

hardboiled

LOST IN TRANSLATION, RACIST?
MIKE PARK INTERVIEW
BEIJING PUNKS
MICHAEL OMI INTERVIEW
KOREAN-AMERICAN DAY

7.4
MARCH 2004

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editor's note

A friend of mine just told me the other day that the term “smart” is a trite, overused word to describe people. It’s true. The word "smart" has become a common compliment that you bestow upon just anyone you like. Everyone is smart. Even Britney Spears is smart—well, at least you’ve heard other people call her smart. But in Berkeley, you don’t stand out just because you’re smart. We have all kinds of smart people here at Cal, from the political activists down at Sproul to the EECS geeks up at Cory Hall. While it is certainly understandable that everyone is busy just trying to stay on top of their demanding schedules, I can’t help but notice how polarized our campus population is. I’m beginning to worry that maybe each and every single one of us has become too content, working exclusively within our own academic bubbles. Lo! We have fallen victim to academic segregation!

The reason why I’m writing about this is because we’re about to distribute another issue of **hardboiled** and although there are always a bunch of enthusiastic readers, there are also those who do not even have the courtesy to at least look at us. On top of that we have to deal with crappy nonsense such as "I don’t read" or "I’m not Asian." When I tried to hand out copies of our SEX issue last semester, someone said to me, "I’m not interested

in sex!" Uhhh...okay! I’m not upset because these people think that reading an issue of **hardboiled** is a waste of their time, I’m upset because they don’t even attempt to find out what it is before saying no.

hardboiled may only deliver news immediately relevant to the Asian American community and it may be a tad bit political to some but then again, you don’t have to be an art history major to be able to enjoy *The DaVinci Code* and you don’t have to be British to appreciate Shakespeare. What’s wrong with finding out about things that you normally wouldn’t hear about? It might not make you smarter, but it will certainly add to your knowledge and who knows, maybe someday you might even care.

So next time when you’re walking around campus, stop thinking about the midterm that you just bombed or the paper that’s due tomorrow, and really take a look around. For 10 minutes, stop worrying about your academic career because we’re all smart, hardworking bastards. We only need to learn to care. Here, why don’t we make a deal, if you take a copy of **hardboiled**, I’ll grab a copy of Engineering News.

elaine

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Omi Interview

AN INTERVIEW WITH UCB'S ETHNIC STUDIES CHAIR

by catherine chen

Professor Michael Omi pretty much does it all. He is an Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies and has most recently taken up the position of the Chair of the Ethnic Studies department. After receiving an B.A. in Sociology from U.C. Berkeley, along with an M.A. and Ph.D. from U.C. Santa Cruz, Professor Omi has come back to teach various Asian American Studies courses here at Cal. His book, *Racial Formation in the United States*, has become a classic read for many savvy audiences. He has teamed up with Howard Winant for yet another collaborative book, and when he isn't teaching or working on research, you'll find him playing guitar.

hb: How have the budget cuts affected the Ethnic Studies department?

MO: Well, it's been interesting because particularly for this academic year a lot of the budget cuts fell in services so they didn't directly affect the instructional budget. However, for the next academic year we have had to plan for budget reductions which would affect things like our ability to hire graduate student instructors or lecturers. So if that situation doesn't improve, it does directly impact the curriculum and our ability to field a wide range of courses.

hb: What is the current situation of the Asian American Studies department?

MO: It still resides as a program within Ethnic Studies and we're trying to reach out to other faculty members on campus to teach Asian American Studies courses. We're very excited about hiring new faculty member Catherine Choy, a Pilipino American Studies scholar, who will be coming in the fall and will really complement a much needed emphasis and track in Pilipino American Studies.

hb: How do you think the Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies departments can spice up the curriculum to reflect the changing times?

MO: At a recent Asian American Studies Program meeting, people suggested trying to do a survey of where students are at, the kind of interests and concerns they have and to ask them what they think is good about the existing program and curriculum and also to think about what is missing.

hb: Where do you see the direction of Asian American Studies going?

MO: For Ethnic Studies as a whole, I think it really needs to think about considering the experiences of groups we haven't thought deeply about. I think in the post-9/11 political environment, for example, issues of Arab-Americans or even of the ways in which we think about Muslims and the way they are racialized in a particular manner are the kinds of issues we're going to have to take up.

hb: As the Chair of Ethnic Studies, are there any changes to the university itself that you would want to see occur?

MO: I'm more concerned around issues of access, particularly for low-income groups and people of color. I think a number of budget reductions that are being currently proposed by Governor Schwarzenegger may have an extremely devastating effect on questions of access, particularly on groups of color. His proposal initiates to abandon most outreach efforts system-wide. Raising fees will affect the graduate and undergraduate level, making

it much more prohibitive for groups to be able to have the economic resources to pursue a higher education.

hb: Do you foresee another Ethnic Studies movement?

MO: Not quite maybe in the same way...in many respects, after the 60's there was a lot of activity with building community-based organizations, and many of them have already been institutionalized throughout the Bay Area such as the Asian Law Caucus and Asian Health Services. I think it really depends on the kind of issues and the way people politically mobilize around certain kinds of issues like Prop 54 that really become a rallying point for a lot of students on this campus to challenge those kinds of political initiatives. So it's all contingent on what comes up on the political horizon. I see a lot more political movements on campus to involve a number of different groups where multiracial coalitions become much more prominent.

hb: In the past, you made correct predictions about the Asian American community becoming more diversified and more pronounced in its labeling. Do you have any more predictions up your sleeve?

MO: We're dealing with a highly heterogeneous Asian American community. I think it's true that many Asian Americans don't see themselves as Asian American, but much more specifically in terms of their own ethnic origin. We've witnessed a huge influx of immigrants who never had the same experiences that characterize some of the Asian groups pre-1965. The same sort of policies of political exclusion is not the same for the new immigrants. They don't have that kind of history and legacy to draw upon.

hb: What do you hope for the future of Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies?

MO: I think a critical issue is increasing political empowerment and voice. It's not to say that Asian Americans are going to have a single, unitary voice. I don't think they will, but nonetheless that their voice be present. Figuring out strategies to make those voices heard is crucial.

hb: How do you think movies such as *Better Luck Tomorrow* is currently affecting the way Asian Americans are viewed?

MO: There seems to be a lot more going on in popular circulation with looking at Asian American representations. I think there are those that reproduce the old stereotypic images, but at the same time there's a growing and vibrant artistic community, many of which are Asian Americans who are trying to do music, film, dance, etc. in ways they think much more reflect the sensibility of different Asian American groups. I think that's a promising sign. Some are becoming more mainstream. There's that *American Idol* guy William Hung...

hb: What does an associate professor do in his spare time?

MO: Lately, what I've been doing is playing more guitar. I used to be in one of those garage bands in high school. I don't think I've advanced as a musician since that time. I play R&B and rock 'n roll, so I've been trying to do that a little more.



