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Within and Beyond: Indie Magazines and the Asian Diasporic Subject

Mike Fu

As a resident of New York City during my twenties and early thirties, I lived through a cascade of cultural eras that exemplified America's complex and oftentimes contradictory character. Certain palpable shifts coincided with major political events: my time in the city was bookended by the election of Barack Obama as president in 2008 and Donald Trump's last year in office in 2020. Other changes were more subtle or cumulative in nature, broader trends that took shape around me as I grew into my adult identity and found footing within various communities. Millennials and Generation Z began to stake positions in public discourse with their idiosyncratic worldviews and economic or political grievances, all while Internet 2.0 developed in step with the proliferation of smartphones and the rise of social media. Amidst this wholesale reshaping of human experience by technology, I started to become aware of the independent magazine as a site of representational discourse and collective identity formation, especially for the Asian American community.¹

Banana appeared on my social radar sometime in the mid-2010s, and by the end of the decade there seemed to be a veritable deluge of other such platforms: *Burdock*, *FAR-NEAR*, and *Slant'd*, just to name a few physically based in New York. Of course, this spate of publications was not breaking completely new ground, per se; a number of Asian American indie magazines, such as *Giant Robot*, *Hyphen*, and *Yolk*, enjoyed their heyday in the 1990s and early 2000s.² But this new wave of cultural platforms seemed to speak to, for, and of younger generations of the Asian diaspora. Moreover, I became interested in three particular characteristics of recent magazines: their emphasis on grassroots cultural production across an array of creative fields; the spaces for online and offline networking and community-building they offered; and their transnational movements and connections to communities outside of North America.

Before I wade into this topic, I must state that I am far from a neutral party. I am a co-founder of *The Shanghai Literary Review*, an English-language independent magazine that I helped launch in 2017 with colleagues based in China. *TSLR* is a traditional literary journal,

¹ In this paper, I have chosen to omit the hyphen from the demographic term Asian American, as is common practice now to denote minority communities in the United States. This seemingly minor shift to use a space instead of a hyphen effectively places the weight of the compound noun on 'American', while 'Asian' is reduced to an adjective, rather than a discrete identity and/or marker of origin that merits equal emphasis, as suggested by 'Asian-American'. While my own cultural identity may be closer to the hyphenated form, I have made this choice out of respect for the contemporary discourse of minority identities in America today.

² Lou Fancher, 'Giant Robot magazine feted in new Oakland exhibit', *The Mercury News* (11 April 2014) <www.mercurynews.com/2014/04/11/giant-robot-magazine-feted-in-new-oakland-exhibit/> [accessed 9 May 2023]. The Story of Hyphen Magazine, Hyphen (n.d.), <hyphenmagazine.com/about> [accessed 9 May 2023]. Jyni Ong, 'For The New Generasian': A Look Back On Long Lost Design Treasure, *Yolk Magazine*, *It's Nice That* (2019) <www.itsnicethat.com/features/yolk-magazine-publication-graphic-design-180219> [accessed 9 May 2023]

rather than a platform specifically for Asian American writing, but I would be remiss not to provide this crucial context for my own interest in the broader topic. I have also been a writer or editorial contributor for several of the other publications mentioned above, including *Banana*. For the purposes of this paper, I would like to think that my intimate knowledge of and access to the processes and people of indie magazine publishing is an advantage, rather than a liability. Nonetheless, I recognise the risk of my judgment or opinion being clouded by my proximity to the topic.

What I propose to narrativise here is not a comprehensive history of Asian diasporic publishing, but a much more focused comparison between two print magazines with provocative resonances and dissimilarities: *Banana*, founded in 2014 by Vicki Ho and Kathleen Tso in New York City, and *Sine Theta*, founded in 2016 by Jiaqi Kang, Iris Lang, and Michelle Tay, who were then based in Switzerland, England, and Singapore respectively. While *Banana* positions itself as ‘a lifestyle and culture magazine centred around all things Asian’ in its website’s search engine description, *Sine Theta*’s ‘About the Mag’ page professes a much more focused mission to ‘[connect] and [empower] members of the Sino diaspora’. *Sine Theta* is not an Asian American magazine per se and has a globally dispersed team, but I believe it to be a relevant subject for comparison due to its Anglophone audience and inclusion of several North America-based editors.

