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## TW: Mentions of suicide (ngai card)

## Sweatshop Aff

**The sweatshop regime across Asia subjugates the human body to a constant state of depletion that rids people of their rights and reduces them to the labor they perform. Even with public outrage and minimal efforts to help workers, the solutions posed misunderstand the crux of the issue and only furthers the exploitive nature of the sweatshop, which workers need to individually isolate themselves from.**

**Mezzadri 18**

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The labouring body is always central to the production and reproduction of the garment sweatshop. Indeed, as a regime based on interplays between physical and social materiality, crossed by multiple forms of difference and unfreedom and shaped by the joint work of many global and regional masters, the sweatshop provides a price tag to workers’ bodies no less than to the many garment commodities it continuously churns out. It assigns these bodies to different segments of the product cycle. It orders them on a complex **employment ladder**, where, as illustrated in this analysis, wages, entitlements, rewards and duties are greatly socially regimented. Effectively, the sweatshop nurtures processes of labour fragmentation also through a capillary ‘body-politics’, aimed at commodifying as well as exploiting each and every social feature of workers’ distinct corporality. In this sense, the body of workers emerges as the primary ‘raw material’ to be deployed in sweatshops to achieve and reproduce sources of comparative advantage. Arguably, however, in this process **the body is also the primary raw material depleted by the sweatshop, consumed as bolts of cloth or bundles of thread going through a stitching machine**. Undoubtedly, the devastating effects the sweatshop may have on workers’ bodies have been all too clearly shown by the Rana Plaza disaster of 2013. In fact, this entailed the destruction of over a thousand of these bodies – trapped, broken, burnt to ashes, gone in a few moments. The broadcasted images of torn up garments and wreckages of stitching machinery scattered across the ground zero of the industrial disaster only provided a pale if already painful glimpse into the far more sinister and heart-breaking reality of all the lives lost in the collapse. As chillingly described by Jeremy Seabrook (2015, p. 21) in his Song of the Shirt, the bodies of the workers recovered and laid out one—the other in front of the ruins “stretched hundreds of meters in the dust and debris”. The magnitude of the Rana Plaza horror Finally brought a considerable degree of attention on the potentially greatly violent nature of the sweatshop, and on the unacceptably high social costs of current models of consumerism. Unsurprisingly, the case triggered a huge upsurge in national and international campaigning in favour of Bangladeshi garment workers, and many buyers, under huge public pressure, ‘agreed’ to compensate their ‘fashion victims’ and their families. Two international agreements were immediately elaborated to prevent another Rana Plaza from ever happening again. The first was the EU retailers-led Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (Kumar and Mahoney, 2014, p. 203). The second, a weaker, US retailers-led counterpart of the Accord, is the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, which remains voluntary even once signed (Gunther, 2013). Serious campaigning was also paralleled by more controversial forms of what Richey and Ponte (2011) would call ‘Brand-Aid’, with celebrities racing to wear T-shirts inside out for ‘Fashion Revolution Day’, under the widely popularized slogan ‘it is what is inside that counts’ (see Jacob, 2014 in Metro; and Khatun, 2014, in ­e Hungton Post). However, despite the great public uproar and attention triggered by the event, to what extent are the bodies of garment workers worldwide much safer today, 2 years a­fter Rana Plaza? Not substantially. First, with time, the Rana Plaza disaster seems to have been slowly reconceptualized as a sort of ‘exceptional’ event, an unpredictable disastrous outcome, and one mainly concerning Bangladesh, despite the fact that, as argued in Chapter 1, other sweatshop scandals and ‘minor’ tragedies have continued hitting the industry. As expressly noted by the CSR regional manager of a world renowned American brand, whom I interviewed in Delhi 2 days before the Rana Plaza collapse, garment production in the country was always undermined by significant ‘infrastructural problems’, although ironically, he reported these as ‘improving’ at the time. Needless to say, one can be sure that he, like many others, soon wished his company never sourced from Bangladesh in the First place. Second, current debates on health and safety seem to increasingly focus on infrastructure and on avoiding factory collapses – briefly, they seem to focus on the rather modest agenda of keeping workers alive. That is weak approach is marred by at least two problems. On the one hand, by reinforcing ideas of exceptionality, it risks representing infrastructural issues as delinked from the overall labour conditions and relations in the sector, which instead, are greatly exploitative as a whole, and not only in Bangladesh. On the other hand, this approach is hardly suffcient to take into consideration all the different ways in which garment work depletes the bodies of workers. Even in the absence of major so-called disasters, garment work has profound implications for the health and wellbeing of workers. It imposes a slow but inexorable tax on their labouring bodies, and, once it has absorbed their working potential and consumed them as a source of competitiveness, it simply discards them like a sort of ‘human waste’. This is especially true where large reserve armies of labour are available, like across the Indian garment mall, which can still massively benet from slack labour markets, and the millions and millions of informalized workers composing the great majority of India’s labourforce (again, see the estimates in NCEUS, 2007, and WTO and ILO, 2009). In these contexts, in fact, capital can consume workers’ bodies without major concerns for protability. A­fter all, upon the depletion of some, others can be made available at the same cheap rates. The production of cheap labour, as this analysis has shown, is all but an easy endeavour. However, the same analysis has also shown that it is an endeavour successfully realized through complex but systemic processes of labour subjugation at work across India’s sweatshop regime.

#### Asian workers, women in particular, have been classified by patterns of submission, where their labor and survival is dependent on forms of passive resistance that lack collective coordination—it reflects the assumption of passivity and stereotypes imposed on Asians in labor systems.

**Mikyoung 03** Mikyoung, K. (2003). South Korean Women Workers' Labor Resistance in the Era of Export-Oriented Industrialization. *Development and Society*, *32*(1), 77–101.

