

Asian American Model Masculinities —Younghill Kang's *East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee*

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Abstract

This essay presents a comparative racial and gender analysis of masculinity and power during the post-Depression United States in a reading of Younghill Kang's novel, *East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee*.¹ I argue that Kang's novel, primarily read as an immigrant story yields insight into the multiple racial and class formations of Asian and black men in the U.S. within the context of sexuality, power, labor, and the economy. Kang's novel shows how the dominant racial paradigm of black versus white in the U.S. depends on an Asian male subject who negotiates his racialized identity within a tripartite racial system of black, white, and Asian. This racial negotiation of Asian masculinity revolves around the figure of the early Asian foreign student who receives privileges

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¹ The first edition of the novel was published in 1937 but for the purposes of this essay, I will be referencing the 1997 edition published by Kaya Press.

and favors by white elites and intellectuals. The Korean male protagonist in the novel understands how his status as the exotic Asian foreign student creates a masculine racial position between black and white men that predates but also mirrors the later formation of the Asian model minority during the U.S. civil rights era and beyond.

Key Words: masculinity, race, sexuality, model minority

In this essay, I consider how Younghill Kang's novel *East Goes West* foregrounds the ways in which a reading of the class and sexuality of Asian immigrants and Korean men in the early twentieth century illustrates their differential racializations in, and access to, the U.S. nation. Kang's novel imagines an Asian America that engages with the heterogeneity and contradictions of American life presented to an Asian male of the upper class. As such, Kang's novel reveals the outlines of the modern Asian racial masculine form and anticipates later developments of a "model minority." Perhaps most interestingly, Kang's novel reveals how at this time an Asian masculine racial form developed unevenly for Korean and Asian men of different class backgrounds and thereby seems to offer in advance a critique of the notion that Asians in America could be, after decades of exclusion, models for other minorities. Kang's novel shows how educated and economically-privileged Korean American men found ways to deploy their class privilege to obtain a modicum of access and privilege in the U.S., but that even they were at times subjected to the same racist laws and negative social treatment of working class Asian immigrants. Hence, the whole notion that emulating certain "models" derived from educational or economic success could render one immune from anti-Asian racism and prejudice is debunked in this early novel. Kang further complicates his narration of the East-West transit by inserting Black American male figures, who act as fascinating foils for Kang's protagonist, Chungpa Han. In the particular case of character Lorenzo, both men are educated; both men are racialized. Lorenzo is a veteran of the race wars, and proleptically figures Kang's denial of both cultural and actual citizenship. Ironically, Lorenzo's people have been freed by the Emancipation Act and will later be given the right to citizenship—Kang's will have to wait longer to be eligible for citizenship. Since it helps us understand the complications of masculinity and "modeling" within a black-white-yellow triad, I will pay particular attention to the critical dynamic between Han and Lorenzo.

In focusing on this dynamic, I am engaging in a mode of

scholarship which, in the last decade, has presented more intersectional analyses of racial difference, foregrounding the complexities of identity formations, specifically with regard to Asian American and African American studies. Helen Heran Jun cautions against “the tendency to approach African American and Asian American cultural texts as indices of a [single] racial ethic that is subject to being critically assessed as ‘praiseworthy’ or ‘failed’ according to our expectations” (2011: 5). I agree that we must approach comparative racial analysis outside of our desire to interpret (or even to project) a racial solidarity or discord that is out of historical context. In *East Goes West*, Kang’s protagonist, does not simply inhabit racial interstitiality—he in fact inserts himself into a black and white racial landscape.

At first glance, the protagonist seems to have a head start on fulfilling the role of avatar for the model minority: he is a middle-class foreign student, equipped with both educational and cultural capital. The question becomes whether or not that capital, derived in Korea, can be transferred to the United States. Kang’s novel can be seen as one of the few works describing the early foreign student experience, not only what they faced, but also how they were able to exercise their class privilege to change their position within the U.S. racial hierarchy vis-a-vis blacks, immigrants, and other Asians. The narrator, Chungpa Han, seeks to neutralize his racialized otherness by calling on his class privilege. In the short run, he is successful; he is even taken in by white Asiaphiles. But ultimately Kang sets out the contrasts and distortions of such “acceptance,” most probingly by deploying a triadic racial critique wherein Kang is able to show more particularly the relative privileges of each—Asian, black, and white—and thereby grant us greater understanding of the U.S. racial dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at that time. And again, those dynamics may be read today as foreshadowing similar issues within black-white-yellow relations in the 1970s and beyond, specifically as they relate to narratives of mobility and modeling.

I. Younghill Kang: Asian American Literature and Divisions

Elaine H. Kim explains how many early Asian American writers were forced to adopt the role as cultural interpreter for the U.S., or were given this role because there really was no voice outside of such a subject position. Kim points out that many of the early Asian authors writing, in the U.S., such as Lin Yutang, were embraced by a white U.S. elite literati and reading public as “cultural ambassadors”—they were read as cultural bridges between Asia and the U.S., often interpreting “Asia” for Americans and other westerners. Lin’s interest in reviving classic Chinese literature was especially interesting to educated and elite Americans during this time. His role as a Chinese celebrity author helped foster political alliances between the U.S. and China through intellectual and literary collaborations between the two countries. Kim explains how Kang’s first novel, *The Grass Roof* was more cited and celebrated than *East Goes West* because the American reading public at the time was more interested in narratives about Korea and Koreans than the experiences of Korean Americans. As Kim explains, the importance of Kang’s work, particularly *The Grass Roof* was that it provided information about a Korea that was little known in the U.S. and in the west at that time (1982: 32-33). At the same time, the U.S. public’s orientalist desires for information about Asia, rather than Asians in the U.S., likewise confined Kang to the role of “cultural ambassador.”²