In this paper, I offer an overview of how both platforms construct an Anglo-Asian diasporic creative community through their publications and associated activities. I examine the professional or creative ambitions of diasporic youth as conveyed by the curated content of the magazines. Finally, I synthesise textual analysis with anecdotal data, interviews, and correspondences to juxtapose the publications’ unique histories and ethos, extrapolating what their thematic concerns may portend for Asian minority subjectivities in an era of shifting cultural politics.

Artefacts in the Making

Four decades ago, political scientist Benedict Anderson argued that the phenomenon of nationalism emerged from a combination of mass literacy, the advent of the printing press, and a global capitalist framework through which stories and texts could be circulated. Imagining oneself as part of a mass readership sowed in the reader the first seeds of cultural affiliation, which would later transform into ardent passions and self-sacrifice premised upon the ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ of the nation-state.³ Since Anderson first published these ideas, the world has been dramatically transformed by the development and proliferation of modern communications technology. Human civilisation in the 21st century is defined by ‘rapidly increasing *transnationalism* and multimedia exposure as a means of negotiating kinship and connection’ (emphasis added).⁴ Cultural identities and notions of belonging are no longer tied to or centred on local, regional, and national media per se. Subjectivities have been stretched or distended, rendered porous and pliant, as the Internet has closed the gap between the farthest reaches of the world while flattening the experience of the quotidian through digital interfaces. ‘In a postmodern and globalised age,’

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London:Verso, 2006), p. 7.

⁴ May Friedman and Silvia Schultersmandl, ‘Introduction’, in *Click and Kin: Transnational Identity and Quick Media*, ed. by May Friedman and Silvia Schultersmandl (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pp. 3–24 (p. 3).

observe May Friedman and Silvia Schiltermandl, ‘the notion of kinship is intertwined with ideas about the self-in-relation and of place as a node of multiple and contradictory cultural currents.’⁵ And yet, despite the complexities of our technologised present, the printed word retains some of its power.

Enter *Banana*. Established in 2014 by Vicki Ho and Kathleen Tso, this magazine’s title playfully reappropriates a term familiar to many Asian Americans as a pejorative for ‘first generation Asians growing up in a Westernised world (“yellow” on the outside, “white” on the inside).’⁶ In their inaugural issue, Ho and Tso articulate a mission to ‘create a voice for contemporary Asian culture’ and to highlight ‘Asian talent across the globe’ while navigating the so-called blurred boundaries between East and West. Both in their early twenties at the time, Ho and Tso brought together around two dozen contributors to produce a volume with nearly the same quantity of visuals (photographs, artwork, design elements) as text. Across eleven stories and 118 pages, including the front and back covers, *Banana*’s first issue offers a millennial take on traditional Chinese recipes for post-menstruation herbal soup; a profile of a newly opened bike shop in Manhattan’s Chinatown; an illustrator’s reminiscences of her maternal grandmother; conversations with Asian diasporic fashion designers and artists; a spotlight on Southeast Asian socialites; and even a feature on the cultural implications of Asians sporting bleach-blonde hair. This last topic would be taken up in a *New York Times* column four years later, affirming in a small measure the prescience of *Banana*’s youth perspectives.⁷

