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Source: MELUS, Vol. 33, No. 4, Alien/Asian (Winter, 2008), pp. 5-22
Published by: The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS)
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20343505

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Introduction: Alien/Asian: Imagining the Racialized Future

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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 resurrected 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 homonymic 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.

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). According to Takayuki Tatsumi contends:

[P]ostcyberpunk science fiction seems to have updated even the old future-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.

David Morley and Kevin Robins assert that cyberpunk representations embody a kind of techno-Orientalism. They note: “[w]ithin the political and cultural unconscious of the West, Japan has come to exist as the figure of empty and dehumanised technological power. It represents the alienated and dystopian image of capitalist progress. This provokes both resentment and envy. The Japanese are unfeeling aliens; they are cyborgs and replicants” (170). Morley and Robins suggest that this offshoot of Saidian Orientalism manifests through ambivalence due to both a desire to denigrate the unfeeling, automaton-like Alien/Asian and an envy that derives from the West’s desire to regain primacy within the global economy.
Christine Cornea places techno-Orientalism in its social context:

[A]t the time of *Blade Runner*’s release certain Eastern economies were growing fast and countries like Japan and Korea were well known for their manufacture of computer components and other cutting-edge technologies. Prior to this, it might have been that these nations were understood as suppliers for the West, but over the course of the 1980s it became apparent that the so called, “Tiger Economies” were growing fast and that they were moving from being the copiers/providers of Western-led technology to becoming the inventors/initiators of new technologies. (74)

These Asian tiger economies, also known as the NICs (newly industrializing countries), required the United States to change its economic foreign policies toward Asia. In the process, terms such as “Asia-Pacific” and the “Pacific Rim” became ubiquitous. Miyohei Shimohara explains that “Japan has emerged as a big power economically, big enough to make the United States uneasy” (13) while Edson W. Spencer discusses how Japan was perceived during this period as an “economic predator” (153). Walden Bello and Shea Cunningham recount:

by the early 1980s, US policy towards the NICs began to change. Triggering this transformation was that the increasing prosperity of the state-led economies was being achieved principally by running huge trade deficits with the US. This provoked the coming together of US industries threatened by NIC imports, resentful US corporations that felt excluded from growing NIC domestic markets. (447)

Given this context, the rise of techno-Orientalism reflects the perceived burgeoning peril to the United States represented by the Asia-Pacific in the 1980s.

In traditional Orientalism, the East often is configured as backwards, anti-progressive, and primitive. In this respect, techno-Orientalism might suggest a different conception of the East, except for the fact that the very inhuman qualities projected onto Asian bodies create a dissonance with these alternative temporalities. Even as these Alien/Asians conduct themselves with superb technological efficiency and capitalist expertise, their affectual absence resonates as an undeveloped or, worse still, a retrograde humanism. According to Toshiya Ueno, “Just as the discourse of orientalism has functioned to build up the identity of the West, techno-orientalism is set up for the West to preserve its identity in its imagination of the future. It can be defined as the orientalism of cybersociety and the information age, aimed at maintaining a stable identity in a technological environment” (94). Inasmuch as the techno-orientalist peril destabilizes American exceptionalism in the global marketplace, Ueno clarifies how
such cultural productions provide the means to stabilize the West as a terrain of technological war. In this conflict, the West, although challenged by the high-tech superiority of the East, nevertheless maintains a moralistic superiority, where the American subject looms as an embattled but resistant fighter. As Wendy Hui Kyong Chun cautions, “Faced with a ‘Japanese future,’ high tech Orientalism resurrects the frontier—in virtual form—in order to secure open space for America. As opposed to openly racist science fiction of the early to mid-twentieth century that featured the ‘yellow peril,’ cyberpunk fiction does not advocate white supremacy or resurrecting a strong United States of America. It rather offers representations of survivors, of savvy-navigators who can open closed spaces” (“‘Othering’ 251). Chun advocates reading for the divergences within high tech Orientalism that do not simply celebrate a superior United States—a hallmark of yellow-peril fictions. London’s short story and Rohmer’s fictions ultimately uphold Western primacy at the expense of the Alien/Asian. However, techno-Orientalism, or what Chun calls high tech Orientalism, troubles the possibility that the West can retain or recover a nostalgically configured purity, and posits instead the coherence of “open spaces” embodied through cyberspaces and the internet. Chun points out that the failures of the West to retain its global economic positioning mean that the United States government and affiliated corporations are not to blame for the problematic futurescape. In this instance, a victory appears as the West, in the form of these “savvy-navigators,” casts itself as the challenger to aggressive Eastern economic growth, thereby cementing the West as the indisputable center for humanistic altruism.

