



hardboiled

an asian american newsmagazine

9.4

in this issue:

- memoirs of a geisha review
- china and the environment
- racist t-shirts are back again
- desegregation of chinatown schools

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editor's note

As I sit here looking at my blank screen and blinking cursor I'm reminded of all the times I've sat down to write a school paper and tell myself that this editor's note is supposed to be fun. No pressure, my fellow editors tell me as they say be creative and write about whatever's on my mind. But what they don't know is that I barely have time to think about anything else in my life except for school, work, and writing for publications. I could sit here and tell you all what I think about Bush's invasion of privacy scheme or the political cartoons published in Denmark that were offensive to Muslims around the world, but you have all probably heard all there is to hear about these issues and if not, there are articles in this issue to give you perspective. So I'll save you the lecture and move on to bigger and better things.

Be creative, I am reminded again, but it is not as easy to think of a quirky blurb to paste in the editor's note section of the paper as you would all believe it to be. So why are you as readers reading this note right now? Why should you care about what I have to say? Well, I cannot really provide a sufficient answer to that question. But I can tell you that even if my editor's note is not grasping your attention and riveting you to the edge of your seat, this issue of **hardboiled** will knock your socks off. I know that you are all way too busy as your lives wiz right by, thinking about midterms and that hot date you have at the end of the week. But before you throw this paper in the garbage or in your pile of recyclable material that will make a bed for the next homeless person, give **hardboiled** a chance to influence your point of view.

veronica louie
hb story editor

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Two Wongs Don't

Make it Right

by matthew hui

History tends to repeat itself. In 2002, the clothing company Abercrombie & Fitch came under fire for selling racist t-shirts depicting Asian stereotypes with statements such as “Wong Brothers Laundry Service – Two Wongs Can Make It White” and “Buddha Bash – Get Your Buddha On the Floor.” While Abercrombie believed that Asian Americans would take these shirts as a joke and laugh with the rest of the nation, the reaction was quite the opposite. As a result, a national movement to boycott Abercrombie & Fitch emerged. Many Asian American organizations came together to send a clear message to Abercrombie that such shirts were racially offensive.

In response to the boycott, Abercrombie agreed to pull the aforementioned shirts from their shelves and to hold workshops to increase racial sensitivity within their corporation. One would think that after Abercrombie’s debacle, other companies would take note and avoid selling such overtly racist apparel.

Fast-forward to today: the Asian American community is again in an uproar, this time in reaction to the “Oriental” type t-shirts of New Jersey-based Spencer’s Gifts. Compared to Abercrombie’s apparel, Spencer’s shirts display far more reckless use of historical Asian American stereotypes.

For example, take the shirt that reads “Suk Mai Cock Poultry Farm.” This shirt is an obvious and egregious mockery of both the Chinese language and the stereotype of Asians’ poor command over the English language. It is truly unfortunate that this type of prejudice of Asian



Americans can still persist in America.

Another shirt depicting Buddha reads, “I May Be Fat But My Cock is Huge,” deriding the physical appearance of a sacred religious idol and disrespecting Buddhism and Buddhists worldwide. If Spencer’s Gifts had taken a different approach and swapped Buddha with a different religious figure, say Jesus Christ, the Christian Coalition would have come down on Spencer’s Gifts like Cal’s defensive line on Stanford’s quarterback.

Finally, there is a shirt that says, “Hang Out With Your Wang Out” and features a caricature of a slant-eyed, buck-toothed Chinese man that has a queue wearing a rice paddy hat while holding his penis. Such an image makes light of a shameful time in our nation’s history during Chinese Exclusion in the early 1900s, as well as the stereotypical physical shortcomings of Asian men.

In response to these t-shirts, Vanessa Au, a graduate student at San Francisco State University, wrote a petition to Spencer Gifts executives demanding these shirts be taken off the shelves. She vowed to stage a boycott with other Asian Americans in the nation. A week later, Spencer Gifts sent her back a letter apologizing for offending Asian Americans with the t-shirts and pulled them off the racks.

Au’s efforts illustrates the potential social impact an individual can have through communication. She continues to advocate forms of protest against corporations that sell racist or offensive apparel. Learn about her fight: <http://wearingracism.blogspot.com/>.



Surveillance and Unchecked Power

by jeremy chen

Shortly after the September 11th attacks in 2001, President Bush authorized the National Security Agency to monitor international phone calls and e-mails of potential terrorists without warrants. Most surprising is how long the President’s domestic surveillance program operated in secret from Congress and the American public. It was not until December 17th, 2005 that the program was revealed through a *New York Times* report.

When the existence of the surveillance program was revealed, President Bush immediately shifted the focus away from himself by accusing the media of jeopardizing national security. In his national radio address, the President stated, “Yesterday the existence of this secret program was revealed in media reports, after being improperly provided to news organizations. As a result, our enemies have learned information they should not have, and the unauthorized disclosure of this effort damages our national security and puts our citizens at risk.”

Despite his initial chastisement of the media, the President has since abandoned his precarious scapegoating position. In essence, the President had given himself limitless and unchecked power through a veil of secrecy. He has since realized the severity of the public relations damage of his program, which has put himself and his supporters on the defensive.

Legally speaking, the President cannot wiretap phone calls or monitor e-mails without a court issued warrant. In response to legal criticism, the President defended his surveillance program on the basis of two legal principles. First, he argues that Article II of the Constitution gives him the power over all foreign affairs as Commander-in-chief. Secondly, the President

reasons that the resolution passed by Congress on September 14th, 2001 gives him the authority to “use all necessary and appropriate force” against those responsible for the September 11th attacks.

Many in Congress have questioned his logic and reasoning, which are based on his claims of authority over determining “necessary and appropriate force.” Recently there has been division within the Republican Party over support for the President’s program. At a recent hearing, 4 out of 10 Republican Senate Judiciary Committee members expressed concerns about the program.

The most vocal opposition has been New Mexico Republican House Representative, Heather A. Wilson. In February of this year, she has called for a complete review of the program, and has gone as far as to call for changes to Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 “to take into account new technology” to limit government monitoring of foreign communications.

While government officials have declined to officially state how many people have been wiretapped, some sources say thousands and possibly up to 5,000 have been monitored. Recently, Vice President Dick Cheney admitted that many innocent people have had their communications monitored, but that the program has in return saved thousands of lives.

President Bush continues to defend his surveillance program under mounting scrutiny and criticism from both Democrats and Republicans. However most recently, a federal judge has ordered President Bush to release documents and give further details of any information that they he may be withholding about the program.

This program leaves U.S. citizens with many questions, but few answers. The secrecy of the program gives the President unlimited and unchecked power. The government has been built on checks and balances, but the secrecy of the program allows the President to avoid this fundamental American cornerstone. During times of war, to what extent should the U.S. compromise its rights for national security?



An Interview with China's Environment

by eric nguyen

In researching environmental issues in China, this hardboiled writer thought to himself, "What better way to understand these issues than interview the China's environment itself?" Needless to say, it was a little difficult contacting something as abstract as mother-nature.

What is the state of the Chinese economy and what is rate of growth?

Chinese Environment: With all this growth, it is necessary to balance economic growth with environmental vitality. However, this is not the case and the economy continues to grow at a tremendous rate. The gross domestic product (GDP) has sustained 9% growth in the past few years. Comparatively, this is almost 3 times the U.S economy, which grew at 3.5% in 2005. This trend is expected to continue in the coming years.

So what does China's tremendous growth mean for its environment?

To start, only 10% of the 20 billion tons of annual waste water in the country gets treated. That means 18 billion tons of raw sewage and industrial waste goes directly into the rivers and reservoirs, creating a dearth of clean water. It is estimated that 700 million people drink partially polluted water. Only six of China's 27 largest cities meet national water standards, which is still below World Health Organization (WHO) standards. It is no wonder that in the province of Guangzhou, 80% of children 5-7 years old have unhealthy levels of lead in their blood. In Sichuan Province, only two of its hundreds of cities have water treatment plants. Consequently, Chinese scientists have found a relationship between their polluted waters and the high levels of diarrhea, hepatitis A, esophageal liver, and stomach cancer in the country.

