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“A transitory step to someplace else”:
The Literature of First Generation
Migrants from China to America

Joe Upton

Submitted for the examination of Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of Sussex

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signed:

Summary

University of Sussex

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Doctor of Philosophy, English

“A transitory step to someplace else”: The Literature of First
Generation Migrants from China to America

This thesis investigates the literature published since 1965 by first generation migrants from China to America. Given the peculiar history of the Chinese in America and the inevitable importance of both superpowers to the twenty-first century, this thesis asks what this group of writers can tell us about China, America, and what lies between them? By combining close reading of key texts with explorations of social, historical and political context, this thesis contributes to the recognition of how migrant writing is central to understanding the modern world.

‘In-between’ and ‘grounded’ spatialities that contain, are evoked by, or are associated with this literature are examined in this thesis. Chapter One explores how Chinatown functions as an imagined space of Chineseness ‘abroad’, and how different representations of the neighbourhood render its essentialised significations always already incomplete. The space of the nation for Chinese migrants in America is complicated by the Cold War and its afterlives, as well as by the racializing and nationalist habits of both nations, and Chapter Two investigates how these histories and discourses have dovetailed. Meanwhile, the ‘transnation’, whilst ostensibly offering to transcend the nation, can become a kind of ‘no man’s land’, as examined in Chapter Three. The life writing produced by these authors brings into question the glocal concerns of the publishing market, and Chapter Four explores the ramifications of ethnic autobiography’s frequent association with the figure of the ‘native informant’.

In the wake of the ‘rise of China’ and America’s response to it, by studying China and America side-by-side in the literature of these authors, this thesis overturns the cultural, national, racial and political significations of ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Americanness’ as thought in distinction.

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Introduction

Between Hanoi and Sapa there are clean slabs of rice fields
and no two brick houses in a row

I mean, no *three*—
See, counting's hard in half-sleep, and the rain pulls a sheet

over the sugar palms and their untroubled leaves.
Hours ago, I crossed a motorbike with a hog strapped to its seat,

the size of a date pit from a distance.
Can this solitude be rootless, unhooked from the ground?

No matter. The mind resides both inside and out.
It can think itself and think itself into existence.

I sponge off the eyes, no worse for wear.
My frugal mouth spends the only foreign words it owns.

At present, on this sleeper train, there's nowhere to arrive.
Me? I'm just here in my traveler's clothes, trying on each passing town for size.

—'Rootless' from *Eye Level*, by Jenny Xie

Aboard a sleeper train somewhere between Sapa and Hanoi, the speaker of Jenny Xie's poem 'Rootless', from her award-winning 2018 collection *Eye Level*, gazes, hypnagogic, at a landscape transforming before and within her (Xie 1). She is in transit between sleep and wakefulness, what is seen and what is perceived. Uprooted, she exists "[b]etween" different geographic and social spaces (line 1). Horticultural metaphors are commonly used to describe the migrant subject, conveying the idea of migrants extracted from their natural (national) soil, roots hewn in their passage to new ground.¹ In Xie's poem, the rootlessness

¹ In Marilyn Chin's *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*, for instance, first generation migrants are depicted as: "the sacrificial tree on which the next crop was supposed to flourish and bear fruit" (20). The migrant generation fertilises the new land for their offspring—the fruits of their sacrifice. A strikingly similar image in Ha Jin's *A Free Life* sees the migrant generation as that which is "meant to be wasted, or sacrificed, for its children, like manure used to enrich the soil so that new seeds could sprout and grow" (419).

metaphor is nuanced. It is itself transported to a different context—not the China of Xie’s birth *or* the America of her upbringing. Instead, the poet speaks from northern Vietnam, travelling between the bustling metropolis of Hanoi and the bucolic hills of Sapa. This is an in-between space, a third terrain, an alternative Asian spatiality. But it is not only an abstracted, theoretical in-between space: the train also snakes through the solid ground of rice fields and brick houses.

Nevertheless, geographical spaces are blurred in the poem. The traditional landscape of Sapa’s rice terraces merges with Hanoi’s modern, urban environment, creating an image of concrete “slabs” of rice paddies (line 1). The superimposition of these images introduces uncertainty, heightened when the speaker corrects herself, admitting that there are actually *three* houses in a row, not the two initially reported. What this correction draws our attention to is a movement between the two registers and mechanics of sight. When the speaker’s eye-sight fails to distinguish the landscape clearly, her ‘I’-sight attempts perception. The “I” inserts itself into the poem as a break, a re-vision, facilitating the speaker’s attempt to perceive other than empirically (line 3). This epistemic uncertainty leaks into the ontological uncertainty engendered by the blurring of geographical space that takes places in transit—the borders of space and perception begin to shift. In the movement from observation to elocution, the content of the scene undergoes its own transmutation, with first the eye and then the mouth interpreting and representing what has been perceived. The lyric ‘I’ thus becomes as unstable as the environment it has become uprooted from.

As such, the rejoinder to the question of whether the speaker’s “solitude [can] be rootless” is: “no matter” (lines 8-9). Elusively, this acts as both response and refusal. It rebuffs the question posed by suggesting that it is irrelevant (no matter) to consider whether one’s solitude can become rootless when “the mind resides both inside and out”, and solitude itself is thus always in dialogue (line 9). Yet the caesura following ‘no matter’ also intimates that matterlessness is a response in totality to the question posed. If, for the

speaker, the Cartesian mind resides both inside and out, organised around a central locus and at a remove from it, “think[ing] itself and think[ing] itself into existence”, then the self is always already both rooted *and* rootless, formed of matter and no matter (line 10). In this poem, we begin to see the outlines of the relationship between spatiality and identity, and how these might both alter migratory uprooting.

The Literary Legacies of 1965

As this Introduction goes on to establish, Xie’s poem encapsulates many of the concerns that drive and motivate this thesis, which investigates the literature (corpus) of a group (cohort) of authors who were born in China and have migrated to America. In many ways, Xie’s poem is the latest iteration of concerns that can be found throughout the contemporary literature of first generation migrants from China to America—albeit presented with Xie’s crystalline poetic precision and candor. To some extent, Xie’s poetry is the protracted result of a policy decision made around half a century ago: a policy that legally allowed large numbers of Asians to immigrate to America for the first time in almost a century.

The texts researched for this thesis were all published after 1965. Using this year to begin this thesis’s enquiry calls attention to the watershed moment in American history and literature that was the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act). Migration from China to the United States has risen exponentially since Lyndon B. Johnson signed this policy into law. In 2016, three million of the forty four million foreign-born people in the United States were from the Chinas—the second largest foreign-born group after Mexico (United States Census Bureau ‘B05006’). Before 1965, however, the population of people of Asian descent in America was small, and in many cases growing smaller. Between 1882 and 1943, with few exceptions, Chinese people were excluded from the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 followed a burgeoning of

discriminatory Californian state legislature, anti-Chinese sentiment fomented by groups like the Workingmen's Party, and acts of violence. This Exclusion Act was the first (though sadly not the last) law to exclude a group from the United States on the basis of race, and led to a significant decrease in the Chinese population of America.² Exclusion was extended in multiple instantiations until the Second World War—during which China was an ally to America—when the 1943 Magnuson Act effectively repealed Chinese Exclusion. However, the annual quota for Chinese migration was still limited to a disproportionately meagre 105 new entry visas until 1965.

It is, therefore, “difficult to overstate the importance” of the 1965 Immigration Act, as Min Hyoung Song attests (31). It abolished national-origins quotas—which had previously been used to give preference to immigrants from northern and western Europe—resulting in a drastic demographic shift. As a result of the Immigration Act of 1965, people of Chinese descent in America who were born in China now outnumber those born in America by some margin.³ In 2016, of the people reporting their race as ‘Chinese’ (alone or in any combination, i.e. mixed race) in the United States, approximately two million were American-born, whilst over three million were foreign-born (United States Census Bureau ‘S0201’). Furthermore, 50% of the foreign-born Chinese population in the United States arrived after the year 2000, and the growth rate of this population continues to increase (United States Census Bureau ‘S0201’). It was not until the 1980s that many of the authors in this cohort arrived in the United States, following the death of Mao Zedong and

² For more on the continued significance of the Chinese Exclusion Act, see Benjamin Railton's *The Chinese Exclusion Act*, which reveals how the distinction between ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ immigrants in the United States came into being with the passing of the Act, and that the first ‘border patrol’ along the Mexican border was commissioned to watch for ‘illegal’ *Chinese* migrants. See also Erika Lee's ‘The Chinese Exclusion Example’, which pinpoints the Act as establishing the United States as a ‘gatekeeping nation’ (Railton 2-3, 20; E. Lee 40).

³ Of these modern Chinese migrants, over two thirds migrated from the mainland (United States Census Bureau ‘B05006’). Before 1965, people of Chinese descent in the United States could almost all (around 90%) trace their ancestry to the single province of Guangdong in southern mainland China (Yin ‘Diverse’ 125). Modern migrants hail from every region of China.

the opening up of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the late 1970s, as well as the 1979 decision in U.S. Congress to grant separate immigration quotas to the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong (Yin 'Diverse' 123). A large group of writers and artists also arrived or remained in America as a result of the Tiananmen Square Massacre of June 4th 1989.⁴

The amount of literature produced by Asian American authors more generally has also risen exponentially (the definition and implications of the term 'Asian American', as well as the terms 'Chineseness' and 'Americanness' are discussed later in this Introduction). Only six texts in this corpus were first published between 1965 and 1980; twenty one were published in the 1980s and 1990s, and fifty six since the beginning of the new millennium. There are multiple reasons for this increase in the quantity of literature being produced by Asian American authors: the publishing industry has become more persuaded by the success and marketability of Asian American literature; there are thus an increasing number of authorial role models and 'champions' for Asian American writing; and there are simply more people of Asian descent in the United States.

The Literature of Migrants from China to America

As noted by Susan Koshy, one of the main preoccupations of Asian American literary studies has been the work of documenting an expanding field of literary production, and of recovering older, neglected works (Koshy 317). It is, in part, these tasks to which this thesis sets its sights, aiming to highlight the cultural production of a group of often overlooked authors. The term 'first generation' distinguishes this cohort of writers from American-born (second or later generation) authors of Chinese descent.⁵ This latter group have tended to

⁴ Following the Tiananmen Square Massacre, President George H. W. Bush issued Executive Order #12711, deferring deportation of Chinese nationals and their dependents (including a large contingent of students) who were in the United States between June 1989 and April 1990, granting them permission to stay and apply for permanent residency in the USA.

⁵ Migrant writers from the '1.5' generation are also included in this cohort. This is a term first used by Rubén Rumbaut and Kenji Ima in 1988, to demarcate those who migrated whilst children or

garner more critical and commercial attention, with writers like Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, and David Henry Hwang having been widely read and studied. Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, for instance, is cited as the most frequently taught text by any living author in American colleges, and Tan's novels were mainstays of bestseller lists around the turn of the century (Sabine 5; W. Li 124). More recently, younger American-born authors of Chinese descent like Celeste Ng, Lisa Ko and Ted Chiang have also found commercial success. The immigration legislation of 1965 created the conditions for the burgeoning of first generation Asian American migrant literature. And yet, whilst several writers from the first generation have been commercially successful (primarily authors of life writing—a phenomenon investigated in Chapter Four), they have typically received less critical attention than Chinese American authors from later generations.

One of the surprises and delights of undertaking this study has therefore been uncovering the abundance of literature produced by modern Chinese migrant authors in America—a greater wealth, I believe, than has previously been acknowledged. The literature of first generation migrants from China to America exists in profusion. In addition to the more than eighty texts by nearly sixty authors that have been investigated for this study, I have found well over two hundred further texts that meet the criteria for this thesis (texts published after 1965 and authored by someone born in China but writing from America).⁶ Beyond just existing in quantity, this cohort has produced writing of considerable quality. Several of these writers have garnered multiple major literary awards. Ha Jin, for instance, has twice won the PEN/Faulkner award, among many others; Yiyun Li's numerous awards

adolescents and who thus experienced many of their formative years in their nation of arrival (1). Eighteen of the authors in this cohort migrated to America before eighteen years of age, and a further eleven when aged between eighteen and twenty five. The authors in this cohort thus have a diversity of experiences, with some socialised and acculturated mostly in China, others in America.
⁶ A list of the published texts read as part of this thesis's corpus appears in Appendix One. A list compiled as comprehensively as possible of texts that fit the criteria for inclusion but have not been read for this thesis can be found in Appendix Two.

include the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, PEN/Hemingway Award and Guardian First Book Award; and Ken Liu has amassed several Hugo, Nebula and World Fantasy awards for his short stories. Despite the amount and artistry of the work produced by this cohort, it largely remains overlooked: no previous scholarly work has surveyed the literature of this cohort of contemporary Chinese migrant authors in America.

Notwithstanding certain biographical similarities between this group of authors, there remains a diversity of literary forms, genres and styles produced by them. This corpus contains works of real ingenuity, like R.F. Kuang's historical fantasy novel *The Poppy War*; formal experimentation, as with Hualing Nieh's part-epistolary novel *Mulberry and Peach*; popular appeal, like Marie Lu's dystopian young adult *Legend* trilogy; and incisive, affective storytelling, like Yiyun Li's short story collection *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*. Novels remain the dominant form in both American and Asian American literature, and this is reflected in this thesis's corpus. A little under half (thirty five) of the texts are novels, and it is to this form that the majority of close reading is devoted. Yet there are numerous other forms and genres included: nineteen works of life writing, fourteen works of poetry, ten short stories or short story collections/sequences, three works of creative non-fiction, one play and one biography. Many of these texts fall between generic categories, and are better apprehended through their sub-genres—those that recur regularly include spy, detective and mystery fiction (the spy sub-genre is examined in Chapter Two); speculative fiction; coming-of-age narratives; young adult and children's fiction; and, unsurprisingly, immigrant narratives. There is a dynamism to the variety of literature produced by this cohort, accounted for by a consideration of the range of forms and genres written by them.

Overlooking the Overlooked

In his monograph *Immigrant Subjectivities*, Sheng-mei Ma writes that “barred by linguistic, cultural, and other barriers, [...] Asian immigrants rarely tell their stories firsthand” (11). By

focusing attention specifically on first generation Chinese writers in America, this idea is challenged. This thesis thus gives the lie to the notion that immigrants' stories are told by their children or grandchildren, leaving migrant subjectivities "largely a blank, an absence—the voiceless, plastic other waiting to be born by their children", as Ma later describes (11).⁷ By bringing this cohort together, we see the profusion of voices from the first generation—a group more than capable of speaking for themselves, though who often go unread.

It has become a truism that Asian Americans and Asian American art are often marginalised. Asian Americans have been written out of history, as in the famous 1869 Golden Spike photograph, which depicts no Chinese workers despite their enormous contribution to Transcontinental Railroad's workforce; or in the forgotten violent purges of nineteenth century Chinese communities from the American West; or the neglected remembrance of Angel Island, where thousands of prospective Asian American migrants were detained in the early twentieth century.⁸ Asian Americans have also been mostly expelled from mainstream cultural production, as seen in recurring Hollywood whitewashing scandals, or the fact that there have only ever been three major Hollywood features with a majority-Asian cast: 1961's *Flower Drum Song*, 1993's *The Joy Luck Club* and 2018's *Crazy Rich Asians*. What is also pertinent about this list is that each of these

⁷ Ma is not the only scholar to sustain the idea that first generation American migrants are a voiceless group within literature. Gilbert H. Muller implicitly gives rise to this notion in his almost exclusive attention to second generation Asian American authors like Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston and Gish Jen in his monograph *New Strangers in Paradise*—a study of 'the immigrant experience' in contemporary American fiction.

⁸ It is worth remembering that a process of expulsion of certain groups of Asians in America has also been part of the history of Asian American Studies. As Jennifer Ann Ho recalls, "Asian American studies was initially figured to be a shorthand for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean American studies (with a glancing nod at Filipino Americans)" (15). It is only within the last couple of decades that the field has begun to make a concerted effort to interrogate "the hegemonic placement of East Asian Americans as subjects and producers of Asian American epistemology" (Ho 15). 'Asian American' is now often taken to include Southeast Asians, South Asians and Pacific Islanders, though the inclusion of West or Central Asians often remains lacking. For many, the field's current concern for remembering and including non-East Asians in the 'Asian American' category positively complicates and enriches the term, whilst for others it reduces the political efficacy of a purposefully limited group who share particular similarities in their historic and current treatment in the USA.

films was based on a book by an Asian American author (two of them being migrant authors at that). The cultural production of this cohort will continue to provide a basis for the representation of this group, and it is imperative that it be exposed to critical as well as commercial attention.

Today, marginalised American migrant narratives are particularly vital, challenging us to acknowledge and resist discourses that see migrants as statistics and news stories, rather than as unique individuals. More than simply reading them critically then, I have experienced these texts as testaments to the vitality and diversity of modern migrant lives. In this thesis, authors and texts that have achieved commercial success or critical acclaim are included alongside authors and texts that have gone largely unknown to literary critics or a wider public. Also attended to are works of wider cultural production, including documents, photographs, artworks and architecture. As Viet Thanh Nguyen recommends in his discussion of the development of Asian American literary criticism, this thesis pays attention to “all the varieties of minor works, which are minor for a number of reasons that range from being ‘bad’ aesthetically to being ‘bad’ deliberately, in their refusal of the kinds of aesthetic features that are rewarded by the mainstream” (*The Emergence* 303).

“[T]o reinvent American English”: A Note on Language

Initially, a guiding research question for this project was: what effect does the bi- or multi-lingual makeup of the cohort have upon their literature? As research on Sinophone Chinese American literature remains an area hugely overlooked by Western scholars, the intention was to read some of these works in comparison to Anglophone texts, and to investigate the borderlands between them in translated works. Over the course of study, it has become apparent that this research would be better serviced by scholars more proficient in the Chinese language(s), and this research question has become less prominent as a result. Nevertheless, my partial knowledge of Mandarin Chinese has allowed an attention

to multilingual and translingual traces in texts otherwise appearing to be primarily Anglophone. This praxis stresses the vitality and historical continuity of American multilingualism, following a movement in American literary scholarship initiated by Werner Sollors (*Multilingual America*) and Marc Shell (*American Babel*), and continued more recently by Maria Lauret (*Wanderwords*).

Moreover, and perhaps surprisingly, English is increasingly the language in which authors who have migrated from China to America compose their texts (Wong ‘What’s in a Name?’ 159). Nine of the texts in this corpus have been read in translation; the rest were authored in English. Focusing on Anglophone texts has therefore been a decision reinforced by the composition of the corpus. There are a number of reasons why any one of these authors may have chosen to write in English or in Chinese, and these reasons rarely boil down to proficiency or lack thereof. The choice to write in English can be experienced as a painful encounter with guilt and betrayal, or as an opting in to a ‘liberating’ domain of linguistic autonomy. Belinda Kong has noted that several female Anglophone migrant writers in America express a sense of freedom in the English language: a “release from the psychological inhibitions of their first language” (Kong 165).

Wang Ping is an author who follows this model, citing a number of interesting reasons for her decision to write in English. The first is simply that she has “been living here” in the United States—a seemingly simple assertion of practicality and acculturation (Sze and Ping 61). Yet she then begins to complicate this explanation: “you know, breathing the air, drinking American milk, eating its grains” (61). For Ping, English is not simply a utilitarian necessity; it is sustenance, a life-force enabling her to encounter each word “with great curiosity and playfulness” (Sze and Ping 61). Her daily interactions with English in America have effected a ludic invigoration of self and language. She later provides another reason—that because English is not her “mother tongue, it isn’t a prohibiting, unconscious, and forbidding force over [her]” (Sze and Ping 61). The Chinese language is likened to an

overbearing mother, who does not allow Ping to “break rules, challenge the authority of the language, and bypass the old ways of seeing and thinking”, as she apparently can in English (Ping ‘Writing’ 13). The ‘freedom’ of English for Ping thus becomes the freedom to upset, unsettle and adapt—not simply to adopt. The apparent ‘freedom’ to write in English has contributed to the outpouring of writing from this cohort.

Reading with Interdisciplinary Concerns

The nature of this project—an investigation into an array of texts orbiting an organising context—has required a balancing of the close analysis of particular key texts with a macrotextual, surveying analysis that reads for both similarity and difference. It has been inspired by other works that have surveyed particular cohorts of Asian American writers, and is chiefly indebted to Min Hyoung Song’s monograph *The Children of 1965*, which approaches the ways in which a cohort of Asian American authors “born since the mid-1960s and who are in the process of making a substantial mark on American literature” have represented Asian Americanness (8). Unlike Min’s work, this thesis studies Chinese American migrant literature specifically, includes authors born before 1965, and does not restrict its corpus to only the most notable of works; yet it shares with Min’s text a period of study and a commitment to formal, thematic and political concerns whilst reading key texts as part of a wider corpus. Xiao-huang Yin’s *Chinese American Literature Since the 1850s* has also served as an insightful survey into much of the Chinese American literature written prior to 1965. Yet Yin’s period of study ends in the 1980s, leaving a large body of work unexamined. Moreover, Yin’s work is perhaps too dedicated to reading “literature as a product of Chinese American life”, engaged primarily with the documentary onus of “recording and reflecting the hardships Chinese have experienced” (Yin *Chinese American* xi). This leaves less room for exploring the artistry and invention of his cohort.

Unsurprisingly then, an ongoing argument in Asian American literary studies concerns whether more credence should be given to analyses of form or of content. Foundational Asian American literary scholarship typically maintained that Asian American literature should be read with an attention to Asian American experience, social conditions and circumstances of production and reception. Elaine Kim states that “understanding Asian American literature within its sociohistorical and cultural contexts [is paramount ...] because, when these contexts are unfamiliar, the literature is likely to be misunderstood and unappreciated” (E. Kim xv). Within recent years, an increasing number of scholars have argued that attention should also be given to *how* Asian American writers express themselves. In *Diasporic Representations*, Pin-chia Feng reads a group of female Chinese diasporic authors through a methodology of ‘attentive reading’—“an empathetic way of reading and using theories by paying close attention to the historical and cultural nuances of each text” (17). She thus advocates reading Asian American texts not as sociological documents but as artistic creations, whilst Christopher Lee looks to the aesthetic as a mode of cognition—the terrain upon which relationships among knowledge, representation, and subjectivity are mediated (Feng 19; C. Lee 14, 17).

The reification of ‘representativeness’ is a risk of using socio-historical analysis alone, whilst an attention only to form might amount to a refusal to engage with the politics of context. As Rajini Srikanth and Min Hyoung Song elucidate, the space between the literary and the social worlds has grown thinner, and these two worlds “intimately intrude upon each other” (Srikanth and Min 2). They remind us that what made Asian American literary criticism radical was precisely its refusal to read the formal properties of texts apart from the flows of social and political concerns (Srikanth and Min 3). Yet an aesthetic act is also always already political—it “effects a reordering, a change in appearance of the social world by constructing an/other world in the consensual world”, as Susette Min articulates (42).

This thesis plants its roots predominantly in the discipline of American literary studies, and as such, its foremost methodology is that of close reading and analysing key texts in order to draw out their distinctiveness, themes in common, and a wide range of interdisciplinary concerns—be they associated with history, cultural studies, politics, social geography, or sociology. Homogenisation is a risk of cohering such a heterogeneous group of authors according to biographical similarities. Nevertheless, to suggest that this corpus of texts is indistinct from those produced by other groupings of writers—American, Asian American or even Chinese American—is to ignore historical specificities of grouped experience. In this thesis, literary analysis is thus situated alongside historical and sociopolitical enquiry, and close reading acts as a means through which to approach the broad sociohistorical, thematic and theoretical concerns of these texts, as well as to explore their artistry and ambiguities. In the following chapters, key primary texts include *The Lost Daughter of Happiness* by Geling Yan, a novel that engages with the stakes of representing spaces of ‘Chineseness’; *A Map of Betrayal* by Ha Jin, which reworks the spy novel genre to present an alternate history of the Cold War relationship between China and America; Chuang Hua’s *Crossings*, a novel that explores how the ‘trans-’ space of migration can manifest; and works of life writing by Adeline Yen Mah, Anchee Min and Ping Fu, which subvert and revalidate readers’ expectations of the genre. To paraphrase Jenny Xie’s ‘Rootless’, by investigating these examples of migrant writing by authors who have moved from China to America, this thesis aims to begin pulling away the sheet that has long been draped over an overlooked body of work (line 4).

A ‘transitory step’: Where Does the Foot Fall?

In Ha Jin’s short story ‘Choice’ from his collection *A Good Fall*, one character observes that the migrants in Flushing’s satellite Chinatown “didn’t plan to stay for long. It was as if their current residences were merely a transitory step to someplace else” (54). The physical

movement of migration becomes just the first part of a journey toward what we might perceive as an idealised space *beyond*: an abstracted ‘someplace’, a transcendent elsewhere. ‘Someplace else’ invokes indeterminacy—the imagined, deferred space ‘beyond’ is one of simultaneity, of being in and of more than one place at once.

Aihwa Ong connects this ‘transitory’ state—the state of rootlessness and the space of ‘someplace else’—with the phenomenon of transnationalism, and demonstrates how the ‘trans’-ness of these notions conjures “the *trans*versal, the *trans*actional, the *trans*lational, and the *trans*gressive” (Ong 4, emphasis in original). The trans- of this transitory step endows it with the possibility of ‘in-betweenness’ (transversal, transaction, translation), but also the latent possibility of change (transformation, transition), and of surpassing the nation as organising logic (transcending, transgression). Speaking of metaphor as a site in which the “desire to transcend” is enacted, Yiyun Li writes that “[a] metaphor's desire to transcend diminishes any human story; its ambition to illuminate blinds those who create metaphors” (*Dear* 141). Yet in denouncing the elements of metaphor that aim to transcend the ‘human story’, Li uses metaphor to communicate her ideas. Metaphor, along with other sites for ‘transcending’, is grounded in the practicalities of meaning-making.

However, whilst the ‘someplace else’ in Ha Jin’s story promises an escape from present surroundings, the literal space described as being a transitory step is a ‘current residence’. The ‘current’ location from which this transition is conjured must be recognised as a socially, historically and geographically grounded site of inhabitation. The ‘transition’ may therefore either be toward a kind of ‘no-place’ (*utopia*) that functions as an in-between space, *or* to another grounded space. Whilst the ‘in-between’ or ‘beyond’ is no less real for being ideological or thought into being, it remains tied and bound to physical place. To speak literally about migration is not to detract from the ideological potential of the in-between or the beyond. Rather, as Sara Ahmed attests, it is to complicate through context, to introduce an environment of historicity, temporality and spatiality (80-1). Racialised

bodies; national border checks and patrols; the gatekeeping powers of literary agents and publishers; material wealth (or lack thereof); homes, neighbourhoods, cities; and many more factors bind together the in-between and the ‘grounded’, the bound and the unbound.

In Jenny Xie’s ‘Rootless’, the gradual move toward depersonalisation that the speaker begins to enact—“the mind”, “the eyes”, a “frugal” mouth—is undercut by a sudden intrusion of the self: “Me?” (lines 9, 11, 12, 14). This self remains in question, mutable, apparently in the spatio-temporal “here” of the “present” yet deferring the grounded referents for her selfhood indefinitely: there is “nowhere to arrive”, so she remains in transit (lines 13-4). The speaker ends the poem with the explanation that she is trying each destination in her journey on “for size”—attempting to clothe herself in a time and space that *fits*, that might answer the lingering question of ‘me?’ (line 14). As Dan Chiasson notices, although it is the speaker who is travelling through this landscape, it is the towns that are assigned the adjective: they are ‘passing’ towns (Chiasson n. pag.). As such, the speaker becomes the constant in a changeable landscape that she both thinks about and thinks into being. Like the ‘someplace else’ in Jin’s ‘Choice’, Xie’s speaker thus dissolves the boundary between interiority and exteriority, the rooted and rootless.

In order to study the connections between the grounded and the in-between or beyond in this corpus, this thesis adapts for literary analysis the ‘realism paradigm’ used in Intercultural Studies. The realism paradigm is itself a hybridisation that has occurred in the contact zone between two other Intercultural Communications research approaches: the ‘critical’ and ‘constructivist’ paradigms. Zhu Hua carefully explains the differences between these three models for research, and it is from her understanding of these terms that I have worked. Zhu describes the critical paradigm as an understanding of culture as “ideological and power struggle” (11). As such, researchers pay attention to macro structures through which differences are ascribed, reified or ignored. It aims to “achieve social justice and equality” by unpacking the Foucauldian relationship between power, culture and

communication (Zhu 11-2). The constructivist paradigm, meanwhile, pays attention to the “subjective nature of meaning making”, with researchers arguing that cultural difference is socially constructed, with each individual engaged in the creation of their own world (Zhu 12). A significant difference between the critical and constructivist paradigms is then the degree of agency each person is conceived of as having.

One of the primary research questions for this thesis has been how to account for both individual agency *and* deeper structures in understanding the cultural production of this cohort?⁹ The realism paradigm has provided a means to answer this question, inasmuch as it ‘grounds’ analysis in a ‘realist’ view of the relationship between structure and agency (Zhu 14). It accepts that individuals negotiate and are often dominated by socio-historical macro-structures, and *also* that individuals are capable of effecting change. Edward W. Said implores us to remember the “often tragic structure of social, historical, and epistemological contests over territory—this includes nationalism, identity, narrative, and ethnicity—so much of which informs the literature, thought and culture of our time” (‘Globalizing’ 68). By introducing these types of knowledge that keep one ‘grounded’, we are drawn to think about how spaces can be transformed from above by capital, national ideology, racial formation and so on, as well as from below by individuals and their everyday practices. Through the realist paradigm then, more questions can be asked of this corpus: how do these writers—who have travelled between China and America—engage with what lies between or beyond the concepts and spatialities they write about *and* with how these concepts are formulated in empirical, socio-historical terms? In other words, how does their migrant writing invoke moving ‘someplace else’ and/or the solidity of distinct geocultural contexts?

⁹ This question is addressed particularly in Chapter Four, in which the relationship between agency, co-optation and trauma is investigated with regard to the life writing produced by this cohort.

Spatialities of the Grounded and Ungrounded

In order to respond to these questions, the kinds of spatiality found throughout this corpus have become a principal nexus of concern for this thesis. At this point, it is worthwhile delineating the differences between ‘place’ and ‘space’. For Yi-Fu Tuan and many others, space is more abstract than place (Tuan 6). Space is untrodden, uncharted, inviting action like a blank page upon which meaning can be inscribed (Tuan 6, 54). Place is what space changes into once humanised and endowed with meaning and value, becoming an object or a pause (Tuan 6, 17, 54).¹⁰ Place is then inscribed space. However, Michel de Certeau nuances this dynamic. For him, space develops when dwellers navigate distinct places, as if turning letters of an alphabet (places) into vocalised words and sentences, which emerge as ambiguous spaces of meaning modified by the context of their enunciation (de Certeau 117). For de Certeau it is space that is humanised, dependent on the entanglement of contexts and meanings that humans bring to places, which remain points on a grid without them. de Certeau’s use of ‘space’ and ‘place’ is followed here, as it offers a rich framework through which to examine how cultural production interacts with spatiality.

So too do Henri Lefebvre’s theories of how notions and practices of space are *produced*, incorporating the social actions of individuals and collectives (Lefebvre 33-4). His conception of space forms a conceptual triad:

1. Representational space, or lived space. This is space as “directly *lived*”; the space of inhabitants as well as of some artists who “*describe* and aspire to do no more than describe” (Lefebvre 39, emphasis in original).
2. Representations of space, or conceived space. This is space as imagined, conceptualised, assumed and produced. It is now the dominant spatiality—the

¹⁰ Carter, Donald and Squires echo this formulation by proposing that place is “named space”, to which meaning has been ascribed, grounding identifications in turn (xii).

space of “scientists, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent” (Lefebvre 33, 39).

3. Spatial practice, or perceived space. This is space as ‘real’ *and* ‘imagined’—space modified by administration *and* by experience and circumstance. It is space of some cohesiveness, without necessarily being coherent (logically conceived) (Lefebvre 38-9).

As Timotheus Vermeulen explains, Lefebvre sees in space “forces [...] continuously mov[ing] into one another, battling each other, subjecting, submitting, subsuming and, eventually, turning struggle into synthesis” in a “continuous social dynamic” (Vermeulen n. pag.).

Lefebvre’s third domain, spatial practice, lends itself to this research in that it examines ‘real’ (grounded) and ‘imagined’ (unbound) spaces not in separation, but rather as a dialectic, with this third, perceived space forming a trialectic. It is in Lefebvre’s third spatiality that artists can produce alternate representations that challenge hegemonic, systematic or passively received versions of space. In other words, the spaces perceived by these authors become dazzlingly complex, expanding beyond ‘lived’ space—a process heightened by the negotiation with displacement that migration can germinate.

As an illustration, S. Li’s novel *Transoceanic Lights* begins with the young protagonist in a state of crossing, in the travel of migration: “[t]he clouds below [him] drifted in the wind and swelled into rain-laden anvils the size of mountains” (S. Li 1). From this trans-space, onto which an imagined topography is projected, shifting in form dependent on the turbulent fluctuations of thought, the family soon returns to the solid ground of an American Chinatown. Yet it is perhaps less ‘solid’ than it first appears. We do find in the novel descriptions of Chinatown’s ‘lived space’: “down the street stood the Chinatown gate: two white pillars flanked by foo lions under a green shingled roof” (S. Li 7). But these are joined by descriptions of Chinatown as conceived space: a garage with a “façade of

thousands of square holes” is reimagined as a housing complex for pigeons; a mural of a ship sailing toward a cityscape reconnects the migrant family with their own recent journey, during which “[t]he present and the past seemed to intertwine as if they were rooms demarcated by a billowing veil”, allowing the family to exist between transnational and trans-temporal spaces (2, 8). Chinatown here becomes perceived space: existing in an unspecified city, upon unnamed roads, allowing the protagonist to fill in and modify the space with his perceptions and stories. As Trinh T. Minh-Ha affirms in spatial terms, tale telling has “the potential to widen the horizon of one’s imagination and to shift the frontiers of reality and fantasy, or of Here and There” (28). At the same time, most of these authors first and foremost represent the spaces of their lived experience, whether through the ontologies conjured in fiction or life writing. Their literature bridges the divide between the in-between, the beyond and the grounded.

In-between space is not always experienced positively. Margaret Y.K. Woo explains that rather than her migrant subject position allowing her to ‘have it all’ by claiming an infinity of layers of self and community, it is precisely the endless “transit between worlds and identities that can become so exhausting [...] and disorienting” (Woo 43). It can feel like dislocation—a painful wrenching out of position. This is how Fourth Jane experiences her transnational intersections in Chuang Hua’s novel *Crossings*, explored in Chapter Three. Every voyage, however it is experienced, involves a re-siting of boundaries, as Trinh reminds us:

The traveling self is [...] both the self that moves physically from one place to another, following 'public routes and beaten tracks' within a mapped movement; and, the self that embarks on an undetermined journeying practice, having constantly to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture, or more creatively speaking, between a here, a there, *and* an elsewhere. (Trinh 27)

Throughout this corpus, an ungrounded ‘elsewhere’ is invoked, be it through the inhabitation of an abstracted transnation; the fiction of certain performances of authenticity;

the conjuring of an alternate in-between space of identity; experimentation with nascent forms and aesthetics; or the utopian pull of a deferred process of ‘becoming’. Whether consciously or not, many of these authors demonstrate a quest for some form of ungrounded alternative space.

Writing itself can also be an instantiation of this ‘someplace else’. Ha Jin, for instance, writes that authors can enter the space of “history” through “the avenue of [their] art”, and stresses that “the page [...] is the space where [they] should strive to exist” (*The Writer* 30). We find in Jenny Xie’s ‘Rootless’ that the page is a flexible material and theoretical space. The couplet form of ‘Rootless’, which at first seems to hook the ideas and signification of the poem onto discrete, governed, formal units, refuses to contain or delimit the poem. Ideas sprawl, travelling across the borders of the couplet, refusing to remain hooked. The couplets allow for an opening up of swathes of white space on the page, acting as devices through which to *create* material in-between space. For Jin, similarly, alternate spatialities—the psychosocial space of history, for instance—can be accessed through writing. The page forms a bridge to spaces beyond it. Readers lie at the other end of this bridge, greeting the words and images that have migrated from one mind to another. In doing so, readers enter a new or transformed context; they are unsettled and uprooted in turn, and this brief period of rootlessness can effect a form of reordering—a “measuring of distance and difference”, as Xie refers to the migratory effects of reading (Xie in Rahmani n. pag.).

Heterogeneity and American Migrant Literature

Since the publication of Elaine Kim’s *Asian American Literature* in 1982—the seminal book of Asian American literary criticism—Asian American literary studies has introduced some hugely influential concepts to the study of American literature.¹¹ One Asian American

¹¹ The discipline of Asian American Studies originated in the late 1960s, borne of contemporaneous civil rights activism, and more directly of the Bay Area student strikes that led to the creation of the

Studies theory that has been particularly influential was germinated by Lisa Lowe's 1991 article 'Heterogeneity, Hybridity and Multiplicity'. Building on poststructuralist and postcolonial discourse, this article asserted that a recognition of Asian Americans as heterogeneous allows for the political mobilisation of 'Asian American' as a group marker based not only on shared histories of exclusion, but also on a "redefined lack of closure—which reveals rather than conceals differences—[and thus] opens political lines of affiliation with other groups" (Lowe 'Heterogeneity' 30). Asian American affiliation becomes a multiply conceived production, position and practice based on multi-vocality and diverse positionality, as well as on coalitions not just within Asian America but also with non-Asian American groups (labour unions, other racial or ethnic groups, feminist alliances, gay and lesbian groups and so on) (Lowe 'Heterogeneity' 30). If for Lowe the boundaries of Asian America are constantly in flux, this teaches us that the 'dominant' culture is never stable either: "it follows that the 'majority' [...] culture, with which minority cultures are in continual relation, is also unstable and unclosed" (Lowe 'Heterogeneity' 29). From Lowe's work I draw a way of reading this corpus with attention to the productive nature of inter- and intra-group difference that can open multiple avenues of affiliation and agency.

A prominent research question that I began this project with is: what is or is not distinct about contemporary first generation Chinese American literature? Or, how and to what extent is it different from the literature of other (ethnic/migrant American) groups? Inspired by works like Caroline Rody's *The Interethnic Imagination* and A. Robert Lee's *Multicultural American Literature*, which take a comparative approach to Asian American literary criticism, this thesis aims to draw out similarities and differences across a broad range of artistic production. It has long been theorised that migrants to America share a set

first Ethnic Studies departments. These strikes took place in San Francisco State University and the University of California, Berkeley. Karen Tei Yamashita's *I Hotel* offers an evocative version of this period in its first chapter/novella 'Eye Hotel'.

of “universal problems” with “all other immigrants”, as Iris Chang articulates—the struggles, for instance, to provide food, shelter and education for their children, to sustain cherished values in a new world, or to survive the loss of a ‘homeland’ (xvi). An attention to similarities of experience across racial or cultural groups challenges the stereotypical idea that there is something peculiarly ‘Other’ about migrants of Chinese descent. Yet this supposedly ‘universal’ set of immigrant experiences can only take us so far toward understanding a hugely diverse set of experiences.¹² A comparative approach to this corpus has been adopted in part, reading this heterogeneous corpus alongside other works of ‘ethnic’ or migrant American literature—particularly in Chapter Four—in order to approach how these texts conform with, adapt, refute or transcend certain models of American literature. Whilst the images of America generated in immigrant literature may have changed over the last century, and vary between differently racialised authors, it remains vital to study this culturally dominant narrative in order to better understand modern America.

The Macrotexts of American Migrant Writing

In two articles written in the early 1980s, William Boelhower formulated that two forms of American writing—the immigrant novel and the immigrant autobiography—are composed of single macrotexts. In his article on the immigrant novel, Boelhower proposes that the ‘macroproposition’, which underlies this genre’s ‘macrostructure’ can be stated as such:

An immigrant protagonist(s),
representing an ethnic world view,
comes to America with great expectations,
and through a series of trials
is led to reconsider them
in terms of his final status. (Boelhower ‘The Immigrant’ 4-5)

¹² It is important for two interconnected reasons, therefore, to contextualise the experiences, history and literature of migrants from China to America within the wider context of a hyper-connected, globalised world *and* alongside wider ethnic and immigrant American experience.

In his article about the immigrant autobiography, meanwhile, Boelhower proposes that an overarching *fabula* forms an “invariable model” that begins with a dream moment in which the migrant envisions America as a ‘Golden Land’, and, after contact with the New World, progresses to a series of contrasts between the ideals and realities of the Old and New Worlds (Boelhower ‘The Brave’ 13). From this “single story”, “an infinite variety of plots can be derived” (Boelhower ‘The Brave’ 7). Whilst the similarities between these two macro-*fabulas* blur the boundaries between fiction and life writing, and his structuralist formulations are inferred entirely from Euro-American migrant writing, Boelhower’s schemas are useful inasmuch as they recognise American immigrant writing as distinct and valuable, introducing into American literary history “a new pluricultural world view” (Boelhower ‘The Immigrant’ 10). Whilst not all of the texts read as part of this thesis’s corpus can be called immigrant writing according to Boelhower’s macrostructures, I read these texts as authored by migrant writers—writers who have experienced a transition between worlds; who have measured differences; and who act, in the words of early twentieth century immigrant life writer Mary Antin, as “the strands of the cable that binds the Old World to the New” (xxi).

In his book of collected essays *The Writer as Migrant*, Ha Jin proposes another taxonomy of American migrant writing. “Many exiles, emigrants, expatriates, and even some immigrants are possessed with the desire to someday return to their native lands. The nostalgia often deprives them of a sense of direction and prevents them from putting down roots anywhere”, Jin writes (63). He goes on to formulate that this rootlessness is a fundamental characteristic of American immigrant literature, giving the examples of Mr Shimerda in *My Ántonia* and Albert Schearl in *Call it Sleep*. As we began to see at the beginning of this Introduction though, in Jenny Xie’s poem, the ‘roots’ paradigm is nuanced and transformed. Roots and rootlessness may form the substance of many pieces of American migrant writing, but the form or formlessness of these roots can shift. Many of

the works in this corpus subvert, nuance, or forego the macrotextual expectations of American migrant writing.

“Can this solitude be rootless, unhooked from the ground?” the speaker of Xie’s poem speculates (line 8). Whilst in American immigrant literature roots are typically symbols of biological connection to native soil—to the culture, history and people of their nation of birth—roots are portrayed more elusively in Xie’s poem as ‘hooks’: anchoring something to the ground that might otherwise fly ‘beyond’, or luring something to the surface that might otherwise remain ‘beneath’. Roots thus multiply, have multiple functions, and ultimately are devices for affixation, locking things in state and stasis. The poem is itself both rooted and rootless within the collection. It stands alone, uprooted from the other poems in the text, which are planted in beds of thematic concern. Yet it is also the introductory poem, rooting the rest of the collection in the ideas and aesthetics it generates. We find in this poem an undoing of the binary between roots and rootlessness, and a refusal to situate this enquiry directly within the spaces of the poet’s migrant biography, inhabiting instead a geographically *grounded* in-between space—a land between America and China, between cities, between stops. Explored in Xie’s poem is the dialectic between grounding and ungrounding, borders and crossings, here and beyond.

To focus only on the spaces that lie ‘beyond’ or ‘in-between’ would be to miss how these zones remain connected to *grounded* epistemologies. For this cohort, conditions of the material world remain central: concern with the socio-historical conditions of geographical space; the bodily (sometimes violent) results of racial formation; the promises and limitations of socio-cultural categorisations; the erection and entrenchment of national borders; the parameters of established forms and genres; and the demands of the publishing market upon the ethnicised author can all be found amongst this corpus. The immigration narrative that propels many of the texts studied here typifies this relationship. Rather than a clear ‘break’ occurring in the move from China to America, we find in these

narratives tales of the entanglement of past and present, China and America, the local and the global, connections as well as discontinuities.

Considering the grounding of these narratives draws attention to the feet planted upon it—to the material presence of migrant bodies. In ‘We Love You Crispina’, the first story in Jenny Zhang’s 2017 short story cycle *Sour Heart*, Christina and her family endure a barrage of hardships during their first years in America. Long, busy sentences allow hardships and sacrifices to accumulate, until the pile eventually topples with the collapse of their Bushwick apartment. In this moment, Christina realises that the reason that they will never leave New York—for the “beautiful rolling hill[s]” of North Carolina where her Aunt and Uncle live, for instance—is because her family refuse to move “because [they] *had* to” (J. Zhang 31, emphasis mine). So it is that after leaving their destroyed apartment, but before getting in the car, the family pick up rubble from the street and hurl it at the windows of buildings where they think “the hoods lived, the ones who assaulted our neighbour [...] and were the reason why she moved back to Taiwan” (J. Zhang 31). Christina’s family grasp pieces of the terrain they have chosen and toss them into the unknown. They do so to “*stand [their] ground*, trying to prove that [they] belonged” (J. Zhang 31, emphasis mine). Rather than capitulate to being forced out, they stay in New York, in a deliberate act of claiming American ground.¹³

American literature has been fundamentally influenced by immigrant characters: from Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* to Emma Lazarus’s sonnet *The New Colossus*, Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle*, or the great outpouring of early twentieth century immigrant literature, including Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Anzia Yezierska’s *Bread Givers*, Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*, and Henry Roth’s *Call it*

¹³ This understanding of grounding echoes the narrator’s rumination in Geling Yan’s *The Lost Daughter of Happiness*: “[m]y roots, in their painful, itchy attempts to rework themselves into American soil, have learned to twist and squirm, to cling to this place, never to be pulled up” (173).

Sleep. As Gilbert H. Muller attests, the fiction of immigration is a prototypical American form, a dominant metanarrative (Muller 5). It has generated the idea of Americans as ‘self-made’—pursuing an American dream that will save them from their pasts and regenerate them and their families through a paradoxically collective rhetoric of individualism and extra-ordinary achievement. It is not just the migrant who is remade in America, but the migrant who remakes America, and migrant narratives too hold within them the potentiality to reform America’s image of itself.

Culturalist Deconstructivism: Grounds of the Subject, Subjected and the Subjectless

One of the leading research questions of this thesis is: in what ways do the ideas generated by the terms ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Americanness’ manifest in this literature? What versions of Chineseness and Americanness are constructed and represented? These are terms loaded with cultural, national, racial and political significations, and conceived of as relating to two distinct, geographical spatialities—‘China’ and ‘America’. Chineseness is, as Eric Liu articulates, a tautology (the thing that binds together the millions of Chinese inside and outside of China, and the very occasion for that binding): it is “anything, everything and ultimately nothing” (Liu *The Accidental* 10, 31). The same should be said for ‘Americanness’. These concepts are the result of a modern predilection for binding the dominant construct of ‘identity’ to cultural, national, racial and ethnic groupings. These terms have never been referentially stable, and their signifying limits are constantly in flux, subject to varying political objectives; flows of migration; cultural exchange and hybridity; racial mixture; imperial or neo-colonial encounter; not to mention personal agency. It is unsurprising then that the negotiation of ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Americanness’ is among the major themes and concerns found throughout this corpus, and is explored in terms of performance in Chapter One, race and nation in Chapter Two, and culture in Chapter Four.

