

1. "Picking strawberries is the worst thing I've ever done in my life. While I was getting my toes wet being a proletariat, I ran across militants in the unions. All these militants were communists! These communists seemed to have some good ideas."

2. "You could look at the Civil Rights Era as the beginning of the Black Liberation struggle, but the Nationalist Movement with Stokely Carmichael, SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), and other younger organizations that sprung up all over the country attracted me."

3. "When the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense sprung up in Oakland, it seemed like a good thing. I was at the first organizational meeting and they said, 'Who wants to step forward to join?' I stepped forward and was made branch captain and then elevated to field marshal, of which there were only six of in the history of the BPP."

Upon promotion to field marshal, Aoki (who grew up with BPP co-founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in West Oakland after returning from the Topaz Concentration Camp) transferred from Merritt College to Berkeley and "went underground to look into the Asian Movement to see if we could develop an Asian version of the BPP." There, he joined the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) and became the spokesperson.

"We protested against the security pact signed by the US in Japan. We participated in anti-war and BPP demonstrations, especially to free Huey Newton, the co-founder who was in jail at the time. Technically I was a representative of AAPA. Privately, I was still making reports to the Panther organization. I'd say, 'This is what's happening, etc.' They'd ask, 'How can we help?'"

"AAPA was the first Asian group at Berkeley that had such a diverse ethnic background. We had Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Koreans. Pan-Asianism really was something that we never thought of at the time. We were so glad to see another Asian."

And not all members were students: "Bob Rita was a founder of the Farm Worker's Union. He was at Berkeley organizing and I was able to talk to him and see if he was interested in AAPA. It was a natural thing for him—he was Filipino and he had been an agricultural worker all his life. He was a labor organizer, yet he joined AAPA because of our stance on the exploitation of workers."

In Fall 1968, the SFSU branch of AAPA joined the Third World Strike. The Berkeley chapter followed in the spring.

## PART 3: GANG OF FOUR

### THE THIRD WORLD STRIKE

**GR: Why did the Asian Americans for Political Action and other groups in the Third World Liberation Front strike at Berkeley and SFSU?**

VW: What we were striking for was not ethnic studies but an autonomous Third World campus, which never happened. We got tremen-

dous community support, despite what people have said about our movement being an isolated group of militant students.

**GR: What was a typical strike day like?**

HD: A common day involved helicopters flying above, shooting pepper gas at the students. The police would sweep the campus with these machines spraying gas. All that repression forced neutral elements to take sides.

RA: I saw how changes occurred in consciousness when 147 of us were arrested. We had a mass arraignment and I was sitting in the classroom. I saw a blond-haired, blue-eyed sorority-type girl walk before the judge with a big-time attorney. So I said, "What are you doing here?" She was coming out of one of the buildings and her boyfriend, a hippie, got his head beaten in. All she could do was recite one of our slogans: "Pigs off campus! Pigs off campus!" They arrested her. You don't think she had an attitude change?

VW: It was the bloodiest and costliest strike in history. We had to come up with these actions and tactics because people in power were violently against the Third World College, against the Third World people uniting.

RA: After three months, the violence got out of control. Reagan called the Alameda County's Sheriff's Department, which brought an atmosphere of terror to our campus. Things happen in a reign of terror. The largest auditorium on the university caught fire.

**GR: What made the Third World Strike different from previous demonstrations?**

VW: People like Richard who had direct military experience. Also, we took inspiration from worldwide struggles, most notably the Zengakuren in Japan. They had very unusual tactics, very mobile and fast actions. We would start really early, break up into small groups. By the time campus officials got there, we were gone. Before they'd just seen big, massive demonstrations.

SL: The Free Speech Movement used very massive, immobile, easy-to-find groups.

HD: The strike was a combination of direct action with education. In the evenings we went to dormitories, fraternities, churches, community groups, and stuff like that.

VW: It wasn't just a local thing or just for our own little group in college. We identified with the struggles of the oppressed peoples of the world, of all of the struggles that were going on then. We fought harder because we didn't see it as just our own fight.

HD: After the Third World Strike, we felt that we had to carry out our rhetoric, so we started setting up field offices in the community.

