# Oriental Alien K

**Western science fiction has led to a depiction of Asians as threats to the white social body. This marginalizes Asian Americans as they are seen as extraterrestrial beings who do not belong. -Hong ’08**

Sohn, Stephen Hong. “Introduction: Alien/Asian: Imagining the Racialized Future.” *MELUS*, vol. 33, no. 4, [Oxford University Press, Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS)], 2008, pp. 5–22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20343505.//ZW>

The Asian is no stranger to science, or for that matter, science fiction. Jack London's 1906 short story "The Unparalleled Invasion," set in 1976, chronicles the emergence of China as a world power coming out from the shadow of Japanese imperialism; due to its incredibly fecund citizens now numbering in the hundreds of millions, China threatens all modern civilizations.1 To combat this reproductive menace, biological warfare is employed, thereby conveniently annihilating the Chinese population. Sax Rohmer's infamous creation of Dr. Fu Manchu in 1913 twined the figure of the Asian other intimately with the dark sciences as he came to be known as the "devil doctor." Although set in London's Chinatown, Rohmer's Fu Manchu-centered series of novels nevertheless drew upon the immigration anxieties flourishing in the United States, where it became a bestselling series; the image was so popular, in fact, that Rohmer resur rected this infamous character time and again. While both Rohmer and London operate within early twentieth-century "yellow peril" fictions, their cultural representations did not emerge from a vacuum.2 Sidney L. Gulick's foundational study, The American Japanese Problem; a Study of the Racial Relations of the East and the West, published in the same year as "The Unparalleled Invasion," explains that "Japan's amazing victory over Russia has raised doubts among white nations. The despised Asiatic, armed and drilled with Western weapons, is a power that must be reckoned with. In the not distant future Asia, armed, drilled, and united, will surpass in power, they aver, any single white people, and it is accordingly a peril to the rest of the world" (225). Here, Gulick refers to the 1905 conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War, which marked a sea change in international relations precisely because it was the first time an Asian nation had defeated a European power in modern warfare. However, Gulick's rhetorical descriptions illustrate how this moment required a reorientation and reconsideration of Asia more broadly as a location from which to mold futuristic representations and alternative temporalities. For instance, continued tensions over Chinese immigrant laborers resulted in a series of exclusion acts throughout the late nineteenth century that further cemented the status of the Asian as an alien subject, unfit for assimilation and integration into the United States. According to Urmila Seshagiri, the social context for Fu Manchu should also be situated transnationally in light of the fact that the Manchu dynasty had just concluded and Sun Yat-sen had begun a modernization campaign: "Fu-Manchu and his hordes . . . emblematize not only dynastic China's ideological opposition to the modern Christian West but also the emergent geopolitical ambitions of a post-1911 China determined to fashion itself as a nation unhindered by the imperial designs of Britain, Germany, France, Austria, Italy, Russia, or Japan" (170). From this perspective, both London's short story and Rohmer's book series draw from multiple anxieties over Asia as pollutive geography, military menace, and economic competitor; these cultural productions interrogate what the attendant Alien/Asian might mean for "any single white people." Both London and Rohmer imagine alternative temporalities where the Alien/ Asian is inextricably tied to science, the future, and technology. Although yellow-peril fictions and other such cultural forms first proliferated over a century ago, this special issue elucidates how the connection between the Asian American and the alien other still remains a force to draw upon to allegorize racial tension and exclusion. I further explore the discursive interventions made by both Laura Hyun Yi Kang and David Palumbo-Liu in employing the "slash" within the term Asian American, as I call attention to the ways in which Asia and America stand in an uneasy and unstable relationship with the other.3 The title of this special issue, "Alien/Asian," also emphasizes how the binaristic formulation of Asian American might possess subcategories and intricacies routed through genre conventions that touch upon and intersect with fantasy, speculative fiction, science fiction, and other similar genres. In its multiply inflected significations, the alien stands as a convenient metaphor for the experiences of Asian Americans, which range from the extraterrestrial being who seems to speak in a strange, yet familiar, accented English to the migrant subject excluded from legislative enfranchisement. In this respect, the Alien/Asian does invoke conceptions of its homonymie counterparts, alienation and alien-nation. Indeed, the notion of the Alien/Asian centrally is concerned with Asian American spatial subjectivities and temporal heterogeneities, especially as various cultural productions imagine futures and alternative realities in which issues of racial marginality are often encrypted, reconfigured, and/or transformed. Asian Americans or figures of Asian descent often have played large parts in tales of alienation, or they conspicuously appear when interplanetary travel and galactic exploration take center stage. Such influences and instances catalyze the essays collected in this issue.

