



To My Dear
Friend: A
Memoir from
an Asian Son

An Anonymous
Asian Son

To My Dear Friend: A Memoir from an Asian Son
《献给我亲爱的同学：来自一个亚裔儿子的回忆录》

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Contents

Contents	3
I The First Voyage	11
1 Things I Once Knew	12
1.1 Letter to Hogwarts	15
2 My Birth	19
2.1 Baby Steps into Hell	20
2.2 An Eulogy to a Dead Tree	23
3 Catharsis	39

II Rebirth	46
4 To the Shores	47
4.1 Guides of the Precipice	51
5 The Uncharted Waters	60
5.1 A Tiny Drop of Antidote	71
6 A New Kind of Asian	77
6.1 A New Kind of Future	88
III The Final Voyage	92
7 Looking Across the Pacific	94
7.1 The New Red Scare	97



*If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been
written yet, then you must write it.*

– Toni Morrison



Foreword

Dear friend,

we recently had to part ways due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to ravage everything that's around us. It torments us, keeping us separated and locking us in place. It seems certain that we may never see each other again, as you have told me many times of your intention of departing from the West at the earliest opportunity. This marks the beginning of the end of our friendship, a friendship that we have only recently promised each other will never end.

I cried all the way back on my flight back to my parents' place. My mask served as a disguise to my half gaping mouth, struggling to breathe. The in-flight movie I

watched was “Onward” by Disney, which I thought would cheer me up. On contrary it made everything so much worse! For one, the characters are so much like us, and second, I regret not hugging you just a little bit longer before I left. I kept on remembering that whimper of a goodbye that you gave me, holding back your tears. That’s the moment I knew everything has been real.

What follows must sound all very cliché to people who grew up with siblings or experienced the death of close loved ones, but I truly didn’t know you could cry so much that you get a migraine that lasts for days or so hard that every fiber of your being shakes uncontrollably. I didn’t know you could be terrified of going to sleep in fear that you would appear in my dreams again, only waking up realizing that you weren’t there. All these years of anger, despair, loneliness and this raw feeling of being tossed into this universe with no handlebars poured from my eyes and coalesced into the letters on these pages.

Above all, I cry because I can no longer protect you. My little brother. What if you get sick and I’m not there? How can I shield you from all the ills of this society that is cruel to men like you (and me) as you are about to embark on yet another major step towards adulthood? Who is there to help you to navigate through all the internal politics of your company? What if someone decides to assault you

in the streets? I would have gladly punched the lights out of anyone who dared to cross you. My conduit of rage. My shadow in a perfect world. But now I am gone.

These pages contain everything that I never said to you, and everything I wanted to tell you during our intense and brief shared moments together...things about me that you don't know about. It is a window to the world I see and a recollection of a crime that happened to me and many other Asian folks who grew up in the West just like me. Things that people like you who grew up in the East never experienced and seldom understand. It chronicles my lonely descend into utter despair, how you've rescued me, and how I am catching myself falling again now that you are gone. I amplify my voice through those of so many other Asian folks who have suffered a similar fate. This is a disease more urgent than COVID-19, it will stay long after we're gone and I desperately want to get my story and those of the others out there at all costs.

Part of this book is written with love, but more of it is written with rage because I have been angry and hurt for far too long. I'm angry at how my life has been crippled and turned upside down by years of racist torment I've encountered during my formative years and how that has even now left my life spiraling out of control. I write to you in anonymity because the things I say hurt and also

because I'm not special: there are tens of thousands of men who are just like me and you will eventually come across someone who lived through my ordeals. But I must leave something behind to you, just from me, and I hope that these pages will bind my spirit to yours. The stories I tell are true and their veracity will be revealed through my sheer conviction and candor that seeps through these pages. As James Baldwin once said:

To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost all of the time — and in one's work. And part of the rage is this: It isn't only what is happening to you. But it's what's happening all around you and all of the time in the face of the most extraordinary and criminal indifference, indifference of most white people in this country, and their ignorance.

These moments of rage have been the fuel to all my writings from all these years past and I now present all of them to you in a distilled form. So to my dear friend, I dedicate everything to you. You are the fuel to my fire. You have channeled my rage into a singular thought: to protect people like you, now and forever after. This writing captures two decades of my journey in the West, and by the sheerest coincidence that you read it, I hope

these writings will guide you to carry on your life's journey without me and to live life to the fullest. If not, then we will read it together one day sitting upon the stars, the place where you once said we will be reunited again. I love you and I miss you.

*— Signed, from an anonymous Asian son, your friend,
your brother.*

Part I

THE FIRST VOYAGE

Chapter 1

Things I Once Knew

Dear friend,

I never told you about my childhood. I was born a few years before the turn of the 21st century in a suburb on the edge of Beijing, a few years before you. Hard to believe, but back then it was a much quieter time, a more rustic time. I could never forget those dark nights, hardly any streetlights in sight. The moon seemed brighter then, casting my shadows on the ground so clearly as the crickets chirped and the bats squeaked around in my mind. There were large patches of tall grass fields in between the six-floor buildings where large swarms of sparrows occasionally rose from and fell in unison. There were no



elevators then, so it was quite the exercise climbing up and down the stairs each day.

My aunt, younger cousin/sister, and my mother lived in the same neighborhood. I had a pet Pekingese, Lily, named after one of the main characters in a kids' English language learning series. At that time my dad was a student in the US, studying to earn his MBA. I was the joy and pride of the family. I was loved.

There was no elementary school in my neighborhood, so we rode the 5:00 AM company bus into the city. The ride was usually lengthy, as the traffic was highly con-

gested in Beijing. In my memories, my cousin and I would finish school at around 4:00 PM and walk across the city, through an entire company complex. We would eat the wild blackberries that grew on the trees as we passed them and board the bus back to our suburb without our parents. The whole trip would be basked in a glorious crimson red sunset over the flat Beijing landscape.

I never knew much about the city. My mother never even took me to any of the important cultural sites. Neither the Old Summer Palace, Temple of Heaven, or the Forbidden City. But why would she? We weren't just some tourists - We were going to live, grow old, and die there. There would be plenty of time in between all that to do some local sightseeing. I did receive some education about my people. My grandma was born in the 30s lived through WWII during the Japanese occupation and air-raids, from who I learned first-hand information about the past. In our history class, I was taught about the sacking of Old Summer Palace and the rape of Nanjing. From them, I knew the ancestors of people like you and me were oppressed, but I thought it was all in the distant past.

There was something else I knew from growing up in China. I learned that there was a such thing as unconditional acceptance, kinship, brotherhood, and genuine friendship with people who are deeply invested in your

well-being. I knew about the possibility of heartaches and healing. I still remember a period when people would be interested in me, as opposed rejecting me before they ever got to know me. I'm glad I lived through that period, otherwise, I would have never known that humanity even existed. Those memories were the glimmers of hope during my worst darkness.

1.1 Letter to Hogwarts

It was at the end of my 6th grade. I had planned to go to a middle school and had already written the exams for it. It was when my mom heard the news that her VISA to the US was finally approved. The next few months were a blur, but I remember my mother, who then had a job in a large English education company and who was someone rising in rank and prominence, took me to various places all the while busy sending our stuff to her mother's place. I could never forget my last glimpses of the new Beijing, the dazzling lights in the Wangfujing district, the loud pop music blaring in the squares, the seemingly endless night of fun and adventure, the fancy bookstores filled with the latest books that children got to read for free. My friend, you are the continuation of that memory.

Just one day before I left China, I remember so vividly

telling my grandma that how happy I was to move to America. I remember telling her that I will have a big yard, own a dog again, and live just like those white people that we saw on TV. Bruce Almighty was it. I was going to see my dad again.

It was my first time on a plane. We landed in Tokyo, sampled their “legendary” ramen, and hurried back on the plane. It was a few years post 9-11 so the air security was tight. We landed in DTW on a typical rainy day up. The air felt fresher, cleaner, but that vibe, that energy I had always associated with America was nowhere to be found. It was almost rural, quiet and the highway stretched itself out. A short ride later we reached our new mansion: no yard, no dog, just a small apartment that smelled like old carpets ought to smell. But I was happy.

And for a while the honeymoon magic was good! Every single day was filled with adventure and discovery. I went to a bank on the next day I got there and the bank manager gave me a lollipop and a children’s book, for free! I didn’t know you could buy one thing and get another, for free! I didn’t know that companies such as American Online (AOL) can give you free discs to install without you even having to go to the computer store!

Right before school started in the fall, I took a trip around the country, to New York City, Las Vegas, Wash-

ington D.C. and even the Hoover Dam. The smiles, the hugs, they were genuine. Several months later I got to watch George Bush and John Kerry's debate on Yahoo! News. Political satire was already all the rage on memorable websites such as Jib-Jab. I wonder if this was the spark that kindled my political mind.

My young life was so far so good...



...much of this exodus can be described as the journey of the colonized to the seat of the colonizers (slaves, as it were, leaving the plantation for the planters' home), while more of it is the flight of war refugees, and (less of it) the relocation and transplantation of the management and diplomatic class to globalization's outposts...

– Toni Morrison, “The Origin of Others”, 2017





Chapter 2

My Birth

Dear friend,

in your youth, you must have often wondered about what happens to those Chinese kids like me who left for America. What fancy, extraordinary lives we must have led as compared to folks back home. What exciting experiences lie await us. What is it like to speak English to a white person? Be f·r·i·e·n·d·s with those same flawless white people you saw in on TV? Here is a brief chronicle of my journey, and it begins with the American school system, my first immersive experience into white supremacy.

2.1 Baby Steps into Hell

My 7th grade started soon after I took my whirlwind tour across the USA. To help me with practicing my English, my dear parents gave me a little tape recorder to tape my lessons, so I could play them back. My relationship with my parents was good then, intact even. Every night, I would cuddle with my parents before we went to sleep, and we would go over the things that the teacher had said in class earlier during the day.

Eventually, I stopped playing these tapes. I would go straight to my room at night and shut my door. I became reticent because I started to have secrets, shameful secrets that I didn't want my parents to find out. I didn't want my parents to find out that the white kids were calling me a "Ching Chong" as I stood silently, nonplussed, or awkwardly fumbled around in search for a comeback. I didn't want my parents to find out I said the "N word" as was taught to me by yet another set of white kids. I didn't want them to find out the things that they said in the locker rooms. They were all caught on tape.

