Cruising Borders, Unsettling Identities: Toward a Queer Diasporic Asian America

Wen Liu

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CRUISING BORDERS, UNSETTLING IDENTITIES

TOWARD A QUEER DIASPORIC ASIAN AMERICA

by

WEN LIU

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Toward A Queer Diasporic Asian America

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Wen Liu

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Cruising Borders, Unsettling Identities: Toward A Queer Diasporic Asian America

by

Wen Liu

Advisor: Michelle Fine

In this dissertation, I challenge the dominant conceptualization of Asian Americanness as a biological and cultural population and a cohesive racial category. Instead, I consider it as a form of flexible subjectivity and an affective emergence that occurs and materializes due to the multiple sites of convergence in the neoliberal assemblage of model minority ideology, imperialist geopolitical history, racialized queer politics, and criminal (in)justices. I examine the spatial and temporal configurations of Asian American subjectivity through a queer and postcolonial lens, first by conducting a critical historical review of the category of Asian American in the geopolitical history of psychological knowledge making; second with an ethnographic investigation of the divergent temporal claims of Asian Americanness toward neoliberal colorblindness and nostalgic forms of Afro-Asian solidarity in the context of Black Lives Matter; and finally through a phenomenological narrative analysis of queer Asian American activists navigating family trauma, the loss of the nation of origin, and transnational political journeys. Drawing from the cultural texts of psychological literature and Asian American representations in the public discourses as well as empirical data on Asian American political participation and life history narratives, the dissertation illustrates Asian Americanness as an assemblage of post-racial futurity and enactments of geopolitical conflicts. The analysis demonstrates how this spatial and temporal assemblage stratifies transnational racial positions by
technologies of neoliberal multiculturalism and mediates the US relations with Asia Pacific simultaneously through military occupation and economic cooperation.

*Keywords: Asian American, neoliberalism, assemblage, queer theory, diaspora*
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Transnational migration in the era of neoliberal globalization has significantly altered the traditional conceptions of nation, citizenship, and immigrant subjectivity, as well as gender, sexuality, family, ethnicity and activism. The recent reemergence of diaspora studies has created new intellectual space to understand the current modes of mobility, transnational linkage, and the socio-political disjuncture that the conventional immigration paradigm of assimilation has failed to capture. The focus on the queer Asian diaspora in this project is, firstly, to invoke the centuries of colonial and racialized histories of wars, labor migration, capitalist expansion and transpacific political relations that has created the contested contemporary formations of Asianness, and secondly, to queer the heterosexual genealogy of national origin implicit in diaspora discourse (Gopinath, 2005; Eng, 2010). In this sense, queer Asian diaspora is an explicit intersectional approach to examine and destabilize the critical questions of migration, racial justice, and queer politics in the current historical moment at home and cross national borders. Refusing to be always uprooted from home or ever-grateful to the host country, submitting to colorblind queer liberalism, the methodological approach of queer Asian diaspora aims to tell a different story beyond the hetero-patriarchal narratives about national building, transnational politics, and social belonging accompanying the process of neoliberal globalization and varied forms of activism.

A queer approach to Asian Americanness necessitates an anti-essentialist and anti-identitarian reading of subject formation. Instead of theorizing Asian Americanness as a biological and cultural population, this dissertation project conceptualizes Asian Americanness as a moving target that traverses and navigates through multilayered geopolitical relations, historical convergences, and affective body politics. In this sense, Asian Americanness is not a
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predetermined racial category that has fixed boundaries and bio-cultural essences that begs for more authentic or diverse representations, but an affective emergence that occurs and materializes due to the multiple sites of convergence in the neoliberal assemblage of model minority ideology, transnational neoliberal trades, colorblind queer politics, and criminal (in)justices. It demands not only a critical intersectional and interdisciplinary reading of racial, sexual, and class configurations, but also a transnational geopolitical analysis of the category that is simultaneously constituted of the weighted national meanings of Americanness and the perpetually racial, cultural, and national other of Asianness. As the favored immigrant category and poster-child for economic success, the circulation, enactments and subjectivities of the queer Asian diaspora reveal much about the current geopolitical moment for gender, race, sexual and class “justice.” As racial relations in the US and abroad intensified by systemic incarceration and police violence, the ongoing wars and occupation in Asia Pacific and the Middle East, and the national competition of neoliberal trade blocks, the intergroup racial comparisons of the “good” minorities versus the “bad” racial Other will only become more drastic. The critical examination of the Asian Americanness, which is often lifted up as the neoliberal racial ideal, is thus ever more urgent and crucial.

The subject formation of Asian Americanness that has expressed historically as a political contingency for civil rights in the United States and anti-imperialist struggles against American imperialism illustrates the inherently contradictory relation of Asian American subjectivity particularly post-World War II (Kang, 2002). Asians were often portrayed as the “honorary whites” (Liu, 1998, p. 34) and model minority citizens in the American national building postwar to strengthen the leading ideology of meritocracy and the US as a liberal, multicultural nation. Meanwhile, Asians were also associated with the Cold War divide of the aggressive Chinese
communists or the obedient citizens of developing nations in need of the strong-arm American capitalism, democracy, and military. These polarizing images illustrate how Asian Americanness has never been a uniform construction and has been positioned contingently and only referentially to the US nation-state, slicing off the Cambodian, Hmong, Vietnamese, and Filipino communities from Chinese, Korean and Japanese, for instance, in education debates. As I will argue in this dissertation, Asian Americanness can only be intelligible geopolitically. Unlike mainstream multicultural discourse that attempts to depict Asian Americanness as a legitimate and cohesive US-based population that represents a set of minority interests and concerns, deployed often in contrast to African Americans, my analysis in this dissertation proposes that these interests and concerns about rights, autonomy, prosperity, sexuality, family and freedom must be understood as the desires and struggles between the competing yet interconnected nationalisms of the US and the Asia Pacific. By examining the unresolved tensions of Asian Americanness as the “foreign within”—the simultaneously foreign Other and the model minority—in the textual accounts of psychology, in the bodily protests for and against racial justice, and in the psychical subjectivities around belonging, I aim to provide a conceptualization of Asian Americanness as a critical location that simultaneously unsettles yet reifies the binaries of exclusion and incorporation, opposition and assimilation.

Conflictual Representations of Asian Americans

The heightened anti-Chinese sentiment recently shocked the Asian American communities with hateful graffiti signs spray-painted in San Francisco neighborhood writing “No More Chinese” (Hamilton, 2015). The Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission also reported that hate crimes against Chinese Americans rose from only one case in 2014 to 11 cases in 2015 in the Los Angeles County, making Chinese Americans the group with the largest
increase of hate crime incidents besides Muslim Americans (Wang, 2016). The xenophobic expressions, particularly against Chinese in the US, are certainly not new. During the peak of the financial crisis at 2008, White supremacist groups and right wing politicians framed Chinese immigrants and China the nation-state as the job stealers and the primary problem that contributed to the American economic downturn. Since 2015, Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, which was largely built on the image of China as an economic enemy and a foreign military threat alongside “ISIS” has triggered a spike in anti-Asian hate crimes overall (Yam, 2017).

While Asian Americans, particular Chinese Americans, were constructed as the hateful and threatening Other, mainstream columnists such as Nicolas Kristof from the New York Times continue to fuel the model minority myth through highlighting the educational and middle-class successes of Asian Americans. The new discourses of model minority, highlighted in Kristof’s (Oct 10, 2015) article “The Asian Advantage,” no longer solely rely on the biological paradigm of the smart Asian brain or IQ test scores, since such arguments can be easily traced back to the biological racial hierarchies sanctioned by natural sciences that are deemed to be backwards and inappropriate. Instead, the newer discourses, incorporate cultural ideologies such as the hardworking Confucian values and even the sociological models of post-1965 immigrant policy to explain this highly selected population of “disproportionately doctors, research scientists and other highly educated professionals.” This “Asian advantage” is often supported by empirical psychological studies of cultural differences and perceptions (e.g., Nisbett, 2009) to explain how success to Asian Americans and White Americans is conceptually disparate, where Asian Americans are taught to always strive toward higher academic achievement through hard work and never feel content with themselves, as in Kristof’s own words, “Asian-American kids are
allowed no excuse for getting B’s — or even an A-. The joke is that an A- is an ‘Asian F.’”

These awfully familiar narratives in the contemporary discussion of Asian Americanness, though avoid attributing differences to biological race, genes, or intelligence, are culturally essentializing and serving the Orientalist function of contrasting Asianness with Americanness, marking Asianness as the ultimate cultural other yet at the same time highly assimilable. As historian Ellen Wu articulates, Asian Americanness has been marked as “definitely not-white” through institutional exclusion but also “definitely not-black” based on its highly assimilable capacity (2014, p. 2; emphasis original), bouncing off Whiteness and Blackness across different moments of history. We thus must understand the construction of Asian Americanness as is neither singular nor linear, but inscribed with “heterogeneity, hybridity, multiplicity” (Lowe, 1996, p. 60)

To combat the model minority myth, progressive Asian American scholars and activists usually attempt to tackle the monolithic portrayal through the route of representation, emphasizing how Asian Americans are a diverse population (e.g., Aung and Chun, 2015; Kang, 2015), including the comparatively less economically and educationally advantageous ethnics subgroups of Cambodians, Laotians, Hmong, Burmese, and Vietnamese. Therefore, in their logic, the stereotypical portrayal of Asian Americans is a result of sampling error that requires a more accurate representation of the racial group. However, these arguments on representation often end up becoming tautological and theoretically weak, and thus contradict the liberal discourse of visibility and representation that sustains the category of Asian Americanness in the first place. One might argue that there are poorer Asian Americans so model minority myth is untrue, but another might say that there are successful Asian Americans and they deserve rights and citizenship. This paradoxical logic is particularly evident in the affirmative action debates, where
Asian American academic achievement becomes a highly contested discourse, splitting between different conceptualizations of who can rightfully represent the population. On one hand, opponents of affirmative action often deploy colorblind rhetoric to argue that Asian Americans with high academic achievements should have the right to enter elite universities over other racial minorities who have lower academic achievements. On the other hand, proponents of affirmative action disagree with the simplistic portrayal of the population, and highlight how Asian American subgroups, particularly the Pacific Islanders who receive lower level of education, are entitled to the rights of admission based on the policy (Park and Liu, 2014). These contradictory and paradoxical discourses of the Asian American success are not purely external, but circulate within the Asian American communities, as polls of Asian Americans have consistently shown a 50/50 split in their view on affirmative action (Ong, 2003).