SO YOU THINK *LOST IT TRANSLATION* IS RACIST?

Whenever something great comes along, controversy is sure to surround it. In this case that something is the movie nominated for four Academy Awards and the winner of three Golden Globe Awards, *Lost in Translation*. Its success, however, is accompanied by accusations of it being a racist movie. In order to see that *Lost in Translation* is not racist, one must understand its message and understand that Japan is the setting with its culture being the context for the plot development, not the victim of ridicule and racism. Those who found this movie to be racist may have thought so because it only represents the situation of the people involved (Bill Murray, who plays Bob Harris, and Scarlett Johansson, who plays Charlotte) from their American viewpoint. After all, that was the point of the movie: to see things from the foreigners' perspective and realize how wonderfully interesting and unique the relationship between Bob and Charlotte turn out to be.

One of the main aims of this movie is to portray the alienation that these two main characters feel and highlight the fact that their loneliness is the pretext for their friendship. If Charlotte's husband had been affectionate with her and if Bob had been able to bring his wife along, Bob and Charlotte would not have been inclined to seek each other's company. The movie would not be deserving of the title *Lost in Translation* without this foreign aspect.

"The viewers could feel the same confusion of being in a foreign country as the actors did because neither the actors nor the audience had the luxury of understanding the Japanese dialogue."

The movie did a great job of portraying this alienation. The director was even able to extend the feeling out to the audience. Although there were a handful of scenes where subtitles would have been helpful, the movie never used a single subtitle. The viewers could feel the same confusion of being in a foreign country as the actors did because neither the actors nor the audience had the luxury of understanding the Japanese dialogue. This is another method for the director to express that these two new found friends really were "lost in translation". Their knowledge of Japanese culture and language was non-existent, their spouses gave them minimal attention, and they were both in a place they did not travel to by their own ambitions but by external forces (Charlotte's husband and Bob's manager). As a result, they ended up in an undesirable situation that eventually developed to become one of the most unforgettable experiences for the two of them.

There were scenes that may seem offensive on the surface. For example, consider the scenes where they seem to be mocking the Japanese ambiguous pronunciation of

the L's and R's. These scenes may be funny or offensive to different people but they just represent the truth that most non-native English-speaking Japanese people have trouble pronouncing the L's and the R's. If Bob had known in advance that the Japanese have a different way of pronouncing English than Americans, he might have saved himself from such confusion in the Call Girl scene. Bob may not have been sensitive to this difference (hence the "lip"/"rip" confusion) but it does not mean the movie was portraying a racist point of view. English pronunciation varies between England, America, and Australia. Likewise native English speakers may have a similar problem of pronouncing certain Japanese words. This viewpoint is missing from the movie because the movie is about Bob and Charlotte's viewpoint and not anyone else's.

"Unless you are in the NBA, six feet is considered tall to most people -- American or Japanese."

Another scene that may have been taken to be racist includes the elevator scene in which Bill Murray's character towers over all the Japanese people. This scene presents an observation that many Japanese people are short. However, anyone who has ever been to Japan may also observe that there are tall Japanese, contrary to what the scene suggests. Furthermore, Bill Murray is six feet tall. Unless you are in the NBA, six feet is considered tall to most people -- American or Japanese. In this movie being tall is represented as an American characteristic and being short as a Japanese characteristic. Neither characteristic is positive or negative. The director could have chosen a short actor to play Bob and surrounded him in an elevator with tall Japanese people, but she did not. While this selection was probably not arbitrary, it is not making fun of being short or tall, it is just displaying yet another difference between the American, Bob, and the natives of Japan, which as a result enhances Bob's alienation and "out of place" mentality. Because it only showed one side of a situation from one point of view does not make it a racist movie.

People can take just about anything in life and put a negative twist on it. This is the case when people call *Lost in Translation* "racist." The movie may have only shown one side of the story -- Bob and Charlotte's viewpoint -- but how could a movie possibly express being "lost in translation" if it was completely clear about every aspect it represented? If it represented the Japanese point of view by explaining customs and translating dialogue, the viewers could not join in the same feeling of being lost as the characters had. This movie represented usual situations foreigners face. *Lost in Translation* does not convey "racism." Rather, it conveys what every first-time traveler abroad feels when he or she is in a foreign country: confusion and frustration, which eventually turn into excitement, and, in some cases, the desire to never return home.



Harmless Stereotypes

by veronica louie

OR YOU THINK *LOST IT TRANSLATION* IS HARMLESS?

Lost in Translation is a brilliant and thought-provoking movie that has received rave reviews, three Golden Globes and four Oscar nominations. But has anyone stopped to ask why this comedy is making audiences laugh? The scenes that contrast the eccentric culture of Japan with American culture are the ones that produce a laughing riot, not the witty banter that goes on between Bill Murray and Scarlet Johansson. The racial stereotype jokes are not apparent at first glance, but they become the focus of attention by the end of the movie.

“The racial stereotype jokes are not apparent at first glance, but they become the focus of attention by the end of the movie.”

Japanese English may not be perfect, but Americans sound equally awkward when they attempt to converse in foreign languages. Even then stereotypes about the Japanese are exploited for the sake of laughter. The Japanese director for the whisky commercial gives his directions for over a minute in Japanese, but all that is translated is, “Turn to the right.” The translator reiterates the message to Murray and he laughs in disbelief. The audience is left wondering if the translator left something out, or if she does not know what the director said and she fabricating her own response. It appears that Murray is in a bad, foreign-dubbed movie where the director’s mouth is moving, but there is no meaning to his words.

The Japanese language takes another hit. When Murray allows a Japanese prostitute into his room, she repeatedly says, “Rip my stockings.” For Murray and the audience, we hear, “Lip my stockings.” This wisecrack on her Japanese accent produces a riot. It is the Japanese language that is ridiculed at the expense of generating laughter from a foreign audience.

“The subservience of Murray’s entourage is exaggerated as they wait for him morning, noon, and night to serve his every whim.”

Japanese culture is rooted in respect, and can be seen through their language and mannerisms. The subservience of Murray’s entourage is exaggerated as they wait for him morning, noon, and night to serve his every whim. The Japanese hosts are hospitable,

but their bowing and incessant questions appear unbearable for Murray. Without much grace Murray performs the necessary return gestures to his welcoming committee. The audience laughs at his awkwardness and the manner in which he deals with the situation. He evades them by taking an alternate route to escape from their field of vision. The scene becomes a video game where his mission is to escape from the Japanese who are trying to kill him with their generosity.

Japanese television may never be fully understood by Americans, but the talk show that Murray appears in is highly exaggerated. The Japanese host is dressed in a neon striped suit and adopts an emasculating voice that causes a world of amusement. When he forms a heart out of his hands and performs a little song and dance this sends the audience over the top. What are they laughing at? Obviously, the Japanese, but they are not laughing with us.

