

Chris Lee & Maiko Tanaka

CRITICAL. MODEL. MINORITY. First, some context: Gendai Gallery is currently a collective, artist-run entity whose mandate is to work with artists, curators, writers, and designers that engage the world through an East Asian diasporic lens. Since 2012, it has been a mobile operation after vacating its brick and mortar gallery space. This created a sense of an existential crisis.

In 2013, Gendai curated an itinerant program called *Model Minority*. Primarily comprised of workshops, discussions, and screenings of films such as Christine Choy's *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1987) and Grace Lee's *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs* (2013). *Model Minority* staged reflections on the fraught relationship between the existence of a minority arts organization and the funding lines of the settler state. Through research into the notion of the model minority—a subject constructed to reinforce racial hierarchies by holding up as the ideal one minority group, while trivializing the grievances and struggles of others—we asked what it means to be a component of Canadian (settler) diversity amidst the persistence of colonialism, while rediscovering “counter-models” and pursuing the articulation of more critical imaginaries.

The program was held with the intent of producing a publication that would document and propel this process and discourse. The resulting book, which includes essays and other forms of textual contributions, was a catalyst and site for the production of commissioned artworks by Will Kwan and Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn. The slow, extended pace given to this project allowed a dwelling in study, and a speculative investment in a way of being that suspends a reckoning with the demands of exhibition cycles (also, printing books can be

cheaper than paying rent). It was a way to creatively navigate the margins of underfunding with a sense of commitment and resentment. Together, these sentiments simultaneously characterize the pragmatism of the model minority and function as engines of critique and creation. Identification with the model minority provokes an unsettling, (self-)critical view on the role of diverse cultural production as an instrument of Canadian settler-state multiculturalism. ¶

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