UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Narrating the Visual:

Seeing Race in Asian American Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Sharon Ro Chon

2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

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By severing the contingency of "Asian American" from essentialist principles governing authorial descent and mimetic contents, this dissertation reads the "Asian American" of Asian American literature as a particular configuration of aesthetic form, namely of fictional form. More specifically, I argue that the contours of what might comprise an Asian American literary archive can be drawn by the archive's formal negotiation with aspects of visuality. This engagement with the visual takes after the critical ambivalences that have framed applications of schemas of the visible and the visual in Asian American Studies' apprehension of Asian racialization in the social, political, and cultural domains. On the one hand, the visual logic of race depends on an optically-grounded epistemology that sutures embodied evidence perceptible to the eye to meaning which is passed off as knowledge. Scholars have deftly denaturalized these "common sense" notions, leading to the valuable interrogation of the social and historical

construction of normalized ways of seeing and apparatuses of racialization. On the other hand, metaphors of visibility and invisibility used to understand the politics of representation have shaped and continue to shape our thinking about the racialized distribution of power and possibilities for transformative social change.

This dissertation additionally revisits Susan Koshy's characterization of "Asian American" as a catachresis that signals dissimulation through its analytical inadequacy by rereading catachresis as a strategy intended to lend legible form to unmarked racialized experiences. The texts taken up by this project are concerned with the way the visual has contributed to experiences of oppression, but moreover display investments in recuperating the visual as a mode of responsive resistance. Legibility means mounting the process by which these forms of the visual contribute to racialization, but also the ways in which these forms of the visual are indispensable to these texts' self-imagining as Asian American literature. Accordingly, in order to demonstrate the consistency with which the visual inflects Asian American literary form, the selection of texts in this dissertation occupies a wide historical range.

The dissertation of Sharon Ro Chon is approved.

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2018

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my committee, Jinqi Ling, Yogita Goyal, Ursula Heise, and Sean Metzger, for their support in bringing this project to completion. I would also like to extend my appreciation to friends and family for their patience and compassion over the years, with a special thank you directed toward Sharon Tran.

VITA

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Introduction

A disruption between sign and referent has characterized "Asian American" since the deconstructive turn of the 1990s. Susan Koshy's 1996 definition of "Asian American" as a catachrestic designator has colored the way scholars have approached the term thereafter; to describe "Asian American" as a catachresis acknowledges the label's uneasy relationship to the population it claims to designate. This signifying shortcoming, notwithstanding the general arbitrariness of language, is one reason why scholars have found the task of defining Asian American literature so challenging. Since the field's inception, marked by Elaine Kim's 1982 *Asian American Literature*, criteria of circumscription have tended intuitively toward two approaches: the filiative and the mimetic, which are both based on identitarian understandings of the category. The filiative ascribes the Asian American-ness of a given literary text to the racial background of the author, while the mimetic reads Asian American-ness into a literary text sociologically, establishing a mirror correspondence between a text's contents and its extratextual contexts. These two approaches cannot account for authors whose racial, ethnic, and national affiliations are ambiguous, multiple, or contradictory, and assume the transparency of language while deemphasizing the aesthetic complexities of a given text.

By severing the contingency of "Asian American" from essentialist principles governing authorial descent and mimetic contents, this dissertation reads the "Asian American" of Asian American literature as a particular configuration of aesthetic form, namely of fictional form. I start with Colleen Lye's assertion that "the Asian American text is not one that represents Asian Americans, since there can be none such," but "is one that is – or can be shown to be – engaged with a problematic of Asian American representation" ("Reading" 492). Though open to varying interpretations, the phrase "Asian American representation," for the purpose of this project,

pertains to the ways in which Asian racialization in America has registered ambivalently on the visual field. On the one hand, the visual logic of race depends on an optically-grounded epistemology that sutures embodied evidence perceptible to the eye to meaning which is passed off as knowledge. Scholars have deftly denaturalized these "common sense" notions, leading to the valuable interrogation of the social and historical construction of normalized ways of seeing and apparatuses of racialization.[1] On the other hand, metaphors of visibility and invisibility used to understand the politics of representation have shaped and continue to shape our thinking about the racialized distribution of power and possibilities for transformative social change. The connotations associated with invisibility and visibility are themselves conditional, dependent on the analytical contexts in which the terms are deployed. Not to mention, Asian American representation in its visual and visible capacities is further inflected by the stereotype of inscrutability, which comments on the ways an Orientalized façade refuses to avail itself to meaning when viewed.[2]

Although Susan Koshy's characterization of "Asian American" as a catachresis is symptomatic of the conflation between literary and non-literary representations that plagues ethnic literature, I return to catachresis to think of the literary text's staging of the problematic of Asian American representation. Catachresis, rather than signaling dissimulation through its analytical inadequacy, can be considered a strategy intended to lend legible form to unmarked racialized experiences. If Asian American literature engages the problematic of such representation, the texts taken up by this project are concerned with the way the visual has

[1] See Abel, Fleetwood, Kawash, Mitchell, Raengo, and Wiegman.

[2] In the section "The Written Face" on the Japanese Noh mask, Barthes writes, "Reduced to the elementary signifiers of writing (the blank of the page and the indentations of its script), the face dismisses any signified, i.e., any expressivity: this writing writes nothing (or writes: *nothing*); not only does it not 'lend' itself (a naïvely mercantile word) to any emotion, to any meaning (not even that of impassivity, of inexpressiveness), but it actually copies no character whatever" (*Empire of Signs* 89).

contributed to experiences of oppression, but moreover display investments in recuperating the visual as a mode of responsive resistance. Legibility means mounting the process by which these forms of the visual contribute to racialization, but also the ways in which these forms of the visual are indispensable to these texts' self-imagining as Asian American literature. As follows, in order to demonstrate the consistency with which the visual inflects Asian American literary form, the selection of texts in the subsequent chapters occupies a wide historical range.

On Susan Koshy and Fiction

Susan Koshy's intervention, "The Fiction of Asian American Literature," ends its exposition of the failure of "Asian America" to do indexical justice to the shifting demographics of its target community after 1965 on the following deconstructive note:

> I would contend that "Asian American" offers us a rubric that we cannot not use. But our usage of the term should rehearse the catachrestic status of the formation. I use the term "catachresis" to indicate that there is no literal referent for the rubric "Asian American," and, as such, the name is marked by the limits of its signifying power. It then becomes our responsibility to articulate the inner contradictions of the term and to enunciate its representational inconsistencies and dilemmas. (342)

She observes that the discord between the need for a politically viable panethnicity and the need to represent the "heterogeneous formation we call 'Asian American'" only arises when "we work from the assumption that there is a 'real' Asian American identity to which our vocabulary and procedures can be adequated" (342). This assumption of positivist correspondence sustains the "additive approach" of many scholars who simply enlarge the boundaries of "Asian America"

via an economy of pluralistic inclusion, which "seems arbitrarily based on the accident of ethnic affiliation rather than on any critical or literary criteria" (Koshy 326). The wish for criteria that are distinctively literary when assessing the limits of Asian America indicates Koshy's belief that formulating such criteria may be possible.

Nonetheless Koshy's ambivalent use of the term "fiction" and its grammatical morphologies in the essay's title and throughout its body showcases her conflation of Asian American literature with Asian American social formation, and equally of Asian American literary criticism with Asian American social studies. The appearance of "fiction" in the essay's title "The Fiction of Asian American Literature" plays on the word's multiple meanings, in particular the dualism between "fiction" as imaginative composition or discourse, and "fiction" as "[f]eigning, counterfeiting; deceit, dissimulation, pretence" (OED).[3] As the essay's argument proceeds to dismantle the integrity of the rubric of Asian American literature, it is clear that Koshy's use of the word steadily aligns with the second definition. Further appearances of "fiction" and its variants alongside or in relation to "Asian American" confirms this suspicion: "fictional notion of unity" (Koshy 318); "the mutability and fictionality of membership" (331); "fictionality of the rubric" (333); "fictions of the putatively more stable Asian ethnic formations" (339). In Koshy's attack on the coherence of Asian American literature, fiction is used as a synonym for fabrication; the "fiction" of Asian American literature is its duplicity in asserting an empty notion of wholeness and consensus.

By stressing the second meaning of fiction (deceit) over the first (imaginative composition), Koshy precludes the capacity to think of "Asian American literature" as separate from but related to "Asian American" as a sociological signifier. The phrases "the rubric of

[3] See Williams, *Keywords*, especially the entry "Fiction" (134-137), and Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction*, especially the chapter "Focus on Fiction," 1-17.

Asian American literature," "the panethnic rubric" (335), "Asian American constituency" (322), and most generally "the rubric of 'Asian American'" (338), are used indiscriminately which indicates a slippage between "Asian American" in describing a social formation and "Asian American" in describing an aesthetic practice. The disabling of fiction as an avenue to distinguish the work of literature from the work of sociology, in addition to the unmethodical conflation of formation with form, continues to impose on Asian American literature its claim to a seemingly intrinsic mimetic correspondence to reality.

In recent decades, scholars have responded earnestly to Koshy's call for "literary criteria" to locate the boundaries of Asian American literature. These critics are dedicated to reading literature as a specific representational practice and consequently to reading Asian American literature beyond the limitations of political instrumentality.[4] For instance, through Theodor Adorno's aesthetic theory of semblance, Christopher Lee tracks the "persistence" of what he calls the "idealized critical subject," a theoretical figure that "operates throughout Asian American literary culture and cultural criticism as a means of providing coherence to oppositional knowledge projects and political practices" (*Semblance* 3-4). Mindful of contingency, the turn toward formalism prioritizes reading texts in context, which has enabled the conceptualization of an Asian American literary archive that is responsive to shifting historical conditions. Dorothy Wang's work, arguing that the perpetual foreigner stereotype associated with Asian Americans manifests as textual residues of a linguistic foreignness in Asian American poetry, operates based on the assumption that "a poem's use of form is inseparable from the larger social, historical, and political contexts that produced the poet's

[4] See Lye, "Racial Form" and Christopher Lee, "Asian American Literature and the Resistances of Theory."

subjectivity" (xxii).[5] By examining the ways the ambivalences of visuality have structured the peculiarly literary nature of the texts to be examined, this project embraces increased attention to aesthetic considerations.

The Visibility Schema in Asian American Scholarship

To the extent that race asserts claims based on perceptible signs of difference on the body, the visibility-invisibility dualism has acted as a productive critical schema by providing the major terms by which processes of racialization might be analyzed. Yet, due to its capaciousness and elementarity, the visibility-invisibility binary has been deployed to varied, and sometimes contradictory, ends.[6] On the one hand, normative invisibility indicates the naturalized standard against which deviant signs are measured. The concept of whiteness as an unmarked racial category, for instance, points towards its position of dominance in relation to other races which are marked as different. On the other hand, the universalization of the male, bourgeois, white subject contributes to the invisiblizing of those that aberrate rendering them powerless on a social and political register. One enduring example of this is the history of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement in the U.S. Originally reserved for white, propertied men, suffrage was gradually extended to formerly disenfranchised groups after contestatory bids for the removal of legal exclusions. Nonwhites similarly were barred from claiming right to citizenship, thus demarcating the abstract (or ideal) citizen as white.

[5] For more examples of this formalist turn, see Jeon, Park, Tang, and T. Yu (*Race and the Avant-Garde*).

[6] This dispersal of uses derives in part due to the instability of the visible in assessing race. Kawash notes, "Race is on the skin, but the skin is the sign of something deeper, something hidden in the invisible interior of the organism…To see racial difference is therefore to see the bodily sign of race but also to see more than this sign, to see the interior difference it stands for. Thus, The modern conception of racial identity maintains an uneasy relation to the visual; the visible marks of the racialized body are only the signs of a deeper, interior difference, and yet those visible marks are the only difference that can be observed" (130).

In part due to the category's perpetually fraught definition, varied usage of the visibility-invisibility topos multiplies when applied to "Asian American." Eleanor Ty offers "the politics of the visible" to address "the effects of being legally, socially, and culturally marked as 'visible,' and, paradoxically, with the experience of being invisible in dominant culture and history" (11-12). It is unclear whether this paradox occurs in the shift between discursive regimes or in the conflict between external identification ("of being…marked") and internal subjectivity ("the experience of"),[7] uncertainties that other critics have addressed. But it is clear in Ty's formulation that the visible precipitate of Asianness derives from "a set of bodily attributes that has been represented in our culture as 'Asian," filmic and pictorial representations of the Oriental – but moves beyond the visual to social, legal, political, and historical spheres" (4). This tropological transfer of the visibility-invisibility opposition from the corporeal to the discursive is provocative and has contributed to the explosion in the framework's paradoxical deployments. What Ty describes is the transformation of visibility into a metaphor that extends its range of application to describe context-dependent power and social relations.

For many, the inception of "Asian American" as an identitarian marker was a direct response to the exclusion of Asian Americans from dominant historical, cultural, and sociological narratives.[8] Heidi Kim notes that the trope of invisibility seeps radically into the very core of "Asian American": "The roots of Asian American literature and literary criticism are, like those of the Asian American historical field, in the very invisibility they seek to overcome" (17). The identity politics of the 1960s and 1970s hinged on a politics of recognition, in which racialized Asian Americans sought acknowledgement of both their common rights as citizens and distinct particularities as minorities. And yet, even when race is noticed, the

[7] See Du Bois and Fanon.

[8] See Takaki and Cheng.

bipolarity of the U.S. racial apparatus has a historical track record of "seeing only black and white…[which renders] Asians, American Indians, and Latinos invisible, ignoring the gradations and complexities of the full spectrum between the racial poles" (Okihiro 62). Yellow is neither black nor white in a monochromatic social landscape.[9]

The drive to attain visibility shaped the active and conscious formation of an Asian American literary canon in the cultural realm.[10] Most evident is *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* published in 1974 by Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong. Working against the faulty assumption that Asian American culture was not visible because of its nonexistence, the anthology sought to bring recognition to standing writers and texts that attested to "the existence of Asian-American sensibilities and cultures that might be related to but are distinct from Asia and white America" (*Aiiieeeee!* viii). Priding themselves on an anthology that is "exclusively Asian-American" (*Aiiieeeee!* vii), the editors targeted denigrating stereotypes of the Asian American peddled by dominant American culture. In following, the anthology is both an effort to recover, or render visible, and to formally establish an "Asian America, so long ignored and forcibly excluded from creative participation in American culture" (*Aiiieeeee!* viii).

In these contexts, there exists a straightforward correspondence: visibility is equated to political and social power while invisibility is liken to disenfranchisement. However, Lisa Lowe has pointed out how the "essentializing of Asian American identity" can duplicate patterns of invisibility and disempowerment effected by dominant culture. Much like how the universalization of the white, bourgeois male subject erases those that deviate from this norm,

[9] See Wei on why the Asian American Movement itself lacked visibility (3).

[10] Lisa Lowe maintains that "the 'cultural nationalist' formation of some Asian American work is motivated by a desire to represent, to make visible the erased and evacuated histories in realist and naturalist modes" (*Immigrant Acts* 34).

"to the degree that the discourse generalizes Asian American identity as male, women are rendered invisible; or to the extent that Chinese are presumed to be exemplary of all Asians, the importance of other Asian groups is ignored" (Lowe, "Heterogeneity" 30-31).[11] With increased attention to the nuances of intersectionality and internal incongruities, critics have grappled with the relation between invisibility and visibility in defining Asian Americanness not as an either-or proposition but as concomitant. Comparing the treatment of Asian American bodies to the nation's strategy of abjection, Karen Shimakawa asserts that Asian Americanness is characterized precisely by the "movement between visibility and invisibility, foreignness and domestication/assimilation; it is that *movement between* enacted by and on Asian Americans…that marks the boundaries of Asian American cultural (and sometimes legal) citizenship" (3). Rather than focus on the vacillation between two binaric oppositions, other critics have analyzed visibility-invisibility in terms of contradiction between external interpellation and internal subjectification (subject formation). In her study of cultural representations of Japanese American women, Traise Yamamoto applies this disjunctive axis to Japanese American women who are hyper visible as cultural objects, particularly in their sexualization, exoticization, and commodification, but remain invisible as social subjects.

The Cultural Realm as Surrogate Field of Visibility

In face of Asian American exclusions in the economic and legal domains, critics have privileged the cultural realm as a space of transgression and possibility. This potentiality of the cultural sphere is most clearly spelled out in Lisa Lowe's analysis of the contradiction between abstract labor and the abstract citizen, which arises because "capital, with its supposed needs for

[11] See, for example, Mitsuye Yamada's essay "Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster" in which she refers to Asian American women collectively as "We, the visible minority that is invisible" (36).

'abstract labor,' is said by Marx to be unconcerned by the 'origins' of its labor force, whereas the nation-state, with its need for 'abstract citizens' formed by a unified culture to participate in the political sphere, is precisely concerned to maintain a national citizenry bound by race, language, and culture" (*Immigrant Acts* 12). At the turn of the nineteenth century, the conflict between the exigencies of the economy and of the state was displaced onto and resolved through the legal exclusion of Chinese laborers. Culture, specifically Asian American culture, emerged as a "material site of struggle," or as "an alternative site to the American economic, political, and national cultural spheres," in which Asian American subjects have been marginalized (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 22, 29). The transgressive potential of culture exists in its ability to destabilize normalized and universalized assumptions surrounding national identity.

Privileging culture can inadvertently enact its own erasures, making certain coordinates of power such as class less visible to the critical eye. Commenting on the visiblizing maneuvers of the *Aiiieeeee!* editors and of Lowe, Yoonmee Chang asserts that in both assessments "[c]ulture is posited as a form of economic ethnic agency" which strives to both validate the culture of Asian American in face of dominant culture and "to level the economic terrain by empowering racialized subjects with a contestatory culture through which they can advocate for economic and class parity" (46). The risk of turning to culture as the primary strategy for remediating economic inequities however, is that "it can backfire by enabling the swallowing up of questions of economic and class injustice into questions of culture" (Chang 47). Invisibility not only can affect subjects that fall outside the parameters of the ideal Asian American, but also certain elements of material reality.

Aiming to address one aspect of the elision diagnosed by Chang, scholars have reconceptualized the invisibility-visibility paradigm in order to recuperate another dimension of

the imperceptible: the abstractions of capital. Mostly adopting a formalist tack in examining the way figures of the Asiatic have been deployed to "visualize the unrepresentable,"[12] this scholarly line looks to unpack the linkages between race and capital by deploying Asian American as an analytical category. In *America's Asia*, Colleen Lye's formulation of "Asiatic racial form" as a "trope of economic efficiency" strives to outline the ways racialization marks social relations shaped under the abstracting forces of capital (5). The double-sidedness of this racial form, either as Yellow Peril or as Model Minority, has lent visible ideological shape to national anxieties arising in relation to the economic ambitions of the U.S. during the era of industrial capitalism. Under the register of economics, the figure of the Asian gives historically and nationally specific form to the Orientalism operative behind U.S. imperialism. Similarly invested in the connection between Asianness and capitalist excess, Christine So's *Economic Citizens* interrogates the way reading economic exchange in narratives of assimilation make the "paradoxical nature" of Asian American identity formation "fully visible" (3). Though Shimakawa noted that the very visibility of Asian Americanness in the cultural realm coagulates through the "*movement between*" marked and unmarked states (*National Abjection* 3), So takes this claim a step further by inextricably tying racial and class formation. Such *movement between* is rendered discernable through economic exchange, but where "Asians have historically symbolized economic imbalance,"

[12] This phrase comes from Lye's discussion of the visual valence of "Asiatic racial form":

> We easily recognize the presence of race in visual media because of its identification with a set of phenotypical traits and a relative absence of interiority. Yet the visuality of Asiatic racial form has a distinctive character insofar as the sense of its deceitfulness or mystery always points to the presence of something not shown. To put it another way, we recognize the Asiatic as a figure for the unrepresentable. Yet how is the unrepresentable to be visualized? Does it have a human body? If not, what shape, as a whole or in part, does it take? These are the kinds of questions that are bypassed if our study of racial figuration begins by supposing the anthropomorphism of Asiatic form. (Lye, *America's Asia* 7)

economic exchange moreover *produces* such movement as "racialized identities are constructed through the machine of capital" (14).[13]

As this overview has demonstrated, the invisibility-visibility schema has been indispensable to thinking about Asian American racialization and has gained increasing complexity in enabling and accommodating different ideas. The schema addresses the salience of corporeal difference, the erasure of marginalized subjectivities, in addition to the possible oversight of critical rubrics. Within the legal, economic, and social domains, the concept of visibility links to power, a link conditioned by the politics of recognition. The cultural realm operates in a peculiar way, however. On the one hand, critics like Chang single out the cultural domain as the space toward which the impetus to power (and visibility) is displaced by repressed subjects, while others following Lye claim the cultural realm is the only venue that will visibly register certain formations of the abstractions of capital. Given the long and embedded history of the visual and the visible in shaping critical insights about Asian America, how do the pressure points of this analytical schema register on a cultural terrain that is deals specifically with language? Could such an analytical angle lend further insight into conceptualizing possible boundaries for an Asian American literature?

A Return to Catachresis

According to Koshy, "Asian American" preserves a utility insofar as it can be analyzed in its inutility. In following, literary critics have used catachrestic Asian American as a shorthand to signal the category's constructedness, artificiality, and discursivity. An embodiment of this

[13] See also Iyko Day for a reading of the racialization of the Asian subject as the embodiment of abstract labor under settler colonialism.

deconstructionist trend is Kandice Chuh's 2003 *Imagine Otherwise*, which advocates thinking of "Asian America" as a "subjectless discourse" – a concatenation of discursive effects rather than an empirically verifiable agential formation (9). As an analytical concept that found elaboration under Derrida and subsequently under Spivak, catachresis symptomatized the field's trajectory toward difference, dispersal, and irresolution. Elda Tsou so far offers the most thought out attempt to use catachresis to develop "critical or literary criteria" for Asian American literature (Koshy 326), however, not without its shortcomings.

That "Asian American" best displays its referential transgressivity through figurative activity, which enables disruption and discontinuity within the signifying circuit of race, underlies Tsou's 2015 monograph *Unquiet Tropes*. Its central premise builds off of Derrida, who found in catachresis a reassignment of a sign's "proper sense" (triggering a process of de-normatization or de-naturalization) through violent misuse by which the catachresis occupies an intermediary position between "primitive and figurative" usages ("White Mythology" 58). If Koshy's critique of "Asian American" rested on the conflation between its literary and sociological applications in which assessment of "proper" usage bent toward the latter (i.e. "Asian American" is an inadequate sociological signifier), Chuh's and Tsou's readings of the term presuppose the ubiquity of its literary or figurative application as always "improper" (i.e. "Asian American" is a metaphor). Under the overwhelming textualizing tendencies of deconstruction, their approach falls short in justifying the singularity of the category's literary dimension in contrast to the socio-political. Tsou defines the literary as "the surplus of meaning and reference generated by language when it exceeds or deviates from proper usage," a definition which is intended "to designate the formal specificity of literature" (*Unquiet Tropes* 6). When considered this way, the specificity of "Asian American" in "Asian American

literature" is subsumed by the generality of the literary. Timothy Yu, who identifies as a central concern for the formalists "the question of whether form is a particularizing or universalizing force" ("On Asian American Form" 416), views Tsou's treatment of form as embedded in "a *universalizing* move" ("On Asian American Form" 415). This is to say, "literary form provides a universalizing structure within which Asian American content unfolds" (T. Yu, "On Asian American Form" 416).

The shortcomings of Tsou's deployment of Asian American catachresis become clear when we return to Spivak's original formulation. In Spivak's assessment, catachresis finds political purchase in circumscribing the limits of a sign's presumed general applicability, or in other words, in underscoring its referential inadequacy. Defining catachresis as a "concept-metaphor without an adequate referent" (*Outside* 60), Spivak refers mostly to totalizing master words such as "woman," "nationhood," and "citizenship," but concedes that any word used politically is "irreducibly catachrestic" (*Outside* 161). Because these master words signal universalized abstractions, they are unable to account for historical particulars, or are unable to adequately relate to their referents. This tendency toward universalization is one of the consequences Koshy and others find troubling about "Asian American": its tendency to erase internal conflict and difference through homogenization in favor of referencing a cohesive identity that does not exist in reality. Returning to Spivak's formulation however, the concept-metaphor's inadequacy in denotation also allows the space for transgression through appropriation. The reclamation of master concept-metaphors such as "nation" and "sovereignty" by decolonized spaces for political ends – that is, the reconfiguration of a sign that departs from its original use, or the "perversion" of a "metaphor" (OED) – reveals the inadequacies of these categories in their origination in the space of the colonizers. This political function of catachresis

works through what Spivak calls "reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value coding" ("Postcoloniality and Value" 228), a capitalistic semiotizing process that is a sort of marriage between Marx's theory of value and Foucault's concept of power.

"Asian American" presents a peculiar case due to its emergence as a phrase deliberately coined to politically mark a presence that remained previously unnamed (or at the very best, misnamed by the term "Oriental"). In its wholeness "Asian American" defies Spivak's discussion of reappropriated value coding and stymies attempts to ascribe to it the "perversion" from proper to improper usage characteristic of catachresis. What was the proper application of "Asian American" if its original use already signaled a gesture of resistance? Alternatively, has its usage always been improper? Does its "perversion" stem from the juxtaposition of "Asian" and "American"?

Deviating from Derrida's (and Spivak's) formulation of literary catachresis as having a destabilizing mediatory role that always signals insufficiency, Andrzej Warminski offers an alternative, compensatory way of conceptualizing the trope. He argues that

> catachresis is less a matter of the relation between literal and figurative, proper and transferred, senses than it is a question of naming, marking, putting a word and imposing a sense where there is neither word nor sense. In other words, as much as catachresis is a figure (because it is a transfer of sense), it is also supplementarily a mere marker, a place-holder; it has nothing to do with sense; it only stands in the place of a lack. As a place-holder for a lack of sense, as a 'syntactical plug,' as it were, it is neither literal nor figurative; it is outside, asymmetrical to, questions of sense. (lv)

Rather than defined by the negative relationship between sign and referent, catachresis in Warminski's rendering comes to mark presence where there previously was none. More specifically, catachresis lends legibility to an entity whose contours were merely visible. Although its fulfillment of its place-holder function is contingent, "Asian American" is a neologistic catachresis – a word not directly repurposed from a formerly proper usage, but a coined marker – that was created in correspondence to a new class of subjects and of historical experiences. Shifting focus away from its referential inadequacies, Warminski's reconceptualization of catachresis imagines the trope as still indexing elements of the material world, a view that may reinvigorate the applicability of "Asian American".

Confronting Inscrutability with Literary Acts

Since my project accepts Asian American literature as indexing texts "engaged with a problematic of Asian American representation" (Lye, "Reading" 492), each of the works I analyze in the following chapters deals with a representational negotiation with inscrutability. If race can be conceptualized according to a depth model in which that which is sensible to the eye is assigned submerged social meanings naturalized as truths or knowledge, Asian inscrutability is a configuration of racism that both draws attention to this structural logic and upends it by short-circuiting the signifying order. When the racial structure is successfully operative, inscrutability bears on the figure of the Oriental as one of many of its many unsavory intrinsic traits (exotic, duplicitous, passive, perpetually alien, etc.). When taken in isolation apart from its cohort of stereotypes, inscrutability – defined as impenetrability, unintelligibility, and unreadability – highlights the denial of access to subterranean meanings.[14] External appearance, specifically

[14] See Rey Chow. For Kingston, "To say we are inscrutable" is to say "that we are by our nature intrinsically unknowable" ("Cultural Mis-readings" 96).

facial expression, and essential quality, specifically inscrutability, are fused into a single superficial unit. Inscrutability refers both to the external Oriental body and to the internal meaning this body is meant to elicit. Both surface and depth, signifier and referent, inscrutability showcases the tautological directionality of a racial logic based on sight.

This logic is tautological because the one-to-one correspondence between visible sign and sensible meaning is frustrated, deterring the translation of visibility into intelligibility. For the texts at hand, inscrutability could be deployed against its stereotypical usage to indicate the same "place of lack" that preexists catachrestical intervention (Warminski lv). This place of lack, which wants sense, can still be recognized as a site of absence much like the inscrutable, which can be perceived as such but only by virtue of its repudiation of meaning. The texts respond to their respective forms of inscrutability through fictional acts that grapple with the question of how to render the racialized experience legible. Unlike intelligibility, which I view as the work of racialization, legibility is the impetus toward cognition that lays bare underlying processes. When read sociologically (or ethnographically), Asian American literature can only lend itself to intelligibility, or the production of knowledge derived from essentialist assumptions. When read formally, Asian American literature provides passage to legibility.

By relying on Spivak's version of catachresis, which reads the trope through inadequacy and impropriety, Koshy understandably reads "Asian American literature" as constituting a fiction of deceit. By following Warminski's version, I hope to pursue an understanding of "Asian American literature" as comprising imaginative composition. His handling of catachresis as provisional naming strives to gets at the referential complexities of the trope in ways that resonate with Dorrit Cohn's treatment of fiction as "nonreferential narrative" (Cohn 12).

She further qualifies the adjective "nonreferential" to indicate that "fiction is subject to two closely interrelated distinguishing features: (1) its references to the world outside the text are not bound to accuracy; and (2) it does not refer *exclusively* to the real world outside the text" (15). Fictional texts are not entirely anti-referential; their references (if any) to the world outside are formally mediated.

In line with the critic's own thesis about fiction, I rely heavily on Cohn's identification of three strategies of formal mediation, which she calls "signposts of fictionality" (109-131), to argue for the discursive uniqueness of Asian American fiction. These signposts include "adherence to a bi-level story/discourse model that assumes emancipation from the enforcement of a referential data base; employment of narrative situations that open to inside views of the characters' minds; and articulation of narrative voices that can be detached from their authorial origins" (Cohn viii). The constancy to fabula and syuzhet differentiation, cognitive privilege into characters' interiorities, and the discrete status of the narrator, point toward the ways a fictional text may showcase narrative nonreferentiality on the level of plot, character, and narrator. Responding to reading practices that habitually ignore these signposts, I find these strategies particularly useful for reading Asian American literature in forcefully imposing a separation between the fictional text and its "referential data base."

The following chapters each begin by arguing for the active decoupling of their respective literary texts from the biographical contexts of their authors. This removal facilitates the ways in which the texts' constitution as Asian American literature is made perceptible through their formal incorporation of the visual. Confronted by the optical markedness of Asian racialization, these texts engage visual logics to complicate claims to the process of Asian American representation. By taking three historical moments separated in time, this project

strives to demonstrate the consistency with which this formal operation appears in Asian American literature. The first chapter addresses the era of Chinese exclusion an early moment in the history of Asian America; the second chapter takes up the period of cultural nationalism, or the height of Asian American social, political, and cultural formation; the third and last chapter takes up the putatively post-racial era.

Chapter one focuses on Sui Sin Far, a biracial author writing at the turn of the century, who slipped into obscurity after her death in 1914. Overshadowed by the success of her sister Winnifred Eaton, who was also a writer, Sui Sin Far had produced one collection of short stories *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* published in 1912 at the time of her death. Following her recovery in the 1970s, for many Asian American scholars, Sui Sin Far's works have marked the origin point for locating the genealogy of Asian American literature. Her status as cultural progenitor has been consolidated both by her historical precedence as one of the earliest fiction authors of Asian descent writing in English and the peculiarity with which she negotiated her Chinese identity in face of nativist hostilities during an era of Chinese Exclusion. Unlike the majority of her siblings[15] who opted to pass as white and her younger sister Winnifred who portrayed herself as Japanese (Leighton 10), Sui Sin Far consciously embraced her Chinese side in living a life of alterity.

