

THE SENSIBILITY OF THE ADOPTED:  
TRAUMA AND CHILDHOOD IN THE CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND CINEMA  
OF EAST ASIA AND ITS DIASPORA

By

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## ABSTRACT

### THE SENSIBILITY OF THE ADOPTED: TRAUMA AND CHILDHOOD IN THE CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND CINEMA OF EAST ASIA AND ITS DIASPORA

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My study delineates the persistence of a predominant nostalgic mode and the affect of orphanhood, in the literary and visual texts of East Asia and its Diaspora—Japan, South Korea and the People’s Republic of China and their Diaspora in the West—which I will describe as “the sensibility of the adopted.” In my dissertation, I import Kirby Farrell’s understanding of trauma as an imaginative trope that reflects the shock of modernization and a post-traumatic mode that is conveyed through narrative structures. I also apply Cathy Caruth’s psychoanalytical approach, which is to consider stories of trauma as a belated experience, which reflects the characteristics of trauma itself, incomprehensible but returning to haunt the survivor. I argue that the pervasive nostalgic mode and the affect of orphanhood created through the selected narratives of trauma, of grieving the loss and striving in vain to recover it, constitutes a compensatory attempt to reshape and recover from the trauma of postwar nation-building.

My dissertation is comprised of four chapters—the first chapter on the extreme cinemas of South Korea, the second on the horror and extreme cinemas of Japan, the third on novels of diasporic writers of East Asian descent living in the West, and the fourth on transnational art films from China. These four chapters deal literally and figuratively with issues surrounding traumatized childhood and youth—in particular the recurring motif of the orphaned and a metaphor for the transcultural adoption of Western modernity in East Asia and its Diaspora.

Each chapter has a different focus on the ways in which narratives of trauma are structured, creating the post-traumatic mode, and the ways in which the impact of incomprehensible traumatic events is transmitted through various tactile and/or empathic paths, yet the four chapters are developed conceptually and interrelated across the themes they explore. In these generically and nationally organized chapters, I analyze the ways in which the thematic representations of the traumatized share a bridging of aesthetics and ethics, poetics and politics.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Diasporic Subjectivities: Reconsidering East Asia and its Diaspora in a Global Context

Recent scholarship in cross-cultural and literary studies has often equated nation-building in the modern era with trauma. This trauma is posited not only as a clinical syndrome of people who have experienced traumatic events but also as a cultural trope of nations suffering from ruptures in their recent history.<sup>1</sup> In my dissertation, I focus on contemporary literary and

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<sup>1</sup> Since the 1990s, Trauma Studies has received sufficient critical attention from literary and cultural scholars as to result in the establishment of a new disciplinary field. One of the field's main concerns is the ethical representation and transmission of traumatic events, which are closely related to questions about how we can access the unreachable past and how we can make truth claims about history through representations in fiction and historiography. While Kirby Farrell, in *Post-traumatic Culture*, emphasizes the role of wish-fulfilling characters and narratives that compensate for the traumatic scars of modern western culture, many relate the representation of trauma to truth claims, in which trauma studies has been a forum for political testimonial of the marginalized as well as the traumatized in history. For example, Shoshana Feldman and Dori Laub in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) examine the literature and visual texts of the Second World War and Holocaust as witnesses to historical trauma, yet they suggest that narratives—confessional or fictional, historical or fantastical—need to be understood as “a mode to access the truth,” [or: a mode of access to the truth] an allegory for traumatic historical junctures (27). Nancy Peterson, in *Against Amnesia* (2001), demands to read marginalized racial and ethnic writers' narratives of “tragic and traumatic moments of American history” as alternative histories of America. She claims that erased events in official history are restructured and retold in fictional forms that convey marginalized voices and heal scars from history. Gabriele Schwab, in *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, also claims that focusing on traumatic history is a way to release us from the present indulgence of violence on a daily basis. Schwab insists that silenced histories, the unspeakable wounds of trauma, haunt the present, and that artwork and the cryptographic writing of literature enables us to access unspeakable truths that will release us from the present. Kate Douglas' *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory* (2010) discloses the ways in which the trope of traumatized or innocent childhood has been used as affective memory practice to create “a consistent catalysis for the emergence of marginalized voices” in contemporary western culture (172). Others, such as Dominick LaCapra, Geoffrey Hartman, and Jill Bennet focus on the roles of artistic form and trauma in generating empathic responses while representing the past.

cinematic texts of East Asia and its Diaspora that employ trauma as a cultural trope.<sup>2</sup> An obsessively recurring set of motifs comprises the central commonality in these texts. They return time and again to themes of traumatized childhood in the historical junctures of colonization and war, or the contemporary era of global capitalism, revealing the untold histories of the forgotten and marginalized. At the same time, the narrative structures and/or visual compositions employed in the literary and cinematic texts of East Asia and its Diaspora are devised to deliver the sentiments and sensibility of the people in East Asia and its Diaspora, who have compulsively adopted western modernity in the flow of globalization.

My research is situated within cross-cultural and literary studies' recent attention to a new framework for, and a critical rethinking of the culture of East Asia and its Diaspora (Ma 2007; Chow 2006). The theorization of the culture of Japan, South Korea, and the People's Republic of China as well as their respective diasporas in the West, demands both reexamining existing critical frameworks of the West and conceptualizing the local context by situating the cultural products of East Asia and its Diaspora within the global. Recent technological developments and the growth of world trade now accompany globalization, transnational migrations, and cross cultural communications. In response, a number of disciplinary fields—including Asian Studies and Asian American studies—that previously confined their research objects and fields to national borders, have started in the last few decades to reconsider their fields through a transnational perspective.<sup>3</sup> The disciplinary walls of these different fields have

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<sup>2</sup> East Asian nations, among which I refer specifically to Japan, South Korea, and China, have been modernized and industrialized at an exceedingly rapid pace since World War II, while the cultures of East Asia and its Diaspora have been violently uprooted and intensely metamorphosed in the modernizing process, whether in the East or the West (Lau 1-2).

<sup>3</sup> As will be explained in greater detail, Asian Studies, along with other regionally defined subfields constituting "Area Studies," is one of the vestiges of post-WWII U.S. foreign policy,

delayed the search for the new, transnational interaction and imagination created through the flow of East Asia and its Diaspora. However, important discourses of Asian American Studies and Asian Studies have emerged in the last two decades to examine the conflation of Asian and Asian American identities within the global context and to examine the hybridized East Asian subjects, both in their nations as well as in Diaspora. Given that this hybridized subject acts, in discourses, as a primary marker of the transnational, this dissertation aims to find potential ways to cross-disciplinary boundaries between Asian American Studies and Asian Studies by employing theories of diaspora. My research is aligned with these new attempts to see East Asian subjects in transnational contexts and to bridge the discourses between Asian Studies and Asian American Studies. For that, I focus on motifs of traumatized childhood, which has been interwoven with the untold stories of the marginalized living through historical junctures in the modernizing global world. I also delve into the ways in which the depiction of the psyches of those marginalized figures, through posttraumatic narratives and/or affective visualizations in the contemporary literature and films of East Asia and its Diaspora, are related to the motifs of traumatized childhood.

By juxtaposing and relating the shared aesthetics and politics in the literary texts and films of East Asia and its Diaspora, this dissertation illuminates the traumatic modern history of East Asia and its Diaspora. I situate the textual and cinematic texts of East Asia and its Diaspora in the discourses of Asian American and Asian Studies and Diaspora Studies. I also apply recent theories of Trauma Studies and Film Studies. Through analysis of the content and form of these

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although other institutional factors have likewise impacted the discipline. For example, international studies centers at Oxford and elsewhere are unequivocally beyond the reach of U.S. foreign policy.

diverse literary and cinematic texts, I show that the varied but shared histories of East Asia and its Diaspora, established through adopting Western modernization, create collective sentiments reminiscent of a transnational adoptee's generally conflicted mindset—love for, and submission toward, his adoptive parents, (self-) hatred toward his own race, ethnicity, and homeland, and repressed longing for his biological family and home—which I call “the sensibility of the adopted.”<sup>4</sup> I also propose that, despite their heterogeneities in terms of the diverse forms employed, the texts under investigation share a sentiment of loss and anxiety that largely is rooted in the traumatic process of East Asian countries' modern nation-building.

Asian American Studies, arising from the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, made substantial efforts to overcome the majority view that considered Asians as resident aliens, foreigners, by emphasizing their identity as hyphenated “Americans.” Aware, however, of the changing tendency of racial and ethnic discourses—i.e., critiques of multiculturalism and cultural/ethnic studies as well as attention paid to globalization, notably in North American academia—scholars in Asian American Studies have repositioned the discourses of the field in a global context. In *Immigrant Acts* (1996), Lisa Lowe suggests that we view the history of exclusion, racialization, and disidentification of Asian Americans in relation to the U.S. view of Asian countries as external rivals (5). Lowe's account challenges a prevailing framework that

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams points out in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, that sensibility has been used in relation to “sentiment,” which until the eighteenth century often negatively connoted excessive emotion or “consumption of feelings” (282). But from the eighteenth century onward, the word “sensibility” started to be used for “distinguish[ing] a particular area of interest and response which could be distinguished not only from rationality of intellectuality but also from morality” (283). It becomes “a preferred general word for an area of human response and judgment which could not be reduced to the emotional and emotive” after that (283). Williams suggests that in the modern era, “sensibility” refers to “the formation of a particular mind,” “not to be reduced to either ‘thought’ or ‘feeling’” (283).

holds that an orientalizing view of Asians based on a presumption of an intrinsic “Asianness,” resulted in the exclusion and disidentification of Asian Americans. Lowe provides a critique of this view by proposing that the heterogeneities and hybridity of Asians and Asian Americans need to be considered in a global context:

Despite the usual assumption that Asians immigrate from stable, continuous, “traditional” cultures, most of the post-1965 Asian immigrants come from societies already disrupted by colonialism and distorted by the upheavals of neocolonial capitalism and war. The material legacy of the repressed history of U.S. imperialism in Asia is borne out in the “return” of Asian immigrants to the imperial center. (16)

No longer limited to narrowly defined domestic concerns of the U.S., Asian American Studies has attempted to reshape the field through the lenses of globalization and transnationalism. For example, in *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits* (2006), edited by Shirley Geok-lin Lim et al., Asian American literary studies is proclaimed in the introduction to be in “[a] moment of crisis” (2). This supposed crisis is explicated as having been caused by the heterogeneity and multiplicity among Asian Americans who have different national origins and languages but lack a grand narrative, as in, for example, African American literature. In the editors’ estimation, Asian American literary studies have been perceived and labeled as training its focus on nothing more than “ethnic-identity literature” in the U.S. (2). To remedy this situation, *Transnational Asian American Literature* attempts to situate Asian American literary texts in a global and transnational context by exploring their “national formation themes” in terms of “the diasporic, mobile, transmigratory nature of Asian American experience” (1).

If Asian American literary studies has been criticized for a parochialism, the more squarely internationally-oriented fields of Area Studies has been criticized for its origins as a proxy for and extension of U.S. foreign policy after the Second World War. In *Death of Discipline* (2003), Gayatri Spivak asserts that Area Studies needs to turn away from this military-oriented approach and instead research the culture of the global South with the same level of respect applied to European culture in Comparative Literary Studies.

In the field of literature, we need to move from Anglophony, Lusophony, Teutophony, Francophony, et cetera. We must take the languages of the Southern Hemisphere as active cultural media rather than as objects of cultural study by the sanctioned ignorance of the metropolitan migrant. (9)

Spivak's embrace of the global South gave a new impetus to the study of Asia on its own terms and not as a mere extension of Western comparative literature. Spivak also argues that in the old framework, the cultural products of other cultures and languages are tested out to prove the universality of Western, Euro-American centric theories, instead of pursuing in-depth analysis that requires the research of, not "training" in, the language, philosophy, and histories of the other cultures. She declares that such aspects of the other's culture have been often overlooked, even in Cultural Studies. Rey Chow shares similar reservations about Area Studies, in *The Age of the World Target* (2006). As the U.S. competed against communist Russia throughout the world for intellectual and cultural supremacy as well as military and economic, universities were expected for strategic reasons to provide specialists on others' lives, and Chow criticizes Area Studies' failure to understand other cultures as resulting from their military-oriented goals and approaches. According to her, while Area Studies claims to pursue a "scientific" and "objective" production of knowledge, "the politics and ideology of war" are inscribed even in the pursuit of

“higher learning,” such as in the fields of language training, historiography, anthropology, economics, political science, and so on. Chow emphasizes:

And yet, if the production of knowledge (with its vocabulary of aims and goals, research, data analysis, experimentation, and verification) in fact shares the same scientific and military premises as war—if, for instance, the ability to translate a difficult language can be regarded as equivalent to the ability to break military codes—is it a surprise that it is doomed to fail in its avowed attempts to “know” the other cultures? (41)

In her criticism of Area Studies, Chow also points out North American academia’s lack of efforts toward “learning” other cultures, which requires language acquisition as a fundamental step toward understanding different cultures in-depth.

In Asian American Studies and Area Studies’ self-transformative efforts to position themselves within the flow of globalization, adherents have started to employ theories of Diaspora, since Asian or Asian American identity is regarded as the embodiment of the transnational, transient, and hybridized identities that cross-disciplinary borders as well as national borders. In *Orientations*, Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa question the meaning of Asian and Asian American Studies in terms of “the contemporary phenomenon of globalization driven by U.S. ideology” that is “articulated through and against Asia” (4). They attempt to cross the disciplinary boundaries between Area Studies on Asia and Asian American Studies by taking the Asian diaspora as “an alternative epistemological object” that is “itself a relation” and “makes reference to a kind of conceptual ratio comparing origins and present locations” (7). In *Displacements and Diasporas* (2005), Christopher Lee and others also point out that reframing



Asian American Studies within a transnational perspective has gained urgency due to “the growing interests in globalization across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences” (24). Sheng-mei Ma’s *East-West Montage* (2008) and *Diaspora Literature and Visual Culture* (2010) also attempt to bridge Asia and Asian American Studies, using the concept of diaspora, and suggest a theoretical lens to map these different groups of Asians and Asian American Diaspora with rich examples of cultural studies. The attempt to see the Asian Diaspora in an interactive relation to Asia expands the field from the political engagement of a minority in the U.S. to the mobile and transnational aspects of the Asian Diaspora. In this context, theories of Diaspora may well serve as a vital tool to bridge Asian American Studies and Area Studies on Asia rather than function as a set of Euro-American centric theories testing out their universality.

Diaspora, however, is an elusive term that can be loosely applied to different types of individuals and groups who have been displaced and/or uprooted. In “Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies,” Zana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur historicize the term diaspora by suggesting it as “the mass migrations and displacements of the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in reference to independence movements in formerly colonized areas, waves of refugees fleeing war-torn states, and fluxes of economic migration in the post-World War II era” (4). The authors point out that diaspora studies in the context of late capitalism, accompanied by examination within transnational capital, can provide “the parameters of specific historical moments” (11). Also, Braziel and Mannur suggest that the hybridity and heterogeneity of diasporic subjects enable us to reconsider the map of nation and nationalism in a world under hegemonic and homogenizing global forces (7).

Diasporic traversals question the rigidities of identity itself—religious, ethnic, gendered, national; yet this diasporic movement marks not a postmodern turn

from history, but a nomadic turn in which the very parameters of specific historical moments are embodied and—as diaspora itself suggests—are scattered and regrouped into new points of becoming. (3)

James Clifford suggests a more expanded usage of the term diaspora. He claims that ethnic communities and minority groups that never leave their homeland also can be considered as diasporic communities. The importance of the imagined homeland, whether it is “a real or symbolic” one, should not overshadow the “decentered, later connections” and “a shared ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance” (306). Clifford also argues that members of a diaspora can be a signifier of struggling, that is to say, of “cultural survival, hybridization, resistance, and political rebellion,” that strives to “define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement” (308).<sup>5</sup> For a more flexible and open usage of the concept of diaspora, Clifford uses the term, “diasporic,” to encompass groups of people who do not fit into conventional definitions of diaspora, but who nevertheless contain diasporic features in their lives. These include tribal peoples who either have been dispossessed of their lands and dispersed, or who have been uprooted from their aboriginal lifestyles but not displaced (309).

While I mainly agree with the subversive potential of the use of diaspora to question the “rigidities of identities” and blur national boundaries, I argue, however, that the celebratory tone of scholars in describing “diasporic traversal,” marking it as “new points of becoming,” is problematic because it does not reflect enough on the marginalized and alienated conditions of

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Clifford discusses the culture of Black Diaspora as a way for displaced Africans in the U.K. to be a different type of “British” subject through awareness of shared histories of enslavement and experiences of racism (Clifford 308).

people in diaspora. The term, diaspora, has been often criticized for being used as “a catch-all phrase to speak of and for all movements,” failing to distinguish between those who have benefited from global capitalism, and been empowered by their newly achieved mobility, from those who are exploited (Brazier and Mannur 3). While the notions of boundary-crossing, hybridized, and becoming subjects, on one hand, insinuate a certain positive nuance into the term Diaspora, the imagined homelands of these subjects often have been plundered, distorted, changed, and westernized as a result of colonial wars and continued globalization. Diaspora, then, may most clearly mark the figure of the transnational, but it is certainly not contained by, or exclusive to, Asian American and Asian identities. Nevertheless, it is worth specifying the notions of the Asian Diaspora that mark the changing atmosphere of Asian American Studies and Area Studies on Asia within the discourses of global capitalism.

Among those scholars employing globalization as their critical lens, many have perceived contemporary globalization as a continuation of colonization in the changed form of the global capitalism that accompanies the political and economic inequalities between the global north and south. Liu Kang in “Is There an Alternative to (Capitalist) Globalization?” (1996) points out that globalization, once regarded as an idea or an ideology, is a historical condition of the present transnational capitalism that resulted from the collapse of Soviet-centered socialism (164). Claiming postcolonial national identity as a resistant form against neocolonial economic globalization, Pheng Cheah, in his “Given Culture” (1997), asserts that, “the problems of unequal development and the postindustrial feudalization of periphery are fundamental structures of the global staging of our everyday” (290). After World War II, the hegemonic power of Britain, which dominated over 85 percent of the world, shifted to the U.S. (Miyoshi 250-1). Geeta Kapur considers globalism as an expansion of American-style capitalism and its

worldview—the ideology of free-market trade and the advocacy of human rights—that followed the U.S. victory in the Cold War (193). In “Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality” (2001), Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan write:

In our views, this approach may inadvertently mystify what existed before the advent of late capitalism, whereas we would argue that earlier phases of globalization produced their own inequalities. Certainly, transnational capital is creating new forms of inequality and continuing older asymmetries. Consequently, a long historical viewpoint, indeed multiple views for many sites, is necessary.  
(665)

Malini Johar Schuller, in *Locating Race* (2009), delineates globalization as “a different continuation of an established, raced U.S. imperialism,” which was “initiated by European and largely U.S. interests, has been taken as an explanatory model for postulating a world culture, and has replaced models of systemic inequality such as first world and third, North and South” (3). Due to the unequal development between the global north and south, followed by colonization and wars as the aforementioned scholars have noted, mass migrations and diaspora—which, according to Arjun Appadurai, have been physically enabled and expanded speedily in the last decades by technological advancement and the development of mass and electronic media—have become important historical phenomena of contemporary global culture as well as theoretical concepts defining and characterizing modern subjects and challenging the fixed boundaries of nations.

My contention here is that a reconsideration is necessary of East Asian diasporic subjects as markers bridging the disciplinary walls between Area Studies on Asia and Asian American

Studies within understandings of the theoretical and historical importance of diasporas and mass migrations in the contemporary era of globalization. More specifically, I want to underscore the need to reconsider the ways in which we conceptualize East Asians along with East Asians in diaspora in the West, both of them transnational, transient, and hybridized between the East and the West in the era of global capital. This dissertation, then, is one stage in a much larger project that begins the work of identifying the ways in which those who occupy one “diasporic” subject position—East Asians in Diaspora—re-envision and re-embody their particular, fragmented relations to multiple national sites, and as such, demand a reconsideration of the very notions of identity, the nation in the flow of global capital, and disciplinary genres.

The notable post-traumatic mode of the literary texts and films of East Asia and its Diaspora, I assert, constitutes a privileging of modernization and westernization and a denigration of traditional East Asian customs and modes of life. Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, in *Multiple Modernities* (2003), suggests that Western modernity has been transplanted in the East, changing not only institutional aspects of politics and economics but also cultural structures, significations, and display (1). Material abundance in modern East Asia, achieved through “unprecedented receptiveness toward Western ideas,” she claims, is accompanied by “anxiety” while its contemporary visual culture and media is “either a direct imitation or a kind of ‘mutation’ from Euro-America” (1). As Lau notes, the “anxiety” of East Asian nations toward the West may be more a question of compatibility than the aggressive postcolonial sentiments apparently shared by other Asian and African nations that were colonized directly by the West. In contrast to those other nations, East Asian nations have consciously or subconsciously depreciated traditional culture, considering it as an object for modification, partly in response to western forces and partly by their self-will to be the compatible other, despite their different

experiences of westernization and modernization. For instance, Japan, the first modernized nation in the East, eagerly sought to Westernize and modernize itself, in fact going so far as to become an imperial power in the region. Undergoing modernization more belatedly, Korea was colonized by Japan, winning its independence from Japanese occupation only at the end of World War II. China, fighting against Western and Japanese colonial invasions as well as enduring civil wars, has shaped its own modernization process by adopting the Communist ideologies and systems, yet in the last two decades it has started to interweave Western capitalist systems with the existing Socialist structure of the nation. East Asian nations have collectively adopted western modernity as a model for their own nation-building, in addition to being nurtured under America's postwar expansion ideologies, as well as the inclusive logics of multiculturalism, color-blind ideology, and cosmopolitan tolerance (Klein 10-12).

In the contemporary literature and films of East Asia and its Diaspora, a pattern recurs in which the indignation of Diasporic East Asian characters, who are typically less thoroughly accepted or assimilated into Western culture, is regularly manifested as nostalgia for a lost past or place. General notions of nostalgia—a displaced person's longing for a cherished place or native land and a national awareness resulting from residing outside of a native community, arising as “a side effect of the teleology of [the progression]” of modernity (10)—have been reconceived by Svetlana Boym as “a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return” (8), which is also a longing for the past, our childhood (xv), or “the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history” (8). Edward Said employs the term “orphanhood” to illuminate the specific conditions of exiles who reflect on their differences as “eccentricities” and refuse to belong to their new homelands. He also emphasizes the will of exiled artists to confront their

alienated conditions and use them as their source for creation (183).<sup>6</sup> I claim, however, that the represented conditions and sentiments of East Asians in East Asia and its Diaspora are akin to, but distinct from, that of exiled artists, due to their self-imposed will to assimilate into western society, even if that will is accompanied by a guilt-ridden sentiment of repressed longing for the old East. Taking Said's trope of "orphanhood" as a point of departure, I will delineate the ways in which writers and directors in East Asia and its Diaspora have, through their portrayals of traumatized psyches in contemporary literature and film, explored literal and figurative issues relating to adoption.

Here, I conceptualize "the sensibility of the adopted" as both a literary metaphor and an aesthetic inscription referencing the diasporic conditions of East Asia and its Diaspora. A prime example of this sensibility can be seen in the autobiographical documentary *First Person Plural*, the directorial debut of Deann Borshay Liem. In the film, Borshay Liem illuminates how her identity is shaped through personal and private stories of family and kinship in America as well as Korea. Through the incorporation of historical footage and photos, however, she attempts to resituate her irrecoverable personal loss, rooted in her identity and memories as a Korean adoptee, in the official and public narratives of Korean/American history about international adoptions. David L. Eng, in *The Feeling of Kinship* (2010), analyzes the psyche of racial melancholia as applicable to transnational adoptees' cases and their visual representations in *First Person Plural*. Eng, pointing out that transnational adoption is a post-World War II phenomenon associated with American liberalism, post-war prosperity, and Cold War politics,

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<sup>6</sup> Said writes: "No matter how well they do, exiles are always eccentrics who feel their difference (even as they frequently exploit it) as a kind of orphanhood. Anyone who is really homeless regards the habit of seeing estrangement in everything modern as an affectation, a display of modish attitude. Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong" (183).

situates Borshay Liem's identity and experiences as a Korean adoptee of an American family within transnational migration from the West to the East and challenges the color-blind ideologies in the U.S (94).<sup>7</sup>

I analyze Borshay Liem's documentary advancing Eng's argument, yet my main interest here is to use my textual analysis of her work as an allegorical marker to indicate the unidentified as yet undistinguished issues in the existing academic discourse on the literature and cinemas of East Asia and its Diaspora. In other words, I attempt to highlight the sentiments and sensibility that she creates, and the politics and conditions that she illustrates, as a parallel allusion to those shown in the literary and visual texts of East Asia and its Diaspora. As discussed above, what I mean by "the sensibility of the adopted" is the traumatized psyche, resulting from a layered sense of orphanhood and nostalgia that combines an anxiety to be westernized and modernized with the loss of cultural roots and a "longing for the impossible mythic return." Through a close reading of Borshay Liem's documentary, I delve into the ways in which a certain type of childhood is reconstructed and imagined, as in reflections of the present condition of diasporic subjects, as well as their hope and nostalgia in relation to the traumatic losses of a nation suffering from colonization, wars, and diaspora.

Borshay Liem's narrative starts with laying out the complexity of her identity, announcing her three different names and various shots of herself: Kang Ok Jin, Cha Jung Hee,

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<sup>7</sup> NAATA is an organization that supports and showcases "Asian Pacific American media productions" to the American Public. As a national media arts organization, it provides funding, distribution, and production support services for film and video projects by and about the Asian American community for broadcast on public television. Borshay Liem has served as Executed Director of NAATA, and is the producer, director, and writer of the autobiographical documentary, *First Person Plural* (2000).



and Deann Borshay.<sup>8</sup> The scenes show Borshay Liem's face continuously, and she appears to be almost the same while wearing different facial expressions, but her narration relates these shots—with jump cut editing—to her different identities: her official and legal Korean identity as an orphan, Cha Jung Hee; her real name/self, Kang Ok Jin, whose family is alive in Korea; and another given identity as adoptee Deann Borshay.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, by deliberately presenting scenes of framed and reframed shots of herself and including the camera itself as either an object in the background or as a framing tool, the scenes insinuate that her complicated identities are established within frames, others' gazes toward herself, and her awareness of those gazes.

Such a narration and the multiple shots of her face demand long explanations of her personal and historical backgrounds as well as questioning the boundaries separating the categories of Asian, Asian American, and Asian in Diaspora. Borshay Liem does not define

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<sup>8</sup> Although her last name changed from Borshay to Borshay Liem when she got married, I refer to her as Borshay Liem throughout my introduction, except the part that I depict her initial arrival to the U.S in the documentary.

<sup>9</sup> *First Person Plural* begins with a fade-in of a very blurry image of Borshay Liem's face in close-up—only the lines of her face and the background—the kitchen of a house—appears relatively clear. The camera slowly reveals her face, slightly despondent, looking directly at the camera, and other parts of the space of the kitchen, including a camera on a tripod, as if it has been shot through a mirror. With these shots, the director narrates, "My name is Kang Ok Jin. I was born on June 14<sup>th</sup> in 1957. I feel like I have been several different people in one life." After a very brief pause, the narration goes on; "My name is Cha Jung Hee," and the screen, shows, through a jump cut, the profile of her face looking down slightly, and then looking back at the camera smiling brightly with her mouth wide open. Through another jump cut, the shot leads again to her profile and her looking back at the camera, sadly, while blinking her eyes slowly but many times. The narration reveals, "I had three names, three different senses of history." Again after a brief pause, the narrator Liem states, "My name is Deann Borshay. I was born on March 3rd in 1966, the moment I stepped off the airplane in San Francisco." With this narration, the scene again changes to her face, which looks almost identical as in the previous shots. Yet the scene shows her face as well as a slightly changed background from the initial shots, shown through the screen of another camera; her face is framed doubly through the camera screen shot by another camera.

herself. Rather, she explains only her feeling that there have been “several different people in one life.” The documentary later reveals that adopted as Cha Jung Hee, a South Korean orphan who had corresponded with the Borshay family in the U.S., this child from South Korea gains citizenship as Deann Borshay. In fact, however, she was Kang Ok Jin, who had lived with four siblings and a single mother but been given up, switched with Cha Jung Hee who happened to be brought back to her home by her father a month before her scheduled adoption, and registered as Cha in Korean adoption documents. Her elusive identity as a transnational adoptee, perceived in the U.S. as an orphan even though her biological mother was still alive, unmoors her from fixed notions of national and personal identity and unsettles “the safe house of identity” (11), the notion of fixed identity markers.<sup>10</sup> As her documentary makes apparent, the naturalized concepts of identity in terms of family, nation, and individual do not apply to her complex self-identity fixed notions of national and ethnic identities, which in turn serves to challenge disciplinary limitations. Instead of artificially situating such adoptees and narratives of/about them within particular conventional identity distinctions and disciplinary genres, I argue that using the term (Yngvesson 37).<sup>11</sup> Fluctuating alternately among the discourses of Asian Americans, Asians, and Asians in Diaspora, the elusive identities of transnational adoptees offer a reconfiguration of “diasporic” would be a way of closely describing the elusiveness of such identities—shuttling

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<sup>10</sup> As Susan Coutin, Bill Maurer, and Barbara Yngvesson point out, in the legal process of immigration or international adoption, South Korean Kang Ok Jin had to “leave one’s country of origin, enter the United States through a formally recognized channel, subject oneself to the authority of U.S. law, and acquire a legal persona in the United States” to become the American Deann Borshay and be stripped of her Korean family, language, and persona (808).

<sup>11</sup> Yngvesson suggests that adopted children have “represented a form of love that exceeded the boundaries of nations and the ethnicized and racialized exclusions through which national identities are constructed” (99).

among identities, continents, and the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future, as these subjects may be said to experience ongoing diasporic conditions.

In addition, the constant framing and reframing of herself in these scenes, I want to point out, resemble East Asian cultural conditions, in the sense that the culture of East Asia and its Diaspora, broadly speaking, has been established through ongoing self-censorship as well as willful re-fabrications by inhabitants building themselves through interacting with and reacting to the West. The Korean orphanage, in order to turn a profit as well as to provide a better life to another (Korean) child, generates fabrication in this child's identity for the American adoptive family when it sends Cha Jung Hee as Kang Ok Jin. In the narration, Borshay Liem reveals the incident that forced her to live under self-censorship. Before she boarded her flight for the U.S., the director of the orphanage told her not to reveal her real identity—she is not the orphaned girl Jung Hee but Ok Jin who has a mother and siblings—to her adoptive parents until she was old enough to take care of herself. Ok Jin's true identity is regenerated through the legal fabrication of her identity and silenced through her initial inability to express herself in English to her adoptive family. An additional factor contributing to her self-censorship is the orphanage director's threatening advice—not to reveal her true identity until she could take care of herself—that warns her of the possibility of abandonment by her adoptive family if her true identity as Ok Jin is revealed.

The documentary portrays how American foreign policies and mainstream ideologies related to the humanitarian/Christian conscience and savior/superior complex, combined with white guilt, influenced the Borshay family's decision to adopt a child from South Korea. After revealing Borshay Liem's close and happy relationships—laughing, talking, and doing nails together—with her adoptive parents in the setting of the Borshay home, the scene changes to a

brief insertion of Borshay Liem's brother Duncan Borshay saying that as "a red-blooded American," and "only knowing American culture," he cannot help but think America is superior to "every" other "in every way," although he acknowledges that his attitude may appear "arrogant and condescending." This leads to home video scenes of the Borshay family before the adoption, and media footage from the 1950s introducing South Korean war orphans to the American public. Alveen Borshay, Borshay Liem's adoptive mother's narration reveals that because they have been doing blessedly well and are affluent, she felt "bad" and "wanted to do something for somebody." After watching a show promoting the idea of being foster parents for Korean war orphans, the Borshays began to support an orphaned girl named Cha Jung Hee in Sun-Duk Orphanage, South Korea. Through two-and-a-half years of correspondence with a nurse who wrote on behalf of Jung Hee, the Borshay family decided to adopt her so that she could "have a family."

From the beginning, the Borshay family is uninterested in knowing the girls' individual differences. Rather, it is more important for them to be able to sustain their faith that they are doing good—saving an orphan from another part of the world. When a group of Korean adoptees arrived at the airport the day the family went to meet Jung Hee and welcome her into their home, the Borshays did not even recognize their new child, despite having a picture (or pictures) of her; instead they thought and wished that another Korean girl arriving at the airport would turn out to be Jung Hee.<sup>12</sup> In addition, even though Ok Jin did look quite different from the girl—Jung Hee—in the photo they had, they did not attempt to question the differences between the two

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<sup>12</sup> The adoptive mother recollects, "We really didn't know which child was ours. There were apparently babies and another girl taller than you," and her adoptive sister, Denise, says that her mother went up to a wrong child, but it did not matter as "one of those was ours." (*First Person Plural*)

Korean girls, Kang and Cha, and accepted Kang Ok Jin as their own. Much later, Borshay Liem grows up and finds photographs of two clearly different Korean girls named Cha Jung Hee. She contacts the Korean orphanage, discovers that she was switched with Jung Hee, and informs the Borshay family. When Borshay Liem questions her adoptive family members about their perceptions regarding the fact that she is actually Ok Jin and not Jung Hee, they constantly respond that it does not matter to them whether she is Ok Jin or Jung Hee. Although the family may intend to reassure Borshay Liem that they love her regardless whether she is Ok Jin or Jung Hee, one consequence is her pained interpretation that they lack any interest in delving into Ok Jin's personal memories and history. These examples from the documentary disclose that for the Borshay family, their adopted daughter is nothing more than a random Korean orphan they saved and raised as a member of the family.

If the Borshay family had just once looked closely at the two different girls' photos, recognized the differences and questioned who is the actual Ok Jin, their understanding and acceptance of Cha and her personal memories would surely have created crucial differences in the interactions between the family and their adopted daughter, as well as in Borshay Liem's building of herself. Similarly, it can be stated that, rather than identifying and articulating the shared uniqueness in the aesthetics and politics of the literary and visual texts of East Asia and its Diaspora, many academic approaches to the literature and films of East Asia and its Diaspora are shaped through applying the lens of Euro-American theories that might universalize and generalize without attending to the distinctions evident in different epistemologies and psyche in cultures, of post-colonial theories that have been used to explain and identify specific psyches depicted in the literature and films of nations that were once colonized by the West, or political theories of ethnic studies that are designed to shed light on the situations and psyches of ethnic

and minority groups in the West. Aware of these tendencies, in this dissertation, I consider and employ many established academic theories. However, I assert that close readings of the forms and contents of the texts in question, in conjunction with close analysis of the psyche born from specific social and historical conditions, would provide a new lens to access and understand the sensibility and sentiments of East Asia and its Diaspora.

In the documentary, the Borshay family's obliviousness regarding the social and national conditions of South Korea, and their indifference toward their adopted daughter's cultural and familial background, leads to another repression in Borshay Liem's psyche, and inhibits her from building a stronger sense of self-love and self-esteem. Once Borshay Liem acquired enough English to express herself as a child, she tried to explain that she was not Cha Jung Hee but Kang Ok Jin, who has living family members including her biological mother in South Korea. The Borshay family, however, decided to believe the legal official documents identifying her as Jung Hee, an orphan, rather than endorsing Borshay Liem's personal memories and explanations. Her adoptive parents' attitudes reflect an indifference to the social conditions and financial situations affecting South Korean orphanages and families; the orphanages wanted to send children abroad, partly because they believed that the children sent abroad for adoption would have better lives and education opportunities in the West, and partly because international adoption benefited financially the orphanage as well as the nation.<sup>13</sup> The adoptive family's potential discernment

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<sup>13</sup> Yngvesson suggests that the "depth of historicity within the postcolonial nation is represented through the figure of the transnational transracial adoptee, the displaced child" (29). Historical pictures of scenes of the Korean War, war orphans, orphanages, and rescue operations of orphans by Holt International Children's Services are shown with her explanations on the history of the Korean peninsula. Borshay Liem narrates that, "[A]fter the Korean War, an impoverished South Korea was unable to support its war orphans but found ways to make money by exporting children to Western countries, mainly Western Europe and the U.S.: South Korea became the largest supplier of children to developed countries in the world, causing some to

regarding the historical and national context of South Korea would have been directly related to their understanding about the identity of their adopted daughter. Thus, the Borshay family's blindness and lack of interest in knowing who Jung Hee/Ok Jin was, can be said to have contributed to Borshay Liem's repression of her past memories of her Korean family and herself. As if Borshay Liem's personal history was only understood by the Borshay family in their categorization of seeing her as no more than an orphaned child rescued from an impoverished Asian country, the East Asian cultural products and literature of diasporic writers of East Asian descent have been always perceived through a certain lens that projects stereotypical or Orientalizing images of East Asia, regardless of each nation's own unique modernization process and emerging new culture.

My close reading in this dissertation of the forms and contents of the literature and films of East Asia and its Diaspora, however, reveals that in their strong drive toward westernization and modernization, East Asians not only have longed for their lost cultural roots but also faced an ineffable anxiety over keeping up with their model, the West; and, likewise, that those sentiments have been repressed in order to achieve modernization and westernization for the sake of national survival in the globalizing capitalist world. In the film, Borshay Liem presents herself as a Korean-born adoptee who is fragmented between appreciation, on the one hand, toward her adoptive family's love, and trauma, on the other hand, from living as a racial other in a white family in America while repressing her memories of her early childhood in Korea. Also

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argue the country's economic miracle was due in part to exporting its most precious natural resource, its children." Institutionalized adoption, in effect, became a business through which Korea rebuilt a country devastated by Japanese occupation and subsequent wars. Borshay explains that in such a context, she herself, Kang Ok Jin, the fourth of five children of a widowed mother who lost her husband in the Korean War, was given up by her mother through the encouragement of an orphanage that benefitted financially from international adoption practices.

her situation and condition as an adoptee drives her to be a perfectly assimilated American, which results in constant anxiety and frustration, while constant feelings of loss accompany her since she does not fit into the existing naturalized concepts of identity that are based on family or nation.

The home-video scenes—in which Borshay Liem’s childhood is portrayed from the date she arrived at the airport in San Francisco, looking frightened and sad, to her high school days as the seeming embodiment of a fun-loving, cheerful American girl—show the ways in which she has adjusted to an American lifestyle and been loved as a member of the Borshay family. In contrast, the melancholy background music of *First Person Plural* makes audiences aware of the facial expression of the child who always wears a smile but comes across as self-conscious. The documentary depicts the ways in which this Korean adoptee turned into a typical cheerful American adolescent who participates in cheerleading and mimics her white sister’s hair, dress, and make-up. Yet Borshay Liem’s narration underscores how out-of-place her younger self felt, and how this led to continuous efforts to be a “real American”:

One of the ways I kind of learned how to be American was by observing you and Duncan and family and friends and T.V. I always thought you have perfect eyes. It was always frustrating that I couldn’t get my eyelashes [to] look like yours.

*(First Person Plural)*

Borshay Liem even underwent plastic surgery in the belief that her ears are “sticking out,” and her anxiety about her phenotypic differences is epitomized in her narration by her worries about her eyes and eyelashes not looking like “yours.” Borshay Liem wanted her eyes and hair to look exactly like her sister’s, and experienced frustration in not being able to match her sister’s “perfect” appearance.



