PERFORMING THE "ORIENTAL":

Professionals and the Asian Model Minority Myth

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Asian Americans are the United States' Model Minority of the late twentieth century. American print and visual media work in tandem with educators and employers enamored by reports of and personal encounters with Asian American prodigies, students, professionals, and small business owners, who seemingly embody the Protestant work ethic to achieve their American Dream.[1] Concurrently, some Asian Americans are encouraged, coerced, and challenged by their parents and fellow Asian ethnic peers to emulate and embody the Asian Model Minority characterization. The desire to gain prestige and commendation from parents and friends further motivates these individuals to become Model Minorities. Meanwhile, critics of the Asian Model Minority image stress the inaccuracy of the representation to a heterogeneous population mostly burdened by insufficient access to resources and misrepresentation by mainstream media. Furthermore, the socio-political realities of historically and institutionally embedded prejudice and discrimination have hindered the achievements of numerous racialized populations, including Asian American professionals.[2] Yet, despite its inaccuracy, the myth persists because it reifies American ideological tenets that valorize self-sufficiency, persistence, and pluck to achieve the American Dream. The myth also exacerbates interracial minority relations through claims that non-Asian racial minorities can emulate Asian American achievements with minimal government support and intervention.[3] From a theoretical

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perspective, one of the more critical condemnations of the Model Minority portrayal is its underlying reinforcement and celebration of European American hegemony at the expense of Asian Americans, whose celebrated efforts and achievements will never enable them to achieve "Whiteness" because they can never truly shed their "Non-Whiteness."[4] As orientalized non-White persons of Asian descent,[5] their response varies from celebration to despair of their racialized marginalization as they valorize or disparage "Asia" in Asian America, a response that reflects the ongoing academic and socio-historical diasporic process wherein Asia intersects with Asian America.[6] Sometimes these disparate responses are articulated simultaneously by young southern Californian Asian American professionals, whose actions and rhetoric problematize the sociopolitical implications of the Asian Model Minority Myth while revealing the fluidity of Asian American identity.

This paper examines how young Chinese American and Korean American professionals imagine their success and the contradictions therein. By creating an empowered persona of the Asian American professional as the embodied Asian model minority, they attempt to navigate through the privileged realm established by successful transpacific Asian professionals of the 1980s to early 1990s.[7] Ironically, respondents' young age, lack of expertise as young professionals, transpacific experiences in America and Asia, and ignorance (at times, denial) of racial politics in the American workplace not only hinder their transformative embodiment as successful professionals, but also inspire them to pursue their aspirations. Although unresolved, these contradictions are integral to respondents' cultural production of their imagined selves as the Asian model minority.

As 1.5 to second generation East Asian Americans reared by at least one professional parent,[8] these men and women engaged in frequent transpacific family excursions designed to familiarize them with extended family members residing in Asian homelands and their parents' cultural heritage. Their resultant transpacific racialized American experiences were paired with their lifelong exposure to American and Asian mass media portrayals of the Asian "Other" to create an Americanized Asian "Other" cultural identity, which they mimetically exploit and embody for personal and professional gain. Their self-image of the Asian "Other" gener-

ally reflects the Asian Model Minority myth, which heralds select Confucian values of educational aspirations, familial piety, and compliance with meritocratic authority. American society elevates the Asian Model Minority —unlike other conventional exoticized, ridiculed, and demonized Asian-as-Oriental foreigner tropes in American literature, media, and cultural history[9]—for its perceived embodiment of American cultural ideals of hard work, perseverance, self-sufficiency and excellence while emphasizing its racial and cultural (i.e., Confucian values) difference as the Asian "Other." This concurrent exaltation and marginalization frustrates respondents as they strategically shape their cultural identity to plot their professional success in the United States. Ironically, their professional effort to adopt an "Asian" identity forces them to confront a racial identity they previously trivialized, suppressed, or denied as youths. Simultaneously idealized and marginalized, respondents attempt discursive resolution of their ambivalence over their racial identity and frustration with the Model Minority myth. Their efforts problematize the Asian Model Minority myth, and thereby challenge hegemonic authority.

Who Are the Respondents?

Between 1995 and 1998, participant-observation fieldwork was conducted in Southern California's Los Angeles and Orange Counties among approximately 400 Asian American professionals. From this group, 22 individuals, ranging in age from 25 to 35, were then selected for in-depth recorded interviews. Informal interviews were conducted with over thirty additional subjects, in order to supplement the information obtained from those who had responded on tape. Primarily of East Asian descent, both groups of interviewees consisted of corporate, legal, health care, entertainment, and engineering professionals. These highly educated 1.5- and second-generation men and women generally had at least one immigrant professional parent, who also had received an American college and/or graduate school education. Comfortably ensconced in American middle class to upper-middle class households, these families benefited from the significantly lowered costs of international travel and improved telecommunication services available to them during the 1960s and 1970s.[10] Frequent long-distance telephone calls and regular transpacific excursions

to visit relatives in Asia characterized most of their childhood exposure to their immigrant parents' East Asian cultural heritage. Raised in either predominantly European American or mixed European American and Asian American suburban communities, these professionals' childhood transpacific experiences supplemented their cultural exposure from weekend excursions to ethnic enclaves and culture/language studies classes, and their attendance at parents' Asian ethnic-specific voluntary association events. For a few respondents, their transpacific experiences were their only childhood exposure outside of the home to their cultural heritage.

Increasing American economic interest in Pacific Rim nations during the period from the 1970s to the 1990s also heightened respondents' exposure to Asia. Since the 1970s, Los Angeles, in particular, had become the "American gateway to Asia" for corporate investments and one of the primary points of entry into the United States for Asian nationals.[11] Subsequent Asian corporate and cultural influences in the Los Angeles area during the 1980s and 1990s resulted in a heterogeneous Asian American professional community. Born in the 1960s and 1970s, respondents' racialized identities developed within this context since nearly half of them had been raised in Los Angeles County and all were employed in the region during the fieldwork phase. As adults enamored with years of favorable regional and national media coverage, several of these professionals also had traveled to the Pacific Rim for business, pleasure, or temporary employment in companies and multinational corporations in the region.

