

An Interview with King-Kok Cheung

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SUMMARY

In this interview, conducted by correspondence in November 1992, Cheung answers questions from a fellow scholar of American studies concerning Asian American, multicultural and comparative literature as well as sexual and cultural politics. Cheung discusses her turn from English Renaissance to Asian American literature, her scholarship on cross-cultural and textual "silences," her position in the gender war among contemporary Asian American writers, her mediation of feminism and cultural nationalism and of Asian and Asian American cultures. The interview is followed by an "Afterword" in which Cheung describes her impression of the conference on Cultural Identity and Chinese American Literature.

KEY WORDS

King-Kok Cheung
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pedagogy



Shan: As the editor of the pioneering *Asian American Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (published by MLA in 1988), you are a well-known scholar of and contributor to Asian American literature. Can you say something about your upbringing and the advantages and disadvantages of your educational background with regard to your work in this field?

Cheung: Born in Hong Kong, I came to the United States at nineteen. Being a foreign-born Asian, I was probably more predisposed than my predecessors (many of whom stress American nativity as crucial to Asian American sensibility) to consider immigrant literature as very much a part of Asian American literature. My ability to read Chinese and speak several dialects, and even my constant exposure to Cantonese opera and all kinds of Chinese movies, are definite assets when examining Chinese American literature. But I do not have the same advantage when dealing with literature by Asian Americans of other national descent.

I see both contrasts and parallels between the experiences of American-born Asians and my own. Growing up as a member of a Chinese majority, I was not subject to white standards of beauty and intelligence--standards that can engender self-contempt among people of color in America. (Never have I felt the desire for blue eyes or blond hair.) Being raised in a British colony, I can understand some of the problems faced by those racial minorities in America who are often considered to be "internally colonized." And because of

my own bicultural upbringing, I am especially drawn to the multiple consciousness and polyglot language of many Asian American writers.

Shan: You did your Ph.D. dissertation at University of California, Berkeley. How and why did you shift your field of study from Renaissance studies to Asian American literature? Had it anything to do with New Historicism or any other critical discourses ?

Cheung: The story is a rather long and complex one. Suffice it to say that the shift had less to do with the influence of any one critical discourse than with the opening up of the literary canon, with my own change in status from a foreign student to a Chinese American citizen, and with the needs of my department. During the time I was in graduate school at Berkeley, the English Department there offered not one course on Asian American literature. It is not surprising that most scholars teaching the literature today were trained originally in another specialty. I was also the first Asian hired by the English Department at UCLA. When I was given the opportunity to teach and to do research in Asian American literature, I was both daunted and excited by the prospect of exploring an emerging field. I also felt a certain pull or desire to bridge my Asian and American experiences through such literature.

I suspected--because of this personal engagement--that I could make a more distinctive contribution to Asian American Studies than to Renaissance Studies. Yet my training in Renaissance literature, in which paradoxes abound, provided me with a particular angle on Asian American literature, in which the protagonists are often caught in alternative and even contradictory ways of seeing.

Shan: Please tell us the motivation, process, reception, and

function of the bibliography. How did it contribute to this field and how did it affect your own career?

Cheung: The Asian American scholars before me had done a lot of work in literally discovering Asian American literature. I wanted to do my share of excavation and at the same time to take stock of an unfamiliar field before launching into critical work. At the time the most comprehensive bibliography of Asian American literature consisted of fourteen pages (pp. 321-34) at the end of Elaine Kim's *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context* (1982), though there were longer bibliographies focused on specific groups. So compiling the bibliography was quite a strenuous and extended business, but I was lucky to have Stan Yogi as my collaborator and Brian Niiya as my research assistant, both of whom were unusually dedicated and resourceful.

I believe the bibliography has stimulated interest and facilitated scholarship in the field. Because it was published by the Modern Language Association, it has had the effect of establishing Asian American literature as a "legitimate" field, along the lines of African American literature. It may also have contributed to a more inclusive and open-ended conception of Asian American literature. I was uncomfortable with the definition of Asian American Literature put forward by the editors of *AIIEEEEE! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, who used what they called the "Asian American sensibility" as the criteria for inclusion. That is analogous to saying that only women with feminist sensibilities can be classified as women writers. Since I believe that Asian American literature should embrace diverse perspectives, I have moved in the opposite direction by including all writers of Asian descent who have settled in the United States or Canada. As a result of this project, I have often been perceived as an "authority" on Asian American literature, a label that I truly do not deserve.

