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PLURALIST UNIVERSALISM:

AN ASIAN AMERICANIST CRITIQUE OF U.S. AND CHINESE MULTICULTURALISMS

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ABSTRACT

Pluralist Universalism studies contemporary fiction from the United States and China as a way of examining the parallels, connections, and differences between U.S. liberal multiculturalism and China's ethnic policy. Through readings of fictional narratives that address the issue of racial and ethnic difference in both national contexts simultaneously, the author models a "double critique" framework for U.S.-Chinese comparative literary studies.

The book approaches U.S. liberal multiculturalism and China's ethnic policy as two competing multiculturalisms, one grounded primarily in a history of racial desegregation and the other in the legacies of a socialist revolution. Since the end of the Cold War, the two multiculturalisms have increasingly been brought into contact through translation and other forms of mediation. *Pluralist Universalism* demonstrates that a number of fictional narratives, including those commonly classified as Chinese, American, and Chinese American, have illuminated incongruities and connections between the ethno-racial politics of the two nations.

The "double critique" framework builds upon critical perspectives developed in Asian American studies and adjacent fields. The book brings to life an innovative vision of Asian American literary critique, even as it offers a unique intervention in ideas of ethnicity and race prevailing in both China and the United States in the post-Cold War era.

PREFACE

In the aftermath of the July 2009 Uyghur riot in Xinjiang, the far northwest province of China with a large concentration of ethnic minorities, foreign correspondent Howard French suggested in a special column in *The New York Times* that the Chinese government take note of the Kerner Commission that President Johnson appointed to investigate the causes for the 1967 race riot in Detroit. Instead of clinging to the "fiction that areas where ethnic minorities have predominated… are 'autonomous regions,'" French argued, the Chinese government should openly acknowledge the magnitude of the country's ethnic tensions.[1] Only then would the social causes underlying the repeated riots in such areas as Xinjiang and Tibet start to be addressed. French's criticism of China's nationalities policy is certainly not unjustified, but his invocation of the Kerner Commission is ironic. The federal initiatives that the commission's final report recommended for improving educational and employment opportunities for urban blacks, after all, were implemented only in a partial and diluted way under Nixon and directly attacked during the Reagan years, and the Commission has become a synonym, for many, of social goals not yet met. If the Chinese policy of ethnic autonomy is a fiction that consolidates national unity at the expense of minority interests, then the idea that the U.S. has set an example for other countries, especially China, in resolving ethno-racial conflicts through legislation and government policy can only be described as a competing fiction. The *Times* piece illustrates a common way in which China's ethnic policy and measures against ethno-racial tensions in the U.S. are compared

[1] Howard W. French, "Letter from China."

in the American popular imagination.[2] It is a solipsistic kind of comparison, where the other country is used as a foil for one's own.

This mode of comparison, unfortunately, reproduces itself on the Chinese side. In reaction to the unfavorable coverage of the Uyghur riot abroad, the Chinese media quickly adopted a counter strategy, scolding the Western media for being tendentious toward the rioters, downplaying their violence, and, more importantly, failing to place ethnic riots in China in the context of presumably worse ones in Western countries, including the LA riots of 1992.[3] Such exchanges between the two countries have become a recurrent scene in the post-Cold War era, when the disintegration of the Soviet Union turned the U.S. and China into the world's two remaining multiethnic "empires."[4] The term "empire" is commonly invoked in cultural and political commentaries on both the U.S. and China in the current era to convey criticisms of the ways in which the two countries maintain order among their diverse populations at the expense of the interests of ethno-racial minorities, while expanding their influence and power globally. The U.S. government has largely ignored or suppressed such criticisms, disclaiming racial and ethnic tensions at home while projecting them onto non-Western countries deemed to be

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[2] For a similar example, see Michael Wines, "A Strong Man is China's Rock in Ethnic Strife." Wines compares the July 2009 Uighur riot in China to race riots in 1960s America. He argues that, while the latter led to the Civil Rights Movement, the former would likely further legitimize the government's hard line positions on discontent minorities, including accelerated economic development in minority regions, aggressive Han settlement, and cultural makeovers.

[3] See Qin Feng, "Cong wulumuqi 7-5 shijian kan xifang meiti shuangchong biaozhun" [The July 5 Urumqi Incident Reveals Double Standards in Western Media].

[4] Many studies have emerged since the early 1990s that examine U.S. culture and history in relation to the country's imperialist expansion across the North American continent and beyond through military, territorial, legal, economic, and cultural means. This focus on American imperialism updates W. J. Pomeroy's argument in his 1970 *American Neo-colonialism* that U.S. activities in the Philippines and Asia constituted a non-territorial kind of colonialism, or "neo-colonialism." Also see Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan, ed., *Cultures of United States Imperialism*; Chalmers Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*. Pease and Kaplan lay down important conceptual frameworks for studies of the U.S. as a new kind of empire. Johnson surveys the history, since the early nineteenth-century, of how the U.S. became an empire that "dominates the world through its military power" (1). For discussions of the Chinese side, see Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese empire: and What it Means for the United States*. Terrill's basic argument is that the PRC is "an autocratic Chinese state ruling a land nearly half of which was historically inhabited by non-Chinese people" and can be seen as "an empire of our time" (3). This view is typical of those critical of the current Chinese state's policy toward its minorities.

"authoritarian" or "dictatorial," including China, in particular. The Chinese government, for its part, has opted for a tit-for-tat strategy. Consequently, each side has frequently accused the other for perpetuating racial and ethnic inequality.

Following a major disruption due to the 1989 Tiananman incident, U.S.-China relations returned to the general principle of "comprehensive engagement" in the early 1990s.[5] Nevertheless, the U.S. government, especially members of Congress, has consistently expressed strong condemnations of China's record on human and civil rights, including minority rights.[6] The State Department ritualistically castigates China for failing to ameliorate "racism against minorities" in such areas as Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet, in its annual reports on human rights in China.[7] Since 2000, the Chinese government has sought to rebuke such remarks with its annual reports on human rights in the U.S., where race relations invariably figure as a prominent target for criticisms.[8] The new millennium has witnessed a few turns in U.S.-China relations, ranging from the tactical alliance on the "War on Terror" that the two governments formed immediately after 9/11 to the expanded U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue following the global financial crisis of 2007-09. Mutual accusations of minority rights violations, however, have remained a constant theme.

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[5] Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 328. After the Tiananmen incident, the first President Bush sought to restore the U.S.-China relationship, "persevering against growing congressional hostility" (Suettinger 93). Clinton continued this policy and "enthusiastically adopted the idea of improving relations with China as one of the key foreign policy goals of his second term" (Suettinger 283).

[6] As Suettinger points out, individual members in Congress took the lead on efforts to adjust the White House's policy of "comprehensive engagement." For example, Nancy Pelosi and Frank Wolf headed a congressional caucus called the Working Group on China, from 1997 to 2006. They "drafted letters, circulated information, and developed legislation" to pressure China into making significant improvements in its human rights (Suettinger 328). Also, in the years following the Tiananmen incident, Congress voted every year on legislation disapproving of extending China's MFN status; not until 2000 did Congress pass H. R. 4444 extending normal trade relations treatment to China, in anticipation of China to entry of WTO. Also, the State Department sponsored a resolution critical of China's human rights practices at the annual meetings of UNHRC up until 1998, prior to President Clinton's China trip.

[7] US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Report: China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau).*

[8] Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, *2008 nian meiguo renquan baogao* [*2008 Report on Human Rights in the United States*].

The solipsistic, accusatory mode of comparison that characterizes the political exchanges between the two countries is also mirrored in the sphere of popular culture, often in surprising and subtle manners. One good example is the Disney movie *Mulan*, released in 1998, which tells the story of a young girl in feudal China who enlists in the imperial army to protect her aged father from conscription. Very few were troubled at the time by the movie's portrayal of Shan Yu, the sinister head of the "army of the Huns" at war with China. Covered with an unnatural, grey tint, Shan Yu cuts a hulking, beastly figure, almost twice as big as the Han Chinese characters in the movie. For all his size, he comes across frog-like, with a small head, a receding forehead, and beady eyes, surrounded by subordinates who are simply altered versions of him. One might see Shan Yu as just another typical Disney villain, but he is too closely based on real historical figures to be brushed aside as a fantastical embodiment of pure evil. Shan Yu, after all, is a phonetic transliteration of the title for the chiefs of the Xiongnu, a nomadic people on the Steppes of central Asia who became such a threat to the early Chinese dynasties that the Great Wall was built to defend China. The movie refers to Shan Yu and his army as the Huns, who are sometimes believed to be descendents of the Xiongnu, to make its villains recognizable to the Western audiences. Attila the Hun pillaged the Eastern and Western Roman Empires during the 5th-century A.D., and the Huns have served as a symbol of military and cultural threat to Western civilization ever since. Invoked during WWI and WWII as an epithet for the Germans, the Huns are not in a strict sense racial figures in the West. However, they pick up clear racial overtones in *Mulan*, complete with a different skin color and physiological abnormalities. Why did Disney get away with racializing the army at war with imperial China, when it would be pretty much unimaginable, for example, to portray the Native Americans in *Pocahontas* in the same way? [9]

[9] *Pocahontas*'s romanticization of the Smith-Pocahontas relationship and, symbolically, the white-Indian relationship, is not without problems. Nonetheless, the difference between *Pocahontas* and *Mulan* remains clear. In

When *Mulan* first came out, much critical attention was drawn toward the staging of the Han Chinese (the ethnic majority in China) in the movie. To the delight of many, Mulan, a girl from feudal China, struck one as a credible embodiment of proto-feminism who defied the stock figures of submissive Asian women in Western cultures. Few, if any, however, took offense at the portrayal of the "Huns" in the movie.

