Introduction

By Chay Yew

There is no single Asian theatre.

There are, however, myriad theatrical forms in Asia—Sanskrit drama in India; Beijing opera in China; Wayang Kulit in Indonesia; Kabuki, Bunraku and Noh in Japan; Talchum and Pansori in Korea, just to name a few.

Although they share several common characteristics, each theatrical form is different. Some are rarely spoken, instead they are sung, danced, mimed and chanted. Others are visual and evocative, and others, poetical and literary. These works are also loosely plotted; despite an emphasis on storytelling, the Western dramaturgy of escalating incidents, plot reversals and climaxes are largely absent. Much of these works are highly stylized; performance techniques require formal training and are passed on from generation to generation. The stories in these performances are rooted in tradition, religion and history; stories, small and epic, that were told three- or four-hundred years ago are still presented to a modern audience. Indian Sanskrit drama dates back to the eighth-century BCE, long before the birth of classical Greek tragedy. These works are some of the earliest theatrical texts.[1] The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are still being performed in the streets of Mumbai or in festivals in Bali.

From the 1200s through the 1840s, the image of Far East Asia had been evolving for centuries in the minds of Westerners. From the Middle Ages to the early Renaissance, contacts between Europe and Asia were relatively sporadic. Stories of China were

brought back by a handful of explorers, merchants and missionaries. Marco Polo's image of China also fueled Westerners' imaginations with the opulent, majestic East. Attracted by the wealth of the Far East, the Dutch and Portuguese began to sail to China; followed by the English and French. When they arrived, they learned that the country's resources could be exploited for financial gain. Soon, Europeans craved tea, spices and wares, such as Chinese silk, ivory, lacquer, collectively known as "chinoiserie."[2]

Given the curiosity and hunger for all things "Oriental," it wasn't long before stories about the Chinese appeared on European stages. The first known play to be performed in Europe was *The Orphan of China*. Originally written in 1330 by Chi Chun-Hsiang, the piece was often considered a minor work. More than four centuries after its completion, Father Prémare, a French Jesuit priest in China, conferred distinction on the work by making it the first Chinese play to be printed in any European language. In Father Prémare's version, informed by his knowledge of French Neoclassicism, he excised what he considered repetitive portions of the play and many allusions to classical Chinese literature. Moreover, French dramatic conventions did not allow characters to suddenly burst into song, so, all songs were cut.

In 1735, Prémare's play appeared in an anthology of Chinese works compiled by another French Jesuit, Du Halde, who had never visited China. For the next twenty years, *The Orphan of China* was translated into Italian and English, but the most important subsequent work was Voltaire's *L'Orphelin de la Chine* which opened at the Comédie-Française in August 1755 to acclaim. Voltaire altered the piece by adding a philosophical significance missing from Prémare's version and the Chinese original: he rewrote the story to accommodate the Confucian virtues of refinement and pacifism (the same virtues he saw in himself and his culture), which he greatly admired in the Chinese culture.[3]

The next noteworthy adaptation was Arthur Murphy's, the form in which was performed at London's Drury Lane in 1759, with David Garrick as the lead; it eventually opened before pre-Colonial American audiences at the Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia on January 16, 1767. Murphy's version presented prevailing Western attitudes about the Chinese, who they considered inferior, bloodthirsty, passionate and uncivilized.[4] This was the first representation of the Chinese on American stages and, for decades, it remained the only dramatic portrayal of Asians in America.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States to work as laborers, particularly on the trans-

continental railroad and in the mining industry. While industrial employers were eager for new and cheap labor, the white public resented the presence of what would eventually become known as the "yellow peril." Despite the provisions for equal treatment of Chinese immigrants in the 1868 Burlingame Treaty, political and labor organizations rallied against the immigration of cheap Chinese labor. Newspapers condemned the policies of employers, and even church leaders denounced the entrance of these aliens into what was regarded as a land for whites only.

