

Professor Shirley Geok-lin Lim
Research Professor, University of California, Santa Barbara

In one individual's fairly short life, we can see illuminated the stuff of imperial projects, their political and economic realities and insubstantialities, and passing powers. I was twelve when the Federated Malay States, together with the British Straits Settlements, were granted independence by the rapidly decomposing empire of the British Isles. I was 24 when I left an already radically transforming Malaysia, soon to establish a Constitution that created a quasi-apartheid, racially-identified community to set above all others, for the United States of America, that had pretty much dismantled its segregationist laws and implemented Civil Rights protections in their place. Even through the humiliating defeats wreaked on the USA by Vietnam, a small underdeveloped Southeast Asian nation, in the 1970s there ran a continuous critique by both foreign and domestic commentators on the imperial power of the American nation. Today, having given up Cuba, Panama and the Philippines, the US is constantly measured against the People's Republic of China, both extolled and condemned as the 21st century empire with its 1.35+ billion population, holder of 1.37+ trillion in US Treasuries, and newly recast master of Hong Kong and Macau, now claiming Taiwan and asserting sovereignty over islands and waters far from its continental shelf. What do these three historical and contemporary geo-political empires have to do with Anglophone, Chinese American literature? The answer, of course, is everything, in so far as literature as symbolic actions of the Imagination participate in, contribute to and intervene in the dynamics whereby empires are imagined and their discourses endowed with threat and danger, capabilities and meanings.

Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* theorized the formation of nations in the early modern period rising out of a matrix of political, journalistic, and multi-media discursive modalities all establishing an imaginary of unitary agendas, ends and identities. Britain, the US, and China, lest we forget, were and are all nations well before imperial perspectives scanned extra-national scopes into their historically fixed borders. My memoir, fictions and poems take on these imperial imaginaries as they get played out in the interpellation of the authorial subject, dramatized in narrative plot and addressed as ideologies and shadowy figures to be obsessively represented, resisted, and also finally introjected as textual residue and strata.

For my summer institute seminar, the readings are from my memoir, *Among the White Moon Faces* (Parts One and Two, chapters 1-6; and chapter 7, Part 3); *Joss and Gold* (Book One: Crossing); and poems in *Walking Backwards* (in section, "Walking Backwards: Passport"). Also, I will have a Reader made up of theoretical pieces on State Apparatuses, Empire, Colonialism, Globalization, Space and Time.