One has to acknowledge that the figure of Shan Yu, as a throwback to the blatant racism characteristic of political cartoons of the WWII era, poses a few interesting questions. Did China provide Disney with an outlet to let loose, or at least leave uncensored, racialist sentiments that are culturally forbidden in the U.S.? Or was Disney simply trying to present Chinese history from a "native" point of view, with the implication that a racialist view of nomadic peoples on the borders of ancient China (some of whom were incorporated into PRC territories and identified as "minority nationalities") remained normative in contemporary China? I believe that the answer to both of these questions is yes. In other words, one can read the "Huns" in the movie *Mulan* as a revelation of the racialist attitudes lingering in American culture against a Chinese backdrop *and* as a (conscious or unconscious) hint at the ways in which Chinese culture remains in the grip of racial discrimination. In either case, the movie demonstrates that representations of ethno-racial issues in the two countries are intimately connected: a movie ostensibly about China can betray racialist sentiments in the U.S., while at the same time suggesting that China (ancient or modern), unlike contemporary America, is a place where racialist attitudes can be taken for granted. The political correctness mandated in the multicultural U.S. is both joyfully jettisoned and slyly bolstered (by being subtly contrasted against "Chinese" racism) in a Disney movie about China. *Mulan*, then, prompts us to reflect on

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the former, it is Governor Ratcliffe, leader of the English settlers in the movie, rather than the Native American figures, that is overtly caricatured.

the unconscious of American multiculturalism, the persistent racialist mindset beneath the "post-racial" rhetoric that requires a Chinese background to simultaneously un-censor and purify itself. Just like the political exchanges between the two countries, *Mulan* reveals an unproductive and often unconscious pattern of comparison that reduces the other country to a foil onto which one's own can project the evil of ethno-racial prejudice.

What this book does is counter this negative, incriminating mode of comparison by offering a few alternatives. It not only critiques the limitations of both U.S. multiculturalism and China's ethnic policy during the post-Cold War period, but also shows the unexpected continuities and connections between the two projects, placing them in a shared context of the global experiment in viable structures for multiethnic nations. The genesis of my thoughts on these questions lies primarily in my involvement with Asian American literary studies. Diasporic Chinese American narratives, including works by Maxine Hong Kingston, Alex Kuo, and Yan Geling, provide important material and viable conceptual models for a new form of transnational or comparative critique. Addressing both Chinese and American histories and literary traditions and at times obtaining an "afterlife" through actual translation into a different language, these narratives provide perspectives on U.S.-China connections that are rarely glimpsed in other forms of cultural production. They also comment suggestively on *how* these connections can be drawn. Kuo, in particular, ruminates on the conflicting implications of metaphor to propose a model of critical comparison that draws linkages between two disparate political and cultural contexts without positing an easy symmetry. Chinese American narratives, thus, enable me to construct the kind of comparative critique that I enact here. Grappling with such narratives, I contend, helps propel Asian American studies into more active collaborations with contiguous fields, including American studies and East Asian studies, thus furthering its

transformation from a field organized around a group of embodied subjects into a loosely associated set of provocations in existing discourses about the conditions and implications of subjectivation and identity formation in different but related national contexts. The intellectual sizzle that comes from crossing Asian/Chinese American literary studies with comparative multiculturalisms is what my project seeks to capture.

A Note on the Text

Most Chinese names (not including Chinese American names) are given in the order of family name followed by given name. Exceptions include names of Chinese writers and scholars that customarily appear in the Western style. The pinyin Romanization system is used for all Chinese proper names. Unless otherwise noted, quotes from Chinese-language material are my own translations.

INTRODUCTION

> Whatever the explanation, Asia is witnessing the rise of "identity politics." People are mobilizing along ethnic, religious, racial, and cultural lines, and demanding recognition of their identity, acknowledgement of their legal rights and historic claims, and a commitment to the sharing of power.
>
> ---- Baogang He and Will Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism in Asia*

> A double critique, "an other thinking," would lead to the openness of the "unforeseeable diversity of the world" and of "unheard and unexpected" forms of knowledge, as argued by Glissant (1998).
>
> ---- Walter D. Mignolo, *Border Thinking*

Pluralist Universalism: An Asian Americanist Critique of U.S. and Chinese Multiculturalisms provides a comparison of U.S. liberal multiculturalism and China's policy toward minority nationalities that does not ascribe a fundamental otherness to either side. It argues that U.S. liberal multiculturalism and China's policy toward minority nationalities are two increasingly intertwined components of contemporary multiculturalism, which we do well to conceive of as a global movement that draws upon different intellectual and political traditions and responds to different local conditions. They are two different but not entirely incongruous forms of pluralism that have increasingly come to bear on each other, through translation (with China at the translating end for the most part) and other kinds of discursive mediation, since the end of the Cold War. A number of historians and cultural critics have intervened in the Cold War discourse of the ideological rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union by demonstrating that, throughout the twentieth century, notions of racial and ethnic equality in the U.S. were

affected by U.S.-Soviet relations and American perceptions of the Soviet nationalities policy.[10] The similar task of complicating the U.S.-China binary in the post-Cold War era, which inevitably requires different approaches, has not been seriously attempted.

Using the term multiculturalism to describe conceptions of racial and ethnic relations in both the U.S. and China does not flatten the differences between the two contexts; rather, it entails a plea for a globalized, non-normative understanding of this very familiar idea. In political and social theory, multiculturalism has picked up different and sometimes conflicting meanings since the early 1970s, when it became the name for Canada's official policy of promoting immigrant languages and cultures. Most conceptions of multiculturalism in existing literature presume that it is a phenomenon peculiar to Western liberal democracies, and are thus too narrow to accommodate the multiplicity of cultural pluralisms in the world. I detach multiculturalism from political ideology, defining it as a corrective to what one may call unitary nationalism, which predicates itself upon a homogeneous conception of national culture and interests. Embodied in state legislation, government policies, social programs, and cultural and political movements, multiculturalism promotes group-specific rights that aim to help ethnic and racial minorities sustain their societal cultures and counter the effects of their forced integration into the majority nation or, alternatively, exclusion from it. These rights often include, understood differently in different contexts, political autonomy, fair political representation, preferential treatment in education and employment, and institutional support for certain languages and cultural practices. Multiculturalism, to borrow from Bhikhu Parekh, can be seen

[10] See Mary Dudziac, *Cold War Civil Rights*; Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain*; Steven S Lee, "Cold War Multiculturalism" and "Borat, Multiculturalism, Mnogonatsional'nost'." Dudziac explains the way in which the Cold War both helped produce and placed severe limits upon the civil rights reform in U.S. from 1946 through the mid-1960s. Baldwin focuses on black American intellectuals' interactions with the Soviet Union between 1922 and 1963 to reassess at once the impact of Soviet internationalism on the political visions of black America and U.S. black modernism. Steven Lee's work, still in dissertation form, proposes that U.S. multiculturalism experienced a turn away from internationalism in the era following the Civil Rights Movement in part because of the pervasive disillusionment with the Soviet nationalities policy.

as a form of "pluralist universalism"— it acknowledges simultaneously the importance of cultivating common values and practices as a basis for a functional national identity and that of addressing the particular needs of historically disadvantaged ethno-racial groups.[11] It is a profoundly political project that serves to mediate between the imperative of national coherence and assertions of minority difference, so that their conflicts do not come to a head. Most states in the world today are multiethnic, via colonization and voluntary or involuntary migration, and many have been compelled, by the pressure of minority insurgences or the international promotion of group rights, to implement a certain form of multiculturalism, redefining national identity in a way that accommodates minority demands for autonomy or equality.