The combination of technological advances and lowered costs of telecommunication and transpacific travel, respondents' socio-economic background, increasing American economic and political interests in Pacific Rim nations during the 1970s to 1980s, and employment opportunities in the Pacific Rim during the 1990s seemingly would have encouraged respondents to cultivate a socio-cultural affinity with select Pacific Rim nations or the Asian Diaspora. Furthermore, their Asian or ethnic-specific Asian Diasporic affinity seemingly would have differed from the distant & idealized memories of disenfranchised Asian American families whose transpacific communication and travels outside of the United States were limited greatly by restrictive United States immigration laws and inefficiently slower communication channels prior to 1945.[12] Since Asian/ethnic-specific diasporic experiences and sentiments were filtered

through their Americentric biases, respondents developed conflicting perceptions and attitudes about "Asia," which entailed both a nostalgic orientalization of their Asian cultural heritage and alternating celebration and rejection of the self as the Asian Other. Although similar to the attitudes of later generation Asian Americans prior to the 1960s, the different socio-historical conditions affecting respondents' lives during the 1970s to 1990s enabled them to develop socially sanctioned racialized identities that selectively borrow or merge elements of both "Asian" and "American" cultural signs. The next section describes how transpacific experiences contributed to these young professionals' ambivalence towards the exoticized Asian "Other" and shaped their Asian American identities.

Experiencing "Asia"

Respondents experienced "Asia" through transpacific travels and consumption of media generated by and about the Pacific Rim. As children, these men and women visited extended family members in one or more Pacific Rim nations during summer vacations once every few years for weeks to months at a time. Although less frequently, they also had traveled to the Pacific Rim upon enrollment in language and culture study abroad programs as teenagers or for business as young adults. Their experiences reflect the changing dynamics of international immigration flows over the past several decades. Ulf Hannerz states that, "[the] time is gone when migration implied the attenuation and eventual loss of links to place of origin."[13] Hence, respondents traveled to Asia with either the pretense or expectation of understanding their Asian cultural heritage. However, American societal biases and contemporary Asian and American media inform their "place of origin" despite transpacific linkages sustained through familial visitations and attachments, employment or educational excursions, and affinity to a mythologicized Asian cultural heritage informed by parental expectations. As non-immigrant Asian Americans, respondents vacillate between "America" and specific "Asia nation(s)" as their dual "places" of cultural origin.

Unlike Hannerz, who considered "place of origin" as limited to ancestral territory, this paper borrows from Achile Mbembe's definition of "place" as "the order according to which elements are distributed in rela-

tionships of coexistence."[14] Therefore, a person's sense of place is not limited to an arbitrary georgraphic boundary, but is expandable according to the social relationships developed and shared over one's lifetime. In this vein, respondents' American and Asian national "places" of origin are imagined through the social relationships they adopted from their parents and then developed on their own when living in the United States and traveling to the Pacific Rim. Since their personal relationships in Asia were limited primarily to relatives and other similarly class-privileged Asian American expatriates, these young professionals' conception of "Asia" and Asian-specific nations (e.g., "South Korea") and their social imaginary of "Asian America" differs significantly from other Asian American populations.

Given their frequent overseas travel experiences, these Asian Americans' self-defined Asianness was shaped primarily from memories of and experiences in Asia and secondarily from American and Asian mass media. Unsurprisingly, respondents' more consistent exposure to American cultural norms hinders their receptiveness to developing an Asian affinity as children and young adults. Aware of their children's cultural insensitivity and growing confusion of Asian cultural knowledge despite temporary though regular cultural immersion in Asia, many parents had enrolled their children in language and culture summer study programs, such as those administered through the Taiwanese government and South Korea's Yonsei University. Older high school and college-aged middle-class to affluent students raised outside the host countries enrolled in these programs under the pretense or expectation of learning the language and culture of their immigrant parents. Hence, these programs became sites for students to develop their "Asianness" by cultivating an understanding and appreciation of their Asian heritage. Contrary to programmatic intentions and parental expectations, however, these programs facilitated respondents' Asian American identity development. Paula Kim, an alumna of the Yonsei program, best articulates respondents' transpacific experiences in these programs.

> It's funny to me because that was my *first* kind of experience where I *met* all these other Korean Americans. I also met all of these West Coast Korean Americans. I was just *fascinated* by them, right? They're

> *so* different from my sister and I. So, that was a really interesting experience.
>
> I guess maybe *that* was actually kind of the *turning* point at which I started to have more Asian American friends. When I was *forced* to (laughs) 'cause I was in Korea. You know? And, then that's, in a way, kind of, I guess, yeah, *that's* it, isn't it?[15]

Prior to Yonsei, Paula rarely interacted with Korean American age peers other than her sister, since their family had resided in a predominantly European American suburban community. Having secured a scholarship to an exclusive mostly European American boarding school in New England for her junior high and high school years, she acknowledged denial of her Korean cultural identity as a second-generation Korean American woman in order to befriend European American peers and distance herself from the few Korean exchange students. Extremely reluctant to attend the language study program, she had become aware of the differences between herself and her Korean American age peers and witnessed cultural differences between Korean nationals and Korean American students. Through her "forced" socialization with Korean American peers in Korea, she gradually had accepted her racial difference (instead of simply acknowledging and denying its salience) as a Korean American.[16] Unfortunately, this racialized identity was dependent upon its regionally ("West Coast") situated Korean American subculture and the alienation of the local Korean national population, a strategy which challenges the inclusiveness of Asian diaspora rhetoric.

All but one respondent similarly acknowledged how their study tour experiences had triggered or furthered the development of their ethnic-specific American identity instead of an Asian ethnic-specific or diasporic Asian identity. Since these programs enforce a selection process that maximizes the admission of Asian American youths, who are middle to upper-middle class, second-generation, educated children of professionals, these students had restricted most of their interaction to program participants. Although some participants had been socialized since childhood in similar Asian American peer conditions in the United States, other respondents enrolled in these programs rarely had encountered such racialized, generational, and class-specific peer socialization prior to attending these programs as teenagers and young adults. Respondents' cul-

tural production of their class-defined Asian American identities during these six weeks to semester-long programs was an amalgamation of American chauvinism, appreciation or admiration of a distant Korean or Chinese cultural past learned in the classroom, and youth-oriented socialization among Asian American peer program participants. Hence, despite parental expectations, these programs rarely further students' sensitivity toward or appreciation of Asian culture. Rather, these programs had encouraged student development of ethnic-specific American identities (e.g., "Korean American") by enabling them to socialize with social class peers who shared the tendency to exhibit cultural chauvinism against the host country (e.g., Korea) and its citizens. Therefore, not all transpacific experiences among Asian ethnics culminate in ethnic-specific Asian or Asian diasporic sentiments.

