


The Narration of Transnational Territory in Kingston's *China Men* and Kim's 검은 꽃 (Black Flower)

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**Ju Young Jin,**  
**"The Narration of Transnational Territory**  
**in Kingston's *China Men* and Kim's 검은 꽃 (Black Flower)"**  
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**Abstract:** In her article "The Narration of Transnational Territory in Kingston's *China Men* and Kim's 검은 꽃 (Black Flower)" Ju Young Jin analyzes Maxine Hong Kingston's and Young-Ha Kim's novels both of which feature East Asian indentured workers in the U.S. and Mexico, respectively. Jin traces the way in which the transnational subjects in the two novels create a textual territory by displacing national histories in a period that has witnessed an increase in indentured workers from East Asia to American continents. Kim creates an apocryphal history of the Korean presence in the New World reimagining the forgotten past by interweaving actual historical facts and Kingston narrates the story of Chinese indentured workers who inaugurate a new cultural tradition in their exiled land to make it their home. Both writers narrate displacement, which Jin reads as "deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari) in order to ground their protagonists in a new space unbound by national territories. For Kingston and Kim creating textual territory is tantamount to legitimation of their own views of literature and the history of immigration in the U.S.

**Ju Young JIN**

**The Narration of Transnational Territory  
in Kingston's *China Men* and Kim's 검은 꽃 (Black Flower)**

The progressive and complementary developments of nation and the novel in the age of globalization have prompted East Asian writers to depict heterogeneous Asian communities going through constant transformations as results of global flow of capital and cultural forces. Transnational encounters between East and West depicted in such novels disrupt the normative categories of the nation-state and citizenship dramatized by (im)migrants, exiled people, diaspora, and refugees who in turn problematize a place-bound, unified national identity. The figures of displacement are predicated upon the power relations by which their sense of belonging is curtailed. Among these figures of displacement, indentured workers can be a locus to trace how the force of global capitalism produced the (im)migration and the contact zone for transnational identity to develop inside and between different nations and cultures. It is in this context that I consider how two novels about Asian indentured workers in the Pacific Rim in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* (1980) and Young-Ha Kim's 검은 꽃 (2003) (*Black Flower*) serve as a stand-in for the "third world" subject caught in the transnational force of global capitalism. My objective is to trace the way in which transnational subjects in the two novels create a textual territory by displacing existing national histories.

In *China Men* Kingston reclaims the personal histories of Chinese indentured workers during the construction of the US-American Transcontinental Railroad around 1865 and the indentured workers in Hawai'i sugar plantation circa 1856 as a Chinese American female narrator tells her four grandfathers' story of displacement: their multiple senses of belonging carve out a transnational territory on textual space. In *Black Flower* Kim creates an apocryphal history of the Korean presence in the New World, reimagining the forgotten past by interweaving actual historical facts of Korean indentured workers in Mexican henequen (agave) plantation that started in 1905 with their subsequent attempt at proclaiming a nation of their own in Guatemala. In both novels, the geographical and social distance provided a new transnational territory in literature where both postmodern cynicism toward grand narratives like nation and postcolonial subject can coexist. Both authors' rewritings of history not only reevaluate the absent past but also constitute the reality of what they each struggle to bring about: the sense of belonging to a non-place bound, transnational community created via shared displacement.

I discuss the non-localizable, displaced subject and in-between space prevalent in both *Black Flower* and *China Men* by elucidating Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of "deterritorialization," defined as "the movement by which one leaves a territory" (*Kafka* 18) and that offers a useful theoretical frame. Deleuze and Guattari construe "deterritorialization" as a double process of creating a line of flight from the territory of external representation (deterritorialization) which configures an establishment of one's own space (reterritorialization). Both processes function dialogically since deterritorialization activates the process of reterritorialization thereby generating the constant becoming of a perpetual nomadic or exilic subject. Through their strategic acts of displacement, Kingston and Kim demonstrate the deterritorialization of the displaced and address the historical and political tensions of the national histories they are each grappling with. Kim depicts an attempt at founding a nation entirely composed of negative identities: after realizing that their fatherland, Korea, had been annexed by the Japanese colonial government in 1910, five years after their emigration, the indentured workers in the novel decide to build a nation of their own situated amidst a deep Guatemalan jungle. While they acknowledge the futility of this effort, they persist if only to avoid dying as Japanese subjects or Mexican workers. Kingston narrates a comparable gesture of the Chinese indentured workers on a sugar plantation in Hawaii inaugurating a new cultural tradition in their exiled land to make it their home to claim the territory.

