



RE-SIGNIFYING “ASIA” IN THE TRANSNATIONAL TURN OF ASIAN/AMERICAN STUDIES

I. ASIAN AMERICAN CRITIQUE AND INTER-ASIA CULTURAL STUDIES:
RETHINKING THE COLD WAR CONDITIONS OF US EMPIRE IN (EAST) ASIA

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For the current work on liberal democracy, universal humanism and human rights law in both American studies and Asian American critique, the question of whether or not the US remains a superpower in the post-Cold War globalizing economy is still at stake.¹ In their discussion, Hardt and Negri argue for the emergence of empire as a construct of multiple competing forces without the centralized regulatory power of an individual state. New forms of global governance entailed by various flows of culture, capital and people denote the decline of US imperialism as a dominating hegemon in this global era (XV). Whereas scholars such as Hardt and Negri theorize a supranational constitution of empire that is marked by the deregulations of free market across national boundaries, many others call for a reexamination of the history of US imperialism and its re-articulation of hegemonic power as a new world order. To declare the end of US imperialism, as Inderpal Grewal argues, dismisses economic and social inequalities occasioned by the earlier colonial histories that continuously

1. I would like to thank the IASA selection committee for including me in this special issue. This essay is part of my ongoing reflection on the broader questions of colonialism, imperialism and the Cold War. I would like to express my gratitude to Lisa Lowe, Lisa Yoneyama, Amie Parry, Todd Henry, Jin-kyung Lee, Pin-chia Feng, Chandan Reddy, Naifei Ding, Josen Diaz, Jung-hyun Hwang for their valuable help and insights in the process of thinking through this paper.

provide advantages for the conditions of US hegemonic power at present (21). According to her understanding, the transnational project of neoliberalism advanced by the US rewrites the American ways of living, and ideas of liberal democracy into consumer cultures in global circuits of what she terms “transnational connectivities”; that is, how the new technologies of communication, production and consumption contribute to the transnationalization of US nationalist underpinnings of freedom, humanity and rights (22–26). Critically reviewing the US reconstitution of neoliberal governance in the global market economy, Wendy Brown lays out a set of characteristics of US neoliberalism, those including neoliberal economic rationality, market profitability, and forms of self-governing moral subjects of democratic values, and capitalist development for the social functions of state power and market economy. She observes a blurring of democratic values and capitalist development in so far as democracy serves as the ends and means of capitalist accumulation and teleological development to be viewed as moral ethics of rationalization. US-led capitalist modernity in this sense underlies the hegemonic power by advancing American exceptional democracy through the overseas market expansion. Market-driven economy, modulated and adopted both within and outside the US soil, has been imagined as the most effective, if not solely viable, path of democratic transformation. As democratic values are being conflated with the neoliberal economic rationality, the entwined relationship between democracy and neoliberalism recreates the self-governing subjects complying with the morality of market economy in which capitalist development has been rendered the most viable form of historical progress. In other words, the integration and reorganization of economy and polity has transformed the political and social life into economic calculation where the autonomy of each has been dissolved (4–9). Aihwa Ong’s accounts of “mutations” in citizenship and sovereignty offer another perspective of understanding US neoliberalism as flexible technologies of governing and self-governing that are deployed in a variety of regimes and ethnographic contexts in East and Southeast Asia. Ong’s study reminds us of a contextualized understanding of American neocolonial relations as “the situated entanglements of geopolitics, market logics, exceptions, and ethical

discourses” to illuminate how American neoliberalism has been experienced and operated in a transnational network of cultures. In her illumination, the interplay of neoliberalism as exception and exception to neoliberalism in Asia detaches citizenship from its adherence to state-regulated legality, and reformulates citizenship into alignment with market logics and strategies (15–18). Her revisiting of flexible citizenship in the neoliberal context of Asia challenges Hardt and Negri’s dominant formulation of “empire” as a homogeneous entity of globalized capitalism because the historical complexity of Asian labor politics needs to be examined within the mutually constitutive forces at the global, national, and local levels across the regions in Asia and the Pacific.