The case of affirmative action illustrates how Asian Americanness is deployed as a moving target in US racial politics utilized by the elites to reinforce colorblind politics and White domination, picking and choosing the appropriate ethnic subgroup to represent the entire population whenever it is convenient. While the liberal discourse that addresses Asian Americanness as a racial and cultural representation has traditionally served to strengthen visibility and demand group-based rights, it also reveals the instability of the racial category itself. Furthermore, the culturally essentialist depictions of Asian values are not only perpetuated by white interests, but also Asian American elites, who have spent a fortune in reproducing the stereotypes and profiting from them. The popularity of Fresh Off the Boat, the ABC TV 2015 series based on Eddie Huang’ memoir, telling the typical story of an immigrant family and the American Dream, and Amy Chua’s (2011) Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother, emphasizing the Chinese values of success, shows the public’s obsession of Asian Americans as the model
minority, as well as the communities’ own investment in cultivating these archaic yet partially advantageous representations.

Therefore, the *myth* of model minority is not an inaccuracy of representation, but a challenge to the assumption that there is such a coherent racial population to be represented in the first place. The abiding myth about Asian Americans serves as a powerful metaphor in the virtue of American multiculturalism: its tolerance, inclusion of differences, and absence of racial conflicts. To move away from the construction of Asian Americanness as truthful population that can be scientifically measured and examined necessitates a rearticulation of Asian Americanness as a raced, gendered, classed, and sexualized biopolitic that produces physical and imaginary boundaries of nation, geography, and citizenship. Moreover, it demands an elevation of scale in Asian American inquiry from the domestic and national to the transnational and diasporic, as well as from the individual and demographic to the historical and structural. Particularly, in the current neoliberal landscape, multiculturalism has been successfully appropriated by the American nation-state to legitimize its global capitalist leadership. How Asian Americanness is deployed not only to mediate US racial relations but also the geopolitical relations between the US and Asia Pacific thus becomes a central concern in this dissertation.

**Asian Americanness as an Assemblage**

For the most part, the Asian American scholarship has been largely concerned with the “*demographic* heterogeneity” (Nguyen, 2002, p. 6), yet representational arguments only affirm the essentialist representational argument of Asian Americanness as an intelligible racial population that ‘has always existed,’ instead of a shifting assemblage contingent to global and local forces. Therefore, in this dissertation, I illustrate how Asian Americanness has always a contested identity category constituted of different convergences of racial, gendered, sexual,
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classed, and national formations at various historical moments. By conceptualizing Asian Americanness as an assemblage (Delanda, 2006, 2016), instead of a racial essence, I investigate how it emerges at the scale of the textual, the bodily, and the psychical and creates different territorial arrangements and claims regarding race, nationhood, and justice. With this approach, the focus of the dissertation is the “ideological heterogeneity” (Nguyen, 2002, p. 6-7) in the constitution of Asian Americanness enacted in psychological literature, social movements, and subjectivity, rather than the demographic diversity.

By conceptualizing Asian Americanness as an assemblage, I examine how heterogeneous historical and political actors and forces have constructed this racialized entity now understood as a stable identity and population. Particularly, I conceptualize the Asian American assemblage as the foreign-within geopolitical position charted out of the spatial arrangement of the transpacific relations since WWII, and as the ideal racial subject exemplified by the post-racial futurity in neoliberal time. These processes of spatial and temporal making of Asian Americanness have created the racialized violence of national exclusion and social segregation, and the false promises of economic prosperity and class advancements in the postwar US. This conflictual subject-making of Asian Americanness simultaneously as the perpetual foreigner and the ideal immigrant produces immense tensions not only at the level of cultural discourses, but also in the bodily encounters of social protests and the psychical level of racial self-regulation and identity belonging. This dissertation looks at how these various processes interact, circulate, and oscillate across scales, marking a timespace entity of Asian Americanness that operates in transnational political forces and demarcates boundaries of racial territories and minority citizenship.
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While I acknowledge that the identity category of Asian American is partly an effortful result of the racial justice movements solidified in the late 1960s (Wei, 1993), I trace the dwelling binarism of assimilation and opposition in the subject construction of Asian Americanness as well as the intended and unintended consequences in the production of a ‘collective’ Asian American narrative at the various scales. Drawing from the critical frameworks of Asian Americanist critique (Chun, 2003), neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2006), and queer of color critique (Erel, Haritaworn, Rodriguez, and Klesse. 2010; Ferguson, 2012; Perez, 2012), I argue that the “stubborn particulars” (Cherry, 1995) of the diasporic, queer, and anti-imperialist subjects are not only the additive components to Asian American representation, but integrated parts of the assemblage that detour the hegemonic path of becoming determined by the master immigrant narrative. They are the resistant subjects that defy the fundamental assumptions of Asian American knowledge production and generate new possibilities of belonging through engaging with the geopolitical, imperialist, and colonial origins in the constitution of the Asian American category.

Literature Review: From America as a Homebase to Diasporic Challenges

The category of Asian American has always been a contested identity group. To trace how the concept develops and moves thus necessities not only an intersectional but also interdisciplinary lens. In psychology, Asian Americanness only began to emerge as an important unit of analysis since the 1970s, after the largest waves of Asian immigrants post-1965. New questions of assimilation and integration had arisen in social sciences with this multigenerational and mixed social economic status group that were roughly lumped in the category of “Asian.” Scholars from psychology, sociology, as well as the new fields of Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies formed through civil rights activism, started to be concerned with how the
Asian population could be integrated into the American cultural citizenship. In psychology, the framework of acculturation (Berry, 1989; 2010; Sue and Sue, 2003) treats the immigrant’s ability to integrate both one’s ethnic culture and the dominant culture as the most adaptive acculturative strategy. This strong emphasis on the *hyphen* of Asian and American identities should be placed within the historical traumas of excluding Asian immigrants, specifically through the immigration bans on the Chinese immigrants and the internment of Japanese Americans, constructing Asians as the unassimilable “perpetual foreigners” (Li, Liang, and Kim, 2001). Therefore, this early Asian American scholarship as well as Asian American activism made efforts to claim the US as the *homebase* for the Asian American communities through the framework of civil rights inclusion. Both in knowledge production and political mobilization, the claims of Asian Americanness during the 1960s and 1970s underlined a pan-Asian political project to build coalition based on shared experiences of racialization under the US governance (Parreñas and Siu, 2007).

Meanwhile, the growing heterogeneities of Asian American communities inspired new scholarship of migration to pay attention to the post-1965 distinct transnational subjectivity on race, culture, and citizenship through the emphasis on transnational activities, particularly for non-European migrants who face significantly more barriers from assimilating to the mainstream US culture and citizenship. Alternative models of assimilation and acculturation were proposed by the scholars to incorporate these transmigrants’ identities that are shaped by the movement, communication, and the cultural, economic and political ties between multiple homes since the 1980s. Concepts of diasporic identity formulation have emerged: for example, “segmented assimilation” (Portes and Zhou, 1996; Zhou, 1997), “transnational migrant circuit” (Rouse, 1989), “transnational life” (Smith, 2000), and “transnational villagers” (Levitt, 2001), which
emphasize the ethnic- and class- specific mechanisms that craft out distinct patterns of acculturation among the transmigrant communities.

This body of scholarship stresses that concepts of culture, race, and ethnicity conflated under the traditional immigration paradigm should be detangled (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc, 1995; Bhatia, 2007). Firstly, throughout history, the US nation-state strategically recruits different migrant groups to multicultural citizenship and mark other groups ‘illegal’ or ‘threats’ to national security. Some Asian communities, particularly East Asians, may be granted limited class and educational access but remain politically excluded and largely the cultural Other (Lowe, 1996). The transnational migration scholarship thus challenges the conflation of race, ethnicity, class, and culture that were previously used interchangeably and destabilizes the homogenous portrayal of Asian Americanness. Secondly, the transnational paradigm examines how members of diasporic communities negotiate their multiple identities between different homes, cultures, and societies that are not contingent to the linear acculturation strategy. For some diasporic subjects, the refusal to integrate may not necessarily lead to the harmful psychological consequences of marginalization but is the way in which they resist racial otherness and construct different hybridized or hyphenated identities across geographical lines (Bhatia, 2007). For others, a flexible national identity that claims allegiance to the flow of global capital instead of nation-state is a strategy to maximize cosmopolitan citizenship privileges regardless of national borders (Ong, 1999).

