



# 行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫成果報告

## 國科會專題研究計畫成果報告撰寫格式說明

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透視藝術經驗：趙健秀私人著作中創作  
影響力演變之記錄研究

NSIGHTS INTO THE ARTISTIC  
EXPERIENCE

Recording the Shifting Creative  
Influences as Revealed in the Private  
Writings of Frank Chin

### 摘要

本計劃旨在利用著名華裔美國劇作家、小說家兼散文家趙健秀先生，提供本研究者閱讀其私人日記之機緣，將之電子化紀錄，並加以研究。本計劃之重點，在探究影響趙先生社會與政治觀點作戲劇性轉變的外在因素。三十年前趙先生執亞裔美國文學運動之牛耳時，曾深信與亞洲傳統保持密切關係之亞裔美國人，具有文化道德上之優勢。這些亞裔美國人昔日在反亞洲榮耀之社會中，曾是力保亞洲光榮之叱吒風雲人物。趙先生對於新移民之亞裔美國人，一窩蜂地接受歐美文化唯恐不及多所批評。趙先生在其文章裡反駁北京共產黨政府，在文化大革命時消滅中國古典文學著作中所揭櫫的傳統英雄價值。相反地，趙

先生雖反共產黨，卻對在臺灣的國民黨政權亦多所批判。他對蔣介石先生全盤接收基督教與西方之價值，而與中國英雄之傳統價值格格不入，亦不敢同。趙先生以為中國大陸與臺灣，均無法避免其人民，不染有歐美文化中種族思想的陰險缺陷。然而，三十年後，趙先生充滿憤世嫉俗之看法，不再視在美國出生的亞洲人為征服北美種族主義勢力之唯一希望。而轉向新移民之亞裔美國人，視之為亞洲榮耀之來源，足以擊敗歐美種族主義的禁錮。如此一來更鼓舞趙先生之對抗種族主義的思想。趙先生目前正投入中國古典文學著作中所揭櫫的傳統英雄價值之研究，也愈來愈投入大眾媒體與英語教學中所呈現的文化帝國主義之探討。本計劃將探究受趙先生之邀所提供之私人日記，包括個人通信、以及自一九六〇年代中葉至今之未出版的手稿。本計劃預期將顯現激發趙先生對新移民之亞裔美國人，保有亞洲文化榮耀的堅定信念之歷史、社會政治、與個人之影響力。此文化光榮傳統，正是一股反對主控美國文化種族主義思想之具有權威的聲浪。

## ABSTRACT

This project took advantage of an opportunity offered to this researcher to electronically document and study the private journals of renowned Asian American dramatist, novelist and essayist Frank Chin. The ultimate research goal of this work was to track the external influences in the author's life that led to a relatively dramatic shift in his sociopolitical worldview. When he was at the forefront in the Asian American literary movement more than 30 years ago, Chin expressed a strong belief in the cultural and moral superiority of the American-born Asian who maintained a close connection to the cultural origins of his heritage. These Asian Americans would be at the vanguard of the fight for respect in a society that he saw was historically committed to the eradication of Asian pride. Chin was especially critical of what he saw as an overwhelming tendency of newly arrived immigrant Asians to eagerly adopt the racist value systems of the dominant Euro-American culture. In his essays Chin attacked the Communist leadership in Beijing for their role in the Cultural Revolution and the attempt to eradicate traditional Chinese cultural heroic values as espoused

in literary masterpieces of imperial China. Although a staunch anti-Communist, Chin was equally harsh in his opinion of the Nationalist leadership that had been established in Taiwan, berating the presidency of Chiang Kai-shek for the wholesale dissemination of Christian and Western values that Chin saw as being at odds with the values of the heroic tradition. Neither of these nations was capable of producing citizens who were invulnerable to the insidious effects of Euro-American racist thinking, Chin believed. Three decades later, however, the author appears to have been deeply infected with a cynicism that has robbed him of his faith in the American-born Asian as the sole hope of conquering the power of racism in North America. Instead, Chin now looks to the new Asian immigrants as the purveyors of Asian pride that can defeat the power of Euro-American racist stereotyping. This has further encouraged Chin to take his fight against white racist thinking to the Asian homefront. He is now involved in the study of the heroic tradition in Chinese literary masterpieces, and is increasingly involved in issues connected to discussions of cultural imperialism as it is purveyed through the international mass media and the teaching of the English language. This project will

examine, at the invitation of the author, Chin's private journals, which include personal correspondence and unpublished manuscripts from the mid-Sixties to the present. It is hoped that this undertaking will reveal the various historical, sociopolitical and personal influences that encouraged the author toward his more positive belief in the ability of the modern immigrant to maintain a cultural pride that can act as an authoritative voice against the racist assumptions of the dominant culture of the United States.