As this scholarship stipulates the contemporary global conditions of neoliberalism in complicity with the consolidating US neocolonial domination as a world-transforming project, this essay pays particular attention to the US neocolonial Cold War conditions of power asymmetries in an inter-Asia context. After Japan’s defeat, the post-World War II era heralded a critical moment for anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements across the regions of Asia and the Pacific; however, the desire for decolonization and independence in Asia was soon codified by the Cold War divisions that were mobilized in the US conduct of the Korean War and Vietnam War. Functioning as a decided project of historical, political and ideological reformulation of power, the US Cold War restructured geopolitics in East Asia that fortified the national divisions of demarcated areas, and also reorganized the dominant understanding of the Cold War—a discourse that pits the purportedly oppositional knowledge production of democratic capitalism against social communism. In his influential book *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Relations at the End of the Century*, Bruce Cumings observes that US economic and military hegemony in Asia is a continuation of Japanese colonialism. As he maintains, post-war Japan serves as subordinate partner to this US imperialist project in Asia in which the US continues its hegemonic power through the management of the Cold War and its allies with post-war Japan under the rubric of Western civilization and international developmental capitalism (16). Japanese colonialism in East Asia, including the colonial relations with Korea and Taiwan, has been

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extended by the US hegemony in contemporary US-Asia relations that are entangled with the rising power of China throughout the Cold War until post-Cold War eras. To put it differently, the discourse of “globalization” in East Asia is deeply tied to a post-Cold War restructuring of knowledge and power from “the state’s concern with the maintenance of Cold War boundary security to transnational corporations that, as the organized expression of the market, saw no geographic limit on their interests” (179).

Also looking at how Japanese colonialism and US imperialism are mutually constituted, Lisa Yoneyama’s critical project demonstrates another compelling path to investigate the transpacific Cold War historical and cultural formations of war, memories, redress, violence and justice. In her discussion of memories in/of war in *Hiroshima Traces*, she has shown the power configurations of war memory as critical sites for interrogating transnational administrations and negotiations that are interwoven with the geopolitical histories of US, Japan and the associated East Asian countries such as China, Korea and Taiwan (44). In this critical methodology, she reads cultural significations and political effects of remembering, recounting, and recollecting the memories of the past as discursively and materially articulated in cultural productions and spatial reconstructions. In her continuous pursuit of this topic, she presents an invigorating critique of how the US administration of post-war world order confines the pursuit of historical justice and redress to the US legal parameters while obscuring our critique of Japanese war crimes and the Americanization of postwar justice. Bringing the critique to a focus on the US Cold War militarism and post-Cold War redress movement, Yoneyama is able to show how globalization of political economy and militarism reinforce the imperialist project of US hegemony across the globe. In particular, she advances our understanding of how the trans-war historical justice has been largely incorporated in and negotiated through the US juridico-political regime of redress and reparation by producing the Asian/American redressive subjects, a process she calls “Americanization of redress and historical justice” (57). The Americanization of postwar justice, as Yoneyama maintains, recasts the US war against Asia as a “good war” and reframes US war memories into a dominant national narrative of human-

ity, democracy, and freedom by obscuring the imperialist violence generated by the US war involvement in these regions. This “imperialist myth” therefore precludes the possibility of redress for the injured subjects of the liberated as their liberation is itself an indication of reparation made to them prior to the violence inflicted upon them (80–81). Her analysis not only illuminates the complicity of Japanese colonial legacies and US Cold War imperialism, but also alludes to the emergence of the transpacific redressive subjects and cultures that complicate our conceptualization of Asian/American.

As Yoneyama’s intellectual project performs transpacific Asian/American critique of the Cold War constitution of US neocolonialism and Japanese imperialism, Kuan-Hsing Chen’s *Asia as Method* presents a correlated inter-Asia project of decolonization movement. Primarily engaging with the intellectual fields of Post-colonial Studies, Globalization Studies, and Asian Studies by foregrounding Asia as a focal analytics, inter-Asia cultural studies encourage a shift in inter-referencing to examine the interconnections of Asian countries as a condition of possibility for the Third World decolonization process. The process of decolonization, as Chen argues, requires a critical unpacking of the Cold War formations of US imperialism in Asia through a self-reflection on how the internalized imperialist mentalities and the Western worldviews are installed in our historical knowledge production (3, 4, 119, *et passim*). In his timely critique, the “discourse of the Southward Advance” in Taiwan—the ways in which Taiwan evokes its national supremacy and superiority in seeking resources, labor, and capital from the economically disadvantaged Southeast Asian countries—evinces Taiwan’s “subimperialist imaginary” in its own formulation of ethno-nationalism entwined with Japanese colonialism and US imperialist desire (17–18). As postwar anticolonial nationalism in Asia has been embroiled in the Cold War historical systems of knowledge formations, Chen contends that de-Cold War, specifically referring to de-Americanization, becomes the most crucial process of the decolonization movement in Asia.

