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Voicing Asia:
Post-Cold War Novels, Geopolitics, and Human Rights

By
Sunny Xiang

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy
in
Department of English
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of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Colleen Lye, Chair
Professor Dorothy Hale
Professor Sau-ling Wong

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ABSTRACT

Voicing Asia: Post-Cold War Novels, Geopolitics, and Human Rights

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in English

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This dissertation explores how novels and geopolitics differently represent a voice as “Asian.” By incorporating cases studies of how U.S. policy “voiced” culturally representative anti-communist voices, it highlights the historical and formal specificity of post-Cold War Asian *novelistic* voices. Each chapter reads a first-person post-Cold War narrator in relation to the Western bloc’s geopolitical management of Asia’s anti-communist representativeness during the Cold War. This geopolitical project depended on a “native informant” model, which promoted the *author’s* racial identity and ideological disposition as the primary determinants of the *narrator’s* reliability. *Voicing Asia* considers the narrative technique of unreliability with respect to human rights flashpoints within U.S.-Asian geopolitics. Paired with the “voices” of puppet presidents, POWs, and cultural diplomats, the post-Cold War narrative voices in my study offer a critical response to the geopolitical production of Asia’s Cold War allegiances *and* a formal manifestation of the contradictions within a post-Cold War order. Specifically, these voices are all unreliable in ways that elicit a historically specific form of Oriental inscrutability. In the novels of Chang-rae Lee, Kazuo Ishiguro, Ha Jin, Wei Hui, and Mian Mian, unreliability keys to ethnic betrayal, excessive patriotism, calculated disinterestedness, and uninhibited consumerism. These forms of unreliability bear out an especially insidious and morally inhumane form of capitalist modernization that is specific to post-Cold War Asian states.

I argue that the formal features of first-person “Asian” narration index but also disrupt this racial economy of Human Rights Discourse. In the novels of Lee and Ishiguro, narrative unreliability doubles as a racial trope and a literary technique, eliciting both an extraordinarily inscrutable “Asian” and a normatively fallible “human.” In the other novels I explore, unreliability is much less at the narrative surface. For Jin, Mian Mian, and Wei Hui, unreliability results from the recruitment of Chinese literature for the contradictory ends of globalization (which finds its most insidious manifestation in Pacific Rim economies) and human rights (which takes Asian development as paradigmatic of modernity’s inhuman conditions). I contend that novelistic evocations of “Asian voice” register, *without being irreducible to*, Asia’s geopolitical status. Most strikingly, these novelistic voices, precisely at their most unreliable moments, can produce the narrative effect of an “Asian human.” I show that locating and hearing an “Asian human” voice requires first, a more nuanced account of the formal relation between Asian narrators and Asian authors and second, a less thematically oriented approach to locating in post-Cold War literature transnationalism, globalism, cosmopolitanism, and other variations

of what Eric Hayot calls “world-oriented discourse.” This “Asian human” challenges the geopolitical contradiction between the *homo economicus* of Pacific Rim Discourse and the Western liberal subject of Human Rights Discourse. As a distinctly *literary* voice, it also undoes the perceived correspondence between the subject of the literary humanities and that of human rights. The historical specificity of a post-Cold War historical juncture, in which Asian capitalist modernity represents the limit of humanity, helps us register the exceptionality of an inscrutable yet fallible, Asian *and* human voice that can be heard *only* within the domain of literature.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	xxiii
I. Chapter 1: The Korean Voice of American Empire: The Democratic Spokesman and the Model Minority Narrator	1
II. Chapter 2: A Long View of History: America’s <i>Kabuki</i> Theater and Ishiguro’s <i>An Artist in the Floating World</i>	24
III. Chapter 3: The Human Rights and Human Limits of Ha Jin’s “Documentary” Narrator in <i>War Trash</i>	51
Conclusion.....	71

For my grandparents,

向南 and 王意

Introduction

“The economic vitality and interdependence now forming in the region have given Asia confidence. The days when the United State sneezed and Asia caught cold are over.”¹

--- Yoichi Funabashi

Voicing Asia examines the effects of “voices” that are geopolitically produced and novelistically rendered as “Asian.” In its early stages, this project was energized by scholars who perceived that the longevity of Asian American studies’ political desires, tided over from its hard-fought coalitional struggle for a Third World university, has led to politically prescriptive readings of literature. In particular, it was emboldened by Colleen Lye’s conjecture that “the formalist desires of Asian American literary criticism today are also deeply at heart historicist desires.”² In treating “Asian voice” as both a formal device serving novelistic ends and a historical index of Asia’s shifting geopolitical status, I have found myself at a knottier disciplinary configuration, one that takes “Asian/American” studies as a jumping point for dialoguing with human rights studies, geopolitics, world literature formations, narrative ethics, and Asian studies. David Palumbo-Liu coined the term “Asian/American” to reference “historical occasions of real contact between and interpenetrations of Asia and America.”³ I comprehend Palumbo-Liu’s formulation on the narrower terms of U.S.-Asian foreign relations in the post-1945 era. This geopolitical context is rarely represented in any explicit way in the Asian-authored novels I examine, all of which were published between 1986 and 2005. But the specter or realization of Asian modernity in the Pacific Century, as the paradoxical byproduct of U.S. containment policy in Asia during the Cold War American Century, serves as the historical framework through which the narrative voices in these “post-Cold War” novels are designated and apprehended as “Asian.”

“Voice” has been a politically efficacious metaphor, not only for Asian American studies but for wide-ranging causes and movements. From Audre Lorde’s call for the “transformation of silence into language and action” to Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign pitch that “one voice can change a room, . . . a city, . . . a state, . . . a nation, and . . . the world,” voice has been conceptualized as the potential for or achievement of radical political change.⁴ While politically-interested readers of Asian/American literary voice have endowed it with transformative clout, from a strictly formalist perspective, voice does not “belong” to the narrator as a person but functions as one component of the narrative infrastructure.⁵ For narratologist Girard Genette, voice is a grammatical “mode of action” that cannot be conscripted for the political transforwmation of any individual or collective. Rather, the “action” of narrative voice is merely “the expansion of a verb,” the connecting of “both *narrating* and *narrative* and *narrating* and

¹ Funabashi, Yoichi, “The Asianization of Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (Nov.Dec. 1993): 78.

² Lye, “Racial Form.” *Representations* 104 (Fall 2008): 92.

³ Palumbo Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Palo Alto, C.A.: Stanford U P, 1999), 2.

⁴ Lorde, “Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, 40-52 (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1984); Obama, Speech at Manassas, Prince William County, Virginia, November 3, 2008, accessed June 19, 2014, <http://obamaspeeches.com/E-Barack-Obama-Speech-Manassas-Virgina-Last-Rally-2008-Election.htm>.

⁵ My thinking on narrative voice and political voice is influenced by Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1992).

story.”⁶ This “action” brings into existence a narrated world that is subtended by voice and exists only through voice. On these terms, any conception of “world” and “voice” would be perforce textual in nature. Hence, Jonathan Culler’s frustration in 1984: writing against the burgeoning of feminist scholarship, Culler admonishes the tendency to “explain textual details by relating them to qualities of persons.”⁷ Limiting the modality of “voice” to “[hypotheses],” “projected or created speakers,” and “narrative personae,” Culler defends the Genettian distinction between “voice” and “person,” with the former being preferred because its “psychological connotations are a little less pronounced.”⁸ For Culler, “refractory modern fictions” are a particular enticement for anthropomorphic reading. It is in these reading scenarios, he writes, that readers tend to misattribute “bizarre formulations and juxtapositions,” which are properly textual properties, to “an obsessive, neurotic, or otherwise deranged narrator.”⁹ Culler’s diatribe anticipates how narrative unreliability would become a flashpoint for debating the “naturalization” of narrative; this term, coined by Culler and reappropriated by Monika Fludernik, refers to the process by which readers use the most “bizarre” textual qualities to adduce the *anthropos* of “voice.”¹⁰

For the narrative voices in *Voicing Asia*, unreliability is indeed textual nature. But unreliability is also informed by the racial economy of the extra-textual world and thus performs a specific characterizing function: it marks the narrating voice as “Asian.” Unreliability, in this scheme, offers a narrative correlate to the long-running racial trope of Oriental inscrutability; it codes “Asian” through *rhetorical* rather than *biological* indices. These rhetorical indices evoke excessive decorousness in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), machine-like objectivity in Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker* (1995), political neutrality in Ha Jin’s *War Trash* (2005), and excruciating boredom in Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* (2001) and Mian Mian’s *Candy* (2003). For the narrators of these novels, measures of reliability are conditioned by their existence within a post-Cold War order that defines itself in contradistinction to the Cold War. To elucidate and investigate this distinction, my readings of post-Cold War Asian Anglophone novels incorporate a documentary archive of U.S. Cold War intervention in Asia. Each chapter probes a distinct component of U.S.-Asian Cold War relations – from “puppet” politicians to POW repatriations to *kabuki* theater diplomacy.¹¹ I am specifically concerned with the U.S. government’s conscription of Asian “voice” during this period to curry favor from a newly institutionalized United Nations and to morally validate a U.S. nationalist project of communist

⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell U P, 1983), 31-32, emphasis his.

⁷ Culler, “Problems in the Theory of Fiction.” *Diacritics* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 5.

⁸ Culler, “Problems,” 4, 10; Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 31.

⁹ Culler, “Problems,” 10.

¹⁰ In *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1975), Culler defines “naturalization” as an interpretive process in which “the strange or deviant is brought within a discursive order and thus made to seem natural” (137). For Monika Fludernik’s “narrativization” refers to a interpretive strategy through which readers “attempt to re-cognize what they find in the text in terms of the natural telling or experiencing or viewing parameters.” Since in her model, human experientiality make up these parameters, “there can . . . be narratives without plots, but there cannot be any narratives without a human (anthropomorphic) experiencer of some sort at some narrative level. See Fludernik, *Towards A ‘Natural’ Narratology* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 9, 25.

¹¹ As critics such as Christina Klein, Mary Dudziak, and Penny M. Von Eschen have shown, U.S. Cold War diplomacy propagated cultural narratives of racial justice and postcolonial nation-building through the Manichean template of communism versus democracy. See Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2003); Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 2000); Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anti-colonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1997).

containment. An ideologically overdetermined ideal for self-representation, especially among Third World populations at home and abroad, serves as the point of contrast for the reliability of the post-Cold War Asian narrators in *Voicing Asia*. For example, Jin's insistently neutral Korean War memoirist in *War Trash* aims to redeem the ideologically besieged voices of Korean War POWs that had been instrumentalized for state needs. The "model minority" narrator of Lee's *Native Speaker* likens himself to a "sentient machine of transcription" (203), a rhetorical departure from the rousing anti-communist oratories of Cold War South Korean "puppet president" Syngman Rhee.

My stake in "voice" inherits from Raymond Williams and Roberto Schwarz a deep-seated belief in the sociality of literary form. In taking unreliable narration as a crucible for exploring the relation between narrative device and racial typology, I build methodologically on Schwarz's positing of narrative unreliability – which he calls "form" – as "a rule for the composition of the narrative" and as "the stylization of a kind of conduct characteristic of the Brazilian ruling class."¹² Schwarz's study represents a singularly social and historical account of narrative unreliability. By contrast, narratologists have largely explained this technique through rigorous taxonomies of textual qualities, persons, and dispositions, but at the exclusion of historical context, social relations, and processes of production and reception.¹³ As a result, unreliability in narrative has yet to be treated as a *racializing* technique.¹⁴ The "correspondence between narrative behavior and the portrayal of society" that Schwarz diagnoses illustrates one way that material processes and social formations function as an "internal shaping impulse" for literary forms, which in turn perform an "active shaping" on these processes and formations.¹⁵

Given my own historical and generic interests, an especially pertinent study of literature's relation to social formations is Joseph Slaughter's *Human Rights, Inc.* Slaughter illuminates the ideological and formal homologies between *Bildungsroman* novel and human rights law, which "[manifest] in a common vocabulary and transitive grammar of human personality development, which are themselves related strains of a more general, hegemonic discourse of development."¹⁶ Insofar as the consolidation of international human rights and the promotion of well-rounded characters occurred amidst a raging Cold War, Slaughter's meditation on the historical origins and contemporary salience of post-World War II human rights engages the same historical

¹² Schwarz, *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*, trans. John Gledson (Durham, N.C.: Duke U P, 1990), 7.

¹³ The sociality of novelistic form, however, has been trenchantly discussed in Dorothy J. Hale, *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998). Hale writes that in the "social formalist tradition, sociality in the novel is . . . barely defined thematically . . . Instead, by narrowly characterizing the social as the experiential interaction between human subjects, social formalists treat this relationality as a formal property of the novel" (14).

¹⁴ For example, Seymour Chatman catalogues characterological traits that suggest unreliability in *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell U P, 1978). William Riggan studies four typologies of unreliable narrators in *Picaros, Madmen, Naifs, and Clowns: The Unreliable Narrator* (Norman, O.K.: U of Oklahoma P, 1981). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan catalogues textual qualities that may indicate unreliability in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983). James Phelan enumerates the ways that audiences relate to forms of narrative unreliability in *Living to Tell About It* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell U P, 2005).

¹⁵ Schwarz, *Master*, 115; Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York, Oxford U P, 1997), 187.

¹⁶ Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham U P, 2007), 4. Another methodological precursor to my study is Patricia Chu's *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke U P, 2000). Chu argues: "Because culture – specifically the *bildungsroman* – is a site for imaginatively transforming readers and protagonists into national subjects by erasing or containing their particular differences, Asian American literature reinscribes those differences in an alternative version of the genre, one in which authorship signifies not only the capacity to speak but the belief that speech – or literary representation – is also a claiming of political and social agency" (3).

framework as I do. My departure from Slaughter is two-fold. First, I insist that novelistic figurations of Asian voice and post-1945 Asian development are crucial to comprehending the epochal distinctions between Cold War and post-Cold War human rights. Second, in exploring how novels and geopolitics differently represent a voice as “Asian,” I argue for a shifting and at times *non-homologous* relation between Human Rights Discourse and post-Cold War novels. In examining the uneven formal effects of *unreliable* Asian narrative voices, I show how unreliability can elicit both a historically specific manifestation of Oriental inscrutability and a novelistically specific instantiation of human fallibility. The historical specificity of a post-Cold War historical juncture, in which Asian capitalist modernity represents the limit of humanity, helps us register the exceptionality of an inscrutable yet fallible, Asian *and* human voice that can be heard *only* within the domain of literature.

My periodization of “post-Cold War” draws on geopolitical triangulations of “Asian,” “human,” and “global,” which enfigure contradistinct but mutually contingent modes of worldedness. By “global,” I mean specifically the social totality instantiated by economic globalization, a phenomenon that has been alternately hailed and denounced as the distinctive feature of the historical present. By “Asian,” I am referring to the specter of an Asian capitalist modernity that has been deemed both distinct from and derivative of its Western precursor; more significant for my purposes, this Asian modernity has been increasingly viewed in the West as paradigmatic of and an intensification of global capitalism’s vicissitudes, thus making Pacific Rim Discourse an important variation of what Eric Hayot calls “world-oriented discourse.”¹⁷ By “human,” I am primarily concerned with the subject of Human Rights Discourse; for scholars such as Slaughter, Martha Nussbaum, Shoshana Felman, Sidonie Smith, Kay Schaffer, and Lynn Hunt this prodigy of Western Enlightenment inhabits both law and literature and represents the utopian aim of individual self-determination on a universal scale.¹⁸

These three modes of worldedness draw our attention to the relations between three distinctly post-Cold War discourses: human rights, global capitalism, and Pacific Rim modernities. I say that these discourses are *distinctly* post-Cold War in that the apparently opposed phenomena they describe are routinely conscripted to certify the exceptionality of our historical present. My thinking on human rights and global capitalism is much indebted to Pheng Cheah, who discusses how these phenomena depend on the other for maximal global purchase. In *Inhuman Conditions*, Cheah conceives of human rights through the inhuman, a term that he sees as synonymous with “*techne*.” Cheah writes, “*techne* can be inimical to the achievement of freedom because, taken to its extreme, a technical attitude toward other human beings reduces them to objects for instrumental use This proscription of instrumentality informs the fundamental axiom of human rights discourse, namely, that the human being, who is capable of rationality, is free and possesses dignity, and therefore is the bearer of inviolable rights.” In a post-Cold War era, the most pervasive exhibition of the inhuman – the most finite limit of individual will and the most systematic instrumentalization of individual persons – is globalization. Protectors of human dignity in this “now globalized system of means and ends”

¹⁷ In *On Literary Worlds* (New York: Oxford U P, 2012), Hayot supposes that “future scholars will read the conjunction between the era of ‘globalization’ and the rise of world-systems theory as the expression of a more general world-oriented discourse whose social form is one prominent reification of the present” (38).

¹⁸ Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Presidents & Fellows of Harvard College, 1997); Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2002); Sidonie Smith and Kay Schaffer, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); and Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

nominate a now universal human rights “to *humanize* the field of instrumentality.”¹⁹ Human rights, however, is also globalization’s inevitable corollary and serves as its moral antidote. If humanity is a “product-effect” of the inhuman, then globalization for Cheah establishes “the inhuman conditions of humanity.”²⁰

One site for examining the material inextricability of human rights and globalization is non-governmental organizations and political and nonprofit groups. These organizations have arguably been the most effective advocates for human rights claimants, yet the humanity they work to retrieve remains necessarily imbricated within global relations and dependent on global circuits.²¹ Since my larger stake is in how Asian capitalist modernity has negotiated the *moral* antinomy between international human rights and global capitalism, let me turn to China for less salutary examples of the *geopolitical* intimacy between “human” and “global” as axioms of worldedness. One line of critique chastises China for manipulating its stock of human rights dissidents by releasing “big names” to “[earn] diplomatic credit.”²² Costas Douzinas considers the economic concerns underlying this diplomatic tactic: “If ideological point-scoring is the symbolic prize behind human rights controversies, trade and market-penetration is often the real stake China has been particularly adept in using trade deals to avoid international opprobrium.”²³ The other side of such critiques charges Western leaders for turning a blind eye to China’s human rights violations in order to safeguard trade relations. Rey Chow bids us “view the West and China as collaborative partners in an ongoing series of biopolitical transactions in global late capitalism, transaction whereby human rights, or, more precisely, humans as such, are the commodity par excellence.”²⁴ Especially key to my study are characterizations of Asian capitalist modernity as an explicit threat to humanity. A 2006 documentary on Tank Man, for instance, treats Deng Xiaoping’s installation of Special Economic Zones in 1992 as the logical corollary to the Tiananmen protests of 1989. Economic reform, Robin Munro speculates, was designed to “buy the Communist Party a new lease on life . . . the deal is there must be no challenge to one-party rule.”²⁵

These portrayals of China bring to bear a broader anxiety about how Asia, as an ascendant global force and new capitalist hegemony, constitutes the paradigmatically “inhuman.” My thinking here builds on scholars who have shown how American perceptions of Asia have been historically routed through economic tropes. Social scientific studies on the burgeoning transnational class of Asian “flexible citizens” and on Asian entrepreneurial enclaves within the United States have afforded an empirical account of Asian economic modernization – a phenomenon that typically dates to 1965 in an American framework and to 1945 in an Asian

¹⁹ Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge, M.A. Harvard U P, 2006), 4, 5, emphasis his.

²⁰ Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions*, 10. Upendra Baxi’s *The Future of Human Rights* (2002; repr., Delhi: Oxford U P, 2006) offers a similar formulation: “the *moral ought* stands derived from an *inhuman is*” (28, emphasis hers).

²¹ For example, Cheah describes NGOs as the “third voice” in the debate between Western and Eastern states about “Asian values.” See the chapter entitled “Posit(ion)ing Human Rights” in *Inhuman Conditions*.

²² John Gittings, “The price of dissent,” *The Guardian*, May 31, 1999, accessed June 10, 2104, <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/1999/may/31/features11.g2>.

²³ Douzinas, *The End of Human Rights: Critical Legal Thought at the Turn of the Century* (Portland, O.R.: Hart Publishing, 2000), 126.

²⁴ Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia U P, 2002), 20.

²⁵ Tank Man was the anonymous and still missing individual who spectacularly attempted to stop a seemingly endless train of approaching tanks. The transcript of the 2006 documentary, written, produced, and directed by Antony Thomas, is available online at “Transcript: *The Tank Man*,” *PBS Frontline*, April 11, 2006, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tankman/etc/transcript.html>.

framework.²⁶ Among both social science and humanities scholars, Asian economic development has formed the bedrock for discussions of the “model minority” in the context of U.S. racial politics, the “Pacific Rim” and the “Asia-Pacific” in the context of Asian regional development, and “Asian values” in the context of human rights.²⁷ Two influential scholars for me have been Christine So and Colleen Lye. So writes that in the second half of the 20th-century, Asians have been portrayed as “representations of capital that has overrun its boundaries.” Following this trend to its logical extreme, So notes that the “threat of Asian capital and Asians *as* capital seems to have morphed in the last decade into an overall anxiety about global capital in general.” Lye claims that the “most salient feature” of Asiatic racial form is “the trope of economic efficiency” and that the Asiatic “metaphorizes the totality of capitalist modernity.”²⁸

Lee’s model minority narrator, Ishiguro’s empathy-deficient propaganda painter, and Jin’s post-Tiananmen memoirist offer different configurations of “Asian,” “global,” and “human” through their evocation of historically-situated modes of narrative unreliability. These modes can be summed up as variations of narrative restraint and political disinvestment—traits that, I believe, reflect the distinctiveness of a “post-Cold War” moment. The unreliable Asian narrators in this study thus represent a critical response to the geopolitical production of Asia’s Cold War allegiances *and* a formal manifestation of the contradictions within a post-Cold War order. Of foremost concern to is the contradiction between the moral discourse of human rights and the economic discourse of global capitalism, which, for my purposes, informs the more specific standoff between the alleged political barbarism and seeming economic modernity of Asian states. On the one hand, the Asian narrator who seems to lack a political agenda caters to

²⁶ The 1965 Immigration Act led to the burgeoning of Asian, African, and Middle Eastern populations in the United States. Within the Asian American community, it helped establish a professional class of workers (e.g. engineers) that counterposed the previous dominance of a working-class landscape (e.g. restaurant and laundry operators). The very possibility of white-collar Asian professionals, however, lies with U.S. implementation of economic programs to spur development in Asia following the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945. On flexible citizens, see Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, N.C.: Duke U P, 1999). For enclave-specific accounts, see Ivan Light and Edna Bonacich, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Koreans in Los Angeles, 1965-1982* (Berkeley, C.A.: U of California P, 1991) and Shenglin Chang, *The Global Silicon Valley Home: Lives and Landscapes within Taiwanese American Trans-Pacific Culture* (Palo Alto, C.A.: Stanford U P, 2006).

²⁷ For accounts of the model minority, see Part III entitled “Modeling the Nation” in Palumbo-Liu’s *Asian/American*; chapters 5 and 6 in Lee’s *Orientalism*; William Petersen’s coinage of the term in “Success Story, Japanese American Style,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 1966; and Anne Cheng’s *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford U P, 2001). Key anthologies on the Pacific Rim include Arif Dirlik, ed., *What is in a Rim: Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, (Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press, 1993) and Rob Wilson and Arif Dirlik, eds., *Asia/Pacific as a Space of Cultural Production* (Durham, N.C.: Duke U P, 1995). For critical accounts of “Asian Values,” see Amartya Sen, “Human Rights and Asian Values,” *The New Republic* (July 14 & 21, 1997): 33-40; Anthony J. Langlois, *The Politics of Justice and Human Rights: Southeast Asia and Universalist Theory* (New York, Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2001); and Michael Ignatieff, “The Attack on Human Rights,” *Foreign Affairs* 80 no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 2001): 102-116. For a defense of “Asian values,” see Weiming Tu, *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); for a sympathetic account of “Asian values,” see William Theodore De Bary, *Asian Values and Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1998).

²⁸ So, *Economic Citizens: A Narrative of Asian American Visibility* (Philadelphia: Temple U P, 2007), 11, 13; Lye’s *America’s Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), 5, 71. See also Laura Kang, “The Uses of Asianization: Figuring Crises, 1997-98 and 2007-?” *American Quarterly* 64 no. 3 (September 2012): 411-436. For Kang, turn-of-the-21st-century financial crises find their racial resolution in and attribute historical causality to the figure of Asian-ness. Another historically-minded study of Asian American stereotypes is Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple U P, 1999).

the supposedly more moral and more universal tenets of post-Cold War Human Rights Discourse. On the other hand, Lee's self-effacing citizen-spy, Jin's ideologically impenetrable POW, Ishiguro's exquisitely composed painter, and Wei Hui's mundanely hysterical celebrity-author perhaps remind one of the muddled, ambiguous "ugly feelings" that Sianne Ngai deems specific to late capitalism, a routinization of "capitalism's classic affects of disaffection" into humdrum impassivity.²⁹ The family resemblance between the formal indicators of racially-inflected inscrutability and those of capitalism-induced disaffection is of paramount diagnostic significance. Not only does this ambiguity account for a post-Cold War iteration of unreliable Asian narration, but it also raises questions about what kind of work literary representation contributes to or performs on historically and racially inflected narrative tone. Put differently, how does an unreliable Asian voice sound in a *literary* world and to what effects?

As I have indicated thus far, one way that *Voicing Asia* conceives of a literary world is through its social relationships and historical conditions of possibility. It also asks how the interrelated "worlds" conveyed by Pacific Rim modernity, international human rights, and economic globalization become problematized by the literary world that co-belongs with narrative voice. I argue that the flat, bored, repetitive, restrained narrative voices assembled here signify "Asian," "human," and "global" in ways that disclose yet destabilize the geopolitical coding of these categories. Most strikingly, these voices, precisely at their most unreliable and most inscrutable moments, can produce the narrative effect of an "Asian human." Taken together, the narrators in this study exhibit how a Pacific Century discourse of human rights informs the racialized coding of unreliability as ethnic betrayal, excessive patriotism, calculated disinterestedness, and uninhibited consumerism. This coding is racialized, in other words, because unreliability keys to an especially insidious and morally inhumane form of capitalist modernization. Yet the formal features of first-person Asian narration can also disrupt this racial economy of human rights. In the cases of Lee and Ishiguro, narrative unreliability doubles as a racial trope and a literary technique, producing the contradictory effects of "Asian" and "human." For Jin, Mian Mian, and Wei Hui, unreliability results from the recruitment of Chinese literature for the contradictory ends of human rights and globalization.

In my reading of these authors, I contend that novelistic evocations of "Asian voice" register, *without being irreducible to*, Asia's geopolitical status. This argument reflects a critical stake in the nonhomologous relation between literary form and racial form and, correspondingly, between novelistic relations and geopolitical relations. Each chapter of *Voicing Asia* considers the technique of unreliability in relation to flashpoints for human rights within U.S.-Asian geopolitics. In Lee's *Native Speaker*, the unreliability of Henry Park, at the level of plot, results from his betrayal of John Kwang, a Korean American councilman guilty of illegal campaign financing; this failure of Korean solidarity through ethnic betrayal allegorizes the political unreliability of "puppet president" Syngman Rhee in Cold War South Korea. At the level of narrative form, Park's unreliability lies in the vacillations between the narrative methodology of a professional spy and the "lyrical modes" of a repentant narrator. His rhetoric of extremity simultaneously conveys the multiple deceptions of an overly strenuous Asian confessor and the multiple dimensions of an overly fallible humanlike speaker. Like Lee, Ishiguro is known for employing unreliability as a narrative technique. Where Lee's canon poses narrative unreliability

²⁹ Ngai describes this disaffection (fear, insecurity) as the redirection of "social conflict and political antagonism" toward "the wage system" and the consequent reconfiguration of these politicized affects into "professional ideals" (flexibility, adaptability). These affects thus become "very lubricants of the economic system which they originally came into being to oppose." See Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2005), 4.

as the formal signature of a model minority narrator, Ishiguro's novels feature a racially diverse cast of narrators who all happen to be unreliable. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, a novel set in the immediate post-World War II period, Ishiguro's authorial trademark of narrative unreliability appears linked to the residual imperial desires of an elderly Japanese painter. Through the narrator Masuji Ono's recollections delivered from an elevated viewpoint, the novel establishes distance as the seeming condition of historical knowledge and objective narration. Ono's attempts at distancing implicitly cast empathy deficiency as concomitant with "Asian values," the catchphrase that in 1990s Human Rights Discourse came to euphemize the authoritarian patriotism of economically ascendant Asian states. In my reading, Ono's physical remoteness and affective detachment produce a superficially reliable narrative that is in effect incongruous and repetitious. I see this form of unreliability as evoking both the Japanese patriot's morally reprehensible tendency to privilege national loyalties over personal ones and the itinerant cosmopolitanite's presentist reconstruction of a distant past.

Through the technique of narrative unreliability, Lee and Ishiguro introduce the formal simultaneity of "Asian" and "human." I believe that we can best appreciate this formal evocation of the "Asian human" in light of the post-Cold War antinomy between human rights moral values and Pacific Rim economic values. For the other novels explored in *Voicing Asia*, unreliability is much less at the narrative surface. For instance, Jin's *War Trash* presents a narrator whose self-proclaimed "documentary" style *seems* reliable, especially for the purposes of historical clarification. The fictional memoirist Yu Yuan, like Ishiguro's narrator Ono, values narrative objectivity and detachment. For Yu, though, these narrative qualities establish the political neutrality of and elicits sympathy for the Chinese human rights claimant. I understand Yu's "documentary" technique as an effect of postsocialist China's alleged crimes against humanity – notably, the Chinese government's oppression of political speech and its ruthless pursuit of economic development. The former human rights scenario accounts for Yu's empathetic capacity; the latter is formalized by the totalizing extent of Yu's detached tone, which manifests formally as narrative omniscience. The unreliability of Yu's neutral politics and neutral voice, I contend, lies in his evocation of omniscience as the extremity of capitalist reason and in his elision of ideological alignment as the only moral choice for Korean War POWs. My concluding piece features censored Chinese women authors who, like Jin, have been treated in the West as victims of Chinese state oppression. But quite to the contrary of Jin's "quiet" style, Wei Hui and Mian Mian flamboyantly depict their narrators' uninhibited consumption of sex, drugs, Western goods, and Western mass culture. Reading these novels as parables on literary language in translation, I suggest that these novels offer both a redemptive account of literature's capacity for human rights dissent and a warning about literature's demise in an age of globalized homogeneity.

Given the methodology for this dissertation, I want to devote some attention to clarifying why my investigation of post-Cold War novels is motivated by a Cold War framework. By incorporating cases studies of how U.S. policy "voiced" culturally representative anti-communist voices, I aim to highlight the formal and historical specificity of a post-Cold War Asian *literary* voice. As mentioned earlier, the Asian narrators I examine critically respond to the Western bloc's geopolitical management of Asia's anti-communist representativeness during the Cold War American Century. This geopolitical project depended on a "native informant" model, which inculcated specific criteria for evaluating the reliability of Asian voices. For the works of literary informants such as Jade Snow Wong and Eileen Chang, which received official sponsorship from the U.S. government, the author's racial identity and ideological disposition

serve as the primary determinants of the *narrator's* reliability. Jin's Korean War memoirist, Lee's model minority spy, Ishiguro's Japanese artist, and Wei Hui's and Mian Mian's quasi-autobiographical narrators have certainly been read as extensions of their authorial creators and as custodians of cultural authority. In this way, these narrators show how the strategic centrality of racial representativeness during the Cold War has influenced the interpretive schemas for *all* Asian-authored literature. In my reading, however, it is not ethnic content or authorial biography but rather formal markers of unreliability that make these post-Cold War voices "Asian."³⁰ Narrative unreliability, by this account, entails a different set of relations between the participants of a narrative act, one that does not presume the synonymy of narrator and author and that does not take for granted the biological indices of race.

Even though the transnational Lee, cosmopolitan Ishiguro, exilic Jin, and translatable Wei Hui and Mian Mian *are* biologically "Asian," they, like their narrators, represent forms of worldedness that derive from specific flashpoints of U.S.-Asian relations. Lee is a Korean American whose immigration history brings to bear the consequences of a long Korean War; Ishiguro is a Japanese British who came to prominence during the "Japanese miracle" of the 1980s; Jin is a Chinese exile who has publicly positioned his literary career as a response to the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown; and Wei Hui and Mian Mian are Chinese-language mass market "chick lit" writers whose sole literary value lies in their victimization by the Chinese government. How does the canonical worldedness of these authors influence the diegetic worlds that their narrators create, and how does it modulate the nature and force of their novels' extradiegetic resonance? Because of the geopolitical conditions for authorship outlined above, narrative unreliability in the novels I examine necessarily links up to specific geopolitical histories. The voice of Lee's narrator Henry Park, for instance, allegorizes the seemingly ventriloquized voice of U.S. "puppet president" Syngman Rhee, which eventually thwarted Korean independence. In Ishiguro's novel, the magisterial narrator's methods of recollecting Japan's imperial past reminds us of the culturalist readings of "tradition" through which the United States tried to account for Japan's Western exceptionalism. I take the post-World War II geopolitical history of Japanese *kabuki* theater as a means of illuminating the different forms that this exceptionalism has taken, as Japan transitioned from a Cold War model democracy to a post-Cold War economic threat. Jin's novel *War Trash* offers a different case of narrative unreliability since his narrator functions as testimonial figure intended to correct for the ideological distortions of existing Korean War memoirs. In comparing the fictional memoirist Yu Yuan's "documentary" voice with the ideologically beholden interrogation narratives of actual Korean War POWs, I take the Korean War POW compounds and the Tiananmen protests as contradistinct human rights flashpoints that inculcated different protocols of reliability for the first-person Chinese voice.

For all the novels in *Voicing Asia*, the paradoxical evocation of an "Asian human" voice challenges the geopolitical contradiction between the *homo economicus* of Pacific Rim Discourse and the Western liberal subject of Human Rights Discourse. This "Asian human" voice, as a distinctly *literary* voice, also undoes the perceived correspondence between the subject of the literary humanities and that of human rights. In terms of methodology, I show that locating and hearing an "Asian human" literary voice requires first, a more nuanced account of

³⁰ To slightly revise Elda Tsou's claim, we might say that the scholarly study, strategic politicization, and mainstream interpretation of Asian American literature have all "tended to privilege a referential approach to literature" and in particular to privilege the author as a referent for the narrator. See Tsou, "'This Doesn't Mean What You'll Think': Native Speaker, Allegory, Race," *PMLA* 128, no. 3 (May 2013): 576.

the formal relation between Asian narrators and Asian authors and second, a less thematically oriented approach to locating transnationalism, globalism, cosmopolitanism, and other variations of “world-oriented discourse” in post-Cold War literature. Through this methodology, I illustrate how post-Cold War narrative voices adhere to different historical touchstones for reliability and produce different formal effects within a specifically literary domain. Each chapter in *Voicing Asia* explores the historical and formal implications of “Asian voice” by pairing post-Cold War Asian Anglophone novels with specific case studies of U.S. activity in Cold War Asia. To better situate these case studies, the next section offers some background on Asia’s anti-communist and ethnic representativeness within the ambit U.S. Cold War policy. This account begins by discussing the Cold War status of first-person voice. From there, I take up two examples of U.S.-led military occupations that had been pitched in the language of human rights as civilizing missions. One is Korea, at the time a newly liberated nation-state, and the other is Japan, the newly defeated imperial power.

America’s Cold War in Asia

“If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony.”³¹

--- Elie Wiesel

“I realize that to *give open official approval or support to any one leader, group or combination* is contrary to past American thinking. But situation in Korea fully warrants such a step and there is reason to believe that unless positive action is taken to give the Koreans a start in governmental participation and organization, our difficulties will increase rather than diminish, and the Communistic group setup and encouraged by the Soviets in northern Korea will manage to extend its influence into southern Korea with results which can be readily envisaged.”³²

--- Acting Political Adviser in Japan, George Atcheson, Jr.

The Cold War, understood as the imprint of U.S.-Soviet *realpolitik* on international affairs, precedes the conclusion of the Second World War. In fact, America’s bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, though most often justified as a design to end the war quickly and to save Japanese and Allied lives, has been interpreted by some historians as an act of intimidation directed at the Soviets; on this view, the bombs initiated the Cold War by forcing Japan’s surrender and thus preventing Soviet troops from entering northeast Asia and Japan.³³ Within the

³¹ Wiesel, “The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration” *Dimensions of the Holocaust. Lectures at Northwestern University* 5-19 (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977). 9

³² Acting Political Adviser in Japan (Atcheson) to the Secretary of State, Tokyo, 15 October 1945, *Foreign Relations of the United States: diplomatic papers, 1945, The British Commonwealth, the Far East* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945), VI, 1092 (hereafter *FRUS*), emphasis mine.

³³ Gar Alperovitz’s *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965) is generally seen as igniting this “revisionist” trend. Alperovitz has frequently updated and reaffirmed his thesis, most recently in *Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Vintage, 1996). A defense of the alternate position – that the bombs were a military decision rather than an act of *realpolitik* – appears in Wilson D. Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to*

dyadic order of the Cold War, the origins of “contemporary human rights” – the founding of the United Nations in 1945 and the passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 – secured what Moyn calls the “victory of American internationalism.”³⁴ These watershed events would endow U.S. foreign policy in the Far East with international legitimacy; they would also provide the United States a resource for financial and military assistance. Not only did the United Nations become the adjudicatory body for U.S. containment policies, but human rights became a totemic force for these policies, according them moral urgency.

It is in this context that we can locate the convergence of native informant autoethnographies and human rights testimonies, the two modes of speaking referenced in the epigraphs for this section. Given the U.S. reliance on social scientists during the rise of psychological and propaganda warfare, it is fitting that the anthropological figure of the native informant became a geopolitical weapon as well as a cultural trope. The autoethnographic informant, a besieged first-person speaker connoting imperial complicity, seems to fall on the opposite end of the political spectrum from the human rights testifier/witness, a putatively less mediated and more truthful first-person mode.³⁵ The contemporaneous emergence of these two first-person speaking situations reflects the codependence between human rights and *realpolitik*, between the Nuremberg Trials and the McCarthy hearings, between post-World War II international resolve behind “never again” and Cold War nationalist pursuits of nuclear influence. During the Cold War, it was precisely the native informant who helped lend moral credence to human rights as an arm of U.S. policy. From literary autoethnographers such as government recruits Eileen Chang and Jade Snow Wong to POWs-turned-double-agents such as Wang Tsun-ming who appears in Chapter 2, Asian “informants” were called upon to “testify” – or, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub define the term, “to vow to tell, to promise and produce one’s own speech as material evidence for truth.”³⁶

The convergence of ethnic autoethnographies and human rights testimonies renders the first-person voice the reserve of both personal truth and geopolitical instrumentality, free will and compulsoriness. In Asia, the U.S. pursuit of anti-communist and ethnic representativeness made symbolic victories outweigh practical liabilities. For example, the founding of a democratic southern Korea was heralded as “a symbol of U.S. determination to resist further encroachments of communist forces in eastern Asia” – even though the division of Korea was repeatedly

Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War (New York: Cambridge U P, 2007). J. Samuel Walker offers a summary of post-Alperovitz scholarship in “Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update,” *Diplomatic History* 14 no. 1 (January 1990): 97-114.

³⁴ Moyn, *Last Utopia*, 59. For the distinction between “modern” and “contemporary” human rights, see Upendra Baxi, *The Future of Human Rights*. Baxi dates the contemporary regime to the end of the Second World War; modern human rights refer to the “natural law” engendered by the American and French revolutions. She describes the distinction as such: “First, in the ‘modern’ paradigm of rights the logics of *exclusion* are pre-eminent whereas in the ‘contemporary’ paradigm the logics of *inclusion* are paramount. Second, the relationship between human rights language and governance, conduct and practices differ markedly in the two paradigms. Third, the ‘modern’ enunciation of human rights was almost ascetic; in contrast, contemporary enunciations present a carnival. Fourth, contemporary paradigm inverts the inherent modernist relationship between *human rights* and *human suffering*” (42, emphasis hers).

³⁵ Mary Louis Pratt gives a more redemptive account of the autoethnographer: “If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations.” See *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

³⁶ Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London: Routledge, 1992), 5. Giorgio Agamben critiques Felman and Laub for “[aestheticizing] testimony” in *Remnants of Auschwitz* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Zone Books, 1999): 35-36.

chalked up to be “impossible” and “fatal”; even though “neither of the two sections is in any degree self-supporting”; even though “southern Korea . . . has a deficit economy and posed a liability to the US”; and even though the Koreans, a people who took pride in their national unity, and never more so than on the heels of liberation, interpreted national division as the obstruction of justice rather than a sacrifice in the name of it.³⁷

U.S. policy in Korea represents a larger effort to equip local institutions and peoples in the Third World with the democratic wherewithal for self-government and, more importantly, for resisting communist infiltration. The developmental telos through which Slaughter links human rights law and the *Bildungsroman* novel is certainly discernible in Washington’s formulation of these objectives. The connections that Slaughter draws between the well-rounded novelistic character and the fully-capacitated liberal subject establish that Cold War literary values and social values both derive from a period-specific and geopolitically-interested form of liberal humanism. Similar to how Cold War literary critics saw characterization as determining or even constituting plot, the U.S. Cold War program made “character” crucial to its foreign policy. In Korea, the United States clothed its moral imperative as the leader of the Free World in familiar *Bildung* garb: “to aid the Korean people in the development of democratic self-government and the establishment of national independence,” a President Harry S. Truman put it in 1949.³⁸ The situation in Japan was more complicated. Washington initially pitched its democratization agenda at the level of anti-feudal and anti-militarism but gradually shifted to target communism as the primary threat. Setting aside the legacy of Japanese imperialism in Asia, which the Allies putatively eliminated with the WWII victory, decorated General Douglas MacArthur’s administration believed that a revitalized Japan, “ideologically linked to the West and economically dominant in Asia, would deter ‘totalitarian pressures in the Far East’ and counterbalance the ‘Pan-Asiatic movement’ under Soviet or Chinese leadership.”³⁹ Bruce Cumings speculates that it is because of increasing animosity between the Americans and the Soviets that by September 1945, “Koreans changed to quasi-enemies, and Japanese to friends, in the eyes of the American Occupation”; due to Cold War priorities outpacing World War II justice, “Korea got the occupation designed for Japan.”⁴⁰ The contemporary situation affirms Cumings’s breakdown: today, Japan, the former enemy state, is graced with the distinction of being an exemplary case of successful postwar reconstruction; Korea, meanwhile, is remembered as the more recalcitrant nation, in which the DMZ zone remains a prominent reminder of the Cold War’s perpetuation in Asia.

America’s desire for global hegemony with moral accountability in Korea made it essential for the U.S. occupiers to cast themselves as a morally inculpable friend and the Koreans

³⁷ Memorandum by Lieutenant General John R. Hodge to General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, 24 September 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VI, 1055; Truman Library, box 256, Intelligence File, Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE) 3-49; “Consequences of US Troop Withdrawal from Korea in Spring, 1949,” February 28, 1949. For another assessment of the perils of division, see The Political Adviser in Korea to the Secretary of State, 15 September 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VI, 1049-1053.

³⁸ Draft of speech for Truman, Memo: Frederick J. Lawton to Harry S. Truman with Attachment, June 3, 1947, Official File, Truman Papers, Truman Library.

³⁹ Michael Schaller, “Securing the Great Crescent: Occupied Japan and the Origins of Containment in Southeast Asia,” *The Journal of American History* 69 no.2 (September 1982): 398. Schaller cites MacArthur’s financial adviser Joseph Dodge, who is responsible for successfully rehabilitating the Japanese economy.

⁴⁰ Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U P, 1981), 128.

as their “friends and allies in the Far East.”⁴¹ U.S. actions, however, illustrate that their benefactors, the southern Koreans, were not allies in the democratic cause but, on the contrary, an obstruction to the Americans’ good intentions. A 1948 National Security Report notes, “The efforts of the US to foster the establishment of a democratic and sovereign government in Korea are handicapped by the political immaturity of the Korean people.”⁴² Understanding the nature of “political immaturity” requires examining the circumstances surrounding the Americans’ arrival in Korea. At first, the atmosphere was euphoric on both the eve and the dawn of independence. In the cities, steps were taken to organize an interim government to receive the Allied armies; in the provinces, peasants revolted against Japanese and Korean landlords.⁴³ But whereas the Korean people were celebrating what they believed to be imminent independence, the U.S. occupying forces worried about the influx of communist influence and strategized to ensure that democracy would prevail and endure amidst Korea’s postwar political havoc. This important difference in priorities profoundly influenced the Americans’ early evaluation of the Korean people. As the U.S. presence transitioned from being a temporary measure for evacuating Japanese military and governmental personnel into being a bona fide military occupation that spanned indefinitely, the Americans turned an intensely critical eye upon the Koreans who destroyed Japanese property, took an extended “holiday” from work, celebrated in the streets, and clamored for immediate independence. The Americans intuited that in Korean local politics, all roads began with and led to the anti-Japanese issue, which was in essence also a pro-independence and nationalism issue. But instead of taking seriously the single uniting passion of the Korean people, the occupiers interpreted the rampant anti-Japanese fervor as the anarchic unruliness and brute fanaticism of the patently uncivilized, the fault line impairing the foundational stability of a modern democracy.⁴⁴

A broad spectrum of character flaws were included in the Korean people’s alleged “political immaturity.”⁴⁵ Taken together though, they establish the power-hungry Korean politicians and the sheep-like Korean masses as the two seemingly antithetical poles for mapping Korean personality. American efforts to learn about “the Korean culture” and “the Korean people” convinced them that both the politicians and the masses rendered the peninsula eminently susceptible to communism. A study entitled “Characteristics of the People” was an especially elaborate and synthetic attempt to schematize a trickle-down version of the typical Korean. The study’s portrayal of the Korean villagers as “forthrightly truthful and honest in all situations” recalls garden-variety prelapsarian ideals. It posits: “The characteristic candor of villagers may be explained at least in part in terms of their group-oriented pattern of social conduct. Within this pattern, there is little opportunity for deceptive behavior and concealment of truth.”⁴⁶ In framing deception and concealment in terms of opportunity, the writer pits the possibilities of individual

⁴¹ National Security Council Report, NSC 8/1, March 16, 1949, President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Library.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See chapter 3 of Cumings, *Origins*, Vol. 1.

⁴⁴ The reason that the pro-Japanese elements hold high positions in the military government “is not merely because of political pull or pressure, but because these groups represent a well-educated and well-rounded background. The Academy men have had opportunities for education and experience in the United States and in China, and many of these men can speak English, which in the eyes of the American Military authorities is sometimes a sign of authority.” See File No. 8-18. “History of Korean Politics,” 26 July 1946, Records of General HQ, Far East Command, Supreme Commander Allied Powers, and United Nations Command, United States Army Forces, Korea. Counter Intelligence Corps APO 235, Record Group (RG) 554, National Archives at College Park (NACP).

⁴⁵ NSC 8/1.