Given the growing presence of the Chinese population in the nineteenth-century United States, it wasn't long before they found themselves represented in other plays, such as Mark Twain and Brett Harte's play *Ah Sin*. The play opened at Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York City on July 31, 1877. One would assume that a Chinese character in a title role suggested the assimilation of the Chinese into American life. This was not the case. A stock character, Ah Sin, served only as a plot-advancing device between the machinations of the white villain Broderick and hero Plunkett. As Broderick's servant, Ah Sin was a simple buffoon who spoke broken English; throughout the play, he is called by other characters "a slanted-eye son of yellow jaunders," "moral cancer, you unsolvable political problem," "poor dumb animal" and a host of other disparaging descriptions.[5]

If the Chinese character was used sparingly as a comic foil and a plot device in *Ah Sin*, Chinese characters were antagonists that drove almost every scene in Henry Grimm's *The Chinese Must Go*. Here the Chinese are portrayed as sinister, greedy and duplicitous; they exhort and threaten the Blaine family for unpaid services; the Blaines (as with every other white family, Grimm warned) have long been too dependent on the Chinese for domestic services. Throughout the piece, the Chinese talk of white slavery, addicting white women to opium and the trafficking of Chinese prostitutes to America. At the top of the play, one Chinese character, Ah Coy, complains about white Americans while smoking on an opium pipe:

> I tellee you, white man big fools; eatee too muchee, drinkee too muchee and talkee too muchee . . . By and by, white man catchee no money; Chinaman catchee heap money; Chinaman workee cheap, plenty work; white man workee dear, no work . . . By and by, no more white working man in California; all Chinaman—sabee?[6]

With the white American cast as victim, the drama plays to the predominant fears of audiences that the Chinese were a menace needing to be contained and deported. Often at the most inappropriate moments of the play, the white character Frank repeats the phrase: "The Chinese Must Go!" This script was most likely performed by amateur actors in meetings held at "anti-coolie" clubs. The audience would have applauded because the play would have reflected its own racist and populist sentiments. In 1879, a small advertisement appeared in a major San Francisco newspaper offering the play to theatre managers. No records exist of a performance at any established theatre, but it was, however, later performed at a theatre in Tucson, Arizona, where it was a great success.[7]

As hostility against the Chinese grew, the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which prohibited immigration from China for the next ten years. The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first U.S. law ever to prevent immigration and naturalization on the basis of race. This law was then extended by the Geary Act in 1892. The Geary Act also made it mandatory for Chinese residents of the U.S. to carry a resident permit; failure to carry the permit at all times was punishable by deportation or a year of hard labor. In addition, Chinese residents were not allowed to bear witness in court, nor could they receive bail in habeas corpus proceedings. Versions of the law actually remained in effect until the Immigration Act of 1965. These laws not only prevented new immigration but also prevented the reunion of the families of thousands of Chinese men already living in the U.S. who had left China without their wives and children; anti-miscegenation laws in many states also prohibited Chinese men from marrying white women.

Despite their anger at the "yellow peril," Americans continued to be fascinated by all things "Oriental" at the turn of the twentieth century. When Asian-themed plays were brought to the stage, such as *San Toy, The Daughter of Heaven, Sultan of Sulu* and *The Yellow Jacket,* one would find an exotic China still filled with historical inaccuracies and stereotypes; all characters, of course, were played by white actors.

One interesting exception was perhaps Eugene O'Neill's treatment of Marco Polo in *Marco Millions*, which appeared on Broadway in 1928. *Marco Millions* is a parody of Western attitudes of both the Far East and the Arab world, places where Christian moral attitudes and the European way of life and colonialism were never quite embraced, either in 1271 or later in 1928.[8] Here, O'Neill treated his Chinese characters "positively" and seriously and did not make them speak pidgin English.[9]

In 1934, Lindsay and Crouse's musical, *Anything Goes,* threw in two Chinese ninnies, Ching and Ling, as embarrassing comic relief, squawking and screeching in broken English.

After the repeal of prohibition in 1933, an Asian American nightclub scene, commonly known as the "Chop Suey Circuit," emerged in clubs and restaurants in the Chinatowns of New York, Chicago, Seattle and several other cities. The most famous was the Forbidden City nightclub in San Francisco. Two or more shows were presented nightly to a Caucasian tourist trade attracted to the supposed exoticism of all-Asian revues. Singers and dancers mimicked popular white American acts; magicians, jugglers, acrobats and contortionists usually wore traditional flamboyant Asian costumes to evoke the mysterious Far East.[10] These supper clubs provided opportunities for Asian American entertainers to earn their living.

After World War II, Asians continued to appear as stereotypes—a ruthless polygamist barbaric king, an Oriental prostitute with a heart of gold and simple-minded postwar Japanese villagers in need of lessons in democracy—in *The King and I, The World of Suzy Wong* and *Teahouse of the August Moon.* These two-dimensional portrayals were not only found in the theatre but in movies and on television.

