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The scope of my project identifies and critiques the fractured subjectivities of fictional characters through a transnational and transcultural lens. I focus my argument around characters who live in or originate from East and Southeast Asia. Critically, I build upon Edward Said's well-known binarist separation of latent and manifest Orientalism in order to argue that such a separation is unnecessary and in fact unproductive. I also engage with Homi Bhabha's work on stereotypes and that work's roots in Said's *Orientalism* (1978) in order to argue for a similar complication of Bhabha. What Bhabha applies to a post-/colonial model I wish to apply to a transnational, transcultural one in order to examine which stereotypes still have great force and influence, perhaps disproportionate, over how we relate to our fellow human beings. I approach both of these theorists through a series of close readings of drama, film, and fiction. Ultimately, I posit that those who can successfully create narratives of identity can capably manipulate stereotypes to their own advantage and then subvert them, or else re-shape that discursive framework and define themselves in different terms. However, the dissertation is particularly concerned with characters who have a harder time subverting or escaping stereotypes. These characters who struggle and fail to define themselves inevitably meet one of two fates: exile or suicide.

CONCUBINES AND SECOND SONS: STEREOTYPES, TRANSNATIONALISM,
AND THE PRODUCTION OF IDENTITY

by

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To my family: my wonderful parents, my beautiful sisters, my aunts and uncles and
cousins and grandparents. You have all given me unfailing love.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In his 2008 film *Gran Torino*, Clint Eastwood plays a character named Walt Kowalski, a crusty old Korean war veteran who seizes every possible opportunity to spout ethnic slurs and brandish a gun. He accuses his neighborhood of going downhill, now that he is the only white person left on his Detroit block (he's a recent widower, and his solitude is literal). When a gang conflict arises within the Lors, the Hmong family next door, and causes a brawl to break out and spill over onto his own lawn, Kowalski runs outside with his rifle and points it into the faces of the gangsters. With his eyes narrowed and his teeth bared, he grits: "We used to stack fucks like you five feet high in Korea. Use ya as sand bags." The gangsters flee, and the Lor family--which is headed by no patriarch, but rather consists of a grandmother, a mother, a scrappy young woman named Sue and her younger brother Thao--adopts Kowalski, showering him with gifts and food in thanks for his heroism and protection. At first Kowalski resists ("I was just trying to get that babbling gook off my lawn"), but soon enough he warms to the family, assumes the vacant patriarchal role, and even gives Thao affectionate nicknames like "Zipperhead."

Lisa Schwarzbaum of *Entertainment Weekly* explains, "[Kowalski] regularly lets loose with such a vile spew of racist epithets that it's clear Eastwood is looking to inflame the PC ears of a contemporary audience." If American audiences were inflamed, it did not prevent them from buying tickets. By February 22, 2009, *Gran Torino* had grossed over \$134,000,000 in the United States (IMDB), more than any of Eastwood's other films (Sperling). Eastwood himself puts it this way: "We've come to this now where everybody has to be walking on eggshells--kind of very sensitive. And so it's become boring, kind of, and I think everybody would like to be Walt Kowalski for about ten minutes" (qtd. in Schmidt). In other words, the audience was not only meant to be provoked, it was meant to identify.

The film's popularity suggests Eastwood's success in having the audience view life through Kowalski's eyes while he sits alone in his shadowed house, or busies himself in his workshop, or jovially insults his barber. For all that he styles himself as a lone wolf after his wife's death, his stubborn individualism speaks to the larger American mythos of self-reliant masculinity, and it should not go unremarked that his last name recalls Stanley Kowalski: another hyper-masculine American icon. He stands in for a collective fantasy of simpler times when the white men were the real men, and when the world was less "PC" and less "boring."

But Kowalski (and through him, the audience) soon learns that the world can no longer be and perhaps could never be packaged up into easy, ugly stereotypes of race, gender, and sexuality. After he rescues Sue Lor from a gang of young black men who threaten to rape her, Kowalski decides to talk to her; she lectures him, and by extension

the audience, on Hmong history in the United States, telling him "Hmong isn't a place, it's a people." She goes on to educate him about Hmong support for the United States during the Vietnam War, explaining that after the U.S. left in defeat, the victorious Communist forces began to persecute the Hmong. Kowalski wonders aloud why the Hmong chose to settle in the Midwest, of all places. After eighty-odd years of life, this appears to be his first significant encounter, not only with his immigrant neighbors, but with a transnational history that is not grounded in his comfortably racist perception of the world.

Nevertheless, Kowalski continues to use racial slurs, even as he sacrifices his own life to protect Sue's family from further outrages by the Hmong gang that torments them. In the end, after being gunned down by the gang (thus ensuring their mass arrest), he lies cruciform on the grass, every inch the martyr. He has died in the culmination of an imperialist fantasy that Gayatri Spivak famously describes as "white men [who] are saving brown women from brown men" (296). Sue and Thao show up at his funeral in traditional Hmong dress, drawing stares from Kowalski's white relatives and friends. As the film ends, Sue and Thao serve as emblems of what he attempted both to embrace and to dominate.

Why is this movie so successful? What does Eastwood expect an audience in the United States to get out of it? I hypothesize that the film employs Kowalski's reliance on ethnic and gender stereotypes, and his use of offensive terms, as a way to "inflare a PC audience," while at the same time allowing the audience to come to "consciousness" vicariously through him. By identifying with Kowalski, the audience can enjoy the

feeling of being "the good guy" when the credits roll, after behaving very badly for the previous two hours. We feel the lure of the stereotype, and of prejudice, even as the movie destabilizes and deconstructs the worldview of Kowalski, our vehicle.

Sue attempts to translate the brave new transnational world for Kowalski as she explains that she comes from an ethnic group that supported the United States during the Vietnam War, yet that is not welcomed or appreciated by other American citizens like Kowalski. What if she, and not Kowalski, were the movie's protagonist? Would a predominantly white American audience then be treated to the story of how she and her family make a life for themselves in oppressive conditions? Would we learn about her strategies for survival as a female Asian American subject in Detroit, whose relatives traveled to the United States from halfway across the world? Would we be interested in it to the tune of \$134,000,000?

The answer to the last question is currently "No." However, Kowalski's grudging interest in the Lor family testifies to his (our) growing awareness of an increasingly unstable global frame of reference. Characters like Kowalski grapple with the stereotypes they are most familiar with--shiftless, crafty "gooks" and sexually aggressive black men, among others¹--as they realize that such identity constructions are becoming less effective in a postmodern world.²

¹ Tellingly, even when confronting the black youths, Kowalski never uses the word "nigger" (although "rice nigger" is uttered earlier by a Latino gang member) thus suggesting Eastwood's acute awareness that some racial slurs are worse/more off-limits in the United States than others. It would be impossible to make Kowalski a sympathetic character if he used such a word, even as his overall attitude and actions show the mindset of a man who would say it, and often.

² I discuss this mentality (the mentality of someone confused by the increasing movement of people and cultures around the globe) further in my fourth chapter, in my reading of a controversy surrounding Texas State Rep. Betty Brown.

This dissertation examines characters like Sue who attempt to negotiate spaces in between two or more societies and cultures. It discusses why some characters manage to identify themselves in a way that allows them to lead relatively fulfilled lives while others cannot. In addition to these, I look at other characters who occupy ambiguously gendered space.

I also investigate the role that the stereotype plays in these attempts at identity negotiation. I use the work of Homi Bhabha as my theoretical apparatus for defining what stereotypes are, although I alter the model. Bhabha writes,

The stereotype, which is [colonial fixity's] major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place," already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved . . . For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency. (94-95)

Bhabha primarily emphasizes *ambivalence* in order to critique colonial discourse.

Kowalski insists on the ignorance and inscrutability of his Asian neighbors even as they befriend him, believing *at the same time* that they embody the negative stereotypes he embraces and that they deserve his love--knowing, in short, that his lived experience cannot "prove" that which, in his own worldview, "needs no proof" to begin with. While this corresponds with Bhabha's ideas in most respects, Kowalski's anxiety is not that of an imperialist (although an imperialist wannabe), but rather of a man behind the times. I use this ambivalence and anxiety as a way to define the stakes of my project, as I read both

Asian American and Asian texts in conversation with each other, rather than as existing within two completely different spheres.

In this dissertation, I build upon Said's well-known binarist separation of latent and manifest Orientalism in order to argue that such a separation is unnecessary and in fact unproductive. He claims that the two types of Orientalism contradicted and worked in conflict with one another, when they worked at all. But the elision of the two is one of the sources of colonial stereotype, and Bhabha's theories of stereotype and ambivalence provide one of the main foci of my whole project. In turn, I look at Bhabha's work on stereotypes and that work's roots in Said's Orientalism in order to argue for a similar complication of Bhabha. What he applies to a post-/colonial model I wish to apply to a transnational, transcultural one in order to examine which stereotypes still have great force and influence, perhaps disproportionate, over how we relate to our fellow human beings. I approach both of these theorists through a series of close readings of drama, film, and fiction.

I propose to interrogate Bhabha's theory of the stereotype in the context of radically changed global flows of commodities. When traditional national loyalties become destabilized, and when colonial powers no longer officially dictate what is and is not known about "the native," what new discourses appear to fill the void? Where is the new locus of anxiety, and who feels it? What new or evolving powers now define the narratives? This dissertation does not seek to answer these questions definitively (that would be impossible), but rather to begin a conversation about them by incorporating Bhabha's familiar theoretical model and adapting it to changing world conditions. Said

famously claims that constructions of "the Orient" tell the West more about itself than anything else. The texts I have chosen will hopefully provide more material to complicate our current notions of "Asian-ness," and how we (the West, people of other races, and people of other cultures) read ourselves against, or within, that discourse. "Asia" itself, of course, is both shorthand and a central term that is grounds for dispute.

The scope of my project identifies and critiques the fractured subjectivities of fictional characters through a transnational lens. Most of the characters I discuss are caught in a shifting, often treacherous world politics that they do not know how to navigate with integrity towards self or others. In this context, I will examine a connection between identity and transnational/transculturalism. In the presence of globalization, and in the absence of (some of) the old rules, racially and sexually marginalized subjects must create their own narratives out of whatever they have at hand or can find: family, sex and sexuality, material possessions, profession. I posit that those who can successfully create such narratives can capably manipulate stereotypes to their own advantage and then subvert them, or else re-shape that discursive framework and define themselves in different terms. However, this project focuses more on those who have a harder time subverting or escaping stereotypes. These characters who struggle and fail to define themselves inevitably meet one of two fates: exile or suicide.

The dissertation adopts a few different theoretical frameworks, though I have attempted to maintain an internal continuity between all of them. I draw on the work of Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Rey Chow, Arjun Appadurai, and a few others. I find several common threads running through the works of these theorists, the

most important of which is the constitution and construction of power and identity from without, through stereotypes and other means. Foucault's theories on power-as-relation form the basis for many of Said's arguments, although Said takes issue with Foucault's idea that power is impersonal; Bhabha and Chow complicate Said's work by refusing to privilege either "the Orient" or "the Occident," and instead argue for a more complex reading of both; and Appadurai brings this elision of Orient and Occident into sharper focus through his theory of "scapes" that frames a new politics of transnationalism. Appadurai's theories are particularly useful in examining discourses of "Asian-ness" across the globe, rather than reading identity through the scholastically familiar lens of national and "ethnic" literatures. Ultimately, I seek to investigate how subjects negotiate identity in newly fluid cultural, racial, and gendered contexts, and in turn, how legible markers of that Asian-ness can be found by readers and viewers.

My first chapter, "*Butterfly's* Legacy: Historical Contexts, Transnational Confusions" discusses David Henry Hwang's 1988 play *M. Butterfly*, which is the story of a French diplomat and the Chinese opera star with whom he falls in love and who deceives him. Among other things, in this chapter I discuss what stereotypes mean for those two characters who come to stand in for transnational subjects with shifting identities. In this chapter, I use Homi Bhabha as my chief critical referent. Bhabha says that most criticism of the stereotype involves "a limiting and traditional reliance on the stereotype as offering, at any one time, a secure point of identification" (99). However, "*at other times and places*, the same stereotype may be read in a contradictory way or, indeed, be misread" (100, emphasis Bhabha's). Bhabha's words emphasize an essential

point: that stereotypes are always a marker of ambivalence and cannot be considered "fixed" in place any more than can such constructs as gender, race, and class. Thus, although the characters I discuss appear to be stereotypically cagey Asians in the way they approach their narratives (and their implied readers), Bhabha reminds us that these stereotypes occupy an *interstitial* space, never fixed at any one point of representation, just like the transnational subjects themselves.

I begin discussing *M. Butterfly* by investigating how it springs from the *Butterfly* narrative made (in)famous by Giacomo Puccini, how it is rooted in a tradition of Western fascination with the "Orient" from the mid-nineteenth century, and how historical events and forces helped to shape that fascination. To that end, I include critical discussions of Gilbert and Sullivan's 1885 operetta *The Mikado*, as well as the novels *Madame Crysanthème* (1887) by Pierre Loti and *Madame Butterfly* (1898) by John Luther Long, followed by the stage adaptation of *Madame Butterfly* (1900) by David Belasco, which Puccini saw and, with his librettists, further adapted into the story's most well-known iteration, *Madama Butterfly* (1904).

Once I have established this context, I argue that Hwang's play makes explicit the moment of ambivalence that we have seen in its precursors. Specifically, I refer to Bhabha's assertion that *content* and *form* are not independent of each other (contra Edward Said's philosophies). Said argues for the distinction between "latent" and "manifest" Orientalism, saying that the first consists of unstated and even unconscious Western views of the East. This is what Bhabha means by form. For Said, manifest Orientalism consists of what is stated explicitly in Orientalist discourse and thought, and

this is what Bhabha means by content. Where Said separates the two notions, Bhabha argues that they work together, and that to view them as inseparable is to undermine productive discourse. In fact, the tension between latent and manifest Orientalism gives fantasy its power, and the power of fantasy gives precedence to the external construction of mass stereotypes and subjectivity from without over the individual subject's right to define his or her identity.

In my second chapter, "Scape-ing the Past: Identity and Agency in Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine*," I move into a more straightforward discussion of the perils of transnationalism. Chen's 1993 film depicts the modern era of Chinese history, covering the span of time between the end of the warlord era in 1924 all the way to 1977, the year before Deng Xiaoping formally assumed power and "opened" China to the rest of the world. Its plot clearly exposes the dangers inherent in a wholesale embrace of nationalism--all three of the main characters suffer terribly under the CCP's regime, especially during the Cultural Revolution--but also portrays the insufficiency of transnationalism as antidote.

The chapter takes a brief look at China's transition from socialism to global capitalism, and uses Arjun Appadurai's theory of "scapes" (ethnoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, and mediascapes) to explore the implications of that transition, and how it relates to the work of Chen's film. China's move towards capitalism in the twentieth century has not been the story of a simultaneous move towards democracy and human rights, and *Farewell My Concubine*, critical of the "New China" as well as the old, reflects that. However, in spite of its complexity, the movie has sometimes been forced

into the role of standard-bearer; its acclaim in the West has led many to believe that it attempts to represent "Chinese history" in one fell swoop, and as such it becomes an unwieldy symbol of China itself for a Western gaze.

My reading of the film is twofold: first, I argue that the film itself is a cultural artifact that, in its production and release, is a transnational product; second, I argue that the characters *within* the film problematize the criticism *Farewell My Concubine* has received. While all of them seem like canned, "type" characters that play to many of our stereotypes about China and Chinese history, they are actually far more complex, and do more to upset those stereotypes than support them. In the end, the chapter suggests that we need a new critical lexicon through which to discuss a new superpower like China.

I continue to explore the tensions between identity, culture, and history in my third chapter. The chapter, titled "'I Do Not Mean to Deceive': Truth, Identity, and Re-Naming in *A Gesture Life* and *The Book of Salt*," focuses on two novels by Asian American authors Chang-Rae Lee and Monique Truong. Whereas the first two chapters focus on works that are situated in China and Japan, the novels in this chapter encompass Japan, Korea, Burma, the United States, France, and Vietnam. As such, their main characters--a Japanese man of Korean ancestry named "Doc" Hata in *Gesture* and a gay Vietnamese chef named Binh in *Salt*--are genuine globe-trotters. The two men constantly seek, and fail to find, a place to call home. They both have dark secrets in their past that they wish to conceal from friends and acquaintances, and yet both novels are written from their perspectives as first-person confessionals. This apparent contradiction between form and content, as Bhabha would put it, results in something more than the

usual unreliable narrator; it also results in a creative space in which both Hata and Binh attempt to construct their own identities by alternately concealing, denying, and finally admitting the truth.

The question of the "true" connects inextricably to the question of ethics. Telling a lie is generally considered to be unethical. However, in the case of these two protagonists, I suggest that we adopt Foucault's way of examining "truth": that is, not as an essential "thing" waiting to be un-/discovered, but as a concept produced by a series of institutions that do not necessarily act in concert with each other. In Foucauldian terms, truth is "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true" ("Truth and Power" 1669). In this sense, storytellers are as much effects as the stories they tell. They are produced by the conditions that surround them rather than arising *sui generis* from the mists of history. Both Hata and Binh travel across the world after being exiled from their families and their "home" nations, and both fail to find a new sense of belonging in the West: Hata in the United States, and Binh in France. In attempting to exert control over the stories they tell their implied readers (us), Hata and Binh attempt to construct their own identities; however, they cannot do this without also admitting to all the secrets they wish to keep. In the end, their painstakingly built narratives fall apart.

I do not ground my final chapter and conclusion, "Alterneity, Subjectivity, Theory," in any particular literary work, although I do open with a close reading. Rather, I posit that transnational subjects are *not* always doomed to exile or death, and I open the chapter by looking at three characters who avoid it: Hata's adopted daughter Sunny, and

Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas of *The Book of Salt*. I investigate the conditions that make it possible for them to exist in different ways, and even to be happy, where Song, Gallimard, Dieyi, Juxian, Hata, and Binh cannot.

After my close reading, I broaden my focus to discuss and compare the theorists I use most in the dissertation: specifically, Said, Bhabha, and Appadurai. I argue that, while the links between the three are hardly linear, they are consistent. As Bhabha also provides my chief theoretical focus--specifically, his essays as reprinted in *The Location of Culture*--I also address those who have criticized his work and argue that the discrepancies between their approaches need not irrevocably separate them. Bhabha applied his theories of the stereotype to a model of thought that was uniquely colonial, and then framed it within the "post"-colonial. But what happens to that model when world power structures begin a gradual shift from the colony/nation to the trans-nation? Specifically, what do we do with systems of identity that are grounded in a geography that is becoming increasingly less fixed? I end my fourth chapter, and the dissertation, by concluding that the critical conversation surrounding transnationalism should be more open and flexible while accounting for both transnationalism's benefits and problems.

In total, this dissertation examines questions of subjectivity in a transnational world. Through a series of close readings, and by focusing on characters who have been repudiated by every grand narrative they seek to give them solace, I suggest that self-representation and self-definition are difficult, and sometimes impossible for those subjects who have no firm allegiance to nation, race, gender, or even the present day. However, I do not believe that this is the whole story, nor that their situation is

completely without hope. I posit that by re-defining the ways in which we look at these narratives, we can gain a greater understanding of subjectivities that are currently undreamed-of in our philosophy.

CHAPTER II
BUTTERFLY'S LEGACY: HISTORICAL CONTEXTS, TRANSNATIONAL
CONFUSIONS

In spring 2007, John Galliano, creative director of the house of Christian Dior, presented his latest collection of haute couture to a crowd predisposed to be skeptical. Galliano's recent collections had provoked a lukewarm reaction from audiences and critics, who called his work "bleak," "tame and flat," "withdrawn," and even alluded to his "drag-queen posturings" (Mower, Menkes). That spring, Galliano silenced his critics: the 2007 couture collection was based on Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*. Models walked the runway in outrageous gowns that looked like oversized origami, with elaborate makeup, wigs, and hairpieces inspired by Japanese geisha. The heavily structured clothes ranged from dove-gray to lime green in color; they were embroidered with cranes and cherry blossoms. Galliano's critics suddenly became his staunchest supporters, praising the "delightful" nature of the show, its romance and elegance, its vibrancy and brightness. Suzy Menkes of *The International Herald-Tribune* said that all the Dior executives, and most reviewers, were "wreathed in smiles" (Menkes). Finally, the critics cried: a triumph, a return to exuberance and pleasure, to fashion that was fun.

And yet *Madama Butterfly* is a tragic opera. Puccini's vocal score and Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa's libretto tell the story of Cio-Cio San, the young Japanese bride who worships her husband, the callous American lieutenant Benjamin Franklin

Pinkerton. The opera's first act is about their wedding day, in which her relatives arrive at Pinkerton's house en masse and protest her conversion to Christianity; Cio-Cio San refuses to listen to their objections, and that night, she and Pinkerton consummate their marriage. The second act begins after Pinkerton has been gone for three years. He had promised Cio-Cio San, whom he has nicknamed "Butterfly" because of her delicate, fragile grace, that he would return to her "when the robins nest." Every spring she awaits his return, along with her faithful maid Suzuki and the young son she bore Pinkerton after his departure. When the marriage broker Goro suggests that Cio-Cio San marry a wealthy young Japanese prince, she scornfully rejects the idea, saying that in America, which she now dubs "her country," marriages are for life and therefore she is still wedded to Pinkerton. In fact, the opera's most famous aria, "Un Bel Di," is her declaration of faith that Pinkerton will return as promised. Eventually, he does return--in the company of an American wife, and with the intention of taking his son away from Japan. Devastated, Cio-Cio San commits ritual suicide.

Western audiences have, in the century since the opera's 1904 debut at La Scala in Milan, found it by turns to be tragic, vulgar, beautiful, and even uplifting. The Asian American playwright David Henry Hwang wrote his landmark play *M. Butterfly* in response to what he perceived as the opera's inherent racism. Rarely, however, has *Madama Butterfly* been described as exuberant or festive, and we have a rather different opinion of people who observe Cio-Cio San's suicide and then leave the theater "wreathed in smiles."

The fashion world's response to Galliano's show is representative of other problematic Western responses to exotic constructions of "the East." Galliano's work was praised for its charming fragility, the "painstaking skill" it took to create the clothes, and its opulent attention to aestheticism (*Guardian Unlimited*). But perhaps most importantly, it was a spectacle designed to impress a jaded audience, a Western fantasy come to life; at the end of the show, the models lined the catwalk to take their bows while John Galliano himself greeted the audience amidst a shower of cherry blossoms. Galliano, well-known for his outré personal appearance, was costumed as none other than B.F. Pinkerton: Butterfly's betrayer and the man who drove her to suicide. The crowd greeted him with rapturous applause.

The response to the Dior show indicates our (I include myself) unflagging enthusiasm for exotic spectacle that makes us feel removed from our everyday lives and selves. The catch, as always, is that spectacles like Galliano's say far more about us and our desires than any ontological reality, any actual place or culture called "the East."

This chapter will focus on Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, and on how it fits into the cultural context I have just described: how it springs from the "Butterfly" narrative (and its predecessors, which I will also discuss), how it is rooted in a tradition of Western fascination with the "Orient" from the mid-nineteenth century, and what it means in terms of my larger project about the potential for transnational agency in marginalized subjects from East Asia. I will look at *M. Butterfly* through Homi Bhabha's lens of ambivalence, refracted through *Madama Butterfly* and Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, both of

which will give Hwang's play, and the cultural forces surrounding it, historical background.

The two main characters of *M. Butterfly*, the Chinese cross-dressing spy Song Liling and the French diplomat René Gallimard, are examples of subjects who try to determine their own agency through their performance as an Other. Song, an embodied male, spends most of the play pretending to be a woman, and Gallimard, who constantly yearns to be more masculine, ends the play by dressing up and enacting the story of Cio-Cio San, right down to committing seppuku. Though marginalized by the narratives of nation and gender, each has a goal, an idea of what s/he wants out of life. In this case, Song wants to live free of persecution at the hands of the Chinese government, and Gallimard wants to obtain the elusive "Butterfly" who makes him feel like a virile Western man. However, both Gallimard and Song are prevented from gaining what they desire: Song by the apparatus of the Chinese nation-state, and Gallimard by the final collapse of the Orientalist fantasy that has sustained him. The French government pardons Song for her espionage, but she must then return to a China that despises her, and even the role she has played in its service. Gallimard, deprived of his illusion, commits suicide. In the larger picture of my dissertation, Song and Gallimard's tale (which is based on a true story!) signifies that neither national nor transnational, neither historical nor "ahistorical" narratives are stable enough to provide racially and sexually marginalized subjects with the means to determine themselves and their own identities.

The Perry Mission and the Context of History

Before I discuss Hwang's play, I want to examine *Madama Butterfly* and *The Mikado*; and before I can do that, I need to look briefly at the cultural forces and contexts surrounding those two dramas. Both are fantastic constructions of the Far East as composed, written, and performed by white Westerners for white Westerners, and as such, form part of the larger narrative of Orientalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I should mention that while I write about texts that are set in Japan and China, I do not conflate the two nations, or the multiple cultures of each. Rather, I attempt to negotiate the discourse personified by characters like Gallimard, and his predecessors, who do exactly that. The Western tradition of ascribing certain characteristics to "Asians," as if Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese people all share one heritage and cultural identity, lives on today, and is in fact satirized and interrogated in true postmodern fashion by websites like alllooksame.com.

No discussion of these elisions and stereotypes can be complete without Edward Said. His ground-breaking book *Orientalism* (1978) explicitly refers more to the European model of Orientalism, which focuses mostly on the Near (Middle) East and the Indian subcontinent, rather than the American model, which tends to focus more on the Far East (Said 1). However, Said acknowledges that the two models share similar features, and in any case his central thesis bears repeating: "Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). Even more importantly, Orientalism is something that actually *produces* the Orient "politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively" (3). Both *The*

Mikado and *Madama Butterfly* are works of the Western imagination that attempt to capture an appealing "Orient" and reproduce it for an audience that longs for the exotic. Said also makes a distinction between latent and manifest Orientalism, two terms I draw on for this chapter: "The distinction I am making is really between an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity, which I shall call *latent* Orientalism, and the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth, which I shall call *manifest* Orientalism" (206, emphasis Said's). In *The Mikado*, the various *Butterfly* narratives, and *M. Butterfly*, as well as other works I study in this project, we see both this unconscious "positivity" at work alongside the more explicit, acknowledged "stated views" of both the characters and the societies of their various authors.

However, I am also aware that the work of Said, who draws on Foucault, is not unproblematic. As Homi Bhabha puts it:

Said identifies the *content* of Orientalism as the unconscious repository of fantasy, imaginative writings and essential ideas; and the *form* of manifest Orientalism as the historically and discursively determined, diachronic aspect. This division/correlation structure of manifest and latent Orientalism leads to the effectivity of the concept of discourse being undermined by what could be called the polarities of intentionality. (102-03, emphasis Bhabha's)

Bhabha's concern is that discourse will be "undermined" by dwelling on the false separation between latent and manifest Orientalism. Indeed, the two converged more often than not. In the mid- to late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the West constructed and circulated stereotypes of East Asia (here, Japan) that were at once

specific in the particulars and incredibly vague in generalities. For example, the American writer and historian Henry Brooks Adams described Japan as "the [land] where everything is upside-down" during his trip there in 1886 (qtd. in Huang 25). Scholar Yunte Huang goes on to explain that such an attitude was hardly unique to Adams, but was rather a "commonplace of educated opinion in late nineteenth-century America about Japan" (25). By describing "everything" as being upside-down, Adams and his fellow educated Americans were able to blanket Japan with the ultimate stereotype: that of something so absolutely Other that it turned Adams's entire world on its head.