Accordingly, much of Sui Sin Far's prominence in the Asian American canon derives from invocations of her immediate genealogy (her racialized half) or summons to her agency in self-interpellation (self-racialization through self-naming). The chapter advocates reading "Sui Sin Far" as a literary persona and argues against the name's conflation with the historical individual Edith Eaton. In adopting this approach, we may circumvent Yoonmee Chang's claim

[15] Sui Sin Far was one of fourteen siblings (Song 225).

that her works fall prey to the ethnographic impulse that burdens all of Asian American literature (if not all ethnic literatures) and transforms all ethnic authors into native informants. Rather than accept Sui Sin Far's humanistic representations of her characters as tracing a more accurate ethnography of the Chinese in America, which reduces her writings to representational correctives achieved through stereotype-busting, I strive to read her works as charting an ethnography of Asian American literature.

Included in Sui Sin Far's ethnography of Asian American literature are critiques of contemporary forms of racializing epistemologies grounded in sight. While her texts' condemnation of biological racism, which painted Chinese Americans as unassimilable heathens, is clear through her three dimensional characterizations, Sui Sin Far's indictment of cultural relativism – at the time, the progressive alternative to social Darwinism – exists far more subtly in her texts' structural forms. Set in Chinatowns of different cities, her short stories demonstrate how white outsiders cast Chinese American inhabitants as fundamentally Other through time and space. Above all, the texts analyzed unpack and critique the ways ethnographic knowledge derives from what Johannes Fabian calls "visualism" or the assumption that the visual offers unmediated access to knowledge. These visualist approaches to knowledge suture together visuality and intelligibility, a naturalized connection that underpins the logic of racism. Sui Sin Far's intervention disrupts the taken-for-granted association between visuality and intelligibility through what might be understood as the legible. This disruptive maneuver is consolidated through the adoption of first person, present tense narration by the text "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," which is often read autobiographically despite evidence of its exclusively fictional practices.

Chapter two examines *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, the first two novels of Maxine Hong Kingston. In part due to the text's immediate popular reception as autobiography,[16] stemming from its publisher's designation as a "memoir," conventional interpretations of *The Woman Warrior* have promoted the text as exemplifying the consolidation of identity formation and voice. These celebratory readings have offered invaluable insights into how *The Woman Warrior* problematizes liminal subjectivities, recuperates and relocates female agency, and complicates the overlay of gender and culture. Nonetheless, the centralization of Kingston interpretation around autobiography and voice has helped to naturalize the essentialist readings of *The Woman Warrior*, lending force to Chang's characterization of Kingston's texts as inadvertently perpetuating the ethnographic impulse, and conversely has contributed to the oversight of the text's more aesthetic elements. Often considered the male counterpart to *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston's second work *China Men* has fallen prey to similar interpretive tendencies.

This chapter disavows the reliance on the "ontological guarantee" of "Maxine Hong Kingston" (Kang 48) that governs much of the analysis surrounding her works by reading her narrator as an imaginary speaker. By detangling critics' thematic assimilation of political voice to literary voice, we can better examine the formal elements that comprise both of her texts. Of particular interest to me is the way in which the visual emerges in the narratives through the invocation of photography and ghosts. Both figures can be read as emblems of opposing modes of knowing and relating to the past. Photography, prized for epitomizing ocular rationality in its seemingly exact reproduction of the represented referent, contributes to the archive of dominant

[16] For a wide-ranging overview of readings of *The Woman Warrior* as autobiography under different disciplinary rubrics, primarily Women's Studies (as women's autobiography), literary studies (as American autobiography), and Asian American studies (as ethnic autobiography), see Kang's *Compositional Subjects*, especially the chapter "Generic Fixations."

history. Ghosts fit into a broader framework of spectrality that is often deployed to refer to elements that are repressed, elided, or overlooked by the archive of dominant history. Alternatively, critics read photography and ghosts as both symptoms of a broader postmodern dispersal pointing toward the fundamental instability of truth on the one hand and of the self on the other.

Against both oppositional and pluralizing readings, I argue that photography and ghosts signal divergent epistemologies that are both necessary for the narrator to apprehend the past in a legible way. The convergence of epistemologies once she moves away from her Chinese American upbringing produces what Gayle Sato calls "superimposed vision" (201) and is what distinguishes the adult narrator from the girl protagonist. The young girl, whose perspective is focalized through the adult narrator, fails to generate meaning from the ghosts that haunt her home life; they prove to be too inscrutable. When the adult narrator distances herself and gains a "new way of seeing" (Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* 204), she is able to render these ghosts legible with the help of her newly developed optics. This new way of seeing is embodied in part by photographs and photography, which appear in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* as avenues to frame reality in such a way so that the narrator's mind can work upon them with her imaginative faculties. This practice is most clearly demonstrated by the frame structure of "Shaman," the central section of *The Woman Warrior*. The narrator gains access to her Brave Orchid's ghost world through the material assistance of a photographic portrait of her mother. More specifically, the aestheticization of a photograph through ekphrasis provides the means through which a ghostly epistemology can take shape and become legible.

Chapter 3 reads "Liking What You See," a short story from Ted Chiang's *Stories of Your Life and Others* published in 2002, alongside "The Man Who Ended History," a piece from Ken Liu's *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories* published in 2011. While Sui Sin Far occupied a historical moment of virulent anti-Chinese nativism, and Kingston a moment of energetic cultural nationalism, Chiang and Liu inhabit a historical period that has been characterized as post-racial, and thus seen as superseding the bounds of Asian American identity. The definition of post-racial I use in this chapter applies to the decades following the end of the Civil Rights era, marked by the landmark case *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (1978). This Supreme Court decision signaled the retrenchment of race-oriented antidiscrimination policies from the public realm into the private domain.

Both stories accordingly seem to be ostracized from issues of race on the level of sublimated contents. On the level of form, this distance from race is compounded by their qualification as works of science fiction, a genre which is viewed as exhibiting a more tenuous relationship to historical referents than realism. Unlike the texts of Sui Sin Far and Kingston which have been read as non-fiction – on the one hand, as mimetic ethnographies and on the other, as autobiography and memoir – Chiang's and Liu's stories cannot be read but as fiction stories. And yet, as this chapter demonstrates, the literariness of these texts is constituted by a formal pattern shaped by the ambivalence of the visual traceable through the texts' fictional signposts in the same way this pattern marked Sui Sin Far and Kingston's. Chiang's story covers a university campus debate over the pros and cons of calliagnosia, a manipulable neurological disorder that prevents those affected from recognizing beauty and could eradicate the form of social discrimination known as lookism. Liu's story involves the invention of a time machine based in quantum physics, which destabilizes notions of empirical evidence and the

narrativization of history. In embodying the ambivalence visual logic associated with the field, Chiang and Liu's stories can be included into the Asian American literary archive.

"Liking What You See: A Documentary" and "The Man Who Ended History: A Documentary" juxtapose two divergent conceptions of the literal in order to gesture toward their own literariness. I expand on Seo-Young Chu's poetics of science fiction, which identifies as one of the genre's defining features the literalization of poetic figures of speech in representing "cognitively estranging" referents (68). The two stories present their literalized contents through the frame of the documentary, as indicated by both of their subtitles, which is a mode of representation that conventionally assumes grounding in denotative literalism. The co-presence of Chu's ontological literalization and documentary's denotative literalism ironizes the tendency to read raced fiction literally, or to read fiction by ethnic authors through the ethnographic impulse. Through a defamiliarization effect, readers are not merely forced to grapple with the constructedness of representation itself, but to arbitrate both the "literal" and figurative dimensions of these representations.

Chapter One

Sui Sin Far's Fiction: An Ethnography of Asian American Literature

The visibility-invisibility paradigm has shaped critical recognition of Sui Sin Far's body of work predominantly on two levels. First, her rediscovery during the sociopolitical formation of Asian American identity during the 1970s relocated the cultural prehistory of this identity's self-consciousness back to the era of Chinese Exclusion. Second, her texts' representations of the Chinese in America boldly subverted existing images of the Chinaman in the midst of overwhelming anti-Chinese nativism. On the one hand, Sui Sin Far lent visibility to Asian American identity formation as a social movement, and later, legitimacy to Asian American literary studies by enriching the historical roots of its cultural canon. On the other hand, the works themselves served as a representational corrective of widely circulating stereotypes by offering three-dimensional portrayals of Chinese American characters.

Visuality, more broadly considered, also shapes the formal dynamics of Sui Sin Far's works. In following the author's liminal positionality derived from her biraciality, scholars have compared her narratives to ethnographic writings, specifically in constituting a form of disruptive mimicry[17] that upends the conventional power dynamics assumed between observer and observed on which anthropological discourse relies. Some of these readings are contingent on themes of hybridity, manifest through characters who occupy an ambiguous relationship to the Chinatown settings of these texts or who have mixed race backgrounds. Falling back on Edith Eaton's biracial background and her deliberate assertion of her Chinese side despite her capacity to pass as white, these interpretations rely on the author as the zero point of reading

[17] See Bhabha.

value into her texts. The thematic hybridity mentioned previously becomes a mere symptom of the author's own hybrid identity, which includes but is not limited to her racial position between white and Chinese as an Eurasian person.

This method of reading biographically confirms Yoonmee Chang's claim that all literature produced by racialized authors in view of or in proximity to racialized subjects will fall victim to the ethnographic impulse. Although the ethnographic impulse is one of many ways to conceptualize Asian American literary classification through authorial descent, Sui Sin Far's literary texts ironically engage the ethnographic in a way that eludes the essentializing force of the impulse and foregrounds their own referential complexities. I argue that it is necessary to unmoor Sui Sin Far and her oeuvre from the historical individual Edith Eaton in order to shift from readings of her fictional texts as interchangeable with ethnographies to readings of her fictional texts as a sort of ethnography of Asian American literature. This is if we follow the assumption that "the Asian American text is not one that represents Asian Americans, since there can be none such" but "one that is – or can be shown to be – engaged with a problematic of Asian American representation" (Lye, "Reading" 492). Rather than think of her texts as a form of literature legitimized by the ethnographic, Sui Sin Far's writings deploy a critique of the ethnographic that is only enabled by their literariness. If reading the ethnographic out of texts authored by racialized writers is next to impossible according to Chang, how could the ethnographic serve instead as a productive element to reconceptualize how the literariness of certain texts subtend their political commitments?

To indulge this dissertation's fixation with the literary, this chapter will use Johannes Fabian's epistemological critique of traditional anthropology and his appreciation of representational discursivity to uncover the repressed potential of the literary elements in Sui Sin

Far's writings. Sui Sin Far's fictional writings showcase a prescient version of the observer-conscious strand of anthropology that would come to characterize the postmodern renewal of the discipline from the 1970s onward. This shift in the field rejected universal notions of truth and objectivity in favor of prioritizing positionality and relativism. The ethical concerns associated with representing others permeate Sui Sin Far's stories in the form of critiquing the white gaze, but also come to characterize her texts' preoccupation with representing the racialized self.

At first glance, her short stories seem to advocate practices associated with Boasian cultural relativism, a welcome transition at the time that debunked the scientific grounds of biological concepts of race. By condemning stereotypes of the Chinese produced through the apparatus of spectacality,[18] or dehumanization of the Other through static images, Sui Sin Far's texts censure modes of knowledge production that rely on observation from a distance. As an alternative, her texts appear to favor emergent ethnographic approaches that emphasize participation with the community of study. But as I will show, even these participatory programs are critiqued by the short fiction through parody. "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" and "The Inferior Woman," the two stories that head the collection *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, frame participant observation as an empty investigative method that fails to yield valuable data about its subjects.

In other stories, Sui Sin Far uses Chinatown as a device to critique the strategies of spatial and temporal distanciation that cultural relativism implements in the construction of the Other. This discursive practice falls under Fabian's conceptualization of the denial of coevalness, or the placement of the Other in a time different from the time of the observer in order to establish the Other's intrinsic difference (*Time* 31). Both "The Wisdom of the New" and "Its Wavering Image" take place in Chinatown, a literary maneuver that aims to reveal how cultural relativism is just as essentializing as the scientific mode of visual observation that preceded it.

[18] See Jirousek.

Both stories feature white outsiders who, like participant observers, traverse the artificial boundary that circumscribes the neighborhood in order to access insider knowledge that they believe to be hidden within. Drawing off of Maurice Bloch, Fabien writes that these enclosed spaces, or

> cultural gardens lie behind the walls of relativism. The anthropologist may watch them grow and change but whatever happens behind the walls occurs in a Time other than his. Whether he moves, temporarily, inside the walls, or whether he considers a culture garden from afar, the very notion of containing walls and boundaries creates order and sense based on discontinuity and distance…[T]his sort of relativism…circumvents the problem of common Time by postulating a multiplicity of times and spatial coexistence. (52)

Even though biological racism relied on a concept of evolutionism that placed distinct racial groups in temporal-hierarchical order, the figurative walls surrounding the cultural garden of Chinatown secure both the geographical and temporal differences of its Chinese inhabitants to affirm their inassimilability into American whiteness.

These stories' engagement with the ethnographic demonstrates that the ethnographic impulse shapes Sui Sin Far's literature in ways that exceed Yoonmee Chang's appraisal of racialized authors as native informants. Moreover, the subversive operation of these texts goes far beyond simply reversing the binary between participant observer and native informant, subject and object, and observer and observed as some critics claim. These stories call the entire epistemic apparatus into question by denaturalizing the means by which such power relations are shaped through the production and circulation of knowledge. More specifically, these works aim their critique toward explicitly visual modes of acquiring and creating knowledge.

Complementary to the denial of coevalness, otherwise referred to allochronistic temporalization, is the epistemic ideology Fabian calls "visualism," under which vision is privileged as the primary sensory source of knowledge. Citing the scientism that legitimated anthropology's disciplinary professionalization at the beginning of the twentieth century, Fabian notes that the field codified rationalism and empiricism through observation as the basis for its knowledge (107).[19] Visualism presupposes that all knowledge about a culture derives from empirical observation, so "the ability to 'visualize' a culture or society almost becomes synonymous for understanding it" (Fabian 106). This epistemic framework relies on the modern endorsements of Cartesian dualism, positivism, and universal objectivity. In asserting the autonomy of the dispassionate observer – whose neutrality is figured ocularcentrically through the floating eye – the ability to visualize a culture or society also demands an absolute distance between observer and observed, a separation achieved through the spatialization and temporalization of the Other.

If visualism is a specific ideological tendency that assumes that the visual offers unmediated access to knowledge, Sui Sin Far's fictional texts counter with the claim that this knowledge is far from immediate. Ethnographic knowledge according to a visualist epistemology relies on the naturalization of the connection between "I see" and "I understand," in a sense, yoking visuality to intelligibility. Sui Sin Far advocates an alternative form of producing knowledge that denaturalizes the lamination between the visual and the intelligible through what might be understood as the legible. It is specifically through the conventions of literary language that Sui Sin Far's texts are able to rupture the signifier (what is seen) from the referent (knowledge) by restaging the process through fiction. At the turn of the century, during which evidence of essential difference was sought on the body, Sui Sin Far's texts demonstrate

[19] See Foucault, *The Order of Things* on the rationalization of vision.

that racial visibility and racial legibility are not completely aligned in the ways they come to produce meaning.

In short, Sui Sin Far's literary texts critique the role visuality plays in producing ethnographic knowledge that is purportedly empirical, but rather than jettison the notion of the visual altogether, recuperates this form of perception in her fiction to mount questions of racialized self-representation. This self-reflexive interrogation culminates in her essay "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," which traces the emergence of the figure of fiction writer in conjunction with the issuance of the visually interpellated racial subject.

Sui Sin Far's Visibility in the Canon

After decades of oblivion, Sui Sin Far reappeared in 1974 in the canonizing *Aiiieeeee!* anthology as the first author referenced in the editor's historical overview of Asian American literature. This praise for the female author is somewhat surprising given the anthology's masculinist priorities and scathing criticisms of women writers such as Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan. Initiating the discourse of origins surrounding Sui Sin Far, the editors wrote, "She was one of the first to speak for an Asian-American sensibility that was neither Asian nor white American…Working within the terms of the stereotype of the Chinese as laundryman, prostitute, smuggler, coolie, she presents 'John Chinaman' as little more than a comic caricature, giving him a sensibility that was her own" ("Fifty Years" xxi-xxii). The editors of *Aiiieeeee!* actively recuperated the once-forgotten writer as an ideal representative for the Asian American sensibility because she spurned dominant stereotypes of the Chinese.

On the academic landscape, the recovery of Sui Sin Far is often attributed to S. E. Solberg whose 1981 *MELUS* article "Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton: First Chinese-American

Fictionist" offered the first sustained analysis of her life and works in the context of her historico-cultural milieu. As suggested by the article's subtitle, "First Chinese-American Fictionist," much of Solberg's fascination derives from both Sui Sin Far's aberrant position in the turn-of-the-century literary world as an itinerant, non-white, female author. Accordingly, it is her social exceptionalism that provides the grounds for critical attention and not the formal value of her writings.[20] In fact, Solberg consistently dismisses the aesthetic merit of her works stating, "She was not a great writer; she has only one book…but her attempts deserve recognition" (27). At another point, he concedes, "While Eaton wrote well, she never acquired the control of style necessary to deal with her subjects in depth or at length" (35). What is perplexing about Solberg's assessment is that he diminishes Sui Sin Far's stylistic merits by recourse to her writings' subject matter. He reasons,

> She was trapped by experience and inclination into working within a sub-genre of American prose: what, for lack of a better term, we might call Chinatown Tales. Such classification by subject matter (Chinatown, or more broadly, the Chinese in America) breaks down an established literary form, the novel, into sub-genres defined by content, not form or stylistic skill. Eaton, by choosing to identify with and write about the Chinese, found herself alone in an essentially formless field. There had been fifty years of writing about the Chinese in America, but out of that writing no clear literary form had evolved. (Solberg 32)

[20] Similarly, Annette White-Parks describes that in her efforts to get Sui Sin Far's works reprinted; "I encountered the question that Jane Tompkins has framed: 'But Is It Any Good?'…[T]his question astonished me. Wasn't the mere fact of this writer's existence enough?" ("'We Wear the Mask'" 1). Both Solberg's and White-Park's responses to the question of aesthetic value echoes comments made by Charles Lummis in 1899 boasting of Sui Sin Far's "discovery" by his magazine *Land of Sunshine* as "the only Chinese woman in America who is writing fiction" (Ferens 87).

But why should a subject matter like "the Chinese in America" lead to a dissolution of literary form? What assumptions about form and content does Solberg make by asserting this claim? Solberg, by categorizing literature about the Chinese in American as one of the "sub-genres defined by content, not form or stylistic skill," reaffirms ethnic literatures as a subset of literary writing that possesses a cohesion predetermined and circumscribed by thematic matters. As long as the "Chinatown Tale" is expected "to record, explain, and somehow give meaning to the experience of the Chinese in America" (Solberg 33), these writings can only remain literary orphans within a "formless field."

The critical recovery of Sui Sin Far by both the Asian American literary field and by the larger American canon[21] has shown her writings to have been far from "formless." Nonetheless, the expectation to "record" and to "explain," as Solberg puts it, persists in the contemporary recuperation effort. One frequently used interpretive paradigm, which has only recently been questioned and complicated,[22] relies on the biographical context of Sui Sin Far and her younger sister Winnifred Eaton, who published under the Japanese pseudonym Otono Watanna. This paradigm juxtaposes the sisters against one another to embody either the bad subject or good

[21] The 1990s witnessed a growth of scholarly attention to Sui Sin Far. Chapters devoted to the author appeared in Amy Ling's 1990 *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* and Elizabeth Ammons's 1991 *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*. In 1995, editors Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks put forth *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* supplemented by a collection of Eaton's nonfiction writings. In the same year, White-Parks published *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography*, the first critical monograph dedicated entirely to the author. Studies of Sui Sin Far's work have appeared in monographs and journals steadily over the decades, and her inclusion into *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* in its second edition (1994) and *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* in its sixth edition (2002) signaled her incorporation into multicultural formations of the American literary canon. Scholars outside the field of Asian American literary studies have read her texts in light of realism, regionalism, and sentimentalism, upending the initial presumptions assigned to her by Solberg. Since then, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* was republished in 2011 with the addition of newly recovered texts under the editorial supervision of Hsuan L. Hsu. Recently in 2016, Mary Chapman compiled a collection of author's previously undiscovered "early fiction, journalism, and travel writing" that expands her cultural relevance beyond the ethnic, alleging that her affiliation with the projects of diversifying literary canons have "oversimplified her complex subject position in the process" (xv-xvi). By uncovering "Sui Sin Far" as one of many pennames Eaton adopted over her writing career, Chapman's contribution enriches our understanding of the author, particularly by accentuating Eaton's linkages to the ideal of the New Woman and to paradigms of transnationalism and post-nationalism at the turn of the century.

[22] See Ferens, Huh, and Skinazi.

subject[23] of Asian American political identity. Critics depreciated the work and cultural significance of the "bad" sister for exploiting "popular orientalia" for self profit, which provided grounds to paint her as a "sellout and a race traitor" (Hattori 228, 229). Meanwhile the "good" sister, despite meeting less success during her time, was idealized for her purported social activism on behalf of the oppressed Chinese population.

Such praise approximated if not realized a fetishistic valuation of the author for her ability to lend historical and political legitimation to the field of Asian American literature. Obliquely referring to the *Aiiieeeee!* editors,[24] Viet Nguyen diagnoses the political strategism behind opposing the two sisters:

> Asian American intellectuals who looked toward the past understandably were interested in finding predecessors who shared their values and their political identification. For literary critics, this meant a search for writers who were "authentic," meaning that the literature they wrote was more "truthful" in regard to the experiences of Asian Americans than the stereotypical, often racist representations of Asian Americans in popular culture and historical discourse. (34)

In this case, mimeticism is cast as so-called "authentic" and "truthful" representations of the Chinese in America, while the value of this mimeticism derives from a presentist reading that projected onto Sui Sin Far's work and life a political congruence with the Asian American activist effort of the 1970s. Dominant paradigms tend to neglect the aesthetic merit of Sui Sin

[23] See Althusser.

[24] Although none of Sui Sin Far's works were included in the first *Aiiieeeee!* collection despite the editors' references to her in the introduction, three pieces were published in the anthology's 1991 follow-up *The Big Aiiieeeee!*. In this introduction, as in the first, the anthology's editors extolled Sui Sin Far for fighting against "rampant stereotype and antiyellow racism" and dramatically maintained that "[i]n her own time, the Chinese considered Edith Eaton a heroine, a champion of Chinese integrity in America" (Chin 12).

Far's writings in favor of prioritizing what can be viewed as the sociological value of her texts bearing witness to her status as a biracial woman author.[25]

Ethnography as Marking Asian American Literature

The approval that critics project onto Sui Sin Far's writings for their "authentic" and "truthful" portrayals of Chinese Americans during the era of Yellow Peril stereotypes unintentionally perpetuates reflectionist expectations that are based in the same principles that govern these texts' reception by the mainstream readership. Yoonmee Chang reads ethnography as a discursive force that has shaped Asian American literature from its inception through what she calls the "ethnographic imperative." This imperative compulsorily links the ethnic background of the author to the ethnic contents of their works by forcing the author into the position of the native informant. The native informant is granted power to speak for their community, and by consequence becomes a representative figure for this community. By administering "explicit directives and implicit pressures to create superficially informative and exoticized 'insider's views' of Asiatic culture," the ethnographic imperative produces "a body of literature that serves as a simplistic 'tell-all' ethnography that reduces Asian American life to Orientalist caricature" (Chang 7), and "into ahistorical, consumable spectacle" (Chang 59). While these texts come off as "caricature" and "spectacle" to the critical reader, under the framework of the ethnographic imperative, Asian American literature becomes "instrumentalized

[25] There are only a handful of critics who take up the aesthetic aspects of Sui Sin Far's texts. David Shih argues that the obsession over locating the origins of an Asian American literary tradition has unproductively enabled an ahistorical treatment of race and nationalism and implemented a teleological understanding of the literature in general. Instead, he encourages the recuperation of Sui Sin Far's "talent as a literary artist" and accomplishments in "stylistic innovation" (Shih 51). Breaking away from critical dialogue that positions Sui Sin Far in relation to realism, Audrey Wu Clark reads her as an avant-garde writer, whose work "reparticularizes institutionalized forms" in its overlay of regionalism and modernism (i.e. literary cubism) (Clark 1). Relevant to my own interests regarding literary engagements with the visual, Nicole Tonkovich aims to enrich understandings of genealogy (both literary and biological) by examining "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" in the context of visual discourses circulated through the omnibus form, the advent of photography, and the rising popularity of family albums.

as transparent records of social life" and "proffered as a kind of social science" (Chang 9). In following, Asian American literature becomes valuable for the purportedly positivistic knowledge they can offer about their ostensibly inscrutable communities.

According to Chang, Sui Sin Far's works, despite the strategies they undertake to try to undermine the ethnographic imperative, are nonetheless anesthetized by it. This critical enervation is entirely attributable to the physical details of "the generic Orientalia of flower blossoms, pensive birds, and Chinese characters" that comprise *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*'s book design (Chang 62). "Nestled in the Orientalism design," Chang argues, "the harsh edges of Sui Sin Far's raw and ironic accusations against racism and ethnography (indeed, against racist expectations for ethnography) are softened, and perhaps defanged, by the physical framing of the book with ethnographic design elements" (65).[26] However, the presence of Orientalist features in a text or its surrounding apparatus does not necessarily render it complicit in the larger Orientalist project. While acknowledging that the cover design may have been beyond Sui Sin Far's control (*Sui Sin Far* 197), Annette White-Parks separates the textual content from its decorative appareling by claiming the publisher's "Orientalist frosting" was unable to "camouflage" the "radical" contents between the book's covers (*Sui Sin Far* 202).[27] Whereas Chang accepts Sui Sin Far's writing to include the surrounding material apparatus, White-Parks relegates these non-textual complements to the larger oppressive circumstances.

Under Chang's analysis, the span of the ethnographic imperative's incapacitating influence is totalizing to the extent that to be an Asian American literary text is to be a text colored by the ethnographic imperative (or "made to bear…the ethnographic genealogy of Asian

[26] Ferens notes that *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* was reviewed a year after its publication "by an anthropologist writing for the *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*, who treated it as a contribution to ethnographic knowledge" (50).

[27] Also, see June Hee Chung for a reading of Sui Sin Far's transgressive parodying of Orientalism.

American literature" [Chang 68]). Although Chang advocates a move away from the resistance-complicity opposition, her overestimation of the containment force of the ethnographic imperative reduces all ethnic texts to be complicit, or at least complacent, with racism. Moreover, her conflation of Orientalist design elements with "ethnographic design elements" overlooks ways in which the Orientalist and the ethnographic diverge. In Chang's critique of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* specifically, the former indicates superficial ornaments – with which mere contact implies consummate complicity. In contrast, the discernable sediments of the ethnographic consist not of exotic novelties and details, but of specific formal configurations that shape the narratives themselves.

Apart from the "the generic Orientalia of flower blossoms, pensive birds, and Chinese characters" that adorn the pages of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, Orientalist imagery suffuses the textual content of its short stories, which feature the ethnographic in formal ways that deviate from the merely accessorial. Entrenched in these settings where differences between communities are geospatially marked, the stories fixate on the interactions between Chinese and white inhabitants governed by or superseding boundaries. Given the dynamics of insider-outsiders to the Chinatown settings that appear in the stories, impressions of the ethnographic observer are hard to ignore and moreover, unsurprising considering the ethnographic discourses that saturated Edith Eaton's cultural moment. But again, those critics who have noticed this ethnographic presence attribute it to Sui Sin Far the person. Viet Nguyen, for instance, writes that by virtue of her biraciality, "She was both the native informant and the participant-observer, and was aware of what it meant to be both the object of a gaze as well as the subject who was

conducting that gaze" (40). Here, Nguyen builds a direct causal correlation between Sui Sin Far's ethnographic double consciousness and its appearance in her fiction.[28]

"Sui Sin Far" as Essential Self or Authorial Persona?

Complementary to her texts' truth-telling quality, the value of Sui Sin Far lies more precisely in the presumed historical function of Edith Eaton assuming the identity of Sui Sin Far. The debates over using the penname "Sui Sin Far," which refers to the singular person of Asiatic descent who authored literary pieces at a certain moment in history, exacerbates critical preoccupations with cultural authenticity. The name assigned to her by her birth certificate, "Edith Maude Eaton," traces her Anglo origins to her English father and birth place. On the other hand, "Sui Sin Far" is the name she took up to publish her pieces on the Chinese community in America. Interestingly, critics such as Annette White-Parks have bifurcated these two names to correspond to two halves of her identity based on bloodline: "The name on this writer's birth certificate is Edith Maude Eaton, reflecting the identity of her English father. Sui Sin Far reflects

[28] Other scholars who have paid attention to the ethnographic strands have following suit, particularly by treating Sui Sin Far's "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" as a strictly autobiographical essay that provides the referential foundation on which to to ground their claims. Lori Jirousek's compelling formulation of "spectacle ethnography" finds anchorage in "Leaves," which she argues catalogues the author's "recurring childhood experience of spectacle ethnography" (29). These autobiographical experiences then reappear as a motif throughout her fictional writings, which demonstrate "efforts to release Chinese immigrants from spectacle display and present them more convincingly as members of the American community" (33). According to this reading, spectacality, something Sui Sin Far experienced firsthand, is an apparatus that produces stereotypes in all of their petrifying confinement. Sui Sin Far's writerly resistance consists of disenthralling the Chinese, along with her readership, from the image by portraying them as human. Similarly, Rachel Peterson and Joel Wendland contend that "Sui Sin Far used ethnography as an act of literally 'writing an image of a community' into existence" (165). Sui Sin Far's ethnographic maneuver both combatted historical invisibility ("writing…into existence"), while correcting and supplanting a perception of a group by one that was more accurate ("an image"), and as such "countered Orientalist stereotypes of Asian people as 'inscrutable'" (164). These readings rightly identify the ethnographic filaments in Sui Sin Far's texts, but rather than read ethnography's formal transformation within her literature, they use ethnography in the way Chang critiques, to reemphasize the significance of "authentic" and "truthful" representations. Instead of presuming the autographical credibility of "Leaves," as a lens to interpret Sui Sin Far's fiction, this chapter will use her fiction to read the ethnographic in "Leaves," treated as a work of fiction.

the identity of her Chinese mother" (White-Parks, "Reversal" 31n2).[29] Considering such assumptions ally "Sui Sin Far" with her "Chinese heritage" and most scholars taking up her work for study hold investments in Asian American literary studies as a field (White-Parks, "Reversal" 31n2), the critical tendency to stick to "Sui Sin Far" as the authorized name is a political act that potentially elides as it attempts to bring the once obscured into relief.[30]

Using "Sui Sin Far" as the authoritative name not only suppresses dimensions of Eaton's writings that do not fall under concerns of Asian American criticism, but also reaffirms the essentialization of Chinese identity, which, according to Joy Leighton, the writer attempted to contest (5). I argue that by abandoning notions of the authentic self and refining the signifying scope of "Sui Sin Far" we can recuperate her texts' fictive valence in a basic way. This basic reconsideration is to recall the distinction Foucault draws between the proper name and the author's name, which gives rise to his conceptualization of the author function. The proper name "Edith Eaton" and the author's name "Sui Sin Far" are "situated between the two poles of description and designation" (Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 209). The names' links to their respective referents, the individual named for the first and a specific classification of writings for the second, behave in ways that are "not isomorphic" (Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 210). The

[29] Elizabeth Ammons similarly opts to refer to the author as "Sui Sin Far" out of respect for her agency: "that is the name she published under and that is how she refers to herself in her autobiographical essay" (119).

