Stigma/ta:
Eyes Slant like Chinks of Christ, or Chin-Kee of *American Born Chinese*

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Abstract:

Genuine pushbacks from Asian North American—off-white, yellow-ish—minority against white mainstream stereotypes are few and far between, given that the bulk of off-white (self-)representations blossom in English after a lifetime of nurture by, and internalization of, white culture. Thus, in their mother tongue of English, projected from the white patriarchal gaze, off-white visual culture reprises Western Orientalist polarization of the "Chink," pardon my Americanism. On the one hand, the racial slur "Chink" stigmatizes the they-all-look-alike Asian Other as having eyes slanting upward and/or in long narrow slits, from Robert Hans van Gulik's self-designed book cover to off-white Gene Luen Yang's graphic books and Domee Shi's animations. On the other, the West projects its own longing onto the exotic Other, whose visual, auditory, and sensorial differences "open sesame" to otherworldly, fantastical escapades. The offensive stigma of slant-eyed Asians hence morphs into, not to mince words, the crucified Christ's stigmata, windows to the soul of transcendent resurrection. The West—white as well as off-white—manages to eat the body of the Other and to have it, too, as proof of the West's spirituality. This project examines cases of Oriental stigma of slanting eyes transformed into stigmata of white and off-white spiritual triumphalism. I hereby talk back against the linguistic and cultural hegemony that schizophrenically splits the racial or immigrant other, skewing/skewering Oriental eyes, from Van Gulik to Yang, Shi, and the like. Let us turn our gaze to those strange, even monstrous, eyes in the mirror!

Keywords: slant eyes, Chinese stigma, Christian stigmata, Gene Luen Yang, Domee Shi, Robert Hans van Gulik, *American Born Chinese*, *Boxers & Saints*, *The Shadow Hero*

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(Figure 1) to off-white Gene Luen Yang's graphic book (Figure 2) and Domee Shi's animation (Figure 3). On the other, the West projects its own longing onto the exotic Other, whose visual, auditory, and sensorial differences "open sesame" to otherworldly, fantastical escapades. The offensive stigma of slant-eyed Asians hence morphs into, not to mince words, the crucified Christ's stigmata, windows to the soul of transcendent resurrection. The West—white as well as off-white—manages to eat the body of the Other and to have it, too, as proof of the West's spirituality.

Robert Hans van Gulik's cover to *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee* (1949), Figure 1 features prominently the stilted chinks for eyes, which are, in turn, simulated by off-white artists, not to mention the frontal nudity of femininity and the frigidity of masculinity that are de rigueur of gender divisions within Orientalism. In his nominal "translation" of an eighteenth-century Chinese chapter novel, the Dutch diplomat-*cum*-Sinologist Van Gulik's has given "a lot of face" to the Chinese text, a face that has launched a thousand Detective Dees on the big and small screen in global visual culture. Yet that face and body oblique in a "Dutch angle" manifest age-old Euro-American Orientalism of misshapen eyes and gender dynamics bordering on sadomasochistic bondage.

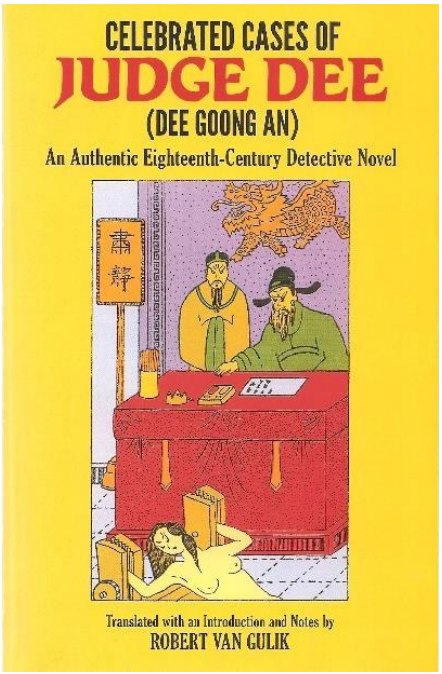

Figure 1: The front cover to Robert Hans van Gulik's *Celebrated Cases*.