Kang remains a complex figure because of his seeming ability to negotiate class privilege and the realities of racialization. Kang entered illegally into the U.S., right before the official enactment of the 1924 National Origins Act. Kang’s national identity as a Korean was largely

² Thus, in some ways Lin conformed more to this western ideal of the oriental intellectual whose scholarly interests were confined to Chinese and Asian literature and art. Lin and other Asian intellectuals also helped support a U.S. imperialist imaginary that resulted in the post-World War II rise of area studies (Chakrabarty, 2007). See also Isaacs (1997: 11-35).

unrecognized by the U.S. Like many Koreans, Kang was likely misidentified as Japanese or listed as a Japanese subject. Younghill Kang's biography describes him as both a political exile of Korea and a student/scholar in the U.S. He spent most of his early U.S. life trying to find a place as a writer, first as a student attending various universities and then later as a professor. Indeed, Kang's protagonist in *East Goes West*, Chungpa Han expresses a desire similar to that of the author: to be a scholar and poet. And yet the realization of this desire is thwarted by Japanese colonization of Korea. In 1910 Japan annexed Korea as a territory—making it part of its growing imperialist expansion across Asia and the Pacific. After colonizing Korea, Japan cut off all emigration. Political exiles constituted one of strongest components of the Korean nationalist movement. Many resided in Manchuria and the Russian Far East. A smaller but very notable number lived in the U.S. These included political activists Syngman Rhee (who became the first president of South Korea), Park Yong-man, and Ahn Ch'ang-ho.³

Kang himself took part in Korea's March 1st Movement of 1919, in which over one million Koreans protested Japanese colonization. Kang was imprisoned and beaten by the police and subsequently escaped from Korea in 1921 with the aid of missionaries (S. Lee, 1997: 403). Kang's novel thus paints a portrait of the Korean American community in the U.S. constructed out of Japanese colonization—a community comprised more by exiles than immigrants. Even the 7,000 Koreans who emigrated to the U.S. and Hawai'i before 1910 suddenly found themselves with no nation to which to return (Takaki, 1989: 284-285).

Moreover, Kang resided within an in-between state, as compared to many of the Asian working-class immigrants in the U.S.

³ Michael Edson Robinson explains how the March 1st Movement actually brought Korea onto the world stage, making visible Korean protest against Japanese imperialism and colonization (2007: 47). Some of the more notable Korean nationalists resided in the U.S. and sustained the Korean American community's ethnic and nationalist solidarity (S. Chan, 1991: 98-99).

He was of a much higher class background than they, yet at the same time, although Kang was from a similar social class as Lin Yutang, whereas Lin had the Chinese government's support, Kang had no nation to ally himself with—only a colonized state. What makes Kang's social and cultural identity particularly vexed is despite his elevated economic and class location, Kang resisted being proscribed as only an elite Asian scholar. In many ways, as the title of his novel signifies, *East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee* reflects his desire to become a Korean American rather than simply a Korean exile in the U.S. At the same time, his bid for citizenship relied exclusively on the argument that he was not like many of the Asian immigrant laborers, but a Korean of exceptional character as a result of his education and intellect.

In 1939, two years after the publication of his novel *East Goes West*, and twenty years after Kang arrived in the United States, Kang's petition for citizenship was finally brought to Congress. The argument that Kang made for citizenship differentiated him from Asian laborers and argued for Kang's inclusion as part of a collective of intellectuals, scholars and writers rather than as a member of the working class. The citizenship campaign included arguments made by prominent American intellectuals, writers and politicians such as John Chamberlain, Pearl S. Buck, Lewis Mumford, Malcolm Cowley, and Charles Scribner. Kang's citizenship petition was sponsored by Congressman Kent E. Keller: the same senator who introduced a bill to Congress challenging the discriminatory limits of the Asian immigrant exclusion laws and their relation to naturalization law. His bill argued that these exclusionary laws should be applied to Asian laborers, but not to intellectuals and scholars such as Kang. The distinction Keller made in his legislative piece is again evident in the way he couches his support for Kang: "[The Exclusion law] was [passed] for the purpose of preventing competition with American labor and not with American scholarship. Therefore, it is out of keeping with the American spirit to have this law operate against a man who has through his own genius written some fine books and

become a teacher of English at a great University” (S. Lee, 1997: 407). Kang, in Kent’s argument, is a species apart from other Asian immigrants who are mostly working-class. It is Kang’s education and privilege that make him a viable candidate for American citizenship.⁴

What were these “fine books” of Kang’s that Keller references and how did they hold special value? Kang is a particularly interesting figure in the context of the early Korean and Asian American literary canon. Within Korean American literary history, Kang is a pioneer not only because of the insightfulness and quality of his writing, but because he was virtually a singular voice in Korean American literature during the early twentieth century. As Elaine H. Kim (1997) explains, the first wave of Korean immigration can be divided into a few groups: foreign students and political exiles (such as Kang), the immigrant laborers who went to Hawai‘i to work on the plantations, and the Korean laborers who worked in the canneries and farms on the U.S. west coast. While the number of Korean immigrant laborers was a fraction of the total Asian immigrant population (particularly on the U.S. mainland), the number of foreign students and exiles was even smaller. Although for Kim, Kang represents one of the dominant voices of early Korean American literature, which depicted a world seen largely through the eyes of educated and privileged Koreans, I argue that it is precisely this distinction between Kang’s racial and ethnic, and class affiliations, that made him more or less invisible in Asian American literary studies until the 1980s, when we see both a rise in Korean immigration and an academic interest in class differentiations between different Asian American ethnic groups.

While Kang’s yangban roots, education, and embrace by a elite U.S. literati did not necessarily exclude him from the early Asian

⁴ In also comparing Kang’s citizenship bid with Takao Ozawa’s 1921 citizenship case, Steven Knadler makes a similar argument about Kang’s cosmopolitanism, which, he argues, is based on a universal intellectualism. However, he situates this universal intellectualism within the novel’s depiction of a cosmopolitan subject position, one that also dismantles the binary racial logic of black versus white (2000).