Since the 1990s, there has been a new generation of writers in Korea who have developed a multicultural sensibility and postmodern skepticism toward grand narratives. Their works showcase their innovative, postmodern narrative techniques characterized by non-linear plot, fragmentation of narrative, interweaving of facts and fiction, a playful tone and metafictional themes. Kim is an

emblematic writer of this new generation "who marked the emergence of digital age or postmodern era" (Yi, Chan, Lee, Kim 108) that started to sweep South Korea in 1990s. Kim's *Black Flower* is about one of the earliest emigrations in Korean history, that of Korean indentured workers who traveled to Mexico and Central America beginning in 1905, five years prior to the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910 that lasted until 1945. Until 1905 Koreans had a strong sense of belonging to their country as homeland rather than the abstract notion of nation as a polity exercising sovereignty. Thus few people from Korea had left the country before Japanese colonization in 1910. During the period 1910-1945, however, a considerable number of Koreans left their homeland and settled in Manchuria, on Sakhalin, and in Japan as "indentured labor migrants" (Bergsten and Choi 15). This was due to the economic and political factors of the Korean peninsula at that time: "Worsening economic conditions and continued political instability between 1905 and 1910 had led to increased Korean emigration, especially into southeast Manchuria. ... Moreover, tens of thousands of Koreans had crossed Tumen River into the Russian Maritime Province" (Robinson 52). The period witnessed the beginning of Korean emigration and the subsequent formation of Korean diaspora, notably in Manchuria and Vladivostok. Moreover, many young Koreans were studying abroad in the U.S. and Europe, albeit the majority of them in Japan thus learning about the West through the lens of modernization in Japan. All these developments propelled Koreans to rethink their concept of "national boundary" and place-bound sense of belonging.

Kim interweaves facts and fiction in his retelling of the tragic and shameful national trauma that happened 5 years before the annexation of Korea by Japan. In April 1905 1333 Koreans who were mostly peasants and farmers embarked on a British-owned ship named *Ilford* to go to Yucatán in the hope of becoming landowners, but which turned out to be an empty promise (Schmid 237-38). What was not known at the time was "the Japanese company enlisting the workers turned to Koreans only because its horrific treatment of Chinese migrants had ruined its reputation in China, making it impossible to recruit any more workers" (Schmid 238). The displaced self in *Black Flower* articulates these historical conditions and at the same time highlights the complementary process of a nation's coming into being and the rise of individual sense of self told through its main protagonist, Ee Jeong Kim. The arrival of modernity precipitated non-Western countries like Korea to carve out an outward appearance and an individual identity at the same time as embodied in the Kim's protagonist Ee Jeong. What Kim's protagonists in *Black Flower* gradually realize is that the nation, just like the self must be imagined through the lens of institutionally sanctioned discourses of sovereignty in order to be independent. Benedict Anderson defines a nation as a group of people who share cultural characteristics such as language, religion, and literature: "fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations" (*Imagined* 36). What this means is that a nation is born and sustained because of the people's shared imagining of it and of their own sense of belonging to it, that it is less place-bound than it seems. This separation of physical location from cultural identity suggests that the displaced in the novel who find themselves in transnational territory can retain their sense of simultaneous and non-competing "national" identities. Indeed, for Korean workers Korea is a "homeland," a concrete geographical space rather than an abstract notion of a nation-state, something they identify with the affect-driven sense of belonging, resembling a father, as opposed to the Western logic-based one.

The theme of heritage and the co-mingling of self and nation also dominate the narrative of the Chinese indentured workers in Kingston's *China Men*, albeit with a different focus. While *Black Flower*'s colonial subject Ee Jeong — whose "orphan complex" speaks of the absence of a father, a *lack* felt by the colonial Korean writers — the Chinese American narrator of *China Men* has to navigate herself through multiple contending fathers who become indistinguishable from one another. The woman narrator's befuddlement about patrimony is palpable from the opening section entitled "On Fathers." While waiting for their father outside home, the children see a man resembling their father and "surrounded him, took his hands, pressed our noses against his coat to sniff his tobacco smell" (6). The man, whose clothing resembles their father — "he was wearing our father's two-hundred-dollar suit that fit him just right" (6) — laughs off and tells the children, "But I'm not your father. You've made a mistake" (6) and walks away. This brief parable sets the tone for the narrator's subsequent search for her father's and grandfathers' personal histories tracing their journey from China in the

