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Transpacific Identities in Film and Literature

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Transpacific Identities in Film and Literature

by

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In her vital 2003 work, Imagine Otherwise, Kandace Chuh argues for an intervention in Asian American studies using a transnational analytic. As globalization increases in the twenty-first century, the continued movement of peoples, capital, and cultures across the Pacific Rim in myriad forms ranging from traditional immigration to new global digital networks demonstrates the importance of continuing the use of a transnational paradigm in Asian American studies. Moreover, within this specifically transpacific framework, this study specifically focuses on the role of visual culture, in the form of the global circulation of film and film images. As Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have argued for African American cultural identity, it is within this global circuit of film that minority communities and individuals have constructed their myriad cultural identities. Thus, this study considers the ways in which Asian American minority subjects interact within this transpacific network of global circulation of film. In other
words, this project sits squarely at this intersection of these three theoretical strands: the transpacific, the role of visual culture, and the creation of an Asian American identity.

Specifically, this study explores the various ways in which different works film and literature articulate both the realities and possibilities of new transpacific identities constructed within this web of global economic, political, and cultural exchanges. Moreover, in thinking about the role of movies and film is to also think about the distance between the spectacular nature of filmic imagery and the everyday lived reality of minority subjects. Furthermore, filmic imagery, especially the Hollywood film product that is the subject of this study, is often highly ideological, offering imagery and representations that both reflect and establish white hegemonic power and control. To this end, the novels of Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters, The Gangster of Love,* and *Dream Jungle* serve to establish a paradigm for the relationship between film and its spectacular nature and the individual living in her quotidian reality. Thus, the various works in this study offer different ways in which individual identities are created both because of, and often in spite of, the spectacular constructions of Asians and Asian Americans.

This study takes on the relationship of the spectacular and the mundane in a variety of forms and media, from those identities created in, by, and in spite of Chinatown - spectacular presentation in another form - to the more specific question of Asian American masculinity. Instead of just thinking about filmic imagery and representations in a narrow political sense, this study attempts to explore the different ways in which the spectacular, writ large, effects the different constructions of Asian American identities.
How do individuals construct and create notions of an Asian American identity within a global circuit of film that more often than not dictates very narrow possibilities for those identities? In other words, what are the possibilities for new formations of Asian American identities within global visual regimes that are often hostile to minority subjects?
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In Wayne Wang’s seminal work, *Chan is Missing*, there is a remarkable image of what is best described as a kind of utopic version of hybridity: an “American” apple pie baked with “Chinese” style methods. To the Chinese American English teacher who offers this delicious baked treat, it symbolizes the ultimate goal of the Chinese, or any Asian immigrant for that matter, in America: to construct an identity that is equal parts “American” and “Asian,” to take the best elements of both cultures and somehow combine them into one delicious whole. However, as the movie makes clear, such a conception of Asian American identity is naive at best. “Chinese American” identity, and by extension, Asian American identity, is much more complex and vexed than one suggested by an à la carte menu where you can simply just pick and choose what is best or ideal from each culture.

The subject of this study is these different transpacific identities and their articulation in film and literature. What are the various ways in which Asian and Asian American cultural productions in both film and literature form and inform, debate and interrogate or otherwise engage in the question of an “Asian American” identity that is more often than not created beyond the national borders of the United States? A fundamental proposition for this study is that if we are to consider Asian American identities and their formation, these identities need to be considered within a transnational and, more specifically, a transpacific framework. However, in considering this transnational identity, it is important not to consider this formation in a merely utopic
manner that suggests that this identity is somehow beyond the bounds of nation. Rather, the transpacific framework reflects the way in which ideas of “nation” continue to hold an important place within the construction and formation of these identities. Key to the question of how these identities are formed, is the question of who or what is involved in the formation of these immigrant identities. In other words, in what ways is the subject able to create and articulate her own identity within the larger discourses of the nation-state? Similarly, how do the various constructions of “Asia” in the American imaginary inform the subject's conception and construction of the self? And are these discourses necessarily a form of colonization or is the subject able to transform these discourses into a generative site? As Kandace Chuh notes in Imagine Otherwise, there is a “productiveness of conceptualizing racial identities beyond the frame of nation” (58).

In many ways, then, this study intends to take up the challenge extended by Chuh, but with a different emphasis on the role of nation in the construction of transnational identities. Chuh argues for an important intervention in Asian American studies by demonstrating the way in which “transnationalism” can serve as an important analytic in Asian American studies. According to Chuh, transnationalism as rubric presents a conceptual framework that not only allows us to consider those Asian American identities that are “indifferent to national boundaries” (58), but, more importantly to mount a “critique of U.S. nationalism’s use of gendered and sexualized racialization as an instrument of power” (59). In positing transnationalism as an analytic, Chuh demonstrates an awareness of the “importance...of cross-border flows of people, capital,
and cultures in the production and evaluation of knowledge” (62); that is, fully recognizing the different elements that go into the construction of an “Asian American” identity. Furthermore, for Chuh, transnationalism as a “cognitive analytic...traces the incapacity of the nation-state to contain and represent fully the subjectivities and ways of life that circulate within the nation-space” (62). Here, as much as Chuh acknowledges the importance of “nation” and national discourses in the construction of various Asian American identities, her focus is on the way in which these identities ultimately exceed both national boundaries and those analytics that rely on the nation-space. Although my approach is informed by Chuh’s work, it also takes what can be seen as an opposite tack: that is, I not only consider the way identities necessarily exceed the idea of “nation,” but how identities are exactly constructed by notions of “nation” in not only various national discourses, but also in the very real material conditions of the nation-space itself.

That is, even if we think of a subject as “transnational,” she must still live somewhere, rather than existing as a free-floating subject in neutral waters. In other words, part of the importance of the transnational is the different articulations of nation(s), an idea that follows from Koichi Iwabuchi’s use of the transnational in his reading of Japanese transnationalism in his study *Recentering Globalization*. Iwabuchi specifically points to his use of the term “transnationalism” to exactly articulate the continued importance of the national in his conception of the “transnational,” a point that guides my own study as well. Similarly, the editors of *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits* make a similar argument for a continued importance of
nation in the consideration of Asian American literature. On the surface, their argument seems almost counter-intuitive, in light of an increasing globalization, which the editors describe as “the growing complex dynamics of postcolonial flows and globalization” that would seem to de-emphasize the importance of nation. However, the editors argue that it is precisely because of this increased globalization and transnational flows that not only allow the United States to be an important “economic, cultural, and media player in non-U.S. territory,” but they also allow for an “Asian presence marked in U.S. borders” (Lim et. al. 3). In other words, globalization has not erased national boundaries, but has allowed different nations to exert their presence beyond their national boundaries in more nuanced and different ways. To this end, this study also considers Asian American literature as, “located and locatable in U.S. territory” and “sited on the discourse of nation, whether immigrant or citizen” (Lim et. al. 5).

In fact, one could argue that the question of nation lies at the heart of Paul Gilroy's construction of a “Black Atlantic” cultural sphere. Again, as much as Gilroy is arguing for a construction that exceeds the idea of nation, the materiality of borders and the nation-space still matter. In order to oppose what he describes as “nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches” (15) to cultural studies, Gilroy argues for the idea of viewing the “Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis...and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (15). Gilroy, of course, is trying to account for what he describes as “the compound culture from disparate sources” (15) of Britain's black settler communities as well as the different kinds of identities that offer “a
new typography of loyalty and identity in which the structures and presuppositions of the nation state have been left behind because they are seen to be outmoded” (16). As Gilroy is theorizing the formation of complex hybrid cultural identities, he nonetheless recognizes the importance of the “disparate sources” of this Black Atlantic cultural formation. I am thus using Gilroy's framework of this Black Atlantic on the opposite coast: to consider a kind of “Asian Pacific” which acknowledges the “flows, exchanges, and in-between elements” (Gilroy 190) between Asia and the Americas, hence the notion of “transpacific” identities. In other words, this is a way to acknowledge and to provide a coherent theoretical framework for what Lisa Lowe terms the “heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity” of Asian American populations within North America. While my own work intends to explore these transpacific identities within a North American cultural context, the notion of transpacific identity could also accommodate such ideas as Pan-Asian identities or colonial relationships within different parts of Asia as well as those that extend to different points across the Pacific. For example, Wong Kar-Wai’s 1997 film Happy Together utilizes formal and narrative styles from French New Wave cinema to the story of two gay Hong Kong expatriates travelling and living in Argentina and suggests an array of different cultural flows. As Gilroy argues that a conception of a Black Atlantic “provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity and historical memory” (16) a similar conception across the Pacific will allow for similar explorations of disparate Asian American communities as well.
The inherent danger in a conception of an “Asian Pacific” that attempts to include all of the various geographic regions and cultures of the Pacific Rim is that instead of offering a useful analytic, such a framework becomes so broad that in its attempt to include everything may come to mean nothing. Gilroy provides an answer to this quandary by not actually attempting to draw the geographical borders and boundaries of his black Atlantic region; instead, Gilroy focuses on the idea of movement and physical crossings: “the history of the black Atlantic, since then, continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people – not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship – provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory” (emphasis added 16). Similarly, Wilson and Dirlik refer to the importance of “the motions of Asian and Pacific peoples [that] have produced networks endowing the region with social reality and cultural texture” (6). In this way, tracing the transpacific is a matter of tracing the movements of these diasporic Asian populations back and forth across the Pacific: as Palumbo-Liu argues, “there is no diaspora without borders and no borders without states. The imperatives of states (even under transnational conditions) contest and constrain the psychic identifications that make up diasporic identity and the identity of diasporas” (344). In this way, for the purposes of this study at least, the Asian Pacific is limned by the movements of these different populations across the Pacific. While it is important to note the “capital and commodity flows and military-political relationships” (Wilson and Dirlik 6) that also connect the different nodes of hegemonic
power (both political and economic) in this vast region, a consideration of those elements is well beyond the scope of this study.

Of equal importance to this movement of populations in defining the Asian Pacific is the role of what Gilroy describes as, “the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering” (3). In a larger sense, this could simply refer to the cultural flows that move with immigrant populations, a point noted by Chuh and Shimakawa where the focus is “on movement itself, on the literal circulation of peoples and cultures, and on the figurative meanings of those movements” (emphasis mine 7).

But with the ever-expanding reach of movies and television and popular culture via different forms to distribution and transmission (ranging all the way from standard film distribution networks to pirated VHS tapes and DVDs to satellite communications and the internet), such flows are not necessarily tied to the movement of populations. What Gilroy more accurately describes is a kind of affective circuit built on multiple media valences, including both aural and video. Similarly, Marta Savigliano describes a “political economy of Passion [that]...has been juxtaposed and intertwined with the economies usually described on materialist and idealistic grounds” (1). In fact, Savigliano goes on to note that this is a “trackable trafficking in emotions and affects” (1) that is global in its reach. What is important here is both Gilroy and Savigliano offer alternative networks and flows that ultimately affect the creation of different transpacific identities. Another one of Gilroy's structures of feeling is the global circulation of film and movies. Thus, an important element of this project involves the analysis of this...
affective circuit of film and media images: much in the same way that Gilroy describes the movement of musical forms along the black Atlantic and Savigliano gives an account of the worldwide transmission of Argentine Tango, I hope to offer a similar analysis for the circulation of film and visual culture.

In fact, the role of visual culture is the other central question of this dissertation. The discussion of visual culture takes many forms within this study, but the main concern of this project is the question of filmic spectacle and the different ways in which filmic spectacle contributes to the construction of different transpacific identities. Arguably, the larger question of the visual is a vital one in regards to the construction of Asian and Asian American identities in the United States cultural imaginary, as historically, Asian racialization has occurred in the valence of the visual. It is in this visual realm that the question of “difference” is most clearly highlighted. As Palumbo-Liu points out, the idea of “difference” is key in the racialization of Asian Americans, arguing that, “‘difference' is thus understood and deployed in various manners – some benign, or even conciliatory, others emphatically brutal. Each instantiation has its own particular historical context” (Palumbo-Liu 3). Robert G. Lee offers a much more specific example of this use of racial difference, using the term “yellowface” to describe this type of “visual management of race” (Eng 106). As Lee argues, “yellowface marks the Asian body as unmistakably Oriental; it sharply defines the Oriental in a racial opposition to whiteness. Yellowface exaggerates 'racial' features that have designated 'Oriental,' such as 'slanted' eyes, overbite, and mustard-yellow skin color” (2). While it is important to for Lee, the
use of yellowface isn't confined only to visual culture – he uses it much more broadly to apply to any grotesque stereotype of Asians – the fact that yellowface is defined in the visual register points to the importance of visual difference.¹ David Eng in *Racial Castration* more explicitly connects the exploitation of difference, configured here as a kind of Asian hypervisibility built along the lines of specific Asian bodily characteristics (along with Asian invisibility), to the visual, pointing out the way in which the visual is used as a technology of Asiatic racialization in the American cultural imaginary:

Invisibility and visibility work in historical tandem to configure and reconfigure the Asian immigrant as the phantamastic screen on which the nation projects its shifting anxieties of coherence and stability. Invisibility and visibility work to fix, shift, and refix the figure of the Asian immigrant according to the particular political exigencies and historical demands of the nation-state. (110)

Because of this emphasis on visual difference, film, to a large extent, becomes the natural medium for this emphasis of visual difference: after all, “[cinema's] unique power was a 'matter of making images seen’” (Gunning 229). In general, Gunning's work is important here as well, because he documents the rise of cinematic spectacle in the United States, which raises the larger question of the function of filmic spectacle in general.

¹ The term “yellowface” itself has another perhaps more common usage, wherein white actors, with the use of sometimes grotesque Asian make-up, are cast in Asian roles. Eugene Wong Franklin's study, *On Visual Media Racism* provides an excellent history of this practice, which, sadly, has not disappeared entirely: this phenomenon still occasionally rears its ugly head in mainstream Hollywood movies: most recently, the 2012 movie *Cloud Atlas* prominently features two white actors as Koreans.
Much of the discussion of the visual regime in this project circles around this notion of spectacle and the spectacular. French social theorist Guy Debord in his influential study, *Society of the Spectacle* offers several key conclusions regarding the nature of spectacle that is particularly germane to this study. First, Debord argues that the spectacular is “not a decorative element,” but is at the “very heart of society's unreality” (1). Furthermore, Debord points out that “spectacle is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (1), again, noting the way in which spectacle is a function of the social and vice versa. More importantly, the nature of spectacle itself is highly ideological, wherein it “cannot be understood either as a distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images,” but rather, “it is far better viewed as...a world view transformed into an objective force” (1). Spectacle, then, not only “epitomizes the prevailing mode of social life” (1), it serves as “both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production” (1). As a Marxist philosopher, it is perhaps unsurprising that for Debord spectacle thus serves the purposes of capitalism, wherein spectacle is “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image” (10). Thus, Debord argues for the primary role of spectacle in capitalist societies, with spectacle itself serving as a kind of visual management of society as well, where spectacle is “the omnipresent celebration of a choice already made in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice. In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the permanent presence
of that justification” (1). In other words, spectacle justifies the existence of the hegemony, which for Debord, is the post-Fordist capitalistic society. Debord's visual management of society via spectacle then also extends to the visual management of race in the United States discussed earlier. What Debord does is to break down the specific ways in which this visual management actually occurs via the technology of spectacle.

While it is important to recognize that Debord uses spectacle in a much broader sense beyond the realm of filmic spectacle, his conclusions are perfectly applicable to the filmic spectacle, which is the main focus of this study, as it is to other visual spectacles produced by society. In fact, the history of Asian racialization in film can be read as a series of textbook examples of the use of filmic spectacle and ethnic difference in the management of a racial minority in America. Eugene Wong Franklin's groundbreaking *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures* and Gina Marchetti's *Romance and the Yellow Peril* both give important historical overviews of the way in which Asians and Asian Americans have been depicted in mainstream Hollywood films, documenting the different filmic stereotypes for Asian characters: from the Yellow Peril of Fu-Manchu to the Confucius quoting Charlie Chan, from the mysterious and exotic Dragon Lady to the shy, retiring “lotus blossom.” In fact, recent events suggest that the United States is entering into another round of Asian racialization, this time against the Chinese, and like previous historical moments, this has occurs across several media, and not just in film.
For example, two political ads, one from 2010 and one from 2012 have painted China as the new economic threat to America. While both ads rework the Yellow Peril narrative based on economic issues - similar to what the Japanese endured in the 1980s - the two ads take remarkably different approaches to painting China as the economic Other. The first, entitled “Chinese Professor,” released in 2010 by a conservative watchdog group Citizens Against Government Waste, features a futuristic lecture hall in Beijing in 2030, replete with a giant image of Chairman Mao and a massive Chinese flag, where the “Chinese professor” of the title explains to a group of Chinese students, in Chinese with English subtitles, how the decline of the United States and the ascendancy of China began in 2010 when the United States turned “their back on the principles that made them great” by overspending, making massive changes to healthcare and taking over private corporations. The ad ends with a close-up of the professor looking straight at the camera, and noting that because of the crushing debt accrued by the United States, a debt held mainly by the Chinese, the Americans “now work for us.” His own mocking laughter is then followed by shortles of approval from the Chinese students in the hall.

The other ad was released in 2012 as part of the Senate campaign of Republican Pete Hoekstra against the incumbent Debbie Stabenow, who is snidely referred to as Debbie “Spend-it-Now” in the ad, and features a Chinese woman riding her bike among some rice paddies to the sound of a gong and traditional Chinese music. After she stops, she looks into the camera, and in broken, accented English, says, “Debbie spend so much American money, you borrow more and more from us. Your economy get very weak.”
Ours get very good. We take your jobs. Thank you, Debbie Spend-it-now.” While this latter ad seems markedly different from the previous: instead of featuring an urban future, this ad evokes a pastoral past, both come to the same conclusion: that China represents a new economic threat to the United States. The first ad is clearly framed as a warning with its futuristic setting and plays on the tropes of the Yellow Peril threat, with the close-up of a smug professor and the leering laughter from the students. On the other hand, the second, arguably more racist ad, defines a Chinese Other with its use of traditional music and the actress speaking broken English. Moreover, both ads rely on different forms of visual spectacle to make their respective cases: from the futuristic lecture hall with its monumental imagery, to the pastoral images of rice paddies. More importantly, while both ads recognize the importance of an economic transpacific connection, both create a fiction of “China” that has very little to do with the reality of China.

Granted, one minute political ads are not known for nuance, but they serve to illustrate the use of the spectacular in Asiatic racialization. The unspoken question that arises from these ads is one that asks what kinds of Asian and Asian American identities are possible within these constructions? This project proposes to study the construction of different kinds of Asian American identities within these larger frameworks of the transnational and the spectacle-laden societies that rim this region. Another way of thinking about the nature of spectacle is in contrast with the quotidian: that is, the everyday lived and material reality of Asian American subjects. This distance between the two can be articulated along several different valences. One way is to consider how
the spectacular outdistances the quotidian, parsing out things that are too mundane to be shown and focusing only on the most visually arresting and interesting. In other words, when showing a Chinatown street, only the glittering neon sign is highlighted, and the peeling paint of the tenement building it is hung on is passed over. Another way of thinking about the distance between these two poles is to consider not just the disjunctures of these two poles, but the bridging of them: in other words, how does the spectacular inform the quotidian? Especially when we acknowledge the worldwide appeal of movies and the way in which movies both reflect and inform culture, it becomes clear that there is a possibility of a complex relationship between movies and the people in a culture who watch those movies. The question that guides this study, then, is finding the different ways in which the relationship between filmic spectacle and quotidian experiences of the Pacific Rim residents who engage in that spectacle is expressed. Another way of asking this question is to consider the lives of the people who reside in that Chinatown tenement: how do they see themselves and what kinds of identities are available to them? Chinatown thus serves as but one example of how the experiences of the individual intersect with these larger questions of race, nation, and their construction in the spectacular. In fact, this relationship between spectacle and the individual can also be seen, via Debord, as the relationship between the individual and the hegemonic power that wields that spectacle. Thus, one of the fundamental
relationships explored in this study is this question between the individual and the larger economic and cultural forces that are arrayed against her.

The broader question of identity and the processes by which transpacific identities are formed is what ultimately drives this study. Thus, this project begins with an exploration of the different technologies of identity formation, drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, Seyla Behnabib, and Nestor Garcia Canclini. All three argue for the importance of individual agency in identity formation, and moreover, Hall and Canclini set their work within the context of global visual culture. It is the empowerment of the individual within these complex transnational flows of people, capital, militarism, culture, and images that I argue is the driving force of the novels of Jessica Hagedorn, which serve as a kind of Ur-text for this study. What Hagedorn does is to create a transformational paradigm for the construction of ethnic identity within the global affective circuit of American movies. Each chapter then examines different geographical nodes within this context and the different ways in which the spectacular and the everyday interact to create transpacific identities that are at times limited and at other times expansive.

Chapter One, entitled “‘Wonderful People in the Dark’: Rewriting the Colonial Legacy in the Novels of Jessica Hagedorn,” looks at the novels of Jessica Hagedorn and the role of movies in the construction of Filipino and Filipino American identities. Beginning with Dogeaters, a canonical Asian American text, Hagedorn traces the cross-
currents of Filipino and American culture in its individual subjects, ranging from Imelda Marcos to street hustlers. As Rachel Lee notes in *The Americas of Asian American Literature*, the watching of American movies plays an important part in the subjectivities of several of the characters: most notably with Rio and Joey Sands. Hagedorn continues to explore the different valences of this relationship in her later two novels as well, *The Gangster of Love* and *Dream Jungle*. In these two later novels Hagedorn shifts the focus of this relationship between the postcolonial Filipino and Filipino American subject and American cinema to deal more specifically with the way in which movie-making, and not just movie-spectating, can serve in the construction of different transnational identities. In each case, then, Hollywood film becomes the avenue in which individual characters are able to carve out a space of agency that is otherwise foreclosed to them by national and transnational circumstances.

There are two key questions that Hagedorn addresses in these works: What exactly are the impacts of Hollywood movies on postcolonial citizens and the construction of these transnational identities? In what ways do citizens and subjects rework the hegemonic cultural influence of Hollywood movies into generative and counterhegemonic forces? Hagedorn traces the different ways in which the influence of Hollywood movies circulates through the various characters, demonstrating the different valences of influence, assimilation and resistance in the postcolonial settings of these novels. Key to this conception of Hagedorn's works then is this sort of transpacific cultural exchange between Hollywood and Manila, not so much as the exchange between
center and margin, but between two distinct loci on a transpacific axis. Central to this chapter, then, is the question of the influence of different national cultures on the construction of individual subjectivity and agency.

More importantly, the reading of Hagedorn presents what could be called the core paradigm that will guide many of my later readings in this dissertation: not only articulating the distance between the spectacular and the everyday, but the transformation of the spectacular into everyday use in the construction of transpacific identities. Furthermore, Hagedorn offers a different paradigm beyond simple resistance and points to a more complex relationship between the individual and their everyday reality, and the spectacular forces that often control how that reality is seen. In other words, Hagedorn illustrates the different ways in which film can serve as a powerful force for the individual subject in the creation of her own transnational identity. Hagedorn's novels are filled with these moments wherein characters take the spectacular representations offered in film and then internalize and manipulate these representations in order to survive and thrive within their own day to day reality. Moreover, with two of the novels set in the Philippines, Hagedorn effectively illustrates the transnational circuit traced by Hollywood film, from Hollywood to Manila, drawing the key role of film in the construction of different transpacific identities. But the vital point of Hagedorn's novels is a kind of bridging between the spectacular to the lived, linking the flickering images of the movie screen to the lived material reality of those who watch those movies and creating new possibilities for identities within the framework of the Pacific Rim. Furthermore, by
focusing on the Philippines, and in *The Gangster of Love*, focusing specifically on Filipino American identities, Hagedorn broadens the outline of the Asian Pacific, pointing to the different ways in which things are connected, emphasizing the idea of seeing these different locales as different points in “an economic system of circulating capital and labor across the Pacific” (Okihiro qtd. in Lee 9). Moreover, the colonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines is one where hegemonic power is on full display. Arguably, the creation of ethnic ghettos and the often racist constructions in the United States racial imaginary are also different articulations of the same power, but that power is often less visible or obvious than in colonialism. Thus, by beginning with Hagedorn who places this colonial relationship at the forefront, I am emphasizing the importance of hegemonic power in all its forms and articulations.

Thus, Chapters Two and Three shift back to the nation-space of the United States and take Chinatown as their common topic. Long seen as tourist attractions and exotic fodder for countless movies and television shows, the fact that these are actual places that have served as, and, in fact are still serving as, homes to millions of Chinese immigrants is often overlooked. These two chapters then attempt to grapple with Chinatown on both these valences: as *both* an idea promulgated in visual culture, and as an actual lived reality. Moreover, different historical Chinatowns at different periods in their histories were themselves designed architecturally to draw in tourists with promises of the exotic based primarily on visual spectacle. Because of this, Chinatown in all its various forms becomes a primary location to investigate another vital theoretical strand in this study:
the relationship between visual spectacle and the everyday lived reality of the Asian American subjects who live there. Key to the formulations of these chapters is the relationship between a social geography and the way people work and live within those public and private spaces. Building upon theories of space and place, these chapters also explore the way in which capitalism organizes city spaces for its own reproduction; as Edward Soja argues, “under advanced capitalism the organization of space becomes predominantly related to the reproduction of the dominant social relations” (91).

Moreover, because of the exotic visual appeal of Chinatown, living in Chinatown is akin to living with spectacle in a uniquely Debordian manner, where spectacle has expanded to dominate social life in the region. Furthermore, these chapters demonstrate the way in which different formulations of “nation,” in terms of both “Asia” and “China” as opposed to “America” both inform and work to create these different Chinese-American identities. These two chapters work together, with the first describing the technologies of space and place which create these neoliberal identities vital to capitalism's survival, while the second traces the ways in which oppositional geographies and identities are created.

As I argue in Chapter 2, “Chinatown and the Construction of a Neoliberal Identity,” works of film and literature that create a Chinatown that focuses only on the spectacular allow for only a very narrow range of possible Chinese-American identities. In this case, by focusing on the most spectacular, exotic and, indeed, “Oriental” of the features of Chinatown, the only identities that become available are those found in neoliberal multiculturalism, a case illustrated by the two films and one autobiography that
form the basis of analysis in this chapter. Michael Cimino's Chinatown based crime thriller *Year of the Dragon* (1985) and the film adaptation of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *Flower Drum Song* (1961) both focus on the most spectacular aspects of two different Chinatowns: from Chinese New Year's parades replete with confetti, fireworks and dancing dragons; to neon signs featuring Chinese characters to pagoda style buildings, the *mise en scene* of both films offer no shortage of these visual tropes of ethnic difference. By beginning my analysis with these two movies, I focus on the importance of space and the way certain spaces allow for the creation of certain identities. Indeed, within these filmic landscapes, the only two identities that seem available are either a type of “Yellow Peril” foreign threat or as the classic “model minority” of middle-class success: fully assimilated and living the American Dream.

In many ways, this latter identity is the same one seen in Jade Snow Wong’s autobiography, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. The story of a first generation Chinese immigrant growing up in Chinatown, Wong in many ways literally became a spokesperson for the type of assimilationist rhetoric of neoliberal multiculturalism, having been sent on an international State Department to promote her autobiography. Key to the argument in this chapter is that the Chinatown Jade Snow constructs and inhabits is very similar to the spectacle-laden Chinatowns of the two movies, thereby producing a very similar Chinese-American identity, which oftentimes has more in common with the “Apple Pie” described in *Chan Is Missing*. In this way, this chapter is built around the analysis of the images and ideas surrounding a “tourist's Chinatown” that
only reflects a small part of the reality of the everyday material and historical Chinatown.

The four works I discuss in Chapter Three, “Oppositional Geographies: Pushing Against the Paradigm of the Neoliberal Citizen in Literary Chinatowns,” offers a much broader range of Chinese-American identities built not only along the visual and spectacular, but also along the material and lived realities of Chinatown. In their own ways and through their own means, Wayne Wang's independent feature *Chan Is Missing*; Faye Myenne Ng's novel of family dynamics, *Bone*; Louis Chu's early novel about the bachelor society of New York's Chinatown, *Eat a Bowl of Tea*; and Frank Chin's seminal play *The Year of the Dragon*, offer alternatives to the Chinese-American identity found in multicultural neoliberalism along with different conceptions of Chinatown that actually push against the more stereotypical images of Chinatown offered in the previous chapter. Of key importance in each of these works is the role of “micro-spaces,” as opposed to the emphasis on the larger “macro-spaces” that often takes center stage in the more spectacular versions of Chinatown. In other words, the works covered in this chapter explore the intimate, personal spaces of Chinatown and its inhabitants, creating multiple and nuanced identities that resist the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism found in the broader scale of the cities. The works in this chapter then, not only interrogate and question these standard Chinese-American identities, but actively work to destabilize these neoliberal constructs.

Like the previous chapter, this chapter also begins with a discussion of a cinematic landscape: the San Francisco Chinatown of *Chan Is Missing*. As the two
mismatched protagonists Jo and Steve search throughout Chinatown for the missing Chan, this is not a Chinatown of dragon dances and neon spectacle, like those in the previous chapter, but one of crowded city streets, cramped offices and tiny apartments. And in this milieu of the everyday, multiple possibilities arise for who Chan is. “Chan” then serves as a kind of metonym for the Chinese-American community, wherein identity is built not on the spectacular, but on the quotidian, and identity becomes flexible and contingent in order to deal with the difficult economic conditions that are often elided in the spectacular movie Chinatowns. This is the common approach to the three other works in this chapter, creating a type of personal geography to resist and oppose the hegemony of geography. Bone and Eat a Bowl of Tea, the two novels in this chapter, explore the same personal spaces as Chan Is Missing, but also add the dimension of history to those spaces as well: a personal history as well as a community and communal history that informs the building of different transpacific identities in both the present and future.

Though Frank Chin describes his play Year of the Dragon as about the state of Chinese America in 1976, the future is what is truly at stake: in this case, whether the future of Freddie Eng and his family is inside or outside of San Francisco's Chinatown: the core questions driving the Engs is what will happen once the patriarch of the Eng family dies and where Freddie's younger brother will end up. In many ways, Chin's play is the logical conclusion to the main thematic elements explored in these two chapters. Nearly all of the play's action takes place in the smallest of spaces: the Eng family
apartment. In this cramped space dominated by a kitchen with its adjoining bathroom, Chin explores a multitude of questions surrounding not only Chinese and Asian American identity in 1976, but also those questions that have driven these two chapters in regards to the construction of Chinese American identities; geography, neoliberal capitalism, the role of spectacle, the encounter between the everyday and the spectacular, and the place of history all become entangled in the question of where Chinese America, both as individuals and as a group, is headed.

These questions of past and future, the spectacular and mundane is taken up in a different way in the final chapter: “The Transformation of Bruce Lee's Body: Asian and Asian American Masculinities” This chapter begins in the past: with the idea of Bruce Lee as a transpacific figure. As an action star in Hong Kong kung-fu pictures, Bruce Lee's popularity very quickly transcended political borders to become an international superstar: an icon to both African-American audiences in the inner city as well as suburban Asian American youths. In many ways, this legacy of Bruce Lee has been well-documented in various critical studies, which often boils down the question of Lee's popularity to two questions: why was Bruce Lee so popular? And what does it mean for Bruce Lee to be so popular? It is the second question that this chapter tackles by first considering the image of Lee from not only his final film, but his first American film: Enter the Dragon, and then looking at three works that pick up on the many different legacies of Bruce Lee: the first American films of Hong Kong action star Jet Li and Paper Bullets, the autobiography of Asian American visual artist, Kip Fulbeck.
In many ways, to consider the role of Bruce Lee in the cultural imaginary is to consider as well the different constructions of Asian American masculinity in the racial and cultural imaginary of the United States. In fact, it is commonly accepted that Lee’s first appearance changed very fundamentally the way in which Asians appeared on the movie screen: no longer the emasculated, feminized man-servant or intellectual detective, but as a bona-fide action star. In many ways, this is the guiding notion of the chapter: the image of the emasculated and feminized Asian American male that holds such traction in the American imaginary. In that vein, I put forth the argument that the construction of Asian American masculinity after the 1970s must rightly be seen as a transpacific construction as well. In fact, it is Lee's status as a both a new image for Asian and Asian American masculinity and as a transpacific figure that is emphasized in Enter the Dragon, and again, the transnational circuit of film is again highlighted. More importantly, by tracing a lineage of Bruce Lee through different decades and different media allows me to explore the core paradigm of this dissertation: articulating the relationship between the spectacular and the lived.

This chapter thus takes on filmic spectacle in perhaps its most extreme form by considering one of the most spectacular of genres: the action movie. Because of its emphasis on gratuitous, often non-narrative sequences (car chases, extended fight scenes), the action movie relies on an outward display of physical action to galvanize audience reaction, making a consideration of the spectacular vital. Moreover, because of the fraught relationship between film and visual culture and Asian racialization, it
becomes important to ask what happens to the Asian male body when it becomes the central focus in a genre that is so dependent upon the visual. In other words, how does the spectacular nature of the action film change the ways in which the Asian male body is seen? By comparing the construction of Bruce Lee's image in *Enter the Dragon* to the construction of Jet Li's image in his two movies, this chapter thus explores the different ways in which the visual affects the construction of both Asian and Asian American masculinity within this transpacific circuit of visual media.

The question of the relationship between the spectacular and the quotidian in the formation of transpacific identities reaches its culmination in the final reading of this chapter. Kip Fulbeck's “fictional autobiography” *Paper Bullets*, picks up not only on the legacy of Bruce Lee, but also on the pop cultural milieu of which the films of Jet Li are a part of, and attempts to weave together a new construction of Asian American masculinity for the Asian American subject that must live with the daily reality of the image of the emasculated Asian male. In many ways, Fulbeck illustrates one of the key arguments of this dissertation: that there is a way in which Asian American subjects can use the materials provided by film and popular culture and use it to negotiate the daily realities of living as a minority subject. For Fulbeck, it is specifically the materials of popular culture: film, music and even *Playboy* magazine become the raw material for creating and understanding himself and his identity. In fact, these references suffuse the work, informing and blending into his own life, not in a dominating, colonizing discourse, but as the raw materials for creating a counter-narrative and a distinct
individual identity. Thus, I intend to conclude the chapter by tracing a kind of lineage of Bruce Lee: from transpacific figure with the potential to redefine Asian American masculinity, to Jet Li, the millenial successor to Lee in an increasingly globalized world that embraces Hong Kong cinema, to Kip Fulbeck, who takes these materials to shape himself an identity that allows him to live his daily, material existence. If *Dogeaters* is the Ur-text of my dissertation, Fulbeck’s work represents the most obvious crystallization of that argument.

As I suggested earlier, this study continues the intervention into Asian American studies through transnationalism begun by Chuh. As Chuh and Lowe both effectively note, Asian American subjects in the United States have historically been constructed transnationally, resulting in what Lowe argues is the ultimate unassimability of the Asian American subject into the American imaginary. Despite the presence of Asian American communities in the United States for several generations now, the transpacific still remains an important factor in the consideration of Asian American identities. The idea of a world shrinking in time and distance isn't just some sort of critical trope or tagline in a telecommunications ad, but rather it is a stark reality that we, as cultural critics, must continue to find a way to grapple with the consequences of this increased globalization. Not only does the continued immigration from across the Pacific bring new Asian populations from India and southeast Asia to the United States, but global film, media, and computer networks continue to spread Asian culture and pop culture beyond their
national borders. All of a sudden it seems, “Bollywood” appears as a category of dance on *Dancing With the Stars*, and Korean rapper PSY and his “Gangnam Style” has become a global hit thanks to YouTube and iTunes. However, it should be noted that there is nothing sudden about these two phenomena: they are just the latest entries in an increased flow of cultural production from across the Pacific, seen most notably in the spikes in popularity of Hong Kong action movies in the 1990s and the popularity of Japanese animation (anime) and horror films from Japan and Korea.

Seemingly less explored, at least in the popular media, are the implications of this globalized cultural mix. In other words, outside of those generic pronouncements about how the world is shrinking and all-things Asian are becoming more acceptable in the United States, what does the huge popularity of “Gangnam Style” say about the larger relationship between the United States and Asia? The suggestion here is that with an increased presence of “Asia” within the United States, Asians and Asian Americans will somehow be less marginalized and more accepted into United States culture. However, for every “Gangnam Style” success, there is at least one Asian-baiting political ad, or another politician painting China as America's new economic threat. If anything, the rise of transpacific phenomena in the United States seems to have exacerbated the problems of Asian racialization and the exoticization of the East by actually making it easier: Japan may no longer be an economic threat, but is now the land of schoolgirl fetishes and the generally bizarre. Moreover, these ideas, images, and questions of Asia being played across the media on the level of the nation has profound effects on the level of the
individual Asian subject living inside the United States, whether she is newly arrived or born here. In other words, within this new economically intertwined, internet-connected world of the Pacific Rim, what are the possibilities for radical new conceptions of Asian American identities? The question is less about how individuals simply resist these constructions of nation, but more about how she is able to do something more powerful: to incorporate and transform these forces of nation and race, to create new identities. In this way, this study begins to explore the complex relationship between the individual subject and these forces of nation as articulated in global visual media. If current trends hold true, then the transpacific world will only continue to become more intertwined, politically, economically, and culturally, making this kind of study of the dynamics of these new transpacific identities even more important for understanding not only how things were before, but where things are headed in the future.
Works Cited


Chapter 1: “Wonderful People in the Dark:”

Rewriting the Colonial Legacy in the Novels of Jessica Hagedorn

In the novels of Jessica Hagedorn, a young girl growing up in Manila finds a way to deal with her troubled family life and lineage through her imaginings of the films of Douglas Sirk (Lee 75); two aging Filipino actors - one an aging starlet, the other an extra from *West Side Story* and *Blue Hawaii* - live out their waning years as neighbors in Los Angeles, reminiscing about their cinematic pasts; and an aspiring Filipino filmmaker moves from awe to disillusionment to finding his own identity as a filmmaker while watching a bloated, big budget Hollywood production toil through filming in the steaming jungles of Mindinao. These characters and the situations that populate Hagedorn’s novels, *Dogeaters*, *The Gangster of Love*, and *Dream Jungle*, serve as a kind of template illustrating the main theoretical strands of this dissertation. Not only do Hagedorn's novels describe the transpacific circulation of Hollywood movies and American popular culture, they also draw out the distance between the spectacular and the lived by articulating the different ways in which those movies become part of the creation of different forms of transpacific identities.

While *Dogeaters* grapples with the way the individual as spectator and audience incorporates American hegemonic practices, the latter two novels deal specifically with how that subject utilizes movie-making in the construction of different identities. In Hagedorn's novels, then, the movies serve several functions: as a reservoir of imaginative material for the creation of new transpacific identities, as well as a kind of master
metaphor serving to illustrate the different ways in which the minority subject deals with the everyday difficulties spawned from the colonial relationship. In other words, Hagedorn explores the various ways in which the very small – the individual minority subject – navigates and negotiates with the very large - the global hegemony of both Hollywood movies and the colonial power it represents – to create new, often resistant identities. All in all, Hollywood, America and the movies suffuse Hagedorn's novels, creating a kind of “cinematext” (San Juan qtd. in Lee 78).

Dogeaters: Spectators and Actors

In The Claims of Culture, Seyla Benhabib offers a model of culture that does not see culture as a “clearly delineated whole” (4), but rather as something that is created by “contested and contestable narrative accounts” (5). In offering this “narrative view of actions and culture” (emphasis in original 5), Benhabib comes to two important and related conclusions. First, cultures are not, as commonly believed, to be “clearly delineated identifiable entities” (8) which are characterized by their “boundedness and distinctness” (4), but rather, cultures should be seen as ever-changing and fluid, marked not by clear demarcations, but created, in part, by “complex dialogues and interactions with other cultures,” thus creating “boundaries of cultures [that] are fluid, porous, and contested” (184). Second, and more importantly, cultures themselves are not the “unified, harmonious, seamless wholes” (102) that are often portrayed in political arenas, but are themselves “internally riven and contested” (16) composed of “competing as well
as cohering accounts” (103) of traditions and practices and values. As Benhabib argues, “from within, a culture need not appear as a whole; rather, it forms a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it” (5). For Benhabib then, this radical reassessment of culture has far-ranging implications for justice and equality in an increasingly multicultural world. But more importantly, what Benhabib describes also has profound implications for the individual who must carve out a “cultural identity” for herself.

Benhabib’s argument for cultural formations echoes Stuart Hall’s description of cultural identity as well, where cultural identity is “a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being’” and not something “which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture” (706). More importantly, these cultural identities are “far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past,” but rather, are “subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power” (706) and “undergo constant transformation” (706). In other words, in the same way that Benhabib offers a conception of culture that is marked by flexibility and fluidity, Hall suggests a similar view of the idea of a cultural identity: subject to change over time and not as monolithic, ahistorical structure borne from an essentialized past.

At the same time, the authors of Global Hollywood 2, in referring to the size and scale of the American movie industry, describe it as “hegemonic” and as “an invitation to replication and domination” (1). Miller and his co-authors go on to draw the parameters of the global reach of the Hollywood film market using a wide variety of statistical data, from film grosses to levels of production, concluding, that “Los Angeles – New York
culture and commerce dominate screen entertainment around the globe, either directly or as an implied other” (9). It is very easy, and many critics and theorists do, to make American movies into the bogeyman of cultural imperialism, powerful in its ability in “shaping and reshaping cultural values, identities and perceptions” (Crane 3) all over the world. Similarly, bell hooks describes “the terrain of Hollywood cinema as a space of knowledge production that has enormous power” (521). In other words, Hollywood, in the form of the entertainment and cultural values it exports, operates as a massive cultural force on a global scale. Thus, if cultures are continuously formed by a wide variety of cultural forces, both internal and external to that culture, then Hollywood movies have a way of shaping cultures far beyond the reach of American shores.

American movies, then, represent a narrative that nearly every culture in the world must somehow consider. With the worldwide reach of American movies, these movies become part of the “webs of interlocution or narrative, from familial and gender narratives to linguistic ones and to the macronarratives of collective identity” in which individual subjects find themselves born or “thrown” into (Benhabib 15). Rather then being merely the product of conflicting forces, Benhabib argues that the individual still retains a powerful agency, which “consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives our individual life stories, which make sense for us as unique selves” (15). In this way, the individual subject is seen less as a “unified and harmonious being with a unique cultural center,” and is more accurately as “the unique and fragile achievement of
selves in weaving together conflicting narratives and allegiances into a unique life
history” (16), part of which includes cultural identity. In fact, Hall argues that,

“Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as
of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much has to the past. It is not
something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and
culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But,
like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.
Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject
to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power. Far from being
grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found,
and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity,
identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned
by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Hall 706)

Manthia Diawara is much more direct in his argument, noting that, “every narration
places the spectator in a position of agency; and race, class and sexual relations influence
the way in which this subjecthood is filled by the spectator” (Diawara qtd. in hooks 512).
In this way, both acknowledge and assert the agency of the individual subject in the
formation of one's cultural identity.

From the very beginning of the novel, *Dogeaters* addresses these questions
regarding Hollywood and its global cultural impact in relation to the colonial subject. Set
in the Philippines and covering nearly two decades and involving the stories and points of
view of nearly a dozen characters, *Dogeaters* traces the lives of these characters during the period of martial law under Ferdinand Marcos. In fact, there is such a complexity to the overall narrative and interlocking characters, critic Rachel Lee felt the need to include an appendix in her book mapping out the main subjects of the individual chapters in the book. Despite this complexity, the novel begins almost quite directly and simply, in a crowded Manila movie theatre in “1956. The air-conditioned darkness of the Avenue Theater smells of flowery pomade, sugary chocolates, cigarette smoke, and sweat. *All That Heaven Allows* is playing in Cinemascope and Technicolor” (3). By entering the world of the novel literally through a movie theatre, Hagedorn establishes the overall thematic importance and primacy of the movies, and specifically Hollywood movies. In other words, *Dogeaters* opens in a world where “reality [is] always already filtered through the spectacular” (Twelbeck 426). One the other hand, there is a contrast drawn between the world of the movies, characterized by a Technicolor sky of “garish baby-blue” with clouds of “ethereal wads of fluffy white cotton” (3), and the mundane world of the movie theatre, permeated by the smells of “flowery pomade, sugary chocolates, cigarette smoke, and sweat” and the sounds of “furtive lovers stealing noisy kisses in the pitch-black” (3) that Rio, the 15 year-old girl who is the ostensible main character of this sprawling novel, tries to ignore. In this way, the novel actually by marking the distance between the spectacular world of the movies, where everything is seemingly perfect and complete unto itself, and the lived reality of its spectators, which is often messy and out of control. Furthermore, implied in this opening, and then developed throughout the
novel, are the specific ways in which that relationship between the two is articulated. In other words, are movies merely another colonizing force or could it be viewed as something more nuanced and complex? How, then, does the novel avoid what Rachel Lee calls “the reductiveness of oppositional politics that couch any signs of Americanness as evidence of the ethnic, minority or Third World's co-optation (that measures resistance in terms of “pure” native identity, or by the purity of one's native sources)” (76)? That is, can the influence of Hollywood movies on the colonized subject be seen as anything other than a colonizing influence? Lee, in her analysis, argues that for Filipino culture, “America is both the imperial power that colludes with native leadership and the cultural wash that forms Filipino/Filipina subjectivity and desire.” More importantly, “it is this contradiction – that America can comprise both an oppressive enemy as well as a formative component of Filipino identity and desire (most emphatically through the influence of Hollywood film)” (Lee 77).

