University of Alberta

Race, Memory & Identity of Overseas Korean Women:
On the Cultural Politics of Independent Kyop'o Women's Cinema

by

© Sandra Jae Song

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Your file Votre référence
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To my family for their bountiful support

and

in loving memory of my mother,

Won, Suk-Hi

Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine the cinematic practices of select Korean North American women filmmakers and their politics of cultural representation in independent cinema and experimental video. Surveying the work of Yunah Hong, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, Christine Chang, Sun-Kyung Yi, and Helen Lee, I explore the various intersections and links between gender, sexuality, race, and class in a North American context, which resonate across different genres (such as documentary, experimental shorts, and video installations) and artistic sites of production (such as film, video, and literature).

The dissertation investigates the overlapping horizons of immigration, racialization, and (racial and sexual) discrimination in Canada and the United States, and the reconstruction of diasporic Korean histories in North America from a critical feminist perspective based on their politics of disidentification, decolonization, and dislocation. It adopts an *autoethnographic* approach that connects the personal with the cultural to analyze the different multilayered identity attributes within film, video, literature, and personal experience. This approach, I argue, emphasizes the importance of context and specificity in cultural practices, and opens up a space for new voices to emerge and describe their sense of the world and politics of self/cultural representation across different sites of artistic production. It builds on past research on gender and

sexuality to include *intersectional* studies on cultural identity and self/cultural representation within the realm of independent cinema and experimental video.

The dissertation not only contributes to the study of Korean Americans and Korean Canadians apart from the larger Asian North American community, but also adds a much-needed analysis of gender and sexuality to the study of diasporic cultural production in film and video. Thus, the principal focus on independent cinema supplements a major lack in current Asian American literary theory as it extends beyond the realm of literature and investigates the pioneering work of *kyop'o* (or overseas Korean) women filmmakers and artists, and the different narrative strategies and techniques of self/cultural representation in their cinematic practice.

Acknowledgement

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I would also like to thank my family for their support and encouragement in all of my intellectual pursuits. I'm especially thankful to Daisuke Matsuura, for his endless love and generosity through thick and thin, and to my father and my aunt, whose stories of "immigration life" and of my mother, have taught me the joy and beauty of "telling stories" and to cherish them always.

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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

1. Artistic reproduction of a family photograph.
Photo courtesy of Jae-Ha Song.

PRELUDE/

Vignette: Returning Home

> *We all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position as 'ethnic artists' or filmmakers. We are all in that sense ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are.*
>
> - Stuart Hall, *New Ethnicities*

> *As we discover, we remember; remembering, we discover.*
>
> - Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings*

Returning Home

It's been a while, but I've returned home to our old neighborhood. It's strange and eerie coming back to the place where I grew up. Things have changed; the old buildings are gone and the streets have been cleaned up. The trannies and prostitutes have moved to another part of town. Now, it's "safer" according to the locals. But, to be honest, I can't remember when I felt unsafe in the neighborhood. I was really quite happy back then. Today, there is no trace of you in the revitalized and gentrified environment. All that is left are distant memories. Our Chinese restaurant is now a burger shop owned and operated by recent Immin (Korean immigrants) to Canada. Dad and I met them during our first walk together in the neighborhood. They've operated the business for about six years; many years after You and Dad owned and operated the Chinese restaurant.

According to them, they heard about You and Dad from the long-time merchants in the plaza. (Believe it or not, the "hair-dresser" brothers are still there. Remember, You would go there from time to time to treat yourself to a nice Up-Do.) You and Dad were known to be very hardworking and kind to everyone.

Twenty years later people still remember You. Your legacy revolves around hard work and kindness; You were known to be self-sacrificing and dedicated to your children. You're elevated as the ideal wife, mother, and friend. The recent Immin also heard about your death and felt very sorry for Dad to be a widower. They looked at me, pausing with a sigh, and said that I'm a very good daughter to look after him.

It was very hard for Dad to join me in the walk around the neighborhood. He said it was too much for him to be reminded of You. During our walk, he remembers the different places You would go to – the bank, the pharmacy, and the park across from the plaza. It was strange to see the well spill of emotion. He felt as though a floodgate of memories raced through him, and he found it unsettling. The leaves are all gone now, along with the famous "Hideaway" that was located at the park. Do you remember the 'colourful' people we met: Bubba and Eugene – the Bouncer Brothers, and Dolores – the gregarious Trannie? Those people would call you, "Mom", because you were kind to them. If they didn't have any money, you would offer them free coffee and a bowl of chili. It's strange that I would remember these things about you: giving free bowls of chili and your strong sense of charity. But, they are vivid and deeply rooted in me. I also remember You

always had a smile on your face – despite your aches and pains from working all day. Maybe that is why I smile a lot; it's a reminder of You in Me.

I begin with a childhood memory that is ultimately fused with another recent memory of a walk with my father in order to situate the importance of Stuart Hall's epigraph, and perhaps, the messiness of memory. One memory fuses into another and the lines aren't clear between them. But these memories represent my past and that is the critical link to Hall's epigraph of bringing the past into the present through narration and representation. For quite some time, I've searched for images to represent my past and sought out an alternative lexicon of meaning and self-expression that made sense to me. Hall's epigraph resonates with me because I speak from a particular place, from a particular time, and particular location in the social world. My experiences, like for many of us, are contextualized—deep in history and rich in detail. It is for this reason of "particularity" that they mark our stamp of ownership and individuality in this world. Perhaps, the stamp of my self-formation has been marked by childhood loss and grief and that may partially explain why I've turned to the past (through memory) in order to understand the present. I am the product of multiple forces within and outside of my own reach, and to speak from this "particularity", I turn to the power of memory to piece together the diverse intersections between historical, communal, and familial ties that weave the complex tapestry of my own cultural identity.

If I think back to a significant feature of my childhood, I grew up to the rhythm of the family *ka' geh* (convenience store) and *shik dang* (restaurant). I was a latchkey kid raising my brother and sister. I learnt to be responsible at a very young age splitting my time at home and at the family business. My parents were never home before midnight, but they were hardly absent from our lives. Instead, our store was our "home". Family dinners were either spent in the backroom or in the restaurant. Strangers would come and go and there was always noise in the background. We somehow managed to have a routine in our lives though it was far from typical or average by all means. Yet, these are things I remember about my childhood and adolescence. In fact, a good part of my life had been spent in the family business and it is not surprising that the family business haunts my psyche like a ghost from the past. The kaleidoscope of strangers, of stock and inventory, and even the smell of grease and the feel of counting cash linger in my childhood memories. I'm at ease with these sensations because they remind me of "home". The familiarity of people coming and going weren't disruptions to our family gatherings; they were part of the backdrop to our way of life. We devised ways to share our meals together and somehow, we managed to keep our family together - safe, healthy, and happy.

Remembering my *past* is not so important as recollecting my *past-in-present* through narration and the activity of writing. There is permanence in writing, which may be the source of fear and trepidation for the novice writer and equal source of strength and power to come to "voice". After struggling for

some time to find the right words and to have confidence in them, this project offers glimpses into myself through an imagined community of women: *kyop'o* (overseas Korean) women filmmakers and women of colour artists and writers. They are the sources of inspiration that nourish my soul from the reservoir of life experience and upon which I draw on their courage to write about the personal. Now, it is my turn to write from the standpoint of experiential knowledge and acknowledge the confluence of ideas and multiplicity of voices that have shaped me.

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INTRODUCTION/

On the Cultural Politics of Independent Kyop'o Women's Cinema: Issues, Framework, and Theoretical Overview

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> *The first fruit of this imagination – and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it – is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. In many ways it is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent one.*
>
> - C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*

> *Like the dead-seeming cold rocks, I have memories within that come out of the material that wen to make me.*
>
> - Zora Neale Hurston, cited in *Kim-chee kismet*

C. Wright Mills once wrote about the power of the 'sociological imagination' to connect one's biography to the larger historical forces surrounding the individual. It was something that always resonated with me since I first encountered the concept during my undergraduate studies: the power to connect my own experiences to the forces of history and understand my relation to the social world. In doing so, I would be able to understand the often-invisible forces that shaped who I am, and to some extent, my life chances in the world.[1] And while he went so far as to distinguish between "the personal

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[1] Of course, this is not a one-way shaping where an agent is solely shaped by historical and social forces alone. Other factors such as free will and self-determination will influence a person's self-concept and quality of life.

troubles of milieu" and "the public issues of social structure", I would like to add another powerful ingredient to the mix. The power of memory, which includes remembering and forgetting the experiences we encounter in our everyday lives, and its intimate connection to images and emotions that are often 'wordless' yet socially and collectively meaningful. In many ways, these images and emotions are beyond the capacity of speech, yet within the representational reach of the allusive, the symbolic and the metaphoric that comprise our collective imagination. In these different realms, images and emotions may be triggered by

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However, at the level of the reproduction of social structures in individual and collective action, Pierre Bourdieu (1977) offers an interesting theory of power and practice. He argues that mechanisms of social domination and reproduction are primarily focused on bodily know-how and competent practices in the social world. That is, agents basically adapt practical know-how and skills based on objective social conditions they encounter in their daily lives.

Bourdieu criticized the primacy given to the economic factors in Marxist analyses, and stressed that the capacity of social actors to actively impose and engage their cultural productions and symbolic systems plays an essential role in the reproduction of social structures of domination. He argues that a *field* is a system of social positions structured internally in terms of power relationships. It is a social arena of struggle over the appropriation of certain species of capital - capital being whatever is taken as significant for social agents. Fields are organized both vertically and horizontally. *Habitus*, on the other hand, refers to a system of dispositions (lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action). The individual agent develops these dispositions in response to the objective conditions they encounter. In this way, Bourdieu theorizes the inculcation of objective social structures into the subjective, mental experience of agents. The objective social field places requirements on its participants for membership, so to speak, within the field.

For further discussion on Bourdieu's theory of practice, see Bourdieu, Pierre. (1977). [English trans.] *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

a lingering scent, a strange sensation, the lull of someone's voice, or an artifact or memento from the past.

When transposed onto independent film and video and other forms of cultural production that are largely autobiographical, the activity of recreating an image is based on the "memories" of the filmmaker/artist to represent the experiences of people living in diaspora or exile. At least, this is the case of 'intercultural cinema,' which Laura U. Marks discusses in *The Skin of the Film.*[2]

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[2] The concept of "intercultural cinema" requires some elaboration, especially in terms of its genealogy within cultural theory. In her definition, Marks includes both video and motion pictures. She notes that for many intercultural artists, the choice to work in video is both aesthetic and economic. And while some artists have crossed over to 35mm film production – including mainstream cinema (as in the case of Wayne Wang), there are significant differences between the media. Yet, she qualifies her terminology by noting how each are "time-based, audiovisual media that requires the experience of an *audience* gathered in a theater," which would fall under the rubric of cinema (Marks 2000: 6, emphasis mine).

"Intercultural", on the other hand, refers to diachronic movements between two (or more) cultures. It denotes a context in which a work is not the property of any single culture, but mediates in at least two directions. In the past, other terms have attempted to describe this type of cultural production and its sociopolitical context in cultural theory. These include: *"Third World," "minority," "marginal," "antiracist," "multicultural," "hybrid," "mestizo," "postcolonial," "transnational," "Third Cinema," "imperfect cinema," "hybrid cinema," "interstitial cinema,"* and so on. A partial list of sources in which some of these terms have been theorized includes: for *mestizo/mestisaje,* see Anzaldúa (1987); for *hybridity,* see Bhabha (1994); for *hybrid cinema,* see Fusco (1991, 1995); and for *interstitial mode of production,* see Naficy (1999).

What Marks argues for, in her conception of *intercultural cinema,* is the notion that cinema mediates between cultures and consequently, serves as a site of power, through which "hosts", "destinations", and "sites of power" are constantly sliding and its agents regrouping in different configurations. This would deflect the criticism that "intercultural cinema" connotes a politically neutral exchange between cultures. For further remarks on the contributions of

Serving as a *metaphor* to emphasize the way film and video signifies through its materiality, through a contact between perceiver and object represented, Marks traces the different ways "intercultural cinema appeals to embodied knowledge and memory in the absence of other resources...It stresses the *social* character of embodied experience: the body is a source not just of individual but of cultural memory" (Marks 2000: xiii). From the global flows of immigration, exile and diaspora, new ways of thinking, speaking, and seeing have emerged as well as representational languages and styles. Cinema theorists such as Kobena Mercer (1988), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989, 1991), and Hamid Naficy (1999) have noted this development of *alternative epistemologies* and *cinematic languages* that are apart of the power-inflected spaces of diaspora, (post- or neo-) colonialism, and cultural apartheid.

Based on Marks' observations, the history of intercultural cinema parallels broader Western intellectual developments of the past twenty or so years. Many of the artists she surveyed were exploring language and representation at a time when academia was seized by semiotic theory, psychoanalytic theory, and strong interest in feminist theory and queer theory. The turn to questions of racial and ethnic identity happened when funding in the arts reflected concerns over

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intercultural cinema to cultural theory, see Marks, Laura U. (2000). *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, especially pp. 5-10.

In the context of this project, the films and videos by *kyop'o* women filmmakers and artists qualify as "intercultural cinema" in their diachronic explorations between Korea and Canada/United States. And I treat their cinematic work as both "authorial texts" and "sites" for cultural struggle.

multiculturalism and in the direction of "representing the race" (Fusco in Marks 2000: 4). Yet far from being counter-productive, the turn to identity politics has been productive for artists, who often conclude that identity must be viewed as a *process* rather than a static or stable position.[3] Marks further observes that a

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[3] This requires some explanation, especially in connection to the formation of diasporic identities. Briefly, the word 'diaspora' comes from the Greek verb *speiro*, meaning 'to sow,' and the preposition *dia*, meaning 'over' (Cohen 1997: ix). In recent parlance in cultural theory, the term suggests 'networks of real or imagined relationships among scattered peoples whose sense of community is sustained by various communications and contacts, including kinship, trade, travel, shared culture, language, ritual, scripture, print, and electronic media' (Peters 1999: 20).

Through processes of globalization and cultural mixing (or syncretism), transformations occur in all of the social parts and not only in the diaspora group. According to James Clifford (1994), such processes involve trans-national and trans-ethnic mixing and consequently, social unities around nation-states become destabilized. While they are not innocent of nationalist aims, diasporas are not exclusively nationalistic (1994: 307). They exist in tension with the norms of the nation-states and with *nativist* identity formations. They are "dwellings-in-displacement" through which they live out a mediated tension between "the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place" (1994: 310-311).

For Hall and Gilroy, the concept of *diasporic identities and experiences* promote a less essentialized and more historically informed understanding of cultural identity formation. In this way, diaspora refers to a *social condition* (as opposed to a traditional *descriptive typology* to map the global movement of populations [see Cohen 1997]) that entails a particular form of 'consciousness' compatible with postmodernity and globalization (see Anthias 1998), or the development of new critical subjectivities (see Jordan and Weedon 1995).

According to Gilroy (1997): "Diaspora is a valuable idea because [it is]...an alternative to the metaphysics of "race," nation and bonded culture coded into the body" (p. 328), and puts emphasis on contingency, indeterminacy and conflict (p 334). Hall (1990), likewise, develops an approach to cultural identity and 'race' that avoids the pitfalls of essentialism and reductionism in his treatment of black cultural identity and representation. His approach focuses on 'positionings,' and tracing their "real, material and symbolic effects" (Hall 1990:

common motif in intercultural cinema is the sense of pain and frustration associated with feelings of cultural homelessness and abjection. At the same time, the frustrated search for identity has compelled a turn to history in order to

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226). He writes: "The diaspora experience as I intend it here, is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 1990: 235). Thus, for Hall, there are two kinds of identity: *identity-as-being* (which offers a sense of unity and commonality) and *identity-as-becoming* (or a process of identification, which shows the discontinuity in identity formation.) Hall uses the example of Caribbean identit*ies*, including his own, to explain how the first one is necessary, but the second one is truer to their postcolonial condition given the three historical presences – African, European, and American – in the Caribbean, which have left their "traces" in the Caribbean identity.

While Hall has been criticized for not adequately addressing the importance of inter-ethnic, class and gender difference in black subjectivity (see Anthias 1998, Shah 1996), the strength of his position focuses on the interplay between historicized and differentiated cultural identities and the centrality of racialization in shaping black subjectivities. For further remarks, see Stuart Hall (1990, 1996a, 1996b) and Paul Gilroy (1993, 1997) for their discussions on cultural identity and diasporic identities, especially black cultural identity and representation.

In the context of this project, the experience of war, colonization, and economic migration as well as racialization in the host country is central to shaping diasporic *kyop'o* subjectivities. Thus, their effort to revive, recreate, and invent artistic, linguistic, economic, religious, cultural and political practices and productions through transnational exchanges is a way to resist assimilation into the host country, and to avoid social amnesia about their collective histories. However, an offshoot of this debate on diaspora theory involves feminist critiques of the implicit power struggles within diasporic communities (see Agnew 2005, Braziel and Mannur 2003, Brah 1996, Chow 1993, Hua 2005, Lowe 1996) and the potential danger in homogenizing difference and multiplicity within the community. As Hua writes: "All diasporas are heterogeneous and contested spaces, differentiated along gender and class lines, generational difference, sexual orientation, language access, historical experiences, geographical location, and so on. Diaspora needs to be understood as embedded within a 'multi-axial understanding of power' (2005: 194).

produce and record individual and communal histories.

In line with Renee Tajima's observation of the early roots of Asian American cinema[4], much of the work in intercultural cinema is clearly *activist-oriented,* tracing the effects of racist and colonial representations on diasporic peoples across the globe. Yet, the work of 'historical excavation' is often a 'willful construction' of fragmented stories, dreams, and fantasies that are threaded together as part of the collective register of communal history (Marks 2000: 4). In other words, intercultural artists are in a position to interrogate the historical archive, both Western and traditional, through their 'double-consciousness' of cultural marginalization and homelessness in competing world contexts. In doing so, they've attempted to fill in the gaps with their own histories, or to force a gap in the archive so as to create a space in which to speak and for others to follow. Yet, this type of undertaking opens up old wounds and magnifies traumatic personal and family memories, only to create an empty space where no history is certain. This lack of certainty, or sense of suspension, forces the artist to contemplate this 'emptiness'. In some ways, the images they produce are narratively thin, but burst with emotion: they are the product of a process of mourning for loved ones outside of the artists' reach. These loved ones, so to speak, may be people, places or ways of inhabiting the world (Marks

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[4] See Tajima, Renee. (1991). "Moving the Image: Asian American Independent Filmmaking 1970-1990," in *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts.* Edited by Russell Leong. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center and Visual Communications, Southern California Asian American Studies Central, Inc., 10-33.

2000: 5). They are emblematic of a past that once was, something that preceded the traumatic dislocation of culture(s).

Through this process of mourning (which entails remembering what is lost), the individual-artist's experience becomes something that is collectively shared with spectators. The process involves holding on to an artifact of culture, including photographic images and mementos, in order to coax the memories from them. It is the attempt to translate to an audiovisual medium that which cannot be named, something that exceeds narrative, but can be understood through other forms of knowledge such as the 'memories of the senses' (Marks 2000: 5). Think of those moments when through sight, sound, smell, touch or taste, a memory (or image) comes to mind. For someone who has mourned the loss of a loved one, I can identify with those moments, especially in coaxing the memories of other peoples' stories and family photographs, and it is at this point my project begins. I attempt to open a space for my story and those of others, such as my parents' and my *kyop'o* sisters' that are usually left unheard or unspoken of in the historical archive.

My earliest childhood memories are literally images of my mother and father working in the corner store. In fact, most of my memories of them are associated with work. They were always busy doing something. Work determined the rhythm of their everyday lives, and of course, as the eldest child, I was not spared of that 'protestant ethic.' Everyone had to pitch in and we all had to succeed in our different endeavors. Even after my mother's death, which

happened so long ago, these memories continue to haunt me. They fuel my desire to write about things that seem so ephemeral – like memory, identity, and cinema. But, I would also argue these memories are deeply visceral. There is an intimate connection between what one remembers and perhaps, chooses to forget, and how it unfolds as a self-narrative or narrative shared with others.

My own story is deeply entwined with the experiences of my immigrant parents. Their experiences shaped my engagement in the social world. Their hard work taught me to excel, their hardship taught me to be critical, and their pain and sadness taught me to be angry. But, most important of all, their hope for a better future taught me to be compassionate and forgiving and committed to social change. As the eldest child, I was privy to partial glimpses of their world. These are the moments I hope to capture in my project: moments that bear confusion and pain in trying to build a new life and the inner strength and fortitude to do so for the next generation.

Unlike the traditional genre of personal memoir or autobiography, this project represents an effort to transcend the 'peculiarities' of my own biography and that of my parents to connect them to a series of investigations on cultural identity shaped by the forces of assimilation, immigration, and racialization in a multicultural landscape. It attempts to be *sociological* by exposing those deeply embedded forces that constrain our daily lives; forces that we often take for granted because they are left unarticulated or even misrecognized. While my parents could not do so in their adoptive tongue, I attempt to do so in this project

by turning to (personal) memory and experience. I reflect on snapshots of my past in order to tease out those deeply embedded forces.

In trying to make sense of it all, I recognize that words alone cannot describe the memories that connect back to my childhood experiences. I need images and emotions to render their expressive capacity. And perhaps, that is why I turn to film and video to make them more fulsome and robust. Through the perfect collusion of action, framing, music, gesture, pauses, dialogue, blocking, and the cut, the spectator is invited to what Toronto-based independent filmmaker Helen Lee calls "*the materiality of the moment*" (Shimizu and Lee 2004). This is where the imagination of the artist/filmmaker offers a space without the headiness of text or words (i.e. pure dialogue). It's something "ineffable" yet remains personal, grounded, and specific. It's that "moment of recognition when you see someone on screen, somebody who speaks to you through some kind of complicated image/identity system, and you in turn feel recognized, understood" (Shimizu and Lee 2004: 1391).

While for Lee that "moment of recognition" came at childhood when she saw Nancy Kwan in *The World of Suzie Wong*, it came much later for me - during my early 20s - when I watched a documentary on a Korean family based in Toronto.[5] Reflecting back on that "moment," the attraction and lure revolved around the intimate portrait of immigrant parents dealing with their Canadian-born/raised children. In many ways, the portrait reminded me of my own

[5] The 45-minute documentary by Sun Kyung Yi, *Scenes from a Corner Store*, will be discussed in Chapter Two.

struggles with my parents and made me more sensitive to their struggles and sacrifices in running a small business. Somehow, I was implicated in that viewing and it put into sharper focus emotional wounds that I tried to forget: the shame I felt in working in the corner store mixed with feelings of anger and guilt towards my parents for owning a corner store. Of course, this was further complicated by my desire to craft a voice that would, at times, replace the loss of my mother as well as shape my own identity.

In a roundabout way, the images I saw in the documentary compensated for this loss and encouraged me to unpack the 'headiness' of the relatively dense academic literature on memory and identity by way of a visceral, evocative, and grounded approach. The moving images fleshed out memories that were very often fragmentary and piecemeal. And they brought to life what was once dormant and stagnant. They definitely stirred something deep inside me. The stories I grew up with and the fragmentary memory-images I had of my mother brought to life reconstructions of her past. They revealed different facets of her personality and way of being. And based on those experiences, I made a connection between the magical power of memory and filmic/video images. Both share similarities in their ability to capture brief snapshots in time and space. And often, they are complicated by the temporal intrusion of the *past-in-present* and layered spatial compression of the real and the symbolic.[6]

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[6] On the issue of cultural memory, see Mieke Bal et. al. (1999), Nicola King (2000), Vijay Agnew (2005) and Anh Hua (2005).

The interdisciplinary approach of this project draws on diverse sources including Asian American cultural studies, film theory, literary studies, feminist theory, and postcolonial studies on race, (im)migration, multiculturalism and marginalization. My argument is especially informed by postmodern theories of the (*de-centered*) subject, embodied spectatorship, and experiential knowledge (i.e., *standpoint theory* and *autobiographical cultural criticism*), which have deep roots in feminist theory. Research on new critical subjectivities and the multiple axes of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality as well as diaspora theories on the shifting boundaries of the international, the national, and the transnational on cultural memory and the sense of belonging also inform my project. At one level, it feeds on the deep-seated desire to probe and interrogate my own position in the world, and to figure this out in relation to diachronic memories of my mother. However, at another level, it attempts to explore the various intersections, layers, and complexities of race, memory and identity within the realm of independent *kyop'o* women's cinema.[7]

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[7] According to the definition in the *Minjung* Korean-English dictionary, *kyop'o*, translates as "a Korean resident abroad" or "overseas Korean." Thus, it implies any person, born in Korea (or granted citizenship by birthright), and who resides in a foreign country, would fall under this definition. To a certain extent, Helen Lee's (1998) use of the term is correct in her reference to those filmmakers born in Korea and raised abroad. However, in the context of this project, I attempt to broaden this definition by including children born to Korean immigrants in foreign countries, such as Canada and the United States, and who share a symbolic connection to Korea based on their parents' birthright.