More specifically, Westerners thought of "Orientals" as "the antithesis of manhood, of masculinity" (Eng 1). White men writing about Japan frequently centered their narratives around desire: specifically, a desire for the Japanese woman who could be either cunning or submissive (usually submissive) or a combination of both. However, there was a place for Western discomfort about Japanese masculinity, as I discuss below. Westerners were quick to construct the East (Near or Far) imaginatively as decadent and effeminate, sometimes even helpless. However, they were also quick to react to its political reality by imposing a military presence, as we will soon see in the case of Commodore Matthew Perry's arrival in Japan in 1853. Something--woman, culture, or nation--that is predisposed to be docile and obedient does not require the intervention of gunboats and stationed troops, which meant that Western attitudes regarding Japan were both patronizing and paranoid.

For Babha, as always, the key lies in the ambivalence between that which is latent in Said's binarist construct and that which is manifest. This moment of ambivalence

features large in both *The Mikado* by Gilbert and Sullivan, in which Japanese people are portrayed as silly and vain (and, on another level, English--which means "safe"); and *Madama Butterfly*, in which the main Japanese character is so naïve that she breaks the mold of "ingénue" and becomes what Song Liling of *M. Butterfly* caustically calls "a deranged idiot."

However, Cio-Cio San reclaims her "Japanese-ness" (that is, her cultural identity that becomes alarmingly masculine) in the opera's final moments, when she takes up her father's samurai sword and kills herself to avoid dishonor. This moment of both literal and symbolic violence reveals the conflicting emotions Puccini's audience felt for a character like Cio-Cio San: pity and fear, in the original tragic sense. Although she uses it on herself and not on Pinkerton (who surely deserves it more), it still jars us to see the sweet Cio-Cio San with a sword in her hands. Rey Chow says, "What we need to examine ever more urgently is fantasy, a problem which is generally recognized as central to orientalist perceptions and significations" (*Ethics* 75). In one sense, Cio-Cio San's suicide indulges our fantasy of the perfectly submissive Eastern subject who, once she perceives she is no longer of use to us, graciously exits the stage of life itself and gives us full possession of what she leaves behind. On the other hand, her suicide intrudes on our fantasy when it shocks us with its sudden violence that is also extremely masculine: seppuku was a practice reserved exclusively for samurai (Mostow 187). We find the ambivalent moment here, when we both approve of and shrink from Cio-Cio San's death: the latent Orientalist construct (her imagined "natural" submissiveness) rubs up sharply against the manifest (the masculine violence lurking in "Oriental" culture that

must be contained by Western shows of force). Cio-Cio San turns the sword on herself, like a butterfly pinned and put in a glass case, but the sword itself symbolizes a Japanese culture of honor, masculinity, and violence that the West would prefer not to confront discursively.

When and how did the fantasy take root? The opera debuted in 1904, fifty-one years after Pinkerton, or sailors like him, showed up on the Japanese scene. When Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan in 1853, he encountered a feudal society that was rigidly isolationist. Perry followed on the heels of a previous failed mission in which the Japanese turned away his predecessor, Captain James Biddle. Japan first became an object of nineteenth-century imperial interest because it, like other territories that were colonized or threatened with colonization, had things that Western countries wanted: specifically, access to whaling waters, as well as a smoother route to China (Jansen 275). Later, when Japan began to build its own empire in the 1890s, the Japanese were both hailed as a model of how formerly backwards nations could modernize and move forward, even as Western nations looked on them with suspicion. Determined to succeed where Biddle had failed, Perry arrived at Edo Bay (forgoing the usual port at Nagasaki, where the Japanese required foreigners to stop) on July 2, 1853. He brought a more heavily armed group of ships and authorization to use force if necessary; he had also "arm[ed] himself with what was known of Japan and taking counsel with others who had traveled in Japanese waters," thus using epistemic weapons alongside literal ones (Jansen 275). He insisted on speaking only to the highest authorities, and eventually the Japanese were forced to give way to his demands.

Scholars traditionally describe this moment as the "opening" of Japan: a moment not unlike those we see in illustrations and caricatures from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which Spanish imperialists set foot in the New World. In these illustrations, the Spanish staked their claims over the less civilized indigenous people, always with the suggestion, sometimes overt, of penetration and masculine conquest. The "opening" paved the way for Japan's astonishingly rapid internal reforms--Japan dispensed completely with the Tokugawa shogunate, reinstated the Emperor as the supreme practical authority, and began a program of industrialization that has never yet been matched for ruthless efficiency.

It also gave Japan a certain spot in the Western popular imagination. Even as the Japanese raced to modernize, Westerners did not forget that the Americans had started the relationship as the ones with the biggest, mightiest guns. In fact, in *M. Butterfly*, Song Liling puts this attitude succinctly into words: "The West thinks of itself as masculine--big guns, big industry, big money" (*M. Butterfly* 83). A few decades after the Perry mission (in Gilbert's and, later still, in Puccini's time), when Japan began to grow into an imperial power in its own right, it would become threatening as well as exotic. But for the moment, Western nations like the United States rested satisfied in their apparent possession of technical, military, and cultural superiority.

Above all else, this mindset resulted in a transaction of the commercial with the cultural. With the "opening" of Japan, to say nothing of the conquest and division of China into spheres of influence, the mid-nineteenth century saw the beginnings of a rage for "Oriental" exoticism in the West. Nobody capitalized on this more ably (nor with

such long-running success) as W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. In *The Mikado* (1885), their most popular operetta, we see many factors at work: the influence of the Perry mission; the East enacted through the West; and the slippage of stereotype between Orientalism both latent and manifest.

***The Mikado*: "Humorous . . . But Lingerin'"**

To the best of my knowledge, no one has yet drawn a connection between the *Butterfly* stories and *The Mikado*: a puzzling critical lapse. Both are European imaginings of the Japanese-on-stage. The residents of Gilbert's village "Titipu" could easily switch places with Cio-Cio San's outraged family in *Butterfly*'s first act. Both operas portray young Japanese women as naïve, silly schoolgirl-types: *The Mikado*'s Yum-Yum and her sisters are the original "three little maids from school" while, as I have said, Cio-Cio San is the poster girl (literally--dozens of promotional posters and illustrations of her abound) for feminine submission. *Madama Butterfly* is tragic; *The Mikado* is comic; *M. Butterfly* is both and partly owes its dramatic effectiveness to the cultural impact of these two predecessors.

The Mikado does not feature a doomed love affair between an Asian woman and a Caucasian man. Rather, its fraught relationship is between the opera's putatively Japanese characters and, in Victorian Britain, its overwhelmingly white audience. As in *Butterfly*, the East is objectified--made charming and fragile.

The plot of *The Mikado* is, like most Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, both intricate and formulaic. Set entirely in Titipu, the operetta follows the story of Nanki-Poo, the heir

apparent to the throne of Japan, who has fled his father's imperial court so that he may avoid a forced marriage to Katisha, an elderly woman with designs on him. During his travels, he becomes a roaming minstrel (specifically, a second trombone), and meets the beautiful Yum-Yum and her two sisters. Sadly, Yum-Yum is engaged to her guardian Ko-Ko, a match that she cannot escape until a Gilbertesque series of wacky hijinks ensues, involving other characters such as Pooh-Bah, an aristocrat who "lowers" himself to work for Ko-Ko (former tailor, current Lord High Executioner). In the second act, Nanki-Poo's father, the Mikado, arrives in Titipu to track him down, and disaster is averted only when the homely Ko-Ko marries the even homelier Katisha. The young lovers are free to be together, and the operetta ends with all the expected revelry.

In contrast to their response to the darkly passionate *Madama Butterfly*, audiences have always considered *The Mikado* to be one of the most light-hearted, entertaining theatrical productions of the last two centuries. Laughs abound, in large part due to Gilbert's famously satirical lyrics. *The Mikado* debuted in 1885, almost twenty years before *Butterfly*, after the less successful D'Oyly Carte productions *The Sorcerer* and *Princess Ida*. Feeling that Gilbert's plotlines were in a rut that relied on "supernatural and improbable elements," Arthur Sullivan talked of quitting the collaboration permanently rather than "turn out more of the Savoy product" (Smith 129). This pronouncement distressed Gilbert considerably.

However, Gilbert found a fresh source of inspiration upon visiting the "Japanese Village" exhibition in Knightsbridge in 1884. "Oriental" or Oriental-"inspired" artifacts had been all the rage in certain British social circles (chiefly those of aesthetes) since the

Perry mission, especially artifacts that were either from Japan or that evoked it. The Franks Collection of Japanese ceramics had been on display at the South Kensington Museum since the 1860s; the Nippon Institute had been formed in 1879 to study "Japanese art, literature, and folk lore." As E.P. Lawrence points out, "Under such circumstances, Gilbert had an audience ready-made to explode with laughter at the costumes and antics of the Japanese as he presented them in *The Mikado*" (164). Fired up by this new zeitgeist, Gilbert wrote his libretto with Sullivan's wholehearted approval.

Gilbert offers the Japanese to his Western audience as a sort of artifact, as art frozen in time. The first lines of *The Mikado*, sung by the male chorus, are:

If you want to know who we are,
We are gentlemen of Japan,
On many a vase and jar,
On many a screen and fan.
We figure in lively paint;
Our attitude's queer and quaint.
You're wrong if you think it ain't, Oh!

Though Gilbert's lyrics satirize, as well as document the British craze, Western art and literature have a tradition of objectifying Asian people in the most literal sense of the term: turning them into *objets d'art*, into purely aesthetic artifacts and spectacles.

Pinkerton compares his Japanese bride to a butterfly that he longs to pin down and keep in a glass case, so that he may admire her there. In his poem "Lapis Lazuli," W.B. Yeats writes about three "Chinamen" who are carved on a stone. In contrast to famous Western

literary characters like Hamlet and Lear, who ramble and rage onstage, constantly in motion, the Chinamen remain imperturbable and immobile on the stone:

Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch
Sweetens the little half-way house
Those Chinamen climb towards, and I
Delight to imagine them seated there;
There, on the mountain and the sky,
On all the tragic scene they stare.
One asks for mournful melodies;
Accomplished fingers begin to play.
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay. (47-56)

Yeats employs the stereotype of the ancient Asian (here, Chinese) man who is wise, serene, harmless, and apparently timeless--and therefore worthy of being represented in stone that will endure longer than a theatrical performance. At the same time, that means the "Chinamen" do not "live" like Hamlet, Lear, *et al.* Those characters move around and speak out loud, caught up in the tragedies of life that the "ancient" and "gay" Chinamen only observe from a distance, and that with sagacious amusement. By conflating people with things, Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were able to escape to "far-away exotic worlds imagined from little people and landscapes on lacquer screens and porcelain teacups," or as it happens here, on semi-precious stones (Prasso 40). That desire for escapism has not diminished. *The Mikado* and *Madama Butterfly* have both continued to enjoy immense popularity since their debuts, as John Galliano

proved when his *Butterfly*-based couture received such an enthusiastic response. The audiences are different, but the allure is the same.³

Critics have historically insisted that *The Mikado's raison d'être* was both to entertain and to instruct--that is, to satirize the eccentricities and foibles of Victorian Britain to Victorian Britain. The Mikado's imperial edicts against flirting made gentle fun of English sexual repression and hysteria, while at the same time the elderly Katisha's desire for Nanki-Poo served to condemn a mature female sexuality that appeared aggressive and threatening. (In upbraiding Ko-Ko for "executing" Nanki-Poo, Katisha angrily addresses him as, "You who have robbed me of my prey!--I mean, my pupil.")

Nevertheless, the British government, at least, was sufficiently aware of *The Mikado's* potential to offend that it banned the operetta in 1907 on the occasion of Prince Fushimi's state visit. The ban caused an uproar among the British, not least because of canceled shows and tickets, and the loss of revenue for several theaters that were already in the middle of a *Mikado* run. The government's decision, which today we might ridicule for its "political correctness," received much the same criticism in its own time. The *Era* proclaimed that the so-called "vulgar caricature" of the Mikado character was in fact "more truly reverential than any real Mikado who ever reigned in Japan" (qtd. in Lawrence 157). Several theaters performed *Mikado* anyway, risking a heavy fine. Eventually, Prince Fushimi returned to Japan, having made no statement on the scandal one way or another.

³ In fact, the next day Galliano debuted his menswear show, which was inspired by Japanese samurai and also received enthusiastic praise from critics. "Confronted by fashion tribalism this savage," Tim Blanks said, "the only sensible option was to suspend all critical faculties and savor the ride" (para. 2).

The British government's insistence on seeing the Japanese in the play as being connected to real Japanese people, instead of figures on screens and fans, angered the British. Ever since then, the operetta's staunchest defenders have insisted that it has nothing to do with "real" Japanese people at all. However, whatever Gilbert's original intentions, there is no denying that he wrote the libretto and staged a very successful drama at a particular cultural moment: a moment when, as a contemporary reviewer of *The Mikado* put it, "We are all being more or less Japanned" (qtd. in Smith 130). Over forty years after the Perry mission, the British capitalized--literally--on both the material benefits (such as increased access to whaling waters) secured from Japan, as well as on pleasing, exotic images of the country that turned "everything upside-down." Though it satirizes the British, *The Mikado* does so through an Orientalist lens.

But so what? If anything, the historical context I have just provided (to say nothing of the abundance of available theory and criticism) shows that Orientalism was a fact of life in Victorian Britain as well as in the United States pre-, during, and post-Civil War. What makes something as funny and frothy as *The Mikado* deserving of a place next to the more "serious" *Madama Butterfly*, an opera that David Henry Hwang was able to denounce as "a cultural stereotype" before he'd even seen it? What makes it stand out?

The answer is that *The Mikado* elides latent and manifest Orientalism in much the same way that *Butterfly* does. As we might expect, during the operetta, Gilbert plays fast and loose with "Japanese" customs: for instance, Ko-Ko solemnly informs Nanki-Poo that when a married man is beheaded, his wife must be buried alive. Yum-Yum

exclaims, aghast, "Burial alive! It's such a stuffy death." Nanki-Poo agrees that it is, indeed, "a beast of a death," with Ko-Ko weighing in and calling it "most unpleasant." Certainly it recalls the British fascination with *satī*, the Hindu practice in which widows must immolate themselves with the burning corpses of their husbands. Later, when the Mikado threatens to execute Ko-Ko, Pooh-Bah, and Yum-Yum's sister Pitti-Sing because he believes they have, in turn, executed Nanki-Poo, he says, "I forget the punishment for compassing the death of the heir apparent. It's something lingering, with boiling oil in it . . . I know it's something humorous, but lingering" (Gilbert).

In the midst of funny songs and dances, Gilbert presents the audience with two different "customary" Japanese executions, both horrific. This is not to say that real Japanese custom did not allow grim punishment for serious crimes. However, in a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, to be sung to about live burial, or boiling people to death in oil, arouses the same feeling of cognitive dissonance as when the delicate Cio-Cio San raises her father's samurai sword. Both moments bring what Bhabha calls "latent" and "manifest" Orientalism together: the imaginative construction of Japanese people as effeminate and silly, combined with an undertone of apprehension about their propensity for shocking violence that required military vigilance lest it turn outward unexpectedly. In fact, I omitted one telling detail of Gilbert's original inspiration in writing *The Mikado*: he claimed that he got the idea when a Japanese sword he had mounted on the wall fell down and hit him on the head.

When confronted with this ambivalence in *The Mikado*, we are encouraged to laugh it off. *Butterfly* is more unsettling, with its tragic ending and the realization that

our ambivalence has consequences in the world for those who are the object of its gaze.⁴

Even Pinkerton, who flees during the opera's final scene out of shame for his own heartlessness, comes back for a second look. He returns to the stage to deliver the opera's final line over Cio-Cio San's dead body: a regretful "Butterfly! Butterfly! Butterfly!"

"Aeverything is his": Incarnations of Cio-Cio San

The story of Cio-Cio San, however, was not always so tragic. Its first precursor was a French novel titled *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) by the French writer and exoticist Pierre Loti. Published two years after *The Mikado's* debut, at the height of the West's Japanophilia, Loti's novel tells the story of a bored French sailor who, in the novel's dedication to the Duchesse de Richelieu, Loti claims is himself. He entreats his patroness to

Kindly receive my book with the same indulgent smile, without seeking therein a meaning either good or bad, in the same spirit in which you would receive some quaint bit of pottery, some grotesquely carved ivory idol, or some fantastic trifle brought to you from this singular fatherland of all fantasy. (2)

The narrator arrives in this fantasyland with the intent of getting married right away to "a little, creamy-skinned woman with black hair and cat's eyes. She must be pretty and not much bigger than a doll" (3). He is quickly disenchanted when he meets actual Japanese

⁴ I am making an effort here not to conflate Cio-Cio San with "real" marginalized subjects in, nor with the work of the opera in the world; I keep in mind Spivak's mistrust of representation, given that Cio-Cio San is, like all characters, a rhetorical construct of sorts, and one who has been created in differing versions by white men of the nineteenth-century imperialist era. That said, she remains a focus of ambivalent longing, pity, and fear for modern audiences (as *M. Butterfly* shows), similar to marginalized/subaltern subjects "the world over," to paraphrase Pinkerton's duet with the American consul Sharpless.

people, who are "ugly, mean, and grotesque" (9). Nevertheless, he resolves to take a Japanese bride while in port at Nagasaki for a month, and settles on Madame Chrysanthème, a geisha, to whose parents he pays twenty dollars. The narrator makes little secret of his contempt for his new "wife," whom he believes to be incapable of serious thought. His chief consolation is that after their marriage, they live in a charming, traditional Japanese house "perched on high, in a peaceful suburb, in the midst of green gardens; made up of paper panels, and taken to pieces according to one's fancy," just as he has always wished (44). For Loti's narrator, as for other "adventurous imperialists" (as Song Liling puts it in *M. Butterfly*), Japan is much more enjoyable without the Japanese.

Chrysanthème's character is very different from that of the worshipful Butterfly. For all that Loti's narrator calls her a toy (indeed, the title of the ninth chapter is "My Plaything"), and constantly denigrates her capacity for thought and feeling, Chrysanthème demonstrates considerable savvy and is not intimidated by her foreign "husband." She is even an adept markswoman, as she proves when she takes up bow and arrow in an archery competition. She is not, however, in love, while Cio-Cio San is inconsolable when Pinkerton abandons her. Chrysanthème only puts on a show of regret when Loti's narrator prepares to depart. In spite of his cynicism, he believes her sorrow to be real, until he returns to their house the next morning to see her counting the coins he has given her. "How simple I have been," he exclaims, "to allow myself to be taken in by the few clever words she whispered yesterday, as she walked beside me, by a tolerably pretty little phrase embellished as it was by the silence of two o'clock in the morning, and all the wonderful enchantments of night" (214). But as he does not think of

Chrysanthème as being quite human, the discovery does not offend him, and he and she part on civil terms: he to depart to China, she to await her next marriage contract.

The reader gets a different impression of Chrysanthème than Loti's narrator intends to give, certainly in comparison to Cio-Cio San's later incarnations.

Chrysanthème is neither sentimental nor sophisticated; rather she is street-smart and well-connected to a social network in Nagasaki. Unlike Cio-Cio San, she does not permit herself to become isolated from her family and friends, nor does she revere her white husband. If Loti's narrator holds her in contempt for this, we may admire her character for its independence, and value the narrator himself a little less than he (and perhaps Loti) would prefer. Chrysanthème, while subject to her world's dictates, nevertheless has her own life and exercises her own will. Unlike Cio-Cio San (and other characters I discuss later), she operates capably within her own circumscribed parameters. She exercises agency, a fact which Loti's narrator appears not to notice, but that is left for the reader to discover. Loti's enunciation of Chrysanthème's difference from the imperialist narrator points to the larger issue of colonial ambivalence in which a subject, fictional or otherwise, might embody a stereotype: the feminine (effeminate) Asian who is largely indolent and harmless, but who is nevertheless capable of taking the white man for all he is worth.

Madame Chrysanthème is now remembered by very few people. Loti's novel has long since been eclipsed by the more tragic variants of the *Butterfly* story. By 1898, Chrysanthème had morphed into *Madame Butterfly* at the hands of an American author named John Luther Long, a wealthy man from Pennsylvania who had never visited

Japan. Long was almost certainly familiar with *Madame Chrysanthème*, which went through twenty-five editions in only five years and was translated into English (Honey and Cole 9). Nevertheless, it was Long who put a spin on the story that appealed even more to Western audiences for the reasons I have just discussed: the submissiveness of a beautiful Eastern woman to her (admittedly worthless) Western husband, and what the Frenchman René Gallimard fulsomely calls, in *M. Butterfly*, her "pure sacrifice" (1383). In Long's story, Loti's narrator transforms into Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, who takes a fancy to Cho-Cho San (as Long spells it), impregnates her, and abandons her, just as he does in the play and opera that followed. Cho-Cho San speaks to him in babyish pidgin English, and even refuses to speak Japanese when she and her maid Suzuki are the only ones left in the home: "Listen! *No* one shall speak anything but United States' languages in these house! ... Also, tha' 's one thing *a*everybody got recomleck--account it is his house, his wife, his bebbby, his maiden, his moaney--oh,--*a*everything is his!" (Long 38-39, emphasis his). Long's Pinkerton is no more admirable than Loti's narrator, but Cho-Cho San lacks Chrysanthème's cynicism and self-reliance. Indeed, she is the little doll Loti's narrator sought for in vain when he arrived in Japan, and thus is unequipped to deal with Pinkerton's indifference.

Pinkerton forbids Cho-Cho San's relatives from visiting her and effectively makes her an outcast from Japanese society, so that she has no support system to rely on when he leaves. His American wife, upon seeing Cho-Cho San (but not knowing who she is), exclaims, "How very charming--how *lovely*--you are, dear! Will you kiss me, you pretty--*plaything!*" (75, emphasis Long's). Only two people take Cho-Cho seriously:

her maid Suzuki, and Sharpless, the American consul, who pities her and despises Pinkerton, but who cannot bring himself to tell Cho-Cho San the truth about her "husband's" intentions. Of the two, only Suzuki--also a female Japanese, although not of Cho-Cho San's caste--remains by Cho-Cho San's side until the end, her only link to adult society.

And yet "the end" is not the end we have come to expect from Puccini's opera. In Long's novella, the Butterfly does not die. Cho-Cho San raises her sword to "that nearly nerveless spot in the neck known to every Japanese," but before she can complete the deed, Suzuki pushes Cho-Cho San's young son into the room and pinches him to make him cry (Long 78). Cho-Cho San abandons her suicide attempt, and when Pinkerton's white wife arrives at the house the next day to collect the child, she finds it empty. That is the end of the novella--we never learn where Cho-Cho San, her child, and Suzuki have gone, or what happened to them--but Cho-Cho San does not kill herself. In the novella's last paragraph she eludes our gaze, having fled the stage, as it were, but not to die. The situation again produces ambivalence. A Western audience can be glad that she did not commit suicide, glad that she did not tie her own value so fully to the love of an unworthy man, but at the same time, her disappearing act is unsatisfying. Readers are denied the pleasures of the scopic drive and of watching the stereotype at work: once Cho-Cho San exits the page/the stage/our sight, she is no longer anybody's property. If she lacks Chrysanthème's spirit, she still manages a final, defiant act of self-determination by leaving the house she shared with Pinkerton and striking out for parts unknown with what we might, today, call "a non-traditional family": herself, her baby,

and her maid. Her final textual act is to deny Pinkerton their son, which is all he still wants from her.

The next version of the Butterfly story is the one-act play *Madame Butterfly*, adapted from Long's novella for the stage by David Belasco in 1900. Here Cho-Cho San finally dies (or dies for the first time?). The play's dialogue reproduces the pidgin English of Long's novella, and lifts many passages wholesale, but, for those who have read Long's work and seen Puccini's opera, Belasco's play appears to begin in the second act, so to speak. It starts when Pinkerton has been gone for three years. We do not see the scenes in which he marries Cho-Cho San, isolates her from her family, and deceives her into believing he cares for her. We see only the familiar scene of Cho-Cho San breathlessly awaiting his return, ultimately being disappointed, and meeting Pinkerton's "real" wife. But this time, there is a key difference: Cho-Cho San follows through on her suicide attempt, in spite of Suzuki's pleas, and holds her baby close to her heart as she dies. Pinkerton, prompted by his wife, arrives on the scene and exclaims, "Oh! Cho-Cho San!" To which she replies: "Too bad those robins didn' nes' again," referring to Pinkerton's promise to return to her when the robins made their nests. On this sentimentalist note, she dies, and the curtain falls.

Belasco's play was reasonably successful, but on its own, it might have been the end of the story had it not featured an extraordinary, and daring, bit of stage directing. Blanche Bates, who played Cho-Cho San, sat for "a full fourteen minutes in complete silence, with only changes in lighting to indicate the passage of time" (Honey and Cole 4). Giacomo Puccini attended the play's British premiere, and was so impressed by the

scene that he decided to compose what would become by far the most popular and famous version of the Butterfly mythos. It continues to fill opera houses, and the famous arias of Illica and Giacosa frequently make their way onto "best of opera" compilation albums. In spite of the opera's problematic staging of Asian female characters and of Japanese culture in general, many fans agree with Helga, Gallimard's wife in *M. Butterfly*: when Gallimard tells her that the Chinese don't like the opera because they find it racist, she responds, "Why can't they just hear it as a piece of beautiful music?" (19). This conclusion tempts. However, *Madama Butterfly's* enduring appeal, in the face of a novel, a novella, and a play that all have been nearly forgotten, has to do with more than its technical artistry.

Cio-Cio San (as it is spelled in the Italian) mercifully drops the pidgin English and sings in the same Italian as the white characters. It is worth noting, however, that the opera was not initially well-received. Its 1904 opening night in Milan was a disaster. The performers were not given enough time to rehearse, the press was hostile, and during the opening night, the audience jeered so loudly that most of the arias were largely inaudible (Jenkins par. 12). Puccini, devastated, pulled the opera from the stage and reworked it, staging it in the smaller Teatro Grande in Brescia, where it was better received. This is Cio-Cio San as most audiences know her today: delicate, vulnerable, and perhaps the more easily bruised for her first disastrous experience on stage.

Susan McClary suggests optimistically that Cio-Cio San's representation might be an empowering moment, rather than a degrading or disempowering one, for a female, non-white character. She points out that many operas have historically given "women

and ethnic Others the power to sing on the stage--to perform their alternative subjectivities in a world that otherwise insisted on their silence and invisibility" (26). This implies that it is better to be misrepresented than not represented at all, and the idea of self-representation does not appear even to be on the table. McClary's statement points to what Rey Chow calls "the increasing objectification of the world" as "part of an ongoing imperialist agenda for transforming the world into observable and hence manageable units" (*Protestant 2*). *The Mikado's* characters, with their propensity for silly hijinks and burying each other alive, and Cio-Cio San, who gracefully ends her life with a quick thrust of a deadly weapon, remain iconic: as iconic as figures on lacquer screens and painted fans.