The connection between spectacular Hollywood imagery and the everyday lives of the Filipino subjects who watch those movies becomes quickly apparent in the novel, with the movies playing often unexpected and significant roles in the construction of the identities of even the seemingly most minor of characters - from Rio, who understands her mother's glamour in terms of Rita Hayworth (79), to Trinidad Gamboa, who is drawn to the handsome Romeo Rosales in part because of the latter's hair, which is not only “perfumed and glossy with pomade” but also “carefully combed and arranged so that his natural curls tumbled carelessly down his forehead. Like Sal Mineo in Rebel Without a
In each case, the question of identity is answered through Hollywood movie images, illustrating at its most basic the connection between identity and the movies. Two minor but telling examples demonstrate not only the way in which the movies effect the construction of identity, but also reveal the specific mechanisms involved in that construction.

Near the end of the novel, Uncle, the Fagin-like character who raised Joey and taught him how to survive on the streets, learns that Joey inadvertently witnessed the assassination of Senator Avila. Bent on his own personal gain, Uncle betrays Joey to the authorities, and as he makes contact with the local policeman, Uncle reacts to the situation in perhaps an unexpected fashion:

The old man savored the English words coming out of his mouth.

'Confidential' and 'a matter of life and death,' just like the clipped dialogue he remembered from old American gangster movies. Paul Muni or Paul Henreid, George Raft or James Cagney – it didn't matter if he mixed them up. The phrases still rang in his ears, after all this time. It suddenly occurred to him that he hadn't been to a movie in over thirty years (200).

Uncle's relish in playing out this snatch of a barely remembered moment from the movies illustrates the way in which American movies allow him to construct an identity as a kind of “tough guy” by aping the moments constructed on the screen. Moreover, in pointing to the length of time that has passed since Uncle had last been to the movies, the novel
suggests the almost invisible, nearly insidious effect of the movies on the individuals within a culture.

Moreover, this type of simple identification is not the only way in which characters incorporate the movies into their identities. Baby Alarcon in the chapter “The Weeping Bride” finds another way to incorporate the movies: as a way of dealing with her mysterious and inconsolable crying after the assassination of Senator Avila. In order to simply survive this situation, Baby “invents a cleansing ritual for herself” that “she makes...up as she goes along” (158). What is striking about this moment is the way in which Baby's “cleansing ritual” actually takes the form of a “movie starring herself, this movie that goes on and on,” and it is “this movie that is the only sure way she knows to put herself to sleep” (158). The movies become the saving grace for Baby, giving her a temporary respite from her interminable tears. In this case, the movies allow Baby to exercise a kind of agency by creating a structure wherein she becomes the “star” of her own movie, that is, the most important element within the movie. This example points to perhaps the most important element for Hagedorn in terms of this relationship between the movie spectator and filmic spectacle: the exercise of Baby's agency in determining her identity within competing cultural forces.

It remains important to note that Hagedorn never loses sight of the fact that Hollywood movies represent a colonizing and hegemonic force. She clearly demonstrates an understanding of and acknowledges the connection between Hollywood movies and colonial and imperialistic motives, referring in one instance how “for Joey,
God was definitely a white man, Charlton Heston in robes, with flowing white hair and matching beard” (190). Joey, a young hustler raised the streets Manila, who could be considered the other “main” character of the novel, prefaced his recollection of his two encounters with the Catholic Church in Manila. By itself, the line references the iconic image of Charlton Heston portraying Moses from *The Ten Commandments*, and in this way connects the colonizing impulses of both the Catholic Church and Hollywood movies. Moreover, there is a kind of forcible indoctrination that is highlighted when Joey goes on to describe the time as a child when a “foreigner nun” literally pulled Joey off the street and “dragged [him] into the parish hall of a church in Malate” (190). The kind of indoctrination found within the Church, and in another form found in the movies, are thus intertwined in Joey's imagining. It is also through Joey that Hagedorn acknowledges another colonial presence in the Philippines: that of the United States militarism as symbolized by the “ghostly carrier floating in the middle of the dark sea” (74) that Joey points out. In many ways, this powerful image of the spectral ship in the distance not only mirrors the spectral presence of the United States military in the Philippines, but also resonates with the nature of the movies themselves as a series of flickering, ghostly images on the screen. In this way, Hagedorn recognizes that imperialism in its myriad forms is far from being a benign force. As the character of Senator Avila, whose assassination serves as one of the narrative lynchpins in the novel, notes, “[We are] a complex nation of cynics, descendants of warring tribes which were baptized and colonized to death by Spaniards and Americans…[We are] a nation betrayed and then
united only by our hunger for glamour and our Hollywood dreams” (101). Hagedorn seems on some level to recognize that America and its imperialistic practices then, are not only built upon the idea of what Lee calls “violent conquest” (Lee 77), but would seem to offer a “suspect…ground for collective identity” (Lee 74).

This question of co-optation by the colonizing force of Hollywood entertainment is actually predicated on the idea of the receiving audience as merely passive vessels ready to be filled “in terms of the dominant ideologies as the producers of the text intended” (Crane 10). However, reception theory in film offers another way thinking about the film audience/spectator/consumer: “as capable of interpreting media texts in different ways” (Crane 10). In this way, the individual spectator actively interprets the film within “the context [and] social characteristics of the receiver (class, gender, race, and age)” (Crane 10). In fact, the examples of both Uncle and Baby Alarcon represent the challenge to “the translation of media images and…notions of direct unmediated communications” (Lee 86), demonstrating the importance of agency. By seizing on the gangster identity, Uncle is able to not only navigate his encounter with the police officer, but to actually derive a kind of pleasure from it. For Baby, movies allow her a semblance of control in her life which has spun so out of control. In both cases, the characters are not simply co-opted by the images and values of Hollywood but turn that equation around, co-opting Hollywood for their personal needs. If anything then, Hagedorn's work demonstrates what Lee calls “the capacities of ’native' agents to redeploy Western artifacts subversively” (14). Stuart Hall addresses this dynamic between the colonizing
power and the colonial subject in this way, noting that, “the error is not to conceptualize this 'presence' in terms of power, but to locate that power as wholly external to us – an extrinsic force, whose influence can be thrown off like a serpent sheds its skin” (711-2). In other words, Hall calls for a recognition of the colonial presence and influence as not merely on the level of external power relations (in terms of oppressive legal policies, for example), but also in terms of a kind of psychic colonization (in terms of things like ethics and morality) of the subject. More importantly, Hall implicitly asserts the agency of the colonized subject to both recognize this kind of psychic colonization and to even transform it.

In many ways, the arc of Rio's character throughout the novel illustrates this dynamic construction of a transpacific identity. Rio's obsessions with movies not only begin the novel, but they also close it by directly referencing Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows*, the movie showing in the darkened theatre that opens the novel. On a trip to the mountain resort town of Baguio, Rio and Pucha not only, “affect the casual teenage glamour of Gloria Talbott” (236) from the film, but filtered through the frame of the movie, the two “find everything unbearably romantic” (236), in a way reminiscent of the wintry setting of the movie: “we shiver in the alien cold weather; we inhale the sharp scent of evergreen that permeates the thin air” (236). In this way, the novel moves from the “Cinemascope” and “Technicolor” of the movie to the material reality of the Philippines – a material reality emphasized through the descriptions of the specific bodily sensations: from the “alien cold weather” and the “sharp scent of the evergreen.” By
bookending the novel in this manner, Hagedorn demonstrates two important, almost contradictory points regarding the relationship between the spectacular and the experiential. First, the emphasis on bodily sensation marks the distance between the world of the movies and the everyday world of the novel. At the same time, the movies also allow for a powerful reframing of material reality.

This latter function of the relationship between the movies and individual becomes apparent in the way Rio uses the movies to make sense of different fundamental questions about her own lineage and identity. Near the beginning of the novel, as Rio's grandfather Whitman lies dying, the movies becomes Rio's vehicle for not only navigating the trauma of witnessing his death, but also the vehicle for understanding the relationship between her Lola and her grandfather. As her grandfather's dying gasps rise to an almost unbearable pitch, “he groans Chicago, Chicago, Chicago, with such longing,” Rio tries to escape into the movies: “I shut my eyes and the movie projector goes off in my head. Concrete, glass, and in the background, cardboard cut-out Skyscrapers. June Allyson descends from a winding staircase, wearing a ballgown made of gold-flecked, plastic shower curtains” (16). The more important element in this scene is the image that Rio imagines of her “Lola Narcisa bending over my grandfather's bed like Jane, an angel of mercy whispering so softly in his ear that none of can make out what she is saying” (16), reflecting a scene from the Rock Hudson and Jane Wyman movie that Rio is watching. By casting her grandparents in these roles, and especially through seeing her Lola as Whitman's “angel,” Rio is able to gain a greater
understanding of their relationship and of her Lola's actions protecting her grandfather during his death. As mentioned earlier, Rio draws an understanding of her mother as well by comparing her with Rita Hayworth. The movies also affect Rio's own sense of self more directly, by allowing her an avenue to explore own sexual identity. On the trip to Baguio that ends the novel, Rio and Pucha, “practice tongue-kissing in front of the rustic fireplace” (236), where Pucha plays the part of “Ava Gardner or Sandra Dee” while Rio is always “Rock Hudson” (236). At the same time, Rio begins menstruating, and “to celebrate, [she] cut[s] off all [her] hair” (236). This prompts her cousin to wail, “You look like a boy! You look terrible – like Joan of Arc!” (236). While these signs may not necessarily point to Rio as lesbian, and can be pointed to as a kind of teenage experimentation – as Lee notes, “neither Rio's homo- or heterosexuality is clearly delineated' (101) – the one thing that is clear is the way in which the movies allow the leeway for Rio to act in a manner that allows her to not only perhaps to discover her sexual identity, but to actually challenge “her proper (hetero)sexual place in the sex/gender system” (Lee 100) of Filipino culture. Again, Hagedorn demonstrates not just the general importance of the movies, but also the way in which individual subjects “decode...and redeploy...the...iconography to other ends” (Lee 86), including building their own, resistant identities.

For Hagedorn, then, merely watching movies can be transformed into an almost radical act of agency, depending on the individual subject. Hagedorn emphasizes this sense of agency at the end of the novel by including the idea of movie-making at the end
of the novel. Rio's pronouncement to Tonyboy at the end of the novel that she's moving to Hollywood “to make movies...Not act in them!” (241) marks an important differentiation between “acting and making – participating in a spectacle whose terms are already set by someone else...or possibly changing the terms of spectatorship” (Lee 100). By invoking the idea of movie-making, Hagedorn introduces a powerful metaphor for the ability of individuals, especially women, to “produce themselves” (Lee 100) in the world. In fact, Hagedorn explores and develops these dual ideas in her next two novels. As with Dogeaters, where movies serve as an important wellspring of raw material in the construction of identity, both Gangster of Love and Dream Jungle delve into ways in which movie-making itself operates as a metaphor for the agency involved the construction of transpacific identities. Thus, the two later Hagedorn novels can be said to be part of a continuum with Dogeaters, where she moves from the idea of movie watching, to the investigation of the ways in which individuals develop their identities through the trope of creation, of becoming part of the production of the spectacle, rather than just consuming it.

The Gangster of Love: Star Power

In many ways, Hagedorn's use of movie-making as a metaphor for identity construction calls to mind in important ways Nestor Garcia Canclini’s paradigm of transcultural identity formation in late modernity as presented in Consumers and Cultures, his study of Latin American cultural formations. While Canclini's focus is on
developing forms of citizenship in the late 20th century, his work offers important insights into the way in which local cultures interact with the cultural imperialism of the United States. Though the actual lived conditions, economic development and relationship with coloniality, not to mention the prehistory of the area before the colonial moment, differ radically from one area of Latin America to another - let alone to the other side of the world - there are nonetheless powerful historical resonances between Latin American and the Philippines in relation to colonialism. For example, as a colonial nation, Rafael describes the Philippines and its citizens as “permeated with foreign origins, their historical realities haunted by the ghosts of colonialism” (9). Canclini argues for a similar characterization of Latin America, noting that “what in Latin America has been called cultural pluralism or heterogeneity is conceived as part of the nation” (10).

The primary focus of Canclini's work is actually citizenship in late modernity, and exploring the various ways in which transnational currents, of which Western media is but one, are reformulating notions of citizenship so that is no longer based on 18th centuries constructions of the state, but in terms of markets and consumption:

Now we see vanish, once and for all, those identities conceived of as the expression of a collective being, of an idiosyncrasy, or of an imagined community secured by bonds of territory and blood. National culture is not extinguished, but it is converted into a formula that designates the
continuity of an unstable historical memory, continually reconstructed in interaction with transnational cultural referents. (29-30)

For Canclini, identity is no longer constructed within the boundaries of the nation-state, but are developed from what he describes as “transnational cultural referents.” Among these referents are American film and television. Again, the concern is the creation of dominated or colonized identities, but, like Benhabib, Canclini suggests that these identities should be viewed as a type of narrative. In fact, Canclini goes one step further, describing identity construction as a “coproduction:”

Identity will not be seen simply as a ritualized narrative, the monotonous repetition proclaimed by certain fundamentalisms. As a narrative that we renew continually, that we reconstruct with the collaboration of others, identity should be also understood as a coproduction. Nonetheless, this coproduction is accomplished under unequal conditions among the various participating actors and powers. (95)

Canclini's last point here is an important one, wherein he continually grounds his model in actual material conditions, acknowledging the fact of U.S. economic and cultural imperialisms. More vitally, as a rhetorical strategy, Canclini's use of the word “coproduction” specifically evokes two things: first, the “multimedia and multicontextuality” (95) of the late modern world saturated by media production from around the world in which subject formation takes place; and second, it evokes the same
powerful sense of agency as Hagedorn by acknowledging the individual subject's role has in creating her own subjectivity.

In fact, Stuart Hall uses the idea of “production” in a similar manner, arguing that, “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (704). Both Hall's and Canclini's arguments overlap in several key ways, such as pointing to the importance of fluidity in identities that exist in a material present as opposed to an essentialized past. Furthermore, both Hall and Canclini recognize the ubiquity of the different forms of visual media in people's lives. More importantly, both argue forcefully for the presence of the agency of the individual subject by utilizing the metaphor of production to describe the formation of both individual and cultural identities. Hall further emphasizes the importance of the presence of these “cinematic discourses” by pointing to the vital role they now play in the construction of cultural identity. In this way, Canclini and Hall make explicit the connection that Hagedorn alludes to between the “cultural wash” of movies and the ability of the individual subject to “produce” themselves from the pre-existing visual materials of film and television. In many ways, what Hagedorn does is to literalize this dynamic in The Gangster of Love.

The Gangster of Love tells the story of Raquel “Rocky” Rivera and her experiences living the sex, drugs, and rock and roll life in San Francisco and New York
across two decades, starting in 1970, and ending in the early 1990s. This novel is
different from both *Dogeaters* and *Dream Jungle* in that it is set in the United States, and
is explicitly concerned with Filipino-American identity in the nation-space of America.
As with the other two novels, *The Gangster of Love* also considers the impact of different
historical imperialisms on the colonial subject, including the cultural imperialism of
American movies. In fact, *The Gangster of Love* is suffused by the pop cultural milieu of
the United States, which is established with the first line of the novel: “Jimi Hendrix died
the year the ship that brought us from Manila docked in San Francisco” (5). Here, the
story literally begins with a touchstone of U.S. of pop culture, important for Rocky, and
especially for her brother Voltaire, who adopts not only a “Filipino Afro,” but also a
“indigenous Filipino’ hippie look” where “the crushed velvet was replaced by batik
fabric; the corny peace medallions replaced by carabao horn, scapulars, and amulets he
purchased from bemused market vendors in front of Baclaran Church” (5). Voltaire's
identification with Hendrix's visual appearance and subsequent alteration of that
appearance is similar to Lee's description of the encounter between the American and the
Filipino in *Dogeaters*: “the encounter...is one in which Manila residents take pleasure in
and identify with icons of U.S. popular culture. In that identification, Filipinos alter the
significance of these iconic acts, making it difficult to determine where the American
cultural markers end and the Filipino ones begin” (75). This interest in the different
forms of transpacific identities also becomes apparent in a cursory review of the names of
her characters.
Nearly all of the characters that Rocky encounters on her travels has a name that signifies some sort of cultural crossing; even the protagonist's choice of Rocky from the more gender-bound Raquel suggests a crossing of gender lines. In addition to Rocky's brother, Voltaire; there is Rocky's on-again, off-again boyfriend, Elvis Chang; her friend Keiko van Heller, who is described as the daughter of a Japanese American woman and “a blue-eyed, black Cuban boxer...or a blue-eyed black Cuban artist” (40-1); and finally Rocky's uncle, Marlon Rivera and his aging starlet neighbor, Isabel d'Ange. In a particular telling moment, when Rocky and Elvis visit Marlon, Marlon finds himself amused, “Elvis Chang in the home of Marlon Rivera. Fucking ridiculous” (85), perhaps laughing at the seemingly impossibility that two such people can even exist: Asians with names picked up from American pop culture. Despite this incongruity, the fact is nonetheless these two people do exist in Hagedorn's fictional universe, and part of what makes it possible is nation-space of the United States. It is important to note that while Hagedorn acknowledges the way that United States allows for these possibilities, she assiduously avoids seeing the United States as some sort of multicultural utopia for these transpacific subjects.

Again, Hagedorn continues to explore the fraught relationship between the colonized subject and colonizing power throughout the novel, especially apparent in this moment when Elvis relates the story of his encounter with some “rednecks” (61). Elvis describes how he and Sly, his African-American friend are filling up their car with gas in Cheyenne, Wyoming when they are accosted by “three very angry peckerwoods” in a
pickup truck (62). After enduring some racial insults, “we don't need Injuns and niggers 'round here”” and barely making off with their lives, Elvis finishes the story:

“'Peckerwoods even followed us on the highway, but we lost them.' I brace myself for the punchline. 'Ever since then, I've wanted my own pickup truck’” (62). The whole point of this story is the irony at the end: that despite his encounter with a racist America, Elvis nonetheless ends up coveting their vehicle. Thus, on the surface, one reading has Elvis occupying the role of the oppressed minority, blindly accepting the cultural values of the dominant culture, here symbolized by his desire for the pickup truck – which itself is arguably a uniquely American symbol, seen in everything from the pickup truck drill team from the Opening Ceremony of Atlanta 1996 Olympics to countless car commercials.

However, this reading misses the subtleties contained in this passage: first, Elvis frames his story by referring to the end of Easy Rider, when the two protagonists, having made it to the South, are randomly gunned down from a passing pickup truck, “Remember Easy Rider? Watch out for those rednecks” (61). The reference to the movie creates a context for his own story to follow, presenting the movie as a kind of truth about racism in America, while simultaneously signalling the very constructedness of Elvis's narrative. In fact, Rocky notes that she had heard Elvis tell this story “a thousand times before, about being in the wrong place at the wrong time” (61). Furthermore, the suggestion that this is really a fictional narrative is further seen by his refusal to explain, “what the hell [he was] doing in Cheyenne, Wyoming” (61) in the first place. Second, the
story is clearly presented as a joke, complete with punch line and a bemused reaction from Keiko, “Keiko smirked, ’Ahhhh, Mr. Chang. What an extraordinary reaction’” (62), suggesting of course that the story is pretty much a put-on. While the story itself may be a fiction, complete with plot elements that one can say came right out of a movie, it still does express Elvis’s very real desire to own this cultural symbol of American life. But what the movie reference does is to allow Elvis to create a narrative in which he can define and incorporate the desire in a way that is an expression of his agency in his own subject formation. In many ways, this episode reflects the paradigm of identity construction found in Dogeaters, where American movies serve as a narrative that can be incorporated by individual subjects in forming their own unique transpacific identity. However, in introducing the characters of Rocky’s Uncle Marlon and his neighbor Isabel, Hagedorn begins to explore the question of how the apparatus of movie-making can, to once again quote Rachel Lee, “chang[e] the terms of spectatorship.”

Rocky’s Uncle Marlon and Isabel seem to be only minor characters within the novel, only appearing in two or three chapters out of the book. As seen in Dogeaters, one of Hagedorn’s techniques is to weave the factual with the fictional, where fictional characters, such as Rocky and her family, rub elbows with the real historical personages, such as Imelda Marcos, whose 1990 trial in New York is dramatized here. Marlon Rivera, described in the novel as the original Chino in the stage and film versions of West Side Story as well as Elvis Presley’s co-star in Blue Hawaii is based on the real-life Jose De Vega, Jr., an actor/dancer/choreographer who died from AIDS related causes in 1990.
Though Marlon is not directly identified as such, de Vega’s father was Filipino and his mother was Colombian (“Jose, jr. De Vega”). In fact, the fictional Marlon, real name Epifanio Sebastian, like so many of Hagedorn’s characters, created his own identity based in the movies when he asserts that he chose his own name, “after I saw The Wild One” (88).

Isabel, while not having a real-life analogue, is described as being the rivals of both Anna May Wong and Dorothy Dandridge (80). This lineage seems unusual, until it is noted that she is “part black, Mexican, and Filipino” (80) with “almond-shaped eyes” (90) that “are a speckled brown” (81-2) and “glowing bronze skin unmarred by lines” (80). Like so many characters in this novel, Isabel is not only an ethnic mix, but also represents multiple racial and cultural crossings, readily apparent in the way she assumes different roles: from the “genteel white lady…a cross between Deborah Kerr and Helen Hayes” (178) to “Peggy Ashcroft” or even “all o’s and swirling j’s, and a purring, sardonic Eartha Kitt” (79). One day she delivers a “lockjawed rendition of Katharine Hepburn [and] tomorrow she could sound husky and growl. Tallulah Bankhead” (81). Isabel seems to literalize this idea of an identity built from the movies in the various guises she takes on. Moreover, for both characters there is also a powerful sense of a faded glamour, of opportunities lost because of skin color. As Isabel archly notes, “I was a romantic prop, for godsake. Second banana” (81). Marlon, too, has fallen on hard times, even though he “still had the body of a twenty-year-old dancer” (86), and he is relegated to “dancing with road companies or choreographing the millionth run of
Flower Drum Song or West Side Story, playing the Yul Brynner part in a second-rate dinner theatre production of The King and I” in places such as “Tampa, Jacksonville, Orlando, Gainsville” (82). Hagedorn seems to suggest that the narrow range of opportunities is responsible for Marlon being past the prime of his career, much like Isabel, who “retired from the movies” only after four of them (81).

Marlon and Isabel enter the novel when Rocky and Elvis drive down to Los Angeles, “a celestial mirage of infinite, crass possibilities” (67), an initial description of Los Angeles and Hollywood that rings more than true. Despite their status as former movie stars, the two are neighbors in a “fashionably seedy neighborhood” (179), where Marlon’s house is a “small…charmingly rustic cottage” (179). In fact, far from the glamour of Hollywood, the scenes in Uncle Marlon’s house play absolutely domestic, as he cooks adobo for Rocky and Elvis, and spends time with Isabel, or as he likes to call her, “Isabella of Spain” (87). In fact, as the novel progresses, and as Isabel slides into dementia, the whole scene takes on a surreal air of decay, as Isabel becomes obsessed with finding a gun to kill the coyote that she is convinced has killed her cat, and Marlon finds her house fallen into an advanced state of disrepair: “an overwhelming ammonia stench emanated from the dusty interior…The cats had definitely taken over. The Persian rug was soiled and ripped, and the once plush sofa was coated with hair. Scattered on the kitchen floor were open tin cans rimmed with crusty remnants of rotting fish, and a bowl of swampy water” (177). The scene is reminiscent of Billy Wilder’s Sunset Boulevard, from the unhinged fading starlet to the surrealistic and decaying surroundings, but instead
of Norma Desmond, we are given Isabel L’Ange, and the fabulous mansion is merely a small house in a seedy neighborhood. Thus, it seems no accident that the title of the chapter where Marlon and Isabel first appear is “Film Noir,” suggesting the atmosphere of bleak hopelessness of the genre that in many ways Sunset Boulevard is representative of. In this way, Hagedorn seems to be writing an indictment of the Hollywood machine and the limited opportunities for actors of color, such as Isabel and Marlon. In fact, Marlon, ill with AIDS, plans his and Isabel's escape from Hollywood: selling everything to return to the Philippines to meet all their long, lost relatives, and “after he and Isabel finished meeting them all, they could collapse in the exquisite heat and be buried next to each other” (179). Marlon's imagined end emphasizes the Pacific part of the transpacific identity, reinforcing the idea of the ethnic and cultural mix that is at work here.

However, there is a certain ambiguity that Hagedorn brings to these characters' relationships to Hollywood which is not so easily boiled down to the question of imperialist system and exploited labor within that system, because the last image we get of both characters is not this forlorn tragedy, but a reminder of the power that was simultaneously brought to the screen and imbued by Hollywood to Marlon and Isabel. As Marlon points out to Isabel, despite her short film career, she was a “very popular star in Manila...There were fan clubs. Movie magazines” (81) devoted to her. In fact, as Marlon relates, at the height of her film career, Isabel became a point of pride for the Philippines, “one of our own” (81). In this way, Hagedorn acknowledges the importance that actors of color have within their respective ethnic communities.
Hagedorn is also quick to point out that this importance moves beyond the simple notion of having these stars and their images as mere role models for the community. This becomes clear when late in the novel, Uncle Marlon's movies become an important touchstone for a depressed Rocky: “my cycle of depression begins. I lose myself in a frenzy of cleaning, dazed mothering, indifferent cooking, and movie watching. Uncle Marlon’s classics are my favorites. West Side Story, Blue Hawaii, even the Mexican Indian bit he played in The Wild Bunch. Uncle Marlon is machine-gunned to bloody shreds in slow motion in a sun-baked plaza reeking of stupidity and death” (241). Despite the minor roles that Uncle Marlon has in these movies, even the scenes of blood-splattered death are still able to provide Rocky with moments of relative lucidity in her depressed daze. Perhaps what Marlon's movies do for Rocky is to remind her of the fact that she is never truly powerless, there remains a presence and a force that Marlon still has despite his minor roles. More importantly, Marlon's story is not one of resignation and loss as described earlier, but is actually one of power and agency.

In fact, the last impression of Marlon given to the reader is the time Marlon played “Elvis Presley's happy-go-lucky sidekick in Blue Hawaii,” an experience that Rocky describes Uncle Marlon as being “strangely proud of” (273). Marlon's pride may seem unusual considering that the majority of his scenes ended up on the cutting room floor, but may be because Marlon nearly upstaged Elvis himself, “who was rumored to have said, 'Don't let that little coconut head steal my scenes'” (274). What is left on screen shows Marlon with his “insinuating grin” and “customized bikini briefs that
showed off his supple body” (274). What is on display then is a sexual and ethnic presence that is so threatening to the controlling hegemony, that despite attempts to contain it, this presence still finds a way to shine through. Moreover, Marlon demonstrates a kind of behind-the-scenes agency that he uses to craft his cinematic identity: during the filming, it is pointed out that Marlon “stubbornly refused to wear the baggy swim trunks brought in by the costume designer” (273-4) and instead not only bought the material for his bikini briefs, but also “found and hired a Filipino mistress to create swim trunks for five different beach scenes” (274). And it is precisely this sense of power and agency that is directed and magnified through the larger-than-life world of the movies.

This is the same identity, presence and, more importantly, gaze that appears in a framed photograph of Isabel “taken in her Hollywood heyday,” (178) one of the novel's last images of Isabel:

In this photo, Isabel drapes herself languidly on a teakwood love seat carved with dragons. A halo of smoke around her, a cigarette holder poised in one hand. The photographer has used a filtered lens, attempting to envelop his subject in a soft-core aura of exotic mystery. But in spite of the gimmicky props and setup, Isabel's face emerges from the smoky mist, brazen and pantherine. She is elegantly costumed in a man's tuxedo, her almond eyes and Cupid's bow lips heavily outlined and painted like the
toughest of whores...Black soot. Dried blood. Sepia. Smoke. Isabel confronts the camera. (178)

Isabel's face overcomes all the “gimmicky props and setup” of Orientalist Hollywood and asserts itself over the scene. In fact, Isabel becomes powerfully transgressive in this moment as well, even defying gender boundaries to the point of being propositioned by the gay photographer who took the portrait. Even in its silence, the portrait has considerable power, spurring Marlon to an unselfish love of “Isabellina, the ruined mother. Isabella, the queen of the jungle. Isabella, the perfume of his nostalgia for lost islands that could exist only in searing flashes of memory” (178-9). Isabel looks at Marlon filtered through the frame of Hollywood, but this frame fails to diminish her sense of self, that is, her sense of sexual and ethnic identity. It is not so much that Isabel somehow breaks through with some sort of “essential Filipana-ness;” indeed, this moment would be more accurately described as the seizing of Hollywood's power by Isabel and an incorporation of the glamour, of the costuming and the make-up to create a powerful new identity. It is almost as if in the creation of her image, Isabel is somehow able to seize upon the elements – the costume, the make-up – that she can use to create her identity, and disregard the Orientalist trappings and the clumsy attempt to create that “aura of exotic mystery.” In other words, she finds a way to defy the image of the Dragon Lady stereotype that continues to plague Hollywood.

Perhaps the key detail in Isabel's photograph is the one that Hagedorn saves for the end: in which the cinematic Isabel, “confronts the camera” with a “gaze [that] is
direct, unflinching, defiant” (178). It is Isabel's gaze which confronts both the camera and the viewer that becomes the most powerful element in the picture. This question of the cinematic gaze is an important one for Hagedorn and an element that she explores in both *Dogeaters* and *The Gangster of Love*. In many ways, both novels are concerned with the idea of spectatorial delight: the way in which the spectator takes pleasure in the cinematic image. On the other side of this equation between image and spectator is the object that is being watched, in other words, the recipient of the gaze. It is, of course, Laura Mulvey who famously pointed out the inherent power relationship involved in the spectatorial gaze, where “the pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” with the male spectator holding the “determining gaze” (487). In many ways, it is in *Dogeaters* that Hagedorn investigates more closely the power in the gaze and the complex dynamics between the gazer and those gazed upon. By carefully looking at Hagedorn's exploration of the gaze in that novel will help reveal the full implications of Isabel's gaze. In *Dogeaters*, the power of the male gaze reflects the postcolonial relationship between the foreign tourists and the Filipino natives, seen most clearly in the tourists who patronize the shower dancer shows and when two American tourists go to Joey looking for a live sex show. Building on Mulvey and the idea of “cinematic seduction” (88), Rachel Lee reads these moments in light of the “commodification of the native” (89), that as a kind of “social relationship wherein the spectator's pleasure rests on the disavowal of the commodity transaction” (88) between the two parties. For Lee, this pleasure becomes nullified when the spectatorial gaze is
returned, resulting in the “subsequent breakdown of the native as useable, visual object” (88). In other words, by returning the gaze, the native object becomes the native subject. While this commodity relationship is important, it is not the only way to read the multiple forms and levels of power in these relationships between looking and being looked at; this complicated dynamic illustrated in that moment when Joey takes two American tourists to a live sex show.

During the show, held in an abandoned night club, Joey makes a point to “stay in the back of the cavernous room” noting that “this way I can watch them all, the two Americans, the young girl with the face turned away, the young man with the magnificent tattoos” (75). After it is all over, the “young man looks up at the white men...grinning at the stunned Americans. 'You want us to do that again?’” (75). Here, the American tourists are clearly taken aback, perhaps shocked by the overall experience, or by the direct address of the young man, who deprives the tourists of their spectatorial pleasure by directly addressing them, much in the way that Lee argues: the young man's question not only calls attention to the nature of their commodity transaction, but his question moves him into the realm of a questioning subject instead of a passive object. Moreover, Joey maintains a distance from the whole group, making it a point to be able to watch them all from his vantage point in the dark, thus, maintaining a kind of power and control over the sordid scene through his encompassing gaze. Because of Hagedorn's overall interest in this idea of “specularized bodies” (Lee 90), her exploration of the dynamics of looking and power involves both sides of the equation. In other words,
Hagedorn very cannily suggests that even those being looked at, those specularized bodies are not entirely devoid of agency.

For example, Lolita Luna, the *bomba* star, seems to recognize that she holds a type of power in her bodily image when she admires herself in the mirror, noting the way in which “the sight of her naked body in the mirror excites her. Transfixed by her own image, she caresses herself” (176). Furthermore, she finds herself “fascinated by her dark brazen image in the mirror, by the way her flesh glows in the midst of such impersonal splendor” (178). This moment is not simply Luna's narcissism; rather, it is Luna instinctively recognizing the power in her bodily image. As in these scenes, it is Luna looking at her own body in the mirror, rather than taking some kind of direct pleasure at her bodily existence. Similarly, Joey recognizes the way in which being looked at imparts this seductive power to him, acknowledging that part of his job at the club is to be “on display” (131) for eligible Johns. As Joey points out in his seduction of Ranier, “this is for the German's benefit. I know he's watching” (141), recognizing not only the presence of Ranier's gaze, but also noting the way in which he can manipulate and take advantage of that fact. At the same time, Hagedorn acknowledges the fact there is only a measure of agency in this dynamic: neither Luna nor Joey are able to use their seductive capacities to escape their respective situations: Luna still finds herself as General Ledesma's mistress despite her entreaties to help her leave Manila, and Joey never progresses beyond the one-night stands with his Johns.
In many ways, the returned gazes are reminiscent of bell hooks description of an “oppositional gaze:” wherein not only is “cinematic visual delight..[found in] the pleasure of interrogation” (519), but the gaze offers ways for the spectator to “contest, resist, [revise], interrogate, and invent on multiple levels” (521). Only here, these oppositional gazes are found in subjects who are normally looked at. Thus, in *The Gangster of Love*, when Isabel confronts the camera and stares back at the viewer, or when Marlon grins slyly while wearing his swimming briefs, they seem to be challenge the viewer's perception of them as painted by the Hollywood image machine, daring the viewer to take some kind of pleasure in these farcical Hollywood images, and ultimately forcing the questioning of the whole structure that surrounds their images as stars and as persons of color. In this way, the returned gaze is a questioning gaze, forcing the viewer to interrogate the reasons for his pleasure.

*The Gangster of Love* is a novel concerned specifically with the work of artistic creation: Rocky and Elvis are the lyricist and songwriter for their band, and Marlon and Isabel are actors. Rocky, Marlon and Isabel all make sense of the contested narratives that form their lives. From Hendrix to the Philippines to Catholicism to the movies, they must imaginatively construct their own identities out of all those disparate elements, not in a perfectly formed way, but as suggested by Benhabib, Canclini, and Hall, in a provisional and dynamic manner, that change as the narratives that affect their lives changes. Moreover, Hagedorn also suggests that there are other modes of participating in
the movies which can change the rules of spectatorship, not only for the people involved in the movies, but for those who watch them as well.

*Dream Jungle: Making Movies, Making Selves*

By the time we reach *Dream Jungle*, Hagedorn continues to develop the ways in which film serves as both the tool of the hegemony and a tool for imaginative construction of identity for the oppressed. It is also in this novel that Hagedorn most clearly and powerfully develops the trope of movie-making as an of analogy for the construction of not only individual identity, but of national identity as well.

*Dream Jungle* covers much the same time period as *The Gangster of Love*, but instead of a sprawling portrait of two decades, this novel presents a much more focused time frame: part one takes place from 1971 to 1973, detailing the discovery of a “lost tribe” by Zamora Lopez de Legazpi, one of the key drivers of the book's narrative, while part two, which constitutes the majority of the novel, occurs almost entirely in 1977 during the filming of an *Apocalypse Now*-like Vietnam War epic in the jungles of southern Philippines. Part three offers the most radical change in setting, taking place in 1997 and mostly in the United States, and is a short coda detailing Zamora's death and its aftermath, offering a “twenty years later” view of the complex events in the novel. A brief summary of the first two sections will provide a helpful overview of the narrative action and also set out Hagedorn's main concerns: explorations of imperialism, conquest, culture and identity, as well as the question of spectacle and the role of the spectacular.
Woven throughout part one, entitled “Conquest and Discovery,” are excerpts from the actual historical journal of Antonio Pigafetta, which is described as the main historical record of Magellan's circumnavigation of the world. Pigafetta, “an obscure Italian nobleman,” has been described as the world's first tourist, who paid to accompany Magellan on his journey (“Antonio Pigafetta”). Hagedorn specifically excerpts the portions of Pigafetta's journal that deal with Magellan's disastrous contact with the Philippines and its native inhabitants in 1521. In this way Hagedorn establishes the colonial lens through which the rest of the book must be viewed: it is this colonial moment that is continually re-enacted and re-staged throughout the course of the novel. In fact, part one is mainly concerned with Zamora and his “discovery” of the Taobo, a purportedly cave-dwelling, stone age tribe that represents the first indigenous people of the Philippines. “Napalm Sunset,” both the title of part two and the fictional movie being filmed in this section, reframes and recreates this colonial moment through a different kind of invasion: an oversized and bloated Hollywood film crew led by *enfant terriblè* director Tony Pierce takes over a portion of the Filipino jungle. As in the previous two novels, Hagedorn continues her blending of fact and fiction: this time, both of the major narrative elements in this novel are fictionalized versions of real world events. Zamora's experience with the Taobo is a recounting of the 1971 “discovery” by a government official and of the Tasaday, purportedly a Stone Age tribe living in the jungles of Mindanao. Similarly, part two is a fictionalized account of the nearly disastrous events surrounding the filming of *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola and his film crew.
Tying the two sections together is the *Dream Jungle* of the title. It is in the same jungle of Mindanao that Zamora, the scion of a wealthy and powerful family in Manila, claims to discover the Taobo and in which Pierce and his film crew set up shop. This is also home to Rizalina (Lina), a girl from the provinces and the protagonist of the second major narrative strand in part one, who ends up working alongside her mother for Zamora after her father and brother are killed in a ferry accident. Like *Dogeaters*, *Dream Jungle* is a metacritical narrative, wherein Hagedorn self-consciously deploys tropes and metaphors of staging that undermine many of the “natural” assumptions regarding colonialism and the cultural imperialism of the American film industry. This time, the two are connected through the jungle setting. In this way, Hagedorn's use of fictionalized versions of real-world events makes a certain amount of literary sense: she herself is “restaging” these real world events in the fictional world of the novel. Thus, the “jungle” of the title become the stage on which the characters created by Hagedorn act and re-enact the colonial moment that is the overarching framework for the novel.

Moreover, the “dream” of the title also serves to tie together the seemingly disparate narrative and thematic strands of the novel. The notion of dreams works on several levels throughout the novel. In addition to being the “dream” jungle of the title, the idea of dreams also refers to the literal nighttime dreams and the waking daytime dreams of the characters. It is the “dream factory” of Hollywood and the movies, and, more significantly, the dreams are also the dreams of nation, conquest, and colonialism. Significantly, the book begins with the description of a kind of a waking dream.
describing Zamora's first encounter with the Taobo: “Zamora's gaze was steadfast and shameless. O they were beautiful, powerful, strange! Their fierce, wary eyes scrutinized him in return, taking in the brown, unruly curls on his head...He had walked into a dream. Someone else's dream...but now stolen and claimed by Zamora. The landscape of that dream – vast, ominous, shimmering blues and greens – was simply part of the loot” (5). Hagedorn is quite explicit with not only the language of dreams, describing Zamora's encounter in a type of shimmering dreamscape of surrealistic colors, but she also invokes the language of conquest and colonialism, noting how this was “someone else's dream,” not Zamora's and how Zamora has “now stolen” and laid claimed to it. In this way, Hagedorn begins to thread together the language of dreams with the dreams of colonial conquest. Paradoxically, the discovery of the Taobo also represents an origin for the Philippines before colonization. As mentioned earlier, the question of a “pure” Filipino identity beyond colonialism is quite fraught, and thus the discovery of the Taobo points to an indigenous Filipino identity that does not involve the colonial legacy. In this moment Zamora's discovery is not only a re-enactment of Magellan's colonial moment, with dreams of colonial conquest and discovery, it also represents the possibilities for a “pure” Filipino nation and identity. The connection between Pigafetta, whose description of the Filipino natives actually opens the novel, and Zamora becomes clear: both are wealthy dilettantes who have transformed themselves into the colonizer. However, it is important to note that the role of “colonizer” is not the only one that Zamora has in mind. In fact,
the murkiness of his goals makes Zamora a much more insidious figure than Pigafetta, a point that will be explored in more detail later.

In fact, there is considerable importance attached to Zamora as this colonizing figure. Not only is Zamora is almost always referred to as “the Spaniard” (54), despite his clearly mestizo heritage, but part one ends with the chapter entitled “The Conquistador's Lament,” which clearly refers to Zamora, who is the first person narrator of the chapter. Furthermore, in part two, Zamora is referred to as “Conquistador of conquistadors” (151) by Paz Marlowe, a freelance journalist who becomes an important part of the book's narrative. It is no accident that her last name is the same as Joseph Conrad's protagonist in Heart of Darkness, who of course journeys into Africa in search of the mad colonizer, Kurtz. Like Conrad's Marlowe, Paz leads the reader through the colonial imagination, and it comes as no surprise that as she leaves Zamora's estate after interviewing him, she also takes note of a “huge painting that took up most of one wall” in Zamora's house: “On a beach, Spanish soldiers decked out in medieval armor were gathered next to a group of wary-looking natives with faces like Sonny's. A balding Spanish priest offered up a chalice to the sky. The smell of blood and betrayal was in the air.. Or so I imagined” (156). By this point in the novel, it seems only appropriate that Zamora would have this painting of the colonial moment on prominent display in his house. However, the further implications of this painting only become clear as the novel and the disputed truth of Zamora's discovery further unfolds.
The connection between dreams, jungle and colonialism is repeated in part two of the novel, with the new colonial power of the 20th century: Hollywood movies, the so-called “dream factory.” In addition to evoking this common trope to describe Hollywood, the role of the colonizer is recast with the tyrannical film director Tony Pierce, who reminds Paz of “the legends that preceded Zamora” (214). Hagedorn becomes playfully metacritical here by having Paz visit the set of *Napalm Sunset*, the fictionalized version of *Apocalypse Now*, which itself is a restaging of Conrad's novel. With Pierce, who is nicknamed “Tony God” (186) by his wife Janet, leading a bloated Hollywood film crew through the jungles of Mindanao, Hollywood and the *Napalm Sunset* crew become the colonizing force re-imagined. In addition to the nearly wholesale co-optation of local and national resources - including the takeover of Lina's village of Sultan Ramayyah and the use of helicopters from the Filipino military - the film crew becomes a symbolically associated with death, after mistakenly procuring several anonymous corpses from the local morgue as props for a scene in the movie. This massively understated “misunderstanding” (240) not only reflects the general arrogance of the film crew, but literalizes the proximity of death to the colonizing force. Moreover, Pierce and his film crew represents what Canclini describes as one of the “exemplary” cultural features of the West: “the predominance of spectacular action over more reflexive and intimate forms of narration; the fascination with a memoryless present” (32) – that is, the tendency towards visual spectacle. And the production is spectacular in every sense of the word, featuring “lavish audiovisual feasts of destruction” involving “futuristic
helicopters...in a sinister ballet set to loud, pompous music” and where “movie stars were shot and stabbed, their wounds rendered in loving detail” (219).

Thus, the colonial encounter is literally restaged, this time, as a scene from the movie with yet another stand-in for the colonizer: in this instance, the Marlon Brando-like, Sterling Claiborne. In the scene, Claiborne, as “Commander X,” with “his bald head and massive girth” (246) commanding the native tribe he has taken over, stands “framed with his menacing army against a chilling backdrop of mutilated corpses” imparting the scene with a “ominous grandeur” (245) that turns into something breathtakingly majestic when “Claiborne lifted his head toward the sky...[and] smiled his dazzling smile at the sun, at God, at no one in particular” (246). This moment in the novel reflects the larger notion developed throughout this part of the novel wherein colonial power is reasserted through the spectacular power of Hollywood, a point that Hagedorn developed in Dogeaters as well. Here, like Zamora who “steals” someone else's dream, the movies also have the capability to co-opt and manufacture new dreams.

