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9

IMMIGRATION AND DIASPORA

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I

Many U.S. feminist and ethnic critics question the patriarchal, Eurocentric interpretations of texts, but they seldom interrogate the national-identity parameters in these interpretations. Instead, they attempt to enlarge that American identity, appropriating myths and characteristics that construct more permeable, flexible, and plurally enclosing borders. U.S. literary tradition has been until recently constructed on works produced by "white, middle-class, male[s], of Anglo-Saxon derivation or at least from an ancestry which had settled in this country before the big waves of immigration which began around the middle of the nineteenth century" (Baym 1985, 69); in these works, "America as a nation must be the ultimate subject . . . setting America off from other people and the country from other nations" (67). With the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, some Asian American critics, taking their cue from Black Arts Movement figures such as Ishmael Reed, criticized Asian American texts that represent Asian Americans as the model minority – successfully assimilated, law-abiding, and Anglo-identified citizens (Chin et al. 1974). This "assimilationist" tradition, they contended, imposes ethnic-based restrictions on the production of self-representations and is gender-biased, resulting in the stereotyping of Asian American males as effeminate and in the skewed success of Asian American women writers. John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957), Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961), Shawn Wong's *Homebase* (1979), and Frank Chin's *Donald Duk* (1991) could be seen to represent the male-identified "American-born sensibility" that these critics privilege. In contrast to this cultural nationalist position, other critics explicate Asian American works as situated in and reflecting the tensions between their Asian descent and the Anglo-conformed world that discriminates against them and assumes that the Asian American imagination is cathected in cultural conflict

"between worlds." "Whether recent immigrants or American-born, Chinese in the United States find themselves caught between two worlds. Their facial features proclaim one fact – their Asian ethnicity but by education, choice, or birth they are American" (Ling 1990, 20).

Opposing these American, even if multiculturally identified critical positions, other critics have bracketed a group of "cosmopolitan" writers who "present their own Third World identities as a mark of distinction in a world supposedly exempt from national belonging" (Brennan 1989, 2). The term suggests an elite "of perennial immigration, valorized by a rhetoric of wandering, and rife with allusions to the all-seeing eye of the nomadic sensibility" (ibid.). The concerns of these "cosmopolitan" writers are not specific to nation-states and often overlap with those of writers who have moved out of their country of origin to resettle in Western urban centers. The term "metropolitan" underlines their absorption into Western publishing markets.

This essay proposes to deal with two categories in Asian American literature that problematize the reifications of U.S. canonical and U.S. minority literature *and* cosmopolitan, metropolitan literature – that is, with writing categorized as immigrant and diasporic, produced by writers who are either first-generation Americans or who mark themselves with a non-U.S. culture and society. Works viewed as diasporic are usually excluded from a U.S.-based grouping for extraliterary, ideological, and political reasons. Although immigrant and diasporic writings overlap with literatures considered minority, cosmopolitan, or metropolitan, they are often seen as falling outside U.S. canonical work.

Ethnic scholars have become receptive to reading Asian American writing as immigrant writing (Sucheta Mazumdar points out that Asian American Studies has existed for a long time as a subfield of immigration history [1991, 29]). But the shift from "writing produced by U.S. writers of Asian descent" to "writing produced by members of a diasporic group" (the Chinese, South Asian, or Filipino diasporas, for example) carries ideological, political, and institutional consequences that have been addressed by a number of critics and writers. Lisa Lowe marks Asian American heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity as condensing around generational, class, and language stratifications, which she argues are not "exclusively hierarchical and familial" but also "horizontal" (1991, 26), that is, operative between subjectivities within similar generations, classes, and ethnic communities. Lowe constructs her argument for recognition of the shifting and unstable marks of Asian American differences around "the terms of debate about nationalism and assimilation" (33) to take into account the "uneven development, nonequivalence, and cultural heterogeneities" (41) between and within the recent immigrants. Sau-ling Wong cautions against an uncritical adoption of a diasporic perspective

because it vacates the position on the domestic American scene that Asian Americans hold to create their own panethnic solidarity and identity with other people of color, an abdication that also leads to Asian American literature being subsumed under the global metanarratives of postmodernism (paper presented in 1993). In urging the formation of a strategic essentialist Asian American cultural nationalism unified under U.S. history, many Asian American critics ironically repeat the call of U.S. nationalists for a shared unified American identity in response to the threat of fragmentation posed by minority interest groups. Thus, even as the oppositional concept of "minority discourses" – covering feminist, ethnic, and gay literature – has begun to receive institutional support, the category of diaspora writing generally has been ignored.

Part of the reason may be hegemonizing dynamics acting within minority discourses, dynamics that these very discourses are supposed to be deconstructing. U.S. minority groups seldom see their interests as being in common with those of new incoming groups or, worse, with groups who speak for concerns outside U.S. borders: their gains in academia have been too recent and too small, and the fear of diffusion of purpose and rewards is understandable. However, if "viewing American racé relations from an international perspective [provides] an important corrective to the parochial and ahistorical outlook of our national consciousness" (Blauner 1982, 518), then, in an international perspective, paradigms of diaspora will tend to overlap, destabilize, or supersede paradigms of immigration.