### Key Words

Asian American Literature  
Frank Chin  
China  
Diasporic Communities  
Electronic Mediation  
Heroic Tradition  
Maxine Hong Kingston  
Postmodernism  
Private Writings  
Racism  
Simulacra  
Taiwan

透視藝術經驗：趙健秀私人著作中創作影響力演變之紀錄研究

### Background and Purpose

In a writing career spanning over four decades and just as many genres, Frank Chin has demonstrated an unflinching commitment to combating racism and struggling for the empowerment of Asian America. As a writer and activist Chin has attempted to disseminate his vision of magnificence and dignity for Chinese America, although the delivery of this message has more often than not been marred by an underlying cynicism born of the author's sense of exasperation and loneliness in fighting what seems at times to be a losing battle.

This research project offers a rare opportunity to see the private and unpublished thoughts, correspondence and writings of the author, providing a "personal" glimpse at his grand vision for Chinese America and recording the progress of how these ideas developed from Chin's young adulthood to his mature years. This work looks at the personal side of the author's development of his views on the workings of the racist system as it affects the psychological and spiritual functioning of Chinese America.

Chin's has an optimistic vision for the integrity and independence of the Asian American community, artist and individual. It was expected that an analysis of the

author's private journals would uncover a development, a progression, of the author's ideas leading up to his notable mix of optimism and cynicism, a mix that is uniquely characteristic of Chin's work and which separates his fiction from that of other Chinese American artists and casts him in the shadow of the postmodern.

### Results of the Research

At the heart of Chin's worldview is the belief that all Chinese are, both in North America and in the Chinese heartland, under threat of cultural extinction. This belief demonstrates the author's assertion that an individual or racial identity is built not only upon one's actual biologically determined racial characteristics, but upon the belief systems controlling that person's imagination as well—or what Chin refers to as “culture.” When Chin speaks of the “extinction” of Chinese, most typically in terms of a war against Chinese, he is referring not to the Chinese body, but to what he sees as a core cultural element that is basic to any definition of “Chineseness.” For Chin, identity is a social construct.

Although Chin's contribution to the discussion deserves serious consideration as a topic of academic and social interest, Chin's own brusque and highly charged delivery

style has contributed in stifling discussion by turning intellectual debate into personal quarrel. An examination of his private writings reveals that his seemingly acerbic approach arises from his heartfelt commitment to eradicating all forms of race-based bigotry, and his sense of racism as an insidious evil that diseases the core of both the individual and the community. Chin's sincere commitment to fighting the social malignancy of racism, regardless of his “in-your-face” style, demands from the global academic community a fair and unemotional examination of his far-reaching views on racism and his suggestions on trouncing the multivariate effects of racism.

Chin's vehemence in fighting the psychological effects of racism is revealed, according to his journals, as springing directly from his sense of having been a victim of this same racist phenomenon. In one mention in a personal letter, for example, Chin calls himself a white man on the inside. This is the epitome of his theory of “racist love,” the belief that Asians are accepted by white America only insofar as they maintain the behaviors and values imposed upon them by white society. That Chin should be so violently angered by even the mention of “racist love” or “the stereotype” is understandable given the revelation

that he was faced with the same feelings of "being white" while simultaneously, as a college student, facing white racism from his landlord and a university dean of housing.

Perhaps the realization that he cannot ever be accepted as "white" led Chin toward the public attitude that so many of his critics deride. Chin became very defensive to the point of rudeness. An example of this can be found in a letter addressed to the IRS, which begins with a profanity rather than a traditional salutation and a demand from the IRS for a refund.

Two other suggestions of the development of the modern mind of Chin are also apparent in the journals. One is the simple fact that Chin is a product of his generation. As a young adult he lived through the beginning of the Sixties, a period of headstrong and often confrontational idealism. Like many young men in the Sixties, Chin experimented with various liberties, including light drug use and a relaxed attitude toward sexuality. Still, he married young and the resulting pain resulting from the eventual failure of this marriage is evident in many pages of private correspondence. At one point Chin writes, "It hurts too much to talk about it, so I'll have to write it out in fiction."

It is possible, then, that Chin's confrontational attitude toward racism and his overall cynicism are linked to his having matured in the heyday of the Sixties. He was infected with the era's idealism, and soured by the realities of human relationships and the vision of how dreams can fail.

A second possible source for the author's attitude and ideology is his experience with the news media. The exposure to television broadcast instilled him, possibly, with an element of showmanship. Included in the journal are letters written by the author to Frank Ching of the *New York Times*. The two men had an harsh exchange of views in print regarding the question of Asian American identity vis a vis the American-born and the immigrant. A look at Chin's letters shows that a good deal of the "animosity" was purposely staged by both writers, while the unpublished correspondence suggests they shared a greater degree of personal friendliness. This supports the idea that much of Chin's aggressive public attitude is mere showmanship, a shrewd awareness of what can catch the eye of a readership and then have an influence upon the way people think.