If we consider Japanese approaches to cyberpunk, the limits of specifically locating a Western-centric hegemony within techno-Orientalism become apparent. Jane Chi Hyun Park frames this issue most elegantly by asking, “[W]hat happens to the gendered and racialized power dynamics of techno-Orientalism when the object becomes the subject, when Japan ‘looks back’ at the United States using the same ideological frame that has been used to render it ‘other’?” (62). In a similar vein, Chun elucidates that techno-Orientalism is not unidirectional, citing the specific example of Japanese versions of cyberpunk in which one Asian ethnic group can potentially orientalize another; anime films such as *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), for example, insist on the Japanese as primary and displace “primitiveness” onto the Chinese (*Control* 196). The rubric that constructs Asia as a monolithic technological threat becomes fractured by techno-Orientalism’s appropriation by Asian cultural producers, writers, and artists and by the redirection of techno-Orientalism at new sites within the continental geography. Chun’s critique of *Ghost in the Shell* demonstrates how high-tech Orientalism functions by locating a future dystopia within
Hong Kong’s urban metropolis, obscuring Japan’s primacy in futuristic representations. Kumiko Sato further posits the importance of Japanese cyberpunk “as a new locus of the old Japanism with the pretentious look of advanced technology. The epistemological innovativeness that American cyberpunk carried in itself easily merged with this old mission of Japan’s modernization” (353). American cyberpunk is reappropriated to enable Japan to recover a terrain once considered lost and destroyed in the wake of World War II. Other films, such as Park Chan-wook’s 2006 film I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK, use science fiction conventions to investigate mental illness and consider how tropes of the Alien/Asian might be further defamiliarized in the genre of the Korean romantic comedy. Recently available for distribution in the United States, this comedy allows one to observe how the Alien/Asian possesses a transnational character that cannot be assumed to be unidirectional.

Thus far, I have discussed American Orientalisms in which the desire to conceptualize the East through a technocratic framework within cultural production leads to a re-articulation and re-emergence of the yellow peril. In response to these orientalized futures, Japanese cyberpunk and self-circumscribed techno-Orientalism employ genre conventions to consider different sociopolitical contexts and anxieties. Asian American literature and cultural production also must be considered as forming an important corollary to versions of cyberpunk and techno-orientalist futures. This approach is energized by the provocative question posed by Colleen Lye in the introduction to her special issue on “Forms of Asia” in Representations (Fall 2007); here she places American orientalist studies (such as Christina Klein’s Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961) in conversation with Asian Americanist critique (such as Lisa Lowe’s Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics). Lye asks: “For critics of empire the concern is with American incorporations of Asia, while for Asian Americanists the concern is with Asian exclusion from U.S. civil society. Instead of using one as the political template for the other, how can we come to a better understanding of the nature of U.S. global power and the modernity of race relations by theorizing them in relation to each other?” (1-2). No question could be better suited to these Asian American approaches to the future, precisely because techno-Orientalism cannot be solely situated within American Orientalism or in its counterpart that has emerged most forcefully in Japanese cyberpunk. Placing critiques of Gibson’s Neuromancer, Scott’s Blade Runner, Philip K. Dick’s The Man in the High Castle, and Neal Stephenson’s The Diamond Age alongside Asian American cultural production provides another way to consider how cyberpunk and the Alien/Asian, among other such organizing tropes, can be reconfigured and reconstructed. In this vein, this issue examines Asian
American science fiction and texts, speculative fiction, and other similarly aligned cultural productions through critiques of Korean American literature, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl*, and Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rainforest*. These readings illustrate how the Asian American artist might complicate future Orientalism within cyberpunk fictions and those other visual productions. It would be simplistic to call all Asian American science fiction texts oppositional, yet these works often operate from within an activist framework and illuminate obscured voices and histories.

