

Asian-American Literature and a Lacanian Reading of Maxine Hong Kingston's Tripmaster Monkey

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Abstract: In his paper, "Asian-American Literature and a Lacanian Reading of Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*," Fu-jen Chen explores the protagonist's subjective progression into the post-Symbolic Real in Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey* -- from subject as Demand, through subject as Desire, to subject as *jouissance*. *Tripmaster Monkey* records Ah Sing's transformation from a racial paranoiac at the beginning of the novel through a subject as demand to a subject as desire who is learning to target new desires via his engaging in *real* myth and staging *real* theater, and finally to a subject as *jouissance* -- one who is oriented to his own cause of desire and is able to enjoy. As a subject as *jouissance*, Ah Sing signifies a "New Man" whose racial identity as Asian-American is free from the grip of the nostalgic other (Chinese) or the racist Other (American) but subjected to the hyphen, the rupture as well as the joint that functions as the thing, cause of desire, and *objet petit a*. At the end, Ah Sing finally can act as cause and subjectify the cause of his existence as an Asian-American.

Fu-jen CHEN

**Asian-American Literature and a Lacanian Reading of Maxine Hong Kingston's
*Tripmaster Monkey***

Following her two early "autobiographies," *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, Maxine Hong Kingston's first work of fiction, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*, is an episodic work, the plot of which is driven by the protagonist's quest for Popo, his revision of Asian folk tales, mythology, and classics, his production of Asian-American theater, and, more significantly, his transformation into a new subject. The protagonist, Wittman Ah Sing, is an actor, a playwright, a sixties hippie, a Berkeley graduate in English, a director of his own theater, a twenty-three-year-old fifth generation Chinese-American US citizen. He is also a person "without a proper name" (Li, *Imagining* 76) because "Ah Sing" is never a last name. "Ah," a sound that is usually emitted before the first name, is just a vocative, carrying no meaning, so "Ah Sing" at best serves as a nickname used by close friends or peers. Besides having an unusual last name, Ah Sing, in his long hair, beard, cowboy boots, Indian poncho, and old brown Wellingtons, has "different" looks and lives. Wittman Ah Sing, however, is seen by many critics not only as a postmodern "China Man," but also as a new national figure, a man who redefines the character of "American," expresses a new vision of American culture, and invents a new American language.

Interestingly, such a New Man is introduced on the opening page of the novel (prior to his journey in it) as one who "consider[s] suicide every day," fantasizes his suicidal act, and envisions his body shattered into fragments. In a suicidal declaration as he asks himself "To be or not to be" (3), Ah Sing first appears to be in despair. His acts of bodily annihilation actually result from his fragmented identity. Facing an identity crisis similar to that found in Frantz Fanon's diagnoses of the Antillean psyche, Ah Sing struggles in the gap of the imaginary perceptions of Asian men and their symbolic representations. The discrepancies between the imaginary ideal images and the socio-cultural distortions of Asian manhood jeopardize his coherent "sense of self." Although Ah Sing fits Fanon's notion of the colonized who always identifies himself with the colonizer according to a logic of representation and interpellation, his efforts to represent himself through the Symbolic signifier turn into a negation of self. The Symbolic Other might allow or even invite minority subjects' identifications for the sake of ideological interests, but the access of those subjects to the Symbolic come at the expense of a reduction of self to "a set of predetermined and necessarily limited sites of representation" (Palumbo-Liu, "Minority" 76).

In *Tripmaster Monkey*, the opening chapter highlights the tension between the protagonist's enthusiastic mimicry of the dominant culture and values, on the one hand, and, on the other, his frustration earning recognition from the American Symbolic. The American Other, however, refuses him a place as he would like to see himself, since his mimicry of the Other is after all "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, *Location* 86). Beginning with Hamlet's existential question "To be or not to be" and the Hemingwaysque death act, the first chapter, "Trippers and Askers," lasting thirty-three pages, contains numerous allusions to canonical American and English literature. Ah Sing's western heritage is clearly expressed by his mimetic connection to Spenser, Shakespeare, Swift, Defoe, Joyce, Rilke, Eliot, Allen Ginsberg, William Carlos Williams, Thoreau, Melville, John Steinbeck, Walt Whitman, and many others. Overloaded with these allusions to Western canonical literature, the opening chapter includes little of Chinese heritage or culture (Wang 101-14). Ah Sing's mimetic enactment of the Other's culture echoes Fanon's critique of the people in Martinique: "There are many people in Martinique who at the age of twenty or thirty begin to steep themselves in Montesquieu or Claudel for the sole purpose of being able to quote them" (Fanon, *Black* 82). Reciting Rainer Maria Rilke aloud to passengers on a Bay Area bus, recalling William Saroyan in Fresno, John Steinbeck in Salinas Valley, Jack Kerouac in Big Sur, and Carlos Bulosan in the Central Valley on the Southern Pacific, Wittman Ah Sing insists on representing himself in the image of the Other, both consciously and unconsciously immersing himself in the realm of the Symbolic. Ah Sing asks himself: "What's wrong with him that he keeps ending up in Caucasian places? Like the English Department. Like Management Training. Like the Actor's Workshop audi-