This paper attempts to demystify the glossy portrayal of economic growth by viewing the challenging work lives of women workers and their subsequent labor resistance. The impressive macro economic indicators did not mean much when the numbers were nottranslated into qualitative improvement in workers’ welfare. Although the export regime euphemized women workers in the export industry as “the industrial warriors,” they had to endure extremely hard work and genderedhumiliation on the shop floor. The degrading social stigma as powerless ,poor, under-educated, rural, young, and female, was another salient source of their discontent. Their lived experiences were in great congruence withthe nation’s social change. The increase in young women’s labor participa-tion and urban migration was in step with the country’s structural transfor-mation. The export-oriented industrialization needed a cheap and skilledlabor force, and women filled the need. The rapid urbanization also meant their radical uprooting from their hometowns. This group of socially mar-ginal women workers whose lives were at the juncture of overall socialchange experienced empowerment from the daily oppression, the shared camaraderie, the resistance experiences, and the outside support. Most comparative studies of women’s labor resistance present a passivepicture of women. Studies on Asian women in particular consistently sug-gest passive resistance as a dominant norm. Gallin (1990) describes the“muting of class consciousness” by Taiwanese women workers. She argues that women workers are inactive because of the dispersal of factories intorural areas, the influence of a patriarchal family structure, the state’s repres-sive labor policies, and women workers’ identification with the company rather than with fellow workers. In addition, Ehrenreich and Fuentes (1985),and Lin (1986) have described Southeast Asian women workers’ unusualforms of resistance in the electronics industry. Southeast Asian women’smass hysteria, such as collapses and sudden outbursts, seems to reflect a lack of resistance strategy. Elson and Pearson (1981) and Hossfeld (1990) **note Asian women workers’ ingenuous but passive resistance against patri-archal management. Women** workers mimic and ridicule male supervisorsin their absence, replacing their usual expressions of respect and deference.Elson and Pearson (1981: 27) observe that “... this passivity is not a natural and original state: to achieve it requires enormous efforts of self-repression.”Bose and Acosta-Belen (1995: 5) also argue for women’s passive resistanceby stating that “women’s survival itself is an act of resistance.” Thus, pas-sive resistance has been argued to be the dominant mode of Asian women workers’ labor struggles.

#### **Stereotyping and the commodification of Asians in labor systems fuel harmful rhetoric and subjugates us to both material and psychological violence that kills, intensifying current trends of hate and aggression**

Tran, D. (2021, July 13). Invisibility and objectification can kill: American theatre's Anti-Asian Problem. AMERICAN THEATRE. Retrieved November 9, 2021, from https://www.americantheatre.org/2021/04/07/invisibility-and-objectification-can-kill-american-theatres-anti-asian-problem/.

