

HELEN LEE

A Peculiar Sensation:**A Personal Genealogy of Korean
American Women's Cinema**

Her hair is wrapped smoothly in a possibly comfortable bun, higher than seems right but that was the style then. She is perched on a rock, near flower bushes, smiling. My mother clutches a small handbag with gloved hands, her legs neatly arranged. Like my father, she wears a crisp suit. I don't know what color because the image is from a black and white photograph, not a memory. They are about the same age as I am now.

As adults, I think we are haunted by an image of our parents in their youth, a time we never knew them. For child immigrants, these images of the past also come from another place. Not here. A place far enough away that a telephone call occasions worry first, not joy. My parents left Seoul when I was three years old. A year later, my sister and I joined them in Toronto, Canada. Our young tongues, trained in Korean food and language but unschooled and now unhomed, were soon eager for french fries and making friends in English. I think that age especially, around three and four (just prior to grade school, when private home life becomes formatively public), was

critical when I try to recall where photographs end and memory begins. It isn't clear.

It is a kind of curse, I think, to leave your birthplace when you are young enough to lose your mother tongue but old enough not to forget the loss. For my generation, Korean American/Canadian women filmmakers who were born there but raised here, the utter contemporaneity of our experiences means "back there" and "back then" as much as right now. As someone who writes and makes images about such tongue-tying experiences, I would like to try to remember this particular haunting of representation and subjectivity, where language is the spine of memory. Through our images, the faded pictures of our mothers speak with new force, saying something about our lives here. I am certain we all became filmmakers as soon as we stepped off the plane.

For now, let's put away those childish wishes for assimilation and discover a new desire for affinity. This article represents the desire to look at the work of my peers, other Korean American women filmmakers,¹ and discover the connections among their work and also the films I have made. I wondered if there was anything specific about the efflorescence of media work over the past few years which represented commonalities of location. How did our experiences as *kyop'o* (overseas Korean) women inform our aesthetic practices? How did these works function from the perspective of cultural displacement and feminist intervention, where race and gender identifications were prominent? How did the imbrication of Korean diasporic sensibilities (our "*kyop'o*-ness" or identities as overseas Koreans), and our multivalent positioning and constant negotiations as women and artists of color in this new world, reflect in our work? What kinds of representational strategies were being deployed, and what did this new visual culture signify²—simply, what were we saying, and how were we choosing to say it?

First, I am quite struck by the fact that most Korean American filmmakers are, in fact, women. For a generation destined, according to classical immigrant narratives of social and economic progress, to be brilliant doctors and lawyers (and by patriarchal imperative, good wives to boot), this is a startling find. Given the male-centered legacies of cinema history, theories of the cinematic apparatus, and the world of film production itself, it is also extraordinary. Was the desire for self-representation so

intense as to supersede all the traditional barriers which usually placed women and people of color as outsiders looking in? Or, in the case of Korean American women filmmakers, did our peripheral status accord a privileged view—a “double vision”?

I imagine a girl standing before a mirror, or a woman holding a camera to her eye. Slowly, she turns to behold her image reflected back at her, like a doubling or twin. Not identical, different but same. She sees herself, as if for the first time.

A kind of “double consciousness”³ is available to us, as minority women in the white-dominant culture of North American society. In an American context, we are Korean. In a Korean context, we are women. These media works embody an ambivalent and contingent status of American/Korean, white/other, here/there, and very often a place in-between. Issues of race and gender are impossible to ignore when their privileges and oppressions affect dimensions of everyday life, not to mention the critical and artistic expressions we try to bring to it. Aptly named a “triple bind”⁴ by Trinh T. Minh-ha, alluding to competing allegiances to different communities, this unique equation of subjectivity—Korean/woman/artist—can also prove immensely enabling. Could it be that patriarchal expectations for the son have, ironically, liberated the daughter? (Sometimes I do wonder if I would have engaged in such an unstable profession as filmmaking if I’d been expected to be the family breadwinner.) More likely though, the Korean daughter became a feminist with something to say.

Our issues are different from what I imagine our female contemporaries in Korea, immersed in anti-colonial, nationalistic discourse in conjunction with feminism in a neo-Confucian context, might take on. In the ’80s, while Korean students were taking to the streets, the business of assimilation and dreams of professional prosperity were occupying Korean American youth. Immigrant success meant moving into ivory towers, not smashing them. But this is a crude simplification (especially now, with government gestures toward political reform stymieing former student movement members of the ’80s, we are faced with a Korean society as economically stratified as ever in the post-Korean war era; as well,

Asian Americans are coming to the economic and political fore as never before). Ultimately, for individuals and organizations devoted to progressive change, the question of what comprises socially committed, critically informed work is answered by where we are located. While cut from the same anti-imperialistic cloth as our Korean colleagues, I think we're more likely to critique ideals of western democracy and liberal society as illusions, than to claim them. Too many encounters with racism make it impossible to be a chest-beating American nationalist (and for a Canadian, it is downright anachronistic). Still, for mostly middle-class Korean Americans, the seduction of capital usually overrides considerations of class and sometimes even race. That's why when I speak of "identity," it is less a personal one (though it may be that, too) than a socially constructed, politicized identity which needs to be "earned" or declared. Although I have always been Korean, becoming "Korean American" or "Korean Canadian" was a longer, self-examining process. Acts of community in the context of racism and acute marginality are, in this way, themselves political.

These films and videos by Korean American women are highly conscious, artistically and theoretically mediated works (all produced by filmmakers with full benefit of college educations or art/film school, usually both). They are not "naïve" in any sense, taking part in this highly politicized arena with strategies of reinvention and resistance. Much of the groundwork laid by feminist cinema and Asian American media has informed our filmic practices and we, in turn, extend those histories.⁵ Fortified by debates around political and "third"⁶ cinema, the rigidities of realist filmmaking and pressures to produce only "positive images" of the community, we roundly reject the banality and victimology associated with "minority" filmmaking. Mere oppositionality, stereotype-fighting documentaries, or simplistic "identity" films ("I am Korean American, and this is a portrait of me") do not constitute this oeuvre. Like some nationalistic Korean, I am proud of this. A fierce and prodigious discursivity is at work; like a persistence of vision, these plural or multiple forms of consciousness pervade our films. The combined forces of our immigrant family pasts, the lingering effects of Korean male patriarchal traditions, Korea's own colonial national history, they all feed into our contemporary North American perspectives. Sometimes there's time to kick