ence" (57). Ah Sing is afraid of identifying with the F.O.B. (fresh off the boat) in the Other's mind, deliberately distancing himself from newly arrived Chinese immigrants.

Ah Sing's enthusiastic mimicry of the dominant Symbolic culture, however, is not rewarded with an access to the Symbolic; rather, he is constantly reminded of distorted images of the Chinese and the Oriental by the Western heritage and popular culture in which he is steeped. For example, he is obsessed with the images from Orson Welles's movie (in which the Lady from Shanghai is a White Russian), "the Oriental Tea Garden" (in which Japanese garden and characters are mis-recognized as Chinese), and the white man's stage (in which the Chinese actors and actresses are asked to sound, to look, and to act oriental). Wittman Ah Sing (Wittman as his first name) models himself upon a nineteenth-century idealist-democrat-humanist and chants a "song of myself" of his own that sounds very Whitmanian, and in addition, Wittman *Ah Sing* (his last name), born offstage, alludes to a theatrical figure in Bret Harte and Mark Twain's *Ah Sin* (1877). In the play, the character Ah Sin is treated with contempt as a "slant eyed son of the yellow jaunders," a "jabbering idiot," and "a moral cancer" (qtd. in Moy 26), yet such a racist portrayal of Ah Sin in the eyes of Twain "reaches perfection" (Moy 26). As he identifies with the projected image of Whitman, the nineteenth-century poet, Ah Sing at the same time faces the racial stereotype prescribed for him by the pre-existing Symbolic.

The incompatibility of Ah Sing's projected image and his re-presented perception of self in the Symbolic traps him in an identity crisis that endangers his psychological state. The conflict is aggravated when Ah Sing leaves school where he could at least momentarily foster his ideal ego in his imaginary world and fantasize himself as Hamlet, Ishmael, and other "alien" identities. Yet, once out of school, he finds that he loses his stage. "Is there life after Berkeley?" he wonders (17). Later throughout the novel, Ah Sing half-seriously questions if he has become "paranoid." He wonders if Nanci's description of "ching-chong chinaman" refers to him (23), if her remark that "we look yellow in green" (44) has to do with racial skin, if people around him tell race jokes (215), if he is seen as "mysterious" because of his yellow skin and slanty eyes (155), and many other questions. Ah Sing constantly contemplates words he has just said and heard and compulsively looks for any racial connotations in them. To him, the Symbolic becomes a network of conspiracies that objectify, gaze at, and deride minority subjects. According to Lacan, paranoia stems from a subject's inability to establish a stable form of belief in the self (*Four* 238). Christy Burns further explains that "with regards to his or her own subjectivity, the paranoiac cannot accept the split within consciousness that allows thoughts to slide away from conscious control" and "insist[s] on a radical distinction between self and other" (152). Because of his insistence on staying fully conscious, Ah Sing always desires to "handle consciousness" so that he cannot stop writing and "talk[ing] himself through fear" (49). Ah Sing's own "tale of paranoia" best reflects his psychic status: Taking flight to a countryside after losing a battle, Cho Cho, an ancient Chinese general, is well treated by the countrymen who excitedly plan a surprise party for him. Confused by their excitement, laughs, jokes, and the absence of all the male villagers, who have gone to market to buy a pig, Cho Cho wonders "why's everybody giggling?" "What's so funny?" and "Does the pig mean him?" No longer standing for the imminent danger of conspiracy, Cho Cho kills them all. Like Cho Cho, Ah Sing, who is "hyperkinetic, hypersensitive and hyperverbal" (*Tripmaster* 97), exemplifies Lacan's descriptions of a paranoiac as being "intolerant," "prideful," and "overly sensitive," and as having "an overblown sense of himself" (see Lacan, *Seminar III*). Nevertheless, we may also argue that racial suppression traps minority subjects like Ah Sing in the Imaginary register and produces in them a matrix of paranoid structure. Richard Boothby argues that the racial suppression produces the effect of psychological fascism: "by collapsing the will of the people onto an imaginary register, political terror induces a pervasive atmosphere of paranoia ... each individual becomes preoccupied by the fear that every other member of the group may turn out to be a stooge or informer" (182).