However, her sister Denise responds that when people saw them—Borshay Liem and herself—they asked her if Borshay Liem was her sister, saying that they looked alike.<sup>14</sup> The politics of colorblindness, “not the suppression of difference but the collective refusal to see difference in the face of it,” clearly has influenced Borshay Liem’s becoming an American, not only through the process of legal and cultural assimilation but by her adoption into a white family in the U.S. (Eng 95). In tandem with the narration, the camera moves from Denise, who sits in a row with other white American girls, to Borshay Liem, the only Asian girl, in a photograph that seems to have been taken for a formal high school event. Accompanying the photograph, Borshay Liem’s narration adds, in a more sober tone, that she learned how to be American by observing others, watching T.V., and doing everything that fit into the image of the ideal American: “I think somehow I had created this sort of collage of things and made myself overdo to fit all the little things that I had seen.” She was unable to act naturally but had to “overdo” in order to fit in with her concept of a “real” American, that is to say, the lifestyle, appearance, and norms of white Americans in a colorblind ideology.

The colorblind ideology influenced Borshay Liem’s pursuit of as “mainstream American” a look as possible through collecting elements of that “American look” from the media as well as imitating Denise. Similarly, the western capitalist ideologies and Euro-American hegemonies and systems that are often conveyed through the media have influenced the modern nation-building process of East Asia and the establishments of the subjectivities of East Asian descendants resettled in the West. Even though Borshay Liem is shown in her video footage to

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<sup>14</sup> Erasing racial differences but emphasizing cultural and ethnic features, the politics of colorblindness functions for the U.S. as part of an ideology that has expanded throughout the world along with capitalism.

have been well cared for and deeply loved by the Borshay family, her traumatized self—scarred by forced displacement and the long-term repression of her different national origins and experience as a racial other in American society—is seen through her extreme self-consciousness and her efforts to be someone other than herself. It is significant, however, that despite that her apparent desire to “blend in” and erase her difference, she turns her experiences and sentiments into a revealing documentary about herself. In my dissertation chapters, I delineate how those sentiments and sensibility, established in the traumatic modern-nation building of East Asia and its Diaspora, have turned into new forms and contents that suggest the adoption of genre conventions and/or visual stylizations of Western literature and films. At the same time, I examine how the literature and films of East Asian and its Diaspora deliver unique sentiments of lost and traumatized psyches built on ongoing “over-doing” to adapt to and resemble the West.

The traces of the cultural roots lost in the process of modernization and westernization have been repressed in Borshay Liem’s case, yet those returned, when she lived away from her adoptive parents during college, as a sudden flashback of memories about her past in Korea and an encounter with the ghost of her biological father. In essence, the writing and filming of *First Person Plural* offers Borshay Liem an opportunity not only to speak publicly about her personal memory as a transnational adoptee but to release her long-suppressed memories of Korea. Although she had repressed her memories of Korea and made efforts to be “a real American,” she explains her conflicting emotions that despite her feeling “disloyal” and as if she were “putting dirt in my mouth” by mentioning her Korean family, she needs to “talk to” the Borshay family about her Korean mother. Her encounter with the ghost of her biological father was the catalyst that led her to reveal the psychological rupture within her caused by her traumatic memories as a child.

Eventually, she looked for her biological family members in South Korea and was able to meet them. What she discovered, however, was that her loss was irrecoverable because she was unable to access certain specific cultural/national sentiments or emotions that could only be reached through an understanding of the culture and language of South Korea. Borshay Liem returned as an American, unable to understand or communicate with her biological family members. She narrates:

I know that language is the barrier between me and my Korean family. There is something about Korean that I can't get access to. I've tried to learn it since I was in college. It is not just about words, and it is not just sounds or letters. I think learning the Korean language is about emotion and about memory. (*First Person Plural*)

The meeting with her biological family reveals that Borshay Liem cannot connect with her Korean biological family because of her limited access to her first language, which also means she has a limited understanding of her family members' culture and sentiments, and this gulf results in emotional distance rather than the intimacy for which she had hoped.

Borshay Liem seems to have hoped that her self-esteem issues—which originated from her forced migration as well as her secret longing for her imagined homeland, Korea—would be healed by recollecting her past, by her journey of a return to, and reunification with, her Korean family. As Yngvesson points out, an adoptee's return to his or her country of origin is imagined to make the adoptee himself/herself as well as the country of origin whole by gathering the fragmented pieces of their shared past (29). However, Borshay Liem's story disproves the idealized mythical return to the country of origin; her return reveals that she does not belong there either, and her various encounters underscore how she would most likely continue to live

with a certain sense of loss—of orphanhood. Understanding that she cannot be part of her biological family, and accepting that her biological mother has not been her mother for over thirty years, turn out to be the only ways in which she is able to achieve any closeness to her birthmother.<sup>15</sup> The ending of the film shows that, having accepted that she is unable to have that access to the sentiments of Koreans, and, thereby, to attain closeness to her biological family, she has married an Asian American man in the U.S. and is starting her own nuclear family. This heartbreaking story conveys her feelings of loss—the sensibility of the adopted that takes the form of a diasporic sorrow and an attendant nostalgia—through the filter of her childhood and adulthood recollections.

In the following chapters of this dissertation, Borshay Liem’s literal adoptee morphs into metaphorical ones, from individual cases to collective sensibilities. I posit that articulating such collective sentiments, as delivered through the literary and cinematic texts of East Asia and its Diaspora, will evoke in readers and audiences the sensation of trauma as well as shed light on the traumatic conditions of the modern subjectivities of East Asians, who are trapped by the allure of western modernization and guilt over the diminishment of tradition. In this way, my argument expands and turns from the melancholic pathology of racial others in the West to the artistic creations of East Asia and its Diaspora, delineating not only the traumatized pathology of such racial others but also an overlapping set of pervasive sensibilities created through the texts—the nostalgic mode and the affect of orphanhood.

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<sup>15</sup> Borshay Liem narrates her permanent losses—her lost past, motherland, mother-tongue and birth mother—as follows: “I think being adopted to my family in some ways...um...brought a lot of happiness for me and for my parents, my American family, but there is something that was...there was a lot of sadness that I think...that we cannot deal with as a family and that a lot of the sadness had to do with loss.”

For this project, I will import Farrell's understanding of trauma as an imaginative trope that reflects the shock of modernization or fast-changing culture and the post-traumatic mode that is conveyed through narrative structures, thereby affectively compensating for trauma. Farrell reads characters' redemptive attempts to recover from trauma as a post-traumatic symptom, a coping strategy and social fantasy for dealing with trauma. Moreover, the compensational effects of narratives "embody efforts to master that [post-traumatic] stress" (27). Along the lines of Farrell's argument, I will also apply Cathy Caruth's psychoanalytical approach, considering particular stories of trauma as "[narratives] of a belated experience, far from telling of [escapes] from reality—rather [attesting to their] endless impact on a life" (7). Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), argues that stories of trauma reflect the characteristics of trauma itself. To the extent that traumatic experiences are unknown, unable to be assimilated or understood, they "[return] to haunt the survivor later on" (4). According to her, a story of trauma is structured "not simply [to] represent the violence of a collision but [it] also conveys the impact of its incomprehensibility" (7).<sup>16</sup> In addition to borrowing from Farrell's and Caruth's approaches to trauma as both a cultural trope and a symptomatic structure overall, I will also analyze the emotional and political effects of direct sensation, created in readers and audiences through encountering traumatic events in fictional texts, by employing a different theoretical focus in each chapter.

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<sup>16</sup> Caruth explains that trauma is an encounter with the Real, the catastrophic events that leave wounds in the mind that will not be healed, but repeatedly come back to the survivor. The nature of trauma can neither be known nor be told, yet the Real, which language cannot access, haunts the victim. She suggests that the complexity of history arises from the fact that history fluctuates "between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). In her analysis of literary texts portraying traumatized characters, she experiments with the doubleness of history in terms of traumatic events that are "impossible" to be conveyed through language but "necessary" to be told (8).

In my first chapter, “Trauma, Excess, and the Aesthetics of Affect: The Extreme Cinemas of Chan-Wook Park,” I delineate, with the three films comprising Chan-wook Park’s Vengeance Trilogy—*Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002), *Oldboy* (2003), and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (2005)—how national trauma, unrepresentable suffering, and pain are conveyed in extreme cinemas through an excess of affect created by melodramatic narratives and the visualization of violence. The excess of extremely violent scenes and overtly (melo-)dramatic narratives of the films enable spectators to feel through their skin, rather than be informed of narratively, the historical and social pains of locals who suffer from the economic polarization and social stratification that have resulted from the nation’s preoccupation with modernization and its prioritization of capitalist development over structuring the social welfare system. Delivered in the extreme aesthetics of Park’s films are the sentiments and sensibility of those who have repressed their pain of being exploited through the national prioritization of economic development. By exploring narratives of violence and revenge, as well as the stylistic excess of the texts in relation to the national trauma of South Korea, I argue for the need to re-illuminate and re-posit the status of Asian Extreme Cinema as an emerging genre of uniquely East Asian aesthetics and politics. I thus shed light on the ways in which they create a new aesthetics, based on their usage and transformation within narratives of national trauma. Although the content and style of extreme films is at a considerable remove from Borshay Liem’s documentary, I consider the quietly pervasive core aesthetic of Asian Extreme Cinema to be the “sensibility of the adopted” of contemporary South Korea, and broadly East Asia.

My second chapter, “Inherited Trauma and Indigested Modernity: Returned Child Ghosts and Wronged Women in the J-horror and Extreme Cinema of Japan,” presents a reading of traumatized, haunting children and women characters as national allegories for the traumatic

national development toward becoming “westernized” and “capitalist.” By comparing child characters in South Korean films with those in the horror/extreme films of Japan—in South Korean films, children and childhood are often shown as the exploited and traumatized, whereas in Japanese films, they are also portrayed as a threatening other—I delineate the sentiments of Japan, contextualizing them within its distinctive modern-nation building process. In addition, my second chapter delineates the ways in which the trauma of modern nation-building in Japan is revealed through narratives of trauma and the aesthetics of rupture. As my case studies, I examine Nakata Hideo’s *Ringu*, one of the most widely circulated J-horror films on the globe, and Miike Takashi’s *Audition*, a notorious work of extreme cinema. In these two films, violence is reenacted for unknown reasons in the present, obliquely taking into account tragic and traumatic past events of the marginalized and oppressed—women and children—with shocking, linguistically inexpressible moments often inserted as fragmented and disturbing scenes in the recursive and non-linear narrative structures. Within this structure, untold and unhealed wounds return as an additional source of trauma, forcing audience members to witness traumatic events of the past as well as absorb the shock of violence and feel the sensation of pain in the present. The visually striking violent scenes and disjunctive narratives of *Ringu* and *Audition* function, I suggest, as aesthetic tools for spectators to re-experience the shock of trauma of characters victimized by the patriarchal capitalist modern nation-building process of Japan.

The third chapter, “The Sense of Deception: Adoption Narratives and Appropriated Trauma in Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *When We Were Orphans*,” elucidates the ways in which diasporic (East Asian) writers in the West have imagined the marginalized lives of displaced racial others in relation to collective memories of colonization and war. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the narrative structures of Chang-Rae Lee’s

*A Gesture Life* (1999) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000) embody "repetitive reenactments of people who have experienced painful events" (Caruth 1), while representing the diasporic conditions and psyches of transnational subjectivities traumatized by war and displacement. Haunting memories from war and colonization serve to structure the narratives of *A Gesture Life* and *When We Were Orphans*, in which the personal traumas of displacement, adoption, and alienation are also repeated. Engaging with these two novels, which represent transnational and hybridized subjects who are not allowed to belong anywhere, I also problematize the idealized cosmopolitanism prevalent in the Western academia while revealing how these two narratives achieve postcolonial aesthetics through the orphaned sentiments and unresolved feelings of subjects who are transnational and hybridized but physically uprooted and psychologically alienated.

In my fourth chapter, "The Cultural Trauma in Capitalizing China: The Aesthetics of Rupture in Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* and Lou Ye's *Suzhou River*," I interrogate the conditions of socially and economically marginalized people in China through a postcolonial and/or transnational context. Focusing on the transnational art films of the People's Republic of China, my fourth chapter builds on the tropes of traumatized artists, delineating their marginalized lives in the inscription of ongoing oppression from the State as well as global capitalism, mainly through examinations of Chen and Lou's works as representative Fifth and Sixth Generation directors, respectively. These films from the People's Republic of China have also been "discovered" in international (or Euro-American) Art film festivals, and consumed in the art house circuit and western academia. I pose questions about the visibility of the traumatized in these films, in relation to their consumption. I delineate in that consumption the operation of a hierarchically formulated relationship between the western gaze and its object, the



culture of the non-western. Also, this chapter elucidates the historical contexts in which the films are set, while articulating the aesthetic achievements of such films, which portray themes revolving around traumatized artists/youth who suffer from the effects of modern nation-building. In discussing the haunting cinematic appeal created through each film's portrayal of traumatized and marginalized artists, I note once again the presence of "the sensibility of the adopted," produced in these two films by the visualization and narrativization of the traumatized, who live with deep psychological scars. As such, I argue that these films epitomize the trapped conditions of East Asian nations traumatized between their indignation toward being uprooted from their past and their longing for the West, or put differently, their efforts to be westernized while secretly being nostalgic for the past. The East is the object of (self-) hatred and the West is the object of longing and hope that is never fulfilled, and is always unreachable. The aesthetic is shown in these films through a combination of the post-traumatic mode and a painful acceptance of the mode, which exposes the entrapment of East Asian nations between their failed attempts and longing for redemption.

## CHAPTER 1

### Trauma, Excess, and the Aesthetics of Affect: The Extreme Cinemas of Chan-Wook Park

Renowned as a cult film director in the U.S. and U.K., South Korean film director Chan-Wook Park's films have been promoted as much as criticized for their sensational features. Although Park is a popular celebrity director in South Korea,<sup>17</sup> his films, have mostly been distributed in the West as DVDs and under the label of "Asian Extreme." The genre known as Asian Extreme Cinema started as nothing more than a brand name, which was Tartan Film's marketing strategy in Europe and North America, beginning in 2001, for a line of Asian films that share a combination of sensational features, such as extreme violence, horror, and shocking plots.<sup>18</sup> Many film scholars of East Asian cinema have criticized Tartan's marketing strategy—their clustering of Asian films from different genres and labeling them with the orientaling as

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<sup>17</sup> Park's third feature film *Joint Security Area J.S.A.* (2000), which has not yet been unseated as the biggest South Korean box office hit ever, deals with the relationship between the divided Koreas through a tragic incident between South and North Korean soldiers who have befriended each other. Although Park's fifth film *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002) did not attain mainstream success in the domestic market, no doubt because of its excessive number of gruesome scenes of violence and heavily loaded class issues, it received positive responses from Korean film critics as well as proved its artistic value by debuting at the Cannes film festival. According to Nikki J.Y. Lee, it was Park's fame as a celebrity director, who had achieved both mainstream popularity and artistic recognition, that resulted in *Oldboy's* commercial success in Korea, where it drew more than three million viewers and ranked as the sixth biggest hit of 2003. After winning the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes, it was even re-released into Korean movie theaters (N. Lee 210). However, with respect to the film's positive reception among Korean filmgoers, Lee points out that, "what really excited the Korean public and media appears to have been the later news that *Oldboy* had won the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes" (210).

<sup>18</sup> Many Asian extreme and horror films have been remade in the U.S. Examples include Gore Verbinski's *Ring* (2002) as a remake of Nakata's *Ringu* (1998) and Spike Lee's 2013 remake of Park's *Oldboy* (2003).

well as essentializing term, “Asian Extreme.” These critics, in response to extremely negative reviews of Park’s films, have suggested that the dismay of western critics and audiences results, in part, from orientalist perceptions about the East, in which the “shadow” of western culture is projected onto the construction of an “Orient” that functions as an inversion of “the West” (Shin 86-7). Others have attempted to reconfigure the aesthetics and excessive style of Park’s films in terms of postmodern aesthetics or body genre discourses, situating the narratives of revenge in Park’s trilogy within the traumatic history of Korea under the force of globalization.

From feminist film theories to cultural studies, discourses on the spectatorship of body genres, which refer to the genres of horror, melodrama, and pornography that create bodily reactions in spectators, have focused on their subversive characteristics, as films belonging to a genre that challenges the binary distinction between object and subject, and high and low art. In *Cinematic Body*, Steven Shavero theorizes the ways in which the “excessive capacity” of cinematic images affects the body of spectators “unwarrantedly” (30). He argues that spectators respond “viscerally to visual forms, before having the leisure to read or interpret them as symbols” (39). In showing examples of the difficulties inherent to distinguishing the elements of body genres and elite art, Joan Hawkins claims that the blurring of boundaries between high and low art can be explained by the similar engagement of bodily responses and the loss of aesthetic distance often created through some avant-garde or art cinema (6). Furthermore, Patricia MacCormack argues that the spectatorship of minoritarians—referring to women, racial others, and perverts—is created through cinemasochism, or the spectator’s “submission to the image beyond comprehension” (41).

Chan-Wook Park’s Vengeance Trilogy—comprised of *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002), *Oldboy* (2003), and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (2005)—has opened up questions of

the politics and aesthetics of transnational Korean films. Park has been renowned as “a commercial auteur” and “a national celebrity” in South Korea, whereas in the West he is often identified as a cult director of so-called “extreme cinema” (N. Lee 203-4). For Korean audiences, the extreme cinema of Park delivers the otherwise unrepresentable trauma of the modernizing process that East Asian nations have undergone, while in the West they have been differently received as entertaining cult movies. Western cultists, collecting specific genres of East Asian films with the expectation of graphic visual extremity and classifying that visual style as distinctively Asian, disclose a recurrent anxiety toward the East, which once again presents the East and its artifacts and commodities as unknown, incomprehensible, and wholly “other.” The branding of the Extreme Asian genre, in other words, borrows from orientalist fantasies of the West, and, in turn, reinforces exotic stereotypes of the East.<sup>19</sup>

By closely examining narratives of violence and revenge, as well as the stylistic excess of the texts in relation to the national trauma South Korea, however, Asian Extreme can be reconceived as an emerging genre grounded in Asian aesthetics and politics. Park’s notable heightening of visual and emotional impact in violent scenes imbues viewers who are aware of, and sensitive to, this cultural history with the sentiment of those who are traumatized in the world of global capitalism. The collective memories of trauma generated by Korea’s modern

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<sup>19</sup> This genre branding of Asian films is seen as the western spectator’s cultural transference. According to Gabriele Schwab, cultural transference occurs:

[W]henver unconscious desires, fantasies, or patterns of being and relating are enacted in an interpersonal or intercultural encounter, including the indirect encounters between literary or artistic objects and their recipients. It emerges as a largely unconscious operation designed to bridge, close, fill, or deny the inevitable gaps in knowing another person or another culture, and to manage the affects such gaps bring forth. (28-9)

The cultural transference of western spectators comes from their attempt to comprehend the extremity depicted in those films, which they have selected to watch, through a projection of the repressed in themselves.

nation-building in the last century, and the affect of trauma, are transmitted through the tactile images in Park's films, which cause visceral responses in the bodies of his global audiences. Although the global spectator's cultural and national positioning, in turn, has influenced the branding and categorizing of Park's films as Asian Extreme, the western recognition of something beyond the ordinary in extreme cinema, even within the context of horror, is a recognition of something else encoded within its graphic images: the trauma of the East, which is produced by the East encountering the West in the modernization process. The western audience members' retroactive presumption towards extremity is thus first conceived as the unrelatable, yet it reveals that the extremity that the spectators perceive and respond to bodily is their recognition of trauma.

The extremity shown through haptic moments in Park's Vengeance Trilogy conveys to the viewer the unrepresentable of the traumatized through the skin. According to Jill Bennett in *Empathic Vision* (2005), shocking images "viewed under controlled conditions" evoke "the instantaneous, affective response" that "mimic[s] the sudden impact of trauma, or the quality of a post-traumatic memory, characterized by the involuntary repetition of the experience that the mind fails to process in the normal way" (10-1). Bennett further argues that the art of sense memory acts as "a language of subjective process (specifically, of affective and emotional process) to complement history and to work in a dialectical relationship with common practice—linked to social histories" (26). In other words, the haptic moments in Park's Trilogy constitute a way of working through, as well as acting out, by repeating the traumatic experiences of Korea's modern nation-building. In effect, Park conveys the post-traumatic national pathology through the excess of affect, which is transferred through both the visually shocking scenes and the narratives of revenge in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, *Oldboy*, and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*.

The Vengeance Trilogy emerged out of, and transmitted, the anxiety and fear experienced by the South Korean populace in the late nineties, as a result of its encountering another national trauma brought about by the Asian financial crisis. These circumstances are imbricated, through extreme aesthetics, with the deep-rooted national trauma of having been repressed by the ideologies of modern nation-building. In support of my assertion, I delineate the history of the last century for South Korea, and starting with *Oldboy*, the second installment of the Trilogy, I expand my focus to *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*. Delivered in the extreme aesthetics of Park's films are the sentiments and sensibility of those Koreans who have repressed their pain of being exploited for national development. The extremely violent scenes in the over-dramatized plots of Park's films allow spectators to feel, through their skin, the historical and social pain of locals who suffer from the economic polarization, social stratification, and unbearably repressive family life that have resulted from the nation's preoccupation with modernization and its prioritization of capitalist development over structuring the social welfare system.

Modernization, for South Koreans, has been a vital goal that needs to be achieved, by all means, more swiftly and effectively for the nation's survival, even though there is a recognition that the nation's modernization also means its self-denial and destabilization. This sense of urgency for modernization arises from Korea's traumatic history of colonization and war, and in the flow of globalization. Koreans lived for decades as if they possessed "refugee status within an emergency state," and they continue to live with, according to cultural anthropologist Hae-joang Cho(Han), a survival-oriented pathology: "Many people were unable to be concerned with anything but their day-to-day existence" (294). Pressured to "catch up," and desiring a fast transition toward becoming a modern nation, a survival-oriented pathology not only continued

after the war but was even reinforced. From the ruins of the war, South Korea, which was no more than a destitute agrarian society in the 1950's, has had an incomparably fast transition to a capitalist industrialized nation. The nation's industrialization process was led by the authoritarian governments of two military generals—presidents Park Jung Hee (1961-1979) and Jun Doo-hwan (1980-1987). It was the developmental state of South Korea, in a state-led process of capitalist industrialization, that made possible the nation's rapid pace of industrial development. It was the state, for example, that extended business favors to *chaebol*, the family-controlled business conglomerates that “dominate industry, media, education, and even religion,” for the nation's export-oriented industrialization (Chang 12). However, the developmental strategy of South Korea has overly burdened families, delayed democratization, and polarized the social classes.

From the late 1980's to 1996, however, South Korea appeared to enter a new phase of positively restructuring its society through establishing democratic governments and enabling the emergence of numerous NGOs.<sup>20</sup> The society of South Korea during this time, as Kyung Hyun Kim points out, could be marked as “leftist insurgence and consumerist excess”; industrial and financial achievements grew visibly, while prior authoritarian governments receded into history. The traumatic memories of the modern nation seemingly resolved in a burgeoning capitalist culture of excess and indulgence in the nineties. This transition has been lauded as “the Miracle of the Han River.” Although Korean anxiety over survival grew into anxiety regarding its economic ranking, South Koreans generally were buoyed by a belief that their nation could “join the ranks of the ‘superpowers.’” Until, that is, the news hit the nation in November 1997 that

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<sup>20</sup> Kim suggests that the 1980s was a “period of political inquietude when millions of people marched in the streets protesting military rule and the complicit role of the United States in sustaining dictatorships in South Korea” (17-8).

South Korea needed a financial bailout by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Cho 291). Perceiving the IMF as “a stand-in superpower” that, as many claimed, tried to have a trusteeship over the nation, the South Korean people, once again, considered the nation’s situation to be “a national disgrace” and pinned the blame on the “monopolistic position” of *chaebol* as well as on “state corruption” (Cho Han 291). The Asian financial crisis—which undermined the national myth of development—rendered visible the open wound of the nation, but in the form of highly aesthetically appealing commodities. Park’s Vengeance Trilogy was released in the new millennium, creating intertextual dialogue about the aftermath of South Korean society re-awakened by the Asian financial crisis.

*Oldboy* (2003), the second film in the Trilogy, opens with salaryman Oh Dae-su being detained at a police station as a result of an altercation arising from having flirted with another man’s girlfriend. Dae-su is an ordinary Korean salaryman, often given to boozing after work, and on this occasion he stirs up quite a fuss. He rambles loudly about the meaning of his name, “getting through one day at a time,” and the camera trains for a moment on a poster, on the wall behind him, of an amicable tiger, the official mascot of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, smiling and waving its paw. This early scene from *Oldboy*, the sole realistic representation of ordinary Korean life in the film, insinuates that the film is, in fact, situated in a historical juncture of Korean modernization (Fig. 1): South Korea’s hosting of the 1988 Seoul Olympics is one of the emblems of a new era that indicate South Korea’s position in the global arena. South Korea advanced its economy into the global market, due in part to the pressure to open its markets to foreign competition, as well as to domestic economic growth resulting from the expansion of *chaebol* into multinational corporations. Dae-su subsequently is released from police custody, yet right after the release, he is abducted and spends fifteen years confined in a private prison,





Figure 1: Still from *Oldboy*.

without knowing why. The fifteen years were the period when South Korea indulged in visible materialistic changes and experienced a new culture of excessive consumerism (Nelson 27), only to then endure a recession precipitated by the Asian financial crisis of 1997 (Nelson 1).

The unfolding plot of *Oldboy* captures how extreme and omnipresent has been the oppressive influence of *chaebol* over the body and thoughts of ordinary South Koreans (the middle and working classes). The film's antagonist Lee Woo-jin, is the presumptive heir to a *chaebol* family. Depicted as a young businessman who lives in the penthouse of a tall glass building and is served by bodyguards, personal doctors, and a business adviser, he ruthlessly manipulates the fates of all of the other characters, including Dae-su and Dae-su's daughter Mido, through his financial power. The various markers of Woo-jin's extreme wealth and social status have resulted in his enjoyment of tremendous privilege, despite his young age; together with his manipulation of others' lives his portrayal constitutes a stereotypical representation, in Korean popular culture, of the male heir to a *chaebol* family. In the earliest phase of his imprisonment, for example, Dae-su watches the news on television one day and learns that his wife has been found dead of a stab-wound to the neck, and that he himself is the prime suspect in



Figure 2: Still from *Oldboy*.

her murder. The helplessness, unimaginable pain and anger that Dae-su must feel in this situation is presented visually through a sequence of images exhibiting his mental derangement:

(imaginary) ants come out from Dae-su's skin and crawl all over him, while he screams in the middle of a room with flashing lights captured as the effect of a camera whirling (Fig. 2).

As the news reporter explains the details of the murder, the scene shows sequentially the television screen that Dae-su is viewing, Dae-su's face, and again the television screen. The camera angle then changes, and Dae-su is shot from his lower right side. He starts to look at his right arm, scratching it. A close-up shot of his arm follows, in which small blobs move around under his skin, and Dae-su's half-numb but confused face is shown, staring at his arm. The shot then shifts to the skin of his arm, from which an ant comes out and starts crawling around. Dae-su's ticklish response to the ant's crawling, which must be imaginary but is shown very realistically, causes an eerie disturbance in spectators. According to Bennett, sensory images are "designed to hit the nervous system" and to influence and shake the spectator's body, not from the skin but from deep inside, "as [in] a deeper, more invasive process" (48). The spectator's

reaction to such images (and sounds) is a “visceral sensation” that “entail[s] some kind of narrative identification: a level of personal identification that renders the image all the more compromising” (48). Dae-su removes the ant, and the scene shows the TV screen on which Dae-su’s photo is shown as the suspect. The shot changes to Dae-su, frightened, frowning, opening his eyes and mouth wide, and then starting to scream. With his scream a swarm of ants crawl over his face, and the camera starts to spin 360 degrees, rotating swiftly to reveal all four walls of the room in quick succession. Against a backdrop of electronic explosives, Dae-su moans frantically and continuously shakes his head as if being electrocuted. He is in the middle of the room, with spinning camera shots showing lights flashing. From the eerie sensation of crawling ants to his desperate screaming, the scenes visualize Dae-su’s traumatized mentality and physicality of being controlled and confined, the result of which is that he sees and believes in illusions created by Woo-jin, who is, unbeknownst to Dae-su, his captor. The fast-changing illusory scenes convey the unspeakable shock and pain of Dae-su, putting spectators in an empathetic state of shock and pain.

While detained, Dae-su hatches a plan to escape by digging a hole in the wall, but just about when he has dug far enough for his hand to reach outside, he is drugged and released involuntarily. After his release, Dae-su strives to find out why he was locked up, so he can avenge himself. In the process of seeking revenge, however, Dae-su not only loses everything he had, but he subsequently loses himself by unwittingly becoming involved in Woo-jin’s plan; every move Dae-su and Mido make is under the control of Woo-jin, who has had Dae-su and Mido hypnotized and keeps watch over them. Although Dae-su believes that he acts out of a desire for revenge, in actuality he is acting in accordance with the plans of his persecutor. *Oldboy* is thus seen as the imaginative and symbolic vengeance chronicle of a Korean salaryman—one

who not only loses out on the era of the consumerist abundance and excess that were supposed to be a reward for workers, but who sacrifices his family, only to be exploited for the sake of the perpetuation of Woo-jin, seemingly a representative *chaebol* character.

The extremely sensational and violent scenes of *Oldboy*, however, comprise a potent way to deliver the emotional reactions—anger, helplessness and sadness—of the manipulated Dae-su to spectators. Dae-su’s octopus-eating scene is another example of how the film induces helpless bodily reactions and delivers feelings from a character to spectators, although it has also been criticized in the West as being excessively barbaric and cruel. The day Dae-su is mysteriously released after his fifteen years of confinement, he meets a man who hands him a cell phone and a cash-stuffed wallet in front of the sushi restaurant where Mido works as a Japanese chef. After ordering “something alive,” Dae-su receives a call from Woo-jin, who derides him with suggestively teasing questions. Despite Dae-su’s awareness that he is being manipulated by the caller, the enraged yet bewildered protagonist is helpless. At this point, the viewer begins to recognize that Dae-su’s eating of a live octopus is symptomatic of the torture he had undergone at Woojin’s hands (Fig. 3). In “Residual Selves,” Joseph Jonghyun Jeon argues that this scene is one of the markers of the ubiquity of *chaebol* influence in Korean society. He points out that *chaebol* are often described as octopuses in Korean newspapers, a reflection of the public perception of *chaebol* as having “tentacles [that] reach out into every imaginable sector of commerce” (727). Jeon contends that while Dae-su’s attempt to eat the live octopus can be viewed as an expression of his resistance against *chaebol*, the weakness of a mere salaryman over the power of *chaebol* is shown, first, in his failure to finish eating the octopus, and second, in his passing out after Woo-jin’s phone call (727). Dae-su’s attempt to eat the live octopus, then,

is an allusion—one that global spectators would miss but Korean audiences would easily grasp—to Dae-su's identification as a working-class man. Raw octopus is a popularly enjoyed Korean



Figure 3: Still from *Oldboy*.

dish, characteristically enjoyed by middle and working-class men who may visit a street vendor or a bar to relieve their stress after a hard workday and order the dish along with *so-ju*, an inexpensive rice wine. Dae-su's eating of the live octopus, which is undeniably an unconventional take on how raw octopus is served—normally it is chopped into bite-size pieces—typically would have reminded Korean audience members of the de-stressing evening rituals of salarymen. In contrast, global audiences often refer to this scene as a marker of the tasteless cruelty and extremity of Park's film. However, whether they understand the cultural context of the scene or not, both sets of spectators grasp Dae-su's unspeakable frustration as conveyed through the sadistic act of eating a live octopus; he grabs the octopus, wriggling and adhering to his hands, and forces it into his mouth. While the body of the octopus is in his mouth, the semi-liquid legs squirm over his face. The effect of this scene has the effect of making spectators feel like the sticky octopus's body and legs are in their own mouths and over their own faces; they might well frown and squirm in response.

Regarding such bodily responses, Bennett writes that they are “a recoil” or “an act of distancing the sensual experience being depicted,” yet they are also “the condition of continued participation” as spectators attempt to numb or repress the pain from deep inside because it is “unbearable” (43). At the same time, such a reaction means that, “the image incites mimetic contagion acted out in the body of the spectator” (43). This horrifying scene conveys Dae-su’s pain by propelling spectators to imagine the pain of the octopus, which strives to live by wriggling helplessly, and the repulsive sensation Dae-su must feel in chewing a living creature occupying his mouth. The spectators’ empathetic pain and disturbance are created as a result of confronting sensory images of cruelty that embody Dae-su’s pain. Neither the spectators nor Dae-su realize, however, the even more abhorrent situation into which Park will lead them next, through Woo-jin’s machinations. One might add that Dae-su is inflicting upon the octopus a similar kind of torture to which he has been subjected.

Dae-su’s cutting off of his own tongue with a pair of scissors is another scene of extremity—excessive in terms of both narrative and visuality—that makes spectators squirm and wince (Fig. 4). When Dae-su confronts Woo-jin at his penthouse, Woo-jin’s motives and plans of vengeance are divulged to Dae-su by way of a series of flashbacks. In the past, Woo-jin’s teenaged sister, Soo-ah, with whom Woo-jin had been involved in an incestuous relationship, imagined herself to be pregnant and committed suicide. Woo-jin blamed his high school classmate, Dae-su, for his sister’s suicide, because Dae-su had accidentally observed Woo-jin caressing Soo-ah and had revealed the incident to another classmate. Motivated by guilt and torment, Woo-jin subsequently orchestrated the fates of Dae-su and Mido. Before his abduction, Dae-su was far from an ideal husband—he drank too much, womanized, and often fought with his wife—but, even when on a spree, he had carried around a costume of angel wings for his

daughter's birthday present. Dae-su's daughter, Mido, is even more miserably exploited and manipulated by Woo-jin. Entirely at Woo-jin's behest, Mido loses her parents and is sent abroad for adoption, then unwittingly winds up in an incestuous relationship with her father, who in the



Figure 4. Still from *Oldboy*

meantime had been abducted, imprisoned, and hypnotized by Woo-jin. When Woo-jin's scheme is revealed to Dae-su—putting Dae-su and Mido in the same situation as Woo-jin and his sister—Dae-su begs Woo-jin not to reveal their incest to Mido. Moreover, he cuts off his tongue in front of Woo-jin to elicit his mercy, despite his awareness of the injustice and unfairness of Woo-jin's manipulation. This scene may create extremely disturbing and confused feelings in spectators, not only because of the horrific visuality of a man's dismembering himself, but also because of the absurdly unjust situation. When the truth is revealed, instead of justice being fulfilled, an excessively exploited character is once again horrifically exploited.

In this revelatory scene, spectators may very well feel that they have been emotionally manipulated. Some may feel guilty for having unwittingly endorsed the romance between Dae-su and Mido, and for having watched graphic sex scenes between the two, albeit without knowing

their biological relationship. In addition, the strong emotional disturbance is compounded by its utter lack of catharsis. Rather, it ensures the perpetuation of the tragedy and makes spectators bear witness to the victims' continued trauma. In fact, the narrative of *Oldboy* alludes to canonical literary works of the West—Greek myths, revenge tragedies, and novels such as *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1823), and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844)—as Park notes in his documentary, *The Autobiography of Oldboy*.<sup>21</sup> However, different from the tragic but cathartic endings of the protagonists—mainly death—in these western literary works, Dae-su chooses to live and decides to forget, even though it means that he and Mido must continue to live with their incestuous love. As the finale of his revenge, Woo-jin commits suicide. Dae-su, losing the object of his grudge and anger, is once again left helpless—he has to live with what Woo-jin has done to him and Mido. However, the film ends with Dae-su erasing his memory through hypnosis so he can continue his life (and relationship as a lover) with his own daughter Mido, and they seem happy together. With yet another shock presented in the closing scene, the burden of memory about Woo-jin's injustice, as well as guilt for the taboo love between Dae-su and Mido, is transferred onto the spectator. Viewers are, in effect, put in the position of being witnesses to the traumatic events of the past, and they know or are left to conclude that the oedipal tragedy of Mido and Dae-su will continue. The suffering of the characters is thus transferred to the spectators, who are forced to confront the trauma and admit the broken social order. Left without any cathartic moment, spectators may even feel helpless. Moreover, the last scene of the film actually insinuates that the happy ending for Dae-su and Mido may create more disturbances for those who accept the implications of the film's plot. That

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<sup>21</sup> One of the Special Features in *Oldboy DVD*, Disc 1: Audio Commentary with Director Park Chan-Wook.



is to say, because they may understand the characters' decisions, the spectators are left unsettled, but in learning of the feelings of those who live with unresolved problems, they are unable to mourn, unable even to be melancholic about their survival.

The fact that *chaebol* in South Korea are able to, negatively or positively, affect the lives of the middle and working classes, in the course of a single day, is turned, in *Oldboy*, into the inexorably grim story of a salaryman's life that is ruined and manipulated by the power of *chaebol*. Major South Korean social issues, such as class polarization, transnational adoption, and the dysfunctional family, are depicted at symbolic and allegorical levels in *Oldboy*. Park approaches these same issues more straightforwardly in his other two films in the Vengeance Trilogy, the first being *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002) and the last one, *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (2005). *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* is a horrific story of kidnapping, torture, murder, and suicide, yet the melodramatic plot and audio-visual stylization of the film deliver, in aesthetically compelling ways, the pain and suffering of the socially and economically marginalized: the working-class laborers who are laid off, without the safety net of a social welfare system, end up committing a crime—kidnapping—during a period when South Korean companies were undergoing the structural regulation and reordering imposed by the IMF as of 1997. *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (2005) depicts a female avenger's cruel revenge in detail, yet it is also a sentimental story, told by a transnational adoptee, about knowing her mother who had to desert her. In this violent revenge story, a story of a mother and her lost child is characterized within the early 2000's social context of a hastily transformed capitalist society lacking in an accompanying growth of moral and ideological principles.

Significantly, this dichotomy is blurred in both films by Park's depiction of western capitalist ideology as resulting in bloodshed when it is intermixed with the South Korean desire

to modernize. South Korea's rapid transition into modern industrialization owes much to the financial aid it has received from the U.S.,<sup>22</sup> which was accompanied by the political and military influence of America over South Korea. According to Martin Hart-Landberg in *The Rush to Development* (1993), the approach to national development by the military dictatorships valued "exports over domestic needs, profits over wages and working conditions, dependence on the United States and Japan over national independence, and thus by necessity the interests of the few over the rights of the many" (20). The nation's swift modern industrialization in the flow of globalization has been attained, then, by neglecting and sacrificing people—the labor forces, the disabled, and even children. Working-class nuclear families have long been overburdened with "almost exclusive welfare responsibilities" (Chang 10) and suffer from "functional overloading" (Chang 13).<sup>23</sup> However, the expectation that the sacrifice of laborers would be rewarded, when national economic growth reaches a certain point, was dismantled when South Korea was hit by the Asian financial crisis. Again, the burden to achieve "transparency and fairness" in the financial field and reform the corrupted system by the *chaebol* and state, resulted yet again in sacrifices by ordinary workers, who were laid off in order to induce foreign investment (Cumings 38).

*Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* starts with a radio DJ reading a letter on air about the sympathetic story of two siblings—a disabled brother, Ryu, and his ailing sister. The jockey is

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<sup>22</sup> From 1948 to 1979, South Korea financially benefited from "the largest amounts of U.S. aid per capita of any country in the world," except Israel and South Vietnam. Also, until the mid-1980's, the U.S. was the main importer of Korean goods at a low tariff rate (Armstrong 24).