Further exacerbating the problem is the poor water management in the country. Half the country's cities face annual water shortages. The northern cities constantly face droughts and the south faces flooding which causes billions of dollars in damage annually. The spatial dilemma of the dry north and wet south prompted the central government to launch the largest water-diversion plan in history. In conjunction with the plan is the Three Gorges dam, which in 2009 will be the largest dam in the world, spanning one mile.

Is the dam an ideal solution for better water management?

It sounds like a win-win situation, with so much flooding in the south, they could send the extra water to the north. Additionally, China would have a "clean" renewable energy source for years to come. It sounds like a great investment, so why are their protests against the Three Gorges Dam?

Though the dam will dramatically increase the country's hydropower, the problems with dams are manifold. At this large of a scale, silt deposits will raise the riverbed level increasingly higher, which will eventually render the dam and power generators useless. More importantly there are social costs. Estimates of 40 million people will be relocated because of the higher water levels upstream from the dam. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which typically would

have no problem funding clean energy source projects, have both refused to fund the environmentally unsound venture. Concerns over the environmental and social impacts have blocked engineering and construction firms in the U.S. from participating in the project. Furthermore, engineers have expressed that the dam will not contribute to flood control. To satisfy the central government's quest for energy, the peasants are left to bear the greatest burden.

What's the skinny on China's air pollution?

China is the second largest emitter of green house gases behind the U.S. Unfortunately, China's biggest problem is its heavy dependence on coal, as 65% of its electricity production comes from burning coal, almost twice as much as the U.S. Besides the blackened skies caused by soot, the burning of coal emits high levels of sulfur dioxide into the air causing acid rain. In 2003, acid rain occurred in 267 monitored cities. Roughly a third of China's land is subject to acid rain, eroding soil, corroding steel, thus causing roughly \$13 billion in damage annually.

In terms of breathable air, 16 of 47 monitored cities met national air quality standards, which are below WHO standards. The cost of bringing air quality levels up to national air quality standards in these key cities is estimated at \$40 billion. Wang Jian, an official with the Chinese State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) stated, "The regional acid rain pollution is still out of control and even worse in some southern cities." More than half of Guangdong Province has been designated as "Acid Rain Control Areas", and as much as 90% of the province's rain is acidic. It is estimated that indoor air pollutants from burning coal alone kills 700,000 people annually.

If coal is so unhealthy why doesn't China just use other energy sources?

This is easier said than done. China has an enormous coal reserve that is enough to last at least another century. However, they have been trying to diversify their overall energy consumption. By 2050, Chinese planners ambitiously hope to cut their coal usage in half and raise their dependence on hydro, wind, and nuclear power. Despite these plans, the amount of pollutants remains extremely unhealthy.

Why doesn't the government do something about it?

The Chinese government has acknowledged the problem and taken measures to change the way they handle environmental issues. The government created its first environmental protection group in the 1980's called the State Environmental Protection Administration. The group created regulations limiting polluting emissions allowed for industry and established a fine system as a deterrent. Factories unable to meet standards were to be shut down. However, enforcement

is a widespread problem. Many local governments simply ignore laws because it would force thousands of factories to shut down, leaving hundreds of thousands unemployed. Also, it is often 5-6 times cheaper to pay the abatement costs than to lower pollutant levels.

The U.S. had its worst environmental problems during its rapid growth in the past, but eventually cleaned up its act. Will China follow this path?

One difference between the countries is that China does not welcome governmental opposition or lobbying. The U.S. market for dams virtually ended because of environmental protests, but dams thrive in China. People who express their opinions against the Three Gorges dam are often jailed. The same goes for other aspects of the environment from equal water resource access, to promised reimbursements for project relocations. Peasants have little money and no political power to voice their injustices.

Does this mean people in China are just unaware of the damage done to their environment?

Not at all, people in China are starting to think critically about their environment. News channels actually report on environmental issues, and exposing local factories that are heavy polluters in their cities. Environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have acted as government watchdogs, allowing people to mildly lobby. However, even these institutions are limited when it comes to central government planning and the ultimate goal of sustaining GDP growth.

All of the information and countless facts that readers will probably forget is a little overwhelming. Are there any solutions, and what are they?

Indeed there are solutions, but they are not simple. Priorities cannot simply be rearranged overnight. However, what the government can do is invest more intelligently in their ecological systems. Instead of relying on dams to control floods, ensuring natural forest health at the head of the Yangtze River would help with the rapid deforestation of the country, slow soil erosion that is eating the land away, and absorb the rainfall that annually floods the Yangtze River. The government has realized this and instituted measures redeveloping of these areas.

What about all that money China loses from the ecological damage they have caused, is that not enough incentive?

Estimates for the cost of environmental damage inflicted annually have come in from 5 to 14% of China's total GDP, conservatively. One doesn't need to be a mathematician to realize that this nullifies China's 5-10% growth completely!

The country should focus less on growing rapidly and put an emphasis on providing sustainable long term economic growth coupled with a larger investment to its environmental health,

for the sake of its economy and people. The Chinese government must realize that when the economic growth slows down, and it will, the dust, soot, acid rain, industrial waste, smog, and raw sewage will settle and they will find themselves sitting in their own shit. If things don't change, China's strategy for economic growth will be akin to committing environmental suicide.



The Sleeping Giant:

China's new AIDS epidemic

by lina peng

“UNAID estimates that by 2010 China could have between ten and twenty million HIV positive people.”



A new estimate released recently by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations AIDS (UNAID) program lowered China's estimated HIV and AIDS cases from the 2003 official government figure of 840,000 to 650,000. But a reported rising rate of new infections at 70,000 in 2005 leaves little room for comfort. For a country with a growing population of 1.3 billion, even a relatively small percentage of infections can spell disastrous consequences both domestically and internationally. UNAID estimates that by 2010 between ten and twenty million Chinese citizens will be HIV positive people. According to a joint study in 2004 by the China HIV/AIDS State Council and the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS in China, around 43.9% of infections were the result of drug use, 24.1% commercial blood and plasma transfusions, 19.8% heterosexual intercourse, 11.1% homosexual intercourse, 0.6 % use of blood and blood products and 0.5% from mother to child transmissions.

AVERT, an international AIDS charity with the goal of AVERTing AIDS/HIV, lays out the history of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in China in historical phases. The first case of AIDS was found in Beijing in 1985, followed by a scattering of small cases along the coastal regions from those who had traveled abroad or were foreigners. Beginning in 1989, HIV was found in 146 drug users in the province of Southwest Yunnan. By the end of 1989 there were 153 Chinese and 41 foreigners infected. HIV was still seen as a foreign disease associated with irregular sexual behavior and became known as “ai zi bing” which translates as “loving capitalist disease”. 1994 saw the spread of HIV beyond Yunnan into various other provinces through drug use and unclean blood transfusions when money designated for testing was pocketed by corrupt governmental officials. By 1998 HIV infection had been reported in all 31 provinces and the first governmental efforts to address the problems began.

With the release of the “China Plan of Action to Contain, Prevent and Control HIV/AIDS (2001-2005)” plan in 2001, China began embracing greater openness towards addressing the issue. The state began a more intensified approach to combating AIDS as it increasingly recognized the need for international support and the danger of continued inaction. A television drama was produced in 2001 about AIDS to mark World AIDS Day. Two years later on World AIDS Day, Premier Wen Jiabao shook hands with an HIV positive person in an unprecedented gesture, mirroring a shift in governmental approach towards HIV/AIDS. In December 2003, a comprehensive policy of “Four Frees and One Care” was announced. The program was specifically aiming to reach free drugs for financially needy patients and pregnant women, counseling and testing, schooling for orphans, and care and economic assistance for affected households.