Facing the identity crisis leading him to the verge of paranoia, Ah Sing stands at a critical moment. First, he may remain caught in the Imaginary and be driven further by the death drive to pursue his extinction. Or he may set out on a "progressive" journey in pursuit of transformation into a subject as *jouissance* first through the dialectization of his desire to shake up his fixation on

the cause (so that his desire is mobilized and no longer stuck), next, the subjectification of the new cause of his desire -- the object a -- (so that his desire is no more fixated on an object), the reconfiguration of the fundamental fantasy (i.e., a fantasy about the ethnic identity), and finally the creation of a new subjective position in relation to the cause in which he is able to enjoy his enjoyment (a new position no longer subjected to the Other's demand or desire, but one's own cause of desire). Positively and optimistically, *Tripmaster Monkey* records its protagonist's *progressive* journey through his identity crisis and his psychological breakdown on to the "true understanding" of his identity in the analytic context (Fink, *Subject* 1). In the novel, Ah Sing's journey begins at the very end of the first chapter when he declares that he is "the present-day U.S.A. incarnation of the King of the Monkeys" (33). The hero of the sixteenth-century Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, the Monkey King, a master of seventy-two transformations, embarks upon a search for enlightenment, and brings back Buddhist scriptures to China from India. At the end of the first chapter, Ah Sing transforms himself into the Monkey King in front of the mirror, yelling "Bee-e-eeen!" He "whipped around and began to type like mad. Action. At work again" (34). Through his productions of signifiers (both visual and auditory) and his unstopped talking and writing, he endeavors to create "a new rule for the imagination" (34), namely, a new order of the signifying chain. Ah Sing briefly exclaims at the end of the first chapter: "Yes, the play's *the thing*" (34; emphasis added). Responding repulsively to the Other's demand or demanding the Other, Ah Sing is unable truly to desire because his desire involves a kind of fixation on something; the Other's desire is rigidly connected with a name. To Ah Sing, the Other's desire (or, rather, demand) always targets "white" in the racial sense. Ah Sing habitually sees the whole world from a fixed stance that may thwart (and at the same time satisfy) his "desire." Ah Sing is unable to act because "white" is a feature he rigidly attributes to the Other's desire and is also one he can never acquire. The name of the Other's desire must be set into motion and his fixation has to be given up. In order to act, Ah Sing has to set his desire into motion and open up a new space of desire. Fink explains that this giving up of fixation for movement is "dialectization" (*Clinical* 26).

Ah Sing's engagement with myth-making leads to a dialectization of his desire. Claiming that "Got no money. Got no home. Got story" (175), Ah Sing, in order to keep himself from going mad, tells stories in an attempt to establish a new connection between signifier and signified, and acquires his security in language, just as the creator of Ah Sing -- Maxine Hong Kingston -- herself once claimed in an interview that "Language is important to our sanity. You have to be able to tell your story, you have to be able to make up stories or you go mad" (qtd. in Woo 187). Ah Sing tells his myths by first demystifying and defamiliarizing Chinese myth, legends, and American mass culture in order to create "a new rule for the imagination" (34) and further open a new space of desire. Traditionally, myth serves an expository and explanatory function through references to the thought, desires, and actions of certain people who learn how and why they live; further, myth reflects a deep pattern of thoughts. Specifically, myth offers some identity-bearing words, images, and fantasies through which one is interpellated into a symbolic subject. Further, myth performs an ideological function that naturalizes and depoliticizes the process of thought and the way the Symbolic operates. In order to untie the knots in his desire, Ah Sing must dialectize the master signifiers and the original rigid interpretation of the Other's desire.