<sup>23</sup> Introducing the concept of "compressed modernity" to describe the swift industrialization and modernization of South Korean society, sociologist Chang Kyung-Sup argues that the accelerated transition of Korean society was possible because of its "unique tendency of perpetually reinforcing a family-centered social order" (1).

played by Lee Kum-hee who is, in reality, a famous radio DJ with the Korean Broadcasting Service and an emcee of morning talk shows mainly dealing with real-life family issues caused by social and economic deprivation. Ryu's sister, according to the sad story revealed in the young man's letter, had given up attending college and worked in a factory to help fulfill her younger brother's dream to attend art school. In the film, the letter that Lee reads on her radio program starts out with the common and familiar story of a Korean family in which an older sister gives up her own education to support her younger brother's. However, the sympathetic story continues, becoming so overtly miserable and horrendous as to defamiliarize the whole situation: the writer of the letter is the hearing-impaired younger brother, Ryu, who has had to give up his college education because his older sister, his only living family member, is now sick and in need of a kidney transplant. The moving story of an older sister sacrificing herself for her brother is thus changed into a portrait of an overburdened family in dire circumstances. While the DJ reads the letter that conveys the younger brother's resolve to donate his own kidney to help his sister obtain a compatible one, the scene cross-cuts from the studio of the DJ to a water-color painting of a pastoral scene. The children in the painting seem presumably Caucasian, but when the drawing fades out, it is followed by scenes of two Asian children, wearing similar clothes and walking on a rock with small puddles, then sitting on rocks in the exact same position as the children in the drawing (Figs. 5 and 6). The girl in the picture points out something far away, and the younger brother looks in that direction, perhaps indicating that they are dreaming of their future or are hoping to leave the rural area for someplace far away. However, Ryu's painting shows that his nostalgia for the past changes his childhood into someone else's: that of white children, children belonging to another race and continent. This transposition represents his sense of the enormous gulf between his dire reality in Korea and his



Figure 5: Still from *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*.



Figure 6: Still from *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*.

childhood dream. In effect, Ryu fantasizes that he and his sister are Caucasian children in a western country, which may allude to his belief that such an idealistic childhood could only exist in a western nation, not in Korea. The DJ's reading of the letter indicates that the location of both the painting and the film sequence is a childhood playground in the siblings' hometown, where the older sister wishes to be buried when she dies. Ironically, the site of innocent childhood in the first scene cannot remain intact, in the reality of the film, but unfolds into a tragic and extremely violent act of revenge.

The highly sympathetic plot of Ryu and his sister is portrayed in the film in very dry

fashion, without melodramatic sentiment. The hearing-impaired Ryu is socially and economically alienated because social welfare programs for the disabled have been neglected in South Korea, which has prioritized political and economic development in the global capitalist system. *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* is set in Seoul in the early 2000s and shows the ways in which the financial crisis, which started in 1997, has stricken small-to-mid-size companies, and, in turn, influenced the most economically deprived, the blue-collar workers who end up being laid off from such companies. Given the social milieu, it is hardly surprising that Ryu is the first to be laid off when his factory confronts economic crisis. With the ten million won (around \$12,000) that he receives as severance pay, Ryu attempts to save his sister by negotiating with black market organ dealers to exchange his own kidney, as well his severance pay, for a kidney suitable for his sister. However, his effort fails miserably when the dealers disappear after taking Ryu's kidney and money. His violent revenge of ultimately killing the black market organ dealers and eating their kidneys results from his long-lasting suffering, as a victim who has lost everything, including his beloved sister, because of dysfunctions in the capitalist system. Significantly, even though the sadness and suffering Ryu has been through are oddly omitted, the film nevertheless focuses on how his repressed resentment turns into a violent act of revenge. The scene in which the unclothed Ryu crouches down on the cement floor, after the black market organ dealers have disappeared with his kidney and money, epitomizes the suffering, alienation, and humiliation that Ryu has been through as an impoverished, jobless, disabled man in Korea. On the cement floor of a yet-incomplete building open to all sides, the surgery to remove his kidney is conducted by an unlicensed medical practitioner. The scene in which Ryu helps the practitioner, who seems to be a drug addict, inject a shot—a drug or tranquilizer—fades out, followed by an image rotated ninety degrees: a faded red rose and cement posts and floors.

Spectators confront the images that Ryu sees when he opens his eyes after the surgery, and feel what he senses naked, damaged, and all alone on the cement floor. In that moment, the soundtrack is silent but the petals of a rose in the screen move in response to the wind. The subtle movements of the petals make spectators sense in complete silence what Ryu's body experiences, and yet the scene suddenly changes to the view of a camera that swiftly flies away from Ryu's naked body, while showing a sequence that consists of him waking up, panicked, and looking up at his scar, accompanied by a cold and discordant electronic sound. Again, the scene changes to a close-up shot of his unhealed wound, blackish red and encircled with a magic marker, the image accentuated by the sound of his painful breathing and moaning. Spectators, led along by the unexpected fast-changing scenes, see through Ryu's eyes and sense his panic and pain (Fig. 7). These sequences allow spectators' bodily identification with the disabled and maimed Ryu, who suffers on multiple levels as a victim. He has lost his job, capital, and kidney, with each loss directly or indirectly attributable to dysfunctions in the capitalist system, and the bodily identification of spectators with Ryu, in turn, offers the opportunity for them to form an emotional understanding about Ryu's violent, even cannibalistic revenge, as shown in the later part of the film.

An unrealistically tragic narrative is deployed in rapid-fire succession, forcing spectators to absorb one shock after another presented by the film. Ryu's failure to gain his sister's transplantable kidney, and the loss of his money, compels him to return with his sister to the site of their childhood, the riverside of their hometown. Ryu and his girlfriend, Yeong-mi, kidnap the factory owner Park Dong-jin's daughter, Yu-sun, in a new attempt to fund Ryu's sister's kidney transplant. Subsequently, however, the sister commits suicide when she finds out about the kidnapping. After his sister commits suicide in the bathroom, Ryu places her dead body in his



Figure 7: Still from *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*.

car, right next to the crying Yu-sun, and drives all night to bury her along the riverside without any proper funeral rites or legal procedures. In the scene in which Ryu entombs his sister's body, wrapped in a blanket, using rocks along the riverside where she wished to be buried, the tactile visuality of the wool texture of the blanket, the smooth, bluish-white face of the deceased, and the rough rocks, maximizes the realism of the moment, thrusting spectators almost directly into the scene of the horrible tragedy.

While Ryu is burying his sister, however, Yu-sun accidentally drowns in the river. Her dead body—eyes open, lying on its side, half floating and half drowning as it subtly sways in the water—is shown through close-up shots. Spectators sense the chill of the water as they confront the tragic death of a young girl. Once Yu-sun's father Dong-jin discovers her corpse, he, in turn, must kill the couple who kidnapped her and inadvertently let her die. Even though Dong-jin understands Ryu's situation and considers him to be “a good man,” he avenges Yu-sun's tragic death by electrically torturing Yeong-mi to death, then drowning Ryu in the very river where Yu-sun died. Significantly, even though the grief and suffering of the characters is not depicted melodramatically, the film once again employs tactile visuality to focus on how Dong-jin's

repressed grief and resentment turns into a violent act of revenge—cutting off the ankles of a tied-up Ryu into the river. Narrative developments like the deaths of a sweet, vulnerable child and a beloved ailing older sister, are designed to generate the melodramatic sentiments long favored by Korean audiences. However, in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, the very omission of such sentiments, in the course of overtly dramatizing the unfair and unjust situation of the marginalized, as well as their violent revenge scenes, is precisely what creates Park's excessive style.

*Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* depicts the victims of an underdeveloped social welfare system in a society prioritizing economic growth. Ryu and his sister have been deprived of the chance to be educated and work at fulfilling jobs because of poverty, illness, and disability. They are then victimized anew by the Asian financial crisis, and the film delivers their resentment against society through dramatic scenes—incorporating tactile visuality—that evoke the bodily responses of spectators. Although the narrative of revenge is deployed at personal levels in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, the social conditions underscored in the film exhibit the sentiments of those who have been damaged by the Asian financial crisis. In such circumstances, the film insinuates that idealistic childhood—epitomized by the painting of the two children, who ironically are drawn as Caucasian children—can only exist outside the Korean nation, in the West. Park echoes this same message in *Lady Vengeance*, the third film of the Trilogy, by employing yet again the motif of the abduction and death of children. However, in this film he uses a mock-documentary style to narrativize the story of a transnational adoptee, Jenny, who was adopted by a couple in Australia. The revenge story in this film is depicted as resulting from the socio-economic polarization of South Korea, which Park explores by interweaving it with two other prominent social issues with which Koreans have been grappling. First is the



widespread and selfish obsession of families with the education of their children, especially when it comes to learning English. Second is an issue that is less far-reaching but nevertheless is significant to the national psyche: the extended psychological suffering associated with the transnational adoption of Korean children. I delineate the collective pathology of South Korea as a sending country by analyzing the representational mode of returned international adoptees in the mainstream Korean media, and I compare that mode with that of Park's *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*.

The motif of the (returned) international adoptee has been employed in the Korean media, since the 1990s, as a signifier of the transnational subjectivities of Koreans. These returnees are often depicted, in the television dramas, films, and documentaries of South Korea, in extremely melodramatic plots, as tragic diasporic subjects who were generated in traumatic modern Korean nation-building processes, such as colonization, war, and the on-going separation between the two Koreas. David Eng points out that transnational adoption is a post-World War II phenomenon associated with American liberalism, post war prosperity, and Cold War politics, while institutionalized adoption has served as a business allowing Korea to rebuild itself after devastation by the Japanese occupation and subsequent wars (94). In spite of South Korea's startling economic development in recent decades, transnational adoption increased in the 1980s as an important resource for Korea to benefit economically from Western countries as well as continue diplomatically friendly relations with them. Undeniably, the melodramatization of the tragic lives of transnational adoptees, whether fictional or non-fictional, compensates for the irresponsibility and guilt of Koreans regarding the fate of such children and allows them to shed cathartic tears. Though modified over time, the representations of transnational adoptees in the South Korean mainstream media, rather than disclosing the cultural and social failures of the

national welfare system, function to cover the cultural and social conditions that result in sending Korean children abroad for adoption.<sup>24</sup> Social factors, such as the Confucian tradition of privileging bloodlines and the lack of a social welfare system for single mothers, have nearly obliterated the possibility of domestic adoption in Korea.

In the mainstream representations of transnational adoptees' stories, the domestic issues surrounding international adoption—the cultural stigmatization of dysfunctional families and single mothers, for example—remain untold and unseen, as do the voices of birth mothers (especially single mothers) and the discourses touching on their stories of problematic social conditions. Rather, according to Elise Prebin, the focus of criticisms directed toward international adoption by the South Korean mainstream media since the 1990s has been mainly aimed at teenage mothers or young single mothers who abandoned their babies inhumanely and led them to being given up for international adoption. About this focus of the media, Prebin suggests that “national shame led to the accusation of single mothers, who are made guilty of a morally disruptive act, a crime, or a sin against the nation as much as against their child or life in general” (22). Korean birth mothers who give up or send their child overseas for adoption

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<sup>24</sup> In serialized TV melodramas in the late 2000s, such as *Bad Guy* (2010) and *Princess Prosecutor* (2010), returned transnational adoptees, were turned into idealized cosmopolitan subjects who have benefited from, and been empowered in, transnational capital flows, and thus embody western modernity. These adoptee characters typically are portrayed as having returned to South Korea to repair and restore the corrupted and ruined Korean social order by carrying out acts of revenge against *Chaebol*, or family-oriented multinational conglomerates in Korea. These depictions reflect the national fantasy—or a wish—that international adoptees sent from Korea have benefitted from their adopted home, that they are indeed westernized and educated enough, even to return to change their homeland. This social fantasy regarding transnational adoptees, in mainstream melodramas, discloses, on one hand, the national anxiety regarding globalization and the desire to be more westernized subjects: subjects who are able to compete, and even win, against the ruthless influence of global capitalism, as epitomized by the power of *Chaebol* in Korea. On the other hand, it highlights the national guilt toward sending children away for overseas adoption and expresses a wish to compensate for that guilt by turning adoptees into that most desirable subject, a member of the westernized, cosmopolitan elite.

become doubly invisible subjects who are unable to voice or even mourn their loss, as they are, in essence, sinners who have deserted their own children. By blaming birth mothers, the national pathology declines to confront its responsibility as an economically abundant sending country of adoptees. However, Chan-wook Park's *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (2005) renders birth mothers' stories visible. *Lady Vengeance* follows Geum-ja as she avenges herself on Mr. Baek, who forced a false confession of kidnapping and murder out of her that resulted in a thirteen-year prison sentence and the loss of her daughter to overseas adoption. In *Lady Vengeance*, the narrative voice explains that Geum-ja had made an important mistake when she was young; having become pregnant but knowing that she could not expect help from either of her divorced parents, the teenaged Geum-ja contacted Mr. Baek, who used to work at her high school as a trainee teacher. After Mr. Baek kidnapped and killed a boy for money, Geum-ja made a false confession to the police in order to save her daughter, whom Mr. Baek threatened to kill. After being released from prison, Geum-ja gathers the parents of victimized children as part of an ambitious plan for revenge. Geum-ja and the other families cruelly lynch the kidnapper Mr. Baek until he dies in agony, having been stabbed and sliced up by each family taking its turn. The melodramatic sentimentalism in conventional narratives about transnational adoptees metamorphoses into a plot of calculated revenge, by the birth mother of an international adoptee who explodes with resentment toward patriarchal capitalism.

I position Park's film as a critical commentary toward the prevalently employed melodramatization or sentimentalization of international adoption issues in the mainstream media, and I will point out the ways in which Park metamorphoses such stereotypical melodramatic moments, in *Lady Vengeance*, into scenes of satirical excess and extreme violence. The brutal depiction of revenge in *Lady Vengeance* revolves around the story of a mother and her

lost child that takes place against the backdrop of the early 21<sup>st</sup>-century South Korean social context of a hastily transformed capitalist society, devoid of an accompanying growth in moral and ideological principles. Kristin Thompson argues that “The Concept of Cinematic Excess” makes spectators notice a work’s style or structure, which in turn “affect narrative meaning” (25). According to Thompson, excess is a factor that contributes to narratives as well as distracting spectators from it. Excess is thus “counternarrative” and “counter-unity” (57), which “may lead the spectator into an awareness of excess” (60).

*Lady Vengeance* starts with the comically presented scene of Geum-ja’s release from prison after serving a thirteen-and-a-half-year sentence. The actress playing the role of avenger Geum-ja, Young-ae Lee, is famous in Korea for her delicate feminine features, and she usually performs subservient and conservative, though very dignified and talented female roles. Chanwook Park, capitalizing on such images of actress Lee, enhances the effect of Geum-ja’s transformation from naïve teenage mother to merciless avenger. As she walks out of prison, Geum-ja encounters a minister and some of his flock, waiting to welcome her. Flashbacks from her past—including being caught by the police and having deceitfully transformed herself into a Christian renowned for her kindness, with the result that she was routinely called an “angel” in prison—are dramatically presented, accompanied by voiceover narration. When the scene returns to the narrative present, the minister presents her with a big, white, square piece of raw tofu. Raw tofu is served, customarily, to convicts who have just been released from prison, since eating tofu symbolizes purification. Not even bothering to conceal her look of indifference, however, Geum-ja causes the minister to drop the tofu by lightly placing her finger on the dish and telling him, “너나 잘하세요.” Her retort is subtitled in English as “go screw yourself,” although the original Korean meaning is closer to “mind your own business,” or “just go and do your job.”

Geum-ja's expression of apathy—in tandem with her ever-feminine beauty, complete with long silky hair and a polka-dotted dress—is contrasted with the minister's goofy and even pathetic look. The contrast is designed to cause laughter in audiences, yet this black humor insinuates a so-called sinful woman's provocative challenge to institutionalized male authority. Christianity in Korea has been uniquely combined with the ideologies and customs of a traditional Confucian patriarchal system, while the patriarchal Confucian tradition of privileging bloodlines has nearly obliterated the possibility of domestic adoption in Korea and even quietly endorsed international adoption. The minister in the film has been stalking Geum-ja, struck by her femininity and beauty, and initially he appears to support her as a kind-hearted angel. Later in the film, however, he turns out to be an informant for Mr. Baek, the antagonist of the film and the very man responsible for sending Geum-ja's daughter abroad for adoption, having succumbed to the temptation of sizeable donations from Mr. Baek. Geum-ja's hostile refusal to accept from the minister the raw tofu, and the "purification" it symbolizes, is accompanied by her sarcastic accusation that the minister has failed to do his job, which is to return her to the patriarchal system as a forgiven sinner. Mocking the minister's welcome and absolution, Geum-ja, as a so-called sinner in Korean society—an oppressed but stigmatized woman—challenges the patriarchal male authority of Korean society.

Park underscores, in *Lady Vengeance*, the ironic truth that the selfishly overenthusiastic desire of Korean parents to raise their children to become members of the cosmopolitan elite leads them to sacrifice their children. Presented as an immoral criminal who has lost his humanism and conscience in pursuit of a capitalistic lifestyle, Mr. Baek is an English teacher who works at private institutions for very young children living in Gangnam, the most affluent district in the South Korean capital of Seoul. These types of kindergartens and other private

institutions in Gangnam are manifestations of the national obsession with the notion that Korean children should grow up to be cosmopolitan elites, able to utter English like native speakers. While these kinds of private institutions have been accused of broadening socio-economic gaps, they continue to attract students whose families are eager to invest whatever it takes to turn their children into competitive global subjects. The families who send their children to the institution, in the film, represent the countless number of Koreans who preoccupy themselves with investing in westernized education for their children but ignore the abandoned children of their fellow countrymen and women. Ironically, Geum-ja, the birth mother of a transnational adoptee, and the other parents seeking vengeance, have similarly been victimized by Mr. Baek, who routinely kidnaps very young students from the institution in order to fund his dream to own a yacht someday.

Before the cruel execution of Mr. Baek takes place, the film deploys an emotionally painful and distorted scene in which Mr. Baek serves as an interpreter for Geum-ja, because the monolingual mother and daughter are unable to comprehend each other's words. Conventionally, media depictions of the emotional scenes of encounter, between biological mothers and internationally adopted children, are designed to evoke catharsis and emotional purification. In contrast, Park's portrayal of this scene is as tragic as it is comedic—a mixture of sadness, humor, and repulsion that evokes emotional disturbance. This moment in *Lady Vengeance* reveals the

The narrative impetus for this scene arises from the fact that Jenny, having been raised by her adoptive family in Australia but subsequently having met her biological mother, wishes to live with Geum-ja and also learn why her mother deserted her. Geum-ja, unable to understand her teenage daughter's question, decides to have the bound-up Mr. Baek interpret. In close-up shots of her serious, tearful face, Geum-ja mournfully explains, in Korean, her story and the

reason why she believes herself to be an unfit mother who must turn down Jenny's request to live together. Geum-ja narrates "After I am done with this man, I will return you to Australia/My sins are too great and too deep for me to take care of such a sweet child as you,/You are innocent, but I made you grow up without a mother,/But that's part of my punishment, too....."



Figure 8: Still from *Lady Vengeance*.

Nearly simultaneously, Baek's voice conveys her story in stilted but pretentiously accented English to Jenny. Geum-ja's pale, suffering features and Jenny's childish but sullen look on-screen contrast with Mr. Baek's cruel and repulsive voice; and this contrast evokes considerable discomfort from spectators. In this intense scene between a birth mother and a returned adoptee, the sorrow of the mother and daughter is never understood by the third party, Mr. Baek, who is the very source of this tragedy. Nevertheless, his mediation as an interpreter enables the mother and daughter to draw emotionally closer, and finally to understand each other. The complicated feelings generated in these moments allow spectators to sense the irony

of transnational adoption, which functions not simply to save children but underscores a complex web of issues related to global capitalism.

The closing scene of *Lady Vengeance* is comprised of an overtly dramatized portrayal of Geum-ja's asking for forgiveness from the daughter she had lost years earlier. This scene yet again underscores the paradoxical national psyche of Koreans toward international adoption. The voiceover narration explains, "Lee Geum-ja made a big mistake when she was young and used other people to achieve her own goals, but she still couldn't find the redemption that she so desired. In spite of this, actually because of this, I liked Ms. Geum-ja." Throughout the film, the voiceover narration, having maintained an objective and omniscient viewpoint, is performed by Saewon Kim. Her voice is famous from documentaries, docudramas, and current-event TV programs that sentimentally depict the biographies of transnational adoptees who have returned to Korea. Park's incorporation of Kim's voiceover, in effect, creates an excess that functions as an allusion to, and critique of, the conventional sentimentalizing of adoptee documentary plots. At the end of the film, however, the audience's expectations are once again toyed with, due to a statement that the narration had been supplied by Jenny. One could plausibly argue that this gesture is a means to give voice to birth mothers and their returned adoptees. I am more persuaded, however, that this abrupt change in point of view instead implies that, "the international adoptee still 'likes' her mother despite everything," a sentiment that arguably caters to what Korean audiences wish to hear.

This statement is followed by the scene, in which Geum-ja shows Jenny a white piece of cake resembling raw tofu. With sentimental, hymn-like music playing in the background, Geum-ja tells her daughter, "Be White, live White, like this." Jenny, tasting the icing from the cake on her finger, says "You too," and gestures for Geum-ja to taste the icing on her finger. When



Geum-ja fails to respond, the camera closes in on Jenny's innocent face, gazing up at the snowy sky as Jenny comments, "More White." Geum-ja finally thrusts her face into the cake, sobbing. Geum-ja's grief highlights the painful fact that she is sending back her miraculously returned daughter to her adoptive Australian parents, not for economic reasons or for convenience, but because she believes that she is too sinful to keep her innocent daughter in Korea, after having conducted her murderous revenge against Mr. Baek.

Geum-ja's decision to give up her parental rights epitomizes as well as discloses the collective pathology of South Koreans—as inhabitants of a sending country in international adoption—which results from the belief that the West is an ideal place for their children to grow up. The savior narratives of humanitarian Christianity, combined with the logics of global capitalism, have been internalized by Koreans, leading them to believe that international adoption is better and necessary for their children. Geum-ja's hand-made cake, shaped like tofu, symbolizes the hope of Korea sending its children away to be raised overseas. The implication is that, just as tofu, a traditional Asian food embodying purity, in this context, has been transformed into Occidental food, the South Korean children sent overseas will turn into an ideal combination of the entirely westernized Asian, by "being white and living [as] white," yet maintaining their innocence and purity in the West.

The three films comprising Chan-wook Park's Vengeance Trilogy tell the traumatic and forgotten memories of South Korean modern nation-building, which have been shaped by an "anxiety over survival" pathology and repressed in favor of a "development first ideology." The narratives of the three films, interrelated, suggest a certain picture of South Korean history by highlighting the suffering of the victimized who have survived ongoing violent events. Characters in Park's films are marginalized and victimized by their socio-economically polarized

society, and the anger and resentment of the victimized, referencing the collective sentiments of South Koreans, are conveyed through narratives of revenge. In these three films, the adult characters who suffer either from the loss of children or traumatic childhood memories, or both, turn into extremely violent and cruel avengers who are both unable to dream of having untainted hopes and happiness, due not only to their inhumane acts of revenge but to the social conditions that doom them to accept the lack of resolution in their lives. The “development first” ideology and the survival-oriented mentality of South Koreans, although they were the inevitable byproduct of the national attempt to achieve compressed modern nation-building, resulted in the ongoing victimization of the working class. Park’s Trilogy delivers the sensibility of those who live with their unresolved pain and suffering through dramatized revenge narratives, wherein catharsis does not exist for the characters.

These narratives alike circle around the theme of victimized children and traumatized childhood as social issues generated by the rapid modernization process of Korea in the flow of global capitalism. In Park’s Vengeance Trilogy, the child characters are often depicted as innocent victims, symbolizing lost hope, who are unprotected because of the malfunctioning social structure. In *Oldboy*, this motif of the innocent but victimized child was explored through the symbolic figure of Mido, who was sent abroad for adoption as a child and later returned to Korea, only to be abducted and manipulated into fall in love with her father. In *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Lady Vengeance*, the theme of child abduction and death is the primary motif surrounding the main characters in their mission to exact revenge, and Korean society in both films is painted as an unsafe place for children, whereas the West is shown as an idealized place that safeguards childhood innocence. Park’s delineation of the inability of families and public forces to protect the children, in spite of individual efforts to save the youngsters, expresses his

critique of Korea as a nation that has failed to serve, against the overwhelming force of global capitalism, as fertile soil for the future promise of its children. Park's Vengeance Trilogy depict an idealized childhood of innocence and inexperience that references the West, in contrast with the corruption and hopelessness of South Korean society. The shared lack of happy childhoods and the recurring loss of children portrayed in all three of the Vengeance Trilogy's films, then, reflect a national sentiment of lost hope and dreams under the hegemonic power of global capitalism.

The collective traumas for Koreans trapped in the project of modern nation-building have been generated by cross-cultural encounters between the East and the West; now, those traumas are being transmitted through transnational media to global audiences. The visual and narrative excess prevalent in Park's films of violence and revenge function as an aesthetic tool for spectators, who may find themselves stoked by visually striking, violent scenes and revenge-driven characters. The physical and emotional disturbance created through the excessive style and extreme violence of Park's films does not necessarily mean that spectators will understand the entirety of the social, economic, and political conditions that underlie family tragedies in Korea, but it does make them feel the suffering of characters while occupied by the stylization of the films. In other words, the aesthetics of extremity in the Trilogy viscerally conveys to spectators the pain of traumatic moments in contemporary South Korean society. Inaccessible and unknown traumas of the past are evoked in the global spectators' body through grotesque and graphic images (as well as through narrative excess. The global spectators' cultural transference—reading the disruptive violence in these films as “the unknown”—simultaneously hides and discloses their recognition of the trauma of South Korea. The films of Park's Vengeance Trilogy circulate within a cycle of encountering and interacting, traumatizing and

working through, and transferring and receiving the pain of being caught between the modernization process of the East and West.

## CHAPTER 2

### Inherited Trauma and Indigested Modernity: Returned Child Ghosts and Wronged Women in J-horror and Extreme Cinema of Japan

One of the most widely circulated J-horror films on the globe is Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (1998), a story about the circulation of a videotape that brings death to its viewers seven days after they have watched the video. In the expectation of finding out what caused the death of previous spectators of the video, the main characters of the film (and extradiegetic spectators as well) finish watching the video by choice. The video, however, refuses to reveal the cause of the viewers' deaths, while hinting that "something horrible happened," but insisting, through its successive presentation of cryptic scenes, that it cannot be explained verbally and logically. Desperately looking for ways to resolve the curse, the main characters delve into the contextual and historical meanings of each scene of the video in the hope of tracing the curse back to its origin. Following the main characters' investigation in the film, the audience members of *Ringu* turn into witnesses of a hidden truth from the past while experiencing psychological fear through the disjunctive narrative of the film. In *Ringu*, the video turns out to be the re-creation and representation of a mind that met a traumatic and tragic death. The scenes of the video are related to the traumatic experiences of a child who lost her mother and was murdered by her father in the 1950s, during the post-war modernization process of Japan.<sup>25</sup> In the narrative, the collective

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<sup>25</sup> I shape this chapter based on Jacques Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis for trauma, the encounter of the Real, to analyze the narrative of trauma. Lacan, in "Tuche and Automation" in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1988), suggests that the Real is the unspeakable, inexpressible, ineffable, unrepresentable truth, an undifferentiated space outside language that exists outside the Symbolic order. Lacan writes, "The real should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it—in the form of trauma" (55).

memories of past trauma appear in the stories of women and children who were victimized within the patriarchal and nationalist ideologies.

In this chapter, I will delineate the ways in which the trauma of modern nation-building in Japan which has been hidden beneath Japan's official national narrative of historical and linear progress is disclosed through narratives of rupture in J-horror and extreme cinemas of Japan. Films such as Takashi Miike's *Audition* (1999) and *One Missed Call* (2003), Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (1998) and *Dark Water* (2002), and Takashi Shimizu's *Ju-on* (2000) and *Marebito* (2004) repeatedly exhibit child and/or child ghost characters who are abandoned, severely abused, and thus traumatized in the settings of the uncanny and isolated home in familiar urban places.<sup>26</sup> In first part of this chapter, I connect the recurring trope of traumatized childhood or children to the complicated pathology of those who consider themselves to be victims of past events. The child ghost characters in J-horror and extreme films are justified in seeking vengeance or compensation, and yet are unable to resolve a sense of guilt caused by their wrongdoings in the narrative present. Along with delineating the traumatic modernization history

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<sup>26</sup> About the filmic employment of Tokyo in J-horror cinema, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, in his article "J-horror: New Media's Impact on Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema" argues that in the post-studio system that brought by the recession, J-horror films employ technology, "elements that are at once particular and universal" as well as "location shooting that frequently captures a sense of Tokyo urbanity" to deliver "a uniquely urban sense of fear" (18). In the introduction to *Consuming Bodies* (2004), Fan Lloyd delineates the history of Tokyo, calling it "a symbol of Japan's spectacular post-war recovery" as well as "a city of paradoxes" (12). Despite the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and fire bombings in 1945, Tokyo has been extensively reconstructed and rebuilt within the modernization process, and the 1980s "real estate and construction boom" accelerated the city's development. This boom accompanied a "bubble economy" that "seemed potentially unending" (12) Lloyd points out that Tokyo is "where the visual onslaught of commodity advertising, the various sites of sex and the consumption of goods exist in the frenzy of the high-tech urban environment alongside prevailing social codes of reticence and decorum" (12).

of Japan, analysis of narratives of J-horror and extreme cinemas discloses the ways in which the collective memories of past trauma are interwoven with the altered socio-economic conditions of Japanese society.

Accompanied with traumatized child (ghost) characters, these films often take the traditional “avenging spirit” motif associated mainly with wronged women who are oppressed by the patriarchal system, and, perhaps having been murdered or harmed by men, return for revenge.<sup>27</sup> In the second part of this chapter, I concentrate on Nakata’s *Ringu* (1998) and Miike’s *Audition* (1999) as representative examples for textual analysis. In these films, the dysfunctional nuclear families and single female characters—their realities shaped by the social conditions of the nineties—are shown as transposed repetitions of those who were marginalized, in the past, for the sake of Japan’s rapidly achieved capitalist and technological modernity and supremacy in the global arena.<sup>28</sup> The prevalent filmic settings of urban dysfunctional nuclear families, and the depiction of the marginalized lives of single women or mothers, in J-horror films, are the sources of unknown and inexplicable grudges that originate from the past but affect inhabitants of contemporary Japan in the late 1990s and early 2000s. I assert that these prevalently used

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<sup>27</sup> Jay McRoy, in his book *Japanese Horror Cinema*, and Valerie Wee, in an article “Visual Aesthetics and Ways of Seeing,” relate the female ghost figure with “long black hair and staring-wide eyes” in contemporary Japanese horror films to the avenging spirits in traditional Japanese literature, folktales and Noh and Kabuki theatre (McRoy 3). Wee traces back the origin of “Yurei, or female ghosts” to many myths and folktales from the Edo period (1603-1867) (43). The typical depiction of these women in those tales is that “innocent women . . . are victimized and brutally murdered by men,” and “the vengeful spirits of these dead women return to wreak vengeance on their murderers, and in some instances, on society as a whole” (44).

<sup>28</sup> Jay McRoy, in *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema*, argues the meaning of the dysfunctional nuclear family of single mother and child, as depicted in Nakata Hideo’s *Ringu* (1998) and *Dark Water* (2002) and Shimizu Takashi’s *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2002), in relation to contemporary Japanese culture and its traumatic experience of modernization.

narratives of J-horror and extreme films convey the fear, anxiety, and hopelessness caused by the long-lasting Japanese financial recession, in the nineties, as well as shed light on the disjuncture in the patriarchal capitalist ideologies of Japan. In the second part of this chapter, I contend that the bodily sensation that these films convey is different from the style of Park's films, which evokes, I claim, bodily responses from spectators similar to that experienced by the characters. These Japanese films contain numerous narrative gaps, with no reasonable explanation provided for why certain horrifying images appear or how such gruesome events in the past are related to the characters living in the filmic present. In such narrative structures, the filmic horror is created, rather, through more of a psychological shock that is generated by abrupt insertions into the films' narratives of graphic images of unrecognizable, dismembered, or distorted bodies or faces, or of sequences of extremely violent past events.

The trauma of modern nation-building in Japan been hidden beneath Japan's official national narrative of historical and linear progress. In *Discourses of the Vanishing* (1996), Marilyn Ivy points out that the establishment of modern nation-building occurred alongside the restoration of the emperor as well as the building of a modern citizenry that was educated, conscripted, and disciplined into becoming imperial subjects in the Meiji period (6). The scheme of building educated and disciplined modern subjects, which resulted from the ideologies of modernity—a developmental sense of time, notions of change, development, and civility—has a parallel with the development and conceptualization of modern notions of the child and childhood. Japan, having made persistent efforts to form itself as a modern nation-state commensurate with Western powers since first opening itself up to the imperial West in the Meiji era, underwent an era of social and cultural turbulence that accompanied its project of modern nation-building: imperial expansion, totalitarianism, violent global wars, military defeat



in World War II and the U.S. Occupation, postwar economic expansion and consumerism, and, in the 1990s, the bursting of its economic bubble followed by two decades of recession and stagnation. Despite this history of upheaval and reformation, Japan created and abides by a national myth that posits an essential continuity between its modern national development and its pre-modern era.

The trauma of Japan's modern nation-building, which was initiated by its encounter with the imperial West in the Meiji period, is associated with its particular self-positioning as the most Western among Asian nations. As the West had constructed itself as the dominant world power in the nineteenth century, Japan attempted to have "a Japan-dominated international order in East Asia" as a replacement for Western power over Asia (Tipton 130).<sup>29</sup> According to Ivy, Japan's claiming its coevalness, that is to say, "the coincident modernity" corresponding to that of Euro-American nations, has nevertheless created a collective national anxiety. This anxiety, Ivy asserts, results from being a quasi-colonizer mimicking the West, repressing its sense of loss for pre-modern times, and being isolated for its pursued exceptionalism—being seen as an exotic Other by the West and a colonizer by the other Asian nations. Ivy also contends that Japan's nation-building was instigated "as a response to the threat of domination by European and American powers in mid-nineteenth century," (Ivy 4) and she characterizes early-twentieth century Japan as a "quasi-colonized mimic" (Ivy 6).<sup>30</sup> However, as Fran Lloyd points out, Japan's expansion—

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<sup>29</sup> In *Modern Japan: A Social and Political History*, Elise K. Tipton points out that Japan's imperialism in the thirties was a way for the nation to keep its autonomy by emulating the West's course of colonial expansion, an element of modernity.

<sup>30</sup> In other words, its development as an exotic but late-modernizing nation-state is paralleled with its becoming a "colonialist, imperialist, and (some would say) fascist Japan" that was able to challenge the dominant Western nations during World War II (Ivy 6). In such efforts

invading and colonizing other Asian nations—resulted from an adaptation of Western modernity, accompanied by imperialism, and eventually brought about Japan’s involvement in WWII. By attacking Pearl Harbor in 1941 and thus acting as an aggressor on American soil, Japan caused the U.S. to join in the War, initially in the Pacific theater only but eventually in Europe as well. The mobilization of U.S. forces ultimately led to the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that resulted in Japan’s surrender and occupation by American forces (13).

In *Northeast Asia’s Difficult Past*, Mikyoung Kim argues that Japan’s attitude and evaluation of its own past during the postwar era has fluctuated, creating controversies between the opposing views of the Left and Right. Members of the Left, Kim observes, “push for war compensation and acknowledgement of war responsibility” (55). In contrast, conservatives have attempted, adapting a Social Darwinism perspective, to justify Japanese atrocities toward other Asian countries during the years of colonization and war as natural consequences of an “inevitable historical course” (55). In other words, conservatives not only have rationalized the memories of atrocity by considering Japan’s wartime acts as self-defense but discussed them favorably as manifestations of the survival-of-the-fittest paradigm.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the atomic bombing has generated a collective sense of victimhood for Japanese citizens that has led Japan to be a “torch-bearer of anti-nuclear pacifism” and complicated Japanese attitudes toward, and

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to emulate the West and/or become the West, Japan has been self-fashioning its being coeval, or having an identical modernity, with Western nations.

<sup>31</sup> Kim also discusses the sense of victimhood in Japanese citizens who did not themselves experience Japanese imperialism or WWII but grew up learning about them through primary school textbooks that emphasize the pain and suffering of Japanese citizens during the war while “[marginalizing] the memory of Japan’s acts of aggression” (57). These textbooks after the war “attribute[d] responsibility to the Emperor and the military government,” thereby intensifying the sense of victimhood in ordinary citizens (57).

evaluations of, the past (57).<sup>32</sup> Likewise, Tipton suggests that this sense of victimhood has led many Japanese to consider themselves “victims of the war—‘guinea pigs’ in a racial war” (151).<sup>33</sup>

J-horror and extreme films depict the horrifying consequences of when the child either grows up without a chance to recover from the psychological wounds or dies only knowing the pain and suffering caused by his or her caretaker. In *Audition* (1999), *One Missed Call* (2003), *Ringu* (1998), *Dark Water* (2002), *Ju-on* (2000), and *Marebito* (2004), the characters’ painful memories of being helplessly victimized as a child are often revealed in present events in which they themselves turn into an abuser or perpetrator. The child turns into an adult who is mentally disturbed and has abusive tendencies, or he or she returns as a ghost possessing supernatural power enhanced by his or her extended pain and fear. These traumatized child

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<sup>32</sup> With respect to this complicated collective mindset of post-war Japanese society, Hanasaki Kohei delineates in his essay, “Decolonization and Assumption of War Responsibility,” the perspective on post-defeat Japan of Kato Norihiro, a literary critic and professor. Kato, in *Discussing Post Defeat Japan* (1998), suggests that “twistedness” is a key concept to explain the schizophrenic mentality of post-defeat Japanese society. According to Kato, this twistedness has become the core mentality of Japanese society even though it has been ignored and overlooked. Because Japan’s wartime past has generally been labeled around the world as “an unjust war of aggression,” those soldiers and civilian migrants who sacrificed their lives in the war were considered to have died meaninglessly. Survivors of the war also could not come to terms with the identity that they had before and during the war. This ambivalent state of mind, which Kato calls a “twist[ed]” identity, is also shown through the Japanese government’s attitude toward other Asian nations. Even though some politicians in recent decades have finally acknowledged Japanese wartime atrocities by apologizing to neighboring Asian nations, often these politicians make accompanying statements that justify Japan’s imperialist past or its wartime aggression. According to Kato, this ambivalence is an inevitable expression of the twisted collective mindset he has identified (178).

<sup>33</sup> Tipton also points out the complex mindset of survivors of the atomic bombings. According to him, the survivors not only suffered from the after-effects of radiation exposure and scars, but had to confront social discrimination when they looked for jobs or spouses (151).

characters, ghosts, or monstrous others, demand parental protection and love from characters living in the present. In *Ringu*, *Ju-on*, *Dark Water*, and *One Missed Call*, a child character who died traumatically haunts characters in the present, looking for alternative parents and transmitting his or her pain to them. In *Audition* and *Marebito*, a young woman or a girl who has traumatic memories of childhood appears first as beautiful and harmless, yet when the secrets of her past are revealed, she turns into a monstrous other toward a male protagonist. They attempt to re-compensate their loss by pursuing the unknown truths of their pasts, and yet their attempts fail, leaving only more scars.