Figure 2 captures the heart of MacArthur Genius awardee Gene Luen Yang's graphic novel *American Born Chinese* (2006, henceforth *ABC*) on, allegedly, ethnic awakening. A wish-fulfilling turning point for the protagonist Jin, homophone of the author's Christian name Gene, the slit-eyed, unnamed herbalist wife in San Francisco Chinatown transforms Jin into the whiteface Danny. Magically, Jin's almond-shaped eyes "norm" into Danny's round eyes, among other desirable physical traits, such as a white mask over yellow skin, to rephrase Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Ironically, such magical touch is delivered via the most stereotypical caricatures against Orientals, specifically, a non-English speaking alien with a Disney witch's missing teeth and crooked, long-nailed

digits, eyes closed like a blind Teiresias in trance, casting an unintelligible, unpronounceable spell of "變" blown up in scarlet red against the dark background. So striking visually, the sound and sense of 變 elude most readers, which intensifies the mystique of the Orient. The unsayable 變 functions as a void that is pregnant with meaning, a blip of a pause in moving lips. That stoppage and lacuna in the reading experience conjures up non-Sinophone readers' imagination to fill this ornamental, Oriental inaccessibility.

Figure 2: The ABC protagonist is turned into a white male by the herbalist wife in Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006).

Mistaken for an abstract painting subject to any interpretation, 變 is in fact pronounced *biàn* in the fourth tone in Mandarin, meaning "change" among a host of homonyms, including "urine" or "feces," or more colloquially, "shit." What a *mot juste* biàn is! It captures the essence, first of all, of the Monkey King's magic of seventy-two metamorphoses in Wu Cheng'en's sixteenth-century chapter novel *Journey to the West*, which inspires Yang's graphic novel; secondly, of Yang's own adaptation of *Journey* into a coming-of-age story in *American Born Chinese*; and, lastly, of the cinematic cross-dissolve from Jin to Danny on the bottom of the panel. What possesses the MacArthur Genius to skip the code-switching from "變" to "biàn" to "Change," not to mention the "shit" inherent in the Monkey King's urinating on the Buddha palm, that epitomizes the ethnic imaginary over empowerment? Yang could have accomplished that by means of a modicum of angle brackets, parentheses, and asterisked glosses within the comic panel, as Yang has done consistently throughout. The explanation appears to lie less in oversight than in Yang's priority of American tales in English over decorative details such as 變, a wallpaper-like design to silhouette the transubstantiation below.

Should the Word be made flesh (John 1:14), then a word that is not a word becomes a self that is not a self, namely, the herbalist wife effecting that word. The herbalist wife's sleight of hand is

accompanied by a "translated" chant in angle brackets for Mandarin in the speech balloon, along with the sound effect of mechanical, metallic, and consonant-filled transfiguration of "CLICK, CLACK" (194). Like a puppet with her hand raised by Yang's invisible string, that cameo comes at the expense of robbing the subjectivity of an elderly female immigrant apparently with her own name, voice, and ordinary life, as trapped as she may have been in Chinatown peddling dead animal parts and dried, desiccated plants, with an occasional side job of wish-granting to any ABC amid identity crisis. Set against all the readable, intelligible scripts in English, angle brackets notwithstanding, the sole Chinese ideograph 變 is mute, just as the Oriental matron-magician performing the "whitewashing" race change is but an extra, receding into the background soon after. Yang's visualization only entraps and crucifies her in the name of elevating, ennobling her.

Figure 3 is a high-angle shot of the teen protagonist Mei-Mei's slant-eyed grandmother with protruding Mongoloid cheek bones in Domee Shi's full-length animation *Turning Red* (2022). That her eyes are visible at all comes after the Chinese Canadian director Shi has been roundly criticized in Chinese social media for the portrayal in Disney-produced *Bao* (2018), an Oscar-winning short animation featuring the Chinese immigrant mother with two choppy lines for eyes, as though hardly ever open, akin to the herbalist wife's. What impresses Oscar only infuriates Chinese viewers. Scathing Chinese criticism opened Shi's eyes to the Chinese mother with no eyes. Shi's self-correction in *Turning Red*, nonetheless, clings onto the exotica of an alien arrival, as the grandmother debuts in oversized sunglasses that completely conceal her eyes, glasses that she holds in her hand in Figure 3. As alienating as this retiree with a heavy accent appears, she doubles as the revenant of mythical empowerment from ancient China, a guardian angel for Mei-Mei's maturation/menarche, indeed a fetish of stigma/ta for chinky pain and Christian deliverance. The winning formula of Orientalism: the undead heathen reanimated by the touch of God—Christian, that is.

Figure 3: Mei-Mei's slant-eyed grandmother with high Mongoloid cheek bones in *Turning Red* (2022).