In 1958, a landmark Broadway musical featured Asian Americans as characters: Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Flower Drum Song*, adapted from C. Y. Lee's novel about a multigenerational conflict set in San Francisco's Chinatown (though the original production had many non-Asians in the leading roles). Despite a stronger presence of Asians and Asian Americans on stage, none of the above works were written by Asian Americans; playwright David Henry Hwang would later adapt the Oscar Hammerstein II and Joseph Fields book for *Flower Drum Song* for another Broadway outing in 2002, this time featuring an all Asian American cast of actors and singers.

The first signs of significant change came in 1965 when a group of actors founded East West Players in Los Angeles as a means to fight racism in Hollywood by creating nonstereotypical roles for Asian Americans. Led by an actor, Mako, the actors at East West envisioned theatre as a platform to showcase their talent for the television and film industries. By the early 1970s, the theatre began to actively encourage Asian American writers to adapt their short stories and novels into plays and to write original scripts.

In 1971, Frank Chin's *The Chickencoop Chinaman* shared this development slot with Momoko Iko's *The Gold Watch.* A year later, in May 1972, *The Chickencoop Chinaman* premiered at the

American Place Theatre, becoming the first Asian American play to be produced in New York City.

Chin later founded the Asian American Theatre Workshop in San Francisco to nurture original playwriting by Asian Americans (the theatre was later renamed Asian American Theatre Company). At this time, Asian American theatre began to flourish. Theatrical Ensemble of Asians began in 1974 on the campus of the University of Washington in Seattle (later becoming the Asian Exclusion Act, then changing its name to Northwest Asian American Theatre). In addition to acting and playwriting, the theatre emphasized community activism and became a cultural center for Asian Americans in the Pacific Northwest. Pan Asian Repertory Theatre emerged as part of Off-Off-Broadway theatre in 1978. Founded by Tisa Chang, Pan Asian Rep became the representative Asian American theatre company in New York City and introduced Asian American plays to East Coast audiences.

The first wave of Asian American playwrights included Wakako Yamauchi *(And the Souls Shall Dance)*, Rick Shiomi *(Yellow Fever)*, Momoko Iko *(Flowers and Household Gods)*, Edward *Sakamoto* *(Yellow Is My Favorite Color)* and Frank Chin *(The Year of the Dragon)*. Common themes in plays by first-wave writers included Asian American history and immigration, generational and familial conflict, cultural identity and nationalism.

The first commercially successful Asian American play was David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. Produced in 1988, it was the first Asian American play to be produced on Broadway, and went on to win the Tony Award for Best Play. The success of *M. Butterfly* created a countrywide interest in Asian American plays, and regional theatre companies around the country began to produce plays by Hwang and other second-wave playwrights, such as Philip Kan Gotanda (*The Wash, Yankee Dawg You Die*) and Velina Hasu Houston (*Tea*). These playwrights were interested in writing plays that bridged and straddled the old world with the new.[11]

Beginning in the late 1980s, a new crop of Asian American theatres flourished in cities across the country. These companies' artistic agendas expanded greatly from the original Asian theatres in aesthetics, mission and styles. As with the original four Asian American theatre companies, Ma-Yi Theater Company, Second Generation and Silk Road Theatre Project produced only new and original plays, while National Asian American Theatre Company focused on producing Western classical plays featuring all Asian casts; Pangea World Theater presented socio-geopolitical, multidisciplinary the-

atre; and Mu Performing Arts fused Asian theatrical aesthetics to specifically cater to local audiences.

In the late 1990s, Asian American plays further increased their presence in theatres around the country with works by third-wave playwrights. While these playwrights continue to wrestle with the same issues of the first two generations of writers, they feel that race and ethnicity are mere jumping-off points in addressing multifaceted experiences of being an Asian American; they are also interested in exploring their often complex relationships with other communities and people outside of Asian America.

Whereas the first two waves of playwrights were mainly Chinese and Japanese Americans, the third wave included Asians of Filipino, Indian, Korean and Vietnamese descent. This generation of playwrights also wrote less realistic plays and pushed theatrical and aesthetical borders further than the first two waves. Some of these playwrights include Prince Gomolvilas (*The Theory of Everything*), Naomi Iizuka (*36 Views*) and Elizabeth Wong (*Kimchee and Chitlins*).