mid-nineteenth century to the Chinese American community in late twentieth-century US-America. *China Men*'s structure is episodic and non-chronological as it reveals the disjuncture of history on its textual surface. The organizing principle of the novel is the patrimony and historicity of Chinese Americans and the six major sections tell stories of paternal lineage of the female narrator. Kingston opens the book with the narrative about Baba, the narrator's father, in "The Father from China" and then tells the story of Bak Goong, her second grandfather in "The Great Grandfathers of the Sandalwood Mountains [Hawaii]," to Ah Goong in "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains" to return to Baba who is now being referred as "The American Father" in the eponymous chapter.

I focus on the chapters about her two grandfathers, Ah Goong and Bak Goong, who came to the U.S. as indentured workers. Provoked by her father's silence about the past, the female narrator decides to become a storyteller who infuses the forgotten history with postmodern sensibility: "You say with the few words and the silences: No Stories. No past. No China" (14). For the female narrator, assuming the male ancestors' voices involves her own act of displacement. She empties out her own sense of self and cultivates an "orphan consciousness" to mimic her grandfathers' displacement and cultural disinheritance: "I talked to the people whom I knew were not really there. I became different, complete, an orphan; my partners were beautiful cowgirls, and also men, cowboys who could talk to me in conversations; I named this activity Talking Men" (181). While in *Black Flower* Kim aims to inaugurate a new tradition/genealogy symbolized by Ee Jeong's "orphan complex" — an exclusion from colonial history — by the Chinese American narrator's symbolic act of becoming orphaned, Kingston seeks an inclusion into the existing narrative of US-American history since it enables the narrator to claim a multiple heritage/patrimony, namely both US-American and Chinese. The narrator's own act of displacement is also demonstrated in the inserted vignettes of the revisions of traditional Chinese folk tales and myth, what Shu-mei Shih calls "intertexts" which she defines as "a text lurking inside another" (66; on intertextuality, see, e.g., Juvan). The narrator creates a genealogy of her ancestors' stories and revivifies them by pairing them with these intertexts: this is a strategy of postmodern narration deployed by Kingston to displace the Chinese American narrator from her own cultural context by immersing herself in the Chinese context so as to symbolically experience her ancestors' displacement herself.

The narrator's ancestors, upon their arrival in the U.S. soon realize that their marginal status resembles their country's diminished status in the global hierarchies of power: their need to assert autonomy from the increasingly enfeebled nation is analogous to Kim's portrayal of the disillusionment of the Koreans upon learning their country's demise and annexation by Japan and their subsequent decision to emigrate. This sentiment is captured in the narrator's question posed to her father who still holds onto his homeland, China, whose name literally means in Chinese the center: "I want to be able to rely on you, who inked each piece of our own laundry with the word Center, to find out how we landed in a country where we are eccentric people" (9). Once occupied the center of East Asia, the displaced Chinese in the U.S. reveals ironically that the center of the nation is thus defined by context and is subject to change. Both in a national and global context, they exist as the ex-centric people whose multiple perspectives destabilize the center. According to Linda Hutcheon, the "ex-centric" is someone who finds himself at the margins, and "excentricity" is the state of being at the margin, the border of the edge: "The ex-centric, the off-center: ineluctably identified with the center it desires but is denied" (60). The narrator's father and other displaced Chinese workers families' ex-centricity in US-America results from their displacement from China as "centric/Chinese" citizens to the U.S. where they exist in the margins of nation: "Do you mean to give us a chance at being real American by forgetting the Chinese past?" (14). The narrator's subsequent search for the lost fathers of Asian American literature is made possible by her retelling of their story which shatters of the ex-centric's silence to remake them into "founding ancestors" of US-America (118) which is exemplified forcefully in her reclaiming of the story of Ah Goong who worked for the construction of the U.S. transcontinental railroad from 1863 to 1869. Ah Goong's contribution in US-American nation building is acknowledged by the narrator, who asserts that her grandfather "was an American for having built the railroad" (145), which is none other than the ex-centric's claim onto the center and once again destabilizes a place-bound, single point of origin. Thus, Ah Goong's story envisages culture and tradition to be something an individual cultivates rather than simply inherits.