This portrayal of Japanese people in the Western popular imagination has angered and insulted many Asians and Asian Americans. Among them is David Henry Hwang, who attempts to reclaim the *Butterfly* narrative and turn it inside out by playing on nearly every single trope and role we have come to expect from the story of Cio-Cio San: gender roles, racial roles, cultural identity, and the lure of stereotype. Hwang's play takes advantage of so many popular discourses that it is impossible to isolate only one for critical discussion; nevertheless, I will focus on the characterizations of Song Liling and "her" French lover René Gallimard, as they are Hwang's re-imaginings of Cio-Cio San and B.F. Pinkerton. Song and Gallimard perform the central work of Hwang's text. They demonstrate both the pleasures and dangers of stereotypes, and bring out the Bhabhian ambivalent moment that such stereotypes play on: Orientalism both latent and manifest. Song and Gallimard are from China and France, respectively, but neither feels at home in

the country of his or her birth. Song is condemned by Chinese Communist authorities for her sexuality and profession, and Gallimard longs for an exotic life that he cannot find in France, or with his French wife and in his job as an official representative of France in China. Rising from a literary tradition of dramas and other literary works such as *The Mikado*, *Madame Chrysanthème*, et al., *M. Butterfly* is a play about the (de)construction of identity in a world that, like Gilbert's, Loti's, Long's, Belasco's, and Puccini's Japan, is more or less imagined.

"There was only room for one": *M. Butterfly* and Ambivalent Fantasies

Jonathan Weisenthal says that when we read the *Butterfly* text, we search for one thing: "a new ending" (15). David Henry Hwang, in *M. Butterfly*, offers one such ending. In 1988, Hwang wrote a play satirizing the long-lasting cultural effects of *Butterfly*, effects he knew well in spite of never having seen the opera: "I knew *Butterfly* only as a cultural stereotype . . . Yet I felt convinced that the libretto would include yet another lotus blossom pining away for the cruel Caucasian man, and dying for her love" (95). I refer again to McClary's argument that dramatic representation allows "subaltern" characters like Cio-Cio San a means of expression. While I do not agree with her completely, in this case the historic desire of the West to construct and then speak for "the Orient" does not preclude the Orient from speaking back, as in the case of Hwang's play. *Butterfly* has her revenge.

M. Butterfly is the story of René Gallimard, a French diplomat in China in the 1960s with a long history of feeling sexually inadequate, and Song Liling, a Chinese

opera star-cum-governmental spy. Song is biologically male and occupies a place in the long tradition of men playing women in opera roles; as she puts it herself, "Only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act" (63).⁵ Gallimard sees Song performing, not a traditional Chinese role, but an aria from *Madama Butterfly*, playing the role of Cio-Cio San herself. In the full belief that Song is what she appears to be--a delicate "Oriental" woman--Gallimard falls in love and begins a relationship with a fantasy. On the orders of the Chinese Communist Party, Song uses Gallimard's ties to the French government to obtain classified information from him, especially about the United States' involvement in Vietnam. In the end, after years of companionship, Song (who has joined Gallimard in Paris) is exposed as a male spy by the French government and deported back to China. Gallimard, who is arrested for selling state secrets, and who is an object of ridicule all across the country, ends the play by dressing in a woman's kimono and committing seppuku in his prison cell.

Although it is clearly a reinterpretation of *Madama Butterfly*, the plot of *M. Butterfly* is also based on the true story of the French diplomat Bernard Boursicot and Shi Pei Pu, his Chinese lover to whom he passed confidential state information. Their relationship lasted for twenty years until Boursicot was arrested in 1983 for passing state secrets to Shi, just as Gallimard does with Song. Later, Boursicot would claim that he'd had no idea that Shi was actually a he. The story of René Gallimard and Song Liling is fictional; the story of Bernard Boursicot and Shi Pei Pu is not. It provides a real-life

⁵ I refer to Song Liling as female, rather than male, for two reasons. The first is that, in spite of her biological maleness, she performs and self-identifies as female throughout most of the play, and Hwang's stage directions refer to her as such until the final act. The second is that critics have traditionally referred to her as female in scholarship on *M. Butterfly*, perhaps to avoid simply going after what Rey Chow calls "the real penis" (*Ethics* 82).

meeting place for the manifest and the latent. Boursicot, like Gallimard, was deceived by his lover's pretense at Eastern female submissiveness. He claimed that "she" never removed "her" clothes in front of him and added that he thought Shi was only "very modest," as she had told him Chinese women always were (Hwang, "Afterword" 94).

The latent, the locus of fantasy and desire, simultaneously provides the moment for manifest Orientalism: action that has political consequences in real time. The deception of Shi Pei Pu, and its fictional double by Song Liling, would seem to speak to Western stereotypes of the inscrutable, sneaky Asian who cannot be trusted. It speaks, in fact, to Sheridan Prasso's claim that "[Western] characterizations of Asian men depict them as effeminate and emasculated on one hand, but inscrutable, sneaky, stoic, and sometimes wise on the other" (xiii). Of course, the two "hands" she refers to are not necessarily in opposition to each other. There is no reason why someone cannot be depicted as effeminate, emasculated, inscrutable, sneaky, etc., all at once. Such is the painful power of the stereotype, and one of its near-infinite uses: "For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjectures" (Bhabha 95). Shi and Song embody nearly every Occidental stereotype, both subconscious and overt, of the Orient. They also use it to strike back at those who have stereotyped them in the first place.

However, Hwang does not construct Song as an unproblematic Chinese citizen within her own cultural context. Song wants European and American state secrets to pass on to the Chinese government. Her motives are manifold: she is an artist, a cross-dresser, and part of a cultural tradition (Chinese opera) condemned as "feudal" during the Cultural

Revolution, all of which place her in grave danger. During the Cultural Revolution, she is deported to the Chinese countryside for "re-education" in spite of her service as a spy. In Act 2, Scene 9, Comrade Chin forces Song to confess, "I was a plaything for the imperialists!" (70). After the Cultural Revolution is over, only her usefulness to the state saves Song again. When she finally leaves the labor camp and accepts another spy mission, the humorless Comrade Chin (Hwang's answer to Butterfly's maid Suzuki) angrily tells her,

You won't stink up China anymore with your pervert stuff. You'll pollute the place where pollution begins--the West . . . You're going to France. Without a cent in your pocket. You find your consul's house, you make him pay your expenses . . . And you give us weekly reports! Useful information! (72)

Although Song is "useful," she is also despised. The CCP makes use of her by thrusting her beyond China's borders, making her a spy-in-exile. When she arrives in Paris, penniless, she sleeps in doorways and must arrange to have a kimono made on credit--Japanese garb, not Chinese, because it is the Japanese ideal of "Butterfly" that Gallimard loves, although he remains incapable of articulating this himself.

Is Song Liling the "native" of Rey Chow's "Where Have All the Natives Gone?"--the native who refuses to stay within tightly defined parameters? It seems likely, given her relationship with both European and totalitarian Chinese power structures, neither of which legitimizes her. It is tempting to label Song as something like a subaltern: ambivalently female, and subordinate to the demands of both Gallimard and the CCP. However, Song clearly exhibits agency. Comrade Chin tries to ascertain that Song is

gathering her information from Gallimard in a way that would not violate any principles of the Communist party, saying, "Remember, when working for the Great Proletarian State, you represent our Chairman Mao in every position you take." Song replies slyly, "I'll try to imagine the Chairman taking my positions" (48). Chin departs, appeased and unaware that Song deliberately acts in ways frowned upon by the power structure to which she, Chin, has devoted her life. Song deceives Gallimard (partly) to save her own skin, but she chooses for herself the ways in which she will do it.

One way to address the apparent discrepancy between Song's agency and her forced obedience is to look at Rey Chow's differentiation of the "other" from the "Other," a la Rousseau and in the same way that Levinas draws a distinction between "autre" and "Autre." Like Levinas, Chow resists totality and instead draws attention to what she calls "the big Difference." "How does the big Other work?" she asks. "It works by combating the construction of the native as the straightforward or direct 'other' of the colonizer" (139). Song is a "big Other" because she fits in neither with Gallimard's nor "her own" culture. She enjoys the Western magazines, the "decadent trash" with which Comrade Chin reluctantly supplies her, even as she abhors Gallimard's racist, sexist, and relentlessly Occidental world-view. She strikes at the French government even as she speaks disparagingly of the Cultural Revolution, complaining about the four years she spent "on a fucking commune in Nowheresville, China" (80). She is neither wholly man nor wholly woman, and is evicted from China, then from France, and finally returned to the same country that forced her out.

However, Song negotiates the world better than René Gallimard does. He spends most of his youth and adult life feeling inadequate, but while living in Beijing, his hard work attracts the attention of his superiors and he receives a promotion to vice-consul. This is largely because Song, with her deliberately cultivated submissiveness, has made the heretofore-insecure Gallimard feel "for the first time that rush of power--the absolute power of a man" (32). Now motivated by a reinvigorated interpretation of his own masculinity, Gallimard attacks his job with a new forcefulness, and as a result, is raised to a position from which he can give Song more and more sensitive information.

At first, he does this unknowingly: Song coos at him, "I want to know what you know. To be impressed by my man," and encourages him to tell her everything he knows about the escalating situation in Vietnam (43). Later, when Song arrives on his doorstep in Paris, Gallimard knowingly passes state secrets on to her, believing that if he does not, she will be in danger from the Chinese government (which is no doubt partly true). When Song appears at Gallimard's flat, she sees how Gallimard has attempted to surround himself with remembrances of his time with her in China. He has constructed a fantasy world that is neither China nor France, telling her:

I've forgotten everything. My mind, you see--there wasn't enough room in this hard head--not for the world *and* for you. No, there was only room for one. (*Beat.*) Come, look. See? Your bed has been waiting, with the Klimt poster you like, and--see? The xiang lu you gave me? (77, emphasis Hwang's)

The Klimt poster and the xiang lu⁶ show how Gallimard has attempted to create a space for himself that merges East and West, by including a reproduction of a Western work of art--not an original, which is fitting, given that their relationship is built on representation and artifice--that Song has admired, and an Eastern artifact that reminds Gallimard of the imaginary China he treasures.

Gallimard represents France in the face of foreign interests, and yet he holds his "home" country in contempt: when his wife Helga says that she hates the smell of Chinese incense, he replies, "Well, I hate the French. Who just smell--period!" (74). As always, Gallimard's construction of China says more about his perception of the West rather than the East, and about the way he has used the East to define himself (a Frenchman who, in spite of his most cherished fantasies, smells). When the moment comes, he willingly surrenders to Song the information she requires, betraying his putative national home, and beginning his final transition into the "woman" he becomes by the end of the play. For if Gallimard has imagined China, then he has also, in a way, imagined France. Gallimard imagines France, and the rest of the Western world, as the masculine force that will dominate the weak, submissive East. This recalls the discourse surrounding the Perry mission and other nineteenth/twentieth-century contacts between China and the West. The Orient, Gallimard tells his superiors in the French embassy in Beijing, "will always submit to a greater force" (46). But even as Gallimard seeks to align himself with his vision of the masculine West, he grows to despise it: an awareness, perhaps, of his own increasingly fractured subjectivity, a fissure that grows complete

⁶ An incense burner.

after his arrest and imprisonment. By sacrificing his allegiance to masculine France, Gallimard foreshadows his own eventual transformation and death.

In fact, Gallimard's final scene in the play, that of his suicide, emphasizes his treason. Marjorie Garber makes the telling observation that when he dresses up as Cio-Cio San before committing seppuku, Gallimard paints his face white, in the manner of a geisha girl. In geisha tradition, white face paint symbolizes the porcelain skin that results from never having to toil outside in the sun. However, in Chinese opera (Song's original profession), a character with white face paint is a traitor.⁷ "In this story of spies and treason," Garber says, "the Chinese and Japanese significations are at odds with one another, and Song has already warned Gallimard not to conflate the two" (qtd. in Eng 39). This is true: during their first meeting, Gallimard tells Song that he found her convincing as Cio-Cio San. Song scornfully replies, "Convincing? As a Japanese woman? The Japanese used hundreds of our people for medical experiments during the war, you know" (17). Gallimard is chastened, but fails to take the lesson (or the warning) to heart, and continues to generalize about "Orientals" for the rest of the play--even when he kills himself after betraying his native land.

However, at the moment of his death, Gallimard reveals that he finally understands, not the various cultural differences of the peoples of the East, but the power of fantasy itself:

⁷ I discuss the conventions and finer points of Chinese opera further in Chapter Three.

There is a vision of the Orient that I have. Of slender women in chong sams and kimonos who die for the love of unworthy foreign devils. Who are born and raised to be the perfect women. Who take whatever punishment we give them, and bounce back, strengthened by love, unconditionally. It is a vision that has become my life. (91)

Even at the last moment, he conflates cheongsams with kimonos: two very different garments (Eng 139). But he also acknowledges his own turned subjectivity. Before Gallimard commits suicide in prison, he sees Song one final time. Song wears an Armani suit, and strips before Gallimard, revealing the incontrovertible fact of his penis that he⁸ has kept so long concealed with Gallimard's subconscious permission. Then he attempts to persuade Gallimard that, in the essentials, he remains unchanged: "I'm your Butterfly. Under the robes, beneath everything, it was always me" (89). By stripping to his skin, Song disavows both the Eastern and Western costumes he has worn throughout the play to take on various temporary identities: Cio-Cio San, Song the opera star, Song the man in a Western suit. He also throws aside, or attempts to, the gender role he has performed both in public and private for twenty years. His facile insistence that, no matter his sex, he is the same person Gallimard has always loved rings false, and he continues to code himself as female when he tells Gallimard, "Men. You're like the rest of them. It's all in the way *we* dress, and make up *our* faces, and bat *our* eyelashes" (90, emphases mine). Furious, Gallimard dismisses Song forever, saying, "You showed me your true self. When all I loved was the lie" (89). After Song's departure, Gallimard dresses in a kimono and paints his face, attempting to claim for himself what he has lost in Song.

⁸ At the end of the play, Hwang's stage directions begin referring to Song as male, and as Song begins performing as such, so do I.

With this act, he embraces the Other-ness that formerly defined Song. As he used to be--a white European male of some authority--Gallimard was in a position to define the rest of the world in terms relative to himself and at his own convenience. In this way, he assumed the mantle of a more robust masculinity than he had heretofore managed. He begins the play by confessing that he has never been successful with women and has extremely low sexual self-esteem. But when he dresses in the kimono, paints his face, and stabs himself, he is penetrated, after trying and failing to penetrate Song's 'female' sex organ for decades. Now that Song has shown the truth of his penis, Gallimard must remove his own, in a symbolic act that is both penetration and metaphorical castration. He takes on the role of an ill-used Asian woman whose only access to agency is to end her own life.⁹

Nor is Gallimard alone in his role-reversal. Song returns to the stage after Gallimard's suicide, still dressed in his suit and smoking a cigarette as he says, "Butterfly? Butterfly?" This echoes the end of *Madama Butterfly*, only with less drama and pathos: Song is Pinkerton, but without Pinkerton's histrionics. About to be returned forcibly to the China that both used and repudiated him, Song coolly surveys what Gallimard has done to himself through his delusional, even obsessive focus on stereotypes and ideas instead of the physical reality of the (wo)man he has loved for twenty years. Gallimard's recourse to seppuku is simultaneously a gesture at recuperating

⁹ In the 1993 film adaptation of *M. Butterfly*, directed by David Cronenberg, Gallimard (Jeremy Irons) commits suicide by breaking a mirror and cutting his throat with a shard of glass. The effect is more gruesome, especially with a few close-up shots, but it is also less heavy-handed in its cultural symbolism: Gallimard does not kill himself in a totemic ritual of the East that has "betrayed" him, but with an object that represents his own final self-recognition. While I generally prefer the play to the film, I find the film's rendering of Gallimard's suicide to be more satisfying and powerful.

masculine honor and at escaping an existence he finds unlivable. Although Song's situation is far from ideal at the end of the play, it allows for Song's survival--at least, as far as we know.

Conclusion

Song and Gallimard have little sense of belonging, even though they share territory and customs with their "fellow" citizens. They are alienated from the authority that claims their allegiance. This state of being is also what Bhabha calls hybridity: an authority's disavowal of difference that also ambivalently maintains a relationship with the Other as an altered reflection of itself. In Bhabha's schema, colonial powers consistently enunciate the difference between themselves and those they rule. At the same time, the powers that be must preserve the illusion that their authority is natural and non-intrusive. However, the emphasis on the difference between themselves and the colonized points to how intrusive and visible such authority really is. This also leads to fears of fellow colonizers "going native" if they become confused about the nature of difference and about who really has the power. Gallimard embodies all of this--the enunciation of difference, as well as the "adventurous imperialist" who has defected to the other side--when, at the end of the Cronenberg film, he looks at his transformed self in the mirror, which he then shatters. Song's hybrid moment is, as I have said earlier, the moment he takes off his Western suit. In these moments, both Song and Gallimard are Western and "Oriental," both are male and female, and yet both are none of these things.

As I said in my Introduction, Bhabha's theories are useful, but chiefly centered around a post-/colonial model of discourse that needs a little altering. Both China and France, the major East-West players in Hwang's play, do have some cultural capital as colonizing powers, although neither operate strictly within the traditional schema. France has not colonized China, but, at the time of the play, it has recently emerged from a humiliating defeat in Indochina and is leaving its colonial legacy in Asia behind.¹⁰ China, though it has a heavy hand in influencing and developing the nations around it (and the language of imperialism features in its policies regarding Tibet), has not struck out across the world and exercised linguistic, commercial, military, and cultural dominion in the same way as the European powers--at least, not in the twentieth century. In the play, Gallimard stands in for a "masculine" West that is and is not a colonial power, and Song stands in for an "ambiguously feminine" East that uses the discourse of neoimperialism while remaining "officially" anti-imperialist. Both are slowly becoming part of a world order that elides the old distinctions.

It would be tempting, then, to connect *transnationalism* to *transgendered* subjects--or at least subjects like Song and Gallimard who are neither intersexed nor transsexuals, but who go beyond simple transvestism in their self-transformations. However, the term "transnationalism," as I have previously explained, has its own problems. Michael Chang reminds us that immigrants from East to West (as well as from South to North) are immediately racialized by the nations they seek to inhabit: "With the challenge that flexible globalization poses to nation-state sovereignty, racialized nationalistic discourses

¹⁰ I briefly discuss France's relationship to "Indochine" in Chapter Three.

putting 'natives' against 'immigrants' have become common within Western nations" (Chang xiii). It works both ways. Gallimard leaves China at the moment of the xenophobic Cultural Revolution when, as his superior tells him, "The only thing [the Chinese are] trading out there are Western heads" (69). That is to say, the cultural identities of those who cross borders, whether immigrant or emigrant, are subject to internal review. When they are caught passing secrets to the Chinese, both Song and Gallimard become notorious in France: s/he for her/his ambiguous gender, and he for his credulity and treachery. They are both ridiculed, but also perceived as dangerous to national stability, much like Gilbert's and Puccini's "harmless" Japanese, who provide the meeting ground for Orientalism both latent and manifest.

Neither Song nor Gallimard can find a cultural home in either East or West. They are compelled and imperiled by outside forces, whether the CCP or the French government. Both of them are capable of exercising agency: Song chooses the ways in which she will deceive Gallimard, and Gallimard chooses to die in the grip of fantasy rather than live in the real world where he is despised, and, worse, has lost Butterfly. Emerging from a Western tradition of over a hundred years of "Japanophilia," and an even longer tradition of Orientalism and the fetishization of the Oriental female, Gallimard finally surrenders the last of his notional French masculinity. They both decide how to deal with their respective situations. But Song, who has so successfully deceived her lover for decades, is pardoned by France--and sent back to China (which already repudiated her once) and an uncertain fate. Is China really her "home"? Does she have one? For Gallimard, the only way out is suicide. Both of them can exercise

agency, but in the end, their choices lead them to death, or to a possibly dangerous return. In a way, this echoes Butterfly herself, the object of Gallimard's obsession and the impetus for his fatal conflation of Song and Cio-Cio San. Long's Butterfly flees her home before Pinkerton's wife can arrive to take her son; Belasco and Puccini's Butterfly kills herself. Both Butterflies have repudiated their connection to their originary culture in favor of a foreigner, and neither gets a happy ending, much like Gallimard and Song.

From this, we see that narratives of stereotype and transnation create fissures through which "ambiguous" subjects--subjects who are ambiguously gendered and/or racialized--fall. I continue with this theme in the next chapter, which is about Chen Kaige's film *Farewell My Concubine*. The film premiered in 1993, the same year as Cronenberg's movie, and features three characters who appear, on the surface, to embody a stereotypically Western vision of China. Its scope covers China's history from the fall of the Qing empire to the "opening" of China under Deng Xiaoping in the 1970s. In both *M. Butterfly* and *Farewell My Concubine*, as well as in the other works I analyze, marginalized subjects seek access to agency, but ultimately find that their circumscribed parameters limit their choices to either exile or suicide.

CHAPTER III

SCAPE-ING THE PAST: IDENTITY AND AGENCY IN *FAREWELL MY CONCUBINE*

Chen Kaige's 1993 film *Farewell My Concubine* achieved international acclaim. It won the Cannes Palme D'Or for that year, and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Western critics lauded the film after its initial release. *Newsweek* praised it for having "the lushness of Bertolucci [director of *The Last Emperor*] and the sweeping narrative confidence of an old Hollywood epic" (qtd. Kuoshu 12). This quote showcases the trend that other reviewers in the "popular" media were quick to follow: setting the film in the contexts of genres and traditions with which Western audiences would be most familiar, while at the same time elevating the film into a quintessential portrait of an equally quintessential "China." Academic critics, however, have generally been less forgiving, accusing the film of self-Orientalization, self-serving transnationalism, and other faults, which I shall discuss further in the pages that follow. In my own analysis, I find that neither view is completely accurate, and that both do a disservice to useful discourse.

This chapter shows that while *Farewell My Concubine* is a clear marker of China's move towards transnationalism, the film, rather than straightforwardly endorsing either a nationalist or a transnational grand narrative, offers a cogent critique of both. In doing so, it follows a natural trajectory from my first chapter on *M. Butterfly*, Western

histories of Orientalism, and the (mis)uses of stereotype. If *M. Butterfly* takes part of its shape from Cold War ideologies, then *Farewell My Concubine* is in turn shaped by the tentative beginnings of a post-Cold War globe in which terms like "First World," "Second World," and "Third World" began to lose their significance. As Michael Chang puts it,

In an era of economic and cultural globalization, American and Chinese interests are not as easily distinguishable as in the past. Although American Orientalism represents a post-Cold War view of the world, it is still influenced by static Cold War impressions of China as a totalitarian, command-economy state with a homogenized culture oppositional to American interests and capitalism. (76)

In other words, the United States continues to invest both ideological and commercial capital in the idea of China as a nation that remains "Other," while in reality, as Chang points out, American and Chinese "interests" frequently converge and coincide. Yet many of our stereotypes of China remain intact. However, while *M. Butterfly* complicates the stereotype by taking advantage of Western misperceptions of the Orient, and then using those misperceptions to turn on the West in anger, *Farewell My Concubine* does something different. The film--only a few years removed from the premiere of Hwang's play in 1988--takes Western stereotypes and deliberately subverts them, not maliciously or in a sinister way, but as a means of deconstructing the Western idea of "China" and then turning that into a successful, commercially viable transnational product.

To begin, I am aware of the difficulty of identity politics. The other three contemporary texts I discuss--*M. Butterfly*, *A Gesture Life*, and *The Book of Salt*--are by

authors who, like David Henry Hwang, were born to Asian immigrants or who, like Chang-rae Lee and Monique Truong, moved from Asia to the United States during their childhood. The texts are also in English. So why include a chapter on a Chinese-language film, produced in China? The answer can be found as part of the larger work of my project, which situates itself not in an "ethnic American" context, nor in an entirely postcolonial one, nor, really, in some kind of hybrid of both. One of the ways in which we define Asian Americans is by their perceived connection to Asia (as opposed to African Americans, for example, whom the popular discourse does not directly connect to Africa). Part of that definition arises from our original reading of Asia as monolithic and unchanging. As Arif Dirlik points out in an interview with Chuck Morse, speaking specifically of China, "There has been a long-standing tendency--I'm tempted to call it an Orientalist tendency, even--to attribute everything new in China to Chinese tradition, which is another way of saying that there is never anything significantly new in China, anything that cannot be explained in terms of the past" (para. 3). People whose origins lie in such an ancient part of the world must therefore be entrenched in never-changing traditions. So goes the stereotype, and Rene Gallimard falls prey to its trap.

However, as the work of writers and critical theorists has shown, identity circulates. True, *Farewell My Concubine* is in Chinese, directed by a Chinese citizen, set in China, and there are no non-Asian characters in the film. But, as I said, and as I will continue to demonstrate, the film was well-received in parts of the world far distant from China--certainly more so than other Chinese films. It is not merely a cultural artifact "about China" rooted in time and place, but a transnational and transcultural product

under the same influences as the play and the two novels written by (Asian?) Americans. It speaks, not to the isolation of one field or group from another (Asian studies versus Asian American studies, Asia versus the United States), but to their inherent interconnectedness. Rather than being rooted in the past and across the ocean, the film moves skillfully through both. We might also consider the work of Ang Lee, the Taiwanese director whose oeuvre ranges from *Eat Drink Man Woman*, to *Sense and Sensibility*, to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, to *Brokeback Mountain*. Or Zhang Yimou, whom I mention elsewhere, and who has directed films as unlike one another as *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Curse of the Golden Flower*.

I have found Arjun Appadurai's essay "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (1996) to be a useful critical focus for this chapter, especially his conception of various "scapes" that describe the fluctuating features of today's world: mediascapes, ideoscapes, ethnoscapes, and financescapes. To his list I wish to add the concept of "genderscapes." Cheng Dieyi, the main character of *Farewell My Concubine*, is a complexly gendered figure who alternately identifies himself as a man and a woman. Specifically, he identifies as a working-class, illiterate homosexual male actor on the margins of Chinese society, and as Yu Ji, a beautiful aristocratic lady who looms large in China's fictive past (and is the character he portrays on stage). In short, Yu Ji is the "center" to Dieyi's "periphery," but, because the two are embodied in the same individual, they collapse the conventional boundaries between man and woman, center and periphery, individual and community.

The chapter begins with a brief summation of China's move over the last thirty years from a socialist system towards a transnational capitalism. I then place *Farewell My Concubine* within the context of this shift, using it as a sign of that transition. Then I give a close reading of the film itself, and conclude by returning to the significance of the film as a whole and a consideration of where it fits into the current politics of transnationalism in China, explaining that Chen Kaige's vision is more far-seeing and ultimately critical than he is presently given credit for.

As part of my overall project, the chapter provides a "bridge" between the 1980s Reagan-era of *M. Butterfly* and the late twentieth/early twenty-first century transnational narratives of *A Gesture Life* and *The Book of Salt*. *Farewell My Concubine*, like all of these works, is part of the larger discourse of "Asia," but, also like all of these, complicates what appears to be a simple geographical/cultural distinction. In the moment of China's "opening" to Western trade (which, unlike the mid-19th century opening of Japan, was self-activated), what does the movie put at stake? I posit that the film critiques the specific cultural moment it inhabits when old discourses must either adapt to changing world conditions or make way for new ones.

Xifang zhuyi: China's Move Towards Globalization and Transnational Capital

"Xifang zhuyi" is Mandarin for "Occidentalism," that binary counterpart to Orientalism that Edward Said warned us about (Conceison 48). I invoke the phrase as a reminder that the West is by no means alone in objectifying its Others. China has a great deal invested (literally) in knowing and dealing with the Western world on its own terms.

After Deng Xiaoping rose to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in 1980, four years after the death of Mao Zedong, China began engaging in what Frederic Jameson, in 1984, described as the "immense, unfinished social experiment of the New China--unparalleled in world history" (qtd. Lu 8). Part of China's experiment has been, of necessity, a compromise between its own socialist ideologies and the capitalist values of the West.

