

any more with the Kuomintang consul-general, there is very little impact on everybody's daily life. Even if they cannot stop thinking about Taiwan, they can still eat Taiwanese food and travel to Taiwan to appreciate the one and only authentic Chinese culture. Moreover, they also have the chance to visit their relatives and go sightseeing in mainland China. Therefore, at this time when the sun is setting for the loyalists, neither urging the overseas Chinese to participate in their political activities nor resorting to trickery to win their sympathies is a practical plan.

In our local city elections, the political strength of the Chinese cannot be discounted. Every vote cast wields some power. But when it comes to international political changes, we can only express our opinion; we cannot influence the outcome. The Taiwan lobbyists in America were quite successful, and almost convinced the whole country to regard Communist China as a kind of malignance. Yet it took just one trip by [President] Nixon to turn the situation around. Chiang Ching-kuo [president of the Republic of China] was feeling free and easy when 70 percent of Americans opposed giving up Taiwan. Yet it took just one broadcast by Carter and all that remained of those 70 percent Americans was one small group of three or four individuals led by Goldwater.⁷ (They kept insisting that Taiwan should not be given up. But is Taiwan an American territory? And what is all this talk of "giving up" and "not giving up"? This kind of thinking is no more than a throwback to nineteenth-century colonialism.) One can see that these events are in no way influenced by us.

"There are circumstances beyond man's control." This may seem like a hackneyed saying, but it still holds true to a certain extent. By accepting this, Chinatown will weather this transition period without any difficulty.

SOURCE: *Chinese Pacific Weekly*, January 4, 1979. Translator: Ellen Yeung.

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Asian American Women and Revolution: A Personal View (1983)

Sadie Lum

The political ideologies of the antiwar, Asian American, and women's liberation movements in the 1970s heightened Chinese American women's awareness of racial, gender, and class oppression in their lives, inspiring many to become political activists. Some chose to participate in community service programs, others in mainstream politics, and still others, like Sadie Lum, chose the revolutionary route. As a member of the League of Revolutionary Struggle, she firmly believed that society's problems were caused by the capitalist system and that the solution was to organize the oppressed classes—workers and racial minorities—to bring socialism to the United States. As a woman, she also believed in the Chinese slogan "Women hold up half the sky"—in other words, that women should be allowed full and equal participation in the revolutionary movement.

In the following essay, originally published in a special Asian American women's issue of East Wind magazine,¹ Lum recalls an exciting period of political involvement and personal growth, when anything and everything seemed possible. At the same time, she remembers the difficulties she had juggling the multiple responsibilities of wife, mother, worker, and activist while at the same time struggling against male chauvinism at home and in the movement. How she was able to contribute to the revolutionary cause, deal with the personal conflicts, and come out of the process a stronger person is the underlying message of this retrospective essay.

The position and role that we, Asian women, occupy—our potential and how to tap and unleash our resources and full capabilities—is an important question to understand and address. Failure to do so will cripple the Asian peoples' struggle for full equality as well as harm the struggle for revolutionary change in the U.S.

1. *East Wind*, a progressive Asian American politics and culture magazine, was published from 1982 to 1989.

I was asked to share some of my experiences as an Asian woman active in the revolutionary movement with *East Wind* readers. I am looking forward to reading *East Wind's* Focus section on Asian women, as it is by sharing and learning from each other's life experiences that we become stronger, collectively and individually. Collectively we have a common oppression—oppressed just because we are yellow-skinned and oppressed because we are women. Asian working women also bear the added weight of being exploited and oppressed as workers. We have many different, as well as similar, experiences in dealing with our oppression. In sharing them we become stronger as our understanding is broadened and deepened with experiences and lessons going beyond our own personal lives.

I am and have been a member of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist), and organizations that came before it,² for over the past ten years. Our organization was born and grew up as an integral part of the new, contemporary revolutionary movement in the U.S. dating back to the 1960s. In our early history we embraced the view capsulized in the slogan we learned from the Chinese Revolution: "Women Hold Up Half the Sky!" This has guided our work to promote and develop the full participation of women in the peoples' struggles and in the revolutionary movement.

Like many Asian women of our generation, I was deeply affected by the times and circumstances in the late 1960s and early 1970s. My political history dating back to that time is also the history of my life growing up and maturing as a woman, a mother and a communist.

It was an explosive time—the rage of the peoples' militant struggles here inside the U.S. and around the world exploded with such a force that you could not be untouched by it. It was a time when our emotions ran a full spectrum—we cried at the military viciousness of the U.S. imperialists in Viet Nam; and we screamed our anger at many anti-war demonstrations in support of our brothers and sisters in Southeast Asia. We were inspired as we saw Vietnamese and Cambodian women take up arms to liberate their people. We marched, picketed and chanted against racist injustice and for our rights. We talked to everyone we could talk to—we learned a lot, we educated ourselves about ourselves and the world around us. We organized, organized, organized to fight. And throughout this entire process, in every aspect of this process, Asian women were right there—leading, contributing, working hard and inspiring others!

Most of us Asian women were brought together because of the times, and there was great diversity in who we were. Many of us had had very different

2. A Communist organization that sought to mobilize the working class and oppressed people of color to overthrow the U.S. capitalist state and replace it with a socialist one, the League of Revolutionary Struggle incorporated the Red Guard, I Wor Kuen, and other political groups before disbanding in the early 1990s.

life experiences. Our ages ranged from over 50 years old to 18 years old. Some of us were working women from the community and some of us were students from universities and campuses from all over the U.S. One of our greatest strengths was our ability to come together and to learn and share the lessons from our lives.

Among the most active of us, we were convinced and motivated by the understanding that in order to deal with the particular issues facing Asian peoples, we had to bring this whole capitalist system down! We could not just change one piece here and there. We had to change the whole thing!

We committed ourselves to the goal of revolutionary struggle to establish socialism right here in the U.S. It was with this outlook, this consciousness, that we carried out day-to-day organizing in the community. We set up programs and took up issues affecting the majority of our people, the working and poor people in the community—the people who have no choice but to fight if they want a decent and better life.

For Asian working women, this reality hits to the heart of their daily existence, i.e., to even try to improve something in their basic, day-to-day situation and position at home, they have to fight. (*Equality between husbands and wives? Equal distribution of the work at home? Where did that come from?*) So, to deal with this, in any real way, women must fight to change their immediate situation and must do this as part of fighting to change the society that puts us in this position in the first place and then keeps us there.

