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Repositioning “Asia”—The Problematics of Liminality and Transpacific Imaginary in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*

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Abstract

This paper intends to posit the importance of thinking through historical specificities as instrumental to understanding the particularities and ideologies that constitutes “Asia” as site of negotiation and intervention. This paper contends that a (re-)investigation of the Cold War discourse will make visible the imperial logic and shifting historical stakes under and through which the threatening presence of U.S. hegemony in Asia invites a careful reexamination of the invention not only of “American” but of “Asian.” Viewed in light of this argument, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée* is both a complicating text that illustrates historically how the present (East) Asian American identity and culture are preconditioned by American empire and Japan’s imperialist past, and an intriguing text that metaphorically cultivates the problematics of liminality

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and transpacific imaginary. Cha uses mixed media to convey the very intricacies of the interrelated discourses on Korean identity, Korean American, and the transpacific imaginary of “Asia.” As such, to analyze *Dictée* within the context of the Cold War discourse is to call attention to the hidden narratives and complex textualization that underlie the dichotomized understanding of “Asia.” In reading this subtle and abstruse text alongside the Cold War politics, this paper then addresses the issues of how “Asia” becomes the very site where various kinds of forces converge, intertwine, and hybridize, and where new ways of making meanings have been engendered and called into question.

Key Words: Cold War, liminality, transpacific imaginary, Asia, Asian American Studies

Still, who best shapes and defines the "Asia-Pacific" region these days, and toward what ends? What does this discursive fusion of region into a higher unity imply for the diverse cultures, spaces, and "identity politics" of this region? Does "Asia-Pacific" mean anything more than the utopic dream of a "free market"; that is, the post-Cold War trope of First World policy planner and market strategies, all doors flung open to the free flow of the commodity form? In short, can ["Asia-Pacific" discourse] . . . open different cultural and critical possibilities? (Wilson, 2002: 235-236)

The Pacific has historically been instantiated as a zone of connections and conflicts. As Rob Wilson puts it, "for over four hundred years, the 'Pacific' region has been a contested construct from various socio-historical angles, a site of trade, conversion, conquest, and an East-West and Center-Periphery struggle . . ." (2002: 238). As early as 1995, in *Asia/Pacific as a Space of Cultural Production*, an edited volume by Wilson and Arif Dirlik, this regional conceptualization was being addressed with "a more critical orientation toward area studies that transcends individual countries/islands/nation states and that ties in with world-system analysis in noncategorical ways" (12). To trace the Asian Pacific region as the dynamics of "global interactive space" is to consider the formation of "alternative subjectivities and of heteroglossic communities, and informed, as well, with coalitional energies and movements to shape a counter-hegemonic future" (12). In the introduction to *Transnational Asia Pacific*, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Wimal Dissanayake seek to map this arbitrary zone, noting that "[t]he Asian Pacific region is a vast territory encompassing Japan, the newly industrialized states of East Asia and China, the Southeast Asian countries, Australia, New Zealand, the South Sea islands, and the Pacific coast of North America" (1999: 1).¹ In

¹ Here, by referring to "the Asian Pacific region" I am well aware of critics' concern about mapping a region. For example, Dirlik states that, "[i]n a fundamental sense,

discussing issues concerning this geopolitical area, Lim and Dissanayake further state that, “[m]any analyses of the Asia Pacific region focus largely on economic and political issues to the virtual exclusion of the sphere of culture, leading to a partial understanding of the dynamics of the region” (1).

Indeed, the term “Asia-Pacific” currently circulates mostly with a view to concentrating on the economics around the Pacific Rim. Gayatri C. Spivak hence comments that “I must take account the possibility of an Asia-Pacific as a major phenomenon. This possibility seems still confined to economic connections, easily established in an era of information technology” (2008: 219). In his recent book *Transpacific Imaginations: History, literature, counterpoetics*, Yunte Huang makes explicit that “[t]he transpacific is both a contact zone and a gap” (2008: 2). To push beyond the confines of economics-oriented concern, he “use[s] transpacific imaginations to refer to a host of literary and historical imaginations that have emerged under the tremendous geopolitical pressure of the Pacific encounters” (2). From the “Pacific,” “Asia/Pacific,” “Asia(n)-Pacific,” to “transpacific,” the region has been mobilizing a number of critics to intervene, to invest in competitive theoretical concerns and definitions.²

Over the past decades, the Asian-Pacific formation emerged out of distinct national economies with transnational forms of industry, capital mobility, varied political subjects, historical complexities and cultural productions. “Asian-Pacific” in its guise of a post-orientalist regionalism, feasibly promises the possibility of new perspectives in envisioning “Asia” in relation either to

there is no Pacific region that is an ‘objective’ given, but only a competing set of ideational constructs that project upon a certain location on the globe the imperatives of interest, power, or vision of these historically produced relationships” (1998: 15-16).

² In the wake of Charles Olson’s studies, scholars such as Stephen H. Sumida, William Spanos, John Carlos Rowe, Amy Kaplan, David Palumbo-Liu, Christopher L. Connery, and Rob Wilson tried to situate American literature in relation to its Pacific encounters.

America, or to Asian America. Scholars' concerns and critique on the "Asian-Pacific" eventually give rise to a renewed attention to categories invented to judge and manipulate Asia(s) in Asian American literature. Cultural studies concerning issues related to the "Asian-Pacific" make more visible the imperial logic, racial/ethnic diversity, and shifting historical context under and through which the trope of "Asia" has been constructed.

This paper seeks to enrich perspectives on the Asia-Pacific by drawing attention to the ongoing (re)defining of "Asia." While most current discussions focus on the "futurology" of successful flows of transnational capital through the Pacific crossings, this paper addresses the ambivalent implication of Asian-Pacific discourse—envisioning it as a cultural-historical formation—a site for the contestation of meanings. The paper will examine Korean American woman writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* (2001)³ to interrogate the troubled interplay of ethnic, national, and imperialist discourses embedded in the text. Specifically, *Dictée* is to be read as a contested text offering a compelling illustration of Asian-Pacific cultural discourse in relation to history, nation and empire. In following Huang's argument of "the transpacific as a critical space," this paper contends that the complexity of *Dictée* has to be understood through the filters of cultural, historical, political discourses of the transpacific imaginary, and as existing on a geopolitically metaphysical path that "lead(s) to both historical fictions and literary truths of the transpacific imaginary" (2008: 2). Here, I use the term "transpacific imaginary" both to account for, and to reach beyond, the politically-invested concept of Asia-Pacific discourse—to push the geo-imaginaries beyond oppositely

³ The spellings of Cha's text are varied: *DICTEE* appears on the cover of the book, *Dictee* on the back and *Dictée* is used inside the book. Is the spelling, *DICTEE*, specially intended by the author for some unidentified reason? Or is it simply the layout of the cover page? The question may remain unanswerable. To avoid confusion, I use *Dictée* in accord with the papers that I consult, and *Dictée* is also the most frequently used one in studying Cha's book.

situated borders, to illuminate its negotiated and changing nature, and to privilege a space that is both historical and geographical, both cultural and metaphysical. By using “imaginary,” I do not hint at a dichotomy between imagination and reality. I use “imaginary” to refer to the ability to form resourceful images of transpacific relations and to bring potential configuration of the transpacific crossing into view. Transpacific imaginary embedded in *Dictée* will be explored from four aspects: first, the traumatic exile enacted in transpacific crossings; second, the transpacific imaginary configured in international negotiations; third, the problematics of liminality engendered through transpacific crossings; fourth, fractures as transpacific reality. Ultimately, the paper addresses these transpacific imaginaries as a dialectically and dialogically contingent formation in order to open up new meditation on *Dictée* along with the potential implications on ideas of “Asia.”