This moment of connecting colonial power with the power of visual culture is repeated near the end of the novel, when Paz, idly watching television, finds herself drawn into a documentary about the Taobo. There, she sees Zamora apparently protecting his lost tribe of Taobo from invading loggers: “the opening shot was of Zamora Lopez de Lagzapi standing on the side of a mountain, squinting hard at ominous, billowing clouds of smoke. It was all so dramatic” (301), and made even more so when “the music on the soundtrack soared just as Zamora's helicopter soared above the fertile,
breathtaking terrain” (301). Surrounded by adoring natives and with arms outspread, “ready to give as well to receive” (302), Zamora takes on the role of Commander X as well, received by the Taobo as a “long-lost king, a glorious saint, a triumphant savior. Our hero, our villain” (302). Hagedorn clearly repeats images and elements to connect this moment with the filming of *Napalm Sunset*. In fact, like Claiborne in *Napalm Sunset*, and like the painting of the conquistadors displayed prominently in Zamora's house, this moment seems clearly staged; Paz refers to Zamora's “performance” as being “sublime” (302) and notes how “the scene was well rehearsed” (302). Nonetheless, Paz also notes how despite its rehearsed nature, the scene still “rang true” (302). In other words, the fact that the scene is clearly staged does not detract from or undermine the overall message and emotional impact. Arguably, it is the sense of spectacle that ultimately delivers the latter and in fact enhances the sense of truth.

More importantly, the colonial encounter isn't simply re-enacted here, it is transformed from a scene of colonization to a scene of resistance against colonization. Rather, it is Zamora protecting “his lost tribe,” a “precolonial” Filipino existence, against the encroachment of loggers eager to destroy the forest. In this way, Hagedorn explicitly questions and disturbs the logic of colonialism; indeed, Zamora muddies his own role by occupying the position of both conquistador and protector. Moreover, Hagedorn presents colonial power - here in the form of visual culture - as Foucauldian: its structures contain the webs of resistance. Zamora is able to turn colonialism's own love of spectacle, using the language of spectacle, against the colonizing power in order to create a new national
identity. There is then, a certain appropriateness in the fact that Zamora's massive mansion and compound is located in a section of Manila called the “Hollywood Hills.” Zamora seems to have an instinctive understanding of the power of spectacle and the savvy ability to turn that power to his own purposes. As mentioned earlier, Zamora's actual motives are called into question, when near the end of the novel, it is revealed that Zamora's discovery of the Taobo may very well have been a hoax: it seems that Zamora's purpose is less about maintaining a “pure” Filipino cultural history and more with lining his own pockets and that of corrupt Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos: “The Taobo exist, but are fake. PIMPF (the President's Indigenous Minority People's Foundation) was a money-laundering scam. Zamora...was a gangster, a poet, and an exploiter of our dreams” (306). The use of the words “dreams” here is perhaps the most significant point, in this case, referring to the dream of a “pure” Filipino heritage and identity outside the bounds of colonialism. In this way, Hagedorn interrogates the necessity for this type of unsullied identity and questions the motives that guide this kind of search. In the end then, this question over the true nature of the Taobo and the purity of this origin is less important than Hagedorn's interest in the different legacies of colonialism. As much as she considers the way these colonial legacies operate on the level of nation, much of Hagedorn's interest is focused on the way individual subjects grapple with this colonial legacy.

Pepito, Paz's friend and an aspiring Filipino filmmaker, serves as a prime example of this intersection between colonialism, nation, filmmaking, and the question of
individual identity and agency. In fact, it is Pepito and Janet Pierce, Tony's wife, who best illustrate Hagedorn's use of filmmaking as a trope for individual agency and the harnessing of the spectacular in the creation of an individual identity. Taken together then, Pepito and Janet demonstrate a kind of technology of filmmaking that allows for it be both the trope of creation as well as the actual creation of new identities for the individual subject. In this way, the process of filmmaking becomes the expression of agency through which identity is constructed.

In another analogue to the filming of *Apocalypse Now*, Janet shoots her own behind-the-scenes documentary while Tony shoots this movie. This, of course, is a reference to the documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* where Eleanor Coppola, Francis Ford Coppola's wife, chronicled the nearly-disastrous filming of that movie. Janet describes the documentary she is making as “*her film*. Financed out of her own pocket, with a little help from hubby” (187). Hagedorn further emphasizes what Janet has with her documentary in a striking one sentence paragraph: “she had free rein” (187). In one particularly revealing sequence, Janet takes her camera around the set fairly reveling in this freedom: “What she loved best was wandering around on her own, finding things to shoot.” When Janet does find something interesting, “she aimed the camera at them” (187) Moreover, Janet has the ability to “Zoom...Zoom out...It was a long, slow, far too intimate kiss. Janet zoomed in.” (187-8) What becomes clear her is the sense of control that Janet has with her camera, allowing her not only to choose who or what she wants to shoot, but how to shoot it. In other words, controlling the camera
and directing the film give Janet a level of agency she previously did not have as the wife of a figure like Tony Pierce: “no one paid attention to the slender, smiling unobtrusive woman” who is the “wife of the director. Mother of the director's sons” (187). In fact, Tony gives Janet both his blessing - “what the hell, Jan. If it makes you happy...Why not?” (187) - and the physical means to make her film by giving her his old camera, “his Bolex, which he'd had since film school” (187). Here Janet literally turns the tools she is given by Tony to her own uses, making the movie that she “knew was going to be good” (187). Furthermore, she is able to exploit the role relegated to her by her gender: because she is merely the "director's wife," Janet is able to transform this role into a level of unprecedented access to the inner workings of the film.

What Hagedorn emphasizes here is the amount of control that the director, the “auteur” has in filmmaking. With the camera, Janet is afforded a certain amount of control over how she chooses to see the world. In this way, filmmaking works as both the ideal trope for the agency involved in identity creation, as articulated by Hall, Benhabib and Canclini as well as the actual method by which Janet is able to articulate a new sense of self. Moreover, Hagedon continues to articulate the complex relationship with what is best described as a white male hegemony. Thus, the final image of the chapter, where, “Tony God gave and little bow and made his exit. Janet followed close behind with camera” (191) can be seen as an expression of both this fraught relationship and Janet's level of access: Janet may be following Tony both literally and metaphorically, but in that space she is able to articulate a sense of self separate from him.
In many ways, Pepito articulates a similar relationship with both Tony and, to a larger extent, with Hollywood movies. And like Janet, Pepito demonstrates the complex relationship between colonizer and colonized and the role of filmmaking and the movies in changing the nature of that relationship. Pepito enters the novel much like Rio from *Dogeaters*: not only is he obsessed with Hollywood movies, it is none other than Tony Pierce who, “is one of the reasons [he] wants to make movies” (221). For Pepito having the opportunity to meet his idol Pierce is an once-in-lifetime opportunity and he imagines “having chummy conversations with [Pierce] about the day-to-day headaches of making movies” and in general, believing that “Pierce could do no wrong” (237). However, when offered “gruesome gifts” (241), in the form of an offer to dispose of the human corpses accidentally acquired by the film crew, Pepito simply says, “no” (240), turning around and walking away. On a merely personal level Pepito turns away from his filmmaking idol, but on another, perhaps more important level, Pepito resists collusion with the imperial forces that treats the local population with such callous disregard. This is his way of resisting the wholesale co-optation to the colonizing force, of articulating a resistance to colonial forces.

Another vital element in Pepito's resistance is seen through his filmmaking oeuvre, which involves him restaging Magellan's journey in his unfinished film, *Circumnavigation* (described by another character as, “that Magellan thing”) (238), as well as titling his next film “*D.O.A....Dead on Arrival*...with a title boldly appropriated from a Hollywood classic” (239). Much like Zamora and Pierce, Pepito seems also
intent on restaging the colonial moment, but this time, from the point of view of the natives, and he is more than willing to appropriate what he needs from the colonizing power to create the kinds of movies he wants. As Pepito puts it in his own words, “for if an overpopulated, complicated, postcolonial India could produce a glorious filmmaker like Satyajit Ray, why couldn't an overpopulated, complicated, postcolonial Philippines produce an artist of equal stature in Pepito Ponce de Leon?” (224). Unlike Zamora who aggressively identifies with the conquistadors, Pepito identifies more closely with the native, and his last name becomes an ironic counterpoint to that native identity. But it is important to note that as much as Pepito is able to articulate this resistance, to appropriate what he needs in the creation of his own sense of self, he still evinces a love for Hollywood and the movies that speak much to the complexity of the colonial relationship.

At the end of the novel, in the last chapter before a short epilogue, entitled “The Shark's Lament,” Pepito helms his own movie, a B-style picture titled, “Taghoy ng Pating (The Shark's Lament)” which is described as “a combination Jaws and Deep Blue Sea, Filipino style” (314). At the chaotic shoot inside “the Holy Cross Mortuary Chapel on a humid Saturday night” (314), Pepito rides herd on a motley crew, including expatriate American actor Vince Moody, who was also in Napalm Sunset; “Rainbow Reyes (a former Miss Philippines)” (314); and “the bitch queens of the world...the baklas, chismosas, poison-tongued brujas, and devilish donas of Manila” (314). The chapter title clearly references the earlier chapter about Zamora, “The Conquistador's
Lament,” except here, things are essentially “remixed”: the Conquistador has been
transformed into the shark, with both still being a “lonely, cunning predator of voracious
appetites” (316). There is a further transformation from from male to female, from father
to “Mother...Hell hath no fury” (316). But in the end, they are still the “dark stuff of
dreams” (316). But here, the conquistador, the shark, and the dreams are remixed to
create something else. Thus, instead of the colonial moment that Zamora represents,
Pepito represents a kind of coalitional moment, where the colonizer is merely a tool – as
Moody says, “Just gimme my money and I'll say the lines” (315) – and the fringe groups
- the drag queens, the bomba stars, and the homosexuals – come together to create
something new. This coalitional moment also appears earlier with Janet Pierce, whose
“discreet crew of two” (187) on her documentary consists of two Asian Americans: Brad
Wong and his wife Diane. Pepito and Janet thus demonstrate a kind of power in building
coalitions among various oppressed groups, wherein filmmaking provides a mode of
resistance, another avenue for these different minority groups.

One final example from the novel not only serves to tie together the complicated
symbolic and thematic threads that Hagedorn has developed through the novel, but
reminds the reader that personal agency matters most not to figures like Pierce or
Zamora, but to people like Rizalina, the young girl whose journey underscores the whole
novel: from working in Zamora's mansion, to dating Moody and working on the set of
Napalm Sunset. Lina, of course, comes from the village of Sultan Ramayyah, near the
Mindanao jungle that serves as the “dream” jungle of the title, and in an arresting
flashback from part one, the jungle outside her village is transformed: Lina recalls seeing a vintage Tagalog movie appropriately titled *The Enchanted Forest* (which is also the title of the chapter), and when she briefly escapes the “unbearably stifling” (81) classroom that serves as a makeshift movie theatre for the grainy black and white movie, the line between movies, dreams and reality suddenly becomes blurred: “The skittish white stallions belonging to the Himal people grazed on the grassy fields. Beyond the mountains, Lake Ramayyah shimmered in the blinding sunlight. Beckoning and deep, vast as an ocean. The movie blared...Rizalina closed her eyes and listened to the soothing, mellifluous voice of Nida Blanca, ‘I, Darna, have finally come to save you’” (81). Here, the real landscape blends with the filmic characters, creating an imagined dreamscape for Lina.

An important element of Lina's dreamscape is the actress Nida Blanca playing Darna, a high flying superheroine in the mold of Superman, complete with both X-ray and heat vision who rescues a kidnapped girl from the “enchanted forest” of the title. It is important to note that Darna is not simply Superman; she is Superman reconfigured and transformed, from male to female, from American to Filipina. As the filmic landscape bleeds into the real one, and as Lina hears Nida/Darna speak of rescue, Lina is imagining how she can effect her own rescue from not only colonial oppression, but also from the crushing poverty of her own circumstances. However, the source of her rescue is clearly not the fictional Darna, rather, Darna as a symbolic figure, representing a native film industry, provides Lina with the imaginative possibilities for her escape. This
connection between the movies and dreams becomes clear near the end of part two when Lina encounters the trained tiger named Shiva, a key part of *Napalm Sunset*. Though he is trained, Shiva still contains a “ferocious beauty and power” (263) that is more than evident during the filming: “the tiger peered out from its hiding place in the bushes. A dragon's face, magnificent and deadly. Ready the spring, the tiger's rear legs and massive padded feet pressed beneath its powerful body” (269). Despite his domesticated state, Shiva, like Isabel d'Ange from *The Gangster of Love*, still contains an unmistakable power that is accentuated by the presence of the camera – after the scene, the tiger quickly becomes “languid, indifferent. His work was done” (270). After Lina witnesses the scene with Shiva, the tiger quickly becomes a kind of totem for her: “the colors of the tiger – Day-Glo orange fur, jet black stripes – disturbed every waking moment” and “in her dreams his scowling face peered out at her from his hiding place in the bush” (271). Ultimately, it is this recurring, almost Technicolor image of Shiva that compels Lina to change her life: to ask Moody to take her from the Philippines, and when he refuses, to set off on her own. Shiva is like Darna, whose connection to the movies allows for the creation of the imaginative circumstances that allows Lina to exercise this kind of personal agency. In other words, Lina is both spoken to by Darna and the tiger, and she becomes Darna herself, articulated and made possible by the reconfiguration of colonial modes of expression, utilizing her own agency to navigate her way through her life, not to be saved, but to save herself.
The final words for this chapter, a pair of closing epigrams, belong, appropriately enough, to the two directors in the novel. Taken together, they summarize many of the arguments about the nature of cultural identity in the age of globalization and modernity. As Pepito attempts to wrangle his motley cast for his movie, Hagedorn notes that he works quickly, by the seat of his pants, but most importantly, “Pepito figures it out as he goes along” (314). As noted earlier, the hallmark of cultural identity, as argued by Benhabib and Hall, is a sense of contingency, of not being trapped by an essentialized past, but always constructing for the future. At the same time, Pierce can hardly contain himself when he describes to Paz the excitement of watching the different directions that suddenly come about as he makes his movies: “It always does, doesn't it? How it's played out, and by whom. A kiss is never just a kiss. I get high just thinking about it. Tickled at the insane possibilities. Where does my story go? Everyone's waiting, on edge, and I am high” (249). Pierce's statement reminds us then of the importance of the personal story, the creation of a personal narrative and identity that, again, doesn't evoke a distant past, but which unfolds in a present to unknown and unexpected possibilities.

In a way, these two statements summarize the search for identity not just in *Dream Jungle*, but in the all the novels discussed in this chapter. From Rio and Joey, to Marlon and Isabel, to Pepito and Lina, these characters are constantly negotiating with the material and cultural forces that surround them, trying to create a sense of self from raw materials that often are only shadowy images flickering on a screen at twenty-four frames per second, delivered sometimes from an ocean away. More importantly, as
much as Hagedorn celebrates these moments of individual possibility, she is always aware of the difficult material circumstances, often the result of a brutal colonialism, that her characters find themselves in. Hagedorn's characters succeed not because of a simple-minded, bright-eyed optimism, but because they struggle and scramble and fight unrelentingly for their identities.

At one point in his study, Canclini not only acknowledges the way in which, “ethnic, regional, and national identities are being reconstructed in relation to globalized processes of intercultural segmentation and hybridization” but also wonders, about “what kinds of literature, film, and television are capable of narrating the heterogeneity and coexistence of several codes within a group and even in one individual subject” (94). Especially in relation to the way in which she explores the relationship of the individual subject to the cultural imperialism of American movies, Hagedorn's work comes very close, if not fully realizing, the type of literature that Canclini wonders about. In noting the way in which both film spectatorship and production can become activated in the formation of the subjectivity of the individual, Hagedorn gives new meaning to Norma Desmond's final line at the end of *Sunset Boulevard*, “Just us, the cameras, and those wonderful people out there in the dark!”
Works Cited


Chapter 2: Chinatown and the Construction of the Neoliberal Identity.

There is Chinatown and then there is “Chinatown.” The former consists of key downtown sections of both major and minor American cities ranging from San Francisco to Chicago to New York. Often created as a result of the Chinese Exclusion Laws, these Chinatowns moved quickly from becoming ethnic enclaves to ethnic ghettos and slums as the Chinese were excluded not only from immigration, but from participating directly in the social and economic life of America. While the number of these actual historical Chinatowns have decreased or even disappeared as the Chinese community spread out of the downtown ghettos to the surrounding suburbs with the relaxation of these exclusion laws, the idea of “Chinatown,” persists (Chen 186). This “Chinatown,” is a construction of countless films and TV shows purportedly set in historical Chinatowns. One of the most well-known of these popular representations is Roman Polanski’s neo-noir film from 1974, the aptly-titled Chinatown. The irony of the film, of course, is that only the final scenes are actually set in Chinatown. Rather, “Chinatown” becomes a metaphor for the sin and corruption that pervades the movie. As both the main character, Jake Gittes, and the audience are told at the end of the movie, “Forget it, Jake, it's Chinatown.” In other words, there is very little that anyone can do about “Chinatown” and its resident moral iniquity. In many ways, the “Chinatown” of Polanski's movie represents one of the popular constructions of Chinatown in the North American racial imaginary that has endured for over a hundred years: not only as a “shorthand for...filth, sexual and moral perversion, and opium use” (Brooks 23), but also as a place unto itself, removed
somehow from the United States both physically and culturally: “In such American fantasies, Chinatown relentlessly produces boundaries: more accurately, it is relentlessly segregated from American public life. Its most typical aspect is its impenetrability, its separation of the public and private realms” (Haenni 26).

However, despite, or more accurately, because of these unseemly reputations, historical Chinatowns have been consistently popular tourist destinations since the 1890s. In fact, it is in this role as a tourist destination that we see the intersection of the historical Chinatown and its fictionalized constructions. While the tourist impulse to visit Chinatown today may no longer include the “the attraction of experiencing, from a safe distance or with a police guide, racially charged urban dangers” (Berglund 6) or visits to opium dens, gambling houses or brothels of the time (Rast 45-7), the powerful “desire to see the exotic” (Berglund 6), still remains. For many white tourists then, the “exotic” Chinatown is often conflated with an “authentic” Chinatown. That is, the style of architecture, the food served in the restaurants, the items sold in curio shops and souvenir stores, and even the residents themselves all offer the adventurous tourist a tantalizing glimpse of an “authentic” Chinese culture. Yet, few tourists seem to recognize the fact that much of this “authentic” culture has been carefully crafted to draw in tourists by playing to their stereotypical and often racist assumptions of what “authentic” Chinese culture is. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, this meant the staging of opium dens for middle-class tourists (Rast). Similarly, when the San Francisco Chinatown was rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake, Chinese merchants were persuaded by an enterprising
Chinese merchant named Look Tin Eli to rebuild the quarter in an “exotic, 'oriental style' of architecture [that] would 'attract tourists' and 'boost business.’” (Rast 53) In many ways, Look's vision of Chinatown could be described as almost aspirational: designed to be “‘an ideal Oriental city’” chock full of buildings modeled after Look’s own rebuilt Sing Chong building with its “pagoda-like towers, upturned eaves, and a color scheme of bright red, green, and gold” (Rast 53-4).

These two examples illustrate two very important points regarding the position of these various historical Chinatowns in the United States. First, we see this intersection between the historic and material - Chinatown as a place where people live and work – and the fictive - “Chinatown” as an idea of a place constructed through popular culture designed to meet the needs of a white hegemony in a specific racial hierarchy. Second, and perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, in each case, these popular constructions of Chinatown as exotic are built on the valence of visual spectacle. As Sabine Haenni points out, much like San Francisco's Chinatown, in New York's Chinatown across the continent there was an equal “impulse to decorate [that] resulted in an aestheticization of difference that ultimately promoted the quarter's attractiveness” (28). In fact, the staging of visual spectacles, such as the faux opium dens and the “Oriental”-style architecture, are examples of the creation of what Haenni terms a “sensational surface aesthetic” (29). This emphasis on the visual and the spectacular in Chinatown is connected intimately with the idea of Chinatown as specific space: that is, Chinatown as a material, geographic location. But it also a question of Chinatown as a
specific place, and the representation of that place and those spaces that serves as the primary concern of this chapter. As a term, “space” is a much more neutral term, often referring to the actual physicality of a “place,” which is the more important term here. As Tim Cresswell notes, “places must have some relationship to humans and human capacity to produce and consume meaning” (7). In other words, spaces are transformed into places by human relations (8).

Even with the cursory examples given above, the importance of the idea of “place” becomes clear: “place” is not simply a neutral mix of geography and buildings that people are simply poured into. Rather, what becomes clear is that, at least on one level, Chinatown operates as “the material setting for social relations” (Cresswell 7). That is, that space, and specifically urban spaces, are both the result of, and reveal important power relationships. As Kay Anderson notes in her study of Vancouver's Chinatown, “Chinatown” and all physical spaces and visual qualities are not the product of some “essential Chineseness” which results in the building of “Chinese restaurants, grocery stores and pagodas,” but that these places are “ideologically constructed as places of difference” (Cresswell 28). In may ways then, an important key to understanding Chinatown as a place is the understanding that not only are places defined by socio-spatial practices, but that often “places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries” (McDowell 4). More importantly, as seen in the case of these historical Chinatowns, “these boundaries are both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded” (McDowell 4). Furthermore, the facts
of these Chinatown ghettos represents the “the processes of geographically uneven
development” (Soja 86) in capitalist societies. As Soja notes, “under advanced capitalism
the organization of space becomes predominantly related to these reproduction of the
dominant system of social relations” (91).

In connecting the spatial with the social, what Anderson, Rast, and Haenni do is to
raise the question of what kinds of Chinese identities are produced in these very different
constructions of these historical Chinatowns. For example, both Anderson and Rast
emphasize the way these spaces affirm the position of the Chinese as “exotic other”
(Cresswell 29). As Rast argues, the attempts of the Chinese merchants in San Francisco
to attract white tourists by claiming that “Chinatown's authenticity lay in the exoticism of
its architecture, theatrical performances, curios and cuisine” further “affirmed perceptions
of Chinese Americans as authentic 'others' more systematically and thus more forcefully”
(33). On the other hand, in studying the role of “slumming films” set in Chinatown,
Haenni argues that these films along with the fictive accounts of Chinatown period
magazines created within the racial imaginary an identity for the Chinese based on a
“decorational aesthetic” and “fakeness” that created a “profoundly contradictory,
incoherent, if not illegible identity” (29). Haenni goes to argue that this identity served as
an important precursor to modernity for both the Chinese and the “white spectators” of
these films.

What Anderson, Rast, and Haenni explore are these questions of place, the
representation of that place and how those representations affect the construction of
specific racial identities. In many ways, the popular perceptions of Chinatown, whether produced by the Chinese merchants within Chinatown themselves or by “those with the power to define place (the media, government, etc.)” (Cresswell 29) is as much a representation of the actual material Chinatown as one of Haenni’s “slumming films” or any of the countless other films or novels that use Chinatown as a setting. What is of foremost importance here is this relationship between a specific place and its representation and thus the kinds of identities that become possible within that space.

These next two chapters intend to take up this question of space, place and identity by exploring a wide range of film and literature set within both the New York and San Francisco Chinatowns. The first chapter will consider two films: Michael Cimino's violent crime thriller *Year of the Dragon* (1985) and the Technicolor musical extravaganza *Flower Drum Song* (1961). Opening the chapter with these two films allows for a more detailed analysis of the idea of space and place: since film is the medium of the representation of space, *par excellence*. More importantly, both of these films powerfully utilize different types of visual spectacle, which ultimately allows for a very limited range of Chinese American identities. Most notably, *Flower Drum Song* offers up a version of a Chinese American identity that is the very apex of an ethnic identity found in neoliberal multiculturalism. Moreover, this is exactly the identity that is found in Jade Snow Wong's influential, now highly criticized autobiography, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. Ultimately, these works are contrasted with four works in the next chapter that specifically push against this Chinese American identity based on the
assumptions of neoliberal multiculturalism. Wayne Wang's feature debut *Chan is Missing* directly addresses these issues of film, geography and identity raised in *Flower Drum Song*, while Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, published a mere ten years or so after Wong's autobiography, explores both the geographical and cultural limits of Chinatown while offering a radically different vision of a Chinese American identity. Likewise, Faye Myenne Ng's *Bone* again explores the geography of San Francisco's Chinatown to question and critique American master narratives of geographical and social mobility. As this chapter begins with Cimino's film, it ends rather ironically, with Frank Chin's play of the same name, perhaps the most savage and biting indictment of the Chinese American identity created under neoliberalism. In many ways directly addressing Wong's work, Chin's work pushes violently on the questions that guides these two chapters: the importance of place, the role of visual spectacle, and the types of identities that are ultimately possible within those parameters.

**The Urban Nightmare: Year of the Dragon**

Beginning this chapter with film and looking at two movies that use Chinatown as integral parts of their narrative and thematic structures allows for highlighting the importance of geography and space in the creation of certain types of transpacific identities. In many ways, *mise en scène* of film not only makes it a premiere visual medium, but can often reveal the oft-hidden relationship between ideology and space. In fact, perhaps the most basic act of film is the concept of “framing a shot,” wherein, “the
frame makes the image finite. The film image is bounded, limited. From an implicitly continuous world, the frame selects a slice to show us” (Bordwell and Thompson 173). More specifically, Gilles Deleuze describes this act of framing in spatial terms, describing the shot as “a uniquely spatial determination, indicating a 'slice of space' at a particular distance from the camera” (24). However, the presentation of different spaces in film is not found only in the static shot: of equal importance are the camera movements, as well as the ways in which individual shots are edited into different montages. Furthermore, the use of lighting and even color influence the final images on the screen. In other words, film space isn't just limited to simply what is seen in the frame of a single shot, but rather film space is constructed through a myriad of different available techniques.

Ultimately, these elements serve to remind us that space as represented on film is not just a neutral backdrop against which the action occurs. Rather, as Bordwell and Thompson point out, “the frame is not simply a neutral border; it produces a certain vantage point onto the material within the image. In cinema, the frame is important because it actively defines the image for us” (Bordwell & Thompson 167). In addition, framing a shot “creates a new way of seeing…[making] us perceive things anew, shaking us out of our accustomed habits and suggesting fresh new ways of hearing, seeing, feeling and thinking” (Bordwell & Thompson 36). Jeff Hopkins makes a similar argument noting that the myriad ways in which space and place are represented in film constitute a “cinematic landscape” which is not “a neutral place of entertainment or an objective documentation or mirror of the 'real,' but an ideologically charged cultural
creation whereby meanings of place and society are made, legitimized, contested and obscured” (47). Thus, to consider the different spaces and places in film is to also consider “the prevailing cultural norms, ethical mores, societal structures, and ideologies” (Aitken and Zonn 5). This returns us to the question of Chinatown: not only what kind of Chinatown is presented in *Year of the Dragon* and *Flower Drum Song*, but also the question of what is possible within those cinematic landscapes.

Released in 1985, *Year of the Dragon* tells the story of the conflict between an obsessive and volatile New York City police captain, Stanley White (Mickey Rourke), attempting to clean up the gangland elements in Chinatown. In his crusade, White not only comes into conflict with an up-and-coming gang leader named Joey Tai (John Lone), but also romances Tracy Tzu (Ariane), an Asian American reporter (styled after the popular Connie Chung), who is doggedly pursuing a story on organized crime in Chinatown. The movie itself was met with controversy on its release, suffering through protests from a coalition of “Asian American associations and media groups that picketed theaters and organized other types of protests against the film” (Marchetti 216) for its negative portrayal of Asian Americans and Chinatown.

The films opens with a Chinese New Year's parade, starting with a dynamic close-up of a traditional Chinese parade dragon. As the camera cranes up to a high angle shot, the dragon leaps away from the camera and moves down the street, away from the camera. The film then cuts to a long shot looking down the Chinatown street: among the crowded *mise en scène* are the neon-lit signs of the different Chinatown stores, the
confetti-strewn streets and sidewalks filled with spectators, and a pagoda-style arch near the rear of the scene. These elements all frame the main element at the rear of the scene: the parade itself, a colorful palanquin surrounded by brightly-hued red and yellow flags. More flags are visible in the foreground and they move to obscure the scene as they pass in front of the camera, as a second part of the parade moves away from the camera towards the palanquin. Two dominant impressions arise from this scene that actually serve to characterize not only the rest of this sequence, but the way in which Chinatown is presented throughout the movie. The first emphasis is on location and a sense of place: both shots emphasize the idea of the city street. The second long shot especially creates this sense of place with its inclusion of the neon-lit signs, cars parked along the street and crowds of onlookers. This sense of place continues to be emphasized as the scene continues: several shots of exploding firecrackers are shot from a low-angle, with neon-lit building signs clearly visible in the background, as well as several shots returning to the long-shot that begins the sequence. The most important impression is the visual spectacle that dominates the scene. From the dancing dragons to the multicolored flags to the signs dominated by Chinese characters, the crowded _mise en scène_ practically overwhelms the viewer. In addition, the falling confetti that dominates nearly every shot adds to the already crowded mise-en-scene. The spectacle here is aural as well: the soundtrack is completely dominated not only by the pounding drums of the parade, but also the cacophony created by the exploding firecrackers.
More importantly, of course, is that this is the spectacle of ethnic difference. The spectacular appearance of the Chinatown parade serves as a kind of visual shorthand to establish that this is a movie set in and about Chinatown (though that point becomes debatable as the movie progresses). It functions as “pure style with neon dragons, pop songs, lion dances, and displays of martial artistry, forming a part of postmodern popular iconography” (Marchetti 203). This spectacular display also represents the exoticization and Orientalizing of Chinese culture at its most basic. More importantly, this use of spectacular display reflects an important feature of American neoliberal multiculturalism, wherein, “to the degree that multiculturalism claims to register increasing diversity of populations, it precisely obscures the ways in which that aesthetic representation is not an analogue for material positions, means or resources of those populations” (Lowe 86). Much like Marchetti’s claim of “pure style,” the technology of multiculturalism reduces the very real social and economic inequities experienced by minority populations to mere visual displays: whether in the form of “ethnic” foods, or in this case, a traditional celebration. Within the logic of liberal multiculturalism, entire cultures and their particular histories in the United States are reduced to the visually arresting and exotic. If anything, then, there is this regressive quality to the construction of Chinatown in the film.

The Chinatown sequence that opens this film ends quite abruptly with the brutal murder of the crime lord Jackie Wong inside a restaurant as the parade continues outside. As Marchetti notes, there is a connection made between “the exotic and the dangerous”
And, as mentioned earlier, this connection between Chinatown and criminality is nothing new, having been part of the construction of different Chinatowns since their earliest days. Haenni notes in her reading of an early Chinatown film, “The Deceived Slumming Party” (a short film about a group of tourists tricked by staged acts of crime and horror in New York's Chinatown), there is a “longing not only to exhibit and display Chinatown” but also “an insistence on the unimaginable horrors hidden within Chinatown” (26). Similarly, Rast describes a similar effort by San Francisco tour guides to show the “backstage” or “hidden” areas of Chinatown that involved “opium dens, gambling halls and brothels” (45). What is most important in this formulation is that behind the innocent facade of a Chinatown of filled with “temples, theaters, shops, and restaurants” (Rast 44), there is a seething underground world of sin and crime. It is this formulation that is repeated in Year of the Dragon when White invades an illegal Chinatown gambling hall. The scene begins on a crowded Chinatown street, which tracks White as walks up to a building, scuffles briefly with some toughs and then forces his way into the building. The camera continues to track White as he moves down a short flight a stairs into a darkened concrete hallway, finally pushing his way through a metal door into a crowded, smoke-filled gambling hall. The emphasis in this sequence is the movement from surface to underground, from a bright, well-lit outside to a dark, hidden and illegal underworld, both metaphorically and literally.

Another element in this link between Chinatown and its hidden criminality is the importance of the labyrinthine. Haenni argues that “the hidden nature of Chinatown was
accentuated by built space: the narrow streets and the break with the grid system helped characterize Chinatown as labyrinthian” (27), while Rast notes the way in which San Francisco tour guides emphasized rumors of an “underground Chinatown...a vast labyrinth of opium dens, gambling halls, criminal hideouts, and slave quarters” (46). The connection between the underground with its maze-like quality and the criminal appears throughout the movie, where the camera tracks characters as they move through crowded back hallways of buildings or through narrow and bustling kitchens. These scenes create a disorienting sense of motion where characters move purposefully, but often leave the viewers behind in terms of where they are and where they are ultimately heading, creating the effect of leading the viewer through the hidden back ways of a mysterious criminal underworld. This equation is seen most strikingly in a sequence where White discovers the bodies of two gangsters in a dimly-lit, underground bean sprout factory. As before, the sequence begins above ground, with an emphasis on the movement from above to below, as White descends into the darkened factory. In fact, the factory is so dark that White and the other characters use high-powered flashlights to light their way as the camera tracks them through several maze-like twists and turns. At the same time, there are several cuts to White's point of view, as he shines his light on the faces of the Chinese workers he walks past, who, as he is informed, are “mostly illegal, sweating a bust.” At the same time, a single flute is heard on the soundtrack, emphasizing the sense of mystery that pervades the scene. Here, White literally penetrates into the dark labyrinth of the Chinatown underworld, bringing light to the criminal activities literally
hidden under the streets. White serves a kind of police tour guide that tourists at the turn of the previous century were exhorted to acquire before venturing into Chinatown. In this way, the Chinatown created in this movie is curiously regressive: invoking the tropes of criminality, tied to the exotic, the unknowable, and the labyrinthine.

As mentioned earlier, this idea of Chinatown as a kind of inscrutable place of mystery is nothing new and, in this case, can be ultimately connected to the inability of Chinatown, and its residents to assimilate fully into the fabric of the nation-state. There is a general sense of unknowability that pervades the visual construction of Chinatown that can be seen in the parade sequence that opens the movie: as the two separate parades meet in the street it quickly devolves into violence as the dancers and celebrants suddenly attack each other in a series of quick shots, each cut punctuated by a blow landing on a parade participant. In fact, the general level of chaos increases as the sequence progresses, culminating in Wong's brutal execution. As Marchetti notes, the street brawl and the execution “are never clearly explained” (206), reflecting a general confusion that matches the visual and aural chaos of the sequence, and is reflected throughout the movie. The paradox, of course, is that while Chinatown itself is perfectly legible as a place of neon signs, crowded and chaotic streets, and dragon parades, the films focus on these visual elements of the sensational and spectacular emphasizes a kind of illegibility, where “the exotic difference of the Chinese,” marks the “inability to assimilate” (Haenni 26). Similarly, Robert G. Lee, in his study of Asian American images in popular culture, notes the way in which the film “deploys spectacle...to create a universal Oriental
otherness” (197). In other words, an emphasis on the spectacular and exotic nature of Chinatown fits part and parcel with attitudes that marked the Chinese as a people as “permanent aliens” in America (Lee 4) and summarily excluded from social integration with the rest of the country.

To further emphasize this point, the film actually constructs Chinatown as a kind of extra-territorial space that, even though is situated in America for nearly a century, is still considered “foreign” soil. Both McKenna, White's superior, and the Chinatown leaders refer specifically to an “arrangement” between the police and Chinatown leaders that allows Chinatown to somehow exist beyond the reach of American laws. In fact, in a later scene, McKenna refers to this arrangement as “a treaty with the Chinese.” While McKenna mocks White by noting, “You're not in Vietnam here, Stanley,” White (and the movie) makes it very clear that McKenna is wrong, with White equating the Chinese gangs with the enemy that White fought in the Vietnam War: “the difference was I never saw the goddamn enemy. Here, they're right in front of my eyes. They got no place to hide, no jungle.” For White, there is no difference between the Chinatown gangs and the Vietcong, suggesting, as Lee notes in his criticism of the film, that “New York's Chinatown is Vietnam; Asian America is the ground on which the Vietnam War can be fought again and again” (197). This equation between Chinese American gangs in Chinatown with the Vietcong in Vietnam emphasizes the transpacific nature of Chinatown: there is an inescapable and indefinable foreignness to Chinatown that it can
never fully escape. It is this foreignness then that comes into play when considering the types of Asian American identities constructed in this film.

Arguably, this construction of Chinatown has more in common with a kind of injurious transnationalism which has served as a technology of Asiatic racialization within the United States (Chuh 59). As Chuh argues, in “highlighting the transnational dimensions of 'Asian American' identity formation seemingly bolsters that process of differentiation whereby... participation in the socio-political and cultural life of the U.S. nation have been regularly denied 'Asians'” (59-60). However, it is thus important to briefly parse this racist logic of the United States from the larger usage of the transpacific within this project as a whole. And indeed, the transpacific identity given to Joey Tai fits squarely within this racist construction. But it is also on this valence of identity that makes the transpacific such an important analytic to this project, because, as Chuh notes, transnationalism reflects “the incapacity of the nation-state to contain and represent fully the subjectivities and ways of life that circulate within the nation-space” (62).

Furthermore, by concentrating on “contemporary flows of capital and information that seemingly find national borders irrelevant and 'patriotic' loyalties displaced from nation-states to differently configured collectivities” (Chuh 3), transnationalism offers a way of moving beyond the framework of nation, which has powerful implications in regards to considering Asian American identities; again, this is an important fundamental premise of my project.

2 Here, as in the Introduction, the transpacific can be a kind of subset of transnationalism where the focus is on the countries of the Pacific Rim.
In its Chinatown milieu, *Year of the Dragon* offers two different constructions of Chinese American identities, seen in its main three Chinese American characters: Joey Tai, Tracy Tzu and Herbert Kwong, a Chinese rookie that White recruits to infiltrate Chinatown. Perhaps the most striking identity, and the one that most represents the unassimilable nature of the Chinese is Joey Tai. As the chief antagonist, Tai represents two different kinds of threats: first, he orders his gangs to “muscle past Canal Street. They’re going to push the Mafia out. I’m talking banks, real estate, drug money,” moving beyond the geographical boundaries of Chinatown to threaten the rest of the city.

Secondly, his threat is specifically transpacific in nature, a point that the movie makes clear in following Tai to Thailand as he cold-bloodedly brokers a deal for a large shipment of heroin. Considering that nearly all of the movie takes place in the different neighborhoods of New York City, the sequences following Tai in Thailand seem almost anomalous. This difference is highlighted when the film cuts from a scene in Tracy Tzu's apartment, where a nude Tzu, seen in silhouette, wanders languorously through her fashionable apartment after having a romantic encounter with White. The scene takes place at night, suffused in dark blues and black, with the lights of the Brooklyn Bridge and the southern tip of Manhattan seen in the background through the large picture windows of the apartment, punctuated by a soft romantic theme on the soundtrack.

Suddenly, the film cuts to a shot of water taxis racing along an unnamed Thai river. Instead of night, it is day; instead of music, only the drone of the boats and the clanging of a large bell seen in the foreground of the shot. As the camera pans, following the
progress of the taxis, a large temple is seen looming in the background as well as a large thatched hut. The camera then pans to the ultimate subject of the shot, Joey Tai, seated at a river side cafe with his right hand man, discussing his upcoming with his drug supplier. Despite some structural similarities in the shots (the presence of the arched windows in Tzu's apartment forms a frame for the city in the background much like the overhanging fringe does in the Thailand shot), what stands out the most are the differences. Here, the difference is literalized as night and day, emphasizing the international crossing that both Tai and the film has taken.

Lee argues that in many ways Joey Tai represents a kind of regressive Chinese stereotype as well: a kind of Sax Rohmer Fu Manchu figure (197). However, a point that Lee alludes to but does not necessarily emphasize is the transpacific nature of this figure. What makes the character of Joey Tai remarkable is not just the fact that he is the unassimilable alien, but the fact that he prefigures the perceived economic threat of international capital investment from Asia that comes to dominate the cultural discourse in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Indeed, Lee connects White's “war” against Tai to an earlier point in this “undeclared trade war” against Japan, suggesting that the “war” the movie fighting is not just Vietnam, but also the struggles of the U.S. Auto industry against an encroaching Japanese automakers (203). In many ways then, the sequences detailing Tai's sojourn in Thailand bring forth not only the threat of “invasion” seen earlier in the movie, but also the role that transnational capital plays in that “invasion.” The linkage between the two is made clear with Tai's almost triumphal procession on
horseback through a massed throng of heavily armed, fatigue-clad soldiers as a martial
tHEME plays on the soundtrack (indeed, spectacle of a different nature) and his later
dealings with General Ban Sung, where the two haggle over the price Tai is willing to pay
for “key” of heroin. The discussion includes Tai worrying about price, quality control
and employing his chemists in Hong Kong, sounding less like a drug kingpin and more
like a multinational businessman trying to close a deal. However, arrayed against this
invasive foreign capital as represented by Tai would be the two Chinese characters
helping White: Tzu and Kwong. One could make the argument that these two characters
seem to defy the notion that the Chinese are ultimately unassimilable and actually
represent the exact opposite possibility: that the Chinese can find a way to assimilate into
the fabric of the nation-state. Perhaps more accurately, Tai represents a kind of “bad”
assimilation in the form of infiltration, while Tzu and Kwong become representative of
the model minority myth, the supposedly “good” type of assimilation. The latter two
characters, then, suggest a Chinese American identity that is possible within this
cinematic landscape, but such a possibility turns out to be just as circumscribed and
limited as the one represented by Tai.

The identity represented by Tzu and Kwong is exactly that of the Asian subject in
neoliberal multiculturalism, existing within, but never affecting the larger hegemonic
structure of society. Geography becomes part of what identifies these characters: neither
character is actually from Chinatown. Tzu lives in a swanky apartment with picture-
postcard views of Manhattan while Kwong is chosen to infiltrate Chinatown precisely
because he is an anonymous face there. Furthermore, despite the ethnically-articulated
defiance that Tzu and Kwong both show against White, both characters literally end up in
the embrace of White. Early on the film, Tzu seemingly challenges the institutional
racism of the state, explaining how both her great-grandfather and grandfather returned to
China “because they wouldn't allow their wives to come,” here criticizing the Chinese
Exclusion Acts of the previous century. In fact, Kwong expands on this criticism later in
the movie, angrily rebuking White not only for taking advantage of him, but also
connecting it to the historical exploitation of the Chinese:

    We dug your gold and silver, Stanley. We taught you how to fish the
    Pacific. And still we were barred from American citizenship until 1943.
    We worked so hard to build your railroads, and when the opium didn't
    come on time, we were so desperate we helped each other kill ourselves.
    But I'm not going to kill myself for you, Captain White. No more
    Chinaman Joe, those days are over.

The irony, of course, is that Kwong simply becomes another victim of the “dead
Chinaman” trope and eventually does sacrifice himself for White, gunned down by Joey
Tai's man on a dirty Chinatown street, and dies in White's embrace, but not before
revealing the vital information that will allow White to bring down Tai. In essence,
Kwong's “gesture of resistance... becomes completely irrevelant” (Lee 203), merely
reaffirming the ultimate importance of “the white American mission” (Marchetti 213) that
Kwong has engaged in. It is this kind of simple neoliberal identity politics that becomes
apparent in the final image of the movie: the final embrace between White and Tzu puts White in the center of frame, looking directly in the camera while Tzu's gaze is off to the side. In the end, the film isn't about addressing historical inequalities or creating new possibilities for Chinese American identities, but to make Stanley “nice.” This final embrace also reveals the ways in which Tzu becomes doubly marginalized through the course of the film: as both a woman and as an Asian American. On a narrative level, by having White fall in love with Tzu, White is thus able to recognize and redeem his own racist tendencies (Marchetti 214); in essence, using Tzu as an Asian woman to redeem White's character failings, further emphasizing the idea that the only subjectivity that matters is White's. Furthermore, as the movie progresses, Tzu slowly loses the independence that she displayed at the beginning of the movie, engaging in an affair with White, but also allowing him to take over his apartment and, as the intensity of White's war against Tai increases, relying more and more on his protection. As Marchetti points out, the film not only does the film take away Tzu's independence, but also “domesticates her [and] places her under white control” (213). In both registers then, this embrace at the end symbolizes the way in which “both as a woman and as an Asian, Tracy has submitted to Stanley's authority” (Marchetti 213). The film itself, then, offers nothing new. Thus, the spectacle of Chinatown has “merely reinforce[d] racial distinctions and maintain[ed] the status quo” (Haenni 23).

The underlying irony is the fact that the filmmakers of *Year of the Dragon* went to great lengths to balance their regressive construction of Chinatown and Chinese
Americans by offering characters such as Tracy Tzu and Herbert Kwong as a kind of antidote to its stereotypical spectacles of Chinese villainy and criminality. Just as apparent is the way the blaring spectacles of dragon dances and blazing guns and gory deaths trump those attempts. Of course, this attempt by Hollywood to more “accurately” portray Chinatown and the lives of Chinese Americans is nothing new. *Flower Drum Song*, a lavish Rodgers and Hammerstein musical based on the novel by C.Y. Lee, released over twenty years before, offered the same corrective, and ends up with the same results as *Year of the Dragon*.