[30] Chapman's monograph of Eaton's texts offers a wealth of newly discovered writings and points toward an alternate direction in conceptualizing the significance of "Sui Sin Far". The title of the collection, edited by Mary Chapman, is suggestive in itself: *Becoming Sui Sin Far: Early Fiction, Journalism, and Travel Writing by Edith Maude Eaton*. The appearance of both "Sui Sin Far" and "Edith Maude Eaton" produces contradictory effects. First, the coexistence of the two names invokes the performatively split structure of character and actor, a layered relationship in which the actor is embedded underneath or within the played character. Second, the present progressive "becoming" introduces a temporal element in which the person who is to become Sui Sin Far is in the process of making such a transition. Indeed the structure of the monograph's contents reaffirms this developmental conversion. Starting with "Early Montreal Fiction, Poetry, and Literary Sketches (1888-1891)," which contains pieces all authored by "Edith Eaton," the collection reproduces unsigned works from the period 1890 to 1896, then to 1896-1897 works penned by "Firefly," a pseudonym Eaton used while working in Jamaica, and ending with "Selected Later Fiction (1896-1906)" with pieces signed by "Sui Seen Far." Is "Sui Sin Far" used as a teleological endpoint of the writerly Edith Eaton, or just another one of her aliases?

misstep taken by a large part of Sui Sin Far criticism is to treat the names as if they were. However, this conflation between proper name and author's name committed by the field could amount to one moment in the fluctuating author function of Sui Sin Far. More specifically, the author's name in the author function "does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy" (Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 216). Sui Sin Far's texts are able to complicate the boundaries policing race, nation, and gender because of the discursive possibilities offered by the literature rather than the biographical facts of the author's life. For instance, some critics resort to Edith Eaton's racial background and geographic itinerancy to demonstrate a "racial self-concept that embraces not a biracial or bicultural identity but a racial indeterminacy, as [she moves] continually between or outside of established racial, social, and national frames" (Roh-Spaulding, "Beyond Biraciality" 21). Read through the author function, the texts grouped under "Sui Sin Far" might maintain referentiality to the contemporary Chinese condition, but are unmoored from their obligations to reference the author's genealogical background or immediate lived experience.

The opening anecdote of "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" tells of the narrator's first realization of herself as a raced object, which immediately coincides with her coming into being as a fiction writer. Although this essay is read frequently as an autobiographical sketch of Edith Eaton and has consequently provided grounds to anchor the referential claims of her short fiction, I argue that the essay charts the emergence of "Sui Sin Far" the writing persona. This primal moment of raced self-awareness unfolds when the protagonist glimpses her childhood nurse whisper to her friend about the narrator's Chinese

mother. Reference to the protagonist's non-Anglo background, combined with the gossiper's visual examination of the little girl, who is scanned "curiously from head to foot," consolidates the explicitly visual dimension that race adopts in Sui Sin Far's imaginary (*MSF* 218).[31] To the young protagonist and later to the adult narrator, to be racialized is to be looked at.

Witnessing but not hearing the verbal exchange between her nurse and her friend, the young protagonist feels compelled to tell someone to share her indignation, thus coordinating the moment of racial self-awareness with the following invocation of storytelling: "When we reach home I rush to my mother and try to tell her what I have heard. I am a young child. I fail to make myself intelligible. My mother does not understand, and when the nurse declares to her, 'Little Miss Sui is a story-teller,' my mother slaps me" (218). Some critics have linked the nurse's mention of storytelling to Sui Sin Far's emergence as a writer, but always through the syllogistic connection to deceit[32] due to this scene's proximity to another anecdote in which the narrator tells her "first conscious lie" (218).[33] Comparable to Susan Koshy's bent use of the term "fiction," which favors the definition of dissimulation over imaginative writing, critics' yoking of storytelling in this moment to conscious lying invokes a limited framework in which to

[31] Subsequent references to Sui Sin Far's writings (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance* and others) cite Ling and White-Parks's 1995 collection.

[32] See Joy M. Leighton and Hiram Pérez.

[33] This anecdote reads:

> Many a long year has past over my head since that day – the day on which I first learned that I was something different and apart from other children, but tho my mother has forgotten it, I have not.
>
> I see myself again, a few years older. I am playing with another child in a garden. A girl passes by outside the gate. "Mamie," she cries to my companion. "I wouldn't speak to Sui if I were you. Her mamma is Chinese."
>
> "I don't care," answers the little one beside me. And then to me, "Even if your mamma is Chinese, I like you better than I like Annie."
>
> "But I don't like you," I answer, turning my back on her. It is my first conscious lie. (218)

Due to the intervening paragraph that contains both a reference to the number of years that have passed since the nurse incident and a moment of narratorial self-reflection, I find the link between "story-teller" of paragraph discussed above the anecdote about lying in this note more tenuous.

analyze the significance of this passage. By rebranding Little Miss Sui's lies as an attempt to tell the truth, one critic uses this moment to color the entirety of Sui Sin Far's writing career:

> Based on the *fact* that Sui Sin Far grows up to be a professional storyteller, it would seem she learns a valuable and lifelong lesson from this childhood incident: the failure to make *the truth apparent* through representation results in misunderstanding and injustice. Because her story is not clear, her mother is prohibited from knowing *the truth*, from discerning *fact* from fiction, thus resulting in Sui Sin Far's punishment. (Leighton 3-4; emphasis added)

The misunderstanding at stake is not an issue of truth and deceit, fact and fiction, but in failing to communicate the experiential moment that had disrupted her sense of self, particularly as a biracial child.[34] This misunderstanding, rather than an effect of conscious or accidental prevarication, is more closely affiliated with the protagonist's immediate mental reaction to an abortive intelligence that resists legibility. The experiencing self fails to communicate to her mother the import of what had taken place because she tries to tell her mother what she had "heard," but what she heard were indecipherable whispers. She fails to recognize that it was what she had *seen*, not heard, that perturbed her sense of self. This is why the entirety of "Leaves," a sustained attempt to rectify this one representational breakdown during her adolescence, conveys the racializing moment in optic terms rather than aural ones. If reading the syntactical structure of the sentence, we see that the message she is unable to communicate is "myself" (my self), or her raced subjectivity.

[34] Priscilla Wald pays less attention to the link between storytelling and deceit, but nonetheless erects binaric logic between intelligibility and ignorance: "When she tries to report the incident to her mother, she is not fully intelligible, and her nurse brands her a 'storyteller,' for which her mother slaps her. Storytelling is itself henceforward connected in her account with prejudice and with the uncomfortable position she occupies as an Eurasian woman, and intelligibility becomes an important theme in her account of life between cultures" (193-94).

By conjuring the name "Little Miss Sui" at the moment the narrator attempts to communicate her first moments of racial awareness (an awareness contingent on the other's racializing gaze), the text overlays the birth of a storyteller with the birth of a raced persona. That her first attempt to relay her encounter with racialization is deemed the act of a "story-teller" demonstrates as well the aptitude of the literary to bring into relief the visual dynamics of race. Given this first abortive attempt to "try to tell her [mother] what I have heard" that results in failed intelligibility, the rest of the essay consists of subsequent attempts to render her experience legible. This gap between intelligibility and legibility, both making use of the visuality in their own ways, plays out through the ethnographic in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance.*

The Ethnographic Moment at the Turn of The Century

The first half of the 1900s marked the transition period between the hegemony of scientific racism to the emergence of cultural relativism, an approach to human societies attributed to anthropologist Franz Boas. Scientific racism, along with the associated polygenics and eugenics, viewed certain characteristics, namely "complex behaviors and morphological traits," as fixed and biologically determined through heredity (Sussman 146). Certain groups were deemed inferior based on their purportedly intrinsic characteristics, which were believed to be resistant to behavioral or environmental intervention. These assumptions relied on a foundation of social evolution, which placed distinct "races" on a unidirectional hierarchy in which perceived savages were considered to be less developed than the more civilized. By endorsing a humanistic notion of "culture," which viewed society as absolute, singular, and capable of achieving perfection, scientific racism used a Eurocentric measure of progress to assess the value of social groupings (Stocking 868). Grounded in biology, this racism of the

nineteenth century contributed to the belief that the Chinese were fundamentally inassimilable; "supposedly, their behavior was as unchangeable as their physical racial characteristics" (Wu 7).[35]

With the publications of his major works, namely *The Mind of Primitive Man* in 1911, the idea of culture underwent a transformation when Boas rejected the evolutionary approach to understanding racial difference and moved toward a relativistic mode. Based on his fieldwork and research, Boas came to believe that different groupings tended toward diversity not uniformity (Sussman 156), and that these differences between societies were not the product of "differences in innate capacity" biologically determined, but rather derived from their different historical contexts (Sussman 160). Consequently, under the emerging discipline of anthropology, the meaning of "culture" moved away from the humanist emphasis on singularity and hierarchy – "the progressive accumulation of the characteristic manifestations of human creativity: art, science, knowledge, refinement" (Stocking 870) – and toward the anthropological application of the term, which addressed distinct human groups. The anthropological use of "culture" recognized various individual cultures, and accordingly the word accumulated connotations of the contingent, plural, and "homeostatic" (Stocking 868). Rather than the unique achievement of humankind, culture signaled the "traditional body of habitual behavioral patterns passed on through what we would not call the encultural process" that predisposes the behavior of individuals (Stocking 877). It was against this transitory period of ethnography's endeavors to account for differences between social groupings that Sui Sin Far wrote her fiction.

Sui Sin Far's engagements with ethnographic discourse at the time is assiduously traced by Dominique Ferens to the author's working relationship to Charles Lummis, historian, ethnographer, poet, and the editor of the *Land of Sunshine*. Between 1898 and 1903, *Land of*

[35] See Wu and R. G. Lee.

Sunshine published ten of the writer's stories. The west coast magazine's contents constellated around three themes: "articles promoting settlement and investment of California; ethnographic studies of Native Americans as well as Spanish and Mexican settlers; and elite regional literature – fiction and nonfiction written primarily by recent migrants from New England" (Ferens 82). Given this context, Lummis valued Sui Sin Far and her writings for the ethnographic content he saw in them, which offered his readers a glimpse of Chinatown exoticism. This quasi-literary patronage forced the author into the position of native informant and used her texts to supply the "token presence" of the Chinese that dotted the Californian landscape promoted by the magazine (Ferens 83). The publisher's perception of Sui Sin Far "as a native informant/ethnographer rather than a woman of letters" restricted the author's capacity to push beyond the textual expectations of native ethnographer (Ferens 94). Recognizing the narrow textual expectations set up by Lummis's ethnographic appetite, which likely provided a rare opportunity for Sui Sin Far to publish her fiction, we can only imagine that the author was well acquainted with contemporary practices of ethnographic research and writing. Lummis's investments in preserving Native American folklore and customs, as evidenced by his founding of Southwest Museum of the American Indian, aligned with the salvage ethnography often attributed to Boas (Ferens 85). Under this program, ethnographers sought to capture the lifeways of cultures threatened by modernization, effectively exemplifying the process by which these cultures are denied coevalness with dominant culture.

If Sui Sin Far's pieces during the *Land of Sunshine* period boxed her into writing as a native informant for the Chinese American community, her later fictional works offer complex critiques of the Boasian school of doing ethnography. The stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* target both the specialized position of the observer and the constitution of the object of study

under the gaze of the observer. The figure of the participant observer, or the researcher who culls data from both observing and participating with the social group he or she is examining, appears in satirized form through the Chinese American character Mrs. Spring Fragrance. The object of research emerges in the stories through the boundaries of their Chinatown settings themselves, depicted from the white perspective as self-enclosed spaces that stand outside of historical time and space.

Role Reversal and the Destabilization of Knowledge in "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" and "The Inferior Woman"

From the start of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, the legitimacy of cross-cultural understanding gained through ethnographic means is ironized through the Spring Fragrance couple and their interactions with their neighbors. Both "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" and "The Inferior Woman" take up as their dramatic centerpieces the trope of the love triangle. Cultural difference between the Chinese characters and white characters is exteriorized spatially through contiguous sequence. The stories' shared setting of the neighborhood is structured linearly with the Spring Fragrance house in between the Chin Yeun family who live on one side and the Carmen family who live on the other side. This arrangement of houses allegorically reproduces the formal pattern of the "contact zone"[36] in which "all three families are busy learning from each other, contrary to the American belief that minorities must assimilate to the dominant culture" (Ferens 102).[37] Indeed, the Spring Fragrance couple expresses inquisitiveness toward Yeun family affairs in one story and toward Carmen family drama in the next.

[36] See Pratt.

[37] See Ferens, especially pages 96-11, for a reading of the Mrs. Spring Fragrance stories that roots Sui Sin Far's treatment of the ethnographic in Christian missionary writings. While my reading of these stories focus on Mrs. Spring Fragrance, Ferens offers compelling thoughts on Mr. Spring Fragrance as ethnographer.

The first story traces the internal conflict of Mai Gwi Far, who is in love with Kai Tzu, a Chinese American baseball player, but whose father has arranged her marriage to Man You, the son of a Chinese Government school teacher. The second story similarly charts the tension between Will Carman, who is devoted to Alice Winthrop, a young self-made woman with lower class roots, and his mother, who wants him to marry Miss Evebrook, a young well-bred woman with an educated background. From the outset, the juxtaposition of the Chinese set alongside the white set provides the opportunity for comparison and contrast between these two families, but what is emphasized are their similarities. Through nearly interchangeable love triangles, with structural arrangements determined by analogous generational and ideological conflicts, "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" and "The Inferior Woman" show that their Chinese and white characters are more similar than distinct. In this way, Sui Sin Far accomplishes what most critics laud her for, breaking down the stereotype of the Oriental by demonstrating their humanness by virtue of their similarities to their white counterparts.

Because the central substance of both stories is molded by the same romantic template, we are then led to examine the ways in which the Spring Fragrance couple shape the narrative scaffolding to these love affairs. In both, the titular protagonist and her husband are cast as curious bystanders who watch these romantic entanglements reach resolution by the stories' ends. Mrs. Spring Fragrance in particular uses a method of data collection that resembles participant observation, an ethnographic method that developed under Boas and his students during the first quarter of the twentieth century. From the start, she is characterized as an assiduous learner of English; five years following her arrival, "her husband, speaking of her, said: 'There are no more American words for her learning'" (17). This thorough mastery of the English language signals Mrs. Spring Fragrance's linguistic assimilation into American culture.

But taken alongside the position of outsider she occupies throughout the two stories, first to the romance plots unfolding and later to the exotic "natives" being examined, this absorption of language also marks the first step an ethnographer takes when initiating a study of another culture.[38]

Mrs. Spring Fragrance is especially engrossed by the plight of her young neighbor Will Carman, presumably because the courtship practices of white Americans are unfamiliar to her. After hearing that Will Carman has failed to secure the hand of his sweetheart Alice Winthrop, Mrs. Spring Fragrance exclaims to her husband, "Ah, these Americans! These mysterious, inscrutable, incomprehensible Americans!" (33). Despite this situation's almost exact resemblance to the obstructed affair between Laura and Kai Tzu that Mrs. Spring Fragrance had witnessed firsthand in "Mrs. Spring Fragrance," she is still intrigued by Will Carmen's situation. By using specific descriptors such as "mysterious" and "inscrutable," Mrs. Spring Fragrance's comments on the unintelligible Americans echo adjectives usually applied to stereotypical characterization of Orientals. In turn, Mrs. Spring Fragrance's curiosity in Will Carman's situation is rooted in a decontextualized exoticism. By casting the white American as incomprehensible Other, Mrs. Spring Fragrance highlights the epistemic ironies underpinning the project of knowing the Other. When taking into account the structural similarities between the Chinese and white love triangles, the provocative mystery of the latter arises from Mrs. Spring Fragrance's constructed conviction in essential cultural differences and her will to suss out these differences.

The quest for knowledge that is the aim of ethnography materializes in the story as Mrs. Spring Fragrance's aspirations to write an informative book on her subject. She tells Will

[38] Boas considered a culture's language to be one of the most important and instructive phenomena to examine when studying a given culture. See Jacobson and Boas.

Carmen's mother of her idea: "The American woman writes books about the Chinese. Why not a Chinese woman write books about the Americans?" (39). Through this neatly chiasmatic logic, Mrs. Spring Fragrance subverts the positions of colonized and colonizer through what Rachel Peterson and Joel Wendland call "role reversal". Annette White-Parks identifies this inversion of the binary between colonizer and colonized, insider and outsider, white and Chinese as a central, recurrant narrative strategy by which Sui Sin Far asserts the humanity of her Chinese characters in many of her works. The lives of her Chinese characters

> are the centers of action. This results in a reversal of the protagonist-antagonist relationship previously seen in Chinatown literature and also alters the conventional hegemonic order pertaining to race. As Chinese or Chinese-Americans become the center of the narrative vision, White Americans simultaneously shift to positions of 'Other-ness' or 'outsiders,' appearing in this new light as antagonists to Chinese-Americans, and to the Chinatown community/culture. (White-Parks, "Reversal" 22)

There is, however, a distinction between the narrative reversal singled out by Peterson, Wendland, and White-Parks and the ethnographic reversal that occurs in "The Inferior Woman." The former describes the reorganization of the hierarchical units of representation while the latter addresses a rearrangement in the form of discursive representation.

Correspondingly, what is striking about the reversal strategy in "The Inferior Woman" is its self-reflexive quality, which reveals a narrative self-consciousness that glimpses and ironizes *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* itself as an ethnography that provides an "insider's" perspective. The conversation between the two female neighbors proceeds as follows, beginning with Mrs.

Carmen's response to Mrs. Spring Fragrance's research ambition to write a book about Americans:

> "I see what you mean. Why, yes, of course. What an original idea!"
>
> "Yes, I think that is what it is. My book I shall take from the words of others."
>
> "What do you mean, my dear?"
>
> "I listen to what is said, I apprehend, I write it down." (39)

The originality of Mrs. Spring Fragrance's idea, or the belief that anthropology produces authentic knowledge, is subtly undermined by her assertion that she "shall take from the words of others." Mrs. Spring Fragrance's act of transcription can be read on the one hand as a form of translation. Translation undergirds "the very nature of ethnography, which assumes that there is a cultural difference that needs to be explained to a Western audience" (Ferens 93). The role of the ethnographer is to "identify the peculiar and unintelligible aspects of the non-Western culture and, using his or her authoritative knowledge, render the unfamiliar in familiar terms" (Ferens 93).[39] On the other hand, to "take from the words of others" signals a mode of appropriative transcription, in which the substance of an Other's speech is actively seized and repossessed.

In a sequence of actions that resembles the process of participant observation, Mrs. Spring Fragrance satiates her curiosity about the inscrutable Americans by identifying her research problem, building rapport with her subjects, collecting data through observation and everyday conversation, recording this data through fieldnotes, and finally drawing conclusions by analyzing the gathered data (DeWalt and DeWalt 4). Mrs. Spring Fragrance's course of actions portrays these steps in a comical light that presents the participant observer method as a

[39] Similarly, Henry Yu explains, "The ethnographic imagination lay in making a place seem strange and then gradually replacing the confusion with knowledge that made the place and the people seem familiar enough to be understandable and perhaps even admirable" (35).

farce. She makes her observations of Will Carman and Alice Winthrop after retreating "behind a syringa bush, which completely screened her from view" (29). She eavesdrops on Ethel Evebrook and her daughter's (the so-called "Superior Woman") conversation about gender norms (35-38), while trespassing on their property and hiding under open windows. The two Evebrook women later find Mrs. Fragrance "seated in a veranda rocker calmly writing in a note-book" under her "pink parasol" (37).

Like an ethnographer, Mrs. Spring Fragrance interrogates multiple native informants, conferring with Ethel Evebrook, Miss Evebrook, and finally Mrs. Carmen about the inferior woman. By denormalizing the position of the subject who observes and the object that is observed, Mrs. Spring Fragrance's fanciful plans to write a book undermines the power relation between that who does the seeing and that which is seen. To equate "an original idea" with "[taking] from the words of others," authentic knowledge is merely gossip between mother and daughter that is seized, translated, and refracted through another lens. What "The Inferior Woman" achieves exceeds the simple reversal of the direction of power relations, but casts the entire process of knowledge production in a satirical light.

Mrs. Spring Fragrance describes her pursuit of knowledge as a distinctively aural process: "I listen to what is said, I apprehend, I write it down." However, we have already recognized that the disruption of this neat sequence of listening, apprehending, and writing opens Sui Sin Far's sustained meditation on race in "Leaves." In that text, the narrator's inability to communicate that which she heard because she never apprehended what was said transforms into grasping the visual dimension of race and racialization. The two pieces that follow the Mrs. Spring Fragrance stories turn their attention to the visual, but in terms of the white gaze. "The Wisdom of the New" and "Its Wavering Light" mount a complex critique of the cognitive

expertise of white outsiders to Chinatown. Through tropes of looking, these white outsiders embody a variant of ethnography that assumes mastery through its gaze.

Chinatown as a Cultural Garden

Chinatowns and the stereotypes that came to define it were the products of exclusionary measures enacted during the last half of the nineteenth century into the twentieth. During the Gold Rush, which attracted many with the prospect of making money, small communities of Chinese developed along the frontier in addition to larger Chinatowns in major metropolitan cities such as Seattle and San Francisco. These Chinatowns were more commonly situated in port cities "where an immigrant ethnic community could provide a social and cultural haven for the newly arrived" (Wu 70). Acts of nativist hostility preceding the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 precipitated increased movement into Chinatowns. For instance, the Foreign Miners' Tax of 1855 subjected noncitizen miners to a monthly twenty dollar tax. Chinese immigrants, who had been denied citizenship since the Naturalization Law of 1790 and "remained in the status of resident aliens until the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952" quit mining, abandoned camps in the mountains, and moved into cities (Lin 23). More substantial was the migration that occurred in response to the Driving Out, the "ethnic cleansing" of Chinese in the Pacific Northwest following the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1969.[40] In contrast to the smaller frontier communities, larger Chinatowns across the country during this period furnished safety in greater numbers (Wu 72). The perceived insularity of Chinese Americans was in fact the manifestation of a community-based security mechanism deployed in reaction against racial antagonism and exclusion.

[40] See Pfaelzer.

Other Orientalizing characteristics attached to Chinatown such as the widespread prevalence of gambling, drugs, and prostitution were the byproducts of exclusionary laws that restricted the migration of Chinese women. Very few Chinese women entered the U.S. before 1882, which, in combination with the ensuing Exclusion Act and miscegenation laws that restricted Chinese men from marrying non-Chinese women, contributed to the formation of bachelor societies (Wu 72). Deprived of the stability of the conventional family structure that fortified the communities of European immigrants, Chinese immigrants developed alternative kinship networks in the form of Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Associations, most notably the Six Companies in San Francisco. This in turn led to the formation of tongs modeled after secret societies in China, groups that "offer[ed] a haven for the disaffected in society and maintain[ed] a sense of rebellion against the established order" (Wu 74). Jan Lin writes that the "male-dominated profile of American Chinatowns… provided markets for a range of vice industries, which assisted the emergence of syndicated crime within these communities" (23). Crime, vice, and violence, far from innate attributes affecting all Chinese immigrants, were the consequences of the gendered social structures that emerged in the wake of restrictive policies.

In light of the socio-historical conditions that led to the formation of the districts, the epistemological and ontological dimensions of the Chinatowns' constructedness align space, time and bodies through the visual. This alignment can be seen in the photographs of Arnold Genthe who strove to represent the San Francisco's Chinatown aesthetically rather than realistically at the turn of the century.[41] Using strategic cropping and manipulation in the darkroom, he tried to frame the district as "an exotic, picturesque 'Canton of the West,' a totally Chinese city within San Francisco" (Tchen 14). By focusing on children and on individuals in

[41] For a historical overview of representations, photographs and paintings, of San Francisco's Chinatown from 1850 to 1950, see Anthony W. Lee's *Picturing Chinatown*.

lavish holiday clothing, Genthe's photographs erased the realities of Chinatown's bachelor society in favor of an image that would appeal to the touristic sensibilities of the upper-middle class white Americans.

Due to its geographic character, perceived as a mappable neighborhood consisting of city blocks circumscribed from the larger urban environment through street borders, Chinatown's ideological architecture aligns with the contingent geographies of orientalism. In following, Kay Anderson conceptualizes Chinatowns as a logical extension of Edward Said's critique of Europe's Orient. Both spaces constitute "imaginative geographies," in which cultural difference is reified through the form of spatial distance (Said, *Orientalism* 55). Chinatown, once a figment of the Western imagination, comes to embody the spatial objectification of the "idea of a Chinese race" becoming a "social fact" (K. Anderson 31). Although according to Said's reasoning, the distance between the West and China provides measureable confirmation to justify social difference, Chinatowns were and are spaces that exist within the larger dominant spatial order.

In its positioning internal to the hegemonic order, Chinatown may be more profitably analyzed according to the logic of the abject, specifically one that operates on a visual register. Both Viet Nguyen and James Moy read Chinatowns as spaces of containment. After the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, "the Chinese were moved from invisibility to contained visibility in the field of American representation, through the segregated urban formation of Chinatown" (Nguyen 37). The Chinatown ideological apparatus thusly achieved "neutralization" of this menacing population found inside the borders of the state by steeping American popular consciousness with nullifying representations of the Chinese. As Moy explains, "While earlier representations in cartoons and photographs sought to absent the Chinese by displacing them into an imaginary Orient, many photographs from the turn of the century attempted to document

populations confined in Chinatown" (65). And because Chinatown was demarcated physically in relation to its adjacent neighborhoods, Chinese cultural difference from white Americans came to be similarly thought of as rigidly marked out. This spatial segregation also imposed a temporal segregation in which Chinatowns and their inhabitants were denied coevalness with those residents outside. In these Chinatowns, the "Chinese were seen, then, not as assimilable but as perpetual 'natives' on the equivalent of a reservation where time itself was suspended" (Nguyen 37-38).

Chinatown in these two spatial models is the product of a Western consciousness in which cultural difference is conflated with spatial distinction – either through distance or containment. Ironically, Chinatown also came to signify that which Western consciousness could not infiltrate on a cerebral level. In discussing the Chicago School sociologists of the 1920s, Henry Yu writes, "They saw Chinatowns as places that were difficult to know, and consequently, they evaluated information from behind Chinatown's 'closed doors' as scarce and valuable. The place was exotic, and so was the knowledge associated with it" (173). In imagining Chinatown as a self-enclosed, homogenous vacuum barricaded from the intrusive presence of outsider non-Chinese, the Chicago theorists treated both the district and its inhabitants as fundamentally inscrutable. Yu adds that the "fact that the Chinese were so effortlessly distinguishable by physical traits made connections to their physical substantiation in the landscape all the more easy" (173). In this series of equations, cultural difference as spatial distinction becomes further consolidated through the Chinese's difference in physical appearance from the white majority.

Ethnography and Chinatown in "The Wisdom of the New"

"The Wisdom of the New" depicts Chinatown as an ethnic enclave separated from the rest of Seattle. The plot follows the emigration and failed assimilation of Pau Ling, who with her young son sails from China to Seattle to settle with her husband, Wou Sankwei, a Chinatown resident for seven years. The dynamic between Wou Sankwei and Pau Lin is complicated by the former's wealthy white benefactor, Mrs. Dean, who took Wou Sankwei "under her wing shortly after his arrival in America" and has maintained a firm presence in his life since then (44). The story ends tragically when Pau Lin, demoralized by the pressure to assimilate, poisons her son the night before he is set to attend an American school, believing absorption into American culture to be equivalent to the annihilation of Chinese culture.

The mere presence of Chinatown as a setting to this story disrupts the naturalized telos of assimilation. The setting itself cannot serve as a stepping stone between China and the rest of Seattle because it is a space that is conceptually removed from the rest of the city and the very timeline of Americanization. Accordingly, both Mrs. Dean (accompanied by her niece Adah Charlton) and Pau Lin are reconfigured as outsiders to the Chinatown. Pau Lin's perspective represents a position that both denies the conflation of Chinatowns in the U.S. with China and offers a view of the former that is not inflected by preconceived popular representations forged in the American popular consciousness. Mrs. Dean and Adah's perspective, on the other hand, exemplifies the white outsider's point-of-view, one that is shaped by both a commodifying and intellectualizing vision of Chinatown. The difference in their respective positions is illuminated by two extended descriptions of the neighborhood, the first focalized on the perspective of Paul Lin and the second expressed from the point of view of Mrs. Dean. Both are similarly constructed in form; each consists of paratactic phrases that concentrate on sensory details, usually visual, of the surrounding environment. However, how each character sees this

environment reveals the differing ways they mentally construct the Chinese community in America.

After conversing with her neighbors across balconies about the predicament with her son's Americanization, Pau Lin has a ruminative moment:

> She gazed below her curiously. The American Chinatown held a strange fascination for the girl from the seacoast village. Streaming along the street was a motley throng made up of all nationalities. The sing-song voices of girls whom respectable merchants' wives shudder to name, were calling to one another from high balconies up shadowy alleys. A fat barber was laughing hilariously at a drunken white man who had fallen into a gutter; a withered old fellow, carrying a bird in a cage, stood at the corner entreating passerbys to have a good fortune told; some children were burning punk on the curbstone. There sent by a stalwart Chief of the Six Companies engaged in earnest confab with a yellow-robed priest from the joss house. A Chinese dressed in the latest American style and a very blonde woman, laughing immoderately, were entering a Chinese restaurant together. Above all the hubbub of voices was heard the clang of electric cars and the jarring of heavy wheels over cobblestones. (49)

Although we know this viewpoint belongs to Pau Lin, the description opens with a perspective that emphasizes the visual from above, which underscores Pau Lin's external position to the scene below. Because this "American Chinatown" resembles very little her "seacoast village," Pau Lin is able to glimpse and listen in on the heterogeneity of a Chinatown that is not China with fresh eyes and ears. About half of the sentences focus on subjects of different racial, class, and social backgrounds interacting with one another, emphasizing the "motley throng made up of

all nationalities." Clearly the Chinatown street block under Pau Lin's eyes is not an impenetrable fortress stuck in time peopled exclusively by Chinese dwellers. The mention of the dissolute, drunken white man falling into a gutter upends the image of the depraved Chinese opium smoker lounging in dark, gritty opium dens. Similarly, the Chinese sporting "the latest American style" with a white, female companion emphasizes that unlike Arnold Genthe's aesthetic fantasies, Chinese Americans in fact wore regular, American clothing. Pau Lin's perspective offers a picture of Chinatown that may be closer to "reality" than the one imaged by Mrs. Dean and Adah Charlton below.

In contrast to this mixed medley of people captured in their everyday mundanity, Mrs. Dean and Adah Charlton's view catches Chinatown when the two are strolling the neighborhood during the Harvest Moon Festival. They take in the sight around them:

> Rows of lanterns suspended from many balconies shed a mellow moonshiny radiance. On the walls and doors were splashes of red paper inscribed with hieroglyphics. In the narrow streets, booths decorated with flowers, and banners and screens painted with immense figures of josses diverted the eye; while bands of musicians in gaudy silks, shrilled and banged, piped, and fluted.
>
> Everybody seemed to be out of doors – men, women, and children – and nearly all were in holiday attire. A couple of priests, in vivid scarlet and yellow robes, were kotowing before an altar covered with a rich cloth, embroidered in white and silver. Some Chinese students from the University of California stood looking on with comprehending, half-scornful interest; three girls lavishly dressed in colored silks, with their black hair plastered back from their faces and heavily bejeweled behind, chirped and chattered in a gilded balcony above them like birds

in a cage. Little children, their hands full of half-moon-shaped cakes, were pattering about, with eyes, for all the hour, as bright as stars. (54)

The description opens by depicting the physical setting of the streets. Lanterns, red papers, and flowers all serve to establish an Orientalized ambiance suffused with color and mystery. From the position of the two white women, the red paper appear to be inscribed with "hieroglyphics" which emphasizes the inscrutable quality of the entire scene. Unlike the social humans of Pau Lin's description who interact with one another, each grouping of people in Mrs. Dean and Adah Charlton's perception – the priests, the Chinese students, made-up girls, and small children – remains segregated from one another, each presented syntactically in separate sentences despite occupying the same space in the street. Here, the Chinese Americans exist as discrete objects. These objectified bodies are costumed for the celebration of the holiday but are presented as "fanciful aesthetic figures, frozen in time and arranged as objects – to be seen and comprehended as fetishes or souvenirs of a tour through the ghetto" (Moy 66).[42] In the same way Genthe singled out photographs of Chinatown dwellers in holiday costume instead of ordinary clothing, the elaborate depiction of Chinatown above reveals how the white perspective preferred to see "extraordinary to everyday scenes" (Tchen 13).