This project proceeds to examine cases of Oriental stigma of slanting eyes transformed into stigmata of white and off-white spiritual triumphalism. To pedants who dismiss this project for its use of pop culture, I submit that liminal, "unserious" whodunit and young adult readings betray the West's symptoms of neurotic repression and displacement. To get even more personal, literally, the play on Christian tropes of stigma/ta and on the Anglophone double entendre of chink the epithet versus chink to epiphany bespeaks this Taiwanese immigrant, a(n) (un)naturalized American, subverting his stepmother tongue of English, prosecuting his "yellow stain" of writing, decades-long, in the midst of whiteness. A Mao's/Trump's "bad element" within the model minority within American exceptionalism repurposed as MAGA, I hereby talk back against the linguistic and cultural hegemony that schizophrenically splits the racial or immigrant other, skewing/skewering Oriental eyes, from Van Gulik to Yang, Shi, and the like. Let us turn our gaze to those strange, even monstrous, eyes in the mirror!

Gazing into the Nietzschean abyss, we spy Chin-Kee from *American Born Chinese* (2006). Needless to say, Yang's character is "slitty-eyed" in the memorable words of the late Prince Philip during his 1986 tour of Hong Kong. The long ē ending in "Kee" subscribes to racist pidgin of nineteenth- and early twentieth century caricature against Cantonese-speaking coolies prone to suffixing such consonants as "k" with vowels, as in "No Tickee, No Washee" from Chinese laundrymen. Serendipitously, "kee" puns with "key." Even more so, Yang's Chin-Kee embodies both the worst of reprehensible xenophobia and the best of all-knowing omnipotence, leading a charmed double life of clown-*cum*-crown—as his pidgin transposes "r" and "l" anyway.

To borrow from Chinese Canadian young adult writer Judy I. Lin's *A Magic Steeped in Poison* (2022), such teas/tease of "the Golden Key" opens onto the West's Orientalism. Such keys to white culture—honorary whites, aka, off-whites, included—have long been bestowed upon Chin-Kee's "ancestor," Charlie Chan, from his debut in Earl Derr Biggers's *The House Without a Key* (1925), blundering all the way to *Keeper of the Keys* (1932) and Biggers's death in 1933. In reverse, Charlie Chan is the *key* to Biggers' longevity of detective stories. A discursive insult holds the clue to whodunit, initiating the apocalyptic denouement by way of Oriental mystique-*cum*-buffoonery. Hence, the Oriental Other like Chin-Kee serves as the key to Yang's *American Born Chinese*, or American Born Christian, rather, given the religious motif "slanting," pun intended, Yang's oeuvre, ever since his earliest graphic books, *The Rosary Comic Book* (2003) and *Loyola Chin and the San Peligran Order* (2004). The yEast of Chin-Kee et al. is kneaded/needed within the West's cultural leaven for Heaven in literature and film. Far from a one-off is this yEast for Western Leaven/Heaven in Yang: his subsequent *Boxers* & *Saints* (2013, henceforth *B&S*) and *The Shadow Hero* (2014, henceforth *TSH*) manifest a repetition compulsion of eyes sloping like Chin-Kee's, the key to Christian redemption. Before returning to the off-white Yang, though, the context of yEast as a fermenting agent for white artistic and cultural alchemy merits a brief sidetrack, a fleeting side-eye.

Take, for example, Figure 4 from Gore Verbinski's 2002 Hollywood remake of the J-Horror classic *Ringu* (1998).

After Verbinski's male protagonist has watched the female ghost's cursed video that brings on death seven days hence, he is shocked by an Asian cashier's ominous prognostication out of left field, "You're gonna die," when she hands over a pack of cigarettes, staring fixedly with her slender eyes. "Oriental" clairvoyance, which is one extreme of the bifurcated Orientalism, shifts in the same breath to its opposite of clowning and trickstery with her next line: "us[ing] two packs a day." Yet the ensuing shot of his distorted, as though scrambled and erased, reflection on the convenience store's surveillance camera, amplified by the soundtrack's grating sonic boom, portends the coming of the anti-Christ to claim her viewer's life. Code-switching between Orientalist stereotypes of supernatural intelligence and utter unintelligibility—the cashier's elders at the counter conversing in what sounds like Cantonese in the background—taps into the proverbial "perennial alien," both the straight-faced, dead-panning girl cashier and the girl ghost. Nevertheless, that Asian cameo sheds light on Verbinski's J-Horror provenance, and on the West's projection of its anxiety onto the racial other while caricaturing her. The fetish of the East, expediently, enables the West to work out and articulate its Munch-esque *Scream* long repressed by the New Gods of modern science and narcissistic ego. The cashier extra embodies the West's displacement extraordinaire.