This would permit a broader understanding of the Korean diaspora, and problematize our understanding of cultural identity to include those 'hyphenated' or second-generation (or more) Koreans who are marked by their

My project aligns itself with an observation made by Helen Lee, in her essay on the nascent body of work by Korean American and Korean Canadian women filmmakers. In the essay, she notes the unique position of her fellow *kyop'o* peers: *the experience of leaving your birthplace when you are young enough to lose your mother tongue but old enough not to forget the loss* (Lee 1998: 292). This project attempts to give voice to that "collective" memory and experience. It will demonstrate the different nuances and particularity of Korean diasporic experiences in a multicultural landscape across generations and along racial and gendered lines of identification and disidentification.

Kyop'o women are in a unique position to critique the increasingly multiracial, multiethnic, and multiple landscapes that unify and challenge the collective identifications to a nation-state. Whereas theorists like Benedict Anderson (2006) have examined the creation and processes behind the global spread of 'imagined communities' of nationality, others have wrestled with the more nuanced and experiential/experimental modes of representation of cultural history and memory that convey a sense of "otherness."[8] Drawing from this rich body of scholarship on cultural otherness and marginalization, there is a sense of loss and remembering that is very compelling and peculiar to the cinematic practices of *kyop'o* women filmmakers residing in the United States and

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racial and ethnic difference outside of Korea, yet within a multicultural nation-state. Thus, the project restricts its focus to those *kyop'o* filmmakers who reside in Canada and the United States.

[8] For further discussion, see Stuart Hall (1990, 1996a, 1996b), Paul Gilroy (1993, 1997) and Avtar Brah (1996).

Canada. Each offers a unique perspective along the margins and borders of the multicultural nation-state whether it is a critique of the *model minority* myth, the U.S. occupation of Korea, the racialization of immigrant labour or the racialization and inscription of the Asian female body. However, I also contend they are *unified* in their understanding of the limits of the multicultural nation-state by probing in the "in-between" of the racialized structures of North American society and the gendered patriarchal structures of Korean society.

The historical backdrop to their cinematic and visual texts often involves diachronic memories, or references to different waves of Korean immigration to the United States and Canada. To a certain extent, these different flows of people over the past century and a half have shaped their 'collective' psyche to include stories about *'picture brides'* who migrated to Hawaii between 1903 and 1924 as migrant laborers in sugar plantations during the first wave of immigration to the United States. The second wave of immigration, which marked the end of the Korean War, consisted of the steady flow of War Brides and adopted children of U.S. military personnel. And finally, the third wave began with the Immigration Act of 1965, which removed "national origins" as the basis for American immigration policy.[9]

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[9] To understand the different waves of Korean immigration to the United States, it is important to trace the historical development of U.S. involvement in Korea, including political, military and cultural presence.

According to Korean sociologist, In-Jin Yoon (2006), early Korean immigration to the United States was greatly facilitated by American missionaries such as Dr. Horace Allen and Reverend George Jones, who played a crucial role in linking

Within the U.S. context, the history and experience of exclusion is unique for Korean immigrants, though similarly shared with other Asian-origin groups

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the demand for cheap labour in Hawaii and its supply in Korea. More than 400,000 immigrant labourers from 33 countries were recruited in this way since 1830 (Patterson cited in Yoon 2006).

During and after the Korean War (1950-1953), the presence of U.S. troops resulted in a sizable number of intermarriages between Korean women and American military servicemen. From 1950 to 2000, approximately 100,000 Korean women entered the United States as spouses of American GIs (Yuh cited in Yoon 2006). Between 1945 and 1965, nearly 6,000 Korean students entered the United States to seek higher education at colleges and universities. Many of them, however, settled in the United States after completing their studies, thus, laying the foundation for chain migration from their homeland (Yoon 2006: 14).

The third wave of immigration (post-1965) included a high proportion of university-educated, urban, middle-class immigrants with strong motivations for upward social and economic mobility. They were preferentially admitted to the United States until 1976 via occupational visa categories. As more Korean immigrants became naturalized, they began to sponsor their family members through the family reunification program. As family networks became increasingly important as an entry mechanism, occupational selectivity of Korean immigrants began to decline. The proportion of immigrants from lower- and working-class backgrounds began to increase during the late 1970s and 1980s. This trend made the Korean American community more diverse and heterogeneous in terms of occupation, socioeconomic status, and class positions in American society (Yoon 1997). Altogether, from 1948 to 2000, 866,414 Koreans immigrated to the United States.

As a result of immigration and the birth of second and later generations, the Korean American population increased from 10,000 in 1950 to 798,849 in 1990. And according to the most recent statistics of the 2000 U.S. Census, the Korean American population reached over 1 million (at 1,076,872), which is a 35% increase from the 1990 figure.

For further information on the immigration and settlement patterns of Koreans in the United States, please refer to Yoon, In-Jin. (2006). "Understanding the Korean Diaspora from Comparative Perspectives." In *Conference Proceedings for the Asia Culture Forum – Transformation and Prospect toward Multiethnic, Multiracial and Multicultural Society: Enhancing Intercultural Communication*. Gwangju City, South Korea: 1-21.

like the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos.[10] Scholars such as Ronald Takaki (1998) and Lisa Lowe (1996) have traced an "exclusionist" history of Asians in the United States. Key dates include the 1790 Naturalization Law, which aimed to protect the national citizenry and national culture from "foreign" and "racial" corruptions, followed by successive exclusions of the Chinese in 1882, Asian Indians in 1917, Koreans and Japanese in 1924, and Filipinos in 1934. Furthermore, the Alien Land Laws of 1913, 1920, and 1923 prohibited Asian immigrants from owning land and other forms of property through the legal construction of nonwhites as "aliens ineligible to citizenship."

In Canada, immigration laws followed a similar racial pattern as exemplified in the Canadian government's treatment of Chinese laborers. The transcontinental railway was built chiefly on the labour of 6,500 Chinese men specifically imported for this job, many of whom died in the process. When the railway was finished in 1885, Chinese labour was no longer needed, and between

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[10] Another unique feature is the history of colonization by Japan during 1910 and 1945, U.S. occupation of Korea after the Korean War (1950 - 1953), and the division between North and South Korea along the DMZ, or demilitarized zone. These historical facts, I argue, represent important "cultural memories" of war, occupation, and displacement that haunt the Korean diaspora, and are addressed in the video work of Yunah Hong and text by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.

Following Lisa Lowe's (1996) contention that Asian American cultural productions are countersites to U.S. national memory and national culture, I argue that Korean American cultural productions, as exemplified in the work of Yunah Hong (discussed in Chapter Three) and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (discussed in Chapter Four), serve to shift and mark alternatives to the national project. Both *kyop'o* women present alternative voices to the U.S. national project by 'remembering' the past (of Korean history) in and through the fragmentation, loss, and dispersal of Koreans in the United States due to war, colonization, and displacement.

1878 and 1899 the British Columbia legislature passed over twenty-six bills aimed at preventing or restricting the settlement of Asians (Mackey 2002: 33). During the Second World War, Japanese Canadians were also subject to the exclusionary policies of internment and were forced to forfeit their property.

Korean immigration to Canada shared similar patterns to the U.S. in that missionaries played a mediating role between Korea and Canada. They were critical in providing educational, medical, and social services to Koreans in the early 19th Century. During that time, Koreans were subject to poverty and oppression under intensifying Japanese colonial rule. As Yoon (2006) argues, Christianity gave comfort and hope among the alienated classes and women while many Korean elites were educated in private Christian schools. During the early 1900s, prospective "native" leaders were sent to Canada, where they would be educated in the Canadian system and then return to the mission field. However, between 1938 and 1945, no Korean students entered Canada. At the end of World War II, increasing numbers of Koreans entered Canada as missionary scholarship students. While most of the students moved to the United States to seek higher education, others returned to Korea after having completed their education and training. Prior to the 1960s, early Korean immigrants to Canada mainly consisted of church ministers, medical doctors, and scholars. This is in sharp contrast to the post-1965 immigrants who entered the country for permanent residence. Figures indicate that between 1970 and 1980, 18,148 Koreans immigrated to Canada while 17,483 joined the immigration

stream between 1981 and 1990. After the 1997 foreign currency crisis in Korea, immigration grew more rapidly, which resulted in an increase of 53,326 between 1991 and 2001.[11]

Based on this brief historical overview of Koreans in North America, and their history of exclusion, there's a sense that "Asian" consciousness only begins to eclipse American and Canadian consciousness in the context of white racism, and particularly as experienced in the diaspora. Thus, it is plausible to argue these *kyop'o* filmmakers are engaged in a line of critique that challenges the strong assimilationist or 'melting pot' ideology to "Americanize" the racial and ethnic cultures within its national boundary. Their interstitial position between a homeland given up and a new one forged - between a "back then" and a "here now" that make for tongue-tying experiences - hinge on the salient connection between (im)migration, memory, language and identity. This, I would argue, is the "third space" - or alternative space from which they engage in social critique.[12]

This project takes up Lee's observation and it attempts to explore their

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[11] For further information on the immigration and settlement patterns of Koreans in Canada, please refer to Yoon, In-Jin. (2006). "Understanding the Korean Diaspora from Comparative Perspectives." In *Conference Proceedings for the Asia Culture Forum - Transformation and Prospect toward Multiethnic, Multiracial and Multicultural Society: Enhancing Intercultural Communication*. Gwangju City, South Korea: 1-21.

[12] On the notion of the "third space" and its connection to a cultural politics of difference, see Bhabha, Homi K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge; Trinh, T. Minh-ha. 1991. *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. New York and London: Routledge.

different intersections as a form of cultural politics based on the textual and visual narratives of independent film/video. As cinematic forms of storytelling, I am interested in investigating the styles and techniques of narration in a range of documentary and experimental films/videos, and their implications in developing a potential site for contestation and an arena for pan-ethnic Asian American cultural criticism.[13]

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[13] On the notion of a pan-ethnic Asian American cultural criticism, my project attempts to situate the different voices of *kyop'o* women within the critical work of Asian American Studies. Accordingly, it addresses the common location of Asian Americans, as *racialized cultural others*, based on their history and experience of exclusion in the United States (and to a certain extent, Canada), and it draws on key theoretical debates that extend the white-black dichotomy in U.S. race relations. Seminal to the project is the understanding that processes of racialization constitute immigrant subjectivities, and that such processes mediate between the "shifting construction of racial meanings formed in the dialectic between state categorization and social challenges to those categorizations" (Lowe, 1996: 21). Following Lisa Lowe (1996), I agree that the 'racial formation' of Asian Americans is predicated on the material contradictions of the national economy and the political state. Thus, immigration serves to provide a racially segmented and stratified labour force for capital's needs, while the articulations of racialized class struggle are mediated in the site of culture/cultural production. This is clearly the case in the early immigration patterns of Asians to North America.

In Chapter One, "Coming to Voice: Personal Reflections on Race, Memory and Identity," I trace the different debates in constructing a pan-ethnic Asian American identity/cultural criticism, especially as they are connected to the development and construction of Asian American literature and literary theory. Key figures include Frank Chin and the *Aiiieeee!* Writing Collective (1973), Elaine H. Kim (1982), and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (1993).

In Canada, however, the notion of a "pan-Asian Canadian" identity is relatively young due in part to the predominance of Asian American discourse in North America. Some scholars, such as Helena Grice (2002) have observed that the "U.S.-centric emphasis upon America and Americanization" is reflected in the proliferation of literary and autobiographical texts which have emerged since 1965, and in the institutionalization of Asian American Studies programmes in

How are their stories informed by a shared sense of pan-ethnic Asian American history, while equally informed by intra-ethnic concerns that dovetail between cultural nationalism and feminism? How do their cultural productions reflect a diasporic sensibility imbricated by race and gender? What representational strategies are deployed, and finally, what do they signify in terms of a new pan-Asian American visual culture? These are important questions in my understanding of the cultural politics of independent *kyop'o* women's cinema. Against the hegemonic grain of mainstream Hollywood films, and even within the margins of independent Asian American filmmaking, the voices of *kyop'o* women filmmakers are being heard a generation later and they are unique unto themselves in matters of form, content, and sensibility.

In her analysis of Asian American independent filmmaking, Renee Tajima (1991) notes two major stages of development. The first stage embodied the spirit and energy of the Asian American political movement that drew force and inspiration from the Civil Rights and ethnic studies movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. In its nascent stage of development, independent filmmaking was firmly grounded in capturing community life and giving voice to its people through documentaries. The second stage, throughout the 1980s, concentrated on institutionalization, pragmatism, and skills attainment to cater to a mass

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universities across the United States that grew out of the Civil Rights and new social movements during the 1960s. With the recent body of scholarship, Asian Canadianists have begun to problematize this U.S.-centric focus as reflected in the work of Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht (2004), Marie Lo (2001) and Guy Beauregard (2000).

audience. The tenor of the work, according to Tajima, was determined in large part by the marketplace of public television and a gradual shift from realist documentaries towards dramatic (narrative) production.[14]

Helen Lee further corroborates this historical backdrop in her analysis of *kyop'o* cinematic/video cultural productions by noting the predominance of Chinese American and Japanese American documentary media work that preceded the nascent cinematic projects of *kyop'o* women filmmakers and video artists throughout the 1990s. According to her estimation, the "efflorescence of media work" by *kyop'o* women may be the result of children of post-1965 Korean immigrants to the United States being formally trained and educated in film/art schools after a period of significant Korean immigration to the United States. This critical mass is one of the key influences in Korean American cultural production.[15]

As relatively recent immigrants to the United States, racial, ethnic, class, and gender identifications shape the stories that spill over into their immigrant subjectivities. The fact that their stories are couched within and complicated by the deep layers of competing Asian American discourses and larger mainstream

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[14] See Tajima, Renee. (1991). "Moving the Image: Asian American Independent Filmmaking 1970-1990," in *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts.* Edited by Russell Leong. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center and Visual Communications, Southern California Asian American Studies Central, Inc., 10-33.

[15] See Lee, Helen. (1998). "A Peculiar Sensation: A Personal Genealogy of Korean American Women's Cinema," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism.* Edited by Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi. Routledge: New York and London: Routledge, 291-322.

discourses on race, sexuality and class in America warrants an investigation on the diverse range of *kyop'o* experiences in a multicultural, though racially stratified America.

In exploring the cultural politics of independent *kyop'o* women's cinema, I'm operating with several key assumptions. First, cultural difference matters between groups and individuals, and race, gender, and class further compound it. In so far as the legitimation of social relations of inequality, and the struggle to transform them is central to cultural politics, my project presumes that any cultural politics fundamentally determine the meanings of social practices and which groups and individuals have the power to define these meanings. Second, the implications of "engaged" expressive forms such as independent film and video as a realm of cultural politics further suggest that they are also concerned with subjectivity and identity, since culture plays a central role in constituting our sense of ourselves.

The issue of "identity" is of course much debated and my project touches on key debates involving women of colour, diversity, difference and multiculturalism. In line with the seminal work by diverse feminists such as Himani Bannerji (2000), Leslie Bow (2001), bell hooks (1989, 1996, 1999), and Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989, 1991) on intersectionality, my project underscores the fundamental precept that "difference" as it is mediated by race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality (to name a few signifiers of difference) serves to create preconditions for *oppositional politics*. In short, personal identity translates

into a "named agency" that is distinctly political and socially grounded. Yet, the collective basis for the identification is based on the "common context of relations of inequality" that marks the entry of women of colour in the U.S. labour force, as opposed to mere colour and racial identification. In short, "identity" is conceptualized as relational and grounded in the historically produced social facts that constitute a social location. As a result, the "personal" becomes "political" when the site of painful material effects of living in a particular social location are exposed and challenged, and brought together in forging an oppositional or coalitional identity imbued by the process of "becoming" rather than "being born" as a woman of colour.[16] Like Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon (1995), I believe cultural struggles often reflect and produce deep emotional feelings that are necessarily connected to subjectivity. The forms of subjectivity that we inhabit play a crucial part in determining whether we accept or contest existing power relations. Moreover, for marginalized and oppressed groups, the construction of new and resistant identities is a key dimension of a wider political struggle to transform society.[17]

This also begs the question of how cultural difference and identity translates into the arena of cultural production, and more specifically *Asian American women's writing*, which has recently moved into the cultural spotlight

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[16] See Bannerji, Himani. (2000). *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, Inc.

[17] See Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon (1995). *Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World.* Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.

and shares some common ground with independent film and video production by women.[18] Helena Grice (2002), in her introduction to Asian American women's writing, notes the parallels between the development and critical treatment of *women's writing* in the last twenty years as a "separate locus of interest and attention in literary and critical analysis" and that of *Asian American women's writing*. Quoting Rita Felski (1989), she writes:

> The emergence of a second wave of feminism in the late 1960s justifies the analysis of women's literature as a separate category, not because of automatic and unambiguous differences between the writings of women and men, but because of the recent cultural phenomenon of women's explicit self-identification as an oppressed group, which is in turn articulated in literary texts in the exploration of gender-specific concerns centered around the problem of female identity (Felski in Grice 2002: 15).

Whereas gender is identified as the main source of oppression in women's writing, Asian American women's writing tends to focus on the interlocking grid of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Like their African American sisters and other 'women of colour' writers, both the writing of Asian American women and

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[18] To locate *Asian American cultural production* within a socio-historical context, critics like Sau-ling Wong and Jeffrey Santa-Ana have observed the flourishing of cultural activity and criticism in diverse fields such as Asian American literature, theatre, film, video, photography and other visual art, as well as popular culture, performance art, fashion, cosmetic surgery and activism. To this extent, they argue it would be impossible to view Asian American literature as a separate – indeed separable – entity from other cultural trends. They must be viewed as interconnected as opposed to disconnected fields of study. See Sau-ling Cynthia Wong and Jeffrey Santa Ana. (1999). "Gender and Sexuality in Asian American Literature," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Vol. 25, No. 1: 171-226.

This would support my use of literary criticism and textual methods to analyze film and video produced by *kyop'o* women in relation to the field of Asian American Studies.

their experiential realities are often marginalized in canonical critical discourses and wider cultural locations.[19] The recognition of this, and the self-identification as marginalized, throws Asian American women's textual negotiations of identity together in what Sau-ling Wong (1993) has termed 'a textual coalition'.[20]

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[19] This line of critique shares many affinities with the body of scholarship produced by 'women of colour' literary theorists and cultural critics, who have challenged the double bind of racism and sexism by turning to the study of life histories, oral tradition, and/or autobiographical writing as a way to reconceptualize the complexities of women's lives. In particular, African American theorists and writers such as Audre Lorde (1984), bell hooks (1989, 1996, 1999), Barbara Christian (1990, 1993), and Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis and Michéle Foster (1996) have challenged the exclusionary practice and bias of the white, (fe)male canon of literary theory and literature in their different interventions on the politics of "naming", "black representation", and "reclaiming the lives, voices, and stories" of African American women.

Other examples are found in anthologies of writing that have grouped 'women of colour' together to offer a broad cross-section of women's experiences and lives. See Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga (1981) and Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis and Michéle Foster (1996).

On how the notion of the 'double bind' applies to Asian American women's writing, see Sau-ling Wong (1992) and Amy Ling (1991). Further general remarks on the gender bias in the literary canon are found in Charlotte Templin (1994).

[20] Asian American literary critic Sau-ling Wong (1993) discusses this issue within the framework of 'intertexuality' and 'context' of Asian American literature, and how this framework serves as a 'critical reading strategy' to circumvent the risk of *misreading, appropriation, and/or co-optation* by white readers and critics. Whereas the former refers to the myriad ways in which texts "build upon, allude to, refine, controvert, and resonate with each other," the latter stresses "the indispensability of historical knowledge to any responsible reading of the corpus" (1993: 10).

On canonicity in Asian American literature, see Ling, Amy. (1991). '"Emerging Canons" of Asian American Literature and Art," In *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives.* (Eds.) Shirley Hune et al. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press. 191-198.

And while this is useful in establishing common ground for Asian American (women) writers, one consequence is to have an exclusive focus on the most significant - and prominent - texts and writers. Indeed, for critics, like Werner Sollors, this is necessary in order to "identify a core of women's and ethnic literatures" and the areas in which they overlap with each other and the dominant literatures as well as their boundaries and interactions (Sollors 1996: 3).

Some of the key features of this writing are the urgent negotiation and re-negotiation of gendered, racialized, ethnicized and nationalized identity. And in doing so, they serve as critical interventions in dominant discourses of identity and identity formation. As Grice (2002) notes, the unique features of this writing often involve the dissolution of the writer/theorist binary; revision of traditional genres, such as the *bildungsroman*, romance narrative, or science fiction that challenge patriarchal discursive codes; and recurrence of particular thematic concerns, many of which overlap with the themes of women's writing - or sometimes ethnic writing - generally. Most prominent are the following thematic concerns: a preoccupation with issues of identity, such as self-identity or woman-to-woman identifications (like the mother-daughter dyad); an objection to limitations placed upon women by patriarchal forces; a focus upon the family; a search for viable female role models; a questioning of white male values and definitions of beauty and attractiveness (with an accompanying desire to reject the objectification of women); a sensitivity to the effects of

violence against women and other trauma (such as sexual abuse); a wariness of hetero-normative approaches to sexuality; an insistence upon the importance of self-definition; an insistence upon the primacy of gossip as a valid 'genderlect'; a recognition of the phallocentricity of history and other mainstream versions of the past; a suspicion of the state as a regulatory force in women's lives; and an unease with the silencing of women's voices (Grice 2002: 16).

Many of these themes resonate throughout my project, but I attempt to engage them both as a scholar and layperson who has experienced the wounds of childhood loss; and as someone who has a deep personal investment in exploring and writing about the past so as to not forget. That might explain why I have titled the project, *Race, Memory and Identity,* so as to think through these major tropes in relation to my life and those closest to me. I've taken to the heart the importance of theorizing from the standpoint of the "I", and have been deeply influenced by those writers who remain steadfast in their commitment to write and theorize "in forms different from the Western form of abstract logic."[21]

Barbara Christian's essay on "The Race for Theory" addresses this issue in reference to the "theory" debates in literary criticism, and how the "philosophers" of the 'new *New Criticism*' - or "neutral humanists of the old literary elite" - have transformed literature into something that is "pallid, laden with despair, self-indulgent, and disconnected" and hegemonic (Christian 1990:

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[21] See Christian, Barbara. (1990). "The Race for Theory" in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse.* (Eds.) Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 37-49, p. 38.

37). She argues that the new takeover is part of the academy's treatment of theory as a 'commodity' that determines hiring or promotions into academic institutions, and consequently, has recast literary "works" into "texts" that strip literature of its sensual elements of originality, creativity, passion, insight and beauty. Ironically, the "*critic-writer*" of yesteryear has been taken over by a new cadre of professionals called "*academics*", whose primary goal is to create a theory only to be replaced by another one as the "race for theory" accelerates.

The general thrust of Christian's argument is the dual understanding of the expression, "*race for theory*". While in one sense she discusses the escalation and recent fixation on theory (and a particular way of theorizing that is acceptable by the Western literary elite/canon), she poignantly notes the flipside meaning of her title by highlighting the alternative way of "theorizing" in contemporary African American women's literature exemplified by writers such as June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. It is a type of theorizing that is narrative in form, and deeply embedded in the everyday lay structures of *stories, riddles,* and *proverbs*: language-structures that are playful and dynamic rather than reified by violent abstraction (Christian 1990: 39). Against the grain of academic hegemony, she argues for a literary canon (and style of theorizing) that is open to embrace "the folk who speak in muted tones...people of colour, feminists, radical critics, creative writers, who have struggled for much longer than a decade to make their voices, their various voices, heard, and for whom literature is not an occasion for discourse among critics but is necessary

nourishment for their people and one way by which they come to understand their lives better" (Christian 1990: 39). She concludes her essay by asking a rhetorical question: "for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism?" Her response is quite striking and worth repeating in full:

> The answer to that question determines what orientation we take in our work, the language we use, the purposes for which it is intended. I can only speak for myself. But what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally. For me literature is a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating, that whatever I feel/know *is*. It is an affirmation that sensuality is intelligence, that sensual language is language that makes sense...My concern, then, is a passionate one, for the literature of people who are not in power has always been in danger of extinction or of cooptation, not because we do not theorize, but because what we can even imagine, far less who we can reach, is constantly limited by societal structures. For me, literary criticism is promotion as well as understanding, a response to the writer to whom there is often no response, to folk who need the writing as much as they need anything (Christian 1990: 47-48).

Christian's desire to reclaim the 'sensual intelligence' of literature is really a battle cry for minority literature to continue and survive from one generation to the next, and to encourage readers/critics on the path of discovery that comes from reading something that compels the individual to read differently. And in many ways, I've embraced her battle cry by writing about *kyop'o* women filmmakers who are definitely not in the mainstream, let alone academic canon. Now the question that comes up is: "What is so important about *kyop'o* women's cinema? And why is it even relevant?" I can only speak for myself. Their stories touch me in ways that are deeply personal and visceral: they allow me to identify with things from my past, such as the accented speech that I heard my parents

speak, and especially, the musicality of *Hangul* of my mother's intonation and inflection. In particular, what I remember vividly is the mix between Korean and English I heard as a child, and the different types of English spoken in different social spaces: at home, at school, and elsewhere. I also remember feeling conflicted when I corrected my parents' speech or helped them interpret 'official' documents. But these are the experiences that are apart of me, and they have shaped how I view the films and videos by *kyop'o* women, especially the documentary work of Sun-Kyung Yi and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson[22] in their nuanced attention to spoken language and how it is filmed in relation to the speaking Korean female subject(s).