Building also on Lisa Lowe's work in 'Heterogeneity' and later monograph *Immigrant Acts*, Susan Koshy has formulated in 'The Fiction of Asian American Literature' that 'Asian American' must also be conceived as being without literal referent. Koshy argues that 'Asian America' can be a strategically useful formation, but it is also a 'catachresis'—an idea without a literal referent, and marked therefore by the limits of its signifying potential (Koshy 342). This is the source of the term's weakness and strength for Koshy. There is deconstructive and deterritorializing potentiality in the term's latent rejection of any 'real' Asian American identity. Similarly to Koshy, Kandice Chuh has more recently proposed that we should see the term 'Asian American' as "subjectless ground" (Chuh 11). Chuh describes it as a "*metaphor* for resistance and racism" of various kinds, rather than being an "objective description of a knowable identity" (27, emphasis in original). For Chuh it is the meaninglessness of 'Asian American' that collectivises and motivates Asian American Studies, which should reinvent itself as a subjectless discourse that thinks in terms of 'unification' over 'identity' and foreground "contingency, irresolution, and nonequivalence" as grounds for a shared critical position (Chuh 8). This study derives from Koshy and Chuh a drive to investigate the tautological nature of terms of identity ('race', 'Asian American', 'Chinese' and so on), and thus to interrogate *how* these terms have been constituted by individuals and parties with multiple and often contradictory agendas.

The Political Stakes of Chineseness

The word 'Chinese' is simultaneously a national, ethnic, racial, cultural and linguistic signifier, depending on context. It both forces a large group of people into a homogeneous grouping, and invokes heterogeneity by reaching outward to the diverse conditions of willing or involuntary group membership. There exists today no single Chinese nation: China refers in national terms to the People's Republic of China (PRC or mainland China) and to the Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan), as well as to Hong Kong (now a part of

the People's Republic, yet for the time being remaining politically distinct). The history of each of these nations is unique, but intertwined with the others. As Allen Chun elucidates, Hong Kong has experienced a shift from British colonialism to partial incorporation into the PRC; Taiwan has undergone nationalism movements, mass-migration from the PRC, and the suppression of its indigenous peoples; and mainland China has faced dynastic rule, colonialist occupation, Nationalist and Communist regimes, and the establishment of a capitalist oligarchy—all within the twentieth century (A. Chun 2). Studied here is the work of authors born in these three *national* Chinas.¹⁴ Of the authors included, forty eight were born in Mainland China, six in Hong Kong, and four in Taiwan. This proportion is consistent with the population sizes of the Chinas (the PRC has over a billion more citizens than the other two combined), and with the demographics of migrants from the Chinas to America since 1965. The term 'America' is also complicated, but in territorial terms is used here to denote only the United States.

Rather than assuming a comprehensive notion of Chineseness, this thesis continues the work of scholars like Ien Ang, Arif Dirlik, Allen Chun and Tu Weiming, who have all engaged with decentring or de-essentialising this concept. Tu Weiming's concept of 'Cultural China' is one of the most influential in this vein, and the framework from which I furthest diverge. Tu conceives of 'Cultural China' as distinct from political China, and proposes that it is formed of three concentric circles. The first circle (core) consists of mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore; the second circle contains diasporic Chinese communities throughout the world; and the third circle comprises any person who takes part in cultural discourse on 'China' (writers, scholars, industrialists and so on) (Tu

¹⁴ Singapore is sometimes considered a Chinese nation, but is not included in the purview of this thesis. Neither are authors born in the Chinese diaspora, for reasons discussed below. Mainland border regions like Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia are fraught with the legacy of Chinese imperialism, and whilst an argument could be made for including authors like Tsoltim Ngima Shakabpa and Tsering Wangmo Dhompa (both of Tibetan descent), I do not include authors born in these disputed areas.

12-3). Cultural China expands outwards, from Greater China as geopolitical centre to marginal or nascent formations of Chineseness. Key to Tu's thought is that the periphery will come to modernise and 'set the agenda' for the centre, thereby undermining its (meaning the PRC's) political effectiveness (Tu 12). This is not the first time that the diasporic (periphery) Chinese have been formulated as vitally important to the centre. L. Ling-chi Wang argues that China's subjugation at the hands of Western and Japanese imperial domination during their so-called 'century of humiliation' engendered an emergent, utilitarian politics dictating that "[t]o be loyal or patriotic for Chinese overseas was to support China's resistance" (L. L. Wang 156).¹⁵ Whilst the Qing dynasty (1636-1912) initially criminalised emigration on penalty of death (though this did little to prevent mass emigration throughout the nineteenth century), by the turn of the twentieth century the status of those who became known as 華僑 (Overseas Chinese) was upgraded to that of esteemed and valued nationals, whose loyalty was *valuable*. The 'centre' thereby harnessed the significant wealth of the diasporic Chinese, helping to fund economic and political resistance to imperial powers and establish a renewed, nationalised idea of 'China'. Thus, the waves undulating outward through the concentric circles of 'Cultural China' eventually rebound, returning to reinforce the centre, unlike in Tu's formulation.

Whilst Tu's challenge to centrist discourses of Chineseness is commendable for its attention to diaspora, I follow Ien Ang in taking issue with the ways in which Tu's formation reifies a (de)centred version of Chineseness: "the rescue operation implies the projection of a new, alternative centre, a decentred centre whose name is cultural China, but China

¹⁵ The Century of Humiliation began with the First Opium War of 1839-42, and ended with the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. The most notable events of the period include: the concessionisation or ceding of several treaty ports to various foreign powers; millions of citizens' deaths in a number of massive uprisings and revolutions; loss of territory, from independence movements in Tibet, Mongolia and Xinjiang; the collapse of the imperial system as the Qing Dynasty fell; the invasion of China by Japan and the devastating war against the Japanese invaders; and the soberingly bloody civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists (Kaufman, *The "Century of Humiliation"* 2).

nevertheless” (Ang *On Not* 43). As Ang goes on to note, whilst Tu’s concept of Chineseness defines it as fluctuating and fluid, the *category* of Chineseness is never in question, and ‘cultural’ China comes to serve effectively as a remodelled avatar for ‘racial’ Chineseness (Ang *On Not* 43-4). It is for similar reasons that ‘diaspora’ is not a dominant framework for this study. The study of diaspora offers to expose the contingent nature of national borders and internationalise the scope of fields like American Studies. What’s more, Stuart Hall reminds us that we should never underestimate or neglect the importance of claiming a diasporic ethnic identity, which can be an act of “imaginative rediscovery” or a resource for resistance to dominant notions of history and representation (Hall 224-5). Yet Hall also explores (and implicitly favours) a second version of identity in diaspora, in which significant differences between notions of “who we are” and “what we have become” leave cultural identity in a deferred state of *becoming* (Hall 225). Foregrounding the diaspora paradigm can threaten to elide the heterogeneity of a group, to prize racial or ethnic (conflated with national) descent over all other consensual identity formations—political affiliations, friendship groups, employment type, place of living at various scales, hobbies, artistic preferences and so on—to use Werner Sollors’ terms (Sollors *Beyond* 6). As Adam McKeown cautions, “[d]iasporas are too often presented as given entities described by the very labels, like Chinese, Indian, or Gypsy, which need to be interrogated or justified in conceptualizing a diaspora” (310). Whilst it is possible to productively question the form and substance of the Chinese diaspora, this thesis focuses instead on surveying the cultural production of a historically specific cohort of writers, with certain biographical similarities but multiple consensual identifications and artistic innovations.

The Political Applications of Americanness

Following Donna Gabaccia’s call for more “[c]riticisms of the [American] immigrant paradigm”, this study also brings the idea of ‘Americanness’ under scrutiny (‘Is Everywhere’

1134). American myths and slogans are often bound intrinsically to the figure of the immigrant. It is no coincidence that it is in books like Gordon Hutner's *Immigrant Voices* that we find endorsements of American promise—"the U.S. is still the place where the everyday level of dreams achieved remains possible for newcomers"—combined with a wariness of the "burden" that those seeking this promise may impose upon the nation (Hutner xvi). These ideas have become the topoi of American literature and rhetoric. Modern American migrant narratives must live as neighbours to preceding migrant narratives that have been elevated to the place of lore and legend: Pilgrim Fathers crossing oceans; frontiersmen pushing west seeking their manifest destiny; the open gates of Ellis Island welcoming immigrants eager to become American and Americanized. Alongside this spatial myth-making, we find powerful temporal correlates. These are the myths of 'progress' and 'assimilation'—corroborating the ideas that America should continue to stand as hegemonic model for futurity, and that its newest inhabitants must incorporate themselves into Americanness in order to 'keep up'. The great Promise of America is, necessarily, speculative.

American migrant writing inherits an ability to challenge American myths, in part by bringing America into comparison with other national contexts. We find an instance of this in Ha Jin's *A Free Life*. The novel ends with a series of poems, ostensibly written by the *Künstlerroman* protagonist Nan. One of these is 'An Admonition': a poem that Jerry A. Varsava reads as denouncing the "severe limits placed upon Chinese citizens", whilst extolling the "possibilities for self-realization available [in] the United States" (Varsava 144). However, this reading is based only on an analysis of the poem's opening stanza. Varsava quotes that stanza in its entirety, declaring that it "describes" the "injustice, corruption, and gratuitous deprivations" of China (144). The second (and final) stanza, focusing on American immigrant life, is ignored. When read in its entirety, Nan's poem reveals that the

hardships of Chinese existence have not vanished in the journey from one nation to the next, nor evaporated in the line-break between stanzas.

In full, the poem reads as follows:

All your sufferings are imaginary,
 all your losses not worth mentioning
 if you keep in mind what you used to see—
 peasants eating husks and tree leaves in the spring,
 workers feasting their bosses to get a raise,
 police rounding up the villagers who refuse to relocate,
 women getting sterilized after their firstborn,
 newlyweds setting up house in cattle sheds,
 worshippers arrested and forced to live
 on rotted food if they do not repent—
 by comparison, all your misfortunes are imaginary.

Here in America you can speak and shout,
 though you have to find your own voice and the right ears.
 You can sell your time for honest bread,
 you can eat leftovers while dreaming
 of getting rich and strong,
 you can lament your losses with abandon,
 if not to an audience, to your children,
 you can learn to borrow and get used
 to living in the shadow of debt...
 Still, whatever grieves you has happened
 to others, to those from Ireland,
 Africa, Italy, Scandinavia, the Caribbean.
 Your hardship is just commonplace,
 a fortune many are dying to seize. (H. Jin *A Free* 653)

The second stanza thus illustrates how immigrants are pressured to be *grateful* for the opportunities they have been afforded in the New World: “Your hardship is [...] a fortune many others are dying to seize”. This describes what Maria Lauret has named in her article ‘Americanization Now and Then’ the immigrant ‘gratitude paradigm’:

the notion that immigrants to the United States [...] owe America something, that the country—in allowing them entry and eventually citizenship—bestowed a gift on them which needs repaying with undying love and loyalty. (439)

With this pressure looming, Nan hides his remaining, post-migration privations below the poem’s surface, imperceptible to those readers too readily accepting of an American exceptionalist reading.

The first couplet of the second stanza introduces a familiar eulogy of the First Amendment—"Here in America you can speak and shout,"—only to quietly moderate its claims: "though you have to find your voice and the right ears" (H. Jin *A Free* 653). The stanza continues with the anaphoric refrain "You can", which might seem to embrace the increased opportunities afforded by the so-called American dream, yet simultaneously laments the loss of America *as* dream: 'you can eat your leftovers while dreaming' (H. Jin *A Free* 653). The 'You can' refrain also calls to mind Barack Obama's famous slogan 'Yes We Can' from his 2008 presidential campaign, which drew affective power from the idea of unrestricted possibility allegedly afforded and exclusive to American citizens: 'Yes, *we* can'.¹⁶ And once an American, 'You can', too. Through the aurality of this repeated exhortation, Nan presents to his American readers a familiar rhetoric of absolute opportunity. However, he concurrently encourages his Chinese-speaking readers—homophonously, through the paralleled pronunciation of the word 'can', with its downward, imperative inflection—to 看 (*kàn*; 'to look'). Nan seems almost to ask that his dual existence in this poem be read more carefully.

Transnational China and America: Duel and Duet

This thesis seeks also to be alert to the mutually constitutive relationship between China and America. There has been, according to Arif Dirlik, "a veritable cult of 'China' for the last three decades", and the 'rise of China' has coincided with a transformation in the relationship between China and the United States ('The Rise' 538). Recently, this relationship has been one of economic competition and trade warfare; territorial dispute;

¹⁶ By the time *A Free Life* was published in 2007, Obama had used this slogan for his 2004 senate campaign. It is unlikely that Jin is alluding directly to Obama's slogan, which came to national prominence when re-introduced by Obama in 2008. Nevertheless, the 'you can' refrain captures a proleptic sense of the euphoric rhetoric of possibility ostensibly open to all Americans that was encapsulated in Obama's campaign.

mutual denunciations of the other's human rights practices; and broad intimations of the potential for the other's threat. And yet this is also a time in which the relationship between these two nations is that of (wary) cooperation, (contingent) respect and (relatively cold) peace.

China looms large in the West's collective imagination: "at once mighty and scary, far too large and powerful for its own good [...]. A 'monstrous' China that, in its unstoppable march to superpower status, threatens to swallow up the world", in Ien Ang's summary ('No Longer' 19). Images of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre flicker in the West's subconscious, alongside conjurings of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, and tenebrous imaginings of current human rights abuses. Nevertheless, China's leviathan achievements have also won it significant international admiration.¹⁷ Sheng-mei Ma describes the mutable relationship between China and America with this metaphor:

The twin cultures meet on occasion in a collaborative duet [...] or the rivals clash in a combative duel [...]. Should one forget to cross the proverbial "t," then the partner's duet becomes a two party duel. [...] Indeed, the millennial China-US relationship morphs between the sunny rhetoric of win-win cooperation and the shadow of antipathy. (*Sinophone* xi-xii)

There is a doubleness to the China-US relationship, a relationship that can appear at once as duel or duet with the smallest of alterations. Central to this thesis then is an attention to thinking 'China' and 'America' together and in distinction—a paradoxical, cross-border, transnational mode of enquiry that preoccupies many of the authors studied here too. Although 'Chineseness' and 'Americanness' are often considered as binaries, they are also mutually constituted, duelling and duetting, taking form in the charged space between them.

¹⁷ Chief amongst China's recent achievements is its acquisition of so much wealth as to wholly reconfigure the global distribution of capital. Moreover, China has become indispensable to the West, in that "advanced capitalist societies have been complicit in [...] the PRC's development both as direct participants in production and as indirect beneficiaries in consumption", as Arif Dirlik reminds us ('The Rise' 535).

For example, one recent manifestation of Chineseness in the PRC has been the idea of ‘The China Dream’. Associated principally with General Secretary Xi Jinping, this phrase has become increasingly popular over the last decade, feeding from the rhetorical power of slogan—a device that has proved devastatingly effective in the fostering of nationalism for the Communist Party of China. ‘The China Dream’ is, in many senses, just the most recent instantiation of Chinese cultural nationalism, promising the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (Xi n. pag.).¹⁸ It symbolises China’s hopes, prospects and promise to the PRC’s citizens, and projects them outward to the world.

Yet there is more to this story—how can we ignore the debt owed to the evocative power of the ‘American Dream’? In his 2010 book *The China Dream*, Liu Mingfu establishes ‘The China Dream’ as a means of opposition to America’s position as world leader: ‘[i]t is the demand on China to create a new world order’ (Liu M. 29). Ironically, Liu argues that China’s major goal for the twenty-first century is to create a “non-hegemonic world” (55). As such, he positions China in opposition to his conception of America, which he sees as trying to “reshape the world according to the American model, [...] a unique brand of despotism called American hegemony” (28). And yet, the ‘China Dream’ is itself *modelled* on American hegemony and globalisation. It too is a call for global hegemony, but with ‘Chinese characteristics’: “The China Dream is China’s dream for itself, as well as its dream for the world. China’s national goals are linked to China’s vision for the world” (Liu M. 55). In order to circumvent the logical bind that sees ‘The China Dream’ as both a refutation and continuation of the ‘American Dream’, Liu constructs a version of Chineseness untainted by “original sin” (64). China’s rise, Liu argues, has been “clean”, unblemished by colonialism and imperialism—“free of guilt” (64). Rather than disprove these claims—though

¹⁸ Xi Jinping spoke of the ‘rejuvenation’ of China some thirty times during his three and a half hour long keynote address at the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017.

it is worth noting that many people from Xinjiang, Tibet, or the indigenous groups of Taiwan, for instance, may find this discourse contentious—the more pertinent question for this thesis is: to what extent is this construction of Chineseness indebted to productions of Americanness?

The China Dream mirrors the American Dream in that both have functioned as covers for territorial expansion. As Maria Lauret shows, the ideological construction of America as a ‘one-minded’ nation drawing unity from diversity through the ‘incorporation’ of immigrants was at its most potent during the early twentieth century Americanization movement (Lauret ‘Americanization’ 435). This movement was the result of an effort to deal with the rapid intake of immigrants from Europe between the 1880s and 1920s by creating a programme for ensuring immigrants’ conformity to and gratitude for American ‘ways’ and ‘values’ (Lauret ‘Americanization’ 435). Yet this was also the period of legislated Asian exclusion—Asians were racialized as too ‘alien’ to successfully undergo the Americanization process. Moreover, it was the heyday of American imperialism, seeing Theodore Roosevelt undertake a brutal domination of the Philippines. Now, the Chinese government in turn is advancing the China Dream alongside a coercive surge in national pride and patriotism, whilst it engages in territorial expansionism in the South China Sea—having over the last few years created thousands of acres of human-made land and several military bases, which Alfred W. McCoy calls “the bellwether bastions of empire” (McCoy 977-8).

The China Dream is a reaction to America’s command of utopian speculation. Yet Americanization, which stood as an imposed, idealised goal for immigrants a century ago, now meets with a dominant multicultural discourse that accepts and values ethnic diversity (or professes to do so), and arguably even *forces* modern migrants to see themselves not only, not wholly, perhaps not even ‘really’ as American—but rather as ethnic, racialised, contingent Americans. The paradoxical demand upon American migrants has now become

to assimilate to American monoculture while retaining ethno-racial difference. The recent changes in the relationship between China and America, as well as the threats and amendments that the Trump administration has made to immigration policy, have highlighted the relevance of studying China and America side by side.

The Problem with Positionality Statements: A Positionality Statement

In Chapter Two, an interrogation of racialization and racial formation is the driving impetus for studying America and China in parallel. This focus draws particular attention to the question of my own research positionality. Whilst I am aware of the insightful criticism levied by Ann duCille upon the kinds of qualifying statements—apologia, in duCille’s words—often found in works about authors of colour written by white scholars, it is nevertheless useful to acknowledge the limitations and opportunities conjured by my own positionality (duCille 610). For duCille, white scholars sometimes use these statements effectively as disclaimers, to efface responsibility and even to bolster their intellectual authority. Nevertheless, I hope that by foregrounding my own positionality, I can clarify what kinds of knowledge I have been able to come to.

I stand as a researcher at multiple removes from the categories and lived experiences of the authors (and the majority of their subjects) studied. As a middle-class white male I am privy to the privileges that these subject positions entail. I am also British, and conduct my research from Britain. As a researcher I am then an ‘outsider’ to this literature and discipline. This is a problematic statement, as it places me in a position opposite to that of my lived experience.¹⁹ In other words, as a researcher of Asian American literature I adopt a marginal position, whilst in everyday life I experience all of the security and privilege of membership to a nexus of dominant social identities. It is thus difficult to frame my

¹⁹ This is a phenomenon that Donald Goellnicht has also written about in his chapter ‘Blurring Boundaries’, in King-Kok Cheung’s *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*.

‘outsider’ perspective positively without acceding to an appropriation of marginality without lived consequence. The pressing question though, given my positionality, becomes not whether non-Asian American scholars can study Asian American literature—they can and do—but how they can best study it *responsibly*.

I agree with John Ernest that it is not enough for white scholars to borrow authority from black scholars and writers; nor to base one’s authority on a body of knowledge; nor to proclaim the virtues of what amounts to an “easy conversion narrative (‘I once was white, but now I see’)” (Ernest 50). Nevertheless, all of these remain important in their own right, so long as they do not form platforms upon which unacknowledged Foucauldian prerogatives of knowledge/power are built. One of the cornerstones of responsible inter-ethnic literary criticism as I try to practice it here is the sourcing of analysis directly from close readings of the literature—eliciting themes, arguments and insight from the primary texts rather than forcing them to cohere to pre-formulated models, or to ‘fit’ established critical theory. A second foundation for responsible scholarship involves a dedication, as Ernest describes it, to “learning to read not just the text at hand but also the white hand on the text” (50). I undertake this process particularly in Chapter Four, in a reading of predominantly white gatekeeping institutions and an imagined group of predominantly white readers/consumers of Cultural Revolution life writing.

Structure of the Thesis

Jenny Xie’s poem, with which this Introduction began, introduces many of the central concerns of this thesis. These themes correspond with and often parallel one another: representativeness; authenticity; agency; negotiations of race, ethnicity and culturalism; border crossings of multiple registers; location and dislocation; historicity and futurity. This poem, and many of the other texts in the corpus, address spatiality and temporality through a blurring of the experiences of grounded- and groundless-ness.

Each chapter examines a combination of ‘ungrounded’ and ‘grounded’ spatialities that this corpus of literature exists within or is associated with. A small migration takes place between each chapter, as new spatialities, temporalities and literary worlds are negotiated. Chinatown is often the first space encountered by the migrant arriving to America from China, and so we too begin in Chapter One, ‘The Chinatown Strategy: Chineseness as Space of Performance and Consumption’, with the cultural and geographical space of Chinatown, as neighbourhood and as symbolic space of Chineseness. The chapter begins with an examination of how Chinatowns became internationally embedded as ‘types’ of ethnic space, with a distinct set of visual signifiers. The architecture of Chinatown is read alongside literary texts, to show how they have become both touristic instantiations of the market’s mediation of ‘cultural authenticity’, and also spaces of Chinese community and resistance. Whilst Chinatown’s touristification has often secured a Chinese community space within the city, it has also led to questions about the performative or ‘authentic’ nature of (multi)cultural space. This chapter undertakes a Performance Studies reading of Chinatown’s representations of Chineseness as a practice of everyday life. Texts like Wang Ping’s short story ‘House of Anything you Wish’, and C.Y. Lee’s *Flower Drum Song* illustrate the ways in which dominant, often negative ideas about Chinatown have become internalised, even for authors writing from within it. Yet these texts also reveal how these governing narratives are challenged and subverted.

From this historical exploration of Chinatown and the cultural production shaped within it, the chapter goes on to investigate how the authors, readers and tourists of Chinatown become agents of its construction. Chinatown is read here as historically conditioned simulacrum, its signification drawn from a palimpsestic imagining of Chinatown’s past and present appearance. Through a reading of Geling Yan’s postmodern novel *The Lost Daughter of Happiness*, this chapter examines what historiographic metafiction can tell us about the ongoing construction of material and representational

space, and how we access different versions of ‘real’ and represented zones and communities.

From Chinatown as localised site of Chineseness, we look outwards in Chapter Two, ‘Betrayal, Asian Spies and Cold War Afterlives: Mapping Race and Nation’, to the nation as its organising spatial logic and to racial formation as organising social logic. Ha Jin’s 2014 novel *A Map of Betrayal* is particularly concerned with the socio-historical, and so it is primarily for this contextual knowledge that this text is analysed. The key historical relationship between the two nations during the post-1965 period is the Cold War and its long afterlife. Periods of war frequently engender changes in the perceptions of migrant populations. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, these changes have often been particularly harmful for Asian American populations—the Japanese internment of World War Two and the mistreatment of Muslim, Arabic and South Asian populations in America post-9/11 are just two examples. *A Map of Betrayal* explores the Cold War and its aftermath through the frame of a transnational narrative that moves back and forth between past and present. Through the mixed-race protagonist, we encounter questions about the internalisation of the racial formations in China and America. How do both nations interpellate their citizens as raced subjects? What impact has American racial formation had upon China’s processes of racialization? And what does this mean for the migrant characters of this novel, navigating both national systems in the context of Cold War opposition?

The genre of *A Map of Betrayal*—a reworking of spy fiction—is particularly pertinent to the task of reading the Cold War and its continuing import for this cohort. On the one hand, Jin’s use of the spy genre recapitulates the imagined threats of bodies that *appear* Asian in America: there are two ‘actual’ Chinese spies in this novel. Yet Jin’s experimentation with the genre also recasts these Asian spies as victims of China’s and America’s mutual and conflicting exploitation of ideologies of loyalty and betrayal. With

comparison to the figure of the Asian spy in other works of Asian American literature like Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* and David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, this chapter explores how characters existing between systematic racializations in China and America are subjected to the grounding of racism's bodily violence and legislative restrictions.

From the nation, we progress in Chapter Three, "In that paralysis I lived in no man's land": Transnationalism, Aesthetics and 'No Man's Land', to the interrogation of the idea of a 'transnation'—a space between and beyond national borders. Transnational scholarship was popularised in the 1990s, but we find through a reading of Chuang Hua's *Crossings* that forms of transnational engagement were present in literature long before then. As Bill Ashcroft formulates it, the transnation is the space inhabited by those migrants who engage in transnational activity. It is imagined as a space that transcends nation—a notion building upon the trend in academia to aggrandise the concept of transnationalism not just as practice, but also as a kind of ideology. However, what we find within this corpus is that very few migrant characters experience the positive consequences often envisioned for transnationalism. Following the Warwick Research Collective, we can see transnational activity as part of a world that is 'combined and uneven', and as such many migrants remain grounded—economically, ideologically and geographically—within the borders of the nation (WReC 13).

Many of the characters in this corpus experience transnational activity and ideology as a process of dislocation, or of postmodern fragmentation of consciousness. Using texts from the corpus such as Ha Jin's *A Good Fall*, Wei Hui's *Marrying Buddha* and Jenny Zhang's *Sour Heart* this chapter asks: to what extent does transnationalism and the space of the transnation allow migrant characters to move 'beyond' borders in the literature of this cohort? How are we to read the transnational in literature? Can we identify such a thing as a *transnational aesthetics*? A novel that allows for a particularly probing response to these questions is Chuang Hua's *Crossings*, in which the transnational space inhabited by the

protagonist becomes a kind of ‘no man’s land’. This no man’s land is at once an internalised Cold War conflict zone, and a liberatory, if perilous, trans-space. Crossing back and forth between America, China and Europe, the protagonist is torn between national and transnational spaces; the gendered limits of the transnation; cultural differences; socio-historically bordered space and Taoist no-space.

In Chapter Four, ‘The Bind of the Native Informant and a ‘Third Possibility’ in Migrant Chinese Life Writing’, we move from the ostensibly ungrounded space of the transnation back to an examination of the coincident territory of individual and collective identity in the life writing of this cohort. Since the vogueish burgeoning of Chinese life writing’s popularity in the 1990s, its continued marketability has led to questions about what kinds of worlds and subjects it conjures, and to what ends. The life writing of this cohort consists predominantly of narratives remembering life in Cultural Revolution-era China. Read together, these deeply personal, individual life narratives meet other Cultural Revolution memoirs of a similar nature, in a potent union of individual and collective experience that has been mediated by the publishing industry and readers’ demands for a particular narrative of life in China. Over the last few decades, a publishing trend has emerged for a life writing narrative that depicts Chinese life and modern history as cruel and dystopian, portraying the Western nations they have ‘escaped’ to as lands of freedom and promise in turn.

To some extent then, the trauma narratives in the life writing of this cohort have been co-opted by a publishing industry that have re-cast them as ‘native informants’. As native informants, these authors utilise a currency of Chinese ethnic ‘authenticity’ to relay ‘truths’ about China and Chineseness. Yet read through the frame of the market, these truths exist in a dialectic with what the author and publisher believes the reader (the interpreter) will want to hear or be told. The question of representation thus becomes fraught with questions of marketability, and can lead to instances of what Arif Dirlik calls ‘self-orientalization’

(‘Chinese History’ 104). These life narratives are read alongside other texts engaged with questions about the responsibilities of representing and informing; the demands of the market upon the ‘production’ of ethnic authors and texts; and the accessibility of traumatic space. Texts including Adeline Yen Mah’s *Falling Leaves*, Anchee Min’s *Red Azalea* and Ping Fu and Mei-mei Fox’s *Bend, Not Break* are read in inter-ethnic and trans-generic comparison with novels by Percival Everett (*Erasure*) and Laura Esquivel (*Malinche*), which engage in turn with issues of an ethnically exploitative publishing industry and the implicit responsibilities of cultural interpretation. What the life writing from this cohort shows us is that there can exist in ethnic autobiography a certain double-tongueness—an enunciation that fulfils the paid role of native informant, and that can meanwhile subvert expectations, reflecting the gaze back towards the reader.

Finally, the Conclusion reaches forward in space and time to the worlds imagined in the works of speculative fiction that several members of this cohort have recently begun to author. It asks what the relationship is between speculative worlds ‘beyond’ our own, and the speculative line emerging from the material conditions of the present. As such, we are returned to the issues that have motivated this thesis: just what kind of space might “someplace else” be for this cohort of authors who have all taken transitory steps from China to America?

Chapter 1

The Chinatown Strategy: Chineseness as Space of Performance and Consumption

Chinatown, my Chinatown,
 Where the lights are low,
 Hearts that know no other land,
 Drifting to and fro,
 Dreamy, dreamy Chinatown,
 Almond eyes of brown,
 Heart seems light and life seems bright,
 In dreamy Chinatown.

—‘Chinatown, My Chinatown’ (1906) by Jean Schwartz and William Jerome

Written in 1906, the same year as San Francisco’s Chinatown burned to the ground, Jean Schwartz and William Jerome’s Tin Pan Alley song ‘Chinatown, My Chinatown’ coupled a fascination for the strangeness and strangers of Chinatown with veiled allusions to its stereotypical peril and iniquity.²⁰ Low lights secrete the ‘dreamy’ fumes of opium; its Chinese inhabitants drift around—unsettled, peripatetic, impermanent; life only *seems* bright, but something wholly more unsettling ostensibly hides behind the haze. Whilst problematic, this barbed ode captures the idea of Chinatown’s blurring of what is seen, what is perceived, and what is ‘actually’ there. The content of each of these categories has changed over the past century, but in Chinatown today and the literature written about it, we still find a complicated entanglement of the ‘real’ and the ‘performed’, the ‘front’ and the ‘back’, the original referent and the simulation.

²⁰In 1910, ‘Chinatown, My Chinatown’ was interpolated into the Broadway musical ‘Up and Down Broadway’. It also became a jazz standard, recorded by Louis Armstrong, The Mills Brothers, Bing Crosby and many other artists.

Welcome to Chinatown: The Chinatown Archetype

This thesis's analysis of the literature of first generation migrants from China to America begins with a consideration of Chinatown as a space often associated with migrants. This chapter describes how San Francisco's Chinatown developed as a space for tourism and commerce in the early twentieth century. Whilst Chinatowns are normalised places of inhabitation for many migrants from China, they are also 'tactically' constructed spaces, as Michel de Certeau might describe them, which have profited from complicating notions of 'authenticity' and performance. A variety of literary and artistic representations of Chinatown are considered here, exploring representations of Chinatown as an already textual space. The chapter ends with an analysis of Geling Yan's *The Lost Daughter of Happiness* as a postmodern novel engaging with questions about the stakes of representing Chinatown and its subjects, and the implications for readers consuming certain narratives from ethnic and migrant American writers.

Chinatown Reconceived: Grand Designs

Chinatowns today are instantly recognisable. Throughout the world, a particular collocation of designs and features has come to signify 'Chinatown'. A wash of scarlet, a Chinese gate at the border, strings of lanterns, pagoda roofing and so on—a set of visual features has come to signify 'Chinese' space abroad. It could be argued that the similarities in most Chinatowns' surface appearances are the result of a shared Southern Chinese aesthetic and cultural inheritance. The streets of Guangdong's Taishan (the 'home of overseas Chinese') and the alleyways of San Francisco's Chinatown, for instance, bear some architectural resemblance. But this isn't the whole story.

The impetus for Chinatown's modern form was, literally, cataclysmic. The ten-block area of San Francisco known as Chinatown—the first of its kind in North America, established in the late 1840s—was levelled in the ruinous earthquake and ensuing

conflagration of 1906 (I. Chang 46).²¹ Photographs like ‘Heart of Chinatown’ (see fig. 1) document the extent of destruction. Space opened up in central San Francisco. *Valuable* space at that; land that powerful figures like Mayor E. E. Schmitz hoped to claim from the Chinese community. Where once stood the buildings of Chinatown, now lay opportunity—to build, and to capitalise. It was proposed that Chinatown and its inhabitants be removed to Hunter’s Point, at the margins of the city (Schmidt 117–8). Wenxing Xu attests that in Chinatown, “the forces of racial prejudice, economic immobility, and cultural marginalization made it extremely difficult for Chinese immigrants to live outside Chinatowns”, and so with this removal, the Chinese population would become subject to both geographic and societal marginalisation (Xu 35).



Fig. 1. ‘Heart of Chinatown, San Francisco, Cal.’ Detroit Publishing Co, 1906. Photograph, 8 x 10 in. Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

²¹ Arguably, San Francisco’s Chinatown was the first major, non-European enclave in America. Chilecito (home to Latin Americans in San Francisco) existed before Chinatown, but for only a relatively short time.

In response to this threat, Chinatown's community and business leaders went about re-securing the area. Drawing from their diasporic connections and international political cachet, China's Empress Dowager Cixi was roused to sending her Consul General to meet with San Franciscan officials on behalf of the community. Combined with Chinatown businessmen's threats to leave the city (thus removing their substantial capital and trade links), Mayor Schmitz was pressured into dissolving his Chinatown relocation scheme (Davis n. pag.). Once resecured for its previous community, a process began in Chinatown not of reconstruction, but of new construction. This new San Francisco Chinatown was formed as an ethnically *themed* space, designed principally to attract tourists and generate revenue, and in doing so to protect its residential areas and inhabitants.

Visiting a Chinatown became a familiar, internationally replicated experience for tourists during the twentieth century, leading to the condensation of an idea of culturally Chinese space. It is therefore important to ask *how* Chinatown was fashioned as recognisably Chinese. What were the markers of its 'Chineseness'? To what extent did Chinatown come to depend on the maintenance of a particular version of Chineseness? What stakes did first generation migrants have in this construction? How have representations of the neighbourhood by artists of Chinese descent upheld or troubled this construction?

The structures that initiated the trend for San Francisco's Chinatown's touristification were the Sing Fat and Sing Chong buildings (see figs. 2 and 3). Completed within two years of the earthquake, they were described by Winston Kyan as the "the most striking symbol[s] of the shiny 'Oriental City' rising phoenix-like from the ashes of the dingy Chinese quarter"—a mythical rebirth from dissolution to resplendence (Kyan 34). These buildings can be read textually, functioning as they did to fashion a new representation of Chinatown. Unlike the brick, Italianate buildings of San Francisco's pre-earthquake Chinatown, which were common throughout the rest of the city, these buildings of 1908 were the first in the

West to feature architectural embellishments aiming to replicate elements of Oriental design (Tsui 22). Facing one another at a Grant Avenue intersection, these buildings lie at a crossroads between old Chinatown, memories of China, the China of American public imagination, and modern Chinatown.



Fig. 2 and Fig. 3. Sing Fat building (left) and Sing Chong building (right) on Grant Avenue, San Francisco. Photograph taken by author, September 2016.

It is no coincidence that these two buildings were the headquarters of prominent Chinese art businesses, selling both valuable antiques and tourist trinkets. They performed the twin commercial functions of re-establishing a centre of business for the Chinese in San Francisco, and enticing customers to the exoticised commerce within. Despite appearances, the Sing Chong and Sing Fat buildings were not designed by people of Chinese descent, but by the architectural team of Ross & Burgren—both Caucasian. Their designs betray an inexperience with Chinese architecture. Their pagoda structures, for instance, are purely decorative (rather than structural, as typical in China) and their function is commercial (as opposed to a characteristically religious purpose in China) (Choy 113–5). Nevertheless, the construction of these buildings was envisioned and commissioned by Look Tin Eli, the Chinese American manager of Sing Chong and secretary of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and supported by other Chinatown businessmen (Choy 43–4; Kyan 35–6). They were to be the frontispiece for a newly composed Chinatown: an ‘Oriental City’ as

Look describes it, with “veritable fairy palaces filled with the choicest treasures of the Orient”; “so much more emphatically Oriental, that [sic] the old Chinatown” (Look 91). In effect, the Sing Chong and Sing Fat buildings acted as the initial marketing for a repackaged Chinatown.

A Disputed Terrain

The hyperbole in Look’s description of his vision for a new Chinatown attests to the level of *persuasion* he anticipated having to undertake to convince Bay Area residents of the new Chinatown’s merits. As Kathryn E. Wilson argues, “not all places are made or created equal”: place making is “deeply shaped by time, social interaction, identity, experience, and power; [...] it is the embodiment of historical legacies and personal/collective memories” (12). Chinatowns have historically been subjected to racist violence and discrimination. The skyline of modern Chinatown can thus be viewed as a response to decades of discrimination; a protective surface defending a vital inner world.

Dell Upton proposes two reasons why Chinese inhabitants of San Francisco’s Chinatown may have desired its architectural Orientalisation.²² First, the exoticisation of Chinatown’s buildings pleased Chinese merchants, promising to draw in tourists with plenty of disposable income. Second, it served the same purpose as any tradition, new or old: “of giving a cohesive public identity to people who were divided by social class, religion, dialect, or regional origin both in their native lands and in the United States” (Upton 84). Chinatowns have thus undergone a kind of strategic self-Orientalism. By this I mean that the appearance and function of modern Chinatowns are both consensually subordinated

²² With the use of Edward Said’s paradigm-shifting concept of Orientalism, I mean that the ‘East’ has been imagined and constructed by the ‘West’ as fundamentally different, in order to create a binary serving to justify Western imperialism and oppression.

to the hegemony of Orientalism—“invoking the fictitious homogeneity out of which [...] racial classification is built” as Kay Anderson puts it—and that through these means, the survival of culturally Chinese space and its resident community was secured, along with the possibility of economic gain (Anderson *Vancouver's* 179).

Chinatown was designed to encourage a new outlook on the neighbourhood—to make it a more *attractive* vision. Under threat of relocation to the outskirts of the city, the construction of a new Chinatown atop its old site was a declaration of fortitude, and its Orientalisation a means of survival. This may go some way to explaining why Chinatowns are more distinctive than other American ethnic enclaves. In the early twentieth century, the level of defensive strategic essentialism necessitated in other American immigrant ethnic enclaves rarely matched that needed by the Chinese community, who by this point had faced severe discrimination, violence and legislative exclusion.

Over the last century, the perception of Chinatown as a ghetto has given way to the idea that it is instead an ‘ethnic enclave’. As ghetto, Chinatown represented notions of vice and violence for white America, replete with underground tunnels, tong wars, sing-song girls and opium dens. Photographs and tours of these scenes were staged, offering a voyeuristic glimpse into an imagined world. The idea of Chinatown as ethnic enclave developed concurrently with its touristification. It was refashioned as a safe space for white visitors: a repository of exoticism with just enough (supposed) history of depravity to entice inquisitive sightseers. The fact that Chinatowns have historically been inhabited predominantly by first generation Chinese migrants has only added to the idea that Chinatown is a space of ‘authentic’, unmediated Chineseness.

Nevertheless, as Yoonmee Chang argues, the recasting of Chinatown as ethnic enclave

makes the de jure and de facto economic and class structures that cause Asian American ghettoization recede from view, replacing an account of how Asian Americans are structurally limited by race and class to spaces like Chinatown with a portrait of these spaces as ethnic communities that are formed, developed, and organized by culture. (26)

It is therefore essential to keep in mind the structural inequality rooted in Chinatown. As Bonnie Tsui reminds us, “[d]espite its splashy outward façade [...], San Francisco's Chinatown is a place where, internally, most residents skirt the poverty line” (33). This has caused a conflict of interests between inhabitants of Chinatown belonging to different social classes. An article from the July 1969 issue of *Gidra*, a radical publication and voice of the Asian American movement, illustrates this divide. The article, titled ‘The Misunderstanding in Chinatown’, begins with a piece written by Kalfred Dip Lum on behalf of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, also known as the Chinese Six Companies. Representing members of Chinatown’s elite, Lum’s piece argues that Chinatown is a “mecca of tourism”, that “[t]here is less crime committed in Chinatown than in any area of San Francisco”, and that any remaining problems “can be solved [...] with guidance from public officials” (Lum 4-5). Whilst this piece may seem innocuous, it ends with a note stating that “this article does not represent the opinion of the Editorial Staff of *Gidra*”, as well as a prominent sidebar written by the editors titled “The Facts” (5). This ‘Facts’ section lists statistics contradictory to Lum’s positivity: “[i]n 1960, one third of the families in the area earned less than \$4000—which is the ‘poverty’ level as defined by the federal government”; “[t]he 3000 workers in the community’s 150 garment factories are still not protected by unions” and “67 percent of the housing in Chinatown is rated ‘substandard,’ compared to 19 percent for the rest of the city” (5). There is a clear conflict of interests between the Chinese Six Companies’ representation of Chinatown as safe, prosperous tourist haven, and *Gidra*’s revolutionary youth highlighting instead the grave social issues of the neighbourhood. While The Six Companies seemed to be seeking the maintenance of Chinatown’s business interests, the disadvantaged youth, who grew vastly in number post-1965, were more interested in improving living conditions for residents.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, inhabitants of Chinatown have sought to alter erroneous or negative perceptions of their community. Nayan Shah shows us in

Contagious Divides—an important work examining the intersection of public health and racial discourses in San Francisco’s Chinatown—how Thomas W. Chinn (the first editor in 1935 of the *Chinese Digest*) refuted the image of the unproductive, “sleepy Celestial enveloped in mists of opium fumes” (Shah 128–9; Chinn ‘Why’ 8). He did so by fashioning a contrasting image of an ‘average’ Chinese American “who drives automobiles, shops for the latest gadgets, and speaks good English” (Chinn, ‘Why?’ 8). In other words, a regular, middle-class American *consumer*: a symbol of American incorporation and assimilation.

Chinn also attempted to shape Chinatown itself as a contributor to American capitalism. Perceptions of Chinatown as an “exotic center of Oriental intrigue [with] ‘ways that are dark’” were countered in *The Chinese Digest* by associate editor Chingwah Lee’s 1935 proposal for seven steps to make Chinatown a “tourist magnet” (Chinn and Lee 8). These seven steps included the Inauguration of Public Pageantry (explicit performances of Chineseness); the Wearing of Chinese Garments (costume); and Converting Dirty Alleys into Picturesque Lanes (beautification) (Chinn and Lee 8). Many of Lee’s designs have since been enacted and are still evident in San Francisco Chinatown: the adding of “[r]ed lanterns and more red lanterns”, and the acquisition of street lamps in Chinese design in time for San Francisco’s 1939 World Fair, for instance (Chinn and Lee 8). Chinatown was styled as a distinct, *themed* city-space. I use the word ‘themed’ as a description of Chinatown’s postmodern nature, in an echo of Rey Chow’s declaration that “[l]ong before theme parks became fashionable around the world, Chinatowns in North America served, in effect, as live theme parks: [...] visitors were presented with a simulacrum, an artificial construct, that conjured the notion of China” (Chow ‘The Provocation’ 100). I return to the idea of Chinatown as a simulacrum later in this chapter.

Nevertheless, Chinn and Lee went on to make an important qualification to their advocacy for a more touristified Chinatown in their article. The penultimate paragraph of “Seven Steps to Fame” begins with two defensive claims: “All this can be done without

'injuring' the standard of the younger generation. We are Chinese, and will always be" (8). These declarations anticipate readers' fears that increased touristification may corrupt younger (American born) generations. That is, the fear foreseen is that modern Chinatown's distinct *un-Chineseness*—being only an embellished performance of Chineseness—may undermine 'authentically' Chinese existence, *especially* if it were to be presented in those very terms. Chinn and Lee's argument against this anticipated backlash is to sarcastically propose: "[l]et us turn to any other field of endeavour, and see how many of us can find employment outside of Chinatown" (8). It is then wider America's marginalisation of Chinatown's residents that engenders here a field of commerce and endeavour to be sourced from the only thing promised to them in the United States—the perception of their essential difference. In a seeming paradox, they will 'always be' Chinese—and because constituted as such from without (as perpetually foreign), so they must of necessity be constructed as such from within (as *essentially* Chinese).

Tactics, Strategies and Resistance

The nature of San Francisco's new Chinatown was determined, at first, by a type of logic characterised by Michel de Certeau as a 'tactic'. Later, these tactics morphed into 'strategies'. The transition from tactics to strategies, following de Certeau's schema from his influential *The Practice of Everyday Life*, provides an insight into the formation of modern Chinatown. According to de Certeau, tactics are an "art of the weak", drawn from an absence of power: actions without proper locus, which must utilise a terrain imposed upon them by a foreign power (de Certeau 37). They are manoeuvres on enemy territory that often take the form of "guileful ruse" (de Certeau 37). These were the types of action undertaken by those first rebuilders of San Francisco's Chinatown. Having lost their territory and locus, tactics were employed to recover and re-secure the space of Chinatown—a stronghold on 'enemy territory'. The tactic used was the creation of Chinese

space that would be both less threatened by and less threatening to the wider city. Chinese housing and business interests would be secured by presenting a version of Chineseness deemed more acceptable to white America. Once Chinatown was re-secured, this initial tactic evolved into a ‘strategy’. For de Certeau, strategy is the manipulation of power relationships originating from a place that can be delimited and that acts as a base from which targets or threats can be managed (35-6). Each strategic rationalisation seeks to distinguish a place of its own (a locus of power) and thus depends on the articulation of physical places (de Certeau 36, 38). The tactics employed in the initial reclamation and construction of San Francisco’s new Chinatown were designed to enable an ongoing *strategy* that would maintain Chinatown’s borders and the relative safety of its inhabitants.

de Certeau’s utilisation of martial lexis and metaphor in his delineations of tactics and strategies highlights their purpose for Chinatown. Under physical and ideological racist attack for decades, and having lost their locus of power to the earthquake, the Chinese residents of San Francisco had first to refabricate their community and subsequently to develop a strategy with which to maintain and defend it.²³ Following Yi-Fu Tuan’s human geography theory of neighbourhood identity formation, it was in part the acute threat to Chinatown’s continued existence that led its inhabitants to construct a sense of place with “strong local flavour, visual character, and clear boundaries” in order to “help the inhabitants to develop [...] place consciousness” (Tuan *Space* 171). The success of modern Chinatown’s strategy depended largely upon exhibiting Chinatown as essentially, immutably, ‘authentically’ Chinese, whereby the essence of ‘Chineseness’ was constituted

²³ The threat of attack upon Chinatowns was acute. In the late nineteenth century, numerous Chinatowns were quarantined and/or razed (as in Honolulu and San Francisco); subjected to lynch mobs (as in Los Angeles), pogroms (also in San Francisco) and massacres (as in Rock Springs); or had their inhabitants violently ‘driven out’ (as in Antioch, Truckee, Seattle and Tacoma) (I. Chang 121, 127, 132-5, 139; Sumi 4). This list is only partial.

as non-threatening—drawing associations with the diplomatically weakened China of the late nineteenth century.

The tactics and strategies upon which San Francisco's new Chinatown was founded have proved impressively successful. So much so in fact, that it has become the prototype—at least in terms of appearance, which was a key manoeuvre in its strategy—of Chinatowns throughout the world. Stemming from the Sing Chong and Sing Fat buildings, the practice of affixing pagoda roofing and other superficially Chinese-looking design elements to otherwise relatively nondescript buildings has subsequently become widespread in global Chinatowns. There were alterations and idiosyncrasies in each newly designed or redesigned international Chinatown, to the extent that Tsui argues that Chinatowns can be read as “microcosms of their respective cities” (74). Yet the base stylistic and commercial genes of the San Francisco precursor are typically identifiable in each of its progeny.²⁴ Numerous historians and geographers reason that “San Francisco's Chinatown shaped the very idea of what a Chinatown should look like”, in the words of Ruth Mayer (Mayer 2; Wilson 8-9; Eom 40; Davis with Tsui n. pag.).