Ah Sing's *real* stories consist of myths, legends, literary texts, popular songs, films, mass culture, and so on. His *real* stories unsettle the historical, cultural, and psychological assumptions and offer "a new rule for imagination." Rather than responding to the "diversity" of culture developed from a binary opposition (center vs. margin), and the clear and direct demands from the Other, Ah Sing's *real* stories propose contradictory and ambivalent connections between signifier and signified, and between signifiers. The disturbing seams (as well as ruptures) between the random signifiers or images in his *real* stories bring up *the thing*, the excess of *jouissance*, so as to shake up his formerly certain configuration of language as well as fantasy and open up a new space of desire. In his stories, the historical events are mismatched: the event of opium dumping into Canton Harbor in the Chin Dynasty is related to the Boston Tea Party. The geographical places are switched: the Pearl River Delta in southern China is mistaken as the San Joaquin Delta or relocated to the Europe from which most Americans traditionally came. The chronology of history is

messed up: America was founded either in 1911 (the year the Republic of China was founded) or in 1949 (the year the People's Republic of China was founded). The historical figures are re-rolled: Ah Sing's great-great-grandfather embarked upon a boat as ancestral as the Mayflower for the New World, the Chinese Lo Bun Sun became the British Robinson Crusoe, and Confucius and Socrates became identical, both dying of poison. The literary classics are intertextualized: *Journey to the West* is contextualized in Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge*, and *The Water Verge*, the thirteenth-century classic, resonates with the social protest of the 1960s. Moreover, when Ah Sing's stories are adapted for a scene on a stage, Bruce Lee, John Wayne, Gwan Goong, Marilyn Monroe, Mao Tse Tung, and many others all appear on the same stage.

Instead of stressing representations of entities (i.e., US-Americans or ethnic US-Americans), Ah Sing's stories highlight the disturbing seams as well as the rifts in disparate episodes, events, spaces, and times, and arouse the desire to symbolize through words. The ruptures and also the joints are Homi Bhabha's "third space" -- the "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" where something has not yet been formulated ("Commitment" 5-23). Ah Sing's stories aim to open a new space of desire so as to reconfigure the fundamental fantasy and further subjectify the new cause of desire. Ah Sing refuses to reconstitute his subjectivity as an "Asian-American" with respect to "either-or," "both-and," or "neither-nor" in imaginary oppositions -- Asian vs. American. Instead, he reconstitutes his subjectivity as an "Asian-American" in relation to the middle hyphen, "-." He wants to become what Bruce Fink terms "the subject as *breach*" -- one who is no longer "a sedimentation of meanings" determined by the Other, but one who "creates a breach in the real as [he] establishes a link between two signifiers" and "the subject being nothing but that very breach" (*Subject* 69). The rupture as well as the joint -- the hyphen -- functions as an *object petit a*, *the thing*, or the cause of desire that motivates Ah Sing to interrogate the monolithic meaning of the master signifiers, to further recognize the Other's deficiency, and ultimately to bring the master signifiers from a dead end into relation with other signifiers. Thus, Wittman Ah Sing will no longer be oriented to his first name or last name, but his middle name -- Joan Fu -- meaning "Inner Truth" (37) in Chinese. It is the "inner truth" that connects the two disparate identities -- Wittman and Ah Sing -- guiding him towards enlightenment or toward what Fink calls "true understanding" (*Subject* 71). Once excluded from the Symbolic, forbidden by the Master signifiers, and misrepresented by a prescribed identity, Ah Sing starts a passage to become a *real* subject, one who is oriented to *jouissance* and acts as the cause of his desire; that is, he as an Asian-American is no longer oriented to either "Asian" or "American" but to the hyphen -- to a seam that is also a link.

As a subject as "hyphen," Ah Sing surges forth between signifiers, reconfiguring his subject position in the process of metaphorization. Ah Sing establishes a new combination and brings a new metaphor into the signifying chain that in turn modifies his subjective position in relation to the new cause. In his *real* stories, Ah Sing presents new hyphenated characters: "a blonde Black lady" (251), "a black Chinese legendary hero, Whirlwind" (257), an outlaw with "blue-green eyes and blue-red beard and hair" (275), and "Chigroes" with "flat noses and cho cho lips and little eyes and yellow-black skin" (323). Ah Sing himself is the most *real* subject: he talks like a black (32), walks like a Japanese (12), dresses like a cowboy (1), lives like a hippie, thinks like a poet, and speaks in a multi-hyphenated language: Cantonese-Japanese-Spanish-African-English. Being a *real* playwright, symbolizing the unspeakable, he wants to "bring thoughts into reality" (240) and "make up many, many names for dark" (60). His *real* stories turn people into Chinese (172), proving a philosophical position that one should "[d]o the right thing by whoever crosses your path. Those coincidental people are your people" (223). In addition, his marriage invents "a new sex act" (157), dialectizing the fixed meaning of the role of wife and husband by playing at being wife and husband through turns in his marriage (273). His marriage demonstrates that "any two random people can get together and learn to care for each other" (337). Ah Sing's motto is "get on with creation" (207). Ah Sing never intends to construct his life into a coherent narrative with all the traumas well integrated. He presents his life story as "a text of bliss (*jouissance*)," one that "brings to a crisis in relation with language," rather than "the text of pleasure" from which he can enjoy "the consistency of his selfhood" (Barthes, *Pleasure* 14).