**A few years ago, I was walking down the street in Portland during the** [2017 TCG National Conference](https://www.tcg.org/Default.aspx?TabID=6555)**.** I was speaking on the phone to my mother in Vietnamese. I walked past a group of young men, and behind me I heard what sounded like the word “chink.” I didn’t turn around, I walked faster. I started shaking. Maybe I misheard it, I thought. Maybe I was just being paranoid. Even now, I tell myself that maybe I didn’t hear what I thought I heard. But if it wasn’t what I thought I heard, why do I still think about it? That’s the thing about being Asian in America: You are constantly telling yourself that what you’ve experienced is *not that bad*. You excuse the ignorant comments of “go back to where you came from,” the “me love you long time” and “ni hao ma” jokes, the being mistaken for the other Asian person [at work](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/05/02/co-workers-keep-mixing-up-people-color-office-its-more-than-mistake/?fbclid=IwAR0K1ZllXVAuRkzbPzQrhz2kDg4YIvIGSGja1A1eIqwnn-4jSwrHE81STmQ). *It’s just words*, we are told. *You should learn how to take a joke*. So we swallow the discomfort. As Cathy Park Hong wrote in her bestselling book [*Minor Feelings*](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/605371/minor-feelings-by-cathy-park-hong/): When I hear the phrase, “Asians are next in to be white,” I replace the word “white” with “disappear.” Asians are next in line to disappear. We are reputed to be so accomplished, and so law-abiding, we will disappear into this country’s amnesiac fog. We will not be the power but become absorbed by power, not share the power of whites but be stooges to a white ideology that exploited our ancestors. This country insists that our racial identity is beside the point, that it has nothing to do with being bullied, or passed over for promotion, or cut off every time we talk. We are usually on the sidelines when it comes to storytelling; we say words but never make any kind of impact. We are so invisible that many people (including many Asian Americans) don’t know our own history in this country, and how that history is rife with exploitation, violence, and exclusion. But Asians are also fed to the [prison industrial complex](https://www.searac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SEAA-School-to-Deportation-Pipeline_0.pdf), [deported](https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2016/04/05/southeast-asian-refugees-and-the-prison-deportation-pipeline), and killed by police officers kneeling on our necks. But because those stories don’t fit into the “model minority” myth of Asians being affluent and successful, you probably haven’t heard them. Being Asian in America is a continual process of being gaslit by the people around you and, most insidiously, by yourself. When the wider culture tells you that your stories, your face, your people are not worthy of attention, you make yourself smaller. You tell yourself that your feelings, your pain, your rage is not worthy of attention. After all, if you’re invisible, you can’t bleed. [May Adrales](https://www.americantheatre.org/2021/03/02/may-adrales-named-next-artistic-director-of-the-lark/) (she/her), director and newly named Lark Play Development Center artistic director, told me that while she’s experienced racism, she “was purposely not taking a lot of space, because I didn’t want it to detract from other movements, from Black Lives Matter. And I think that that reticence was respectful. But it also wasn’t allowing for greater solidarity and building a movement against the violence.” With the murder of six Asian women in Atlanta, amid a rise of violence and hate crimes against Asians in America, we now know that invisibility can kill us. **According to the** [**Asian American Performers Action Coalition**](https://www.americantheatre.org/2020/10/01/aapac-report-reveals-larger-pattern-of-inequities-in-ny-theatre/), in the 2018-19 theatrical season in New York City, Asian American actors were cast in just 6.3 percent of all available roles, Asian American playwrights and musical theatre writers made up just 4.9 percent of all writers produced, and Asian American directors oversaw just 4.5 percent of all productions. As AAPAC said in their own recent statement condemning anti-Asian violence: In **our own industry, we have witnessed this same white supremacist narrative in the form of the exotification, dehumanization, and erasure of Asian men and women on America’s stages. Words matter. Representation matters. The perpetuation of hideous and inaccurate stereotypes, only seeing our stories via a white lens, and removing us from the American narrative through exclusion are all directly connected and have their ramifications.** They dehumanize us to the point that some believe we are expendable enough to further erase with cold-blooded murder. The American theatre has historically sidelined Asians in two main ways: yellowface—hiring white actors to play Asian roles—and stereotyping. Yellowface only very recently became a faux pas in theatre, and only because [a critical mass](https://www.americantheatre.org/2016/05/04/hard-questions-tough-truths-at-beyond-orientalism-forum/) of theatre artists protested against it. I have written about the [theatre field’s love of Asian stereotypes](https://www.americantheatre.org/2015/10/27/from-orientalism-to-authenticity-broadways-yellow-fever/). Even before the pandemic, [*Miss Saigon*](https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/04/13/i-am-miss-saigon-and-i-hate-it/) was still touring around the country and *The King and I* was touring worldwide. There has been no similarly widespread reach for a play written by Asian Americans. Mainstream theatre audiences would still rather see Asians as foreigners in need of white people’s help than as equals. American stages have perpetuated the sexualization and dehumanization of Asian women, from frequent performances of *Madama Butterfly* to its knockoff *Miss Saigon*. In the popular *South Pacific*, Bloody Mary gives her Polynesian daughter Liat away to an American sailor as a gift. Liat doesn’t speak in the musical. Silent and submissive, she takes off her clothes immediately after meeting Lt. Joseph Cable. She is merely an object to be looked at and taken. *Miss Saigon* is the story of a Vietnamese prostitute named Kim. We never learn much about her: What are her dreams? What was her village like before the war? What does she like to eat? The only thing we know about Kim and her fellow prostitutes is that they all want to go to America. Their entire characterization is about idolizing whiteness. Like *South Pacific*, *Miss Saigon* positions Asian women as playthings of white men, minus any aspirations, dreams, agency, or last names. Their only job is to service white men. It’s [“me love you long time”](https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2021/03/26/asian-women-hollywood-portrayals/) as a musical. I’m not saying sex workers should not be portrayed onstage—[Among the Dead](https://www.tdf.org/articles/1562/Meet-the-Unknown-Survivors-of-WWII) by [Hansol Jung](https://www.americantheatre.org/2018/11/08/lost-and-found-with-hansol-jung/), for instance, is a brutally frank play about Korean comfort women that doesn’t romanticize the history and instead highlights the resilience and inner life of those women. Bottom line: You shouldn’t portray a sex worker without also showing why she is in that position. In the case of Kim and *Miss Saigon*, it’s because [American imperialism has destroyed her country](http://bostonreview.net/global-justice-gender-sexuality/jessie-kindig-violent-embrace#.YG33SW0VFyE.twitter). It’s because of the American appetite for Asian women’s bodies. You cannot have prostitution without demand. But that’s not what white audiences want to see. They want Asian women who are subservient and self-sacrificing, so that white audiences don’t feel complicit in Kim’s pain. They can write it off as, That’s just the way those people are. They want to see American soldiers as flawed heroes, but still heroes—not as sex traffickers and bannermen of the American war machine. When you sexualize an Asian woman without giving her agency or a personality, when you make her a vessel for white guilt, you contribute to stereotypes about Asian women. You make her invisible. You make her less than human. And when she is murdered in Atlanta, you