Kim also demonstrates the ironical power of the displacement in fostering a sense of nation by depicting a formation of a transnational community among the heterogeneous Asian diaspora. In a journalistic manner, Kim describes the fate of the Korean workers within the context of newspaper articles which documented the growing awareness of the inhuman treatment the Koreans were receiving at the hands of henequen plantation owners:

Hur Hwei, a Chinese living in Merida, met up with Chosŏn [Korean] immigrants in a place close to Downtown Merida. He wrote down the shock he registered from that meeting to Moonhong Ilbo, a Chinese newspaper circulating in San Francisco. After reading the article in Moonhong Ilbo, the two Korean international students, Jo Young Soon and Shin Jeong Hwan immediately sent a letter reporting the incident to Christian Youth Community in Seoul. The young evangelist of the Christian community, Jeong Seon Gyu, then, summarized the content of the letter and forwarded it to *Hwengseong Shinmoon* [Korean newspaper]. The article titled "Now that its subjects have become slaves, what would Korea do to save them?" appeared on July 29th 1905. It was only after this complicated process that the reality of the indentured laborers in Yucatan came to be known in the Greater Korean Empire. (135)

Compiled in this snapshot of the spread of the Koreans' situation in the U.S. is not only the self-awareness of the purported verisimilitude that the novel maintains, but also the self-awareness of the nation itself in the face of the others by taking the reader back to the moment of the birth of the makeshift nation which traumatically coincides with its very demise. The helpless new nation, further deflated by the ironic name, the "Greater Korean Empire," cannot do anything for its subjects who are displaced and who end up forever in transit, unclaimed by its fatherland whose sovereignty is not recognized by other countries. Ironically, the news arrives thanks to not only the displaced Koreans scattered in the U.S., but also the Chinese community there which illustrates the transnational, horizontal affiliation forming across the displaced. Literature can germinate the non-place bound feeling of community that Anderson describes as follows: "nation is imagined as community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (*Imagined* 7). Anderson argues that along with the novel the national subject is embodied in print media such as newspapers, capitalizing on the simultaneous, homogenous time they create among the readers. The readers are interconnected by the media even more than by speaking in a textually based mutual recognition of belonging to other readers. Anderson uses the examples of a Mexican novel and an Indonesian short story to demonstrate how characters are supposed by the reader to be living in a single, national community: "the 'national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (*Imagined* 30). The experience of reading the intertext of a newspaper story brings disparate readers together as Kim demonstrates how the Chinese diasporic community helps members of Korean diasporic community and shows how the displaced can form communities of shared displacement.

Similarly, Kingston dramatizes the theme of shared displacement in its depiction of the sudden deflation of the nation and the inflation of individual subject which results in transforming the grandfathers from a single national subject to a transnational self thus encompassing different nations and regions with a cosmopolitan sensibility. The perpetual exile figure, Yüan Ch'ü, serves to illustrate the pervasive sense of homelessness which regards China as one among the many possible homelands in "The Li Sao: An Elegy" section: "He had to leave the Center; he roamed in the outer world for the rest of his life" (256). Kingston's narrative displaces the binary concepts such as marginal and center with a postmodern strategy of refuting a simple inversion or a valorization of the marginal. Kingston's construction of a nomadic, adventurous Chinese diaspora stems from the historical circumstances many Chinese intellectuals were faced with in the early twentieth century. Commenting upon the work of Qichao Liang, a Chinese historian and political reformist from the May Fourth era, Yunte Huang argues that "This shrinkage of China's geographical self-awareness was accompanied by the enlargement of the personal self-consciousness of an ordinary Chinese, a process described by Liang as one of change from a villager (*xiangren*) to a citizen (*guoren*) and then a cosmopolitan (*shijiren*)" (42; see also Feng). In the same vein, the narrator traces how her male ancestors transform themselves from a villager and the "ex-centric" Chinese citizen to a transnational self with a nomadic impulse to assuage their disillusionment upon the weakened status of China in the U.S.