Scenes from their past are interwoven with present moments of fear and anxiety, while wronged women and/or child (ghost) characters—manifestations of grudge, in the films—transmit their memory of suffering by harming others in the same way. This pathology, as I view it, of the victimized and the perpetrator has been gained through, and in tandem with, the modernization process of Japan. In the first half of the twentieth century, as I delineated above, Japan invaded and colonized other Asian nations in order to establish a modern nation compatible with the West, and was subsequently defeated by the U.S., first through the WWII atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and, later, financially during the recession of the 1990s and 2000s. Such a complicated and unresolved national consciousness, fluctuating between guilt and victimhood, has been repressed and hidden by the national slogan, “catching up with the West.” Yet it manifests itself in a variety of ways, including—arguably most potently—the excessive aesthetics of extreme cinema and J-horror films.

In the J-horror and extreme films such as *Audition* (1999), *Ju-on* (2000), *Dark Water* (2002), *Marebito* (2003), and *One Missed Call* (2003), the monstrous others, traumatizing and terrifying, are seen as lonely and innocent figures who had a tragic past or death, and in filmic

presents want desperately to receive parental attention and love from characters living in the present. These films repeatedly present characters who have traumatic childhood memories from belonging to dysfunctional families; they are raised by a single mother and/or experience the absence of a mother and/or have an abusive (step) father. What is striking is that this strange desire is accepted by the protagonists in these films, who respond with their affection and love despite the horrifying appearance of the monstrous others. Protagonists who suffer from haunting child ghosts or other monstrous existences, and yet who embrace those beings, are repeatedly shown in these films. In *Ju-on*, female protagonist Hiromi, haunted by a child ghost Toshio, discovers that his mother had been murdered at home by his father, and she turns into the same persona as Toshio's mother. In *Dark Water*, Yoshimi Matsubara (Hitomi Kuroki), a single mother, ends up being an alternative mother for a ghost child who died tragically in the water tank of an apartment building. To save an unknown existence—one that looks like a teenage girl but feeds only on blood—from the underworld of Tokyo, the male protagonist in *Marebito*, Masuoka, bites off his tongue and lets her drink his blood.

In *Ringu*, this uncanny reunion between a child ghost from the past and an alternative mother is depicted sentimentally. Reiko finds the rotting body of Sadako in the well. To undo the curse, Reiko descends into the well where Sadako met her tragic death. From the putrid water in the well, a hand reaches out to grab Reiko's arm, and a head covered by long black hair emerges. Although eerie and unrecognizable moaning and rambling sounds heighten the disturbing nature of the scene, Reiko, instead of screaming for fear, unveils the face from behind the hair, which falls out as soon as it is touched. The background sound changes into sentimental and melancholy instrumental music, while Reiko gazes at the muddy and rotten face of the skull, then hugs and kisses the skull as if she had found a long-lost child of her own. It is because that

scene transforms what would conventionally be understood as a horrifying discovery into an excessively melodramatic encounter between a mother (Reiko) and her child (Sadako). These moments in the narrative reveal the strangely repressed pathology of redemption by reenacting the love lost between parents and child, despite the monstrosity and otherness of the child.

These extreme J-horror films from Japan have shared similar attributes with the extreme and horror films from South Korea. Many of the Japanese and Korean narratives alike circle around the theme of victimized children and traumatized childhood. Also, social issues generated by the modern western ideologies of the nuclear family, which have been, in both countries, a foundation for their rapid development, contextualize the films along the horizon of modern nation-building. These films of both nations reveal erased but remaining memories, repressed feelings of loss and longing, and an unyielding desire for compensation, which I view as a “sensitivity of the adopted” of East Asia and its Diaspora. However, the extreme cinema of Korea depicts characters who are marginalized and victimized by their polarized society in terms of class, and the anger and resentment of the victimized is shown through revenge-driven but melodramatic narratives. In addition, as I show in the textual analysis, the marginalized and victimized in the past who return to exact revenge in the Japanese films are all children or female characters, while in such films from Korea, gender issues are more subtly alluded to than issues of class polarization

Another distinctive difference between the representation of child characters in the extreme and horror films of Japan versus those from Korea, is that extreme and horror films from Japan convey ambivalent sentiments toward the perpetrators by presenting narratives in which a perpetrator was victimized in the past, and his or her unresolved grudge is exploding and expanding in the present. In such films from Japan, the traumatized child in the past is

empowered and returns as a revenging and monstrous other. In contrast, in the films from Korea, the child characters are often depicted as innocent victims, symbolizing lost hope, who are unprotected because of the malfunctioning social structure. Because the child figures in the Japanese films are left without any exorcising resolution or catharsis, they regenerate similar child victims, while the films themselves end with the re-generation and transmission of pain and fear. Inaccessible and unknown traumas of the past, in these films of Japan, are not represented, but instead are evoked through grotesque and graphic images (often accompanying unexplainably eerie sounds) and narrative excess. This sensibility is created in the long and ongoing traumatic modernization process, which has been shaped out of, and oriented in the logic for survival—which, in Korea’s case, has meant the compressed modernity that accompanies the victimization of the working class, and in Japan’s case, has meant technological and patriarchal capitalism.

Post-war Japan’s rapid growth is often called an “economic miracle”; the nation achieved astonishing changes in the course of transforming itself “from the ashes of defeat” into “an economic power second only to the United States” (Tipton 2008, 187). Japan doubled its Gross National Product (GNP) within a decade of the late sixties, during which time it also hosted the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the 1970 Osaka World Exposition (Tipton 187). The Olympics in Tokyo symbolized Japan’s “national resurrection” as well as “its full re-entry into the international community in areas of peaceful competition” (Tipton 190). By 1971, Japan was ranked the third largest exporter in the world and dubbed “Asia’s New Giant” in the global arena. Simultaneously, ninety percent of Japanese citizens considered themselves to belong to the middle class (Tipton 186). Despite the oil crises of the 1970s, Japan was able to maintain a higher growth rate than other industrialized countries. From the middle of the 1980s, with its

economy booming again, Japan became “the largest creditor nation in the world,” and Japanese products and companies were spread globally (Tipton 203). It appears, then, that in the seventies and eighties, Japan’s long-time wish since the Meiji Restoration, to “catch up” with the West, came true (Tipton 204).

The ways in which such miraculous achievements were possible, Tipton asserts, is due to the unique Japanese combination of continuing to value its traditionally hierarchical social structure and communal sense of loyalty while also privileging the modern ideologies of enlightenment and progress. The dual emphasis on the pre-modern ideology of Confucianism, which values “hard work, frugality, loyalty and learning,” and on the aforementioned modern ideologies, which promote fast economic development, enabled the fostering of productive and “cooperative relations between labor and management” as well as “the commitment of workers to their companies” that enhanced productivity (204).<sup>34</sup> Nuclear families, in Japanese society, have functioned within a social structure that is constructed to maximize the efficiency of the labor force, which has resulted in the repression of women (Muto 154). The idealized family is required to uphold a clear distinction between the roles of husband and wife, who sacrifice themselves for each other, their family, “the greater good” of society, and the nation (Tipton 214). In this structure, Japanese society has emphasized the role of mothers in cultivating and educating their children to be modern citizens. Thus, it is the sacrifices of women that was inevitable for Japan’s rapid growth in finance, as well as its industrial and technological

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<sup>34</sup> Tipton (2008) notes that although Japanese citizens have been skeptical since the early seventies about the sacrifices they have made for the nation’s rapid growth, the secure employment conditions and material abundance characterizing the lives of salary men in big enterprises, and their families, by extension, may have silenced the doubts of such individuals (214).



advancement, that again brought back material abundance to family members, and, in turn, reaffirmed the validity of the national image as a homogeneous middle-class nation with hegemonic ideologies (Napier 56).

The long economic recession that started in the early nineties, however, compelled many observers to recognize the possible failure and ruptures in both the modern ideologies of development and progress, and the predominant image of Japan as a predominantly middle-class nation with homogeneous and harmonious familial relations at various social levels (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 9). The Japanese economic bubble in the 1980s, characterized by a rapid increase in the price of stocks and real estate, burst in the early 1990s. As a result, the number of bankruptcies increased greatly, and banks were forced to deal with massive non-performing loans. In addition, many alarming socio-economic and technological crises during the time added more reason to doubt modern national ideologies regarding the continuation of national development. One of the critical social issues that accompanied the recession in Japan during the nineties was the increasing rate of juvenile crime and “the sexual precociousness of girls and young women” (Leheny 2006, 29). A significant number of girls and young women were involved in “compensated dating,” which came to epitomize, and was tied to, the large scale of social anxiety (29). The aforementioned events, along with the collapse of the stock market and banking system, were “attended by growing evidence of distrust in large institutions,” and this led to the creation of a prevalent sense of crisis in Japanese society (29).

This anxiety about seeing horror is initially presented, in *Ringu*, in terms of exposing and relating the cursed video to the lives of teenagers on the loose in the nineties. The first victim in *Ringu* is a teenage girl, by the name of Tomoko (Yuko Takeuchi), who watched the video when she spent a night with her boyfriend and other friends on the Izu peninsula. In Tomoko’s room,

two teenage girls—Tomoko and Masami (Hitomi Sato)—are talking about Tomoko’s secret: whether or not Tomoko has a sexual relationship with her boyfriend. This topic is overlapped with Masami’s topic, which revolves around a rumor about the cursed video. At a certain point, Tomoko’s parents call to inform the girls that they will be returning late. Tomoko and Masami respond with relief to the news, and they decide to celebrate their night of freedom. Tomoko, however, encounters the horror embedded in the video and dies of shock. Her shocking death scene then segues into a scene in which a camera screen records an interview of a teenage girl regarding the rumor of the cursed video. The main character Reiko (Nanako Matsushima), who interviews several girls, learns from one of the interviewees that two high school students who watched the video were found dead in their parked car. Later, watching the news, Reiko finds out that these teenagers were mysteriously killed in a parked and locked car while engaged in sexual activity. These libertine teenagers’ deaths draw Reiko’s attention to the investigation of the cursed video, with the result that the circulation of the cursed video expands from the teenagers to Reiko’s family. The fear of perceiving this rupture stems from the phenomenon of middle-class teenage girls in the nineties who lived in comfortably well-off residential neighborhoods but overstepped the expected roles of girls that undergird the ideologies of the harmonious nuclear family.

Eric White (2005) argues that the narrative of *Ringu* does not reiterate the traditional motifs of the return of the repressed, in which “the vengeful ghost losing its eternal rest” comes back and haunts the living, while its grudge is resolved by being “exorcized by means of a therapeutic catharsis” (40). Instead, White hypothesizes that the endless transmission of the curse through the videotape and other technological devices highlights the fear and anxiety caused by “simulacral proliferation of information in media-saturated culture” (41). He also asserts that the

hidden faces of ghosts and the blurred images of the killed people's faces in photographs represent "the intrusion of 'posthuman' otherness," which means, according to him, the imposition of "a new cultural logic of the simulacrum" onto "contemporary cultural life" (41). White suggests reading the narrative of *Ringu* as a postmodern text, that is to say, not as another uncanny horror story following the formula of "the return of the repressed," but as a narrative of the symptoms of postmodern and post-industrialized society. I claim, however, that the urban fear, from which the films were born and which the films in turn convey to audiences, is not only the social anxiety caused in the nineties by recession. The films underscore the trauma of citizens who perceive the rupture in modern nation-building, a rupture on which the aforementioned social anxiety might shed light. I propose that the deviation in *Ringu*'s narrative arc from conventional horror films—the repressed returning without cathartic exorcism, only expanding the grudge through technology—is a post-traumatic text that reveals the traumatic past in Japan's modern nation-building project.

*Ringu* depicts trauma that has lost a chance to be properly recognized, but having been buried, comes back in the form of a revenging ghost whose life is linked with that of a divorced woman who is a single mother. The link between two dysfunctional families—Shizuko's in the 1950s and Reiko's in the 1990s—represents the anxiety of post-industrial Japan with respect to its national ideologies about nuclear families and the role of mothers. During the recession in the 1990s, married women whose husbands might be laid off returned to the workforce in order to maintain the lifestyle to which their families were accustomed, as well as to support educational expenses for their children, although most of these women could only acquire part-time jobs. Despite their changed social conditions, these women were still responsible for housework and even wanted to prove that their working outside the home did not cause any inconvenience for

their family members (Tipton 226). As a symptom of this altered cultural and economic state of Japanese society, the horror and extreme films released in the late 1990s present social anxiety caused by the loss of the idealized nuclear family and the undermining of the hegemonic view of women's expected role as dedicated mothers and auxiliary workers.

In *Ringu*, the main character Reiko (Nanako Matsushima) is a busy career woman and a single mother with a seven-year-old son, Yoichi (Rikiya Otaka). Although Reiko and Yoichi are seen to be a close and loving mother and son, the film depicts tension between the demands placed on Reiko as a reporter and as a mother; throughout the film, Reiko repeatedly apologizes to Yoichi about getting home late from work and being unable to spend time with him. In the first scene in which Reiko and Yoichi are shown together, Reiko is late from work. She apologizes to her son, as they are scheduled to attend a pre-funeral ceremony at Tomoko's house (Tomoko is Reiko's niece and Yoichi's cousin). Yoichi clearly is used to such situations, and has not only changed into suitable clothes but even prepared Reiko's as well. Most of the time during the film, Reiko is away from Yoichi pursuing her investigation, and she frequently calls her son to tell him she is sorry for that. One night she stays with him, only to leave him at his grandfather's house so that she can travel the next day to further her investigation. That very night, however, Yoichi leaves his bed and watches the cursed tape while Reiko is asleep in the next room. After Reiko's realization that the only way to save her son is to have another person watch the video, she chooses to transmit the curse by showing it to her own father, even knowing it will cause his death. From the first scene in which Yoichi appears, to the end of the film, Reiko is presented as a hard-working single mother who does not spend enough time with her son, and is therefore anxious for, and apologetic toward, him. The film thus depicts the guilt of a single mother, who feels she is failing her son by being unable to provide him with a functioning

nuclear family in which she provides a constant and nurturing presence. At the same time, it reveals how her guilt motivates her to transmit fear, in the form of the cursed video, to others.

The anxiety of characters who are situated in, and deal with, dysfunctional family issues in the narrative present of these film is interwoven with the mystery of a revengeful ghost whose origin can be traced back to the 1950s. Reiko's ex-husband Ryuji (Hiroyuki Sanada) is a professor with psychic powers but also an irresponsible father who is completely absent from his son's life (not even recognizing him when he passes Yoichi). Despite his apathy as a father, Ryuji ends up helping Reiko investigate the curse. The divorced couple's investigation uncovers the buried story of a child who encountered a tragic death in the process of Japan's modernization. The curse of the video turns out to be rooted in the murder of a young girl named Sadako, in the fifties, who is assumed to be the illegitimate child of an affair between Shizuko Yamamura and Dr. Heihachiro Ikuma. Shizuko was known for her psychic powers, while Dr. Ikuma was a famous professor of modern psychology who was convinced of Shizuko's psychic powers and attempted to demonstrate them in public. Following the failed demonstration, Shizuko committed suicide and Dr. Ikuma had to resign from his job. Ultimately, he throws his daughter Sadako down a well, and it is she who returns to the narrative present as a ghost.

The aforementioned events are set in 1950s Japan—especially, the post-war era when Japan struggled to reestablish itself as a modern nation after having undergone the traumas of war, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and several years of American occupation. In the nation's attempt to recover from trauma and redeem itself in the eyes of the Allied powers by employing capitalist ideologies and technology from the West, there was a belief that Japan

must remove pre-modern elements that still resided in its culture in the fifties.<sup>35</sup> Midori Matsui claims that Japan's acceptance and domestication of modern Western ideas and culture represented an "incomplete digestion," as Japan preserved its hierarchical pre-modern system in the fields of politics, economics, and education (142). In the film, the symptoms of that repression are shown as the story of a returned Sadako. Shizuko's psychic powers, which may symbolize the pre-modern elements, is denied and repressed by the modern western ideologies of mainstream society in post-war Japan. A western-educated psychologist, Dr. Ikuma attempts, through the public demonstration of Shizuko's psychic powers, to integrate pre-modern elements into the modernization process. But the only results are the tragic deaths of Shizuko and himself, as well as the trauma or grudge produced by their illegitimate union—Sadako. The symbolically loaded story of Sadako portrays that which has been repressed returning as a hybrid being of spirituality and technology that has taken form as an "incomplete digestion" of modernity; Sadako's psychic power allows her to have control over, and empower itself through, atomization, that is to say, telephone wires and television sets. She inherited her mother's psychic powers but they seem to be supplemented by her father's rationality and scientific capability. However powerful she may have been, Sadako was thrown into a well by her father, remaining there until her grudge had deepened to the point that her tragic story, untold and unmourned, has become the source of yet another trauma in the present.

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<sup>35</sup> Japan's development as a late-modernizing nation-state is paralleled with its becoming a "colonialist, imperialist, and (some would say) fascist-Japan" that was able to challenge the dominant Western nations during World War II. In such efforts to emulate the West and/or become the West, Japan has been self-fashioning its being coeval or possessing an identical modernity with Western nations, a state that negates its forceful and intrusive encounter with Western modernity but emphasizes the continuity of Japan's progressive history (Ivy 6).

As if the ghost of Sadako from the past has emerged from the television screen via the video, the film *Ringu*, itself, rematerializes the past in a visual form via the touch of characters. When Ryuji touches material that is related to the grudge of Sadako, he can see the past. The traumatic past event is reestablished via contact from the present. When traumatic events or memories are visualized as images, the shock turns not into representation but a bodily process, a process, according to Bennett, that is “experienced not as a remembering of the past but as a continuous negotiation of a present with indeterminable links to the past” (Bennett 38). Ryuji’s psychic power enables him to see past events, and the film *Ringu* allows the extradiegetic audience members, in turn, to become witness to traumatic events in the diegetic past. The scenes uncover details of the untold past, such as the public demonstration held to display Shizuko’s psychic power, in which she is accused of fraudulence, and her daughter Sadako’s killing of a reporter who accused her mother of faking her psychic powers. Another scene in the final part of the film visualizes Dr. Ikuma’s killing of Sadako by throwing her into a well. In such scenes, these untold histories are conveyed through Ryuji’s hallucinations, but they are also presented in black-and-white scenes resembling historical documentary footage, as if they are records of truth (Fig. 9). Ryuji’s hallucinations are being materialized in the visual form of documentary footage, as if Sadako’s ghost has turned from an image on the television screen into a material being. The repressed memory that official history refuses to contain is preserved as sense memory, and it can only be revealed by someone who truly wants to learn the truth. The characters’ touching of items related to a past memory allows the characters as well as the extradiegetic spectators of *Ringu* to recognize the other’s trauma. The boundaries between images and materiality, imagination and reality, and spirituality and technology are thus blurred in the narrative of *Ringu*. Through the ruptures of the temporally complex alternation of the

narrative present and past, and from the aforementioned blurred dualities, the untold history of the past crawls out and demands the attention of the living in the contemporary world.

The combination of the pre-modern element and western modernity is, in *Ringu*, repeated through particular features of the characters, while the residue of trauma from the union of the pre-modern and the modern results in the unstoppable curse spreading, through modern technology, to another dysfunctional nuclear family. The illegitimate union of psychic Shizuko



Figure 9: Still from *Ringu*.

and Dr. Ikuma is echoed in Reiko and Ryuji's relationship; in the past the psychic was a woman (Shizuko), whereas now it is the husband (Ryuji) who has psychic powers. In a sense, the two couples are similarly marginal—one couple is having a secret affair and produces a child who cannot be acknowledged, while the other couple had a state-sanctioned relationship but broke it off after producing a publicly acknowledged child. The present couple's such characteristics seem diverted from the earlier couple's, taking a modernized and legalized form, but Reiko and Ryuji unwittingly spread the curse to their child rather than end it; Sadako's curse survives



through being watched by Yoichi. This once-dysfunctional but reunited family—Reiko, Ryuji, and Yoichi—repeats mistakes similar to those from the past, and, by becoming mediums of the curse, reproduce tragedies in the present. In *Ringu*, then, anxiety about failing the modern ideologies of continuity and linear progress as well as a harmonious society built upon the nuclear family is shown to be a path for the repressed past to crawl out to the narrative present.

Director Nakata uses the film itself, and the cursed video within the film, to convey the shock of trauma from the past to the present by visualizing the face of fear and terror. Although the horror—the ghost from the video—does not show its face to the extradiegetic spectators until the end, the reactions of characters within the diegesis suggest that the *diegetic* spectators see the ghost, which returns to the narrative present via television screens. That horror kills the diegetic spectators of the video in the film, and in turn, shocks the extradiegetic spectators, the audience members of *Ringu*, by showing the horrified look of the diegetic spectators. When Tomoko is on the first floor by herself, and a television turns on automatically while her friend Masami leaves briefly. Tomoko turns the television off and walks away, but feeling something she turns back. Apparently she sees something extremely horrifying, but the camera only shows a close-up of Tomoko's shocked face (Fig. 10), which stays static a few seconds, and then changes into an overexposed negative of the scene in black-and-white (Fig. 11), which intensifies the shock on

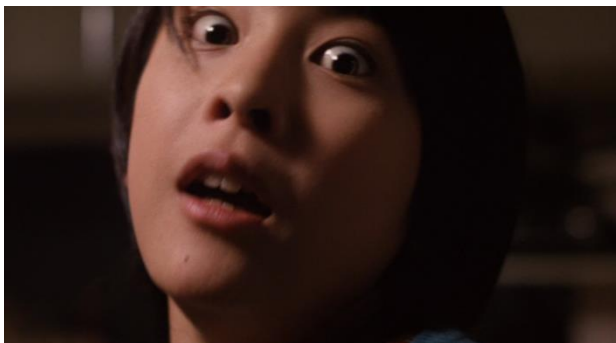


Figure 10: Still from *Ringu*.

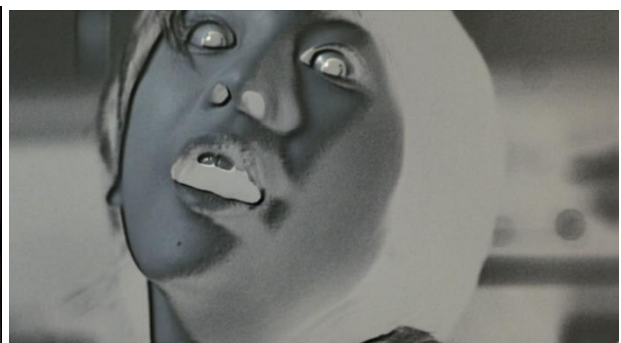


Figure 11: Still from *Ringu*.

her face. With respect to the act of seeing others experience sensational pain, Bennett writes that “seeing sensation for an audience surely entails feeling or, at the very least, experiencing a tension between an affective encounter with a real body in pain and an encounter with the body as image or ground of representation” (2005, 38). In *Ringu*, the horror is imitated by the characters’ faces in the film, and the horror is revealed through the sensational pain inscribed in their faces. Seeing the expressions of inexplicable shock and fear, which are not “the graphic spectacle of the violence” but “the physical imprint of the ordeal of violence,” leads audience members to make contact with the truth, the pain of the traumatized (Bennet 39). At the end of the film, it is finally revealed that the distorted face of the female ghost, Sadako, full of pain and anger, is the horror. When Sadako, hiding her face behind her long dark hair, comes out of the screen and reveals her facial expression of utter shock and fear (Fig. 12), character’s watching her experiences (Fig. 13) is conveyed to extradiagetic audiences’ bodies by “the physical imprint of the ordeal of violence” (Bennet 39). Within the narratives of the horror and fear experienced by a young girl in the past, the distorted faces of the ghost and the spectators in the film are shocking and terrifying, and the concept that a monstrous ghost might emerge from a daily



Figure 12: Still from *Ringu*.



Figure 13: Still from *Ringu*.

object—a television—may well intensify the horror of extradiegetic spectators who watch the screen playing *Ringu* in the extradiagetic present.

The traditional motif of the wronged woman who comes back as a ghost is transformed, in Miike's *Audition*, into a dramatically distorted "modern day heroine." The catch phrase, "modern day heroine," is used within the film to advertise a (sham) audition whose ostensible purpose is to cast a main actress for a movie, but in actuality the audition is being held for Aoyama to find his "ideal" woman so he can court her to be his future wife. *Audition* starts with a scene in which Ryoko Aoyama (Miyuki Matsuda) passes away in a hospital room while her husband Shigeharu Aoyama (Ryo Ishibashi) watches.<sup>37</sup> Their young son Shigehiko (Tetsu Sawaki) arrives carrying an art project from school for his mother and witnesses her death, broken-hearted. The film, starting from the end of a harmonious nuclear family, moves forward seven years after the mother's death. It is during Japan's recession, and Aoyama has decided to look for a new wife. Through the sham audition, Aoyama meets attractive 26-year-old Asami Yamazaki (Eihi Shiina) and later has a sexual relationship with her. Asami, while seeming to satisfy all of Aoyama's expectations for his ideal wife, is revealed over the course of the film to be a monstrous murderer, abuser, and revenger motivated by traumatic childhood memories from being raised in a horrifyingly dysfunctional family. *Audition* presents the repressed anger of the marginalized female who returns as a monstrous modern-day heroine who tortures, dismembers, and abuses men's bodies using physiological knowledge and tools.

Stephen Hantke (2005) reads this film in the context of a web of feminist discourses—that is to say, he uncovers the meanings of the female character's revenge, both in the socio-political context of patriarchal Japanese society and in reference to the film's allusions to previous Japanese films in which female characters are depicted as sexual and social victims. Hantke suggests that Asami is a modernized version of traditional Japanese female avenging

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<sup>37</sup> An adaptation of Ryu Murakami's novel of the same title.

ghosts. He asserts, however, that Asami's torture of Aoyama is not a part of the conventional "revenge" story, as Aoyama is portrayed in the film as an identifiable and likable character, a good father and lover who has not done any injustice to deserve Asami's torture (60). Rather, positing Asami as a figure in the line of "the Japanese tradition of the female avenger," Hantke points out that her violence is a challenge toward the "ideology of family" (60) that undergirds the patriarchal and capitalist modern Japanese family. Alongside this contestation of hegemonic values, Hantke views Asami's torture of men as a female rejection of the commercialized but romanticized form of modern love idealized in modern Japanese culture, where in fact family is "already dysfunctional" and "male authority" is "already often undermined" (60). Reading in Asami "a reincarnation" of "the traditional female avenger" as well as "a reaction" toward the patriarchal capitalist family structure of modern Japan, Hantke suggests that "cultural anxieties about the success or failure of modernization" are expressed through the horror and shock conveyed by *Audition* (61).

In accordance with Hantke, but more specifically, I view the film as concerning itself with the social anxiety of the nineties. I contend that the film presents the ways in which Japanese (corporate) men's anxiety is in conflict with modernized women's desires during the recession. The long-held Japanese dream of being a so-called "family nation" is undermined ideologically by the recession, while, in society, the female labor force is again victimized due to corporate restructuring. This new socio-economic circumstance led to substantial layoffs of employees at corporations in every sector, which in turn generated numerous social problems and cultural anxiety relating not only to the concept of the "family nation" but to the structure of Japan's nuclear families themselves (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 8). In addition, female workers, long considered as supplementary labor in Japanese society, and often employed in

part-time or temporary positions, became the first target of cost-cutting by having their work hours reduced or even losing their jobs. When it came to new hires, companies prioritized male over female applicants to fulfill their limited need (Tipton 2008, 226). In other words, the recession led to even greater inequality between Japanese men and women, both in terms of their working conditions and their household situations.

The very tone of *Audition* is unmistakably shaped by the anxiety caused by the recession in the 1990s. The film's male characters—middle-aged businessmen—are imbued with a defeatism that results from the recession, while they try to reclaim their power and masculinity by reestablishing traditional nuclear families of their own. In one scene, Aoyama meets a friend in the film industry, Yasuhisa Yoshikawa (Jun Kuniura), at a bar to inform him of his decision to pursue remarriage. Before he has a chance to bring up the topic, Yoshikawa mentions the dire condition of Japan's economy as "a survival game or a test of endurance," and adds, "It seems a bright future is ahead but I don't know how long we should wait." In that moment, however, his pessimistic outlook on business changes into annoyance toward some young women laughing and talking aloud in the bar. Yoshikawa complains that all the attractive women have disappeared, while the new ones are "no class, stuck up, and stupid as well." Finally, he ominously declares, "Japan is finished." Put differently, his failing belief in "the family nation" is paralleled by his perception regarding the disappearance of attractive women. Aoyama, however, is unconvinced by Yoshikawa's pessimism about Japanese women. Revealing his decision to get remarried, Aoyama notes that he himself plans to meet as many women as he can in search of someone who has decent skills, such as playing the piano, singing, or classical dance like his deceased ex-wife. The two men's dialogue alludes to their assumption that Japan's supposedly impending demise is related to and reflected in women's being "no class, stuck up,

and stupid.” At the same time, it reveals these middle-aged corporate men’s fantasy that if they find a woman with qualities that meet their standard of an ideal wife in the traditional nuclear family, they will regain happiness. Aoyama wants as his spouse a woman who is talented enough to be confident but not so successful that he is unable to control her. Aoyama’s expectation for his wife-to-be’s talent is evoked by his belief that women’s confidence would bring happiness at “home.”

The plot unfolds in the first half of the film with linear realism and at a relatively slow pace, mainly depicting Aoyama’s family life and work through Aoyama’s perspective. Stable, routine, and highly regimented Japanese men’s lives—compartmentalized into family and work—are deployed, and in such a mode, even an unethical and provocative event—a sham audition—held by Aoyama and Yoshikawa is shown as matter-of-factly as it was a normal scene in the daily routine of corporate men. In the sham audition, the women who respond to the casting call are willing to fulfill any request for the chance to be “the modern day heroine,” and they answer even the rude, sometimes sexual and irrelevant questions that Aoyama and Yoshikawa ask, doing their best to satisfy the two men’s demands. The mock-casting audition shows, on one hand, the ways in which these two middle-aged men, or, more specifically, two dominant figures who wield a powerful resource, abuse the film production company’s support, and at the same time mislead and deceive female participants at the audition for their personal gain. On the other hand, it reveals how the young women’s desire to be successful professional women in modern Japan makes them vulnerable to exploitation by corporate power. The naturalized depiction of the sham audition insinuates that Japanese society is embedded in capitalist corruption as well as patriarchal exploitation.

The editing pace and style changes into one that is non-linear, fast-paced, and artificially unrealistic from the scene of Asami and Aoyama's (supposedly) romantic trip, which is a fulfillment of the middle-aged man's sexual fantasy as well as his first encounter with the reality of what he has fantasized. By the time of this encounter, it is revealed that there is a disjunction between Aoyama's idealization of his wife-to-be and what the patriarchal capitalist society has generated by its long-standing repression of women. During this trip, Asami brings Aoyama to her bed, revealing to Aoyama the post-burn scars on her thigh from being tortured as a child by her stepfather. Until the trip, Aoyama's perception of her is based on what he expects to see from her—an agreeably submissive, decent, well-mannered and beautiful woman, accepting of her position and her painful past in positive ways. However, once Asami exposes her scars and sexual desire to him, the style and content of the film are transformed from those of a melodrama to those befitting a psychological thriller. Aoyama traces Asami's past, and in the film, Asami's past and present are shown as interweaved with Aoyama's imagination and filmic reality. In the course of looking for Asami, who has vanished after their intimate relationship, Aoyama witnesses—in scenes that could be interpreted as his fantasy or imagination—how Asami is abusing another male victim who is amputated and trapped in her house, his life sustained by eating Asami's vomit. Overlapping with these scenes are moments from her childhood, in which, for example, Asami's stepfather asks the young Asami if she would dance for him to avoid being tortured as usual. However, rather than dancing for him, Asami hesitantly stretches out her legs and takes her father's torture, which is to burn her legs with heated tongs (Fig. 14). Moreover, at the end of the film, Aoyama passes out after being drugged, and the following scenes flash across the screen: Aoyama dining with Asami while she recounts her traumatic childhood, then listening to his late wife's warnings about Asami, then being fellated by Asami, who changes

into other women successively—his female employee at work and a high-school-aged girl who is his son's friend. Additionally, there are scenes in which the child Asami is tortured by her



Figure 14: Still from *Audition*.

stepfather and the adult Asami slits the throat of that self-same stepfather. All of these scenes are ambiguously framed as Asami's guilt-driven hallucinations regarding exploited women and/or the film's omnipresent narration of the past. Within this disjunctive narrative structure, hideously grotesque scenes of torture, abuse, and violence—they are either acted upon the child Asami's body or the adult Asami is acting out her rage on the bodies of men—explode across the screen.

While the boundaries between imaginary and realistic scenes, and the past and the present, are blurred in non-linear order in the last half of the film, the most gruesome and shocking torture scenes and traumatic memories of Asami come at the end of the film, set in Aoyama's house. From this point, Aoyama, who pursued Asami throughout the film, turns into an object of her sadistic and meticulous torture; Asami is shown as an invader of Aoyama's home and aggressor toward his body. With this conversion, the film opens up with rapidly-paced scenes of



torture, abuse, and sexual perversion that put audience members in unavoidable shock and awe. Underprepared audiences—whose standard expectations have led them to assume *Audition* will follow the relatively conventional format of melodrama—are disoriented by the turn of the film into a thriller. The abrupt change to sadomasochistic violence, in turn, compels these spectators to experience visceral traumas of their own in this particular film-viewing experience. When Aoyama opens his eyes after having been drugged, Asami—wearing a white pleated skirt that suggests that its wearer is a well-mannered and submissive woman, contrasted with ominously black gloves and apron, not to mention a belt for a set of tools—pulls out her other medical supplies and tools from a big handbag. Explaining to Aoyama that the drug will paralyze him but make him sense pain more acutely, she inserts a needle on his tongue. She then tortures Aoyama by poking numerous needles into his stomach and eyes, and then slices off one of his feet with a wire. Scenes from her childhood are again inserted into the sequences of Asami’s torture of Aoyama; Asami, in the present, is in the process of cutting off Aoyama’s foot (Figs. 15&18), while her stepfather, in the past, touches himself (Fig. 17) while watching his stepdaughter dance beautifully in her pale pink leotard and shoes (Fig. 16). These sequences seem to convey the confused affects of fear, shock, and humiliation, as well as the pleasure of child victims in general—Asami, in this specific instance of the film—who are “sexualized at an



Figure 15: Still from *Audition*.



Figure 16: Still from *Audition*.



Figure 17: Still from *Audition*.



Figure 18: Still from *Audition*.

early age” by a person with whom they have a close attachment. Asami, in turn, repeats and recreates the pain and abuse by inflicting it on Aoyama while simultaneously turning him—another supposedly loving and close man—into her father figure who did not have feet.<sup>38</sup> The psychological pain and wound that the young Asami had to endure cannot be represented visually or explained verbally, but it is transformed into the visualization of Aoyama’s bodily pain caused by his torture at Asami’s hands. The visceral quality of the scenes depicting her acts of torture compels spectators, in essence, to experience Aoyama’s pain and wounds in the narrative present through their own bodies in the viewing present.

Bennett points out that those who were sexually abused at an early age are “more than being a passive victim,” as they “live and continually negotiate the effects of the abuse” (2005, 27). The affect of such trauma cannot be conveyed in “moral or medical classification precedes representation,” but it can be expressed by artistic forms that deliver its sensation and create “a discursive framework” that “develo[p] cultural awareness of the issue of sexual abuse” (28). The

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<sup>38</sup> Ballet, in general, requires performers to embody and internalize a distinctly western aesthetic and performance technique characterized by an understanding of western classical music. As such, ballet arguably epitomizes the highly sophisticated beauty of Western culture. I see that Asami’s learning of ballet from her footless father thus allegorizes the rootlessness of Japan in its insistent pursuit of modern nation-building that has created a pathology of repressed nostalgia and anxiety.

artistic forms deliver “a condition of confusion” that provides “only fragments of memories, written onto the body.” The visual representation of such shocks generates physical imprints on audience members’ bodies, and the bodily sensations of those spectators compel them to sense confusing memories of trauma (29). In the film, the realistic depiction of physical violence enacted on Aoyama’s body and the fragmented dream-like scenes of Asami’s past are mixed and compressed in a short period of screening time. The result does not so much help spectators understand the situation as traumatize them in their viewing experience. Nevertheless, it leads them to empathize with the young Asami’s confusion as a sexual victim. The moral ambiguity that Asami might have experienced when she was abused sexually and physically by her stepfather is re-created in spectators through the parallel editing scenes of Asami’s violent acts and her traumatic childhood. At the same time, the parallel scenes suggests that Asami is, in the filmic present, reenacting on male subjects the tortures that had previously been performed on her own body and mind. Asami’s torture of others does not bring forth any resolving cathartic moments in relation to her past pain, but rather functions to reveal her traumatic past while conveying the pain of her victim, Aoyama, to spectators. The recurring scenes of Asami’s torturing of male bodies in the film manifest the endless repetition of trauma continued in the diegetic and extradiegetic presents.

Surprisingly, the ending scene of *Audition* comes back to its prior melodramatic tone, adding a bizarre sentimentality through narrative excess that serves as a diversion from the avenging ghost narrative that Hantke suggests in his reading of *Audition*. Shigehiko, Aoyama’s son, unexpectedly comes back home, interrupting Asami’s torture of his father and then injuring her. Pushed by Shigehiko from the stairs, Asami falls from the second floor to the first. The final scenes of the film, after all the horror, are composed of oddly juxtaposed sentimental dialogues

between Asami and Aoyama, who both lie on the floor, injured, while calm, smooth instrumental music changes the mood to melancholic and melodramatic. Their lines are repetitions of various dialogues from previous scenes when they were dating.

Asami: I thought you were a very busy man. I don't know what you do very well.

You might think I am desperate. I was longing for your call.

Aoyama: (Looking at her in a distance, he shed tears, trembling.)

Asami: I didn't think I would see you again. Sorry. I am pretty excited. Living alone was a hassle. I have nobody to talk to. You are the first one who is truly warmhearted and tries to accept me and tries to understand who I really am.

Aoyama: It's hard to overcome that experience but someday you will feel life is wonderful. That's life isn't it?

After this melodramatic scene, the final scene of the film shows a blank young Asami sitting alone in an apartment, wearing ballet shoes. After the shocking torture scenes, this insertion of melodramatic dialogue could be read as a scene that reifies the film's critical perspective, toward patriarchal capitalist formulations of love and marriage, by turning the story into a black comedy. However, considering the last scene of Asami as a child, these snatches of dialogue may, rather, sentimentalize the whole story by changing Asami's violent actions into a reaction by an unloved and unprotected child. In other words, Asami desires back parental love in her relationship with Aoyama. The film, again, delivers an ambivalent perspective toward the wronged one's damaging of others by creating a sentimental moment.

The buried stories of the forgotten, unmourned women and children are symbolically retold in the films through a recursive narrative structure that juxtaposes past events with those in the narrative present. Such traumatic events belong to the past but return to the present in these

films, I show in this chapter, as allegories of Japan's past attempts to transplant pre-modern elements into the imported, modern western cultural milieu, processes that have been accompanied by psychological scars. J horror films convey ambivalent sentiments toward the perpetrators by presenting narratives in which a perpetrator was victimized in the past, and his or her unresolved grudge is exploding and expanding in the present. I delineate the collective sensibility that these films convey by analyzing specific scenes and narrative contents of representative J-horror and extreme films, in which those who have been marginalized or victimized in the modernization process of Japan come back for revenge. In addition, as I elucidate in the textual analysis, the marginalized and victimized in the past who return to exact revenge in the Japanese films are all children or female characters. Child characters in J-horror films are represented as the traumatized ghost who is empowered and returns as a revenging and monstrous other. These films reveal erased but remaining memories, repressed feelings of loss and longing, and an unyielding desire for compensation.