Japan may just serve as a background for the unfolding relationship going on between Murray and Johansson, but it is ever present. Every scene throughout the movie is littered with caricatures of the Japanese culture. It even comprises more of the movie than the odd “romance.” Very rarely is there a scene without a jibe at the Japanese people. Asian people tend to be relatively shorter than Americans, but time and time again this stereotype is exploited. The elevator scene with a six-foot Murray and short Japanese men focuses on his towering presence. When Murray takes a shower the head of the shower is way too short for him. He is forced to contort his body in weird positions just to wash his hair.

“Japanese television may never be fully understood by Americans...”

The Japanese culture is unfairly exploited, giving off the assumption that all of the people who live in Japan are funny little people. This film superficially touches the surface of what Japanese culture represents and discredits Japan as a whole. The subtle racist jokes are the aim of the comedy in the movie. The “romance” or connection between Murray and Johansson takes a back seat to the humor created by making fun of the Japanese. Was the setting of Japan absolutely necessary to the plot of the movie? Why couldn’t it have been set in another country outside of America? Questions like these need to be addressed because, frankly, the Japanese are overly stereotyped and unjustly portrayed in this film. Japan ends up as a cheap punch line with its predictable karaoke, bright lights, and crazy entertainment.



Mike Park

an interview with the founder of Asian Man Records and an all around cool guy
by hellen jo

Mike Park, THE MYTH: an eight foot tall Korean American man who skanked his way to stardom, started a mammoth punk record label out of his folks' garage, and then beat three East Bay punks by himself in a game of Gilman basketball, 10-4. A devoted San Joser with a love for peace, music, and burritos, Mike Park was a member of pioneering ska-punk band Skankin' Pickle; later he went on to play with Less Than Jake as the Bruce Lee Band and then in the Chinkees, an all Asian-American band. In 1996, he founded Asianman Records, which today has over one hundred CDs from fifty bands, distributes records from other labels, and is still run from his parents' garage. Mike Park recently released his first solo acoustic album, *For the Love of Music*, on SubCity Records. He is, according to me, the most fucking rad Korean American San Joser EVER.

hb: When you founded Asianman Records in 1996, did you have a particular mission in mind?

MP: It was just an outlet to release my own music and also my friends' that I had met through the years. I just wanted to have an outlet for people who needed their music to be heard.

hb: Does Asianman continue to provide that outlet, that you had originally intended?

MP: I really think so, more than ever. I think that it's really scary how the views, and how everything has stayed intact, including the same employees, so I'm pretty happy that's been able to continue in the same direction it's always been striving at.

hb: Since you started Asianman, you've run it out of your parents' garage, and you've had the same two employees, but your label has over one hundred CDs from around 50 bands, and you distribute CDs from other labels; it exemplifies the DIY business ethic. But in an email you sent out recently to the AM mailing list, you
6 hb

mentioned the possibility of expanding AM to more "professional" levels.

MP: Well, yeah, not more "professional"; it's just like, we're running out of space and I was just kind of curious what people thought, and what I got was pretty much unanimous, that everyone supported whatever I would do. I was talking to Miya and Tony [the two employees at Asianman Records] and thinking to myself, it's better to stay put and keep myself grounded. I think the biggest problem was we could only get one phone line where we were at, and it was killing us. And cell phones don't work there, so we were screwed. We still are but, you know...

hb: So, do you have any specific plans for the future of Asianman?

MP: I really think... just to kind of keep it the same and make sure that I'm happy with what I'm doing; I want to make sure it's something I enjoy and if I keep that intact, I think I'll be okay.

hb: You recently played a show at Gilman with several Bay Area Asian American bands, including the Clarendon Hills, the Skyflakes, Charmin, and Pete the Genius. What are your thoughts on the growing Asian-American indie and punk scenes in the Bay Area, like the PiNoisePop community?

MP: I think that especially with the PiNoisePop community, it's pretty amazing, especially in the Bay Area, how much they support each other. The bands seem to really support each other, there's no competition, it's more like, "Hey let's have fun, we're doing something we enjoy, and we're just gonna continue doing it," so it's really exciting how everyone just seems to help each other, instead of battling each other, trying to outdo each other, and it's also just neat to see, as a minority, as an Asian American, just support in the scene, in terms of being a minority in a minority. You know what that means?

hb: Yeah, like a double minority.

MP: Punk rock is predominantly white, so we're catering to kind of like a dead-end street, like in the corporate world. You know, we're doing it in our own ways, and it's very, uh... very neat!

hb: How long have you been working on your solo album? I can remember waiting for it in 2000, when I was in high school, wondering when it was going to come out.

MP: (laughs) Well that's when the idea came up, and I was going to do it, but I just put it off. The idea has been in the works for probably three or four years, but I finally got to the point of setting aside time this year and doing it. And most of it was done at Expressions in Emeryville for free, so I really wasn't under any time constraints to work; you know when I'm paying, I got to finish. I was really taking my time, and it was great. I felt like I was able to really work on song and develop them the way I want.

hb: In "On That Stage" you sing, "My culture bleeds/ but I'm shaking it on through." What does that mean?

MP: It's just an example; basically, it's just a cultural difference. Okay, "My culture bleeds;" that can mean many things. It can mean, I'm in pain from my culture, I'm pouring my blood out from my culture, but the differences are causing whatever stress, but those differences... I'm shaking it on through (laughs).

hb: Looking at your songs on this album, and the songs you've written in the past for Skankin' Pickle, the B. Lee Band, and the Chinkees, the lyrics have a balance between personal content and politically driven messages. As an Asian-American artist, do you feel like the audience has certain expectations and demands for you?

MP: Umm, I don't think so, not at all. It's just, you know, something that I do. I don't think the Asian American audience expects anything. I could be singing about puppy dogs and ice cream, and I think they'd be cool with it as long as we're good.

hb: On the other hand, you make your feelings about racism and hatred very explicit in your lyrics; in "From Korea" you sing "My eyes are small, but your eyes are closed"; you also sing "Are you a leader or somebody's dunce?" and you have a song entitled, "Don't Sit Next to Me Just Because I'm Asian," so it's pretty obvious from your music how you feel about racism, but do you still encounter ignorant attitudes in the present-day punk community?

MP: Sure. In *all* communities, you know, stupid people are stupid people; that's the bottom line. You know, what can you do, except educate your surrounding people, and lead by example. Yeah, I mean, it's a common thread; I'm sure you get it too. You know, we're lucky we live in a pretty diverse area of the United States, but also, that doesn't make the ignorance disappear. You know, sometimes I feel more comfortable in a region that's predominantly white; backwards hick-towns sometimes are better than my own hometown. You know, it's just how you view things. So, you know, you just gotta persevere

hb: On that note, as a fellow San Joser, I have to ask, do you ever wonder why there aren't any cool things around? Because I think the last and only cool thing to come out of San Jose is Asianman.