San Francisco Chinatown's early twentieth century transformation soon attracted the attention of filmmakers, as an exotic but conveniently close at hand setting; and its representation on screen came to feed its touristification. Chinatown has a long history on film, typically as a space of iniquity, dubious morals and Oriental threat. Yunte Huang and Björn A Schmidt note that some of the earliest experiments with film featured Chinese and Chinatown subjects (Huang 195-6, Schmidt 108).²⁵ Indeed, as social historian Bonnie Tsui uncovers, Chinatown and Hollywood became so entangled after recurring cinematic

²⁴ Kay Anderson reports that Sydney's Alderman Andrew Briger stated: “One must admit a sense of shame when one shows a San Franciscan our version of Chinatown” (Anderson “Chinatown Re-oriented” 150). Sydney's council consequently agreed to erect Chinese-style decorative lanterns, bins with ‘Chinese motifs’ and other ethnicised ornamentation.

²⁵ Thomas Edison's *Chinese Laundry Scene* (1895) and *Dancing Chinamen-Marionettes* (1898) are two of the earliest examples.

representations of the space that when Los Angeles' old Chinatown was demolished in the 1930s, one of the two new Chinatowns built in the city (China City) was designed to include props from *The Good Earth* (the Oscar-winning 1937 film based on Pearl S. Buck's novel about a Chinese peasant family) (Tsui 116-7). China City was also designed in consultation with architects, set designers, and superintendents from the Paramount lot (Tsui 117). Although its competitor (New Chinatown) was to endure, whilst China City lasted only a few decades, China City epitomised how Hollywood has not only shaped the *idea* of Chinatown, but also its physical appearance. The link between Hollywood and Chinatown acquired its most lasting visual symbol in 1927, with the opening of Grauman's Chinese Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard. As Huang describes it, the theatre "boasted two gigantic coral-red columns supporting a jade-green roof. Between the columns flew a thirty-foot-long stone dragon. Many artefacts [...] had been imported from China": a monument to Orientalism (Huang 196).

Thanks to strategic manoeuvres by civic leaders and business leaders, San Francisco Chinatown's design went global. To some extent though, the similarity between the world's Chinatowns has led to the reduction and reproduction of the imagined look and function of 'Chinese' space. The physical architecture of modern Chinatown is the substantiation of "the market's dynamic mediation of cultural authenticity", as Claire Jean Kim states (116). Certain appropriations of styles and things deemed 'Chinese' have become signifiers of both Chineseness and Chinatownness. Once considered signifiers of ethnicity and culture, these attributes acquire market value within Chinatown's tourist economy. However, in the process of refining and polishing these cultural signifiers—as a bazaar might treat its exotica—any surface traces or accumulations of the particulate of varied Chinese existence are usually wiped away. What is left is a remodelled version of an empty signifier, a commercially viable cultural essentialism that has been roughly handled by the hegemonic desire for the tidying up of grouped ethnicity.

Representing Chinatown: Which Chinatown is Through the Gate?

Ethnic enclave, ghetto, city-within-a-city; underworld, exotic fairyland, and lived place of diasporic identification—each version of Chinatown is familiar. Chinatown is what K. Scott Wong terms ‘contested terrain’, subject to divergent sociopolitical agendas (3). Rob Shields stresses that spaces are “hypostatized from the world of real space relations to the symbolic realm of cultural significations” through artistic representations (47). However, Chinatown as urban construct can also be read as text. Through reading physical space, Chinatown can be understood as a performative space, with textual representations acting as additional scripts that conflict with, complicate or nuance conceptions of the neighbourhood.

In Wang Ping’s short story ‘House of Anything You Wish’ and C.Y. Lee’s novel *Flower Drum Song*, we find both the reiteration of dominant, often negative or stereotypical narratives about Chinatown, alongside elements that challenge or destabilise these ideas. Chinatown’s textuality so builds upon itself, in ever further adorned, embellished or defaced layers. Moreover, as seen in the previous section, modern Chinatown was always already a reproduction of sorts. Chinatown is thus a postmodern space as experienced by its audiences, whether as tourists or readers. It is a simulacrum of appearances and surfaces, of ‘front’ and ‘show’. Later in this chapter, the problematics of representations of Chinatown are considered in relation to Geling Yan’s *The Lost Daughter of Happiness*.

Chinatown was a customary setting for pre-1965 Chinese American migrant literature. C.Y. Lee’s *The Flower Drum Song* depicts inter-generational familial discord and is discussed further below; Louis Chu’s *Eat a Bowl of Tea* portrays the sequestered, bachelor society of Exclusion-era Manhattan Chinatown; and Lin Yutang’s *Chinatown Family* introduced Anglo-American readers to the merits of and adversities faced by the Chinese in America. Yet after the explosion in immigrant writing post-1965, Chinatown became a less frequent setting for Chinese authors. Major Chinatowns were no longer the primary destinations for new Chinese economic migrants, and so-called satellite Chinatowns are

now far more common sites of settlement. However, this thesis's corpus does include significant Chinatown-based works including, in addition to the texts already mentioned, Jean Kwok's *Mambo in Chinatown* and *Girl in Translation*, as well as texts set in satellite Chinatowns like Ha Jin's Flushing-based short story collection *A Good Fall*.

Just as Chinatown is not a singular geographic location but multiple sites, all similar *and* distinct, representations of Chinatowns are also constantly redefined, whilst maintaining formative notions from centuries ago. Many depictions of Chinatown have been negative to some extent—the enduring legacy of nineteenth century attitudes toward Chinese migrants on the Pacific coast. These attitudes are exemplified in the public health risk narrative that Nayan Shah examines in *Contagious Divides*. Beginning in the 1850s, a series of government-sponsored investigations defined the apparent menace of Chinatown, ultimately declaring Chinatown a ‘nuisance’ in a report from 1880. In this report, Chinatown was labelled a “cancer in the heart of the city” and the attributes of both Chinatown and its Chinese inhabitants were broadly conflated: “unnatural crowding” signalled the threat of Chinese excess, ready to spill over the border of Chinatown, carrying its biological and social contagion with it; “[f]ilth of this and every other description” implicitly disputed the suitability of Chinese workers in the service industry; and the way that “men and women are huddled together in beastly promiscuousness” hinted at worrisome social mixture and the risk of sexual leakage beyond prescribed boundaries (*Chinatown Declared* 3-4; Shah 22, 71). It is easy today to see the flaws in the 1880 report's supposedly “truthful account”: the idea, for instance, that it was only the providence of the Pacific breeze that prevented plague spreading from Chinatown to the rest of the city is contradicted on the same page by the claim that “[n]ot a ray of sunlight or breath of fresh air can ever penetrate [Chinatown]” (*Chinatown Declared* 3-4). However, the report's arguments continued and perpetuated negative narratives about Chinatown and its inhabitants that have been influential ever since.

Early Chinatowns were isolated by wider society, so as to corral their racialised inhabitants inside their borders. Even now that Chinatowns have become “symbols of ethnic diversity [and] objects of civic pride” in the era of municipal multiculturalism, they still often represent reified spaces of an ‘Oriental’ Other, as Anderson recognizes (“Chinatown Re-oriented” 144). Modern Chinatowns are courted precisely for their perceived distinctiveness, against which ideas of normalised whiteness acquire definition. When major Chinatowns feature in this corpus, these representations must follow in the wake of negative or touristified versions of the space. Representations of Chinatown from within this corpus thus often aim to challenge those negative perceptions and to disrupt the touristified façade’s capacity to obscure the fact that people actually *live* there, sometimes in less than ideal conditions. For many of its inhabitants, Chinatown is simply a normalised place of residence, a place of comfort, or a site of collective, diasporic memory (K.S. Wong 14; Wilson 127; R. H. Lee 78; Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 125). As Lisa Lowe points out, Chinatown is itself “the very emblem of fluctuating demographics, languages, and populations”, and home to a variety of people (‘Heterogeneity’ 26).

Performativity and Staging Chineseness in Everyday Life

Given the ‘realities’ of modern Chinatowns, how are we best to understand a neighbourhood that also presents itself in certain ways to an audience of visitors? One way is to draw upon the interdisciplinary field of Performance Studies. Dwight Conquergood delineates five areas for thinking through the ‘world as performance’, the first of which includes “thinking about culture as a *verb* instead of a *noun*, a process instead of a product [...] an unfolding performative invention instead of reified system” (190). We begin to see then how Performance Studies might be used to think through Chinatown’s Chineseness as performed and inventive, rather than static and rote. The sociological use of the theatre as a frame for interpreting behaviours performed outside the playhouse can be attributed

to Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman describes a ‘performance’ as any activity occurring before observers that has some influence upon those observers (70). In Goffman’s dramaturgical theory we find the separation of a ‘front’: the part of a performance that defines the situation for observers. The front is constituted of ‘setting’ (furniture, décor and layout, acting as scenery and stage props) and ‘personal front’ (clothing; sex, age and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns and gestures) (Goffman 70-1). It is possible through this frame to analyse Chinatown’s ‘front’, and so to read the physical landscape of Chinatown for its ‘setting’, and its human population for any presentations of ‘personal front’.

Look Tin Eli’s project for the reinvention of modern Chinatown *performed* the function of turning San Francisco’s Chinatown into a highly viable site of tourism. The desired form of tourism differed from that of old Chinatown, which had emphasised the intrigue of Chinatown’s imagined dark side (although vice tourism returned periodically). The 1909 guidebook *San Francisco’s Chinatown* focused instead on guiding tourists to the best places to “Go”, “See” and “Shop”, as well as persuading visitors that they “need fear no harm from members of the Chinese race”, “[t]he health in Chinatown is remarkably good” and “there are no ‘white slaves of yellow masters’ in San Francisco’s Chinatown” (3, 12). In his 1964 San Francisco travelogue, Chiang Yee describes how “Chinatown at the present day is still a great show place, as attractive as ever, but without the old smell of ‘Slave Girls, Opium fiend, Devil’s kitchen,’ etc.” (Chiang 216). In modern Chinatown then, visibility and ‘show’ became the organising modalities for encountering Chinese space. As Björn A. Schmidt argues, the spectacle of old Chinatown, symbolised by underground and backroom vice and adventure, is brought to the front in modern Chinatown, concentrated in ornamentation and the storefront (Schmidt 145). But if modern Chinatown presents itself as all *front*, does anything more lie behind it? And how can ‘backstage’ Chinatown be

presented as such without drawing *it* to the front too? Is the dichotomy between ‘staged’ and ‘authentic’ Chinatown(s) a kind of performance itself?

Chinatowns of the Real and the Fake

For Frank Chin in his 1974 play *The Year of the Dragon*, there is a rigid divide between ‘real’ Chinatown and ‘fake’ Chinatown. This division is embodied by protagonist Fred Eng. Fred is a Chinatown tour guide—a figure that Dorothy Ritsuko McDonald quotes Frank Chin calling “‘a Chinaman, playing a white man playing Chinese... A minstrel show’” (Chin in McDonald xxii). Fred enacts a ‘fake’, caricatured performance of ‘Chinaman’ as tour guide (“We’come to Chinatowng, Folks! Ha. Ha. Ha... Hoppy New Year!”) and lives as a ‘real’ Asian American who resents his occupation (he ends each shift with a series of embittered expletives) (Chin *The Year* 71). A sociological study of Chicago’s Chinatown by Carla Almeida Santos and Grace Yan suggests that many Chinese ethnic workers in Chinatown are “conscious” of their role in the neighbourhood’s touristic performance: “awareness [that] translates into an operational mode characterized by both obeying the existing order of conduct while simultaneously distancing themselves by claiming their operational mode as on-the-job play” (894).

The divide between real and fake versions of Chinatown in Chin’s play is a continuation of his theoretical investment in separating the ‘real’ from the ‘fake’—as seen most clearly in the title of his essay in *The Big Aiiieeee!* (an updated edition of the pioneering 1974 anthology *Aiiieeee!* by Chin et al.) named ‘Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake’. As described in the Introduction to the anthology, the ‘real’ has its sources in “Asian fairy tale and the Confucian heroic tradition” whilst the ‘fake’ derives from “Christian dogma and [...] Western philosophy, history and literature” (Chin et al. ‘Introduction’ xv). This led to Chin and his associates distinguishing certain, often female, Asian American authors as ‘fake’, whilst endorsing their own brand of masculinised

writing as ‘real’. There is a parallel with Chinatown here, in the distinction and blurring of what is ‘authentic’ or ‘imitation’; performed ‘front’ or lived ‘backstage’; masculinised traditionalism or feminist, postmodern revisionism.

And yet, whilst the separation of Fred’s ‘fake’ performance as tour guide from his ‘real’ Chinatown existence seems to suggest that tourists are denied access to this other, ostensibly realer, backstage Chinatown, a large part of Fred’s act involves code switching from Changlish to naturalised American speech.²⁶ Part of his recurring sales pitch is comprised of breaking the fourth wall and drawing attention to his performance: “And on my last tour of the day, no hooey. I like to let my hair down. Drop the phony accent. And be me. Just me” (Chin *The Year* 71). Fred makes a spectacle of his (and Chinatown’s) ability to perform both realness and fakeness, authenticity and invention, “[g]ood home cookin and souvenir chopsticks” (71). Both sides of the binary are ultimately part of the performative tourist experience and the lived experience of Chinatown’s residents. “Real’ and ‘fake’ start to become indistinguishable, and it seems to be this dissolving of clear boundaries between the two that causes Fred, and Chin by extension, so much distress.

All Chinatown’s a Stage?

The breaking down of this boundary has engendered a host of attitudes towards and representations of the space. Photographer and cultural archivist Henry Woon shot images of Oakland’s Chinatown during its period of remodelling in the 1970s—the result of increasing development in the neighbourhood following the influx of Asian migrants after the Immigration Act of 1965. Woon’s photographs (see fig. 4) emphasise contrasts between a seemingly ordinary city-scape and the ornamentation within it that signals ‘Chinatown’.

²⁶ Following Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch’ien, ‘Changlish’ describes the parodying of Chinese speakers’ use of English (as in Charlie Chan’s style of speech). ‘Chinglish’, meanwhile, is the “language that is actually used in communities rather than imagined or appropriated” (Ch’ien 111).

Though distinctive, Chinatown is a hybrid space: always part of a larger city and a non-Chinese nation. Yet it is often appearances of ‘Chineseness’ that draw the eye. The gas pumps’ awning in fig. 4 recalls in reductionist style the roof of a Chinese temple, for instance. The composition magnifies the awning’s peculiarity, how it seems affixed to the text of Chinatown like a second-hand citation. This remains a living Chinatown though, one fuelled by the same crude substances as wider America. There is no obvious ‘personal front’ or performance of Chineseness by the people on the street.



Fig. 4. Woon, Henry. Photograph, Oakland, CA. Henry Woon Photographs and Scrapbooks, Comparative Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.



Fig. 5. Woon, Henry. Photograph, Oakland, CA. Henry Woon Photographs and Scrapbooks, Comparative Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA

Another set of Woon's photographs (see fig. 5) focus on the scaffolding erected during Oakland Chinatown's reconstruction. It appears as exoskeleton, supporting the original body of Chinatown as it is modified and re-framed. Here then, the 'front' of Chinatown begins to surpass and eclipse its original form. Yet it remains a peopled space, even as those inhabitants are screened behind increasing layers of adornment. In contrast, Yun Gee's painting *San Francisco Chinatown* (see fig. 6), presents Chinatown as surface. As Anthony W. Lee has noted, Gee's Chinatown is a place dominated by architectural constructs that are essentially lifeless and vacant (173). It is a wonderland of glowing street lamps and colourful facades, a pseudo-cubist space of component parts fitting jigsaw-like to form a set of surface relations; yet it is devoid of life beyond the spectacle (A.W. Lee 173). The painting's title too leads the viewer only to surface, introducing no character and concealing no mystery. Chinatown appears here as empty stage.



Fig. 6. Gee, Yum. *San Francisco Chinatown*. Oil on canvas, 11x16in. 1927. Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA. collections.museumca.org. Accessed 27 July 2017.

For Gee then, Chinatown is only its surface impression; nothing lives in its hidden places, or acts behind the façade. Indeed, for Gee, the façade seems the organising motif of Chinatown. To some extent, a Chinatown façade is the architectural counterpart to the stereotype of Chinese inscrutability. Perhaps more pertinently though, Lefebvre observes that the façade admits certain acts to the realm of the visible whilst ‘condemning’ others to “obscenity”—the ‘scene’ necessitates an ‘ob-scene’ (Lefebvre 99). We find with the façade, then, that what is ‘real’ about Chinatown becomes tainted by the ostensible necessity of its veiling. It is this bifurcation that comes under scrutiny in many representations of Chinatown.

Chinatown Tours and Staging Authenticity

If Chinatowns are performative spaces, with tourists acting as audiences of sorts, what we find in the literature of this first generation cohort is that readers of these texts can also

function as tourists to the space. Many representations of Chinatown by Chinese Americans attempt to transport readers behind the front: to the backstage, lived, ‘authentic’ spaces rarely glimpsed by tourists. However, it is often claims to authenticity that fuel modern Chinatown tourism. C.Y. Lee’s 1957 novel *The Flower Drum Song* illustrates this complex relationship. Lee’s vision for the novel was to “show Chinese life” in San Francisco’s Chinatown (C.Y. Lee ‘Response’ 13). Yet he admits that he “exaggerated a little, perhaps, made it a little more quaint” because he was writing for a mainstream audience (C.Y. Lee ‘Response’ 13).

One register in which to read Lee’s novel is then as a kind of backstage tour—a guided excursion into an area presented as ‘off-limits’ that *is* nevertheless accessible to reader-tourists, facilitated by a local author acting as guide.²⁷ As such, Lee functions as a kind of ‘native informant’—a term used in ethnography to describe an individual who functions as linguistic and cultural translator for the Western researcher. The native informant is a figure returned to in Chapter Four, in the context of modern publishing. The “typical Chinese” atmosphere of the Hsiang Yah Teahouse, for instance, in which “[a] Caucasian American struggling clumsily [...] with a pair of chopsticks would seem out of place”, acts as a synecdochal equivalent of the novel’s own investment in staging Chinatown Chineseness (C.Y. Lee *The Flower* 19). The white tourist-reader would *seem* ‘out of place’, an interloper in Chinese space; yet they are also intentionally brought to observe that space, and thus inserted into it. In other words, Lee introduces his readers to Chinatown’s backstage, yet in doing so these spaces also become staged areas of performance.

Many of the trappings of touristic and Orientalised Chinatown are so reconstructed in *The Flower Drum Song*. We are regaled with lists of exotic ingredients used in Traditional

²⁷ I borrow here from Sau-ling Cynthia Wong’s influential analogy of the ‘Chinatown tour’—a metaphor used to investigate the representational stakes of Chinese American autobiography. I extend Wong’s usage to include the more literal analogy of Chinatown tours in fiction written by residents.

Chinese Medicine: “dog tail and tiger tail, the sex organ of male seals [...]; heavenly heroic lizard from Kwangsi Province”, and a catalogue of the exotica available in Chinatown bazaars: “the lacquer, the silk, the tiny porcelain, the jade, the silk brocade of gold and lavender” (C.Y. Lee *The Flower* 6, 58). The novel’s patriarch is Wang Chi-yang, an immigrant who exiles himself within Chinatown’s borders (which he avoids crossing), clothes himself in Chinese traditional dress and, for the majority of the novel, refuses any active process of acculturation. When he steps onto Chinatown’s streets then, “the American tourists seemed to regard him as a natural phenomenon on Grant Avenue” (C. Y. Lee *The Flower* 5). He becomes an exhibit: the living fulfilment of expectations of Chinatown’s Otherness. It is naturally through Wang then, acting as a glass magnifying the appearance of Chineseness, that readers access a familiar vision of those tirelessly revalidated signifiers of Chinatownness—“pagoda roofs, [...] lantern-like street lights, [...] blinking neon signs of English and Chinese” (C.Y. Lee *The Flower* 6).

Lee’s novel was capitalised upon by mainstream America in the form of a major Rodgers and Hammerstein Broadway musical, which premiered just a year after Lee’s novel was published; a film adaptation of that musical in 1961; and a revival of the stage version from David Henry Hwang at the start of the new millennium. For Rodgers and Hammerstein’s show, an Asian cast was sought—an idea considered risky. What was important in their casting process was the facilitation of an *impression* of Chineseness, to be realised not only in plot and set design, but also in the cast’s physical appearance. The idea of Chineseness was more important than its reality, with central and supporting roles given not only to Japanese American and Filipino American actors, but also Caucasian and African American performers. ‘Oriental’ decoration—be it human, ornamental, musical, or choreographic—was thus pursued, but only as far as to the *appearance* of ‘authenticity’.

David Henry Hwang’s version of the play typifies the complicated relationship between representation, the marketing of the appearance of Chineseness, and the self-aware irony

of Asian American artistic participation in performativity. As William C. Boles observes, Hwang's work is frequently engaged in both perpetuating and subverting Asian American stereotypes (216). Boles provides the example of Hwang's self-conscious appearance in Greg Pak's short film *Asian Pride Porn*, in which he plays himself as a hawker of "politically correct Asian porn" (Hwang qtd. in Boles 216). What a popular audience gets from David Henry Hwang's production of *The Flower Drum Song* is different from what they get from Rodgers and Hammerstein's staging. The former is a reaction against as well as a revival of the latter, offering a popular audience both familiar tropes of Chineseness and commentary upon them: the assimilationist character Madam Liang from the earlier musical becomes a single-minded Chinatown businesswoman in Hwang's staging, who persuades the local Chinese opera theatre to turn into a nightclub-cum-tourist-trap, Club Chop Suey. When the cast sing 'Chop Suey' in Hwang's version, they are feeding the popular audience what their appetites have been prepared for: an Americanised version of something at several removes from an already ambiguous 'original'.

From C.Y. Lee's novel then, which was itself influenced by the touristification of Chinatown, additional Oriental edifices and ornamentations are added by Rodgers and Hammerstein and by Hwang, creating ever more embellished impressions of Chineseness. In other words, if Chinatown is "a *mise en scène* of Victorian buildings made over with Orientalized facades", as Anne Anlin Cheng formulates it, Chinatown on stage is in turn a kind of *mise en abyme*, with Chinatown itself being the original performance, and iterations of *The Flower Drum Song* acting as its scripts (37-8).

"Walking Chinatown[s]" in Wang Ping's 'House of Anything You Wish'

We find another response to Chinatown from within this corpus in Wang Ping's short story 'House of Anything You Wish'. The story's narrator is Tiger, a migrant from China whose wife, Mei, has joined him after he has spent several years establishing a home and business

in Manhattan's Chinatown. Soon after arrival, his wife spurns him, and begins an affair with a white man. Tiger responds:

I'm successful, too [...]. I built my antique store from scratch in the heart of Chinatown. Do you know that every square inch of land here is worth more than gold, and our condo on Bayard Street is just as valuable as the loft in SoHo? [...] But the smirk on your lips stopped me cold. Since when did you pick up that white man's look? (51)

Despite his success, and despite the *value* of their Chinatown environs, Mei perceives her new life in Chinatown as degraded. She believes that Tiger is a *tong* (Chinatown gang member). Tiger's question about 'when' she picked up the white man's look—the look that sees Chinese vice instead of virtue and refuses to trust that Tiger “run[s his] business clean in Chinatown”—is pertinent (Ping 'House' 54). Did she acquire this look after becoming involved with a white man? Or did she, rather, learn it as a part of her American socialisation, from everyday interactions as well as “[a]ll the movies and TV shows [she] watch[es]” (Ping 'House' 53)?

As discussed above, Chinatown's touristification and its filmic representations have tended to reproduce each other. Often, Chinatown manifests on screen as a space of vice, iniquity, and the historic threat of the Orient. In Roman Polanski's lauded *Chinatown*, for instance, Chinatown is an absent (until the final scenes) but indomitable threat: an “impenetrable backdrop, a malevolent referent that signifies the duplicity and evil in the emerging modernist wasteland of 1939 Los Angeles”, as Jan Lin describes it (181). Characters like Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu—a supervillain appearing as the Yellow Peril incarnate, whose fictional base is London's Limehouse Chinatown—came to dominate the landscape of representations of Chinatown during the early-mid twentieth century, and Chinatown's danger is a filmic trend that has endured. It has spanned from Michael Cimino's neo-noir stylings of anti-heroes, gangs and ultra-violence in the 1985 film *Year of the Dragon*, to 2012's *Men in Black 3*, which featured Chinatown's inhabitants as *literally* alien—another joke to add to its action-comedy portfolio. The supernatural and comedic

elements of *Men in Black 3*'s depiction of Chinatown are also abundant in John Carpenter's 1986 film *Big Trouble in Little China*. As in several other popular American films including *Gremlins*, Woody Allen's *Alice*, and the 2003 version of *Freaky Friday*, Chinatown appears here as font of perilous magic, a netherworld inside the city.²⁸

For Mei in 'House of Anything You Wish', representations of Chinatown are inseparable from 'reality' or 'authenticity'—she experiences the space through a postmodern manifestation of hyperreality. It is both ironic and telling that, whilst swearing his innocence, Tiger admits that "there *are* tongs everywhere [in Chinatown]. But that's only half the truth. You never gave me a chance to tell *my* story" (Ping 53, emphasis mine). At this point, Tiger functions as a metatextual agent for the author. Regardless of the accuracy or inaccuracy of mainstream portrayals of Chinatown, their prominence silences the representations from Asian American artists. Tiger comes to the realisation that Mei's accusation "[y]ou are Chinatown" is an accurate one: "I wear my watermelon hat and silk robe, just like a Chinaman in a movie, to amuse tourists. [...] Is it a crime?" (56, emphasis in original). This question is both a refutation—a release of frustration that the necessary means of his survival in America have been scorned—and a genuine probing of the consequences of his subjectively 'inauthentic' being. Both understandings of his question acknowledge that for some, his performance as 'Chinatown Chinaman' could be considered harmful.

The Chinatown merchant role Tiger enacts must be placed upon a continuum of performances of everyday life—this particular act functions as an amplified presentation of both a professional role and a racial role (or more accurately, a racial role as professional role). Tiger's performance bridges a perceived gap between performances of everyday life and the 'make-believe' action of theatrical/filmic performances. Even if Tiger knows that

²⁸ The use of Chinatown as a setting in which to plot mystery and intrigue, often of a supernatural nature, is not exclusive to film. Novels following a similar trajectory include titles such as: *Dim Sum Asylum* (Ford), *The Girl with the Ghost Eyes* (Boroson), and *The Chinatown Death Cloud Peril* (Malmont), all published in the twenty-first century.

his mercantile Chinatown performance is distinct from his non-professional identity, his audience may be unaware. To further complicate matters, even in his ‘everyday’ life, Tiger is, like everyone, implicated in performances of gender and race/ethnicity. Following Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler influentially asserted in *Gender Trouble* that gender is a socially constructed performance. Tiger too performs a kind of hard-boiled masculinity as part of his everyday being. To fend off the Tongs’ “soldiers and thugs”, Tiger plays Russian roulette: “[t]he only way to show them I could play, and play hard, despite my pale skin and girly face” (Ping 53). To counter perceptions of stereotypical Chinese emasculation (pale skin is typically associated with Chinese femininity—historically and presently in China, those women who can afford not to engage in manual labour often demonstratively emphasise their pale skin tone), Tiger performs a version of defensive masculinity that ‘out-performs’ the Tongs’ own intimidating enactments.

Although performativity is a theory most often associated with Judith Butler’s work on gender, race and ethnicity can also be understood performatively: not simply ‘givens’, but identities acted out and reproduced. Whilst some may think that an assigned racial or ethnic role can be enriched or challenged through a novel or subversive performance of that role, in Tiger’s conception, all Chinese in America are viewed as embodied performances of Otherness: “Will they ever look at me and say: Perhaps he’s an American too, just like us. Do you know, Mei, that you’re a walking Chinatown yourself?” (Ping 58). For Tiger, Chinatown is the inevitable condition of being Chinese in America, regardless of their individual performances—constituted as such by an audience who sees only a ‘front’.

The Postmodern Tourist

However, tourists are not just audiences. Sightseers are also agents of another function. They are, as Jonathan Culler argues, the “unsung armies of semiotics” (155). By this, Culler means that tourists engage in the process of reading the geographical and cultural

landscapes they have entered as sign systems. More specifically, they read everything as a sign *of itself*. Chinatown signifies Chinatown-ness, and its apparent Chineseness signifies just that. Those modern tourists who seek ‘authentic’ experiences are not exempt from their role as semioticians. According to Culler: “The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself and hence lacks the authenticity of what is truly unspoiled, untouched by mediating cultural codes” (164). If we see readers of Chinatown texts also as tourists of sorts, then they too are semioticians. Writers born in China, who would seem to bear the ultimate mark of ‘genuine’ Chineseness, can thus come to legitimise representations of the space through their ostensibly ‘undiluted’ Chineseness.

Chinatown and the images created of it reproduce one another, leading Anna-Lisa Mak to state that Chinatown “has ceased to be representative of anything other than itself. [... It] has become a simulacrum—a copy without an original” (96). By reading Chinatown and its images through the frame of simulacra, as explicated by Jean Baudrillard, we gain insight into the consequences of its touristification. There is a significant concordance between Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum and Jonathan Culler’s semiotic model of (post)modern tourism. For Baudrillard, the postmodern world substitutes the signs of the real for the real, leading to a loss of our ability to distinguish authenticity from artifice (Baudrillard 2). For Culler, authenticity is voided once it is marked as such, with the sign of the authentic usurping the signified. The touristic space of Disneyland is, for Baudrillard, “a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation” (174). It is an imaginary world acting as social microcosm: a “profile of the United States” with “[a]ll its values [...] exalted here, in miniature and comic strip form. Embalmed and pacified. [...] Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real” (Baudrillard 174-5). Chinatown too can be characterised as a theme park-like space; yet unlike Disneyland,

it creates an imaginary world presented on some levels as ‘authentic’.²⁹ In modern Chinatown, tourist experiences are not typically driven by a desire to push past appearances and surfaces, but rather to revel in the ‘show’ of authenticity.

The idea of Chinatown being a simulation significantly complicates the reading of Chinatown through representations of the space. If both Chinatown and its representations are recreations, repeating previous signs and images in iterations of an ‘original’ design which was always already a simulation of Chinese space, then “representation ends, and reproduction [...] takes over”, as Schechner reasons (117). Each Chinatown and each representation of Chinatown is both an ‘original’ and a ‘copy’ in a theoretically infinite series. Nevertheless, to subscribe wholly to this postmodern version of Chinatown is to deny artistic representations of Chinatown their novelty, and perhaps too their artistry. In practical terms there are ways to distinguish between different representations of Chinatown that resist confining them all to the same continuum of simulation. One way to distinguish between representations of Chinatown is to examine to what extent they engage with the metatextual implications of their representations of the space and the image of its inhabitants. I consider this in relation to one key text in the following section.

Consuming Chinatown and the Stakes of Representation in *The Lost Daughter of Happiness*

Set in San Francisco’s old Chinatown in the mid-late nineteenth century, Geling Yan’s award-winning novel *The Lost Daughter of Happiness* (the Anglophone version of Yan’s

《扶桑》) recovers and reimagines the life of a single nineteenth century Chinese prostitute.

²⁹ The connection between Disneyland and Chinatown is not simply an imagined one. In fact, one early project planned (though never fulfilled) by Disney’s so-called Imagineers was for the creation of a small Chinatown-themed zone branching off from Disneyland’s Main Street, U.S.A. In this version of Chinatown, a Chinese restaurant would cater to guests eager to experience Oriental wonders like a talking dragon and an animatronic Confucius, who would respond to diners’ questions with pseudo-Eastern maxims and adages.

Extrapolating from the “high percentage of the Chinese female population in San Francisco [who] worked as prostitutes”—often brought to America as prisoners, indentured servants or coerced contract labourers—Yan’s narrator isolates the narrative of an individual from this historical mass, removing her from obscurity (Yung 29). It is the interplay between historiography and fiction that seems to most concern Yan in this novel, which becomes a postmodern meditation on the potentially corrupting power of narrative authority.

Narratives of History and Historiographic Metafiction

The Lost Daughter alternates between two styles of narrative. For the majority of the novel, three central characters—Fusang, the most famed of Chinatown’s prostitutes; Ah Ding/Da Yong, a self-reinventing trickster-gangster who comes to own Fusang and to marry her in a gallows wedding; and Chris, a young white boy who is obsessed with Fusang—are focalised by a seemingly omniscient narrator, in the style of a historical novel. However, interspersed throughout the novel are the interjections of an overt authorial narrator. This interplay creates a form that Linda Hutcheon famously terms historiographic metafiction—an archetypically postmodern form in which metaleptic games and violations occur at the border between the narrative conventions of historiography and fiction, in novels that refute the idea that “only history has a truth claim” (Hutcheon 93). This challenge is raised through the questioning not only of the firmness of the ground upon which truth claims are raised in historiography, but also of the material from which this ground is established.

Conflating time and space, the narrator of *The Lost Daughter* writes “[f]rom a distance of one hundred and twenty years” (Yan 1). The sense of history as a foreign land, imaginable only through the representations of others, is emphasised by this mixed metaphor. Fredric Jameson comments on the effect of the spatial logic of the simulacrum upon ‘historical time’ in *Postmodernism*, showing how the past has now become “a vast collection of images”, with the past as ‘referent’ gradually finding itself bracketed and

effaced, eventually leaving only texts (Jameson 18). As such, Jameson explains, the historical novel “can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only ‘represent’ our ideas and stereotypes about that past” (25). Chinatown seems an ideal setting for a postmodern novel engaging with the textualisation of historical time, given that it too functions primarily as a collection of images emphasising the at once essentialised and meaningless nature of ‘Chinese’ space over time.

The narrator’s claim that only she can bring characters like Fusang “to light”, as the “only one who can give you a clear picture” slowly unravels throughout the novel, revealing the representational limits of fiction as well as history (Yan 30). “[B]oth history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity”, Hutcheon emphasises (93). As such, the connection between the historiographic and the literary is not effaced in historiographic metafiction, but underlined (Hutcheon 128).

The implications of narration are metaleptically highlighted in the novel. The narrator tells us almost immediately that she has thoroughly researched Fusang and prostitution in old Chinatown, having looked through “all one hundred and sixty” books on the subject (Yan 2). Yet to what extent can readers trust this statement? How are we to understand this desire to foreground her research? Rather than assimilating historical data into a fictional world in order to provide a sense of verifiability, Yan’s narrator foregrounds the “process of attempting to assimilate [it]” (Hutcheon 114). The narrator does not claim to be an impartial narratorial vessel through which Fusang’s life is focalised. Instead, she highlights her research in order to draw similarities between historiography, narration, and the auction block upon which Fusang’s body is sold. Each domain acts as a site for the observation, appraisal and speculation of individual subjects who are deemed to be of significance or value.

Feminist Recovery or Recovered Exploitation?

In one register, the narrator's attempt to fictionally represent the life of Fusang is a feminist act of recovery and restoration. Chinese women in nineteenth century America were a doubly marginalised group, facing legislative restrictions from the United States, and a patriarchal Chinese tradition emblematised by Confucian ideologies like the 'Three Obediences' and 'Four Virtues', as well as practices like foot-binding.³⁰ As Judy Yung expounds:

Speaking no English, having no independent means of support, and insulated within Chinatown from alternative views of gender roles, they continued to abide by the patriarchal values of their homeland [...]. In this sense, their early settlement in America was similar to that of Jewish mothers and Italian women, whose cultures also dictated that they remain within the house, isolated from the larger society. Regardless of social status [...] Chinese women were considered the property of men and treated as such. (24-5)

The occupations of the tiny population of Chinese women in nineteenth-century America (just 7.2% of the total Chinese population in 1870, dropping to 3.6% in 1890) were limited more or less exclusively to house-bound wife, domestic servant or prostitute, as Sucheng Chan exposes (94). To centralise the story of one of these women—a Chinese prostitute at that, the “archetype of female bondage and degradation” as described by Yung—is then to reclaim a female body and narrative from an objectifying historiographic framework through fiction (29).

However, the narrator's repurposing of Fusang's form also commits a kind of violence of its own. In the first sentence of the novel, the narrator instructs Fusang: “This is who you are” (Yan 1). The semiotic equivalence (“is”) of the signifiers (“this”, “who you are”) and the signified (*this is who you are*) create a logical tautology—a closed system in which the

³⁰ Legislation against Chinese prostitution included the banning of entry of Asian prostitutes by California state legislature in 1870 (which in practice excluded entry for all unmarried Asian women), and the 1875 Page Act, which implemented the same restrictions at a federal level (Shah 85). These pieces of legislation acted as significant precedents for the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

meaning of ‘*this*’ is both open entirely to the narrative decisions of the narrator, and always already whatever those decisions come to appear as. As such, the narrator appears to attain narrative omnipotence under the guise of naturalistic representation. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the tautology soon requires the narrator to begin giving form to the ‘you’ that she evokes. She moderates her identification of Fusang with qualifiers: “the one dressed in red, slowly rising [...] is you” (Yan 1). What is given shape in this narratorial process is the notion that, from the outside, it is often form and appearance that delineate the peculiarities of subjectivity and identity. Just as Chinatown had to *appear* Chinese to qualify the existing notion that ‘Chinatown is what it is’ in a fashion beneficial to its inhabitants, so here it is through the distinctions of Fusang’s body, her form, that the narrator qualifies the paradoxical specificity and imprecision of ‘This is who you are’. Moreover, the narrator draws attention to the form of her own novel in order to qualify the stakes of her narrative, which is—as Hutcheon describes historiographic metafiction—“both resolutely fictive and yet undeniably historical [with] both realms shar[ing] their constitution in and as discourse” (142).

On Narrative Unreliability

Over the course of the novel, the narrator reveals her unreliability. As such, Yan “exploits readers’ awareness that the version of the story retailed by the narrator should be treated with scepticism”, as Suzanne Keen explains the function of the unreliable narrator (44). At various points, the narrator calls direct attention to her inability to comprehend or accurately narrate historical events and internal subjectivities: “To tell you the truth, I’m often wrong about white people. Never mind the white kids of your day. Even with the white man I married I end up in ridiculous conversations because I assume I know what he’s thinking” (Yan 65). In instances like this, the gap between past and present as well as between author, narrator, narrated and focaliser is collapsed in order to expose the

insecurity of narrative assumptions. Yet the seeming vulnerability of the narrator, who exposes herself as limited and fallible, also provides an opportunity to reverse the stereotype of Chinese inscrutability by revealing the imprecision of cultural translation in each direction. The ethnographic gaze is shifted away from Chinatown and turned onto Chris, who comes to metonymically ‘represent’ all white men, including the narrator’s husband, much as Asian characters are typically made to function in Western media.

The subversion of this narrative manoeuvre is heightened by the fact that this was originally a Sinophone text. The gaze at whiteness here was originally intended for a Chinese audience for whom whiteness is not normalised, but is rather Other and potentially inscrutable. In the translated text, the narrator’s subject position is also translated to that of an English speaker in dialogue with other English speakers. Yet in the original version, the narrator communicates with a Sinophone audience as a subject who feels connected to Fusang and to Chinatown first and foremost as a Chinese migrant:

“We flock to Chinatown too to limit our culture shock. We too crowd into cramped, shabby apartments, a group of us splitting the rent, a sense of safety a matter of everyone feeling equally unsafe, a sense of good luck a matter of everyone feeling equally unlucky”. (Yan 153)

In the translated text, the narrator becomes doubly unreliable with our realisation that her words have been taken out of the Sinophone context of their original enunciation.

In revealing herself as unreliable, in whichever language, the narrator implicitly insinuates the instability of all narration, whether fictional or historiographic. The narrator bemoans the fact that the one hundred and sixty history books she has read “don’t offer enough information to understand someone like you”, which she finds unbearable because she “can’t stand a mystery” (Yan 261). Her fictionalisation of Fusang’s narrative is thus in part an effort to fill in history’s blank spaces, to author an explanation for history’s enigmas. If Chinatown reproduces itself in a continuum of postmodern simulacra, then Yan’s novel suggests that historiography undergoes the same process: “the historians just kept

reproducing one another's accounts, errors and all" (Yan 90). The process behind this kind of historiographic reproduction is depicted by Yan as anaphoric. Describing the police raid of the underground Chinatown auction in which Fusang is first sold, the narrator begins five consecutive paragraphs with the phrase: "It was said[...]" (31-2). Through repetition, hearsay becomes description, utterance morphs into statement, story transforms into history.

The narrator's questioning of how it is possible to "analyse or explain a historical figure like you" is not simply a confession of inaccuracy, but an allying with contingency, ambiguity and indeterminacy (Yan 187). At the end of the novel, the narrator instructs Fusang to listen to descriptions of her in old age. "No one knows how this woman [...] spent the rest of her life", one historian instructs (Yan 273). "A little eatery cropped up [...]; its proprietress looked to be in her sixties. She was rumoured to be the Fusang who was once so famous", another speculates (Yan 273). "In her seventies, she sits at the fruit stand peeling pineapples. She is shabbily dressed and seems pre-occupied", a third source divulges (Yan 274). With the disputes of historians foregrounded, the narrator sees a smile appear on Fusang's face, knowing that "there can be so many different versions of the same historical event" (Yan 274). The narrator appears to hand agency back to Fusang by refusing closure, permitting Fusang the opportunities of multiplicity.

However, the narrator comes to realise that by raising Fusang's body from history's mass grave and intending to hand agency back over, she is confronted by an individual so fully fleshed out that narratorial interpretation is hindered: "your smile and the look in your eyes now don't even give me [a basic grasp on what's behind your mystery]" (Yan 261). Paradoxically, by individuating Fusang, the narrator encounters a subject so complex that she can only understand her as a symbol for opacity and mystery. As such, the reader is not permitted plurality as an easy answer to the question of the stakes of representation. After introducing the multiple versions of Fusang's uncharted later life, and appearing to refuse

any single representative ‘truth’, the narrator returns to the idea that “all I can be sure of is the you right in front of me” (Yan 274). All the narrator can return to is the single ‘you’—the single representation of Fusang—conjured by her own hand. In a sense, we are shown the mechanisms of historical and psychological literary recovery, in a similar fashion to the foregrounding of the processes of “rememory” in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (Morrison 43). Yan’s novel’s act of recovery—of making a Chinese migrant the subject of her own narrative, and having another Chinese migrant function as narrator of and participant in their individual *and* collective experience—does not impose upon its subjects the mastery of historiography, but rather speaks into the unspoken places of history through the soft-edged, protean summonings and becomings of a reforming imaginary.

Upon the Auction Block: Consuming Chineseness

In her work on Yan’s novel, Wen Jin reveals the differences between interpretations of the novel by Western and Chinese readers and critics. She argues that these differences are ideologically motivated in part, but also that the sections of the novel shortened or excised by translator Cathy Silber have altered the perceptions of Anglophone readers (W. Jin 175). According to Jin, Chinese readers tend to read Fusang’s seeming accommodation of sexual and social violence as an allegory for the Chinese nation—which was subjected to the nineteenth century violence of Western imperialism and hegemony—whilst Anglo-American readers have typically read Fusang as an embodiment of Chinese inscrutability and forbearance (W. Jin 176).

Just as Fusang’s body accommodates the body of each of her ‘johns’, “[t]he way the beach accommodates the tide”, so each critic and reader enters into an exchange with her form, imposing upon Fusang their own interpretation of her character (even if that interpretation is of stereotypical inscrutability) (Yan 62). As Wen Jin states, there are “strong parallels between the male characters’ competing interpretations of Fusang’s body and

those of the novel's critics" (186). I would extend this analysis to include—to some extent—all readers engaged in hermeneutic scrutiny of the text. This is one of many ways in which Yan implicates the reader in the selling of Chineseness and the female Chinese body, as Chineseness is sold to Chinatown's tourists through its architectural form.

If the narrator is the figure who forces Fusang to "turn around, just like all those times on the auction block", then we as readers must by extension be the audience and bidders (Yan 1). In this postmodernist turn, the reader consumes "sheer commodification as a process", as Jameson describes—we buy into, consume and are consumed by the consumption of Fusang's form (Jameson x). And if Fusang subsequently slips "beyond the narrator's creative and interpretative grasp", refusing to "yield her story" as Sally E. McWilliams describes in one of the few Western articles analysing *The Lost Daughter*, then the reader too finds that their masculinised gaze at Fusang fails to fully realise her as anything more than object (McWilliams 134). The state of Fusang's body under the narrative control of the narrator is made analogous to the position of her body under the circumstances of her prostitution. In both conditions Fusang's body is the site of precarity, seemingly deprived of all agency. As such, not only is the "narrator's literary endeavour [...] marked as intersecting with the 1860s sex traffickers' gaze of commodification", but the reader's gaze is also implicated (McWilliams 142).

The commodification of Chinese femininity has a long history in the United States. The very first Chinese woman to arrive in the USA in 1834 did so aboard a trading vessel, alongside a hold full of other 'goods' from China, Erika Lee reveals (*The Making* 31). This was Afong Moy, advertised to Western viewers as a 'beautiful Chinese lady', and exhibited to New York audiences adorned with Chinese costume and her peculiar-appearing bound feet. She was exhibited to audiences in a manufactured, Chinoiserie decorated space that anticipated some of the design features of modern Chinatown: she was positioned in a room decorated with "paper lanterns, gold and red satin drapes, Chinese furniture, and paintings"

(E. Lee *The Making* 31). This display allowed audiences both to consume a version of Chinese feminine exoticism in a setting highlighting the differences of Chineseness, and to presume familiarity with passive Asian bodies.

Looking at Chinese Objects: A Gendered Approach

Alongside gazing at her form, the narrator makes frequent demands of Fusang's body: "Let me raise your chin a bit here, and bring your lips into the dim light. That's it, just right" (Yan 1). The narrator poses her subject, arranges her to appear in the most accommodating form. Fusang appears to passively comply, as she does with countless customers throughout the novel. Yet implicitly, the narrator also acknowledges here that her control and possession of Fusang can only ever be partial. She may be able to 'direct' and 'stage' Fusang, presenting her in a certain light, but just as actors have their own private subjectivities, stages have 'backs', Chinatown is not all 'front', and prostitutes are not permanently performing sexually, so Fusang can never be fully represented here, despite the narrator's desperate requests to repeatedly "have a look" at the prostitute, in search of all aspects (Yan 89). The act of looking at this subject of Chinatown is a troubling one for Yan.

Chinatown's visitors encounter the space as a principally visual experience. Chinese archways are portals to streets filled with buildings embellished with pagodas, latticed woodwork and dragons; non-English scripts monopolise its linguistic landscape; grocery stores are filled with Asian produce; there are traditional herbalists, window displays of Chinese art, roast meat hanging in restaurant windows; and it is peopled predominantly by non-white faces. There is a lot for the visitor to *look* at. When Chris follows the "lily white crowd" into Chinatown, who throng in protest against the Chinese presence in the city, at first he too "just wanted a look" (Yan 43). But this looking leads to action, and soon Chris too is dispensing anti-Chinese handbills. As with outsiders' experiences of Chinatown, 'looking' often acts as a precursor to assumed 'knowing', which is reinforced by the

reproduced representations of the space created in the popular imagination. The narrator's desire to look at Fusang—and thus to take command over her seeming passivity by imposing meaning upon her form—points back to us, and to the implications of our role as readers.

The reverberations of the novel upon our own reading practices and the stakes of representation are often most apparent in the sections of the novel in which literal mirrors appear. Chris, the white child who becomes infatuated with Fusang, carries a little round mirror around with him. He uses this glass to appraise and savour Fusang's body. He learned as a young boy that he could use his mirror to "capture any scene in the world as his own, however momentary, private possession" (Yan 10). It is this partial, mediated gaze that becomes erotically charged for Chris—in early childhood Chris looks at a number of unusual subjects through his glass: "baby foxes suckling, the cook picking her nose while a hired man stuck his hand up her skirt, birds kissing, the feet of his siblings and cousins kicking each other under the dining room table" (Yan 114). Each subject of the mirror's focus portends a kind of voyeurism that manifests more malignantly when trained on Fusang. When the mirror is used on Fusang's form, Chris believes that by slowly and self-indulgently rotating his wrist, running the lens over her body, he can "suddenly [...] see everything" (Yan 114). This is of course paradoxical. In fact, he 'sees' a series of fragments—singular images extracted from a wider scene, fractured glimpses that can more readily be appraised, considered and consequently possessed. It is then the mirror's frame that limits the scene, extricating Fusang (or more specifically *parts* of Fusang) from her environment as if in a visual blazon.