During the same year, there were groups of white boys who would regularly harass me in the locker room just after gym class. During one episode, I was reminded of a white boy grinding his buttock on my crotch to the up-

roarious laughter of the other boys. My first introduction to the concept of “sexual harassment” was a white male peer doing it to me.

Many things happened that year. An older white teacher singled me out for being talkative, stood me in front of the class, stopped the entire class dead on its track and humiliated me (along with my buddy Eddie, who is Mexican). She later called my parents to pick me up. Why me, I wondered? Looking back, she must have held negative stereotypes towards Asians and immigrants in general. It was a natural conclusion: many other teachers at the school had similar beliefs. It was an open secret at the school. You can say things were less “politically correct” in those days.

In the 8th grade, a white girl accused me of sexual harassment. It was because I implied that she was being sexually promiscuous with one of the guys I knew on the school bus. I must have been only about 12 or 13 then. What I did was no more serious than what Emmett Till did to Carolyn Bryant, so minor that it never even crossed my mind what I said was offensive; the girl seemed curious, and my friend who sat right beside me during our conversation thought it was funny. The news soon spread to the entire school. I was interviewed by my ESL teacher, my homeroom teacher, the principal, the school’s police, the

mental health counselor, one after another to get to the bottom of my criminality. White people delight in making a criminal out of their victims. It gave them power. After all, it was a serious “police matter”.

After this incident, I was regularly harassed by white classmates at the school. They would walk up to me and confront me physically, in the locker room, in the cafeteria, out on the fields, in the classrooms. These truculent white boys were never interviewed by the police. The principal, who is white, was indifferent to my side of the story and throughout our conversation, I felt dismissed and treated as if I was some sort of a budding rapist. At times it felt that the entire school was against me. I had to do some volunteering work afterward to make up for my “sexual assault” against a white girl. To this day, I still remember all of those people’s names who were involved because it was the most traumatic thing I experienced then. Funny, the principal who so cruelly dismissed me had a name that meant “gentle, kind, a good person”.

Even then I had no idea what monstrosity was waiting for me just one year later.



..all our phrasing-race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy-serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.

– Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Between the World and Me”, 2015.



2.2 An Eulogy to a Dead Tree

Our family soon moved further into the South. Just as when I first arrived in America, My dad always assuaged these traumatic severing of my friendships with the promise of the excitement of the American highway. But there was no bandage for what's to come.

My 9th grade began at a new school, which was 90% white, the rest is a mixture of black and Latinx students. On the first day of class, the students were divided into

different groups that were overseen by older students ("mentors"). My white "mentor" gave me a nickname on the first day of school, which was derived from *Jackie Chan* while he simultaneously erased my extremely easy to pronounce Chinese name. This mentor figure is now a very successful DJ/musician. I became wary of all of these white singers and celebrity figures ever since I met him; you never know what they are like in private.

Throughout the semester, I faced racial slight from virtually everyone I came across, but what I remember the most was the viciousness towards me by white girls who were on the school's football cheerleading team. They made fun of me in every way you can think of: my height, my perceived lack of masculinity, my skin color, my accent. Every movement was scrutinized under those blue eyes. Those glaring, judging, unforgiving white gaze. It was all very public humiliation, with almost all the incidents happening in class in front of the teachers, who did nothing to help me. For them, laughter always translated to harmless fun. I can still remember their faces and their exact names because of how much hatred I still hold towards them. I can still hear them say, after one of their castigation, "*if you tell on us, who do you think they will believe? White girls or a chink?*"

Chink. It was the first time I've ever heard of the word

and it already was their favorite word, perfected from years of white impunity. They also loved to accuse me of eating dogs. In reality, I had lost my precious Lily to thieves a few years earlier, so the injury and trauma of being called a dog-eater were multiplied. None of these people were ever punished in any way that I know of. I suspect that yet another one of them became a singer.

In the 10th grade, I was at the same school and virtually had no friends. I think I was one of the three Asians in a school of over a thousand people. I still dealt with racism from my white peers regularly. I remember one of the white boy in my class telling the only other white kid who talked to me, *why would you ever hang out with a chink?* I found out through another white boy who tried to goad me into a fight. They wanted to see that mythical Chinese Kung Fu. Racism was not limited to the students, but was also perpetrated by the teachers. One white teacher accused me of making drug paraphernalia in her class and subsequently got me suspended. *A clay bong? Was she out of her ever-loving mind?* My suspension offered a rare, first-hand insight into the prison-to-school pipeline. During suspension, I got to know who all the “bad” kids were and our relationships became more entrenched. I was being socialized into criminality through the school’s “justice” system.

My friend, you cannot imagine the kind of jealousy you inspired in me when you told me about all sorts of wonderful things you did during your 10th grade in China, even having the opportunity to teach elementary school kids. Did you know in my 10th grade, I regularly skipped school with black and brown kids all day and every day? Some of those students coerced money from me regularly and I let it happen because they were the only people I had. I was living on the edge of society and hung out with mainly drug addicts, students who were mentally ill, alcoholics, prostitutes, drug dealers and gangsters. Some of these people died before even graduating high school. I was routinely sent to detention by this time.

My parents were irate, not at the society which had so cruelly punished me, but at me, for failing to maintain a good attitude, for being "down all the time", for not wanting to go to school, for not being able to maintain a good grade. My parents were completely blind to the racial trauma I felt and in many ways were still on their honeymoon period, in spite of the racism that they personally encountered. Every struggle in their mind would be explained away by attributing them to their "foreignness" or "outsider status". Anything but race, anything but the truth. After two decades of living here, I can say that they still haven't really seen the light. In any case, I became

an insomniac by this point, had an eating-disorder and developed obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), which made me ruminate on certain past trauma over and over again in my mind. I never saw a health professional about my problems. That year, I remember trying to commit suicide by intentionally getting run over by a car. A lot of things I did since that time could be constituted as a form of slow, passive suicide. That specter never truly left me.

It was around the same time Seung-Hui Cho shot up Virginia Tech, killing some 32 people. The media went into a frenzy on uncovering his past. The US embassy immediately, without any shred of evidence, accused the shooter of being a Chinese national and the Chinese embassy even issued an apology. The media quickly accused of him being a serial sexual harasser, a stalker, a deranged psychopath. My mind went, *did he sexually harass the white girl in the same way that I sexually harassed a white girl when I was 13 by the mere insinuation of sex on a school bus?* Later on, in his manifesto he said,

To you sadistic snobs, I may be nothing but a piece of dog shit. You have vandalized my heart, raped my soul, and torched my conscious again and again. You thought it was one pathetic, void life that you were extinguishing. Thanks to you, I die, like Jesus Christ, to inspire genera-

tions of the Weak and Defenseless people — my Brothers, Sisters, and Children — that you fuck.

— *Manifesto of Seung-Hui Cho as reported by MSNBC.*

I had no context of what he meant, or who he was after (the rich kids? the child predators?), but a part of me believes to this day that I am one of the “brothers” he spoke of. *Seung-Hui, did you know your brother was being torched in hell?*

In the 11th grade, I ate lunch in the bathroom every day because I didn’t want to sit alone in the cafeteria anymore or to be subjected to racial taunting. On most days I did not eat anything at all and that obviously had lifelong detriment to my growth and my health. It all hits hard on the body. I was by this time an alcoholic, I would drink hard liquor in the morning before class. Most of the teachers knew I was unwell and yet nobody stepped up to help me in any way. I remember not feeling very well one day, enervated by my empty stomach and left the classroom without permission. By the time I got back, the white teacher was waiting for me and rudely yelled at me in front of the entire class, accusing me of lying about my condition and I got suspended afterward. Her screams reverberated through the hallways – “YOU LIE!” This was the same class where I was harassed by a group of white

girls who accused me of “being a faggot” during the first week of school. This very same teacher was present during that day and she did nothing. There were too many other incidents to mention: racist name callings, derogatory references to my body, white kids stealing money from me. A white guy went up to me in the class and flat-out told me that he wants to “saw my head off and mount it in his house like a 12-point buck”. None of these people were ever punished in any way and now hold lucrative careers or important positions in society. All these things were done very publicly, always with teachers and other adults present. But beyond racial aggression, the thing brought more pain were the silent treatments: nobody wanted to pair up with me for group activities, nobody wanted to be on my team in the gym. I tried to commit suicide again by overdosing (OD) on painkillers or sleeping pills. I was a full-blown insomniac (I am still now), I had OCD, constant anxiety attacks which manifested in the form of a muffled scream.

Just to compare what a hell of my life was to yours, here are a few journal entries that I kept:

- *...I thought about dying for a while now and I remained undecided...I don't know where I am going or what I am going to do, I don't know if I'd make*

through this year. I just pictured me dying a while now while my father was hugging me. I cried a little, I cannot imagine the pain I will cause on them when I am gone, but holding on is just so incredibly tough. The world is a cruel and dark place...It is depression, it is cold hard depression, I cannot face myself in the mirror...God forgive me of all my sins! 12/31/2008

- ...I had no where to go, no where to run, no one to turn to. And it wasn't just me, few of my "acquaintances" in school weren't having it too joyful as well and oh how I remember what they had to go through each and every single day, how I remember their faces. Now my parents are the superstitious, conservative lots...truly believed depression to be a "significant, critical, fatal psychological disturbance" and they were too scared to even talk about it. And how I did reach out for help, I wished I had talked to someone other than my parental guardians, and I so wished I had received help from anyone. Of course, things got worse, things had gotten really bad...I was at the nadir of my life. I knew I was suffering from not only ADD, but also suffering from a severe form of OCD which replays my "horrendous" memories over and over again like a broken record. My life was severely*

disrupted, my grade rapidly descended, and everything was falling apart. I drank the first time when I was 16, and bootlegged throughout the year...I've never thought of "having fun" while intoxicated, to me, it was simply another way to throwing away my already decayed life. 11/13/2009

- *There are few things I could say about my life other than the utter horror I'm experiencing. Loneliness, despair, isolation, anger, rages...I've felt it all, at once. I don't know when I've started drinking, but I know it will eventually end me. The depression is boundless, endless alley...the darkness drips and covers all over me. I feel more trapped than ever, I feel more alone than ever, and I feel as if I'm falling, falling and knowing that no one could catch me or even notice. I've tried for help, verbally, with action, with obvious action. Nobody notices, nobody cares, not even my closest relatives... and I'm so lost and confused...What day is it? I don't remember, all I want to do is to get out... god help me...so god please help me...I am so desperate. I am helpless. I am alone. I am lost. I am empty. I wish I was dead. 5/16/2009*

God never came.