can dismiss her as “temptation**.” See how easily that excuse of the killer was taken up by the police and parroted by the media. America would rather see Asians as objects and stereotypes, in part because that’s what American popular culture has been giving them**. These stereotypes also affect the way Asian Americans are treated as theatre workers. As Adrales told me, production teams don’t know what to do with an Asian woman in a position of power. “Many attempts of assertiveness were met with reprimand and ‘difficult to work with,’” she told me. “When I tried to create space for myself to do my job at the helm of the production, I was criticized and in subtle ways retaliated against. Production managers have undermined my authority because of these instances, souring my reputation with other theatres and talking badly about me with members of my creative team—even as I see my white male counterparts gain respect from the very same behaviors.” This is more than the usual misogynist double standard—it is that, definitely, plus racism. “I think it’s largely because what those with authority/power saw was an Asian woman who would comply and remain obedient and grateful, and any disruption of that stereotype was seen as an egregious aggression and incompetence,” Adrales said. “It’s taken me a very long time to come to terms with that racism; even articulating it now is still somewhat revelatory.” **Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit,** New York City was experiencing something I had never seen before in my 10 years of covering theatre: Asian American playwrights being produced [in record numbers](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/21/theater/asian-american-playwrights.html). [*Cambodian Rock Band*](https://www.americantheatre.org/2018/06/29/rock-in-a-hard-place-lauren-yees-cambodian-rock-band/) by Lauren Yee was running at the same time as *The Headlands* by Christopher Chen, [*Endlings*](https://www.americantheatre.org/2020/03/22/the-night-the-lights-went-off-off-broadway/) by Celine Song, and [*Suicide Forest*](https://www.americantheatre.org/2019/02/21/token-theatre-friends-kristine-haruna-lee-takes-us-inside-the-suicide-forest/) by Haruna Lee. Yee was one of [the most-produced playwrights in the American nonprofit theatre that season](https://www.americantheatre.org/2019/09/18/the-top-20-most-produced-playwrights-of-the-2019-20-season/). Before then, we were lucky if we got one production a season at a major Off-Broadway or regional theatre. It seemed that Asian American plays were finally having a moment. These weren’t just stories about immigrant parents and their kids, or trauma porn, or merely identity-driven. They were playful and edgy, and they showcased Asian faces as human, with individuality and variety, with characters who loved rock music or ocean diving. That moment was hard-won. I talked to a number of Asian American artists for this story, and all agreed that there is a “bamboo ceiling” in terms of how big a budget level they can expect to work with. For one thing, you normally won’t normally see a predominantly white theatre’s Asian American show—or any show by BIPOC artists—on the mainstage. It’s usually in a theatre’s secondary space. As a director of new plays primarily written by playwrights of color, May Adrales knows this tendency well. “Typically I’m in the smaller spaces,” she said. “Most of those theatres formulaically do their person-of-color show in February or March. They don’t do it as the big spring closer or the big fall opener.” As Adrales and a number of artists told me, theatres will usually program a BIPOC show to fulfill the mandates of a diversity grant. Which means they don’t necessarily believe their white subscriber audience will actually see it or relate to it. Over her career, Adrales has noticed that Asian American artists often have to “prove that there is a demand for these stories.” A common question she’s been asked is, “How could an Asian show possibly attract enough people to fill a bigger space?” Adrales concludes: “People think that Asian stories are not universal,” but “exotic outsiders to the mainstream.” Playwright [Lauren Yee](https://www.americantheatre.org/2019/09/23/offscript-rocking-out-with-lauren-yee-and-the-top-10-plays/) (she/her) faced similar hesitancy when she was looking for commercial producers who might help transfer her hit play *Cambodian Rock Band* to Broadway. It had done well regionally and Off-Broadway, selling out and extending at multiple major theatres. But when it came time to talk about Broadway, Yee hit a wall. “It seems harder to get an Asian American show on Broadway than it is to get a movie or a TV show made,” said Yee, who is one of the writers for *Pachinko* on Apple TV+. Indeed, to date, there have been many more major Broadway productions about Asians by white writers than Asian stories by Asians. Regardless of authorship, plays with Asian characters at least mean that Asian actors can find work—indeed, it seems to be the only time they can hope to get work. [According to AAPAC](http://www.aapacnyc.org/2017-2018.html), Asian American and Middle Eastern actors were the least likely to be cast outside their race. If the role isn’t racially prescribed, 80 percent of the time it will go to a white actor. Even when they are cast, Asian American actors are seldom embraced as whole people, or as the heroes. Actor and AAPAC leader [Pun Bandhu](https://www.americantheatre.org/2015/10/22/offscript-whos-in-the-room/) (he/him) was once brought into a major Off-Broadway theatre to play an Asian American side character. He wasn’t given an opportunity to make the role deeper or to change it, because the director was white, the playwright was white, and the artistic director of the theatre was white. “You just felt like a cog in a wheel,” Bandhu said. “It’s really subtle things that are so hard to articulate, but it’s a real thing that’s felt, and it’s totally systemic.” Bandhu described working in theatres run by white producers as akin to being a guest in someone else’s house. “You’re the show of color this season, you’re fulfilling some sort of diversity initiative, it feels like a diversity hire,” he said. “And so there’s this feeling of like, ‘Oh, we’re so glad you’re here.’ But there isn’t the level of engagement where they’re interested in you other than what you bring in terms of race.” **There are also economic consequences for siloing BIPOC creators on smaller stages:** It enshrines a wage gap between BIPOC and white artists. Because pay rates and profit-sharing are dependent on how big a theatre’s house is, the smaller the house, the less money there is to be made. The deck is stacked from the get-go. As Yee put it, “If you produce all women and BIPOC artists on the second stage, and you do all your white men on the big stage, those white men will make more for the same amount of work.” Indeed, AAPAC’s study points out that for every $1.70 a white actor makes, a BIPOC actor makes $1, due largely to this sidelining of BIPOC plays and spaces. It also limits the impact our stories can have: When a white play can get 500 pairs of eyes on it per night, the 100 viewers that a BIPOC show has in the second stage is minuscule in comparison. This inequality is also felt sharply between theatres of color and predominantly white institutions. Theatres of color have historically been underfunded compared to white theatres (I’ve also [covered this topic before](https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/07/21/who-gets-most-arts-money-still-large-white-organizations/)). AAPAC looked at the 990 forms of the 18 largest nonprofit theatres and 28 BIPOC theatres in NYC, and found that the white theatres got over $170 million in funding, while BIPOC theaters received $12.2 million in funding. It’s not just in NYC. As the [Consortium of Asian American Theaters and Artists](https://caata.net/) (CAATA) pointed out in a statement, “When looking at government funding alone, the predominantly white institutions received $30.7 million of government funding while BIPOC theatres received under $5 million. It is evident that being historically underfunded normalizes deprivation and rigidly employs structural social control.” “If you look at the budgets of theatres of color across the country, they’ve been stagnant,” said Ralph Peña (he/him), artistic director of Ma-Yi Theater Company. “Because funders, both private and