The films and videos by *kyop'o* women also offer insight into a "history" that I really never knew first-hand; yet, they connect me to a place that I could only imagine through the stories of my childhood and that of my parents. Their cinematic stories are worth listening to, because they have not been heard before. And each one is different from the next, which only demonstrates the richness and complexity of our everyday lives and the multiplicity of experiences. Neither story is authoritative; rather, each one explores different aspects of the diasporic experience and seeks to enrich the stockpile of cultural knowledge as a source of empowerment. Telling one's story affirms our sense of being, and

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[22] For Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, see *Sa-I-Gu: From Korean Women's Perspectives.* Christine Choy, Elaine Kim and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, 1993, 36 mins., video. NAATA: 326 Ninth Street, Second Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103.

knowledge of (one's) history is that pathway to enlightenment and open-mindedness.

In writing this project about independent *kyop'o* women's cinema, I've recovered (and even discovered) different aspects of myself by identifying with these different and not-so-mainstream images. And incidentally, seeing images that were largely absent from the mainstream or represented in a different light only reaffirms the need to challenge its single-mindedness and paucity of alternatives. It is my hope that this project will begin a conversation and draw attention to this emerging body of work, and encourage readers-spectators "to listen carefully with their eyes and see with their ears" in the words of Trinh T. Minh-ha at 2007 film screening in Ottawa, Canada.[23]

My sociological reading of the films and videos by *kyop'o* women is informed by a strong desire to expose relations of inequality that often are naturalized as part of the *immigrant experience.* Despite the lure and cachet of liberalism and multiculturalism, processes of cultural assimilation and acculturation are predicated on the logic of social division and racial hierarchy. The tacit assumption in each is that one group is subordinated to another since it must subscribe to the beliefs, norms, and values to gain social approval or acceptance.

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[23] Gala Presentation of *Night Passage* (dir. Trinh T. Minh-ha). *Art Star 3 Video Art Biennial.* SAW Gallery in collaboration with the National Gallery of Canada. October 4-14, 2007. Ottawa, Canada.

On many different levels, my project touches on these issues from the standpoint of *kyop'o* women, who are interested in exploring their location and position. But, they do so in creative ways that incorporate their "particularity" around language, memory, and the body. They speak from the standpoint of "I" yet, they invite each other (including the spectator) to a collective "We" that challenges the relations of inequality that constitute our social locations, and cut across different communities of colour. As the eldest daughter of Korean immigrants, I identify with the strong undercurrents of pain, disorientation, and glaring self-introspection of their work. If there is something that unifies their work, it is the subtle undercurrent of self-formation or 'sense-making' of that self that is both exhilarating and terrifying. I attempt to draw this out with key moments or recollections of my own past to engage the theoretical literature *via* vignettes of my own childhood memories. This affords a creative opportunity to understand some of the key issues that mark the traditional approach to immigrant identity formation, and how audio-visual media transcends some of the limitations of this body of research.

The structure of the project reflects this diversity in *kyop'o* voices and standpoints. It consists of four essays interspersed with the personal vignettes of childhood memories that are thematically connected, but by themselves, can be read as independent essays on the cultural politics of select films and videos by Korean American and Korean Canadian women filmmakers released in the 1990s, and artwork by conceptual artist, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, during the

1970s. They explore, in a variety of ways, a number of broad questions regarding race, memory, and cultural identity in the context of Asian American feminist politics.

Taken together, these essays and memory-vignettes attempt to contest, criticize, and complicate some prevalent understandings of notions such as "culture," "tradition," and "national identity" by pointing to the problematic assumptions they embody, and by emphasizing their importance to critical Asian American feminist perspectives.

The first chapter, *"Coming to Voice: Personal Reflections on Race, Memory & Identity"* serves to situate my research project in relation to the growing body of literature on Asian American cultural production, memory, and identity. Influenced by diverse writers such as Barbara Christian, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, Elaine H. Kim, and Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés, who have discussed or practiced autobiographical writing/autobiographical cultural criticism, I highlight key moments in my life as an aspiring scholar and in spheres outside of the academy to engage the theoretical literature. I weave these different moments as part of a larger critical enterprise to trace the gradual development in consciousness-raising around issues of race, memory and identity as they have touched my life.

The second chapter, *"Between Two Worlds: Exploratory Notes on Second-Generation Korean Canadians,"* examines a documentary by Toronto-based filmmaker, Sun-Kyung Yi, entitled, *Scenes from a Corner Store.* The film offers an

intimate portrait of the intergenerational struggles between immigrant parents and second-generation children, and serves as a straightforward representation of the 'immigrant experience' and two bounded cultures: *Korean* and *Canadian*. Moving through the cultural landscape of two generations of Korean Canadians, I explore the interpretive dynamics of second-generation Korean Canadians coming to terms with their cultural identities. In particular, I address the connection between the 'model minority' myth and 'immigrant stories,' and their impact on the construction of the Korean Canadian identity for second-generation children of immigrants. Next, I explore the changing conceptions of love across generations and the influence of ethnicity on shaping cultural boundaries within interracial relationships. I conclude my analysis with the multivalent and complex positioning of second-generation Korean Canadian women.

The third chapter, "*Liminal Borders, Ambivalent Boundaries: Transgression and Transformation in Kyop'o Women's Cinema*," examines the critical role of independent *kyop'o* women's cinema in developing new images of Korean Americans in the U.S. multicultural imagination and their implications for Asian American cultural politics. The chapter surveys several films and videos directed by *kyop'o* women that present a complex introspection of one's location and position in a heterogeneous world of cultural difference, and the contingent differences within the term, *Korean American*. It focuses on the circumscribed territories of 'male privilege' within a neo-Confucian, anti-colonialist and anti-

nationalistic context, and from *outside* and *within* the white-dominant cultural context. In short, two preoccupations shape this chapter. First, I examine the contradictions and tensions in occupying multiple interstitial positions defined by the historical legacy of colonialism, American cultural hegemony, and patriarchal sexual relationships. And second, I attempt to point to their transformative potential in the connection between language, memory and subjectivity.

The fourth chapter, "*Intercultural Visuality: Image and Memory in the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha,*" addresses the critical importance of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha on the politics of intercultural representation. Here, I argue that Cha's artwork functions as theoretical meditations on language, memory and identity. In her art practice, including video work, performances, and publication of a book, Cha pushes to the forefront her symbolic connections to a Korean past that entwine with the real struggles of immigration and cultural assimilation to the United States as mediated by language. Thus, contrary to the facile image of cultures coalescing together in harmony in the rhetoric and myth of liberal pluralism, Cha exposes the friction of their co-mingling within the site and arena of language.

The project concludes with my own observations on cultural identity, and the importance of returning to the standpoint of the "I" in relation to a community of the "We." Both, I argue, are integral to the journey to voice that I have shared with other women of the Korean diaspora.

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INTERLUDE/

Vignette: That night

> *'The mission of man on earth is to remember'. To re-member. To put back together. To re-attach a lost member.*
>
> - Henry Miller, cited in *Unreliable Truth*

That night

I read her story last night. She gently tapped my shoulder and asked me to read something that she wrote for her Women's Studies class. I was excited and totally unprepared for what unfolded that night.

The story was about You. It described how You and your sister survived many different hardships: poverty during the Korean War, immigrating to a foreign country and building a new life with the hope of prosperity for the next generation. Your life in Canada was not easy but it seemed life in Korea was also not very easy with a traditional father who couldn't afford to educate his daughters. Two difficult choices: stay in the shackles of tradition or go elsewhere and forge a new life. It seems your adopted home was your final resting place. I'm sorry You never had the chance to visit your family.

She misses You very much and we both share this great sense of loss. All that is left of You are memories, which are slowly fading away with Time, and a handful of photographs that I've desperately tracked down from different family members.

Every time I visit her, I want to hear her stories. I relish in them. They take me away to another place and time. However, this time, she chose to write about You. It's different reading her words; in her own handwriting. I can tell by the careful hand-strokes that she spent a lot of time and effort to write about her pain in her adopted tongue. She told me she was shy to share this piece with me for fear of embarrassment. Her English is not very good, she says, but I reassure her that her writing touches me. It did. I can only imagine the late nights she spent alone in her room writing: writing in another language and constantly feeling uneasy and unsure with every word-choice. She's very brave and I'm so proud of her. There's a wellspring of emotion that night. We both cried thinking about You. So many years later, we still feel the pain of losing You. I still have flashbacks of the August heat and the day You passed away and the grieving faces of relatives I never really knew at the funeral. I didn't cry that day; I felt numb. A part of me died that day.

She told me to be strong and to write about You. She told me to have confidence in my words and to write in order to remember. If not for myself, for her and for You. My writing represents an effort to re-member You and to fight against Time stealing those memories of You.

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ONE/

Coming to Voice: Autobiographical Reflections on Race, Memory & Identity

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And of course I am afraid because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger. But my daughter, when I told her of our topic and my difficulty with it, said, 'Tell them about how you're never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there's always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken about, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder, and hotter and hotter, and if you don't speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside.'

In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live.

- Audre Lorde, *'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action'*

When words call, to answer, to satisfy the urge, I must come again and again to a solitary place – a place where I am utterly alone. In that moment of grace when the words come, when I surrender to their ecstatic power, there is no witness. Only I see, feel, and know how my mind and spirit are carried away. Only I know how the writing process alchemically alters me, leaving me transformed...Written words change us all and make us more than we could ever be without them.

- bell hooks, *Remembered Rapture*

Yunah Hong, a Korean American filmmaker, once said that every memory begins with a journey. In her video-piece, *Through the Milky Way*, she opens with this statement and describes the experiences of Korean immigrants to Hawaii in the early 20th century. The story is told from the point of view of Korean

immigrant women and their range of experiences as newly arrived *picture brides*: daily struggles associated with acculturation, menial labour, racialization, and the longing for home. While Hong's video-piece attempts to connect memory with the physical movement across geographies and the longing to return to a place in the past, the concept of journey has another layer of meaning. For those of us nurtured in oral traditions—hearing the folklore and stories of the past and wanting to participate in the storytelling, it's a movement within oneself marked by discoveries, introspection, and coming to voice: from silence through pain (and frustration) to speaking out. The journey to voice is also about the struggles associated with *enunciation* and the conditions of *articulation* - from silence to speech - in the gradual movement of the physicality of an utterance to the poetics of language, and finally, the cultural politics of voice. It's about the power and beauty of language in uniting us and dividing us. And it's about being implicated in language because we find meaning in narrative and we are largely driven by it.[24]

The two epigraphs serve as counterpoints in our relationship to language and the experience of silence that women face in our daily lives. Very often, when we speak of silence, we are referring to social and cultural pressures that undermine our confidence and make us hesitant about speaking. Conversely, it is only through speech and written language that we are able to make our presence known, which is a remarkable transformation in subjectivity. We are

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[24] See Rosenwald, George C. and Richard L. Ochberg (Eds). 1992. *Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

no longer invisible. But is the issue really that simple? Does speaking always assert an identity and silence a non-identity? Silence is not always a matter of gender; it is complicated by language, gender, and other differences. For example, women of colour writers have described their frustrations and experiences of silence: feeling uneasy in coming out or addressing their sexuality in a more open-fashion (as exemplified in the writings of Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde); being denied access to male-dominated places/spaces (such as the gentlemen's club); or being subject to trauma and forced to secrecy (such as sexual abuse or other forms of personal violence). Differences in race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality also play their part, and very often, they are interrelated.

When I reflect on my own subject position, silence is a part of me – it is something that I experienced by being subject to it, but I've also used it consciously to signal my disapproval or as a tactic in negotiation. It is a form of agency. Silence asserts my opinion as opposed to (always) being absent of one. It is far more complex and persuasive since, as Trinh T. Minh-ha writes,

> Silence as a refusal to partake in the story does sometimes provide us with a means to gain a hearing. It is voice, a mode of uttering, and a response in its own right. Without other silences, however, my silence goes unheard, unnoticed; it is simply one voice less, or more point given to the silencers (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1989: 83).

When used *strategically*, silence is powerful. It does not always signal weakness or powerlessness; it is a form of voice. Because it is relational and context-bound, we need to know who uses it, where and in what ways in order to minimize the

risk of abstraction and reification. It's tempting to associate it with (Asian) femininity or cultural marginalization, something to group people together. But in reality, silence is far more rich and complex. Like the norms of speech vary across situations and cultures, silence operates in various ways across social and cultural differences.

Silence and speech are intertwined in language. They move in and out of language, leaving gaps and pauses in between that further punctuate speech. Both are fragile, yet overwhelming if not in check. There is an amplifying effect: too much speech drowns you in silence (relegated to nonsensical speech and idle chatter or noise that fills the air) while too much silence drowns you in oblivion. You are seen but not heard.

> *When words call, to answer, to satisfy the urge, I must come again and again to a solitary place – a place where I am utterly alone. In that moment of grace when the words come, when I surrender to their ecstatic power, there is no witness. Only I see, feel, and know how my mind and spirit are carried away. Only I know how the writing process alchemically alters me, leaving me transformed...Written words change us all and make us more than we could ever be without them.*
>
> - bell hooks, *Remembered Rapture*

Feminist literary theorists and critics such as Rita Felski, Mary Eagleton, Linda Anderson, Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn have noted the rich body of contemporary women's writing that has flourished over the last forty years. And they have also observed its symbiotic relationship with autobiography, which as

Anderson remarks, is 'the shadow and locus for its evolving debates about the subject' (Anderson 2006: 119).[25] As they argue, autobiographical writing has played a crucial role in feminism's development as a 'privileged space' for women to discover new forms of subjectivity. Anderson, for instance, traces the complex trajectory of feminist theorizations of this autobiographical space, from a field of feminine difference (as exemplified in the writings of Hélène Cixous, or what she calls *'l'écriture féminine'*) through *testimonios* (testimonials) to Carolyn Steedman's conception of autobiographical memories as "interpretive devices," or ways of interrogating the "truth of theory," rather than as personal confessions. In her overview of the genre, autobiography has served to interrogate feminism from within by opening up questions of identity, difference, and the role of the reader of autobiography.

Like Steedman (1986) and Hua (2005), I agree that memory allows reflection on a social configuration without reifying or generalizing the self. Thus, autobiographical writing puts into practice a notion of the self as a "point of view," which can allow new insight into "the construction of particular conjunctural social moments (Probyn 1993: 99)." This notion of "point of view"

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[25] See Felski, Rita. (1989). *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (especially pp.86-153); Anderson, Linda. (2006). "Autobiography and the feminist subject." In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*. (Ed) Ellen Rooney. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. pp.119-135; Eagleton, Mary (Ed). 1996a. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Eagleton, Mary. 1996b. *Working with Feminist Criticism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Greene, Gayle and Coppélia Kahn (Eds). *Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism*. London and New York: Routledge.

suggests that images and memories within the autobiography relate to material situations and objects but they are also inflected through systems of discourse and imbued with the feelings of real people. That is, they serve as a bridge, or "historical structure of feeling."[26] This is clearly the case in the writings of bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, and Cherríe Moraga - women of colour writers, who have deeply influenced me to write from my "point of view."[27]

My own journey has been marked by a series of migrations across the globe, different rites of passage from daughter, graduate student, wife, to feminist scholar, and finally, starts and stops along with side trips (or detours) to only find myself back where I began: a keen interest in voice, narrative, and identity. Even though the journey hasn't been straightforward or clear-cut, I still find myself drawn to its path. In part, this journey (or coming to voice) is very much about self-expression and finding creative ways to articulate our different standpoints but also, understanding that we are not alone in the search (which, incidentally is very reassuring). I've been fortunate enough to nourish my soul and intellectual pursuits among a community of scholars who are sensitive to the different intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and class (to name a few

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[26] On this notion of the "point of view", see Probyn, Elspeth. 1993. *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies.* London and New York: Routledge.

[27] For an excellent anthology of critical writing by women of colour literary theorists, see Stanley, Sandra Kumamoto (Ed). 1998. *Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Color.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. For a survey of essays on postcolonial literary theory, see Singh, Amritjit and Peter Schmidt (Eds). 2000. *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature.* Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi.

markers) and who are equally committed to breaking the yoke of institutional racism, sexism and classism in society.

Unsure of the final destination, I do have signposts to guide my journey by way of the different scholarly writings I've encountered during my research and academic training, and a strong commitment to blend (and perhaps, juxtapose) the different voices I've crafted as a second-generation Asian/Korean Canadian woman from a working-class background with academic aspirations. In many ways, a mélange of voices that cut across the personal markers of my "difference" and the one the academy lauds as acceptable (i.e. theoretical, analytical, neutral, and objective) have shaped who I am, how I think, and what I deem important in my scholarly pursuits. And like all journeys, we need time for respite. We need to rest in order to restore ourselves and sometimes, we need to backtrack in order to move ahead. This is one of those times when I can look back to get a sense of the big picture of how this *blending of voices* came about, and ultimately, to acknowledge the strong influences on my intellectual development, and the different writers and theorists who have shaped the ideas and overall approach in this project. If there is one fundamental thing I've learnt from this journey, and Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés puts it well, "life, like narrative, is not linear; even chronology misleads" (1998: 325). And this *blending of voices* has many beginnings, each monumental as the next, without an end in sight.

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At the cusp between student and scholar, I was invited to an academic conference focused on Canadian Studies, and to give a talk at my father's alma mater: Korea University. Thirty years after he left Seoul, he accompanied me during this trip and we were both thrilled that I would engage a community of scholars considered the elite of Korean society. Here I was the only female graduate student, who spoke English "with no accent" among comparatively older, male, tenured professors specialized in Canadian Studies. What also seemed peculiar was that I presented a paper on the identity issues confronting second-generation Korean Canadians among specialists trained in political economy and international relations. I stood out at all possible fronts; it made me feel uncomfortable.

Though it was unclear at the time, what transpired during the two weeks I shuttled between extended family and academic life revealed to me the trip had different meanings for my father and myself. For my father, it was a bitter-sweet homecoming; a return to his homeland that gradually opened up old wounds between siblings and feelings of guilt and shame in what he left behind (i.e. a prestigious government job) and what he felt were meager accomplishments in his adoptive home (i.e. the loss of his wife, several failed businesses, and a low-paying job as a short-order cook). For myself, it pushed to the forefront mixed feelings toward my cultural heritage. Having spent a good part of my childhood and adolescence "white-washed" - or the cultural equivalent of a "banana" - I

was suddenly shocked by the plethora of faces that looked like me, but unlike me in terms of daily mannerisms and general outlook. Feelings of shock, frustration, and anger eventually turned into awkwardness.

Ironically, my father and I felt like outsiders in a place where we were supposed to belong. And it was even stranger for me to bear witness to his frustration and pain. Two moments still stand out from that trip: the night I heard my father weeping in front of his siblings asking for their forgiveness in failing to meet his obligations, and his response to me when I asked if Korea could ever be his "home": a place where he could return to and seek refuge in the familiarity of a common language and the comfort of his family (i.e. brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews). In sharp contrast to the tears and emotional tension of the family discussion several nights before, during our flight back, he turned to me and answered: "Korea could never be my home. Canada *must* be my home." There was a sense of resignation in his voice, but it really struck me that he felt he had no choice but to make Canada his home. His quiet determination to succeed, despite the difficulties he endured in losing his wife and a series of unsuccessful businesses, generated mixed feelings inside me: anger, shame, sadness, and helplessness, which served to propel a steadfast determination to chart a course different from my parents. It was perhaps at this

moment that I wanted to write about the frustrations of being an "outsider" – be it immigrant, female, or working-class.[28]

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Another beginning is when I decided to change my research project from interviews with second-generation Korean Canadians to an analysis of films and videos produced by Korean American/Canadian (or *kyop'o*) women filmmakers. It happened while living in Tokyo. After several months of struggling to get the project off the ground, along with the culture shock of not fitting in with the daily rhythm of Japanese life and being far removed from an English-speaking (academic) community, I endured a fairly lengthy period of solitude induced by research. I spent time alone drifting between cultural worlds and lost in my thoughts, unsure where I was going with the intended research project. Staring at old childhood photographs, I kept focusing on the images of my mother, wondering what her life had been like when she was younger, or even around my age at the time. Then I came across an essay by Elaine H. Kim (1993) on her perspective of the 1992 L.A. Riots, as a Korean American; it struck a chord in me.[29]

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[28] For an excellent collection of essays discussing the intersections between race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality by women of colour writers in the United States, see Anzaldúa, Gloria and Cherrie Moraga (Eds). 1981. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press.

[29] For the original essay published in Newsweek magazine, see Kim, Elaine H. "They Armed in Self-Defense," in *Newsweek*, 18 May, 1992: 10. For a discussion

The piece focused on the critical reception of her earlier personal essay published in *Newsweek* magazine, which I naturally tracked down and read with anticipation. In the *Newsweek* piece, she argued that while many of the problems which caused the riots derived from the racial history of the United States, the media played an influential role in focusing upon and contributing toward creating and perpetuating the *myth* of a Black-Korean conflict. From her standpoint, it was "another case of visual media racism." Their portraits of a Black-Korean problem were in fact "a decontextualized manifestation of a much larger problem" and only served "to divert attention from the roots of racial violence in the U.S. not created by African Americans or Korean Americans." During and after the riots, the major media and some European Americans discussed the conflicts as if they were watching a "dogfight" or a "boxing match," which enraged many Koreans.

In the essay that followed the *Newsweek* publication, Kim (1993) recounts the editor's attempts to change the essay, its eventual publication as is, and the resulting hate mail from the American public. Poignantly, she connects this negative reception to the ambivalent and precarious position of Korean Americans in the United States. She writes, "The letters also provided some evidence of the dilemma Korean Americans are placed in by those who assume that we are aliens who should 'go back' and at the same time berate us for not

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on the reception of this essay, see Elaine H. Kim. 1993. "Home is where the Han is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals," in *Social Justice*, 20 (1-2): 1-21.

rejecting 'Korean-American identity' for 'American identity'" (Kim 1993: 223). She then connects the Korean notion of *Han*, a cultural construct of sadness, hope, and lament considered a national trait or collective consciousness of a people, to the social positioning of Koreans in America.

What struck me about the two essays was the fluid movement between personal biography and social analysis. The fact that Kim (1992; 1993) could connect her experience with other Korean Americans to the larger history of racism in the United States demonstrated the possibility (and promise) of the "sociological imagination." It also brought to the forefront a new voice and fresh perspective to the race riots (and history of race relations in America), and produced within me a strong *symbolic* connection to people who shared my racial/ethnic background. It was around that time I developed a pan-Asian (North) American consciousness. In broad strokes, I could identify with the plethora of emotions including anger, frustration, disorientation, and general unease in both multicultural and homogeneous cultural contexts, which were described in a range of aesthetic domains such as film, literature, and art. The sense of "otherness" resonating across these cultural spheres spoke to me, especially in raising important issues about centers and margins (see Okihiro 1994), about representation (see Trinh 1989, 1991, 1992; Feng 2002; Marks 2000), about origins, history, and memory (see Hua 2005; Kin Gagnon 2000, 2002; Kang 2005), about nationality and transnationality (see Gilroy 1997; Hall 1990, 1996a. 1996b; Chow 1993), about race and ethnicity (see Espiritu 1992, 1997; Kibria

2002), and about gender and sexuality in contemporary society (see Espiritu 1997; Kim 1998; Lowe 1996; Shimizu and Lee 2004). The different articulations of "particularity" meshed well with me as well as the need to examine the ontological status and the representations of Asians in North America both as *'immigrant'* and *'citizen.'* It seemed my own life experiences confirmed their importance. Having grown up in Canada and lived in Japan for several years, I have some unique insights into the contradictions of what constitutes a *'citizen'* and *'immigrant'* in diverse cultural settings. Whether citizen (in Canada) or immigrant (in Japan), I was a cultural/racial minority; there was always a sense of living at the periphery and fragile sense of belonging. I was curious to research these experiences further in the academic literature, which in turn directed me to the area of Ethnic Studies, and in particular Asian American Studies.

Asian Americanists such as Gary Okihiro (1994), Lisa Lowe (1996), Elaine H. Kim (1982, 1993, 1998) and Ronald Takaki (1998 revised) opened my eyes to the "exclusionist" history of Asians in the United States, and the critical importance of developing a pan-Asian American perspective on this issue. Historically, the term, *Asian American*, could be traced back to the political coalition of different ethnic Asian communities in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this period, according to Nazli Kibria (2002), the

larger social changes of this time included immigration law reforms and the enactment of civil rights legislation, which consequently launched the United States into a period of what is often referred to as the "new immigration." [30] Like their predecessors in previous times, the new immigrants of the post-1960s have been the focus of considerable anxiety and often of anti-immigrant fervor and activity on the part of the dominant society.