It was also that year when my dear mother told me I was a “dead ghost” (死鬼), arguably the worst insult you can give to your relatives. I spent that day crying locked in my room because, with nobody left for me, not even my own mother, I knew I was going to die soon. I just didn’t know that these blades pointed at my throat were guided by the invisible hands of white supremacy...

Please don't kill me!! I'm not ready to leave!!

One afternoon soon after I took some sleeping pills and when I woke up, don't remember when, I was unable to move my body. It was the same feeling you get when your arm falls asleep and you couldn't control it anymore. A conscious death. Dear friend, do you believe in parallel universes? Maybe I died that day and I'm just a spirit, walking the earth, seeking retribution. Nobody noticed me, nobody found me. I passed out and when I woke up again, my mother told me I missed the school bus. I received a faceful of acid from some middle-aged white woman when I got there. I told her "I'd like to change the education system one day" and she gleefully replied with a smirk, "I'd like to see you try".

My family decided moved again after that semester. I found a couple bottles of alcohol in a cabinet left by the previous family that lived there and got stone drunk on the day we started packing. Instead of inquiring about my condition, my uneven steps, my parents ignored me. I must have became such an alien to them, I had became a死鬼.

The racism I experienced in my senior year (12th grade) was less intense, as this new school had more people of color. But the sense of isolation and the mental anguish I had was often too much to bear. I was finally diagnosed with suicidal ideation and had alcohol and mental health

counselors with me full time, people who I am forever grateful for. At this time I knew my life had been fundamentally destroyed by forces that I could not yet comprehend. I had absolutely nothing to show for at the end of my high school compared to my peers. I was rejected by almost all the colleges I applied to; the white administrators no doubt only saw an Asian kid with questionable academic history, limited community engagement, no extracurricular whatsoever and did not see the damages that their people had done to me. In their blindness, they have unwittingly conspired with my tormentors. This is how society punishes people like me. By this time I was trying to synthesize cyanide or trying to obtain a firearm. I had to be sure this time. Then before you knew it, high school was over, a new hope came, and my thoughts moved on.

All of these acts – which comprised less than 50% of what I experienced, as I have simply forgotten most of them – were perpetrated against me by mainly white, Christian, men, and women, across all age spectrum, across all education backgrounds, across all walks of life. My experience spanned over more than three different states, five different cities. It wasn't just the individuals, but an entire system of oppression.

The most painful moment in my sophomore year was this one time I was huddling against a dead tree outside

of a clinic outside of my school, biding my time, because I was alone during lunch hours and had nowhere else to go. A white doctor saw me across the window, grimaced at me, and waved his arm, gesturing me to “get lost!” I then went to a coffee shop even though I had no money on me. I could never forget those white eyes all simultaneously gazed at me at once as I entered, like a gunslinger entering a saloon. I saw a cop just about to finish his order so I left immediately. That white cop caught up to me on the way back to school, escorted me back in his police car straight to the principal’s office. Then I received detention for being outside of school grounds.



There are tens of thousands of poems on these walls

They are all cries of suffering and sadness

The day I am rid of this prison and become successful

I must remember that this chapter once existed

– Heungshan, Angel Island Detention Center, San Francisco Bay, composed between 1910 - 1940



There must be tens of thousands of Asian men like me, haunted by the memories of their past. I can still see the faces of the other Asian kids, of all ethnicity and types, silently weeping by the lockers next their classrooms, or sitting alone in the library during lunch hour, not eating much, or hiding in a place where they cannot be found. Their agony was always accompanied by a sea of white laughter in the background, some laughing at them, but more were laughing without them. I cannot remember their names but no doubt we will never forget the neglect, ostracism and exclusion that we faced during our shared prison years.





In the quiet of night, I heard, faintly, the whistling of wind.

The forms and shadows saddened me; upon seeing the landscape, I composed a poem.

The floating clouds, the fog, darken the sky.

The moon shines faintly as the insects chirp.

Grief and bitterness entwined are heaven sent.

The sad person sits alone, leaning by a window.

– Angel Island Poetry





Chapter 3

Catharsis

Dear friend,

there you have it. This is the charming, romantic and magical journey that a young Chinese boy had to suffer through. It is of little wonder why I became so protective of you after we met. You are a glimmer of hope, a single light in my darkness. You lit up my world with a sense of joy I've long yearned for, begged for. You are that happy, lovable, trusting, care-free and healthy Asian man that I never had the chance to grow up to be. I saw you as a mirror of me, *my reflection in a perfect world.*



...there are no strangers. There are only versions of ourselves...

– Toni Morrison, “The Origin of Others”



Oh by the way, just in case if you are wondering about the word “white supremacy” (白人优势系统), it is used by me to describe the web of relationships and social interactions that lead to my (continued) oppression. The white principals, teachers, coaches, cheerleaders, school police, youth leaders, pastors, are all part of a system that creates benefits to whites at the expense of the lives of non-whites. Their lives are intimately tied to each other through their collective actions and (conscious or not) will to dominate, to punish, while simultaneously rendering people like me powerless to seek justice or exact vengeance. It was never about individual white people, but about the system of power that granted them immunity to every wrongdoing.

I have read the writings of many fierce critics of white supremacy over my lifetime. Novelists, public sociologists, race scholars, anti-racist activists...brilliant men and

women, of all races, all walk of life, who I will soon introduce to you. While a part of me admires their work and courage, another part of me can't help but wonder: *have they suffered as I have? Were they deprived of all relationships while growing up? Do they have the same stakes as I do?*

I long for the destruction of white supremacy. Sometimes I feel like I couldn't even live for another moment knowing that I am so utterly alone and helpless. As long as it reigns, people like me are continuously being thrown into a loop of despair and depression, for it never leaves us, and there is no unseeing. What happened during my adolescent years is still with me after so many years: the occasional suicidal ideation, the compulsions, the screaming, the shouting of obscenities, and oh the insomnia. I wonder if you have ever seen me without those dark rings around my eyes or the purplish tint on my lips. The face of a man long deprived of peace. These thoughts strike at me when I'm crossing the pedestrian sidewalk, when I'm writing, when I'm sharing moments with other people, and when I'm alone.

White supremacy has ripped my family apart and stripped me of a life time of friendship, relationships, self-esteem, manhood, pride, joy, experience, physical health and to a large extent, material wealth. Unlike you my

friend, instead of rising up in this world, my energy has been spent on finding solutions to my constant torment. Instead of enjoying my holiday, I am condemned to write this letter to you. It has permanently snipped any possibility of a real cross-racial relationship with white person by the bud. But more than that, I wonder if I can truly trust anyone in this world, even (and especially) fellow Asian people. No matter how far I run, no matter how successful I become, it will forever haunt me. I'm diseased. I'm cursed. I'm condemned.

There is a popular saying by Nietzsche, “beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster...for when you gaze long into the abyss. The abyss gazes also into you”. I wonder if white supremacy hasn’t already made me into a Devil. As Michael Eric Dyson once said, “The Devil. Racism. Another metaphor. Same difference.” And just as Malcolm X celebrated the death of (according to him) descendants of Georgia slavers after the crash of Air France 007, out of the blue, a thought rampages its way to the surface:

“So what if COVID kills 300,000 Americans? I WISH my would be white murderers and their families are burning in hell! I WISH more would join them in hell!”

The entire Western culture tells us to protect the white body, to exalt the white female body, and the media carefully curates what white pain can look like, training us daily to come to its aid like the good little Pavlov's dogs that we are. By rejecting whiteness, I have also became inured to white pain, for so much pain that has been dealt to me by the same white body. Like a deranged chimp, it strikes us as it screams and yells. This is the soul of whiteness.

And just as quickly, the thought fades. I'm left in shame.

My friend, I have witnessed too much pain in my short life, pain deliberately inflicted upon innocent Asian folks (and other non-white folks) through the structure of white supremacy, happily clung onto and up held by a majority of whites and their sycophants. They do not deserve our sympathy, because we've been holding that olive branch for far too long. So many perished while still holding it and after all this time we have failed to get our message across.

I hope I will live till I see the fruit of my labor, and the labor of so many Asian men and women before me and those working right alongside me, silently.



No more water, the fire next time.

— James Baldwin, “Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region of My Mind”, 1963



Years later during university I opened up to a mental health professional about my high school experience. She asked me whether if I held a grudge towards those who had wronged me. Specifically she wanted to find out if I harbored violent thoughts toward others. I paused, looked at her dead in the eyes, trying to organize my thoughts so not to make my seething anger at this question boil up to the surface. She flinched when her eyes met mine.

What could it have been?

I can only imagine she saw the red streak in my eyes, tearing through the clouds, lighting up the purple sky. Tearing flesh from the bones, a meteorite hurling itself towards the earth, reducing everything to ashes.

Then I smiled at her and said,

“Of course not.”





...the reality is we're as fiery and ill-tempered as any other group of people. A lot of Asian men out there, especially people my age, need or seek subconsciously this revenge. They either find it in some way or grow older and it's not such an important part of their psyche. But I think there are a lot of Asian men who do still have it in their heads that this revenge has never been realized. It's like they're deformed; gestalt psychology says people need to finish their unfinished business, and if they don't it stays with them.

– Irwin Tang, the author of “Asian Texans: Our Histories and Our Lives”, excerpt from “Asian American Sexual Politics”, p. 128.



Part II

REBIRTH

Chapter 4

To the Shores

Dear friend,

when you first moved to the US, you told me you visited the beach. I never asked, how did you ever get there given that you don't drive? A journey also took me to the shores, but it was of a different kind, the shorelines of racial awakening. It lead me to a vast ocean filled with agony and pain and there exists so little in its vastness to shelter people like me and you. I will now guide you through my awakening. The following roughly took exactly a decade.

The neighborhood that I first lived in America was a classic white-flight neighborhood. A fictive, lily white ring of safety centered by a dark black mass of violence, gangs,

drugs and crimes, which also served as a barrier to the greater ring of white opulence. *Rings. Barriers. Zoos.* The more you lived around the more you realize how similar American cities are to zoos, not too far removed from the literal human zoos that littered around the country during the late 19th century.