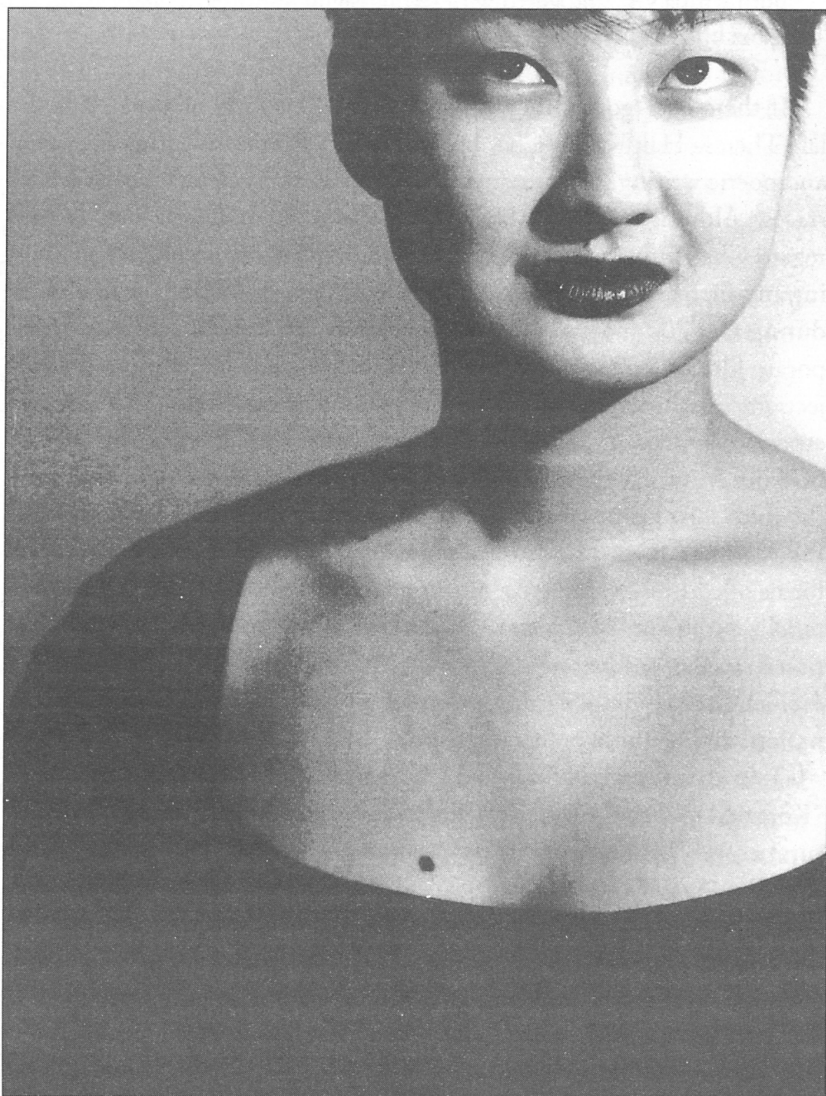
at the can of postmodernity and cultural theory, too. As signposts of new knowledges and new subjectivities, these media works represent complex and personal articulations of race and gender, representation, and the politics and aesthetics of identity formation in film.

Born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight.
— W.E.B. DuBois

If there is a “godmother” to this recent flowering of work, it is the late Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Her profound, luminous legacy of critical and poetic writing, performance art, and film and video work has left its traces. Although few of the film/videomakers discussed here would regard Cha’s influence as a direct one (I knew only her name when making my first film), the themes and formal concerns of her media work during the ’70s and early ’80s surface again and again in these contemporary films. Cha’s semiotic explorations of language, memory, and subjectivity in the context of feminism and Korean colonial history are especially prescient. While the feminist, postcolonial writings and films of Trinh Minh-ha gripped me as a cinema studies undergraduate during the mid-’80s, I didn’t yet know of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha before her. Like Trinh, Cha can be at once poetic and interrogative in her unusual forms of address, which are almost oracular. As a body, Cha’s work re-materializes the site of Korea-as-cold-war-victim, and re-maps the emotional and cognitive terrain of “Korea” into something tangible for *kyop’o* understanding, a groundswell of critical fictions, diasporic imagination, and genuine political struggle.

Talk about marginal. Until a few years ago, an identity as specific as “Korean American” filmmaker was an impossibility in the American cultural consciousness, even in its alternative quarters. When I made my first film, *Sally’s Beauty Spot* (1990) and was living in New York, the prevailing term, politically and organizationally, was “Asian American.” For someone from Canada coming to the States, even Asian American sounded great. To encounter organizations such as Asian CineVision in New York, Visual Communications in Los Angeles, and the National Asian American Telecommunications Association in San Francisco was a revelation. This history of Asian American filmmaking, I discovered,

was predominantly Chinese American and Japanese American, and consisted primarily of documentaries. These organizations, devoted to supporting the production, promotion, and exhibition of media work by Asian American film/videomakers, also mounted annual film festivals. I decided I was going to make a film to show specifically at ACV's New



From stereotypical object to sexual subject: *Sally's Beauty Spot*

York festival. The film wouldn't be documentary and wouldn't be earnest, but elliptical, theoretical, feminist, and hopefully, funny and accessible. This Asian American audience would be my primary audience. Besides, how could they turn me down; just how many Asian American filmmakers were out there, anyway?

Enough, I guess. I showed the selection committee a silent cutting copy, which kept falling apart in the projector. They turned down the film. Come back next year, they said, when it's finished. I did.

Sally's Beauty Spot is an image-and-idea-driven film. Rather than focusing on character or story, the deconstructionist tendencies of the film and its hybrid aesthetics were inspired by a personal excitement with theory. Using a despised black mole on a young woman's breast as a metaphor for the threat of cultural difference, the film explores western notions of Asian femininity and idealized romance. Sally tries rubbing, scrubbing off, and covering up the skin blemish. Made without a script per se, the piece collages together my interest in postcolonial and feminist film theory with pop cultural elements. At the time, I was researching the representation of Asians in the history of American film and television. In the postwar period, a spate of Asian/white romances had emerged from Hollywood, what I call "miscegenation melodramas." Ubiquitous among them, and my clear favorite, was *The World of Suzie Wong*, starring William Holden and Nancy Kwan. Revisionistically speaking, I should spit out this bit of colonial candyfloss I know, but in truth I've loved eating it since childhood. The film was shown regularly on TV, and Kwan's prostitute was one of the few popular images of Asian women around. This kind of obsessive, acculturated form of spectatorship was interesting in itself: Korean girls in Canadian suburbs, glued to California sitcoms and old Hollywood movies on the tube; we were not exactly the intended audience for this once racy bit of entertainment. True, during all those times of looking, rarely did any of these images look back at me. But this one did.

Kwan's Suzie Wong was dragon lady and lotus blossom rolled in one, but caught in a racist time warp, could you really blame her? She was beautiful, fiesty, and deserved reclaiming. Homi Bhabha's seminal retheorization of the stereotype⁷ was the trick. Instead of arguing the derogatory or false nature of racial and sexual stereotypes, Bhabha reconceptu-

alized them as “arrested” forms of representation. Stereotypes should be viewed “relationally” according to other representations, he suggests, rather than held up to any picture of reality, thereby releasing it from burdens of truth or moralism. My “Suzie Wong” was a total fiction, pulp romance. As a Korean growing up in North America, it was impossible to be a real essentialist. No one knew where Korea was, so what could they really know about you, if they didn’t even know where you came from? In this way, I became an Asian American before I became Korean American. Pillaging troves of Hollywood fare such as these “mixed race” dramas, I found all the Asian characters were Japanese or Chinese anyway (though I don’t want to fight for Orientalist crumbs, this problem of the lack of a popular Korean signifier still dogs me to this day). Although Suzie Wong herself is from Hong Kong, the main character in *Sally’s Beauty Spot*, while played by my sister, Sally, is not specifically named as Korean, Chinese, or Japanese, to underscore the shared dimensions of Asian American women’s experience.

Sally’s Beauty Spot tries to give a pulse to these linchpins of racial and sexual identity, in tandem, as inseparable preoccupations. The discourse of race in the United States was, and still is, overpoweringly white versus black. If Asians are admitted into the dialogue, it is almost exclusively in relation to white-dominant culture. Such a status quo—reinforcing focus on the white/other dynamic is not only supremely irritating, but it reflects the workings of power, not our multiracial society. Personally, I haven’t been interested in representing Asian/white couplings. The predominant relationships in my films have been between Asian and other Asian, black or Native characters, and then only marginally, whites. In *Sally’s Beauty Spot*, Sally’s vacillation between white privilege and the prospect of a liaison with a black man (a pairing you’d be hard-pressed to find in Hollywood), reflects the tension of broaching an Asian presence in the stratified minefield of American race relations. On the soundtrack, different musical idioms and numerous abstracted voices interrogate this terrain. Clips from *The World of Suzie Wong*, photographs and voices of other Asian women, and images of Sally’s body punctuate this narrative of discovery and subjecthood. The film maps this progression of psychic and theoretical attachments to the body, spectatorship, and voice with a simple story about an unwanted mole.