The other third-wave playwrights are represented in this anthology *Version 3.0*. As no anthology could cover everything, this particular compendium hopes to capture the landscape that defines the third wave of Asian American plays. I see these plays not so much as a record of a specific generation of Asian American playwriting, but the cumulative legacy of Hwang, Gotanda, Chin and Yamauchi.

> I did not like my work. But I did it. Every little thing have to be put into computer. Make a report and another report and another. All day long, every day, day after day . . . I did. And if I didn't get laid off, I would still be there, doing. And I would feel . . . lucky. Lucky to have some place to go every day. But why? Why did I want so little? Where did I learn to want so little for myself?

In Julia Cho's achingly haunting drama *Durango*, Boo-Seng Lee, a middle-aged Korean immigrant, sits poolside at a motel with a fellow guest, and describes the twenty-year office job from which he has just been laid off: "Where did I learn to want so little for myself?" That is the question that haunts the three-member Lee family: Boo-Seng, shackled for years in an arranged marriage, now a widowed father of two boys; Isaac, his twenty-one-year-old musician slacker son; and thirteen-year-old Jimmy, an overachieving swimming prodigy. All of them are trapped in lives of quiet desperation, and each

yearn for something they think is unattainable. Their first, last and only chance for happiness is symbolized by a road trip to Durango, one that turns into a journey of self-discovery and acceptance. Julia Cho is a master witness to the complexities of the human heart; she exposes the brutal and honest feelings of her characters not in her dialogue but between the spaces of words and in the wells of pauses and silences. Early in the play, Isaac explains to Jimmy the enduring popularity of the Marvel comic book superhero Wolverine: "He was made to suffer. That's what his gift is. And because he suffers, because he feels pain, we see in him the truest expression of what we, as humans, experience." Those same words apply to the men of *Durango*. They exemplify, in some way, what we all go through every day.[12]

> We'll just go point A to point B. Then back to A and back to B and back and forth. Always in between. Living nowhere.

Sunil Kuruvilla's *Rice Boy* is a luscious, quietly moving, coming-of-age drama that explores the difficulties of migration with respect to a South Asian Canadian family. Tommy, a twelve-year-old boy, returns with his father to his parents' native Kerala, India, for the first time since his mother's tragic drowning there ten years earlier. Accustomed only to life in Canada, Tommy has a difficult time adjusting to India. He soon develops an endearing relationship with his sixteen-year-old cousin, Tina, a housebound paraplegic who is learning the ancient art of *kolam* (the creation of elaborate patterns with rice powder) from her grandmother in preparation for her arranged marriage to a man she has never met. As Tommy shows Tina the world beyond her front porch, he begins to see India with new eyes. This enchanting interwoven, cross-cultural narrative also situates the importance of disability aesthetics in the play, and this makes us consider questions of agency and independence in relation to the modern Indian woman who still faces constrictions of tradition.

> I'm not telling you this isn't your country / I'm telling you: / Know your cage . . . Know your cage well / memorize its dimensions / its distinguishing traits / so that when you go to bed / in the instant before you pitch into black that's what you see the clearest and / you'll know / if you run or / if you kill or / if you— What do you do.

The first play of his *Suitcase Trilogy*, Han Ong's *Swoony Planet* is an intimate epic about how immigration is changing the face of America. This gritty and poetic play tells of Kirtana, a single, Indian woman, who searches for her runaway son Farouk. Jessica, a Filipina who has adjusted to life in the Midwest, aids her search, leading Kirtana to an unimaginable world no child should experience. Artie, Jessica's son, races to find the father who abandoned him sixteen years ago. Each of them, longing for wholeness and the chance to "swoon," takes on an unforgettable, compromising journey into self and country. "In *Swoony Planet,* the immigrant narrative is a frequent-flier narrative," Ong says. "It's been flown so often, it's bleached dry of any significance. America almost desperately needs the mirror of the outsider. I don't think there is such a thing as the American Dream, personally. My characters have certain notions of it, such as the dream of being away from where you are, or were. Like the disillusion of all dreams, it's a journey from generic to specific—from the fuzziness of cotton and pink and the wide, blue expanse of sky to more specific details, like being spat on at a street corner. In my plays it's a journey from up to down, an inverted triangle. It's the limitless possibilities of coming to America and the disparity between its myth and reality."[13]

> I despise your petty desires, your dick stuck between countries. Your silly grasp towards a deeper identity. "Who Am I?" you ask in that whining voice. WHO THE FUCK CARES? Nobody. I renounce you as I would one of the Japanese soldiers taking my father to one of the work camps. Taking my mother to be a comfort woman. Face it. You're no more American than a bowl of kimchee stew, hot and fermented, opening your nostrils to the pigmented pigskin of your fucked up identity crisis.