Sine Theta’s inaugural issue was released in 2016 and prominently featured the Chinese character 始 (shǐ) on the cover and front matter, translated into English as ‘Beginnings’. The magazine opens with a letter from editors Jiaqi Kang, Michelle Tay, and Iris Lang that describes the incident that incited this collaboration. As teenagers who desired to ‘help empower members of the Sino diaspora like [ourselves],’ the three of them organically decided to start a magazine based on the enthusiasm and momentum from a single conversation thread on the microblogging website Tumblr. They chose to produce a print magazine as it offers ‘a different kind of permanence’ that they hoped could serve as a physical token of community solidarity.⁸ Kang, who uses they/them pronouns, says that the magazine’s stylised title of *sinθ* is a ‘visual play’ on the term Sino, a prefix denoting ‘Chinese.’⁹ Seven individuals contributed a total of nineteen works—seven written and twelve visual pieces—to this issue of 44 total pages (including front and back covers), with each contributor’s location noted beneath their byline, ranging from Switzerland to Saratoga, Guangdong to Texas. The youngest of them was only sixteen years old at the time, ‘a half-Swiss half-Chinese exchange student,’ while the oldest appears to have been in college.¹⁰

The editors of *Banana* and *Sine Theta* diverge in median age by less than a decade, but this gap places them squarely into the discrete demographic categories of millennial and

⁵ Friedman and Schiltermandl., p. 8.

⁶ Vicki Ho and Kathleen Tso, ‘Editors’ Letter’, *Banana*, 1 (2015), p. 5.

⁷ Andrea Cheng, ‘Why So Many Asian-American Women Are Bleaching Their Hair Blond’, *New York Times*, 9 April 2018 <www.nytimes.com/2018/04/09/fashion/why-are-so-many-asian-american-women-bleaching-their-hair-blond.html> [accessed 7 May 2023].

⁸ Jiaqi Kang, Michelle Tay, and Iris Lang, ‘Letter from the Editors’, *Sine Theta*, 1 (2016), p. 4.

⁹ Jiaqi Kang, email to Mike Fu, 21 January 2022.

¹⁰ ‘Contributor Bios’, *Sine Theta*, 1 (2016), p. 41.

Gen Z.¹¹ Despite the common ground they share, the magazines' origin stories and self-conscious positionalities bespeak particular trends and infrastructures that shaped their generational experiences. Deborah Wong contends that Asian America at the turn of the millennium was already firmly situated within 'a globalised circuit of Pacific Rim exchange'.¹² The Asian American youth of the early 2000s had been exposed to diverse forms of mass media and, as a result, consumed prolifically and created a hybrid culture in turn. Wong's sketches of some of her students ring relevant today, especially in their fluid conceptions of identity, belonging, and even generational naming. Her insistent usage of the label 'GenerAsian' to describe Asian American youth of the era, however, feels contrived at best and unrecognisable at worst to the contemporary reader.¹³

Wong also delves into the nuances of the slang term 'AZN', which indeed has persisted—*Banana* even uses this on their website's splash page, where the header 'All Things AZN' is emblazoned. This playful (and tongue-in-cheek, depending on who you ask) designation is a direct inheritance from the Asian American online culture of the early 2000s described by Wong. Though *Sine Theta* avoids this term, the fact that this publication was conceived on Tumblr demonstrates the continuing importance of the Internet and social media to the formation of youth identity. Per Kang, who now leads *Sine Theta* as editor-in-chief, the Internet provided a space where geographically dispersed teenagers 'juggled anonymity and authenticity' and interrogated their sense of cultural belonging. Finding peers of similar backgrounds and interests helped Kang continue to workshop a nascent feeling that Chineseness 'could be something good and interesting, rather than something to be ashamed of'.¹⁴

While Kang and their teen conspirators connected in the digital space of Tumblr, millennials Vicki Ho and Kathleen Tso encountered each other in a decidedly more traditional manner: as young professionals working in the fashion industry in New York City. Tso initially met Ho through the video project of a mutual friend, and they bonded as the only two Asian girls on set. Tso said in a phone interview that 'Black creative culture was really on the rise' in downtown Manhattan of the early 2010s, and the grassroots events that were coalescing around a creative agency called Street Etiquette partly inspired her and Ho to stake out their own cultural space for the Asian American community.¹⁵ The decision to create a print publication arose naturally from the duo's combined experience in writing and digital media. Like *Sine Theta*'s editors, Tso envisioned the atemporal potentiality of the magazine-as-artefact, the idea that the fruits of their labour could be

¹¹ Millennials can be defined as those born between the years of 1981 and 1996, while Gen Z denotes those born in the following fifteen years (1997–2012), according to Michael Dimock, 'Defining generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins,' *Pew Research Center*, 17 January 2019 <www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/> [accessed 7 May 2023].