Critical of US racialized history, Lisa Lowe was one of the very first to articulate how the US wars in Asia have occasioned transpacific labor migration in the process of US empire building. Lowe’s

landmark work places the history of Asian immigration as an index to the US state building and neocolonial expansion through the US war interventions in Asia until the global restructuring of economic development (7). Central to her argument, Lowe insists on Asian American cultural critique as a critical knowledge interrogation of the governing technologies of racialization and gendering through legal administration of citizenship (11). Rather than seeing Asian American as an identity category, she theorizes Asian American critique as an analytics of US power formations that are constitutive of Asian American racialization. Bringing Asian American cultural critique into critical conversation with inter-Asia cultural studies, I propose to rethink the transnational Asian/American historical conjunctures articulated, rearticulated and disarticulated within the geopolitical routes of intellectual activisms embedded in decolonization movements. On the one hand, I contemplate on the conditions of possibilities by linking Asian American cultural critique to inter-Asia cultural critique as a transnational project of social transformations. I assert that the theoretical insights of Asian American critique and inter-Asia cultural studies can be historical resources for each other, furthering intellectual sophistication and social transformation, as well as enabling a transpacific investigation of Asian and Asian American subject formations across differences of race, gender, sexuality, class and other organizing categories.

II. (UN)LIKELY “THIRD WORLD” INTIMACIES

Exploring the relationships between literature, history and society, scholar of transnational feminisms, Neferti Tadiar, provides a critical methodology to analyze literature as a way to contemplate the political potential and social struggle that allows the space for the submerged histories of social experience and cultural life to emerge out of the national/capitalist narrative of developmentalism. Rather than regarding literature as representing the social realities or as a means of transcendence of humanity, she looks to literature for “creative possibility.” In her formulation, literary works serve as “both ethnographic material (ethnography of social imagination as much as of actually lived life) and theoretical resource for writing an alternative history of the present,

a history that foregrounds the creative work and transformative potential of marginalized social experiences and their unrecognized role in making of the contemporary world” (18). Her insight inspires my discussion of the nonfiction narrative in *Our Stories: Migration and Labour* by Yu-ling Ku. In conceiving literary work as a dense site of social dynamism and human experiences, I look at how the migrant narrative in *Our Stories* enables a transpacific exploration of the suppressed histories of the Cold War formations in Asia and the Pacific, and render legible the obscured intimacies among transnational migrant workers across the national divisions.

Our Stories is a nonfiction novel that consists of three sections of narratives organized around Ku's experience as a labor activist as well as her recollection of her own family's history in terms of both intra-regional and inter-regional migration and movement. The narration of labor and migration in *Our Stories* suggests that we consider the ways in which social and cultural practices of inter-Asian migration are often embedded within longer histories of colonialism, occupation, modernization and war. In linking the emergence of Asian modernity to the larger Cold War historical and political formations, the migrant narrative in *Our Stories* sheds light on multiple sites of inter-Asian migratory routes including the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan and China. Through a Cold War geopolitical remapping, *Our Stories* renders legible the transpacific entanglement between US Cold War, inter-Asia modernization and Chinese globalization by showing the inter-regional migration from Mainland China to Taiwan and vice versa as a result of economic integration and capitalist development. As Amie Elizabeth Parry points out, Ku's writing “rewrites or at least problematizes a Cold War version of positivist epistemology in Asia—a positivism whose modernity and authority is linked to rapid industrialization, and its attendant values and structures of feeling” as she exploits Cold War category to rearticulate the history of various life stories (Ku, 2011: 178). According to Parry's analysis primarily through her discussion of the first section “We/Us,” *Our Stories* employs multiple narratives that transverse linear temporalities and geographies, recreating the historical intimacies of cross-racial labor migrations by bringing the multiple layers of temporalities into particular localities/cities/streets to make