By the 1990s, the rapid expansion of global capitalism has resulted in the polarization of the Asian American image. With new waves of transnational migrant labor and the rise of a cosmopolitan class of Asian elites (Ong, 2006), Asian American scholarship has generated critical discussions on the limits of nation-state, the critiques of multiculturalism, and the
permeability of border. Diaspora has thus became a central theoretical framework that calls the claim of US as “home” into question and seeks different forms of identification as well as transnational political alliances against neoliberal globalization. It demands Asian American scholarship to incorporate not only analysis of racialization and acculturation but also examination of the multiplicity and hybridity of Asian American subject formation through the frameworks of imperialist geopolitics, neoliberal globalization, and transnational activist movements.

**Neoliberal Multiculturalism**

Towards the end of the Cold War, a new political economic regime emerged globally—Wendy Brown (2006) characterizes neoliberalism not only as a set of economic transformations where the corporate-led privatization policies dismantle public services and welfare, but as a political rationality based in free market logic that regulates governmental practices and citizenship. It has given new meanings to the social sphere as well as individual subjectivity through market rationality. The US moved from the benevolent liberal state to a state that constructs itself in market terms, as we witness the large-scale privatization of the traditional state apparatus such as the military, prison, education, and social services. The neoliberal governmentality produces citizens as self-entrepreneurs who manage their own needs and developments, by self or in family, without expectation for public care, folded into the hetero-normative state.

Under neoliberal governance, where the principle of equality is replaced by market ideology, racial relations have also taken on a new form, displacing the liberal multiculturalism onto neoliberal multiculturalism. Jodi Melamed (2006) argues that by the 1990s the US has ceased to establish a kind of postwar liberal multicultural citizenship that attempted to include
people of color and immigrants into the Keynesian workforce through government subsides and multicultural education. Instead, a unifying discourse of neoliberal multiculturalism has become a hegemonic form of US governmentality. Neoliberal multiculturalism repeats some of the core mechanisms in postwar liberal multiculturalism including the removal of scientific racism associated with biological features while substituting the definition of race with cultural differences. And furthermore, it creates new categories of privilege by the standard of “multicultural world citizens” who are valuable for generating global capital across racial groups, and relinquishes those who are not valuable from state protection. In other words, neoliberal multicultural governmentality manages racial tensions and disguises racial inequality by employing the discursive strategy of culture—often associated with the neoliberal rhetorical gestures of diversity, openness, and freedom—to fracture conventional racial categories or color lines into different statuses of privilege.

More importantly, neoliberal multiculturalism is not only a domestic project but an imperialist endeavor. Racial relations are restructured through class and state loyalty, under the current period of globalization where privileges are not as neatly aligned with racial lines, as we witness a minority class of elites with diverse racial identities and nationalities controlling wealth and managing knowledge production. The depiction of Asian American has specifically become polarized along the class line due to the increasingly visible Asian cosmopolitan class riding on the waves of transnational capitalism, and the unprecedented amount of unskilled labor that migrate to fill the demands of low-waged work (Ong, 1999, 2006). This schizophrenic portrayal of “Asianness” is an example of how neoliberal multiculturalism reassembles the Asian racial category, dissociating material inequality from race and attaching privileges to a small minority of mobile, “multicultural world citizens.”
Queer Liberalism and Homonationalism

Indeed, neoliberal multiculturalism defines new configurations of racial, economic, and sexual citizenship, and rules for exclusion. David Eng (2010) argues that emergence of queer liberalism—the inclusion of gay and lesbian US subjects into citizen recognition and legal rights—relies upon the logic of colorblindness, the denial to see racial differences and racial inequality. Eng writes that the paradox of queer liberalism occurs in this historical moment when the legalization of same-sex marriage becomes a new way to secure racialized property rights in the private domains, in which (White) gay and lesbian citizens with capital are granted rights to reproduce wealth within kinship structure. As the state plays out this benevolent gesture to secure a minority of queer families, it relinquishes responsibility from welfare and social services through neoliberal measures, neglecting the social reproductive needs of racialized marginalized communities (Kandaswamy, 2008). Under the hegemonic politics of queer liberalism, queer people of color are either scrutinized within the White gay norms and pressured to erase any internal contradictions of race, gender, and class, or ostracized as the unfitting subjects in the ethnic communities that are deemed to be ‘too homophobic’ to tolerate queerness. Queer people of color thus often find themselves in a conundrum, in which they are cast outside of the promises of multicultural citizenship and facing intensified forms of surveillance and exclusion across national borders.

Jasbir Puar (2007) elaborates on the logic of US multiculturalism acting as a beneficent state toward the sexual other, and how this reproduces white racial privileges, consumption capabilities, and normative forms of kinship. Racialized terrorist bodies in the context of the post-911 war on terror were juxtaposed against proper homonormative queer subjects of White, middle-class, and patriotic American citizens to create US homonationalism, a discourse that not
CRUISING BORDERS UNSETTLING IDENTITIES

only declares the successful management of its sexual populations but also justifies the US empire’s intervention in the sexually backwards nations. Puar’s concept of homonationalism has brought profound critiques to queer analysis that has traditionally only dealt with issues of sexuality and sexual acts and neglected the problem in which population reproduction precisely relies on the biopolitics of race, gender, class and nation. Resistance to heteronormativity, thus, is not inherently transgressive as the queer subject may be complicit with other types of privileges.

These interlocking power mechanisms produce conflictual sites of belonging for diasporic queer immigrants of color. The successes of same-sex marriage and other gay rights inclusion do not alleviate the structural violence of border patrol, urban policing, the prison industrial complex, and the ongoing wars and militarism in the Middle East in the Asia Pacific for queer people of color. This results in the difficult position in which many queer immigrants of color find it impossible to find safety in the White dominant LGBTQ spaces yet ‘home’ was not a viable place to return. The existence and continual reproduction of racialized violence in the global and domestic LGBTQ communities demands an intersectional lens to look at how power acts through the differential mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion on racialized queer bodies. Instead of applying a dichotomized sexual framework of normativity and non-normativity, the lenses of diasporic queerness and the racial politics of homonationalism are particularly crucial to inform my project on Asian Americanness as a desired object of social imagination for multicultural nationalism, and a desiring subject of political resistance where unlikely affiliations are formed across identity. Rather than naturalizing the US racial relations as the primary site to understand Asian American subjectivity and subjectification, this project brings in the literature of psychology to understand how the Asian “population” has been
subjected within science, and explores the diasporic queer enactments of activism to understand the geopolitics and neoliberal desire that constitute Asian Americanness transnationally.

While the US-based, civil rights agenda has long defined Asian Americanness and Asian American studies, the frameworks of neoliberal multiculturalism and homonationalism have pointed out the limits of understanding race and sexual politics through privileging the US as the focused site of analysis. Indeed, these theories argue that an American-centric, and identity-based analysis disguises the actual workings of American imperialism at home and abroad that are fundamental to the formation of radical and sexual subject. The rapid expansion of global capitalism with new waves of transnational migrant labor since 1990s has instigated the redefinition of Asian American studies through adopting the transnational paradigm in Asian area studies post-Cold War, generating critical discussions on the limits of nation-state, the critiques of multiculturalism, and the permeability of border. Diaspora thus became a central theoretical framework that calls the claim of US as home into question and seeks different forms of identification as well as transnational political alliances against neoliberal globalization (Parreñas and Siu, 2007).

**Psychological Splitting**

In the discipline of psychology, however, these conversations on diasporic politics and subjectivity have not entered the center of knowledge production on racial and cultural research in North American Psychology except by the efforts of a few scholars (e.g., Bhatia, 2007). Race and culture are often divided into different areas of inquiry, where Asian Americanness is split off as either a racial issue of inequality or discrimination domestically or a cultural issue of essentialized cognitive cross-nationally without an integrated framework. Asian Americanness in the racial and immigrant paradigm is operationalized as a specific population located within the
US, whereas in the cross-cultural psychology, Asianness is constructed as the direct cultural opposite to Americanness—the “collective-individualist” cognitive schemes of Asians and Westerners that almost seem to be naturally occurring due to geographical and national lines (Burman, 2007; Gjerde, 2004). In both of these frameworks, Asian Americanness is always about the failure of assimilation, cross-cultural conflict, and the exceptional, privileged category of Americanness. Either way, the baseline contrast is White Americanness; Asians either succeed or fail, as an undistinguishable, homogenous mass.

“The authors find East Asians to be holistic, attending to the entire field...whereas Westerners are more analytic, paying attention primarily to the object...The authors speculate that the origin of these difference are traceable to markedly different social systems” (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan, 2001, p. 291). Written in seemingly politically neutral tone, the scientific narratives of Asian cultural stereotypes have been continually reified by psychological knowledge production. As one of the most cited cross-cultural psychological text, Nisbett and his colleagues’ work that performs as the empirical truth about the Asian mind signifies the normative cultural production of Orientalism in the discipline as a whole. While the North American Psychology rarely ever explicitly contextualizes the social and political life in Asia beyond stereotypical representations, even as an imagined concept, Asia has dominated psychological knowledge making. The prototypical psychological subject of the cognitivist rational mind is constructed through making Asians the Other—the superstitious, irrational, inscrutable, and selfless and the coherent – across China, Japan, and South Korea—countries feuding with each other find ‘peace’ inside the US psychological imagination, hovered together as one. Without the construction of Asians as having a particular type of psychology, there would be no foundation for a normative, Western psychological subject. Even with the recent
developments in embracing globalization as a significant impact in immigrant identity formation (e.g., Berry, 2008), Asians remain largely a static, homogenous cultural subject that is constituted of paradoxical stereotypes. Psychology lacks a theoretical integration of geopolitical dynamics, and risks of replicating not only cultural essentialist, but also the Cold War paradigm of othering Asia to bolster the legitimacy of American imperialism.