Figure 4: An Asian-looking cashier prophesying death in *The Ring*.

"Out of left field" is right on the mark in diagnosing such whimsical, negligible, and haphazard meetups: the eyemaker Chew (James Hong) in *Blade Runner* (1982); the unnamed Keymaker (Randall Duk Kim) in *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003); the Indian-looking Mara (devil), doppelganger to Keanu Reeves's yellowface Siddhartha, in *Little Buddha* (1993); and many more iterations in

English words and screen images. The eyemaker, the Keymaker, and the kingmaker are one and the same, malleable in the white master's hands, from Verbinski to Ridley Scott, the Wachowskis, and Bernardo Bertolucci. All these marginal characters from the East serve as the yEast for Western enlightenment, providing, practically, the source of light, yet predetermined to fade out anon. Like Mara rising out of the puddle when Reeves looks down into it/himself, the East is the West's reflecting pool before nirvana (Figure 5). What the Italian auteur Bertolucci visualizes is, in Western eyes, the archetype of Buddhist Zen awakening by defrocking, baring South Asianness. The Freudian definition of joke that comprises the rhyme of "*Verblüffung und Erleuchtung*," rendered in English as "bafflement and light dawning," finds its butt in the nudity of the vanquished Mara (*The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* [1905], 3). Bertolucci's Zen joke on the racial other is exposed herein, for Zen *is* a joke, its litany of *gong'an* (public cases) of epiphany nothing but riddles that make no sense, thereby tranZENding all human senses and, ultimately, meaning itself.

Figure 5: Reeves's yellowface Siddhartha facing off with the evil Mara in *Little Buddha*.

Without missing a beat, this "J'accuse" moves from Exhibit A to Exhibit B, from the white slant in Verbinski et al. to the off-white slant in Yang, or from four white directors to one off-white graphic novelist's three books: *ABC*; *B&S*; and *TSH*. Throughout these three texts as well as spanning Yang's oeuvre and those of myriad Asian North American artists, the key to their creativity is, to put it bluntly, Chin-Kee, whose name "Chink" personifies all the stereotypes against Asians, leading to the struggle for self-identity. To borrow from Fredric Jameson's maxim of "history is what hurts," Asian American culture is what hurts, so much so that it feels like self-hurt. Arising out of a minority drive for subjectivity in denial of racial stereotypes, Asian North Americans resort to juxtaposing erstwhile stock images found in the dustbin of history vis-à-vis ethnic identity founded on the debunking thereof. The dialectic approach of thesis and antithesis, of stereotype and refutation, theoretically results in synthesis that is ethnic identity.

It begs the question, though, when the President of the United States, who is Pax Americana

incarnate, one that surely enfolds Asian America, raises good old anti-Chinese zombies by spewing such white trash as "CHINESE virus" and "Kung Flu" during the COVID-19 pandemic, strategically provoking nation-wide divisiveness in general, and anti-Asian hate crimes in particular. Since they are all alike, anti-Asian violence spins off into anti-Asian American violence. When Brandon Elliott assaulted a petite sixty-five-year-old Filipino American woman right outside a luxury Manhattan apartment on March 29, 2021, screaming racial slurs and "You don't belong here," he did not stop to inquire whether she is an FOB or ABC. The "street show" was in full view of such idle spectators as the apartment's security guard, two additional apartment personnel, and one delivery man. Nor did the anti-masker Ebony Jackson think of asking two women wearing face masks whether they were Asian or Asian American before hammering them on the head on May 2, 2021, once again near Times Square. Where have all the syntheses of Asian Americanness gone in Trump 1.0, 2.0, and, conceivably, 3.0 and beyond? Or is Asian Americanness itself the trigger for Ebony-on-Yellow, or anti-white-on-off-white violence? After all, even one of "our own," Yang, in his thrice-told tales of the twenty-first century, parrots nineteenth-century white caricatures of slant eyes and such.