Living there made it easier for me to relate to a tragedy that happened to another neighborhood. It was New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Who can forget when the Associated Press (AP) referring to black people as "looters", where white people as "finders". That was my first contradiction, a tiny crack of enlightenment. I watched videos on Yahoo! News during that time, and it showed black folks being crammed into a stadium, with no water or running toilet. I remember vividly, one black woman interviewed said to the cameraman "*...people out here are shooting up (drugs), pissing and defecating out in the open. We are being treated like animals left to die!*"

Around 2007/8, I started watching "The Young Turks" (TYT), hosted by a young Cenk Uygur, Ana Kasparian, Ben Mankiewicz, Steve Oh and Jayar Jackson, which at that time mostly covered sordid celebrity affairs and related dramas. Some tidbit from around that time: a white teacher called a black student a "nigga" and doubled down by telling the student that it is *fine* because he wasn't using

the *actual* N-word. Of course, white people on the internet went berserk; they always did get very angry at perceived violation to their “freedom of speech”. I would always dig through the comments in search for a (usually heavily downvoted) counter-argument. A wise commentator pointed out that the teacher never bothered to talk to the student, neglected the power dynamics and the history of the word and immediately became defensive and escalated the situation. My early racial training involved much of the above type of feedback: digging through heaps of vitriolic and ignorant comments made by anonymous white people to find the hidden gems.

The Young Turks is still a channel that I often come back to. It is an invaluable repository of video evidence of white crime against people of color of all walks of life. The theme is always so clear: white people abusing their power, white criminals and white police officers alike getting away scot-free. Although their analysis often misses the mark on the deeper racial meanings, the channel has improved dramatically over the years.

I never told you that I went to church once. It was a useless endeavor as I felt alienated at the white churches and found the Asian churches aimless, almost as if nobody had a good reason to worship a white God in the first place. My ennui with the church was somewhat cured by the

excitement of trolling religious white people on Yahoo! Answers. It was a good exercise in debate tactics and recognizing logical fallacies. Of course, these debates soon extended to other reaches of their white fragility, such as on the issue of white privilege, US imperialism, and the topic of China. I must have had thousands of arguments on there with tens of accounts having been permanently banned. It was a form of digital suicide followed by rebirth.

During the middle of my undergrad, I decided to take a night class on sociology just to get some easy credits. That course became a precise recount of my life. It made sense of many of my experiences and made me realize what I was good at: critically analyzing the media, and above all else, racism. I wanted to become a “white-people connoisseur”. At this time I was simultaneously doing full-time at a local company. I gave a talk at the company and the topic I choose was environmental justice related to Indigenous people. I was so naive! I did not anticipate such an atmosphere of discomfort in the room. Afterwards, a white co-worker who I was just beginning to trust came to me and said *“I didn’t know you were such a social justice type”*. I didn’t even know what “social justice” meant! Defending the Indigenous folks was simply logical to me. I later found out there are those who claim young people like me must have been woken up due to some

“social justice” propaganda, such as the books by Robin DiAngelo, Ibram X. Kendi or Reni Eddo-Lodge. Chuckles. The groundwork were already there, quietly waiting.

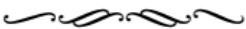
My obsession became full-blown around the time of Donald Trump’s first election. Using my newfound powers, I predicted his election in front of some people who thought I must have been joking. What I never told them is, *while you cannot imagine a single person voting for Trump, I know in my heart that every single white American I’ve ever come across would vote for him, with glad*. White people wanted him, so he will win, it was as simple as that. Malcolm X’s sage words have never been truer: politics is just a football game between whites. We were never invited to the game.

4.1 *Guides of the Precipice*

My first guide into the jagged terrain of anti-racism was an anti-racist educator by the name of Tim Wise, who as of today is still very active on Twitter and frequently gives speeches at various universities and colleges around the US. When I discovered him, I was so shocked that a completely untrained neophyte like me could come up with the very same examples that he uses to refute his detractors; it instilled in me that I was a “natural” when

comes it came to thinking critically about racism, and that this was the calling that I am (still) not yet completely ready to heed. By the way, his talks on Youtube are a treasure trove that I hope you will one day take a listen to, especially the one he gave at Google, which is so relevant to you.

Now, the fact that my first tour guide was a white man from the Deep South was not a coincidence, after all, I've been long waiting for an apology from white people. Tim offered me something different: he gave unsparing, scathing admonishment to his people for their wicked racism. There are many things that he said in his speeches as well as in his book "White Like Me" 《像我这样的白人》, that stuck with me. One is, "I am doing this for my people" and another is "racism hurts white people". These were the key sparks that kick-started my journey into the uncharted waters of anti-Asian racism during my mid-twenties and gave me permission to contemplate upon the plight of my people without needing the approval of anyone. Tim's analysis of how the anti-apartheid protests that he participated in was in effect a distraction to the on-going apartheid in Louisiana (as marked by the then on-going candidacy of David Duke, the former grand wizard of the Knights of the KKK) deeply informed my opinion on the (on-going) US propaganda against China.



The very serious function of racism . . . is distraction.

– Toni Morrison



Robin Diangelo, then a little known anti-racist workplace trainer, came much later. When her talk came out, many years before her masterpiece “White Fragility” 《白人脆弱性》, I was one of the first ones to listen. Her talks were crucial at solidifying many years of private musing that was already well marinated in my head. *I was not crazy after all*, I thought to myself, *this is really what white people were thinking*. Soon after listening to her talks, I was so overwhelmed with revelations I immediately reached out to her pleading to join her in her research. Of course the letter went un-replied; I didn’t have a shred of background in her area of research and I wouldn’t think it would be wise for her to ever check on her emails. Nonetheless, “White Fragility” is the one book that I keep on coming back to. She gave me new language and vocabs such as “psyche energy”, “minoritized”. These concepts continuously shape how I interact with the world. My friend, she’s one of the bravest white woman I’ve ever known and I really hope you will read all her works.



Racism is a system, not an event.

– J. Kēhaulani Kauanui



Another brave soul I met on my journey was Professor Robert Jensen, a professor at the University of Dallas, who was simultaneously a critic on whiteness, a fierce feminist and an environmentalist. The starting point was his lecture on Youtube titled, “The Color of The Race Problem Is White”¹. I’ve subsequently read his book, “The Heart of Whiteness” 《白色之心》. It is a beautiful, deeply introspective piece and gave me yet another vocab, “non-white”. This term is similar to “minoritized”, as it highlights the role that white people played at defining who are the so-called minorities, and who are the so-called people-of-color. It trained me to always think in terms of my knowledge in relation to how white people may have crafted it to exculpate themselves from their acts of oppression. By the way my friend, always use “white” and not simply “American” when it comes to describe white

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aH-WSqanyQ&ab_channel=freededge369

people in the US, for the latter erases me and people like me from existence.

By this time I was seriously doubtful of any work written by a white author that was lauded by the white mainstream. My dear friend, unlike you who had read texts on US constitution written by famous historians, profiles of the rich and famous such as Warren Buffett and Steve Jobs, I avoided all books written by white authors on subjects such as the economy, business and politics. They were of no interest to me; I only cared if a white person had something to say about race and their oppression.

My journey took me to contrarian lands. For example, the history section of my shelf included works such as “Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India” by Shashi Tharoor and “An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States” by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. Dunbar-Ortiz’s book was crucial to me in thinking about the place of Asian people in the context of the wider pillaging of the world by whites. It illustrated how little was the difference between the white will to dominate over the Indigenous folks versus their will to dominate us. We are the Indigenous people who they failed to conquer. Our very existence, the intactness of our culture and of our written and spoken language, are some of white supremacy’s greatest failures. Keep on living my friend.

Through this panoramic view of racism, the history of inequality to me is like streams flowing into a vast ocean of pain. The more I read, the faster I paddled down these streams, and the sooner I found myself lost in the middle of the ocean. The most devastating book I've ever read was "American Holocaust" 《美洲大屠杀》 by David Stannard, a heartbreakingly honest recount of the calculated destruction of the countless pre-Columbian cultures that once thrived on that land that we now stand upon.

My dear friend, I were to chronicle my progression into an anti-racist frame of mind as linearly as I possibly can, this would be it,

- Since middle school, I have encountered, witnessed, suffered through countless amount of racial abuse at the hands of white people across all age groups, economic class and gender, which made me distrustful and wary of all whites people, especially ones in positions of power. Those years of mental abuse and isolation endowed me with an obsession. Any topic must be thoroughly looked into no matter how late into the night. And luckily for me, that topic became "race".
- The advent of the internet, anonymity, loneliness, compulsion allowed me to have mostly unfettered

arguments with easily tens of thousands of white people online. I've made my marks on Yahoo! Answers, Quora, Reddit and various online games. You can say I challenged whiteness 24/7 and increasingly relied on research papers, news articles and writings I found online to support my argument. I didn't know some of these references would come from the biggest names in anti-racist work.

- I blossomed during my year studying sociology which was soon followed by the rise of Donald Trump. I grew an instinct on many different matters and developed a true sociological imagination. Now my writings are much more intricate and I started to receive rare but well-appreciated approval from other non-white people. A positive feedback cycle emerged.
- The Donald Trump years, with the rise of so many ignorant discourses, I sought for refuge in the arms of anti-racists. People such as Michael Eric Dyson, Robin Diangelo, Ta-Nehisi Coates grew in prominence and became popular figures on my digital bookshelves. My horizon was broadened and my vision became clear. I have became a solution seeker.

My friend, you may be wondering why the narrow focus on “white racism”? This is because race is literally a construction by whites during the colonial days. The history of race points to an origin, which was a socially constructed separation between slaves and masters, and whiteness continued to serve as a separator even when slaves managed to convert to the faith of those of their masters. So the color of the race problem is white and white people are responsible and have the power to put it to a stop. As Robert Jensen once said, *“it is not about guilt, it is about taking responsibility.”*

There are of course individual acts of violence perpetrated by non-white people against Asian people, but for one, these form of violence do not simply come from nowhere, and white people are always implicated in some ways for engendering that violence, and second, whites control most of the resources to protect, defend, investigate and charge. They hoard resources and expect us solely rely on them for carrying out justice, despite all their biases. Finally, my life experience tells me that some violence, particularly physical violence, can be escaped from as a matter of geography (e.g., moving to a wealthier neighborhood), however, the types of “violence” carried out by whites (and by men) are inescapable.