### CHINATOWN CO-OP

**GR: How did the Chinatown Co-op start?**

HD: It began as a research project. There was a lot of research on the problems of garment workers and we didn't want to be "poverty pimps" who did research, filed reports, and that was it. They were trying to get into the union. I was involved in two union drives. The problem was that there wasn't much democracy within the union, so we looked more toward the idea of developing a cooperative. The Co-op lasted about four years.

**GR: Was it hard to get workers involved?**

VW: We were fortunate enough to recruit one of the top workers, Mrs. Lum, who was mak-

ing a lot of money for a garment worker back then. She tested us for a while, but after the third meeting she decided to join. She helped recruit other workers.

**GR: Did they freak out when you asked them to sew Chinese worker-style jackets?**

VW: No. That was a big moneymaker. It became a famous thing among international labor movements. We would get people visiting us from Iceland and Canada.

HD: And they all brought home Mao jackets. It was kind of unique. This whole concept of alternative institutions was part of the whole movement going on at the time. Eventually, it shut down, but we were able to make new links with immigrant workers and provide things like English classes. Later, when there were other labor disputes and strikes, some workers from the Co-op came to the Asian Community Center for help in their struggles.

VW: Every day, people would come down and say, "Can you help us?" Electronics workers, garment workers—they had no place else to go. Some of them felt intimidated. Busboys would say, "I shouldn't be here." We said, "You have every right to be here. This is supposed to be a public university."

### THE I-HOTEL

**GR: What was the International Hotel?**

HD: The hotel was owned by Walter Shorenstein, one of the real estate barons in San Francisco. The tenants (elderly Filipino and Chinese men) organized a union that opposed eviction. They got a lease extension, then a fire was set in the building and several tenants died in it. Shorenstein said, "See? I was right." Just around the time the Third World Strike was winding down, tenants of the I-Hotel contacted AAPA for support.

SL: When I first saw it I thought, "Holy shit! What a tuberculosis breeding pit!"

HD: That's when all the former SF State strikers, AAPA from Berkeley, and the Filipino community converged. The Co-op was a part of that. The Asian Community Party was part of that. The Asian Legal Services set up shop there. The Red Guards opened there.

VW: You had the Financial District that was Moneybags City. Then here was one block, totally the opposite in the way they dressed with paintings, murals, and all these banners saying, "Get the rich off our backs." The community started to see this was their center. All these different groups operated out of there. On paper it looks good: young and old, unite! It was a real lesson in democracy. We argued, but we kept the place going when they were going to tear it down.

**GR: What was eviction night like?**

SL: It went beyond the Asian community. Five to six thousand supporters came from all over the city. They went there because we were fighting for something that we thought was important. There was a landlord-tenant aspect of the struggle, but when they wiped out the block, they wiped out a center of activism in the Asian community.

VW: Not just the Asian-American Movement. It became a center for The Movement.

HD: Although you can't prove it, we see the eviction as being political. It's not a landlord-tenant dispute; it's an attempt to destroy the Asian-American impact that was going on.



Left to right:  
 Panther photos  
 liberated from  
 Vanguard book.  
 Pampachour photo  
 by Flea, borrowed  
 from *Gotha*.  
 New photo of Art  
 Ishii and Guy  
 Kurose by MW.



**PANTHER**  
**BROTHERHOOD**



Photo by Flea  
**YELLOW BROTHERHOOD** member Ronnie Nakashima speaking  
 before Westside Optimists at Youth Appreciation Week dinner.

**A**rt Ishii was a gangbanger who became one of the Yellow Brotherhood, which was the first group of Asian activists in Los Angeles. Guy Kurose was a Black Panther who became an Asian activist in Seattle.

Today, both run their own dojos, teaching karate to at-risk kids in their respective cities. When Guy was in L.A. for a speaking engagement (he's a spokesperson on race and gangs), I met both of them in a Silverlake coffeehouse to talk about their experiences in the Asian-American Movement.

**GR:** How did a Japanese-American kid from Seattle become a Black Panther?

**GK:** I was raised in the black community and listened to these songs: "Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud." I wanted to be there, too. Also, the Black Panther Party had a strong anti-war line. My perspective of the anti-war movement was "I'm not going to fight no Asians."