Since their experiences in Asia had been restricted to familial and temporary age-peer socialization with local youths, respondents rarely had challenged their own American jingoistic attitudes. As youths, respondents relied on their socio-economic class to minimize or ignore their Asianness on both sides of the Pacific. When in the United States, respondents had invoked their class privilege to minimize or deflect their racial marginalization as children and youths raised in predominantly or exclusively European American suburban communities. The phenomenological sublimation or occlusion of Asian racial difference in light of assumed social class parity between middle and upper-middle class Asian Americans and European Americans has been implemented strategically by other Asian American populations, as well.[17] When in the Pacific Rim, these Asian American youths alienated non-kin "Asian" nationals by coupling their class privilege with their Americentric arrogance, especially when enrolled in study abroad programs with fellow Asian American youths. Hence, respondents had cultivated class-specific normalized or racialized American identities as youths, rather than an Asian or Asian ethnic diasporic affinity despite regular transpacific exposure.

Other than travel, their construction of Asia is influenced partially by internationally distributed media generated in and/or about Asia. In an era when international media transcends national boundaries, especially in world-cities like Los Angeles,[18] these men and women can view,

rent, or purchase media generated from Asia in the form of educational movie videos, television and radio programs, newspapers, books, and magazines. While the variety, quantity, and immediacy of available American and Asian media generated about Asia for consumption outside of the Pacific Rim can speculatively strengthen pre-existing diasporic sentiments among the immigrant generation, they can potentially weaken diasporic affinity among 1.5- and second-generation Asian Americans. Disillusionment and confusion, which arose from conflicting impressions shaped by their personal experiences in Asia and their media-influenced ahistoricized expectations of a traditional "Asian" past, exacerbated respondents' ongoing discomfort with and disassociation from an "Asian" or diasporic Asian ethnic cultural identity. Miranda Tam, a second-generation Chinese American, best articulates the confusion and disillusionment of these young professionals.

Although she frequently had visited extended family in Taiwan (Republic of China), she had visited China (People's Republic of China) only once as a young adult. Her expectations of contemporary China had been influenced by both European American orientalist perspectives from National Geographic documentaries and dramatized pseudo-historical and mythologized popular Chinese soap operas situated in China's dynastic past. 19 Miranda recalled viewing pre-taped programs as a child with her mother, who had rented the tapes from Chinese video stores in Monterey Park, California. When asked to discuss her impression of China, Miranda describes her visit to a Buddhist temple:

> Even the monks in the temple, I mean, this was the first time I ever saw part-time monks. I'm like, "You're in tennis shoes! Get out of those!" And, "You don't have the three dots on your head. Where are the three dots on your head?" Dad was like, "They're not full monks." I'm like, "They're partial monks?" Even then, it just seemed like a lot of their tradition was lost. *[somewhat forlornly]* A lot of the rituals [were] lost. They're sitting on plastic seat covers. They're selling the beads, prayer beads, as trinkets—tourist things in glass cases.[20]

Her Orientalist melancholia partially stems from her reliance on the accuracy of orientalist and ahistorical media portrayals of China and, in this case, of Buddhist monks.[21] Some scholars attribute such portrayals to European American imperialistic or colonial constructions of Asia.[22] How-

ever, condemnation of these hegemonies alone not only reifies their prevalence by claiming its salience for all people (in itself Euro/Americentric hegemonic position), but it also diminishes the salience of both Miranda's agency and the role of Asian media. Stemming from her naivete and faith in the accuracy or "authenticity" of media portrayals, her nostalgic bias also was shaped by Asian media's portrayals of China's past. The use of potentially essentialized Asian "historical" cues in the soap operas Miranda viewed as a child could have resulted from producers' intent to provide an educational element to the program. Although the product (in this case, the soap opera) is subject to audience (mis)interpretation, the historical cues themselves may be subject to fabrication.

Conventional American and European conceptions of Asia's historical past and present are an amalgamation of primarily "Western" and selected "Asian" historical discourses, shaped by a century-and-a-half of Westernization.[23] Stemming from a desire to replace the loss of an originary past, Asian citizens can create a phantasmic reality/event, which is a source of consolation and redemption against an encroaching modernity. 24 While potentially marginalizing, these sometimes essentialized portrayals of "Asia," by Asians, can be an empowering strategy which challenges the dichotomous identity-as-essence and identity-as-conjecture discursive conceptions of an imagined reality and Eurocentric essentialized portrayals of Asia.[25] Hence, American and Asian representations of Asia, although driven by different objectives, can potentially and inadvertently work in collusion to foster orientalist expectations of a rarely seen or experienced "Asia" or Asian specific nation for viewers like Miranda. Thus, respondents' orientalization and trivialization of specific Pacific Rim nations (and, sometimes the entire region) drives their pursuit of opportunistic endeavors in Asia.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the economic vitality of the Pacific Rim region appealed to several respondents who opportunistically sought fortunes and professional stature to a degree unavailable to them in the United States. Since the 1980s and mid-1990s were boom years for Pacific Rim economies, many American and European companies increased their presence and investments in the region, triggering the steady recruitment of bilingual Asian American personnel for their branch of-

fices in Asia. Enticed by high starting salaries and better job advancement opportunities than were available in the United States, Asian Americans with and without bilingual skills sought employment in Pacific Rim countries. Manipulating the race fetishism of corporate America, some professionals selectively presented themselves as ideal candidates by not disclosing their lack of familiarity with Asian cultural dynamics and language. These men and women seemingly pursued these job opportunities while ignorantly unaware or blatantly unconcerned that such strategies of "performing the 'Oriental'" reify racist stereotypes of the homogenous alien Asian "Other" in corporate America.