**The Suburban Dream: *Flower Drum Song***

In many ways, *Flower Drum Song* broke new ground for a “great, big old-fashioned Hollywood musical,” a description included in the making-of featurettes featured on the *Flower Drum Song* DVD. In offering an all-Asian cast in telling its story San Francisco's Chinatown and the lives and loves of its denizens, Hollywood offered something that had seldom been seen before. However, as with *Year of the Dragon*, *Flower Drum Song* offers plenty of spectacle, some of it different from that in the former, but much of it the same in terms of its presentation of Chinatown. Song and dance in the form of staged musical numbers replace the spectacle of guns and violence, but in many ways, Chinatown is presented with the same visual style: neon signs, pagoda arches, and a Chinese New Year's Parade complete with a dancing dragon.
In fact, there is a keen interest in location throughout the movie, perhaps best evidenced in the “Grant Avenue” number that is set during this Chinese New Year's parade. First of all, the number itself is integrated closely with location footage of an actual Chinese New Year's Parade in San Francisco's Chinatown: a high angle shot of the parade moving down the street (in itself highlighting the visual spectacle offered by the parade) cuts to the Celestial Gardens float, with its miniature pagoda flanked by traditionally dressed characters seated on Chinese style thrones, gliding to a stop at an intersection of three streets, where the high energy dance number is subsequently performed. This integration with the scenes from the actual parade emphasizes the narrative of “authenticity” that is so important to the movie, an idea that is further developed in the chorus of the song: “Grant Avenue, San Francisco, California, USA, looks down over a foggy bay.” The lyrics are designed to suggest the specificity of a real-world location: Grant Avenue, in a very specific place: San Francisco's Chinatown. Furthermore, as Rick Altman points out in his book length study *The American Film Musical*, the use of location shooting in musicals is often “carefully chosen to recall a cinematic or pictorial precedent” (277). In this case the precedent is the focus on ethnic spectacle that is commonplace in Chinatown and it is no surprise then that the film ultimately links spectacle with the “authentic,” as in so many other constructions of Chinatown. As Altman notes, “whether the raw material is a studio set or a western landscape, the function remains the same: to keep simultaneously before the viewer's eye's the true stuff of America plus the mythifying vision which turns it into Americana”
(281). In other words, the use of location shooting doesn't necessarily connote any type of additional “realism” or “authenticity,” only a vision that has existed previously in culture: Chinatown defined by its visual difference. Ultimately, then, the film undermines its own narrative of authenticity through its this utilization of ethnic spectacle.

What also becomes clear in this number is the way that Chinatown is constructed as a separate world. As David Henry Hwang (who penned the libretto for the 2002 Broadway revival of the show) points out in one of the documentaries accompanying the DVD release of the movie, the song emphasizes the notion of touristic travel, offering a “tourist's-eye view” of Chinatown. After all, as the lyrics note, “you travel there in a trolley, in a trolley, up you climb,” with the “you” in the lyrics implying the point of view of an outsider, specifically a tourist, coming into Chinatown. Moreover, once this imaginary tourist reaches Chinatown, the song celebrates any number tourist activities for him to engage in: from shopping “for precious jade or teakwood tables or silk brocade” to enjoying some “shark-fin soup, bean cake fish” or, as the song suggests, even enjoying the sight of “the girl who serves you all your food [who] is another tasty dish.” In short, “you're in Hong Kong, having yourself a time.” The sense of progression in the chorus, “Grant Avenue, San Francisco, California, U.S.A.,” performs a similar function by locating the setting of the movie within larger and larger contexts: moving out from street, to a region in the city, to the city itself and eventually to the state and ending up in the nation. This progression allows the song to have it both ways, as it were: “Grant Avenue” and Chinatown exist as both separate entities and within the larger framework of
the nation. In other words, as much as Chinatown can exist as a separate world, that is it can actually be “Hong Kong” as the lyrics state, in all its picturesque detail, but it is also firmly within the geographical, juridical and cultural boundaries of the United States, being merely the “western street with eastern manners.” The implications of this last point will be discussed in more detail later.

In many ways, the American film musical is the ideal genre to contain what is a powerful contradiction. Richard Dyer argues for what he calls “entertainment's utopian sensibility” (21), which offers a vision of “what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized” (20). Because musicals must bridge the gap between two powerful contradictions, that of the narrative versus that of the numbers musicals as a genre are quite adept at, “work[ing] through these contradictions at levels in such a way as to 'manage' them, to make them seem to disappear” (27) Part of this work-through, Dyer continues, is the “removal of the whole film in time and space...to places, that is, where it can be believed (by white urban Americans) that song and dance are 'in the air', built into the peasant/black culture and blood, or part of a more free-and-easy stage in American development” (30). In other words, an often essential part of the musical as a genre this need to separate the world of the musical from the “real” world, a position already occupied by Chinatown in the United States racial imaginary. Altman makes a similar point in his discussion of of what he terms “the folk musical,” one of the three classification of Hollywood musicals he uses in his historical analysis of the Hollywood musical. Altman traces the development of the folk musical to the all-Black musicals of
the late 1920s, noting the way in which “blacks were in no sense a part of the American 'we'; instead they represented a picturesque and mysterious 'they' living among us, a source of romance...so the all-black folk musical served as a romanticized substitute for direct experience of the Old South” (290). In many ways then, *Flower Drum Song* does in the 1950s for the Chinese what the these all-black musicals did in the 1920s. In other words, *Flower Drum Song* utilizes spectacle to draw a sharp distinction that not only separates the Chinese from the rest of America, but also boils down the Chinese American experience to something palatable and understandable to white America.

If anything then, *Flower Drum Song* offers a powerful narrative of assimilation into America by not only offering a panoply characters at different stages of assimilation, but also by utilizing another key convention in the musical genre: the smoothing over of contradiction. Altman expands in great depth upon this point, arguing that the musical has a “dual-focus approach,” where male and female characters representing often opposite, diametrically opposed positions are presented not linearly, but in “parallel” (22) through the musical numbers and scenes. In this way, Altman argues, “nearly every American film musical sets up a series of male/female oppositions, eventually resolving them through...marriage” (24) – a feature that also applies to *Flower Drum Song*. Thus, the most important element in the musical is not necessarily plot, which Altman argues, “has little importance to begin with” (27), but in “the oppositions developed in the seemingly gratuitous song and dance numbers...are instrumental in establishing the structure and meaning of the film” (27). In other words, what is most important is what is
arguably the most spectacular part of the musical and that meaning is not carried mainly
through plot, but through the musical numbers. Moreover, Altman makes an important
theoretical turn, moving from these formal elements to the question of the larger function
of the film, when he argues that “only when we identify the film's constitutive dualities
can we discover the film's function” (27). For Altman, the film's function, and in fact, the
function of genre in general, is as a “cultural problem-solving device” (27), because it is
through the cultural creation of genre that “a single coherent narrative mediating cultural
contradictions which the culture can handle no other way” is created. Thus, the musical,
as a genre, operates “by reconciling terms previously seen as mutually exclusive, the
musical succeeds in reducing an unsatisfactory paradox to a more workable
configuration, a concordance of opposites” (27). In short, the job of the musical is to
resolve for culture the seemingly unresolvable. In the case of *Flower Drum Song*, it is the
question of the somehow assimilating the unassimilable immigrant, specifically, the
Chinese immigrant.

The film resolves this question of the Chinese immigrant by resolving the
question of personal and cultural identity; that is, the Chinese immigrant becomes
assimilable by acquiring what would be best described as a “hybrid” identity that
somehow combines the best of the Chinese culture with the best of Western culture. As
Auntie Liang proudly pronounces at the party celebrating her successful graduation from
citizenship school: “I am happy to be both Chinese and American.” The film configures a
series of conflicts around the old trope of Asian American literature: that of the
generational conflict, where the older generation of characters represents “an anachronistic (if quaint), stultifying (if wise), oppressive (if loving), traditional world view” while the younger generation is, of course, the opposite: “shallow (yet glamorous), modern (yet materialist) romantic (yet rootless)” (Lee 175). These conflicts are seen most clearly in the family of Old Master Wong and his two sons: the older Wang Ta and the younger Wang San. While Wang Ta may chafe over his father's strictures regarding whom he should marry and serves in many ways as the main plot driver, it is old Master Wang's conflict with the hyper-assimilated Wang San that offers the most visually striking illustration of this conflict. While Wang is dressed in a traditional Chinese outfit complete with queue, Wang San makes a series of appearances in what can only be termed iconic American costumes: from his first appearance in a complete baseball uniform to his literally iconic appearance as the Spirit of '76 for the Chinatown New Year's Parade. Furthermore, the number that most clearly embodies this conflict, “The Other Generation” is a number carried mainly by Wang and Wang San. However, as is often the case, the question of generational conflict is secondary to the question of cultural conflict. The film provides its answer to this quandary through what can be best described as a kind of blueprint for neoliberal assimilation through three key numbers in the film: “Chop Suey,” “Grant Avenue” and “Sunday.”

“Chop Suey” is the show-stopping number that comes almost at the halfway mark of the movie and takes place during a dual celebration for Wang Ta's graduation and Auntie Liang's successful completion of citizenship school. Set in Old Master Wang's
traditionally Chinese courtyard, the number nevertheless represents the film's paradigm for the successful assimilation of the Chinese immigrant. Not only is Madame Liang happy to be both Chinese and American, as mentioned earlier, she becomes the exemplary citizen, the “winner of the medal of excellence of the Moreno School for Citizenship” and the “best in class.” The introduction of this “fine American citizen” into Wang's family causes him to invoke the idea of “the Chinese dish Americans invented,” that mish-mash of different meats and vegetables that is “Chop Suey,” which serves as a segue into the number. Not only does the song explain that “living here is like Chop Suey,” it demonstrates it visually with an exuberant mix of dance styles, musical genres and languages. Most notably, the number includes a “hybrid” square dance where Chinese dance moves are called in English and traditional square dance steps such as the “do-see-do” are called in Cantonese. In order to become the exemplary American citizen then, the Chinese immigrant must somehow incorporate and speak both literally and metaphorically in an American idiom with traditionally “American” values; after all, the idea of “Chop Suey” is in the end, an American invention.

The “Grant Avenue” number pushes this paradigm a bit further, beginning with the Chinese New Year's Parade that begins the sequence. The parade itself is filled with hybrid images: an American style marching band in traditional Chinese outfits, Wang San leading the parade as the Spirit of ’76, all seemingly marching to a John Phillip Sousa's “Stars and Stripes Forever.” The actual number begins with the image of Chinese spectacle: a close-up of a gong that rolls away to reveal Linda Low in a traditional
“kneeling” pose in front of the Celestial Gardens float. Then the two seated traditionally dressed figures, intone the first lyrics, before literally giving way - as their thrones slide to the side of the float and the screen - to a chorus line of young dancers as the jazz-inflected music kicks in and Linda Low casts off her “Asian” robes to reveal high heels, a sporty pair of capris and crisp white blouse, offset with a little pouf headdress. Arguably, this sequence can be read as yet another image of Chinese-American hybridity following the New Year's Parade: composed of traditionally Asian elements combined with the best that America has to offer. However, the structure of the number, with the disappearance of the more traditionally Asian elements, seems more to suggest the disappearance of the Asian elements rather than an incorporation of the Western elements. Much like Linda Low's costume, what is Chinese becomes merely adornment, a little pouf to ostensibly mark ethnic difference.

The dream sequence “Sunday,” where Linda Low and Sammy Fong dream of their future together, marks the final step in this progression of ethnic assimilation. Almost entirely gone are the images of hybridity that populated the previous two numbers: Sammy and Linda lounge in pajamas, while their visitors are dressed in decidedly Western fashion. Even their imaginary daughter is dressed as a cowboy. Furthermore, with its abstract, almost sterilely white set and “surrounded by middle-class luxuries” (Lee 177), the sense of location that was so clear in the previous two numbers has been lost and replaced by what is best described as an image of middle-class paradise, an imaginary space marked by its forced perspective hallways, rather than a real-world
location. This sense of “nowhere” reinforces the notion that the ultimate goal of ethnic assimilation is the removal of any outward signifiers of ethnicity. In other words, in the perfect, assimilated, middle-class world of America, there is no need to be Chinese anymore. In a remarkable manner, this sequence also makes visible the relationship between the spatial organization of society and its role in the technologies of citizenship in the United States. As Sammy and Linda literally shed their ethnic identities, they strikingly illustrate the notion of the “abstract citizen,” where they are effectively cut off from their histories and origins. Moreover, this shedding of ethnic identity is connected with the jarring sense of dislocation in the scene: this move towards Americanness also involves the move away geographically from the socio-spatial practices that only makes certain identities possible.

As this sequence illustrates, the only thing that matters is to be “American,” and if this number is any indication, being “American” is entering the middle-class lifestyle. Thus, not only is the ultimate goal of ethnic assimilation synonymous with assimilation into a middle-class lifestyle, but the consumption of goods becomes the mediating factor in that assimilation. The focus on consumerism and consumer goods is quite prominent, having been a major thematic element throughout the movie, seen mostly with Linda Low’s seemingly pursuit of these goods. Unsurprisingly as well, she is also one of the most assimilated characters in the movie. In this sequence, the fancy four poster bed, the shiny art-deco toaster that rises magically from the counter, and the large television mounted on the wall represent the importance of this type of consumption. Furthermore,
as if to reinforce the imaginary and almost magical qualities of the space, the cowboy and Indian move out of the television and enter into the set, engaging in a slapstick chase with the other characters through the magically foreshortened hallway. Not only that, the emergence of these characters indicates the overall importance of the traditional Hollywood Western and its iconic trappings as a kind of stand-in or shorthand for the idea of America, or as Altman would phrase it, as “Americana.” Here television operates as both a physical marker of middle-class success in its form as an appliance, but also as a cultural phenomenon of the West.

The importance of the television and its literal mediation of the Chinese immigrant into the fabric of America is also seen in the finale of the movie. While the discussion so far has focused on the musical numbers, it is also important to note that the plot itself follows the gradual assimilation of Mei Li, one of the romantic leads of the movie, and whose journey to America serves as the main plot driver. Mei Li's assimilation is also marked visually: from the watercolors in the opening credits that document her journey by boat from China to San Francisco, to the Western style dress she wears to Wang Ta's graduation party, to her final assimilation via television and the movies. It is her final step in her assimilation via television, movies and Western pop culture that reflects several of the thematic elements seen in “Sunday.” First, Mei Li notes that in the movies she watches, “every American has a beautiful automobile and a beautiful golden girl in the car who wears wonderful clothes. They all seem so happy, but I don't understand why they go around killing each other,” again marking the ideology of
consumption as a primary feature of American citizenship. More importantly, it is through watching a television Western that Mei Li finds the inspiration that allows her to negotiate the difficulty that prevents her from marrying Wang Ta, since she is being forced to marry Sammy Fong (who himself would be rather married to Linda Low) because of the pre-existing marriage contract.

At the wedding, Mei Li declares to the assembled wedding party, “I must confess something, I came into this country illegally, across the Pacific Ocean, it is for that reason I cannot marry your son, my back is wet,” offering a malapropism of the phrase, “wetback” that she saw on the late movie from the night before. Due to the fact of her illegal status, the marriage contract is declared null and void by Sammy's horrified mother: “My son cannot marry a wetback. She has broken the law and can be deported. The contract is not valid.” With this final obstacle overcome, the way is clear for the triumphant double wedding: Wang Ta risks deportation to marry Mei Li and Sammy Fong and Linda Low take their first step into future Sundays to the joyful chorus of the reprise of “A Hundred Million Miracles.” In this way, with the double wedding of the rightfully-matched pairs at the end of movie, not only are the romantic difficulties of the movie resolved, but also the question of integration of the Chinese immigrant into the nation-state. Again, the movie returns to images of not only hybridity, but also of middle-class consumption: the wedding procession consists of the traditional Chinese palanquin followed by a television, refrigerator and other accouterments of successful middle-class life in tow. As Altman argues, in the folk musical, “the creation of a couple is parallel and
simultaneous to the formation of a community” (309). Here, it is the unproblematic full integration of the entire Chinese American community in Chinatown with the overall fabric of the nation-state. In other words, the film seems to say, despite the seemingly intractable differences in culture, the Chinese are easily integrated into America, and cultural differences are surface products: operating as the spectacle of ethnic difference that is either easily dispensed with, or as optional as the ethnic costumes that the characters don or doff as suits their needs.

However, despite the film's joyful embrace of this type of neoliberal multiculturalism, there still remain the possibility of contradictory, even resistant readings. After all, there is a stark, and unaddressed irony in the fact that the solution to the marriage problem depends upon Mei Li's outing herself as having entered the country illegally, or in the parlance of the movie, as “wetback.” There are two contradictions here: first, the movie states that whoever marries Mei Li would risk deportation as well, thus prompting Mrs. Fong's invalidation of the marriage contract. Thus, the fate of Wang Ta and Mei Li is on one level uncertain, as the movie suggests that Wang Ta might be deported along with Mei Li, belying the movie's “happily ever after” conclusion. More importantly, considering the extent to which the movie celebrates the successful integration of the Asian immigrant, the fact that this integration is achieved only through patently illegal means suggests a gap in the overall narrative of the assimilation process. Altman argues that such outside threats are actually a vital part of the folk musical genre, where, “the genius of the folk musical is that it manages both to mythify the American
past and yet, by making the process of mythification visible, to retain before our eyes the very dangers which necessitated that process to begin with” (290), and often easily dispensed with. In this case, however, the inclusion of this fact seems to indicate a failure in the mythification, where despite the overarching reach of the myth of assimilation, cracks and gaps are nonetheless visible because of the intractability of the problem of the Asian immigrant subject. This problem is also quite literally visible in “Sunday” as well, largely because of its use of imaginary space. First, as discussed earlier, it represents the ultimate goal of the Chinese immigrant and marks the dream-like achievement of that goal. At the same time, it also marks the imaginary nature of such a goal, and contrary to the film's overall purpose, and suggests that the ultimate assimilation of the Asian immigrant is an imaginary notion as the set itself for “Sunday.” As much as Sammy and Linda work to become the “no one” of the abstract citizen, there is ultimately “no place” for them to go. Despite the possibilities posed in these resistant readings, the fact remains that the movie posits a largely unproblematic transformation of the cultural identity for the Asian immigrant as the route for the easy assimilation of the Asian immigrant into the fabric of the nation-state, specifically through middle-class consumption.

The Road to the American Dream: Fifth Chinese Daughter

In many ways, the identity constructions found in these two films feed easily into the “model minority” myth for Asian Americans, described by Sau-ling Wong as where
the Asian immigrant is often “held up as the truest realization of traditional American values” (38, emphasis in original), of which the dogged and unwavering pursuit of the so-called “American Dream” and middle-class security is its main feature. Elaine Kim describes the myth in more cynical terms, noting that in the myth, “all that is required from him [the Asian subject] is that he accept his assigned status cheerfully and reject whatever aspects of his racial and cultural background prove offensive to dominant white society” (18-9). In many ways, the model minority myth is the subset specifically set aside for Asian immigrants in neoliberal multiculturalism and is on stark display in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Jade Snow Wong's oft-criticized autobiography of her formative years in San Francisco's Chinatown.

Derided by Patricia Lin Blinde as a “Horatio Alger account in Chinese guise” (59), *Fifth Chinese Daughter* offers a transpacific identity that oftentimes seem perfectly consonant with that found nearly twenty years later in *Flower Drum Song* and fifty years before Cimino's *Year of the Dragon*. Critics such as Lin Blinde, Kim and Wong have all provided incisive critical analyses of Wong's work, one of the first works written by a Chinese American to be published in English, often taking the work to task for its assimilationist stance and commodification and packaging of Chinese rituals and traditions for a white Western audience. Using these and other critical works as an important starting off point, this section seeks to highlight the importance of geography and the way in which that specific geographic space leads to the creation of the neoliberal Chinese subject. In many ways, the book itself signals this importance of specific places
and spaces with the illustrations by Kathryn Uhl that lead off each chapter. These line
drawings often emphasize the characters in very specific places, whether it is the opening
illustration of Jade Snow being wheeled along in a wheelbarrow by her father on a
Chinatown street or the image that also serves as the cover for the University of
Washington's 1989 edition: the focus is not on the figure of Jade Snow, but of a San
Francisco street lined with brownstones, with the figure Jade Snow not only dwarfed by a
telephone pole in the foreground, but also seen only from the back, black hair blowing in
the invisible breeze. While not a strictly geographical reading, this analysis seeks to
discuss the importance of place, both in macro terms as city or region and in micro terms
such as the interiors of specific rooms and buildings, in the construction of the Chinese
American identity found in the book. That is not to say that this geography is the sole
determinant of identity, but to consider more closely the role that geography plays in the
development of transpacific identities.

Near the end of the book, there is a particularly telling passage that not only
explicitly summarizes Jade Snow's purpose in writing the book, but also illustrates the
main concerns of this chapter. Interestingly enough, this moment takes place not in
Chinatown, but in the Santa Cruz mountains, where Jade Snow goes “to get away from
the turmoil of work and the city to do some thinking” (234) about her future plans. Here,
“at the tail end of the tourist season [with] few people around,” Jade Snow takes “long
walks alone” and “review[s] her philosophy of living” (234-5). It is here that she comes
to an epiphany about her future, deciding to become a writer, in order “to contribute in

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bringing better understanding of the Chinese people, so that in the Western world they would be recognized for their achievements” (235). In other words, this is the specific moment where Jade Snow decides to serve as a kind of cultural bridge between the East and the West, in essence, assuming “the role of an anthropologist's key informant” (Kim 67) with her writing. This decision also marks Jade Snow's choice in terms of her own identity in combining the “best” of Chinese values with the “best” of American values, ultimately an important part in the construction of her own ethnic identity. In many ways, though, Wong's depiction of Chinese cultural practices and her construction of Chinatown through her descriptions of specifically ethnic details can be understood in the context of this quote. For Wong, helping Western audiences understand Chinese culture more often than not means detailed descriptions of the more exotic and spectacular aspects of not only Chinatown but also of traditional Chinese celebrations and traditions - including a chapter devoted to the Chinese New Year's Parade. Most notably, and perhaps most criticized, the book “is filled with descriptions of... curious foods” (Blinde 59), prompting Frank Chin's oft-quoted derision of this book as a kind of “food pornography.” The use of the spectacular and the exotic and its myriad implications will be explored a bit later in this chapter.

This passage also illuminates a point that is often ignored in critical treatments of this book, namely a specific consideration of place in the construction of Jade Snow's identity. In many ways this passage emphasizes the importance of place: after all, Jade Snow only comes to her “life plan” after leaving the hustle and bustle of the city.
Furthermore, there is a remarkable level of detail in describing the specific setting for her epiphany: from “the mountain trail, crunchy with dried leaves” to the “fallen log under a huge bay tree” to the way the “sun warm[ed] up the earth with its early rays” (235). It is in this “peace and silence” that Jade Snow's plan comes to her, “in a split second – from where she didn't know. It seemed like an inspiration from above” (235). This passage not only illustrates the importance of place on a “macro” level, reflecting Jade Snow's larger travels through the Bay area and the influences these locations have on her, but also the importance of specific “micro” spaces that are detailed with great care by Wong. Here, the specific details of location are very telling about the role of some powerful American myths in Jade Snow's thinking. Her description of her sudden epiphany, literally “an inspiration from above” in an idyllic natural setting could be read as either a sudden religious conversion or it could be a moment of Thoreau-esque enlightenment. However, it is the Thoreau-esque qualities of this moment that become emphasized a little bit later when Jade Snow, “deliriously happy,” exults in her newly-charted course in life, noting how, she could “write when she wanted to, and make pottery when she wanted to. She could call her soul her own, strike her own tempo as she carved her own niche. How far she would get would depend on how hard she wanted to work, not on anyone else's whims or prejudices” (236). The echoes of Thoreau's popular sentiment about self-determination is abundantly clear in Jade Snow's use of the musical metaphor. In many ways, Thoreau with his philosophy of self-determination seems an appropriate touchstone for Jade Snow, as this expression of her happiness reflects several powerful myths, not
the least of which is the idea of the “self-made man,” which is so vital to the American notion of the middle-class American dream. Jade Snow's seemingly unqualified and notoriously upbeat conclusion that her success depended only “on how hard she wanted to work” is a direct expression of the “model minority” identity that she constructs in the autobiography.

Even though the main thrust of this passage is the question of place, it becomes clear that this question serves only as a starting place for numerous other analytical strands, starting with the specific way in which Chinatown is presented and ending with the transpacific identity that becomes possible within that literary landscape. Furthermore, there is the question of the accompanying American myths that inform Wong's vision of her journey and herself and the role that genre, here, the autobiography, plays within the book.

At its most basic level then, the book is structured around Jade Snow's physical journeys through the Bay Area that are accompanied by her metaphorical journey towards assimilation. To this end, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* can be read as a mobility narrative, where Jade's seeming ability to travel freely taps into the myth that “the essence of American [which] consists in freedom, in both a physical and spiritual sense” (Wong 118). In fact, it is Jade Snow's “enhanced mobility,” that is, “the opportunity to go where one wants, do what one wants, shape live anew” (Wong 118), that allows her to construct a transpacific identity that for Jade Snow combines the “best” elements of both Chinese culture and American culture. In her book, *Reading Asian American Literature*, Wong
suggests that “plotting a map for a mobility narrative...would be one interesting way to
discover the author's vision of the land's possibilities and proscriptions, as derived from historical experience” (129). Indeed, a map for Jade Snow's journey would be an interesting one, resembling a series of concentric circles radiating outward from Chinatown, which serves as the center of these circles. Jade's initial journey would be a movement away from Chinatown as she moves further and further into the white world, gaining more and more knowledge of Western ways that allow her to, in essence, start shedding her Chinese identity. After reaching Mills College in Oakland, the second phase of Jade's journey has her moving back into Chinatown, where she not only re-engages with her Chinese heritage, but articulates her newly created “hybrid” identity.

To this end, the Chinatown that Jade Snow describes seems completely segregated from the rest of San Francisco: in Chinatown, the young Jade Snow sees only Chinese faces and experiences only Chinese culture, and in her trips to downtown San Francisco with her father, Jade Snow “saw a completely different world which filled her with shyness and wonder” (6). In many ways, this reflects Wong's initial descriptions of Chinatown that begins the book: noting that “tourists and curio-seekers in a bare three minutes can stroll from the city's fashionable shopping district into the heart of Old China” (1). Wong expands on this description, describing the way in which “Chinatown in San Francisco teems with haunting memories, for it is wrapped in the atmosphere, customs and manners of a land across the sea” (1). In each case, not only is Chinatown
separated from the rest of San Francisco culturally, it is also separated temporally, her language suggesting that Chinatown exists in some kind of a misty past.

The book then can be read as the process by which Jade Snow slowly learns about the Western world. Each revelation for Jade Snow is guided by geography: each step takes her further and further from Chinatown and Chinese culture. For example, the second chapter entitled “The World Grows,” details Jade Snow's first experience with American public school, though still apparently located in Chinatown, and American culture and values, ranging from American playground songs to a new sense of freedom and abandon that causes the young Jade Snow to become “less actively concerned with was proper or improper” (13). In fact, this chapter is largely structured along these contrasts of Jade Snow's Chinese upbringing versus her new American education, perhaps most starkly seen in the composure and discipline involved in her first lessons in Chinese calligraphy. These contrasts are best summarized by the last line in the chapter, signalling Jade Snow's growing awareness of what was happening to her: “she was now conscious that 'foreign' American ways were not only generally and vaguely different from their Chinese ways...and the comparison made her uncomfortable” (21). In other words, the burgeoning awareness of the differences between American and Chinese ways begins to cause Jade Snow to doubt those Chinese ways, here expressed only as an “uncomfortable” feeling. As Jade Snow begins to move further away geographically, this feeling grows stronger as she not only matures, but learns more about these “American ways.”
As Jade Snow grows older, then, her circle of travels widens, allowing her a wide range of encounters with American culture, beginning with her experiences working as a housekeeper in a variety of white households. Later on, Jade Snow will not only attend junior college in San Francisco, but also go to Mills College in far-away Oakland. Afterwards, she finds work in a shipyard across San Francisco Bay in Marin County. In each of these locations and through her experiences there, Jade Snow gains significant experience and additional insights into the differences between the “Chinese ways” and “American ways,” which often results in a conflict between the two. The conflict is usually resolved with Jade Snow gradually acquiring American values and thinking that serve as the full expression of her unnamed doubt hinted at in the conclusion of chapter two. While there are a variety of specific cultural conflicts that Jade Snow encounters, they generally fall into the category of Jade Snow's increasing sense of personal freedom coming up against the traditional Chinese views that force her into a more subservient role.

A striking example of this occurs during her time working as a domestic in seven different American households which “exposed [her] to a series of candid views of the private lives of these American families” (103). Perhaps the most important of these is the “considerable period of time” she spent not only as a live-in domestic for the Kaisers, but also as “an intimate member of an American household, where she observed...a pattern completely different from her own Chinese background” (113). Part of this pattern, and perhaps most importantly for Jade Snow is the fact that in the Kaiser family,
“each member, even down to and including the dog, appeared to have the inalienable right to assert his individuality” (114). In describing the right given to the dog to assert his individuality, Jade Snow simultaneously trumpets the freedom afforded in an American household and bemoans her own lack of freedom in her family's more traditional household. Again, as Kim notes, while serving at the Dean's house in Mills College Jade Snow is grateful to be one of the recipients of the Dean's “kindness and consideration” along with the family pets: “including a pair of cocker spaniels... Pupuli and Papaia, and a black cat named Bessie, and Jade Snow” (qtd in Kim 67). However, as Kim points out, in celebrating her parity with the family pet, Jade Snow “does not question the contradiction of her own position without democratic rights” (67). It is the failure to fully acknowledge these contradictions that characterizes Jade Snow's unqualified acceptance of the American Dream.

Moreover, Jade's time at Mills College has perhaps the heaviest influence on the development of Jade Snow's transpacific identity. In addition to devoting several chapters to this time, which except for Santa Cruz marks the furthest circle of Jade's travels, Jade Snow is careful to point out that “Jade Snow's years at Mills College were inseparably colored by living at 'Kapliolani,' the dean's little brown-shingled home” (155). Of course, even though Jade was working as a domestic for the Dean in order to offset her tuition, she points out that “though these duties filled her days with busyness, she never felt too rushed and she never felt herself to be merely a servant” (156). Again, the unironic emphasis here is on the powerful sense of personal freedom that Jade Snow
discovers in this American household that seems to be absent from her Chinese home. In considering Jade's time spent as a domestic, with much of that time devoted to working in the kitchens of these different households, the importance of these “micro-spaces” in the production of Jade Snow's identity becomes clear. In fact, Jade Snow often uses this personal geography to both reflect her own feelings and symbolize her development along a parallel track with the larger geographical map that she develops. In addition, the time that Jade Snow spends within these different kitchens extends to her copious descriptions of Chinese food and cooking that permeate the book. In many ways, it is these descriptions of food that have been the object of the most scathing critical scrutiny.

In the same way that Jade Snow's distance from Chinatown allows her to learn more about “American” ways and to experience the increase in freedom, her specific depictions of different places reflects the same movement towards individuality and freedom. For example, after her father's refusal to pay for college, Jade retreats to her room, where, she “now...felt imprisoned” not just by the increasing number of people in the household, but by “a mesh of tradition woven thousands of miles away by ancestors who had no knowledge that someday one generation of their progeny might be raised in another culture” (110). Here, Jade Snow's already small physical surroundings takes on a different affective quality that she connects directly to her growing discontent with Chinese culture. Unsurprisingly, then, this sense of imprisonment is followed by the one of Jade Snow's first open acts of defiance towards her parents, where she, “impulsively...threw on her coat and left the house – the first time she had done so
without notifying Mama” (110). This impulsive act represents the first of Jade Snow's many walks around the city which come to symbolize Jade's “open rebellion” (130) against her parents. For Jade Snow, these walks represent the “independence, freedom, an opportunity for individual actualization” (Wong 121) often seen in American myths of mobility, and by freely roaming the city, Jade Snow exercises her own growing sense of freedom and individuality. After all, not only does Jade Snow experience her first kiss at seventeen on one of these walks, she comes to value these walks because “she found comfort and sometimes the answers to problems by wandering through odd parts of San Francisco, a city she loved with an ever increasing affection” (133). In this way, Jade Snow acts like a kind of female flâneur, taking “delight and pleasure in ambling contentedly and unhurriedly through the city” (Hubbard 324) with a sense of unqualified freedom that Jade Snow concludes is one of the most valuable aspects of American culture.

However, what remains unacknowledged is the fact that Jade Snow's mobility, either through the Bay Area or wandering through the city, doesn't really take her anywhere. After all, the furthest extent of her travels is out to Oakland, Santa Cruz and Marin County. Her self-described mobility in this case seems largely metaphorical, since her actual travels are themselves quite limited. In this way then, there is a certain sense of irony that unintentionally reveals more about the limits that have been placed on Jade Snow. That is not to say that Wong was insincere in her descriptions, but the strong sense
of irony found in Jade Snow's declarations of being given parity to family pets in American households carries over in her declarations of mobility.

The question of mobility and its use is only part of the question of geography and place as it appears in this book. The other question is the exactly what kind of Chinatown Jade Snow constructs in her narrative, and that question goes back to her stated purpose to serve as a cultural bridge connecting the minority Chinese culture to the majority American one. This purpose informs and limits the Chinatown that is display. To accomplish this end, Jade Snow often serves the role of a kind of native informant, devoting pages to describing Chinese traditions and practices, most notably and notoriously, food. In the more practical terms of the narrative though, Jade Snow more often than not becomes a tour guide introducing an American audience to the mysteries and wonders of Chinatown. In fact, this touristic style is readily apparent from the opening of the book. Jade Snow begins by locating Chinatown within the boundaries of San Francisco, but her description of Chinatown as “hugging the eastern slope of San Francisco's famous Nob Hill” and as “one of the unique spots of this continent” (1) could easily come out of any tourist's guide. Moreover, like the “Grant Avenue” from *Flower Drum Song*, the opening offers a tourist's-eye view, literally following a “tourists and curio-seekers” taking the “three-minute...stroll from the city's fashionable shopping district into the heart of Old China” (1). Furthermore, the series of dichotomies that Wong sets up in the next paragraph, “a tangible link between old and new, past and present, Orient and Occident” (1) aligns Chinatown and Chinese culture with the “old,”
the “past,” and promises the reader a kind of unveiling of the “atmosphere, customs, and manners of a land across the sea” (1). In this equation, the West becomes aligned with the present and modernity, while China and Chinatown exist in a mysterious and exotic past that must be opened up to curious Westerners.

Unfortunately, what happens, then, is Wong delivers exactly what she promises in this opening. In catering to American audiences and essentially taking on a “white frame of reference” (Kim 66), Linde argues that Jade Snow in “no way adds anything in terms of real knowledge where the general public’s picture of Chinese people is concerned. What Wong does is essentially to ‘repeat’ the white world's articulations and expectations as to what Chineseness is or is not” (58). Similarly, Kim argues that the use of “meticulous detail” in the book was aimed to “entertain and enlighten” an American reading public that had a growing interest and receptivity toward Chinese Americans, “but were...conditioned by expectations rooted in long-established images of Chinese Americans as a group” (66). In other words, more often than not, Jade Snow resembles a turn-of-the-century tour guide, taking visitors on a “backstage” tour of Chinatown satisfying white audience's “curiosity about exotic customs, people, and food” (Kim 66).

These criticisms regarding Jade Snow's use of description coalesce around Jade Snow's numerous descriptions of Chinese food, perhaps best summarized in Cynthia Wong's discussion of what Frank Chin describes as “food pornography,” wherein the minority writer makes a living by “exploiting the 'exotic' aspects of one's ethnic foodways.” As both Linde and Kim point out, this “translates to reifying perceived cultural differences
and exaggerating one's otherness in order to gain a foothold in a white-dominated social system” (55). What is notable here, and less discussed, is the fact that this type of “food pornography” also extends towards Jade Snow's descriptions of place, where Chinatown is defined mostly in terms of visual and ethnic difference; descriptions that permeate the book, but can most clearly be seen in Jade Snow's rediscovery tour of Chinatown in the penultimate chapters of the book (Kim 69).

The Chinatown re-engagement tour actually represents an important part of the construction of Jade Snow's ultimate transpacific identity. After her two years at Mills College, Jade Snow returns to her parents' home in Chinatown only to feel, “more like a spectator than a participant in her own community” (199). Moreover, “finally she accepted the fact that with them she just couldn't 'pick up where she left off’” (199). Here, Jade frankly acknowledges her own seemingly irrevocable alienation from her Chinatown community with an almost casual tone, seen most prominently in her use of the American idiom. From this moment, Jade Snow comes to realize that rather than occupying the same niche as before, she must construct a new identity, and to this end, not only does she find companionship with her white friends, most notably Jade Harp, but develops new behaviors, “a dual pattern, combining the new interests and the old familiar comforts” (202), that is developing an identity that allows her to live comfortably in Chinatown while still incorporating elements from Western culture. Jade Harp also serves as to bridge this cultural gap between the white and Chinese worlds; she is Jade Snow's white friend who, because of her interest in Chinese culture, not only learns about
the culture from Jade Snow, but is virtually adopted into the family when Jade Snow's father gives her the name of “Jade Harp.” This dual identity allows Jade Snow to serve exactly the purpose she aims to be; that is, the cultural bridge between the American and Chinese cultures, after all, “Jade Snow was moving with increasing confidence and pleasure in the Western world, but she was also taking pleasure in rediscovering her Chinese community” (211). The geographical connection between the construction of Jade Snow's identity and her physical movements is also clearly illustrated in this moment, where her use of the word “move” has both literal and metaphorical meanings.

Jade Snow's method of rediscovery thus allows her to bring along not only Jade Harp, but the reader as well, allowing Jade Snow to play tour guide through Chinatown's exotic and ethnic variety. She even takes the reader on a kind of “backstage” tour, eschewing the novelty bazaars aimed at “the eager tourists with...flush pockets” (212), only going “when visiting friends insisted” (212). Instead, Jade Snow takes the reader along with her as she visits “the craftsmen in Chinatown...of the older generation who took great pride in their work” (212). From the shoe-repairman's wife with her “first-generation look – feet which had one been bound, long black cotton Chinese skirt and blouse, straight all-black hair knotted into a bun and an ageless plain face” (212) to the meticulous and cranky watch repairman to a night at the Chinese opera where Jade Snow plays both insider and outsider, Jade Snow pulls back the curtain to reveal a Chinatown that is at the same time beyond the eyes of tourists, ensuring a veneer of authenticity, yet still manages to maintain the audience's expectations of what they would expect to find in
Chinatown. Jade Snow attempts to reveal the “authentic” Chinatown to readers, but the only Chinatown that comes out is one steeped in the exotic detail of ethnic difference despite her best efforts. As Blinde argues, rather than illuminating Chinatown or Chinese culture in any meaningful way as Wong clearly intends, this “abundance of colorful and detailed descriptions” (59) only reinforces previously existing stereotypes and conceptions created by a white reading public: “Wong's Chineseness is, consequently, the product of not only her Chinese upbringing but that of the American public that, having gleaned certain facts about the Chinese in America, required their views to be substantiated by an individual who presented all the earmarks of ‘Chineseness’” (57-8).

A visit to the “The Sanctum of Harmonious Spring,” a Chinese herb shop, provides an excellent example of this. Not only is the shop a new discovery for Jade, the display for the shop consists only of Chinese characters, “a rare item for which there is no domestic substitute” (218). Unsurprisingly, the “dim interior” of the herb shop is equally mysterious and exotic, “worn smooth, and age-darkened, giving Jade Snow the feeling that the place was timeless” with “the merest hint of a medicinal smell that permeated the atmosphere” (219). Though the image of the proprietor of the shop “dressed immaculately in a dark American business suit” (219) hints at a kind of hybrid identity, the rest of the chapter invariably focuses on the Chinese character of the shop as Jade Snow gets to know herb doctor and has him diagnose and treat her cough. In fact, the whole chapter is devoted to Jade's experience with the Chinese herb shop, a difference from the previous chapter which detailed visits to the watch-maker, the shoe-maker and
the opera. Though she supplements the herb doctor's herbs with Vitamin A and aspirin, “following her research on colds...she could not help wondering whether they were helping the making the fire worse, or were no help at all in Chinese terms” (226). In the end, the herb tea proves effective in curing Jade Snow, having “completed its work, both in quenching the fire and quelling the wind” (226). The idea that ultimately triumphs in this chapter is the mysterious workings of the Chinese herb tea, trumping even Western medicine, whose efficacy is questionable at best. Ostensibly showing the “superiority” of Chinese culture, the emphasis unfortunately falls upon the exotic, and this sequence reads as a metaphor for the book itself in its construction of Chinatown.

As identified by James Holte, one of the patterns of ethnic autobiography involves the eventual triumph of the autobiographer, with the autobiography chronicling “the transformation from outsider to insider, from immigrant to American” (34). In many ways then, what Wong has done here is used the autobiography, in the words of Robert F. Sayre, to “enter the House of America” (167). Indeed, for both Holte and Sayre, the autobiography represents a key genre in both understanding and explaining the national character; as Holte notes, “the American question is a question of self, and the autobiography is a central part of the American literary tradition” (25). Because of this, the autobiography seems an especially apt genre for Wong to preach the gospel of assimilation, where “middle-class values such as movement, the emphasis of the individual over the group, and a progression of worth – the values emphasized by assimilationists – are advocated for the immigrant” (Holte 38). In the end, what Wong
has done in telling the story of Jade Snow is to “provide an edifying example for others of a rise to worth” (Holte 38) and “becomes the known individual that most Americans would like to be” (167). The sequence that most crystallizes this view is the triumphant moment near the end of the book when Jade Snow sets up her own pottery business inside the window display of a store on Grant Avenue. Here, not only does Jade Snow sell own homemade pottery, but she actually makes the pottery in full view of curious crowds, becoming, “a wonder in the eyes of the Western world” (244).

In many ways, then, this sequence brings together the numerous theoretical strands that have guided this chapter. Jade Snow's work in the display window represents not only the final destination in her journey, it also represents her ultimate middle-class success, where only after three months of work, Jade Snow “was driving the first postwar automobile in Chinatown” (244). Furthermore, her success represents the fulfillment of both her and grandfather's prophecy in coming to America, where women are raised by the “Christian concept [that] allows women freedom and individuality” from the “shameful and degraded position in which the Chinese culture has pushed its women” (246). In other words, Jade marks the ultimate fulfillment of the American dream writ large, achieving both material success as well as exerting a new identity marked by the expression of her own self-determined course: “she had found herself and struck her speed” (246). For Jade Snow then, her course lead explicitly through “the middle way” that allows her to combine elements of her Chinese heritage with her American-style gumption. To that end, her pottery work within the store window represents the
manipulation of the spectacle of ethnic difference in the much the same manner as the rest of the book, with this sequence serving as a kind of metonym for Jade Snow's use of ethnic difference.