¹² Deborah Wong, 'GenerAsians Learn Chinese: The Asian American Youth Generation and New Class Formations', in *Art in the Lives of Immigrant Communities in the United States*, ed. by Paul DiMaggio and Patricia Fernández-Kelly (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2010), pp. 125–54 (p. 126).

¹³ Referring to Asian American youth born in the 1980s (who thus came of age around the turn of the 21st century), Wong claims that "'GenerAsian" is more and more widely used by members of this generation to self-identify' (Ibid., p. 131). Though I fall into the age group she narrativises, this neologism was totally unfamiliar to me; an informal survey of my Asian American friends of the same generation revealed a similar ignorance.

¹⁴ Jiaqi Kang, email to Mike Fu, 21 January 2022.

¹⁵ Kathleen Tso, WhatsApp interview with Mike Fu, 2 December 2021.

retrospectively seen as ‘an encapsulation of what was going on in our world, our community at the time’.

Since its founding in 2014, *Banana* has produced a total of seven glossy-covered print publications. In style and content, the magazine resembles *VICE Magazine* with its countercultural bent and hip posturing. Issue 005, for example, includes three features on Asian entrepreneurs working in the cannabis industry, as well as a story on the flourishing drag performance scene in Taipei’s gay nightlife. Unsurprisingly, New York City features heavily in the pages of the publication and also plays a large role in offline community-building for the *Banana* editorial team.

In addition to this hyperlocal scene, the magazine also offers interviews with Asian or Asian American cultural figures who have achieved mainstream recognition in their industries. The profiles of diverse musicians, entertainers, and businesspeople in the pages of *Banana* establish a new paradigm for Asian American ambition beyond the staid notions of the model minority or perpetual foreigner and collectively convey a cultural cachet attractive to generations of young readers. Consider, for example, Issue 006’s interviews with diasporic comedians such as Bowen Yang, *Saturday Night Live*’s first Chinese American featured player, and Ronny Chieng, an actor who appeared in *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) and went on to release his own stand-up comedy special via Netflix. Within the same issue is an extensive interview with Los Angeles-based Malaysian musician Yuna, who talks about her cultural and religious identity in relation to her songwriting practice, among other topics. Asian artists, restaurateurs, and designers are regular fixtures in the world of *Banana*, tacitly affirming the desires of younger generations who may have their sights set on professions outside the traditional STEM fields typically prized by immigrant families.¹⁶

Tso and Ho both still hold full-time careers in advertising, and the offline social dimension of *Banana* reflects the urbanite lifestyle that informs their ethos. The magazine’s first event was a fundraiser at a Lower East Side art bar called Beverly’s, while in subsequent years the team has organised (oftentimes with corporate and/or local vendors as sponsors) a Halloween party, a Lunar New Year karaoke night, a fried chicken happy hour, and launch parties for each issue featuring various Asian diasporic artists, craftspeople, and performers. Tso agreed with my assessment that in-person events are a critical component of the platform fashioned by *Banana* in New York. The physical magazine itself is ‘just a vehicle to bring us together,’ she explained over email, and went on to enumerate the various logistical hurdles related to printing and distribution.¹⁷ In-person events are thus a core activity for the *Banana* community—no longer merely imagined through circulation numbers or social media, but a physical reality that affords opportunities for mutual