MP: Yeah, well, the problem with Asianman is maybe that we're not community-involved, so it's not like, "Oh there's another Asianman event, and there's this!" We just exist in the South Bay and that's it. The coolest thing in the South Bay is Derek Finale and the stuff that he does, and the fact that he puts on shows and things like midnight movies; he plays obscure, well not obscure, but these old John Hughes flicks or whatever. Cool stuff. So, I don't know why there's not more... I was analyzing San Jose and there's a lot of stuff I do like. Living downtown... you gotta live downtown first. All the streets are flat; you can ride your bike anywhere downtown with minimal effort. There's two art theatres, so many good restaurants; there's the Tech Museum, there's comic book stores, uh what else is good downtown. There's the university; I get a basketball game for five bucks. Little things I find; it's culturally diverse... I like it! (laughs) There's no shows though, that's the problem. I wish there was a nice venue downtown that I could ride my bike to and know that there's gonna be this amazing show, but that's rare. There's one club, but that's it, and it's 21 and over too.

hb: Most of the bands on Asianman Records aren't from the Bay Area; they're from other states.

MP: There is no prerequisite; I like to keep diversity coming. It'd be nice to sign more Bay Area and get a stronger community going, but that ain't happening any time soon. It's just... whatever I like, and that's what I'm gonna put out.

hb: I was reading the CD jacket of your album, and you write a paragraph about the Plea for Peace Foundation, a non-profit organization of which you are founder and president [a portion of the proceeds that Mike Park and his distributor, SubCity, earn from the sale of his album are donated to PFP]. You write that one of the future projects for PFP is to open a Bay Area teen center "that will be open year round for kids who have interests other than sports or the normal medium that peers deem as 'normal', a center that will give youth an outlet to perform music, create art, dance, and talk with others who share the same interests." Do you feel that these youth-oriented spaces number few and far between?

MP: Sure. Like we were saying, there *is* nothing in the Bay Area, in the South Bay, for kids.

If there were just an outlet of stuff to do, that would be amazing. But, you know, at this point, there *is* nothing... gotta try to build that up.

hb: Was that frustrating for you when you were in junior high and high school?

MP: Yeah, there's just not a lot of artistic creativity out there. You're really limited in what you can and can't do. You're either just partying or ... well, partying (laughs). You know, it's really drab; there's gotta be more out there. So I'd like to be able to do something more about it, but it costs so much, and there's so much red tape. It's gonna be an uphill battle, but I think, the more I keep talking to people, I'll figure it out, you know what I'm saying?

hb: Yeah, man, I've been reading online how excited people were to learn that there was a Plea for Peace table on the Vans Warped Tour last summer; they were saying things like, "WOW, Mike Park is so rad! Plea for Peace is cool!"

MP: There's stuff about it online even? That's cool. I like that (laughs).

hb: I think you are one of the "bigger" Asian Americans in music entertainment, and I don't think that there enough... not "role models", but Asian Americans in punk, or even mainstream music. In the future, do you think it will continue being this way? In punk, will we continue to be just the double minority?

MP: Psh, yeah. Well, until, culturally, things change, we gotta blame ourselves; we need breakthrough artists in the underground. Not just mainstream, but the underground. I mean, Karen O from the Yeah Yeah Yeahs; she doesn't embrace her culture; she's not like, "Hey I'm Korean American!" It's just, no one knows; I mean, I don't think people know that she's half-Korean. Someone's just gotta be... fucking politically into it, and until that happens, it's just small time. I guess we'll just see what happens. Yeah, it's gonna stay underground, and things aren't gonna change until there's this breakthrough. Someone like Kathleen Hanna or Bikini Kill, destroying and kicking ass...

hb: I've noticed in the last couple years that there have been a lot of Asian American women who produce their own mellow solo albums on acoustic guitar and tour together, like Jenny Choi or Annie Lin. It seems cool, but then, at the same time, they're not necessarily politically driven or anything.

MP: Well I don't really know anything about it, so I can't really comment on it. You know, I think anytime you get a group of women of color to do something, anything, it's pretty awesome, and I can only support that, but I don't know anything about that scene. I'd like to learn more, but at this point, I don't know anything (laughs).

hb: Over the summer, Jenny Choi organized the Asians in Rock tour; what do you think of such a tour, that showcases a very wide variety of Asian American bands and sounds, from folk to indie to punk to college rock?

MP: I think it's amazing; I feel bad that I didn't go to any of the shows, but I'd give it full thumbs up, and "A" for effort. It's hard when you don't have a name act going out; they're doing that strictly word of mouth. That's a *lot* of work, lot of hard work. But I think she did good; from what I heard, there was a decent turn-out and a lot of people were really excited about it.

hb: That's rad. Oh boy, I'm almost out of tape; do you have anything else you'd like to say?

MP: ...Nope. (laughs)

hb: Oh, I just wanted to tell you, I was listening to the album in the car with my dad the other day when I went back home, and we were listening to you sing, "Southbound 280/ I travel toward Race Street/ Traffic keeps me from the church/" just as we were about to exit southbound 280 on Race Street on the way to my parents' church. My dad was all, "Whoa, that's creepy."

MP: (Laughs) That's funny. Did he buy my record yet?

hb: Oh! (Laughs)

MP: Damn!

hb: I just let him listen to mine.

MP: That's cool.

for more information please visit:
www.mikeparkmusic.com
www.asianmanrecords.com
www.subcity.com

BEIJING

PUNKS

by jen weiting



Brain Failure and Hang On The Box, two of China's 'leading' punk bands, came to the Bay Area in early November, and performed two shows in Berkeley, including one at the Bear's Lair on November 3rd. Wei Ting Jen muses on their show, the bands, and Chinese punk rock.

Why, one might ask, would two seemingly obscure punk bands from China suddenly show up in the US and perform not one, but two national tours in a single year? And through what means? This was the burning question on my mind as I watched Brain Failure and Hang on the Box perform at 924 Gilman on November 1st, and when I helped the Society of Hong Kong and Chinese Affairs organize their second gig in Berkeley at the Bear's Lair two days later.

Having a national tour in the US is no small matter for local bands, not to speak of foreign punk bands. Conducting their second national US tour in less than a year without even a solid popularity base back home somehow seemed a tad extravagant. Still, I was a little surprised when I had to take the bands out for dinner and Xiao Rong (vo. Brain Failure) casually mentioned that they didn't want to go anywhere expensive – "no more than six or seven dollars". Given that one can feast like a king for less than \$5 in China, it was not all that surprising of course, but Xiao's thrift certainly spoke volumes.