This time in my life was very important. Doing community work in Chinatown and being involved in the anti-Viet Nam war movement gave me new eyes—a new outlook—to look at myself and at life. It was through my political activism that I came to believe in socialist revolution and communism and came to see how Asian women like myself would really win liberation. The developing revolutionary movement turned my life around. It gave me an understanding of myself which enabled me to bring my life under my control and give it direction. It gave me belief that my life was of value and that I was worth something and had something to contribute to society for the betterment of mankind. This may seem very simple, but it was not an easy or simple realization.

I was raised in San Francisco Chinatown in the Ping Yuen housing projects. My mother, a single parent, working mother (a wonderful and strong woman), raised me and my two sisters on her own. I went to Francisco Junior High and Galileo High School and "hung out" at the Chinese Recreation Center and Commodore Gym and in the streets of Chinatown. I grew up conditioned to feel that human life is not worth much generally. (*You read and hear so much about people being killed and dying every day.*) I now understand that to cover their crimes against the people and the decadence of this capitalist society, the ruling class must promote an atmosphere of indifference and numbness towards the value of human life. Also, as a Third World woman

from a working-class family, I felt I had very little to hold my head up about, since everything promoted in this society as things to be proud of and to strive for were not relevant to me. This includes almost everything, from all kinds of material possessions, to what you looked like and how you acted, to what school you went to, to where you lived, to what job you were going to get, to almost anything you can think of—was someone we were not and never would be; and were things we did not have nor would we ever have in our lifetime. (*What were we doing here, then?*)

This kind of thinking led me to strive hard for what I thought I could have, and to draw sharp limitations on myself. To avoid experiencing repeated disappointments in my life, I made up all kinds of justifications to not want more. It was also this kind of thinking that nurtured my greatest insecurities about who I was and my self worth.

I grew up judging a woman's value and goals in life with: who you were (*lucky enough*) to marry; then to be a good wife and mother, period. (*Is this all our life is?*) Who you married determined your economic status in life and your new circle of friends—his friends. That's why there was always so much emphasis on going out with the "right guy," a guy with a "future." It got to be so that I thought there was something wrong with me because all the guys I went out with either couldn't even get a job or their "futures" were in the post office or the phone company (or something like that). Later I realized that it wasn't just my luck to end up with the "wrong" guy, but that the majority of Asian guys at my school were working-class guys whose futures were to be workers.

I had my first daughter when I was still in high school. I went to work right after she was born and struggled to deal with being a young mother and a wife. Life was hard. It was hard to make enough money. (*My husband was unemployed most of the time.*) I really wanted to move out of the apartment, into our own place, without his mother. (*Who wanted to live their entire life there, or even most of it?*) I was tired when I got home, but I had to pick up my daughter, do all the cleaning, all the cooking—everything. (*Why can't he do some of it, especially since he isn't even working?*) And I took care of and had the main responsibility for raising my daughter. (*Of course, I'm the mother!*) Fights and frustrations. Frustrations and more fights.

About three years later, I began to become more aware of the importance of the rebellions taking place all across America, and saw that the war in Viet Nam was a plunderous war being waged by the U.S.—people here and overseas were really fighting against the *same* enemy. By this time I had left my husband and was in a really oppressive relationship with this possessive man who thought and acted as though he owned me and all my emotions and my thoughts—everything that's me. I really felt I would suffocate and die (or be beat to death) in this relationship. I never had the nerve or strength to just break it off. The extreme insecurity I had about myself kept me tied to him.

At this same time, some of my friends were beginning to become politically active in the San Francisco State Strike (a massive Third World student strike in 1969 at the San Francisco State University),³ and in doing youth work, draft counseling, etc., in the community. They had formed an organization—the Red Guard Party, a revolutionary organization. I was really interested and began to go around to see what was happening. This did not sit well with the guy I was going with. According to him, I could only be interested in the Red Guard and community work because I was interested in some guy there! Doesn't that sound terribly, typically awful? Women can't have any other independent reason for interests in her life separate from liking a guy or doing things because of a guy.

It was this realization that actually made me more determined to get involved in political work. I was going to stake out my own claim in life, and do what I wanted to do. Amazingly, this was the first time in this completely oppressive relationship that I felt I had the strength to break up with this guy. I must have told him and myself, at least 20 times in the year we were together, that I was going to break this off. But this time I actually did it! It was like a hundred pounds lifted off my shoulders.

I joined the Red Guard Party and later, I Wor Kuen (IWK), a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist organization. It was the community organizing work that led us to become Marxist-Leninists, as this was the only scientific, only real way to bring socialism to the U.S.

We got completely involved in doing community organizing work—to build a strong base and ties among the masses in the community. We paid special attention to developing our work among women. The women I met and worked with taught me a lot, reinforced my feelings of independence and pride and inspired me deeply. Some of us became like sisters, and with the older women, we became their daughters and they, our mothers.

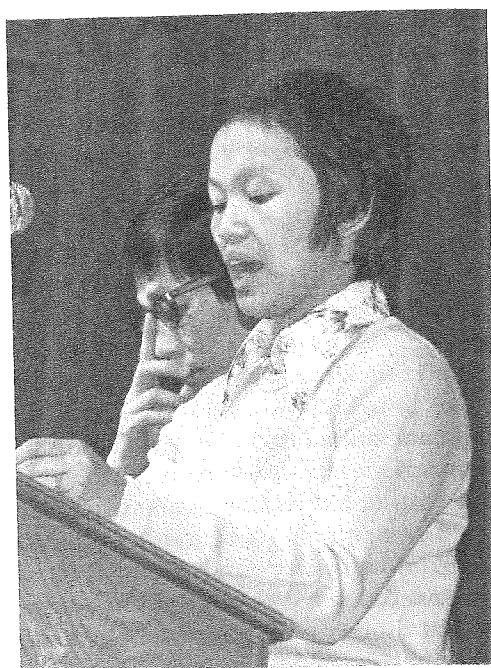
It was at this time (1971) that I had my second daughter and settled into a stable relationship with my present husband. (We just celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary.)

Some of the work IWK did among women included the Hsin Hua School (New China School), which was a full daytime childcare and after-school program; the Asian Women's Health Team that provided free community health services such as TB testing; and we started a Women's Group in the Chinese Progressive Association⁴ to promote support and discussion among the women. In addition to these programs, the women were also very active

3. In 1968 students of color at San Francisco State College sustained a strike for five months, winning concessions from the university administration to establish an ethnic studies program.

4. Founded in 1972, the Chinese Progressive Association advocated for normalization of relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States, and continues to serve as a grassroots organization offering social services in Chinatown communities.

Sadie Lum speaking
at the May First International
Workers' Day celebration in San
Francisco Chinatown, 1975.
(Courtesy of Sadie Lum)



in the different community issues that we took up around housing, police brutality, education in the schools, and immigration cases.