China is not a postcolonial nation per se, but its own leadership has frequently described it as "semi-colonial," and most scholars acknowledge that there are several similarities between China and more typical postcolonial nations (Conceison 14). China has suffered occupation at the hands of foreign powers, including the British and the Japanese, and we can find the legacies of twentieth-century Western imperialism in China as well. As Sheldon Lu puts it, many of the issues China faces, such as "national and cultural identity, nationalism, ethnicity, Westernization, [and] indigenusness," are the same issues faced by postcolonial nations (61). This is all by way of saying that the Western world has irrefutably changed the course, not only of Chinese history, but also Chinese internal and international policy.

Lu, to whose work on Chinese culture and postmodernism I am heavily indebted, explores the consequences of China's powerful move into the world market. "Foreign investment," he says, "transnational capital, joint enterprise between Chinese and foreign businesses, and individual entrepreneurs--these various forms of ownership and entrepreneurship have created an extremely diversified economic and social reality" (10). Post-Cold War, China is "Number Three," offering an alternative somewhere between the

United States and the former Soviet Union, the two superpowers who provided two very different models for consumption and production. While it would be hasty and mistaken to claim that China occupies Homi Bhabha's elusive "Third Space" simply by virtue of being Number Three, the Chinese model unquestionably poses a unique potential for an elision of the binary discourse between socialism and capitalism in a major nation-state. As Richard Smith points out in *New Left Review*, "China now produces half the world's toys, two thirds of its shoes, most of the world's bicycles, lamps, power tools and sweaters . . . China is also the largest recipient of foreign investment after the United States. More than \$35 billion in direct investment poured into China in 1995, a record" (qtd. in Lu 4). China's economy has grown with astonishing rapidity since Deng's ascension in the 1970s, and even managed to survive the recession of the late 1980s/early 1990s that hurt so many other Asian economies, including Japan. Today, during what news commentators are calling the "global financial meltdown" of 2008 and 2009, China's economy continues to grow, although "at a declining pace"--certainly, decreased Western consumer demand will hurt the national wallet (Chang para. 14). However, although experts have recommended that China try to "make the transition from an export-oriented economy to a domestic-market economy," everyone agrees that such a process would (will?) be incredibly arduous; and in the meantime, China continues to feed the appetites of Western consumption (Chang para. 25).

The Chinese Question looms large on television, and in popular periodicals, financial magazines, internet forums, talk radio, and every other conceivable medium. What is the significance of China's new prominence on the world stage, and how will it

ultimately affect current global systems of trade, foreign relations, human rights, and government? How does this prominence factor into the new transnationalism that defines subjects and stereotypes not by the colonial/postcolonial model espoused by Bhabha, but by something more fluid and less definitive? These enormous questions are, of course, far beyond the purview of this dissertation, but it is important to keep these issues in mind as the constant background noise in any discussion of contemporary China.

With its growing prominence in the global community, and its interest in becoming a still more major player, China has reason to pay attention to the ways in which it is perceived by the West and the rest of the world. This includes its representation in media such as the news, fiction, art, music, and, of course, cinema. Colin Mackerras, who also wrote two studies on Beijing opera I cite later in the chapter, offers his perspective on why China is so interested in creating a pleasing international image. Drawing a Foucauldian theory of "truth" (which I also draw on in my third chapter), he says that "images of China would tend to become a bulwark for a particular set of policies towards that country, or even for a more general policy," adding later that "Western images [of China] gain additional significance because they bear upon the West's relations with China, how one major civilization relates to another" (*Western Images* 2, 8). Of course, this is true of civilizations everywhere, not just China. But China and the Western world have a long, fraught history of attempts to interact, some more successful than others, and China has long been the object of the West's fascinated gaze. China is exotic, mysterious, and utterly foreign, in a way that is no longer true even of Japan. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter (and will continue to discuss in the

third), Japan has been introduced to the West in various ways. China remains impenetrable and unknowable in a way that intrigues us.

But however mysterious and seductive, China's image in the Western world has hardly been uniformly positive. The 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre created an international setback for China as horrified viewers witnessed, on live television, the Chinese army mowing down student-led movements for democracy under the orders of Deng Xiaoping. Anti-Chinese sentiment reached a new height. A few years later at the 1992 party congress, however, the Chinese government legitimized a "socialist market economy"--which Sheldon Lu calls a code phrase for "capitalist economy" (12). I am not an economist and make no claims as such, but surely China's turn towards capitalism indicates an attempt towards compromise, a need to have points in common with the West in a bid for financial success, as well as international respect in the face of a disappointing human rights record. Tellingly, while the markets have opened up, the Communist government apparatus remains fundamentally the same and most public demonstrations remain discouraged (except those against the Japanese).

Transnationalism, then, does not necessarily mean that China will embrace the core "democratic" values of the West, or those pertaining to human rights--rather, it is based on consumption and production, exchanges of Western and Chinese cultural capital ("Made in China" clothes in Wal-Mart and McDonald's in Beijing). As before, I use "transnationalism" to mean, not only global capitalism, but a transaction of cultural capital as well: selling an idea as well as a commercial product. The two do not always match up. Mackerras informs us that Chinese gestures towards Western values are often

grounded in sheer practicality rather than ideology: "On several occasions, China released imprisoned dissidents on the eve of a major American decision over trade with China" (144). Given this, is the Chinese move towards international and social compromise simply a reification of capitalist systems under the guise of quasi-socialism? Is this compromise possible or desirable?

This is why Appadurai's conception of "scapes" is so useful to my premise. The scapes allow for shifting and fluidity in our perceptions of post- and semi-colonial discourse in ways that other earlier, more binary theories, like those of Edward Said, do not. Said's theories of Orientalism, for example, have their ontological roots in the Western reliance on binaries--East versus West, the Orient as a passive object of subjugation and imagination. This in some ways makes things too easy, often reproducing the colonialist method of "labeling" that Said should rather try to repudiate. His Orient is a fabulous construction of the West and is in some sense abetted by himself. While initially revolutionary and always important, his foundational theories cannot truly account for China.

Appadurai's scapes are therefore fitting for such a place at such a juncture in history. If, as Appadurai asserts, the world "is now an interactive system in a sense that is strikingly new," we can come to understand that no nation (if the traditional concept of "the nation" even remains relevant) stands alone, or remains static in its development (26). For Appadurai, the past is no more fixed than the present or, for that matter, the future: "It has become a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios, a kind of temporal central casting, to which recourse can be made, the scene to be enacted" (29). As regards

Farewell My Concubine, the main character slides between past and present as he variously identifies himself between his "true" identity and the identities of the ancient Chinese beauties he portrays onstage.

The role of the imagination looms larger than ever before in terms of constructing agency, which is how the scapes come into being: as natural products of the unprecedented global flow of information and capital. Appadurai asserts, "The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be seen in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries)" (31). The Mandarin word for China is "Zhongguo," or "Central Kingdom." China has historically asserted itself as the center of all civilization, establishing its own primacy over the other kingdoms of the world (rebuffing Britain's King George III when he tried to establish diplomatic ties at the end of the eighteenth century), but now finds itself enmeshed in the global web, and is adapting to present circumstances. Appadurai's theories of international interdependency provide us with a more comprehensive lens through which we can examine China's current cultural position, as well as the discourses surrounding it.

As I stated earlier, I wish to add my own idea of "genderscapes" to the other scapes proposed by Appadurai. As he says, "The suffix *-scape* allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shape of [global cultural flows], shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles" (31). Appadurai describes ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes as the main "scapes" of the world, but it seems only logical to add genderscapes to the list. We no

longer see gender as a binary construction of man/woman or powerful/powerless with no negotiable territory in between. At the same time, gender is a dominant factor in the other scapes Appadurai mentions: women, men, and the people in between have different access to, and influence over the global flows represented by the other scapes. Gender, when used as a metaphor for postcolonial nations and conditions, often falls into the same binary traps of Said and others. The postcolonial nation is a victim of oppression, just like women; women are the opposites of men, defined, as Luce Irigaray would argue, by their lack. R. Radhakrishnan claims that "Woman becomes the allegorical name for a specific historical failure: the failure to coordinate the political or the ontological with the epistemological within an undivided agency" (85).

In a transnational world that requires new language as it re-investigates subjectivity, this philosophy seems reductive. I find that it is more productive to acknowledge gender (like the other scapes) to be a fluid and flexible construction rather than a foregone conclusion, which leaves it as a suitable metaphor for the construction of national identity as well. In much the same way as gender can be imagined, so can trans/national communities. Chinese modernity needs a different narrative than one that equates masculinity with that modernity and femininity with the traditional. As I will discuss later, *Farewell My Concubine's* main character, Cheng Dieyi, represents China in the twentieth century (and, I would argue, the twenty-first as well). He also transitions, with difficulty, between the roles of man and woman in his society. The film's central character, himself a metaphor for China both old and new, suffers from living in a society

that has no useful or working definition for his ambiguously gendered life: at least Song Liling could survive by working as a spy.

I now turn to examine *Farewell My Concubine*, first in the larger context of the significance of its release, and afterwards, in a close reading of the film itself in terms of the issues I have just raised. The movie's release in 1993 occurred nearly simultaneously with the 1992 "premiere" of the socialist market economy. While its critics have, by and large, denounced it either as a new form of the old party line, or as a sell-out move towards transnational self-exoticization, I interpret it as a critique of both those perspectives.

"Look Mama, a Chinaman": the Broader Cultural Significance of *Farewell My Concubine*

Frantz Fanon's frustrated complaint about his own object-status in France recalls the Western perception of the Chinese in the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries. As I said, China has long been the object of a Western gaze because it is so fascinatingly Other--the writing system is nothing like the Romanized systems of the West, Western tongues have difficulty forming Chinese syllables, and the social customs of many Chinese are far removed from those familiar to the West. The Chinese film industry (which sadly lacks a catchy name like "Bollywood") has learned to cater to this appetite, producing artistically ambitious films like *Raise the Red Lantern*, *The Wooden Man's*

Bride, and, of course, *Farewell My Concubine* that have been critically well-received abroad.¹¹

These movies all fit in the category of what Appadurai would call "mediascapes," which "refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information . . . and to the images of the world created by these media" (35). Simply by virtue of existing and succeeding in a transnational market, *Farewell My Concubine* operates within a mediascape, producing information about a period of Chinese history and offering it to the world. Geographically and ideologically removed from China, the West welcomes the access to the exotic Other the film provides as it blurs the boundary between historical and social reality and imagined landscape. Again, nothing is fixed. If the film has something to say about the East, but succeeds commercially in the West, then that says something about the film's audience too--one is not inseparable from the other, as Mackerras points out when reminding us that our image of China can and will impact how we materially deal with it. Mediascapes, by their very nature, offer the pleasures and perils of spectacle along with the dissemination of information, and *Farewell My Concubine* has spectacle aplenty with its brightly-colored costumes, dramatic lighting, and powerful performances. The film plays on what

¹¹ The films to which I refer are all products of what is generally known as China's "Fifth Generation" of filmmakers--that is, filmmakers who graduated from the Beijing film school after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Since then a new genre of popular Chinese films has emerged: that of the *wuxia* films, such as *Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. All of these films sell visions of China's ancient past (frequently glossed with a patina of a particularly suspect nationalism, especially *Hero*). Chen Kaige himself directed *The Emperor and the Assassin*, a 1998 *wuxia* film that also starred Gong Li and Zhang Fengyi and that told the story of Qin Shi Huang, China's first emperor. Although the *wuxia* films have been exponentially more popular in the West, this study focuses on the Fifth Generation films that are more immediately post-Cold War and that occupy the moment of transition into a socialist market economy.

Lacan calls the "scopic drive," the pleasure we derive from the act of watching. Once we are drawn in, *Farewell My Concubine* works powerfully against our own expectations and assumptions of what we *thought* we were going to watch.

Brief introductions are in order. *Farewell My Concubine's* plot revolves around the lives of three characters. The first and most important is Cheng Dieyi, a Beijing opera star who is famous for his portrayal of female characters.¹² Dieyi begins the film as Douzi, a boy of perhaps seven or eight years old who is left at the opera by his mother, a local prostitute who can no longer afford to keep her son in the brothel. Initially, the opera master refuses to take Douzi in because one of his hands has six fingers. Therefore, Douzi's mother takes him outside and cuts off his sixth finger with a cleaver before returning the screaming boy to the opera master. Then she leaves him there, never to return. This symbolic castration, as well as maternal abandonment, shapes Douzi's perception of himself for the rest of his life.

The first friend Douzi makes at the opera is boy named Shitou, who becomes his protector. When the opera teachers torment Douzi as part of the training (in order to encourage flexibility, the boys are pinned to the wall, their legs forcibly spread by cinderblocks), Shitou does his best to ease Douzi's pain at cost to himself. As he and Douzi grow up and become the most promising young members of the opera troupe, Shitou continues to protect Douzi, earning his friend's devotion and, eventually, his love.

By 1937, on the eve of the Sino-Japanese war, Douzi and Shitou have risen to stardom and taken on new names: Douzi has become Cheng Dieyi (played by the late

¹² I discuss Beijing opera more fully later in the chapter.

Leslie Cheung), and Shitou has become Duan Xiaolou (Zhang Fengyi), who often plays the male love interest of Dieyi's female characters. Dieyi himself has fallen in love with Xiaolou. His affection, however, is not returned: on the very night that Dieyi confesses his love, Xiaolou marries Juxian (Gong Li), a beautiful woman who has left her brothel to become his wife. Yet again, Dieyi finds himself bereft of a part of himself at the hands of a prostitute and, desolate, becomes the lover of a wealthy male opera patron named Yuan.

The love triangle provides the impetus for the rest of the film, in which the stories of Dieyi, Xiaolou, and Juxian intersect with China's tumultuous history in the twentieth century. The three of them live through Japan's invasion, the temporary victory of Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist forces, the Communist takeover, and the Cultural Revolution. Like Song, Dieyi and Xiaolou are both persecuted during the Cultural Revolution because, as artists and protectors of an imperial tradition, they are seen as reactionaries. During a street demonstration, Red Guards force Dieyi and Xiaolou to give each other up, causing Xiaolou to expose Dieyi's homosexual relationship with Yuan, and then to repudiate his own marriage to Juxian. Devastated, Juxian returns home and commits suicide, and Xiaolou and Dieyi are separated. They reunite in 1977, forty years after their ascent to fame. While re-enacting their old roles of Yu Ji and the King of Chu, Dieyi commits suicide as well.

These characters, as well as the mediascape within which *Farewell My Concubine* works, destabilize existing notions of center and periphery. China, the Central Kingdom, is embodied in the film by Cheng Dieyi, a character on the margins of Chinese society. The homosexual son of a prostitute, who seeks his identity in the female roles he plays,

Dieyi perfectly exemplifies the need for a more flexible theoretical paradigm: he is center and periphery, public property and private individual, male and female. He collapses the putative boundaries between a "modern" masculinity and a "traditional" femininity. Above all, he is a tragic, dramatic figure who appeals to a transnational audience. As such, he collapses the old, familiar binary paradigms.

I now turn to a closer reading of the film itself, beyond its broader cultural significance. I believe that *Farewell My Concubine* has received substantial negative commentary from academic critics that is unwarranted. In spite of its so-called self-Orientalization, the film upsets our preconceptions of China through its characters, its setting, and its use of Beijing opera as a frame for the action.

Why the Concubine Has to Die: Decoding and Deconstructing "China" in *Farewell My Concubine*

Bawang bie ji is not typical of a Beijing opera production. However, in *Farewell My Concubine*, director Chen Kaige presents it as a quintessential example of the art form.¹³ Here I will show that the *Bawang bie ji* conceit serves to translate and market an idea of "the essential China" to the West as a means of exploding that very essentialism. Chen's desire to exploit cultural myth differs from what many critics argue are more cynical and market-driven reasons behind the movie's artistic choices.

Many critics have argued that *Farewell My Concubine* supports a selling-out to transnational interests, by enshrining Beijing opera as something "essentially Chinese."

¹³ In order to prevent confusion between the two, I will refer to the film as *Farewell My Concubine* and to the opera as *Bawang bie ji* (literally, "The Hegemon King Bids Farewell to the Concubine").

In an otherwise spirited defense of the film, Yomi Braester admits, "It is easy to understand why the film's attempt to use Beijing symbolism to counter nationalist myth has been misread" (95). Films produced and directed by the "Fifth Generation" of Chinese filmmakers, like Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou (*Raise the Red Lantern*), often offer a historical or sociological perspective, rather than a more allegorical or metaphorical one, such as can be seen in earlier Chinese films from the 1930s to the 1960s. This approach lends itself to certain pitfalls: the Fifth Generation films did well abroad, but poorly in China itself, where they are seen as either reactionary or revisionist. These films also present themselves and their (re-)visions of history as "truth," designed to teach the viewer something about China that is automatically authentic simply because the film is "Chinese" and it depicts "history." Wendy Larson speaks for many of the film's detractors when she points out that *Farewell My Concubine* has succeeded so well in the West precisely because of this:

Farewell has convinced Western viewers that it is an authentic portrayal of Chinese history. Yet at the same time, the film continually turns the viewer's attention toward an ahistorical consciousness and a gendered subjectivity-under-power...[the film] appropriates the past to reject history in favor of fantasy as the means through which Chinese national subjects who want to enter transnational culture must produce personal and cultural narratives. (73)

Here she specifically refers to China's twentieth century, presented (she says) by Chen as a time and place apart from history even though the movie claims to portray it faithfully. An "ahistorical consciousness" suggests a history that

somehow transcends "real" time and takes on a larger, essentialist connotation that implies a humanist history shared by all subjects. In other words, by coming to "consciousness" beyond the bounds of history, we run the risk of ignoring the historical context of the film. Thereby, perhaps, Chen runs the risk of making the movie more appealing to a larger international audience not so invested in the broader political implications of (for example) the Cultural Revolution, as in the "fantasy" of a timeless Oriental subjectivity.

This works in seeming opposition to the worldwide attention to Chinese polity that I described earlier. If the world, especially the Western/Northern world, pays so much attention to China's emerging economy and increased military might, then surely it is also in Western interests to learn more about "real" Chinese history--itself a problematic term--than indulge in fantasy. I do not wish to attribute to *Farewell My Concubine* the kind of sinister meta-consciousness that Larson suggests. Admittedly, it is difficult to ignore the film's glamour and spectacle. The color, music, and melodrama are undeniable, and can be nothing other than a conscious decision to present a cinematic vision of China to the West. However, this vision and the purpose behind it differ from what Larson *et al.* perceive as a misguided attempt to stage "local" culture on a transnational scale in the hope of attaining a vague sort of historical legitimacy in the eyes of the West.

Orientalist prejudices and pop-culture saturation lead many Westerners to perceive the Far East in general, and China in particular, as an exoticized locale of

cheongsam-wearing courtesans, opium dens, and sexual intrigue. And undeniably, *Farewell My Concubine* offers up for our consumption visions of prostitution, opium use, and sexual desire. However, the film does not succumb to any of our preconceptions of these elements. The prostitute leaves the business to become a respectable married woman; the drug abuser recovers from his addiction with realistic hardship, but no permanent damage; and the sexual intrigue occurs not between a man and an exotic/objectified Eastern woman, but between men. *Farewell My Concubine*, deliberately playing off the trope proffered by the opera *Bawang bie ji*, sets up a Western audience to enjoy a vision of "traditional" China, and then very carefully subverts the audience's expectations. From this perspective we can analyze the film as both cultural production and cultural commodification. It deconstructs culture myths paradoxically through repackaging and exploiting those same myths, exposing them as insufficient metacultural constructions imposed by outsiders. The film's emphasis on authenticity imposed from without versus identity discovered from within demonstrates, contrary to critical opinion, Chen Kaige's vision of what happens when various narratives of identity are either taken too seriously or not seriously enough. This tension between imposition and discovery informs my entire project as I study characters who are caught between the two, and seek, with varying success, to integrate them.

Since *Farewell My Concubine* uses Beijing opera as its main conceit, I will begin by discussing Beijing opera in general, and what it means to Chinese culture as a whole (and also what it does not mean). I will then move on to a more specific examination of

Bawang bie ji, how it does not fit with what we might expect from a traditional Beijing opera, and why *Farewell My Concubine* uses it as a trope in spite of, or because of, this.

Beijing Opera: a Short Introduction

"If you're human," says the harsh master of *Farewell My Concubine's* opera school, "you go to the opera." The rest of the film supports his assertion: throughout the movie, the opera house is always packed, whether by occupying Japanese forces, Chinese nationalists, or everyday citizens. It seems, indeed, that every human goes to the opera. The film presents Beijing opera as a cultural art form that permeates the traditional barriers of class, gender, education, and even nation and race (it is very popular with the Japanese officers during the occupation). And yet, Beijing opera is also inherently "Chinese," a marker of cultural identity and authenticity. As Colin MacKerras explains in *The Rise of the Beijing Opera*, Beijing opera is "China's most widely loved operatic form" (2). Peter Lovrick adds, "In the West, Beijing opera has come to represent the Chinese approach to theatre" (Siu and Lovrick 13). *Farewell My Concubine* capitalizes on this iconic status, marketing the image of Beijing opera to its Western audience as a sign of the film's authority to portray "Chinese life" as Western viewers would understand and accept it.

In this way, Beijing opera becomes a part of China's ideoscape. Ideoscapes involve what Appadurai calls the "subtle question of what sets of communicative genres are valued in what way (newspapers versus cinema, for example) and what sorts of pragmatic genre conventions govern the collective readings of different kinds of texts"

(34). If *Farewell My Concubine* is the text at hand, then Beijing opera, as a well-known part of China's cultural history, makes up part of the ideoscape of both China and the film. However, as with all the other scapes, the ideoscape offered by Beijing opera is not a simple window into the film, but rather a marker of the connection between a transnational product and cultural heritage.

Admittedly, the idea of Beijing opera as a monolithic representation of Chinese culture presents problems. After all, Chinese opera varies widely across the country, depending on its region of origin, and it is fallacious to assume that Beijing opera is the most "authentically national" form of the art, even if it is the most popular. There are over three hundred regional opera styles in China. It would be more accurate to say that Beijing opera combines features of many of these styles, thereby creating a cosmopolitan art reflective of its position in the Chinese capital. *Jingxi* is Mandarin for Beijing opera--literally, "theater of the capital." "Opera" is, of course, a misnomer, a term applied to the art form by Westerners, since Western opera as we know it has no exact counterpart in China. While Western operas like *Madama Butterfly* often have tragic plots, use realistic props and sets, and feature long, coherent story arcs, Chinese operas (especially Beijing operas) tend to be comic, rely heavily on stylization, and are quite short. It is not uncommon for an evening at the Beijing opera to include what Westerners would consider "skits": short scenes from traditional Chinese stories, histories, or legends, performed with music and dancing.

Neither the contexts nor plots of the operas are explained, since all of them are predicated on legends, myths, and stories that are very familiar to the Chinese. The

characters' extravagant costumes and elaborate makeup tell the audience more about their characteristics than does plot exposition. For example, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, Chinese opera-goers know that a character whose face is painted white is a traitor. Every gesture is fully rehearsed, and there is no room for improvisation or even individual interpretation of a role. *Farewell My Concubine* brings this attitude towards tradition sharply into focus when Yuan, the upper-class opera expert, accuses Xiaolou of taking only five steps when he enters the stage instead of the customary seven. Performers are cast within role-types from which they do not deviate throughout their careers: *dan* (female roles), *sheng* (male roles), *jing* (painted face roles,) or *chou* (the clown), and there are several sub-specializations for each role type. This strict adherence to rules and tradition creates an atmosphere of familiarity and comfort for those who know the art form, and of alienation for those who do not.¹⁴

Beijing operas are classified as either *wen* (civil dramas) or *wu* (military dramas), in contrast to Western/Aristotelian divisions between comedy and tragedy. Colin Mackerras explains:

There is no highly developed theory of comedy and tragedy in the Chinese literary tradition. The concept that the essence of tragedy resides in the unsuccessful struggle of the hero against his own fate is, not surprisingly, totally absent from the Chinese world. On the whole, the Chinese do not like a sad ending. The battle scenes generally show the good character and his or her men victorious, and although some of the enemy may be killed, this is not represented by actors dropping down on the stage but by rapid exiting. (*Peking Opera* 26)

¹⁴ I do not have time to discuss even the basics of Beijing opera performances as thoroughly I would like; for more information on this fascinating art form, see Mackerras, Siu and Lovrick, and Halson. (All are fully cited in my Bibliography.)

Bawang bie ji, a *wu* opera, deviates from these Chinese operatic norms in many ways. How is *Bawang bie ji* an "atypical" Beijing opera, and why is it an appropriate motif for a modern film about Chinese history--so appropriate that the film even borrowed its title?

Bawang bie ji: "*Lasciatemi morir!*"

The plots of many popular Chinese operas can seem bizarre to a Western outsider, such as René Gallimard, who goes to see Song perform in order to "further his education." Here are some brief examples of Chinese opera plots: a snake comes down from heaven to marry a mortal, becomes pregnant by him, and fights battles for his love, but is ultimately locked in a tower by a mad monk who doesn't approve of bestiality. In another opera, the naughty Monkey King steals all of Laozi's magic pills because he wasn't invited to a heavenly garden party. In a third opera, the clever fox fairy turns on her unfaithful human husband and exacts a terrible revenge.¹⁵

All things considered, a Western audience might turn with relief to *Bawang bie ji* for its relatively straightforward plot. China is approaching the end of the Qin dynasty, which over two thousand years ago laid the foundations for China's immense bureaucratic apparatus (Lieberthal 5). Civil war tears the country apart as two rival leaders fight for the supreme position of Emperor: Xiang Yu, the King of Chu, and Liu Bang, the King of Han. The opera begins when Xiang Yu knows his defeat is nigh. His

¹⁵ Respectively, these operas are *The Legend of the White Snake*, *Monkey Business in Heaven*, and *The Wrath of the Fox Fairy*. (Further information is available in Siu and Lovrick.)

troops have fled, and he is left only with his horse and his faithful concubine, Yu Ji.

Xiang Yu orders Yu Ji to defect to the Han in order to save herself (scholars disagree on whether this is genuine concern on his part, or a test of her loyalty), but Yu Ji refuses to leave her king. Instead, she distracts him by dancing with his sword, and at the end of the dance, cuts her throat so that she will not be a burden to him in his own escape. Grief-stricken, Xiang Yu plunges into battle one final time. At the moment of his defeat, he too commits suicide.

How, then, can we take at face value Mackerras' assertion that "the essence of tragedy resides in the unsuccessful struggle of the hero against his own fate is, not surprisingly, totally absent from the Chinese world"? What could be more tragic than a story about a double suicide, during the course of which the hero most certainly struggles against his own destiny? Moreover, why would Chen Kaige choose this opera, which deviates so much from the general pattern of Beijing opera, to serve as the focus for his narrative in *Farewell My Concubine*?

Many of the film's critics would, I am sure, respond cynically: that *Bawang bie ji* was chosen precisely *for* its atypicalness, for its deviations from the norm that allow it to conform to a more Western standard of what an opera should be like (lovers separated by a cruel fate, the self-sacrificing woman, the soaring duets and the tragic finale). Here we find the transnational moment, during which the film performs traditional Chinese culture in such a way that Western audiences can find a way "in" to access the message of the film: the attempt at hybridity. The sell-out.