**Rhetoric focusing on threats by the East to Western countries pushing the “future war” narrative and fears of the East’s advancements only further the alienation of Asian American and yellow peril. -Hong ’08**

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Examining the Alien/Asian allows us to consider the prospective thesis that cultural production is still invested in parsing out how the yellow peril continues to be a mode to draw from, write against, challenge, negotiate, and problematize. The yellow peril traditionally operates with an overtly racist representation predicated on the danger it represents to the West's economic and military primacy; yet the spectrum that draws together the Alien/Asian across the late nineteenth century and well into the twenty first century demonstrates the dramatically divergent and varied ways Asian Americans have been represented as dangerous, subversive, and tactical in visual, aural, and written texts. Rather than attributing a certain innovativeness to the cyberpunk wave in the eighties and nineties that cast Japan, in particular, as well as other Asian nations, as the site for the projection of futuristic anxieties, one can see that this phenomenon operates again within a frame of the perceived threat the so-called East presents to the West. The most commonly cited cyberpunk texts that include these orientalized futures are William Gibson's Neuromancer (1984) and Ridley Scott's film Blade Runner (1982). The trend of orientalizing the future has continued through numerous major Hollywood films such as Luc Besson's The Fifth Element (1997), the Wachowski Brothers' The Matrix trilogy (1999, 2003, 2003), and Joss Whedon's Serenity (2005), as well as in literary fictions such as Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash (1992).4 Accordingly, Takayuki Tatsumi contends: [Pjostcyberpunk science fiction seems to have updated even the old fixture-war narratives. What is highly paradoxical, however, is that the more high-tech our society gets, the more atavistic our literature becomes. For us to recognize the extent to which the future-war literary heritage has unwittingly influenced the science fiction of the present, it is important to reconstrue the pre-Wellsian and post-Wellsian narratives that emerged at the turn of the century. (70) Here, Tatsumi points back to the "future-war narratives" as characterized by London's "The Unparalleled Invasion" and reminds us how a stronger lineage must be drawn from yellow-peril fictions to the contemporary representations of the Alien/Asian.

**Science fiction allows for the extrapolation of reality by adopting a version of reality that erases cultures by altering history. This is directly linked to how society is viewed and influences future actions – NASA proves. -Thacker ’01**

(Eugene, Professor of Technology and Culture at Rutgers University, “The Science Fiction of Technoscience”, Leonardo 34.2, Project Muse,<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/leonardo/v034/34.2thacker01.html>)