There are several important elements in the immediate physical surroundings of the display window. First of all, the shop is located on Grant Avenue, that iconic main drag of Chinatown that serves as the center of spectacle in *Flower Drum Song* as well, and it a more than appropriate location for Jade Snow's own ethnic spectacle. After all, the ultimate key to Jade Snow's success is the fact that “Caucasians came from far and near to see her work, and Jade Snow sold all the pottery she could make” (244). By all appearances then, Jade Snow has created a tourist spectacle inside the Chinatown shop window that specifically allows her to manipulate Western expectations of an “authentic” Chineseness. As Jade Snow points out, this success is largely due to the American tourists, as “the Chinese did not come to buy one piece from her” (244), who, one can assume from this description, have no interest in this type of ethnic spectacle. Rather part of Jade Snow's appeal derives from the fact that she does not, as the proprietor of the store observes, “look like an American-Chinese” mainly because of the way she wears her hair, “with two braids on [her] head instead of a permanent wave” (241). Rather, to the spectators, Jade Snow looks like “a China girl...her braids are the way they wear them in Shanghai. Here is a Shanghai girl” (244). Furthermore, throughout this sequence, Jade Snow demonstrates a clear recognition of her transformation into spectacle by pointing out how the onlookers “acted like as they thought she was deaf or dumb or couldn't
understand her language” (245) and noting with some satisfaction at the ignorance of the “two high-ranking Caucasian Army officers” and their assumptions about Chinese “primitiveness” (245). In this way, Jade's work in the shop window vividly illustrates the overarching thesis of this dissertation - the relationship between the spectacular and the lives lived beneath that spectacle - by, in essence, revealing the inner life of what has previously been hidden. In fact, the argument can be made that by serving as a “cultural bridge,” Jade Snow's ultimate purpose for the autobiography is to pierce the “mystery” of Chinese-American life for Western audiences, to offer a “peek behind the curtain” onto the “authentic” lives Chinese-Americans that ends with a message of broad-scale inclusion. Such a grand purpose is also apparent in *Flower Drum Song*, with its small-scale story of ordinary lives set in Chinatown. In this way, Jade Snow's work in the display window strikingly illustrates this notion by bringing forth and making visible the hidden labor of Chinese-American women in the various factories and home factories found throughout Chinatown that is often invisible amid the tourist attractions of Chinatown. In fact, the question of labor permeates the book, ranging from Jade's own work as a domestic, where in one household she chafes at being viewed as “merely another kitchen fixture” (106), to the description of her own workplace home, to her comparison of a Chinatown factory and an American-style factory. In this way, Jade Snow's work can be seen as attempt to “alter representations of places, events, and people, particularly women's own identities” by not only “changing their material circumstances in different places” (212), but also through the work of her autobiography.
The importance of this scene cannot be understated, as it also demonstrates the ways in which Chinatown both overtly and implicitly produces Jade Snow's identity as a Chinese-American. The focus on ethnic spectacle and racial difference in all three of these works allows for only a very narrow range of Chinese-American identities, and indeed, overall, Jade Snow offers up an identity consonant with the values of neoliberal multiculturalism. However, Jade Snow's usage of spectacle to make visible the previously hidden world of Chinese-American women's labor briefly reveals another possibility for Chinese-American identities wherein the labor of Chinese-American immigrants is recognized and acknowledged. Attuned to seeing and recognizing this hidden labor, Jade Snow is thus able to recognize and point out that the kitchen staff at Mills College “was entirely Chinese, some of them descendants of the first Chinese kitchen help who worked for the founders of the college” (157). Arguably, it is her upbringing in a Chinatown that uses spectacle to hide the labor of the Chinese that has allowed her to turn that self-same spectacle to her own purposes in achieving this middle-class success. In other words, as much as Jade Snow has produced a Chinatown built largely on the spectacular in her autobiography, this same Chinatown has produced an identity for Jade Snow that she herself may not be fully aware of, but becomes apparent in these individual moments and scenes.

However, the ultimate problem is the fact that while Wong is able to bring these elements to light, the overall narrative approach limits and over-reliance on the details of ethnic difference effectively hampers Wong's ability to create the possibility for a
Chinese-American identity beyond neoliberal multiculturalism. While Wong's autobiography reflected a “new interest in the 'real family lives' of Chinese American people” by Western audiences, this interest “still had about it an element of curiosity about exotic customs, people, and food” and in the end, Kim argues, “Wong uses her Chinese American life to entertain and enlighten non-Chinese readers” (66). That is, Jade Snow may recognize her own nature as spectacle, but the problem becomes that Jade never transcends the spectacle. She willingly plays the part of the silent “Chinese girl,” foregrounding the ethnic spectacle in her narrative, and continues to play the part of the Chinatown tour guide for Western audiences: allowing only a superficial “peek behind the curtain” that, unlike the Chinatown tours of the past, reveals hard-working Chinese who live lives governed by ancient ritual and tradition rather than secret dens of iniquity. While not the spectacle of crime, it is still the spectacle of the exotic, as “authentic” as the pagoda arches of Chinatown. Ultimately, by remaining in the display window, Jade Snow can never escape the fact that she is still on display. To put it another way, while Jade Snow can recognize economic marginalization, she lacks a context or the language to offer an effective critique of the socio-economic and cultural conditions that have created this situation. For Jade Snow, it is enough to put facts like these in the window and hope that they speak for themselves.

One way of thinking about all three of these works discussed in this chapter is the fact that they never fully “look past the window” of ethnic spectacle. The Chinatowns offered up in this chapter have more in common with a set of Russian nesting dolls: as
each doll is removed, nothing new is revealed, only a smaller version of the same thing.

In this case, the spectacle of Chinatown is peeled away only to reveal more spectacle, albeit in a different form. Remove one layer, and there is the hidden criminality of Chinatown. Or maybe, it is the spectacle of the Chinese New Year parade or the carefully prepared exotic food of Chinatown. Thus, it comes as no surprise then that the possibilities for Chinese-American identity is severely circumscribed to a very narrow range, like the final doll of the sequence, all dressed up in its ethnic finery, perfect for display, but not for much else.
Works Cited


Chapter 3: Oppositional Geographies: Pushing Against the Paradigm of the Neoliberal Citizen in Literary Chinatowns

In Wayne Wang's *Chan Is Missing* (1981), there is a striking street level shot of a San Francisco Chinatown neighborhood with the pyramidal Transamerica building looming in the background. This image can serve as a metaphor for the paradoxical place that “Chinatown” has occupied in relation to the nation-state. Located at the social and cultural margins of society, these Chinese populations and the historical Chinatowns they lived in nevertheless occupied prime real estate near the downtowns and city centers across the United States. While some of these Chinatowns have been literally paved over as these downtown centers have expanded, the continued survival of the Chinatowns in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles serves as a physical and geographical reminder of the contradiction that has marked the history of the Asian immigrant in the United States.

As Lisa Lowe points out in *Immigrant Acts*, different immigration policies of the United States have “placed Asians 'within' the U.S. nation-state, its workplaces, and its markets, yet linguistically, culturally, and racially marked Asians as 'foreign' and 'outside' the national polity” (8). Thus, for Lowe, immigration policy has not only been the “locus of legal and political restrictions as the 'other,'” it has also served as “the site of critical negations of the nation-state for which those legislations are the expression” (8). In other words, in attempting to create a “universal” through the exclusion of the “immigrant,” the margin becomes the place that makes a critique of that universality possible. This
attempt at universality, "a national institutionalization of unity" (9), also holds important ramifications for an American culture which, as Lowe notes, is the “key site for the resolution of inequalities and stratifications that cannot be resolved on the political terrain” (9). This universalizing tendency found at these various levels in American society points to the neoliberal economic and social philosophies that are now at the heart of this country. As discussed in more detail previously, the formation of a neoliberal policy of multiculturalism serves to offer nominal inclusion to ethnic and minority groups while continuing to marginalize them and leave them on the periphery of power. In other words, neoliberal multiculturalism is not only “a hallmark of American nation and culture,” it is more problematically a “form of political organization that represents a vast group of constituencies under a single identity that is inadequate in terms of fully addressing the cultural, political, and class heterogeneity of American populations” (Nguyen 12). A key point for Lowe, and one worth mentioning, is that this distance from the national culture does not cut off the agency of the Asian American subject, but can actually engender different types of agency beyond, “politicized cultural work” (9), including “the acts of labor, resistance, memory, and survival” (Lowe 9, emphasis in original). What Lowe does here is to expand the possibilities of what constitutes agency, pointing to the way in which “immigrant cultures and practices that emerge in contradiction to [the] regulating sites” (173) of “the law, workplaces, schooling, community organizations, family, sexual life, churches, and popular culture” (172). In
other words, for Lowe, these sites of regulation and control also hold the potential for exposing the disjunctures and contradictions of these national narratives of unity.

Arguably then, the lived reality of an ethnic ghetto such as Chinatown would serve as an important site of this resistance and opposition. This chapter thus focuses on the cultural work that has arisen from this unique place, both literally and metaphorically that Asian Americans, specifically Chinese Americans, have occupied in the United States. It is this unique place that at times has been both “within” and “without” the economic and cultural life of the United States that has allowed Asian American cultural production to become an important “countersite...to U.S. national memory and national culture” (Lowe 4). More specifically, Chinatown becomes that literal and metaphorical place from which Chinese American writers and filmmakers have created works which have challenged the neoliberal constructions of the Asian American subject and citizen.

In many ways then, the works discussed in this chapter reflect and tap into this oppositional force embodied by these historical Chinatowns. What these Chinatowns do then, despite what Edward Soja describes as, “the instrumentality of space and disciplining effects of the changing geography of capitalism” (34) – that is, the way in which geographical space reproduces the conditions necessary for neoliberal capitalism – is to offer an oppositional geography that will “enable the formation of new subjects outside official dictations and dominations” (Lowe 127). As the last chapter explored constructions of Chinatown that produced the ethnic subject under neoliberal capitalism, this chapter will focus on those works which not only expose and critique this national
narrative, but they also present “alternatives to liberal citizenship” in addition to creating “critical subjectivities ...in new configurations, with new coherences” (Lowe 156). In short, this chapter considers a different series of Chinatowns that produce a different series of possible identities.

Where is Chan? Locating Chinese American Identity in Wayne Wang's Chan Is Missing

In 1981, Wayne Wang signalled the maturity of Asian American cinema with the release of Chan Is Missing. Hailed by mainstream critics as offering a “true portrait” of San Francisco's Chinatown (Ebert, Hatch, Siskel qtd. in Feng), Chan ostensibly tells the story of two Chinese American cabdrivers, Jo and Steve, looking for their friend Chan Hung who has mysteriously disappeared along with nearly $4,000 that the two paid him for their taxi licenses. This MacGuffin (to borrow Hitchcock's famous term) sends Jo and Steve to various locales in and around San Francisco's Chinatown, searching for Chan in an attempt to recover their lost money. Like any Hitchcockian MacGuffin, while the search for Chan serves as the initial driver that motivates the narrative, solving the mystery of Chan's disappearance falls to the wayside: not only do the two fail to discover Chan's whereabouts, the “narrative tension” (Feng 200) of the plot is further deflated when Chan Hung's daughter, Jenny returns the money to Jo and Steve. As Peter X. Feng argues in his analysis of the film, the operative question that guides the film is not “where is Chan Hung?” but, more accurately, “who is Chan Hung?” (Feng 200, emphasis added).
*Chan Is Missing* then, is less about the search for one missing man, and more about the much larger question of Chinese American identity in the United States. However, the film also resolutely refuses to answer the second question as well, foregrounding “the heterogeneity of Chinese American subjectivities, thereby arguing for the fluidity of Chinese American identity” (Feng 189). However, a reading of the film that focuses almost exclusively on this question of “who” pushes into the background this question of “where” and more importantly, the inter-relationship between the two questions of “who” and “where” becomes obscured. In other words, *where* Jo and Steve search for Chan Hung is as vital a question as *who* Chan Hung ultimately turns out to be. Because the search for Chan is structured as a physical and material one, attention must ultimately be paid to the film’s screen geography and the way in which that geography produces its fluid construction of a Chinese American identity. In fact, it is the grounding of this fluid Chinese American identity in the material geography of Chinatown that prevents it from simply slipping into a “postmodern fragmentation” that would “efface markers of social marginality” (Feng 189). Indeed, a geographical reading of the film suggests new ways in which the film pushes against the assumptions of pluralism in neoliberal capitalism.

Near the end of the film, two things become clear to Jo and Steve: first, they are not going to find Chan, second, and more importantly, they realize that their understanding of who Chan was has become increasingly muddled. As Jo muses reflectively at the end of the movie, “I've already given up on finding out what happened to Chan Hung, but what bothers me is that I no longer know who Chan Hung is.” Jo is
referring to the fact that in the course of their search for Chan Hung, not only do they unearth multiple explanations for Chan Hung's disappearance, but each of these explanations also offers a different interpretation of who Chan Hung actually is. Is he a “paranoid person” who vanished to avoid being implicated in a politically-motivated murder? Or is he “back in Taiwan fighting with his brother over the partition of some property”? Or is he patriotic, having “gone back to the mainland to serve the people”? Perhaps Chan Hung is “too Chinese, and unwilling to change.” Or, maybe, he is simply an “eccentric” who enjoys eating HiHo crackers and listening to mariachi music at the senior center in Manila Town. Of particular note are the identities that could be defined as specifically transpacific in nature: those versions of Chinese American identity that connect back to either Chinese or Taiwanese nationalism. The film is careful to draw the distinction between identification with either the PRC or Taiwan, making the “flag-waving incident” at the Chinese New Year's parade one of many possible focal points for the Chan Hung mystery. This emphasis points to a distinct heterogeneity to even what could commonly be called “China.” Jo's speech on the metaphorical fluidity of Chan Hung's identity is accompanied by an image of literal fluidity: Jo speaks in voice-over narration over an extended shot of the ocean, with the camera angled in such a way that moving waves cover the whole screen. This use of arguably “local” geography (the Pacific Ocean), is indicative of the film's overall use and interest in the material, a point that will be covered in more detail later.
In fact, it is this uncertainty about Chan Hung's identity that serves as a metonym for the fluidity of Chinese American identity. This idea is emphasized by the film's structure as a kind of “reverse mystery,” wherein more questions are raised than answered, and instead of a triumphant resolution and clarification of the central mystery, the film ends on an anticlimax accompanied by a feeling of anything but surety. In fact, William Galperin argues that the overall narrative “is not governed by the expectable – an unrelenting point of view – but by an enormous deference or tendency to dwell in possibility” (1165). This becomes apparent, as over the course of Jo and Steve's investigation, the people they talk to often spend less time talking specifically about Chan Hung, and generally more about the larger issues and politics surrounding Chinese American identity. For example, Henry, the cook at the Golden Pagoda, suggests that Chan Hung simply “went back to China because it was too difficult for him to identify with the mainland Chinese from 8,000 miles away.” This leads Henry to launch into an extended soliloquy on the importance of Chinese identification, arguing, “you have to identify with the 900 million Chinese in China. Then you have some meaning there.” Henry, whose speech is done in a combination of Mandarin and English suggests that for Chinese American identity to work, there must be a stronger emphasis on the Chinese side of the equation because of the inherent racism and power differential in America: “if they don't recognize us, they don't want to recognize us, and they will not recognize us.” On the other hand, George, “who runs the Newcomer's Language Center,” offers a different solution to what he calls the “immigrant problem.” He offers an image of
hybridity reminiscent of *Flower Drum Song*, where one can simply “take the good things from our background and also [try] to take the good things from this country to enhance our lives.” For George, the answer is as simple as the Sun Wah Kue apple pie, “a definite American form,” combined with “Chinese baking technique” that offers a paradigm for living life as an immigrant: “when we deal with our everyday lives, that's what we have to do.” It also becomes clear that neither of these possibilities apply to Chan Hung: Jo dismisses Henry's explanation as making Chan Hung “too simple,” and that George's example, in addition to being laughable on its surface, is simply an oft-repeated “spiel” that doesn't offer any “specific information” on Chan Hung. What remains after each and nearly every encounter is the fact that Chan Hung remains resolutely unknowable. And by extension, the film muddies the waters in terms of the larger question of a Chinese American identity.

This sense of unknowability of identity is emphasized by the film's formal insistence along the same lines. The film actually opens with an image of blankness that is repeated at the end of the movie: as Jo's cab moves down the street, the tracking camera is set at such a high angle that windshield of the cab ends up reflecting the sky, producing a startlingly white surface that effectively obscures the driver of the cab. Similarly, whether by accident or design, many of the offices that Jo visits have blank white walls that fairly pulse their blankness thanks to the low-budget black and white photography. One of the more striking images of blankness occurs when Jo finds his way into Chan Hung's shabby bachelor apartment. There he finds a spot where a photograph
once hung on the wall, its original position marked by four pieces of tape. The camera holds the close-up of this image for several seconds, and what becomes most striking about this image is the fact that it's not an image of blankness, but that it's actually an image of absence: what was once there, the photograph, is no longer there, and its former presence is distinctly marked by its remnants, in this case, the four pieces of tape. In other words, like Chan Hung himself, this image emphasizes the fact that something central to understanding is somehow missing from its intended place. The proliferation of these blank spaces are important for several reasons: first, the film creates a formal atmosphere of unknowability, that actively resisting any type of ontological certainty, which extends to the question of Chinese American identity. In addition, these blank spaces do not simply evacuate all meaning, implying a kind of nihilism, but rather they communicate a powerful sense of indeterminancy that pervades nearly every frame of the film.

It is this proliferation of possibilities and attendant instability of identity that causes Steve to explode at the end of the movie, “Ah, that's a bunch of bullshit, man. That identity shit, man. That's old news, man. That happened, fucking ten years ago.” Steve's frustration reflects a dawning realization that if Chan Hung's identity is in question, then his own sense of identity is in similar jeopardy. It is this dawning truth about identity that puts into question all the assumptions that Steve has held about his own life and experience in the United States that causes him to react in this way. Steve's violent reaction highlights the film's ultimate message that, if anything, Chinese
American identity is unstable and unsettled, despite any claims to stability that may have been articulated in the identity politics movements of the 1970s, which Steve alludes to when he claims “that happened, fucking ten years ago.” This emphasizes what Feng calls “a process of becoming” (209) that actively resists “notions of stability” (209).

Ultimately, it is by not allowing for the creation of a stable, all-encompassing Chinese American identity, by insisting on a “contingency of identity” (Feng 186) that the film actively resists the racialization of both Chinese American and Asian American identity in the United States.

The question of Asian American racialization has been a vital one for a large group of Asian American critics for at least the last twenty years. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, Lowe argues that the racialization of the Asian immigrant occurs under marked contradictions, wherein the Asian immigrant has alternately been placed “‘within’ the U.S. nation-state, it's workplaces, and its markets” while at the same time, situated “linguistically, culturally, and racially...as 'foreign' and 'outside' the national polity” (8). That is, while the United States willingly exploits the labor of the Asian immigrant, it nevertheless denies the Asian immigrant full participation in the cultural and political life of the United States. More importantly, as Lowe notes, by locating the Asian immigrant “outside,” it actually stabilizes the construction of the American citizen as white (in addition to be male and propertied): “in the last century and a half, the American citizen has been defined over against the Asian immigrant, legally, economically, and culturally” (6, emphasis in original). Similarly, in Imagine Otherwise,
Kandice Chuh argues for the importance of “Asiatic racialization as a technology of national identity formation” (81). Chuh predicates this argument by pointing out the fact that "the very idea of a national identity is contingent upon what it is not; it is an inherently comparative construct” (69). In other words, the way that both American citizenship and American national identity (while similar, they are not the same) have been defined, is by clearly defining what it is not. This negative formation for a largely white national identity finds its starkest demonstration in the legal and political policies which determine which immigrants are granted the full rights of citizenship; that is through, “the apparatus of immigration laws and policies, through the enfranchisements denied or extended to immigrant individuals and communities, and through the processes of naturalization and citizenship” (Lowe 7). As an example of this, the history of Supreme Court jurisprudence in determining who qualifies for citizenship has “codified into an official realm a fantasy of a 'genuine' American 'race’” (Chuh 68) that is white. Similarly, as Mae Ngai notes in her analysis of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, this piece of legislation not only “resolved the legal ambiguities and conflicts over the racial status of Asians,” it “also simultaneously solidified the legal boundaries of the 'white race’” (Ngai 7) by excluding not only the Asian immigrant, but other non-white immigrants in order to produce a coherent definition of national “racial identity based on whiteness” (Ngai 7).

In addition to solidifying a white national identity, what also happens is the stabilization of these surrounding ethnic identities. In other words, what is implied in this construction is the necessity of a relatively stable construction of an Asian identity that in
turn will help stabilize this national definition of “whiteness.” As Chuh notes, “race and nation become significant because those forces affiliate to them certain meanings out of an infinite range of possibilities” (70); that is, the meanings of a specific “race” or “nation” must be fixed by the determining forces of jurisprudence or culture in order for these meanings to become legible and useful for the purposes of the nation-state. In the case of the United States, it has involved the fixing of the Asian immigrant as – a term utilized by both Ngai and Robert G. Lee - “aliens”: that is, “permanently foreign and unassimilable to the nation” (Ngai 8), whether by dint of biological or cultural difference.

It is also important to note that while the exact details of that exclusion may differ from Asian minority group and historical period, what remains essential in each case is that the Asian immigrant, and by extension, the Asian American subject is somehow located outside of these terms of national inclusion and citizenship. By refusing this type of stability, this fixing of Chinese American identity, Chan Is Missing exposes the neoliberal fiction of a stable Chinese American identity that has long supported the larger fiction of a coherent national identity, ultimately upsetting the larger meaning of the idea of who is allowed to be called “American.” Unlike Flower Drum Song which attempts to concretize a stable and idealized version of Chinese American identity, Chan Is Missing refuses such attempts at fixity by exploring and affirming numerous versions of a Chinese American identity that vary in degrees of assimilation and national identification. Thus, the final indeterminancy of Chan Huang's identity reflects the heterogeneity of Chinese Americans as a minority group in the United States.
The proliferation of possible identities in *Chan Is Missing* could suggest a kind of postmodern decenteredness for Chinese American identity, a move to “equate Chinese American fragmentation with postmodern fragmentation” (Feng 189). The danger of this kind of move reflects a key critical concern where the fragmentation of ethnic identity is simply folded into and appropriated by postmodernism, leaving to the wayside the “contingent political phenomena” (Harper 8) of social marginality to the wayside. In other words, postmodern fragmentation of identity has the unfortunate effect of effacing the very real markers of difference such as “race, class, gender and sometimes sexual orientation” (Feng 188) that have marked the experience of minority populations.

Combined with the clearly “postmodern” characteristics of the film itself - ranging from a very clear awareness of its own filmic construction to its use of a kind of postmodern pastiche, offering numerous allusions to other films – it would seem that *Chan Is Missing* reflects this postmodern view of identity.

At this point it is important to return to the question of geography and the way in which the filmic geography and formal elements of *Chan Is Missing* serves as a type of visual matrix for its articulation of a fluid Chinese American identity. In other words, this “distinctive organization of space and time is...the framework within with individual identities are forged” (Harvey 316). After all, the exploration of Chan Hung's non-identity is keyed directly to Jo and Steve's physical journey through San Francisco's Chinatown and its environs. However, rather than serving merely as a metaphor for discovery, it is startling in the way that the immediate material presence of the city asserts
itself throughout the journey, offering a stark contrast to the indeterminacy of Chinese American identity. Furthermore, the movie avoids the trap of a decentered postmodern identity by grounding the movie in a real-world geography, seen most strikingly in its specific use of real-world locations. Like Chan Hung who is the missing center of the film and who in his absence actively resists attempts to solidify an identity around him, the Chinatown of the movie offers a similar resistance, albeit in a different manner. Rather than resisting through a kind of formal absence, the film resists attempts to inscribe a definitive identity to Chinatown by offering a specific material reality against the cultural, economic and social forces that attempt to define Chinatown from the outside.

While this may be at odds with the earlier analysis of the film's use of visual blanks, an important distinction can be made here between the filmic use of visual blanks and the film's creation of a context for those blank spaces. The city itself is not blank, nor is it composed of blank spaces ready to be drawn in. Rather, the city operates as a concrete materiality where blank spaces can be found. In fact, in returning to the “blank” of the windshield of Jo's cab, while the window seems blank in obscuring the face of the driver, it actually reflects a very real, and very solid material reality; the windshield reflects the Chinatown buildings that the cab passes. The film treats this context, Chinatown, very differently, demonstrating the fact that Chinatown is most definitely NOT just a “blank space” that is drawn in as Steve and Jo make their journey. The city is on constant display throughout the movie: either as a series of long and medium shots.
that moves the viewer down to street level; more often than not, the camera lingers on a location for several seconds before characters into enter into the scene, suggesting, of course, that the city existed before the characters and their narratives. In fact, the film ends with this emphasis on the lived geography of Chinatown.

The last several minutes of the movie are a succession of scenes from around Chinatown, accompanied by the “Grant Avenue” number from *Flower Drum Song*. It begins with a view down a “typical” Chinatown street during the day: signs climbing up the tall buildings advertise shops in Chinese writing that seem to crowd the frame to the left and right, as cars travel down the steeply inclined street. After a shot of an ornately decorated pagoda-style roof, the film cuts to a shot of the side of a worn-looking brick building with peeling paint. This is followed in quick succession by an extended shot of an elderly Chinese woman walking on a balcony, and then a high angle view from the street, looking into a Chinese restaurant, steam baskets clearly visible up front while the partially obscured faces of people in the restaurant move behind the glass. In a way, these shots defy description precisely because they are so mundane, with no clear narrative or visual focus. This shot sequence, along with other moments like it spaced throughout the movie, creates a kind of visual grammar, “best described as relational,” wherein “its multiplicity of images in random juxtaposition...grant[s] no single element a primacy that would negate multiplicity” (Galperin 1165). In purely visual terms, the proliferation of seemingly random images of the city operate to reinforce the idea of possibility, resisting a type of cultural and social fixity by paradoxically displaying the
solid and material. Moreover, the sequence of images also creates an ironic juxtaposition with the lyrics and aim of the song: rather than visually offering the tourist paradise described in the song, it presents a rather quotidian image of Chinatown, emphasizing its features as a place where real people live and work, a point further emphasized in this sequence by the pan across several elderly Chinese residents on the street.

This ironic use of “Grant Avenue” points to another way in which the film resists the over-determination and stereotyping of not only Chinese American identity, but also of Chinatown itself. In fact, the film utilizes allusion and pastiche to comment critically on a culture that has attempted to inscribe its own meaning on the lived reality of Chinatown. Thus, when Jo references Charlie Chan, it is to make fun of the image, good only for a “laugh.” The genius of Chan Is Missing is the understanding that an effective oppositional narrative and counter-identity isn't created merely by offering competing narratives or images of a “real” Chinatown. Such a move often results in the reification of exactly those elements the film is trying to counter. Rather, the film effectively combines these elements with a constant self-awareness of itself as a constructed filmic product to both expose and “contest the traditional cinema without admitting that cinema's primacy as a condition of contestation” (Galperin 1152). Rather than foreclosing the possibilities for “Chinatown,” the film maintains “an enormous deference or tendency to dwell in possibility” (Galperin 1165). This is accomplished through playing with viewer expectations on multiple levels, from the narrative to the formal and aesthetic.
Along the lines with the “Grant Avenue” number, the film often directly addresses these previously formed expectations of Chinatown on a largely narrative level. For example, the film begins with an unseen cab passenger entering Jo's cab and asking the Chinese cabdriver, “Hey, uh, what's a good place to eat in Chinatown?” The response comes in the form of Jo's voice-over narration, “Under three seconds. That question comes up under three seconds 90% of the time. I usually give them my routine on the differences between Mandarin and Cantonese food and get a good tip.” Here, Jo's cynical reply to a predictable question evinces a clear understanding on the part of the film of the standard perception of Chinatown. This sequence begins with a point-of-view shot of the unseen tourist climbing in the back of Jo's cab, filmicly placing the audience in the point-of-view of the tourist first entering Chinatown. However, by the time Jo's voice-over ends the sequence, the point-of-view camera has switched to Jo's, P.O.V.: we see the street passing outside the windshield from the driver's seat. The film actually shifts the viewer's point-of-view from “outside,” that is the passenger entering the cab, to “inside,” that is, to Jo through both narrative (the use of dialogue) and formal means (the use of voice-over narration and the shifts in framing). From the beginning, then, the film works to upset prevailing notions of Chinatown and to move the viewer into literally a different frame of reference and viewpoint. However, on the surface, this type of response bears more than a passing resemblance to those Chinatown tours described in the last chapter that promised a “real” Chinatown from an “inside” perspective. The film avoids this trap
by suggesting that nearly all perspectives are suspect by using filmic form to directly and upset manipulate audience expectations.

This manipulation occurs throughout the film in often tiny and seemingly unimportant ways. For example, when Jo returns to his apartment in one scene, the sound of barking dogs is heard in the background. There is cut to a close-up of Jo flipping a switch on a piece of stereo equipment, and the sound of barking abruptly stops. The audience expectation in this scene – that the barking dogs is just a random urban noise – is literally flipped. Not only does this moment upend the expectation going into the scene, it also points to the overall constructedness of the moment. In a similar moment that occurs after Jo visits Chan Hung's wife, he is given some tangerines. The film then cuts to a close-up of a hand peeling the tangerine underneath Jo's voice-over. The natural assumption is that it is Jo who is peeling the tangerine: narratively, he received the fruit from Mrs. Chan, formally, it is his voice heard on the voice-over. However, as the camera pulls back, it is revealed that it is actually Steve peeling the tangerine, and Jo is standing to the side. While these moments seem minor, they both use formal conventions to toy explicitly with audience expectation. The second moment, especially, plays on the expectations created through classic Hollywood continuity editing, where the narrative and voice-over prime the viewer to expect to see Jo, but instead Steve is shown. By creating these visual and audio disjunctions, the film not only points to its own constructedness, but more importantly, it exposes and critiques the specific ways in which film with its continuity editing and framing often leads the viewer
into pre-defined points of view as articulated by the filmmaker. In other words, the film questions any such attempt to inscribe a meaning upon it, whether it be in the form of well-meaning tourists or through the medium of film itself.

Two more examples will illustrate the way in which the film emphasizes its own constructedness and the way in which meaning is created and attached to certain objects and situations. The first involves the space on Chan Hung's wall where the mysterious photograph once hung, the significance of which was discussed earlier. The first time this blank space appears is when Jo enters Chan Hung's apartment. However, the blank space is seen again later in the movie, but in a different context: it is suddenly the space underneath another photograph on the wall. The new photograph is of the “flag-waving incident,” part of the political intrigue surrounding Chan Hung's disappearance (as Jo makes clear, the provenance of the flag-waving photograph is also questionable). Suddenly, the blank space is seemingly imparted with another meaning – a relationship of some kind is established with the other photograph, implying that the two are somehow closely related. In this way, the sudden presence of the previous photograph dictates in some way the content of the latter photograph. Suddenly, the space is defined and the possibilities for the blank are foreclosed. In addition, the camera reflects this relationship by panning from the top photograph to the blank space. This camera movement suggests another parallel: the arrangement of the photographs on the wall resemble two frames on a strip of film, pointing to the film's self-awareness. Paradoxically, the blank space also resists any attempt at foreclosure.
because there is nothing actually there: the photograph could be another related photograph, or it could not; it could be a completely, random unrelated image. In essence, because the blank space is never filled in, the possibilities remain, despite any effort to absolutely define it.

A similar point is made later in the film with a slightly different emphasis. In voice-over, Jo speculates about the identity of a mysterious woman who was seen going in Chan Hung's apartment, noting, “he moved six months ago with the other woman.” Suddenly, the film cuts to a shot of a Chinese woman in dark glasses, standing on a Chinatown street brushing her hair. The woman is framed by the passenger side window of Jo's cab, implying a P.O.V. shot. The whole sequence is accompanied by a burst of the piano suspense music used earlier in the movie. There is a quick shot of Jo looking away, and then looking back, and the woman has suddenly vanished. The implication made by this sequence seems to be clear: this could be the mysterious woman that Jo is searching for. However, this expectation is quickly upended. After the sequence returns to the P.O.V. shot, the camera lingers there for several seconds longer, and soon, an older woman enters the frame, in addition to numerous other passers-by who pass on the sidewalk. Perhaps this is the mysterious woman involved in Chan Hung's disappearance? This arrival of the second woman reminds the viewer of how the use of music and narration conditioned them to assume that the first woman was somehow the mysterious woman Jo was referring to. Moreover, the framing by the cab window is reminiscent of the movie frame itself, and serves as an analogue to the larger frame of the movie screen.
itself, further emphasizing the overall constructedness of the sequence. In essence, the latter half of this sequence basically deconstructs the first half by calling attention to the specific formal elements – ranging from music to framing to narration - that dictated what the audience sees, or what the audience thinks it sees. Again, in exposing these formal mechanics of film, *Chan Is Missing* displays a suspicion towards not only these formal processes, but also towards the social and cultural institutions that utilize them to dictate what Chinatown “means” from the outside.

In the end, the film suggests that what Chinatown ultimately “means” cannot be dictated from the outside, but must be defined from “within,” by the lived environment and the people who live, work and play in that environment. This is the final message of the movie, imparted by the elderly faces on the street seen in the final montage of the movie. As the film tells us, as much as there is no one “real” Chinatown, there is no one “real” Chinese American identity. It is precisely this fluidity of identity that resists and upsets the neoliberal regime which relies on the stabilization of minority identities in order to maintain a definition of whiteness that continues to hold onto political, economic and social power in the United States. Furthermore, the fluidity of Chinatown serves more than just as mere analogue to the fluidity of Chinese American identity. Rather, it serves as the filmic landscape that makes that fluidity of identity possible. Rather than freezing Chinatown in any one possibility, *Chan Is Missing* creates a Chinatown steeped in possibilities by utilizing a postmodern sensibility. It is a sensibility that understands that the only way to avoid fixing a meaning to Chinatown is to continually point
out its own filmic constructedness, to explore and play in the arena of possibilities, and in that way, it offers a Chinatown that is paraxodically closest to the “real” Chinatown.

**Lives Found “Backdaire”: Faye Myenne Ng's Bone**

In many ways, Faye Myenne Ng's *Bone*, a novel centered on the Ong family grappling with a powerful family tragedy in San Francisco's Chinatown, has much in common with *Chan Is Missing*. Besides the setting, the backwards narrative structure of the novel, where the earliest chronological event is related last, could be seen as a kind of postmodern move. However, as with *Chan Is Missing*, “postmodernism” serves only as a starting point to understanding *Bone*; there is much more at stake with this densely textured novel. *Bone* rests at the intersection of the questions of place, history, and identity, and rather than just presenting the different possibilities for Chinese American identities, it explores the role of place and history in the construction of those identities. While *Chan Is Missing* suggests the importance of place in the construction of identity, *Bone* can be seen as an excavation of this relationship, exploring the ways in which history, both on a personal level and on a national level, affects both place and identity. Moreover, the novel creates a Chinese American identity that is built on a *particularity of place* that resists national narratives of identity – that is, there is no one overarching “Chinese American” identity, there is only a contingency of identity that is often in excess of not only state identifications, such as those required by strictures of “citizenship,” but also identifications of other national unity narratives, such as that of the
“model minority” or “The American Dream.” In many ways, the novel offers a Chinese American identity constructed in defiance of these overarching narratives that attempt to strip away these particularities of place in order for it to fit into these larger narratives of an “uncritical multiculturalism” (Kim 54). Ultimately, what Bone does is to not only highlight the importance of space and all that that term implies in the construction of a Chinese American identity, it also posits alternative identities built along this paradigm of space.

Again, it is important to return to the idea of the larger idea of the social construction of space and the more specific idea of the role capitalism plays in the construction of space, an idea that Edward Soja summarizes as, “the instrumentality of space and disciplining effects of the changing geography of capitalism” (34). Soja, in following Lefebvre, advances the primacy of the role of geography in capitalist systems, noting that “the survival of capitalism has depended upon this distinctive production and occupation of a fragmented, homogenized, and hierarchically structured space” (92). He also makes an important link between the social and the spatial by pointing to the way in which “under advanced capitalism the organization of space becomes predominantly related to the reproduction of the dominant social relations” (91). Moreover, this reproduction of social relations also finds expression in the “penetration of state power into everyday life” (92), which Soja notes is vital in continuing to maintain and reproduce the conditions necessary for advanced capitalism. What Soja points to here is the way in which neoliberal capitalism, under the auspices of the state, exerts power over the
individual through the control of geography. Soja makes this linkage more explicitly, arguing that “power proceeds primarily through the organization, enclosure, and control of individuals in space” (63). Thus, as an ethnic ghetto resulting from restrictive immigration policy, Chinatown is “‘social space' that is produced and reproduced over time in connection with forces of production” (Lowe 121).

So how the individual articulate resistance within this hegemonic control produced by space? Both David Harvey and Lowe argue that such resistances occur in the specifics and particularities of location. As much as Soja sees the dominance of the social through the spatial, Harvey points to the way in which De Certeau sees these “social spaces as more open to human creativity and action” (213), emphasizing the importance of personal street level interactions: “walking he suggests, defines a 'space of enunciation.'...’Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together,' and so create the city through daily activities and movements” (213). In this way, Harvey continues, “spaces can be more easily 'liberated'... precisely because social practices spatialize rather than becoming localized within some repressive grid of social control” (214). Lowe makes a very similar argument in her discussion of Chinatown, by first acknowledging the way in which, “the buildings and streets, the relations between spaces, and the relations between human individuals and work, to leisure, to life and death are all material testimonies to the means through which U.S. society has organized Chinatown space to enhance production and to reproduce the necessary relations of production”
However, for Lowe, these same spaces of control and domination are equally capable of being spaces for resistance: “but they testify equally to the means through which Chinatown society has reconfigured spatial discipline and has rearticulated the ethnic ghetto as a resistant, recalcitrant 'historical' space” (121). In other words, resistance occurs literally at street level through the lived lives of its residents, who manage to inscribe their own history in the geography of Chinatown itself. It is this precisely this idea that is articulated throughout Bone: where despite the geographical regimes of control, Chinatown still makes possible resistant identities, literally built up from the city streets themselves.

The novel's interest in a kind of street-level geography is clear from the outset, with what is best described as a personal Chinatown tour through given by Leila, the middle daughter of the tragedy-beset Ong family. In contrast to Jade Snow Wong's Chinatown tour from Fifth Chinese Daughter, as discussed in the last chapter, the emphasis of Leila's “tour” is strictly personal, as she searches for her stepfather Leon by tracing him through his regular haunts: from his bachelor apartment at the “old-man hotel on Clay Street, the San Fran” (2) where he likes to “sit in the lobby timing the No. 55 Sacramento buses” so he can, “hassle the drivers if they're not on time” (2) to “Uncle's Cafe” where Leon often “passed his mornings...drinking coffee and reading the newspaper” (5) and all the way through several other locations before finally ending up at “the Square” (6). Significantly, each location is tied directly to Leon by some personal activity of his; each location is ultimately given a meaning through Leon's activity at that
location. One moment in particular suggests the ways in this personal history is intertwined with the larger history of Chinatown. In her search for Leon, as Leila walks through “Waverly Place, the two-block alley famous in the old days as barber's row,” she again connects it back to Leon, noting the way he “still calls it Fifteen-Cent Alley, after the old-time price of a haircut.” Moreover, Leila also remarks how, “now Waverly Place has everything” (5). Here Leila actually references the historical change that has occurred on Waverly Place through the change in businesses located on the street.

Significantly then, Ona's suicide, the narrative lynchpin of the novel, is introduced through this blending of the geographical, the personal and the historical:

Next to the school is the Nam Ping Yuen, the last of the four housing projects built in Chinatown. *Nam* means south and *ping yuen* – if you want to get into that – is something like “peaceful gardens.” We call it the Nam. I've heard other names: The Last Ping. The Fourth Ping. For us, the Nam is a bad-luck place, a spooked spot.

My middle sister, Ona, jumped off the M floor of the Nam. (12)

Here, the history of the Nam Ping Yuen is first presented, as the “last of four building projects built in Chinatown,” quickly followed by the way in which that history is particularized through the different names of the building, before ending on the highly personal meaning attached to the building as the location of the Ong family tragedy. Thus, the Nam Ping Yuen, Waverly Place, and by extension all of Chinatown, becomes
the sites of not just a personal history, but also points to a larger national history of the Chinese in America, a point that will be explored in more detail later.

Moreover, the novel is peppered throughout with what would seem to be fairly mundane descriptions of Chinatown street life, from the various street names to the specific locations of such unremarkable features such as gas stations, to the seemingly endless cycle of daily routines. For example, the narrator will describe “the shortcut up through Café Alfredo's parking lot” (44) or point out the fact that her friend Zeke, “grew up hanging around his uncle's gas station, the one with the '76' sign in Chinese on the corner of Pacific and Taylor” (37). Moreover, in several places Leila describes those one of those daily routines, from the early morning deliveries - “it was not yet eight, but all along Stockton Street the trucks were already double-parked, unloading” (51) - to her own morning routine of greeting “Chuck Lee, who was setting out his vegetables” and the “noodle maker next door, and just like every other school morning, he raised a floured hand back” (112). In fact, it this profusion of these seemingly minor and insignificant details that works against a Chinatown where “Grant Avenue glittered like a Hollywood movie set” (139. This, of course, is the what Chinatown “looks like from inside those dark Greyhound buses” (141) filled with eager and gawking tourists.

In a key moment near the end of the novel, as Leila drives with her boyfriend Mason down Grant Avenue to tell her mother about Ona's suicide, Leila looks out the window and sees “the spidery writing on the store signs, the dressed-up street lamps with their pagoda tops, the oddly matched colors: red and green, green with aqua blue, yellow
with pink” (141). Here, she realizes that “this slow view, these strange color combinations, these narrow streets, this is what tourists come to see” (141). More importantly, Leila recognizes that this image of Chinatown has nothing to do with the lives of her and her family: “I knew no matter what people saw, no matter how close they looked, our inside story is something entirely different” (141). In many ways the idea articulated here is nothing new: in this scene, Bone seems to acknowledge the idea of a “hidden” Chinatown waiting behind the ornate facade of the buildings to be revealed to the prying eyes of tourists. On the other hand, as with Chan Is Missing, Bone takes this concept of the “backstage” Chinatown tour but reworks it in two key ways: First, the use of “Grant Avenue” self-consciously evokes the iconic status of the street as a tourist destination that has developed through the years (again, most notably in Flower Drum Song) which only serves to emphasize the stark distance between this tourist-eye view of Chinatown and the actual lives of the Ong family and the rest of Chinatown's residents. More importantly, there is the emphasis on the lived materiality of Chinatown and its denizens, an idea seen throughout Chan Is Missing as well. Bone develops through this materiality through the accretion of the mundane details of everyday life throughout the novel that has led up to this moment. In this way, Bone reverses the standard formula of “pulling back the curtain” on Chinatown. By beginning, in essence, “behind the curtain,” that is, by first building the various details of the lives of the Ong family and their Chinatown home, the novel is the able to reveal the constructendess of these tourist visions of Chinatown. In this seemingly simple and powerful way, like Chan Is Missing,
the novel insists upon what Lowe would term a “heterogeneity” of identity through a geographic particularity that resists monolithic constructions of Chinese American identity.

This connection between place and identity is further reaffirmed throughout the novel, seen both in the death of Ona and in the end of the novel. The reverse chronology of the novel, where the most recent event is presented first and the narrative then moves backwards in time, seems to suggest that at some point the narrative will reveal the exact reason for Ona's suicide. However, the novel thwarts this expectation, revealing no one cause for Ona's death, but rather, as Lowe notes, Ona's suicide becomes, “a symptom of the Leong family's collective condition” (Lowe 122). In many ways then, this “condition” includes not just familial dynamics, that is the “how” of their lives, but would also include the “where” of their lives as well, that is, the way in which their lives were conditioned by their physical surroundings in the ethnic ghetto that is Chinatown. Nina, the third and youngest daughter in the Ong family, reflects this dynamic in her view of the tragedy: “Nina blamed us, this family. Everybody. Everything. Salmon Alley. The whole place” (48). Significantly, the final emphasis of blame is put on “place,” which can reflect not only the more common use of the term, but also the term in a larger theoretical sense, where a space is defined through the creation of meaning for the individual (Cresswell 5).

In fact, the importance of Salmon Alley as a place integral to the construction of identity is seen at the end of the novel, as Leila, having made the decision to move in
with Mason, takes one last look at her childhood home: the last thing she sees is “the old blue sign, #2-4-6 UPDAIRE,” which despite the misspelling on sign, Leila notes that “no one has ever corrected it; someone repaints it every year” (190). Leila then recognizes the importance of the sign, which “like the oldtimer's photos, Leon's papers, and Grandpa Leong's bones, it reminded [her] to look back, to remember” (190) her own personal history. The novel then concludes on a sense of hope for the future that is actually tied firmly in the past, as Leila leaves, “reassured. I knew what I held in heart would guide me. So I wasn't worried when I turned that corner, leaving the old blue sign. Salmon Alley, Mah and Leon – everything – backdaire” (191). Not only is there the final emphasis on the importance of the place, the novel specifically reflects the misspelling of “daire” that Leila identifies with her home, acknowledging the importance of both a personal and personalized history. In fact, it is the way in which the sign has been continuously repaired and repainted to reflect the misspelling that moves beyond simply the personal history of the Ong family to a larger history of place. In other words, it not just the “backdaire” of Salmon Alley, but it is a “backdaire” that looks back into a past beyond the Ong family history to include the history found in Chinatown. After all, it is in places like Salmon Alley where the personal history intersects with a larger national history, where the “history in Bone is the history of place, an archeology of the richly sedimented, dialectical space of urban Chinatown community” (Lowe 120).