The ways the stories are retold in J-horror films generate a specific sensibility of ambivalence, a mixture of guilty, anger, anxiety and sadness that not only represents the social atmosphere of the late 1990s, but is related to the mentality of the Japanese that has resulted from the modernization process. It manifests itself in a variety of ways, including the deconstructive stories of J-horror films. Traumas dating from 1950s Japan, untold and repressed, are shown as recurring symptoms of unrecognized horror in the late 1990s, when the nation suffered during its economic recession from a loss of hope for the idealized nuclear family. The nuclear family model, in which women devote themselves to their children's education, and children are subject to disciplining mechanisms that turn them into ideal modern citizens, once characterized the hope of national progress and modernity in post-industrial Japanese society. However, in *Ringu*

and other J-horror films, women and children are shown as figures entrapped in the past and thus representing discontinuity, but haunting the present and luring other characters to encounter the real, the truth or the past, and traumatic events untold. The recurring theme of the problematic relations between mother and child in the dysfunctional family of the nineties, I demonstrate in this chapter, is a reflection of the repressed problems in the unique cultural and social system of modern Japan. This sensibility is created in the long and ongoing traumatic modernization process, which has been shaped out of, and oriented toward, technological and patriarchal capitalism.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Sense of Deception: Adoption Narratives and Appropriated Trauma in Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*

In my two chapters on South Korean and Japanese horror and extreme cinemas, I contended that the ways in which national traumas were generated in the modern nation-building processes in Japan and South Korea, respectively, are shown in and delivered through extreme aesthetics on the symbolic level. In Chapter 1, I argued that with Chan-wook Park's films, the collective shock and suffering of Koreans—who have lived through a traumatic era of modernization and yet identify with that compressed, modern industrial nation-building process—are conveyed through the aesthetics of extreme cinema. The complicated psyche of the Japanese—claiming themselves coeval with the West in terms of modern nation-building, but scarred by the incompleteness of their transition to modernity—was discussed in Chapter 2, through an analysis of representative J-horror and extreme films, *Ringu* (1998) and *Audition* (2000). In that chapter, I delineated the ways in which psychological fear is delivered to spectators, not only through deployment of the narratives of the repressed past's return to the present but also through extremely affective moments—shocking and disturbing scenes often shown through disjunctive editing. In their establishment of a globally appealing mode of horror and revenge, these films employ conventions of body genre films but transform them through unique differences in content and form. These differences are, ironically, the productive results of the modern nation-building processes of these nations.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the literary works of diasporic writers of East Asian descent that underscore the continual longing and attachment for their homelands by displaced people in the West. These works attribute the longing not to a refusal by such immigrants to be adopted by a

new land, or to form new cultural and political loyalties, but mainly to their alienated and marginalized conditions in their newly settled homes. A prominent characteristic of works by diasporic writers of East Asian descent is the frequent representation of the traumatic experiences—rooted primarily in racism, war, and impoverishment—of child protagonists.<sup>39</sup> Many point out that such use of a child's viewpoint or the presence of a child protagonist in ethnic or minority literature in the West, and especially in Asian American literature, is a narrative strategy that exposes social problems and challenges social norms by illuminating the traumatic experiences of the alienated conditions of ethnic and racial others. While providing a counter-history of marginalized and alienated people against official histories, such narratives effectively deliver the collective sentiments of the nationally, socially, and financially deprived through a child's sense of being orphaned and longing for lost parents, home, and nation.

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<sup>39</sup> Asian American novels, such as Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980), Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995), Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging* (1997), and Gish Jen's *The Love Wife* (2004) and *Mona in Promised Land* (1996), feature child characters who manifest the alienated conditions of the East Asian Diaspora in the West. In Kogawa's *Obasan* (1984) and Desmond Nakano's film *American Pastime* (2007), which portray the internment of ethnic Japanese in Canada and the U.S. during WWII, the theme of traumatized childhood extends from historical junctures in the past to the contemporary world of the transnational. Shan Sa's *The Girl Played Go* (2003), and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), and *When We Were Orphans* (2000), describe traumatic memories during and after WW I and II. Comfort women issues are illuminated through the relationship between an immigrant mother and her daughter in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* (1998), while Chang-rae Lee's *The Surrendered* (2010) represents the war orphans and the Korean War as well. Many ethnic films also portray young characters who undergo hardships due to their hyphenated identity. The adolescent characters, whether East Asian or Asian American teenagers in North America, in films such as So-young Kim's *In Between Days* (2007) and Justin Lin's *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2002), wander off as they experience isolation and discrimination as the marginalized. In addition, transnational adoption is dealt with as a main theme in Marie Myung-Ok Lee's novel, *Somebody's Daughter* (2005), Deann Borshey Liem's documentary, *First Person Plural* (2000), and Jane Jeong Trenka's autobiography, *Language of Blood* (2003).



Introducing in this chapter discourses of the Asian American *bildungsroman* for its prevalent motif of traumatized childhood, I analyze Korean American writer Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* (1999) and Anglo Japanese author Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000).<sup>40</sup> Employing the theme of traumatized childhood in historical events as a literary motif, Lee's and Ishiguro's novels explore the traumatized psyche of the displaced. Through the analysis of the two novels, I address the diversified and evolved narrative strategies taken, in the contemporary literature of diasporic writers of East Asian descent, for reflecting on changing social atmospheres and challenging mainstream ideologies in relation to race and ethnicity. These two novels, rather than having child narrators, are narrated by adult main characters who experienced the traumatic loss of their respective parents through being adopted or displaced. Also, instead of portraying characters directly suffering from institutionalized racism and discriminations, these two writers characterize their main narrators as socially and financially successful men who believe self-deceptively and delusively that they are perfectly assimilated into mainstream society in their respective host countries. Engaging with these two novels, I will problematize the idealized colorblind ideology in the U.S., as well as the cosmopolitanism prevalent in Western academia, while revealing how these two narratives achieve diasporic aesthetics through portraying the orphaned sentiments and unresolved feelings of their characters.

In addition, I delineate the ways in which such appropriation of trauma works as an aesthetic tool to express the sensibilities and sentiments of people who, in diaspora, have

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<sup>40</sup> Lee and Ishiguro both immigrated from the East to the West in early childhood (Lee from Korea to the U.S. at age three in the 1960s, and Ishiguro from Japan to England at age five in the 1950s). The plots and themes of Lee's *A Gesture Life* and Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* are uncannily similar, even though they are set in different nations with different ethnic characters.

experienced yet another layer of trauma through displacement and discrimination in their “home away from home.” In these two novels, national traumas in East Asia turn into literary tropes that function as imaginative fictional elements symbolizing traumatic situations, rather than serving as vehicles for relating the untold and hidden past to contemporary readers. They disclose the ways in which these traumas are appropriated by writers to shape the structure of their narratives so as to deliver the confusion and anxiety of people in diaspora. I also point out the affective mode, which causes the diasporic narrators’ confusion to be transferred to global readers, by analyzing the narrative tactics and tone of the narrators’ deliberately deceptive portrayals of traumatic past memories for excusing or justifying their behaviors.

In recent decades, the color-blind ideologies and multiculturalism, along with cosmopolitanism, have been prevalently taken up as the official banner of the racial/ethnic and global politics of the U.S. The politics of colorblindness functions for the U.S. as part of an ideology that has expanded throughout the world, erasing racial differences but emphasizing cultural and ethnic features. David Eng in *Language of Kinship* (2010) points out that in terms of the legal field, “state-sponsored segregation of the races” was brought to an end in the U.S. through “the official end of legalized segregation” in the 1950s and the legalization of interracial marriages in the 1960s (4). In the contemporary U.S., however, this “official banner of colorblindness” often functions to cover the continuing effects of the legacies of racism and racial discrimination. The official politics and laws of the state, according to Eng, “refuse to see inequality as anything but equality, and by a pervasive language of individualism, personal merit, responsibility, and choice” (5), while failing to change ongoing racial conflict and racism (5). In other words, the assimilation of racial/ethnic minorities into mainstream society is considered to be a matter of individual will and choice. These views seemingly reflect changes in the social

atmosphere toward greater liberty and open-mindedness toward diversity, yet those very changes function as obstacles to address the ongoing issues of racism and racial discrimination toward minorities and displaced subjects.

As Robin Cohen suggests, the longing for homeland by diasporic subjects, and their emotional attachment and adherence to their culture, has often been perceived, in the dominant discourse, as a voluntary tendency or desire of those who leave their homeland, and have often been criticized by cosmopolites as a long-distance nationalism.<sup>41</sup> For example, Bruce Robbins claims that we need to realize our belonging to multiple places, instead of sticking to “the childish reassurance of belong to ‘a’ place” in the world of globalization (4). According to him, “plural and particular” cosmopolitanisms have “already shaped and been shaped by particular collectives” (2), emphasizing changes in discourses of cosmopolitanism from the universalizing traditional concept of “fundamental devotion to the interests of humanity as a whole,” (1) to “a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance” (3). Moreover, notions associated with diaspora, such as boundary-crossing, hybridization, and becoming

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<sup>41</sup> A well-known Diaspora scholar, Cohen defines Diaspora, in *Global Diasporas*, in terms of commonalities among the various types of global migration. In addition, he classifies Diasporas by their different characteristics and ethno-national groups. The core concepts of the term Diaspora can be reduced to 1) being “settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories,” 2) keeping a certain degree of loyalty to “the old country,” that is to say, to a collective memory and myth about the homeland, 3) an idealization of the supposed ancestral home, 4) “a troubled relationship with host societies” and a member’s “adherence to diasporic community,” and 5) “an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar background” (ix). Cohen regards physical resettlement or traumatic border-crossing experiences and emotional attachment to the homeland and culture as essential characteristics of members of diasporic communities. Cohen’s definition of Diaspora is important, as it limits the range of the usage of the term by shedding light on definitions of Diaspora from ancient usages onward to the contemporary era of globalization, and yet his definitions limit the number of Diasporic subjects who can satisfy all the characteristics that he suggests.

subjects, insinuate a certain positive nuance into the term Diaspora. However, racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants' diasporic tendencies—longing for home—are consequences of disregarding the host nations' varying levels of cultural and systematic exclusion of, discrimination against, and disidentification of racial and ethnic others. In other words, minorities' racial identification is inevitably related to their grief and loss, and to the social pathology of race in cultures where cosmopolitan ideals and racial equality appear to be norms but in fact institutionalized and internalized racism and social and cultural prejudices against displaced subjects continue on, as Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race* (2001) and Paul Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) point out.

Literary critics and scholars in Asian American Studies have examined the issue of how Asian American experiences and history are portrayed in relation to the deserted, alienated, and disidentified experiences of child characters in the Asian American *bildungsroman*. In *Immigrant Acts* (1996), Lisa Lowe points out that *bildungsroman*, in terms of canonical Anglo American novels, identify with the process of an individual's "reconciliation with the social order" and "identification with an idealized 'national' form of subjectivity" by deploying the change of the protagonist "from youthful innocence to civilized mutuality" (Lowe 98). The existence of a tension between homogenizing Anglo-American narratives and minority literature reveals the heterogeneity within the nation by challenging the conventional narratives of the nation or the majority of society (Lowe 45). According to Lowe, while the genre of *bildungsroman* has performed a nationalist project for self-development, Asian American writings that even satisfy the conventional criteria for the genre of *bildungsroman* produce an "effect of dissonance, fragmentation, and irresolution" that results from "the historical specificities of racialization, ghettoization, violence, and labor exploitation" (100).

For example, in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1984), the traumatic childhood incidents of the main character, Naomi, are deployed through a child's point of view, while also being interwoven with the present-day perspective of Naomi, as an adult survivor of those incidents. Her traumatic childhood experiences—Naomi was raped by a pedophilic neighbor, forcibly displaced to an internment camp during WWII by the Canadian government, and lost her parents during the war and the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima—are thus juxtaposed with a portrayal of a thirty-six-year-old schoolteacher, unmarried and self-conscious. Although she has survived, the grown-up Naomi is portrayed, not in a triumphant way that celebrates her successful transformation into a person who fulfills social expectations, but as a person marginalized and alienated from the community, indulging in her own personal memories. Lowe claims that, in spite of the expectation for Asians in the U.S. to narrate their assimilation and development into the mainstream culture, a path easily absorbed in the canonical Anglophone novels contributing to the construction of a national form, Asian American literature discloses a history of “disidentification.” This term does not mean the mere construction of oppositional identities against national states, but rather the place in which cultural, political, and economic subjectivities that emerge within the continuing effects of displacement” (103-4).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Lowe's argument, which posits that Asian American writers' *bildungsroman*, as minority narratives that challenge the conventional narratives of the nation or the majority of society, seems related to Homi Bhabha's insights on the construction of the nation in relation to its narration. Bhabha proposes that the conception of modern Western nations, supposedly homogeneous, holistic, and historically continuous, has been established upon narrative constructions. He also declares that marginal voices or minority discourses reveal “the contentious internal liminality” of those nations (*Location* 214). Significant to Bhabha's argument is his conceptualization of the marginal or “minority,” as it represents “substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity—progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past,” that have been used and abused in the pursuit of national interests (Bhabha, *Nation*, 4). In terms of the development of the nation in relation to childhood, Stefan Tanaka points out that the ideologies of childhood are closely related to aspects of modernity,

Emphasizing the potentials and possibilities of hybridized identities and subversive implications of Asian American *bildungsroman*, Alicia Otano, in *Speaking the Past*, contends that Asian American narratives written from a child's point of view challenge the traditional *bildungsroman* genre through delineating the child protagonists as caught between two culturally different worlds and thus finding "unique forms of acting upon the world," "a third world" (167). This third place, according to Otano, is a space that enables protagonists to act such that they can reside, and be completed in, a space as a hybridized subject (167-8). Similarly, Jennifer Ann Ho, in her book *Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of Age Novels* suggests that the Asian American *bildungsroman* is another way to develop a coherent self for Asian Americans, that is to say, by disclosing the ways in which the bodies of racial others have been discriminated against but reclaimed in light of the fact that "American citizenship [includes] all racial differences" (10).<sup>43</sup> Ho argues that young Asian Americans symbolize the marginalized status of Asian Americans in America, as they are doubly unstable in terms of both "their age and their ethnic or cultural affiliation" (6). According to her, "adolescent protagonists" embodying a time of "exploration and experimentation" are "particularly vulnerable to cultural

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like progression and maturation through the teleological time of society at large, in which "the idealized past or originary state" must be "guided and transformed" (22). Within modern society, the child is a cultural asset of the modern nation-state, and childhood is considered to be a site of interiorizing nationhood for individuals (Tanaka 22), enabling the transformation of society from local communities to nations. In other words, childhood embodies "universalistic categories of development" in terms of the establishment of subjects who constitute modern nations (38).

<sup>43</sup> Rocio G. Davis in "Begin Here" also addresses the fact that the central theme of childhood in Asian American autobiography is to convey "the specificities of the Asian American experience and articulation of childhood" (162). This very act is potentially subversive, as it shows the different process of socialization and establishing subjectivity of racial others from the Euro-American model while "situating the subject in multiple discourses" (Davis 165), such as in relation to the diaspora in the course of his or her alienation and separation from American mainstream society.

influences due to the nature of their unstable position in society” (5). While the *bildungsroman*, in general, shows the negotiation between individual and society, in Asian American narratives the hyphenated identity of protagonists marks them as identifying themselves against “the larger Euro American society” as well as “an Asian-ethnic ancestry” (Ho 9).

In Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *When We Were Orphans* the layered stories of the complicated characters portray the effect of the inaccessible traumatic history of diasporic people as displaced subjects, for they have been always identified as others in the West. Scarred by the processes of modernization and westernization, Hata in Lee’s novel and Banks in Ishiguro’s are displaced characters from the East to the West, yet have a strong desire to belong to more modernized, “western,” social circles. They have both internalized the hegemonic codes and ideologies of the groups by which they aspire to be accepted, distinguishing themselves from the underprivileged in the mainstream society of the host nations. However, these characters lead lives of delusion and self-deception: they believe that their assimilation into, or conformance with, mainstream white society is almost perfect, although their perceptions of the present and memories of the past seem (heavily) distorted. In addition, their strong desire as well as self-imposed misperception of their assimilation result in repression and erasure of their ethnic or national affections towards the country they left behind, these two protagonist-cum-narrators are impeded by the burdens of history.

In these novels, haunting memories from war and colonization serve to structure the narratives, in which the personal traumas of displacement, adoption, and alienation are also repeated. The reality of the East Asian Diaspora—constituted of subjects who are diligently making efforts to assimilate, but are physically uprooted and psychologically alienated—is delineated in each work, with the narratives similarly driven to recover and rediscover the past in

a vain attempt to seal historical trauma. Many scholars have situated Lee's *A Gesture Life* (1999) and Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000) as trauma narratives in structure, and narratives about (trans)national trauma in content, contending that these two novels employ post-traumatic narratives. These diasporic writers of postwar generations employ historical motifs of the national traumas of East Asia such as the comfort woman issue and the Sino-Japanese war: motifs that have either remained generally unknown in the West, or in which little interest has been invested. These motifs can be read as the authors' voicing of the untold and unknown histories of others for a global readership.

However, in Lee's and Ishiguro's novels, I contend, traumatic events in East Asian histories are appropriated as literary motifs that embellish the conflicted psyche of diasporic subjects. Marianne Hirsch, for one, questions how we in the contemporary world can represent the pain of others in the past without "appropriating them," which means not displacing the concerns of the present onto the massive trauma of history.<sup>44</sup> These two authors' deployments of the historical motifs of war, colonization, and displacement from East Asia arise as imaginative tropes, rather than historically accurate or realistic depictions. The fictional recreations of historical events in their novels are far from authentic or realistic representations of untold histories. I posit that the two works' depictions of such dynamic, traumatic events in history are problematically appropriated for imaginative literary motifs that function as devices for shedding light on the conundrum that diasporic subjects deal with in the West.

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<sup>44</sup> During the last three decades, the traumatic history of exiles in Diaspora has been transformed into a winning formula, a highly profitable theme for minority writers and diasporic and transnational filmmakers in the global market. Indeed, criticism has been leveled regarding the act of writing about the traumas of past generations, charging that it serves to exploit the cultural identity and historical traumas of those prior generations in ways that reinforce their orientalization and commodification.



In addition, I reveal that the complicated psyche and its resulting sensibility of displaced people are disclosed by Ishiguro's and Lee's linguistic styles and narrative tonalities. Both Lee's *A Gesture Life* and Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* convey the sentiments of characters who live in a self-deceived world, which is created in the fluctuation between their continuous efforts to conceal their anxiety as well as contain their frustration and uncontrollable moments of rupture. Jenny Edkins explains that trauma as "an event has to be more than just a situation of utter powerlessness" but must entail "a betrayal of trust," including, for example, situations in which "the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security," such as a community or family to which we belong, "become our tormentors" (4). When our existence, which relies on "the continuance of social order," is betrayed by this order or, stated differently, when our belief or intimate bond with community is broken, the meaning of existence is changed by the loss of illusion about safety or security (Edkins 4). At the same time, however, the traumatic experience is also "a revelation" of the contingency and impossibility of the social order (Edkins 5). For example, the right of violence by the modern nation-state, which enables the ruling majority to exclude from within, if necessary, shows the contradiction of the institution that performs abuse, control, and coercion while promising safety, security, and meaning (Edkins 6). The survivors of traumatic incidents pursue "a way of resistance" against the social order, or political community, while the language that is part of the social order, or the community of power, does not allow those survivors to speak (Edkins 8).

The worlds painted by the narrators' delusions in the two novels are conveyed through the impeccable speech, the artificially structured upper-class language of each narrator; yet, this narrative tone makes the reader aware of the highly pressured, anxious, and repressed selves that are simultaneously masters of elite assimilation and purveyors of delusional trauma. In this way

the reader sees the narrators as complicated characters who live under a heavy burden. Within these repressed characters' stories, their artful speech manipulates the reader, taking us into their confidence, readily accepting at face value a certain level of realism—an expectation of accuracy with respect to their personal and hitherto untold history (dealing with past trauma related to their ethnic background). However, ruptures between the narrators' self-images and the world existing outside their narrations undercut this heavily controlled speech. Through these ruptures a staggering ironic reversal emerges: these narrators who present themselves as persons |entirely assimilated into, and accepted by, elite mainstream Western society, are revealed to be little more than fantasists. The narratives simultaneously hint at the existence of untold real pain and trauma beyond the well-refined sentences and heavily controlled storytelling of these narrators. Consequently, readers attentive to these narrators' manipulations begin to perceive an undercurrent of pain and suffering that is unreachable, that seemingly exists somewhere beyond the narrators' delusional voices and imaginative historical motifs.

Grace M. Cho, in *Haunting The Korean Diaspora* (2008), suggests that the traumatic effects of the following unresolved and silenced issues in Korean history continue to haunt the Korean diaspora in the United States: “the deracination from indigenous language and culture under Japanese imperialism, the loss of autonomy under U.S. military dominance since 1945, the decimation of the peninsula and its people during the Korean war, and the deferral of the war’s resolution” (5). In *A Gesture Life*, Hata’s transnational identity is structured through the most critical modern historical events of East Asia—including the Japanese occupation of Korea for over three decades, the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia during World War II, and the defeat of Japan by the Allied Forces. At the same time, Hata’s personal recollections link him to the collective Korean memories of Korea and its Diaspora, such as the experiences of Korean

comfort women (the term “comfort women” is a euphemism for Japan’s sexual enslavement of Korean, Chinese, and Filipina women, as well as other nationals, during World War II) and the international adoption of Korean orphans after the Korean War.

As such traumatic events of history of East Asia and its Diaspora are structured in Hata’s narration, *A Gesture Life* is often read as a trauma narrative of an alternative history of the marginalized. Alexis Motuz reads *A Gesture Life* as a trauma narrative, a genre that offers minorities’ “counter-narratives” toward “the official versions of history” and challenges stereotypical immigrant narratives of assimilation (411). Also, Hamilton Carroll argues that Hata’s story constitutes a trauma narrative that discloses the patriarchal and nationalistic “twinned imperialism” of Japan and America to which Korea and its diaspora was subjected in the twentieth century. Referring to Lisa Lowe’s argument that Asian America authors often portray alternative “memory, history and collectivity,” against conventions of the *bildungsroman*, Carroll suggests that *A Gesture Life* also deconstructs the “*bildungsroman* narrative” by turning a seemingly immigrant narrative of assimilation into a trauma narrative. The narrative employs the trauma of racial and cultural minorities and it functions as “an alternative form of memory and history” (Carroll 595).

Rather than reading *A Gesture Life* as a narrative of alternative history, I suggest that the ways in which Lee reshapes historical events as literary motifs brings attention to problematic representations of minority history in the West. *A Gesture Life* deploys a dialectical dynamic between a diasporic Korean’s drive to attain a modernized and westernized self and his desire to compensate for the burdens of the untold history of diasporic Koreans. An Asian American writer, Lee characterizes the Asian immigrant Hata with stereotypical images of Asians—a (self-orientalizing) model citizen in a suburb of the U.S.—while painting Asia and its history with his

imaginations.<sup>45</sup> In addition, Hata's fluid identity, first as a Korean adoptee in a Japanese family during Japan's occupation of Korea, and then as a Japanese immigrant living in the U.S., is an artificially packaged and manufactured device constructed by Lee to allow him to write about transnational subjectivity. The setting in which the novel's transnational characters—Hata, a Korean adoptee raised as Japanese; Kkutaeh, a Korean comfort woman from an upper class (but fallen) Korean family; Sunny, a biracial child adopted by a bachelor Hata through his large donation to an adoption agency—are placed, is imaginative and symbolic, rather than an authentic and realistic representation of the history of Korea or the Korean Diaspora. The narrative world of Hata is uncannily distorted, repressed, and delusive, which in turn allows careful readers to perceive the problems inherent to the writing of history as well as to feel the scarred psyche of Koreans in diaspora.

Hata's narration, many parts of which are composed of reflections on specific moments in his own past—either traumatic or disturbing events—discloses the ways in which the protagonist's psyche has been damaged, both by his drive to survive and by his desire to remain a successfully assimilated and accepted self. Hata's mindset appears as one that willingly adopts and internalizes hegemonic ideologies for his survival and success, despite the fact that it requires his self-effacement and the repression of his national and ethnic origin. Those traits epitomize the psyche of transnational adoptees from Korea, and captures how they attempt to

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<sup>45</sup> To a western readership unfamiliar with the sentiments and history of East Asia, it may be taken at face value as a form of ethnography. The national and transgenerational memories Koreans have about Japan's colonization of Korea mostly emphasize the unimaginable atrocities and violence that the Japanese inflicted upon Koreans, the structural exploitation of its economy, and the repression of traditional Korean culture and language. Given the sentiments that historically defined national relations between Japan and Korea—that is to say, the heightened racial and national discrimination toward Koreans by the Japanese, and Koreans' extremely strong anti-Japanese sentiment—Hata's adoption stories are literary fabrication by Lee.

survive their resettlement on new soil in the West. They are also characteristic of Koreans in diaspora who seek not only to survive but to thrive. These two groups, I suggest, have been situated in ways that lead them to adopt, willingly and voluntarily, the hegemony, ideology, and culture of dominant nations in modern history.<sup>46</sup> In this respect, Lee depicts Hata, as a symbolic adoptee, as someone who stands in for Koreans in diaspora, living with an enhanced desire to blend and assimilate into the dominant society and culture of their host countries: Japan and the United States.

He has adopted a new ideology—that of the white, upper-middle class suburban American town, Bedley Run—and nearly passes as a white American. Lee initially illustrates his character Hata as a reliable and likable character, a Japanese American who seems to blend easily and successfully into the dominant societies of his times, and thus to be accepted as a familiar member of a white town in the U.S. In the opening of the novel, Hata's narration starts with "People know me here," (1), claiming how he has been an accepted member of the community. As the retired former owner of a medical supply shop, he has stocks and savings, a house with a swimming pool, and he spends much of his day gardening. His house is "not the grandest," yet is "generally known" as "the two-story Tudor revival" which is "one of the special properties in the area" (16). Hata reflects on his prior adoption of a girl, Sunny, from Korea, and on how much time he has spent fixing the house while letting Sunny practice the piano (26-7). Also he narrates how he met his latest girlfriend, Mary Burns, a well-educated upper-middle-class white woman who had never imagined herself to be in a relationship with an Asian man

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<sup>46</sup> Such a psyche of the Korean diaspora can be paralleled with the Korean "survival-oriented pathology" and "development-first ideology," two expressions associated with the nation's prioritizing of modernization and westernization over individuals' wellness or humanitarian values for its modern nation-building.

(52). His having adopted a girl from Korea even mimics the liberal patterns of his affluent neighbors, and his Caucasian girlfriend who had never thought she would be with “an oriental man” all testify to the extent to which he has found a comfortable niche in his adopted country (52). Hata’s life in the U.S is introduced as emblematic of comfortable, thorough-going psychological and financial assimilation. It marks an exceptional departure from conventional stories about immigrants or racial minorities in the U.S., which typically depict the financial, social, and cultural obstacles that they face and thus function as alternative histories. However, Lee entirely omits any such typical (and realistic) immigration stories from Hata’s narration, instead depicting him as a symbolic model minority figure.

Furthermore, Hata continuously identifies himself as Japanese, emphasizing his Japanese identity in response to his perception that the Japanese are favorably compared with other racial minority groups in the U.S., such as African Americans or the Chinese diaspora. Hata first explains how he was easily able to settle down in the town by emphasizing the inhabitants’ exclusive acceptance of him. During his “brief travels” throughout the country in 1963, he found that “it seem[ed] people took an odd interest in telling [him] that [he] wasn’t unwelcome” despite the existence of “certain” groups in the U.S., “such as blacks or the Chinese in the cities,” who “live apart” while “everyone for the most part lived together” (3). He also explains the familiarity and comfort that he has achieved as a resident of the town, by depicting himself as “Japanese,” as “odd and delightful to people, as well as somehow town-affirming” (2). The narrator implies that even though Hata is a racial and national other in his suburban American town, of which most of the residents are white, at least he is treated differently than other races because he is “a Japanese” who might be seen as racially different but, compared with other ethnic groups in the U.S., as nevertheless civilized and modernized as well as respected and liked.

However, belatedly Hata discloses that he was a Korean adoptee to a wealthy, childless Japanese couple (a factory owner and his wife) because of his outstanding academic promise. He had been “fortunate to score exceptionally high on several achievement tests,” despite his origin as the son of lower-class Korean laborers in Japan—a tanner and a rag maid (72). He is raised as the wealthy couple’s son and “treated [by them] as well as a son,” receiving the benefits of education and material support, and passes as Japanese with “this prominent family name Kurohata” (72).<sup>47</sup> Later in the novel, it is revealed that he was viewed “favorably” as an imperial subject who wishes to study for a career in modern (Western) medicine. Indeed, during the war, he became a medical officer in the Japanese imperial army. Hata’s two displacements in his life—being adopted into a Japanese family during Japan’s colonization of Korea, and immigrating to the U.S. after WWII—are depicted using the exceptionally positive languages of passing and assimilation.

This belated revelation about his origin as a Korean adoptee, however, allows readers to recognize the source of Hata’s compulsive drive for assimilation and his servile mentality. In Lee’s fictional world, filtered through Hata’s narration, imperial Japan is depicted as an adoptive parental figure who is civilized, modernized, and well-meaning, and who enables an underprivileged but talented Korean boy to attain a better life and education. It has been Japan’s reasoning and justification for their brutal colonization of and expansion into other Asian nations.

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<sup>47</sup> Given the realities of Japanese attitudes toward Koreans during its occupation of Korea, Hata’s identity as a Korean adoptee to a Japanese family seems to represent a most exceptional and rare case. Historically, Imperial Japan’s ideology emphasized the homogeneous racial and ethnic identity of the Japanese people, and a corollary of this ideal of homogeneity was a strong racism not only toward Caucasians (who were alternately glamorized and vilified), but toward Koreans and other Asians. Also, traditional Japanese family system *ie*, a strong patriarchal family system valuing family bloodline, has not contributed to the prevalence in Japan of transnational adoption, even of fellow East Asians. The same, it should be noted, can be said of China’s and Korea’s privileging of family bloodlines.

Differentiating itself from other Asian nations as the first to modernize its industry, military, and educational system, Japan's imperialist drives—the invasion and colonization of other Asian countries—were established for and justified by the national narrative of modernized Japan as a symbolic parental figure to other pre-modern, and thus metaphorically childlike, Asian countries. Hata internalizes not only the model minority stereotype of Asian Americans in the U.S., but also imperial Japan's idealized image of itself. Hata's identity and perception of the situation as a Korean adopted by a Japanese family as well as a model minority in the U.S. embodies such colonial/mainstream ideologies of Japan and the U.S.

In contrast to Hata's continuous efforts to maintain his view of himself as a welcomed and respected Japanese man, developments in the novel imply that mainstream society does not always perceive him the way he evaluates himself. In *Bedley Run*, Hata is associated with representative U.S. stereotypes toward Asians, revealing that even though Hata has made many efforts to belong to and perform as “the number-one citizen” within the mainstream community, he is stereotyped and mocked for being Asian. The townspeople have seen him as a generalized Asian, a foreign subject whom they do not even bother to distinguish from other Asian nationalities. For example, Sunny grew up as a defiant teenager who was known to associate with “sleazy men” in town (87). When Hata questions her about being intimate with the men in her circle, she not only admits that she has been, but she blames Hata for caring only about his reputation in town. She accuses him of living a “gestured life,” living for nothing more than to be “the number-one citizen” and aspiring to live with the exclusive goal of making his neighbors regard him highly and thus like him (95). Hata's response, however, is that he was simply being Japanese; “I am a Japanese! What is so awful about being amenable and liked?” (95). For Hata, “being Japanese” means being naturally well-behaved and superior, which in turn means being



liked. Sunny retorts that she has overheard comments from others, such as “How nice it is to have such a ‘good Charlie’ to organize the garbage and sidewalk-cleaning schedule (95).” “Good Charlie” may refer to the famous fictional Chinese character, Charlie Chan, who reifies the stereotypes of Asians both in terms of the model minority stereotype and the image of Asian men as asexual, servile, and submissive. Likewise, it could be a reference toward generalized Asian enemies, referred to in the Vietnam era as “Charlie.” The term came from military slang for the Viet Cong (or V.C., the military code for which is “Victor Charlie”). Both possible origins of the term thus carry negative connotations of Asians as the inscrutable Other, whether by referencing them as servile or as enemies. Sunny’s revelation about the perception others have of Hata is the outburst of an angry teenager, yet it punctures the image of Hata that Lee built in the initial part of the narrative. Hata is revealed to have been an unreliable narrator who is delusional about himself, unable to tell that how he has been perceived by others differs from how he perceives himself.

Hata’s delusional self-perception is more apparently uncovered in other episodes in which people recognize and point out his accented speech. Hata, trying to find Sunny, who had not stayed at home in many days, visits the Gizzi house where racial others reside and are having an open party. Hata is shocked by the gathering: “What struck me immediately was that a number of the partygoers were black and Puerto Rican; colored people were a rare sight in Bedley Run, especially at social events, and hardly ever did one see such ‘mixed’ gatherings” (101). In this setting, Hata’s race and English speech—his accent and enunciation—is openly mocked and laughed at by the party attendees. One man asks Hata to say, “Well done, grasshopper” (100). The phrase “Well done, grasshopper,” Hata is asked to enunciate refers to an episode from a well-known, popular 1970s television show, *Kung-Fu*, starring David Carradine

(a white man) playing a Shaolin priest wandering through the racial prejudices of the Old West. In the main character's flashbacks, the Chinese master who trained him, a stereotypical oriental character in American T.V. shows, says things like, "Well done, Grasshopper." In addition, the statement allows the partygoers to hear Hata's enunciation of "L" and "R" sounds, which non-native English speakers from Asia do not always clearly distinguish. Hata's utterance of the phrase causes them to burst into laughter, yet Hata instantly denies that his English accent is distinguishable as that of a foreigner. Hata narrates, "[a]ll the while he kept saying the phrase to his friend in a choppy, halting voice, not at all as I had spoken it. My accent has never been perfect, and was less so then, but I've always been somewhat proud of my flowing verbiage, and that I speak in the familiar, accepted rhythms" (101). The scene does not expose Hata's imperfect enunciation or accents, but it situates Hata as a national and racial minority, a vulnerable self, who can be easily mocked for his embodiment of stereotypes and his imperfect English accent, regardless of his real proficiency or fluency in English.

People in the U.S. or Korean comfort women in the Japanese army in the novel identify Hata's speech as a foreigner's—an Asian speaking English, or a Korean speaking Japanese—while Hata defensively goes into denial about his accent; shaken deeply, however, he is forced out of his gestured self. Hata opens up to narrate the hidden truths of his past about serving the imperial Japanese army and encountering Korean comfort women during World War II. Moreover, he reveals that despite his denial of his Korean origin, he has a repressed emotional affiliation with Koreans, as well as is recognized as a Korean by others for his speech and/or appearance. Hata and his comrades, medical officers in the Japanese Imperial army stationed in Singapore, were initially excited to meet new girls—comfort women, or sex slaves for the soldiers—who were about to arrive at "a welcoming club." However, what they first met was a

death, a suicide from one of the women who threw herself from the building where she was locked in at the welcoming club for soldiers. Hata narrates that it was the first time he encountered someone's death, and he contemplated on the deceased young woman, a teenager who seemed around fifteen years old and looked possibly Korean. His mild sympathy toward her contrasts with the other soldiers' self-serving complaints about having to wait longer in the queue for sex (108). Hata, while waiting to have sex with the newly arrived comfort women, happens to catch another comfort woman attempting to escape from the house.

In this unexpected encounter between Hata and the comfort woman, Lee does not reveal whether the characters spoke in Japanese or Korean, as Hata narrates in English. Nevertheless, Lee insinuates that the comfort woman recognized Hata's being a fellow Korean. When she begs him, "Please," "Let me go, please, let me go!" Hata answers, "There's no place to go," "You must stay in the house" (111). Her response is to "[look] surprised at" Hata's speech, and she "[stares] at him as if Hata were someone she knew" (112). Just as Hata recognized the dead comfort woman's face as Korean, Lee implies that this woman also recognizes Hata's origin as a Korean, either from his speech or looks. As she continues begging, another officer shows up and takes charge of her. She begs again, calling Hata "O-ppah," which means "older brother" in Korean (the term is generally used by women as an affectionately respectful title for a man whose age is slightly more than hers). When the other officer asks what they were saying in her language, Hata denies that he spoke with her in Korean.

The collective trauma erased and repressed in the history of Korea and its Diaspora haunts Hata, and, in turn, he continuously attempts to reshape these psychological burdens through deceptive distortion and opportunistic justification in his narration of events in his carefully obscured past. When these disjunctures in Hata's life in Japan and the U.S. are

disclosed, however, the narrative tone in which Hata depicts himself and his past actions is consistently civil and cultured. Lee allows readers to identify with his complicated mindset through the work's first-person narration, which initially makes Hata appear to be a well-assimilated and accepted immigrant. By keeping Hata's polite tone and eloquence, even for descriptions of disturbing situations, Lee's narrative strategy ultimately compels readers to sense Hata's attempts to normalize his invasive acts and perversions while avoiding encounters with his own traumatized psyche.

Hata's reflection on Kkutaeh, a Korean girl conscripted as a comfort woman, is introduced in the middle of the narrative. Lee presents Hata and the comfort woman K in a melodramatic setting imbued with the narrative tone of a romance, which both dramatizes their tragic situation as well as discloses distorted perceptions of Hata. In addition, Lee characterizes the comfort woman K as a modernized (though limited) and literate woman who has the capacity to converse about literature with Hata. K was originally from a fallen aristocratic Korean family, and her class and education had marked her as being from a distinctly higher social status than other comfort women (235). Recognizing her difference, Captain Ono had released her from her sexual duties to the soldiers and let young Hata supervise her, which is a historically implausible scenario. Yet, this development results in Hata falling for her. Hata had admired and sympathized with her, knowing her origin as a daughter from an upper-class family in Korea and identifying "her speech" and "her education" as those revealing her "class." Hata compares his own origin, "the only child of a hide tanner and a rag maid," and present status, "a second lieutenant's uniform of the Ocean Sky Battalion of the Imperial Forces," to hers: to his mind, she is someone "who born into a noble, scholarly house (if perhaps one fallen), would have to sleep in a surplus closet of a far-flung military outpost" (257).

Hata expresses his belief that they were mutually in love, yet K's reserved speech and action imply that the relationship between Hata and her is different from what Hata depicts. In response to Hata's imaginative plans for their meeting in other countries, when the war ends, and his promise that he would "take care of" and "protect" her, K responds with skepticism and frustration. K says, "you're a decent man, Jiro, more decent than you even know, so please. You can pretend, if you wish, and I'll pretend with you, as much as I am able. But I ask you please not more than that" (258). Her speech suggests that K has been playing the role that Hata wants from her, and for her Hata is nothing more than a "decent" man. Right after this conversation, Hata depicts K as suddenly turning numb, indifferent, and silent. Hata simply assumes that K "fell asleep" (258) and starts to touch her hair and body. As Hata more actively pursues her body, he considers her numbness as an indication that "[s]he was sleeping, or pretending to sleep, or somehow forcing herself to, and she did not move or speak or make anything but the shallowest of breaths" (260). Continuously, despite her unresponsiveness, Hata misreads and idealizes the situation self-absorbedly: "I felt bewildered and innocent and strangely renewed, as though a surge of some great living being were coursing up my arm and spreading through my unknowing body" (260).