As it functions to counter, or at least contain, ethno-racial tensions, multiculturalism cannot simply be equated with narrow identitarianism or communitarianism.[12] That it oftentimes seeks to contain, rather than fundamentally confront, the political conflicts among different ethnic and racial groups subjects multiculturalism, not unjustly, to the criticism that it accords merely formal or symbolic recognition to minorities, masks structural inequalities, and distracts from the goal of social redistribution.[13] However, the limitations of certain configurations of multiculturalism should not be a reason for rejecting the entire idea. Even superficial forms of

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[11] Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism,* 126-136. Parekh uses the term to define a conception of human cultures that departs from both hegemonic universalism and unprincipled relativism. I use it to describe an attitude toward cultural differences within a nation-state

[12] This view that multiculturalism equals communitarianism was more prevalent in the theoretical discussions of multiculturalism in the 1990s and it remains a popular understanding in both conservative and radical quarters. See Slovaj Zizek, "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism," 26. The author warns leftist intellectuals against subscribing to the dominant fiction of group identity and modeling progressive movements upon the logic of communitarianism or popularism, which, for Zizek, always entails pernicious practices of exclusion and easily slides into ethnic fundamentalism. Instead he urges them to shift their focus from the cultural to the political, to offer a program for *égaliberté* that seeks to transform the public space of civil society and active responsible citizenship—the fight for human rights, ecology and so forth. *Pace* Zizek, I do not reduce multiculturalism to a narrow particularism, but instead emphasize the political, dynamic nature of contemporary multiculturalisms, defining them as discursive and political battles that continue to re-shape the configurations of national identity and political universalism.

[13] For two of the most oft-cited criticisms of multiculturalism's neglect of structural inequalities, see Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Identity*; Michael Waltzer, "Multiculturalism and Individualism."

multiculturalism open the door to broad discussions, in scholarly circles as well as the public sphere, of multiple understandings of national solidarity—social democratic v.s. culturalist, for example—and possible ways of making it compatible with the goals of equality and justice. This point is particularly important to emphasize given that the victory of multiculturalism over the arguably bigger evil of overtly oppressive or exclusionary forms of nationalism is by no means clear. As Anne Phillips points out, there has been much talk of the "death of multiculturalism" in recent years in Britain and continental Europe, among other parts of the world. [14] Even though U.S. liberal multiculturalism and China's policy toward ethnic minorities are both severely constrained, working more often to conceal deep-seated social tensions than to openly address them, both have provoked or helped fuel alternative conceptions of pluralism in their respective context.

Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka, one of the most influential and prolific theorists of multiculturalism, has most consistently written about this subject in relation to nationalism, defining it expressly as a project integral to the process of "nation-building." [15] It is not a coincidence that Kymlicka and his collaborators are also major proponents of a global, comparative approach to multiculturalism. The understanding of multiculturalism as an instrument of nation formation both necessitates and enables a collection of case studies from states other than Western liberal democracies. As Jacob T. Levy points out, Kymlicka is an important practitioner of "contextualist political theory" who remains sensitive to the specific

[14] Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture*, 5. One can make a similar argument for post-9/11 America as well, with renewed outcry against "political correctness" and the vaunted rhetoric of a "post-racial" society.
[15] Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular*, 23-27. Kymlicka believes that academic debates around multiculturalism have undergone three stages. The first stage revolved around the merit of the perceived communitarianism of minority groups, the second stage focused on the implications of multiculturalism for traditional political liberalism, and the third, current stage emphasizes the relationship between multiculturalism and nation-building. The three stages, of course, do not have to be seen as a linear sequence.

circumstances surrounding different instances of pluralism.[16] Kymlicka's work emphasizes the undiminishing urgency of the project of nation-building in the contemporary era of globalization, pointing out that states with drastically different histories and political systems, ranging from the post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe to the various postcolonial societies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, share the task of forging national identities while addressing minority demands for autonomy and equality. Liberal multiculturalism has spread its influence around the world, especially among intellectual elites, but the actual policies addressing minority needs vary widely from country to country.[17] Kymlicka and his collaborators, among others, have produced a substantial amount of work that constitutes an emerging discourse on comparative multiculturalisms.[18]

Extrapolating from this emerging discourse, I contend that, as a political project central to the process of nation-building, multiculturalism does not have to be grounded in liberal theories of rights and justice. Political liberalism provides a particular set of conditions and challenges for multiculturalism, but it does not define multiculturalism. The liberal emphasis on individual rights has been conceived as both a foundation for and impediment to the promotion of group rights in multiculturalism, but these rights can also derive from other political and cultural traditions.[19] As I will point out in more detail later in this introduction, although Kymlicka's work gestures clearly toward an expansive view of multiculturalism through his various case

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[16] Jacob T. Levy, "Contextualism, Constitutionalism, and *modus Vivendi*," 183.

[17] Will Kymlicka provides a vivid testimonial to this growing interest among global elites in liberal models of multiculturalism. See *Multicultural Odysseys*. The author has been participating in "seminars, workshops, and advisory groups" on the formulation of international norms of minority rights in "some two dozen countries, from Ethiopia to Estonia, from Syria to Sri Lanka, from Mexico to Moldova," where he has watched the diffusion of liberal concepts and discourses "through academia, civil society, and the bureaucracy" (7).

[18] See Grant H. Cornwell and Eve Walsh Stoddard, *Global Multiculturalism*; Ella Shoha and Robert Stam, *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*; Milan Mesic, *Perspectives of Multiculturalism*.

[19] In regard to how multiculturalism both derives from and challenges the tenet of individual rights and that of the common rights of citizenship, see Joseph Raz, "Multiculturalism;" Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*; Kimlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*. For forms of multiculturalism outside the liberal framework, see N. Ganesan's discussion of Malaysia's consociationalism and Chua Beng Huat's discussion of Singapore's communitarian model of multiculturalism.

studies, it remains invested in using these case studies to test the feasibility of the global diffusion of conceptions of liberal justice. For Kymlicka, in other words, a global perspective on multiculturalism entails, for a big part, understanding the conditions for and means of transplanting liberal multiculturalism into various local contexts. By contrast, I see multiculturalism as an inherently global phenomenon with many interrelated components that compete with and influence one another. I will elaborate in Chapter One that U.S. and Chinese multiculturalisms can be seen respectively as a liberal and a socialist version of cultural pluralism that have come into increasing contestations and contact in the post-Cold War era. I adopt this expansive understanding of multiculturalism not to erase all distinctions between U.S. liberal multiculturalism and China's nationalities policy, but to provide a conceptual basis for the comparative project that I undertake here, which aims to illuminate the different but related ways in which nation-building projects impact racial and ethnic minorities in the two countries, thus unsettling the habitual practice, espoused by both, of elevating one system over the other.

This is not to say, however, that my study *inaugurates* a way of mediating between U.S. and Chinese ethno-racial politics across a chasm of mutual misconceptions. Rather, it builds on the comparative perspectives articulated in the literary writings produced in the two countries since the early 1990s, including, in particular, Chinese American fiction (defined broadly, including texts written in both English and Chinese). These writings constitute a rare alternative to the common practice of pitting U.S. liberal multiculturalism and China's nationalities policy against each other by illustrating the interlinked social contexts to which they respond in the post-Cold War era and reflecting upon the political functions and structural limitations that they share. If, as I have argued, it is both important and intellectually viable to study the two systems as two related components of the global movement of multiculturalism, this study must give a

crucial role to fictional narratives from Chinese America. They provide a crucial but overlooked source of insights into the relations between U.S. and Chinese multiculturalisms. My book reveals, analyzes, and structures itself on the basis of the logic of these narratives.

Narrative fiction and fictionalized narratives, then, constitute a supplement to social science discourses, allowing us to question and dislodge the liberal biases built into normative definitions of multiculturalism. If multiculturalism's mediation of the conflicts between national unity and minority differences continuously changes the connotations of both of these terms, the ways in which this very mediation proceeds should not be a fixed matter either. As a form of pluralist universalism, in other words, multiculturalism is best reconceived in a way that simultaneously universalizes and pluralizes it. Multiculturalism, indeed, is itself in need of being "multiculturalized." Through an analysis of the narrative texts included in this study, I project a fluid conception of multiculturalism that is more encompassing *and* more accurate than the normative liberal conception. I do not subsume heterogeneous ethnic policies under one coherent model, but instead make the idea of multiculturalism more accommodating to actually-existing, competing modes of ethnic and racial integration. In the meantime, as I trace how multiculturalism has played out in related ways in Chinese American, and Chinese and American, narratives from the post-Cold War period, I offer a comparative, dual critique of contemporary American and Chinese nations.

Strategic Doubling

In 2006, the prolific but under-discussed Chinese American author Alex Kuo published his novel *Panda Diaries*, which he drafted in 1991 and 1992, when he visited China as a foreign teacher. In the novel, Kuo juxtaposes the Indian policies of the nineteenth-century U.S. with the

Chinese government's efforts to integrate ethnic minorities into the project of socialist modernization during the Cultural Revolution. This comparison involves time-space configurations that are apparently distanced from the post-Cold War moment in which the novel was written and published. It is, however, a comparison that can be read as a response to the later moment, when the U.S. and China both claim a genuine form of cultural pluralism, often over and against each other. Kuo's juxtaposition of the two unsavory historical moments throws these claims into question by highlighting the colonization of minority space that has occurred in the process of national expansion in both countries. His comparison also intervenes in the emerging discourse in China that parallels the Chinese government's ongoing campaign to develop its western regions, which have a high concentration of minorities, with the American westward expansion, a parallel that largely serves as a justification for prioritizing the state's conception of economic and social development over minority interests.