One respondent, John Chow, a second-generation Chinese American, best illustrates the attitudes of respondents whose professionally opportunistic interests rest on their condescension toward Asia and Asian-specific nations. Influenced by his business school professors and American media coverage of the rising economic potential of the Pacific Rim, John traveled to Hong Kong and China to pursue investment and job opportunities. He invoked his loosely constructed "cultural heritage" to legitimize his opportunistic endeavors in Western free market expansionism in Asia. Unlike most respondents, however, John had not traveled to Asia until he attended the Taiwanese study program during college. Although he traveled regularly to the Pacific Rim in pursuit of job and investment opportunities as a business school student and after graduation, his independent efforts proved unsuccessful. Yet, John is hopeful:

> There's a lot of opportunities there. They need a lot of things that Westerners *have*: advice, knowledge. I saw some people out there that were doing very, very well, [who] really aren't that sophisticated. So, you know, you should be able to get a job and command a managerial position right away. And, there's a lot of opportunity there. Then again, the foreign crisis, the currency crisis, hit.
>
> I was always pursuing [opportunities, the] most I could. Just, nothing developed. If I could develop a relationship and make a *buck* at it, I would've done it. Just nothing came up. But, I also think it's also very hard to do that. You have to have a little bit of *luck*, as well. Also, a little bit of who you *know*.[26]

Interestingly, his Americentric arrogance and orientalist assumptions about the desirability of Chinese American professionals, like himself,

who developed American business skills without which Chinese businesses could not function competitively in international markets, blinded him to his lack of Chinese cultural capital. He knew almost no Chinese dialect and lacked the requisite interpersonal relationships (guan xi) with local government officials and business leaders to cultivate viable business opportunities and employment in the Chinese speaking nations within the region.[27] Despite these handicaps, however, John eventually secured a position in a transpacific business venture established by his mentor, European American professor who specializes in Chinese economies at John's business school. Ironically, the "Oriental" (John) relied upon the "Occidental" (his mentor), who was more adept at "performing the 'Oriental'" in the world of Chinese business, to gain entry into "the Orient." Although other respondents shared John's opportunistic aspirations in Asia and held similar though less orientalist assumptions, very few professionals were as naïve about Chinese business protocol.

The presence of numerous Asian American job-seekers and professionals in the Pacific Rim can strain interpersonal relationships between Asian Americans and Asian nationals. Maria Wong, a second-generation Chinese American, best articulates the personal and professional antipathy of both groups. Unlike John, Maria cultivated friendship and family networks in the United States and Taiwan to help her secure employment in Taiwan and Hong Kong. When in Hong Kong, Maria learned Cantonese and actively befriended both Asian American professionals ("expatriates," or "ex-pats") and Hong Kong colleagues at her company. When asked to elaborate on her impression of the strained relationship between Chinese American expatriates and Hong Kong locals, Maria offers an instructive reply:

> Locals, yeeeaah, because they think, I mean, first of all, it's still that typical, "If you're Asian, how can't you speak your language properly?" [It's] that kind of thing because they just generalize all the ex-pats as non-Chinese speaking because there are a lot of them that are ABCs that don't speak the language. And, they come over here because they work for multinational companies. They come and they make oodles and oodles of money at levels of positions that they wouldn't be able to get *here* in the United States. They *do* come and become cocky and arrogant, and *do* kind of exude this kind of "holier than thou" attitude. So, then, the locals do sometimes categorize you that way.[28]

Alienation, culturally based arrogance, and condescension characterize the attitudes of both Asian American professionals and Asian nationals when interacting with each other. "ABC," an abbreviation for American-Born Chinese, implies that a person is an Americanized Chinese. The abbreviation's connotation varies from an innocuous designation to a scathing condescension, especially when used by Chinese immigrants or Chinese nationals who question the cultural authenticity of Chinese Americans. Hence, the cultural arrogance of Asian nationals rests on their skepticism of the cultural integrity, or Asianness, of Chinese American professionals, many of whom cannot speak fluent Chinese.

Meanwhile, Asian American professionals (ABCs) assert their classist and jingoistic arrogance, attitudes that reinforce and complement the discriminatory hiring practices of some multinational corporations. Several respondents claim that Asian expatriates born and/or raised in the United States, Canada, and Europe are hired by American and European multinational companies for middle to upper management positions in their Asian subsidiaries and branch offices.[29] Meanwhile, Asian nationals or "locals" are hired primarily as support staff.[30] Such hiring practices obviously exacerbate already strained relations between Asian Americans and Asian nationals by extending pre-existing hostilities from the social and everyday realm of interactions to the workplace. Given the collapse of several Asian economies since July 1997, aggressive hiring practices have lessened but not ceased. Rather, American investors chose to wait or to assist these economies in their recovery; for instance, American companies' direct investment in the region had reached $14.9 billion during 1998 – $1 billion more than the $13.8 billion invested during 1997, the year Asian economies faltered.[31] As recently as 2001, U.S. firms invested $35 billion in China (or the Peoples Republic of China) alone.[32] Analysts speculate that foreign investments in the area will continue as the markets recover and as changes in Pacific Rim laws create big long-term opportunities.[33] If correct, American companies will continue to hire qualified Asian Americans, thus ensuring the continued cultural dissonance between these employees and Asian nationals.

Hence, the cultural dissonance arising from all of these conditions hinders respondents' development of a sincerely experiential Asian affinity. Instead, these professionals develop an Asian identity shaped by their

difference as Asian Americans. The next section discusses how they reify and problematize their self-selected and other-imposed Asian "Other" identity—an identity developed to emulate and, at times, to embody the Asian Model Minority Myth.