This commodification of Chinatown constitutes one of two ways objectification of Chinatown (and by consequence, Chinese Americans) is critiqued through the character of Mrs. Dean. Although segregated from one another, the individuals who occupy the street scene are indistinguishable from the ornate decorations that embellish the background setting. People are conflated with places and endure a "physical substantiation in the landscape." Given the "perceived distance, both geographic and cultural, between whites and the Orient," outsiders adopted "perceptions of Orientals as curiosities from exotic Chinatowns, replete with opium

[42] This quote originally addressed Genthe's attitude toward his Chinatown subjects.

dens, gambling parlors, and silk-clad prostitutes" (H. Yu 159). Tourism of this type and the vending of Oriental goods proved to be appealingly profitable: "The desire for authentic products of the Orient, whether an embroidered silk dress, a painted fan, or the services of a Chinese prostitute, heavily drove the economies of American Chinatowns (particularly the smaller ones) after the exclusionary acts of the late nineteenth century" (H. Yu 160). As has been demonstrated, white curiosity of Chinatown was not limited to merchandise, Chinatown inhabitants themselves were looked on with fascination like animals at a zoo. Such economic desirability derived from as logic of difference that rendered culture, bodies, and spaces equivalent.[43]

Not unconnected to commodification, the second mode of objectification critiqued by the text is the treatment of Chinatown (and its inhabitants) as an object to be mastered through knowledge. Shortly following the second description of Chinatown above, the narrator informs us of Mrs. Dean's purported expertise in navigating this space among these bodies like an experienced participant observer. She is poised as the tour guide to her niece, Adah Charlton, and "familiar with the Chinese people and the mazes of Chinatown, led her around fearlessly, pointing out this and that object of interest and explaining to her its meaning" (54). Mrs. Dean is figured as the expert on all things Chinatown, more so than even her protégé Wou Sankwei ever could be, because her knowledge is one that belongs to an outsider asserting dominance over their object. Building off of Said's "domestication of the exotic," a process in which "the previously unknown becomes familiarized by its identification with a previous experience,"

[43] The "Chinatown ethnography" emerged as a genre of writing in the 1940s and 1950s and included Pardee Lowe's *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1943), and C. Y. Lee's *The Flower Drum Song* (1957). Christine So notes that these Chinatown ethnographies "assiduously carve out the social space of Chinatown, marking its geographic and cultural borders for large U.S. audiences, and in effect creating an identifiable Chinatown culture" (37). These texts also have been accused of self-exoticizing and self-essentializing in view of increasing their commodity value. See the introduction to *Aieeeee!* And Sau-ling Wong's "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour?: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese American Autobiographical Controversy."

Rachel Lee describes how the program of commodification and the project of knowability are intimately linked. The menacing inscrutability of the Oriental is mitigated by the "quintessential knowability" of the commodity through its usability. Therefore, the consumer could "figuratively 'own' a part of the East" the mystery of which has been reduced to a simple product (R. Lee, "Journalistic Representations" 255).

The knowledge project embodied by Mrs. Dean extends far beyond the pacification of fears of the unknown through the objectification of Chinatown. Her assimilative programs showcases altruistic tendencies characteristic of paternalistic attitudes characteristic of racial uplift discourse circulating through imperial discourses of the time. White women, in particular, worked in Christian mission schools in Chinatowns, which strove to Americanize through English language training (Ferens 127). On the international stage, Moy points out that the anthropological gaze's historical entanglement with the imperialistic gaze "allowed America to claim equal status in the community of imperialistic Western powers, but under the sign of altruism" (Moy 8).[44] Mrs. Dean "had devoted herself earnestly and whole-heartedly to the betterment of the condition and the uplifting of the young workingmen of Chinese race who came to America" (52). More specifically, she believed the mode of uplift could be executed through "closer acquaintance with the knowledge of the Western People, and *that* she had undertaken to give them, as far as she was able. The rewards and satisfactions of her work had been rich in some cases. Witness Wou Sankwei" (52). Reminiscent of the policy of benevolent assimilation enacted by the U.S. in the Philippines,[45] Mrs. Dean's attitudes uphold education as the most effective avenue toward assimilation and cultural subordination.

[44] For readings of this gaze through spectacle exhibits and theater during the 19th century, see Moy, 7-22.

[45] For U.S. use of education as a colonial apparatus in the Philippines, see Meg Wesling, *Empire's Proxy.*

This attitude toward education expresses itself as a domestic conflict between her male protégé and his stubborn wife when Mrs. Dean contemplates the gossip circulating around Pau Lin's refusal to send her son to an American school: "Here was a man who had benefited and profited by living in America, anxious to have his son receive the benefits of a Western education – and here was this man's wife opposing him with her ignorance and hampering him with her unreasonable jealousy" (52-53). Mrs. Dean frames the success of the immigrant in terms of enlightenment and ignorance, rationality and irrationality. Wou Sankwei is a good subject due to his interpellation by the Western education system and his desire to transmit these benefits to his son through generational enculturation. Though Mrs. Dean interprets Pau Lin's refusal to assimilate as ignorance, it is through Pau Lin's entrance into the text that Mrs. Dean's own ignorance is brought to legibility.

The destabilization of both Mrs. Dean's epistemic authority and the method of accruing knowledge from sight takes place at the very start of the story at Pau Lin's arrival to the port of Seattle. Hoping to "make herself fair to see in the eyes of her husband," particularly after having not seen him for seven years, Pau Lin "had arrayed herself in a heavily embroidered purple costume, whitened her forehead and cheeks with powder, and tinted her lips with carmine" (45). Conspicuously attired in Genthe-like fashion, she waits with her young son on the deck of the steamer. When her husband finally arrives, however, Wou Sankwei ends up "looking over and beyond her" (45), and it is not until the ship's captain points out Pau Lin to him that he is able to recognize his wife and son. The description of their reunion emphasizes the persistence of misrecognition, as Pau Lin "raised her patient eyes to his face – the face of the husband whom she had not seen for seven long years" only to be met by disappointment; "her eyelids drooped, and her countenance assumed an almost sullen expression" (46).

Wou Sankwei's act of misrecognition only sets the stage to highlight Mrs. Dean's false understanding of the community she claims to uplift through the dissemination of Western knowledge. Both Mrs. Dean and Adah Charlton have accompanied Wou Sankwei to welcome Pau Lin. When Adah Charlton reaches out to take Pau Lin's hand in greeting, Pau Lin turns away in disgust, a gesture that the two white women interpret to indicate the newly arrived woman's shyness: "'Poor little thing! How shy she is!' exclaimed Mrs. Dean" (46). Secretly, Wou Sankwei feels relief that the two women are not familiar with "the meaning of the averted face," which clearly does not signal timidity (46). This circuit of looks and deflections sets up a series of misapprehensions that casts doubt on the reliability of visually-derived knowledge. That Pau Lin is dressed in elaborate costume, much like the individuals who populated the scene of Mrs. Dean's version of Chinatown, only serves to reaffirm the objectifying gaze of the white woman.

Pau Lin's structural role in disrupting Mrs. Dean's normalizing knowledge system is furthermore reflected in the title of the story itself. As has been mentioned, Pau Lin views sending her son to an American school as a form of indoctrination that will transform him into a good American subject who disavows his Chinese roots. This educational apparatus she refers to as the "wisdom of the new" and its operation on pupils as a form of "contamination" (52). By casting Western knowledge and its acquisition as a corruptive and polluting, Pau Lin's perspective denormalizes what counts as legitimate knowledge.

Ethnography and the Visual

In "Its Wavering Image," the critique of the white outsider's claim to knowledge of the Chinese through the penetration of Chinatown is complicated by the ambiguous presence of the

character Pan, "a half white, half Chinese girl" (61). The story oscillates between the perspectives of Mark Carson, a journalist sent to write a sensationalist article about Chinatown and Pan, the young woman he exploits for "insider" information. Unlike Adah Charlton, who is able to look at Pau Lin "with radiant eyes" because the white woman feels "[s]ecure in the difference of race" (51), notably a difference that manifests visually, Mark Carson's primary struggle is to resolve the ambiguity of Pan's racial identity, which depends inconsistently on the journalist's sexual desires and his desire for hidden knowledge. Such contradictory moments of racialization stems from a sense of white authority anchored in Mark Carson's sense of sight; "Its Wavering Image" undermines this dominant mode of seeing through Pan's own coming-into-sight. This recuperation of the visual to underscore the raced subject's own self-legibility foreshadows Sui Sin Far's "Leaves."

The moment Carson steps foot into Chinatown emphasizes his allochronistic perception of the neighborhood as a timeless space distinctively set apart from the rest of San Francisco. Stepping "across the threshold of cool, deep room, fragrant with the odor of dried lilies and sandalwood" (61), Mark Carson enters the shop of Pan's father. This "Oriental Bazaar" seems to transport him into a redolent, exotic fantasy (61). The emphasis on the senses in this scene marks the primacy of the body that will come to regulate the circulation of knowledge in the story, but interestingly the rest of the story posits visuality and sight as the marker of rationality. This rationality is put to use when he meets Pan and is beleaguered by questions: "What was she? Chinese or white?" (61). Not only is the mystery of her race figured in essentializing terms, Caron's binaric rationality limits the possible range of responses by the question's either-or proposition.

Mark Carson's determination to race Pan as white stems from his sexual desire for her, which is policed by the taboo of miscegenation. In his mind, evidence for Pan's whiteness can be grasped visually. He is described as approaching his encounters with Pan with "clever eyes" (61). After she grows more comfortable with him, Carson constructs a narrative for Pan in which her appreciation of her own whiteness has been stymied by her lack of exposure to other white people. As "Pan's first white friend," Carson would be the one to initiate her to the ways of whiteness by teaching her. "All this Mark Carson's clear eyes perceived" (62), leading him to believe himself to be the authority on Pan's identity and personal narrative. Paralleling Mrs. Dean's program of didactic assimilation, Carson "educat[es] Pan, or assimilate[es] her to his beliefs and his loyalty" in order to begin his "discursive exploitation" of her (R. Lee, "Journalistic Representation" 269).

By turning her into a white woman, Carson also is able to circumvent the taboos associated with racial amalgamation. Two moments of physical intimacy evoke Carson's desperate claims to Pan's whiteness. First, when Pan confesses that Chinatown is her home, Carson "grasp[s] her hands" and cries to her, "[Y]ou do not belong here. You are white – white" (63). He defines Chinatown as a homogenous space in which only the Chinese exist to the exclusion of white Americans. In the second moment, after another debate about Pan's identity, Carson tells the girl, "Pan, don't you see that you have got to decide what you will be – Chinese or white? You cannot be both" (63). The journalist wants her to choose between the two identities, but also indirectly advises her to open her eyes to the rationalism of the situation, which offers her only two choices. She starts to breaks down emotionally, at which point Mark Carson instructs, "Look up at me…Oh, Pan! Pan! Those tears prove that you are white" (64), and then they kiss. The command to "look up" reiterates the indirect instruction to use her eyes to

apprehend her situation, but the object of that gaze is Carson himself, the epitome of whiteness and white authority. Carson reads Pan's tears as proof that she is not Chinese, for the lack of "emotional display" applies only to the Chinese, as "evidence of inhumanity" (R. Lee, "Journalistic Representations" 252). Pan's tears demonstrate her capacity for feeling and consequently prove her whiteness and corresponding humanity.

While Carson justifies his sexual attraction toward Pan by racing her as white, he unwittingly relies on her Chineseness to mine her for knowledge about Chinatown. Motivated by his muckraking venture, Carson manipulates her into the position of native informant: "in full trust and confidence, she led him about Chinatown, initiating him into the simple mystery and history of many things, for which she, being of her father's race, had a tender regard and pride" (62). Her access to the "mystery and history of many things" is only enabled through her identification with Chineseness. With the secrets of Chinatown revealed to him, Carson publishes a sensationalizing article about a Chinatown "cruelly unveiled and ruthlessly spread before the ridiculing and uncomprehending foreigner" (65). Ironically, this act of betrayal consummates Carson's racializing education of Pan. While trying to come to terms with Carson's deception, Pan reasons, "Someone had hurt her. Who was it? She raised her eyes. There shone: 'Its Wavering Image.' It helped her to lucidity. He had done it" (64). Many critics have interpreted the "wavering image" to signal the ambiguities of Pan's racial identifications which wavers between white and Chinese, but in the context of the song to which the phrase alludes,[46] the wavering image refers to the ambivalence of knowledge production derived from sight. The lyrics of the song read:

> And forever, and forever,
>
> As long as the river flows,

[46] See Diana and Pryse,

As long as the heart has passions,

As long as life has woes,

The moon and its broken reflection,

And its shadows shall appear,

As the symbol of love in heaven,

And its wavering image here. (64)

The lucidity that Pan speaks of is not one of a clear image, but a clear understanding that images will fluctuate based on the position of the viewer. The image of the moon, which only shines by reflecting the light of the sun, is mediated by the rippling surface of the river. Though Carson embodies the belief in universalized rational perception as whiteness, Pan comes to apprehend in her own way that at once recuperates the critical potential of sight for the marginalized and critiques the dominant form of self-evident knowledge.

When Mark Carson encounters Pan at the end of the story, his confidence in his ability to ascertain Pan's whiteness through sight is severely undermined. Pan's appearance provokes an uncanny reaction in the man: "Mark Carson felt strangely chilled. Pan was not herself tonight. She did not even look herself. He had been accustomed to seeing her in American dress. Tonight she wore the Chinese costume. But for her clear-cut features she might have been a Chinese Girl. He shivered" (66). That Pan was not herself and that she did not look like herself represents the faulty correspondence between what is visible and what is knowledge, a correspondence that underpins Carson's system of rationalizing truths through visual observation. The naturalized equation of visuality to intelligibility sutured by Carson's white authority is ruptured through the interchangeable artifice of Pan's clothing.

Mark Carson's profession as a writer and Pan's position as a racialized object resonates with the metanarrative awareness evoked by Mrs. Spring Fragrance's book project about "mysterious, inscrutable, incomprehensible Americans" (33). Instead of discursive reversal however, "Its Wavering Image" is more direct in its indictment of the objectification of Chinatown and its inhabitants through the production and circulation of salacious representations. With multiple factors propelling Carson's pursuit of Pan – namely, her "insider" connections and her body – this representational exploitation is figured as rapacious on several levels. I am not sure if "Its Wavering Image" raises "the issue of how to write about Asians without exposing them to a critical white gaze" (R. Lee, "Journalistic Representation" 266), since the fact that Sui Sin Far endeavored to combat John Chinaman stereotypes showed she wrote for a white audience.[47] What is unambiguous is that her fictions reveal an intense preoccupation with the way in which her writings would go about mediating that gaze.

Recuperating the Visual in "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian"

In the wake of the selections from *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* that I have analyzed, this chapter will conclude by returning to "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," published in *The Independent* later in Sui Sin Far's writing career in 1909. The stylistic differences between this piece and "Sui Sin Far, the Half Chinese Writer, Tells of Her Career," another essay published in the *Boston Globe* in 1912 are striking. In contrast to the latter's faithful adherence to the conventions of autobiographical writing (explicit alignment of author and narrator, chronology, reference to concrete places etc.), "Leaves" contains a number of exceptional formal features that undermine easy assignments either to a straightforward

[47] See Sui Sin Far, "The Chinese in America" in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* (233-258).

autobiography.[48] These formal idiosyncrasies affiliate the text more to a narrative in which the racialized self comes into being upon seeing itself racialized through the gaze of others. "Leaves" is above all an imaginative text that foregrounds issues self-representation and self-reference, especially when the subject is the apprehension of racial difference manifest outwardly.

Anthropological conventions dictating ethnographic discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century relied on the "use of Time…for the purpose of distancing those who were observed from the Time of the observer" (Fabian 25). The denial of coevalness features very clearly in Sui Sin Far's short stories through representations of Chinatown, which is perceived by its white outsider characters as belonging to the Orient both in time and space. However, her texts depart from Fabian's critique in conceptualizing the ambivalent role vision plays in the subjugation of the Other. For Fabian, the visual orientation of anthropological research perpetuates the reproduction of split temporalization: "As long as anthropology presents its object primarily as seen, as long as ethnographic observation is conceived primarily as observation and/or representation…it is likely to persist in denying the coevalness of the Other" (151). But at other moments, the ideological persistence of visualism appears to depend on this temporal denial: "As an ideological bent, especially if it is true that there is collusion between such a bent and allochronic tendencies, visualism functions as a cognitive style that is likely to prejudice the study of all kinds of cultural expression" (123). The fundamentally oppressive bearing that materializes from binding temporal distancing to a visually-oriented epistemology becomes complicated under Sui Sin Far's imaginary. It is precisely through the recuperation of the visual, via the mediatory function of the literary, that "Leaves" manages to endorse what

[48] See Nguyen, page 40 for the failure of "Leaves" to fulfill the generic conventions of autobiography due to its short form.

Fabian calls the creation of *intersubjective* time. It is furthermore through the engagement of the visual through the literary that "Leaves" conceives of the work of the ethnographer as what Fabian calls *reflexion*, as opposed to *reflection*.

The emphasis on seeing, the visual, and optics abound in "Leaves." From the start, the title, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio," suggestively metaphorizes memory as pages of photographs belonging to an album located in the narrator's mind. Mentioned previously, the essay opens with the narrator witnessing her realization of her racialized condition, a moment triggered when she notices others scrutinizing her. The first sentence of "Leaves" reads, "When I look back over the years I see myself, a little child of scarcely four years of age" (218), beginning a series of scenes that mark various moments in which the protagonist notices she is racialized or unracialized by sight. This opening phrase neatly bifurcates the narrating self (narrator) and the experiencing self (protagonist), which are both held in mutual suspension through the act of looking. What ensues consists of a montage of ten "frames" or shots taking place at different times and places throughout the narrator's life that document moments of sighted racialization. As demonstrated by the repetition of optical verbs ("look," "see," "watch"), these acts of recall are predominantly visual, in a literal sense retrospective, but the temporal backwardness of this glance is complicated by the narrator's use of present tense while summoning events that are meant to have taken place in the past.

This unconventional use of grammatical tense is what sets "Leaves" apart from other autobiographical works and is solely enabled by the text's literariness. Unlike many first person narratives in which the narrating self and the experiencing self are linked through the pronoun "I" but separated by an intervening temporal interval, the temporal gap in "Leaves" is swallowed up so that the narrated self (object) and the narrating self (observer) occupy the same

temporality. This establishment of coevalness through the use of the present tense however, can only occur at the level of literary discourse.[49] More specifically, the text's use of tense marks its uniquely fictional constitution. "Leaves" use of present tense offers a variant of the narratological conundrum Dorrit Cohn identifies as simultaneous narration, or first person narration in the present tense. In her attempt to normalize simultaneous narration according to the "conventions of fictional realism," Cohn finds this aberrant form of narration caught in between the "historical present resolution" and the "interior monologue resolution" (104).[50] The first resolution derives from the "norms of formal mimeticism" associated with "*first*-person fictional narration: the imitation of an autobiographical discourse where the narrating self refers to the past life of an experiencing self," while the second resolution derives from the "norms of verisimilar psychological presentation" associated with "*third*-person realist fiction: the transparency of fictional characters that grants inside views into their consciousness" (Cohn 104).[51] Neither first-person autobiography striving to relay past events nor interior monologue aiming to reproduce the immediacy of internal thoughts, the narrative of "Leaves" nonetheless draws on both of these resolutions in accentuating point of view and the process by which that point of view comes to make itself and its object.

The nuanced distinction between the way Yoonmee Chang uses "ethnographic" and the way I consider Sui Sin Far fulfilling the "ethnographic" is illuminated by Fabian's separation of reflexion and reflection. The latter, Fabian characterizes as "a sort of objective reflex (like the image in a mirror) which hides the observer by axiomatically eliminating subjectivity" (90), and

[49] See Culler, "Story and Discourse" in *The Pursuit of Signs*, 169-187.

[50] See Benveniste, 206-7.

[51] The use of first person present tense in "Leaves" does not resemble stream of consciousness or interior monologue.

closely approximates the grounds for Chang's indictment against the ethnographic impulse. Reflexion, on the contrary, is a "subjective activity" (Fabian 90) that stems from reflexivity, which

> asks that we "look back" and thereby let our experiences "come back" to us. Reflexivity is based on memory, i.e., on the fact that the location of experience in our past is not irreversible. We have the ability to present (make present) our past experiences to ourselves. More than that, this reflexive ability enables us to be in the presence of others precisely inasmuch as the Other has become content of our experience. (Fabian 91-92)

If the narrating-self is the self-reflexive ethnographer who "looks back," then the narrated-self comprises the position of Other. Given the conditions of "making present" her past experiences, the narrating-self creates the conditions for intersubjective time, the recognition of which "would seem to preclude any sort of distancing almost by definition" (Fabian 30).

The narrator's use of present tense to refer back to former iterations of herself is an act of temporalization (Fabian 74), or a way language encodes Time. Both the use of past tense and present tense in ethnographic discourse, according to Fabian, produce effects of temporalization that deny the Other coevalness with the present of the writing subject. Though Fabian claims the use of the present tense gives rise to generalization and implies "a static view of society" and "'freezes' a society at the time of observation" (81), the coordination of the present tense with the structure of montage in "Leaves" sustains the text's responsive dynamism.

What makes this proto-postmodern form of ethnography even more compelling is how Sui Sin Far uses variations of the self to posit as subject and object. In a sense, "Leaves" charts not only the coming-into-being of an individual who realizes herself to be raced by others, but of

a writer who grapples with the problematics underlying representing an unevenly raced community, rendered uneven due to the instability of racial optics applied. In the third scene, she describes being "called from my play for the purpose of inspection" by "a white haired old man" who "adjusts his eyeglasses and surveys me critically" (218). A subsequent scene set in Eastern Canada where "persons pause and gaze upon us, very much in the same way that I have seen people gaze upon strange animals in a menagerie" (220). Though the narrated self herself is gazed upon by strangers, the narrating self witnesses the act of gazing through a visual scope that exceeds that of the gazing strangers. To demonstrate the inconsistency of the optical logic governing the sight of this gaze, the narrator also watches her self unracialized through vision.

At a dinner party in "a little town away off on the north shore of a big lake" (224), the protagonist listens to her employer and his guests share derogatory remarks about Chinese immigrants, in particular the feelings of disgust these guests endure upon sighting one. One man proclaims: "Their bodies are enough for me. A Chinaman is, in my eyes, more repulsive than a nigger," to which a young girl responds: "They always give me such a creepy feeling" (224). After enduring her shame internally for a few moments, the narrator object announces that she is Chinese. Though her bold declaration is met by the host's apologies, it can also be viewed as a confession since the protagonist's ambiguous appearance up to that moment enabled her to pass as white. Contradicting the opinion of the man, in whose "eyes" Chinese "bodies are enough" to assign them an inferior position on the racialized social hierarchy, the narrator's verbal articulation of her identity shows that visuality and intelligibility do not align so easily. In the same way the appearance of Pan in "Its Wavering Image" disrupted Mark Carson's racializing rationality, the narrator of "Leaves" upsets the optical claim to knowledge. Nestled inside an

explicitly fictional framework, this moment attempts to render the experience legible and to restore value to the visual world.

When read as a literary work and not as sociological evidence, "Leaves" charts the emergence of a literary persona and a racializing optics, producing a raced literature structured through the visual. In a sense, "Leaves" signals the emergence of an Asian American literature that is conscious of itself as a representational form, the politics behind representation, and the substance of representation itself. Building off of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*'s critique of ethnography, I have attempted to demonstrate how Sui Sin Far does not fall so easily into Chang's ethnographic impulse. "Leaves" imagines the workings of a discursive system in which observer and observed are brought into reciprocal contact with another. This mutual coexistence is achieved through a defiance of temporal and grammatical norms of representational language, a playfulness that could only be enable through reading the text as a work of fiction.

Chapter Two

Maxine Hong Kingston's Narrator: Superimposing Ghosts and Photographs

If Sui Sin Far has shouldered the "ethnographic genealogy of Asian American literature" as one of the genre's progenitors (Chang 68), Maxine Hong Kingston has been obliged to sustain this ethnographic genealogy as one of the genre's most recognizable authors. Her writings complicated Asian American literature's consolidation after the formal emergence of "Asian American" as an identitarian category during the 1960s and 1970s. The publication of *The Woman Warrior* was met with acclaim most pointedly by the mainstream readership, while the text's focus on gendered themes spurred dialogues between white feminists and feminists of color. This salient reception by a broad non-Asian American audience also prompted internal fissures within Asian American literary community and gave rise to the well-known conflict between Kingston and Frank Chin. Perhaps due to this historical period's intersection of social, political, and cultural visibilities, Kingston the person has become conflated with the narrators of her texts in much the same way Edith Eaton the historical individual has come to subsume Sui Sin Far the literary persona. Following a similar tact to the previous chapter, this second chapter begins its discussion of its primary sources by urging a split between their literary contents and the author's biography.

By accepting the narrator of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* to be the product of literary imagination instead of a mouthpiece for a specific community, we are better able to recognize the specifically aesthetic structure of Kingston's texts. Keeping in mind that the Asian American text is "one that is – or can be shown to be – engaged with a problematic of Asian American representation" (Lye, "Reading" 492), this chapter argues that the two novels trace the

Asian American fictional process through the coming-into-being of its imaginary speaker. This process is measured by the underlying dissemblance between the girl protagonist and the adult narrator, a distance limned through tropes of visuality. More specifically, visuality appears in the two texts through the interplay of two seemingly antithetical modes of optical cognition: photography and ghosts.

Conventionally, interpretations of photography and of ghosts in Kingston's texts indirectly oppose the two by treating the first as a stand-in for the mechanism by dominant history maintains its archive and the second as that which gets repressed by this mechanism. In particular, postmodern ontological instability of self has been cathected by critics through the figure of the ghost, one of the most overdetermined figures of *The Woman Warrior*. As an aspect of the text built into the text's subtitle "Memoir of a Girlhood among Ghosts," the meaning of ghosts and hauntings varies from one section to another and even within individual sections, a semantic slipperiness that has invited the interpretive equation of ghosts to all the various indeterminacies that can beleaguer a fragmented subjectivity.[52] The majority of these readings cast ghosts in a negative light; ghosts signal the absences, gaps, and estrangements that shape the narrator's Chinese American girlhood, which is usually read as suspended between two competing cultural systems. Consequently, there is the implied necessity of coming to terms with such negativity through a form of exorcism – usually realized through the act of naming the ghosts after the narrator has gained her voice (Li, "The Naming" 509; Miller 24) – which actualizes an identitarian resolution.

[52] Ghosts in Kingston's texts have been read as figurative stand-ins for liminality that disrupt binaries (Odabas 148), diasporic displacement (Lim 160), the loss of history, memory, and genealogy (Gilead 54; Miller 20), a mode of confronting the Other (Ken-fang Lee 112), the ostracized outsider (P. Chu 103), and not unrelated, the return of the repressed (Mattio 135).

This conceptual opposition registers in the way interpretations addressing photography tend toward *China Men* and analysis of ghosts focus on *The Woman Warrior*.[53] *China Men*, commonly received as a male-centered counterpart to *The Woman Warrior*, is read as ostensibly more engaged with history than its feminist predecessor.[54] At the very center of the text appears a chapter entitled "The Laws," which provides a chronological overview of exclusionary policies directed toward Asian migrants beginning in 1868 and ending at 1978, a couple years before the book's publication. This organization, in which the China Men stories surround the core that consists of codified legislation, suggests the fundamental role official history discourse plays in the text's narrative formation. According to David Palumbo-Liu, "Kingston inscribes memory work deeply in Chinese American history…and sees the production of individuals within collective and national histories" (406), while *The Woman Warrior* features "sublimation of the political into the personal" (403). Major historical events and conditions, such as the sugar plantations of Hawai'i, the construction of the transcontinental railroad, and the Vietnam War, appear more explicitly in *China Men* in contrast to *The Woman Warrior*, marking a shift from the private stories of the women of *The Woman Warrior* to public, archetypal stories of the China men.

Instead of reading photography and ghosts as representing two opposed epistemic attitudes – photography can stand-in for a dominant archive that elides, while ghosts embody that which is elided – this chapter reads the two modes as necessary for Kingston's narrator's imaginative process. While photography, in its supposed mimetic fidelity to what is visible to the

[53] This gravitation of spectral readings toward *The Woman Warrior* may be in part due to the way "Kuei" or "Gwai" is translated as "ghost" in *The Woman Warrior* and as "demon" or "devil" in *China Men* (see Sato 199).

[54] See Ling, *Narrating Nationalisms*, for a reading that problematizes the text's rehabilitation of Chinese male agency in the exclusionary national narrative. Ling writes: "the significance of Kingston's feminist renegotiation in *China Men* lies crucially in her fashioning a strategy not only to expose the structural interdependence between institutionalized American history and the Asian American heroic imagination, but also to allow a reassertion of women's perspective that subverts the logic of Western historicism" (119).

human eye, embodies the tenets of empirical rationalism, ghosts, considered immaterial, come to mark the boundaries and "function as the blind spot in the logic of ocular evidence" (Castle 49). More overlooked than the narrative significance of ghosts is the way in which such phenomena are perceived. Ghosts are considered invisible, or even nonexistent, when looked upon through eyes that prize ocular rationality. These scientific eyes do not register the phantasmagoric as possessing evidentiary weight, and consequently ghosts trace that which exceeds the boundaries of the empirically valuable.

In the same way "The Laws," as the narrative kernel of *China Men*, is key to understanding the novel's historical intervention, I argue that the section "Shaman," centrally located in *The Woman Warrior*, is formative to understanding the narrator's use of ghostly empiricism to supplement her Asian American literary imagination. This chapter intends to disrupt the binary of dominant history and personal memory by reading photography and ghosts not as correlated to official archive, on the one hand, and silenced traumas, on the other, but as two forms of seeing that can produce "superimposed vision" for the narrator when considered in conjunction with one another. Gayle Sato insightfully frames Kingston's use of ghosts as an explicitly Chinese American literary strategy and the ghost world the site where social identity and writerly imagination come together. Sato writes, the narrator "[enters] it to develop imagination and individuality, and leaving it to confirm familial and communal identity" (206). As such, ghosts possess a figurative capaciousness that endows the narrator with a "'superimposed vision,' which can admit the simultaneous existence of two seemingly opposed ideas or states of being" and give rise to "the ability to perceive that reality is layered" (Sato 201, 203). Through superimposed vision, one concept is understood through the other, originally thought to be irreconcilable with the first. This superimposed vision initiates the narrative

possibility of the "Shaman." In this section, the narrator can only access the world of the ghosts by ruminating on a photographic portrait of her mother, Brave Orchid. By figuring this cognitive process as one that resembles ekphrasis,[55] or the trope of giving "voice and language to an otherwise mute art object" (Hagstrum 18n34), "Shaman" demonstrates that the ideal domain to achieve this superimposed vision is the literary.