A common thread weaving the different articulations of Asian American (and Asian Canadian) subjectivity over the years is the sense of "otherness." A number of critics have framed this sense of not being part of the dominant white culture in different ways, often cutting across the trajectories or shifting boundaries of the international, the national, and the transnational. For those Asian Americans (and Asian Canadians) who write about their experiences in

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[30] The concept of "new immigration" refers to the racial makeup of non-European and nonwhite immigrants during the post-1965 era in the United States (and post-1967 era in Canada), in particular new immigrants of Asian, Caribbean, and Latin American origins. Critics, however, challenge this notion as a direct product of the 1965 immigration law reforms. As they contend, immigration from Latin America rose before the 1960s, thus challenging the 1965-centered view of immigration history. This is though, a moot point since the concept of "new immigration" is useful in calling attention to important shifts in the social and political context of immigration and immigrant adaptation, especially in the United States. As Kibria (2002) contends, the legacy of the civil rights movement—the reforms and other changes that it initiated—are a particularly important aspect of this context.

The current research project takes into consideration this larger historical backdrop and situates it within the specific arena of Korean North American cultural production. More specifically, it explores the question of race and cultural representation with reference to the experience of a particular group of Asian North Americans - i.e., people of Korean descent - and focuses on the dynamics of race (or racialization), adaptation, and identity among diasporic Koreans in North America.

negotiating their cultural identities, they grapple with the question of *who they are, from whose perspective they view their lives,* and *from which position they are speaking.*

Given the efflorescence of Asian American writing and cultural criticism, this body of work underwent a series of transformation over the years. As early as 1973, writers like Frank Chin pressed the notion that *Asian Americans* have "evolved cultures and sensibilities distinctly not Chinese or Japanese and distinctly not white American" (Chin et al, 1973: xi). According to them, 'otherness' stemmed from one's ethnicity (or birthright in China and Japan), a signifier "to distinguish you from being American-born, in spite of the fact that you may have no actual memories of life in Asia" (1973: xiii). In his Introduction to *Aiiieeee!*, the first edited collection of Asian American writing, Chin distinguished between "real" Asian Americans, whom he defined as those born in the U.S., and Asian immigrants to America. This crude distinction, however, was problematic in that it constructed a subject position by making another group (Asian immigrants) into a new kind of 'Other' against which he could define Asian Americans. The subject of their attack was the different forms of "Orientalism," which pervaded in the dominant culture at the time, and exposing the logic of "accommodation, adaptation, and appropriation of the familiar orientalist geopolitical imagination" of the larger American public culture in granting classics such as Maxine Hong Kingston's, *The Woman Warrior,* "official literary visibility" (Li 1998: 45-46).

In 1982, Elaine Kim's pioneering study of Asian American literature examined the "creative writings in English by Americans of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino descent" (Kim 1982: xi). For Kim, the shift from the term, "Oriental" to "Asian American" made these American identities "more precise" and "more objective" (1982: xii). She was attempting to *unite* Asian American voices, in the hopes that it would lead to effective community organization across domains and sectors within the United States. However, her attempt at "unity" simultaneously excluded South and most Southeast Asian Americans, which consequently, has been subject to critical scrutiny, a generation later, by Asian American literary theorists.[31]

A more forgiving reading of this anthology is that Kim's examination was based on the particularities of Asian American "experience" and attempted to include as many voices as possible in the emerging canon of minority literatures. Obviously influenced, at the time, by the larger discourses in women's studies and African American studies concerning "giving voice" to those who had been silenced, Kim's critical study allowed Asian Americans "self-expression" (1982: xv) in order to counter existing stereotypes that circulated in the dominant culture. It also gave academic legitimacy to a long struggle, led by writers and

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[31] See Ty, Eleanor and Donald C. Goellnicht (Eds). *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press; Davis, Rocío G. and Sue-Im Lee (Eds). 2006. *Literary Gestures: The Aesthetic in Asian American Writing*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

filmmakers, to "give voice" to Asian North Americans in the wake of the long history of exclusion in American history.

In retrospect, both anthologies reflected the political impetus evident at the beginning of Asian American studies in the United States in the early 1970s. Moving beyond a distinct body of knowledge, theoretical paradigms, and literature, the *'institutionalization'* of Asian American Studies in universities and colleges across the United States allowed for the development of political alliances across ethnic American identities with members of the wider community. Consequently, during the period between 1973 and 1982, the Asian American pan-ethnic coalition served two major functions: first, as an effective organizational strategy across racial, ethnic and class lines, and second, as a response to the "institutionally relevant ethnic categories in the [American] political system" (Espiritu 1997: 10). In its initial stage, English-speaking, American-born, students of Chinese and Japanese descent dominated the movement, and there was considerable effort to distinguish *Asian American* Studies from *Asian* studies as part of the strategy of "claiming America." Critics charged their approach was quite anti-immigrant, as exemplified by Chin and company, while feminists were critical of the patriarchal structure of gender relations within and outside the *culturally nationalist* movement (see Espiritu 1992). Over time, the coalition has broadened their membership to include Asian immigrants from all walks of life, as well as crossing economic lines to join the well-to-do or successful Asians with refugees, and domestic and factory

workers with professionals. Differences in many ways were deliberately obscured in order to highlight the unifying sense of exclusion, marginalization, and otherness from the mainstream that Asians in America felt.

Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the sense of otherness was frequently conceptualized as the space "*between worlds.*" Often the vantage point would be between "*countries of origin*" and "*adopted homelands,*" and further extended to include a "*metaphorical space*" between marriage and divorce, between life and death, or between war and peace. Since the 1990s, however, there has been a shift in the way critics approach the question of Asian American identity. As exemplified in the work of Lisa Lowe (1996), there is greater recognition and acceptance of heterogeneity within Asian America, and striving to find a delicate balance between an "identity politics" based on "strategic essentialism" to seek out political unity of diverse intra-ethnic Asian groups, and sensitivity of those differences from within and outside of the political coalition/alliance. Lowe writes, "essentializing Asian American identity and suppressing our differences—of national origin, generation, gender, party, class—risks particular dangers:...it inadvertently supports the racist discourse that constructs Asians as a homogeneous group, that implies we are "all alike" and conform to "types"" (1996: 30). Rejecting both nationalist/nativist and assimilationist models of Asian American subjectivity, Lowe champions instead "interventions that refuse static or binary conceptions of ethnicity, replacing

notions of identity with multiplicity and shifting the emphasis from ethnic 'essence' to cultural hybridity" (1996: 33).

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Autoethnographic cultural criticism[32] *– Towards a Methodology.*

> *Auto-*
> *a combining form meaning "self," "same," "spontaneous," used in the formation of compound words. [Origin: < Gk, comb. form of autós self]*
>
> *Ethno-*
> *a combining form meaning "race," "culture," "people," used in the formation of compound words. [Origin: < Gk, comb. form of éthnos]*
>
> *Autoethnography-*
> *A recognised qualitative social research method where the researcher documents a group by recording his or her own individual experience as it relates to social history. Often, but not always, the researcher is a member of the group in question rather than the traditional outsider ethnographer.*

In many ways, my own viewing and interpretation of the films and videos by select *kyop'o* women filmmakers and artists extends this notion of

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[32] There exists a rich body of literature on autoethnographic writing. Theorists, such as Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) and Françoise Lionnet (1989) have noted the different formulations and approaches to autoethnography as a form of ethnographic autobiography, or a *synthesis* between postmodern ethnography and postmodern autobiography. For Reed-Danahay (1997), the term, autoethnography, has a double sense—referring either to the ethnography of one's group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest. Similarly, James Buzard (2003) defines autoethnography as "the study, representation, or knowledge of a culture by one or more of its members," but he notes that while it has been used at the junction of Sociology, Communication Studies, and Education, it is still relatively underused "by critical humanities and social science scholars over the past several decades" (Buzard 2003: 61).

"heterogeneity" by focusing on the differences *within* a cultural group—in particular, Korean American and Korean Canadian female artists/filmmakers, whose identities are caught in the interstices of gender, race/ethnicity, and class. However, as I've delved into the theoretical significance of writing from my own standpoint, especially in relation to my personal memories, I've discovered that my journey to voice has been mediated by the activity of writing from a personal space. Consequently, this self-reflexive journey has been *informed by* and *informed* my approach to the literature and research project. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) has described this subject position as the "triple bind" and deftly connects this to the politics of cultural representation. As I've discovered, I share this bind with my *kyop'o* sisters along with the community of women of colour writers and artists. If there is an image that my projects attempts to convey, it is that of a *refracted prism* through which we may see differences in the light, held together by a transparent structure. Some would argue that film and video are "screens" and "mirrors" of a displaced subjectivity, but I would argue they are "embodied structures" of voice. They allowed me to imagine and recreate a "voice" that I've haven't heard in a long while as well as given me the strength and confidence to forge one that is distinctly my own.

From the very start when I thought of the research topic, I wanted to do something different and focus on the key texts or lines of research that I have returned to repeatedly that have shaped who I am and how I think. Nurtured by the strong oral tradition of my family's personal stories and testimonials of

diverse feminist writers such as bell hooks (1989, 1996, 1997, 1999) and Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés (1998), my project on *kyop'o* women's cinema and diasporic cultural production in general is informed by a method that I call, *autoethnographic cultural criticism.*

It's about situating the writer/researcher within the context of the subject s/he studies, and demonstrating how they are mutually intertwined within the larger social context of history. As it applies to my approach to *kyop'o* cultural production, the consequence has been to confront some of the biases, preferences and blind spots of my selective reading, and wherever possible, to establish links with my own personal experience in order to develop an organic approach to the literature. It also entails putting into force the notion of *haptic (or tactile) visuality,* which invites the viewer/reader to respond to images in an intimate, embodied way. As Laura U. Marks (2000) contends, such an approach to intercultural cinema facilitates the experience of other sensory impressions such as touch, smell, and taste through an appeal to non-visual knowledge. It is arguably, at this point, that memory and the creative act of invention and imagination on the part of the artist/writer intersect and propel this relationship forward with the viewer/reader.

Equally informative is the notion of *bodily writing* that captures the work of diverse writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Writers, who have nurtured my soul and sense of community through their adept attention to voice and identity, and the activity of cultural

production to nourish their development. If, as their writings suggest, the *written body* is the metaphor of the *written page,* then it is possible to claim that diasporic cultural production, as exemplified in the work of *kyop'o* women filmmakers/artists, extends the activity of cultural production as a critical form of self-expression.

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INTERLUDE/

Vignette: Corner Store Blues

> *When a writer has the courage to host a painful memory, she has the opportunity to make sense of the suffering and confusion it entails. Suffering clarifies identity and connects us with our deepest selves. The expression of suffering, in any form, is often accompanied by shame. But all feelings need expression, and the insights gained from describing a particular passage in life give us the opportunity to grow as human beings. It is the act of writing rather than the writing itself that provides an opportunity to heal. The compassion, regard and deep respect we grow for ourselves and each other is what creates the shift.*
>
> - Maureen Murdock, *Unreliable Truth*

> *Tell them my story. Tell them about my life. Tell them about Mom's life, if you can.*
>
> - Jae-Ha Song, *personal communication*

Corner Store Blues

When I think back to my childhood, with those memories that lay deep in the crevices between past and present, between fact and fiction, between real and imagined, the corner store is what brought my family together and held us together. Those disjunctive memories I have offer glimpses into a world that is largely ignored; dismissed into the background of the cityscape but foreground to my subjectivity and subjection. Flat, uninspiring buildings – often small and worn down, are sites of peoples' dreams, frustrations, hopes, and regrets. I don't have to look very far for these 'people.' They are my parents and my relatives. Immigrants, now settlers, who struggled to make ends

meet, who labored in factory work, and who struggled with language and strange social customs in order to become protégés of Horatio Algiers.

If A Past Life Could Be Scripted...

Medium Shot; Outdoor Scene. Somewhere in the city. Bright sunny morning. Street traffic left side of frame. Older Asian man crossing the street toward the camera. Cut. Next shot. Close up. "Family Fair Variety" Cut. Medium Shot. Older Asian man picks up a bundle of newspapers. Switch to Inside Store. Cuts bundles open. Mumbles privately to himself (in Korean) while sorting through the different stacks of newspapers. Counts them. Logs them in book. Opens cash. Counts money. Checks lottery tickets. Checks cigarette stock. Brews coffee for himself. Starts singing. Noise of kettle is audible. Sound of glass door opening. Extreme close up of older Asian man smiling. Greets white customer with an enthusiastic, "Good morning, what can I do for you?"

- Scenes from a Memory of a Corner store

They worked hard, they saved, they denied themselves holidays and vacations, and they denied themselves simple luxuries to build a future for themselves and their family. To build this future modeled on success. The corner store represented their sacrifices and their hopes for prosperity. Some of us managed to succeed, but a lot of us also failed in pursuit of this Dream. Privately we wept, we screamed, we despaired but publicly we maintained 'face.' Smile, smile, and only smile, we're told. We must be happy to be here; over there, things would be worse. You don't know what it was like back then, being

hungry, being poor. Here, we are blessed. Hard work will pay off. It will bring us success.

Being the eldest child, I spent a lot of time in the store helping out my parents – doing cash, organizing stock, and light cleaning. With all that time I spent in the family business, it was a place that provided the comfort of 'home' while denying that very comfort. It was, after all, a place of business. Most of the time, my parents were too busy running the business to look after us. And some of the memories I have of my childhood center on their fatigue, their anxiety, and their frustration in running the business. These aren't one-dimensional images in my mind; I see details, colour, light, shade, and I remember smells. The strong smell of grease and smoke that lingered on my parents' clothes from working in the restaurant kitchen. I can also remember the soft lingering scent of my mother's perfume and my father's aftershave before going to work. But, with the movement of time, memories fade and remembering in the present about the past becomes harder. At times, I'm caught in a desperate search. Some sounds I vividly remember (like the clutter and clamor of street noise and traffic), but there are those that are waning. The sound of my mother's voice is drowning in the abyss of Time. I'm not sure if there was a soft lull in her voice, or 'sing-song' rhythm to her diction. Write fast and write furiously so as not to forget. But you can only write what you (want to) remember...so what do I (want to) remember? Slow down. Slow down to remember – digging deep into that site of memory (Toni Morrison) to recover.

My aunt would always say (in conscious earshot distance) that she had to struggle to make "bread and butter" with her variety store; my parents took a different tack. They tried to protect my siblings and me from their stress and frustration with quiet whispers at nights. They didn't want us to know they lost their business; as much as possible, they maintained 'face.' Their quiet whispers, late at night, were not unheard. Nor was their silence ignored; it was something that always haunted me (like a ghost that needs to be confronted through writing) in my flashbacks and memories of my youth. There are thing-like images that I remember. Events that are fragmented and fleeting. Even painful. Spliced images of watching my mother unravel the bandages from her legs that covered her swollen varicose veins, intercut with another moment, happier and more joyful. Grainy in texture. Fading in colour. Time takes over. I see my parents dancing and laughing buoyantly at each other. For a thirteen-year-old girl, watching my parents dance was an embarrassing experience. But now, I look back at that moment with fondness. Surprisingly, though, there are things that I can't remember – like amnesia – but is this forgetfulness willed or not? A yearning for youth and for life that once was and encased in imagination – a time now only encapsulated by memory.

Thinking back on how the corner store structured my life, it was a place where *public* and *private* coalesced and collided. People would come and go as they please. Some were strangers, others were regulars – and occasionally, there would be small talk. Rarely, did we engage in talk that was substantial or meaningful. My parents would smile – briefly engage in conversation, and then

go back to their business. When it wasn't too busy, there would be silence. At times, playing the radio in the background would break that, or my parents would talk about something to do. There was always something to do. Organizing stock or preparing a list for the wholesalers. For my parents, this separation between public and private was not feasible—a luxury they couldn't afford as immigrants. Life is work; work is life.

The two were always the same, if not closely related, in their mind. Perhaps, this is the very logic that I want to seize and to interrogate. To map out its re/configuration as a cultural myth that shackles and binds people and communities in the documentary, *Scenes from a Corner store.* To examine in a critical light what that logic of the *model minority* translates into in terms of human cost—and to engage those very 'voices' that are often left mute and pushed to the periphery. But whose voices are heard?

Arguably, a *multiplicity* of them—the cinematic subjects', the filmmakers', my own, and my parents' all struggling and competing to be heard, struggling to voice. Listen carefully. Listen to the barely audible. There it is; the tension and the source of their mediation. *Image, Text, Sound.* See, Hear, Speak, and Write. Speak with them. Speak nearby them. Not for them. Listen to their heart. Not hear mere words-as-sounds. Recite their words as a way of self-recovery. Go beyond the search for facts. The propensity for fact-finding. Get inside the folklore (*Zora Neale Hurston*). Inside the cinematic lore. What out find what lies beneath the documentation of events and of (familial/familiar) conflicts in

support of an argument? Can you hear it? The voice; the *heteroglossia* of voices. If the question is about the ideology of success, of making it in the real world, then what does 'success' entail for *the immigrant*? In relation to your parents, in relation to the filmmakers, and in relation to the subject(s) on screen. *Who speaks? Whose voice(s) do you (want to) hear?* How is this re/constructed in terms of a dominant ideology on-screen and off-screen? And how is this logic negotiated across the smoke screen of cultural representations of an immigrant family in Toronto.

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TWO/

Between Two Worlds:
Exploratory Notes on Second-Generation Korean Canadians

> *An individual memory becomes the repository of a family or cultural memory. In writing memoir and trusting that our stories have value, we gain access to the larger culture. Passing our life story on to the next generation preserves the culture. In writing the secrets that have not been said aloud but must not be forgotten, we honor the struggles and dignity of our people.*
>
> — Maureen Murdock, *Unreliable Truth*

Theorizing the 'Korean Canadian' experience: The experiential & the abstract

Several years ago I watched a CBC documentary featuring a Korean Canadian family in Toronto.[33] Focusing on the daily life of a corner store owner and his family, I was struck by the intimate portrait of the family's struggle to understand each other. The (mis)communication between first-generation immigrant parents and their three second-generation Canadian-born daughters evoked personal memories of my past as well as critical questions on intergenerational relationships, and the distinct experiences of being 'Korean Canadian' across generations.[34] As a second-generation Korean Canadian

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[32] *Scenes from a Corner Store.* Sun-Kyung Yi. 1996. 45 minutes, video. Aysha Productions. Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

woman, I share with these young women similar struggles on learning how to communicate with my immigrant parents, and learning to forge an identity which is distinct from my own parents. Likewise, I share with them some insight into how our immigrant parents have dealt with the difficulties posed by cultural assimilation.

The issues raised in this documentary were not only of personal interest to me because of my ethnic background, they also reinforced my theoretical interests on cultural hybridity, new immigrant subjectivity, and in general, theories on race and ethnicity from a critical perspective. However, most of my academic training did not center on explicating the connection between these abstract theoretical issues and my own personal experiences as a Korean Canadian. They were always kept distant in two separate worlds: the personal and the professional. It was only recently, with the flurry of scholarship on identity, that I began to think through the possible connections between these two worlds: the empirical realities of being Korean Canadian across generations and the larger academic (and highly abstract) discourse on race and ethnicity and cultural hybridity. There is much to be learnt from both worlds. Personal experience adds 'flesh' to abstract concepts while these concepts lend clarity and

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[34] Following the lead of Nazli Kibria (1997), I define 'first-generation' to refer to immigrants to the host society while 'second-generation' to include those who are the children of immigrants, and who have been born and/or raised in the host society since the age of twelve or younger. Children over the age of twelve and who have immigrated with their parents are typically referred to as the "1.5 generation." See Kibria, Nazli. 1997. The construction of 'Asian American': reflections on intermarriage and ethnic identity among second-generation Chinese and Korean Americans. In *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 20 (3): 523-544.

rigor to the mundane affairs of everyday life. Thus, a critical interrogation of both worlds provides an Archimedean point to discover what it means to be Korean Canadian. It also provides an impetus for research that connects sociological studies on racial and ethnic inequality with narrative and literary approaches that define a cultural landscape of difference.

In order to bridge the experiential narratives of 'real people' with the abstract theoretical discourse on race and ethnicity, I want to bring to the foreground excerpts from the documentary that slice through the discourse on race, ethnicity, and cultural hybridity. Moving through the cultural landscape of two generations of Korean Canadians, I want to explore the interpretive dynamics of second-generation Korean Canadians coming to terms with their cultural identities. In particular, I am interested in how racial (and gender) identifications are tempered by feelings of cultural displacement that are produced in the liminal spaces of two culturally different worlds.[35]

My discussion will be divided along three major themes that draw inspiration from the documentary, and it will extend itself to the larger theoretical issues that confront second-generation Asian Canadians as suggested in the literature.[36] The first theme will address the connection between the

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[35] While gender identifications are clearly implicated in the intersection between race, ethnicity, and class for multiply disadvantaged women of colour, the scope of my paper can only permit a focused discussion on racial identifications.

[36] Due to the dearth of literature on Korean Canadians, I have drawn heavily on Asian American sources to highlight similarities between the two cultural groups. The immigration patterns and policies between the two nations have

'model minority' myth and 'immigrant stories,' and their impact on the construction of the Korean Canadian identity for second-generation children of immigrants. The second theme will address conceptions of ethnicity through an analysis of attitudes and beliefs about interracial dating and marriage between

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produced different waves of immigrants and settlement patterns that have ultimately shaped their ideological beliefs and value systems in being 'Asian' in a predominantly white society. Given the strong presence of the discourse on race (and race relations between African-Americans and whites) in American cultural politics, the position of Asians is unique in that they are *neither* black *nor* white, though in the terrain of racial politics they are defined *relative* to either group. That is, in the conventional framework of black/white relations, Asian Americans are perceived to be either like whites or not like whites, or alternatively, like blacks and not like blacks. See Takagi, Dana Y. 1993. Asian Americans and Racial Politics: A Postmodern Paradox. In *Social Justice*, 20 (1-2): 115-128.

Canadian cultural politics, on the other hand, has tended to gloss over questions of race and ethnicity in favor of questions of language rights between French and Anglo-Canadians during the Quebec referendum, and the recognition of cultural identities as they are constitutionally protected in the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedom. However, like their American counterpart (though in very broad strokes), the political position of Asians is pushed to the periphery in the contemporary terrain of race politics in Canada.

Clearly, future research should redress this gap by reinstating the importance of Asians in Canadian society, and exposing the various institutional forms of discrimination and racist practices of the larger society. For example, scholars such as Himani Bannerji (2000) and Monika Kin Gagnon (2000) have addressed the contradictions and problematic assumptions behind cultural diversity and multiculturalism policy and practice. In particular, both have addressed the impact of the construction and ascription of racialized ethnicities within the Canadian multicultural imagination, and how these groups have been marginalized from the nation-state.

Within Asian Canadian literary studies, scholars such as Elenor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht (2004), Marie Lo (2001) and Guy Beauregard (2000) have addressed the U.S.-centric focus of Asian North American literary production, and pushed to the forefront the contributions by Asian Canadian women writers in the literary scene.

family members in the documentary. Here I will explore changing conceptions of love across generations, and the influence of ethnicity on shaping cultural boundaries within interracial relationships. The final theme will explore the ambivalence of being labelled and identified as Korean Canadian. I will highlight the 'double-consciousness' of a racialized identity that is shaped by experiences of marginalization, and the desperate search for community and belonging in this race-conscious world. I conclude that the multivalent positioning and constant negotiations of these young Korean Canadian women point to the intersection between race, gender, and class, and the tenuous construction of a stabilized identity. To become 'Korean Canadian' is more than a personal identity; it is a socially constructed, politicized identity that is always relational to the dominant society. It is only invoked in acts of community, and in the context of racism and acute marginality. Thus, it is and always will be political.

From Personal Narratives of Struggle to the Creation of Cultural Myths

> *Mr. Bak (56 years old): When I first immigrated to Canada, I had a very good start. But I had a change of heart, quit my job, and started a business...[break]...It is very hard work, not much income and long hours. No relaxing life at all...so which means it's dead almost. Corner store is only for me, that's all...my generation, not my second generation...not any of my child to do the corner store...[break]...It would've been alright if I was successful, but things haven't turned out the way I expected. I don't feel good*

about running a corner store. I am embarrassed in front of my [three] daughters.[37]

Evelyn Bak (19 years old): When I work long hours at the store, that's when I tend to think of my parents...thinking I don't know how they can do this day in and day out. That's the last thing I want to do and that's the last thing they want us to do. I think owning a store could be the lowest occupation someone could have, especially a variety store...I guess we feel burdened knowing that our parents are suffering because they are trying to make us happy. So my goal is to have a job then I can start supporting them and giving back what they gave to me...[break]...I feel morally obligated to make it up to them like that's my goal...so they won't regret coming to Canada.