The Chinese government's recognition of the need to address the AIDS/HIV problem is a fairly recent one. As a result, the success of funding, aid distribution, and immediate assistance relies significantly on previously established local organizations, particularly in the central village provinces. Though still carefully controlled by the state, the emergence of Chinese HIV/AIDS non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is an encouraging sign for patient relief and care and the further development of Chinese grassroots action. Not only do many organizations offer basic medical treatment and care

and shelter and education for HIV/AIDS orphans, but they also promote increased awareness in sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptives, and homosexuality. According to U.C. Berkeley Political Science Professor Darren Zook, the Chinese government is willing to be more open towards addressing social issues such as HIV/AIDS, as long as the activity remains apolitical.

The signs seem positive for containing the disease but the urgency of the situation cannot be underestimated. Prevention remains difficult primarily because of the lack of awareness in China about HIV/AIDS. A survey published by Reuter Health in 2003 revealed one in six Chinese had never heard of AIDS and 77% do not know that using condoms can prevent transmission. Fear of the unknown and discrimination against fringe members of society believed to be the primary transmitters of AIDS accounts for high stigma against AIDS in China. Particularly in the rural and culturally isolated regions where the disease is more prevalent, intolerance instills great

psychological harm in the diseased. During a 2003 Human Rights Watch interview, an HIV positive Chinese man testified, “Your family won't eat with you, they give you food to eat apart from them, and they won't have contact with you. Your friends ignore you. They are afraid of getting it from causal contact.

If you pass them a cigarette, they won't accept it.” The sheer number of people in China presents another major obstacle. Despite governmental programs and NGOs, medical and human resources are scarce, making access to aid for many patients impossible even if they seek it. Continued education, de-stigmatization, medical services, program development, funding and willingness to tackle the problem from all aspects of Chinese society are urgently necessary. As U.N.

Secretary General Kofi Annan stated, “China has everything to gain if it can stem the tide of the AIDS epidemic and everything to lose if it fails”.



[IN FOCUS]

[Chi Heng Foundation]

The Chi Heng Foundation founded in 1988 takes a fairly progressive stance on tackling HIV/AIDS. Like many Chinese non-governmental organizations it is based in Hong Kong where there is a higher degree of social openness. Chi Heng translates into “knowledge in action” and its corresponding mission is to create a harmonious and equal society for HIV/AIDS sufferers through care, education, and anti discrimination. As of summer 2005, it has helped a self-reported 3,000 affected children through its programs in four provinces, with techniques focusing on psychological well being. A notable feature of the Chi Heng program is a commitment to limiting stigmatization by allowing affected children to grow up in a familiar and comfortable environment with other non-impacted children, rather than placing them in orphanages. Another interesting aspect of Chi Heng is its Chinese online information and prevention website. It includes, in addition to new and health information, an “Ask Angelo” section with answers to questions like, “How do I know if I am gay?” and general heterosexual and homosexual dating advice given by Angelo Pezzote, a smiling New York psychologist. www.chihengfoundation.com

[Positive Art Workshop]

A fairly new organization, the Positive Art Workshop (PAW), funded by the Ford Foundation, began in December 2002 at Beijing's You An Hospital, the most well equipped hospital in China for HIV/AIDS treatment and care. PAW has a unique vision of enabling people living with HIV/AIDS to experience greater dignity and human connection through artistic expression, specifically painting and Chinese calligraphy. Its workstation is situated within the hospice “Home of Loving Care” at You An Hospital with a classroom accommodation of fifteen students. PAW sponsors hospital art workshops and extends such programs into the community with ongoing domestic and international exhibition projects. Its website is a unique blending of simplicity, stylistic art showcases and product promotion with the almost unexpected content of HIV/AIDS prevention. The beautifully exuberant original designs by HIV/AIDS patients are featured on everything from posters to mugs to postcards, all available for international purchase, though most only for mass orders, with proceeds going towards the designers themselves.

For more information and art samples:
www.paw.org/cn



Memoirs of a Stereotype-Hating Artist

by liah matsui

Critically acclaimed director of Chicago, Rob Marshall sadly fails to continue his success with his latest film *Memoirs of A Geisha*. Unlike Chicago, it just simply is not all that jazz. Although *Memoirs* is easy on the eyes with its beautiful scenery and cinematography, the rest of it is painful. From the actors' dense dialogues and terrible accents to its soap opera-like acting, this movie fails to deliver. But if the problems with *Memoirs* just stopped with its terrible casting and acting, then it would not have been too bad of a movie. It would just be another book gone bad on the silver screen. Sadly, this is not the case. Marshall somehow manages not only to disappoint the many readers of Arthur Golden's popular novel but also fails to convey the powerful account of the novel's heroine. Instead, the movie further fuels already existing stereotypes of Asians. It propagates Orientalism and reduces the once respectable role of a geisha to a modern whore dressed in flashy kimonos with long black hair. Scary enough, this movie is not about geishas but rather the Western perceptions and fantasies of the Orient.

Memoirs of a Geisha is a modern Cinderella story with a cast of A-list Asian actors. It follows the story of Chiyo (Suzuka Ohgo as a child and Ziyi Zhang as an adult) and her journey to become a geisha and fulfill her undying love for the Chairman (Ken Watanabe). However, throughout the film she encounters many obstacles while trying to become a geisha and unite with her prince charming. One such obstacle is Hatsumomo (Gong Li), a star geisha who takes an instant dislike to Chiyo and makes her life a living hell. Yet like any other fairytale, things start to look better for Chiyo. With the guidance of her "fairy godmother" Mameha (Michelle Yeoh), another geisha, Chiyo blossoms into a beautiful and famous geisha and adopts the name Sayuri. The rest of the movie follows the rest of Sayuri's journey, which despite its drama, fails to move the audience emotionally.

At best, *Memoirs* can be enjoyed as a feel good chick flick, but it cannot be cast aside as frivolous. What the movie sells is more than just a love story; it is selling a stereotyped image of the East. Not only is it evidence that the West still misunderstands the East, it is a testament to the world that the Hollywood's portrayal of Asians has made very few strides towards understanding since the days of Madame Butterfly.

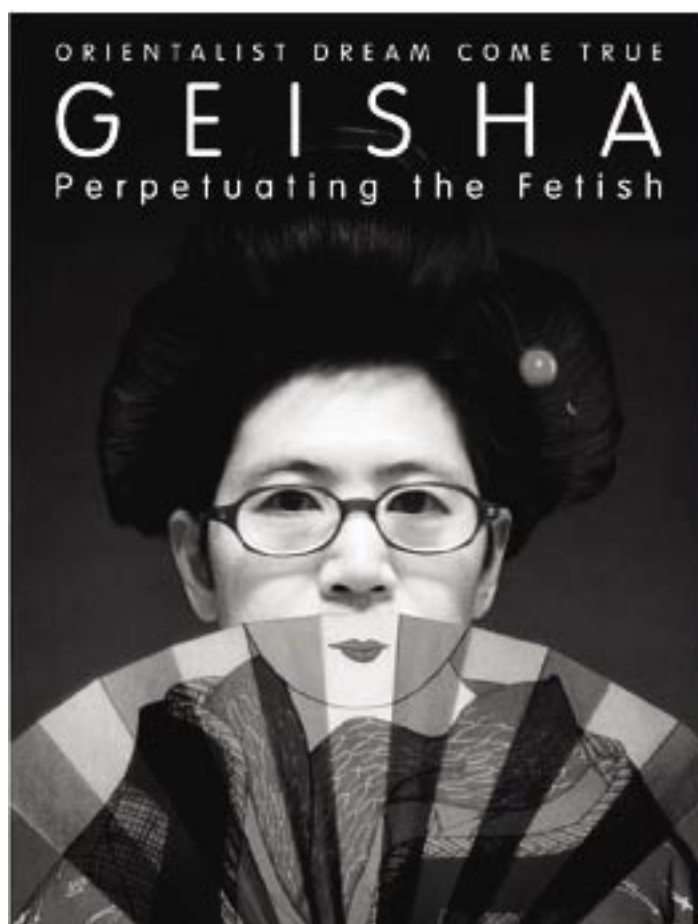
But hope is not completely lost; there are still people willing to fight against Orientalism like fellow UC Berkeley alum, Scott Tsuchitani. As an engineer turned artist, this third-generation (sansei) Japanese American decided to speak against the increase of Orientalist stereotyping of geishas through his art. Fed up with the San Francisco's Asian Art Museum's advertisements for its "Geisha: Beyond the Painted Smile" exhibit