Through her childhood, the girl protagonist struggles with her position in between; she is able to perceive ghosts with the help (or curse) of her mother but struggles to ground their existence in something palpably verifiable. Beyond signaling the threshold between two cultures, two generations, and two continents, ghosts for the narrator mark the disjunction between what she perceives and her inability to produce meaning from these images. She observes early in *The Woman Warrior*, "Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America" (*WW* 5),[56] and this means of "figuring out" comprises the literary emergence of the narrator herself. The task of the narrator – a task that only the literary is capable of fulfilling – is to render the invisible world of ghosts not only solidly visible but also legible to herself and to her readers.

Instead of tending to ghosts to produce conciliatory meaning through potential exorcism or repudiating the type of empirical rationalism embodied by photographs, the narrator finds the two to be interdependent in her enterprise toward achieving legibility. The girl protagonist is

[55] As a long-standing rhetorical device dating back to Western antiquity, ekphrasis – of which a few well-known examples include Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in *The Illiad*, Shakespeare's description of the Greek army in *The Rape of Lucrece*, Keats's description of a vase in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and William's description of Brueghel's painting "The Fall of Icarus" – has been the subject of much debate, both in terms of its conceptual ramifications and its basic definition. A broad point of contention centers on the rub between word and image and the relationships between their respective aesthetic forms. While one approach understands ekphrasis to embody Horace's dictum *ut pictura poesis*, or "as is painting so is poetry," in which "the 'sister arts' are reciprocally inspiring" (see Hagstrum and Krieger), the opposing approach associates it with the contestation among art forms, a tradition derived from da Vinci's *Paragone* (Fischer 2; see also Heffernan).

[56] Subsequent references to *The Woman Warrior* are indicated by the abbreviation "*WW*" and cite the 1989 edition, while references to *China Men* are marked "*CM*" and cite the 1989 edition.

unable to productively mediate between these two epistemic positions, while the adult narrator marks a mindset that recognizes that both ghosts and photography can be imagined into meaning, producing a form of ghostly empiricism.[57] If the logic of ocular empiricism depends on one's field of vision and if ghosts mark the blindspots in this field, Kingston's narrator comes to grasp that precognition of this field is necessary to even discern holes in vision. Through the literary act, "blindspots can be located and ways of re-illuminating them reimagined" (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren 94). This act of re-illumination via the literary is the undertaking confronted by the narrator, whose tangibly rational frame of perception – both in cognition and narrative – provides the lens through which the reader glimpses these overlapping modes of epistemology.

Cleaving Author and Narrator

Falling under the same ethnographic impulse that conflated Sui Sin Far the author with Edith Eaton the historical individual, Kingston's voice has frequently been equated to the voice of her narrator(s). However, extratextual and intratextual signals indicate Kingston's original intent to dissociate herself, or her life story, from that of the narrator-protagonist of *The Woman Warrior*. The "autobiographical pact" is one necessary but insufficient criterion that delineates the border between the autobiography and the novel. The pact consists of an implicit textual contract drawn between author and reader that establishes the correspondences among the author, narrator, and protagonist by way of a shared proper name. According to Philippe Lejeune, "[a]utobiography (narrative recounting the life of the author) supposes that there is identity of name between the author (such as s/he figures, by name, on the cover), the narrator of

[57] Conceiving of a ghostly empiricism aligns with Avery Gordon's conceptualization of a ghostly objectivity: "To write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories. To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects. To impute a kind of objectivity to ghosts implies that, from certain standpoints, the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows" (17).

the story and the character who is being talked about" (12). Although subsequent discussion surrounding Lejeune's theory has interrogated the instability of this autobiographical "signature," the pact still serves as a useful measure to determine whether a text qualifies as autobiography.

Maxine Hong Kingston's name appears on the cover of *The Woman Warrior* as its author, but within the text's body, there is no reference to either the narrator's or the protagonist's name.[58] The narrator's use of the first-person pronoun "I" to refer to her diegetic self is the primary means by which we are able to associate the narrating-I with the narrated-I,[59] but her connection to the author is left disjunctive, thus rupturing the integrity of the autobiographical pact. Critics' insistence on identifying the narrator with Kingston, or even with a seemingly anodyne "Maxine", is bizarre in light of Kingston's explicit pronouncements of authorial dissociation.[60] "Did you notice that the narrator of *The Woman Warrior* doesn't have a name?" she asked the audience during a university Q&A session, "Her name isn't Maxine; that's my name. I see this as a literary text that's very separate from myself. Throughout, nobody calls her anything" (Skenazy 133). During another conversation, Kingston emphasized, "Oh, that narrator girl. It's hard for me to call her me, because this is an illusion of writing" (Thompson 6). By severing herself from "that narrator girl," Kingston thwarts biographically-motivated

[58] The only reference to the narrator-protagonist's name appears in the section "At the Western Palace" when, through the focalized perspective of Moon Orchid, the narrator recounts, "There was indeed an oldest girl who was absent-minded and messy. She had an American name that sounded like "Ink" in Chinese" (WW 131). The equation of the narrator's name to writing paraphernalia emphasizes the literariness, both in terms of fiction and narrative, of the central mind communicating the stories that make up *The Woman Warrior*.

[59] However, this link is also troubled at times, for instance when the narrator projects herself onto the character Fa Mu Lan in "White Tigers."

[60] Laura Hyun Yi Kang's reading is the only I have encountered that is equally preoccupied with the almost consensual assertion of "'Kingston' as a discernible textual figure," which "[elides] any distinction among the protagonist, narrator, [and] author" (34).

readings of the text and attempts to preclude reductive readings that simplify the text to mimetic representations of her life experiences.

What the disconnection between author and narrator does instead is provide the necessary condition for the reception of *The Woman Warrior* as a work of fiction. In an attempt to amend the general and self-implicated narratological conflation of narrative as a whole with fictional narrative exclusively, Gerard distinguishes between "fictional narrative" and "factual narrative" by conceding that "[t]he 'indices' of fiction are not all of a narratological order, mainly because they are not all of a textual order; more often, and perhaps increasingly often, a text signals its fictionality by *paratextual* markers which are a safeguard against misapprehension" ("Fictional/Factual" 770). The main paratextual marker discussed in the essay is the very disidentification considered above between author and narrator via the "onomastic feature" (Genette, "Fictional/Factual" 767), or nominal authorization. Once separated from "Maxine Hong Kingston," the narrator can be read more explicitly as an "imaginary speaker" (Cohn 32),[61] whose literariness is essential to understanding the "illusion of writing" to which Kingston refers above.

Imaginative Girl Protagonist versus the Rational Adult Narrator

In addition to cleaving Kingston the author from the narrator of her texts, it is necessary to carefully distinguish between the two selves – narrated and narrating – internal to the texts. This split between the young female protagonist and the adult narrator has been misconstrued by critics in order to heighten the tension between the narrator-protagonist and her mother and to dramatize the text's mother-daughter trope. According to this misreading, the generational

[61] The "creation of an imaginary speaker" Cohn takes "to be the essential token of fictionality in the first-person regime" (32).

conflict materializes between the daughter's desire for stable truths grounded by rationality and the mother's embodiment of mythologies and tales that remain mercurial under the transience of storytelling. A resolution is reached when the narrator learns to disenthrall herself from the constraints of rational thought and learns to acknowledge and assimilate her mother's fabulous – and distinctively female[62] – mode of knowledge transmission.

Critics have framed this resolution in terms of internal development by contrasting the young narrator-protagonist with her adult counterpart. Bonnie TuSmith argues that the "fluidity between immature and mature perceptions is maintained through two narrative voices: one child, the other adult" (255). Through her rebellion against her mother's talk-stories, the young narrator displays her want for "certainty" and "clarity" in her life, a position that is subsequently "undercut" by the adult narrator (TuSmith 255). This facile alignment of the child narrator-protagonist with rationality and of the adult with non-rationality assumes a trajectory in which the maturation from one to the other symbolizes the achievement of an inherently transformative positionality that derives from the decenteredness of the narrator's social identity. When set up in this way, Kingston's text is understood to "[challenge] western rational ways of seeing, classifying, ordering" – an epistemic viewpoint inaccessible to the narrator who is not a Western, bourgeois male subject – but such broad strokes led to generalizing dichotomies like the geo-spatial conflict offered by one critic between "a flat literal reality equated with America" and "a mythic, three-dimensional reality represented by China" (Johnston 36).

The Woman Warrior indeed is split between child and adult modes of vocalization, but this division most straightforwardly can be identified as the separation between the child-protagonist and the adult-narrator, and not as between two narrators. Although there are points in which the child-protagonist appears to straddle the diegetic boundary, these are restricted to

[62] See Jenkins.

scenes in which the moment the child listening to or receiving a story coincides with the moment this same story is being communicated to the reader by the adult-narrator. A more definitive separation between child-protagonist and adult-narrator is established through temporal distancing. The main subject of *The Woman Warrior* consists of exactly that which its subtitle indicates, "a girlhood among ghosts," which includes events experienced directly by the girl (which mostly appear in the last section "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe") and stories received either directly or indirectly by the girl (which comprise the bulk of the first four sections). In following, the entirety of this girlhood, which marks a particular temporal phase of the narrator-protagonist's life, is mediated through the voice, perspective, and position of the adult narrator (with the exclusion of direct quotations – for instance, see "No Name Woman").

Moreover the change in attitude between child protagonist and adult narrator transitions from the capaciousness of the child's imagination and the grounded rationality of the adult narrator, not the other way around from the child's want for certainty to the adult's tolerance of maternal ambiguities. The story in *The Woman Warrior* that most closely approximates the perspective of the child protagonist is "White Tigers," which, according to Sau-ling Wong, comprises the "protagonist's most sustained excursion of the imagination" ("Necessity" 18). The protagonist projects herself into the position of the legendary Fa Mu Lan and envisions the warrior's experiences from the perspective of the first person. On the formal level, the landscape of Fa Mu Lan's training is delivered through sensuous language focusing on vivid visual details of the swordswoman's environment. From the colorful spectrum of pine needles that rearrange themselves according to age (*WW* 21) to the prowling white tigers and self-immolating white rabbit in the forests (25, 26) to the old mentors who appear to shape-shift at unexpected moments, the intensity of imagery that distinguishes "White Tigers" demands attention be paid

to the role of the visual imagery. In addition to contributing to the section's stylistic peculiarity, the visual serves a structural function in mediating between the historical world of Fa Mu Lan, daughter wife and mother, and fantastical world of Fa Mu Lan, warrior-in-training, through the device of the gourd. By looking into the reflection of the water gourd, which presents not a mirror image but a visual display in which Fa Mu Lan and her mentors are able to scry the scene back in her home village.

Due to its fantastical stylization, "White Tigers" is especially telling in undermining the child protagonist's purported fetishization of truth and certainty. Central to the text's expressions of female empowerment, the myth of Fa Mu Lan demonstrates the young narrator's propensity for the imaginative. At the section's end, referring to the bird that leads the fledging woman warrior from her quotidian village home to the fantastical mountainside world where she will receive her training, the narrator confesses:

> I've looked for the bird…Once at a beach after a long hike I saw a seagull, tiny as an insect. But when I jumped up to tell what miracle I saw, before I could get the words out I understood that the bird was insect-size because it was far away. My brain had momentarily lost its depth perception. I was that eager to find an unusual bird. (49)

The fantastical element in this passage resonate on two registers though the figuration of the bird. First, the narrator is amazed by the bird's extraordinarily small size, a matter of perception. Before she is able to articulate her astonishment of the amazing bug-sized bird, reason takes over and she realizes that the seagull's miniscularity is the product of perspective. More significantly, the "unusual bird" represents the access into a fantastical world, identical to that which Fa Mu Lan enters during her warrior formation. The narrator admits that she has looked for "the bird";

the use of the definite article suggests more broadly that she has searched for the bird that will guide her from historical reality into one of imagination. The protagonist in this memory was "eager" to find the bird, revealing a desire to not be constrained by the rationally regulatory mode of "depth perception."[63]

"No Name Woman" and Ghostly Hauntings

Since a thorough investigation of the adult-narrator's rational framework is most effectively realized by the ways ghosts and photographs are superimposed through her literary perspective, it is necessary to review existing understandings of these two elements in the texts. These analyses tend to oversimplify by playing photography and ghosts against one another antinomically. The reading of ghosts in *The Woman Warrior* is epitomized by interpretations of hauntings in the text's opening section "No Name Woman." In this section, the narrator offers an account of her father's sister, who becomes pregnant out of wedlock, suffers expulsion from her family and community, and throws herself and her newborn baby into the family well. Reflecting on the significance of silencing and omission that underpins this entire section, the narrator muses, "In the twenty years since I heard this story I have not asked for details nor said my aunt's name; I do not know it" (*WW* 16). The mystery surrounding the aunt's name exemplifies both the logic of familial exclusion in addition to the unilateral directionality of the aunt's haunting. The No Name Woman has no name because her family members have erased signs of

[63] Conforming with her prior identification as a painter after college, Kingston has firmly entrenched the creative germination of her works in terms of visions and images. "The visions, the images, come first" (Skenazy 126), she has explained, while their transmogrification into writing comes as a "secondary step" (Bonetti 33). To offer a concrete example of this process, Kingston described the conception of *China Men* as follows:

> For about thirty-five years, I glimpsed a sharp white triangle. It looked like a shark's tooth or a corner of paper or a creased pantleg. I felt great fear and energy whenever I beheld it. I beheld it and beheld it until I found the story of it. That white triangle turned out to be *China Men*, and appears contained in that book as the creased pantleg of a Navy officer looking for the stowaway father. Where did that image come from? Why is it full of radiation – stories ramifying from it? How do you recognize this white triangle when it appears? How do you evoke one? (Kingston, "Imagined Life" 569)

her identity and her transgression (conflated into one) from the family line, and also because the narrator has been powerless to speak back to her aunt. Due to the themes of gendered violence, silencing, and spectrality, "No Name Woman" has often been read through the framework of trauma, hauntings, and memory-work.

The story itself has repressed origins, as the narrator begins by quoting her mother: "'You must not tell anyone,' my mother said, 'what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself" (3). The subsequent narrative consists of a retelling of her mother's account of the story, which is intended as a cautionary tale designed to police the narrator's body through the shame of female sexuality. The commencement of the narrator's menstruation inducts her into a circuit of secrets that must only be dissemination among the women of the family; the narrator's mother warn, "Don't let your father know that I told you. He denies her" (5). The silencing of a gendered trauma from the past invites critics to read "No Name Woman," and *The Woman Warrior* more broadly, as contributing to the proliferation of ghost stories that "signal an attempt to recover and make social use of a poorly documented, partially erased cultural history" (Brogan 150).

If ghosts "are part of a symptomatology of trauma" in that "they become both the objects of and metaphors for a wounded historical experience," then the act of recounting is integral to the "[p]alliative possibility of memory-work" (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren 12). Consequently, the consensus surrounding "No Name Woman" asserts that the ghost of the No Name Woman represents the trauma of "repressed female tradition in a patriarchal society" (K. Lee 113), and the violence of "culturally inscribed gender roles" (Jenkins 62). In response, this critical consensus casts the narrator both as medium and mediator in initiating the healing process on behalf of her aunt: "This return to the aunt's story years after hearing it in childhood reveals her

drive to bring forward the ghosts, to allow them to surface, and to claim their own story within the life of the survivor" (Griffiths 368). Memory-work through storytelling and unsilencing consists of "envisioning a conjuration of the past's truth, primarily through giving a voice to its victims, which is subsequently laid to rest as traumatic repetition is foreclosed and the memory integrated into a narrative account" (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren 12).

In this way, memory-work, especially through the figurations of ghosts, functions as a counter to the dominant forces that construct a version of history that elides in the first place. Kathleen Brogan notes, "The turn to the supernatural in the process of recovering history emphasizes the difficulty of gaining access to a lost or denied past, as well as the degree to which any such historical reconstruction is essentially an imaginative act" (152). Sau-ling Wong has noted how "[t]ypically a section of the meditation begins with brief syntactic cues suggesting conjecture…then almost imperceptibly slips into the simple past tense which lends greater concreteness and immediacy to the imagined happenings" ("Necessity" 8). Note for instance, the repetition of the hypothetical adverb "perhaps" when the narrator imagines the aunt first meeting the man who would impregnate her: "Perhaps she [the aunt] had encountered him in the fields…Perhaps he worked an adjoining field, or he sold her the cloth for the dress she sewed and wore" (*WW* 6). Indeed grammatical marks of conjecture point toward "efforts at imaginative reconstruction" (Wong, "Necessity" 8).

However, the proliferation of "perhaps" that punctuate the middle chunk of the section expresses the narrator's ambivalent relationship to her disowned aunt. At the end of "No Name Woman," the narrator admits, "My aunt haunts me – her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her, though not origamied into houses and clothes. I do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her" (*WW* 16). Far from a

curative act of trauma recovery, the narrator's writing is viewed as a potential violation and betrayal of her aunt's secrets. The aunt's ghost does not merely visit the narrator, but "haunts" her with unrecognizable intentions. This unease with which the narrator ends her retelling of No Name Woman's story furthermore marks the distance between the girl protagonist and the adult narrator. Twenty years stretch between the moment the girl protagonist hears the story and the moment the narrator feels she is able to render the story somewhat legible.

Photography as Metonym for History in *China Men*

If the maligned ghosts of *The Woman Warrior's* "No Name Woman," coincides with the novel's portrayal of marginalized and invisible Chinese women, *China Men*'s masculinist alignment with historical nonfiction has consequently cleared an interpretive space conducive to analysis of photography. The pertinence hinges on the photograph's presumed referential fidelity to external reality or its direct physical resemblance to its represented object. Even postmodernists such as Roland Barthes and Linda Hutcheon have conceded respectively that the "photograph is literally an emanation of the referent" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 80),[64] and that the photograph is "in a very real sense technically tied to the real, or at least, to the visual and the actual" (Hutcheon 42). More radically, the metaphorization of the camera as a "mechanical eye" participates in an epistemic regime Lorraine Daston calls "mechanical objectivity" wherein knowledge about nature is seemingly acquired "free of meddlesome human interference" ("Objectivity" 616n16). The superimposition of photography onto typical ways of seeing and the belief in photography's immunity from human intervention are instrumental to its acceptance as a technology that produces objective recordings of reality. Accurate, disinterested, and

[64] In other words, "Photography's Referent is not the same as the referent of other systems of representation. I call 'photographic referent' not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph" (*Camera Lucida* 76).

unthinking, the photograph is a tool that authenticates dominant modes of legitimation by underpinning the objectivity of truth regimes and bestowing them with the status of "science."

Appropriately, in treating an outwardly recuperative narrative such as *China Men*, which strives to recalibrate our relation to the past by making visible stories erased by dominant history, critics have read photography as oppressive in contributing to the elision of Chinese American history. David Eng, in his chapter "I've Been (Re)Working on the Railroad," uncovers the ways *China Men* provides a critique of systems of looking in which photographs are recruited to achieve different ends. With reference to a historically extant photograph, Andrew J. Russell's "East and West Shaking Hands at Laying of Last Rail" (1869) depicting the Golden Spike Ceremony, he argues that *China Men* critiques a specific form of visual epistemology that overlays photographic images with historical truth. Drawing on Jacques Lacan's notion of the "given-to-be-seen" – a structure of visible reference points that establish the "normative sense of reality" within which a spectator orients him or herself (44) – Eng unpacks the ways Kingston's text portrays protagonists who, by virtue of "errancies of their memories" (91), learn to apprehend images in ways that exceed the bounds of the dominant "given-to-be-seen". In its capacity to glimpse sidelined images, this errant perspective is a similar one exemplified by the figure of the ghost in the previous section.

The narrator's description of the Promontory Summit photograph, which depicts the Golden Spike Ceremony (1869) commemorating the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, is focalized through the perspective of Ah Goong, the so-called "Grandfather of the Sierra Mountains" and one of many laborers indispensable to the construction of the railway. Posing for the photograph, a "white demon in top hat tap-tapped on the gold spike, and pulled it back out. Then one China Man held the real spike, the steel one, and another hammered it in," in

this way emphasizing the gap between representation and reality. The narrator continues, "While the demons posed for photographs, the China Men dispersed. It was dangerous to stay. The Driving Out had begun. Ah Goong does not appear in railroad photographs" (*CM* 145). While the given-to-be-seen offers a triumphant image of Leland Stanford surrounded by white workers, through Ah Goong's point-of-view, we apprehend details of industrial achievement that were elided through the workings of ideology: the economic exploitation of Chinese male laborers, their political disenfranchisement, their social estrangement, and erasure from the reigning visual record. According to Eng, "This photograph thus provides a culminating occasion for the convergence of errant memory, a critique of racially motivated given-to-be-seen, and the historical recuperation of this Chinese American visual absence" (63). It is this "politically productive capability of looking awry" (Eng 91), of decentering the naturalized "geometral point" of view, that enables the protagonist to access elements of Chinese American history rendered invisible (suppressed) under the dominant visual regime/order.

Eng's analysis offers valuable insights into the mechanisms by which images accrue meaning, power, and validation through variable frames of interpretation, and into the means by which the circuit of subjugation through looking, fixing, and ordering is disrupted. However, Eng limits the critical potentiality of photography by treating it as a metonym for canonized accounts of history itself, in other words the unifaceted hegemony of the modern archive. In the same way dominant interpretations of ghost forms in *The Woman Warrior* equate their presence with repressed or silenced memories, Eng's reading sustains the simplistic binary between history and memory. Both ghosts and non-normative modes of seeing mark an optic that exceeds dominant history. The binary between memory and history is one that Kingston's novels actively

work to trouble, as the narrator presents photography both as a rational means to provide historical evidence and as a practical means to preserve personal memories.

Troubling the Binary between History and Memory through Photographs

Upon closer scrutiny, photography in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* comes to mark more than the myopia of dominant history. The negating authority of photography symbolized by the Golden Spike photography is offset by photography's subversive potential when deployed "from below" as a personal keeper of memories. This non-authoritative form of photography is most noticeable from within the private realm, in which memory is often conceptualized as one of dominant history's vulnerabilities. For instance, scholars such as Annette Kuhn and Marianne Hirsch have contemplated the role photographs play in mediating family relations, dispatching and interrupting ideologies, and subjectifying narratives through the family album. To Kuhn, photographs are a type of "memory text" whose "democratic quality…makes it a powerful practical instrument of 'conscientisation': the awakening of critical consciousness" (9). Likewise for Hirsch, photographs are a valuable mnemonic vehicle for what she terms "postmemory." A creative process by which children of survivors of trauma, such as the Holocaust, relate to the past, postmemory "characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (Hirsch 22). Both Kuhn and Hirsch point out ways photography serves as an adjunct to rituals of keepsake and remembrance, in turn emboldening and sustaining the counternarratives that dominant history elides.

In both novels, photographs trace the realities shaped by transnational migration in addition to the experiences marked by the sense of dislocation and distance by such migrations. Kinship traditions such as maintaining annual portraits of the family to hang in the hallways of the home are practices preserved by families that have settled in the U.S. Upon exploring her sister's home in Stockton for the first time, "Moon Orchid looked up at the grandparents' photographs that hung on the wall above the desk. Then she turned around and looked at the opposite wall; there, equally large, were pictures of Brave Orchid and her husband. They had put up their own pictures because later the children would not have the sense to do it" (*WW* 122). This tradition of taking and displaying family portraits follows a "yearly" cyclicality (*WW* 130), which endows photographs with the responsibility of measuring the passage of time.

Photographs also come to serve as surrogate presences that bridge gaps between families in China and sojourners in the U.S. Though distanced from his family in China, Bak Goong, the Great Grandfather of Sandalwood Mountain in *China Men*, goes into town to have his "yearly picture taken at the photo studio" (*CM* 106). The narrator explains her family "had a family portrait taken to send to the faraway relatives" (273). When Moon Orchid sees her sister's husband for the first time in decades, she "recognized him as the brother-in-law in photographs, not as the young man who left on a ship" (*WW* 119). Similarly, the narrator imagines No Name Woman's memory of her husband in terms of the portrait photograph: "The night she first saw him, he had sex with her. Then he left for America. She had almost forgotten what he looked like. When she tried to envision him, she only saw the black and white face in the group photograph the men had had taken before leaving" (*WW* 7). In these instances, memories are materialized into photographs.

More striking is when appearances or references to photographs refuse to follow the transgressive molds cast by Eng, Kuhn, and Hirsch.[65] Rather than sources of epistemic disruption, photographs are often used as a mobilization of evidence. Mad Sao's mother, who as a ghost haunts Mad Sao for his neglect after migrating, sends him missives with claims to starvation accompanied by photographs. At one point, she writes to him, "I'm starving to death. In the enclosed picture, you can see my bones poking through the skin. You must be turning into a demon to treat a mother so" (*CM* 172). Likewise, the narrator's father, when receiving a request for money from his mother in China, "asked for proof that she was still alive before he would send it" (*CM* 248). The narrator continues, "For proof, the aunts sent a new photograph of Ah Po. She looked like the same woman, all right, like the pictures we already had but aged. She was ninety-nine years old." (*CM* 248-49). This logic that equates the photograph with reality or with evidence of a reality is one that is internalized by the narrator herself. Striving to account for the large gap in her father's past, she reflects, "You only look and talk Chinese. There are no photographs of you in Chinese clothes nor against Chinese landscapes. Did you cut your pigtail to show your support for the Republic? Or have you always been American? Do you mean to

[65] While Eng's reading of *China Men* assimilates photographs to history itself, other readings of photography in Kingston's text adopt the opposite tact: to further accentuate the texts' internal juxtapositions of source materials, which critics read as a formal hybridity that interrogates issues of representation, truth, and accuracy. For example, in consideration of the fallibility of memory, Carol Neubauer argues that Kingston deploys a "creative synthesis of diverse sources" (26), including photographs from family albums, to contest the silences that shrouds the narrator's family history. Adopting a more anti-foundationalist stance, Teresa Zackodnik counters that photography's equivocal constitution – the instability of photographic meaning under interpretation, photography's capacity to attest to both presence and absence, and its contradictory relationship to temporal change by being both atemporal and transtemporal (55) – undermines the entire schema of referential valuation. Zackodnik aims to do away with judgments of objectivity altogether, since "to name a source unreliable or unstable, presupposes the existence of a reliable, stable, factual source upon which to draw." This leads to the broad conclusion of imagining "the possibility for many American histories in the plurality of meanings drawn from any single source, and the revelation that no one truth is absolute or all-encompassing" (67). Timothy Dow Adams similarly reduces photography's complexity in Kingston's narratives; because "the author often comes to express her own doubts about their [her ancestor's photographs'] authenticity," these photographs comes to lose their documentary value, thus opening up the space "for Kingston to exercise her imagination and memory" (Adams 47). Each of these readings homogenize the particularities of photography as a representational mode, either by voiding its link to its referent or by generalizing its referential function through comparison to other forms. Both maneuvers, while aiming to undercut notions of absolute truth, objective reality, and a singular epistemic system, instead lapse into a pluralism that risks unfastened relativism. My own reading strives to maintain a position in between these two extremes.

give us a chance as being real Americans by forgetting the Chinese past?" (*CM* 14). The series of questions that follow the narrator's assertion that there are no photographs documenting her father's Chineseness demonstrates the way the narrator requires such imagistic support to ground the direction of her imaginative acts.

This valuation of photographs for as both personal mnemonic vehicles and signs of evidence is best demonstrated in the chiastic structure set up between two sets of photographs that are referenced in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men.* These two sets of images consist of the narrator's father's personal snapshots from his days as an American bachelor on the one hand, and of the narrator's mother's school portraits found on her school diploma on the other. The narrator first mentions these family mementos at the beginning of "Shaman" in *The Woman Warrior*, which I discuss in further depth later in this chapter. While perusing her mother's school documents, the narrator digresses on the topic of her father's snapshots, which depict her "father smiling and smiling in his many western outfits, a different one for each photograph that he sent from America" (*WW* 59). There is the photo of her father and his friends "in bathing suits at Coney Island beach," and the ones in which they "pose in the cockpit of a biplane, on a motorcycle, and on a lawn besides the 'Keep Off the Grass' sign. They are always laughing" (*WW* 59). The emphasis on the subjects' smiling and laughing serves to define snapshots as photographs that specifically preserve memories of subjective emotion – in this case, the feelings of happiness and excitement derived from having migrated to a new, stimulating country. The narrator's father is portrayed out of the element in which she knows him best – family life – among friends, as an implicit bachelor, engaging in leisure activities.

These frozen snapshots are further narrativized in "The Father from China" section of *China Men*. The Coney Island snapshot, merely mentioned in *The Woman Warrior*, is enriched by a fairly detailed anecdote of the day at the beach:

> On Sunday they [the father and his friends] rode the ferry boat to Coney Island. Woodrow asked a blonde to take pictures of the four friends with their arms on the railing and their black hair flying in the wind. At the beach, a bathing beauty photographed them in their bathing suits, nobody wearing a jockstrap, which might now yet have come into fashion. Ed had bought a beach robe, "which is different from a bedroom robe," he explained. He sent many pictures to his wife, including one of himself sitting on the sand with his arms around his knees and his sweat shirt tied around his neck; he was smiling and looking out to sea. (*CM* 66).

Presumably this photograph of the father (though not yet a father in this moment) sitting on the beach is the one that the narrator comes across in "Shaman." She similarly provides narratorial expansion of the airplane, motorcycle, and "Keep Off the Grass" snapshots. These photographs serve multiple functions for the father: preserving positive memories of experiences he had with friends, mediating intimacy with his wife in the face of transpacific distance, and most subtly in affirming his Americanization. "In his quiet time at night," the narrator tells us, "he mounted the photographs in a fine leather album. With his first spending money, he had bought a postcard of the Statue of Liberty, the album, picture mounts, white ink, and a pen with a steel nib. He pasted that postcard in his expensive album, then added the other pictures" (*CM* 67). The repeated references to the cost of the album transform the personal archive into a form of investment whose value multiplies over time. The insertion of the Statue of Liberty postcard signals the

album as a distinctively American archive, providing grounds to read the father's snapshots as forming a counternarrative.

In the same way snapshots of the narrator's father were briefly acknowledged in *The Woman Warrior* but further developed in *China Men*, Brave Orchid's school documents, so elaborately described in *The Woman Warrior*, feature glancingly in *China Men*. Shortly following the description of the father's snapshots and photo album above, the father decides that it is time to send for his wife in China. He writes to her with instructions: "Here's what you have to do if I'm to bring you to America…Leave the village. Go to Hong Kong or Canton and enroll in a Western scientific school. A science school. Get a degree. Send it to me as evidence you are educated, and I'll send you a ship ticket" (*CM* 67). The school degree and its accompanying documents in the airmail tube described in "Shaman" comprise the material evidence that prompts Brave Orchid's migration to the U.S. The significatory distance between the father's snapshots and Brave Orchid's photos is further underscored by the narrator when she observes, "There are no snapshots of my mother. In two small portraits, however, there is a black thumbprint on her forehead, as if someone had inked in bangs, as if someone had marked her" (*WW* 60). The overlay of ink on the mother's face could refer to the obligation of proof the father brands onto Brave Orchid in initiating her migration. The ink just as well could refer to the complex act of narrativization that sustains the whole of "Shaman." In both the case of the father's snapshots and the mother's official portraits, photographs enable the narrator to engage in the act of fictionalizing – in a way that departs from pure acts of imagination.