In *Scenes from a Corner Store,* the narratives of the three young women combine to reveal the 'complex relationality' or intertwining dimensions of race, ethnicity, and class. From their perspective as second-generation Korean Canadians, they are witnesses to their parents' struggle for economic survival in a highly racialized world that imposes implicit or explicit labour market barriers. Their parents' poor English and untransferable skills in a segmented labour market force them into the competitive world of small business ownership. Long hours, repetitive tasks, and marginal profits are part of the harsh realities of owning a labour-intensive family-run business such as a small corner store or restaurant. There is a constant struggle to lower labour costs to survive, especially when these corner stores are competing with 24-hour convenient store

[37] In reproducing these video-taped excerpts into text form, it is important to preserve the accent and broken English of Mr. Bak. The square brackets, or [break], refer to different segments in the documentary. Thus, in defense of my modifications of his dialogue, I would like to inform the reader that my intention has been to connect the interspersed comments to a common theme. Future excerpts of other members in the family will be modified accordingly.

franchises and larger supermarkets. Consequently, this struggle can lead to poor work conditions and to the use of family, extended family, and relatives as a pool of 'cheap' labour.

Mr. Bak's narrative reveals the choices he made upon immigrating to Canada. But I suspect his choices were similar to those of many other Koreans who immigrated to North America during the post-1965 immigration wave. Despite his high education, occupational skills, and language facility, Mr. Bak's early work experiences in Canada adopted the general pattern of downward mobility segregation from the mainstream (i.e., developing ties with other Koreans and opening businesses in "Koreatowns" or other minority areas), and general isolation from the white community. Kitano and Daniels (1995) note several characteristics of this "third wave" of Korean immigration that still continues in the United States–and perhaps, is reflected in Canada as well. Current Korean immigration is family oriented, and includes a large proportion of housewives and children. Unlike the earlier waves of immigrants,[38] they are

[38] According to Kitano and Daniels (1995), Korean immigration to the United States can be periodized along three waves. The first wave of migration centered on Hawaii. Between 1903 and 1905, Koreans provided cheap labour in sugar cane plantations, and they were neither integrated nor assimilated. The second wave came after the Korean War (1951 to 1964). Largely comprised of war brides, orphans, and students, they are a heterogeneous group with very little documented information. The third wave was the result of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965. For the first time in American immigration history, flows from Asian nations exceeded those from European countries. Between 1969 and 1973, the Korean share of total U.S. immigration rose dramatically from 0.7 percent to 3.8 percent. See Harry H.L. Kitano and Roger Daniels. 1995. *Asian Americans: Emerging Minorities.* Second Edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

highly educated and have settled in major cities or urban centers. Though Kitano and Daniels (1995) argue it is still too early to define detailed patterns of settlement of these newcomers, they observe the following general trends of third wave Korean immigrants: (1) economic success in the majority culture, (2) retention of certain aspects of Korean culture, (3) rapid flight to more desirable housing in the suburbs, and (4) the development of ethnic business districts (Kitano and Daniels 1995: 119-120).

Numerous studies have documented the widespread concentration of Korean immigrants in small business.[39] Several explanations for this gravitation to small business suggest that first-generation Koreans are often influenced by ideological conceptions of the American Dream of success and better opportunities in the new land, and their connection to *norokui taekka* (or the

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[39] According to the literature on Korean Americans, Korean immigrants are highly concentrated in retail and service businesses. Kyeyoung Park (1997) reports that in a 1980 census in the United States, 13.5 percent of employed Koreans were self-employed or unpaid family workers. In marked contrast, only 7 percent of the general U.S. working population was self-employed. See Kyeyoung Park. 1997. *The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press; In-Jin Yoon. 1997. *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press; Yen Le Espiritu. 1997. *Asian American Women and Men: Labour, Laws, and Love.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; Harry H.L. Kitano and Roger Daniels. 1995. *Asian Americans: Emerging Minorities.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

For more recent figures of the Korean population in the United States and Canada, see Yoon, In-Jin. 2006. "Understanding the Korean Diaspora from Comparative Perspectives." In *Conference Proceedings for the Asia Culture Forum – Transformation and Prospect toward Multiethnic, Multiracial and Multicultural Society: Enhancing Intercultural Communication.* Gwangju City, South Korea: 1-21.

notion that one will be rewarded in proportion to how hard one works). Likewise, the structural constraints posed by language or culture barriers further exacerbate the situation of untransferable skills and education that result in a segmented labour market. Another thematic explanation for this skewed development is the formation of ethnic enclaves, or places where a group's culture, identity, and internal solidarity are preserved (Park 1997: 41-46). To this extent, the socialization of newly-arrived immigrants in 'Koreatowns' throughout the major cities provides an insulated alternative to the larger host culture. Many immigrants thus survive with little knowledge of the host culture or language.

These hardships nevertheless have served to promote hegemonic conceptions of Asian minorities in the larger society. In particular, two competing conceptions are the "unassimilable alien" and the "model minority" (Kim 1993a). As racialized "others" who occupy a position outside the mainstream, Asian identities are collapsed (into a singular, monolithic identity which is equally problematic) and reconstructed along a binary construct of difference in terms of a 'black-white' continuum.[40] Their ambiguous, middling positions maintain systems of privilege and power but also threaten and destabilize these false constructs of hierarchies. Furthermore, they complicate

[40] While the discourse on race in American cultural studies has been dominated by the black-white continuum, there is an emerging third voice of Hispanic cultural workers that is triangulating the relationship between blacks and whites. Thus, along with their Asian counterparts, they are destabilizing this conventional framework of a racialized social order.

the traditional bifurcation between black versus white, since Asians are *either* "near black" in providing cheap and exploitable labour, *or* "near white" in maintaining the status quo of the model minority myth. But simultaneously, they are *neither* black *nor* white, while *both* like black *and* like white (Okihiro 1994). Elaine Kim (1993a) aptly describes this racial ambiguity and the challenges it poses to dominant discourses of mutually exclusive binaries, especially as they are articulated in the growing body of Asian American literature. She writes:

> Historically, Asian Americans, as we renamed ourselves, have had no place in the discourse on race and culture in the United States except as "model minorities" on the one hand or as unassimilable aliens on the other...Faced with sets of mutually exclusive binaries between "East" and "West," between Asia and America, and between suspect alien and patriot, those seeking a third space as "both/and" instead of "either/or" are usually considered racist, un-American, even anti-American. Within the context of these silencing systems of domination, Asian Americans are supposed to deny their cultural heritages, accept positions as sojourning "exotic aliens," or "go back" to Asia...I read Asian American literature as a literature of protest and exile, a literature about place and displacement, a literature concerned with psychic and physical "home" - searching for and claiming a "home" or longing for a final "homecoming" (Kim 1993a: viii-ix).

This third space serves to destabilize the binary opposition between black and white, but it also points to the significance of doing away with another kind of dualism; one that treats race, gender, and class as mutually exclusive categories. Rather than privilege one category over another, there is a pressing need to understand their interconnections. Otherwise, this dichotomous

thinking serves only to minimize the experiences of those who are multiply disadvantaged (i.e., working-class women of colour.)[41]

Along the two-tiered racial construct of black and white, Asians are re-inscribed within this black-white dyad as "near blacks" or "near whites". But simultaneously, they are neither black nor white and this is the source of their oppression. As members of both the "nonwhite other" and an intermediate group between black and white, Asian people have received "special opportunities" but have also faced "unique disabilities" (Okihiro 1994: xi). The construction of the perpetual alien and the model minority reflect historical conditions of oppression. Whereas the former image is rooted in the denial of citizenship rights to Chinese labourers in the early 19th century, the latter image promotes maintenance of the status quo based on a model of success. However, while Asians are lauded for their alleged economic success, they continue to face (white) racism in the political, economic, and social arenas, and have been targets of violence and resentment like in the case of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Thus, both images are connected in fundamental ways. They served to pin Asians against blacks as well as against whites, while rendering them the most

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[41] For an excellent discussion on the intersection between racial, ethnic and cultural differences among minorities of colour from different class backgrounds, see Ong, Aihwa. 1996. "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States," in Current Anthropology. Vol. 37, No. 5: 737-762. In this article, Ong examines the institutional practices whereby nonwhite immigrants in the First World are subjected to two processes of normalization: (1) ideological whitening or blackening that reflects dominant racial oppositions and (2) an assessment of cultural competence based on human capital and consumer power in the minority subject.

exploitable and exploited workers. The designation of Asians as "favored workers" or "industrious" and "efficient hard workers," is actually a pretext of their exploitability. Historically, they have served and continue to serve as a cheap(er) pool of labour in a segregated labour market.

Another important aspect of the model minority myth is the narratives of first-generation immigrants who speak of their struggles and who are observed by their second-generation children. Like the story of Mr. Bak in his description of a "dead-like" existence in a corner store, his daughters have both witnessed and endured their father's struggles. They have taken his narrative (and experiences of immigrant life) and internalized it in terms of a general "immigrant story." Evelyn's narrative is quite telling in that her determination to succeed in school and to have a job to support her parents is an extension of the immigrant narrative. What she observes and experiences throughout childhood and adolescence are the oppositional dichotomies of immigrant *versus* Canadian, traditional *versus* modern. Thus, the prototypical clash between generations and between cultures is the hallmark of the second-generation experience.[42]

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[42] For someone who strongly identifies with the young women in the documentary, my own reading of the film may be different from the intentions of the filmmaker in her portrayal of the experiences of these women as second-generation Korean Canadians. Far from arguing that what is portrayed in the film is a generalized experience, I do believe the issues addressed in this film resonate with my own past experiences, and to a large extent, this influences my reading of the film. Thus, a tension exists between my own reading of the film and that of the discursive construction of the second-generation experience. It is my hope, however, that the reading will invite others to share their experiences

With the ambivalence of trying to mediate between different cultures, the second-generation are caught between the oppositional pulls of their "Asian upbringing" and trying to "fit in" with the larger social group. A sense of "not belonging" is a strong theme for both generations. However, while the narratives of immigrant parents reveal a life of sacrifice and hardship for the sake of their children, the narratives of second-generation children reveal a sense of ambivalence of witnessing their parents' suffering and feeling an obligation to succeed because of their sacrifice.[43] This coincides with Kibria's (1997) findings of the identity formation of second-generation Asian Americans. Based on interview data, she argues that the sense of "not fitting in" among second-generation Asian Americans is an essential part of their self-identifications. And it is largely the result of a series of "identity crises" stemming from not only normal sources of teenage Angst, but also from the complications raised by their ethnic and immigrant affiliations (Kibria 1997: 535-536).

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and continue the conversation on racialization and cultural othering.

[43] I cannot help but think of my own experiences of working in the family business. Both my father and my aunt and uncle have worked very hard to maintain a successful variety store and gas bar, but it came at a high price. Throughout their thirty years of living in Canada, they have rarely taken the time to go on a vacation, and their long hours have only produced marginal profits. Their stories of hardship have shaped my own self-concept, and also, they have shaped my future aspirations and desires. It is unavoidable to project their sacrifices in heroic proportions, but I am equally cautious that their narratives can reinforce hegemonic conceptions of Asian-ness. At this point in time, I am still ambivalent in taking their stories at face value, without questioning what function these narratives serve in terms of a larger social context.

The intersection between Mr. Bak's and Evelyn's narratives focus on issues of hardship and psychic conflict. Owning a corner store brings no glory to either person; it is a source of embarrassment and shame. However, their own personal narratives have been co-opted by a larger discourse that recasts their struggles and determination to succeed as a cultural myth of being Asian. Their suffering takes on heroic proportions, because hard work is the only way to succeed–and to be more like a Canadian. But the fact of the matter is that their narratives are shaped by discriminatory practices that appear to be invisible– they have no comprehension of the labour market imposing structural barriers, they are victims of it. Thus, Evelyn's heroic attempt to excel in school (and her aspirations to become a medical doctor) is at once a clear refusal to work in a corner store, but it is still another dimension of the oppressive effects of the model minority myth that shackle many Asians today.

Interracial Dating & Marriage: Creating & Maintaining Ethnic Boundaries

> *Mrs. Bak: Koreans are not like Canadians. Teenagers bring their girlfriend or boyfriend home. They even have dinner with each other's family. It's very casual. We're not like that; we're still Korean...[break]...Most people stay on, even though the wife is suffering, they're still patient because of children's sake...They don't divorce for the sake of the children. But here, when it comes to marriage, white people think differently than Koreans. They marry too easily, fall in love too easily...they divorce too easily...I don't like that.*

> *Evelyn Bak (19 years old): The qualities I look for in a guy are all the qualities that I hate in Korean men. So if, Korean men...let's say they're stubborn, then I would take the opposite of that and then I would look for that quality in Caucasian men or whatever they*

may be...[break]...When I see Korean men, it reminds me of my father. Not to say that I don't love my father, but I love my father because I accepted him, but, I don't think I can take it as a husband.

Carolyn Bak (25 years old): I tell my mom what's the big deal of getting married. To me, getting married is not a very big deal; some people are happy not married. Mom doesn't think that's normal. She jokes around that if I'm not married by 30, my mom will commit suicide...I have to live at home till I get married. They feel that I should live at home, learning how to cook, learning how to take care of the household...[break]...A boyfriend to my father is marriage; to be engaged in a serious relationship...the only time he would have a serious discussion with Bob [Carolyn's Caucasian boyfriend of 6 months and who had not been introduced to her parents at this point in filming the documentary] if we were thinking of getting married...[break]...He [Carolyn's father] asked my mom everything about Rob except his bank account number...What does his mom do? What does his dad do? Where does he live? Does he drive?...Maybe I'm afraid that my father will hate him.

Part of the forces and processes that shape Asian Canadian identities are the maintenance of cultural boundaries. The concept of 'boundaries' is often used in the study of ethnicity as a way to understand the mechanisms of group differentiation and identity (Kibria 1997). In the context of a heterogeneous society, children of immigrants are more likely to be exposed to interracial dating opportunities and outmarriage practices. Yet, for members of ethnic groups, interracial dating and outmarriage pose boundary dilemmas in that they must confront questions about the definition, meaning, and consequences of outmarriage for their ethnic affiliation. This of course translates into fundamental questions about their ethnic identity, especially for members in groups that have both a strong tradition of censure towards marriage with

'outsiders' and relatively high rates of outmarriage. Thus, reflections on interracial dating and outmarriage represent a useful vehicle for understanding conceptions and experiences of ethnic identity.

It is interesting that between the two generations of Korean women in the documentary, each has their own conception of what it means to be Korean and Canadian, and what would be considered an ideal mate in a relationship. According to Mrs. Bak's understanding of relationships among and between Koreans and Canadians, Koreans are more formal and stoic in their relationship commitments. They do not approach them in a 'casual' manner; the ideology of romantic love is dangerous according to her estimation. Canadians fall in love too easily, marry too easily, and divorce too easily. This is in marked contrast to her upbringing in Korean society where from her perspective, there is no such thing as falling in love at first sight; a husband and wife learn to understand each other. Warmth and security as opposed to the emotional thrill of 'falling in love' are the prerequisites of a sound marriage.

The narratives of Carolyn and Evelyn, on the other hand, reveal a different conception of love and relationships. Falling in love and individual choice are prerequisites in a sound relationship. Likewise, having a partner who is not Korean is also deemed important. Based on their own assessments, Korean men are modelled after their father: too traditional and too conservative. But rather than interpret their stance on Korean men as a one-sided, wholesale rejection of their ethnic background, it should be recast in terms of a more

complex, situational, and multi-layered definition of ethnic boundaries. Their social class and level of contact with other Korean people as well as with non-Koreans shape their responses. Their daily affairs expose them to a myriad of cultural groups, and their contact with these groups has socialized them into Westernized (i.e., Canadian) norms that are clearly different and in conflict with some of their traditional values they are exposed to at home. Thus, their preference for a "non-Korean" or "Canadian" partner is actually a reflection of the *degree* to which they perceive to share membership with this particular cultural group.

Because ethnic boundaries are not rigid or fixed but shifting and emerging, the ways in which these second-generation Korean Canadians construct the continuum of interracial relationships and outmarriage is subject to change. This coincides with Kibria's (1997) finding that definitions of outmarriage are affected by the collective identity shifts that immigrant groups and their descendants experience in the course of settlement and integration into the 'host' society (Kibria 1997: 525). Thus, collective identity shifts, or processes of ethnogenesis, is a critical feature of the immigrant experience. Integration into mainstream society translates into (selective) adoption of newly realized affiliations with more established cultural groups. Whereas first-generation immigrants are less likely to give up their ethnic norms and mores despite being transplanted in a different cultural environment, their second-generation

children are more likely to adopt these cultural norms given the power of secondary socialization agents such as peers, schools, and the media.

The process of ethnogenesis is further propelled by experiences of racial labelling. How Asians interpreted their experiences of racial labelling varied according to their contact with pan-Asian organizations that promote a race-centered and politicized group identification, and through their personal sense of shared racial history with other Asian groups outside of these public forums.[44] While it is not clear how the young women in the documentary have interpreted their experience of racial labelling, it is safe to conclude that part of their experiences of being second-generation Korean Canadians have involved experiences of being labelled as Asian, as Oriental, or even addressed in derogatory terms.[45]

Whereas I can only speculate on what could be their possible experience of racial labelling, the literature on pan-Asian identity formation (in the United States) suggests that children of Asian immigrants often affirm the popular stereotype of Asians as a 'model minority' (Kim 1993a; Okihiro 1994; Espiritu 1997; Kibria 1997). To the extent that second-generation Asian Americans share a common culture, it largely revolves around the shared experience of 'an Asian

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[44] See Espiritu, Yen Le. 1992. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

[45] Carolyn's reference to Caucasians "seeing dark hair, slanted eyes, and yellow skin" only intimates an ambivalent reaction to racial labelling. At best, Angela's comment on feeling an automatic bond with other Koreans is an indirect indictment of racial labelling; or at least, an expression of racial difference.

upbringing' and socialization into the Asian values of education, family, hard work, and respect for elders. Thus, as core values of "Asian-ness," they are set up against the backdrop of a white dominant culture. That is, they serve to create and maintain ethnic boundaries of "Asian-ness" by distinguishing these values from a more homogeneous white 'mainstream' culture (Kibria 1997).

The main implication of this construction of "Asian-ness," however, is that it is hinged on a double-edged sword. As a universal, monolithic identity, it glosses over the differences between and amongst different Asian groups. But in order to begin articulating common experiences of being Asian in a white society, it is necessary to identify certain commonalities. Thus, what appears to be significant in the process of creating and maintaining a pan-Asian identity is the critical role of national ethnic attachments, such as Chinese-American/Canadian, Korean-American/Canadian as opposed to Asian American or Asian Canadian. The stronger the national ethnic identification, the weaker the pan-Asian identification. In other words, the strength and viability of pan-Asian ethnogenesis as a pattern of incorporation will depend heavily on the extent to which Asian Americans/Canadians, either by choice or by necessity, are socially engaged with each other.

Korean Canadian: Psychic Ambivalence & the Search for Community

> *Carolyn Bak (25 years old): One thing about the Korean community, they have these morals. What is right, what is wrong. I mean, you can't get divorced, you can't be a single mother, you can't get pregnant, you can't do this. You have to be married at a certain*

age. You know what I mean. I think it's all old-fashioned...in how they were raised back in Korea. They're all superficial.

Angela Bak (18 years old): I would consider myself first a Korean then a Canadian, like a Korean Canadian, not a Canadian-Korean. So...because, you can't escape that identity no matter what...It's pretty clear, like I live my life as a Canadian, but I am a Korean. When you're with Koreans, like you have that automatic bond whereas Caucasians, I never felt totally in the group. Koreans are very studious and they take school very seriously. They would yell at me for getting like a good mark, right...but they said you could always do better, like get the "A." There's no such thing as a "C" you know, if you get a "C" you didn't try hard enough. But it did make me try harder.

Carolyn Bak (25 years old): I'm 95% Canadian, and maybe 5%, certain things I'd say, I'm Korean. When people look at you, they only see white skin and blonde hair. They see dark hair, slanted eyes and yellow skin. You're Korean...[break]...It's something that Bob said to me when I met him. He asked me, "Do you think...what will happen when two worlds collide?"...and he let me ponder upon it, right. So I said to him...when two worlds collide, they'll destroy one another. They'll be nothing left...right...but he said, "No, if two worlds collide slowly...they'll merge."

K.B.A. announcer: As sons and daughters of Korean immigrants to Canada, you have overcome the double of struggles. You helped your parents' business while struggling with a mixed cultural environment...

What does it mean to be Korean Canadian? And what are the implications of being labelled as Korean Canadian? For Carolyn, she identifies herself more Canadian than Korean. Angela, on the other hand, is comfortable identifying herself as Korean Canadian, though she feels an automatic bond with other Koreans in her circle of friends. Evelyn alludes to feeling different from her white friends. Their interspersed narratives throughout the documentary reveal a sense of ambivalence of being Korean Canadian. Caught in the liminal

spaces between two worlds, their bi-cultural identity is shaped by psychic forces of conflict that cut across the two generations. They have difficulties meeting their parents' expectations-yet, they try to balance them out with the Western norms they have been socialized into. Whereas Carolyn rebelled against her parents' traditional ways-leaving her family home for a year and a half without contact-her younger sisters have tried to be obedient. For all three women, the challenges of bi-culturalism involve the mediation of their immigrant family past, the lingering effects of Korean male patriarchal traditions (as exemplified in their relationship with their father), and even, constructing an image of "Korean-ness" that serves to contrast and explain their different attitudes and beliefs about their parents' traditional ways.

In certain instances, there are nuances of the women going through a "white phase" - being conscious of the idea that 'being Korean' is different from 'being white,' and developing preferences for white people in terms of potential mates.[46] It is akin to feelings of rejection; to reject one's own ethnicity in favor of the larger society. That is, their refusal to date Korean men is a symbolic rejection of their own ethnic background.[47] However, I am cautious to interpret

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[46] Here I have in mind, Evelyn's preference to date non-Korean men, and Carolyn's current relationship with a Caucasian man.

[47] Anne Cheng offers an interesting theory of racial abjection. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, she distinguishes between experiences of grief and grievance in racial justice, and explores their connection to racial and ethnic identity formation in the United States. While grievance speaks the language of material and social recompense, and is the most visible course of action for people of colour, grief, for Cheng, is more important to explore since it is the fundamental basis for "social and subjective formations of the so-called

this as a wholesale rejection of 'Korean-ness.' It is really an articulation of a cultural boundedness that is suspended between the liminal spaces of two competing worlds: generational and cultural. It may also reflect a reaction to experiences of exclusion and negative stereotyping which cut across both generations. In witnessing their parents' struggles they have internalized the desire to adopt the norms and mores of the larger society.

However, I was struck by Carolyn's comment on interracial relationships. She states that when two worlds collide they will destroy each other, while her Caucasian boyfriend [Bob] believes that when they collide slowly, they will merge. It is telling that a Korean woman imagines a world of destruction upon bi-racial contact, while her Caucasian partner imagines a fluid movement of cultural symbiosis. Her image is shaped by experience; an experience of being labelled and identified in a race-conscious world. As a visible, female minority, her self-identification has been complicated by the intersection between race, ethnicity, gender, and class, and between intergenerational conflict. Her partner, a white male is not subject to such scrutiny. He blends in with mainstream society while Carolyn does not.

Bob's image of cultural symbiosis reflects an ideological distortion of multiculturalism. Different racial and ethnic groups meet and coalesce into new

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racialized." Thus, her concept of racial melancholia offers an interesting account of the subjective experiences of race and racism in America. See Cheng, Anne Anlin. 2001. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

hybrid forms. However, these meetings are not so fluid, harmonious, or transparent. They are marked by conflict, ambivalence, and confrontation at all levels of representation. Cultural identities demand highly reflexive forms of consciousness; a double-consciousness which combines experiences of objectification with subjecthood. A way or sensibility to look at one's self through the eyes of others, but in the context of marginality and exclusion coupled by the desperate search for belonging and community. Unlike the harmonious development of a stabilized 'Canadian' identity, the second-generation Korean Canadian experience is shaped by a tenuous, 'othering' relationship. One is defined Korean Canadian against the backdrop of what is Korean, what is Canadian, and in the liminal spaces between them. It is also an identification that is not secured in physical space-such as being positioned in the physical landscape of Canadian. It refers more to what writers like Salman Rushdie and Edward Said interpret as a 'mental' space of belonging. Rushdie writes:

> The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves - because they are so defined by others - by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves (Rushdie cited in Lee 1998: 305).

This 'in-betweenness' between the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary spaces of generations and of cultures characterizes not only the immigrant

experience of the first-generation, it also characterizes the subjective identifications of second-generation children. While Korean parents talk of their past-recalling idyllic images and memories of their forsaken homeland and their struggles to better their lives for the sake of their children-their Canadian-born children can only 'imagine' what Korea is. It becomes an 'imaginary' place, but it is one that is supposed to partially root their ethnic/cultural (subjective) identifications. These children become uprooted-not in sense of their parents consciously leaving the old world for the new. They are mentally suspended by feelings of cultural displacement. Because they cannot identify completely with their parents' normative expectations and Korean ways, they feel different against the construction of 'Korean-ness.'