Chinese immigrant writer Yan Geling, one of the best known of her generation, provides another example of a simultaneous critique of U.S. and Chinese multiculturalisms. Her 1996 Chinese-language novel *Fusang*, set in nineteenth-century San Francisco, portrays a Chinese prostitute as an embodiment of a new form of subjectivity by turning sexual slavery into a voluntary act that disturbs the regimes of race and gender in nineteenth-century America. Widely read among Chinese-speaking audiences in both the U.S. and China, this novel reached an English-speaking audience through a translation in 2001. The capacious, amorphous subjectivity embodied by the character of Fusang, thus, came into conflict with the logic of mainstream multiculturalisms in both the U.S. and China. The story of Fusang departs drastically from the familiar narrative of Asian American female empowerment that operates as a testimonial to the dissolution of racial barriers in the United States. At the same time, the

ambiguous characterization of the female protagonist also resists appropriations by Chinese readers and critics, who habitually read Asian American characters like Fusang as a symbol of a united, though ethnically diverse, Chinese nation grappling with the legacies of Western imperialism and racism.

The examples of Yan and Kuo, both of whom are studied in all their complexity in my book, demonstrate that Chinese American and Chinese immigrant fiction plays a crucial role in modeling a conceptual framework within which one can study U.S. and Chinese multiculturalisms as two comparable, interrelated processes of mediation between the imperative of national coherence and minority demands for autonomy and equality. The model, to borrow from Argentinian critic Walter Mignolo, can be called "double critique." Mignolo uses the term largely in relation to Moroccan philosopher Abdelhebir Khatibi's critique of both "the domain of Western metaphysics" and the "theological realm of Islamic thought."[20] It is a critique that grapples with the legacy of French colonialism in Maghreb and Arabic nationalism simultaneously. For Mignolo, Khatibi's double critique signals the practice of thinking from multiple discursive lineages and yet none of them, thus generating subaltern knowledge that did not previously exist before the very act of mediation. It does not constitute a transcendent vision, but a site of irreducible epistemic difference. The concept of double critique, along with its various critical cognates, resonates strongly with the logic of *Panda Diaries* and *Fusang*.[21] Studying these works helps illuminate the shared limitations of U.S. and Chinese conceptions of ethnic and racial difference and the connections between the two (for example, the relationship between China's official and popular nationalism and the translation of postcolonial theory from the U.S. to China). The logic of double critique in their works is naturally affiliated with the

[20] Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 68.
[21] Mignolo cites Dubois's double consciousness, Anzaldúa's new mestiza consciousness, and Glissant's creolization, among others, border thinking as concepts akin to double critique. See Mignolo, 77, 84.

emerging discourse of comparative multiculturalisms in that it also engages in comparisons that are sensitive to both parallels and differences, but it challenges the latter by refusing to establish, even implicitly, a normative conception of ethnoracial justice against which others are measured. Kuo and Yan address both the U.S. and Chinese contexts so as to allow them to de-center and defamiliarize each other, holding up a distorting mirror to each other so that neither figures as a model or positive exception.

Double critique is not an idea extraneous to Chinese American writings. In 1943, Lin Yutang published a collection of essays titled *Between Tears and Laughter* with John Day. Having written a string of books, including *My Country and My People*, that made him the first best-selling Chinese author in America, Lin waded into international politics in the new book. In the essays, he critiques the Allies' neglect of struggles for decolonization and national liberation in Asia, pointing out that their wartime rhetoric of freedom contradicted their begrudging of freedom to their colonies in Asia. In contrast to lopsided, imperialist views of the world, Lin advocates for a "binocular vision," a comparative, transnational perspective that traces how such ideas as freedom pick up different meanings in different national contexts.[22] Lin's venture into political commentaries hurt his own popularity in the U.S., but the idea of a "binocular vision" survived, re-emerging in Chinese American narratives of later eras.

Double critique does not assume that the two things being organized into one critical framework occupy symmetrical positions in their respective cultural and political contexts. There are no such neutral grounds in any comparative projects. I do not assume, that is to say, that the question of race and ethnicity has the same resonance for readers on both sides of the Pacific. Instead, I consider double critique as a form of "strategic doubling," along the logic of strategic essentialism. Strategic essentialism re-appropriates existing identity categories,

[22] Lin Yutang, *Between Tears and Laughter*, 40.

including racial and ethnic ones, so as to transform the disciplinary force inherent in them into subversive energy. Likewise, "strategic doubling" responds critically to the conventional manners in which racial and ethnic issues in the two countries are compared, explicitly or implicitly, in popular culture and official political rhetoric.

I not only study how Chinese American authors like Kuo and Yan mediate between two different national contexts, but also extend the logic of "strategic doubling" embodied in their narratives. Comparative insights into U.S. and Chinese multiculturalisms can derive not only from transnational narratives that straddle different national spaces, but also from the critical practice of juxtaposing and comparing narratives that emanate from within these spaces. Both U.S. and Chinese authors have addressed the relationship between national identity and minority difference in the form of fictional narratives, a genre that allows for more diverse and nuanced perspectives than the more overtly political genres. Some of them demonstrate that, over the past two decades, U.S liberal multiculturalism and China's ethnic policy have been conceived and questioned in related ways. Clive Cussler's *Treasure of Khan* (2006, translated into Chinese as *kehan de baozang* in 2008) and Jiang Rong's *Lang Tuteng* (2004, translated into English as *The Wolf Totem* in 2008), both bestsellers when first published, illuminate some of the common denominators of the popular views of nation and ethnicity in the two countries. Hui Muslim writer Zhang Chengzhi's *Xinling Shi* (1991) and Arab American writer Rabih Alameddine's *Koolaids: The Art of War* (1998), on the other hand, call our attention to the ways in which these popular views are questioned in Muslim writings. Double critique, then, is a mode of critique embodied both in the Chinese American fictional narratives I study and in the connections I draw between previously unrelated Chinese and U.S. narratives.

Re-reading *The Woman Warrior*, Yet Again

Authors like Kuo and Yan, of course, do not work in a vacuum. Double critique is not an exclusive product of the post-Cold War period, though it is particularly important for this period, one that has seen increased U.S.-China cultural relations, the ascent of both Chinese nationalism and U.S. global hegemony, and the resurgence of the question of ethnicity on a global level. This section studies Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* as an earlier example of what double critique may look like as a literary practice. Kingston has often been thought of as one of the first to "create in literature a sui generis [Chinese American] reality."[23] She breaks the silence imposed upon Chinese in America not by acting as a cultural informant, but by offering consciously subjective, personalized narratives of Chinese history and cultural traditions. In other words, Kingston disavows conventional notions of narrative authority that customarily deny access to marginalized social groups. I endorse this reading of Kingston, but believe that more attention is to be paid to exactly *how* she handles her Chinese sources and how the descriptions of China and the U.S. interact in *The Woman Warrior*. If the book bodies forth a singularly Chinese American reality or consciousness, it contains surprising dimensions that are yet unexplored.

About thirty years before Disney's *Mulan* came out, Kingston drew upon Mulan's story in her 1976 work *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston's version of the story carries much more nuance than the one from Disney. Unlike the movie, Kingston's book interweaves the experiences of the protagonist-narrator, a Chinese American teenage girl, in the postwar U.S. and

[23] For the most well-known article on this topic, see Sau-ling Wong, "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour?" 48. Wong makes a case for the claiming of artistic freedom, as we see in Kingston's imagining of China, as an anti-racist narrative strategy. Also see Robert G. Lee, "*The Woman Warrior* as an Intervention in Asian American Historiography;" Mark Chiang, *The Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies*, Chapter Three. Both Lee and Chiang argue that the anxiety of representation in *The Woman Warrior*, its constant move to question its rendering of Chinese history, constitutes a major impulse underlying much Asian American literature. Chiang ascribes the same impulse to Asian American literary criticism as well.

Chinese folklore and culture that the narrator reconstructs from a familial oral tradition. Whereas the Disney movie *Mulan* contains an expression of the unconscious of contemporary multicultural America, which requires China to un-censor and purify itself, *The Woman Warrior* is a much more conscious exploration of the formal and political implications entailed in juxtaposing notions of race and ethnicity from the two countries. Kingston's subtly presented critique of what is amiss in both countries' ethnic and racial dynamics foreshadowed the later Chinese American writings that I study, gesturing toward a history of Asian American critical comparativism that dates back to at least the Cold War era.