Lowe further argues that it is the reverse chronology of the novel that allows for this “elaboration of space” (122) through a “nonlinear emplotment of history’ that maps,
rather than narrates *spaces* of insurrection and supression” (120). In other words, the reverse chronology upsets the usual patterns of cause and effect, effectively removing the “overdevelopment of temporal contextualization as a source of meaning” (Lowe 122), and thereby opening up the possibilities of space and geography as a “category in which to read about the emergence and the obstacles to Asian American social life over the past century” (Lowe 120). Moreover, in highlighting what John Berger calls “an explicitly geographical as well as historical configuration and projection” (qtd. in Soja 23), the novel allows for “‘the simultaneity and extension of events and possibilities' to make sense of what we see” (Berger qtd. in Soja 23). Berger continues, arguing that “we can no longer depend on a story-line unfolding sequentially, an ever-accumulating history marching straight forward in plot and denouement” because “far too much is happening against the grain of time, too much is continually traversing the story-line laterally” (Soja 23). Thus, once these “simultanities intervene,” it extends “our point of view outward in an infinite number of lines connecting the subject to a whole world of comparable instances” (Berger qtd. in Soja 23). In other words, the focus on geography allows for the presentation of a simultaneity of lived space: where the present lives with the past and the past occupies the present, and in the case of *Bone*, its “contemporary inscription of Chinatown manifests traces of earlier inscriptions of Chinatown” (Chang 112). Not only does the reverse narrative allow for this shift to the geographical, it also emphasizes the role of history in another way. The reverse narrative operates as a kind of literal unearthing of the past. By working backwards in time, the novel is slowly working its
way through the layers of a sedimented history, carefully stripping away each layer of time as the narrative moves from the “present” to the “past.” In this way, “the novel investigates Chinatown as a repository of layers and historical time, layers of functions, purposes, and spheres of activity” (Lowe 123), operating as a kind of “excavation” into the sedimented past that is Chinatown (Lowe 125).

This relationship between identity and this geographical unearthing is literalized in Leila's search through Leon's old suitcase: needing to find some form of identification to legitimize Leon's identity at the Social Security office, Leila hunts through “Leon's brick-colored suitcase – the one he arrived on Angel Island with” (54). As Lowe notes, “the suitcase of papers is a material archeology of Leon's life, just as Chinatown is a sedimented site of collective memory for the Chinese in America. Sedimented space is an emblem for history as excavation rather than projection, simultaneity rather than sequential time, and collective geography rather than individual biography” (125). Thus, Leila's search through Leon's suitcase not only uncovers his past, but also uncovers the history of the Chinese in America, complete with all the “legal, political, and geographical exclusions and demarcations” (Kim 42) that have been part of that history. Significantly then, Leon's suitcase, the one that he brought with him from China, marks not only the beginning of his personal history in the United States, but it also marks his history in relation to an American immigration, legal and juridical system as a “paper son.” As Leila discovers, Leon takes this status quite literally, having “saved every single scrap of paper” (55). As Leila digs through Leon's suitcase, moving down through the
layers of personal papers, official documents, photographs, newspaper clippings and the ephemera of his life, she also uncovers Leon's past, a past that continues to inform the present in unexpected ways. After all, it is his original status as a paper son that has resulted in Leon's inability to get Social Security. As Leila notes, Leon has been “caught in his own lie; the laws that excluded him now held him captive” (54).

More importantly, as Leila begins to make “paper files, trying to organize the mess” (56), it becomes clear that there is not just “one” Leon. Rather, the different files that Leila organizes seem to suggest the multiple identities that Leon has acquired over the years, ranging from “Leon the family man” to “Leon the working man” to “Leon the business schemer” (57). What becomes clear here is the contingency of identity that Leon has had to enact in the face of the forces of domination, oppression and exclusion. Leon's various struggles to affirm an identity can be seen as struggles of legitimizing an identity within the oppressive structures of the nation-state. After all, it is the contents of the suitcase that somehow legitimize Leon's right to be in America, that “should prove...that this country was his place, too....Leon had earned his rights. American dollars. American time” (55). Furthermore, these identities are often “in excess of his official identity” (Kim 45) as dictated by the Social Security office and the larger juridical and legal structure of the nation-state. In other words, Leon's creation of multiple identities reflects an ongoing relationship with the nation-state and its legal and cultural institutions which have actively worked to either exclude him or to assimilate him in
often destructive ways. Ultimately, Leon's contingency of identities marks his attempts at resistance and survival in America.

The importance of this contingency is also seen later in the novel when Leila describes an earlier time “when Salmon Alley was our whole world and we all got along” (173). Only, as Leila points out, “Leon pronounced it 'get long,' and there was something about the way the English words came out – slow and solid – almost like his voice was building something” (173). Here Leon's misuse of the English phrase “get along” becomes a source of strength for Leila, who further observes, “'to get long' meant to make do, to make well out of whatever we had; it was about having a long view, which was endurance, and a long heart, which was hope. Mah and Leon, Nina, Ona, and I, we all had a lot of hope, those early years on Salmon Alley” (173). The notion of “to get long” then acknowledges the importance of finding different strategies of not just mere survival, but of living, to not just “make do” but to “make well” of the existing circumstances and surroundings, of “whatever we had;” that is, acknowledging the importance of contingency in daily life. Furthermore, Leila suggests that this type of contingency is tied to geography, noting that their sense of happiness is connected to their lives in Salmon Alley, the location of their “hope.” In this way, the contingency of identity that becomes apparent in Leon's trunk is reflected not only in a way of living, but the specific ways in which the latter can be translated as a contingency of space. For example, Leila's description of the funeral home where Grandpa Leong is prepared for burial reflects this same ad hoc nature of living:
the funeral house where Grandpa Leong was buried was as makeshift as his coffin. Its storefront windows faced Portsmouth Square, and the heavy sheets that were hung to shut out the light looked like old rubber mats they used on the floor of fish stores. There were a few quickly nailed-together benches, and in one corner, stacks of boxes with odd bits of bright, leafy debris. (80)

In addition, the funeral home, which Leila learns “doubled as Shing Kee Grocery’s warehouse” also embodies its own history as it goes on to “house other things: Everybody's Bookstore, Master Kung’s Northern-style Martial Arts Club, and the Chinese Educational Services” (80). Like the naming of Waverly Place at the beginning of the novel, this account of these different places also serves as a recognition of the richly sedimented history contained within that space.

More importantly, as Lowe points out in her analysis of the novel, this contingency of space is important because it articulates a kind of resistance to capitalist structures. This can be seen at the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Benevolent Association, where each floor of the five-story building serves a different function: from the “rumble of machines and odor of hot steamed linen” on the second floor, to the “racket of mah-jongg sounds, plastic tiles slapping and trilling laughter of winners” which fills the third floor, to the smell of sweat and the “sharp intakes of breath, sudden slaps, guys grunting” coming from the “White Crane Gung Fu Club” on the fourth floor (72). Once she arrives at the Association office, Leila notes the way in which the Association office “was like
many other Chinatown family-association offices: family and business mixed up” (72). In many ways, this “mixing up” of the space for multiple purposes ranging from the personal to the commercial, including both leisure and work, reflects what Lowe describes as “a condensed simultaneity of spaces [that] ultimately comments on that organization of other social spaces that relegates Chinatown to the periphery serving the dominant center” (124). Here Lowe points to the way in which this contingency of space can also operate as a critique of a capitalist system that uses space for social domination and control. In essence, Lowe argues, by adapting a space for something other than its intended use, by transforming the “collective space of the Benevolent Association” for something which is “not organized toward production as its sole referent” (124), articulates an alternative to these neoliberal capitalist systems; that is, it offers a different way to “get long” within the constraints of a capitalist system.

At the same time that the novel offers this kind of street-level critique of neoliberal and capitalist systems, the novel also utilizes a more abstract geographic scale to critique American myths of the American Dream as articulated through mobility. This critique is seen most clearly in the demarcation between “inside” Chinatown and “outside” Chinatown. For the characters in the novel, leaving the ethnic ghetto that is Chinatown represents a fulfillment of the American Dream. This demarcation becomes clear in the difference between Chinatown and “down the peninsula” (39). When Leila accompanies her boyfriend Mason to deliver a “white Mercedes” (39) that Mason had repaired to Mason’s cousin Dale in Redwood City, Leila makes a stark distinction
between working-class Chinatown and “the garden, the pool, the lollipop-colored lawn furniture” (41) of the suburbs. In fact, Dale is all assimilated middle-class affluence, a “computer wiz” (42) with a “surfer's build, his tennis-tanned legs, and his perfect haircut” (42), part of “fourth-, fifth-, even sixth-generation kids who had no Chinese” (40) and who sound “white” (40). Here, it seems that the successful achievement of the American Dream is not only located outside of Chinatown in the affluent suburbs, but also involves a certain degree of assimilation, much like the suburban fantasia seen in *Flower Drum Song*. However, unlike the latter, this success comes at a cost, the loss of a Chinese “home education” (42) and a proper understanding of “how to treat people...family” (42) that Leila and her friends feel is important. However, the costs associated with this attempt to escape Chinatown is is shown to be much greater in the case of Leon's disastrous pursuit of the American Dream.

Again, the novel locates the achievement of the American Dream beyond the borders of Chinatown, seen when Mah suggests to Leon that they could go into business together, but only “outside Chinatown. What if they really put all their effort into something?” (159). This dynamic is seen most clearly though in Luciano and Rosa Ong's “sunny apartment outside Chinatown” (161), even though their “old Victorian apartment building on the corner of Jones and Pacific...was only a couple of blocks from Salmon Alley” (160). Moreover, to the Leongs, the Ongs come to represent the ultimate attainment of this American Dream which can only be found outside of Chinatown. It is this dream which is most clearly embodied in their family patriarch, Luciano Ong with
his “embroidered shirts, his Sun Yat-sen mustache,” his “snakeskin shoes” and “gold Rolex” and his “big-money dreams” (162) for success. It is Leon who is most taken by Luc's apparent success, wanting “to be Luciano's last man; [Leon] wanted to have the honor of giving the grand that would make his big-money dreams come true” (162).

Thus, the subsequent failure of the “Ong & Leong laundry...on McAllister Street, on the seedy edge of the Tenderloin” (163), with the Ong's being a victim of Luc's scam, reads in itself like an indictment of the American Dream and the ultimate hollowness of its promise. However, what is also significant for the novel is the fact that the laundry itself is located outside of Chinatown, a point that the novel makes clear in giving specific directions to the laundry from Chinatown: “to get there, we took the number 30 Stockton bus downtown and then transferred to the 38 Geary and got off on Polk and walked two blocks past massage parlors and all-male strip joints and the Mitchell Brothers' famous theatre” (163).

What becomes emphasized is precisely the distance from Chinatown, with the geography seemingly fueling Leon's dream that somehow this laundry located outside of Chinatown will lead to his and his family's success in America. Furthermore, by locating the American Dream outside of Chinatown, by making the American Dream something that can only be achieved by travelling there, the novel also evokes American myths of an “enhanced mobility,” (Wong 118) that reflects “the opportunity to go where one wants, do what one wants, shape life anew” (Wong 118). It is the connection between what Wong characterizes as movement on a horizontal axis (127) (travel across the country), to
a socioeconomic mobility that has been part and parcel of the American fabric practically since its founding. And it is precisely this part of the myth that undergoes the severest critique, as seen with both Mason and Leon.

In many ways, America's love affair with the car has been symbolic of this connection between travel and opportunity, and in many ways, the novel presents that same dynamic: from Luciano Ong's “big, black Monte Carlo” (161) to Leila's drives with Mason, which are often described as moments of freedom: whether it's the feeling of “flying” (39) while in Dale's white Mercedes, or how when “Mason came and took us all for a ride...over the Golden Gate Bridge [because] he knew Mah loved how the light bounced off the cables, copper and bright gold, and Leon liked to remember the first time he sailed into San Francisco” (111). The latter case is especially telling, as the moment across the bridge allows Leon to relive the first moment he arrived in America, “when his ship passed the Golden Gate” (111), when his sense of freedom, hope and opportunity was as its peak. Moreover, this car trip “turned out to be a great idea” (111), allowing the family a “change of scenery” (112) from the oppressive conditions of Chinatown after Ona's death. Here, the freedom found in mobility operates in direct contrast to the stasis of Chinatown. Furthermore, Mason is seen in a variety of different cars: from the Mercedes that he drives to pick up Mah and Nina from the airport to the “Jag” (92) he and Leila drive down the coast. However, the luxury cars that Mason drives only serve to emphasize Mason's distance from the material success and freedom they represent, as the cars he uses are invariably “borrowed...from work” (95) or happens to be one “he was
working on” (92). Rather than symbolizing Mason's achievement of the American Dream, Mason's transient access to the this symbolic association of wealth becomes the novel's critique of a larger lack of access to the American Dream. In other words, the novel reaffirms the mobility myth as precisely that: a myth.

This critique of mobility is seen most starkly with Leon, who is virtually defined by his sense of restlessness and movement. As a merchant seaman, Leon is constantly at sea and away from home, “pushing into another time zone” (23). At first blush, Leon's constant shipping out appears to be a function of what Wong describes as a mobility derived from Necessity, as opposed to Extravagance. Wong summarizes the difference thusly, where the mobility of Extravagance is the great American myth of mobility writ large, where “horizontal movement...connotes independence, freedom, an opportunity for individual actualization and/or societal renewal” (121). On the other hand, the mobility of Necessity is the “contrasting position...on a continuum,” and is “usually associated with subjugation, coercion, impossibility of fulfillment for self or community” (121). The mere fact of Leon's travel can thus be read as one of economic Necessity, reflecting the diminished opportunities available to Chinese immigrants of Leon's generation, which, by itself, is already a scathing critique of those policies. Moreover, Leon's need to travel also reflects not just an economic Necessity, but a personal one as well, a need that is alternately described as “Leon's way of dealing” (59) or, as Leila puts it near the end of the novel as, “escape. What Leon searched for” (147). Arguably, what Leon is escaping from is not just the personal trauma of Ona's suicide or the shame and
embarrassment Mah's affair with Tommie Hom, but rather the oppressive social and economic conditions for Leon in America. This connection can be seen most clearly after Ona's death, when Leon rages against “America for making big promises and breaking every one”:

Where was the good job he'd heard about as a young man? Where was the successful business? He'd kept his end of the bargain: he'd worked hard. Two jobs, three. Day and night. Overtime. Assistant laundry presser. Prep cook. Busboy. Waiter. Porter. But where was his happiness?

“America,” he ranted, “this lie of a country!” (100)

Significantly, Leon's anger speaks directly to the sense of economic betrayal he has experienced in the United States. Furthermore, he recapitulates many of the numerous identities that Leila found represented in his suitcase, but this time, the what becomes clear is the powerful sense of economic necessity that drove Leon to these different occupations. By itself then, this passage is a scathing indictment of the failed promises of the American Dream, but more importantly, this betrayal is also linked to the novel's larger critique of mobility and stasis.³

Most critically, while Leon's constant travels may be miles of literal movement, it actually ceases to be any actual mobility and instead is transformed into a kind of stasis.

Leon himself seems to acknowledge this fact, when he compares the way “sorrow moves

³ Images of stasis actually occur throughout the novel: characters get stuck in traffic or circle city blocks interminably, Leon's pet projects often remain unfinished. Furthermore, Ona's suicide is described with the same juxtaposition of movement and stasis: “I saw Ona falling and falling. She wouldn't stop: it was like movement and no movement” (132). In many ways, this sense of stasis also serves to symbolizes the Ong family's inability to escape the shadow of Ona's suicide.
through the heart” to “the way a ship moves through the ocean” (142): “ships are massive, but the ocean has simple superiority. Leon described the power: One mile forward and eight miles back. *Forward and forward and then back, back*” (142). Leon's choice of metaphor focuses on the idea of stasis, where the backwards motion of the ocean impedes any actual forward progress. Similarly, Leila describes the way the family waits for Leon's return from these voyages with the same image of stasis and repetition, noting how things would be “the same as always. Leon would go back, ship out on the next voyage, sail away. We'd wait for him again. Tomorrow and tomorrow would be same...until...Leon came home again” (178). Here, Leon's extreme mobility fails to help the family economically: each time Leon ships out, the family repeats the same cycle of increased privation, seen in the “forty-one slivers of salted fish” (178) that is the family's nightly meal while Leon is gone. In this way, the novel articulates the paradoxical transformation of movement into stasis, thus creating a larger critique of the mobility of Extravagance.

Geography then becomes the paradigm that Bone uses to create a resistance to neoliberal regimes of oppression and control, whether articulated in social space or through immigration policy or through the creation of national myths of inclusion. The novel peels back successive layers of history embedded within the Chinatown landscape to reveal the ways in which both individuals and a whole minority community has lived and struggled within a country that did its level best to exclude them in virtually every way: economic, culturally, and socially. Ultimately, the novel reminds readers that those
events that happen “backdaire,” whether in the personal lives of families or in the broad reaches of history, those events have powerful repercussions that not only echo into the future, but resonate in the landscape itself. The identities that are constructed within this environment serve not only as powerful indictments of the system that influenced, but also testifies to an individual's ability to survive and flourish within those conditions.

**A Return to Origins: Louis Chu's Eat a Bowl of Tea and Frank Chin's Year of the Dragon**

Up until this point, the works studied in these two chapters have either focused on San Francisco's Chinatown or New York's Chinatown. Considering this dissertation's larger theoretical bent is distance between the spectacular and the lived, it is no accident that the works considered here have explored the two most well-known Chinatowns. Thus, what makes Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* unique for this study is the fact that it is not just - as the cover of recent editions proclaim - “A Novel of New York's Chinatown.” Rather, it can be more accurately described as a novel of two Chinatowns and it serves as a kind of textual bridge between New York's Chinatown and San Francisco's Chinatown. Though the latter appears only in the novel's coda, the movement between the two locations proves to be vital in the novel's articulation of the possibilities for a new Chinese American identity. Like *Bone*, the novel offers a critique of both the immigration regime of the United States and American myths of mobility. Unlike *Bone*, however, *Eat a Bowl of Tea* paradoxically suggests ways in which the Chinese American
community can actually access this self-same myth of mobility to create new identities and new communities within the United States. As with the previous works, these ideas are expressed in a specific geography of spaces, stretching between the two cities and China.

Set in the post World War II period, the novel tells the story of two aging bachelors, Wah Gay and Lee Gong, living in New York’s Chinatown arranging the marriage between their two children, Ben Loy and Mei Oi. However, problems arise when Ben Loy suddenly finds himself impotent with his newly-minted wife from China, which results in a scandalous affair between Mei Oi and an aging playboy that becomes the talk of the entire bachelor community. As Jinqi Ling puts it, the novel “paints a portrait of Chinese American life that dramatizes a community in transition” (36) from a generation of first generation Chinese immigrants to their children. If anything, this bachelor community is constructed in the novel as a result of an injurious mobility of Necessity (once again utilizing Wong’s formulation) combined with an oppressive state immigration policy. Having come to the “Golden Mountain” - a phrase used throughout the novel to describe America – in search of economic opportunities, the male immigrants found themselves effectively isolated and marginalized in the United States, unable to bring their families over as a result of a series of restrictive immigration statutes instituted in the late 1800s and early 1900s and not rescinded until 1943 (Ling 37-8). As Ling notes, “the predominant male presence in New York Chinatown bachelor society is not a natural or culturally coherent phenomenon but one contingent upon the structural
limitations of Chinese immigration history in the United States” (Ling 36). The
Chinatown of the novel then not only reflects these realities, but serves as a powerful
critique of these policies in presenting a picture of a community characterized by a
powerful sense of distance, dislocation and what Geoffrey Kain calls “a spiritual atrophy”
(192). This distance is often emphasized in subtle ways, whether it is Wah Gay
daydreaming about a reunion with his wife, “during lonely moments, if perhaps some day
he and Lau Shee would have a joyous reunion. His mind began to wander the clouds”
(24), or Wah Gay chuckling to himself, thinking about how his picture hangs in the
village church in China, “some fifteen thousand li from New York” (45).

More importantly, this physical and temporal “distance from their native land”
(Kain 192) and family results not only in Kain's “spiritual atrophy,” but a kind of physical
atrophy as well, expressed most clearly in Ben Loy's physical impotence with Mei Oi.
Most interestingly, this sense of spiritual and physical atrophy is often reflected on a
street-level as well, where the physical environment of Chinatown itself is described as
suffering through a kind of stagnation or stasis. In fact, the first scene set in Chinatown
on a “humid and muggy” (15) day, where “the afternoon moved slowly” and “even the
sidewalk outside was deserted on this hot, sticky day.” More tellingly, the novel notes
that “the perennial voices of children playing, the roar of their roller-skates against the
pavement, were missing” (19). This description then emphasizes not only the stagnation
in the air, but also the lack of generation that plagues the Chinatown bachelor community,
here described as the literal lack of children. This sense of stasis and lack of generation is
seen again, albeit in a different register when the novel describes Ben Loy's first encounter with a prostitute in New York during a snowbound evening where, "outside the whole world was blanketed in snow. The whole world stood still. Waiting. Just waiting" (37-8). The emphasis again falls on the lack of movement and generation, as the stillness of the outside world is linked with the idea of Ben Loy's empty sex with the prostitute: sex without hope of generation. In this way, New York's Chinatown represents a kind of dead-end on multiple levels for the Chinese American community in America, suffering the results of an injurious mobility of economic Necessity combined with a racist and oppressive immigration regime.

Paradoxically, mobility also serves as the solution to this problem of stasis experienced by the Chinese American community in America. For the novel, the solution to the problem created by the mobility of Necessity is found in the mobility of Extravagance, which is linked in the novel to growth, potency and, most importantly, generation. The novel first makes this link when Ben Loy takes Mei Oi on a trip to Washington D.C. Struggling to find a cure for his mysterious impotence, the local doctor suggests that maybe what Ben Loy needs to regain his ability to perform is, "a change of scenery. Go away. Go away for a vacation and see what happens" (84). Sure enough, during the first night of their trip, Ben Loy "rediscover[s] his manliness" (85). One could argue that the very idea of a holiday signifies the kind of travel-by-choice that marks the idea of a mobility of Extravagance. This notion of Extravagance is repeated at the end of the novel when Ben Loy and Mei Oi make the decision to move away from New York to
San Francisco to avoid the fallout of the scandalous affair between Mei Oi and Ah Song. While Wah Gay and Lee Gong feel compelled to move out of a heavy shame, the novel frames Ben Loy's decision as exactly that: a decision on his own part away from the dictums and orders of his father: “He had tired of playing the role of the dutiful son, keeping silent while his father told him what to do...He was going away himself with Mei Oi” (240). More importantly, the whole idea of moving West – as both an actual location and an abstract concept – signals something more important for Ben Loy, specifically, the promise of new opportunities: “the mere thought of going away with Mei Oi had given him new hope. He saw on the horizon a chance for a new beginning” (240). In fact, the novel describes San Francisco near the end in specifically pioneering terms: “new frontiers, new people, new times, new ideas unfolded” (246). Kain characterizes this move as “the willing ('pioneer') encounter with the New World” (188), a reflection of the mobility of Extravagance.

It is important to note that what the move to San Francisco does not represent a complete solution to the problems facing the Chinese American community, but rather is more accurately described as an opportunity to regenerate the Chinese American community on different terms. As both Ling and Kain point out, this regeneration occurs in terms of cultural values: from what would be considered “traditional” Chinese ones to newer ones, especially in terms of gender roles. As Ling notes, the move West by Ben Loy and Mei Oi signals a “recognition on the part of both bride and groom that their relationship must be renegotiated on a non-traditional basis” (Ling 40). Kain makes a
similar observation as well, though in more unequivocal terms, arguing that the “more evident source of his/the couple's regeneration is the breaking away from the insular community with its insistent parody of traditional social structures and rigid gender roles in order to seek a home for themselves in a new world” (195). In this way, the move West, as in the traditional version of the American myth, signals new opportunities and possibilities.

In his introduction to 1976 edition of the novel, Jeffrey Chan notes, “it is no coincidence that Chu sends Ben Loy and Mei Oi to San Francisco to reclaim his virility, his paternity, and his wife. His return to San Francisco to make himself anew is not the response of a sojourner. He is a Chinese-American remaking a covenant with Gum Sahn...He returns to the city where Chinese-America first began” (5). As Chan points out, the fact that the novel ends in San Francisco's Chinatown, the historically oldest, and in many regards, the “first” and originary Chinatown signals a transition from sojourner to citizen for the Chinese American community. Arguably then, the couple's move could be characterized less as a move into uncharted lands and more as a return to origins. This return to San Francisco then serves as a kind of “new beginning” not only for the couple, but as a place that serves as an opportunity for the building of an uniquely “Chinese American” identity, freed, as Kain and Ling suggest, from gender roles and traditions originally formulated in China. Furthermore, because it is articulated as a return to origins, the novel seems to imply that as Chinese Americans there is a way to access the promises of America, but it requires a starting point, an origin. This can be seen as
merely assimilationist, which, arguably, would be a more common and less nuanced view, or, it could be more positively viewed as a “a conscious assertion of the Chinese American's claim to the American land” (Wong 142), similar to Cynthia Wong's reading of Shawn Wong's Homebase. In other words, Eat a Bowl of Tea asserts the Chinese American claim to the American land by rediscovering the origin. In fact, this new point of origin and generation is Ben Loy's and Mei Li's bedroom in San Francisco, where after months of drinking the “bitter tea” (246) - which for Chan, symbolizes the bitter experiences of the Chinese in America: “the sacrifices of the immigrant pioneers” and “the bitter prescription meted to them by the often hostile society” (5) - Ben Loy regains his potency in the bedroom. The way this sequence is described is particularly telling, described with the imagery of generation as birth, in marked contrast with the empty sex that Ben Loy has with the prostitutes: “for this hour, all creation existed solely for them. Their bed was the universe, the stars, the sun, the moon, the air, heaven and earth. The room was incandescent...” (250). The ellipsis at the end of this sequence further indicates a sense of continuation and of new possibilities that are yet to be determined. This ending provides an additional context to the couple's earlier trip to Washington D.C.: again, it is the assertion of the Chinese American claim to America.

Near the end of the novel, Ben Loy exults in the fact that “he had come to a new golden mountain” (246). In many ways this quote encapsulates many of the main themes and concerns of the novel. Not only does the use of the phrase “golden mountain” reflect the promise of America to an earlier generation of Chinese immigrants, there is the irony
of San Francisco as the “new” Golden Mountain, since in many ways it was the “original” one. In this way, the novel allows for the Chinese American immigrant to “go West,” to access to a national myth of mobility that were previously excluded from. Furthermore, the specific lack of capitalization of the term also highlights the personalization of the immigrant experience for Ben Loy and further emphasizes the importance of a kind of personal geography within a larger national landscape.

By focusing on the idea of a personal landscape and focusing on the everyday lives of these residents of Chinatown, *Eat a Bowl of Tea* adroitly avoids many of standard tropes associated with representations of Chinatown in popular culture. Specifically missing from the novel is any mention of the Chinese New Year's parade and the appearance of the dancing dragon: perhaps the preeminent visual trope and shorthand in signifying Chinatown in all its exoticness and sense of visual excess. Thus, another way of considering the relationship of each of the works discussed in these two chapters to neoliberal multiculturalism is on this almost purely visual valence through its treatment of this yearly ritual found in so many historical Chinatowns. Whether a work willingly constructs a Chinese American identity clearly along the lines of neoliberal multiculturalism or articulates a resistance to it is seen in the way that the work addresses or fails to address the presence of the parade. In fact, even a brief comparative analysis of the different ways in which the Chinese New Year's parade is utilized or not utilized in the works discussed in these two chapters serves to summarize many of the crucial themes of both this section and my project at large, including the status of the Chinese
immigrant in the neoliberal culture of the United States, the role of geography in the
development of the previous relationship, and finally, the distance between the
spectacular and the lived. Moreover, this analysis also provides a valuable introduction
to the final work in this section: Frank Chin's *The Year of the Dragon*, and the specific
ways in which Chin's play manipulates the visual and geographical in articulating a
resistance to the neoliberal paradigms of multiculturalism.

Considering the excessive visual spectacle of the Chinese New Year's parade and
its comfortable fit with the surface reduction of a culture to only the most spectacular - a
prime tendency in neoliberal multiculturalism - it comes as no surprise that in each of the
works discussed in the previous chapter prominently features the parade. As discussed in
depth in the previous chapter, Michael Cimino's *Year of the Dragon* literally begins with a
bang with the annual parade in New York City that not only serves as an impetus to the
plot, but highlights the criminal chaos and sense of the foreign that permeates the
Chinatown of that movie. Similarly, the parade's San Francisco counterpart serves as a
central element in *Flower Drum Song*, elucidating the hybrid Chinese American identity
espoused by the film as well as establishing the movie's bona fides in terms of a
“realistic” depiction of Chinese Americans, points discussed in more detail previously. In
both cases, not only is a parade a central narrative element in the movie, but it becomes a
central visual element as well, characterizing Chinatown in terms of the visually exotic
and the other. This is similar to the way in which the Chinese New Year's parade is
portrayed in Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, where the parade and her
surrounding descriptions of the Chinese New Year's rituals is the central focus in one of the chapters and fits in comfortably with Jade Snow's overall design of peddling a quaint and exotic Chinese culture to American readers.

In often stark contrast then, the annual New Year's Parade is conspicuously absent or downplayed in the three works discussed so far in this chapter. As noted before, the absence of the parade from *Eat a Bowl of Tea* suggests a conscious move away from the spectacular to focus on the daily, lived reality of Chinatown and its denizens, an idea shared by both *Chan Is Missing* and *Bone*. While the parade is mentioned in the former, it is not actually shown on-screen. Moreover, the parade is mentioned in the context of the “flag-waving incident” that serves as the impetus to the murder plot in the movie, effectively moving the parade into the background, not only removing the visual spectacle of the parade, but also upsetting viewers' common expectations of how Chinatown is represented on screen. In some ways, *Bone* articulates a more complex relationship with the New Year's parade that would seem to refute these claims. In fact, the spectacle of New Year's appears in the form of the “firecracker blasts” and “rockets [that] flash into the air like lightning” (110) and culminating when “the dragon dancers wind down Grant Avenue” and the “streets turn red with spent firecracker, and the air smells like lead” (111). Significantly though, Ng's descriptions of the parade are quite flat, with the focus not on the sense of visual spectacle, but on the remnants of the parade. As with *Chan Is Missing*, the parade itself literally fades into the background, becoming part of the personal geography of Leila, as the New Year's festivities are colored by the
Ona's death, and as the family tries “to put our grief away for the holiday, for good luck” (111). This transformation from public spectacle to personal remembrance can be seen when Leila returns to Salmon Alley the night of the parade, noting how “Salmon Alley felt like the only safe place” (117). As she returns home, “the slow, heavy beat” of the parade drums “quickened like a pulse” and Leila “remembered the times the three of us watched the dragon dancing down narrow Grant Avenue” (117). Here, the transformation of drums to heartbeat accompanies a movement from present to past, as the parade becomes a backdrop for Leila's recollection of a happier time before Ona's suicide.

Arguably then, Frank Chin's *The Year of the Dragon* articulates the most complex relationship between the pomp and spectacle of the Chinatown parade and the everyday existence of Chinese Americans. Not only does the parade serve a vital narrative function in the play, serving as the backdrop to the Oedipal conflict between the protagonist Fred Eng and his father that ultimately drives the play, it also functions as an important critique of the standard construction of Chinese Americans in neoliberal multiculturalism. After all, it is during the parade that Pa, serving the ceremonial function as the “Mayor of Chinatown,” intends to publicly acknowledge Fred as his “Number One Son” (131), something that Fred has longed for. However, after Fred confronts Pa over letting Johnny, the younger brother leave Chinatown, Pa physically attacks Fred, resulting in Pa's death from the exertion. Significantly, Pa's death comes at the appearance of the dancing dragon, perhaps the most visually arresting symbol of the parade and the height of Chinese exoticism. Here, this sense of visual spectacle is
signalled by the announcer's breathless pronouncements to the unseen crowd, “Listen! Hear dem balls? See doze lights? . . . Hear doze drums?” (140). Equally significantly, despite this narrative importance, the parade is never actually seen onstage, the progress of the parade is described by an offstage narrator speaking in an overexaggerated Chinese accent, who opens the parade and the act by announcing, “sin dah Ninete' fi' ty fi' e Sahm Fa'nsicko der Chinatown mo's famoused worl' famous Chinese New Year anywhere” (126). By removing the parade entirely from view, the play not only removes the visual spectacle of the parade, but, more importantly, it also consciously upsets viewer's expectations surrounding Chinatown. Moreover, the presence of the parade announcer with his overly exaggerated accent quickly moves into the “grotesquely parodic” (Shimakawa 90), thus confronting the viewer with her own distorted conception of Chinese Americans and serving also as a critique of those stereotypes. In this way, the parade announcer serves the same function as Fred's Chinatown monologues which are interspersed through the play, all of which begin with an equally parodic, “Charlie-Chan-broken-English shtick for the tourists” (Shimakawa 90).

In fact, in the first monologue, Fred in his Chinatown in his guise as “'Freddie' of Eng's Chinatown tour'n'travoo“ introduces the audience as well as the tourists to Chinese New Year: “Allaw week Chinee New Year. Sssssshhh Boom! Muchee muchie firey crackee!” (71). However, as each of these monologues progress, Fred not only drops “his phony accent” (71), he also promises “no hooey, No more boo sheet” (77) and to give the tour group the “backstage” tour of Chinatown with “the sights only Chinatown's topguide
can show ya” (71). As discussed in the previous chapter, the promise of a “backstage” Chinatown tour is nothing new and has a deep historical precedent reaching back to the very beginnings of Chinatown. It becomes clear then that Fred never stops pandering to tourist expectations of Chinatown. However, except for the final monologue – an important exception that will be discussed later – each ends with a string of curses: “Goddamn, motherfucking cocksucking sonofabitch . . .” (77), indicative of Fred's anger and frustration at having to play the part of the “Chinaman.” Even though Fred is exploiting popular conceptions of Chinatown and Chinese Americans, his response clearly indicates that playing this role comes with a heavy price.

Fred's selling of Chinatown is mirrored in his sister's success as “Mama Fu Fu,” and her Chinese cookbook with its “atmospheric patter between the recipes” that Fred snidely remarks, “sure makes Chinatown sound like I'd live there” (79). In fact, both Fred's descriptions in his monologue of “Cantonese sweet'n'sour goes straight to your scrotum” and “Pekingese goo makes you dream in 3-D” (77) and Mama Fu Fu are dismissed as Fred as being “food pornography” (86), that is, “making a living by exploiting the 'exotic' aspects of one's ethnic foodways” (Wong 55). Furthermore, Wong argues, this type of self-exploitation is “a kind of prostitution” that ends up “reifying perceived cultural differences and exaggerating one's otherness in order to gain a foothold in a white-dominated system” (55). In other words, this kind of “food pornography” allows for the inclusion of the Chinese under the umbrella of the neoliberal multicultural construct in the United States. Fred's self-loathing and his bitter criticism towards his
sister's success reflects a harsh critique of not only this practice found most prominently in Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, but also of the multicultural principles that makes it not only possible, but oftentimes necessary for the ethnic subject. This latter point is best exemplified by Sissy herself, who uses Mama Fu Fu to escape the Chinatown slum, which also reflects a certain ambivalence towards this notion of “food pornography.” In many ways then, this ambivalent state of “food pornography” reflects a state of what Karen Shimakawa calls “national abjection.”

In *National Abjection*, Karen Shimakawa's book length study of Asian American theatre, Shimakawa utilizes Kristeva's notion of abjection as a “descriptive paradigm” (4) to describe the condition of Asian American groups in America. Shimakawa argues that Asian Americans occupy the position of the “national abject” (3), where the Asian American subject is paradoxically circumscribed and radically differentiated, “deemed repulsively other” (2) but at the same time “occupies a role both necessary to and mutually constitutive of national subject formation” (3). She further argues that since, in abjection, “there is nothing objective or objectual to the abject. It is simply a frontier” (Kristeva qtd. in Shimakawa 3), it more accurately describes the way in which Asian Americanness “comes into visibility”: as a “constantly shifting relation to Americanness” (2).

Regardless, one of the central parts of Shimakawa's formulation is the fact that Asian Americanness is somehow in the contradictory position of being both vitally inside

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4 Here Shimakawa seems to contradict the earlier argument made in this chapter that ultimately what makes Asian Americanness resistant is its inherent instability. The important element here, though, is the similarity of argument: that is, the characterization of U.S. national identity as a negative construction that defines itself against minority groups such as Asian Americans.
and irretrievably outside U.S. Americanness, a state that Shimakawa argues is best described by Kristeva's psychoanalytic description of the production of the subject/"I" through the process of “‘jettison[ing]' that which is deemed objectionable” (3). For Kristeva, though the realm of the objectionable is often seen as “filth, waste, or dung” (Kristeva 2), it is ultimately generative, in the form of creation of the subject: “dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be” (Kristeva 3). In Bodies that Matter, Judith Butler also references this paradoxical nature of abjection, wherein what is considered refuse and excrement is actually teeming with life: “the abject designates here precisely those 'unlivable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject” (qtd. in Shimakawa 4).

As Shimakawa points out, Chinatown serves as one of these “unlivable” zones that is so vital to the construction of an U.S. national identity, especially in the works of Chin, where Chinatown represents the “quintessential site of abjection” (Shimakawa 86). Much like the Chinatown in Chan Is Missing that sits so close to the TransAmerica Building in San Francisco, “Chinatowns function as a circumscribed space of 'outside-ness' that is nevertheless, unavoidably, even necessarily – located 'inside.' Domestically situated enclaves of 'foreignness,' these communities signify for Chin both intentional community formation and racist exclusion” (Shimakawa 86-7). It is important to note the way in which Chinatown itself is characterized here in both terms of abjection: as both that which is excluded, but which also holds the possibility of generation. Furthermore,
as seen with the specific use of the New Year's Parade, specific geographic concerns are never far from the play's mind in terms of the way in which Asian American identity is not only imposed from the outside by a neoliberal regime, but more importantly, the ways in which it can also be constructed from within.

Within this context of national abjection, and within the specific geographic context of the play then, the “food pornography” of Fred and Mama Fu Fu also operates as a kind of technology of abjection that emphasizes the ultimate foreignness and exoticness of both the food and the culture (a function also served by the New Year's Parade). Furthermore, the abject nature of Fred's “food pornography” is made clear when Fred satirically connects Sissy's Chinatown cookbook to sexual pornography: “And I got an idea for a book of recipes telling the story of a Chinatown family...how to make a toasted cheese sandwich without a sound. Then Mama Fu Fu recalls eating it listening to her parents slurp in their quiet little fucks” (86). Not only does this connection between food pornography and sexual pornography emphasize the exploitation involved in both (after all, Wong characterizes “food pornography” as “a kind of prostitution” [55]), it also makes clear the transformation of food into the abject, that is, transforming what Wong describes as the “alimentary”(18) to the metaphorically base and disgusting – in this case, sexual pornography. Moreover, the connection between the alimentary and the excretory is also made clear in the physical staging of the play, that is, the specific physical geography of the Eng's Chinatown apartment.
In the stage directions at the beginning of the play, it is specifically noted that, "the kitchen is the main center of action" (72). It is also noted that, "the bathroom is attached to the kitchen and is another center of action" (72), making the border between food and shit almost uncomfortably close. In fact, the play seems to take unreserved delight in not only setting action in the bathroom, but emphasizing the bathroom as the location for the excretory, such as the moment where Pa takes, "the world's longest turd" (107). Furthermore, it is in the bathroom where Ma, who uses the bathroom as her safe haven from the stresses of the family, that she unleashes a profanity-ridden tirade, "Shit! Piss! Muckle Dung!...Mugger fummer sobba nichie sandwich!" (90). However, it is also in the bathroom, the place of refuse and excrement, that becomes the place where Ma is allowed to not only drop "playing the part of a Chinese woman...which means she's Susie Wong and Flower Drum Song" (126), but where she can also speak the truth to Fred about the circumstances of his birth: "I think it's important for you to hear it from me. I'm not your real ma" (133). Fred's response is just as interesting, acknowledging that he is in fact Ma's son and his biological connection to China Mama cannot change that: "because I am . . . but you just tole me I'm not your song, didn't you? And ha! Look, ma, I haven't disappeared...I'm still me" (134). In other words, the bathroom, as the place of the abject, also serves as the place where Ma and even Fred can both acknowledge the truth and use that truth to begin the construction of new identities different from those imposed by a neoliberal regime and its geography. Within this context, not only can
Fred's cursing, an abject use of language, at the end of his monologues be viewed as the burden of abjection, it can also be seen as the beginning of a resistance to that abjection.

However, as mentioned earlier, Fred's monologue that ends the play doesn't end with cursing, but with an almost ominous air of resignation: “And you seen garbage climb out of the trash wearing the clothes of old dead men...Makes you wonder what Chinamans eat, don't it? I know the feeling . . . BAD FEELING” (142). This sense of resignation actually starts at the beginning of this final monologue when Fred “puts on a white slightly oversized jacket, and appears to be a shrunken Charlie Chan, an image of death. He becomes the tourist guide” (141). As the stage directions make clear, Fred is no longer just playing the part of the “tour guide,” he has become that identity that is associated with the worst of Chinese American stereotypes, represented here by “Charlie Chan,” arguably the chief Chinese stereotype before the appearance of Bruce Lee, whose legacy will be the focus of the next chapter. Chin's feelings towards the Charlie Chan stereotype is quite clear, suggesting that inhabiting that identity is a kind of death for Chinese Americans. Thus, at the end of the play, Fred is unable to escape his “burden of abject representation” (Shimakawa 91) and gives in entirely to it, becoming the “corpse” (Kristeva 3), and drowning in the “garbage” and “trash” at the end of the play. When Fred asks the question, “makes you wonder what Chinamans eat, don't it?” one can't help feeling that the unspoken answer to that question is “shit.”

However, the focus of this chapter has been on the idea of resistance, a resistance against a neoliberal regime that utilizes the geographical to ensure its own survival, and it
seems unfair to end on a note of surrender. As the works in this chapter have made clear, resistance to these neoliberal identities can also be born of the geographical, often arising from the street and allowing for the creation of new identities that rework the myths and narratives of a country that has kept Asian American subject at a distance from the national culture and polity. It is again important to remember that it is precisely this distance that “constitutes Asian American culture as an alternative formation that produces cultural expressions materially and aesthetically at odds with the resolution of the citizen in the nation” (6). Moreover, the distance from a national culture allows for the creation of oppositional narratives that directly challenge national narratives of inclusion without reifying the universality of those narratives: “Rather than expressing a 'failed' integration of Asians into the American cultural sphere, this distance preserves Asian American culture as an alternative site where the palimpsest of lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured and retraced, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulacy” (Lowe 6).

Another way of looking at this is to consider another connective thread that runs through this chapter. Thus, this chapter that began with Wayne Wang's *Chan Is Missing*, and as Feng suggests, the “Chan” of the title could just as easily be Charlie Chan, ends again with that figure that has become the subject of endless approbation and criticism. For Chin, as much as Charlie Chan is a figure of death, it can also be the figure of possibility: when Fred learns that it is through Pa's “first all-American joke” about Charlie Chan and that Fred is his “Number One son” (131), there is a brief moment
where Fred sees the acceptance from his father that he has craved. In other words, there is a moment when the grossest of popular culture stereotypes opens up the possibility to be reworked into something new and stronger: a Chinese American identity that turns the stereotype on itself and allows for the creation of a new Chinese American paradigm. This is an idea that will be explored in the final chapter.
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Chapter 4: The Transformation of Bruce Lee's Body:

Asian and Asian American Masculinities

There is a moment in Quentin Tarantino’s 1997 film *Jackie Brown* where Samuel L. Jackson’s character, Ordell, riffs on the Hong Kong action films of John Woo: “When them Hong Kong flicks came out, every nigger in the world had to have a .45. And they ain’t want one, they want two, ‘cause all them niggers want to be the killer… But you know how them niggers is out there. You can’t tell ‘em shit. They want a .45. The killer had a .45, they want a .45.” Ordell, of course, is referencing John Woo's blood and bullets action opus *The Killer*, originally released in Hong Kong in 1989, but gained a steady cult following in America throughout the 1990s. On the surface, this is a classic Tarantino scene, wherein a character riffs in a profanity-laden monologue on some issue of pop-cultural significance, often ancillary to the plot of the movie itself, and ultimately revealing something about Tarantino’s own interests and fascinations. However, a careful unpacking of this particular monologue reveals a whole host of issues that are vital to this chapter.

At its core, this scene refers to the transpacific crossing of the Hong Kong action movie, referencing its popularity in the United States in the mid to late 1990s. In fact, as a direct result of this increasing popularity, within a year, both Chow-Yun Fat, the star of *The Killer* and Jackie Chan both make movies in America, attempting to capitalize on their action movie success. Furthermore, this scene references the spectacular nature of the action found in Woo’s films: specifically the image of *The Killer* armed with two guns.
blazing away at a horde of bad guys. Woo himself has noted the ways in which Western action films have affected the themes and images in his films. In this way, the scene can be used to trace the transpacific flows of action movie images and figures, from America to Hong Kong, and then back again. In addition, this scene also references the power of those images on its viewers, or the spectating audience, referred to here as “them niggers out there” who want the same type of gun as “the killer.” Perhaps what is most interesting about this scene is what it has to say about both black and Asian masculinity. In describing the need of “them niggers” to emulate an Asian action hero carrying two guns, Tarantino is describing a kind of identification or affiliation between an image of black masculinity with a specific image of Asian masculinity, that itself has some very specific historical resonances. In many ways, this particular image of Woo’s killer can be read as an image of Asian hyper-masculinity that is seldom, if ever, seen in the United States. In fact, it can be argued that the last time this type of popular culture identification between an African American audience and a Asian action icon was in the 1970s with the immense popularity of Bruce Lee with black urban audiences.