**Research Questions and Objectives**

This dissertation utilizes a three-part research design on how the notion of Asian Americanness moves across time and space to construct particularly forms of racial, gendered, and sexualized subjectivities in light of the different historical events since WWII. The central research questions guiding the project were: How has psychological literature represented Asian Americanness and for what historical, social, and political purpose? How has the making of US nation-state incorporated Asian Americanness as a key component from the postwar civil rights racial liberalism to the current phase of neoliberal multiculturalism? How have various forms of activist subjectivities appropriated or rejected the category in order to make claims about national belonging and identity affiliation? As a specific modern and wartime construction of the entangling geopolitical conflicts between the US empire and Asia Pacific, I argue that Asian Americanness cannot be examined without its imperialist lineages. Therefore, this dissertation is an explicit attempt to take on a transnational and geopolitical analysis of the category of Asian American in order to destabilize the common US-centrist Asian American discourses that reinforce the naturality of the US as the unquestionable place of the origin, instead of a land constituted of the ongoing history of colonialism, imperial conquer, and White supremacy. In other words, to make claims about Asian Americanness through a transnational epistemology is to contest the stagnant borders of the nation-state, citizenship, and racial identity, that is often
taken-for-granted in the mainstream discourses of Asian Americans as a racial minority situated in the US and seek alternative frameworks of theorizing US racial relations beyond liberal multicultural representations.

While the process of psychological knowledge production often flattens out the “thick descriptions” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 21) of histories, politics, and affects in the name of objectivity, this dissertation aims to uncover and make explicit the events that give life and meanings to what we understand as Asian Americanness today. By exploring the tensions between the construction of Asian Americanness and the establishment of the US nation-state and how the im/migrants have made sense of their racial, gendered, sexualized position in the host society, we can understand that the making of subjectivity is neither developed intrinsically or imposed structurally, yet a contested and politically charged process. As one of my central arguments provokes, the flexibility of Asian Americanness not only emphasizes the Asian American subject’s tendency of being triangulated between the Black-White paradigm in the US racial formation—to be simultaneously “not White” or “not Black”—but also its elasticity and resilience in surviving and thriving on decades of imperialist and racial violence. The notion of flexibility is also to echo Lisa Lowe’s (1996) seminal book Immigrant Acts that theorizes how the racial formation of Asian Americanness is precisely the result of the contradictions of the Asian American subject being placed and recruited within the US for her labor yet continually marked as the foreign Other outside of the national imagination. Moreover, it speaks to Aihwa Ong’s (1999) influential work on how neoliberalism not only flexibilizes capital, labor, and national borders, but also the modes of citizenship and identification. From the geopolitical diplomatic strategies to immigration policy, and from the symbolic cultural representations to racial identity subjectification, these contradictions of the ‘foreign-within’ and ‘outsider-inside’
continue to shape the global discourses about Asian Americanness as a race, a culture, a spatial position, and a racial futurity.

By applying the word *cruising* in the title, I do not intend to suggest that my selection of this particularly thread Asian Americanness is aimless or indiscriminate. What I want to invoke is the potential *pleasure* in this search and uncovering of an alternative path to theorize and reconnect with Asian Americanness through an explicitly queer and transnational approach. As José Muñoz (2009) writes in *Cruising Utopia*, cruising as a politicized act of feeling hope and seeking utopia “from a renewed and newly animated sense of the social, carefully cruising for the varied potentialities that may abound within that field” (p. 17). On the exhausted poststructuralist stance I initially embarked on this project and the ‘subjectless’ position of Asian Americanness against representations, deep down I seek to rebuild a different kind of relationality of Asian Americanness that undoes its imperialist baggage—to unsettle the nation-state and the patriarchal lineage of history—and reemerges as a critical location of geopolitical consciousness to build affiliations across identity. That is, *cruising borders, unsettling belonging*, to me, is not a project of searching the nostalgic ‘home,’ but fundamentally, a project toward *deimperialization*.

A project of deconstruction like this dissertation essentially involves a “paranoid” approach to the subject that requires vigilantly unpacking of the text and being suspicious of the knowledge presented (Sedgwick, 2003). In privileging paranoia in my relationship to Asian Americanness, I am bounded by an epistemological failure that is incapable of constructing a solid definition of *what Asian Americanness is* as the project is committed to challenge the dominant assumptions packaged and wrapped into such seemingly cohesive and naturalizing category. Instead of identifying the materiality and essences of the subject, what I can
accomplish with this approach is to trace the movements of *where Asian Americanness go* and *what Asian Americanness does* to illustrate an approximate cartography of the assemblage that it has produced in relation to the process of racialization, sexualization, colonialism, nationalism, and imperialism. In this ‘backwards’ movement in deconstructing history, the goal is to “find a different place to begin” (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995, p. 7). That is, I aim to provide a map that locates Asian Americanness at a different temporal and spatial to generate new questions about the subject beyond the binarisms of Blackness and Whiteness, victim or perpetrator of racism, injured or successful, foreign or American. The directionality of the project—the gesture of moving *toward* somewhere—is not only to clarify the problematic discourses about Asian Americanness that have accumulated across history to the presence, but also to point to the neglected questions that have been blindsided by the reductionist politics and narratives of racial liberalism, immigrant acculturation, and minority citizenship in *becoming Asian American*.

Aside from my training as a critical psychologist who is attentive to and suspicious of essentializing constructs, other driving affects underneath this paranoid project have emerged from my own experience as someone who is perceived and who performs as Asian American in most of my social, political, and academic circles. Despite my strong identification and political commitment both as a Taiwanese national and an Asian American, I have learned that these two categories are not easily reconcilable as most of the spaces, especially in academia and scholarship, require affiliation and loyalty to a singular identification. Specifically, there is a violent splitting of interests between the ‘foreign’ issues of geopolitics, militarism, and imperialism and the ‘national’ concerns of White supremacy, structural racism, and immigrant justice. Compared to disciplines such as literatures and ethnic studies that is oriented toward a deconstructive approach, this split feels much more intense in the existing psychological
scholarship where ‘culture’ and ‘race’ are compartmentalized into drastically different bodies of scholarship. This splitting in psychology has resulted in a perplexing framework in which ‘cross-cultural’ differences are located outside of the US borders and ‘racial discrimination’ happens within the borders. Refusing to ‘choose’ between the camps and forcing into the singular narrative of becoming Asian American, my ontological anxiety of being erased and flattened has become a driving affect in the project to find the fault lines of anti-imperialist and Asian American politics in order to start somewhere anew.

As much as I have engaged in the deconstructive critiques about the Asian American subjects in this text, whether they are literatures, immigrant communities, or even activists, my intention is not to demobilize the accumulative works and political agency enacted through the discourses of Asian American, but seek alternative alliances and coalitional possibilities that incorporate a queer anti-assimilationist and anti-imperialist lens. In doing so, this melancholic refusal of letting go and refusing to be split is a deconstructive move that can be potentially generative for a different Asian American futurity. In this dissertation, I suggest a queer methodology of researching Asian Americanness that unsettles the presence and affirms the ontology of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). In the risk of losing the recognition of Asian Americanness as a racial population, I believe it is worthwhile to take the speculative leap and put our faith in conceptualizing new forms of political agency: from population to assemblage, from identity to moving body politic and commitment, from demographic representation to ideological heterogeneity, and from developmental consciousness to ephemeral affective emergence. Perhaps this is ultimately what I hope to accomplish with the dissertation: putting my paranoia into a collective yet heterogeneous voice that can provoke new inquires in the psychology of race, Asian American studies, and queer of color critique.
Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of a total of six chapters. In this chapter, I provided an overarching introduction and literature review of my research area and objectives. As I began the process of conducting dissertation research in 2014, I was inspired by the growing momentums of the Black Lives Matter movement across the country, and thus was compelled to explore the role of Asian Americanness in the movement and how racial relations could be understood with an intersectional and transnational lens. The project unfolded with the movement and was hugely inspired by the activists I met during this time who were involved in racial justice solidarity work in New York City. While the dissertation was not designed as a participatory project, it was the collective energy in the streets, in the organizational meetings, and through the countless conversations I had with mentors and comrades that enabled the theorization and analysis of this work. Chapter 2 detailed the methods that I employed across the three studies, which included more detailed descriptions of my ethnographic involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement, and the context in which I met the informants of the project. I also provided the rationale behind the analytical methods, including content analysis, discursive analysis, and phenomenological narrative analysis for each of the study.