I. Traumatic Transpacific Crossings

Dictée, a genre-defying book, is a collocation of varied sources and forms with textual references to multiple places and times. Since being republished, *Dictée* has been canonized for theoretically different reasons—the text unusually stands at a joint point in many different late-twentieth century discourses. *Dictée* has been challenging and intriguing scholars in a wide array of fields. In her book *Compositional Subjects*, Laura Hyun Yi Kang maintains that “*Dictée* is an internally diverse, fragmented, and contradictory text that precludes thematic encapsulation and generic fixation” (2002: 219). Some critics seek to incorporate language translation into the visual artwork of the text to analyze *Dictée*; some read the text as caught between an aesthetic undertaking and a postmodern textual strategy; some explore its “feminist genealogy” (Eileraas, 2007: 89); some address its meditation on history; some focus on its collision of genres, “pastiche, eclectic assemblages of incongruous languages” (as cited

in Schechter, 2007: 13); still others approach *Dictée* through issues of national identity.⁴ To unravel the textual complexities, Laura Schechter states that, "language, the translation of language, and its connection to identity [are] of central concern in *Dictée*" (11). Yet, Kandice Chuh observes that *Dictée* "demonstrates a metonymical rather than static relationship among past, present, and future" (2001: 281). As a result, *Dictée* is read under several disciplinary rubrics: memoir, novel or novella, poetry, filmic artwork, "a transnational epic" (Park, 2005: 214), "an edited archive" (Hayot, 2006: 605), "collective autobiography" (Mukherjee, 2006: 210), etc. These sometimes contestatory interpretive approaches shed critical light on the instability of the text. *Dictée* is seen as an unorthodox representational endeavor traversing different fields of study, containing confusingly uncertain themes and meanings. Scholars have therefore examined the text by emphasizing one aspect or another.⁵ For all the diversity of the politically invested interpretive choices in reading the book, transpacific imaginary—the crucial feature of the text—remains unexplored. A transpacific perspective interwoven through the varied narratives of *Dictée* that tracks the complex cultural, linguistic, and geopolitical realities from across the Pacific, and back to Asia, has long been ignored. *Dictée* is a rich text that legitimizes Asia-Pacific imagery as an

⁴ In *Writing Self, Writing Nation*, an influential book on *Dictée*, Elaine H. Kim notes that Cha "foregrounds a highly specific cultural context, inserting Korea, Korean women, and Korean Americans into the discourse" (Kim, Kang, Lowe, & Wong, 1994: 8); in a more recent essay, Kim numbers *Dictée* among important Korean American texts which recover "subjugated knowledges" (2000: 91). Following a similar line, Helena Grice argues that Cha's "primary project" is "creating a Korean (American) national identity which is gendered" (2000: 44). According to Joo and Lux, "Cha's text risks exposure to suspicious from both Korean Americans and Koreans" (2012: 12). As such, critics who engage a common theme may come to a different conclusion. The diverse interpretive approaches mentioned here intend to suggest the elusive nature of Cha's text.

⁵ Critical momentum for the book has been engendered for varied reasons, as evidenced by the number and focus of articles and dissertations that have been published since the text's second printing. The unusual trajectory of the book reflects the changing cultural politics at work in its reception.

amalgamation of voices, histories, memories, and visuals.

The multiple writing of *Dictée* begins with a prologue by Sappho: “May I write words more naked than flesh, stronger than bone, more resilient than sinew, sensitive than nerve.” The text then evolves to incorporate a diversity of forms, including: verse and prose, typed and handwritten letters, translations, Catholic catechism, cinematic scripts, Chinese calligraphy, still images from film, iconic women photographs, a map of Korea Peninsula, and anatomical diagrams. All of these various materials are organized into nine sections based on the names of the nine Greek muses. While the diversity of sources in this genre-bending text is frustratingly inexplicable, its immediate aspects are accessible. *Dictée* depicts the drastic impact of imperialist domination on Korea, reflecting “the complex histories of relations between and among Japan, Korea, and the United States” (Chuh, 2001: 281). Against such a backdrop appears a family’s (trans)migration story.⁶ The multiply inscribed histories that undergird *Dictée* are Japan’s

⁶ To escape Japanese colonization, Cha’s parents were among the first generation of Koreans to live in Manchuria, China. Here, I would like to mention a brief biography of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Cha was born in Pusan, South Korea, 1951, in the midst of the Korean War, immigrated to the United States with her family at the age of ten. They moved first to Hawaii and then settled in San Francisco in 1964, where Cha and her sister attended the Convent of the Sacred Heart School. Cha went on to study ceramics, film theory, and comparative literature at the University of California, Berkeley. In 1976, Cha went to Paris, staying one year for research. She studied film and film theory with Christian Metz, Raymond Bellour, and Thierry Kuntzel at the Centre d’Etudes Américaine du Cinéma à Paris. Returning to Berkeley, Cha received her M.A. and M.F.A. degrees in art and continued her work as a performance artist, writer, and filmmaker in the Bay Area. In 1980, she returned to South Korea. In the same year, she moved to New York to work as a writer and filmmaker. In 1981, she published the film anthology, *Apparatus: Cinematographic Apparatus*, examining the ideological processes of the filmic apparatus. Essays written by theorists and artists Dziga Vertov and Maya Deren, to Roland Barthes, Christian Metz, and Cha herself are anthologized. In 1982, her work *Dictée* was published. Shortly after its publication, unfortunately, Cha was murdered by a security guard in New York City on November 5, 1982.

annexation of Korea in 1910 and its occupation until 1945,⁷ Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the 1919 anticolonial independence movement, the division of Korea after World War II (1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), US imperial intervention in Korea during the Cold War,⁸ the 1962 demonstration, and the 1980 bloodshed of two-hundred South Koreans, mostly students, killed on the street by the nation's army. Apparently, Cha utilizes and references modern Korean history to investigate colonialist and nationalist practices, and imperialist projects across the Pacific.