There is an important analogy here for the narrator's function and the implications of her representative act. Framed by the narrator's unreliable gaze, by historiographic research, by the physical dimensions of the text, by the reader's inclinations and prejudices and so on, Fusang can only ever be seen partially, mediated by the author, viewer, reader, narrator and the representational limits of their words, images and imaginations. There is

another parallel here with the representational limits through which Chinatown has come to be known. Chris does not ‘see everything’ when he looks at Fusang—he *pictures* everything. He extrapolates a scene from the parts that he can most readily comprehend, just as tourists in Chinatown read parts of the environment as representative of a whole, subsuming narrative to metanarrative.

Nevertheless, Fusang is able to use the same device as Chris, the white Everyman, in order to look back towards him: “Fusang saw *him* in the mirror” (Yan 10, emphasis mine). If the mirror acts as a metaphor for the mediation and limited scope of the representational act, what does it mean then for Fusang to usurp the medium? We find an answer during another scene featuring Fusang alongside a mirror. She sits “before a cracked mirror, the size of a *wutong* leaf” and turns to look at Chris (139, italics in original). As if instructing Chris on the fragmented nature of what is ‘seen’ in his mirror, she turns away from the cracked glass to look directly at Chris, who feels “all his senses shift” in this moment of unmediated exchange (Yan 139). What becomes apparent in *The Lost Daughter* is that in seeming inscrutability lies a sort of power. By foregoing narrative omniscience, the hermeneutic work of interpreting Fusang falls squarely upon the reader—and Fusang frustrates the desire for tidy, singular readings through her absolute, inexorable accommodation. Like Chinatown, which also receives the impulses and interpretations of its visitors, Fusang remains subtly in control, anticipating the advances made upon her: “Her body was [the] basis; she controlled the advance and retreat” (Yan 62). Even Fusang’s name is an allusion to her frustration of readers’ and critics’ desire to ‘know’ her. Fu sang was the name used in the Xia dynasty (2070-1600BC) classic 《山海经》 (*Classic of Mountains and Seas*) to describe a fantastical land east of China. Chinese historians and Sinologists have subsequently debated whether this land was in or around Japan, or whether it was in fact

the Americas. Wen Jin has concluded that the name Fusang enfolds the character in “slippages between myth and history” (178).

Yan does not include any chapter and section breaks in the novel. The effect is simultaneously a laying bare of the normalised devices of narration (or rather the lack thereof) and also a denial of the reader’s desire for a ‘break’ from the sometimes uncomfortable material. The past and present are joined in a nonlinear, atemporal blur of (dis)continuity that implicates Fusang, the narrator and the reader in each other’s chronotopes and narratives. By exposing the devices and parameters of representation—the limits of what can be ‘seen’, Yan confronts the reader who seeks to know and thus to consume a corporeal version of Chinatown Chineseness.

Conclusion

As the readers of these Chinatown texts—often adopting the position of tourists—are guided through its streets, they encounter a version of Americanness as well as of Chineseness around every corner. It is an Americanness that has bought into an idea of multicultural urbanity—that pans the ethnic landscape for something to take to market. Chinatowns were successful, in part, because they successfully offered American tourists both a seemingly foreign urban space, and a self-congratulatory belief in their tolerance of this apparent alienness. Chinatown has thus become both a geographical space set apart from its surroundings, and a metaphor for authentic Otherness—a fantasy of China not only to be visited, but also to be believed in.

Both Chinatowns and Chinese people have consistently been defined in the negative. They are either not like the rest of America, or not like the resultant representations constructed of them as such. This trend of negative definition has led to numerous, conflicting conceptions of what Chinatowns, China and Chinese people are ‘really’ like. However, in striving to describe and create these representations, a process of reductionism

has sometimes led to restrictive notions of essential Chineseness or Chinatownness. The touristification process in Chinatown seeks to preserve the Otherness of its Oriental-themed space, whilst simultaneously selecting and then magnifying or minimising the most and least marketable traits of its supposed difference, thereby creating a commercially viable form of cultural essentialism.

With the majority of new Chinese migrants in America settling in suburban neighbourhoods known as satellite Chinatowns, the major modern Chinatowns of the twentieth century are becoming ever more geared towards the tourist experience. Moreover, it is only the white population of many of America's original Chinatowns that has grown over the last decade according to Huiying Bernice Chan (n. pag.). This is not to say that Chinatowns are stagnating or dying out. But they are changing. Some Chinatowns are beginning to drop some of the more stereotypical visual signifiers of Chineseness described above. Today, none of New York's numerous satellite Chinatowns, nor its original Manhattan Chinatown, accommodate many lanterns, ornamental pagodas, dragon emblems and so on. As Ien Ang summarises, there is now a disjuncture between the "self-conscious construction of Chinatown as essentially Chinese, on the one hand, and the increasingly mixed-up, hybrid realities that these areas represent, on the other" ('Sydney's Chinatown' 210).

Chinatowns continue to be hubs of Chinese American community infrastructure: nuclei for members of the Chinese diaspora community and spaces holding "affective and imaginative ties [...] even [for people who have] never lived there", as Claire Jean Kim summarises (116). Chinatowns also continue to be lucrative. Indeed, new Chinatowns are still being planned and produced in order to mine the depths of ethnic tourism. In Liverpool (UK), one such New Chinatown is currently under development. The description and artist's impression for the project from the original developers (North Point Global) are replete with all of the tried-and-tested signifiers of Chinatownness: it will be a

“city within a city”, a “distinctively Chinese urban quarter” underpinned by the motif of the “awakening dragon”, with red lanterns, neon signs, latticed woodwork, sunken streets and, crucially, “retail bazaars” offering “an utterly unique shopping experience” (‘New Chinatown’). No organisations representing the local Chinese community appear to be involved in the design or management of the project, and investment is principally being sought from China and Hong Kong rather than from the diasporic Chinese community. Clearly, the commercial promise of Chinatown is beginning to outweigh its function as lived or private space for the local Chinese community in this case (Liverpool already has a Chinatown, the first in the UK, with a large Chinese community).

New Chinatowns like this are artefacts of a global neoliberal imperative, in which cities and nations are counting on the continuing rise of China—and its potential for investment—for their own future success, as Ien Ang affirms (214-6 ‘Sydney’s Chinatown’). They have little to do with the historical conditions of racism, threat, exclusion and destruction from which the Chinatowns of the twentieth century emerged, and are associated instead with what Ang calls Orientalist modernism (Ang 214). Yet one thing that firmly connects this new generation of Chinatowns to their predecessors is the motor of tourism, and the commodified essentialisation of a version of Chineseness considered acceptable to wider Western society.

If Chinatown is a “space of self-invention”, as Bonnie Tsui expresses, so too is it a space of Other-invention—a space in which a self and an Other are constructed and performed as everyday life (246). “There is a Chinatown for every perspective”, Eric Liu muses, and ultimately, “we see the Chinatown we want to see. But in the end, Chinatown sees us, too. And knows what is false about our representations” (Liu *Accidental* 107-8). Yet what we find in the literature of this cohort is that the ‘truth’ and ‘falsity’ of our representations of Chinatown are often indistinguishable. Depictions of the space can add additional layers of performativity to the neighbourhood, whilst the distinctions between

‘front’ and ‘backstage’ Chinatown become blurred as readers are brought behind the front by authors acting as literary tour guides. The stories we tell and are told about places give them power, or leave them disempowered. So it is that tracking the representations of this space of community and tourism becomes an important process for understanding the valence of this cohort toward this emblematic Chinese American community space.

In *The Lost Daughter of Happiness*, Geling Yan engages with how the history of spaces or characters can be shaped by the representations of them that have followed. Her body is used and consumed by not only her clients, but also the narrator, author, and reader. Each imposes their interpretations upon her, yet Fusang ultimately remains in control through her apparent accommodation, frustrating our collective desires for control and comprehension of her narrative. Like Fusang, the space of Chinatown has undergone a continuing process of construction that may at first seem to reveal a singular version of itself, ready for consumption. Yet in *The Lost Daughter*, we find that what we ‘see’ in Chinatown is always fractured and incomplete. Authors in this cohort have turned our gaze toward the hidden spaces of Chinatown, which in turn are brought to the fore. In doing so, new, elusive space is left behind, which stays for now beyond the reach of representation.

Chinatown is a neighbourhood that is at once local and global, singular and universal, ‘performed’ and ‘authentic’, textual formation and self-referential simulacrum. The following chapter goes on to explore a space just as complicated and entangled. This is the space of the nation, a space with a peculiar relationship to notions of race and ethnicity. This relationship becomes particularly complicated for migrants who have navigated multiple racial and national formations. Through reading Ha Jin’s Cold War spy novel *A Map of Betrayal*, we can investigate how race and racialization have been mapped and remapped for a Chinese migrant family who must navigate formations of Chineseness, Americanness, and everything in between.

Chapter Two

Betrayal, Asian Spies and Cold War Afterlives: Mapping Race and Nation

Dr. No: I was the unwanted child of a German missionary and a Chinese girl of good family. Yet I became treasurer of the most powerful criminal society in China. It's rare for the Tongs to trust anyone who isn't completely Chinese. I doubt they shall do so again. I escaped to America with ten million of their dollars in gold.

[...]

Dr. No: Missiles are only the first step to prove our power.

James Bond: "Our" power? Your disregard for human life means you must be working for the East.

Dr. No: East, West—just points of the compass, each as stupid as the other. I'm a member of S.P.E.C.T.R.E. Special Executive for Counterintelligence, Terrorism, Revenge, Extortion. The four great cornerstones of power headed by the greatest brains in the world.

—*Dr. No*, directed by Terence Young (1962)

How to Read a Map

Spies—apparent betrayers by trade—are imagined as either heroes or villains, dependent on point of view. They loyally serve their nation whilst betraying that of their enemies. Or, more precisely, a spy's loyalty to their nation is paradoxically expressed in their *performance* of loyalty to another nation. If caught, the 'enemy' nation experiences this revelation as a betrayal, an unmasking. Yet in Ha Jin's 2014 novel *A Map of Betrayal*, a Chinese spy is accused of betraying both America *and* China, as well as levying accusations of his being betrayed by each nation in turn. Further complicating these dynamics of loyalty and treachery in the novel is the often unmapped interaction between discourses of nation and racial formation.³¹ In this chapter, this intersection is explored with a focus on the

³¹ The term 'racial formation' was first used by Michael Omi and Howard Winant to describe the "sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed", and how the discourse of race comes to signify the differences between peoples (109). Whilst the terminology of race and ethnicity is complicated and leads to inevitable inaccuracies, I refer to racial formation in this chapter to facilitate the distinguishing of different racializations across different contexts.

relationship between China and America during the Cold War and its aftermath, and how it has affected the perception of East Asian Americans in the USA.³² *A Map of Betrayal* deals with these issues through the narrative of Gary Shang, “the biggest Chinese spy ever caught in North America” (H. Jin *A Map* 3). Jin’s novel follows historian Lilian Shang as she uncovers the life and death of her father, who operated as an employee of both the Chinese and American governments during the Cold War, and who aimed to relieve tensions between the two countries through his intelligence work. The novel describes Lilian’s life in the modern-day as she investigates her father’s past, interspersed with excerpts from the biography she accordingly writes. In this chapter, Jin’s ‘mapping’ of loyalty and betrayal is investigated, in order to orient understandings of race, ethnicity and nation in the post-Cold War world.

It is no coincidence that Jin crafts Lilian, his protagonist, as a historian. Jin is principally concerned with the history and historiography of the Cold War and post-Cold War in this novel. Lilian’s writing about her father functions as a device for Jin to include lengthy historical commentaries on modern history. These sections are written in dense, rather staid, essay-like prose:

So many things happened in the USSR that 1957 could be called the ‘Soviet year,’ the year the number one socialist power triumphed over the West. The Soviets had succeeded in firing an intercontinental missile that could deliver nuclear warheads. (They possessed both atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs by then.) They sent into orbit two satellites, the second one carrying an animal passenger, a dog named Laika. In December the Soviet Union launched its first nuclear submarine. In contrast, the United States, having suffered the recent setback on the Korean Peninsula, seemed on the defensive. In late May in Taipei a large mob broke into the American embassy after the U.S. military court acquitted an American officer who had murdered a major of the Nationalist army [...]. (H. Jin *A Map* 95)

³² I refer specifically to East Asian Americans here, in reference to the ways in which this group (primarily descending from China, Japan, the Koreans and the Philippines) have historically been both homogenised and, paradoxically, set against each other in national terms, dependent on contemporary US foreign relations. I refer to this in greater detail below.

Jin seeks with this retelling of history to enlighten his reader, to contextualise the novel's concerns, and to add a veneer of verisimilitude to Lilian's (and his own, by proxy) historiography. It has been suggested by Steven Yao that in spite of Jin's recent accolades and popularity in the USA, his work may have been largely neglected by scholars due to its "simplicity" and "realist style", making socio-historical explication mostly redundant (111-2). Yet there is more to be said about Jin's use of historical context than this reading allows for. The 'simplicity' and 'realism' of his style leave certain things concealed, even as they expose its surface. Often, what remains hidden beneath Jin's seeming straightforwardness is a complicated engagement with Chinese history, politics and identity.

What the rather dry nature of the historical tracts in *A Map of Betrayal* conceals is an account that rubs against the grain of the official versions of history sanctioned in the PRC. Of China's involvement in the Korean War, for instance, we are told that despite the Chinese army's initial victories across the Yalu river, Gary was disheartened:

he knew China was a weak country [...]. When news came of the horrendous casualties the Chinese had suffered, Gary suspected that his countrymen had been used as cannon fodder for the Russians. His suspicion was verified later on. Through translating articles and reports, he chanced on information unknown to the public. (H. Jin *A Map* 40)

In this novel, Ha Jin interposes an alternate history—a past purported to be hidden from the reading public of China—by supplying in turn information that may be unknown to the reading public of America. These divergent accounts are written by Lilian in an ostensibly 'American' scholarly style, contrasting with a variety of Chinese scholarship she condemns elsewhere: a style she believes her Chinese graduate students have been trained in, mistaking "verbosity for eloquence and ambiguity for beauty, worshipping the evasive and the fuzzy while looking down on lucidity and straightforwardness" (H. Jin *A Map* 98). "If you can't write clearly", Lilian berates her students, "that's because either your head is muddled or you are too afraid to reveal your true feelings and thoughts" (H. Jin *A Map* 98). The subtext of her criticism is that for Lilian, 'straightforwardness' works against the

ambiguously universalising (and politicised) nature of Chinese scholarly ‘evasion’. Concealed beneath the anodyne nature of Jin’s sometimes affectless prose then, lies an attempt to rupture conventional historiography, claiming in turn neutrality and truthfulness—which is coded American.

Lilian’s (and Jin’s) poetics of ‘clarity’ and ‘lucidity’ manifest throughout the novel. Jin hints at the intrigue of his novel with his title: the text is a map—functional, exploratory, facilitating the charting of courses. To this extent, it benefits from a reading framework that allows for an examination of context (history, sociology, politics) alongside more traditional literary analyses. Whilst the novel’s ‘straightforwardness’ can at times telegraph all too clearly how Jin intends the novel to be interpreted, one of the more subtle themes is the interaction between racial dynamics in America and China in the Cold War and post-Cold War eras. This is a relationship that foregrounds a less familiar area of the ‘map’ of America and China’s late twentieth-century relationship. In *A Map of Betrayal*, we find a near-absence of racial issues in this otherwise politically charged text. The symbol for ‘race’ appears infrequently upon its chart, and the symbol for ‘racism’ even less. Yet Jin’s novel still offers the reader a guide for navigating these courses. In *A Map of Betrayal*, we find quiet explorations of Chinese racial formation, as well as of its oft-plotted American counterpart, allowing for the nuancing and internationalising of the discourse. Jin explores the ways in which nationality and race are linked in a discourse of loyalty and betrayal both *to* and *by* the state.

Loyalty to Nation and the Figure of the Asian Spy

The idea of a traitor to the nation inspires strong feelings: the crime of treason has traditionally carried the highest penalty. But in *A Map of Betrayal*, Jin presents his fictitious spy as a modest, peaceable man who serves—in his mind—both the USA and the country of his birth. Yet in doing so, he betrays both nations: he passes top secret American

documents to China, while living a comfortable life in the USA, far removed from the tenets of Maoist Communism. When his espionage is eventually uncovered, he is rejected by both nations, leaving him feeling betrayed himself.

Crystal Parikh informs us in her monograph *An Ethics of Betrayal* that:

[B]etrayal is a moment of violent invention. From this perspective, betrayals are intersubjective, revealing to another or to [...] others, what had been thought to be a sacred or secret trust. [...] [I]f betrayals undo the bonds by which subjects know themselves in relation to others, they wreak havoc not only on the betrayed, but on the traitor as well. (Parikh 12)

We see in *A Map of Betrayal* that there is a duality to the nature of loyalty and betrayal, which can readily transform into one another, and bilaterally affect both or all parties involved in the relationship.

Moreover, through the narrative of a man torn between two nations, Jin presents a version of the migrant condition, with conflicting loyalties not only to nation but also to families, friends and places. As well as highlighting fears of ‘aliens’, the spy narrative in *A Map of Betrayal* parallels some migrants’ experiences of conflicted allegiance. Under war-like conditions, whether martial or ideological, hot or cold, Chinese migrants in America find themselves implicated in relations between the two nations.

A Map of Betrayal acts in some ways as a culmination of much of Jin’s previous work, which often prominently features and explores the notion of loyalty to nation. Jin is by far the most prolific writer in this cohort of Chinese migrant writers in America: he has published eighteen books of poetry, short stories, novels and essays over the past three decades. His authorial career began shortly after the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, which he watched on a television set whilst studying in America. His first book, *Between Silences*, is a poetry collection about life in Cultural Revolution China. It commemorates the people of China as both the “victims” and “makers” of history—the textuality to contemporary China’s “blank page” (H. Jin *Between* 1). The closing poem, ‘Because I Will Be Silenced’, offers a statement of poetic intent:

Once I have the freedom to say
 My tongue will lose its power
 Since my poems strive to break the walls
 That cut off people's voices,
 They become drills and hammers.

But I will be silenced.
 The starred tie around my neck
 At any moment can tighten into a cobra.

How can I speak about coffee and flowers? (H. Jin *Between* 79)

Manifesto-like, with an understated tone disguising the boldness of its claims, this poem asserts that Jin's words are tools that allow others to speak prosopopoeiacally through him, despite knowing that this poetic act is dangerous, can be constricted at any moment, and *will* be censored. As such, Jin questions how he can write about 'coffee and flowers'—standing in for non-politicised content—whilst speaking for those behind the bamboo curtain of Cold War-era China. Reflecting on *Between Silences*, Ha Jin recalls in *The Writer as Migrant* that he “viewed [him]self as a Chinese writer who would write [...] on behalf of the downtrodden Chinese”, but was unaware of the complexity of this position: “too much sincerity is a dangerous thing”, Jin comments without elucidation (H. Jin *The Writer* 3-4).

Rather than speaking directly on behalf of Chinese citizens in his subsequent work, Jin now presents versions of China that seem to speak for themselves: his apparent criticism of modern China and its ruling party often seems transparent, accessible on the surface of his work. However, certain things remain hidden behind this veneer of accessibility. In 'Because I Will Be Silenced', the initial allusion to 'hammers' that codes the violent 'cutting off' of citizens' voices as Chinese (Communist) is transmuted into an allusion to the USA's capacity to do the same, with its invocation of a *starred* tie threatening to tighten like a snake around his throat. Furthermore, Jin's image of a 'cobra' tightening around his neck, given that cobras do not typically constrict their prey, is curious in the way it suggests how one

threat might be misinterpreted as another. This chapter explores what *A Map of Betrayal* might in turn hide in its presentations of China and America.

A Map of Betrayal foregrounds the concept of *betrayal*, along with its progenitor, *loyalty*, with regard to the relationship between the individual and the state. These are topoi that run throughout Jin's work. In *Wreckage*, a book of poetry charting the progression of Chinese history from myth to modernity, Jin explores how loyalty has been utilised by China as dynasty, nation and state. Jin's poem from this collection titled 'A Weapon' illustrates the homogenising, ethnically universalising bent of Chinese civilisation. For threatening to undermine demands of loyalty to the "new dynasty", a thriving town of "Huns, Jurchens, Tobas, Hans, Mongols" is obliterated: "One by one / we put them to the ax" (H. Jin *Wreckage* 17). Jin goes on to further depict the danger and detriment of loyalty in another poem from *Wreckage*, 'On the Great Wall':

All sing praises of the Great Wall,
but no one mentions the skeletons
under the bricks, rocks, ramparts, roads. (54)

From the bottom of the stanza, buried below the grandiloquent first line, with its capitalised words at start and end rising like watch towers, the ghosts of the conscripted labourers allegedly buried in the wall's foundations whisper of the sacrifice of their loyalty.

In Jin's 2007 novel *A Free Life*, a large community of Chinese overseas endorse continued service to the motherland. Amongst the Chinese diaspora community in the United States, protagonist Nan is portrayed as the only subject to fully renounce his supposed responsibilities to long-distance Chinese nationalism: "*loyalty is a two-way street. China has betrayed me, so I refuse to remain its subject anymore*" (H. Jin *A Free* 96, italics in original). Yet Nan's disavowal of Chinese long-distance nationalism is an emotional response, his vituperation is a measure of his remaining attachment to his 'homeland', and his fixation with betrayal affirms the grip of a 'loyalty pact' (or a 'contract' as Nan terms it in his poem of the same name) with his nation that he had believed to be mutual.

Correspondingly, in Ha Jin's nonfiction text *The Writer as Migrant*, he speaks of having been indoctrinated into believing that there was "an unstated contract between yourself and your country" (*The Writer* 26).

Yet this contract operates differently in China and America. In China, the paradoxically 'unstated' contract is relational, with implicit terms, and there is a latent threat from any perceived breach. In the USA, meanwhile, the contract is explicitly and repeatedly *stated*. Naturalization ceremonies serve as an example of the American government's requirement for singular national loyalty. Although dual nationality is permitted, the oath of allegiance undertaken requires a pledge to "absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen" ('US Citizenship Oath'). Meanwhile, children across the country regularly pledge their allegiance to the American flag. In 'My Days and Nights of Terror' from Jenny Zhang's short story collection *Sour Heart*, the young protagonist Mande refers to the Pledge of Allegiance as "the Oath-to-lick-America's-Balls-Even-Though-They're-Dirty-in-Order-to-Certify-That-America's-Wonderful-and-Tolerant-Even-Though-It's-Not", derisively referencing the Pledge's exceptionalist promise of 'Liberty and Justice for all' (J. Zhang 180). In *A Map of Betrayal*, Jin explores what it means for both the individual and the state to be party to these contracts to states, and for each side to betray them.

Gary's story in *A Map of Betrayal*—as presented by Lilian—is a tragic one, owing to the dynamics of national loyalty/betrayal. He is required by the Communist Party to remain in the USA on a long-term basis, whilst longing to return to his Chinese family. Yet his lifestyle in America is comfortable, replete with the trappings of American success: a good salary; a job where he is valued; a decent house and car; a second wife and child (as recommended by his handler), as well as a Chinese American mistress. He is caught by the CIA when he

uses Chinese government funds to help his American wife, Nellie. The reaction from Beijing when Nellie pleads for their intervention is scornful.

Gary's path to this confluence of betrayal, as charted by Lilian, does not seem to start from a place of 'loyalty', as one might expect. Breaking the mould of spy characters who become agents of the state for ideological or patriotic reasons, Gary's employment process is relatively pragmatic. Espionage is simply within the spectrum of viable employment for this man, who initially seeks little more than an income: "I need to eat and have to take whatever is available" (H. Jin *A Map* 10). This kind of utilitarianism is also employed by the Chinese state in their exploitation of Gary's labour and eventual disavowal of his services. Lilian discovers that Gary was also betrayed by his Chinese employers. Although they had promised to support his estranged Chinese family whilst he served in the West, funds stopped being sent to them many years before Gary's capture. Furthermore, despite Chairman Mao Zedong reportedly stating that Gary's service "is worth four armored divisions", Chairman Deng Xiaoping refuses to negotiate his release: "Let that selfish man rot in an American prison together with his silly dream of being loyal to both countries" (H. Jin *A Map* 274-6). Bingwen, Gary's former handler, explains to Lilian that Gary was a 'nail': "A nail must remain in its position... and rot with the wood it's stuck in, so a spy of the nail type is more or less a goner" (H. Jin *A Map* 20). The echoing of the word 'rot' by both Bingwen and Chairman Deng implies the readiness of the Chinese government to sacrifice expendable materials, including personnel, to the project of nation-building.

Lilian makes the argument that American federal authorities have *also* betrayed Gary. At trial, Gary testifies that he is "an American and love[s] this country like every one of you", yet he is sentenced to 121 years of imprisonment (H. Jin *A Map* 260). It is clear that Gary is complicit in egregious activity: he uses Chinese government funds to purchase a bakery for his wife, he is a bigamist—literally, and as a crude analogy for making his bed in

two nations—and, as King-Kok Cheung points out, his “tipping off Beijing during the Korean War about Chinese POWs with anti-Communist leanings, result[s] in their execution after repatriation” (‘Fate’ 64). Nevertheless, in Lilian’s narrative, America too received years of invaluable national service from Gary, mutually benefitting from the peace-ensuring endeavours he made as an employee of the Chinese state and as a federal agent working for the CIA: “it was he who had helped bring the two countries together to shake hands like friends. For that kind of diligence and dedication he should be recognized as a valuable citizen, if not decorated with laurels” (H. Jin *A Map* 260). Lilian presents her father’s espionage as diplomatic, yet the court comes to determine him only as traitorous. For both nations, loyalty should be unidirectional—dual loyalties amount to betrayal, treated as if loyalty were measurable as a finite quantity.

Asian Spies as Foreign Bodies

Lilian’s description of Gary bringing China and America together to ‘shake hands’, positions him as a middleman, a business-like mediator facilitating interaction between two parties. Both the novel and the two nations pivot on Gary’s function as this intermediary figure, which is similar in nature to that of the mediating role of the ‘native informant’, as explored in Chapter Four. Gary is a middleman in his centrality to the novel’s plotting, in bringing East and West together, in his translation work, as an immigrant, and as a resident of the American South, where ‘race’ conventionally exists in black and white. In Bharati Mukherjee’s short story ‘The Middleman’, we find the protagonist, Alfie (the ‘middleman’), in an unnamed Central American country during an insurgency. Alfie makes his living “from things that fall”, collecting his spoiled yield from the shaded spaces of unscrupulous organisations and regimes (Mukherjee ‘The Middleman’ 3). From a narrative of arms dealing, corrupt governments, betrayals and murder, Alfie seeks profit: “There must be something worth trading in the troubles I have seen” (Mukherjee ‘The Middleman’ 21).

Gary too trades in troubles, his interstitial position offering him a degree of agency. Yet, as we also see in Mukherjee's story, there is a sense of untenability to the middleman role. Implicit in the rhetoric of Gary as middleman, bringing nations together to shake hands, is the necessity of using the metaphor of states as sentient. This is the same rhetorical device that countenances accusations of Gary's personal, private betrayal of other American citizens. If countries are reified bodies, able to 'shake hands', they must also be bodies vulnerable to infection. One of Gary's American colleagues testifies that: "it gives me the creeps to think of Gary Shang as a Communist mole among us" (H. Jin *A Map* 261). Gary's colleague is appalled at the idea of a foreign body nesting below the nation's surface, its skin. In *A Map of Betrayal*, Gary is a foreign body that re-emerges upon expulsion from the body politic, his strangeness bursting through the second-skin that had previously contained him.

This fear of foreign, alien bodies lying concealed within the skin of the national body can be viewed as a peculiarly Cold War-era concern. For instance, in Don Siegel's 1956 film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the protagonist returns to his town to find that it has been invaded by an alien force, which is producing doubles to replace the human inhabitants. These doubles appear and remember the same as those they have superseded, making them an (in)visible enemy: aliens hiding in the appearance of Americanness. The fear in *Invasion* is that: "They're here already. You're next!", as the protagonist screams to the viewer as the film ends (n. pag.). The message often perceived by Cold War American viewers was that communist subversives had already infiltrated the national body, and may even *appear* to be American. As Bryan E. Vizzini argues, "[t]hat the pod people eschewed human emotions, desires, and ambitions, making all of their decisions collectively only reinforced for the audience the sense that [the aliens were] communists" (30).

The dialogue in the epigraph at the start of this chapter is taken from another Cold War-era film, spoken between James Bond and his eponymous adversary Dr. Julius No: a German-Chinese criminal scientist. Dr. No was modelled by Ian Fleming on Sax Rohmer's Dr. Fu Manchu, a character symbolising the 'Yellow Peril' incarnate, and the inherent dangers of his Chinatown base. There was a racial aspect to the Cold War fears explored in these films. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was released shortly after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling of 1954, which deemed separate public schools for black and white students unconstitutional. It can be seen as a meditation on the perceived threat to white neighbourhoods from invasive Others. The Cold War, red scare context of the film engendered a racialized fear of the inscrutable alien concealed like a pathogen inside the American national body. *Dr. No* (1962) built upon this trend by mixing red scare fears with yellow peril suspicions. Combining in one body the 'enemy' formations of World War II fascism and Cold War communism, Dr. No's mixed racialization confounds Bond: he *must* be Eastern (coded evil), yet he affiliates himself with neither East nor West, estranging himself from conventional geopolitical mappings of the Cold War world. In Dr. No we find an amalgamation of fears of the Chinese Other—fears of a foreign, immigrant body in the Americas who pledges allegiance to an extraterritorial establishment; fears of the Asian scientist, a figure who has been targeted numerous times by the American government in the Cold War and post-Cold War periods; and fears, by association, of the Asian spy.

In *A Map of Betrayal*, the figure of the Asian spy functions as a metaphor for the perceived strangeness of an Asian form within America's national body—the alien organism nesting under the nation's skin, simulating Americanness, whilst harbouring a threat to the country. The inclusion of an Asian spy as the central character of *A Map of Betrayal* is indicative of a continuing discourse depicting Asian Americans as inscrutable, duplicitous Others: "whose foreign allegiances make it not only possible but probable that his/her claims to American-ness are suspect", as Tina Chen depicts (*Double* viii).

The lingering stereotype of inscrutability can be found in Ezra Pound's alignment of Asian mystique with Modernist abstraction, as in *Cathay* or 'In a Station of the Metro'; the enigmatic pidgin ("No glot...C'lom Fliday") that closes William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, as if in a conclusive incoherence; and even in the high theory of Jacques Derrida (Burroughs 196). As Rey Chow argues, Derrida's *Of Grammatology* conceptually translates the perceived unreadability of Chinese faces into the inscrutability of the Chinese language's (sur)face: "The face of the Chinese person and the face of Chinese writing thus converge in what must now be seen as a composite visual stereotype—the other as face—that stigmatizes another culture as at once corporeally and linguistically intractable" (Chow 'How' 72). The implicit fear is of an unreadable Asian face, which might, like a mask, conceal the hostile intentions of the creature concealed behind it. In *A Map of Betrayal*, Lilian describes her Irish features seeming to fade as she ages, whilst appearing to become "more Asian each year, as if my Chineseness had been pushing out from within and manifesting itself on my face" (H. Jin *A Map* 32). This description of a Chinese face seeming to gradually manifest itself, as if a dormant alien body were consuming her from inside to out, echoes the description of her father as emergent stranger within the American body politic. A Chinese face—a homogenous, indeterminately, inscrutably Asian appearance—emerges from within, allowing her to pass for Chinese whilst in China but also to be viewed as generically Asian in America.

Lilian writes of her father: "Wherever he went, he'd feel out of place, like a stranded traveler" (103). We might be reminded of the corresponding idea of migrant 'rootlessness' here, as introduced through Jenny Xie's poem in the Introduction. As discussed there, in *The Writer as Migrant*, Ha Jin suggests that for many migrants, a sense of nostalgia—loyalty to the idea and memory of their 'homelands'—prevents them from putting down 'roots' elsewhere (63). Yet this places all of the responsibility for migrants' accommodation and acculturation onto the shoulders of migrants, eliding histories of systemic and often violent

exclusion. Lilian's description of Gary as a 'stranded traveller'—transnationally displaced, unbound from national belonging—contains echoes of the language used a century earlier to depict Chinese people as 'perpetual foreigners' in America. Iris Chang provides an example of this narrative, quoting an 1853 editorial from *San Francisco Daily Alta California* that states: "They are not our people and never will be, though they remain here forever. [...] They do not mix with our people, and it is undesirable that they should [...]. They can never become like us" (I. Chang 51; 'Chinese Citizenship' 2). The popular anti-Chinese rhetoric of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries emphasised that those racialized as Chinese would forever remain "aliens ineligible for citizenship" (as in California's 'Alien Land Law'), or, more explicitly, as in the words of California Senator John F. Miller, "inhabitants of another planet", "progenitors of an inferior sort of men", "the gangrene of oriental civilization" (qtd. in Gyory 224). American residents and citizens of Chinese descent have long been subject to a construction of their persons as alien, infecting bodies.

Asian Spies in American Culture and Cultural Production

The antagonism of the American populace towards those countries opposing their own has often been displaced onto the American descendants of (and migrants from) those nations. "In times of war," Walter Lim expounds, "there is no barometer capable of objectively measuring an ethnic Other's loyalty to the United States" (40). This leads to mass distrust of groups differentiated along certain racial and ethnic lines, resulting in the questioning of those groups' loyalty to the USA. For example, the American government regarded Chinese Americans with suspicion during the Cold War, with FBI director J. Edgar Hoover convinced that they posed a domestic Communist threat. In a continuation of 'Yellow Peril' scaremongering, Helen Zia recalls how Hoover warned the Senate in 1969 that "Red China has been flooding the country with propaganda and there are over 300,000 Chinese in the

United States, some of whom could be susceptible to recruitment either through ethnic ties or hostage situations because of relatives in Communist China” (qtd. in Zia 45).

The media have played no small part in creating narratives that feature Asians in America as possible enemy agents. The case of Wen Ho Lee is perhaps the most famous instance of a Chinese American scientist having been accused of spying for the Chinese state. Born in Taiwan, the Los Alamos National Laboratory worker was named in a 1999 *New York Times* article as the source of leaked nuclear technology that China appeared to have obtained. In response, Lee was fired, arrested by FBI agents, and charged with secrecy violations. A year later, the U.S. Department of Justice admitted that it had no evidence that Lee had committed espionage, and that it was provable that the leak could not have been from Los Alamos. However, as Iris Chang elucidates, in the period following his arrest, Lee was threatened by federal agents in an attempt to coerce confession, imprisoned for nine months without trial, and denied bail (I. Chang 359-61). Several governmental leaks to the media about Lee were not only lies, but also violations of American law (I. Chang 364). Nevertheless, according to Chang, “[m]ajor newspapers drew fantasies of millions of Chinese united by a nefarious master scheme to commit espionage” (364). The media have not stopped investing in this discourse, however, with headlines like ‘FBI chief on biggest threats: China spies, terror, rise in violent crime’ run by NBC in March 2018. The article reports on FBI chief Christopher Wray telling Congress that “Chinese businessmen, students and scholars present such a threat that it demands a ‘whole of society’ response by the U.S.” (P. Williams n. pag.).

The figure of the Asian spy in the West is also familiar as a fictional trope, found in literature and film. We find this figure iterated in the characterisation of Chunjin in *The Manchurian Candidate*, Song Liling in *M. Butterfly*, Henry Park in *Native Speaker*, the unnamed protagonist in *The Sympathizer*, and the ambiguous Rukou in *The Quantum Spy*, amongst other examples. These characters, however complex or dissimilar in

characterisation, remain bound within the contingent range (spies, supervillains, martial artists, courtesans, tiger mothers) of racialized, troped roles for Asian characters.

The Asian spy role in *A Map of Betrayal* can be read as a continuation of Chang-rae Lee's spy character Henry Park in *Native Speaker*. In an act that is both a quick, cheap "parting shot" and a compendium of "terse communiqués from her moments of despair", Henry's wife leaves behind a list that describes him variously as:

illegal alien
 emotional alien
 genre bug
 Yellow peril: neo-American
 [...]
 _____ analyst (you fill in)
 stranger
 follower
 traitor
 spy (C.-r. Lee 5)

As much as this description applies to Henry in *Native Speaker*, so too might it apply to Gary in *A Map of Betrayal*: a message from a white American wife, who knows her husband all too well, even as they remain a 'stranger'. Both Gary and Henry are legal citizens of the USA, yet remain 'illegal aliens' as a result both of their espionage activities and how the general public perceive them. They continue to seem inscrutable ('emotional aliens') to white America, as well as unknowable to their wives, from whom their '_____ analytic' activities are both hidden and intuited. These Asian spy characters fulfil the rote racial role, but are also 'genre bugs': anomalies in the system, not "the kind of figures you naturally thought of" (C.-r. Lee 17). They are the antithesis of traditional Cold War spy heroes, becoming instead agents of the 'Yellow Peril' in all its durability. As products of stereotypical Asian households, they are bred as 'followers': perfectly pliable agents, raised on "Discipline farms"—the perfect environment for breeding obedient espionage agents according to Henry's spymaster (C.-r. Lee 173). To some extent, espionage is a logical choice of profession for peoples racialized as Chinese or Asian in America. As Tina Chen

argues, the marginal position of the racialized Asian “easily translates into the spy’s marginalized status as the ‘secret observer’” (‘Impersonation’ 645).

Jin’s figuration of the Chinese spy character is both a continuation and a critique of the stereotype, as can be inferred by comparing Gary to perhaps the best-known Chinese spy in American literature: Song Liling, from David Henry Hwang’s 1986 play *M. Butterfly*, a re-working of Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*. Both Gary and Song are characters based on accounts read by the authors of ‘real’ Chinese spies. As Peter Mattis explains, Gary Shang is modelled on Larry Wu-Tai Chin, who until 2009 was the only Chinese agent to be successfully prosecuted for espionage in the USA (Mattis 685). Chin too served as an agent for the Chinese government whilst also working for the CIA, arguing that his work benefitted both countries. Once exposed by American authorities, he appealed to Beijing for help. As *The New York Times* reported, China responded that it had no knowledge of Chin, despite clear evidence to the contrary—China thus sacrificed him to a sentence of life imprisonment in the United States (Engelberg n. pag.). Both Chin and Gary are betrayers and betrayed, loyal and disloyal, “double agent[s]” and “double-crossed”, to use King-Kok Cheung’s terms (‘Fate’ 62). Song Liling was based on Hwang’s interpretation of Shi Pei Pu, the Chinese spy involved in what has become known as the Boursicot case—named after the French diplomat who fell in love with a male Chinese spy posing as a female opera singer, and was coerced into providing the Chinese government with documents (Mattis 685). Both Hwang’s and Jin’s texts are based on accounts of espionage conducted by spies employed by China during the Cold War, and to this extent, reinforce a connection for the reader between fictional Chinese spies and the apparent *reality* of Chinese espionage—actualising the Cold War fear of invasion from within.

Yet Gary and Song are not archetypal Cold War villains, with evil intentions to corrupt the purity of the West. Neither are they generic, James Bond-esque spies embroiled in spectacles of action and violence. Gary’s is a life suffused with the banal routine of the

espionage business: analysing documents, drafting reports, periodically meeting a mild-mannered middleman for updates. There is none of the cloak-and-dagger intrigue we might expect from a spy novel. Even when the narrative focuses directly on the *action* of espionage, following Gary as he ‘lifts’ an important document from the office of his superior, Jin leaves readers with an anti-climax:

At this point the phone rang and Thomas picked up. The call was from his wife, Alicia. ‘Excuse me for a moment,’ he said to Gary and went into the inner room, where he could speak privately. Seizing the opportunity, Gary opened his boss’s chestnut portfolio, which was lying on the sofa, found the report, and slipped it into his own folder. He had planned to create a small mishap, upsetting an ashtray or coffee cup, so that Thomas might go to the bathroom for a paper towel and give him a moment alone in the office. (H. Jin *A Map* 164)

Jin removes any drama or suspense from this account. The immediacy of the word ‘seizing’ offers the narrative an opportunity for sudden activity. Yet as the action lurches forward, it also holds back, denying spectacle. Gary’s opportunity to lift the report is thanks only to the ordinariness of both parties’ existence. The position of the report, lying on the sofa, emphasises the comfortableness of the action. It is only after the reader knows how relatively simple Gary’s task was to complete that Jin tells us how he had planned to create a diversion that would afford him only a hurried ‘moment’ to perform his mission. The order of Jin’s narration thus affords no possibility for the reader that this drama might be realised. Lilian’s narrativisation of Gary’s espionage activities demystifies the occupation, in an extension of her historiographic inclination towards verity and candour, wanting to relate his tale “as objective[ly] as possible” (H. Jin *A Map* 8).

In her account, Gary exhibits a “disregard for the general practice of spycraft”, allowing him to remain “below the radar” by withdrawing from any degree of explicit performance (257-8). Song Liling’s espionage career in *M. Butterfly* is rather more flamboyant, as he masquerades as a female opera singer in order to exploit Gallimard’s “fantas[yl]” of playing “the cruel white man” exploiting “the submissive Oriental woman” (Hwang 17). There is a clear aspect of performativity that puts Song’s identity at a degree of remove from his role

as Asian spy. In contrast, Gary's apparent lack of performativity re-affirms his *realness* to the reader—Asian spies not just as characters, but as living next door. As if to confirm the actuality of Chinese spies and their continued threat, Jin introduces a second character who is both *presumed* to be a spy and actually *is* a spy. Lilian suspects that her estranged nephew Ben “was an agent of some kind” when she meets him in America, despite having no evidence and her husband's protestations that she's “paranoid, still under the shadow of [her] father's case” (H. Jin *A Map* 170, 199). Nevertheless, he does “finally [confess that] he was indeed a Chinese spy, though a minor one” (H. Jin *A Map* 264). Even as Jin's characterisation of the Asian spy breaks from conventions, fears of Asian spies in America's midst are also reaffirmed. Paradoxically, as the stereotype of the Asian spy is exposed and explored in *A Map of Betrayal*, so too is it formalised, plotted on the map of American racial formation in correspondence to something apparently concrete.

Cold War Afterlives: Temporalities of an Ideological Conflict

The Cold War imperative of loyalty to the nation, and its inverse—betrayal or questionable allegiance—continue to be important to Ha Jin in *A Map of Betrayal*. The novel encourages us to ask how Chinese Americans are implicated in the ideological conflict between the two nations that have been constructed as rivals. In order to explore this relationship, we must first take into account the parallel temporalities of the novel, which work together to suggest a prolongation of the experience of the Cold War.

In *The End of History*, Francis Fukuyama suggests that with the collapse of Soviet communism, the Hegelian teleology of ‘progress’ as an advance from East to West has reached its conclusion (Fukuyama xi-xxiii). In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel proposed that:

The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning. [...] The East knew and to the present day knows that only *One* is Free; the Greek and Roman world, that *some* are free; the German

World knows that *All* are free. The first political form therefore which we observe in History, is *Despotism*, the second *Democracy* and *Aristocracy*, the third *Monarchy*". (Hegel 103–4, emphasis in original)

As Howard Williams et al. surmise, the narrative of Fukuyama's *The End of History*, echoing Hegel, amounts to: "Liberalism has defeated its great enemy, socialism" (Williams, Matthews and Sullivan 77). Nevertheless, much contemporary literature suggests that, rather than having come to the 'end' of history, we are now in what might be termed a *post*-Cold War age, in which the dominant ideologies, oppositions and narratives of the Cold War endure—though no longer with the Soviet Union as the primary Eastern "evil empire", as President Reagan famously dubbed it. Jodi Kim argues in *Ends of Empire* that in many regards, China has now displaced "the Soviet Union as America's principal Cold War threat" (J. Kim 4). As such, the Cold War has outlived its "eventness", in a protracted Cold War afterlife (J. Kim 76).

As demonstrated by their titles, numerous books published within the last two decades have established China and America as not only rivals, but opponents, heading for a major collision.³³ Many of these titles stress that a clash between America and China is the 'next' or the 'newest' great conflict, emphasising the contemporaneity and presage of the conflict. Donald Trump's attitude toward China in the run-up to the 2016 Presidential elections is also indicative of contemporary anti-Chinese sentiment in the USA: "we can't continue to allow China to rape our country, and that's what they're doing" (Trump 'Donald' n. pag.). Trump's use of language is a startlingly similar manifestation of what Lisa Lowe described twenty years earlier in *Immigrant Acts* as "the emergence in Asia of formidable capitalist rivals [giving] rise to a discourse of economic *penetration* and trade with those overseas

³³ A sample of these titles includes: *The Improbable War: China, The United States and Logic of Great Power Conflict*; *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*; *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America*; *The Next Great Clash: China and Russia Vs. the United States*; *When China Rules The World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (Coker; Friedberg; Liang and Xiangsui; Levin; Jacques).

nations that the United States had previously caricatured as enemies” (102, emphasis mine). The ‘penetration’ metaphor suggests how national discourses of Chineseness and Americanness become bodily, and thus fold into discourses of miscegenation and racial formation. The relationship between China and America is one that bleeds outward to colour the world at large.

That *A Map of Betrayal* was published in 2014, over two decades after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, suggests that the Cold War era continues to be of importance to Jin. *A Map of Betrayal* challenges not only what Steven Belletto sees as the “conventional wisdom that the People’s Republic was sealed off from Cold War politics prior to the detente marked by the so-called Ping-pong diplomacy of the early 1970s”, but also challenges the notion that this detente has persisted (Belletto 808). If it is true that, during the Cold War period through which Gary operated, America and China “seemed unable to understand each other, heading toward a frontal clash”, as Lilian describes it, then this is a misunderstanding that has endured—yet with the resultant clash now more likely never to become ‘frontal’ (H. Jin *A Map* 28). By juxtaposing Gary’s and Lilian’s narratives, Jin subtly highlights continuities between Gary’s Cold War-era and Lilian’s modern, post-Cold War existence.

For example, Jin uses Gary’s tale to pass comment on China’s “simpleminded” Great Leap Forward initiative (H. Jin *A Map* 123). Promising a utopian society based upon record-breaking economic progress, Gary presciently muses that it will be the Chinese “country folks” who will suffer from these “reckless experiments” (H. Jin *A Map* 123-6). In a previous chapter, Lilian accompanies her niece in the present day to watch the Songhua river break its winter freeze. The water hurtles forward, “roaring [...] like an ancient battle in full swing”, sweeping up icebergs and “smashing” them against whatever lies in their way (H. Jin *A Map* 88). Suspended barely visibly in the churning waters, “a number of fish, carp and pike and bass, floated by, belly-up, crushed dead by the ice” (88). This scene acts as a

portent of Gary's later comments on the Great Leap Forward, as well as a metaphor for the continuity of Chinese citizens (the small fish) being caught up in the surging forward of Cold War-era China and, implicitly, of contemporary China, caught up again in rapid economic expansionism. Jin's simile fortifies the linking together of linear historicity—from ancient battles, to Cold War enmity, to post-Cold War opposition—which sees Chinese citizens continually falling victim to the machinations of the state.