held in the summer of 2005, he decided to make a spoof of the ad. To get an idea of his work, first imagine a "traditional" geisha wearing a red kimono, her black hair extravagantly tied up and holding a fan over her red lipstick covered mouth. Now take that same image, replace the face with a man's, add glasses, and tada! You have just been introduced to the genius of Tsuchitani. Using Photoshop, Tsuchitani created his eye-catching image with the words "Orientalist Dream Come True: GEISHA -- Perpetuating the Fetish" above. He then distributed his image as postcards and posters all around Japantown and even managed to slip some into the museum. According to an interview with San Francisco Chronicle's Annie Nakao, Tsuchitani felt the need to do something because of the ad's projection of Asian women as sensuous, a propagation of the Asian mystique of the East.

When asked about his views on *Memoirs of A*

Geisha and its stereotypical portrayal of geishas, Tsuchitani instead expressed himself to be more of a visual artist than cultural critic. "I prefer to express my ideas through my work than my words." And like any great piece of modern art, his work speaks for itself. Funny, engaging and bold, it requires the viewer to look past its outer appearance and interpret its deeper meaning. It is not merely an image of a beautifully adorned middle-aged man in glasses with a kimono and red lipstick, but a hint to the many undiscovered layers of a geisha. A geisha is not just a beautiful woman clad with heavy white makeup who hiding behind a fan. She is an individual that cannot be generalized as submissive whore. Quiet, passive, and exotic, she also does not represent the average Asian woman. Like the Asian woman, there is more to her than meets the eye and Tsuchitani points this in his work. With his self-portrait as a geisha, he prompts viewers to take another look and search for the artist's intention. The purpose of Tsuchitani's art is to encourage thought and actively engage the audience. And if his work can, as expressed in his interview with Steven Tanamachi of Nichi Bei Times, "bring joy, challenge structures of domination, inspire, empower and create cultural space for the marginalized," then he has done his job successfully.

However don't just take this fan's opinions about his artwork. Be your own judge and take a closer look at this refreshing art work. As for *Memoirs of a Geisha*, consider yourself warned and watch at your own discretion. In all fairness, the film is not a complete disaster. It does have Ken Watanabe and what Asian girl can resist that? I'm not complaining.



CRASH

Though *Crash* has been nominated for six Academy Awards, including Best Motion Picture, it is difficult to say how the film advances racial tolerance given its vilifying portrayal of Asians. Hailed as an honest and provocative depiction of post-9/11 racism in America, Paul Haggis's directorial debut dares to blatantly display common racial stereotypes, in order to deconstruct them through the reality of race. The film deals with society's perceptions of blacks, whites, Middle Easterners, Latinos, and Asians by depicting racial interactions that boil over, exposing the latent ethnic discrimination within the supposed melting pot of Los Angeles. Yet the film attempts to bridge these ethnic divides through unsettling sequences that dispel preconceived notions about race, advance universal tolerance, and promote understanding of people whose lives are ruled circumstance.

Crash brazenly shows skewed prejudices against minorities. Latinos become cheating Mexican gang bangers. Middle Easterners become stubborn and incoherent convenience store owners. Blacks become gun-toting criminals. Asians become greedy smugglers. And whites oversee this chaos with condescending bigotry. The film boldly takes the perspective of intolerant and quick to anger white Los Angelinos, a perspective filled with racial slurs, injustices, and narrow-mindedness, leaving viewers in disbelief.

However as the film progresses, *Crash* manages a portrayal of Latinos, Middle Easterners, and blacks that goes beyond these unfair stereotypes. The characters become more than their initial stereotypes imply; they become human. The Latino characters become loving fathers and mothers. The Middle Eastern characters, though stubborn, comprehend and appreciate their mistakes. And the black characters, despite their criminal history, see the worth of human life beyond race.

Crash shows that people are people. Most importantly *Crash* shows that race and stereotypes are meaningless, yet at the same time significantly influential in how society views its individual members. The film intertwines stories in which racist characters gain the compassion to come to the aid of those that they once thought unworthy. For example, LA police officer Ryan (Matt Dillon) regularly profiles blacks while on the job. In one particular sequence, Ryan shamelessly molests a black woman in front of her husband, yet later selflessly rescues that same humiliated woman from a burning car. Similar redemption is given to Ludacris's character, Anthony, who first steals a car, runs over a man with it, then tries to sell off that man's van, but still manages to regain some dignity through his actions at the conclusion of the film.

In contrast, Asians receive only a negative representation in the film. The movie's opening scene depicts an Asian woman involved in a car accident. Both parties are angry, with the Asian woman speaking shrilly in broken English, while the Latina detective mocks her. Later, an overly boisterous Asian woman bursts into a hospital shouting her husband's name. The white nurse shakes her disapproving head at the obnoxious Asian intrusion. Once the woman finds her husband, the couple's only concern is centered on quickly turning a buck. The image of Asians that *Crash* creates is that Asians are pushy, avaricious, bad drivers, and heartless.

So when does *Crash* turn the stereotype on its head and say, "Hey, Asians are not all insufferable and materialistic?" When does the film redeem Asians from their stereotype, like other characters find atonement through heroism or altruism?

While blacks, whites, Middle Easterners, and Latinos prove that they are more than their skin color imply, the little Asians of the film are left unredeemed. *Crash* only opens the door of Asian stereotypes and leaves the Asian characters without any closure. And because Hollywood has not said otherwise, the American impression of Asians remains

that Asians are pushy, loud, materialistic, and that all are terrible, terrible drivers.

The other characters portrayed are given the opportunity to transcend their typecasts and become part of the fabric of a diverse Los Angeles society. According to the film's representation, Asians appear to all be elderly women caked with makeup to hide their age or elderly men who only know a few common English phrases. Their heavy Asian accents are dominant in their English speech. Their names—"Choi," "Park," "Kim Lee"—are too foreign for American tongues. *Crash's* Asians seem to have recently crawled out of some cargo-hold, and are too Asian to be American, and therefore not part of American culture and society -- thus not worth placing in good light.

For a movie that wants to "boldly remind us of the importance of tolerance as it ventures across color lines...and uncover the truth of our shared humanity," as the Lion's Gate synopsis states, Asians seem incongruously left out. No Asians, not even Daniel Dae Kim of *Lost* fame, appear on the cast list on the *Crash* website.

At first *Crash* seems to be a film meant to overcome racism in America. But a deeper look at the film suggests that none of the characters truly find a deeper understanding of humanity; instead, their "positive" deeds are selfish acts meant to redeem the individual character and

not their racial group, and are nothing more than reactions to a race conscious world. Poignant as Officer Ryan's heroism may be, he is simply performing his duty as a police officer, and the trapped woman's race, sex, or class is irrelevant. However, *Crash* implies that Officer Ryan made a special effort to save the black woman, whom he had disgustingly mistreated earlier. If anything, the chauvinistic cop attempted to save her out of his own guilt.

As an anthology of racial crimes and redemptions, *Crash* portrays African Americans, Middle Easterners, Latinos, and whites as having the ability to learn from mistaken racial assumptions to build a greater tolerance for those unlike themselves. By no means should *Crash* be passed up due to some of its misguided content. The way numerous storylines intertwine and merge together adds a depth to the film that is rarely achieved. The actors perform the conflicted outer anger and inner helplessness with seamless balance. The film's attempts at bringing race out into the open is a bold beginning, but also reminds audiences to be actively critical of what the film asks us to believe.