As third-order simulacra, science fiction is not necessarily different from the technologies and the sciences it narrativizes, and in fact it creates the conditions for their possibility. In fact, science fiction is necessary in order for biotech and biomedicine to continue constructing their narratives of technological advancement and the increasing sophistication of a biotechnology of the population. In other words, the functions and attributes of genre science fiction (which still exist in genre science fiction, but which can now only belatedly keep up with developments in science and technology) have been incorporated by the technosciences. **As a powerful political tool, science fiction enables the biotech industry to create a narrative of a bioinformatically based, disease-free, corporate-managed future.** In doing so, it is also creating a history, a self-fulfilling narrative of progress. What is unique about the manifestation of science fiction at the opening of the biotech century is that science fiction is no longer the proper domain of culture (that is, of culture's critically commenting upon the intersection of society, science and technology). Instead, science fiction has come to be self-consciously embodied as part and parcel of the domains of biotech and biomedicine. To take two examples: researchers at the NASA Ames Center for Virtual Surgery explicitly utilize the rhetoric of science fiction in a language infused with the giddiness of new technologies. They clearly envision a future of telemedicine that would be at home in the Cyberpunk worlds of Gibson, Sterling or Cadigan .13 Their experiment in the spring of 1999 of a three-way, fully simulated, telesurgical collaboration is a concrete manifestation of what the discourse of science fiction can make possible. In order to approach such a question, it will be helpful for us first to attempt to outline something like a “definition” of contemporary science fiction. To be sure, histories of science fiction as a genre refer to as many definitions as there are movements or types of science fiction [5]. However, for our purposes here, we might begin with the following: science fiction names a contemporary mode in which the techniques of extrapolation and speculation are utilized in a narrative form, to construct near-future, far-future or fantastic worlds in which science, technology and society intersect. This is of course a provisional definition, but in it are three important components that characterize contemporary science fiction (most often in fiction, film and video games). The first is the distinction between the methodologies of extrapolation and speculation [6]. Generally speaking, extrapolation is defined as an imaginative extension of a present condition, usually into a future world that is “just around the corner” or even indistinguishable from the present (“the future is now”). By contrast, speculation involves a certain imaginative leap, in which a world (either in the distant future or altogether unrelated) markedly different from the present is constructed. As can be imagined, most science fiction involves some combination of these, culminating in worlds that are at once strange and very familiar. Secondly, science fiction’s narrator logical goal is the delineating of a total space in which certain events occur; that is, the construction of entire worlds that operate according to their own distinct set of rules that form their own “reality” (what has been called the “ontological” mode in science fiction) [7]. Finally, more and more genre science fiction is coming to terms not just with technical concerns, but also with social, cultural and political concerns. As such, the use of extrapolation or speculation and the construction of ontological worlds move science fiction into a realm that involves thinking about the complex dynamics between technology and globalization, science and gender, race and colonialism, and related concerns. Such a complexification of science fiction has been highlighted by critics such as Fredric Jameson as a critical function. In an article entitled “Progress versus Utopia,” Jameson articulates two critical functions that science fiction can have [8]. The first is characterized by the development of “future histories” or ways in which science fiction places itself in relation to history. Discussing science fiction as the dialectical counterpart to the genre of the historical novel, Jameson suggests that one of the primary roles of science fiction is not to “keep the future alive” but to demonstrate the ways in which visions of the future are first and foremost a means of understanding a particular historical present. A second role Jameson ascribes to science fiction is a more symptomatic one. Referencing the work of the Frankfurt School on the “utopian imagination,” science fiction can form a kind of cultural indicator of a culture’s ability or inability to imagine possible futures. For Jameson, writing during the high point of postmodernism, science fiction was an indicator of a pervasive loss of historicity and the atrophying of the will to critically imagine utopias. Thus, not only is each vision of the future conditioned by a historical moment in which it is imagined, but, increasingly, science fiction’s main concern is with the contingency involved in producing the future, as well as interrogating the constraints and limitations that enable the capacity to imagine the future at all.

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**This leads to the dehumanization of Asian Americans as they are seen as either aliens due to their lack of human emotions and failure to be like Americans or they are seen as villains because their success is portrayed through malicious intent and as a threat against the West furthering yellow peril – putting them in a double bind. -Cheng ’19**

Cheng, John. “Asians and Asian Americans in Early Science Fiction.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, 28 Aug. 2019, oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-924#acrefore-9780190201098-e-924-div1-8, 10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.924. Accessed 31 Jan. 2022.//ZW