As if to enforce this parallel Cold War and post-Cold War imagery, Jin fashions a backdrop to the river-scene of “back alleys [...] like a ghetto without any drainage or sanitary service [...] behind the shiny façade were the hapless people jettisoned by the ship of success” (H. Jin *A Map* 88). The insinuation is that China's surging post-Cold War economic conflict with the West leaves in its wake a devastated ground onto which the poor masses are jettisoned—a description similarly applicable to the Cold War drive toward economic success with the Great Leap Forward, which resulted in “people [...] starving and dying” in their millions across China (H. Jin *A Map* 136). Furthermore, Lilian's reference to the back streets of Songhua appearing like a “ghetto” complicates and internationalises the scene. In referencing the ‘ghetto’, Lilian invokes the double standard of Cold War American propaganda, which suggested that all Americans lived equally and freely—at the same time as Martin Luther King Jr. testified before congress that: “With every block that the ghetto advances, [...] the spectre of an America divided by cast[e] looms larger over all of us. [...] Unwittingly or otherwise, the administration of many worthy federal programs has served to disadvantage and to further segregate our Negro citizens” (2). Indeed, it may be argued that not much has changed in America since King's warning of continuing racial and economic urban segregation.

As well as suggestions of socio-historical continuities between the Cold War era of Gary's historical narrative and Lilian's twenty-first century life, the form of the narrative creates doublings that stress a crossover in temporalities. Gary moves from China to

America in 1955, around halfway through the *fabula* of Lilian's biographical account. Meanwhile, Lilian moves from America to China at the start of the novel, and back to America again halfway through the novel. Although the connection between Lilian and her father in the novel is indirect, recast through research and recollection, Lilian spends much of the novel directly interacting with members of her previously estranged family in China—a connection she rediscovers upon researching her father's diaries. These parallels and crossovers reduplicate and emphasise the central chronotopic intersection of the Cold War and post-Cold War eras. These intersecting chronotopes are peopled—they connect members of a transnational family who must negotiate often hostile international and interpersonal relations across generations and continents.

The status of people of Chinese descent in America in particular has long been linked with international relations between the two nations. Lisa Lowe describes how throughout the twentieth century (and arguably before and after then too), the figure of the Asian migrant has “served as a ‘screen,’ a phantasmic site, on which the nation projects a series of condensed, complicated anxieties regarding external and internal threats to the mutable coherence of the national body” (*Immigrant* 18-9). The ‘blankness’ of Asian migrants’ perceived inscrutability comes to serve as a screen upon which anxieties about the integrity of the national body play out.

In modern history, China and America have been partners and adversaries, collaborators and competitors. When people from China began arriving in California in the mid-nineteenth century, China was in the throes of what came to be known as its ‘century of humiliation’. Like the country of their descent, these early Chinese migrants were not regarded as a threat. Yet once hostilities began mounting against the Chinese in the American West, China was correspondingly perceived as too weak to protect its former nationals or protest the indignity of racist legislation. Consequently, these migrants became subject to wanton and often devastating mistreatment. The fortunes of the Chinese in

America did not improve for many more decades, and came yet again as a response to international relations between China and the USA, who became allies during the Second World War.

Yet China's recent accolades and perceived strength have also done few favours for people of Chinese descent in America. As Eric Liu describes:

The more powerful China becomes, the more Chinese Americans are perceived as vessels of such power. The more discomfitingly assertive China is, the more Chinese Americans are seen as discomfitingly assertive in their dealings. The more underhanded, the more deceptive, the more inscrutably treacherous China's moves appear, the more Chinese Americans are assumed to be all these things. ('A Chinaman's' 56)

In periods of competition between America and China, or indeed any Asian nation, Asians in America are subject to paradoxical yet inextricable groupings as both homogenously Asian, and as peculiarly Chinese, Japanese, Korean and so on. For instance, the perceived economic war between the American and Japanese automotive industries in the 1980s led to the death of Chinese American Vincent Chin. Reeling from the collapse of the city's automotive industry, white Detroit residents Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz scapegoated Asian Americans for their imagined connection to the boom of Japan's motor industry. Chin was beaten to death, the attack instigated with the declaration: "It's because of you [...] that we're out of work!".³⁴ Appearing to be *generically* Asian led to Chin's murder during a period of perceived economic conflict with a specific Asian nation.

This perhaps makes it slightly unusual that Gary is treated with little racialized suspicion by his American employers. Indeed, neither Gary nor Lilian experience the same kind or degree of racism as we find directed towards Asian Americans elsewhere in Jin's novels. In *A Free Life*, for instance, Nan is told that a Chinese couple he knows are not

³⁴ After pleading guilty with no contest at trial, Ebens and Nitz were each sentenced to only three years' probation and \$3,970 in fines and court costs. They never spent a night in jail. Helen Zia explains that the judge reasoned: "These aren't the kind of men you send to jail, [...] You fit the punishment to the criminal, not the crime" (Zia 60). After several retrials, Ebens and Nitz were cleared of all charges in 1987.

welcome to buy a house in their neighbourhood: “Mrs. Lodge, Fred, Terry, and Nate” had convened, and decided that they “don’t want this subdivision to become a Chinatown”—there are “too many Chinese in this neighbourhood already” (Nan’s family and one Vietnamese family) (H. Jin *A Free* 411). As in the case of Vincent Chin, the mistaking of the Vietnamese family for Chinese highlights how Asian Americans have consistently been racialized as both homogenous and nationally distinct.

This seeming absence in *A Map of Betrayal* is especially surprising given the time and place of Gary’s narrative. After moving to Virginia in 1955 (just one year after *Brown v. Board of Education*), Gary very quickly finds a white American girlfriend, whom he marries the following year (a decade before *Loving v. Virginia* overturned Virginia’s anti-miscegenation Racial Integrity Act of 1924).³⁵ Moreover, we are told that Gary “blended well with Americans”, and was satisfied by 1969 that although “racism was rife and prejudices everywhere [...] racial segregation had been abolished and the country had been making social progress”, making it “a country that protected its people” (H. Jin *A Map* 94, 208). Gary encounters a little resistance from his fiancée’s parents, but this is as much because he is “too starchy” as because of the racialized suspicion of his “unclear background” (H. Jin *A Map* 77).

Whilst Jin’s novel is heavily condemnatory of China during the post-war and Cold War era, it ignores issues of the racial discord occurring in America simultaneously. As King-Kok Cheung comments about the novel:

The violent backlash after the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and also during the civil rights movement—the murder of Emmett Till, the arrest of Rosa Parks, the Little Rock Crisis, the murder of Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and, above all, the “state”-sponsored police violence in Birmingham, Alabama—all go unmentioned. (‘Fate’ 76)

³⁵ Although Virginia had anti-miscegenation laws prior to 1924, the Act of that year was the first to explicitly prohibit ‘Mongolians’, ‘Asiatic Indians’ and ‘Malays’ from marrying whites, in an attempt to include all races in the ban.

Cheung concludes that these omissions must be attributed to the fact that “the author was not himself in the US at that time” (‘Fate’ 76). But this is too simplistic—Jin often writes intimately about a China that he has not returned to since 1985. The lack of interest in American race relations remains one of the novel’s unresolved issues—a silence that speaks of Jin’s more explicit interest in critiquing the Chinese government and society. But if the racialized Asian American body becomes a contingent, vulnerable form during the periods of war and competition upon which the novel focuses, has the question of race been elided from Jin’s novel? Or is it instead subject to an alternative form of mapping?

Racial Formation and Racialization in *A Map of Betrayal*

Jin’s tacit representation of racial formation can be contrasted with that of another novel written by a migrant writer dealing with issues of race in contemporary America. Published the year before *A Map of Betrayal*, Nigerian American author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* is far more explicit in its desire to *teach* readers about racial formation. Protagonist Ifemelu writes a blog called “*Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*”, which functions as a lesson for Adichie’s imagined ‘mainstream’ reader (Adichie 4, italics in original). The first excerpt from Ifemelu’s blog reads like an introductory tutorial, explicitly pointing out the paradoxes of the racial designation ‘Hispanic’: both “companions of American blacks in poverty rankings” and “a slight step above American blacks in the American race ladder [...] All you need to be is Spanish-speaking but not from Spain and voilà, you’re a race called Hispanic” (Adichie 105). Racism is explicitly foregrounded in Adichie’s novel, with declarations like: “blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Jews—all get shit from white folks, different kinds of shit, but shit still” found throughout (Adichie 205). Jin’s readers are presented not with the caustic insights of Adichie, but with the paradoxes, incongruities and confusions of racialization and racial formation in China and America—

they live, unresolved, within the text. Jin's mapping of race is not clearly labelled like Adichie's. Instead, the reader must follow a series of faintly drawn tracks which sometimes return them circularly to a familiar view of the proximate races, but at other times allow them to discover a new vantage point which reveals the topographical structure and intersections presented by racial formations across two societies. Jin's approach is more subtle than Adichie's, and at times more thought-provoking. In particular, it allows its reader to explore the notion of racial formation—an idea typically explored from a Western orientation—from a different perspective, from the Chinese side of the map.

When speaking about 'race' in America though, it is important to recognise the difference in racializations across different groups. Where European migrants gradually underwent a process of 'melting' into whiteness during the twentieth century, migrants of non-European descent have long been subject to the discrimination and violence of racialized separation. David Roediger, in *Working Towards Whiteness*, his influential study of ethnicised European migrant groups, notices that despite the discrimination these groups initially faced in America, "no European immigrant group suffered anything like the terror that afflicted people of color" (106). He illustrates this claim with the estimate that the number of Chinese to be killed in the Rock Springs massacre of 1885, which claimed twenty eight Chinese lives, probably exceeded that of all European immigrants to ever be lynched (106). Lynchings of African Americans, meanwhile, outstripped those of European immigrants by more than seventy five to one (Roediger 106).

Moreover, the racialization of any one group impacts the wider racial formation of a society. We find this in the modern stereotype of Asian Americans as the 'model minority', for instance. When Gary becomes an honouree of the CIA, he is recognised for being a "model of devotion, diligence, and loyalty" (H. Jin *A Map* 222). It is no coincidence Gary is labelled as a 'model'. Gary is *included* in cosmopolitan America here, constituted homogeneously as a hard-working and therefore 'model' Asian, in a continuation of the

same racial discourse that a century before led to the exclusion of *too*-hard-working and therefore economically jeopardising Asians. Historian Gary Okihiro argues that, once taken to its extreme, the model minority formation re-cycles into the ‘Yellow Peril’ formation (*Margins* 141).³⁶ The model minority myth stems from the idea that generic Asian characteristics result in diligence, indefatigability and deference as workers in the West—a stereotype borne of late nineteenth-century American fears of Chinese migrants threatening to push European migrant workers out of employment in their ineluctable willingness to work hard, in tedious jobs, for little money.

Yet since the 1960s, the perception of East Asians in America as hard-working has transformed from a threat to white America into something else. As ‘model minorities’, Asian Americans are held up as ‘models’ for other racial groups—namely, African- and Latin@-Americans. If Asian Americans are exemplars of sorts, then they ostensibly serve as an example of how a minority group *can* achieve ‘success’ in America. They are thus fashioned as foils to the comparable ‘failings’ of the other races, and their racialization is employed as a wedge driven between ‘black’ and ‘white’. Okihiro quotes an article from the December 26th 1966 issue of *U.S. News & World Report*—the era in which model minority discourse developed—in which Chinese Americans are commended for “winning wealth and respect by dint of [their] own hard work” (qtd. in Okihiro *Margins* 140). The subtext is that the contemporaneous civil rights movement could have been avoided if only African Americans *tried harder*. Given this context, Robert G. Lee argues that Asian Americans were constructed as ‘not black’ in two significant ways here: “They were both politically silent and ethnically assimilable” (256). Moreover, as Okihiro adds, the concept of the model minority “posits a compatibility, if not identity, between key elements of Asian and Anglo-American culture, and thus [...] reifies and attests to its original” (*Margins* 140).

³⁶ For more on the model minority formation and its relationship with yellow peril discourse, see Madeline Y. Hsu’s *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority*.

Constructed as an intermediary body that sustains the separation of whites and blacks, the model minority formulation buttresses the workings of American racial formation.

‘Asianness’ and ‘Chineseness’ do not signify in a vacuum; they are relational and contextual. For example, Leslie Bow argues that people of Asian descent in the American South are ‘interstitial’ subjects, who force “established perspectives and definitions into disorientation”, disrupting notions of strictly binarised black-white racial formation (4). “[W]here did the Asian sit on the segregated bus?”, she probes (Bow 1). As such, whilst the Asian ‘perpetual foreigner’ stereotype might be damaging, it can in some contexts facilitate a strategic repositioning in local racial formation:

Asian “foreignness,” then, might be reconceived as a useful alienation from entrenched southern race relations, an estrangement that provides the space for questioning norms of etiquette, habit, or intimacy—and, in the process, those of regional exceptionalism. (Bow 194)

As such, bringing Asians in America into questions of racial formation can facilitate a reimagining of what Bow describes as the “boundaries of belonging” (195).

Race and Cold War: A Holistic Approach to American and Chinese Racialization

But to trace a less trodden path, how are migrants from China to America affected by the racial landscape of *each* country? If racial formation continues to form the bedrock of America upon which Chinese migrants must settle, hoping that they are sufficiently protected by the regolith of liberal multiculturalism from the cracks and fissures found there, then to what extent is the social landscape in China also impacted by race and racism? America and China remain nations structured according to a codified racial logic. America is unlikely to “transcend” racism any time soon, as Jerry Varsava provocatively suggests in his 2010 interview with Ha Jin (Varsava and Jin 23). Nevertheless, in response to this suggestion, Ha Jin echoes Varsava’s sentiment, submitting that Obama’s Presidential election proved that racial prejudice is not as rife in America as it is portrayed to be in

China: “A lot of Chinese, especially those angry young Chinese people [...] thought prejudice was so rampant that a black male would never have a chance. So the election of Obama blew this propaganda to pieces” (Varsava and Jin 24). Jin seems to take some pleasure in having seen, to his mind, the patriotic anger directed towards America by young Chinese citizens ‘blow up’ in their faces. Yet *A Map of Betrayal* still presents America as a nation fundamentally organised by racial formation.

Similarly to the Western post-racial fantasy, we sometimes find the idea in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong that racism is not widespread. Yet in the Chinas too, racial formation continues to modulate inter-ethnic interactions. In mainland China, the idea of Chineseness has taken on racial connotations through the differentiation of a dominant ‘Han’ ethnic majority from fifty five other officially recognised ethnic minorities; in Hong Kong, racial dynamics shade into socio-economic prejudices against the large community of mostly Southeast Asian domestic workers; and in Taiwan, the ten officially recognised aboriginal ethnicities have suffered centuries of imperialist violence and discrimination, and continue to be subject to significant economic disparity.³⁷

In her 2012 study of American and Chinese multiculturalisms *Pluralist Universalism*, Wen Jin reads Asian American texts with a comparative approach to China’s and America’s versions of multiculturalism and ethno-racial formation. In both nations, Wen Jin argues, multicultural discourse works differently, but ultimately struggles to reconcile the competing forces of national hegemony and actual or imagined diversity. I follow Wen Jin’s holistic approach to comparing Chinese and American national contexts of racial formation.

³⁷ For more on the formation of the PRC’s ethnic minority policy, see Margaret Maurer-Fazio and Reza Hasmath’s article ‘The Contemporary Ethnic Minority in China’, in which they discuss how the 1953 Election Law, which guaranteed each minority group at least one seat in the National People’s Congress, led to an effort to enumerate the population by means of census. The resulting data indicated the existence of over 400 ethnic groups—a number considered unmanageable. A large-scale project was thus commissioned to categorise a smaller number of ethnic groups. To date, fifty five minority ethnicities—or ‘nationalities’ as originally named according to Stalinist terminology—have been officially identified.

In *A Map of Betrayal*, Lilian and her nephew, Ben, revive Cold War debates about differences, similarities and oppositions between the two countries. Reprimanding her nephew for being too “possessed” by patriotism, Lilian tells him that she believes:

a country is not a temple but a mansion built by the citizens so they can have shelter and protection in it. Such a construction can be repaired, renovated, altered, and even overhauled if necessary. If the house isn’t suitable for you, you should be entitled to look for shelter elsewhere. (H. Jin *A Map* 151)

In Lilian’s disapprobation, China becomes nation-as-temple, with “some young Chinese” willing to “sacrifice themselves” on the altar “for their motherland” (H. Jin *A Map* 151). China thus becomes linked to an essentialised, unconditionally Chinese *body* through a co-optation of the Western theological body-as-temple trope.

In contrast, America is understood by Lilian as a ‘mansion’. It is, therefore, a *structure*: a fabrication built by the state to house its residents and to protect them from outside elements. It is a construction that can be reorganised or redesigned whenever desired, or even vacated for a more fitting domicile. Yet it is also a dwelling necessitating a divide between owners and retainers, the comfortable and the servile. It is where one can serve, whilst aspiring to proprietorship. Tellingly, for migrants in America, the idea follows that they should ‘look for shelter elsewhere’ if they don’t like the conditions of their accommodation.

Lilian’s two contrasting depictions—of China as body-as-temple, necessitating sacrifice, and of America as sheltering yet exclusive structure—reflect her beliefs that a democratic America is superior to a Chinese nation in which “patriotism has become a religion” (H. Jin *A Map* 152). Nevertheless, she concedes that shelter is provided to American citizens only so long as they allow authorities to “[keep] the house *safe*” (151, emphasis mine). As such, the bodies obscured within the American mansion remain subject to differing experiences, levels of protection, and ascriptions of threat, according in part to the logic of racial differentiation.

Nevertheless, Lilian goes on to ask her nephew: “On what basis should a country be raised above the citizens who created it?” (151). She seems unmindful of the irony of her question, coming as it does just after having carefully fashioned a metaphor presenting America as structure, raised from the ground, formed around and *above* the citizens it contains. She condemns “them”, the Chinese, for being unable to “envision an existence outside their country”, or anything “bigger or higher than China”, and tries to teach Ben to think within the Western tradition, insisting that he “remember this caveat: “The unexamined life is not worth living”” (152). Yet she too seems unable or unwilling to examine the national structure of the United States, and to assess the foundations upon which the mansion was built.

The American ‘Melting Pot’, Multiculturalism and Racial Formation

“You don’t look like American”, Lilian is told when she travels to rural China in search of her estranged family (H. Jin *A Map* 81). The correlation of nation and race leaves Lilian appearing un-American. American racial formation is typically understood as a black-white binary, within which Lilian as a mixed race Chinese American is not readily accommodated. Shirley Hune has argued that “[f]or decades, research agendas have analysed racial interactions in the U.S. almost exclusively as Black/White relations. [...] All power and race relations have come to be seen within this framework of subordinate/majority dynamics” (Hune 29). More recently, American racial formation has been re-cast beyond this binary, as in David Hollinger’s formulation of an “ethno-racial pentagon”, yet the legacy of the black/white racial framework, which according to Hune reinforces “the exclusion of [many] from public and private agendas”, often still organises American race relations (Hollinger 8-9; Hune 30). Neither black nor white, Lilian is perceived as being beyond the bounds of Americanness.

However, Lilian narrates for herself different criteria for entry into the fictive unity of the American mainstream. Upon arriving in China, she declares: “half Chinese and half Irish; that made me American” (H. Jin *A Map* 31). American multicultural discourse has encouraged her to opt in to ethnic identity as a basis for American identity, and for Lilian, it is precisely her mixed ancestry that makes her American. Paradoxically, she claims the right to America by centralising her peripheralised identities, asserting her right to inclusion based upon the mixture of her descent. Under the conditions of multiculturalism, in which ‘ethnic’ Americans categorise themselves into a “neat, virtual grid of distinct ‘ethnic communities’”, as Ien Ang describes, Lilian’s mixed-race descent inadvertently challenges simple, descent-based mappings of identity along lines of bordered containment (Ang *On Not* 14). Lilian envisages a new grid, or map, in which the lines of separation are removed to allow for new intersections and unities to emerge.

Nevertheless, Lilian’s statement ‘half Chinese and half Irish; that made me American’ might be more problematic than it first appears. We could also read Lilian’s statement as indicative of an insistence upon ethnic identity for all ‘non-white’ American subjects—even for multiracial Americans who might seem to defy the logic of multicultural, monoracial grouping. Arguably, it is this kind of ethnic grouping—‘Chinese’ as group A; ‘Irish’ as group B—that makes Lilian both an American, and a subject of American hegemony. In this case, she is incorporated into a system of *multicultural Americanism*: all Americans must be ethnically, culturally and racially categorised in celebration of the diversity of America; all Americans must be categorised in a continuation of American racial formation.

The continuing *racial* dimension of Lilian’s mixed descent is evinced in her concern for being *seen* differently in China and America: “In China I liked being viewed as Chinese, though in the States I always insist I am American. [... In America,] strangers tended to regard me as a brunette. Clearly it was my last name that singled me out” (H. Jin *A Map* 69). She wishes to be viewed as a Chinese body in China, where a discourse of (Han)

Chinese ethno-nationalist pride thrives, but as an un-raced ('American'), coded white-raced ('brunette') body in America. Due to societal pressures or threat of discrimination in failing to achieve either of these racial passings, Lilian attempts to embody the role of a different race in each society.

Meanwhile, her nephew Ben expresses his fears that America might force him to become something *other than* Chinese: it might 'seduce' and corrupt him, "suck [him] in", and make him forget where he's from (H. Jin *A Map* 155). The sexualised language reveals that his is a corporeal fear: the foreign land, ever gendered female, might claim his body, consume his identity. Lilian's reply suggests that losing his Chineseness to the great "melting pot" of America, as she terms it, is a process to be welcomed and applauded (H. Jin *A Map* 155). However, in suggesting to Ben that he may well lose his Chineseness, which will disintegrate into an indistinguishable stew of American-flavoured humanity, Lilian ironically overlooks the probability that American multicultural society will continue to remind Ben precisely of his foreign, racialized origins, refusing to let him 'forget where he's from'.

Donna Gabaccia has described how multiculturalism can commit marginalised peoples to seemingly willing acts of Otherness (*Immigration* 200). She suggests that as a result, the power dynamics underscoring multicultural relationships are rarely questioned—if individualism and diversity are not only tolerated, but promoted, the argument might go, then there is no cause to feel victimised as a group; having been granted the option of *embracing* their ethnic difference, Americans thus ethnicised should feel vindicated. Yet for Gabaccia, 'ethnic' has become "a code word for 'peripheral', with only those at the center privileged enough to elude its stamp and odor" (*Immigration* 200). Gabaccia's description of the 'odor' of ethnicity is particularly evocative of the kind of habitual racism that remains despite the anti-racist ideals of multiculturalism, as it harks back to portrayals of non-white bodies as dirty: a narrative encapsulated by depictions of Chinatown(s) as sites of "filth, disease and inhuman habitation", as emphasised in the work of Nayan Shah (20).

America remains a country underpinned by racial formation, and in *A Map of Betrayal*, Jin provides his audience with an understated demonstration of how it continues to impact peoples of Chinese descent in America.

The Chinese Concept of Race: The Transnationalisation of Racial Formation

Perhaps more striking though is that in *A Map of Betrayal*, we find quiet explorations of Chinese racial formation alongside its oft-plotted American counterpart, allowing for a nuancing and transnationalising of the discourse. The subject of racism in mainland China is most frequently considered in scholarship as a process in which a single ‘Chinese’ race discriminates against races considered to be external to the nation—particularly those raced as black. We find examples of this brand of Chinese racism in the 1988 Nanjing Anti-African Protest, as well as in pop culture: in the nationally broadcasted 2016 Qiaobi detergent advertisement, for instance, a black man is pushed into a washing machine by a Chinese lady, emerging post-spin as a handsome, *cleaned* Asian man. Refracting this anti-black racism through an American lens, in *A Map of Betrayal*, Lilian is amazed to find a substantial community of Africans living in Guangzhou, in an “area called Chocolate Town”—she guesses that they “must like the semitropical climate” (H. Jin *A Map* 111). However, racism also occurs amongst the citizenry of the PRC, and racial formation plays a larger role in the PRC than is often acknowledged.

As Chan Kwok-bun and Li Chenyang have argued, the Confucian concept of 和 (*he*, harmony; harmonisation) implies a behavioural imperative to respect differences between self and other, achieving harmony without making similar (Chan K.-b. 12; Li C. 584). In this concept, then, we find an ancient correlate of multicultural discourse. Modern China has begun to re-fashion itself as a Confucian society: a culture and philosophy that has been rekindled post-Mao, as indicated by the establishment worldwide of Confucius Institutes (a

paragon of soft power); in Xi Jinping's explicit endorsement of Confucianism, becoming the first party chief to attend a birthday celebration for Confucius in 2014; and in former paramount leader Hu Jintao's famous slogan 和谐社会 (*hexie shehui*, Harmonious Society), repurposing Confucian ethics and linguistics of harmony. The rhetoric of harmony and acceptance of difference suggests, perhaps, that China is more likely than America to have avoided issues of racial and ethnic conflict or discontent.

It has indeed been argued that without a distinct historical discourse of 'race' in China, racism cannot exist there. As Frank Dikötter summarises this argument before going on to discredit it, "[r]acism', [...] like 'human rights' is a 'Western concept' with no equivalent in China"—or rather, with no direct historical translation (Dikötter 'Introduction' 2). Yet as Dikötter makes clear, the existence of racial formation cannot be reduced to the mere appearance of the word 'race' (Dikötter 'Introduction' 3). A slightly stronger argument has been made by Anatol Lieven that Chinese discrimination against Others is not based on 'racism' so much as "cultural prejudice"—an argument based on the idea that in dynastic China, once so-called 'barbarian' invaders (those of the Mongol-founded Yuan dynasty or the Manchu-founded Qing dynasty, for instance) had learned and adopted Chinese language and culture, prejudices against them from the citizenry later ceased—they "became Chinese" (Lieven 42).

Nonetheless, Aihwa Ong and Frank Dikötter both contend that there is a clear history of Chinese race-consciousness and biological racism in China, which has long separated imperially bordered Chinese insiders precisely from 'barbarian' outsiders, according to a logic of cultural *and* racial exclusivity and elitism (Ong 56; Dikötter 'Introduction' 1). This racial order was transformed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dikötter explains how, in response to the newly encountered pressures of an imperially imposed racial discourse, nineteenth-century Chinese nationalists adopted the derogatory

‘yellow’ racial signifier from the West as “a positive symbol of imperial nobility which was actively mobilised by reformers who transformed it into a powerful and effective means of identification” (‘Racial Discourse’ 13). This inversion of signification was aided by the fact that yellow had long been considered the most prestigious colour in China, associated with royalty, heroism, and sacredness due to its connection with the mythical 黄帝 (*huangdi*, Yellow Emperor). Meanwhile, Suisheng Zhao’s *A Nation-State by Construction* investigates how, in the wake of Manchu and imperialist invasion from the West, “[t]he term ‘Han’ emerged [...] when scholars like Liang Qichao responded to the European notion of race by claiming that the yellow race was dominated by the Han people who ‘were the initiators of civilization and have civilized the whole of Asia’”, encoding a notion of national pride no longer based on culture, but now on race (Zhao 22). As Zhao goes on to explain, the combination of these racial and national discourses inspired the Han people, formulating themselves as dominant and original peoples of China, to initiate an ethno-national revolution to overthrow the ostensibly non-Chinese, because non-*Han*, Manchu state (61).

Chinese racial discourse can be evinced in the term 中华民族 (*zhonghua minzu*, Chinese nation *and/or* Chinese race), a phrase that over the course of the last two centuries has had various meanings. It has designated Han people as the essential Chinese race during the late Qing period; aggregated several distinct ethnic groups (Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, and Tibetan according to Sun Yat-sen) into one Chinese nation during the Nationalist period; been used by both the ROC and the PRC as a common denominator to avoid strife in differing interpretations of Taiwan’s right to sovereignty; and is now most widely used in the PRC to incorporate all 56 officially sanctioned ethnic groups into one universalised, world-spanning, Chinese race *and* nationality.

Some Chinese Americans have sought a sense of belonging by claiming Chineseness, bound up with Han-majoritarian patriotism, in response to nearly two centuries of anti-

Asian discrimination in the USA. In narrating his migration, Lilian styles Gary as a severed part of the Chinese national body, who, “despite the distance of an ocean and a continent, [... could still] feel China’s pulse” (H. Jin *A Map* 126). From abroad, Gary feels China’s pulse through the skin of a foreign body. Eric Liu speaks of a linguistic precedent for the understanding of Chinese citizens as biological kin—as part of a shared bloodline:

In Chinese *tongbao* is a compound word that means 'compatriot.' *Tong* means *together* and *bao* means *uterus*. To be Chinese is, at the deepest level, a matter of blood relations, the coagulation of disparate histories into one. Now that those shared lines of descent seem globally ascendant, so many people of Chinese blood who live outside China feel at once far from the core and reanimated at the core. (*A Chinaman’s* 72)

This construction of racial and national unity may provide a feeling of strength in communal identity, but Lilian’s description of Gary feeling China’s pulse from abroad also illustrates how the crystallisation of these discourses comes to be *felt*. It may be felt affectively as a biological connection to a group of people, but race is also felt bodily by those who are subjected to violent attacks, confinement in penitentiaries, prying hands keen to *feel* physical differences and so on. The emigrant’s feeling of bodily connection to their homeland often translates into the immigrant’s *feeling* of racialized bodily trauma.

In *A Map of Betrayal*, concepts of racial formation in both China and America coalesce whilst Lilian is living in China. She praises and admonishes her Chinese students as a collective body: for having good Chinese qualities “such as diligence, resourcefulness, modesty, respect for old people”, but being guilty of “petty cleverness and practical-mindedness”, qualities that Lilian “might also have since I’m half Chinese” (H. Jin *A Map* 184). Lilian repurposes an essentialist logic that serves for different reasons in both China and America to designate character or ability according only to biological descent.

Yet Lilian also *disrupts* patterns of racial formation whilst in China by engaging in a practice of impersonation. While travelling on local trains through parts of China from which foreigners are often excluded, Lilian’s “stock answer” to questions about her identity

from fellow passengers is that she is “half Uigur”: a “minority people in western China [who] are light-skinned and named the Whites of Asia”, as Lilian styles them (H. Jin *A Map* 65). Tina Chen proposes in her monograph *Double Agency* that impersonation is an archetypal Asian American experience: a “strategic performance calculated to foreground the limits of subjectivity even as it insists upon the undeniable importance of subjecthood” and a derivative of the *a priori* subjectlessness of the ‘Asian American’ grouping, as discussed by Kandice Chuh in *Imagine Otherwise* (T. Chen *Double* xvi–xviii). To this extent, Asian American acts of impersonation work to establish claims to American identity at the same time as critiquing the systems and discourses that have necessitated their impersonation (T. Chen *Double* xix). A similar process can be seen in Lilian’s impersonation: through this act, she claims entry and connection to China, whilst also disrupting the existing identity categories that brand her as suspect, alien, and debarred from literal access to the country through, in Chen’s words, a “*deliberate confounding of both visible difference and visible sameness*” (*Double* 10, italics in original). Yet it is also an act of impersonation, or perceived impersonation, that leads to Gary’s arrest and eventual death in prison. Ideas of Asian American impersonation bleed into (post-) Cold War narratives of Asians in America as spies, double agents, or foreign bodies.

Conclusion

As Erika Lee maintains, “[i]n exemplifying [the] complicated and contingent history of American race relations, Asian Americans remain absolutely central to understanding the ongoing ways in which race works today” (*The Making* 9). In *A Map of Betrayal*, Ha Jin adds to this reckoning through a complication of national contexts. Nationally and racially foreign, Chinese faces in America contain in this novel a latent sense of danger, the risk of Americanness as ‘mask’, under which an alien Chinese body lurks, ready to corrupt the American body politic from the inside. Yet Jin’s characterisation of Gary also complicates

notions of American cosmopolitanism. Before being expelled from the realm of American inclusivity, Gary is presented as being an archetypal figure of ethnic, cosmopolitan acceptability. Meanwhile, Chinese migrants in America risk ‘betraying’ a notion of Chinese national, racial and political unity that grew in part out of nineteenth century Western imperialism. The organising idea of loyalty to China, which maintains Gary’s employ and the sacrifice of abandoning his young wife and family, is betrayed by his Chinese employers in order, ironically, to retain the same peaceable relationship between China and the USA that Gary was working towards.

The merging of national and racial discourses is particularly apparent in periods of perceived international conflict. In *A Map of Betrayal*, Jin also explores questions of race in relation to the continuing post-Cold War opposition between the United States and China. According to a racially determined identification between Chineseness and *China*, Chinese migrants are often impacted by the continuation of Cold-War antagonism between the two nations in racial terms. In Gary, Jin presents us with a character who embodies the adverse effects of the intersection between race and nation. As we see in *A Map of Betrayal*, racial and national systems in both the USA and China dovetail to produce a reciprocal field of mistrust. This is evinced in Gary’s expulsion from both the American and Chinese national bodies, in the transference of Chinese as positive racial category in China to a category of racialized dissimilarity in America, as well as in the concurrent suspicion and actuality of Gary and Ben’s espionage activities.

Jin’s choice of an Asian spy as the novel’s protagonist comes with many contingent paradoxes. His treatment of this figure at once demystifies the masculinised secret agent role often found in popular media, whilst reinforcing the idea that Chinese racialized bodies *do* pose a threat to America—they may indeed remain treacherously loyal to the Chinese state. Jin further complicates the Asian spy figure by portraying Gary as a character who betrays *both* nations, and is “not only a betrayer but someone who’d been betrayed”, as

Lilian states (8). Jin adapts the Asian spy figure to focus on the racial and national intersection that leaves Gary vulnerable to persecution from both of the governments under which he has been employed. Gary's betrayal, both *of* and *by* China and America—what King-Kok Cheung terms “reciprocal betrayal”—is the equatorial centre of *A Map of Betrayal's* mapping (Cheung ‘Fate’ 61). From this central juncture, the reader must navigate a path through topographical layers of dual chronotopes, twin racial formations, intergenerational conflict and continuation, and a blurring of fiction, fact and historical precedent.

In *A Map of Betrayal*, Lilian expresses the opinion that her nephew Ben's dedication to China—to, in his words, “a bigger cause than my personal well-being”—is “[b]ullcrap! [...] You've just been using your country as an excuse [to] lighten your personal responsibilities” (213). Her disapprobation insinuates that loyalty to group is a convenient fiction, obscuring one's *real* responsibilities to self. Yet paradoxically, Lilian's sentiment reveals her own loyalty to the *collective* American ideology of individualism—the shared idea that the primacy of the individual is fundamental to American national identity. In China, Lilian encounters an alternative understanding of individual responsibility from her students: “they claimed [...] that as] an individual, you could find the meaning of life only in ‘a harmonious relationship’ with the people around you” (H. Jin *A Map* 98). Invoking the Confucian ideal of ‘harmony’, which has been repurposed in China over the last century to consolidate both ethnic (minority) difference and ethno-national unity, Lilian nevertheless maintains discourses of racialized and nationalised disparity, despite her pride in her mixed-race Americanness. Notwithstanding the significance of socio-historical context for the novel, Jin's treatment of race and racial formation is not only subtle, but confounding. Yet its contradictions and lack of didacticism allow the reader to navigate their own paths, and perhaps to discover new routes through the terrain.

The following chapter considers the idea of transnationalism and the transnation as discourses and spaces that promise to move *beyond* the nation and all its contingent discontents.

Chapter Three

‘In that paralysis I lived in no man’s land’: Transnationalism, Aesthetics and ‘No Man’s Land’

Tomorrow is my grandfather’s one hundredth birthday and so I decide to grow what some people might think of as wings, but what I think of as a natural desire to collect my family, which I do, sweeping down into cities and towns and villages I’ve never been in before and pulling each person close to me for a brief moment before throwing them into a sack.

[...]

I say: hello, hello! Hello there, hello remember me, I’m your cousin, remember me, I’m your niece, do you know me, I’m your second cousin, remember me [...].

The answers I get are: no hi yes yes yeah yup dang ran ji de sour angel I’ve missed you ning ning baobei is it really you you can fly piao liang gu niang it looks like your eczema’s flared up again do you still speak Chinese you look old.

[...]

Is there a home for us somewhere? I ask the bag of my family, and immediately, I hear muffled votes for New York! Shanghai! Beijing! Shandong! Wenzhou! Heilongjiang! Tianjin! San Francisco! Williamsburg! Los Angeles! London! Bushwick! Paris! Sichuan! Hunan! Hong Kong! Washington Heights! E Flat!

I try to take in all their suggestions but there’s too many and still more coming in. Without knowing exactly where I am, I begin to descend. We will all live to see this moment, I say into the bag of my family. We will land wherever there is solid ground, I promise. (297-9)

—‘You Fell into the River and I Saved You!’ from *Sour Heart: Stories* (2017), by Jenny Zhang

The term ‘trans-nationalism’ was coined by Randolph Bourne in his 1916 essay ‘Trans-national America’. Bourne sought to challenge the Americanization movement of the era, championing an expansive vision of a cosmopolitan, pluralist, socially reforming America.

Whilst some of his phrasing has perhaps not aged well, Bourne was an early proponent of cultural pluralism, and opposed the then recently-popularised concept of the melting pot:

What we emphatically do not want is that these distinctive qualities should be washed out into a tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity. Already we have far too much of this insipidity,— masses of people who are cultural half-breeds, neither assimilated Anglo-Saxons nor nationals of another culture. (Bourne 90)

In challenging the early-twentieth century nationalist, nativist zeitgeist, Bourne championed “foreign savor” over the homogenisation of the melting pot (Bourne 90). Bourne’s alternative of *trans*-nationalism advocated a society that was at once American and cosmopolitan, containing multiple nations (trans-national communities) within a single, unifying state (Bourne 88). “We are all foreign-born or the descendants of foreign-born, and if distinctions are to be made between us they should rightly be on some grounds other than indigenoussness”, Bourne provoked, seemingly removing America’s indigenous citizens from the “we” of the national community, whilst also acknowledging that the “early colonists” no more came to “adopt the culture of the American Indian” than later immigrants came “to be melted down into the indistinguishable dough of Anglo-Saxonism” (88, 95). Although the term fell out of usage for the better part of a century, Bourne’s ‘trans-nationalism’ set the stage for the mixture of pluralism and cosmopolitanism found in the multiculturalism movement that followed.

Though it was not the focus of his essay, Bourne also preemptively touched on the practicalities associated with a modern understanding of transnationalism:

Along with dual citizenship we shall have to accept, I think, that free and mobile passage of the immigrant between America and his native land again which now arouses so much prejudice among us. We shall have to accept the immigrant’s return for the same reason that we consider justified our own flitting about the earth. To stigmatize the alien who works in America for a few years and returns to his own land, only perhaps to seek American fortune again, is to think in narrow nationalistic terms. It is to ignore the cosmopolitan significance of this migration. It is to ignore the fact that the returning immigrant is often a missionary to an inferior civilization. (Bourne 95)

Bourne anticipates here the emphasis upon the mobility of migrants—whether in search of work, leisure, familial reconnection or war—that helped to define the field for early scholars of transnationalism. Although understandings of transnational migration have evolved to facilitate the inclusion of those less mobile migrants, who nevertheless remain participants in a wider transnational social field, the notion of movement and the crossing of borders remains a central idea and implicit *ideal* for many scholars of transnationalism.

Transnationalism as a modern scholarly framework was developed in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, around seventy five years after Bourne's essay. With the emergent promise of a significant shift in the geopolitical borders and alignments of the post-Cold War world, scholars of the early 1990s began to imagine transnationalism as a remedy to nationally-bordered allegiances, and in America, as an alternative to the discourse of American exceptionalism. In 1993 Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc published their seminal *Nations Unbound*. In it, they define transnationalism as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (7). Since then, demarcations of participation in transnationalism have increasingly expanded in order to accommodate participation in transnational connectivity via the internet and digital media, the consumption of global products, the sending of remittances and so on. The exchange involved in transnationalism is typically no longer conceived as being limited to the physical movement of migrants.

In order to speak about transnationalism with any degree of accuracy, it is worthwhile determining what we mean by the 'national' from which it derives and deviates. The differences and persistent perplexities between definitions of the terms 'country', 'nation', 'state' and 'nation-state' have been analysed and disputed in a good deal more detail than I could hope to achieve here³⁸. I use the term 'nation' to refer to the *idea* of a people, demarcated by territorial boundaries ('country') and a belief in social commonalities of 'values', 'culture' and 'heritage'. The 'state', in turn, is the governing authority invested in maintaining nationalism as a political tool. A 'nation-state' is a state in which the *great majority* of citizens share 'national' commonalities of language, culture and descent.

³⁸ Walker Connor's 1978 paper 'A nation is a nation, is a state, is an ethnic group is a ...' is perhaps the most influential modern article to insist upon and suggest definitions for thorough delineation of these terms. However, these words continue to be used interchangeably or overlap with one another in much artistic and academic literature. I adopt my own working definitions.

Although both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the USA are often referred to as 'nation-states', neither can be properly defined as such. The USA is instead a federation of states and Native American tribal nations. The PRC is, like the United Kingdom, a state composed of several nations with varying degrees of sovereignty (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and, contentiously, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang) as well as 55 officially recognised ethnic minority groups, some of which are granted a measure of constitutional autonomy.

The relationship between the nation and the transnation (a spatiality discussed further below), or between nationalism and transnationalism, is forged in the act of migration. As with the concept of diaspora, moving away from the country associated with one's nationality creates a splitting of 'nation' from its territory, a dialectic of departure and arrival, a transfer of one nationality through the in-between space of the transnation and into a second country defined by its own forms of nationhood. Transnationalism might be thought of as the condition of multiple 'nations' stacked atop one another, which can be transferred across territories even as they remain governed by the regulations of states.

As presented in the Introduction to this thesis, Aihwa Ong has helped elucidate how the 'trans-' of transnationalism conjures a notion of its transcendental potential, facilitating the movement of migrants not only between but *beyond* nations. For many, transnationalism offers to oppose the kind of allegiance to nation evinced in scholarship of the past as well as in contemporary politics. It is often seen as a liberatory force, portending the cleaving of identity from nationality. This is an idea that carries across to recent literature. In 'Shame' from Ha Jin's 2009 short story collection *A Good Fall*, a Professor visiting the USA from China decides to stay in America. This decision is based on an idea of the 'ideal' state of transnationalism: "A human being should live like a bird, untrammelled by any man-made borders" (H. Jin *A Good* 127). Nevertheless, this sentiment is at odds with the political constraints that leave him at once undocumented in

America, and unable to return to China because of his ostensible defection. The story ends ominously, with the protagonist admitting that he's never seen the Professor again, nor knows his fate: "You don't know how long the officials can stretch their tentacles" (H. Jin *A Good* 133).

There can be no 'absolute' transnational transcendence—migrants remain tied in some capacity to the grounding of state-mandated politics and security. Everything from passport controls and red flags to border patrols and deportation mandates delimit the trajectory of the transnational migrant. Whilst nationality can expand beyond territorial borders, not all migrants (or prospective migrants) can transcend the borders of the state. Moreover, Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald remind us in 'Transnationalism in Question'—one of the most influential articles opposing uncritical investment in transnational scholarship—that "the rise in massive state apparatuses *controlling* population movements between states represents the most striking development" of recent years (1188, emphasis in original).

Transnationalism has become increasingly popular amongst scholars over the past three decades. But rather than assuming either the meaning or usefulness of transnationalism, this chapter questions the usefulness of the concept for literary criticism. How is this originally social science-based framework best translated into one that could be useful for the reading of first generation migrant writing? Can we identify such a thing as a transnational aesthetics? Following this investigation, readings of Wei Hui's *Marrying Buddha*, Jenny Zhang's *Sour Heart* and Chuang Hua's *Crossings* are undertaken in order to further explore and elucidate the notion of transnational aesthetics, with the latter text proving particularly fertile ground for discussion.

Existing Scholarship on the Transnational Aesthetic

In order to adopt a cross-disciplinary approach to transnationalism, the tools developed in the social sciences must be reformed to suit their application to literature. A literary critic

must approach transnationalism from a new trajectory, countenancing a direct consideration of whether there is something *distinct* about transnational art and aesthetics, instead of focusing purely on the biographies, practices and lifestyles of migrant authors and characters. How do these literary artefacts themselves travel?³⁹ Can a mode of literary analysis be created that mines the interstices of the numerous borders and boundaries that the transnational spans, rather than simply *designating* transnational texts? How might a transnational literary framework differ from competing paradigms? And if the privileges of transnational activity engender in some scholars a “premature dismissal of the effectivity of the nation”, as Deckard et al. of the Warwick Research Collective argue, then might the study of transnationalism for literary critics afford the potential for both promoting and problematising the assumptions of transnational ‘transcendentalism’ (42)?

To begin exploring these questions, I consider in this section the contributions of literary critics who have described something similar to a transnational aesthetic. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s edited volume *Minor Transnationalism*, published in 2005, was one of the most important early works to reconceive ‘transnationalism’ through a diverse and intersecting range of disciplinary and methodological perspectives. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s influential theory of a ‘minor literature’ is clearly evoked in their title, yet this is a connection that remains mostly implicit. Lionnet and Shih pass comment explicitly on the earlier pair’s thought only once, and this address is revealing: “Deleuze and Guattari end up falling back into a recentered model of ‘minor literature.’ For them, the minor’s literary and political significance rests on its critical function within and against the major in a binary and vertical relationship” (Lionnet and Shih 2). What they reference here is that in Deleuze and Guattari’s conception, ‘minor literature’ is “that which

³⁹ This question will be addressed primarily in the following chapter, which explores published Cultural Revolution life writing texts as artefacts traded as commodities by publishers, often undergoing processes of translation and co-authorship, being considered for international literary prizes, and marketed to multiple communities.

a minority constructs *within* a major language”, deterritorializing it from the centre outwards (Deleuze and Guattari 16, emphasis mine). As Lionnet and Shih see it, in this conception of ‘minor literature’, the centre remains the main object of study, containing and incorporating the margin (3). Like Deleuze and Guattari though, Lionnet and Shih formulate ‘minor transnationalism’ in spatial terms, proposing that minor transnationalism “occur[s] in the nonspaces of boundaries and borders, spaces which are nonetheless infinitely expansive and full of possibilities” (Lionnet and Shih 19). We will return to this idea of ‘nonspaces’ in the reading of *Crossings* below.

Some of the prescriptiveness of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘minor literature’—the idea that *everything* in minor literature is political or that *everything* within it takes on collective value, acting as an individual instantiation of an assemblage of collective enunciation—is thus done away with in the idea of ‘minor transnationalism’, which favours instead the horizontal relation of minor transnational spaces and “international minority alliances” (Deleuze and Guattari 17-8; Lionnet and Shih, 3-4). In the simplest sense, what ‘minor transnationalism’ does is bring the ‘minority’ back into the question of the ‘minor’, exploring how groups are minoritised by different mechanisms in different places (Lionnet and Shih 11).

Lionnet and Shih finish their introduction to the idea of ‘minor transnationalism’ by ascribing a sense of the aesthetic that might be generated from it: “introspective and mournful [in tone,] different from the more triumphant ‘major’ key, [and thus] perhaps the mode in which the traumas of colonial, imperial, and global hegemonies [...] continue to work themselves out and produce new possibilities” (21). Their musical metaphors of ‘tone’ and ‘key’ valuably indicate the stylistic and affective nature of a transnational aesthetic. This is an idea that will be returned to in a reading of Jenny Zhang’s *Sour Heart* below, a section of which appears as an epigraph to this chapter.

Meanwhile, the suggestion from Lionnet and Shih that minor transnationalism might become the best way to study the “traumas of colonial, imperial and global hegemonies”

leads us to the question of competing or overlapping theoretical frameworks (21). Why would postcolonial theory, for instance, be any less well equipped than minor transnational analysis to explore the traumas of colonialism and imperialism? The framework of postcolonial studies seems at first to be “absorbed” or “sideline[d]”—to use Yogita Goyal’s expressions—by the recent expansion of transnational scholarship (60). Whilst postcolonialism necessitates a degree of social and political engagement on the part of the researcher, transnationalism appears to offer researchers a means through which to study subaltern and minority subjects whilst avoiding political terrain—at least when it is conceived as a framework that exceeds nationally opposed politics. Does a transnational literary framework then risk monopolising, or indeed ‘colonising’ the intellectual space of politically engaged discourses like postcolonialism, borderlands critique or ethnic studies?