The fundamental problem lies in the source, the alleged thesis, which is already an antithesis inherent within Trump's Sinophobic stigma, a mold and a collective psyche so twisted that it (fore)casts not so much transcendent stigmata Yang intended as re-traumatization. Any perversion and devaluation ill-fits to serve as foundation for born-again selfhood. The dialectics of ethnic consciousness yields, hypothetically, new identity, the alchemy of which goes beyond arithmetic addition and subtraction. In multiplication, however, a negative and a positive still makes a negative, still a revalidation of the same old, same old. The mathematical or psychological formula is further doomed by Asian American poetic license or "immigrant license" that represents Asianness—be it immigrant (grand)parents in the promised land or Asians on the other side of the Pacific or both—of, by, and for Western eyes. By virtue of their "birthright" of Asian ancestry, Asian American artists feel entitled to speak for/as Asian immigrants by leveraging Orientalist binarism of mystery and menace, power and atrophy. The schizophrenic split crystalizes in Maxine Hong Kingston's immigrant mother, holographically flipping between the woman warrior and the idiotic laundress, in her classic *The Woman Warrior* (1976). This fault line in immigrant (mis)representation calcifies into, alas, a throughline within Kingston's heirs apparent, from Amy Tan to Kevin Kwan and beyond. Such bifurcation of Asianness caters to white readership, which eases into the time-honored tradition of reckoning with perennial aliens in terms of either eighteenth-century "Celestial Kingdom" or nineteenth-century opium addicts. Asian America kneads their biological parentage in the distorted, internalized image fancied by their adoptive white parentage. Bloodline is trumped by the assembly line for Made in America, aka, Asian American handmaids in the employ of America!

What actually transpires within the dialectics evokes the turn-of-the-last-century technology of stereograph or stereoscope to fashion three-dimensional optical illusion of depth over an object out of its two flattened images captured at a different angle by the stereographic eyewear, no different from how the two eyes receive an image slightly apart. The stereoscopic scenario taps into Derridean

différance for both "to defer" and "to differ." To differ is to defer judgment; therefore, Yang's comic riff critiques "the distance between the cultural Real and the cultural Ideal" (Ben Urich's "Humor in Popular Culture," 303). If stereotypical belittlement is the Real, then what is the equalitarian Ideal that, as Simon Dentith puts it, "contradict[s] our addressees" (*Parody* 2)? Whereas the Greek root of "stereo," meaning stiff, gives solidity and "body," it also fixates and calcifies the object, particularly when the organic, evolving Asian self, estranged as Asian America's Other, is nowhere to be found, a phantom limb of ethnic pain.

Yang's splicing of stereotypes and their alleged subversion, of past and present images, telescopes the US Census Bureau's designation of "Asian American," with the last word "American" understood to be the synthesis, the operative word, "colored," pun intended, by the adjective "Asian." Yet the Asian American project has largely been thwarted, given the persistent, ruthless scapegoating from the nineteenth-century "The Chinese Must Go!" movement to the cross-century Chinese Exclusion Act to the anti-Asian febrility of MAGA. The ethnic failure is written on the face, specifically, the eyes of, respectively, Yang's triptych of book covers, featuring the veritably slant-eyed protagonists of Chin-Kee; of Bao and his avatar, the First Emperor of Qin (Figure 6); and of the Shadow Hero (Figure 7).