Let's give the band some credit. Brain Failure and Hang On the Box are well-known to a certain extent in China – at least on the underground circuit. Their live shows in Beijing pack in hundreds of teenagers and young adults. Their albums have sold well enough for them to live as punk musicians, a career that would have been unthinkable in Maoist China before Deng Xiaoping 'opened-up' China. But their punk riffs are drowned out in China by the torrent of commercial pop flooding in from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the West.

Not quite unlike the punk scene in the US, you might say. Or at least, like how the punk scene was pre-Green Day and Blink 182. In a certain sense, Brain Failure and Hang On the Box are the granddaddies of China's future punk generation. There was no one who walked the path before them. If you grew up in China (or Hong Kong, Singapore or Taiwan) in the eighties or nineties, chances are your music diet consisted of the Four Heavenly Kings, or perhaps the Four Heavenly Kings Jnr (stumped? neither are bands, thankfully). Perhaps, if you wanted to be a little different, you might listen to Western music instead of slick-haired teenyboppers and their soppy love ditties – Take That anybody? Or if you got a little more adventurous, it was Bon Jovi, or Metallica. If you wanted to be *really* different – well, classical music or Chinese *erhu* would cut it too. Punk? That was not even on the radar screen; at least in the US you could still *find* their records.

But ten years is a long time in Chinese history, especially if it's the last decade you're talking about. Somehow, somewhere, punk records slipped insidiously through the chokehold of commercial pop into China. Maybe through Japan, maybe through enthusiastic foreign students studying in China in the early days. They made it as far as

the musty back shelves of a (mostly bootleg) record store in Beijing, China. It was here that Wang Yue (vo), Yilina (b) and Yang Fan (ex-g) of Hang On The Box met in high school, drawn together by their love of the Ramones, et al. With Yang Fan originally playing the drums and Wang Yue doubling up as guitarist, they put on their first live show at Scream in 1998, China's very first underground music club, pronouncing themselves as Beijing's first (and only) all-girls punk band. (Shen Jing, the drummer, joined a year later, at the age of 16.) Not having practiced once beforehand, they were booed, laughed at and ridiculed – which according to their website, was what galvanized them to try and become the best all-girls punk band possible.

Five years on, Hang On The Box have made it far indeed. They're no longer China's only all-girl punk band, but that's not because of capitalist competition. Their guitarist, Yang Fan, quit in April this year, ostensibly to form a band with her boyfriend. She's been replaced by a 'he' – Xiao Gan. Thanks to the novelty of (once) being an all-



girls punk band, they were signed on by Benten Record, a Japanese label which specializes in all-girl bands, including the infamous Lolita No. 18. With their backing, they've been able to release two albums and perform shows throughout China, Japan and the US.

Brain Failure, has a slightly longer history. It was founded in 1995 by Xiao when he was still a student at one of Beijing's most elite high schools, together with three other classmates. The band nearly disintegrated in 1999, but with the recruitment of Wang Jian (g) and Xu Lin (dr) – both Henan natives – in 2000, and Shi Xu Dong (b) in 2001, Xiao managed to restart the band. They were signed onto Japan's Band News Records in 2002 and their first album was re-released. Together with Hang On The Box, they were marketed as "Beijing punk rock" and performed tours in China, Japan, and the US.

The two bands however, could hardly be further apart on the punk spectrum. Hang On The Box's music leans towards pop-punk, no surprise for a band which cites the Ramones, the Avengers and Janis Joplin as their biggest influences. Brain Failure on the other hand is firmly lodged in the hardcore/thrash segment. During their two shows in Berkeley, Hang On The Box's bop-happy, midtempo ditties did a good job of getting curious audiences grooving, while Brain Failure's set induced a lot more head-banging and moshing.

Having heard both bands before more than two years ago at Happy Paradise, another underground music club in Beijing (which has been demolished to make way for the massive reconstruction effort for the 2008 Olympics), I was pleasantly surprised at how much their sets had improved. They were certainly a lot slicker, and I liked the new sounds I was hearing – a new ska/reggae twist for Brain Failure, and a definite swing towards pop-punk for HOTB. Affability-wise, Brain Failure's members were as congenial as I remembered, Wang Yue still the ice queen (if not icier!) and *lao ban niang* (lady boss) of her band.

At the end of the night though, I could not help but rue perhaps one of the biggest ironies – that both bands continue to write songs overwhelmingly in English, even while hardly speaking the language. If they were capitalizing on their novelty as Chinese bands to tour in the US, where was their "Chinese-ness" to distinguish them from the million other garage punk bands out there? At least Brain Failure makes some sense with their English lyrics (e.g. "Anarchy in the PRC"), but I don't think anyone can make head or tail of HOTB's songs ("You're a fucking dirty fish", "Heroin and Cocaine, Heroin and Cocaine" anyone?). It's a sort of twisted irony that HOTB was recently denied visas to perform in England because the authorities deemed them as "unrepresentative of Chinese culture."

True, they're probably trying to promote some notions of universal love and brotherhood by singing in English, but I certainly didn't catch very much of that. It reminded me terribly of a conversation I recently had with a Japanese friend, Toshi-Low, who's the lead singer of one of Japan's most popular indie punk bands, Brahman. I asked him why he'd suddenly switched to singing in Japanese, when he'd been singing in English from the start. "I don't quite know," he mused. "But then I've suddenly been feeling recently that I can say a lot more in Japanese, express a lot more of the nuances and subtleties, than I could ever in English."

The answer to my burning questions didn't come easy, but it turned out to be deceptively simple. Why perform a US tour? Why, for the same reasons that unknown US bands perform in obscure venues throughout the country – to get signed onto a major label, and to promote their music. But to fly in an entire band from China and pay for their accommodation and transport (from New York City to Oregon to San Francisco – and Monterey, no less), no less than six months after *another* cross-US tour, sounds like quite an overkill. But as an unnamed source traveling with the band slipped out, their record labels were keen to capitalize on their novelty to generate buzz in the US; in fact several weighty labels had already expressed interest.

Chances are, we'll see HOTB and Brain Failure in the US again soon, if not in 924 Gilman then at least in the musty back shelves of Amoeba. As Xu Lin and Shi Xu Dong, cheerfully told me, "we'll be back again, maybe even before you can visit China next year." They'll have their 15 minutes of fame, no doubt. But whether that can be sustained, or fizzle out soon after, is an open question.



unmasking the emasculated asian male

by lisa wong macabasco

Ask any Asian male what he thinks of media representations of Asian men, and you know what answer you'll get: they'll rail on the emasculated Asian male stereotypes, like Long Duk Dong or our own William Hung. To which I can only answer: boo-freaking-hoo.

Let me first say the emasculated Asian male stereotype undoubtedly exists: it's rare for Asian males to be portrayed as masculine (in the Western definition of the word) or sexual beings in the mainstream media. To make things worse, Asian women are usually paired with White men in films, as if our Asian American brothers aren't man enough for us. Furthermore, it's undeniable that media stereotypes produce real-world implications. But to believe that the stereotype of the emasculated Asian Pacific American male is the reason APA men sit at home alone on a Friday night is ridiculous. As my best friend put it: "I know some of them are hurtin', but that isn't the media's fault."