One way to avoid the annexation of these other frameworks is to borrow from Lionnet and Shih’s idea of *alignment* with other ‘minor’ formations. For Lionnet and Shih, where postcolonial studies has been “overly concerned” with the vertical relationship between coloniser and colonised, minor transnationalism takes a horizontal approach by bringing minor cultural formations across national boundaries into comparison, facilitating transnational comparisons of structure and experience (11). Yet we need not do away with postcolonial studies—nor indeed the study of diaspora, borderlands, world literature, ethnic studies and so on. Instead, we might look to these fields as generative ways to recalibrate an idea of the transnational aesthetic, allowing each to crossover with and provide insight to transnational readings of these texts.

How, for instance, might transnationalism and the transnational aesthetic interact with and differ from the far more established lens of ‘diaspora’? Whereas transnationalism is concerned with connections between multiple nationalities, diaspora is attentive to continued connections to a single nationality from abroad: diaspora is the result of the “departure of a group that already has a clearly delimited identity in its homeland”, as

Khachig Tölölyan describes (14). In other words, where diaspora is backward-looking, transnationalism looks sideways. A transnational aesthetic would thus differ from a diaspora aesthetic in its evocation not only (not necessarily) of a ‘homeland’, or of attachments to a national culture and people from afar, but also of attachments to alternative groupings and spatialities—‘third’ nations; other ethnic groups; spaces of the ‘in-between’ and so on. Unlike with diasporic literature, a transnational aesthetic would not necessarily require “a mythicized idea of the homeland”, to use Tölölyan’s phrase (15). Yet by ‘crossing’ scholarly understandings of ‘diaspora’ and diasporic literary analysis with the transnational aesthetic, we might also usefully be able to ask questions of how the spatial locus of the ‘homeland’ corresponds with those alternative spatialities ‘beyond’ nation.

Form Informs: Transnational Poetics and Beyond

Perhaps the most influential consideration of transnationalism and literary aesthetics is Jahan Ramazani’s award-winning 2009 monograph *A Transnational Poetics*. Its exclusive attention to twentieth-century poetry facilitates an exploration of two primary cohorts of poets (modernists like T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Langston Hughes, alongside postcolonial poets like Agha Shahid Ali, Lorna Goodison and Kamau Brathwaite) in relation to transnationalism’s interaction with modernity and novel kinds of poetics. Ramazani notes that the “pan-cultural allusiveness” of both of these groups “explodes mononationalist conceptions of culture” (x). As such, he considers formal qualities—“intercultural tropes, allusions, and vocabularies” and so on—associated with transnational poetics as part of a project to disrupt the critical practice of “culture-of-birth determinism” (Ramazani 31, 36).

For Ramazani, poetry’s peculiar, paratactic compression of expression—its unmistakable juxtaposing of “discrepant idioms and soundscapes, tropes and subgenres”—makes it the ideal form to study in relation to transnational aesthetics, facilitating a focus on

“the creolized nature of transnational experience” (Ramazani 4). Yet these formations can be extended to other forms of literature. The collocation and commingling of national, cultural and literary contexts, allusions and styles can be seen and mapped in a diverse range of literary forms. In Marilyn Chin’s *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*, for instance, sisters Moonie and Mei Ling grow up in Southern California amongst a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multinational community. The chapter titled ‘Monologue: Grandmother Wong’s New Year Blessings or, They Can’t Kill Us if They Don’t Know Our Names’ begins with an epigraph in memory of Isabel Alvarez Razo, thus paying homage to connections made beyond ethnic groupings. Focalised through Moonie and Mei Ling’s Grandmother, this chapter is written colloquially, channelling the Chinese translingual traces in Grandmother’s speech: “I say, okay smart turtle egg, call big lawyer put me in jail” (M. Chin 39). Loading their van with presents of Chinese cleavers, tiger-bone wine, and phoenix webs (duck feet), Grandmother Wong and her granddaughters set out to deliver gifts for the New Year. Across a sequence of three short, interlocking scenes, the trio visit Mrs. Faith in “Little Sudan”, Mrs. Gonzalez in the “bar-ri-o” and Mrs. Goldstein in the “rich people houses” up the hill (41-4). Throughout these scenes of intercultural, minor transnational communication, we encounter Chin’s play with form and language: “I memorizing Declaration of Independence for speech class. [...] Chinese girl have good memory: life, liberty, hirsute happiness”; “She hit her heart with little fist and cry loud, Mrs. Wong, estoy-consada, estoy-consada, estoy-consada! I hit heart, cry with her, I estoy-consada, too!” (39). Translingual games disrupt the ground of white, Anglophone American culture and tradition here, with the wit and appeal of the passage generated through minor-cultural exchange and translingual innovation. With discussion of Chuang Hua’s *Crossings* below, there is further demonstration of how transnational aesthetics can be tracked across literary forms other than poetry.

To Lionnet and Shih's formative conception of 'minor transnationalism', we might add Ramazani's concern for questions of form alongside context in order to reach an understanding of transnational aesthetics. Whilst the distinction of certain formal devices alone is not enough to distinguish a category of art—those forms can always be used to a different end—reading with an attention to transnational aesthetics might allow us to understand a literary work's formal qualities differently. For instance, Ha Jin's *A Good Fall* is a collection of short stories all set within the predominantly Chinese American immigrant community of Flushing, Queens—one of the largest satellite Chinatowns in the USA. The stories are set contemporaneously to one another, each following a character who has migrated from China. These characters are alluded to in more than one story, with the text cohering individual stories into a community of narratives. There is nothing intrinsically transnational about this formal interconnection of stories in a collection.⁴⁰ Yet if we read this formal decision through the lens of transnational aesthetics, it might reveal how *A Good Fall* forges a sense of one-worldness, of an ability for these migrant characters to travel between, across and beyond the borders of discrete narratives. It might allow us to notice, for instance, how several characters are found reading the *World Journal*—a Sinophone American newspaper that Ha Jin also reads, as well as Nan, the protagonist of Jin's 2007 novel *A Free Life*—leading to the overlapping of the characters', author's and readers' worlds, networking them all into a transnational community of readers.

In another example, we find the eponymous protagonist of Annie Wang's 2001 *Lili* returning to Beijing after three months of 'rehabilitation' through labour for a charge of 'hooliganism'. She finds there:

Fancy hotels, supermarkets, discos, Kentucky Fried Chicken, construction sites, open-door policies, 'socialism with Chinese characteristics,' 'spiritual pollution,'

⁴⁰ There are plenty of comparable examples of ontologically consistent worlds existing across the borders of short stories in a narrative cycle. From James Joyce's *Dubliners* to John Steinbeck's *The Long Valley*, narrative worlds have often been connected across and beyond the borders of discrete stories.

export permits, handicapped role models, learning from the soldier Lei Feng, t'ai chi, Sigmund Freud, existentialism, 'the four Four Basic Principles of China's socialism,' the one-child policy, foreign-exchange currency, Japanese soap operas, pest-extermination campaigns, nepotism, young nannies, kung fu novels, the new rage for studying abroad, breakdancing and the 'moonwalk,' Wham and George Michael, getting rich quick, the notion that foreign moons are bigger and rounder, color TV sets, dishwashers, refrigerators, sewing machines, ESP, New Tide literature [...]. (A. Wang 40-1)

In the seat of Chinese power, Lili encounters in Beijing a city replete with international business and thought, connected to a network of global exchange, engaged with Chinese tradition and Communist politics as well as with foreign media and philosophy. What conjures the transnational aesthetic in this passage though is not the international makeup of the city alone, but the listing that gives it form. As we read through this extended inventory, each entity begins to blur into the next. We might see 'handicapped role models' learning 't'ai chi' from the (late) 'soldier Lei Feng', or 'the one-child policy' as a 'foreign exchange currency' as our eyes run over the list. In this kind of paratactic expansion of meaning, each of these articles exists in simultaneity, enumeration becoming impression. The verticality of the list transforms into the horizontality of a transnationally intertwined globality.

Formal qualities alone are not enough to distinguish a transnational aesthetic. Yet applying Ramazani's consideration of form *alongside* reflection on contexts of sex, class, race, colonialism and so on gives additional shape to the spectral quality of the 'transnational aesthetic' in Lionnet and Shih's *Minor Transnationalism*. By offering a sense of how form can "foster an aesthetically attuned transnational literary criticism", Ramazani fleshes out the bones of what might constitute a transnational aesthetic (Ramazani xi). Perhaps in order to acknowledge a unique poetics of transnationalism, we must consider the 'minor' affect of minority and migrant participants, as in *Minor Transnationalism*, distinct formal qualities (like intertextuality, bricolage, the surpassing of typical narrative borders) that evoke the nature, spatialities and condition of transnationalism, and the

constellation of formal and non-determinative contextual concerns proposed by Ramazani in *Transnational Poetics*.

To these considerations, we might also add the groundedness or ungroundedness of the text. A transnational aesthetic would thus be one that removes the character or reader from any *constant* locale: that interposes multiple ‘locals’, that engages multiple nodes and forms of interconnection, or that evokes spatial formations between or beyond that of the ‘nation’. As Russ Castronovo argues, it is precisely the “refusal to occupy any particular ground [that] invests aesthetics with transnational potential” (74). And so to avoid collapsing a diversity of experiences into a unitary literary movement—to prevent it occupying a single ground—we might think of transnational aesthetics as just one mode through which to consider an assemblage of artistic styles found in texts that engage with the migratory, the post- and trans-colonial, and an array of ‘minor’ cultural and linguistic relationships. Whilst we may not be able to identify a definitive transnational aesthetics without delimiting its potential scope, emptying its signifying range through endless expansion, or obscuring the usefulness of competing frameworks, it can provide a focus of attention that allows us to think through migrant writing with an attention to constellations of spatiality, nationality and culture. In the rest of the chapter, texts like Wei Hui’s *Marrying Buddha*, Jenny Zhang’s *Sour Heart* and Chuang Hua’s *Crossings* will be read with an attention to their transnational aesthetics, in order to trace the various forms it may take.

Transnational ‘Activity’ in Wei Hui’s *Marrying Buddha*

Before moving on to more complex instantiations of transnational aesthetics, it is worth considering how they may correspond with the most literal measure of transnational ‘activity’: the regular physical movement between two or more societies and nations. Within the literature of first generation writers who have migrated from China to America, there are very few examples of characters engaged in this kind of activity. One of the exceptions

is Coco, from Wei Hui's novel *Marrying Buddha*, who engages in frequent travel around the world. This was a sequel to the controversial *Shanghai Baby*, written after Wei Hui had begun her own transnational activity, travelling and living between China and America. We find in *Marrying Buddha* an explanation for the paucity of transnationally active characters in this corpus. Coco, named for her predilection for Coco Chanel, is a migrant of substantial means, with a job that allows her to work from any locale. As a thinly veiled analogue for Wei Hui, Coco comments on the "huge success" of *Shanghai Baby*, which "has been published in over forty countries and was recently adapted for a feature film", allowing her the economic opportunity to "agonize over whether to buy a two-thousand-dollar wool-trimmed black leather coat at DKNY", and the funds to facilitate regular trips between New York, Shanghai, and Putuo Island, and publicity excursions internationally (*Marrying Buddha* 16, 69). Zhen Zhang states that Wei Hui is "highly conscious of commercialism's logic" and "focus[es] on the forces of globalization and [...] modern metropolis[es], allowing readers to contend at once with its allures and repulsions" (Z. Zhang 389). Whilst the reader may baulk at Coco's excesses, the ease with which she navigates multiple geographies is undeniable, in a world that seems to be becoming rapidly more uniform for the emergent and established middle classes. As Wenche Ommundsen notes, "[s]earching for a more authentic self, Coco returns home, only to discover a city striving to be more like New York than the Western metropolis itself: her first invitation is to a "Sex and the City" themed party" (Ommundsen 109).

Coco is one of the few characters within the corpus studied for this thesis to possess large amounts of disposable income. Conversely, other characters from the corpus, like Kimberly Chang and her mother in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*, spend most of the novel in poverty. In the novel's prologue, Kimberly recalls finding an old school portrait, upon which "The word PROOF covers much of [her] face" (2). Emblazoned upon her portrait, obscuring her very person, is linguistic *proof* of their deprivation, of the fact that

they could not afford the “actual photo”, so had to treasure the sample (3). Without enough money to fill their tenement window with a pane of glass, they certainly cannot afford to travel repeatedly between nations.⁴¹

The physical movement between multiple countries that is often associated with transnational activity is only feasible for certain classes of people, and excludes those without the financial, familial or occupational means. As the Warwick Research Collective argues, the modern, transnational world is both “[c]ombined *and* uneven”—modernity is a globally disbursed ‘situation’ in which impoverishment is “just as emblematic” as futuristic capitalist development (Deckard et al. 12, emphasis in original). As such, the favelas, slums, ship graveyards, impoverished hinterlands and “vast, deindustrialised wastelands north, east, south and west” are the “necessary flipside” of (post)modern topoi like Jameson’s Portman Bonaventura Hotel (Deckard et al. 13, emphasis in original). So it is that the transnational aesthetic must account for a greater variety of concerns than the physical movement of migrants.

‘Is there a home for us somewhere?’: Jenny Zhang’s *Sour Heart*

The closing section of the final story in Jenny Zhang’s 2017 short story cycle *Sour Heart* (featured in the epigraph to this chapter) sees Christina, the 1.5 generation protagonist of two stories, engaging in a reunion with her extended family. She flies across the ocean to reach China—the land of her ancestors and her contemporary kin—compelled by a ‘natural desire to collect [her] family’. For Christina, it is in accordance with the nature of the diaspora, and of her transnationally dispersed family, to want to ‘collect’ her family—in the act of collection, Christina aims to gather things that are alike, to cohere the diffuse into a

⁴¹ The Chinatown room with a “broken window [...] covered with duct tape” is also a scene we are presented with in Jenny Zhang’s *Sour Heart*. In both cases, the migrant family’s poverty is encapsulated in the image of a broken portal, creating a dissolution of inside and out, the home and the world, and highlighting an unbearable ‘coldness’ of their new space.

single assemblage. Having lived both in China and America, but now estranged from members of her family in each, she takes this opportunity to throw her relatives into the metaphorical sack of her travelling consciousness, to be carried with her on later crossings. Contained within Christina's holdall is a kind of transnation: a metaphorical space in which the geographically disparate are mixed, becoming a melange of voices communicating across borders, a host of bodies coexisting beyond the boundaries of any particular nation, as created by an individual who moves between multiple sites of being and belonging.

After effusively reminding each relative of her relation to them, Christina is greeted by an outpouring of responses. Affirmations, uncertainties, remembrances, sobriquets, questions and observations all emanate from the bag: "no hi yes yes yeah yup dang ran ji de sour angel I've missed you ning ning baobei is it really you you can fly piao liang gu niang it looks like your eczema's flared up again do you still speak Chinese you look old" (J. Zhang 298). Amongst the responses in English, Chinese words and phrases are interpolated. Maria Lauret describes instances of untranslated multilingual elements in texts as 'wanderwords' in her monograph of the same name: those "words and phrases in other languages that disrupt, enchant, occlude or highlight the taken-for-granted English of American literature" (2). In this case, these wanderwords—assurances of remembrance, pet names and terms of affection—remain inaccessible to non-Chinese speakers, reaffirming the private stakes of Christina's reunion whilst reminding the reader of the multilingual connections tying together families across borders. As in Annie Wang's *Lili*, we find here a parataxis that makes each of these responses, regardless of language, equal and simultaneous. If we were to incorporate a notion of wanderwords and translingualism (the ways in which vernaculars transform and are made new in their contact with other languages in Lydia H. Liu's definition) into an understanding of the transnational aesthetic, this would add a consideration for the role of language in the transfer of nation, for the creation of new meaning in the contact zone between two languages (L. H. Liu 26).

In the third story from *Sour Heart*, ‘Our Mothers Before Them’, Annie’s uncle uses a Chinese word that she is unfamiliar with. She describes how “when [she] didn’t understand a word [she] imagined a hole where the word was supposed to land” (J. Zhang 107). Later in this story, we see a visualisation of these ‘language holes’. As her mother sings karaoke in Chinese, Annie hears “[_____] / *may be broken, can [_____] / wind [_____] / rain*”, and “*You and I are like [_____] / birds*” (J. Zhang 124). In imagining ‘holes’, Annie fashions spaces that are not *only* blank—they also mobilise a multiplicity of interpretations that defer any single meaning ‘landing’, from occupying the ground of signification. We also find untranslated words in both Chinese characters and in *pinyin* (the official romanisation system used in mainland China) throughout *Sour Heart*. In ‘My Days and Nights of Terror’, Mande responds with frustration to judgments of her English: “Yes, I mispronounced “stereo” [but that’s because] I wouldn’t have an opportunity to say “Mom, can you turn up the stereo?” I would say, “可不可以把音响关轻一点”” (J. Zhang 204). A footnote is provided for these characters, yet the reader (who is made implicit in the retort) is denied the access and translation that has been set up: “Sorry, no translation currently available”, the footnote reads (204). With a transnational aesthetic, translation is not necessarily favoured over that which remains unrevealed. A transnational aesthetic might open up space between languages, or between signification and that which remains unknown or unspecified.

Returning to the passage in this chapter’s epigraph, Christina asks the “bag of [her] family” whether there is “a home for us somewhere”, and is met with requests for neighbourhoods, cities and territories across the world (J. Zhang 299). Nestled at the end of the list, after a vote for “Washington Heights!”, is one for “E flat!” (299). We find out in the first story from the collection, in which Christina is also the protagonist, that E Flat is the name Christina and her parents have given to East Flatbush. They do so because they

“loved the sound of E Flat on the piano and [they] liked recasting [their] world in a more beautiful, melodious light” (5). From the later chorus of her family, a minor note is struck—a moment of melody from a single note imagined alongside those struck by the rest of her family. But this is also a moment of discordance. Each member of the family has cast their vote for somewhere to collectively make home. But there are ‘too many’ options—single places that must always stand apart, single notes that cannot, seemingly, be played together. The excitement of the possibility of familial unity and reconnection transfers into an angst about their inability to ever inhabit a single space. How are they all—this network of transnational, familial connections—to settle in one place? How can the ‘heights’ and the ‘flat[s]’ ever be united, rather than listed separately? How can all of these notes ever be played together? From Lionnet and Shih’s aesthetic framework, we can question how this ‘minor’ moment may or may not work itself out; how might or might not the family be brought into harmony?

Christina’s transnational reunion with her family creates a polyphony of possibility. Somewhat lost within this transnation, Christina descends, with a promise to relocate her dispersed family on ‘solid ground’. This final phrase, ‘we will land wherever there is solid ground, I promise’ creates a split in meaning—a pull away from the transnation back to the grounding of geo-political territory *and* an invocation of the extent of the world-spanning Chinese diaspora. Earlier in the story, Christina’s father had brought home a map of the world and a tin of thumbtacks. Together, they push the tacks into each location around the world in which they have relatives: China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Atlanta and so on. As Christina’s mother traces the diasporic movements of their family, she muses: “‘Wouldn’t it be nice if instead of all this [...] being scaled to the whole world, wouldn’t it be nice if this were our own private continent?’” (J. Zhang 295). “‘Maybe we can think of this as a blueprint for our future home’”, her father returns: a home in which the networked

strands of dispersed family can be brought together, worked into a design for a space of reconnection across geopolitical borders (295).

The ‘Transnation’ and ‘No Man’s Land’ in Chuang Hua’s *Crossings*

One novel from the corpus studied in this thesis is particularly pertinent for reading with regard to transnationalism and the transnational aesthetic. *Crossings* is the only known literary work of Stella Yang Copley, a reclusive writer who immigrated from China to the United States at some point in the 1940s or 50s, and who published under the pseudonym Chuang Hua. The primary plot is one of a toxic international love affair between protagonist (and focaliser for the majority of the novel) Fourth Jane and her French lover, whom she meets after she stops working for her father and moves to France. This story is joined, in a seemingly disjunctive, nonlinear arrangement, by strands of narrative about the twisted, knotty dynamics of life in a large family, in the wake of the controversial marriage of Fifth James to a white woman; grief at the death of a grandmother and a father; the constraints of national tradition whilst living in another nation; belonging across borders; and much more. The third person narrator leaps, in the space of a paragraph, between different time periods, locations, focalisers and perspectives, and the reader must reconstruct the story presented to them as collage. The disjointed structure of the novel mirrors the kaleidoscopic collocation of identities that are accrued and refused in the mind of Fourth Jane. Each crossing she undertakes, whether geographical or affective, adds new points of reference and identification whilst also dislodging some of those that might previously have seemed fixed.

Crossings was published in 1968, but afforded little commercial or critical attention until being recovered from obscurity by Amy Ling in 1982. Since then, *Crossings* has been hailed as Asian America’s first modernist novel. Subsequent critical approaches to *Crossings* have often focused on its modernist elements, as well as investigating how it

simultaneously moves towards postmodernism.⁴² It has also been read for its Chinese components, both thematically and aesthetically.⁴³ *Crossings* arguably has all of these characteristics, as well as being a proleptic treatment of transnational migration. Hua's novel was published over two decades before *Nations Unbound*, yet Fourth Jane's international crossings match a contemporary definition of 'transnational activity'. We are told that Fourth Jane, for instance, "had packed and unpacked so often [...] she knew the gestures by heart, could repeat them in sleep" (Hua 75). *Crossings* challenges the notion of transnationalism as a contemporary phenomenon, suggesting in turn that a literary transnational framework need not be restricted to contemporary texts.

As with many American modernist writers, Chuang Hua and her obliquely autobiographical protagonist live transnationally: physically so, with Fourth Jane's frequent crossings between America and France, but also psychologically so, traversing back and forth between affective connections to America and China primarily. Exceeding bi-national conceptions of migrant narratives, *Crossings* extends a history of modernist writing that exists across multiple borders. Ramazani's comment that the "modernists translated their frequent geographic displacement and transcultural alienation into a poetics of dissonance and defamiliarization" holds equally true of Hua's novel (25). Hua thus utilises the "vocabulary" of "intercultural collisions and juxtapositions, [...] epistemic instabilities and decenterings" that was, according to Ramazani, developed by the modernists, but from it creates new and further decentred writing through an innovative use of Chinese and Chinese American context (Ramazani 99).

⁴² Amy Ling, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, Karen An-Hwei Lee, Monica Chiu, Wen-ching Ho and Li Shu-yan read *Crossings* as a text with modernist features, while Weimin Tang and Yichin Shen explore it as a text moving towards postmodernism.

⁴³ Lesley Chin Douglass's 'Finding the Way: Chuang Hua's *Crossings* and Chinese Literary Tradition' is the most influential essay to study the influence of Chinese literary tradition and form in *Crossings*. She proposes that *Crossings* "transports us to China", whilst I suggest that it conveys us to somewhere that is not necessarily China or America (Chin Douglass 52).

Spatialisations Beyond the Nation: The 'Transnation' and 'No Man's Land'

Postcolonial literary theorist Bill Ashcroft imagines that a new spatiality is created through the Andersonian 'imagined community' of transnationalism. This is a space that Ashcroft calls the 'transnation'. Following Homi Bhabha, he depicts this transnation as "an 'in-between' space", a kind of transcendental psycho-scape: a space without boundaries that "injects the principle of hope into the equation", allowing identity and subjectivity to be constituted beyond the remit of "one definitive people, nation or even community", thus becoming a "space without boundaries" (Ashcroft 'Globalization, Transnation and Utopia' 16-19).⁴⁴ If, for Bhabha, culture's 'in-between' is an interstitial space that refuses stable formations, facilitating cultural encounter and hybridity that contradicts hegemonic representations of discreet cultures, then Ashcroft's 'transnation' is the result of mapping this imagined space.

Ashcroft describes the "transnation" as the "fluid, migrating *outside* of the state that begins *within* the nation", populated by "subjects who live in-between the categories by which subjectivity is normally constituted" ('A Borderless World' 170-1, emphasis in original). The transnation is a space both within and beyond the nation, a space of the imagination above the solid earth of geo-political place. As such, it is a space populated by subjects conceivable as either subversively autonomous, or as unstructured and formless. Ashcroft goes on to argue that the mobility of the transnation need not "be a permanent condition of displacement, loss, and exile", because alongside the "fragmentation of transnational cultures" the transnation offers the "promise of hegemonic unification offered by globalization" ('A Borderless World' 171). Yet in *Crossings*, Fourth Jane *does* often feel her experience in an equivalent transnational space to be one of loss. In *Crossings*, the

⁴⁴ Ashcroft repeats verbatim the phrase "The mobility and in-betweenness of the transnation injects the principle of hope into the equation" from his 2010 chapter 'Globalization, Transnation and Utopia' in his 2015 chapter 'A Borderless World', indicating his continued belief in the utopian potentiality of the transnation.

‘transnation’ that Fourth Jane inhabits is a ‘no man’s land’: a place of paralysis, displacement and dehumanisation. As with Christina in *Sour Heart*, Fourth Jane’s ‘transnation’ is crowded with connections, and her individual affective experience is of the threat of loss—loss of associations, of affection, of home, of memories, of solid ground. It would be dangerous to settle in this no man’s land, necessitating a continual shuttling back and forth between the communities and identities that surround it.

No man’s land is a metaphor introduced directly in the novel, and the context in which Fourth Jane uses the term is revealing:

Our engagement in Korea paralyzed me. I saw with dread my two lives ebbing. Each additional day of estrangement increased the difficulty of eventual reconciliation, knowing the inflexibility of Chinese pride. In that paralysis I lived in no man’s land, having also lost America since the loss of one entailed the loss of the other. Moments I thought of giving up one for the other, I had such longings to make a rumble in the silence. But both parts equally strong canceled out choice. (Hua 122)

The Korean War is a conflict that Fourth Jane feels as an embattled encounter between two senses of her self—the ‘our’ that she believes implicates her in both America’s and China’s hostile engagement in Korea. The war transforms the cohabitation of these dual national claims upon her into a paralysing internal struggle in which both lives ‘ebb’—receding from shored up stability, moving beyond the terra firma of fixed identity into the choppy waters of ‘no man’s land’. This no man’s land is a conflict zone in which both ‘parts’ of her, equally strong, cancel one another out, leaving her feeling dehumanised and impotent. In effect, Jane is so *moved* by the affect of the war, that she becomes transfixed. Jane’s subjectivity is not characterised here by continual movement, but by ‘paralysis’, and a shell-shocked ebbing away of agency. She longs to make a ‘rumble in the silence’—a drive, in the depersonalised topography of this space, not only to be heard, but also to destabilise the ground on and beyond which she exists.

On many levels, no man’s land functions as a metaphor for the transnational imaginary. It is an imagined space that is at once a conflict zone between two or more

different nations, and a liberatory—albeit hazardous—space in which one might transcend the human form. It is a metaphor for the transnational aspects of migration: for the process of ‘crossing over’, and for negotiating the in-between. But unlike the space of the transnation, no man’s land is also a battlefield, a purgatory, a ‘threshold’ (a word we find regularly repeated in *Crossings*) that cannot stop being crossed. It is no coincidence that it is through the context of American involvement in the Korean War that Fourth Jane invokes the idea of no man’s land. Repurposing a term that came to prominence earlier in the century to describe the horrors of the Great War’s trench warfare, Fourth Jane describes her own subjecthood during America’s military involvement in Asia in the same terms. As in Jenny Xie’s ‘Rootless’, discussed in the Introduction, the migrant subject’s relationship with and negotiation of China and America is displaced onto an alternative Asian spatiality. In this instance, between and beyond two entrenched national identities, lies a no man’s land in which the self does battle with the other-as-self.

As Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease determine, the Korean War synchronised the “domestic and transnational aspects of the Cold War State”, leading to:

The securing of US hegemony throughout the transpacific region, and the justification of Cold War ideological oppositions. It was the Korean War and not World War II that led to the establishment of a permanent standing US army, that authorized the formation of the national security state, and that transformed the United States into an empire of military bases abroad and a vast military-industrial complex at home to service that empire. (Yuan and Pease 4)

Whilst previously the Cold War had remained ‘cold’—a chiefly ideological and technological battle—the Korean War was decidedly ‘hot’, and its heat was felt across the transpacific. At the same time that numerous decolonization movements were taking place in the Southeast-Asian Pacific (in the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam), America was consolidating its military, political and economic hegemony throughout East and Southeast Asia (Yuan and Pease 4). In the arena of the Korean War, the paradoxes and conflicts of the transpacific played out. In *Crossings*, these conflicts

coalesce in Fourth Jane's psychic figuration of the transnational 'no man's land' she has come to inhabit.

The association of no man's land with rootlessness and homelessness is not exclusive to this novel. Amy Ling remarks that Chuang Hua is indebted stylistically to modernists like Woolf, Hemingway, and Faulkner (Ling 'A Rumble' 28). We find leitmotifs of crossing national, cultural and parental barriers in the literature of numerous popular contemporary authors—Amy Tan, Jhumpa Lahiri, Zadie Smith and Salman Rushdie to name a few (Ling 'A Rumble' 28). In Rushdie's essay 'Imaginary Homelands', he writes that those migrants who "are now partly of the West" feel sometimes that they "straddle two cultures", and at other times, that they "fall between two stools" (15). This sense of either standing over (straddling) a border that appears as an absence beneath the migrant's mobile form, *or* of falling into the no man's land between two apparently solid grounds, resonates with the dual registers of transnationalism that *Crossings* proleptically explores.

Fourth Jane finds herself both unable to settle and immobilised by her inability to do so. In her Parisian apartment, Fourth Jane enters a chronic state of stupor, physically resisting dislocations in an echo of the paralysis she felt about the Korean War: "On certain days moving from one room to another in her apartment was the only displacement she felt capable of undertaking" (Hua 116). In *Crossings*, a French city resembling Paris is the central geographical locus beyond which no man's land exists, serving as a geographical mid-point to the transnational space between China and America, and as a historical reminder of the Great War's French battlefields. The association of *Crossings* with modernism is thanks in part to Fourth Jane's crossover with those American modernists who made Paris their home in the early twentieth century.

Passing from one room to the next in her Parisian apartment exerts such a toll on Jane that even crossing this domestic limen is almost too much for her. However, paradoxically, she chooses this accommodation precisely for its facilitation of her rootlessness: she desires

a place with “white walls and not too much furniture”—a place to enable her impermanence, to move within and beyond without distraction or restriction (Hua 11). This white, sterile room links Fourth Jane’s transnational being to her father’s hospital room, a location frequently returned to in the novel, and a site from which he eventually passes on into another type of no man’s land. Experiencing this bond beyond geographical space, Fourth Jane finds herself awakened in the Paris apartment in a state of limbo: “She saw white walls, ceiling, floor, some furniture about but did not know where she was. Certainly this must be death she thought. [...] She had managed to enter death wrapped in white sheets, a crossing not so difficult as one would imagine” (Hua 124). At the moment between sleep and wakefulness, Jane experiences her environment as one of multiplicity. Distinct locales are stacked atop one another: the aesthetics of her father’s hospital room, her French apartment, and the purgatorial unknown. As the sound of water trickling from the air conditioner returns her to consciousness, Fourth Jane feels “somehow unrelieved by the waking” (124).

Fourth Jane lives in a state of reductive transience. “Winds blow from all sides”: winds that push Jane ever onwards, uproot her, carry her forward, but that are met by winds from the opposite direction, that buffet and resist, still and shift (Hua 204). She paradoxically inhabits a space and a state of homelessness—a rootlessness that crosses borders with her. This is exemplified in Dyadya’s pained introduction of Fourth Jane to his nurse: “My Fourth ... you have not met ... today returned abroad” (82).⁴⁵ The ambivalence of ‘returned abroad’ highlights the possibility that both the place returned *from* and the place returned *to* is ‘abroad’ for Fourth Jane. Within Fourth Jane’s transnation, the “[f]arm house, field, solitary tree [and] distant mountains” she remembers from her childhood in China “have fused, have become one with the American landscape” (125). For the majority of her life,

⁴⁵ Dyadya is how Fourth Jane’s father is referred to throughout the novel.

the consequence of this fusion for Fourth Jane is that: “In [her] mind [she] expelled [her]self from both” Chineseness and Americanness (121). In this state, Fourth Jane positions herself in no man’s land—exiled from both of her self-identified but refused nations, and thus universally ‘abroad’.

Fourth Jane is particularly cognisant of borders and boundaries. Hua frequently erects images of barriers and borders, especially around gardens, which are spatialities of conflicting significance in *Crossings*. In each place they come to settle, Fourth Jane and her family tend a garden, establishing roots. Yet as such, after each crossing to a new plot, these roots multiply, extending beyond the bounds of any single site, and becoming at once uprooted and rhizomatically interpenetrating. Fourth Jane’s father encourages his family to: “*Imagine* the Chinese have brought the lichee tree to America and have planted it in American soil”, and thus to *acknowledge* how their own transplanting might bear fruit (Hua 17, emphasis mine). But Fourth Jane carries both rooted- *and* rootless-ness with her. In Jane’s American family home, for instance, “[c]hicken coop wiring two feet high and all around fenced out rabbits” (87). The chicken coop wiring, evocative again of the barbed-wire of history’s no man’s lands, protects the sanctity of the family’s garden from interlopers, but also encloses Fourth Jane and her family. Jane is constantly aware of the physical boundaries that continue to contain her and determine the mapping of her movements. Standing in the centre of a square carpet that is referred to as “a garden enclosed by four white walls”, she discerns in its patterns “oases and deserts, scorpions and camels, departures, wanderings and homecomings woven inextricably there” (187). In this garden-carpet, Jane travels around the world and back, yet remains affixed to a central locus, which limits her, and stops her flying fully ‘beyond’ its boundaries. Living already within the circumscription of the nation’s borders, Chuang Hua and Fourth Jane begin to investigate their own relationships with and beyond various margins and boundaries.

Reading the Riverbank: Paying Attention to Transnational Aesthetics

In order to explore the space of no man's land as it manifests in *Crossings*, it is worth reading a passage through the lens of transnational aesthetics. The following passage can inform us about Fourth Jane's transition between nation and transnation, land and no man's land:

And in the spring bloated corpses flowed in the current of the yellow river, bobbing among torn roots and bits of watermelon rinds gnawed to the skin flowed under the bridge connecting their land to that of the local military commander who cultivated sugarcane scientifically in the Japanese way. By the riverbank under the shadow of the wooden bridge they dug in the shallow water for that sweet red-skinned ling shaped like tightly closed lips. Then they dashed across the bridge to the other bank and into the waving cane fields. Their amahs hacked away at the slenderest stalks of cane on the edge of the planting, choosing the reddest, therefore most tender and full of juice inside sweet to chew and suck on. They sat in the field of canes their backs to the bridge. In the distance they saw the gray city walls saw-toothed against the argentine skies. (Hua 48-9)

The 'and' that begins the paragraph does not logically conjoin it to its preceding line, which found Fourth Jane offering water biscuits to her French lover. But neither is this paragraph entirely discrete from that event. The 'and' threads together an association between food and the bloated corpses of this recollection from childhood in China. Throughout the novel, food is juxtaposed, associated and contrasted with death and the grotesque. Whilst preparing a chicken for her French lover, Fourth Jane watches a drunk vomiting on the street below her, "emitting a sharp scream at each new convulsion of body which preceded a surge of vomit" (62). Later, after buying sea urchins for the Frenchman, who "devoured creatures of the sea", she cuts their tops away, "exposing grainy orange matter and soft slithering ooze that must have been digestive systems, blood and vomit" (97). These are just two other examples of how Hua marries life and death, incorporation and abjection. Her characters are forced to confront the viscosity of life's sustenance, to reconnect with the mortality that connects man and beast (no man), regardless of nation or transnation.

As Sau-ling Cynthia Wong submits in *Reading Asian American Literature*, we find many instances of eating in Asian American literature, often functioning as metaphors for

the “unusually difficult ‘swallowing’” of American life that ensures the “survival of family and ethnic group” (26). The act of *assimilation* thus creates a link between the consumption of food, and the integration of the migrant subject into their new nation (S. C. Wong *Reading* 77). However, the association of assimilation with vulgar, abjected substances in *Crossings* refuses the promise of assimilation as sustenance and survival in new lands. Hua is concerned with the limits of endurance and consumption—there is only so much that can be assimilated and that the body can contain.

The passage resumes with: ‘[a]nd in the spring bloated corpses flowed in the current of the yellow river, bobbing among torn roots and bits of watermelon rinds gnawed to the skin flowed under the bridge connecting their land to that of the local military commander who cultivated sugarcane scientifically in the Japanese way’. The winding, choppy current of the sentence sweeps up the signification of both bloated corpses and gnawed watermelon rinds—the material trace of starvation—and deposits them both at a denotation of cultural exclusivity: the sugarcane cultivated in a Japanese ‘way’, under the command of Japanese colonisers. The Japanese national ‘way’ has transnationalised—moved *beyond* the nation of origin—yet is reinstated according to the specifics of the local land. The transnational aesthetic, in this instance, evokes an on-running, continuous stream that connects peoples and histories across nations, in uneven power relations. Transportable allegiance to Japanese culture has brought about both cultivation and casualty here. Pertinently, the site of this trauma is the Yellow River, often regarded as the birthplace of ancient Chinese civilization. An element of localised trauma is introduced to the narrative, and as Monica Chiu asserts, these “atrocities negatively impact and continuously disrupt an individual’s present psychology” (*Filthy Fictions* 30). What this suggests then is that to some extent, Fourth Jane’s unmoored, fractured psychology is a result of her having carried China’s traumas with her, down the Yellow River, and across oceans. Through rivers and oceans,

the natural borders to ‘grounded’ identities, Hua transports competing contexts into new settings.

Continuing with the passage, on the banks of this fouled river, an unspecified ‘they’—perhaps a depersonalised representation of Fourth Jane and her siblings—dig for ‘sweet red-skinned ling shaped like tightly closed lips’. The word ‘ling’ here functions translingually: an obscure word calling to mind images of long, sleek, deep-running fish or, more obviously, rhyming with ‘thing’, and thus calling forth ambiguity. To pin the word down, or to pull it from the bank, this ‘ling’ most likely refers to the Chinese word 菱 (*ling*), translating to water caltrops—an aquatic plant containing a large, edible seed. Although water caltrops are native to China, they were introduced into the USA in the late nineteenth century, where they are now classed as an invasive species. The ‘they’ of this passage, if understood to be Fourth Jane’s family, will also migrate to America, where Chinese residents and citizens have also historically been perceived themselves as a kind of invasive species.⁴⁶ The ling call forth a cultural and linguistic specificity that has been brought into a ‘major’ language, transforming it from within, whilst pointing towards the transnational connections between China and America.

The passage ends with a description of crossing over, which functions as a symbol both of migration, and of death: ‘Then they dashed across the bridge to the other bank and into the waving cane fields. Their amahs hacked away at the slenderest stalks of cane on the edge of the planting, choosing the reddest, therefore most tender and full of juice inside

⁴⁶ Interestingly though, as in *A Map of Betrayal*, racism against Chinese people in America is never directly addressed in this novel. Instead, it is the family’s hired help who are racialised—we meet “[b]lond Scots amah”, “Katie the Irish cook with mouse-colored hair”, “black amah” and “Lisa the Austrian” (Hua 58-9, 108). It is the *Frencl*man who engages in stereotypes, though these tend to be about Americans in general: Americans drink too much milk, take too many pills and so on. *Crossings* decentralises the importance of Asian racial identity. Chineseness is the default subject position here; *Crossings*’ lack of explicit address of Asian racialization in America is subversive precisely in its refusal to attribute Asian Otherness.

sweet to chew and suck on'. They traverse the bridge over the river of corpses, but do they emerge in a promised land, plenteous with the sweetest crops, or in an Underworld? There is a clear analogy between this crossing and the desired results of migration to America, yet in a transnational aesthetic reading, this analogy merges with another allusion to passing on to a spiritual world above or below. There is no single, constant locale. It is in passages like this that we find evidence for Helena Grice's assertion that *Crossings* produces a sense of "spatial palimpsest of Fourth Jane's many real and imagined locations" (*Negotiating* 215).

Having crossed over to an apparent promised land, '[t]hey sat in the field of canes their backs to the bridge. In the distance they saw the gray city walls saw-toothed against the argentine skies'. Amongst the bountiful cane, they sit with their 'backs to the bridge', their eyes focused on the city walls in the distance. After having crossed over, further borders and boundaries appear on the horizon, and it is these that they fix their gaze upon. The gray of the city walls begins to blur into the silvered, argentine expanse of sky, its barrier thus extending from the ground up to a space 'beyond'. Even after having crossed over, they remain focused on the further delimitations of their existences. Donald E. Pease argues that "[t]ransnational citizen-subjects are always already mixed, heterogeneous, and even paradoxical entities" with "inherently split subject position[s]" (49, 57). A transnational aesthetic is thus one that evokes the heterogeneous experience of migration as it is imagined, created and appreciated.

No Man's Land as Women's Land

There is, however, another way that the metaphor of 'no man's land' can be understood to operate in *Crossings*. No man's land can be interpreted as a space in which women—'not men'—exist. In 2008, Wen-ching Ho warned that existing critical work on the novel had "fail[ed] to puzzle out a key thematic strand—that of gender inequality and its concomitant psychological and emotional impact on the female protagonist" (157). Following this call, it

is important to explore how the transnational metaphor of no man's land interacts with the theme of gendered inequality in *Crossings*.

As previously mentioned, Fourth Jane's existence in this narrative is one of fragmentation. This is a result, in part, of Fourth Jane's transnational existence, but is also paralleled by the disjuncture she experiences between the expectations of her gender roles. Natalie Nadon highlights how Fourth Jane regularly adopts the traditional Chinese role of a son, evidenced by Dyadya's expectation that she will step into his shoes at the bank; by Dyadya's desire that she marry a man with the same family name so that she can carry on that name the way a son would; and by providing Dyadya with a blood transfusion, metaphorically making her the direct inheritor of his bloodline (Nadon 85). At the same time, however, Dyadya also insists that she remain a traditionally obedient daughter, leading Fourth Jane to feel "hard pressed to reconcile all of these disparate parts of her identity" (Nadon 85).

The result of this fragmentary existence is that, as Yichin Shen concludes, the "only locus from which [Fourth Jane] could draw her sense of identity is the unity represented by her parents and the 'oneness' constructed by her family" (Y. Shen 280). Specifically, it is Dyadya who offers this 'oneness' through his retention of traditional Chinese patriarchal control over the family in America. He is portrayed as a caring and devoted father, yet his dominating presence is also made clear. In one extended section of the novel, Dyadya records a kind of diary, profiling each of his children with headings referring to the number of the stocks and shares accounts he holds for each of them. His dedication to his offspring is clear: "Every little attention brings further progress" (Hua 172). In one particularly tender scene, Dyadya drives three hours to see Fourth Jane in college and gives her a new Royal typewriter. He finds her busy though, and so: "Good-bye take care of yourself and he got back into the car and drove all the way back" (Hua 77). Nevertheless, by referring to his children by their account numbers he not only underscores his control over them, but also

turns them into *investments* that promise some return. Except his seventh child (Account 595227), whom he loves as the last-born “like all the rest but a little more”, Dyadya summarises his relationship with each of his children as such: “I love you because you are mine” (177, 179).

Shaped in part by her parents, Fourth Jane is conditioned for her no man’s land. She is between traditional gender roles, between asset and progeny, trying to ‘fit’ into the family as well as multiple transnational cultures. Fourth Jane’s name is one of the first indications of her no man’s land existence for the reader of the novel. Assigned an ordinal position in the birth chronology of her siblings, Fourth Jane is the middle child of seven, caught between categorisation as an older or younger child. Fourth Jane is also a name caught between the Chinese tradition of designating birth order, and the conventions of an Anglophone society. Jane’s Chinese name, meanwhile, is Chuang Hua: a name that blurs the psychic, generic and ontological boundaries between author and character. Finally, Chuang Hua is a name that can be conceived as both masculine and feminine, a name “belonging [...] both to the male attribute and the female” in the words of the narrator, thus placing her nominally in a no man’s land between the genders (Hua 31).

If Jane’s no man’s land is shaped by Dyadya, so too is it by Ngmah (the mother of the family). An early passage gives access and form to Ngmah’s psyche. Ngmah spends her time in this passage making “small even stitches, sewing neatly and rhythmically in time with her thoughts”, unlike in the “Far East”, where she can “have clothes cut expertly and sewn to measure” (Hua 15). Her sewing stitches together her corporeal activity and her thoughts. Drawing together the fragments, she metatextually attempts to weave a coherent narrative:

Days, weeks, months, years, the pains of birth, absences, voyages, wars, losses, solitude, storms at sea, thirst and hunger, her Father dead, miles of silks newly dyed floating sullen and heavy in the waters of the canal, silks twisted and looped oozing dripping colors not yet fastened into the fabric from overnight soaking in the canal. (Hua 16)

This passage bears a striking resemblance to one written by Randolph Bourne in ‘Trans-national America’. Bourne wrote that:

America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. Any movement which attempts to thwart this weaving, or to dye the fabric any one color, or disentangle the threads of the strands, is false to this cosmopolitan vision. (Bourne 96)

The transnational aesthetic here takes the form of a woven fabric: an intertwining of one land with another, a weaving together of threads formed from the lived experiences of multiple localities. The syntax of the passage from *Crossings*, coming after Ngmah has “threaded the needle and continued to stitch”, parallels the practiced, measured, regular movement of her stitching hand (Hua 16). It continues, rhythmically and relentlessly, joining the ripped fabric of her migratory life: the passage of time, pain, loss, lack, silence, violence—all she sews together to re-fashion her narrative world. Symbolically, she weaves together ‘miles of silks’ dyed by new experiences, knotted by the winding pathways of her migration. The colours of her new experiences leach into the waters of the canal. The canal, one of the spaces of her migration, becomes a receptor of that which can be drawn from her stitched-together, transnational existence. In the waterway, this mother’s story soaks away; into the waters of travel leach the shades of her existence.

Evident in Chuang Hua’s equation of Ngmah’s life with that of a seamstress is the figurative desire to *fit*. Ngmah imagines the life of a master tailor who “knows the secret” (Hua 16). This tailor is afforded the luxury of inherent privilege: the unacknowledged freedom to offer “[b]orders or no borders”—implying the irrelevance of borders to those ‘masters’ of the cultural elite (Hua 16). The tailor’s ‘secret’ is that he spends “hours and hours [...] fitting” (Hua 16). Ngmah, on the other hand, as she stands looking into mirrors “in front of her and [...] flanking her and [...] behind her”, is, like Fourth Jane, encircled by numerous versions of herself, all of which are trying to fit in (16).

Man Encroaching on No Man's Land: Healthcare and the Tao

The reader is soon met with the notion that all is not well in Fourth Jane's no man's land. The women in the novel are frequently associated with imagery of illness. Natalie Nadon investigates how "pills, hospital imagery, and wounds in *Crossings* signify the often invisible injuries the characters experience, and the healing that they seek" (77). The relationship between psychic injury and images of illness and healing is, moreover, gendered.

Fourth Jane's Grandmother dies alone after having "tor[n] out" the "[r]ubber tubes inserted in various orifices man made and nature made and taped to her body" (Hua 32). This image and sentence is the first in one of the novel's unlabelled chapters, and functions as both a continuation of and break from the final sentence of the previous chapter, in which Grandmother declares to the family gathered around her: "Out of my womb came these generations" (31). In this sentence, there is a fertile progression from generation to generations, which is undercut in the space of a chapter break with a kind of reversion or unpicking of this same logic: grandmother's ailments are treated through the probing and plugging of the orifices and openings of her body. She refuses the masculinised treatment of her body, but in doing so, loses her life. This is the precedent established early in the novel for women escaping 'man's land': an alternative *no man's land* of the afterlife. Women's entrance to no man's land is treated in *Crossings* as both a violent renunciation of man's advances, with Grandmother tearing out the rubber tubes, and as a lonely departure from life and vitality, from the generativeness of her body.