When I showed the film to Homi Bhabha, one of the critical inspirations for the film, he remarked how the mole or “beauty spot” on Sally’s breast functioned as the *punctum* of the piece. Roland Barthes used the term to describe how a peripheral detail in a photograph may “prick” or unsettle the viewer in ways unexpected from the photograph’s more conventionally coded meanings. The *punctum*’s effect is startling, like a “sting, speck, cut, little hole.” Registering a visceral effect, “It also bruises me,” Barthes writes, “is poignant to me.”⁸ Such a compelling detail may give a clue to how we come to “remember” an image or photograph, through the body. My sister, Sally (who by the way has no neurotic impulse towards her mole), had an immediate but different response to Bhabha’s suggestion. To her, the *punctum* was not the mole but the stretch marks on her breasts. The film’s final images are of a black man’s lips dissolving into Sally’s own, radiant smile.

She heard faintly the young girl uttering a sequence of words, and interspersed between them, equal duration of pauses. Her mouth is left open at the last word. She does not seem to realize that she had spoken.

—Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

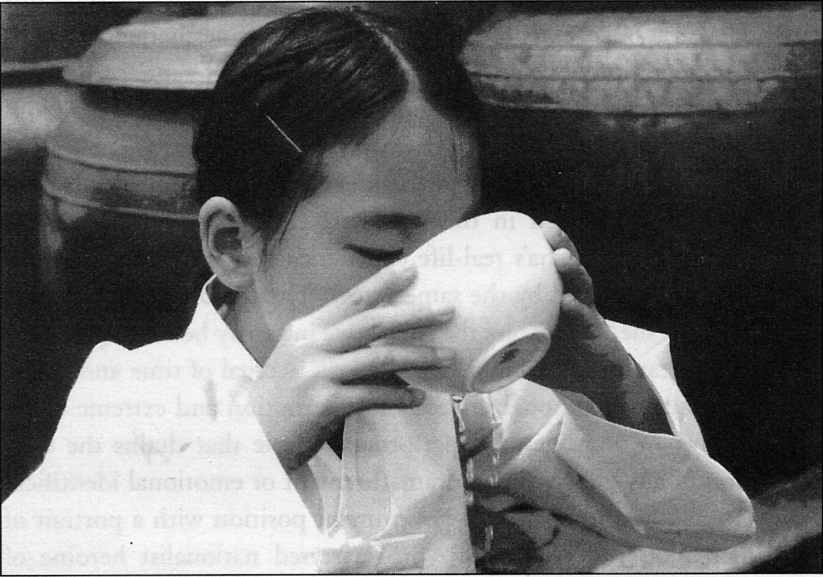
During the mid-’70s, Theresa Cha began producing work as a student at the University of California, Berkeley. The sheer formalism, elegance, and occasional opacity of her text constructions, in writing and media, reflect an excitement and curiosity about French poststructuralist ideas which were then gaining importance on this side of the Atlantic. For the theoretically uninitiated, Cha’s work can be daunting. Embracing a conceptual indeterminacy characteristic of avant-garde performance aesthetics, their meanings are often created provisionally in the encounter between the text and reader. The specificity of the reader as a social subject is always a precondition of performing the meaning. But different from her Euro-American intellectual peers, her thoughts were as much about Korea, which was marginal even to a western understanding of “the Orient.” Problems of language embody this sense of cultural displacement. The word, Cha implies, is not a universal or neutral signifier, not always in English or French. By a specific somebody, words are read, spoken, and breathed around, sometimes with considerable strain. In *mouth to mouth* (1975), the Korean language can offer the

assurance and comfort of one's mother tongue, or is slippery as a cipher—depending on the viewer and her positioning. Cultural location, however, does not always guarantee a linguistic one. Language, once a repository and reliable signifier of culture, becomes contingent and fragile in the context of displacement.

mouth to mouth opens with a continuous left to right panning movement over a series of written characters: simple vowel letters from *hangul*, the Korean phonetic alphabet. The movement fades into black, then fades up to a video snow effect, accompanied by static noise. This is followed by an image of a woman's mouth framed in close-up, superimposed over this snow/static. Her mouth widens ever slowly, but we don't hear her. Fade out. Fade in with another close-up of the same, her mouth forming a different, voiceless vowel. The video follows this pattern in a highly composed, almost ritualistic manner, with variations in sound treatments (static, water, bird sounds, sometimes silence) and the occasional camera movement. As in her other film and video work, the piece's formal austerity extends from the visual to the aural dimensions of the piece.

Although *mouth to mouth* references the populist, physiognomic origin myths of *hangul*,⁹ the functioning of language for the *kyop'o* speaker is not nearly so transparent. The supposedly neutral text of written language is gradually overturned by the arduous, subjective aspiration of speech. This tension between the text and speech mirrors the disintegrating relationship between sound and image in the videotape. While the disembodied voice may function as a radical, even liberatory tool for her feminist avant-garde contemporaries,¹⁰ Cha's voiceless body suggests other problems of cultural legibility and knowledge. Here, the disconnection of voice and body alludes to the oscillatory nature of native/non-native tongues where the transparency and certainty of language is suspended. The use of the vowel as a structuring absence of the word, as opposed to the positivity of consonants, underscores its supplementary but elemental nature. Significantly, two vowels are missing from the written text (compound vowels aren't even included here). The incomplete set suggests a child or beginner's first apprehension of the language, or the imperfect recall of a native speaker whose mother tongue is lost. Cha's mute mouth, forming familiar/unfamiliar vowels,

“performs” the Korean language with a desire for speech. The vowels’ “absent” nature indicates the materiality of language, as building blocks. Where language itself is homed, however, is another question.



Remembering *DICTEE*: *Memory/all echo*

Cha's long-standing interest in negative space and silence is shared by the work of more recent video artists, most directly in Yunah Hong's work. Hong's first videotape, *Memory/all echo* (1990), is based on Cha's seminal poetic text, *DICTEE*.¹¹ The book itself is a complex document combining written text with graphic components, and covering topics ranging modern Korean history, Catholic ritual, and cinema spectatorship, to topographies of the human body. Hong's video gathers together archival material from the Korean war and dramatic reenactments filmed in Korea and the U.S., with visual montage elements such as computer-generated effects and photographic stills. Using *DICTEE* as a base text, the voice-over is comprised solely of selections from the book. But Hong's style is more allusive than illustrative of Cha's writing.¹² Rather than attempting an exhaustive, literal adaptation of the book, the video focuses mainly on themes related to Korean and American identity and issues of cultural and linguistic displacement, underscoring the

interpretive possibilities and elliptical phrasings of the translation process itself.

Like the book, *Memory/all echo* attempts to engage the viewer in a self-reflexive, readerly relationship to the text. Hong tracks several discursive levels at once, extending the video's montage aesthetic to a multi-layered presentation of voice. Three narrators with different accents (signifying varying levels of acculturation to the English language), adopt several forms of address. In one segment, Cha's eyewitness retelling of her brother's decision to join a 1962 student demonstration against their mother's will is narrated in third person. The video dramatizes this sequence, collapsing Cha's real-life experience with the story of a fictional character (played by the same actor). The use of the pronominal shifter (you/I; she/he) enables the subjective interplay between historical and autobiographical accounts locked by the accrual of time and memory. The sequence, although filmed in slow motion and extreme close-up, employs an arch, gestural performance style that drains the confrontation of any conventional dramatic intent or emotional identification. Linking her brother's anti-government position with a portrait of Yu Guan Soon [Yu Kwan-sun], the martyred nationalist heroine of 1919, the narrator/author/character traces the politics and history of modern Korean resistance to locate it within a personal, familial framework. The space between—tensions of nation and family, gaps between history and autobiography, the ellipses of story and memory—is transformed into a language of loss, displacement, and exile.