**GR:** What was it like being in the party?

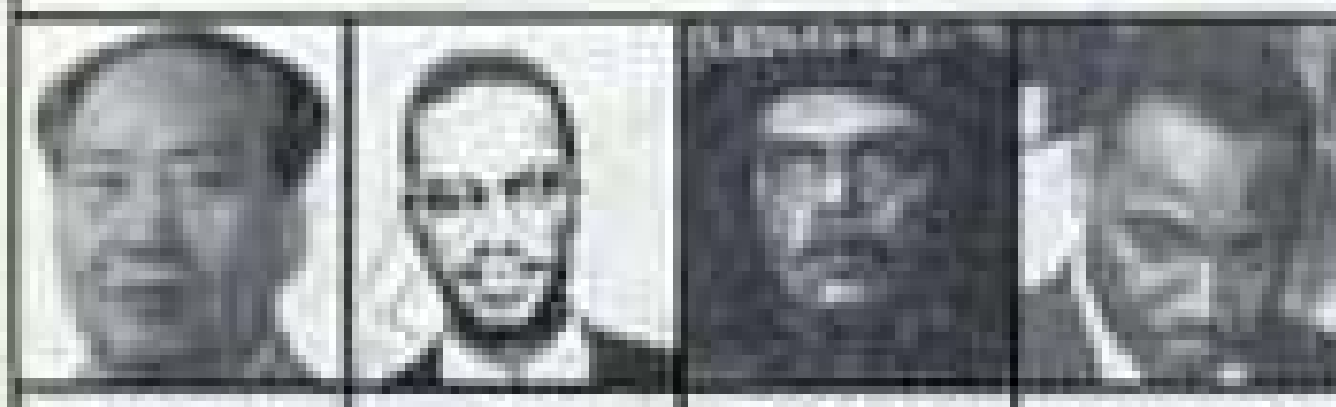
**GK:** We did what we wanted. I was a renegade Panther. We were what Bobby Seale called "jackanapes," kids that had good intentions but were relating strongly to hoodlumism. He said we were good guys, but we always wanted to do something crazy.

**GR:** How did you find out about the Asian Movement?

**GK:** When Mo Nishida, Victor Shibata, and Warren Furutani came from the JAACL to speak in Seattle, I was introduced to them. I was 16 and I was a member of the Black Panther Party. I had basically said, "I don't need to talk to no Japanese motherfucker who thinks he's white, man. So fuck you!" I was a kid. I was telling him what was going on with the Party up there. My perception of other Asian Americans was that they weren't very hard.

**GR:** Why did you think Asian Americans were soft?

**GK:** A lot of that was due to the camps and the way the community had become very insular about it. There was a fear. I tell people I'm a product of the concentration camps my parents went to. I was born a few years after they got out. I felt all this injustice.



Mao X Ché MLK  
 O O O O

**ART ISHII**  
**GUY KUROSE**

by Martin Wong





GR: Did you read the Red Book?

GK: The Panthers took the Red Book and broke it down into how it affected the community in a real direct sense. I was a Panther, I got a Red Book, I said, "This motherfucker's Asian." I got an identity thing out of that.

GR: How long were you a Panther for?

GK: I stayed in for three years until I was 18. Then I entered college and became involved in the Asian Student Coalition. We had demonstrations on campus. I was into rioting. We'd cause wild stuff. We'd all end up in jail because we'd fight the police and fuck up all the buildings.

GR: What sort of support did you get in the Asian community compared to the black community?

GK: As Panthers, we were heroes in a lot of communities. In the Japanese-American community, everything our parents knew culturally and through their camp experiences for the most part was to be quiet. I'm proud of the activists' search for identity that resulted in the Redress Movement. Some people back then would have called it bourgeoisie-counter-revolutionary. I don't agree with that. It's wonderful it happened for, if nothing else, psychological reasons. I see so many Niseis out there and you know they're traumatized. They're hypersensitive or hyperapologetic. We picked up some of that.

AI: That's why the Yellow Brotherhood was so controversial. We weren't hyperapologetic. We weren't like, "Let's keep it hush-hush."

GK: We were told to outwhite the white, and groups like the YB and me said, "Fuck the whites. Fuck that shit."