One big area of our work was in supporting People's China as the real representative of the Chinese people, not the Taiwan regime. We actively fought for the normalization of state-to-state relations between the U.S. and China and conducted mass educational work about People's China, including the role of women in New China.

In August 1974, a significant struggle broke out in San Francisco Chinatown involving 135 Chinese women garment workers—the Jung Sai garment strike. These women, against numerous odds, organized themselves and went out on strike for the right to unionize and for decent wages, benefits and working conditions. The Jung Sai garment sweatshop was a typical Chinatown sweatshop with the exploitative conditions: low-pay piecework, long hours, bad lighting, fire hazards, etc. The women even had to bring their own toilet paper to work! The strength and power of the strike rested in the fact that the women saw their fight as an important part of the struggle for all Chinese people to be treated justly. The workers' demand for the basic right of unionization has been historically denied to Chinese workers in this country, as have many of their basic rights.

IWK was actively involved in the direct support work for the strike. The

Jung Sai workers were determined to get their demands. Even when the boss closed down the shop and the union dragged its feet, the workers were not disheartened. They kept up the picket lines and their optimism. The majority of the women were married and mothers. For them to have sustained the strike for over eight months was no easy thing. This determination and strength of Chinese working women has been documented many times before and since then, such as the 1938 strike by Chinese women garment workers at the San Francisco National Dollar Department Store for unionization to the recent walkout of over 10,000 Chinese women garment workers who demanded and won a union contract in New York Chinatown in July 1982.

Doing the political work was much more difficult for the women than for the men. There were both very practical problems limiting the participation of women as well as mental and emotional pressures on us. For the women who were working full-time and raising a family, doing community and political work was very difficult. Whether we had children or not, we paid a lot of attention to trying, where possible, to collectivize home responsibilities. For instance, we would do food shopping for each other, help pick up the different children and watch them, help cook dinner, and help wash the clothes. We offered each other a lot of practical support and help.

A common problem that kept coming up was the bad attitudes of husbands/boyfriends towards the women doing political work. Some husbands would absolutely prohibit it and would demand that the woman stay home. In some of these cases, we would organize the meetings and discussions at the woman's house and organize the work for the weekends when it was easier for her to get out of the house. Sadly, in some cases the pressure of the men forced the women to drop out of political work, and they, while interested and wanting to be active, would give it up to keep peace in the home. In one case, a woman in her late forties decided that she wanted to continue her political work even after her husband threatened a divorce if she didn't stop. She kept up her work and tried to talk him out of it, but he filed for divorce anyway. At the divorce hearing, he sat on the stand and went on and on about how he was leaving her because she was a communist. She got custody of all seven children, and he got most of the money and property. But she never regretted the decision. She taught me a lot about the importance and value of your own life and that we all had the right and the duty, to ourselves, to make our lives what we want them to be and to be happy. Especially when we know that to be a revolutionary is right and important. Her strength helped all of us to deal with the pressures, guilt feelings and conflicts that we all went through at some time or another.

Some other common things were: the more active political women were labeled as not being "feminine" and guys would make jokes about us and not want to go out with us; and that to be bold in taking up the work and to have strong opinions and state them, we were seen as "nags" and "bitches."

These were just ploys by some of the men to try to undermine the validity of our political ideas, to discredit us and limit our political impact. What they didn't even realize was that their backward attitudes hurt all of us in our common struggle. Thus, in order to ensure the women's contributions to the work, we had to develop a clear perspective on how we were going to handle the question of fighting male chauvinism. We had to develop a situation where the women could fully participate with ease of mind.

From our experiences we knew that a daily struggle against women's oppression in its most concrete forms had to take place. For women to stand up and be politically active was an integral part of the actual struggle against our oppression—it was a step toward our own liberation. We established the principle and firm belief that women can and should strive to do anything a man can do. That, as women, we should struggle to be active in the political movements and to take up political leadership, even when in leadership over men. We should not define limitations for ourselves just because we are women.

It was this outlook that guided us in handling, very successfully, the questions and situations facing women in our daily lives as political and revolutionary women. With this perspective, we were able to maintain and develop a high level of participation by women at all levels of the work, including many of the main leadership roles.

That tradition has carried forth with us over the years. In all the political and revolutionary work that the League is involved in, there is a high level of women's participation in all different kinds of political work and at all levels of work, including the most demanding and difficult work.

For myself, my life is grounded in the fact that I am a communist. I believe that an important responsibility as a woman and a mother is to be a communist—for the good of my children and for mankind. I do believe communism is our future. I also believe that as a communist I am a better mother. The understanding I have of life, of society, enables me to raise my children in a far-sighted, objective way. It gives me a way to understand them—the social influences and pressures on them; it gives me the understanding that I alone cannot determine all their views and attitudes; and it enables me to build friendships with them because I can understand and respect them as independent people, seeing all sides of them. I want to continue to build a good marriage and raise my daughters to be good people and prepare them for their futures. I also want to have the ability to continue to carry out my political work, make the contributions and take up the responsibilities that I feel are very important to do, and that I want to do. My family and political work are part of the fabric of my life, and in turn my family takes pride in my political work and beliefs.

Many of us came into the peoples' struggles and into the revolutionary movement because of our oppression as Asians, as women, and for many of us, as workers. For me to be able to live my life in the way I do has only been

possible through a lot of conscious work to promote and pay special attention to the participation and contributions of women. This is an important tradition and precedent to promote and continue in all our lives and in our work. And without us women, where would our movement be?

As of 2004, Sadie Lum has worked as a legal secretary with the same San Francisco law firm for fourteen years, and has been married to Irwin "B. M." Lum for thirty-three years. They are the proud parents of two college-educated daughters and have one sixteen-year-old grandson, and they remain active in political issues such as the antiwar movement, women's rights, and labor.

SOURCE: *East Wind* 2, no. 1 (spring/summer 1983): 46–50.

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"In unity there is strength"

Garment Worker Speaks Out at Union Rally (1982)

Shui Mak Ka

Chinese women garment workers made history on July 15, 1982, when more than twenty thousand people turned out at a strike rally called by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) to fight for a three-year union contract that would give workers increased wages and benefits. It was the largest labor strike in New York Chinatown to date, and it had come about at the insistence of the workers after the owners of five hundred factories in Chinatown voted down the contract for a second time.

One of the key organizers and speakers at this historic event was Shui Mak Ka, a fifty-year-old garment worker who was once a medical doctor in China. After coming to the United States in 1973, she had resorted to supporting her family of three children by working in a Chinatown garment shop during the day and a Chinese restaurant in Brooklyn at night. When her husband, Sun Fook Ka, chief physician of a major hospital in China, arrived a year later, he too ended up working in a Chinatown garment shop. Underemployment was a common situation for many well-educated but non-English-speaking Chinese immigrants like the Kas, who poured into the United States after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965. Arriving in New York Chinatown when the garment industry was prospering and union organizing going strong, it was not surprising that Shui Mak Ka would end up working as a seamstress and, given her forceful personality and firm belief in social justice, that she would end up being chosen shop representative by her fellow workers.