The Woman Warrior, the most widely read and taught work in Asian American literature, incited a long-standing debate in Asian American literature. The debate centers on the cultural work performed by the representations of Chinese history and culture in Kingston and Chinese American writings in general. As Colleen Lye points out in a recent essay, Chinese American literature, unlike other sub-categories of Asian American literature, has been characterized by an "exoticist presentation of ancestral culture" since at least the 1930s.[24] This phenomenon, which Lye sees as a formal correlative of the "unevenness of Asian American panethnicity," [25] has largely been discussed as either a symptom of U.S. Orientalism, which authorizes a set of racial stereotypes that permeate the Asian American imaginary, or an effort to "displace" or undermine these stereotypes.[26] My reading of *The Woman Warrior* takes the discussion into a new direction.[27] I argue that Kingston's incorporation of redacted Chinese folklore into a narrative

[24] Colleen Lye, "The Sino-Japanese Conflict of Asian American Literature," 43.
[25] Ibid., 45.
[26] David Leiwei Li, "The Production of Chinese American Tradition," 319.
[27] One must qualify this statement by pointing out that Sau-ling Wong offers a useful discussion of how "a few traditional Chinese literary sources have been altered to serve as commentary on the narrator's Chinese American reality," though she does not touch on the issues I discuss here. See "Kingston's Handling of Traditional Chinese Sources," 28. Also see Feng Lan, "The Female Individual and the Empire." Lan traces the permutations in the figure of Mulan through the several renditions of her story in Chinese literature, finding that Kingston's portrayal of

about growing up in the Cold War U.S. prefigured the comparative, doubly-critical politics of post-Cold War Chinese American narratives, even as it attests to the bewilderment with which Chinese Americans struggle with the "mass of unexplained cultural data" about Chinese culture and customs transmitted from their parents.[28] Read closely, the novel that marked a watershed moment in Asian American literature turns out, surprisingly, to have heralded the project of comparative multiculturalisms undertaken in this study.

The second chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, titled "White Tigers," centers on an extended fantasy on the part of the Chinese American girl narrator, in which a Chinese girl follows a bird into the mountains and meets an old couple, who adopt her and train her in martial arts. After she returns to her birth village as a young woman, she protects her father from being conscripted by the imperial army and then leads an army of rebels toward Peiping, the capital, where they overthrow the Emperor and install a peasant, one of their own, on the throne. Having accomplished the impossible, the warrior woman returns to her village to confront the baron who has been oppressing the villagers. She beheads him and metes out well-justified punishment to his family and servants who had been involved in evil deeds. Inspired by the Chinese folklore that the narrator's mother passes down to her as an oral tradition, the figure of the warrior woman is clearly the narrator's expression of her desire for empowerment, confronted as she is with socially debilitating injustices: prejudice against girls within the Chinese American community, racism against Chinese in America (which has gendered implications as well), and the Communist rule in China (which the narrator believes had robbed her family of their farm).

Critics have found this fantasy troubling for various reasons. Those familiar with the Chinese sources of the mother's stories that the narrator reinvents in the fantasy have pointed out

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the heroin embraces the Confucian and Communist doctrines about women's social position in some ways while deviating from them in others.

[28] Sau-ling Wong, "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour?" 45.

that, in creating the figure of the young warrior woman, Kingston blends together two of the most beloved folk heroes in Chinese history. The more obvious one is Fa Mu Lan (Hua Mulan), whom the narrator refers to in the beginning of "White Tigers" as a figure she has heard about from her mother. Fa Mu Lan is a household name in China, the protagonist of the "Ballad of Mulan," commonly believed to have originated during the Northern Wei (386-534A.D.). Mulan is known for being in the imperial army for twelve years disguised as a man to protect her aged father from conscription.[29] A less overt subtext for the narrator's fantasy is the story of Yue Fei (1103-1142A.D.), a general during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279A.D.) celebrated for his unwavering loyalty to the Emperor and his valiant but failed attempts to recover northern China from the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234A.D.), ruled by the Jurchens. Although Yue Fei is more of a verifiable historical figure than Mulan, the lives of both have been mythologized in various stories and legends in China. The narrator's fantasy invokes Yue Fei with the detail that the swordswoman's parents carved words of resolve and revenge into her bare back before she leads the army of rebels to the capital. Yue Fei is known for having borne the tattoo "*Jinzhong baoguo*" [Serve the Country with Utmost Loyalty] on his back. The conflation of the two unrelated folk heroes in Kingston seems simply disrespectful to some of her critics,[30] but more pernicious to others. Frank Chin's famous parody of the fantasy section of "White Tigers" compares the liberties Kingston takes with Yue Fei, by fusing him with a female figure, to

[29] The date of the composition of the "Ballad of Mulan" is uncertain. Today it is most commonly introduced (to Chinese students and common Chinese readers) as a ballad from the Northern Wei Dynasty, composed in a folk style called "*yuefu*." Some point out, however, that the ballad, like many folk songs, were collective creations. The basic form of the ballad we see today was most likely to have emerged during Northern Wei, but it probably derived from earlier sources and continued to be revised through the subsequent dynasties. See He Yuping, "'Mulanci' chuangzuo shidai yu zuozhe zhi tanjiu" [A Study of the Composition and Authorship of the "Ballad of Mulan"].
[30] Zhang Ya-Jie, "A Chinese Woman's Response to Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*." As a Chinese professor who visited the U.S. at one point, Zhang writes that she first reacted negatively to the stories in *The Woman Warrior*, finding them "somewhat twisted" (17).

defiling Joan of Arc by portraying her as a lesbian to a Chinese audience.[31] For Chin, Kingston's disregard for the authenticity of Chinese history and folklore perpetuates the "Christian social Darwinist stereotype" of Chinese culture as despicably misogynistic, and, additionally, the transmission of the deed of a male hero onto a female one promotes an Asian American feminist agenda at the expense of Chinese American men, who are deprived of a chance to connect with the powerful male archetypes in the Chinese folk tradition.[32] The Kingston-Chin debate sparked a series of critical responses, which mostly seek to establish a common ground between Chin's search for viable models for Asian American masculinity and Kingston's critique of the structural causes for the various challenges facing Asian American women.[33] Both, in other words, are seen as deeply concerned with the implications of racialization for the configurations of gender and sexuality in Asian America.

These responses, however, do not address directly Chin's argument for more authentic, faithful representations of Chinese culture and history. It is perhaps because the notion of authenticity, when understood as factual accuracy, sounds inherently naïve and unsupportable. For Chin, however, authenticity matters because Chinese folklore, understood in its own context, does not figure Chinese patriarchy the same way as Kingston does in her novel, but instead contains a range of admirable male figures who can provide important cultural resources for Chinese American men as they struggle against exclusion from the prevailing model of

[31] See Frank Chin, "The Most Popular Book in China."
[32] Frank Chin et al, *The Big Aiiieeeee*, 29.
[33] King-kok Cheung, "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific;" David Eng, *Racial Castration*. Cheung summarizes the debate as one that construes a dichotomy between "feminism and heroism," between "Chinese American women and men" (113). She believes that this dichotomy can be deconstructed when Chinese American woman writers "find a way to negotiate the tangle of sexual and racial politics in all its intricacies" (127), and Kingston, she argues, does just that in not only *The Woman Warrior*, but her subsequent works as well. Eng revisits this debate, agreeing that "Asian American activists and critics must refrain from seeking antifeminist solutions to predicaments of Asian American masculinity" (16).

masculinity in mainstream American society.[34] Chin's point will sound more interesting to Asian Americanistists if one just reframes it slightly, as an argument against Asian American writers' employment of China as a source of cultural material that can be taken out of context and transformed at will to fit the themes at hand. Understood this way, Chin is calling for authenticity not in terms of mere factual accuracy, but in terms of adequate contextualization. Implicit in Chin's critique of Kingston is an argument that, even as Asian American writers insist justly on the distinctions between Asia and Asian America and reject the demand for "authentic" representations of Asia, they need to avoid mystifying Asia in a way that perpetuates existing stereotypes in American culture. In light of Chin's challenge, then, how does one rethink Kingston's novel? Does she take the stories of Mulan and Yue Fei out of context and blend them together irresponsibly? Or does she re-contextualize their stories in "White Tigers" according to a certain narrative logic? Reading carefully, we can see that Kingston is not simply using the story of the warrior woman to make a point about the empowerment of Asian American women; she also places the story within the context of the historical relationship between the Han Chinese and the nomadic peoples on China's northern borders, some of whom were eventually incorporated into the administrative structures of China and identified as "minority nationalities" after the founding of the PRC. Existing criticisms of *The Woman Warrior* completely overlook Kingston's representations of ethnic dynamics that affected both feudal and modern China, which are in fact intertwined with the author's commentaries on race relations in Cold War America.

In the passage right before her army scores its final victory over the Emperor, the warrior woman surveys the capital from the top of a hill:

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[34] Chin, *The Big Aiiieeeee*, 30-52.