Most approaches to techno-Orientalism posit a binary between East and West, while eliding the possibility that other Orientalisms might also exist concurrently within the United States. For instance, Perry Miyake’s novel *21st Century Manzanar* (2002) imagines a future in which Japanese Americans are embroiled in the development of another World War. Derived from the cyberpunk social context of Japan as economic predator, the novel imagines that “World War III became the Economic War with Japan. If the economy went down the toilet, the terrorists would have won. If World War II was the battle to save Western Civilization from the Nazi party and the Japanese race, World War III—the Economic War—became the ultimate battle to save the very soul of America: its pocketbook” (13).\(^8\)

While techno-Orientalism clearly posits East Asia as the geographical site of anxiety, Miyake’s novel revisits how Asian American subjects can be conflated with their Asian counterparts. Whether or not the premise of Miyake’s novel is plausible, *21st Century Manzanar* investigates the continued preoccupation with the Alien/Asian as part of a futuristic world filled with tension and conflict.

The novel continues its speculative arc as individuals of Japanese ancestry are rounded up during ReVac (“re-evacuation”), yet again placing Japanese Americans in internment camps, but it clarifies that such anxieties concerning the Alien/Asian do not appear out of a sociohistorical vacuum. At one point, one Japanese American character thinks about her re-evacuation to Manzanar: “At least in here, they [don’t] have to worry about terrorists. No tall buildings to plow an airplane into. No crowded sporting events to bomb. If a group of overzealous patriots wanted to pull a drive-by, they’d have to drive a couple of hours into the desert” (29-30).

This passage compares the Japanese American internment to the post-9/11 milieu and suggests a heightened awareness of larger-scale racial, ethnic, and religious tensions in the twenty-first century. The Japanese American internment experience grants the novel one way to enter into conversations about contemporary racial politics. Even as the novel purports to state that the war on terror is “over,” there is also the sense that racial anxiety never dissipates, but only moves onto other bodies. In this new
future, Japanese Americans are subjected to what is called “The Plan,” in which all Japanese American males would be sterilized. In controlling the reproductive capacity of Japanese Americans, the nation-state deploys biopower as a way to subdue the oncoming generations, one “strain” of yellow peril having finally been eradicated.9 One is reminded again of London’s “The Unparalleled Invasion,” as a reproductive menace of the Alien/Asian might be terminated. However, Miyake’s 21st Century Manzanar does not simply evoke the trope of the Asian American as the oppressed minority or radically resistant activist; indeed, the murkiness of the plot shows how various Japanese American characters face the pressures of relocation, whether by passing for a different Asian ethnicity, becoming a docile internment camp resident, or by becoming an informant working for the relocation camp’s director. Miyake’s novel investigates the ways in which those constructed as Alien/Asians might find ways to harm and damage others.