At the time of the strike, six out of every ten families in New York Chinatown had someone working in the garment industry, and 430 out of the 500 Chinatown shops were union shops, which meant that there were twenty thousand Chinese members in ILGWU's Local 23-25 (85 percent of them women). Employers in five eastern states had approved the new contract; only the owners of New York Chinatown's 500 shops refused. Disgruntled over the contract they had signed three years ago and smarting from losses in their margin of profit caused by global competition and changes in the city's garment industry, Chinese contractors voted to reject the contract on June 10.



"The grasshopper cannot stop the car in its tracks!" says Shui Mak Ka at the union rally in New York Chinatown, 1982. (Courtesy of Shui Mak Ka)



More than 20,000 people attend the rally in support of Local 23-25's strike for a union contract, 1982. (Courtesy of Shui Mak Ka)

They obviously underestimated the power and militancy of their women workers, who in no time mobilized fifteen thousand people to attend a union rally at Columbus Park in the heart of New York Chinatown to pressure their employers to sign the contract. The following speech, sprinkled with analogies from Mao Zedong's poetry, was given by Shui Mak Ka at this first rally on June 24, 1982.

Dear brothers and sisters of Local 23-25, greetings to all of you!

On behalf of all sewing factory workers, first please allow me to convey our thanks to our union representatives. The union has been fighting hard for our rights as expressed in the three-year contract. Many of them have been busy working day and night, putting aside their own need to eat and sleep; please give them a big round of applause to express our highest sense of gratitude and respect.

The three-year contract is something we absolutely must have. We work very hard, and deserve every bit of the wages and benefits contained in the contract. The bosses depend on our sweat and labor, and have profited quite a bit of money to buy their houses and cars. But capitalists are never short on desire and wants. They oppose the three-year contract. We must clear our eyes, and not allow them to substitute a fish eye for a pearl or let them fish in muddy waters.¹ We must unite around the union's banner, because in unity, there is strength. The grasshopper cannot stop the car in its tracks!

It is not spring when one flower blossoms; only when a hundred thousand flowers bloom is it spring. If we close up ranks, work in unity, and move forward with one heart, no matter how tumultuous the coming waves, no matter what kind of difficulties stand before us, we will remain steadfast and strong. In unity there is strength. In unity there will be victory. Our struggle for the three-year contract will be victorious.

That's all I have to say. Thank you!

SOURCE: © 1982 Shui Mak Ka. All rights reserved. Translator: Shiree Teng

The rally succeeded in getting over twenty organizations to sign petitions supporting the workers, but failed at getting the employers to approve the contract when they took another vote on June 29. Some of the contractors went as far as to shut down their shops for two days, in effect locking out their employees, in retaliation. The union had no choice but to call a strike on July 15. In front of 20,000 supporters at Columbus Park that day and broadcast on radio, Shui Mak Ka gave the following speech, which was translated by Shiree Teng at the rally:

We are very angry about the actions of a small handful of employers in the

1. Meaning that the employers are trying to get away with substituting a "fish eye" for a "pearl," which is what employees deserve, and that they are also trying to stir up the dirt in the pond to stop people from seeing clearly.

recent days. Enough is enough! They have faced their desire to negotiate, and in the end they rejected the contract for the second time. The action is totally irresponsible. The worst thing is that this small bunch of employers also has been using all kinds of threats and intimidations to force other employers to close shop. The way that these people are behaving is like a blind bat trying to knock down the tree. It's like a grasshopper's attempt to stop the car in its tracks. They are daydreaming and we tell them, you are nuts. They are trying to substitute a fish eye for a pearl, and they're trying to fish in muddy waters. And we tell them, you are wrong.

According to Xiaolin Bao's account of the rally and the outcome,² the rally had started at 11 A.M. that morning. By 1 P.M. all of the Chinatown shop owners but one had approved the contract. Shui Mak Ka made it her job to track down the last holdout and succeeded in getting him to sign the contract. The strike was declared a victory for Local 23-25 at 1:15 P.M. that same day, thus ending a six-week labor dispute in the shortest strike in New York Chinatown's history. Ka would go on to work full-time for the ILGWU as its liaison to the Chinese community until her retirement in 1999.

SOURCE: Gail Pellett, *We Are One* (New York: Local 23-25, ILGWU, 1982). VHS.

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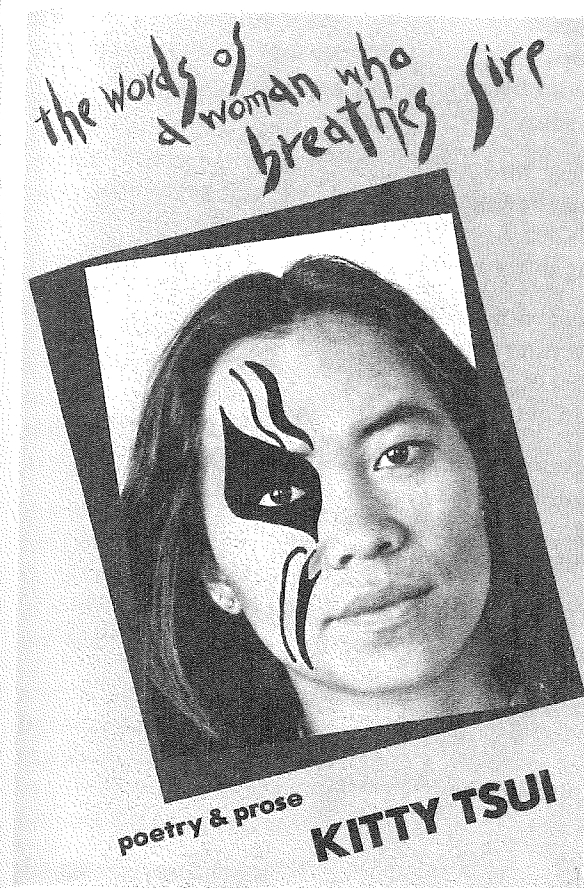
The Words of a Woman Who Breathes Fire (1983)

Kitty Tsui

Community activist and poet Kitty Tsui became the first Chinese American lesbian to come out publicly when her collection of poetry and prose, *The Words of a Woman Who Breathes Fire*, was published by Spinsters, Ink, in 1983. Born in Hong Kong in 1952, Tsui grew up in Liverpool, England, and immigrated to the United States in 1968. She graduated from San Francisco State University with a B.A. in creative writing in 1975. Inspired by the independent life style of her grandmother Kwan Ying Lin, a Chinese opera star, as well as the gay liberation movement, Tsui chose to come out to her family when she was twenty-one. "It was one of the hardest periods of my life," she said, "but I had my tools for survival: a typewriter, a voice that was screaming to be heard, and my best friend, alcohol."¹ With the support of feminist writers and gay sisters, Tsui overcame alcoholism and marginalization by taking up bodybuilding, writing poetry, and becoming an activist in the Third World and gay communities.