American literary canon, at the same time he did not exactly fit into the predominantly working-class Asian American writers of the early period.⁵ Kang was one of the rediscovered Asian American writers in the *The Big Aiiiiieee!*; however, it was not *East Goes West* that was anthologized therein but Kang's first book, *The Grass Roof*, a memoir about his early life in Korea. Kang's *East Goes West* was not taken up by scholars with enthusiasm till after it was finally reprinted by Kaya Press in 1997. The resurgence of interest in Kang's text is perhaps a reflection of the desire to reexamine our conventional models of Asian racial formation with respect to a theorization of how class, privilege, and mobility intersect with race, even as the Asian model minority image is pervasive.⁶

In some respects Asian American studies has yet to adequately

⁵ The yangban is an elite ruling class of Koreans during the Choson dynasty (1392-1910). The yangban upheld the idea of the Confucian scholarly and literary individual and served as both civil and military officials in Korean society. During the late Choson period, the original status of yangban began to erode as Korean society began to change. The rise of wealthy merchants and peasants who could obtain yangban rank through economic ascension began to erode the power of the original yangban families and their descendants. Although his biography in English does not identify this specifically, Kang was more likely a descendant from the older yangban since he retained the status of a yangban but no longer had the family money attached to the status. Kang's social and class status in Korea thereby marks him as different from the majority of Korean immigrants/exiles in the U.S.

⁶ The roots of the Asian model minority stereotype can be found during the civil rights era. At that time, the perception that Chinese and Japanese Americans were economically successful was considered to be proof of American meritocracy. Such images of Japanese and Chinese success deflected the criticism of structural racism in America and its historically racist legal policies. The persistence of the Asian model minority myth obscures the issues of class disparity within Asian American communities. The polarization between middle- and working-class Asian Pacific Americans is a phenomenon of the "duality" of the 1965 Immigration and Reform Act, because of the immigration preferences made to attract the educated and highly skilled Asian immigrant. But the existence of newer Asian migrants from Southeast Asia, the migration of Pacific Islanders to the U.S. mainland, and illegal immigration from China also comprise the diversity of Asian American populations today (Woo, 1999. See also, Liu & Cheng, 1994).

theorize how class historically intersects with the sexual, gender, and national formations of racial experience within Asian American communities. Most of the work on class and Asian American identity formation involves the post-1965 Asian immigrant group who came under the 1965 Immigration and Reform Act's preference for highly skilled and educated workers. Asian American identity formation before 1965 had been premised on an Asian American working-class masculinity deriving from the mostly sojourning male Asian laborers who came here. During the early twentieth century, American industrialization's demand for cheap labor was answered in the form of the Asian male laborer, and many of the representations of Asian men were thus of working-class laborers and bachelors.⁷ For the most part, works that have been anthologized and championed as "Asian American" were written by Asian immigrants and second- and third-generation Asian Americans of mostly working-class backgrounds such as Carlos Bulosan, Frank Chin, Toshio Mori, John Okada, and Louis Chu who recount experiences of exploitation and oppression as immigrant laborers and the emasculating effects of racism. The editors of *The Big Aiiieeee!*, Frank Chin, Shawn Wong, Jeffrey Paul Chan, and Lawson Fusao Inada (1991), themselves writers and poets, were committed to exposing Asian America's experience of labor exploitation, cultural and class inequities, and racial emasculation. In response to historically racist and emasculating images of Asian American men, these literary works defined an Asian American literary and artistic sensibility that was and is predominantly masculine and consciously working-class. It is this condition with which early Asian American history has been most concerned and perhaps one reason why Kang's novel, *East Goes West*, a work that demonstrates his experiences as an educated yangban transplanted in the U.S. was passed over until the 1980s-1990s.⁸

⁷ Commerce agreements made between East Asian countries, mostly China and Japan, included the importation of Chinese and Japanese laborers. For a history of these agreements, see Chan (1991); Takaki (1989).

⁸ Since the 1980s however, new inclusions to Asian American literature classes and

In arguing for an Asian American artistic sensibility that is rooted in a working-class consciousness and aesthetic, and writing in 1986, Fred Wei-han Houn implicitly references the Asian American cultural nationalist identity formations that impacted the compilation of *The Big Aiiieeeee!* Houn writes passionately against the

mistaken idea that early Asian American literature is represented by Lin Yutang, Pardee Lowe, Etsu Sugimoto, Jade Snow Wong and other privileged writers of merchant, high scholar, diplomatic and business class in America. These writers wrote in English for white publishers and to reach a white audience. As reflective of that small emerging petty bourgeois class of Asian Americans, their literature sought white acceptance, promoted the boot-strap path and projected their class interest: to be accepted by white society as model minorities, to be a credit to their race. (1986: 6)

In his revisionist zeal, Houn leaves no place for a writer such as Kang. Narrowly defined, Houn assumes that the Asian American bourgeoisie were most concerned with white approval. Houn's mention of writers such as Pardee Lowe, Jade Snow Wong, and Lin Yutang reiterates Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan's earlier diatribes against Asian Americans writers who become "the privileged foreigner" and hence the "assimilable alien" (1972: 72).

In his well-known 1972 essay, "Racist Love," Frank Chin

anthologies reflect other Asian/American identities and positions. Among these new works are those depicting the diasporic and transnational migrations of Asians outside of the U.S. and the lives of new Asian migrants and refugees (Southeast Asians), and especially, Asian Americans who are not of the working class. We see more and more narratives about those who came to the U.S. as highly skilled and educated laborers from upper middle to elite families in Asia. These works demonstrate how the passing of 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act created what Lucie Cheng and John Liu (1994) called the "duality of Asian immigration in the post industrial U.S." which denotes the polarization between a working class Asian immigrant population and elite and highly skilled Asians.

describes these Asian American writers as perpetuating stereotypes of Asian exotica and docility in their novels because this is what the mostly white reading public wanted to read. Here, the writer's class affiliation becomes associated with the desire to create literary characters that conform to white racist desires for the inferior Asiatic. Certainly writers such as Bulosan, Mori, and Okada represented an essential part of the Asian American experience that was prevalent during the early twentieth century. However, the presumption that writings by Asian writers from privileged backgrounds do not hold literary and historical value has limited our ability to see clearly the entire picture of Asian American experience.