Having found that Kkutaeh was unresponsive to being touched by him, he romanticizes the scene, comparing her to "the sculpture of a recumbent girl," and even remembers that he told her, "I love you" (260). However, she "didn't respond" and he repeats again "I love you" in Korean, yet she does not reply. About her stillness, he thinks nothing more than that "she was completely asleep" (260). Hata's depiction of having had a sexual relationship with K discloses K to have been a powerless object who cannot refuse but is constrained to endure the situation. The state of constriction, according to Judith Herman, is a response, "a state of surrender" (42),

adopted by a completely powerless person knowing that any kind of resistance would be futile. The self-defense mechanism of that person completely stops working, and this state, according to Herman, is often adopted by women who have been raped. Herman points out that “[t]he helpless person escapes from her situation not by action in the real world but rather altering her state of consciousness” (43). However, Hata does not recognize the effects of the unequal power dynamic between the two characters; he is an official of the colonial army and K is a colonial and sexual object under his supervision. K’s reaction after Hata’s violation of her body exposes the situation as having been far from romantic for her; rather, it was an upsetting and unsettling experience. After taking advantage of her and leaving her room, Hata overhears K crying and “realized that she was fitfully crying, though in quelled gasps, as if she was trying to hush herself” (Lee 261), but he rationalizes the situation by saying that “she was perhaps sad for the end of her maidenhood” (261).

The romanticized Hata’s narration about K ends on a shockingly traumatic note in the aftermath of the Japanese soldiers’ violent murder of K. Hata reflects on the events that led to K’s horrible death—she is gang-raped, mutilated, and murdered by soldiers. Despite his supposed affection for K, Hata was unable to protect her from a tragic death in the course of conducting his duty as a medical officer. Lee had, until then, had his readers perceive the narrator Hata as a relatively sensible and rational narrator—though in a self-deceptive form—and had maintained a realistic tone in Hata’s narrative all along. However, almost at the end of his narration, Lee abruptly brings about a dramatic change in his readers’ view of Hata, with revelations of traumatic events that Hata had been through and involved in. In addition, it is revealed that Hata has been haunted for decades by the ghost of Kkutaeh. The fact that he sees and communicates with her instantly undermines Hata’s credibility as a rational narrator. The

truth about Hata's past remains as elusive as ever, for Hata turns out to have been an unreliable narrator. Indeed, Hata's rationality is revealed to have been nothing but a gesture.

Hata's adopted daughter Sunny is presented in the novel as another victim resulting from the ongoing national trauma of Korea. Yet, Hata's perceptions about her, in comparison to himself as adoptee and racial other, reveal his prejudices about others as well as the internal logic he has established through surviving and succeeding as a Korean in Japan and the U.S. Despite his wish to adopt a female Korean/Asian child from a "respectable" family that had fallen on hard times and could not afford to raise her, Hata's adopted daughter from Korea was an abandoned child from an interracial union, presumably between an Asian (sex worker) and an African American (soldier) who resided in South Korea. Her birth of origin is associated with the history of South Korea, which even after gaining independence from Japan, has been under the influence of the U.S. Addressing his disappointment in his adopted daughter Sunny's racial identity and her origin of birth, Hata contrasts his gratitude in his circumstances to his daughter's palpable insincerity. Hata himself was "more than grateful" towards his Japanese parents and felt obliged to do his best as an adopted boy; "I should always give myself over to its vigilance, entrusting to its care everything I could know or ever hope for" (73). He had therefore expected the same of Sunny, and is disappointed by her lack of appreciation.

Hata's disappointment, although repressed for accepting and raising her, creates a rupture between them. Hata delusively believes that he was "an overgenerous Japanese father" although events in the novel indicate that he was, in actuality, an imposing, critical, and judgmental parent. Hata explains that Japanese fathers are "extremely permissive and obliging with their little ones," which is "(the opposite of what most Westerners would presume and wish to think)" (71). However, he continuously imposes his wish—to be a perfectly assimilated subject, accepted by

the dominant culture—on Sunny. Where a medical education represented the pinnacle of success for Hata, the classical piano lessons he provides for Sunny may be viewed as his attempt to ensure that she, too, is viewed as westernized, modernized, and cultivated. Classical music, for him, symbolizes the enlightened refinement of Western society, perhaps a feminine version of his ambition to be a doctor, and Hata takes this view to an extreme by wanting to mold Sunny to be a concert pianist. In addition, he characterizes one of her piano performances, when his girlfriend Mary was at his place, as “shaming” (71), despite Sunny’s protestation that she did her best and Mary’s generous appraisal of Sunny’s performance. In Hata’s view, Sunny was intentionally not doing her best, and he even thinks he “should probably have exercised more rigor and sternness” toward her rather than being an overgenerous Japanese father (72).

Hata, an adoptee himself, had tried to create a semblance of family by adopting Sunny and assuming a fatherly pose, but it all collapses with Sunny’s sexuality reducing Hata to a Peeping Tom. Looking for Sunny in her boyfriend Gizzi house, he asks himself what the comfort woman K or his past comrades would think of him—“an old man loitering in the shadows of a party house in America, peering into private rooms?” (113). When Hata finally finds Sunny dancing in the middle of a room, he peers at her through the glass window of a door; Sunny is wearing only a tank top and underwear, dancing slowly and erotically while two men drink liquor and watch her. Hata narrates:

She wasn’t playing anything up for them, performing. She was simply there, moving without music, hardly looking at them as she swayed and twirled and pushed out her hips, her chest. I kept myself far enough from the window to remain hidden. I could hardly bear to watch the scene, much less allow it to go on.



And yet each time Sunny turned my way I stepped back and quieted myself and hoped the darkness would camouflage me. (Lee 114)

Hata—as a father or a role-model citizen—should have either left the scene to protect his teenage daughter’s privacy from himself, or entered the room to prevent his under-aged daughter from her irresponsible actions. Hata fails to play the expected role as either a father or a model citizen in this private situation, where he can keep his action as a personal secret. Despite Hata’s self-reflective narration that “I could hardly bear to watch the scene, much less allow it to go on” (114), his action transgresses boundaries as a father and an ethical and moral subject. Hata reveals that he does recognize his ethical failings; he only wishes the “darkness would camouflage” himself (114).

Despite depicting the moments in which he violates ethical and familial boundaries, turning Sunny into an object of his patriarchal gaze, Hata’s speech—his tone and eloquence in depicting the situation—normalizes and even romanticizes the situation as an act of fatherly (patriarchal) overprotectiveness. Hata presents another self-contradictory excuse—in the same way he waited to meet the new comfort women while claiming not to be interested in them, and subsequently was disturbed by encountering the death of one of them—about covertly watching Sunny. He states that he had often seen her at home wearing only a bikini, yet just as “a good father would, with pride and wonder and more innocent (if impossible) measure of longing, an aching hope that she stay forever pristine, unsoiled” (114). Hata, by putting parentheses around the phrase “if impossible” implies that he attempted to modify his desire toward Sunny’s body, in a “more innocent” way than what it actually was. Hata’s narration is deceptively self-defensive, as he keeps stating that he was not actually involved in these two incidents; he simply

happened to be there, and even though he recognized that his actions in both cases were not anything to be proud of, he was confused by the liminal setting and could not help his actions.

Hata's detailed portrayal of Sunny's intimacy in bed ends with another of the first-person narrator's self-conscious confessions of his psychic state; "And it was then that I wished she were just another girl or woman to me, no longer my kin or my daughter or even my charge, and I made no sound as I grimly descended, my blood already trying to forget, growing cold" (116). Hata unconsciously unveils his distorted and damaged self by acting as an invasive and forceful patriarchal figure. In addition, his nuanced excuse that Sunny is not biologically his daughter, and is even a racial other to him, transforms what started as a father's looking for a missing daughter into a scene that exposes the instability and fragility of the nuclear family that Hata attempted to build.

At the near end of the narrative, Lee situates another traumatic episode of Hata's, his attendance and assistance at Sunny's abortion, which she undergoes, despite her reluctance, due to Hata's request to (and persuasion and bribery of) a doctor. This shocking episode insinuates what this traumatized self of Hata has become, through his forced displacements and adoptee mindset. Hata's flashback discloses that, nearly a year after Sunny left Hata's house, she renewed contact with him, phoning to let him know her dire situation. Hata, the narrator, does not inform readers of the exact details of their conversation, but after getting her phone call, he "made several discreet contacts and by the afternoon the procedure was arranged and scheduled" (339). As soon as Hata saw Sunny arriving at the train station, he observed that "she was indeed quite near full-term" yet his "first thought" is "it was a Sunday and quiet, when there was hardly anyone about, and that I ought to spirit her to the private clinic and to Dr. Anastasia as quickly as possible" (339). Hata narrates that Dr. Anastasia, as an immigrant himself, had different ethics

and standards than other doctors in the U.S. Of utmost concern, for Hata, is that their fellow townspeople should not know of Sunny's return in her pregnant state; he intends to take care of the situation secretly so as not to lose face. Driving back home with her, listening to classical music, Hata reveals his awareness that, although what he was supposed to be concerned about, as a father, must be his daughter's wellness and "how frightening all this was to her, how overwhelming and awful," yet he "sensed instead only the imminent disgrace and embarrassment that would hang about the house like banners of our mutual failure" (340). Hata acknowledges that he is incapable of feeling fatherly concern for his daughter's situation; he cannot help but evaluate the situation as "their mutual failure" in creating a model nuclear family. Her pregnancy serves as "a banner" that reveals their failure, which is "the imminent disgrace and embarrassment" for him (340).

Hata forces his daughter to have an abortion despite her reservations as her pregnancy is an affront to his idealized image of her. Hata's choices reveal the damaged psyche with which he has lived, as a subject who has been displaced and burdened by traumas in history yet maintains a public and social self through grand gestures of normalcy. Before visiting the clinic, Hata points out that Sunny expressed her hesitance about abortion; "she said she wasn't anymore sure about going ahead, and he assured her of visiting the clinic by saying that 'it was an examination and nothing was yet determined'" (341). However, after examining Sunny, Dr. Anastasia strongly rejects the idea of her getting an abortion, as the surgery would be illegal to perform on someone who is nearly full-term. The doctor also notes that Sunny "appear[ed] unsure as well" about the surgery (343). Out of Sunny's hearing, however, Hata strongly insists to Dr. Anastasia on the necessity of the abortion by saying that he understands the procedure would be complicated and "much more costly than usual," but he was "willing to do everything" to get her

the surgery. Hata expresses it as an effort “to help [his] daughter” and save them from desperation (343). Dr. Anastasia still refuses to conduct the surgery, as he cannot count on help from his nurses, who “would likely not agree to assist such a procedure” (343). Despite the doctor’s strong objection and Sunny’s hesitancy about the surgery, however, Hata convinces Dr. Anastasia and even offers to assist with the surgery. The doctor warns Hata of the psychological horror of witnessing and participating in the termination of the life of his own unborn grandson, yet Hata replies, “I’ve witnessed such things. Similar things” (344). In the public realm, Hata violates the law by bribing a doctor to perform an illegal procedure. In the private sphere, he overrides Sunny’s objections and enforces his own wishes onto her body, in his role as her father and guardian, and transgresses her privacy by assisting the surgery without Sunny’s knowledge. However, his survival- and assimilation-oriented pathology does not allow him to face his disjunctures but makes him lead a life distorted by unresolved trauma.

In Lee’s text, Hata’s pursuit of an idealized family is frustrated, yet he finds contentment in saving children, even while accepting that he should be a loner and an outsider. At the end of the novel Hata decides to dispose of his possessions in order to treat a child, Patrick, who suffers from heart failure. Hata also leaves his old store and house to Sunny, who needs a place and a job to support her son Tommy. Instead of making efforts to idealize his past and present anymore, Hata, in handing over all his belongings, not only opens up a future for Patrick, but also provides a home for Tommy. Thinking of his own future, Hata narrates:

Perhaps I’ll travel to where Sunny wouldn’t go, to the south and west and maybe farther still, across the oceans, to land on former shores. 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 be already 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. (Lee 355-6)

Hata, in other words, plans neither to settle down nor make another home. Rather, he accepts his conditions of being orphaned, an outsider, and an observer, for good. This process of acceptance, in turn, enables him to feel that he reaches “almost home,” as expressed in the final sentence of his narrative (356). Hata accepts his diasporic conditions as he realizes the fact that his life will not necessarily fit within the fixed forms of national boundaries, but instead has the flexibility to extend beyond those boundaries.

Kazuo Ishiguro’s *When We Were Orphans* presents a narrative structure and themes very similar to Lee’s *A Gesture Life*, yet *Orphans* is often read as a postcolonial/postmodern detective story. Its main character is a detective, portrayed as an unreliable narrator who presents contradictory views about his past experiences as well as often misinterprets his circumstances in the present. Tobias Döring, for example, contends that Ishiguro’s novel challenges the genre conventions of Classic English crime fiction, or the Golden Age of English mystery writing in the 1930s, of which its narratives aim to “vouch for justice and restore a sense of order” (64). He argues that *Orphans* is a rewriting of the genre in a postcolonial setting and perspective, with its unreliable narrator’s observations and memories unfolding in the two settings of England and China. In addition, Tim Christensen suggests that Christopher Banks’s attempts to solve the crimes related to his parents are symbolically related to the recovery of waning English authority, and that the trope and theme of “orphanhood” signifies “post-national identity” (202). Alexander M. Bain argues that Ishiguro’s novel, featuring a protagonist who is a “well-meaning citizen,”

explores the issues of “how globalization works, whom it benefits and injures, and what the political and economic crises of the global South have to do with” Anglo-American culture or “globalization’s beneficiaries” (241). Indeed, Ishiguro tweaks conventions of detective stories to illuminate the story of Banks’s search for his origins, his British birth parents with whom he lost contact in China. By setting Banks’s identity as an orphan displaced from China to England, Ishiguro’s *Orphans* explores the traumatized psyche of people who are displaced across national borders.

Advancing the existing arguments, I argue that with *Orphans*, Ishiguro depicts and delivers, by reinventing a transnational adoptee character and re-contextualizing the setting in the historical junctures of colonization and war in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a sensibility of the adopted to a contemporary readership. The narrative structure and contents of *Orphans* takes its cues from the conventions of transnational adoptees’ biographical writings in the contemporary era. In general, such transnational adoptees’ stories portray the traumatic confusion and pain experienced by adoptees as a result of their displaced national, ethnic, and racial identities, shedding light on their irrecoverable losses. An orphaned child in the global South is adopted out to a parent from the global North, growing up struggling to assimilate into the culture of the host country while repressing the memories of his or her origins. Yet, the haunting memories of the past have them return to the country of their origin to search for their birth parents, especially a birth mother. Although they may find their mother, their reunion does not restore their loss and a sense of belonging but rather underscores their losses in culture, language, and community. Christopher Banks’s story of growing up in China, being displaced as an orphan to another continent—specifically, to London, England—and adopted into a new culture and nation, but then returning to China to find his biological parents, and eventually finding his mother

(although that remains a dubious point about the old woman with dementia) as well as confirming her love for him, resembles the prevalent narrative arc of transnational adoptees' biographical writings in the contemporary era.

In this chapter, I delineate the ways in which Ishiguro transfers to readers the sentiments of Banks's displaced psyche—confusion, shame, and shock—by employing the conventions of trauma narratives featuring transnational adoptees' autobiographical stories. Through unconventionally illustrating a transnational adoptee's national and (racial) identity as that of a white British boy, Ishiguro thereby sheds light in strategically effective ways on a displaced subject's ongoing anxiety and embarrassment as having arisen from disorientation and cultural confusion. As Bain points out, Banks—a white, male British citizen—represents a beneficiary of globalization, a colonizing subject, yet because he is also orphaned and displaced, like transnational adoptees, he can likewise be conceived as a victim in the flow of globalization. In addition, his narrative is shaped in two important historical junctures in the modernization process of early twentieth-century China. Banks's childhood, spent in the International Settlement in Shanghai, is at the height of the opium trade, when British companies in China became controversial for ethical and political reasons globally, marking the end of Great Britain's long-lasting capitalist domination of China. In later part of the novel, the imperial Japanese military invasion of China illuminates the fall of Banks, who turns extremely delusive and irrational during the battle. By establishing the main character Banks and the setting as such, Ishiguro delicately interweaves the guilt of the beneficiaries of globalization with the victimhood of the traumatized in the transnational flow. In my analysis, I also examine Banks's interactions with female characters—his adopted daughter Jenny, his female friend (at some point a romantic friend), Sara Hemmings, and his mother Diana Banks—who share similar characteristics and

tragic fates with Banks. These shared characteristics and fates, I posit, are motifs employed by Ishiguro to reveal the self-absorbed mindset of Banks, as well as his delusional humanitarian goals, limitations, and failures.

The initial parts of the narrative present the cultural confusion and anxiety of the displaced subject by depicting ruptures between the narrator Banks's memory of himself and others' perceptions of him. *Orphans* starts with Christopher Banks's memory of encountering an old classmate, James Osbourne, in London in 1923. Osbourne's telling recollection of Banks as "an odd bird" at school upsets Banks, as the protagonist's delusional belief is that he "blended perfectly into English school life" from the first week of his arrival (7). However, ironically, the next depiction of himself reveals how much effort he put into fitting in and making himself believe in his assimilation into society. He had to observe and mimic the British students' behaviors, such "as a mannerism many of the boys adopted when standing and talking—of tucking the right hand into a waistcoat pocket and moving the left shoulder up and down in a kind of shrug to underline certain of their remarks" (7). Ignoring Osbourne's retrospective remark on Banks's having been "odd" in school, Banks claims that his "reproducing this mannerism," was conducted "with sufficient expertise that not a single of my fellows noticed anything odd or thought to make fun" (7). Through Banks's own remembering of the past, Ishiguro hints at how self-conscious Banks was as a displaced young child in the alien culture of London. Keenly aware of the difference between his own behavior and that of other students in school, he secretly observed the British students' behavior, hiding his fear of being embarrassed or ridiculed by those students for his differences.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ishiguro uses this motif again in the later part of the narrative by depicting another of Banks's encounters with an old schoolmate, Morgan. In 1937, Banks returns to Shanghai and



As a boy who spent most of his life in the International Settlement in Shanghai, Banks had been self-aware of his own foreignness in relation to British culture. For example, the anxiety of Banks and his childhood friend Akira—a Japanese boy living in the International settlement—over their respective cultural and national identities is expressed through their childish worries about disappointing their parents and finding role models. Akira had once told Banks that his parents stopped talking to each other whenever they were disappointed with his being “not enough Japanese” (77). Banks confided that this was true of his parents, too—whenever they were deeply frustrated with Banks’s “not behaving like an Englishman,” they would stop talking to each other (77). This conversation with Akira made young Banks ask Uncle Philips, a former employee of the British Opium company as well as a family friend, how he “might become more English” and if he might “copy” him to be “more English” (79). The episode illuminates that Banks’s self-awareness of his own difference from the British, and his wish in boarding school to become “English” by mimicking others, originated from an even younger age.

Despite being in denial regarding his own social alienation in London, Banks clearly identifies with his childhood friend Akira’s failed assimilation in Japan, in his flashbacks of their childhood together in Shanghai. Reflecting on Akira, who had subsequently moved to Japan but returned to Shanghai, Banks narrates as follows:

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happens to meet Morgan, who remembers Banks and himself as “two miserable loners” who “felt so left out from things” (195). Again, Banks invalidates Morgan’s memory of him. He even adds his own interpretation that “Morgan’s assertion” about them being miserable loners “was simply a piece of self-delusion on Morgan’s part” (197) that might have resulted from Morgan’s creating a self-deceptive, invented memory to paint the bleakness of his childhood happy. By disclosing Morgan’s already remembering himself as a “miserable loner,” Ishiguro underscores that the character who is “self-delusional” is Banks. Ishiguro’s portrayal of these moments illuminates Banks’s delusion and self-deceptive memory problems regarding his cultural and social identity.

From his very first day in Japan, Akira had been thoroughly miserable. Although he never admitted this explicitly, I surmised that he had been mercilessly ostracised for his “foreignness”; his manners, his attitudes, his speech, a hundred other things had marked him out as different, and he had been taunted not just by his fellow pupils, but by his teachers and even—he hinted at this more than once—by the relatives in whose house he was staying. In the end, so profound was his unhappiness, his parents had been obliged to bring him home in the middle of a school term. (Ishiguro 94)

Banks “surmises” that Akira’s so-called homecoming to Japan ends in total failure, despite the fact that Akira “never admitted” it, but only “hint[s]” at it, yet the narrator depicts Akira’s failed homecoming as if he actually saw what Akira experiences. By portraying Banks’s imaginations regarding Akira’s failed assimilation in Japan, Ishiguro frames the scene as Bank’s self-deceived disclosure of his own experience of London through his projection of himself onto Akira’s case.

In striving to gain social acceptance and attention as a celebrity detective in London society, Banks experiences another cultural confusion and embarrassment. As is uncovered through implicit suggestion in the narrative, Banks lacks social background and is oblivious to the socio-cultural nuances and conventions of the city. His self-deceptive and delusional self-image in London may well have been enhanced by his lack of subtlety in distinguishing certain cultural nuances and unspoken manners in society. While believing himself to be a celebrated detective, Banks feels London society’s indifference toward his achievements, or perhaps toward himself. His explanation is that he sometimes gets “a vague feeling” about others’ “disapproval of” him and the fact that they are “just managing to conceal it,” especially people whom he expects “to be most appreciative of his work” (142). By noting, “When talking to some

statesmen at a dinner, say, or to a police officer, or even a client, I would be suddenly surprised by the coldness of a handshake, a curt remark inserted amidst pleasantries, a polite aloofness just where I might have expected gushing gratitude,” Banks again reveals his strong wish to be acknowledged and further appreciated in London society, whereas he must instead worry anxiously about “some offence [he] might inadvertently have caused the particular individual” (142). In this scene, Banks is depicted as someone who not only has an exaggerated self-image but also is unable to discern subtle differences in situations, tones, and nuances. These scenes convey the endless humiliation and anxiety that are experienced by subjectivities leading displaced lives in an alien culture. Despite his sense of people’s coldness, Banks is unable even to identify what caused their indifference or aloofness, while he believes his work deserves “gushing gratitude” (142). Whether it is because his achievements are much less impressive than he considers them to be, or because it is the general perception people have of Banks, as he concludes, Banks interprets their indifference, self-deceptively again, as signs that lead him to return to Shanghai to solve the crime related to his parents’ disappearance.

Banks’s departure for Shanghai, to find his biological parents, can be compared with the return of transnational adoptees to their motherland in order to find their birth parents. Such a wish and longing in adoptees is often due to their sense of rootlessness, of feeling themselves to be outsiders who have failed to be entirely assimilated into the society into which they have been transplanted. In conventional stories of transnational adoptees, the returnee often finds that he is a very different subject from the people in his or her country of origin. Similarly, Banks is foreign in the eyes of British society; yet, when he goes back to Shanghai as a detective to solve the crime related to his parents’ disappearance, he acts as if he is part of the imperial influence of England on Chinese society. Banks’s obsession with his own agenda—solving a crime involving

the parents he has lost—blinds him from a much bigger crime being conducted in Shanghai while nevertheless turning him into a bystander of that crime. Banks's self-deceptive tendency allows him to see only what he wants to see, while ignoring subtle differences and facts, and this of course is an enormously detrimental quality in a detective.

Ishiguro specifies the time and spaces that Banks returns to in Shanghai, with chapter titles specifically referring to dates of historical events and factual locations, such as Part Five, "Cathay Hotel Shanghai, 29th September 1937," Part Six, "Cathay Hotel, Shanghai, 20th October 1937." However, the historical events and settings are appropriated in order to depict this complicated mindset of a diasporic subject. Banks returns to Shanghai in September 1937, the start of the second Sino-Japanese war. This moment was understood to present the "threat of a Second World War": at a time when China was bitterly divided between two parties—the Nationalist Government, or the Kuomintang (KMT), was led by Chiang Kai-shek, whereas Mao Tse-tung was the head of the Communist Party of China (CCP)—and was experiencing the upheaval of civil war in the wake of having been weakened by colonial western powers, imperial Japan initiated a war by invading Shanghai. The battles mentioned in *Orphans* led to one of the most shocking atrocities conducted by the Japanese imperial army, the Nanking Massacre, in history.<sup>49</sup> However, in the novel, the battleground of Shanghai is transformed into a mysterious place in which Banks delusively searches for the place where his parents were captured, and what might happen during these times to the Chinese, or how the opium trade and war affect

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<sup>49</sup> In what is now known as "the Nanking Massacre" or "the Rape of Nanking," Japanese soldiers committed mass murders and rapes against Chinese civilians. In other words, the battle depicted in *Orphans* led to one of the most shocking atrocities conducted by the Japanese imperial army, the Nanking Massacre, and it marked the outbreak of the Second World War.

where Banks meets his childhood friend Akira.<sup>50</sup> Banks's narrative is utterly unconcerned with them. This episode discloses Banks' being deluded and self-centered, to the point of being detached from reality.

By situating the narrator at this urgent and historically significant moment, Ishiguro reveals Banks's most delusive version of himself when he confuses a Japanese soldier with his childhood friend Akira. While looking for traces of his parents, Banks expects, naively, to encounter Akira, and when he meets a wounded Japanese soldier who has been attacked by children, Banks delusively believes him to be Akira. Banks's misidentification saves the wounded soldier, who only speaks rudimentary and broken English. The soldier, spitting on his inadvertent savior, then declares, "I not know, you pig" (267) to Banks. However, it is through their miscommunication that Banks firmly comes to believe that the soldier is indeed Akira. In the chaos of the battle that rages between Japan and China, the atrocity of the war is aggravated by the contrast between Banks's personal obsession and the larger tragedy taking place around him.

His rationality, which might have enabled him to solve other crimes in London, turns into madness and confusion that perhaps resonates with what he experienced when he lost his parents as a child. In the middle of the war, the Japanese soldier and Banks have a conversation about their respective childhoods conceptually, stating that the value of nostalgia for childhood is in its

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<sup>50</sup> As Ishiguro reveals in an interview regarding *When We Were Orphans*, that depiction of China is a stereotypical and "branded" image of Shanghai in the West. Ishiguro notes, in response to a series of questions about novels demanding more emotional participation by their readers than films of their viewers, "*When We Were Orphans* is set in Shanghai at a certain time. I was very conscious that we're not just dealing with images from the real Shanghai at that time. You say 'Shanghai' and people immediately conjure up a lot of images. There's a certain kind of branded, packaged atmosphere of Shanghai: this exotic, mysterious, decadent place." [www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/ishiguro.html](http://www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/ishiguro.html)

capacity to allow us to imagine a better future. “Akira,” as Banks believes the fatally wounded soldier to be, talks about the meaning of nostalgia:

Important. Very important. Nostalgic. When we nostalgic, we remember. A world better than this world we discover when we grow. We remember and wish good world come back again. So very important. Just now, I had dream. I was boy. Mother, Father, close to me. In our house. (Ishiguro 282)

As childhood occupies center stage in Akira’s nostalgia amidst a traumatic situation, Ishiguro seems to suggest that being nostalgic for childhood, dreaming of a better world, is vital to withstand painful, even traumatic realities and build a different future. According to Svetlana Boym, immigrants are nostalgic not only for the space that they have lost, but also for the ideal time of their lives, “the time of childhood” (xv). The utopian time of childhood is something they imagine themselves to have once had, but it may in fact not have existed, comprising instead “the slower rhythms of our dreams” (xv). Ishiguro, likewise, seems to arrive at the conclusion that yearning for a better world is nothing but a dream or fantasy. Although, in the overall narrative of *Orphans*, Banks’s nostalgic recollections of his childhood drive him forward, in pursuit of his goal “to combat evil—evil of the insidious, furtive kind” (22), a “better” or “good world” never comes true in the novel.

During the battle, Banks is found by Japanese military forces, admitted and treated for his unstable and delusional mental status, and he finally finds out about the truth of his parents, not through his detective work as he had believed would happen, but by learning the truth from other people who already knew his parents’ fate. Near the end of the novel, Banks is led to a certain “Yellow Snake” for whom he had been looking, and it turns out that the person not only is a family friend, Uncle Phillips, but he has secretly worked with a Chinese warlord for the opium

trade. He reveals that Banks's mother has been abducted in a scheme devised between himself and the Chinese warlord, and that his father eloped with his mistress. In addition, Phillips adds that he later found out that Diana Banks became not a mistress but a sexual slave who was occasionally stripped naked and whipped by her master, on a dining table, in front of his guests. According to Phillips, "It wasn't just...just a matter of surrendering to him in bed. He regularly whipped her in front of his dinner guests. Taming the white woman, he called it. And that wasn't all, do you know" (314). It is also disclosed that Diana Banks has endured her degraded and shameful condition as a sex slave to the Chinese warlord only because the warlord, in return, supports Banks financially. Phillips tells Banks that "[s]he only lived for you, worried about you.... All she wanted was for you to be looked after. She only wanted news of you" (314).<sup>51</sup> The final revelation of the truth about Banks's parents is employed to generate shock and disturbance, as it presents an entirely distorted ending from conventions in the biographical writings of a transnational adoptee. Even though the events in *Orphans* are related, in the bigger picture, to the imperial powers invading China, whether economically or militarily, the effect of the shocking revelation about the Banks is to turn into the victims of the whole sequence of events a British woman and her child, and their abuser a Chinese man.

The novel is not about the multitude of people who suffered from imperialism in China, but about a uniquely traumatized beneficiary of this history of colonization, the narrator Christopher Banks. Although Banks is a detective who seeks, ironically, to defeat evil in the world, Banks himself may be viewed as a victim, given that he is unable to see larger

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<sup>51</sup> Uncle Phillips even makes an unnecessary confession regarding the pleasure he derives from imagining her being sexually enslaved by a Chinese man, as he was unable to have her himself.

frameworks of evil, whether imperial capitalism or war, and instead is confined in and obsessed with his own personal trauma of having lost his parents. The plot follows Banks's magnifying glass that does not capture the traumatic national events occurring in China but only amplifies the personal trauma that he has been through. Banks's narrative is utterly unconcerned with what might happen during these times to the Chinese, or how the opium trade and war affects them. Rather, what is brought into focus, through Banks's perspective as a detective, or as a traumatized colonizer's child, is the concern, guilt, shame, and (imaginative) friendship of two colonizers, and by extension, of their respective imperialist nations. Ishiguro's way of depicting these historical junctures through Banks's eyes allows readers to see how issues that are unimportant to the narrator are precisely those historical events in China that had a crucial effect, not only on millions of people's lives in China, but on the modern national development of China.

In addition, Banks's obsessions with his mission and ideals are portrayed as having caused him to desert his personal responsibility and commitment to his family members and loved ones—his mother Diana, Sara, and Jennifer—and therefore to have resulted directly in the tragic fates befalling these female characters. Banks is obsessed with his mission and ideals—finding lost parents and saving worlds from chaos—while neglecting his responsibility and duties toward relationships in his real life. Like a transnational adoptee settling in a new country, his mindset is one of trauma and ambivalence. Diana Banks, Christopher's mother, actively participated in the anti-opium movement, while his father worked for a company called Morganbrook and Byatt, the British opium trading company in China. This misalignment of perspectives resulted in recurring conflicts and issues in their family life, which took place in the home they rented from the British opium company. Yet, the narrator is emotionally attached to



this time and place in Shanghai. Banks's recollection of his mother, in particular, is idealized, depicting her as an epitome of Victorian beauty and virtue. In Banks's memory, Diana Banks is as "beautiful" "as [it was] said of her," but Banks distinguishes her beauty from that of women contemporaneous to him, who are expected to have "coquettish" manners, by depicting Diana as being "handsome," "a beauty in an older, Victorian tradition" (59). Not surprisingly, Banks paints his mother as a non-sexual but admirable Christian beauty. In addition, he remembers her not only as beautiful, but a heroic and moral figure who actively protested against the British opium trade company Morganbrook and Byatt for importing opium from India for sale to the Chinese.

The narration of Banks hints that he remembers his childhood with deliberate distortion that is both enabled by, and accompanies, his incredible propensity for self-deception. In fact, Banks's recollection of the episode is filled not with glorious images of his mother but with doubtful questions. Although Banks's personal memory of his mother is full of admiration and longing, his narrative also discloses the ways in which his memory of his mother as a heroic figure might be emboldened and exaggerated. Banks recognizes, for example, that what he remembers might be different from "what he [witnessed]," since some of his memory is based on his mother's repeated retellings of particular episodes. In one episode that represented a key moment of "moral victory" for her, a health inspector from Morganbrook and Byatt visited Banks's house, which belonged to the company, and raised issue with the fact that their housemaid Mei Li was from Shantung, known for its high levels of opium consumption and production at the time. Diana scolded the inspector, saying, "Are you not ashamed, sir? As a Christian, as an Englishman, as a man with scruples? Tell me, how is your conscience able to rest while you owe your existence to such ungodly wealth?" (61). Uncharacteristically, Banks

suggests that he is aware how ironic the situation is by noting, “Had he had the temerity to do so, the inspector might have pointed out the inappropriateness of my mother’s admonishing him in such terms, of such words issuing from the wife of a fellow company employee, residing in a company house” (61). But at the same time, Banks deliberately avoids seeing the truth and continues to maintain his own idealized or self-deceived vision of his mother by adding that the inspector “had realized he was out beyond his depth, and muttering a few stock phrases to preserve his dignity retreated from the house” (63). Banks recalls that in his childhood, it was shocking for him that such an inspector was “ignorant of my mother’s campaigns against opium” in which she served, to his mind, as “the principal enemy of the Great Opium Dragon of China” (63). Moreover, he is unable to find any official records of his mother’s activism. To support his memory of his mother as such a renowned activist working for the betterment of humanity, Banks tries, in London, to find any historical record of her activism in Shanghai, yet he fails to find any. Ishiguro depicts Banks as oddly aware of all of these contradictions but deceiving himself in order to keep the image of his mother pristine. By depicting Banks’s inconsistent memories and evaluations of his mother, Ishiguro reveals not only Banks’s ongoing distortion of and deception regarding his perceptions and recollections, but a desperate longing and nostalgia for his childhood.

The novel in the end discloses that Banks’s traumatized psyche is unable to proceed to establish a connection between his perception and reality. When his idealized version of his mother does not match with the reality of it, Banks enumerates a host of self-justifying excuses to support his decision not to renew his severed connection with his mother. At the end of the novel, Banks finds that his mother has been institutionalized in Chungking, Hong Kong, since the end of WWII. When Banks visits her, Diana Banks, now known as Diana Robert, is weak,

shabby, and old—she is “smaller [than] [Banks] ha[s] expected” and “her shoulders had a severe hunch,” in addition to which she is mentally ill, unable even to recognize Banks (325-6). The Chinese nuns who run the place tell Banks that Diana “doesn’t always understand what’s said to her,” and to make her understand, they need to repeatedly say the same thing (325). Although Banks hears Diana say dementedly how much she has missed and worried about her young son, and thus confirms for himself that his mother “has never ceased to” love him, he leaves her alone, without revealing his identity to anyone at the institution. Banks later explains to Jennifer that there would have been no reason to take Diana with him, because “she’d have been no better off in a home in England,” and, having “lived all her life in the East” she would “prefer to rest out” there (328-9). However, his explanation seems to be another excuse for him to avoid his responsibility as a son whose mother sacrificed her whole life for his wellbeing. Diana is depicted as an independent, strong, even sacred woman in Banks’s memory, yet the revealed truth is that she was a sexual toy for a Chinese man as well as a demented old woman. Banks does not try to perform his filial duty by allowing people in the institution to know his identity and restore his responsibility as a caregiver. In other words, seeing that she is not the mother that he has pictured over the years, Banks again provides self-justifying and self-absorbed explanations for his actions, and leaves his old and weak mother behind to fend for herself.

The motif of Banks’s idolizing a person but then leaving when the reality does not meet his expectation is repeated in the relationship between him and Sara Hemmings, another orphan of the London society. Banks pursues her albeit passively and indirectly, regarding her recognition of him and his work as a detective as a social barometer of his success in the London society. Banks keeps attending Osbourne’s social event for “well-connected guests,” and at one such gathering, finds his attention drawn to a young woman, Sara Hemmings, who is depicted by

Banks as someone who looks to be “scheming” with eyes of “severity” (15). Despite the fact that Banks is advised by someone that he should not “wast[e] [his] time pursuing her,” he is unable to forget her (16). At similar social events, Banks finds that Sara has gained a reputation as a social climber, “clever,” “fascinating,” “complicated, but a terrible snob of a new sort” only pursuing those who “possessed celebrated names” (19). For example, she had caused a social scandal through “pursu[ing] ruthlessly” a famous conductor, and then breaking her engagement with him, right after his career failed (19). After achieving his “first public triumph” by solving a crime, “the Manning Case,” Banks approaches her at another social event, introducing himself by mentioning his case. Her response is “a flat statement”—“[y]es, you investigated it,” and in evaluating her indifference toward him, Banks states that “she was still far from being enlightened as to why I was standing beside her table” and “for all my praise of my friends, somehow [my achievement] did not carry as much importance in the wider world as I assumed” (21).

The narrative builds the relationship between Banks and Sara by depicting Banks’s fulfillment when she recognizes him as a successful man in the London society as well as revealing many shared characteristics between them--both are orphaned and pursuing alleged humanitarian goals. However, Banks’ pursuit of her ends when she saw him as paling in comparison to another prospective husband. Later in the narrative, as Banks increasingly establishes himself as a detective, Sara approaches and flatters him by asking to accompany him to an exclusive social event, the “Meredith Foundation dinner” (35). At the entrance to the banquet, with Sara holding his arm, Banks feels “pride” and enjoys speculating that the “very distinguished people” would recognize him “in arm with Sara Hemmings” (39). Banks narrates that he imagines other people think that Sara Hemmings had “caught him now” (39). However,

suddenly realizing that her intention is not to be with him, but to meet the year's celebrity Sir Cecil Medhurst, who is depicted as "the illustrious statesman," but is much older than Sara and retired from his work, Banks "feels" great fury and leaves Sara Hemmings behind at the entrance (38-9). Sara marries Sir Cecil, despite the age and class gap.<sup>52</sup> According to her, the reason why she married Cecil is because other people said that they needed someone like Sir Cecil, opposed to another war, and that she believes that she would be the right person to help him, "at the end of his career, to summon up what's needed for one last great push" (152). Later, she moves with her husband Sir Cecil to Shanghai. However, in Shanghai, Sir Cecil indulged in gambling and drinking, abusing and mistreating Sara. Sara wants to elope with Banks, and Banks decides to do so, yet Banks suddenly left her at the last possible moment to look for his lost parents. Sara's whereabouts are revealed at the end of the narrative through Banks's encounter with Sara's old friend in London and an old letter Sara sent to Banks. After leaving Shanghai, she had lived in Macao, Hong Kong, and Singapore (334) with her romantic French companion M. de Villefort. It is implied that her life was not the easiest one, due to poverty and being interned during the

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<sup>52</sup> Her justification of being a social climber results from as self-deceived and delusional a version of herself as with Banks. Sara later explains to Banks that, if her "parents were still alive," their concern would be that it was "high time" for her to be married, but that she herself considers such a marriage to be a waste unless she is able to harness her capability to support a "distinguished" man able to contribute to "humanity, a better world" (49). With this self-justifying motive, Sara reveals that she does not mind embarrassing herself or even using someone like Banks to achieve her mission. Her explanation, on one hand, uncovers her limited agency as a woman in patriarchal and hierarchical British society; the accomplishments and expectations for a single woman who has neither family support nor adequate social background would be limited to getting married and having a family. On the other hand, not reflecting on her selfish aims, she easily justifies marrying someone distinguished by suggesting she would thereby be able to contribute to humanitarian missions. In reality, she does not do anything to make "a better world," and her self-deception resembles Banks's belief that he will be able to save the world from chaos in the course of his obsessive and delusional mission to save his lost parents.