The text relates the modern history of South Korea in several sections, thematizing, in particular, the traumatic experience of displaced family members. Cha's mother, Hyung Soon Huo, was born in "Yong Jung, Manchuria" to first-generation Korean exiles (Cha, 2001). The family's expatriation and sojourn in China, in Korea under Japanese rule, and migration to the U.S. is chronicized obliquely. In the "Melpomene/Tragedy" section, the narrator delineates the imminent occupation of Manchuria by the Japanese army and the mother's life in exile under Japanese colonial rule:

Mother you are eighteen. It is 1940. You have just graduated from a teacher's college. You are going to your first teaching post Japan had already occupied Korea and is attempting the occupation of China. Even in the small village the signs of their presence is felt by the Japanese language that is being spoken. The Japanese flag is hanging at the entry of the office. And below it, the

⁷ Japan's annexation was facilitated by the United States when, after the Japanese defeated the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War (February 10, 1904~September 5, 1905), the U.S. government stepped in and agreed to let Japan occupy Korea.

⁸ The Cold War began officially with Winston Churchill's famous "Iron Curtain" speech in March 1946 and putatively ended with the fall of Berlin Wall in November 1989. The Cold War, as a period of East-West competition, tension, and conflict, is characterized by mutual perceptions of hostile intention between military-political alliances or blocs. Nevertheless, the passing of the Cold War with its overriding emphasis on taming the Soviet Union ushered in a period of confusion and complexity.

educational message of the Meiji emperor framed in purple cloth. It is read at special functions by the principal of the school to all the students. (48-49)⁹

Further, the narrator depicts the mother's ultimate return to Korea for the first time since childhood:

You knew it would not be in vain. The thirty six years of exile. Thirty six years multiplied by three hundred and sixty five days. That one day your country would be your own. This day did finally come. The Japanese were defeated in the world war and were making their descent back to their country. As soon as you heard, you followed South. You carried not a single piece, not a photograph, nothing to evoke your memory, abandoned all to see your nation freed. (80-81)

The eagerness to return is affectionately described: "*The population standing before North standing before South for every bird that migrates North for Spring and South for Winter becomes a metaphor for the longing of return. Destination. Homeland*" (80; italics original). However, the narrative that follows is not a celebration of freedom, but a story of the suffering the narrator's family and other Koreans endured in the aftermath of World War II. When Japan relinquished control of Korea after its defeat in 1945, the Soviet Union and the United States agreed to divide the peninsula into Soviet and American occupation zones. Subsequently, Korea is divided at the 38th parallel between the northern radical nationalists (supported by the Soviet Union and later Communist China) and the southern moderates (supported by the U.S.).¹⁰ War broke out in 1950 when North Korean military

⁹ *Dictée* was republished by University of California Press (Berkeley, CA) in 2001. All subsequent references to the text will be from this edition. Because the book is composed of nine disconnected sections, this paper will also cite the section title. The book is read as separate chapters in competing for the utterance of heteroglossia voices. *Dictée* was originally published by Tanam Press, 1982. In 1994, Third Woman Press reprinted the work.

¹⁰ The 38th northern parallel—which cuts the Korean Peninsula roughly in half—

forces invaded the South, and unofficially ended in 1953. Ever since, relations between the North and South have been mostly antagonistic. A single Korean people has come to embody two completely different nation states. That the section "Melpomene/Tragedy" begins with a map of North and South Korea with the DMZ (the demilitarized zone) clearly marked is especially bitter. Paik Nak-Chung describes this as "certainly a legacy of colonial rule and even more a direct product of neocolonial intervention . . . that has taken on a systematic nature of its own with self-reproducing antidemocratic structures on both sides of the dividing line" (1998: 227). The DMZ is allegorized as "a persistent rupture that refuses to be healed" (Park, 2005: 237). Ever since, the forced separation of millions of Korean families, and the geographical area known in English as "Korea," have represented division and conflict.

As shown in the text, these autobiographical and historical pasts are traced back from Asia after the family migrates to the U.S.; all of the narrative about the mother's exile is written in the form of a letter from Cha after returning to Seoul, South Korea. It takes the form of a daughter talking to her mother across the Pacific. The daughter narrates: "I write. I write you. Daily. From here. If I am not writing, I am thinking about writing. I am composing" (56). Speaking to and writing to her mother across the Pacific means, for Cha, a conscious and persistent effort to trace the family odyssey as an ethnic history through Asia back to the U.S. It is a spatial and discursive trajectory, as well as a transpacific trajectory, that the

was the original boundary between the UN-controlled and Soviet-controlled areas of Korea at the end of World War II. Upon the creation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, informally North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (ROK, informally South Korea) in 1948, it became a *de facto* international border and one of the most tense fronts in the Cold War. Both the North and the South remained heavily dependent on their sponsor states from 1948 through to the outbreak of the Korean War. The war, which claimed over three million lives and left the Korean Peninsula still divided, commenced on June 25, 1950 and ended in 1953 after international intervention pushed the front of the war back to near the 38th parallel.

author performs to enact an Asian experience projecting against America. In this way, *Dictée* offers a reading of Asian experience against the backdrop of the U.S., inscribing the traumatic transpacific crossings to reflect on transnational existence in exile. As Josephine Nock-Hee Park makes explicit in her book, *Apparitions of Asia*, “Cha’s work” serves as “formal attempts to reveal the modern history of American involvement in the Far East,” “to unveil a literary and political past that binds Asia to the United States”(2008: 22). In Cha’s work, to recross the Pacific is to see how the migrant’s existence is subject to competing forces across and around the Pacific.

In the section “Melpomene/Tragedy,” the mother’s exile and return from Manchuria to Korea is narrated in parallel with the daughter’s later emigration to the United States and return to South Korea. But, painfully, the returns of mother and daughter only confirm a deeply felt sense of homelessness. The mother’s dreams of returning to find a free country are ruined by national divisions and civil unrest, the turmoil and aftermath of which despoils the daughter’s much anticipated homecoming: “Our destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of search. Fixed in its perpetual exile. Here at my return in eighteen years, the war is not ended. We fight the same war. We are inside the same struggle seeking the same destination” (81). The Korean Peninsula remains separated. The agony of a nation riven and victimized by imperialism and colonialism is once again called to mind. Eventually, the various regional, economic and racial investments made in the Pacific by the expansion of the American empire manifests the Pacific not as a “sublimated immensity” (Wilson, 2000: 37) but as a tapestry disturbed by such factors as imperial logic, ethnic dislocation, cultural fragmentation, and life in exile that intersect across the ocean. Given the heated discussions of economic, political, and social discourses on the Pacific from either the shore of America or Asia, Wilson reminds us that,

[we] can barely conceal the uncanny traumas and social

contradiction that haunt its very formation. All but replacing warier Cold War visions of the "Pacific Rim" as the preferred global imaginary in the discourse of transnationalizing and de-nationalizing corporate Americans, that is to say, "Asian-Pacific" has become a discourse of liberal sublimation that has surfaced, in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, to trumpet neo-liberal market forces and regimes and thereby to forget Cold War traumas and to get beyond the stark geopolitics of imperialism and colonialism that had marketed the region's long history. (2002: 235)