More importantly, in the case of Kang this dismissal of value based on class status prevents us from adequately theorizing the ways that class and race differentiate experiences of Asian American men during this period. Not simply the narrative of an Asian immigrant laborer, nor of the Asian bachelor exiled to America, Kang's novel reflects the difficulties of being seen as both. *East Goes West* expresses very consciously Kang's own ambivalences over class and privilege, race and exclusion, often exploiting these contradictions through a naïve narrator and a picaresque style. The novel remains a critically important historical and literary document of the specific experiences of educated Korean and Asian men in the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the protagonist's successes and failures at redeeming his educational and cultural capital in the U.S. social, cultural, and, critical, legal marketplaces are made all the more vivid by counterposing them to those of the black American figures in the text.

II. East Goes West: America and Discontents

In the first few pages we are introduced to Kang's protagonist and narrator, Chungpa Han, whose observations of the contradictions of American life will persist throughout the novel. Upon landing in New York, Han declares "It was always New York I dreamed," echoing

many an immigrant's vision of America. Yet even at this early stage, Han perceives the thinness of the ideological message of Americanization: "magic words—opportunity, enterprise, prosperity, success, just business words out of world-wide commerce from a land rich in natural resources" (1997: 5). Still, the opening pages suggest optimism—he describes his landing in the U.S. as a rebirth. He draws on a metaphor embedded in the Korean language to describe his travel via steamer from the East to the West: "In Korea '*to come from the boat*' is an idiom meaning *to be born*, as the word 'pai' for 'womb' is the same as 'pai' for 'boat'" (1997: 5). In this rebirth, Han draws on the idealism of America's promise of individual freedom, especially as it contrasts with Korea, which at the time is being crushed by Japanese colonization. Thus, not simply an immigrant, Han describes himself as an exile whose desire is to "seek roots for an exile's soul" (1997: 5). Indeed, Han situates his thwarted desire to be the scholar and poet in Korea as a result of Japanese colonization. In Korea, the scholar exhibits the "futility of the martyr, or the death stifled scholar back home" (1997: 9). Again, where the old world of Korea "stifles" the individual, in contrast, in the U.S. there is opportunity in the birth of the "individualist" who is "demanding life and more life, fulfillment, some answer to his thronging questions, some recognition of his death-wasted life, some anchor in thin air to bring him to earth though he seems cut off from the very roots of being" (1997: 9).

Filled with excitement and enthusiasm, Han is already well aware of his tenuous position in the U.S., coming with just over four dollars in his pocket, he is also an undocumented migrant who slipped in just prior to the "the law against Oriental immigration was passed" in reference to the National Origins Act of 1924 which placed strict quotas on immigration from countries within the eastern hemisphere. With little money and few resources or contacts, Han spends the next few weeks essentially homeless, sleeping on park benches, rubbing shoulders with other homeless men in New York City, and running up a bill in Chinatown restaurants, hoping to make contact with fellow Koreans who can help him find a job and a place to live. As the novel

progresses, Han's journey in the U.S. will continue to demonstrate the contradictions of his life as a Korean man who comes to the U.S. with an education and dream and at the same time limited by U.S. racism. His male prerogatives to cash in on his class and education are thus doubly negated by Japanese colonialism and American racism.

In Han's further journeys, he travels up and down the northeastern U.S. coast, as far north as Newfoundland, in search of a university that will accept him as a student and provide funding. But because of anti-Asian legislation and racially discriminatory laws Han is denied scholarships. It is crucial to note that Han is confronted by the multiple racial boundaries, between black and white, white and nonwhite, and Asian and black; indeed, Han discovers that the racial and class stratification in the U.S. places him in a contradictory position on many levels that cannot be read as simply white versus Asian.

In Kang's novel, despite his protagonist Chungpa Han's possession of certain forms of cultural capital, it turns out that the Asian American intellectual is granted access to mainstream America in ways that paradoxically limit him from fully becoming an American. As the "foreign student," he is given near white privilege in the ability to pursue (in limited ways) higher education and become a student scholar, but this is only possible within a particular racial politics. Kang shows how Han's particular identity as the foreign student and thus an Asian token for intellectual elites and Asiaphiles can take place within a tripartite racial and caste paradigm of black/white/Asian. Han's privileged identity as an Asian foreign student can be leveraged by comparison to blacks who are not given the same type of access. In the following sections of this essay I first show how Kang uses the black figures in his novel to create a fuller understanding of racial America and Chungpa Han's position within it, and then show the limits of Han's ability to transcend racial stigmatization through deploying his educational background and his status as a foreign student. Kang thus gives us a preview of the debates about Asian racial formation and class in the post-1965 era where the Asian model

minority, albeit still racially distinct from whites, accrues a “near white” privilege vis-a-vis blacks and Latinas/os largely through middle-class status and educational mobility. And yet Kang also gives us a preview of the limits of Asian ascendancy into the white norm.

III. Between Black and White

Kang’s novel shows how the dominant racial paradigm of black versus white in the U.S. depends on an Asian male subject who negotiates his racialized identity within a tripartite racial system of black, white, and Asian. In viewing the Korean/Asian subject through differentially racialized and classed positions, Kang uncovers the complexity of inter-ethnic minority relations, and their relation to whiteness. Kang’s protagonist quickly discovers that, for an Asian in America, searching for these roots through education can be a class and even a race privilege. In the novel, Han even develops cross-racial sympathies between himself, as an educated Korean, and educated blacks in America. The struggles that Han endures is similar to the plight of black people in America, who, despite their education, remain in occupations serving white people. Thus in the novel, Kang openly voices his shock and disappointment in America through his protagonist Han, who realizes that he resides within “a crystallized caste system . . . here in the greatest democracy on earth” (1997: 273).