This revised dynamic for Asian villainy resonated significantly beyond their explicit racial representation, passing on its associations to what is perhaps science fiction’s hallmark trope, the alien. While Asians were familiarly alien in the context of early 20th-century immigration, the term “alien” was rarely found science fiction at the time—and was used as an adjective, not a noun. Other terms, “foreign,” “odd,” “weird,” “strange,” and “beastly,” were used in similar fashion and far more frequently. In that era, “alien” connoted difference; it did not denote creatures from outer space or other worlds. The familiar conventions of Asian difference grounded concerns about alien difference in science fiction. While in the abstract, the idea of life on other worlds offered fertile grounds for imagination, without a point of reference, its myriad possibility was a diversity that could not be fully realized; their life forms could only be described and not understood as things in and of themselves. Asians, whose form was part of their figuration, bridged that divide and provided perspective for projected comparison even if their racial basis also limited the possibilities for imagining alien life. Their apparent lack of human emotion, in particular, allowed their association with nonhuman beings; its characteristic was doubly dehumanizing for its social implication and its radically natural expression. At the same time, otherworldly creatures assumed the roles that Oriental Asians played in figuring fundamental difference: revealing information about unknown nature; representing science’s negative potential; and expressing contemporary social anxieties about the body politic. They became alien by association with Asians and only later, in the Cold War period, became aliens by themselves. The affinity of Asian racial difference to alien difference explained the greater presence of Asians within science fiction’s alien adventures. The affinity was so significant that it occasionally found direct expression. As Cliff Hale exclaimed to Ray Fletcher, his fellow chemist-hero in William Lemkin’s “The Doom of Lun-Dhag,” when they realized the foe they faced was not Martian, but an Oriental villain, “Tibet or Mars! . . . it makes no difference.” “We’re in a jam,” he continued, “and we’ve got to get out of it—somehow.”[21](https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-924#acrefore-9780190201098-e-924-note-21) Indeed, several Asians in early science fiction had extraterrestrial ancestry, realizing the full import of Hale’s exclamation: There was literally no difference between Orientals and aliens because they were one and the same enemy race—and species. The Han Airlords in Tony Rogers’s 25th-century world were revealed to be the result of an intervention from outer space. Creatures arriving on a meteor that crashed in 20th-century Tibet interbreed with nearby natives, imbuing their hybrid offspring with greater strength and mental abilities, but “a vacuum in place of that intangible something we call a soul.” Their subsequent global conquest, in this sense, was the result not of ordinary historical social development but of extraordinary, extraterrestrial interference in Earth’s evolution. They, and their successes and failures, were neither simply Asian nor alien, but both. This unnatural natural history added new dimensions to the associations of both. On the one hand, it confirmed Asian scientific achievement, already suspected of evil intention and moral degradation, to be a cheat in the otherwise normal clash of civilizations. On the other hand, it added to early 20th-century America’s already potent anxieties about the consequences of miscegenation, which it suggested could not only be interracial but also interplanetary, interstellar, and intergalactic. These additional associations informed and transformed the already resonant meaning of Wilma Deering’s first words in the comic strip adaptation of Rogers’s adventures. In its first panel, Buck emerges from his five-century slumber to see the woman who will ultimately be the love of his life blasting distant figures and cursing them as “Half Breeds!”

### The hierarchies of human/dehumanization have overlapping spheres with general dehumanization structures. One cannot be addressed without the other. The act of dehumanization renders the individuals inanimate and one step closer to the approximation of death -Chen 12

Chen, Mel Y. Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect. Duke University, 2012 P.42-50. Edited for ableist language

How are **objectification** and **dehumanization** positioned in relation to animacy? The two are not synonyms, but they do **exist within overlapping spheres** of meaning; and, I argue, they come to mean in a similar way **in the brutal hierarchies of sentience in which** only **some privileged humans are granted the status of thinking subject**. I examine both terms, sometimes unearthing quite specific meanings (Marxian objecfication, for instance, which bleeds into dehumanization), but cognizant of the ways that the terms sometimes diverge; throughout, I gloss them as responding to or logically relying upon underlying animacy hierarchies.

What, after all, does it mean to dehumanize? In present times, certainly the animalizations and dehumanizations of suspected “terrorists”- discernable in extrajudicial complexes or cages and discourses of “Barbaric” practices and militarized hunts (for instance, the presidential candidate John Kerry’s comment in a debate: “I will hunt them down, and we’ll kill them”)- implicitly invoke economies within the animacy hierarchy. If dehumanization often involves a positive (That is, active) force, then what acts work to do so? One form of what is understood as **dehumanization involves the removal of** qualities especially cherished as **human**; at other times, dehumanization involves **the more active making of an object.**

Indeed, perhaps the most unsparing **dehumanization is an approximation toward death**. Critical disability and feminist studies have raised biopolitical questions about certain living states of being that have been marked as equivalent to death: death was one of the many bleak futures prescribed by strangers, doctors, and fellow patients to the critically disability theorist Alison Kafer upon apprehending her body. There are, too, conditions of illness so profoundly altering that categories of life, death, object, and subject are powerfully rewritten.