The utility of "trumpet[ing] neo-liberal market forces" to refer to "Asian-Pacific" at the expense of full acknowledgement of the infliction of imperial history that traumatizes areas around the Pacific is blind to the similarities between "imperialism" and "globalization." As John R. Eperjesi points out, "[t]here are a number of similarities between debates over imperialism then and debates over transnationalism and globalization now. . . . The rhetoric of imperialism at the turn of the century, like that of globalization today, was an important locus for the creation of an economic imaginary that enabled fantasies of regional coherence" (2005: 104).¹¹ To address and redress this economic-centered view, Wilson continues that "[u]neven and unjust, the memory of *immigration* and *war* is just such a traumatic Asian-Pacific 'kernel' being worked through in Asian/American fiction as in other genres of cultural criticism" (2002: 237; italics original). While the dreadful experiences of exile and migration are common themes

¹¹ In quoting Eperjesi's argument here I do not imply that globalization has replaced imperialism. Since the turn of last century, American military and economic power has swept into Asia to fill the void left by the departing colonial powers. After World War II, the U.S. emerged as a capitalist empire. There have been several U.S. wars in Asia: with Philippines (1898-1910), against Japan (1941-1945), in Korea (1950-1953), and in Vietnam (1959-1975). The U.S.-Asia confrontations eventually entail a particular subject narrated as much by the modern discourse of citizenship, immigration the dynamics of the current global economy, as by imperial projects, and U.S. histories of wars in Asia.

found in Asian American literary texts, it is Wilson's elaboration that highlights the "Cold War trauma"¹² embedded in Pacific discourse. *Dictée* elaborates on, and implicates such a "kernel" by devoting layers and layers of its narratives, moving back and forward across the Pacific, to inscribing the traumatic re-memberings of the pasts.

II. Transpacific Negotiations

Apart from the reinscription of the experience of exile, *Dictée* elaborates on the transpacific imaginary through an attempted negotiation across the Pacific. In the "Clio/History" section, a letter signed by P. K. Yoon and Syngman Rhee, on July 12, 1905, is suggestive of the long history of American involvement in the Korean Peninsula. Entitled "Petition from the Koreans of Hawaii to President Theodore Roosevelt," the letter "authorized by 8,000 Koreans now residing in the territory of Hawaii at a special mass meeting held in the city of Honolulu" pleads for American assistance. According to the cited letter, "[a] treaty of alliance" was entered into "to preserve the independence of Korea from Japan and to protect Eastern Asia from Russia's aggression" (34), but, Japanese aggression turns out to be "exactly the same as that of Russia prior to the war" (36).¹³ The petition continues:

The United States has many interests in our country. The industrial, commercial, and religious enterprises under

¹² Here, we recall the fact that both "Pacific Rim discourse" and "Asia Pacific discourse" became highly visible because they serve as "the U.S. geo-imaginary," which is applied to the "political situation of the United States in the late Cold War years" (Connery, 1994: 31).

¹³ Here, the "war" refers to the Russo-Japanese War. It is generally believed to be a conflict that grew out of the rival imperialist ambitions of the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan over Manchuria and Korea. The outcome dramatically transformed the balance of power in East Asia—Japan's victory led the country to prominence on the world stage; Russia's defeat proved a major cause of the Russian Revolution of 1905.

American management have attained such proportions that we believe that the Government and people of the United States ought to know the true conditions of Korea and the result of the Japanese becoming paramount in our country The clause in the treaty between the United States and Korea gives us a claim upon the United States for assistance, and this is the time when we need it most. (36)

The main concerns of the letter are, first, the lethal deal between Korea and Japan, which is used by the U.S. as a means of warding off Russian political ambition in intruding the Korean Peninsula and, second, the belated awareness of the Koreans that Japan would prove to be only another malignant force threatening them. The letter then reveals that U.S. is not a protector of Korean sovereignty: "[t]he United States has many interests in our country" (36). Half a century later, strategic interests in the East Asia further embroiled American military forces in Korea, eventually leading to the division of the Korean Peninsula along the demilitarized zone (DMZ).

The full recitation of the petition exemplifies the connections between Korea and the United States through negotiations, and speaks to the dynamics of international relations among Japan, Korea, and the United States across the Pacific. The petition presents a seemingly feasible request; however, the Roosevelt administration did not respond positively to Korean immigrants' plea to intervene on behalf of the cause of Korean independence from Japan. Instead, the United States signed the Taft-Katsura Agreement the same year, 1905, and officially acquiesced in Japan's continuing dominance of Korea.¹⁴ President Roosevelt considered Japanese imperial policy a way of countering the Soviet Union.¹⁵ The involvement of these two forces—the Soviet Union

¹⁴ Elaine H. Kim critiques that "[t]his agreement allowed Japan free reign in Korea in return for (Japan's) promise to allow the U.S. to dominate the Philippines, which had recently been acquired in the Spanish-American War" (Kim et al., 1994: 10).

¹⁵ The military threat of Russia was replaced by Japanese occupation, which was in

and the U.S.—in the peninsula ultimately resulted in the division of the country along the DMZ.

Transpacific imaginary is intriguingly evoked in the Korean immigrants' petition of the Roosevelt administration, which speaks to how transpacific international relations contributed to the victimization of Korea. Transpacific imaginary is in this way categorized, informing the international community with potential involvement on some uneven terms. Through the petition, *Dictée* cartographically contracts geopolitical boundaries and projects onto them transpacific imaginary. As Laura Hyun Yi Kang writes, the letter not only testifies to “the early presence of Koreans in the United States, their abiding love for the Korean homeland in the face of both their geographical separation and its internal colonization, and the crucial role of the United States in shaping the political fate of Korea in the twentieth century,” but the letter also “shrinks the transpacific expanse between the two lands and their histories to reveal a significant complicity and imbrication” (2002: 228).

III. Problematic Liminality

In addition to the evocation of international links as transpacific imaginary, *Dictée* cultivates the problematic liminality of transpacific crossings. In the section “Calliope/Epic Poetry,” the narrator ambivalently recounts her own return:

You return and you are not one of them, they treat you with indifference. All the time you understand what they are saying. But the papers give you away They ask you identity. They comment upon your ability and inability to speak. Whether you are telling the truth or not about your nationality. They say you look other than you say. As if you didn't know who you were. (56-57)

turn replaced by an American intrusion occupation that persists from 1953 with the station of thousands of American troops along the demilitarized zone. Later, as Rhee went on to become Korea's leader, he was heavily backed by the United States.