This scene sketches out the main concerns of this chapter: 1) the construction of both an Asian and Asian American masculinity in the American cultural imaginary; 2) the relationship between the representation of Asian and black masculinity in film; 3) the role of the spectacular, as articulated in the action movie and its effect on the construction of these masculinities; 4) the lingering effect of Bruce Lee as an icon of Asian and Asian American masculinity; 5) the way in which the spectator ultimately is both affected by,
and can ultimately refigure the iconic image of Bruce Lee as a figure of both Asian and Asian American masculinity. This chapter then, traces the idea of an Asian masculinity articulated through Bruce Lee and the action film, and the effects that these spectacular representations have on the lived material existence of male Asian American subjects. Because of the unique legacy of Bruce Lee as an icon in both Asian and African American communities, it also becomes helpful to trace this specific intersection between Asian and African American masculinities and to consider the various results that have resulted from this intersection for both masculinities.

The trajectory for this chapter both begins and ends with a moment from Kip Fulbeck’s autobiography *Paper Bullets*. In it, he describes losing his virginity to Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon*: “It is tenth grade before I enter my first woman – a fourteen-year-old girl, really. Fumbling and overanxious in my father's study with our pants pulled to our knees. I had asked her over to watch *Enter the Dragon* on television. No lie. Even I couldn't make that one up. She said she had seen it before, but she came anyway” (18). In this moment, Fulbeck (despite his protestations to the opposite), links his own sense of masculinity and virility to the iconic image of Bruce Lee. This passage also illustrates the complex relationship between Asian and Asian American, and is in many ways the core question of this dissertation: wherein lies the transpacific, even after some Asian Americans have been in the United States for generations now? Thus, in tracing the legacy from Lee to Fulbeck, I also begin with *Enter the Dragon*, and the ways in which Lee's image markedly altered the landscape for Asian and Asian American masculinity.
Furthermore, Lee's legacy is also clearly on display in the American film debut of Jet Li with *Romeo Must Die* (2000) and *Cradle 2 the Grave* (2003). It is this trajectory - from the spectacular occurrences of the movies to the quotidian experiences of the lived - that becomes the focus of the chapter and undergirds the argument that the possibilities for a 21st century Asian American masculinity lies in a transpacific circulation of movies and bodies.

Thus, it is important at this early stage of the chapter to parse the difference between an *Asian* masculinity and an *Asian American* masculinity. A key part of this chapter is the argument that there is a difference between the two within the United States cultural imaginary. The two constructions can be easily conflated for a variety of historical and cultural reasons. For example, the historical feminization of Chinese immigrant workers during the Gold Rush could be defined as the construction of an Asian masculinity, simply because of their status as first generation immigrants. But yet, this construction continues to have considerable staying power several generations later. Another way to illustrate this question is to consider the character of Long Duk Dong from the movie *Sixteen Candles*. In the movie, Asian American actor Gedde Watanabe plays the Dong, ostensibly a foreign exchange student from China. As a horribly offensive racist stereotype, complete with broken English and exaggerated “r's” and emasculated character traits, the character falls in line with a long history or racist representations of Asians in Hollywood. Yet, is this necessarily a construction of Asian masculinity, since the character is supposedly from Asia? Or is it rightly read as a matter of an Asian American ste-
reotype, since the movie was produced and created in America? As will be seen, because of his unusual status and transnational fame, Bruce Lee occupies a similar site between the two constructions. The separation, doubling, and conflation of Asian and Asian American masculinity are thus important questions within this chapter.

In order to explore these different valences of masculinity it is important to work from a definition that avoids seeing masculinity simply as a set of essential and well-defined characteristics associated with the male body, but rather, as a set of “gender relations” (Connell 44). In this way, masculinity can be seen as “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (71). In other words, by focusing on social institutions and practices as defined by gender, R. W. Connell's definition allows us to avoid a universalized, essentialized definition of masculinity. As Daniel Kim notes in his work on Asian and black masculinity, these types of “specific traits [that are] assigned to black and Asian men respectively” are “to some degree historically variable” (7). Likewise, Connell suggests that masculinity should be viewed as a series of “processes and relationships” (71) that are inflected by several different factors: not the least of which is race and class. That is, because gender is “a way of structuring social practice in general, [and] not a special type of practice, it is unavoidably involved with other social structures. [It] 'intersects’ – better, interacts – with race and class” (75). What this allows for is the very important recognition that there are
multiple forms of masculinities. In other words, one can consider working class masculinities, or as this chapter does, Asian and Asian American masculinities.

Perhaps most importantly, Connell argues that recognizing “more than one kind of masculinity is only a first step” and what really bears examination is “the relations between them” (76). In considering masculinity within the context of social relations rather than some sort of essential construction, it becomes important to note that these different forms of masculinity are inflected by both geographic region – what Connell calls “nationality or position in the world order” (75) - and historical circumstances. That is to say, not only can the form of these masculinities change in the course of these historical circumstances, but the relationships between these masculinities are as Connell puts it, “a historically mobile relation” (77). The discussion of the numerous types of masculinities within this chapter - Asian, Asian American, black and white - is informed, then, by these fundamental understandings regarding the nature of masculinity itself.

Thus, the central question of this chapter is the question of how Asian and Asian American masculinity is constructed not only within the realm of visual representation, but also within the American cultural imaginary as a whole. The problem of Asian American masculinity within the United States is perhaps best summarized in a moment from the Jeff Adachi's 2006 documentary about the Asian image in Hollywood, *The Slanted Screen*, where Asian American character actor Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa succinctly explains the reason why he often chooses playing the villain in movies: “In Hollywood, up to this point...you had a choice between playing wimpy businessmen or evil bad guys. The
worse thing I could do is play a bad guy and be a wimpy bad guy, which is what I grew up with…if I’m going to choose between a wimpy businessman and playing a bad guy, I’m going to play a bad guy, because I got balls. I got balls. And I want kids to grow up to know that Asian men have balls.” Tagawa’s observation highlights not only the problem of the construction of Asian masculinity in the United States, but also, interestingly enough, some of the problems with the various critical responses to that problem.

First, Tagawa's quote points to what has almost become a truism regarding the representation of Asian American masculinity: that is, the image of the emasculated Asian male. In other words, it is the idea that Asian men somehow lack, “balls,” that they are lacking in a certain type of normative masculinity. As pointed out by Richard Fung in his oft quoted piece, “Looking for my Penis,” in the United States, “Asian and anus are conflated” (Fung), reflecting the dominant image of the Asian male not only in gay pornography, but also in mainstream visual media representations in both television and feature films. Similarly, critical works such as Eugene Wong Franklin's *On Visual Media Racism* and the various writings of Daryl Hamamoto and David Mura have documented “the various ways in which the Asian American male is both materially and psychically feminized within the context of a larger U.S. cultural imaginary” (Eng 2). In fact, it seems more often than not, that at its most basic the struggle of Asian American masculinity is often fought on the grounds of simple representation: that is, anything that presents the sexuality of the Asian American male subject as, “as negative or non-
existent” (Media Action Network for Asian Americans [MANAA] website) becomes instantly “stereotypical” or “bad,” while anything else, such as the romantic Asian lead, defaults to “good,” or “more accurate.” Unfortunately, this practice often serves as a kind of critical dead-end where nothing can be said beyond whether a representation is “good” or “bad.”

In fact, representation is only symptomatic of a larger set of questions surrounding the construction of Asian and Asian American masculinity in the United States. In his ground-breaking work *Racial Castration*, David Eng offers a convincing case for the seeming intractability of this construction within the United States by utilizing an analytical “toolset” derived from psychoanalytic theories. However, the psychoanalytic approach offered by Eng suffers from the criticism that has long been levelled against psychoanalytic approaches to literature: that these approaches are often ahistorical and suggest a universalism that ignores cultural and historic specificities. Thus, the question of something like the role of the transpacific in the construction of an Asian American masculinity remains unanswered in a study such as Eng's.

**Bruce Lee: The Dragon Enters**

To further illustrate this point, one just needs to consider the figure of Bruce Lee to consider the specific role of the transpacific in altering the landscape of Asian American masculinity. As much as the image of the emasculated Asian male has become a kind of truism, many critics have argued that Lee’s first appearance changed very fundamentally the way in which Asians appeared on the movie screen: no longer the emascu-
lated, feminized villain symbolized by Fu Manchu, or the intellectual, sexless detective seen in Charlie Chan, but as a clearly masculine, physically powerful action star. While it is true that Lee gained a measure of fame co-starring in *The Green Hornet* television series from 1966-67 as Kato, the Green Hornet's masked sidekick, the role itself was ultimately limiting: Lee was literally masked and still consigned to playing the sidekick. As Frank Chin cogently observes in Adachi's documentary, it wasn't until the 1970's when Lee returned to Hong Kong and started making movies across the Pacific that Lee’s appearance as an action star was really given full-reign, where he could “take off his shirt” both metaphorically and literally. Chin's observation ultimately highlights the international and transpacific nature of Lee's fame and influence. Because of the various economic and cultural constraints against Asian American actors in Hollywood at the time, Lee literally had to travel across the Pacific to create an image of Asian and Asian American masculinity that had been largely absent within the larger American imaginary. But once he arrived there, with his explosive popularity that came with the international release of his films *Fists of Fury* and *The Chinese Connection*, Lee's “cinematic image dismissed previous stereotypes of the yellow peril and model minority” in addition to smashing into the “desexualized Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan stereotypes” (Chan 6-7) with a few well-placed roundhouse kicks. In fact, Lee's popularity was “transcultural:” revered not only throughout Asia (Kato 13), but also having a widespread following in the United States, making appearances on *The Tonight Show*, as well as striking a special chord with black urban communities, a point that I will return to later.
The widespread cultural impact of Lee's image regarding masculinity can perhaps be best seen in a scene from *Saturday Night Fever* (1977). In this scene, John Travolta's character Tony Manero is preparing for his night out, standing in front of the mirror in his bedroom clad only in blue bikini briefs. As he stands there, the scene cuts to a poster of Bruce Lee, shirtless in a martial arts stance. The scene cuts back to Manero striking a similar martial arts pose in front of the mirror. Then there is another cut to a low angle shot of Manero striking another martial arts pose, with his bikini clad crotch dominating the frame. The scene then cuts again, this time to another poster on Manero's wall: the iconic image of the swimsuit-clad Farrah Fawcett that dominated the decade. What is most striking about this scene is the way in which Lee is positioned as a symbol of muscular virility: there is a direct visual linking through Manero's martial arts poses, between Lee's image on the wall and Manero's own virility, demonstrated most clearly in the low angle shot of his crotch. In short, Manero strives to be a “man” in the same way as Lee. One could easily argue that this scene represents a kind of sea-change for the construction of Asian and Asian American masculinity in America: for perhaps the first time, an Asian man is held up as an icon of masculinity.

However, what fails to appear in this scene, and what is ultimately vital to Lee's star image, is the transpacific nature of that image that even makes the idea of Lee's virility possible. Even though Lee himself is in actuality Chinese American, what makes this construction viable and legible within the United States imaginary is the fact that he appears ultimately Chinese and decidedly not American. Leon Hunt emphasizes Lee's
status as “a transnational, trans-Pacific” (qtd. in Ongiri 256) figure, who ultimately functions as “a 'mosaic,' everywhere and nowhere, a mobile transnational signifier” (qtd. in Ongiri 256). Chris Berry makes a similar argument when he notes that, “Bruce Lee's body is a transnational frame” (218). As Jachinson Chan notes, on his first appearance in the United States, Lee was virtually ignored by contemporary Chinese American audiences, largely because he was “considered to be a star from Honk Kong who...did not share the plight of the Chinese in America, particularly their histories, cultures, politics, and struggles” (75). Thus, what ultimately makes the image of Bruce Lee possible as an image of virile masculinity in the American cultural imaginary is his alienation from and foreignness from that imaginary. Lee, then, does not necessarily represent a new construction for Asian American masculinity, but a new construction for a specifically Asian masculinity. In fact, the ease with which Lee's image crossed and continues to cross the Pacific operates as a kind of “transnational hypermobility” that “renders Lee's body multiple and fragmentary” allowing for “an extensive array of variant meanings” (Heinrich and Martin 123). In many ways, then, the image of Lee functions as “a mobile transnational signifier” that allows local populations around the world to read multiple meanings into his image that are often radically subtracted from the cultural and historical conditions of Hong Kong - where Lee made his popular films - of the time. It is this fungibility of Lee's image that becomes the basis for understanding one of the possible reasons for Lee's popularity with black urban audiences of the time.
If anything, Carl Douglas' disco funk hit from 1974, “Everybody was Kung-fu Fighting,” serves as the roughest and perhaps most mainstream example of the popularity of the Hong Kong martial arts film with black urban audiences in the early 1970's. In the song, “funky Billy Chin and little Sammy Hung,” acting as symbols of resistance, take on the “big boss,” a kind of oppressive social force. This is the reason that critics such as David Bordwell and David Desser often give to account for Lee's popularity, summarized by Amy Ongiri thusly: “African Americans identify with Lee's character's fight against oppression” (253). However, as Ongiri goes on to say, “these assessments are not exactly wrong” (253, emphasis in original), but what these explanations do is only consider the films and Lee's legacy in largely narrative terms. In other words, what these explanations fail to consider is the effect of Lee's image as precisely that: a visual image on the movie screen. On the other hand, Ongiri's analysis of Lee's popularity among African Americans is located precisely in the body. As Ongiri argues, “the kung fu genre's display of physical prowess and hypertraumatized bodies in pain...was immediately intelligible to an African American audience that experienced its own history through a collective visual experience of traumatized and transcendent bodies” (255). In other words, what Ongiri calls the “stylized action of the martial arts genre” allowed African American audiences not only to recognize the violence that was perpetrated upon their bodies, but also to refigure and reimagine that violence in order to “assert a powerful collectivity and, ultimately, a resistance” (254-5). In reconsidering the relationship between the martial arts films of the 1970s and urban African American audiences
through visual representations of the body, Ongiri emphasizes the importance of filmic form. As she points out, the martial arts film “is a visual representation of a movement form that was both combative and highly trained” (254, emphasis mine). It is important to emphasize then that any consideration of Lee's star image is also a consideration Lee's bodily image as it appears within the genre of the martial arts film. After all, Lee's masculinization is predicated solely on the images of his shirtlessness and the physical prowess of his martial arts displays, which are both highlighted in the generic conventions surrounding the martial arts movie. In relocating Bruce Lee's star image in this visual representation, Onigiri raises the question of what exactly happens at the intersection of masculinity, bodily image and the action movie. In answering these questions, I want to give a fuller account of the way in which form specifically inflects the construction of Asian American masculinity seen in Lee's star image.

When considering the action movie in terms of its formal characteristics, two main elements come to the form: the focus on the body and the emphasis on spectacular action. Richard Dyer presents a useful framework in for the presentation of the male body in his analysis of the peplum (a series of cheaply produced Italian films from the late '50s and '60s films featuring the adventures of heroes drawn from classical antiquity and starring American bodybuilders such as Steve Reeves). Moreover, Dyer's discussion of the construction of a white masculinity is precisely grounded in a historical, cultural, and I would add, geographical specificity that constructs masculinity as a whole. More importantly, Dyer links what he calls the “exceptional presentation of the white male

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body as spectacle in film” (287) to the construction of a white male masculinity that was culturally necessary to what was happening in an Italy recovering from the upheavals of World War II. In this case, Dyer explicitly links the formal qualities of a specific film genre, in this case, the Italian adventure film, to the construction of a specific type of masculinity with specific implications for the society as a whole. In many ways, the spectacular display of the male body, or as Dyer terms it, the “built body” (300), in these Italian adventure films provides a useful way to think about the display of and representation of bodies in both action films in general and the martial arts film in particular. As Dyer notes, “different ways of constructing body image have to do with different ways of understanding and practicing social relations” (311). Or to put it another way, the specific visual qualities of film directly affects the construction of masculinity within a specific cultural context. What Dyer does here is to specifically link cultural constructions of masculinity to the way in which male bodies are put on display in film. Indeed, as Tasker points out, the genre of the action movie, is primarily concerned with “a set of visual pleasures focused on the display of the male body.” She further argues that, “indeed it is the emphasis on action in these films which both legitimates, through the affirmation of an active understanding of masculinity, and provides a narrative justification of such physical display” (emphasis in original 2). What Dyer and Tasker both offer is an important starting point in considering the way in which the action film affects the construction of Asian masculinity. After all, if we consider that the primary focus of the action film is on the spectacular presentation of the male body, it
should be no surprise that it is through the action movie that Lee made his impact: the film itself is structured around his spectacular physical displays. The question then that guides my reading of these films thus centers around this notion of what happens when the Asian male body is put on this kind of cinematic, spectacular display. Tasker makes a similar point when she notes that the discussion of race “problematise[s] any simple analysis of the working out of gender and sexuality in the action picture. For the black male hero to display his muscular torso bears vastly different connotations from the display of the white hero” (5), and of course, by extension, things change as well when it is the Asian male body at the center of this kind of display.

In addition to the focus on the display of the male body, the action movie is also concerned with the larger notion of cinematic spectacle, wherein, “the pleasures of the action cinema are primarily those of spectacle and not dialogue” and spectacle has been pushed to the point where the “‘action' of action cinema refers to the enactment of spectacle as narrative” (Tasker 6). Here, “spectacle” can also be read as “excess” in terms of the way in which so many of the elements of the action film are designed solely for spectacle and outside the tidy realm of narrative. As Linda Williams points out in her investigation of the genres of pornography, horror and melodrama, “the linear, progressive form of the Hollywood narrative cannot accommodate 'melodramatic' attributes like spectacle” (208). She goes on to argue that there is “the possibility that excess may itself be organized as a system” (208). I argue that the action movie is precisely that system which organizes the spectacle of the action film. Thus, the car chases, explosions, and extended
fight sequences of these types of movies and other action movies as well, all represent a type of organized excess that is central to the pleasure of the movie. What the action movie offers is a coherent system wherein the displays of excess are not only tolerated, but actually expected and becomes the standard by which the quality of the action movie is often ultimately determined. What is important to note here as well is that the display of the body in action constitutes an important element of that excess. As Dyer points out in his discussion of the peplum, the action set pieces within the films often found ways to maximize the image of the male body within the conventions of bodybuilding: “posing conventions, maximizing size, tightening for definition, relating muscle groups to one another” (300). That is, the formal elements of the action genre are built exactly on this notion of spectacle, display and excess. Similarly, the martial arts movie, as a kind of subset of the action movie, relies on what Tasker describes as an “elaborate, quick-fire, physical performance” (73) of its male (and often female) stars.

Thus, to consider the construction of Asian masculinity in Enter the Dragon is to consider a broad array of seemingly unrelated elements. However, in turning to a close analysis of the film, it quickly becomes apparent the ways in which the film uses both narrative and formal techniques that not only constructs a version of Asian masculinity that is revolutionary, but at the same time becomes ultimately limiting and constraining.

In many ways, the release of Enter the Dragon by Warner Bros. was shrewdly and specifically designed to not only to capitalize not only the myriad elements of Lee's star image established from his previous Hong Kong productions, but also meant to clearly
position him as a transnational figure. It seems no accident then that the opening credits sequence features panoramic shots of Hong Kong and low angle shots of jet airplanes landing, following the main characters' travels to that city, emphasizing this idea of international and, specifically transpacific connections. The film itself is designed around the narrative teaming of Lee with a multi-racial cast: on one hand, Roper, a white millionaire playboy, played by John Saxon, and on the other hand, Williams, an African American played by Jim Kelly. In fact, the main setting of the movie, a mysterious island, known only as Han's Island, is located in extra-territorial waters outside of Hong Kong, denoting a kind of transnational limbo. As Braithwaite, the shadowy British intelligence operative that recruits Lee, puts it, “after the war, the nationality of the island was uncertain, and sometime after that, Han bought it...He lives like a king on the island.” As if to highlight its status in this transnational limbo, the image on screen under Braithwaite's narration is a zoomed-in shot of the island itself on Braithwaite's black and white briefing film. Isolated as an image on film highlights the removal of Han's island from any kind of geographical specificity and becomes a kind of meta-comment on what Enter the Dragon itself hopes to accomplish: it literally serves as the filmic backdrop from which Lee is to be launched further into transnational superstardom that knows no national boundaries.

Thus the film is constructed around these notions of transnational alliances: Lee, a Shaolin disciple, is tasked to infiltrate Han's Island and bring Han, a renegade Shaolin monk who has turned to international drug smuggling and human trafficking, to justice.
Lee travels to Han's Island under the cover of a international martial arts tournament staged by Han to recruit the top fighters to his evil organization, thus, drawing Roper and Williams from the United States. Eventually, the three disparate fighters must join forces to defeat Han and his nefarious schemes (though Williams ultimately sacrifices himself to make this happen).

In addition to the casting of Williams, the film makes overt attempts to appeal to the black urban audiences along the same lines as pointed out by Bordwell and Desser: that is, viewing Lee as a figure of social justice for minorities. When Williams is first introduced to the narrative, he is seen fighting and defeating two police officers who are harassing him without cause as he travels to the airport. The mise-en-scene of the sequence clearly evokes the image of the “ghetto:” set at night, in what appears to be a trash-infested alleyway, Williams uses his martial arts skills to quickly dispatch the clearly racist and oppressive police, who disparagingly refer to Williams as “jig.” Similarly, after Williams arrives in Hong Kong and he travels by water taxi across the crowded and garbage strewn bay, he notes to Roper, “ghettos are the same all over the world. They stink.” And finally, in a shocking image from the film, after Williams is killed by Han, Williams' body is hung from a series of chains, more than resembling a lynching.

Most importantly, this narrative arc allows for the construction of several set pieces that allow for a variety of martial arts displays: from the introduction to each of the three main characters, where each is introduced as a fighting machine, to the fights
involved in the tournament, and climaxing in the battles between Lee and Han's minions, and ultimately, with Han himself. As mentioned before, it is of course these spectacular displays of action that are most commonly seen to be “excessive”: extended fighting sequences that seem to go on for much longer than is necessary for narrative function. While each character is given their showcase in terms of these sequences, what these sequences in *Enter the Dragon* do is to ultimately highlight Lee and his physicality.

What becomes most apparent in these sequences is the way in which Lee's muscular virility is constructed along lines of what both Dyer and Tasker refer to as hardness. For both Dyer and Tasker, the *hardness* of the body, represents the body's invulnerability to harm. After all, “a naked body is a vulnerable body” (Dyer 299), and in order to counter the image of the naked body as vulnerable, the body must become built: that is display features of hardness such as the “skin stretched over pumped-up muscles [that] creates a taut surface” (Dyer 300). This hardness could also be achieved through fighting skill as well: wherein “the hero must avoid letting any stray kick or punch through his/her defense, so that body functions as a sort of armor” (Tasker, *Fists* 318).

Both of these elements of hardness are readily apparent in the numerous action scenes featuring Lee. In a short training sequence (itself a staple of action films and Lee's movies in particular) prior to the second day of the tournament, Lee, shirtless, is seen in a high angle shot performing several punches and kicks. What is most apparent in this sequence are the taut lines of Lee's arms and shoulders, accentuated by the high angle of the shot which looks almost directly down on his body. Furthermore, the sequence ends with Lee
holding a kick, and then slowly turning his leg towards the door, just as Oharra - Han's bodyguard, whose actions led to the death of Lee's sister - enters the room. This final moment clearly underscores the idea developed throughout the sequence: that Lee's body is itself a weapon, hewn to the point of muscular perfection. This, of course, is also the focus of the numerous fight sequences featuring Lee.

In his second encounter with Han's guards in Han's underground lair, a stray attacker rips Lee's shirt; clearly, a flimsy excuse for Lee to take his shirt off and put his muscular and well-toned body on visual display. As Dyer notes, “the built body is one that is meant to be seen – it is built to show” (301). And in these sequences, almost entirely framed in medium shot, features Lee, bare torso on display, demonstrating the other hardness of the body: that is defending against and dispatching untold numbers of clothed guards. Perhaps most strikingly, Lee is featured in several shots where, after dispatching a foe, Lee strikes a pose, his body flexed and tense, showing off his musculature and emphasizing the hardness of not only his body, but his martial arts ability as well. It is clearly these moments of muscular hardness and virility, on display through Lee's martial arts abilities that mark Lee as a figure of a new brand of Asian masculinity, of which, as suggested earlier, sexuality and sexual appeal are important components. Berry notes that in his films, Lee's image was that of an “eroticized body” (225) and that Lee offered an Asian masculinity that was actually a transpacific construction: combining a traditional Chinese “wu or martial masculinity” (224) with codes and features of American masculinity: “when the shirt literally comes off and he
bares his muscular upper body” (227). It is in these moments that Lee is largely characterized as a strong sexual figure; after all, the image of the naked male body, as both Dyer and Berry suggest, is a powerfully eroticized body. However, despite the appearance and assertion of this construction within the movie, there are at least two major problems with this construction.

The first involves the three-way narrative teaming of Lee with Roper and William. This narrative three-way teaming results in a triangulation of three types of masculinities that are constructed on explicitly sexual grounds. Most critics point to the sequence after Han's lavish opening night ball in which Han offers the three fighters their pick from his menagerie of enslaved women as emblematic of the differing constructions of masculinity that seem to recreate typical and stereotypical notions of these masculinities: Lee eschews sexual contact, instead choosing to contact Mei-Ling, the undercover operative spying on Han, while Roper chooses the only white woman in the group and Williams chooses multiple partners. The most common reading of this scene involves the most common discourses on Asian, black and white masculinity: Tasker argues that it ultimately Williams who “must bear the burden of the film's discourse about race...In Enter the Dragon Chinese sexuality is erased while blackness, in the figure of Jim Kelly, becomes the overdetermined space through which the film signifies both sexuality and racial difference” (327-8). Williams' hypersexuality appears most strikingly in one particular scene where Williams is literally framed by a naked female body: while one nude woman leans artfully in the foreground of the shot, another naked woman lies next
to him as Williams climbs out of bed post-coitus. This scene contrasts sharply with the scene proceeding this one and the one immediately after it. In the former, Roper is shown in bed with Tania, while the latter features Lee preparing for his night time reconnaissance of Han's underground lair.

Perhaps what is more revealing about these two sequences is the way in which they reveal the relationships between the three different types of masculinity. What is seen here is a kind of triangulation of masculinities, where Lee and Williams are positioned as “too little” and “too much” respectively with Roper serving as the “in-between.” In fact, this scene could be said to reflect the construction of these three masculinities within the United States cultural imaginary in general. Helpful in understanding this relationship is to return to the notion of “excess.” In other words, both Asian and black masculinities are portrayed in these scenes to be excessive in different ways. Zygmunt Bauman argues that “excess” is what defines the norm: “rather than stating the obvious – that the idea of excess would be meaningless without the norm – one should say that the idea of the norm would never occur and would have no content were it not for the experience of excess...the idea of 'norm' can solidify only as a sediment of excess” (86). In other words, Bauman suggests that to fully understand what constitutes the norm, one needs to understand what is considered to be outside of that norm. He goes on further to state that the “norm needs a repeated experience of excess particularly badly when its own legs are too weak or wobbly to stand on. Amidst the gaudy, colourful cavalcade of excesses, the ghost-like frailty of norm escapes notice”
I will argue that Bauman's conclusion here more than adequately sums up the state of white masculinity in America today.

As numerous theorists have argued, including Judith Halberstam and Eng, white male masculinity in the United States is constructed along the lines of different kinds of excess: Halberstam notes that “excessive masculinity tend[s] to focus on black bodies (male and female), latino/a bodies, or working class bodies, and insufficient masculinity is all too figured by Asian or upper-class bodies; these stereotypical constructions of variable masculinity mark the process by which masculinity becomes dominant in the sphere of white middle class maleness” (Halberstam 2). I would add that both black and Asian masculinities can be considered “excessive” in exactly the way Bauman defines: what they do is define the parameters of white masculinity. David Eng argues that the technology of this definition is psychoanalytic in process, wherein there is a “triangulating of American race relations beyond the conventional Manichean relationship of black and white” (151). On the one hand, you have the “hyperbolic black male penis [that] threatens the unity of the white male ego by placing him in a position of being less masculine, thereby endangering the structural distinction between him and white woman” (Eng 151), or, more simply put, this is the image of the hypersexualized black male. On the other hand, there is the figuration of the Asian male as “feminized, emasculated, or homosexualized” (16) which places him “in a position of lesser masculinity to secure for [the white male] a position of greater masculinity” (151). The result of this is a normalizing of the threatened relationship between the white man and
the white woman created by the appearance of the hyperbolic black penis; in other words, “a gendered distinction between the white man and the white woman is stabilized and secured through racial difference” (Eng 151). Eng suggests a masculinity continuum with Asian and black on opposite ends: too little and too much define what is just right. Ultimately, then, despite the presence of Lee's eroticized body within the action and fight sequences, the image of his sexuality is still denied, brought into a kind of sharp focus by the explicit sexual presences of Roper and Williams. It is important to note here that Lee's masculinity is excessive in two different ways: first, as the “too little” of the tripartate construction of white masculinity in America, but also as the muscular virility that was previously denied to Asian males. This seeming contradiction points as well to transnational nature of the production. Previously, Lee's movies were produced in Hong Kong and intended for Asian audiences, and while white characters would appear, they often were featured as foes to Lee (Lee's classic fight with Chuck Norris in The Chinese Connection is a great example of this). As pointed out earlier, Enter the Dragon was financed by Warner Bros. and featured an American director and writer. Thus, the film combines elements of what previously worked with Lee – most notably his martial arts displays – with what would be best described as a production sensibility borne from the United States cultural imaginary. This particular viewpoint is also seen in the use of the transpacific within the movie.

As discussed earlier, Lee's masculine identity is actually constructed specifically as an Asian and not necessarily an Asian American identity. What becomes most
apparent narratively and visually is Lee's Chinese-ness. After all, Lee plays a Shaolin
disciple and when he is first introduced, he is seen engaging in a practice bout surrounded
by yellow-robed Shaolin monks. In fact, the early parts of the film are composed of a
series of outward markers that signal Lee's ethnic identity: he is seen discussing eastern
philosophy of strength with the temple elder; he invites Braithwaite to tea in the temple
garden; he trains a student by speaking in Confucian-style proverbs: “Don't concentrate
on the finger or you will miss all that heavenly glory.” Furthermore, once on Han's
island, Lee refuses to change into the yellow “uniform” that Han requires. Instead, Lee
continues to wear his Chinese style tunic, clearly marking him in numerous crowd scenes
as both unique and unmistakably Chinese. The “Pacific” part of the transpacific
construction is what becomes specifically emphasized here: that is, Lee's character and
his masculinity are ultimately a foreign masculinity and has very little to do with Asian
Americans. Thus, as Berry suggests, Lee does present a new transpacific construction for
Asian masculinity, but the transpacific operates in a different way from what Berry
proposes. Rather than just simply combining different codes of Chinese masculinity with
those of American masculinity, the transpacific becomes the vehicle that makes Lee's
Asian masculinity legible and possible within an American imaginary. Because of the
intractability of the construction of Asian American masculinity as a desexualized one
within the imaginary, it makes sense that an alternative to that construction must come
from outside that structure. As Frank Chin suggests, it is only outside the
representational and economic structure of the Hollywood studios and production
companies that Lee is able to articulate an aggressive, muscular, and sexual construction for Asian masculinity. It is no wonder then that when he is folded back into those structures those same restrictions reappear, but in altered form. In fact, what is constructed here could be defined as another form of excess: in this case, excess as defined as by what comes outside of national boundaries.

What becomes increasingly clear in this analysis of Lee's star image is the way in which different elements of that image are defined in terms of excessiveness: from the way in which his masculinity is constructed, as well to the genre, the action movie, in which that masculinity is constructed. What also becomes clear is the way in which the excesses of genre and territory make the excesses of Lee's virile masculinity even possible within the American cultural imaginary. The excesses of genre and territory thus function as a type of containment for Lee's masculinity by presenting it as non-threatening to hegemonic white masculinity in the United States. Because it is ultimately “foreign,” it poses no threat to the current status of Asian Americans within the United States imaginary. Furthermore, Lee's displays of physical prowess and physicality are safely contained within the action movie genre, wherein such excessive physical displays are expected. Like the peplum, which created “a safe space of legitimated display” for the built male body which would not “incite the possibility of a libidinal response” (Dyer 302), the action movie serves a similar function here for Lee and his image of virile masculinity which ultimately would not threaten the position of hegemonic white masculinity. That is not to say that Lee's image did not exceed these boundaries or create
new possibilities for Asian and Asian American masculinity, but it is important to note the specific ways in which Lee's masculinity was both allowed to flourish and at the same time circumscribed.

Perhaps then, the more fitting visual image to describe Lee's star image and construction of masculinity is not the iconic poster seen in Tony Manero's bedroom in *Saturday Night Fever*. Rather, it is one from the final battle between Lee and Han in *Enter the Dragon*. In a scene reminiscent of the climax of *The Third Man*, Lee and Han stalk each other in an elaborate maze of mirrors that serves as Han's dressing closet. As Lee carefully picks his way through the closet, the mirrors renders his muscled body multiple and fragmentary; at the same time, it is both coherent, easily identified as Lee's body, but also broken up and divided into jagged lines. Lee's star image, the way his virile masculinity is ultimately perceived, is not the easily identifiable, consistent image on display in a poster on someone's wall, but is subject to multiple interpretations and possibilities, depending on a variety of factors, the least of which are time and geography.

The enduring power of Lee's image is unmistakable and, as pointed out by Chan, has not only entered into the panoply of “typical” Asian images in mainstream media, it has become the dominant image: “[Lee’s] cinematic image dismissed previous stereotypes of the yellow peril and model minority” (8). At the same time, Chan also points out the damaging nature of Lee’s legacy, noting that, “Bruce Lee's cinematic image is utilized not to include Asian Americans in the mass media but to further marginalize them” and in fact, “his martial arts has limited the roles Asian American men can play in
the mainstream” (7-8). In many ways, Chan’s concern here is similar to that of the advocacy groups like MANAA: focusing on the types and images available to Asian and Asian American actors in Hollywood. However, Chan’s statement also suggests larger, more varied ways in which Lee’s creation of a virile Asian masculinity has ultimately been more limiting rather than expansive. First of all, as Chan points out, Lee is more often than not seen as specifically Asian, and seldom seen as an Asian American, though he was born in San Francisco. As discussed earlier then, it is hardly a surprise that his image is often seen as an Asian masculinity that does not necessarily extend to Asian Americans. In fact, it could be argued that the schoolyard taunts of “Bruce Lee” endured by male Asian Americans growing up in the 1970s served as a kind of ironic taunt of their lack of hegemonic masculinity: that is, instead of being identified as Bruce Lee, it produced much the opposite effect. Interestingly enough, these episodes also demonstrate the continued liminality of the Asian American subject: despite Lee's identification as primarily Asian, the Asian American subject was still easily characterized and identified as “Asian,” though the primary identification of these subjects may not have necessarily been “Asian.” In other words, though the Asian American male failed to live up to Lee’s masculinity, he was still undeniably Asian; in essence, getting the worst of both worlds.

In addition to the limiting of roles and images for Asians and Asian Americans, Lee’s image has actually mutated. What has ultimately been passed down from Lee is not his eroticized body, but a body that has been transformed into the asexual martial arts
body: in other words, what has ultimately entered the cultural imaginary is not the “virile” image of Lee's masculinity, but rather the display of martial arts with its erotic nature largely stripped away. Thus, when Fung writes about the “desexualized zen asceticism” of the “kung fu master/ninja/samurai” (183), he points to the transformation of Lee's overall screen image by the intractability and enduring power of the image of desexualized Asian male in the American cultural imaginary. While Lee may have taken his shirt off in Hong Kong, America eventually was still able to metaphorically cut off his balls.

Jet Li: The Dragon Redux

The mutation of Lee’s screen image can be seen most clearly in the Asian action star who is in many ways the spiritual successor of Bruce Lee: that is Jet Li, who makes his mainstream American debut in 2000 with *Romeo Must Die*, quickly followed by *Cradle 2 the Grave* in 2003. In considering the first two leading roles of Jet Li (in 1998 Li had a silent co-starring role in *Lethal Weapon 4* as a deadly assassin) within the context of Lee’s star image, what becomes apparent is the intractability of the image of the desexualized Asian male, and the way in which form and genre, work together to constrain the possibilities of Jet Li's screen image as well. What is perhaps most interesting is the way in which these films work to bring together Asian masculinity and African American masculinity in what are meant to be progressive ways but just end up
repeating old constructions and ultimately highlighting normative and hegemonic masculinity.

In many ways, Jet Li serves as the perfect figure in terms of a spiritual ancestor to Bruce Lee. Famous for his martial arts prowess and heroic roles in a series of Hong Kong action films, Li marked his territory as Lee’s successor when he starred in *Fist of Legend*, a remake of Lee’s *Fist of Fury*. It seems only appropriate then that his two American debuts were also produced by Warner Bros. - the same studio that produced *Enter the Dragon*. Furthermore, both movies clearly exploit what Gina Marchetti termed “The Ghetto Connection”: that is, Lee’s popularity with black urban audiences by narratively situating Li in black urban settings with black co-stars: Aaliyah in *Romeo Must Die* and rapper DMX in *Cradle 2 the Grave*, refiguring the teaming of Bruce Lee and Jim Kelly nearly thirty years before.

Li’s appearance in these films was actually part of a mini-wave of transpacific crossings by Hong Kong action stars in mainstream Hollywood film projects in the late 1990s, following in the footsteps of Jackie Chan in *Rush Hour* and Chow Yun Fat in *The Replacement Killers*. Chan’s co-star in *Rush Hour* was motor-mouthed black comedian Chris Tucker, another clear attempt at aligning an Asian martial arts figure with black urban culture. In fact, Tucker’s emphatic proclamation in the film, “I’m blackanese” represents the main thematic that runs through both Chan’s and Li’s films: the possibility of a positivistic black/Asian hybrid cultural construction, in the mode that Vijay Prashad describes as “polycultural” (258).
For Prashad, these polycultural constructions represent an “anti-racist” model of diversity that recognizes not only the “history and complexity” of different cultures, but also wherein “social interaction and struggle produces cultural worlds [that] are in constant formation” (265), leading, most importantly, to the recognition that “our cultures are linked in more ways than one could catalogue, and it is from these linkages that one hopes our politics will be energized” (265). In other words, Prashad sees these moments of cultural blending as moments of alliances, providing opportunities to have real, material effects within the bounds of the U.S. nation-state. However, what becomes clear in these films, and a point that Prashad seems to overlook in his optimism, is the fact that these formations are primarily masculine constructions - though there is an important exception in *Romeo Must Die* that will be explored in greater detail later. What becomes clear is in putting Asian masculinity up against black masculinity in this way, these films allow a careful interrogation of Asian and black masculinities in combination with each other. This is precisely something that Kim argues for in his study of the Asian and black masculinities in literature: “Given the persistent power of nationalist and cultural nationalist identifications, the need remains for rigorous and comparative studies of such ideologies” (xix).

Like *Enter the Dragon*, the overall narrative movement of each movie is towards a notion of black/Asian cultural connection. Just as Lee must team with up both Williams and Roper to defeat Han, Jet Li has to do the same in both of his movies. In fact, the narrative arcs of these movies allows much more interaction between Li and his black co-

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stars. In both movies, Li comes to America on some kind of mission: in *Romeo Must Die*, he plays Han, a former Hong Kong cop who breaks out of a Hong Kong jail and travels to Oakland to avenge the death of his brother, while in *Cradle 2 the Grave*, he is Su, a Taiwanese intelligence agent tracking stolen gems.

One key difference between Li’s films and *Enter the Dragon* is the fact that both of Li’s films take place in America: no longer does the action occur in the transpacific limbo of Han’s island. Both films take place squarely on American soil, a fact emphasized by the opening credits sequence of *Romeo Must Die*. The movie begins with a travelling overhead shot, zooming over a darkened ocean and following a car as it travels across the Golden Gate Bridge. Over these shots, the name of Warner Bros. appears first in Chinese characters, which then fade out, to be replaced by English. Similar transformations of the names of the principal players play over the credits as the camera follows the car as it travels further into the city. In many ways, then, the opening credits marks the transpacific transformations that occur in the narrative of the movie: that is, Jet Li’s character travels from the East to end up in the West. However, as in the opening of *Flower Drum Song* (1961), what is really emphasized in this sequence is the idea of destination: what is important here is the fact that Li is in within the national boundaries of America, and with the hip-hop music of the credits, it suggests the importance of the urban setting to not only the narrative, but also to connections to a black cultural sphere as pioneered nearly three decades before by Bruce Lee. In many ways then, this opening credit sequence is designed to signal not only the arrival of Li’s
character, Han, but also of Li’s image as a bonafide Hollywood action star. However, this emphasis on location has other implications that will be discussed in the conclusion of this section.

In each case, conflict arises between Jet Li and a black criminal element: in *Romeo*, it is with a black mob run by Isaak O’Day, played by Delroy Lindo, in *Cradle*, it is with both Tony Fait, as played DMX, and a crime boss named Jump Chambers. In each case, the conflict is connected to or articulated over some sort of cultural difference between Jet Li and the black milieu he finds himself in. However, the Jet Li character eventually teams up with one or more of the black characters to fight for a common cause: he and Trish, played by Aaliyah, in *Romeo* work to uncover the crooked land deal that seems to be the reason for his brother's death, while, in *Cradle*, Fait and Su end up fighting rogue Taiwanese intelligence agent Ling to save Fait's kidnapped daughter and to recover stolen “black diamonds” (an action movie MacGuffin if there ever was one). This team-up then leads the film to end with some sort of conciliation between the Asian and the black, as represented on the individual level by Jet Li and his costar. At the most basic level then, both these narratives move from an idea of cultural separation to one of connection, wherein basic cultural differences are worked out and result in a notion of hybridity very similar to Prashad’s idea of a polycultural moment.

Both films articulate these hybrid moments visually as well as narratively. In *Romeo Must Die*, two related scenes demonstrates this dual cultural crossing. In the first, Han and Trish face off against a motorcycle-riding assassin. A car chase quickly de-
volves into a hand-to-hand fight, but in a single moment, Han discovers that his helmeted foe is not only Chinese, but a woman. It is interesting to note that after the helmet comes off, Han's first identification is with race: “You're Chinese!” and not gender: only after getting kicked in the chest and stopping short of punching her directly, as opposed to just parrying her attacks, does Han announce to Trish, “I can’t hit a girl.” As Trish informs Han after knocking the assassin down with her car door, “Look, I don't know how it is China, but in America if a girl is kicking you're ass, you do not have to be a gentleman.” Despite this claim, Han can still be “in China” by literally wielding Trish like a weapon to fight the assassin by guiding her hands and feet for punches and kicks until the assassin in defeated. Thus, at this moment, Trish becomes part of Han's cultural signifier: his kung fu.

Another scene later in the movie serves as a kind of bookend to this scene: Trish and Han must sneak their way into an exclusive nightclub, and in order for Han to blend in, Trish must give him an outward sign of “blackness”: the backwards Roots baseball cap, as she notes admiringly, “Now you're giving me some B-Boy flavor.” Trish then explains to the confused looking Han, “Hip-hop.” To which he replies, after pulling down his pants a notch and striking a swagger, “I know hip-hop” to Trish's amused chuckle. In fact, part of the way Han gains entry into the all-black club (that is in addition to being accompanied by Trish, “the boss' daughter” of course) is by “striking a 'tude” with the bouncer at the door. When they finally enter the all-black club, in a series of shot/reverse shots, Trish and Han are confronted by the belligerent stares and approaches of several
large black men. Trish's response, “You know what, I'm not feeling this, let's go to the
dance floor.” Thus, Trish defuses the almost inevitable physical conflict by pulling Han
to the dance floor and giving him an impromptu dance lesson. Here we see another cul-
tural trade-off: as Han engaged her in his cultural signifier, she returns the favor here by
engaging him in an R&B dance, in addition to her teaching him how to “get that B-boy
flava.” In fact, the camera goes through several visual moves similar to the earlier fight
scene, including circling the action and having Trish wrap herself around Han, both shots
literally articulating a notion of connection and alliance.