> … Between roads the woods and plains move too; the land was peopled—the Han people, the People of One Hundred Surnames, marching with one heart, our tatters flying. The depth and width of Joy were exactly known to me: the Chinese population.[35]

The warrior woman's adoration for the Han people here is certainly at odds with the historical circumstances surrounding the figure of Mulan in Chinese folklore. The Northern Wei Dynasty originated from the nomadic Xian Bei tribe. While it was subsequently influenced by Han culture and eventually subsumed under the Sui Dynasty, ruled by the Han, Northern Wei was certainly non-Han in its origin. The original "Ballad of Mulan," in fact, contains both Han and non-Han elements as a result of the mutual penetration of different cultures during the Northern Wei. The draft call answered by Mulan is issued by "*ke han*" (khan), the title for the leaders of a number of nomadic peoples that destabilized China's northern frontiers throughout history. One can certainly argue that, by combining the story of Mulan and that of Yue Fei, Kingston erases an important distinction between the two figures in terms of their ethnic affiliation, as well as their gender. To be fair, this distinction has been all but erased even within China. The Northern Wei was eventually incorporated into China and the Chinese today hardly remember the non-Han identity of the "khan" that Mulan serves in the ballad. Nevertheless, one may find Mulan's emphatic love for and identification with the "Chinese population" in "White Tigers" out of place.

One way of explaining this passage is that it fits well into a pattern of romanticization that runs through the entire fantasy section in "White Tigers." Kingston not only transforms Mulan from a loyal soldier of the khan's in the original ballad into a leader of a peasant rebellion, a warrior against feudalism and patriarchy. She also diffuses the ethnic elements of the original story, suppressing not only the differences between Mulan and the Han and but also the war that

[35] Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 42.

Mulan enlists to fight in the original ballad, a war that has been identified as a successful campaign against a neighboring confederation of nomadic tribes, the Rouran.[36] Kingston's Mulan, therefore, is cleansed of any involvement in violent encounters among the various peoples inhabiting China's northern borderlands. By extension, Kingston also alters the Han-centric tone of Yue Fei's story, distancing the general from the war against the Jurchens that makes him a celebrated hero in the Chinese national imaginary. We can argue that Kingston consciously merges Mulan into the "Chinese population" as a gesture toward rejecting rigid ethno-racial or cultural divisions. She re-contextualizes Chinese folklore so as to stage a kind of romanticization, or critical romanticization, that challenges ethnicity-based, as well as gender- and class-based, hierarchies in Chinese history.

Kingston's critique of Chinese history, moreover, is also an implied critique of Cold War America. The narrator's fantasy in "White Tigers" contains an intriguing dream scene, where the Chinese girl, at the end of a survival test (part of her training under the old couple) that exhausts her, sees a vision of "two people made of gold dancing the earth's dances."[37] The dancers appear to be "Chinese lion dancers," but then morph into "African lion dancers in midstep," and their dance is accompanied by "Javanese bells," which deepen "in midring to Indian bells, Hindu Indians, American Indian."[38] At this point in the fantasy section, the Chinese girl becomes a conduit for an ideal form of cultural pluralism that the novel's Chinese American narrator derives from and wishes for Cold War America. This illogical detail can be read as an instance of deliberate conflation that punctures the fantastical nature of the entire middle section of "White Tigers" and the author's conscious disavowal of factual accuracy. In light of the

[36] Zhong Jialian and Ye Xinyuan, "'Yanshan huji' dang zhishui?" [What are the Referents of "Yan Mountain Barbarian Calvary"?], 147. Also see Feng Lan, 231.
[37] Kingston, 27.
[38] Ibid.

overall structure of *The Woman Warrior*—the girl narrator's memories of her and her family's experience of settling in America interwoven with redacted folktales from China—the easily-missed detail hints at an emerging Chinese American consciousness that simultaneously rebukes the racial injustice that silences the narrator's "'chink' words" in the Cold War U.S. and the Han-centrism that motivates the lionization of Yue Fei at various points in Chinese history.[39] It suggests that both American and Chinese cultures are burdened with a history of racism or ethnocentrism that might be counterbalanced by imaginings of a fluid kind of pluralism, which allows all cultures to converge with and infiltrate each other.

Kingston amplifies this point at the end of the novel's last chapter "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," projecting a full-blown vision of how the racial and ethnic boundaries might be made porous in both Chinese and American contexts. She presents an imaginary moment of ethnic amalgamation during imperial China as a comment on the possibility of racial reconciliation in Cold War America. Kingston ends the last chapter, and the entire text of *The Woman Warrior*, with the story of Ts'ai Yen (Cai Yan), a Han noble woman who was captured by the Hsiung-nu (Xiongnu) in her twenties. Ts'ai Yen is a real historical figure documented to have been born circa 177 AD. She was eventually ransomed by the Han people, though forced to leave her two young sons behind. Upon return, she composed long poems based on the rhythm of the Hsiung-nu music with which she became familiar, expressing the sorrow of having had to choose between homeland and motherhood. As with all the other folk material she invokes, Kingston takes liberties with this story, rendering the encounter between Ts'ai Yen and the Hsiung-nu into a process of mutual understanding. Though Kingston refers to the Hsiung-nu as "barbarians," invoking the common English translation of *hu* (the epithet that the Han people used historically to refer to the Xiongnu), she works to deconstruct the self-other split entailed in

[39] Ibid., 53.

both the Chinese term and its English translation. When Ts'ai stays with the "barbarians," she listens to the sound of their flute, eventually learning to imitate this sound in her own songs about her life back home. Although the "barbarians" cannot follow her words entirely, they catch a few "barbarian phrases about forever wandering" and become mesmerized by her voice.[40] Before too long, the "barbarians" join Ts'ai in an invented ritual of mourning, sitting in a ring around her as she sings to their music in a hybridized language. When Ts'ai returns to the Han people, she brings them an appreciation of a different culture by composing songs in the "barbarian" style, the most famous of which is titled "Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" (a literal translation of "*Huqia shiba pai*," reputed to have been authored by Ts'ai). The song "translate[s] well," the narrator points out in the very last sentence of the novel, suggesting that Ts'ai had turned her experience of captivity into a condition for cultural mediation.[41] Kingston's reappropriation of Ts'ai Yen's story can certainly be read as a continuation of her romanticization of historical Han-"barbarian" relations in "White Tigers," but it also comments on contemporary American culture. The chapter concluded by the Ts'ai Yen story contains the oft-discussed passage where the girl narrator tortures another Chinese American girl at school and then falls mysteriously ill. If that passage emblematizes the psychic and physical symptoms of the racial trauma sustained and transmitted by Asian Americans, then the Han-"barbarian" reconciliation that Ts'ai Yen helps broker models an idealized solution to it.

We can argue at this point that, although Kingston does not address the political conditions in the PRC or its nationalities policy in significant ways in *The Woman Warrior*, she does present a few moments from an imaginary historical China, inherited by the PRC in 1949, that was shaped in the midst of continuous contact and conflicts between the Han and other

[40] Ibid., 209.
[41] Ibid., 209.

peoples around them. Weaving together the ethno-cultural dynamics in imperial China and the experiences of racial minorities in the contemporary U.S. in her narrative, Kingston stages a critique of both histories while mining them for imperfect but valuable models of ethno-racial reconciliation. With *The Woman Warrior*, therefore, Kingston offers a uniquely Chinese American perspective on U.S-China relations, a perspective that was unusual during the Cold War and remains so today. Although the novel has been canonized as *the* classic of Asian American literature, almost no attention has been paid to its impulse toward thinking about the issues of race and ethnicity in U.S. and Chinese contexts comparatively.

The comparative impulse in *The Woman Warrior* is continued in Chinese American writings that emerged in the 1980s, especially writings by Chinese students and intellectuals who came to the U.S. for study during the decade. Many of them articulate a kind of skepticism toward national identifications that results from their exposure to racial discrimination in the U.S. and disillusionment with official nationalism in China. They frequently invoke the sociological concept of the "marginal man" in explaining the social condition and literary sensibilities of new Chinese immigrants in the United States.[42] Oftentimes, their renunciation of the idea of a cohesive Chinese nation to which they owe their primary allegiance is accompanied by an understanding of the nation's internal ethnic and regional divisions. Zha Jianying's novella, *Congling xia de binghe* [*The Ice River in the Jungle*] (1988), for example, tells the story of a female Chinese student in the U.S. who slowly realizes the irreversible dissolution of her

[42] In 1987, a number of P.R.C intellectuals and students based mainly at Columbia University formed a literary group, called the Morningside Society. Some of its members held a roundtable discussion on the development of "overseas student literature" in New York City in 1987, and the transcript of the discussion was published in a 1988 issue of *Xiao Shuo Jie* [*Fiction World*], a prestigious literary journal based in Shanghai. Yu Renqiu, a central member of the literary society, started the discussion by examining the historical positions of Chinese students in the West. The concept was also brought up in a parallel discussion held in Shanghai. See "New York Chen Bian She 'Liu Xue Sheng Wen Xue' Zuo Tan Ji Yao" [Minutes from New York Morningside Society's Roundtable on "Overseas Student Literature"] and "'Liu Xue Sheng Wen Xue' Zuo Tan Ji Yao" [Minutes from the Shanghai Roundtable on "Overseas Student Literature"].

comforting, if blinkered, attachment to the idea of the Chinese nation, even as she navigates the well concealed racial code in American social life. In a key part of the novella, the female protagonist returns to China for a vacation and goes on a trip to the northwest region so as to trace the footsteps of her former lover, who had chosen to work in the underdeveloped area upon graduation and died in an accident while there. The small northwestern cities that she visits have an ethnic and cultural mix that she finds alienating, forcing her toward a mental and literal diarrhea. Unable to fit in there, the protagonist feels as if she is stuck in a "neither-nor state," neither dead like D nor alive like the others around her.[43] This feeling of alienation replicates the tone of her experiences in the U.S., where she looks in vain for friendships and relationships that transcend racial and class barriers. The state of double marginality explored in writings like *Congling xia de binghe* can be seen as the affective corollary of the practice of double critique.