In her first two works -- *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* -- Kingston transforms Chinese or Chinese-American females from victims into heroines and saviors in the male-dominated Symbolic; she turns the immigrant Chinese men from coolies to mythical American founding fathers by promoting the dialectization of master signifiers with less of the monolithic and the definite during the process of myth-making and myth-rewriting. Instead of aiming only at the proliferation of the master signifiers, her third work -- *Tripmaster Monkey* -- goes one step further. It not only frees identity-bearing signifiers from the grip of the Other, untying the knots of the subject's desire, but also subjectifies the cause of the subject's existence. In *Tripmaster Monkey*, the subjectification and the assumption of the cause is manifested by Ah Sing's production of the theater in which *object a* is enacted through stories told in roles and about roles and through the process of "en-rolling" and "de-rolling." Early in the novel during his crisis of identity, Ah Sing recognizes the need for a theatre (24). He makes a promise to Nanci that he will write her a play and revive the Asian American theatre (27). "The reason he doesn't have right livelihood," he says, "is that our theater is dead" (249). Politically, Ah Sing employs his theater as a platform to combat racial stereotypes and spread anti-war messages. He says that there should be "no more accessible girls and unspeakable men" (138) and insists on "solv[ing] the world's problems with fun and laughter" (Jeanne Smith 69). Culturally, his theatrical production aims to "educat[e] a very ignorant America" (Simmons 146) and expand its cultural horizons with an encyclopedic showcase of Chinese myths, legends, classics, and sagas. The revival of a Chinese-American theater is a social practice to reinvent and reconstruct a community. Ah Sing asserts, "community is not built once-and-for-all; people have to imagine, practice, and re-create it" (306); "We make theater," he says, "we make community" (261). Psychologically, his involvement with theatre prevents his being brutalized by the anger and hatred caused by racism (Simmons 33).

Ah Sing's aesthetic presentation of a theatre reflects his psychological goals in staging a play. First, he stages a "long and continuous play that goes on for a week without repeating itself" like "ancient languages with no breaks between words" (149). It is "theater for a century" (149), and "the audience comes back every night for the continuation" (250). Driven to the next performance by a new cause of desire, the actors and audiences go on reconfiguring their fantasy and assuming a new position in relation to the cause of desire. The progressive continuation of the performance, as Ah Sing stresses, does not rely on the plot; instead, its substance is interruptions, sidetrips, verbal fireworks, improvised acts, and incongruous connections. Ah Sing presents a *real* theatre that serves as the pure cause of desire, for it emphasizes the juncture as well as detachment rather than the meaning of signifiers. Its first rehearsal opens with scenes from the Chinese classic *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*, and develops with a bizarre finding that Gwan Goong travels to Angel Island and Ellis Island. Both Gwan Goong and the Monkey of *The Journey to the West* are brought to America. The Chinese classic *The Journey to the West* becomes the journey in the West.

Next, the cast of characters and audiences in the show include nearly all the people whom Ah Sing has met. His friends, relatives, and acquaintances contribute not only roles for the production but also their own voices as well. They don't merely play out the roles based in historical events that make up their lives; rather, they frame stories about themselves in roles and act in relation to the cause of desire in their present existences. They are not so much performers as improvisers. The players act to bring out nothing but a breach, a hyphen, or a new link between two disparate signifiers, between two discordant identities, between the past and the present, between the East and the West, between fantasy and reality, between desire and drive, and between the Symbolic and the Real. It is this "in-between" that provides a new cause of desire. The players act out their roles in relation to "lots of holes" in their scripts "for ad lib and actors' gifts" (277). A player named Lance brings his own gangs to do their own act and another named Siew Loong brings his own script to the rehearsal (279). In addition, in the "Bone and Jones" section, the unsymbolized hyphen, breach, link, or space is incarnated in the Siamese twins played by Lance and the Yale Younger poet. Tied together in green velveteen connected suits, the twins explore many problems of identity in relation to the unsymbolized "joint." They change their names from Chang to Change Bunker and from Eng to Eng Bunker in hopes of being "more like the normal American person"