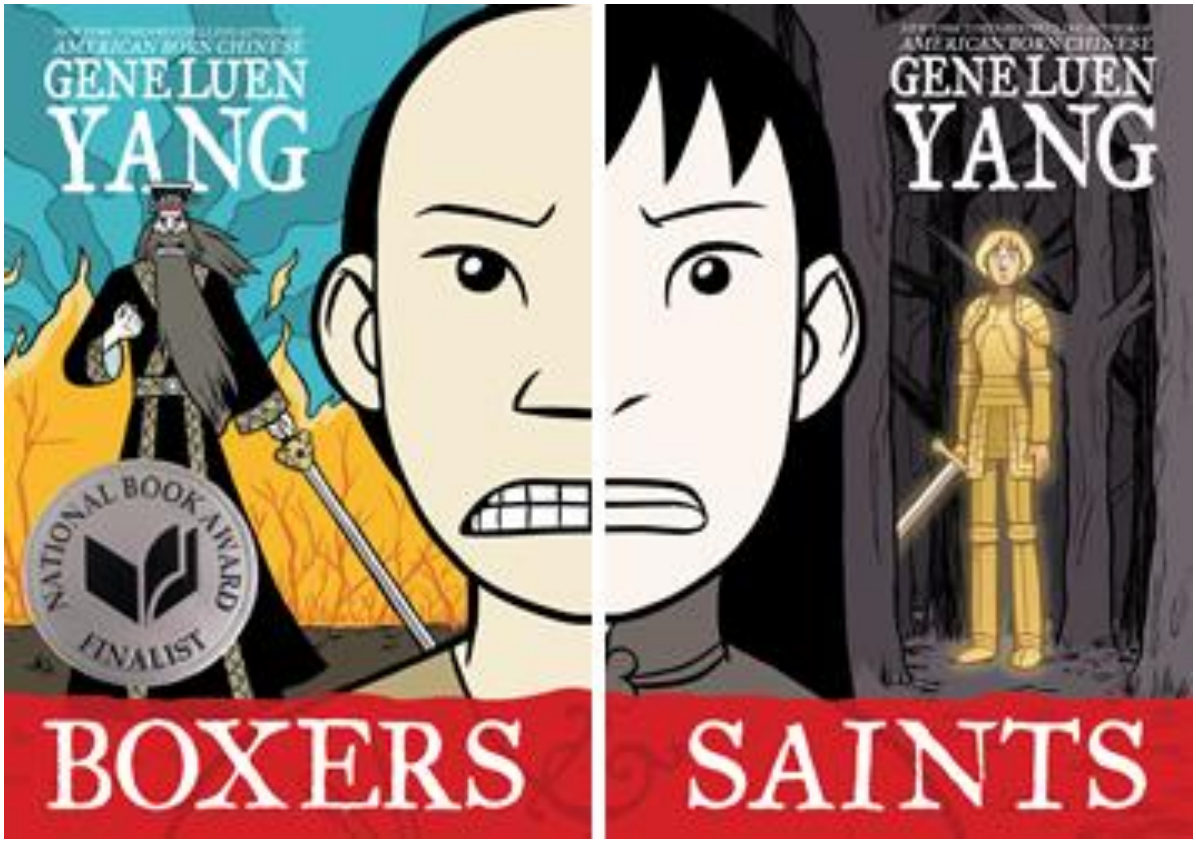

Figure 6: Bao and his avatar, the First Emperor of Qin, joined by their doppelgangers of Vibiana and Joan of Arc in *Boxers* & *Saints*.

In *B&S*'s book cover (Figure 6), the titular ampersand of "&" yokes form and content, graphics and meaning. Grammatically, the ampersand functions as a conjunction of what precedes and what

follows. Formalistically, "&" with its flourishes twirls in the shape of a traditional Chinese frog button of cloth loop and knot that ties together the two separate graphic novels *Boxers* versus *Saints* by way of the collars of the two protagonists, Bao and Four Girl, a misogynist pun on Death Girl, flanked by their guardian angels of the First Emperor of Qin and Joan of Arc. The right half of Bao's face nestles with the left half of the face of Four Girl, baptized as Vibiana. Gender differences notwithstanding, their knitted brows, tilting eyes, and grimace complement each other. The tension in their countenances is kindled by their avatars' swords, the emperor's tongues of fire, and Joan's burnished armor and halo. Bao leads the peasant group called the Fists of the Harmonious and the Righteous during the Qing dynasty against colonial oppression. Their slogan of "Repel the Foreign, Support the Qing" finds favor in the Empress Dowager, who manipulates them against the West and Japan. Four Girl enjoys no such imperial backing, her gender having devalued her in the eye of Chinese patriarchy. Instead, she converts herself into Vibiana, adhering to another system of patriarchy, going beyond that which discriminates against half of the Chinese population. Although accessed through the female visions of Joan of Arc, Vibiana relies on French Father Bey and the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ's crucifixion, which Joan witnesses as she breathes her last burning at the stake. In turn, Vibiana witnesses the saint's vision before her own execution. A Christian lineage runs from the Heavenly Father to the Son to the saint to Vibiana, painstakingly forged by Yang.

All eyes in Figure 6, except Joan's, tilt upward, in epicanthic folds to boot. The box set of two-in-one revisits the ABC—the acronym for American Born Chinese that doubles, unwittingly, for American Born Christian—Yang's Catholic passion throughout his artistic career. Here, Yang weds the Western obsession over the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) with Saint Joan's campaign against the English invasion. For his imaginary homecoming, Yang gravitates to the Qing dynasty's Boxer Rebellion, a favorite subject in Western scholarship replete with monographs on this nativist revolt against Western imperialism that prompted the allied forces of eight colonial powers of Germany, Japan, Russia, Britain, France, the United States, Italy, and Austria-Hungary and, ultimately, led to the downfall of Qing a decade later. Yang's page-long list of "Further Readings" in the end matter to *Boxers* testifies to what drives his retelling, reminiscent of the collective motif of his Western scholarly peers, let alone in pop culture (327). Pitted against the Boxers' swords, spears, and ritualized possession by theatrical warriors, American soldiers in Yang don cowboy hats, wielding six shooters and bowie knife. Like the historical gunboat diplomacy, bullets decide the outcome of the fight. Yang's skirmishes set in the capital city conjures up the Hollywood dramatization of *55 Days at Peking* (1963), where Charlton Heston and his, for lack of a better word, cavalry come to the rescue of Westerners, Ava Gardner included, besieged in the foreign diplomatic compound (291).