Photographs and Language in "The Wild Man of the Green Swamp"

The capacity of language to animate the static potentiality of photographs appears in "The Wild Man of the Green Swamp," a short intertext found in *China Men*, in which the narrator recounts a newspaper article reporting on the capture and arrest of a man who had been living in the outskirts of Green Swamp, Florida. With the assistance of a Chinese translator, authorities discovered the man had been working on a Liberian freighter to support his family back in Taiwan but became homesick and consequently was put into an insane asylum by ship officers who deemed him mentally unstable after unsuccessfully attempting to send him back to China. The man escaped the hospital only to end up for eight months in the swamp where he was found and apprehended. After learning that authorities were planning a second attempt to send him back to China, the man grew frantic and hung himself while under the custody of the U.S. Border Patrol.

The dominant reading of this intertext seizes on the text's disruption of dominant, monologic history through the assertion of the polyphonic multiplicity of truths by referring to the inclusion of the narrator's description of the photograph that accompanies the newspaper article (Zackodnik 66; Neubauer 30). While the written record portrays the man as wild, unkempt, and mentally unfit, the narrator questions the reliability of this narrative with the following paragraph, a description of the photo:

> In the newspaper picture he did not look very wild, being led by the posse out of the swamp. He did not look dirty, either. He wore a checkered shirt unbuttoned at the neck, where his white undershirt showed; his shirt was tucked into his pants; his hair was short. He was surrounded by men in cowboy hats. His fingers stretching open, his wrists pulling apart to the extent of the handcuffs, he lifted his head, his eyes screwed shut, and cried out. (*CM* 223)

At the outset of the passage, the narrator immediately negates the wildness of the Wild Man's epithet, an observation supplemented by evidence from the photograph that underscores the man's tidy and orderly appearance (tucked shirt, short hair) and the emotional distress that derives from his apprehension by the cowboy-hatted posse (splayed fingers, facial expressions). Indeed the contrast between the newspaper article's unsympathetic account and the narrator's reading of the man's vulnerability in the photograph points towards the instability of sources through variable interpretation foreclosing the possibility of an absolute truth, but what does this say about the referential function of photography or the visual more broadly?

Eng's analysis of "The Wild Man" affirms that the juxtaposition of newspaper article and photograph offers "two incommensurate versions of reality" (47): the first a dominant "given-to-be-seen" that willfully frames the man as irrational, uncivilized, and dangerous to the community, the second a decentered view that renders visible the racial violence that structures the first. Relying on Foucault's analysis of the modern archive, Eng further elaborates that dominant images such as racial stereotypes are constituted through "the arrangement of a number of arbitrary images and unrelated documents – police records, public testimonies, medical records, and newspaper stories, images, and captions – into a unified and naturalized totality" (49). According to Eng, the same totalizing racial logic appears in the paragraph that immediately follows the one cited above and concludes "The Wild Man" as a whole. The narrator recounts,

> There was a Wild Man in our slough too, only he was a black man. He wore a shirt and no pants, and some mornings when we walked to school, we saw him asleep under the bridge. The police came and took him away. The newspaper said

> he was crazy; it said the police had been on the lookout for him for a long time, but we had seen him every day. (*CM* 223)

Like the example with the Taiwanese Wild Man, this instance with the Black Wild Man exhibits two alternate perspectives: "there is a visual disjunction between what the narrator sees on a daily basis – a homeless man asleep under a bridge – and what the dominant eyes of the law and the newspaper are able or willing to perceive – a crazy and elusive fugitive" (Eng 48). Indeed the two paragraphs display parallel themes: the repetition of the ironic epithet "Wild Man," the men's physical and symbolic positions on the fringes of society (in a swamp, under a bridge), their apprehension by local enforcement agents, ensuing reports of their apprehension in the newspaper, and marked perception of the narrator which contrasts with newspaper accounts.

What Eng smooths over in his analysis, however, is the unevenness that arises between the two accounts of each Wild Man, and consequently the irregularities that are exposed among the indexical elements that comprise the evidentiary potency of the "modern archive." While the narrator's impression of the Black Wild Man is shaped by the temporal regularity and contiguous immediacy of optical contact with this man granted by her daily routine, thus interweaving his presence into the broad fabric of everyday life, her perception of the Chinese Wild Man is mediated through a single (though perhaps protracted) encounter with the newspaper photograph, and his social restitution lies in her attention to the visible details of this image. As a result, the referential orientation of the photograph takes on a seditious ambivalence that distinguishes its status as pure documentation as deployed by the regulating archive. On the one hand, it provides the means by which the narrator is able to reconstruct the data she culls from the newspaper article itself in order to create a narrative that underpins the, as Eng puts it, "awry" view that challenges the "given-to-be-seen." On the other hand, the narrator's mediated perception of the

photograph is structurally positioned by the text so that it is homologously equivalent to her direct perception of her daily life. Through this literary juxtaposition of the two Wild Men, the referential function of the photograph regains its anchorage to material reality.

The Juxtaposition of Ghosts and Photography in "The Making of More Americans"

I have so far surveyed the way critics, in reading Kingston's two novels, have read ghosts and photography, according to a simplistic framework in which the first represents history's casualties and the second embodies its facticity. Subsequently, I pointed out patterns in both texts that undermined Eng's equation of photography and the modern archive. For the remainder of this chapter, I examine the ways photography and ghosts interact in mediating the perspective of the narrator herself. The first story that opens the section in *China Men,* titled "The Making of More Americans," tells of the narrator's third and fourth grandfathers, Say Goong and Sahm Goong, who lived in a house down the street from the narrator's family and kept two horses in a stable. The string of anecdotes that forms this section shows the girl-protagonist in the process of becoming the adult-narrator. In other words, we witness through the protagonist's attitude toward ghosts and horses, her implicit realization that elements of rationality are necessary to produce legibility. The account of the grandfathers follows a structurally nested form in which reminiscences by the narrator herself frame the kernel of a ghost story, specifically of Say Goong's haunting of Sahm Goong. This narrative structure produces in miniature the shelled structure that shapes the section "Shaman" in *The Woman Warrior*, which I will examine in greater detail later.

When recollecting her experiences with her two grandfathers, the narrator is most fixated on their two horses, which they used to cart produce to sell around town and whose manure they

used to gift to family and friends. One day, Say Goong takes the young protagonist into the horse stable, where she appears to have an experience with the equine sublime: "A horse was a black creature so immense I could not see the outlines. Grasping Say Goong's finger, I dared to walk past the horse, and then he pointed again, 'Horse.' There was a partition, and on the other side of it – another horse. There were two such enormities in the world. Again and again I looked inside the stalls to solve the mystery of what a horse was" (*CM* 167). This scene puts three aspects of cognition into play: the act of using language to account for a reality, the pre-linguistic existence of such a reality, and the mind's apprehension of such reality through vision.

The protagonist's relationship to Say Goong up to the point of the horse stable had been colored by linguistic play; her opening memory of him consists of chasing and catching toads in the grandfathers' garden. Say Goong would call the toad a "field chicken" or "heavenly chicken" – a product of punning. Not yet apprehending the semantic consequences of variable intonation, the protagonist, in her confusion, resorts to visual observation: "On his brown hand sat a toad with perfect haunches, eyelids, veins, and wrinkles – the details of it, the neatness and completeness of it swallowing and blinking" (165-66). The term "field chicken" is confusing for its arbitrariness, in addition to its incapacity to encompass all the minute features in their totality. It is through optical apprehension that the narrator can capture the entirety of the toad, in bodily specifics and bodily functions. Although her reliance on the visual supplements the shortcomings of language in the case of the toad, visual scrutiny is what fails her when attempting to apprehend the horses in the stable. She is unable to grasp the horses' outlines, their "neatness and completeness," and this inability persists despite repeated attempts to understand.

One day, she visits her grandfathers only to discover that the horses have vanished. Receiving dissatisfying answers from her parents ("'Where are the horses?' I asked. 'They're

gone,' said both my parents with no surprise or emphasis" [168]), the protagonist goes in search of tangible evidence to account for the horses' disappearance. To the parents, the horses are literally just animals, but for the protagonist, the horses signify something that exceeds the limits of coherence. Accordingly, she reasons, "Such vastness could not possibly have disappeared so completely" (168). Just as in her attempts to rationally apprehend the horses when they were alive, the protagonist's efforts to understand this disappearance are rooted in visual tactics: "I looked inside the first stall, looked again in the other one but found no aliveness there, bright now and not dark with horses. I could see boards and into corners, no vestige of horses, no hay spilling over the troughs, not a single yellow straw sticking out of a crack, floor not covered with straw and horse shift, everything swept clean. Manure pile gone" (168). This immediate search comes up empty handed for the girl protagonist, but the narrator admits, "I have looked for proof of horses, and found it in the family albums, which has photographs of horses with blinders" (168). The horses, which once proved elusive to the girl protagonist, make an appearance for the adult narrator. The photographs in the family albums not only provide evidence of the horses' existence but also provide a tractable way for the narrator to comprehend reality and to put this reality into words.

The horses in the narrator's past represent the immensity of reality that exceeds one's ability to conceive of something so grand. The quest for proof that ends with the family album reassigns photography's value from keeper of memories (a "memory text" according to Anne Kuhn) to a mechanism that enables the narrator's narrative faculties. In a movement that foreshadows the structure of *The Woman Warrior*'s "Shaman," the reference to the photographs of the horses in the narrator's recollections about Say Goong and Sahm Goong quickly segues into a reiteration of a ghost story:

One day Sahm Goong, Third Grandfather, came to our house alone, and he said to my mother, "Say Goong is standing in the stable."

"No," said my mother, "He's dead."

"He's in the stable. I saw him. I left him there just now, standing by the wall near the door."

"What was he doing?"

"Just standing there. Not working."

"You know he's dead, don't you?"

"Yes. It must be his ghost standing there. He comes to visit me every day." (169)

The rest of the story is uneventful and recounts the stationary persistence of the ghost. Sahm Goong spends the next few days fruitlessly trying to figure out the reason for Say Goong's visit so that he can make the ghost dissipate. Say Goong's ghost finally leaves when Sahm Goong shouts at it to go back to China.

The section concludes with the reappearance of photography. After Sahm Goong himself passes away and the brothers' descendants come to visit, the narrator points them toward the house and the stable where the men used to live. The relatives take "pictures with a delayed shutter camera, everyone standing together where the house had been" (171), performing an act that is a strange mix of tourism and memorialization. The ghost of Say Goong and his exclusive haunting of Sahm Goong shows the inability of a mechanistic referentiality to capture the ineffability of the past. Although his relatives come to visit the brothers' home, stand in the place where they lived, and take numerous photographs to add to their own family albums, these relatives will never encounter the ghost of Say Goong in the same way his brother did. Such

themes are complicated in "Shaman" of *The Woman Warrior* in which the narrator's rational-mind can only access her mother's ghosts through the photograph. Her deployment of ekphrasis is a testament to the literary's ability to accommodate both the logic of empiricism and to highlight its blind spots.

"Shaman": Ghosts and Photography in Highlighting Literariness

Ghosts and photography intersect far more essentially for the narrator in "Shaman." I have left sustained discussion of this section for the end of this chapter because its complex overlay of narrative framing best exemplifies my argument about the role ghosts and photography play in informing the narrator's aesthetic practice. Understood conventionally in its functional capacity, the opening pages of "Shaman" have one major purpose for the section's plot: to present Brave Orchid's diploma – contained in an airmail tube along with her school photograph – as the narrative trigger that sets in motion the narrator's mother's recollection of her "biography." In this way, the photograph initiates the expansive story of Brave Orchid, covering her training at an all-women's medical school, her exorcism of ghosts through talk story, and her ensuing fate as a female Chinese immigrant living in the U.S. As the section's title makes explicit, the bulk of the narrative centers on Brave Orchid's expulsion of the Sitting Ghost from the haunted dormitory room at the medical school. This central plot is followed by a number of smaller anecdotes; most of which are related to ghosts: Brave Orchid's experiences as a doctor after her return to her home village, her purchase and eventual liberation of a slave girl, telling ghost stories at the laundry in Stockton on hot days, the stoning of the "village crazy lady" during a Japanese air raid (*WW* 94), and lastly, the narrator's experience with occupational ghosts in the U.S., e.g. Newsboy Ghost, Grocery Ghost, Milk Ghost, Social Worker Ghost,

Factory Ghost, Hobo Ghost, etc. I am most interested in how the photographic portrait of Brave Orchid intended to serve as evidence operates in the narrative as that which substantiates the "non-empirical" – the world of ghosts. The bridge between the historical world of sensible rationality and the fantastical world of ghosts is forged via literary strategies, specifically that of ekphrasis.

Because any given photograph captures an isolated moment in time, its "message depends on some external matrix of conditions and presuppositions for its readability" (Sekula, "Photographic Meaning" 4). In other words, a photograph's meaning must be derived in view of its context. There are at least two "external matrices of conditions and presuppositions," or contexts, that impress on Brave Orchid's photograph as it is described in *The Woman Warrior*. The first, what might be called the diegetic context, consists of the conditions surrounding the photograph within the frame of the plot. The photograph forms a component of the collection of documents intended to certify Brave Orchid's training at To Keung School of Midwifery. As we have already seen, these objects act in *China Men* as the proof the narrator's father requests in exchange for his wife's fare for her passage across the Pacific. These objects additionally create a material link extending from Brave Orchid's pre-migration life in China to her daughter's life in the U.S. The second system of conditions, which can subsequently be called the meta-literary context, amounts to the narrator's depiction of the photograph in accordance with the surrounding literary coordinates.

Most notably, consideration of the photograph in its literary context can bring into relief aspects of the photograph that defy ocular rationality, that is to say, its blind spots. Building on Barthes's concept of the punctum, Avery Gordon explains the significance of the photograph's blind spot (called the "blind field" in the following) and ghosts:

> The blind field and its fundamental imbrication in the visible field is what we are aiming to comprehend. The blind field is what the ghost's arrival signals. The blind field is never named as such in the photograph. How could it be? It is precisely what is pressing in from the other side of the fullness of the image displayed within the frame; the *punctum* only ever evokes it and the necessity of finding it. Yet the blind field is present, and when we catch a glimpse of its endowments in the paradoxical experience of seeing what appears to be not there we know that a haunting is occurring. (A. Gordon 107).

Brave Orchid's school portrait captures the narrator's attention in a way not seen with other photographs described in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*.

In the school portrait, the punctum, which Barthes describes as the detail of the photograph that unexplainable "pricks" the viewer (*Camera Lucida* 26), consists of Brave Orchid's expression. The narrator, in the middle of her description of the tube contents, pauses for a moment:

> The last scroll has columns of Chinese words. The only English is 'Department of Health, Canton,' imprinted on my mother's face, the same photograph as on the diploma. I keep looking to see whether she was afraid. Year after year my father did not come home or send for her. Their two children had been dead for ten years. If he did not return soon, there would be no more children. (60).

The first two sentences are impartial in presenting information. The third sentence, "I keep looking to see whether she was afraid," reveals the narrator's persistence preoccupation with an unnamed detail of her mother's frozen face – maybe her eyes, to register what seems to be ineffable, or at the very least, inscrutable. The use of the present progressive tense, "keep

looking," suggests this fixation remains at the moment of narration. The sentences that follow then transition to personal narrative that relays aspects of family history: the children have been dead and the father has been away. The last sentence of the excerpt, however, peculiarly marks the distinctiveness of the narrator's literary enterprise. The sentence maintains the past tense of the previous two sentences with the addition of the temporal deictic "soon."[66] From this point on, the text enters into the story of Brave Orchid's voyage to Canton to begin her medical education. Consequently, the interruption of the narrator's description of the diploma by the photograph's punctum initiates her entrance into Brave Orchid's ghost reality. A. Gordon writes, "The *punctum* is what haunts. It is the detail, the little but heavily freighted thing that sparks the moment of arresting animation, that enlivens the world of ghosts" (108). Indeed, the narrator's curiosity about her mother's fear, or absence thereof, fuels her visual scrutiny of the photograph for evidence of this fear.[67] Instead of signs of optical evidence however, the narrator is met by a ghostly empiricism, which help to render legible her mother's experiences compressed within that school portrait.

A. Gordon's phrase, "moment of arresting animation," is suggestive of an additional form of literary framework that comprises the photograph's "external matrices of conditions and presuppositions." Embodying the contradiction between stillness and movement, "arresting animation" could describe the literary handiwork of ekphrasis. While it may be unnecessary to review the narratological debates concerning ekphrasis's accordance with description or

[66] See Banfield.

[67] Barthes writes of the spectrality of the photograph from a different angle, "[T]he person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any *eidolon* emitted by the object, which I should like to call the *Spectrum* of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to 'spectacle' and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead" (*Camera Lucida* 9).

narration,[68] the very terms of this debate – i.e. the subordination of description to narration – explain why very little critical attention has been paid to the beginning section of "Shaman,"[69] which consists of five pages of the narrator rambling over the contents of the airmail tube before she enters into the story itself in the way analyzed above. Given the frame's multipage superfluity and the intense focus on the tangible details of material objects, the opening to "Shaman" can be accurately specified in narratological terms as an illustration of realist description. In conceding the absence of structural function for certain descriptive notations (or what he consistently calls "useless details"), Roland Barthes remarks that these notations "seem to correspond to a kind of narrative *luxury*" and serve only to increase "the cost of narrative information" (*Rustle* 141). In the context of Barthes's conception of modern literature, these insignificant descriptive minutia, such as the "little flowers that look like gears for a gold machine" embellishing the airmail tube, the lavender colored ink used to stamp the diploma, and Brave Orchid's hair curly in one photograph and straightened in the other (57, 58), have come to index a new mode of verisimilitude, or a sort of poststructuralist reconstitution of mimesis known as the reality effect.

[68] See Roby, *Technical Ekphrasis in Greek and Roman Science and Literature*.

[69] Although critics have almost always neglected the opening of "Shaman," the attention it does receive emphasizes the textualization of reality and the instability of truth reviewed above. For instance, Helena Grice writes, "Brave Orchid's life is doubly textualised. The narrator herself pieces together her mother's history by sifting through the textual fragments that she discovers: Brave Orchid's medical diploma, graduation photographs and photographs of her father. Although this material is partly supplemented by Brave Orchid's stories about her life, the narrator is left to imaginatively reconstruct the missing sections of her mother's life. In fact, all of the narrator's experiences of China, including mythical narratives, are mediated textually; even her knowledge of her relatives and ancestors in China is gleaned from letters to her parents" (26). Sidonie Smith similarly points out that the "[t]hree scrolls from China serve as originating locus of this biography of her mother pieced together with 'autobiographical' fragments. Texts that legitimate her mother's professional identity as doctor, the scrolls stimulate biography because they announce public achievements, a life text readable by culture" (68). Grappling with her mother's effects "forces Kingston to question, at the moment of their origin, her own interpretations and thus the 'truth' or 'fictiveness' of the autobiography she would inscribe through her memories of the past. As a result, the young Kingston comes to recognize the relativity of truth, the very elusiveness of self-representation that drives the autobiographical enterprise" (S. Smith 79).

What is peculiar about the opening pages of "Shaman," beyond their superfluity, is that the "useless details" mostly center on describing images, offering a representation of a representation articulated through the point of view of the narrator. To be more specific, these pages offer a "*verbal representation of visual representation*," which is how James Heffernan defines the rhetorical exercise of ekphrasis (3). To Barthes, ekphrasis, as a type of description, is at most a "detachable set piece," which " [contains] in germ…the very idea of an aesthetic finality of language" (*Rustle* 143). Barthes appears to overlook the critical potential of ekphrasis, specifically the way it channels meta-aesthetic and meta-referential discourses. Subsequently, rather than produce a "referential illusion" wherein signifier and referent are fused to the exclusion of the signified (Barthes, *Rustle* 148), the description that opens "Shaman" produces a metadiscursivity by signaling its own representational status.[70] Ekphrasis, according to Heffernan, "explicitly represents representation itself. What ekphrasis represents in works, therefore, must itself be *representational*" (4). Accordingly, what the narrator's ekphrastic description of Brave Orchid's mementos affords is not only a visual meandering that searches, however unconsciously, for an entry point into the ghost world of her mother, but an acknowledgement of the problematic regarding the representational stakes at risk in this act of narrativization.

The problematic of Asian American representation is furthermore staged through ekphrastic opening's creation of a narrative frame. This frame marks multiple transitions, namely the move into Brave Orchid's diegetic time, the narratorial passage from the narrator's

[70] The representational logic of ekphrasis can be broken down into three "orders" (Yacobi 22) as follows: 1) the represented, Brave Orchid the medical student; 2) the representational, the school identification photo of Brave Orchid the medical student; and 3) the re-presentational, the narrator's verbal description of the school identification photo of Brave Orchid the student. Consequently the mechanism of ekphrasis moves away from immediacy of representation or failure thereof, and toward mediation of representation without completely embracing the poststructuralist disposal of the representational orientation toward reality.

perspective to Brave Orchid's (focalization), and most significantly, the epistemic shift from the rational empirical of the narrator's historical world to the ghostly empiricism of Brave Orchid's spectral world. Taken plainly, a frame is a tool used to organize and interpret visual data by delimiting a border around a given artwork. The border distinguishes between what is the artwork and what is not, and disappears from view so that the artwork may be perceived. For Derrida, frames provide the "physical, conceptual, and ideological structures that are the condition of possibility for perception" (R. E. H. Gordon 128).[71] Taken abstractly, a frame is an apparatus that shapes experience and produces meaning. Much like how Spivak's characterizes the political function of catachresis as the appropriation of the "apparatus of value coding" ("Postcoloniality and Value" 228), frames also serve as modes of encoding. According to Werner Wolf, cognitive frames "help to select (or construct) phenomena as forming a meaningful whole and therefore create coherent areas on our mental maps" (5).[72] Much like how Warminski's formulation of catachresis as place-holder lends legibility to an entity whose contours were merely visible, frames offer meaning and sense-making in place of the apparently haphazard accumulation of data. In "Shaman," Brave Orchid's seemingly irrational and supernatural life story is bookended by logics of rationality – the narrator's strategy of rendering solid her mother's invisible world.

As mentioned previously, the opening part of the frame consists of minute observations that provide the referential basis on which Brave Orchid's ghost stories are mounted and against which they are contrasted. The details of the airmail tube reaffirm the material prominence of qualities of external verifiability, physical evidence, and empirical grounding. The diploma bears stamps certifying its provenance from the school, the red seal of President Wu Pak-liang, M.D.

[71] See Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*.

[72] See Goffman.

ratifying the diploma's authenticity, and the signature of Dean Woo Win-kam, M.D. further authorizing the document's validity. The diploma displays Brave Orchid's portrait photograph, a referential anchor securing the credential to its owner. The facticity of what these document corroborate is further underscored by the narrator's own research efforts: "I read in a history book that Hackett Medical College for Women at Canton was founded in the nineteenth century by European women doctors" (58). The history book, and external source, places the college, setting of things phantasmagorical, in a concrete place at a concrete time.

The closing frame is similarly empirically oriented but comments more directly on the status of the narrator and of Asian American literature more broadly. In a rare moment where protagonist and narrator are as temporally proximate as they ever have been, the concluding pages of "Shaman" recounts the narrator's last visit to her mother in the not-so-distant past. This section consists mostly of directly quoted dialogue between Brave Orchid and her daughter, in which Brave Orchid's comments of discomfort about the harshness of immigrant life are counterbalanced by her daughter's more analytical attitude. When the mother laments that her daughter is always away, the narrator confesses, "I don't want to hear Wino Ghosts and Hobo Ghosts. I've found some places in this country that are ghost-free. And I think I belong there" (108). Far from signaling freedom from or avoidance of cultural hauntings, ghost-free places designate a state of mind in which the narrator is able to make sense of her surroundings and her experiences.

When oriented retrospectively, the adult narrator must distance herself from her girlhood among ghosts in order to acquire the perspective to tell these stories and to initiate the transition from protagonist to narrator. With this distance, the narrator does not unlearn dominant modes of reasoning but instead develops a new sensible logic:

> I had to leave home in order to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing. I learned to think that mysteries are for explanation. I enjoy the simplicity. Concrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks. Give me plastics, periodical tables, t.v. dinners with vegetables no more complex than peas mixed with diced carrots. Shine floodlights into dark corners: no ghosts. (204)

Through the force of illuminating rationality, figured as a mode of seeing and an exigency of "solid America" (5), the ghostless world into which the narrator undergoes her education has one effect of tempering the imaginative inclination of the girl protagonist. Shortly following the above passage, the narrator remarks of the change:

> Now colors are gentler and fewer; smells are antiseptic. Now when I peek in the basement window where the villagers say they see a girl dancing like a bottle imp, I can no longer see a spirit in a skirt made of light, but a voiceless girl dancing when she thought no one was looking…[W]hat I once had was not Chinese-sight at all but child-sight that would have disappeared eventually without such a struggle…I continue to sort out what's just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living. (205)

Although her younger inclination toward imagination is subdued over time, the narrator acquires a new way of seeing, which opens up new perceptual possibilities. Under these fresh optics, the "spirit in a skirt made of light" converts into "a voiceless girl dancing." To the narrator, beings and experiences that were once seen to be apparitional achieve a solid legibility. The difference in optics furthermore stems from a difference in age, rather than cultural difference. What is "child-sight" but the unmethodical capacity to accept things as they are, without the order of

hierarchies, classifications, and relations? Adult-sight, on the other hand, consists of "sorting out" and practicing discrimination in framing experience and producing meaning. That the distinction between the child and the adult is mounted through the language of sight reemphasizes the significance of superimposed vision in understanding the ways the narrator's maturation undergirds the two texts' literary constitution.

As was the case with Sui Sin Far, when the texts of Maxine Hong Kingston are emancipated from their referential data base (Cohn viii), namely from the life facts of the author, the aesthetic complexities within become more outwardly noticeable. With *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, imposing a rupture between the narrator and Kingston enabled my reading of the narrator as an imaginary speaker, a speaker whose formation as such is staged through the two texts as the acquisition of superimposed vision. Photography and ghosts embody two modes of optical cognition that seem antithetical at first glance, but are necessary for the narrator to transform her "girlhood among ghosts" into a narrative that achieves legibility for herself and for others. Only by treating the texts as literary can we parse the narrator's internalization of the co-presence of ghostly empiricism and rational empiricism.

Chapter Three

Literalization, Literalism, and the Literary in Asian American Science Fiction

Legitimized by their growing popularity and accumulating laurels, speculative fiction writers Ted Chiang and Ken Liu have been grouped by the critical eye into an emerging cohort of Asian American science fiction writers, including E. Lily Yu, Yoon Ha Lee, and Charles Yu. This classification, which is defined both by literary genre and by the author's racialization, is most interesting for housing together two authors with diametrically opposed stances toward this intersection of work and identity. On the one end of the spectrum, Chiang's texts display an abstinent attitude towards social issues. Of the eight stories included in his 2002 collection *Stories of Your Life*, most are fixated on fleshing out ostensibly apolitical themes related to science, mathematics, and ahistorical mythologies. On the other, Liu's works embrace themes such as cultural identity, class conflict, and contemporary geopolitics. In addition to translating Liu Cixin's Three-Body series, Liu has an ongoing trilogy called *The Dandelion Series* written in the form of what he calls "silkpunk epic fantasy," inspired by technology features of classical China.

These divergent approaches to political and social (dis)engagement are reaffirmed directly by the authors themselves. More pointedly, Chiang has persistently eschewed the influence of race both in his creative process and in his texts with the hope that the same renunciation will sway his stories' popular reception. As he explained to Vandana Singh: "I'm hesitant about making my protagonists Asian Americans because I'm wary of readers trying to interpret my stories as being about race when they aren't. People have looked for a racial subtext in my work in a way I don't think they would have if my family name were Davis or Miller"

(Singh, "Interview"). In contrast, cultural identity plays a determining role in Liu's literary enterprise. To Dario Ciriello, he has expressed, "As an American who claims a proud identification with my Chinese cultural inheritance, I'm particularly interested in stories that challenge the assumptions behind what it means to be "American" or "Chinese" and reveal these categorizations as attempts by the powerful to assert dominance over fluid, unstable, always-forming identities" ("Interview").

While Liu unreservedly connects his racial and ethnic background to the contents of his literary works, the active division Chiang erects between his life and his fiction mirrors his anxiety about the reader's instinct to yoke author and text via associative racialization. Inattentive to the notion that "everyone in this social order has been constructed in our political imagination as a racialized subject," Chiang's comment about author surnames fails "to make visible what is rendered invisible when viewed as the normative state of existence: the (white) point in space from which we tend to identify difference" (Carby 193).[73] Yet at the same time, Liu's endorsement of identitarian linkages seems to risk reaffirming crude sociological interpretive tendencies that essentialize works by marginalized authors. Such risks must be averted by carefully walking the tightrope between cultural affiliation and biological filiation when considering ethnicized and racialized contents in his texts.

This chapter juxtaposes Chiang's "Liking What You See: A Documentary" from the collection *Stories of Your Life* with Liu's "The Man Who Ended History: A Documentary" from the collection *Paper Menagerie* to examine how, despite the authors' contrasting views towards aesthetic engagement, both stories can be read as raced not by recourse to their authors' ethnic backgrounds, but in ways that are enabled by the science fictional form. Specifically, I build on

[73] Similarly, Toni Morrison writes in *Playing in the Dark*: "The act of enforcing racelessness in literary discourse is itself a racial act" (46).

Seo-young Chu's formulation of science fiction as a specific type of lyricism – one that self-actualizes through the literalization of poetic figures – in order to tease out the ways the ambivalence of the visual, which marked both Sui Sin Far's and Kingston's works, manifests in these contemporary texts. More pointedly, both stories complicate their status as science fiction via their subtitles by adopting the mode of documentary, which is a representational form conventionally defined by its indexical indebtedness to external reality. From the outset then, the two texts introduce themselves as representational paradoxes: on the one hand, the science fictional presents a fictional world that is incompatible with our own historical reality,[74] while on the other, the documentary is preoccupied with elements contained within this historical reality.

The co-presence of what Chu calls ontological literalization, which she argues defines science fiction, and denotative literalism, associated with documentary, in fact comments on the literariness of the text's themselves. The documentary subtitle of the two stories ironizes the tendency to read raced fiction literally, or to read fiction by ethnic authors through the ethnographic impulse. Chiang's and Liu's texts consequently are "engaged with a problematic of Asian American representation" (Lye, "Reading" 492) by turning their attention toward how these representations have been read historically and by making demands on their readers to consciously negotiate the terms of their fictionality. While the stories ask that the readers accept their representations referentially through the documentary frame, the contents enclosed therein consist of ontological phenomena that are inconsistent with this mimetic referentiality. Through a defamiliarization effect, readers are not merely forced to grapple with the constructedness of

[74] The science fictional can be thought of as falling into the broader category of counterfactual narratives, given the shared reliance on hypothetical extrapolation. Although some logics, places, characters, and expectations may appear in both fictional and material worlds, speculative fiction's strategies align with the counterfactual narrative's use of "specific and recognized hypothetical conditionals known to be contrary to fact" (Gallagher 334), which forces its reader to "mentally build an alternate place to accommodate the different events" (Gallagher 332).

representation itself, but to arbitrate both the "literal" and figurative dimensions of these representations.

Documentary, a genre typically associated with visual media and the camera, is one way the visual shapes these two stories' forms, but the visual also inflects the narratives' thematics through its entanglements with questions of history. Chiang's "Liking What You See" charts a social polemic unfolding at fictional Pembleton University addressing the compulsory adoption of calliagnosia, a manipulable neurological disorder that disables an individual's capacity to see beauty in other people's faces. Its proponents view calliagnosia as an effective panacea for lookism, or discrimination against people viewed as ugly, while its detractors contend such a blindness would affect people's capacity for aesthetic appreciation altogether. Lookism, as a form of discrimination that operates on the surface of visible, corporeal difference, offers a literalized metonymy of racism, specifically the neoliberal variant of racism that thrives by virtue of its denial of historicity. In the case of "Liking What You See," the visual impedes access to history for its character, but through the broader frame of the documentary, asks the readers to question their own relationship to what is visible.