⁴⁶ National Intelligence Survey (NIS) 41: Korea – Characteristics of the People. February 1952.

freedom against the limitations of group-think. Honesty is a moot point when everyone thinks the same – and, for that matter, ambition, social mobility, political dissent, and democratic debate are moot as well. While the moral compass for traditional Korean society was protecting the integrity and harmony of the immediate kin group, the Americans saw “group-oriented” social behavior as a “passive-adaptive attitude” that hampers all forms of individuality. The Korean’s “subconscious urge to adapt himself to the inevitabilities of life as the only possible means of attaining security and success . . . stands in direct contrast to . . . [the] optimistic expectation of improvement of conditions of life, usually through the individual himself.” In contrast to a Western perspective that promotes an individual’s capacity for transformation, the Korean’s “total moral perspective” is based on an individual’s capacity for acceptance, whether of sanctioned leadership or inclement weather.⁴⁷

Although the study contends that the Korean’s identification “with a fixed role in an idealized structure . . . develops a strong compulsion toward *conformity*,” it also notes that “[t]his characteristic of Korean society sometimes conflicts sharply with the temperament of the people, which is, in many respects, strongly *individualistic*.”⁴⁸ If, as the Americans presumed, “a strong compulsion toward conformity” makes one inherently prone to the clannish infrastructure and ideological fanaticism of communism, then how would one’s “strongly individualistic” temperament concord with Western-style democracy, which takes the individual as its basic political unit? The answer implicitly offered up by U.S. policy is that the self possessiveness of the Western *individual* could not be confused with the self obsessiveness of the *individualistic* Korean. Where individual development within the framework of democracy should in theory yield the liberal subject, the Americans saw their endeavors to cultivate the Korean personality as only enhancing the unrest, brutality, recklessness, and emotional excess with which the Korean was culturally endowed. “Modernization,” with its focus on the individual, created the conditions of possibility for both the egoistic politicians who abused the democratic process and the unwitting masses whom these politicians so handily exploited. Because “Koreans, especially villagers, do not often express spontaneously individual attitudes,” the study conjectures, “the function of articulation has been monopolized by the small segment of society that is educated, informed, and active in national affairs.” The democratization in Korea was thus seen as begetting a system of corruption, in which the masses and the politicians fed each other’s undemocratic tendencies.⁴⁹ Although the “active” segment of political rabble-rousers appears to possess the traits that the villagers lack, the study sees these individuals not as custodians of reason but of coercion. In lieu of a Habermasian public sphere, democratization produced a “highly-vocal leadership element” that “[exploited] the fundamental biases and current reactions to construct a popular base for its various objectives.”⁵⁰

This conceptualization of democracy as a public forum suggests that “voice,” whether of the self-interested politician or the apathetic masses, constituted the fundamental hazard that the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., emphasis mine.

⁴⁹ An earlier study suggests notes that while external forces have attempted “to promote an awareness of external activities and to foster some change and a limited amount of individual thinking, the basic tendency to date has been limited acceptance and incorporation of these forces or ideas into the mores of the village. The unitary nature of the village then asserts itself; the attitude or response of the villagers become uniform; and a later competing force or idea is resisted and rejected.” See Department of State, Division of Research for Far East, Office of Intelligence Research Report No. 4698, “Social and Political Forces in Small Communities in South Korea,” June 10, 1948.

⁵⁰ NIS 41. For another account that arrives at a similar conclusion, see Department of State, Division of Research for Far East, OIR Report No. 3479.35, “Political Groupings in South Korea,” August 1, 1947.

Koreans posed to their own democratic potentiality. The problem with the masses was that they “[did] not often express spontaneously individual attitudes” and “[would prevent] the growth of a representative and influential public opinion.”⁵¹ The politicians, by contrast, were *too* individualistic and *too* spontaneous; they corrupted the democratic process with their single-minded pursuit of power. Containing Korean character via *voice*, it follows, required the United States plan *for* – rather than *with* – the people they sought to liberate. They pushed from the negotiating table the Korean politicians whose egoism threatened democratic protocol, and they silenced the Korean masses whose dumb simplicity predisposed them to communist machinations. As I discuss in Chapter 1, inaugural South Korean president Syngman Rhee, at one time well-known for his stirring oratories laced with democratic symbolism, appeared to be the solution to the problem of Korean voice. Yet the Americans would come to see Rhee’s voice as more deleterious to American interests than even the communists.

In Japan, Washington encountered what on the surface seems to be a similar cultural and social milieu: a feudalistic society in which conformity reigned. The primary difference is that the United States and Japan had been at war, and studies of Japan were instigated on these terms. In fact, because of this history, there existed a much larger supply of psychological warfare research on Japan compared with Korea, the “hermit nation.” Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* is the most famous of these wartime studies and is representative of a larger attempt to “clear up this seeming double-nature of the Japanese.” Why – asks “the puzzled American” – does “a quiet, meek, self-effacing, obedient little chap at home becomes a raging beast when he goes to war”? How does “the violent Japanese soldier of the last, desperate banzai charge change immediately into a quiet, polite, cheerful little man who is quite content to sit in the corner and bother nobody”?⁵² U.S. psychological warfare studies posit that for the Japanese, conformity proceeds from the culturally-bred and militarily-enforced doctrine of loyalty. If conformity made the Koreans uneducated sheep-like peasants, it made the Japanese fanatically loyal soldiers. Longtime Japan specialist and chief of psychological warfare operations Bonner F. Fellers announces that “the psychology of the Japanese soldier is the psychology of his people.”⁵³ A U.S. War Department Orientation film directed by Frank Capra makes a visual case for this synonymy by depicting machine-like coordination not just among soldiers – who are “as much alike as photographic prints off the same negative” – but also among laborers, farmers, dancers, rowers, and students; even Japanese women, the film proclaims, are but “human machines producing soldiers.”⁵⁴ The “voice” of this carefully regimented and spiritually brainwashed people is represented as always unanimous and always speaking just one word on monotonous repeat: “Banzai! Banzai! Banzai!”⁵⁵

As with studies on Korea, conformity among the Japanese was seen as part and parcel of a social order that submits individual will to family clans and social hierarchies. But in Japan, the United States tried to exploit a specific manifestation of loyalty: that of the Japanese people to the emperor. As U.S. studies often reported, the emperor was believed to be a direct descendent of the sun goddess. During the war, John Dower writes, the United States went so far as to

⁵¹ NIS 41.

⁵² William J. Niederpruem, *Guide to Japan* (CINCPAC-CINCPOA Bulletin No. 209-45, September 1945), 40, 54. William J. Niederpruem Papers, Box 4, Hoover Archives, Stanford University.

⁵³ Fellers, “The Psychology of the Japanese Soldier,” Individual Research Study (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: The Command and General Staff School, 1934-1935), 30, Box 1, Bonner F. Feller Papers, Hoover Archives, Stanford University.

⁵⁴ Frank Capra, *Know Your Enemy: Japan*, U.S. Army Pictorial Service, Signal Corps, 1945.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

consider “painting the emperor’s picture on the sides of Allied ships to deter kamikaze suicide attacks.”⁵⁶ In the postwar years, the relationship between the sacred Emperor Hirohito and the unquestioningly loyal Japanese people took on even more significance for the United States. Much to the outrage of the victorious Allies and the American public, both of whom had long been calling for the prosecution and execution of Hirohito as a war criminal, the U.S. government began a concerted campaign not only to save the Emperor from prosecution but to transform him from a Shinto deity into “a cornerstone for building a peaceful future for the country.”⁵⁷ As I explain in Chapter 3, this immediate postwar period proved that it was not only the Japanese people who needed education about democracy, but also the American public that needed reeducation about their former enemy. This reeducation from the state began even before the war’s end, especially with respect to the Emperor. Fellers in large spearheaded this campaign. In a memo entitled “Hirohito’s Struggle to Surrender,” he recounts Hirohito’s heroic endeavors to stop the war, only to be deterred by the self-interested Soviets and Japan’s thuggish militarists.⁵⁸ In another study published in 1944, Fellers asserts that “the mystic hold the Emperor has on his people and the Spiritual strength of the Shinto faith properly directed need not be dangerous. The Emperor can be made a force for good and peace provided Japan is totally defeated the military clique destroyed.”⁵⁹

Because of the Emperor, conformity among the Japanese came to hold strategic value for the United States. In contrast to Korea where the disjunction between the politicians and the masses was seen as undemocratic and dangerous, in Japan it seemed crucial to divide the nation “into the emperor on the one hand and everyone else on the other,” with the latter assuming responsibility for Japan’s defeat.⁶⁰ Washington actively worked to protect Hirohito from incrimination within an international forum, on the assumption that Japanese government heads could be controlled through him. Hence, as the leaders of Hirohito’s military clique were dramatically brought down by the war crime trials, the Americans served justice in Japan by bringing the Emperor down – arguably, in even more dramatic fashion – to the status of *Ningen Tenno*, or “Human Emperor.” The humanizing move was intended to serve the democratization cause. This cause began with Hirohito’s renouncement of divinity in the *Ningen Sengen*, or “humanity declaration,” of January 1, 1946. Delivered at the behest of the Supreme Commander Allied Powers, MacArthur, this New Years address clarified that the relation between the Emperor and his people was to be based on “mutual trust and affection” rather than on “mere legends and myths.”⁶¹

In that same year, Hirohito, clad in his “democratic” business suit, embarked on a series of nationwide tours intended to demonstrate the humanity – or democracy – that he had declared. Whereas Rhee was a natural orator, talking “effortlessly, articulately” and producing “overwhelming effects,”⁶² Hirohito was inarticulate and awkward, having “never been socialized

⁵⁶ Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 284

⁵⁷ Joseph C. Crew, Memo of Conversation by the Acting Secretary of State, Washington, May 28, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945 VI, 547.

⁵⁸ Feller, “Hirohito’s Struggle to Surrender,” undated, Box 1.

⁵⁹ Feller, “Answer to Japan,” 1944, Box 1.

⁶⁰ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 287.

⁶¹ Quoted in Richard B. Finn, *Winners in Peace: MacArthur, Yoshida, and Postwar Japan* (Berkeley, C.A.: U of California P, 1992), 64.

⁶² Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942-1960: A Personal Narrative* (Seoul, Korea: Panmun Book, 1978), 3, 34.

to be capable of even normal conversation.”⁶³ One publication, *Taishu Kurabu*, published a caricature with the joke that “the Emperor refutes the Darwin theory of evolution by having degenerated from a god into a man.”⁶⁴ The joke gets at another peculiarity of democratizing the Far East, a project that proved that “human personality development” – Slaughter’s choice phrase – seemed less viable for the Orientals than the modulation of extremes. Although the imperial tours began as inspection visits to damaged areas of Japan, designed to build morale and to reacquaint the “human emperor” with his people, Hirohito’s conscientious projection of ordinariness did not prevent these tours from becoming lavish affairs that reaffirmed his social, if not divine, superiority to the Japanese common folk. Local governments and businesses often went nearly bankrupt to accommodate the ballooning entourage of officials, attendants, and media representatives; prefectures reportedly spent between one to five million yen.⁶⁵ Paul J. Kent of MacArthur’s Political Affairs Division called the visits “campaign tours.” Rather than humanizing and democratizing the emperor, they in effect reaffirmed “the power and influence of the Imperial tradition.”⁶⁶ The controversial tours were discontinued in 1951.

The Allied occupations of Japan and Korea offer glimpses of how the U.S. government grappled with the question of Asia’s democratic potentiality within the interlocked missions of human rights, containment policy, and Third World democratization. The difficulties the occupiers encountered at the level of the individual – of developing the faceless masses into individuals and of bringing down the divine emperor into a human among equals – were offshoots of broader concerns about the contradictions between Asian culture and Western democracy at the level of economic and governmental reform. With respect to Japan, Brigadier General Frayne Baker writes: “The Allied Occupation of Japan is more than a mere military mission. It is also an experiment, a paradox, and a symbol . . . it is an experiment to determine whether it is possible for a feudal society, by a concentrated effort of national will, to compress history and develop into a modern democratic state without falling prey to extremist convulsions.” Baker’s characterization of postwar Japan as “a political and economic paradox” in 1948 was in essence the paradox between Western political systems and Eastern cultures. “In what is apparently becoming a world-wide contest for the allegiance of mankind,” he says, the Allies encountered in Japan “a race between the ability of the Japanese people to absorb quickly the values, attitudes, and spirit of democracy and the strong pull of traditional habits of regimentation.”⁶⁷

Japan’s success in leaving behind its ugly feudalist and imperialist past and in overcoming its wartime devastation is well-documented. This documentation shows how the Cold War introduction of capitalism to Asian states has been selectively leveraged to validate the efficacy of U.S. activity in the region. In the sphere of U.S. geopolitics, for example, postwar Japan has been touted as the model democracy and has been juxtaposed with other U.S. military occupations; in that of U.S. domestic politics, Japanese Americans’ postwar “success story” resulted in the coinage of the “model minority” as a racial category, which continues to be

⁶³ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 289.

⁶⁴ General Headquarters, SCAP, Civil Information and Education Section, *Publications Analysis*, “The Emperor’s New Role,” no. 203 (September 7 1948), 10, Niederpruem Papers, Box 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Bix, “Inventing the ‘Symbol Monarchy’ in Japan, 1945-52,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 352.

⁶⁷ Baker, “The Occupation of Japan,” *Army Information Digest*, 3 no.1 (January 1948): 3, 7, Niederpruem, Box 4.

deployed against African-Americans.⁶⁸ Yet Cold War America's oft-expressed fears of whether modernizing Asian states would be able to set aside their backward traditions – Confucianism, Buddhism, Shintoism, and the like – continue to surface in the international arena, most recently in another Eastern cultures versus Western political systems standoff: that between “Asian values” and human rights. This standoff again poses the problem of “development” (this time economic) as inconducive to Western conceptualizations of modernity and morality. In Western critiques of China and Singapore, the two primary petitioners for “Asian values,” development is almost profane, a word that implies materialistic excess and an exploitative, inhumane relationship between the individual and the state.

Voicing Asia considers the perceived paradoxes of Asian capitalist modernity with respect to the perceived historical novelty of post-Cold War globalization. In my readings of post-Cold War Asian Anglophone novels, “Asia” is not so much a racially particular, geographically localized, politically minor object within the orbit of a globalized world. Rather, the unreliable Asian narrative voices I bring together provoke us to treat depictions of Asian modernity as a metonym for a globalized world. In turning to novelistic voice to interrogate the coordination between moralist critiques of Asian capitalist modernity and apocalyptic prognoses of global capitalism, I hope to demonstrate how the special properties of a diegetic world – which one might alternately think of as “the contradictory and peculiar nature of literature as a kind of social fact”⁶⁹ – can activate new relations between and within discursive modes, historical periods, academic disciplines, canonical lineages, and, most importantly, logics of worldedness.

Based on existing criticism and reviews, the first novel I examine, Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995), is perhaps too domestic to meet the qualifications of “world literature” and too “ethnic” to warrant attention to style and aesthetics. A riff on the contradictory position of the Asian American within the matrix of U.S. multiculturalism, *Native Speaker* portrays narrator Henry Park as both model citizen and professional spy – both happy assimilator and stealthy infiltrator. This spy plot, embedded in an allegory of multicultural politics and multinational corporatism, denotes an attempt to wrestle with America's geopolitical management of Asian representativeness. The locus of this Cold War history is Park's voice, which vacillates between the severe, unadorned style mandated by his spy reports and the cryptic, sentimental style pervading his self-titled “lyrical modes.” Park's recounting of his past deceptions makes narrative unreliability an extension of racialized unreliability; these deceptions, the novel suggests, largely pivot from the exploitative methods of capitalist accumulation that Korean immigrants, including Park himself, are culturally inclined to employ. I read Park's voice in relation to the stridently anti-communist yet radically maximalist oratories of Syngman Rhee, the official leader of South Korea from 1948 to 1960. Both the model minority and the puppet president become unreliable when the prospect of Korean solidarity is at stake; this theme of unification is underpinned, I believe, by the Cold War division of Korea, a product of U.S. containment policy pursued as an extension of Free World human rights. Park's narrative unreliability, however, engages the reader not just through the moralizing rhetoric of a U.S.-centered human rights both also through the ethics formalized by the novel. Narrative ethics, I show, forecloses racially-motivated interpretations of Park's unreliability and recasts the stereotypically deceptive Oriental as a normatively fallible *human* speaker.

⁶⁸ Petersen, “Success Story, Japanese American Style.”

⁶⁹ Lye, “Racial Form,” 92.

Chapter 2 reads Ha Jin's 2006 novel *War Trash*, a fictional memoir narrated by a former Korean War POW in the U.N. camps. Unlike the other novels in *Voicing Asia*, *War Trash* is expressly interested in representing the Cold War and, specifically, in doing historical justice this period from the purportedly more clarifying standpoint of present-day America. Our narrator Yu Yuan's unrelenting commitment to family and self distinguishes him from his fellow POWs, whose sole commitment is to the Chinese communist party. This difference appears most strikingly in voice: Yu uses a neutral, objective style to portray his comrades, who are, by contrast, unable to articulate themselves without recourse to ideology-laden party slogans. I read Yu's fictional narrative with first, Jin's authorial ethos of political neutrality, directed against the oppressive policies of the Chinese government, and second, with the U.S.-commissioned autobiography of Wang Tsun-ming, a Nationalist Chinese officer captured by the Communists. Wang's narrative shows how passionate, uninhibited vocality about one's ideological affiliation was of moral and geopolitical necessity based on the imperatives of Cold War human rights. I argue that Yu's *neutral* voice must be understood in relation to the post-Cold War discourses of globalization, human rights, and Chinese economic modernity. In such a context, *neutral* signifies both the universality of a human rights that purports to have transcended the Cold War's ideological schisms *and* the indifference of capitalist reason, which in China has perpetuated indiscriminate economic expansion in the name of modernity.

Among the authors I study, Ishiguro is the most conscientious and consistent about employing narrative unreliability. In all his novels, unreliability is linked to empathy – his narrators are unreliable because they lack or misallocate the resources to care. In reading Ishiguro's second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), Chapter 3 posits an analogy between the narrator Masuji Ono (whose wandering, repetitious recollections of his prewar past are delivered from a pavilion, hill, or some other view on high) and the Western reader (whose morally-tinged assessments of Japanese history are delivered from the geopolitically- and temporally-removed standpoint of present-day Western democracies). I pair Ishiguro's novel with the postwar history of Japanese *kabuki* theater, a repository of "tradition" that was differently inflected in U.S. geopolitical discourse to account for two postwar "miracles" of Japanese development: first, in the late 1940s to 1950s when war-torn Japan became a model democracy under U.S. occupational rule, and second, in the 1970s and 1980s when Japanese technological prowess and economic prosperity led to a multi-billion dollar U.S. trade deficit.⁷⁰ The historiographic reliance on culture to explain Japan's "miracles" anticipates the cultural relativist accounts of "Asian values" on both sides of the human rights debate among geopolitical actors and substantiates a Western perception that empathy deficiency is an inhuman consequence of a specifically Asian form of economic development.

Voicing Asia concludes by bringing translation and translatability to bear on political dissent and globalized literature. This discussion centers on the publication and translation histories of Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* (2001) and Mian Mian's *Candy* (2003), two semi-autobiographical novels written in China and censored by its government. These novels require us to conceive of translation, the hallmark of "world literature" especially since David Damrosch's seminal study, as simultaneously a human rights response to the state suppression of free speech and a sign of globalization's encroachment on literary innovation and human freedom.⁷¹ Wei Hui and Mian Mian show how the international order of human rights that,

⁷⁰ This deficit peaked at \$16 billion in 1981. See C. Fred Bergsten, "What to Do About the U.S.-Japan Economic Conflict" *Foreign Affairs* 60 no. 5 (Summer 1982): 1061.

⁷¹ Damrosch, *What Is World Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003),

through translation, rescues their novels from Chinese state censorship are in effect inextricable from the engine of globalization that, also through translation, commutes “literature” into the infinite generality of a global idiom.⁷² This moral necessity and globalized inevitability of literary translation in the domain of U.S.-China relations bear out both the promises and contingencies of human rights literary dissent in the age of Asia’s globalized ascent.

⁷² In distinguishing between the French term *mondialisation* and the English term *globalization*, Jean-Luc Nancy writes, “the word *mondialisation*, by keeping the horizon of a ‘world’ as a space of possible meaning for the whole of human relations (or as a space of possible significance) gives a different indication than that of an enclosure in the undifferentiated sphere of a unitotality *mondialisation* preserves something untranslatable while *globalization* has already translated everything in a global idiom. See Nancy’s *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany, N.Y.: State U of New York P, 2007), 28.

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Chapter 1

The Korean Voice of American Empire: The Democratic Spokesman and the Model Minority Narrator

“Perhaps the Korean War is not mentioned in world history classes because American heroism could not be easily extrapolated from it. All that can be said has been that Americans, unable to save all of the Korean people from Communism, worked valiantly to rescue the prostitutes and adopt the orphans.”⁷³

---Elaine H. Kim

In the opening pages of Chang-rae Lee’s 1995 novel *Native Speaker*, our narrator Henry Park frames the forthcoming narrative as a confession: “For as long as I could I lied. I will speak the evidence now” (7).⁷⁴ Some readers have taken this claim of presenting an evidentiary narrative at face value. James Wood, for example, contends that even though *Native Speaker* may not be *formally* striking, “it describes, with subtlety and insight, the difficult hyphenation of immigrant experience.” It is because of this “avant-gardism of content,” Wood declares, that makes the novel Lee’s most innovative and valuable one.⁷⁵ Wood’s evaluation of *Native Speaker* assigns it a familiar pedagogical function. Familiar, I say, because it reflects the tendency to read *all* Asian American literature as a kind of cultural education, whereby the author’s ethnic credentials serve as the primary determinant of narrative reliability.⁷⁶

What critics such as Wood miss, though, is that Lee’s first-person novel actually *ironizes* this idea of the Asian narrator as a reliable informant or autoethnographer. Park initially appears to be the *ideal* informant: he’s a modern-day professional spy, an ethnic agent who specializes in re-presenting biographies (or ethnographies) of his Asian kin to his American boss, Dennis Hoagland, an allegorical figure for American empire in the age of multiculturalism. Hoagland’s spies are ladled straight out of the New York City melting pot – indeed, they’re recruited specifically for their ethnic resourcefulness since immigrant upstarts are the primary targets of the spy agency Hoagland operates. The novel’s central plot concerns Park’s latest assignment, John Kwang, a Korean American councilman, whose core constituency is New York City’s recent immigrants. In covering Kwang, Park begins unraveling. The model spy struggles to write Kwang’s story, an act that would betray his fellow Korean – which he eventually does. This failure of Korean solidarity informs Park’s *unreliable* autoethnographic voice. One key form that this unreliability takes is Park’s oscillation between spare, straightforward, insistently *literal* prose on the one hand and cryptic, profligate, self-consciously *literary* meditations on the other.

⁷³ Kim, “Roots and Wings: An Overview of Korean American Literature, 1934-2003,” *The Sigur Center Asia Papers: Korean American Literature*, ed. Young-Key Kim-Renaud, et al., 1-18. (Washington, D.C.: George Washington U, The Sigur Center for Asian Studies, 2012), 12.

⁷⁴ Lee, *Native Speaker* (New York: Riverhead, 1995). Subsequent citations will appear parenthetically within the text.

⁷⁵ Wood, “Chang-Rae Lee’s ‘The Surrendered,’ Review,” *The New Yorker*, March 15, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2010/03/15/100315crat_atlarge_wood.

⁷⁶ Sau-ling C. Wong, “Autobiography as a Guided Chinatown Tour?,” *Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior: A Casebook*, ed. Sau-ling C. Wong, 29-56. New York: Oxford U P, 1999. Rey Chow’s concept of coercive mimicry from *The Protestant Ethnic* and Stephen Sohn’s account of “racial asymmetries” in *Racial Asymmetries: Asian American Fictional Worlds* (New York: New York U P, 2014) are also useful in this context.

Due to its set-up, *Native Speaker* has often been read in terms of U.S. domestic politics: for example, Black-Asian relations, multiculturalism, and Asian American political apathy. But, I believe, an examination of Park's first-person voice ought to entail taking a more transnational framework, one that takes into account a Cold War history of U.S. geopolitical voice management in southern Korea. This chapter builds on the work of Jodi Kim in reading *Native Speaker* as motivated by Cold War logics. While Kim treats the Cold War as an absent presence in *Native Speaker*, I suggest that Cold War geopolitics are much more at the novel's surface – in the conspiracy plot, the spy thriller, the native informant, right down to a dog named Spiro (referring, presumably, to Spiro Agnew, Nixon's vice president).⁷⁷ More to point, in focusing in on the narrator Park, I read *Native Speaker* not as evidence of Cold War America's oppression or displacement of Asia's voice – that is, not as a “generative [refusal],” as Kim would have it – but as a critical response to America's projection of Cold War Korea's forceful, passionate, and far-reaching anti-communist voice.⁷⁸

We *do* see Kim's argument manifest in a number of literary endeavors to engage the Korean War through silence, absence, and obliqueness. Key among these works are Lee's previous novels, *A Gesture Life* (2005), which completely elides the Korean War despite the narrator's fraught Japanese-Korean identity, and *The Surrendered* (2010), which structurally poses the Korean War as an unrepresentable yet generative force. Lee's “Asian American novels” illustrate his frequently expressed authorial belief that fleshing out the nuances of character ought to take precedence over sorting out the minutiae of plot.⁷⁹ Specifically, Lee excises the plot of his protagonists' immigration and assimilation – his narrators are *already* “model minority” citizens at the novels' outset. If we read Lee's novels as “haunted” by the Cold War, we see that the Korean American attainment of model citizen status (the story that has become so well known that it preempts retelling) is in fact the knowledge-effect of the Korean War (the story of the relatively unacknowledged catalyst for Korean diasporization).⁸⁰ The elision of the immigrant success story implies that allegories of the American Dream have become not merely factual truths but dull truisms; the elision of the Korean War story, on the other hand, implies that the implementation of democracy may include a darker side, the revelation of which might shatter the pristine mythos of the American dream.

The readier explanations for how the incorrigible Korean national of Cold War America's liberal imaginary came to be the model citizen of America's neoliberal democracy can be extrapolated from the familiar stereotypes of the good Asian versus the bad Asian. In the narrative that validates a U.S. Cold War victory, the deftness with which the Asian immigrant has achieved success in America substantiates the efficacy of US democracy and the breadth of

⁷⁷ Colleen Lye, “Reading for Asian American Literature,” *A Companion to American Literary Studies*, eds. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine (Chichester, U.K.: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 494.

⁷⁸ Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010), 7. Kim's argument, to be sure, likewise treats Lee's novel as an enactment of “ethnographic refusal” (6); the difference in our interpretations resides in the form taken by a *literary* critique of an (auto)ethnographic legacy.

⁷⁹ For example, when asked why *The Surrendered* neglects the protagonist's years “between Korean refugee and successful New York antiques dealer,” Lee replied: “I felt as if all that business would explain things that were not important to her character. It would explain certain questions about how she made herself fit into this world. And that was not important to the book.” See Lee, interviewed by Anis Shivani, *Asia Literary Star*, 16 (Summer 2010), accessed June 23, 2012, <http://www.asialiteraryreview.com/web/article/en/171>.

⁸⁰ Ji-Yeon Yuh writes: “Post-1945 Korean migration has been shaped by the division and militarization of the Korean peninsula . . . Most, if not all, of Korean migration since 1950 can be traced to the war and its consequences.” “Moved by War Migration, Diaspora and the Korean War,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8, no. 3 (October 2005): 278.

US opportunity; in the narrative that anticipates the demise of the Free World at the hands of Pacific Rim economies, the alien Asian's unprecedented economic success is part and parcel of his unprecedented capacity for deception. This chapter aims to understand this Janus-faced figure of the model minority through the geopolitical production of Asian voice.⁸¹ It understands Cold War Korea's "voice," at least within a geopolitical context, as embodied by a single representative: inaugural Republic of Korea (R.O.K.) president Syngman Rhee. As the figure who paved the way for South Korea's entry into "modernity," Rhee is a herald of sorts for the Asian coming to voice under the auspices of "American Orientalism."⁸² In that respect, he gives us a historical sense of why the informant or double agent is Lee's chosen metaphor for a model minority citizenship. The U.S. government's strategic invention of democratic representatives and democratic representativeness in Cold War Asia via Rhee discloses the stakes of an era during which "neutralism was immoral."⁸³ Through Rhee, we see how America's cooption of Korean voice within the tactical realm of policy was couched in its efforts to scale a national anti-communist cause to a global human rights ethos. Rhee's active promotion of U.S. policy helped lend credence to the development of democratic societies and liberal individuals – that is, human rights and human subjects – in the Third World.⁸⁴ Rhee's centrality to the U.S. containment project in East Asia, however, was multiply problematic. As I will elaborate, the cultivation of Rhee's anti-communist voice would eventually result in Rhee's betrayal of both the Free World and the Korean people.

I take these multiple betrayals as a historical precedent for Park's anxieties about ethnic exploitation, which he casts as the defining feature of Korean American immigrant identity. But by treating Rhee and Park as two iterations of the morally inscrutable Asian, I aim to illuminate *not only* the enduring legacy of the Korean War but, more precisely, the changing tenor of this long war. The spy reports that Park writes – "remote, unauthorized biographies" – are to adhere to a rigorous objectivity, free of not just ideology but of an authorial presence (18). Park's proficiency at these biographies suggests that Rhee's immoderately anti-communist voice has been tamed – neutralized, in both senses of the word. The more obvious analogy *Native Speaker*

⁸¹ By Janus-faced, I mean that the figure of the model minority has been deployed to look backward and forward: in the former case, we can confirm that Asia has been saved and that the Free World has risen; in the latter, we can augur the apocalyptic consequences of a Pacific Rim order. For a more historically nuanced account of frameworks for understanding East Asia's economic rise since the 1970s and the 1980s, see Christopher Connery's "Pacific Rim Discourse: The US Global Imaginary in the Late Cold War Years," *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production*, eds. Rob Wilson and Arif Dirlik, 30-56 (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995). Connery's frameworks are Orientalism, modernization theory, left-liberal humanist internationalism, and Cold War discourse.

⁸² Lye distinguishes American Orientalism from European Orientalism as such: "Where a European Orientalism had disclosed the discursivity of nineteenth-century, territorial-based colonialism, America's Asia thus reflected the discursivity of a neocolonialism that installed the East as a Western proxy rather than antipode." See *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945*, (Princeton UP, 2004), 10.

⁸³ John Foster Dulles, as quoted in Immanuel Wallerstein's "What Cold War in Asia?," in *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, eds. Yangwen Zheng, Hong Liu, and Michael Szonyi, 15-24 (Boston: Brill, 2010): 16.

⁸⁴ Rhee is akin to other Asian "informants" and "ambassadors" who received official US sponsorship to promote democracy – for example, "puppet" leaders such as Chiang Kai-shek and Ngo Dinh Diem, whose regimes involved similar scenarios of the tail wagging the dog, and cultural ambassadors such as Jade Snow Wong and Eileen Chang, whose writings educated Americans about Chinese America and Communist China. For Asian American Cold War cultural production, see Ellen Wu, "America's Chinese: Anti-Communism, Citizenship, and Cultural Diplomacy During the Cold War" *Pacific Historical Review* 77 no.3 (August 2008): 391-422; Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 2003); and Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism*.

invites is one between Park's narratorial absence as a spy-scribe and the model minority's "honorable-seeming absence" within the schema of American multiculturalism (202). My geopolitical reading of the novel, however, treats Park's rigorous self-effacement as effecting the post-Cold War ethos of a truer universalism – that is, a universalism based on human morality rather than anti-communist politics.

The contrast between Rhee's stridently anti-communist voice and Park's "clean," "reasonable" voice (203) alerts us to the different moral demands of the historical milieu in which they are speaking. According to Moyn, Cold War human rights was in essence "American internationalism" and as such reproduced "the politics of the state"; in a "post-Cold War" era, on the other hand, human rights has putatively expanded to include "the morality of the globe."⁸⁵ This shift in geopolitical values reflects a shift in the perceived threat to human dignity. A "post-Cold War" order can be marked by the displacement of a U.S.-based containment policy targeting communism with a more "universal" effort to check the vicissitudes of global capitalism. As Cheah argues, economic globalization instrumentalizes the human and reifies its moral content. As a result, the human is the inevitable corollary of globalization, even though Kantian moral law "categorically prohibits the instrumentalization or technologization of human beings."⁸⁶ The question that Park's post-Cold War narrative voice raises is whether the carefully calibrated neutral tone of the Asian spy signals the arrival of a more moral *human rights* order, or if this measured subject-less style follows the precepts of a Pacific Rim *economic* order that takes capitalist reason to an inhuman extreme. The menace posed by "Asian capital and Asians as capital," as Christine So puts it lends racial specificity to Cheah's contention that critiques of globalization hinge on the moral inhumanity of capitalistic expansion.⁸⁷ By following Cheah and So, my understanding of human rights in Asia complicates Leslie Bow's claim that American portrayals of Asia's human rights violations reinforce the synonymy between "democratic rights" and "human rights." Specifically, I illustrate that the shifts in a U.S.-inflected human rights discourse dating to the Cold War and try to dispel the notion that human rights has "emerged as a dominant framework," now that "the Cold War dead."⁸⁸

Taken together, Park and Rhee show that 1) Asian voice has mediated U.S. efforts to establish its national proximity to the moral cause of international human rights, and 2) "Asia" represents the limit of the "human," whether in the form of Cold War Asian communism or post-Cold War Asian capitalism. In *Native Speaker*, Park's voice indexes both the Asian/human antinomy within human rights discourse and the history of Asian voice management as a U.S. Cold War geopolitical project. I argue that this indexical power of Park's voice is all the more significant because of the contradictory formal effects produced by his narrative unreliability. In *Native Speaker*, unreliability functions as both a racialized trope and a novelistic technique – both the racial signature of the inscrutable "Asian" within the moral economy of race and the formal signifier of the fallible "human" within the ethical domain of literature. Narrative unreliability convicts Park of Rhee's most infamous crime, betrayal, while *at the same time* inducting the Asian American *narrator* into the realm of humanity – a realm that was enabled by but always denied to America's Asian *statesman*.

⁸⁵ Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 59, 43.

⁸⁶ Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions*, 4.

⁸⁷ So, *Economic Citizens: A Narrative of Asian American Visibility* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple U P, 2007), 13; Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions*.

⁸⁸ Bow, *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women's Literature* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 138-39.

The fact that the voice of the unreliable Asian, coded as inscrutable and immoral within a geopolitical framework, can be comprehended as “human” within the literary world of the novel troubles how we have understood the relations between “American,” “Asian,” and “human.” To investigate these relations, I first excavate another genealogical line between contemporary Asian America and America’s Cold War in Asia, one that follows the mechanisms and forms by which Rhee’s voice was strategically projected. Then, turning to *Native Speaker*, I explore how an Asian American narrator sounds (if not like a native informant) and how the reliability of this narrator is measured (if not by ethnicity). In both scenarios, I am particularly interested in how an Asian speaker resonates with a Western audience. I show that Rhee’s oratorical voice and Park’s narratorial voice produce drastically different effects upon their listeners, be it Rhee’s “international” public or Park’s implied reader. Rhee’s “use of the democratic symbolism” initially endeared him to “American hearts,” yet the militancy underlying his anti-communist stance and the luridness with which it was expressed were ultimately seen as typifying the vagaries of the “Oriental mind.”⁸⁹ Park’s densely figurative asides, directed to a readerly “you,” seem similarly lurid and equally unreliable; yet the cryptic symbolism, flagrant contradictions, and sentimental digressions in these asides point up not only his racially-particular inscrutability but also his universally human fallibility.

This contradiction in rhetorical effect leads me to posit that literature differently engages Asia’s racial form, the content of which has been articulated in negative relation to a U.S. foreign policy that has consistently insisted upon a human aspect. The *literary* voicing of the “Asian human” in *Native Speaker* gives us a historical heuristic lodged at the crossroads of human rights and East-West relations as well as an apparent resolution to the conflictive representational exigencies of literary character and racial type. In treating human rights geopolitics and novelistic ethics as two contradictory modes of voicing, I aim to problematize the seeming tautology of the “American human,” a figure born of the Cold War equivalence between U.S. foreign policy and human rights jurisprudence. I am also interested in the specific relations between readers, narrators, and authors that brand a text as “Asian American.” In contrast to the multiculturalist injunction to read all Asian American literary works – especially those in first-person – as a form autoethnography, Anglo-American literary modernism has consecrated authorial impersonality as an aesthetic touchstone.⁹⁰ In light of recent efforts among Asian American scholars to defend the “aesthetics” of Asian American literature, this disjunction can be construed as a reworking of the field’s political agenda so as to account for literature on its own terms. My goal is to trouble the “polarization of the “ethnic” and the “aesthetic.”⁹¹ If Asian American literature cues us to read the narrator as an unmediated mouthpiece for the author, and “literature” recommends attributing diegetic voice to a literary character, then how might Lee’s novel give us cause to reconsider, and perhaps reconcile, the pieties of literary humanism with the expectations of ethnic literature? As I will show, it is precisely because *Native Speaker* is conventionally “Asian American” that we perceive the human at the exact moment that we

⁸⁹ Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U P, 1990), 226.

⁹⁰ Canonical figures within this latter group include Wayne Booth, W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, and T.S. Eliot.

⁹¹ In “Racial Form,” Lye assesses the turn to “aesthetics” and “form” in Asian American studies in the mid-2000s. She suspects that this turn represents a critical awareness of how “politically instrumental reading . . . has contributed to dualistic framings of the ethnic text and the American text, and the continuing polarization of the ‘ethnic’ and the ‘aesthetic.’” Such readings, she says, have “overlooked the critical potential of literary interpretation to discover for the ethnic text more transformative kinds of agency” (94).

perceive race.⁹² Only by treating this paradigmatically “Asian American” voice as an effect of human rights geopolitics *and* narrative ethics can we hear it speak as the “Asian human” voice.

Syngman Rhee: The Democratic Spokesman of “American Internationalism”

In October 1948, the C.I.A. conducted a personality study of Syngman Rhee, who had two months ago been inaugurated as the president of the Republic of Korea. The study, according to Bruce Cumings the first that the C.I.A. conducted on a foreign leader, praises and condemns Rhee in the same breath and, at times, with the same line⁹³:

Rhee Syngman is a genuine patriot acting in what he regards the best interests of an independent Korea. He tends, however, to regard the best interests of Korea as synonymous with his own. It is as if he, in his own mind at least, were Korea.

Rhee has devoted his life to the cause of an independent Korea with the ultimate objective of personally controlling that country He has also been unscrupulous in his attempts to thrust aside any person or group he felt to be in his way. Rhee’s vanity has made him highly susceptible to the contrived flattery of self-seeking interests in the US and in Korea. His intellect is a shallow one, and his behavior is often irrational and literally childish. Yet Rhee, in the final analysis, has proved himself to be a remarkably astute politician.⁹⁴

Rhee, who would go on to lead the R.O.K. until 1960, is framed here as the ultimate patriot yet the ultimate double-crosser, the conniving politician yet the gullible child; “genuine” and “astute,” yet also “unscrupulous,” “irrational,” and “susceptible to contrived flattery.” If stereotypes can be read as a resolution to the representational crux of Oriental inscrutability, then we might say that such portrayals of Rhee help reinforce the central theme of Saidian Orientalism: “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.”⁹⁵

Rhee’s rousing yet unruly voice compels us to reframe the Saidian question of “how does America represent Asians?” as “how does a morally-vested American hegemony mediate Asian acts of self-representation?” Rhee, in a way, paved the way for Korea’s entry into “modernity,” insofar as his work as a typically malleable yet corrupt “puppet president” secured the neocolonial relationship between the United States and South Korea. Rhee, in the end, proved to be both a solution to and an intensification of the problems the United States encountered in Korea. On the one hand, he filled Washington’s need for someone to lead a “politically unsophisticated” people who were seen as exhibiting a “strong tendency toward social conformity”; on the other, he fed Washington’s fear that the Koreans’ incapacity for “spontaneously individual attitudes” would allow him to “[exploit] the authoritarian potentialities of his position to the fullest.”⁹⁶ Rhee’s status as the democratic spokesman *of Korea for America* thus constitutes the central paradox of his voice: Was he a democratic representative, singularly endowed with the capacity to speak on the behalf of the Korean masses? Or was he an

⁹² I say *Native Speaker* is “conventionally” Asian American in part due to its self-conscious exploration of familiar themes related to second-generation immigrants but also to its ubiquity in Asian American scholarship and among college syllabi.

⁹³ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: Norton, 1997), 214.

⁹⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE) 44-48, “Prospects for the Survival of the Republic of Korea,” Oct 28, 1948, Appendix A, “Personality of Syngman Rhee.”

⁹⁵ Edward Said famously quotes Marx in the epigraph of *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

⁹⁶ NIS 41: Korea – Structure of the Government. February 1952.

authoritarian dictator, whose insistence on being the *only* voice of Korea morally and practically undermined the Free World?

With the conclusion of World War II, the Allied forces divided Korea at the 38th parallel with the Soviets in the north and the Americans in the south.⁹⁷ As explained in the introduction, the Koreans had initially welcomed the occupiers as liberators: the Soviets and the Americans were supposedly in Korea “for the limited purposes of receiving Japanese surrenders and of disarming and demobilizing enemy forces.”⁹⁸ However, the division of Korea, superficially an act of Allied cooperation, quickly gave way to intensifying hostilities between the Soviets and the Americans as well as misunderstandings between the occupiers and the Korean locals. In the south, the Korean people saw an *independent* and *unified* Korea as key to “peace in the Far East, therefore in the world”; the United States, on the other hand, saw an *anti-communist* and therefore *divided* Korea as critical to its own need to legitimize the Free World.⁹⁹

At first, Rhee, summoned back to Korea by the U.S. occupying forces, seemed like the solution to this conflict. After 40 years in the United States, Rhee boasted excellent credentials. Having spent six years in a Japanese prison for pro-independence activities, Rhee had the necessary anti-Japanese pedigree to placate the Korean locals.¹⁰⁰ More important to the Americans, Rhee distinguished himself from these locals, whom they deemed “most narrow, selfish and confused in their political thought.”¹⁰¹ He also stood out among the contingent of returning exiles that the occupiers deemed “thinking Koreans,” who had been educated abroad, identified as Christian, and spoke English.¹⁰² According to Rhee’s biographer and adviser Robert T. Oliver, “the chief foundation of [Rhee’s] effective leadership” was his “integration of the cultures of the East and the West.”¹⁰³ Although a Korean, he had studied under and befriended Woodrow Wilson; received an American doctorate from Princeton (from Princeton, no less); married a Austrian woman; developed a breakfast habit of coffee, fruit juice, cereal, and eggs. By the time he returned to Korea, he spoke an English-accented, grammatically-garbled “pidgin

⁹⁷ Notably, the US-Soviet military occupation of Korea was actually not the Allies’ intended route for Korea. The United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China had in 1943 secretly and informally decided upon a four-way trusteeship for Korea. But while the trusteeship had been laid out in the spirit of Rooseveltian internationalism, Truman’s administration decided to opt for what Cumings calls “classic nationalist methods.” The erection of a US military government in the south with “definite territorial boundaries” would offer a “surer” path for “containing Soviets and anticolonial nationalism” and, correspondingly, for ensuring American hegemony in the postwar world. For a thorough account of the occupation years, see Cumings, *Origins, Vol. 1* and *Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U P, 1990).

⁹⁸ Report by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Subcommittee for the Far East, 22 October 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VI, 1095-96.

⁹⁹ Ben Limb stipulates that anything short of independence “will surely lead to another world war. Human consideration must prevail over expediency and all other considerations. Appeasement in any form and sacrifice of justice invariably leads to war.” See “The Acting Chairman of the Korean Commission (Limb) to the Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (Vincent),” *FRUS*, 1945, VI, 1116-17.

¹⁰⁰ Rhee had fled to the United States after his imprisonment, “ostensibly to study” but, Robert T. Oliver implies, actually to “save Korean independence.” See *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1954), 76.

¹⁰¹ NSC Report 8/1.

¹⁰² “History of Korean Politics,” July 16, 1947, Records of General HQ, Far East Command, RG 554; The Political Adviser in Korea (Benninghoff) to the Acting Political Adviser in Japan (Atcheson), 10 October 1945, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1945, VI (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945), 1070.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, viii.

Korean.”¹⁰⁴ Two specific factors helped Rhee secure U.S. backing over other contenders: first, his status as “the symbol of anti-Communism in the Korean mind,” and second, his unparalleled *vocality* about Korea’s national debt to American democracy. Indeed, Rhee’s open homage made him “so much the greatest of Korean statesmen that . . . he [was] the only one.”¹⁰⁵

Even though U.S. Cold War policy invested in Rhee with the hope of exercising through him “a considerable voice” in Korea’s post-liberation development,¹⁰⁶ and even though his strings were pulled tight by Washington’s clenched fists, Rhee was not exactly a puppet president in that he never hesitated to pursue his own agenda of national independence and personal glory. Rhee’s voice, accordingly, was anything but ventriloquized. Oliver writes, “He talked well, effortlessly, articulately, with words well chosen and faultlessly articulated . . . His features were mobile, his eyes glowed.” In his heyday, up to 200,000 Korean people would stand for hours to see him speak. He would “achieve overwhelming effects . . . The result would put Sinatra to shame!”¹⁰⁷

Rhee began appealing oratorically to the United States to support Korean independence decades before the issue entered U.S. purview. A diplomat upon arriving in the United States in 1904, Rhee averaged two to three speeches per month as a student. Hee-wan Yang writes, between 1905-1910, “Rhee settled upon public speaking as the chief medium for such influence as he could exert on American foreign policy toward Korea.”¹⁰⁸ Yang, Oliver, and Seymour Vinocour maintain that Rhee saw Korean independence as the logical corollary of international opinion and especially of US foreign policy.¹⁰⁹ As a result, Rhee often recorded speeches for US radio and television and would opt for English when addressing a mixed audience.¹¹⁰ He also actively pursued speaking opportunities at global venues. After helping found the Korean Provisional Government in 1919, Rhee immediately hightailed to Paris to petition the League of Nations on behalf of the new exilic government. The Paris Conference conveners were unwilling to discuss the issue of Korean independence much less help resolve it; yet Eric Yong-Joong Lee conjectures that Rhee’s “active approach to the world public opinion might have influenced the Allied powers to decide the independence of Korea right after World War II.”¹¹¹ In the months leading up to the inaugural United Nations conference in 1945, Rhee nagged Washington for an invitation, declaring that international recognition was “the only effective means to stop the Soviet Union’s occupation of Korea.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁴ “Father of His Country?” *Time* (Oct 16, 1950). Mark Gayn writes, “After thirty-five years in exile he spoke what was almost a pidgin Korean. He made it do, and his intensity compensated for the tortured grammar.” See “What Price Rhee?” *The Nation* (March 13, 1954): 215.

¹⁰⁵ US Military Governor John R. Hodge, as quoted by Oliver in “Transition and Continuity in Korean-American Relations in the Postwar Period,” *Korean-American Relations, 1866-1997*, eds. Yur-Bok Lee and Wayne Patterson, 67-82 (New York: SUNY Press, 1999): 74.

¹⁰⁶ “Personality of Syngman Rhee.”

¹⁰⁷ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 3, 34.

¹⁰⁸ Hee-wan Yang, “A Critical Edition of Major Speeches by Rhee Syngman and Park Chunghee on the issue of Korean Unification, 1945-1979” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1985), 47.

¹⁰⁹ Vincour’s dissertation, “Syngman Rhee: Spokesman for Korea” (PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 1953), was written during the Korean War. Like Oliver, Vincour knew Rhee personally. Oliver’s writings on Rhee are extensive, but see in particular “Case Study in Transnational Oratory,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 48, no.2 (1962): 115-127.