However, their visible features of slanted eyes, dark hair, and yellow skin in white (Canadian) mainstream society, become cultural markers of difference. No matter how "white" they are in their beliefs and value system, they are still confronted with suspicion or false naïveté in such scenarios as 'Canadians' asking where they are really from when asked about their background/birthplace, and comments about their ability to speak perfect English without an accent. On one level, these reactions appear to be harmless and mundane. But they serve to enforce (and reinforce) racial/cultural labels of difference. They separate 'us' from 'them' on the basis of our physical features. We are left with feelings of estrangement; of not even belonging in the 'white'

world we have been socialized into and assimilated. We are caught in between two cultural worlds, and our experiences are largely ambivalent.

I am deeply suspicious of the literature on bi-culturalism that suggests negotiation of a bi-cultural identity is an effort to get the best of both cultural worlds. Whether in the guise of "adhesive adjustment" or developing a bilingual, bi-cultural model, both theoretical frameworks emphasize the immigrants' strong and persistent sense of attachment to the Korean culture while adopting some of the ways of the new culture. However, they are (potentially) limited by their exclusive focus on the first-generation immigrant experience. Rather than dispense with these insights into the first-generation, I am pressing for further research on how second-generation children of immigrants come to terms with these cultural attachments. Parents' efforts to teach their children Korean customs and traditions while simultaneously maintain a positive orientation toward the majority culture is a potential source of conflict and psychic ambivalence. How they negotiate what is best from both worlds is heavily scrutinized by their children's expectations of trying to fit in both worlds. It is the prototypical source of intergenerational and cultural conflict.

The identification, Korean Canadian, is clearly an unstable one. Many second-generation Korean Canadians are trying to come to terms with this racial label by creating associations with other Korean Canadians, or establishing ties with them. In their conscious efforts to understand why they are different from

their parents and from the larger, mainstream society, they are drawing strength from both their parents' struggles and their own in forging a distinct cultural identity. Because of their multivalent positioning across race, ethnic, and class lines, they are in a unique position to destabilize hegemonic constructions of Asian-ness. Thus, rather than being labelled Asian Canadian–or truncated into a monolithic, universal cultural identity, their efforts to identify themselves as Korean Canadian is really a symbolic call and embrace of their difference. That is, at this embryonic stage of coming to terms with their cultural identity, the term, 'Korean Canadian,' is actually a socially constructed, politicized identity. It is only invoked in acts of community–whether real, imagined, or symbolic–and in the context of racism and acute marginality. Thus, it is and always will be political–and it will draw its strength from experience and critical self-reflexivity.

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INTERLUDE/

Putting the Pieces Together: Snapshots of Suk-Hi's Life

- Dedicated to Jae-Ha and Suk-Ja, whose stories continue to inspire me to remember.

The idea of reattaching a lost member of our tribe through memory is a remarkable concept, because in truth, that may be the most tangible experience we have of one another. Memories are particular and fragmented, and they are all we have to offer the loved ones with whom we have shared life.

— Maureen Murdock, *Unreliable Truth*

History was someone you touched, you know, on Sunday mornings or in the barbershop. It's all around you. It's in the music, it's in the way you talk, it's in the way you cry, it's in the way you make love. Because you are denied your official history you are forced to excavate your real history even though you can never say that's what you are doing.

— James Baldwin, cited in *The Black Scholar*

Putting the Pieces Together

2. Who is She?

- Photo Courtesy of Jae-Ha Song

Song, Suk-Hi. (née Won, Suk-Hi)
Daughter, Sister, Wife, and Mother.
Immigrant. Citizen.

Birth: January 15, 1944. Chong-Ju, South Korea.
Married: November 28, 1968. Chong-Ju, South Korea.
Emigrated to Canada: March 21, 1970.
Granted Citizenship: 1976.
Had three children: two daughters, one son.
Occupation: Factory worker; Small business owner.
Death: August 3, 1984. Toronto, Canada.

Key facts and dates are not enough to capture your life. They seem empty and void of meaning. Faced with the reality that all I have left are fragmented memories and a handful of photographs of You, I will need to 'recreate' your presence in the world. To remember You, I will need to imagine and to invent. I will need to use my imagination to fill in the gaps. What kind of story will unfold in the narration? What do I want to remember of You?

Snapshots of Suk-Hi's Life

3. Farewell at Kimpo, 1968.
- Photo courtesy of Suk-Ja Won

Departures are always filled with sadness, especially when a loved one chooses to move to a foreign land.

You are about 24 or 25 years old. You have mixed feelings about her departure. She's moving to Canada with her three children. You are probably already missing her; you must have cried the night before. Compared to the other women, who are dressed in their traditional han bok or Western-style dress, you are wearing a knit top with slacks and sandals. You look tom-boyish, especially with your short hair. You're different from the rest of the women. I like that very much.

4. Meeting. Suwon, 1968.
- Photo courtesy of Jae-Ha Song

She was told that he would be her husband. He was educated and had a promising career. She obeyed her father's wish to marry. She would build a new life with the young man.

I thought this photo was taken during your Honeymoon. But it was actually taken during your 'formal' introduction. You were very bold and clever to travel to Suwon to see if the man really had a government job. He was surprised to see You at his office. He was equally impressed by your forthrightness. At least, this is what I'm told.

5. Wedding Day. 1968.
- Photo courtesy of Jae-Ha Song

He slowly lifted her veil in front of the onlookers. Her eyes downcast, she kept still and silent. For that brief moment, you could hear the rustle of her taffeta gown. Her heart racing, she knew the moment was near. They would be "Husband" and "Wife". Today, unlike the other days, she would embark on a new journey. She would now share her hopes and dreams with her husband.

You look beautiful in your wedding dress. Almost angelic. I love this photo of You. I'm wondering what you're thinking as the vows are recited. Were you nervous like I was on my wedding day? It seems we both shared mixed feelings of excitement and sadness. Your sister was not there to share your special day. And sadly, sixteen years after your death, You could not be there on my wedding day.

6. Departure. Kimpo, 1970.
- Photo courtesy of Jae-Ha Song

Saying good-bye is difficult. The journey ahead means leaving someone behind. Trying to hold back her tears, she embraces her mother one last time. There's a wellspring of emotions: excitement, fear, and sadness. What lies ahead in the new land? Her sister waits while her mother is left behind. Forging ahead she will pursue her dreams and build a new life elsewhere.

You said goodbye to your mother one last time. You hugged her and reassured her that you would return. But you weren't sure when. Life abroad would be hard. Learning a new language and new customs would be difficult, but you did so with the hope of building a new life.

7. Birthday. Toronto, 1971.
- Photo courtesy of Author

She's happy. The long hours at the factory cannot steal the joy she feels at this very moment for her own child: her first-born in the new land. Her daughter is healthy and strong. Her husband is delighted to have a child. The future is bright.

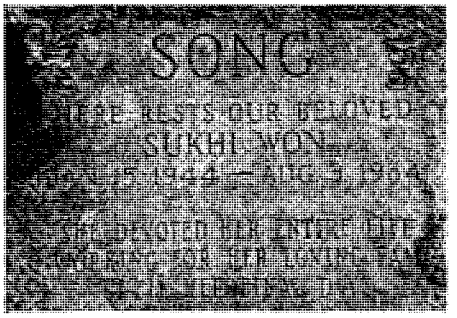
You lived with your sister for several months to get settled in. Including her children and your husband, six people shared a small apartment. You learnt quickly that hard work was necessary in order to survive. At night, You studied English with your husband. You worked hard to support your sister and your husband. You didn't mind the double-shifts; you wanted to build a bright future for your child(ren).

8. Picnic. Toronto, 1979.
- Photo courtesy of Jae-Ha Song

She hasn't taken a break for the past four years. Her legs are sore from standing all-day. It's been difficult on her husband; their savings lost in a failed business. She's worried, but remains resolute to rebuild her family's future. She wants to protect her children. Just for today, let's enjoy: laugh, sing, and play.

One of the strongest memories I have of this day is when You took off your sandals and raced with me against the other families. You laughed and joked with the other women. The feel of the grass on your feet must have been liberating. Still, though, I can never forget unraveling the bandages that night like many other nights. You always told me that you loved me. Sadly, I've forgotten the lull and timbre of your voice. This image is one of the few that I have of You and me together.

9. Grave. Toronto, 2000.
- Photo courtesy of Author



She left that day. Finding peace elsewhere. Never to return. What remains is an epigraph and fleeting memories etched in the imagination of those she touched.

Sixteen years later, I returned to your grave to introduce You to my husband. It was deeply emotional. To see the etched words intercut with painful memories of that day. But, something stirred inside me. I realized that You never left me. There were stories that nurtured my soul. Stories, which I hope to pass onto others. Glimpses of You as a young girl, a young bride, a hardworking woman, and a loving mother. These memories enrich us. Writing them ensures You will not be forgotten.

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THREE /

Liminal Borders, Ambivalent Boundaries:
Transgression & Transformation in Kyop'o Women's Cinema

> *The cultural criticism of expressive forms such as film are part and parcel of a greater transformative political project guided by grounded social theory. For this reason, the critical enterprise requires not only formal and aesthetic considerations of cinema, but also the identification, explication, and activation of the latent political meanings inherent in all film.*
>
> — Darrell Hamamoto, *Countervisions*

Korea and America: two worlds, which collide and coalesce in the narratives of mothers and daughters and captured in the aesthetic work of independent Korean American women's cinema. In the hybrid cinema of *kyop'o* (overseas Korean) women, we see the liminal borders and ambivalent boundaries of women negotiating their multiple positions in two competing cultural worlds: Korean and American. Unlike the conventional techniques of Hollywood realist cinema, Korean American women's cinema largely adopts an experimental format. Their films are not defined by chest-beating nationalist tropes such as *I am Korean American and I am proud of it*! Rather, there is a subtle and complex introspection of one's location and position in a heterogeneous world of cultural difference marked by race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

As a novice spectator, (hardly schooled in avant-garde film theory) I'm struck by the personal candor of these films and videos. The intimacy of their

visual confessionals, whether captured up-front in a documentary interview or rehearsed in a dramatic re-enactment, touches me. I can't help but be pulled into the spectacle of the image, but it's not like the Hollywood sort where I see images of Asian women objectified and powerless to the male gaze. I see something different. I see for the first time, myself, in these films. I identify with these *kyop'o* filmmakers in their search for identity, and I begin to understand the complex interplay between language, memory, and longing for home/land. Borders and boundaries are not static and steadfast; they are transgressed and transformed by the triple bind of *kyop'o* women filmmakers: as Korean, woman, and artist.[48]

We need to re/dis-cover and embrace the contingent differences within each term held by *Asian* and *American* in Korean American women's cinema.[49] In the context of this paper, I will argue that the general theme of transgression and transformation is centered on the location and position of *kyop'o* women in at least two competing contexts: Korean and American. While the former focuses on the contingencies of gender in an anti-colonial, nationalistic discourse circumscribed by male privilege in a neo-Confucian context, the latter focuses on the contingencies of racial/ethnic difference in a white-dominant cultural

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[48] See Helen Lee. 1997. "A Peculiar Sensation: A Personal Genealogy of Korean American Women's Cinema," in *Cineaste*. Volume 23, no. 1 (Winter): 36. Document maintained on server: http://www.lib.berkeley.edu at the University of California, Berkeley Media Resources Center.

[49] For an excellent discussion on the solidus, which unites the terms, *Asian* and *American*, please see David Palumbo-Liu. 1999. *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

context. Of course, their crossover and intersections with class complicate both, but I will highlight their fluid movement across physical, imaginative, linguistic, and cultural borders. Thus, my discussion will be restricted to the contradictions and tensions of occupying multiple interstitial positions defined by the historical legacy of colonialism, American cultural hegemony, and patriarchal sexual relationships. But it will also point to their transformative potential in the connection between language, memory and subjectivity in select independent films.

Language, Memory & Subjectivity: Reinscribing Korean American Women's History

The video work of Yunah Hong (1990, 1992) reveals the rich complexity of the relationship between language, memory and subjectivity. Whether across generations, across cultures, or across nations and the arbitrary divisions within a country (that is, Korea as it is divided along the 38th parallel), the negotiations of a cultural identity involve a return or re-search of roots. Her early video, *memory/all echo*, which draws inspiration from Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's book, *Dictée*, pays homage to the role of women in shaping Korean history and in problematizing the male-centered discourses of Korean nationalism. Against the historical backdrop of Japanese colonization, martyrs such as Ahn Joong Kun and Yu Guan Soon—a sixteen-year-old Korean woman who led a massive protest against Japanese colonialism on March 1, 1919 (*Sam-il Undong*), are re-cited and re-inscribed in the history of Korean independence. Faded black and

white pictures of Yu Guan Soon and the former assassinated ruler Queen Min are accompanied by a woman's voice-over that recites Yu's courage in forming a nation-wide resistance movement and her tragic arrest and execution by Japanese officers (see Cha 1982: 30-32). Another woman, whose voice is marked by a thick Korean accent then follows with a recital of a hand-written excerpt in *Dictée*.[50]

The sharp juxtaposition of culturally marked voice-overs (one English the other Korean reciting excerpts from Cha's book) and shifting scenes/visual images reveal a theoretically rich and sophisticated understanding of *kyop'o* cultural identifications.[51] There is no balance between Korea and America, between here and there, and between past and present. Instead, the memories and effects of Japanese colonialism, the Korean War, years of civil unrest against authoritarian rule, and patriarchal privilege complicate their relationships. Korean women are thus implicated in the historic forces of colonization, war, and civil unrest, while also battling with the sexual conservatism of neo-

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[50] Time and space restrictions cannot permit a full discussion of the theoretical significance of *Dictée* to Korean American cultural production. This will be explored further in another chapter.

[51] Most prominent are the visual images which vacillate between a torn country divided by North and South, a young girl watching her mother and brother argue over his participation in a student demonstration, interspersed with archival footage of the Korean War, Japanese colonization, and scrolling text. The assemblage is confusing; though, it falls in line with Cha's deconstruction of the implied coherence and correspondence between language, word, and image that is often taken for granted.

Confucian ideals of Korean femininity: chastity, fidelity, and self-sacrifice.[52]

Indebted to Cha (1982), *memory/all echo* presses the need for recovery of the past through memory. To be re/located through recitation, the cultural borders between East and West (*Korea and America*), and North and South (*within Korea*) are stretched to reveal the interstitial limits of Korean American cultural identifications. It subverts the willful indifference often exhibited by the powerful in colonial and neo-colonial relations by placing Korean history center-stage: Korea is no longer pushed to the periphery; the recitation of Japanese atrocities and American indifference to colonization and national division stir the nationalist consciousness of all Koreans. Significant events in Korean History are recited "to name it now so as not to repeat history in oblivion" (Cha 1982: 33) and Cha reclaims this history by re-centering women in its largely male-centric discourse.

At another level, while the identification of *Korean American woman* is invisible from the master narratives of the West and official Korean history, it is reinscribed from the daughter's initial sense of her own Korean identity that springs from her parents' nationalist narratives. The young girl, who is the flashback of the adult author (*hence a recollection or re-memory*), attempts to understand her position as *kyop'o* woman by tracing the genealogy of her Korean American female identity to Korea, the *nation*, to *race*, and to *ancestry*. One's

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[52] Here I'm thinking of the traditional stories my father told me as a child: *The Tale of Choon-hyang*, a kisaeng's daughter who remained loyal to her high-born lover despite torture and imprisonment, and the story of *Simchung*, the filial daughter who sacrificed herself for her blind old father.

sense of self is not static or stable, as revealed in the video. It is destabilized by endless differentiation, moving from race and nationality to sect, strain, breed, and finally caste. In between, the narratives of mother further complicate this identification because her exile leaves her "spirit-heart" or *Mah-uhm* unfulfilled.

The longing for home often originates from conditions of exile or forced immigration. In the case of Cha's mother, she fled from Korea to Manchuria during the period of Japanese colonization and eventually immigrated to the United States. Thus, the immigrant mother passes onto her daughter this sense of displacement in space and time. For both, in their own unique way, "destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of search. Fixed in its perpetual exile" (Cha 1982: 81). For the mother, search and longing are tied to physical movement across national, cultural, and linguistic borders, while for the daughter, there is an ambivalent search crossing facile boundaries between America and Korea. She is simultaneously suspended between and belonging to neither.[53] She is caught in the spatial and temporal interstices of memories and experiences across real, imaginary, and symbolic places that reside in the cultural nationalist narratives of her parents and their exilic longing for home.

The liminality of borders and the ambivalence of boundaries are aptly captured when the Korean American narrator (*via a series of black and white photographs of Cha returning to Korea for a visit*) is interrogated "every ten feet" by

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[53] See Elaine H. Kim. 1994. Poised on the In-between: A Korean American's Reflections on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*. In *Writing Self, Writing Nation: A Collection of Essays on Dictée by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha*. Edited by Elaine H. Kim and Norma Alarcón. Berkeley, California: Third Woman Press: 3-34.

"uni formed" Korean immigration officials. Official documents, such as an American passport, are not enough to secure her hybridized Korean/American identity. Though she shares their blood, colour, shape, form, smell, speech, breath, and will to "espouse this land this sky this time this people" (Cha 1982: 57), and she longs to be recognized as part of the group, she is consistently 'othered' by her own. She is conscious that she is not one of them; she is not allowed to speak from station to station during security check. After her interrogation, she finds herself caught in a demonstration that she discovers is part of a long series of social unrest—indicative of nothing has changed in Korea. The war still rages on; division is now imposed by the South Korean police and soldiers.

In another piece, which extends this theme of re-tracing roots through memory, Yunah Hong (1992) narrates the story of a Korean woman's experience of emigrating to Hawaii at the turn of the century. *Through the Milky Way* is a recovery of the past by contextualizing the sense of displacement that arises from the conflict between native identity and adopted culture. The (grand)mother protagonist is seen through the eyes of a child narrator/auteur filmmaker. She begins her experimental piece by stating that, "Every generation begins a journey. In December 1902, 121 Koreans left their native land for Hawaii." At once it suggests every Korean American has origins in somebody else's journey, whether grandparent or parent, while it simultaneously attempts to recenter Korean women in this fledgling history by delving into the crevices of their

counter-memories.

Through Hong's narration, we learn that some of the Korean women who emigrated to Hawaii around the turn of the century were "picture brides." But, for each picture bride, there is always a story behind her journey. Personal reasons to escape hardship or to refuse submitting to patriarchal social practices (such as remaining married to a man with a concubine/mistress.) Dreams of the new land, however, are tempered by the harsh reality of menial labour, little sleep, and endless worry. Through the narrative of the (grand)mother, we learn that her days were spent working on the sugar plantation while at night she would do laundry for other Korean workers. Interspersed with her physical activities, she would reminisce about her forsaken homeland. Archival footage of Korean plantation workers coupled by images of a young girl walking through a bleak landscape are narrated by the following voice-over:

> *Displaced. She dares to cross a boundary. The place has existed within her ever since she arrived. When she speaks, it is silent; when she is silent, it speaks. The distance of two places, twenty hours ahead of time. When she is out there she feels here is so far away. The memory of here is so dim. At one moment, the memory passes. At another, it disappears without a trace. She is on this side of the road, and yet, still, on the other side of the road...*

Both visually and through narration, Hong (1992) aptly captures the fluidity of cultural boundaries. Language and memory are tied to loss, and they are further complicated by tongue-tying experiences of acculturation. Spoken English marked by broken inflection and strained intonation; in another voice-over marked by a thick Korean accent. The shift between oral fluency and

accented speech serve to displace an implied coherence of the national identity: *Korean/American*. Though official papers may grant her residency, the Korean American immigrant woman is still marked by her cultural difference while also marked by her gender in defying neo-Confucian ideals of fidelity, obedience, and sacrifice. She is both here and there, while neither there nor here. Her sense of cultural displacement is found within the simultaneous suspension of 'the Korean' and 'the American.' Both cultural identities are interrogated and their borders stretched to reveal the liminal spaces *kyop'o* women occupy in both the Old World and the New World. Thus, language, speech, and voice are punctuated by her memories and longing for Home/land.

Immigrant Subjectivities: Intergenerational Conflict, Racial Violence & De/Stabilizing the Model Minority

With the post-1965 immigration boom of Asians to America, the genre of Asian American literature and (independent) film have attempted to grapple with the *model minority myth*. As racialized "others" who occupy a position outside the dominant white mainstream, Asian identities are collapsed (into a singular, monolithic identity which is equally problematic) and reconstructed along a binary construct of difference in terms of a 'black-white' continuum. Their ambiguous, middling positions maintain systems of privilege and power but also threaten and destabilize these false constructs of hierarchies. Both *either/or* and *neither/nor* in the black/white continuum of race discourse, the third space opened up by the racial ambiguity of Asians reveals the source of their

oppression in America.

As members of both the "nonwhite other" and an intermediate group between black and white, Asian people have received "special opportunities" but have also faced "unique disabilities" (Okihiro 1994: xi). In the case of the model minority myth, it serves to maintain the status quo based on a model of success. However, while Asians are lauded for their alleged economic success, they continue to face (white) racism in the political, economic, and social arenas, and have been targets of violence and resentment like in the case of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots (or *Sa-I-Gu* as known by the Korean American community).

Coming to terms with the model minority myth, at least in the context of independent *kyop'o* women's cinema, is to get up close and personal. In the documentary work of Sun-Kyung Yi (1996),[54] and collaborative work of Christine Choy, Elaine Kim and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson (1993), and short satire of Christine Chang (1992), these *kyop'o* women artists have focused on destabilizing the hegemony of the *model minority* myth. Each, in their own way, interrogates the limits and boundaries of what it means to be Korean/American/Canadian. They problematize the boundaries of race, ethnicity, gender, and class by debunking

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[54] Though Sun Kyung Yi is Korean Canadian, her documentary, *Scenes from a Corner Store,* aptly describes the intergenerational conflict of Korean immigrant parents and their Canadian-born daughters. The issues raised in this documentary I believe transcend the contingencies of national identity. It offers insight into the different sources of intergenerational conflict, the struggles posed by acculturation and assimilation, and the ambivalence in negotiating the boundaries of ethnic identity. For further discussion, please refer to Chapter Two entitled, *Between Two Worlds: Exploratory Notes on Second-Generation Korean Canadians.*

the myth that hard work will be rewarded.

In *Scenes from a Corner Store* (1996), for instance, the intergenerational conflict between immigrant parents and second-generation *kyop'o* daughters is couched in the intersection of their competing narratives. While the narratives of first-generation immigrants describe a life of struggle, hardship, and shame in owning a small corner store, they are re-appropriated and recast in terms of a general "immigrant story" by their three second-generation daughters. A trope that often describes a young adult's determination to succeed in school and have a successful job. Though, sometimes, the pressure to succeed proves to be immense, and family conflict ensues (*as in the case of Carolyn who decided not to go to university and who ran away from her home*).

Shifting between the narratives of Mr. Bak and his second daughter, Evelyn, Yi (1996) carefully slices through the myth of the model minority by highlighting the trope of immigrant hardship and psychic conflict, and putting a human face to them by revealing their tears and sigh-full resignations. Owning a corner store brings no glory to either person; it is a source of embarrassment and shame. However, what Yi's intimate portrait of the Bak family reveals is that their own personal narratives have been co-opted by a larger discourse, which recasts their struggles and determination to succeed as a cultural myth of being Asian.

The boundaries between *immigrant, citizen, model minority,* and *Korean/Canadian* are blurred and ambivalent. While her documentary attempts to

deconstruct this myth by showing the emotional face of Korean immigrants trying to succeed in Canada, Yi still leaves room for ambivalence since both parents and children are caught in the seduction of capital, or trope of *immigrant success*. Their suffering takes on heroic proportions, because hard work is the only way to succeed—and to be more like a Canadian. But the fact of the matter is that their narratives are shaped by discriminatory practices that appear to be invisible—they have no comprehension of the labour market imposing structural barriers, they are victims of it. Thus, Evelyn's heroic attempt to excel in school and her aspiration to become a medical doctor is at once a clear refusal to work in a corner store, but it is still another dimension of the oppressive effects of the model minority myth that shackle many Asians today.

Taken to its extreme limits, the model minority myth can besiege a community, especially in the face of blatant racism. In their candid portrait of Koreatown after the 1992 L.A. Riots, collaborators, Christine Choy, Elaine Kim and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson offer another perspective on the event. Seen through the eyes of Korean American women, the discourse centers on pain, shock, anger, and confusion. The different women interviewed describe their hopes and aspirations in coming to America, and how in the span of three days, their dreams and years of hard work came to ruin. We also see them trying to understand how their community and perceptions of their community by blacks, whites, and Hispanics were involved in exacerbating the problem. Their candidness stands on the border between prejudice and xenophobia, but their

narratives serve to introduce a new voice to the discourse on race relations in America. Through their experience of fear, disbelief, shock and anger, we learn from these Korean American women that the contents of the American Dream have to be seriously questioned; and the notion of an American identity problematized. Who defines this dream? And what rites of passage will ensue in pursuit of this dream?