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legible the historical connections of domestic and transnational labor migration (179). In Ku's depiction, the distinctive ambience of the Zhongshan North Road in Taipei that had been recalled by Shu-hua, for example, illuminates a situated picture of the historical conjunctures of the Taiwanese migrant workers and their shared alienation and "foreignness" with the foreign migrant laborers. At the age of 18, the Taiwanese migrant worker Shu Hau, who migrated from a rural area to Taipei city in the 1960s as a hairdresser, finds this place particularly compelling because of its exotic aura and urban glamour; yet, she cannot help but feel like a stranger, alienated because of the urban transformations and industrialization as a result of the Cold War involvement in Asia's capitalistic development.

As a unique place that was 'rented out' to foreigners who were living in Taipei at that time, the mixing of cultures and tastes had turned it into a foreign land in a local place. As Taiwanese, Shu-hua and Jiu-xiong felt strangely foreign to the place; they even felt somewhat shy and embarrassed, yet at the same time excited and curious. It had opened their eyes to a new and different world that seemed to remain beyond their reach. (Ku, 2011: 25)

The ambivalence of excitement and estrangement emanated from the urban splendors invokes precisely the historical memories of the Cold War, from the outbreak of the Korean War until the Vietnam War, which "rendered Taiwan like the Philippines, as key military base for the invading American army," turning this city area not only into a "back-up service" place for military needs but also a "paradise for American GI's rest and recreation" along with the flourishing of sex tourism and American consumerism (Ku, 2011: 26). As Ku comments on the inter-Asia historical interconnections of labor, migration, and national development through the lens of the Cold War, she narrates:

Shu-hua, like many Taiwanese of her generation, who lived precisely at this historical juncture of the Cold War, only knew they should work doubly hard for their livelihood, save as much as they could earn, so as to leave poverty behind. Few among them realized of course, that the Philippines, which shared a similar fate to Taiwan as an American military outpost in the Pacific, was similarly locked within the global politics of Capitalism versus Communism. They were living on the same side of the iron curtain and had much in common with Taiwan. However few

Taiwanese like Shu-hua, were conscious of the fact that in both places, protest movements against American imperialism and the White Terror were being ruthlessly and brutally repressed, persecuted and crushed by their respective governments in collusion with the American state. (Ku, 2011: 27)

Through a juxtaposition of narratives about Shu-hua and Meriam, a Filipina migrant worker who was later married Shu-hua's son Chin-yi, Ku manages to render a non-linear narration about cross-generational memories and transnational migratory routes without rehearsing a dominant configuration of historical development. The historical nonlinearity in Ku's narratives facilitates a different understanding of the dynamic relationship between foreign migrant workers and Taiwanese subjects, projecting a shared space of mutual historical formulation as a result of the Cold War conditions in Asia. As Zhongshan North Road, where St. Christopher Church is located, starts to attract foreign migrant workers at the turn of the century to gather for Sunday mass in English, this street gradually transforms itself into one of Taiwan's most distinctive ethnoscares. As a Taiwanese subject, Chin-yi experiences an unexpected sense of foreignness being in the unfamiliar environment where a mixture of English and Tagalog are spoken, and the normally "quiet and solemn" migrant workers become "self-confident, self-assured and high-spirited beings" (32). The shared foreignness among the varied historical subjects across generations, gender, race, and nationality significantly directs our attention to the sidelined discussion of inter-Asia connections by US Cold War modernity.

In foregrounding the Cold War conditions as that *Our Stories* pressingly lays out, I would like to extend my discussion particularly through the examination of the third part "The Long Journey" to envision another critical genealogy of (un)likely illegal alliances among the *queer* subjects, queer in the sense of denoting non-normativity, illegality, and ephemerality. "The Long Journey" begins with a narrative of an *illegal* runaway migrant worker, Maria, and her spouse Edgar, both of whom migrated from an impoverished rural area of the Philippines. Ku describes how Maria, being a runaway migrant worker, reaches out to the TIWA office for assistance because she is pregnant, and is due to deliver in a month. All she