Asian American and East Asian Studies

To tease out the comparative insights in Asian American literature, one needs, as Kingston does in the structure of her narrative, to transgress a few borders and build a few bridges. The comparative approach that my book studies and employs is not simply an antidote to political and popular discourses that polarize the two countries; it is also a challenge to the traditional disciplinary divides that separate Asian American studies, and American studies in general, from East Asian studies. To fully understand the complex models of double critique that authors like Kingston, Zha, Kuo, and Yan engage in, it is imperative that Asian American critics reconstruct, and bring into dialogue, the various histories and literary and political discourses they address through robust collaborations with both American studies and East Asian studies. My study shows the critical possibilities that can be generated through such

[43] Zha Jianying, *Congling xia de binghe* [The Ice River in the Jungle], 68.

interdisciplinary work, mimicking the mediating role that many Asian American authors assume through their writings. In so doing, it argues that Asian American studies should be conceived, on an intellectual level, as a multiply located field, or a set of provocations in nation-based fields that have long been kept apart.

Asian American studies and U.S. ethnic studies in general have taken the critical examination of race and ethnicity into a comparative direction. It is important to note here that, as an invented category that did not exist prior to the 1960s, "Asian American" entails a comparative orientation inherently. By virtue of its inception, Asian American studies contributed significantly to a heterogeneous conception of race in the U.S. by disrupting the familiar black-white binary. The recent comparative turn extends the founding logic of the field, with a focus on the interconnected patterns of racialization in the U.S. and the resonance, as well as dissonance, among the oppositional political and cultural tactics that different minority groups employ to negotiate the "institution of citizenship" or "racial power." [44] Asian Americanists' venture into comparative racialization and comparative ethnic studies has borne much fruit.[45] My study, however, involves a type of comparison that is equally important but rarely attempted, namely, a bi-national comparison that places U.S. ethno-racial dynamics in the unfamiliar context of their counterpart in an Asian nation.

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[44] Helen Jun, "Black Orientalism;" Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Roots*. Jun argues that nineteenth-century black discourses on the "institution of citizenship" employed Orientalism to ground black opposition to segregation (1049), and Kim argues that black-Korean conflicts in contemporary America is a symptom of and response to "racial power" (9).

[45] Such comparative projects fall within a range of disciplines. In history, see Mae Ngai's *Impossible Subjects*. In literary and cultural studies, see James Kyung-Jin Lee's *Urban Triage*, Crystal Parikh's *An Ethics of Betrayal*, and Allan Punzalan Issac's *American Tropics*. Lee brings together Asian American, Latino, and white American novels in his discussion of the failure of multiculturalism's fantasy of a "parallel movement of more equitable representation and resources" during the Reagan era (xiv). Parikh juxtaposes Asian American and Latino narratives in her exploration of the ethics of betrayal in "emergent U.S. literatures and culture." Isaac sets out to "[supplement] the project of comparative ethnic studies" with a postcolonial perspective, by demonstrating the linkages between the various U.S. territorial acquisitions outside of the North American continent. The book brings together Filipino American, Puerto Rican, and Hawaii writers who articulate a "postcolonial" consciousness, while comparing them with mainstream U.S. representations of the American Empire in the first part of the twentieth-century (19).

Although there has not been much critical attention to what might be called U.S.-Asian comparative ethnic studies, Asian American literature, as we have seen in the example of *The Woman Warrior*, has long been invested in bringing into dialogue the different ethno-racial politics of the U.S. and Asian countries. Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* juxtaposes the veneer of racial harmony in suburban America during the 1990s with the racial hierarchy constructed under the Japanese empire in East and Southeast Asia during WWII. Wendy Law-Yone's *Irawaddy Tango* opens and closes in a fictitious dictatorship (based on Burma) embroiled in ethnoreligious conflicts (based on the Karen-led insurgency against the military dictatorship in Rangoon), with a middle section that lampoons American culture's obsession with capitalizing on the gruesome experience of Third World refugees and exiles. Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music*, yet another example, interlaces the experience of Indian immigrants in the culturally volatile Manhattan of the 1990s with the history of East Indians in the West Indies and Muslim insurrections in contemporary India. These writings, like the work of Kingston, Zha, Kuo, and Yan, can be described as diasporic. Discussions about the meaning of "diaspora" in Asian American literary and cultural critique flourished throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.[46] I

[46] The cultural nationalist politics that locates Asian Americans fully within the domestic sphere of the U.S. started to share its stage with the critical framework of diaspora in the early 1990s. See Sau-ling Wong's "Denationalization Reconsidered." There, Wong analyzes a set of related frameworks that emerged in Asian American Studies in the early 1990s, defining cultural nationalism and diaspora as two distinct discursive and political positions. Diasporic subjectivity is characterized by "a perpetual turning of one's gaze toward the lost homeland" while cultural nationalism focuses on the conditions of living in the place of residence (10). But her argument contains its own antithesis. She notably acknowledges that the longing for the "lost homeland" might be read as a correlative of the racialized exclusion of Asians from the U.S. mainstream, thus linking diasporic impulses to U.S. domestic issues. In the context of Asian American cultural politics, in other words, the diasporic approach should not be equated with being oriented toward Asia or defined as the binary opposite of the U.S.-centered cultural nationalism. It provides a set of conceptual tools with which to examine the formation of racial, ethnic communities within specific locales in relation to *both* national and transnational processes, including state racism, postcolonial migration, and global capital. See Oscar V. Compamanes's "Filipinos in the United States and Their Literature of Exiles" and David Palumbo-Liu's *Asian/American*. Campomanes's idea of "a literature of exile and emergence," which he uses to describe literature about Filipino nation-building by Filipinos in America, best captures the ironic doubleness (the displacement from and imaginary return to nation-states) characteristic of the concept of diaspora (Campomanes 51). Palumbo-Liu uses the term Asian/American to suggest that the teleological narrative of Asian immigrants settling in the United States, symbolized by the U.S.-centered term "Asian

invoke this term here to describe a type of narrative text, as well as interpretative approach, that pays particular attention to the ways in which Asians in America, due to a history of exclusion from U.S. legal and cultural citizenship, occupy what David Eng refers to as a state of "suspension" between competing structures of citizenship, modes of belonging, and patterns of cultural experience.[47] The emphasis on diaspora in Asian American studies, however, has not translated into systematic reflections upon how Asians in America, in their cultural expressions or embodied experience, straddle and mediate between different conceptions of race and ethnicity in the U.S. and Asia. Critical interpretations of Chinese American diasporic writings, for example, have so far largely focused on how these writings present the condition of diaspora and complicate nation-based literary categories.[48]

To pave the way for projects in transnational ethnic studies, then, Asian American studies needs to further its collaborations with not only other fields in American studies, but also Asian studies (or, more specific to this study, East Asian studies), where much of the knowledge of ethnic and race relations in Asian countries is produced. These collaborations do not simply involve gathering exotic knowledge. Their more profound implication lies in enabling and emphasizing a broad conceptualization of the intellectual location of Asian American studies.[49] Since its beginning at the end of the 1960s as a revolt against Cold War, exceptionalist conceptions of American history and culture, Asian American studies, along with other components of U.S. ethnic studies, has effected important paradigm changes within American

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American," is "yet incomplete and unsettled" (227). The hyphen and the slash symbolically disrupt the nationalist approach to Asian Americans and gesture toward an indeterminate map of diaspora.

[47] David Eng, *Racial Castration*, 211.

[48] Sauling Wong, "The Stakes of Textual Border-Crossing;" Xiao-huang Yin, *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*. Wong offers an important discussion of the position Chinese-language writings in the U.S. in relation to exiting literary taxonomies (modern Chinese literature, Taiwan literature, immigrant literature, world literature, etc.).