The results of the three studies are separated into three different chapters. Each of the chapters discusses the unsetting tensions of constructing Asian Americanness in the textual, the bodily, and the psychical spheres. By exploring the question with multiple methods and with various “texts” that consist of published psychological journals, the visual and interactive discourses in street protests, and life narratives, I illustrated not only the analytical but also the deeply affective accounts of Asian American subjectivities. Chapter 3 began with a critical survey of psychological literature on the notion of “Asian Americanness” through the database,
By tracing the scientific archives from the 1950s to 2000s, it destabilized the category of “Asian American” as a coherent racial population in the mainstream US racial discourse. In Chapter 4, I examined the emergence of two contrasting Asian American subjectivities by ethnographically documenting the political discourses of a pro-police Chinese American coalition and a pro-Black Lives Matter Asian American coalition surrounding a controversial case of police murder in New York City. The unsettled questions of Asian American subjectivity as either the oppressed racial minority or the successful racial ideal emerged and became the central tension around the Black Lives Matter movement. In Chapter 5, I conducted phenomenological narrative interviews with the queer Asian / American activities involved in Black Lives Matter and anti-imperialist racial justice works to seek alternative conceptualizations of Asian American subjectivity that resist the hegemonic identification with the nation-state and the binary of assimilation and marginalization. Finally, Chapter 6 provides some concluding thoughts and discussion on the concept of intersectionality and queer negativity in identity research, as well as implications of these findings in theorizing toward a queer and diasporic Asian America.
CHAPTER 2

METHODS AND ANALYSIS: THE TEXTUAL, BODILY, AND PSYCHICAL

This dissertation investigates three movements of Asian Americanness in the textual, bodily, and psychical scale. The selection of cases across scale, which included psychological texts, political protests and life narratives, enables me to compare and contrast discourses at multiple levels and trace how they move from one site to another. Rather than reifying the demographic boundaries or individual accounts of experiences as the ‘truth’ about the Asian American population, I conceptualize discursive productions and embodied life events as the forces that territorialize and deterritorialize Asian Americanness as an assemblage (DeLanda, 2006) of racial relations, geopolitics, and neoliberal governmentality throughout history. The central research questions guiding the project were: How has Asian Americanness been represented by psychological literature and for what historical, social, and political purpose? How has Asian Americanness has been incorporated as a component of US nation-state making from the postwar civil rights racial liberalism to the current phase of neoliberal multiculturalism? How have various forms of activist subjectivities appropriated or rejected the category in order to make claims about national belonging and identity affiliation?

To explore these questions, I employed multiple qualitative methods including a textual and discursive analysis of psychological literatures, ethnographic study on Asian American participation in Black Lives Matter, and phenomenological narrative interviews with queer Asian American activists. The methods of the textual, bodily, and psychical are employed in the dissertation to invoke a different conceptualization of scale. The scales I use in this dissertation are not an indication of the effect size or the truthfulness of the evidence as often signifying in the framework of the micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis (e.g., privileging the structural
impacts of the macro over the micro level, or treating the micro as more ‘real’ or ‘essential’ than the macro level), but an exploration of diverse material qualities of the different data. On one hand, the psychological text has a characteristic of declaring truth and producing knowledge about populations and individuals that is interpreted as permanent and unchanged, solidifying statistical results across time and space. On the other hand, the bodily expressions are far more contested ‘evidence’ that relies on the physical signifiers of the body, skin, flags, signs, and the movement and interaction of crowds that simultaneously recreate and unsettle preexisting discourses about a community, a group, and conception of race. Furthermore, the psychical affects operate across the temporal and spatial spheres, where the subject draws past memory and conscious awareness about one’s trauma and desire to create narratives about the self. These different levels of expressions converge and function as a whole to mobilize what I term Asian American assemblage, rendering intelligible the notions of identity, race, and nation in the dominant discourses about the Asian American subject.

Across all three studies in this dissertation project, I took on a “subjectless” position of the Asian Americanist critique to examine the relationship between Asian American subjectivity and its representations (Chuh, 2003). By “subjectless,” I mean to foreground the discursive constructedness of a geographical, racial, and affective unit termed Asian Americanness, instead of assuming its internal, biological coherence as a predetermined population. The research project is thus not to illustrate the concrete boundaries and measurements of what Asian Americanness is, but what it can tell us about psychological knowledge production, nation-making, and identity construction by elevating the historical and geopolitical tensions that have constituted such a term, and enactments that contest and renegotiate the term. Each study provides the descriptions of different Asian American enactments that unsettle the discursive
construction of Asian Americanness as a distinct racial population that is ‘neither Black nor White,’ as a politically assimilating subject, or as a psychically and culturally ‘confused’ subject. Each of these discourses have dominated and coexisted in the public imagination of what Asian Americanness is, and even taken on by Asian American elites to make claims about the political and moral legitimacy of Asian Americans’ role in the US society. My application of discursive analysis is not to prove how psychology has constructed a ‘structure of lies’ about Asian Americans, but to uncover what historical conditions make these discourses productive and intelligible.

Both Said (1983) and Foucault (1991) emphasize the materiality of discourse: that we should approach discourse less as representations of history, but as active power that directs multiple sites of institutional forces and investments. As Said articulates, the goal of discourse is “to maintain itself, and more important, to manufacture its material continually…” (p. 216). In other words, with the three studies, I am interested in exploring what material qualities of these overlapping events about Asian Americanness—imperialist wars, colonialism, uneven economic development, and neoliberal globalization—that aggregate and congeal to make Asian Americanness racializable? Discourse is not abstract signification in any sense, but a form of practice that enacts violence through science, institution, and regulation of the body. In its repetition and iteration, discourse finds its regularity that governs our life without direct forms of domination, but with cultural hegemony and consent, as Gramsci (1999) terms, where we voluntarily participate in the discursive reproduction.

The Textual: Psychological Science as a Genre of Discourse

The textuality of psychological research as a particular scientific genre is significant for how it corresponds with different institutional power—policy, medicine, culture, morality, and
the psyche. The colonial taxonomy that explicitly displayed phrenology and racial phenotypes has now been replaced by the tone of scientific neutrality and tables of descriptive statistical results in the recent psychological research, yet they still contain an organized series of presentations, as Foucault (1972) articulates, “a certain style” and “a certain constant manner of statements” (p. 33; emphasis original). My first study examined the shifting configuration of Asian Americanness since the 1950s to 2000s across psychological literature in the PsychInfo database. I traced how the subject construction of Asian Americanness mapped onto a transpacific history of postwar political anxiety, the 1965 waves of immigration, and the neoliberal ‘post-racialization.’ The psychological texts selected are thus beyond the empirical, descriptive statements on scientific discovery, but rather, the knowledge they produce feed back into public discourses and become part of our collective consciousness.

One cannot simply treat psychological research about Asian Americanness as inaccuracy of methodological application or scientific hypothesis. I understand these texts as the embodied practices of the social scientists informed by their cultural and political contexts. It is as much about diplomatic decisions, ethical life choices, moral judgments of success and failure, clinical practices, and institutional regulations. With discourse analysis that pays specific attention not only to the shifting yet persistent notion of Asian Americanness but also the particular function of the genre in which psychological research takes shape, my goal is to demonstrate how psychological science has always been an intimate aspect of our cultural and material life.

The Bodily: Ethnography on Movement and Friction

To contrast the dichotomizing and orientalist portrayal of Asian Americanness in the literature, I applied ethnographic and participant observation methods to understand how contemporary Asian American geopolitics operates on the ground. Departing from ethnography
on social movements in the 1990s and early 2000s that centered on the role of institutional
mechanisms, state apparatus, and global finance in analysis of movement dynamics, where
activists were depicted as subjects of changes ‘within the state’ with set political demands, I am
interested in how multiple subjectivities of Asian Americanness are produced and circulated
beyond the confinement of the state through an explicit transnational activist convergence (Juris
and Khasnabish, 2013). The transnational alliance, whether it is made possible through meeting
across physical geography and nations, ideological exchanges in the virtual world, or imaginary
beyond the confinement of time and space, is necessarily politically charged and contentious due
to the uneven structural relationships globally.

While these transnational spaces of convergence can be productive and generative
towards a more progressive vision of global social justice, my analysis pays specific attention to
struggle and tension around the meanings of Asian Americanness in activist practices. The goal
is not only to reveal internal movement conflicts, but more importantly, to prevent romanticizing
the transnational as smooth flow of people, capitals, goods, and ideology. Rather, I foreground
the analysis of “friction” in my ethnography, which addresses structural confinement of global
power on transnational movements (Tsing, 2005). According to Tsing, friction is not about
blocking movement or slowing down the flow, but it shows us “where the rubber meets the roads”
and reminds us how “[roads] create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in
doing so they limit where we go” (p. 6). Friction brings both a sense of racial consciousness and
racial resistance from the Asian American communities in their struggles through and against
transnational flows. The claiming of Asian Americanness in the late 60s as a radical racial
movement in the US, for instance, borrowed from both the Third World Liberation movement
globally and racial equality rhetoric from the civil rights movement. While it aimed toward a
broader anti-war and anti-imperialist international solidarity struggle, it essentially turned to become a liberal reformist movement within the US nation-state, given the political shift toward racial inclusion in electoral politics and change of immigration policy to absorb more middle-class Asian populations from abroad (Wei, 1993). Friction is how global power paves the way for transnational convergence yet restricts its trajectory. It facilitates encounter of differences and enables us to see the working of global power that is built upon moments of disruption, resistance, and discontinuity, rejecting the myth of a mutually consensual operation of global machine.

The site where I began my ethnographic work was the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) where an escalation of racial consciousness and racial conflicts emerged at the same time since 2014. Originally an activist campaign with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter from African American communities in response to a series of police shooting and killing of young Black men, now it has become a multiracial and international movement against the devaluation of Black lives and militarized state violence. The movement has inspired solidarity across Black, Latino, South Asian and Muslim racialized communities, yet the voice of Asian Americans has been relatively silent from the pan-racial rhetoric, both in mainstream media and in progressive circles in the beginning. The political message of “Black, Brown, and Muslim Lives Matter,” where an anti-state racial subjectivity is defied by the shades of skin tone but also the disproportional police violence against particular racialized bodies, in a way intentionally singles out Asian Americans—especially East Asians—as a differently positioned group in the US racial relations that is absent from racial struggles and often actively embracing the American Dream.