public, think of us as an economic subset of American theatre.” In other words, because theatres of color usually program stories about one particular ethnic community and serve those audiences, they’re considered “small” and “niche,” said Peña. “We’re specialized, we cater to specific communities. And so our funding has been kept at that ceiling, so we never get to grow beyond that.” It’s hard to grow when you keep getting the same amount of money every year. When white theatres want to program “diverse” shows, on the other hand, they will often get specialized funding to do so from foundations (which don’t normally fund theatres of color). Then these same white theatres will ask theatres and artists of color to serve as their marketing arm, to spread word about the show in their specific communities. Yee told me how she had to act as a community liaison for her plays to make sure that, for instance, Cambodian Americans would turn up for *Cambodian Rock Band*. As that labor is not recognized, it is also not compensated. “You have to change the way you value our work,” said Peña. “Because no one else at these PWIs [predominantly white institutions] are responding to the needs of our community. Or if they do, it’s almost always carpetbagging. They’re there to sell tickets, but they don’t have a relationship with the communities.” Just as Asian shows are seen as exotic oddities rather than universal, Asian American theatres aren’t considered national theatres by funders, even though it is companies like Ma-Yi, Theater Mu, and East West Players that have historically nurtured Asian American artists when white theatres would not work with them, and told Asian American stories before there was a financial imperative. Even now, in quarantine, Ma-Yi is providing [$500 micro-grants to BIPOC artists](https://www.americantheatre.org/2021/04/01/ma-yi-theater-company-announces-5000-micro-grant-program/). Theatres of color are responsible for nurturing many BIPOC artists, who in turn are not seen as legitimate artists until they’re produced at white institutions. It’s not that Asian American artists shouldn’t work at the most prestigious institutions or get their Broadway credit (and money). But when what is considered prestigious are white institutions, and Asian American theatres are seen as niche and less worthy of attention, that’s a problem. At the recent [Ovation Awards](https://www.americantheatre.org/2021/04/07/no-la-stage-alliance-didnt-fold-over-a-single-anti-asian-blunder/) in Los Angeles, organizers had no problem mentioning white theatres whose shows were nominated but made no mention of East West Players, which had two shows nominated (the awards also [misidentified an Asian nominee](https://spectrumnews1.com/ca/la-west/entertainment/2021/04/01/several-companies-exit-la-stage-alliance-after-asian-american-nominee-is-misidentified) by mispronouncing her name and showing a photo of another Asian actor in her place). Peña sees a link between the sidelining of Asian American stories and the surge of recent violence against the community—and the urgency of his theatre’s work to counter that. “We do the humanizing of Asian faces for America,” he said of Ma-Yi’s work. “We tell Asian stories from Asian artists, with Asian agency and centering Asian lives, therefore humanizing Asian lives. That’s our function. And so when we do that, it’s harder to [choke somebody on the subway until they’re unconscious](https://www.news10.com/news/ny-news/hate-crimes-unit-investigates-punching-choking-of-asian-man-on-subway/).” He then added for emphasis, “That is our function, and you need to empower us to do that, because otherwise we just don’t have the resources.” Microaggressions aren’t the same as full-scale violence. And better representation isn’t the only answer to Asian hate. But the former president and many in his party have consistently referred to COVID-19 as the “China virus,” leading directly to the past year’s increase in hate crimes. And violence does not come from nothing**. Microaggressions, erasure, stereotypes, and exoticitization provide the soil in which violence can grow**. Also indifference to violence: How else to explain people looking away when a [65-year-old Filipina woman](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/30/nyregion/asian-attack-nyc.html) is being kicked repeatedly in the head in midtown Manhattan, as if she doesn’t exist? It wasn’t until the Atlanta shooting that Stop Asian Hate became a hashtag that reverberated outside of the Asian American community. Hate crimes against Asian Americans had been happening before last month, but most people didn’t want to hear about it. The day before the Atlanta shooting, [32 Vietnamese Americans](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/still-reeling-trump-era-policies-groups-demand-biden-address-deportati-rcna517) were deported back to Vietnam, even though they had already served time in jail for their misdemeanors. You probably hadn’t heard about that because of how normal it is for Asians to be invisible, for our stories to not be worth mentioning. As Tracy La, executive director of VietRise, an advocacy organization for Vietnamese immigrants, [said on Twitter](https://twitter.com/_TracyLa/status/1377049098621222914): “When I write or think about anti-Asian violence, I’m not talking about microaggressions, although that is harmful, too. It can become violent if you grow up in an environment where that is your everyday reality, and the racism makes you hate yourself and where you come from. If the microaggressions and racism restructure/rewire your connection to your identity and make you hate yourself and your community, that is psychological violence.” How can we learn to acknowledge our history and learn to be proud of who we are when the popular culture insists on shoving us to the side or worse, making us the [butt of the jokes](http://mildlybitter.blogspot.com/2015/01/honeymoon-in-vegas-its-bad-day-for.html)? When we are seen as invisible, we internalize it. That’s why Asian Americans are the ethnic group least likely to [report a hate crime](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-americans-are-least-likely-report-hate-incidents-new-research-n1262607). We have gotten used to swallowing our own pain. This is why I am tired of solidarity statements. I do not want another theatre to release a statement saying they condemn Asian hate, or that they stand with the Asian American community, without reckoning with their own role in sidelining Asian voices. Because we did not make ourselves invisible. We have been made invisible. Lately I’ve been taking comfort in my own community as we rally and support each other, and learn to vocalize our own truths, some of us for the first time. After the Atlanta murders, Adrales and the Lark hosted a virtual convening where anyone could attend, process, and find support. Said Adrales, “If we can, as an entire BIPOC community, recognize that many of our struggles are different but many are the same and that one injustice to one group is an injustice for all, I’m hoping that will sow the seed for other conversations and coalition-building with other social justice movements.” There is no easy answer for what happens next (though [CAATA has some suggestions](https://caata.net/caata-announces-initiatives-to-combat-anti-asian-hate-violence/)). Even as I write this, in the darkness of this particular moment, I remember the light that shined briefly: the moment before the pandemic when, for the first time, there was a proliferation of Asian stories that showcased our individuality. And I am buoyed that for the first time, an Asian American story, [*Minari*](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/steven-yeun-minari-seeing-asian-america-its-own-third-culture-n1257078), is nominated for Best Picture at this year’s Academy Awards. I am reminded that artists and activists have been banging against the doors of the white establishment for centuries, despite those pretending not to hear or see. The outcry of this moment shows that maybe people are finally listening. And when theatre comes back, I want more stories, bigger stories, and for Asian faces to take centerstage and for all audiences to see themselves in us—to see us as not a *them*, but a you. Our history is American history. Our stories are American stories. One thing is for sure: Being invisible is no longer an option. The price is too high.