As I elaborated to you in a retelling of my life story

growing up in the South, I was bullied by Latino folks and was sometimes treated with slight by black folks (although I have had largely positive experiences with both groups of people). Even as I suffered from discrimination from my non-white peers, I innately knew white supremacy was yet the greater of my problems. For example, in the 10th grade, once I was sitting together with two Latino guys outside of Hobby Lobby, just talking, when two ordinary-looking youngish white men in their mid-twenties drove up and without greeting us, started asking us for identifications and our immigration statuses. Of course, we had no identification on us, no one was even 18 yet. But it was not as if they cared. I was scared at first, but then realized these white men were probably simply impersonating law enforcement or homeland security. While these Latino men had prejudicial feelings against me, we were all powerless against the larger forces of racism perpetrated by whites. You cannot be distracted from what you are really fighting against.

Dear friend, by now you might be wondering where are the Asian voices in all this? This is the journey that I will take you on, but be careful, for the water runs really deep.

Chapter 5

The Uncharted Waters

Dear friend,

my early life experience equipped me with the realization that I was alone and was up against forces that I could not ever bring down on my own. So when I started my graduate degree, a few years before you did, I set myself on a path of finding a community of like-minded people, for which I had none in my immediate vicinity. I was trapped in-between worlds, neither Chinese nor Chinese American, for both groups seemed blissfully ignorant to my struggles.

I was already then an established writer on Quora, specializing in distorted Hollywood media representation of

Asian people. I love to analyze movies, drilling down to the nitty-gritties and relating them to the larger political environment in which the movies were created. I frequently rubbed elbows with some of the fiercest critics of white male supremacy on that platform, people such as Robert Strickland. However, most activists on Quora were black, and by the end of my one year anniversary on that platform, I had a better understanding of the struggles between African immigrants and black Americans than the issues facing Asian people. With the exception of folks such as Christopher VanLang, there were so few voices on there who had insights on anti-Asian racism. On the contrary, most of the Asian folks were gaslighting each other's experiences while upholding white supremacy. Most racism against Asians went unchallenged and Quora was drowning in false narratives.

I found my way instead to Reddit, a place that I had high hopes for despite my initial skepticism of yet another mainstream white-owned discussion board with loose moderation. *A new beginning*, so I thought to myself. I first made my way to the r/racism forum (or “ subreddit”) and found it a completely abandoned wasteland. It was time to find my people.

r/AsianMasculinity was the very first real Asian activism community I found and I was immediately chal-

lenged like never before. The general philosophy on that subreddit is not about rejecting white supremacy, which many had thought was too abstract, not actionable, but learning to live with it, imitating it if one has to and at the end, dominating it through sheer physical prowess and cold hard cash. Many members placed a great deal of emphasis on building one's musculature to increase the overall image of Asian men. Many encouraged self-defense and firearm training. A set of strategies designed for a brutal world.

Initially, I was taken aback by their approach. I was a bit of a purist when it came to racial justice and saw any tinge of collaboration with white supremacy as unacceptable. But like Tim Wise always said, activism starts small, as small as fixing a busted street lamp in a dilapidated inner-city neighborhood. So working out seemed like a very tiny step in the quest to fix our dilapidated media representation and our racial stereotypes as scrawny, small men, despite that knowing in our hearts that whites still decided if and when they wanted swole Asian men on the big screen. That subreddit got me started working out for the first time in a long time and I am forever thankful for that kick in the butt. But I still needed something that went deeper. Like Alex Tizon, the (late) author of "Big Little Man" said, "No amount of grunting in the weight

room could turn me into (big) Kim".

r/Aznidentity was my second home and it had already amassed with some of the sharpest Asian thinkers on race, media representation and Asian sexuality. Once again, the members are practical-minded, which I felt complimented my more theoretical perspectives with free feedback and ammunition in the form of real-life examples. The subreddit is always flooded with a large variety issues facing Asian people who are living in the West: affirmative action, bullying, harassment, Eurocentrism (欧洲中心论), which include the usual baggage such as "white worship" (白色崇拜), skin whitening, dyeing's one's hair blonde or anglicizing one's name, and things about moving abroad or finding a suitable location to settle down.

Now, by far the most popular topic on r/Aznidentity at that point was the wedge between Asian men and women living in the West, of how Asian women were being uplifted by white supremacy at the expense of Asian men. To people who are out of the loop, this issue may seem perplexing at first glance because Asian women are penalized both racially and on the gender level, so it seems absurd to suggest that they in fact have some form of a "leg-up" as compared to Asian men. Many members were critical of the so-called "Westernized" Asian women, not only in the area of interracial relationships with white

men but also in their interaction with Asian men. Some common protestations included,

- Asian women dating or marrying any white man no matter how shoddy his qualifications were as compared to an Asian man of similar or even greater class status.
- Asian women intentionally putting down Asian men, cruelly rejecting them based on physical features (e.g., engaging in heightism), psychological attributes, or simply giving them the silent treatment. One example is the stand-up “comedian” Esther Ku, who often relies on offensive anti-Asian male stereotypes in her comedy.
- Asian women ignoring the history of pain, racism, classism, sexism so frequently leveraged against Asian men AND Asian women in order to climb the racial ladder and contribute to white supremacy. Mitch McConnell and Elaine Chao come to mind.
- Asian women dating or marrying avowed white supremacists, e.g., Tila Tequila, wife of John Derbyshire. The examples here are tragically large.

- Asian women getting raped or murdered by their white partners, often one with a shoddy background to begin with. The tragic death of Anna “Karissa” Grandine, a Filipino-Canadian woman, along with her unborn child, offers one such example. The murder of Mengmei Leng from Sydney is yet another.
- Asian women ignoring the issues facing Asian men either through trivializing these issues or re-focusing the attention onto themselves through charges of sexism. A few members referred to this as “Asian female fragility”.
- The over-abundance of White Male Asian Female pairing (WMAF) as compared to the reverse situation, Asian Male White Female (AMWF). Asian women enjoyed widespread positive media representation as compared to Asian men.



If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.

– *The Thomas Theorem of Sociology, 1928.*



Robin DiAngelo once said in passing that the racial hurt to non-white people was deeper coming from white women, because as women, sexism is a way into seeing the structure of racism. So it was easy for me to imagine how deep the hurt is to an Asian man when the emotional wounds are perpetrated by Asian women. I used the word “imagine” because I never held any serious romantic relationship with a woman before.

Of course, r/Aznidentity’s stance brought upon many detractors, both from other subreddits, white supremacist hate forum, but also liberal progressive circles. I knew that by joining in the discussion I would be labeled by some as a misogynist, an “Asian male supremacist”, or an “incele”, but my racial training has taught me to never dismiss the pain of non-whites and instead listen to them.

I never dated during college, so analyzing a topic as inflamed as the battle of the sexes necessarily took some effort and I needed ammunition to fuel my arguments. This lead me to Rosalind Chou, one of the most important sociologist studying the intersectionality between race and sexuality today, who specializes in Asian sexuality. Her joint work with Joe Feagin, a professor at Texas A&M University, titled “Asian American Sexual Politics” (AASP)

《亚裔美国人的性政治》was a shocking read. It is an awe-inspiring, excruciatingly carefully researched, and

truly sublime masterpiece on the sociology of sexuality and race and I would urge any Asian person living in the West to read it. It is our “White Fragility”. Each page of AASP is overflowing with insightful statements such as,

Bonilla-Silva has formulated a tri-racial model where a few Asian Americans are categorized as whites, and largely East and Asian Indian Americans are “honorary whites”...However, if a gender component were added to Bonilla-Silva’s model, these classifications would be insufficient. Asian American men, especially those with East Asian roots, would be in the lowest tier of the intersected order.

– Chou and Feagin, AASP, p. 116.

Bonilla-Silva, the author of “Racism without Racists” 《没有种族主义者的种族主义》, was then (and still is) one of the most recognizable public-facing sociologists in the United States, who later also became the president of the American Sociological Association, so seeing his model being referred to as “insufficient” invoked many thoughts. *Maybe what I was taught in my undergraduate sociology class was also insufficient to understand my problems.* Indeed, unlike black folks, where the most salient aspect of their identity is their blackness. For Asian folks,

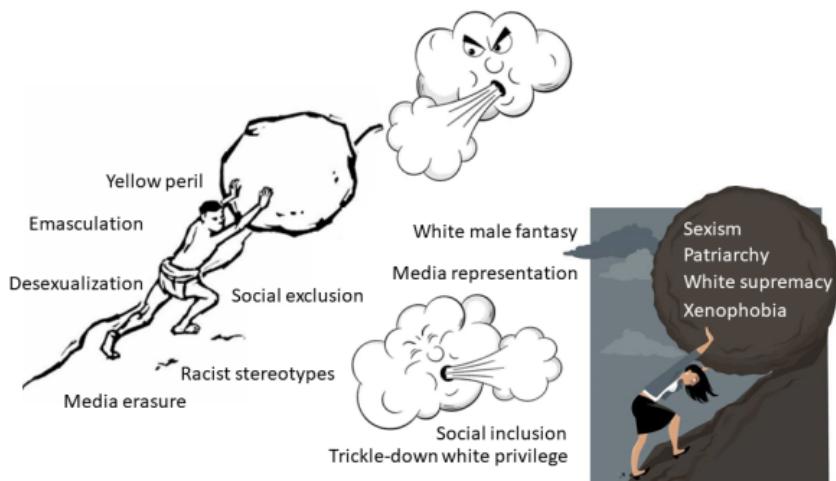
the salience of our sexuality could be said to be on par with our Asianness. We are full of pressure points.

Her book had a serious side-effect and that is being extremely painful to read because I felt my life was being analyzed under a microscope. It contained interview excerpts such as "*I look for predominantly white males as partners, specifically those who are over 5'10" in height, with similar education level, and are career ambitious. I prefer white men because they are more independent and don't have a tendency to be as needy as Asian men in relationships.*" (by Diana, a Chinese American female senior)" My mind went, *could this have been one of the reasons that I was never able to date anyone during my college years?* At this time I also started registering the truly staggering amount of WMAF couples not only out and about, but also in the media and in my personal life.

As Chou remarked, "*while it is tempting to shrug off racial romantic preferences as natural or accidental, they are in fact guided by a larger racial hierarchy and are political in nature.*" It was painfully obvious what was going on. White men have desired for Asian women since the colonial days and they have constructed an entire society geared at luring Asian women into their laps while simultaneously putting up social barriers for Asian men. The media, various social functions, dating websites, ad-

vertisements, and the music industry are all involved in this racist power struggle. And as if the constant manufacturing and reproduction of a hegemonic white male supremacy wasn't enough on the part of the whites, a large amount Asian women have given their consent, buying into the negative racial stereotypes of Asian men, while ignoring the racial pain that white supremacy has inflicted upon...just about everyone. While part of it is about survival in a white supremacist society, more of it seems to be a matter of choice: Asian women deliberately trading their sexual appeal (part of it carefully engineered by the white man through his media) for racial status, for those precious droplets of trickled-down white privilege.