In Kim Su Theiler's *Great Girl* (1993), the haunting of cultural loss takes the form of a search for origins. The film's departure point is Theiler's own trip to Korea to find information about her birth mother. But this search doesn't function as a transparently autobiographical document or an effortless return of the subject to the mother/land. Laid out as a series of vignettes, the piece unfolds rather cryptically: a roomful of black hair, American dollar bills bandaged to a young girl's belly, an ambivalent childhood encounter with a U.S. serviceman (perhaps her father?), neutral adoption documents, uneasy travelogue footage of a hometown that existed before only in her mind. Like secret layers of a memory long repressed by familial and cultural silence, the discursive curiosity of this search unearths a place—Korea—sediment-

ed by the absences and persistence of memory and silence in stark and unsettling ways.

Theiler's film begins with an extreme close-up shot of a black and white image, accompanied by music and a regulated scraping noise. The image is magnified to the point of illegibility. It is similarly difficult to locate the source of the sound, or its relationship to the image. This disjunctive relationship between the visual and aural is a primary stylistic



In search of the mother/land: *Great Girl*

trope of *Great Girl*, where sound is used contrapuntally or non-synchronously towards a redefinition of the subject, who is variously named in the film ("K," Sun-Mi, Cho Suk-hi, and implicitly, Kim Su Theiler). This non-realist use of sound, including voice-over, represents an interventionist strategy which feminist film theorists such as Kaja Silverman and Mary Ann Doane have deployed against classical realist cinema's reinforcement of male subjectivity and the illusion of a unified, coherent subject. The seamlessness of realist sound/image production masks "the potential trauma of dispersal, dismemberment, and difference,"¹³ and the spectator's imagined plenitude or insufficiency of the image/subject. As the mirror opposite of realist filmmaking, identity-production seeks to expose its material workings. In *Great Girl*, Theiler's deconstructive task is to uncover the past trauma of dispersal (adoption and immigration), dismemberment (separation and loss of the mother), and difference (the *kyop'o*'s return to Korea).

In a key scene of the film, "K" is being interviewed about the trip and her experience meeting hometown folks who can give her information. The sequence is reenacted by an actress (Anita Chao) wearing a suit and coiffed hairstyle, and sitting obediently behind a desk. Strangely, her lips move out of sync with the monologue, followed by a slight echoing effect. As she moves into a story about how a scar on her body could definitively identify her, "K" detaches the microphone from her lapel and leaves the desk, as the camera follows her walking into another part of the room. She talks about meeting a woman who "could be my mother." The beating noise (the dislocated sound from the film's opening) is almost thunderous. But no one provides the right answers ("I looked nothing like the pictures"). Engaged in what Cha has called a "perpetual motion of search," the film's discursive explorations of self-identity and self-knowledge render an asymptotic relationship to "truth": the closer she comes, the more inaccessible and irrecoverable her past is. The carefully staged testimony of "K"'s faked performance undermines the documentary-like presentation of a unified, spontaneous, "authentic" subject. The film's visual and conceptual fragmentation, and the interpolated nature of the filmmaker's investigation—chance meetings, faulty memories, nasty rumors (the townspeople's suggestion of her mother as a prostitute with no prospects but American adoption of her

biracial, illegitimate child), and implied wishes for a happy ending—reveal the impossibility of a transparent search for cultural and biological origins. Later in the film, the initial, illegible black and white close-up shot is widened to reveal the image's contents: sails of a boat caught by an intense wind.

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

—Salman Rushdie

The “in-betweenness” that characterizes films about immigrant experience, especially when faced with the physical or metaphoric possibility of return, is a persistent wound of the diasporic imagination. What is interesting is how these ideas take shape, depending on the form. The more free-wheeling language of experimental film and video can be immensely enabling in conveying a discursive complexity. It's possible to pack a film with dense ideas and a radical aesthetic, and be all the richer for it. The rules of narrative film, however, are far stricter. Still, the principle of diminishing audience (the more experimental your film is, the smaller your audience) plagued me as I contemplated a shift to narrative filmmaking. Why not try to communicate hitherto marginalized stories and characters through a more accessible form? At the same time, other models of contemporary innovative and subjective filmmaking that identified marginalized characters and the interplay of difference—cultural, psychic, sexual—showed it was possible to locate these ideas in a narrative context.¹⁴

My second film, *My Niagara* (1992), features a Japanese American/Canadian¹⁵ protagonist, a 20-year-old woman named Julie Kumagai. In continuing my exploration of displacement and assimilation, and racial/sexual representation in film, I wished to collaborate with another Asian writer on a film about an Asian/Asian relationship. This didn't come about innocently. One of my guiding lights, video-

maker Richard Fung, had an interesting reaction to *Sally's Beauty Spot* and the Asian/black dialectic it sought to set up. "So, you think that's radical, Helen?" he challenged (very gently, of course). "The Asian and black thing is provocative but you know what's really radical? Yellow on yellow."



An inaccessible interiority: *My Niagara*

My Niagara is a story of maternal loss and intercultural discovery. Written with novelist Kerri Sakamoto, the film explores the inner world of Julie Kumagai who, on the cusp of adulthood, faces choices to move her life forward. At the film's outset, she is breaking off with a boyfriend and contemplating a trip to Europe with her best friend, Enza. Julie lives at home with her incommunicative father, and her life is shadowed by the death of her Japanese-born mother (who, on a return trip there when Julie was a small girl, died in a drowning accident off the coast). At Julie's workplace, a stately water filtration plant by the lake, she meets a young man, Tetsuro, who, recently emigrated from Japan but of Korean origin, is obsessed with all things American. They make a connection, but Julie ultimately cannot escape her listless state; life goes on. While this is the plot proper and *My Niagara* is a drama, the film is essentially minimalist and counter-dramatic in design.

The central relationship that Kerri and I wanted to portray was Julie and Tetsuro's, and their evolving realizations of cultural difference. To us, the picture of an assimilated Asian in America was a *sansei* (or third-generation) Japanese Canadian/American. But Julie's background also resembled my own upbringing in a predominantly white suburban environment. What were the differences between being a settled Asian person in North America, and a recent immigrant; what were the similarities? What kinds of dynamics and perceptions existed among Asians of differing nationalities living here? Also, how does the fantasy of Japan in Julie's idealized memories (as a place of origin and the site of her mother's birth and death), change when confronted with Tetsuro's experiences of discrimination as a Korean in Japan? Although these were our didactic considerations in creating the story and our characters, we were also dead-set against making an earnest "race relations" drama. Once established, cultural identity would be a given, not constantly "rehearsed" for an assumedly "white" audience; our audience would already be knowledgeable and informed. As well, there would be no obvious or Orientalist signifiers (for instance, although we assume Julie's father, as a *nisei* or second-generation Japanese, had an internment camp experience, this never comes up in the film, not as much because the story isn't his but that this would be the most obvious filmic representation of a *nisei* character. He was just an emotionally bottled-up dad, for personal as well as cultural reasons). Enza and Dominic (not coincidentally, both ethnic whites) have their own quirks, and Tetsuro his Memphis stylings.