As the following two poems from her anthology attest, Asian American lesbians must not only grapple with discrimination and homophobia from within their families and ethnic communities, but they must also contend with racism, sexism, and homophobia in the larger society. Determined to overcome invisibility, break silence, and assert her multiple identities as a Chinese American lesbian, Tsui has continued to make waves with her writing. Her poetry, short stories, and essays have been included in over seventy anthologies, and she is the author of two other books: *Breathless*, a collection of erotic short stories, and *Sparks Fly*, a novel about the adventures of a gay man in San Francisco.

1. Kitty Tsui, "Breaking Silence, Making Waves and Loving Ourselves: The Politics of Coming Out and Coming Home," in *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures*, ed. Jeffner Allen (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 55.



Cover of the first book by a Chinese American lesbian, published by Spinsters, Ink, in 1983. (Book design and calligraphy by Kitty Tsui, cover photograph by Cathy Cade)

A CHINESE BANQUET

for the one who was not invited

it was not a very formal affair but
all the women over twelve
wore long gowns and a corsage,
except for me.

it was not a very formal affair, just
the family getting together,
poa poa, *kuw fu* without *kuw mow*²
(her excuse this year is a headache).

2. *Poa poa* means grandmother; *kuw fu* means uncle; and *kuw mow* means aunt.

aunts and uncles and cousins,
the grandson who is a dentist,
the one who drives a mercedes benz,
sitting down for shark's fin soup.

they talk about buying a house and
taking a two week vacation in beijing.
i suck on shrimp and squab,
dreaming of the cloudscape in your eyes.

my mother, her voice beaded with sarcasm:
you're twenty six and not getting younger.
it's about time you got a decent job.
she no longer asks when i'm getting married.

you're twenty six and not getting younger.
what are you doing with your life?
you've got to make a living.
why don't you study computer programming?

she no longer asks when i'm getting married.
one day, wanting desperately to
bridge the boundaries that separate us,
wanting desperately to touch her,

tell her: mother, i'm gay,
mother i'm gay and so happy with her.
but she will not listen,
she shakes her head.

she sits across from me,
emotions invading her face.
her eyes are wet but
she will not let tears fall.

mother, i say,
you love a man.
i love a woman.
it is not what she wants to hear.

aunts and uncles and cousins,
very much a family affair.
but you are not invited,
being neither my husband nor my wife.

aunts and uncles and cousins
eating longevity noodles

fragrant with ham inquire:
sold that old car of yours yet?

i want to tell them: my back is healing,
i dream of dragons and water.
my home is in her arms,
our bedroom ceiling the wide open sky.

THE WORDS OF A WOMAN WHO BREATHES FIRE

a woman was asked to conduct
a workshop of a conference
to talk about the kinds of oppression
she had experienced
as a gay asian woman in america.

the woman was asked to do
her presentation as part of
the female sexuality workshop.
as if being a lesbian
is merely a sexual personality.

a week later the woman was informed
by the coordinator that
she was to do her presentation
as part of another workshop
because it was feared that

the family counselor who was to lead
the female sexuality workshop,
might feel uncomfortable
sitting next to a woman
talking about her lesbianism.

the woman shouted,
the woman screamed:
what does it mean to be a lesbian?
i am a woman, they call me a bitch, a cunt.
i am asian, they call me a slant-eyed whore.

the woman shouted,
the woman screamed:
i am not a professional homosexual.
i am my grandmother's youngest daughter,
a warrior, a worker, a writer.

I am a visionary who creates
 blood and courage soaked stories
 of countless *ah goongs* and *ah poas*.³
 i link arms with women, with men to fight
 the diseases of a patriarchal past.

i am a warrior who grapples with three
 many-headed demons: racism, sexism, homophobia;
 a twenty-four hour worker;
 a writer with the will to change
 the age-old inheritance of inequality.

i am a warrior, a worker, a writer,
 my grandmother's youngest daughter,
 a feminist who does not believe in silence.
 i am a woman who loves women,
 i am a woman who loves myself.

Source: Kitty Tsui, *The Words of a Woman Who Breathes Fire* (Argyle, N.Y.: Spinsters, Ink, 1983), pp. 12-13, 51-52. Reprinted by permission of the author.

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3. *Ah goongs* means grandfathers, and *ah poas* mean grandmothers.

Anti-Asian Violence and the Vincent Chin Case

In the 1980s, as the United States deindustrialized and sank into a recession in response to rapid changes in the global economy, hate crimes against Asian Americans erupted. It was not a coincidence that the first outbreak occurred in Detroit, Michigan, where the auto industry, unable to compete with foreign imports, had all but collapsed. In 1982 unemployed workers and the mass media were blaming Japanese imports for the depressed economy when Vincent Chin, a twenty-seven-year-old Chinese American, was brutally killed in a barroom brawl by two white auto workers. During the fistfight that preceded the murder, one of the men was heard saying, "It's because of you mother-fuckers that we're out of work." They had obviously mistaken Chin for a Japanese as well as unfairly blamed all Asian people for the economic problems of the country.

THE NEW VIOLENCE (1984)

Helen Y. Zia

Helen Zia was working as a journalist for the Detroit Metro Times and Metropolitan Detroit when she heard the shocking news about Vincent Chin. Inspired by the antiwar and Asian American movements while an undergraduate at Princeton University, she had moved to Detroit in 1976 to do grassroots organizing. For two years she had worked as a large-press operator at a Chrysler plant before being laid off. Although she could understand the underlying causes behind the Vincent Chin murder, she could not believe or accept the lenient sentences that the judge meted out to the two killers; nor could the Asian American community. Helen Zia ended up leading a national campaign to seek justice for Vincent Chin. The following article, one of many that she wrote on behalf of American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), was published in Bridge, a leading national Asian American magazine, in 1984.

In 1982, in America, a Chinese American named Vincent Chin was beaten to death with a baseball bat by two men—after being accused by them of causing the unemployment of U.S. autoworkers. His killers were each fined \$3,000 and given three years' probation.

When news spread of the lenient sentences given for the crime of brutally taking a life, there were storms of protest.

