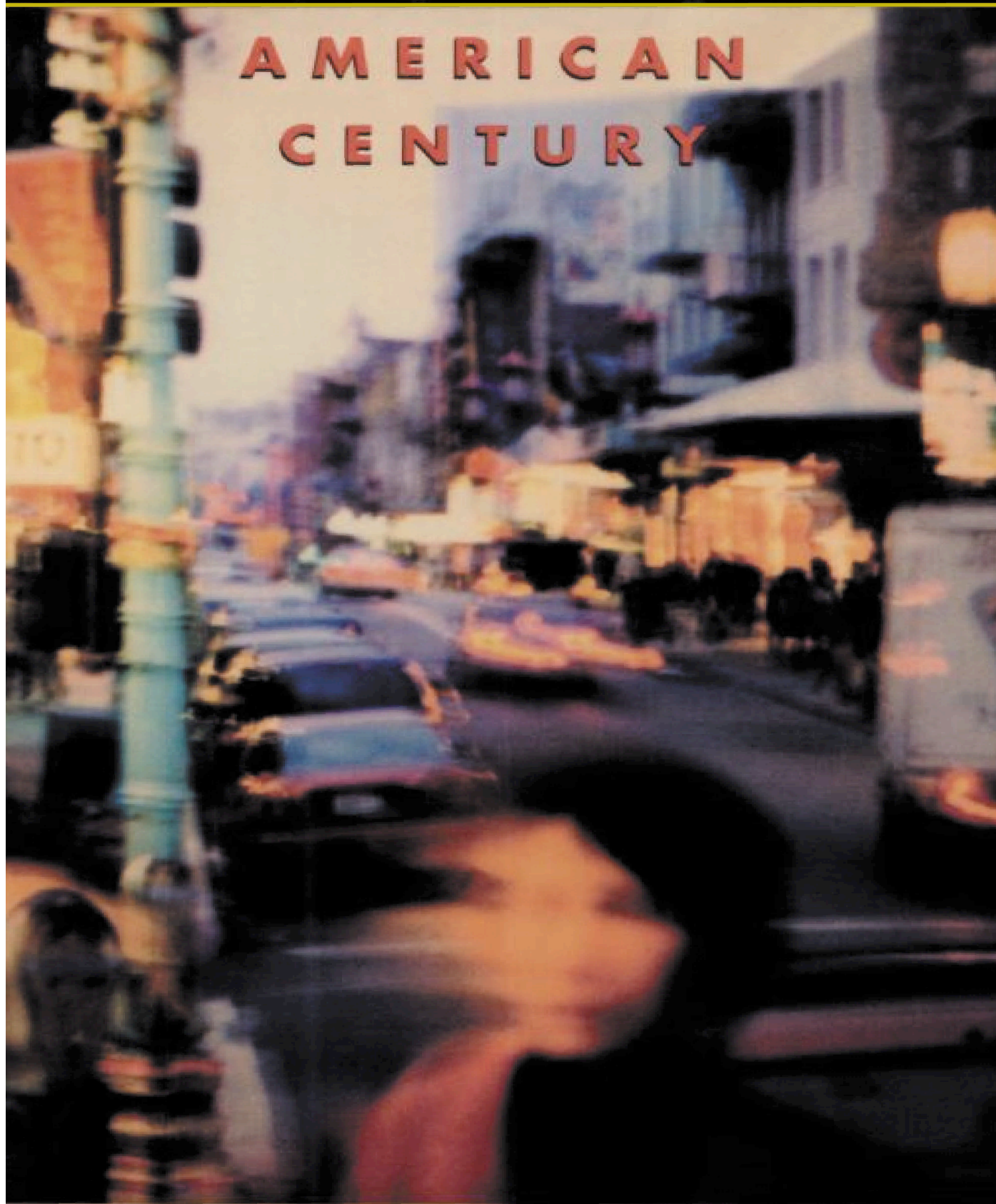


# THE ASIAN



## AMERICAN CENTURY



# **THE ASIANIZATION OF AMERICA**

My third topic of investigation is the extraordinary “Asianization” of America—the accelerating influence of East Asia on American life and identity, a phenomenon neglected by most students of American history. It is clear that art, film, food, and religion in the United States have been profoundly affected by contact with Asia. In a few years there will be more Buddhists than Jews in the United States, and one in ten Americans will be of Asian ancestry. Of greatest importance is the fact that Asians, especially as a result of the migration waves of the last third of the twentieth century, are changing American identity—what it is to be an American. Finally, to complete the circle, Asian Americans are beginning to affect the course of state-to-state relations.

A student of socio-linguistics might enjoy the way in which elements of Japanese culture have come to be used as similes, as in a report on parents in Pelham, New York, seeking ways to pick their children's teachers without appearing to do so, a process described as a game "as stylized as a Japanese tea ceremony." A mother involved in this game described it as "a mysterious process, like Kabuki theater."<sup>33</sup> These are examples of Americans thinking and acting like Japanese, becoming adept at *haragei*, indirect methods of manipulating outcomes. And references to the Chinese concept of *feng shui* are becoming more frequent. Rowenta irons, for example, are sold with a brochure entitled "The Feng Shui of Ironing," which explains that a wrinkle is actually tension in the fabric, the removal of which improves the flow of *qi*.<sup>34</sup> In April 2000, Alex Stark, described as a *feng shui* expert, helped realign the Web site of Corcoran.com, enabling the owners to achieve a harmonious balance in cyberspace.<sup>35</sup> And would-be NBA stars having trouble finding the hoop can now read *The Tao of the Jump Shot*.<sup>36</sup> Expressions derived from East Asian languages are nearly as prevalent as those from Yiddish in contemporary American English. This Asian-influenced change in language usage reflects changes in habits and values resulting from increased contact and greater familiarity with Asia.