Chin's awareness of an audience was shaped through his experience in the newsroom of a television station, where towards the end of his

employment he strove furiously to defend his contribution to the station. This includes arguing his role as a script writer on several documentaries and his submission of ideas for documentaries and television dramas that went unpublished.

While this is only the tip of the iceberg, these abovementioned examples point out to the value of reading the mature author's ideas through the lens of his private life as revealed in his personal journals.

#### Academic and Practical Value

For researchers interested in the work of Frank Chin, possession of the author's private writings is invaluable, as many of his unpublished dramas are in these pages—including a television script for a comedy about a tribe of Indians, a film script for a zombie horror film, and two plays that were performed in public but never put into print.

These texts not only provide a body of works that in themselves can be examined as part of the writer's full body of work, but they also serve to explain the sources of many of the author's ideas that found their way into his primary novel, *Gunga Din Highway*.

For example, most academics are unaware that Chin held dreams of achieving financial success when he

was hired to write the film script for the popular "Return of the Living Dead" series. His script, although filled with plenty of gore and ghoulish happenings, was never used, unlike the success faced by the author's fictional protagonist Ulysses Kwan who achieves economic security through a series of zombie films and novels.

At the very practical level, the transference of the journals into a CD-ROM format ensures greater longevity. To that degree this was a project of preservation. A complete copy of the CDs is to be sent to the author and, upon his request, to UCLA for safekeeping. This researcher is currently requesting, albeit unsuccessfully, that a copy be released to Taiwan's prestigious Academia Sinica as well.

#### Publications Possibilities

This researcher was originally optimistic that reference to the journal would be a cornerstone of his current dissertation project. Beyond that, however, there are—as mentioned above—numerous possibilities insofar as published articles is concerned.

The journals are the only source of Chin's unpublished works, including two television scripts, one film script, and four stage pieces—*Gee Pop*, *The Comedian*, *Shakespeare in Chinatown* and *Blood*. Unfortunately, these are largely

unfinished works scattered in bits and pieces throughout the journals. Still, they are available for study.

The journals are also valuable for future biographical writing, offering an insight into the mind of the maturing artist. The majority of the 30,000 pages are private correspondence, although much of this is little more than scheduling arrangements and bookings.

Other pages, however, are private ponderings, attempts at poems, and even ink drawings. It is, to some degree, almost painful to read these private thoughts.

Finally, as noted in the earlier sections of this report, the journal is a rich source of information regarding Chin's theories on racism and Chinese American identity formation. Clarification and confirmation can be found throughout, and the academic researcher may trace the developmental history of Chin's ideas using documents that, when written, were never intended to be used in a public forum.

Of course, there is the heart of the problem. Reference or quotation cannot be made without first obtaining the author's approval, as these are still the private property of the writer. However, the author is usually not reluctant to share his early writing as if it were written by a different person—indeed he often displays the view that as he

has changed and matured, there is no need to be ashamed of his early work since this was written by a different man as well. This is a phenomenon that literary theorists would find quite fascinating.

### Overall Evaluation

In supporting this project, the National Science Council has taken part in a very valuable assignment. As a simple act of preservation, the photocopying and digitizing of these many volumes of Chin's private writing is a service that future researchers will be forever grateful for.

Future biographers and historians of Asian America will likewise find these journals of great value, as they reveal the private life—the daily trials both large and small, trivial and traumatic—of a man who has hitherto preferred to keep his private self separate from his public self.

That it is a Taiwanese governmental agency that sponsored this project is a source of great pride for the national academic community.

### Chin's Primary Texts

What follows is a list of the primary texts, not including Chin's collection of award-winning theater pieces, published by Frank Chin. This is a collection of essays, a collection of short stories, and two



novels.

The unpublished works mentioned in this report are supplementary to these published texts.

Chan, Jeffery Paul, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong. Introduction.

*The Big AIIIEEEEE!*. Eds. Chan, Jeffrey, et. al. New York: Meridian, 1991. xi-xvi.

Chin, Frank. *Bulletproof Buddhists and Other Essays*. Intersections: Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies. Los Angeles: U of Hawai'i P and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1998.

---. *Donald Duk*. Minneapolis: Coffee House P, 1991.

---. *Gunga Din Highway*. Minneapolis: Coffee House P, 1994.

---. *The Chinaman Pacific & Frisco R. R. Co. : Eight Short Stories*. Minneapolis: Coffee House P, 1988.