The Asian "Other" and the Asian Model Minority Myth

Several respondents describe encounters that simultaneously challenge and reify the Asian Model Minority Myth. Analysis of their encounters illustrates how actions are misunderstood unintentionally by the media, analysts, and scholars who rely on quantitative data and incomplete or superficial interviews and studies that describe the Model Minority. While sole reliance on subjective perspectives is equally flawed,[34] respondents' subjectivities nevertheless should be considered in conjunction with other data to better understand the Model Minority Myth and its implications. Furthermore, respondents' experiences, attitudes and reflections concurrently reify, challenge, and negotiate the conflicting discursive systems of meaning which constitute a social reality that marginalizes Asian American professionals in the workplace.[35]

The following encounter at a general reception hosted during an academic conference illustrates the ironic circumstances that characterize many respondents' anecdotes and recollections of work-related discrimination. Celeste Chang, a Chinese American graduate student in the planetary sciences, shares her memories:

> It was an amateur, so it wasn't a professional [scientist], that we were conversing with. He was drunk. He kept talking to me. I could tell that he was hitting on me. He said, "how do you expect to make any money as a [planetary scientist]?" I said that I was married to a lawyer [to] get rid of him. He said, "Oh, just like you Asian women to marry for money." I just [could] not believe that he said that. I turned around and walked away. He said, "Hey, hey. I didn't mean anything. I had a Filipino woman before." That's what he said to me! I was like, "Get away from me!" I just went over and [sat] next to my advisor for the rest of the night. So, there are definitely things like that. But I think, for the most part, if you made it this far, you've already come in contact with that a lot. I think that if you're determined enough to go for a Ph.D., you are not going to let those things bother you.[36]

By denigrating the antagonist as both "an amateur" scientist and an impersonal "it" in the first sentence, she privileges her position as a Ph.D. student, referentially. By calling attention to his amateur status, she diminishes his legitimacy and weakens the sting of his accusations. Celeste belittles him further through the discursive referents of "it" instead of "he" and "that" instead of "who." Although her use of the pronouns "it" and "that" may be a simple indication of unintended grammatical errors, she does use the correct pronoun designation for the remainder of the anecdote. Hence, her grammatically consistent use of the pronouns to objectify the instigator in the entire sentence suggests otherwise. By describing the man as a "drunk" in her next sentence, she trivializes both the man and his subsequent commentary about her motivation for marrying an attorney and his salacious characterization of her as an erotic Asian female.

Yet, despite her discursive disempowerment of the antagonist, Celeste ends her anecdote by stating, "if you made it this far, you've already come in contact with that a lot. I think that if you're determined enough to go for a Ph.D., you are not going to let those things bother you." Is this a dismissive, yet resigned comment or a cynical attempt at self-empowerment? Perhaps, it is both. Like her fellow respondents, these young professionals hope to break the proverbial glass ceiling while keeping their despair at bay. Yet Celeste's expectation of encountering increasing discrimination as she achieves greater educational capital contradicts other professionals' articulated determination and anticipation of encountering less racial discrimination as they achieve more cultural capital through post-graduate education and professional success. Although several factors may have contributed to Celeste's cynicism, one compelling factor most respondents did not share was her familiarization with studies, media reports, and experiences of fellow planetary scientists, which disclosed the prevalence of racial and gender discrimination in the workplace regardless of professional and educational achievement.

Overall, Celeste's anecdote reveals a troubling contradiction in the representation of the Asian Model Minority. Although psychologically able to remedy her angst through both her patronizing characterization of the man and the multiple evocation of her educational capital,[37] should

she publicly have confronted her antagonist? Or, was she right to ignore him, given the extenuating circumstances of the setting (academic conference) and the positionality of the actors (a drunken male amateur taunting a sober female graduate student in the presence of academics, who would directly determine her professional fate upon graduation)? Although she likely made the wiser decision in ignoring the instigator's infantile advances and disparaging comments in this context, her action nonetheless may have perpetuated the stereotype of the silent and acquiescent Asian American (female) and Asian Model Minority—hence, "performing the 'Oriental'"—to both the antagonist and fellow academics within earshot of the encounter.

Unfortunately, other respondents share Celeste's discursive strategies in such situations. Her decision to refrain from confrontation, her condescending portrayal of her antagonist, and the trivialization of the encounter are recurring themes in the articulated memories of most respondents who confront the Asian Model Minority Myth in the workplace. They claim the deployment of subtle discursive tactics during the encounter, or the recollection of the encounter empowers them by diminishing the debilitating impact and frustration of being either erroneously perceived or purposely identified as members of the Asian Model Minority. Yet they do not realize how their avoidance and silence during such encounters can be perceived as an affirmation of their model minority status.

Another popular discursive strategy is their articulated confidence in meritocratic individualism, which is maintained even by professionals who recount parental struggles with the glass ceiling. The cultural anthropologist, Katherine Newman, defines meritocratic individualism as "an inspired individualism that inculcates a tenacious belief in the efficacy of personal striving."[38] Hence, the ability to succeed is dependent upon individual action, a popular claim among respondents. They proudly expound upon their individual merits, abilities, and accomplishments as representative members of the overachieving Asian Model Minority, and upon their faith in institutional enforcement of meritocracy as a means to achieve success. However, they also realize that their success is dependent partially upon how others judge them and their work performance.

Aware of potential and actual racial and gender impediments to their success, they nonetheless situate themselves as active agents capable of overcoming such hindrances through perseverance and meritocratic ability.

Ben Cho and Miranda Tam best illustrate how respondents deploy various discursive strategies, including meritocratic individualism, by invoking the trope of the exoticized Asian "Other" to challenge their colleagues and supervisor's implicit categorization of them as representative of the Asian Model Minority. When asked if he felt his current employer took into consideration his racial identity when evaluating his application for employment with the firm, Ben's reply was emphatic:

> I, for one, don't believe that anyone has hired me because I'm Asian. [chuckles] I'm good. I know what I'm doing. I've **never** seen any indication of any affirmative action at [my] company. It's like, come on guys. The only African American they ever hired – now this is a company that has hired 150 people – the only African American person that they hired was a secretary. And, it was pretty obvious what position they thought she was going to be in. They don't get any benefits from hiring minority subcontractors, Asian, Hispanic, or otherwise, because they don't get any – because at [another firm], when they hire them, they don't get any points for hiring.[39]

When comparing himself to the only other non-European American in the firm, he criticizes the management's flagrant discriminatory hiring practices while claiming ignorance of similarly flagrant discrimination directed at him. Later in the interview, Ben recounts incidents when the lone African American employee (a secretary) in the firm was ridiculed and harassed at the same time that he invokes his merits and valued contributions to the firm. He seemingly mentions the latter as a discursive shield to deflect any of his colleagues' and supervisors' inferential racial marginalization of him. This strategy enables him to maintain the illusion of (1) his meritocratic individualism and (2) his claims that colleagues and supervisors' accept and appreciate his presence in and labor for the firm, despite his racial difference.