But I think the real pain to many Asian men comes from this fear that we are being unfairly selected in the Darwinian sense. Selected for elimination. The hurt and fear is down to the biological level and it goes much deeper than physical or emotional pain. It is a betrayal at the cellular level. Added onto this pain is the inability to do much about it, except for self-improvement, which compounds the injustice. White people never seems to need to "self-improve" in order to procreate. In fact, no other racial group of men (aside from Indigenous men living on settler lands) seem to have such dire concerns.



But that is the point of white supremacy—to ensure that that which all others achieve with maximal effort, white people (and particularly white men) achieve with minimal qualification.

— Ta-Nehisi Coates, “We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy”



5.1 A Tiny Drop of Antidote

I realized then I had to look for something, anything to help my people in this situation. Obviously confronting various media personalities who are perpetuating these forms of inequalities could only go so far, and it came with a hefty risk of being dismissed as raging misogyny. Confronting people in real life is also largely out of the question when one takes into consideration the innumerable personal setbacks that would entail. In fact, these topics cannot be discussed too openly in online spaces as these activism subreddits can always be banned at the whim of a few white men. There's no safety in a white space.



The crushing of the colonized is included among the colonizer's values. As soon as the colonized adopts those values, he similarly adopts his own condemnation. In order to free himself, at least so he believes, he agrees to destroy himself. . . . Just as many people avoid showing off their poor relations, the colonized in the throes of assimilation hides his past, his traditions, in fact all his origins which have become ignominious.

— Albert Memmi, 1965

Of course, what is the root of the problem, and what can be done on the individual level to effect change? Some of the problems I have mentioned to you, such as the WMAF phenomenon, can be at least partly explained by the effects of growing up Asian in a white supremacist society. We refer to this problem as “internalized white supremacy” (内心白人至上) or “internalized racial oppression” (内心种族压迫). It is a racial take on the idea of *manufactured consent* by Hermann and Chomsky, and is related to the concept of *discipline* by Michel Foucault. This is also a very old topic, that has been researched at least since the ’40s with the Clarks’ doll experiments and have been written extensively by people such as Frantz Fanon. Surely, if an Asian person did not love him or herself, he or she would attempt to avoid all things Asian, things that reminded them of their selves. And if such a thing was not avoidable, then they would create mental shortcuts to justify why a separation existed between them and the Asian object of their disapproval. The white society provides them with these shortcuts in the form of racial stereotypes, perpetual foreignness, imagined body parts.

I was eventually able to dig up a paper titled “Asian Americans and Internalized Racial Oppression: Identified, Reproduced, and Dismantled” by Monica M. Trieu and Hana C. Lee. This research paper was instrumental in

helping me to see the solution.

These researchers found that in the stages of the lives of young Asian folks growing up in white supremacist Western societies such as the US, Canada and Australia, many if not most experience a universal desire to be white, coupled with a disassociation from anything Asian-related. As an example, one Korean American adoptee said "*I'm a Twinkie...don't be mistaken, I might look Asian but I really am white.*" Another Hmong interviewee said, "*I just want to be an American. I just want to have blonde hair, blue eyes so that nobody would judge me or that nobody would discriminate against me.*" Or taking an example out of my own life, in high school I had a hair-style that imitated whites, despite that many of them had straight hair and mine was soft. I prevented myself from establishing real connections with the other Asian kids in the school because I perceived them to be nerdy outcasts and I saw myself as above them by my association with whites, no matter how little that these white people loved or cared for me.

Healing eventually came about through later acceptance of their Asian identities and/or engagement in activism after being exposed to Asian organizations, history, or people. From another interviewee, after reading the murder of Vincent Chen (陳果仁謀殺案) and the Yellow

Power movement that followed, remarked “*Yellow Power was about a counter-narrative to white supremacy...Yellow Power was inherently about solidarity because they were trying to form a Pan-Asian movement before it existed.*” My critical exposure was the introduction to Asian activism subreddits such as r/Aznidentity and it was instrumental for me to find my healing. As the author remarked, *our results show how the critical exposures and emergence of a critical consciousness led respondents to resist the white racial frame of whiteness as normative and embrace a more positive self-image as Asian Americans. We find in this research that, at the individual level, change (or “healing”) is possible when racial subordinates are critically exposed to their own racialized and oppressed position.* This tells me that we must continue to promulgate our forgotten history, highlight our unique issues and spread our experiences of anti-Asian racism far and wide, no matter who hears. It is one of the least demanding thing we could do to meaningfully rescue our people.



The candidate for assimilation almost always comes to tire of the exorbitant price which he must pay and which he never finishes owing. He discovers with alarm the

full meaning of his attempt. It is a dramatic moment when he realizes that he has assumed all the accusations and condemnations of the colonizer, that he is becoming accustomed to look at his own people through the eyes of their procurer. . . . Must he, all of his life, be ashamed of what is most real in him, of the only things not borrowed?

– Albert Memmi, 1965



I started writing this letter to you just before Christmas, the season of whiteness. Unlike you, where Christmas is based on your conditional participation, for us it is a ritual and there is no escape as long as you live in the West.

This is the time of the year when every radio station starts playing white musicians in tacit agreement without our consent. Remixes of music from the 30s - 60s, at the apex of white imperial power. Cheerful white people, beckoning us to be cheerful with and for them. White people sure love a content colonized man, from the late Charley Pride to Nathan Apodaca, the Ocean Spray cranberry justice skater whose video went viral amidst the pandemic. Any non-white person celebrated in the media is but another brick to be forcefully shoved into the cathedral of whiteness.

I've spoken to you just now about the stages of evolution, from internalized oppression to self-healing. But what creates such internalized oppression in the first place? It doesn't make much to notice, just turn on the TV. The movie of the season is "Die Hard" featuring Bruce Willis, a typical "white man saves the day" type of movie. Just imagine how many times a young Asian person growing up in the West is exposed to this "sacred tradition". The media integrates their sense of pleasure, joy, with white supremacy, white masculinity and white power. Whiteness became their food and filled their empty stomach.

Come, let me show you just how deep the rabbit hole goes.



These ceremonials in honor of white supremacy, performed from babyhood, slip from the conscious mind down deep into muscles...and become difficult to tear out.
—Lillian Smith, "Killers of the Dream", 1949



Chapter 6

A New Kind of Asian

Dear friend,

when I met you, you were like a gift to me sent from on high. Whereas I was fascinated by contemporary Chinese culture, you were juggling your way through both academic life as well as the corporate culture here in the West, things that I was well equipped to help you with. We were such a perfect match for each other. I was so excited when you introduced me to all these fresh and hip Chinese social media apps such as BiliBili and Douyin, it would have been daunting for me to navigate on my own. Through our conversations, I got a glimpse at what people were interested in back home. Little shards of lives,

unfettered by the chains of anti-Asian racism here in the West.

Likewise, I started to share Western media with you. But I soon became sad, because so much of it is constructed based on the exaltation of whiteness, which forms a dichotomy to the downright indignation or erasure of Asian men. Unlike you who grew up with all these Chinese celebrities, the start of my journey was accompanied by the grotesque display of Asian emasculation by mainstream jesters such as Gedde Watanabe (*Sixteen Candles*), Bobby Lee (*MADtv*), Ken Jeong (*MADtv*, *Hangover*) and Matthew Moy (*Two Broke Girls*) of the world. We've mostly exited that era, with some of these characters fading to obscurity, only to enter yet another grotesque age with the likes of Asian Andy and various "Rice" characters such as RiceMan and RiceGum. There are no safe spaces for non-white people on social media of the West.

The fact I was unable to share my world with you was revelatory for me. It put a lot of theory into practice. It pointed to the way that white supremacy functions in the West, which starts by taking control of all our pleasure senses. It is all incredibly mainstream. As an example, Youtube kindly recommended me a 2-minute clip from 2015, titled, 'Jean-Claude Van Damme Recreates His "Kick-

boxer' Dance Scene - CONAN on TBS”¹. In this video, Conan O'Brien invites Jean-Claude Van Damme to recreate a dance scene from a 1989 movie called “Kickboxer”. A brief clip, viewed 46 million times, contained the following sequence of imagery,

1. A dingy bar in Thailand filled with questionable looking Asian men,
2. A muscular white man dances in a skimpy muscle-tee while being surrounded by multiple admiring Asian girls, as the song “Feeling so good today” by Beau Williams is played in the background,
3. Several Asian men, seemingly unprompted, walks up to the white man and starts a fight,
4. Said white man easily defeats multiple Asian men.

All these scenes are displayed with riotous laughter from the background audience, especially at the expressions of those Asian men. Loud applause can be heard after the clip ends (this is right after the Asian man gets punched in the nose). Conan then invites Jean-Claude

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aztdMwYrF4k&ab_channel=TeamCoco

to recreate the scene live. Two Asian-looking guys joins the stage with them, starts a fight totally unprompted, and again gets “defeated” by Jean-Claude. As they lay on the ground motionless, Conan joins Jean-Claude in a celebratory dance to the roaring applause of the audience.

This clip perfectly captures so many elements of Asian emasculation and normalized white supremacist racial hierarchy that we face in the West. White pleasure is predicated on Asian men’s pain, black man’s labor (the song was sung by a black man), and consent from Asian women. The approval from the audience and the host normalizes the clearly racialized interaction. In the movie, the white man becomes a hero (literally, “white warrior”), and defeats an Asian rapist, which also perversely reverses the direction of sexual violence in modern-day sex tourism. The only Asian character who was able to briefly defeat the white men in this movie was the rapist, who was portrayed by the Moroccan actor Mohammed Quissi, who is definitely not Thai.

Something else interesting that lingers on my mind about that clip was that Van Damme was dancing in a very unusual, twerky, almost in campy queer kind of way... ponder upon this, as I will soon provide you with my own interpretation.