asks is that TIWA find her a safe place to deliver her baby secretly. The unlawful operation needs to be kept underground for she is afraid of being deported in the event of a police discovery. As Ku depicts, migrant domestic helpers and caretakers in Taiwan have been de-sexualized as subjects that have to “forgo their sexuality and sexual desires” (15) within this national and legal framework of laboring conditions. The fear of deportation that comes along with pregnancy puts them in a precarious and underground position at the margins of the law and society. Differently put, the domain of their sexuality and desires becomes where the technology of state power turns into the rule of law to deploy the state’s political interests. The desexualization of their desires is a stringent re-politicization of their sexualities along the line of the rule of law, which is why “[t]hey usually relied on word of mouth to find a hospital that would agree to carry out the abortion” due to their illegal status. Ku’s narrative also tells us that one of the outlets for their sexual desires would be seeking prostitution; however, their opportunities for *legal* sex were further deprived as the Taiwanese government abolished the licensed system of legal prostitution: “some of the employers of these migrant workers might still take them to Guisui Street’s licensed brothels for safe and legal sex occasionally, so that these workers could have some sort of outlet” before its abrogation (215). I argue that it is informal economic exchange rather than the dominant national legal system that renders legible the queer contacts of these illegal subjects of the runaway migrant workers, the prostitutes, and the illegal “secret doctors” (*miyi* [密醫] in Taiwan) whose relationship need to be reimagined more than within the legal framework of human rights, national development, and neoliberalism. There is an informal class of medical reproductive labor in Taiwan that consists of laborers who were produced as supplements to the demand of a US-defined medical project of modernity in the 1950s–70s, but were driven underground by the professional society of the state as their practices were declared illegal as *mi-yi*, so-called “secret doctors.” The *illegal* contact among transnational migrant workers and *miyi* outlaws bring to the foreground the obscured genealogy of the shared laboring experiences of the (Taiwanese) *mi-yi* informal caregivers and the (Filipino) “runaway” domestic and care workers

across from historical timeframes, but also strikingly gestures toward the queer intimacies of the two at the present moment as one lives by performative illegal *miyi* labor, and the other looks for the “mi-yi” for illegal operations. The shade of each other ironically brings much needed light to each other’s historical experiences of laboring, and their illegal status as social beings under the shadow of the Cold War.² As Parry elaborates, “the Cold War functions in the narration as an overlooked and obscured explanatory framework that sheds a very needed light on many conundrums of daily existence, while connecting Taiwan’s migration patterns to larger historical shifts that are also formative of Asian American immigration” (177).

The uneasy alliance of illegal subjects points to how the exercise of state power compartments their histories into the nationalized legal structure that has brought them together but prevented them from seeing each other. To perform a critique of state violence in rendering another level of queer intimacies among the illegal subjects, I turn to another story about Hu-chong Ling and Ida based on a real legal case in *Our Stories*. In discussing this story about a disabled Taiwanese man and a female “foreign” caregiver, I explore the (im)possibility of reading a space of intimacies predicated on unconditional hospitality and forgiveness in a Derridian sense, through the shared sense of loss. Ida is a live-in caregiver from Indonesia hired to provide assisted care for her Taiwanese employer Hu-chong, who became paralyzed due to a severe spine injury after a car accident. In a personal care residence, Ida offers the extremely labor-intensive home care for Hu-chong, who depends on Ida as “the key to his mobility and activities” (250). As a home caregiver for an ill patient like Ling, Ida has the most demanding round-the-clock care work, including housekeeping, nutritious meal preparations, assistance with personal hygiene,

2. Here I am referring to my research that traces the genealogies of the “mi-yi” (translated as “secret doctors”) to explore how the scientific discourse of modernity converges with state politics that redefined the legality of medical knowledge and practices, thereby subjugating informal labor and non-orthodox practices to the margins of society. Part of this research has been published in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*: “Governing ‘Secrecy’ in Medical Modernity: Knowledge Power and the *Miyi* Outlaws.”

and incontinence care. After four months, Ida leaves without notice and becomes an absconded migrant worker. As Hu-chong sadly recalls, it was during the Chinese New Year holidays that Ida left him on the bed unattended. He felt overwhelmed by fear and desperation when thinking that he would have perished alone because of hunger or from being immersed in his own excrement. If his neighbor had not heard his scream for help, he would have died on his bed. Given the situation that Ida had run away, Hu-chong as an employer would be punished for his neglect of duty according to the state regulation and therefore would be deprived of his right to hire another migrant worker until Ida was found. Hu-chong told the State Attorney, "She ran away, I was nearly murdered, why should I have to prove that it was not my fault?" Driven by anger, disappointment, and fear, he decides to file a lawsuit against Ida for the offenses of abandonment and murder with intent (260).