Novels such as this turn futuristic Orientalisms domestically inward, locating them within the geographical confines of the California deserts rather than over the Pacific and into the East. With a new geographical terrain in which to situate this Alien/Asian, 21st Century Manzanar also posits how the Alien/Asian might be placed against other historically located racial lineages. Some of the regular visitors to the Japanese American internment camps are local Native American tribe members. The main character, David Takeda, thinks that “Every time they came, he thought he saw someone he knew. Someone in the Tribe who looked Nisei” (136). This sense of physical attachment acts as a harbinger for the novel’s conclusion. A group of Navajo Indians ultimately enables Takeda and his family to successfully escape from Manzanar, invoking the connected histories of the forced resettlement of both Native Americans and Japanese Americans. In this respect, even as there is a concerted effort to investigate the Alien/Asian in futuristic temporalities, Miyake’s novel draws back into the past by linking racial groups within domestic US geographies.10 In particular, large tracts of Japanese American internment camps existed on Native American reservations, a constant reminder that marginalization necessarily twines together “unwanted” physical locations with undesirable racial subjects. 21st Century Manzanar thus discloses an orientalized future, but also questions how Asian American spatial subjectivities are placed in comparative scope. The novel leaves the now-fugitive Japanese Americans living on a tribal reservation, which has at this point become a pan-Native location. As Takeda feels, “[H]e had found refuge in a land of exile and discard that had been reclaimed by its original inhabitants” (381).

Another cultural production that examines other orientalized futures is
the television episode “Detained,” which first aired on April 24, 2002 as part of the Star Trek: Enterprise series (2001-2005). The episode revolves around the rescue of Captain Jonathan Archer (played by Scott Bakula) and Helmsman Travis Mayweather (played by Anthony Montgomery) from an unknown detention facility in which they awaken mysteriously. They discover that they are being held with a humanoid alien species known as the Suliban, who may or may not possess the ability to shapeshift. In their original form, their rough, rock-like skin exudes a lime green glow, while their eyes appear yellowish. The Cabal, members of a Suliban sect, are among the primary alien antagonists for the Enterprise crew in their travels; thus, the crew’s suspicion of their fellow Suliban inmates is not surprising. Archer and Mayweather are soon interrogated by Colonel Grat, a Tandaran, a different humanoid species similar to humans in physiology except for a distinct nasal bridge. Like the Enterprise crew, the Tandarans have suffered at the hands of the Cabal, and yet there are a number of Suliban still living in Tandaran territories. Under the auspices of protecting those Suliban who live in Tandaran boundaries, these Suliban are relocated to these holding facilities, but Archer and Mayweather learn that these Suliban are not part of the Cabal and are being held against their will in an internment camp. Indeed, what Archer and Mayweather discover is that not all Suliban are members of the Cabal. Befriending two of the prisoners, Archer makes the historically informed connection that the Suliban are being treated just like Japanese Americans living on the west coast of the United States during World War II.

In and of itself, the allegorical connection between the Japanese American internees and imprisoned aliens renders a striking parallel. One could make the case that the Suliban’s skin color literalizes the yellow peril as an alien race, replete with yellowish skin and eyes. Determined not to leave them behind, Archer and Mayweather enable the Sulibans’ escape, even though it risks their own chance of being rescued by the Enterprise, which awaits them in orbit. Like 21st Century Manzanar, the politically progressive politics of the episode are more apparent in the connection to the post-9/11 milieu. Rick Berman, one of the co-executive producers of Star Trek: Enterprise, affirmed that the name Suliban drew inspiration from the Taliban; his decision to include references to the Taliban occurred after his visit to Afghanistan. The violation of civil liberties after 9/11, especially for Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, South Asian Americans, or anyone suspected of potentially being a “terrorist,” has generated numerous comparisons to the experiences of Japanese Americans after the attacks on Pearl Harbor. Since this Star Trek episode was written four months prior to 9/11, the eerie prescience of Berman’s vision serves as an indicator that part of science fiction’s appeal is its abil-
ity to predict the future. Nevertheless, this episode cannot be considered only from an intergalactic, techno-Orientalist, transnational, or global lens, because the dialogue refers to the Japanese American internment, placing literalized alien abjection against a racially motivated and racist historical event within the domestic confines of the United States. Interestingly, one of the major *Enterprise* characters and regular cast members, Japanese American linguist and communications officer Hoshi Sato (played by Korean American actress Linda Park), takes no part in the major storyline related to the Suliban internees. While the character’s ethnicity should not necessarily require her to function as an extension of the Suliban narrative, the narrative of liberation upholds the heroism of Captain Archer, as he is ultimately the one who mobilizes the Suliban to escape. Archer resists his own marginalized status and helps lead the Suliban detainees to their freedom. Although the Suliban are able to exit the internment camp, the episode’s conclusion remains focused on Archer as he contemplates whether they will flourish on their own.