Needless to say even in the absence of the visual, anti-

Asian racism can still achieve mainstream popularity. For example, a popular genre in 2020 is “electro-swing”, an anachronistic mixture of electro-jazz and swing music from the 30s. One most popularly played song in this genre is “Booty swing” by Pavro Stelar. The song, which was created in 2014, samples from Lil Hardin Armstrong from 1938, and it says clearly in its lyrics:

*Now, in the land of Fu Manchu, The girls all now do
the Suzie-Q, Clap their hands in the center of the floor,
Saying, “Ching, ching, chop-suey, swing some more!” Now,
geisha girls in old Japan, Wink behind their peacock fans,
Since they learned to say, “Yeah! Let’s swing it like [sic]
Amelican’s swing swing dance!”*

A single clip containing this song was played over 64 million times by the end of 2020 on Youtube. Old-school racism, colonialism, yellow peril, anti-Chinese/Japanese sentiments all rolled up into a single crunchy soundbite, life breathed anew. I couldn’t help but notice that white pleasure is again conditioned on Asian pain and black labor. Lil Hardin Armstrong is black.

Much of this daily denigration is unintentional, manufactured through a web of social media personalities eager to get their names out there or to make a quick buck. What

can feel more pernicious are ones that are intentional. As Nancy Wang Yuen, the author of "Reel Inequality"《电影不平等》, points out, Hollywood producers have a long history of deliberately fostering racial bias in their productions. Likewise, the production of the Asian male body on screen is also subjected to strict manufacturing standards. Chong-suk Winter Han, the author of "Geisha of A Different Kind: Race and Sexuality in Gaysian America"《不同种类的艺妓: 亚裔同志种族与性论》meticulously documents multiple ways that Asian male body is emasculated in the media:

1. Juxtaposition of a large white male body with a small Asian male body, thus using the smaller Asian man to highlight the masculinity of white men. The entire career of Bobby Lee is exploited by whites in the production of this effect. I would also add that another version along the same line is the juxtaposition of the tall white male body with squat but not necessarily small Asian body. The contrast between Wong and Dr. Strange typifies this, as well as that of the Spider Man portrayed by Tom Holland and his best friend Ned Leeds, portrayed by the Filipino actor Jacob Batalon.
2. Infantilization of the Asian Male Bodies by painting

Asian men as deliberately small, immature, childish. I would add that the media goes further by directly putting the Asian man in the metaphorical crib, especially as (surrogate) child in the care of a white man. *Gran Torino*, *From Dusk Till Dawn*, and *Up* all serve as examples here.

3. Using Asian Male Bodies as the Comic Punchline. Han from *Two Broke Girls* exemplifies this, as do Ken Jeong's character from the *Hangover* series.

Just as the media constructs the hyper-masculine black man, the feeble, sexually inadequate Asian man is also a key ingredient in the construction of the normalized white male representation. And what is normal becomes normative.



If you can only be tall because someone else is on their knees, then you have serious problem. And white people have a very, very serious problem.

-Toni Morrison



What is the ultimate logic behind emasculation? Chong-Suk Han provided a hint when he mentioned that another tactic of emasculation is by putting *the Asian Man as the “wife” to white men*. One only needs to take one glance at the Western media landscape to note that most of the biggest, most mainstream Asian actors are gay, such as, Bowen Yang (SNL), B. D. Wong (Jurassic Park, Mulan), George Takei (Star Trek). Countless mainstream Asian celebrities, such as Bobby Lee, Ken Jeong, Matthew Moy (Two Broke Girls), Alex Landi (Grey’s Anatomy), Jack Yang (Grey’s Anatomy) have portrayed either gay or effeminate men. Not only do these actors portray gay Asian men, they also exclusively go on to have relationships with white men. Nearly all other Asian men in the media are portrayed as sexless, nerdy, inept. There hasn’t existed a mainstream, sexually successful Asian man on the big screen for ages. I have rarely even seen an Asian man and an Asian woman on the same screen.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The most extreme disparity can be found in the gay Asian community. In Western gay pornography, Asian men are almost always portrayed as “submissive bottoms” in one-sided interracial-relationships, often exclusively with whites. The web is littered with the visceral display of physical domination of the Asian male body, solely for the enjoyment of his

white partner. I can say without hesitation that the racism facing gay Asian men in the West is one of the starker forms of sexual racism in the modern world and there is virtually no assistance, no education, no knowledge to guide or to help Asian men who find themselves trapped in such positions.

My dear friend, I am speaking directly to you now because I fear that only a few will understand me. If you believe that racism and white supremacy is truly wicked down to the core, that racism seeps into the taboo, that racism can easily morph the minds of young men and women into hating the very skin that they inhabit, that white supremacy masquerades itself as liberal values, if you believe that all statistics hits hard on our biological bodies, then it is not so hard to consider my perhaps unorthodox and radical proposals:

1. Western society engineers gay Asian men.

2. Because power is physically transmitted across time through sexual reproduction, one of the most extreme way that Western society can forbid Asian men from gaining power is by taking away their

reproductive power with women.

3. Many Asian men consent into identifying as homosexuals, unwittingly relegating themselves into a permanent racial and sexual under-class.

A duality of sorts emerges:

1. Western society engineers Asian women who desire for white men.
2. Because power is physically transmitted across time through sexual reproduction, the most extreme way that Western society can forbid Asian people from gaining power is by locking their reproductive power with white men.
3. Many Asian women consent into relationships with white men, relegating themselves into a racial upper-class at the price of their Asianness.

How can such grand social engineering be taking place without any of us knowing about? My intuition tells me,

guided by all the things I've witnessed in my life, the manufacturing process looks something like this,

1. A young Asian man who does not possess the body type of mainstream white American masculine ideals, propagated by the media, wishes to conform to those idealized bodies of white men.
2. They imitate them through body-work (e.g., exercise, diet) or covet them from a distance, a distance created by racial segregation.
3. Western society simultaneously tells young men that imitation of the body is "homosexual behavior", this sows the seed into young Asian men that their behavior is deviant, that perhaps they themselves are homosexuals.
4. In racially oppressive environments, meaningful social interaction with females is limited or denied. The young Asian man finds himself alone with no guidance and these thoughts just compound onto themselves, layer by layer. For example, when I was growing up, even pornography showing Asian men and (any) women were non-existent in the West.

5. After prolonged and repeated rinsing through this cycle, homosexuality is manufactured in the young Asian man.

So what is the point of realizing that white supremacy had a hand at crafting one's sexual preference or sexuality? To me, perhaps it is necessary for young Asian people to bring a racial awareness angle into our relationships. Otherwise, how can you say that someone really loves you, when such love is merely an intended outcome of mass assembly?

6.1 A New Kind of Future

While I have painted a bleak picture of the type of toxic media environment facing Asian men in the West, my life experience has taught me that every portrayal, however negative, fill a niche, a void. They shows us what cannot be, so we can contemplate on what could be. After all, the media keeps their grotesque white figures on the big screen and even parades them. But instead of emphasizing them, as they do to the Asian bodies, whites employs them to accentuate their idealized bodies. The metamorphosis from the scrawny, short, unmanly Steve Rogers to the muscly, square-jawed Captain America exemplifies such machination.

Our heroes have begun to emerge and we need to rally behind them, all the while rejecting or minimizing the impact of those who we do not wish to portray us. Here are just a few of these changes that are taking place in my life-time,

- In the Hollywood industry, Bobby Lee, Matthew Moy and Ken Jeong of the world have given rise to charming and unapologetic Asian American actors such as John Cho, who has portrayed a rare Asian father figure in the hit movie “Searching”. We have also seen Asian American media figures such as David Chang and Hudson Yang, who defy the on-screen traditional Asian male body. Alex Tizon would be proud. What is more interesting are “imported” Asian figures such as Donnie Yen and Jiang Wen in major Hollywood blockbusters such as “Star Wars: Rogue One”. This is not to mention the rising popularity of oversea Chinese, Japanese and Korean media and the on-going development of a unique Chinese Hollywood industry.
- In stand-up comedy, Asian “comedians” such as Esther Ku have been paved over by Ronny Chieng, who have achieved enormous mainstream success.

- In the music scene, groups such as Notorious MSG gave rise to people such as MC Jin ("Still a Chink") and China Mac. Jin has since acquired new found fame and freedom in mainland China. The image associated with "hard" Westcoast rappers such as \$tupid Young, Youngmain and Jay Park has long since overturned the racist imagination of Asian male singers during the William Hung days of the early 2000s. This is simultaneously coupled with the growth of home-grown Chinese and Korean rappers such as Higher Brothers. The rap music industry in China is expected to continue to grow, along with the popularity of the shows such as "The Rap of China" and "Hip Hop Man". Two decades later, I can finally see myself being represented in the media. I can finally imagine myself singing.
- In politics, which in the West is nearly synonymous with entertainment, for every Gordon Chang, there is a Weihua Chen. And for every Elaine Chao, there is an Andrew Yang and a Ted Lieu.

This makes me upbeat for the future. A future filled with brand new kinds of Asians. This also makes me hopeful for someone who will bring our liberation and

end our suffocation. Our Asian Rosa Parks, our Asian MLK Jr., our Asian Malcolm X. Some of the people who are gaining momentum on social media include Carl Zha, and on the ground, China Mac. But many of them are too far away from the sites of oppression: the classrooms, the playgrounds, the locker rooms, and the corporate offices.

The fate of Chinese people living in the West, and indeed all Asian people, rises and falls along with those of our fellow kinfolks back home. The future of Asian activism in my imagination would involve Asian folks who can bridge both worlds. Someone who is fluent in Quora as well as Zhihu, someone who masters Youtube as well as Youku and other social media platforms. You are our biggest untapped resource.

My friend, our combined power will shake the earth.

Part III

THE FINAL VOYAGE



Chapter 7

Looking Across the Pacific

Dear friend,

ever since graduating I have had plenty of opportunities to visit China and every visit left me jaw-dropped at just the incredible pace of development of this place. From the exceptionally modern high-speed rails and subway system to the fancy restaurants, full of so many delicious treats that I've never even heard of. China has truly blossomed.

Going back to China also serves as a poignant reminder of what I've lost. I am reminded of that one time I went back with my mother, the very first thing we did was to visit all the places that I never been to as a child. I demanded it. I wanted my childhood back.

We visited Beihai park just a few hours after getting off of the plane. The only adjective I can use to describe that place is *serenity*. There was a children's song playing near the canteen by the lake and the lyrics went something like this,

...Little boat softly rocking afloat, in the middle of the water, as a cool zephyr softly blew in my face...

– “*Let’s paddle together*”, 1955

My eyes become wet whenever I think about this song. All these years of pain, agony, regret, all rolled up into one. The price our family paid was too high. Much too high. This song also reminded me of how much I wanted to see my friends from elementary school again and paddle ourselves down the river. Reunited. No more dreams.