The daughter, as an immigrant returning from the U.S., is confronted by the bureaucratic system and skeptical interrogations. It seems impossible for the Korean American narrator to reach a definite reconciliation with the place she calls her "homeland." She is torn between her American identity and her native Korean one. Early in the same section, the narrator depicts the "naturalization" with simple, cogent, and ironic sketch:

Documents, proof, evidence, photograph, signature. One day you raise the right hand and you are American. They give you an American Passport. The United States of America. Somewhere someone has taken my identity and replaced it with their photograph. The other one. Their signature their seals. Their own image. (56)

The narrator follows the procedure with smoldering anger, recalling the role the U.S. played in the colonization and division of Korea. Through naturalization, the narrator undergoes transformation, but a partial one. The repeated "their": "their photograph . . . their signature . . . their own image" suggest how the expatriated subject is distorted in submitting to the imposing power of the American juggernaut. Officially changing citizenship evinces a brutal process in which one becomes "the other one." Later the narrator says more painfully: "I speak in another tongue now, a second tongue, a foreign tongue" (80). Eventually, the narrator returns to her homeland only to find that she is an outsider. She comes back to discover herself situated in a double alienation. Formerly, upon arrival, the Korean American narrator relates her close involvement in her home country; she initiates the re-memberings of the student demonstration with total identification, "I am in the same crowd, the same coup, the same revolt, nothing has changed. I am inside the demonstration I am locked inside the crowd and carried in its movement" (81). Concerning her change of citizenship, the narrator laments again that "I speak another tongue, a second tongue. This is how distant I am. From then. From that time" (85). The immigrant eventually

posits herself within the split between Koreans and Korean Americans and between American and Korean subject positions, both the “inside” and “outside” of either the host country or her homeland. The result is a liminal status. Nevertheless, it is precisely within such a fracture and contradiction that the immigrant seeks to position herself. The immigrant once crossing the Pacific remains, interminably, a part of both shores. The text dissolves identification into indeterminacy, and interweaves the displacement into a rite of passage, a state of forever transition. The concurrency of repudiation and identification is projected onto the transpacific imaginary, a situated and contested imaginary used to implicate the “incompleteness, or regional undecidability” of Pacific discourse, that “connects the imperialist past to the transnational present” (Eperjesi, 2005: 104).

Apart from the exemplification of liminality in the returnee, the form of *Dictée* is also illustrative of a liminal nature. Cha not only sets the narrator adrift, but destabilizes the text. A passage from the section, “Terpsichore/Choral Dance,” can be read as an attempt to metaphorize the unstable translational/linguistic/textual crossings:

Further, Further inside. Further than. To middle. Deeper. Without measure. Deeper than. Without means of measure. To core. In another tongue. Same word. Slight mutation of the same. Undefinable. Shift. Shift slightly. Into a different sound. The difference. How it discloses the air. Slight. Another word. Same. Parts of the same atmosphere. Deeper. Center. Without distance. No particular distance from center to periphery. Points of measure effaced. To begin there. There. In Media Res. (157)

“In medias res”—literally, “in the middle of the thing”—describes a literary strategy in which the action of the story gestures both forward and backward. Generally, such a text begins with a “middle” will later consolidate the beginning and ending in a sensibly logical order. But here, *Dictée*’s narrator seems to suggest

that "any such middle must also be a beginning defined by depth and interiority" (Hayot, 2006:608). The "depth and interiority" trigger the movement through nine separate sections with different narrative forms, circulating diverse materials and languages. In this way, *Dictée* proceeds against the "linear logic" and diverges among multiple paths. It is also intentionally elliptical, and therefore difficult to comprehend in its entirety. Ultimately, the meaning of the text seems to lie somewhere in the developmental circulation between the separate sections, the fragments, silences, and the incoherent images. As Sue J. Kim points out, the politics elaborated in *Dictée* "lies not in form, content, or context alone, but in the developing dialectical relationship between these elements" (2005: 145-146). In addressing *Dictée*, Lawrence R. Rinder also observes that, "[r]ather than charting a clear path home, [the] work evokes a labyrinthine sensation of motion without destination or origin. The only place markers in this dizzying maze, the words themselves, are reduced, through their repetition, to virtually meaningless signs" (2001: 17). In a similar vein, Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts* discusses the way that *Dictée*'s "discontinuity, fragmentation, and episodic unfluency" interrogates the configurations of the ideological apparatuses of state, church, imperialism, patriarchy, and other structures of power (1996: 152).¹⁶ As a result, the effect of the

¹⁶ Here, "church" refers to "the long historical presence of the French missionary colonialism in Korea" (Lowe, 1996: 148). See "Unfaithful to the Original: The Subject of *Dictée*" in her influential book *Immigrant Acts*. The essay also appears as one chapter in *Writing Self, Writing Nation*. Here, I quote the passage from the former. In the essay, Lowe discusses, at some length "French Catholicism," which is seen as analogical to "the state apparatuses of domination and assimilation" (135). With the title "*Dictée*," Cha's work is, on the one hand, metaphysically centered on the acts of translation between language and cultures" (Frost, 2002: 183). A French word, "*Dictée*" is, on the other, used as a metaphor to make visible the normalization of language through "dictation." With its juxtapositions of Greek mythology, French translation exercise and the insertion of Chinese characters, *Dictée* is located among different and conflicting premises. *Dictée* thus interrogates an earlier understanding of cultural identity, disrupts the binary opposition for the location of the subject identity, either resistance or assimilation to American mainstream culture.

narratives is not stable or whole, but liminal: “Cha’s work reveals fracture upon fracture, destabilizing the relation of past and present, home and exile, being and non-being” (Rinder, 2001: 17). The paper argues that the very form of *Dictée* is telling, and that the plural and partial textual representation of the troubled relationship across the Pacific beset by the imperialist agenda manifests the modern history of East Asia. The immigrant’s exile and return are written into the transpacific crossings and recrossings on which *Dictée* grounds its miscellaneous narratives and images. With this, *Dictée* goes further in demonstrating a reification of experimental form that gestures to the problematics of identity and to the limits of representation.

Finally. View. This view. What is it finally. Finally.
Seen. All seen. All. All the time. Over and over. Again
and again. Seen and void. Void of view. Inside outside.

...

All aside. From then. Point by point. Up to date. Updated.
The view. Absent all the same. Hidden. Forbidden. Either
side of the view. Side upon side. That which indicates the
interior and exterior. Inside Outside. (126-127)

In tracing both the “inside outside,” the narrator and the textual form do not actually complete a transition. They remain in-between two other states, and become permanently liminal, “inside outside.” The narrators speak not merely from shifting positions, but also from shifting boundaries: “A step forward from back. Backing out. Backing off. Off periphery extended. From imaginary to bordering on division Imaginary borders. Unimaginable boundaries” (87).

Consequently, the text’s unfixed liminality is at once geographically and linguistically at odds with the context of Asian-American confrontations. The text shows not only a larger political order (or disorder), but also the dynamic relationship between sites of cultural production. The ethnic homogeneity, national cultures, consensual or contiguous transmission of

historical narratives seen in other Asian American literature are, in this text, undergoing a profound process of redefinition.