I will concede that, in part, this cynicism is warranted. In his remarkable study *Cross-Dressing in Chinese Opera*, Siu Leung Li offers a convincing case for the parallelism between *Bawang bie ji* and a typical Western opera such as *I Puritani* or even *Madama Butterfly*. Siu backs up Mackerras's assertions by declaring that "The Chinese operatic tradition represents happy union as a general structural device," but also acknowledges that *Bawang bie ji* is an exception to the rule. He compares Yu Ji's determination to kill herself in order to save her king (she pleads with him, "My king, give me your precious sword") to the heroines of Italian opera who cry: "*Lasciatemi morir!*" "Let me die!" (67, 75). Siu's penetrating insight acknowledges a cultural trope on which the Western psyche is fixated: that of the tragic heroine.

We might expect, therefore, that *Bawang bie ji's* profound differences from other Beijing operas might make it less popular with Chinese audiences while simultaneously rendering it more accessible to Western ones. However, Liu says that it has "enjoyed unsurpassed popularity" in China since the great *dan* actor Mei Lanfang became internationally famous for his portrayal of Yu Ji (76). Colin Mackerras acknowledges that the opera is "famous" (*Beijing Opera* 26), and Harry Kuoshu calls it "a favorite piece in the Beijing Opera repertoire" (Kuoshu 70).

I found these claims curious, since my own research had unearthed comparatively little information about the opera itself. Mackerras's own 1972 study of Beijing opera does not mention it. Nor do any of the various volumes I consulted on the plots of popular Chinese operas. These sources all have one thing in common, however: they were published before the release of *Farewell My Concubine* in 1993. Since 1993, most

sources published on Beijing opera do, in fact, mention *Bawang bie ji*. Therefore the movie appears to have had the effect of reigniting interest in the opera it appropriates, rather than using a more "typical" Chinese opera to market culture for its own purposes.

The film does have certain purposes, of course. In returning to a discussion of the film itself, I will now demonstrate that *Farewell My Concubine* uses the conceit provided by the plot of *Bawang bie ji* both to exploit and to undermine Orientalist cultural myths and stereotypes used to market a vision of China.

"You really are Concubine Yu": the film, reality, and history

In *Bawang bie ji*, Yu Ji selflessly kills herself in the hope that her beloved king will escape and survive, thus fulfilling the Western viewer's desire for Asian feminine subjection and sacrifice (as I discussed in the previous chapter). *Farewell My Concubine* concludes with a similar scene, except that now the concubine and king are actors in a gymnasium. The audience is unmistakably supposed to make the connection between the "fantasy" of the opera and the "reality" of the film, as the movie opens with the two actors in full opera costumes; however, Cheng Dieyi and Duan Xiaolou do not exemplify the virtues of fidelity and bravery extolled by the opera. They become good friends in the harsh environment of the opera school, but once they reach adulthood and leave the school's confines for their own acting careers, the bonds between them prove more fragile. Dieyi loves Xiaolou (and even tells him that he wants to be with him for the rest of their lives), but Xiaolou marries the beautiful prostitute Juxian. In retaliation, Dieyi

becomes Yuan's pet. Dieyi and Xiaolou's offstage lives contrast sharply with the lives of the noble characters of the opera who risk everything to remain faithful to one another.

The dangerous turns of Chinese history separate Dieyi and Xiaolou as well. Rather than presenting an "ahistorical consciousness," the film contains a scene in which Xiaolou attacks a Japanese soldier backstage during the Japanese occupation of China. Even as Dieyi receives applause from the enemy onstage, the Japanese drag Xiaolou away and put him in jail. In order to save Xiaolou, Dieyi agrees to give a private performance to the Japanese officers, after which Xiaolou is freed. Xiaolou, however, does not appreciate his friend's efforts on his behalf. When he demands to know if Dieyi performed for the Japanese, and Dieyi tells him, "There's one [Japanese officer] called Aoki. He genuinely likes opera," Xiaolou spits in his face and temporarily quits the opera altogether. Here, Xiaolou's political, social, and historical awareness wages war against Dieyi's insistence on art for art's sake. This persists during the Cultural Revolution, when the Red Guard persecutes opera singers as decadent reactionaries. Xiaolou breaks under duress, and once again repudiates Dieyi, and Juxian as well, in a wrenching scene that eventually culminates in Juxian's suicide (in other words, the suicide of a true concubine). In short, the film deconstructs the opera's message by placing it in a (post)modern setting that sharply contrasts with the romanticized conflict of the Qin dynasty with the uglier, grittier traumas of twentieth-century China.

Juxian, the prostitute character (that is, the character who just happens to be a prostitute) shows how our expectations can be subverted. What could be a more stereotypically Western (and therefore marketable) image of China than the seductive girl

in a cheongsam? Juxian, Dieyi's nemesis and Xiaolou's wife, is, like Dieyi and Xiaolou, a socially marginal figure. Before her marriage to Xiaolou, she was a prostitute, and apparently a very popular one, since her fellow call girls refer to her as the "phoenix" of her brothel. She leaves the brothel, lies to Xiaolou that she was ostracized for becoming engaged, and announces that she will kill herself if he tires of her. Already we see several stereotypical categories into which Juxian could potentially fall: the almond-eyed seductress, the ruthless gold-digger, and the whore with a good heart. But while Juxian partially fits each of these stereotypes, she conforms fully to none of them. She is certainly beautiful and capable of seduction, but she spends most of the movie as a happily married woman wearing practical, nearly shapeless clothing. She immediately latches onto the chance to marry Xiaolou, a famous actor, but she appears genuinely devoted to him. Finally, she shows maternal tenderness to Dieyi when he is in the throes of his opium addiction, but makes it clear that she still regards him as a threat to her relationship with Xiaolou and will not hesitate to strike back at him if necessary. Because she does not fit into any of our predetermined ideas of what a sexy "Oriental" woman should be, especially a (former) prostitute, Juxian overturns our expectations for her character. In this way, she becomes a marketing vehicle for the movie, but one that ultimately subverts the viewer's prejudices in an unexpected and startling way. If this particular idea about China was mistaken, we must wonder if perhaps our other preconceptions are wrong as well.

This is the first part of the film's "genderscape" I wish to address. Juxian, as a subversive cultural icon of China, also embodies the positive aspects of femininity. She

is an active, clever, strong-minded woman, willing to adapt to societal change, and to force Xiaolou to adapt along with her in the interests of survival. From call girl to actor's wife to homemaker, she is a social chameleon who acts on her environment rather than being acted upon; even her suicide, though inspired by rejection and grief, is an act of will rather than passivity. Though she suffers many losses and frustrations--not the least of which is the miscarriage of her only child--she emerges as a powerful and complex figure, a woman to be reckoned with.

But while Juxian refuses to perform the roles we expect of her, Cheng Dieyi, the film's focus, cannot do anything else. This, too, confounds our expectations because Dieyi insists, repeatedly, that he is not what we perceive him to be (i.e., a man). He has a difficult time separating his own life experience from that of the female characters he plays onstage. He is not wholly to blame for this. At the opera school, he was trained to perform female roles, and was beaten for insisting, "I am by nature a boy, not a girl." It is not until he undergoes what Wendy Larson accurately calls "symbolic rape" at the hands of his beloved Xiaolou--who viciously shoves a metal pipe into his mouth in frustration at Dieyi's inability to say the line correctly--that Dieyi proclaims himself, in song, to be female (79). After this, as he grows up, he submerges so much of himself in his characters that he prompts Xiaolou to say in exasperation, "I'm just a fake king. You really are Concubine Yu." Although Xiaolou speaks sarcastically, his words ring true. The overriding passion of Dieyi's life, aside from Xiaolou, is to perfect himself as a performer of *dan* roles. To this end, he meticulously cares for his accessories and costumes. In fact, we learn in the novel by Lillian Lee, on which the movie was based,

that Dieyi buys his own costumes rather than renting them as the other actors do. He practices constantly, and even identifies himself with Yu Ji offstage, as in the scene when he paints his face and sings drunkenly with Yuan on Xiaolou's wedding night.

While Juxian took her place on the genderscape as a positive, though complex character, Dieyi's own place is far more ambivalent, and less positive. Unlike Juxian, he cannot be a strong woman like Yu Ji. For Dieyi, his masculinity, not his femininity, is a source of lack. This echoes Song Liling, who resembles Dieyi in several particulars, not the least of which is living her own role so deeply that she continues to refer to herself as female even when standing nude before Gallimard. However, while Song's complex identity similarly calls for a more fluid approach to gender, she is able to use that identity in order to preserve herself in the face of persecution and difficulty. Dieyi, on the other hand, loses himself in a way that destroys him. Symbolically castrated at the beginning of the film, when his mother cuts off his extra finger, and then symbolically raped by Xiaolou, Dieyi can conform to neither a strict masculine nor feminine gender role. This makes him successful in his professional life, but deeply unhappy in his private one. As a metaphor for China, as I discuss below, Dieyi is neither the woman who symbolizes the nation, nor the man who can rescue her from the fraught past, but is more interesting than either of these. He is something else entirely, something unaccounted for by earlier modes of postcolonial thought such as those espoused by Said and even Bhabha.

For example, I do not mean to suggest here that by changing one or two particulars, Dieyi would suddenly be "okay" and fit comfortably into Chinese society. Being heterosexual would not save him, as it were. Even then, should he "merely" be a

cross-dresser and not a gay man, he would still destabilize the notion that man stands in for modernity while woman represents tradition. By examining why, exactly, Dieyi is so personally and specifically invested in the character of the concubine, we discover what he is trying to (re-)create; by discovering what he is trying to recreate, we can draw a parallel between his intentions and those of the film. Specifically, Dieyi is a figure on the margins of society who is trying to appropriate a privileged and mainstream identity. Dieyi is an illiterate gay actor, born into the working class, idolized onstage but held in contempt by polite society offstage. By contrast, Yu Ji is a tragic heroine, a figure of aristocratic beauty and virtue who occupies a prime position in the national narrative. The other *dan* roles Dieyi performs also fall into this category; from what we see in the movie, he also performs the parts of Yang Guifei in *The Drunken Beauty* and Du Liniang in *The Peony Pavilion*, both of whom are, like Yu Ji, privileged and celebrated beauties of classical China. In embodying the role of a refined, socially-accepted (and lauded) female, Dieyi both elides his own unstable and ever-changing role in twentieth-century China and embraces that same China's fictive past. Seen like this, Dieyi is attempting to create his own identity out of unlikely materials (a noble lady from a gay male actor), in much the same way that *Farewell My Concubine* builds a vision of "China" out of three marginal Chinese citizens (two actors and a prostitute).

Dieyi is the film's focal point. As such, he represents two Chinas: firstly, the oft-Orientalized vision of the West, of ancient courts, romantic stories, and political intrigue, and secondly, the harsh reality of his own lifetime, during which he is alternately exalted and excoriated for his profession, his talents, and his sexuality. As Dieyi performs the

dual identities of noble lady and marginalized actor, the film's audience questions which role is the truly authentic one, and what implications the notion of "authenticity" has for a film like *Farewell My Concubine*. What is at stake here?

According to Wendy Larson and other critics, Fifth Generation Chinese films have arrogated the responsibility of representing China accurately to the rest of the world. Larson also claims that this is impossible, saying that, "When Chinese film is positioned within the transnational and transcultural market, any innocent notion of cultural representation immediately becomes simplistic and reductionist and reinforces the consumerist commodification of culture" (84). *Farewell My Concubine* offers its own riposte: Dieyi himself feels the drive to perform as a moral issue of responsible representation (hence his perfectionism). As Stan Godlovitch points out in *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts* (1999):

Authenticity may seem to carry its own warrant, for not only does it connote "accuracy," it also connotes a quasi-moral "genuineness." The latter sense arises in crises of self-integrity where one anguishes over being true to oneself and sticking up for one's deepest, self-defining convictions. (167)

Dieyi's problem is that he has more than one self/self-definition for which he is "sticking up," which begs Godlovitch's next question: "To what are we meant to be true?" (168). To this end, Dieyi sacrifices his "real" self for his "stage" self, identifying himself fully with the women he portrays, and the version of Chinese society they represent. In clinging to his own version of China's past, Dieyi denies its present, as when he dismisses

the value of the new Maoist operas proposed by his adopted protégé Xiao Si. These operas intend to present another national narrative, but one without costumes and ritual, without glamour and grace. Upon learning that his place of honor in the opera company has been usurped by the treacherous Xiao Si, Dieyi laments to Xiaolou: "Why does the concubine have to die?"

The false ideal of authenticity plagues Dieyi throughout his life, and is precisely what the film exposes in its rendering of China. If, as Rey Chow says, Dieyi "not only embodies a different time and value, but also represents an otherness that is absolute" (141), then he can in no way be expected to give an "authentic" performance of China today, as critics accuse Chen Kaige of attempting to do through the character (and through the film as a whole). Yet Dieyi is unquestionably the film's center. Xiaolou, and even Juxian, though complex and intelligently rendered characters, do not generate pathos--or drama--on the same level as Dieyi, and it is with Dieyi that our sympathies lie. Dieyi wonders why the concubine must die. The answer is that, at least for the purposes of Chen's film, the concubine Yu Ji embodies historic, romantic China, and Dieyi embodies Yu Ji. In purchasing his own costumes and accessories, he even "buys into" the imperialist mythos of China.

So far, Wendy Larson's argument holds up. In attempting to claim a romanticized past for China and for himself, Dieyi is indeed subscribing to the national narrative, as Larson also accuses Chen Kaige of doing with the film, while at the same time performing a gaudy "Chinese" spectacle for a transnational audience. As Dieyi reproduces this ideology for his audience (both in the opera house and in the cinema),

Larson believes Chen similarly reproduces a consumable and commercial version of China for his. This argument would be correct, if the story ended there, but it does not.

In the film's final scene, Dieyi and Xiaolou have returned to Beijing after being separated for twenty-two years during the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution. In a gymnasium, which is a far cry from a traditional Beijing opera stage, Dieyi and Xiaolou begin to rehearse their old roles of Yu Ji and Xiang Yu. In the middle of rehearsing, Xiaolou causes Dieyi once again to misquote the opera lyric he so often misquoted in his youth: he says, "I am by nature a boy, not a girl." When Xiaolou teases Dieyi for repeating his "mistake," Dieyi's eyes, elaborately painted for his role, open wide in obvious revelation. Directly afterwards, he distracts Xiaolou, steals his sword, and slits his throat with it--his final recreation of the suicide of Yu Ji.

In this moment, we understand that traditional models of masculinity and femininity do not suffice to explain or contain Dieyi. Even such a talented actor cannot find space to perform himself between these models, and any widespread understanding of a suitable genderscape that would allow him more flexibility is sorely lacking. Dieyi is also Chen's metaphor (one of many) for China itself. He is one of the most famous actors in all of Beijing opera, which is one of China's most revered traditional art forms, and he plays roles like that of Yu Ji, who occupy prime positions in China's mythic past.

But, like China, he never fits easily into one category or another. He is neither man nor woman, nor can he transition easily between the past and the present--the past, we might argue, is literally another country. Dieyi cannot be defined by any hard and fast standard, any more than China can. He returns to his old job in what should be a moment

of triumph, when China is changing once more and he has been permitted to return home and reunite with Xiaolou. However, when Xiaolou points out that he has made the same mistake he made in his childhood, Dieyi understands that, so far as he is concerned, *nothing* has changed--or at least, nothing has changed enough. He still wears the concubine's costume, and he still makes the same mistakes. He is still not sufficiently masculine, even in the face of his own insistence that he is a "boy." Here, Chen Kaige puts a twist on the construction of masculinity as modern and femininity as traditional. The realities of Dieyi's everyday life are the same as they were when he was a child just learning his role for the first time. When he tries to be accepted, one final time, as a man, he is thrown back into the past. In this moment, Chen associates masculinity with the hidebound and the traditional--that which oppresses and restricts, while Dieyi requires a paradigm that is both new and progressive, and that will allow him, in some way, to be both a man and Yu Ji without destroying himself.

Benzi Zhang argues that Dieyi's suicide is his way "to face his true self by death" and to "express himself and to assert his homosexual identity" (Zhang 64). But I read Dieyi's death as a final expression of defeat and of the irreconcilability of his two selves. Ultimately, he chooses to die rather than face that defeat, just as Yu Ji does--and he is even in costume, holding on to that stage identity until the very end. The mythical past that Dieyi strives to represent in order to provide the ballast for his own "authentic" self, ultimately leads to his destruction, as his stage self and his private self are too disparate to work in harmony.

Conclusion

Farewell My Concubine is an elegant film. Its many themes come together more or less seamlessly. Cheng Dieyi, the film's most marginalized character, serves as the movie's focal point, thereby undermining any claim the message could have to being "mainstream Chinese"--destabilizing center and periphery. The other main characters are also marginalized figures, and the opera on which the film itself is based was not (at the time of the film's production) generally upheld as a typical example of Beijing opera, itself another cultural marker of China. The movie introduces certain stereotypes, such as the devious prostitute and the delicate lady, only to surprise the audience by subverting those same stereotypes: the prostitute is a loyal wife, and the lady is a man. While many critics believe that the film cynically capitalizes on an Orientalist, stereotypical view of China in order to market that view to the West, I believe that it exploits those same prejudices first to market itself and then to expose such stereotypes for the flimsy creations they are.

An examination of these fluctuations and contradictions is necessary for an understanding of the film. Older theoretical paradigms like Said's, which tend to reify binarism and oversimplify existing cultural and social conditions, cannot explain the film, nor interpret the discursive markers of "Chinese-ness" we find in it. It takes a newer, more inclusive and flexible model, like Appadurai's, to approach both. The movie offers an alternative way of looking at gender, as well as at the existing binary models of nationalism and globalization, of center and periphery. Dieyi is the protagonist who embodies an indefinable China, and who can never be wholly comfortable in an imperial

past, a socialist present, or a transnational future. Through him, director Chen Kaige rejects binarism and offers China as an immensely complicated entity poised on the edge of an uncertain global future. Both China and the West need a new vocabulary; the old paradigms, after all, proved disastrous for Dieyi, who under different circumstances might well have thrived as a sensitive and talented artist. By acknowledging global and cultural flows as ever-shifting and mutable, and rejecting traditional either-or categories of thinking, we can discursively define a world where the concubine does not have to die.

CHAPTER IV

"I DO NOT MEAN TO DECEIVE": TRUTH, IDENTITY, AND RE-NAMING IN *A GESTURE LIFE* AND *THE BOOK OF SALT*

In my third chapter, I branch out into a different genre. Having already focused on drama and film, I now turn to fiction. I have discussed how both *M. Butterfly* and *Farewell My Concubine* problematize images of an exotic Orient by showing us how the protagonists of these works, both of whom appear to "embody" that exoticism, are not at all what they seem. Song Liling, the beautiful opera singer, is a male spy for a country that despises "her" and the lover of a white man who cannot accept who and what she really is. Cheng Dieyi, who wishes to embody a lotus-blossom-like, traditional femininity, is a man who cannot survive in a world that insists on the separation of male from female, and past from present. As Edward Said points out, the Western notion of "the Orient" says more about those who imaginatively construct it than the people and places it purports to understand. *M. Butterfly* and *Farewell My Concubine* both combat stereotypes of the Orient, whether blatantly (*M. Butterfly*) or subtly (*Farewell*), through central characters who marshal a Western audience's expectations only to subvert them. At the same time, the characters, while serving these larger subversive interests of the texts, do not personally "triumph" in the end. Rather, their subjectivities are fractured as

the texts demonstrate, among other things, the harm traditional stereotypes and (trans)nationalist power structures can do to marginalized persons.

In Chang-rae Lee's 1999 novel *A Gesture Life* and in Monique Truong's 2004 novel *The Book of Salt*, we encounter two more protagonists who struggle with cultural identity and community. Like Song Liling, Hata of *A Gesture Life* and Binh of *The Book of Salt* circulate around the globe, left to their own devices as they navigate the world in the absence of any larger support system. In this chapter, I demonstrate how these two men attempt to produce their histories and determine their futures on their own terms, but because they are unstable, transnational subjects, they fail. Having emigrated to the West from Asia, neither man knows how to structure his own identity in the absence of the narratives that defined him in his home nation.

Chang-rae Lee and Monique Truong give us protagonists who begin their lives in Asia--Japan and Vietnam, respectively--but emigrate to the West (America and France) in adulthood, making them transnational subjects. Both men have fraught and hidden histories; but, tellingly, both novels are written in the first-person perspective, from the protagonists' points of view. This lends both novels the air of being both a memoir and a confession, luring the reader to believe that s/he is getting an "honest" and "ethical" account of two Asian characters' lived and living experiences in both Asia and the West. This is far from the truth--as we would conceive of truth. But as Foucault reminds us, "truth" is always in the eye of the power structures that define it.

The two novels are concerned with the ethics of (self-)representation and narration. Hata and Binh both tell what the reader would regard as "lies"; that is, until the

very ends of their respective stories, they intentionally deceive us about their pasts and, to some degree, their presents. As Foucault points out, the two are hardly independent of each other. As subjects who are denied agency--in fact, who are "effects" of the societies around them, just like their stories--telling what the reader would regard as an "untruth" is the only gesture towards self-determination they seem capable of making. Both novels are rife with dramatic irony, and the audience can infer more about the characters and their pasts than the first-person narrative form would seem to suggest. As such, Lee and Truong use Hata and Binh as the foci around which the larger work of the novels revolves. This work is naturally multi-faceted. Both authors use their characters' sometimes unreliable, always problematic narration to explore issues of self-identification and agency. If Hata and Binh both frame their stories in ways that are at times disingenuous and deceptive, then those stories connect to larger questions of truth-telling, nationhood, and identity. Ultimately, both novels suggest that Hata and Binh have both failed in defining themselves as persons, and posit alternatives to their behavior that allow other transnational characters/subjects to survive, and even thrive where Hata and Binh cannot.

I have mentioned Foucault to remind the reader of what is ultimately at stake for Hata and Binh, and in the larger work of the novels. For Foucault and the critics who have succeeded (and complicated) him, truth is not a Platonic ideal to be chased after and uncovered, however imperfectly, in the world. It does not "exist," waiting for a seeker to pluck it out of the ether. Rather truth is "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true"

(Foucault 1668). The key question here is: Who establishes the rules? Who gets to decide what is false and what is true, who gets to exercise "'The will to truth'--that set of exclusionary practices whose function is to establish distinctions between those statements which will be considered to be false and those which will be considered to be true" (Mills 74)? Both novels feature protagonists who are at the mercy of global and historical forces, just like everybody else in the world. As Foucault is at pains to point out, power is not personal, but institutional, and no one is immune to its effects. However, isolated globetrotters like Hata and Binh are even more vulnerable to the effects of power-in-action than people who are more secure in narratives of citizenship. Therefore, they try to compensate by exercising a "will to truth."

Hata and Binh try to make their own rules about what truth is, and how and to whom they will tell it. By denying the reader access to certain facts until it becomes impossible, or at least too difficult to conceal them, and by "spinning" the events of their lives in order to present the existing facts in a more positive light, Hata and Binh are not so much "lying" as they are attempting to construct their own, *extremely* local "ensemble of rules" that will constitute truth: so local, in fact, that the ensemble is individual to each of them. When Hata and Binh construct their narratives with a first-person tone of confession even as they withhold crucial information from the reader, they exercise as much authority and agency as they can. Truth, as Foucault notoriously says, *is* power. But this authority/agency can never be total or complete. Of course, it never can be for any one individual subject, however privileged, within a Foucauldian schema: in that schema, we are all produced by society and born into hegemony.

Nevertheless, characters and subjects like Hata and Binh are at a particular disadvantage. They have been born into national hegemonies that teach them various "ensembles of rules" for belonging to the nation and/or the state. However, those rules do not account for the fundamental circumstances of their identities: ethnicity (Hata) and sexual orientation (Binh). Although Hata follows the rules, he is never truly accepted into Japanese society because of his Korean heritage. Likewise, Binh is repudiated by his fellow Vietnamese, not for his ethnicity but because of his homosexuality. Because of this, when Hata and Binh try to produce their own truths, they cannot do so within the circumscribed national parameters into which they were born because those parameters already exclude them. Nor do they succeed, however hard they try, in producing truth in a more transnational context--that is, in the various places they travel after leaving the nations of their birth, and where they also fail to find a home. By the ends of their respective novels, their carefully constructed histories fall apart and reveal Hata and Binh, not only as unreliable narrators, but as wholly isolated characters with fractured identities and little access to true agency. As such, my specific argument here is that Hata and Binh fail to create suitable narratives for themselves in the midst of cultural confusion.

Both Hata and Binh are unreliable narrators. I will explore this in more detail when I look at both characters individually and in the context of history, but it is crucial to establish this unreliability at the outset, because it is closely linked to their lack of fixity in the world(s) they inhabit. What implications does this non-fixity have for the ethics of narration and representation, and for the production of truth?

I begin with Hata of *A Gesture Life*. Several articles have already analyzed Hata, the main character of *A Gesture Life*, regarding both his tenuous connections to wartime Japanese nationalism and his unreliable narration.¹⁶ However, I have found very little scholarship on Hata's position as a fraught transnational subject, so curiously removed from his own history and continually trying to compensate for that lack. As for *The Book of Salt* and its main character, a gay Vietnamese chef named Bình, almost nothing has been written at all; small wonder, given that the book is several years more recent than *A Gesture Life*, and that Monique Truong does not yet enjoy Chang-rae Lee's international reputation. Nevertheless, the book merits attention for the complex issues of transnationalism, ethics, and identity that meet head-on. Moreover, the protagonists share some startling similarities that make it productive to examine them side-by-side.

"People Know Me Here": Hata and Non-Belonging

"Doc" Hata is a man in his seventies who served in the Japanese army during the Second World War and emigrated to the United States in the sixties. We know nothing of the time between the end of his military service (the end of the war) and his arrival in America. This is blank, interstitial time; Hata himself never addresses this gap. We never learn what he did, or how he lived, between 1945 and the 1960s.

Hata was not born Japanese, but was rather the son of two poor, working-class Korean people. At a young age he was adopted by a well-to-do Japanese family and

¹⁶ See my Bibliography for examples.

given a Japanese name. Though he always tried to please his Japanese family, going so far as to call his adoptive parents "my real parents," he never felt true filial affection for them: "I think of them warmly, as I do my natural parents, but to neither would I ascribe the business of having reared me, for it seems clear that it was the purposeful society that did so, and really nothing and no one else. I was more than grateful" (72-73). Always aware of his Korean birth, "grateful" for the opportunity to live a more prosperous life in Japan, Hata remains plagued by a continual sense of non-belonging, calling himself and other ethnic Koreans "Japanese, if ones in twilight" (72). When Japan enters the Second World War, Hata enlists, eager to be of service and to prove himself finally and completely "Japanese."

His ambitions are doomed to frustration. Though Hata makes a few friends in the army, he also finds himself mocked by his comrades and superiors. His commanding officer, the sinister camp doctor Captain Ono, tells Hata, "I need order from you, Lieutenant. Order and adherence to our code. And yet this is a challenge" (184). By not "adhering to the code," however hard he tries, Hata is continually made aware that he is not part of Ono's "our," not someone who belongs in a Japanese group. The situation worsens when a group of Korean "comfort women"--women forced into prostitution for Japanese soldiers--arrives at the camp. One of these women, named Kkutaeh and dubbed simply "K" by Hata, overhears Hata accidentally speaking Korean. She immediately identifies him as a fellow Korean in spite of his Japanese upbringing.

Hata is horrified at first, and vehemently denies her claims to and on his ethnicity, but he is also drawn to K, who herself becomes the exclusive "property" of Captain Ono.