Later that day, we watched Kung Fu Panda II together with my family. Again, if you knew the plot then you would know why it absolutely crushed me. A panda who had lost everything due to a white peacock, with all of the obvious symbolism. Every moment while sitting in that theater reminded me of what I've lost. China is my ultimate heartache. Don't you see, you are a reminder of that heartache.

But above all else, I went back to seek peace of my mind. There were peaceful times, but my mind was constantly abuzz, comparing, and contrasting. The traces of neo-colonialism were everywhere, the relics of white supremacy littered the landscape. For example, we went to a dining franchise called “Mr. Lee” and of course, the first poster of the place that greeted me was an Asian man half bowing in front of a white man, getting his approval of his California beef noodle soup. *Does whiteness make Beef noodle soups taste better in slumbering minds?* On the highway were many billboards featuring blonde hair, blue-eyed white family, apparently enjoying some exhibit somewhere. *Does white approval make fun more enjoyable?*

Those white gaze were still with me, no matter how far I ran. My friend, don’t ever let them do this to you, for they would never return the favor for us no matter how much we beg.

When I’m feeling down, there is a part of me longing for my chance to go back to China again, and with luck, settle down, recuperate, start a new life, build a base of young Asian folks fully prepared for the trials and tribulations they will face here in the West. No more exploited children. Of course, there are plenty of counter-arguments to my proposal. More souls can be rescued and more damage can be dealt right where I am, so why bother starting all over

again? And of course, this is what my tormentors have always wanted. They relish in our permanent departure; they would buy me a one-way first-class ticket if they have to. They hate living with their still-living victims. Our very presence is a mirror to their depravity and I'm not ready to let them have their day. Perhaps I never will.

7.1 The New Red Scare

My friend, you have expressed some wishes in the past of obtaining some form of naturalized residency here. A friendly piece of advice: should you ever obtain a citizenship in the West, I want you to remember that to whites there is no such thing as nationality or citizenship, race trumps them all, specifically only the fictive chasm between whites and non-whites.

When you are white, you could be the devil himself and they will be happy to exculpate your sins. When you are a non-white, you could be a saint and they will still press charges against you. And when you get on the “white-government” radar, they will resort to any subterfuge just to see you are dead, locked up, or deported (sent into exile). You should read up how the FBI blackmailed MLK Jr. in the 1960s, urging him to commit suicide.

The threat against Chinese nationals or Chinese de-

scents living in the US, and indeed anywhere in the west, is constant. Any technology even remotely associated with anything “Chinese” – Chinese American, Chinese company, Chinese descent three generations removed – it doesn’t (and never) matter, is subjected to close monitoring. In the past two years we’ve seen the repeated trumped up charges against companies such as Huawei, Zoom, TikTok with not a shred of evidence. There will be a period of moral outrage, followed by radio silence because the initial “evidence” is either falsified or exaggerated. Whites even forced the owners of Grindr to sell just because they were Chinese. Now why would Chinese owners jeopardize the world’s most profitable and biggest gay app? The charge is always the *concerns of* spying or *concerns of* intellectual property violation, even when said intellectual property was created in parts at the hands of Chinese engineers. Their modus operandi speaks loud and clear: guilty by association, guilty until proven innocent.

If you ever want to know just how tightly their gaze is fixated upon us, look no further than the case of Xue-hua Edward Peng, who was accused of doing a “dead-drop” of some unspecified “classified” US information. His ordinary-looking hotel room in Northern California was rigged with dozens of cameras and audio recorders. The news never followed up just on exactly what he stole, but

whatever it was, it is not serious enough to be charged for more than 4 years with a fine of \$30,000. This pales in comparison to the multi-million dollar bribery scandal uncovered in 2019 involving admissions to top American universities. The white man who orchestrated the bribery, arguably one of the biggest scandals in modern American history, served a 1-day prison sentence with a fine of \$10,000. As Edward Snowden once described, when you contemplate on the ways on how American intelligence operatives function, and how they get to know what they know, you would have to come to the realization that we live in an open-air prison. A panopticon. Once you get on their radar, every action is tracked, scrutinized. There is no anonymity in the West; why else would Google, famous for collaborating with the US military in creating surveillance drones, ask you to provide your phone number just to register an email account?

As John Cho once said, "*for Asian Americans, our belonging is conditional*". Don't think for a moment just because you are "innocent" therefore they won't ever come a-knockin' at your door. Just read up on the long list of stories of exonerated Chinese academics and industry researchers such as Xiaoxing Xi from Temple University. When his initial charges were dropped, the FBI forged evidence against him. It wasn't enough to simply accuse

an innocent victim, but they had to make sure that he was permanently silenced, locked-up, to cover up their mis-handling of the evidence. Closely related is the on-going case of Sherry Chen, a hydrologist with decades of working experience in the US, who – in a Big-Brother-esque move – was given up to the US national security agency by a presumably white colleague for alleged spying. From her detailed recount of her story, she was merely trying to apply a known solution to a comparable situation that her relative living in China had faced. Clearly to some white people, benefiting humanity beyond the physical boundaries of their stolen land is a national security concern.

Any normal collaboration between Chinese academics in the West and those in the East are subjected to extreme scrutiny by the FBI, CIA, or other Western military-related agencies, looking for any opportunity to make us disappear. There is the story of award-winning Ebola scientist Xiangguo Qiu, who was escorted by the Canadian military for sending samples to a Chinese lab...for a collaborative project. *Is academic collaboration possible under the white gaze?* Two white scientists came out to vouch for her, telling the public that it is “routine to share pathogens”, “there is also no market for the Ebola virus”, “definitely not espionage” and finally that “Xiangguo is known for her integrity”. As of the end of 2020, this story has been too

swept under the rug by the media and it appears Xiangguo has been quietly rehired. She is now only mentioned in fringe conspiracy theory forums, alleging that she was responsible for creating COVID-19, something that she has zero expertise in. White media never cleans up their libel.

It is not paranoid to suggest that even this letter to you will probably be read by intelligence operatives hundreds of times scouring for clues, deciphering my true identity, determining my threat level to “national security”. They are probably thinking: “is this written by some Chinese operative try to mobilize our blacks? ” As long as you are tangentially related to China, you will be besieged in a way that few writers or thinkers on sensitive matters can ever even comprehend. Black people writing about black pain is expected, of little concern. White people writing about black pain is expected, within the realms of imagination. But Asians writing about Asian pain? About black pain? The mere existence of an outspoken Asian man is always seen as the straw that finally breaks the camel’s back.

This is yet another way that white supremacy upends my relationships and severs my connections. I have been forced to write about my thoughts and feelings in complete anonymity for two decades, never once breaking character. The few times I was contacted by other anonymous people

online, either soliciting information or discussing ideas bridging together some sort of anti-racist alliance, I was always very quick to cut them off the moment I felt my identity was jeopardized and then spend the next months erasing my digital footsteps or pretending to be dead. A digital suicide. It is so ritualistic at this time that I feel no loss at tossing away accounts and I am completely anesthetized to my severed online relationships. This little game of hide and seek shows that the West exemplifies the “Big Brother” boogeyman that they have drilled into the heads of our impressionable youth as something that only belongs to their nations’ enemies. There is no genuine online relationship to be had for Chinese descents like us living in the West.

There is a Wikipedia page dedicated to a list of alleged Chinese spies. But I’ve noticed,

1. There was no list for the un-imaginably long list of “white American” perpetrators of intellectual property theft.
2. Qian Xuesen, who is arguably one of the first major case of Chinese spying, was not a part of this list. We all know why. Whites in power are terrified of inspiring a new generation of Asian people to bring

our knowledge back home, knowing that our lives could be upended in the West at any moment by some falsified evidence against us.



...in continuing to find or invent enemies across the globe, expand what is already the largest military force in the world, and add to an elaborate global network of military bases, all in the name of national or global “security”, does not the United States today resemble Mrs. Winchester (of the haunted Winchester Mystery House fame) constantly trying to foil her ghosts?

— Dunbar-Ortiz, “*An Indigenous People’s History of the United States*”, p. 235.



My friend, I wonder if I will ever join you back home. This is something only time will tell. In the mean time I will continue to dig up stories of people like me who have made their decision and see if a new kind of freedom can be found, for living my present life of thought-crime is living no life at all.

Our Final Goodbye

Dear friend,

so what do you think about my journey? My face turns red at the thought that you finally got to know the *real me*.

I know by now you are probably wondering who I am. Say what, I will tell you personally one day should your suspicions lead you to me. Drop me a sign. I'm all ears. And here is something else I know, by the time you reach out to me, I would know that you are ready and you would have grown, or at least you would have gotten over your shock at figuring out who I am. I wish you will find me and we will have a good laugh at all of this.

But don't fret if you never do. I never had any real

friends, even less who I told an ounce of my life to, so finding me is like finding a needle in a haystack. This being said, it is a small world after all. I may pass by you every single day on your way to work. I am the person that you least suspect. I am the person who sits across from you on the bus on your way home. My footsteps and traces are all over the internet. You could easily chance upon something that a younger me wrote. You never know.

The same goes for the ones who had hurt me in the past. You never know.



One bright and early morning about two years ago, guided by sheer curiosity, I went to the Native and Indigenous people's section of our campus and went into their library. It was a tiny and confined space, yet it was filled with books, books that look as if they haven't been checked out in decades. So much knowledge and stories of pain, just like this one, that will never see the light of day. Likewise, all the books on anti-racist works by the wonderful, courageous and intelligent people — Asian, Black, White, Indigenous, Latinx — I have mentioned are too silently gathering dust at all the libraries from around

the world. I am hopeful that all these seeds that we have planted will bloom in a more enlightened age. I really hope that you give them a read with an open mind.

Given the extremely brief amount of time I've allocated to complete this letter to you, there are bound to be much left unsaid. My deepest secrets and most radical ideas have not yet been shared. But don't worry, I will one day compose another letter to you, maybe simply on top of this one. This is the benefit of not being beholden to anyone: not the publishers, not the research grant committee, not the editors. I'm just writing for me, you, and my people.

I must continue on. There are so much I still do not yet understand about race, sexuality and their intersections. Seeing the connection between them is like piecing together a giant puzzle. I must solve it in order to discover the meaning of my life. But I get the feeling I can finally move on now from my past. My story has been told, and that young boy who was huddling against a dead tree so many years ago has been found, and with your love, in time, he too will heal.



Goodbye, my dear friend.

再见了, 同学。