War. The incident again reveals that Banks' inability to build a realistic relationship with another person and his irresponsibility toward a close friend because of an obsession in his mission.

Ironies in Banks are again revealed through his continuous yet unsuccessful pursuit of familial connections. In Banks' relationship with his adopted daughter, Jennifer, Banks' action of idolizing and neglecting is repeated, generating another tragic life. Right before Banks' departure for Shanghai to solve the mystery of where his parents ended up, the narrative abruptly introduces Jennifer, and how Banks came to adopt her, as if to highlight the consequences of Banks' departure for his adopted daughter. The occasion of Jennifer's adoption is shown again as Banks' recollection; during another of Osbourne's social occasions, Banks heard about a young orphaned girl from England, displaced to Canada. Because the girl's grandmother, her caregiver in Canada, was in declining health and lost the capacity to take care of her, Jennifer led a miserable life (137). Banks adopts her as a single father; Jennifer is depicted as an independent and strong little girl, being "self-possessed" despite her tragic experiences, and having "a capacity to make light of setbacks which might have brought other girls her age to tears" (139). Believing that he needs to go to China to solve crimes related to his lost parents, and having convinced himself that Jennifer is a strong girl, different from others, Banks easily justifies deserting Jennifer by assuming that she would accept his explanations. Furthermore, when she grew up, his departure would be remembered as "a triumphant memory" and she would "be truly glad [he] rose to the challenge of [his] responsibilities" (159). However, Jennifer's dire situation is also revealed at the end. Years after Banks' sudden departure from her in childhood, she is a thirty-one-year-old single woman, living in "a boarding house" of which "the shabbiness" saddens Banks (329). It is even implied that Jennifer attempted to commit suicide by turning on gas jets; when Banks says that he worries about her, she assures him by saying that she would

not do “anything foolish like that,” again, and that she actually did not intend to end her life, as “the window was left open” (329). Despite Bank’s encouragement to take heart in the future that lies ahead, Jennifer seems already to have given up on life, as she is too “tired” to go through another relationship, and is content with life if she “could work in a shop somewhere, go to the cinema once a week, and not do anyone any harm” (331). Doubly orphaned—losing her biological parents and then her adoptive father Banks, Jennifer leads a life that is not only unhappy and hopeless, but also disconnected from others. Ishiguro depicts Banks’s departure for Shanghai as resulting in generating another doubly orphaned and displaced subject, Jennifer, but Banks himself does not realize that by leaving her behind, he is creating a transgenerational tragedy.

In Chang-rae Lee’s narrative, the identities of the two female characters—a biracial child and international adoptee, Sunny, and a comfort woman, K—are appropriated to mold the narrative of Hata. The female characters are placed in extremely shocking, disturbing, and traumatic events, to depict situations in which Hata unintentionally allows the victimization of these female characters. Hata’s depictions of and perspectives on events involving these two female characters are used to reveal the traumatized psyche of the self-delusional and deceptive Hata, intercutting his narrative of building himself as a successful model minority in the U.S. In Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Orphans*, the female characters—Jennifer, Sara Hemmings, and Diana Banks—are endowed with agency (although limited) and have seemingly positive relationships with Banks. They are also seen as adherents to and devotees of Banks’s mission, and to contribute to its success. The female characters in *Orphans* attempt to gain their agency by challenging patriarchal colonial hegemonies, yet they end up entirely succumbing to those forces and/or being left out of the social order. In this sense, they are seen as having failed agencies,

which, like Banks's, were generated in losing the patriarchal colonial hegemonies and ideologies of colonial Britain.

I have shown, in this chapter, that the narrators in Lee's and Ishiguro's novels reveal complicated psyches resulting from the mainstream ideologies they have internalized. They desire to be seen as perfectly modernized and westernized selves and believe that they are, while trying to differentiate themselves from other minorities and outsiders. However, their self-deceptive tendencies are revealed through the ruptures in their speech that disclose the diasporic subjects' encounters with their alterity. Although naturalized in the elegant speech of the narrators, awkward, disturbing, and/or shocking scenes repeatedly are depicted in the novels. Such moments are invariably portrayed in a way that indicates the narrator's lack of awareness or realization about the shock or disturbance created by their actions. Yet they bring to the surface the narrators' self-deceived and delusional understanding of their situations and their perceptions about their interactions with other characters. In these novels, the narrators' continuous attempts to erase and avoid reality slip into failure, yet the narrators never give up their self-deception, for that would mean admitting to their failure to assimilate and to recover the sense of wholeness.



## CHAPTER 4

### The Cultural Trauma in Capitalizing China: The Aesthetics of Rupture in Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* and Lou Ye's *Suzhou River*

In previous chapters, I shed light on the embedded psychological effects of the traumatic past and present in the culture of East Asia and its diaspora. By analyzing the structure and content of these cinematic and literary texts, I elucidate the collective affects and effects of the culture of East Asia and its diaspora. That culture, broadly speaking, has benefited from, and at the same time been traumatized by, embracing modernity and struggling to survive in the hierarchical global world order, and I call the resulting collective affect “the sensibility of the adopted.” In Chapters 1 and 2, I challenged the prevalent receptions of the Extreme and horror films of East Asia—South Korea and Japan—in the West, which perceive the extremity of violence and shocking plots as distinctive features of Asian-ness. Rather, I view these cinemas as reflecting the traumatic experiences that people in these nations have been through in their modern nation-building or westernization process. In Chapter 3, I shed light on diasporic writers of East Asian descent and their unrealistic depictions of historical events—in particular, of national traumas experienced by East Asian nations, such as the comfort woman issue and the Sino-Japanese war. I disclose the ways in which these traumas are appropriated by writers to shape the structure of their narratives so as to deliver the confusion and anxiety of people in diaspora.

In this chapter, I will turn my critical focus to the forms and contents of the 1990s Fifth and Sixth Generation films of China. I contend that these films deliver the sentiments and sensibility of Chinese citizens in the 1990s who lived by and through ongoing shocking social

changes in their country's modern nation-building process. The films turn their historical settings into visually alluring scenes that simultaneously evoke the pain and suffering of the Chinese people through emotionally affective plots, while also interweaving modern/post-modern cinematic aesthetics of the West with traditional aesthetics or nativist stories. The concerns dealt with in this chapter are analogous to those found in the reception of Korean Extreme Cinema and J-horror films in the West, as well as the opaque fictions of Lee and Ishiguro that employ historical motifs as formal elements to depict the sentiments and traumatized psyche of people in diaspora.

With China's opening up after decades of relative isolation, the art film directors of China have pursued aesthetics and plots to attain global (or, more precisely, Western) recognition—through targeting international film festivals—by turning the historical settings of traumatic times of the nation into aesthetically appealing modernist or post-modernistic mise-en-scene and their peoples' pain into affectively melodramatizing plots. In turn, the global attention cast on the Fifth and Sixth Generation directors, through their ongoing success at international film festivals, reinforced Chinese directors' coming under the influence of the Western gaze.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the filmic contents reveal the lives of the marginalized and/or oppressed in China. As such, although the stories are depicted in globally appealing aesthetics, they are not the most favored or accepted in the culturally oppressive atmosphere shaped by the Communist state of China.

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<sup>53</sup> In 1985, Chen Kaige debuted at the Hong Kong International Film Festival with *Yellow Earth* (1984), and in 1988 Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* was honored with The Golden Bear Award at the Berlin International Film Festival. Zhang's *Judou* (1990) and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) were both nominated and won in various international film festivals.

In this chapter, I introduce the histories of the traumatic modern-nation building of China, as well as the discourses on the ways in which the films of the Fifth and Sixth Generation directors have been produced, “discovered,” received in, and influenced by the flow of globalization. My study centers around two 1990s art films from China, Chen Kaige’s *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) and Lou Ye’s *Suzhou River* (2000). Adopting the filmic styles and modes of western auteurs, Chen’s and Lou’s translations of the old and new China in their cinematic texts constitute an indirect uncovering of the complicated sentiments of people living in times of continuous change and turmoil. I will discuss, additionally, how the two films’ form and content, specifically their alluring visuals and affective storytelling mode, are each constituted to depict and deliver their respective directors’ love, affection, and devotion toward their nation and people, as well as their longing for lost ideologies and beliefs toward their nation.

Chen Kaige and Lou Ye are renowned in the West as Chinese auteurs whose respective films share distinctive features associated with Fifth and Sixth Generation directors and won awards at international film festivals. Winning the Palme d’Or at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival, and, therefore, receiving attention from the People’s Republic of China and beyond, Chen’s *Farewell My Concubine* has been considered as representative of the general mode and themes favored by Fifth Generation film directors. The term “Fifth Generation directors” refers to graduates of the Beijing Film Academy, such as Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, and Tian Zhuangzhuang, who started a new wave of filmmaking characterized by their films’ self-reflective gaze on the national past in the post-Mao era. Lou’s *Suzhou River* won a Tiger Award at the 2000 International Film Festival Rotterdam. The emergence of independent film directors such as Zhang Yuan, Wang Xiaoshuai, and Lou Ye, since the early nineties, has reshaped the cinematic landscape of Mainland China. Sixth Generation films have been perceived as a new

cultural trend, “having “challenged that uniform perception of contemporary Chinese cinema by precisely opening up the time and space of ‘contemporaneity’ of Chinese society and its coeval relation, and tension, with global currents” (Z. Zhen 23).

Despite employing different modes of representation, the two films were born in a cultural climate in which the state underwent violent transplantation of global capitalist practices onto their old system and structure of communism, the so-called socialist market economy. I claim in this chapter that the content and form of *Farewell My Concubine* and *Suzhou River*, respectively, mirror the disjuncture and confusion of Chinese citizens in the 1990s, who experienced directly and indirectly the traumatic violence—the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989—set in motion by their state, and, who then lived through what I term a “society of rupture.” What I mean by “society of rupture” is that, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Massacre, the Chinese people had no opportunity to heal in the Communist state’s partial acceptance of the ideology and practices of the capitalist West, which took place even as the state maintained the social structure established by the Communist party. I contend in this chapter that Chen and Lou’s translations of the old and new China in their cinematic texts constitute an uncovering of the sentiments and sensibility of nostalgia, loss, disorientation, and disillusionment in people living in post-Mao and post-Tiananmen China.

China’s modern nation-building process is not only different from the rest of the world but also distinct among other East Asian nations. Japan and South Korea accepted Western ideologies and social structures much earlier, and they suffered in the process of seeking “victory”

in an assumed competition to become more westernized in the flow of globalization.<sup>54</sup> Yet, China, once an empire of the region, took a very different path toward industrialization and modernization, and, only after Mao's death in 1976 tried belatedly to become a part of global capitalism. Until the nineteenth century, China had been one of the most powerful empires and had exerted its cultural, sociopolitical, and military power over East and Southeast Asia. However, in the nineteenth century, China experienced a decline through European nations' colonialist invasions—such as the Opium Wars—and through its defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War by Japan, which had already undergone westernization and (modern) militarization. Incursions into China by Western nations and Japan had weakened the empire of the Qing Dynasty, which collapsed in 1911. Since its foundation in 1911, the Republic of China (ROC) has experienced ongoing revolutions, wars, and turmoil. These traumatic events, rather than leading to national progress, instead brought endless suffering to its people, not least of which was the civil war that, in 1949, resulted in the ROC becoming the PRC (People's Republic of China) (Berry 1).

Chinese cinema and culture in the twentieth century has been built within and through the state's enforcing of discipline on the culture and its people. Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949 by the Communist party led by Mao Zedong, the state has controlled the production and distribution of every film in China through its studio system, including a severe censorship

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<sup>54</sup> As I pointed out in my previous chapters, since its opening-up to the West, Japan has attempted to turn itself into “the West” in Asia by adapting Western systems in military, political, educational, and social institutions, not to mention ideologies of imperial expansion by which it justified invading and colonizing other Asian nations. Korea was once colonized by an already modernized Japan for its belated modernization, and after gaining its independence, South Korea has pursued an aggressively industrial modernization and westernization process by adopting particular aspects of Western culture, as well as its capitalist system, in order to survive in the flow of globalization.

process for domestic and foreign films, as well as the use of films for “propaganda and ideological indoctrination” (Lu 6). In order to promote Socialist nation-building and the myth of a homogenous national identity, the filmic contents were limited to “the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people to overthrow their imperialist, feudal, and capitalist oppressors” (Lu 7). The ongoing censorship and control conducted by the state limited the industry’s exploration of diverse subjects, and the Cultural Revolution in particular left traumatic effects on many people who worked for the film industry.<sup>55</sup> The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, remembered as one of the most shocking and painful atrocities in twentieth century China, was a political and social movement to remove all traditional and/or bourgeois forms of culture—old thoughts, culture, customs, and habits—remaining in the People’s Republic of China. “[T]orture, imprisonment, public humiliation, psychological torture, and forced relocation” were perpetrated against people who were “former landlords, those with connections abroad or to the Nationalist government,” intellectuals, and artists, and the decade-long process was accompanied by brutal pain and emotional as well as physical scars (Berry 254).

The Cultural Revolution ended with Mao’s Tse-tung’s death in 1976, and the cultural field of China boomed with hopes and expectations for change within the flow of globalization. Since 1976, the People’s Republic of China has entered itself upon the flow of (western) modernization and capitalism by undertaking gradual reforms in the economic, social, and cultural fields. In the post-Mao era of the late seventies and early eighties, discourses of culture regarding “China’s distinctive history and heritage” had garnered the enthusiastic attention of Chinese intellectuals—artists, educated urban professionals, and writers (97). In this cultural

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<sup>55</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, film production was extremely limited and restricted; only ten films produced by the State were released while many people who had worked in the field of cinema, including Chen Kaige’s father, a renowned director, were denounced and sent to rural areas.

milieu, the cinematic visions of Chinese film directors in the 1980s quickly shifted away from the repressive domestic limitations of the Cultural Revolution—resisting any Western ideologies and technologies—to a global aesthetics established by the European masters of the West, as one way to “reinvent Chinese cinema” (97-8).<sup>56</sup> “Think big” became a motto, and these intellectuals obsessively asked questions about the meanings of culture and civilization, as well as their roles as intellectuals in establishing a civil society. This phenomenon was dubbed a “culture craze” (97).<sup>57</sup>

Zha Jianying attributes the Fifth Generation directors’ cinematographic style and thematic subjects, which depict Chinese society in times of modern nation-building, to their alignment with the emerging new enthusiasm of the people in the late seventies and early eighties toward culture, referred to as “The Beijing Spring” (97). This reinvention of Chinese cinema came with changes in the state-led film production and distribution system, which had been centralized through the major studios, as China gradually opened itself to the world market and integrated some capitalist approaches into its existing socialist system.<sup>58</sup> Such developments

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<sup>56</sup> The Fourth Generation directors who were trained in film schools in the 1950s and experienced the horror, as did all intellectuals and artists, of the Cultural Revolution, initiated filmmaking anew. They did not entirely restrict themselves to the State’s ideologies, but they were already middle-aged in the 1980s and thus returned only briefly to filmmaking.

<sup>57</sup> For example, Chen was one of those who was involved in and led the culture craze. In this cultural milieu, his *Yellow Earth* (1984), produced at Guangxi Film studio, one of the major film studios run by the state, presents historical events in 1939 to narrate a story about impoverished peasants in a rural area. The film is regarded in China as a critique of Maoist history that employs traditional Chinese aesthetics in its cinematography. It was appraised both nationally and globally as a result of drawing attention at international film festivals.

<sup>58</sup> Because the state controlled the official distribution of all films to the public, any films made through private or international funding could be distributed to the public, both within and

in the eighties also increased the expectations of the Chinese populace regarding the softening of state policies toward intellectual and cultural expression. Simultaneously, Zha writes, “‘Go to the world!’ was the slogan of the day” for intellectuals and artists in China during that period (99). Gradual transformations took place in the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural fields in the eighties, stirring up hopes regarding possible reforms to the one-party system of the Communist party.

The state’s gradual transformation in the economic and cultural fields, however, ended in 1989 with another traumatic national event, the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Also known as the June Fourth Massacre, the incident began with a rally of students who had gathered to mourn the sudden death of a liberal government leader, Hu Yaobang. The rally, which soon turned into a serious protest after ordinary citizens—workers, intellectuals, civil servants—joined in, lasted six weeks and ended with the state’s deployment of troops to assault these protesting civilians.<sup>59</sup> In official records, what happened in 1989 China has been wiped out, and citizens who expected democratic changes in their lives are only left with more painful memories. Not only did the state

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outside China, only if the films underwent the old censorship process and was approved for distribution. Since 1982, even though the Ministry of Culture still continues to make decisions for filmic contents and production quotas, it has encouraged studios to induce financial investment from external sources. This meant that film directors now had a choice between using highly equipped facilities owned by the major studios or personally locating alternative facilities where they could shoot their films (Lau 15-6). With this change, in the late 1980s, another new phase started for “large budget film production with substantial international funding and transnational audiences and critics” (Latham 173).

<sup>59</sup> During those weeks, the protest proceeded with “impassioned speeches of student leaders, the erection of a towering ‘Goddess of Democracy,’ the defiling of Mao’s portrait with black paint, and group hunger strikes in a makeshift camp in the middle of the square” until the crackdown, which led to an unknown number of death of citizens. Although the Chinese Red Cross states that casualties were recorded as numbering 2,600, the actual number of deaths is undocumented (Berry 299).



deny the existence of the massacre by labeling the incident a “disturbance,” “a political turmoil,” and, in turn, erasing the historical details of the massacre from official records (Berry 300-3). The expectations, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, for changes in the 1980s were dashed in 1989 with this traumatic national event, the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Michael Berry argues that in the twentieth century, the historical trauma generated by Western imperialism and colonization turned into “state violence” toward citizens of the PRC as a means to “‘discipline and punish’ the subjects of a new Chinese nation” in its modern nation-building process (Berry 5). According to Berry, the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square Massacre are representative examples of historical trauma as a manifestation of state violence to punish and discipline citizens. Berry writes:

Heeding Mao’s call to ‘continue the revolution,’ countless youths rebelled against their own history, culture, and society only to find themselves the new subjects of state punishment as they were sent to China’s frontier land. In 1989,... the result of [the Tiananmen Square Massacre] was a brutal crackdown during which cries for reform were smothered under the sound of rifle fire, the weight of tanks, and the power of a political iron fist. (5)

The Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square Massacre are emblematic disciplining processes conducted on citizens’ bodies by the State in order to sustain socialist ideologies and reject and annihilate the influences of Western ideologies. The passion and resulting enthusiastic missions of that period ended with the violent repression at Tiananmen Square (Zha 100-2), and “Now the feeling had passed” (Zha 101). Traumatic events in China are neither mourned over, nor is healing possible, due to the ongoing repression by the State. Without any healing allowed

to have taken place, Chinese society was subsequently led to yet another phase in its modern nation-building.

In the 1990s' the state started to more widely accept the Western capitalist practices and open up the nation within the flow of globalization, while holding onto the previous social structure for the continuation of the already constructed social hierarchy. According to Zha, Deng Xiaoping led "wider, faster and deeper marketization" from 1992, with the outcome that Chinese society, seemingly "wak[ing] up from depressing slumber and suddenly [seeing] a whole world of opportunities," has metamorphosed into a commercialized space (21). Zha describes the society of post-Tiananmen China as having "marched toward economic prosperity, all cheered on by the same old drumroll of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics,'" with neither the "heartwarming, soul-cleansing catharsis" that successful revolution for democracy would have accompanied, nor "the starkly bleak picture of protracted oppression and depression" that might have resulted from cruel restraints and repressions (15). Instead of political freedom, more economic freedom has been granted since the brutal confrontation in 1989. While the economy has boomed with the private sector's acceleration in post-Tiananmen China, the cultural realm has undergone a different kind of transition. This wave of change has dismantled the old structures, habits, and alliances of Beijing, which in turn has broken "old illusions and romanticisms" in modernizing China (Zha 21).

The 1990s brought another transition to Chinese cinema. Lu writes, "[i]t is undergoing an unprecedented process of internalization and is on its way to becoming a transnational cinema in the conditions created by global capital/capitalism" (8). The major studios managed by the state were failing financially, and at the same time local audiences lost interest in local films, instead preferring global films, such as Hollywood blockbusters, Hong Kong martial arts or

horror movies, and so forth (Zha 103). In terms of production, with China opening up to the world, film distribution in China, which until 1989 had been solely controlled by the China Film Bureau, came to be shared with private companies, although state censorship of filmic contents continued (Lau 16). Under this change of circumstances, according to Paul G. Pickowicz, “[o]n the eve of Tiananmen, it was clear that the state was no longer willing to subsidize movies of this sort [art movies of the Fifth Generation directors]” (212). As Lu points out, as well, transnational Chinese “art films” have mostly been coproduced with foreign capital, “targeting non-Mainland audiences and international festivals, and distributed outside China” by being involved in transnational production, exhibition, distribution, and consumption in the world market (9).<sup>60</sup>

Chen’s *Farewell My Concubine* and Lou’s *Suzhou River* create alternative versions of the official history of China, yet the ways in which those contents are stylized have nearly the opposite effect, as there is a time gap between their respective production points. *Farewell* was produced in the early nineties, almost right after the Tiananmen Massacre, within the ongoing oppression and silencing of the people by the State, and the film appropriates elements of classical realist films while situating the setting much before the trauma of Tiananmen (the narrative of *Farewell* ends in 1976, the point of the Cultural Revolution). Released in 2000, *Suzhou River* employs a quasi-documentary style of shooting, disjunctive editing, and non-linear narratives while depicting the dire conditions of people in the 1990s who are marginalized and damaged in the corrupted capitalist society of globalizing China.

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<sup>60</sup> Zhang Yimou’s *Judou*’s main funding source was capital from Japan, and his *Raise the Red Lantern* was financed by Taiwanese investors, en route through Hong Kong, to bypass mainland limitations on the scope of investment for politically sensitive issues (Pickowicz 212). Likewise, Chen’s *Farewell My Concubine* was funded by “the Hong Kong subsidiary of former Taiwanese actress Hsu Feng’s Tomson group” (Leung 41).

Despite extremely different stylization and contents, Chen's *Farewell Concubine* and Lou's *Suzhou River* have the aesthetic features that both reflect the ideologies ascribed to by the films and appear to change them within the narrative development. Through Chen's emphasis on traumatic events in Chinese modern history and Lou's illumination of the psyche of the marginalized artists in post-Tiananmen China, both *Farewell My Concubine* and *Suzhou River* depict the untold stories of oppressed and/or marginalized artists. In *Farewell*, the protagonists are performers of Beijing Opera in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, meaning they are practitioners of traditional performance arts and thus are subjected to tremendous oppression during the Cultural Revolution. In *Suzhou River*, the main characters are a documentary director (or more accurately a cameraman paid for personal recordings) and a female performer in a bar in the 1990s, modern artists who cannot help but commodify their talents and bodies to survive the ironic capitalizing of Socialist China. The four characters' personal traumas are shaped, in considerable part, by historical forces in these films, while the narrative developments they experience illuminate the sentiments and sensibility of nostalgia, loss, disorientation, and disillusionment of the traumatized.

In this context, I read *Farewell My Concubine* and *Suzhou River* in the category of posttraumatic cinema, by using the definition of trauma in a broader sense. Joshua Francis Hirsch, in his book *Afterimage* (2001) suggests that trauma, in poststructuralist discourses, is perceived as the ongoing painful life conditions existing universally in history rather than as particular abnormal and exceptional events. According to Hirsch, the films are shown as "the projection of giant images in the dark" that resemble, for spectators, "mental imagery, memory, fantasy, and dreams" (7). Given the magical mechanical process of the medium of film, it has the potential to make spectators not only witness to traumatic past events visually but to experience the

psychological process of the mental shock of those events through visual and narrative formation. Hirsch suggests that posttraumatic cinema is defined, not so much in films including scenes of shocking atrocities, but in films “attempt[ing] to discover a form for presenting that content that mimics some aspects of posttraumatic consciousness itself,” the psychological effects and affects that survivors of trauma would live with after “seeing the unthinkable” (Hirsch 19).

On the other side of cultural interpretation about the narrative of trauma, Kirby Farrell argues in *Post-Traumatic Culture* (1998) that trauma has often been employed in narratives as a trope to reveal the ruptures and injustices of the world. Farrell points out that modern western culture is post-traumatic, as it has been shocked by modernity’s radical changes, wars, socioeconomic and racial conflicts, and rapidly changing technological environments (2-3). In his exploration of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Euro-American texts, he argues that narratives of trauma “strategically evoke symbolically mediated [post-traumatic] stress to structure and desensitize aroused fears and make mastery possible” (27). He reads characters’ redemptive attempts to recover from trauma as a post-traumatic symptom, a coping strategy and social fantasy for dealing with trauma. According to him, this trauma is posited not only as a clinical syndrome of people who have experienced traumatic events but also as a cultural trope of nations suffering from ruptures in their recent history.

However, the posttraumatic consciousness of people living in the capitalizing socialist China of the Post-Mao and Post Tiananmen era, as presented in *Farewell* and *Suzhou River*, are differently shaped by the cultural/literal representations in narratives of Euro-American cultural texts. The ongoing historical national and cultural trauma in the modern nation-building process of China generates the distinctive aesthetics of posttraumatic cinema. The plot of these two films fabricate sentiments in spectators so that they feel the affect of the collective trauma resulting

from the ongoing violence and turbulence, without chances of healing, that broke the Chinese people's belief in the grand ideologies pursued and embodied by the nation. At the same time, *Farewell* and *Suzhou River* appear to employ greatly contrasting aesthetics, and their contents also shed light on different historical junctures of China. However, by situating these two films within the discourses of the reception of Chinese art films in the west and contextualizing their thematization of China's traumatic modern-nation building, I reveal in this chapter that the rupture of ideology and its practice, in Post-Mao and Post Tiananmen Chinese society, is reflected in the disjuncture between the film's content and form.

The Fifth Generation directors' auto-ethnographic representations have been identified as "cultural and historical reflections" of China's past in addition to earning western audiences' enthusiastic reception of these works. In China, however, the films of representative Fifth Generation directors such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige were treated with suspicion. Zhang's *Judou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* not only failed to receive any awards but were banned in China until mid-1992, and Chen's *Farewell My Concubine*'s screening was belatedly allowed, in the middle of 1993, only after heavy editing to meet censorship requirements (Pickowicz 212-3).<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Chinese intellectuals who had expressed pride in the success of the Fifth Generation film directors at international film festivals, when their films were produced and distributed by the state-controlled studio system, viewed the new productions as a betrayal (Zha 105-6). Referring to the Chinese exile magazine *Today*, one of "the most famous underground avant-garde magazine[s]," and other elite critics in China, Zha explains the shift in attitude

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<sup>61</sup> *Farewell My Concubine*, after being awarded at Cannes, generated controversies that led to banned screenings, albeit temporarily, by the Chinese authorities. The Chinese regime problematized *Farewell My Concubine*'s critical portrayal of the Communist party and the Cultural Revolution, as well as its depiction of homosexual desire.

toward the global success of Fifth Generation directors, as follows: “The Fifth Generation, once heralded as brilliant *enfants terribles*, were now [in 1992] to be unmasked as a group of overrated, callow, and pretentious self-promoters” (106).

At the same time, internationally favored Fifth Generation directors have been criticized by scholars such as Rey Chow, Sheldon Lu and Yingjin Zhang, for their self-orientalizing tendency that allowed western audiences to desire the culture of the other as an exotic object. Chow points out that the Fifth Generation directors’ films has been perceived as “betraying cultural translators”; according to her, the ethnographic films of the Fifth Generation directors are seen as “the toys, the fabricated play forms with which the less powerful (cultures) negotiate the imposition of the agenda of the powerful” by “consciously exoticizing China and revealing China’s ‘dirty secrets’ to the outside world” (170). At the same time, Chow has critiqued Westerners’ viewing of Chinese films as unavoidably ethnographical, as it creates an unequal power relationship between the subject and object of a gaze.<sup>62</sup> She claims that meaningful cultural translation will only be possible when “the visualistic epistemological bases of disciplines,” meaning “anthropology and ethnography,” are deconstructed by the reductive binary perception between the East and the West (164-5). Yingjin Zhang, examining Chinese films that have proceeded into the transnational flow, argues that “favorable reviews at international film festivals lead to the production of more ethnographic films, and the wide distribution of such films facilitates their availability for classroom use and therefore influences

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<sup>62</sup> Rey Chow employed and advanced Laura Mulvey’s feminist reading, in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” which suggests that film viewing is a voyeuristic and scopophilic performance that constitutes the unequal power relationship between the wielder of a gaze, and the object of that subjectively cast gaze.

the agenda of film studies, which in turn reinforces the status of ethnographic films as a dominant genre” (121).

In the most recent decade, scholarship on Chinese culture and cinema has shifted its focus, slowly, from authentic representations of realistic China to the aesthetics and politics of delivering the trauma of modern nation-building. For example, in “National Trauma, Global Allegory: Reconstruction of Collective Memory in Tian Zhuangzhuang’s *The Blue Kite*” (2010), Xudong Zhang reads the 1990s films of the Fifth Generation directors as narratives of personal and national trauma, revealing ruptures in history. Referring to 1990s films that gained global recognitions through festival circuits, such as Chen’s *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), Zhang Yimou’s *To Live* (1994) and Tian Zhuangzhuang’s *The Blue Kite* (1993-1994), Zhang suggests that these films’ narratives are either “epics [or] anti-epics” featuring “unstable and even impenetrable aesthetic styles” (624). The films are counter-narratives that challenge the hegemonies and ideologies of communist China—“the ‘grand-narrative’ of social revolution and idealism” (623). Zhang suggests that the Fifth Generation director’s auteurist touch might appeal to global spectators through their distinctive style—“the riots of colors, images, and unheard-of stories,” while their political stance in content provides “a self-gratifying sense of moral relevance” to the style (627). For example, *Farewell My Concubine* plays off of a double logic. In terms of its content, it presents a narrative of the traumatic modern nation-building of China, depicting ruptures and scars in its modern history through the tragic destinies of some of the most marginalized Chinese citizens. However, in terms of form, the film appears as a seamless perfection, appealing to spectators with seductively entrancing scenes composed of carefully articulated, dazzling shots of excess. Almost all the scenes of the film are theatrically set up with



meticulously detailed props and framing, which are often symmetrically balanced and feature exaggerated color.

Zhang argues that a high modernist style, characteristic of the 1990s Fifth Generation directors, is an embodiment of capitalist logic—turning pain into visual spectacles and entertaining pleasures that attract and appeal to global audiences (especially western spectators in international festival circuits). At the same time, those styles and modes generate transcendence in their melodramatic depictions of personal pains that translate into universal and ontological questions of human existence. Zhang suggests:

[T]he undeniable strength and the mesmerizing magic of these films—the works of the Fifth Generation films—lie in their treating personal experience as autonomous, that is, in the disinterested realm of the aesthetic. (628)

In so doing, Fifth Generation films justify such styles and reveal the social and cultural changes of 1990s China, both in its adoption of the Western ideologies of universal humanism and developmental progress, and its recognition of its lack in Chinese history. Zhang contends that these transcendences, or transformation of content through style, fill the ruptures in history. That is to say, the ruptured historical moments in the modern nation-building process of China turn into scenes that ask “an ontological speculation of the ultimate meaning of existence” through focusing on personal stories shown in aesthetically appealing form (698). In this sense, the spectators’ enjoyment is generated in their involvement in “creating the memory of catastrophe,” collective memories of trauma while consuming visual spectacles (627). Their works function as a “common point of reference” for global and domestic spectators to gain access to and to have discourses on “the historical experience of Chinese modernity” (Zhang 624).

As Zhang argues, the desire of liberal Chinese intellectuals in the 1990s to engage with globalization and be acknowledged by the West is turned into the dialectical aesthetics of high modernist style. However, I challenge Zhang's argument that the aesthetics adopted in Fifth Generation directors' works function to transform personal and national trauma into transcending moments through "images of personal intimate experience" (Zhang 628). I assert, rather, that high modernist style and ontological themes about existence are employed and appropriated in *Farewell My Concubine* in order to translate the traditional or pre-modern aesthetics and ethics of China for global audiences. At the same time, the film delivers the sense of loss and longing of people living in the 1990s China, the society of rupture. The Chinese people's loss of trust in the state, and in the revolutionary practices and ideologies endorsed by it, are shown, in *Farewell*, as nostalgia toward pre-modern China, as symbolized in the national tradition and aesthetics epitomized by the Beijing Opera. Chen shapes the narrative of *Farewell My Concubine* in a particular way, in order to deliver a sense of the (imagined) loss or tragic fall of the Chinese empire by depicting the rebirth, in filmic form, of the traditional arts and aesthetics of China, and its subsequent fall during the Cultural Revolution.

In the first part of the film, the depiction of the inhumane and abusive disciplining process for the theater's child trainees may indeed look like the director is revealing the "dirty secrets of China," yet the deployment of the film discloses that the painful discipline imposed on young bodies was a necessary process to perfect their technique, an art in itself. Indeed, I argue that the film tries to deliver the traditional aesthetics of pre-modern China by showing how artists—in this case the Beijing Opera performers in the film—turn themselves into things, art objects, themselves in order to achieve aesthetic transcendence through pain and discipline. The traditional craftsmanship and techniques of China are different from modern Western

philosophies and aesthetics, which are rooted in Renaissance humanism, meaning that art works are viewed as manifestations of humanism. When it comes to certain traditional Chinese aesthetics, losing the self or one's humanity is considered a viable way to achieve the highest level of art, through transcendence of the self to the level of universal and collective consciousness.

During the scenes featuring the young trainees, many close-up and medium close-up shots of child characters' bare faces—most of them of the young Dieyi and Xiaolou, known in childhood by their given names Douzi and Shitou—allow the spectators to feel what the children feel, to be affected by their emotions. For example, when Master Guan, a teacher and director of the young trainees, places bricks next to Douzi's ankle for practicing splits on his first day in training, Shitou sees Douzi screaming and crying from the pain and kicks the bricks away for Douzi. Shitou is then subjected to horrible physical punishments for helping Douzi. The scenes are composed of recurring close-up shots of Douzi and Shitou, their faces wet with tears and sweat, though revealing the genuine appreciation and trust that develops between the two. In addition, in many scenes, the camera moves around these trainees, as if from a supervising parental point of view. For example, the first scene in which these trainees perform is shown briefly through a medium shot, and then the camera moves farther away from the stage, behind the seats of a small number of audience members, as if from the perspective of someone who cares about their performance as well as who silently and covertly observes audience members' responses. It is not a manifestation of humanity as Renaissance artists in the West have tried to express, but extreme physical pain in the scenes is enforced in order to inscribe artistry and technical mastery onto the trainees' bodies, might seem to contemporary spectators like abuse of the human body. Chen shows that it is an effective way to turn human beings into the epitome of

certain arts. Also the film conveys the message that this type of art and craftsmanship is only possible under a certain type of system, like a pre-modern culture that enables repression and oppression of trainees' bodies in the name of patronage.

Significantly, the film also announces the end of the days of the Beijing Opera. The culture that allowed young students from impoverished families to undergo such an excessively strict, even abusive, training process, was the culture of patronage. The patronage possible through the corrupt and exploitative custom of the old Dynasty—young *dan* (female impersonator) performers of the theater were sexually exploited by patrons who belonged to the high society of the Qing Dynasty in its final years—is encapsulated in the taking away of these performers' childhood innocence. For example, when Douzi is called upon by Eunuch Zhang for perverted sexual play, the scene that follows the route by which Douzi is sent to Zhang, carried piggyback by an old servant, again consists of close-up or medium close-up tracking shots of the faces of Douzi and the older servant that effectively convey the boy' confusion, fear, and anxiety. At the room of the eunuch, who makes the boy urinate in a delicate glass bowl, standing in front of him, the camera again takes Douzi's perspective as he watches the eunuch attaining perverted pleasure in seeing Douzi's action. Douzi's childhood ends with the sexual abuse committed against him by the perverted eunuch, and the depiction of Eunuch Zhang makes spectators feel disgust and shock for the situation, thereby making the boy a victim and the object of sympathy. Under that repressive system, craftsmen and artists made things that were in demand by the elite, yet the era of the old dynasty ends, and this phase of the film likewise ends with the shot of a group picture of all the trainees and Master Guan.

When art and aesthetics reach a particular degree of accomplishment, they are able to transcend their boundaries and limitations within humans who live under limited

conditions. Chen's *Farewell* attempts to show that disciplining and practicing techniques, in the end, turn into a certain ideal level of artistic accomplishment. The next phase of the narrative starts with the shot of a photograph of the now grown-up and successful Douzi and Shitou. As the boys turn into young adults, the scenes that frame the two main characters are shown through the perspectives of fans in pursuit of their idols. Douzi and Shitou turn into celebrities of the Beijing Opera, and their mesmerizing performances of scenes from *Farewell My Concubine*, a famous play of the Beijing Opera, seduce spectators entirely through their acting and alluring mise-en-scene. This transition is likely calculated to imbue spectators with awe and admiration. In one scene, Master Yuan is seated, curiously watching the beginning of a play. The scene turns into a close-up of Dieyi's profile, until he turns his face to the camera, at which point the camera zooms out slowly while Dieyi sings. Dieyi makes intricate gestures and little turns in his face and body, with the flow and rhythm of his singing, and the camera shooting Dieyi actually moves—zooming out—making delicate and subtle directional changes, as if the movement of the camera is mirroring the delicate dancing and gestures of Dieyi. The movement of the camera is as delicate and subtle as Dieyi's movement, drawing spectators into Dieyi's performance such that they might not even realize the delicate turns and gestures made by the camera (Fig. 19).

As Dieyi sings a prolonged word, slowly extending his arm and pointing with his finger, the camera zooms out at the same pace. Suddenly, the medium shot shifts to show the cheering adulation of the audience, and the stage, through a high-angle long shot from the right side of the room in the teahouse. It then turns into a medium shot of Master Yuan, a wealthy patron of the theater who stares at the stage with rapt attention, and finally it again shows Dieyi in a medium shot through a shot-reverse-shot sequence. The manager of the theater hosting Master Yuan asks, “[Y]ou be the judge, Master Yuan. Has he not blurred the distinction between theater and life,

male and female?” Master Yuan does not answer the question, but the screen shows him staring—attentive and mesmerized—at the stage, which is again shown as a series of medium shots of Dieyi and Xiaolou as they perform. At the same time, the diegetic audiences in the film



Figure 19: Still from *Farewell My Concubine*.

are presented as overwhelmed with a sense of awe and admiration, and the mise-en-scene, camera movement, and camera angles put the extradiegetic spectators of the film into a similar position.