Thus, just governments ought to recognize the unconditional right to strike

Empirically, Asian Americans have demanded better working standards through strike, but conditions impede their ability to isolate themselves from these systems, reinforcing the cycle of passivity and violence.

**Chang**, R. (2021, April **30**). *When 20,000 Asian Americans demanded garment workers' rights-and won*. History.com. Retrieved November 9, 2021, from https://www.history.com/news/garment-workers-strike-chinatown.

It was an unlikely group to storm the streets of New York City’s Chinatown in the summer of 1982: Nearly 20,000 garment workers—mostly Asian American women—marched together in solidarity for better benefits. Clad in matching union caps, they carried signs in both English and Chinese, reading, “In union, there is strength,” and “Support the union contract.” “The mood was so exciting!” says May Chen, a labor organizer who worked for the hotel union at the time and was “borrowed” to help with the picket lines and logistics. “Chinatown’s hierarchy was so male-dominated, and here came the women standing together and speaking out.” The walkout succeeded in retaining critical benefits for garment workers who toiled long work days in often harsh conditions. The strike’ success also showed that Asian American women—even those with a language barrier—could amplify their voices, take action and be heard. In 1980, about 430 garment shops employed a total of 25,000 workers—80 percent of whom were female. Many had come to the United States when the discriminatory [Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882](https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/chinese-exclusion-act-1882) was overturned by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, eliminating racial quotas. Some had come to [reunite with their husbands](https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/pdf/2009/quan_amerasia09.pdf), while others had fled turmoil in their home countries. Securing a job that didn’t require speaking English had provided these women with career independence, as well as a community of fellow immigrants. But conditions in the packed factories were not always humane. The buildings were often decrepit and the workspaces packed together tightly, according to an [account](https://aaww.org/chinatown-garment-strike-1982/) in the Asian American Writers’ Workshop. Being pricked by needles was so common, Katie Quan writes in Amerasia Journal, that some bosses checked for needle fragments in workers’ fingers and then congratulated them for reaching that right of passage. On top of that, poor airflow and crowded quarters led to [tuberculosis](https://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/28/nyregion/new-money-people-and-ideas-alter-chinatown-of-tradition.html), as well as kidney and gastric issues. Works days commonly stretched on for more than 10 hours—in low-light conditions. And pay was earned by the piece—at meager rates. Garment workers in Chinatown's shops earned 50 cents for a skirt and 50 cents for a jacket, according to an October 12, 1983 [article](https://www.nytimes.com/1983/10/12/nyregion/after-years-of-decline-sweatshops-are-back.html) in the New York Times. Experienced workers, according to the Times, said their daily earnings amounted to just $9 or $10 per day. Still, the women clung to the jobs, many drawn to [benefits](https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/pdf/2009/quan_amerasia09.pdf) provided by the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU), Local 23-25. The union protected wages, holiday pay, welfare payments and pension, it also offered access to a health center, with full coverage for the workers and partial benefits for their families. Every three years, the contract was renegotiated between the employers and union. But in 1982, things changed. As overseas labor became more accessible, some employers tried to [cut benefits](https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/pdf/2009/quan_amerasia09.pdf) by scaling back on vacation days as well as medical and retirement benefits. Many employers were willing to work with the union, but, Chen explains, a small group of them used “the Chinese press to rile up support against the union.” Quan, who was working at Kin Yip Sportswear, one of the largest Chinatown shops at the time, wrote in the Chinese-language community paper Sing Tao Daily News that if the union said to strike, workers should follow suit—and included her phone number. Among the nonstop calls she received, one came from a worker's anonymous husband who quoted a Chinese proverb, “When fire singes the hairs on the skin of the women workers, they will rise up like tigers.” And, as Quan writes, that’s what happened. The garment workers started banding together, distributing union leaflets, answering phone calls, and spreading the word through the local media. “Workers were really concerned about protecting their benefits which was the main attraction of the union to them,” Chen says. “So most workers were positive about the union’s call to action.” Despite increasing support for a strike, on June 24, some women [hid in the shops’ bathrooms](https://aaww.org/chinatown-garment-strike-1982/), afraid to participate. But as soon as the organizers knocked on doors, showing the power of the masses, they joined in. Their numbers swelled to 20,000 as they walked down New York City’s Mott Street to Columbus Park. “Most of these women were really the backbone of their families so it was wonderful to see them feeling so strong and powerful,” Chen says. Another rally was held five days later—again with a turnout of nearly 20,000—and the holdouts gave in. In the end, most employers signed with the union, marking a major victory for the garment workers and a turning point for the union, which would work closely with its Asian American workers. While this may have been one of the loudest and effective labor rights strikes, Chen (who went on to work for the union after the strike) says the seeds had long been sown. “There had been a tradition in NY Chinatown of collective action by the huge number of Chinese community organizations,” she says. The 1982 strike was unique, however, in that it was powered by a group of people who had historically been expected to simply put up with inequities. As Chen says, “The community came to respect the women and the power of collective action to win rights."

#### The ROB is to reject every instance of anti-asianness in the classroom – anything else normalizes stereotypes of passivity and fosters this violence for future generations

Eng & Han 4, DAVID L. ENG & SHINHEE HAN [David L. Eng is Richard L. Fisher Professor of English as well as Graduate Chair of the English Department at UPenn. He is also Professor in the Program in Asian American Studies, the Program in Comparative Litera Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America (Duke University Press) as well as the Coeditor (with Alice Y. Hom) of Q&A: Queer in Asian America (Temple University Press, 1998). His current project is a co-edited collection (with David Kazanjian) entitled Loss: Mourning and Melancholia in the Twentieth Century. Shinhee Han, C.S.W., is a psychotherapist at the Counseling & Psychological Services of Columbia University. She is a doctoral candidate in the Shirley M. Ehrenkranz School of Social Work at New York University and maintains a private practice in New York City.], RACIAL MELANCHOLIA, RACIAL DISSOCIATION: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans, DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, Durham and London, 2019, ghs//BZ Recut/Tagged Nato