II

Although it is true that, except for Native Americans, all Americans are descended from immigrant populations and are members of diasporas, Asian American immigration history manifests distinctive differences from that of other groups. These differences, attributable to historical legislative racism against Asians (Weglyn 1976; Chan 1991), have been continuously foregrounded and thematized in Asian American literary productions. Articulated through tensions between cultural reciprocity and resistance, themes and subjects in Asian American literature play on issues of identity that encompass non-Western cultural configurations and heterogeneous Asian communities. One must read Asian American immigrant autobiographies as both within and expanding beyond the autobiographical tradition that James Craig Holte defined as "a central part of the American literary tradition" illustrating "the American question [as] a question of self" (1982, 250).

Immigrant non-English texts – for example, the poems translated in *Songs of Gold Mountain* (1987) and *Island* (1991) – generally offer proposi-

tions of cultural incommensurability and mourning, juxtaposed with propositions of desire for an Other figured as a sexualized object or as U.S. material culture. Except for a few nonethnic-marked texts by writers such as José García Villa (1949) and Diana Chang (1974), second-generation English-language works – often autobiographical – generally rework themes of generational and cross-cultural conflicts that negotiate between foreign and native-born communities. A social and regional present/presence constructed on U.S. memory and history, such as we find in William Faulkner's or Flannery O'Connor's fiction, or even in the work of second-generation writers such as Grace Paley or Philip Roth, is seldom represented in Asian American writing. Instead, the individual who is articulated in poem or scene or narrative is often constructed in relation to at least two national cultures, two homelands, two origins. Mitsuye Yamada, for example, articulates this double-consciousness in her poem "Guilty on Both Counts," in which the Japanese American narrator, on a visit to Japan, is rudely treated by a survivor of the Hiroshima holocaust and ruefully notes that in the United States she is also held responsible for the infamous 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor (1988, 20–3). Conflict, often privatized and psychologized in U.S. mainstream literature or embedded in U.S. cultural history, is socialized in the context of Asian and U.S. cultural values that are enacted as immigrant memory and history.

Immigrant memory and history function as major narrative strategies that infuse genres as diverse as poetry, drama, and fiction with an ethnographic discourse (Fischer 1986). As William Boelhower theorizes, memory is integrally related to the ethnicization of the subject through specific genealogical projects and strategies of ethnic semiosis (1987). Family, home, community, origin, loss, dislocation, relocation, racial differences, cross-cultural resistance, second-generation Americanization and assimilation, identity destabilization and reformulation, as in many other American ethnic texts, are common trajectories in Asian American literature. Even third-generation (sansei) Japanese American writers like Garrett Hongo (see "Bon: Dance for the Dead") and David Mura (for example, "A Nisei Picnic," in Bruchac 1983, 207) position their subjects in relation to family and community through immigrant memory and history, which inevitably entail histories of an Asian homeland, of U.S. immigration, and of cultural loss and change.

This immigrant logos – insisting on a time before U.S. entry and on cultures separate from U.S. Anglo-identity – may be explained by the fact that Asian Americans are chiefly a recent immigrant group. Until 1965, Asians formed a very small percentage of the U.S. population. Filipino sailors had settled in Mexico and parts of Louisiana during the Manila galleon trade between Mexico and the Philippines, both colonies of Spain;

but the major Asian immigration began only in 1848, with the discovery of gold in California. Drawn by a combination of push–pull factors – famine, civil unrest, and poverty in China; labor opportunities in the gold mines, Hawaiian plantations, and railroads in the American West (Cheng and Bonacich 1984) – Chinese immigration rose dramatically between 1860 and 1880. Like the nineteenth-century immigrants from Europe, many Chinese eventually returned to their villages; 47 percent of the 330,000 Chinese immigrants who came to the United States between 1850 and 1882 returned to China (Takaki 1990, 116). But, unlike their European counterparts, a series of exclusion acts, beginning in 1882 and culminating in the severest legislation against immigration from Asian populations east of the Barred Zone in 1924, prevented these Chinese immigrants from returning to the United States. Other discriminatory legislation against landownership, naturalization, "miscegenation," and the entry of Chinese women further discouraged Chinese American settlement. Between 1882 and 1943, when all the Chinese exclusion acts were repealed, the Chinese American population barely increased from 0.02 percent to 0.05 percent of the U.S. population.

Indeed, the Asian American demographic explosion after the 1965 revised immigrant laws is closely related to the development of the interdisciplinary nexus of Asian American Studies, which "focused on the migration and subsequent settlement experiences of various Asian groups to the United States." As Evelyn Hu-Dehart points out, "Only recently has the field made a move toward recognizing the importance of the Asian diaspora throughout the Americas and the world" (1991, 7). Paralleling the research emphasis on immigrant history, literary scholars have generally concentrated on the immigrant thematics sounded in archival as well as contemporary Asian American writing. Though the subject of race relations is primary in Asian American writing, as it is in other ethnic literatures, the intersection of race with immigrant and other-national histories is to a greater extent less visible in this writing than in the other ethnic literatures.

The convergence of race with national identity is demonstrated in contemporary global politics that continue to cast immigrants as a racial problem. According to the 1991 United Nations Population Fund, about seventy million people now work legally or illegally in countries of which they are not native-born citizens. Their numbers grow annually by two million refugees and immigrants. Whereas the United States is a primary destination for immigrants from Asia and Central America, high birth-rates in North Africa and other parts of the developing world also lead to immigration pressures on Europe (Meisler 1992, A9). Although these immigrants are needed to work in jobs that nationals no longer desire, they are unwanted because they are perceived as "strangers" and "aliens."