To support this latter illusion, Ben claims that many of his colleagues jokingly comment, "'[Ben], you're about as Korean as . . .' [and] they point to some White guy. Yeah, you're probably right. [Management] doesn't see me as Korean."[40] Although he insists that his profession is "**notori-**

ously, if not racist, certainly segregated," he denies experiencing any marginalization, given his purported abilities and accomplishments.[41] However, he eventually admits to encountering occasional discrimination, some of which he claims had improved his working conditions in a seemingly bizarre inversion of the stereotype of the alien Asian "Other."

Ben's company, an architectural design firm, has many clients from Asia, which he attributes to his positive reception in the workplace:

> When they take the clients around the office, where [the clients are] all Japanese, or Chinese, or Korean businessmen, they see an Asian **face**, sitting there; your boss can't treat you too **badly** or **unfairly** because, who knows? Maybe you'll call up the Asian hotline [chuckles, sentence said in sarcastic amusement] . . . and say, "hey, these guys are racists."[42]

Ben's humorous and sardonically poignant inversion of popular Asian stereotypes (from "Asians are all alike" to a covert "Asian hotline") is influenced directly by the increasingly "polycentric world of late capitalism," which privileges Asian modernity resulting from the prominence of Pacific Rim nations.[43] Although he adamantly denies any personal affinity with his firm's Asian clientele, Ben relishes the opportunity that the situation raises to ridicule the stereotypes he encounters but initially refrains from acknowledging. Since he, like other respondents, prides himself in maintaining an air of professionalism in the workplace, he may not have articulated this sentiment to his predominantly European American co-workers. Hence, Ben unintentionally may have portrayed himself as the stereotypically compliant "Oriental." As with Celeste's conundrum, is Ben expected to be the token "Oriental" in order to become the honorary "White" colleague in the firm, even when he does not purposefully "perform the 'Oriental'" role?

Another young professional, Miranda Tam, a Chinese American public policy analyst employed in both Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles, describes a similar encounter at a previous job. However, unlike in Ben's anecdote, she was confronted squarely by the Asian Model Minority Myth:

> I don't think I've had problems with discrimination. I've noticed that discrimination kind of rears its ugly head sometimes. In comments that people have said, [at one of her previous jobs], "we hired you because you're Asian, and Asians are known to be hard workers." And, I said,

> "Well, **HEH**! Your tough luck, I'm a slacker!" [chuckles] In DC, you got a lot of, "You speak very good English." I say, "Yes. I speak it very good." [laughs sarcastically] You know, you get a lot of comments.[44]

Consciously aware of popular stereotypes about Asians, she subverts the impact of the stereotypes through sarcasm in her personal narrative. By claiming to be a slacker and mimicking her protagonists' poor grammar, she both challenges and parodies the caricature of the Asian Model Minority as the diligent and industrious employee with poor English language skills, especially since the Asian Model Minority also can be the immigrant "Other."

It should be noted that her grammatical parody was not intended to reify the alienness of her Asianness, nor was her mimetic reply simply an unconscious paraphrase of a grammatically incorrect sentence. The latter is unlikely because she takes pride in the editorial skills she honed, since she was an undergraduate, as the author of multiple policy analyst reports and similar smaller publications (e.g., newsletters). Rather than reify her alienness, her grammatical mimetic parody intends to ridicule her protagonists for their implicitly ironic and hypocritical comment. Since her protagonists recognized her fluency if not mastery of the English language ("You speak very good English," instead of "Your English is good"), these protagonists were most likely native English-speakers. Hence, the delicious irony of native English speakers' (the protagonists) inability to speak grammatically correct English, when complimenting the English proficiency of an assumed foreigner (a woman who is not only a native English speaker but who also was born and raised in the United States), was not lost on Miranda. However, Miranda may not have verbalized these sarcastic barbs because she is generally cautious about publicly voicing her consternation through sarcasm, since she takes great pains to maintain a professional persona to colleagues.

However, she recalls another work-related incident in which she confronted her supervisor, one of the deans at her graduate institution, on the last day at her part-time job as a conference planner:

> [T]he dean, who always respected my opinion, came up to me and said, "Well, I hope that you can let your friends know that your position is open. Hopefully, there will be more **minorities** applying." It kind of

> took me aback. I was like, "Why? Why do you think they should be applying to this job and not to one that's in management? Do you think they should be support staff?" **He** kind of **stood** and he's like, "Well, you know. . . . " I'm like, "No need to hedge. That's okay." [chuckles].[45]

Although not as sarcastic as the previous anecdote, her retort does reflect her indignation. However, the actual implication of the dean's comments is uncertain. He could have implied his wish to increase minority presence in the administration or, as Miranda assumed, to increase minority presence through support staff hires. Regardless of his intent, however, Miranda's reaction challenges one of the Model Minority stereotypes of Asian American complacency. Moreover, her assertiveness in this instance is not an isolated example. Other respondents iterated similar indignation, either to the offending protagonist or in hindsight during their interviews.

Overall, respondents' participation in the discursive manipulation of their racialized identities as idealized Asian/Asian American professionals engenders their self-empowerment through the creative appropriation of the Model Minority Myth. Respondents must actively engage in this creative production, regardless of their own desires, because their colleagues and supervisors assume their conformity to the Model Minority persona of the diligent, hard-working, compliant, and over-achieving professional. Although Asian American professionals, like Ben and Miranda, are troubled by and sometimes challenge these assumptions, they also fluctuate between unintentional and opportunistic reliance on these expectations to secure employment, commendation, and promotion. Although the creative appropriation of an assumed social role is a common strategy implemented by marginalized groups to transform their disenfranchisement into self-empowerment, with varying degrees of success, these respondents' combination of specific methods of appropriation is unique to this group of young professionals. They create an empowered Asian American identity to manipulate their social role (the Asian Model Minority) by invoking an imaginary "Asian" cultural identity through the selective deployment of personally nostalgic and transpacific memories, transpacific social class fragmentation, American and Asian media influences, and the orientalist assumptions of multinational American and European corporations.