One might therefore posit that the Japanese American internment narrative and the ensuing Suliban escape plan in “Detained” are another example of the visually overdetermined symbolic potency of the male hero, who determines morality, value, and liberation. The Federation, in this case represented so gallantly by the square-jawed and perennially plucky Archer, can be prevented from committing racially motivated mistakes again. History is invoked in order to promote the Federation’s enlightenment. Hoshi Sato’s marginalization from the storyline makes more evident the Federation’s post-race politics in which its multicultural and racially integrated cast demonstrates that racial inequality is a thing of the past. Sato may not even identify with this historical event regardless of her racial background, precisely because race should not be an issue. However, Sato’s, or for that matter, Mayweather’s role in “Detained” is minimized to the extent that heroism is embodied most effectively by Archer, the white male lead. Indeed, as Allen Kwan points out, Sato’s and Mayweather’s roles are marginal throughout the entire series, suggesting that the show’s content must be illuminated from the dissonance created by contemporary race politics (67). Racism’s literal displacement onto the alien body consequently veils the ways in which the show operates to reproduce what David Columbia has called “the white ideology of *Star Trek*” (87), in which minority cast members, while plentiful, do not receive as much screen time, nor as powerful positions within the Federation.13

My reading imagines a racialized future beyond the dualism that posits the West against the East, and even more specifically, destabilizes Asia as the primary site for projected anxieties. *21st Century Manzanar* reminds us that Asian American literature can be a conduit to considering how
racial histories intertwine and intersect. In the case of “Detained,” the alien Suliban internees are employed as visual markers that suggest not only the past through their connection to Japanese Americans in the post-World War II milieu, but the present and future as well, in the way that the episode ominously foreshadows the civil rights milieu following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Whether it be a cyberpunk-inflected Asian future, or the cyborg technologies intertwined with Asian American bodies, the essays collected here investigate how alternative imaginaries provide fertile terrains to consider the prospects of racial subjectivity and identity.

Betsy Huang’s “Premodern Orientalist Science Fictions” opens this special issue as she argues that science fiction writers employ Asian philosophies, especially in the form of Zen and Daoism, to mobilize their narratives. Huang first considers how writers such as Philip K. Dick (in The Man in the High Castle) and Ursula K. Le Guin (in The Lathe of Heaven) utilize these Eastern philosophies as tropes to highlight the ambiguous nature of the West’s relationship with the “Orient.” Huang emphasizes how both writers appropriate the Daoist discourse of “inaction” to mobilize various orientalist representations. The ways in which Daoism becomes so flexibly wielded and reductively represented necessitates the interrogation of the nature of premodern Orientalisms. Huang’s essay also indicates that premodern Orientalisms continued long after techno-Orientalisms emerged in the 1980s. Her reading of Maureen F. McHugh’s China Mountain Zhang investigates how Eastern philosophy appears again as a new form of technology—“Daoist engineering.” Whereas Le Guin’s and Dick’s premodern orientalist fictions seem rather ambivalent toward constructing Asia strictly as a menace or an ally, McHugh’s novel posits a premodern orientalist text influenced by the rising Sinophobia and the Japanophobia that climaxed during this period. Huang’s essay generates a vital intervention into seeing how different Asiatic cultural forms, in the guise of seemingly mystical philosophy, could be the basis for and the catalyst of futuristic science-fictional representation.