GR: How did you meet the Yellow Brotherhood?

FC: I came to LA to meet the Movement people. Some of them were from the middle class, espousing philosophical and ideological kinds of things. Then I heard about the YB and I liked that. I was in the BPP, but I knew I wasn't black. There was this quest for belonging. I didn't want to be like the stereotype of our own people. I said, "Yeah, man, fucking wearing glasses and becoming dentists and lawyers. Fuck that, I'm with the people; struggling for the cause."

GR: What was the Yellow Brotherhood?

AI: We were way before all those other groups,

late 1969. We had just gotten out of prison or the service. We realized all these young next-generation gangsters respected us. We thought that we could turn all that respect into something positive. That's how the concept of the Yellow Brotherhood started. It was anti-drug, anti-gang, and pro-school. We were at the forefront of the Asian Movement. Most people from those days will acknowledge that the YBs were the first ones talking shit and kicking ass.

GR: What was it like being in the YB?

AI: Unlike the Panthers, we weren't heroes. We really struggled with denial, particularly among the Nisei. Their thing after the camps was to out-white the whites and don't rock the boat. So many of my generation, my classmates, were doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, and optometrists. That's typical of the baby boomers. But there was also a minority who became gangbangers: the Ministers, the Shokashus; those groups were like a hidden part of the community. People wouldn't acknowledge that we had a problem with gangs and drugs. The Rafu Shimpo, the Japanese-American newspaper, reported day-in and day-out in the obituaries, 15 and 16-year-old kids dying of heart attacks. They had such denial. We were the ones who put the ugly statement out. We went to parents and their kids would be drugged-out and drooling on the rug. But they were in denial that their kids had drug problems.

GR: What types of drugs were people taking?

AI: We had this epidemic in LA and all over the Coast of barbiturates and heroin. They had to turn to guys like the Yellow Brotherhood and say, "Help us save our kids." I think one year there were more than 30 funerals of Japanese-American kids. Groups like AADAP write articles patting themselves on the back about how they salvaged the cities and talk about how their predecessors (and they could only be talking about the Yellow Brotherhood) used to be barbarians. Part of that was true. We weren't academic. We were people from the community working in the community, as opposed to outsiders with their Nikon cameras and 280Zs.

GR: Was the Yellow Brotherhood political?

AI: Very political people would come into the

Yellow Brotherhood house and espouse the Red Book. Gangsters didn't give a shit about Red Books; they cared about red pills. We were political in terms of what we did, but we were very reluctant about grandstanding. There was actually a lot of internal struggle in our meetings about just how political we were going to be.

GR: What about other groups in LA?

GK: There was Asian American Hardcore, Joint Communications and there were small groups geographically.

GR: Did people belong to more than one group?

AI: Pretty much one, but we networked a lot.

GR: What was Eastwind?

GK: Eastwind was a Marxist-Leninist group. They were more political. People in Eastwind called themselves "comrades" and they'd go, "You said that Lenin said this, so you're a revisionist." It was so bizarre. They wanted to start attacking other people. They were all my friends, but when they'd talk about purging people, I'd say, "Yeah. Whatever, man." They were pretty elitist.

GR: How did it all end?

AI: There's a time and place for everything. The same problems weren't as apparent. Also, mobilization reached a critical mass and a transition. As we got older, my friends started having kids. There was a transition and we tried getting younger guys to assume leadership positions. But you had to find the right people and the right dynamics. With the YB, you couldn't be just the most intelligent guy, because you also had to be bad. People had to respect you. The transition was the demise of all of those organizations, carrying on those ideals.

GR: Was there a stronger sense of Asian community during the Movement?

GK: It was really splintered. There was this group called the Movement, but then you had the Asians outside and you wonder if they even knew about it.

AI: I grew up in a predominantly black neighborhood. All my time in the service was with blacks. So I've always socially gravitated toward the black culture, just like my peers in East LA gravitated toward Chicano culture. But one of the negative things about all this Black Power, Brown Power, and all this togetherness as social ethnic neighbors, is that it divided us. The first time I ever heard a black call me Jap, I was shocked. The polarizing started then and it continues today.

GR: What's the most lasting effect of the Asian Movement for you?