Masculinity, like femininity, is a social construct, which means that time and culture determine how they are defined. Both are related to socially constructed gender roles — masculine men have muscles and jobs, feminine women have long hair and babies. Masculinity and femininity are also related to sexuality —more feminine women attract more men (but don't have sex with them because good girls don't have sex — right?), and more masculine men get more women. This gets to the point of why I and many others roll our eyes at men who complain about emasculated Asian male stereotype: APA men who want more "masculine" images think they will benefit (i.e. get laid) as a result. They want to get more women, preferably white women, who will hopefully see these hot Asian boys onscreen and shed their clothes immediately (it's that easy, really).

This type of thinking was shown in a recent *L.A. Weekly* article on L.A.'s Koreatown. A group of Korean men (described by the white female author describes as "a table of hotties") discussed media stereotypes of Koreans, complaining that in movies and TV, "the order of sexy guys is always white, black, Latin, vibrators, Asian guys. We're always below the vibrators." Notice they're not complaining about lack of representation; these Korean men are complaining because vibrators are getting more action than they are. It comes down to sex — APA men just want more of it and think the media can help them achieve that goal.

A blurb on VH1's website for the show *TV's Illest Minority Moments Presented by Ego Trip* is similarly telling about the true motivation behind complaints about emasculation: "Why is it that Asians guys can play martial artists capable of kicking the asses of 100 bad guys, yet they can't ever seem to score a hot chick?" Perhaps it's because Asian guys continue along with the juvenile mindset of wanting to "score a hot chick" (I know it's every girl's fantasy to be thought of in those terms). Either way, there's a clearly distinction here between masculinity (isn't being able to beat 100 bad guys masculine enough?) and sexual desirability, and APA guys want the latter under the guise of the former.

In the same *L.A. Weekly* article, the Korean men go on to lament always being portrayed as bad guys, kung fu masters, or yakuza gangsters. While Asian women are portrayed as "exotic," they said, Asian men are portrayed as having small penises, as math geeks, computer nerds, laundry men, workaholics, and businessmen. What struck me as odd about these complaints was that they included depictions of men in positions of power, such as yakuza gangster and businessmen, and men with typically masculine abilities, such as kung fu masters. APA men have got things so backwards that they can't even appreciate what they have — they already have their "masculine" images; now they just want their women. APA men don't want masculinity for the sake of masculinity. They want it for more sex.

However, more "masculine" media images of Asian males may actually function to the detriment of APA females; APA women may pay the price of APA male fantasies of hypermasculinity because they are further objectified. Women become another thing masculine men can acquire by virtue of muscles and nice cars, instead of winning them over with personality and charm. Masculinity can also lead to more violent ends when taken to the extreme. For instance, men like to hold up NBA star Yao Ming as an example of an Asian male who negates the passive, emasculated stereotype. What makes Yao "masculine" is his skill at basketball, but more importantly, his physical dominance. In extreme situations, physical dominance over women can lead to sexual harassment,

domestic violence, and rape. Thus, it's easy to understand why APA women are skeptical of having more patriarchal, Western, testosterone-fueled images of masculinity.

Better Luck Tomorrow was one of the few instances of Asian American men being portrayed as "masculine" in a mainstream media text. More than just the blockheads or gangsters (Western versions of masculinity), the characters were complex and multidimensional, and they represented different types of masculinity. Han was the brooding beefcake with a temper; Darric was the suave and overachieving ladies man; Virgil was the boyish misfit; John Cho as poor little rich pretty boy Steve made me cross my legs once or twice; and Ben was intelligent, sensitive, ambitious, *and* he got the girl (who was smart and sassy to boot!) in the end. The film was a good example of alternate versions of masculinity (and to a lesser extent, femininity), moving beyond conventional Western signifiers like brawn and physical domination to more nuanced, and therefore more realistic, depictions.

I know that some think I should be championing my Asian American brothers in their plight for more multidimensional media representations instead of criticizing them. But, how often do Asian American men stand up for Asian American women's causes? Where are they when issues of domestic violence, sexual assault, sex trafficking, and reproductive rights come up? In the end, what this has to do with is standing by each other not solely by virtue of our common race or ethnicity but through our differences in gender as well. APA men have to be wary of falling into white male ways of thinking (especially in regards to definitions of masculinity and femininity) that only further oppress APA women. We need to rise above White-mandated, stereotyped notions of masculinity and femininity as much as we need to move beyond racial stereotypes.

It seems as if APA guys want to not only subscribe to but also be included in the dominant discourse that men must be muscular, womanizing, motorcycle-riding, wifebeater-wearing Alpha males. The queer Chinese Canadian author behind *lildragn.com* put it best: "In order to be masculine ... we men should be muscle-bound meat-heads filled with so much testosterone and machismo that we leak semen from our ears." Instead of realizing that this archaic mentality is wrong and representative of white normativity, APA men are agreeing with it and are actually angry to be excluded from it. These men have internalized racism and sexism by being complicit with what patriarchal white Western society dictates to be signifiers of "real men."

At a more elementary level, it's all about respect. All Asian American men, from frat brothers to engineers to activists (especially activists), need to take a long hard look at their male privilege (which has long plagued our communities) and think about how it oppresses Asian American women. Notice how often and how long you speak in group situations or in class, and whether you're listening to what women are saying or even giving them an opportunity to speak. Be aware that any comments on a woman's appearance may make her feel like an object and lessen her self-confidence in being your equal. Stand by me, and maybe, just maybe, I'll stand by you.

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hooray for

KOREAN AMERICAN DAY

by junette sheen

Mexican Americans have Cesar Chavez Day. African Americans have Martin Luther King Jr. Day. And now we, Korean Americans, have Korean American Day. I heard this explanation repeatedly on January 13, when I attended a student empowerment seminar and dinner banquet to celebrate the California Legislature's passage of Korean American Day. The California Legislature unanimously adopted HR 38 on January 13, and Korean American Day is now a statewide holiday. The activities throughout the first Korean American Day in Los Angeles were a joint effort by the first, 1.5, and second generations, which was not a simple task considering the language and cultural differences. Many KA legislative staffers and field deputies of politicians helped organize the events, while the students showed support by attending the banquet. The students were represented by the South California Korean College Student Association, who had been planning the bulk of the student seminar since October of 2003.