The role of Asian Americans in the BLM movements drastically shifted when Peter Liang, a Chinese American rookie police in New York City who shot an African American man,
Akai Gurley to death in November 2014. This incident happened during the height of the Ferguson protests, where both Asianness and Blackness became the collateral damages of state sanctioned violence, became quite controversial and instigated debates about racial justice and anti-Blackness in both the mainstream and progressive Chinese and Asian American communities. While both White and Chinese/American elites appropriate the model minority discourse to bolster the state’s investment in anti-Blackness and neoliberal interests, queerness has become a politically critical strategy in progressive Asian American communities for the “unlikely affiliations” across racial and national categories (Eng, 2010). My ethnographic work specifically follows the tensions of how the conservative and progressive communities employ Asian Americanness to advance their agendas, and the “sticky engagements” (Tsing, 2005, p.6) of this incident intertwined in the US-China geopolitics over the definition of a global multicultural society.

The Psychical: Activist Narratives and Queer Negativity

For the final study, I selected nine activists to conduct narrative interviews. The US-based queer Asian participants were approached from the Asian and Pacific Islander Peoples’ Solidarity (APIPS), a pan-Asian coalition of progressive NGO leaders that convened in New York City as a response to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2013, a neoliberal trade pact that aims to counter the growing economic and political influences of China in the Asia Pacific region by forming its trade block in the region and reinserting military intervention and presence, which was called “the Pivot to Asia” by the Obama Administration. The anti-TPP coalition provided a rare opportunity in which ethnically oriented diasporic organizations come together to combat US militarism collectively. These organizations that primarily worked on shaping the bilateral relations between the US and their perspective nations in the Asia Pacific—including
South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, and China—joined forces to counter the US capitalist expansion and imperialist adventure. The group represented not only the common experiences of racialization in the US domestically, but also attempted to build a new form of pan-Asian diasporic solidarity in opposition to the US hegemony globally. This pan-Asian diasporic formation can be understood as an insurgence not only rejected US nationalism that propagates middle-class assimilation values for minority citizens, but also opposed the neoliberal multiculturalism that attempts to decentralize the issues of race, class, and nation. At the coalition, issues of sexuality and LGBTQ experiences were not a central political concern, as we primarily organized around anti-militarism campaigns. However, the topic came up often during our meetings and casual conversations, playing a visible role in the social and organizational life.

While APIPS was not my ethnographic site, it was a space that provided me with alternative insights into Asian American politics in the height of the Liang-Gurley conflicts during my fieldwork. Many of the members became involved in the case in support of the BLM, solidifying a progressive coalition of Asian Americans against police brutality to show solidarity to Gurley’s family. Though I initially designed the narrative interviews for capturing queer Asian American subjectivities from participants who positioned themselves in different queer Asian social spaces (i.e., same-sex household, activist organization, or ethnic-specific social network), I changed my design to focus on the life stories of the APIPS activists as I became much more involved in the Liang-Gurley conflicts during my fieldwork and built closer relationships with these activists (see the details of the methodological shift in Appendix A). I interviewed the APIPS activists who self-identified as queer regarding their experiences of immigration, family formation, racialization, intimate relationship, and social belongingness to get a holistic sense of
how queer Asian diaspora is imagined and practiced beyond the mainstream assimilationist desire of queer liberalism.

**On Analysis: Sideways Reading of Asian America**

With critical analysis across temporal scale from the postwar period to the current phase of neoliberal globalization and geographical scale from the US domestic race relations to the transnational, this dissertation hopes to offer an intersectional framework across context and time, texts, movements and bodies, to conceptualize Asian Americanness in psychology, grassroots movements, and activist narratives. The dissertation is divided into three parts based on the different scales of the investigation. While the textual analysis first lays out the major changes of discourses and provides a broader examination of Asian American representations across history, the ethnographic details and activist narratives show how these representations generate frictions against Western dogma and create alternative pathways and knowledge about Asian Americanness. The multiple methods are not separate elements in my analysis, but together create a motion that leads us to understand how Asian Americanness circulates, diverges, and congeals in the transnational circuit.

Throughout the chapters, I have adopted a “sideways” movement of analysis and interpretation of the data. Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) has specifically termed the “sideways” as a queer mode of accumulation and accretion, where the vertical progress over time is not the primary object, but rather, it alludes to a horizontal and lateral movement of building networks and connections. Rachel Lee (2009) elaborates on this analytical strategy as “key to understanding Asian/America as a multispecies assemblage” that reorganizes agency as distributed across body parts instead of locating in the singular identity. My reading of Asian Americanness across history through the notion of the sideways is not to craft out a singular
narrative about Asian American progress or the strengthening of group identity. Rather, aim to highlight the continued tensions and conflicts over Asian American representations across sites. My training as a critical social psychologist also indicates that I am attuned to the fractures and counter narratives of established group identity, where the analysis emerges from “lines of difference and power” that challenge the “representational coherence, integrity, and stability” (Weis and Fine, 2004, p. xx). These “fault lines” of group identity are indeed not only the antiestablishment forces, but also the openings of radical possibility. In short, while the making of Asian Americanness in this project is historically situated, but not historically determined. Given the group’s deep entanglement in the geopolitical history, the sideways analysis also means an attention to how Asian Americanness has come to forms across lands, borders, and nations, and wars, as well as the complex webs of intersectional subject formation, instead of a linear development of immigration into the US.

On Reflexivity: Queer of Color Critique

As an engaged participant in the research and someone who has deep investment in the meaning of Asian Americanness, one way I employ strategies of reflexivity is through the framework of queer of color critique (Erel, Haritaworn, Rodriguez, and Klesse. 2010; Ferguson, 2012; Perez, 2012) that conceptualizes intersectionality as the interweaving power relations, instead of discrete identity category formation. Particularly, I draw on the queer of color critique to make explicit how ethnic nationalism and racial formation compromises the disciplining structures of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and imperialism that take for granted the concepts of nationalism, community, safety, and futurity. Queer of color critique rejects the reproductive futurism pervasive in the immigrant acculturation narratives and the White assimilationist homonormativity built on the further marginalization of radicalized subjects. It demands a
temporality elsewhere, away from the hegemonic neoliberal future, and alternative way of belonging beyond the constraints of biological and ethnic ties (Haritaworn, 2015). In my ethnographic context, queer of color critique has emerged not only as a valuable theoretical framework and strategy of reflexivity, but as the everyday social and cultural life in the activist milieu I am engaged in. It is not an essentialized identity category that tells the truth about a population, but rather, a way of longing and desiring an alternative Asian American futurity.

As contemporary debate on the boundary of Asian Americanness is heated in the affirmative action policy and anti-Chinese sentiment on the rise globally, it is a critical time to revisit the social scientific knowledge production that constantly reinforces a static conception of race and culture that are infused with American imperial interests. As I have emphasized earlier, the myth of model minority is not an inaccuracy of representation about academic success, as much as it is a myth there is such a coherent racial population to be represented in the first place. The abiding myth about Asian Americans serves as a powerful metaphor in the virtue of American multiculturalism: its tolerance, inclusion of differences, and absence of racial conflicts often deployed in contrast to the ‘bad minority’— African Americans (Kim, 1999). To move away from the construction of Asian Americanness as truthful population and coherent racial identity that continues to propagate racial conflicts and neoliberal racial citizenship necessitates an examination of Asian Americanness as a raced, gendered, classed, and sexualized assemblage that produces the false binaries of Blackness and Whiteness, the good minority versus bad minority, and assimilation versus marginalization. These contradictions cannot be simply resolved by claiming a more accurate or diverse representation, but should be understood as the central elements in the making of the Asian American assemblage, which has become the contour of the physical and imaginary boundaries of nation, geography, and citizenship.
CHAPTER 3

PSYCHOLOGY CONSTRUCTS ASIAN AMERICAN\(^1\)

“[As much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other.” (Said, 1978, p. 4-5)

Psychology has a long history of involvement in scientific racism, providing the empirical, rational, and moral justifications for domination over the racialized Other since the late 19th century (Bhatia, 2002; Rose, 1985; Teo and Febbraro, 2003). As a modern discipline that claims its expertise in the science of the individual, it has joined with other natural sciences to consolidate the notions of “race” with techniques of differentiation and quantification of the interior cognitive life. In order to distinguish itself from other disciplines, psychology must establish its object of study within the unit of the individual, leaving social hierarchies and contexts as merely additive to the descriptions of the individual. Therefore, many critics within the discipline—from the consolidation of Black Psychology (e.g., Clark and Clark, 1950; Cross, 1971), Feminist Psychology and Critical Whiteness Studies (e.g., Fine, 1992; Fine, Weis, Powell, and Wong, 1997) in the 1960s and 1970s to the emergence of Critical Psychology in the 1980s (e.g., Bhatia, 2002; Teo and Febbraro, 2003)—have long pointed out the problem of psychology that conceptualizes race as a category that separates populations and signifies the different mental process and cognitive abilities between the Westerners and non-Westerners, Whites and non-Whites, where the line of normality and pathology is determined. These critics emphasize

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\(^1\) The title of the chapter is inspired by Naomi Weisstein’s article, Psychology constructs the female: The fantasy life of the male psychologist (with some attention to the fantasies of his friends, the male biologist and male anthropologist. Originally published in 1971, the article challenges the psychological male gaze on women’s body and subjectivity that has constructed a patriarchal representation of womanhood in the discipline.
that race should be considered as a social construct established by the technology of regulation and imperialist ideology that was part of the problematic foundation of the discipline.