Shan: As a female scholar, you pay special attention to the women's position represented in American minority literatures. And you were a participant in Nancy K. Miller's seminar on "The Subject of Feminist Criticism" in the 12th summer session at the School of Criticism and Theory at Dartmouth College, 1988. How did you apply your interest in and knowledge about feminism to your study of minority literatures?

Cheung: *Articulate Silences* explores the crisscross between feminist studies and ethnic studies. Feminist scholars have argued that women writers tend to express feminist sentiments indirectly--through narrative gaps and silences--because these writers are judged by a patriarchal society. And feminist critics have long been ferreting out the hidden sentiments in women's texts. But I believe these interpretive strategies can uncover other forms of subversive understatement as well. In *The Woman Warrior*, for instance, the narrator's understandable anger at the immigrant community for devaluing girls conceals a strong racial self-hatred instilled by the American educational establishment.

I also use feminist interpretive strategies to reveal the inequality suffered by minority men. The racist treatment of early Asian male immigrants has historically assumed a gendered form. As "represented" through American legislation and in the popular media, Asian Americans were, in Frank Chin's words, "lovable for being a race of sissies" (1972, 66). One contributing factor is that Chinese and Japanese cultures and white American culture often look at silence differently. Hence the father figures who appear in Asian American literature often straddle contradictory inscriptions of silence--as dignified Asians and effete Orientals, as oppressive patriarchs at home and submissive aliens at work, as stoic and heroic survivors and unprotesting victims. Even their wordless tenderness is often misconstrued as a lack of expression.

Exploring these contradictions allows us to see not only crosscultural constraints of manhood (its privileges notwithstanding) but also the peculiar predicaments faced by men whose code of masculinity differs from that of the dominant culture and whose "manly" reserve doubles their historical and political invisibility in white America.

Yet unlike the many Asian American male writers/critics who try to reverse stereotypes by reviving an Asian American heroic tradition, I am not too enthusiastic about glorifying an Asian mythology--even if it is authentic--that sustains a patriarchal ethos.

Shan: You seem to be very interested in the "silence(s)" of American minority literatures, such as Chinese American literature, Japanese American literature, and African American literature. On the one hand, you emphasize "imposed silences" ("Don't Tell"), "attentive silence," and "Provocative Silence" (*Articulate Silences*). On the other hand, you stress articulation and "double-telling." And the title of your book, *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa* (1993) reflects this paradox. Why are you interested in these paradoxical silences?

Cheung: "Don't Tell" was my very first essay on American literature, written when I was still a novice in feminist studies and ethnic studies. There I applied "mainstream" feminist insights to ethnic American literature rather uncritically, stressing primarily the silencing of minority women both by the dominant white culture and by respective ethnic cultures. While I still believe that it is important to address such silencing, I have come to realize that it is no less important to point out crosscultural perceptions of silences, which tend to be more positive in Chinese and Japanese cultures. In Chinese and Japanese literature, there is a strong preference for the suggestive (含蓄) over the explicit. To dwell only on the

negative aspects of silences is to succumb to a form of cultural hegemony. Therefore, in addition to exposing oppressive silencing, I also try to show how silences in Asian American texts can signify, can be articulate.

Shan: In your 1990 paper "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?" you talked about the war between the sexes staged by Maxine Hong Kingston and Frank Chin and your own position as a Chinese American critic in this confrontation. Can you say something about this?

Cheung: I find this confrontation painful at both professional and personal levels. Asian American sexual politics is vastly complicated by racial politics, since Asian men are often perceived as "feminine" in the eyes of the dominant culture. That's why I use feminist strategies to analyze both female and male silences, as mentioned earlier. What we need is mutual empathy--not antagonism--between Asian American women and men. I also know Kingston and Chin personally, and appreciate the works of both. So I am quite disturbed by Chin's unrelenting denunciation of Kingston.

Shan: What do you think about Chin's exclusion of Kingston and others like Amy Tan and David Henry Hwang from *The Big Aiiiiieee!* by accusing them of catering to white taste and producing "the fake"? How would you comment on what you once called "Asian American re-vision of Chinese literature" from this perspective?