Susan Scweik points to the ways in which disability has proven to be a rubric by which people are dehumanized within regulating regimes of public law in the United States in her book The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public. She describes a Chicago city ordinance from 1881 which shought to “abolish all street obstructions,” written in language that “makes it sound at first as if the ‘ugliness’ in question concerned inanimate objects, such as ‘piles of bricks’. But the street obstructions turned out to be humans.” The coincident relation between **legalistic abstraction** (obstruction), **inanimacy** (piles of bricks), **and certain humans** (The targets of the ugly laws in this case) **speaks of** stunning (if quiet) **suturing of animacy terrains to public sentiment, legal bodies, and** notions of propriety**, a suturing to which people with visible disabilities are regularly subjected.**

**For Marx,** **the creation of an alienated laborer depends on** a concerted interplay of factors, including the unequal distribution of capital, **the enhanced nature of “things” as opposed to the “human world**,” the identification of a laborer with the labor it produces, and the dependency of a laborer on that labor. One consequence of this transformation of social and economic relations is the loss of a laborerer’s connection to its once-elaborate human nature (presumed civilization and the enjoyment of other higher forms of social relation), leaving it in the world of the animal function. Furthermore, self-possession is no longer the laborer’s right, since the laborer belongs to the labor on which it depends for its livelihood. Commodification impels the laborerer away from what makes it distinctively human and toward the circumscribed and limited lives of animal: “they are animal.”

I pause here to note that in such invocations not only is the animal caught on the wrong side of a species boundary, but theorizing has caught itself up in a contradiction of downward deferral that cannot quite succeed. Hence, perhaps the most significant, and most commented- upon leak within animacy heiarchies: **Human self-representation’s original “error**,” if such a determination could be ventured, **was in attempting to essentially provoke an unhappy wresting of animacy in order to apply it “Above” the level of the animal itself** (a simple class to which humans certainly belong) ,**to the realm of the (rationalized) subject**. In domains of taxonomic dependence, the is-and-is-not complex rises again here, affectively intense on its contradiction.

There are consequences for this precarious design**, co-conspiring as it must with prelapsarian fantasies of mirthful animality, precivilized and innocent.** **For the “human” feeling must then be forever in battle with rationality, and as humanity’s categorical guarantor, rationality had every time to win out as the exclusive and primary property of humans**. **The responsibilities of feeling then fell to lower places on the hierarchy- women, animals, racialized men, disabled people,** and incorporeals such as devils or demons**. The theory of the subject thus had consequences** that had everything to do with animacy and mattering, **given the distribution of ontological castings down** along **the hierarchy.** Marx hinges the human struggle with alienation precisely against “the animal”, almost backhandedly leaving an illusory vitality to the animal itself (since otherwise it would just be a commodity).

**Xenophobic language and the yellow peril has manifested physical violence onto Asian Americans -Lang ‘21**

Lang, Cady. “The Atlanta Shootings Fit into a Long Legacy of Anti-Asian Violence in America.” *Time*, Time, 18 Mar. 2021, time.com/5947723/atlanta-shootings-anti-asian-violence-america/. Accessed 5 Feb. 2022.