Julie (Melanie Tanaka), Tetsuro (William Shin) and Mr. Kumagai (George Anzai) are played by non-professional actors, not because of the dearth of Asian actors, but because of a particular "non-performative" performance style which I had hoped to experiment with. Different from documentary-like naturalism, the style I was searching for was a convergence of real-life personas and scripted characters toward non-psychological portrayals. Reduced and flattened, they could suggest an inaccessible state of interiority. I thought their alienation wouldn't be properly served by gutsy, positivist performances. Muted or held-in, their canted expressions of emotional discord and cultural displacement alluded to theoretically based notions of absence and negativity. Suspicious of models of identification that relied on audience absorption, I hoped for some criti-

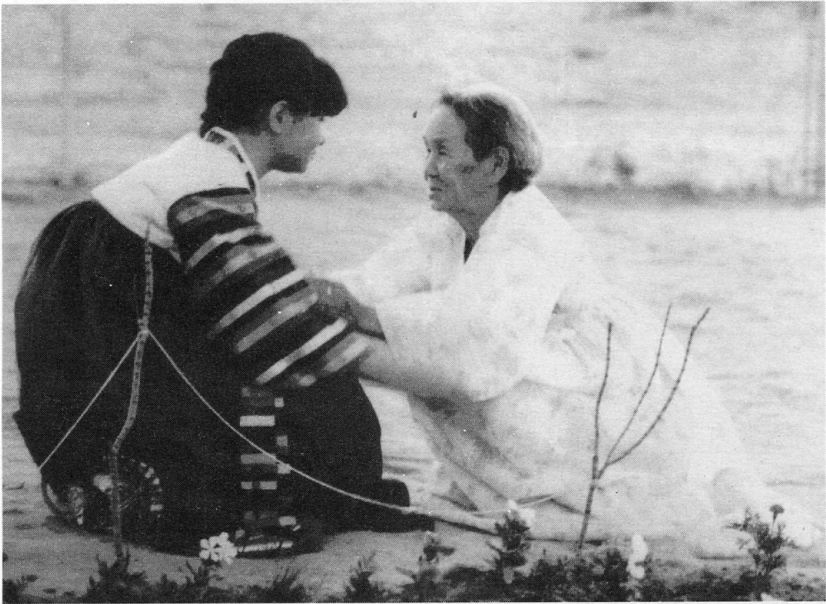
cal distance (was it possible to be both emotionally engaged and critically aware at the same time?). Similarly, the progression of the story is obliquely presented and ultimately subverted. Julie's own passivity is mirrored in the film's languid expository style. In the ending, Julie's momentary communion with her father (she finds a charged but constipated gift of a wooden box he's crafted himself—touching, but also oddly paralyzing), also denies specific narrative closure. But it is less a refusal than a deferral. The film's final notes, the daughter's dutiful gesture of filling her father's rice bowl, and an image of her mother's watery grave, suggest another chapter of a continuing story.

Also dealing with families and parent/child dynamics, other narrative films by Korean American women filmmakers avoid a deconstructionist approach in favor of a realist, reconstructionist tone and spirit. These works feature critical dilemmas faced by Korean American families with female protagonists, interestingly all daughters, at their center. While issues of national culture and the family still coalesce around language, critical discursivity is transformed into dialogue and dramatic conflict.

Problems of language and cultural difference encountered by second-generation Korean Americans, compounded by biracial identity, are the subject of Kyung-ja Lee's *Halmani* (1988). Kathy is born of a Korean mother and U.S. serviceman father. Her home life is an example of middle-class assimilation, idyllic and erased of any signs of ethnicity. Living outside of an urban center (and therefore outside a community of Korean Americans), Kathy's white-as-norm American comfort is uprooted by the arrival of her very Korean grandmother, Halmani. Oriental signifiers start to proliferate: gifts of a ceramic vase and traditional *hanbok* dresses, yucky foods, odd customs, and an unrecognizable language. Her mother's assurance that "Korea is a long way away" is threatened by Halmani's newfound presence, and a reminder of not the foreignness "over there" but of the difference within.

Kathy speaks only English, and Halmani only Korean, so grandmother and granddaughter literally cannot speak to one another. Halmani's Korean is left untranslated, reinforcing Kathy's sense of estrangement (and curiously, the viewer's; I craved for Halmani to be on equal footing but Lee decides not to subtitle Halmani's dialogue). Instead, their method of communicating transfers to the body, and

oscillates between the physical connection/repulsion of Kathy's own biological and cultural ambivalence. Still, their bodies can correspond. The film's framing often places Kathy and Halmani within the same two-shot, emphasizing their shared physical stature. "Halmani noticed that you're left-handed, too," her mother says. It's when Halmani does something strange and visceral, like squatting on the earth, chanting while polishing the vase, or praying as she burns paper, that Kathy's alienated Americanness seeks to excise any display of alterity.



East meets southwest: *Halmani*

When asked to draw a self-portrait in class, Kathy models her fingers around her face and is stymied; the drawing's a mess, and she runs away. After her father brings her home, Kathy proclaims, "She's disgusting. I hate her," and smashes the precious vase to the ground. Halmani's reaction is swift and perfect: fury and true disgust. This a moment when Halmani's identity, throughout the film positioned as "authentic" and unknowable, won't be denied. The film's resolution, Halmani's forgiveness and Kathy's penance, plays out the banality of cultural compromise: Kathy eats her words after Halmani takes the blame for the broken vase,

and she dons the *hanbok* for her family. Through the verbal and non-verbal communion of the film's final scene, a long shot of Kathy and Halmani together against a desert sunset, Kathy willingly accepts not just the signs of cultural difference, but the language itself. "*Kamsa-hamnida*, Halmani," she thanks her grandmother, her tongue humbled by the native.



Sexual liberty as personified by Mae East: *Be Good, My Children*

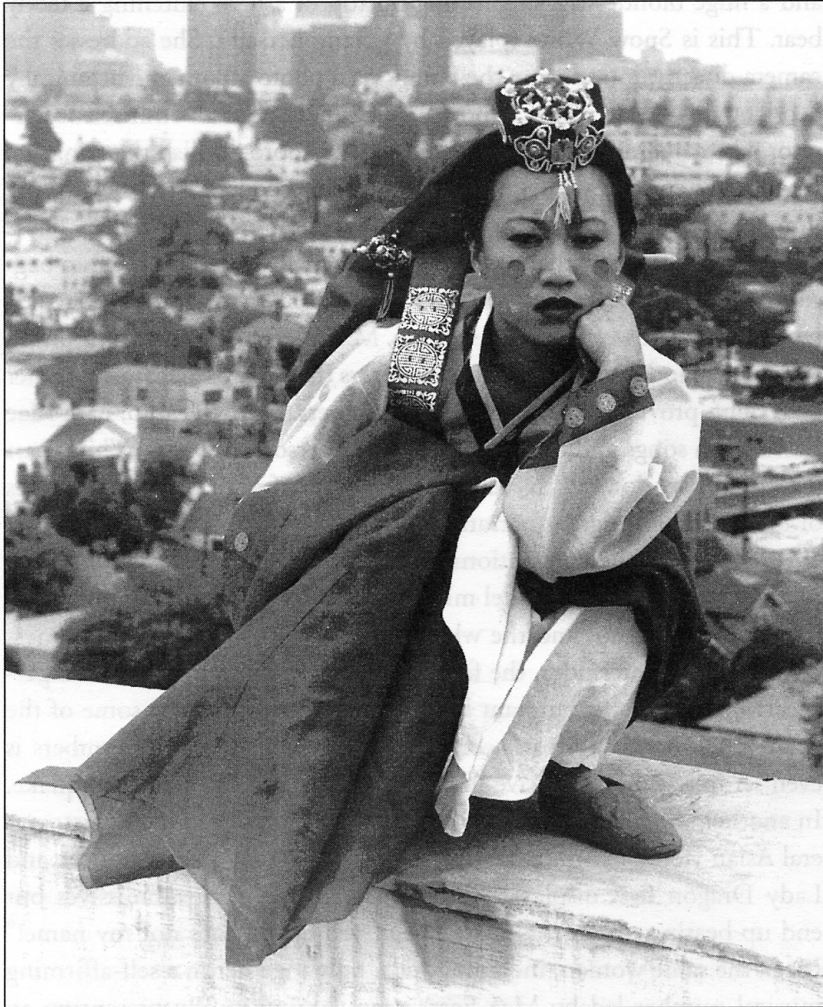
The desire for assimilation takes a decidedly adventurous, sardonic turn in Christine Chang's *Be Good, My Children* (1992). At the film's outset, Chang boldly asks of her characters, "Why did you come to America?" A musical-comedy-drama, the film satirizes the saga of a struggling Korean immigrant family in New York City: Mom is a "Jesus freak" who works at a Harlem clothing store, Judy aspires to be an actress but tends