(290). They even discuss the possibility of taking on a "Japanese identity." In addition, they dance with and date other pairs of "hyphenated" girls such as the Eaton sisters -- Edith and Winnifred --, who are Eurasians, and "Millie and Christine, the Carolina Black Joined Twins" (291). Recognizing that their being is unavoidably defined by the unsymbolized joint -- the thing--, Chang yells: "We know damned well what you came for to see -- the angle we're joined at ... You want to look at *the hyphen*. You want to look at it bare" (293; emphasis added).

In the beginning chapter of the novel, Ah Sing announces his mythic status: "I am really: the present-day U.S.A. incarnation of the King of the Monkeys" (33). Later Ah Sing emphasizes again that he is not "supposed to be" but "I am the Monkey" (191). Ah Sing's other role -- the Monkey King in *Journey to the West* -- possesses more complex and ambivalent characteristics than does Gwan Goong, who is always invoked as heroic. Sometimes rebellious, the Monkey King challenges bureaucratic order in Heaven as Ah Sing eagerly defies the American Symbolic. Sometimes, the monkey is helpless, imprisoned in a mountain by Tripitaka, trapped by demons, teased, and rescued by the goddess of Mercy. Likewise, Ah Sing in depression envisions himself as a lost child clinging to the Mother's dead body that is still warm (222). Most of the time, the Monkey is full of the spirit of fun and joy. Ah Sing is likewise mischievous and playful. With his irrepressible joy and sense of humor, he avoids being victimized by racism, and thereby becomes a tragic figure. Just as the Monkey King has the power to escape trouble through endless transformations, Ah Sing at will enroles and deroles many hyphenated figures (or subjects of hybrid) in order to avoid his desire being stuck in the Symbolic by continuously targeting a new desire. The Monkey King is not only a master of seventy-two transformations, but he *is* transformation. In the same vein, Ah Sing is not only the master of creating hyphenated subjects, but he *is* the hyphen or the hybrid. The Monkey King's endless transformations as well as Ah Sing's continuous "enroling" and "deroling" enact the process of dialectization of master signifiers.

The dialectization of the master signifiers for both the Monkey King and Ah Sing is urged by the object a -- the cause of desire. Embarking upon a perilous journey to India, the Monkey King accompanies a Chinese monk to bring the Buddhist Scriptures to China. His quest for the sacred scrolls leads to the climax of his enlightenment as he finds out that though the sacred scrolls given by the Indians are blank ones, the Indians claim that "the empty scrolls had been the right ones all along" (42). The Monkey King's enlightenment is his final assumption of the cause, his recognizing that the whole journey to the West has been driven all along by the blank scrolls -- the cause of desire. Likewise, Ah Sing's quest for a *real* subjectivity is not driven by an "authentic" identity, but by his own cause of desire. He continuously creates subjects with multiple hyphens for the sake of hyphen itself -- the object a. In the Lacanian discourse of the Analyst, the object a is played by the analyst who, according to Lacan, should act as "a blank screen" to the analysand (Fink, *Clinical* 32). Ah Sing's quest for a real subjectivity in respect to his cause of desire is crystallized in the Monkey King's journey to enlightenment in respect to the blank scrolls.

As the master signifiers are dialectized through the *Real* play and the *Real* theater, metaphorization occurs and the subjectification of the cause starts. No longer rigidly defined or easily stereotyped, a subject can finally subjectify his fate, moving from being one subject to the Other's demand or the Other's desire to being one subject to his own cause of desire. *Tripmaster Monkey* records Ah Sing's transformation from a racial paranoiac at the beginning of the novel, through the role of Gwan Goong, an angry legendary character who demands but at the same time is demanded by the Other. He ultimately transforms into the Monkey King, an embodiment of a subject who is good at targeting new desires via transformations. Through a process of enroling and deroling, he frees himself from the grip of the Symbolic Other; Ah Sing transforms himself into a subject who is able to desire and finally into a subject who can enjoy. Ah Sing's last subjective transformation is epitomized in his final action -- "One-Man Show" -- in which he puts on his last role: Ah Sing. In his tragic-comic soliloquy, Ah Sing reveals how he lives with role ambivalence, with conflicting desire, and with split subjectivity. At first, Ah Sing presents himself as an angry and demanding subject who speaks against white critics whose reviews of his earlier shows call them "exotic," "sweet and sour," or "inscrutable." Next, he turns to identify with what, in the eyes of the dominant American Other, is "inscrutable." Assuming such thing-like qualities as "little