¹¹⁰ Yang, “Major Speeches,” 50-51; Oliver, “Case Study,” 120-124.

¹¹¹ Eric Yong-Joong Lee, “Early Development of Modern International Law in East Asia: With Special Reference to China, Japan and Korea,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 4 no.1 (2002): 54-55.

¹¹² Sang-hoon Lee, “Syngman Rhee’s Vision and Reality: The Establishment of the Nation and Thereafter,” *The Review of Korean Studies* 14 no.3 (September 2011): 41.

Between 1945-1960, Rhee undertook more than 1,000 “speaking situations.”¹¹³ Especially when commemorating key points in Korean national history, Rhee would fetishize US milestones, values, and leaders, often through highly figurative language. For example, in the wake of the R.O.K.’s first elections, Rhee proclaims that the nation’s “final destination” lies “at the end of a road that may be both long and rough,” but “we must hold to the faith that only righteousness can defeat evil. If we would make a mountain, we know from experience that we must carry every load of earth.”¹¹⁴ On another occasion, he describes the plight for independence as the planting of seeds that “have not yet come to full harvest.”¹¹⁵ By likening the democratization of Korea to a harvest, a road, and a mountain, Rhee overloads mixed metaphors and overextends well-worn clichés. His recourse to natural phenomena and his idiom of absolutism dramatize Korea’s national journey as a moral plight against villainous forces.

Oliver alleges that Rhee, “unusually expressive,” was exempt from “the myth of Oriental impassivity.”¹¹⁶ From the standpoint of classical rhetoric, however, this oratorical overexertion emblemizes the style of “Asianism.” Unlike the “restraint, decorum, plain style” of Atticism, Asianism is a “florid, bombastic style, [with] exaggerated rhythmic effect, excessive figurative embellishments, and the valuing of form over substance.”¹¹⁷ Rhee’s efforts to “play upon the theme of commitment by blood and upon the heartstrings of American voters” may cause some to “grimace at the melodrama.” Nevertheless, Henry W. Brands concedes that even Rhee’s critics “could not deny [his] effectiveness.”¹¹⁸ Joon Mann Kang argues that the specific climate of anti-communism enabled Rhee’s “rhetorical charisma,” which he calls a “forensic aggressiveness” pursued for “strategic advantages.”¹¹⁹ I would add that Washington’s determination to “[maintain] U.S. prestige in the Far East” enhanced, if not activated, Rhee’s charisma. Just as the R.O.K.’s symbolic value for US policy outweighed its practical liabilities, Rhee’s stalwart anti-communism and rhetorical charisma were seen as sufficient compensation for the fact that he was “[going] almost insane with megalomania” and “just couldn’t [be] shut . . . up.”¹²⁰

So long as Rhee’s and Washington’s goals were one, it was crucial for “the name of Korea [to be] for ever be associated with the United Nations.”¹²¹ Such a calculation aptly elucidates the contingent nature of southern Korea’s autonomy and the specific kind of global consequence that Rhee sought for the R.O.K. For America, the founding of the U.N. was a

¹¹³ These “speaking situations” included “formal and occasional speeches, radio addresses, press conferences, interviews. He also issued written statements and handbills and wrote letters” (Yang, “Major Speeches,” 80).

¹¹⁴ Rhee, “Re-establishment of Korean Nation,” *Vital Speeches Of The Day* 14 no. 23 (September 15, 1948): 709.

¹¹⁵ Rhee, “Where Do We Stand Today: United Resistance of Free Countries of Asia,” *Vital Speeches Of The Day* 16, no. 11 (March 15, 1950): 346.

¹¹⁶ Oliver, “Case study,” 117.

¹¹⁷ J. Vernon Jensen, “Teaching East Asian Rhetoric,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 17.2 (1987): 138. George A. Kennedy cites Cicero in calling Asianism “fat and greasy.” One form is “epigrammatic and pointed”; the other is “swift and impetuous, with ornate words.” Cicero is referring to the orators of Asia Minor. See *A New History of Classical Oratory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U P, 2009): 96.

¹¹⁸ Brands, “The Dwight D. Eisenhower Administration, Syngman Rhee, and the ‘Other’ Geneva Conference of 1954,” *Pacific Historical Review* 56 no.1 (Feb 1987): 84.

¹¹⁹ Kang, “Syngman Rhee’s Charisma of Anti-Communism: An Analysis of a Rhetoric of Machiavellianism, McCarthyism, and Monism, 1945-1960” (Masters thesis, University of Georgia, 1984), 82, 18.

¹²⁰ Memorandum of discussion at the 375th Meeting of the National Security Council, 7 August 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, XVIII: 482; Oliver, *Man Behind the Myth*, 32; Oral History Interview, John Muccio, February 10, 1971, Truman Library, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/muccio1.htm>.

¹²¹ D. H. N. Johnson, “The Korean Question and the United Nations,” *Nordisk Tidsskrift for International Ret* 26 (1956): 25.

“victory of American internationalism,” in that it validated U.S. anti-Communist policy as a human rights crusade.¹²² For Rhee, however, this event launched a lifelong campaign for what might be termed “Korean internationalism”; Korea’s independence, Rhee asserted, was indispensable to “the best interest of humanity.”¹²³ At first, America’s human rights internationalism and Rhee’s pro-independence internationalism were formally indistinguishable. The R.O.K., after all, was a direct product of U.S. and U.N. action.¹²⁴ Enlisting a common history of colonial oppression to substantiate a mutual commitment to national liberation, the United States intercepted the post-WWII surge of Korean revolutionary nationalism and turned it into a democratization project to consolidate the Free World.¹²⁵ In 1947 the Americans abandoned the U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission, a taskforce convened to assist Korean independence, and deferred to the U.N. for “international” oversight of Korea’s first “national” elections (it was administered only in the southern region). If these elections were in effect “American policy garbed . . . in internationalist clothes,” then Rhee was the Korean brooch that awkwardly held the policy in place.¹²⁶ While the Americans saw the U.N. sponsorship of Korea’s elections as international backing for U.S. policy, Rhee saw it as international backing for the long-running theme of his speeches – that a free and democratic Korea goes hand in hand with a free and democratic world. Because administering Korea’s elections helped validate US policy, Rhee’s proclamation of the event as “one of the most significant missions in human history” fell in step with America’s own rhetoric. Rhee’s agenda matched Washington’s even in early 1950, just months before the official start of the Korean War, when he urged President Harry Truman to “risk a few more millions of its hard earned wealth” so that “Korea, the only free spot on Northeastern Asia, can . . . be held . . . for *the free world* and for *an independent Korea*.” Less than a month later, Truman approved a bill sending \$60 million to the R.O.K.¹²⁷

The diplomatic alliance and rhetorical equivalence between Korea and the Free World that Rhee’s speeches relentlessly trumpeted, however, lost their luster during the Korean War (officially, 1950-1953). When, three months into combat, Rhee praised “the men who have died fighting here that *Korea should be kept free* and in so doing that *the world should be kept free*,” the analogy between “Korea” and “world” was already becoming a rhetorical fallacy and a

¹²² Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 59.

¹²³ “The Urgent Need of Victory,” in *Korea’s Fight for Freedom, Vol. II*, edited by Robert T. Oliver, 5-7 (Washington, DC: Library of International Speech, 1952): 6.

¹²⁴ Cumings writes, “In essence we may say that the de facto containment that the Occupation realized became in [Secretary of State Dean] Acheson’s mind and practice a de facto commitment to include South Korea in the Truman Plan from 1947 onward.” The Truman Doctrine, ratified in 1947, supplied economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey, making them the first containment sites. Moreover, by bringing in the UN to lend “international” oversight to the Korean national elections, “Washington policy” became a “post-facto ratification of the containment policy” that was “the modal example of the Truman Doctrine as it should have been.” See *Origins, Vol. 2*, 45, 68.

¹²⁵ Here, the different between “revolutionary nationalism” (as advocated by the Korean left, most of whom were anti-Japanese revolutionaries) and “nationalism” (as advocated by the Korean right, such as Rhee, most of whom bore the stigma of having “collaborated” with the Japanese imperialists and then the American occupiers) is largely inconsequential, in that at issue is not how America factored into Korean national politics but how America viewed Korea in terms of its own Cold War strategy.

¹²⁶ Cumings, *Origins, Vol. II*, 65-67.

¹²⁷ The point is not that Rhee had a direct influence on the bill but that Washington largely backed the same cause as Rhee. The Far Eastern Economic Assistance Act, which also sent \$103 million to Formosa, brought the sum of U.S. aid to Korea for fiscal year 1950 to \$110 million. See “Memorandum of Conversation by Mr. John Z. Williams of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs,” 20 January 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VII, 12.

strategic liability.¹²⁸ After being defeated by the North Koreans at Osan, Pyongtaek, and Taejon, the U.N. Forces could not but question if Korea was, as Rhee insisted, singularly qualified to sustain the Free World or eminently disposed to jeopardize it. Contra the Americans who wanted a Korea that could symbolically stand for the Free World, Rhee wanted “humanity, democracy, and Christian civilization to take a firm stand” for Korea on the battlefield.¹²⁹

Rhee’s oratories show how political strategy and military realities inform the moral registers of rhetorical style. As long as the Cold War remained cool, Rhee’s promulgation of the analogy between Korea and the Free World was useful. But once the war turned hot for America in Korea, Rhee’s rhetorical strategies for advocating Korea’s democratic significance came to seem excessive and their effects jeopardous to the Americans. Rhee wanted to continue fighting until Korea could be reunited under his regime. The United States believed that doing so would lead to more world destruction rather than to the world peace that Rhee so doggedly linked with Korean reunification. President Dwight E. Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dean Acheson both clarified that the United Nations saw Korea not as a site for resolving the global conflict between communism and democracy but as simply a site where such a conflict could be avoided. That Rhee wanted the former rather than the latter made him as much a threat as the Communists to Free World security. Reflecting on the war in July 24, 1953, Eisenhower calls Rhee “uncooperative, even recalcitrant.” He continues: “It is sufficient to say that the United Nations went into Korea only to repel aggression, not to reunite Korea by force the fact remains that the probable enemy is the Communists, but Rhee has been such an unsatisfactory ally that it is difficult indeed to avoid excoriating him in the strongest of terms.”¹³⁰ At this juncture, Rhee’s voice was no longer a ventriloquization of U.N. policy. On the contrary, his speeches aimed to combat the “defeatist talk . . . heard in the United Nations corridors.”¹³¹ During the Panmunjom truce negotiations, Rhee’s deployment of his “oratorical powers to defeat . . . a compromise in Korea” made him a nuisance, practically turning the Western Allies against the United States and eliciting something resembling sympathy from the Communists for the U.N. negotiating team.¹³² U.N. Commander Mark W. Clark recalls, “I found myself engaged in a two-front diplomatic battle . . . with the Communists at Panmunjom and with President Syngman Rhee in Seoul” – and, he says, “the biggest trouble came from Rhee.”¹³³

In the summer of 1954, exactly a year after the Korean War armistice, the 79-year-old Rhee visited the United States on a speaking tour of sorts. Rhee’s visit oratorically encapsulates the problems he had caused during the truce talks of 1951-1953 and the Geneva Conference of 1954.¹³⁴ Especially controversial was Rhee’s address to Congress on July 28. At this keynote

¹²⁸ Rhee, “Korea and the United States,” in *Korea’s Fight for Freedom*, 13, emphasis mine; Rhee, “The Recapture of Seoul, Upon Reentering Seoul September 29, 1950,” in *Korea’s Fight for Freedom*, 18, emphasis mine.

¹²⁹ Rhee, “The Urgent Need of Victory,” 6, emphasis mine.

¹³⁰ Robert H. Ferrell, ed. *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York: Norton, 1981), 248. Dean Acheson offers the same assessment at the war’s commencement in *State Department Bulletin, XXIII, No. 575, July 10, 1950* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1950), 579-80.

¹³¹ Oliver, *Korea’s Fight for Freedom, Vol. II*, iv.

¹³² Ibid., iii. For conflicts between the United States and the Western Allies at Panmunjom and Geneva, see Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U P, 1990), 7-8, 200-204. One article notes, “the Peking radio betrayed something akin to sympathy for the U.S. predicament.” The broadcast deemed Rhee’s actions ““an insult to the spirit of independence and democracy of the American people” (“Struggle of Wills,” *Time*, July 13, 1953, 27).

¹³³ Mark W. Clark, *From the Danube to the Yalu* (New York: Harper 1954), 256.

¹³⁴ Rhee has been accused of purposely delaying the truce talks, which constituted two-thirds of the three-year war. Of his tactics, the most notorious was his unilateral release of 25,000 anti-Communist P.O.W.s in protest of the

event, Rhee's figural descriptions of the U.S.-Korea alliance were interpreted as exploitative and fallacious. His steadfast anti-communist stance and overzealous performance of American-ness, both of which had once been deemed his core virtues, here seem rhetorically excessive and politically maximalist. Rhee set the tone for his speech when he departed from his script to stipulate that even though he was by law and by birth a Korean, "by sentiment I am an American."¹³⁵ He then elaborated on the presumed union between Korean and American soldiers (their "souls . . . went up together to God") and between Seoul and Washington ("death is scarcely closer" to the former than to the latter). Most significantly, throughout the talk, Rhee rhetorically likens himself to his American audience, the listening "you":

Ladies and gentlemen of the Congress, the fate of human civilization itself awaits *our* supreme resolution. *Let us* take courage and stand up in defense of the ideals and principles upheld by the fathers of American independence, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, and by the great emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, who did not hesitate to fight in defense of the union which could not survive half free and half slave. *Let us* remember, my friends, that peace cannot be restored in the world half Communist and half democratic. Your momentous decision is needed now to make Asia safe for freedom, for that will automatically settle the world Communist problem.¹³⁶

Here, Rhee deploys one of his pet techniques by according significance to the Cold War in Korea through the American civil war.¹³⁷ This technique allows Rhee to revisit his and the audience's common ideals, principles, and forefathers. His purpose, though, is not only to authenticate his own American-ness but also to insinuate that the congressmen, cabinet members, military officials, diplomatic corps, and joint chiefs of staff in attendance needed to act *more* American.¹³⁸ He rallies up a collective "us" not just to fight on Korea's behalf but to recognize *him* as the authority on U.S. moral values and foreign policy. By likening his own crusade for a united Korea free from Communism with Lincoln's for a United States free from slavery, Rhee installs himself as America's "great emancipator" and reiterates an accusation he had leveled at the Americans upon arriving at the Washington D.C. airport: "If we only had a little more courage . . . we could have reached the Yalu [to take back North Korea during the war] But some people had a little cold feet."¹³⁹ Rhee's self-designation as the quintessential American statesman comes with the underhanded accusation that U.S. personnel have been undermining the Free World's security. Insofar as Rhee maintained a harder anti-communist line than the Americans with the Soviets between 1945-1948 and with the Chinese and North Koreans between 1950-1954, it was often remarked that he "pursued the American interests more than

peace treaty. The Geneva Conference had been convened to reunite Korea but instead placated Rhee by sending substantial economic aid to the R.O.K. See Foot, *A Substitute for Victory* and Brands, "Eisenhower Administration."

¹³⁵ Walter Trohan, "Rhee Urges U.S. Ships, Planes Join China War: Proposes 2 Million Man Oriental Army" *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 29, 1954).

¹³⁶ Rhee, "Text of Rhee's Address to Congress," *New York Times*, July 29, 1954: 2, emphasis mine.

¹³⁷ Yang notes that "Rhee frequently quoted Lincoln, particularly his 'House Divided' and Gettysburg" speeches ("Major Speeches," 154). For analogies between the Korean War and the US civil war, see Cumings's *The Korean War: A History*, (New York: Random House, 2010.) 64, and William Frank Zornow's "Lincoln and Rhee: An Historical Analogy," *Lincoln Herald* 55 no. 3 (Fall 1953): 23-46. For Zornow, the "major difference" between the two wars is that "Korean unification by arms may not serve American interests" (44).

¹³⁸ C.P. Trussell, "Rhee Bids U.S. Join War on Red China," *New York Times*, July 29, 1954, 2.

¹³⁹ Edward T. Folliard. "Rhee Welcomed to Washington, Mince no Words on Korea," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, July 27, 1954, 1.

Americans.”¹⁴⁰ Just as Rhee’s staunch anti-communist stance ended up being the biggest thorn on which U.S. diplomacy snagged, here his efforts to unite Korea and America toward a common cause put into sharp relief the radicalness of his proposals.

The U.S. media called Rhee’s speech “provocative,” “ill-timed,” “belligerent,” “stunning,” “saddening,” and “such [a] colossal misunderstanding of American and United Nations policy that it was very painful for Congress and the public to hear.”¹⁴¹ Their suggestion that Rhee was propositioning to *start* a war assumes that the Korean War had been a “police action” intended to free the R.O.K. from Communist invaders. But for Rhee, the war’s objective was reunification. His idea of justice was that America follow through with its commitment to Korea and *finish* the war. Just as the symbiosis between U.S. and R.O.K. policies from 1945-1950 manifested in Rhee’s apparent harmonizing of his American and Korean halves, the resounding clash of national interests during the Korean War refracted onto Rhee. Where Rhee’s rhetorical charisma was once seen as part and parcel of his exceptional status as a “Korean American,” a 1954 editorial’s pejorative claim that “President Rhee was an American invention, and is an American protégé” makes him seem akin to Frankenstein’s monster¹⁴² – a grotesque hybrid who affects and thoroughly exhausts the readymade clichés of American-style democracy.

For the remainder of Rhee’s tenure as president, the Americans would come to associate his increasingly overwrought and worn-out rhetoric with his parochialism about world affairs, delusions of self-grandeur, and overestimations of Korea’s international importance. While the fanatical intensity of Rhee’s beliefs vexed the U.S. policymakers, their traitorous content enraged the Korean people. Given that many Koreans had turned to communism during the colonial period as a means for opposing Japan, Rhee’s anti-communism was interpreted as casting his lot with the “alien intrusions that had disrupted and destroyed the placid self-sufficiency of the traditional Korean economy and society.”¹⁴³ It was more than by default of his anti-communism, though, that Rhee became seen as a traitor; it was the specific ways that he used anti-communism to thwart national reunification and to justify retaining in Korea “pro-Japanese” elements (individuals who had served and benefited from “collaborating” with Japan during the colonial period). During the U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission sessions that Rhee subverted, editorials regularly branded him and his cohorts as “pro-Japanese and national traitors who dream about the establishment of a separate South Korean Government.”¹⁴⁴ After being elected president, Rhee staffed his cabinet, as well as the powerful National Police, with “collaborators.” He also disbanded a committee formed by the National Assembly in 1948 to prosecute

¹⁴⁰ Kang, “Spokesman for Korea,” 242.

¹⁴¹ Chalmers M. Roberts, “Rhee Whittles Down China War Proposal,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, July 30, 1954, 1; “Dr. Rhee’s Preventive War,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, July 30, 1954, 24.

¹⁴² “Editorial: The Shape of Things,” *The Nation*, August 7, 1954.

¹⁴³ Cumings, *Origins*, Vol. 1, 95. It is important to clarify here that communism in Korea in 1945 was distinctly national and not international in nature. Cumings writes, “Communism . . . did not signify . . . an adherence to an authority residing in the Kremlin, or commitment to Marxist internationalism. It was a specifically Korean communism” (86). Cumings breaks down the postliberation demographics as such: the patriots were the “communists and leftists who had cut their teeth in anti-Japanese struggle”; the traitors were the Korean capitalists who had become “parvenu opportunists and servitors of alien influences” (82, 95).

¹⁴⁴ A May 28 statement in the *Dok Lib Sinbo* by the Supporting Society for Anti-Japanese Movements (a leftist group) cited in RG 554, “The Pro-Japanese Issue,” 24 June 1947. For the Koreans and particularly the leftists, the Joint Commission was the only road to reunification. For Rhee, it was the equivalent of giving up Korea to the communists.

“collaborators.”¹⁴⁵ The pro-Japanese issue was thus swept under the carpet with the same fell swoop as the independence issue.

In sum, the United States may have by default treated Rhee’s voice as synonymous with that of Korea’s, but many of the Korean people – in particular, those seeking reunification – would come to see Rhee’s policy maneuvers as working *against* the interests of the nation. But even if Rhee’s stake in Korean reunification and his claim to speak for the Korean people were at least a mere facade for his megalomania, America’s privileging of a united, anti-communist Free World over a unified, independent Korea exposes U.N. intervention in Korea for what it is: a U.S. *nationalist* project for which democratic human rights served as the justification for intervention but not the end goal. Within a Free World order, Korea’s push for national independence was untenable, given that the institutional existence of the R.O.K. was defined by its neocolonial relation to U.S. empire. Such an empire, guided by its founding principles, would happily foot the bill for a symbolic Korean democracy. Yet when the issue on the table was jeopardizing its national clout for Korea’s independence, America would hedge, even as it brandished the same card – apparently the trump card – of moral superiority.

Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*: The Model Minority Narrator of American Multiculturalism

The failure of the Korean reunification movement enabled the preservation of a democratic R.O.K.. This failure, furthermore, allowed the Free World to appear victorious, even as we see the Cold War’s manifest irresolution in Korea’s heavily militarized partition and in continuing hostility between its northern and southern halves. The success of the Free World was measured by the reformation of Asian states *and* Asian individuals. Robert G. Lee traces the “model minority” typology to Cold War liberalism and argues that the “transformation of the Oriental from the exotic to the acceptable . . . helped construct a new national narrative for . . . the American Century,” one that entailed both the “self reliance” and the “political silence of Asian America.”¹⁴⁶

Reading the model minority as symptomatic of a Free World victory means that Asian Americans must credit their successes to the missionary spirit of Cold War America, which had given “3 billion people in the developing world (Asia) . . . the rapid escalator to modernity.”¹⁴⁷ Although such a reading implicitly accuses Asia of cashing in on America’s Cold War spoils, the model minority figure has also been used to augur the demise of the Free World at the hands of a Pacific Rim order. If we take the model minority as an *economic* trope – which I do – then Rhee is something of a pivotal figure for this transition since his increasingly authoritarian rule has been seen as enabling South Korea’s postwar development. Rhee’s double betrayal – of the United Nations and of the Korean people – reflects his role in transforming “the nationalism of liberation . . . into the nationalism of domination in the form of state dictatorship.” If, Min-Jung Kim writes, “modernizing the economy became the master narrative of South Korean state nationalism” between 1950-1980, then the resulting “economic nationalism” is precisely what a post-Cold War human rights internationalism would come to counter. Kim posits, “the military

¹⁴⁵ In less than a year, the investigated 682 cases and brought 38 to court. All convicted were released before the outbreak of the Korean War. See Koen de Ceuster, “The Nation Exorcised: The Historiography of Collaboration in South Korea,” *Korean Studies* 25, No.2 (2001): 214.

¹⁴⁶ Lee, *Orientalism*, 146, 151.

¹⁴⁷ William Shawcross’s “A New Dark Age?” *Weekend Australian* (August 1994): 20-21, quoted in Mark T. Berger, “Yellow Mythologies: The East Asian Miracle and Post-Cold War Capitalism,” *Positions* 4 no.1 (1996): 96.

government's implementation of its aggressive modernization policy took the form of state capitalism and was achieved at the cost of enormous social problems."¹⁴⁸ Kim's characterization closely aligns with what scholars have termed the East Asian model of capitalism. This modernization program has been a ready target for post-Cold War human rights discourse, in particular during the "Asian values" debate of the 1990s. Western participants in this debate, claiming to defend universal human rights against claims of cultural relativism, cast "Asian values" as an apology for the curtailment of civil and political rights by Asian states. As they see it, the "East Asian model of capitalism" wholly expunges civil society and is sustained through depersonalized agents of capital – a pointed contrast to American democracy, which empowers its human agents.¹⁴⁹ The immorality of East Asian modernization practices rests with the problematic role of the authoritarian state. On the domestic side, the "strengthening of state authority, central control, and social discipline" putatively comes at the expense of "the development of democratic institution."¹⁵⁰ In terms of international trade, state-regulated economic activity, an export-led development that protected domestic markets, has led to Western accusations of unfair trade practices.

From the American perspective, South Korea, at least until the early 1990s, still lacked a civil society.¹⁵¹ But where its former government was an echo chamber for Rhee's voice, its successive ones had become chambers in which only money talks. Within the terms of a Pacific Century discourse of human rights, Korea's *economic* over-development seems of a piece with Rhee's *political* over-development. On the surface, Lee's novel seems to abide by a different logic, for the ambivalently-coded "Asian value" it thematizes is the narrator Henry Park's invisibility. Park's "talent" for "always [knowing] that moment of disappearance" initially appears key to his commensurability with American democratic society. His "honorable-seeming absence" necessitates his "own instant live burial," yet he relishes the ability to "go anywhere I wish" (202). Park's accretion of "subject effects" through absence has a narrative correlate in his spy reports. In these reports, Park's restrained, subdued voice seems to correct for Rhee's excesses. He says:

I am to be a clean writer, of the most reasonable eye, and present the subject in question like some sentient machine of transcription. In the commentary, I won't employ anything that even smacks of theme or moral. I will know nothing of the crafts of argument or narrative or drama. Nothing of beauty or art. And I am to stay on my uncomplicated task of rendering a man's life and ambition and leave to the unseen experts the arcane of human interpretation (203).

If Rhee's anti-democratic charisma illustrates what Anne Cheng terms "exuberant theatrical extravagance,"¹⁵² then Park's voice appears to have been flattened and stripped clean by the logic of late capitalism – or more precisely, the logic of an indiscriminating *Asiatic* capitalism. But Park remains, as Sianne Ngai would say, "animated." His racialized extravagance obtains "*even* when [racial] difference is signaled by the pathos of emotional suppression rather

¹⁴⁸ Kim, "Moments of Danger in the (Dis)continuous Relation of Korean Nationalism and Korean American Nationalism" in *positions* 5 no. 2 (Fall 1997): 361.

¹⁴⁹ For a breakdown of the attributes of the "East Asian economic model," see Cumings's *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations* (1999; repr., Durham, NC: Duke U P, 2002), 88-92.

¹⁵⁰ William Theodore De Bary, *Asian Values and Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1998), 3.

¹⁵¹ Democracy formally arrived in 1992 with Kim Young-sam, South Korea's first civilian president.

¹⁵² Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*, 36.

than by emotional excess.”¹⁵³ Given that “animatedness” mediates between “the seemingly neutral state of ‘being moved’” and “the image of the overemotional racialized subject,”¹⁵⁴ the difference in Park’s and Rhee’s rhetorical registers keys us to the historical specificity of their animation. In contrast to Rhee’s anti-communist sloganeering, Park’s neutral voice adheres to a purportedly more universal world order. The apparent arrival of a post-Cold War human rights regime, it seems, requires America’s Korean spokesman to transition from being an enthusiastic campaigner for anti-communism to being a mechanical transcriber of events.

Presuming that Rhee’s rhetoric typifies Asianism, then could we say that Park’s clinically pristine style exemplifies Atticism? Ostensibly, yes. The disciplining of Park’s voice, like the cultivation of model Asian citizens, in a sense proves that the US experiment in democracy has borne fruit: the Asian speaker rhetorically and legally manifests the liberal subjectivity that Cold War America aimed to instill in the Third World. But there is a crucial caveat. Park’s “clean,” “reasonable” style denotes not an inhabitation of the liberal subject but an imitation of its obverse, a “sentient machine of transcription.” We see in his style the need to purge writing of theme, moral, argument, narrative, drama, beauty, art – of, to be sure, an authorial presence. In the attempt to realize the Asian-American-minus-the-Asian, the machine-like Park produces the same narrative effect as the self-present, self-possessive liberal subject but via self-effacement and self-dispossession.¹⁵⁵ In such a scenario, what is extravagant is not the performance itself but its concealment. Park’s transcription of “events” so effectively dramatizes the voice of a machine and so seamlessly conceals his subjective presence that Hoagland tacks his reports – “textbook examples,” “veritable stylesheets” (170) – on the office wall. Although we never actually see one of these reports, Park’s narration gives us a sense of how they might look. His syntactically simple, structurally parallel sentences connote order, proportionality, facticity even.

Notably, this list-like and apparently mechanized prose is stylistically set off from Park’s “lyrical modes,” which often appear at the ends of chapters. As I see it, *Native Speaker* has been a shoo-in for Asian American studies syllabi because the tension between Park’s spy reports and his “lyrical modes” animates the tension between the politically-compromised voice of the model ethnic assimilator and that of the “idealized critical subject.” Christopher Lee defines the “idealized critical subject” as a theoretical construct that “[integrates] the production of critical knowledge and effective political praxis.”¹⁵⁶ Since its inception, the field of Asian American studies has worked to theorize, locate, name, and promote this subversive protagonist. For example, in an essay entitled “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake,” Frank Chin works to distinguish the “real” Asian American artist from the “fake” one, who glories in “racist love.”¹⁵⁷ Scholars such as Lisa Lowe have retained Chin’s political indignation while dispensing with his chauvinism. Lowe poses this “political subject in critical apposition to the category of the citizen” and celebrates Asian American cultural texts as immanently

¹⁵³ For Ngai, “animatedness” is a racially-specific term that connects “the organic-vitalistic and the technological-mechanical” (95, emphasis hers).

¹⁵⁴ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 95.

¹⁵⁵ To quote Palumbo-Liu’s reading of James Fallows, the “Asian American is precisely the Asian American purged of Asia” (*Asian/American*, 206).

¹⁵⁶ Lee, *The Semblance of Identity: Aesthetic Mediation in Asian American Literature* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford U P, 2012), 9.

¹⁵⁷ Chin, “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake,” *The Big Aiiieeee!*, eds. Jeffery Paul Chan, et. al., 1-92 (New York: Meridian, 1991).

subversive critique.¹⁵⁸ In considering the effects of this political disposition to the academy, Viet Thanh Nguyen contends that Asian American intellectuals self-identify as “bad subjects.”¹⁵⁹

If we follow these above critics by employing Asian American studies’ industry standard for literary appreciation, Lee’s use of an enigmatically lyrical style to portray his model minority protagonist spy may seem puzzling, for he presents Asian America’s bad politics *through* the “oppositional politics” of aesthetic experimentation.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, criticism on *Native Speaker* largely pits Park’s manifold masks (his racial reification) against his ponderous lyricism (his literary subjectivization). Michelle Rhee, for instance, claims that Park’s spy reports “implicate the act of writing prose or poetry about one’s own people as a kind of spying on or selling out of one’s ‘own kind.’” For Tina Chen, Park’s deceptions lie not only in his purveyance of “insider” knowledge on his culture but also in his cultivation of an identity based on “[speaking] a story not his own.”¹⁶¹ To the extent that Park’s disciplined spy discourse have been taken as evidence of his racial abjection and political complicity, his sporadic bursts of lyricism have been read in terms of racial redemption and political compensation. Rhee writes that Park’s “crafting of artistic language is actually perilous, as . . . he nearly destroys Hoagland’s operations.” She sees Park’s lyrical addresses to “you” as warning “the reader or . . . a white or non-Asian American” of “an imminent invasion of ‘perilous’ model citizens and ‘dutiful brethren.’” Though Chen and Liam Corley accord Park’s “lyrical modes” redemptive value, it is Daniel Y. Kim who bears the most fierce and most critically-engaged stake in Park’s lyricism. Kim’s juxtaposition of Lee’s aesthetic representation with Kwang’s political representation leads him to posit that the novel “constructs the aesthetic realm . . . as a domain of abundant recompense.”¹⁶²

Instead of treating Lee’s spy theme and his lyrical modality as contradictory, I propose that both proceed from Lee’s employment of narrative unreliability. Like the model minority, the unreliable narrator was a concept birthed by Cold War liberalism. Also, just as the model minority yokes America’s Cold War triumph with its post-Cold War anxiety, the unreliable narrator has been interpreted via contradictory moral registers. My reading of Park’s narrative unreliability begins with but pointedly departs from Wayne Booth’s original coinage of the concept in 1961. Booth writes, “a narrator [is] *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not.” Booth’s theory, in being predicated on “norms,” makes the narrator’s “moral and intellectual qualities” the primary site of readerly judgment.¹⁶³ Based on his model, the narrator’s ironic distance from established moral centers discloses both the norms at stake and the character traits that violate them.

¹⁵⁸ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke U P, 1996), 12.

¹⁵⁹ Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian American* (New York: Oxford U P, 2002).

¹⁶⁰ In *The Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies: Autonomy and Representation in the University* (New York: New York U P, 2009), Mark Chiang notes how the institution of Asian American studies has “[yoked] oppositional politics with aesthetic autonomy” (29).

¹⁶¹ Rhee, “‘Greater Lore’: Metafiction in Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*,” *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 36 no.1 (Spring 2011): 160; Chen, *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford U P, 2005), 153. See also Hyungi Park, “Diaspora, Criminal Suspicion, and the Asian American: Reading *Native Speaker* and *A Person of Interest* across the Pacific,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 13 no.2 (2012): 231-250.

¹⁶² Rhee, “Greater Lore,” 165, 166; Corley, “‘Just Another Ethnic Pol’: Literary Citizenship in Chang Rae-Lee’s *Native Speaker*,” *Transnational Asian American Literature*, eds. Shirley Geol-lin Lim, et. al., 55-74 (Philadelphia, P.A.: Temple U P, 2006): 68; Chen, 153; Kim, “Do, I, Too, Sing America?: Vernacular Representations and Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 6 no.3 (October 2003): 251.

¹⁶³ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961), 158-159, emphasis his.

As poststructuralism, postcolonialism, feminism, and critical race studies have brought the liberal subject into disrepair, literary scholars have worked to distinguish between narrative unreliability as moral deficiency on the one hand and human fallibility on the other.¹⁶⁴ As a result, narrative unreliability, a literary technique conceptualized to substantiate the liberal subject, has come to critique this hegemonic subject by underscoring the perspectival limitations that plague *all* humans. The post-Cold War world, then, has not merely introduced an apparently more universal “human” that dethrones the liberal subject but has also set the stage for the literary debut of an unreliable and *therefore* humanlike narrator. Western liberalism can no more claim the “end of history” than the reliable narrator can claim the politically transcendent title of enlightened “human.”¹⁶⁵ In displacing liberal man as the literary and legal standard-bearer, critics such as Adam Zachary Newton pit “the claims of intersubjectivity against the claims of reason” and suppose that “stories, like persons, originate alogically.”¹⁶⁶ Applying the spirit of Newton’s critique to unreliable narration, Greta Olsen accuses Boothian critics of too hastily “[assuming] the normative validity and universality of their ‘moral philosophy.’”¹⁶⁷ This growing scholarly concern with the “mimetic function” of narration illustrates the notion of “ethos” as “not truth but verisimilitude, the semblance of veracity.”¹⁶⁸

So, does Park’s narrative unreliability make him (to borrow Olsen’s categories) “untrustworthy” or “fallible”? Is he purposefully deceptive or unwittingly naive? Morally flawed or perceptively flawed? “Asian” or “human”? In the final analysis, we cannot answer these questions – that is both the rub and the point. If Park’s mechanistic modes indict him of complicity and betrayal, his “lyrical modes,” often appearing at the end of chapters and in the form of direct addresses, tend to serve an explicatory and expiatory function. In them, Park ponders the terms and the consequences of his “assimilation, so many years in the making” (202). It is particularly in these addresses to “you” that Park purports to disclose his acts of ethnic betrayal – presumably the price of a model assimilation. We see the link between American belonging and ethnic betrayal most clearly in Park’s relationship with John Kwang – the Korean American councilman who entices Park with both the utopian ideal of American democracy and the dream of Korean alliance. Given that Rhee became a strategic liability when his maximalist push for Korean reunification threatened U.S. interests, we see some symmetry in Park’s position: it is when Korean unity is at stake that Hoagland’s most talented agent becomes professionally and politically unreliable.

Kwang, Park’s latest spy assignment, takes Rhee’s rhetorical tactics to their logical extreme – and is wildly successful. Like Rhee, Kwang relies on the theme and rhetoric of

¹⁶⁴ Tom Kindt, “Werfel, Weiss and Co.: Unreliable Narration in Austrian Literature of the Interwar Period” in *Narrative Unreliability in the Twentieth-Century First-Person Novel*, eds. Elke D’hoker and Gunther Martens, 129-146 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008); Greta Olsen, “Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators,” *Narrative* 11 no.1 (Jan 2003): 93-109; Dorrit Cohn, “Discordant Narration,” *Style* 34 (2000): 307-316; Phelan, *Living To Tell About It*; and Kathleen Wall, “The Remains of the Day and its Challenges to Narrative Unreliability,” *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 24 no. 1 (Winter 1994):18-42.

¹⁶⁵ Vincent Pecora conceptualizes the ethical turn as a critical counterpart to Francis Fukuyama’s infamous trumpeting of the end of the Cold War as the “end of history.” Pecora writes, “It is perhaps no accident that at a time when the possibility of viable adversary politics in Western Democracies (that is, more or less collective and coherent opposition to existing structures of power) has been once again reduced to mere neurotic fantasy, ethics should return to critical discourse.” See “Ethics, Politics, and the Middle Voice,” *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): 204.

¹⁶⁶ Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1995), 5, 13.

¹⁶⁷ Olsen, “Reconsidering Unreliability,” 97.

¹⁶⁸ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 227.

likeness. In one speech, he points and gestures at his listeners, bellowing, “This person, this person, she, that person, he, that person, they those, them, they’re like us, they’re are us, they’re just like you!” (152). Here, Kwang incites his audience to view their likeness to each other – and, notably, to *him* – as a premise for “ethnic fellowship” (87). While Rhee’s comeuppance results from his efforts to galvanize his listeners to be more American by being more *like him*, this same tactic enhances Kwang’s appeal. Park tells us: “In ten different languages you say *Kwang is like you. You will be an American*. You have a flyer with his fine picture and his life story beneath If you tell them the story of their lives they will listen” (143, emphasis Lee’s).

While on assignment, Park is supposed to be scavenging Kwang’s life materials for something that Hoagland would find “useful” (289). However, he ends up being wholly taken in by Kwang’s campaign message. The source of Kwang’s appeal is not only his apparent American-ness but the “ready connections” afforded by the two characters’ shared heritage. Park tells us, “one [man] was an outlying version of the other” (138). Park’s difficulty with Kwang as a spy subject leads to an inability to render Kwang as a narrative subject. Kwang drags Park into the narrative frame, causing him to lose his machine-like neutrality. A colleague confides, “I am seeing what you write of Kwang, the way you present him with something extra. It is evident that you cannot help yourself. Something takes you over” (291). This “something extra” that creeps into Park’s spy biographies of Kwang manifests peculiarly in the autobiography he narrates to the reader:

My ugly immigrant’s truth, as was [my father’s], is that I have exploited my own, and those others who can be exploited. This forever is my burden to bear. But I and my kind possess another dimension. We will learn every lesson of accent and idiom, we will dismantle every last pretense and practice you hold, noble as well as ruinous. You can keep nothing safe from our eyes and ears. This is your own history. We are your most perilous and dutiful brethren, the song of our hearts at once furious and sad. For only you could grant me these lyrical modes. I call them back to you. Here is the sole talent I ever dared nurture. Here is all of my American education (320).

In this passage, Park is profligate, contradictory, sentimental, and cryptic, producing prose that is encrusted with figurations, periphrasis, superlatives, and absolutes – Lee’s Korean American narrator, we might say, reproduces Rhee’s rhetorical tendencies. These unreliable tendencies suggest that Korean nationalism cannot be reconciled with American empire, any more than Korean racial particularities can be reconciled with an American-centric ideal of moral humanity. Korean reunification – whether between Korea’s northern and southern halves, Rhee and the Korean people, or Park and Kwang – performs a credentialing function for American democracy, as long as it never *actually* materializes.

On the one hand, Park’s narrative unreliability, like Rhee’s, evidences the fraudulence of the Korean speaker’s claim to Americanness. Yet speaking within a literary realm, Park’s voice produces different and more complicated effects. Where Asian American critics have read Park’s narrative “extra” as vengeance against the white American *reader*, Booth says that narrative unreliability makes the *speaker* “the butt of the ironic point. The author and reader are secretly in collusion . . . agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting.”¹⁶⁹ Reading with Booth for the moment (because *Native Speaker* does bait us with this liberal humanist interpretation), we might conclude that Park’s “lyrical modes,” like Rhee’s oratorical addresses, undermine his

¹⁶⁹ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 304.

performance of American-ness. How can this grammatically awkward, logically perplexing, syntactically contorted method of delivery substantiate the realization of an “American education”? The “talent” Park describes – the ability to “learn every lesson of accent and idiom,” to “dismantle every last pretense and practice,” and to convincingly voice his *absolute* likeness – may appear to be precisely what Rhee could never master. Yet Park’s intensely categorical language expresses not the thoroughness of his achievement but the extremity of his unreliability and the enormity of his deceit. When he presents “you” with “all of my American education,” the Boothian reader would understand the clash between what Park claims and how he claims it as one between “the narrator’s explicit discourse and the author’s implicit discourse.”¹⁷⁰ Through Park’s emphatic bid for American-ness, the reader apprehends the implied author’s message that “all of my American education” is an inferior, invalid substitute for “all-American.”

While Booth’s model of unreliability flatters the reader’s interpretive and moral prowess, post-Boothian critics would have the reader treat the narrator as innocent until proven guilty – or, to be precise, as situationally fallible until proven dispositionally untrustworthy.¹⁷¹ Such critical gestures of accommodation and non-judgment turn the unreliable narrator into a revelatory, instructive, critical figure. Taking unreliability as a sign of a literary speaker’s humanlike qualities helps nudge us toward an interpretation that reverses Booth’s terms. If, for F. K. Stanzel, “the most important use” of first-person narration is “to reveal the biased nature of our experience of reality,” and, for Kathleen Wall, unreliability “gives us clues to habitual ways of thinking,” then we might say that the narrator’s fallibility has a reflexive effect – it indicts the *unreliable reader* for her biased interpretations.¹⁷² This kind of literary engagement, Judith Butler writes, provokes readers to “understand the limits of judgment and to cease judging . . . in a way that assumes we already know in advance what there is to know.”¹⁷³ Following Butler, our ethical responsibility to Park is not to appraise him morally but to cease immediate judgment and cede prior knowledge. In fact, to treat Park’s narratorial aberrations and equivocations as an extension of his status as a spy or an Asian would be tantamount to not just generically faulty reading but the much more politically insidious act of racial profiling.

Dorothy J. Hale applies Butler’s readerly ethics to the novel through “characterological alterity.” For Hale, alterity refers to the novel’s circumscription of the reader’s access to characters. A formal facet of the novel, this alterity facilitates the perception that “characters [possess] an autonomy” and “have a right to human rights.” Hale writes: “Fictional characters are produced as ‘human’ precisely by the perceived limitation . . . that novelistic form places on their autonomy. Fictional characters can be felt to be no different from real human beings to the degree that their functional positionality seems like a restriction of their subjective potentiality, a limit to the full freedom that they have a right to enjoy beyond their representation by and in the novel.”¹⁷⁴ The asterisk that Park poses to this theory is that while the distinctive character of the universal human form may be its depth and dynamism, which in the novel always points to

¹⁷⁰ Dan Shen, “Unreliability” in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, eds. Peter Hühn, et al. (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2011), [hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php?title=Unreliability&oldid=1529](http://sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php?title=Unreliability&oldid=1529).

¹⁷¹ Olsen, “Reconsidering Unreliability,” 102.

¹⁷² Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, trans. C. Goedsche (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984); Wall, “The Remains of the Day.” Wall quotes Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987): 150.

¹⁷³ Butler, “Values of Difficulty,” *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena*, ed. Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford UP, 2003): 203.

¹⁷⁴ Hale, “Aesthetics and the New Ethics: Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century,” *PMLA* 124 no. 3 (May 2009): 903.

something unshowable, “the distinctive character” of “Asiatic racial form,” according to Colleen Lye, is “its deceitfulness or mystery,” which in literature “always points to the presence of something not shown.”¹⁷⁵ In other words, whereas characterological alterity signifies dimensionality and underlines the inability of representational forms to do justice to the particularities of human individuals, Asian inscrutability invokes racial typicality and suggests that Asian-ness resists being coherently transcribed into a representational mode. This idea that what is *not* shown has signifying potential harkens to Wolfgang Iser’s case that narrative “gaps” activate the reader’s imagination and invite him to “[work] things out for himself.”¹⁷⁶ Park’s unreliability, however, resides not in gaps but in the “extra” that he cannot keep out. This “extra” denotes both the authorial taint disrupting his stylistic impersonality and a narrative extra, literally an extra-diegesis that appears outside of the narrative proper. We might consider Park’s extradiegetic interpellation of a universal “you” as analogous to Rhee’s public addresses to an international audience. Like Rhee, Park insists on the comprehensiveness of his American indoctrination, only to discredit his own claim by doing so.

Unlike Rhee, Park tries to come clean about the price of “[pursuing] the American interests more than Americans.”¹⁷⁷ Park’s claim to “possess another dimension” beyond the “ugly immigrant’s truth” of deceit and exploitation reminds us of the narratorial atonement that he had sought out at the novel’s outset: “For as long as I could I lied. I will speak the evidence now” (6). But much like how the “evidence” Park provides in his diegesis ends up being not expiatory but inculpatory, his “lyrical” extradiegesis offers yet another layer of incrimination. At the conclusion of *Native Speaker*, we see that each moment and each mode of reckoning reaffirm Park’s illegitimacy as an American *and* his unreliability as a narrator. His applications to “you” to evaluate the American-ness of the “good Asian” coincide with the novel’s formal cues that we evaluate the humanness of the unreliable narrator. The extra-narrative that cannot be reconciled with the narrative proper – the “lyrical modes” that exceed the logic of a spy thriller – thus brings to light Park’s Korean-ness by disrupting the illusion of a reliable machine-like narrator. In revealing to the reader the ugly truth of having “exploited my own, and those others who can be exploited,” Park demonstrates at the level of narration how he had characterized his spying: “in every betrayal dwells a self-betrayal” (314). Just as his reports of Kwang are like an “exposure of a different order,” like “offering a private fact about my father or mother,” Park’s diegetic “extra” shows that what gets betrayed through self-betrayal is the deceptive Korean’s human aspect (147). Put differently, Park’s revelation of the model minority’s duplicities comes in the same narratorial swoop that hazards to capture the multiplicity of the human. His rhetoric of absolutism purports to eliminate the possibility of blanks, to leave no corner of himself uncovered, no dimension of his deceptions unplumbed. This aspiration for exhaustiveness in one respect confirms and gives narrative form to his “assimilist sentiment,” his “ugly and half-blind romance with the land” (267). Yet Park’s language of extremity conveys the impossibility of capturing all of his dimensions and hence preserves the alterity – the characterological unknown – that he so strenuously tries to account for. Park’s “extra,” by allowing for the simultaneity of human complexity and Asian typicality, illustrates how the endeavor to thoroughly expose his

¹⁷⁵ Lye, *America’s Asia*, 7. Chen’s theory of “double agency” offers another excellent theory of the Asian American’s multi-dimensionality. For Chen, double agency represents not betrayal but rather the “multiple allegiances that Asian Americans have maintained in order to construct themselves as agents capable of self-articulation and –determination” (*Double Agency*, xviii).