bar on the sly, and Jimmy is failing out of school (the father is notably absent). Mom still hopes for mainstream professional success for her children, who opt for white boyfriends and wished-for car dealerships in LA. Their entanglements and conflicts form the basis of the film's plot, but it is the extra-diegetic levels, in the form of two "narrators," which subvert our expectations of the conventional family drama.

The film opens with an Asian woman wearing impeccable make-up and a huge blonde wig languishing on top of a bed, clutching a teddy bear. This is Snow White (played by Chang herself). She addresses the camera directly, introducing the family via a photo album and acerbically decrying this "mean world." Snow White functions as an omniscient narrator, like a guardian angel to the family, but more devilish than angelic. In an early episode with Jimmy, she dribbles chocolate candies to lure him, fairytale-like, into a lesson of simple economics, NYC-style ("These are pennies; we throw them away. These are nickels; we give them to beggars"), before releasing her authority as the film's driving force ("Say it! I have absolute power"). Another figure, Mae East, who is first introduced as daughter Judy's alter ego but soon enters the story as a character in her own right, provides the main musical numbers. It's high camp, with Mae East's torch songs and the sexually charged persona of Snow White, part sex kitten/part dominatrix, releasing the drama from the realist confines of the typical immigrant narrative.

Toying with the conventions of a morality tale, Chang discards the myth of hard-working, model minority citizens in an explicit critique of the American dream and the white norm. Offset by the sheer jazziness of the musical interludes, the family's parables offer a deeply ironic perspective of Korean immigrant life (for me, marred only by some of the actors' inauthentic Korean accents). One of Mae's musical numbers is even set in a California drive-in theater in the middle of an earthquake. In another sequence where Judy recounts a dream to a psychologist, several Asian women with names like Cherry Blossom, Miss Butterfly, and Lady Dragon first display themselves as stereotypical submissives but end up beating up on the white males, yelling, "That's not my name!" Later, the same women, including Judy, rally together in a self-affirming musical number led by Mae East's rebel femininity. By presenting an unequivocally sexual image of the Asian woman in a campy musical or

melodramatic context, the film avoids essentializing the Asian American experience or “fixing” the stereotype as false/true. The film’s radicality lies in this refusal to reinforce dramatic realist presentations of what Korean women are “really like.” Its parody of Hollywood happy endings similarly denies escapist tendencies of the immigrant narrative. When Jimmy and Judy steal the church offerings from their mother’s church to hail a cab to “somewhere over the rainbow,” and Mom launches into the



L. A. Woman: *La Senorita Lee*

show tune of the same name, you know that Snow White (and Chang herself) is smirking. "Oh my, just the lullaby I needed," she says. "But forget it. This ain't no time to dream."

The dysfunctional family and personal compromises made to sustain the illusion of perfect nuclearity also propel the narrative of Hyun Mi Oh's *La Senorita Lee* (1995). The film follows the choices made by Jeanie Lee, a vivacious young woman ending an affair with Tomas, a Mexican worker who has left her pregnant. She feels pressured to marry Harry Kim, a childhood friend and young doctor, in order to bail out her mother and grandmother. The backstory is the financial ruin of the family's business during the L.A. riots, and the father's subsequent abandonment of his wife, mother, and daughter (even in a household containing only women, patriarchal pressures still assert themselves). Oh presents Jeanie's personal crisis as an example of the complex positioning of this generation of Korean American women in Los Angeles, poised on the edge of a continent bordered by desiring bodies, clashing cultural realities, and a "prodigality of tongues."¹⁶

The film's structure is circular, beginning and ending with Jeanie (also played by the filmmaker) lying on a highrise rooftop, moments after fleeing her traditional Korean wedding. The strains of a Korean folk song and the vivid colors of her *hanbok* and *chokturi*, set against the smoggy backdrop of downtown L.A. and the sound of helicopters in the distance, portray the conflict almost iconically. We enter the story through Jeanie's vision, a close-up shot catching her half-conscious state as she passes through dream, sleep, and memory. The film's flashback structure effectively internalizes the site of Jeanie's dramatic conflict into her body, so that the drama unfolds as part of Jeanie's consciousness and her subjectively-drawn world. Struck by pregnancy cramps in the bathroom of a hotel room she's sharing with Harry on a whim, Jeanie's thoughts move to an idyllic scene on the same rooftop where she and Tomas speak Spanish to one another, and share a night of lovemaking. Later, on the operating room of an abortion clinic, the threat of terminating her pregnancy conjures up an image of a small girl—Jeanie herself as a child. This jolts her into a moment of self-apprehension, and she runs. Jeanie's "wildness" and its repression are also reflected in the film's structure, a continuous sublimation of her sexual identity into the

filial role of dutiful Korean American daughter and now, mother.

When Jeanie's feminist will and new world freedoms are overtaken by considerations of the family's future (ruled by the interdependency of different immigrant generations and, ironically, a continuation of patriarchal structures supported by women), her marriage to Harry is a sign of defeat. But Jeanie's radical decision to keep Tomas's baby shows the exact price of compromise. "I don't believe anymore," she tells a small Mexican boy on the rooftop in one of the film's last scenes. The "cosmopolitanizing of humanity" in a place like Los Angeles (which Tomas calls "the loneliest city in the world"), can also signal what Rey Chow has named a "vanishing of human diversity."¹⁷ Difference is subsumed by forces of urbanization, assimilation, and homogenization. At the film's closing, various spoken lines from the film create a voice montage over a single shot of Jeanie's quiet face, ending on a freeze-frame of her eyes opening, wide awake. Of the different languages which haunt her—Korean, Spanish, English—which will her child eventually claim?

Hyun Mi Oh's script was a kind of revelation when I first read it several years ago. Encountering its cultural sophistication and astute writing recalled a time years earlier, when I first saw Pam Tom's seminal film, *Two Lies* (1989), a beautifully made black-and-white film about two Chinese American sisters and the psychological aftermath of their mother's eyelid operation. With strongly enacted characters and a compelling story, it struck a perfect balance of cultural identity exploration and expertly crafted narrative. The film spoke to me, and it spoke well. The film also made me laugh, the better to spit out, not swallow, the bitter pill of racial assimilation. For a fourth-generation Chinese American filmmaker like Tom, the question of language isn't such an issue (all the dialogue is in English). But for 1.5 generation filmmakers such as Oh and myself, language functions as a kind of primal site of conflict, a site which signifies torment, misunderstanding or loss. Perhaps it is because I am now struggling with Korean language lessons, or crave certain foods to which I do not know the names, or cannot discuss intellectual topics in real depth with my parents, that I make the films I make, to recover this sense of loss.