Whenever a speaker triumphantly proclaimed that there was finally a day reserved specifically for Korean Americans, I clenched my teeth. In Los Angeles, where race relations have often been strained, as evidenced by the 1992 LA Riots, to acknowledge these pronounced and precarious racial lines caused me to wince. I asked, what if a Mexican American was standing here right now? Being that the most common relationship between a Mexican American and Korean American in Koreatown is that of employee and employer, respectively, a Mexican American might take Korean American Day as a testament of the narcissism and haughtiness of Koreans. Though it grated against my personal belief that race should never be a factor of distinction or a cause for celebration, I was still unreasonably proud, along with the other Korean Americans in whose company I sat. However, it was not until I understood the history behind Korean American Day that I was able to be unapologetic about this celebration of being a Korean American.

Helie Lee, Janet Choi, Cooke Sunoo, Pulitzer Prize winner KW Lee—to many, these are unfamiliar names, but being moderately knowledgeable about the KA community, I was excited to know that these were some of the speakers at the student seminar. Though these are all prominent Korean Americans, I did not really expect much of a connection between the speakers and Korean American Day. They were merely proud of being Korean Americans because they were successful and honored within the KA community.

However, when the keynote speaker, KW Lee spoke, I began to understand and appreciate the accomplishments of Korean Americans. Though there is no way I could fully express the meaning and fire of his speech, I venture to write how he spoke passionately about his pride in Korean Americans and especially in the student population. He celebrated the way in which Korean Americans have done so much in the past, but he also told us of his faith in us, for he believes we will surpass our predecessors and do greater things. It has been one hundred years since Koreans first immigrated to America, and since then Korean Americans haven't just assimilated into American society and culture, but they have become vital members of it. I saw this when I listened to the speakers in the smaller workshops.

My first workshop was a community service workshop with Cooke Sunoo. I was expecting a talk about service in terms of volunteering at hospitals and volunteering at soup kitchens, but instead he spoke about serving the KA community. Here was a person whose professional goals were not to amass the most amount of money in the smallest time possible. He served the community that he lived in by working and giving as a leader in a nonprofit organization.

In my other workshop, I was able to hear Helie Lee, author of *Still Life with Rice* and *In the Absence of the Sun*, speak about her experiences as a Korean American with an atypical Korean American job. Not only did Helie Lee inspire me to think about the role that a Korean American has in Korea but also to try a little writing myself (as evidenced by this article). Through the experiences that Helie Lee and Cooke Sunwoo shared with us, I began to see that Korean Americans truly participate and excel in every aspect of American life. Korean American Day does not celebrate being Korean. It does not concentrate on Korean food, language, or Korean cultural awareness. It celebrates being Korean American, and it celebrates the way in which Korean Americans, for a hundred years, have contributed so positively to our American society. Whether I am in Southern California, where Korean Americans abound, or at school in Northern California where the KA community is smaller, I am now more confident about my identity as a Korean American, and the way in which I complement American society. As a Korean, I feel especially proud of Korean American Day, but as an American, I am also proud of the diversity and changes that have affected America through the many ethnic groups that have entered over time. So, why should you care about Korean American Day, even if you aren't Korean American? I remember reading a proclamation from President George W. Bush about Korean American Day, and I took it as a sign that America recognizes and is unified by her diversity. So it is not that Mexican Americans have Cesar Chavez Day or that African Americans have Martin Luther King Jr. Day. It is that we, as Americans, celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. for bringing about social change and affecting American society, just as on January 13, 2004 and on all subsequent January 13ths, we celebrate that America is diverse and that immigrants and their descendants constitute America in all her faults and glory.

With a large number of immigrants in California and a looming budget crisis, it is not a surprise that there is growing sentiment against immigrants, especially illegal immigrants, living in the state. However these immigrants should not be blamed for California's fiscal crisis.

Save Our State is an organization that represents anti-immigration sentiment in California. They lobby for legislation that hinders the rights of illegal immigrants and fight to stop legislation that aids them. They have petitioned for Proposition 187, which refuses state and local benefits for illegal immigrants, and are now trying to block recent laws that allow illegal immigrants to obtain drivers license.

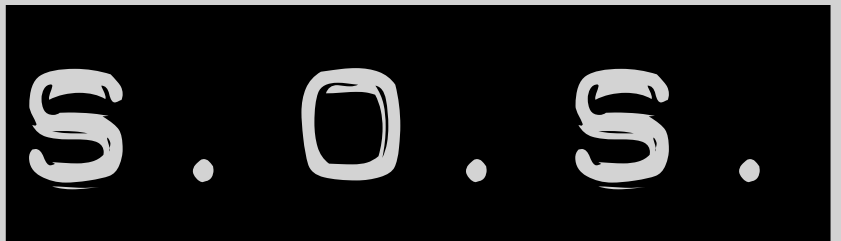
The main argument for anti-immigration laws from groups like Save Our State is that the immigrants are taking jobs away from Americans.

"With millions of Americans out of work and millions more unemployed, it's appalling that the President would allow illegal aliens to stay here and bring their relatives too," said Ron Prince, Chairman of Save Our State, in a recent press release. He adds that, "this give-away of American jobs will further weaken an over-taxed and under-paid middle class."

Advocates for anti-immigration laws may see this growth of immigrants in national universities as proof that immigrants are taking away jobs and spots in higher education from Americans. Yet many illegal immigrants take jobs that middle class Americans would not be interested in and secondly, educated immigrants who come to America provide human capital resources, such as knowledge, that would help the American economy to expand.

"By [immigrants] working in America, they increase the nation's economic output

no need for a



by dan nguyen

because we are paying them at a lower price for the same amount of output," said Ahn Bui, a freshman. She comments that "this will improve the nation's economy, and they will further help the economy by spending the money they earned in the United States."

In theory, any improvement in the economy will provide more jobs for America. If illegal immigrants are improving the American life, they deserve the benefits of being an American citizen that groups, like Save Our State, do not want to give them.

"[Immigrants] are not abusing the system. They will become beneficial to society, and [as a result] should be treated as humans and as American citizens," said Trevor Nguyen, a junior transfer and recent immigrant.

Save Our State adds to their main argument by stating that illegal immigrants undermine the security of America. There are no precedents to justify this argument because, for example, all of the terrorists in 9/11 were legal immigrants that the United States allowed into the country who became functioning members of this society. Some might feel then that the government should keep an eye on all immigrants and foreign-born citizens. However, this will be against everything this country is based on, and the issue of privacy is a whole other debate in itself.

Save Our State also exaggerates the immigration situation in America through the rhetoric on their web sites and literature. Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights states that immigrating in America only accounts for two percent of migration in the whole world on annual basis. In California, the foreign-born population accounts for twenty-five percent of the population, and illegal immigrants account for only fifteen percent of the state's population. Because migration into America is proportionally low compared to the world and immigrants are a low percentage of this state's population, it does not seem that their impact will affect the social welfare of Americans citizens to the point that they will be poor, as Save Our State tries to deduce.