Timothy Yu’s “Oriental Cities, Postmodern Futures: Naked Lunch, Blade Runner, and Neuromancer” tracks how figurations of Asia alter over a thirty-year period in three major cultural productions. Theories of postmodernism have yet to engage fully how Orientalisms structure urban geographies represented in literature and film. As Yu contends, orientalist cities possess different ideological functions based on sociohistorical and narrative contexts. William Burroughs’s Naked Lunch structures its Asiatic city through Near Eastern signifiers that evoke traditional Saidian Orientalism. While Naked Lunch seems to suggest the possibilities for a radically hybrid future united under orgiastic ecstasy, it nevertheless rehearses the common trope of European/American hegemony that will
later be encrypted in the darker, post-apocalyptic futures constructed in Scott’s *Blade Runner* and Gibson’s *Neuromancer*. *Blade Runner*’s oriental city teems with Asian American bodies that threaten, if inconspicuously, the deracinated pastoral future that the main character, Deckard, and his replicant girlfriend, Rachael, escape into as the film concludes. On the other hand, *Neuromancer* presents a strangely paradoxical Asian future in a Japanese city, Chiba, populated with few Asians and yet providing the analog for cyberspace, the very locale of unmitigated freedom that the protagonist, Case, so idealizes. In linking these three cultural productions, Yu advances an essential reconceptualization of the Alien/Asian as it collides with postmodernism aesthetics.

Greta Aiyu Niu’s “Techno-Orientalism, Nanotechnology, Posthumans, and Post-Posthumans in Neal Stephenson’s and Linda Nagata’s Science Fiction” argues that popular speculative fiction (SF), first in the 1980s subgenre of cyberpunk and second in 1990s nanopunk, situates emerging technology in Asian nations, particularly Japan and China. According to Niu’s definition, techno-orientalist practices ignore the constructed nature of relationships between Asian subjects and technology. Beginning with an investigation of techno-Orientalism in key elements of cyberpunk, including the cyborg, Niu queries representations of the so-called latest and greatest form of technology, molecular-sized nanotechnology. Her main futuristic nanopunk texts—financially successful Stephenson’s *The Diamond Age* (1995) and Linda Nagata’s lesser known *The Bohr Maker* (1995)—are products of the same publisher. Niu asserts that while both authors demonstrate intense interest in biotechnology and subversion, *The Diamond Age* ultimately champions the ruling powers of largely white neo-Victorian Atlantis/Shanghai; Nagata’s text, on the other hand, shows outlawed emerging bionanotechnologies coming to fruition, and humble characters, especially one woman from Indonesia, temporarily gaining agency and eminence. An underlying current is Niu’s interest in the post-human figure that gained prominence in the 1990s and the post-posthuman figure that followed.

Seo-Young Chu’s “Science Fiction and Postmemory Han in Contemporary Korean American Literature” locates an intriguing subject position in which Korean American second-generation “postmemory han” looms large. Korean “han” is related to a sadness deriving from first-hand experiences of sorrow and loss; postmemory han, on the other hand, affects later generations. Somehow, second-generation Korean Americans confront losses they have never experienced, reconfiguring them through literary representation. Chu mobilizes a diverse array of Korean American literary texts including Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*, Suji Kwock Kim’s *Notes from the Divided Country*, Jane Jeong Trenka’s *The Language of
Blood, and Nora Okja Keller’s Comfort Woman. She interrogates various discourses and historical events ranging from the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea to the Korean War. In addition, she examines the complex psychic terrain of the transracial/transnational adoptee. Even while such recovery is made possible, postmemory han’s ability to catalyze interrelationality nevertheless appears often through fragmented and non-linear trajectories. Chu’s reading illustrates how postmemory effects a linkage that concatenates rather than erases or estranges.

In “Extrapolating Transnational Arcs, Excavating Imperial Legacies: The Speculative Acts of Karen Tei Yamashita’s Through the Arc of the Rain Forest,” Aimee Bahng contends that speculative fiction provides a terrain upon which to contest, problematize, challenge, and interrogate the colonially-informed legacies that have structured and restructured various national, transnational, and global relationships. In particular, Bahng provides an incisive critical excavation of Yamashita’s novel by considering how the novel allegorizes the colonial exploitation of Brazil through a focalized re-engineering of its landscape. Because of its tropical climate and the increased demand for rubber due to the rise of the automobile industry, Brazil became a prime location for rubber trees. Yamashita’s novel updates this colonial history; in her novel the discovery of a mystical rubber-like substance called the Matacão results in an economic frenzy to harness its amazing powers, as it can be molded into numerous products and commodities that have the strength of steel. However, Bahng makes clear that fetishization of the Matacão as a dynamic and new resource fails to underscore that this substance’s development is a literal product of prior imperialist and colonialist histories. Rather than progress and linear movement, Yamashita destabilizes such clear-cut trajectories. Indeed, Bahng fleshes out how Japanese labor and narrative structure are all implicated in de-exoticizing and recontextualizing seemingly alien objects and bodies.