Course In

Societal

Racism

by erin wong



Police officer Ryan (Matt Dillon) rescues a woman in the movie *Crash*.

Image from vh1.com

"Crash's Asians seem to have recently crawled out of some cargo-hold, and are *too* Asian to be American"



MIKE SHINODA GOES HIP-HOP WITH “*The Rising Tied*”

by annie chung

I have never been the type of music fan who knows all the lyrics to every song of an artist. My usual music criterion is simply, “I like it if the beat is catchy.” But something about Fort Minor’s *The Rising Tied* was different. Fort Minor is the latest production of Linkin Park’s Michael “Mike” Kenji Shinoda. As one of the main voices to Linkin Park, Shinoda has been a major force in bringing people of Asian ancestry to the forefront of the American entertainment industry. Shinoda’s father, Leslie Shinoda is of Japanese ancestry and his mother, Kim Shinoda is of Russian-Hungarian heritage. Although many connect Shinoda with Rock, his first and true passion lies in his rap roots. Raised in Agoura Hills in Los Angeles, Shinoda first began his interest in music in middle school, which escalated in high school after he attended a Public Enemy/Anthrax concert. This first exposure into the music world inspired him to pursue his own possible talents by taking piano lessons which allowed him to venture into jazz and hip-hop fields as well. Shinoda’s high school years were crucial to the formation of Linkin Park since it was at Agoura High when he met two of his future band mates, Bourdon and Delson.

With his roots from Los Angeles, much of Shinoda’s musical influence traces back to hip-hop and rap. When first listening to Fort Minor, I expected a totally different sound, something more commercialized, a song that would be blaring at the clubs. The typical mainstream rap song consists of lyrics about making millions, being a “baller”, and hot girls—themes that Shinoda would probably refer to as “second hand smoke.” In his song “Cigarettes” he criticizes music listeners who don’t care about the words of songs and only care about the beat. According to Shinoda this taste in music is comparable to second hand smoke, “don’t want the truth, we just wanna feel fuckin’ cool.” Shinoda’s raps were obscured beneath all the technicalities of the instruments and beats of Linkin Park. This is why the production of *The Rising Tied* is a trademark of the real Mike Shinoda; there is nothing to hide his words from listener critique.

To truly appreciate Shinoda’s latest creation, as cliché as it might seem, one must allow the lyrics sink in. Fort Minor is a representation of two opposite ends: “Fort” stands for the strong, bold streak in the beats and “Minor” represents the small, musically dark aspect of music. Track one of the album, “Remember the Name”, features Styles of Beyond gives a good feel for the album: a steady beat with real instruments, and

catchy refrains such as, “This is 10% luck, 20% skill, 15% concentrated power of will, 5% pleasure, 50% pain, 100% reason to remember the name.” As if to warn the listener of lyrics to come, “Remember the Name” mentions that Shinoda just wants to be heard, while Styles of Beyond boasts of Shinoda’s rapping skills.

Though Shinoda’s style of rapping follows a clean beat it is very elementary compared to that of Jay-Z, executive producer of *The Rising Tied*. “Petrified,” a song with more of an alternative sound, rhymes are literally, “you must be so lonely...so phony...show me...homie.” The theme, lyrics, and beat of some of the songs are simple to the point of sounding improvisational. Shinoda then takes a rapid turn and raps about his family’s struggle through Japanese American internment during World War II. In “Kenji” the voices of Shinoda’s aunt and father are incorporated into his rap concerning how Japanese Americans were evacuated and looked upon as “enemies” although they were “innocent laborers.” During an interview with Morley Seaver from antiMusic, Shinoda explains the song, “I’m half Japanese, and the song “Kenji” is based on my family’s story during WWII in an internment camp. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government began a period of racial profiling. They put all the Japanese Americans (and some other Asian Americans) in secluded camps for the duration of the war. My dad was three years old, and had twelve brothers and sisters. My oldest aunt was in her twenties, and had four kids. Her youngest was born in camp. Her husband died in camp. They stayed there for the duration of the war, captive. Once they were released, they returned to vandalized homes and racial tension. That’s what the song ‘Kenji’ is about.” By creating a solo project, Shinoda is able to share stories from his Japanese heritage that is unique from the other members of Linkin Park. As a producer and artist, Shinoda knows that music is powerful and utilizes this knowledge by intertwining the Japanese American’s struggle with his music, sharing that pain with younger generations.

The overall theme of *The Rising Tied* seems to be the longing for home, a wish to belong and be accepted for our real selves, nothing more and nothing less. Rather than rapping about the trials of being abandoned by a lover, Shinoda’s lyrics exposes him as not only a member of a Grammy winning band, but as a true rapper struggling with belonging and creating one’s own identity as an Asian American making it in the rap game. The public may not be ready to swallow Shinoda’s genuine lyrics but his sincerity will one day be appreciated.



“It’s not straight hip-hop, but it’s not rock at all. For our fans who only like the rock side of Linkin Park, I hope you enjoy it, but you never know,” he said. “I am playing every instrument on there, but it’s not really about me. I’m featuring a lot of great MCs that are friends of mine. I want to work with people that I’m friends with, that I get along with. I’m not just going to go out there and grab whoever’s hot at the moment.”- Mike Shinoda, in an interview with MTV News, March 4, 2005, *Mike Shinoda’s Solo Album May Divide Linkin Park Fans*

image credit: mtv.com and amazon.com

MAJORLY INDEPENDENT

JIN THA EMCEE



by sofia salazar-rubio

Last year was a dramatic one for Jin Au-Yeung, née Jin Tha MC. Less than a year after the release of his long-delayed debut album, *The Rest is History*, Jin announced his retirement from the industry with the cut "I Quit," only to reemerge a few months later on the battle circuit. Jin made his return felt by winning the \$50,000 grand prize at Power Summit's annual rap battle. His return to the music industry was solidified by the release of his acclaimed independent sophomore album, *The Proterganda*, under his new name, simply, *The Emcee*.

Although Jin was born and raised in Miami, he started making a name from himself in the New York underground as a battle emcee. Dominated by African-American rappers, Jin's ethnicity was constantly the subject of poorly crafted verbal attacks.

"In hip hop, you let your rhymes speak for yourself," Jin explained in an interview with *Generation Rice*, "But if they brought up being Asian, then I definitely had to use it against them, too."

Rather than shy away from remarks about his ethnicity, Jin turned the fact that he's Chinese into his best weapon, surprising unsuspecting opponents with comebacks like the famed, "Ask your girl/ She had my egg rolls and dumplings in her mouth."

It was this on-the-spot inventiveness that got Jin his big break on "Freestyle Friday," a battle segment on the popular BET show *106 & Park*. Jin ripped up lesser emcees for seven straight shows, making him the second person to be retired from the segment. More importantly, Jin's exposure earned him a record deal with Virgin Records and a place in the Ruff Ryder's crew, which included the likes of DMX and Eve, making him the first Asian-American rapper to sign with a major label.

But after leaving Ruff Ryders, little has been heard from Jin and even the release of *The Proterganda* was under the radar despite critical acclaim. So why did an emcee with considerable talent, big name backing and enough exposure to jump start a successful career fail to achieve the notoriety of his predecessors?

First of all, despite the contributions of rap notables such as Wyclef Jean -- who produced the egregiously asinine single "Learn Chinese" -- and Kanye West, Jin had little to offer the hip-hop community in *The Rest is History*, apart from his race, that was exceptional or fresh. The creativity and scathing invective of Jin's battles didn't translate well into an album.

However, there have been plenty of rappers before Jin who have achieved considerable success

with much less talent. The reality of Jin's struggle is that mainstream hip-hop is not yet a viable medium for underrepresented minorities.

"The entertainment industry is image-based," explained Travis Rimando, an Asian-American DJ who has a biweekly show on Berkeley's radio station, KALX 90.7 FM, "And the current image of a rapper in the mainstream mind is of an urban African American."