The First Emperor of Qin features traditional upward-tilting "Phoenix Eyes" in Peking Opera, ink-brush painting, and temple sculpture. Such Phoenix Eyes, slender with a "lilt" in the corners, are de rigueur in traditional art, an aesthetic stylization. Van Gulik has evidently transcribed such style onto the courtroom characters in his DIY cover design for *Celebrated Cases*. Phoenix Eyes on the Chinese stage, on rice paper, and on temple walls are universalized as Chinese facial features. Akin to

Van Gulik, Yang repurposes Phoenix Eyes in the emperor and the Boxer leader Bao. The mise-en-scene of two slant-eyes in *Boxers*' cover equates the emperor's theatrical makeup called *diao fengyan* (to hang and stretch Phoenix Eyes) with the peasant boy's supposedly born eye shape. If a "foreign devil," a Flying Dutchman over Chinese curios that are Van Gulik's hobby, slant Chinese eyes, does that make Yang who subscribes to the same pattern yet another foreign devil? Van Gulik and Yang's mistake lies in popularizing an artistic stylization as Chinese eyes writ large. The slant resides less in Chinese eyes than in Western hearts, Yang's as well. This is tantamount to representing the stride of Western women in line with ballerinas en pointe, namely, they all walk on their tiptoes. Absurd indeed! Yet absurdity is Orientalism's middle name, or self-Orientalizing, for that matter.

Figure 7 is the cover to *TSH* designed by Yang's co-creator, Sonny Liew from Singapore. Himself from Asia, Liew copies instead of critiques his Asian American partner's visualization of slant eyes. The dark shadow on the cover suggests the protagonist's guardian, the tortoise spirit in exile from China. On the heels of the cover's slant eyes, the tortoise on the opening page— accompanied by his fellow Chinese mythical guardians of dragon, tiger, and phoenix—sports eyes slitting upward as dramatically as any theatrical warrior spirits from *B&S*. To complement the stilted depiction, *TSH* is riddled with Orientalist usual suspects of Chinatown tong wars, gambling dens, dragon ladies in risqué *qipao* of high side slits and standing collars, mortal combats, a Fu Manchu lookalike, even the martial arts personage Yuen Siu-tien of *Drunken Master* fame, all perpetuated under the justification of repudiating said usual suspects.