AI: I went to a function and ran into a kid I hadn't seen for 25 years. I remember him as a high school kid. That kid voluntarily came up to me and said, "You know what man? You guys really made a difference in my life." This guy was very high-risk. If it was one isolated incident, it would've been worth it, but there was more. Too much press goes to how many people died.

GK: To articulate, the Panthers—I have this huge identity behind them. "Former Black Panther" and all of that stuff. But what if they said "Former Asian Movement participant?" People would say, "What the fuck is that?" I don't like that because I am proud of our involvement, our trying to empower the community, trying to get young people to see their identity.

## GIDRA

In a communal house, a group of Asians decided to put together a publication that was going to be cool, funny, and politically conscious at the same time. It was named after the Japanese Godzilla foe, the three-headed beast, Gidra. With a revolving staff who smoked sticky green pot (if they could get it), they put together what some say was a predecessor to the mag you're holding. This was in '69 when things were going off in the world. They used the word "fuck," to the dismay of the rightist tightasses, but they got the job done for five years. Funded by donations, a bunch of ads, and whatever sales they could put together, they put this sucker out once every two weeks. One of the early staffers, Eddy Wong (also a member of the Asian Radical Movement, a small group of five or six folks) recalls, "We were getting high and there was a lot going on. It was a great experience, it was fun, it was life or death for some people, since every day brothers and sisters were getting killed in Vietnam. The LAPD were vicious motherfuckers. They were cracking down on protests. Things were changing in the world. We had fun, man." Later on, many staffers found out that one of the "hangers-on" was an FBI informant. Posing as a photographer, he probably could only report that people smoked pot. —EN

Graphic on right taken from Gidra





Left to right: Alex Hing talks to Red Guards about meeting Ho Chi Minh (Photo by Nikki Arail). Asian members were the only war protesters to snake dance (Photos courtesy of Steve Louie). Following page: Alex Hing in New York City today (by MW).



# RED STAR IN AMERICA

**S**an Francisco's Red Guard party was named after Mao Zedong's young squad of private property burners, but patterned more closely after the Black Panther Party. Initially gaining inspiration and guidance from the Panthers across the Bay in Oakland, the Chinatown-based Red Guards formed in 1969 to uplift their community and create social change. Minister of Information Alex Hing was one of the co-founders. Now a cook, Union organizer, and Tai Chi instructor in New York City, Hing remains politically and socially active. When I called him from the Marriott Marquis in Times Square to arrange a meeting, he informed me that his group was boycotting that particular hotel because it was non-union. Then he invited me over to his Chelsea flat for morning tea and conversation.



Mao 3	X 0	Ché 0	MLK 0
----------	--------	----------	----------

## ALEX HING IWK

by Martin Wong



### ON GUARD

GR: What were some of the Red Guards' accomplishments?  
AH: One of the first things we did was make it acceptable for political forces other than the KMT to exist in Chinatown. That's important because prior to the Red Guards, Democratic party liberals would be branded as communists, and it made it very hard for them to have any political influence. When we came out and said, "We're communists," we established ourselves as the real Left. We participated in the movements for China's gaining a UN seat and also for the United States to have a relationship with Beijing. We created that pull in Chinatown, to make it OK for people to talk about Beijing as China, and not just Taiwan.

We also accomplished some small reforms. The federal government wanted to cut down a Tuberculosis testing center in the community, although at the time Chinatown had the highest rate in the country. We demonstrated to keep

that TB testing center functioning. They wanted to close the traditional Buddhist temple, to turn it into a parking lot. We demonstrated support for the temple so they didn't tear that down. We did a number of those kinds of reforms. We worked in what we called the Asian Legal Services that had a branch of the Asian American Draft Help Center. We had 1,000 cases of people who didn't want to go to the military and kept them out. We actually got four people who were in the military out. So we were quite successful in establishing an anti-war base in the community. I think that we opened up Chinatown for more progressive politics.

GR: What about the breakfast program?  
AH: The Panthers set up a free Breakfast for Children program. We tried that, too. The kids who came were African Americans who lived in the projects of Chinatown. So we re-thought it and had an afternoon lunch program for senior citizens. We tried to model ourselves after the Panthers. When it didn't work, we gave it our own characteristics.