Christopher A. Shinn’s “On Machines and Mosquitoes: Neuroscience, Bodies, and Cyborgs in Amitav Ghosh’s The Calcutta Chromosome” provides an incisive critique of cyborg ontology and the critical practice that leans upon technology to situate new “post-human” subjectivities. Existent criticism of Ghosh’s novel privileges information technology and cyberspace as a way of repositioning the radical postcolonial subjects who populate the novel. Indeed, advanced computer technology appears to be personified as its own major character and is seemingly granted the power to transform and alter human subjectivity. However, Shinn details how the computer’s sentience must be negotiated against the figure of the mosquito, which exists as a catalyst rather than an agent for biological mutations that take center stage within the narrative trajectory. The computer exists as a mode of transference rather than as the locus of power. As Ghosh teases
out the quest for domination through re-envisioning the historical circumstances around the cure for syphilis (vis-à-vis the early treatment for the sexually transmitted infection that involved infecting late-stage syphilitic individuals with malaria), the desire for everlasting life, and mind-body transference, Shinn elucidates the importance of bodily pleasure as a key component to change and alter human subjectivities.

In “Stinky Bodies: Mythological Futures and the Olfactory Sense in Larissa Lai’s Salt Fish Girl,” Paul Lai explores smells and the sense of smell in Larissa Lai’s second novel. Following the protagonist Miranda Ching’s defining feature, the stench of durian fruit, Lai discusses how smell functions as an analytic to critique genre, nation, identity, and politics. The eruption of smells throughout the novel, especially as linked to an enigmatic “dreaming disease,” signals the excesses of bodies that refuse to be contained by corporate and techno-scientific control. These smells unearth repressed histories of the downtrodden and war-ravaged, exposing the seams of a highly regulated future of corporate cities scrubbed of any unseemly, non-normative bodies. Through Miranda’s smell, the novel also offers an epistemological and ontological alternative to Western modernity’s privileging of sight and sound. Lai ultimately argues that the novel’s fusion of hybrid genres—mythology and science fiction—also presents possibilities for conceiving alternative modernities that hinge on scientific knowledge yet allow for different perspectives on temporality and subjectivity.

Juliana Hu Pegues’s “Miss Cylon: Empire and Adoption in Battlestar Galactica” closes the essays in this special issue by investigating how Boomer, a character from the original Sci-Fi television series, embodies certain sedimented racial paradigms, despite the fact that the television series is set in a post-race future. Precisely because Boomer is only one of many versions of a humanoid cyborg known as the Cylon, she inhabits multiple subject positions and narrative trajectories. Boomer enables a reconsideration of the tragic Asian American heroine, most famously configured in Miss Saigon, now recast in the context of a post-9/11 milieu. The Boomer figures are romantically linked with military personnel; such romances further complicate their positions as sexed-raced-gendered cyborgs. Hu Pegues argues that one must approach the Boomers in terms of how they illustrate the ways in which discourses of motherhood and adoption collide with racial otherness in a neoliberal context. Rather than elide the position of mother and child in a global context of war and conflict, the show leaves us with a text that mobilizes the perilous nature of the Asian American body, one that cannot be domesticated or disciplined with full certitude.