Cheung: To my mind Chin's criteria for what is fake and what is real, like the criteria for "Asian American sensibility," is highly subjective. At the same time, I don't deny that there are elements in *The Woman Warrior*, *Joy Luck Club*, or *M. Butterfly* that appeal to a white audience. But that is not to

say that any of these writers consciously pander to white taste. Take *M. Butterfly*. Hwang explicitly states in his Afterword that he wrote the play with the intent "to cut through layers of cultural and sexual misperception" (100). Yet his intent seems lost on most of the white audience watching the play. If the play subverts the stereotype of the submissive Asian, it nevertheless reinforces the stereotype of the cunning Oriental. Worse, it also confirms the stereotype of Asian men as feminine, so much so that they can pass for being female. So you see, the intent of the author and the effect of his work on the audience can be very different.

As for re-visioning Chinese literature, I was referring to Kingston's rewriting of Chinese myths, especially the one about Fa Mu Lan in *The Woman Warrior*. More than simply invoking a traditional legend told her by her mother, Maxine projects her own desires onto the warrior and in so doing transforms the original story. Where the original legend celebrates filial piety, Maxine's fantasy elaborates upon the warrior's military prowess, sexual exploits, and triumphant vengeance. Furthermore, unlike her prototype Fa Mu Lan, who is never known to have been tattooed, Maxine-as-warrior has magical words etched onto her back. Since military, sexual, and verbal power are traditionally male prerogatives, the fantasy opens Maxine to unconventional ways of asserting herself. To me Kingston's Fa Mu Lan is no more "fake" than Milton's Samson (in *Samson Agonistes*), in which the blind poet projects his own anxiety about women and his own hope for divine vindication onto the biblical figure. As in Hwang's case, Kingston's problem has more to do with the audience than with the text.

Shan: As a participant-observer, please tell us your view about the present situation of Asian American literature (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Burmese, Vietnamese . . .) in general and Chinese American literature in

particular.

Cheung: At present Asian American literature is very much "dominated" by Chinese and Japanese writing, and (with the notable exception of Elaine Kim) by Chinese and Japanese American critics. As a teacher of Asian American literature, I feel the need to include the voices of Korean Americans, Filipino Americans, Vietnamese Americans, South Asian Americans--all the hyphenated Americans from Asia and the Pacific Islands.

As a Chinese American, however, I am excited by the phenomenal growth of Chinese American literature. Whereas in the past most people only knew about Kingston and Chin, now writers such as Marilyn Chin, Gish Jen, Gus Lee, Li-Young Lee, David Wong Louie, Fae Myenne Ng and Amy Tan are also widely read. The works of these writers differ markedly in subject matter, style, and sensibility. They preclude any simple generalization of Chinese American aesthetics or experience.

Shan: What do you think are the characteristics of Chinese American literature in comparison with other non-Asian minority literatures in the United States (for instance, African American literature, Mexican American literature, and Native American literature) and other Asian American literatures?

Cheung: This question is so vast that I am afraid I can't answer in one paragraph, or even in one book! So I'll merely venture an observation off the top of my head. Chinese American literature seems to be less stable, or to be in greater flux, than either African American literature or Japanese American literature. It is more difficult for Chinese Americans--who came to this country at different times and from different places (People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam, Macao, Philippines), and who

speak different dialects--to claim a common historical experience. Whereas much of African American literature alludes to the painful history of slavery, and much of Japanese American literature harks back to the experience of the internment during World War II, no analogous historical experience has captured to the same degree the imagination of all Chinese Americans.

Shan: It seems to me that the mainstream study of Chinese American literature is the criticism written in English by American women scholars. However, these scholars are not necessarily familiar with the Chinese language and literature and have to rely on the English translations for their discussion of Chinese intertexts in Chinese American literature. Kingston, among others, has complained about the "cultural mis-readings" of Western literary critics. As a scholar with a Chinese background in the American academy, what do you have to say about this? What do you think is the possible contribution of Chinese scholars in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China?