squinty eyes" (312), Ah Sing declares his "looks -- teeth, eyes, nose, profile -- perfect" (314). He claims that "these eyes are cowboy eyes with which I'm looking at you, and you are looking back at me with cowboy eyes. We have the eyes that won the West" (314). Further, on the stage Ah Sing eats a banana that with its "yellow" skin and "white" flesh arbitrarily signifies Asian Americans. His stunt of eating a banana suggests his subjectification of *the thing* he once rejected; following the act, Ah Sing declares the emergence of "I" that means warrior in Chinese (319), saying "I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I-warrior win the West and the Earth and the universe" (319). Even though he may still be victimized by the racist Other, Ah Sing is no longer a victim. He is able to speak as a subject, as "I" instead of "me." He is able to say "I am," "I was," "I did," and "I want" rather than "They did this to me," or "It just happened to me," or even "That is just my fate." Instead of responding to the Other's demands by internalizing the Other's values or judgments, Ah Sing acts as cause and subjectifies the cause of his existence as an Asian American.

At the beginning of the novel, a racist paranoiac, Ah Sing sees things in racial terms, rejects his racial identity as an Asian American, and even distances himself from the newly arrived Chinese immigrants, but through a progressive journey to analytic enlightenment, he ultimately assumes and subjectifies the cause of desire and transforms himself into a subject as *jouissance*. In addition, he was once a "warrior over masculinity" (157); very early in the novel, he cared greatly about the presence of an Asian American on the University of California's football team because that presence prevented his manhood from being "totally destroyed" (6). Moreover, a sense of insecurity also urges him to identify with such figures of mythic Chinese masculinity as the 108 outlaws or martial masters like Gwan Goong. During the progression of his journal, Ah Sing mobilizes his sense of rigid gender dichotomies and finally assumes his own feminine "thing." First, his journey to enlightenment in an aspect of gender is juxtaposed with his search for Popo (grandmother), who was abandoned by Ah Sing's parents in the wilderness. Popo raised Ah Sing and called him "honey girl." Once psychologically attached to Popo, Ah Sing now eagerly looks after her. His search for Popo reveals his desire to symbolize the unknowable, yet indelible, feminine "thing." The novel states that "if there is a plot to life, then his setting out in search of her will cause Popo to appear" (207). Secondly, Ah Sing's penis is stripped of all symbolic mystique as the phallus by detailed and literal depictions, and, moreover, it is even associated with the vagina: "He sat on the footboard, his sword between his knees. In the shining steel handguard, his penis reflected huge. Behind it, his pinhead peeped out a long ways off. How odd, his head, the container of his mind, which contains *the universe*, is a complicated button topping this gigantic purple penis, which ends in a slit, like a *vagina*" (220-21; emphasis added).

His gigantic penis, which equates with the universal Other, becomes merely an imitation of the vagina. A "vaginal penis," Ah Sing's genital thing is appreciated by his wife for its loveliness and softness (157). In addition, his wife, Tana, proposes that Ah Sing be her "wife" (272). As he assumes gradually the feminine "thing" toward the end of his journey, his subjectivity as a man as well as husband is repositioned in relation to his own cause of desire rather than the Other's demand or desire of men. Ah Sing's journey culminates in his confession of "true desire": "The marriage is about two months old. I know what will happen next. I'm going to stay married to her; we're going to grow old ... Tana, if you're listening in the wings, you're free to leave if you want to leave me. But I'll always love you unromantically. I'll clean up the place, I get the hint. You don't have to be the housewife. I'll do one-half of the housewife stuff. But you can't call me your wife. You don't have to be the wife either. See how much I love you? Unromantically but" (339). No longer burying himself in imitating as well as blaming the Other for his troubles and seeking retribution, he is learning to survive symbolic victimization by identifying with the particular form of his enjoyment and enjoying his own symptoms.

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