IV. Fractured Reality of the Transpacific

In addition to the troubled liminality that confounds the form of the text and the subject positions, *Dictée* configures fractures as transpacific reality. With its peculiar heterogeneous composition, *Dictée* does not fit readily within any formal structures or tradition. *Dictée* "reflect(s) on the literary and political activities of making, translating, and becoming a work of art" (Walkowitz, 2007: 531). The text abruptly moves "from specific location with specific temporality conjunctured in a set of cultural, national, geopolitical relations to another, without any preceding explanations" (Heasock, 2005: 18). Seen in a critical light, *Dictée* is a textualized diversity, an uncategorized plurality with multiple layered narratives in the hope of achieving its goal of utterances. The text is always in the process of moving to fruition. "[The] innovations of these modes remind us that they were never settled in the first place. The wonder of Cha's text is her creation of an aesthetic frame that keeps alive the many tensions that preoccupy her" (Park, 2008: 130). *Dictée* is then read as a text with "half-revived, half-buried information" (Cheng, 1998: 119), as "powerful, incomplete making," and "incomplete assimilation" (Hayot, 2006: 607). Though aimed at uncovering allusive truths of colonialism and imperialism, *Dictée* is split between a gesture to formal experimentation and a turn toward radical critique. Consequently, the mix of genres and multilingual mobility thwarts critics' efforts to place the text within any critical or national geography. It is, therefore, very difficult to pinpoint the text's "double movement of attachment and detachment," for, as Cheng argues, "[h]ow do we construct a political subject when that 'subject's' very voice, *and its boundaries*, is always in oscillation? How does this apparently postmodern, seemingly ahistorical and dislocated *récit* come to

effect its intense, localized critique of cultural history and its reconstructions?" (1998: 120; italics original). To respond to these questions, this paper contends that boundaries which seem to oscillate and to be unlocable can be situated within and between the political and cultural arena stretching across the Pacific. The text's settings—China, Japan, France, U.S., UK, and Seoul—formulate a nexus of references recording selected historical events involving Euro-America and Asia. What the narratives and images scattered inconsistently throughout *Dictée* elaborate are the multicultural and multinational traces around and across the Pacific that resist totalization.

Apart from its diverse narratives, the book's visual collage also contributes to its representational miscellany and further speaks to the textual fractures.¹⁷ Almost all nine sections come between two pictures; one initiates it, the other concludes. Staging the montage effect, the pictures engage allusively with different cultures and politics while articulating a cosmopolitan, transnational and hybrid vision of the conflicting worlds inflected by colonialism, and imperialism. Among the pictures, the very first one may be the most important. *Dictée* begins with a frontispiece related the multiple images of the transpacific crossings to the larger politics of imperialism. According to scholars, the frontispiece is an archived picture, meaning in English: "Mother, I miss you; I am hungry, I want to go home" and was found on the underground walls of a coal mine "in a tunnel in Nagano Prefecture, Matsushiro City, Japan" (Wong, 1994: 108) carved by a Korean worker either during or after the Japanese occupation of Korea.¹⁸ Preceding the

¹⁷ Visual images include portraits of Korean women, historical photographs of Japanese colonial persecution of Koreans, a mass anticolonial rally, a map of divided Korean peninsula, both front and rear body shapes in Chinese style, anatomical diagrams, Cha's mother, female martyrdom Yu Guan Soon, and still images from films such as Carl Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*.

¹⁸ Here, I use Shelley Sunn Wong's translation and discussion about the origins of the photograph (1994: 107-108). In addition, Lisa Lowe also offers an insightful analysis of this section (1996: 132-135). See Kang's paper (2002) for more on

text’s proper opening, the frontispiece lays the groundwork to enact a tangible connection leading to Korean pasts. Apart from the frontispiece, the other pictures, including a mass anticolonial rally, historical photographs of Japanese colonial persecution of Koreans, and a map of divided Korean peninsula, focus on Korean pasts and are all pertinently channeled into making anti-imperialist arguments.¹⁹ Nevertheless, with all these captionless photographs, the possibility of empathetically identifying with and thereby witnessing traumatic past experiences are unquestionably disturbed. The “Clio/History” section tells us that,

This document is transmitted through, by the same means, the same channel without distinction the content is delivered in the same style: the word. The image. To appeal to the masses to congeal the information to make bland, mundane, no longer able to transcend their own conspirator method, no matter how alluring their presentation. (33)

Accordingly, the visual topography is at once recapitulated and ironically ruptured by the text’s double attachment: It seeks to represent, yet it also questions such an attempt. Every retelling invents anew the expression of the experience, the outcome of which “does not cease to continue.” Without proper explication of the relation between the fragmented, flawed narratives, the images,

the history of the inscription.

¹⁹ Other examples include the pictures that initiate and conclude the “Urania/Astronomy” section (63, 75), which are classical Chinese medicine with the front and rear views of human body printed in white-on-black captioned with Chinese characters and Western anatomy diagrams indicating the vocal organ of human body. Though they cannot be easily categorized at first sight, the medical diagrams are used to critique the utterances of language prescribed by imperial forces. Between these two diagrams are translation practices. As such, the diagrams are pictures connected to pronunciation—the speech which is produced as a correct gesture by using the vocal organs in our bodies. Some feminist critics choose to approach the pictures in *Dictée* in favor of a radical materiality that speaks for the text’s political ends, especially the iconic images of women.

and reproduced documents, the text becomes an amalgamation, set in an unfinished transformation. The fragments are distilled and dispersed into uncategorizable “traces.” In the section “Erato/Love Poetry,” the narrator therefore states that, “[h]er portrait is not represented in a still photograph, nor in a painting. All along, you see her without actually seeing, actually having seen her. You do not see her yet. For the moment, you see only her traces” (100). Metaphorically, these uncategorizable traces set *Dictée* in transit, a text whose interpretation begins from somewhere inside the imperfectly constellated arrangement of a story. In this way, *Dictée* discourages totalizing and reductive views of what constitutes “national identity” and what it means to be Asian, or Korean American. While the text illustrates its own investment in the physical form of linguistic transmission (Catholic catechism, translation; the shift of language, including French, Chinese, English) and visual forms of representational transformation, the text has not yet completed and organized itself into a final, definite constellation. Suggestively, the text illustrates a series of transformations, and it resists arriving at the consolations of that final crossing over. As the text works to blur given boundaries, either textually or culturally, it also announces itself as a self-production of incomplete assimilation, of the oppositional underside of ethnic Americanization.

As such, the narrative of *Dictée*, which is set between disciplines, also shifts within a variety of transformations. Transformations, however partial or radical, proceed with the intensity of becoming and with developmental momentum. The text achieves this by locating the speaking subject in temporally and geographically shifting and separate positions. While trying to come to terms with the nationalist and colonialist ideologies that saturate East Asia, the narrator struggles to utter, and to contest, the meaning of fragmented histories across the Pacific in the disjointed structure of the text. The book thus reflects the reality that long-standing yet conflicting transpacific relationships are uneven, compulsive, and inexplicable.