Even while Han benefits, to some degree, from white American Asiaphiles who take him in as a foreign student, he is ambivalent about such exotic tokenization. Han knows very well that his luck may run out at any time and that benevolence can easily turn into scorn.⁹ Thus, solely dependent on this type of white fetishization of his

⁹ I use the term “Asiaphile” to refer to white westerners who express great interest (even obsession) in all things Asian, from its art, literature, geography, culture, food, to its people. In other words, an Asiaphile possesses a fetishistic desire for anything Asian. In this particular essay, I use this term to refer to educated white elites in the U.S. whose scholarly and cultural interest in Asia also includes their interest in Asian people.

Korean culture and ethnicity, Han balances his life in America through the negotiation of racial and class privilege so he can support his dream. More than any Asian American novel at this time, *East Goes West* invokes how this “racial caste system in the greatest democracy on earth” forces its protagonist into becoming an ambivalent racial subject. Such a subjectivity is not only further complicated by the erasure of his privileged class background as a Korean yangban, but also by his location between black and white, the twin poles of dominant U.S. racial paradigm. Kang’s novel shows how the illusory basis of acceptance and access occurs through the uneven navigation across this black/white binary.

Han encounters various African American characters whose existences mirror his own as a racial other in America. As he works alongside them as a busboy or a domestic, fraternizes with them at Harlem nightclubs, and joins them as academic colleagues, Han is told by Wagstaff, a black Harvard student, that being black in America is an impossible situation: “What room is there in America for an educated Negro? There is not much else, but the yessuh jobs” (1937: 274). Crucially, despite their conjoined lives, Han is not the victim of the same racism as Wagstaff—although Wagstaff works as a porter by day and studies at Harvard by night, he is not granted the same kinds of privileges of education that Han is given. Unlike the black man whose position as a racialized person within the U.S., Han’s status read by Americans is of the “Asian immigrant” and foreigner putting him in a different racial and class position than those of blacks in the U.S., even educated blacks.

One key episode aptly demonstrates how Han’s experience of integration in the U.S. as an Oriental student is positions him as a racially in-between subject, between black and white. At one point in Chungpa Han’s travels, he ends up a boarder in the home of an elderly couple who live in a house just across the river from Harvard University, where he is studying. Mr. Schmitt, learning that Han is a student from Korea, offers him room and board if Han will index his library. For white liberals such as the Schmitts, Han’s position as

“foreign student” affords him a higher rank than the Schmitt’s black cook, Lorenzo, who, as it turns out, is also educated.

Kang demonstrates Lorenzo as the racially schizophrenic black man who embodies the duality of the racial stereotype, at once showing an appearance of deference and civility that masks resistance and contempt.¹⁰ During the week, Lorenzo is the perfect houseboy—deferential, polite and efficient. But on his Sunday off, he is often heard stumbling up to his room past Chungpa Han’s room, clearly inebriated and, entirely unlike the obsequious and quiet manservant he is during the week. After an extended Sunday out, Lorenzo comes home so drunk that he ends up sleeping through the workday. Lorenzo’s inconsistent behavior gives the Schmitts grief every week, when he shows up late Monday morning or sometimes temporarily disappears. Every week, Han overhears the Schmitts deliberating over whether they should keep Lorenzo. However, after some tearfully remorseful pleas from Lorenzo—“One last chance, Mrs. Schmitt. Just give me my last chance. I hate the stuff. I’ll never touch it again. No more, no more, no more,” the Schmitts always agree to give him another chance (1937: 263). One can see Lorenzo’s drunkenness as kind of racial and class rebellion against his employers and this becomes clearer in Lorenzo’s claim of a virile and sexually proficient masculinity that rivals the white man’s.

Here, Lorenzo is depicted as using the stereotype of the sexually aggressive and more virile black man as a means of inverting or at least destabilizing the hierarchies not just between whites and blacks, but between blacks and Asian. In contrast to his deference and

¹⁰ Although I do not discuss this in the essay, the notion of Lorenzo as racially schizophrenic loosely comes from Franz Fanon’s psychoanalytic explanation of the black man who is constructed as the racial other through colonialism. Fanon’s notion of the racial epidermal schema describes how the black man is the projection of white fears of savage blackness and racial otherness. The black man wears this otherness on his body as a “fact of blackness” and this fact is also a recognition of himself as an object of racism and surveillance. This recognition of an external and imposed upon blackness creates a split self (though not one without agency) (Fanon, 1967: 109-140).

penitence while sober, during his inebriated moments, Lorenzo opens up and speaks out against his white oppressors through claiming an unparalleled and virile masculinity that the white man does not possess. Han describes Lorenzo as especially voluble when inebriated, discussing issues ranging from the futility of an educated black man's future to his "secret" weapon against the white man: white women (1937: 263). Lorenzo's self-proclaimed sexual prowess with white women is a means of exacting revenge against the white men who "don't know nothing about his women" (1937: 263). In claiming this hyper masculinity as a "secret that the white man don't know," Lorenzo fulfills a stereotype as the sexually menacing black beast that is by day a good servant and by night, the threatening racial Other. Lorenzo's claiming of sexual vigor as a "secret weapon against" the white man is an attempt at undermining, if not equalizing race relations between the black and the white man. Yet it is a secret that no one should know. During a time when lynching of blacks was at its height, Lorenzo feels a camaraderie with Han, as if the two share a bond of racial marginalization as non-whites in a white world. There is the sense that telling other blacks would not give the same uplifting effect since Lorenzo believes that black women in particular see him as acting white because of his education: "I don't bother going round with no nigger gals . . . not me! They don't like me neither because of my education" (1937: 263). Thus, Lorenzo uses Han as a kind of safe confidante and even white proxy. He is able to confide in Han about his "secret weapon" without judgment by other blacks or of the deadly consequences from whites. Han, in turn, accepts the role of the white proxy. At the same time, one wonders if in depicting Lorenzo as a kind of black male stereotype the novel does not reveal the subtle shifts of power between black and Asian man, as Lorenzo and Han use not just race and class but sexuality as a means of discrediting the other.

