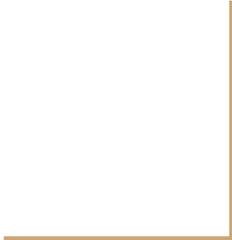




# The Poetics of Asian American Culture

Yeena Yoon



# The Asian American Movement (AAM)



Activist at the first Asian American anti-war rally in Los Angeles in 1970



1968 anti-war rally: Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) protest at UC Berkeley

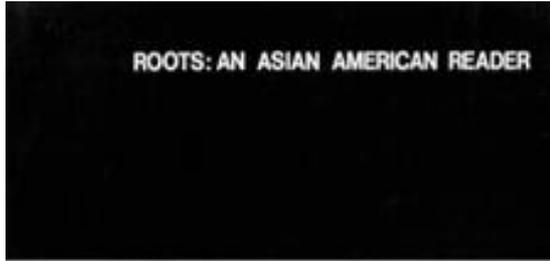
# Asian Americans & Black Power



1969: Oakland high school students at Black Panther Party funeral rally for Bobby Hutton

- Black Panther Party as model for an Asian American identity in 1970s
- Racial consciousness
- History of Asians in America
- Self determination and rejection of assimilation

# Central Role of Poetry



Anthology  
published in  
1971; contains  
over 20 pages of  
poetry

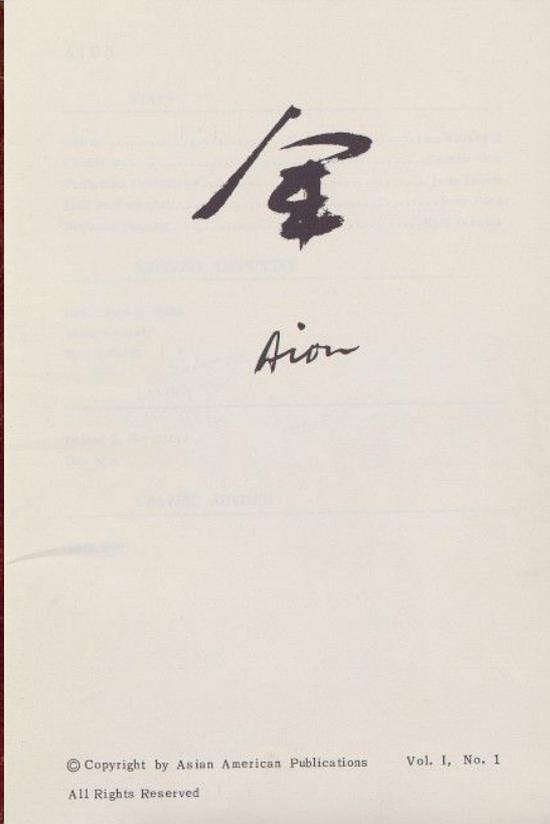
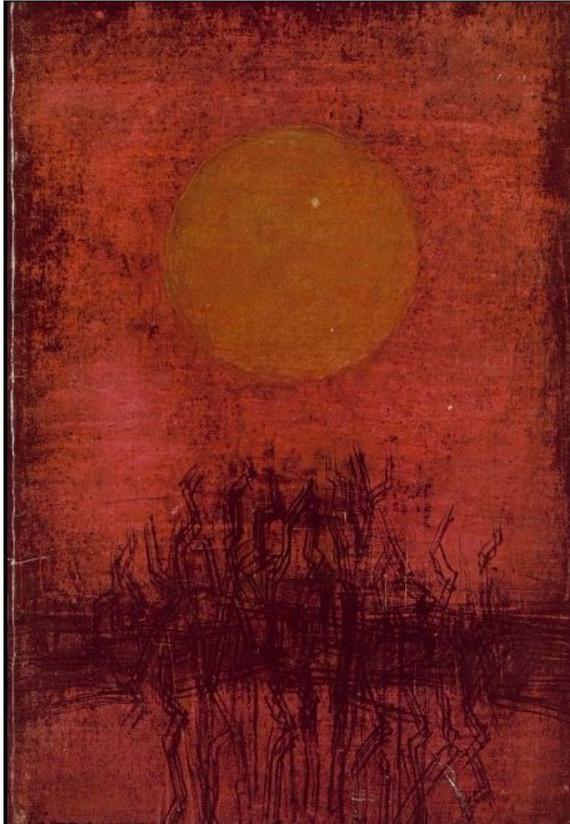
*Activist*

*Documentary*

Monthly  
newspaper-  
magazine;  
ran from  
1969 - 1974



# Aion



- Widely regarded as first Asian American literary magazine
- Two published issues: Spring 1970, Fall 1971
- Based in San Francisco
- Editor-in-Chief: Janice Mirikitani

## EDITORIAL

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The dominant white society in America, by perpetuating its racist values, has insidiously created a cycle of self-hate between and within ethnic groups.