Conceptualizing psychology as a scientific discipline built of the necessity of constructing the individual subject allows us to understand it as a scientific discourse, rather than a discipline that provides scientific truths about the mental life. The Foucauldian notion of discourse (1972)—as a set of practices and knowledge formation that reinforce existing dominant ideologies and subjectivities—points to the underlying cultural constructions and power constellations that constitute assemblages of psychological scientific texts about race and normality. The relatively marginalized and simultaneously homogenized Asian American racial representations in the psychological notion of race not only signify the problem of the Black-White dichotomy, but also the covert imperialist history of the discipline. The vast interests in Asianness as a psychological category and distinctive culture post-WWII highlight the persistence of the Orientalist fantasy about the Asian Otherness originated from the construction of Asia as a region of geopolitical significance but of which has been seldom explicitly discussed within the field. Therefore, to make sense of how Asian Americanness has become a subject matter in psychology, we must examine the Orientalist architecture of knowledge in the formation of modern psychology.

Orientalism as a Psychological Epistemology

The historical and contemporary entanglements between psychology and imperialism call for a critical analysis of the construction of the Other not only through the biological essentialist discourse of racial inferiority, but also the Orientalist discourse, which according to Edward Said (1978/1994) sets up geopolitical distinctions between the “East” and the “West” by means of scientific discovery and cultural hegemony. Gramsci’s idea of hegemony is crucial in the analysis
of Orientalism, because it illustrates how Western power works through consent rather than domination. That is, under Orientalism, the Western form of life is understood as not only superior over the Oriental backwardness, but also normative in its way of governing the definition of humanity. Said elaborates that Orientalism is a “flexible positional superiority” (p. 7), where Western interests are invested in producing and maintaining a geographically distinctive “Orient” through sociological, psychological, historical, philosophical and aesthetic descriptions where the “West” can be positioned flexibly and in relatively advantageous terms to such construction.

Therefore, to make sense of how psychological discourse is implicated in assembling the colonial and racial Other, we must understand that its Oriental subject is not only constructed within the chain of racial hierarchy, but distributed across the colonial cartography. As anti-colonial theorist Sylvia Wynter (2003) points out, colonialism does not only aim to separate the human and the savage, and the rational and irrational, but also the civilized and the uncivilized world: “One of the major empirical effects of [the colonial power] would be ‘the rise of Europe’ and its construction of the ‘world civilization’ on the one hand, and, on the other, African enslavement, Latin American conquest, and Asian subjugation” (p. 263). These colonial structures of location and geographical references of the world massively transformed the Western ideology and scientific knowledge about the representation and management of the non-West, and at the same time, produced new methods of classification and regulation of the non-White Other. These relations of coloniality as an ongoing power consolidated through colonialism turns to “define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” survive even after the end of the formal
colonial regime (Torres, 2007, p. 243), and continue to outline and arrange the modern production of knowledge and subjectivities.

Both of the frameworks of Orientalism and coloniality thus enable a spatial analysis of race and culture beyond the psychological confinement on the scale of the individual and identity. To address the central questions in this chapter: what discursive subjectivities have been inscribed to Asian Americanness within post-WWII psychology? How do the shifting representations of Asian Americanness map onto the political anxieties especially in the US? Conceptualizing the psychological representations of Asian Americanness as inherently embedded in the ongoing colonial projection of the West, I trace three particular periods where the conceptions of Asian Americanness have shifted and transformed in psychological literatures in domestic racial relations and in the context of US racial relations as well as global geopolitical tensions from the 1950s to the present. I started in the 1950s because the immediate post-WWII period was the first time when the notion of Asia and Asianness was introduced. The changing signifiers of Asian Americanness as both the cultural Other outside of the US and the racial Other within the US illustrate how Asian Americanness can be thought of as a series of transpacific flows that sustain the codependent, constructed regions of ‘Asia’ and ‘America.’ The Asian American subjectivities emerged from the unfolding geopolitical struggles that harness both imperial fantasies and the possibility toward deimperialization. With such analytical approach, I do not intend to merely offer a critique of the enactments of scientific racism and Orientalist epistemology in psychology, but address how these scientific discourses are a reflection of “our collective psychological history” (Richards, 1997, p. xii) upon the societies we live in, and are still very much part of our conscious and unconscious lives.

**Diasporic Cruising: Finding Asian Americanness in the Scientism of Psychology**
Drawing from Chuh’s (2003) Asian Americanist critique, in this chapter, I examined Asian Americanness as a “subjectless discourse” (p. 9) that foregrounds the “discursive constructedness of subjectivity” in psychological literatures. The approach critiques the liberal multicultural paradigm that upholds the fantasy of the “naturally achieved” citizenship and equality of Asian Americans as a racial minority in the US, and highlights the regulatory regimes of politics, norms, culture, and scientific production in which Asian Americans are made into a legible subject position and epistemological object. The destabilizing position of the diasporic analysis also emphasizes the transpacific enactments and deployments of Asian Americanness that are entangled in the imperial and neoliberal ambitions in the making of the Asian American subject (Hoskins and Nguyen, 2014; Ong, 1993; Parreñas and Siu, 2007). The method of the diaspora thus disrupts the taken-for-granted distinctions between ‘Asia’ and ‘America,’ and examines the Orientalist construction of Asianness as both the Other and the interior subject within the US empire.

Archival selection and analysis. In searching for Asian Americanness across psychological literature via PsychInfo database from 1950 to the present, I found that Asian American has never been a consistent racial category or even a coherent concept. As I stated earlier, “Asian American” did not emerge in psychological scholarship until the 1970s through the waves of student activism and post-1965 waves of immigration from the Asia Pacific. The “subjectless” position I employ allows me to look for Asian Americanness through the multiple signifiers of “Asian,” “Asia,” “Chinese,” “Japanese,” and “Asian American” at each decade since the 1950s. I used these terms in the literature title search to limit the articles to those ones whose primary concerns were about the given subject, rather than just a comparative sample to other social groups. I selected only peer-reviewed articles published in English concerned with
human subjects, as I was primarily interested in how these psychological representations mapped onto the public perceptions and anxieties about the Asian American subject. I traced how the primary signifiers switched across time and analyzed the different scientific preoccupation with the subject by highlighting the dominant theoretical paradigms and concerns in each of the decades. I applied thematic and discourse analysis both quantitatively and qualitatively: Firstly, I looked at the frequency of how these representational signifiers (e.g., Asian or Japanese) were used as the conceptual framework and then identified the primary figure of Asian Americanness at different periods; and secondly, I examined how these figures were discursively constructed and how they were related to broader political projects at the particularly historical moments. Furthermore, I identified the distinct tensions of the Asian American racial construction in each of the period, highlighting the ongoing, contested forces in the making of Asian Americanness that speak to the racial anxiety and social preoccupation. The first two analytical steps were rooted more closely in the contents of the psychological texts, whereas the final step was my analytical leap from the text to the broader social and political discourses about Asian Americanness across time.

My review of the literatures certainly cannot claim to provide a complete representation of all Asian American ethnic groups or histories. The selection of my archive followed a particular thread of post-WWII geopolitical development between the US and the Asian Pacific nations that have constructed the tropes of the “foreign within” and the “model minority.” Therefore, I emphasized on the two key ethnic groups of the Japanese and Chinese Americans who are arguably the primary figures that have established the racial prototype of Asian Americanness in this period. By doing so, I excluded the discussion of the representations of South Asians and Southeast Asian groups, who diverged from the immigrant histories of the
Japanese and Chinese, as many of them came to the US as refugees post-WWII and experienced a qualitatively different racialization process particularly post-September 11, especially for the Muslim populations (Lee, 2015).

Given the limitations, in this chapter, I have outlined my analysis of the psychological dominant discourses of Asian Americanness at three periods with distinct patterns of scholarship in relation to the broader changes in Asian / American politics: 1) the postwar geopolitical tensions of the 1950s and 1960s, 2) the minoritizing of Asian Americans of the 1970s and 1980s, and 3) the establishment of US-based citizenship of 1990s and 2000s that I argue have subsequently relied on the discourses of the “unassimilable subject,” “model minority,” and the “flexible citizen” to represent and solidify Asian Americanness. For each of the periods, I will select three key papers that demonstrate primary configuration of the Asian / American subject to illustrate the shifting historical trends in the construction of Asian Americanness in the next section.

Table 1
Number of peer-reviewed literatures with different search terms across decades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Term / Decades</th>
<th>Asia / Asian</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Key Research Concerns</th>
<th>Major Theoretical Tensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950-1969</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>• Psychotherapy</td>
<td>Assimilability vs. Unassimilability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Personality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Delinquency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search Term / Decades</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>Japanese American</td>
<td>Chinese American</td>
<td>Key Research Concerns</td>
<td>Major Theoretical Tensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1989</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>• Mental health</td>
<td>Discrimination vs. Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Racial Identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Acculturation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-2009</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>• Acculturation</td>
<td>Ethnic territorialization vs. Segregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cultural differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Unassimilable Subject: The Postwar Period of the 1950s and 1960s

“Because they collaborated in the making of the war, and because they’re yellow and have different beliefs” (Frenkel-Brunswik and Havel, 1953, p. 121).