This phenomenon of internal colonialism, critiqued in Milton Murayama's tragifarcical novel of Japanese-Hawaiian plantation families, *All I Asking For Is My Body* (1975), carries cultural consequences: as people move from their natal territories, notions of individual and group identity, grounded in ideas of geographical location as a national homeland and of segregated racial purity, become contested and weakened. The literatures being produced today by immigrant populations *and* by nationalists reflect, address, express, and reconstruct the late-twentieth-century preoccupation with and interrogation of concepts of "identity," "home," and "nation," whether through recuperating ideals of tribal origin and community, through reinscribing the modern invention of nationalism as a political strategy for social organization, or through negotiating the unstable territory of the minority subject or destabilized psyche through a cosmopolitan elite attached to an ideology of the autonomous subject.

III

Critical awareness of the cooperation or absence of cooperation between birthplace and identity is crucially missing in literary canons that categorize by national distinctions. At the heart of critical consciousness, Edward Said argues in "Secular Criticism" (1986, 605–22), is the cooperation between filiation and affiliation. He defines filiation as chiefly natal, natural, situated in the capacity to produce or generate children; but because men are alienated from all the products of human labor, including children, filiation is fraught with difficulties and ultimately impossible. The pressure to produce new and different ways of conceiving human relationships results in alternatives provided "by institutions, associations, and communities whose social existence was not in fact guaranteed by biology but by affiliation." In the dialectic between natal relations and social relations, Said interposes "a worldly self-situating, a sensitive response to the dominant culture – that the individual consciousness is not naturally and easily a mere child of the culture, but a historical and social actor in it" (1986, 613). Such critical awareness must "trouble the quasi-religious authority of being comfortably at home, at home among one's people, supported by known powers and acceptable values, protected against the outside world" (614).

We find this "worldly self-situating" in much of the extant Chinese-language writing recently translated into English. The poems found on the walls of the Angel Island detention barracks where Chinese immigrants were held for interrogation before admission into California directly treat themes of protest against U.S. immigration policies and testify to the outrage, humiliation, fear, and feelings of vengeance that these

detainees harbored (Lai, Lim, and Yung 1991). Countering the nineteenth-century stereotype of Chinese immigrants as illiterate, degenerate coolies (S. C. Miller 1969), many poems express a consciousness of human rights and ideals of social justice and patriotism:

> I beat my breast when I think of China and cry bitterly like Ruan Ji.[1]
> Our country's wealth is being drained by foreigners,
> causing us to suffer national humiliations.
> My fellow countrymen, have foresight, plan to be resolute,
> And vow to conquer the U.S. and avenge previous wrongs!
>
> (Lai, Lim, and Yung 1991, 92)

The undifferentiated gap between immigrant status and diaspora identity is evident in such non-English "mother-tongued" text, in the ways in which the subjects of the poems name themselves, and in their cultural di/stance toward U.S. society and culture. "I am a member of the Huang clan from Xiangcheng," one Angel Island detainee proclaims; while another laments that "the [Western] powers still have not yet recognized *our* China" (emphasis added, 86). The Cantonese poems published in U.S. Chinatown newspapers at the beginning of the twentieth century and translated in *Songs of Gold Mountain* (Hom 1987) exhibit more extreme oscillating markers that offer alternative affiliations. Unlike the *Angel Island* poems, however, many of these folk poems site the conflicting and contradictory social values on Asian American women's bodies. Although some of these Gold Mountain songs celebrate the liberating effects of Westernization on Chinese women ("Following the practice of Western countries, / I am free to make my marriage choice. / . . . . I have found a good husband on my own" [223]), others condemn these same effects as threatening unbounded female sexuality: "What a batch of lousy broads, / All without proper upbringing. / . . . . Alas, their dissipation is shameful to *our* China" [emphasis added, 225]). Any discussion of Asian American immigrant and diaspora writing must take into account such non-English productions, a body of texts usually delimited as archival, but which make emphatic the shifting relations between diasporic and immigrant social formations (see Hom 1984 for an example of this recuperative move).

In contrast, the tensions between filiation and affiliation demonstrated in Chinese-language first-generation literature are redacted in the naive reproductions of assimilationist narratives of second-generation Chinese American writing in English. Pardee Lowe's *Father and Glorious Descendent* (1943) and Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945) construct Chinese American lives as progressing from immigrant to U.S. national

identity. Although both autobiographies have been critiqued for their alleged appeal to ideals of American-defined democracy and citizenship and consequent refutation of Asian cultural origin, they also suggest some of the tensions that have historically rejected Asians as unassimilable immigrants; and Wong's autobiography recuperates a strong patriarchal figure in the Confucian father whom the daughter struggles to persuade of her value (Lim 1992a).

Claims to full U.S. national-cultural designation, moreover, are claims to a privileged norm. As Said points out, these claims carry with them "a formidable battery of other distinctions between ours and theirs, between proper and improper, European and non-European, higher and lower" (Said 1986, 612). Reviews of Wong's and Lowe's works that insist on their "American" qualities collapse the diasporic subject into the amnesiac condition of the "new American," a tabula rasa on whom is inscribed an ethnic-cleansed national identity. These reviews repeat orthodox myths regarding immigrant abdication of memory in the face of the cultural and material superiority of the intaking state.