The Vincent Chin case has come to mean far more to Asian Americans than a failure of the criminal justice system, though this aspect of the case serves as a lesson to all. This case has come to represent the racial hatred, scapegoating and very real discrimination that Asian Americans of all our diverse nationalities have been forced to endure since our forebears set foot on this land. To the extent that what happened to Vincent Chin could happen to any one of us, all Asian Americans are in jeopardy.

The Chin case is also a mandate to those of us who are fortunate enough not to have suffered Vincent's fate. The nationwide response to it symbolizes what can—and must—be achieved by Asian Americans acting together on behalf of our common need to live in our nation free from the threat of racial violence and innuendo. This case has proven that Americans from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, India and other Asian heritages can make a powerful impact by working together for our mutual interests.

On the night of his slaying, Vincent Chin was 27 years old and his future was promising. He was doing well at work in computer graphics, was well liked, and was looking to buy a new home for his wife and his widowed mother. In fact, Vincent's story typified the experiences of many Asian American immigrants: his father, Chin Wing Hing, came from Guangdong Province to America in search of a new life, which he found in the laundries and restaurants of Detroit. When World War II began, he enlisted, and after serving honorably in the U.S. Army, became eligible for citizenship. As a reward of citizenship, Mr. Chin was permitted to bring his wife, Lily, to this country. There were no children, and a few years later, the couple adopted a five-year-old boy from Guangdong, whom they named Vincent.

Friends and teachers say Vincent was a fun-loving, happy kid. His mother says he could have studied harder, but that he was a good boy, the kind who would help others. When he was nine, he began working in local Chinese restaurants, bussing tables. He had two passions: fishing and reading. "Whenever he had a chance, Vince would try to get to a lake and drop a line—it was his way of relaxing," remembers boyhood friend Gary Koivu, who was with Vincent the night he died.

And Vincent had a sensitive side to his personality—he often wrote poetry to his fiancée, Vikki Wong. She is trying to renew her life and is reluctant to talk publicly about Vincent, but some memories stand out, such as a Valentine's Day poem that Vincent placed in a classified section of a local paper:

There is no life without you
There is no joy or laughter
There is no brightness, no warmth
All the mornings after.

So stay with me
And we'll face the tomorrows
To find if our love
Can overcome the sorrows.

Though Vincent began college studying architecture, he later changed his mind, thinking that it might not be a secure profession. "Vince said he did not want to work his whole life in laundries and restaurants like his father did," Vikki recalls. So he later studied computer operations at a local trade school, and graduated with honors. He found a job at an engineering firm, combining his drafting and computing skills in computer-aided design work. To help save money for a house, Vincent also worked on weekends as a waiter.

Like many a "red-blooded American male," Vincent enjoyed going out on the town with his buddies. But unlike those other Americans, Vincent had an Asian face. On that warm Saturday night, Vincent and three friends decided to celebrate his upcoming wedding by going to a nude go-go joint that Vincent frequented during his carefree bachelorhood. Though his mother told him he shouldn't go out so close to the wedding date, he laughed and reassured her that "it would be his last night out with the guys." That night, Vincent was the target of a racial attack, and he died four days later as a result of that assault.

The bar that Vincent and his friends—two white and one Asian—went to was a seedy strip joint where women dance by the dollar: one dollar buys a few gyrations right in front of the customer—the more dollars, the more gyrations. Vincent and his friends had gone to have a good time, bringing plenty of dollar bills. But the more time the dancers spent with the free-spending Asian American, the more provoked two other patrons became.

Ronald Ebens, a tall, heavy-set white man, then 43 years old, and his stepson Michael Nitz, a tall, slim 22-year-old, were seated across from Vincent. Dancers from the bar say that Ebens, perhaps resentful that an Asian man should be receiving so much attention while he was not, began calling Vincent racially offensive names, needling Vincent, suggesting that he wasn't a man, talking about what he could do with his mother. One dancer heard Ebens say explicitly, "It's because of you motherfuckers that we're out of work."

A good-natured Vincent uncharacteristically stood up to them as the epithets continued, and a scuffle ensued. Vincent and his friends left the club, followed closely behind by Ebens and Nitz. Outside, in the parking lot, Ebens went straight to the trunk of his car and pulled out a baseball bat. Vincent ran, chased by Ebens and Nitz. When the two larger men were outdistanced

by Vincent, they returned to the lot, where Vincent's two white friends and Jimmy Choi were standing—and they homed in on Jimmy, who had been uninvolved in their assaults against Vincent. But Jimmy also had an Asian face, and the two began chasing Jimmy, Ebens still wielding his bat. "I ran for my dear life," shudders Jimmy.

Intent on their purpose, Ebens and Nitz embarked on a search-and-destroy mission. For the next 20 minutes, they drove through streets and alleys searching for Vincent and Jimmy. They hired a third man to "help them get the chinks," as that man, Jimmy Perry, freely admits today. And they found the two Asian Americans waiting outside of a fast-food restaurant for a bus or a car or anything to get them away from their assailants. Ebens, Nitz and Perry crept up behind the two unsuspecting Asians, who noticed their attackers too late. Nitz grabbed Vincent in a bear hug, and his stepfather pummeled Vincent's legs, arms, body—and finally, sent four grand-slam swings into the back of Vincent's skull.

Two off-duty police officers stopped the carnage at gunpoint. "I ordered halt twice; if I hadn't stopped him, he would have gone for another 20 blows," recounts one officer. But for Vincent, it was over. Doctors operated on his battered head all night; surgeons said it looked like someone had beaten an animal. Vincent was placed on life support systems—his brain was already dead. Four days later, on June 23, 1982, his grieving fiancée and his stricken mother consented to turning off the life supports. Instead of attending Vincent's wedding, his friends went to his funeral.

What might have been just another senseless tragedy then turned into a carnival of bungling and sheer incompetence—the product of an insensitive, overburdened system where there is often no justice—just another case. And Vincent Chin was treated as just another case. No one went to the bar to find out what had initiated the murderous hunt. No one even thought to ask if race might have been a factor. A dough-faced detective (from what is reported to be one of the state's most inadequate police departments) says the killing was no big deal and that he is sure there was nothing racial about it—even though he acknowledges he made no effort to find out. Two defense lawyers managed to get the case moved from courtroom to courtroom within Wayne County, and found one judge to set the charges at second-degree murder, prompting another judge to comment on the record, "I am of the opinion that the defendants were undercharged. The elements of first-degree murder are here."

Finally the case went before Judge Charles Kaufman, who overlooked a probation officer's recommendations of incarceration and a psychiatric report warning that Ebens was an "extremely hostile and explosive individual . . . with a potential for uncontrollable hostility and explosive acting out." While the prosecutors didn't even bother to show up at the plea-bargained manslaughter sentencing, Kaufman ignored the previous courtroom testi-

mony and listened to the killers' lawyers say that Vincent provoked his own death while Ebens and Nitz were innocent bystanders. Judge Kaufman took ten minutes to consider the charges, and sentenced Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz each to \$3,000 in fines and \$780 in court costs, payable at \$125 per month with no interest, and three years' probation.