As Asian Americans we should ally against any movement for anti-immigration laws because of our families' history as immigrants. Our backgrounds allow us to empathize with the immigrant's desire to be an American citizen—a want fueled by the belief that hard work will open opportunities.

"Compared to other nations ... there are plenty of obstacles in America; but obstacles were meant to be overcome. If you work hard in America, you can achieve your goals," said Dave Zhang, an engineering freshman.

This is sentiment is reflected by the many students, especially Asian Americans, attending Berkeley who are not only first generation, but also whose parents have worked hard to provide them with an education, or who are immigrants themselves.

As long as the United States is embraced as the land of opportunities, there will always be a large and growing immigrant population. We should embrace these immigrants because they improve the American life, and they will add color and diversity to this already diverse nation.



THE FORGOTTEN HERO: Recognizing Chiune Sugihara

by kristopher capello

For most Japanese Americans, the vast majority of heroes who emerged from World War II were either members of the 442nd Infantry Regimental Combat team or exceptionally strong-willed survivors of the American internment camps. There is no doubt that the respected people from these groups fully deserve their praise. There is, however, a hero who was a Japanese man, who in fact worked for the aggressive Japanese government as a foreign affairs officer. Once a tool of Japanese government, Chiune Sugihara's individualism in the face of an imminent genocide molded him into a little-known, but nevertheless important hero to many Holocaust survivors.

Sugihara was born in 1900 in Japan. Excelling in his studies, he graduated from high school at the top of his class. As an early sign of his independent streak, Sugihara disobeyed his father's order to study medicine, and instead elected to pursue his love of literature by studying English at Waseda University in Tokyo. Not long after, his Foreign Service career began.

Seeing an ad for a study abroad position in Manchuria, Sugihara jumped at the opportunity to expand his worldly experiences. Studying Russian in Harbin, China, fostered Sugihara's open-mindedness and curiosity of the world. After graduating, he served in the Manchurian government (which was, of course, controlled by Japan) and in 1934, Sugihara made his first official stand against the Japanese government by resigning his post in protest of Japan's cruel treatment of the Chinese.

In 1939, after one year of serving at the consulate in Finland, Sugihara was sent to Lithuania to open a one-man consulate in order to keep the Japanese government abreast of any developments in the relationship between the USSR and Germany.

But Sugihara's attention was quickly diverted from the escalating international conflict and towards the struggle of thousands of Jewish refugees, who had found a potential solution to their plight. The refugees had learned of two islands that had been long ago colonized by the Dutch: Curacao and Surinam. These islands were unique in that they required no formal entrance visa to enter, thus presented a potential safe haven for the fleeing Jewish refugees. Additionally, the Dutch consul informed them that he would (for a fee) issue final destination visas to the islands. If they could receive Japanese transit visas, they would be allowed through a sympathetic USSR on their way to the islands.

Sugihara, knowing full well that his government would most likely dismiss him for his actions proceeded to write as many visas as he possibly could. Between July 31 and August 28 of 1940, Sugihara and his wife worked almost nonstop, writing over 300 visas per day, knowing that his time was limited. Sugihara was transferred to a post in Berlin, but he didn't leave without performing another important deed, handing over his visa stamp to the refugees, which allowed even more to survive. It is believed that Sugihara saved 2,000 and 6,000 refugees in Lithuania. Many have wondered why Sugihara would risk not only his job, but also his life to save the refugees. Sugihara himself liked to say that they were human beings and they needed help. And when asked why he would disobey his own government, he responded by saying that he would have to disobey his government, if that meant obeying his God. His decisions are less surprising when one understands his spirituality and belief in a universal God who cares for all human life.

Another contributing factor to Sugihara's decision may have been his close relationship with the Ganor family. Yukiko and Chiune had joined the Ganor's for a Hannukah dinner

in 1939 and became close friends. Solly Ganor, a young boy, had invited Chiune to the celebration after Sugihara gave Solly two Lithuanian dollars to see a Laurel and Hardy movie. Sugihara was touched by the closeness of the family, which reminded him of his own, so many miles away in Japan. As the persecution of the Jews neared, Solly and his father received visas from Sugihara, but being Soviet citizens, they were not able to use them. Sadly, most of the Ganor family died in the concentration camps. Solly and his father, however were liberated by Japanese American soldiers and moved to Israel. Most of the refugees quickly headed through the USSR and on to Japan, where they were allowed to stay for several months before being moved to China and eventually on their separate ways. Every Polish refugee who received a visa survived.

Despite his refusal to follow explicit orders from the Japanese government, Sugihara was employed by the Japanese government until 1945, when he was dismissed from his post in Japanese Foreign Service. He maintained a quiet and humble existence, working as, among other things, a translator and a manager for a shipping company. Sugihara never publicly discussed his actions in the early stages of World War II and was largely forgotten. In 1969, however, Mr. Yehoshua Nishri, who survived the Holocaust with Sugihara's assistance, was able to locate the aging rescuer. Nishri brought the extraordinary actions of Sugihara to the attention of the international Jewish community and others who had been saved by the visas testified to the Holocaust Memorial. In 1985 Israel honored Sugihara with its highest honor, the title of Righteous Among the Nations. One year later, Sugihara died at the age of 86.

It is odd that Chiune Sugihara's story is not more widely known. Here, in the US it might be that telling the story of a heroic Japanese man, one that even worked with our enemies would undermine the black and white, good and evil distinction that is so easily taught (especially as it pertains to the great American pastime of warring). Instead of expanding views, the paradigm that has led to a society of close-minded individuals remains powerfully in effect. The majority of Americans' inability to achieve the most minute level of empathy toward anyone that commits any wrongdoing against them is largely a result of the oversimplification of history, which not only disrespects such great men as Sugihara, but also creates a dangerous culture, one that is unwilling to look deeper.

Recently, a man whose own inability to look deeper led to thousands of deaths spoke at Berkeley, stressing the importance of empathy. Robert McNamara, once vilified by a large group of Americans for his role in sending America to war in Vietnam, is now an ardent advocate for empathy and learning as much as one can about one's enemy. But what better lesson than that of Sugihara does one need to recognize the power of empathy? Of course, the empathy that McNamara speaks of and the variety that Sugihara displayed are somewhat different, but they both underline the basic importance of looking at everyone as human beings.

Unfortunately, these powerful lessons will most likely fall on deaf ears. Society will continue to view history as a struggle between pure good and pure evil, and the stories of men like Chiune Sugihara will continue to be overlooked in an attempt to simplify our understanding of the world. Leaders will continue to paint a picture of a world divided into two, those who defend the good and right, and those who want to undermine said goodness. Empathy makes the world confusing and confusion is simply undesirable.

HELLEN NOTICES HAIR

THEN...

HELLEN CUTS HAIR

THEN ...

HELLEN
DRAWS THIS
SHITTY-ASS
COMIC

THEN...

YOU
FREAK
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THEN ...

I GET
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