Cheung: Chinese American literature, and indeed all literature, benefits from being studied by people of different backgrounds--as long as the scholars are willing to do the necessary "homework." The "cultural mis-readings" Kingston complains about result largely from Orientalist assumptions that view Asian Americans as perpetually foreign. There are critics who persist in viewing Chinese American literature as representing Chinese--rather than Chinese American--culture. Some of them also mistake the legends presented in Kingston's work for authentic Chinese myths.

Chinese scholars in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China who are familiar with Chinese literature will certainly not make the same mistakes. They will furthermore be able to detect Kingston's allusions to *Flowers in the Mirror*, *T'ai*

P'ing Kuang Chi (太平廣記), *Journey to the West*, etc. But another set of problems could emerge. For instance, some Chinese scholars judge Chinese American literature according to how faithful it is to Chinese literature when the writers have no intention of simply duplicating or continuing the Chinese literary tradition. Some of them may also have a condescending attitude toward Chinese American literature, seeing it as a "branch," an "offshoot," or worse, an aberration of Chinese literature--rather than a separate literature altogether. It would be better to focus on how Chinese American writers transform--not transliterate--Chinese stories. Because most Americans, including many Asian Americans, are unfamiliar with Asian cultures and literatures, Asian scholars can play an important role in enlightening the American public on how Asian American writers recast Asian traditions.

Shan: You now serve as the Associate Director of the Asian American Studies Center, UCLA. What is the nature and organization of this Center? What do you think about the significance of the institutionalization of Asian American Studies?

Cheung: The Center was founded in 1969 in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. It has three major functions: research, teaching, and publications. The research is mostly in the social sciences and the humanities. The center also offers undergraduate courses as well as a Master's Program in Asian American Studies. Its major publication is the *Amerasia Journal*.

The institutionalization of Asian American Studies can result in a gap between academia and the community, because the educational establishment often fails to see research that addresses communal issues as intellectually significant. In literature, however, such "institutionalization" has paid off. Both Asian American literature courses and ethnic journals

have provided much needed forums for Asian American writers, who are multiplying and publishing at an unprecedented rate.

Shan: You were one of the resident fellows in the three-year Minority Discourse Project at UCHRI. How would you position Chinese American literature in that context? How did you contribute to that project? How did your participation in that project affect your teaching and research in Asian American literature in general and Chinese American literature in particular?

Cheung: Participating in the Minority Discourse Project at UCHRI has deepened my interest in comparative ethnic American studies. The lecture that I will be delivering in Taiwan, for instance, is part of a much longer essay written in collaboration with black historian Professor Sterling Stuckey (U.C. Riverside), a fellow participant. We want to explore the contradictory impulses of many African Americans and Asian Americans toward their ancestral cultures.

Shan: You have played an active role in the academic circle and I'm interested in the function(ing) of the academic establishments. Here I will focus on the MLA only and I hope you can give us an insider's view. As mentioned at the beginning of the interview, your *Bibliography* was published by the MLA in 1988. You were a member of the Executive Committee of the Asian American Literature Discussion Group, MLA, 1987-1991. You have been on the MLA Publication Committee since 1990 and on the MLA Executive Committee of the Division on Ethnic Studies in Language and Literature since 1991. How would you evaluate the MLA's function in promoting American minority literatures in general and Asian American literature in particular? What are the most urgent tasks at present?

Cheung: The MLA has tried in recent years to promote diversity both in their annual conventions and in their publications. As a result there are now many sessions and publications on ethnic literature. However, ethnic scholars have not increased at the same rate, so that the visible ones are often made to represent large constituencies. For instance, eminent critics such as Edward Said or Gayatri Spivak are often invited to speak for or about the oppressed "Third World." But, as they themselves have pointed out, they are from exceptionally privileged backgrounds, trained primarily in the "First World" and thoroughly at ease with Western paradigms.

I too sometimes face the problem of being a token ethnic. I am often put in a position--whether on a scholarly panel or publication committee--in which I am expected to represent the Asian American or the "ethnic" point of view. Needless to say, I feel rather uncomfortable speaking for heterogeneous groups.

I see the need, for the MLA and the academic community as a whole, to move away from tokenism by increasing the number of minority scholars in various activities, and also to promote dialogue between members of different ethnic groups.

Shan: You have been teaching for years at UCLA and one of the functions of the MLA is to focus on pedagogy, as clearly demonstrated by its "Approaches to Teaching" series, including *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's The Woman Warrior*. What's your opinion about the function of pedagogy (especially the pedagogy of American minority literatures) in revisioning, redefining, and reconstructing American literature?

