



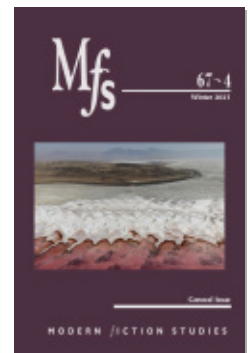
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*Tonal Intelligence: The Aesthetics of Asian Inscrutability
During the Long Cold War* by Sunny Xiang (review)

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In his presidential speech delivered in 1953, Dwight Eisenhower declared a “total war” (3). After the two world wars, themselves total wars that mobilized all national resources, he advanced a cold war version of total war, far expanding the domain of totality. Eisenhower defined total war as “a new kind of war” (4) that called for “the dedication of the energies, the resources, and the imaginations of all peaceful nations.” Nothing is left untouched by this new totality; even peace and our imaginations must serve as munition of permanent warfare. Under this new totalized state of warfare, US foreign policy came to be governed by an iconic cold war strategic technology: intelligence. Despite the assumed totality of surveillance, however, its scrutinizing gaze was not uniformly cast; cold war intelligence was, as Xiang terms it, “*racial intelligence*” (7): “While to most Americans the Soviet symbolized ‘the red scare’ and the Negro ‘the race problem,’ the Oriental exemplified the blending of two kinds of color, one hidden in the heart and the other worn on the skin.” In contrast to distinct enemies, in Americans’ eyes cold war Asia—the two Chinas, Koreas, and Vietnams—loomed as an ambiguous theater of total war, “where the dominant temperament of U.S. foreign policy was suspicion” (6). With this framework, Xiang turns to works produced by Asians because her primal concern is not how Americans scrutinize Asians but how Asian targets produce, affect, and reshape the American way of scrutiny. As “racial and ideological unknowns” (7), Asians constitute a critical core of cold war America’s suspicious thinking. Following Heonik Kwon’s proposal, Xiang’s book employs the uncapitalized cold war, signaling that her scholarship is a part of collective interventions to triangulate the bipolarity of the Cold War.

Before jumping into case studies, Xiang devotes chapter 1 to explicating her choice of tone as an analytical focus. She foregrounds its polyvalence, noting the racial and aesthetic connotations embedded in the term. When evoked as an indicator of race, such as skin color or speech accent, tone operates as the “literal and indexical” (40) sign that “makes difference perceptible.” The tone of skin—an implication of nonwhiteness—is an empirical determinant of racial identity. By juxtaposing this pseudo-evidential usage to the other, much fuzzier aesthetic meaning of tone, Xiang draws out “a faithless relationship between surface phenomena and inner truths” (38). This ambiguity, though, finds its expression not only in Asian liter-

ary (aesthetic) texts but also in intelligence reports, as she defines the aesthetic as “a general perceptual mode attentive to rhetorical, stylistic, sensory, and affective details” (41). At its broadest, Xiang’s study endeavors to rework ways of reading and knowing that remain defined by the capitalized Cold War framework by means of exploring the entire archive of tonal intelligence.

In juxtaposing early cold war archives and relatively recent fictional works, each chapter aims to unsettle the assumed periodization of the Cold War, which presupposes a clear-cut transition “from cold war secrecy to post-cold war disclosure” (50). Chapter 2 contrasts Japanese emperor Hirohito’s postwar “tour” (59) and Kazuo Ishiguro’s second novel. Chapter 3 considers the ways two Korean Americans, Christian educator Induk Pahk and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, cope with the period that Lisa Yoneyama terms “transwar” (58), when the interimperial transition from Japanese colonialism to American militarism occurred. While “a tone of excessive haste” (21) in Pahk’s memoirs reflects an enforced adaptation to the rapid transwar shift, Cha’s later works, through their slowness, capture the contradictions of late capitalism and colonialism that became palpable after the 1960s. Chapter 4 brings together two Korean War Prisoner of War documents, Ha Jin’s memoir-novel *War Trash* (2005) and Wang Tsun-ming’s 1954 interrogation-autobiography. In situating these two Chinese (American) anticommunists’ first-person accounts within the context of the Korean War as psychological warfare, Xiang challenges the American characterization of China as a “brainwashing” (22) communist or authoritarian state. Chapter 5 focuses on Vietnamese refugees within the American empire, examining CIA officer Edward Landsdale’s account of the Philippine medical humanitarian group Operation Brotherhood in the 1950s, and the 1989 documentary *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* by Trinh T. Minh-ha. While both mobilize “informal tones of intimacy” (24)—the former through the trope of “brother” and the latter through interview as a discursive form—Trinh’s work goes on to critically undermine its own methodology, seeking to imagine an alternative collectivity. In the coda, Xiang contributes to the discussion of nonidentity-based political solidarity by proposing the idea of “solidarities without a solid” (259), that is, a solidarity emerging through difference that “manifests not as a trait but as a tone.”

As an account of American hot wars throughout Asia, *Tonal Intelligence* merits particular attention in acknowledging Japan, rather than Korea, as the starting point of the long cold war. In contrasting cold war and post-cold war Japan, chapter 2 reveals how “rumor cir-

culatation evidences the desire for and the impossibility of stabilizing a distinct or typical racial subject" (95). While the US utilized Japan to advertise its capacity to democratize a former militarist state, it strained to revive Japanese wartime crimes during the trade war in the 1980s. Since the Pearl Harbor attack, this cold war ally of the US has long represented an "exceptional" (56) specimen of Asian inscrutability, vacillating between enemy and friend. In this context, Xiang juxtaposes the absolved emperor Hirohito with Japanese-born British novelist Ishiguro's characters. Through his postwar "tours" (94) across Japan, Hirohito, no longer divine but an awkward human being, came to constitute "a passive vessel through which rumors could pass," a feeble, harmless figure who seemed incapable of commanding military force. Examining Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), Xiang illustrates how the protagonist Masuji Ono, who bears a shameful past—a wartime commitment to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities—embodies and encapsulates the shift from Japanese cold war innocence to post-cold war criminal. In Ishiguro's works, what Xiang calls "post-Fordist" (85) characterization makes characters interchangeable and redundant; in place of characters, rumors prevail. With this "Japan Decade" (95) version of self-negation, Ishiguro refuses to play a racial informant's role. "By employing rumors as a representational technique and characterological principle" (93), Xiang argues, "Ishiguro's novels disable our reliance on anthropomorphic coherence as the baseline for locating the presence of race."

Along with other Asian Americanists' literary studies, such as works by Jodi Kim, Lisa Yoneyama, Viet Thang Nguyen, Josephine Nock-Hee Park, and Daniel Kim, Sunny Xiang's *Tonal Intelligence* brings a refreshing perspective to reimagining how the Cold War shaped racial discourse. Though I sometimes found her discussion too driven or distracted by keywords that she touts in ways that can obscure her main argument, Xiang's first book casts new critical light on Cold War studies, expanding its archival limits. Her frameworks of tone and Asian inscrutability also suggest ways to understand the present anti-Asian sentiment, as well as all other racial hate, as historically constructed and politically manipulated—as an affect that can be discursively unsettled and rechanneled. To build "a solidarity without a solid" (259)—connections that are "*not* organized by a delineated identity" (259-60)—we need to hearken to racial tones that resonate across color lines.

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