This case can be simply translated as hostility between the native employer and the foreign employee. Rather than reading the already reified antagonism, I endeavor to provide another reading of queer intimacies into this case. One of the discernible levels of the intimacies is first registered through the ways in which Ida performs immaterial and affective labor in the domestic sphere of Hu-chong's house, where she provides the domestic and care services maintaining the sanitary conditions and the living functions of her employer's body by washing and feeding him that requires intimate bodily contact and affective care. The domestic space of family and bodies as an administered site of production and management has been made clear by Michel Foucault's discussion of biopower. Ann Stoler elaborates on Foucault's biopower by identifying the colonial racial configuration of intimacy. Stoler explains that the matters of intimacy, namely domestic arrangements, care and sexual services, divisions of domestic labor, and family relations and ideology, are the tangible domains of colonial power relations. It is through the domain of the intimate that one is able to trace the affectivities of colonial politics and imperial power (Stoler, 2010: 7). Alongside Stoler's discussion of the intimate in the late 19th century's European colonial power over its Asian colonies, I continue to pursue the ongoing contemporary neocolonial politics in the inter-Asia contexts of former colonies.

Within the uneven development of global economy that continues the neocolonial domination of the global north over the south as well as geopolitics of East Asian and Southeast Asian countries since the 1980s, I analyze the forced “excremacry” between Hu-chong (Taiwan) and Ida (Indonesia) as more than a residual of former colonial prescriptions and practices. Rather I pursue the loss of family and intimacies as an index of the international division of labor within which third world formerly colonized women perform domestic reproductive labor and affectivities of “care” for the middle-class families of industrialized societies.³ I use the word “excremacry” (excrement and intimacy) to suggest the asymmetries of power organized around the categories of race, gender, sexuality, class, and national economic relations in the reproduction of care, and the disagreeable consequences of the *shitty* intimacies between global capitalism and nation-states. Hu-chong feels betrayed by Ida’s escape from “home/work,” and it pains him whenever he recalls how well he had been treating Ida, even considering her as a “real” family member. The intimacies between Hu-chong and Ida allow us to reflect on the logic of patrilineal kinship ideology as “family” and the violence implicated in the institution of marriage and family. I suggest Ida’s escape should be regarded much more as a betrayal of the forced “excremacry” than as a betrayal of Hu-chong himself. The betrayal of the “excremacry” therefore elicits another level of intimacies between Hu-chong and Ida: that is, their shared domesticity and disability, the alienation from their own bodies as “property-less” subjects who do not own the autonomy of their movement. In other words, Ida’s escape from the intimate relations unravels their forced intimacies constructed around their vulnerabilities. Only as the forced “excremacry” is fractured at the moment when Ida breaks it will another level of cross-racial intimacies possibly surface.⁴ The momentary flash of possibilities for such intimacies

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3. My use of this word “excremacry” to refer to the first level of forced intimacies is inspired by Chandan Reddy’s comments on an earlier version of this part of discussion. I would like to express my gratitude to him for his suggestions and insights.

4. My discussion of cross-racial intimacies is informed by Lisa Lowe’s “The Intimacies of Four Continents,” in which she addresses the potential

is quickly foreclosed when Hu-chong arranges to bring in an indictment against Ida.