Similar moments can also be found throughout Cradle 2 the Grave. Fait and Su
occupy similar screen spaces throughout the movie: from the first moment they meet, the
two exchange dialogue in a simple shot/reverse shot sequences where both characters are
given equal emphasis. This matching of the two characters is most clearly dramatized in
the first fight scene involving Su and Fait. Fait is cornered in an alley by two Chinese
thugs, but Su quickly comes to the rescue. The rest of the sequence cuts between Su and
Fait each fighting an assailant, in their own fighting style: Fait, with the roundhouse
punches of a boxer or street brawler, while Su uses kung fu. These cuts between the indi-
vidual fights eventually end when two separate fights become one, as Su and Fait stand
next to each other opposite their opponents. There is even a switch between opponents,
who are dispatched via simultaneous roundhouse kicks from the two protagonists. In-
cluded in this longer sequence is a shot/reverse shot sequence where Su looks over Fait,
and Fait looks back at Su, further aligning the two within the same screen space. In fact,
the final kick, is edited in such a way that it appears that Su starts a kick, which is then ended by Fait. This type of cutting reappears at the end of the movie, where the final confrontation between Su and his archrival Ling is intercut with fights between Fait and the goon threatening his daughter, and Daria and Sona, Ling’s right-hand woman. On the surface, these scenes seem to be literal reenactments of a black and Asian “resistance culture” much in the style of Lee as argued by Bordwell and Desser. In fact, the movie itself ends with two moments of alliance: first, a close-up of Su and Fait grasping each other's hands, and the second, a rising crane shot over an airport tarmac that recalls the famous final moment in *Casablanca* where Rick and Renault walk off into “the start of a beautiful friendship.” Instead of the orchestral strains of “As Time Goes By,” this scene is scored to a DMX rap, here serving as a signifier of the black cultural sphere.

However, in many ways, these readings of hybridity are too easy, and fail to account for many underlying issues. In writing about Bruce Lee as a polycultural figure, Prashad notes the ways in which Lee, “stuck it to the institutions of white supremacy” by fighting and defeating in his films by trouncing Chuck Norris as a representative of “white power and privilege” (259). However, in both of these films, the direct enemy is seldom this notion of “white power and privilege,” but rather, black and Asian criminality in *Romeo*, and an international Asian weapons ring in *Cradle*. Significantly, Han and Trish must defeat a Chinese woman together and then face down angry black men. At the same time, Su and Fait fight, and ultimately triumph against an Asian ringleader and his henchmen. Thus, in both films, black and Asian are set against each in conflict as much
as they are putatively “working” together in an “interethnic identification and alliance” (Lipsitz as quoted in Kim xix).5

Thus, what we see in these movies are constructions of Asian masculinity put right up against black masculinity. However, it would seem that the presence of Trish in *Romeo*, especially in reference to the two scenes discussed above, problematizes this formulation. It would seem that hybridity in that movie is developed upon a dyad of masculinity versus femininity, representing the Asian and the black, respectively. However, as I will argue, this dyad does not necessarily hold, as the movie is actually more interested in advancing patriarchy than the presence of the female character implies. That is not to suggest that the presence of Trish does not offer alternatives to the masculine structures developed in the film, but, nonetheless, the movie is much more invested with notions of masculinity.

The question then arises, is what happens when these two “excessive” masculinities are considered next to each other, instead of seeing them in relation to the dominant white hegemonic masculinity of the nation-state? Daniel Kim suggests in his comparative study of the nationalistic literatures of Frank Chin and Ralph Ellison that these “influential nationalist ideologies encourage African and Asian Americans to see one another in antagonistic rather than cooperative terms” (xix-xx). Like Eng, Kim utilizes a psycho-

5 Something very similar occurs in *Enter the Dragon* as well. After all, the villain of the piece is not Braithwaite, the shadowy British intelligence (who actually bears more of a resemblance to a friendly uncle), but the renegade Shaolin monk, Han. While Han kills Williams, it is Lee who ultimately defeats Han. In this way, this movie as well upsets the notion that many critics argue for Lee’s popularity with urban audiences: his resistance against oppressive power structures based upon racial identifications, whether Japanese or white.
analytic framework, arguing that these two nationalist literatures were developed in a framework of injurious racism, subjecting both black and Asian subjects to similar types of castration and emasculation: “if racism seeks to emasculate and femininize men of color, this reflects the fact that they are forced to function under racism as objects that satisfy the sadistic and erotic desires of white men” (7). Because of this emasculation, Kim argues, there arose in both traditions a reactionary masculinist stance coupled with an almost virulent homophobia because of this linkage between racism and homosexuality. As a result then, “certain paradigmatic elements of the cultural nationalism forwarded by each...encourage[s] an interracial antagonism” (Kim xix).

Outside of this psychoanalytic framework and focusing specifically on the representations of race in film from a structural viewpoint, Denzin offers a different account for this Asian and black conflict found in these movies. Hollywood, Denzin argues, as a product of “racially and ethnically segregated society” (24) and varying historical currents, has created a “cinematic racial order” (18) wherein each minority group's place is “shaped by and how and when it entered this system of structural commonalities” (25). Because this cinematic racial order is “a fractured, discontinuous system of representation,” it is “constantly being revived in light of new understandings” (25). Thus, Denzin argues, different historical and cultural imperatives will result in new representations in film. In the case of the Asian and black conflict, Denzin suggests that it is a result of shifting notions of black and Asian, creating cinematic moments in which “the Asian and
black communities do violent service for white society” in the name of liberal multiculturalism (37).

While both arguments offer compelling reasons for the underlying antagonism between the black and Asian communities, and in many ways accounts for some key elements in the films, both fail to address the main structuring element for the conflict within the movie: capitalism. Connell draws a direct connection between masculinity in the form of patriarchy and capitalism, noting, “the gendered character of capital” (74). This is especially relevant in *Romeo Must Die*, where the movie is continually concerned with masculinity in the form of patriarchy. In fact, the driving element of the movie is the confluence between capitalism and patriarchy: the developing gang war between O'Day and Sing, the patriarchs of both real and gangland families in the movie, is built around the desire of both of them to acquire by whatever means necessary, various waterfront properties in order to sell to a ruthless real estate developer named Roth who will then turn around and develop the land for the NFL. It is no accident that Roth becomes the representative of hegemonic white masculinity in the movie, and, except for one scene, is always seen in his skyscraper office framed against large picture windows showing the expanse of the city below, visually marking the position of hegemonic power. At the same time, O' Day is seen trying to protect both his son and daughter from the dangers of his criminal occupation: as he tells his son, Colin, “I got something else lined up for my boy.” Thus, O' Day is constructed as the “good” father who not only tries to protect his children, but also to build a better future for them, by “going to the owner's box” in be-
coming the first black team owner in the NFL and leaving behind the criminal life. In fact, O'Day is given several scenes where he develops this loving and protective relationship with his children, with a particularly intimate one where he reveals his insecurities to Trish while reminiscing in her old bedroom. At the same time, Sing is constructed as the “bad father” who not only gladly accepts Roth's payoff with a smile, but who kills his own son in order to protect the deal. Instead of scenes of familial love and connection, Sing is seen engaging in sadistic torture. Through these two characters then, masculinity, patriarchy and capitalism are all deeply imbricated.

*Cradle 2 the Grave* operates on a similar relationship between the three structures. Even though he is master thief, Fait is a loving father driven to rescue his daughter from the hands of Ling who, in turn, is driven purely by economic imperatives: he needs to recover the black diamonds that Fait stole in order to sell them at an obscene profit on the black arms market. This is what brings Ling in conflict with both Fait and Jump Chambers, the black crime boss in this film. Like O'Day, Fait is seen in an intimate scene in his daughter's bedroom also: this time, giving her a diamond necklace he stole earlier in the movie. Like Colin O'Day's assertion that his mob boss father is merely a “businessman and [he] works for this businessman,” Fait expresses the same sentiment, albeit more colorfully: “I'm a fucking businessman!” Thus, when Han asks the question in *Romeo Must Die*, “why fight with blacks?” it makes sense that the answer is framed in terms of economics: “Well, the waterfront is only four square miles. Half the businesses belong to us. Half to them. It's only a matter of time.” These films suggest that one of
the sources of the conflict between these cultures and these masculinities is indeed capitalist. This returns us the idea of excess: both the Asian and black patriarchies shown here, represented respectively by Sing and Ling and O' Day and Chambers, are excessive precisely because they are criminal enterprises, marginalized, subordinated and used by the hegemony. Mac, O'Day's right hand man refers to this marginalization when in response to O' Day's plan to go legitimate, he says, “No, you lost your mind when you started thinking this white boy was going to let you own a piece of their game.” In many ways, what these two films have done is to more clearly illustrate and literalize the relationships between Asian, black and white masculinities through the idea of capitalism that was at least implied in Enter the Dragon.

In that film, Roper is initially presented as a kind of failed capitalist: his first appearance is on a golf course, and part of his motivation to join Han’s tournament is his impending bankruptcy. While this may mark white masculinity here as a kind of failed capitalist, there is nonetheless the clear alignment between whiteness and capitalism: after all, Lee is an ascetic monk while Williams’ occupation remains undefined throughout the movie. It is along these lines that Han attempts to tempt Roper to join him, noting that, “the business of corruption is like any other.” In fact, Han’s request, “I’m hoping you’ll join us; represent us in the United States,” is clearly couched in a kind of business terminology. While on the outset, Roper agrees with Han, noting that, “it’s the law of economics,” it also becomes clear as the sequence progresses and Han is showing the Roper the extent of his operations: including opium manufacturing and human traffick-
ing, that Roper is growing increasingly uneasy about Han’s brand of capitalism. The sequence ends with Han displaying Williams’ hanging body to Roper, and a close-up on Roper’s anguished face: “you want me to join this?” Clearly, Han has gone too far for Roper, with Han representing a kind of brutal excessiveness of capitalistic ideologies. After all, the sequence began with Han’s observation to Roper, “then there is a point you will not go beyond.” This scene constructs Roper as a kind of “good” white capitalist who stays safely within prescribed boundaries, while Han is the “evil” Asian capitalist who laughingly obliterates those boundaries, representing an excessive capitalism.

In many ways then, using the genre of the action film to articulate this conflict between masculinities deemed excessive makes perfect sense, because, as discussed before, the action movie is the language of excess. *Cradle 2 the Grave* provides two prime examples of this type of “gratuitous action” (Williams 208): First, there is an extended scene in which Su ends up at an underground fight club, where patrons in the first row must cover themselves with plastic sheets like at a Gallagher concert to avoid getting blood splattered on them. He soon finds himself not only fighting within the chain link enclosed arena, but outside of it as well. It is the excess spectacle of the action film literalized: where boundaries such as fences cannot contain the action. Similarly, when Fait engages in an extended ATV chase through Los Angeles, he quickly ends up not just on the roads, but on the rooftops of the city, jumping from building to building.

Once again, as much as the action movie genre allows for these types of narrative excesses, its ultimate capacity is to form a type of safe container for those excesses. In
the end, nothing is excessive in an action movie because that is exactly what is expected. The action genre, which speaks the language of excess, serves a double process by which not only are these excesses surrounding the construction of race and masculinity allowed free reign to flourish, but also become safely contained by the form. This type of containment is literalized at the end of both movies, where the final duel between Jet Li and each of his adversaries takes place in a ring of fire. The ring of fire represents a kind of pure visual spectacle that allows full reign to Li’s martial arts. However, at the same time, the ring of fire serves as a kind of impassable barrier, which safely contains these excesses. In short, the action film genre serves as that ring of fire: it allows the tropes of Asian and black masculinity to be safely deployed into mainstream culture without threatening mainstream social order.

In both movies, then, both Asian and black masculinities are constructed in ways which simply reinscribe the dominant tropes of Asian and black masculinities throughout popular culture. Thus, as Eng suggests, the Asian male is still presented as emasculated and femininized. The most obvious desexualization of Han is the fact that he is allowed only the barest of sexual contact with Trish. Despite the fact that much of the movie hinges on his characterization as “Romeo” to Trish's “Juliet,” the only sexual contact that Han and Trish have is a hug at the end, in addition to the fighting and dancing scenes discussed in detail above. Here, sexual energy is displaced into images of what Denzin would characterize as visual excess: kung fu and dance. In fact, when Maurice accuses of Han of “trying to get in them panties,” Han reacts with confusion: “what?” It is un-
clear whether he is confused by Maurice's idiom or the simple fact that he had no real in-
terest in getting “in her panties.” At the very least, we are left with Maurice's general dis-
belief that “you didn't think she was going to give it up to you, did you?”

In addition, in both movies, the Jet Li character is victimized by a constant stream of verbal abuse, most strikingly when Su confronts the black crime boss Jump Chambers. In the course of a short scene, Jump deploys at least three racial epithets against Asians: “gook,” “poon” and “slope” in addition to insulting Su's intelligence and describing Koreans as having “faces like walls.” Throughout this abuse, Su stands almost impassively by. This impassivity would not be so pronounced if not for the histrionics in the same scene coming from Tony Fait, where he literally kneels down begging Jump for help, in addition to nearly attacking Jump for disregarding his daughter's life with a flippant, “make another one.” As Jump jokingly notes, “ooh, drama” is precisely what we don't get from Su, characterized here as either immensely stoic, or incredibly passive. Within the context of these scenes, Li’s characters often seem less “manly” when compared with his co-stars. While Li demonstrates a level of physical prowess with his martial arts that many would argue is on par with that of Bruce Lee, he does not have the same sense of virile masculinity that became the hallmark of Lee’s image. In addition to these narrative moments, there is the simple question of how Li’s body is put on display: while Lee’s bare torso became part of his image, as seen in Enter the Dragon, in both films Li is often seen in form-fitting dark suits that cover him from head to toe; Li’s physique is never put on visual display in the same way as Lee's. Furthermore, the
geographical location of the movie, that is, the clearly established setting of America makes this desexualization all the easier: after all, though he is from “the East,” in order for Li to be safely contained within national boundaries, he is stripped of his virile masculinity, in exactly the opposite way in which Bruce Lee was able to flaunt his. So while Bruce Lee has just as few sexual liaisons as Li, ultimately, the image of his virile masculinity is often constructed by visual, rather than strictly narrative means, a point that was visible in *Enter the Dragon*, but much more prevalent in Lee's previous films.

Though hegemonic male masculinity makes only a passing appearance in this movie, it nonetheless still structures the construction of both Asian and black masculinities in the way suggested earlier by Eng. As discussed earlier, white hegemonic masculinity is connected with the capitalist enterprise that serves as the ultimate goal of the black characters in both movies. It is also important to note that black masculinity in both films is linked with criminality. As both Denzin and Tasker note, there is a long history of film representations which relies on “an equation between blackness and marginality, blackness and criminality” (Tasker 4). Indeed, nearly all the characters in these movies are associated with criminality in some way, shape or form. In *Romeo Must Die*, O' Day's attempt to turn legitimate, to enter the owner's box is thwarted by Mac, who says with a note of disgust, “I've had enough of this legit shit.” Even Tony Fait, despite all his claims that he's just is “fucking businessman” really is, as Jump characterizes him, “just a thief in the night, stealing shit that don't belong to you.” Contrast this with the law and order characters that Jet Li plays: Han is a former Hong Kong cop who went to jail to
protect his gangland father, and Su is a Taiwanese intelligence operative. In fact, both movies tie this criminality to the image of the hypersexualized black male: Tony checks out Daria's breasts with an admiring glance when they are pressed down against the subway car, Jump nods approvingly at the Hustler magazine, shown in close-up in his luxurious jail cell crib. Perhaps the most telling moment linking black masculinity to both criminality and hypersexualization is a scene in *Romeo Must Die* where Colin O'Day is seen chafing under his father's restraint: “he needs to start respecting me like a man. He needs to start respecting my manhood,” as he says this to the hooker dressed only in a robe and skimpy lingerie while preparing and smoking marijuana. Here, black manhood is visually linked with both sex and drugs in the image of the hooker preparing weed.

A key component of Kim's argument concerning the construction of black masculinity is its homophobic currents, currents that are more than apparent in both films and both articulated through the characters played by Anthony Anderson in both movies. Significantly, Anderson's portrayals fall in line with “the comic Negro, the jester” (Denzin 26), operating in a largely physical realm composed of pratfalls and general buffoonery and serving as the main source of comic relief (though he shares that duty with Tom Arnold in *Cradle 2 the Grave*). More significantly, his characters also display the most obvious homophobic attitudes in both movies. For example, in Cradle, Tommy is called to distract a guard during a heist, prompting Tommy's anguished response, “Oh, hell no.” Despite this, Tommy deploys a swishy gay stereotype against the guard. Similarly, there'-
s a moment in Romeo where his character Maurice, performs a raucous endzone dance after scoring a touchdown on a video game, taunting his opponents with cries of “Take it, take it” and “these nuts in your mouth. I said put the nuts in your mouth.” In many ways, one could apply a resistant reading to these moments of homophobic buffoonery, operating in such a way that “even as they played fools and clowns, blacks maintained their own sense of reason and pride within this absurd racist system” (Denzin 99). In the end though, the clown serves as a way to safely acknowledge and discharge the more obvious homophobic attitudes that structure black masculinity.

In many ways, these two films are so involved in the language of the medium and absorbed into recreating masculine structures of the dominant culture that they fail not only to provide a truly viable black/Asian alliance or a hybrid culture of resistance, but their notions of Asian and black masculinity simply reify existing structures to such an extent that the gestures towards an inter-ethnic alliance come off as ultimately hollow. But yet, it may be that Trish is the character that provides, in the words of Delueze and Guattari, “a line of flight” out of this system. When confronted with the seemingly inevitable fight in Silk's casino, she is able to avoid it, by literally escaping the situation and onto the dance floor. When Han informs her that the dance floor, “is not my scene,” he is in many ways right. Seemingly bound inextricably into the structures of masculinity, he fails to see the way in which the feminine can be a legitimate and viable avenue of escape from the violence that often attends masculinity. Despite the fact that Li has often been
portrayed as a kind of spiritual ancestor to Bruce Lee, the former clearly strikes an all-to-
gether different image of Asian masculinity than the former.

**Kip Fulbeck: The Inscrutable Asian**

In many ways then, Kip Fulbeck’s “fictional autobiography” *Paper Bullets* operates clearly within the bounds of these constructions of Asian and Asian American masculinity within the cultural sphere of the United States. That is, Fulbeck's autobiography is about the way in which he negotiates the daily material conditions of his life while dealing with the way in which Asian American males are viewed and constructed within this sphere. The movies of Bruce Lee and Jet Li thus serve not only as important examples of that construction, they oftentimes are the source of that construction as well. Because Fulbeck makes film and popular culture important touchstones in this work – and Bruce Lee in particular plays a key part in this book – this book becomes a key text in exploring the relationship between the spectacular and the lived that is at the heart of this project. In other words, given the way Asian males have been portrayed within film and popular culture, how does the Asian male live in these material circumstances?

Eng offers another way of looking at the ways in which these popular constructions operate and that also serves to illuminate Fulbeck’s own project and his relationship to these constructions of Asian American masculinity. In talking about the role of visuality in the construction of the Asian American male subject, Eng employs the
use of the Lacanian screen and the “given-to-be-seen,” which not only serve as important critical constructions, but also serve as lucid metaphors in explaining the different technologies of visuality. Though not speaking only of film, Eng’s use of Lacan then seems very useful in considering the impact of these filmic constructions of Asian American masculinity in the cultural imaginary. Eng describes the Lacanian screen as “the field of representations and the image-repertoire of visual perceptions [which] interven[es] between the human look and the gaze.” More importantly, the screen “is comprised of ideologically marked and pre-given images through which the subject is captured as a picture within the visual domain.” In other words, the screen allows for the social recognition of the individual in relationship to pre-existing images social images. It is these images, “these pictures, from television, cinema, and print media, that permits subjects to assume their social – for example, racial, economic, and national – identities” (43). Thus, the way in which the individual is recognized socially is colored by a complex network of already established images created by popular and mass media. In this way, Eng is able to discuss the way in which these images, including those from television and movies, operate on the level of the individual subject.

Furthermore, key to Eng’s formulation of the screen is the idea of Lacan’s “given-to-be-seen,” a specific set of screen images that are the “culturally sanctioned images against which subjects are typically held for their sense of identity” (43). It is these images of the given-to-be-seen that not only provide for “the ideological point of view from which the spectators are encouraged to identify with those pregiven representations
that would most easily accord with the dominant sociopolitical ethos of their time” (44), but also create the foundation for “the formation of punitive and static stereotypes of the other” (44), including, in this case, the stereotype of the emasculated Asian male. Eng's description of the relationship between the spectacular representations of the Asian male and the individual articulates more clearly what the stakes are here, pointing to the way in which the material conditions of daily life are affected by the cultural wash of movies - including those of Lee and Li - that surround the individual subject. Thus, for the Asian male subject, this particular given-to-be-seen affects not only the way in which the Asian male subject sees himself – a point that Tagawa makes when he noted earlier that the images of the emasculated Asian male are the ones “which I grew up with” - but these are also images by which Asian American men are seen by others – again, as Tagawa states, “I want kids to grow up to know that Asian men have balls.” In many ways, Tagawa’s assertion that “I got balls” is also the assertion that Fulbeck makes in his autobiography, seemingly writing “against-the-grain” of the given-to-be-seen.

Lisa Lowe articulates the idea of Eng’s screen in a slightly different valence, noting that, “Asian American culture also includes the practices that emerge in relation to the dominant representations that deny or subordinate Asian and Asian American cultures as ‘other.’...perhaps one of the more important stories of Asian American experience is about the process of critically receiving and rearticulating cultural traditions in the face of a dominant national culture that exoticizes and ‘orientalizes’ Asians” (65). In other words, Lowe contends here that one of the things that Asian American culture, of which
literature and autobiography are included, articulates itself against the perceptions and representations of popular culture, whether they be the “exotic Oriental,” or, in the case of Fulbeck, “the emasculated male.” Fulbeck's approach of resisting the stereotypes of Asian and Asian American masculinity illustrates Lowe’s description of Asian American culture as “an alternative cultural site” (ix-x) to the terrain of American national culture. As a series of oppositional practices and narratives, Asian American culture is “the medium through which alternatives to liberal citizenship in the political sphere are narrated, where critical subjects and collectivities can be reproduced in new configurations with new coherences” (156). Though it seems that Fulbeck’s project in creating alternative formations to Asian American masculinity seems too narrow to be connected with Lowe’s political and social project and her concern with liberal citizenship, Lowe’s theoretical framework nonetheless sheds important light on what Fulbeck is doing beyond the simple fact of the oppositional nature of his work.

On the surface, it would appear that Fulbeck's construction of an Asian American masculinity is merely reactionary: popular culture and the American racial imaginary present the Asian American male as emasculated, so Fulbeck will provide a sexually active and virile alternative. In this way, it would seem that Fulbeck is contesting these constructions of Asian American masculinity solely on the grounds of representation, much in the same way as political groups such as MANAA. However, it becomes clear that Fulbeck offers a more complicated and nuanced construction of Asian American masculinity that uses the contestation of representation as his starting point. Ultimately,
Fulbeck’s consideration of Asian American masculinity does several things: first, he plays with the idea of a “visual culture”—in terms of both the images of film and television that form the Lacanian screen, as well as the visuality of racial difference in the United States—that produces an Asian American masculinity; second, he filters his own sense of masculinity through the visual culture that surrounds him: not only in the way he writes “against the grain” of the given-to-be-seen of the emasculated Asian male, but also in the way in which the visual is used to construct his notions of women, both white and Asian, against which he ultimately constructs his own identity as “Asian” and “male;” finally, he interrogates the idea of the hypervisibility of Asian Americans within the American racial imaginary.

The linking of Fulbeck's sexual and racial identity is perhaps best illustrated near the beginning of the work where Fulbeck details a moment of both sexual and racial awakening through the pages of *Playboy* magazine. Ostensibly, Fulbeck's explicit purpose in this section is to describe the way in which, “Asian girls hit my conscious radar not long afterwards, and they hit it hard” (61), but it becomes very clear that Fulbeck is carefully delineating an intersection of sexuality and race as viewed through the lens of a visual pop culture.

Fulbeck frames the moment innocuously, describing it as “an age-old ritual. My schoolmates and I had snuck into our treehouse to look at dirty magazines on a hot summer afternoon” (61). However, instead of simply aping a larger image of hegemonic masculinity, Fulbeck uses this scene using in order to articulate his own unique position
as a subject of color by consciously appropriating and then subsequently reworking this bit of almost mythic Americana in order to investigate and articulate his own identity as both a masculine and racialized subject, a point that Fulbeck consciously drives in by specifically setting in within that other symbol of boyhood Americana: the treehouse. It also becomes clear that the “given-to-be-seen” that Fulbeck writes not only against the grain of the image of the emasculated Asian American male, but he is also positioning himself against a white hegemonic masculinity and its myths of childhood.

What Fulbeck describes in this section is his attraction to white women, or as he puts it, “White. My mini-corduroy boner has its direction set for the next decade and I'm comfortable with it. Issue? There's no issue here. The only issue I know is a five-year-old copy of July '72 and I got it in my hand. It's under control. It's just where I am, what I'm doing, and what I'm looking for” (63). Fulbeck is responding here to the image of “Miss July...Carol O'Neal” (62) who is, “gorgeous. She's everything my twelve-year-old mind wants in a woman – big hair, big eyes, big breasts with pink nipples. White” (63). The image here is not just simply of a nude white woman in a magazine, but an image of an almost extreme form of whiteness. Not only does Fulbeck identify the Playmate specifically by a distinctly white, Anglo-Saxon sounding name, “Carol O'Neal,” he repeats the word “big” to describe her physical attributes, from her hair to her eyes to her breasts, emphasizing the idea of an almost overwhelming sense of whiteness.

More importantly, Fulbeck's attraction to white women and whiteness is actually more of a move away from an ethnic Chinese identification, as indicated by Fulbeck's
anger, and even revulsion at pulling a *Playboy* with a Chinese Playmate: “I look down at my new toy, and the woman's Chinese. What a rip-off. I mean this is a joke, right?...I got enough of a glimpse to get sick the first time” (62). It is important to note that this a revulsion based primarily on the visual – the physical features of the Asian body, most notably in the image of the Asian female body: “Brown nipples! You're gonna chomp down on brown nipples? Gross. She's got that flat Chinese nose and black hair and yellow skin. Even her pose is full John Robert Powers you-too-can-be-a-model crap and she's wearing pearls. My Ma wears pearls” (62). What becomes clear in both of these instances is the largely visual nature of these various identificatory processes. His response is cued to both the visuality of the Playmate and related to his own awareness of his identity, as written in a series of bodily ethnic identifiers that are cued to his Chinese mother as well as to his own hapa body.

Furthermore, Fulbeck makes clear that this move away from ethnic identification is a move away from “Michael Loo or Brendan Yang and playing with our little rice dicks in the backyard...I might as well be wearing Hong Kong polyester pants and ordering roast duck and almond gelatin in the same red-chaired Chinese restaurant every day. I mean, why don't you just make fun of me for the rest of my life while I can't get a date?” (62-3) It is Fulbeck's twelve-year-old self that has very quickly learned this “given-to-be-seen” of the Asian male not only of his tiny suburban universe, but also of society in general: the emasculated Asian male with his “tiny rice dick.” As Fulbeck describes
earlier as well, it is “five white boys in fourth or fifth grade [who] taught me that bit of information” with their bullying and their taunts:

I should go back to China with Michael Loo, the other Asian kid at Mesa.

*Hey maybe you and Michael Loo are fags! Maybe you guys like to suck each others rice dicks! Do you? Huh? Do you?...Chinamen fight like pussies. Chinamen have little dicks.* (emphasis in text 32)

In other words, it becomes clear very quickly to the twelve-year-old Fulbeck that to be Chinese is to be somehow less than a man on all levels: to lack all the basic attributes of hegemonic masculinity, including power, strength, and virility. Thus, in order to escape this identification, Fulbeck expresses simultaneously an attraction to whiteness and a disidentification to Chineseness. Ultimately, what Fulbeck does is to construct his own racial/masculine identity on the image of the visualized and literally exposed female body, here both white or Asian. From the beginning, initially learned through both his schoolyard environment and given visual expression through the images on purloined *Playboys*, Fulbeck ties his burgeoning sexual awareness with a burgeoning racial awareness, which results in a diminished sense of his racial self, seeing himself as somehow emasculated or reduced as a sexual being. Racial and sexual identities are imbricated from the beginning.

It would then seem to follow that Fulbeck constructs a version of Asian masculinity around the sexual and against the female. In fact, it can be argued that Fulbeck’s autobiography can be read in terms of the different and numerous relationships
that he has throughout his life: from his sexual awakening to a desire for white women, to his various encounters with women of various races. On this level, it can be argued that Fulbeck's construction of an Asian American masculinity is ultimately masculinist: creating a masculine self at the expense of women. After all, the easiest way for him NOT to be the emasculated Asian male is to demonstrate the fact that he has had lots of sex, and his multiple graphic descriptions of his various sexual encounters in the book is perhaps the easiest way to illustrate his virility and masculinity; as he notes, “I've been with enough women to die without fretting about my masculinity” (141). This inclination to the masculinist becomes most obvious in his extended description, encompassing several chapters, of his sexual encounter with “a Chinese woman named Mandy Chan who cuts her hair with a shaver...She's a strong Asian American feminist. Done her reading. Done her theory. Done her marching” (121). After Chan refuses to allow him to get behind her during sex, Fulbeck explodes angrily in his narration:

    And I realize this woman has brought the shit to bed with her. She's brought her books. She's brought her seminars. And she's brought the entire history of misogyny, sexism, sexual harassment, and women's power to bed with me. And she's brought it at the expense of every other form to natural behavior and normal human desire...How dare you bring this shit to bed with me? (139)

That is not to say that Fulbeck's dismissal of theory and feminism, the fact that it gets in the way of “every other form of natural behavior and normal human desire” (139) makes
his attitude automatically masculinist. Rather, what this scene serves to illustrate is the fact that unlike Mandy and her theory, Fulbeck is a kind of “natural male” wherein sexual desire is perfectly natural, writing, in this way, “against-the-grain” of what an Asian American male is constructed to be in America. What ultimately happens though is that this revelation comes at the expense of Mandy, who “is all stance and all posture. [Fulbeck] is embracing Mandy, and Mandy's embracing her politics” (140). Fulbeck proves himself to be a MAN, but even though he characterizes Mandy as “a strong, beautiful woman” (142), this description does not balance the fact that Fulbeck, while not necessarily demeaning Mandy, still describes his encounter with her at her expense, to, in essence, trumpet his own sexual prowess. In other words, by politicizing their sex, Mandy is portrayed to be in the wrong here, and allows Fulbeck to appear as a much “purer” sexual being. Clearly, Fulbeck is well aware of a need to construct this image of virility, noting rhetorically near the end of the work, “is it my responsibility to prove the existence of a passionate Asian man? To show the size of my cock? To show public aggression? If I don't show her, who will?” (228). And, indeed, he often does use his work to do exactly what Cary Tagawa does when he plays Asian villains: to prove that Asian men “have balls.” However, in a point to be taken up later, Fulbeck more often than not, complicates this simplistic reading.

In fact, by the end of the work it becomes clear that Fulbeck's autobiography serves as actually a kind of confession of both his past sexual experiences and his internal life to an unnamed woman who is “the woman I want to spend my life with” (261).
Fulbeck writes, “her name isn’t important, because everything I’ve written here has been for her. Everything is in her name” (263). Fulbeck actually uses the second person “you” in the last section of the book to directly address this unnamed woman. This element of the book becomes clear in the very last paragraph of the book: “I know what I’ve got in my hands right now. I know what I’m looking for, what I know what I have to offer. But I can only guess what you have in yours. I don’t know where you are, who you’re with, or how you’re sleeping. And I don’t know what you’re holding behind your back. If I ask really nice, will you show me?” (270-1)

Here at the end of the work, Fulbeck does three things: first, he clearly acknowledges an understanding of himself, knowing, “what he has in his hands right now,” having fully laid bare his life in the preceding pages, reflecting the idea that “the autobiography [works] as a means to impose order on an experience that was both disruptive and confusing” (Holte 28). Second, it seems to be clear that from beginning to end, from his first experiences to the culmination of his life, his life can be read and understood in terms of his heterosexual relationships. Finally, Fulbeck then uses that metaphor to serve as an entreaty to the unnamed woman to do the same with him, to reveal herself and what she is hiding, what she is “holding behind [her] back” as fully to him as he has shown her. Key to this formulation is the idea of what is hidden and what is visible, and, on the surface, it seems a pretty clear invocation of this idea of rendering what was once invisible, visible; in this case, it is the self. However, this relatively straightforward reading assumes a clear relationship between the hidden and visible, and
ultimately fails to take into account the way in which Fulbeck has continually played with
the notion of the visible and visuality. In the simplest of terms, Fulbeck has been
signalling to the reader throughout the work, and a point that he emphasizes here at the
end, is that all may not appear as it seems. Ultimately, then, this suggests that Fulbeck's
construction of Asian American masculinity is not so simple as to be a mere “writing
against-the-grain” of what popular and visual culture says about Asian American
masculinity.

In fact, what Fulbeck offers is a manifold interrogation of the technology of
visuality in creating Asian American masculinity within the American racial imaginary.
Part of Fulbeck's strategy is an appropriation of exactly that visual culture which is a vital
part of the “given-to-be-seen,” a visual culture that marginalizes Asian American
masculinity. Fulbeck's introduction reads like a jazzy riff, free-associating different pop
culture elements that he has “soak[ed] up...like a sponge”:

It comes out of movie scripts, deejay signature playlists, a repeating four-
color poster set edge to edge along plywood construction barriers and iron
scaffolding. Advertisements for magazine subscriptions and androgynous
singers and closer, better shaves...canceled seventies sitcoms and old
commercial slogans rising from the dead. Music videos getting played so
often you no longer hear the sounds without seeing the images. (3)

He goes on, noting how how keeps “20,000 random melodies, lyrics, guitar solos idling
too high at traffic lights, replay monologues and shot sequences in my daytime sleep” (3)
However, in this seemingly random list of pop culture elements, the visual becomes a recurring and important motif: from the “four-color poster” to the “shot sequences” replayed in his head, Fulbeck already highlights the importance of the visual and visual culture. More importantly, for Fulbeck, “over time everything slowly mixes together like so many nondairy smoothies at your local juice bar...my every recollection filled with random names and places” (3). Fulbeck then follows this claim with what appear to be three non-sequiters drawn from various seventies' television shows, as a kind of illustration of his point: “Marsha Marsha Marsha! Steve Austin, a man barely alive. Jill, Kelly, and Sabrina. They work for me. My name – is Charlie” (3). Fulbeck continuously enacts exactly this type of blending of his own life and pop culture throughout the narrative by filling the narrative with fragments of song lyrics and lines of dialogue from various movies at seemingly random intervals, designed as either appropriate or ironic comment. This then, is Fulbeck's key move in appropriating the “given-to-be-seen” of the American racial imaginary through the lens of visual and pop culture. By taking these quotes from their original context and reworking them to fit within the narrative scheme of his life, Fulbeck effectively “turns the table” on the “given-to-be-seen” that would define him; instead, he radically redefines the meanings of these fragments, giving them a new meaning that only makes sense within the context of his life and experiences. In that way, the same culture that provides “a lack of positive media images” (64) for Asian Americans is reconfigured and restructured in a way that allows Fulbeck to construct his identity as an Asian American male.
Paradoxically, Fulbeck also uses these fragments to play with the indeterminancy of meaning: in other words, as much as he recontextualizes these pop cultural elements, in decontextualizing them he also plays with the potential in making these quotes ultimately meaningless. Even in the introduction, the three quotes he lists, one from *The Brady Bunch*, one from *The Six Million Dollar Man* and one from *Charlie's Angels*, follow each other in a seemingly random order, with no discernable connection to Fulbeck's text. In essence then, Fulbeck is signalling here the tension between surface readability and actual knowing – the same tension discussed earlier that appears at the end of work as well. Here, he states this tension, noting that, “sometimes everything in life, and everything on TV, is just one big fiction” (3). Ultimately, if it is impossible to discern reality from fiction, like on TV, then this becomes just another way of asking the questioning of what is readable on the surface and what that surface actually signifies. Fulbeck begins playing with this tension between surface readability and actual knowing from the very beginning in his introduction, where he writes, “it comes out of movie scripts, deejay signature playlists, a repeating four-color poster...” (3). Here, “it” is the first word of the book, and in this primary position, it serves as a kind non-referential term: it is never clear to what the “it” refers to. Is “it” Fulbeck’s life? Is it his “fictional autobiography?” In fact, the even the logical fallacy in his subtitle, “fictional autobiography” suggests an inherent unreadability in relationship to the meaning of these terms: after all, how can an “autobiography” be “fictional”?
Fulbeck’s stance towards visuality is conditioned by the fact that his male hapa body is constantly under scrutiny, as evidenced when he stands in front of a group of students, noting, “All the students see is something else. Constant visual assessment. Everything is where it's supposed to be. And everything is more than I am” (257). It is this kind of interpellation that Fulbeck deals with continuously throughout his life: where others attempt to read his body in various, and often incorrect ways. Whether it's being called a “fag” in middle school because he looks like “Michael Loo,” or in another key moment, when Fulbeck and his father are on vacation in Cabo San Lucas and they are mistaken for a gay couple, these interpellations are built precisely on the valence of race: “And I suddenly realize what this woman was thinking all along. Old white man. Young Asian guy. In a Speedo. Hanging out together by the pool in Cabo, 'vacationing'” (101). Throughout the book then, these misreadings and misinterpretations often occur along the lines of homosexuality, an ultimately emasculating one for the straight Asian male, such as Fulbeck. It is against these types of visual misreadings, the connection between Asian and “gay” that Fulbeck ultimately resists in order to construct his counterformation of Asian and Asian American masculinity. As Eng notes, for Asian American males, “visibility is not necessarily better or more positive than invisibility” (110) and can have damaging and far-reaching effects for the Asian American male subject.

Fulbeck’s strategy then is much more complex than simply writing “against-the-grain” by just simply detailing his heterosexual exploits. While he does that as well, what Fulbeck ultimately does then is to critique the technologies of visuality in the
American racial imaginary that has equated “Asian male” with “emasculated” and “gay” by continuously demonstrating the various ways in which the surface belies what is underneath; or as often is the case, where the surface image or visual has nothing to do with any type of reality. After all, Fulbeck can both feel the responsibility “to show the size of [his] cock” (228) and then ultimately deny it by not sleeping with a white girl named Holly, slyly noting, “I hold her from behind and we fall asleep, unjoined, waking at dawn in the same position. To this day, I have never slept more peacefully than a single night with a virgin named Holly. What does that tell you?” (228)

It is precisely that rhetorical demand from Fulbeck - what these incidents tell this unnamed “you,” that could be the reader - that Fulbeck keeps bringing up in order to emphasize this thematic of misreading and unreadability. A close reading of two key scenes will further illustrate this point: the first, Fulbeck's account of the drowning of a young black girl at Raging Waters, and the second, one in which Fulbeck reflects on hunting halibut. Initially, both scenes seem to suggest obvious readings in relation to race, but upon closer reading, it becomes clear that there are moments of disjunction and discontinuity which precisely resists that type of reading. What Fulbeck emphasizes in these incidents is then the failure of visuality in determining meaning, directly enacting his critique of the role of visuality in the American racial imaginary. In the Raging Waters incident, Fulbeck describes how a twelve-year-old black girl, “entering the water in the SoCal recreation dream,” drowns in the wave pool at the water park: “she is immediately buried in a sea of rubber rafts and white people...Kicked and prodded, she is
forced under a giant yellow raincoat like some evil Morton Salt girl, listening to garbled screams and water and the Beach Boys” (136). The impulse then, is to interpret this scene as one where a white bourgeoisie society, represented by the “SoCal recreation dream” literally, and thus metaphorically, drowns the African American subject under its powerful oppression. However, two things undermine this reading. The first is the fact that Fulbeck himself refuses to draw any such conclusion from the incident. Instead of ending the episode on some kind of reflection concerning its symbolic possibilities, he instead explains how the lifeguard on duty that day, “quits his job after working one more day to prove he can. 'I just didn't want it to be on my last day,...' he says” (137). By ending in such a manner, Fulbeck makes the suggestion that there is nothing to interpret in this incident, that the drowning of a twelve-year-old girl is tragedy enough. Indeed, his description of the incident, comparing the smothered girl to some “Morton Salt girl” (136) fails to track as well, as it is the drowned black girl who is somehow equated with the young, umbrella-carrying white girl on the can of salt.

Fulbeck makes a similar disjunctive association in describing the halibut he catches later in the novel: “they [halibut] are special fish. Brown on one side, white on the other. Everyone sees them as two sides instead of being just one fish. They keep the white side down you can't see it, but it's the brown side that gets shot. If I look deep enough, there must be something to learn there” (213). The irony of that last line, of course, is the fact that, like the description of the drowning episode, is that there is nothing to learn from this description. A closer reading of the half-white, half-brown
halibut, evenly divided on both sides suggests that it is some kind of analogue for Fulbeck himself, yet at this point in the narrative, Fulbeck has already made it clear that he is not so clearly demarcated in this way. In fact, with his postmodern pastiche of writing style, Fulbeck has already suggested a kind of blending, rather than a strict demarcation of his “white half” and his “Chinese half.” If anything, Fulbeck has been writing about the indeterminancy of race and racial categories in the construction of his identity as an Asian American male. Thus, again this moment fails to track in terms of coming with a powerful metaphor or conclusion about race, and Fulbeck enacts precisely the kind of unreadability that he has constructed throughout his work.

That brings us back to the Bruce Lee moment, the moment that began this chapter, that moment when Fulbeck, “enter[s] [his] first woman” on the pretense of asking her “over to watch Enter the Dragon on television.” Fulbeck insists on the veracity of this moment, noting that it was “no lie. Even I couldn't make that one up” (18). A fuller consideration of this moment offers up a reading beyond the simple linking of Bruce Lee as a image of Asian virility to Fulbeck's own burgeoning sexuality. Undoubtedly, Fulbeck deploys Lee's image in much the same way as many critics have argued for Lee as a revolutionary figure in Asian and Asian American sexuality. After all, Bruce Lee is “there” at what is often considered the traditional entrance into manhood and masculinity: penetrative sex. What is more interesting is the way Fulbeck feels the need to defend this moment, as if it is precisely the sort of thing people would expect him to make up. Two things becomes apparent here: first, it points to the way in which there is a
naturalness to the way Lee is connected to a virile Asian and Asian American sexuality. Second, and more importantly, Fulbeck's over-defense of the moment, his insistence that it was “no lie” and something that “even I couldn't make up” actually throws doubt on Fulbeck's ultimate veracity: if it is indeed true, why does he need to insist on it's truth so vehemently? The reader is then left wondering less about Bruce Lee's status as a figure of Asian and Asian American masculinity, and more about the reliability of Fulbeck's narrative voice, reflecting the type of indeterminancy that is so key to understanding Fulbeck's construction of Asian American masculinity. Furthermore, Fulbeck calls into the question the use of the spectacular in the figure of Lee, of whether such a surface could truly reveal the everyday lived lives of Asian American male subjects. Fulbeck's ultimate goal then is to create a “new” Asian American masculinity by first questioning, and then using and appropriating a visual culture regime that marginalized Asian American masculinity in the first place.

This chapter began with the argument that Bruce Lee changed the way in which Asian American men were viewed in this country and ends with Kip Fulbeck taking up Lee's legacy in very unexpected ways. While it is an easy claim to make, it becomes clear that because of the very real limitations imposed by an action film genre, that Lee's legacy was, simply put, a hard act to follow, as demonstrated in the first American films of Lee's spiritual ancestor, Jet Li. While chained to the spectacular of film, Lee's image by itself could not produce a new type of Asian and Asian American masculinity. In many ways, it is the presence of “America” itself that is a force so powerful that needs to
“fix, shift, and refix the figure of the Asian immigrant according to the political exigencies and historical demands of the nation-state” (Eng 110). Thus, for Bruce Lee to be that figure of virile masculinity, he needs to do it outside of America, something that Jet Li was not able to do with his films set in the United States. The presence of nation and its accompanying forces – cultural, economic, and political - become too powerful to overcome. What needed to happen to Lee's image is what Fulbeck does in his autobiography: to take the figure of Bruce Lee out of the realm of the strictly visual, to blunt the technology of visuality that marginalized the male Asian American subject in the first place. Fulbeck doesn't simply just follow-up on Lee's legacy in the same way that Jet Li attempted to do in his films. What Fulbeck does is to re-cast and re-invent Lee's image, to articulate a transformation from the realm of the spectacular to the realm of the everyday; after all, this is how Asian males have to live with Bruce Lee. Rather than simply refusing the image, Fulbeck does something more powerful by incorporating the image and the idea and creating a new identity, building it from the bits of a popular culture that is, best, indifferent to the Asian male subject.
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