In his *Transpacific Imaginations*, Huang shows that his "central concern is with the possibilities of literary representation and historical knowledge in the transpacific context" (2008: 2). The Pacific, in Huang's words, "the deadly space between," "is both a contact zone between competing geopolitical ambitions and a gap between literature and history that is riddled with distortions, half-truths, longings, and affective burdens never fully resolved in the unevenly temporalized space of the transpacific" (2). With unresolved fragmentations, incompleteness and textual disruption, *Dictée* demonstrates Huang's imagined topography of the transpacific world structured by, and rendered in, the partial truths produced and inflected by the hegemonic imperial powers. The vertiginous quality of this transpacific imaginary as reflected in *Dictée*, both produces a suspicion about the possible formation of a transnational or translational congruity in critical interpretation of Asian American literary texts, and implies a challenge to the invested categories of West and East, which we have all learned to recognize as profoundly mediated by a dialectics of culture and history. In blurring the deceptive binaries, *Dictée* "complicates the traditional paradigm of conceiving the transpacific as an oppositional space of the East versus the West, Asia versus America," to appropriate Huang's observation in his introduction chapter (9).

V. (Re)positioning Asia(s)

In the ninth section "Polymnia/Sacred Poetry," Princess Pali, in search of a cure for her ailing mother, meets a woman at a well who gives her ten packets of medicine (Lew, 1992: 14).²⁰ Fulfilling the nine-day mission, the young girl of Korean

²⁰ Shu-mei Shih also discusses Cha's use of the myth of Princess Pali (1997: 156). In effect, we can read this Korean myth of mother and daughter as a counterpart to the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone. See also Josephine Nock-Hee Park's "What of the Partition: *Dictée's* Boundaries and the American Epic" (2005: 215-216).

mythology returns to the house where her mother awaits her:

Already the sun was in the west and she saw her village coming into view. As she came nearer to the house she became aware of the weight of the bundles and the warmth in her palms where she had held them. Through the paper screen door, dusk had entered and the shadow of a small candle was flickering. (170)

Thus, before entering the house, the young girl sees her mother through a “screen.” *Dictée*, then, ends at the reunion of mother and daughter in the tenth section as mother and daughter view another “screen” together. Like the text itself, the “screen,” unfolding its layers of metaphor, thwarts a full appreciation. A multiple and complex text, *Dictée* begins with a frontispiece of Hangul writing and concludes with a Korean myth. Commenting on the frontispiece, Park states that “[t]hese scrawled lines, untranslated, stand as the single instance of Hangul in the text; the Korean language itself is a ghostly underground presence, never voiced” (2005: 227). Though never reappearing in the text, the traditional Korean alphabet along with the folktale of Princess Pali that wraps up the multiple strands of narratives in a coda signifies hidden but empowered “Asian” aspects of the text.²¹

The surge in the significance of “Asia” arose in the wake of heated discussions on “the Pacific century” within Asian/American studies. Looking back to the late 1960s, the emergence of Asian American studies as a discipline has evidenced a dependency on the very racial inequality that Asian Americanists simultaneously seek

²¹ *Dictée* is mainly a story that probes in the history of twentieth century Korea. One of the pressing questions of reading *Dictée* is how “Korea” is addressed in the text. The evocation of “Korea” in *Dictée* is arguably a crucial but unattended theme. In his “A Commentary on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*,” Michael Stone-Richards points out the fact that critics hold different opinions about “the necessity of following Cha’s movement toward the place of Korea” (2009: 151). Nevertheless, he leaves the issue unresolved. Other discussions on thematic connection between “Korea” and *Dictée* can be found in Stephens (1986: 184-210) and Wilson (1991: 33-37).

to dismantle. The paradoxes inherent in the formulation of Asian American studies as a category become even more apparent as critics debate about the futures of Asian American studies. While analyzing the complexity of "racial shadow," Sau-ling C. Wong explores texts in which the second generation of Asian Americans project their own fears and insecurities onto less assimilated, recently arrived Asian immigrant doubles (1993: 77-118). Such projections instantiate what Wong refers to as "the impossibility of the agenda set for Asian Americans: that they are expected at once to lose their offensive 'Asianness' and to remain permanently foreign" (1993: 91). In his *Race and Resistance*, Viet Thanh Nguyen draws attention to a similar concern that, "[t]he work of Asian American intellectuals is dependent, to some extent, upon the continuing validity of such characterization and the endurance of the conditions that mark Asian Americans as being racially different" (2002: 170).

Recently, those Asian Americanists who discuss the possibility of a post-nationalist or post-assimilationist future, have begun to ponder "what it means both to be and to write as an Asian American" (Bella, 2008: 179). The hidden narratives and contested textualization that underlie the dichotomized understanding of "Asian" or "Asia" in Asian American literature are hence foregrounded. However, negotiating the "Asia(s)" in an "Asian American" text is not unproblematic. R. Radhakrishnan, for example, acutely states, "[t]he interests that inform Asian studies and Asian American studies are different" (2007: 224), and that,

[i]t is a little too naïve to expect that the "Asia" in Asian studies and the "Asia" in Asian-American studies are/should be identical. [However,] there are determining connections, and relations between the two. Both "Asias" are constructed and not natural, and both carry historical density as well as urgency. The "Asian" in Asian studies is not necessarily authentic whereas the "other" Asia is merely "hybrid." (2007: 223)

The “Asia” in Asian studies and the “Asia” in Asian American studies are neither authentic nor genuine, according to Radhakrishnan’s viewpoint. The question, then, is “what is Asia”? Asia(s) has long been analyzed, represented, figured, and articulated either as a geopolitical area or as an ideological construct. For Lowe, “‘Asia’ has been always a complex site on which the manifold anxieties of the U.S. nation-state have been figured . . . ” (1996: 4). In her *Other Asias*, Spivak maintains that “[n]ow the ‘Asian’ is broken into old and new. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent events in Eastern and Central Europe, these outlines have become altogether unstable” (2008: 219). She furthers her argument: “Asia can be for me a position without identity It was a cartographic position, without identity . . . it is a place for negotiation” (2008: 240). Spivak furthers observes that,

[Asia] does exist, geographically, and yet, as we know, it doesn’t exist . . . we tend to think of our part of Asia as Asia. That’s what I was questioning. The idea that this is Asia is US-centric. It comes from the decision, in the United States, that East Asia, because of immigration and the pattern of military and political relation patterns, is Asia. People who are not particularly in favor of the US have accepted this view that a strip of Asia is Asia as such. (2008: 240-241)

Based on Spivak’s argument, the way we think of “Asia” is already immersed in an American perspective. In the making and unmaking of contemporary Asia(s), American power has substantially channeled or distorted how the geopolitical trope represents Asia. As such, to read an Asian American literary text for an understanding of its articulation of “Asia(s)” is to encounter such complicated questions as what Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa make clear that any effort to study Asian American literature for the “built into” Asian experience is a “self-consciously particularized engagement” (2001: 18).

