gender to class analysis—which are key theoretical questions raised by the Asian American 1960s.

In the United States, the impact of Mao's particular concept of contradiction was perhaps most obvious in the way multiplicity went hand in hand with a displacement of class as defined by one's position within a system of production. In the years 1927 to 1949, Chinese Marxism sought the creation of a revolutionary force out of masses who were peasants not proletarians. The distinctive approach of Mao to classes in the socialist period lay in the claim that there were newly generated antagonisms arising from power and privilege, which had to be combated by an extensive democracy in which the masses or “the people” would replace the Party. Outside China, the anti-hierarchical energy of the New Left also witnessed the questioning of expert knowledge and administrative power, indeed a revolt against intellectual representation or political formalism as such. In the United States, the emergence of Third Worldism coincided with the turn to a New Communism, which was strongly Maoist in tendency (see Elbaum 2002). Beyond the official party affiliations of various Left people of color groups, the informal influence of Maoism gave support to the notion of multiple axes of oppression—including race, gender,

COLLEEN LYE

sexuality, disability—as an alternative to a universal analytic of exploitation. In place of a class-based subject of revolution, the New Communism of the late 1960s posited a coalition-based subject of revolution, of which Third World groupings were exemplary. So too was the Asian American movement, which was inter-ethnic as Third World organizations were interracial, and which, in the form of the Asian American Political Alliance, arose simultaneously with the formation of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) at SF State and UC Berkeley in 1968, and—unique among other TWLF constituents—not before it (Umemoto 1989: 3–42).

What was new about certain U.S. literary texts written after 1968 was that they too were able to make use of Mao's concept of contradiction to shape the narrative form and content of Asian American identity: As suggested earlier, what marks *The Woman Warrior* as a 1960s text, for example, is something we might locate in the structure and thematics of the text rather than its indexical cultural references, since these latter are as ethnically specific as in, say, *Eat a Bowl of Tea* or *Fifth Chinese Daughter* before it. Furthermore, what traces of Maoist influence that are detectable certainly do not lie in *The Woman Warrior's* declarations of ideological sentiment, given citations of revolutionary excesses directed against family members which demonstrate history's ironic relation to (the Mu Lan) fantasy. *The Woman Warrior* reveals the theoretical impact of Maoist contradiction upon its recasting of intergenerational conflict as a permanent, unresolved unity of opposites. Less abstractly speaking, its moral values—including to the extent to which they seem on face antipolitical—might too be seen to reflect disseminations of the Cultural Revolution.

While the anti-statism of Kingston's writing is more obviously thematized as an attribute of the migrant subject, who is always voyaging away from China and hiding from the gaze of U.S. Asian exclusion law, it is also legible within the terms of the world 1960s revolt against political formalism. The casual depiction of regime change resulting from Mu Lan's march on the imperial capitol conveys little textual investment in hoped-for transformation; it goes hand in hand with the restorationist note of the story's ending, when Mu Lan famously returns to the role of obedient wife and daughter. Importantly, at both levels of state and family, revolution is no mere rebellion, since it is successful all the way. Thus, how success functions is something like Mao's 1960s' call upon insurgent youth to renew the authority of the Party. Moreover, what education youth needs to change the world is acquired in extra-familial settings, such as the medical school the mother attends or Mu Lan's martial arts fostering. In the text's U.S. setting, the narrator's comparatively circumscribed potential for political action might be read not just as indicating the non-revolutionary realism of Western modernity. The subjective focus in this space might rather be seen as yet another aspect of the Cultural Revolution, whose emphasis on ideological struggle in the form of self-criticism turned political action into a question of ethical improvement or moral inquiry. Not that the text is without ambivalence toward this necessary process: the tormenting of the girl in the empty bathroom communicates self-criticism's extremity, perhaps even more shocking (because drawn out, and up close and personal) than the situation of the uncle who had been criticized by communist others for "selfishly taking food for his own family and killed" (Kingston 1989: 51) during the Great Leap

ASIAN AMERICAN 1960S

Forward. The presence of the scene—in which the narrator's characteristic self-questioning gets acted out upon another in a quasi public/quasi private space—actively associates U.S. New Left culture (in which the personal was now political) with the Chinese Cultural Revolution in which political action demanded the reform of personality.