Images of healthcare and mortality extend throughout the novel, and for Fourth Jane become symbolically interlaced with concerns about migration, sexuality, and womanhood. Upon returning to America from France, Fourth Jane is given "a shot at the airport which made [her] ill" (Hua 144). In this short, seemingly inconsequential sentence, we are reminded of the various degrees of governmental control over Jane's migrant body, and

presented with the insinuation that she is perceived as a threat to the health of America. Her female, transnational migrant body is both threatened and threatening.

In the space of three pages, Fourth Jane takes three sets of pills, with the final medication taken after having had sex with the Frenchman for the first time (Hua 38-40). The description of Fourth Jane taking this last set of pills is striking:

Under the harsh beam of light hanging above the cabinet she saw her image, cut off at the waist, mirrored against the shadowed confines of dull porcelain walls. Her face appeared intolerably alien and unclaimed as the space and light around her. (Hua 40)

In the reflection of the medicine cabinet's glass, Fourth Jane 'sees' her image in the glaring light—a light that violently severs her body-image. Identifying her raced and gendered form—a Chinese female body surrounded by porcelain and confined to the shadows—the light illuminates her 'intolerable' strangeness. This alien appearance extends both from and towards the space around her—her apparent alienness and lack of humanity seeps out of and spreads towards the land and space she inhabits.

In Taoism and other forms of traditional Chinese philosophy, brightness and light are gendered male. In the *Tao Te Ching*, for instance, we are told that 萬物負陰而抱陽 ("The ten thousand things carry shade / And embrace sunlight. / Shade and sunlight, yin and yang") (Lao-Tzu 42). This can be interpreted as meaning that all things bear the negative principle (*yin*) and embrace the positive principle (*yang*). Yin and yang, visualised through the *taiji* symbol, are often conceived in gendered terms, with *yin* coming to signify femininity, darkness, the moon, passivity, coldness, and interiority, whilst *yang* signifies masculinity, brightness, the sun, vigor, heat and exteriority. Seeking the succour and care of medication after her first sexual encounter with the Frenchman, Fourth Jane is subjected to the violent severance of her form under the masculine gaze of the light, which penetrates her interiority by cutting off the bottom of her image, the base and root of her reflected personhood.

As Chuang Hua frames it, no man's land can be perceived as a formation that has been influenced by Taoist thought. On the bookshelf of the family home rest "several copies of the *Tao Te Ching* translated into English by a literary friend" of Dyadya's, their multiplicity a measure of their importance to the family as well as a symbol of their philosophical and hermeneutical range (Hua 72)⁴⁷. Fourth Jane also gives the Frenchman a translated copy of the text, in an attempt to communicate something of herself to him. The *Tao Te Ching* is thus a text that informs Fourth Jane and her family, as well as the transnational aesthetic of the novel. It is possible that Taoism also directly influenced Chuang Hua's conception of no man's land. As Lao-tzu writes in the *Tao Te Ching*, "No-thing enters no-space" (Lao-Tzu 43). This can be interpreted in several ways:

- (1) No-thing enters no-space—'no-thing' crosses the boundary between space and no-space. Paradoxically, 'no-thing' becomes thing, crossing over into 'no-space', which becomes space⁴⁸.
- (2) No-*thing* enters no-space—no *thing* enters no-space, but a not-thing may cross over. If not a 'thing', what crosses into no-space may be immaterial—an idea, a spectre.
- (3) No-thing *enters* no-space—no-space has portals, no-thing can move beyond space to no-space.
- (4) *No*-thing enters *no*-space—the negative enters negative space.

⁴⁷ I refer to the '*Tao Te Ching*', 'Taoism' and the '*tao*' here for the sake of consistency. However, in standardised *pinyin*—the romanisation system used in the rest of this thesis—the 道德經 (*Tao Te Ching*) is spelt '*Daodejing*'. 'Daoism' and the '*dao*' are consequently its correlates.

⁴⁸ It is significant that Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo's translation of the *Tao Te Ching* speaks of no-thing entering no-space, as opposed to 'nothing'. If it spoke of the latter, the reader may infer that nothing is able to cross into no-space—it is an uninhabitable realm. With their translation, Addiss and Lombardo bypass the singularity of this interpretation.

(5) 無有入無間—the original Chinese text can be understood to mean that formless power holds universal influence.

These Taoist ideas and interpretations can shed some light on how the metaphor of no man's land as transnational formation is used in *Crossings*. Fourth Jane is, in the words of Monica Chiu, “unmoored in both body and psyche”, yet this unmooring is presented by Chuang Hua as a “fluidity within rigidity, an emancipation within boundaries, a critical self-acceptance amid social rejection, [...] the positive consequences of complicating the borders” (*Filthy* 26, 55). Set adrift from the solid ground of selfhood, Fourth Jane is the nothing able to cross between space and no-space, the nation and transnation, land and no man's land. She does so not in physical form, but in the realm of thought—a movement between landscape and psycho-scape that arguably offers to release her in part from the confines of the human form. However, moving back and forth between land and no man's land is not an entirely positive experience or mode of being for Fourth Jane.

If Fourth Jane achieves the ‘positive consequences’ of her complication of borders, as Chiu argues, she does not do so without considerable difficulty. The adverse effects of her crossings are established in part through the contrast between Fourth Jane's Taoist accomplishments and those of her Grandfather. The final chapter and scene of *Crossings* is imbued with a particularly Taoist essence:

Grandfather practices calisthenics. In the yard of his former gate keeper's house he makes studied movements of limbs and body. He is frail and each gesture is very precise. His eyes squint in the sun. His sight is clear. He retreats, advances, and with each change of movement he inhales and exhales. The air comes out of his mouth in puffs of vapor which dissolve in the morning air. (Hua 214)

Just a paragraph long, the chapter is textually as concise and measured as Grandfather's studied movements, and as ambivalent as the cycles of retreat and advance, inhalation and exhalation that he practices, creating a modulating, detached flux within which he generates

‘vapor’ and allows its release into nature. Chuang Hua foreshadows Grandfather’s Taoist exercises in her description of Fourth Jane’s reunion with the Frenchman:

They separated and came together, separated and came together from room to room and each time she had more to add about her trip, breathing less inconsequential sentences, phrases incomplete, exclamations, but always with reference to him and how she had missed him while doing this and that. (Hua 151)

However, Fourth Jane is not as successful as Grandfather in achieving Taoist order and alignment—her fluctuating movement is dependent on the Frenchman’s actions, and she must rely on him as a stable point of reference upon which to ground her transnational experience. Fourth Jane does not achieve the measured acceptance of flexibility and change exemplified in the fluid motion of Grandfather’s tai chi, or what Yichin Shen describes as the “delicate balance from one subject position to another” (285). For Jane, there is no ‘release’. Instead, her balance is skewed toward making attachments upon which to ground her crossings and transnational identity, regardless of their stability or safety. She embodies instead the paradoxical Taoist impossibility of ever finding the *tao*, the ‘way’: 道可道，非常道 (Tao called Tao is not Tao) (Douglass 54; Lao-Tzu 1). With both of her self-identified ‘lives’ ebbing away from her, Fourth Jane cannot find the ‘way’ to consolidate her fractured selfhood, and thus enters no man’s land—a seemingly negative space of silence and paralysis. Read with an attention to the transnational aesthetic, the Taoist resonances of *Crossings* become reflections on the relationships between transience and transcendence, the rhythms of the ‘natural’ world and a ‘supernatural’ world *beyond*, and the harmony (or lack thereof) in relationships inflected by differences in nation, gender, class, and race.

Conclusion

Returning from a trip to the cinema, Fourth Jane finds “the streets slippery with ice”, the sibilance threatening to sweep her over on one of the snow-banked, “unfrequented

crossings” (Hua 106). The movie that she and her brother had just gone to watch, moreover, moves Jane to tears with its portrayal of a character, “half child half woman”, who is caught midway across a stream and summoned by her estranged parents to “[c]ross. You don’t belong there. You belong with us” (Hua 105). She freezes, advancing a few steps, retreating a few steps. Fourth Jane is, perhaps, reminded of herself, living in a state and space of both transience and paralysis.

What we see throughout *Crossings* is a dialectic between cognitive and spatial situatedness and its transgression, which, as Weimin Tang articulates, “ignites [a] nostalgic yearning for the lost centre of self and sense of cultural belonging that is inherently tethered to the migratory existence” (W. Tang 28-9). With each boundary to be crossed comes a splitting and unmooring of identity and stable ground for Fourth Jane. If Fourth Jane *does* achieve any ‘positive consequences’ from her complication of borders, she does not do so without certain adverse effects. Fourth Jane’s transnational activity in *Crossings* never quite permits her anything as utopian as entry into a ‘transnation’.

A close reading of *Crossings* facilitates the use of a transnational scholarly framework that engages with migrant writing not purely on sociological terms, but also with a regard to aesthetics. This chapter has investigated one distinct device that is imbued with these qualities in *Crossings*: the metaphor of no man’s land. It is a formation that extends outward from Fourth Jane’s fractured psyche to a textual place *beyond*—a formation that comes to signify the negative potentiality of the space of the transnation, as well as an alternative space for the transnational female characters of this family, borne out of their intersectional exile from ‘manned’ land. Read through the metaphor of no man’s land, *Crossings* is a text that anticipates and antedates the discussion of transnationalism that would flourish several decades later.

The following chapter explores how migrants’ transnational connections have impacted global exchange. Specifically, it investigates how migrant writers have used and

been used by the global publishing industry, and considers to what extent their apparent foreignness has been capitalised upon, and whether they have been able to ‘write back’ against these formations.

Chapter Four

The Bind of the Native Informant and a 'Third Possibility' in Migrant Chinese Life Writing

What fails for me is that [...] virtually nothing is made of the fact that these guys are Koreans. I suppose in the alleged melting pot of America that might be a good thing, but for the book it doesn't lend anything even lightly exotic to the narrative or the characters.

—Rejection letter from unnamed publisher, received by Leonard Chang and quoted in 'Publishing U'

D.W. Griffith: I like your book very much.
Richard Wright: Thank you.

—*Erasure* (2001), by Percival Everett

Reading the Ethnic Autobiographer

The 'native informant' is a figure formed in the ethnographic encounter. In ethnographic research, the native informant is a 'local'—a spokesperson and translator for their language, community and culture. A Western researcher is responsible for processing the information supplied by the informant, thereby turning information into *knowledge*. The people used and employed as ethnographic native informants have been exploited and co-opted into systems of colonialism, have translated and been translated, have had their voices made subject to manipulation and redirection through the figure of the ethnographer and the institutions they represent. But focusing attention solely on colonial exploitation runs the risk of removing any sense of agency from the native informant.

In literary criticism, the 'native informant' label has become a term describing a certain type of author/researcher/artist, who mediates between their 'own', minority culture and the culture of the majority, by providing the latter with information about the former.

Werner Sollors describes an often involuntary process whereby ethnic writers “begin to function as translators of ethnicity to ignorant, and sometimes hostile, outsiders” (*Beyond* 250). In this form, the authorial native informant is a figuration (as well as a person) who, paradoxically, does not need to be ‘native’ in their present context nor to *intentionally* be an ‘informant’. The figure of the migrant writer has merged with the figure of the native informant—both are often understood as sources of information about their own perceived Otherness.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has provided a characteristically complex investigation into the figure of the native informant in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Through the realms of philosophy, literature, history and culture, Spivak charts the figure of the ‘Native Informant’ (Spivak ix). Ethnographic native informants, as Spivak understands them, are “denied autobiography” by the West, whilst serving as “blank[s]” that are generative of a text of cultural identity that only the West [...] could inscribe” (6). Through the paradox of a generative blank, the West masters the self- (and other-)telling of the colonial subject whilst denying their selfhood—the native informant is thus an “imagined and (im)possible perspective”, a “figure who, in ethnography, can only provide data, to be interpreted by the knowing subject for reading” (Spivak 9, 49). The transformation of the concept from *ethnographic* to *authorial* native informant is thus also an (im)possible one—a transmutation from “a site that can only *be* read, by definition, for the production of definitive descriptions”, to a subject who *speaks*, inevitably multivalently (Spivak 49, emphasis in original). What Spivak sees today is that “[i]ncreasingly, there is the self-marginalizing or self-consolidating migrant or postcolonial masquerading as a ‘native informant’” (6). This is a subject who performs analogously to the ethnographic native informant, but who, whilst marginalising a self, is also able to consolidate a self—thus putting them at a point of remove from the native informant even as they bear its mask.

Authorial and ethnographic native informants differ in one key aspect. Where the native informant of ethnographic research has their voice doubly mediated through an outsider to their society (the ethnographer), the native informant in literature seems to speak *directly* for and about ‘their’ people. In removing the mediation of the ethnographer, the literary native informant appears to a reader as both ‘authentic’ and reliable—the single medium between the reader and the ‘truth’. Yet whilst the ‘native’ side of the equation may signal unmediated communication, the ‘informant’ side must always be mediated. Once ideas have been translated for a different linguistic and cultural community, reduced into discrete pieces of information, and published in edited prose, the reader inevitably comes into contact with mediated knowledge. Literature and language are, inherently, sites of mediation.

Nevertheless, many forms and genres of literature are still read as the work of writers performing in the role of the native informant. Indeed, there is often an imperative from publishers for ‘ethnic’ and migrant authors to function in this capacity (as in the rejection Leonard Chang recalls receiving in the epigraph to this chapter).⁴⁹ The alignment of ethnic authors with native informants is by no means exclusive to Chinese or Asian American writers, or even migrant writers, and this chapter thus takes in part a comparative approach to analysis, in order to approach how these life writing texts conform with, adapt, refute or transcend the significations of the native informant figure across ‘ethnic’ and world literature.

⁴⁹ Similarly, Maxine Hong Kingston recalls being told by other Asian American authors that publishers are sending out “‘generic Maxine Hong Kingston rejection slip[s]’”—meaning that they have been advised to read Hong Kingston’s work for guidance on how ‘Chinese American literature’ should be written (Satake Blauvelt 84). Elsewhere, PP Wong shares an Asian American friend’s book rejection on the basis that “[t]he novel does not seem to fit into the genre of our current Asian authors and we do not know how to place it in the market” (n. pag.). Wong speculates that the ‘genre’ referred to are “tear-jerking literary novels about being tortured under Chairman Mao”, whilst her “friend’s novel was a contemporary comedy on growing up as an Asian-American” (PP. Wong n. pag.).

Life writing is particularly fertile ground for analysing the (apparent) appearance of the native informant figure, due to a correlation between the supposed truth-telling imperatives of both native informants and life writers.⁵⁰ This is a truth that is signed into being through the so-called ‘autobiographical pact’, as Phillipe Lejeune terms the imagined contract between autobiographer and reader (3). The pact assures the reader that the narrative being related refers to a verifiable history and the ‘real life’ of the autobiographer (Lejeune 3). Life writing by first generation Chinese migrants to America appears to offer the reader unmediated renderings of Chinese experience, promising to represent both a real account of life in China and the greater notion of ‘being Chinese’. But as in the representations of Chinatowns—Wang Ping’s ‘House of Anything You Wish’, for example—explored in Chapter One, the authenticity of these life writing narratives is often complicated and problematic. What accounts for the popularity of these life writing texts? Who gets to judge their verisimilitude? What are the stakes of life writing’s implicit/explicit pedagogic function? And what degree of agency do life writers have to subvert the role of the native informant? This chapter explores these questions with regard to the life writing texts written by the authors studied for this thesis. The ethnographic native informant is a now-universalised result of colonialism, as well as a mechanism of racialized disparity. Yet this figure, particularly in literature, also has creative agency—the ability to control the intention of cultural interpretation.

La Malinche, an Alternative Model of Dialectical Authority

In order to better understand the figure of the native informant, we might look to another figure of (cultural) translation/interpretation found in North American literature. This is the

⁵⁰ As we will see below, the borders of this generic categorisation are troubled by many of these texts. However, I use ‘life writing’ in this chapter as a term that always involves a writer presenting the narrative(s) of their own lives.

figure of La Malinche—the ‘native’ interpreter and adviser for the Spanish conquistadors, a slave and concubine to Hernán Cortés, and also the mother to his son. Like the native informant, La Malinche embodies the dialectic of co-optation and agency within a system of racialized/colonial inequity. By mapping the figure of La Malinche onto that of the native informant, we see how both engage in and with what we might call ‘dialectical authority’, as instruments and operators of cultural translation/interpretation. As such, La Malinche and the native informant are not only mechanisms of imperialism *or* disruptive voices of change, but may be able to produce a ‘third possibility’.

Although La Malinche, or Malinalli as she was named at birth, was a historical figure, the idea of her has since then become so symbolically charged and so frequently reworked in literature that she is best understood now as a trope, or as a literary construct, as Sandra Messinger Cypess puts it—one of the symbols that helps to forge an idea of the Mexican nation (Messinger Cypess 2). Laura Esquivel’s 2006 novel *Malinche* is perhaps the best known recent fictional exploration of La Malinche’s life and significance. One of the novel’s innovations is the marrying of prose narrative with codex narrative. In an introductory Author’s Note, Esquivel explains that the “ancient Mexicas told the epic poems of their people through images [...] called codices”, which were a “sacred mode with which to tell stories” (Esquivel vii-viii). The novel is thus accompanied by the “codex that Malinche might have painted”, representing “what the words narrate in another fashion” (Esquivel viii). The codices are filled with symbols. As in modern comics, a vocabulary of visual signifiers is utilised here in order to create narrative meaning. La Malinche is a master of languages, with scholars agreeing that she must have been a speaker of at least three tongues (Nahuatl, a Mayan language, and Spanish at the least). By including codices, Esquivel encourages the reader to experience something equivalent to La Malinche’s encounter with new languages: the reader is urged to become literate in a visual language that may at first seem indecipherable, but through repeated contact may begin to become clearer.

What Esquivel gestures towards in her dual modes of narration is the way in which translators and cultural interpreters must navigate two or more versions of the ‘same’ narrative, which must necessarily differ in form. The “two ways of storytelling—the written and the symbolic” remain distinct formally, whilst merging in the creation of meaning (Esquivel viii). For instance, whilst the meaning of some parts of the novel’s first codex may at first appear obscure, they are often later given context in the first prose chapter. The ruched band covering the mouth of the infant emerging from the figure of the female at the centre of the first codex is later given signification: “a small head poked out from between its mother’s legs with the umbilical cord caught in its mouth, as if a snake was gagging an infant” (Esquivel 4). The twirled, sperm-like icons that form the codex’s background are revealed later to be the ceaseless raindrops that drown out the mother’s groans, as if meaning is being fertilised at birth. The signification of the umbilical cord, which the grandmother takes “as a message from the god Quetzalcóatl”, who appears in serpent-form, intersects with the delivery of the “message” from the rain-god Tláloc, engendering another union of form and implication. From this storm of meaning, magnified in the novel’s doubleness of narrative form, we rely on the benefit of using prose as an interpretative technology, much as the conquistadors utilised La Malinche as their own technology of interpretation.

La Malinche comes to understand that she wields a certain degree of power in her position as interpreter. Cortés feels that “[n]ot knowing the language of the natives was the same as sailing through a black sea. For him [the Mayans’] unintelligible voices made him feel insecure, vulnerable” (Esquivel 35). In this vulnerability, La Malinche senses an opportunity—she can become indispensable in her ability to act as ‘La Lengua’, *the tongue*, for Cortés—the mediating figure between two worlds. If cultural translation sits alongside “cannons and horses” in the arsenal of Cortés’s conquest, then La Malinche is his most cutting edge military technology (Esquivel 37). She comes to find that “whoever controls

information, whoever controls meaning, acquires power" (Esquivel 65). Interpretation is, for La Malinche, a kind of divine power: "words transformed the empty space of the mouth into the center of Creation" (Esquivel 65).

If La Malinche is a slave with celestial powers, where does this leave her capacity for agency? To what extent is she able to control the import of the words and ideas she translates, for instance? When Malinalli is baptised, she is renamed Doña Marina, a name that she is told means 'she who came from the sea'. In Esquivel's rendition, Malinalli is disappointed by this explanation—a name should have a deeper meaning, and she should be named for reasons greater than a phonetic similarity to her existing name. She decides to:

take control of her new name. If her native name meant braided grass, and if the grass and all plants in general needed water, and her new name was related to the sea, it meant that she was assured of eternal life, for water was eternal and it would forever nourish who she was: the braided grass. Yes, that was exactly the meaning of her new name! (Esquivel 45)

Whilst the condition and nature of a new name may be forced upon her, La Malinche is able to revise its meaning to make it more suitable to her individuality and values.

Yet the apparent agency of La Malinche's ability in re-interpretation remains conditional: "[her] privileged position was unstable and could change at any moment. Even her life was in danger. Only a victory by the Spaniards would guarantee her freedom" (Esquivel 66). She must serve the Spanish in order to remain indispensable. Moreover, "[b]y translating, she could change what things meant and impose her own vision on events, and by doing so enter into direct competition with the gods, which horrified her" (Esquivel 67). For La Malinche, the responsibility of interpretation gives her a frightening degree of power, putting her in opposition to the Gods. Whilst Julee Tate argues that Esquivel's narrative focuses on La Malinche's "unique position [...] in the clash of two worlds and the ways in which she used that position to work toward her dream of freedom and self-actualization", La Malinche ultimately comes to feel betrayed by her own tongue, for its

symbolic centrality to her role as interpreter (Tate 85). By the end of the novel, Malinalli has pierced and bifurcated her own tongue, destroying the instrument of Cortés's conquest. Ultimately, this action highlights the impossible position of the native informant. The destruction of the tongue is both the most subversive and the most debilitating action she could take. In losing her position as interpreter, she loses any potential to speak for herself and her people, whilst also refusing to serve the hegemonic powers.

Shortly after being baptised and receiving her new name, La Malinche remembers an interaction with her beloved but long estranged grandmother. Malinalli and her grandmother, who appears also as a child, mould animals and magical figurines from the wet earth, in a dream-like sequence that merges memory and mythology, mud and magic. In the middle of the grandmother's "frenzy" of creation, she tells Malinalli:

"Life always offers us two possibilities," the grandmother said after she was completely caked in mud, "day and night, the eagle or the serpent, creation or destruction, punishment or mercy, but there is always a third possibility hidden that unites the other two. Find it." (Esquivel 55)

Whilst merging her form with the ground in order to build the world anew, Malinalli's grandmother encourages her to look beyond a binarised organisation of existence to find the dialectical 'third possibility'.

Much as Malinche had to find a third way of storytelling, migrant life writers have somehow to meet the expectations of the public and publishers, while retaining the integrity of their life narratives. Jeffrey F.L. Partridge argues that "[a]n Asian American author can tailor his or her artistic creation to the demands of the public and publishing industry, or he or she can forego the lucrative possibilities of mainstream publishing and seek other avenues" (65). This chapter reviews nineteen examples of life writing from the corpus of this thesis, many of which succeed in finding a 'third possibility' from their dialectical authority—a way to appeal to the demands of the market and write a self, to play to the public and play in the margins.

Ethnic Lives: Publishing Authenticity

Claims to verisimilitude and the truthfulness of ethnic representation are often modulated by defensive, capitalist or nationalist imperatives. It is worth recalling here how modern Chinatowns were often designed to invoke ‘Chineseness’ through certain (typically visual) signifiers—chop suey fonts, dragons, pagoda roofing and so on are repeated until their signification is self-evident. Tourists are disposed to *see* most clearly those aspects of Chinatown that align with their expectations of exoticism. As in Chinatown, so in other forms of art: claims of what it means to be Chinese cohere around the lowest common denominators. Outliers indicating heterogeneity or individuality in each artist’s work of life writing are liable to be discarded by readers in favour of those that adhere most easily to extant, readily available categories.

The publishing market has capitalised upon the currency of ethnic authenticity. Partridge argues that we can see the material trace of this most immediately upon the covers of books written by Chinese American authors, the designs of which—often featuring illustrations of dragons, fans, calligraphy, brocade and so on—combine with other peritextual information like the author’s name, biography or the book’s title to “codify ethnicity and market the entire package [...] as ethnic” (Partridge 63). Partridge has, indeed, coined the phrase ‘literary Chinatown’ to describe a series of tendencies for mainstream American publishers and readers to confine Chinese American authors to a literary equivalent of Chinatown. There is, in Partridge’s words a “ghettoizing principle” at play in the publishing industry, which all Chinese American authors must write with or against the grain of—and sales are affected by this decision (Partridge ix). But what is the ‘grain’ for the migrant Chinese life writing studied in this chapter? And how are we to know if a work is writing against it?

An overview of the life writing texts by modern first generation Chinese Americans gives an indication of their variety as well as their similarities. Of the eighty three texts studied as part of this thesis's corpus, nineteen are works of life writing. The high proportion is, in part, due to my selection. Comparatively, of the 224 texts featured in Appendix B (texts that met the criteria for this thesis but were not read), thirty one are life writing texts. Yet since many of the texts in Appendix B are parts of fiction series or children's picture books, it is undeniable that life writing features prominently in the literary output of this group of authors. One of the strongest trends is that of the fifty life writing texts listed in both Appendices A and B, thirty five focus on life in China under Mao, with the majority predominantly featuring the Cultural Revolution era. Also, almost all of the life writing texts that form part of this thesis's corpus were written in English (though as explored below, some were co-authored with a writer more confident in English), suggesting that the intended audience for these texts are readers *outside* of China. Like La Malinche and the figure of the native informant, for a variety of reasons, these life writers offer the knowledge of their lives to an audience of outsiders. The (im)possible role of the authorial native informant—a role that 'allows' a marginalised subject to speak within the hegemonic discourse and thus to legitimise a subject as a self upon those terms—is also contingent upon a continuing relationship with Western intellectuals interested in the lives and voices of a/the Other.

The earliest life writing text in the corpus is Yuan-tsung Chen's *The Dragon's Village* (1980). This is, in fact, an explicitly autobiographical 'novel' about a newly-Communist China, and is prefaced with an insistence that the characters are "real people" and that the story "is true" (Chen 1). Nien Cheng's *Life and Death in Shanghai* (1986) was one of the earliest memoirs by a Chinese expatriate to reach a wide audience in the West, and details Cheng's resourcefulness and resolve in the face of relentless persecution and imprisonment during the Cultural Revolution. Alice Murong Pu Lin's *Grandmother Had No Name*

(1988) uses the life writing form to critique gender inequality in Chinese history and tradition.

In the 1990s, a boom in Chinese expatriate life writing followed the publication of British Chinese author Jung Chang's family memoir *Wild Swans* (1991), which is estimated by HarperCollins to have sold over 13 million copies worldwide. In its wake, several Chinese migrants in the USA published prominent life writing texts. One of the most renowned of these is Anchee Min's *Red Azalea* (1993), which is discussed further below. *Bitter Winds* (1994), is the memoir of dissident Harry Wu, who spent years in China's extensive prison camp system. Jaia Sun-Childers' *The White-Haired Girl* (1996) traces the breakdown of interpersonal connections during the Cultural Revolution and beyond, and the disillusionment that led her to leave for America. With the pace of publication of memoirs by diasporic Chinese writers picking up throughout the 1990s, we find that several of the life writing texts studied for this thesis were published in 1997. Ji-li Jiang's *Red Scarf Girl* (1997) is a memoir written for children, recounting Jiang's own adolescence during the Cultural Revolution. Rae Yang's *Spider Eater* (1997) is particularly candid in its ruminations on Yang's own (almost unavoidable) complicity in Mao's regime, as well as in its distinction between narrating and narrated autobiographical subjectivities. Yang wonders in an introductory passage whether all of the versions of herself written in the succeeding pages "[c]an [...] be the same person? Can this person be me? Among these, which is the real me and which are the roles I have played?" (Yang 9). These are questions that force the reader to reckon with the doubleness of the authorial native informant, and the multiplicity of their representations. The most commercially successful memoir from 1997, however, was Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves*, which recalled Yen Mah's troubled life from childhood until the present day, and led to her publishing several other life writing narratives over the following years—*Chinese Cinderella* (1999), an amended and abridged

version of *Falling Leaves* for children; *Watching the Tree* (2000) and *A Thousand Pieces of Gold* (2002), both of which weave together life writing and lessons on Chinese tradition.⁵¹

The turn of the millennium saw the publication of Da Chen's *Colors of the Mountain* (1999), about Chen's childhood in a 'black' family in rural China during the Cultural Revolution.⁵² Li Cunxin's *Mao's Last Dancer* (2003) also presents a childhood spent during the period, yet this narrative follows Li's successful—if troubled—career as a ballet dancer and his eventual defection to America. Chun Yu's *Little Green* (2005) follows the trend, depicting a childhood lived through the Cultural Revolution. It is imbued with an innocent quality that partners its entirely free verse form, contrasted with its Cultural Revolution backdrop, allowing for a less violent, nightmarish version of that time than is typically presented: "We played war games among the graves / and picked wildflowers in the new grass" (Yu 81). By using verse in tandem with the genre of memoir, Yu overlays the confessional associations of autobiography (discussed below) with the confessional poetry of private, psychological experience. Emily Wu and Larry Engelmann's *Feather in the Storm* (2006) once again recalls a childhood lived in a 'black' family, yet is presented in a more immediately tragic and traumatic narrative than Chen's.

There is greater variety to the life writing produced in the present decade. Ping Fu's controversial *Bend, Not Break* (2012) begins with the narrative of a particularly traumatic childhood spent in Cultural Revolution China, and ends with the story of Fu's success as an entrepreneur in the USA. Anchee Min's *The Cooked Seed* was published in 2013. It is

⁵¹ First published in 1997, Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves* had considerable success worldwide. Helena Grice informed us in 2009 that it had sold almost half a million copies in the UK alone (Grice *Asian* 19). Its success was characteristic of the 'boom' in the sales of life writing in the 1990s and 2000s, as critics like Julie Rak have reported and explored (Rak 8).

⁵² Chinese society during the Cultural Revolution was cleaved into 'red' and 'black' designations. Whilst the meaning and relative power of these two designations shifted intermittently, a black family was generally one that was deemed to have among its ranks or ancestors: landlords, rich farmers, anti-revolutionaries, bad 'elements', rightists, traitors, spies, 'capitalist roaders' or intellectuals. These categories would impact and determine almost every interaction during the era.

the autobiographical follow-up to *Red Azalea*, resuming from the point of departure to the USA and detailing her difficult but (eventually) fulfilling life and career there. Finally, Yiyun Li's *Dear Friend* (2017) combines life writing with essay-form ruminations on life and literature.

After finding a successful formula for Chinese expatriate life writing following the runaway success of *Wild Swans*, publishers have sought to replicate this model. Hence, “each subsequently published text is declared to be in the same vein as the last”, as Helena Grice states (*Asian* 14). Many Cultural Revolution autobiographical texts feature remarkably comparable experiences: time spent either in jail, labour camps, or in the countryside during a programme of rustification; scenes of brutality at the hands of Red Guards or in struggle sessions; a breakdown or restructuring of interpersonal relationships; reflections on the day of Mao's death and so on. The simple reason for this is that such experiences were omnipresent. Yet it is also the case that these are the kinds of experiences that readers have come to expect. Nevertheless, as Grice goes on to explicate, noticing only similarities between these narratives “masks very real differences in style, tone, location, social circumstances, intended audience and focus between books” (Grice *Asian* 14). Whilst the narratives of apparent native informants are often read as representative of an entire culture, reading these life writing texts alongside one another highlights differences as well as similarities between their enunciations and representations. And indeed, most readers seek not replication—like publishers—but innovation. This innovation has continued to be provided by these writers, many of whom have discovered how, like La Malinche, to serve as a ‘tongue’; to navigate multiple narratives whilst presenting them as mutually intelligible; to create new meaning in translation; to control the information being transmitted; to trouble the notions of ‘accuracy’ and ‘authenticity’ in cultural interpretation; or to write back against the implicit expectations of the audience.

Bookshelf Segregation

The ‘native informant’s’ negotiation of the expectations of the market is by no means confined to Asian or migrant writers. Many writers have expressed their frustration with the way publishers and booksellers select and market books written by non-white authors. In this capacity, the publishing industry is responsible for forming the figure of the native informant. Percival Everett’s novel *Erasure* provides an extended commentary on how African American literature has been formed and restrained by the publishing market. Thelonious ‘Monk’ Ellison, the protagonist, is an author who repeatedly hears from editors and reviewers that his novels aren’t “*black enough*” (Everett 4, emphasis in original). Whilst in a Borders bookstore, Monk is frustrated to find his book located in the ‘African American Studies’ section, despite the only thing ostensibly African American about his work being the jacket photograph (33-4). Whilst rueing the categorical segregation of his work, Monk sees a poster advertising Juanita Mae Jenkins’ bestseller *We’s Lives in Da Ghetto*, picks up a copy to read a passage (“*My fahvre be gone since time I’d borned and it be just me an’ my momma an’ my baby brover Juneboy*”), and thinks that he is “going to throw up” (34, italics in original).

Monk’s reaction to Jenkins’ novel, whilst being a rather unforgiving satire of African American women who write in African American Vernacular English, is ultimately inspired by his knowledge of how this kind of writing is often received by critics and readers: as a representation, rendered with “*haunting verisimilitude*”, of “*the voices of her people as they make their way through [...] Black America*”; as a tour through the “*ghetto [...] painted in all its exotic wonder*”—these quotes he later reads “in the *Atlantic Monthly* or *Harpers*”, the ambiguity emphasising the ubiquity of this type of review (Everett 46, italics in original). Monk’s exasperation is with the different demands for what African American writing should offer a reader—as Monk sees it, ‘good’ writing is unimportant to readers and reviewers; the affirmation of stereotypes of black life are the quality in demand. “[W]hy did

Juanita Mae Jenkins send me running for the toilet”, Monk ruminates, when literature that he did not like by white people did not have this effect (240)? He speculates that it is “because Tom Clancy was not trying to sell his book to me by suggesting that the crew of his high-tech submarine was a representation of his race (*however fitting a metaphor*). Nor was his publisher marketing it in that way” (240, emphasis in original). For Monk then, it is not simply the quality, nature or subject of this kind of writing that is objectionable, but rather the capitalist enterprise that markets it and that ‘sells’ a certain version of blackness.

In an act of satire and defiance after having had his latest novel denied for being “*too difficult for the market*”, Monk decides to write his own Juanita Mae Jenkins-esque novel under the pseudonym Stagg R. Leigh, which he titles *My Pafology*, and retitles *Fuck* just prior to publication (Everett 48, 151, italics in original). This is the pseudo-naturalistic story of Van Go Jenkins, a young African American man caught up in a life of sex, violence and sexual violence, and replete with harmful stereotypes about African Americans. *Fuck* is featured in its entirety within the pages of *Erasure*. The reader is made to reckon with it physically, to turn its pages and *feel* its familiarity—to remind themselves, perhaps of similar books that they may have previously held. If Everett’s analysis of the market is to be followed, then the reader is also being provided with the novel that they *really* want to be reading, with *Fuck* emerging out of *Erasure* and coming to outgrow it.

While the primary intertext of the main body of *Erasure* is Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (“I wondered how far I should take my Stagg Leigh performance. I might in fact become a Rhinehart”), *Fuck* is principally a parody of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (a connection made explicit in the imagined endorsement of Wright by D.W. Griffith, featured as an epigraph to this chapter) (Everett 184, 218). It is Monk’s joke on the publishing industry, a hastily produced caricature of blackness and black literature sent off to publishers to lampoon their apparent expectations from African American writers. Yet *Fuck* is a runaway success, lauded for being “magnificently raw and honest” by publishers;

for being “true, raw, gritty”, “life-like” and “important” by each of Monk’s fellow (and unwitting) judges on the panel for a prestigious literary award; and for being “so honest”, “so raw”, “so real” by reviewers (155, 254, 260). For Everett then, ethnic American fiction is acclaimed for its autobiographic and representational honesty, in a mainstream market that has little capacity to judge what is ‘real’. There is no apparent ‘third possibility’ presented here: there is either the ‘real’, but unrecognised, unprofitable ethnic writing of *Erasure*, or the ‘fake’ but lucrative performance of black writing of *Fuck*. As with Frank Chin’s cleaving of Asian American writing into the ‘real’ and the ‘fake’ (as discussed in Chapter One), Everett is wary of the reader’s ability to distinguish the ‘authentic’ from the embellished in their encounter with the ethnic author or autobiographical subject/object.

‘Immigrant Autobiography’ and the Confession

If, according to Everett, each racial/ethnic group of writers is segregated to a different part of the literal and metaphorical bookstore, what types of books might sit alongside the life writing explored in this chapter? Should these works be shelved alongside other works of American immigrant autobiography? Perhaps not, given that the majority of life writing texts by recent Chinese migrants to America (thirteen of the nineteen studied for this thesis) focus largely or entirely on a period of the author’s life lived in China. These narratives often come to an abrupt halt upon the moment of departure for/arrival in the United States. This goes against William Boelhower’s typology for American ‘immigrant autobiography’, as Sau-ling Cynthia Wong has previously argued (Wong ‘Autobiography as’ 40). As explored in the Introduction to this thesis, Boelhower identifies an ‘invariable’ macrotext for American immigrant autobiography, which at a structural level can be outlined as “three fabula moments of anticipation, contact, and contrast: Old-World reality vs New-World ideal; New-World ideal vs New-World reality; Old-World reality vs New-World reality” (Boelhower ‘The Brave’ 13). Whilst he makes clear that the macrotext does not exhaust

the variety of microtexts, what is essential to the immigrant autobiography for Boelhower is a consideration of the New World in confrontation with the Old. But what of life writing by migrants that focuses solely on the ‘old world’? To call this only ‘Chinese autobiography’ would be to ignore the circuits of social and economic exchange from and into which these texts are written. These texts are, after all, written and published in English, in the USA—these too are American immigrant autobiographies.

The interest for international readers of Chinese migrant life writers is perceived to be not their experiences of encounter with America, but rather the “image of their otherness”, as Wong speculates (S. C. Wong ‘Immigrant Autobiography’ 303, ‘Autobiography as’ 41). Wong argues that Boelhower’s formulation of his *fabula* was based on his study of texts written by authors of European, Judeo-Christian descent, who are part of a unique cultural and literary tradition: that of a “lost Golden Age or lost Eden to be recovered, a new Adam to be reborn, the Old World renewed, the New Jerusalem, the City on a Hill—these are European-origin fictions” (‘Immigrant Autobiography’ 304-5). Wong argues that Boelhower’s formula cannot readily accommodate the writing of Chinese migrant autobiographers, as these Christian tropes are not the dominant fictions of China: so the narratives of the migrant life writers she discusses do not “bespeak the kind of total immersion in the Judaeo-Christian tradition that informs Boelhower’s cited works” (‘Immigrant Autobiography’ 305).

Whilst Wong’s point is valid in most cases, it is worth noting that several of the life writers studied in this thesis *do* describe having been educated in missionary schools, or otherwise having had some kind of formative encounter with Christianity.⁵³ In Da Chen’s

⁵³ Sau-ling Cynthia Wong also notes the “preponderance of Christianized authors among Chinese immigrant autobiographers”, and usefully highlights how their appearance “stems from complex historical interactions between colonialism, religious institutions, emigration, and perhaps not the least, the American publishing industry and reading public” (Wong ‘Immigrant Autobiography’ 305).

Colors of the Mountain, the interest in education that eventually leads to Chen being able to leave China was inspired largely by Soong, the son of a Christian violinist, and Professor Wei, a Baptist who teaches him English. Professor Wei and her sister are treated in Chen's village as "the closest thing to real Westerners", and while this makes them "alien", it also anticipates for Chen his eventual encounter with America (D. Chen 153-4). "Educate me, I prayed. Teach me, enlighten me. Make something out of nothing", Chen invokes upon beginning his lessons, calling forth a faith in something 'foreign' in order to create new life in the denuded 'old world' (188). Upon Professor Wei's walls hang two portraits: one, a "picture of a white man with kind eyes, long hair, and a white robe. He must be Jesus Christ", and the other, hanging opposite, "a much smaller picture of Chairman Mao, with his Buddha's face. It was clear who was the boss and who was the altar boy" (216). For Chen then, Christianity is presented in opposition to Communism, the faith of the Christian West in opposition to fanaticism for an enshrined Chinese ruler.

In Yuan-tsung Chen's *The Dragon's Village*, meanwhile, autobiographical protagonist Ling-ling speaks to her comrades about the lessons of her first teacher, an American nun:

I still can quote Patrick Henry's words, 'Give me liberty or give me death.' I can quote Lincoln's speech about 'government of, by, and for the people,' and the American Civil War to liberate the black slaves. I still observe our school's motto, 'To serve,' to serve the poor as Jesus Christ had done. Those words inspired me. This is one of the reasons why I'm here. (Y-t. Chen 139-40)

This speech serves as a confession: "it was always safer to confess a past mistake than a current sin" (Y-t. Chen 140). By making this address during a Mao-era criticism and self-criticism session she is able to valorise the Christian education that has led her to her present 'service' of the Communist nation *and* to criticise the (Christian) 'Americans' who made her "trust" them too much (Y.-t. Chen 134, 140). In neither Da Chen's or Yuan-tsung Chen's texts are we presented with the actualisation of the Christian 'idea' of travel to America/the Promised Land (an idea returned to below). The centre of gravity is, instead, China.

Ling-ling's criticism/self-criticism merges with the Christian form of the confession. The confession is central to a history of debate within Asian American Studies about the politics of autobiography. Among those who have criticised Asian American life writing on these grounds has been Frank Chin. Chin has repeatedly asserted that autobiography is a fundamentally Western, Christian form that functions as an extension of the practices of confession and conversion. He views Chinese American life writing as a product of the white racist desire to have Asian Americans 'convert' to Western ideals through the mode of confessing *Eastern* sin. He complements this with a parallel argument that life writing does not belong to a tradition of Chinese literature. Chin's analysis aligns with the view that life writing has been an established genre in Western literature for much longer than it has been in the East: Saint Augustine wrote his *Confessions* as early as the fourth century. Nevertheless, there is certainly a history of autobiographical writing in China, from Sima Qian's *Self Account of the Grand Historian*—written at the turn of the first century BC—to Shen Fu's *Six Records of a Floating Life*, written around the turn of the eighteenth century.

There is, however, a much more pertinent precedent for life writing as confession in modern China. The writing of autobiography was one form of punishment used in the systematised process of self-criticism under the Chinese Communist Party, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. In Harry Wu's *Bitter Winds*, Wu is instructed to write an autobiographical essay to "demonstrate [his] own loyalty and honesty" (Wu and Wakeman 14). Nien Cheng also describes in *Life and Death in Shanghai* being commanded to write an autobiography by her jailors whilst under arrest as a political prisoner: "Do not try to hide anything. We will check what you write with the material we already have about you. [...] We will make an assessment of your political standpoint and your sincerity from what you write" (N. Cheng 140). Cheng realises that she must exercise care writing this autobiography. Each time, with each demand for a re-write, she gives a simple account that avoids implicating herself or others in any imagined crime, denying the interrogator's

supposed hope that “through writing the autobiography I would provide him with some material they could twist and use against me” (N. Cheng 141). We see here the political repercussions of the confessional autobiography.

In Maoist China then, the masses were expected to write their lives as confession, to reckon with the inescapable culpability of the individual in service of the masses—to be an *informant* of their own crimes. Yuanxi Ma compares Maoist Communism with “some spirit of Christianity (especially, the spirit of self-sacrifice). The core of this education was to achieve self-oblivion, self-effacement, and self-abandonment—‘dissolution of self’” (Y. Ma 78). Ma reflects on how she “could not comprehend this contradiction: self-effacing versus self-displaying and trying to forget the self versus becoming aware of the self” (83). This form of self-criticism works towards the suspension of the individual, intended instead to merge the self into the collective (and the Party). By contrast, in the texts read in this chapter, self-effacement is not the authors’ objective. This is instead life writing as an urgent form of self-making, in the wake of a regime that has sought to dissolve the self—autobiography as a mechanism of writing into being a life that *can* write a life.

There is a parallel between the demands of Nien Cheng’s captors for an ‘accurate’ (read: self-incriminating) narrative and the imperative for ‘accurate’ (read: China-incriminating) autobiographical narratives from readers and publishers in the West. As Wong explains, China “excites the American imagination, evokes mystery and alienness, and requires the service of knowledgeable insiders to explain terminology, kinship, manners, social organization, cultural practices, political ideology, ... *differences*” (S. C. Wong ‘Immigrant Autobiography’ 306). To some extent, as Esquivel’s rendition of La Malinche suggests, the agency of a native-informant-style figure is conditional—the informant’s privileged position is dependent on the survival of the non-‘native’ power. We should therefore add to the investigation of the exoticism of Chinese ‘difference’ in this life writing a reckoning with the political ramifications of public interest in a nation constructed

as an ideological opponent to the USA. Given the import of China-US relations to the twenty-first century, what stakes does the spectre of the Chinese ‘native informant’ have in maintaining this ideological opposition?

From ‘Ambassador of Goodwill’ to ‘Native Informant’

The native informant in literature frequently has the role of a cultural ambassador, favouring the distribution of certain types of information in service of improved interracial and international relations. Elaine Kim uses the term ‘ambassadors of goodwill’ to describe some early-twentieth century Asian American writers who explained and implicitly defended Chinese people (and therefore Chinese migrants) to Western readers, by presenting “as attractive a picture of Asian life as they could” in order to “dispel negative images” (E. Kim 24–5). Rather than perceiving racism as a product of capitalism, colonialism and the socio-cultural environment, these authors believed that racism was the result only of ignorance and misunderstanding on the part of white America. Thus, by “disseminating *correct* information on various aspects of Chinese culture and society, they thought it possible to improve the image of their homeland and win sympathy and acceptance for Chinese immigrants” (Yin *Chinese American* 55, emphasis mine). These writers offered a corrective narrative by offering information about China, its people and culture that they deemed ‘correct’. By coupling this action with the autobiographical genre, they combined a pedagogic imperative with a personal narrative of assimilation, invoking the potential for (their) racial harmony in America.

If anything, a negative view of China is one that has become even more widespread in the West in the modern era. It serves as an Eastern foil, or perhaps even as dystopian warning, taking prominence in this role since the fall of the Soviet Union. China *does*, of course, have a hugely troubled modern history, and many of its citizens continue to suffer at the hands of their government. It is essential that these abuses be addressed by the global

community as China rises to ascendancy in the contemporary world. When writing about the suffering inflicted by the Chinese state, these life writing narratives counter the censored versions of Chinese Communist history that have been published in China. In her monograph *Asian American Fiction, History and Life Writing*, Helena Grice illuminates how several works of life writing about the Cultural Revolution are “intended by their authors to be exposés of China's hypocrisy and the severity of elements of the Communist regime during the twentieth century” (25). Having lived through what Christine So describes as a “frenzied, tragic era, filled with famine, displacement, destruction, and death”, it is unsurprising that authors would want to inform the world of the ‘real’ history of Maoist China (So 132). Indeed, Frank Dikötter, one of the world’s foremost historians of modern China, reads published and unpublished Cultural Revolution memoirs for the “insights” they offer “that cannot be gleaned from official accounts” (*The Cultural* xix).

It has come to be expected that these life writing texts should function concomitantly as social histories. A review by Paul Theroux excerpted in Nien Cheng’s *Life and Death in Shanghai* lauds it for being “much more than a memoir [... it] is a history of the Cultural Revolution” (N. Cheng n. pag.). And many of these texts do indeed intersperse historiography with life narrative. This is clearly signalled in Jaia Sun-Childers’ *The White-Haired Girl*, in which italicised blocks of historiographic prose are scattered throughout the narrative. The provision of history alongside autobiography offers to substantiate the narratives, to validate the author’s claims to facticity. The provision of historical context also extends an individual narrative to incorporate countless other lives lived under similar conditions. In a sense, it is not that history is being inserted into these life writing texts, but rather that these authors are inserting their individual lives into the facelessness of traditional historiography. By placing themselves at the centre of stories of the past as told to others, these often multiply marginalised writers reassert their very subjectivity: history is made to *mean* in relation to their *own* stories.