Conclusion

Although the conflict between self-representation and societal perception frustrates these men and women, while also fueling their efforts to succeed as professionals, their uncertainty and conflicting (re)actions and responses reveal the inherent contradictions and multiplicity of any embodied and situated identity. More specifically, in their attempt to re-orient themselves—by performing a self-orientalized racial identity that differs from their cultural affinity as Asian Americans—they dis-orient the discursive hegemony of the homogenized and naturalized Asian "Other." Since attribution of this mythic persona is based on their perceived racial identity as the Asian Other, these men and women create a cultural identity rooted in nostalgic transpacific memories, Americentric portrayals of the Asian "Other," and class-based antagonism of non-familial Asian nationals. Hence, their resultant cultural identity is more contextually Asian American than Asian diasporic or transnational, despite the regularity of their transpacific travels, communication with relatives in the Pacific Rim, and exposure to Asian media—the forces Arjun Appadurai attributes to creating a transnational cultural identity.[46]

For example, respondents' orientalist attitudes as youths toward Asian nationals persist into adulthood as several professionals sought employment in the Pacific Rim. Once employed in Asia, their recollections conveyed how fellow management colleagues in American and European multinational corporations encouraged these Asian Americans' orientalist attitudes. Although their alienation of Asian nationals parallels their reluctant self-identification as "Asians," these young professionals construct an "Asian" cultural identity, modeled after the Asian Model Minority Myth, in anticipation that their model minority performances will facilitate their employment and professional success in either the United States or the Pacific Rim. To confirm their expectations, these men and women selectively invoke favorable mass media coverage and anecdotal evidence from seemingly successful Asian American professional peers and colleagues. Unfortunately, respondents generally are unaware that their performances simultaneously validate their representative embodiment of the Asian Model Minority and facilitate their marginalization as the Asian "Other."

Their ignorance stems partly from their early access to class privilege in the United States, wherein their racialized identity is inextricably entangled with their cultural and educational capital.[47] In other words, respondents' cultural capital lessened the sting of their racialized marginalization, thereby facilitating their generally uncritical emulation and manipulation of the Model Minority myth. As children of professionals, who provided creature comforts in middle- to upper-class neighborhoods, they socialized with similarly motivated age peers, encountered their parents' seemingly successful Asian American professional peers, and secured access to educational and transpacific opportunities. Hence, respondents were more likely to have identified closely with the Model Minority myth throughout their childhood and young adulthood than were their less privileged peers, who are more likely to problematize the inherent contradictions of the myth's idealized expectations of the Asian "Other" when confronted by the social realities of their daily marginalization. In their effort to embody the myth, these young professionals inadvertently reify the mythologized constructs of meritocratic individualism and an essentialized Asianness. While they eagerly embrace and defend the former, these Asian Americans ambivalently adapt the latter to create an "Asian" cultural identity informed by Americentric arrogance and orientalist assumptions ironically reinforced, in part, by their transpacific experiences.

Unfortunately, this ambivalence will persist as long as the salience of the Myth remains explicitly unchallenged by these professionals themselves, their colleagues, and their supervisors or employers. If they remain members of a small racialized Asian minority presence in their companies and organizations, these Asian Americans will continue to reify and problematize the exoticized Asian "Other" as they simultaneously contest and adapt to (not adopt) an "Asian" cultural identity. However, what will happen when larger numbers of Asian Americans, currently enrolled in and graduating from American undergraduate institutions in substantial numbers, enter the workforce? Will the greater presence of these Asian American professionals from potentially more diverse backgrounds force respondents to self-reflexively problematize their own emulation of the Asian Model Minority myth? If this realization occurs in

tandem with their probable encounter with glass ceiling barriers within the next ten to twenty years, when they are in their 50s and 60s,[48] then the Asian Model Minority myth may lose credibility when disgruntled and disillusioned professionals, who not only attempted to embody the myth but also were upheld by their colleagues and society as emblematic of the myth, reveal its hypocrisy.

Notes

I would like to thank Ashwini Tambe and Tim Pilbrow for their valuable suggestions for this article.

1. David Palumbo-Liu, "Modeling the Nation: The Asian/American Split" in *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*, edited by Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); William Petersen, "Success Story, Japanese-American Style," *New York Times (Magazine)*, January 9, 1966; Bob H. Suzuki, "Education and Socialization of Asian Americans: A Revisionist Analysis of the 'Model Minority' Thesis" in *Amerasia Journal* 4 (1977):23–51.
2. Timothy P. Fong, *The Contemporary Asian American Experience* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1998); Kwang Chung Kim and Won Moo Hurh, "Korean Americans and the 'Success' Image: A Critique," *Amerasia Journal* 10 (1983):3–21; Suzuki, *Amerasia Journal*; Deborah Woo, *Glass Ceilings and Asian Americans* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2000)
3. Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991); Fong, *The Contemporary Asian American Experience;* Palumbo-Liu, "Modeling the Nation" in *Orientations*; Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
4. Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994)
5. This statement does not imply that Asian Americans are exclusively of Asian descent. Interracial Americans of Asian descent have stated similar alienation from Whiteness, even if they are also of European descent. See Claudine Chiawei O'Hearn (ed) *Half and Half: Writers on Growing Up Biracial and Bicultural* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).
6. Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa (eds), *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); Sheng-Mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000)
7. Aihwa Ong, Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999)
8. For this study, 1.5 generation designates people who immigrated to the United States by no later than five years of age. Psychological anthropologists assert that a person's aptitude to adapt/adopt cultural practices, values, and symbols

is greatest prior to the age of five; children usually are not introduced to and formally educated on their group's cultural practices, values and symbols until the approximate age of five. See Beatrice Blythe Whiting and Carolyn Pope Edwards, *Children of Different Worlds: The Formation of Social Behavior* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). Hence, acculturation at an age prior to age five is more likely to result in adults whose level of acculturation, including linguistic acumen, is comparable to those of the second and possibly third, fourth and 'nth generation.