Sung Rno sets his rollercoaster of a play, *wAve,* "somewhere between *M*A*S*H* and Margaret Cho, between the 38th Parallel, between two centuries, between McDonald's and Burger King."[14] Loosely inspired by Euripides' *Medea* and with a chorus of comic characters, this wildly inventive pop satire focuses on a dysfunctional love story that careens from madcap farce to tragedy, as an isolated Korean immigrant's dream of a perfect life as an American housewife turns deadly. In his own version of the classical myth, Sung Rno has called one of his leading characters M, and given her a husband named

Jason, who is having an affair with a digitized Marilyn Monroe while he's starring in a film version of *Miss Saigon* re-dubbed *Mister Phnom Penh.* Meanwhile, M, who betrayed her family on Jason's behalf, sits alone watching *The Chinky and Gooky Show*, featuring two film critics whose rating system runs along the lines of: "Moo goo gai PAN" and "Chicken kung PAO." The result is a passionately remixed, exhilaratingly lyrical work exploring the collision of cultures, love, immigration and contemporary American culture.

> A meteorite. A chip off of some billion-year-old comet that came crashing through here to let out all the ghosts, all the stories, all the history . . . To let us know . . . we can make up the words ourselves.

In Diana Son's witty, wisely observed and unflinchingly explosive *Satellites*, her biting and urban characters inhabit a constantly shifting world where racial, social, economic and sexual borders have become so permeable that they never quite know who or where they are at any given moment. Korean American architect Nina and her African American husband, Miles, and their baby Hannah find themselves marooned in their new home—an uninhabited brownstone fixer-upper in a gentrifying Brooklyn. Amidst the couple's financial troubles, sexual inadequacies and Miles's unemployment, a brick is hurled through the couple's window—a literal wake-up call. Given Nina and Miles's own distance from their respective cultural identities, they wish for Hannah, a better connection. Nina, assimilated away from her Korean heritage, hires a nanny who's able to sing Korean lullabies to the baby and "basically do what a Korean mother would do," says Son. For Miles, the fact that his African American identity was sublimated by his adoption into a Caucasian family is made more evident by the visit of his adoptive, white brother. "Miles grew up in a white neighborhood and knew what it was like to stand on your front lawn and be called a nigger," Son adds. "I titled the play *Satellites* because all of the characters are free-floating . . . A satellite is an entity that orbits around a larger entity; all of the characters lack a defining thing within their lives, so they end up colliding into each other."[15]

> Sometimes, Twila, sometimes you must go back to the first, the FIRST time, the beginner time when everything was new, and closer to true nature. Remember it . . . remember.

Alice Tuan's first play, *Last of the Suns,* centers on Yeh Yeh, a Chinese Nationalist army general, shriveling away under the harsh California sun as his failed ice-skating champion granddaughter, Twila, comes to visit him on his one-hundredth birthday. *Last of the Suns* is an acrobatically lyrical, perversely intelligent piece of theatre. Here, Tuan reinvents and deconstructs the Asian American play: bordering between the real and fantastical, she fuses Chinese mythology, her personal family history, her wicked sense of humor and American kitchen-sink drama in an amalgamated triumph that assaults every one of the five senses. She uses streetwise and theatrical language to blend Chinese folklore with the banalities of American consumerism. Says Tuan, "My grandfather, who was a lieutenant general in Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist army, lived with us in his later years. I woke to the sound of beeping one morning . . . beep beep beep, endlessly . . . and found my grandpaps bent over the microwave, pressing numbers, trying to warm his tea. He could not find the start button, and my screamed explanation to the ninety-three-year-old man sparked a moment of the past trying to start 'fire by buttons' in the modern world. This literally was the first scene I ever wrote. I think playwriting was a way to try and fuse contradictions, old/new, East/West, male/female power, which has led me to a synthesis point in which my drama thinking stems from, always striving for that point above the original plane of conception."[16]

> I was one of these real American patriots then. Back then, I was all American . . . At the time, I was ashamed of being Japanese. I think many Japanese Americans felt the same way . . . That sort of changed while I was in the camp. I hated the war, because it wasn't just between the governments. It went down to the people, and it nurtured hate. The evacuation showed us that even though there is a constitution, constitutional rights could be taken away very easily.