As New York Times reporter Ta-Nehisi Coates pointed out, Jin has "chosen a medium defined by blackness." Being outside of this norm has made it that much harder for Jin to be taken seriously as an artist.

Rimando also mentions that Jin's relatively short ride to fame doesn't jive with the hip-hop belief in earning your way to the top.

"The fact that he's otherwise unestablished and thus hasn't properly paid his dues . . . seems to work against him," Rimando explained.

The complications of Jin's rise to fame are further compounded by the fact that he is difficult to market. Jin has always expressed a desire to be the workingman's emcee by rapping about subjects he has more experience with instead of more typical gansta rap topics -- the violence of the streets, rolling in an Escalade, flashing bling.

However, apart from the logistics of Jin's career, his struggle brings to light the issue of historical invisibility. From old-school -- Beastie Boys DJ Mix Master Mike -- to new-school -- DJ Babu of Dilated Peoples or Black Eyed Peas' Apl.d.Ap -- Asian-Americans play

Amerie for example; although she identifies as Korean and African American, her audience largely recognizes her as a black entertainer.

All things considered, what Jin has already accomplished is unprecedented for a solo Asian American emcee. Although there have been many Asian Americans in the hip-hop scene, none except Jin have chosen to go it alone. And after trekking through the minefields of the mainstream music industry and ending a less than desirable relationship with Virgin Records, as *The Emcee*, it seems that Jin has gone back to the basics. As his website biography proclaims, "Taking it back to the essence with a fresh sound as well as a new agenda, *The Emcee* sets out to pick up where Jin left off."

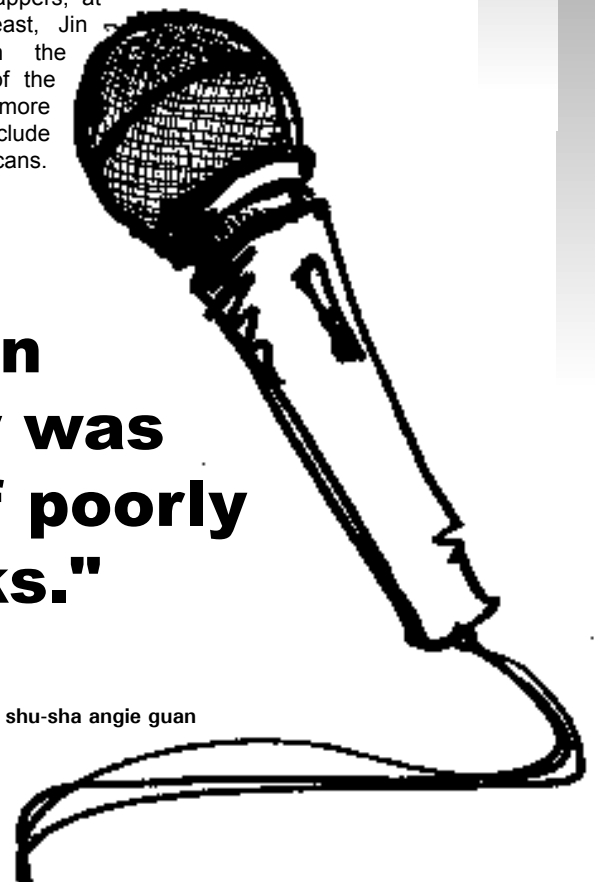
The Proterganda has had critics hailing Jin for his newfound maturity and ability to write songs rather than just battle raps. Now that he has managed to outgrow the bungling antics of his earlier release, he has the potential to earn a unique place in hip-hop history.

"What I wanna do is do for Asians what [rapper Big] Pun did for Latinos," Jin explains in an interview with *allhiphop.com*. Just as Big Pun opened doors for Latino rappers, at the very least, Jin has begun the expansion of the horizon to more readily include Asian Americans.

**"Dominated
by African American
rappers, Jin's ethnicity was
constantly the subject of poorly
crafted verbal attacks."**

an integral role in hip-hop that goes largely unnoticed. Asian Americans as producers or DJs has become commonplace, although low profile. Mainstream entertainment still finds it difficult to recognize Asian American talent. Take singer

artwork by shu-sha angie guan



SAM magazine:

Where Asian Men Can Be Real Men, and Where Asian Women Can Be in Their Underwear

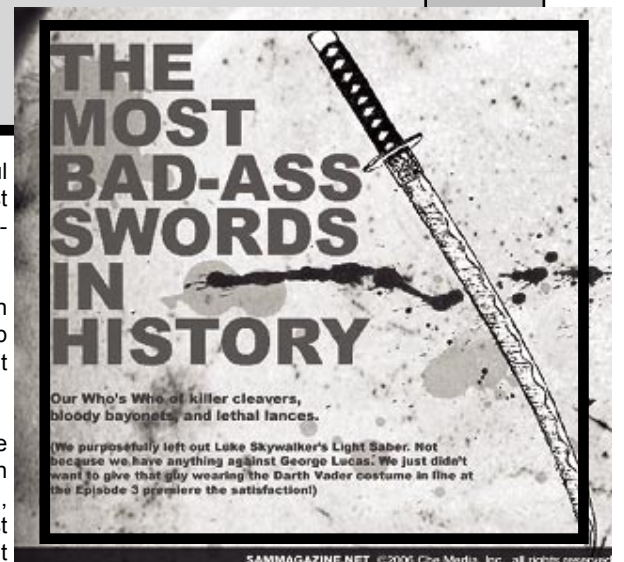
by virginia wang eleasar

SAM Magazine, the “premier Asian American men’s magazine” is for “real men.” By the way, SAM stands for Successful Alpha Male. So the Successful Alpha Male Magazine is for Real Men. Talk about a whole lot of masculinity, and that’s just the cover page. While the predominant, mainstream portrayal of Asian American men includes the kung-fu lovin’, Long-Duck-Dong talkin’, nerdy, effeminate man, SAM Magazine aims to demolish those notions, but at what cost?

SAM Magazine is an answer to popular men’s magazines like Maxim, FHM, and Stuff, that disregard the Asian American males’ specific concerns and perspectives. According to the first issue of SAM, those concerns include tips to picking up “hot Asian chicks,” reviews of Asian beer, interviews with Asian self-made millionaires, and the typical man-centric stuff about cars, poker, boxing, and. . . swords.

Of course, you can’t have a men’s magazine without the ever so potent potable: almost naked women. Because the magazine is geared towards Asian Americans, SAM capitalizes on the opportunity to sprinkle their magic ingredient (Asian women) just about everywhere. The “Asian Beer Review” is informative, and so are the photos of a bra-clad Asian woman, beer in hand, poised ever so subtly at her pursed lips. Hey, it doesn’t look like she’s drinking any beer. And why is her chest moist? There is also a short spread about fast, bold colored cars. Surprisingly, there are no women on these cars. But don’t worry; they’re on the next page, posing with animals. Wow, how’d that bunny rabbit get on that girl’s upturned bottom? The

poker tips were a little bland, but the Asian girl in the flimsy white dress spiced things up. And finally. . . the swords. It would have been a fantastic photo opportunity for women to pose with “the most bad-ass swords in history,” but the article was much more preoccupied on those swords. Perhaps they were too sacred.



No man will resist SAM’s article “The Definitive Guide to Picking Up Hot Asian Babes.” As SAM makes clear, there are different types of “hot, Asian babes,” and this issue’s article concerns “bagging” the “Hot, Clubaholic, Dance-aholic Asian Girl Whose Ugly Friends are Cockblocking” type. Writer Vinny La imparts “methods” which have proven successful with Asian women. What distinguishes the article from most men’s advice sections is La’s continued direction of assertiveness. “You have to be assertive while being funny,” La writes, “If she brushes past you, be assertive and grab her hand.” This “be assertive” message actually seeps through the whole magazine, which creates a problematic tone and ideology.