¹⁷⁶ Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins U P, 1978), 48.

¹⁷⁷ Kang, “Rhee’s Charisma of Anti-Communism,” 242.

multiple dimensions, to once and for all pull back the Asian's endless masks, in effect discloses the human's infinite dimensionality.

Rhee's "extra," let us remember, signaled his incorrigible Korean-ness. The immorality of his oratorical form (imitation) and content (military aggression) threatened US security and international human rights; he was un-American and thereby inhuman, if not inhumane. For Rhee, the failure to consummate an "American education" and the betrayal of his Korean brethren show that the irreconcilability between Korean and American maps onto that between Asian and human. For Park, though, these very same indicators of unreliability merely point up his fallibility; they make him no more than – but, importantly, no less than – human.

The literary voice of Asian America

Given the terms by which the United States deemed Rhee unreliable, Park's unreliability, in establishing his humanness, brings to bear the critical potency of *literature* for challenging the universal claims and moral presumptions of a U.S.-based human rights geopolitics. I want to conclude by considering how the multivalent moral registers of unreliability might help us rethink the relations between the narrator Park, the interpellated reader "you," and the Asian American author Lee, and to revise the literary legacy of the "native informant" that America's Cold War in Asia helped consecrate.

Through Rhee and Park, we see how America's moralization of its national identity through divergent human rights regimes has hinged on foreclosing Korean unification and on suspending the Korean War. For both the Cold War anti-communist representative Rhee and the post-Cold War "model minority" Park, the moral legibility of the "American human" requires distinguishing between Korean and American and partitioning the useful Korean model from the dangerous Korean peril. Hence, even though the Cold War rages on in a still-divided Korea, and even at the cusp of Asia's apparent "rise" and America's apparent wane, Asian voice remains central to mediating the relation between, and at times enabling the synonymy of, US foreign policy and western human rights discourse – or, more succinctly, of "American" and "human."

If within America's human rights diplomacy the representative Asian voice has helped secure the legal and symbolic synonymy between American and human, then within cultural diplomacy the voice of the native informant or autoethnographer has depended on the synonymy between author and narrator. The most well-known case of this latter dynamic is Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1975), the uncertain generic status of which has spawned vicious debates about the politics of representation – does Kingston's authorial voice vouch for the cultural knowledge introduced by the narrator? does Kingston's cultural authority perpetuate negative stereotypes? is the autobiography the only marketable genre of Asian American literature? The crisis for political self-representation produced by the ethnic author's generically overdetermined spokespersonship caused Frank Chin to bemoan, "[A] Chinaman can't write an autobiography without selling out."¹⁷⁸ Scholars have henceforth complicated Chin's position, and one might even say that the very premise and subsistence of Asian American studies has relied upon the political recuperation of voice. Efforts to locate the "Asian American," whether in the culturally authoritative autoethnographic voice or in the politically resistant voice, demonstrate how, to quote Mark Jerng, "Asian American writing [is] construed and constructed through the articulations of writers, texts, and audiences."¹⁷⁹ Within this context for reading,

¹⁷⁸ Chin as quoted in Wong, "Autobiography," 35.

¹⁷⁹ Jerng, "Nowhere in Particular: Perceiving Race, Chang-rae Lee's *Aloft*, and the Question of Asian American Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 56, no. 1 (2010): 189.

Lee's *Native Speaker* has been such a popular "Asian American" novel because for the field's critics, Park's allegedly vengeful "lyrical modes" reaffirm the political purchase of the aesthetic autonomy, while for mainstream readers, the thematization of Korean American assimilation affords the easy ethnic connection between author and narrator.¹⁸⁰

In my reading, Park *is* Lee's proxy – just not in an autobiographical sense. Park speaks for Lee because the unreliable narrator is a device that allows the author to indirectly "[communicate] with his or her audience by means of the voice of another speaker addressing another audience."¹⁸¹ The novel's voicing of the unreliable Oriental as the "Asian human" performs two functions: 1) it delinks *American* from *human* within the domain of geopolitics, thus *de*-authorizing America as the enforcer of human rights, and 2) it delinks *author* from *narrator* within the domain of literary politics, thus *re*-authorizing the ethnic informant, Chang-rae Lee, as a novelist. Where Rhee's push for Korean reunification exposed his rhetorical unreliability and *therefore* his political unreliability, Park's near sabotage of American empire signifies not (only) the slipperiness of the typical Oriental but the fallibility, vulnerability, and limitedness of the normative human. To the extent that Park's unreliability is effected by the novel form, we can suppose that the "writers, texts, and audiences" that construe and construct the "ethnic" in Asian American literature are the very same as the implied authors, implied readers, and unreliable narrators who enable the voicing of a literary speaker as "human." This "Asian human" figure does not, in my mind, represent an easy reaffirmation of literature's affiliation with "humanism" in an ideological sense. But it does allow for a strikingly positivist account of Asian voice that is distinctly literary *and* historically specific. In coding the latent desire for Korean unity – and, even more latently, for Korean reunification – as "human," *Native Speaker* brings literature's humanist imperatives into conflict with human rights. In other words, Lee's novel forces a critical reconceptualization of the "human" as the master signifier of Enlightenment thought and by doing so problematizes the kinship between human rights and literary humanism. That the paradoxical convergence of "Asian" and "human" comes by way of a text so exemplarily "Asian American" – that the potential for humanization resides within the *literary* signifier of Asian – suggests that the ethnic and the universal are no more mutually exclusive poles for the literary humanities than the Asian and the human are for human rights.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Rand Richards Cooper writes, "Hidden inside 'Native Speaker' is a memoir struggling to get out." See "Excess Identities" *New York Times*, April 9, 1995, accessed March 6 2012, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A0CE4DC163AF93AA35757C0A963958260>.

¹⁸¹ Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State U P, 2007), 9.

¹⁸² In reading *Aloft* (2005), the only novel in Lee's oeuvre to feature a non-Asian protagonist, Jerng writes, "These strategies of *ethnicizing* [the Italian protagonist] Jerry or *universalizing* him (and concomitantly realigning him with an ethnic Lee or a universal, suburban Lee) . . . use a binary of universalism (white, suburban life) and particularism (immigrant, cultural heritage)" ("Nowhere in Particular, 190, emphasis mine).

Chapter 2

A Long View of History: America's *Kabuki* Theater and Ishiguro's *An Artist in the Floating World*

“We are now in the new, international system of globalization.”¹⁸³

--- Thomas Friedman

Upon enrolling in a one-year creative writing course at the University of East Anglia in fall of 1979, Kazuo Ishiguro rented a small room and began to write. He penned and tossed two stories set in present-day Britain. Then, he recalls, “quite suddenly one night . . . I found myself writing, with a new and urgent intensity, about Japan – about Nagasaki, the city of my birth, in the last days of the Second World War.”¹⁸⁴ After a short gestation period that included publications in now-defunct literary journals, these early short stories culminated in two novels: *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986). Both novels were well-received, with *Pale* winning the Winifred Holtby Award (for best expression of a sense of place) and *Artist* being awarded the Whitbread Prize and shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

Ishiguro has often conjectured that his relatively painless transition to novel-writing had to do with “a great hunger [in the 1980s] for this kind of new internationalism,” for a writer who “could kind of blow British culture out of its inward-looking, postcolonial post-Empire phase.”¹⁸⁵ Critics and reviewers of the time were generally of a similar mind. Finding postcolonial or multiethnic literature the most convenient rubric for placing Ishiguro, they often discussed him alongside the likes of Salman Rushdie, Timothy Mo, and Hanif Kureishi.¹⁸⁶ These culturally-interested readers interpreted Ishiguro's works as unmediated expressions of Japanese-ness. Even *The Remains of the Day* (1989), a novel narrated by a British butler, has been treated as an exposé of Japanese character and tradition. In more recent years, Ishiguro's works have found a rather different canonical home: namely, cosmopolitan literature and world literature. These days, he is just as likely to be grouped with Ian McEwan as he is with Amitav Ghosh; explicitly ethnic East Asian writers such as Mo have all but fallen out of the conversation. The centerpiece of this conversation, moreover, is less often Ishiguro's ethnic background. Instead, critics flock to address his widespread circulation, his relation to translation, the status of art in the age of globalization, and posthumanism and human rights.

This chapter reads Ishiguro's novels in relation to U.S.-Japan geopolitics. In the context of Japan's economic ascent in the 1970s and 1980s, the familiar guidebook-approach to Ishiguro's 1980s novels – *Pale*, *Artist*, and *Remains* – represents not an innocuous will to knowledge about a foreign land but a strategy for containing Japan by studying its hidebound culture and time-honored traditions. Critics who returned to Ishiguro's “Japan” novels following his achievement of a rarefied “cosmopolitan” status have re-interpreted these novels – once

¹⁸³ Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Picador, 1999), 7.

¹⁸⁴ Ishiguro, “Introduction,” *Early Japanese Stories* (London: Belmont Press, 2000), 7.

¹⁸⁵ Ishiguro, “January Interview: Kazuo Ishiguro,” interviewed by Linda Richards, *January Magazine*, October 2000, accessed Nov 21, 2013, <http://www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/ishiguro.html>.

¹⁸⁶ Susie O'Brien notes “the extraordinary imaginative effort required” to situate Ishiguro in a postcolonial or Third World paradigm. See “Serving a New World Order: Postcolonial Politics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 42 no. 4 (1996): 800. See also Chu-chueh Cheng, “Making and Marketing Kazuo Ishiguro's Alterity,” *Post Identity* 4 no.2 (Fall 2005), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.pid9999.0004.202>.

deemed national allegories – as a critique of Japanese ultra-nationalism.¹⁸⁷ Ishiguro's second novel, *Artist*, has been the most obvious candidate for enabling such critiques.¹⁸⁸ The narrator Masuji Ono's political immorality and narrative unreliability appear to proceed from his status as an imperial apologist. In showing the detrimental effects of Ono's unwavering *national* loyalty on the individuals closest to him, *Artist* keys us to the moral values articulated by Western democracies, namely the United States, in their censure of industrializing East Asian states, beginning with Japan in the 1970s and most recently targeting China.

Artist is divided into four sections: October 1948, April 1949, November 1949, and June 1950. It opens three years after Japan's World War II surrender. We learn that Ono's home has been severely damaged by American bombs and that both his son and wife had died during the war. These losses, though, are inconsequential to the story Ono tells. They emerge obliquely as Ono agonizes over his daughter's marriage negotiations, which have been hampered – he believes – by the other family's insecurity about the social repute he has achieved as an artist. As Ono summons evidence from his memories to justify this superior social stature, we see him conjuring Japan's former glory and touting his own significance within its imperial project.

My reading of *Artist* treats Ono's parochial vision and inflated sense of self as not primarily a signifier of his excessive patriotism but, more significantly, as an effect of his apparent cosmopolitanism. *Artist* is in essence a collection of “promontory descriptions,” a series of what Mary Louise Pratt terms “monarch-of-all-I-survey scenes” narrated by an itinerant artist.¹⁸⁹ Ono's recollections often begin with the painting of a scene – or at least this is the metaphor to which he is partial. His memories of a bygone Japanese empire emerge piecemeal through the scenes he paints as he shuffles from bridge to pavilion to balcony to hill. Ono's narrative unreliability lies in his application of a paradigmatically cosmopolitan vision upon a stereotypically Japanese landscape – that is, he presents a narrative of “Japan” with which we, the cosmopolitan Western reader have become intimately familiar. Ono casts distance, both temporal and physical, as vital to historical knowledge. Yet the narrative that he tells is glaringly unreliable, primarily due to his rhetoric of conscientious detachment and his unwitting repetition. These narrative qualities superficially evidence his analytical prowess but in effect betray his empathetic incapacity.

In reading Ishiguro's novel through the problematic of cosmopolitan vision, I show how the circumscribed “world” Ono sees and re-presents offers a premise for investigating the historically-contingent modes of seeing employed by us – the contemporary Western reader. I employ visual metaphors in discussing the adjudication of the historical present and its relation to a bygone past, in part because Ono, as a historian-artist, invites us to do so but also because the stereotype of Oriental inscrutability is, as Rey Chow has pointed out, fundamentally wedded to “a composite visual stereotype – the other as face.”¹⁹⁰ Ono's descriptions of local scenery also function as frames for his narrative recollections of the past. The conjoining of vision and voice

¹⁸⁷ The publication history of Ishiguro's novels reflects the reading trend I am suggesting here. Bill Bryson writes that *Pale* was widely praised in Britain and translated into 13 languages but “sank without a trace in America.” *Artist* met a similar fate, selling “fewer than 2,000 copies” (“Between Two Worlds,” April 29, 1990, accessed November 21, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/29/magazine/between-two-worlds.html>). Vince Passaro deems *Remains* Ishiguro's true breakthrough novel, claiming that “[*Artist* and *Pale*] garnered . . . substantial sales,” only after its success (“New flash from an old isle: Kazuo Ishiguro's latest novel exhibits Britain's literary vigor.” *Harpers* 291 no. 1745 October 1995: 73)

¹⁸⁸ Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World* (New York: Vintage, 1986). Future citations will occur parenthetically.

¹⁸⁹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 198, 200.

¹⁹⁰ Chow, *Protestant Ethnic*, 64-65.

in these instances links “showing” with “telling,” mimesis and diegesis¹⁹¹; it also highlights the novel’s internal focalization, a narrative situation in which a narrator relays only what falls within his province of knowledge.¹⁹² I am interested in how the regime of the visual – a stand-in for *knowledge* – begets apparent historiographic surety as a specific kind of narrative reliability. We readers are quick to realize that Ono’s “paintings” of the past – what he sees, remembers, and interprets – reveal his shortcomings in vision and unreliability in narration. But one could say the same about what *we* see, remember, and interpret about Ono – the qualities that compel us to caricature him as an allegorical embodiment of the “Japan” we associate with WWII.

Ono’s narrative tendencies point up our own tendency to draw on the past to understand and legitimate the cult of the present. They compel me to ask how Western assessments of “Japan,” what Chow would deem “an impenetrable (sur)face,” take for granted the historical and analytical acuity of a viewer whose knowledge of the Other is total and reliable.¹⁹³ Of specific concern is how a presentist orientation manifests in Western efforts to account for Japan’s exceptional status as a modern Asian state. Japan’s post-World War II exceptionality has been symbolized and staged by Japanese *kabuki*, famously known as a “theater of traditions.”¹⁹⁴ The livelihood of America’s *kabuki* is relatively short but dramatically varied. I trace how this “feudalist” art was paradoxically enlivened by the Allied Occupation of Japan, sent on diplomatic tours in the 1950s and 1960s, and re-deployed as a codeword for the deceptiveness and capriciousness of Japanese policy during the 1970s and 1980s. This history of America’s *kabuki* shows how Western attempts to make historical sense of Japan’s geopolitical status has relied on “tradition” as a stable repository of cultural knowledge. Ironically, *kabuki*’s apparent conservation of enduringly “Japanese” cultural qualities has made it particularly reliable for allegorizing Japan’s aesthetic sophistication, democratic compatibility, technological innovation, political deception, and economic aggression. In other words, this ancient art form has been valued by the West for its timelessness, which has offered a pseudo-historical method for rationalizing the exceptionality of Japanese *modernity*. On the two specific periods I examine, this exceptionality was expressed in the rhetoric of “miracles”: during the occupation years through the 1950s, Japan transformed overnight from consummate enemy into model democracy; in the 1970s and 1980s, Japan displaced the United States as the largest international creditor, thus becoming a geopolitical threat. How was *kabuki*, the age-old theater of tradition, resourced to explain the miraculous and the new? I show how the seemingly diametric coding of “tradition” as conservative or inviolate, archaic or universal, has contributed to the moral coding of Japanese modernity as fascist (when Japan and the Allies faced off during World War II), democratic (when Japan become a crucial Cold War ally), and Asiatic (when Japan inaugurated in Pacific Century).

¹⁹¹ Dorothy J. Hale’s *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (Palo Alto, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1998) discusses the seemingly oppositional between novel critics who prioritized “vision” (e.g. Henry James and Perry Lubbock) and those such as Girard Genette, Roland Barthes, and Wayne Booth who believed that “showing cannot be better than telling, because showing is not an alternative to telling; in literature, it is simply an illusion produced by telling” (67).

¹⁹² For Genette, internal focalization refers to narrator-characters who are “[limited] . . . to the information held . . . at the moment of the action,” a technique that “goes sometimes so far as to become that form of hyper-restriction of field that we call paralipsis (*Narrative Discourse*, 199, 205)

¹⁹³ Chow, *Protestant Ethnic*, 64.

¹⁹⁴ Samuel Leiter, trans. and ed., *The Art of Kabuki: Famous Plays in Performance* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1979), xvi.

Ono's "vision" keys us to questions about historiography and knowledge production; his "voice" raises more racially specific concerns about the moral constitution of Asian modernity. For many narrative critics, "voice" represents a locus of empathetic engagement. Adam Zachary Newton, for example, distinguishes between the realm of the "Said" and the domain of the "Saying," whereby the former is moral and therefore propositionistic and the latter is ethical and defined by "relationship and human connectivity."¹⁹⁵ The crux that "voice" poses in *Artist* is that our narrator is unconscionably impaired in his empathetic capabilities. His lack of awareness about the ethical impact of his actions, moreover, seems to go hand in hand with his unshakeable confidence in his own deductive reasoning. Within human rights discourse, *empathy* has been a key catchphrase, particularly in attempts to promote the social value of literature's moral effects and in attempts to denounce the East Asian model of economic development. How does this geopolitical context influence a reader's indictment of Ono on the basis of his empathy deficiency? How does the affinity between reader and narrator on the basis of their shared faulty vision bear on this indictment? I believe that the likening of (Japanese) narrator with (Western) reader prompted by the novel undoes the easy allegorization of Ono as a proxy for "Japan" and thereby compels a reexamination of our historical premises for condemning Ono. I argue that our swift condemnation reflects our own historical position at a juncture that has been triumphantly marked off as "post-Cold War." This resounding break has been integral to the achievement of a post-Cold War global modernity, to the extent that it configures for us a history that we can now see clearly and know fully.

When read with the history of America's *kabuki*, *Artist* helps us register the consequences of taking a long view of history and bids us investigate rather than presuppose historical relevance. For both the Japanese narrator-painter and the Western surveyor of "Japan," the pursuit of ever larger frames of reference begets ever more distant objects to help light up a historical present. The "world" that Ono mis-represents from his promontory view and the "world" that *kabuki* hypostatizes for American viewers point up related strategies for understanding the historical present; namely, both "worlds" entail a kind of "seeing" that reduces historical processes to an ostensibly reliable historical category: "tradition." On a more general level, my account of America's *kabuki* and Ishiguro's novel take heed of numerous calls that historicist thinking must contend with, to recall Walter Benjamin, "a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now."¹⁹⁶ More specifically, I wonder how a characterological instantiation of both the cosmopolitan reader and an allegorical "Japan" reworks the *ethical* relations between a character and reader with respect to a "post-Cold" War moment. Whereas Lee's *Native Speaker* encourages the reader's empathetic relation to the unreliable narrator Henry Park and therefore recodes Oriental inscrutability as human fallibility, Ishiguro is much more cautious about the literary cultivation of empathy. In the case of *Artist*, Ono's narrative unreliability resides in his literal and metaphorical shortsightedness; it manifests formally in his technique of excessive decorum and restraint, and it corresponds with his moral obtuseness. In Ono's case, unreliability is directly opposed to empathy. Not only does

¹⁹⁵ Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, 5, 7.

¹⁹⁶ Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 261. Carl Schmitt writes, "That all historical knowledge is knowledge of the present, that such knowledge obtains its light and intensity from the present and in the most profound sense only serves the present, because all spirit is only spirit of the present, has been said by many since Hegel" ("The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations" in *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*, trans. by G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 81).

he roundly betray the individuals closest to him, but in doing so his narrative becomes a confession rather than a testimony, and we, correspondingly, we assume the role of prosecutor rather than judge or witness.¹⁹⁷

I aim to understand this prosecution of the empathy-deficient Asian narrator within the geopolitical context of Japan's Western exceptionalism. To that end, I am especially concerned with the cult of a *particular* present. To me, Ono's incapacity for empathy alerts us to the distinction between two prognoses of global capitalism's grip on a post-Cold War present. One is what I refer to as the Global Now, which purports to be more morally accountable and more globally connected and to possess an enlarged capacity for both feeling and knowledge; it also valorizes literature as being especially well-suited for cultivating empathetic ties and shedding historical light. The second manifestation of global capitalism is the Pacific Rim economies, which have taken Japan as a developmental model. Given that empathy has been a core feature of Western conceptualizations of East Asian economic modernization and political immorality, I would say that we Ono's unreliability – the guise of cosmopolitan reason and the dearth of empathetic wherewithal – poses the risk of an Asia-centric economic order. While discourses of the Global Now – as exemplified by Thomas Friedman cited in this chapter's epigraph – projects a celebratory, euphoric attitude toward globalization's upshot, Western human rights groups, government officials, media outlets, and the general public have come to comprehend Asian economic development as globalization's dark side, a program that sacrifices human rights to economic demands and state politics.

We see this specific conundrum played out in Ishiguro's novels; these works have repeatedly, almost obsessively, thematized anti-professionalism and anti-nationalism as socially-imposed obstructions to human dignity. From Stevens to Kathy H. to Masuji Ono to Christopher Banks to the anonymous composer, Ishiguro's characters are consistently defined by the lack or misapplication of the resources to care, due to the demands that their profession and/or their nation places upon them. Among these characters, Ono best illuminates the axioms of the global now: empathy is more humane than reason, the global is more inclusive than the national, the present is more knowledgeable than the past. Ono's unreliable voice, in being an extension of both his ultra-nationalist loyalties and his cosmopolitan aspirations, produces complicated effects on the reader. To what extent are we politically and morally opposed to Ono? Does the extent of our opposition to Ono on political and moral terms undermine our *likeness* to him on the basis of our equally limited historical perspectives and our similarly unreliable historiographic methods? If we analogize narrator with reader in *Artist*, with both figures construed as unreliable surveyors of history, what might be revealed about the recruitment literary texts in the service of a presentist historical orientation? And, finally, in reading Ono's personal history with the Cold War history of America's *kabuki*, how might we account for the constitutive distances that condition our perception of historical archives as well as those that structure our relationship with novelistic characters?

In the pages that follow, I explore the problematic of Ono's cosmopolitan vision and unreliable voice with respect to 1) Cold War geopolitical relations between the United States and

¹⁹⁷ This scenario thus complicates Newton's more redemptive account of narration as ethics: "Cutting athwart the mediatory role of reason, narrative situations create an immediacy and force, framing relations of provocation, call and responses that *bind narrator and listener, author and character, or reader and text*" (*Narrative Ethics*, emphasis mine, 13). At such moments, Newton's notion of narrative ethics employs similar rhetorical tropes as critics of human rights literature – such as Martha Nussbaum, Lynn Hunt, and James Dawes – who understand literature, especially narrative, as a particular kind of testimonial truth and producing special social effects.

Japan and, more broadly, how these relations impacted the key controversies within 1990s human rights discourse, and 2) the novelistic relations between the narrator Ono, the author Ishiguro, Ono's narratee (the recurring "you"), and Ishiguro's implied reader (whom I will refer to as "us" and whom I assume to be a Western contemporary reader). This chapter has four movements. First, my discussion of Ono's cosmopolitan viewpoint troubles readings of *Artist* as either a straightforward critique of excessive nationalism or an unmediated reinscription of Japanese traditional values. Then, I present a case study of how the traditional theater of *kabuki*, a proxy for a historically-ossified "Japan" coded and recoded depending on US geopolitical needs. Third, I discuss two stylistic features in *Artist*, detachment and repetition, in conjunction with the antinomy between Asian values and human rights. Ishiguro's representation of Ono's apparent visionariness and actual unreliability critically engages the historical form of Japan's Western exceptionalism, which, I believe, has informed the culturalist line of reasoning that assumes the compatibility between "Asian values" and economic productivity.

Ishiguro's allegories: nationalism and cosmopolitanism

Though every author may claim the desire to address "universal" ideas, Ishiguro's approach to this objective clearly aims to compensate for the ethnicizing effects of his Japanese heritage. For instance, a *Newsweek* article introduces Ishiguro as "[b]orn into a samurai family," which "raised him Japanese style." Another reviewer observes that Ishiguro "almost always wears black . . . probably because (though he would deny this) he was born Japanese."¹⁹⁸ Given this early reception, Ishiguro has often seized upon interviews as a platform for rebuffing the Japan connection: "My writing has been compared to hi-fi and to sumo wrestling and to cherry blossoms and oriental painting. That is as irritating as it would be for an Italian if every time he wrote a novel reviewers compared his plotting to spaghetti and said that his prose had the precision of a Mafia hit-man."¹⁹⁹ Following the publication of *Artist*, Ishiguro made the "conscious decision to do the next book [*The Remains of the Day*] away from Japan." He has also played up the insignificance of setting to his novelistic projects, noting that the "Japan" that his novels create is "personal, imaginary."²⁰⁰

The "imaginary" nature of Ishiguro's Japan has helped rally the critical tide toward his budding cosmopolitanism. *Artist* has spurred readers to two related interpretations. First, it has elicited an easy condemnation of WWII Japan's ultra-nationalism. Such readers attribute Ono's narrative unreliability to his militaristic nationalism. Maria Stefanescu writes: "[E]arly in the story [readers] will find no reason to doubt the protagonist's account." It is only after "readers become aware of the protagonist's active involvement in Japan's nationalist and expansionist policies" that they come "to re-process preceding information." The second kind of interpretation responds to Ishiguro's tactic of "describing stereotypes . . . and manipulating them engagingly."²⁰¹ Such purposefully heavy-handed depictions of Ono's obsession with samurai-

¹⁹⁸ "Call me Ish: On Doing without Japan," *Newsweek*, October 30, 1989, 114; Kate Kellaway, "The Butler on a Bender," *The Observer*, April 16, 1995: 6.

¹⁹⁹ Christian Tyler, *The Financial Post* (Toronto, Canada), August 12, 1995: 22.

²⁰⁰ Dylan Otto Krider, "Rooted in a Small Space: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro," *Kenyon Review* 20 no. 2 (1998): 149; Kazuo Ishiguro and Kenzaburo Oe, "Wave Patterns: A Dialogue," *Grand Street* no. 38 (1991): 75.

²⁰¹ Stefanescu, "An Artist of the Floating Wor(l)ds," *B.A.S.: British and American Studies* 14 (2008): 73; Ishiguro, "January Interview."

like loyalty and social hierarchies have fed and validated the belief that “national allegories” are a politically incorrect *and* stylistically unsophisticated form of literary representation.²⁰²

Such readings conceive of Ishiguro’s cosmopolitanism as critiquing the political *and* literary form of the nation. Along these lines, Rebecca Walkowitz contends, “Ishiguro undoes national allegory by allegorizing the invention of national identities.” *Artist’s* representation of an overly patriotic and reductively nationalistic “Japan,” she writes, conveys the larger message that *loyalty* – whether of an individual to a nation or of an artwork to its referent – is “neither possible nor desirable.”²⁰³ Graham MacPhee and Brian Finney offer similar accounts of the correspondence between literary form and political form in their readings of *Remains* and *When We Were Orphans* (2000), respectively.²⁰⁴ These efforts to situate Ishiguro’s early writings in relation to his subsequent “cosmopolitanism” posit nationalism as an oppressive political regime *and* a cramped literary imaginary. The ideology of “nationalism” and the conceptual category of “nation” are both seen as constraining; to summon Homi Bhabha, “the epistemological ‘limits’ of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a wide range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices.”²⁰⁵

The underlying assumption in these critiques is that our ability to *now* see the nation as “fanaticist,” “mindless,” “narrow,” and “hateful” must mean that we are no longer hampered by its “epistemological ‘limits.’”²⁰⁶ In *Artist*, however, Ono’s epistemological and perspectival limits can be attributed to nationalism *only* if we draw the novel in line with *our* world’s telos of historical progress (that is, the trajectory of ultra-nationalism to universalism, fascism to democracy). But if we give more credence to the world of the novel, we see that Ono’s limits result from a misplaced faith in the artistic superiority and historical accuracy of the view from above. The novel’s pejorative representation of a classically cosmopolitan viewpoint (atop both physical promontories and social hierarchies) offers a case in point not only of Pratt’s “monarch-of-all-I-survey scene,” but also of Bruce Robbins’s “bombsight perspective,” Hannah Arendt’s “modern scientific world view,” Noam Chomsky’s “hypothetical extraterrestrial observer,” and even Robert J.C. Young’s “elite looking-glass world of the university.”²⁰⁷

²⁰² This *general* tendency can be viewed as a continuation of the backlash against Fredric Jameson’s claim that “all third-world texts are necessarily . . . national allegories” (“Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” in *Social Text* no. 15 [Autumn 1986]: 69) – but, of course, the case of Japan is does not at all fit Jameson’s idea of the “third world.”

²⁰³ Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia U P, 2007), 110.

²⁰⁴ MacPhee writes that in *Remains*, “Ishiguro creates a kind of fictional analogue for the construction of national myths” (“Escape from Responsibility: Ideology and Storytelling in Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*,” *College Literature* 38 no. 1 [Winter 2011]: 194). Finney commends *Orphans* for “[departing] both from narrative realism and from nationalism” (“Figuring the Real: Ishiguro’s *When We Were Orphans*,” *Jouvert* 7 no. 1 [2002], accessed March 7, 2014, <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v7is1/ishigu.htm>).

²⁰⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 6.

²⁰⁶ In *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (Columbia U P, 2003), Pheng Cheah writes, “The millennium’s end is marked (and marred) by an endless catalogue of fanaticist intolerance, ethnic violence, and even genocidal destruction, which are widely regarded as extreme expressions of nationalism” (1). Postcolonial critic Partha Chatterjee’s *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Tokyo: Zed Books, 1986) describes (European) nationalism as “a rational ideological framework” that easily gives way to “mindless chauvinism and xenophobia” (2). Conservative critic Elie Kedourie calls nationalism “irrational, narrow, hateful and destructive”; as “one of Europe’s most pernicious exports,” it inevitably “[annihilates] freedom”; see “Introduction” in *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, ed. Elie Kedourie [London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1970], 2).

²⁰⁷ Robbins, *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (New York: New York U P, 1999), 2; Arendt, *The Human Condition* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 3; Chomsky, *Hegemony and Survival: America’s Quest for Global*

Of course, Ono is some sense the precise opposite of European “adventurers” who, descending upon some exotic third world landscape, “perch themselves to paint the significance and value of what they see.”²⁰⁸ His travels amount to circling between familiar haunts within the confines his unnamed hometown. Though Ono’s world is limited to a war-torn Japanese town, his perceived position within it is that of a cosmopolitanite – by which I mean that we frequently see Ono speaking in transit (primarily, on a bridge or a tram) and from an elevated standpoint. The novel’s penultimate scene offers the most pronounced representation of the view from above and its perceived payoffs. En route to see his former teacher Mori-san, Ono climbs “the high mountain path that gave a fine view” (203). This encounter, he suggests, will provide validation for his decision to strike out his own path as a political artist. Ono’s experience on the hill, however, ends up preempting his plan to confront Mori-san:

I seated myself amidst the wild grass growing along the ridge and went on gazing at Mori-san’s villa And it was as I sat there, looking down at the villa, enjoying the taste of those fresh oranges, that that deep sense of triumph and satisfaction began to arise within me. It is hard to describe that feeling, for it was quite different from the sort of elation one feels from smaller triumphs – and, as I say, quite different from anything I had experienced during the celebrations at the Migi-Hidari [a local bar]. It was a profound sense of happiness deriving from the conviction that one’s efforts have been justified; that the hard work undertaken, the doubts overcome, have all been worthwhile; that one has achieved something of real value and distinction. I did not go any further towards the villa that day – it seemed quite pointless. I simply continued to sit there for an hour or so, in deep contentment, eating my oranges.

It is not, I fancy, a feeling many people will come to experience. The likes of the Tortoise – the likes of Shintaro – they may plod on, competent and inoffensive, but their kind will never know the sort of happiness I felt that day. For their kind do not know what it is to risk everything in the endeavour to rise above the mediocre.

. . . . For however one may come in later years to reassess one’s achievements, it is always a consolation to know that one’s life has contained a moment or two of real satisfaction such as I experienced that day up on that high mountain path (204).

This singular moment of “real satisfaction” represents the anti-climatic climax of both Ono’s life and the novel. We see here trademark features of Ono’s narrative style: he employs analytical mannerisms, at several points purporting to explain himself without actually doing so. He is also repetitive, mentioning a number of times his “satisfaction,” “happiness,” and “contentment,” but never providing concrete evidence for such feelings. Ono’s easy recourse to indefinite pronouns (“it was,” “it is,” etc.) and the passive voice creates a gappy narrative, one that mimes the gestures of careful analysis. These narrative tendencies invite the reader to jump in and demonstrate *her* analytical superiority as well as *her* historical vision. For example, Ono reasons that this “deep sense of triumph” is “hard to describe” because it is profoundly grander than the “smaller triumphs” of the Migi-Hidari, the bar scene that had inspired his earlier paintings of

Dominance (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 2; Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); 12.

²⁰⁸ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 212.

pleasure women. The reader, on the other hand, may be inclined to attribute Ono's descriptive difficulties to the fact that his feelings are in fact groundless – both because Ono clearly has no descriptive language for legitimizing such feelings and because based on the story we have heard thus far, Ono's profound triumph is part and parcel of his profound immorality. A reader who is eager to condemn Ono for his ultra-nationalist politics may be particularly stymied by a gaping historical elision: surely Japan's war crimes, fascism, military strategies, and, most of all, resounding defeat would vitiate Ono's experience of "real satisfaction."

Insofar as this passage incites the reader's moral, political, and rhetorical critique of Ono's narration, it offers a textbook case of James Phelan's notion of "estranging unreliability." Estrangement refers to the relation between reader and narrator – the "two participants in [a] communicative exchange" who are now "distant from one another."²⁰⁹ This distance is often a critical one, in that it involves the reader's demonstration of allegiance with the implied author through her condemnation of the unreliable, unwitting narrator.²¹⁰ In the case of *Artist*, our estrangement from Ono arises from our recognition that his nostalgia for Japan's glorious imperial past has inhibited his ability to register its thorough-going defeat, much less to repent for his own wayward political views. But if we limit our view to the world of the novel, we see that Ono's recollection here follows – and is juxtaposed with – a seemingly more momentous recollection, one in which he had received a prestigious award for his work as a wartime propaganda painter. Rather than describe the satisfaction of *this* event, he describes the satisfaction of his present-day reflections, a retrospective process of locating "real value and distinction." Ono's belated achievement of triumph by combing the past for significance is a recurring narrative strategy. This narrative form of unreliability, which cannot be easily accounted for by his ultranationalist views, creates the impression that Ono speaks with the authority of a person who has lived to stand at the end of history. It suggests that distance from his past experiences has endowed him with the powers of historical judgment while at the same time illustrating the unreliable effects of such distance. Ono's triumph, therefore, reflects not only his misplaced belief in Japan's imperial future but also something equally unfounded: his stake in the revelatory powers of the present moment, of what "I experienced that day up on that high mountain path." It is *this* experience, he indicates, that will come to him "in later years" when he "[reassesses his] achievements," and *this* experience that supersedes whatever may have *actually* happened.

If the reader were to engage Ono not only, or not primarily, as a militant ultranationalist but as an impotent cosmopolitanite, then the configuration of novelistic relations changes. Notably, Ono's narrative voice no longer produces an *estranging* effect. If Ono's unreliability proceeds from the blind spots produced by his remoteness from a bygone past that he magisterially yet wrongly assesses, then how does that bear on *us readers*, whose condemnation of Ono depends on our historical and geographical remoteness from World War II? If Ono's self-satisfaction is founded on his relentless assessment of and refusal to join those who "plod on,"

²⁰⁹ Phelan, "Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of Lolita," *Narrative* 15 no.2 (2007): 225. Phelan makes a similar argument about Ishiguro's *Remains*. The operative terms in this case, though, is whether the narrator Stevens is "underreading" or "underreporting," whether he is fallible or deceptive (*Living to Tell About it*, 34-35).

²¹⁰ In Wayne Booth's formulation of narrative unreliability, "the speaker is himself the butt of the ironic point. The author and reader are secretly in collusion, behind the speaker's back, agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting" (*The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 304).

then what does that say about *our* deductive powers, which we exercise through the retroactive assessment of a postwar Japan that we in 2014 are still calling upon to apologize?²¹¹

Ono's indulgence in a panoramic view of history could perhaps evidence a belief that chronological distance enables clarity and objectivity. According to Franco Moretti's theory of world literature, distant reading is absolutely key: "distance, let me repeat it, *is a condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, less is more."²¹² I would say that plowing *Artist* for national allegories or national stereotypes is one result of a distant reading strategy. If we situate *Artist* within a post-1945 archive of Western literary and cultural production on Japan, which *does* often focus on WWII, it *would* be justified to indict Ono on political terms. But by doing so, we would miss that the conflict of significance for Ono and at stake in the novel is not between Japan and the Allies but between aesthetic approaches – notably, his own militaristic approach versus the dreamy, lantern-lit methods inculcated by his former teacher Mori-san. We would also be less inclined to question how Ono's nostalgic reconstruction of an imperial past reflects upon his present circumstances in 1948-1949 – a moment when Japan had been so thoroughly stripped that of its autonomy that its domestic politics and foreign disputes *still* remain inextricable from US oversight.

Granted, we cannot completely do away with distance, even if we wanted to, for it would be "not possible for us to describe our own archive." As Foucault surmises, archives "[emerge] in fragments, regions, and levels, more fully, no doubt, and with greater sharpness, the greater the time that separates us from it." But following Foucault, I also question whether "this description of the archive [could] be justified . . . if it persisted in describing only the most distant horizons."²¹³ The next section of this chapter offers an extended example of how the Western perception of Japan's exceptionality has been premised on taking distant horizons as a reliable form of historiography. In examining the relatively short history of America's *kabuki* theater, I illustrate how taking a long view of *kabuki*'s origins (in 17th-century Japan) calcifies it in the ahistorical cast of archaicism and re-purposes this culturally-predetermined history for geopolitical ends. The shifting status of America's *kabuki* – from a feudal art to a democratic business to an Asiatic trope – took place over roughly a forty-year span, from the occupation years of the 1940s to the Japanese economic boom of the 1980s. This compressed time frame allows us to see how *kabuki* was differently deployed to shore up a "the hegemonic discourse of Imperialism or Orientalism, where cultural value is associated with the teleological triumph of Tradition."²¹⁴ The paradox, I will show, is that within the framework of US-Japan postwar geopolitics, *kabuki*, an unchanging, timeless, universal "theater of traditions,"²¹⁵ was fundamental to recurring yet radically different accounts of Japan as extraordinary, exceptional, new, and miraculous.

America's *kabuki* and the production of Japan's Western exceptionality

²¹¹ Tsutomu Ishiai, "Interview/Ezra Vogel: Japan must continue apologizing for war atrocities," *The Asahi Shimbun*, April 25, 2014, accessed April 29, 2014, <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201404250047>.

²¹² Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (February 2000), <http://www.newleftreview.org/?page=article&view=2094>, emphasis his.

²¹³ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Allan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1982), 130.

²¹⁴ Bhabha, "Foreword" in Young's *White Mythologies* (x).

²¹⁵ Samuel Leiter, *The Art of Kabuki*, xvi.

The Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-1952), the undisclosed setting for *Artist*, has been remembered by Americans as one of the most successful postwar reconstruction endeavors. Under the steady hand of General Douglas MacArthur, the Occupiers is remembered to have transformed Japan from a feudalist totalitarian state into a democratic model for Asia. So triumphant is this official view that MacArthur allegedly proclaimed “no people who have once experienced as much democracy as the Japanese have under the occupation will ever willingly accept anything else.”²¹⁶ The underlying implications of this boast are precisely what some Japanese have taken issue with. Their less rosy take on Japan’s transition from feudalism to democracy faults the Allied administration for failing to account for indigenous Japanese conditions; for foisting an Americanized system upon the Japanese and, finally, for depriving the Japanese of any semblance of national autonomy, economic, political, or military.²¹⁷ Eto Jun describes the Allied Occupation in terms of “the ‘taboo’ imposed upon the Japanese mind by an exogenous authority [which] has been transformed and internalized to such an extent that it has eventually become a kind of pseudo-conscience for the Japanese at large, functioning to ‘guide’ and control Japanese thinking.”²¹⁸

Jun here is referring specifically to the censorship regime implemented by the Allied forces. Although the stated aim of the Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) and the Civil Intelligence and Education Section (CI&E) was “an absolute minimum of restrictions on freedom of speech,” in practice, these agencies sought the “psychological demilitarization of the Japanese,” John W. Dower writes.²¹⁹ Given this stated aim, it makes sense that *kabuki* was an early target of MacArthur’s administration, likely for the same reasons that Ono’s paintings had been shuttered away at the outset of *Artist*. In 1946, Hal Keith, lead theater censor at the start of the Occupation, called for “the Samurai tradition of the popular *kabuki* drama” to be “discouraged,” due to its “themes of revenge, sex-inequality, warrior worship, blind loyalty to one’s lord and the absence of individual conscience.”²²⁰ Such plays typically involved the sacrifice of a child (or sometimes woman) as a demonstration of loyalty.²²¹ In a 1947 special report, CCD official Earle Ernst writes that this “feudal concept” of loyalty or obligation lies at the core of the Japanese social hierarchy: “Politeness within the home, respect for parents and teachers, love of the Emperor, banzai charges, kamikaze attacks – all have their genesis in the sense of obligation.” Indeed, “[i]t is difficult to imagine a concept which is in greater opposition

²¹⁶ Kazuo Kawai, “American Influence on Japanese Thinking,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 278 (Nov 1951): 25.

²¹⁷ For critical accounts of the Occupation, see Kawai; Eto Jun, “The Civil Censorship in Occupied Japan,” *Hikaku Bunka Zasshi: The Annual of Comparative Culture* 1 (1982); Dower, *Embracing Defeat*.

²¹⁸ Jun, “The Civil Censorship in Occupied Japan,” 17.

²¹⁹ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 407, 413. Dower cites Supreme Commander of Allied Powers Instruction Note (SCAPIN) 16, also known as the “Freedom of Speech and Press Directive.” Though the Occupation persisted until 1952, censorship eased up gradually beginning in 1947 and formally ended in October 1949 with the dissolution of the CCD (432). The CI&E was more educational and promotional, in that it aimed to propagate democratic ideals through media outlets; the CCD had more explicit power to censor. Theater officials in both divisions worked together.

²²⁰ Hal Keith, “Occupation and the Japanese Stage” *Theater Arts* 30 (October 1946): 240.

²²¹ For example, scenes or lines were at some point deleted from plays that involved a general pushing his young nephew to *seppuku* (a samurai suicide) as an expression of military loyalty (*Moritsuna’s Battle Camp*), a general who beheads his own son instead of the emperor’s, a family who sacrifices their own son so that the son of their lord may live (*The Village School*), and a samurai who murders a female servant (*The Broken Dish*).

to the development of democratic thought in Japan.”²²² Based on such accounts, *kabuki* was as dated as the ideals it propagates; the feudalist content determined and doomed the art form as a whole. The initial solution to this “special problem” was to urge the production of new, democratic plays that, as Ernst puts it, “[would force] the old ones into oblivion.”²²³ On this view, the US occupiers were posed to steer *kabuki* on a path that parallels the one paved by the Japanese wartime government. Between 1931-1945, the Japanese administration had shuttled about 160 war-related plays into production; McArthur’s office seemed to similarly see *kabuki* as a vessel for developing the political agenda of the governing authority.

But while the CCD and CI&E did withdraw and partially censor some *kabuki* plays, James R. Brandon notes that “the men wielding the censor’s stamp were more inclined to become *kabuki*-philes than harsh foes of enemy plays.”²²⁴ Both Keith and Ernst, for example, were theater critics, and Ernst in particular published prolifically on Japanese theater during the Occupation. CI&E official John Boruff was an actor, playwright, and former president of Yale’s Dramatic Club.²²⁵ Faubion Bowers, also a theater critic, is the most famous among the censors, having become self-mythologized as “the man who saved *kabuki*.”²²⁶ Many of these men published articles and studies on *kabuki*. Bowers even staged private performances for US personnel, complete with translations and annotations, and held parties at his home for the purposes of bringing the censors into contact with *kabuki* actors.²²⁷

As Ernst, Bowers, and their cohorts became *kabuki* aficionados and henceforth its saviors, the “classicism” of the art form became necessarily divorced from the feudalism of the content. Based on production numbers, *kabuki* may have experienced a “boom” in the mid-1930s thanks to Japanese “war profiteers”; but based on the barometer of aesthetic purity, “kabuki’s darkest hours occurred during the war, when the Japanese government discarded Grand Kabuki in favor of more populist fare.” For Brandon, “Kabuki was close to death in August 1945,” not because the Allied forces had killed off *kabuki* when they brought the Japanese empire to her knees, but because the Japanese militaristic campaign had killed off a traditional art form by mobilizing it for propagandistic ends.²²⁸ To the rescue, then, came the Occupation’s “*kabuki*-philes.” Saving *kabuki* from an inglorious death in the crudifying gyre of wartime propaganda meant that this high art had to be “classicized with the least delay.”²²⁹ To “classicize” meant to “manufacture an ‘old’ kabuki for the sake of the new American censors.” Brandon writes, “if kabuki was said to be divorced from real social concerns . . . then plays with overtly feudalistic,

²²² Ernst (with Faubion Bowers), “Special Report No. 18: Censorship and the Present State of the Japanese Theatre,” June 15, 1947, reproduced in *Operations of the Civil Intelligence Section GHQ, FEC & SCAP*, Documentary Appendices (II), Volume IX, Intelligence Series, Item no. 21. Tokyo: The Command (1949), 5-6.

²²³ Ernst in a draft memo, as cited in James R. Brandon, “Myth and Reality: A Story of Kabuki during American Censorship, 1945-1949” *Asian Theatre Journal* 23 no.1 (2006): 16.

²²⁴ James R. Brandon, *Kabuki’s Forgotten War: 1931-1945* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2009), x, 14.

²²⁵ Brandon, “Myth and Reality,” 22.

²²⁶ Brandon, “Myth and Reality,” 18. See also Shiro Okamoto, *The Man Who Saved Kabuki: Faubion Bowers and Theatre Censorship in Occupied Japan*, trans. Samuel L. Leiter (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2001).

²²⁷ Samuel Leiter, “From Bombs to Booms: When the Occupation Met *Kabuki*” in *Rising from the Flames: The Rebirth of Theater in Occupied Japan, 1945-1952*, ed. Samuel Leiter, 11-74 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

²²⁸ Brandon, *Kabuki’s Forgotten War*, 352-353.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 351. The recommendation to “classicize” comes from a close adviser to Shochiku, Japan’s long-standing kabuki company.

militaristic, or nationalistic content could be staged without harm in a new democratic Japan. All traditional kabuki plays, therefore, should be acceptable to Occupation censors.”²³⁰

The situation came to be such that *only* traditional – that is, feudalist – plays were acceptable, and it was through the good offices of the American censors and on their standards of *aesthetic* acceptability that *kabuki* came to be seen as “international,” “universal,” and even “democratic.” Ernst writes that the original CI&E plan to present one modern script for every *Kabuki* play “unfortunately resulted in the production of inferior modern plays.” These plays were *formally* un-democratic in that they “[repeated] the same old patterns in a disguised form.”²³¹ In this scenario, the new plays, like the propagandistic wartime *kabuki*, demonstrated the “lack of concept of individual responsibilities and absolute moral values.” Ernst concludes, “The problem of Kabuki is, in the final analysis, one of art. Having grown, developed and flourished since 1600, it has attained a state of venerable tradition, which removes it from the realm of really ‘harmful’ content.” Ernst even goes so far as to defend Japanese traditional theater via human rights: “When, by the War Crimes trials, we are attempting to prove to the Japanese that there are certain moral laws which prevail universally . . . , it would seem inconsistent to permit the theatre to perform plays which are an antithesis of this philosophy.”²³² If the universality of human morality must prevail, then so ought that of good art.