In the film, Dieyi’s turning into the character Concubine Yu, through his own confusion between reality and life, is presented as an expression of artistic transcendence and then transforming that self into the perfection of art. The director manifests it with Dieyi’s perfect transformation, which his co-actor, Xiaolou, was unable to achieve. Dieyi, on the surface, is the epitome of female beauty, indeed the reincarnation of a beautiful concubine in early Chinese history and a figure in the Peking Opera from which the novel and film are derived. Although Dieyi’s loss of identity as male would generally be perceived by modern audiences as

disorientation, yet, his losing himself or transcending himself for art's sake is drawing audiences to the film. Likewise, the film's spectators also experience a certain disorientation and confusion through the character that Dieyi plays. His perfect identification with the character—a disorientation of himself—also includes the spectators in this disorientation. Dieyi's effeminized look creates enormous confusion for spectators, because they also see him as a beautiful woman, despite knowing or being aware that he plays this role. At the same time, the director experiments with filmic technique—a modern western art—in order to present this transcending moment of Asian aesthetics through the deployment of unique camera movements.

The camera movement and composition, in Chen's *Farewell*, are modernistic but overlaid with an application of the traditional aesthetics and values of balance and harmony. The prevalent composition that the screen employs is a symmetrical frame, shown through a frontal camera angle, as if incorporating Asian or pre-modern aesthetics from architecture and painting, with their prioritization of balance and harmony. Another prevalent camera movement that follows the characters' movement, while capturing it with frontal shots, is also related to traditional Chinese aesthetics: spectators identify with a work of art by looking at it from the front, and appreciate it while walking to the left. In a later scene, after the Japanese forces occupy Beijing, Dieyi performs "Peony Pavilion" privately for the imperialist army, in order to save Xiaolou's life. The situation can be read as the physical and psychological dominance of the Japanese on Chinese bodies and minds. However, Chen also emphasizes how the artistic appeal and aesthetic achievement of Dieyi's performance not only appeals to, but gains respect from, Japanese soldiers. The unfolding of the performance in the scene resembles the traditional Chinese folk art known as shadow theater, or *pi ying*, which was originally invented to console Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty for the loss of his favorite concubine, although the art form has

mainly been entertainment for the masses. The scene of the performance is shown only as silhouettes projected onto the white paper screens of traditional sliding doors, as if the paper wall shields the shame that Dieyi's performance carries.

The silhouettes of the right profiles of the musicians, sitting near a wall in the room, reveal shadows—probably pillars of the building—behind the musicians, and serve to distinguish the musicians' location from which Dieyi sings and performs. Dieyi's silhouette, which shows his left profile, suggests that he is not wearing any costumes or hairpieces, but rather simply stands as he sings and performs (Fig. 20). The camera moves slowly, from the right to left, to show row after row of seated Japanese soldiers watching Dieyi's performance without so much as blinking. As the camera moves to the left, it reveals fully armed Japanese soldiers standing outside and guarding the room, while the performance is taking place behind sliding doors. The scene changes inside the room, and the actual setting inside is slightly different from the silhouettes—the musicians are seated, facing toward the inside room, which reveals Chen's tactful setting to show the situation, first, as an art form of shadow theater. The performance scene ends with the Japanese generals clapping at the end of Dieyi's performance. His performance for the enemy soldiers underscores the tragic and shameful conditions the Chinese experienced during the Japanese invasion, yet this scene embodies the ways in which the director Chen emphasizes the artistic appeal of Beijing Opera and the aesthetic achievement of Dieyi's performance. In doing so, he brings to the surface the distinction between the colonizer and the colonial subject.

In addition, partly because its many scenes peddle traditional Chinese customs, accessories and crafts, the film has been criticized for orientalizing and exoticizing China. However, rather than intending to exoticize or orientalize China by providing constant visual





Figure 20: Still from *Farewell My Concubine*.

spectacles through the presentation of numerous exotic objects, in my view *Farewell My Concubine* appears to be designed to highlight the disappearance of pre-modern Chinese craftsmanship in the traumatic modern nation-building process. The two main characters keep using the dresses and hairpieces, despite changes in time, while the number of props decreases to indicate the reduced financial means of the theater. The repetitive usage of the same hairpieces, makeup, and decorative objects and costumes emphasizes the constant efforts in the film to preserve traditional craftsmanship and techniques. At the same time, the national tradition and aesthetics symbolized by the Beijing Opera appear, in *Farewell My Concubine*, more marvelous and exquisite, but fixed, the epitome of purity. In fact, the institutions of and cultures within the Beijing Opera have been modified and changed, throughout the modern nation-building process, in ongoing interaction with Western culture. Chen's style in the film is not only a manifestation

of Chinese acceptance of Western ideologies and aesthetics, but also stands for a maker of regenerating and retranslating traditional aesthetics in a way that appeals to global audiences.

The sense of loss is enhanced by the film's reconstruction of the image of the nation as something authentic, magnificent, and elegantly grand. The fall and rise of the Beijing Opera is thus depicted by Chen, in conjunction with the traumatic nation-building process (and decline) of China. The fall of these opera performers during the Cultural Revolution embodies the end of belief in the ideologies that Communist China had espoused, as it is presented in the form of the protagonists' denunciation and public shaming during the Cultural Revolution, a time when Maoist ideologies erupted into violence. The film's plot follows the main characters up through



Figure 21: Still from *Farewell My Concubine*.

the time of the Cultural Revolution, at which point the composition of frames slowly but continuously loses its symmetrical balance in depicting the nation's forceful removal of its traditional arts, as epitomized in the film by the Beijing Opera. In one such scene, Dieyi and

Xiaolou are violently beaten, denounced, and shamed by a group of Red Guards—college and high school students—who consider themselves as new revolutionary rebels following Chairman Mao’s policies. Dieyi and Xiaolou are kneeling down, their faces shown through medium close-up shots, shaken and blurred by the flames of a fire set by the Red Guards to burn objects not endorsed by the Cultural Revolution. Although the characters are framed in the center of the screen, Dieyi’s face and hairpiece tilt to the left. The medium close-up shot shows Xiaolou forced to reveal and denounce Dieyi’s past. When Xiaolou asks Dieyi if he has had an intimate relationship with Master Yuan, a close-up shot that presents Dieyi’s desperate facial expression transitions to a long shot that shows Dieyi standing, while other performers kneel, and a group of Red Guards wearing uniforms and red armbands. Not only is the scene blurry from the constant motion and opacity of scarlet flames, but the camera angle for this shot is slightly tilted, with Dieyi located slightly to the right of center (Fig. 21). When he walks forward, revealing long-



Figure 22: Still from *Farewell My Concubine*.

kept secrets—Xiaolou’s wife, Juxian, used to be a prostitute—the camera shot moves, but rather than follow Dieyi’s step and movement, it is slightly later than Dieyi’s pace and moves in the opposite direction. The camera’s movement refuses to mirror Dieyi’s movement, and thus creates a disjuncture between the main character and the form (Fig. 22).

The intrinsic drive of the narrative, shown in chronological order, represents a lack of development in history, at the same time suggesting the circularity of historical events rather than presenting them in a linear progression. *Farewell* starts from the filmic present, 1989, twenty-three years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, and, after the opening credits, it restarts from the shared childhood of the two main characters, proceeds to their adolescent days and adulthood, then returns to the filmic present—the opening scene—and ends. The film ends by going back to the setting of the first scene of the film, years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, in a big, dark, empty hall. In that empty hall in the first scene, the two main characters are in full costume and makeup, and they start a conversation with an unknown voice assumed to belong to a keeper or guard of the hall.

Voice: Who are you?

Xiaolou: We’re with the opera troupe.

Voice: Oh, I didn’t recognize you! I am a great fan of you both

Xiaolou: Is that so? Thank you

Voice: It’s been over twenty years since you performed together, hasn’t it?

Xiaolou: Twenty-one

Dieyi: Twenty-two

Xiaolou: Yes, twenty-two years

Xiaolou: And it's been ten years since we saw each other.

Dieyi: Eleven, Eleven years

Xiaolou: Eleven. Eleven years.

Voice: It's due to the Gang of Four and the Cultural Revolution. Things are better now.

Xiaolou: That's for sure. Everything's fine now.

However, in the final scene of the film, Dieyi, performing Concubine Yu, ends up slitting his throat with a real sword. This moment reminds spectators of the dialogue in the first scene between Xiaolou and the nameless voice. The characters have to be “fine,” despite the fact that everything depicted in the film discloses that nothing has been “fine” for people enduring socio-political violence in the course of history. Yet the characters in the film keep moving on, by naturalizing traumatic events as their normalcy. The only thing Dieyi holds onto is his play, but even his play betrays him by making him a symbol of female beauty committing suicide.

Chen's *Farewell My Concubine* depicts people who are traumatized by betrayal of their own times, historical forces, or ideologies. The films suggest that, in times of massive turmoil, such as that of twentieth-century China, people will inevitably betray themselves and their loved ones in order to survive amid ongoing upheavals. Stated differently, the ideologies of the times have betrayed the beliefs of ordinary Chinese citizens. In the film, main characters yearn for loyalty and love, while they live through the traumatic reality of modernizing China, in which constantly changing politics and ideologies have not allowed people to remain loyal and nurture their love for one another.

For this depiction, *Farewell My Concubine* adopts the classical realist mode by depicting national and personal traumas through an omnipresent point of view. Whenever there is a transition in the historical phase being experienced by his characters, a brief description, which may work as an intertitle for global audiences, appears onscreen: “1924 Beijing—The Warlord Era,” “1937 7.7 On the Eve of War with Japan,” “1945 Japanese Surrender As Chiang Kai-Shek’s Nationalist Army Retakes Beijing,” “1948 The Eve of the Nationalist Evacuation to Taiwan. The Communists Have Surrounded the City,” “1949 The Communist People’s Liberation Army Enters Beijing,” “1966 Beijing The Eve of the Cultural Revolution.” These written descriptions inform viewers of the exact dates of events, situating the fictional narrative in the middle of historical junctures. For example, Chen situates the first scene of the two performers, as adults, on the exact date of July 7, 1937. This was the date of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, which initiated the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). The protagonists, known by their stage names, Dieyi and Xiaolou, are wearing dark western suits for a photography session. They then change into traditional clothes for a second photograph. Outside the building, student protesters march and chant, “Down with Japanese imperialism! No invasion by Japan!” When Dieyi and Xiaolou leave the building after the photography session is over, the protestors yell at them about putting on a performance despite the nation’s endangerment by the Japanese attack. “You’re playing into the hands of the Japanese! How can you put on makeup and sing opera at a time like this?” “You have no feelings for your country.” Given the chaotic scene, the earlier intertitle of 1937, as well as all other time indicators, are gestures toward setting the tone of the film as objective and realistic. These intertitles suggest an omnipresent narrator guiding spectators through historical events in a seamlessly linear progression.

Hirsch argues that posttraumatic films challenge and undermine conventions of the historical film genre by making distinctions in the posttraumatic cinema of historical events from classical realist films in the genre of historical films (9). According to him, classical realist films depict traumatic historical events in seamless narratives, or through chronological depiction of events through an omniscient point of view, making spectators “false eyewitnesses” who obtain a sense of masterfulness toward past traumatic events, such as the Holocaust. The objective and omniscient perspective and seamless narratives presented in realist films draw spectators toward the contents, or “events represented,” such that they remain unaware of this filmic format, “the film’s own act of presentation” (Hirsch 21). This type of representation generates “narrative memory,” which changes the unrepresentable and inexplicable nature of trauma, or rupture, in history, into elements of normalcy for spectators, without delivering to those spectators the psychological and physical shock of traumatic events (Hirsch 21). As a result, classical realist films nudge spectators toward a false sense of knowing, seeing, and mastering traumatic events in history, while posttraumatic cinema induces the opposite effects and affects (20-1). Hirsch attributes this effect to the disappointment of spectators’ expectations regarding mainstream narratives in history itself, as well as narrative conventions in the historical film genre (19).

Chen’s *Farewell* seems to follow the conventions of historical realist cinema, yet it refuses to create a sense of realism: it is transformed into a hybrid of genres and styles conveying the different psychological affects and effects of the trauma experienced by the Chinese in their modern nation-building process. The form and style employed in the film, of extremely emboldened, exaggerated, and symbolic visuality, which Xudong Zhang refers to as a high-modernist style, constantly push audiences to recognize the presentational form of the film, as well. Rather than turning spectators into “fake witnesses,” this form, in a way, functions to make

spectators aware, through its excess in narrative, that the past events of national and personal trauma depicted in the film are not authentic representations of the past but reconstructed fantasies. At the same time, the motifs of betrayal and abandonment, and scenes of death (suicides) and violence, though altered, are continuously repeated throughout the film. At first, such melodramatic elements compel spectators to engage with the narrative and be imbued in the sentiments of loss and sadness. However, as such narrative motifs are constantly reshowed, spectators, probably in the middle of the film, become desensitized to the pattern of shock. To a certain degree, they disengage from the narrative excess of melodrama, yet spectators might sense the posttraumatic psyche of people who have not had the time to mourn for, or work through, much less move on from, the scars of traumatic events.

Since the early 1990s, Sixth Generation films have not only been produced outside the official studio system of China, but their contents are often politically controversial. Lin Xiaoping also points out that the Sixth Generation directors illuminate “redemption of the new evil of a capitalist market economy and neoliberal globalization” (5). The Sixth Generation directors identify themselves as social mavericks and their works as “an alternative or minor cinema” that “re-captures the socio-economic unevenness, and psychological anxiety, and moral confusion” of China’s encounter with rapid economic and social change; as such, their public releases are often banned by state censorship (Z. Zhen 23). These directors tend to view international film festivals as venues not only for critical acclaim but for financial reward and potential audiences. As a result, the production and distribution of Sixth Generation films depend heavily on international channels, including international film festivals, foreign producers, and non-mainland film critics.



Certainly, the filmic representations of China in last two decades have enjoyed a more diversified style and content than before. However, the power dynamics of looking and being-looked-at between the West and the East, which resulted in the leveling of criticism against Fifth Generation cinema's representational mode, seem not to have changed. Although Sixth Generation Chinese films may look like they are no longer essentializing Chinese culture, the Chinese films chosen for viewing by and in the West reify the formulaic disposition of western audiences to peep into the other's culture through "typical third world scenarios." According to Shuqin Cui, Sixth Generation film directors are not all that different from Fifth Generation directors, and even "have discovered that official censure at home can enhance their stature overseas, inducing 'investors'" (97). This awareness has resulted in the directors' strategic mode of acquiring recognition: they tend to adopt the politically savvy stance of dealing with more controversial contents that will specifically draw attention from global audiences. Cui points out that the recognition by these directors of the aforementioned issues make them "embody a two-sided identity"—they are "a shunned minority within mainstream production in China, but valued dissidents in the eyes of film critics in the West" (97).

As such, *Suzhou River* has been criticized for its seeming lack of originality. The film is considered to mimic Alfred Hitchcock's Hollywood classic *Vertigo* (1958), European master Krzysztof Kieslowski's *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991) (*La double vie de Veronique*), and Japanese director Iwai Shunji's *Love Letter* (1995), in all three of which the theme of "the related fate of two look-alike women" are depicted (Z. Zhen 351). However, Zhen points out that the beautiful young woman's suicide and reincarnation (or returning as a ghost) has been a prevalent motif in traditional Chinese culture. The plot of *Suzhou River* alludes to *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudang ting*), one of the most famous traditional Chinese literary and theatrical texts written by

Tang Xianzu—the renowned poet and playwright—in the sixteenth century (360).<sup>63</sup> Also Zhen points out, referring to Jerome Silbergeld’s argument, that *Suzhou River* employs other conventional themes of Chinese folktales and stories about a beautiful young woman’s committing suicide and returning as a ghost. In addition, in terms of the cinematic tradition of China, Zhen relates the female doubles or “phantom sisters” in *Suzhou River* to “the trope of the female twins” taken in the 1930s classical Chinese film, Zheng Zhengqiu’s *Sister Flowers* (1933). One of the few Chinese films, at that time, to be screened in international film festivals, such as the Moscow International Film Festival in 1935, *Sister Flowers* also gained favorable attention from domestic audiences (367). The film melodramatically portrays the marginalized lives and dire conditions of twin migrant-worker sisters who toil in an urban center, and Zhen delineates the shared concerns and tropes, as well as changed stylistic depictions, employed in *Sister Flowers* and *Suzhou River*. Both of them illuminate the fragmented and illusive lives of urban China by taking up the trope of female doubles (369-70). In this context, *Suzhou River* is also seen as a retelling of many conventional plots of literary, theatrical, and cinematic texts in Chinese culture through the new aesthetics of depicting the 1990s capitalizing China.

The filmic narratives shape the main characters’ lives in interrelated tragic stories of love, betrayal, and death, which depict people living in a society of rupture where romantic ideologies are unable to be sustained in 1990s China. *Suzhou River*, by adopting a frame narrative of two tragic love stories, delivers the doubled anxiety and loss of those who live entrapped between the

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<sup>63</sup> The theatrical form is also performed and screened in *Farewell My Concubine* when Dieyi performs for Japanese soldiers. *The Peony Pavilion* depicts a love story in which a young woman falls in love with a man whom she met in her dream. Eventually, she becomes obsessed with an impossible longing to re-encounter the man and dies lovesick. However, she returns to the world when the man in her dream happens to stay at a temple where she was buried, sees her self-portrait hung on the wall, and invokes her.

failed socialist ideology and declining post-Mao utopianism. The narrator and shooter of the story is a videographer (voiced by Lou Ye, although he never shows his face in the film) in love with Meimei (played by Zhou Xun). The videographer first meets Meimei when he films a promotional video for the bar where she works, and he falls in love with her. Meimei often vanishes from him for a few days at a time, and each time she leaves, she asks him if he will look for her, then tells him the love story of Mardar, the motorcycle courier. Anxious about her frequent disappearances for days and following Meimei's comment that anyone could make up such a love story, the videographer tells and shows an imaginative story, through the frame narrative, about Mardar (Jia Hongsheng) and Meimei.

In the frame narrative, a motorcycle courier named Mardar happens to be assigned to transport a teenage girl, Moudan, who looks like Meimei (played by Zhou Xun, who also plays Meimei), to her aunt's house while her father consorts with prostitutes. Often spending time together, Mardar and Moudan fall in love, yet he later kidnaps Moudan. Realizing Mardar's betrayal of her—kidnapping her for a fairly trivial sum—Moudan throws herself in the Suzhou River with Mardar's birthday gift, a mermaid doll with long blond hair, saying she will come back as a mermaid. Mardar, after serving his sentence for the kidnapping, looks for Moudan, but he instead finds Meimei, the videographer's girlfriend, who looks exactly like Moudan. From this point in the film, the frame narrative of Moudan's story becomes an intertwined part of the story of the videographer and Meimei. Nearly at the end of this story, Mardar finds another woman who works in a convenience store and looks alike Meimei (and Moudan), yet Meimei counters that this couple—Mardar and the other woman from the convenient store—committed suicide together. Shocked and saddened, Meimei disappears from the videographer, leaving a note that says, "Find me if you love me." What the characters hold onto is the concept of

romanticized love, yet the filmic narrative shows that such loves cannot be sustained in a capitalizing China.

The tragic love stories of these characters fabricate sentiments in spectators through beautifully depicted scenes, evoking a particular sense of loss and nostalgia, while interrelated stories with three look-alike female characters create constant confusions and ruptures in the plot. The plot of these characters represents those who lead the lowliest lives in a capitalizing China, as the environment that they reside in does not provide any hope or resources for them to dream of a different lifestyle. In this context, I claim that Lou's *Suzhou River* is a representation of the urban generation's sentiment of entrapment, as well as its nostalgia for a failed Maoist socialism in the face of declining hope for a post-Mao utopianism. In addition, I suggest that the film's affective aesthetics generates empathic understanding of people living in a society of rupture.

The film shares many features of the Sixth Generation directors' works, in terms of content and form. As seen in Lou's editing techniques and use of the direct cinematic mode, however, *Suzhou River* illuminates the social reality of China through aesthetically invested mise-en-scenes crystallizing the melodramatic stories of the film's characters. As the Sixth Generation directors try to capture the fast-changing daily life of urbanities, they often employ documentary techniques that challenge the boundaries between fiction and reality by integrating styles of neorealism in their films. Lou also adopts such a documentary style of shooting; yet, according to Zhen Zhang, the features distinguishing this film from those of other Sixth Generation directors are Lou's "[exploration of] the affective economy and the possibility of sensory revivification," as the film emphasizes "vanished bodies and resuscitated memories and senses" (Z. Zhang 346). Advancing Zhang's argument, through analysis of *Suzhou River's* plot and visuals, I will show how the embedded metacommentary, self-referentiality, and affective

and affecting aesthetics in the films reshape the power dynamics between looking-at and being-looked-at. Borrowing from Laura Marks's concept of haptic visuality, I argue the ways in which haptic images are able to create a new aesthetic and viewing ethics for the other's culture.

Affective haptic images in Lou's *Suzhou River* of the city and the film's characters, as well as the prevalent motifs of drifting, doubles, and losses in the film deliver untold histories of the marginalized people in China.

*Suzhou River* depicts urban youth living in 1990s Shanghai, a representative city of China that has been changing rapidly, due to capitalization within the flow of globalization. In the film, the marginalized characters cannot help but being purveyors of whatever consumers desire in the exploitative capitalist practices in 1990s China. For example, the videographer does not have a regular job and ekes out a living from the occasional shooting work he finds. His willingness to between her living space, with its hyperbolic emphasis on western fantasies of free expression,

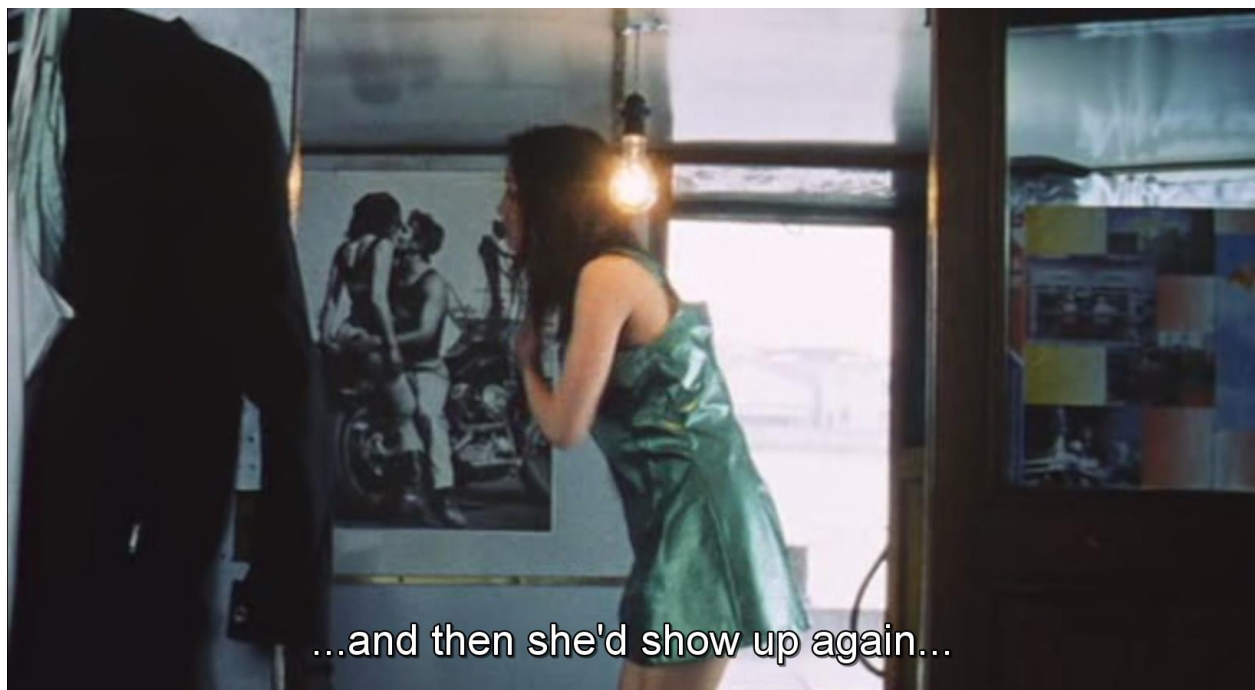


Figure 23: Still from *Suzhou River*.

accept any project may be an allusion to the conditions under which many new independent film directors in 1990s China worked; they had no choice but to film those things that satisfied their expected audiences, whether they were targeting domestic or international desires. The videographer's girlfriend Meimei is a performer who dresses as a blonde, heavily made-up mermaid and splashes around in a fish tank at a sleazy bar called Happy Tavern. In her performances, she comes across as a western doll on display as entertainment, as if she represents the myth of capitalism that China had accepted and was promoting. In addition, her residence is a tiny, shabby boathouse on the Suzhou River (Fig. 23). She has adorned the walls with large posters of western couples kissing romantically. The film highlights the ironic contrast and the fact that she sustains her life in a confined boathouse by playing an exoticized half-human, half-fish caught in a water tank.

Mardar, another main character in the frame narrative that the videographer narrates and shows, is a motorcycle courier who delivers whatever people want. Despite his wish to get away from it all on his motorcycle, a symbol of freedom, his subservience to the motorcycle, as a mode of transportation not affording much greater horsepower than a bicycle, is revealed in his inability to escape the mundane life of a courier. He even works to drive around a teenage girl, Moudan, and even though they become emotionally involved, he ends up kidnapping her for money. Moudan's father is portrayed as a smuggler of Russian vodka, and he sends his daughter to her aunt's place whenever he hires a prostitute to service him at home. The film suggests that, although commercial freedom might create financial wealth, the new capital of patriarchal capitalism has not been accompanied by a growth in ideology or ethics. Instead, it has generated more exploitation and domination of people's bodies.

These stories of the marginalized are not depicted in the drily realistic representation of social reality of China that is often adopted by other Sixth Generation directors. Rather, *Suzhou River* challenges the unbalanced power dynamic between the viewer and the viewed by re-situating its (meta)narratives and self-referentiality within domestic Chinese discourses relating to the New Documentary movement in early 1990s China. This New Documentary movement, emerging as a result of the increasing popularity of home television sets and digital cameras, started to challenge mainstream socialist propaganda documentaries, which were confined to delivering pre-scripted lectures. The independent new documentary makers' main objective has been to present the reality of marginalized people in post-socialist China, which in turn has fostered their preference for on-the-spot realism. Director Lou Ye once worked at Shanghai Television Station, and in 1990 he began shooting *Suzhou River* as a documentary for domestic television distribution. His sensibility to capture a certain reality (although framed) as a documentary maker influenced by on-spot realism, as shown at the beginning of the film, is something that came to be established through the New Documentary movement. When a German production company sponsored the project, however, he turned it into a cosmopolitan art film (Z. Zhen 348-9). As a result, even though the opening scenes in *Suzhou River* are part of Lou's documentary project for people residing around Suzhou River, the ending is shaped through the aforementioned imaginative stories of its main characters, blurring the genre conventions of documentary and fiction.

The film starts with scenes showing the Suzhou River in Shanghai, the daily lives of the people who live on and by the river, and the demolition of old buildings along the riverside, with narration by the videographer. These images are presented through a hand-held camera incorporating discontinuity editing. Showing the clip, the narrator first says that he witnessed a

mermaid combing her golden hair, then follows up with the admission, “But I’d be lying.” After a short sequence featuring the title of the film, the scene shifts to the narrator spraying paint on the wall to leave his contact information, promoting himself as “a videographer” who shoots anything a client pays him to shoot. The narrator makes an additional claim: “But don’t complain if you don’t like what you see. Cameras don’t lie.” However, the documentary-like reality abruptly ends here. The scene moves into the narrator-cum-videographer’s fictional personal life. It starts with his meeting a woman, Meimei, at a bar, and developing a relationship with her. Soon, the story between Meimei and him turns into another imaginative story that he tells about the fictive characters of Mardar and Moudan.

The narrator’s comments that he would lie but cameras do not, and the realistic cinematic representation of his claim, “Cameras don’t lie,” are diegetic insofar as they hint toward the stories that are told in the film. Yet they are also non-diegetic, considering the film’s genealogy. In this context, the narrator’s aforementioned claims of, “I’d be lying,” “I will shoot anything I am paid to shoot,” and “Cameras don’t lie,” are commentaries regarding both the urban generation’s approach to film/documentary production, broadly speaking, and his own making of *Suzhou River*, more specifically. On one hand, the Sixth Generation directors were unable to document the unexpected shock and aftershock of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, whereas they have the option to shoot anything they want to shoot in a capitalizing China. On the other hand, the European co-funding process changed Lou’s original intention of making a documentary about the Suzhou River to the extent that he wound up producing the kind of cultural artifact that his targeted global audience expects.

Although cameras appear not to lie in documentaries, a message underscored by the Chinese New Documentary Movement’s independent directors, the film itself can and will lie,



given that its maker is paid to shoot whatever the paying customer wants to see. Nevertheless, the director's inclusion of the original shots for the documentary, including its meta-critical commentaries, insinuates Lou's critical reflection on the ways in which his film will be shown. By inserting his comments in the scenes of the original documentary, Lou challenges viewership by drawing spectators into the filmic world, in which the boundaries between fiction and reality, and the viewer and the viewed, are blurred. His commentary thus pulls the spectators between objective and subjective poles, between accepting and reflecting upon given images.

*Suzhou River's* affective haptic images are characterized by the employment of frequent close-up shots of the main characters, which are merged with the pseudo-documentary style of the film and its doubly fictional narratives. *Suzhou River*, revealing a self-reflective consciousness toward cinematic representation in the voice-over monologue that occupies the beginning of the film, shows the daily lives of the people and city of Shanghai by employing haptic visuality. As Paul Stoller writes, "a more sensual gaze will not enable us to see what the ethnographic other sees, but it will produce texts that correspond more closely to the experience and perception of the ethnographic other" (68). Similarly, Laura Marks points out in *The Skin of Film* that many ethnographic films and videos employ haptic images to counter viewers' expectations of an informative or exotic visual spectacle.

The images of characters in this film are frequently taken as close-up or extreme close-up shots that allow spectators, on one hand, to embody intimately the characters' emotions. Their lives in Shanghai, on the other hand, are moving in parallel with the continuously drifting camera-eye. In contrast to the static, theatrical, and balanced composition favored in many scenes (especially before the Cultural Revolution in the filmic narrative) in *Farewell My Concubine*, in *Shuzou River*, scenes are often shot with a handheld camera constantly following

characters in motion. In the beginning of the film, the videographer's affection toward Meimei is shown through the scenes in which the videographer shoots as well as looks at the constantly moving Meimei. Meimei appears to be an object of desire to pursue, and at the same time, an unreachable dream and longing. When the videographer first encounters her, the camera shows her performing, as a mermaid in constant motion in a small fish tank, in a medium shot. Her blond hair (a wig) is swirling and dancing in the flow of the water, while the water and the splashes she creates in the tank block spectators from catching a clear view of her, thus rendering her a fantasy-like dream. The scene abruptly changes into the videographer's sight of another street in Shanghai, where he calls Meimei from a public phone. The scene again suddenly changes. This time, Meimei is joyfully walking around the street, smiling charmingly, smoking, and blowing a chewing-gum bubble, all shown through close-up shots taken by a shaky hand-held camera and accompanied by bright music. The background music suddenly turns lyrical and melancholic, and the scene centers around Meimei's saddened but sensual face, shown through extreme close-up shots. In these shots, her facial expressions are constantly changing, and she constantly moves her head to different angles. At the same time, the camera is constantly moving—not exactly following her movements, and yet as if the camera is touching and sensing her face. Again, suddenly the scene changes to medium-close shots from the videographer's perspective. He gazes at Meimei, who playfully sits on his belly and plays hand-clapping games with him at the boathouse. The scene again changes into another close-up shot of her sad profile. Right after, the scene cuts back to the boathouse, again showing her dressing up and leaving him suddenly.

The movements of the camera-eye and characters in the film make spectators feel transient, changing, and alive, which in turn resonates with the dynamic of Chinese society's

constant transformation. The characters are, however, socio-economically marginalized people, unemployed and impoverished, and the film often employs close-up shots of their faces to reveal their unspeakable loss, sadness, and frustration, which are untold as if to suggest they cannot be explained in language. The unofficial stories are effaced from dominant cinematic representations, but they can be encoded in haptic visuality, according to Marks. In addition, employing Bergson's theory that memory is embodied in the senses, and borrowing Deleuze's concept of time-image cinema that frees time from the causality of non-linear structure, Marks suggests that the "cinema of tactile images is able to evoke the particularly hard-to-represent memories of people who move between cultures" (129). Explaining that "a more embodied perception" of films on another culture will at least give us a sense of what we are missing, she suggests that haptic visuality, a visuality that functions like the sense of touch, invites viewers to respond to the image in an intimate, embodied way, whereas optical images are unable to represent or speak one's own culture, history, and memory for the ethnographic gaze.



Figure 24: Still from *Suzhou River*.

For example, although characters neither address their pain and suffering nor burst into tears of sorrow or frustration, in a scene such as when Moudan is riding with Mardar on his motorcycle, her close-up face, which is highlighted through the key lighting in contrast to her dark background, discloses the sadness and isolation that this young girl has endured while nevertheless holding onto a glimmer of hope whenever she sits behind her courier and lover (Mardar). Mardar is only looking forward, and Moudan is not looking at him, yet his profile is more highlighted than Moudan's face, which generates a certain sense of distance while



Figure 25: Still from *Suzhou River*.insinuating that the light and hope in Moudan are dependent on him (Fig. 24). However, her hope and love are shattered when Moudan, tempted by others to commit a crime for financial gain, takes her as a hostage. Forcing Moudan to stay in a run-down building and call her father for ransom, Mardar even makes her urinate on the open rooftop of the building in which she is being held. When he looks at her squatting down and peeing, his frontal face is shown in a close-focused with yellow tone lighting, the background—the city of

Shanghai—is shown blurred in toned-down bluish grey, with slow melancholy background music (Fig. 25). Again without any words, this stylization of the scene is designed to deliver an impoverished motorcycle courier Mardar's own subdued pain and guilt, both for choosing to betray a young girl who has depended on him emotionally, and for his helplessness in the situation. As such, scenes of this nature would not be registered as official memory, but rather are affect images that, according to Deleuze, would normally be followed by action images. However, the close-up shot sequences of characters end with the affective haptic image of the city Shanghai looking nostalgic and aesthetically appealing, without any dialogue. In the film, the scene of Shanghai from the rooftops is poetically shown through the contrasting effects of the beautifully glowing sky and river, on one hand, and the setting sun and darkened residential buildings in the city's underdeveloped districts, on the other (Fig. 26).

In addition, in *Suzhou River*, the boundary between a story framed-in and a story framed-out is blurred. After depicting the tragic destinies of each character—Mardar and Moudan's death and Meimei's disappearance from the videographer—at the end of the film, the affective and sensual images of Meimei shown in the beginning part of the film as scenes that the videographer shot on the streets of Shanghai, reappear. These images of her create at this moment a sense of nostalgia and delusion. Nothing is entirely explained in these interrelated stories of these characters. Refusing to disclose the identities of the three (or two) look-alike women, Meimei, Moudan, and the woman in the convenient store, the film ends with only more questions and mystery. However, a sense of the loss, desire, and delusion of the marginalized youth living in a capitalizing Chinese city, Shanghai, is unmistakably delivered through the affective haptic images and the narrative related by the videographer. The fabric of their



Figure 26: Still from *Suzhou River*.

everyday experience, which will never be told in official histories and will elude optic representation in this film, are metamorphosed into haptic images that convey the feeling of double loss by people who live on the margins or outer edges of transformation. These tragic romances must be about personal loss, yet many gaps in these stories make spectators suspicious and hesitant about the missing or untold stories.

*Suzhou River*'s Shanghai does not repeat the clichéd image of a cosmopolitan city showing off its present economic power and urban culture. The scenes of Shanghai are bathed in fading tones through a soft focus effect that decorates the city with nostalgia in tactile images. *Suzhou River*'s city scenes, instead, include what the narrator describes as "the filthiest river," and the city's most sordid neighborhoods, crowded as they are with "rundown buildings, grimy industrial compounds, and all sorts of domestic and industrial waste," (V. Lee 150). However, the videographer or camera-eye's view of the city is of someone who knows and loves the place.

The cinematography of the city, not representing a unified version of Shanghai, conveys the narrator's feelings—affection and nostalgia—toward the river. The narrator mentions in the beginning that the river contains a century's worth of stories about the people, and the film shows disappearing old neighborhoods where buildings are marked for demolition. What Shanghai has lost are not only the buildings being demolished by its transformation into a modern city, but also layer upon layer of stories about its residents. The subjective emotions clothe the cinematography, with the result that the city's most vulnerable areas are protected from the indifferent gaze of outsiders. As Marks points out, the filmmaker's tactile connection with his environments allows spectators to have the intimate look of one who already knows what he is going to see, rather than represent well-known and beloved places in the harsh light of optical vision.

Through my analyses of the films of Chen and Lou, I have captured the pulse of the posttraumatic psyche in China in the 1990s. The psyche of people who lived through the turbulent, traumatic historical junctures of modern China, are delivered through these films' fabrication of sentiments via narratives of love, betrayal, and death. Dieyi's performances as a Beijing opera actor and Meimei's as a mermaid performer at a bar allow them to continue on in life with the impassible and impenetrable thick makeup of disguise, yet *Farewell* and *Suzhou River* embolden the psyche of the heavily scarred, even though there is no prospect of healing. Just like the Chinese people cannot, collectively, retell the narrative of the trauma and what led up to it, neither Dieyi nor Moudan can reveal his or her own experience. Dieyi's and Moudan's faces in *Farewell My Concubine* and *Suzhou River*, respectively, may look like objectified, exoticized, and orientalized images. However, they also deliver their unbearable sadness that cannot be told in the official histories of China. The heavily made-up face of Dieyi, the

concubine in *Farewell My Concubine*, and Moudan's beautiful face in close-up scenes of *Suzhou River*, each gazes at the camera, and by extension, the audience. Highly embellished images of the characters and their distant but sad faces, as well as the mise-en-scene painted with nostalgia, remain seared in the memory of global spectators as the untold stories of people living Post-Mao and Post-Tiananmen China.

Discourses of "being authentic and real" have always followed in the global and domestic reception of the Fifth and Sixth Generation director's works. In this chapter, I analyzed Chen's *Farewell My Concubine* and Lou's *Suzhou River*, globally acclaimed Fifth and Sixth Generation works of Chinese cinema, respectively, in order to demonstrate how such films can challenge and reshape the power dynamics of looking-at and being-looked at. I have delineated the problematic ethnocentric reception of Chinese art films in the West, which are prevalently considered as an optical means to peer into the other's culture without emotional engagement. I have pointed out, nevertheless, that recent discourses of the reception of cinemas from different cultures and nations have newly raised as a critical matter the emotionally engaged, subjective experience of sharing with others, in other words, the establishment of intimacy or interpersonal relationships by spectators with their objects of viewing.

This chapter has revealed, in terms of global audiences' viewing of transnational art films from China, how it would be possible for films to establish a modicum of intimacy with represented others, by translating the contents and forms generated from the nativist culture and integrating into them modern/postmodern or (western) aesthetics and plots. I show the ways in which the aesthetics of *Farewell My Concubine* and *Suzhou River* translate traditional aesthetics or storylines into modern/western forms and contents for global spectators as well. By articulating the ways in which the directors' artistic representations deliver emerging new



sensibilities and sentiments regarding China to global audiences, I shed light on the affects and aesthetics of the mainland Chinese Fifth and Sixth Generation cinemas, whose analysis challenges the anthropological viewership in the global consumption of transnational Chinese films. Without indulging in (colonialist) fetishism, it would have been possible for a subjective gaze to establish intimacy and/or to be in transnational love with the representation of others and their worlds. This, in turn, allows film viewers to comprehend the critical and political stance established by a film, and to feel the affection of the Chinese directors toward their native land and people.

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