Hata and K grow closer, but their closeness finally culminates in a sexual encounter for which K does not give consent, although neither does she resist Hata's advances. Shortly afterwards, she kills Ono, and begs Hata to kill her to spare her from her inevitable fate at the hands of Japanese soldiers, even explaining how he can do it without falling into danger himself: "The guards are going to return at any moment and they will announce themselves. When he doesn't answer they'll come in. You must say I killed him just as I did, and that you took his pistol and you shot me" (301). Yet Hata cannot do it. Instead, he stands by while Japanese soldiers lead K off to rape and murder her. Young-Oak Lee accurately says of Hata and his choices, "The sexuality that is abused and politicized under colonial rule is juxtaposed with love and truth that are abusively pursued" (157). Hata claims to love K and to feel an affinity with her, but in the end, he uses her for his own sexual gratification, and then sacrifices her to the Japanese soldiers who have never fully accepted him as one of their own. The choice continues to torment him for the rest of his life.

The schism between Hata's race and his nation reproduces itself when he tries to make a new life in the United States. He arrives in the sixties and settles in Bedleyville, a suburb of New York City that eventually gentrifies and becomes Bedley Run. (Hata acknowledges he has fictionalized both names.) Here, as in Japan, Hata tries desperately to fit in with his adopted country and culture. He acquires a house and adopts a daughter of his own in an attempt both to fulfill his own idea of "the American dream" and to atone for his past mistakes with K: he hopes that the girl he adopts will be from a good Korean family, as K was. He is dismayed, however, when his new "daughter" Sunny

arrives from the agency and is clearly half African-American, "the product of . . . a night's wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl" (204). Hata nevertheless feels obligated to assume responsibility for the child he demanded, though he feels no more love for her than he did for his adoptive Japanese parents--indeed, his first look at Sunny induces in him a feeling of "blighted hope" (204). Yet again, his attempts to assimilate into American life by creating a family for himself end in frustration when Sunny finally rebels and leaves home as a teenager.

Hata's belief that Sunny's race separates them points to larger issues of the connection between constructions of race and nation. His Korean birth separates him from his "real" Japanese parents. In turn, Sunny's African-American half puts her apart from her Korean-Japanese father, and unlike Hata, she doesn't evince any particular gratitude for her rescue from penurious circumstances. Rather, she mocks Hata for trying so hard to be a part of Bedley Run, the place he has chosen as his American home: "You know what I overheard down at the card shop? How nice it is to have such a 'good Charlie' to organize the garbage and sidewalk-cleaning schedule. That's what they really think of you" (95).

As the white villagers of Bedley Run carelessly conflate all Asian people together, much as Gallimard does in *M. Butterfly*, Hata's self-proclaimed, if ambiguous status as "a Japanese" sets him apart from them. Hata's friend Renny Bannerjee, an Indian American, also perceives the casual racism that actually seems to be increasing, rather than decreasing in Bedley Run.

Last week I'm there [in a tobacco shop] to buy cigarettes, just an in-and-out, and old Harris, who's sitting in his usual spot in the corner, says something about the millions of smokers in the Third World. I turned around and he just waited. I asked him if he was talking to me and he said he was interested to know what I thought about the situation. I told him I had no opinion and got my change and was about to leave when he said, "People don't even care about their own anymore." (133-34)

Renny, a long-time native of the town and a friend to many (and who also has a mercurial romance with the white realtor Liv Crawford), encounters "old man Harris," plainly known to him, yet who seems to have relegated him to the ranks of "Third World" smokers. Harris not only points at Renny's racial difference from himself (and from the mostly white affluent village), but goes farther, implying that Renny doesn't even belong to America--which might, perhaps, be worse than not belonging *in* America.

According to Renny, racism in Bedley Run has been on the rise: "I'm always this dark . . . But it never mattered much before" (134). Now, when more people of color-- moreover, people of color who are not native to the United States--are taking over businesses in Bedley Run, white residents feel threatened. Renny excludes Hata from this broad condemnation when he says, "I guess except for you, Doc," which shows that perhaps he is not as perceptive as Sunny, who has heard other slurs (134). When Liv Crawford objects to his assessment, Renny tells her that he has noticed the increase in such charged "observations," since now, "There's every sort of merchant in town, the Viet people who bought the cleaner's, the French-speaking black couple at the old candy

store" (134). In *Bedley Run*, racial "Others" are often also transnational "Others"--nonwhite immigrants who have come, like Doc Hata, to make a better life for themselves in the United States.

Anne McClintock says, "Nations are not simply phantasmagoria of the mind but are historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed. Nationalism becomes, as a result, radically constitutive of people's identities" (353). As outlined in the contexts I discuss below, we see that the "historical practices" that define Hata's existence, including Japan's attitude towards Korean people, complicate the intersection between Hata's Korean ethnicity, the Japanese nation he seeks, unsuccessfully, to embrace, and his later life in the United States, where he must contend with being the "good Charlie" in the inaccurately named "melting pot" that really uses whiteness as its dominant discourse.

Given the ambivalent relationship Hata maintains with three nations--Korea, Japan, and the United States--it might seem odd that I now draw parallels between Hata the transnational subject and Korea the nation. However, Hata's story embodies Foucault's (and Levinas's, Said's, Spivak's, Bhabha's, and countless others') contention that history is both lived and living--that the "return of the repressed" is not really a return, but rather the recognition of what has been present all along and continually denied. As Saskia Sassen puts it, "The past is unsettled, not in the sense that it yields only imperfect knowledge or data but in the sense that it lives" (269). Just as Hata's repressed memories plague him in his old age, Japan's actions in and against Korea still have consequences as Japan continues to deny its responsibility for many wartime

atrocities. Korea's story in the twentieth century is, like Hata's, a story of cultural confusion, of colonial domination and fractured identity during a time of unprecedented global violence.

Japan and its Conquests: Empire and Assimilation

In Chapter One I discussed the effects of Commodore Perry's arrival and Japan's subsequent, rapid industrialization under the Meiji restoration. Here, I specifically focus on Japan's complex relations with Korea, Hata's country of origin. I also connect this history to Hata's own story, and in the larger picture of my project, show how national belonging intersects and often conflicts with individual identity (especially individuals who have no firmly rooted national home), and how nation-building can similarly run afoul of an individual subject's own ability to define and narrate his or her own identity.

Japan always intended Korea, so strategically positioned between China and Russia, to be part of its imperial program. Many historians have pointed to a diversion in method and motive between the Japanese and European empires. Mark Peattie writes that while European nations "stumbled on" their colonial positions after these territories had already been "discovered" by adventurers, merchants, and missionaries, Japan's approach was more deliberate (218). However, there were similarities between the two approaches to empire. As in the European colonial model, the rhetoric of Japanese imperialism was full of the idea that it was Japan's "duty" to civilize its Asian neighbors, who were by turns primitive (the Micronesians) or weak and decadent (the Chinese and

the Koreans). Hata's fictional experience with his "real [Japanese] parents" was not unique or even unusual in real life. Koreans from lower classes were strongly encouraged "to speak Japanese, to live in Japanese homes, to dress in modern Japanese clothing, and generally to reinforce this physical identity with the ruling elite" (Peattie 241). Japan's two-pronged approach to empire, both military and cultural, thus found its apogee in Korea. The Koreans, as East Asians, were "like" the Japanese, although not quite good enough; nevertheless, with enough costuming and education, they could assume a convincing disguise, as Hata attempts to do.

In Madeline L'Engle's novel *A Wrinkle In Time*, the heroine, when faced with an important test, produces the correct answer: "No! 'Like' and 'equal' aren't the same thing at all!" Though Koreans might have been encouraged to be "like" the Japanese, they were certainly not equal. We can locate a version of Bhabha's theory of ambivalence in this startlingly schizoid colonial moment: specifically, we locate it in what Bhabha calls "the area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" (123). As always, Bhabha refers to European colonialism--specifically, "post-Enlightenment English colonialism"--and it is true, as I have said here and elsewhere, that Japan does not conform precisely to this model. Nevertheless, the moment of mimicry vis-à-vis the Koreans and the Japanese adheres more or less to Bhabha's definition.

Moreover, "In order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha 122). Thus, when the Japanese required the Koreans to mimic them, it was only to a point, and so the Koreans were constantly

reminded that they lacked agency on par with their colonizers: their inferiority emphasized Japanese superiority, and vice versa. Chang-Rae Lee makes use of this phenomenon in *A Gesture Life*: whenever Captain Ono mocks or speaks harshly to Hata, who only wants to fit in. Hata says that he "genuinely admires" Ono, and thus feels "the sharp heat of anger and shame" when Ono belittles him in front of his comrades in the infirmary (179, 178). Hata attempts to model his own behavior and professional training on Ono's example, but as an ethnic Korean, he can never be good enough. When he faithfully obeys Ono, he also opens himself up to ridicule and to the reminder that his attempts to assimilate into Japanese life somehow still fall short.

His shortcomings are also partly a result of his inability to overcome his Korean heritage completely. In spite of being raised by Japanese parents, Hata still speaks Korean fairly well, and in fact "slips" in his very first encounter with a Korean comfort woman in the camp. She flees her room, begging him for help in a tongue that he should not be able to understand, as most of his fellow officers don't. But he responds: "'There's no place to go,' I said, unthinking" (111). Astonished, she continues to plead with him in Korean until she is led away, and a Japanese soldier says to Hata, "I thought I heard you say something, in her tongue" (112). Hata immediately denies it, but his later encounters with K lead him to identify more and more closely with her, and with his own ethnicity, until he must choose between his ancestry and his environment, ultimately siding with the latter.

Japan's legacy of cultural and political imperialism over people like Hata endures. As Alexis Dudden says, "Separating this history [of Japanese imperialism] as either

economic or political--rather than insisting on both dimensions--encourages contemporary Japanese governments to continue to avoid responsibility for Japan's twentieth century" (25). The examples of Japan's refusal to acknowledge its wartime atrocities are legion. Especially relevant to this chapter is the creation of the Asian Women's Fund in 2007 to make economic restitutions to Korean "comfort women" like K. While the Japanese government helped to sponsor the fund, it refused to associate the sponsorship with any official admission of guilt or wrongdoing in the war. Haruki Wada, the fund's executive director, said, "It is true that it was not state compensation. Although the Japanese government spent lots of money on this, we were not able to give the impression that the government was taking full responsibility" (Hogg).

Like Japan, the ethnically Korean Hata has difficulty owning up to his actions in the war. A great deal of *A Gesture Life* is devoted to Hata's attempts both to divorce himself from the horrors of his past, and to divert the reader from his complicity in them. As such, he assumes a complex symbolism: that of someone who stands in for the very nation that he never fully feels a part of. Only when he begins to acknowledge what he saw, did, and was during that time does Hata find himself able to talk about the more recent difficulties of his past involving Sunny and her first, abortive pregnancy.

Burma (now Myanmar), the territory where Hata served during the Second World War, was perhaps a more fitting place for him than Japan. The country was first colonized by the British in the imperial heyday of the nineteenth century, and the Japanese overran Burma early in World War II. An independent Burmese army, believing in promises of liberation and independence from British rule, supplemented the

invading Japanese. However, when it became apparent that the Japanese mission was conquest, the Burmese began to resist, and returned their support to the Allied forces. "For here there was another Asia," explain historians Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, "the Asia of the minority groups" (83). An anonymous resident of the 1940s, speaking of the capital, said, "Rangoon isn't Burma really. It's much more an Indian city, with a bit of China thrown in, run by Scots and Irishmen" (87). Later, Rangoon along with the rest of Burma, would be run by a puppet government controlled by the Japanese.

If Burma was not like Rangoon, this begs the question of what it *was*: a problematic territory, a site of contestation by various nations and ethnic groups, with complex issues of race relations between the native Burmese, the British, the Japanese, the Chinese, and the Indians. In theory, Burmese were allowed to marry outside their own ethnicity; in practice, this was strongly discouraged, especially by the British (87). Burma's racial and cultural *mélange* further complicates Lee's exploration of the relationships between nation, ethnicity, and identity.

George Orwell's 1934 novel *Burmese Days* features, as an important subplot, the desire of U Po Kyin, a Burmese magistrate whose burning ambition is to be accepted into a prestigious club reserved for white imperialists. Although Hata might have found U Po Kyin's methods repugnant, he would certainly have sympathized with his desire to be included in the ranks of polite (white) society. Nevertheless, imperial Britain hardly had a stranglehold on Burma when compared to its other territories, perhaps because, as Nicholas Tarling explains, "Burma had not been regarded as liable to attack by a major

foreign power" (Tarling 95). Decades of oppressive British rule, combined with Britain's inadequate military defenses, made Burma a willing tool of the Japanese--for a while.

Actual Burmese characters are noticeably scarce in *A Gesture Life*. Lee only writes about one, a man who is caught stealing from the camp and who, instead of being executed, is handed over to Captain Ono for vivisection. Ono cuts open his chest, putting him only into a "half-sleep," and begins to stop and start his heart over and over. Hata notes, "It was all most surreal," and adds that even Ono seemed "nonplussed" by the procedure (76). When Hata remembers the gruesome proceedings, he says, "to me it seemed more academic than anything else" (76). As someone who is not of Japanese ancestry himself, but who is trying to be, Hata had to distance himself emotionally from the atrocity he witnessed being perpetrated on another man who was an interloper in a Japanese camp, another man in twilight.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas says, "If I am reduced to my role in history I remain *as unrecognized as I was deceptive* when I appeared in my own consciousness. Existence in history consists in placing my consciousness outside of me and *destroying my responsibility*" (252, emphases mine). It is all too easy to dissociate individual subjects from their lived and living experiences by placing those experiences in a fixed and immutable "past." This especially applies to Hata, whose experiences position him firmly in a constant moment of mimicry and ambivalence, even as they fix him in historical stasis that he resists with his attempts to create his own "truth." This idea of history--a history that people and states try to suppress but that always returns, a history that always lives--perpetuates itself in Hata. He tries to appear peaceable and

respectable to everyone he knows both in Japan and in the United States, but he is haunted (once, literally) by ghosts. History works on him for the rest of his life, and has its roots in very particular cultural conditions in prewar and wartime Japan.

"A Contagion Within": Hata As a Transnational Subject

Hata was raised in the context of wartime Japan and in the midst of a strongly nationalist culture. For example, in 1942, several Japanese scholars held a symposium called "Overcoming Modernity." While the title of the symposium would slot neatly into a roundtable at the MLA convention, its tone was absolutely nationalistic as it called for a return to Japanese cultural traditionalism in the midst of war. Hayashi Fusao, one of the presenters, wrote, "There can be no imperial loyalty without patriotism, just as there can be none without allegiance" (92). He goes on to say that, due to an insufficient upbringing and education, he had to work all the harder to "awaken the imperial loyalty *that ran in my blood*" (93, emphasis mine). For Hayashi and his compatriots, to be truly Japanese was to be ethnically Japanese: to feel imperial loyalty "in the blood" by answering to an ancient call and impulse that only true Japanese people would recognize (after receiving the proper training).

Hata, Korean-born, lacks this Japanese blood, and though he always seeks to prove his "allegiance" to both his adoptive nations, he never quite manages to do so: to others, or to himself. Whereas he finds himself speaking Korean to a comfort woman without even thinking about it, he lacks the "blood" to feel the loyalty that is necessary to

be Japanese, a missing component that even his surrender of K to his comrades cannot supply. Wearing Japanese clothing and living in a Japanese home is not enough to instill a true feeling of belonging. Later, when he moves to the United States and tries just as hard to join (what he perceives to be) typical American society, he again seems to feel, not genuine affection for his new home, but rather the obligation to *attempt* to feel such affection. It doesn't always work. Whenever he steps outside his large house, he feels "as if I were doing so for the very first time, when I wondered if I would ever in my life call such a house my home" (22). Hata thus operates from a difficult position from the very beginning. In the face of rising racism in Bedley Run, his difference grows more and more marked, as Sunny and Renny point out in their different ways. Hata yearns for a sense of belonging, of fitting in, that cannot be his either in Japan or the United States. The novel positions Hata as a subject who, after an undefined period of mobility, is trapped.

Hata resists accepting this. In the novel's remarkable first line, he declares: "People know me here." Over the next few hundred pages we learn, in fact, that no one knows Hata at all--not the implied reader, not the citizens of Bedley Run, and perhaps not Hata himself. This is not entirely surprising, since there are many Hatas to know, each more complex than the last. He has many names (all of them significant) to go along with the many different phases of his life. He discloses one of them in the novel's first few pages: "Doc" Hata, the name by which he is generally known in Bedley Run. However, Hata, though he received medical training in the Japanese army, is not a licensed physician: not a "real" doctor. His first claim to identity is thus broken by a

series of disclaimers, establishing his unreliability from the very beginning while he tries to form the "set of exclusionary practices" that will let him decide what is "truth" and what is not. By trying to form this set of practices, Hata attempts to build a happy life for himself, but Lee's novel suggests that the specific conditions of his life as a transnational subject--I mean "specific" in contrast to other characters, whom I will discuss in my final chapter--make this impossible.

Hata is called "Doc" because of his chosen profession in Bedley Run. When he opens a business, he decides to make it a medical and surgical supply store. He says, "For many patrons, [the store] came to be regarded as an informal drop-in clinic, the kind of place where people could freely ask questions of someone who was experienced and knowledgeable as well as open and friendly, a demeanor that quite a few doctors, unfortunately, no longer feature these days" (4). After the atrocities he witnessed during the war, several in the name of science, Hata wants to turn his knowledge to good use. Captain Ono mocked his tendencies for empathy and compassion, but Hata now attempts to use those as strengths. Although his store chiefly supplies the nearby hospital with equipment and other necessities, Hata takes more pride in his everyday, one-on-one interactions with the villagers of Bedley Run, most of whom are not placing large orders for medical supplies, but who "drop in" for free advice. These same villagers do not know how Hata gained the knowledge that allows him to give free advice, and as far as Hata tells us, they never ask him. His business is in part an attempt to atone for his past and to heal himself, but since his secrets remain his own, he can never truly gain validation from the group he wants to inhabit. Thus, true atonement eludes him. "Doc"

is the nickname the villagers give Hata, and one he willingly accepts, but in the end, the physician--or something like one--cannot heal himself.

Hata's second name, the name he assumed after moving to the United States, is Franklin: reminiscent, of course, of Benjamin Franklin, and perhaps not coincidentally, *Madama Butterfly's* Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, who seduces and betrays an Asian concubine much as Hata does to K. But although Hata has lived in Bedley Run for over thirty years, he says that almost nobody in the town calls him Franklin. The one notable exception is Mary Burns, the white widow and neighbor whom he befriended and had an affair with before driving her away with his lack of emotional availability. She alone addressed him as "Franklin," and he in his turn called her "Mary" to her face. However, in referring to her for the reader, Hata invariably calls her "Mary Burns," always using her first and her last names, as if he is introducing a stranger to his audience for the first time, every time. In this way, even as Mary sought access to Hata's inner life by calling him by a name that nobody else used, Hata distances himself and his reader from a woman who would uncover this life, and by extension, him.

Hata's third name is the Japanese name given to him by his adoptive parents: Kurohata Jiro. The name "Jiro" means "second son" in Japanese. While Hata does not mention having siblings in his Japanese home, the name befits a Japanese man "in twilight," one who is ostensibly part of the national "family," but who never receives pride of place as a firstborn son. Kurohata, his family name, also means "the banner a village would raise by its gates in olden times to warn of a contagion within" (224). Hata does not share this patronymic information until roughly the last third of the novel;

having spent the first two thirds assuring the reader of his successful acceptance into affluent white American culture, he finally, by disclosing the meaning of his full name, admits to his lack of belonging and his keen awareness, though suppressed and denied, of his own alterity. As a "noble Japanese" (as a fellow character calls him) in *Bedley Run*, good "Doc" Hata feels much more like a contagion than a cure, his business notwithstanding.

Hata's fourth name is the name he would have received from his peasant Korean parents. But when K asks him about his birth name, he immediately responds, "I don't have one," although he adds in an aside to the reader, "I'd had one at birth, naturally, but it was never used by anyone, including my real parents" (235). Hata disclaims his originary identity in favor of a series of increasingly inaccurate substitutes that reveal themselves as his story unfolds. At birth, he was given a name that he claims not to remember. Then he was given a Japanese name when he is not ethnically Japanese (and feels no imperial loyalty in his blood). Then he claims an all-American first name when he does not feel comfortable in America and which, in any case, his white neighbors do not use. Finally, in lieu of this first name, he accepts the appellation "Doc" although he is not a doctor. At every turn, he attempts to present his identity to the reader as untroubled and comfortable, when patently it is neither.

Other characters in my dissertation have multiple names, of course. Pinkerton names Cio-Cio San "Butterfly" in his native English, and Gallimard frequently refers to Song as "Butterfly," too. Both Cheng Dieyi and Duan Xiaolou of *Farewell My Concubine* assume stage names in order to leave their less-than-glamorous beginnings

behind. "Doc" Franklin (Kuro) Hata Jiro, however, pushes this propensity for re-naming the farthest of all, representing an individual identity stretched to its outermost limits-- stretched so thin, in fact, that it finally pulls apart at the novel's end. Hata does not shed names as he travels from place to place; rather, he acquires them.

His many names represent the larger fissures in his history and identity. Hata's lack of a nation-home destabilizes and finally fractures him. This is not to say that he would have been "saved" by a traditional nationalist grand narrative. In fact, his very predicament points to the impossibility of this. In wartime Japan, when Japan was doing its utmost to create an empire of which it would be the cultural, political, and military epicenter, a man like Hata was invariably pressed out to the margins even as the central power demanded he assimilate. He is like, but not equal.

However, neither can he find meaning or satisfaction by living in the West. He is always and ineluctably *different* from those surrounding him, who appear to have a firmer grounding in "the homeland," whether Japan or the United States. "To put it succinctly," Bhabha says (without a trace of irony), "the recognition and disavowal of 'difference' is always disturbed by the question of its re-presentation or construction" (116). Hata, who disavows his own difference at every turn, resents those who insist on disturbing this disavowal by either reminding him of his past or by calling his present into question. When these reminders and questions arise, they make Hata's attempts to re-present and re-construct himself all too clear, and to clarify these attempts, to call attention to their mere existence, is to render impossible the desired result. If anyone points out how Hata has tried to create his own identity from scratch, then his disavowal of his difference

becomes moot: his difference has already been proven, and he resents most the people who prove it.

Here, Chang-rae Lee uses Hata's futile struggle as an opportunity to point to the ways in which difference can be either disabling or, as Bhabha sometimes has it, productive. In Hata's particular case, the results are, curiously, both. He spends most of the book in denial, either to himself or the reader. But finally, even though he never settles down and finds the home he yearns for--in fact, he undertakes yet another journey--he faces his past and admits to the reader what he has done, after being confronted by other characters who insist on either getting to know him or on drawing the truth out of him.

The main culprits are the three women in his life: K, Mary Burns, and Sunny. K draws Hata's attention to his use of the Korean language, and unearths the truth about his heritage. Mary Burns insists that Hata is "like no one [she has] ever known," a charge he immediately denies, as though it were an insult rather than a compliment--by his lights, it *is* an insult (347). That Mary Burns also represents the most traumatic event of Hata's adult life only complicates the matter. After K's murder, Hata goes into the woods in a state of shock and gathers up her remains. Much later, in the United States, Hata and Mary Burns are alone in the woods, sharing a moment of genuine intimacy that is unusual for Hata, even as it makes him, as he admits, profoundly uneasy and even "overwhelm[ed]" (313). But just as they are about to make love, Hata panics and stops the encounter. Clearly the sexualization of Mary Burns's body in a woodland environment unearths Hata's memories of K's death. Not coincidentally, Mary Burns's

story, too, ends in death: after she and Hata separate, she dies of cancer, of a "contagion within" that kurohatas, black banners, are meant to signal.

As for Sunny, Hata adopts her in the hope of finding a substitute for K, even paying the adoption representative under the table, since the adoption agency he approaches is reluctant to adopt out a young girl to an older single man. But Sunny, not fully Korean and defiant from the start, is not what he anticipated. Nevertheless, he attempts to atone, as Mary Burns points out, saying, "It's as if she's a woman to whom you're beholden . . . you act almost guilty, as if she's someone you hurt once, or betrayed, and now you're obligated to do whatever she wishes" (60). However, Hata never fully understands Sunny's wishes or her needs. He provides for her materially, but remains inaccessible to her emotionally. In her childhood, when she comes across Hata making a household repair, she offers to help. He rebuffs her and sends her off to practice piano, separating her from the project that takes up most of his free time and to which he is devoted. As she grows up, he finds himself incapable of controlling her rebellious streak, and does not attempt to stop her when she leaves home at seventeen. Not long afterwards, she returns in the last trimester of pregnancy, and he arranges for her to have an abortion over both her protests and the physician's, after which she flees again. In Sunny's youth, Hata fails her just as he failed K, long dead.

Strangely, Hata feels more connected to Bedley Run than he has ever been after Sunny's departure, saying, "It was during Sunny's absence that I finally awoke to this notion, that I was perfectly suited to my town, that I had steadily become, oddly and unofficially, its primary citizen" (275). In the absence of Sunny's penetrating insights,

Hata can again afford to ignore the cracks his fellow townspeople make about "good Charlies," and he can turn away from his troubled past and his memories of K. Now that he knows he cannot atone for her death, or "save" her reincarnation (Sunny), he turns away and tries to forget, and to persuade himself that Bedley Run is his true home, a place that welcomes him as "its primary citizen." In fact, ". . . my well-known troubles with Sunny were not a strike against me or a sign of personal failure but a kind of rallying point" (275). When most people would take the disappearance of a rebellious child to be a mark of embarrassment or shame in public, Hata embraces it, as if his sudden divorce from Sunny--from the reminder of his traumatic past--is what will finally allow him to connect to his present in a new town, a new country, and a new time. Once again, he tries to relegate the past to the past, to "kill" living history.

This is not to be. Beyond the rising racism of Bedley Run, K returns to haunt Hata--literally: after Sunny comes back into his life, bringing her young son Thomas with her, Hata dreams of K as vividly as if she were actually (and always) present. He says, "I thought I had convinced her to remain yet again, remembering now how many times I had done so, today and yesterday and all the days before that, in a strange and backward *perpetuity*" (288, emphasis mine). In his most vulnerable moments, when he is alone and dreaming, Hata is forced to acknowledge that his personal, private history cannot be shoved back into a static "past" and forced to remain there. Nor can it be contained over the seas in Burma: K has followed him in his journey across the world.

All his memories finally burst forth, complete and no longer repressed, in the last quarter of the book. In these final pages we see how Hata's carefully self-constructed

identity falls apart along with the carefully distant narrative tone he has maintained throughout. Hata finally puts his difference into his own words by revealing the horrible truth of K's death, and the ways in which it irreparably separates him from his American neighbors who remain ignorant of his past, just as he prefers. This is also when he reveals the truth about Sunny's abortion. These final confessions are also final gestures at the self-revelation that his first-person narrative has seemed to promise all along. As his past collides with his present, Hata essentially gives himself up.

At the novel's end, we finally come to appreciate the different masks Hata has worn all his life: masks to his "fellow" Japanese citizens, soldiers, and superiors; to his "fellow" citizens of Bedley Run; and to us, his implied readers. Hata, like Song Liling and also like Binh, has traveled across the globe and found acceptance nowhere. As someone who transgresses boundaries, especially by trying so hard to stay within them, Hata occupies an interstitial space that exposes the failure of nationalist grand narratives-- i.e., the wartime Japanese discourse of racial, ethnic, national, and imperial unity, and the postwar American discourse of diversity that proves untrue.