In contrast, Liu's "The Man Who Ended History," showcases the ways ambivalent visual apprehension of the past molds our relationship to historicity through the literalization of the metaphor of time travel. The story follows the tribulations of Evan Wei and Akemi Kireno, a husband-wife team who develops a method of time travel enabling an individual to visit to any moment in history. The principle drawback is that through the act of visiting, the technology simultaneously destroys that moment in history, much like how an excavation destroys an archeological site at the same time it discloses. Nonetheless, Evan Wei prioritizes trips to 1940s Pingfeng Manchuria, the site of Unit 731, a subdivision of the Japanese Imperial Army that

committed crimes against humanity during World War II. Underlying the main tensions of the plot are two competing modes of historiography that diverge in their relationship to empirical data seized optically. The first believes historiography to be an objective enterprise, or an accumulation of self-evident facts, while the second forcibly calls attention to the necessary situatedness in interpreting this empirical data. Both converge on the assertion of a historical referent, but depart on how to go about deriving meaning, or legibility, from these referents. Struck by the dilemma of these two historiographical approaches through the frame of the dilemma, readers of this story, like those of "Like What You See" are disposed to scrutinize the contexts and ways in which perceptible experiences transform into visible evidence.

The Poetics of Science Fiction

The previous two chapters began with the premise that the works of Sui Sin Far and Maxine Hong Kingston had been reductively read as forms of reflectionist realism in that the texts examined were understood to derive from the authors' life experiences. My analysis sought to complicate these readings by reintegrating considerations of fictional language in assessing the literary functions of the texts. How might works of science fiction, often considered to be more mimetically discordant than those of realism, complicate antithetical expectations that (de)couple author and work, context and text? For some critics, science fiction – a genre characterized by its engrossment with alternative, hypothetical, and imagined universes, timelines, and forms of life –serves as the *raison d'être* of a literary text's political disinterest. Christopher Fan's compensatory reading of Chiang's works excuses the author's political abnegation precisely due to his inexorable dedication to logical and scientific extrapolation, which ironically frees him from the limitations of history, namely "externalities like race, ethnicity, or politics"

("Melancholy Transcendence"). For others, due to its imaginative capaciousness, science fiction provides an efficient channel that metaphorizes social difference as otherworldly. For example, interested in how the trope of Yellow Peril has been further sublimated through a techno-Orientalist framework, Stephen Hong Sohn notes that the homological link between Asians and aliens "invoke[s] conceptions of its homonymic counterparts, alienation and alien-nation" (6).

Though contradictory, these two attitudes depend on the same fundamental assumption regarding the relation between text and context. They take for granted that fictional reference to race is always figured substantively, and usually anthropomorphically in the presence or absence of othered characters.[75] This presumption feeds the broader conclusion that despite its indexical flexibility, science fiction nonetheless presupposes a one-to-one correspondence between representation and referent when it comes to race. Whether it is to absolve a text's purported lack of reference to our reality or to mark ways in which a text's social themes line up with real world relations, these approaches inadequately conceptualize science fiction's distinction from other representational discourses. In particular, they shortchange the aesthetic elements of literary works, which possess frames of reference and strategies of representation that exceed straightforward communicative functions.

An interpretative approach that attends to science fiction's embrace of the imaginative in addition to its compulsory reference to material reality is necessary when attempting to apprehend the imbrication of a text's figurative and referential dimensions. Seo-Young Chu's lyric theory of science fiction[76] offers a promising start. "Science-fictional environments,

[75] See Lye, *America's Asia*, for thoughts on examining the figurative resonance of race in nonanthropomorphic forms.

[76] Chu is self-aware in using the terms "lyric" and "poetic" interchangeably despite not being synonyms. However, she defends her choice arguing that "the lyric – a form wherein poetic qualities such as musicality and figurativeness exist in extremely compressed state – is *quintessentially* 'poetic'" (S. Y. Chu 252n8, emphasis in original).

creatures, and artifacts are not the imaginary referents that most people understand them to be," she argues; instead "[t]hey are mediums of representation constituted by literalized poetic figures of speech" (68). More specifically, she asserts that "lyric figures are systemically literalized, substantiated, and consolidated in science fiction as ontological features of narrative worlds" (11). Some examples she offers include the literalization of apostrophe into telepathy, "whereby a speaker addresses an absent person who is actually alive, mentally present, and capable of listening to the speaker without the aid of telephones or even ears," of synesthesia into "paranormal sensorium," or of personification into the "animation of a humanoid artifact," commonly recognized as androids (11). A textual occurrence of such literalization Chu calls a "science-fictioneme," which, as the suffix "-eme" suggests, constitutes the "basic unit of SF" and serves to mediate referents that are "cognitively estranging," either unknown or unknowable thus eluding concrete representation (68). Though more proactive in its attempt to grapple with the poetic components of a specific genre of literary text, Chu's explication of science fiction lyricism focuses on identifying discrete elements within an ostensibly larger formal structure. As a closed system built on rigid correspondences, a literary text read in this way reproduces structuralist tendencies toward ahistoricalness and reductiveness.[77]

A more all-encompassing consideration of the science fiction text as an integrated system would enable a more historically mindful reading its deployment of lyric literalization. In this regard, David Lodge's broad premise that the "literary text is always metaphoric" is a useful reminder: "we make it [the literary text] into a total metaphor: the text is the vehicle, the world is the tenor" (109). Consequently, every literary text, regardless of genre, possesses a referentiality

[77] The architecture of Chu's monograph reaffirms its ahistoricity. Her study self-consciously presents itself as a "taxonomy" or a "catalogue" that has the possibility of becoming a "truly encyclopedic compilation" (S. Y. Chu 14). The introduction's concluding words, headed "The Introduction Ends on a Historical Note" resembles more a belatedly affixed postscript than a serious attempt to draw out the historicity of her claims (S. Y. Chu 80-81).

that is mediated through metaphor. Liu, in understanding his own writing's relationship to science fiction generic conventions, combines both Lodge's generalization and Chu's assertions regarding genre:

> I think all fiction, including so-called "realist fiction," relies on the logic of metaphors, but I prefer writing stories in which a key metaphor is literalized into something tangible. There's a particular pleasure in working with such literalized metaphors, in exploring their nooks and crannies, in discovering shears and drops, in stitching them together into elaborate structures that model something felt but not seen in our lives. (Teitelbaum, "Small Miracles")

"Literalizing the metaphor" is first conceptualized by Liu as the imaginative process by which science fiction distinguishes itself from other forms of fiction, and equally as significantly, the manner in which material reality is formally implicated into the fictional world of the text. In contrast to Chu's science fiction lyricism, the individual elements of which are analytically isolable, Liu's variant of this practice implies a necessary historicity. The claim that literalized metaphors can give form to "something felt but not seen in our lives," resonates strongly with Raymond Williams's idea of structures of feelings, which are operative in a larger theory of social and cultural change – the residual, dominant, and emergent – that posits a complex relationship between past, present, and future.[78]

Indeed Chiang's and Liu's stories fall under the genre of science fiction by engaging ontological literalization, the representational transformation of poetic figures into concrete actualities. The stories do so by focusing their attention on some element of the visual: Chiang's story concentrates on building a society that suffers from discrimination based on good looks, a literalization of racial metonymy, and Liu's story contemplates a world where the metaphor of

[78] See Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121-135.

time travel through history is literalized via quantum physics and attendant questions of observability. Curiously both texts are furthermore shaped by the way they are framed, as documentaries, which I argue takes this process of literalization further in playing with the denotative and figurative resonances of the term "literal."

Literalizing through the Documentary Mode

As made clear by the subtitle they share, both "Liking What You See: A Documentary" and "The Man Who Ended History: A Documentary" identify with and present themselves through the documentary mode. This seemingly inconsequential tag appears not within the body of the text, but in the paratext of both narratives, which constitutes an excess that makes demands on the reader to arbitrate the conditions of the documentary from a formal perspective. Referring to the writings of Leo Hock, one of the initiators of "modern title science," Genette explains that the title has acted since classical times as "an artifact created for reception or commentary" ("Title in Literature" 692).[79] Among its many possible expressions, the subtitle commonly provides the "generic indication" of the given text, thus underscoring its functional role within the titular apparatus as a whole (Genette, "Title in Literature" 694). The title and the subtitle furthermore diverge on a semantic level; while the main title refers to the thematic contents of the text – "Liking What You See" is *about* visually gratifying human faces and "The Man Who Ended History" is *about* a man who invents a time travel machine – the subtitle indicates its formal dimension by referring to the "text itself considered as a work and as an object" (Genette, "Title in Literature" 709). In light of the facts that the titles of the other short stories in Chiang's

[79] Hock more specifically defines the title as "A series of linguistic signs which can appear at the head of a text to designate it, to indicate its general content and to appeal to the public aimed at" (quoted in Genette, "Title in Literature" 708). For more on the title and other paratexts, see Genette *Paratexts*.

and Liu's collections are not affixed with similarly-marked generic definitions, and that these two stories both end their respective compilations renders their subtitles all the more remarkable.

If one of the title's jobs is to condition the reception of the given text, the subtitle "A Documentary" creates tension when considered in contrast to the generic designations of their collections. Both Chiang's and Liu's works can be classified as science or speculative fiction; genres that are at odds with the conventions associated with documentary. As a mode "grounded in a denotative literalism" (Nichols 29), documentary provides a literalizing lens through which the reader accesses the world of each story. Beyond relying on material tactility and actual objectness to ground its appeal to literalism, this version of the literal refers to the conceived distance, or in this case, proximity, between representation and referent. Conceptualizing literalization in this way offers an entry point into examining each story's claims on our lived reality, and consequently, each story's sociopolitical orientation concerning race and history in a way that bypasses straight avoidance and simple analogy exemplified by critics like Christopher Fan and Stephen Hong Sohn. With stress on the observational, the documentary's status "as *evidence from* the world legitimates its usage as a source of knowledge" (Nichols ix). This builds on the more fundamental assumptions that the documentary as representation sustains "an indexical relation to the historical world" (Nichols 27) and in its indebtedness to the historical world, presupposes "the objective knowability of the world" (Cowie 20).

The stories' adoption of the documentary subtitle contorts yet again the meaning of "literal," a connotative shift that both depends on and reemphasizes the texts' status as literary representations. The first turn consists of Chu's ontological literalization performed under the genre of science fiction, the second amounts to the conventional implications associated with the documentary mode, namely its denotative literalism, and the third involves an ironizing of the

"literal" dimension by the juxtaposition of the previous two. Literalization and literalism both actuate the primary level of meaning – both demand that words or images are received in their exact sense, rather than metaphorically or figuratively. The inability to read "Like What You See" and "The Man Who Ended History" literally through the documentary tag not only draws attention to the complexities of documentary that arise in face of a postmodern landscape but more importantly for my purpose, imposes a defamiliarization effect on the reader. The subtitle compounds the texts' "emancipation from the enforcement of a referential data base" (Cohn viii) both on the level of author and narrator, and textual contents. Legibility becomes the responsibility of the readers; bereft of what Yoonmee Chang, under the influence of Dorrit Cohn, might call signposts of the ethnographic, they must determine whether these texts exhibit any perceptible residues of race, and whether these residues can lead to the construction of meaning.

Visual Discrimination in Chiang's "Liking What You See: A Documentary"

The central conflict of "Liking What You See" involves the compulsory adoption of calliagnosia on college campuses, and by extension the social issue of lookism, which is presented through a series of interviews with individuals involved in the controversy surrounding the election. This multiplicity in points of view sets up two parallel plotlines: the broader unfolding of the calli campaign, which is ultimately defeated by oppositional nongovernmental organizations bankrolled by corporate interests, and the individual view depicted through student Tamera Lyons as she navigates her first year at Pembleton amidst the controversy. Along with the general themes of difference and social equity, specific plot elements, namely "lookism" and "calliagnosia," welcome comparisons to racism and race blindness, while the primary setting of

the calli debate, the college campus, resonates with real-world disputes over the handling of race by and within institutions of higher education.

However, to ward off interpretations that plumb his stories for "racial subtext," Chiang depicts the ability to appreciate good looks as a neurological transaction, and calliagnosia as the medical intervention that effectively shuts down the physiological pathways supporting this biological mechanism. Speaking to Jeremy Smith, Chiang emphasized that the apprehension of race cannot be reduced to biological mechanisms in the same way calliagnosia can: "While I agree that race blindness is an interesting idea, I didn't think there was any way to make it even remotely plausible in neurological terms. Because there are just too many things that go into racism. It seems to me that to eliminate the perception of race at a neurological level, you'd have to rewrite the underpinnings of our social behavior" ("Interview"). If the regulative perception of race cannot be explained biologically because it is a product of socialization, the reverse is apparently true of the perception of good looks. By locating the efficacy of calli in purportedly immutable biological structures, the text strives to naturalize lookism's universalized horizon.

Further, unlike racism, which is premised on the naturalized connection between perceptible appearance and presumed essence – a connection that is historically conditioned and systemically operative to perpetuate the uneven distribution of power – lookism accrues import from appearance alone. While racism's claim to essentialism can be denaturalized by teasing out the particular ways certain physical characteristics are assigned social meanings under varying historical circumstances, lookism's unilateral focus on surface, shadowed by the void of associated social contents, presents a unique case in which the very mechanism of discrimination assumes the annihilation of historicity as a precondition for its operation. In short, while racism has been subject to critical examination due to the widespread acceptance of race as an effect of

culture and history, lookism evades such mediated readings due to the way the text presents seeing good looks as the product of an "innate disposition" (284) or a direct, timeless expression of nature.[80]

By rerouting discrimination in this way, Chiang takes for granted that race's social constructedness is common knowledge, which is indispensable in erecting an impermeable division between biology and sociology, and consequently an impenetrable interpretative barrier between lookism and racism.[81] Nonetheless, what both the story and author fail to take into account is that a large share of racism's ideological persuasion is determined by the misconception that unseen, internal characteristics are genetically transmitted in correspondence to phenotypical features, like hair type and skin color. In other words, although racism is a product of social convention, its potency and productivity depends on the muddled relationship between biology and sociology.

The story figures lookism's dependence on biologically-determined facial features and internalization of a discriminatory logic based on visible signs of difference as a metonym for racism's reliance on attributes of the same constitution. More specifically, lookism, in wielding physical attractiveness as its main criterion, exemplifies a particular iteration of racism operative in the post-racial era, one that not only divorces itself from historical contexts, but further eliminates historicity in favor of a future-oriented self-conception that supports its ostensible naturalness. In deploying both a marker of difference (facial beauty) and means of discrimination that are conceived as temporally and culturally transcendent because biologically determined, the narrative metonymizes lookism's fixation on appearances in relation to a racial logic that severs

[80] Subsequent references to "Liking What You See" cite Chiang's 2002 *Stories of Your Life*.

[81] Thomas Foster's sociobiological reading usefully demonstrates how "Liking What You See" upends the dichotomy between nature and culture by questioning the twin process of "seeing" when it comes to registering facial beauty.

appearances from historical contingency by evacuating surface of any reference to deeper social relations.

Under the rubric of science fictional lyricism set up by Chu, the story literalizes lookism as a metonym for racism by presenting it as a discernable social phenomenon, whose functioning depends on the automatic functions of neurological circuitry. This literalization leads to two drastically divergent interpretations when considered inside and outside the frame of the documentary. By overlooking the frame and restricting our attention to the borders of the fictional world, the reader accepts lookism as an actual form of discrimination and calliagnosia as an actual, potential remedy. Accordingly, the reader inhabits the position carved out by Tamera who, throughout the narrative, struggles to come to a decision about the calli vote. Like the denizens of Tamera's reality, the reader must come to his or her own judgment regarding the story's main point of contention, which asks: "Would you elect to adopt calli or not if given the choice?" Chiang encourages this type of literal, denotative reading of the text by providing his own personal response (he would at least try it [Chiang 331]), which further reinforces the foreclosure of references to race to the level of subject-matter and contains the critical potency of the narrative, disarming calli into a playful thought experiment. While the first version of literalizing manifests in the narrative as tangible contents, this second variant acts on the text on a formal register, rerouting the narrative's referential bearing to the reality outside the text, or to the reality of the reader, and revealing, however repressively, its connection to contemporary configurations of race and racism. By adopting the university campus as its central setting, Chiang's story affiliates itself with the shifting composition of affirmative action as it has emerged through the fraught politics over college admissions policies.

The retrenchment of affirmative action during the period of political quietism beginning in the late 1970s is traceable through the series of Supreme Court cases striving to dismantle conscious integrationist efforts in the domain of school admissions.[82] *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) was the first to contest the consideration of race in university admissions procedures, which gave rise to "reverse racism" rhetoric that would come to express the backlash of white resentment and entitlement against affirmative action. The Supreme Court decision resulted in a plurality opinion, of which Justice Lewis Powell's sole-authored opinion was most prominent for casting the deciding vote and for marking the shift from remedial justification of affirmative action to a defense based in notions of diversity. Under the requirements of strict scrutiny where the burden of proof would fall on universities to provide incontestable evidence of past discrimination in order to justify the constitutionality of preferential treatment of racial minorities, proponents of affirmative action programs turned toward the diversity rationale to maintain the consideration of race in their admissions procedures. Since *Bakke*, at points referred to as marking the end of the civil rights struggle, the conflict over affirmative action has favored the conservative turn, bolstered by the Equal Protection Clause, which has enabled colorblind interpretations of the Constitution.[83]

The setting of "Liking What You See" suggests parallels between the real-world conflict over affirmative action and the fictional debate over calli, but the narrative is quick to subdue any further consideration through the wholesale exclusion of legal perspectives from the

[82] For more on the history of affirmative action in the U.S., see T. Anderson, Skrentny, and Graham.

[83] Notable cases which led to universities' suspending consideration of race in admissions include *Hopwood v. University of Texas* (1996), *Smith v. University of Washington Law School (2001)*, *Gratz v. Bollinger, et al.* (2000), while cases such as *Grutter v. Bollinger, et al.* (2002) and *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2016) upheld the *Bakke* ruling that promoting class diversity qualified as a compelling state interest that justified the use of race as a factor in admissions.

multiplicity of voices included in the documentary.[84] This displacement of attention from the legal realm to the cultural, social, and biological domains reaffirms the extent to which contestations over race have shifted from being articulated through public policy to arenas that exceed the reach of government intervention, an incontrovertible fact of the periodizing tendency to align the post-racial era with the post-Civil Rights era. If the "post-racial" signals a sociopolitical atmosphere in which race is struck out from legislation, set either executively or judicially, marking the termination of *de jure* racism, "Liking" embodies the quintessential post-racial text by striking out the legal.

The story introduces its central debate through a proposed campus initiative that would require all Pembleton students to adopt calliagnosia, or blindness to facial beauty. As an addendum to the Code of Ethical Conduct, this initiative is motivated by ideals of social equity, specifically in striving to dismantle the form of social discrimination known as lookism. Since the main issue at stake is physical appearance, the pro- and anti- sides of the debate forge their positions based on the collective value or harm of facial attractiveness. Those supporting the initiative consider attractiveness as a detriment that produces false consciousness through a distortion of reality; those against the initiative view attractiveness-cum-beauty as a boon that produces societal good through pleasure This debate of lookism finds referential purchase in colorblind discourse and diversity rationale, two post-racial ideologies that govern the contemporary conflict over affirmative action.

If calli adherents desire to undo social wrongs through the nonrecognition of looks, calli opponents believe social ills should be challenged on the level of the individual, as opposed to through institutional intervention. The former argues for the negation of "good looks" entirely,

[84] The only reference to the legal sphere appears in the interview of Richard Hamill, who explains how recalls "[i]t was around the last legal challenges to calliagnosia were resolved" that plans to establish a calli-only alternative school for children were formulated (286).

while the latter favors the isolation and preservation of the collective good of looks, but both stand on the detachment from history. This evacuation of history underscores the temporal orientation of the desubstantiated and privatized racism of neoliberalism typified by the affirmative action debate. Unlike "backward-looking" remedial race-conscious policies, which strive to correct present social inequities by identifying and redressing past racial injustices, both colorblind and diversity discourses rely on a temporal framework that is "forward-looking," and consequently alienated from the historical record. According to Sheila Foster, "Proponents of forward-looking rationales believe that race-conscious measures can be seen as more justifiable in pursuing a vision of the future rather than in eradicating an ugly, sinful past" (113). By conflating a race-free rhetoric with a race-free reality, colorblindness functions according to the misassumption that the "future society [of racelessness] is already here and functioning" and resolves previous conditions of racism by "pretending they were never there" (Freeman 1103). The diversity rationale treats differences homogeneously, ignoring the uneven effects of cumulative historical impact; at the same time it locates value in recognizing difference as a commodity by looking toward future compensation.

Colorblindness and Calli Advocates

Much like how subscribers of colorblindness allege to achieve racial equity by not seeing race,[85] calli adherents believe that the only way to stamp out discrimination based on attractiveness is by eliminating the capacity to see attractiveness. Maria deSouza, the President of Students for Equality Everywhere (SEE), emphasizes that calli "lets you do what you know you should: ignore the surface, so you can look deeper" (282). Calli's social mechanism

[85] And obversely, claim racism when seeing race; or as Leslie Carr observes of colorblind proponents: "To recognize race is immoral and racist" (126).

resembles process Neil Gotanda calls "nonrecognition," the technique undergirding the operation of colorblindness. This process first designates the existence of something visible that would qualify as "surface," then perceives this something, and lastly disregards consideration of this something (Gotanda 16). Ironically in order to ignore something, one must first recognize it as a thing to be ignored. In addition to nonrecognition, deSouza claims calli enables one to "look deeper," beyond the surface, which enforces a fundamental split between appearance and character, in which externalities such as good looks are superficial factors superfluous to the more essential, or more real, aspects of an individual.

Characteristics that *should* measure one's value are those that are cultivated within one's control such as talent and ability, mimicking colorblindness's reliance on the myth of meritocracy to substantiate individual assessment. To a certain extent, the general frippery of good-looks is taken for granted by the pro-calli side; third-year Pembleton student Adesh Singh makes as if pointing out the obvious at a student debate when he declares in absolute terms, "*Everyone* knows physical beauty has *nothing* to do with merit" (293, emphasis added). Rachel Lyons, Tamera's mother, explains why she enforced calli during her daughter's adolescence: "Being pretty is fundamentally a passive quality; even when you work at it, you're working at being passive. I wanted Tamera to value herself in terms of what she could *do*, both with her mind and with her body, not in terms of how decorative she was" (287, emphasis in original). Suggesting that physical attractiveness is a "decorative" and essentially nonfunctional trait, Rachel Lyons hopes that her daughter can find self-empowerment in her singular capability and potentiality, attributes governed by the liberal principles of individual freedom. Duncan Kennedy explains that individual merit derives from the "will" of the individual and not from his or her

"merely 'social, 'accidental,' 'ascribed' or 'inherited' characteristics" (738), characteristics that, as products of the sociohistorical conditions, limit the scope of an individual's agency.

The ideology of the individual that propels a meritocratic attitude also underlies lookism's mechanisms of subordination, which are largely limited to individual actions and individual people. This emphasis on discriminatory acts as deviant exceptions from the difference-blind norm reduces social injuries to aberrant actions, rather than widespread conditions produced by inequitable structural configurations. Alan David Freeman notes that antidiscrimination law's frame of reference is fixed in what he calls the "perpetrator perspective":

> The perpetrator perspective presupposes a world composed of atomistic individuals whose actions are outside of and apart from the social fabric and without historical continuity. From this perspective, the law views racial discrimination not as a social phenomenon, but merely as the misguided conduct of particular actors. It is a world where, but for the conduct of these misguided ones, the system of equality of opportunity would work to provide a distribution of good things in life without racial disparities and where deprivations that did correlate with race would be 'deserved' by those deprived on grounds of insufficient "merit." (1054)

Contrary to the "victim perspective," which would view discriminatory treatment as embedded in the underlying conditions of social life and consequently enmeshed in the broader historical matrix, the perpetrator perspective finds an ideological foothold in the sovereignty of the individual. Since discriminatory wrongdoings are behavioral irregularities that occur due to individual ignorance and psychology, proponents of this view of racism see awareness raised

through education as a solution that would work by rectifying misinformed attitudes. Given antidiscrimination law's biased espousal of the perpetrator perspective, which locates racial injury in individual actions rather than as a product of cumulative historical impact, the legal system is able to convey a commitment to equality of opportunity without shouldering the onus of redistributive justice.

Diversity Rationale and the Anti-Calli Contingent

While supporters of calli uphold the existence of a reality hidden beneath visible surfaces, their opponents claim that the perceptual blind spots created by the agnosia allegedly lead to cognitive gaps in apprehending the external world, suggesting reality includes that which is plainly manifest to the senses. After growing up with the disorder under the guidance of her parents, Tamera Lyons points out that spending time with people without calli "reminds you that there's something you can't see," and for minors, breeds resentment against parents, who are viewed as "keeping you from seeing the real world" (285). The "real world" includes episodes of lookist discrimination that the pro-calli camp believe possible to will away through resolutely ignoring the problem. In her speech attacking the proposed campus initiative, Rebecca Boyer, spokesperson for People for Ethical Nanomedicine, plays on her audience's moral imperative, stating, "If you're outraged by that sort of lookism, how can you afford to get calli? You're precisely the type of person who's needed to blow the whistle on that behavior, but if you've got calli, you won't be able to recognize it" (318). The speech ends with the line: "If you want to fight discrimination, keep your eyes open" (318), an exhortation that underscores the conviction that lookism constitutes a material problem in the world, not just a shortcoming in perception rectifiable through neurological manipulation.

In contrast to colorblindness's refusal to register race, translated in the story as calli's refusal to register looks, anti-calli reasoning patterns itself after the more race-conscious diversity rationale, which is often cited as colorblindness's logical adversary in debates addressing affirmative action. Beyond the subjective gratification of seeing pretty faces, the anti-calli side constructs the benefit of good looks as something that is also collectively profitable. Daniel Taglia, Pembleton professor of comparative literature, opines: "Being in the presence of a world-class beauty can be as thrilling as listening to a world-class soprano. Gifted individuals aren't the only ones who benefit from their gifts; we all do. Or, I should say, we all can. Depriving ourselves of that opportunity would be a crime" (306). The synonymy drawn by Daniel Taglia between "world-class beauty" and "world-class soprano," shows the leveling effect diversity discourse has in homogenizing particularity in inherited appearance with one in cultivated talent.[86] Such equivalences between disparate "gifts" (or "plus factors" in the language of college admissions) resonate with the Harvard undergraduate admissions program cited by Justice Powell throughout his opinion on *Bakke v. Regents*. Attributes as heterogeneous as an individual's home state, artistic or athletic skill, and desired career path are considered to be analogous to socio-economic upbringing and racial or ethnic background. While the former could be considered to be incidental, idiosyncratic, and indiscriminate, the latter are entangled in complex sociocultural histories of repression. By imposing identity between these two forms of difference[87] under the structure of a list of criteria, Harvard's conception of diversity evaluates difference in a "sociopolitical vacuum" (S. Foster 133).

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[86] Daniel Taglia complains that "Next thing you know, a student organization will insist we all adopt music agnosia, so we don't feel bad about ourselves when we hear gifted singers or musicians" (306).

[87] Sheila Foster makes a distinction between "salient" and non-salient" differences. While salient differences are those historically constructed differences that govern the systematic exclusion and subordination of a class of people, non-salient differences are incidental and isolated instances that do not contribute to perpetuating structures of disadvantage. According to Foster, "the current concept of diversity is 'empty' because it lacks a mediating

While colorblindness negates history through the refusal to recognize the compounded effects of past racial injustices, diversity discourse elides history by ignoring the temporal endurance of racial discrimination as it shapes the material realities of its victims. Rather than recognize racial difference's historical contingency, the diversity rationale embeds in racial difference a seed of social value that is to be remunerated sometime in the future. Though this value is outwardly upheld for the ways in which exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints in an institutional setting leads to the cultivation of abstract civic virtues, the diversity concept's forward-oriented payoff is fundamentally financially profitable. The spread and proliferation of the diversity rationale from the educational setting to the private sector, a expansion marked by the 1987 publication of diversity management handbook *Workforce 2000*, led to the emergence of a veritable human resources industry hawking programs to foster inclusiveness and respect for differences in the workplace. The demographic transformations of both labor and consumer markets under globalization unearthed the salability of cultural expertise and literacy.[88]

Tamera and the Reader

What was once a debate centered on the social justice issue of combatting lookism transforms into a microeconomic issue of consumer choice when it is revealed that the anti-calli campaign is in fact a public relations campaign financed by the cosmetics industry. The all-encompassing appropriation of facial beauty and its attendant controversies by the commercial domain signals the comprehensive withdrawal of race matters into the private sphere. Despite losing the election, Maria deSouza, the most outspoken advocate of calli in the narrative,

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principle. By treating all differences the same, it ignores the 'salience' of certain differences in this society by extracting differences from their sociopolitical contexts" (S. Foster 111).

[88] See Kelly and Dobbin.

nonetheless expresses optimism in light of the introduction of a new technology that enables a consumer to "reprogram" their "neurostat," turning calli on or off at will without having to visit a doctor's office (318). No longer an issue of public policy, the adoption of calli becomes a private affair that can be put on or taken off at will.

If the campus calli debate, saturated as it is by outside influence, depicts the activity of lookism in the broader cultural terrain, Tamera, the Pembleton freshman who shuttles from one side to the other, stands in for the individual navigating this social topography. Throughout the documentary Tamara offers the only sustained portrayal of a person coming to a decision about the debate, and in this sense Tamera's journey is the reader's own. In the end, her final decision regarding the debate is consolidated through the realization of her self both in terms of individuality and social identity. "I don't want anyone else deciding calli's right for me," she assert, "[N]ot my parents, not a student organization. But if someone decides they want calli themselves, that's fine, whatever" (316). The social consequences of the calli debate are negligible; what is significant for Tamera is the individual's right to choose untainted by external influence. This libertarian conviction in the individual's self-determination comes to color her understanding of her own manipulation of her ex-boyfriend Garrett through her good looks and need to respect his sovereignty if she is to act harmoniously with her ideological convictions. On Garrett's decision to turn his calli back on, Tamera confirms, "I should let Garrett decide for himself, I know that" (316). But this acceptance of Garrett's choice, and inherent reaffirmation of individual rights, is accompanied by indignation toward makeup companies: "I am angry at them, because they used a trick to manipulate people; they weren't playing fair. But what it made me realize was, I was doing the same kind of thing to Garrett. Or I wanted to, anyway. I was trying to use my looks to win him back. And in a way that's not playing fair, either" (322).

Tamera connects the dots between her entrapment by corporate machinations and her own beguilement of Garrett through her good looks.

Tamera's conscious linkage of her own exploitation of beauty (to get Garrett to fall back in love with her) to the way beauty is capitalized on by corporate systems represents an individual's coming-to-consciousness about the implications of the polemic beyond the terms marked out by the debate. Viewed from this perspective, the short story resembles a cognitive map, as defined by Fredric Jameson, albeit a stunted one. Presented as "a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 51). The terrain charted by "Liking What You See" resembles a stunted cognitive map, because although Tamera becomes aware of her positioning in the larger interpellative framework mediated by the ideology of beauty, her comprehension of this is shallow and remains an apprehension of appearances. Lookism presents a mode of discrimination in which "phenomenological perception" and "reality" are not separated by a gap that can be crossed because they are one and the same (Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping" 353). Lookism, due to the negation of its historicity, renders individual experience transcendent and remains a social problem unable to be dismantled through the cognitive map offered by the narrative. Tamera herself fantasizes about the possibility that she and Garrett will reunite: "And if we do get back together, maybe we'll get those new spex they're talking about. Then we can turn off our calli when we're by ourselves, just the two of us" (322). Tamera's ideal end consists of a romantic resolution conditioned by the constraints of lookism. Referring to the new technology mentioned by Maria deSouza, Tamera is overcome by a sort of consumeristic complacency.