As Asian Americans, we have been conditioned by stereotypes imposed upon us by the white middle class and have internalized the consequent insecurity and confusion. Dependency upon these values and standards has caused an absence of self-knowledge and its complementary fear and paralysis.

Our continued complacency within this racist society will bring about our cultural destruction. We must join the international movement to end the exploitation of all Third World peoples and work to create our own revolutionary culture in this country.

We hope that **AION** will provide a forum for Asian American self-definition and expression on issues relevant to problems and needs of our communities.

-The AION Staff-

Form

- Boss mops making heads look explosively enlarged / walking 4 abreast down on grant avenue / "outa the way, fucken' tourists"
- A head that is an explosion to a head slicked down with black straight hair...
- "Can't you people read English? The sign's over there." / Who is 'YOU PEOPLE'?
- A small dark slit in the yellow thin-boarded walls defines the gig

## WE AIN'T GOT CLASS

by H. Wong

Paper-thin dark blue or black jackets over white undershirts

Big Bens or blue-jeans slightly wider at the ankle

Boss mops making heads look explosively enlarged

walking 4 abreast down on grant avenue

"outa the way, fucken' tourists".

The wind cutting through the dark-clad bodies of four thin, emaciated dudes

The wind on its way to being sucked into a mammoth hole that the "other world" knows to be the Broadway Tunnel.

The wind as a ghost whose presence cuts deeply  
The Man is a ghost with hard knuckles and nicotine stains.

Yellow lights on balsa boarded walls is the lobby of the Tropicoro's Young Person's Nightclub.

"How much is the gig, man?"

A head that is an enlarged explosion to a head slicked down with black straight hair; Paper-thin dark-blue or black jackets to striped buttoned down collar and prescription glasses (Hell, my eyes are just as fuckedupedly myopic as that cat's).

"Can't you people read English? The sign's over there."

Who is "YOU PEOPLE"?

A small dark slit in the yellow thin-boarded walls defines the gig.

- Sometimes, even the President of the United States / sits and groans on the toilet seat, shitting runny greenish black diarrhea / smelling up the White house toilet. / he's got Asian flu / and blames the Goddamned Asians / because we started it all

Sometimes, even the President of the United States  
sits and groans on the toilet seat,  
shitting runny greenish black diarrhea  
smelling up the White house toilet.  
he's got Asian flu  
and blames the Goddamned Asians  
because we started it all

I imagine, too, that even the President of the supreme Soviet  
lies in bed, twitching on affairs of state;  
twitching, jerking, stroking, grunting  
and wham!  
shot on the sheets  
yellow with sperm  
and lies again  
completed and satisfied  
for the 17th time this week.

And I wonder what Ronald Reagan has to say about eating out  
and getting blow jobs up the ass  
from assorted males and females  
because I've heard that those hollywood parties are a gas  
stinking with liquor and sperm in orgies  
because his wife was no virgin  
and he eagerly eats her cunt each night

and he eagerly eats her cunt each night  
unless he's too old to sock it to her  
or turned too prude to function  
like a normal human being.

## LAMENTA: 423

BY MYUNG MI KIM

“peacekeeping troops”  
“tanks beneath the windows”

The inside of someone else’s dwelling visible — a table and some chairs.

You start to count one, two, three, four . . . until the explosion is near your neighborhood.

You can guess the position of mortar by this counting and try to find a safe place.

If the windows are gone, weak plastic is taped up but the strong wind comes and we stay awake.

In this South Cholla Province where all vehicles had been confiscated, we resorted to walking, the method of travel of the Yi Dynasty. We reverted back 300 years.

*Kwangju, 1980*

It’s the same to be in the house, at the shelter or anywhere. There is no safe place. When we have no electricity, we are sitting in the dark and we know what life looked like before Christ.

*Sarajevo, 1992*

# On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous

BY OCEAN VUONG

*i*

Tell me it was for the hunger  
& nothing less. For hunger is to give  
the body what it knows

it cannot keep. That this amber light  
whittled down by another war  
is all that pins my hand

to your chest.

*i*

You, drowning  
    between my arms —  
stay.

You, pushing your body  
    into the river  
only to be left  
    with yourself —  
stay.

*i*

I'll tell you how we're wrong enough to be forgiven. How one night, after  
backhanding  
mother, then taking a chainsaw to the kitchen table, my father went to kneel  
in the bathroom until we heard his muffled cries through the walls.  
And so I learned that a man, in climax, was the closest thing  
to surrender.

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