Less patriots than aesthetes, MacArthur’s censors eventually became *kabuki*’s proselytizers. As cultural and economic traffic between the US and Japan increased, icons from the American art world – among them playwright Paul Green, film director Joshua Logan, and author James Michener – also began hailing *kabuki* as “the finest theatre art in the world” and “the true representational theatre art.”²³³ Seeking to refine their countrymen’s aesthetic tastes, these artists and diplomats worked to export *kabuki* to America – a task that recalibrated the US mission to democratize Japan. The presentation of *kabuki* to US viewers as a traditionally Japanese and *therefore* universally significant art served two geopolitical ends. First, as a public education campaign, the American *kabuki* tours helped reacquaint the US public with Japan, remaking the nation’s former enemy as its premier Cold War ally. Second, as a public relations effort sponsored by the US and Japanese governments, these tours served as the cultural instantiation of the US-Japan Security Treaty, which signaled harmony and mutuality on America’s terms. Integral to both these aims was a happy coincidence of American exceptionalism and Japanese exceptionalism. In signaling the successful democratization of Japan, *kabuki* cast the Americans as the exceptionally benevolent and humane victors. By the same logic and to the same extent, *kabuki* cast traditional Japanese culture as exceptionally compatible with American democracy.

In a sense, *kabuki* services an age-old call for the West to acquaint itself with an eternally unknowable Japan; as Barbara Thornbury describes it, Cold War *kabuki* continues “America’s

²³⁰ Ibid., 351.

²³¹ Ernst, “Special Report,” 12. Yet more insidious, these new plays featured a “steadily increasing number” of Communistic themes (19). Hence, to forestall the production of new plays and to preserve the “traditional” were “democratic” insofar as they helped ward off Communism.

²³² Ibid., 17, 11, 18.

²³³ Paul Green, “Tribute to the Kabuki Theatre of Japan,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1952, X1. These supporters saw *Kabuki* as performing a similar function for American theater as what Ezra Pound and other modernists had sought in the Orient when trying to revitalize (to “make new”) Western art. Leonard C. Pronko writes that “one of the most fruitful uses of Kabuki would be to retheatricalize a western theatre dominated at that time – 1965 – by realism, and even today still working its way out of that morass”; see “Creating Kabuki for the West,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 1 no.2 (1994): 113.

nearly hundred-year-old romance with exotic Japan.²³⁴ But the lessons that *kabuki* has been saddled with teaching, while always “exotic,” have been wildly inconsistent. In November 1943, *Life* had ran a story on *kabuki* subtitled “the most popular play in Japan reveals the bloodthirsty character of our enemy.” If in the heat of World War II *kabuki* had been offered as a guide for “[understanding] . . . the action of Jap soldiers on Guadalcanal or Attu,” then in the Cold War, *kabuki* was similarly instructive but toward diametrically opposed ends.²³⁵ Josh Logan’s preface to Bowers’s *Japanese Theater* (1952) frames the study as an endeavor “to help the Westerner to better understand the instincts and impulses of the Japanese people”²³⁶ – a statement that sound as if Bowers has indeed “brought forth a sequel to [Ruth Benedict’s famous World War II study] *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.”²³⁷ But whereas the *Life* article locates continuities between the vengeful, violent themes of *kabuki* and the actions of the Japanese soldier, Cold War *kabuki* relies on a clear division between life and art. John D. Mitchell and E.K. Schwartz understand this division in terms of expressivity. They reason that for a society wherein “all outward show of emotions is a violation of etiquette,” *kabuki* offers a “a socially acceptable mechanism by means of which . . . emotion both strong and weak can be given expression.” This expressive freedom afforded *only* by *kabuki* makes it useful for the Westerner, who “grows somewhat frustrated by the masks behind which his Japanese friends seem largely inaccessible.” *Kabuki* actors, despite being *literally* masked, operate in an aesthetic domain ostensibly free of Japan’s rigid social script, thus empowering the viewer to “discover . . . displays of emotion.”²³⁸

Also significant at this moment was the east with which *kabuki*, a Japanese artistic tradition, could be disarticulated from Japan’s present-day politics. The introduction of *kabuki* to Western viewers – and the rising popularity of Japan and all things Japanese in the United States – coincided with the renegotiation of the 1951 Security Treaty between the United States and Japan. On the surface, the Treaty is a mutual defense pact: both the United States and Japan pledge to come to the aid of the other in the event of armed aggression and in the name of “democracy,” “economic stability,” and “the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East.”²³⁹ What stymied many Japanese, however, was the blatant lack of mutuality: the Japanese Constitution of 1947 (forcibly implemented by MacArthur) prohibits Japan from *ever* maintaining military forces or “other war potential,” while the United States indefinitely stationed 260,000 military personnel at more than 2,800 bases in Japan – a military position that allowed America to maintain “security” not only in Japan but also the Far East. Backlash over the Treaty’s unequal terms, coupled with general anti-American sentiment, led to strikes, protests, and petitions. The political unrest became particularly charged between 1957 and 1960 during treaty renegotiations.²⁴⁰ The revised treaty was eventually ratified

²³⁴ Barbara E. Thornbury, “America’s ‘Kabuki’-Japan, 1952-1960: Image Building, Myth Making, and Cultural Exchange,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 25 no.2 (Fall 2008): 195.

²³⁵ “The 47 Ronin” *Life* 15 no. 8 (Nov 1, 1943): 52-57.

²³⁶ Josh Logan, “Preface,” in Bowers’s *Japanese Theater* (New York: Hermitage House, 1952): ix.

²³⁷ Thornbury, “America’s ‘Kabuki’-Japan,” 201.

²³⁸ Mitchell and Schwartz, “A Psychoanalytic Approach to Kabuki: A Study in Personality and Culture,” *The Journal of Psychology* 52 (1961): 275.

²³⁹ “Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between the United States of America and Japan,” 19 January 1960, *Asia for Educators*, Columbia University, http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/japan/mutual_cooperation_treaty.pdf.

²⁴⁰ For an account of the protestor’s specific concerns, see Fuji Kamiya, “Japanese-U.S. Relations and the Security Treaty: A Japanese Perspective,” *Asian Survey* 12 no.9 (Sept 1972): 717-725. For a more recent take on the long-term effects of US-Japan Cold War relations, see Shunya Yoshimi, “‘America’ as desire and violence: Americanization in postwar Japan and Asia during the Cold War,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 4 no. 3 (2003): 433-

on June 23, 1960, but the violent controversy surrounding this process led US President Dwight Eisenhower to cancel his visit to Japan (slated to coincide with the ratification) and Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi to put in his resignation.

It was amidst these diplomatic failures and political turmoil that *kabuki* embarked on its maiden voyage to the United States.²⁴¹ The actors of the Grand Kabuki, the first “authentic” troupe to tour the United States, left Japan during the height of the protests in May 1960. Yet the troupe was officially sponsored by the US and Japanese governments and was promoted as “the centennial celebration of the Japanese-American signing of a treaty of amity and commerce.”²⁴² A *New York Times* review shows how the status of *kabuki* as art could be used to disregard not only the feudalistic content of the plays themselves but also the anti-American rioters in Japan who, at the very moment of *kabuki*’s American debut, were staging a drastically different narrative about US-Japan relations. Even though reviewer Brooks Atkinson ponders how “strange” it is “that the Kabuki should conquer New York so spontaneously at a time when our political relations with Japan are ugly and painful,” he goes on to pronounce *kabuki* an “impersonal art that has no time or place.” In this way, *kabuki* directly contrasts the “violence and hatred” expressed in recent news reports on Japan, for such “passions are personal, focused on the present moment.”²⁴³

The confluence of American exceptionalism and Japanese exceptionalism – reflecting a harmony between the two nations’ diplomatic/economic aims and their ideological/cultural dispositions – was what the *kabuki* tours performed for American viewers. Kevin J. Wetmore claims that “*kabuki* was marketed to the United States . . . because of the need to reimagine the former enemy Japan as an economic and military ally in the face of communist Asia.” The United States, “by demonstrating that *kabuki* was big business, freedom-loving, comprehensible, and yet exotic, . . . could use *kabuki* to present a Japan that was fundamentally anticommunist and pro-Western in its values.” According to Wetmore, *kabuki* supporters such as Michener pitched it as “first and foremost a profitable, well-run business,” a scheme for “Eisenhower’s America” that was no different from how “General Motors was marketing its automobiles.”²⁴⁴

This idea of *kabuki* as *business* is especially compelling, if we think about the extent to which the success of the Security Treaty and the Occupation depended on Japan’s economic rehabilitation. As America adapted its WWII priorities to its Cold War agenda, the concomitance of Japan’s economic expansion and demilitarization amounted to “pacifism.” Douglas Mendel locates Japan’s “pacifism” in its “economic progress,” which was “matched by an equally striking reversal of foreign and military policy.”²⁴⁵ We see here the logic that made the Security Treaty both a scandalous outrage to Japanese students, leftists, and nationalists and an unprecedented success for the Americans: not only did it sanction a US military presence in Japan (in particular Okinawa), but it also spurred Japan (in particular the mainland) to transfer its

50. For an “American” perspective on the treaty and its consequences, see George R. Packard, “The United States–Japan Security Treaty at 50: Still a Grand Bargain?” *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 2 (April 2010): 92–103.

²⁴¹ The first *kabuki* troupe to perform in the United States was the Azuma Kabuki Dancers in 1954. The Grand Kabuki, however, was a far more elaborate affair. Kabuki troupes also toured in the Soviet Union and China during the 1950s and 1960s and also under the auspices of diplomacy. The US tours, however, were longer and more frequent. See Nagayama Takeomi, et. al, eds. *Grand Kabuki: Overseas Tours, 1928-1993* (Tokyo: Shochiku, 1994).

²⁴² Oscar Godbout, “Full Kabuki Troupe Will Perform at City Center” *The New York Times* (March 22, 1960): 39.

²⁴³ Atkinson, “Superb Clown, Kabuki’s Kanzaburo Stars as a Drunk,” *The New York Times* (June 17, 1960), reproduced in Nagayama Takeomi, et. al, eds. *Grand Kabuki: Overseas Tours*, 32.

²⁴⁴ Wetmore, “1954: Selling *Kabuki* to the West,” *Theatre Journal* 26 no. 1 (April 2009): 83.

²⁴⁵ Mendel, “Perspectives on Japanese Foreign Policy,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 21 no.3/4 (1966): 346.

prewar militarist expenditures toward postwar industrialization and trade. The “Great Crescent,” a regional arc or “economic defense perimeter” that spanned “from the Kurile Islands to the borders of Iran and Afghanistan,” was thereby secured through a combination of US military control and Japanese economic influence.²⁴⁶

In this Cold War context, the bilateral relationship between the United States and Japan was seen as necessary for containing Soviet and Chinese ideological and economic penetration in Asia. Ronald E. Dolan and Robert L. Worden write that “both nations had tended to characterize the security alliance as the linchpin of the relationship, which should have priority over economic and other disputes.” But with the breakup for the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s, US public opinion began to question “which was the more serious, the military threat from the Soviet Union or the economic challenge from Japan.” Polls in 1989 and 1990 indicated the latter.²⁴⁷ As US-Japan *economic* relations deteriorated, the United States began viewing the Security Treaty on different terms: how unjust that Japan could be relieved of defense expenditures at home and abroad, thanks to US military support, in order to devote its energies solely to economic development.²⁴⁸

In the 1950s and 1960s, the ideological battles and nuclear threats of the Cold War may have compelled the United States to view a robust Japanese economy as “pacificism”; but in the 1970s, the expansion of Japan’s economic capacity, specifically its productivity in key manufacturing sectors and its rapid export growth, was discussed in the precise opposite terms: “adversarial.” Peter Drucker defines “adversarial trade” as that which “creates serious social dislocation in the importing country and is seen as a hostile act rather than as fair competition.” Distinct from “competitive trade” (as seen in the Western industrial countries, including West Germany), Japan’s “adversarial” method aims “to create major *economic* damage.”²⁴⁹ The “Japan Problem” of the 1970s and 1980s can be summed up as Western indignation regarding Japan’s allegedly unscrupulous economic policies.²⁵⁰ In claiming claim that one of the “central fictions” of post-WWII Western thought is that Japan belongs in the group of “‘capitalist, free-market’ economies,” Karen Van Wolferen’s *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (1989) enjoins the West to (again) reacquaint itself with Japan in order to solve the Japan “riddle” and rebalance the

²⁴⁶ Schaller, “Securing the Great Crescent, 392-393.

²⁴⁷ Ronald E. Dolan and Robert L. Worden, ed., “Relations with the United States,” *Japan: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/japan/132.htm>.

²⁴⁸ Yet, importantly, the Japanese government had been financially supporting the US security arrangement in Japan since the occupation. Kamiya notes that if Japan were to “rearm itself,” the US would be faced with a “situation more onerous” than the current one (“Japanese-U.S. Relations and the Security Treaty,” 722).

²⁴⁹ Drucker, “Japan and Adversarial Trade,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 1, 1986, 32, emphasis his.

²⁵⁰ The main area of noncooperation with the United States in the 1980s was Japanese resistance to repeated United States efforts to get Japan to open its market more to foreign goods. Paul Krugman argues that the “Japan problem” resides not in “Japanese trade and business practices” but rather “in the structure of Japanese trade, in the huge Japanese surplus in manufacture and especially in the rapid pace of growth of Japan’s exports” (26). He also explains the trade tensions through structural changes in the world economy, especially the rising price of oil. See Krugman, “Is The Japan Problem Over?” NBER Working Paper No. 1962 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, June 1986). For a foreign policy perspective on the Japan problem, see C. Fred Bergsten, “What to Do About the U.S.-Japan Economic Conflict.” Bergsten sees exchange rate misalignments as the most significant cause of trade frictions. He writes that from 1966-67 to 1971-72, the U.S. deficit rose from an annual average of \$0.5 billion to an annual average of over \$3.5 billion. It reached a record high of about \$16 billion in 1981 (1061).

global economy. “Under such circumstance, a better understanding of the nature and uses of power in Japan is no luxury,” she warns.²⁵¹

In 1952, *kabuki*-advocate Logan had written that “it would be heartwarming for us to exchange something besides money with a foreign nation. Perhaps in this way we could see deeper into each other’s minds and emotions and find sources of sympathy and similarity.”²⁵² In contrast to these Cold War years when *kabuki* helped Americans to apprehend the passions behind the Japan’s mask-like exterior and to locate sympathy and similarity in shared ideological beliefs, *kabuki* served a rather different function in the 1970s and 1980s. During this period, reviews of *kabuki* performances implicitly and explicitly reference deceptive maneuvers on the geopolitical stage; even ostensibly neutral descriptions (ones that focus on aesthetics) end up *sounding* politically incriminating. For example, Eve Zibart’s 1982 review asserts: “[*Kabuki*] is the ritual of restraint, and startlingly, the mask-like makeup and stiffened gestures transmit a sense of barely suppressed power.”²⁵³ Herta Pauly in 1967 describes *kabuki* as “an inviolable ritual.” She continues: “It epitomizes a tendency in Japanese art found also in a type of drawing which reduces the diversity of natural subjects to some essential and decorative features and then retains that manner of rendering the subject as a once-for-all formula.”²⁵⁴

In the period of Japan’s economic boom, *kabuki*, the “theater of traditions,” continued to stand for “all things Japanese.” Yet the “things” conveyed by *kabuki* – the gestural, ritualistic, deceptive, formulaic – were taken to be so evocative of Japanese trade and business practices that the “*kabuki*” became a totemic term for explaining Japan’s arrival among the world’s economic elite. A 1983 *New York Times* article proclaims the Japanese economic program to be “an elaborate and grueling *Kabuki* play.”²⁵⁵ Journalist Clyde H. Farnsworth describes US efforts to win trade concessions from Tokyo as “a stylized give and take” that is “the diplomatic equivalent of *Kabuki*.”²⁵⁶ Terms such as “*kuruoko*” (referring to *kabuki* stagehands who function as unseen go-betweens) and “*hanamichi*” (referring to *kabuki* stage exits) appear in multiple accounts of US-Japan relations during the 1980s – for example, the role of Japanese industrial firms in US banking and Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato’s exit from political office. *Slate* journalist Jon Lackman rightly surmises that “*Kabuki* acquired its modern derogatory meaning” in the “hostile atmosphere” of the 1960s and observes that the “usage [of *kabuki*] increases whenever Japan is in the news for disingenuous behavior.”²⁵⁷ The term was at its height during anti-Japan sentiments of the 1980s, but it survives into the 1990s (“when it turned out that Japan’s go-go economy was an elaborate sham,” Lackman writes) as well as the 2000s (when

²⁵¹ Van Wolferen, *The Enigma of Japanese Power: People and Politics in a Stateless Nation* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 6, 4.

²⁵² Logan, “Mr. Logan Seconds Mr. Green” *The New York Times* (January 27, 1952): XI.

²⁵³ Zibart, “*Kabuki* Loses Little in Translation” *The Washington Post* (July 23, 1982): 5.

²⁵⁴ Pauly, “Inside *Kabuki*: An Experience in Comparative Aesthetics” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 25 no.3 (Spring 1967): 304.

²⁵⁵ “Business People; Finance Minister Keeps Japanese Budget Lean,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 1983, accessed March 38, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/01/03/business/business-people-finance-minister-keeps-japanese-budget-lean.html>.

²⁵⁶ Farnsworth, “On Matters of Trade, A Stylized Give and Take,” *The New York Times*, November 28, 1984, accessed March 28, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/28/us/on-matters-of-trade-a-stylized-give-and-take.html>.

²⁵⁷ Lackman, “It’s Time to Retire *Kabuki*: The word doesn’t mean what pundits think it does” *Slate* (April 14, 2010), accessed December 3, 2013, http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the_good_word/2010/04/its_time_to_retire_kabuki.html.

journalists use the term “kabuki economics” to characterize “Japan’s number-crunchers” responsible for the wild oscillations of the nation’s GDP.)²⁵⁸

The reappropriation of kabuki, the epitome of tradition, as an economic metaphor gives us some sense to how pundits attempted to explain the “Japanese miracle.” According to Chalmers Johnson, humanists and anthropologists tended to believe that “the economic miracle occurred because the Japanese possess a *unique, culturally derived* capacity to cooperate with each other. This capacity cooperate reveals itself in . . . subordination of the individual to the group; intense group loyalties and patriotism; and, last but not least, economic performance.” (By contrast, economists, who joined the conversation later, took the “no-miracle-occurred” stance, asserting that the Japanese economy was, in fact, quite ordinary – “a normal outgrowth of normal forces.”)²⁵⁹ Japan’s singularity as a non-Western industrial nation made terms such as “tradition” and “culture” key to explaining its success. The next section looks at how this correlation between cultural tradition and economic growth manifests again in a similarly heated conversation in the 1990s, one that cast Asian cultural values as particularly conducive to rapid economic development but at the expense of individual human rights.

Cosmopolitanism, human rights, and Asian values

The spate of publications on Japan during the height of anxiety about the “Japanese miracle” marks the shift from a cultural Japan-philia to an economic Japan-phobia – or, put differently, from *kabuki* theater to *kabuki* economics. In 1979, Ezra Vogel’s *Japan as Number One* broke ground as the first of several studies adumbrating what the United States might learn from Japan. As a counterpoint to this trend, James Fallows came out with *More Like Us: Making America Great Again* (1989), as well as other publications on how Japan, as well as other East Asian economic miracles, might be contained rather than emulated. During this period, literary and filmic blockbusters such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Neuromancer* (1984) imagined a Japan-inspired future that augured the dystopian possibilities of advanced capitalism.²⁶⁰

This was the milieu in which the 25-years-old Ishiguro embarked on a career in fiction-writing. In one interview, Ishiguro describes how a British television network “rang me up during rumors of a U.S.-Japanese trade war and asked me if I would go on a program to discuss things from the Japanese side.”²⁶¹ This *faux pas* may seem less ridiculous to a *geopolitically-minded* reader – for example, essayist and novelist Pico Iyer. In a 1991 review of *Remains*, Iyer declares: “It seems only appropriate, perhaps, that of all the books tumbling off the foreign presses purporting to explain Japan to the West, the most revealing one so far is not, in fact, set in Japan, has nothing to do with Japan and, as it happens, is a novel about six unexceptional days in the cloistered life of an English butler in 1956.” Iyer locates the revelatory power of *Remains* in both narrator and author. Iyer describes the world of Stevens, a hidebound, fastidious British butler, as “precisely stratified hierarchy,” with “its uniforms and rites and stress on self-

²⁵⁸ “Japan’s Fragile Economy: Kabuki Economics,” *The Economist*, February 18, 2010, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/node/15546424>.

²⁵⁹ Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth Industrial Policy: 1925-1975* (Palo Alto: Stanford U P, 1982), 6-9.

²⁶⁰ The origin of the Japanese miracle discourse is usually traced to a two-part series in the *Economist*, entitled “Consider Japan,” published in September 1962. The 1960s and 1970s provided the lead-up to the explosion of works in the 1980s with Ralph Hewins, *The Japanese Miracle Men* (1967); P.B. Stone, *Japan Surges Ahead: The Story of an Economic Miracle* (1969); Robert Guillain, *The Japanese Challenge* (1970); Herman Kahn, *The Emerging Japanese Superstate* (1970); and Hakan Hedberg, *Japan’s Revenge* (1972). Vogel’s *Japan as Number One* is considered the landmark study.

²⁶¹ Bill Bryson, “Between Two Worlds.”

negation”; such a world, he says, could “almost belong to Sony or Toshiba.” Iyer then offers the following appraisal of Ishiguro’s novels: “all [are] as delicate as antique vases, and sometimes just as cold,” for they employ a style that is “too well-designed, too careful in its calculations.”²⁶²

The antiquity of Japanese tradition, manifest for Iyer in both Oriental vases and Ishiguro’s novels, directly correlates with the rigidity of Japan’s obscure social rites and its formulaic technology. This through-line from an ossified Japanese traditional culture to a mass-produced globalized culture brings us to some possibly familiar connections – between cultural values and economic productivity, Confucianism and modernity, Asiatic capitalism and global capitalism. The explicit Japan content of *Artist* makes these connections even more pronounced. At the level of plot, the novel opens with Ono describing his ravaged home through the lens of imperial nostalgia but concludes with him complacently observing a series of new office buildings. Of more interest to me is how the problem of Asian modernity is *formally* rendered. Ono’s decorous, restrained, calculated voice enacts the harmony between, to borrow Iyer’s analogy, antique vases and cutting-edge electronics.

What can this voice tell us about the *moral* implications of this correlation between the logic of Asian tradition and that of capitalist expansion? I want to address this question by returning to Ono’s historical vision. In recalling the fleeting moments of his past from physically removed standpoints, Ono presumes a link between his panoramic vision and his narrative and historical reliability. This conflation of physical distance and temporal distance results in a detached method of narration that appears to shore up his status as a objective observer and deductive thinker. Paradoxically, though, Ono’s demonstration of his analytical abilities, specifically in the form of repetitiousness, engenders the reader’s experience of his *unreliability*. The primary target of Ono’s analysis is *character*. He is constantly describing patterns, especially with respect to similarities in the personalities, statuses, and beliefs of the people around him. As a result, the novel proliferates with doubles: his current son-in-law Suichi and his future son-in-law Taro; Taro’s brother Mitsuo and a similarly insolent youth Enchi; and his son Kenji and his grandson Ichiro. Ono himself has two doppelgangers: his former teacher, Mori-san, and his friend Matsuda.

One of Ono’s early exhibitions of character analysis provides us with the only extended discussion of his deceased son Kenji. Or, more accurately, it is Kenji’s funeral that serves as the backdrop for a concerted effort to prove to the reader that a phrase he initially attributes to Miyake, his prospective son-in-law, had in fact come from Suichi, his current son-in-law. In this tortuous recollection, Ono first discusses his exchange with Miyake, one that he had accorded “little significance to before.” During this exchange, the young man had ostensibly insinuated that those who had not repented for the war were guilty of “the greatest cowardice of all” (56). We, like Ono, are aware that Miyake had backed out of a wedding agreement with Ono’s daughter, Noriko. But rather than realizing through this recollection (like we do) that his own unabashed, untimely patriotism likely gave rise to Miyake’s retraction, Ono comes to the conclusion that the phrase in question – “the greatest cowardice of all” – sounded “much more like Suichi than the mild-mannered young Miyake.” Although this paragraph begins on a note of doubt – “Did Miyake really say all this to me that afternoon?” – it concludes with Ono confidently declaring, “I am sure that [the phrase] is Suichi’s. In fact, now that I think of it, I am sure Suichi used it that evening after the ceremony for the burying of Kenji’s ashes” (56).

We see this interpretive process again and again in Ono’s narrative. First, he experiences something surprising (for example, Miyake’s retraction). Then, he “[casts his] mind back” to

²⁶² Iyer, “Waiting Upon History: *The Remains of the Day*,” *Partisan Review* 58 (September 1991): 585-586, 588.

some encounter, “searching it for significance” (53). Finally, Ono arrives at an obviously erroneous conclusion that relies on his exceptional assessment of character: the phrase “the greatest cowardice of all” is more in keeping with Suichi’s “hardness” and “maliciousness,” he deduces (59). The most consequential scene that gets re-assembled and re-told is the immolation of artwork. Ono first describes the destruction of his own paintings by first his father and then his teacher. As he does so, he employs similar turns of phrase and shows how the two occasions both lead to the “kindling [of] my ambition” (47). Later, we see an eerily similar account of *Ono*’s destruction of his protégé Kuroda’s “unpatriotic” paintings; the incident, which Ono had initiated as a member of the Cultural Committee of the Interior, led to Kuroda’s brutal imprisonment during the war years (182).

Ono’s most significant act of character analysis appears in his relations with the narratee. This “you” figure is *formally* distinct from Ishiguro’s implied reader (whom I have been referring to as “us”), but it occupies a position within the novelistic production that we are invited, if not expected, to take up. Ono, like Ishiguro’s other unreliable narrators, operates in the mode of direct address, often demonstrating narratorial magnanimity by purporting to take into account the limitations of the narratee’s knowledge. Ono’s attentiveness to who “you” is (and, by default, who *we* are) leads him to hazard a series of presumptions. These presumptions are conveyed through a self-consciously syllogistic narrative technique and create the illusion of non-presumptuousness. The novel’s first paragraph, for instance, consists only of *if/then* constructions. These early hypotheticals present logical causalities that we are likely to agree with. But the next paragraph, the second in the novel, strips us of the faith we might have too readily placed in our narrator’s reliability. Here, Ono tells us: “The imposing air of the house will be accounted for, perhaps, if I inform you that it was built by my predecessor, and that he was none other than Akira Sugimura. Of course, you may be new to this city, in which case the name of Akira Sugimura may not be familiar to you” (7). Ono, with characteristic faux narratorial intuitiveness, appears to anticipate a problem: we do not know who Akira Sugimura is. In assessing this problem, however, Ono exposes his own obtuseness. Yes, the name is unfamiliar to us, but not because we are new to his city, at least not in the sense that he suspects. At this moment, the reader displaces Ono from the seat of logical thinking. Henceforth, our analytical insights trump Ono’s, again and again, as we witness and reevaluate the scenes that he describes. We catch onto how Ono tends to repeat and reattribute key phrases and how this tendency enables his analytical moves. Having become trained to look for these moments as flags of Ono’s unreliability, we then interpret the reappearance of the same phrases, scenes, or characters as a sign of Ono being gratuitously confident and horribly confused.

Throughout *Artist*, Ono’s rhetorical gestures (e.g. “you may well wonder,” “the truth is,” “as far as I recall,” “I should perhaps explain”) give the impression that he is not only casually telling us stories about his past, but systematically building a case for the truth-value of the story being recounted. He returns to Kenji’s death not to mourn his son but to assemble and recreate evidence for the purposes of self-absolution and self-congratulation. He recounts three instances of art immolation, each time as if he were presenting us with new information, and each time to substantiate his courage, originality, and foresight. Yet it is precisely these analytical tendencies that make me suspect we that are in fact much more similar to Ono than we are to “you.” Like him, we are primarily concerned with evaluating character – in this case, our patriarchal, contradictory narrator. We, like him, also draw on our memories – and historical memory – to justify present-day character judgments, and it is the validity of these judgments, we believe, that endow a particular historical narrative with reliability.

The publication of *Artist* during the height of anti-Japanese sentiments in the West surely influenced how readers interpreted Ono. The problematic nature of imperial nostalgia, and specifically its relation to Japan, is the historically-informed logical conclusion that Iyer's review of *Remains* pushes us to arrive at. In explaining the Japanese-ness of Ishiguro's English butler, Iyer writes: "Stevens has no self outside his job, and no thought for anything except his job; he even – like a good company man – gives 'military-style pep-talks' to his staff."²⁶³ The implied correlation between Japan's military ultra-nationalism during World War II and its economic nationalism of the 1980s becomes more explicitly articulated and cast as a warning in Ezra Vogel's foreword to a 1989 reissuing of Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*: "understanding the Japanese is perhaps just as critical now, when Japanese progress is made by troops of suited businessmen, as it was when troops of khaki-clad soldiers were advancing."²⁶⁴ Vogel here calls for the reader to comprehend the current geopolitical landscape through a historical parallel; this call, moreover, is delivered in the language of reason and pitched as a logical, necessary step for national security.

At work in these works is none other than Ono's approach to historical memory. Both Vogel and Iyer speak of Japan's economic ascent as both historically unprecedented and culturally predetermined. They rely on a superficially historical approach to understanding this ascent by casting a long glance back. Iyer writes that in Ishiguro's narrative, "one can almost hear the unconscious snobbery of Sei Shonagon, or a hundred other ancient Kyoto courtiers."²⁶⁵ Vogel, following Benedict, upholds the enduring value of "the beauty of the chrysanthemum" and "the cult of the sword" to understanding the Japanese mind.²⁶⁶ This pseudo-historical pursuit of culture is what *kabuki*, the theater of traditions, also elicits and enables. The dubbing of Japanese economics as "*kabuki* economics" shows that "tradition" remains the paradigm through which Japan is understood. This unchanging, ahistorical aspect of *kabuki* has given the Western viewer a resource for constructing and reconstructing "Japan" as exceptional on geopolitically-contingent terms. Through *kabuki*, then, we can see how geopolitical reconfigurations install historical breaks or ends.

Ono's narrative unreliability brings into dramatic relief the moral consequences of his past actions as well as the historical injustice of his misreading of and lack of repentance for these actions. It is worth mentioning that *Remains* offers a similar moral. Like Ono, the exceptionally Japanese artist, Stevens the exceptionally British butler is loyal to a fault and is narrating from the aftermath of WWII, at the dawn of the American century and the wane of British imperial prestige. Read together, *Artist* and *Remains* illuminate the overriding moral tropes of Ishiguro's larger canon. In *Artist*, the object of critique appears to be Japanese nationalism. In *Remains*, as Bruce Robbins has argued, unreliability conveys a critique of professionalism. Through Stevens, the novel "stages the intrusion of work into the intimate sphere of the family." This lifestyle, Robbins writes, has been "evaded and distorted by means of professional rationalization and overwork."²⁶⁷ For example, so committed is Stevens to working

²⁶³ Iyer, "Waiting Upon History," 586.

²⁶⁴ Ezra F. Vogel, "Foreword," *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, by Ruth Benedict, (repr. 1989; Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1967), xii.

²⁶⁵ Iyer, "Waiting Upon History," 586-587.

²⁶⁶ Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 239, 2.

²⁶⁷ Robbins, "Very Busy Just Now: Globalization and Harriedness in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*," in *Globalization and the Humanities*, ed. David Leiwei Li, 233-48 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 236, 240.

his lord's dinner party (a defining moment for Nazism) that not even his dying father, calling for him in a nearby room, can distract him from his duties. Bringing *Remains* and *Artist* in line with Ishiguro's canon as a whole, one might arrive at an overarching moral: "cruelty is bad." This banal dictum, Robbins shows, proceeds from the portrayal of protagonists who "[behave] with sudden, inexplicable, and astonishing cruelty – not to a stranger, but to an intimate."²⁶⁸ With *Artist*, this portrayal begins with a narrator who thinks of himself as an honorable man, willing to sacrifice his own needs for the sake of a larger social collective. Our understanding of this sacrificial spirit, of course, is that national and/or professional demands have overrun the narrator's more important relations and, most of all, his ability to care.

The lesson here may be banal, but the terms of its articulation point us to the historical specificity of our moral sensitivities. In posing as a *moral* problem the irreconcilability between the welfare of the national whole and the needs/rights of the individual, Ishiguro's novels might be read as a literary exploration of the "Asian values" versus universal human rights debates of the 1990s. "Asian values," usually traced to a Confucian heritage, includes "strong leadership, respect for authority, law and order, a communitarian orientation placing the good of the collective over the rights of the individual, emphasis on family, etc."²⁶⁹ For select East Asian states, these values are responsible for unprecedentedly rapid national development. This model of modernization, of which Singapore and China have been the most enthusiastic exponents, prioritizes economic and social rights over civil and political rights. It features a strong bureaucratic state that regulates economic activity, in the form of protecting domestic markets while capturing foreign ones, while maintaining strict social discipline at home. Offering a congenial take on this model, Wei-Ming Tu writes, "[W]hat Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons [Singapore, China, South Korea, Taiwan] symbolize is a less adversarial, less individualistic, and less self-interested but highly energized and fiercely competitive approach to modernization."²⁷⁰ From the Western perspective, however, the promotion of "Asian values" amounted to an apology for authoritarian rule. Michael Jacobsen and Ole Bruun cite the Tiananmen protests in China and Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest as the impetus for a further flexing of "economic muscle" and a redoubled effort among "several Asian governments to promote Asian values in their external relations." They conclude that "despite Asian societies having adapted well to modernization and industrialization," their "political morality" remains "underdeveloped."²⁷¹

In discussions about Asian values, Japan is frequently cited as a case of successful democratization, whereby Confucian culture need not necessarily manifest in an authoritarian politics. Yet in other cases, Japan is taken as a precursor, and indeed the anti-Japan outcry of the 1970s and 1980s can be said to have given rise to the morally-inflected discourse against East Asian economic development. Although those who choose to absolve Japan do so by isolating its economic success from its cultural traditions, former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew has regularly indicated that Singapore has taken Japan as a model for having "become an industrial society, while remaining essentially Japanese in its human relations."²⁷² One might

²⁶⁸ Robbins, "Cruelty Is Bad: Banality and Proximity in *Never Let Me Go*." *Novel* 40, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 289.

²⁶⁹ Michael Jacobsen and Ole Bruun, eds. *Human Rights and Asian Values: Contesting National Identities and Cultural Representations in Asia*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Democracy in Asia series, no. 6 (Abingdon, Oxon, OX: RoutledgeCurzon, 2000), 2. See also William Theodore De Bary, *Asian Values and Human Rights*.

²⁷⁰ Tu, "Introduction," in *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity*, 9.

²⁷¹ Jacobsen and Bruun, *Human Rights and Asian Values*, 4, 12.

²⁷² Fareed Zakaria and Lee Kuan Yew, "Culture is Destiny: A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew," *Foreign Affairs* 73, No. 2 (March/April 1994): 118.

view the “Asian values” problem of the 1990s as a litmus test of sorts for Japan’s exceptional status in the Western imaginary. Would Japan partake in the surveillance of human rights, a course that, according to Leszek Buszynski, would “deepen divisions with the Asia Pacific region”? Or would “a successful Asian regionalism” take priority over Japan’s bilateral security relationship with the United States? This test materialized in concrete form during the North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993 and the Chinese missile launches over Taiwan in 1996. In both instances, “Japanese inaction” was discussed in ambiguous terms: pacifism, passivity, isolationism, regionalism. These incidents, Buszynski writes, “brought home to the Americans the need to adapt the [US-Japan security] alliance to the new challenges of the post-cold war era in which Japan would play a greater security role.”²⁷³

To call out Japan’s “inaction” in these regional skirmishes implies that even though Japan may not be an explicit violator of human morality (in the way of North Korea or China), it *is* guilty of moral apathy. In this respect, Ono does seem like an allegorical figure, for *Artist* is in essence a novelistic documentation of profound inaction. In terms of plot, we see how Ono’s patriarchal, imperialistic thinking impedes his adaption to his new social environment. But we also see this inaction in his reluctance to descend from his elevated viewpoint, in the way of the stigmatized cosmopolitan elite. This consummate viewpoint appears to enable a more comprehensive and objective narrative. In effect, though, it inhibits Ono’s apprehension of difference and dynamism and leads him to reduce individual characters into interchangeable parts of an argument. Given the novel’s geopolitical moment of emergence, this characterization of Ono suggests that Asian capitalist modernity, as the extremity of capitalist rationality, is culturally distinguished by an inhuman defect: an empathy deficiency.²⁷⁴

To be sure, this antinomy between reason and empathy is a defining one within *Western* thought, particularly when distance and detachment are at stake. According to Amanda Anderson’s reading of George Eliot, the “underdevelopment of the moral faculties, particularly the faculty of sympathy” was the biggest drawback of modern distance, as conceptualized in Victorian culture. Distance, Anderson writes, enabled “progressive knowledge, full comprehension of the social totality, and the possibilities of transformative self-understanding”; yet it was also tied to the “alienation and rootlessness that accompanied modern disenchantment, industrialization and the globalization of commerce.”²⁷⁵ David Palumbo-Liu offers a different but equally valid periodization of scientific language by looking to the nuclear age of the 1950s as “the precise moment when the world indeed became a launching pad. That launch entirely new vantage point, and the world appeared in a different light, and in a different language. That linguistic turn . . . valorized rationality and divided the ways in which we would speak about, and know, this new world.”²⁷⁶ Scholarship on the post-Cold War era, specifically the economic phenomenon of globalization, offer yet another variation on this thesis. Following the emergence of a human rights cultural and popular imaginary in the 1990s, this line of work takes

²⁷³ Buszynski, *Asia Pacific Security - Values and Identity* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 62. Japan cited the refusal to meddle in US affairs. The US blamed Japan for not shirking the responsibilities of the security alliance. Buszynski sees the “consensus-based system” in Japan being unable to handle the procedural aspects of security response (61).

²⁷⁴ According to Colleen Lye, “the Asiatic metaphorizes the totality of capitalist modernity” (*America’s Asia*, 71)

²⁷⁵ Anderson, *The Power of Distance Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11, 4.

²⁷⁶ Palumbo-Liu, “Rationality and World-Systems Analysis: Fanon and the Impact of the Ethico-Historical,” in *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, and Culture*, eds. David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins, and Nirvana Tanoukhi, 202-222 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 204.

multinational capitalism as the amoral, inhuman force that disempowers individual agents and violates human dignity. Peter Schwab and Adamantia Pollis, for example, claim that “in the contemporary era it is the private global actors that are frequently the most egregious violators of rights” and call for increased efforts to understand “[human rights] violation as a consequence of globalization.”²⁷⁷

These moments when reason makes itself felt as oppressive reflect a skepticism toward industrialization and technological innovation and, correspondingly, an abiding faith in empathy as the singularly human trait.²⁷⁸ With regards to the Asian values debate, we might view Western efforts to rally around the human dignity of Asian individuals *not only* as an accusation against the immoral economic calculations of Asian states but also as a spectacular exercise of Western empathy. This outpouring of human feeling shows the continued relevance of Eric Hayot’s “hypothetical Mandarin,” a “philosopheme” that takes China as an “instrument of measure” for one’s sympathetic faculties and as the test case for “how best to be, or to become, a modern, sympathetic human being.” Insofar as sympathy is integral to Western modernity, so too are the Chinese – the strangest among strangers, the most distant of sufferers.²⁷⁹ The stakes of this formulation are sharpened in human rights discourse by the presence of the Asian authoritarian state, which China arguably best represents. Prime Minister Lee once noted, “It is not enough to have sympathy . . . Freedom, human rights, democracy, when you are hungry, when you lack development, when you lack basic services, does not add up to much.”²⁸⁰ This prioritization of economic and social rights has been interpreted as the implacable advancement of nation-building over and against the human rights of individuals. The characterization of the Asian state as immoral and inhuman bears out a more general antithesis between the nation and empathy within human rights discourse. Lynn Hunt, for example, uses the term “imagined empathy” as a corrective to Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community,” claiming that it is empathy and not nationalism that “serves as the foundation of human rights.”²⁸¹

Literary scholars have long claimed sympathy as the special province of literature and, in recent decades, have relied on it to substantiate literature’s distinctive contribution to human rights. In a post-Cold War modernity, one in which the primary threat to democratic society has been increasingly framed as global capitalism (rather than global communism), we are encountering a throwback to neo-romantic accounts of literature’s salutary powers. James Dawes claims that his experiences among humanitarian workers have taught him that “storytelling is the very nature of the work” because “stories teach us about the nature of sympathy and imagination.” Dawes asks, “Can we better understand how spectators of suffering develop (or fail to develop) empathy for persons geographically distant or perceived as alien if we first examine how they can so feelingly respond to the dreams, desires, and dignity of fictional persons?”²⁸² Dawes’s answer to this question is, unequivocally, yes. The moral imperative in his provocation is that we care about those different from us. It also suggests that our humanity is

²⁷⁷ Schwab and Pollis, “Globalization’s Impact on Human Rights,” in *Human Rights: New Perspectives, New Realities*, ed. Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab, 209-224 (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 215.

²⁷⁸ It is important to clarify that Anderson’s account is not a critique of distance as a vestige of Enlightenment thought but a defense of “the progressive potentiality of those modern practices that aim to objectify facets of human existence” (5-6).

²⁷⁹ Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), xiii, 8.

²⁸⁰ Quoted in Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions*, 233.

²⁸¹ Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, 32.

²⁸² Dawes, *That the World May Know*, 1, 6-7.

measured by our ability to empathize not so much with kin but, crucially, with strangers – to recall Hayot’s hypothetical mandarin, with the distantly suffering Chinese. In terms of human rights jurisprudence, this moral imperative has motivated the institutionalization of international oversight over intractable nations at the level of governmentality. Among literary critics, it has motivated the conflation of cultural otherness (of far-flung human rights victims) with literary otherness; literary characters, in this scenario, function as proxies for the hypothetical mandarin.

The compatibility between human rights and the humanities on the basis of cultivating empathy for *distant* others implicitly links universality with largeness. Palumbo-Liu and Robbins posit that “the objects of interest these days . . . call on us to learn once again to tell large stories, and to tell them better. The horrified recoil from any hint of panopticism has clearly had its day.”²⁸³ In a world that is more inclusive, larger stories must prevail – for stories must conscientiously test our empathetic limits through the presentation of non-Western literary worlds, and readers must conscientiously take this “world” as a framework for empathy enlargement. This idea of treating characters as empathy test cases or projects is perhaps a more moralistic version of Hayot’s supposition that “the ‘world’ in world literature operates as “a *marker of scale*, a figure for the relationship between the method of discovery and the breadth of its applicability.”²⁸⁴ Through this rubric of literary engagement, we can see why Ishiguro’s novels have been dubbed worldly: the narrative worlds of these novels are, as critics have pointed out in different ways, imminently scaleable to the world of the reader. Walkowitz, for instance, observes how seemingly trivial incidents in Ishiguro’s novels are weighted with an absurd amount of significance; within global literary culture, she writes, “blowing things up out of all proportion is just what enlarged thinking requires.” Katherine Stanton reads *The Unconsoled* as a “demand for greater accountability for the powerful and privileged actor on a transnational scale,” and Wai-chew Sim examines both the scale of historical change and trauma represented in Ishiguro’s novels and the “society calibrated on a human scale” that “allows intimacy and closeness to develop.”²⁸⁵ These examples show that just as the smallest ripples in these novels become weighted with disproportionate significance by the unreliable narrator, the narrated world, precisely due to its seeming insularity and provinciality, afford the reader social parables relating to bombs, wars, biotechnology, and human rights; Ishiguro’s small narrative worlds in which not much happens, in other words, are paradigmatic “large stories” studded with moral lessons on a universal scale.

Swamps and Wheels: Literature of the Global Now

In a reading of Pratt’s “monarch-of-all-I-survey scenes,” Robbins problematizes a “topographical exhibition of progress.” For Pratt, the swamp view – the view from below – is occupied by a marginalized female subject and offers an improvement from the distortions and elitism of cosmopolitanism’s infamous “view from nowhere.” Resisting this “disguised progressiveness” which “lurks in every account that purports to come from the margins,” Robbins considers the fate of the topographical trope in a geopolitical shift from the era of

²⁸³ Palumbo-Liu and Robbins, “Introduction” in *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, and Culture*, 1-26 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 9.

²⁸⁴ Hayot, *On Literary Worlds*, 40.

²⁸⁵ Walkowitz, “Unimaginable Largeness: Kazuo Ishiguro, Translation, and the New World Literature.” *Novel* 49, no. 3 (2007): 231; Stanton, *Cosmopolitan Fictions: Ethics, Politics, and Global Change in the Works of Kazuo Ishiguro, Michael Ondaatje, Jamaica Kincaid, and J.M. Coetzee* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 20; Sim, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 89.

colonial domination, which employs a clearly vertical relation between ruler and subjects, to that of global capitalism, which has brought an end to promontories. Robbins writes: “The swamp is a figure of feminine subjectivity and, at the same time, a figure of a market-induced leveling or liquefaction Antihierarchical, collapsing high and low into obscure intimacy, characterized not by fixity but by indeterminacy, capitalism finds a better image for itself in a swamp than on a promontory.”²⁸⁶

The metaphor that Ian Baucom prefers – and, in fact, that Ishiguro’s butler Stevens prefers – is a wheel²⁸⁷: “As I imagine it, [global form] resembles a spoked wheel whose expanding rim spins ever more tightly around a glittering metropolitan hub. Or perhaps global form (and, by implication, the form of the end of history) is better apprehended in terms of a strictly regulated flow dynamics that balances the relentless centrifugal distributions of capital with their inevitable centripetal return to a seat of high finance.” For Baucom, this “end of history” is recurring, as the determining force of global form is determined by, alternately, “the Bourse in Amsterdam, Exchange alley in London, Wall Street in New York,” and so on. In Baucom’s model of financial centers, the global is the form that history takes when the present, the *now*, compels a “resetting of the clock of history.” The relation between “*then* and *now* is not an analogy at all but an eternal recurrence, a continual stopping and resetting” of this clock; in other words, the seat of high finance is also the seat of historical vision – a vision that sees more broadly and truthfully because it is at history’s end.²⁸⁸

The conclusion of *Artist* offers some variation of both Robbins’s and Baucom’s visual metaphors. In the novel’s final scene, we glimpse Ono amidst the “transition from one mode of speculation to another and an absorption of a prior mode by a later.”²⁸⁹ Sitting on a bench, Ono watches “busy people” in their “bright white shirtsleeves emerging from a “glass-fronted building” that had replaced the Migi-Hidari bar he used to frequent (205). We see here the resetting of history’s clock to a moment when Japan is entering its bid to replace New York as the seat of high vision. No longer the proud imperialist and no longer at the center of history-making, Ono has assumed a peripheral view from a bench where he “can only wish these young people well.” He lightly compares “these young office workers” with the young men from “those brightly-lit bars” and momentarily “[feels] a certain nostalgia for the past” – but this moment passes quickly, and he concludes his narrative by declaring his “genuine gladness” for “how our city has been rebuilt, how things have recovered so rapidly over these years” (206).