Clearly, the transgressive element of this documentary is to introduce the position of *kyop'o* women caught in the interstices of class, race, ethnicity, and gender. Caught between the triangulation of blacks, Hispanics, and whites, Korean Americans face structural forms of discrimination. Their businesses are often set up in poor neighborhoods dominated by people of colour. Poverty and violence in South Central L.A. dovetail with the Korean immigrant shopkeepers' struggle to buy a cheap/er business that insurers are most likely to red-list (*businesses which are often seen as a high-risk for insurers to cover*). They have a dream to succeed; they work hard operating these businesses with poor English skills and limited knowledge of American cultural mores. The images of America they grew up with in Korea are totally shattered once they set up shop in South Central: America more resembles Mexico in the words of a Korean immigrant shopkeeper.

While perceived to be unfriendly, uncaring, and racist to the black community, the narratives of these shopkeepers try to explain their earnest efforts to fulfill the *American Dream* by putting in long hours, and sacrificing their

personal lives for the sake of running a business. Thus, their narratives are recuperated from the violent one-dimensional images of armed Korean men shooting aimlessly at mobs of rioters. Their voices are no longer silent.

In *Be Good, My Children,* Christine Chang opts for a satirical look at Korean immigrant life. Framed around the story-line of a born-again Christian Korean immigrant mother and her two 1.5 children struggling to make it in the Big Apple—a daughter who aspires to be an actress but is caught working nights as a bartender to make ends meet despite her university degree, and her brother who struggles from job to job by dreams of becoming a car salesman in L.A.—Chang turns the model minority myth and conventional trope of immigrant success upside down. She subverts "white privilege" by having an Asian/Korean woman named *Mae East* dressed up in a blonde wig and talking like her infamous counterpart *Mae West.* At once, this symbolizes the farce in trying to be something that you are not: no matter how hard you try, you can't be 'white.' But at the same time, it provides a subtext on the cultural indifference of whites to Korean Americans, and the pressing question as to what constitutes an American—someone who has blonde hair, blue eyes or immigrants who are struggling to fulfill an *empty* dream?

Though the Korean immigrant mother busies herself with work running her clothing shop in Harlem and attending to regular church activities—a common signifier nowadays for the many Koreans who are born-again Christians in North America, her children are utter sources of disappointment.

Judy, a university graduate and aspiring actress, can't seem to make ends meet and occasionally has to ask her mother for money, and she's even willing to be bribed to go to church for it. Jimmy, on the other hand, is a highschool drop out obsessed with fast cars. In the end, both children steal the offering of their mother's new church, not too sure where to go or what to do with it. But, what's even more comical is that the mother sings "*Somewhere Over the Rainbow.*" Not only does this floor the all-seeing Mae East—a substitute white (*and occasional alter ego to Judy*)—but it provides an indirect commentary of ambivalence. Despite all her disappointment and hardship, this woman still finds hope—as symbolized in the popular Judy Garland song—does this mean she is delusional or is she really steadfast? There is no easy answer; you are left feeling ambivalent.

The unexpected twists and turns of Asian/Korean American women singing famous American tunes, and Judy recalling and discussing a dream she had about her sexuality and the perceptions white men have of Asian women with her white, and obviously uptight therapist who dispenses poor advice, is a telling commentary.[55] Cultural differences are not recognized; they are leveled to the point of ridicule and dismissed as insignificant in the liberal rhetoric of

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[55] In this scene, Judy recalls her dream of not quite fitting into any of the Western images of Asian female sexuality. While Judy is "a woman who knows how to cook" and talks like Mae West, she is contrasted with other Asian women (working in a brothel ironically) typecast as *Cherry Blossom, Madame Butterfly,* and *Lady Dragon.* Obviously, Chang pokes fun at the dominant controlling images of Hollywood in portraying Asian women as either passive/submissive or sexually dangerous/experienced.

cultural diversity. White norms rule and Korean Americans have to adapt to them. Though her white boyfriend and his parents pride themselves as being open and fascinated by ethnic cuisine and Asian culture, their liberal rhetoric still exposes cultural insensitivity. In the case of the parents, they perpetuate an image of Harlem as unsafe and crime-infested while her boyfriend casually comments that he has an Asian housekeeper come in to do his laundry, though he fancies Judy's sexy Asian body. While they can't see the contradictions of their comments, Judy (and the audience) can't help but see them (*via her alter ego, Mae East*). Thus, Chang's sassy visual commentary on American multiculturalism and the struggle of Korean Americans stretches the boundaries between *Korean* and *American*. The immigrant can never be a citizen (*though her children can be "Americanized");* the immigrant and her children are always suspended between the two signifiers.

Asian/Korean/American/Woman: Seeing through Different Eyes

The idea of borders and boundaries being stretched and transformed is a common theme in independent *kyop'o* women's cinema. By focusing on a diverse set of women's experiences shaped by race, ethnicity, gender, and class—across generations, across nations, across languages—these *kyop'o* women filmmakers engage in the complex interplay between language, memory and subjectivity. Through the vehicle of the visual medium, time and space are compressed to reveal haunting representations that traverse real and fictional worlds. As an oeuvre, these artists are engaged in a process of becoming (see

Stuart Hall 2000)—through fictional characters or real people—of coming to terms with the complex interplay between *Asian/Korean/American/woman*. Neither category can be understood in its own right. The collusion of different worlds—shaped by linguistic and cultural differences—means that each term has to be understood relationally, not exclusively.

Whether through the landscapes of body, voice, and memory, independent *kyop'o* women filmmakers seem to transgress and transform conventional boundaries. They have re-appropriated the dominant controlling images of Hollywood and turned them around for self-reflection.[56] We are no longer the Madame Butterflies, Lotus Blossoms, or Dragon Ladies of the past—and yet, we still have to grapple with their legacy since they permeate through the deep crevices of our gendered and racialized consciousness. Despite our parents' admonitions to be silent, to speak softly, to look pretty, to act feminine may be well intentioned and naturalized as common signifiers of developmental angst—they are very often implicated in hidden cultural norms: whether *Asian/Korean/(North) American*.

In a hip documentary focusing on two young Asian women contemplating cosmetic surgery, Ann Shin (2000) takes us through their emotional journey in trying to come to terms with their racial identity and search

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[56] See Yen Le Espiritu. 1997. *Asian American Women and Men: Labour, Laws, and Love*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

for beauty. *Western Eyes*[57] offers an intimate portrait of a young 16 year-old Korean Canadian girl recall not fitting it in her mainly white neighborhood in rural Alberta—and finally opting for eye-lid surgery, while an older Filipino Canadian woman is still thinking about it. Despite their age, ethnic, and class differences, both Asian Canadian women are united in their feelings of awkwardness posed by their racial identity. Compared to the white, waifish women they see on t.v. and in fashion magazines—even on the streets of Edmonton and Toronto—they feel they are inferior to them. Their small eyes apparently get in the way.

It might be tempting for us to dismiss cosmetic surgery as self-absorbed egoism, but through the narratives of Sharon Kim and Maria Estante, we are drawn into an emotional and painful journey that lies deep behind the desire for plastic surgery. Yet, we are left feeling ambivalent. At one end, we feel angry and frustrated at the standard of beauty promoted and perpetuated by popular culture, but we are equally empathetic to the pain and feelings of awkwardness these two women feel. *How many of us have felt we didn't measure up to the glamour models and actresses we saw on television and in the fashion magazines?*

The power of this documentary rests on the fact that Asian women are

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[57] Though Ann Shin is a Korean Canadian film director, and her documentary focuses on two Asian women living in Canada, I believe the issues she raise in this documentary transcend ethnic and national boundaries. Women, regardless of ethnic and national background in North America, have to grapple with unyielding standards of beauty. Shin's documentary manages to take a hip approach by layering the personal interviews with pop-culture references to beauty icons and supermodels.

now talking openly and up-front about not fitting into the hidden white standard of beauty. Though resorting to cosmetic surgery allows us to make our eyes look more Western (*bigger and round*), the purpose of the video is to question if this should even be considered as a viable option. Shin deftly slices through the hidden white standard in the complex relationship between beauty and perception. Questions such as, *How we see, how we are seen, and how we see how we are seen* is not restricted to the level of individual idiosyncrasies; it is also shaped by larger social forces that impinge on us. Thus, another space is opened up between the *Asian/Korean/American*—though this time, filtered through the lens of gender.

Perhaps, because of their triple bind as *Korean/American/artist*, independent *kyop'o* women filmmakers have learned to be adept readers of images. Given the recent flowering of their work over the past 15 years in Canada and the United States, it appears they have something fresh to offer us. No longer just Asian/American, they are also Korean/American—but they also traverse between the liminal borders between the two. At times, the issues they discuss can be generalized to all of us, though you can't help to notice also the specificity of their experiences. Though I'm not arguing for a pure, uncontaminated, authentic *Korean/American/Canadian cinema* eclipsing the specificity of their experiences under the banner of *Asian/American/Canadian* is not productive either.

I think the theoretical acumen and power of this cinematic oeuvre is that

there is nothing purely one thing. *Asian/Korean/American/Canadian*—these boundaries crossover to each other; they remain elusive and liminal. Korean American can easily be Asian American and vice versa, given the general position Asian minorities hold in American society. But the specificity of cultural narratives and signifiers, such as a child wearing a *Han Bok* or signs written in *Hangul* throughout Koreatowns across L.A. and Toronto suggest there is something distinctively different and specific to Korean American experiences. Still, though, to further complicate things, within each category of *Asian/Korean/American/Canadian*, differences posed by race, ethnicity, gender, and class spill over to each other.

It's clear the films I review offer a fresh look at Asian America. Korean American women filmmakers have adjusted their lens to Korean women speaking about their experiences in a strange and foreign land called (North) America. Through the complex interplay between language, memory, and subjectivity we are drawn in to haunting and complex representations of the (post) colonial subject. From frame to frame, we—the *kyop'o* spectator, the second-generation *kyop'o* who have no intimate knowledge of a land called Korea—are one step closer to self/cultural identification. They offer us different ways at looking at home, memory, and language. How they work together to forge our cultural identifications—but most important of all, they offer an elegant approach to the perpetual motion of search to what Helen Lee calls

"curiously beautiful ways of travelling in a strange land" (Lee 1997). They are not only involved; they have invited us too in this search/journey.

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Filmography

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Western Eyes. Ann Shin, 2000, 39 mins, 30 sec., video. National Film Board of Canada. P.O. Box 6100, Station Centre-Ville Montreal, Quebec H3C 3HS.

INTERLUDE/

Vignette: Voice – the faintest echo...

> *The voice is elusive. Once you've eliminated everything that is not the voice itself – the body that houses it, the words it carries, the notes it sings, the traits by which it defines a speaking person, and the timbres that colour it, what's left? What a strange object, what grist for poetic outpourings...*
>
> — Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*

Voice – the faintest echo...

10. Family Photograph.
- Photo courtesy of Jae-Ha Song

I heard it. Some time ago. A faint and distant echo murmuring inside and alongside your image. A black and white photo. A photo withered over time but invested with so much emotion and desire. My own investments in recalling an event that I never witnessed first-hand but imagine happening at a distant place and time. The power of

re/constructing that event through stories told and imagined. Couched in between fact and fiction. There is no date stamped on the photo-image, but it is obviously recorded in time and in space. I wonder when and where that photo took place, but more so, I begin to concentrate on that faint echo. Your voice in memory space. That 'grain' which embodies you (Roland Barthes).[58] *With the passage of time, the sound of your voice, as it once was but can never be repeated as the same, is now transformed in the sonic space of my imagination, alongside with my image-memories of You. Images and sounds, which coalesce into something ephemeral and fluid in memory space. That space of imagination, which opens up new spaces across the different realms of real, symbolic, and imaginary while simultaneously occupying them. Translating the images and sounds into words is a process fraught with difficulty. Words pose the threat of 'de-historicising' them. Robbing them of a sense of place, of context, and of positioning beside me and inside me. They tear at the fabric, but also, provide a new pastiche for reconstruction or recollection to discover our/my positioning within competing narratives: historical and personal.*

I concentrate on your voice, a barely audible echo, to connect it to the image I see: a black and white photo of you. Past in present, but it is in the present which modifies the recall of the past. I close my eyes. Now, the image fades into darkness and I try to remember your voice. The grain, the inflection, the timbre lull me into another place, to another time. Musical metaphors to suggest the seductive powers of imagination and the

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[58] See Barthes, Roland. 1985. "The Grain of the Voice" in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation.* Translated by Richard Howard. Hill & Wang: New York, 267-277.

potential abyss of the Sirens' call. Will the seduction of seizure and reification kill the memory? Listen. Can you hear the song of memory and nostalgic lament? Your photo; without a date to be recorded as historical fact but dated according to the passage of time. You are about the same age as I am; maybe a few years younger than I am now. But it is not our age that concerns me it is the various intersections that interest me. Women at the threshold of cultures, straddling between the crossroads of racialization, assimilation, and migratory movements within and across competing landscapes. Where we meet, others must be there. I want to find out is anyone there?

The search begins. A series of moving images. Brief, like a flash of light. Time is ephemeral in the recall. The memories of You, if they could be projected on screen, are that of an old home movie played out in vain. Over and over, like the fanatic who controls the remote, I freeze certain frames only to be disappointed by the worn, thin quality of the image and barely audible sound between the photo-image and screen-image. They don't match; they only resemble each other. Toni Morrison (1992) suggests that images are associated with sounds. Like her account of writing from 'the site of memory,' I see colour, light, texture and shade in my mental images (of You). The unfocused image of your face is now connected to the rhythm, timbre, tone, and pitch of your voice as I imagine it to be. The one thing I concentrate on is your voice.

Back then, unlike now, I heard it clearly. The voice associated with the weathered photo-image. Rhythmic sounds marked by foreign inflection. The branded tongue marked by

the clash of cultures and languages. Caught in-between and held hostage to time and geography. Mastery of one language is no easy task so how can You handle two very different languages. But You try. It was not so distant like it is now. Distance marked by the elapse of time and by the expanse of space. Your voice, barely audible among the multitude of 'immin' (i.e. immigrant) voices here, as opposed to there. Kyop'o woman, born so many years ago in a distant land that I am so unfamiliar with, your face and your voice still haunt me. How do I put ghost-mother to rest? Search for the voice (among the multitude of voices), search for You alongside me, search for similarities only to accept (and acknowledge) differences between us. But I begin the search (again) unsure of what to look for. Your voice, hidden in the crevices of my deepest memories. Your voice that is soft, resonant, and barely audible. Turn up the sound so that I can hear it...even the faintest echo of your laugh or sigh.

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FOUR/

Intercultural Visuality:
Image & Memory in the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha[59]

Dead words. Dead tongue. From disuse. Buried in Time's memory. Unemployed. Unspoken. History. Past. Let the one who is diseuse, one who is mother who waits nine days and nine nights be found. Restore memory. Let the one who is diseuse, one who is daughter restore spring with her each appearance from beneath the earth. The ink spills thickest before it runs dry before it stops writing at all.
- Dictée

11. Theresa Cha preparing an exhibition.
- Reproduced from *The Dream of the Audience*, curated by Constance M. Lewallen

I open this discussion on aesthetic interculturalism with an image *of* and recitation *by* Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, a visual artist well aware of the politics of intercultural representation. Born on March 4, 1951, in Pusan, South Korea, she was the third of five children, who grew up with the direct experience of exile. The economic and social hardships posed by the Korean War forced her family to move from place to place until eventually settling in San Francisco in 1964 after a brief two-year stay in Hawaii. Already a veteran of geographical dislocation at a young age, Cha's Catholic-school upbringing in the United States

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[59] I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Minh Nguyen in sharing her insights on Cha's artwork, and the Pacific Film Archive at U.C. Berkeley in allowing me access to Cha's video work.

overlaid her Korean roots with Christianity and steeped her in both the French and English languages and Greco-Roman classics. This exposure to different intercultural influences further encouraged her artistic and academic sensibilities to obtain graduate degrees in Comparative Literature and Fine Arts at the University of California at Berkeley.

For Cha, the environment of formal experimentation at U.C. Berkeley and the Bay Area meshed well with her biographical roots of dislocation. They served to develop a visual narrative of fragmentation in her oeuvre. Throughout her body of work, the themes of fragmentation and dislocation in all their multitudinous forms (i.e. linguistic, cultural, and geographic) resonate as a melancholic longing or search for an elusive cultural past of a "once was" that remains to be "elsewhere." This longing and search embody a fractured psyche that is transplanted to another place and culture. For Cha, of course, this adoption was *forced* instead of *chosen* and it forms the backdrop, or perhaps, impetus of her short but powerful art career spanning throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, until her tragic murder on November 5, 1982, in New York City, just seven days after the publication of her book, *Dictée*.

Spanning performance, photography, print media (e.g. visual and textual assemblages) and video art, Cha's art practice was both eclectic and fertile. But, despite this diversity in modes of expression, Cha's main preoccupation centered on language. Both spoken and written, language is fundamental to all of her work and it is taken up in novel ways. She pushes to the forefront her symbolic

connections to a Korean past that entwine with the real struggles of immigration and cultural assimilation as they are mediated by language. Accordingly, Cha's work suggests that our relationship to language and memory both unite and fracture any 'essentialising' narrative of identity both within and outside the borders of a unified and often, monolingual nation-state.

Returning to the opening image of Cha, we see the artist preparing for an exhibition, cleaning a glass window case with the word, *viewed*, written backwards in lower case. Read on different and multiple levels, this image plays on the idea of her 'viewing' us from a glass division, though she doesn't look directly into the camera, and of her being 'viewed' inside this transparent case. It also alludes to her (and to us by implication) 'viewing backwards'—as exemplified in the backwards position of the text that we see.

In all three references, language is tied to the activity of seeing, but multiple spaces open up to reveal disparate connections between sight and language. In being 'viewed', for instance, Cha's artwork could represent an extension of her self. Her body is tied to language through the organs of the mouth and the larynx, which permits the articulation of words in a language system. But, there is also an ironic moment in this image of Cha. Being encased in a glass window with the word, *viewed*, written backwards suggests that language does not always lend a transparent connection to the world, despite the transparency of the glass case. That is, while language permits access to the

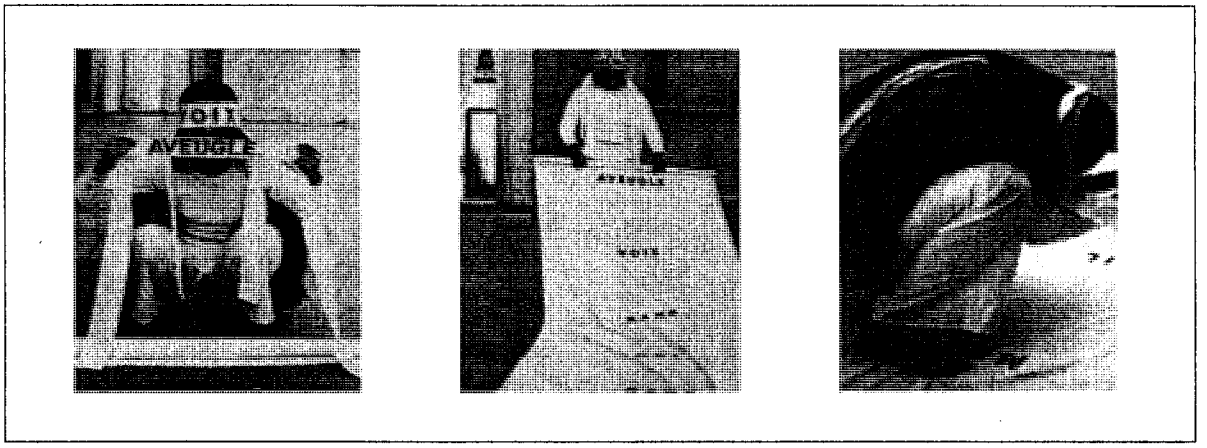
world, it can also provide an impasse for those not acquainted with the rules of grammar or syntax of that given language.

The very position of the text, *viewed* as *deweiv*, is neither intelligible nor decipherable in the English language when it is read from the convention of left to right. If, however, it is read in the Asian way, from right to left, the graphemes become intelligible in the English language. Since this can only make sense once another convention is employed to decipher the graphemes, this suggests a subtle and implicit (almost unconscious) maneuver in which two language systems meet and transform themselves into a third language system. A space opens up to incorporate both conventions (i.e. Western and Eastern), and as such, it represents a *third space* or *hybrid space* that offsets the purity or domination of one language system over another. Finally, the third reading of the image alludes to Cha using language to 'view' the past. Here, language facilitates access to memory whether personal or collective (i.e. past in present), and as such, her incorporation of Korean graphemes in several of her installations testifies to this interpretation.

For the most part, Cha's artwork seizes the master languages of English and French at its roots by breaking down words into their semantic parts to develop new words and new meanings, or to play with their aural and written qualities to reveal the gaps in between listening, speaking, and writing words as text. As an immigrant or exile to America, trained and immersed in two foreign languages—English and French—Cha approaches language (acquisition) from

the perspective of an *outsider* living in the master's space. In several of her pieces and multi-media installations, Cha refers to these languages with a sense of distance and consciousness that is akin to an immigrant or exile learning a new language.

Turning to the second image, which captures still-photos of a 1975 performance entitled, *Aveugle Voix* (or Blind Voice), we see these very operations of manipulation and transformation in the grammatical structure of the French language.



12. Performance entitled, *Aveugle Voix*, 1975.
- Reproduced from *The Dream of the Audience*, curated by Constance M. Lewallen

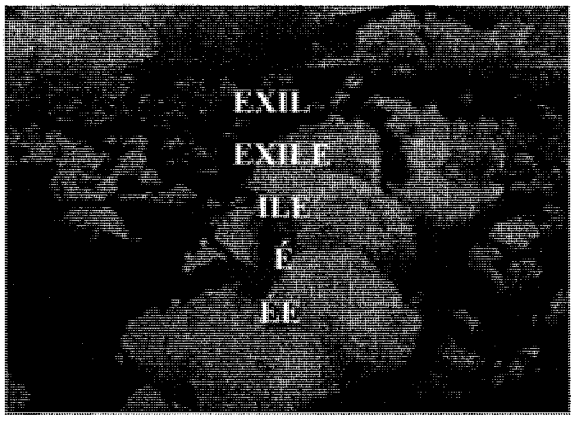
In this series of images, Cha is wearing a headband marked, *Voix* (or voice) tied over her eyes and another marked, *Aveugle* (or blind) tied over her mouth while unrolling a white banner with the following French text: *aveugle/ voix/ sans/ mot/ sans/ moi.* Translated into English, the statement reads *blind/ voice/ without/ word/ without/ me.*

Noting the position of the bands on the different parts of the body and their attending text in the (title of the) performance, there are multiple operations at work. First, the word as text, *Blind/Aveugle* and *Voice/Voix* bear little significance as individual, discrete words. However, their combination as *Aveugle Voix* when literally translated into English permits the adjective to be placed in front of the noun. Yet, the rules of French grammar dictate that the noun should precede the adjective; that is, the reversal of the original text, *Aveugle Voix,* should be written as *Voix Aveugle* in order to be translated properly as Blind Voice. At work in the original title of the performance is a literal translation of French into English that confuses the convention of one language system over another: French read in the English way. Such a maneuver of *literal translation* from one language system into another is common to foreigners learning a new language. They struggle with rules of grammar and correct syntax—mixing the position of nouns and adjectives from their native tongue to the host language.

Second, the position of the bands over the eyes and mouth in the first still-photo adds another dimension of Cha's manipulation of language. She opens up the possibility that sight is blind to voice (by the literal act of covering her eyes) and the voice speaks blindly (by the literal translation of the text covering her mouth). But, even more significant, is the possibility that "the eyes hear into the space of the blind voice" that is "without word" (*sans mot*) and

"without me" (*sans moi*) found in the last still-photo.[60] As Trinh T. Minh-ha (2001) notes, Cha's performance opens up a space between the *written* word and the word that is *spoken*. Without the aid of the written text, Cha plays on the sounds of words spoken in French. *Aveugle Voix* (blind voice) could easily be understood (aurally) as *(l')aveugle voit*, or *the blind sees*.

Both expressions sound the same in French, and consequently, they demonstrate the potential gaps between words that are written, words that are spoken, and words that are heard. Hearing is blind to the spoken word without its written form. Thus, there are gaps between different parts of the body: the eyes (to see text), the ears and the mouth (to hear text that is spoken), and the hands (to write text). While they may work together in the comprehension of a language, Cha's performance reveals their separate interventions in language as a bodily system.