In tandem with its emphasis on the horizontal affiliation of the minorities, Kim deploys both the Mexican revolution and Guatemalan civil war as indispensable elements of the narrative. The novel intensifies the irony of the fate of the characters further by placing or situating Ee Jeong in the midst of the Mexican revolution: he becomes a mercenary soldier fighting for Pancho Villa's army to join in their liberation from the colonizer, the Spanish hacienda landlords. Kim re-imagines this forgotten emigration history with an emphasis on the element of irony rather than tragedy to downplay the disorientating effects of the gap between the past and present which could undermine the creative participation from the reader. Ee Jeong's life Kim imagines is a flight from the monumental history where Korea does not have its place and thus Ee Jeong displaces himself onto another country's historical context, an act which enables him to go beyond the limit of a single national boundary. Kim's portrayal of Korean indentured workers' involvement in the Mexican revolution underscores its "fictional quality," a rewriting of the actual history. The strategic displacement of colonial self culminates in Ee Jeong's attempt at founding a nation that can be coterminous with a "perpetual revolution." Ee Jeong eventually goes to fight in Tical, a Guatemalan jungle, and becomes one of the founding fathers of a nation along with his fellow Korean mercenaries. Their hopeless act, a gesture, rather, testifies to their desire to give birth to their own tradition so as to substitute their lack of not having the patrimony of their own nation where they come from originally, Korea. The assumption lies behind Ee Jeong's positing of the empty signifier, a nation of the displaced indentured workers thus reflects his tacit acknowledgment of the futility and meaninglessness of his act. Ee Jeong and his fellow mock-founding fathers' ironic gesture exemplifies the arbitrary nature of a nation/sovereignty holds for individual subject, a force analogous to that of language: regardless of the veracity of its content, the signifier predicates the signified's existence, not the other way around. As a character in *Black Flower* retorts, "When did we ever choose our nationality? Unfortunately, it is nation who gets to choose" (Kim 260). Hence, what propels Ee Jeong and his fellow displaced indentured servants to found a nation of their own is his acknowledgement of the construction of the idea of nation, that it is not given, but a self-created truth: "What is it to us if there is a nation or not? Ee Jeong seemed to ponder for a while. Then he grinned. If it doesn't matter to us, does that mean that we can just make one for ourselves? There was a pause for a moment. We could all die tomorrow. Is there anyone here who wants to die as Japanese or Chinese? I know I don't. Ee Jeong asserted" (306). The fictional new nation they create, in effect, is closer to a community of the displaced for it consists of the Korean mercenary soldiers and the Mayans who are also displaced by the Guatemalan nationalists (306). Lacking any form of sovereignty, "Shin Daehan" does not have any political bearings on the outside and lasts about one year until they get defeated by the Guatemalan government army. In this sense, the creation of textual territory in *Black Flower* does not lead to an absolute cancelation of nation, but to an exposure of apertures in the process of arriving at a nation, while endlessly stripping the idea of nation as patrimony and inheritance.

Kingston advances her project of claiming the Chinese ancestors' stories simultaneously with its creation of textual territory so as to counteract the assumed center of US-America and its literary canon through the same trope of displacement. Bringing our attention to the exilic, nomadic impulse of Ah Goong, the narrator tells us that Ah Goong's picture hangs next to an equally large one of "Guan Goong, God of War and Literature" (126) and also points to Ah Goong's interweaving of a US-American imagery (the Cowboy) with a Chinese one (the Spinning Girl): "Pretending that a little girl was listening, he told himself the story about the Spinning Girl and the Cowboy" (129). Ah Goong rewrites a well-known Chinese folk tale of the Qixi Festival, the seventh night of the seventh month by casting a cowboy falling in love with a Chinese princess who can meet once a year, according to the folktale: "On the seventh day of the seventh month(which is not the same as July 7), magpies form a bridge for them to cross to each other" (130). To alleviate his homesickness, Ah Goong displaces the original folk tale so that it can match his own displacement thereby familiarizing his surroundings: "He had found two familiars in the wilderness: magpies and stars" (130). Rewriting the tale in his own terms sustains his cultural sense of belonging to the literary repository of Chinese storytellers. Moreover, by creating a symbolic bridge, the "magpies [forming] a bridge," which make the folktale resonate with both places, Ah Goong is able to connect China with the U.S.: he creates transnational territory on textual space, on the body of the text. The construction of a postcolonial hybrid subject is