Cheung: Including texts by ethnic writers in the Approaches to Teaching series certainly encourages teachers to incorporate these texts into the curriculum. To transform the curriculum substantially, however, we need also to unfix

mindsets and retool the critical apparatus. For instance, what constitutes masculine and feminine behavior, what constitutes a novel or a tragedy, and even what constitutes appropriate classroom behavior, differ from culture to culture. Instead of simply using Western criteria, we must allow works by diverse authors to challenge our deep-seated assumptions.

Shan: In your Preface to the *Bibliography*, you mentioned why you did not include critical works on Asian American literature written in languages other than English. Could you say something about the possible contribution of these doubly marginalized critical works--"doubly marginalized" in the sense that Asian American literary studies are marginalized in terms of the canonical American literary studies and these non-English critical works are marginalized once again in terms of the "canonical" Asian American literary studies? Can you imagine a multi-lingual approach to Asian American literature?

Cheung: If I were to include critical works in Chinese in my bibliography, I would have to include those written in Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Hindi as well, and I simply do not have the linguistic qualifications to do so. But I know that critical works written in Asian languages could make a very significant contribution to Asian American literary studies. Unfortunately, while I may be able to cite those written in Chinese in my scholarly writing, I could never assign them in class for the simple reason that less than 5% of my students read Chinese. So unless there is a radical movement in America toward multilingual education--which I would certainly support--critical (and even literary) works written in languages other than English will continue to be marginalized in this country. It's a pity.

Such marginalization is not quite the same as the marginalization of Asian American literary studies, however.

Those who dismiss Asian American literary studies consider this field to be outside the mainstream; the marginalization of critical works written in Asian languages is due primarily to linguistic limitation. As more and more Ethnic Studies and Comparative Literature programs hire scholars fluent in Asian languages to teach Asian American literature, what you call "doubly marginalized" works should gain a wider readership.

But while it is feasible to have a bilingual approach to Chinese American literature or Korean American literature and so on, it is much more difficult to have a multi-lingual approach to Asian American literature. Most American-born Asians do not speak their ancestral tongue, let alone other Asian languages. So English is likely to remain the only common language for diverse Asian Americans.

Shan: Would you please give us a foretaste of your lecture "Asian and Asian American: To Connect or Disconnect?" to be given here in Taiwan?

Cheung: As I noted earlier, my lecture will discuss the contradictory impulses of Asian Americans toward their ancestral cultures. These impulses, I believe, are related to the issues of autonomy and dependency in minority discourse. Because of the dominant perception of what constitutes "American," the desire of many minority members to reclaim a distinctive ethnic tradition seems forever at odds with their desire to be recognized as fully "American."

Shan: You are the first scholar to be invited to attend the Conference on Cultural Identity and Chinese American Literature, sponsored by the Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica, the first conference on Chinese American literature ever held in Taiwan. After the conference, all the papers will be reviewed and published in a collection of critical essays in Chinese. What do you think

about the significance of this conference and the Chinese proceedings in the context of a multi-lingual approach to Asian American literature or in the context of minority discourse ?

Cheung: I feel honored to attend this conference. More than that, to draw from my lecture, I feel a sense of a new connection. I hope that this conference will be the beginning of lively intellectual exchange between Chinese and Chinese American critics.

Conferences such as this one, in which Chinese is the "official" language, should also provide a strong incentive for Chinese American scholars to study works originally written in Chinese. Currently many of these works, such as Nieh Hualing's *Mulberry and Peach* and Pai Hsien-yung's *Crystal Boy*, are discussed primarily through the English translation.

But I hope the contribution is not just one way--from Asia to Asian America. We hear often about the influence of Asian cultures on Asian American literature. I wonder whether this conference can, in a sense, complete the loop of influences; I wonder whether Asian American literature may also have an impact on Asian cultures, and on Asian literatures.

Finally, I believe that this conference enhances the visibility of Chinese American literature nationally and internationally. It has the potential of giving Asian American literature an important role in the growing Pacific Rim Studies, so that this literature will not simply remain a subset of American ethnic studies. The conference may also change the opinion of the many Chinese American writers and critics who think that scholars in Asia do not take Chinese American literature seriously.