The differences between Asian American literature – past and present – and other American minority literatures can be understood differently in the framework offered by the diaspora paradigm. In contrast to reductive notions of the immigrant as someone without history prior to entry into the Western state, recent critical theories recognize the historical discontinuities and the psychological violence visited on individuals through the tragic course of wars, famine, and economic dislocations, and the resulting contradictory constructions of social identity that disallow any racial or national essentializing of the subject.

Said's binarism of filiation and affiliation, therefore, should logically be elaborated to incorporate the histories and notions of exile and the diaspora. Immigration, which is the condition of being outside the natal order, has usually been constructed in assimilative narratives as proceeding toward integration into the "ideas, the values, and the systematic totalizing world-view validated" by an affiliative order (Said 1986, 616). When the relationship between affiliative identity (socialized self) and filiative place (homeland) is reified, the resulting condensation of signification underlines national canonical categories and, arguably, also produces the conditions of exile and diaspora. The exilic experience, like that of immigration, is the condition of voluntary or involuntary separation from one's place of birth; but, unlike immigration, this physical separation is offset by continued bonds to the lost homeland, together with nonintegration into the affiliative order in which the exilic subject is contingently placed. Literatures of exile have become increasingly evident as wars, famines, and natural disasters result in more and more involuntary dislocations of large groups of people.

Diaspora, as imagined in a work like Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China* (1981), denotes a condition of being deprived of the affiliation of nation, not temporally situated on its way toward another totality, but fragmented, demonstrating provisionality and exigency as immediate, unmediated presences. The discourse of diaspora is that of disarticulation of identity from natal and national resources, and includes the exilic imagination but is not restricted to it. To this category, I would also assign the literature of the transnational, the minoritism of a Kafka, for example, as Deleuze and Guattari reconfigure his work, that deterritorialization of language and imagination exhibited in works attending "the decomposition and fall of the Empire" (1983, 25), when a work turns away from the dream of fulfilling "a major language function" and uses its polylingualism instead to "find its point of non-culture and underdevelopment." Many works written from the position of the ex-colonial or postcolonial attempt acts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization: Diana Chang's novel *The Frontiers of Love* (1956), set in World War II Shanghai, literally and figuratively constructs a political space in which nationalities are militarily and philosophically contested, to critique both "native" and "colonial" historical and cultural hegemony.

IV

The contemporary debate surrounding a text's national identity is no longer simply one of admitting immigrant voices into a national canon, or even of replacing a centripetal monocultural construct with a rhizomic decentered paradigm (Deleuze and Guattari 1981). Technological innovations in the twentieth century – for example, the transistor, satellite television, microchips, fiber optics, and jet propulsion – have resulted in the emergence of global cultures in which events taking place in once remote places of the earth are acknowledged as directly affecting peoples far away. The shift from the discourse of immigration to the discourse of diasporas is one example of the dynamics of an evolving global technology capable of transmitting information simultaneously through mass media to geographically separate yet culturally related peoples.

This global culture must be distinguished from the globalization of cultures, the changes taking place within separate societies in response to increasingly transnational forces, such as the multinational and corporate nature of the publishing industry, or of most late capitalist industries for that matter. Even without the migrations of refugees and immigrants that break down the historically recent state constructions of nationality as social identity, the new technologies of travel, media, and industry sub-

vert these constructions and lead to renewed state efforts to control, and patrol, their physical and cultural borders. These technologies, increasing in global reach and affect, relate and commingle cultures once separated by tribal, racial, and national distinctiveness, which are thus threatened by their loss in ability to protect themselves from uncontrollable change or unwanted influence from "alien" cultures.

Benedict Anderson, in his study of nationalism, points to the entry of print capitalism or print language as laying the bases for national consciousness (1983, 46). However, as publishing becomes absorbed into the circulation of late-twentieth-century international corporate capital, it now arguably lays the basis for a transnational consciousness that undermines national consciousness. Much diaspora literature that rethematizes Western cultural hegemony has become a highly marketable product. One can read in the privileging of the diasporic imagination in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990) the convergence of capitalism and print technology to create the possibility of a new form of imagined community, but a community/nation that is Western metropolitan-based rather than non-Western national. It is not only the choice of the English language and of Western publishers that has consequences for the community the texts purport to represent. The axis of diplomatic history in which the interpretive community is situated, a situation that is historically contingent and provisional, also affects the community constructed in the text and the kinds of community addressed by the text.

The literature produced by "metropolitan" writers across borders is thus open to contradictory interpretations. One reading situates diasporic writing as interrupting or challenging the hegemony of metropolitan cultures (for example, L. Lowe 1991). Another reading interprets the popular publication and reception of texts produced by writers who are situated outside their natal borders – especially those works that can be taken to illustrate Western notions of Asian corruption or Western practices of postmodernism – as pointing to the dispersal of their strangeness, and finally to the naturalization/nationalization of the alien (see Lim 1992b). The transformation of the non-natal – of U.S. space and time – through interpretative affiliations marks writing produced by writers of Asian descent as American in intention.