As a collected endeavor, these articles posit variant formations of the
Alien/Asian. The plasticity of these orientalized alternative temporalities and racialized futures suggests that the Alien/Asian concerns the future, but is also a preoccupation of the present. Post-race politics have questioned the efficacy of ethnic studies, but it would seem that deployments of the Alien/Asian demonstrate the continued importance of invoking race and its attendant encryptions to organize questions of marginality, oppression, and erased histories.

Notes

Acknowledgment: I would like to thank Gayle K. Sato, who provided late-stage revision suggestions.

1. Although there are a number of conflicting dates for the publication of Jack London’s stories, this piece operates from the understanding that “The Unparalleled Invasion” was “written in 1906 and published in McClure’s Magazine in 1910” (Franklin 37). It would later be included in London’s 1914 short story collection, The Strength of the Strong.

2. A number of recent critical studies have emerged relating to the figure of Fu Manchu. Jachinson Chan’s Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee traces a genealogy of Asian American male figures that have emerged in popular culture, specifically devoting the second chapter to an analysis of the “devil doctor.” Urmila Seshagiri’s “Modernity’s (Yellow) Perils: Dr. Fu-Manchu and English Race Paranoia” investigates the figure of Fu Manchu within a British context. Daniel Y. Kim’s third chapter in Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow, “The Legacy of Fu-Manchu: Orientalist Desire and the Figure of the Asian ‘Homosexual,’” draws out the emasculated Asian American teleology against which Frank Chin would write. For more recent scholarly considerations of Fu Manchu, see also Chen (2002), Christensen (2002), Ling (2004), and Kingsbury (2004).


4. Lisa Nakamura succinctly describes this orientalist phenomenon within cyberpunk: “While the genre of cyberpunk fiction has since expanded and been reiterated many times, one thing seems constant: when cyberpunk writers construct the future, it looks Asian—specifically, in many cases, Japanese” (62).

5. The term techno-Orientalism seems to have a two-fold origin. While Morley and Robins first defined it in print, Nakamura cites Greta Aiyu Niu’s paper presentation at Duke University in 1998 as her model for the definition.

6. At the height of this unease between the US and Asia in the mid 1980s, Kiyohiko Fukushima noted that “Trade tensions between the United States and Japan have recently reached the level at which they may endanger the most remarkable political achievement of the postwar era—the U.S.-Japanese political partnership” (22). But, such economic growth was not limited to one country. Indeed, Saburo Okita recounts: “The 1980s were a decade of growth for the Asia-Pacific countries as
they steadily became more important in the world economy, their share of nominal world gross national product (GNP) increasing from 41 percent in 1980 to 52 percent in 1985” (26).

7. The route through which this recovery occurs, as Sato notes, appears through the proliferation of female cyborgs, a gendered phenomenon that serves to trouble a feminist recovery of these hybrid figures who exist as protectors, shoring up the very instability at the core of Japanese identity.

8. Perhaps problematically, Miyake states: “Unlike September 11, this enemy was immediately identifiable; the same economic foe, the same arch-enemy of the United States since December 7, 1941—Japan” (13). In this respect, the novel seems to posit that there was no visual racialization that occurred due to the events of September 11, which seems reductive. At the same time, the polemic here underscores the deterritorialized nature of terrorism itself—that it would not simply be linked to one country, or even one global region, as terrorist cells proliferate in numerous areas.

9. I employ the term as Michel Foucault defines it in The History of Sexuality.

10. In this respect, the novel would be a prime example of what Vijay Prashad has defined as a polycultural historical approach; see Everybody Was Kung-Fu Fighting.

11. This TV Guide interview was published in the May 5-11 issue in 2002.

12. For comparison of the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II and Muslim Americans/Arab Americans following the 9/11 attacks, see Ahmad (101, 105); Naber (225-27); Howell and Shyrock (450); and Bayoumi (272).

13. Denise Alessandria Hurd argues that the Star Trek franchise “still tends to reify a particularly loaded image from nineteenth-century psychology and anthropology in the United States: The Tragic Mulatto” (23). Lynne Joyrich also investigates the development of female characters within the Star Trek franchise.

Works Cited