¹⁶ In 2013, Youyoung Lee and An Xiao wrote about the relatively high percentage of Asian Americans represented in the so-called creative class, a departure from the ‘doctors and lawyers their parents may have once groomed them to be.’ In a similar vein, sociologist Jennifer Lee called for Asian diasporic communities to broaden their perspectives on professional success in an opinion column for *The Guardian* the following year. Youyoung Lee, ‘In America, A New Asian Creative Class’, *HuffPost*, 27 August 2013, <www.huffpost.com/entry/in-america-a-new-asian-creative-class_b_3822813> [accessed 6 May 2023]. An Xiao, ‘America’s Newest Creative Class: Asian Americans’, *Hyperallergic*, 17 September 2013, <hyperallergic.com/81614/americas-newest-creative-class-asian-americans/> [accessed 6 May 2023]. Jennifer Lee, ‘We Need More Asian American Kids Growing Up to Be Artists, Not Doctors’, *The Guardian*, 14 March 2014, <www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/16/asian-american-jobs-success-myth-arts> [accessed 8 May 2023].

¹⁷ Kathleen Tso, email to Mike Fu, 26 January 2022.

connection, after the fashion of Tso's and Ho's first meeting.¹⁸ Their online presence is strong in spite of their relatively sparse posts, with over 17,500 Instagram followers as of August 2023, more than five times *Sine Theta's* roughly 3,300 followers.

If *Banana* could be said to operate within the realm of Asian American popular culture—on the streets of New York, thriving through its multitude of connections to fashion and entertainment and nightlife—*Sine Theta* occupies a very different psychic space as an independent platform that exists outside and beyond any one city or country. *Sine Theta* is fundamentally a transnational literary-artistic society for anyone of self-identified Chinese heritage, and the scope of their activities primarily targets Anglophone youth who engage in poetry, prose, and visual art as mediums of creative expression. The editors are highly active online and skew quite young, though they have advanced from their late teens to early twenties in the years since the publication's founding.¹⁹ Rather than brick-and-mortar parties, the magazine invites interaction through online activities such as Zoom events, film tournaments, and contests judged by established Chinese American writers, such as fantasy novelist Rebecca F. Kuang (*The Poppy Wars*) and poet Chen Chen (*When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities*).

Despite the geographical distances that separate them, the editors have had opportunities to connect on the ground in places such as Beijing, San Francisco, and Oxford, demonstrating the tremendous degree of mobility that characterises their diasporic experience. In addition, one or more editors have represented the magazine at book fairs such as the London Radical Bookfair, the Asian American Literary Festival, and the Kuala Lumpur Art Book Fair. While Kang told me that the team hopes to have more physical engagements, they are hampered by the financial costs of preparing for events—such as the production of merchandise or the gathering of physical issues to sell—and the logistical hurdles of being dispersed around the globe. On the other hand, the focus on online activity has allowed *Sine Theta* to flourish even during the Covid-19 pandemic: they have maintained a steady clip as a quarterly magazine, releasing an impressive fifteen issues since 2020. In fact, the editorial team looks more robust than ever, now numbering twenty-three individuals across four continents.

Casual Cosmopolitanism

In his seminal essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', sociologist Stuart Hall identifies two divergent notions of cultural identity that inform the contemporary world. The first is an essentialist interpretation that seeks commonality over disparity, integral to concepts such as Aimé Césaire's 'négritude' that call for anti- or postcolonial solidarity. The second, while recognising some degree of shared understanding between marginalised peoples, foregrounds the 'critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute "what we

¹⁸ *Banana's* sixth issue was released in 2020 in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic. Recent conversations with Kathleen Tso have suggested that a seventh issue is forthcoming in 2023.