My study of the ethical relation between narrator and reader in *Artist* has focused on a shared misperception of one’s historical knowledge and capacity for analysis and, specifically, on how elements of the past become configured to conform with presentist ideals. How we relate Ono’s narrated world (1948-1950) to the world in which Ishiguro is publishing and we are reading (1986-present) is deeply implicated in how residents of the Global Now, in denial of or in opposition to the Pacific Rim, seek to understand postwar Japan. The critical element of Ishiguro’s narrative unreliability – enjoins the reader to revise her historiographic methods. How might we access Ono’s narrated world from our own without taking for granted our position as

²⁸⁶ Robbins, *Feeling Global*, 62, 64-65.

²⁸⁷ At one point, Stevens says: “the world was a wheel, revolving with these great houses at the hub, their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor, who revolved around them.” See *The Remains of the Day* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1989), 137-138).

²⁸⁸ Baucom, “Globalit, Inc.: Or, the Cultural Logic of Global Literary Studies” *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (January 2001): 160.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

the cosmopolitan viewer of history? How might we evaluate Ono's narratorial acts in terms that take stock of but are not overdetermined by the crimes for which Japan has already been convicted? Our ethical detachment from Ono as formalized by the novel is not, I would say, a license to see more than our narrator, even though we necessarily see differently than he does. Though it lies beyond the scope of this chapter, I wonder how one might read the imperial nostalgia that structures Ono's world on different terms – if this nostalgia expresses a “disappointment with the present” (that is, with an American-occupied present) instead of or in addition to an immoral patriotism²⁹⁰; if Ono's presumptuous knowledge of a bygone past can be thought of in relation to Occupation-era slogans of a “new Japan” that recycles the Japanese empire's rhetoric of the “rising sun”²⁹¹; if his wholesale commitment to “propaganda” paintings evidences not the submission of individuality to work and nation – in the way of “I work for Mitsubishi, therefore I am”²⁹² – but rather the ambition to produce art that is of social consequence.

²⁹⁰ John J. Su, *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel* (New York: Cambridge U P, 2005), 9.

²⁹¹ Dower describes how “intimate communications from the very maw of the war itself . . . would be read as an eloquent cry for peace” during the Occupation (*Embracing Defeat*, 198). He writes, “the use of wartime writings as peace statements resembled the more rudimentary carry-overs from war to peace of simple catchwords such as *reconstruction, brightness, culture, and new*” (199).

²⁹² Iyer, “Waiting On History,” 587.

Chapter 3

The Human Rights and Human Limits of Ha Jin's "Documentary" Narrator in *War Trash*

"I would like to sound a word of warning – To speak is to lie – To live is to collaborate."²⁹³

---William S. Burroughs

The frame story of Ha Jin's *War Trash* (2005) introduces our narrator Yu Yuan, a 74-year-old Chinese man, who is visiting his son in Atlanta. Yu has brought with him the materials to compose a memoir about his tenure as a Korean War POW. He has smuggled these materials out of China, despite fears of his passport being revoked or his notes confiscated, and brought them to a country where the composition of an honest memoir – the one we are about to read – would be possible. Such perilous conditions help explain Yu's intentions: "Before I go back, I must complete this memoir I'm going to do it in English, . . . and I'm going to tell my story in a documentary manner so as to preserve historical accuracy."²⁹⁴ Yu's "documentary manner" seems to be the ideal stylistic choice for an author who has claimed that "the key function of literature" is "to combat historical amnesia."²⁹⁵ Readers, by interpreting Yu's voice as a conduit for Jin's "insider's knowledge of China," have accorded *War Trash* unprecedented historical authority.²⁹⁶ David Anthony Durham, among the judges who had awarded *War Trash* the PEN/Faulkner award, praised Jin for resuscitating a history that "most of us have forgotten or never knew about."²⁹⁷ Even renowned Korean War scholar Bruce Cumings commends Yu for being a "fair, discerning observer" whose tale "rings true on every page."²⁹⁸

Why, though, does Yu's "documentary" memoir ring more true than the memoirs of *actual* Korean War POWs – including the ones Jin cites in the novel's bibliography?²⁹⁹ The passage above suggests that because the piece is a literary text written in English and published in America – because it is a linguistic, geographic, *and* modal translation – it corrects for the ideological taint of official state historiography, which presumably permeates all discourse emanating from the People's Republic of China. In this chapter, I aim to problematize the assumption that the literary narrator Yu's "documentary" voice is, as Jin puts it, a "timeless, relatively universal" vehicle of historical truth.³⁰⁰ I argue that the Korean War POW camps to which Yu aims to give truth and the post-Cold War context of globalization, human rights, and Chinese economic modernity from which he narrates offer different reference points for evaluating a neutral, "documentary" voice. To execute this argument, I interrogate the truth effect of Yu's voice with respect to the two figures for whom he speaks: 1) Jin, the post-Tiananmen exilic author who has framed his literary career in terms of defiance against the Chinese state, and 2) actual Chinese Korean War POWs whose "oppressed" voices Jin strives to

²⁹³ Burroughs, *Nova Express* (New York: Grove, 1964), 7.

²⁹⁴ Jin, *War Trash* (New York: Pantheon, 2004), 5. All future references will appear parenthetically.

²⁹⁵ Jin, "The Spokesman and the Tribe," *The Writer as Migrant*, 3-30 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008), 30.

²⁹⁶ Julia Lovell, "Review: Fighting for Mao," *The Guardian*, November 11, 2005, accessed June 20, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/nov/12/featuresreviews.guardianreview19>.

²⁹⁷ Quoted in Darragh Johnson, "'War Trash' Wins Ha Jin 2nd PEN/Faulkner Award," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2005, accessed June 22, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A61742-2005Mar23.html>.

²⁹⁸ Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Random House, 2010), 75.

²⁹⁹ I am referring here to the July 2005 plagiarism scandal surrounding *War Trash*. The last section of my essay will address this issue.

³⁰⁰ "An Interview with Ha Jin," conducted by Jerry A. Varsava, *Contemporary Literature* 51.1 (2010): 23.

“[preserve] . . . in memory.”³⁰¹ In reading *War Trash* with the autobiography of Wang Tsun-Ming, a Korean War POW who became a U.S. informant, I show that Yu’s privileging of political and narrative neutrality elides the strategic and moral necessity of ideological commitment during the Korean War. My assessment of Jin’s authorial creed, meanwhile, illustrates how the neutral register of *War Trash* is just as implicated in U.S.-China *realpolitik* as the ideological register that Jin casts as a dehumanizing tool of the state.

Jin’s valorization of a documentary voice points up the authorial baggage of a writer who has referred to 1989 as the beginning of his literary career and exilic life. It also alerts us to the broader effects of Chinese state censorship on canon formation – specifically, the post-Tiananmen consolidation of a Chinese literary diaspora. What links Jin to the likes of Mo Yan, Gao Xingjian, Bei Dao, Wei Hui, Ma Jian, and Yu Hua is literary exile vis-à-vis state censorship; what distinguishes him is his insistence on writing *only* in English. In an editorial entitled “Exiled to English,” Jin declares, “the Chinese language [has] been so polluted by revolutionary movements and political jargon” that in order “[t]o preserve the integrity of my work, I had no choice but to write in English.”³⁰² Jin similarly justifies his choice to live and write in America: “after [the 1989 Tiananmen protests] I realized it was impossible for me to return [to China] because I would have had to serve the state.” This politically-motivated recourse to English makes Jin most similar to Yiyun Li, who also moved to the United States as a graduate student and unexpectedly became an English-only novelist.³⁰³ Especially following Tiananmen, an event staked in freedom of speech, Chinese literature has been under the constant threat of state censorship. As a result, for Western readers, such texts have become tokens for freedom of speech and thus necessarily operate within the context of human rights and geopolitics. The writers mentioned here all engage *literature* – rather than journalism, scholarship, or activism – to announce their critical relation to the Chinese state. For example, Mo Yan, whose penname means “don’t speak,” offers heavily allegorical stories critiquing the state; Gao’s famously modernist aesthetic is posed against the “isms,” or ideologies, of Chinese intellectuals; Wei Hui’s explicit representations of sexuality rebuts the government’s encroachment of privacy; and Yu Hua’s gothic realism challenges the “reality” installed by government surveillance.

The critical element of Jin’s writing, as borne out by Yu’s opening gambit, putatively lies in a spare, orderly, documentary style – an antidote to the state-mandated rhetoric of patriotism. I focus specifically on *War Trash* because this novel explicitly juxtaposes its origin of narration and publication (the present-day United States) with its represented content (the United Nations POW compounds during the Korean War). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Jin’s style has been strikingly consistent across multiple works and genres. In this respect, Jin’s oeuvre can be described in terms of attempts to revisit historical landmarks of modern China with Tiananmen as a moral filter and to re-present these events through a neutral, and therefore more historically responsible, narrative tone. This “compulsive attempt to imaginatively return to the lost homeland, whose heart [is] at Tiananmen” prompts Belinda Kong to call Jin a “remote witness”

³⁰¹ Jin, “Spokesman,” 30.

³⁰² Jin, “Exiled to English,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 2009, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/31/opinion/31hajin.html>

³⁰³ Li “self-censors” by writing only in English, but, going a step further than Jin, she also prohibits the translation of her works into Chinese. See Aida Edemariam, “Found in Translation,” *The Guardian*. December 5 2006, accessed June 27, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/dec/06/guardianfirstbookaward2006.gurardianfirstbookaward>.

of China. For Kong, this “aesthetic of diasporic witnessing and trauma” makes Jin “above all a writer of *political . . . Chineseness*.”³⁰⁴

Revising Kong, I interpret the remote witness as a self-consciously *literary* position that in *War Trash* is occupied by the novelistic narrator. Jin’s presentation of the Korean War through the post-Tiananmen remote witness *qua* literary speaker reflects a belief that historical redress requires not only his own exilic remoteness from the Chinese party-state but also Yu’s remoteness from politics writ large. *War Trash* thematically evokes Yu’s apolitical stance through his inability to choose between the Nationalists and the Communists. It does so formally through his employment of a narrative voice that is confiding yet objective, personal and apolitical. Though a more truthful exegesis of the Korean War is more than I dare claim for this chapter, I do think it is important to see that Yu’s “documentary” voice, far from being *more* historical or *transhistorical*, is in fact irreducible either to a single conceptualization of human rights or to a stable object called China. As I see it, the moral surety with which Jin’s novel sets out to wrest History from the rackety din of tone-deaf Ideology indicates that the Western world’s Cold War nightmare of international communism has been displaced by a post-Cold War nightmare of multinational capitalism with China at the helm. The Cold War event of specific interest to me is the Korean War “brainwashing” scare. In the United Nations compounds, POWs were compelled to passionately pronounce their categorical devotion to the democratic credos of human rights – a credos that Samuel Moyn associates with American nationalist ideology³⁰⁵ – in order to prove that they had not been “indoctrinated” while under communist command.³⁰⁶ *War Trash*’s mode of depicting the Korean War POW camps, however, is inflected a more recent human rights crisis, the Tiananmen blackout and the Chinese state’s subsequently intensified censorship campaign, both of which have been central to Jin’s authorial vision.

Yu’s narrative voice indexes yet re-inflects two seemingly opposed modes of first-person speaking: the human rights witness-testifier and the native informant. Both figures have an enduring legacy, the former as a bastion of truth in both narrative and legal contexts and the latter as a figure of imperial complicity deployed for geopolitical and propagandistic ends. The two flashpoints for U.S.-China relations I examine, the Korean War and the Tiananmen “massacre,” were junctures when Chinese testifier/informant were morally indispensable to human rights. In both cases, Chinese first-person voices were expected to validate western liberalism against Chinese communism. The Korean War was and remains a stalemate war. During the Panmunjom armistice negotiations, the United Nations Command (U.N.C.) tried to salvage a moral victory – what Rosemary Foot calls a “substitute victory” – by calling upon Chinese and North Korean POWs to voice their renouncement of their communist homelands in favor of Free Asia. These “non-repatriate” prisoners were pressed into service by a Korean War human rights order that fashioned itself an anti-communist fortress against the moral and psychological assaults of Chinese Communist “brainwashers.” Cast against an American culture putatively built on truth, Chinese brainwashing was executed through compulsory confessions and was seen as the product of “a civilization based completely on the technique of the lie.”³⁰⁷ The Free World’s primary weapon for combating this hitherto unknown psychological warfare

³⁰⁴ Belinda Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square: The Chinese Literary Diaspora and the Politics of Global Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple U P, 2012), 86, emphasis mine.

³⁰⁵ In *The Last Utopia*, Moyn refers to the formation of the United Nations in 1945 and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 as victories for “American internationalism.”

³⁰⁶ American POWs faced a similar test upon their return from communist captivity. Famously, 21 U.S. and British POWs chose to return to China instead of to repatriate to their home countries.

³⁰⁷ Eugene Kinkead, *In Every War But One* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), 95.

method was the stridently partisan “testimonies” of Chinese POWs who could credit their “education” in United Nations prison compounds for their ideological freedom. The testimonies solicited from non-repatriates were ostensibly truthful, “voluntary.” Yet, by reading the autobiography of Wang Tsun-Ming, a classic case of the Cold War informant, I will show how these first-person accounts served specific geopolitical needs – information, defense, propaganda.³⁰⁸ Non-repatriates who “volunteered” their tales of duress under Communist China not only testified to the Free World’s moral superiority but also facilitated key strategic advantages that salvaged a Korean War victory for the United Nations and shaped the future of human rights law.³⁰⁹ When read in a geopolitical context, these POW testimonies, articulated through the frame of human rights, share a family resemblance with the false confessions that the Chinese were alleged to have forcibly extracted from Free World POWs.

The first-person voice of post-Cold War U.S.-China relations is likely more familiar to Jin’s readers, given the notoriety the Chinese government has accrued for its exercise of martial law at Tiananmen and for its subsequent efforts to – as Sophie Richardson puts it – “censor history, crush dissent, and harass survivors.”³¹⁰ Three years after Tiananmen, Deng Xiaoping inaugurated a new agenda for economic liberalization. The Tiananmen crisis of 1989 and the economic miracle of 1992, in bringing to bear contemporary China’s human losses and capital gains, present the most acute manifestation of a specifically East Asian mode of development that sacrifices humanity under the banner of modernization. Though scholars such as Xudong Zhang often regard 1992 as “the true watershed year in post-Mao Chinese history,” it is 1989 that has held the strongest moral resonance for the West.³¹¹ Iconized for the “Western democratic nations” by Tank Man, Tiananmen exalts “the courage of the individual standing up to the power of the authoritarian State and [marks] China as the limit case for human rights.”³¹² The courage of this individual has largely been gauged by her capacity for voice. Kong writes, “Where free expression is absent, especially when the media fail and the cameras go black, into the void steps the witness. Tiananmen is hence an event heavily saturated with testimonial claims.”³¹³

Jin’s novel has been read primarily in the testifier/informant conundrum, insofar as the truth-bearer speaking out in defiance of the Chinese government and in defense of human rights has been viewed from the other side as a sell-out writer who, according to Steven Yao, “critiques a totalitarian communist regime primarily for consumption by an audience in the United States.” Like Yao, I believe that Jin’s “plainly realist style” betrays an “ahistorical notion of total

³⁰⁸ Tsun-ming Wang, *Wang Tsun-ming, Anti-Communist: An Autobiographical Account of Chinese Communist Thought Reform*, edited by William C. Bradbury (Washington, DC: Psychological Warfare Division, George Washington U, 1954); future references will appear parenthetically.

³⁰⁹ In 1954, Eisenhower declared that the Korean armistice “inaugurated a new principle of freedom – that prisoners of war are entitled to choose the side to which they wish to be released. In its impact on history, that one principle may weigh more than any battle of our time.” See Eisenhower, Address of the President (Eisenhower) delivered at the Columbia University National Bicentennial Dinner at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York City, May 31, 1954, RG 389.

³¹⁰ Sophie Richardson, as quoted in “China: Tiananmen’s Unhealed Wounds,” *Human Rights Watch*, May 13, 2009, accessed August 6, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2009/05/12/china-tiananmen-s-unhealed-wounds>.

³¹¹ Xudong Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008), 132.

³¹² Smith and Schaffer, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*, 190. David L. Eng, Teemu Ruskola, and Shuang Shen write that “the image of the tank man [was] instantly legible for a Western audience, as there could hardly be a starker depiction of the solitary encounter between the two main protagonists of the liberal political universe”; see “Introduction: China and the Human,” *Social Text* 29, no. 109 (2011): 20.

³¹³ Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions*, 12.

transparency.”³¹⁴ But while Yao reads this style as pandering to U.S. multiculturalist protocols for legibility, I aim to situate the neutral first-person voice on more historically and geopolitically nuanced terms. To me, *War Trash*’s use of a “post-Cold War” voice to lend documentary transparency to America’s Cold War in Asia calls us to comprehend the historical present not as the continued dominance of U.S. foreign policy and nationalist ideology but as the West’s confrontation with the moral and economic threats posed by China’s “rise.” Yu’s first-person voice maintains the moralistic connotations of and ambiguities between the ethnically particular native informant and the universal human rights testifier. But we must understand these Cold War models for speaking in terms of the “fundamental difference” that Robert Meister diagnoses “between human rights as a slogan of popular resistance and today’s Human Rights movement, with its ostensibly less political focus on compassion for bodies in pain.”³¹⁵ The shift from a political to a moralist orientation helps us account for the tonal and rhetorical distinctions between the first-person voice of Yu, the fictional memoirist speaking from a post-Cold War moment, and Wang, the POW beholden to Cold War precepts.

My readings of two first-person narratives that epitomize the touchstones of reliability for their respective historical milieus demonstrate how economic globalization and universal human rights have displaced ideological affiliation as the world’s primary organizational schema. I believe, moreover, that Yu’s neutral Chinese voice denotes a shift in narrative tone that is symptomatic of the post-Cold War erosion of American economic clout and the contemporaneous emergence of Chinese capitalist modernity as a hegemonic threat. More simply put, our New World Order is “post-Cold War” to the extent that capitalism has become unprecedentedly globalized *and* to the extent that Chinese economic modernity has come to embody the vicissitudes of globalization, from political infractions against the individual to economic inequalities wrought by development. China, in this respect, embodies the antinomial yet mutually reinforcing relation between economic globalization and human rights as diagnosed by Pheng Cheah.³¹⁶ I argue that we register these codependence in Yu’s neutral voice, given that *neutral* signifies both a putatively more universal human rights that has transcended the Cold War’s ideological schisms *and* an insidious, indiscriminate variant of globalization discourse that finds its most controversial expression in Chinese economic development. If Chinese capitalist modernity bears out the injustices born of “neutral” reason taken to the extreme, then Yu’s voice abides by a similar logic. In *War Trash*, Yu’s neutral voice enables his claim to humanity as an unheroic everyman (the victim of communist machinations) at the same that it substantiates his claim to reason as a presumptuous, intrusive omniscient-like narrator (the narrative correlate of China’s bid for global economic supremacy).

Though Jin does not cite Wang’s autobiography, I pair it with *War Trash* because Yu and Wang share a strikingly similar profile: both are curiously resistant to communist indoctrination, possess unprecedented access to both the Communists and the Nationalists, and share the burden of testifying to America’s moral supremacy. But while Yu’s *profile* is akin to Wang’s, his *voice* sounds like Jin’s. My assessment of the relations between the Chinese author, the documentary narrator, the Cold War informant/testifier, and the contemporary reader shows that the Chinese

³¹⁴ Steven G. Yao, *Foreign Accents: Chinese American Verse from Exclusion to Postethnicity* (New York: Oxford U P, 2010), 114, 116.

³¹⁵ Meister, *After Evil*, 8.

³¹⁶ In *Inhuman Conditions*, Cheah writes, “Although human rights are supposed to regulate and humanize the field of instrumentality, they are themselves dependent on the political *techne* of states for their enforcement and realization” (5).

voice produced by U.S.-China relations *tonally* marks the epochal shift from the political to the moral or, alternately, from state patriotism to human rights universalism. First, I discuss how this shift appears in *War Trash* as the difference between Yu's neutral "documentary" prose and his fellow POWs' propagandistic sloganeering. Yu's narratorial disposition presupposes a relation between the individual (voice) and the state (censor) that is heavily mediated by Western perceptions of Tiananmen. Then, I turn to Wang's autobiography, a study commissioned by U.S. Psychological Warfare that occurs in the exact opposite tone of Jin's novel. For Wang, a Nationalist officer captured and possibly indoctrinated by the Communists, reliability is predicated on his capacity to assist the "battle for hearts and minds" between America and China. As this moral battle took a psychological turn with the Chinese brainwashing crisis, America's defense of the liberal subject entailed a serious reworking of the relation between the individual and the state, one that called for self-silencing and self-proscription in the face of compulsory confessions and psychological annihilation. Finally, turning to the *War Trash* plagiarism scandal, I illustrate how Yu's neutral voice indexes his distance not only from the POWs within the novel but also from the actual POWs whose ideologically-ridden narratives Jin cites.

The Korean War POW repatriation problem

According to Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, the post-World War II institutionalization of human rights has "made testimony the literary – or discursive – mode par excellence of our time."³¹⁷ Elsewhere, Felman refers to this "age of testimony" as "an era of historic trials."³¹⁸ Commenting on legal responses to WWII, and in particular the Eichmann Trial, Felman writes, "The testimonial approach was necessary for the full disclosure of the thought-defying magnitude of the offense against the victims." This approach "consciously embraces the vulnerability, the legal fallibility, and the fragility of the human witness. It is precisely the witness's fragility that paradoxically is called upon to testify and to bear witness."³¹⁹ Such characterizations of post-WWII modernity concord with recent efforts to conceptualize the positive relationship between law and literature through human rights. Martha Nussbaum is among the most emphatic in positing empathy as the foundational link between these two discourses, though she is certainly not alone in doing so.³²⁰ According to Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, the "post-Cold War decade of the 1990s" is "the decade of human rights," which has "[n]ot incidentally . . . also been described as the decade of life narratives." For them, "life narratives" are now "one of the most potent vehicles for advancing human rights claims."³²¹

During the Korean War, a version of human rights now deemed a watershed for testimony was put to an early test by the Chinese POW voice – and it did not pass muster. Voice, exploited for confessions, was how the *Chinese Communists* committed "mind murder";³²² to

³¹⁷ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 5.

³¹⁸ Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*, 1.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 132-34. Felman contrasts the Eichmann Trial with the more famous Nuremberg Trials, which, by her account, has built its robust legacy on "nonhuman and nonliving" evidence.

³²⁰ Nussbaum discusses over a range of texts that "the greatest contribution literature has to make to the life of the citizen is its ability to wrest from our frequently obtuse and blunted imaginations an acknowledgement of those who are other than ourselves, both in concrete circumstances and even in thought and emotion." See *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Presidents & Fellows of Harvard College, 1997), 111-12.

³²¹ Smith and Schaffer, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*, 1.

³²² Memo, "Possible Communist Indoctrination of U.S. Captured Personnel" (Feb 19, 1953), National Archives, Record Group (RG) 319.

add legal insult to psychological injury, the 1949 Geneva Conventions, created before the West had encountered Chinese Communism, prevented the U.N. liberators from heeding the voices of *Chinese Nationalists* seeking to escape the Communists' clutches.³²³ Because the Chinese voice was seen as both manipulating the existing human rights order and exposing its inadequacy, the U.N. negotiators' appraisal of this voice appealed to, yet also questioned, the Geneva Conventions. With respect to the repatriation controversy, the Communists pushed to enforce the Conventions, phrasing the issue as "the withholding of prisoners versus their automatic return"; the morally indignant U.N.C., however, introduced "a new standard" that cast the issue "as voluntary versus forcible repatriation."³²⁴ Claiming a rupture between legal and moral humanitarianism, the U.N.C. called for the Conventions "to be revised or at least interpreted in such a way to handle a new type of prisoner."³²⁵ One U.S. memorandum pronounces: "To return [a nonrepatriate] into slavery would amount to enslaving a free person, and neither the United States nor any officer under their authority can enslave any human being."³²⁶ Such demands for legal flexibility were driven by demands for moral certitude. Barton Bernstein writes, the U.N.C. "wanted to present a position as an immutable principle and then wait for Communist compliance."³²⁷

This insistence that the word of the law conform to the binding principles of anti-communism mirrored the moral stance assumed on America's home front. One article in *Christianform* frames the matter in terms of "Communist reality being what it is." It proclaims, "Our only choice is between final victory or final defeat."³²⁸ Victory, in the end, was far from final, given that Korea remains divided. Victory, moreover, was also not categorical or even claimable by either side. Of the 132,000 Communist POWs in U.N. camps, 21,820 refused repatriation, a number that embarrassed the Communists. Meanwhile, the Communists held 12,000 U.N. prisoners, of which 22 were non-repatriates.³²⁹ In spite of the statistics favoring the U.N.C., the POWs who chose communism stirred much alarm among the U.S. public, and the war was often viewed as proof that democracy had, as Eugene Kinkead pronounced, "failed signally" in the showdown against Communism.³³⁰ The moral problems posed by Korean War POWs made the negotiating table far more important than the battlefield as a site for securing a victory. The truce talks, which began in Kaesong and concluded in Panmunjom, stretched from July 10, 1951, to July 27, 1953, and ended up constituting the majority of the war.³³¹

³²³ Article 118 of the Geneva Conventions provides that POWs "be released and repatriated without delay after the cession of hostilities." See *A Study of the Administration and Security of the Oriental Communist Prisoners of War During the Conflict in Korea* (September 25, 1953), RG 389.

³²⁴ Barton J. Bernstein, "The Struggle over the Korean Armistice: Prisoners of Repatriation?" in *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953*, ed. Bruce Cumings, 261-308 (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1983), 274.

³²⁵ *A Study of the Administration and Security*, RG 389.

³²⁶ Memo, "Legal Considerations Underlying the Position of the United Nations Command Regarding the Issue of Forced Repatriation of Prisoners of War" (1952), RG 389.

³²⁷ Bernstein, "The Struggle over the Korean Armistice," 268.

³²⁸ Battle Bulletin No. 16 of the *Christianform*, quoted in Hon. Charles J. Kersten (WS), "Americans Can Help POW's in Korea," *Congressional Record*, Appendix (Jan 13, 1953), RG 389.

³²⁹ Foot, 196-197.

³³⁰ Kinkead, *In Every War But One* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), 10.

³³¹ The Korean War officially commenced on June 25, 1950, purportedly with northern Korean invading the south. President Truman immediately mobilized US forces to assist southern Korea, with fifteen other nations sending troops to join the U.N.C. The Chinese People's Volunteer Army entered the war five months later to back northern Korea. In a betting pool, U.N. newsmen put the "pessimistic" estimate for the negotiations at six weeks. Barton J.

Yu's "documentary" testimony

With a moral bounty on their heads and both sides clamoring to claim it, the Chinese non-repatriates' testimonies became crucial to both *America's* moral triumph over "a civilization based completely on the technique of the lie" and *China's* heroic efforts to "resist America and assist Korea."³³² Jin's central message in *War Trash* is that the "choice" between repatriation and non-repatriation effectively left no language for POWs that was not already ideologically-coded. Appealing to literary reinterpretation as historical recuperation, Jin tries to remedy the paucity of objective accounts of the Korean War by creating a narrator who spurns both the Communists and the Nationalists, the Chinese and the Americans, due to each side's ideological dogmatism. Jin depicts the privileging of national interests over individual lives as dehumanizing; it turned POWs into "chessmen," "mere [pawns]," "war trash" (345).

The humanizing move Jin makes through literature is to show that Yu's *inability* to "[lay] down [his life] for an idea" enables his *ability* to think beyond the polarizing choices given him (250). Yu initially portrays his distance from the prescribed ideology as a lack: "I wished I could have been as brave as a genuine Communist, who, crazed and fanatic, viewed death without flinching" (112). But toward the end of his memoir, Yu's anxiety about his failure to meet ideological expectations turns into a profound skepticism about the irrational, inhuman actions of the "crazed and fanatic" Communists. After a dangerous exploit to recapture a flag, Yu explains his ambivalence:

On the one hand, I admired the courage our men had displayed, and in a way I'd been awestruck by their passion and bravery, which I have to admit I didn't share. On the other, I doubted whether it was worth losing a man's life for the sake of a flag, which, symbolic as it might be, was just a piece of nylon cloth. I had noticed that there was a kind of religious fervor in some of these men, who were capable of laying down their lives for an idea. However silly the idea might be, the act of self-sacrifice made them truly remarkable. Potentially many of them were heroes (250).

In a superficial sense, Yu continues to portray the distinction between himself and the "genuine Communist" as a matter of his own incapacity. He claims to admire the other men's "courage," "passion," and "bravery" and portrays their acts of "self-sacrifice" as "truly remarkable." These words of apparent praise, however, in effect shore up a decidedly derisive attitude. Yes, "the act of self-sacrifice made these men truly remarkable," and indeed, perhaps "many of them were heroes" – but heroism reflected "a kind of religious fervor in some of these men" that Yu is clearly trying to extricate himself from. What Yu had earlier cast as an apparent deficiency in mettle is here the source of his moral and perspectival advantage. We see Yu project this kind of implicit comparison on multiple occasions. At one point, for example, he confides that "when I was with . . . my comrades, I couldn't help but grow vigilant, because there was always some ulterior motive behind every activity and every statement" (66). While this disclosure implies that suspicion runs rampant among captives of all political stripes, it shows us that for Yu, vigilance is necessary, not due to the potential sabotage of whichever side's righteous cause, but

Berstein, "The Struggle over the Korean Armistice: Prisoners of Repatriation?" in *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953*, ed. Bruce Cumings, 261-308 (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1983), 266.

³³² Kinkead, *In Every War But One*, 95. In Chinese publications, the Korean War is often dubbed the "War to Resist America and Assist Korea."

to the fact that this rigid framework of loyalty versus betrayal had become a basis for misreading character.

Yu, by contrast, is an exceptional reader – of character, behavior, books, newspapers. His characterizations of his compatriots pit the “fervor” of their actions against the deductive nature of his own thought process. Yu’s vocation as a translator highlights his status as a thinking man. His “ability to control the flow of information in Compound 602” (135) is formalized as a narratorial ability not only to control but to interpret information and generate knowledge about the other prisoners – or, as he often calls them, “these men.” Yu’s commentaries on the prisoners’ artistic endeavors most poignantly establish his belief that “fervor” is at odds with authentic self-expression. He confides, “These men” were but “smart hacks, blind to their own shoddiness.” An unabashed adherent of a Kantian ideal of art, Yu chides “these men” for creating works that subscribed to the precepts of war. Their creations, like “a weapon,” were “powerful at times, but never beautiful” (271). Yu is particularly long-winded about and disgusted by the prisoners’ enjoyment of song, which was “by far the most popular form of entertainment” (269). He elaborately describes the composition and circulation of songs, even transcribing in full the lyrics of “a fighting anthem.” Despite this transcription, Yu quickly tells us that he “never learned to sing it” (269-270). To clarify his *social detachment* from the singers, Yu maintains that he preferred to “[spend] more time reading English-language newspapers” and often “craved a good book” (271). To underscore his *narrative detachment* from the “simpleminded boastfulness” of their “chanting,” he uses purposefully analytical, detached prose to describe them:

Without a question, singing together assuaged their misery and cheered their hearts. More importantly, songfests enabled them to identify with one another emotionally so as to increase their feeling of solidarity

The singing also eased the prisoners’ tremendous dread of loneliness. The inmates were very gregarious, as most Chinese are. Some of them feared loneliness more than incarceration Singing . . . not only soothed their aching hearts but also suspended their individual isolations. Frankly, sometimes I wished I were more like them, capable of chanting whatever came to mind with total abandon (269-270).

This passage discloses a peculiar narrative tendency: when discussing his “fellow countrymen,” our memoirist sounds like an anthropologist in the field. Showcasing his agility in moving from observation to social interpretation, Yu sets himself apart from those who merely “[chant] whatever came to mind.” His insights, however, take deductive reasoning to an illogical extreme: his vision penetrates not just ideology but also *individuals*. He purports to know “without a question” the prisoners’ unspoken sentiments, despite his supposed alienation from them. These excavations of interiority act as a foil to Yu’s concealment of his own emotions. From this narrative dynamic, we might glean that Yu is a more complex character – round, so to speak. His comrades, on the other hand, are flat – because they are minor characters but, more precisely, because their entire existence is based on the axiomatic standpoint of a well-rehearsed ideology. The accessibility of the POWs’ interiority is concomitant with the predictability of their artistic creations. Yu’s denunciation of songfests as unthinking chants implicitly typecasts the other POWs as fanatically ideological Communists, who cannot but exist as a brainwashed horde, unable to think for themselves. In this context, Yu’s “frank” concession that he, too, wanted to chant “with total abandon” seems like a backhanded way of stressing that he is vitally *not* “like them.”

Yu's portrayal of "these men" as unthinking heroes and sheep-like chanters draws our attention to his own ordinariness as a multiply fallible, multifaceted human who cannot – more by default than by principle – sacrifice himself for "an idea" (250). In a way, Yu's emphasis on his own fallibility plays on a common literary technique for engaging an empathetic reader. Characters – and in particular narrators – who betray an inclination toward nostalgia, a misplaced hope for the future, or some other vulnerable quality are taken to possess a humanlike aspect.³³³ For Yu though, fallibility is not due to emotion overpowering reason or hindering vision. On the contrary, fallibility, in affording a buffer against communism, is precisely how he demonstrates his extraordinary capacity to *think* and to *see*. This capacity for reason and vision allows Yu to see past ideology, across enemy lines, and even into the hearts and minds of his compatriots – in short, it creates the narrative effect of an omniscient narrator.

Among Jin's readers, Yu's perspectival prowess with respect to the world of the novel has been seen as evidencing Jin's knowledge with respect to all these Chinese. Julia Lovell, in an overall scathing review, locates Jin's sole value in his "insider's knowledge of China" and his "political freedom to write about it."³³⁴ That Lovell takes exception to Jin's putative linguistic and stylistic shortcomings shows how U.S.-China relations have informed interpretations of *War Trash*. Such interpretations, which concord with a post-Cold War prioritization of morals over politics, are facilitated by Jin's plain style. Readers such as Lovell, often located in the West, mount praise for Jin's works on China's status as a recognizable site of human rights crimes, exhausting a store of China's atrocities, both past and present, including "wars whether 'hot' or 'cold,' various Maoist follies, the casual deprivations of military life, bureaucratic sclerosis, the social conservatism of Confucianism, the backwardness of rural China, (post-)Tiananmen reformist yearnings, environmental problems" – in short, what Jerry Varsava calls "social superfluity," whereby "the individual is crushed under the weight of political structures."³³⁵

The looming specter of China's weighty politics and superfluous society in *War Trash* highlights the antithesis between the personal and the political that has anchored Jin's authorial ethos.³³⁶ Just as Yu's "documentary" narration puts into relief the other prisoners' "propagandistic gibes" (131), Jin's insistence on a "documentary manner" puts into relief contemporary China's ideologically-overwrought historiography and its incapacity for moral progress. In his first English-language publication, Jin assigns himself a key role in remedying such dire circumstances. Through literature, he purports to "speak for those unfortunate people . . . who have created [Chinese] history and at the same time were fooled or ruined by it."³³⁷ Nearly two decades later, however, Jin abandons the task of political spokespersonship and, claiming the exigency of historical truth, refashions himself as a literary craftsman. He professes that "today literature is ineffective at social change. All the writer can strive for is a personal voice."³³⁸ Jin's diminishment of literature here recalls Yu's emphasis on own ideological incapacity. For Jin, literature's social impotence is precisely what makes it historically visionary. Jin writes that particularly during historical crises, artists must "stay above immediate social needs and create a genuine piece of literature that [preserves] the oppressed in memory. Yes, to

³³³ On the ethics of first-person narration, see Newton's *Narrative Ethics*. For the specific case of untrustworthy versus fallible narrators, see Greta Olsen's "Reconsidering Unreliability."

³³⁴ Julia Lovell, "Review: Fighting for Mao."

³³⁵ Jin, "An Interview," 2, 3.

³³⁶ Notably, this antithesis between the personal and the political runs counter to the 1980s Anglo-American criticism that took the personal to *be* the political.

³³⁷ Jin, *Between Silences: A Voice From China* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990), 2.

³³⁸ Ha Jin, "The Spokesman and the Tribe," 28-29.

preserve is the key function of literature, which, to combat historical amnesia, must be predicated on the autonomy and integrity of literary works *inviolable by time*.³³⁹ This plea for literary autonomy consecrated through the personal voice is a distinctly post-Tiananmen ethos. As Jin's writings, interviews, and lectures have made quite clear, for him, it is ultimately not *time* that violates literature's "integrity" but the Chinese government's regime of terror and censorship.³⁴⁰ King-kok Cheung characterizes Jin's position as such: "What is left unsaid in [Jin's] exaltation of literature is that its historiographical function can hardly be implemented in a country that polices and regulates publications." This link between Jin's "refrain about the primacy of literature" and his "political plea for artistic freedom in China" indicates that for Jin, historical truth requires transgressing the state-policed boundaries of individual expression and monitoring the morally-sanctioned boundaries of aesthetic autonomy.³⁴¹

In Jin's account, literature is a sanctuary for the Chinese individual – a compensatory domain impervious to the Chinese party-state. This ideal of literature, it follows, is neutral (of Chinese state politics) and personal (with respect to the individual). In *Yu*, we have a narrator whose exhibition of political disinterest functions as the novel's primary affective register. In fact, Ron Charles notes that this exhibition comes at the expense of convincingly conveyed feeling: "[Yu] has none of the revolutionary zeal of his comrades He regards even those he loves or loathes from a strangely disinterested point of view."³⁴² I should point out that Charles intends this observation as a compliment. Such a reading suggests that post-Cold War U.S.-China relations overwhelm the ethical relations – notably, between the fallible narrator and the empathetic reader – that the novel normally facilitates. As Charles would have it, Yu's clear, forceful expression of *political detachment* is so morally vital that it outweighs his "strangely disinterested" expression of *personal attachment*. This implicit valuation scheme shows how "China," as an object of representation, compels different conditions for perceiving the "human" in narrative. In recounting Girard Genette's definition of homodiegetic narrators, Dorrit Cohn writes that these character-narrators who participate in the narrated world are "presented as human beings with human limitations, including the inability to perceive what goes on in the minds of their fellow beings, to perceive what others perceive. In this respect they are comparable to historians."³⁴³ If we apply these narratological criteria to *War Trash*, we would suppose that Yu's "human" status depends on whether his "fictional 'reality' determines (and is determined by) his imitation of real-world discourse."³⁴⁴ Because Yu's omniscient-like commentaries are not plausible "imitations real-world discourse," his voice is something of a narrative anomaly. Put differently, his objective rigor and capacity for reason make his narration like that of a third-person or heterodiegetic narrator rather than that of a mimetically humanlike first-person speaker.

For James Phelan, the fact that readers often encounter narrative aberrations in a text "without registering that there is anything unusual going on" speaks to "the power of the

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30, emphasis mine.

³⁴⁰ Exemplary pieces are Ha Jin's essays, "Exiled to English" and "The Censor in the Mirror," October 2008, accessed May 20, 2013, <http://theamericanscholar.org/the-censor-in-the-mirror/>.

³⁴¹ King-kok Cheung, "The Chinese American Writer as Migrant: Ha Jin's Restive Manifesto," *Amerasia* 38, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 4, 11.

³⁴² Ron Charles, "Review: Soldiers Caught Between Death and Life," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 12, 2004, accessed June 20, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1012/p14s01-bogn.html>.

³⁴³ Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction*, 122.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

interpretive habit to preserve the mimetic”³⁴⁵ – that is, to preserve the belief that “voice” references a human speaker. I contend that Yu’s “mimetic” pull, despite his un-humanlike capacity for knowledge of others, can at least in part be adduced to the moral terms of U.S.-China geopolitics through which his voice is accessed. By alerting the reader of his humanlike vulnerability, Yu distinguishes himself from the communist zealots that populate the U.N. compounds; in this instance though, the vulnerability of the *ordinary* man keys us to the *extraordinary* vision of the omniscient narrator. For Jin’s detractors who invoke the native informant paradigm, the more knowledgeable – the more omniscient – Yu is about his native China, the more intimate he becomes with the sympathetic Western reader.³⁴⁶ In my mind, a neutral first-person voice produced by post-Cold War U.S.-China relations attune us to the mutually reinforcing relation between the moral discourse of human rights and the economic discourse of global capitalism at our post-Cold War moment. Given that the codependency of these discourses has become most apparent and acute in discussions of by China’s economic advancement and political barbarism, the *neutral* that *War Trash* presents as a more clarifying alternative to a dehumanizing, deaestheticizing “Mao-speak” must be conceptualized alongside the *neutral* as a narrative instantiation of the Chinese state’s uncompromising, indiscriminant pursuit of economic progress.³⁴⁷ If the extremity of capitalist reason compels unmitigated economic development without regard to individual human dignity, then it must by the same logic condone the penetrating vision and will to knowledge that Yu exercises with respect to his fellow inmates. The prose style in which Yu relays this knowledge of anthropological Others recalls both the language of reason that substantiates the institutional oversight of human rights law and the “new kind of flatness or depthlessness” that Fredric Jameson attributes to late capitalism.³⁴⁸ Yu’s neutral voice elicits empathy for the vulnerable everyman insofar as it reminds Western readers that the postsocialist Chinese government remains a remarkably legible sign and a most salient measure of state corruption; by the same token, this voice evokes inhumanity insofar as it subscribes to the logic of *techne* in a “now globalized system of means and ends” that instrumentalizes individual persons and violates human freedom in the name of reason.³⁴⁹

Wang’s “Anti-Communist” testimony

Jin’s conceptualization of literature’s “key function” as “[combating] historical amnesia” seems especially urgent for the Korean War, which has been memorialized in America as “the Forgotten War” and idealized in China as a valiant effort to save Korea from U.S. imperialism. But although Jin’s authorial creed implies that the literary narrator remote from politics *is* in fact

³⁴⁵ Phelan, *Living to Tell About It*, 28.

³⁴⁶ Hayot takes China as a limit case for “the putatively ‘natural’ feeling of human sympathy” (*Hypothetical Mandarin* 5).

³⁴⁷ I am influenced here by Jason McGrath’s notion that the aestheticization of Chinese cultural production is both a method of censorship evasion and a byproduct of economic liberalization. In *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Palo Alto, C.A.: Stanford U P, 2010), McGrath writes: “In the realm of the arts, one thing we see as new in contemporary Chinese culture is the sort of relative autonomy of the aesthetic that was part of the process of modernization in the West. Thus the various modernist, postmodernist, or otherwise avant-garde movements in Chinese culture in the reform era follow much the same logic of increasing artistic autonomy as that of the various Western modernisms – an autonomy which takes place under the more global logic of the differentiation of society in general, through which the arts stake out their autonomous spheres just as do politics, religion, and so on” (10).

³⁴⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke U P, 1990), 9.

³⁴⁹ Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions*, 5.

the surrogate of the diasporic exile remote from China, I have proposed that we cannot conflate “[combating] historical amnesia” with combating contemporary China’s censors. To elaborate on this claim, I turn now to a historical scenario when the Chinese voice born of U.S.-China relations was evaluated by different standards. I pair Wang’s autobiography with Yu’s fictional memoir because the similarities shared by these two figures – most of which proceed from their exceptional status among their peers – elucidate the tension between a post-Tiananmen human rights ethos and a Korean War human rights ethos. Notably, both Wang and Yu make themselves out to be singularly capable of thwarting indoctrination. Yu, as we have seen, is unequivocally apolitical, despite the fact that his choice to write his memoir in the United States serves as a vote of moral confidence for present-day America’s freedoms of expression. Meanwhile, Wang a Nationalist officer captured and possibly “reformed” by the Communists, is passionately anti-communist, despite the American interviewers’ foregrounding of his account as “objective” (viii).

Wang’s autobiography, known as the Wang Report, was headed by William C. Bradbury, with the aid of Lloyd E. Ohlin and Richard P. Harris. The report’s prologue introduces Wang as “clearly a vigorous man of action. He is also unusually lucid and articulate. He is tall, with an impressive military bearing.” An “unusually difficult pupil” for the Communists, Wang was subjected to “re-molding” for three times longer than the typical Nationalist officer (vii). We see that Wang, based on comportment alone, stands out from the other Chinese POWs – the infamous horde – due to his proximity to a liberal subject. That this characterization comes from the report’s administrators is telling, for their paratextual commentary throughout the “nearly verbatim record of Wang’s replies” heavily influences how we view him (vii). Hence, even though Wang appears to be the authority on the Communist Others, whom he presents via his distance from “these people” (9), this authority is explicitly granted by his interviewers.

Yu’s *fallibility*, let us remember, is in fact the source of his sweeping, penetrating vision. Wang, by contrast, claims to have thwarted the Communists’ brainwashing because of his psychological *infallibility*. This claim bears out the contingent nature of his vision, which is circumscribed by the ideological values of his interviewers. As a result, whereas Yu distinguishes himself by emphasizing his capacity for reason, Wang profligately flaunts his loyalty to anti-communism, so much so that ideological consistency takes precedence over logical consistency. For example, at one point, Wang highlights his psychological stamina by lamenting that “[a] lot of the men just go crazy”; later, though, scoffing at the Communists’ lack of originality, he claims that it is “possible for anyone to escape [their] deception” (51, 53). Bradbury, et. al., largely ignore Wang’s contradictory remarks. Yet their ambivalence clouds the entire report, for almost every sentence includes a qualification or contradiction. Even as they praise Wang’s “unusually strong” sense of “distrust and dislike” toward the Communists and deem these sentiments the source of his success in resisting indoctrination, in the same line, they betray suspicions that “his conformity was not a mere surface yielding” (vi).

In the last analysis, Bradbury, et. al., come out in strong support of Wang. Despite the murkiness surrounding his possible offenses and their ambivalence about his indoctrination, emphatic language underlines the points that they take to be true: he is “*clearly* a vigorous man of action” and “*evidently* proud of his record as an anti-Communist fighter.” Such endorsements make the administrators out to be excellent readers of the traits Wang plays up – what he “volunteers.” Of utmost importance is that “he tells the story *freely* and expresses *willingness* to have it widely known” (viii, emphasis mine). The moral caliber of Wang’s testimony corresponds with his psychological fortitude. The administrators allege that the Communists’ “effort to remold and control” Wang, rather than compromising his mind, “reinforced his hatred”

– to be sure, his psychological wherewithal. The intelligence value of Wang’s report is in this sense deprioritized by his testimony’s moral value for America’s Free World crusade. The facts may not line up, but the ideological position is vigorously articulated.