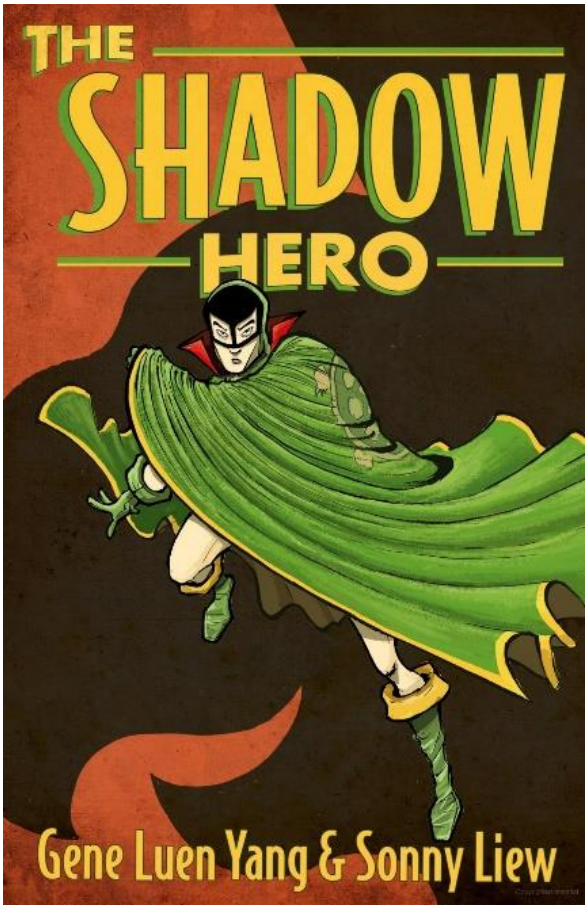

Figure 7: *The Shadow Hero*'s cover

Yang's artifice excels in seamlessly suturing East and West, while secretly privileging the latter. Not only apparently Anglophone in the Western tongue, but Yang's visual repertoire prioritizes Christian symbolism. Such favoritism extends from the frog button on the cover design to the saving grace of "The Lord's Prayer" to the triumphant Jesus and Guanyin, Goddess of Mercy, in contrapuntal pictorials of the resurrection and of Guanyin of one thousand hands, one thousand eyes. Figure 8 in *Boxers* tells of Guanyin's filial pious self-sacrifice—gouging her own eyes and cutting off both hands—to heal her ailing emperor father. Nothing so torturous ever punctuates Guanyin's Chinese legend; her magic power of multiple eyes and hands does not derive from self-blinding and -amputations. Yang's sleight of hand evokes the cover to *ABC*, where the portmanteau of Tze-Yo-Tzuh (自有者 "Self-Owned One" for Jehovah) substitutes the Buddha seal that imprisons the Monkey King for five hundred years. The autograph of Tze-Yo-Tzuh is, supposedly, an authentic Chinese moniker that authenticates Yang's ethnicity, yet it is a construct found nowhere else in the infinite Sinosphere. Likewise, the bespoke Guanyin is tailor made by Yang to match, what else, Jesus's stigmata in his palms and feet. From Guanyin's eyes to the eyelets in her palms, they invariably slant, not so with Jesus's eyes in Figure 9, although the halo-like, peacock-feather eyes resemble one another in the hagiographic twins.

Figure 8: Bao and his female companion imagine Guanyin of one thousand hands, one thousand eyes to tend to the masses' woes.

Figure 9: Vibiana witnesses Joan's vision of the Resurrection while burning at the stake.

The speech ballon in Figure 9 delivers Jesus's message, via Joan, to Vibiana: "Be mindful of others as I am mindful of you," a rendering in plain English of the King James Version's "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:4). By contrast, Guanyin in Figure 8 is as reticent as Van Gulik's nude, or as unintelligible as Yang's herbalist wife. The page preceding Figure 9 shows three panels where the wound in Jesus's palm open up incrementally like a teary eye, transubstantiating blood and death. This reanimates Bao's master in *Boxers*, whose potbelly conceals an eye that eventually transmits *qi* or mythical breath onto Bao. As Bao comes to possess supernatural might, his master turns deflated and expires. Whether a pierced palm or a Chinese navel, whether Vibiana stabbed to death or Bao spared by the mercy of God, twice or thrice removed, Yang sublimates wounds into eyes, blood into tears, pain into pleasure, Chinese stigma into Christian stigmata. Any psychic sublimation rises like air out of corporeal cremation.

To close this essay, to shut the slant eyes, hopefully, in perpetuity, I revisit the Blakean, tyger-lamb "fearful symmetry" in *B&S* of Figure 6. Faced with the "secondary devil" Vibiana's refusal to renounce her faith, not even divulging her Chinese name, Bao resolves to put her to the sword after a short reprieve of listening to what turns out to be "The Lord's Prayer." The opening words, "Our . . . Father . . . Our Father," are all Bao manages to recall and stammer, feigning to be a Christian convert like Vibiana, when the tide of war turns and a Western soldier holds a pistol to his head (*Saints* 167).

What saves Bao from the West's bullet is the Heavenly Father of the West. "Hallelujah, hallowed be thy name!" appears to be the last word from an American Born Christian in the yellow mask of American Born Chinese.

How many of the illustrated characters in all nine figures are staring at us? Nearly all of them are, with their "slitty" and/or narrow eyes! Even in Figure 8 when Bao and his female companion have their eyes closed in an intimate moment, Guanyin's one thousand eyes remain trained on us. The frame-within-the-frame of Figures 8 and 9 have the protagonists bleed to the edge of the panel, as though reaching beyond the page and all the way to the reader. The mise en abyme structure echoes *B&S*'s cover when "real" protagonists in the foreground are "backed," literally and figuratively, by their mystical familiars of the Chinese emperor and the Catholic saint. Indeed, reading slant eyes onscreen and on paper is to read ourselves, since we slant them in the first place. Like its Western gunslinger Clint Eastwood, the West squints its eyes to set the unknown East in its crosshairs of beauty and bestiality. The pretend game of Chinese speaking not only in English but in Christian metaphors ought to awaken us to the chink, the fissure, that rips apart Western metanarratives plied by whites and off-whites alike. To undo it once and for all, however, is far from an open-and-shut case. What is closed out, blanked out needs to be filled in, preferably, by a pair of human eyes neither stigmatized nor stigmata-like.

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