The tradition of writing by transnationals of multiple diasporas resists such nationalistic appropriation. Han Suyin's multivolume autobiography (1965, 1966, 1968) and Edward W. Said's critical work (1978, 79) are prime examples of this tradition, in which the West is one agent in a diplomatic axis, with China or the Middle East as the other agent. Commenting on the momentous changes in U.S. attitudes after Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972, Michael Hunt points out, "The history of U.S. dealings with China neatly illustrates how likely Americans . . . are to

ignore diversity in the world and instead reduce cultures radically different . . . to familiar, easily manageable terms. There is a danger in putting great national power at the service of such a flawed and essentially ethnocentric vision. . . . If more harmonious cross-cultural and interstate relations is an ideal worth pursuing, then Americans must rein in the fatal tendency to project our tendencies beyond our borders" (Hunt 1983, 313). This axial positioning opens up problematics of affiliation that suggest a different history of the individual imagination as modulated by at least two cultural systems, each undermining and reconfiguring the other in a dynamic of intranationalism that is the ground of diplomatic history. Such works construct a confrontational relation between place and identity and compose a tradition of "global literature" complexly differentiated from the tradition of nationally bounded and divided identities that has conventionally organized our understanding of "world literature." These global traditions, read together, indicate a recent multifaceted cultural phenomenon, produced within the borders of the metropolitan state, by migrant and diasporic intellectuals – a phenomenon different in kind from immigrant writing.

To give an example of the nonaffiliative and affiliative traditions in Chinese American women's literature, when Diana Chang's novel *The Frontiers of Love* (1956) and Lin Tai-yi's *The Eavesdropper* (1958) appeared, they were not reviewed as American productions but as writings by diasporic Chinese writers. Like the author, the protagonist in Chang's novel, Sylvia Chen, is the daughter of an American mother and Chinese father; but because the action takes place in World War II Shanghai, reviewers approached the novel as being of "the Far East." Similarly, although half of *The Eavesdropper* treats the protagonist's, Shutung's, immigrant experiences in the United States, reviewers focused on its Chinese sections (Martin 1959; Payne 1959). Written by China-born Lin, now resident in Washington, D.C., *The Eavesdropper*, on the one hand, attempts an act of deterritorialization, locating itself through a critique of Chinese and American historical and cultural hegemony; Shutung's point-of-view is one of resistance to U.S. civilization, which is presented as seductively easy to penetrate. The novels by second-generation writers (for instance, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* [1989] and *The Kitchen God's Wife* [1991] and Gish Jen's *Typical American* [1991]), on the other hand, share a common set of assimilationary themes. These novels, beginning with an ex-filiative position, plot the acculturation of their Asian protagonists into a U.S. society represented as desirable, fetishistically possessable, and offering utopionist possibilities. They exhibit many of the marks of affiliation that symbolically reknit American sociopolitical hegemony. Read together, they indicate a different, although multifaceted, tradition of literature, written and published within the borders of the

United States, produced by Asian women of the diaspora, a tradition that includes such disparate works as Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945) and *No Chinese Stranger* (1975); Anna Chennault's *A Thousand Springs* (1962); Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), *China Men* (1980), and *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989); Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953); and Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) and *Jasmine* (1989).

In contemporary geopolitics, the West is identified with international corporate capital. In the diasporic imagination of Lin Tai-yi's *The Eavesdropper*, the loss of vital native place and the removal of exilic themes attendant on this loss can be said to be filled in by an a-filiative sensibility in which the material/territorial world inflates or deflates to subdue and to reattach the individual psyche into a social world now without traditional place or national boundaries. In contrast, the subject of Gish Jen's immigrant fiction, *Typical American*, suggests that assimilation into this corporate world is innocent, natural, inevitable, or valuable; in the progression from "origin" to metropolitan inhabitant, the natal "home" is constructed as less than already past – it is always already absent. The void of origin prepares the reader for the construction of the metropolis as material vitality, and for the resolution in favor of an international culture based on capital.

Unsurprisingly, Kingson's, Tan's, and Jen's novels (unlike Lin's and Chang's works) published in rapid succession between 1989 and 1991 have been well received as contributions to the emerging body of U.S. minority writing. Like those canonical critics Nina Baym analyzed for us, reviewers look for the "American" qualities in these novels. Jen herself, arguing that to read her novel "solely through an Asian-American prism is 'to use just one lens,'" insists "this book is about America" (Mehren 1991, E2). The protagonist, Ralph, develops in the Chinese American assimilation narrative seen in Pardee Lowe's and Jade Snow Wong's books. Jen's *Typical American* begins with a protagonist who leaves Shanghai for the United States in the throes of the Nationalist defeat. An engineering student, Yifeng (renamed Ralph) Cheng's first experience in the United States is falling in love with a Caucasian secretary. In the space of two pages, the novel imagines Yifeng's assimilation into the American socioeconomic world. The hegemonic cultural force that dislodges the individual from an original community is naturalized and at the same time given the inexorable mechanic force of a giant clock (32). In the progression from China origin to United States indigenous, China is represented as a void, thus preparing the reader for the construction of the United States as material vitality, possessing everything: "He missed his home, missed having a place that was home. . . . He might gild it, but in truth it was lacking. . . . Something, everything."