For instance, two interviews with self-made Asian American millionaires are immediately followed by a two-page spread on how to “stay inspired” and an essay titled “Don’t You Quit.” Three main points can sum up SAM’s overall message: be strong, make money, and bag the “hot chick.” Don’t you quit, because this magazine is only for the real, alpha male. While the message may be read as inspirational and positive, it is not new. SAM reinforces the qualities that have attributed to gender and racial stereotypes everywhere. It affirms that to be a man, you should be interested in millions of dollars, dominating females, and not show any weakness. The magazine’s underlying message is for Asian men to break the mold of the weak, effeminate man by copying the same habits and ideologies of the men who produced that mold in the first place. By playing off and answering the stereotypes behind Asian men and masculinity in this manner, SAM deals itself into the paradigm of social norms.

Most men’s magazines reinforce this exact SAME message. The point is not to criticize SAM for following the lead. However, if entering a medium riddled with rhetoric about what makes a man a man, why not be innovative and creative by showing Asian men moving beyond that whole macho, alpha domination model? What’s wrong with being yourself?

But let’s get serious now. Let’s bring back the main reason men buy magazines like FHM and Maxim. The women! While SAM presents Asian men as dominating, alpha males, they portray their female counterparts as over sexualized women who, as luck would have it, have goals and intelligence.

On the SAM website, publisher and editor Samuel Choae writes, “SAM Magazine answers the need for strong and enduring images of Asian American males and meets the demand for the portrayal of beautiful, intelligent Asian American women.” Hyphen magazine’s seventh issue quotes Darrell Hamamoto, a UC Davis Asian American professor who lectures about media, in their own review of SAM magazine who says, “(SAM) fills an important niche, but it’s going to be mostly white people who read it because they’re going to have lots of pictures of Asian women. (SAM) is aiming for a certain ethnic demographic but will get mostly whites.” Professor Hamamoto and Choae’s statements actually complement each other. Men of all color “demand,” or prefer Asian women. SAM Magazine caters to that “demand” by giving the entire male population just what they want. Almost nude pictures of “hot Asian chicks.” SAM Magazine knows that sex sells, and Asian sex sells immensely because it’s harder to find in mainstream media. SAM differentiates their “foxes” (yes, their models are actually called foxes) from other men’s magazine models by their intelligence. But I thought we already knew Asians were smart.

華美博物館近況

華美博物館的預定館址嘉尼爾大樓的防震工程現已完工，其他整修工程也已裝水電。嘉尼爾大樓的整修工程，至今為止，洛杉磯市政府已耗資三百萬元之多。由於結構及施工上的種種因素，整棟嘉尼爾大樓共五戶的龐

十一月十七日晚間在環球影城希爾頓大飯店舉行。晚會中將頒發第四屆《歷史締造者獎》，並舉行大型義賣會。目前已有數十位名義賣家，包括珠寶、電器、古董等。歡迎社會大眾踴躍參加，為華裔保存歷史文化並開創美好未來而努力。晚會入場券每張250元，請提早定位。

中醫師譚良的藏書。陳、冀兩位專員並將圖書目錄輸入電腦檔案以便日後學者研究中華文化及華裔先民生活之用。

謝麗莎的著作《一位華裔美人在金山的經歷》而設計的一項展覽正在奧羅西部落傳統博物館隆重展出。展出期間為2000年7月23

GO OUT FOR CHINESE

by wendy tai

Enrollment numbers for Chinese language classes have skyrocketed in the past decade, shedding the long-time negative associations the harbored towards the language in the past.

Public education institutions are quickly developing a Chinese language curriculum catering to the appetites of nearly 54,000 students currently enrolled in Mandarin Chinese courses across America. For the 1998-1999 academic year, 180 schools nationwide reported Chinese language enrollment figures of 10,974 high school students, 2,026 middle school students, and 6,852 grade school students, according to a survey conducted by the Secondary School Chinese Language Center at Princeton University. In sum, K-12 grade enrollment in Chinese language programs totaled 19,852, a 37% increase from the previous year.

The College Board's introduction of a Chinese Advanced Placement (AP) Exam is sure to further increase Chinese language enrollment numbers as high school students take advantage of the chance to earn college credit with a passing grade on the exam. Given a choice between Italian, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese, high schools across the country surveyed in 2003 were asked which foreign language curricula should be offered for AP credit. The results showed that 240 schools opted for Italian, 50 for Russian, and 175 chose Japanese. Chinese, gathered votes from 2,400 high schools, more than five times the amount of the other three languages combined.

As a response to the growing demand articulated by the survey, in December 2003 the College Board announced the creation of an AP Course and Examination in Chinese Language and Culture, which will be available in 2007. "Our education system needs to respond to an increasingly interconnected global economy," Gaston Caperton, President of College Board said. "It is our hope that this partnership will become an educational bridge to China, a country whose political, cultural, and economic impact on the Asia-Pacific region and the world is paramount."

Students are aware of China's economic potential, as they take on the daunting, character-based language. "I'm thinking of taking Chinese in college," says Alice Lin, freshman at the University of Houston, as she considers continuing her Chinese language education she started in high school. "It would be a great advantage to be fluent in both languages [English and Chinese], especially Mandarin. That would be a big plus in a lot of companies." With China's ballooning, double-digit economic percentage growth and its soothsaid role as a giant global power, speaking Chinese has become a coveted skill. "We want to ensure that the next generation of Americans speaks more than one language and is competitive in a global marketplace," Caperton said.

While China's predicted leading role in the future global economy is strong motivation for pursuing fluency in Mandarin,

Chinese,
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curriculum.

many students have personal reasons for learning Chinese. For many second or third generation Chinese Americans, learning Chinese is a way to reconnect with family and explore an important perspective of their heritage. Cindy Wu, a sophomore currently taking Chinese 1BX at UC Berkeley, reminisces on her Taiwanese American upbringing. "Growing up not knowing Chinese—it felt like I was missing something," she reflects, "I think it's unfortunate to not know your own language." Many other students tackle Chinese for other reasons. When asked why he would consider learning the Chinese language, freshman Michael Bremner at the University of Texas at Austin said, "So I can understand my damn Chinese friends."

Chinese language courses at the collegiate level are in high demand as well. According to a survey conducted by the Modern Language Association (MLA) in fall 1998, Chinese taken as a foreign language on college campuses is the only language whose enrollment has increased by at least 5% since 1960. In 1998, 28,400 students were enrolled in Chinese classes. As of 2002, enrollment has jumped 20% to 34,000, ranking Chinese as the seventh most studied foreign language in American colleges and universities. UC Berkeley, second-year Mi-Jong Kim has taken 3 semesters of Chinese language as result of close family relations with China. "Chinese—I love it, because I get to speak it with people around me," she said.

The December 2005 issue of US News and World Report featured a special report on new endeavors to undertake in the New Year. Making the list was a short article titled, "Go out for Chinese," stating, "anyone considering a language (or looking for a career boost) might think about tackling Chinese." Once confined to Asian ghettos and Chinatowns, the Chinese language has reached unprecedented levels of popularity, seeping into mainstream curriculum in American schools. Chinese courses are no longer full of reluctant parentally pressured Chinese American kids. Students seeking to connect with their roots, gain an economic edge, and fulfill their language requirement are taking advantage of the unique and attractive opportunity presented in Chinese courses. Just as China's students arduously learn English, American students must prepare themselves for the global society of the twenty-first century.

UNSEPARATE AND

by adrienna wong

UNEQUAL?

On December 31, 200, court-supervised desegregation of San Francisco public schools officially ended. US District Judge William Alsup refused to extend the consent decree that would continue court ordered desegregation policy, saying that it, "asked the parents to suffer through a system that does not achieve what it says it achieves." According to Alsup, the desegregation system failed to create, "diversity in any meaningful sense."

Alsup's statements are backed up by the bleak reality in San Francisco schools: 50 of the city's 119 schools are severely resegregated, which is to say that one racial group makes up more than 60% of the school's students. In terms of test scores, African American and Latino children still fall behind, with black students of San Francisco reporting the lowest test scores in their racial group of any urban area in California.