That was the total value placed on the life of 27-year-old Vincent Chin, whose only crime was having an Asian face at a time when anti-Japanese and anti-Asian sentiments were rampant.

In rendering his now-infamous sentence, Kaufman offered several rationalizations: "These aren't the kind of men you send to jail . . . We're talking here about a man who's held down a responsible job for 17 or 18 years, and his son is employed and is a part-time student. You don't make the punishment fit the crime, you make the punishment fit the criminal."

News of the killers' sentences and the judge's opinion drew an immediate response from a shocked and disbelieving Chinese community. A grief-stricken Mrs. Chin, friends and members of the community struggled to understand what had happened and to discover what might be done about the clearly flawed judicial decision. There were emotional meetings of hundreds of Asians and others who had never before come together, suddenly talking about the pain, humiliation and suffering that we had endured silently for generations. We knew that what happened to Vincent Chin endangered all of us, and we knew that we could no longer stand in silence.

March 31, 1983, stands out in the history of Asians in America, for it was the night that individuals and representatives of local and national Asian organizations came together in Michigan and recognized that our fate and indeed our lives depended on our willingness to work in cooperation and in coalition with one another. In the drafty hall of the Detroit Chinese Welfare Council,¹ there was a joining of liberals and conservatives, youths and seniors, scientists, businessmen, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and Koreans, Christians and Buddhists, Cantonese- and Mandarin-speakers, American-born and immigrants—all of us put aside the differences that kept us apart and agreed that night to form a new organization to protect our rights as Americans of Asian ancestry, and we named it "American Citizens for Justice."

In the ensuing days, weeks and months, the many volunteers of ACJ donated money, time, effort, and whatever else was needed to discover what caused this miscarriage of justice. We engaged an attorney to look into legal recourse. (Our small force of Asian American attorneys in the Detroit area could not support a sustained *pro bono* effort, unlike some larger com-

1. Affiliated with the long established Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and On Leong Merchants Association, the Detroit Chinese Welfare Council represented the interests of Chinatown to the city and at political functions. Vincent Chin was one of its younger members.

munities.) Obtaining court records and reconstructing the events of that tragic evening took much hard work and persistence in a system that seemed all too eager to cover up the mistakes made. The more established civil rights organizations of Detroit recognized our concerns and helped us open doors in an unwieldy bureaucracy. Bit by bit, we were able to reconstruct what happened to Vincent and what happened in the courts.

The more we learned about the case, the more evident it became that a grievous wrong had occurred. ACJ deliberately avoided making accusations of racism against the judge and did not call the killing a racial attack—until statements of additional eyewitnesses, who had never been questioned by police, prosecutors or anyone else from the criminal justice system, forced an inescapable conclusion: that the crime of violating Vincent Chin's civil rights on the basis of his race had taken place, and that it was time for a governmental body to review the evidence that this fledgling civil rights organization had uncovered. In May 1983, an FBI investigation was initiated by the Justice Department; in September, a grand jury probe was announced, and in November, 23 grand jurors returned indictments against Ebens and Nitz for the violation of Vincent Chin's civil rights.

During that long summer of 1983, as the news of what happened in Detroit spread throughout the U.S. and across the globe, Asians began to respond to what many had recognized long ago: the knowledge that the welfare and livelihood of each of us, regardless of national origin, depends on our ability to work together. Even our personal safety is at risk, subject to bigotry and scapegoating for economic or foreign policy problems since we "all look alike." Demonstrations and support activities took place in San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago, Toronto, New York, and a huge demonstration was held in Detroit. Mrs. Chin and ACJ were invited to address groups all over the country as new organizations formed in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago. We were able to bring our concerns about anti-Asian sentiments to the nation for the first time, whereas previously Asians were usually featured as the "national threat" or the "national super-minority." Mrs. Chin and ACJ representatives appeared on national television—all three news networks, *The Donahue Show*, NBC's *First Camera*, and local TV documentaries in Detroit—and Sacramento ACJ addressed the founding meeting of the Democratic Party's Asian Pacific American Caucus. In Japan, coverage by newspapers and TV prompted Japanese to question visiting American businessmen and government officials who were soliciting Asian business whether Asians are safe in the U.S. and whether Asians can get equal treatment here. The example of cooperative effort set by the Detroit groups was taken up nationally by the Japanese American Citizens League, the Organization of Chinese Americans, and the National Chinese Welfare Association, among others.

While many minority and civil rights groups greeted the Asian American

presence in the civil rights arena as a long overdue event, others instead questioned the right of Asians to join the civil rights coalition. ACJ representatives were at times treated to tedious and absurd arguments that Asians are not truly a minority in America, and to the equally absurd question of whether racial slurs make a racial incident. Indeed ACJ was advised by some constitutional lawyers that Asians are not protected under the federal civil rights statutes and that it would be ill advised to consider a civil rights violation. Some legal organizations wrote tortuous essays on the dangers of double jeopardy for the killers—often a specter in civil rights crimes—while other liberal legal groups were either strangely and unusually silent or eager to jump to fellow liberal Kaufman's defense. Conservatives, meanwhile, were quick to jump on the case as a law-and-order issue, but completely ignored its racial aspects. Mostly, though, the response of legal professionals was one of alarming indifference to injustice, which, they say, happens all the time. Partly, it seems, because of their total unwillingness to do anything about it.

There were the usual difficulties encountered when organizations learn to work with one another. Still, support for the efforts of the ACJ and the growing Asian American civil rights network continues. We are living in a depressed economic period that makes it all too easy and convenient to direct frustrations and anger at us. What happened to Vincent Chin was not an aberration or an isolated quirk of fate. The list of assaults and killings of Asians since the Chin case, maintained through an informal network, continues to grow:²

- A 17-year-old Vietnamese student was stabbed to death in his Davis, Calif., high school after weeks of racial harassment by a group calling itself the "White Student Union."
- A gun was pulled on a Chinese American telecommunications marketing professional working in Texas.
- A Vietnamese man was stabbed to death in Dorchester, Mass., reportedly in a racial incident.
- A Buddhist temple in Greenview, Mass., was blown up by Vietnam War veterans who said they wanted to get even for what happened to them in Vietnam, even though the temple has no Asian members.
- A Vietnamese family was forced from its farm in West Virginia after several cross-burnings.
- The words "Nips Go Home" were spray painted on the store of a Korean family in Davis, Calif.