Han's inner response to Lorenzo's stories reveals ambivalence over his racial privilege and power, and illustrates the intersections between class and sexuality. Han's tone in these passages is of pity and

if slight derision at times. In speaking of Lorenzo, Han expresses ambivalence over the genuineness of his claims: "He alternated self-pity with boasting and obscenity, and abuse of kind, dignified Mr. Schmitt" (1937: 263). Han defends Mr. Schmitt against Lorenzo's vitriolic debasement and in turn discredits Lorenzo's veracity by claiming that he is merely "boasting." Han's judgmental tone essentially emasculates Lorenzo. At the same time, it is important to read Han's judgmental tone against his description of the Schmitts. Even while it may seem that Han is more sympathetic to the Schmitts, his description of them is equally ambivalent, especially their reactions and treatment of Lorenzo. Where the Schmitts are repressed, Lorenzo is expressive, where they are vegetarians and teetotalers, he is a drinker, where they are disciplined and humane in their eating (as vegetarians and members of the anti-vivisection society), Lorenzo represents nearly the opposite, no restraint or more likely selective restraint. In short, Han's description of the Schmitts is of a rather sterile, even impotent couple in comparison to Lorenzo. As observed by Han, Mrs. Schmitt could not even say "vivisection" without crying. While they save animals from vivisection and human consumption, on the contrary their behavior towards Lorenzo is dehumanizing refusing to see him as a whole human being outside of being their superior veggie chef and deferential manservant. Unsure of what to do about Lorenzo's drinking, they took to chaining the doors, locking Lorenzo out on his weekend jaunts.

Thus Han's ambivalence toward Lorenzo, and even the Schmitts, reveals how white racial hierarchy proscribes Lorenzo and Han's differential positionalities. While Han is forced to play the role of the foreign student to obtain food and shelter, such a position also allows him a more privileged racial class position to Lorenzo's. Here, white economic power and privilege are expressed through Han, who as a boarder and not a worker, tenuously inhabits a privileged site in relation to Lorenzo. As the Oriental student/scholar, he is both aligned and mis-aligned as a beneficiary of white Asiaphiles. Han's contemplation of Lorenzo's invisible status as an educated black man

in America reveals **both** identification and dis-identification with blackness. In one exchange between the two men, Lorenzo explains mournfully to Chungpa Han:

Do you see me? I'se a college man. I'se been to Williams College, and to Washington, and then I come up here to go to Harvard. I'se studied medicine for 4 years (I think Lorenzo was exaggerating a little) but how's that going to help me? Here I am chockfull of education. Still a niggerman That old devil down there (he meant Mr. Schmitt), he got everything. What he know about medicine? But a niggerman's only good to cook and wait, that's all. (1937: 262)

As noted above, on the one hand, the continuities between Chungpa Han's experiences of racism in the novel and those of Lorenzo's would seem to position Asians and blacks as equally oppressed. On the other hand, Han's critically discerning voice (that Lorenzo may just be exaggerating) can be read multiply as Han's efforts to distance himself from blackness and at the same time, anxiety over his own ambivalent race/class position.

Han's perception that Lorenzo is exaggerating about his education discredits Lorenzo and makes the black man's version of reality false. However, one can also read Han's doubt of Lorenzo as casting doubt on his own life. Throughout the narrative, Han's life does parallel that of Lorenzo's—both are educated and yet work as manual or domestic laborers under white employers. Thus, this slight doubt about Lorenzo's words would seem also to cast doubt on Han's own circumstances—can an Asian man in America be an educated one, and if so, what would that education mean? The discerning tone in Han's narrative, in this episode, indicates that he has the ability to judge the honesty of Lorenzo's statements, a fact which places him socially above the black servant. It also momentarily aligns Han with the Schmitts. The ambivalence of race and class created by this episodic encounter with black Americans remains one of the many

disturbances in the novel that shows the ambiguity of Asian racial formation in the U.S., specifically as it involves Asians of the educated class.

The Korean man's integration in the U.S. through access to education hinges on his difference from black Americans and thereby constructs him as a nascent Asian model minority. He constructs an assimilation narrative that underscores the purported equalizing effect of education as a promise of social and economic mobility, and yet the narrative trajectory of becoming a Korean American man of letters illustrates the failed promise of "white" cultural capital seen through the Asian's parallel experiences of race and class to black Americans like Lorenzo and Wagstaff. Despite the fact that both Han and Lorenzo are educated minorities, their racial and national identities skew their relative positions in the U.S. As an Oriental token, Han can be read as an honorary white person in direct contrast to Lorenzo's black identity, but as foreigner and an alien, Han is a perpetual outsider. Kang reveals how education and race for the Korean/Asian man structures differential access to U.S. integration. Although access to education is an issue that reflects racial and class inequities, this episode between Han and Lorenzo rewrites access into performance in order to display how education, as a signifier of social mobility, is invisible, and unreadable on the black man Lorenzo while contingently visible on Han as the Oriental scholar and "foreign" student.