Ralph marries, gains tenure, and ventures into the capitalist mechanism of the United States with obsessive energy. Much of *Typical American* describes the Changs' upward mobility, a near vertiginous climb accompanied by an accelerated appetite for material accumulation. The melodrama in the last third of the novel, however, exposes that immigrant vision of an America of endless invention, filled with the possibility of containing everything and satisfying every desire, as a cultural fantasy. In a diasporic move, Ralph, on his way to visit his sister, who has just emerged from a coma, unexpectedly finds himself on that border that destabilizes national-grounded identities: "It seemed to him at that moment, as he stood waiting, trapped in his coat, that a man was as doomed here as he was in China. . . . He was not what he had made up his mind to be" (296). The promise of American capital, which is the promise of progressive improvement, of change and accumulation, is set against the limits of human ability: "A man was the sum of his limits; freedom only made him see how much so. America was no America" (296). This "bleak understanding" strips the immigrant of the naturalizing totality of American culture, which has composed a fiction of seamless yet contradictory values: progressive social mobility and community cohesiveness, increasing wealth and intensifying consumer patterns, hyperindividualism and strong family bonds.

Jen's novel interrogates even as it reinscribes American bourgeois narratives of capital competition and individual psychic struggle and survival. Still, as A. G. Mojtabi, a recent immigrant, suggests, contradictions bedevil the reading of *Typical American* as a wholly U.S. work: "Were there no contending forces? No dim remembrances of Confucianist harmonies or Buddhist detachment . . . [to raise] a little point–counterpoint?" The novel's gaze on the "foreign" Chinese is constituted by an American Other, the narrator, who is represented through extraliterary means – publisher's publicity, book blurbs, and reviews – as authorially identified and as immigrant U.S. citizen. This problematic gaze elides the absent half of the equation, the lacuna of the other half of the world, in the thematic totalization of capital as the sole motive in the narrative.

A different phenomenon partly accounts for the way in which Amy Tan's second novel has been mediated and sold to the American public. In contrast to the 1950s reception of Chang's and Lin's novels, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, whose action is set chiefly in wartime China, has been received as a U.S. text. Arguably, this "Third World" imagined in *The Kitchen's God's Wife*, as Spivak explains in a different context, is the site of "raw" material that is "monstrosity" – the socially monstrous phenomena of concubinage, abandoned daughters, arranged marriages, patriarchal abuse, and so forth – produced "for the surplus-value of spectacle, entertainment, and spiritual enrichment for the 'First World'" (84). China,

after all, "has been for the past several decades a spectacle for the West . . . an overdetermined event" (Chow 1991, 83). In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, it is not the novel's apparent content, its Third World materials, but its affiliative grid, the insertion of American ideological positions, including those of Western feminism, ethnic identity, and class, that affects its reception. Critics, however, must be careful to distinguish between what is national fantasy and what bears traces of Asian identity formation in the works by second-generation Asian Americans produced within U.S. borders. Uncritical acceptance of all Asian American writing as accurate representations of China, India, or the Philippines must itself be contextualized critically, as a mode of appropriating these "Orients" for American national purposes.

Kingston repeatedly asserts that in her books she is claiming America for Chinese Americans, a proposition that can be restated to mean claiming Chinese Americans for America. The double movement of appropriation is marked in the critical reception of her work, chiefly praised for making accessible to American readers the strange world of Chinese living in the United States. The accessibility works more in one direction than the other. Americans of Chinese ancestry, or even Chinese living in the United States, do not find that *The Woman Warrior* has made the United States more accessible to them, or that the book helps them to negotiate the dominant culture and to appropriate it for their needs. The book's popular reception in the universities suggests that it is the dominant culture which is incorporating Kingston's version of the Chinese into its transcultural psyche.

Rather than breaking, interrupting, or challenging the hegemony of U.S. mainstream culture, the popular adoption of selected Asian American texts – illustrating, for example, Western feminist notions of Asian patriarchal modes, or Western literary ideas of the postmodernism – points to the dispersal of their strangeness, and finally to the Americanization of Asia (Lim 1993). The transformation of the natal country, China, in the reception of *The Woman Warrior*, through the interpretative affiliations that make it the national text it is today (read under the grids of U.S. feminism, U.S. immigrant history, U.S. ethnographic community, U.S. literary experimentation, and so forth), underlines its power as a text of assimilation. As Edward Said elaborates, the affiliative order "surreptitiously duplicates the closed and tightly knit family structure that secures generational hierarchical relationships to one another. Affiliation then becomes in effect a literary form of re-representation, by which what is ours is good, and therefore deserves incorporation and inclusion in our programs of humanistic study, and what is not ours in this ultimately provincial sense is simply left out" (1986, 617).

V

Until the 1980s, Asian American literary criticism focused chiefly on Chinese American and Japanese American writers, but it is now also exhibiting shifting positions and sensitivities around the status of U.S. identity. These disavowals and fixities of identity, as seen in the sharply divided reactions among Asian American critics to the popularity of Kingston's and Tan's novels, for example, complicate critical theories and evaluations and keep them fluid. The 1970s' critique of the conflation of Asian American with Asian and Asian immigrant identity, and the enunciation of a U.S. identity not composed of Asian cultural elements, had severely delimited the terms for cultural belonging for smaller and more recent immigrant groups such as South and Southeast Asians and Filipinos (Penaranda et al. 1974). The historical specificities in the experiences of heterogeneous Asian immigrant groups inevitably call into question and destabilize the construction of a monolithic U.S.-identified Asian American identity.