At the same time, Hata does not find security in the possibility of transnationalism, either. He ends the novel by leaving Bedley Run to go on a journey with an undetermined destination:

But I think it won't be any kind of pilgrimage. I won't be seeking out my destiny or fate. I won't attempt to find comfort in the visage of a creator or the forgiving dead. Let me simply bear my flesh, and blood, and bones. I will fly a flag. Tomorrow, when this house is alive and full, I will be outside looking in. I will already be on a walk someplace, in this town or the next or one five thousand miles away. I will circle round and arrive again. Come almost home. (356)

Finally, Hata does not seek a firm and fixed place of belonging--a "destiny" (destination). He ends the book, not by selling his house to buy another, or even to move to a different town, but to achieve *perpetual* motion, "circle round and arrive again," which evokes the image of the globe. His arrival "again," however, will not lead him directly to the place he has left, but rather, "almost home," where once again he will be an outsider looking in. The passage recalls a much earlier one, about a story Hata reads in one of Sunny's books. In the story, a man resolves to "'swim across the country,' and after some travail of walking in on his neighbors and scaling property walls and crossing busy parkways, he finally makes it back to his own home, which, to his desperate confusion, he finds locked up and deserted" (23). Hata, like the man in the story, will circle around the globe, but he already anticipates what he will find when his journey ends.

"Almost home" separates him forever from those who have found what he wants for himself, which is security--for example, his friends Renny Bannerjee and Liv Crawford, who will marry, and even Sunny and her child Thomas, to whom Hata bequeaths an equal share in his home and business (which he named after her) so that she might sell them and "open whatever shop she wants and--if she and Thomas please--come live in the apartments above" (355). Whether Sunny will accept it or not (an issue I

briefly discuss in the next chapter), Hata still offers his daughter and grandson the place of belonging that he has always wanted but been denied, both by the continuing effects of history and by his own, often self-destructive choices. He will never be anything but "almost home." Hata, who is in his seventies, is bearing his "flesh, and blood, and bone" towards death, where he hopes to find neither God nor ghosts. Like Dieyi of *Farewell My Concubine*, and even Gallimard of *M. Butterfly*, the resolution of Hata's internal conflict is exile and death, not acceptance by a larger community. While his decision gives him a measure of personal peace that he has long sought, we will never know the story of this journey, much as we do not know the story of the time between the Second World War and his arrival in the United States. He simply disappears from view yet again.

I turn now to another character from another time and place who also lives perpetually in exile. Like Hata, Binh of *The Book of Salt* seeks an elusive sense of belonging, and is denied a home at every turn. He is also a transnational subject who remains trapped in in-between spaces, and who exerts control over his narrative in an attempt to exert control over his own life and to make a home for himself. But he fails, and just as Hata does, he ends his story poised to undertake yet another journey whose final destination is unclear.

"The Fruits of Exile": Bìn̄h and the Spaces in Between

Like Hata, Bìn̄h leaves, not "his" country, but the country of his birth that rejects him. Unlike Hata, Bìn̄h does not move to the United States, though he does spend several years living with two very famous Americans: Gertrude Stein and her partner Alice B. Toklas. Bìn̄h occupies three national spheres during his lifetime. Born in Vietnam near the turn of the twentieth century, he leaves in disgrace after he is discovered having a homosexual affair with Blériot, the Governor-General's (white, French) *chef de cuisine*. Bìn̄h boards a ship headed for France and, after a series of voyages, finally lands in Marseilles. From there, he journeys to Paris and works as a chef in a variety of households before settling in with two women who figure large in modern American letters and are the hostesses of a very exclusive, once-a-week salon at their home, 27, rue de Fleurus.

In this way, Bìn̄h occupies Vietnamese, French, and American spaces while achieving belonging and acceptance in none of them. Both his "father" the Old Man (not his biological father, but rather his mother's abusive husband) and his older brother turn their backs on him after his affair with Chef Blériot is discovered. His brother, Anh Minh, asks Bìn̄h, "How can I save you now?", meaning that Bìn̄h is beyond hope of redemption, even by the ties of blood and family (53). In this particular case, we see that even blood, the thing that Hata lacks, is not enough to "save" Bìn̄h (who in any case does not wish to be saved). Perhaps in retaliation for this abandonment, Bìn̄h sheds his own blood into the food of the white people who employ and look down on him, giving away that which has been treated as worthless even by his own kin.

He fares no better in France than in Vietnam. He divides French households into three categories: in the first, he is turned away immediately at the door because of his race; in the second, he might or might not be hired, but is always keenly questioned and forever treated with suspicion before being either turned away or fired. The third type is the most important, and he calls employers of this type "collectors." The word's ominous undertones are fitting. The collectors hire Binh immediately without waiting for references or even an interview, because they find him to be an exotic curiosity--because "they crave the fruits of exile, the bitter juices and the heavy hearts" (19). Binh's exile from his homeland, his very lack of fixity, attracts these employers and opens his eyes more and more to the racism he encounters every day. Unlike Hata, however, Binh never mistakes racism--whether overt or casual--for anything other than prejudice, fear, and hatred. He never deceives himself that he is truly welcome in the homes and lives of the French.

His life improves only slightly in an American home, where Stein and Toklas treat him with benign condescension. Binh does not understand Stein's favorite nickname for him, and tells us, "She never fails to greet me with a smile and a hearty American salutation: 'Well hello, Thin Bin!' She then walks on by, leaving me to speculate on what this 'thin' could be" (32). Stein knows that Binh speaks almost no English, and only halting French, but finds this to be an amusement and not a handicap in her relationship with him--Toklas is responsible for directing him in the kitchen, not she. Thus, Binh's lack of access to the English language, especially in the home of a woman famed for her

mastery of it, separates him irreparably from his employers as much as his race and his class.

Notions of race and class both recall and complicate Vietnam, Binh's country of origin that he is forced to leave. As with Hata and Korea, the history of colonized Vietnam mirrors Binh's life experiences in many ways. This history of colonization, so familiar all over the world, is a large part of what leaves Binh stranded on the margins--like Hata, who will end his life "outside, looking in" (Lee 356).

"French Indochina": Vive la différence

The French presence in "Indochina"--here, Vietnam--was quite different from the Japanese approach to empire. The French made no effort to claim any sort of ethnic commonality with the people they ruled. There was no equivalent to the discourse of a "Pan-Asian empire." Also unlike the Japanese empire, the French empire was largely the result of exploration of territories that resulted, sometimes centuries later, in acquisition and domination. The final great king of the Nguyễn dynasty, Nguyễn Ánh Gia Long, hired French mercenaries in 1802 to help him defeat his many rivals, and even invited French counselors and missionaries into his court. After his death, the power of the French in the region was, or has been perceived by many scholars to be, unmistakable and irreversible.

The 1860s in particular marked the inauguration of the French colonial era in Vietnam (Wilcox 195). Between the two world wars (the time period in which Binh's

story takes place), France maintained its control over "Indochina" and its various other possessions. However, historian Martin Thomas asserts that during this period, France's empire was growing shakier: "If anything, France's 'imperial trajectory' was downward" (1):

The *Indochine français* described in official policy statements was an artificial construct, a concept with little basis in fact. Its supposed marriage of French administration and local tradition bore no correlation to the economic and cultural gulf separating French settlers from their Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian subordinates. (3)

The word "marriage" evokes something that, as Martin says, was meant to imply a convivial, mutual agreement between Eastern and Western culture in an occupied territory, but that in reality was a sham. After the First World War, France was more concerned with maintaining its strength in the epicenter of the empire, within France itself, and worried less about the margins. As such, in the house of the Governor General, Binh inhabits an environment that is in its incipient death throes, surrounded by a tenuous French nationalism that is changing from a discourse of expansion and empire to a discourse of discontent and neglect. The French did not, of course, openly admit this. Like so many other colonial powers, France cast its mission as one of "civilization" as well as of conquest. Just as "Doc" Hata is repudiated in Japan for his Korean ancestry and condescended to by his white neighbors in Bedley Run as a "good Charlie," Binh too endures stereotypes based on race, and in this case, race as linked to sexuality and decadence in the midst of fading French grandeur.

Virginia Thompson, writing on "Indochina" in 1937, says, "The famous tolerance of the Orient is largely dislike of effort. Love is nothing beyond sensuality and the begetting of children" (43). Love for the Vietnamese, says Thompson, is only "sensuality." Binh, an astonishingly sensual man, seems to conform to the stereotype. He experiences the world as a matter of tastes, sights, textures, and smells beyond what most people manage every day. Speaking of Anh Minh, Binh says, "He has never dipped a handful of orange peels into the sea and licked away a soothing slick of salt" (76). In the privacy of his thoughts, he explains the connection between food and love to the white Gertrude Stein: "Quinces are ripe, Gertrude Stein, when they are the yellow of canary wings in midflight. They are ripe when their scent teases you with the snap of green apples and the perfumed embrace of coral roses" (40). In his ceaseless internal monologue, Binh acquaints Anh Minh with Parisian cuisine far more lively than that demanded by the Governor General, and educates Gertrude Stein (who surely knew the art of putting sensory experience into words) on the art of connecting food with love, and of eating the "sublime," as Binh's lover Lattimore describes his cooking. In this way, Binh appears to conform to the colonial stereotype: that of the decadent Vietnamese who has little personal initiative--indeed, Binh is very passive--and who lives by the senses, not the intellect.

However, like Song, Dieyi, and Hata, Binh subverts this stereotype in unexpected ways. Fittingly, considering Binh's gift for gab, Virginia Thompson says of the Vietnamese language, "[its] vocabulary is limited and lacking in words to express the major emotions . . . the language materializes and analyses everything it touches" (45).

Bình expresses himself readily enough, in flights of eloquence that put Hata's to shame. Monique Truong is at pains to let us know that, as I pointed out earlier, Bình speaks no English and little French; therefore, she asks us to assume that he "speaks" to us in a Vietnamese that excels at "expressing the major emotions" even as he proves himself to be a marvelously "analytical" narrator as well. Thus he is both sensual and cerebral, inhabiting one stereotype only to "flip" it over unexpectedly, like Song and Dieyi.

Through his language use, Bình expresses his own awareness of and dissatisfaction with the French colonial regime in a way that Hata never manages with his Japanese conquerors. Unlike Hata, Bình knows that his history, both individual and cultural, has been impacted by the colonial presence in a way that is hardly wholly positive--indeed, to Bình, it is a matter of both anger and shame. However, as much as he loathes the condescension and callousness of the French, Bình acknowledges that neither is he a "true son" of Vietnam, as in the "Old Man" who raises Bình but is not his biological father. Bình is a bastard both literally and metaphorically: not the true son of his mother's husband, not a true son of Vietnam. He is a transnational and transitional subject who can find a home nowhere.

A Mesmerizing Tale: Binh and "Real Names"

Like Hata, Binh keeps secrets while purporting to tell everything through his first-person narration. However, while we begin to see through Hata's attempts from the very first page, Binh manages to string us along until the last few pages of his story.

Throughout most of the novel he employs an extravagantly confessional tone, exposing many of the most painful episodes of his life right away. After introducing Stein and Toklas and explaining his role in their household, Binh opens up his memories of working in the Governor-General's kitchen back in Vietnam. The Vietnamese scholar Truong Buu Lam explains, "The governor-general served as the chief representative of the French republic in the colony and, conversely, as the spokesman for the colony in its relations with the mother country" (9). Even though French imperial influence in Indochina is on the wane, we see right away that for Binh to work in the household of the Governor-General (whose title he capitalizes, making it a name) requires a leap of faith on somebody's part: Binh is poor, frail-looking, and has no obvious qualifications when he begins. This leap of faith, his entry into the house of the "chief representative" of France, is facilitated by his older brother, the sous chef Anh Minh. When Binh is caught with Blériot, frustrating his brother's expectations and hopes for their family, Anh Minh says, "I have given you everything, and you have wasted it" (Truong 52). To work for such a prestigious Frenchman, washing dishes and cleaning countertops, is to be "given everything."

But Binh never deceives himself, as Anh Minh does, that this is a true honor, or anything but the result of colonial condescension and the exploitation of a cheap native

labor force. In his 2000 study of Vietnamese encounters with French colonizers in the early twentieth century, Truong Buu Lam writes, "I have always wondered about the inferiority complex I have noticed everywhere in Vietnam, a complex that almost every Vietnamese person manifests vis-à-vis the French or any white person" (4). Anh Minh manifests this complex as he tirelessly carries out the orders of the Governor-General's wife, who controls the kitchen and orders that everything be done "As if in France!" However, Binh lets us know right away how degrading he finds his great opportunity and how deluded he finds his brother: "I am afraid that the only way that my dear brother's prayers will be answered is for him to lay down [*sic*] one night and die. Then he must hope that when the next morning arrives, his bruised but uncrushed spirit is reborn inside the body of a Frenchman" (249). Unlike Anh Minh, Binh knows that being a faithful servant to the Governor-General will bring no final reward or recognition. Anh Minh is forced to learn this lesson when Blériot arrives from France to replace the former *chef de cuisine*, showing Anh Minh that, no matter how loyally he has served, and no matter how much talent he has, he will never be granted the supreme position in the kitchen because he is Vietnamese.

Binh recounts these memories with wry bitterness, giving the impression that he is sharing all his secrets with the reader--that, even though he has experienced degradation, punishment, and exile, he has nothing to hide. In short, he treats the reader as he treats "the collectors," who crave "fruits of exile, the bitter juices and the heavy hearts." His story is the sort that gets described on the back of the Mariner Books edition as "A mesmerizing tale of yearning and betrayal."

And yet, we do not learn until the very end of the story that Binh's name is not, in fact, Binh. Like Hata, he shed his name when he left the country of his birth, and took a new one. His real first name is Bão. "Binh" means "peace," while "Bão" means "storm." He changed his name when he boarded a ship to Marseilles, ready to leave Vietnam after his disgrace at the Governor-General's house. His bunkmate was a young man also named Bão. When he asked after Binh's name, Binh replied, "without blinking an eye," that he is named for peace. Bão immediately accepted this with delight, saying, "That's good. We cancel each other out" (249). What Bão means is that, since they are on a ship, it would be unlucky to have two storms on board, but "storm" and "peace" together can cancel each other out, resulting in a safe journey. After pages and pages of "Thin Bin," and of Binh explaining how neither of his Western lovers (Blériot and, later, an American in Paris named Marcus Lattimore) can pronounce his name properly, we learn that it isn't his name at all. The sudden, last-minute unveiling is astonishing.

Of the many encounters Binh has with male characters throughout the novel, the most significant is with Bão, who serves as his most marked double. They share a name, they share a bunk, and they share stories. It happens that Bão is as gifted at fiction as Binh is, although, "During our time together, Bão and I developed a tacit understanding that everything he said was true" (24). During our time with Binh, we develop a similar understanding, and only when our voyage with him is over do we learn the real truths behind his storytelling. Binh also says of Bão, "As long as we were together, we had shelter," and even initiates one furtive sexual encounter (25). However, though Binh loves Bão, Bão betrays him--another crucial fact we do not learn until the end of the

novel. Before Bình left Vietnam, his mother, his only true source of love and care, gave him a pouch filled with gold leaf that she had been saving for years. Bão learns of the pouch, and steals it when they arrive at Marseilles, taking a ship to the United States and leaving Bình--impoverished in more ways than one--behind. We learn then how much Bão means to Bình: "If he had only asked, I would have given this man of my own free will my mother's gold, my father's skin, my brother's hands, and all the bones that float loose in this body of mine now that he has gone" (242). Bình is betrayed by the man who is both his double and his last tenuous connection to the country that did not want him.

Bình and Bão find each other--meaning Bình also finds himself--on board a ship, a place that is no place, that is designed to go between places. Then Bình loses Bão both to treachery and to the wide ocean. He finds home and belonging neither in Vietnam, nor in France, nor even in the space in between where he seeks it most ardently, believing that together, he and Bão can form "a safe house" (25). But nowhere is safe enough for Bình.

After Bão deserts him, Bình continues trying to make a home on the water. He spends some time in Marseilles before remembering some pertinent advice he received from Bão himself: "It is easier to be broke at sea than on land." So he signs on with another freighter because "I always believed that on the next ship, at the next port of call, I would find Bão." But he never does, and finally his life on a series of ships becomes so unbearable that a fellow-kitchen boy tells him bluntly, "You need to shit on land again" (256). Following this even more pertinent advice, Bình returns to Marseilles, where he makes his way to Paris "through means that even I do not want to remember" (256-57).

Given Binh's capacity for relating the most brutal and painful episodes of his life, we must assume that yet another trip between places, between Marseilles and Paris, was excruciating indeed. He fares well nowhere.

Like *A Gesture Life*, *The Book of Salt* ends with the protagonist about to undertake one more journey. Stein and Toklas (whom I offer as alternatives to Binh and his experiences in the following chapter) have both left France to return to the United States, where Stein will go on a lecture tour, confident of her success even in the midst of the Great Depression. They leave behind their two beloved dogs, Basket and Pépé--Binh makes a point of noting this, since they seem to regret leaving the dogs much more than they regret leaving him. But if the dogs get his "Mesdames" affection, then Binh is given a more material parting gift:

Miss Toklas asked me whether I wanted a round-trip train ticket back to Paris or the amount in cash so that I could purchase a one-way ticket to some other destination. With this question, I again did not hesitate. "The money, please," I replied. I did not know where I wanted to go after Le Havre. So asking for cash as opposed to a prepaid ticket was my way of making no decision at all. (259)

We never learn where Binh goes. We do know that both the Old Man and Binh's mother have died and that Anh Minh has sent Binh a letter telling him that it is time for him to return to Vietnam. However, Binh never commits to going, and for him Vietnam remains, as he calls it himself, a "memory" and a "story" instead of a home (258). But he is a perpetual traveler--a perpetual foreigner--and no matter where he chooses to go, he

has another journey to undertake. It is not unreasonable to suppose that, like Hata, he might "come almost home," but only almost.

Thus, like Song, Dieyi, and Hata, Binh is let down by his own quest for identity, which has been subordinated by multiple narratives. He cannot live happily in Vietnam as a gay man, he cannot live happily in France as a Vietnamese, and he cannot live happily in between because his mirror-self betrays him worst of all. It is small wonder, then, that he seeks to protect what remains of his identity until the very end, just as Hata does. In fact, at the end, Binh makes the extraordinary claim that "I never meant to deceive, but real names are never exchanged" (243). The first part of that statement is doubtful. The second rings with a more eerie truth. During the novel, Binh also withholds the name of his lover in Paris, Marcus Lattimore, continually referring to him as "Sweet Sunday Man." Gertrude Stein first voices his real name aloud. Binh meets Ho Chi Minh in Paris, but never learns his name (and Ho Chi Minh, we know, also carried a surplus of names). Given this, and given how Hata has also presented himself to us, may we--must we--assume that real names never really are exchanged?

By taking a new name--moreover, a new name whose meaning lies in direct opposition to his old one--Binh seeks access to power, to the ability to alter his history and thus make a place for himself in the world while he gets a fresh start. Gayatri Spivak links naming to power when she says of power: "Like all names, it is a misfit." By "power" she means "a generality inaccessible to intended description" (145). Binh claims a new name when he encounters Bão, his double. Binh, of course, is a "misfit" as we generally use the term, but his name, in that it was not the name given to him at birth, is a

"misfit" as well. But power is "inaccessible" to any real form of "description," and it is not enough for Binh to change his name. Whether at sea or on land, he remains without agency, because even with his omissions and evasions, and even with his final confession, he cannot make reality behave as he wishes. The voice of the Old Man continually taunts and haunts him, rising up in his subconscious time after time to name him, neither "Binh" nor "Bão," but "Stupid." Binh is furious that he cannot escape this ever-present voice of condemnation: "Oh, you again? I thought I was *dead* to you, Old Man?" (12, emphasis Truong's). We see again that history is never frozen in the past, and that Binh cannot remake it. The strategy of withholding names appears to be futile. No matter what Binh or Hata call themselves, the world(s) they inhabit insist on identifying them on much different terms than they wish.

Conclusion

Let down by the nations that claimed and then disowned them, exiled, repudiated by their own families; unable to find belonging or peace in another country; and, worst of all, unable even to find a space for themselves in the time and place of *transition* (a ship, for Binh; the blank time between his Japanese military service and his arrival in America, for Hata)--Binh and Hata lack any firm sense of home. All this hearkens back to my original point about the Foucauldian production of truth. When Hata and Binh tell their stories, trying to conceal the "truth" until the very last minute, they exercise agency and control over what the reader will and will not know about them. As Spivak says, speaking of Foucault, "[He] seems to be pushing for the poets' desire for autonomy as a

general ethical *goal*" (156, emphasis Spivak's). Foucault specifically refers to Ancient Greece, his pet time and place, but the analogy still stands. To reach for and construct "autonomy" is to make a gesture--a gesture life?--towards ethnicity. Unfortunately, Hata and Binh also seek to protect themselves in the absence of any larger protection that might come from home, nation, or family. Even in the spaces in between, they are alone and unconnected to other migrants. Here, the desire for autonomy conflicts with true confession.

Hata's and Binh's frustrated ambitions in this regard do larger work. In spite of what I have just said about the myriad difficulties of transnational and transcultural life, *A Gesture Life* and *The Book of Salt* do not display a wholly negative view of the world. Indeed, both Lee and Truong offer alternatives to fleeing pain and attempting to forget/rewrite history. Specifically, they do this through the characters of Sunny Hata, Gertrude Stein, and Alice B. Toklas--three women who live not only transnationally but who occupy other complicated subjectivities (mixed race, homosexuality) as well. These characters find different ways of negotiating the world on their own terms, avoiding the pitfalls that menace Hata and Binh. In my final chapter, I explore these characters as a gateway to larger concerns regarding stereotypes, transnationalism, and the formation of identity.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: ALTERNEITY, SUBJECTIVITY, THEORY

The previous three chapters have expressed a rather bleak view of transnationalism. Transnationalism offers a richer way of looking at the world than globalization vis-à-vis the movement of cultures, traditions, ideas, and persons across international borders, rather than the mere movement of capital, but its place in living human history remains problematic. In his Author's Note to *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka criticizes the notion of "culture clash," calling it "a prejudicial label which, quite apart from its frequent misapplication, supposes a potential equality *in every given situation* of the alien culture and the indigenous, on the soil of the latter" (5, emphasis Soyinka's). Transnationalism complicates the intersection of the alien and the indigenous, and indeed forces us to look more closely at binarist distinctions between "the Other" and "ourselves."

However, the problem of "culture clash" or, in a less loaded catchphrase, "cultural exchange" (which transnationalism by definition implies) remains burdened with long histories of inequality between regions, nations, races, sexes, and sexualities. Movement, circulation, and exchange of cultures can serve to mash, or smash, one group of persons or ideas into another, sometimes violently (as in the long chain of global events that eventually culminated in the 9/11 disaster) and sometimes in the most mundane of ways ("Chinese" food in the United States). Occasionally, as I have pointed out, this transfer

leads to a confusion so complete that an individual subject's identity can be fractured and lost, in spite of the subject's frantic attempts to recoup or reconstruct it. In the last chapter, for example, I examined a Japanese war veteran who also contended with his ethnic Korean ancestry and his ambiguous position in the postwar United States, and who attempted to build a life for himself "out of gestures and politeness," as his adopted daughter Sunny puts it (95). Hata's attempts to construct his own identity, I argued, ultimately failed until he finally confronted the truth of his own past--and then, confronting it, he chose to leave his current environment and the life he tried so hard to build.

He is only one example among several I have chosen, and as I said, my prognosis looks bleak. Is it true that the transnational subject is doomed to exile, death, despair? In this chapter, I argue against that notion. Specifically, I argue that agency is possible when subjects find alternative ways of negotiating the world. After all, Hata is not the only character in *A Gesture Life*. The life he attempts to choose for himself, and the goals he sets, do not precisely work out. However, his daughter Sunny leaves him behind and makes her own life on her own terms. Likewise, while Binh of *The Book of Salt* finds little to no solace in his peripatetic existence, hampered by both his ethnicity and sexuality, the lesbians Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas survive and thrive.

In this final chapter, I use these characters as a "way in" to examine alternative subjectivities in a transnational world. How do we understand identity construction in the face of changing global conditions upon which we formerly relied? How can potentially marginalized subjects simply find ways to "be"? From there, I broaden my focus to find

close connections between the various theorists (especially Bhabha) I have drawn on in my project and the ways in which their ideas are complicated by emerging world conditions. I continue to interrogate Bhabha's theories of the stereotype throughout, and to adapt them to a model of discourse and identity that is shifting away from the postcolonial into the transnational.

Transnational Lives, Alternative Subjectivities

One way to examine Bhabha's theories further is to apply them to transnational characters who do *not* succumb to grim fate. Lee's Sunny Hata and Truong's Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas all make it out alive, as it were--better said, on their own recognizance. Unlike the other characters I discuss, these three women travel "the whole world over" and use their experiences as a means of flourishing and not perishing.¹⁷ I hasten to point out that this is not simply by virtue of their being women, which is a tempting conclusion given that most of the other characters I have discussed are men. However, in the epigraph to this dissertation, I quoted a well-known passage from Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. The quote itself--the reference to "another country" in which "the wench is dead"--is startlingly apt for most of the texts I discuss.

¹⁷ I considered including Loti's Madame Chrysanthème in the list, as she "marries" a white European sailor, speaks a childish kind of French, and could potentially be considered as some sort of transnational-subject-by-proxy. As I said in Chapter One, she is also a survivor who ably negotiates her society in the face of foreign prejudice. However, she is not physically mobile in a transnational sense, as she never leaves Japan, and my argument partly hinges on subjects who leave their "homelands" in search of more distant and uncertain climes. I discarded the idea, but wanted to give her a footnote, since she shares some characteristics in common with the rest.

In another country lie the bodies of Cio-Cio San, Juxian, K, Binh's mother, and even Dieyi and Gallimard in female dress.

One thing that sets Sunny, Stein, and Toklas apart from these other characters is the way that they do not disappear from view, or return to untenable situations, at their stories' ends. Hata and Binh leave for parts unknown, Song returns to a hostile nation, and when Dieyi and Juxian die, it happens offscreen. However, while Hata loses sight of Sunny when she runs away, and while she does not alert him to her return to Ebbington, she does come back and remains visible for the rest of the novel. Stein and Toklas depart from France at the end of the novel, but we know where they're going: to a prestigious lecture tour in the United States. When I mentioned Long's Cho-Cho San in my first chapter and the way she vanishes from her house before Pinkerton can take their son away, I referred to Lacan's scopic drive (as interpreted by Bhabha) and our voyeuristic desire to keep her onstage until we know her final end. Her disappearance, I argued, was the only way she could claim agency. The same is true for Hata and Binh who, having so far failed to create homes for themselves among strangers, depart. Paradoxically, Sunny's return, and the fixed destinations of Toklas and Stein, are signs of their own agency and independence. We know where they are, or at least where they're going, but there is no sense of their isolation or of being lost in the world. Sunny has her son, her business, and her independence (and seems to be happier with all three than Hata ever was), and "the Steins" have each other, as well as the anticipation of fame and acceptance over the ocean.