2. The National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, an organization of legal and civil rights organizations formed in 1993 as a result of the Vincent Chin case, is committed to documenting, monitoring, and educating the public about hate violence. Its *Audit of Violence against Asian Pacific Americans* in 2001, the year of the 9/11 terrorist attack, reported 507 incidents of anti-Asian violence.

- The word "Chink" appeared on the cover of *National Review* magazine, a conservative publication. Its editors say they didn't think it would be offensive.
- A 19-year-old pregnant Chinese woman was decapitated by a train when she was pushed in front of it at a New York subway stop by a man whose lawyer says the murderer was "overcome by a fear of Asians."
- A Chinese graduate student, also in Davis, was stabbed to death and police have not ruled out a racial motivation in his killing.
- Every day of the week, countless Asian Americans are insulted, intimidated, threatened, cursed at and told to "go back home" by total strangers, for no reason other than because we look Asian. How many of these insults will turn into senseless racist murders?

The flurry of Asian American activism throughout the country that followed the shocking sentence by Kaufman may seem strange to some observers, but it is a natural result of two centuries of oppression and the final straw for many who've suffered a lifetime of indignities. For many of us, the killing of Vincent Chin and the sentences of probation for his murderers shattered the illusion that Asians are being treated as equals of other Americans. Instead we learned that little has changed: in 1873 a rancher could kill his Chinese servant and be fined \$20; in 1982 two men could beat a Chinese American to death and be fined \$3,000. No matter how long we stay in this country, and no matter how "accent-free" our children learn to speak English, we are still regarded as foreigners, and as "foreigners" we are suspect as an enemy from overseas.

For us, the price of personal safety in the U.S. is eternal vigilance and involvement. While we, like other Americans, cherish our heritages, we cannot afford the luxury of being silent or isolated from other groups. Our ability to demand the protection of our constitutional rights depends on our willingness to work together and maintain the fragile network that has been woven as a result of the Vincent Chin tragedy. It is to the credit of thousands of Asian Americans who sacrificed their time, money and effort to make sure we did not turn our backs on this life-threatening issue. In doing so, we have written another page in our history. But until the day groups like ACJ can disband because their work is done, we all still have much to do, to try to ensure there will be no more Vincent Chin cases.

SOURCE: *Bridge* 9, no. 2 (1984): 18-23.

A LETTER FROM LILY CHIN (1983)

Lily Chin was the moral backbone behind ACJ's national crusade for justice. A Chinese immigrant woman of great courage and fortitude, she never gave up in her quest



Lily Chin speaking at a rally for Vincent Chin, with Jesse Jackson (left of podium) and Helen Zia (right of podium) in attendance. (Courtesy of Renee Tajima-Pena)

for justice and the hope that no other mother would ever have to lose a child to hate and prejudice again. Her presence and active participation in the national campaign helped to galvanize broad-base support for the first Asian American civil rights case against hate crime. In 1983, after Judge Charles Kaufman sentenced Ebens and Nitz each to \$3,000 in fines and three years' probation for the killing of Vincent Chin, Lily Chin wrote the following letter in Chinese to the Detroit Chinese Welfare Council:

I, King Fong Yu (wife of Bing Heng Chin), grieve my son, Vincent Chin, who was brutally beaten to death by two assailants with a baseball bat. The two killers were apprehended by police and prosecuted in court. During the court proceedings, I, because I am widowed and poor, with no money in my bed, could not retain legal counsel to press the case for my deceased son. As a result, the murderers' attorney had the say. Yesterday, I read in the newspaper, the sentence was only a fine and probation; and the killers were set free. There was also no compensation for the victim's family. This is injustice to the gross extreme. My son's blood had been shed, how unjust can it be? I grieve in my heart and shed tears in blood. Yes, my son cannot be brought back; and I can only wait to die. It is just that my deceased son, Vincent Chin, was a member of your council. I, therefore, plead to you. Please help me. Please let the Chinese American community know, so they can help me raise funds and hire legal counsel to appeal. You must put the killers in prison so

my son can rest his soul; and my grief vindicated. This old woman will be forever grateful.

I, King Fong Yu, respectfully submit this letter of appeal.
March 18, 1983

SOURCE: Courtesy of Helen Zia.

In 1984, the U.S. District Court sentenced Ebens to twenty-five years in jail for violating Chin's civil rights and acquitted Nitz. But the victory was short-lived. Ebens's attorney succeeded in appealing the decision on a technicality and getting a retrial in the conservative city of Cincinnati, Ohio, where the jury returned a verdict of not guilty on May 1, 1987. Ebens was acquitted of all charges. Although Vincent Chin's mother, Lily Chin, later won a \$1.5 million civil suit against Ebens and Nitz for the loss of Vincent's life, no money was ever paid; nor did Ebens or Nitz ever serve a day in jail for the murder of Vincent Chin. Grief-torn and bitter over her son's murder and the miscarriage of justice, Lily Chin moved back to China to live out the remainder of her days. She returned to Detroit after a long illness and died on June 9, 2002, at the age of eighty-two.

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A Journey of Bitterness (1999)

Lily Wang

In 1989, Lily Wang (pseudonym) was one of 50,000 Chinese that year to be smuggled into the United States from the Fuzhou area in southeast China. In the next decade, approximately 150,000 others would follow her, almost all seeking better economic opportunities in New York City. Lacking a legitimate way to immigrate to the United States as sponsored relatives or skilled and technical workers, many Fuzhouese fell prey to a human smuggling syndicate that profited handsomely in arranging for their clandestine passage into the United States. More often than not, the journey proved difficult and dangerous, forcing immigrants to risk their lives, endure physical discomforts and abuse, and incur enormous debts before ever reaching their destination. Then began the difficult task of toiling for years as undocumented workers in the underground economy—at construction sites, restaurants, garment shops, and factories—in order to pay off their smuggling fees, estimated to be \$30,000 in the early 1990s.

*The following story by Lily Wang came out of a survey of three hundred Chinese illegals in New York City conducted by criminologist Ko-lin Chin for his book *Smuggled Chinese: Clandestine Immigration to the United States*. The majority of his subjects were men, and although many of them had harrowing stories to tell about their hazardous journey and harsh lives in America, in some ways, as shown by Wang's story, it was worse for the women.*

I left China mainly for non-financial reasons. When I was in China, I met an overseas man in a barbershop where I was working, and we developed a very close relationship. Later, he went back to America. When he was about to leave, he promised he would return in a year to marry me and bring me to America. However, I did not hear from him again. I believed he looked down on me. Later, through a flashy guy who came frequently to my hair salon to get his hair done, I made contact with a snakehead [human smuggler] from Tingjiang. I heard say that he was really cool and very good at what he was doing.