Through the administrators’ underlying, unarticulated uncertainty in the Wang Report, we can perceive the degree to which the fence-hopping non-repatriates troubled the Cold War’s absolutist paradigms – good versus evil, victory versus defeat – especially as these POWs were pulled to commit to a particular side. The questions surrounding Wang’s reliability show how the Manichean formulations that became deeply problematized and racialized through the Chinese POWs ultimately come down to psychological status: Was Wang ever indoctrinated? Is he now fully de-indoctrinated? Such questions came to the fore in a section on “New Evidence of Unreliability.” Here, the administrators question Wang’s account of two incidents that had supposedly caused the Communists to mistrust him. Though it is unclear what exactly makes Wang unreliable, the “evidence” is noteworthy in that it raised suspicion for both the Communists *and* the Americans. This mutual suspicion spells out a causal relation between the reliability of Wang’s narration and the efficacy of his indoctrination. From the perspective of the Chinese, ambiguities in Wang’s narrative are grounds for wondering if their indoctrination program has truly “washed” a man; from that of the Americans, these same ambiguities invite skepticism about whether this man who claims to have withstood intense mental torture is legitimately anti-communist.

The uncertainties surrounding Wang’s allegiances suggest an analogy between the subject of Chinese brainwashing and the subject of U.S. interrogation. In my reading, these non-repatriate POWs, rather than being doubly instrumentalized, were also *double agents*. On the one hand, the Wang Report, in questioning Wang’s alleged psychological resilience, seems to be as much an account of his inscrutability as it is of his commitment to anti-communism. Yet Wang’s mobility between the Free World and the Communist world also reveals how “*automatization, impersonation, or mimicry*” can accord “legitimacy and security” as well as “potentiality and empowerment.”³⁵⁰ Like Yu’s seeming omniscience, Wang’s seeming knowledge of both sides establishes his trustworthiness to a Western audience. For Yu, omniscience evidences the human rights *dissident’s* ability to dispense with the ideologically-colored glasses issued to all Korean War POWs. For Wang, double agency evidences the native *informant’s* ability to strategically manage his allegiances. Despite the apparently disparate moral connotations underlying the kind of service that their first-person voice performs, such distinctions are ultimately untenable; the main difference is openly defying versus openly serving the state.

For Wang and Yu, a telling indicator of reliability is where they direct their emotions. The apolitical Yu maintains that his loyalties are strictly personal – something we gather from his emotive expressiveness with respect to his mother and fiancée. When it comes to recapturing a flag, singing a fighting anthem, or statements of patriotism, however, Yu seems incapable of working up any feeling. This discrepancy between personal and political emotion appears in reverse for Wang. The portrayal of his voice as “lucid,” “articulate,” and “objective” imparts a sense of restraint and composure – qualities we see when he “speaks of his family with little emotion and in the past tense” (2). Yet Wang becomes “highly emotional and upset” when detailing a forced confession incriminating his anti-Communist troops (32). He also gives “long,” “impassioned” stories of resistance within the Communist camps and turns “most intense” on the

³⁵⁰ Chow, *Protestant Ethnic*, 110. Also relevant is Tina Chen’s “double agency,” a term that refers to the “multiple allegiances” an Asian American maintains for the purposes of “self-articulation and -determination” (*Double Agency* xviii).

topic of “re-education” (21, vii). Even as men commit suicide under the strain of Communist manipulation, even as “[m]ost of us become dumb and feelingless,” Wang says, “I never really lost the view of myself as being against Communism” (41). For Wang, the last bastion of feeling and the chief touchstone of narrative reliability is his strong sense of ideological interpellation. By limiting his emotional expressivity to the realm of politics, he conveys the tenacity of his ideological commitment, which cannot be impinged upon even by ties of ethnic kinship. Anti-communism, in being the sole emotional register, is in effect the most important moral and narrative register.

Even though Yu mentions that “the Communists were skilled in psychological attacks” (314), he never directly addresses Wang’s titular topic of “Chinese Communist thought reform.” During the Korean War, the Communists’ brainwashing of Free World POWs was seen as a crucial liability for U.S. intelligence and a moral unmooring of a liberal democratic order premised on the dignity of rational man. Some trace the origins of *brainwashing*, a term directly translated from the Chinese phrase *xi nao*, to the Soviets’ Pavlovian methods. Others see it as organically Chinese, dating to the 4th-century B.C. Confucian thinker Mencius, the “ancient oriental tradition” of warlords, or the Communist regime.³⁵¹ Most scholars agree that the term “brainwashing” came into broad and casual usage in 1950s America and persisted through the later Cold War years, as the Chinese treatment of U.S. POWs during the Korean War gained traction as a cultural trope.³⁵² Honed by Oriental cunning and mysticism, the “techniques used by the Communists” were believed to be “so advanced” that they resembled “a psychoanalytic or almost hypnotic process.”³⁵³

Wang’s memoir outlines the brainwashing myth’s defining features and successive stages. At first, he says, “we had a lot of freedom”(24). But then, “the airing of grievances began”: Each of us had to accuse the others in group meetings for their past or present failings; we all had to criticize ourselves and each other. Soon began the period when we had to write our personal histories. These autobiographies went into the file and were used to check our activities in the past. Then came the period of ‘greater understanding of each individual’, the purpose of which was to probe into our backgrounds and build up the file. All our own confessions in response to the accusations by others were included (26).

Wang details here how brainwashing played into China’s “lenient policy.” Whereas the North Korean treatment of POWs was “of almost incredible brutality,”³⁵⁴ Chinese “mental torture” was

³⁵¹ Edward Hunter’s *Brainwashing in Red China* (New York: Vanguard, 1953) and J.A.M. Merloo’s *Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1956) pursued the Pavlov angle. In Hunter’s later writings, he presents the Korean War brainwashing as indigenously Chinese, for example, beginning with Mencius; see Hunter, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied it* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1956), 4. William Lindsay White’s *The Captives Of Korea An Unofficial White Paper On The Treatment Of War Prisoners* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1957) dates brainwashing to Chinese warlords (35). Notable studies on brainwashing as a homegrown Chinese Communist institution include Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of “Brainwashing” in China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961) and Edgar H. Schein, *Coercive Persuasion: A Socio-psychological Analysis of the “Brainwashing” of American Civilian Prisoners by the Chinese Communists* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971).

³⁵² Albert D. Biderman writes, “conceptions of Chinese practices were nourished by images drawn from European totalitarianism by Koestler, Huxley, Orwell, and Meerloo” (554). The most enduring cultural portrayal of brainwashing is Richard Condon’s *The Manchurian Candidate*.

³⁵³ Memo, “Indoctrination of US POW’s by Chinese Communist Forces” (Nov 13, 1952), RG 319.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

taken to be “a much more subtle and outwardly benign, but exceedingly efficient exploitation of the human animal’s natural anxieties.”³⁵⁵ Willis A. Perry recalls, “The Chinese to our great bewilderment would greet each captive with a smile, a cigarette, and a handshake.”³⁵⁶ What followed such civilities, we might suppose, was the distribution of writing utensils. The endless cycle of accusation, self-criticism, and interrogation that Wang describes exemplifies one intelligence report’s claim that all Chinese psychological warfare methods were “to extract confessions.”³⁵⁷ Prisoners were allegedly required to log autobiographies of up to 500 pages. The writing and rewriting of these tracts were interspersed with “‘friendly’ personal [interviews]” – what Wang refers to as “greater understanding of each individual.”³⁵⁸ In these accounts of “thought reform,” we see that voice functions quite differently than it has for the familiar human rights agenda of historical redemption and subject formation. The compulsive telling and retelling of one’s story through “formal instruction, group discussion, confession, and self and mutual criticism” created occasions for self-contradiction (Wang v-vi). To speak without end about oneself and about one’s comrades created “greater understanding,” in that it opened the door for the eventual emergence of lies. The personal voice, in short, enabled the “physical and mental liquidation of one’s self by one’s self” (Wang 33).

The compulsory autobiographies solicited by the Communists were seen as impinging not just on truth but on the liberal ideal of an autonomous, rational subject. Directly contrary to the *bildung* apparatus of autobiographies that would transform the speaking protagonist into the self-possessed liberal subject, we have instead a case of discursive self-annihilation. Brainwashing may have been useful in helping the Americans explain how the “communists had come to accept their own ‘enslavement,’” but the procedure “posed a serious problem for dominant western thinking about subjectivity.” Timothy Melley writes: “If individuals were truly capable of succumbing to wholesale external control, then liberal individualism was fatally flawed.”³⁵⁹ Wang, in a sense, concretizes these fears. Through the Western-like Wang, Bradbury, et. al., come to the “crystal-clear” conclusion that the efficacy of brainwashing has no “special affinity to Chinese culture” (v).

The brainwashing crisis led the United States to undertake a massive restructuring of its military training programs. Recommendations to future servicemen were wide-ranging, perhaps to accommodate “any positive action that the individual can take” to feel “a sense of control over a situation that is otherwise controlling him.” For Allen W. Dulles, the only available “positive action” for the hypothetical captive – the only way he could achieve “an immeasurable boost in morale” – was to “[combat] his own reactions.” Since “little can be done to control the pressures exerted upon [the prisoner],” Dulles says, the key strategy would be “thwarting individual emotional reactions to brainwashing techniques rather than . . . the techniques themselves.”³⁶⁰ The need to modulate one’s actions not to the situation at hand but to what remains within one’s self-control lays bare a dramatic reconfiguration of the axioms that define the liberal subject as

³⁵⁵ US Joint Intelligence Processing Boards source, “Threats, Physical Punishment and Torture,” RG 319.

³⁵⁶ Kinkead, *In Every War But One*, 87.

³⁵⁷ US Joint Intelligence Processing Boards source, “Threats, Physical Punishment and Torture,” RG 319.

³⁵⁸ Transcript of a presentation by Dr. Carleton F. Scofield, Director of Research, Psychological Warfare Division, “PSYFREE Briefing Notes” (October 1 1954), RG 319.

³⁵⁹ Timothy Melley, “Brainwashed! Conspiracy Theory in the Postwar United States,” *New German Critique* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 162-163, 149. For an important counterargument to Lifton and others who see brainwashing as an actual transformation of the self, see Biderman’s “The Image of ‘brainwashing.’”

³⁶⁰ Dulles, Memo, “A Report on Communist Brainwashing” (April 25, 1956), Central Intelligence Agency, Office of the Director, <http://karws.gso.uri.edu/Marsh/MKULTRA/brainwsh.htm>, accessed July 3, 2012.

such. To sum up Dulles's diagnosis, the only way an individual can retain his much-vaunted autonomy is through self-proscription – something that, in the end, seems not so different from Wang's depiction of brainwashing as the “physical and mental liquidation of one's self by one's self” (33). Given the centrality of voice to conceptions of liberal subjectivity, it follows that the principal recommendation for self-proscription is self-silencing. In America's democratic society, voice, at least in theory, consummates subjectivity. In the communist society of the Chinese prison compounds, by contrast, voice is putatively where the subject loses control. Psychiatrist Major Harry A. Segal says, “Once a man starts talking, there is no escape from more talking. And the more he talks, the greater his guilt and anxiety.” To future American GIs, Segal instructs, “First, you must know that your best chance for survival lies in your not talking. And, second, you must know that your *buddies*' best chance for survival lies in your not talking.”³⁶¹

On the home front, Washington leveraged brainwashing as a rallying point to reaffirm “the necessity of Americans banding together.”³⁶² This urgent call to ideological arms meant that “[c]itizens were expected to enlist in the Cold War. Neutrality was suspect.” Due to this “unseemly political interest,” everyone was expected to exhibit an “enthusiasm” for America and her traditions.³⁶³ To put this expectation into the context of the Korean War, we might add that neutrality and disinterest were not just unpatriotic but suspiciously communistic. To be divested of an opinion evoked the blank, robotic daze of the indoctrinated; to be washed of interest was to be washed of a brain. The call for enthusiastic patriotism among Free World citizens gives lie to the presumption that compulsory confessions were a specifically Chinese or specifically communistic tactic. Inasmuch as the post-WWII institutionalization of human rights was inflected with Cold War politics, so too was the first-person voice. What Felman dubs the “age of testimony” was, according to Harold Rosenberg, the “Confession Era in the United States” (239).³⁶⁴ Robert Genter views the late 1940s as a “spectacle of forced confessions.” This spectacle became procedural with the passage of legislation that required “employees to produce a complete account of their life histories.” Such legal measures were “designed to circumvent the ability of witnesses to cite the Fifth Amendment as a way to avoid testifying.” They stemmed from “the growing assumption that those witnesses who invoked this right did so because they were in fact guilty.”³⁶⁵ Then, there was a turn in the view on confessions. Says Genter: “As the tremors of McCarthyism began to recede after 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court rethought . . . self-incrimination, arguing that the forced compulsion to confess . . . was a violation of the Fifth Amendment.” To back up his claim, Genter locates a string of cases, culminating with *Miranda v. Arizona* in 1966, which protected “the right to remain silent.”³⁶⁶

In the context of McCarthyism, confessions present the logical extreme of the testimonies so fundamental to human rights. Not only does the first-person voice signify truth, but the *lack* of this voice gives just cause to pronounce the non-speaker guilty – specifically, guilty of communism. As the most radical manifestation of post-WWII human rights testimony, the Cold War confessional ethos offers a variation on Michel Foucault's notion of the confession, a mode

³⁶¹ Segal quoted in Kinkead, *In Every War But One*, 194-195, emphasis his.

³⁶² Alan W. Schefflin and Edward M. Opton, *The Mind Manipulators* (New York: Paddington, 1978), 231.

³⁶³ Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins U P, 1996), 10.

³⁶⁴ Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2002), 1; Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon, 1960), 239.

³⁶⁵ Robert Genter, “Cold War Confessions and the Trauma of McCarthyism: Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess* and *The Wrong Man*.” *Quarter Review of Film and Video* 29 no. 2 (2012): 129, 130.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 131, 132-33.

he dates to early Christian sacramental rituals, as the engine of modern subject formation.³⁶⁷ The confessions elicited by the Chinese, however, purportedly precipitated a *turning over* rather than a *transforming into*, a “washing” of truths rather than of sins.

In the U.N. compounds, neutrality was even more suspect, given that a moral victory hinged on Chinese POW testimonies thanking the U.N.C. for saving them from communism. The cultivation of Free World values rested with the Civil Information and Education (C.I.E.) Program, an educational initiative “designed to demonstrate the principle of freedom of speech and its application in a democracy.”³⁶⁸ The C.I.E. launched in mid-1951 but intensified as the repatriation trials approached.³⁶⁹ The difference between the C.I.E.’s “educational” program from the Communists’ “brainwashing” program presumably resided in the “voluntary” nature of the former. POW letters and interviews document the phenomenal results of the C.I.E. programs.³⁷⁰ In these accounts, imprisonment within U.N. compounds represents the beginning of a new life, free from communist “slavery.” One prisoner says: “[The Communist] method of teaching was to cram, push and repeat the subject The C.I.E. program let the men think for themselves.” Trying in every way to emphasize their ideological position, the prisoners curse “the Iron Curtain” and pledge to “fight the communists to my death.”³⁷¹

Though displays of maudlin sentimentality and hawkish patriotism ran rampant among non-repatriates, not all prisoner testimonies sat well with the U.N.C. One man, who lamented having to fight his “own people,” was labeled “unreliable” for “his short military service and dislike of military life,” which led to “disinterest . . . in the information offered.”³⁷² Another untrustworthy figure was Han Hak Kyo, a high school teacher. Han, “short and slender” and “not too neat” in appearance, was, according to his interviewer, “reluctant” and “very unfriendly.” Han’s report proceeds as follows:

It is good to be given the opportunity to write down a part of my lifetime as a poor man of Korea, a country which has had a 4,000 year history of struggle under adverse circumstances and enjoying none of the cultural advantages of other countries. I am very discouraged about my future, the merits of our ancestors and the happiness of our posterity. To be truthful, a happy sightseeing voyage on the smooth sea is a desirable thing, but we must have a firmer determination to overcome our future difficulties. We must be prepared for the rest of our lives to struggle for existence (sic). I will try to become a well-educated man who is able to search for truth in the world.³⁷³

³⁶⁷ In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), Foucault writes: “The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged, in our most secret nature ‘demands’ only to surface” (60).

³⁶⁸ Command Conference Subject No 1., *The Story of the PW Command*, RG 389.

³⁶⁹ Cheryl Benard, et. al., *The Battle Behind the Wire: U.S. Prisoner and Detainee Operations from World War II to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 2011), 17-32.

³⁷⁰ Particularly rousing prisoner testimonies can be found in “Letters of appreciation from Compound 74,” RG554.

³⁷¹ US Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE), Psychological Warfare Section, *Interviews with 24 Korean POW Leaders* ([N.p.] 1954), 91, 9.

³⁷² “Interrogation Reports 1950,” Records of General HQ, Far East Command, Translator and Intelligence Service, RG 544.

³⁷³ USAFFE, *Interviews with 24 Korean POW Leaders*, 80.

Han's sole reference to the U.N.C. comes indirectly, as he calls the interview an "opportunity" to recount his past. From there, Han becomes increasingly distraught. He does not pledge life and loyalty to the Free World, nor does he name his captors, much less glorify their cause. His account of northern Korea lacks personal particulars and political signposts. Instead, with a melancholic air, he hints at Korea's long "history of struggle" under successive colonial regimes. Rather than declaring his hopes of fighting the Reds to a glorious death, Han merely submits to being "very discouraged" about his future and Korea's. His take on this future is meandering and vague, alternating between hope and despair. Calling "the rest of our lives" a "struggle for existence," he implies that the "democratic" conditions of the U.N. compounds, far from infusing him with the promise of freedom, serve as a foreboding indicator of postwar life. His concluding desire to be "well-educated" and "able to search for truth in the world" lets on that education and truth are precisely what his current environs lack.

In *War Trash*, we also encounter Yu staring out at the water as he dreams of another life. Watching the boats at sea "for hours on end," he would "[imagine] myself making a living as a fisherman on the ocean" and [long] for an untrammelled life" (101). For Yu, an untrammelled life means repatriating to another country, "a third choice" that would let him "disentangle myself from the fracas between the Communists and the Nationalists" (313). In an interview with Jin, Varsava writes that this "Third Way" is "the human way."³⁷⁴ Similarly, Ian Buruma claims that Yu's ability to "think for himself" makes *War Trash* "a fine novel on the human condition."³⁷⁵ But while Yu's dream of a life outside of politics endears him to Jin's 21st-century Western readers on the terms of human rights, Han's expression of similar sentiments is interpreted by his interrogator as "very evasive" and "untrue."³⁷⁶ This assessment is accurate in that Han *does* evade ideological specifics, and he *does* presume the existence of a "truth in the world" that is incongruous with Truth in the Free World. That this desire for truth of a more metaphysical strain is taken to evidence political *unreliability*, however, marks Han's difference from Yu. Insofar as this prose style makes Yu's voice "[ring] true"³⁷⁷ and Han's voice seem "untrue" we see that the Chinese everyman's reliability in each period is determined by his ability to speak as a human rights claimant. The transformation of the Chinese subject of human rights from state patriot to *homo economicus* complicates Jin's efforts to historically recuperate the Chinese everyman of the Korean War. In the last analysis, the historical value of Yu, a narratorial figure of moral righteousness and market reason, lies not in his restoration of the past from a more enlightened standpoint, but in the insights that his neutral voice affords on the historicizing methods and terms of judgment inculcated by our post-Cold War present.

Coda: Bearing witness

During his imprisonment, Yu learns of a journalist whose coverage of the Korean War won her a Pulitzer and turned her into an adventure junkie. For Miss Margaret Hinton, Yu supposes, the war was "a publicity stunt." Yu follows his critique of Hinton with a treatise on the ethics of representation: "To witness is to make the truth known, but we must remember that most victims have no voice of their own, and that in bearing witness to their stories we must not appropriate them" (299). Ironically, the misappropriation of stories is precisely the accusation

³⁷⁴ Jin, "An Interview," 18.

³⁷⁵ Ian Buruma, "Chinese Shadows," *The New York Review of Books*, March 24, 2005, accessed June 20, 2013, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2005/mar/24/chinese-shadows>.

³⁷⁶ USAFFE, *Interviews with 24 Korean POW Leaders*, 80.

³⁷⁷ Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*, 75.

some readers have leveled at Jin, most literally with the plagiarism scandal surrounding *War Trash*.³⁷⁸ This scandal, however, which remained relatively hush within the United States, is of a piece with a more general anxiety about appropriation among Jin's Chinese readers. Where Western readers have treated Jin's accounts of modern China as a particularly striking form of literary realism, if not actual historiography, readers such as Zhu Tianwen who are sensitive to America's hegemonic mediation of US-China relations have accused Jin of exploiting the Chinese everyman for his own "opportunistic venture."³⁷⁹ Beijing University professor Liu Yiqing writes, "Under Ha Jin's lying pen, the many good and honest ordinary people of China . . . have become a laughing stock for Americans."³⁸⁰

In the final lines of *War Trash*, Yu's former comrades, sick and dying, beg him: "Please write our story!" (349). But lest we interpret Yu's memoir as fulfilling this plea, his parting words instruct us to "not take this to be an 'our story.' In the depths of my being I have never been one of them. I have just written what I experienced" (350). Yu's refusal to be the spokesman of his tribe poses his memoir as a less exploitative and less intrusive approach to "bearing witness" than Hinton's journalism. It also offers a preemptive defense against charges of appropriation by casting the narrated experiences as belonging solely to the fictional Yu.

In both respects, Yu's insistence on speaking only for himself constitutes a final attempt to dissociate himself from "them." His possessiveness over his story implies a critique of political spokespersonship as a kind of appropriation as well as an embrace of personal testimony as a timeless, universal vehicle for truth. Rather than take for granted the universality of the "documentary" first-person voice, I have pushed us to recognize how post-Cold War U.S.-China relations superimpose a specific relationship between literary representation and historical referent as well as between narrators, authors, and readers. Through Yu, Jin reveals the post-Cold War human rights stakes of a narrator who can convert the ideological discourse of the Cold War into a politically disinterested narrative. Following Xie Xinqiu, I interpret Yu's claim to having "never been one of them" as a critique of both the POWs within the novel *and* the veterans whose memoirs Jin cites.³⁸¹ Yu's rhetorical strategies, by distancing him from his comrades, allegorize his difference from nonfictional, ideologically-beholden raconteurs of the Korean War. Indeed, by Jin's account, to call *War Trash* a mere copy of these (un)original texts would go against the very spirit of his literary project. What Jin's literary canon discloses is that his recourse to art to deliver the humanity of the Chinese everyman tests the boundaries of literary ethics with a human rights ethics particular to U.S.-China relations. A more literary and more historical perspective is the affordance of a special kind of narrative vision – one that belongs to the ordinary yet extraordinary post-Tiananmen narrator and that refers to this empathetic yet omniscient narrator's capacity to see both beyond ideology and within individuals. Never has plumbing the hearts and minds of men been so ethical.

³⁷⁸ On July 24, 2005, journalist Chen Li reported that 10,000 characters from Zhang Zeshi's edited collection of Korean War POW memoirs appear unmodified in *War Trash*. Xie Xinqiu, "War Trash: War Memoir as 'False Document,'" *Amerasia Journal* 38, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 35-42; Jing Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010), 107-9.

³⁷⁹ Zhu Tianwen as quoted in Tsu, *Sound and Script*, 102.

³⁸⁰ Liu as quoted in Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions*, 121.

³⁸¹ Xie claims that Yu's detachment from the rhetoric and the politics of his compatriots "[conveys] Ha Jin's criticism of the works he used," which are "characterized by their overt heroism and nationalism" (39).

Conclusion

“Everything is Translatable”: Chinese “Bad Girl” Literature and the Paradoxes of Translatability

“All that this document requires therefore is simply that it be rendered in all the accessible languages of all societies.”³⁸²

---Wole Soyinka, on *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

“To risk ‘world’ in its most expansive form requires . . . risking also the meaning of the term ‘literature’”³⁸³

--- Eric Hayot

In 2000, Jonathan Napack writes, “an enraged President Jiang Zemin personally recited to the Politburo one passage [from Mian Mian’s *Candy*], a description of casual sex with a young Westerner.” Jiang and the Politburo, it turns out, functioned as a special kind of reading group whose literary opinions, values, and interpretations would bear far-reaching influence. After Jiang’s impassioned reading of *Candy*, “the Chinese government gave [Mian Mian] its ultimate award: It banned her books, along those of her nemesis, fellow Shanghai chronicler Wei Hui.”³⁸⁴ This was a special kind of literary award indeed: it launched both Mian Mian and Wei Hui into the international literary stratosphere and, in this respect, seems not unlike prestigious awards such as the Nobel, the Pulitzer, or the Booker. Given this process of internationalization, one might say that the most pivotal reader of Mian Mian’s and Wei Hui’s works – the one with the power to confer an international literary award – has been the Chinese government. The literary tastes and reading practices of this authoritarian regime, as with any other widely regarded literary award committee, have profoundly shaped how a work is received by a Western reading public. Take, for example, Newt Gingrich’s 2002 Amazon review of Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby*. Gingrich explains that “the Chinese dictatorship burned 40,000 copies of the book in April 2000.” This was the “intrigue” that motivated him to pick up the novel in an Australian bookstore: “What kind of book is so subversive and so threatening that it is worth publicly burning and banning?” In reading the novel with the actions of the Chinese government in mind, Gingrich asserts that the “artistic and personal freedom” Wei Hui portrays is “clearly incompatible” with this “totalitarian” dictatorship. Rather, “personal goals and anxieties of young people in this book are clearly compatible with the modern west.”³⁸⁵

Gingrich and Jiang would converge on this last point – but whereas the former associates the “modern west” with “freedom,” the latter prefers terms such as “decadence” and “spiritual pollution.” Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* (1999; 2001), translated by Bruce Humes, and Mian

³⁸² Soyinka, “Foreword,” *Universal Declaration of Human Rights: English, French, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba* (Ibadan: Institut français de recherche en Afrique, 1993), accessed June 24, 2014, <http://books.openedition.org/ifra/438>.

³⁸³ Hayot, *On Literary Worlds*, 35.

³⁸⁴ Napack, “Banned in Beijing: A Rebel Writer’s Message,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 2001, accessed May 15, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/08/style/08iht-mian.t.html>.

³⁸⁵ Gingrich, “Unexpectedly and Surprisingly Interesting,” *Amazon*, February 27, 2002, accessed May 14, 2014, <http://www.amazon.com/review/R1G28WRYIF2O43>.

Mian's *Candy* (2000; 2003), translated by Andrea Lingenfelter, are the two quasi-autobiographical novels with which I will conclude *Voicing Asia*.³⁸⁶ The narrator of Wei Hui's novel is Nikki, who goes by Coco, after Coco Chanel. In the novel's opening paragraph, she proclaims, "Every morning when I open my eyes, I wonder what I can do to make myself famous" (1). From there, we follow Coco as she attends parties, clubs, and galleries, drinking and flirting with friends and potential lovers. The central plot line concerns Coco's relationships with two men, Tian Tian, a gentle but sexually impotent Chinese man whom she loves, and Mark, a German businessman whom she sees in secret to satisfy her sexual desires. Coco, a devotee of Henry Miller, is already an accomplished writer of short stories but is in the process of completing her first novel. *Shanghai Baby* concludes with Tian Tian's death, due to a drug overdose; Coco is devastated but recovers quickly.

Mian Mian's *Candy* features similar themes (drugs, sex, consumerism, art, and culture) but is significantly darker in tone.³⁸⁷ It follows the narrator Hong from the late 1980s to the present, 1999. Hong, in search of work, drops out of high school and moves from her native Shanghai to Shenzhen in southern China, a Special Economic Zone installed by Deng Xiaoping to stimulate economic development free from state control. According to Lingenfelter, Shenzhen represented "personal and economic freedom" in particular to Chinese youths but also caused "many forms of vice and corruption" (viii). Hong, a lover of American rock music (especially the Doors), struggles to come to terms with her on-again-off-again lover Saining, who leads her on a rollercoaster of heroin addiction and recovery. Like Coco, Hong is a writer, but she is more conflicted about its therapeutic function and her own abilities. Toward the end of the novel, Hong resignedly tells us, "After the writing was done, I wanted to become famous, but was there really anything that great about being famous?" (184).

Wei Hui and Mian Mian are the self-proclaimed progenitors of an emergent canon of Chinese literature in translation.³⁸⁸ This canon has been termed "Pink-collared Beauty" novels, "body writing," "Chinese Chick Lit," "babe literature," "privacy literature," "pretty women's writing," "beauty writers," and "bad girl literature."³⁸⁹ As such monikers suggest, gender has

³⁸⁶ Zhou Wei Hui (Wei Hui), *Shanghai Baby*, trans. Bruce Humes (1999; translation, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001); Wang Shen (Mian Mian), *Candy*, trans. Andrea Lingenfelter (2000; translation, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2003).

³⁸⁷ Hongwei Lu describes the distinction between the two writers as such: "If Wei Hui's body-writing advocates a kind of cosmopolitanism that comes to signify an enchantment with the promise of capitalist modernity . . . then Mian Mian's stance of physical rebellion invokes an instinct to integrate the body and the self to confront the raw cruelty of commercial reality." In short, Mian Mian represents China's "urban subculture," whereas Wei Hui's is iconic of its "urban consumer culture." See "Body-writing: Cruel Youth, Urban Linglei, and Special Economic Zone Syndrome in Mian Mian's *Candy*" *Chinese Literature Today* (Winter/spring 2011): 41, 46.

³⁸⁸ Chun Sue's *Beijing Doll* (2002; 2004) and Muzi Mei's collection of online writings, *Ashes of Love* (2003), are other obvious subscribers to this canon. Chen Ran's *A Private Life* (1996; 2004), and Hong Ying's *Summer of Betrayal* (1992; 1997) were both published (in China and Taiwan, respectively) before Wei Hui and Mian Mian emerged on the domestic scene but garnered similar criticism. These two novels, along with the anonymous Chinese internet sensation *Lan Yu* (1998), all somehow engage the Tiananmen affair of 1989. In explicitly juxtaposing the political with the personal, these works represent an important subgenre of "bad girl" literature. Annie Wang's novels, *Lili* (2006) and *The People's Republic of Desire* (2007), would fit perfectly among the "bad girls," though Wang writes in English. I focus on novels that bear no textual imprint of Tiananmen in part to highlight how this hyper-politicized event overwhelms even the circulation and reception of works that explicitly comment on China's consumerist modernity.

³⁸⁹ Eva Chen, "Shanghai(ed) Babies," *Feminist Media Studies* 12 no.2 (2012): 215; Kun Zhang, "Body Melting into Words," *China Daily*, December 4, 2003, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://app1.chinadaily.com.cn/star/2003/1204/fo5-1.html>; Wenche Ommundsen, "From China with Love: Chick Lit

been key to how these novels have been canonized. The defining features of this canon include: 1) an openly autobiographical approach, even though the first-person narrator bears a different name than the author; 2) a wholesale subscription to post-socialist China's social excesses, among them drugs, sex, violence, and consumerism; 3) a quasi-critical yet generally uninhibited consumption of Western consumer and cultural goods; 4) a pronounced political apathy, which results in little or no reference to the Chinese government or its policies; and 5) a female author/heroine who is an aspiring or successful writer and whose unspoken target reader turns out to reside in the West.³⁹⁰

In my discussion of Wei Hui and Mian Mian, I opt for the term "bad girl literature" because its double meaning – literature by "bad girls" and girl literature that is "bad" – captures the frameworks in which these novels have been read. I conclude with the "bad girls" – and introduce them vis-à-vis the most prestigious literary awards – because these representatives of an "alternative modernity" press us to conceive of an alternative model for understanding "world literature." Based on the market value of high literature as determined by international literary awards, the widely-regarded Chang-rae Lee, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Ha Jin seem much better positioned than the "bad girls" to be the vanguard of an alternative world literature. *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* accentuate what these other Asian Anglophone novels imply: that the economic miracle and political crisis of post-Cold War Asian modernity mediate the relation between "world" and "literature." In the specific case of Wei Hui and Mian Mian, at stake is both the work that worlding performs in determining our comprehension of "literature" and the work that literature performs in catapulting mass market authors into a "world" beholden to human rights. To explicate this rather abstract claim, my concluding remarks will consist of an extended juxtaposition between the triumphant terms by which a Western reading public interprets Chinese authorship and the much more complicated and contingent terms in how authorship is represented by Wei Hui's and Coco's literary narrators.

I argue that *Shanghai Baby's* and *Candy's* relation to "world" and to "literature" is negotiated through their *translatability*. David Damrosch's influential study has helped make translation a touchstone for defining world literature. He argues that "a work enters into world literature . . . by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin."³⁹¹ Even though both Wei Hui and Mian Mian fly a banner of individuality, purporting to write only for themselves, the exclusively international status of their works, which can obtain no legal form of existence in China, suggest that they *must* write for the express purpose of translation. That the translation of "bad girl" literature serves a human rights agenda and that these texts beg to be rescued through translation in the name of freedom lend new meaning to

and the New Crossover Fiction," *China Fictions/English Language: Literary Essays in Diaspora, Memory, Story*, ed. Robert A. Lee (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008): 327-345; Shuyu Kong, "Literary Celebrity in China: From Reformers to Rebels," *Celebrity in China*, eds. Louise Edwards, Elaine Jeffreys, 125- 143 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U P, 2010): 141; Daria Berg, "Consuming Secrets: China's New Print culture at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century," *From Woodblocks to the Internet: Chinese Publishing and Print Culture in Transition*, ed. Cynthia BR.O.K.aw and Christopher A. Reed 315-332 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010): 317; Yanjun Shao, "Pretty Women's Writing" *Wasafiri* 23 no.3. (2008): 13-18; Sheldon H. Lu, "Popular Culture and Body Politics: Beauty Writers in Contemporary China," *Modern Language Quarterly* 69 no. 1 (March 2008): 167-185; Sidonie Smith and Kay Schaffer, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*, 207.

³⁹⁰ It would be a stretch to say that Wei Hui and Mian Mian wrote *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* specifically for a Western audience. But they certainly embraced the international attention, and the writers who followed in their stead, as well as their own later writings, can be seen as bearing a more strategic relation to translation.

³⁹¹ Damrosch, *What Is World Literature*, 6.

Ishiguro's oft-repeated statement that he wants his "words to survive translation."³⁹² For Ishiguro, surviving translation is achieved by dispensing with brand names, euphemisms, and "cultural reference points" that "don't transfer geographically."³⁹³ *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* show how *translatability* can reference not only words or ideas that "survive translation" but, more significantly, a literary text's survival of untoward political circumstances *through* translation. If, based on Rebecca Walkowitz's reading, Ishiguro illustrates that something we call "global literature" will require us to conceptualize a new idea of literature premised on "a principle of unoriginality," then "bad girl" literature calls on us to rethink "literature" as bearing the potential for maximal authenticity *in* translated form.³⁹⁴ This valorization of literature in translation revises but ultimately perpetuates the kinship between literature and human rights, especially in a case whereby authorial creativity bears a direct correlate to the human rights dictum of self-determination.

The narrators of *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* relentlessly portray literary voice as a singular "freedom," a mode of unfettered self-expression. This portrayal seems to substantiate the extratextual human rights narrative centered on the authors' attainment of freedom of speech. Coco and Hong, however, are in fact exceedingly ambivalent about the status of literature in the age of unbridled translation. The narrators' descriptions and transcriptions of their own writing – a technique that offers up their theory of what makes writing "literary" – demonstrate a logic of fungibility and circularity. In these novels, literary writing serves as the best demonstration of "freedom" insofar as it allows the narrators to say whatever they want. Yet whatever Coco and Hong say is eminently disposable, interchangeable, *translatable*. Even though the international publication of *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* has helped them "survive" as poster girls of human rights justice, the narrators of these novels demonstrate at the level of narrative style how literary translation can function as a kind of linguistic leveling that prioritizes interchangeability. This logic of absolute translatability brings to mind John Guillory's notion of absolute commensurability. Guillory writes:

The premise of our social life is the absolute commensurability of everything. The language of judgment has been transformed into the discourse of 'value-judgments,' a discourse which then raise a perennial problem the relation between 'economic' values and every other kind Every social relation of any kind can be reified in discourse as a value, where it immediately becomes commensurable with all other values by virtue of its reified form."³⁹⁵

If, as Barbara Hernstein Smith observes, traditional humanists tend "to isolate or protect certain aspects of life and culture, among them works of art and literature, from consideration in economic terms" (33), then the subsumption of *literature* to "the absolute commensurability of

³⁹² Tim Adams, "For me, England is a mythical place," *The Guardian*, February 19, 2005, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/feb/20/fiction.kazuoishiguro>.

³⁹³ Ishiguro, "Interview: Kazuo Ishiguro, The Art of Fiction No. 196," *The Paris Review*, interviewed by Susannah Hunnewell, no. 184 (Spring 2008), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5829/the-art-of-fiction-no-196-kazuo-ishiguro>.

³⁹⁴ Walkowitz writes that Ishiguro's novels ask us to imagine global "largeness" as "constituted by copies rather than by originals." Through Ishiguro, we see how "a principle of unoriginality expands the horizon of social relationships (!), figuring new networks of local and global largeness" ("Unimaginable Largeness," 219, 235).

³⁹⁵ Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994), 323.

everything” connotes the totalizing extremity of economic globalization.³⁹⁶ This notion of literature as the limit case to globalization bears out a truism within translation studies: the literary component of literature is that which defies translation – hence, the notorious difficulty of translating poetry. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has shown, translating *literature* by non-Western women presents a particularly delicate case. “Translatese,” the term that Spivak uses to describe language that has been wholly saturated by an economic logic, thus links globalization’s flattening of literary language with its commodification of subaltern authors.³⁹⁷

Wei Hui and Mian Mian show how the impasse between “world” and literature” might be productively probed through the problematic of translatability. How does translatability facilitate an author’s claim to freedom of speech? In interrogating the narrators’ representation of *Chinese* authorship, what might we gather about how the translation of Asian modernity impacts the “literature” end of world literature?³⁹⁸ The inevitable and total translatability of *Candy* and *Shanghai Baby* help illuminate the connections between Human Rights Discourse in the Global Now and Asian capitalist development in the Pacific Century. How does the arrival or the promise Asian modernity – one premised on government censorship, ruthless development, and unchecked piracy – bear upon the composition, dissemination, reception, and valuation of a literary text as well as the touchstones by which we evaluate this text as “literature”?

The following sections will explore how the apparent enactment of literary life through translation makes “bad girl” literature particularly “worldly.” First, I will unpack the hefty extratextual apparatus that has attended the international publication and reception of *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy*. The “bad girls,” I show, update Walter Benjamin’s reinterpretation of translation as not the unavoidable betrayal of an original but as the “afterlife” of a text, the means through which it “survives.” Second, I examine how *Candy* and *Shanghai Baby* engage the notions of translation and originality through elaborate metafictional commentaries on writing and authorship. What does “freedom” – and writing *as* freedom – look like in the context of contemporary Chinese modernity? Third, I contemplate the paradox of absolute translatability – a phenomenon that Emily Apter sums up best through the thesis “everything is translatable.”³⁹⁹ At once democratizing and homogenizing, this thesis points up the utopian *and* dystopian strains that have been foundational to translation studies. I provisionally adumbrate this history through the geopolitical origins of machine translation and its implications on an alternate “world literature.” As prototypes of this “alternate” formation, Wei Hui’s and Mian Mian’s novels – censored and translated, denationalized and internationalized – bear out the codependency of two poles of absolute translatability: the textual afterlife that redeems human life itself and the utter evisceration of individual life by a globalized “translatese.” To conclude, I bring the discussion

³⁹⁶ Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard UP, 1988), 33.

³⁹⁷ Spivak writes: “In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest. This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of with it *translatese*, so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan. See “The Politics of Translation,” *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 182.

³⁹⁸ In asking such a question, I am clearly influenced by Christopher Prendergast’s attempt to consider “both terms of the expression ‘world literature’ . . . not only who is included in the ‘world’, but also what belongs to ‘literature.’” See *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (New York: Verso, 2004), 4.

³⁹⁹ “Everything is translatable” is the 19th and final “thesis” explored in Apter’s *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2005). The first thesis is the more common truism that “nothing is translatable.” Apter and I understand the phrase “everything is translatable” on similar terms (that translatability is a function of a multinational capitalist globality), but we pursue this “thesis” in different directions.

of *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* back to some of this dissertation's central preoccupations. The *absolute translatability* of these "bad girl" novels puts into sharper relief the phenomenon I have been tracing: the paradoxical codependency between a post-Cold War capitalist globalization that has taken on an Asiatic cast and a burgeoning human rights order that has taken Asia as its limit. The "bad girls" show how particularly in this historical milieu, the increasingly fraught status of "humanity" is intimately tied to the equally tenuous status of literature and literary language.

Literary afterlives

The litany of appellations that "bad girl" literature has accrued reflects both the perceived novelty of these works and their kinship with other subgenres of post-Mao Chinese literature. For example, in exposing the dark side of Chinese capitalist modernity, *Candy* and *Shanghai Baby* could be seen as contemporary spinoffs of "scar literature" or "wound literature," which in the 1970s, following the prosecution of the Gang of Four, provided fictionalized testimonies of the Cultural Revolution horrors. In terms of style, the highly experimental closing sections of *Candy* is reminiscent of the stream-of-consciousness writing so popular among 1980s Chinese writers. Accordingly, the accusation of "decadence" directed against both Wei Hui and Mian Mian recalls the political authorities' response to experimental writers who self-consciously identified as "modernist" during that period. Most significantly, both Mian Mian and Wei Hui follow in the footsteps of Wang Shuo, who popularized "hooligan literature" (*liumang* or *pizi* literature) in the late 1980s and who inaugurated the break from the politically strategic "scar literature." Wang's fiction in a sense celebrates the "common man" – criminals, prostitutes, unemployed, drug-users, and other deviants.⁴⁰⁰ But for many critics, the unprecedented nature of Wang's work is irreducible to characters and themes. Wang, according to Jing Wang, represents "the first specimen of a 'marketized' literature that promotes 'bestseller consciousness.'" Moreover, the "playful boredom" cultivated in Wang's works embodies "the modernity of commodity economy" and anticipates "the post-Tian'anmen ethos that plays fast and loose with almost every conceivable facet of human life."⁴⁰¹

Given that Wei Hui and Mian Mian found their fame in the West after being banned in China, they also bear a link to the exiled Chinese literary diaspora as well as to the Asian Anglophone writers – Lee, Ishiguro, and Jin – comprising the core of my study. One key method of analysis in this dissertation has been interrogating how novelistic voice engages the post-World War II modernization of East Asian states. Wei Hui and Mian Mian offer a more extreme case of this dynamic, in that the politicized context of Chinese censorship serves as the primary, if not the exclusive, determinant of publication. To that extent, they also dramatize the narrative constructs and narrative effects of East-West foreign relations that I have been discussing. For Lee's *Native Speaker*, the literary voice of the model minority/model spy recasts the native informant, a geopolitical instrument, as a fallible humanlike speaker. Like Lee's novel, *Candy* and *Shanghai Baby* have been interpreted as representative case studies of the foreign and the unknown; through them, Western readers are purportedly accorded direct access to the side of

⁴⁰⁰ Geremie Barmé, "Wang Shuo and *Liumang* ('Hooligan') Culture," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 28 (July 1992): 32. Wang Shuo's flippant, sardonic, nonchalant writings are generally seen as marking the break from the "scar literature" or "wound literature" of the 1970s and early 1980s, which anxiously detailed the traumas of the Cultural Revolution in the politicized language of an urgent disavowal of the past regime.

⁴⁰¹ Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996), 44-45.

contemporary China that the government tries to conceal. But unlike Lee, who ironizes the native informant through narrative unreliability, Wei Hui and Mian Mian actively embrace and viciously jostle for the privileged title of the most representative and most authentic informant. Though it falls outside the provinces of this piece, the popularity of these two writers in China arguably has less to do with the merits of their work but derives in large part from a widely publicized internet war.⁴⁰²

As Wei Hui implies in *Shanghai Baby*, the phenomenon of Chinese women authors writing for a Western audience was pioneered by Eileen Chang, a celebrated Chinese novelist whose writings and translations serviced US intelligence during the Cold War. Surprisingly, though, Wei Hui and Mian Mian are rarely, if ever, mentioned in tandem with their contemporaries – Chinese writers who publish also almost exclusively in translation as well as Chinese diasporic exiles whose works have similarly been banned in China.⁴⁰³ Common to these writers is that their works are most often discussed in the moralistic rhetoric of human rights and freedom of speech. The catfight between Wei Hui and Mian Mian for international recognition captures their difference from Jin, the Chinese diasporic figure in this dissertation to whom they appear most similar. Whereas Jin has crafted an authorial persona defined in opposition to the political crisis of Tiananmen and formulated a literary ethos of apoliticality directed against the hyper-politicized Chinese party-state, Wei Hui and Mian Mian are apolitical in a radically different way. Their oppositional orientations are purely personal; they rarely mention and never indict the Chinese government, nor do they explicitly celebrate Western political values. We find some version of this personal orientation (or, if we opt for a more politically inflected idiom, this *private* orientation) in their protagonists' total preoccupation with the "petty details of daily life" that perpetuate "a monotonous theme of our materialistic age" (*Shanghai Baby*, 7). *Candy*, although less materialistic than *Shanghai Baby*, is more acutely attuned to boredom and monotony. At one point, our narrator Hong bemoans, "Every weekend is the same to me. The locations change, but it's still the same old bullshit. Shanghai nightlife is hopeless. But we go out on weekends anyway" (240). For both Coco and Hong, the cycle of drugs, depression, sex, and parties leave no room for any kind of political stance *or* for the much-vaunted freedom, privacy, and self-determination that reviewers locate in their heady lifestyles.⁴⁰⁴

As suggested earlier, Wei Hui and Mian Mian are most logically aligned with Ishiguro because the success of their works, like his, has been so intimately bound up with the metric of translatability. What accounts for their widespread translation?⁴⁰⁵ Such a question is perplexing,

⁴⁰² Mian Mian alleges that Wei Hui plagiarized her collection of short stories, *La La La* (1999), in writing *Shanghai Baby*. Chinese "netizens" have devoted a special forum on the Chinese website NetEase, entitled "Wei Hui/Mian Mian: Who Started it," to debate the issue. See Aijun Zhu, *Feminism and Global Chineseness: The Cultural Production of Controversial Women Authors* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria, 2007), 147-148.

⁴⁰³ I follow Belinda Kong in viewing the formation of this diaspora as an effect of Tiananmen. Kong writes, "Tiananmen itself has become one of the hallmarks of diasporic literary identity. Writing Tiananmen thus constitutes a preeminently diasporic enterprise, one that spurs the expansion of diasporic literature even as it consolidates the literary diaspora's identity" (*Tiananmen Fictions*, 2).

⁴⁰⁴ Lu Hongwei nicely captures this incongruity between the texts and their reviews: "The immediate and immense media attention and popularity that was heaped on [Mian Mian and Wei Hui] exemplified the social response to a social, economic, and political situation in which development provided no outlet for political idealism and so individual energy was channeled largely toward the economic and personal sphere" ("Body-writing," 42).