In *The Woman Warrior*, the shifts from China to U.S. settings connect to shifts of focus from questions of group representation to questions of individual self-representation—the latter styled as a matter of the competing correspondence of Chinese- and English-language signifiers to a self whose referential solidity is missing. This shuttling between geographical settings (or linguistically distinct discourses and myths) in place of linear journeying is, I have been suggesting all along, one concretion of the static effect of Maoist contradiction conceived predominantly as a unity of opposites. Readers of *The Woman Warrior* have also come away from the text with a predominant sense not of stasis but of ambivalence and undecidability, which are the flipside of this contradiction without resolution. Starting in 1989, historical novels of the Asian American 1960s appear to have done away with the Orientalist scaffolding that in *The Woman Warrior* still seemed structural to the narrative of Asian American emergence. In these novels, strictly local U.S. settings frame a subject no longer allegorically split between Asian and American sides. In these novels, the Asian American subject is still constitutively split, ever on the threshold of emergence. But now the splitness of the Asian American subject is not distributed across an East–West geographical imaginary and is more clearly thematized as an extended contemplation of the relation between aesthetic and political formation, or individual and collective agency, that it historically was all along.

The Asian American historical novel of the 1960s

If *The Joy Luck Club* performs the end of the Asian American 1960s at the very moment *Tripmaster Monkey* chooses to give them narrative shape, Kingston's method suggests that to set Asian American subject formation in history is to fold the question of Asian American being—the question entertained by *The Woman Warrior*—into the question of Asian American doing. *Tripmaster Monkey* is no less existential than Kingston's first book, but its protagonist Wittman's early Hamlet-esque poses soon give way to a quest for artistic realization, specifically, for an art form that has the power to stop war. The negative action that is Wittman's standard for effective art sets forth a ramifying challenge pondered by the novel as a whole: when is resistance mere inaction and when does it amount to transformative change? At the level of character, when is a drop out a conscientious objector and when a paranoid narcissist? The novel ironizes Wittman's 1960s-themed political ambition with a picaresque plot in which nothing much happens, culminating in his staging of a play that exemplifies art as happening. Since the play, though highly attended and warmly received, seems to be from Wittman's perspective largely misinterpreted by its audience and reviewers, the novel encourages us to question what it is exactly that has happened in and through the performance.

COLLEEN LYE

Wittman himself at the end of the performance seems to rethink his project:

He had staged the War of the Three Kingdoms as heroically as he could, which made him start to understand: The three brothers and Cho Cho were masters of war ... And they lost. The clanging and banging fooled us, but now we know—they lost. Studying the mightiest war epic of all time, Wittman changed—been!—into a pacifist!

(Kingston 1990: 340)

If the play has effected anything—perhaps some maturation in its author, a paradoxical, axe-grinding peacenik—this representation of interior development in the penultimate lines of the novel hardly asks to be taken seriously. The novel's flagrant inconclusiveness on the question of change is matched by the final indeterminacy of what form Asian American art ought to take—whether Wittman's theatricalization of war had displaced or merely reflected U.S. wartime reality. Though occupying many pages, the account given of the play seems purposely tedious, in part because it chooses to describe rather than narrate, and often defaults to defining itself negatively against established genres. For example, we witness Wittman thinking to himself: "A job can't be the plot of life, and not a soapy-love-marriage-divorce—and well, no, not Viet Nam. To entertain and educate the solitaries that make up a community, the play will be a combination of revue-lecture" (Kingston 1990: 288). Consisting of lots of "blasting and blazing" (306) on the one hand and of the playwright's meandering monologue of conflicting intents on the other, the play symbolizes Asian American art as the impossibility of social narrative, or the unending search for how to represent the interconnections that are "the plot of our ever-branching lives" (288).

In some sense such open-ended and processual emphases help keep alive the aspiration for a total Asian American art. Yet the effect of this is also a shadowy sense of failure, indicating *Tripmaster's* satirical or at least skeptical treatment of the political investments—in pacifist politics, in community theater—that are very much its own. How to make sense of this? On its face, *Tripmaster's* focus on a character who seeks to create a political art sets up an inevitable tension between art and activism: in seeking to change the world through art, Wittman is always anxious about and threatened by the more direct action he is not engaged in. Focalized through this perspective, the novel offers a jaundiced view of the committed leftist characters who do cross his path. Wittman's anti-bureaucratic, anti-institutional sensibility envisions social transformation through a freedom from rather than a transvaluation of work, all of whose extant forms are judged to be fatally alienated. Agreeing with this, the novel's values might be situated on the anarchistic or libertarian rather than Marxist end of the spectrum of 1960s' counterculture.

Yet complicating this ideological assessment is the novel's use of Chinese material to invent a tradition for 1960s' counterculture. Throughout the novel are references to Chineseness as characterized by: living outside an exchange economy (Kingston 1990: 334); an anti-authoritarian attitude to government (248, 263); having trippiness built into one's genes and blood (323); a long tradition of agitprop theater (306); a native knack for community (10, 298). We are not necessarily meant to believe in these claims about Chineseness as historical truths since they are presented as

ASIAN AMERICAN 1960S

extravagant fantasies oft punctured by experience. What is important is that, to the extent the 1960s involved developing alternative political values into a whole way of life, that counterculture is thematized as “Chinese.” “Chinese” is in quotation marks because it denotes not an inherited ethnos but the very possibility of transforming culture—in other words, the work of Cultural Revolution. This is why the novel couples Wittman’s quest for a people’s theater with the search for his grandmother, Popo: both involve a character’s search for his tribe. Importantly, the parallel between artistic community and family does not involve the biologization of the former. Rather the parallel reinforces a depiction of family that has been stripped of natural pretensions, “headed” by a grandmother who was adopted by Wittman’s parents and who speaks a hybrid of Japanese, Chinese, and English. “Do the right thing by whoever crosses your path. Those coincidental people are your people” (223). The result is the subsumption of family into “the people,” and the explosion of a monoethnic imagination of community.