The consent decree started in 1983 after the NAACP sued the school district for segregation. In its first incarnation, the decree sought to redistribute students on the basis of race, and placed caps on enrollment of 45% of any racial or ethnic group per school. In response to these race-based enrollment caps, a group of Chinese parents sued the school district in 1994 in *Ho v. SFUSD* (better known as the "Lowell School" case), charging that the caps on Asian students in competitive magnet schools like Lowell were racist. The conditions and strategies of the decree were then renegotiated, prohibiting race as a determinant of student assignment. Instead, it created a "diversity index" to take into account other elements of a student's profile such as economic status, language, and family background.

The desegregation program has been widely criticized, along with the rest of the San Francisco public school system. Despite the efforts of the courts and the district over the past two decades, segregation in public schools persists. Additionally, many parents complain that the busing involved in desegregation is costly, dangerous, and detrimental to the education of their children. Students assigned to schools in parts of the city far from their homes have to travel long distances each weekday.

Opponents of the busing program are portrayed in the media and in general perceptions as Asian American, and specifically Chinese American, especially after the "Lowell case". Curiously enough, the flaws in the discussion about desegregation in San Francisco do not lie, as usual, in the exclusion of Asian Americans from a black-white debate, but in the particular way that they are posited in opposition to other racial minorities, namely, blacks and Latinos. The presumption that a small group of Chinese American parents can represent the very large Chinese American population in San Francisco is of course problematic, as groups like Chinese for Affirmative Action point out.

The focus on Chinese Americans opposing busing and desegregation programs also downplays or altogether ignores the crucial issue of "white flight" -- the ongoing tendency of white, middle-to-upper-class families to move their children to private schools and other parts of the Bay Area like Albany or Berkeley where public schools have a better reputation. Instead, the current dialogue removes whites from the discussion altogether, setting up Asian Americans as the lone adversary of Blacks and Latinos. Implied in this view is the idea that Asian Americans are a homogenous and academically successful group, happy with public schools in their segregated state, in contrast with Blacks and Latinos who do not benefit

from the system in the same way. Even progressive Asian American writers participate in reproducing this simplified formula, saying that Asian American opponents to desegregation are "on the wrong side of the debate" by "swinging right." This particular reconfiguration of the model minority myth may be a dynamic narrative, but it in no way represents the full reality of San Francisco Public Schools.

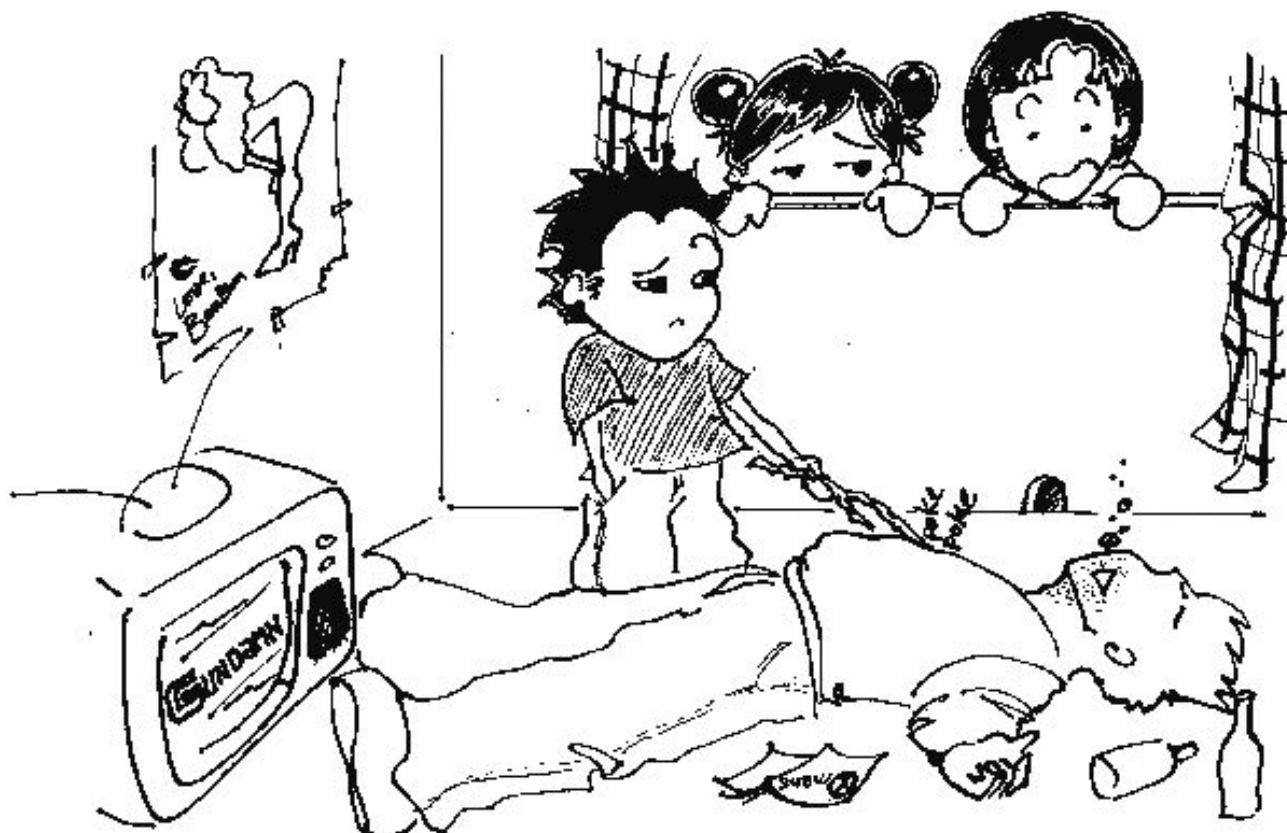
The fact is that community activists of all races and ethnicities are realizing that desegregation is not the simple answer to the school district's woes. For example, district 10 candidate and Bayview community activist Charlie Walker recently said, "I am hoping seriously that we consider separating blacks from whites because it's not working... What good did it do us to demonstrate to get our freedom when we didn't get nothing out of it... We've got to have separate schools but we've got to have a budget that is equal to the budget that you educate whites with." Walker's statements are part of a general trend towards calling for focus on local schools as an alternate solution. Disillusioned with the idea that a racially integrated school means a better education, and frustrated with busing, many parents and public officials are turning towards investment in neighborhood schools as the next option. "Students can better participate in extracurricular activities being close to home and at a neighborhood school, and schools can expect better parent participation," Supervisor Fiona Ma said.

However, groups like the Harvard Civil Rights Project call the neighborhood school a "nostalgic ideal", saying that, "although there are isolated instances where neighborhood schools have positive effects for minorities, overwhelmingly evidence indicates that such schools are low performing... and are the most segregated schools." In addition, turning a blind eye to resegregation in favor of neighborhood schools also does not acknowledge the extended benefits that studying in a diverse educational environment brings, denying one of the city's great resources, and privileging test scores as an indicator of learning instead.

A true solution to the problems of San Francisco public schools must address both diversity in schools and raising educational standards across the board. Even after two decades of court-supervised desegregation, the district has been incapable of meeting either task. Consequently, different ethnic groups are put in the position of having to compete for coveted spots in better schools. But if we reduce the desegregation issue to "Asian competitiveness," or looking out for my community versus yours, we are missing the more necessary question: In a land of supposed "equal opportunity", where public education must serve the essential function of leveling the playing field, why is there a need to compete for a K-12 education at all? Thus the grievances of Asian American parents, when placed in context, can be reformulated not as self-serving and exclusionary moves for power against other minorities, but instead as part of the immense common frustration that activists, parents, and students involved in public schools feel in the face of a system that cannot provide every student, regardless of race or neighborhood, an adequate education.



COMIC



Wen's brother was a high achiever. He worked hard at becoming a comic artist...or an astronaut. All the kids in the neighborhood came to admire.