Although Tamera, presented as one who undergoes the subjectivizing process associated with lookism, is unable to grasp the total system, the reader is still positioned a step removed from the narrative by virtue of the documentary frame. From this vantage point, we see that Tamera, existing in a reality wherein discrimination is entirely decoupled from its historical roots, is an individual who holds an interiorized relation to the past.[89] The past figures in her mind only in terms of individual desires and goals, a form of privatization that denies the formation of collective memory and of historical consciousness. The reader, on the other hand, is privy to the destabilization of visible, outward signs of difference that once seemed to appeal to natural instincts and preferences. That the discrimination that exists in Tamera's world depends on not the presence or absence of such signs of difference but the process by which these signs gain meaning forces the reader to grapple with their own practices of seeing. Are signs of facial beauty really that universally recognizable especially when the documentary presents both these signs of beauty and ways of recognizing these signs as falling under the manipulation of cosmetic companies? How have other marks of biologized difference undergone similar naturalization processes and how does the reader come to interpret these marks?

The Empirical Grounds of History in Ken Liu's "The Man Who Ended History"

While the reader of "Liking What You See" faces the way visible surfaces may impede access to history, the reader of "The Man Who Ended History" is immersed in problematics of historiography. More specifically, the story addresses the conflicting ways visible evidence is constructed as such and the divergent historical accounts produced as a result. By taking as its main subject the war crimes committed by Unit 731 of the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II, Liu's story draws links to the Holocaust, which has been universalized as the

[89] See Roth, 15-16.

apotheosis of inarticulable historical trauma.[90] Sometimes referred to as the Asian Auschwitz, Unit 731 conducted experiments on human subjects with the objective of developing biological weapons, which resulted in the deaths of roughly 200,000 men, women, and children, most of whom were Chinese. In exchange for granting immunity to the researchers of the unit, the United States received data accumulated from testing, a deal which would later contribute to advancing the U.S.'s own biological warfare program, while implicating the U.S. in the perpetuation of the transnational amnesia obscuring Japan's colonial aggression.

Engaging with repressors of Japanese war crimes through the Internet, Liu wrote "The Man Who Ended History" in an attempt to "understand the perspective of these denialists" (Huang, "Interview"). These ordinary voices of negation provide the backdrop against which the documentary is mounted; clusters of short remarks by everyday people ranging from a manager of the Sony store in Tianjin to homemaker in Milwaukee appear regularly throughout the narrative like the chorus in a Greek tragedy (see 403-4, 416-7, 435-6).[91] Liu's deference to journalist-historian Iris Chang furthermore underscores his authorial investment in confronting the challenges of historical negationism.[92] Chang's 1997 *The Rape of Nanking* is a push against "the cover-up, the story of how the Japanese, emboldened by the silence of the Chinese and Americans, tried to erase the entire massacre from public consciousness, thereby depriving its victims of their proper place in history" (14). Chang's major argument contends that Japan's

[90] See Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation.*

[91] "The various denialist statements attributed to 'men in the street' are modeled on Internet forum comments, postings, and direct communication to the author from individuals who hold such views" (Liu 450). Subsequent references to "The Man Who Ended History" cite Liu's 2016 *The Paper Menagerie*.

[92] On the story's dedication to Chang, Liu commented, "I wrote it in part to commemorate Iris Chang, who killed herself after writing about atrocities committed by the Japanese Empire during World War II, and also to explore the complexities of history and historiography" (Chen, "Interview").

continued effacement of these depravities from view commits violence against the victims afresh, a claim that is evoked repeatedly throughout Liu's story.

"The Man Who Ended History" uses time travel as a literalized metaphor for the epistemic aspects of the past, its knowability as an object, and consequently its representability and communicability through language. Historian Evan Wei, the fictional iteration of Iris Chang, has invented a process of time travel with his physicist wife Akemi Kireno, which sends an individual into the past so that he or she may tangibly experience that moment firsthand. The process of history-inscription is equated to the spontaneous splitting of what the narrative calls Bohm-Kirino particles. According to Dr. Kireno, these particles are consistently and multiply materializing in sets of two; at the moment of their emergence one member remains locally on site while its counterpart is flung out into space at the speed of light. Despite the vast distance separating them, one particle is always exhibiting properties also possessed by the other under the rules of quantum entanglement. Through measuring the local particles, the Kireno method of time travel is able to access moments in this world's past now inscribed on partner particles light years away. It is in this way that the central metaphor is literalized; history, at least that which is intelligible to the senses, is etched onto the observable architecture of subatomic particles.

This metaphor is literalized against the backdrop of two watershed moments in the history of modern physics: Einstein's formulation of the theory of relativity and the subsequent advent of quantum theory. The rootedness of Kireno's research and project into the work and theories of real-world physicists such as David Bohm, Richard Feynman, and Erwin Schrödinger places the narrative's concept of history squarely in the break between classical and quantum mechanics. An early twentieth century paradigm shift, quantum physics challenged core

assumptions held to be self-evident by Newtonian physics, among them notions of absolute time and space, the principle of causality, and the certainty of observables. When brought to bear on history, these fundament tenets of quantum theory loosen its ties to absolute objectivity, ontological autonomy, and identical temporality, but also disturb history's own availability to observation, cognition, and representation.

The subjective instability of the observer is itself a consideration that experiences a range of positions even within the purview of quantum physics. For instance, Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle seems to endorse its own brand of solipsistic constructivism in asserting that "measurement *defines* what is being measured" (Lindley 155) or that "observations determine realities" (Isaacson 449). Reality, in other words, depends on our perceptual, and by extension, linguistic faculties. More tempered is Einstein's theory of relativity which demolished the idea of an absolute frame of reference and reinvented notions of time and space, but did not suggest that "everything is relative" (Isaacson 131). Rather, it highlighted the relative character of observations or measurements made within distinct frames of reference of multiple observers; although the observers may contradict one another, "events retain a distinct and unarguable physicality" allowing for the possibility of mutual consensus (Lindley 131-2). Although the story emphasizes a shift of attention onto the observer, rather than the object observed, the persistence in the material reality of the historical referent (or the object observed) is consistently taken to be unquestionable.

The narrative responds to these concerns more specifically by way of this form of time travel functions, a procedure which introduces the element of human intervention through a consciousness that both observes and recalls what it observes. Confronted by a deluge of information unleashed by the Bohm-Kireno particles—an amount that would overwhelm the

most powerful computer servers – Akemi develops a makeshift solution by enlisting volunteers to serve as "observers," travelling back in time in order to conserve their findings through human memory. Arguing that the brain possessed "massively parallel processing capabilities," Akemi explains that it "could be given the raw electric signals, throw 99.999 percent of it away, and turn the rest into sight, sound, smell, and make sense of it all and record them as memories" (396). The ethical and intellectual implications of this technique are many; the misgivings surrounding the use of a "human" data collector to retrieve evidence to fill in gaps in the historical record rest on the very elements of this human-ness: the potential bias of subjectivity, the fallibility of memory, the spottiness of selection. This skepticism intensifies in face of the main consequence of time travel: the destructive nature of the entire process. Because, as Akemi ruefully points out, "for each moment in the past, we get only one chance to look" (392), deciding who gets to return to the past becomes an exceptionally fraught act.

Most pointedly, this phenomenon of time travel is staged as a fundamentally visual act, which emphasizes the optical nature of observation, and later on, of witnessing. Akemi explains the mechanics thusly: "[T]he past is consumed even as it is seen. The photons enter the lens, and from there they strike an imaging surface, be it your retina or a sheet of film or a digital sensor, and then they are gone, stopped dead in their paths. If you look but don't pay attention and miss a moment, you cannot travel farther out to catch it again. That moment is erased from the universe, forever" (390). Though the commensurability of the human retina to a film sheet and digital sensor suggests the automatic and objective nature of scientific observation, Akemi qualifies this comparison through human selection and combination. She distinguishes between "looking" and "paying attention"; this difference separates humans from machines, and observers from witnesses.

The Self-Sufficient Research Model and Constructivist Approaches to Historiography

In this manner through the framework of quantum mechanics, "The Man Who Ended History" reveals how imagining an ethically responsible vision of history is far more complex than the binary oppositions of concealment-disclosure, silencing-enunciation, denial-acknowledgement, which may characterize a vision of history within the framework of classical mechanics. As with quantum mechanics, in which measurements are inflected by the mode of measurement and positionality of the measurer, denialism depends just as much on the practices of the denialist. The performance of denial appears in the story not as a straightforward, purposeful erasure[93] but combines the instrumentalization of history for immediate gain with a rhetorical strategy that neutralizes narratives of past grievances through recourse to language. Both of these aspects of historical negationism are typified in the story's depiction of a House of Representatives hearing held to vote on a resolution to officially acknowledge Japanese war crimes. Representative Hogart, who claims "we have no definitive proof" of Unit 731's operations (421), stresses that the "Japan of today is the most important ally of the United States in the Pacific," concord with whom "is vital in our efforts to contain and confront the Chinese threat" (422). Hogart deploys denialism through appealing to the absence of hard evidence in order to prioritize the maintenance of U.S. geopolitical power in the Pacific region, a show of dominance buttressed by its postwar alliance with Japan.

Beyond the mere refusal to recognize "proof," which itself is the arrangement of facts toward a certain end,[94] this denialist program depends on sophisticated manipulation of language.

[93] Liu notes, "With the exception of a few minor characters, no one in the story is an outright denialist" (Huang, "Interview").

Pinpointing the syntax of Representative Hogart's glib dismissal of Unit 731, Representative Kotler, sponsor of the resolution, notes: "It's easy to hide behind intransitive verbal formulations like 'terrible events occurred' and 'suffering resulted'" (423). While the exploitation of passive voice and intransitive verbs acts to grammatically circumvent agency and culpability of perpetrators, rhetorical denialism operates more insidiously by recoding narratives of past crimes as works of fiction, or as it is worded in the narrative, as "illusions" (396, 422).

Representative Cotler's denialist tactics set up an authorization of history that relies on hard proof to substantiate the veracity and integrity of the (in this case, state-sponsored) historical record, while dismissing other proof-less claims to the past as falsehoods. Cotler's positivistic understanding of history follows what LaCapra calls "a documentary or self-sufficient research model," which operates on the assumption that "gathering evidence and making referential statements in the form of truth claims based on that evidence constitute necessary and sufficient conditions of historiography" (*Writing History* 1). Japanese Ambassador Yoshida in the story asserts, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof…But 'stories' are not evidence" (432-3). In direct methodological opposition to the research model LaCapra pits "radical constructivism." To this approach, "essential are performative, figurative, aesthetic, rhetorical, ideological, and political factors that 'construct' structures – stories, plots, arguments, interpretations, explanations – in which referential statements are embedded and take on meaning and significance" (*Writing History* 1). As protagonist Evan Wei explains, "History is a

[94] Lorraine Daston, in "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence," writes, "According to a commonplace view, facts are evidence *in potentia*: mustered in an argument, deduced from a theory, or simply arranged in a pattern, they shed their proverbial obstinacy and help with the work of proof and disproof…On their own, facts are notoriously inert – 'angular,' 'stubborn,' or even 'nasty' in their resistance to interpretation and inference. They are robust in their existence and opaque in their meaning. Only when enlisted in the service of a claim or a conjecture do they become evidence, or facts with significance" (93). Later she observes: "Implicit in this conventional distinction between facts and evidence is that in order for facts to qualify as credible evidence, they must appear innocent of human intention. Facts fabricated as evidence, that is, to make a particular point, are thereby disqualified as evidence…it is the distinction between facts and evidence that is at issue, not the reality of the facts per se, nor their quality as evidence in general" (94).

narrative enterprise, and the telling of stories that are true, that affirm and explain our existence, is the fundamental task of the historian" (433).

The divergent assumptions regarding linguistic accountability in both these historiographical approaches reproduce contending visions of the relation between subject and object. While the research model prioritizes the constative (or referential) use of language by an observer assumed to be detached from the object of research, the constructivist model conceives of language as performative; an utterance entangles observer with object of observation (*Writing History* 5). Consequently in the historiographical enterprise, empirical evidence exists autonomously from the observer in the first, whereas evidence is constituted by the observer in the second. These two models – one that imagines history-writing as the transparent record of past human actions and the other that views history-writing as a product of power – provide the conceptual parameters governing Liu's story. Appropriately, Evan Wei frames the radical stakes of his time travel project in the tension between self-evident empiricism and constructed narrative. "[W]e have now come to the end of history," he declares; "What my wife and I have done is to take narrative away, and to give us all a chance to see the past with our own eyes. In place of memory, we now have incontrovertible evidence. Instead of exploiting the dead, we much look into the face of the dying. *I have seen these crimes with my own eyes*. You cannot deny that" (433).

The phrase "end of history" in both the excerpt above and the story's title takes on a perplexing proliferation of meanings. On the most basic level, the end of history refers to the terminal consequences of the Kirino process, which destroys subatomic particles as it retrieves information, effectively preventing others from revisiting. As the fictionalized piece from *The Economist* indicates, "History, as it turned out, was a limited resource, and each of Wei's trips

took out a chunk of the past that could never be replaced. He was riddling the past with holes like Swiss cheese" (443). But Wei also equates "the end of history" as the act of "tak[ing] narrative away." If Wei characterizes denialists as "exploiters of the dead" who colonize the past by taking control of and shaping historical narrative and the idea of history itself, time travel is a potent mode of decolonization.

However, in order to declare the end of history, or the removal of narrative, Wei relies on an alternative mode of apprehending the past that is quintessentially empirical. The act of seeing, of being able to subsequently assert "*I have seen these crimes with my own eyes*," provides "incontrovertible evidence," proof beyond doubt, eliminating the grounds for competing narratives and narrative altogether. In the same stroke, memory is relegated to an inferior position, replaced by the certainty of evidence. On the one hand, this invocation of empiricism seems to embody a variant of positivism endorsed by Representative Cotler and Ambassador Yoshida, which fulfills LaCapra's notion of the research model of historiography. On the other, Wei preserves a crucial element of narrativity that undergirds the constructivist enterprise: point of view. The past is not seen by the detached, third-person observer that anchors the research model's claim to objectivity, but is subjectively modulated; the past is seen with "my own eyes."

Two Approaches to Conceptualizing the Observer

These two models of historiography are staged and troubled through the point-of-view of the observer, who has at hand two contrasting methods of managing their relation to the visual. At the story's core is the juxtaposition and entwinement of two testimonies by two different sets of witnesses who appear to embody, on the one hand, history as empirical record masculinized through the public sphere, against, on the other, memory as individual recollection feminized and

located in the private realm. Under the heading "Excerpts from the televised hearing before the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 11Xth Congress, courtesy of C-SPAN" (406), the testimony of Lillian C. Chang-Wyeth offers the narrative's sole firsthand account of Kireno time travel. She travelled back to 1941 to observe the fate of her Chinese aunt who was captured and taken to Pingfang where she suffered sexual abuse until her death under imprisonment. Sections of Chang-Wyeth's testimony alternate alongside a pieces of a segment titled, "Interview with Shiro Yamagata, former member of Unit 731, courtesy of Nippon Broadcasting Co." (411). A former doctor in the unit, Yamagata communicates his story in two parts: first, a straightforward exposition of the human experiments conducted during his tenure at Pingfang, and second, a contemplative account of his imprisonment under Chinese Communists after Japanese surrender.

At first glance these two testimonies exemplify the gendered tension between history and memory, objectivity and subjectivity, the public and the private that characterize the dynamic between an oppressive official history and transgressive counterhistories. Chang-Wyeth, a woman, relays a story from a feminized perspective about her emotional family relationship to her aunt, another woman who suffered unspeakable sexual violence under the Japanese regime. The feminized filter, along with the gendered subject-matter, amplifies allegations of the testimony's unreliability and untrustworthiness initiated by Chang-Wyeth's participation in Evan Wei's time travel project. The process itself sustains attacks for its illusory nature, accused of spinning "stories told by emotional witnesses" who engage in "theatrical sentiments" (422) after being subjected to "'time travel' hallucinations" (433). Traveller reports of their visits to the past are painted as questionable due to the saliency of feelings, perceived irrationality, impressionistic quality of their narratives, and above all, their reliance on memory.

Cheng-Wyeth's testimony furthermore privileges the personal inextricability of visitor and historical forebears, upsetting any chance of dispassionate distance. She is presented as an overlay of her aunt, a superimposition that signals the transmission of historical trauma from one generation to the next. Fascinated by the aunt with whom she shared a birthday but whose life never overlapped with her own, Chang-Wyeth takes her aunt's name as her "courtesy name" during her *jījīlǐ* ceremony, an event marking her entrance into adulthood. The assumption of the name is not without a subtle revision however; as Chang-Wyeth explains, "My name sounds like hers but it is written with different characters, and instead of 'smooth happiness,' it means 'long remembrance'" (409). Chang-Wyeth, with the help of the Kireno process, serves a mediatory purpose to transmit her aunt's legacy, and more broadly, the repressed crimes of Unit 731.

Unlike the Chang-Wyeth's account, Yamagata's story illustrates aspects of what Lorraine Daston calls "aperspectival objectivity." Aperspectival objectivity is characterized by emotional detachment, restraint from judgment, method and measurement, empirical reliability, and self-effacement (Daston, "Objectivity" 603), all traits prized by the research model of historiography. This suppression of "individual (or occasionally group, as in the case of national styles or anthropomorphism) idiosyncracies" enables the possibility of shared knowledge (Daston, "Objectivity" 599). Specifically in its significance to science, Daston comments, "Aperspectival objectivity became a scientific value when science came to consist in large part of communications that crossed boundaries of nationality, training and skill." Its essence is "communicability, narrowing the range of genuine knowledge to coincide with that of public knowledge" ("Objectivity" 600). Fittingly, the data Unit 731 derived from human experimentation would ultimately cross boundaries to supplement the U.S. cache of biopower.

Yamagata's clinical voice delivers statements of observation, which echo his legitimacy and credibility in the public realm. On taking prisoners out into freezing conditions and spraying them down with water, he explains, "We…observed the effects of gangrene and disease as the frozen limbs died on the prisoners" (411). On forcibly infecting women with syphilis, he remarks, "It was all research that had not been done before" (414), the novelty of the science justifying its inhumanity. On gagging prisoners during live dismemberment and dissection, he reasons this was done "because the screaming interfered with discussion during the vivisections" (415). The prioritization of science over humanity drives Yamagata's sense of purpose; he insists "that the work we did on the women was very valuable and gained us many insights" (416). Moreover he notes that "[i]t was important for the army to produce good surgeons quickly, so that we could help the soldiers" (416), and aptly pairs science with imperialism to vindicate the activities of Unit 731. In this light, the presentation of Yamagata both as a man of science and an agent of the Japanese empire only serves to underscore the official authority of his assertions.

Despite representing antithetical sides of the historiographical spectrum, both Chang-Wyeth and Yamagata's stories are fundamentally shaped around principles of their opposite, a chiasmic structure that is reflected in the way both accounts appear interwoven in the text. Chang-Wyeth becomes acquainted with the existence of her aunt when her father shows her a family photograph. As the only piece of documentary evidence of its kind, the photograph also serves to corroborate the veracity of the aunt's existence. Chang-Wyeth brings the photograph to her testimony "to enter it into the record" (407), and thusly a personal family token makes inroads into the official archive. Similar to Kingston's narrator's visual contact with her mother's school portrait, which enables her to make meaning of the ghosts that populated her childhood, the encounter with the photograph here is more significantly essential to Chang-Wyeth's own

apprehension of her individual history. Because her aunt bore a large dark birthmark on her face, the visual image is the only practical means by which Chang-Wyeth is able to recognize her once she travels back to 1941 Pingfang. The personal, private journey, though mediated through Chang-Wyeth's memory and testimony, is enabled by the referential fidelity of a photograph.

Taking on a similarly inverted structure, the last interlude of Yamagata's interview shifts strikingly from observational statements to confessional purgation, a transition marked by an emotional breakdown. He recalls a moment while working at a provincial hospital under Chinese Communists when he received a patient with a broken leg, a woman whom he recognized as a former prisoner and whom he had frequently raped. Just before his breakdown, Yamagata reflects, "I didn't know her name. She was just '#4' to me, and some of the younger doctors had joked about cutting her open if we had to retreat" (419). This moment of realization, both in recognizing the woman and his own barbarity, is registered in the way "just '#4'" flickers from dehumanized specimen to subjectified patient. His inability to remember the woman's name, or the brand of her humanity, and his ability instead to recall her tag number suggests the extent to which Yamagata's capacity to look at his subjects with human eyes was crippled under the management of Unit 731. The transcription at this point is interrupted by a bracketed description: *"[Interviewer (off-camera): Mr. Yamagata, you cannot cry. You know that. We cannot show you being emotional on film. We have to stop if you cannot control yourself.]*" (419). The interviewer's emphasis on stoicism and self-control reflects attempts to restore elements of aperspectival objectivity that had characterized Yamagata's account up to that moment. Following the bracketed interruption, the tone of Yamagata's commentary shifts to one that is explicitly confessional and pivots into direct self-reflection. He admits, "I was filled with unspeakable grief. It was only then that I understood what kind of a life and career I had.

Because I wanted to be a successful doctor, I did things that no human being should do" (419). These sentences remark on Yamagata's emotions, aspirations, and sense of self – in short, introduce his subjectivity, the suppression of which is the prerequisite for the authority of a disinterested observer (Korda 192).

Transformed from a disinterested observer into a vessel of mourning, Yamagata gains retrospective insight only when the affective is allowed to dominate the impersonal.

Both Chang-Wyeth's and Yamagata's accounts of Unit 731 rely on sensible, mainly visual, apprehension of their respective experiences. Chang-Wyeth, through her role as time traveler, witnesses the fate of her aunt firsthand. Wrapping up her testimony, she says, "I have seen what happened with my own eyes. And I will speak about what happened, speak out against the denialist. I will tell my story as often as I can" (420). Her form of empiricism is one that reiterates Evan Wei's version of a socially-responsible historiography. Repeating the phrase "with my own eyes," Chang-Wyeth emphasizes both the positionality underpinning the historical enterprise and its reliance on empirical evidence. Yamagata, through his role as army doctor, exemplifies a form of observation that presumes the absence of the observer. Purportedly objective and detached, the scientific positivism espoused by Yamagata's occupation cannot hold against the intrinsic situatedness of his data. Furthermore, the two testimonies demonstrate the reciprocal nature of collective history and individual memory, thus demonstrating the inadequacy of apprehension by either the research model or the constructivist approach.

Race and Historical Consciousness

Although the "The Man Who Ended History" fails to reach an executive resolution regarding the ambivalent dependence of differential historiographies on the visual, what is more

striking than the debate itself is the way the narrative fleshes out the personal conditions that led to the emergence of the debate. The story-as-documentary can be considered not just an examination of a controversial time travel method that perturbed the international conscience around past traumas, but also an account of the relationship between its creators. Unlike the "raceless" characters that populate Chiang's fictional worlds, Evan and Akemi are consistently introduced by way of their respective ethno-national identities in addition to their professional titles. Consequently, the narrative's engine of historical consciousness, not matter how unstable, centers on and is driven by the "young Chinese-American specialist on Heian Japan" and the "Japanese-American experimental physicist" (441). In this sense, their project is a racialized affair; one that is premised on the undoing of established categories: the male humanist paired with the female scientist, a Japanese American and a Chinese American recovering the violent traces of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

This relationship is figured through the trope of coming to consciousness, and while the tension between Evan's Chinese and Akemi's Japanese filiations is acknowledged, their Asian heterogeneity, filtered through American racialization, leads to self-discovery rather than conflict. The fact that both had immigrated to the U.S. as young children paved empathic connection based on "the meaning of growing up as outsiders trying hard to become Americans" (400). On the process of becoming American as a process of assimilation, Akemi criticizes, "Ever since I became an American, people have told me that America is about leaving your past behind. I've never understood that. You can no more leave behind your past than you can leave behind your skin" (446). Much like the ideologies undergirding the calliagnosia debate in "Liking What You See," Akemi's description of an amnesiac America marks the space and attitude that is future oriented, which depends on the erasure of the past to fulfill this prospective

bearing. Akemi responds that skin, the color of which is commonly considered to be a marker of race, is tied inextricably to one's awareness of their personal history, both of which are essential to one's understanding of their identity. Accordingly, historical consciousness, for Akemi and Evan, is indispensably racialized. Of Evan's role in inspiring this consciousness in her, Akemi says, "[H]e gave me an interest in Japan that I never had…As a teenager, I rebelled by refusing to do anything that seemed 'Japanese,' including speaking Japanese at home" (401). This stimulation of interest subsequently bolstered Akemi's sense of self worth: "Evan made me proud to be Japanese, and so he made me love myself. That was how I knew I was really in love with him" (403). With Evan's help, Akemi is able to recast her relationship to Japaneseness – a link that is necessarily contingent on historical understanding – from one of contempt to one of gratification.

Evan's own deepening of historical consciousness is prompted by a film that questions the divide between fiction and nonfiction. During one of their early dates, Evan and Akemi go to the movies and randomly watch Andrey Iskanov's *Philosophy of a Knife*, a horror film based on Unit 731. Evan is filled with dismay not for ruining a romantic night out, but for his ignorance surrounding Japanese war crimes. Despite being told by his friends, "It's just a film…fiction" (405), Akemi recalls that "in that moment, history as he understood it ended for Evan. The distance he had once maintained, the abstractions of history at a grand scale, which had so delighted him before, lost meaning to him in the bloody scenes on the screen" (406). Shortly after this realization, the narrative reveals that the couple started to brainstorm the possibilities of time travel through Bohm-Kirino particles.

Evan's awakening is undoubtedly significant for leading to the development of time travel and the *raison d'être* of the entire story, but I am more interested in the way in which this

awakening comes about. Unlike Chang-Wyeth's and Yamagata's visual apprehension of former events as witnesses, Evan visual apprehension arrives through contact with an ostensibly fictional film, which shifts his understanding of how to view the past. On the one hand, *The Philosophy of a Knife* exposes Evan to the existence of Unit 731 and unveils his ignorance, but on the other, Akemi identifies as the larger consequence of the film the destabilization of Evan's frameworks of understanding such events in the past. He was not longer able to find secure grounding in the legibility of "the abstractions of history at a grand scale" and was forced, as a consequence, to develop an alternative means of framing the past. Although not as dramatic, the short story itself strives to precipitate a similar displacement in its readers. Not merely content to expose readers to the doings of Unit 731, which would materialize through a denotative reading, "The Man Who Ended History" strives to discharge the mediatory layers that exist in between the reader and the past. Similar to "Liking What You See," the debate under examination – between two different attitudes toward history – in Liu's story fails to reach a resolution by the narrative's end, but the readers are assigned the task of fabricating legibility for themselves by questioning *how* they view history.

By examining the works of two authors, one who shuns associations with race and the other who welcomes such associations, this chapter aimed to demonstrate how both stories might be considered examples of Asian American literature given their respective entanglements with questions of the visual. We can access these questions most effectively by reading the texts as works of fiction. In these two cases, fictionality derived from the contradictory overlay of the literalization of poetic figures of speech characteristic of science fiction and the denotative literalism associated with the documentary form invoked by the stories' subtitles. Though both

“Liking What You See” and “The Man Who Ended History” make use of the documentary subtitle in a way that ironizes the idea of the “literal,” what the two stories preserve in traditional understandings of documentary is the mode’s pedagogical orientation. But rather than inculcate in the reader matters of substantial constitution, both stories work to invoke in the reader awareness of their own interpretive practices. In following, the production of legibility and meaning in face of certain inscrutabilities becomes the reader’s task to pursue.

Conclusion

Literature, as Toni Morrison points out in *Playing in the Dark*, has the representational capacity to render traceable the "subjective nature of ascribing value and meaning to color" (49), one way to approach the operation of race. This idea of the "meaning of color" pithily foregrounds the arbitrary accumulation of abstractions under what is cast as embodied evidence. Morrison more specifically delineates this contingent link as an "alliance between visually rendered ideas and linguistic utterances" (49), placing acute emphasis on the interaction between visual and the linguistic representation. Exceeding the bounds of anthropomorphism and permeating systems and epistemologies, race is not "merely an object to be represented visually or verbally" (Mitchell, *Seeing* 13). The logic of race, especially in its visual orientation, manifests in perceptible components that structure a literary text's formal architecture.

This dissertation has shown that the contours of what might comprise an Asian American literary archive can be drawn by the archive's formal negotiation with aspects of visuality. This engagement with the visual is ambivalent and takes after the critical ambivalences that have framed applications of schemas of the visible and the visual in Asian American Studies' apprehension of Asian racialization in the social, political, and cultural domains. On the one hand, Asian American literature eschews the one-to-one correspondences that race normalizes between visible surfaces and interior depths. On the other hand, the literature itself relies on the visual formation of race in order to lend legibility to its own program.

Sui Sin Far's writings mark the literary emergence of this representational ambivalence in the way the texts critique and redeploy visualist epistemologies underpinning anthropological discourse in portraying Chinese Americans. But these questions concerning the visual percolate

into the problematics of self-representation. Maxine Hong Kingston's two novels manifest this ambivalence in the way *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* stage their narrator's coming-to-being as the negotiation between invisible ghostly and visible rational empiricisms. The young protagonist and adult narrator occupy discrete positions and possess divergent modes of seeing. The science fiction short stories of Ted Chiang and Ken Liu displace questions of this ambivalence onto the reader. Through the literary frame of the documentary, the stories ask readers to interrogate the process by which visible data turns into evidence through the positionality of the observer.

In order to access these literary texts' engagements with Asian American representation as a specifically visual problematic, I have depended heavily on Dorrit Cohn's theorizations of the distinctiveness of fiction. Observable representational phenomena, including but not limited to the story-discourse disjunction, narrative focalization, and separation between narrator and author, all serve the purpose to not only highlight the exclusivity of fictional discourse but also to pinpoint aspects of what makes a literary text specifically literary. Though this project has limited its attention to works of prose fiction, similar approaches can be and have been taken to undertake the analysis of the explicitly literary dimensions of Asian American poetry.

Attention to texts that focuses on the ways they exhibit race in exclusively literary ways can lend the notion of catachresis, a concept now integral to the understanding of Asian America, a particularizing rather than universalizing force. Koshy's initial comparison of Asian America to catachresis and Tsou's adaption of the trope to the literature, relies on catachresis's impropriety, or the deliberate misuse of a word. In pressing the indispensability of impropriety, this conceptualization of the trope relies on a formerly proper use of the word, a preexisting condition which can then be transgressed through catachresis. Reliance on this binary of proper-

improper reproduces expectations of "Asian American," especially of Asian American literature, to fulfill a misguided referential function, which can only result in 1) its inadequacy when contained to a sociological framework or 2) its indiscriminate surplus when sticking to a deconstructive framework.

By reconceptualizing catachresis through presence rather than inadequacy, I have attempted to reroute considerations of the trope as a force that marks and affords form where previously there was none. As a neologistic catachresis, "Asian American" marks and lends legibility to historical experiences and subjects that were formerly witnessed and felt but remained inarticulable. The ambivalence of the visual that I have traced throughout this project constitutes just one specific variation of the relationship between meaning and color (Morrison 49), a variation that is particularly Asian American.

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