Shan: Can you say something about the teaching, course offerings, curriculum arrangement, and research work of Chinese American literature in American universities at

present?

Cheung: Generally Chinese American literature (along with works by writers of other Asian origins) is taught in courses on Asian American literature and interdisciplinary courses in Asian American Studies. There are exceptions. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is the book most widely taught on American college campuses written by a living American author. At UCLA and Berkeley, where Chinese Americans constitute a large (if not the largest) percentage of the Asian American student body, courses devoted exclusively to Chinese Americans are also offered. This coming spring quarter, for instance, I will be co-teaching an interdisciplinary course with writer David Wong Louie on the Chinese American experience. And recently Berkeley hosted an interdisciplinary conference on the Chinese diaspora.

Shan: Can you say something about your current work and plans for future ?

Cheung: I am currently editing a work tentatively entitled *A Companion to Asian American Literature*, under contract with Cambridge University Press. It consists of two parts. Part One contains introductory essays to various national literatures (Korean American, Filipino American, South Asian American, etc); Part Two focuses on issues that connect these different groups (e.g. gender, immigration, poetics, racial politics). In the future I hope to do more comparative work, between Chinese and Chinese American literature, between Asian American and other ethnic American literatures, and also between East Asian and Euro-American literatures. This coming spring quarter, for instance, I will be teaching a course called "Comparative Heroic Traditions," which will cover Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, Shakespeare's *Henry V*, selections from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Water Margins*, and

Journey to the West, as well as Krista Wolf's *Cassandra*, Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, John Barth's "Menelaiad," Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*, and Frank Chin's *Donald Duk*. My disparate interests are finally converging in one course.

Shan: As usual, at the end of this interview, I would like to ask you to say something about the interview, something about its nature and its significance, or even your dissatisfaction with this "genre."

Cheung: It is a treat to be interviewed by a scholar who has himself written and published on Chinese American literature and who has also read my work. I also welcome this opportunity to talk about issues not covered in my writing. As the only scholar from America at this conference, however, I am anxious *not* to be perceived as a "representative" Chinese American scholar. The burden of representation has been felt by writers and scholars alike, especially when s/he is the only one present. So I'll merely stress that everything I have said is strictly my own opinion or, to borrow the title of Carolyn Lau's award-winning book of poetry, purely "Wode Shuofa (我的說法): My Way of Speaking."

Afterword

Upon arriving at Taipei--for the first time in my life--the female immigration officer who was leafing through my American passport smiled at me and said, "It has been a long time since you last returned." Instantly I recalled the many occasions when I was asked (sometimes by immigration officials) "Where are you from?" in the United States, a country in which I have spent my last twenty years. The warmth with which I was greeted at the airport in Taipei extended to my entire stay. Despite the strong Cantonese accent in my Mandarin, I felt like an insider throughout the conference on "Cultural Identity and Chinese American literature."

This was also the first time I attended a conference devoted exclusively to Chinese American literature. I was impressed as much by the quality of the papers as by the nature of the intellectual exchange. Most American conferences cover so many topics that scholars are not always informed enough to enjoy every presentation. By contrast, throughout this conference I sense genuine engagement among both speakers and audience (though I couldn't help but notice the small number of women in both groups). I was thrilled to discover that Chinese American literature has gained a firm foothold in one distant ancestral home. Given the number of scholars qualified to do in-depth research on Chinese American literature in Taiwan and, more important, given the frequent interaction among the scholars, I expect to see some first-rate research on Chinese American literature emerging here. I wish I had as many colleagues to bounce ideas off at home. To use the current academic jargon, I envy your "critical mass."

Concerning the loop of influence I mentioned in the interview, I was happy to see reciprocity between Taiwan and

the United States. Even as scholars discussed how Chinese culture informs Chinese American literature, they also noted how writing by Chinese Americans can be used to reflect the situation of ethnic minorities in Taiwan. But I was saddened by the irony that most of my Chinese American students at UCLA would not be able to read the many original papers on Chinese American literature presented at the conference--because these were written in Chinese. I hope that more Chinese Americans will learn Chinese in the future and that more Taiwanese scholars will consider translating their work into English. Asian American literature itself often thrives on bicultural and bilingual interplay.