Writing by South Asian immigrants or "Indo-American" writing (Tapping 1992, 288) exhibits similar dialectical relations between the U.S. and an Asian homeland or point of origin as in the Chinese American texts, but the best known of such Indo-American writing tends toward diasporic versions of identity that exceed the notion of exile (see Mehta 1972, 79, 82, 85; Suleri 1989; Seth 1986). Bharati Mukherjee goes further than many Asian American writers in her assimilationary position. After her naturalization in February 1988, she addressed an audience of New Yorkers from the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*, stating, "I am one of you now" (1988b). Arguing that the immigrant writer is situated without history prior to her U.S. entry, her construction assumes that mastery by people of color of and in the United States is simple and given, that it works one way, with the immigrant writing the great epic. Mukherjee openly embraces a twenty-first-century version of assimilation, advocating historical amnesia, "arising from nowhere and disappearing into a cloud" (1989, 214), and reprivileging the myth of America as the unhindered and sovereign individual, "greedy with wants and reckless with hope" (214), reinscribing a manifest destiny on the American landscape.

Mukherjee distinguishes between exiled Asians, whose works she dismisses as "too often hokey concoctions composed of family memory and brief visits to ancestral villages," and U.S. immigrants, whom she idealizes as "masters of America in ways I can never be" (1988b, 28) – a retrograde notion that sociologists such as Oscar Handlin had criticized as early as 1951. As an outsider, Mukherjee claims to have an advantage

over the incompetent, blind, putative insider-immigrant and so is able to appropriate "some of the richest materials ever conferred on a writer." She represents herself as an avowed writer of American affiliation: "I mean [my fiction] to be about assimilation. My stories centre on a new breed and generation of North American pioneers. I am fascinated by people who have enough gumption, energy, ambition, to pull up their roots. . . . My stories are about conquest, and not about loss" (Hancock 1987). Though she acknowledges "cashing in on the other legacy of the colonial writer," this colonialist duality is truncated into the here and now of American opportunity, with "third world material" represented in her schema as "the fugitive attraction of something dead."

Mukherjee's career, from India as an Anglophone daughter of Westernized and upper-middle-class Brahmins, via a university education in the United States, marriage with a white Canadian, to a university position in Toronto, and finally immigration to the United States in her forties, underlines one formation of American identity, in which a pre-U.S. history becomes degraded as "nostalgia" and "sentimentality" lacking effective cultural power (Wickramagamage 1992). Her rejection of Indian cultural vestiges has been praised as evidence of the continued vitality of American national ideals, permitting the triumphant location of her work in the tradition of American immigration epics next to "the best of our [American] writers" (Mukherjee 1988a). Problematically, however, her self-representation as immigrant success ignores the history and present existence of other immigrants – the illegals, refugees, poor, and working class – immigrants who – ironically – are heavily represented in her fictions (see *Darkness* [1985] and *The Middleman and Other Stories* [1988a]), suggesting a disjunctive and strategic commodification of these figures in her texts.

Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (1989) reformulates the American romance, depicting the development of an autonomous subject who enters the new world and successfully negotiates the dangers posed by the instability of capital (Jasmine's midwestern banker-lover is paralyzed by an aggrieved debtor-farmer's bullet; her young neighbor, under the stress of banking loans and reinvestment, hangs himself) to a happily-ever-after conclusion with her true love, a university professor, and his affectionate daughter. The assimilation narrative in *Jasmine* reproduces the hegemonic epic of the United States as the nation of limitless opportunity, freedom, and triumphant individualism, repeating a master narrative of individual autonomy, economic competition, and race-assimilation that masks the convergence of the discourse of nationalism with that of racism and sexism (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, 37) in U.S. cultural productions.

In sharp contrast to Mukherjee's renewed assimilationist position,

Oscar Campomanes, surveying Pilipino American literature, argues that "The orientation toward the Philippines prevents prevailing notions of Asian American literature from reducing Filipino writing in the United States to just another variant of the immigrant epic, even if this in itself must be seen as an ever-present and partial possibility as time passes and Philippine-American relations change" (1992, 55). While seeing Filipino American experiences as part of a larger diaspora, Campomanes reads all Filipino American writing as postcolonial and neocolonial produced discourse within an exilic tradition. The exilic interpretation, of course, comes from a specific critique of the continuing relation between a resisting subaltern culture and a U.S. imperial culture. Campomanes's exilic paradigm emphasizes a historically oppositional construction of identity that can be validated only outside of U.S. borders (in the Philippines) and which is different in kind from the constructions of ethnic and minority identities that seek empowerment within U.S. borders.

The exilic paradigm maps bodies of literature and brings to consciousness the more complex problems of identity politics that an insistence on "an American-born sensibility" excludes. But it does not fully account for all the dynamics of the diasporic cultures that produce Asian American literature, including the Filipino diaspora. The work of Bienvenido Santos, for example, demonstrates a richer relational problematic within the subject of the writing and between that subject and national affiliation thematics than can be suggested in the trope of exile.