In the dissonance was confirmation of what many Asian Americans already knew: the violence that has long targeted their community is rarely seen for what it is. Since the start of the pandemic last spring, Asian Americans have faced racist violence at a much higher rate than in previous years. Stop AAPI Hate, a reporting database created at the beginning of the pandemic as a response to the increase in racial violence, received 3,795 reports of anti-Asian discrimination between March 19, 2020, and Feb. 28, 2021; women reported hate incidents at 2.3 times the rate of men. After his capture, the police noted that the shooter said he was seeking to address a “sexual addiction” and “was not racially motivated.” But for Asian women, racism and misogyny are deeply intertwined. A 2018 report from the American Psychological Association outlined the ways in which Asian-American women are exoticized and objectified in media and popular culture, depicted as “faceless, quiet and invisible, or as sexual objects.” The survey said these stereotypes “contribute to experiences of marginalization, invisibility and oppression” for Asian-American women. On March 16, America saw that reality manifest in the most brutal way. From the time the first wave of Chinese immigrants arrived as laborers in the U.S. in the 1850s, Asian Americans have always been subject to racist violence. As a source of cheap labor to build railroads, Asian immigrants came to be seen as threats to white jobs and scapegoated as dirty and disease-ridden. The “yellow peril” ultimately led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first time the U.S. had ever barred a specific ethnic group from the country. The brutality runs through more than two centuries of U.S. history, from the incarceration camps of World War II, when over 100,000 Japanese Americans were rounded up and imprisoned because of xenophobic fears, to the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, who died after being beaten by white men in a racially motivated attack in Detroit. Yet while racial violence has been an undeniable part of the history of Asian Americans in the U.S., the pervasive “model minority” myth has helped to obscure it. That false idea, constructed during the civil rights era to stymie racial-justice movements, suggests that Asian Americans are more successful than other ethnic minorities because of hard work, education and inherently law-abiding natures. Racial-justice educator Bianca Mabute-Louie emphasizes the connection between this damaging stereotype and the violence we’ve seen on the news–videos featuring Asian-American elders shoved to the ground. “This contributes to erasing the very real interpersonal violence that we see happening in these videos, and that Asian Americans experience from the day-to-day, things that don’t get reported and the things that don’t get filmed,” she says. Because the myth suggests upward mobility, it creates a fallacy that Asian Americans don’t experience struggle or racial discrimination. In reality, the community is America’s most economically divided: a 2018 study by the Pew Research Center found that Asian Americans experience the largest income-inequality gap as an ethnic and racial group in the U.S. The current surge in anti-Asian hate crimes was exacerbated by the xenophobic rhetoric of former President Donald Trump, who has continued to refer to COVID-19 as “the China virus,” blaming the country for the pandemic. Trump’s choice of words followed a long American history of using diseases to justify anti-Asian xenophobia–one that has helped to shape perception of Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners.” “There’s a clear correlation between President Trump’s incendiary comments, his insistence on using the term Chinese virus, and the subsequent hate speech spread on social media and the hate violence directed toward us,” says Russell Jeung, a co-founder of Stop AAPI Hate and a professor of Asian American studies at San Francisco State University. Anti-Asian racism also surged during the pandemic in Britain and Australia, with incidents of discrimination and xenophobia reported last summer by Human Rights Watch in Italy, Russia and Brazil. The news from Atlanta landed hard in Asian communities already feeling extraordinarily vulnerable. “We’re all feeling a collective trauma at the moment,” says Mai-Anh Peterson, co-founder of besea.n (Britain’s East and South East Asian Network). “We know that this isn’t just a problem for North America.”

**ALT**

### Retooling allows for Asian Americans to regenre science fiction. Prioritizing the oriental aliens subversive voice and shift mindset in order to stop the alienation, Huang ‘10

Huang, Betsy. Contesting Genres in Contemporary Asian American Fiction. New York, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2010, link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230117327. Accessed 1 Feb. 2022.