¹⁹ I would like to note that *Sine Theta* has roughly the same number of followers on Twitter (around 3,000) as Instagram (around 3,300), but on the former platform they outnumber *Banana's* audience fivefold. *Banana* has not tweeted with any regularity since 2019; *Sine Theta's* Kang and other editors have sustained regular interaction and engagement on Twitter and skilfully use the platform to publicise the magazine's initiatives and activities.

really are”²⁰ This latter view acknowledges the ruptures and asynchronies in the experience of the colonised subject and posits that their identity is shaped by and produced in relation to a shifting present and potential future, as much as the irrecoverable past. The Asian minority subjectivity of today’s independent magazines treads between these two modes, simultaneously calling for kinship while sensitive to myriad economic, social, linguistic, and political disparities within the imagined community. But what does Asian or Sino diasporic solidarity portend for the decades ahead?

For Kang, the cosmopolitan composition of *Sine Theta*’s editorial team is one of its major assets. Kang grew up in Switzerland and says that Asian identity and experience in continental Europe is still necessarily ‘mediated through an American and [Anglophone] lens’. Conversely, the publication intentionally avoids privileging North American perspectives as far as possible. Their *raison d’être* is to showcase the diversity of the Sino diaspora, and they have made good on this promise across more than two dozen issues. All of the contributor bylines include location, revealing at a glance the diffusion of writers and artists from across the United States—California, New York, and many places in between—as well as Canada, England, Chile, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, and elsewhere. Each issue also includes a glossary of Chinese terms that appear in the text, aphorisms and vocabulary words alike. Both Mandarin and Cantonese romanisations are provided, along with a definition or gloss. The magazine intuits the multiplicity of Chineseness in this manner, suggesting that this singular ethnic category belies a diversity of embodiments that spans languages and lineages around the globe.

Despite the emphasis on New York in the pages of *Banana*, the magazine has also looked farther afield and inflects transnationality in the style described by anthropologist Aihwa Ong in her book *Flexible Citizenship*. Issue 006, released in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, prominently showcases the artwork of Taiwanese artist SAITEMESS on the cover and includes a profile of her work by New York-based Taiwanese writer Nadia Ho. The same issue sketches the fraught history of indigenous shamanistic practices in Korea as context for a narrative about Helena Choi Soholm, a Seattle-based Korean American ‘neoshaman’ whose hybrid practice draws on her training in Western psychotherapy. Meanwhile, the feature ‘Vietnam Voyeur’ revisits the streets of Saigon and the bucolic countryside through photography by Vincent Trinh, juxtaposed with poetry by Diana Khoi Nguyen, both Vietnamese Americans. Issue 005 of *Banana* also showcased the trajectories of a handful of Vietnamese Americans who returned to their country of ancestry to build businesses or jumpstart creative careers. Cultural fluidity and cosmopolitan belonging are now more a part of the Asian American experience than ever, the magazine conveys through these stories. These themes and subjects deftly encapsulate Aihwa Ong’s notion of transnationality as a sense of ‘cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space’ and a series of intersections, exchanges, or passages between identities under global capitalism.²¹

Diasporas and migration effectively ‘[destroy] the concept of the nation-state or of national belonging,’ says Kang, and this phenomenon should be embraced as an alternative to hegemonic discourses of identity. Case in point: Kang’s preferred usage of the term Sino, in lieu of Chinese. Rather than a single definition of an ethnic category, Kang locates power

²⁰ Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. by Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), pp. 257–71 (p. 259).

²¹ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 4.

in the actions of individuals and groups who create communities, plural, that are ‘constantly shifting and morphing’. Furthermore, the malleability and potentiality of terms such as ‘diaspora’ or ‘queerness’ lend themselves to an entire ecosystem of dialogue, positioning *Sine Theta* in adjacency to many other communities and platforms. Meanwhile, the editorial decision to centre each issue’s theme on a single Chinese character, emphasising a poetic interpretation over a literal one, speaks to the magazine’s goal of reading and rereading language, culture, and ethnicity from an original and perhaps defamiliarised perspective.²²