Rather than reading Ida's escape and Hu-chong's accusation of her as a complete rupture of their relations. I argue on the contrary that both Ida's escape and Hu-chong's lawsuit perform a critique of law and reveal major limitations in the discourse of rights. Ida's case is not a particular incident but a symptomatic example of multiple structures of juridical, political, and capitalistic oppressions facing the migrant workers. The reason behind Ida's flight is unknown. However, the moment when she plans her escape from Hu-chong, she is already defying the law, the contract, and her disability/domestication from the alleged *protection* ensured by the law and human rights. Her violation of the law implicates her distrust and critique of law that is supposed to protect her rights as a human being. If Ida's flight can be regarded as a critique of the unjust law, then how can we analyze Hu-chong's legal resort as a critique of law itself? In his three statements that explain why he wants to file the lawsuit, he first of all reiterates his hurt feelings and blames Ida for her heartless abandonment of him. Secondly, he stresses the unfairness of the fact that illegal migrant workers have a better chance to earn more money than law-abiding workers. Lastly, he points out that he would have died in a pool of his own waste had he not been discovered (Ku, 2011: 260). Upon a closer examination of his statements, one would realize the real object/person he files complaint against is what/who could have made him die. What is killing him on his bed is not Ida. It is the power of state policies that disclaim his right to hire another domestic worker as punishment for his *impotence* in insufficiently domesticating/disciplining his *maid*. What is killing him is that the government will not grant him the rights to apply for home healthcare services provided by the state if he has already applied for foreign domestic helpers. To put it differently, his real object/person of complaint is the state violence of the law, not Ida. That reason for why he can only hold Ida accountable tells exactly the impossibility of law and rights. His appeal to law for justice is eventually confined

alliances of rebellions that derive from inner contradictions of the intimacies of four continents.

by the law that has held him against Ida, for both of them are located within the preoccupation of legal justice. The same legal system limits their pursuit of justice within the confines of state-recognized legality, preventing them from filing their charges against the state violence that is unjustly entrenched by law. The impossibility to claim justice guaranteed by the state compels me to contemplate on the rupturing possibilities of the cross-racial intimacies that exceed the bounds of the nation, the contingent coalitions of their shared critique of state, law, and human rights.

Soon after he files the lawsuit, Hu-chong does feel regret. In his second investigation at court, Hu-chong decides to drop the indictment against Ida even though the police have not captured her yet. He tells the judge and everybody in court, “Between fairness, justice, and tolerance, I choose tolerance” (261). The Chinese characters, *bao-rong* (包容), translated “tolerance”, are not entirely about tolerance, or sympathy for practices that are different from or conflicting to one’s own. *Bao* in Chinese suggests embracing, being receptive to and accommodating whatever may come, with an implicated cosmopolitan mentality. *Rong* means to allow, to forgive, to tolerate, to open up to include what you like or dislike. Hu-chong’s speech suggests the different possibilities of gesturing towards hospitality that are not entirely exhausted by the law as it signifies how he tends to open himself up and embrace whatever may come to his life as a form of forgiveness. I do not mean to dismiss the implicated hierarchies between Hu-chong and Ida, but I suggest that his attempt to withdraw the charge recasts his doubt on law, and signals a gesture of moving and thinking of redress beyond the realms of state-governed rights. However, the judge explains to Hu-chong that his charge is irrevocable because murder is an indictable crime. This indicates how the emerging justice of forgiveness is immediately contained by the juridico-political system again. Namely, the queer intimacies of (un)likely alliances are constantly being interrupted by the law. Despite the legal interruptions, the possibilities of human experiences—those immeasurable affectivities and the adamant sediments that have been produced and reproduced by the speech/act of “I chose *bao-rong*”—should not be completely relegated to the footnotes of history. I suggest we regard the “unexhausted” laboring effects

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and acts in the novel as significant traces of the longer histories of colonialism, the US Cold War, and neoliberal globalization that continue to reshape our new world order.

This cross-historical query about the queer intimacies of (il)legal alliances endeavors to explore an alternative of ethics to enable the emergence of different historical imaginations. The scope of my analysis that underscores inter-Asian connections re-conceptualizes a transnational framework of Asian/American perspectives without collapsing the potentials of literary and cultural studies to the late-Cold War politics of comparative “area” studies within nationalized divisions and disciplinary demarcations of knowledge. In this reading, I have theorized “Asia” at the critical conjectures of Asian American cultural critique and inter-Asia cultural studies by putting these fields into conversation with each other alongside the novel. I have done so with the goal of furthering our collaborative intellectual effort to imagine the uneasy but necessary connections of Asian/American cultural critique and Inter-Asian cultural studies as fields that provide visions of social transformation.

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