configured by literature, particularly novels, as much as it is mediated by the complex "textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative stratagems" of nation (Bhabha 300). Bak Goong, the narrator's great grandfather who worked on a Hawaii sugar plantation conceptualizes an alternative model of nation based on a shared displacement. Bak Goong invents forms of resistance with ludic sensibility, reminding us of Ah Goong's hero, Guan Goong's imbrication of War and Literature. Resisting against the prohibition of Chinese talking, the racist work rules concocted by the overseers to suppress any communal effort to take place among the workers, Bak Goong sings instead and coughs up words to disguise his speech. Bak Goong and his fellow workers later turn this into a communal activity by digging a hole in the ground to have a "shout party" to shout the Chinese words like seeds onto the Hawaiian soil (118). Just as Ah Goong creates a textual bridge by rewriting the Chinese folktale, Bak Goong and his fellow workers literally plant Chinese words which later reverberate with the narrator who visits the sugar cane plantation: "The land sings. We heard something. It's a tribute to the pioneers to have a living island named after their work hat. ... I again search for my American ancestors by listening in the cane" (90). Jennie Wang points out that Kingston "is deconstructing the word 'American' while disseminating the word 'Chinese'" (105). By this act, Bak Goong and his fellow workers stake a claim and proclaim themselves as "the founding ancestors" of a mock nation: "'I want home,' Bak Goong yelled, pressed against the soil, and smelling the earth. 'I want my home,' the men yelled together. 'I want home. Home. Home. Home. Home.' Talked out, they buried their words, planted them. 'Like cats covering shit,' they laughed. 'That wasn't a custom,' said Bak Goong. 'We made it up. We can make up customs because we're the founding ancestors of this place'" (118).

The above referred to act of claiming territory emancipates them from the crippling despair of colonial subject: "from the day of the shout party, Bak Goong talked and sang at his work, and did not get sent to the punishment fields" (118) and achieves the communal effect at the same time for their act helps "bring into being a community grounded in dislocation" (Lee 472). Kingston's creation of textual territory via the power of the displacement is very much akin to that of Kim's in *Black Flower*, especially in the shared valorization of a sense of community over sovereignty of nation. Moreover, *China Men* also mobilizes the postmodern sensibility of believing one's self-created truth so as to demonstrate how novels can also function outside the national narrative. Ah Goong's and Bak Goong's acts of creating textual territory via displacement make them reborn as the female narrator's rightful ancestors, as confirmed by her remark: "How could they not go to the Gold Mountain again, which belonged to them, which they had invented and discovered?" (43). Just like Guan Goong, the god of War and Literature, the father "rode on, coming to claim the Gold Mountain, his own country" (52). The invented national origin and homeland qua displacement confer a sense of mobility and becoming instead of a static being.

Although Kim and Kingston both deploy the trope of displacement and people's settlement in a new land, they do not envisage a clear point of national origin unlike the case of exile, neither do they exhibit an unassailable sense of belonging to their fatherland as in the case of diaspora. The self-willed, strategic uses of displacement enacted in the two novels disrupt the distinctions among exile and diaspora while destabilizing the concept of nation. The transnational, non-place bound sense of belonging that the indentured workers generate in the novels shares clear affinities with Deleuze's and Guattari's conception of "deterritorialization." Deleuze and Guattari deploy a botanical metaphor of "rhizome" which configures and mobilizes the subjects enacting "deterritorialization" which stands in radical contrast to a continuous, vertical root: "A rhizome has no beginning or end. It is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 25). Rhizome expands horizontally and aligns with others by dispersion, problematizing the notions of family tree or genealogy which envisages a single origin and a teleological progress to an end. "Deterritorialization" displaces signifier and signified as well as subjects and space "to express another potential community, to force the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 17). As the personal histories and narratives of the displaced in the novels become deterritorialized and dispersed into the larger historical developments, they radically challenge the privileged notion of history. Thus historically specific expressions of deterritorialization such as *Black Flower* and *China Men* overcome the limit of



Deleuze's and Guattari's tendency toward abstracting all deterritorialization into a "universal movement" (Grosz 175). For the subject who devises a line of flight qua the power of the displaced, the process of deterritorialization does not aim at a final stage of completion of that process. Rather, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, "what the completion of the process [of deterritorialization] is: not a promised and pre-existing land, but a world created in the process of its tendency, its coming undone, its deterritorialization" (*Anti-Oedipus* 322). The postmodern discourse of discontinuity is here made possible by the process of deterritorialization in which the self does not aim to totalize experience but rather experiences the decentered, displaced, "deterritorializing" movement of desire.