Yet we must also be wary that when represented in life writing, “these factual events are often metonymically taken to represent the essence of China, and serve as ideological filters through which contemporary Chinese literature is [received]”, as Tong King Lee reasons (264-5). Helena Grice argues that life writing by Chinese expatriates since the 1980s has in many ways been central to “retrospectively confirming China in the minds of Western readers as a politically and socially draconian state”, and that “[t]his is clearly a deliberate strategy of vilification, since with the collapse of Communist Russia, China has become the new cultural, political and economic target [for the West]” (Grice *Asian* 22). Whilst Graham Huggan proposes that “[e]thnic autobiographies [...] signal the possibility of indirect access to ‘exotic’ cultures whose differences are acknowledged and celebrated even as they are rendered amenable to a mainstream reading public”, it would be largely accurate in this case to say that the imagined version of modern, communist China accessed through Cultural Revolution life writing is not only rendered wholly different, but also deplorable as a society and national/political ideology (Huggan 155).

The paratextual and marketing copy for these life writing texts is particularly evocative of this ideological construction. For instance, the jacket description of Anchee Min’s *The Cooked Seed* describes how: “Min returns to give us the next chapter, as she moves from the shocking deprivations of her homeland to the sudden bounty of the promised land of America” (n. pag.). There is a marked difference between how the text is marketed and its actual contents. There is no ‘sudden bounty’ for Min in America. Upon arrival, she describes being desperate enough to look for work as a subject in experimental drug trials (she is declined); she makes a net profit of \$8.50 per day in a garment factory; and she shops exclusively in discount food stores. Yet the exterior of the book markets her narrative as a triumph of American individualism—in which she “learns how to succeed”—unlike in China, where Min was a “mere bolt on the great machine of Communism” (Min *The Cooked* n.pag.).

The construction of China as dystopia takes form in the implicit binary: America becomes a ‘promised land’ or utopia. The image of America as ‘promised land’ has a long history, but the phrase rose to cultural significance with the publication of Mary Antin’s 1912 autobiography *The Promised Land*, the title of which combines the Jewish idea of a new homeland in Canaan with the Protestant belief in America as a new Holy Land. Min’s memoir is therefore inserted into the continuing narrative line of this ideology. The book jacket’s description of China as ‘shockingly deprived’ is echoed verbatim by Elif Armbruster in her interview with Min published in *MELUS* (Armbruster 173). Tong King Lee reasons that as these narratives become ever more entrenched, publishers are motivated to endorse texts that tell similar stories, and promote similar views: “[t]he loop closes, enabling discourses and cultural artefacts to thrive in tandem in a self-justificatory bind” (T. K. Lee 254). The cultural artefacts created by writers imagined as native informants often contribute to a discourse that holds nations apart, even as their work brings the voices of the people of each nation together.

As Julie Rak has theorised, in America, there is an *ipso facto* connection between the fact of its democracy, its championing of the individual, and the writing of a self in life narratives. Ironically, “in autobiography it is possible to ‘represent’ the self and have it stand in for the selves of others [... and] memoir becomes one of the technologies for the private self that can be shared” (Rak 32-3). Much as American individualism is in fact a collective ideology, American life writing always finds itself responsible for *representing* both the self and the group. Life writers from Communist China can find themselves being read in a contradictory bind: both essentially American and non-American. As Americans, these life writers are contributors to capitalism and the discourse of individualism, and as non-Americans, they are the traumatised Other now afforded freedom. Yet the dialectical nature of these texts’ Americanness throws into question the modern idea of ‘trauma’ that is typically central to the affective and diegetic power of these narratives. What kinds of

trauma are evoked in these texts if they are both of and not of America, and why might these be appealing to a Western consumer?

Trauma and the World

Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves* details the trials and traumas of her life. She revisits the experiences of her childhood in *Chinese Cinderella*—a retelling of many of the same incidents, produced for the children's literature market—and in several instances in her later non-fiction writing. Yen Mah's frequent revisiting of her life narrative is indicative of the trauma it attests to. As Sidonie Smith relates, "people suffering the agonies of traumatic memory are haunted by memories that obsessively interrupt a present moment and insist on their presence" (Smith *Reading* 21). This is an argument that follows in the wake of Cathy Caruth's seminal writing in the development of trauma theory, where through a reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, she comes to argue that:

[T]rauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. (Caruth 4)

For Caruth then, trauma is not a single instance that is revisited by survivors, but is instead the dialectical "encounter with death" alongside the "ongoing experience of having survived", both of which are "unbearable" (Caruth 7). Unlike the *suppression* of historiographic memory in mainland China (addressed more below), traumatic memory is *repressed*. When a survivor revisits their trauma, they return not to:

the incomprehensibility of one's near death, but the very incomprehensibility of one's own survival. Repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died, but more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt *to claim one's own survival*. (Caruth 64, emphasis in original)

Yen Mah's revisiting of her life narrative across a series of publications is emblematic of the Freudian grip of trauma's continuous resurfacing, and its apparent imperative for *reckoning* with one's own survival.

Caruthian trauma theory is, however, based on a reckoning with “events that took place in Europe or the United States, especially the Holocaust and, more recently, 9/11”, as Stef Craps argues (9). Rather than accepting traditional trauma theory as all-encompassing, Craps posits that “breaking with Eurocentrism requires a commitment not only to broadening the usual focus of trauma theory but also to acknowledging the traumas of non-Western or minority populations for their own sake” (19). Trauma theory should then “take account of the specific social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received” (Craps 43). When reading Adeline Yen Mah’s life writing, we should consider not only the causes of her trauma, but also the profitability of what is, in Yen Mah’s case, marketed to some extent as a specifically *Chinese* trauma.

Whilst Yen Mah’s life narratives do not dwell on the brutality of Maoist China, they are replete with traces of *Chineseness* that lead to a conflation of Yen Mah’s trauma with its geo-cultural origins (So 132). For instance, *Chinese Cinderella* begins with a map of China. In this image, China is painted in calligraphic brushstrokes, and is removed in its entirety from the rest of the world – only the Pacific Ocean appears beyond China’s borders, as if China were a nation entirely estranged from the rest of the globe. Unlike in *Falling Leaves*, the narrative of *Chinese Cinderella* is confined to mainland China and Hong Kong. Combined with visual emphases upon Chinese characters; Chinese proverbs—‘falling leaves’ alludes to the phrase 落叶归根 (falling leaves return to their roots); Chinese folk tales like *Ye Xian* (the Chinese ‘Cinderella’ tale); and Chinese visual design—several of the covers to Yen Mah’s books feature a background of traditional Chinese embroidery—the reader is given an impression that Yen Mah’s suffering is correlated with the appearance of ‘things Chinese’.

Whilst *Falling Leaves* and *Chinese Cinderella* share with the other texts some focus on the Cultural Revolution, the primary trauma found in Yen Mah’s narrative is *not* an

outcome of this period of fear, violence and hysteria. The trauma that drives her narrative is, instead, personal and familial in nature. The accounts of hardship, persecution and famine—familiar from other Cultural Revolution narratives—are present, but are overshadowed by the private story of her troubled life under her stepmother, Niang.⁵⁴ As Aunt Baba says after having lived in Shanghai through the Maoist era:

All those campaigns and struggle meetings. The savagery of the Cultural Revolution. Poverty, hardship and fear. Quite honestly though, all the miseries put together were more tolerable than living under the same roof as your Niang. (Yen Mah *Falling Leaves* 225)

Falling Leaves situates Yen Mah's experience of trauma not at a national level, but in a uniquely local, domestic milieu. Yen Mah's life narrative is not so much a foray into dystopian Chinese history and culture as into the forms of suffering that families can inflict. Although Christine So's argument that *Falling Leaves* conflates the power struggle and suffering caused by her family with "larger battles for dominance and unity within China" is valid, this correspondence is never the focus or objective of the narrative (So 132). Yen Mah's narrative may not be designed to be read allegorically, or to conflate the micro- and macro-contexts, but readers are often inclined to do so. It is, therefore, a conflicted text: one hand beckons the Western market with its promise of exoticism, whilst the other pushes back against the Western reader's expectations.

Whilst *Chinese Cinderella* locates the trauma of Yen Mah's life fixedly in China, *Falling Leaves* takes another approach, making the rest of the world complicit in a global network of interconnected histories. As Niang says in *Falling Leaves*, the Yen family seem really to be "citizens of the world" (233), with Yen Mah herself having migrated between concession Tianjin, concession Shanghai, colonised Hong Kong, the UK and finally America. Yen Mah recognises that both she and many of her readers are part of a global society and marketplace: she understands that the people "opening the pages of [her] book

⁵⁴ Yen Mah refers to her stepmother in these texts as 娘 (Niang), an antiquated term for mother.

[... will be] in Sydney, Tokyo, London, Hong Kong or Los Angeles” (*Chinese Cinderella* v). Whilst Sansan Kwan reads *Falling Leaves* as “the author’s grateful liberation by the Free World”, there is little evidence for this in the text. Indeed, Yen Mah is careful to note that “in the early 1970s, racial and gender discrimination was still prevalent” in America, much as she also describes it being in England and Hong Kong (Kwan 110, *Falling Leaves* 206).

To what extent then can we really call Yen Mah a ‘native informant’, if she instead represents a form of globality? And if this global consciousness is at odds with her role as native informant, why does Yen Mah take pains to cultivate the idea that the primary aim of her life writing is pedagogic—to teach her (Western) readers specifically about China?

The Pedagogic Imperative and the ‘Third Possibility’

Adeline Yen Mah has repeatedly stated her belief that “for East and West to get along, they must know and understand one another's history” (Yen Mah *China* 229). She sees her books contributing to this project. Like the autobiographical ‘ambassadors of goodwill’ of the early twentieth century, the principal drive of many of the modern life writers studied here is to fight prejudice against Chinese people in the USA.⁵⁵

Adeline Yen Mah provides an abundance of information about China throughout her work. She thus introduces the Western reader to “Confucian belief[s]”, Chinese folk tales, and to explications of the Chinese language (*Falling Leaves* 131, 250). Her 2001 text *Watching the Tree* sets out to tell the Western reader “why we Chinese think the way we do”, and then proceeds to list “*qi*, *feng shui* and *yin/yang*” as being illustrative traditional

⁵⁵ Teaching Americans about China and Chinese people is a primary motivation of several other life writers from this cohort. Anchee Min recalls the moment she realises that “she wanted to introduce China and its people to Americans” for “the rest of her life” in *The Cooked Seed* (218-9). Ji-li Jiang, author of *Red Scarf Girl*, started a company named East West Exchange “to promote cultural exchanges between the United States and China”, and sees her memoir as a component of that project (Jiang 271-2). With a slightly different, more commemorative, valorisation Rae Yang states in *Spider Eaters* that it is her responsibility to “make the lessons we learned [from the Cultural Revolution] known and remembered by the people in the world” (Yang 284-5).

concepts (3, 9). Whilst it is not inherently problematic to attempt to give form to the consciousness of one's own group, when presenting an entire group as alike to an audience of outsiders, Yen Mah not only risks duplicating the stereotype of Asian homogeneity, but engages in what Arif Dirlik terms 'metonymic reductionism': in order for nationalism to take comprehensible form, "[some] traits become emblematic of the nation, while others that are inconsistent with the national self-image are swept aside as foreign intrusions" ('Chinese History' 106). In her desire to teach readers about 'Chineseness', Yen Mah often tells the Western reader what they think they already know through stereotyped knowledge, from a position of reliability as an 'authentically' Chinese native informant.

King-Kok Cheung argues that Asian American life writers use the genre to "wage some kind of war"—be it, for instance, against the sins of the Chinese state or the discrimination of the West (*Chinese American* 187). So what war might Yen Mah be waging? On the surface, Yen Mah is fighting against intercultural ignorance in the service of multicultural, humanist harmony—the native informant as mediator of peace. Yet as such, Yen Mah also wields the 'nativeness' of her identity in order to construct her own narrative. For instance, the story of Ye Xian (Chinese Cinderella), that she explicitly places as an intertext to her life writing, is altered by Yen Mah in her telling of it. Amy Lai shows how, in the original story, Ye Xian receives her golden shoes directly from a magical source. In Yen Mah's version, the magic gives a special sheen to one of the pots that Ye Xian has skilfully crafted, and she trades this pot for the golden shoes. As such, Ye Xian "earns her happy marriage entirely through her own efforts" (Lai "Two Translations" 55). This alteration accommodates the topos of Yen Mah's texts: the idea that "[w]e must [...] stand on our own two feet and create our own destiny" (*Chinese Cinderella* 201).

Yen Mah's exposition of the Chinese character 忍 *rěn* (endure) features a similar embellishment of meaning that brings it into line with her theme. In Yen Mah's version,

the top component [of 忍 *ren* (endure)] 刀 *dao*, means knife, but it has a sheath in the centre of the rapier 刃. The bottom component, 心 *xin* means heart. Combined together, the word is telling a story. Though my son is wounding my heart, I shall ensheath the pain and live through it. (*Falling Leaves* 76-7)

However, 刃 *rèn*, also written 刃, actually means the blade of the knife: it can only be read with connotations of ensheathing in a fairly liberally artistic interpretation. Rather than actively sheathing a blade in an act of willful forbearance, as Yen Mah's explanation of the character would have the reader believe, a more accurate elucidation of the character would see her grandfather passively submitting to the sharp, cruel blade edge poised over his heart. This exemplifies how Yen Mah sometimes bends her teaching of Chinese language and culture to her own narrative, knowing that it will go largely unchallenged by a Western readership. To some extent then, Yen Mah is seeking to reassure us of the power of individualism and self-reliance, against the apparent failures of self-effacing, Confucianesque (serving others before the self) Communism. Whilst on the one hand Yen Mah enforces some of the stereotypes that constitute 'Chineseness' to many of her Western readers, she also finds a way to deploy the information she provides in order to structure the narrative of her life according to a preferred topos. She creates a 'third possibility' of storytelling by combining the literal and symbolic registers of her life narrative.

In response to reworkings of information provided by life writers read as native informants, King-Kok Cheung asserts that "[a] writer should not be held responsible for a reader's ignorance", and should, moreover, be allowed a degree of agency over the narratives that circulate about their nations, cultures and ethnic groups (*Chinese American* 55). We might, in fact, see this ability to alter narratives as an extension of a Chinese American history of amending and reinventing Chinese history and personal identity in order to survive in the United States. After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, fires raged through the city and destroyed many of the official records stored in City Hall and the Hall of Records. This led to an opportunity for peoples of Chinese descent (whether living in

America or elsewhere) to circumvent the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and claim American citizenship, typically by professing to be the offspring of extant Chinese American citizens. A cottage industry began, effectively selling citizenship to aspiring Chinese migrants, who became known as paper sons and daughters. Subsequently, an immigration station was established on Angel Island, off the coast of San Francisco, in order for federal officials to interrogate those coming to America claiming to be the sons and daughters of Chinese American citizens. The interrogation process sought to disprove the claims of filiality professed by Chinese migrants, which meant that aspiring paper sons and daughters had to learn and adopt the fictitious identities that had been created for them. There is, therefore, a history of Chinese migrants amending the details of their personage in order to circumvent (whilst entering into) the racially unequal, but ostensibly economically favourable system of the United States.

Asian life writers have sometimes been subject to criticism for adopting fictitious identities and life episodes. Xiao-huang Yin reports that “[t]he agent of Anchee Min, author of the bestselling *Red Azalea* (1994), [...] suggested that she add a [lesbian] relationship to her story to make the memoir of her life in China during the Cultural Revolution more captivating” (*Chinese* 171). Yin’s report is not entirely reliable—he cites only having “received the information from several friends and colleagues”—yet it illustrates how narratives can be controlled and altered by both author *and* publisher, facilitating the creation of life writing that has been amended for sale to mainstream audiences’ tastes and expectations (Yin *Chinese* 181).

Nevertheless, despite the influence of publishers, authors like Min can still find ways to reacquire agency. In fact, Wendy Somerson argues that the potential fictionality of Min’s life writing “redraws the boundaries of autobiography by refusing to separate fact from fiction” (Somerson 100). In one scene in *Red Azalea*, we find Min being escorted by the Supervisor, her superior and ambiguous lover, to a local park:

I begged him to leave the place. To leave the forest of the lonely ones. He supported me with his shoulder, the strengthless me, and we made our way off into the velvet night. The thorns of the bushes slashed my clothes, scratched my limbs leaving marks on my flesh. The shadows arched their backs. The bushes trembled in dense rhythm. The masturbators rocked, rising and falling monumentally and, as we passed, I heard the sound of them exploding one after another. I collapsed, half-unconscious, in ecstasy. (Min *Red Azalea* 218)

Whether intended or not, this passage can be read as an analogy for Min's alleged compulsion to publish an embellished, exaggerated narrative. Min's subjective self, the 'me' at the heart of her text is strengthless here, compelled by an abstruse authority figure toward a voyeuristic audience, who tremble, out of sight of the author, upon observation of her person. Her response, intriguingly, is ecstasy—a combination of elation and stupor at the effect she has on the imaginations of her onlookers, and the knowledge that she has a kind of power over them—a power to reveal or withhold in exchange for their (monetary) emissions.

In the passage above, Min disrupts the relationship between native informant and audience by drawing attention to the processes of looking. Min acknowledges the public's voyeurism for witnessing the trauma of others/the Other, and subverts it by *looking back*. As the reader looks at the supposed, repressed trauma located on and in a Chinese female body, so that traumatised body sees the reader in the shadows. Min and Yen Mah, along with other authors in the cohort, find a 'third possibility' for their narratives. They find ways to unite the homogenising imperatives of the market with the agency and destabilising potential of their individual narratives. They often do so by playing with the ephemeral quality of the 'fact' and 'reality' they seem to so concretely represent.

'Fact Varied': Qualifications of Verisimilitude

In Jenny Xie's 'Rootless', featured in the Introduction to this thesis, the speaker of the poem corrects herself about how many brick houses she has seen from the train: "and no two brick houses in a row / I mean, no *three*—" (lines 2-3, emphasis in original). This

revision introduces to the poem the question of a writer's responsibility for verisimilitude, a question that troubles many of the writers studied in this thesis. Asian American authors and critics have long debated the perceived requirement for the 'representativeness' of ethnic American writing: the expectation that non-white and migrant authors must write accurately and 'authentically' about their 'own' ethnic, racial or national group. In Xie's poem, the issue of verisimilitude boils down to a question about how *anything* can be accurate if we must depend upon our fallible, individually variable senses. Each reader will "see" differently: through diverse filters, from different perspectives, at degrees of remove in space, time and experience—seeing the same object as either a "motorbike with a hog strapped to its seat" or as a "date pit", as Xie's poem suggests (line 4; lines 6-7). We perceive literature through both the pinhole of context and the prism of artistic ambiguity. For Xie, the uncertainty of our senses functions as an opening up, an acceptance of change and the generative possibilities of (mis)perception.

But there are different rules and expectations for verisimilitude in life writing. Life writing is, after all, perhaps the genre in which most weight is given to the 'truthfulness' of the narrative. This is a legacy of life writing's association with confession, and continues to have wide-ranging implications. Leigh Gilmore explains two ways in which the 'legacy' of the confession persists for women's life writing:

First, the confession imports not only the spiritual but also the legal constraints of truth telling and potential punishment for error into the genre. The story of the self is constructed as one that must be sworn to and will be subject to verification. Second, truth is marked as a cultural production entwined with our notions of gender so completely that even the structural underpinnings of truth production are masculinist; that is, the maintenance of patriarchal authority and male privilege follow from the formation of rules in confession to the installation of a man as judge (authorized through that massive tautology of male power legitimating males to power). (Gilmore 57)

Combining the registers of the legal and the religious, the confession's influence on autobiographic writing requires life writers to reckon with readers' expectations that they are relating a single, verifiable truth. And as Gilmore makes clear, writing in this mode as a

woman is fraught with the power imbalance of the omnipresent and discursive male *judge*. Like La Malinche, the female life writers in this cohort must contend with their position as mediators whilst subject to the constraints of an androcentric standard for judging the ‘truth’ of their information.

We find an indicator of the kinds of truth expected in this life writing when we look at how publishers intend a book to be read, received and marketed. An index of this can be found in the selection of reviews chosen for display on the text. At the beginning of the 2009 Bloomsbury edition of Anchee Min’s *Red Azalea* for instance, a review excerpt from *Vogue* proclaims that: “[n]o Chinese, much less a Chinese woman, has written more honestly and poignantly [...] about the desert of solitude and human alienation at the center of the Chinese Communist revolution” (*Red Azalea* 1). Yet we see from Min’s narrative—from the couple whose love-making costs them their lives, to the homosexual relationship between Min and Yan and to Min’s relationship with the Supervisor of the film production company—that the dehumanisation of the Cultural Revolution engenders covert relationships that necessitate both a strength of will and an explicit queering of Maoist discourse.⁵⁶ As Lanlan Du explicates, Min’s account of her sexual experiences during the Cultural Revolution serves the double function of satisfying voyeuristic Western claims upon witnessing the Chinese female body (in combination with witnessing its trauma) and making “sexuality a site of resistance to state repression” (140).

How are ‘honesty’ and ‘poignancy’ being measured here? Smith and Watson ask:

Are [readers] expecting fidelity to the facts of their biographies, to lived experience, to self-understanding, to the historical moment, to social community, to prevailing beliefs about diverse identities, to the norms of autobiography as a literary genre itself? And truth for whom and for what? (Smith and Watson 15)

⁵⁶ For a Queer Theory reading of *Red Azalea*, see Wendy Somerson’s article ‘Under the Mosquito Net: Space and Sexuality in Red Azalea’.

What the *Vogue* review seems to commend is Min's faithfulness to a version of her life narrative that corresponds to what Western readers *believe* China to be like—a narrative that appears more honest than others for the familiarity of its negative portrayal. As Leigh Gilmore writes, “[w]hat we have come to call truth or what a culture determines to be truth in autobiography, among other discourses, is largely the effect of a long and complex process of authorization” (54-5). In this case, the andocentric ‘truth’ of a “Chinese woman” life writer is authorised by a Western reviewer, and Min's authority comes from the fact that her narrative ‘rings true’.

Bending, not Breaking, Reality

These life writers must simultaneously negotiate the genre's implicit expectation of facticity, the authentication of facticity in a patriarchal tradition of confession, the Western market's demand for sensational accounts of life in China (especially during the Cultural Revolution), and the representative and political implications of their depictions of life in China (and America). The apotheosis of these competing difficulties can be found in the controversy surrounding Ping Fu's memoir *Bend, Not Break*. Co-authored with Mei-mei Fox, a white American, Fu's memoir garnered much interest from the American press (mostly positive), and even more interest from Chinese netizens (mostly negative). Fu was praised in reviews, features and interviews from media outlets like *npr*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes* and *PBS*. All the while, a backlash was emerging online. What many of these objectors challenged was the veracity of her tale, which they contended was laden with inconsistencies, improbabilities and falsehoods. A website was set up, dedicated to “document[ing] the facts, questions, and falsehoods behind [Fu's] book and words” (E. Cheng n. pag.). Objections were numerous, including a debunking of claims that her grandfather and grand-uncle were raised by Dr. Sun Yat-sen; a discrediting of her portrayal

of the practice of 忆苦饭 (consuming ‘bitter meals’) as a punishment for ‘black’ classes, rather than as an educational tool for all; an objection to the claim that officials at Suzhou University required female students to prove they weren’t pregnant by sexually violating them; and doubting the veracity of the gang-rape she experienced as a child.

In response to the backlash, Fu published an edited paperback edition of her memoir. In the Preface to this edition, she refers to the criticism as a “cyber-bullying attack”, defending herself by explaining that “[n]o one really knows what went on [during the Cultural Revolution], and facts varied” (Fu *Bend* x). The online attack against Fu’s bleak portrayal of Cultural Revolution-era China might suggest defensive Chinese nationalism, or a continuation of the abuse and denunciation of that era.

And yet the criticism and questioning of her memoir is by no means exclusive to Chinese nationals. Many Western media publications across the political spectrum have also questioned the accuracy of her claims. Clearly, the verifiability of life writing remains a central issue in its reception. What are we to make, then, of Fu’s idea that ‘facts varied’?

Few, if any, of the other life writing texts about the Cultural Revolution have sparked this type or degree of outrage. Certain factors set Fu’s text apart for its detractors: the apparent ease of its dis-provability (parts of her narrative seem to be contradicted by an earlier work of life writing written by her); the fact that Fu *has* acknowledged inaccuracies in the first edition of her text; and perhaps too, the era in which it has been published. In an age of limitless (un)verified information on the internet, with cybercultures of Chinese nationalism and white supremacy, ‘trolls’ and bigots pervading social media and so on, Fu finds herself defending the ‘truth’ of her life writing by calling proleptically upon an argument similar to the notorious idea of ‘alternative facts’.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ ‘Alternative facts’ is a phrase most famously uttered by Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway, in defence of White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer’s false statement about the attendance numbers of Donald Trump’s inauguration.

Given that various political campaigns have allegedly been won on the grounds of ‘alternative facts’, it is easy in a struggle against the ‘post-truth’ age to see only controversy in Fu’s statement. Yet we must bear in mind two alternative contexts when reading this explanation. Firstly, as numerous historians have made clear, *official* fact has varied in China. Dikötter writes that the “entire record of the Maoist era, as reflected in official and internally published sources, is a skilful exercise in obfuscation” (*Mao’s* 344). In the face of this, Fu co-opts the strategy and arguably subverts its ability to superimpose alternative narratives. Secondly, it is not unusual for life writing to play in the borders of fact and fiction, or to stand on the unsteady foundation of memory. Fu is explicit about the nature of the memories she relies on for her life narrative: “[m]emories of the time [...] flutter like butterflies at the edges of my consciousness. [...] My dreams felt like memories as my memories faded into dreams” (Fu *Bend* 77). As theorists of life writing like Sidonie Smith have made clear, *any* utterance in autobiographical texts, regardless of whether they are based on memory, ‘verifiable’ history, dreams, or shades of each, characterises its writer, and thus becomes the substance of ‘autobiographical truth’ (Smith 13).

The import of “[w]hat is remembered and what is forgotten, and why, change[s] over time”, and so life writing becomes implicated in a politics of remembering (otherwise), or choosing certain events and narratives to forget (Smith 18). In one notable instance, Fu responded to the criticism that she had fabricated a certain tale in her memoir about being forced to watch a teacher be dismembered by having each of their limbs tied to four horses. She explained that this was an “emotional memory” that had, in hindsight, only been the stuff of her nightmares (Fu ‘Clarifying’ n. pag.). If certain memories have been collectively repressed or suppressed according to distinct contexts, life writing is often poised to contradict official or dominant narratives of the individual and collective past. Fu (re)organises the butterflies of dream and memory in order to construct meaning from a past which cannot (and perhaps should not ever) be fully recovered. The materiality of the

butterflies of memory flickering at the edge of Fu's consciousness, fluttering between different epistemological modes, are indicative of Fu's autobiographical truth, of her narrative's symbolic truth, regardless of the degree to which they have metamorphosed from different forms of 'reality'.

Conclusion: Achieving the Third Possibility

The texts studied in this chapter evince a Malinallian/La Malinchian double-tonguedness that on the one hand offers the authors the opportunity for "self-explanation and, ultimately, self-empowerment", as Bella Adams argues, and on the other hand allows them to enter a market in which their individual life narratives are indexed to cultural, national and political Otherness (6). Whilst it is true, as King-Kok Cheung avows, that "autobiography is often a vehicle of subversion and 'self-invention'", it is also the case, as Rey Chow surmises, that the market may have begun to allow minorities to 'speak' only "on the explicit expectation that they speak in the documentary mode, 'reflecting' the group from which they come" (Cheung *Chinese American* 35; Chow *Modern* 22). What Grice recognises though is that these works of life writing are "sites of multiaccentuality or sites of pluralistic meaning", and as such:

there is the possibility that these texts may be construed or consumed as appealing to the stereotypical assumptions about China's 'cultural difference' (for this substitute 'cultural inferiority'). [...] So whilst their authors produce them as critiques of Maoist China, they are consumed by a readership that is fixated upon a 'neo-orientalist' exoticism and voyeurism. (Grice *Asian* 25)

So it is that the context of the collective or individual traumas described in many of these narratives should be taken into account.

The collective traumas of the Maoist era are implicated in a global narrative of the East's difference to the West, whilst the ordeals of the individual are often subsumed by the similarities of the genre. We can read autobiography not only as a way for writers to testify to oppression, but also as a way of entering a global market on these terms—terms

that *mean* differently depending on the publishing context. However, at the same time, the profusion of voices from Chinese expatriates testifying to the hardships of life in modern China works individually and collectively to write back against a regime that has sought to silence dissenting voices. Their life writing functions in part as an alternate historiography, and as an assertion of the value of individual lives in the wake of a politics that aimed to subsume the individual to the collective.

The late twentieth century saw a boom in life writing in general, and in migrant Chinese life writing in particular. With this boom, important stories were brought to light—stories that allowed these writers to testify, confess, explain, teach, subvert and revise their individual (and collective) lives. Yet this boom is also indicative of an ideological and capitalist logic that simultaneously sought to exploit a successful generic formula and to maintain the separation of a milieu (the West/America) that is superior to China *because* it ostensibly offers the freedom to establish a self to express. Whilst there may seem to be only two options presented to life writers—bowing to the pressures of the market, or forging their own path and being rejected or selling few copies—the life writing from the authors in this thesis’s cohort sometimes shows that there is a ‘third possibility’. Anchee Min ‘looks back’ at the voyeuristic gaze directed toward her, Adeline Yen Mah uses the pedagogic authority of her assumed ‘nativeness’ to accommodate her own narrative, and Ping Fu defends her form of autobiographical truth against the expectations of the informant’s facticity. By mapping the figure of La Malinche onto the phantasm of the ‘native informant’, we can see how the conflicting pressures of cultural representation and interpretation can be navigated by authors in order to write back against the expectations of the role.

Conclusion

Coherence and Heterogeneity

This study began with the idea that literature written since 1965 by first generation migrants from China to America (one of the USA's fastest growing populations) deserves focused critical attention. Discovering the extent of the work published by this group of migrant writers has been astonishing. It is my hope that the appendices featured here, which list each text that I have discovered written by this group of authors (published in or translated into English) will serve as a foundation for future work on the literature of this cohort. These appendices include some 307 texts, ranging from Cultural Revolution life writing to detective fiction, Bildungsroman to high fantasy, avant-garde poetry to short story cycles, narratives of immigration to narratives rooted in China, or America, or elsewhere. Amongst these texts there are award-winning books, bestsellers, rediscovered classics, forgotten favourites, and a host of works that have seen little or no notable scholarly attention in English.

As the work of this thesis evolved, it became clear that the project to highlight Chinese migrant writers in America was, on the one hand, vital—due to the underrepresentation in scholarship of many of these writers, and the insights that these texts can give us into how two of the world's foremost superpowers are negotiated by those who often know both of these nations best—and, on the other hand, that its classifications and groupings unravel in the face of a cardinal heterogeneity that constantly interrupts attempts at circumscription.

Whilst such attention to first generation migrants usefully highlights writers with distinct experiences of moving between homelands, nationalities, languages, cultures and politics, it also, paradoxically, highlights both the cultural specificities of migration from China to America and the similarities with migrant writing across Asian American, American and

diasporic literature. Bringing together this group of authors according to similarities in their biographies, marked as distinct from other ethnic or migrant groups, in some ways repeats the dominant discourse in the West and in China of homogenising people of Chinese descent according to a racial logic, whilst in the West simultaneously marking them as different and staking the limits of their Otherness. Yet to suggest that this corpus of texts is indistinct from those produced by other groups of American, Asian American or even Chinese American writers would be to risk valorising assimilation to a hegemonic, ‘mainstream’ norm, or to ignore the historical and situational specificities of experience that each member of this cohort has variously lived through.

“To place two writers together because of similar details in their biographies reveals one's motivations and limitations”, observes Yiyun Li in *Dear Friend* (94). Decisions made about the criteria for inclusion in surveys of art always involve a sort of politics. For example, which categories might the writer Shirley Geok-lin Lim be included in or excluded from? Would her US citizenship suggest her writing should be incorporated into a survey of modern American literature? Does the fact of her migration to America mean that she is an American immigrant author? Does her non-whiteness assign her to the realms of ethnic literature (and if so, belonging to which group or groups)? Does her Malaysian birth qualify her as a Malaysian writer? Would her Malay-speaking Peranakan mother and/or Hokkien father qualify her as a Chinese, Chinese American or Chinese diasporic writer? Does it matter that she does not identify with China as a nation, nor speak a Chinese language fluently? Or does her participation in “what anthropologists may assert are ‘Chinese’ kinship, ritual, and communal features—ancestor worship, the extended family, food practices, and bred-in-the-bone Confucianist pieties” make her culturally Chinese (Shirley Geok-lin Lim, in discussion with the author, December 2016)? Do her literary concerns make her a postcolonial writer, or does the fact that she was educated as a British colonial subject? Might she also be classed as a Commonwealth writer? An author of World

literature, diaspora or migrant writing? Does it matter how Lim might position herself or ask to be positioned by critics?

What the work of this thesis has shown is that whilst these sorts of questions might remain unanswerable, paying attention to their tensions, paradoxes and discontents allows at least for the discovery of how each text works within and against the various borders that it might find itself (un)contained by. The authors assembled here are individual voices brought into chorus under a title that is in some senses arbitrary, and in others essential. The geographical coincidence of each author's birth location, and the fact of their migration to America is both coincidental and fundamental: local and national contexts are generative of real cultural difference, and individuals are all racialized into groups in ways that are critical to address. Yet the somewhat arbitrary nature of this grouping is also highlighted by the inclusion in Appendix B of a writer like Kavita Daswani, an author of South Asian descent who writes about desi Americans, but was nevertheless born and raised in Hong Kong. However, this is also the advantage of this grouping—it is circumscribed by a border that perpetually deconstructs itself, highlighting the differences between the authors and the books it brings together as much as it stresses other similarities.

Grounding and Ungrounding

What has been examined throughout this thesis is how processes and spaces of *ungrounding*—of the beyond, the between, the elsewhere—are conjured, how *grounded* spaces and epistemologies are evoked, and how these opposing forces are frequently inseparable. In Chinatowns, representations of 'authentic' Chineseness (in the archetypal space of Chineseness abroad) often become performative, moving beyond a supposed reality of 'things Chinese' to a fiction of the Orient. Yet all the while, as the means through which we represent, construct and enter Chinatowns are deconstructed by the literature of this cohort, performances of Chineseness are also solidified as practices of defensive

community-making: securing the borders of these ethnic neighbourhoods that have long been targeted for exhibiting the *wrong kinds* of Otherness.

Ha Jin's *A Map of Betrayal* is a novel rooted in history. Given the import to this novel of the context of US-China relations—through the Cold War, in the abiding mistrust of Asians in America, or in the continuing tensions between China and America—the narrative appears to stake out the solidity of geographically separate nations. Yet it is also a novel that raises questions about the mapping of discrete borders: it uncovers how the racial formations of each nation intersect, how past and present overlap, and how generic conventions can simultaneously be upheld and broken down.

Through the popularisation of the discourse of transnationalism, migrants have sometimes been imagined to surpass the organising logic of nationhood. But by examining the contingent spatiality of the 'transnation', this notion is problematised. The transnational is inherently tied to the grounding of states' controls upon migration, and many characters found in the books of these migrant writers express feelings of dislocation or disintegration as they engage in transnational activity, rather than the hope and positivity envisioned for those moving 'beyond' the nation.

The local and the global, the grounded and the ungrounded, cannot be easily separated. By examining the boom in the publication of life writing by this cohort of authors in the last few decades, we see how narratives can be both entirely personal—the writing of a single life—and representative of collective experience; how they can be specific to very particular spaces or nations and implicated in a global politics and market; how the author's self-making can be read alongside the reader's potential ungrounding of this self-positioning. A doubleness thus inflects many of these narratives, which simultaneously affirms and subverts the implicit expectations of the author, the publisher and the reader.

Looking Ahead and Speculative Fiction

Given the central tensions that have been traced throughout this thesis—between grounding and ungrounding; similarity and heterogeneity; sociohistorical context and innovations of form; local situation and global/transnational *beyond*—one generic shift that has occurred within the literature produced by this cohort over recent years is of particular note. A rapidly increasing number of Chinese migrant authors in America are turning to speculative fiction to explore questions of the modern world. However, whilst their fictionality may be speculative—postulating futurity, imagining alternate realities, conjuring different worlds—they are also rooted fundamentally in the world and context of the author and reader, and this grounding determines the shape of their speculation. Some of these texts are particularly evocative of the wider concerns of this thesis.

Marie Lu's *Legend* trilogy (2011-13), ostensibly based on *Les Misérables*, is set primarily in what was the western United States. The USA is now only a myth to the citizens of the Republic of America, which is separated from the 'Colonies' to the East and has been ravaged by plagues and flooding. It is a Young Adult dystopian series with a feminist, class-conscious bent. The two protagonists are both multiracial, partly Asian, and the Republic evinces a certain degree of 'Easternization': mourners don their best whites, street vendors sell boiled goose eggs and *you tiao* (fried dough) alongside hot dogs, Chinese-themed bars can be found in the slums selling knock-off Tsingtao beer. China and 'Africa' are the world's superpowers, with China sporting enormous, floating metropolises built over the ocean. The Republic, in comparison, is seen by the rest of the world as the isolationist, brainwashing, rogue state—the North Korea of its time. In the world of *Legend*, power and international relations are not absolutes. The Hegelian line of 'progress' from East to West is disrupted in this future—it only takes one generation to turn the world order on its head. As Arif Dirlik states, "there is much to be gained from imagining the end of

world in thinking through some of the more intractable problems of the present”, and the rise of China is tied to the fate of the USA in Lu’s speculative world (“The Rise’ 533).

Ling Ma’s 2018 novel *Severance* echoes *Legend* to the extent that it too is set in a dystopian America in which the arrival of something ‘Asian’ signals the decline of the United States (and the world at large). What both Ma and Lu explore is precisely the (dis)connection between worlds, the ties between here and there, the tensions between grounding and ungrounding that this thesis has investigated. *Severance* is, however, also substantially different from Lu’s novel. It is set in an alternate recent-present, in which an apocalyptic event has already taken place. An epidemic from China (‘Shen Fever’) has wiped out the vast majority of the world’s population, leaving them ‘fevered’—not quite alive, or dead, or zombies. The fevered mindlessly repeat the habits of their lives, whilst their bodies decay, working away until decomposing. They are the end point of modernity: only a step away from the drone-like work of corporate office workers like protagonist Candace Chen, or the employees in Asian factories and sweatshops employed by those corporations—from routines of capitalist work *and* everyday life. Candace seems to be to some extent immune from the apparent threat of nostalgia, which Candace believes has “something to do with [becoming fevered]” (L. Ma 143). Her life was always already nostalgic: she moves from Salt Lake City to New York having been inspired by the screen, which eventually makes her “wistful for the illusion of New York”; her blog, NY Ghost, reproduces the iconography of the city both before and after its collapse (despite her initial belief that an “outsider’s perspective” would show “undiscovered aspects” of the city, the images remain “variations of the same”); she makes routine trips to the Fujianese side of Chinatown, during which she looks into people’s windows and imagines “the lives of the occupants”, much as she later imagines her own return to Fujian: “beautiful, sunny, tropical Fuzhou, Fujian, fenced in by towering mountains and bounded by a boundless sea through which everyone leaves” (L. Ma 9, 14, 41, 98). If for Candace the “past is a black hole, cut

into the present day like a wound”, and the salve is to “keep moving”, then the movement itself has become habitual—beginning with her migration and ending with her post-apocalyptic wandering—tying together past and present, or the route from there to here (L. Ma 120).

Whilst the apocalypse is not shocking for Candace—“[t]he End [...] passes as ordinary”—it is clear that China is associated with that End (L. Ma 3). Dirlik poses the notion that “there is something risky about the association of ‘China’ with the end of the world, with its origins in the Yellow Peril discourse” (“The Rise 539). Yet he goes on to argue that modern imaginings of the end of the world are also distinct from the historical context of Yellow Peril discourse: with the authority of science, we now know that the threat of the ‘end of the world’ is no longer simply “the end of the world *as we know it*, but the end of the world as a literal end-of-history existential possibility” (Dirlik “The Rise’ 539-40, emphasis mine). What Ma adds to this equation is the notion of globality; or, what she subtracts is any notion that America and China are distinct forces upon the (end of the) Earth. Through capitalism, both are inherently tied together, inseparable in their ecological, sociological and economic order and disorder. It is implied that it is from one of the (eminently interchangeable) factories in China that Candace’s publishing company source their materials that the fever starts, having been portended by the “gemstone supplier that Spectra had initially contracted” closing down due to widespread lung disease amongst its employees (L. Ma 23). It is not the encounter with the alien that signals the end of the world in Ma’s novel—as in the Asian spy narrative, Yellow Peril discourse, nativist politics and so on—but the routine quality of inequality in the globalised present.

Where North America is the ground from which the speculative lines of *Legend* and *Severance* extend, R.F. Kuang’s 2018 novel *The Poppy War* imagines an alternative version of East Asia. Combining historical precedents from our world—the Japanese empire, the Chinese imperial examinations, the Nanjing Massacre and so on—with Asian mythical hero

tradition, Kuang crafts an alternate version of the modern world plagued by war, genocide and political manipulations. The protagonist, Rin, learns to commune with the Gods in order to defend her country. Yet her shamanic powers also move her beyond the ground of nation: “She had travelled somewhere beyond time”, and “[s]he saw now that reality was a façade; a dream conjured by the undulating forces beneath a thin surface” (Kuang 209, 213). It is this ungrounding that both allows her to fulfil her potential, as she learns to channel the power within her, and that means she forgets the context from which that power springs. Rin is one of the two remaining Speerlies: an indigenous race wiped out by the Mugen empire (an analogue for Japan), and in her rage about the empire’s destruction, the novel ends with Rin unleashing her power upon Mugen, with the force of an atom bomb. “Warfare was about absolutes. Us or them. Victory or defeat. There was no middle way”, Rin concludes, realising that this is the same logic that “justified the destruction of Speer” (Kuang 432). Against the binaries that appear to inherently structure the material world, perpetuating its state of warfare, Rin ventures to a world ‘beyond’, only to find that she is tied inextricably to the politics of the ground.

Su Wei’s translated novel *The Invisible Valley* (2018) is also set in China, though this is a China of the past. Protagonist Lu Beiping recalls his time as a ‘re-ed’ in Hainan—one of the ‘sent down’ youths in Mao’s rustication programme during the Cultural Revolution. From a base(camp) of historical precedent, Lu Beiping is thrown into an alternate world after being sent to work as herdsman in the dense jungle of the island. As he entrenches himself more in the forest, mythical, folkloric, vaguely supernatural elements begin to take hold of the narrative. Lu falls in with an unconventional family of ‘driftfolk’—itinerant labourers who are the “homeless, unpapered, ‘invisible’” elements in Maoist society (Su 42). Lu senses a “lurking aberration” amongst these driftfolk: they express different forms of love from those sanctioned by the state (Su 76). Yet what quickly becomes clear for Lu is that the mysticism and apparent danger of this ‘other’ world is no more ‘absurd’, to use

Lu's language, than the society of the base camp: "between the second and third bends of the creek [was], he did his best to imagine, the sole safe haven offered him by Fate; [...] a quarantine, a no-man's land, demilitarized zone between two bristling absurdities" (Su 77). In a reimagining of the kind of no man's land found in Chuang Hua's *Crossings*, Lu's isolated zone tucked in the folds of the creek is in fact continually *crossed* by the people of both camps. Both make incursions on his imagined 'in-between' territory, and he is forced to choose allegiances.

As Lu spends more time beyond the borders of the base camp, he is brought circularly to a metaphorical overlook that superimposes the camp of the driftfolk upon that of the reeds. The driftfolk's lore of the mythical Snakeweird, 'crossed' kin and ghost-wives, is not so different to Communist commands to "Exterminate All [...] Horned Demons and Hidden Serpents"—yet one is rooted in tradition and the other in destruction (Su 227). Lu thus chooses (or perhaps is chosen) to join the family of the driftfolk in some capacity, and so to "become a citizen of the shadow world" (Su 239). As the separation between the 'real' and the 'fantastic' becomes blurred, Lu's affiliations change: he becomes spiritually joined to the "primitive paradise" of the jungle (339). Yet we know from the novel's frame narrative that despite fathering a son with one of the driftfolk, Lu eventually returns to 'mainstream' modern China, working for the Hainan Foreign Visitors Office. He becomes distant from his life in the jungle, experiencing it only as anecdotal recollection to Tsung, the framing narrator—a device that forces Lu's narrative even further away from its origins. Whilst Lu feels that he has moved beyond the tumult of the human world during his time in the jungle, the frame narrative continually reminds us that he is eventually forced back to it.

The 'someplace else' that sits beguilingly on the horizon of almost all of the texts in this thesis's corpus is given form in these works of speculative fiction. To focus only on the spaces imagined 'beyond' or 'in-between' would be to miss how these zones remain fundamentally linked to the conditions of the material world that give form and structure

to even those spaces that seem to transcend them: nation, race, history, culture, form, genre, capital and so on must be read in tandem with the project of transcending borders. The immigration narrative propelling many of the texts studied here typifies this relationship.

Unlike the transatlantic migrant writing of the early twentieth century—archetypes of immigrant literature like Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Lavinsky* (1917), *Bread Givers* by Anzia Yezierska (1925) or Henry Roth’s *Call it Sleep* (1934), for example—the literature written by this cohort of modern migrant authors from China is oriented around the transpacific. Assumptions and fabulas (like those proposed by William Boelhower) formulated around American immigrant writing are often based upon readings of migrant authors of European descent. But they often need to be rethought in reading the literature of Asian American migrant writers. Based on a history not of huddled masses welcomed into a ‘melting pot’, but rather of racialized exclusion from the nation, this transpacific migrant writing emerges from an alternate tradition. When this alternate historicity of the transpacific orientation is combined with a reckoning with what Bharati Mukerjee calls the ‘Literature of New Arrival’—a paradigm for modern, multicultural immigrant literature—the importance of studying modern American migrant writing in all its diversity becomes clear (‘Immigrant’ 683). As Mukherjee expresses, to read modern immigrant literature is to “immerse oneself in the history of the homeland the immigrant author has left”, to feel an “intimacy” with the immigrant character, and to recognise the plurality of the American nation (‘Immigrant’ 691-2). Not all of the texts read for this thesis deal directly with the immigrant experience, but by understanding all of this writing as part of modern, transpacific migrant writing, it becomes apparent that rather than a clear ‘break’ occurring in the move from China to America (a putative transcending of place and past, as well as the model of immigrant literature in the Americanization era), there is instead an entanglement between these nations, spaces and cultures; between transformation and continuity, history and modernity; and between the local and the global.

The group of authors that this thesis has investigated has, since The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, grown exponentially in number, as well as in international acclaim from literary prize-givers. Yet they have also often gone largely unnoticed by the academy. Reading these authors as a cohort of first generation migrant writers, this thesis has explored the tensions between different forms of (dis)connection—spatial, artistic, cultural and economic—and how forms of ‘grounding’ and ‘ungrounding’ intersect in their work. It has examined the notion of ‘authenticity’ that is often assumed to be contingent with ethnic writing, and how distinctions between ‘realness’ and ‘fakeness’ often break down in this literature. It has, ultimately, investigated a cohort of authors who have migrated between two of the nations around which the twenty-first century is likely to pivot, exploring how these nations interact with, differ from and produce one another, and how migrants and migrant writing are central to understanding the mechanisms of each nation in a globalising world.

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Appendix A

Books published by first generation migrants from China to America that form part of this thesis's corpus

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Appendix B

Books published by first generation migrants from China to America that have not been read as part of this thesis's corpus

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