13. Still from Multi-media video installation, *Exilée*, 1980.
- Reproduced from *The Dream of the Audience*, curated by Constance M. Lewallen

Other techniques of manipulation also operate in the multi-media video installation entitled, *Exilée* or *Exiled* in English (1980). In this piece, Cha adopts

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[60] See Trinh, T. Minh-ha. 2001. "White Spring," in *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982)*, edited by Constance M. Lewallen and prepared by the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press. 33-50.

the formal strategy of combining video and film to evoke the movement of time and space, which accompany physical migration, with the symbolic movement (or rather, stillness implied by the seizure of a moment in place and in time) of remembering that migration as a memory in video form. The textures of black and white (or light and shadow) between video and film, and within each medium, and the projection of a video onto a large film screen evoke an ephemeral connection between time, space, and memory. The soundtrack in the video carefully charts the time (or duration) in the trans-Pacific passage between San Francisco and Seoul: Distance in time, coupled by distance in space, is measured by the following track:

following daylight to the end of daylight

ten hours twenty three minuits[61] *sixteen hours ahead of this time*

ten hours twenty two minuits[62] *sixteen hours ahead of this time*

ten hours twenty one minutes sixteen hours ahead of this time

While Cha describes a flight from San Francisco to Seoul by counting off the passing minutes, she simultaneously reminds herself of the sixteen hours that separate her from her homeland. This combined allusion to *movement* and *stasis* evokes a sense of suspension. That is, running forward in time with the

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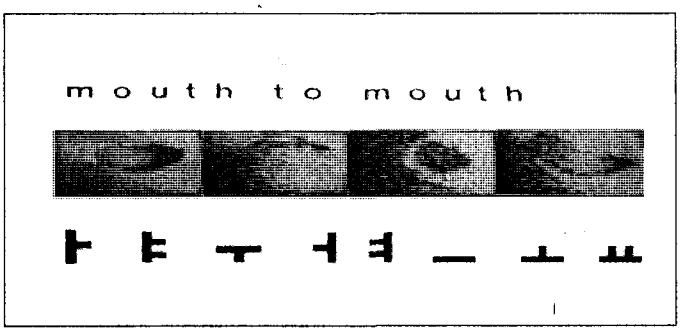
[61] Here, the French word, *minuits*, instead of, *minutes*, is deliberate.

[62] Ibid.

movement of minutes while remaining motionless by the fixed distance in hours, as measured by the division of Greenwich Mean Time zones that separate the two places, San Francisco and Seoul.

The next image extends this argument further by fleshing out the implicit connection between language, memory, and image. In the video entitled, *Mouth to Mouth* (1975), Cha records an anonymous woman mouthing Korean graphemes, or *Hangul* vowels. To the untrained Western eye, the slow pan in extreme close up focus on the movement of a mouth that is unintelligible and indecipherable in the master languages of French or English.

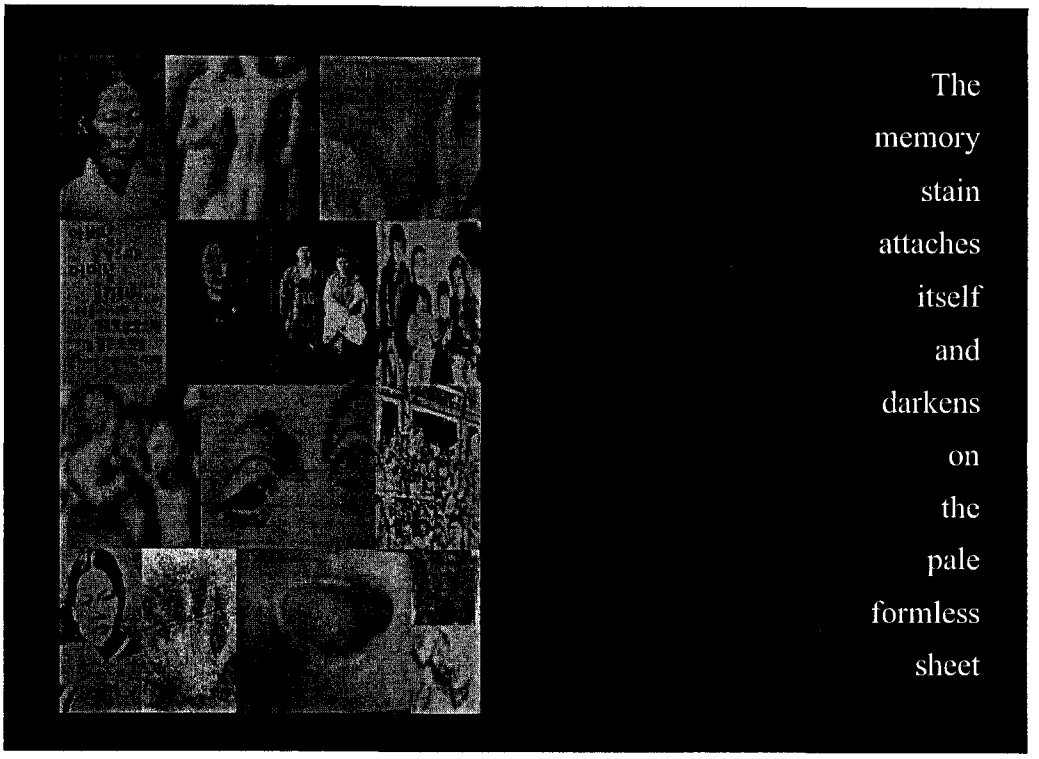
14. A compilation of Stills, *Mouth to Mouth*, 1975.
- Reproduced from *The Dream of the Audience*, curated by Constance M. Lewallen



Likewise, the fact that the Korean vowels are not heard, but rather, drowned out in electronic noise with recorded water and bird sounds, further suggest a mournful loss of a native language or Cha's mother('s) tongue. The sound of falling water (like drops of rain) and birds chirping in flight, combined with the dominant noise and image of video static that obscures the mouth, which seeks to re/articulate and recover the sounds of a lost language, suggest an effort to resurrect a distant past. Thus, Cha implores a *voice-resurrection* of her Korean past while the movement between light and shadow in the concave and

convex positions of the anonymous mouth signifies the movement between life and death in the resurrection of that past or Cha's Korean ancestry.

Language, in this case, *Hangul,* is both at the brink of erasure while resurrected to life in this video piece. Noise and silence co-mingle and coalesce to reveal gaps and fissures between the image track and the sound track. What is



15. A compilation of images created by Cha.
- Images reproduced from *The Dream of the Audience,* curated by Constance M. Lewallen

seen is often not heard, and what is heard is often not seen. Thus, the mouth that is marked by a fork tongue split between languages is one that is silenced and drowned out by another's master language or tongue. That is, Cha's quiet and poetic meditation on the movement of a mouth, which up close and in slow motion, seeks out to reclaim and to recover through articulation and enunciation of the graphemes of a lost language, is both ironic and symbolic of the dialectical

relation between silence and noise, and between losing a mother('s) tongue and remembering that mother('s) tongue.[63]

On this notion of *voice-resurrection* through image, memory, and language, Cha's book, *Dictée* (1982), is both seminal and powerful. As the collage of images suggest, the book is complex because of its formal composition, which mixes writing styles, images and voices, and its devotion to the story of several women: the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon, Joan of Arc, Ste. Thérèse, Cha's mother, Hyung Soon Huo, and Cha herself. Given the diversity of voices and mix of writing styles (i.e. journal entries, allegorical stories, dreams, and dictation exercises), *Dictée* is seminal and germane to discussions on identity politics inside and outside art circles. It is a direct poetic summation of Cha as a woman of colour, and as an artist, who struggled to find a voice to name the forces that shaped her.

In this provocative and experimental book, the spaces between text and image and the pages themselves inside the book appear to be fragments. However, these fragments are held together by the different voice positions of women as narrated by Cha. She writes from a conscious sense of distance. Neutral in tone, like a dictation exercise with punctuation and pauses duly noted in both French and English that open the book, and often from the perspective of a camera lens framing her subject, such as the case in her description of a young

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[63] Here, I am playing with the idea that mother tongue can easily refer to Cha's mother, Hyung Soon Huo, who spoke Korean fluently despite being raised in Manchuria.

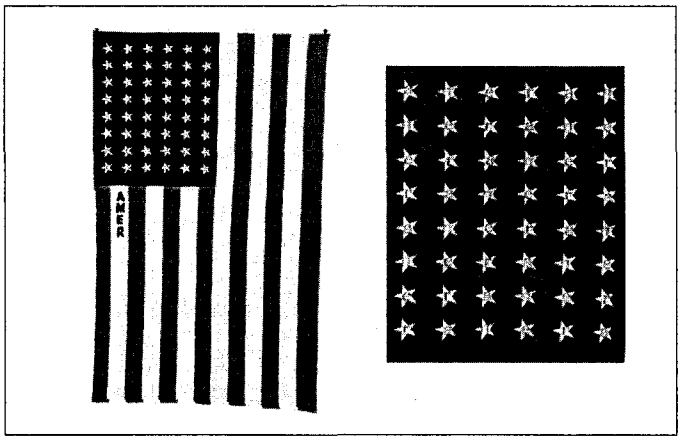
Korean bride preparing to get married. As the caption of the overhead reads, "the memory stain attaches itself and darkens on the pale formless sheet," *Dictée* represents Cha's attempt to mediate the pale white sheet of paper with the blackness of ink and the redness of blood to signify filial relations between a mother and a daughter, and relations that extend beyond the family to include a community of women, who are rewritten as martyrs in their own right. Thus, the book offers a rewriting of history as a master narrative towards one that aims to recover different and disparate histories of women, who would often not be mentioned together.

With the interspersion of English, French, and Korean throughout the book and the references to the nine Greek muses, which structure the book, *Dictée* forces the audience or reader to register the uneasy alliance of language systems that mark the hybrid tongue. The style of writing often alludes to a voice that stutters and stammers to mimic a master's language. In failing to mimic the master('s) languages of French and English, the Korean narrator's voice is marked by accented inflection. It is the type of speech that implodes with interruption and fragmentation. Words and sentence fragments are decomposed, repeated, and often, mis-spelled and mis-pronounced. They are isolated from each other and left incomplete.

To conclude my discussion, I leave you with this final image of Cha's artwork, entitled, *Amer* (1976). Again, a sense of ambivalence resonates throughout the work. An image of a flag, in red, white and blue and with stars

and stripe, resembles the American flag at first glance. However, the vertical (top-down) position of the symbolic flag-image is different from the horizontal (left-right) position of the real American flag. Thus, it serves as a *metonymic* symbol of (and for) America. But, the text of the piece, which is also peppered throughout the top-left corner of the image-flag reads, *Amer*, or the French word for '*bitter.*' The individual graphemes form the French word for '*bitter,*' but in their different possible combinations, the word, *Amer*, could also mean, '*à mer,*' or '*to the sea.*' Broken down further as individual graphemes, the letters, a/ m/ e/ r/ could also combine to form the following words: *mer* (or *sea*); *ma* (or *my* in feminine form); and mare (or pond), while the pronunciation of individual graphemes in three-letter combinations could resemble a ritualistic chant: *ame, ram, mer, ame, era, mer,* and etcetera.

16. *Amer*, ca. 1976.
- Reproduced from *The Dream of the Audience*, curated by Constance M. Lewallen



Nevertheless, in just reading the two basic combinations, *amer* and *à mer*, we see a potential connection between *being bitter* and *looking to the sea.* For many Asian immigrants and exiles, America captures both senses of the French word and meaning combinations contained in the word. Looking and referring *to the sea*, Asian-based immigrants and exiles have traveled oceans and landscapes in their real,

physical migrations to another home/land. While this suggests an image for hope and the pursuit of freedom for the immigrant or exile in America, as emblematic of the American flag, the real frustrations and struggles associated with acculturation and assimilation are deftly captured in the other word combination, *amer*, or *bitter*. Living in a foreign land, despite its offer and promise of better opportunities for the immigrant and the exile, is really fraught with many frustrations and constant battles or struggles with language acquisition and cultural assimilation. In this very powerful conceptual piece, Cha deftly captures the different layers of meaning behind a flag. For the Korean immigrant or exile in America, this image-flag signifies belonging to a place that is not their own, and how that flag represents an intercultural space that is turned upside down. It echoes the multiple feelings of longing, desire, and hope and happiness, which highlight the ambivalence of wanting to belong to a place (such as a nation-state) but not belonging there (as a symbolic and imaginary elsewhere).

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INTERLUDE/

Vignette: Writing Memory - A Journey to Voice

> *We write because language is the way we keep a hold on life. With words we experience our deepest understandings of what it means to be intimate. We communicate to connect, to know community. Even though writing is a solitary act, when I sit with words that I trust will be read by someone, I know that I can never be truly alone. There is always someone who waits for words, eager to embrace them and hold them close.*
>
> - bell hooks, *Remembered Rapture*

Writing Memory - A Journey to Voice

It's cold and wet outside – in fact unusually cold for Spring weather. The rain is quite heavy and oddly, its downpour reminds me of Tokyo. Around this time of the year, the cherry blossoms would have come and gone and you would feel the impending heat and humidity of summer. Alas, my time in Tokyo is now a memory.

Thinking back of how I spent my time in Tokyo, I felt incredibly alone, completely removed from the rhythm of life in the bustling streets of Arakawa-ku, with the local market down the street from my apartment. Most of my days were spent in a small, bright room filled with sunshine, surrounded by photos of my childhood. Reading and writing this project, which seemed to take forever. I struggled with writing; to find my voice amongst the many. Searching for words to describe the myriad of feelings and

emotions deep within me. Somehow, though, I was blocked. I just couldn't write. That was a very dark period in my life – filled with one crisis after another. But, somehow, I managed to survive – and yet, I felt I lost so much in the confusion. I just couldn't write; I lost my voice. Years later, I've gained confidence to write (again) and finish what I started so long ago. That is why I'm writing about the journey – my journey to voice that I repeatedly turned to in the solace and comfort of other women writers. Hearing their stories and gaining the strength to tell my own.

"My journey to voice has been marked by starts and stops, side trips, meanderings, and finding myself back where I began. The road winds on, always drawing me.," writes Cecilia Rodriguez Milanes (1998: 325). Oddly, I've followed a similar path. On and off and on again; traveling to different cities and across different boundaries: real, symbolic and metaphoric. Still unsure, yet steadfast to trek onwards, I continue to write. By finishing this project what do I gain? bell hooks, in her poignant discussion on writing autobiography, suggests that in doing so I will 'break hold of the past and be fully in the present' (1999: 80-81). In the process, I nurture my voice.

To write about memories of You, I dove into the abyss and discovered that the memory-images are no longer sharp and crisp. They are grainy like a fading (and not faded) photograph. To make sense of this haziness and sad recognition, I turned to the work of kyop'o women. Their stories are visual – they provide nourishment. They supply possible images of You; I draw from them and begin to recollect – "re-collect" – my sense

of place and location and imagine your own. My memories of You serve to re-attach You to me. The loss is filled with hope; the gap is temporarily filled with possibility.

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CONCLUSION/

Kyop'o Women's Trajectories: Identities across Differences

> *The voice the memoirist selects determines to a large extent her identity. The narrator does not simply describe events in her life; she selects what events to tell and shares her insights about them. How she tells the story – rather than what the events are – allows the reader to discover what it is the writer wants to find out about herself as well as what she wants the reader to know.*
>
> - Maureen Murdock, *Unreliable Truth*

I began this project with an exploration on my personal experiences with memory and tying this to a visceral search for some kind of connection with other women from the Korean diaspora. Searching for a voice that could perhaps fill in for my mother's own absence, I instead discovered a wellspring of voices within the Korean diaspora and among racial and ethnic communities. These different voices spoke to my complex yearning and desire for community and belonging. Whereas with my *kyop'o* sisters I recognize the impact of our common features and traces of our cultural heritage, I also realized our connection was not based on birthright or citizenship *per se*. Our connection and sense of solidarity is based on the grounds of social justice and oppositional politics that crosses racial and ethnic boundaries with other 'women of colour.'

This project afforded me that insight by engaging in the cultural production of *kyop'o* women based in the United States and Canada. It opened

my eyes to a new body of images associated with the Asian female, and which resonated with a sense of cultural identification. It also introduced me to a new body of scholarship focused on the intersections between race, ethnicity, class, and gender - and the power of *racialization* to thread these constructs together as 'lived reality' for many *racialized immigrant women* in the United States and Canada. In some ways, I listened to the voices of other *kyop'o* women and discovered our shared differences: whether born in North America or choosing it as your adoptive home, you're racialized as a 'cultural other' against the national project.

Within the realm of Asian American women's writing, the key features of this writing are the urgent negotiation and renegotiation of gendered, racialized, ethnicized and nationalized identity. They serve as critical interventions in dominant discourses of identity and identity formation. As Helena Grice (2002) notes, the unique features of this writing involve the dissolution of the writer/theorist binary; revision of traditional genres, such as the *bildungsroman*, romance narrative, or science fiction that challenge patriarchal discursive codes; and recurrence of particular thematic concerns across women's writing and ethnic writing in general. Most prominent are a preoccupation with issues of identity, such as self-identity or woman-to-woman identifications (like the mother-daughter dyad); an objection to limitations placed upon women by patriarchal forces; a focus upon the family; a search for viable female role models; a questioning of white male values and definitions of beauty and

attractiveness (with an accompanying desire to reject the objectification of women); a sensitivity to the effects of violence against women and other trauma (such as sexual abuse); a wariness of hetero-normative approaches to sexuality; an insistence upon the importance of self-definition; an insistence upon the primacy of gossip as a valid 'genderlect'; a recognition of the phallocentricity of history and other mainstream versions of the past; a suspicion of the state as a regulatory force in women's lives; and a general unease with the silencing of women's voices (Grice 2002: 16).

Many of these themes resonate throughout my project, but I attempt to engage them both as a scholar and layperson who has experienced the wounds of childhood loss; and as someone who has a deep personal investment in exploring and writing about the past so as to not forget. That might explain why I have titled the project, *Race, Memory and Identity*, so as to think through these major tropes in relation to my life and those closest to me. I've taken to the heart the importance of theorizing from the standpoint of the "I", and have been deeply influenced by those writers who remain steadfast in their commitment to write and theorize "in forms different from the Western form of abstract logic."[64]

What I learnt from the cinematic stories of *kyop'o* women is that each of us speaks from a different position and location, and through different means (or visual formats) to engage each other. Some of us chose to "document" the perils

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[64] See Christian, Barbara. (1990). "The Race for Theory" in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse.* (Eds.) Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 37-49, p. 38.

and pain of our (parents') immigrant subjectivities, a.k.a. the *model minority myth*, or our deeply conscious relationship to our bodies and physical features. Others chose to delve into more poetic and experimental meditations on recovering the 'traces' and 'roots' of our cultural heritage. Together, however, they pushed to the forefront our "symbolic" connections to Korea and the deeply layered connections we have toward language. Under the historical movement of Time, and across geographical landscapes, our "site of memory" that Toni Morrison (1990) describes as the nexus between memory and imagination (or recollection) that tap into the "unwritten interior life," is marked by our complex and tenuous relationship to *Hangul*, or the Korean written alphabet.[65] For the diasporic

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[65] It is interesting to note the historical development of *Han' gul*. Upon its introduction to the masses by King Sejong during the 15th century, the writing system was ridiculed and challenged by the Korean aristocracy, or *yangban* class. At that time, only male members learned to read and write using Chinese characters, or *hanja*. Thus, excluding a majority of the Korean population to be literate. In the late 19th century, Korean nationalism increased as Japan attempted to sever Korea from China's sphere of influence. *Hangul* came to be considered a national symbol by some reformists. By 1894, *Hangul* was adopted in official documents as a result of the *Gabo Reform* (갑오 개혁) by pro-Japanese politicians. After Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910, *Hangul* was briefly taught in schools before being banned as a measure of cultural assimilation. Until the early 20th century, the literate elite who preferred the traditional *Hanja* writing system denigrated *Hangul* as vulgar. They gave it such names as:

- *Eonmun* (언문 諺文 "vernacular script").
- *Amkeul* (암클 "women's script"). 암-(probably derived from 陰 *yin)* is a prefix that signifies a noun is feminine.
- *Ahae(t)geul* (아햇글 or 아해글 "children's script").

However, these names are now archaic, as the use of *hanja* in writing has become rare in South Korea and completely phased out in North Korea. Refer to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/*Hangul*.

Korean, the historical traces of Japanese colonization, war and civil unrest, and American neo-colonialism inflect our hybridized speech. This would include the pidgin' English spoken in the adoptive land of the (neo)colonial masters, or the spoken Korean, which was silenced or restricted to the family hearth during the period of Japanese colonization.

In writing about my observations and reactions to *kyop'o* cultural production stemming principally from the United States and Canada, I now have to acknowledge the stakes of my own personal investment and cultural positioning as an *Asian American/Korean Canadian/woman of colour/feminist.* In short, how does my own Canadian experience shape my approach towards the cultural production of *kyop'o* women in the United States? And where do I stand on the presumed "difference" between the United States and Canada in their approach to cultural difference and by implication, multiculturalism?

Turning to my formative childhood experiences, there were hardly any positive signifiers of my racial and ethnic background. Hollywood popular culture made it all too easy to dismiss any strong identification with "Korean-

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As a side-note, these designations (and denigrations) suggest an intimate connection between the feminine and *Hangul.* Extending Trinh T. Minh-ha's (1989, 1991) insight into the 'triple bind' that connects the cultural politics of *writing* and *women of colour,* I would argue her notion of a 'bodily writing' or ascription of the female body in writing, is valuable to my reading of *kyop'o* cultural production. The Korean woman is inscribed by her relationship to *Hangul.* It is this image that resonates in the artwork of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, with the interspersion of *Hangul* throughout *Dictée* and video work, *Mouth to Mouth.* Arguably, it is also this image that is refracted in the different films and videos I have analyzed in the project.

ness." I was surrounded by images that were different from me. Seldom did I see Asians on screen, and when I did, they were often stereotypical portraits of men and women speaking pidgin' English or speaking a language totally foreign to me. Their gestures and facial expressions were far too exaggerated to be real; almost comical, and yet, they were uncannily real to me. Although there was some semblance to the English spoken by my parents, I learnt very quickly and quite painfully that it was a negative caricature of not measuring up to an implicit "white" standard.

These feelings of alienation and exclusion, however, were also coupled by a facile belief that my 'cultural difference' did not matter. As a child of Canadian multiculturalism, I grew up with an "official" discourse that embraced the 'song, food, and dance' of my cultural heritage based on the top-down policies and programs of the Canadian state. I still remember those after-school heritage language classes I took back in the 1970s and early 1980s. Such maneuvers were intended to embrace cultural diversity, but in reality, served to occlude or deflect critical attention on the *racializing* Canadian political economy. Even today, when we talk about multiculturalism in Canada, it is still a political discourse that relies on a narrow interpretation of culture and ideological constructions of ethnicized and racialized communities: immigrants of colour continued to be distinguished from Francophones, Anglophones, and Aboriginal peoples. The main danger of this ideological construction is that cultural difference is reified, immutable, and contained to cope with the influx of non-European immigrants.

Consequently, this mosaic approach fails to address the *racialization* involved in Canadian class formation.

Where I side with my *kyop'o* sisters and 'women of colour' on the other side of the border is on the distinction between antiracism and multiculturalism. Their *oppositional politics* is based on a radical pluralism that seeks to connect "race relations" with antiracism. There is a shift from a 'language of colour' to a 'language based on relations and social location.' This is crucial to my embrace and acceptance of an oppositional identity such as *Asian American woman* or *woman of colour feminist.*

To position oneself intellectually and politically as an Asian American/Korean Canadian feminist is definitely not an easy task. It is an identity that is both unsettling and unsettled (as identities in general often are), but it is also an identity that is often forced to justify itself in front of others. There is nothing inherently wrong about the project of giving an account of oneself towards another. For example, of one's specific location as speaker and thinker; of the complex experiences and perceptions and sense of life that fuel one's concerns; of the reasons, feelings, and anxieties that texture one's position on an issue; and of the values that inform one's judgment of things.

For Asian-origin women and 'women of colour' in general, however, these others extend well beyond the familiar context of family and ethnic community. They also include middle-class women shackled to "white privilege" who have a vested interest in protecting and maintaining their position in the liberal

establishment. The double bind of racism and sexism often forces women of colour to choose sides—either to side with their (Asian) male counterparts and combat racism, or to side with their white sisters and combat patriarchal social practices. It is a hard place to maneuver in and the danger with such dualistic thinking is that loyalty is tied to betrayal. Someone wins because someone loses.

It is tempting to vacillate between an "either/or" choice. Either I am Korean, or I am Canadian. But, I think the whole point to cultural identity is akin to what Stuart Hall (2000) calls a "process of becoming" marked by the instability of constant transformation. Both are destabilized once you start to probe into what constitutes each category. Is it based on birthright, citizenship rights, or the possession of official documents? You slowly begin to realize that how you define them depends on where you are located, where you are positioned along the axes of history, culture, and power. Thus, becoming Korean Canadian, based on my own experience, yields to the understanding that each is different within and across their categorical distinctions.

The "process of becoming" that Stuart Hall (2000) eloquently writes about in the relationship between cinematic representation and cultural identity involves not a mere recovery of the past. It involves understanding that identities are the names we give to our different positions in relation to the narratives of the past. *Who speaks, what is said,* and *how is it said* – answers to these questions shape and define our relationships to cultural identity.

My journey - imagined otherwise - is shared with my *kyop'o* sisters. My story, like their stories, began with an image and unfolded to reveal the tension between nation and family, history and autobiography, and the ellipses between story and memory. Thus, the counter-memories of the stories, proverbs, songs, and folklore of our "mothers'- tongue" challenge the dominant narrative of world History - which in the North American context often ignores Korea. Through our "mothers' - tongue," Korea feeds into North America...and we use our imagination and recollections (or memories) to wonder what is fact and what is fiction? This, I have argued, is the "in-between-ness" of immigrant life that is a persistent wound of the diasporic imagination.

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