The confluence of language and crisis surfaces in my third film, *Prey* (1995), a drama about a young Korean Canadian woman who falls for a shoplifter in her father's convenience store the morning after an

overnight robbery. Taking place over the course of one day (but a day that will determine what the next days are like), Il Bae's everyday family routine is upset by this handsome Native stranger, Noel, who insinuates himself into her life and apartment. Is he to be trusted? A surprise visit by Halmoni, her grandmother who doesn't speak English, forces her to choose alliances, but Il Bae's defense is poorly negotiated by the fact of Noel's ethnicity and his disheveled, possibly dangerous appearance, as much as by Il Bae's unsure command of the Korean language. These problems of miscommunication and cultural perception are heightened by circumstance when Halmoni meets him not only post-coitally shirtless but also in possession of a gun (echoing a specter of violence familiar to Korean American store owners' lives). In the film's conclusion, a late-night confrontation set in their convenience store, Noel proffers this gun to Il Bae's father as a safeguard against future robberies. But to the father, Noel couldn't be anything but a robber, and he mistakes the gesture as a hold-up. Il Bae's final introduction ("Dad, this is Noel. Noel, this is my dad.") is in some ways just the beginning.

The meeting of Il Bae (Sandra Oh), a young Korean Canadian



All you need is a girl and a gun: *Prey*

woman and Noel (Adam Beach), a Native man, creates an unexpected alliance. While they each come from totally different social spaces, there are also aspects which are shared—the same high school, a sense of cultural displacement, and lives shadowed by personal loss (the death of Noel's sister, Lucy; Il Bae's absent mother). I think of their relationship as a completely contemporary one, a phenomenon of the late twentieth century that allows such encounters between Asian immigrants and indigenous people to be possible. Since Koreans emigrated in significant numbers only in the past two decades, it's historically unlikely that Il Bae and Noel would have met until now. Native people, who suffer the same invisibility as Asians and other racial minorities in mainstream media, are practically unknown to the Korean American/Canadian community. It was important to me to explore how a Native character could impact on a Korean family who may have never before acknowledged the Native presence in their adopted land. Halmoni refers to Noel as a "foreigner," not suspecting the irony of her words. While Il Bae and Noel are familiarly cast as star-crossed lovers, this "new world" narrative also creates an emotional space where ideas around ethnicity and belonging can be as meaningful and dramatic as cinematically coded elements like trust, desire, and gunplay.

In conceiving the film, I wanted to avoid reinforcing certain dualisms that I thought typified some Asian American filmmaking. The binaristic opposition of tradition (old, backward "Orient") and modernity (progressive western ideas and attitudes) particularly unnerved me. Although traditional perspectives play a large role in our lives, I don't believe that Korean identity played in simple conflict with living in North America. It wasn't an either/or choice; we live an incredibly hybrid existence. In the film, both English and Korean co-exist, however fragily, a balancing act of language and identity for 1.5 or second generation immigrants of any nationality. Hyphenated existence (Korean-Canadian, Korean-American) from an adult perspective as opposed to the assimilating impulse of childhood affords the distance and desire, and sometimes necessity, for both tongues to exist in simultaneity. A typical convenience store was the perfect stage to enact this drama, a place where so many Korean Americans have spent their lives (my own movie-watching hours are just recently outpacing my days

behind a retail counter). Il Bae's father, circumscribed by this setting, is a barometer of this tongue-twisting dance of language and race. Even he, as imperfectly "bilingual" as his daughter, misunderstands—his daughter, Noel's intentions, the unending drone of labor at the expense of love. By the film's end, Il Bae does not make an either/or choice, but mediates her father's position into a place of forced compromise and personal release.

The script for *Prey* was originally written for Sandra Oh and my mother's sister, In Sook Kim, to play the roles of Il Bae and Halmoni. I knew this would be an interesting process of not only pairing a highly trained actor like Oh with my aunt, who'd never performed before, but also because Oh, like the character, didn't speak Korean and my aunt doesn't speak much English. Since I cannot really speak Korean either, a process of translation was integral to the project. At every stage, from rehearsal to shooting to editing, the interpreter, Jane Huh, stuck close and ready. I wasn't prepared for the cultural wrangling over specific attitudes and sayings that I thought were authentic or convincing, but Jane insisted were off-mark. True to form, my aunt, herself a prolific essayist and poet, refused to play the role of the grandmother (who was initially written as very accepting of Noel and Il Bae's liaison) and demanded changes. My aunt wanted Noel out of Il Bae's apartment and out of her life. While I never thought I'd take identity for granted, especially in a film about cross-generational differences, here I was making my own cultural assumptions. Ultimately, developing Halmoni's character was a collaboration between my aunt and myself, a creation of the Korean and *kyop'o* imagination. I doubt the film would exist without her.

No one today is purely one thing.
—Edward Said

From our "simultaneously split and doubled existence"¹⁸ as Korean American women, we have learned to become adept, sophisticated readers of images. From this minoritized position, we had learned to focus on subversive readings and peripheral details, seeing how the *punctum* satisfies. Now, we take up the whole frame; as writers and filmmakers, we have created new images, enlarged those details. Can the

production of an image of identity lead to the “transformation of the subject in assuming that image”?¹⁹ The representation of Korean women is complex, figured by and interpolated through a variety of discourses, but each frame of these moving images elucidates us, bringing the image of the colonial subject one step closer toward self-identification. The ideas of home, memory, language, and desire obsess us; we try hard to translate these collective thoughts in ways never imagined for us. These narratives of the tongue, voice, and body, they all speak with newfound specificity. The velvet grain of Mae East’s voice, Sally’s crooked smile, the flaring of Jeanie Lee’s *hanbok*, Cha’s silent lips—all engaged in a “perpetual motion of search,” these explorations signal a kind of *kyop’o* arrival. While the question of identity is never guaranteed, this new clamoring of images suggests other, curiously beautiful ways of traveling in a strange land.



SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

This listing includes films and videos made by and about Korean American women, available through the following distributors or filmmakers:

Be Good, My Children, Christine Chang, 1992, 47 min. 16mm. Women Make Movies, 462 Broadway, #500, New York, NY 10012, 212-925-0606.

Camp Arirang, Diana Lee and Grace Yoon Kyung Lee, 1995, 28 min. video. Third World Newsreel, 335 West 38th Street, New York, NY 10018, 212-947-9277.

Comfort Me, Soo Jin Kim, 1993, 8 min. video. 201 Wayland Street, Los Angeles, CA 90042, 213-550-1772

Daughterline, Grace Lee-Park, 1995, 11 min. 16mm. Grace-Lee Park, 6104 N.E. Sacramento, Portland, OR 97213, 503-223-2243.

Distance, Soo Jin Kim, 1991, 13 min. video. Soo Jim Kim (see *Comfort Me*)

Do Roo (Circling Back), Soon Mi Yoo, 1993, 14 min. 16mm. Yellow Earth Productions, 3900 Cathedral Avenue N.W., #501A, Washington, DC 20016, 202-338-9577.

A Forgotten People, Dai-Sil Kim Gibson, 1995, 59 min. 16mm. Crosscurrents Media, NAATA, 346 9th Street, 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103, 415-552-9550.

Golden Dreams, Alice Ra, 1995, 9 min. 16mm. CrossCurrents Media.

