

from an interview with Gene Yang by Kristy Valenti
The Comics Journal (11 July 2007)

VALENTI: I also noticed that you mention Oliphant High School [in *American Born Chinese*].

YANG: That was a conscious plant. That was actually a reference to a strip that Pat Oliphant did during the Chinese spy-plane crisis. He drew this cartoon where he had Uncle Sam visiting this Chinese restaurant, and the restaurant owner was this horrible, horrible stereotype. I actually quote a couple of lines from that strip word-for-word in *American Born Chinese*. The spelling of "Amellica" when Chin-Kee comes on the scene was directly from that strip, and then when Chin-Kee eats lunch in another scene, he eats cat gizzards with crispy-fried noodles. That was a direct quote from the Pat Oliphant strip, too. I was pissed off about the strip so I wanted to put it in the comic book.

VALENTI: Oh, I see. So you were disapproving of that strip.

YANG: I was disapproving of that strip, yes. I don't remember the exact date of the strip but I have it encoded in the street number of the high school, Oliphant High.

cartoon by Pat Oliphant, 9 April 2001



from an interview with Gene Yang by Shaenon Garrity
***Sequential Tart* (1 November 2006)**

ST: *You've been working on American Born Chinese for a long time. When did you first come up with the idea for this story?*

GY: The whole thing took me about five years to finish. I started around 2000.

I'd been wanting to do a Monkey King comic forever, ever since hearing his stories from my mom when I was a little kid. He's a monkey who knows kung-fu! People love monkeys! And people love kung-fu! How can you go wrong with that?

As for the other two storylines, I came up with them after finishing *Gordon Yamamoto and the King of the Geeks* and *Loyola Chin and the San Peligran Order* (which were both published as graphic novels by the lovely folks at Slave Labor Graphics). At that point, even though I'd done stories with Asian-American protagonists exploring Catholic themes, I hadn't yet tackled anything explicitly Asian-American or explicitly Catholic. And I really wanted to. I feel like my ethnicity and my religion are the two most central pieces of my identity. So for the Catholic part, I did *The Rosary Comic Book* with Pauline Books and Media and for the ethnic part I did *American Born Chinese* with Modern Tales and then First Second.

They're crossover books, by the way, via a single panel towards the end of *American Born Chinese*. They have shared characters. I also think the two projects bleed into each other thematically. I quote one of the Psalms in *American Born Chinese*, and I (with the help of Lark Pien, who colored both projects) tried to inject a little more color into *The Rosary Comic Book* than is common to most interpretations of the Gospel. For instance, I made the angel Gabriel a person of color. Or maybe I should say angel of color. I wanted to link them together because, for me, my Roman Catholicism and my identity as an Asian-American are linked.

ST: *Speaking of Catholicism, in ABC you interpret the Monkey King stories in a Christian context, with the Christian God taking the role of Buddha. Have you gotten any reaction from readers about this choice?*

GY: Yeah. At APAture (an Asian-American arts festival in San Francisco) this year, somebody came up and told me she thought the Christian elements of the Monkey King chapters were really distracting. She was, of course, familiar with *Journey to the West*, the Chinese novel that the Monkey King chapters are based on. It was a good, valid point. I think for someone who's familiar with the original, it is distracting. It's like taking Star Wars and replacing the Force with Jesus.

But for me, it was a necessary part of making it an Asian-American retelling, rather than just an adaptation. I would hope that the theological differences that come out when comparing the original to my interpretation say something about what it means to be an Asian-American, about the difference between Asian-Americans and Asians. And I'd hope that the distraction would be worth it.