Thus, though Kingston’s famed project of claiming of America has Wittman wanting “to bring back—not red-hot communist Chinese—but deep-roots American theater” (1990: 141), the focalization of 1960s culture through an Asian American character entertains visions of “Chinese revolutionary” alternatives to lived U.S. capitalist reality. “In a land where words are pictures and have tones, there’s music everywhere all the time, and a party going on ... A billion communalists eating and discussing. They’re never lonely” (330). It cannot be said that *Tripmaster* officially adopts a Maoist platform: even if the novel does not fully embrace Wittman’s belief that a revolution is a party, it certainly rejects the notion that “revolutionaries must shoot and bomb and kill, that revolution is the same as war” (305). But like *The Woman Warrior*, *Tripmaster*’s main cultural revolutionizing is in what it does with the family narrative—the fact that Wittman’s socially rebellious choices are already anticipated by his artistic and itinerant parents. Where intergenerational conflict does arise, it exists between his parents’ and grandmother’s generations. Red Guard-like, Wittman criticizes his parents for their abandonment of filial duty (in this case to Popo rather than any Party), and sets about correcting for their deviations. Finding roles for the quarreling generations in his play and bringing them together in the same space, Wittman gestures toward a potential resolution. However, the effect of bringing all of parts of his life into his art results, as we have seen, in an anti-narrative improvisational form that resists closure. Like the form of the play, the Asian American subject in this text is ever on the threshold of emergence.

Following *Tripmaster Monkey*, historical novels of the Asian American 1960s appear to take one of two routes: either they focus on actors within an Asian American countercultural milieu, or they concern actors who are bit players in other people’s social movements. The first group makes eclectic use of first person narration, distributed across a multiplicity of characters, in a manner readers might identify as “postmodern.” The second group relies on third person narration to convey the experience of a protagonist in a more classically “realist” manner. Whether by juxtaposing discrepant character perspectives without independent mediation or by crafting a protagonist who is racially exotic within her activist milieu, both kinds of novels decenter the Asian American subject of the 1960s. Such is true even of the novels whose ideological values are most apparently aligned with the 1960s, such as

COLLEEN LYE

Frank Chin's *Gunga Din Highway*, Jessica Hagedorn's *Gangster of Love*, and Karen Tei Yamashita's *I-Hotel*, which belong to the first group. In these novels, contradictoriness is structured into the very form of the Asian American subject, and plays out as a permanent equivocation about the conflict between the aesthetic and political practices that gave rise to it. The second group of novels, which includes Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* and Susan Choi's *American Woman*, locate contradictoriness in the relation between the emergence of the Asian American subject and the radical social movements—Black nationalism and the antiwar movement—that were its very condition of possibility. In the end, both types of novels have the effect of disturbing our certitude of the place of the Asian American subject in history. They suggest that to historicize Asian American subject formation, to focalize the 1960s through an Asian American perspective, is to raise consciousness of the 1960s as an unfinished revolution. This can mean, as poststructuralist readings are wont, figuring Asian Americanness as the supplement that continually exposes internal Left shortcomings of race, gender, and sexual politics that forecast Left failure. Or it can mean, as U.S. Third Worldist readings prefer, seeking to recuperate Asian Americanness as the militant, unassimilable turn that unleashed the external repression responsible for revolution's defeat. Though seemingly disparate or even dichotomous, both kinds of intellectual labor are immanent to the Asian American 1960s, which is what the historical fiction helps us see.

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Notes

- 1 See the essays collected in Omi and Takagi (1995).
- 2 Maeda points out that the mistaken attribution of Asian American identity discourse to an origin in the activist movement's cultural nationalism stems from a disciplinary blindness on the part of literary critics and cultural historians who have restricted their focus to published cultural materials such as plays, poems, fiction from the period (Maeda 2009: 16, 76).
- 3 Malcolm's X's speech is cited in *I-Hotel* (Yamashita 2010: 302).
- 4 My account of global Maoism and Mao Zedong Thought draws from: Connery (2007); the essays collected in Dirlík et al. (1997); and Žižek (2007).
- 5 Fredric Jameson was among the first to note the influence of Mao on Althusser, in "Periodizing the 60s" (1984)

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ASIAN AMERICAN 1960S

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