NATIONAL MELANCHOLIA For Asian Americans and other people of color, suspended assimilation into mainstream culture may involve not only debilitating personal consequences; ultimately, it also constitutes the foundation for a type of national melancholia, a collective national haunting, with destructive effects. In Caucasia, the ambivalence characterizing the narrator’s passing into whiteness leaves her with the constant and eerie feeling of “contamination.”13 Writing about the nature of collective identifications, Freud notes in “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” (1921), “In a group every sentiment and act is contagious, and contagious to such a degree that an individual readily sacrifices his personal interest to the collective interest. This is an aptitude very contrary to his nature, and of which a man is scarcely capable, except when he makes part of a group.”14 Our analysis insists on a consideration of what happens when the demand to sacrifice the personal to collective interest is accompanied not by inclusion in—but rather exclusion from—the larger group. It reorients psychic problems of racial melancholia toward social problems concerning legal histories of whiteness as property and, in particular, exclusion laws and bars to naturalization and citizenship for Asian Americans as a type of property right. As we know, the formation of the US nation-state entailed—and continues to entail—a history of institutionalized exclusions, legal and otherwise. Part of our introduction focused on the transatlantic slave trade and indigenous dispossession. Here, it is vital to consider the long history of legalized exclusion of Asian American immigrants and citizens alike—from Japanese internment and indefinite detention during World War II to earlier exclusion acts legislated by Congress, brokered by the executive, and upheld by the judiciary against every Asian immigrant group.15 For example, from 1882 to 1943, Chinese immigrants experienced the longest legalized history of exclusion and bars to naturalization and citizenship—the first raced-based exclusions in US history. To cite but one specific instance, in 1888 the US Congress retroactively terminated the legal right of some twenty thousand Chinese residents to reenter the United States after visiting China. Those excluded from reentry were also barred from recovering their personal property remaining in the country, underscoring the ways in which race, citizenship, and property were simultaneously managed by the state to control and restrict flows of both Asian labor and capital. This law was followed by a series of further exclusion laws, as well as accompanied by legislative acts against miscegenation and the ownership of private property, culminating in the National Origins Act (1924) and the Tydings-McDuffie Act (1934), which effectively halted all immigration from Asia for an indefinite period. As Teemu Ruskola notes, at the very historical moment when “the United States was pleased to refer to its China policy as Open Door … it hardly escaped the Chinese that the door swung one way only.”16 Yet, in our multicultural and colorblind age, few people remember this history of racially motivated discrimination against Asian Americans that laid the legal foundation for the emergence of the figure of the “illegal immigrant” and of “alien citizenship” preoccupying so much of political debate concerning immigration today. This history of exclusion is barely taught in US universities or high schools—indeed, colorblindness and the model minority myth demand a forgetting of these events of group discrimination in the name of abstract equality and individual meritocracy. A return to this history thus expands our prior analyses of race as relation and whiteness as property to consider how the legal mechanisms of citizenship have broadly functioned as a kind of restricted property right. For Asian immigrants, these mechanisms have mediated a long history of social exclusion and inclusion in US law and society. Racial melancholia can be seen as one profound psychic effect marking these histories of legal exclusion from the nation-state and prohibitions from national belonging. Today, discourses of American exceptionalism and democratic myths of abstract equality and individualism demand a forgetting of these formative losses and exclusions, an enforced psychic amnesia that can return only as a type of repetitive national haunting—a type of negative or absent presence.17 The contemporary model minority stereotype that defines Asian Americans is both a product of—and productive of—this negative or absent presence.18 Asian American model minority discourse emerged in the postwar period after the lifting of legalized exclusion—in the wake of Cold War conflict, the US civil rights movements, and the reformation of the Immigration and Nationality Act (Hart-Celler Act) of 1965. The Hart-Celler Act abolished the earlier immigration quotas based on national origins at the heart of US immigration policy for nearly half a century, replacing it with a system of preferences focused on the technical skills of immigrants and on family reunification. It dramatically shifted immigration patterns to the United States and spurred a “brain drain” of settlers from Asia (and Latin America). At the same time, Hart-Celler also created a vast and largely unacknowledged force of low-income and undocumented migrants from South Asia, new areas of China, particularly Fujian province, and Southeast Asia. This “yellowing” of the US nation-state reversed a long history of anti-Asian exclusion precisely under the banner of model minority citizenship and the collective forgetting of this history of exclusion and its unauthorized subjects. The model minority myth identifies the academic success of second-generation Asian American immigrant children as dispositive of the United States as a land of equal opportunity free of racial discrimination or distress. Thereby, it functions as a national tool that manages and erases a long history of institutionalized exclusion by characterizing Asian American success precisely as the result—rather than something that occurred despite the lack—of equal opportunity in the United States. In turn, the deployment of the model minority myth configures the unequal status of African Americans in US culture and society as a self-inflicted injury. Resisting the invidious political juxtaposition of Asian American “success” with African American “failure,” comparative race scholars have sought to reformulate this regulatory dialectic. Over a hundred years ago, W. E. B. Du Bois asked African Americans in The Souls of Black Folk (1903), “How does it feel to be a problem?”19 Today, comparative race scholars have revised Du Bois’s earlier inquiry, asking Asian Americans, “How does it feel to be a solution?”20 (We return to this dynamic in detail is chapter 3 on parachute children and psychic nowhere.) Put in terms of comparative race relations, Ellen Wu observes that during the prewar era of exclusion and yellow peril, Asians were defined as definitely not white. However, following the postwar era of inclusion, citizenship, and the emergence of model minority stereotype, Asians were defined as definitely not black.21 Understanding this triangulation is key to apprehending the ways in which racial binaries of black and white mask complex social relations of race while preventing political coalitions and alliances. Effacing unequal histories of racial discrimination, this divide and conquer strategy emerges most forcefully today in contemporary debates about affirmative action that seek to pit the interests of African Americans and Asian Americans against one another. The model minority stereotype is a myth because it homogenizes widely disparate Asian American and Asian immigrant groups by generalizing them all as academically and economically successful, with no social problems to speak of. In this manner, the stereotype works to deny, in Lisa Lowe’s words, the “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity” of various Asian American individuals and groups who do not fit its ideals of model citizenry.22 The pervasiveness of the model minority stereotype in our contemporary national imagination thus works as one important melancholic mechanism facilitating the erasure and loss of repressed Asian American identities as well as histories of discrimination and exclusion. These identities and histories can return only as a type of ghostly presence. In this sense, the Asian American model minority subject also endures in the US historical imaginary as a melancholic national object—as a haunting specter to democratic ideals of inclusion that cannot quite get over these legislated histories of loss. The psychic consequences that this model of national melancholia has exacted on the Asian American psyche are extensively explored and interrogated in Asian American cultural productions. One compelling example comes from Maxine Hong Kingston’s China Men (1980). In Kingston’s historical novel, an imaginary chronicle of several successive generations of male ancestors in the United States, the narrator speculates about the disappearance of the “Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.” After he helps to complete the transcontinental railroad, the greatest technological feat of ﻿the nineteenth century, Ah Goong vanishes. Kingston writes, “Maybe he hadn’t died in San Francisco, it was just his papers that burned; it was just that his existence was outlawed by Chinese Exclusion Acts. The family called him Fleaman. They did not understand his accomplishments as an American ancestor, a holding, homing ancestor of this place.”23 Kingston understands that the law’s refusal to recognize Chinese immigrants as citizens “outlaws” their existence, subjecting them to legal erasure as well as institutional violence: “It was dangerous to stay,” she observes in the context of the “Golden Spike” ceremony commemorating the railroad’s completion. “The Driving Out had begun. Ah Goong does not appear in railroad photographs.”24 At the same time, Kingston also underscores how this historical repudiation of the Asian laborer gains its psychic efficacy through a simultaneous internalization of its interdictions on the part of those excluded themselves. That is, the grandfather’s own family members refuse to recognize him as “an American ancestor, a holding, homing ancestor of this place.” They cannot perceive the “Fleaman’s” accomplishments building the transcontinental railroad as legitimizing his membership in the American nation. How, in turn, can it be possible to see themselves as legitimate members of this society? In this regard, racial melancholia can be described as splitting the Asian American psyche. This cleaving of the psyche can be productively thought about in terms of an altered, racialized model of classic Freudian fetishism.25 That is, assimilation into the national fabric demands a psychic splitting on the part of the Asian American subject who knows and does not know, at once, that she or he is part of the larger social body. In the same breath, fetishism also describes mainstream society’s disavowal and projection of otherness onto a disparaged group that is then homogenized and reduced to a stereotype. In this manner, racial fetishism delineates a psychic process by which difference is assumed and projected and then negated and denied, returning us to social dynamics of Myrdal’s “American dilemma.”