For an incredibly heterogeneous group like the contemporary Asian American diaspora, I believe that Hall’s second framework—emphasising the difference and heterogeneity of minority cultural identities—is urgent and necessary to speak meaningfully of the community at large, not to mention its substrata and subcultures. While solidarity may have been the basis for the establishment of the Asian American as a category of personhood during the 1960s civil rights movement, today’s discourse is much more fractured by virtue of the globalisation, transnational mobility, and digital mediations that characterise human society in the 21st century. As *Sine Theta* attests, the Sino diaspora alone contains multitudes. In their academic work as a PhD student at the University of Oxford, Kang has begun thinking about this narrative of mobility and dispersion from China as a history of capitalism itself. In this way, the Sino diaspora ‘can help tell a story about the world’ that Kang hopes ‘would ultimately inspire all sorts of people to imagine a better future.’

I asked the editorial teams of *Sine Theta* and *Banana* to share their reflections on current trends in global cultural dynamics and how the world might change in the coming decades. Unsurprisingly, processes of globalisation and the popularity of transnational media were commonly cited as major influences on human civilisation today. *Sine Theta*’s managing editor Chi Siegel expressed her hope that ‘non-Western sources of media [could become] more mainstream [...] decentering Hollywood as the default locale for “prestige” film and TV,’ while Kang highlighted the need to maintain ‘hyperlocal cultural scenes and production modes’ to resist monopolisation by corporate media entities such as Netflix, Amazon, and Disney. Tso of *Banana* thinks that exposure to international perspectives through the Internet and other media will continue to increase the visibility of minority communities. Though diversity and inclusion are hot topics nowadays in the United States, Tso notes that there is a bit of ‘repetitiveness’ as companies continue to workshop their approach to such matters.²³

‘There is this joyous strength’ in the Asian diaspora, declares writer Xuan Juliana Wang in a nonfiction piece for *Banana*’s sixth issue, reflecting on her return to Los Angeles and discovery of a much more vibrant creative community—‘my fellow Asian degenerates’—than she recalled in her teenage years. ‘It creates this strange feeling—what is it called? Is it belonging? Is it happiness?’²⁴ As of September 2023, *Banana* is poised to release its seventh issue while *Sine Theta* has already published its twenty-eighth. Their latest works offer diverse views onto the field of Asian diasporic cultural production, highlighting cast members on American reality TV shows and queer Asian painting to profiles of

²² Some of *Sine Theta*’s Chinese character themes are more literal than others, such as 始 (shǐ) for ‘Beginnings’ (#1) and 泥 (ní) for ‘Mud’ (#7). On the other hand, I enjoy their rendering of 口 (kǒu) as ‘Gate’ (#11), 香 (xiāng) as ‘Perfume’ (#14), and 角 (jiǎo) as ‘Vertex’ (#15), in lieu of more straightforward definitions as ‘mouth’, ‘fragrance’, and ‘corner’ for these respective characters.

²³ Jiaqi Kang, Chi Siegel, and Kathleen Tso, responses to a short Google Forms survey, 30 October 2021.

²⁴ Xuan Juliana Wang, ‘LA Spawn’, *Banana*, 6 (2020), p. 124–27 (p. 126).

novelists and textile artists.²⁵ As the United States enters another presidential election cycle and ideological tensions simmer across the globe, the mundane stories in the pages of these independent magazines become a form of escapism and utopian yearning. Were it so simple that finding community and belonging, whether online or in the city, could offer protection from racial enmity and violence. These platforms demonstrate nonetheless the potential of camaraderie beyond borders, a solidarity that is more than the sum of its parts. In an era of widespread discord and dissent, this hopeful narrative is a much-needed salve.

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²⁵ 'PRE-ORDER: ISSUE 007', *Banana* (n.d.) <www.banana-mag.com/shop/pre-order-issue-007> [accessed 26 August 2023]. 'ISSUE #28 "SOUND 音"', *Sine Theta* (n.d.) <sinetheta.net/28.html> [accessed 26 August 2023].

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