Can we discuss the "Asian" aspects in the text, which is ironically characterized by anti-assimilation, as evidenced in *Dictée's* representation of the process of transformation without ever reaching the endpoints—always in the shifting and shaping without reifying the ethnic identity? Paradoxically, yes. Insightfulness in reading *Dictée* comes not merely at the moment that we delve into the text's transpacific imaginary, its fractured reality, and liminality, but also as we turn critical eyes on the text's gestures to "Asia(n)." *Dictée* is said to be a text that cultivates a "Korean perspective." According to Srimati Mukherjee, embedded in *Dictée* is "a gesture of unreservedly voicing . . . from the Korean perspective," which "will not only prevent erasure, but will also bring into sharper focus the constituents in the identity of the Korean immigrant to the United States" (2006: 209). While pushing beyond a simple reversal of center and periphery, *Dictée* is also said to have been based on "a singularly apposite mode—one shaped by alliances between the United States and East Asia—to tell a painful story of historical and political intimacies between East and West" (2008: 131), as Park observes in his book *Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics*.

According to Stefans, "Cha's work had gotten only limited exposure in Asian American literary communities because of its deconstructionist and hybrid formal characteristics which seemed to make it unassimilable to the social realist paradigms then ascendant" (2006: 78-79). Textually and thematically, *Dictée* also defies those features of Asian American literature that Elaine Kim notes:

For the most part, 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"—search for and claiming a "home" or longing for a final "homecoming." I looked for unifying thematic threads and tidy resolutions that might ease the pain of displacement and heal the exile, heedless of what might be missing from this homogenizing approach. . . . (1993: 12)

The initial cold reception of *Dictée* might be caused by the text's betrayal of the "homogenizing" policy. Unlike other Asian American writing, *Dictée* provides a sophisticated understanding of the incommensurability that constitutes the grounds between Asia and America. Seen from this light, *Dictée* seems located in a more consciously ethnic concern, both by articulating different voices that reject assimilation, and by shifting between the different shores of the Pacific, and thereby cultivates a transnational perspective. Through disruptions and fragmentations, *Dictée* complicates Asian/American subjectivity by locating it in a shifting site, in the interstices.²² In this way, *Dictée* takes issue with a number of assumptions that have been inherently and theoretically embedded in Asian American studies since its inception. Unlike most Asian American literary texts, the critical geographies evoked in the text have to be read according to different means of theorization. In explicating the text's particulars, Sue-Im Lee explains that *Dictée* is celebrated as "suggestive of a new form of Asian American subject representation, a postmodern, antirealist subject whose empirical substantiality is not generated through the 'intelligible whole' of plot nor whose social identity is categorizable within ascriptive terms of the majority culture" (2002: 242). As shown in its multiple narratives, *Dictée* elaborates on the way a Korean American claims along with other diseases (Greek muses, French and Korean woman martyr Yu Guan Soon) her historical/national legacy across the Pacific, and, significantly, how this Korean American does so by inhabiting a liminal conjunction

²² *Dictée*'s "nonlinear, cyclical, and layered narrative punctures, fragments, disturbs, and questions the apparently seamless surface of conventional Korean historiography" disturbs its categorization as a typical example of Korean, Korean American, or Asian American literature (Lee, 2006: 84). It is said that any act of textual deviation from the realist norm will inevitably produce a sense that the writer fails to adequately "reflect" of his or her ethnic identity. The inability or instability of *Dictée* to reflect its "ethnicity" causes its initial cold receptions by Asian American critics. Therefore, the problematics of ethnic identity that the book so rigorously engages has been neglected.

and its contradictions, challenging nationalist institutions and imperialist infliction.

VI. Coda

Drawing on a varied array of disciplinary approaches and sources, Palumbo-Liu states in his insightful book *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* that "modern Asian America should be read within a context of multiple subjectivities whose multiplicity can be depathologized through a close and critical reading of Asian, American, and Asian/American history" (1999: 389). In following Palumbo-Liu's viewpoint, I read *Dictée* by positing the importance of thinking through historical specificities as instrumental to understanding the particularities of constituting "Asia" as sites of negotiation and interventions as evidenced in the transpacific imaginary discussed in this paper. This paper argues that an Asia conceived in antagonistic or contemptible categories in relation to the U.S. is an Asia that is forever an other. The idea of "Asia" should be repositioned according to changing cultural, historical, political, or economic contexts. Reading through the multiple narratives of *Dictée*, we find that "Asia" is always multiply determined—it is at once a geopolitical entity, a cultural diversity, and a historical contingency.

Dictée, dealing with the historical complexities of East Asia, makes explicit that the connections between Asian and American discursive forces are based on a multiplicity of contradictions—of race, nation, ethnicity, gender, and politics—arising from heterogeneous sites and conditions, with the hegemonic sway of political power taking priority over others at particular historical moments. *Dictée* especially makes visible the near erasure of the transpacific imaginary, offering several points of confrontations, negotiating, and intersecting through the fragmentary, palimpsestic narratives, blank spaces, incomplete structures, and partially flawed reproduction of images. As a text written under the shadow of the

empires, *Dictée* disturbs categorization, negotiates the problematic of liminality, configures transpacific imaginaries while mobilizing the reconceptualization of “Asia.”

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求索「亞洲」：
閱讀車學敬《聽寫》的闖境性與跨太平洋意象

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摘 要

南韓近代境遇與其地緣政治、冷戰美蘇對峙息息相關。以冷戰議題重思亞裔美國研究可凸顯帝國、種族、政治符號操縱如何肇始、形塑今日「美國」與「亞洲」概念。本論文循此脈絡閱讀韓裔美籍女作家車學敬的《聽寫》：爬梳文本中南韓與歐亞帝國主義、殖民霸權的糾葛，剖析這異質混雜文本的「闖境性」與「跨太平洋意象」如何串接、嵌鑲、構築，求索「亞洲」。即，探求思索「亞洲」作為政治勢力交鋒、斡旋場域背後的歷史殊異與意識形態。

《聽寫》是個跨太平洋的族裔故事、「隱喻」「紀實」更迭，也是個「非此、亦非彼」，既「離索」又「趨近」身分認同疇隙迴游的「闖境」書寫。其兼容卻悖反的「亞洲」描摹，指涉「亞洲」論述非侷限於探討亞裔性之弔詭或何謂亞洲之論戰；而是關乎「亞洲」作為論述交錯、或扞格、或協商之軸域如何左右亞-美政治文化意義生產之洞見觀瞻。

關鍵詞：冷戰、闖境性、跨太平洋意象、亞洲、亞裔美國研究