In the wake of America's entry into World War II, more than 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were forced to leave their homes, possessions and communities, and report to relocation centers and internment camps. This federal action, authorized by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, through Executive Order 9066, led to the suspension of many civil rights of Japanese Americans. One lasting legacy of the internment experience was the so-called "loyalty questionnaire," which was designed to test the loy-

a park by Peter Handke in Germany, we started conceiving a play set in a fictitious setting based on Columbus Park in Manhattan's Chinatown. Asian Theatre Workshop then commissioned eight Asian American and eight non–Asian American playwrights to create a theatrical forum of perceptions, experiences and relationships of the Asian American community with non–Asian Americans in a ten-minute piece that used the park and its environs as its setting. *The Square* stages the relationships of Asian Americans with other communities and enacts our contemporary dilemmas around issues of race and power. Like any collective identity, Asian American is intersected by multiple forces: diaspora, sexuality, class, gender, among others. And historical and demographic changes—interracial marriage, children of mixed race, post-1965 immigration—create an increasingly complicated, multiracial landscape. The playwrights voice these complexities and articulate visions of both danger and promise. Indeed, *The Square* contains the promise of our futures in its own structure. The product of interracial collaboration, it is alive with unexpected connections, startling contrasts and vibrant multiplicity.[18]

I encourage you to seek out other Asian American playwrights who are not featured in *Version 3.0*; discover, too, the other plays that make up the diverse body of work of each playwright included in this anthology. A wonderful online resource for Asian American plays and playwrights is the Asian American Theatre Revue (www.aatrevue.com), passionately maintained by Roger Tang.

I have not included theatre work by Asian American solo performers who exist alongside the third-wave playwrights. They are an integral part of our Asian American theatre ecology and have existed mainly in the fringe scene. The writings and performances of Alison M. de la Cruz (*Naturally Graceful*), Jude Narita (*Coming into Passion/Song for a Sansei*), Dan Kwong (*Monkhood in 3 Easy Lessons*), Sandra Tsing Loh (*Aliens in America*), Kristina Wong (*Wong Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*), Denise Uyehara (*Maps of City and Body*), to name a few, are provocative and political, as they are witty and poignant. They are not to be missed.

As I'm writing this, there has already been a fourth wave of Asian American playwrights emerging in the recent years. They include Rajiv Joseph (*Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*), Young Jean Lee (*Songs of Dragons Flying to Heaven*), Michael Lew (*Microcrisis*), Kenneth Lin (*Po Boy Tango*), Qui Nguyen (*Trial by Water*), Lloyd

Suh (*American Hwangap*), Lauren Yee (*Ching Chong Chinaman*) and many others. The playwrights of this new generation do not always identify as Asian American, nor do they write plays with Asian American characters. Even third-wave playwright Julia Cho admitted, "What I was trying to articulate in a lot of these plays is what it is to be Asian American . . . But I think I might be getting to the end of that exploration."[19]

Since no single definable Asian theatre exists, no single Asian American theatre does either. These plays are as evocative as they are visual. Poetical and literary, these works are performed in a multitude of theatrical aesthetics: in traditional and experimental forms of drama, comedy, performance and musical theatre. Yet every play (epic or intimate) uniquely tells of a collective and varied experience of diaspora, immigration and citizenship. And these stories can only be born in the U.S. For Asian American's plays are undeniably American experiences, and our stories belong as part of American history and the American theatre canon.

Will a fifth or seventh wave of Asian American playwrights emerge in the future? Or will we be able to finally shed "Asian" and just be "American"? Will we have all assimilated into an increasingly diverse America? Shall we look to the history of Yiddish theatre or even perhaps gay theatre as examples? Once these theatres served a specific community and told stories that reflected their audiences. Now their voices can be heard from Broadway to storefront theatres around the country, without cultural or racial markers. Is this the result of assimilation? Will the plays in this anthology become historical artifacts of a time when race was differentiated? Or will we suddenly be cast as different, as Asian Americans, as foreign again, should another threatening national incident occur in the future, putting us back into similar situations as the internment camps in World War II or the Exclusion Act?

What plays will we write then? What plays will we return to? Will we see ourselves?

Time will tell.

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