If *East Goes West* shows how the Korean male subject can be made into a product for Western consumption, it also shows how this product, the foreign student as both a projected and adopted identity cashes in on near white privileges. Kang shows how the Korean/Asian subject recognizes the tenuous balance between metaphoric whiteness and blackness. Yet what makes Kang's novel unique at this time is how his narrative description of Han's discerning tone creates ambivalence. Does Han really believe Lorenzo, or does Lorenzo bring out in Han his own discomfort as a member of a racial minority who yet adopts

the part of the privileged racial other? Hence the projection onto Han and other Korean men as well as their adoption of the identity of the foreign student as a model minority figure reveals the uneven relations of power and privilege between races and between men.

IV. The Oriental Student/Scholar

In the above section, we can see that class, race, and sexuality define black and Asian masculine identity through each other. More importantly, we see that the novel displays the discrete and sometimes subtle plays of difference between the men—where Lorenzo and his claiming of a kind of stereotypical black male sexuality (one that could be seen as alternately derogatory and yet subversive) can highlight Mr. Schmitt's impotence and at the same time be used by Han to leverage class and racial privilege as I illustrated through Kang's use of tonal ambivalence.

Hence, becoming a veritable "oriental Yankee," called for a specific molding of the Korean man as an oriental scholar/student in order to cash in on the rather meager benefits of being an Asian foreign student. Near the end of the novel, Chungpa Han realizes that his American university education did not fulfill his desire to be an oriental scholar in the West, and that his position as the foreign student was born out of pragmatism and survival: "In a way I might have starved if I had not been a student. It was a kind of racket. Just by being a student, I had got fed, clothed, sheltered, as a guest in the house of Western civilization. And I thought to myself cynically, now I understand why there are so many quasi-professional students here from the Orient, like Mr. Ok" (1937: 281). The novel therefore demystifies class privilege for the Korean man revealing how Han's survival in the U.S. depends upon his insertion into the particular subject position as oriental scholar/student.

In this way, Kang's novel shows how the construction of the foreign student came out of the political relations between the U.S. and Asia, and was contrasted with the position of blacks in the U.S.,

and in that respect, the oriental student/scholar becomes a token beneficiary of that relationship. Han's position as an oriental student/scholar in part derives from the impact that U.S. imperialism in Asia had on U.S. cultural and scholarly fascination with Asia. Han is a beneficiary of white liberal American intellectuals, many of who were influenced by the considerable interest during that time in the knowledge production of Asia in the arts and humanities, sociology and anthropology (Chakrabarty, 2001: 108-109; Chow, 2001: 190-212; Isaacs, 1997: 11-35). This interest in Asia between the early and mid-twentieth century ironically took place at the same time that the U.S. passed a series of stringent exclusion laws aimed at Asian immigrants and the Asian American population. This contradictory engagement with Asia situates the Asian subject within various competing domestic interpretations. U.S. acquisition in Asia includes the appropriation of Asian lands, and goods, in the form of imports and immigrant labor, as well as Asia's cultural productions of art and literature. By the early twentieth century, between colonization and U.S. imperialism, "Asia" had a particularly visible presence in the West in very material ways. In response to a white professor's Asian art collection, a friend of Han's, Wan To, implicitly demonstrates the effect of western imperialism on Asia by asking: "Do you realize that to study Oriental art, man is now obliged to come to the West" (1937: 211)? Indeed, these commercial and political relations between the U.S. and Asia give Han the opportunity to become a foreign student boarder with the Schmitts and even obtain entry to prestigious universities such as Harvard, albeit temporarily. In this respect, the educated Asian subject was categorized as a living cultural artifact of the East and ensconced in the orientalist corner of the West.

While the historical context of Han's integration in the U.S. as the foreign student is different, Kang's novel thus predates a similar phenomenon of foreign student migration during the 1960s and 70s who, like Han, found that this was one, if not the only way, an Asian could immigrate to the U.S. and survive. However, prior to 1945, the "official" number of foreign students (rather than those claiming

foreign student status such as the Korean men in Kang's novel, and including of course, the narrator Chungpa Han) coming from Asia was small. Official programs included the 1903 Filipino Pensionados program and the Chinese Educational Mission in the 1870s (shortly before the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882). Both of these programs encouraged the education of Filipino and Chinese students in U.S. universities to foster geopolitical alliances between nations.¹¹ In the case of the Philippines, the Pensionado Act occurred approximately five years after the U.S. territorialization. The goal of this Act was to educate Filipinos in American educational methods, which they would then take back to help rebuild their nation in the image of the U.S. Interestingly, a 1971 essay about Yung Wing and the Chinese Education Mission (in *Amerasia Journal*) was entitled, "Yung Wing and The Americanization of China" (B. L. Lee, 1971). The essay recounts how Wing was a former Yale graduate and married a white American woman. Wing felt that China's political and economic future depended on maintaining ties with the U.S., which could only be strengthened through China's internalization of American cultural ways. Wing argued that Chinese students who studied abroad in the U.S. for a few years will return to China armed with new knowledge of American culture and systems that could then transform China from a decentralized, crippled nation to one that competes with the U.S. Neither of these programs lasted long but the early foreign student represented a kind of hope for intercultural and inter-national relations in modernity and is a blueprint for later foreign student migrations under the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Reform Act's preference for highly skilled laborers. However, at least we can

¹¹ While the Filipino Pensionados program was a U.S. federal program, the Chinese Educational Mission was actually begun by a former Yale graduate, Yung Wing from China. After the passing of the Burlingame Treaty, Wing convinced the Chinese government to create an educational program for Chinese youths to obtain a U.S. university education as he did. Like the Filipino Pensionado would later, these Chinese educated in U.S. universities would go back to China and foster positive relationships between the China and the U.S. (B. L. Lee, 1971; Worthy, 1965).

see that for the Korean men in Kang's novel, inhabiting this position as the foreign student was not so much a geopolitical strategy, but one a survival tactic born of necessity. In many ways, these early foreign students, official and unofficial, paved the way for the larger migration of foreign students after World War II. Chih-ming Wang explains how the foreign student was thus integrated into the U.S.:

In fact, Asian student migration in the 1960s was an important component in the post-1965 Asian immigration, because studying abroad was the only viable means for immigrating to the United States. It was both an attempt to advance one's professional career and a means to obtain transnational mobility and political liberation. The feelings of displacement were not so much a political imposition as the necessary cost of a better life. (2007: 143)

Certainly becoming a foreign student is easier for the Asian immigrant possessing cultural capital. But it is important to see how this subject position is also a construction of an Asian model minority: one possesses some privilege via education and yet one of the few avenues to integration in America is through occupying this particular subject position. In seeing the foreign student as an Asian model minority we recognize how that subject position erases the realities of necessary survival for Asian immigrants and also how such a subject only exists via their inclusion as a liminal racial/class subject between the racial axis of black and white. The outlines of this nascent Asian model minority fleshed out in the novel through the foreign student points to the compromises that an educated Korean man must make to be included within the U.S. In short, the novel shows how this Asian racial form derives out of the tensions between the idealism of becoming the oriental Yankee or Asian American and the limits imposed by U.S. racism.

V. Conclusion

Kang's novel reflects a model minority thesis that is grounded in

a set of Asian-black relations in the U.S. Although the model minority would not be articulated in U.S. popular culture until the mid 1960s, it is not coincidental that this naming of Asians as the model minority began during a rise of black power and rebellion and inevitably evoked the irrational white fears of black aggression, rampage, and militancy. David Palumbo-Liu describes how the 1966 *New York Times Magazine* article by William Peterson, "Success Story, Japanese American Style," which lauded the immigrant success of Japanese Americans, appeared 6 months after the Watts Riot. The *New York Times Magazine* essay received popular and positive responses from a white public who believed that American meritocracy is a colorblind system as evident in the (mostly) Chinese and Japanese Americans economic and educational success.¹² In Peterson's view, despite being interned in concentration camps during World War Two, Japanese Americans overcame the trauma of incarceration as well as the social barriers of racism to become exemplary American citizens. Japanese American success was thus juxtaposed to black Americans, whose failure to integrate in U.S. society was seen in the Watts Riot. Moreover, Robert G. Lee (1999: 182-189) also references the 1960s as the birth of the Asian model minority. Specifically, Lee argues there was the belief that the reason Chinese and Japanese Americans had such low crime and high education and income rates was the result of an intact patriarchal and heterosexual family structure. In contrast, black American families were a "tangle of pathology" as defined in the Moynihan Report. As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan argued in his report, black families were matriarchal, and lacking a father or patriarchal figure because most black men abandoned their families. The absent father figure in the black family not only explains the high crime rates of black male youths and adults, but more importantly, their failure to succeed fully in American society. Angela Davis argues

¹² See a discussion by Palumbo-Liu (1999: 174-179) about Peterson's assumptions about Japanese and Chinese Americans.

that the report inaccurately defines the impact that slavery had on black families which forcibly separated mothers, fathers and children, and erased the fact of white male sexual violence and rape of black women. Rather than being the center of the “tangle of pathology,” black women were the backbone of their families and communities during and after slavery. Davis (1972) critiques the historical fallacy of Moynihan’s Report which blames the victim, black communities, and absolves the perpetrator, U.S. white racist patriarchy, of blame and responsibility. In both cases, this erasure of the conditions of black people by the Moynihan Report and the perception of Asian American success in the face of adversity dislocates a critique of structural inequities in the U.S., identifying “success” as inherent cultural traits of an ethnic minority.

Kang’s protagonist is an excellent candidate for avatar of the model minority: he is educated, has cultural capital, and is readily exoticized. This would seem to neutralize his racial difference and hold his “success” up as a model, precisely because it is a contained success—his acceptance, marginal as it is, is granted only if he acquiesces to the role of exotic curiosity. When he distances himself from being that, he begins to lose ground. A decidedly minor character that is on stage only for a few lines—Laurenzo, creates the interesting dynamic. But Laurenzo presents a powerful other figure. Like Han he is racialized, and like Han he is educated. The irony is that because of the legacy of slavery he will never ever be a “model,” and yet, precisely because of his embeddedness in African American history, Laurenzo is part of an historical minority that is granted citizenship. His more abject history ironically has enabled his rights. Conversely, Han has never been enslaved (though his countrymen in Korea are now colonial subjects of Japan), but ironically again he is ineligible for citizenship. The manufacturing of the Asian model minority, while coined and articulated during the 1960s was, thus, not a new phenomenon. Kang’s novel is virtually the only Asian American novel before 1945 that depicts Asian/Korean experiences and engagement with black America. Rather the novel reveals that the

making of a model minority was already evident in American society at that time, revealing the very contradictions of race and class, which only offers Asian Americans the illusion of mobility and privilege.

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亞美模範的男性氣概：姜鏞訖的 《自東徂西——一位東方美國北佬的形成》

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(紀元文譯)

摘要

本文旨在閱讀姜鏞訖的《自東徂西——一位東方美國北佬的形成》(1937) 所呈現的美國後大蕭條時期，男性氣概與權力的比較種族與性別分析。著者主張，在性傾向、權力、勞工與經濟的脈絡裡，姜鏞訖的小說當作移民故事閱讀，箇中美國亞裔與黑人男性多重的種族與階級形構饒富洞見。姜鏞訖的小說顯示美國黑白對立的支配性種族範式，如何取決於亞裔男性主體在黑、白與亞裔的三方種族系統內協商其種族化的身分認同。亞裔男性氣概的種族協商，繞著獲得白人菁英與知識分子之特權與恩寵的早期亞裔外國學生之形象轉動。小說中韓裔男主角瞭解其異國的亞裔外國學生身分，如何在黑人與白人間創造男性種族位置，而美國民權運動年代及其後亞裔模範少數民族的形成立實已提前來到並反映於此位置中。

關鍵詞：男性氣概、種族、性傾向、模範少數民族