In his collection of short stories, *Scent of Apples* (1979), and in novels such as *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor* (1983) and *What the Hell For You Left Your Heart in San Francisco* (1987), Santos constructs the experiences of the Pinoy or first-generation Filipino American as an existentialist condition. Viewed by Americans as "alien" ("I look like nobody," the protagonist says to the young American woman who mistakes him for a Mexican [1983, 140]), Santos's protagonists appear to elaborate on the theme of the outsider that Bulosan had vividly portrayed in *America Is in the Heart* (1946). Exile is an explicit motif running through his fictions: "The way of the exile was a series of passing through, a habit of roads, and the highways were so easy and inviting" (1983, 157). As with the Pinoy characters in "Manila House" and "The Day the Dancers came" (Santos 1979), Solomon King lives *in* America but is not *of* America: "Home was always a bit of the faraway land of their birth. No matter how long they stayed in America, they were still Filipinos" (1983, 12). Neither expatriate nor immigrant, these characters are like the transients they observe, befriend, or eventually become, shifting inhabitants without a fixed address. Shaped by intimate Filipino village communities and extended kinship systems, they attempt to reproduce these social relations in a culture that is urban, distant, and individual. Aliens in

the United States, U.S. culture is also alien to them. Nostalgia, homesickness in the original Greek sense, is the prevailing sentiment in Santos's fiction.

In *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor*, Sol, who has tied his life to his dimly acknowledged American double, the actor Robert Taylor, finds himself an old man, alone in the United States; his "vacation" from Chicago to San Francisco, retracing his youthful wanderings, metaphorizes his preparation for death, which itself is metaphorized as a return to his Filipino social roots. Two contrasting dreams summarize the novel's theme of the transplanted Filipino. In the first dream Sol, the brown man, sees the White House, "barbed wire around it, familiar like the board now swinging in the wind with the words . . . OFF LIMITS, NO TRESPASSING, U.S. PROPERTY" (156). In the concluding dream, Sol's mother offers him a candy bar from his childhood sweetheart "To sweeten his way" (173). The first dream suggests a history of U.S. imperialism and racism that has raised political and psychological barriers to the Filipino's entry into U.S. identity; the second refigures the nostalgia for a childhood home that keeps him psychically enmeshed in a past that is no longer available except through death.

However, although Santos categorized his position as that of the exile, Sol's alienation in the United States does not arise from his desire to return to the Philippines. In fact, the novel carefully maps a counter-desire to remain in the United States despite the awkwardnesses of cultural differences: "As soon as Sol received his green card . . . he knew that for him there was no more going back to the Philippines. . . . Now there was one thing he had to do, master the English language as a way out of the many difficulties that plagued the lives of his countrymen in America" (48). Sol's many failed relations with white American women function as a trope for his failed relation in the United States. Sexual desire and satisfaction stop short of marriage and a stable family life, a plot that hinges on the miscegenation laws that the novel only barely suggests and that had historically prevented Filipino male immigrants from full assimilation into U.S. society. The tragedy of Sol's life, his unsatisfied longing for a child as seen in the incident with Blanche and her son Jerry (148), becomes more than mere psychological dysfunction in the context of American racist legislations. In contrast to Sol's lonely aging, Alipio and Noli, who marry Filipino women, are portrayed as contented old men, settlers in a materially comfortable United States.

Rather than a novel of exilic longing for a homeland, *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor* is chiefly a critique of desire as it operates in and is operated upon expatriate Filipinos in U.S. culture. The fiction of Sol's relations with white women – relations that fail to move beyond the level of the sexual to the social – narrativizes the problematics

of cultural desire of the Filipino in America. Desire in the novel is not unidirectional, exilic desire; it is also desire for the United States, assimilationary desire. That this assimilationary desire, gendered as male and raced as brown, is frustrated, unsatisfied, and dysfunctional in no way obverts its counter, nonexilic reach. Sol's absence of and longing for familial paternity in the United States, as well as his regressive nostalgia for an idealized familial childhood in the Philippines, recalls the paradigm of "between worlds" that critics like Amy Ling have foregrounded in their interpretations. But, chiefly, the novel's siting of desire in brown men for white women – Filipinos for the United States – reconstitutes the metanarratives of domination–subordination relations that underlie the cultural production of differences in U.S. discourses of race and gender.

The contesting notions of the American-born sensibility (Chin et al. 1974), the between-worlds dilemma (Ling), the immigrant/assimilation narrative (Mukherjee), and the exilic paradigm (Campomanes) together demonstrate the historically shifting, heterogeneous processes of identity-formation and identity-politics thematics in the works of first-generation and second-generation Asian American writers. Indeed, the intersecting discontinuous trajectories of immigrant and diasporic constructions of race, class, and gender identities call into question any hegemonizing theoretization or orthodoxies, suggesting instead that these works need to be interpreted as *individually negotiating* the contestations and the cooperations of the filiative and the affiliative in the historicized context of the subjects' particular diasporic/ethnic cultures.

NOTE

1. "Ruan Ji (A.D. 210–63), a scholar during the period of the Three Kingdoms (A.D. 220–80), was a person who enjoyed drinking and visiting mountains and streams. Often when he reached the end of the road, he would cry bitterly before turning back" (Lai et al. 1991, 66).

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