Great Girl, Kim Su Theiler, 1993, 14 min. 16mm. Women Make Movies.

Halmani, Kyung-ja Lee, 1988, 30 min. 16mm. Pyramid Film & Video, 2801 Colorado Avenue, Santa Monica, CA 90404, 310-828-7577.

Here Now, Yunah Hong, 1995, 32 min. 16mm. Yunah Hong, 223 East 4th Street, #12, New York, NY 10009, 212-677-8980.

An Initiation Kut for a Korean Shaman, Diana Lee and Laurel Kendall, 1991, 37 min. video. University of Hawaii Press, 2840 Kolowalu Street, Honolulu, HI 96822, 808-956-8697.

In Memoriam to an Identity, R. Vaughn, 1993, 5 min. video. Katharine Burdette, 15308 Alan Drive, Laurel, MD 20707, 301-725-0472

Korea: Homes Apart, Christine Choy and J.T. Takagi, 1991, 60 min. 16mm. Third World Newsreel.

La Seniorita Lee, Hyun Mi Oh, 1995, 26 min. 16mm. Cinema Guild, 1697 Broadway, #506, New York, NY 10019, 212-246-5522.

living in half tones, Me-K. Ahn, 1994, 9 min. video. Third World Newsreel.

Memory/all echo, Yunah Hong, 1990, 27 min. video. Women Make Movies.

Mija, Hei Sook Park, 1989, 30 min. 16mm. Visual Communications, 263 South Los Angeles Street, Suite 307, Los Angeles, CA 90012, 213-680-4462.

mouth to mouth, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, 8 min. video. University Art Museum and

Pacific Film Archive, University of California at Berkeley, 2625 Durant Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94720, 510-643-8584.

My Niagara, Helen Lee, 1992, 40 min. 16mm. Women Make Movies.

Permutations, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, 10 min. 16mm. University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

Prey, Helen Lee, 1995, 26 min. 16mm. Canadian Film Center, 2489 Bayview Avenue, North York, Ontario, M2L 1A8, Canada, 416-445-1446.

Red Lolita, Gloria Toyun Park, 1989, 6 min. video. Gloria Toyun Park, 3064 Cardillo Avenue, Hacienda Heights, CA, 91745, 818-336-6141

reldisappearing, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, 1977, 3 min. video. University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

Sa-i-Gu, Christine Choy, Elaine Kim, Dai-Sil Kim Gibson, 1993, 36 min. video. Crosscurrents Media.

Sally's Beauty Spot, Helen Lee, 1992, 12 min. 16mm. Women Make Movies.

Through the Milky Way, Yunah Hong, 1992, 19 min. video. Women Make Movies.

Translating Grace, Anita Lee, 1996, 20 min. 16mm. Nagual Productions, P.O. Box 364, Station P, 704 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, ON M5S 2S9, 416-588-6976.

Undertow, Me-K. Ahn, 1995, 19 min. video. Asian American Renaissance, 1564 Lafond Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104, 612-641-4040.

Videoeme, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, 1976, 3 min. video. University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

What Do You Know About Korea? R. Vaughn, 1996, 7 min. video. Katharine Burdette (see *In Memoriam to an Identity*)

The Women Outside, Hye-Jung Park and J.T. Takagi/Third World Newsreel, 1995, 60 min. 16mm. Third World Newsreel.

NOTES

I wish to thank Elaine Kim and the editors for their encouragement, all the filmmakers who supplied tapes, photographs and comments, Abraham Ferrer for additions to the filmography, and also to Esther Yau, Richard Fung, and Cameron Bailey for their usual fabulousness.

1. Although I refer to "filmmakers," videomakers are also included here. Also, I use the term "Korean American" although it is properly "Korean North American," which includes Canada as well as the United States. To talk about the differences (and similarities) of Korean American vs. Korean Canadian identities and histories would comprise another article, so excuse my predominant use of the former.

2. "New" is relative, and everything is context. While the "history of cinema" recently celebrated its centenary, the respective histories of Asian American and feminist cinemas date back only some twenty odd years. In this particular context, anything called "Korean American" would have been begging company, or collapsed into other definitions. Only in the last few years has this work reached a critical mass to be so named. In this sense, film and video work by Korean American women is still a cinematic project in its infancy, and this survey is provisional at best. For reasons of space and focus, this discussion centers around a selection of experimental and narrative works, not documentaries. Refer to the filmography for a more complete list of works by Korean American women filmmakers.

3. W.E.B. DuBois's concept of "double consciousness" is useful in cultivating possibilities for considering cultural difference in non-dualistic ways. Allowing the co-existence of objectification and subjecthood, he writes about "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others." This turn-of-the-century model of decolonization for post-emancipation blacks uncannily resembles the tricky balance between identification and alienation marking the post-colonial, migratory experiences of the late twentieth century. See DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: First Vintage Books, 1990.

4. Trinh, T. Minh-ha. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989, 6.

5. One striking note is the dearth of filmmaking by Asian American lesbians, including Korean Americans. I can't speculate why, but the absence is astonishing considering the strength of lesbian work in feminist cinema, especially in recent years.

6. "Third cinema" (versus Third World cinema), was first coined by Argentinian filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino during the late '60s as a rallying cry for anti-colonial, revolutionary cinema. During the late '80s, a renewed concept of third cinema was debated, especially among black British theorists and practitioners, to signify the work of diasporic, politically and theoretically minded filmmakers who were starting to see themselves increasingly in terms of a community. See *Questions of Third Cinema*. Jim Pines and Paul Willemsen, eds. London: British Film Institute, 1989.

7. Bhabha, Homi K. "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the

- Discourse of Colonialism," *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994, 66–84.
8. Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, 27.
9. *Hangŭl*, developed under the reign of King Sejong (1418–1450), was designed to replace Chinese characters and achieve widespread literacy. The consonants are said to be based on the shape of the human tongue, mouth, and throat when forming these letters.
10. See "Disembodying the Female Voice: Irigaray, Experimental Feminist Cinema, and Femininity" by Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 141–186. Silverman examines the work of Yvonne Rainer, Sally Potter, Patricia Gruben, and Bette Gordon in relation to the asynchronous use of the female voice and female subjectivity.
11. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *DICTEE*. New York: Tanam Press, 1982, 168.
12. See also Walter Lew, *Excerpts from: Dikte, For DICTEE* (1982). Seoul, Korea: Yeul Publishing Co., 1992. His book offers another example of a critical collage based on Cha's *DICTEE*.
13. Doane, Mary Ann. "Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing," *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980, 47.
14. Although I watched Korean movies whenever possible, they weren't a prime source of inspiration because, with the exception of a few works, the exported films I saw during the '80s and '90s were typically staid melodramas or slight comedies. Because I was interested in a subjective cinema, middle-aged male perspectives (from which the directors invariably worked) about Korean women and their representation in Korean cinema struck me as idealized or, again, marginalized or tokenistic.
15. Japanese American or Japanese Canadian, the interchangeability was intentional because the co-writer, Kerri Sakamoto, and I believed the social and political histories were so similar, why not the personal ones? This story was meant to transcend an arbitrary national border and acknowledge the similarities between the experiences of people of Japanese descent in North America.
16. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "The Cinema After Babel: Language, Difference, Power," *Screen* 26 (May–August 1985), 35–58.
17. Chow, Rey. "Where Have All the Natives Gone?" *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, Angelika Bammer, ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 137.
18. Jameson, Frederic. "Modernism and Imperialism." *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, Edward Said, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, 51.
19. Bhabha, Homi K. "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative." *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994, 66–84.