[49] One should certainly add "institutional" here, but it exceeds the scope of the present book.

studies.[50] While Asian American studies has played a subversively constructive role within American studies, standing apart while taking an active part in the transformation of the latter, the field's relationship with East Asian studies is much more tenuous and tense. Asian American scholars who began their careers in East Asian studies often tell stories of how their interest in Asians outside of Asia or Asian migration to the West was not sufficiently supported. Asian American studies, therefore, has become the main intellectual home for an impressive array of studies, in the humanities as well as social sciences, that focus on Asian migration as a site for inquiries into processes of globalization and transnational patterns of power that link America to Asia.[51] More recently, however, East Asian studies has become more receptive to projects focusing on Asian subjects and Asian-language writings in the U.S., giving an impetus to research that speaks to Asian Americanists' concerns.[52] These developments make the current moment an auspicious one for more exchanges between Asian American studies and East Asian studies aimed at synthesizing, while transforming, the knowledge produced in both fields. Comparative Literature scholar Eric Hayot argues in his recent essay "The Asian Turns" that "the encounter between Asian American studies and East Asian Studies" through a mutual focus

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[50] For a memorable discussion of how minority insurgence has unsettled American studies as an institutionalized discipline since its Cold War origin, see Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman, eds., *Futures of American Studies*, 1-42. Their argument is that the various social movements in the 1960s played a crucial role in restructuring academic politics, including the politics of American studies, opening it to an uncertain, unbounded futurity. Ethnic Studies has also been instrumental in fostering the transnational turn in American Studies, which has recently been theorized. See the presidential addresses for the American Studies Association in 2007 and 2005 respectively, namely Emory Elliott's "Diversity in the United States and Abroad" and Shelley Fisher Fishkin's "Crossroads of Cultures.

[51] Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires*; Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943*; Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care*; Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*; Madeline Hsu, *Dreaming of gold, Dreaming of Home*.

[52]See Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity*; Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven G. Yao, *Sinographies: Writing China*. Shih theorizes the "Sinophone Pacific" in *her* a study of the circulation of visual images between Chinese America and other sites of the Chinese diaspora. In 2007, this project gave rise to a three-day conference at Harvard, "Globalizing Modern Chinese Literature," where international scholars from both China and Chinese American Studies gave papers on Chinese-language writings across the Pacific. *Sinographies* brings together essays that deal with the perceptions of Chineseness in American culture and Chinese-language writings in the U.S.; both of these topics broaden the traditional concerns of the scholars of Chinese literature. One can perhaps go back a bit further. Also, in 2005, a two-day conference at Wesleyan University, "Traffic and Diaspora: Political, Economic, and Cultural Exchanges between Japan and Asian America," occasioned a dialogue between scholars in Japan Studies and Japanese/Asian American Studies. Though not an entirely fruitful dialogue, it did signal that studies of Asian cultures and literatures were beginning to show interest in the extension of Asia in America.

on "subnational locations" and "ethnic matrices" can set in motion the "becoming that reconstitutes the fields," neither of which will return from this encounter unchanged.[53] Similarly, I propose that an active engagement with East Asian studies will allow Asian American studies, comparative and transnational all along, to broaden itself further into a field with multiple intellectual locations, consisting of not a bounded body of knowledge, but a series of provocations in the more established, nation-based fields.

Pursuing the kind of interdisciplinary encounter that I promote, my study draws extensively on the histories of China's minority nationalities constructed by scholars in Chinese studies. Chapter 1 provides a detailed account of the development of both U.S. and Chinese multiculturalisms since the mid-twentieth century, but it is useful to offer a brief account of existing studies of the latter here. The ethnic policy in the PRC was fashioned after the Soviet model of a multinational federation, though it resisted explicit invocations of the term federation.[54] During Republican China (1911-1949), both the ruling GMD and the CCP ascribed paramount importance to the unity of the nation-state in formulating and implementing their respective policy toward minorities. While the GMD exercised only weak control over minority regions, many of which were ruled by semi-independent warlords, the CCP eventually seized and held on to these regions with a combination of military force and an appealing policy of minority autonomy. In the early 1950s, upon the founding of the PRC, a system of regional autonomy for ethnic minorities was established, consisting of autonomous areas at provincial, prefectural, and county levels. The 1952 *General Program for the Implementation of Nationality Regional Autonomy of the Chinese People's Republic* stipulated that these areas were

[53] Eric Hayot, "The Asian Turns," 910.
[54] Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*. Martin has argued that the Soviet Nationalities policy did not involve federation in a rigorous sense. Although the term "federation" was used in the 1922-23 constitution settlement, it "concentrated all decision power in the center" (13). Lenin's rehabilitation of this word in 1917, according to Martin, to "describe what amounted to a much more ambitious version of" ethnoterritorial autonomy (14).

"inalienable parts of the motherland."[55] Under the overriding principle of state sovereignty, the central government was to recruit cadres from minorities so as to increase their political representation in autonomous areas and on the state level, as well as encourage minorities to develop their own language scripts and cultural traditions. The 1954 Constitution reiterated that the state would "pay full attention to the full features" of minority groups in implementing its economic policies.[56] The ethnic policy has since then fluctuated in the degree to which it accommodates minority rights, in ways particular to the specific areas involved.

The 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a slew of anthropological and historical studies of one or more of the fifty-five officially recognized minority nationalities.[57] The past two decades has also witnessed important efforts to link China's minorities to Western conceptions of race and ethnicity. Pamela Crossley's important essays at the turn of the 1990s trace the meaning of *minzu* ("nationality" or "nation" in English) in contemporary China to multiple intellectual traditions, including the discourse on lineage that emerged during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), and notions of race and ethnicity developed in Western history.[58] Some of the more recent studies of minority nationalities in contemporary China have sought to borrow useful critical tools from critical race studies and postcolonialism. One approach is to rework the idea of Orientalism, turning it into an analytical framework for understanding the power dynamics between the Han Chinese and non-Han minorities. Louisa

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[55] June T. Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions*, 105.
[56] Ibid., 126.
[57] Gru Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*; Stevan Harrell, *Way of Being Ethnic in Southwest China*; Louisa Schein, *Minority Rules*; Ralph Litzinger, *Other Chinas*; Katherine Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*; Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*; Uradyn Erden Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge*; Colin Mackerras and Michael Clarke, *China, Xinjiang and Central Asia.*
[58] Pamela Kyle Crossley, "Thinking about Ethnicity in Early Modern China," "The Qianlong Retrospect on the Chinese-Martial (*hanjun*) Banners." Crossley's early projects were extended later in a collected edition, which traces the vicissitudes of ethnic identities during the Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty through dynamic interactions between the imperial state and the human subjects of the state. See Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, *Empire at the Margins.* Studying the earlier meanings of ethnicity in China, the authors argue, is indispensable to integrating the investigations of "various frontiers" and minority nationalities in contemporary China (17).

Schein, for example, argues that the early 1990s saw a proliferation of "otherness" in China, with the feminization and fetishization of cultures in rural, ethnicized areas mimicking the structure of Orientalism.[59] Schein's argument about what she calls "internal Orientalism" casts the PRC's incorporation of ethnic others, not implausibly, as a form of colonialism and racialization.[60] Another approach that has emerged is comparing the oppositional cultures of minority nationalities in China with those of racial minorities in the West. Steven Venturino explores this approach in a recent essay, which takes the initiative of linking the subversive tactics in Tibetan literature, produced both inside and outside China, with those found in African American literature.[61] The comparative approaches employed in studies of China's ethnic minorities have produced critical visions similar to those embodied in Chinese American diasporic narratives. They challenge, rightly, the fiction of a pluralist Chinese nationalism by implicating it in the enterprises of colonialism and institutional racism, suggesting that, while we must acknowledge the West's preponderance in constructing the social categories, including race, ethnicity, and nation, central to global modernity, it is also necessary to consider regional or local patterns of power that complicate Western-centric narratives of modern history.[62] To claim that we can find racial and ethnic politics outside of the West that do not result completely from Western colonialism and imperialism is not to espouse a reductive form of universalism that implicitly naturalizes race or ethnicity as inevitable givens, just as proposing a global perspective on

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[59] Louisa Schein, "The Consumption of Color and the Politics of White Skin in Post-Mao China." Also see Schein's *Minority Rules*; Chih-yu Shih, *Negotiating Ethnicity in China*. Shih argues that some minority groups in China, such as the Miao, actively cash in on the Orientalized images created by "the dominant state and market forces," in a move that Shih calls "reflective Orientalism" (66-67).

[60] Schein, "Consumption of Color," 478.

[61] Steven J. Venturino, "Signifying on China."

[62] One can argue that this dual perspective arose from an encounter between Area Studies and postcolonialism. Discussions of Chinese nationalism have been an especially fertile site for the development of such a dual logic. For a concise summary of these discussions and an argument for this dual perspective, see Timothy Brook and Andre Schmid, *Nation/Work*. The authors simultaneously recognize that the history of modern nations in Asia is "inseparable from the history of imperialism" and calls attention to "sets of fissures internal to Asian nations" (2-3).

multiculturalism does not indicate that there is anything natural to it. Rather, it is to promote a strategic, anti-hegemonic universalism that rebels against the safety of the conventional ideological and political mappings of the world, as well as the traditional division of labor among different academic fields.