#### Err our pedagogy as it is key to rupturing the political systems that exercise divisive hierarchies among all people, scrutinizing Asian violence controls the link to their arguments as we can only criticize the world without a tinted view when we rid the political of anti-asianess.

#### Moy, L. A. (2017). *From yellow peril to model minority*. Smith Scholar Works. Retrieved November 9, 2021, from https://scholarworks.smith.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2986&context=theses.

The internment of Japanese Americans during World War II left an indelible mark on the psyche of Japanese Americans. The unlawful acts of civil right violations against Japanese Americans during this time were justified by drawing from pre-existing yellow peril sentiments. The racial identification of Japanese Americans as foreign, regardless of their citizenship status, served to justify the egregious incarceration of Japanese Americans. Saito (1997) states that this underlying constant sentiment towards Asian Americans as foreign allows for the “magical right before-your-eyes transformation of the images of Asian Americans from positive to negative and back to positive again. Each of the images have been painted with the brush of foreignness, and it is this tinting that provides the continuity behind the changing values attributed to them” (p. 76). Marking the racial identity of Asian Americans as foreign serves a political function to create and reinforce socioeconomic hierarchies in the United States. Saito (1997) argues that Asian Americans are triangulated as the model minority and a buffer between those identified as White and Black. This constructs the precipice whereby Asian Americans are perpetually othered, viewed as foreigners, and can be treated as enemies against whom “real Americans” can unite against during times of national crisis and economic instability. Anti-Asian Racism and Discrimination The model minority myth functions to mask the pervasive anti-Asian racism and discrimination evident in Asian American history in the United States. It is crucial to deconstruct and scrutinize this myth and the detrimental impact of its perpetuation on the Asian American community and other racial and ethnic minorities. While some may view the model minority label as a positive stereotype, Asian Americans often face the brunt of the repercussions of this divisive and dangerous hegemonic narrative

#### Sociological discourse in relation to policy is key to actualizing change and deconstructing oppressive labor structures, which inherently empowers Asian workers counteracting notions of passivity in light of mass hysteria caused deaths

#### Ngai et al. 14. Ngai, P., Yuan, S., Yuhua, G., Huilin, L., Chan, J., & Selden, M. (2014). Worker–intellectual unity: Trans-border sociological intervention in foxconn. Current Sociology, 62(2), 209–222. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392113514892

What are the implications for global public sociology and labor studies when more than a score of Foxconn workers jump to their death and when a wave of protests, riots and strikes occur in their wake? This article documents the formation of a cross-border socio-logical intervention project and illustrates how, through the mobilization of SACOM, sociological research **could fuel regional campaigns that gradually developed into a global campaign**. This experience confirms the premise that ‘social science’ should never be separated from ‘politics.’ **We challenge the conventional idea that social studies can or should be divorced from the researchers’ core values and political vision.** We attempt to bring about new understanding of the relationship between global production and worker resistance in China, about university education and about the goals of research-ers. We also shed light on how social and economic injustice can be creatively chal-lenged by combining the strengths of workers, researchers and transnational movement activists. We use both quantitative (semi-structured questionnaires) and qualitative (in-depth interviews and participation observation) methods to gain insights concerning the experiences, world views and collective agency of Chinese workers, who are struggling to make sense of the global production regime they inhabit and to contest the forces that shape their working and social lives. In the course of our research, we documented labor strikes, protests and riots in vari-ous Foxconn facilities and dormitories. These collective labor actions are now challeng-ing the Foxconn and Apple managements. These labor struggles, while thus far dispersed and short-lived, are spreading across China. With new factory operations in west and central China, a substantial portion of rural workers are being recruited from within their home provinces and even their home towns or prefectures. We anticipate that the form of labor resistance for rural migrants will change as they work closer to their native places and have the opportunity to draw on local social networks. The sociocultural politics of place can be important. There is potential for Chinese worker activism to grow to a regional or national level. Neither ‘pessimism of the intellect’ nor ‘optimism of the will’ offer insight into possibilities of this kind.At the time of this writing, the movement is continuing. Workers go out on strike, SACOM and other labor groups build solidarity networks to support the workers’ strug-gle, and sociologists are writing a book for the general public as well as carrying out comparative research across regions in China. Reigniting the tradition of intellectual–worker unity, more mainland Chinese university students are working on production lines during their summer vacations to understand and document the life-world of work-ers’ hardships and struggles. A number of sociology students have departed from their elite career paths by moving to live in local industrial communities, offering education programs and organizing cultural activities for Foxconn workers. These engagements on the ground aim to facilitate the formation of an emergent worker community organiza-tion. A critical approach to public sociology is slowly taking root in China. If it flour-ishes, its implications will extend far beyond China to the world.