In this chapter, I argue that science fiction affords the Asian American fiction writer unique narrative tools for destabilizing the generic and social imperatives that have governed Asian American literary production. This may seem like a counterintuitive argument, to be sure, given the critical and popular consensus that the genre is one of the most convention bound, its plots and themes so frequently repeated that they have become powerful disciplinary forces in the production of a work of science fiction. In a 1975 seminal structuralist essay on science fiction, John Huntington identifies a “paradox that lies at the heart of [the genre]”—that is, the conflict between its subversive politics and its highly conventionalized narrative forms: “It may seem inconsistent,” he observes, “that the genre, which one might expect to explore the possibilities of fictional styles and forms, has traditionally conformed closely to a clear and powerful set of stylistic and narrative conventions.”19 But he also stresses the genre’s capacity to “escape nature’s rules and make its own.”20 This observation echoes Robert Scholes’s structuralist analysis of the genre in “The Roots of Science Fiction,” in which he argues that the genre is a form of “fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way.”21 The discontinuity is produced through the creation of an alternate world, a different place; Scholes lists “Heaven, Hell, Eden, Fairyland, Utopia, The Moon, Atlantis, Lilliput” as just a small sampling of such worlds and places in classical literature.22 The purpose of such radical discontinuity, Scholes explains, is “to get a more vigorous purchase on certain aspects of that very reality which has been set aside in order to generate a romantic cosmos.”23 In other words, the constructed fantasy world is actually, and quite paradoxically, an effective deconstructive instrument for unmasking the sociopolitical desires and fears in the “real” world that motivated the creation of the alternate world in the first place. The appeal of science fiction for writers and readers thus resides in its capacity for social and material critique through the deliberate use of nonrealist, nonempirical, highly representational and metaphoric literary devices. As Scholes puts it, in very similar terms to Huntington’s observation about “nature’s rules,” “one way [to represent the dislocation between the world of romance and the world of experience] has been to suspend the laws of nature in order to give more power to the laws of narrative, which are themselves projections of the human psyche in the form of enacted wishes and fears.”24 The genre, Scholes suggests, gives the writer license to dispense with the imperatives of verisimilitude and realism, precisely because the genre’s raison d’etre is founded on an emphasis of the not-real, of fabulation. **Fabulation in science fiction is usually triggered by a novum, a term coined by** Darko **Suvin in Metamorphoses of Science Fiction as the “new thing” that does not yet exist in our world, the main formal device that distinguishes a work of science fiction from “realistic” fiction.**25 Running the gamut from objects and peoples such as spaceships and extraterrestrial aliens to imaginary places and times such as future settings or alternate histories, the novum is the very thing that makes a work of fiction science fiction. The novum precipitates the process of what Suvin calls “cognitive estrangement,” a concept Suvin developed from the nonnaturalistic works of the Russian Formalists as well as Brechtian theater.26 It was Bertolt Brecht, Suvin explains, who defined the concept of estrangement in his 1948 Short Organon for the Theatre: “A representation which estranges,” Brecht writes, “is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar.”27 For Suvin, cognitive estrangement and its key device, the novum, constitute the very ars poetica of the science fiction genre. Thus, science fiction offers Asian American writers a unique way to engage in subversive political and ideological critique not by contravening genre conventions, but by using them to rewrite the rules of the genre. Creative uses of the novum instigate the processes of cognitive estrangement and dissonance that unmask entrenched ideological assumptions about the familiar self and the uncanny Other. Metaphorical encoding of various forms of alienness—alien settings, beings, social institutions, and ideological apparatuses—engenders new understandings of racial, cultural, sexual, and other forms of difference. If immigrant fiction and crime fiction are eminently concerned with the social politics of yesterday and today, then science fiction re-creates and reimagines the social politics of tomorrow. **While science fiction can retool Asian American literary aesthetics, Asian American writers can reciprocate by “regenreing” science fiction, Wai Chee Dimock’s term for writerly acts that challenge the “systemizing claims” of genre categories**.28 I wish to stress, too, that while the idea of retooling Asian American literary production with the instruments of a genre so historically steeped in Orientalist representations and exclusionary publishing practices may be regarded as a misdirected or even futile exercise to dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools, I see the exchange as mutually transformative at the aesthetic, political, and epistemological levels. In their reappropriation of science fiction, Asian American writers retool the genre as well, providing different narrative lenses for revising generic imperatives and epistemologies. Thus, this chapter examines works by three Asian American science fiction writers who appropriate three of science fiction’s most conventional subgenres: the alien encounter, the robot fable, and the future dystopia. Ted Chiang’s alien encounter novella, Story of Your Life, traces a linguist’s acquisition of an entirely new worldview as she works to establish communications with a visiting alien race. Greg Pak’s anthology film, Robot Stories, links four short robot fables together to dramatize the human costs of assimilationist prescriptions and socioeconomic aspirations. And Cynthia Kadohata’s dystopian novel, In the Heart of the Valley of Love, paints a pessimistic portrait of a future America deeply divided along racial and economic lines. Through the deployment of each of these subgenres’ chief novum—the alien, the robot, and the future, respectively—**the authors broaden the narrow social and generic imperatives that have limited Asian American aesthetic experimentation and political representation for too long.**

### The ROB is to reject every instance of anti-asianness in the classroom – anything else normalizes violence

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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.”