9. See Ma, *The Deathly Embrace*
10. Terrence E. Deal and Allan A. Kennedy claim that increasing international business in the post-World War II era facilitated lowered cost and increased frequency of international travel for Americans. Citing the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Deal and Kennedy assert that "between 1960 and 1988, the real cost of international travel fell by 60%. This helped spawn a 3,000% increase in overseas travel" (1999:152–153). Terrence E. Deal and Allan A. Kennedy, *The New Corporate Cultures* (Reading, Mass.: Perseus Books, 1999).
11. Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng (eds), *The New Asian Immigration in Los Angeles and Global Restructuring* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989)
12. Although the Asian immigrant population increased exponentially after 1965, this population began increasing significantly during the 1950s due to (1) the War Brides Act of 1945 and the Fiancees Act of 1946, which permitted the legal immigration of alien brides or fiancees of United States military men; (2) the Luce-Cellar Bill of 1946, which increased the immigration quota of Asian Indians and Filipinos; and (3) the Information and Education Exchange Act of 1948, which increased the immigration quota of foreign nurses.
13. Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections* (London: Routledge, 1996), 99.
14. Mbembe attributes this conception of "place" to Michel de Certeau. See Achile Mbembe, *At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa* Trans. by Steven Rendall in *Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001)
15. All names in this paper are pseudonyms to ensure respondents' privacy. "Paula Kim, Interviewed by author (Los Angeles, CA), July 31, 1998. All quotes incorporate the different degrees in which words or phrases were stressed by respondents, from mild stress indicated in italics, to strong stress indicated in bold, to great emphasis indicated in bold and capitals. On occasion, the tone of the quote is indicated in parenthesis to aid the reader in contextualizing the transcribed words of the respondent.
16. For further confirmation of the development of a Korean American identity among Yonsei program participants, see Nicholas D. Kristof, "Where a Culture Clash Lurks Even in the Noodles," *New York Times*, September 4, 1995.
17. Yen Le Espiritu, "The Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, and Class: The Multiple Identities of Second-Generation Filipinos" in *Identites* 1: 2–3 (1994):249–

273; James W. Loewen, *Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971)

18. See Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies,* for a critical examination of Los Angeles as a world-city.
19. See Catherine Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) for a detailed analysis of the impact of *National Geographic* publications in shaping the world view of White, educated, middle class Americans and individuals outside these parameters who choose to adopt a similar perspective. *National Geographic* documentaries are examples of what Arif Dirlik characterizes as European American products, which have embedded meanings from a European perspective.
20. "Miranda Tam," Interview by author, (Orange County, CA), January 18, 1998.
21. In her critique of a sinologist, Rey Chow uses the term "Orientalist melancholia" to describe the "anxiety that the Chinese past, which he has taken to penetrate, is evaporating and that the sinologist himself is the abandoned subject" (2001:191). See Rey Chow, "Leading Questions" in *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*, edited by Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001).
22. Catherine Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic*; E. San Juan, Jr., *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations: Articulations of Power in Ethnic and Racial Studies in the United States* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992).
23. Arjun Appadurai (ed), *Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Arif Dirlik, "Introducing the Pacific. In What is in a Rim?" in *Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* edited by Arif Dirlick (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making" in *Current Anthropology* 37.5 (December 1996): 737–762; Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
24. Marilyn Ivy defines phantasm as a relationship that "reveals how an originary event can never be grasped in its punctual thusness, but can only emerge as an event across a relay of temporal deferral (what is sometimes called 'deferred action' or *Nachraglichkeit*)." (1995:22) See Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
25. For a discussion of the potential empowerment inherent in such Asian portrayals of "Asia," see Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, eds., Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996); for a discussion of Eurocentric portrayals, see Spivak's comment in Angela Robie, "Strategies of Vigilence: An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak," in *Block* 10 (1985): 5–9.
26. "John Chow," Interviewed by author (Los Angeles, CA), March 9, 1998.
27. You-tien Hsing, "Building Guanxi Across the Straits: Taiwanese Capital and Local Chinese Bureacrats." *Ungrounded Empires,* ed. Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (New York: Routledge Press, 1997).

28. "Maria Wong," Interview by author (Los Angeles, Calif.), March 16, 1998.
29. This claim is confirmed in an article by Evelyn Iritani, "Pacific Rim Employment Market Shopping for Asian Americans" in the *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1997.
30. Similar discriminatory hiring practices are used in non-American and non-European multinational companies with international branch or subsidiary offices. Several Japanese corporations with branches and subsidiaries in the United States generally hire local non-Japanese nationals as support staff and lower middle managers (Tomoko Hamada, "Unwrapping European American Masculinity in a Japanese Multinational Corporation" in *Masculinites in Organizations* edited by Cliff Cheng (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996); Tomoko Hamada and Yujin Yaguchi, "Hollowing of Inustrial Ideology: Japanese Corporate Familism in America" in *Anthropological Perspectives on Organizational Culture* ed by Tomoko Hamda and Willis E. Sibley (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994)
31. Michael White, "Investors Still Believe in Asia," *The Associated Press,* 1999 (via ClariNet).
32. Joshua Kurlantzick, "Making It in China" in *U.S. News & World Report*, October 7, 2002.
33. American corporate investment in China's manufacturing industry has increased since 1984 in their efforts to remain internationally competitive at the cost of diminished job opportunities in the United States as factories are systematically moved to China. See Rich Miller, et. al., "Is the Job Drain China's Fault?," *The Washington Post*, October 3, 2003.
34. Sole reliance on subjective interpretations incorrectly assumes that one's subject position and conception of reality are coherent and authentic constructions unmediated by historically situated power dynamics. See Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1980) and Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1987).
35. For an explanation of "social reality," see Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40:4 (1989): 5–11, and Weeden, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. For a discussion of workplace marginalization among Asian Americans, see Deborah Woo, *Glass Ceilings and Asian Americans* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Altamira Press, 2000), and Diana Ting Liu Wu, *Asian Pacifiic Americans in the Workplace* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Altamira Press, 1997).
36. "Celeste Chang," Interview by author (Los Angeles, Calif.), April 4, 1995.
37. Educational capital is a crucial dimension of these professionals' cultural capital.
38. See Katherine S. Newman, *Falling From Grace: The Experience of Downward Mobility in the American Middle Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), p233.
39. "Ben Cho," Interview by author (Los Angeles, Calif.), November 12, 1997.

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini, *Ungrounded Empires* (New York: Routledge Press, 1997)
44. "Miranda Tam," Interview by author (Los Angeles, Calif.), January 18, 1998.
45. Ibid.
46. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
47. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
48. See Woo, *Glass Ceilings and Asian Americans.*