Sunny has rebelled against Hata's authority since her arrival in his home. Before she leaves, she tells him, "I never needed you. I don't know why, but you needed me. But it was never the other way" (Lee 96). As for Stein and Toklas, they return to the States in triumph. Binh even muses, "Gertrude Stein and Miss Toklas seem genuinely surprised by the commotion that is intent on following them back to America" (255). In neither case is it a sign of defeat to leave the story, nor (in Sunny's case) to return. All three characters are marginalized in ways other than being female--Sunny is half-Korean, half-African American, while of course Stein and Toklas are lesbians. However, Lee and Truong construct the three characters in such a way that they are not impeded by these additional complications of identity in a male-dominated, hetero-centric world. Sunny raises her son alone and achieves some professional success and respect as a retail manager. Once a week, admirers flood Gertrude Stein's Parisian home, anxious to be near her brilliance.

Of course, there are key differences between Sunny and Hata, and between Binh and the Steins. Sunny lacks the emotional baggage that Hata carries from the war, and Stein and Toklas are white women with education, money, and privilege that Binh lacks. But by including these characters in their novels, Lee and Truong point to the potential for a different kind of life--that while grand narratives can fracture people, alternative strategies for survival exist. I do want to avoid Julia Kristeva's mistake, which Bhabha calls

[Speaking] too heavily of the pleasure of exile--"How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger to one's own country, language, sex and identity?"--without realizing how fully the shadow of the nation falls on the condition of exile. (201-02)

The pleasures, or "fruits," of exile are precisely what Binh's "collector" class of employers wants from him, perhaps sensing that he has fled, more than simply left his home country. However, in making their way around the globe, Sunny, Stein, and Toklas "avoid sinking into the mire of common sense" while at the same time not becoming strangers to country, language, sex, or identity. Gertrude Stein famously said, "America is my country, but Paris is my hometown," thus claiming the best, rather than the worst of both worlds. Kwame Anthony Appiah calls this statement an example of "patriotic cosmopolitanism"--a notion of global *citizenship*, not of interminable intransigence and non-belonging (22). Cosmopolitanism and transnationalism are not, of course, identical notions or theoretical schemas, and in fact divide in substantial ways (partly in that the first, I would argue, is an ideology, while the second is more akin to a lived experience). Nevertheless, both -isms have in common a concern with crossing borders and superceding, insofar as is possible, the construct of the state. Stein and Toklas manage it, returning to the United States in triumph, but all the while knowing that Paris is their hometown.

Bedley Run, however, is not Sunny Hata's hometown. When she returns to Hata's life with her son Thomas in tow, she moves to Ebbington, which is adjacent to the prosperous Bedley Run but is "a working class suburb of drab, unadorned homes and

small motel-style apartment complexes" (65). By moving to Bedley Run's poor cousin, Sunny too comes only almost home. In fact, when Hata offers to help her in the face of her financial difficulties, she tells him, "I won't take one step in that town, and neither will Thomas. There's no chance of that" (215). At the novel's end, Hata announces his intention to put her name on the deed to Sunny Medical Supply after he purchases the mortgage, but we don't know if she will accept it, as Hata himself acknowledges (355). When there is danger that her store branch will fail, she announces that she is willing to move away again, even across the country. Her decision lacks the ring of defeat, and she does not sound afraid: "It doesn't matter. I'll get by. I always have" (215). By contrasting Sunny's attitude to that of Hata, who has always been so careful and so desirous of fitting in, Lee gives the reader an alternative view of a peripatetic subject. Sunny lived in Korea for her first seven years, which is old enough for her to remember her country of birth when she arrives in the United States and sees what Hata refers to as his "blighted hope." But while Hata's journey across the world has only made him desperately want to settle down, Sunny is comfortable with being mobile and always getting by.

What conditions make this possible? The easy answer is that Lee has simply drawn her character as having independence and spirit. But her inclusion in the story points to Lee's larger concerns about the formation of identity. She comes of age in a postwar and post-Cold War period in which people circulate over the globe, and her identity is not tied so tightly to a national narrative as Hata's is--first to Japan's and then to America's. As I said in the previous chapter, she is also of mixed race, a part of the

increasing "difference" (versus "diversity" in Bhabha's schema) of the United States. Even her name suggests a brighter day, in spite of her rebelliousness and the trouble she brings on herself during her teenage years. Given the importance Lee places on naming in the novel, Sunny's name points to a more hopeful future for her and her son than the future that Hata--a second son, a warning of plague--has managed for himself. Sunny capably operates among different ethnic groups and races, different social classes, and different environments (wealthy Bedley Run, blue-collar Ebbington, and the less affluent parts of New York City). In short, Sunny lives in exile, but does exactly as she pleases.

One of the popular myths about American identity is the idea of the "melting pot," and Sunny's various experiences would, on the surface, appear to speak to that. However, if anything, the worlds in which Sunny lives demonstrate how difficult it is for most groups of people to "melt" with each other, and Lee repeatedly draws attention to her acute awareness of this reality. Paradoxically, by being aware of her own subject-position, and never falling for those myths of identity that Hata so eagerly embraces, Sunny reads as "more" American than he, in the sense that she experiences more facets of American culture and life. She also speaks better English than he does. In this way, we can "read" Sunny as being more legibly American than Hata, and Lee shows that her knack for metamorphosis, her ability to cross various cultural and social boundaries, makes her more successful and happy than her adoptive father.

In *The Book of Salt*, Monique Truong creates a similar disparity between her protagonist Binh and her fictionalized versions of Stein and Toklas. Here the difference between the three is a little more clear-cut than between Sunny and Hata. As I said

before, Stein and Toklas are white, American, financially well-off, educated, and respected in their social sphere. It seems on the surface that the only thing they have in common with Binh is their homosexuality, as well as a certain propensity for travel, although the way in which Stein and Toklas undertake journeys is again very different from Binh. Circumstance and privilege favor them. However, prejudice against them exists, as Binh discovers during one of his trysts with Lattimore:

You refer to them both as "the Steins," which confuses me but you assure me that all the boys who gather at their Saturday teas call them "the Steins" as well. Behind their backs, that is, you say, warning me never to say such a thing to their faces. The Steins? Of course not, Sweet Sunday Man, that would make them sound like some sort of a machine. (176)

Stein and Toklas, as lesbians, are collapsed together into a "machine," something not quite human. One recalls Picasso's painting of Stein, in which her face looks like a mask (and which Picasso felt able to complete only in her absence).

And yet, the poor, poorly educated, Vietnamese chef Binh finds more in common with "the Steins" than we might have originally suspected. When he first meets Alice B. Toklas, he realizes that neither of them speaks French as a first language, and he tells her only, "'I am the cook you are looking for.' Her eyes flicker with *recognition* and respond with an implicit 'Of course'" (26, emphasis mine). He and Stein also bond over their lack of mastery of French. He refers to the sound of Stein speaking French as "a shoe falling down a stairwell," and Stein, in turn, is pleased by Binh's "interpretation" of French,

leading Binh finally to say of her, "She is a coconspirator" (33-34). Although Binh is never on a social level with Stein and Toklas, he finds comfort in knowing that he has this in common with them--that they are all aliens in France, even if Stein and Toklas feel more at home there than does Binh.

Gertrude Stein also understands how important it is to name things. As I said in my third chapter, she gives Binh the cheerful, if condescending nickname "Thin Bin." Before meeting her, Binh learns about Stein's preference for being addressed only by her complete name--GertrudeStein--rather than "Miss Stein." When a concierge explains this to Binh, his response is, "Is that it?", baffled that anyone would find this strange, because it makes sense to him immediately (21). He, of course, perceives the urgency of self-naming in a confusing world.

Like Sunny Hata, Truong's Stein and Toklas go where they please, when they please. Although as I said, they are in a better financial and racial position to do this than Binh or even Hata (who at least makes his own fortune), they are also helped along by being able to shift their identities in a way that is transcultural, willing to be European or American as it suits or benefits them. What in Hata and Binh occurs as cultural bastardy turns to flexibility and survival for Stein and Toklas, and even Sunny (who, like Binh, is a bastard, having been born to an unmarried woman, but who makes her own way without faltering as he does).

In the larger work of the texts, Lee and Truong's comparisons between transnational characters who thrive and those who do not demonstrates what it can mean to be an alternative subject, and how one can negotiate a world that is rapidly changing.

Although Binh, Stein, and Toklas do not occupy the post-Cold War world of Sunny and Hata, they (like the rest of Europe) live in the aftermath of the First World War and the global changes that came with it. Decades later, Sunny and Hata are still dealing with the ramifications of that conflict: the First World War that led to the Second World War, and the Second World War that led to the Cold War, and the Cold War that led, in part, to an American culture and an increasingly traveled world that Sunny can negotiate and Hata cannot (a crudely linear summation, but, I hope, adequate). Through Sunny, Toklas, and Stein, Lee and Truong both argue for a subjectivity that can claim its own independence-- a subjectivity that accepts and even embraces history without being pinioned by it.

Having discussed various forms of subjectivity, and the ways in which it can be self-motivated or society-suppressed, I now come to the end of my close reading of the various texts of this dissertation, although I will continue to refer adjacently to them in my concluding review of theory. In examining the nature of these historical and discursive forces that act on human subjects, and applying that examination to my close readings, I have drawn on a variety of theorists whose work concerns issues of identity and transnationality. This work, as I demonstrate, not only has repercussions for literary studies, but for "real people" in "real time" whose experiences echo those of the fictional subjects I have analyzed.

Impossible Objects: Theory and Method

This dissertation has depended in large part on Homi Bhabha's insights into what Spivak would call conditions of globality. Bhabha's project, as ever, is to privilege the enunciative over the ontological, and the ambivalence that informs such an enunciation. The classic example, and the one I have repeatedly employed, is that of the stereotype, which inevitably calls to attention to what it simultaneously seeks to obscure. Bhabha says, "The stereotype is . . . an impossible object" (116). I have used this central idea as a place to hang my hat, as it were, shaping my textual close readings around it. The many characters I have examined are framed within "impossible" constructs of stereotype, especially stereotype as it relates to discourses of nationalism and transnationalism. In *M. Butterfly*, for example, we see what Bhabha calls the metonymic figuring of lack versus the aggressive phase of the imaginary: specifically, Song Liling's "lack" (she is not physically female--curiously, her penis is actually the source of lack, contra centuries of phallogocentric discourse) and Gallimard's aggressive investment, which destroys him, in an imaginary person/culture.

Song represents "the whole" (culture, society, Otherness) through a stereotype. Gallimard the voyeur comes to seek the whole. The play's audience knows all along that the whole is not truly represented through this particular subject. Because of the innate incomprehensibility of the whole, the gazer takes aggressive actions to name and, therefore, *create* the whole through stereotypes. It never works, as we see with Song, and later Dieyi and Juxian, who confound Orientalist stereotypes, and Hata and Binh, who

attempt to name themselves in the face of a world that narrates their lives for them. All are, to differing degrees, harmed by an enunciation of difference that insists on calling attention to, naming, and then containing them even as it pushes them towards the margins of nation and society.

That said, Bhabha's approach has, unsurprisingly, garnered a fair number of critics. Benita Parry and Arif Dirlik are particularly straightforward in their denunciation of his methodology and general philosophy. Indeed, Dirlik skeptically critiques the discourse of postcolonialism as a field of study, saying that the word itself appears to spring, not from any serious "fact" of postcoloniality,¹⁸ but from the mere increasing presence of "Third World academics" in "First World" learning institutions ("The Postcolonial Aura" 329). He calls Bhabha specifically "a master of political mystification and theoretical obfuscation, of a reduction of social and political problems to psychological ones" (333). Parry says of Bhabha, "[His] many fecund insights into cultural processes are paradoxically denatured by the theoretical modes that inform his work" (122). (Of particular interest to me, naturally, is Parry's prefatory note in which she laments "students [who] routinely reproduce his pronouncements in manifest ignorance of their theoretical context and ideological implications" [119].)

Both Parry and Dirlik critique Bhabha's focus on enunciation versus what we might call *realpolitik*. Specifically, they accuse him of deliberately obfuscatory prose (and presumably disagree with Spivak's assertion that "plain prose cheats") at the expense

¹⁸ In *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), Graham Huggan draws the distinction between "postcolonialism" and "postcoloniality" by saying, "[Postcolonialism] concerns largely localised agencies of resistance, [while postcoloniality] refers to a global condition of cross-cultural symbolic exchange" (ix). Seen in this way, *postcoloniality's* definition is not far removed from *transnationalism's*, but remains constrained by its dependence on colonial-as-signifier.

of confronting events and conditions in real time. While I can perceive the fissure between the two approaches, I believe it need not be an impassable chasm. Bhabha's insistence on the primacy of discourse (recalling Foucault and Said, though with a twist) serves, in my project, as a way of framing the real historical problems confronting the marginalized character-subjects I discuss. I use his theories in Chapter One to focus on the convergence of latent and manifest Orientalism in nineteenth-century Western perceptions of the Far East, particularly Japan. Gyan Prakash says that "History is ultimately founded through and representable in some identity--individual, class, or structure--which resists further decomposition into heterogeneity" (qtd. in "The Postcolonial Aura" 334). Song, Dieyi, Hata, and Binh all attempt to ground their individual histories and therefore identities in discourse. Song refers to herself as female while standing naked, Dieyi maintains that he is by nature a boy, Hata insists that he is "a Japanese," and Binh changes his name on the spot when questioned about it. These declarations of subversive identity, in the face of a world that insists on fixity, are all discursively formed. Thus, while I occasionally find Bhabha's approach frustrating, I do not necessarily find it irresponsible, nor incompatible with Parry's and Dirlik's methods.

A current "real life" example might put my point into sharper, more immediate focus. An episode in April 2009 exposed the connection between discourse and reality, in which Texas State Representative Betty Brown made controversial remarks during a discussion about the difficulties Asian American citizens face when dealing with voter identification legislation. She said to Organization of Chinese Americans representative Ramey Ko, "Rather than everyone here having to learn Chinese--I understand it's a rather

difficult language--do you think that it would behoove you and your citizens to adopt [names] that we could deal with more readily here?" In one sentence, she both put the burden of education and self-translation onto the minority group and insisted that the second half of the moniker "Asian American" doesn't really exist: people with Chinese, Japanese, etc., surnames are not part of her "we," even though they are in fact citizens of the United States. In fact, per Prakash, Brown resisted the "heterogeneity" of America, subsuming individual identity to a larger national narrative (and confounding what Dirlik calls "a politics of location"--Asian Americans, it appears, are always still in Asia). She later apologized, but the remark has continued to make the rounds, particularly inspiring commentary all over the Internet. The blogger "Angry Asian Man" (whose blog entry links to a videoclip of the Brown proceedings) says, "I'm sorry, Betty, if our strange, exotic Asian names cause such an inconvenience to you and your people. I guess you forgot the fact that us crazy-named folks are your people too . . . whether you like it or not" (para. 2).

Even as Betty Brown attempted to push forward voter identity registration--thus assuming a commonality between all Texan citizens in that they will be "able" to participate in the democratic process--she enunciated what keeps one group discursively separate from another. Surely there is room for Parry, Dirlik, Prakash, and Bhabha all in deconstructing this disgraceful episode. In Brown's view, are Asian Americans--indeed, are Asians--"impossible objects," in spite of objections by actual Asian and Asian American people? Here, in Brown's speech, the Asian American is conflated with the Asian, as if both terms are not only unproblematic in and of themselves, but in fact are

the same. All things considered, it is small wonder that when someone like "Franklin" Hata makes an effort to choose an "American" name for himself in Bedley Run, his fellow villagers do not use it, choosing instead the inaccurate appellation "Doc." Even though the name Hata adopts (a relevant verb, whether Brown knew it or not) sounds all-American, he is not allowed to put it into play. If a name like "Franklin" is easier for "real" Americans to deal with, then designating Hata solely by his professional role--insisting on him as a function and not a person--must be easier yet. Hata, as I have discussed, goes along with this readily enough in his quest for acceptance by the community, using a series of names throughout his life that he hopes will win him a sense of belonging but never do.

Bhabha argues that Orientalism and other racist colonial discourses are marked by "a fundamental instability" (Burke and Prochaska 37). The Brown episode is an unstable moment in which discourse and reality collide, exposing the continuing attitudes of the modern-day Western world towards Asia and Asian Americans. I argue that Bhabha's theoretical framework remains relevant and useful, and need not work in conflict with the work of the other theorists I have drawn on. It does need, however, to be flexible in the face of a world that seems to be moving away from the postcolonial and into the transnational, into a world where the objects of stereotype are not necessarily situated in the old colonial contexts. The enunciation of difference has clear consequences in real time and in real (living) history, not just in a nebulous colonial past. *The Location of Culture* opens with an essay titled "The Commitment to Theory." It is up to us to decide

how committed we are, and to adopt or adapt theories that can help us make sense of a changing world.

Connections and Contexts

In the course of my project, I have made use of diverse theorists and theories. All are linked together, and many consciously and explicitly inform each others' work. I invoke Bhabha most frequently, but as I have just demonstrated, he must also be read alongside other theorists who offer slightly less cerebral alternatives. In that vein, as I approach the end of the project, I will link together the theorists I have used in order to offer a coherent "big picture" after my series of close readings. After linking them, I will look specifically at how their work informs the notion of the stereotype.

Edward Said's foundational work on Orientalism remains essential to any discussion of stereotypes and representations in Asia--and, indeed, anywhere with a colonial presence in which "the native" is imaginatively Othered, as Said himself says when he ends his work by asking, "How does one *represent* other cultures? What is *another* culture?" (325, emphasis Said's). He largely operates out of the theoretical groundwork laid by Foucault. Foucault's contention that power is a series of relationships, as well as his theory that discourse informs modernity, does a great deal of work in Said's schema as he argues for a similar approach in terms of studying both Orientalism and Othering. However, as Said points out, Foucault's concepts of "modernity" are rooted in a Western European model, and as such need to be altered in

order to address the prejudices and problems of imperial and colonial discourse effectively. Said says of Foucault, "[He] believes that in general the individual text or author counts for very little; empirically, in the case of Orientalism (and perhaps nowhere else) I find this not to be so" (23). In Said's view, examining individual texts and authors is crucial to unburdening the centuries-old project of imperialism and Orientalism, and looking at its language, among other things--in short, his approach is more personal (his word) and less wholly post-structural. Said's methods have been relevant to my work, not only because of their determining and indeed defining influence on the field of postcolonial studies, but because I also found it productive to examine individual texts and authors, and I believe, like Said, that "society and literary culture can only be studied and understood together" (27). To that end, I have focused my work around close readings, and more specifically, have looked at the discursive powers that both act on the texts and appear in the texts themselves.

Said's work, while groundbreaking, remains controversial and leaves a great deal of room for further discussion. For example, though Arif Dirlik supports Said's contentions in several respects, he succinctly characterizes debate when he says that while certain factors in the development of Orientalism are still very much in play, they are "not necessarily where Said located [them]" ("Chinese History" 387). He also points out that Said "has little to say on the question of how intellectuals and others in Asian societies may have contributed to the emergence of orientalism as practice and concept," and argues that "the usage [of the term 'orientalism'] needs to be extended to Asian views of Asia, to account for tendencies to self-orientalization" (389, 392). This recalls my

argument in Chapter Two that Chen Kaige's film *Farewell My Concubine* to some degree capitalizes (literally) on stereotypical Western images of China in order both to overturn those stereotypes and to examine China's national and cultural past/mythos. Another example would be the *wuxia* films that I alluded to, but did not discuss in detail-- especially Zhang Yimou's *Hero (Ying xiong)*, a flashy spectacle of a film about the rise of China's first emperor, and which ends with the words "Our Land" as a marker of China's move towards unity beneath the first imperial dynasty. In this movie, Zhang (who also directed the highly acclaimed Fifth Generation film *Raise the Red Lantern*--a very different sort of movie--as well as the lavish Opening Ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Olympics) uses a glorified version of China's imperial past to support a narrative of China's nationalist present. As Dirlik points out, the psychology behind Orientalism is not limited to the West; rather, as a global influence, it complicates that false binary.

By acknowledging the validity of Said's claims, but arguing for the need to reframe them in the context a more complicated transnational world, Dirlik joins ranks with Homi Bhabha (his erstwhile foe), Edmund Burke III, David Prochaska, H.D. Harootunian, and others. I have already discussed the differences between Said's and Bhabha's approaches in Chapter One, but to reiterate briefly, Bhabha complicates Said's distinction between *latent* and *manifest* Orientalism, instead arguing for an elision and thus destabilization of both. Where Said invokes Foucault and then proceeds to argue against him in certain particulars, Bhabha returns to Foucault and argues that Said needs to read him more carefully: "The productivity of Foucault's concept of power/knowledge lies in its refusal of an epistemology which opposes essence/appearance,

ideology/science" (103). For Bhabha, as always, the key lies in the ambivalence existing between any two elements that are traditionally considered different halves of a binary.

Arjun Appadurai, who provided the critical focus for my second chapter, also sets aside the notion of binaries in engaging, not with West and East nor North and South, but with his web of scapes or, as he occasionally calls them, "nodes" of imaginary landscapes. His work engages most explicitly with the work of Benedict Anderson, who focuses in turn on the role of imagination in creating national communities, but Foucault is also part of Appadurai's theses. When Appadurai asserts that global flows "occur in and through the growing disjunctures between ethnoscapas, technoscapas, financescapas, mediascapas, and ideoscapas," he echoes Foucault's contentions that power is not personal, but is rather a web of interlocking influences (Appadurai 35).

We see this at work, not just in my second chapter, but in the way David Henry Hwang takes advantage of popular stereotypical discourses of "East" and "West" and exposes them on-stage (a medium that is part of both larger mediascapas and ideoscapas). We also see the influence and interdependence of these scapes in *A Gesture Life* and *The Book of Salt* when we watch Hata, Binh, and their fellow characters get caught in various global/transnational webs in two different, if recent epochs in world history. Most notably, Hata, Sunny, and Binh are deterritorialized (Stein and Toklas less so) as they move around the world in search of work, family, and home, and they all find themselves in the midst of societies run by a dominant ethnic group not their own. Hata even finds himself as part of a larger financescape: he starts a business in New York and makes it thrive, and attends conferences over the years in which he meets fellow businessmen

from all over the world. In addition to this he is also, as Renny Bannerjee points out, part of an increasing population of foreign/non-white business owners in Bedley Run, who in turn are all part of an expanding global marketplace. Thus, Appadurai's premises can shed light on individual subjectivities (and representations thereof) as well as larger transnational concerns.

In this section I have looked at different theoretical approaches and tried, not to reconcile them, but to see the ways in which they speak to each other and produce meaning out of conflict. In the concluding section, I return to the problem (and production) of stereotypes. I end my dissertation by raising new questions--questions beyond the scope of this particular project, but that investigate where there is room for future research, and some of the places this discussion could continue to go, crossing borders along the way.

Conclusion

I opened my first chapter by discussing John Galliano's Fall 2007 couture show for Christian Dior, a show themed around *Madama Butterfly* and which fetishized "the Orient." The show was roughly a year and a half ago. In his ready-to-wear collection for Fall 2009, Galliano demonstrated that not much has changed. As writer Sarah Mower put it:

The main point of Galliano's device is that it gave access to the areas of harem pants, rich gilded brocades, and Asian influences in general. Christian Dior never went East himself, certainly, but the notion wove ikat patterns, cheongsam fastenings, paisley prints, and those newly fashionable trousers into the house codes in a way that came out making sense for the many markets Galliano has to juggle. ("Fall 2009," para. 1)

Once again, Asia is in vogue--or is always still in vogue ("newly fashionable" notwithstanding). And the clothes will go out all over the world--two of Galliano's "many markets" consist of wealthy customers from Russia and the Middle East. Wives and daughters of oil barons will be eager to clothe themselves in Galliano's re-visioning of harem pants, sometimes wearing them beneath chadors. Shoppers in Hong Kong will don Dior clothes accented with cheongsam fastenings. Additionally, while I have already referred to the Christian Dior Spring 2007 couture show based on *Madama Butterfly*, I did not mention the September 2007 issue of *Vogue Korea* that contained an editorial spread with the same theme, except that it featured all Asian models wearing Westernized versions of "Butterfly's" clothes.

Naturally, the fashion industry has plenty of room for irony and play. But fashion is culture writ large, the sartorial equivalent of skywriting: we wear the world. And since those endless global complexities must needs be distilled into individual garments, while there is play, there is not always subtlety. Part of that distillation is the power of the stereotype, something that can easily be reproduced and endlessly re-presented, season after season.

Stereotypes, in the critical lexicon of the last ten to twenty years of postcolonial study, have assumed a status as markers of instability in colonial discourse. As I said in my Introduction, they are "explanations" of what colonial powers maintained needed no explanation (or proof) in the first place--that is, the essential, immutable nature of the colonized (sneaky Asian, bestial African). And just as Eastwood's *Gran Torino* proves, their cultural cachet lives on. However, the movie also shows that the contexts for stereotype have changed, just as the world itself has changed, moving from a post-/colonial model to a transnational one. After all, neither Japan nor China was ever colonized in the strictest sense of the term, although China shares some similarities with colonized nations. But they do have a long history of being exoticized in the West, whether through fashion, lacquer screens, lapis lazuli stones, or any number of variations on the theme. Stereotyping the Other, rather than being limited within a postcolonial construct, has gone global--or at least transnational.

If stereotypes are markers of instability, then they can fit within the paradigm we might call transnationalism, which is itself inherently unstable. In my Introduction, I asked, "What do we do with systems of identity that are grounded in a geography that becomes increasingly less fixed?" I would like to append a few more questions. How can we account for "systems of identity," which include stereotypes, when old borders and definitions are changing? How do we read, for example, "Asian-ness" in the context of the Betty Brown episode, where people who have lived in the United States all their lives were treated as if they were fresh off the boat, so to speak?

One answer is to do what this dissertation does, and that is to read texts (and contexts) against each other. Brown's insensitivity reflects the continuing, disempowering influence of stereotypes--here, stereotypes of Asian and Asian American (specifically, Chinese American) people, languages, and cultures. If stereotypes are an inadequate and insulting way to approach, haltingly, the Other; if discourses and practices of transnationalism bring people and ideas in closer propinquity than ever before in human history; if all that is a given (as I maintain), then the task left is to unpack what we take for granted, to own our privilege where it exists, to claim our responsibilities, to cease arrogating responsibilities that are *not* ours, and to listen to the words that are already and ceaselessly in circulation, often in tongues not our own.

Aldous Huxley asks, "What is the That to which the thou can discover itself to be akin?" (21). He speaks of a "perennial philosophy" in which human thought and faith can, across cultures, be reduced to fundamentally essential ideas about God, myth, and life--a philosophy naturally grounded in his identification with Western modernity (he is, in this respect, like Foucault). However, Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*, first published in 1944, coincides with the beginning of another stage in global relations, similar to the position we find ourselves in now. As such, Huxley's question "What is the That?" raises intriguing possibilities. In our world, "That" can be so many things: transnational subjects, cultures, capital, and more. I do not mean to suggest that everyone in the world should find some means of becoming alike. Such an idea would involve a naïve return to humanism and the erasure of difference. I do mean that "akin"--related to

(kin), but not the same--implies a commonality, but not a reduction, as well as a possibility for facing and being faced by the Other without prejudice.

In that vein, future conversations on this topic should be about, among other things, responsible ways of being "akin," of framing our current vocabulary to encompass isolated transnational subjects rather than exclude them. The reasoning behind Bhabha's theories of stereotypes, mimicry, and ambivalence is evolving into a different paradigm. Even Walt Kowalski can sense this shift, and reaches out to it as best he can, although his methods are fatally flawed. Like Kowalski, we all seek--not "we *must* seek," because we're already doing it--a new way of being with people from the margins and peripheries, people from the center, and people who demonstrate how the two can be collapsed or elided.

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