In the same vein, the new transnational identity depicted in the two novels is not merely about crossing national boundaries or an aesthetic gesture at romanticizing the notion of exile. Rather, the strategic acts of displacement shown in both novels posit a new transnational identity, which allows a room for horizontal alliance and multiple versions of history to unfold and ground the new identity within. Understood in this context, the denouement of *Black Flower's* ending — which depicts the death of Ee Jeong — acquires potential meaning for the deterritorializing desire of the displaced. The ending of the novel overlaps with the beginning. As the novel starts by what Ee Jeong imagines at the moment of his death when the reader is not yet informed of what this signifies: "Ee Jeong fell headfirst into the swamp, filled with green algae dancing lazily. Too many things invaded his purview at once. It was the landscape of Jemulpo [the harbor of Korea from where they left for Yucatan] he thought that he had already forgotten a long time ago" (11). The novel's envisioning of the beginning and the end as an interchangeable doubling is configured so as to deepen the relationship between the colonial subject's "orphan complex" and his subsequent desire of deterritorialization — which substitutes the territorial presence of self and nation with the textual one. The novel's postmodern repudiation of binary concepts and assumed hierarchy between the beginning and the end rescues Ee Jeong's death as the forgotten, anonymous one. Consequently, displacement registers a radical liminality which can be located neither here nor there since self and nation generated from it constantly oscillates from an estranged past and a dislocated present. Ee Jeong is facing his own "orphan complex" yet nonetheless gives birth to himself by creating textual, transnational territory: "The soldiers rummaged through the deceased's belongings. Inside his clothing, they found a certificate so old and brittle that even a gentle touch would destroy it. On the document, it states 'Park Kwang Soo, born in Wedo, Jeolla Province, age 28' in Chinese and the official seal of the Greater Korean Empire glimmered softly. But there was no one who could read what was written" (317).

Now complicit with the novel's genre convention which propels the reader to engage actively in reading, the reader is the one who rescues Kwang Soo Park from his life and death as the displaced, whose birth certificate remains illegible to the soldiers. Privy to the information, the reader performs the redemptive act of interpretation by rendering Kwang Soo's document legible in the present moment. The novel urges the reader to be complicit in imagining the textual territory he belongs to. Settled upon the birth certificate and passport, "the two most widely prevalent, quite modern official documents of personal identity" (Anderson, *Spectre* 69), both of which were born in the nationalist nineteenth century and later became interlinked is the idea that an individual's identity is displaced onto papers issued by nation-state which the two novels aim to dislodge. In *China Men*, Ah Goong and the other Chinese indentured workers are eager to become "paper sons" of the Chinese immigrants who already obtained the necessary official forms of identity such as "visas, passports, re-entry permits, American birth certificates, American citizenship papers" (46). The would-be immigrants borrow or forge facsimiles of the papers of China men who had travelled to the U.S. before them. Then they would memorize and retell the stories immigration officials would accept. However, the 1906 San Francisco Fire burned up "every paper a China Man wanted for citizenship and legality ... An authentic citizen, then, had no more papers than an alien. ... Every China Man was reborn out of that fire a citizen" (150), as the narrator ironically observes. To reclaim their paper identity, Kingston chooses to create textual territory on paper by making the Chinese ancestors create US-American versions of themselves: "In my father-book, *China Men*, I used the very techniques that the men developed over a hundred years. They made themselves citizens of this country by telling American versions of their lives" ("Imagined Life" 563). And it is this version that the reader approves and with the same gesture the textual territory is also acknowledged.

If creating transnational territory on textual space is the virtue of *Black Flower* and *China Men*, it is also their weakness. Both novels can be read as espousing a facile postmodernism where political engagement is embodied simply as a politics of individual expression and free play. Yet in exploring transnational sense of belonging, both novels are located in global cultural politics. Within this larger context, the power of the displaced shown in the postcolonial critique of the two novels illustrates literature's potential to address and redeem these issues as the fundamental affinity and opposition between art and politics. Kingston and Kim interrogate the assumed or privileged notions of history and grounds of comparison and give rise to the new formation of alliances among unexpected and neglected intersections of art and politics thereby creating transnational territory on text.

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