⁴⁰⁵ The editorial blurb to *Candy* says it has been published in eight countries. In "Shanghai(ed) Babies," Eva Chen writes, "More than thirty countries bought the copyright to publish [*Shanghai Baby*] one year into the ban" (21). As of 2014, publishing house Faber and Faber reports that Ishiguro has been translated in over forty languages, though in the mid-2000s, that number was usually cited as twenty-eight.

if we consider how Wei Hui and Mian Mian operate in a fundamentally different literary economy than Lee, Jin, Ishiguro, and select members of Chinese literary diaspora. They do not know English, and Mian Mian, at the English publication of *Candy*, had not even been to America. They benefit from the prestige and glamour of being published in English, garnering reviews in the *New York Times*, scholarship by well-known literary critics, and even an invitation (for Mian Mian) to speak at a Stanford research consortium⁴⁰⁶ – yet they possess none of the acclaim or gravitas of Mo Yan, Gao Xinjian, Li Yunyi, or Bei Dao, who, in addition receiving the Chinese government’s unofficial award of censorship, have been the recipients of or finalists for the Nobel, the Pulitzer, the PEN/Faulkner, the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write, the MacArthur, and the Guggenheim.⁴⁰⁷ This widespread reaping of international awards show the datedness of Michael Duke’s 1990 essay, which pondering the relative obscurity of Chinese literature in English translation. Duke posits, “Aside from the serious problems of the writers’ lack of literary education and training, lack of intellectual discipline, and lack of inner resources . . . , political interference, however subtle, still remains, and is likely to remain or some time to come, an obstacle to the emergence of good fiction in the PRC.” He concludes by reiterating “that literary excellence is the primary reason for . . . favorable reception . . . and that the painfully obvious lack of such literary excellence in fiction from the PRC” is the primary deterrent for “sophisticated readers of English.”⁴⁰⁸ A year later, Duke published an introductory survey of contemporary avant-garde Chinese literature. Because these works feature “innovative and artistic” language that replaced “Maospeak,” he contends, they could be seen as “approaching the quality of the finest in world fiction.”⁴⁰⁹

The “bad girls” are fascinating because they are “walking toward the world” through literature that many would hesitate to call “the finest in the world.” Both Wei Hui and Mian Mian published their first stories in highly reputed Chinese-language magazines such as *Writer*, *Harvest*, and *Fiction World*; but their subsequent career trajectories have prompted Shao Yanjun to wonder how “a group of talented young writers who were introduced and nurtured by serious literary magazines . . . [could] become transformed into the most sought after and faddish in the book market within China and abroad?”⁴¹⁰ In comparison to the contingent of readers who extol Jin’s impeccable grasp of the English language and his careful, pristine prose, those who elect to

⁴⁰⁶ “A Walk on the Wild Side with Shanghai Gen X Writer Mian Mian,” *Stanford Shorenstein APARC Seminar Series*, January 28, 2004, accessed June 5, 2014,

http://fsi.stanford.edu/events/a_walk_of_the_wild_side_with_shanghai_gen_x_writer_mian_mian/. The program was a part of a series entitled “Globalizing Asian Cultures.”

⁴⁰⁷ All these writers have been officially banned by the Chinese government, with the exception of Li Yunyi, who “has been quoted as saying she’s banned translations [in China] because her work would not be understood there.” See Jackie McGlone, “Yiyun Li focuses on the Internal Landscape,” *Herald Scotland*, April 12, 2014, accessed May 16, 2014, <http://www.heraldscotland.com/books-poetry/interviews/yiyun-li-focuses-on-the-internal-landscape.23915038>.

⁴⁰⁸ Duke, “The Problematic Nature of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Fiction in English Translation,” *Worlds Apart: Recent Chinese Writing and Its Audiences*, ed. Howard Goldblatt, 198-227 (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 204, 217. Another article in the same collection addresses similar issues regarding “literary excellence.” W.J. F. Jenner critiques artists, translators, and publishers, indicating that all “neglect their responsibility to present readers with translations of literature that read like literature.” See Jenner, “Insuperable Barriers? Some Thoughts on the Reception of Chinese Writing in English Translation,” *Worlds Apart: Recent Chinese Writing and Its Audiences*, ed. Howard Goldblatt, 177-97 (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 190.

⁴⁰⁹ Duke, “Walking Toward the World: A Turning Point in Contemporary Chinese Fiction,” *World Literature Today* 65, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 389.

⁴¹⁰ Shao, “Pretty Women’s Writing,” 13.

comment on style or method in *Candy* and *Shanghai Baby* are rather short on compliments.⁴¹¹ A *Kirkus* review, for example, deems *Candy* “a mercifully quick read: lots of action, many clichés . . . Interpolated anecdotal portrayals of other restless youths hell-bent on early death provide some variation, but little relief. We’re stuck with Hong’s smug, essentially unconvincing declarations of self-reclamation and enlightenment.”⁴¹² A similar assessment of *Shanghai Baby* as “boring” appears in the German publication *Die Gazette*: “Unfortunately, a reading of *Shanghai Baby* leaves one with the distinct impression that as a novelist Wei Hui is as yet not capable of the breadth and depth, not to mention the structure, which such a project requires [The book] often reads more like a collection of aphorisms and one regrets the text in between.”⁴¹³

Like this reviewer, I admit to also sometimes “[wondering] whether the reviewers actually ever opened the book.”⁴¹⁴ Ultimately, though, opening the book seems relatively insignificant, since the politically and ethically prudent reading strategy is simply to situate oneself *against* the interpretations of the Chinese authorities. Viewed as such, “bad girl” literary texts quite forcefully evidence Smith’s provocation that “value” is neither intrinsic to whatever is “in” a text nor reflective of whatever may be universal among humans but rather “is continuously produced and re-produced by . . . implicit and explicit evaluation.”⁴¹⁵ What separates the “bad girls” from the award-winning members of the Chinese literary diaspora, as well as the award-winning authors discussed in this dissertation, is therefore a matter of high- versus low-brow culture as determined through the literary institutions of publication and translation and the geopolitical institution of human rights. Based on their reception history, these novels offer us a variation of Franco Moretti’s distant reading – the concerted illumination of a human rights context causes the text itself disappears, and we may be all the better for this disappearance since it is, after all, humanity at stake.⁴¹⁶ Praise for *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* is allocated almost entirely on the grounds of human rights. Granted, Chinese exilic writers such as Jin have been received on such grounds as well. But the *democratic* stakes are certainly more pronounced here. Case in point: the Chinese government raided book fairs to confiscate Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby*; publicly burned 40,000 copies of the novel; forced the publisher to destroy the page proofs, shuttered the publishing house, and continued to confiscate “tens of thousands of copies . . . throughout the country”⁴¹⁷ – all of which occurred *despite* reader demand (pirated versions continue to circulate on the Chinese internet, and unofficial copies allegedly cluster in

⁴¹¹ An exception is Chris Gage: “[Mian Mian] writes with the best of the confessionals, taking a simple story and infusing it with layers of perspective and points of view. It’s like a Chuck Close mosaic portrait: if you zero in, you see the gorgeous singular objects, each whole and sustainable, and when you pull back a distance, you perceive the amazing way the objects interlock.” See Gage, “Candy by Mian Mian,” *Pop Matters*, July 30, 2003, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://www.popmatters.com/review/candy/>.

⁴¹² “Review: Candy,” *Kirkus*, June 24, 2010, accessed May 17, 2014, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/mian-mian/candy-2/>.

⁴¹³ “Young and Decadent in Shanghai,” *Die Gazette*, February 16, 2002, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://gazette.de/Archiv/Gazette-Februar2002/Martin.html>.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ Smith, *Contingencies of Value*, 52.

⁴¹⁶ In adducing a theory of world literature, Moretti writes, “if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more.” See “Conjectures on World Literature.”

⁴¹⁷ Dawn B. Sova, *Literature Suppressed on Sexual Grounds* (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 217.

dark sections of bookstores).⁴¹⁸ Furthermore, whereas China's diasporic heavyweights tend to produce historical epics that cast a wide net to pick up the various pieces of China's communist history, the bad girls lay claim to a less familiar side of China: "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, and a cynical, disaffected me-me-me generation."⁴¹⁹

In this latter respect, should *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* possess a value beyond liberating the author's voice, the case could be made for social expose. The commentary surrounding these novels pose them as illuminating the contradictions of China's – and broadly, East Asia's – "alternate modernity." In 1996, Liu Kang sums up such contradictions as such: "Inevitably, the ensuing power struggle in the post-Deng era (it will occur any moment now) will resolve the antinomy of a capitalist economy and a noncapitalist political system, either by catastrophe (as in the former Soviet Union) or by a smoother, 'peaceful evolution' of political power from the Communist Party to pro-Western capitalist democrats."⁴²⁰ Published at the turn of the 21st-century, *Candy* and *Shanghai Baby* prophesy that this antinomy of Western capitalism and Chinese communism will not likely be resolved at "any moment now." Within the novels themselves, one contradiction of Chinese modernity can be located in the protagonists' exercise of "freedom" through the voracious consumption of Western music and brand name goods. Reviewers (such as Gingrich) have been more keen on the contradiction between text and context – that is, between the novels' perceived depiction of various "freedoms" and the authors' utter lack of freedom under the watchful eye of the Chinese communist state. This kind of international reception shows that the notion of China's unmitigated politicization, extending from the early twentieth-century infinitely onwards, is largely a perception held by the West. Jing Wang writes, "The image of Chinese writers defying the communist regime in the name of humanity will continue to feed into the Western fabrication of 'Oriental despotism' long after the Chinese themselves have gone far beyond their preoccupation with human rights issues."⁴²¹

My particular concern is a key "freedom" (and, arguably, a key mode of self-commodification) that both "bad girl" writers and their fictional surrogates valorize: authorship. In describing authorship along these lines, I wonder how the function of these novels as allegories of contemporary China relates to their function as commentaries on the status of "literature" at a globalized moment. In *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy*, the narrators' representation of "literature" is in some sense overwhelmed by their representation of "China." Through these representations, we can forge a solid enough link between conspicuous literariness and

⁴¹⁸ Craig S. Smith writes, "Tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of young Chinese have bought the book, making *Weihui* . . . a national phenomenon." See "Shanghai Journal; Sex, Lust Drugs: Her Novel's Too Much for China," *The New York Times*, May 11, 2000, accessed May 14, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/11/world/shanghai-journal-sex-lust-drugs-her-novel-s-too-much-for-china.html>.

⁴¹⁹ Michael Mackey, "Banned in China for sex, drugs, disaffection," *Asia Times*, April 29, 2004, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/FD29Ad01.html>.

⁴²⁰ Liu Kang, "Is There an Alternative to (Capitalist) Globalization? The Debate about Modernity in China." *Boundary 2* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 195.

⁴²¹ On Chinese writers' eclipsing of its "earliest specimens of exposé literature" in the 1970s, Wang writes, "Such an asymmetrical reception of the literature of humanism tells us worlds about the discrepancy between China's ever changing agenda grown out of an increasingly unstable self-identity and the stagnant frame of reference known as postcolonial Orientalism, in whose terms the West fabricates the representation of China" (*High Culture Fever*, 9). On the subject of post-Mao China's urgent *depoliticization*, Xudong Zhang writes, "If Chinese communism is the culminating form of this century-long ideology of national imperatives, then the general *depoliticization* of postcommunist China also dismantles the ideological and discursive infrastructure of the orthodox notion of nationalism in modern China." See "Nationalism, Mass Culture, and Intellectual Strategies in Post-Tiananmen China," *Social Text* No.55, (1998): 115, emphasis mine.

conspicuous consumption as illustrations of “freedom” with Chinese characteristics. I am interested in how translatability pertains to the liberation of censored Chinese authors on the one hand and the “freedom” of writing as represented in their novels on the other. As a preface to that discussion, I want to go now to two possibly conflicting tendencies within translation studies: Walter Benjamin’s account of a text’s achievement of a redemptive “afterlife” by way of translation, and Spivak’s passionate call for conservation of the subaltern’s voice through translational fidelity.

Spivak, whose ideal translator is “able to discriminate on the terrain of the original,” initially seems like the more pertinent critic here since the censorship of Wei Hui and Mian Mian in their native tongue by their native country leaves the tricky task of conservation to the Western translator. On the contingencies of translating “a non-European woman’s text,” Spivak writes: “The task of the translator is to facilitate this love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay.” At stake, she insists, is caring for and preserving “rhetoricity of the original.”⁴²² In the case of the “bad girls,” translation bears a more positivistic connection to authorship, in that an author’s constitutive right – freedom of speech – hinges on the possibility of her translation. Whereas for someone such as Ishiguro language or idiom occasions translation, for these authors, politics *necessitates* translation. Because the original text bears such a tenuous place and lacks the possibility of legal existence within China, it is the translated text that is singularly positioned to secure the author’s voice and to convey her truth.⁴²³ In the context of contemporary China, therefore, Benjamin’s characterization of the translator as life-giver takes on political and moral significance:

a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at that time of their origin, their *translation marks their stage of continued life*. The idea of life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity.⁴²⁴

Benjamin’s credence to a text’s “afterlife” has mobilized translation studies beyond a model of “fidelity and betrayal” and seems especially well-suited for understanding world literature as a celebration of, to quote Apter, the “original’s glorious afterlife.” Apter writes, “In this scheme, the significance of origins and originality cedes to grander concerns over the work of art’s messianic perpetuity.”⁴²⁵ For Benjamin, “unmetaphorical objectivity” refers to the “pure language” from which all originals and translations are born. He spells out this point more explicitly elsewhere: “Translation attains its full meaning in the realization that every evolved language . . . can be considered a translation of all others Translation passes through

⁴²² Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” 187, 181.

⁴²³ Granted, Chinese-language versions of *Candy* and *Shanghai Baby* do legally exist in Sinophone countries such as Taiwan and Hong Kong. But it is emphatically a Western readership that has been responsible for internationalizing these novels and turning them into moral talismans.

⁴²⁴ Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 71, emphasis mine.

⁴²⁵ Apter, *The Translation Zone*, 222.

continua of transformation, not abstract areas of identity and similarity.”⁴²⁶ The association of translation with continual transformation suggests that the “origin” of text no more represents an absolute beginning than “translation” certifies an absolute end. What Benjamin’s translator Harry Zohn dubs “afterlife” has also been translated as “survival.”⁴²⁷ This latter term perhaps better attunes us to translation as bearer of textual life itself and makes more clear the alternative: *discontinued* life. For *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy*, this triumph of translation as the potential for transformation and perpetuity gives new meaning Damrosch’s idea that world literature represents a realm in which a work, “far from inevitably suffering a loss of authenticity or essence, . . . can gain in many ways.”⁴²⁸ What is preserved through the translation of “bad girl” literature is *precisely* autographic authenticity and autochthonous essence; more significantly, what is gained is a free voice and, by extension, “humanity” on the terms of Western democracy.

That “life” bears such profoundly biopolitical connotations bears out Amy Hungerford’s claim that post-World War II literature has been structured by confluences of texts and persons. This conflation, she argues, has its historical roots in the holocaust (“the destruction of human life on the massive scale that World War II . . . suddenly made imaginable”), but it pertains to all efforts “to articulate the value of writing, especially when it is perceived to be threatened.”⁴²⁹ To take some liberty with Benjamin’s terms, translation functions as a human rights vehicle for *Candy* and *Shanghai*, bringing forth an “afterlife” for them in the West when “life” has been legally and pyromaniacally decimated by the Chinese government. Insofar as translation transforms Chinese artists into political dissidents and Chinese literature into human rights testimonies, authenticity *cannot* belong to an original text that resides in communist China. Either this “original” is itself confiscated, or censorship – whether externally mandated or unconsciously self-imposed – eradicates the text’s fundamental authenticity and essence.

Freedom with Chinese Characteristics

As a politicized response to censorship, the translations of *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* are by default culturally reliable and politically oppositional. But how does translation bear on the status of these texts as *literature*? I want now to turn to the novels themselves, for the protagonists seem just as perplexed and preoccupied by this question as I am. Both Coco and Hong incessantly describe and transcribe their own writing. Indeed, the coverage and detail that they devote to writing are challenged *only* by the coverage and the detail that they devote to sexuality. If female sexuality has been viewed by reviewers as the shining symbol of freedom in *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy*, then I would say that writing functions as both the practical means by which this freedom finds expression and the metaphorical analogue to personal exposure. In both regards, the two narrators are strikingly audacious – we can locate the happy confluence of sexuality and authorship in the creative premium they both place on writing while naked.⁴³⁰ In

⁴²⁶ Benjamin, “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” *Selected Writings, Vol. 1, 1913-1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott, 62-74 (Cambridge, M.A.: Belknap Press of Harvard U P, 1996), 69-70.

⁴²⁷ The term in question is *Überleben*. Joseph F. Graham opts for “survival” in translating Derrida’s “Des Tours de Babel” [on Walter Benjamin], *Difference in Translation*, ed. Graham (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985).

⁴²⁸ Damrosch, *What is World Literature*, 6.

⁴²⁹ Hungerford, *The Holocaust of Texts: Genocide, Literature, and Personification* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003), 6, 10.

⁴³⁰ Says Hong: “I want to find a way of writing that’s as close to the body as possible” (160). At another point, she tells herself, “You can be a naked writer” (149). Coco writes: To convey one torrid scene as authentically a

addition to explicitly baring their bodies to the reader, Coco and Hong undertake the yet bolder task of even more explicitly (by which I mean more literally) baring their writing to the reader. By including in their novels both their philosophy on writing *and* transcriptions of their writing, Coco and Hong confidently invite the reader's evaluation.

Coco much more openly flaunts her success as a writer. At the start of *Shanghai Baby* she (like author Wei Hui) has already published a collection of short stories, *Shriek of the Butterfly*. For her, writing is what distinguishes her among Shanghai's *nouveau riche* Generation Xers; it makes her not just beautiful but, as she often implies, brainy. Coco's "target market," according to a friend, "could be defined as university students and white-collar workers, especially women" (182). When discussing her own writing and methodology, commercial success and aesthetic achievement seem like foregone conclusions. Recounting her origins as a writer, she tells us, "At the university I often used to write letters to boys I was secretly in love with, rich in expression and affection, almost guaranteeing conquest. At the magazine, the interviews and stories I wrote were like something out of a novel, with their *twisted plots* and *rarefied language*, so that *the real seemed false* and vice versa" (18, emphasis mine). Just a few pages later, Coco lays out her writing intentions, thereby enjoining the reader to evaluate the forthcoming novel in accordance with this schema:

Now must be the time to cut to the heart of things. Start writing; set off on this journey of writing using your dreams and your love. Use flawless prose to complete beautiful novels, one after the other. Use wit and passion to handle the story's opening, suspense, climax, and conclusion, like the world's most fantastic singer standing on Everest, singing at the top of her lungs (22, emphasis in original).

Despite Coco's exuberant confidence in these accounts, her presentation of her writing technique and its effects are at times remarkably unflattering. In characterizing her journalistic writing as rife with "twisted plots" and "rarefied language" that manipulate the "real" and the "false," she almost rehearses Western critiques of Chinese media coverage. In the longer passage on writing methodology, Coco celebrates personal confession, literary fecundity, linear plots, and loudness. Not to say that these values are inherently bad – but they do run astray of what devotees of Western literary traditions may consider good. Even if a Western reader's literary sensibilities are not violated, this reader might take Coco's blunt, self-congratulatory language as an abuse of political freedom. Indeed, a reader curious about what freedom of speech looks like in the Chinese context may find it jarring and sinister to see Coco so flippantly declare that "writing is like sorcery" and that an author ought to "suck dry the juice of life like a leech" (93).

These lines alert us to Coco's partiality to the simile as a means for demonstrating her literariness. Coco becomes particularly "literary" when describing Tian Tian and consistently draws on animal imagery. In the novel's early pages, she likens her handsome and devoted but sexually impotent Chinese boyfriend to a dolphin (6), a butterfly (10), a baby elephant (30), and "a fetus soaking in formaldehyde who owed his life to unadulterated love" (70). Sabina Dierdre Knight and John Crespi take Tian Tian to be an allegorical commentary on Chinese modernity's relation to the West, which is embodied by Coco's German lover Mark, "an ultra-potent, ultra-rational, and fundamentally amoral embodiment of invasive yet oh-so irresistible overseas

possible, I tried writing naked I certainly believe there's a secret connection between writing and the body" (167).

capital.”⁴³¹ My primary interest lies in the figurative fervor that Tian Tian elicits. The range of similes Coco employs indicates that Tian Tian is as much the inspiration for literary sorcery as he is the object that thwarts coherent description. The intensity of figuration in her accounts of Tian Tian is matched only by that in her transcriptions of her own writings. These snippets often appear in italics, physically set off from Coco’s narration. The passage above (“*Now must be the time . . .*”) is one example; here is another:

God, what does it all mean? What kind of fate has been arranged for [Tian Tian] and me? My tears always fall for him, my heart always aches for him, and it’s for him that my soul soars. I don’t know if what we have between us is love, but it is hopelessly tragic, the purest poetic expression of doomed passion, like a prisoner locked in a hidden cell, like lilacs swaying in the wilderness, like fish swimming in the abyss of despair (emphasis in original, 178).

Coco’s aside opens with language that is figurative, but also idiomatic – a heart that aches and a soul that soars. Perhaps finding such descriptions of her feelings for Tian Tian inadequate, Coco then transitions from an idiomatic to a poetic register, summoning “the purest poetic expression” to convey the ineffability of her feelings. She conjures radically disparate affective scenarios to characterize her relation to Tian Tian, from imprisonment to freedom to despairing fish. These similes, much like the ones employed to portray Tian Tian, are discrete and self-contained. Signifying individually rather than additively, they are fungible units within the economy of language; one phrase seems no less and no more well-suited than any other in its powers of poetic evocation or descriptive fidelity, and each is just as easily brandished as it could be dispensed with.

Sheldon Lu calls *Shanghai Baby* “more ornate” than *Candy*.⁴³² *Candy* is also more modest in its depiction of authorship. For the narrator Hong, writing is a last recourse, the lone beacon in a profoundly dark and bleak social landscape. This contrast more emphatically identifies writing as a “freedom.” Deemed utterly unheroic on the one hand and no short of miraculous on the other, “[w]riting is simply the thing that gives me the strength to keep on living. It’s an exercise that’s full of feeling, it’s a kind of love, and it’s one of the easiest things in the world – and easy things can be liberating” (261). At another point, Hong says:

I am someone who sees herself as a problem. For me, writing is a method of transforming corruption and decay into something wonderful and miraculous. I used to be the sort of person who was always on the lookout for excitement and novelty, but now I’ve somehow come to sense that if any marvels are going to appear in my life, they will undoubtedly spring from the act of writing. I feel that writing is the only thing that has meaning for me (lately I’ve been playing that depressing game of ‘What is the meaning of my life?’ yet again) (171).

We immediately register Hong’s difference from Coco in both character and tone. Hong is a “problem” rather than an automatic success, and whereas Coco seeks to “suck dry the juice of life like a leech,” Hong is more resigned than ambitious. But Hong is just as unequivocal as Coco when it comes to her faith in writing’s phenomenal powers. She heightens the dramatic

⁴³¹ Knight quotes Crespi’s 2001 presentation at the Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting, entitled “*Shanghai Babe* and the impasse of post-modern self-promotion.” See “Shanghai Cosmopolitanism: Class, Gender, and Cultural Citizenship in Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby*,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 12 no. 37 (2003): 642.

⁴³² Lu, “Popular Culture and Body Politics,” 171.

effect of these powers, moreover, by posing writing as the only possible source of life's "marvels." The exceptionality of writing among Hong's other unsavory pastimes emphasizes the extent to which it is morally transformative. Following in the genre of the *kunstlerroman*, she limns a telos of individual and artistic development, from the corrupt to the wonderful.

Hong's juxtaposition of her current and previous selves poses "freedom," symbolized by "the act of writing," as the opposite of "excitement and novelty." But if Hong's narration is any indication, writing may be no different from "that depressing game" she plays again and again. This cyclical nature of everyday life is described (and for Hong, experienced) *ad nauseam*. Early in the novel, we see this cycle in Hong's relentless pursuit of "excitement and novelty" and her inevitable return to her one anxiety: boredom. Hong's rocky relationship with her boyfriend Saining is one prominent cause of this lifestyle: "We both felt depressed. It was a sickening cycle, of sadness giving way to boredom and circling back again until in the end we were afraid to even try making love" (153). Other external stimuli similarly lead Hong from excitement to boredom: "Unlimited quantities of alcohol and chocolate put my blood sugar on a roller coaster, I got infections in my eyes and my tonsils, and my asthma came back to haunt me yet again I knew that another vicious circle had begun" (180). This vicious cycle is formalized through Hong's idiom of tautology and circularity. Her choice nihilistic aphorisms include "The only meaning in my life was that my life was meaningless" (97) and "The only thing I understand is that I do not understand why our lives are destined to slip out of control" (98-99).

Ostensibly, writing helps Hong overcome these obstacles. In the quote above, she explains that "writing is the only thing that has meaning for me." At another instance, she confides: "What I really wanted to get out of writing was to arrive at some deeper understanding of things; but the only thing I knew for sure was that writing had, at least for the time being, made me into a hardworking woman" (150). Writing may function as a means of moral transformation and perhaps even civic incorporation, but it is described with the same rhetorical constructs as the existential conundrums she struggled with earlier. Hence, even though the discovery of writing is stylistically marked by a shift into stream-of-consciousness prose, Hong's descriptions of writing still abide by a logic of circularity and thus produce the same effect – at least narratively – as the alcohol, chocolate, drugs, and other such stimuli. In the novel's closing lines, Hong's euphoria regarding writing reaches its peak but continues to be weighted with ambivalence: "Sometimes we have to believe in miracles. The voice in my writing is like the reverberations of a bottle breaking at midnight. Listening over and over to the Radiohead CD I stole from a friend, on this uniquely pure and stainless morning . . . I come to the end of this piece of candy" (269-270).

This representation of writing in terms of the habitual and the miraculous, the repetitive and the unique, does in some sense comment on the status of political freedom in post-Cold War China. The excess and disposability evoked by Hong's circular language and Coco's fungible language could, for instance, correspond with the Chinese government's position on economic progress and human life; they could also indicate that Coco's self-indulgent and Hong's self-destructive lifestyles are less "free" than some Western readers have suspected. To return to the geopolitical context of U.S.-China relations in which these novels were produced and read, I suggest that the protagonists' stylistic recourse to circularity and fungibility in *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* illustrates the contingent and potentially *disempowering* effects of *writing* to the extent that they also bear out the apparently *empowering* effects of *translation*. In the narrators' fashioning of a literary voice, we find the relentless pursuit and easy celebration of novelty routing back to an inevitable descent into boredom and sameness, the compulsive drive to say

something unique resulting in language that disaggregates into disposable parts. Writing is everything for them, and “everything is translatable.” Translatability (into English) enables the “freedom” that writing (in China) cannot; yet this “freedom” is certainly precarious when it is coterminous with the very forces that render novelty indistinguishable from boredom and individual creativity inseparable from rote “translatese.”

This problem – or miracle – of everything being translatable, of literary language as “fungible,” was provocatively raised by Steven Owen in his now infamous reading of Chinese poet and Democracy Wall activist Bei Dao’s *The August Sleepwalker* (1990). Owen contends that the “need to have one’s work approved in translation creates, in turn, a pressure for an increasing fungibility of words. Yet poetry has traditionally been built of words with a particular history of usage in a single language—of words that cannot be exchanged for other words.” What results from this fungibility of words is the fungibility of national literatures: “These [poems by Bei Dao] could just as easily be translations from a Slovak or an Estonian or a Philippine poet. It could even be a kind of American poetry.”⁴³³ Owen’s provocation that Bei Dao may be pandering to an international audience has incensed critics, most notably Rey Chow and Michelle Yeh.⁴³⁴ But for some, Owen’s fear – that international publishing protocols in an increasingly globalized world have built up a stockpile of genres, styles, and words that writers are predisposed to use – is warranted. I have already mentioned Spivak’s term “translatese,” which comes closest to designating the problematic Owen describes.⁴³⁵ Other like-minded critics have termed this homogenization of literature in translation – alternately, this reification of *literary language* in translation – as “CNN Creole” and “market realism.”⁴³⁶ Andrew F. Jones’s metaphorization of the translator as an entrepreneur, who profits from retrofitting Chinese literature to Western tastes, implicitly casts language as monetary units and translation as a financial transaction⁴³⁷ – in this case, a transaction that forces an exchange based on the desires of Western palates.

One of the hallmarks of “bad girl” writing is indeed the proliferation of Western brand names and cultural icons – *Shanghai Baby*, after all, features a protagonist named after Coco Chanel. That words such as Coco, Mild Seven, Madonna, Ginsberg, the Doors, and McDonnell Douglas can “survive translation” represents a particular kind of “translation universal”⁴³⁸ – one that, to be sure, unquestionably reinforces Euro-American culture’s claim to universality. The

⁴³³ Owen, “What is World Poetry?” *New Republic* (November 19, 1990): 28, 31.

⁴³⁴ See Chow’s introduction in *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1993): 1-6. Yeh’s Chinese-language critique appears in *Today (Jintian)* and is referenced in Chow’s piece.

⁴³⁵ See footnote 8 for the similarity of their critiques.

⁴³⁶ In *The Translation Zone*, Apter defines “CNN creole” as “the media-speak of global capitalism.” She continues: “brand names build up into a new kind of language as they intersect with the languages of their reception” (161). Tariq Ali defines “market realism” a style that “[panders] to a literary culture of consumerism.” See “Literature and Market Realism,” *New Left Review* 199, May-June 1993, accessed May 5, 2014, <http://newleftreview.org/I/199/tariq-ali-literature-and-market-realism>.

⁴³⁷ Jones, “Chinese Literature in the ‘World’ Literary Economy,” *Modern Chinese Literature* 8 no. 1/2 (Spring/Fall 1994): 171-190.

⁴³⁸ Leo Spitzer describes this kind of commodified language as a specific kind of neologism: “Kodak . . . stands for thousands of modern words in our languages designating objects in the commercial, industrial, scientific, technological, social, and political areas of our civilisation which did not exist before.” See “The Individual Factor in Linguistic Innovations,” *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, eds. Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley, and Alan Girvin, 64-73 (1956; reprint, London: Routledge, 2000), 66. On translation universals, see Anna Mauranen and Pekka Kujamaki, eds., *Translation Universals: Do they exist?* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004).

point, though, is not simply that English remains the *lingua franca*, a notion that would reinforce Jean Luc-Nancy's belief that the rigorous normativization effected by globalization extends from a Western-centric "universal and reason."⁴³⁹ My point, rather, is that in a still Anglicized and Eurocentric world seen as under siege by *Asian* modernization, the prelapsarian values of literary originality and cultural authenticity seem to rest with the indiscriminant translation of blacklisted authors and, correspondingly, the dramatic transformation of self-consciously apathetic "bad girls" into political dissidents and world authors. But if "world literature" is the triumph of translation – if it represents the achievement of equality for literary afterlives – then for *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy*, this great height of translatability is synonymous with not only the conservation of freedom but also the limit of humanity and that of what we call "literature."

Everything is Translatable

Reliable translations, or absolute translatability, has been the utopian end of comparative literature and, more recently, of "world literature." In a 1993 report, American Comparative Literature Association Chair Charles Bernheimer deems the present moment "particularly propitious for such a review since progressive tendencies in literary studies, toward a multicultural, global, and interdisciplinary curriculum, are comparative in nature." The report, which outlines practical curricular approaches for investigating and respecting cultural difference, frames the field's future as a project to "expand students' perspectives and stimulate them to think in culturally pluralistic terms."⁴⁴⁰ Such aims and values have also been the cornerstone to translation studies, not only for *literary* scholarship but also for the field's more scientifically- and practically-oriented approaches. Indeed, the utopian dream of absolute translatability within literature has perhaps its closest correlate in diplomacy – the equally utopian dream of human rights, cross-cultural understanding, non-violent conflict resolution, sustainable peace, and the like.

The formal representation and geopolitical achievement of absolute translatability in *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* bring together two key paths deeply influenced by translation studies between the 1940s and 1970s: literature and diplomacy. It was in a world carved up by nuclear impasses, that Warren Weaver, the director of natural sciences at the Rockefeller Foundation, expressed a concern that would resonate with the objectives of what has become comparative literary studies: "A most serious problem, for UNESCO and for the constructive and peaceful future of the planet, is the problem of *translation*, as it unavoidably affects the communication between peoples."⁴⁴¹ This letter that Weaver directed to MIT cyberneticist Norbert Wiener on March 4, 1947, is seen as the origins of modern machine translation (MT) and, correspondingly, of translation studies in its present-day manifestations. Weaver admits to "knowing nothing official" about the technical aspects – hence his consultation of Wiener, followed by other field experts. But Weaver's push to mechanize language translation was premised not only on the practical belief, informed by information theory, that "languages have certain invariant

⁴³⁹ Luc-Nancy writes, "The civilization that has represented the universal and reason—also known as the West—cannot even encounter and recognize any longer the relativity of its norms and the doubt on its own certainty" (*The Creation of the World*, 34).

⁴⁴⁰ Bernheimer, "American Comparative Literature Association Report on Professional Standards," *ACLAnet*, 1993, accessed May 25, 2014, <http://www.umass.edu/complit/aclanet/Bernheim.html>.

⁴⁴¹ Weaver, Natural Sciences Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, to Professor Norbert Wiener, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, March 4, 1947, *Machine Translation Archive*, reproduced from the Rockefeller Foundation Archives, <http://www.mt-archive.info/Weaver-1947-original.pdf>, emphasis his.

properties which are independent of the language in question” but also on more humanistic considerations of the possibility of and the need for universals across cultures.⁴⁴²

Of course, MT research would be deployed for other ends as well, and Weaver’s humanist vision would quickly be revamped into an “MT race” that proceeded alongside the arms race.⁴⁴³ A full accounting of this history will have to be tabled for now. But the attainment of translatability in *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* is significant, considering the status of literature in translation studies as well as in MT studies. Literature is the limit case for (machine) translation – the measure of absolute translatability. In Emile Delavenay’s 1960 study *An Introduction to Machine Translation*, he enthuses that “the translation machine . . . is now on our doorstep Will the machine translate poetry? To this there is only one possible reply – why not?”⁴⁴⁴ Most MT experts are less optimistic, especially those speaking during the “MT Winter,” which dates roughly between 1966 to the late 1980s.⁴⁴⁵ In 1979, Bozena Henisz-Dostert, et. al., expressed skepticism about MT’s ability to tackle “great literary works” and asserted that “poetry is particularly intractable.”⁴⁴⁶ More recently in 2010, amidst the beatific bustle of Silicon Valley technological innovation, a Google research team led by Dmitriy Genzel attempted to build a system that would “[translate] not only poetic meaning, but form as well.”⁴⁴⁷ Perhaps the most outstanding and most controversial feat of Genzel’s experiment, however, what he deems “a pleasant side-effect,” is that “the system is also able to translate anything *into* poetry.”⁴⁴⁸

In a way, this “pleasant side-effect” is a more dramatic version of how Chinese-language faddish confessional writing became not merely translated into English but veritably transformed into “world literature.” But at issue here is not that we can plug something random into a Google translator (or some other MT platform) and through some algorithm arrive at “literature.” The absolute translatability of *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* has nothing to do with superior technology of translation – or, for that matter, with superior human translators – but with the inextricability of globalization and human rights at our current historical moment, which has reworked our criteria for determining what counts as “literature.” Specifically, Wei Hui’s and Mian Mian’s publication histories show how geopolitical levers can facilitate through translation the consecration of a text’s literariness. For their novels, the quality of translation (however one might construe “quality”) is of less significance than the fact that a translation – *any* translation – exists and, by existing, legitimates an individual’s claim to authorial voice.

⁴⁴² In a 1949 memorandum, Weaver articulates his most utopian proposal – the notion that all languages share common structural properties – through a metaphor of cross-cultural human connections: “Think, by analogy, of individuals living in a series of tall closed towers, all erected over a common foundation. When they try to communicate with one another, they shout back and forth, each from his own closed tower. It is difficult to make the sound penetrate even the nearest towers, and communication proceeds very poorly indeed. But, when an individual goes down his tower, he finds himself in a great open basement, common to all the towers. Here he establishes easy and useful communication with the persons who have also descended from their towers.” See Weaver, “Translation,” July 15, 1949, *Machine Translation Archive*, reproduced from the Rockefeller Foundation Archives, <http://www.mt-archive.info/Weaver-1949.pdf>.

⁴⁴³ Steve Silberman, “Talking to Strangers,” *Wired*, May 2000, accessed May 24, 2014, http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/8.05/translation_pr.html.

⁴⁴⁴ Delavenay explains, “If we dare to reply ‘why not?’ it is because from the Cartesian absolute of metalanguage to the mystic absolute of pure poetry, there are differences not of kind but only of degree.” See Delavenay, *An Introduction to Machine Translation* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), 109, 110.

⁴⁴⁵ Silberman, “Talking to Strangers.”

⁴⁴⁶ Henisz-Dostert, et. al., *Machine Translation* (Berlin: Mouton, 1979), 93.

⁴⁴⁷ Genzel, “Poetic Machine Translation,” *Google translate blog*, October 5, 2010, accessed May 26, 2014, <http://googletranslate.blogspot.com/2010/10/poetic-machine-translation.html>.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

It is this fungibility of translated texts and of translated language that constitutes the central paradox surrounding these Chinese novels. We might also extrapolate this paradox of translatability as a symptom of our historical moment, which looks increasingly globalized to the extent that it looks increasingly Asiatic. For example, in the case of *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy*, the perseverance of textual life in the face of government annihilation and in the name of human rights has only been possible through rampant piracy, a by now stereotypically Chinese phenomenon more commonly taken to evidence the unscrupulous techniques of Chinese technological modernization. Another example bears more directly on translation as the literary engine of globalization. In 2000, *Wired* magazine published a speculative timeline entitled “Machine Translation’s Past and Future,” in which the year 2003 is accorded the following milestone: “Text of Joyce’s *Ulysses* is run through Cliff’s Notemaker, a new omnidirectional literary interpreter and summarizer. Program: ‘Your professor didn’t read it either. Don’t worry about what your essay says, just include the words *Dublin*, *pub*, and *fuck*.’”⁴⁴⁹ The arbitrariness of the language *in* the text has a correlate in China, which, in the mass circulation of canonical literature, seems to condone the arbitrariness – and therefore to violate the sanctity – of literary texts themselves: to wit, between 1994 and 2001, no less than *four* different translations of *Ulysses* were published. Yifeng Sun cites this mass proliferation of *Ulysses* not to critique the phenomenon but to prove China’s cultural and political progress. He writes, “the Chinese obsession with stream-of-consciousness was politically motivated, and . . . signaled not only the beginning of a change in the world of fiction but also an attempt to dethrone the dominant ideology. Stream-of-consciousness emerged in art and politics as an emancipatory mode of action and thinking based on a celebration of individualism.”⁴⁵⁰

Such examples show how the dream of absolute translatability is expected to usher in, if it hasn’t already, a more genuinely intercultural world unhampered by language barriers. This meticulously connected world allegedly liberates oppressed authorial voices in China, allowing them to be heard and understood by international “netizens” and Western readers. On the other hand, this “oneworldedness” – a neologism that Apter uses to describe utter connectedness and “systematicity”⁴⁵¹ – is achieved by dint of a linguistic order that depends on the interchangeability of words. Interconnectedness renders irrelevant the modal distinctions between the literary and the technical, vitiating Barthes’s writerly text and obviating deep textual engagement. The abolishment of a literary meritocracy based on aesthetics serves to redeem dissident literature on the grounds of human rights. And, in the case of *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy*, we might even say that the democratic ethos of human rights is tested and reaffirmed through works that do not neatly fit the terms by which we canonize texts as “literature.”

Coda

Owen’s review of Bei Dao leads him to introduce a question that “must trouble us”: “We must wonder if such collections of poetry in translation become publishable only because the publisher and the readership have been assured that the poetry was lost in translation. But what if the poetry wasn’t lost in translation? What if this is it?”⁴⁵² I was initially struck by the

⁴⁴⁹ Kristin Demos and Mark Frauenfelder, “Machine Translation’s Past and Future,” *Wired* 8 no. 5, May 2000, accessed May 25, 2014, <http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/8.05/timeline.html>.

⁴⁵⁰ Sun, “Opening the Cultural Mind: Translation and the Modern Chinese Literary Canon,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (March 2008): 26.

⁴⁵¹ Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (New York: Verso, 2013), 72.

⁴⁵² Owen, “What is World Poetry,” 31.

strangeness of Owen's misgivings. Shouldn't we be *glad* that nothing – and especially not the poetry! – was lost in translation? Haven't we long clamored for faithful representations of indigenous voices, especially in translation? I could easily envision another reader responding to this exact same scenario by exulting, "What if this is it! The unmediated Bei Dao, speaking authentically in English with no net loss of poetic expression!"

The presumption here, as discussed earlier, is that Owen believes Bei Dao to be speaking "translatese." Nothing is lost in translation, it follows, because everything is translatable – *even poetry*. This characterization of Bei Dao's poetry makes translation out to be a menace to the mode of writing called "literature" in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. The impact of global capitalism on literature and culture have been rigorously discussed. Rather than rehearsing these discussions here, I will reference Adorno, Horkheimer, and Jameson as thinkers who have no doubt influenced more recent campaigns to pry literature from the jaws of globalization. These campaigns have been predicated on two axioms fundamental to the literary humanities, that I have referenced at least implicitly: 1) that literature is in its essence humanistic, so mitigating globalization's de-aestheticizing effects services the cause against dehumanization as well, and 2) that literature is in essence opposed to the logic of capitalist instrumentality, so substantiating literature's autonomy constitutes a compensatory and perhaps even subversive act against globalization.

I am not trying to nor would I be willing to disprove these two axioms (and, on that note, I will not go out of my way to prove them either). But I do want to diagnose how these axioms have been articulated and adapted to address translation, the apparatus driving literature's globalization. To this end, it is prudent to return briefly to Spivak's plea for translators of texts by subaltern women to engage "the rhetoricity of the original." This call to honor the original text, which for Spivak is tantamount to honoring the subaltern woman, in effect constitutes an attempt to safeguard *literature's* ineffability. Elsewhere, returning to the issue of translatese, she writes: "The only way to get rid of translatese is to feel the authority as well as the fragility of the 'original,' by way of resonance with *its irreducible idiomaticity*."⁴⁵³ Reviewers who attempt to give the "bad girls" the benefit of the doubt attribute the novels' apparent aesthetic shortcomings to the possibility of translation lapses⁴⁵⁴ – a compensatory move that reflects an implicit awareness of Spivak's postcolonial translation ethos or, pace Owen, a hope that the literature did exist in the hallowed "original" but was irretrievably lost in translation.

The irreducibility of an original's language, style, and history, through which Spivak guarantees the irreducibility of a non-Western woman writer, appears as a more explicit defense of literary autonomy in Apter's notion of "untranslatability." Like Spivak, Apter, to invoke the title and subtitle of her 2013 book, summons a "politics of untranslatability" to mount a polemical stance "against world literature." For Apter, the fact that "World Literature seemed oblivious to the Untranslatable" – as evidenced "by its unqueried inclusion of the word 'world'" – indicates that a literary formation committed to worlding and therefore contingent on translatability is by default inimical to "literature." The "untranslatable," she writes, can be "discernible as a pull away from language norming." It marks when a "target language refuses to cooperate with the translator." Most significantly, it is "a linguistic form of creative failure with homeopathic uses."⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ Spivak, "Questioned on Translation: Adrift" *Public Culture* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 21.

⁴⁵⁴ For example, see "Young and Decadent in Shanghai," *Die Gazette*, and Knight, "Shanghai Cosmopolitanism," 648.

⁴⁵⁵ Apter, *Against World Literature*, 8, 20.

Embedded in these accounts of textual originals is a practical axiom within translation studies – that the “literary” aspect of literature is that which remains untranslatable. Owen’s concern about the poetry that *wasn’t* lost shows how this truism becomes differently inflected at a moment when globalization works to make *everything* translatable. Fredric Jameson’s account of globalization as unprecedented and universal helps shed light on the rhetoric of absolutism that prevails in these discussions of literature and translation:

Any talk about the future must first confront globalization as its absolute horizon Some call [globalization] Americanization, a characterization I understand but feel to be slightly misleading, as I’ll try to show. Some think that it is nothing new, going all the way back to the neolithic trade routes. That’s true, too, but I feel that it is more useful to insist on *the historic originality of this stage*, in which international relations become dominant rather than secondary or incidental. In fact, what we confront today is an immense international division of labor, which has certainly been anticipated at certain moments of the past, but has now become both *universal* and *irreversible*, with consequences for culture fully as much as for economics.⁴⁵⁶

Jameson’s dramatic account of globalization’s “historic originality” and futuristic inevitability brings to mind another discourse about historical exceptionality – that of Asian economic “miracles.” As I have been claiming, it is impossible to think about the vicissitudes of capitalist globalization, and in particular its impingement on the domain of “humanity,” without taking into account the concrete realization of economic modernities racially marked as “Asian.” The danger of this modernity in the Western imaginary lies not in its difference *per se*, but in the possibility that the *alternative* modernity of Asiatic capitalism will evolve into a *new* global hegemony.

What does this potential merger between an alternative “Asian” and a new “global” bode for literature, specifically one that may be no longer distinguishable by its untranslatability? The novels I have examined in *Voicing Asia* to some extent cast the reliable narrator as one who *enables* translation. Yet they also problematize this model of reliability through the racial figuration of these narrators as “Asian.” For instance, Lee’s portrayal of “Henryspeak” in *Native Speaker* as a machinelike neutral voice sets a standard for narrative reliability that analogizes the model minority Asian’s insidiously seamless assimilation. For Ha Jin’s narrator in *War Trash*, the vocation of translator allows POW Yu Yuan to regulate and filter the information passing through the compound, and this epistemological advantage is formalized as narratorial omniscience. The “bad girl” novels I have read here most provocatively raise the question of how narrative voice registers “Asian,” insofar as the technology of translation explicitly brings the voice of the novel into contact with the world in which this voice is accessed. If Ishiguro is paradigmatic figure for Walkowitz’s conceptualization of “comparison literature” as “an emerging genre of world fiction for which global comparison is a formal as well as a thematic reoccupation,”⁴⁵⁷ then the “bad girl” novels postulate “global comparison” in terms of globalization’s injunction for easy equivalences and effortless translatability. *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* illustrate how translation enables “freedom” within the domain of human rights but at the same time levels language into a circular, tautological, fungible “translatese.” These novels’ engagement of translatability dispels the viability of chasing a bygone romance of literary

⁴⁵⁶ Jameson, “New Literary History after the End of the New,” *New Literary History* 39 no. 3 (Summer 2008): 375, emphasis mine.

⁴⁵⁷ Walkowitz, “Unimaginable Largeness,” 218.

uniqueness untainted by global forces, yet their emphatic survival through translation also productively complicates straightforward critiques of globalized literature as by default aesthetically sterile or morally inhuman. These novels show that in the context of post-Cold War U.S.-China relations, which is emblematic of a human rights order mediated by and built on *realpolitik*, writing cannot exist autonomously from translation – for both globalization *and* human rights demand translation and translatability, especially when an Asian voice is at stake.

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