The psychological scholarship during the postwar periods of the 1950s and 1960s are marked by a preoccupation of ‘Asia’ as a separate knowledge system from Western psychology and psychiatry. Asia, outlined by the wartime cartography of conflict and alliance, emerged as a relatively new region of US political and economic interests. The postwar American deployment of military power and economic resources expanded westward along the Pacific coast and recruited Asian Pacific countries, most notably South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore as the exterior of the US empire (Hopskins and Nguyen, 2014). The massive expansion in interest in examining the psychological structures of non-European subjects through a psychoanalytic framework, especially on the pathological Japanese national character during and immediately after the US-Japan war, slowly died down due to the decline in the popularity of psychoanalytic approach (Richards, 1997, p. 225).

During this postwar period, Asia or Asianness had not been recognized as a coherent racial population in psychological scholarship, partly due to how the Pacific War on the stage of WWII divided the region by the competition of different imperial interests. However, the psychological interests in the Japanese remained strong in light of the implementation of the Japanese internment camp during WWII, which undeniably separated the Japanese as military threats and the American national Other (Lee, 2015). As part of the Axis forces, Japanese as a race was particularly marked by anti-Americanism and put down as the “enemy Japs,” whereas the Chinese were constructed as the “friendly” ones who were more “tolerant” (Wu, 2014, p. 11), despite their recent histories of being deemed to be ‘unassimilable’ and ‘un-American’ by the
Chinese Exclusion Acts. The self-proclaimed immigrant leaders in these different communities also used these contrasting representations of different ethnicities to project their groups’ respectability and civility in their own race making—that is, to ensure the American public that they were “not like the Chinese” or vice versa (p. 19). In a sense, Asia and Asianness became largely a geographical concept fueled with intra-regional and inter-group conflicts and the unwavering Orientalist ideas of differences, despite the imposed homogenization before the war.

As a result, the literatures on Asianness as a coherent racial population either in the US or abroad are absent from this time period. The literatures on either the ‘Japanese population’ or the ‘Chinese population’ as the two major Asian immigrant groups at the time significantly outnumbered the literatures titled with ‘Asian’ or ‘Asia’ (Asian n=12; Japanese n=104; Chinese n=68) during the 1950s and 1960s. There was an upsurge of interests in examining the personality characteristics of the Japanese and Chinese populations that included the primary concerns about their psychiatric abnormality, motivation, values, and attitudes in comparison to the ‘normative subject’ of White Americans. These psychological evaluations were done with various assessment methods from the Rorschach test (e.g., Yang, Tzuo, and Wu, 1963) to personality surveys (e.g., Scofield and Sun, 1960) that all aimed at differentiating how they deviated from the normative sample. The depictions of the Japanese and Chinese, whether as immigrant populations based in the US or abroad, generally matched the Orientalist stereotypes of conforming, culturally traditional, and sexually repressive as in lacking the Western romantic desire in heterosexual courtship. These representations were appropriated not only to show the inferiority of the psychological qualities of the populations, but, especially for the Japanese, to explain why the Japanese society was capable of waging wars against Western countries.
**Wartime epistemology of race.** As I stated earlier, while there was a minimal interest in addressing Asianness as a race, there were much more scholarly engagements with the Japanese and the Chinese subject. In many occasions, the Japanese and the Chinese were deployed in parallel comparisons with Negroes, Mexicans, Jews, and Italians regarding White Americans’ perceptions of social distance and stereotypes of minority groups, where *nationality* was seen as synonymous to the concept of race and the Japanese were separated from the Chinese as distinct racial populations (e.g., Frenkel-Brunswik and Havel, 1953; and Miles, 1953; Zeligs, 1953). While these minority groups were treated as “comparable” on the same plane, their social positions were not seen as equivalent in any way. In Frenkel-Brunswik and Havel’s (1953) study, 161 White American children between 10 to 15 years old were selected to participate in a scale of ethnocentrism and interviews developed by the authors. The results showed that the children consistently rated “Negroes” the highest on the prejudiced attitudes and Jews the lowest, whereas the ratings of Chinese, Japanese, and Mexicans sat closely in the middle.

The interview opened with the question “What is an American?” (p. 96) and funneled down to questions about specific minority groups, such as “Why don’t people like [X group]?” “What could [Y group] do to get along better?” and “How do you feel about the segregation of [Z] group?” It’s important to note that here the groups were already presumed to be different and separate from the majority group—“Americans”—where Whiteness was unmarked. Moreover, the questions were designed in a way that did not leave space for children’s reflexivity of their perceptions of the Other, but on the opposite, encouraged their projection of difference on the Other. The authors analyzed not only the general ratings of prejudice across groups but also the specificity of attitudes toward different groups. While the Japanese and Chinese were placed on similar position out of the general ratings, the children in the study viewed the Japanese as more
aggressive and treacherous, especially those who were from the West coast and had witnessed the internment of Japanese Americans in the 1940s. One girl addressed the question regarding reasons behind the prejudice against the Japanese:

Because they collaborated in the making of the war, and because they’re yellow and have different beliefs. It’s so funny that many children say, ‘the dirty Japs’ and they don’t even go over there and see them. So many people here hate them when they don’t even know what it’s all about (Frenkel-Brunswik & Havel, 1953, p. 121; emphasis mine).

Here, the yellowness of the Japanese race functions particularly as an effect of the war, and is associated with the Japanese only. On the other hand, the Chinese were characterized by favorable middle-class values of “cleanliness, industriousness, thrift” as well as well as “quiet, patient, and submissive” (p. 120) that demonstrated “good citizenship.”

The othering of the Japanese was consistent with the children’s responses to the overarching question of “What is an American?” which was overwhelmingly defined by one’s “loyalty” to the country. For instance, a boy said being American means that “...you have to be loyal to the country, respect the flag, be willing to fight in the case of war” (p. 105). Besides this relatively blunt interpretation of loyalty, some children personalized Americanness as one’s innate moral character: “[An American is] one that obeys the laws—is good to his country” or “One should obey try to be a good citizen, do what other people do and not try to be different...”

The themes of patriotism and conventionalism rooted in the backdrop of the war and the demand for law and order ran across the children’s statements. To be a “tolerable” minority, is thus to fit in and to pass as closely as one can toward an unmarked Americanness. The traits of “cleanliness, physical health and strength, and conventionalism” (p. 106) were considered to be the most important and favorable qualities an American should possess, noting that these qualities were
contrasted to the yellowness of the Japanese—as dirty, aggressive, and disloyal. Assimilation at the time demanded a racial and physical passing of being utterly invisible. The Chinese were perceived as more favorable precisely because they were considered to be relatively unmarked due to their quietness and submissiveness, and the hardworking morality coded in the definition of cleanliness. Similar to the Jewish group, their economic status and the hardworking attitude enabled them to be freed from the visible, physical and spatial segregation and the darkness of skin that was particularly loaded for the “Negro” populations (p. 116). The contrasting perceptions toward the Japanese and the Chinese showed how the wartime epistemology was deeply embedded in how race was constructed and who were seen as the unassimilable Other in this period. Prior to the establishment of Asianness as a coherent racial category in the 1970s, one’s relation to the war largely defined one’s social position and citizenship.

**Unassimilability and racialized space.** The knowledge production of “race” and difference in psychology immediately postwar was more preoccupied with the question of Americanness than the previous blatant scientific racism on the attributes of biological differences across racial populations. With the diminishing fear of foreign attacks and the war stage becoming more hidden and covert, the anxiety about the Other was gradually transformed to the American urban spaces by the 1950s. Chinatown, which has been associated with criminality and deviancy for decades, became a significant psychological concern. Published in the *Journal of Social Psychology* in 1952, Lee’s study on Chinese juvenile delinquency in the Chinatown of San Francisco addressed the new rise of native-born Chinese children and their immigrant families as an urgent social problem. Lee articulates her concerns in the phrasing of the research questions:
“...with the unprecedented addition of population among the newly arrived families, together with that of the established families, the next decade’s Chinese juvenile population is substantial. A timely question may be posed, ‘Will the next decade see an increase in delinquent, neglected, and dependent Chinese children?’ Assuming the group under study to be representative and the nativity of parents and children shifting to a preponderance of native-born, what significant adjustment problems confront persons who possess physical visibility and cultural diversity? If family and personal disorganization is more prevalent as acculturation proceeds, what cultural traits are lost or reduced in strength which functioned as mechanisms of social control for foreign-born persons? What part has the community, i.e., San Francisco Chinatown, played in preventing, ‘hiding,’ or inducing problems?” (p. 16; emphasis mine)

The geographical segregation of the war was brought within the American borders, in which the ‘ethnic enclaves’ of different immigrant communities became a visible social problem. As implicitly stated in Lee’s (1952) paper, the Chinese people’s “physical visibility” (p. 16) is intimately connected to the spatial segregation of the population from the White Americans, and she was particularly concerned with how racialized spaces such as the Chinatown may indeed “induce problems” for the process of acculturation and increase delinquency rates for the native-born Chinese children. Noted here that the representations of the Chinese were quite contradictory. In Frenkel-Brunswik and Havel’s (1953) study, they were considered relatively invisible in contrast to the Japanese, yet the spatial segregation made them inevitably visible and separate from the mainstream society. This conflictual portrayal of the Chinese highlighted the instability of the racial construction of the Asian ethnic groups at this time immediately postwar.
The paradigms that psychologists adopted to conceptualize race and ethnicity were rapidly shifting and lack consensus.

In Lee’s study, Chinatown was constructed as a decadent place that was full of gang fights and robberies that tended to be “hidden” from the general public and thus a space needed special attention and investigation. Lee attributed the Chinese juvenile delinquency to cultural conflicts with the foreign-born parents and adopting the ill lifestyle of their working parents unsuitable for the American life:

“...the Chinese-Americans keep late hours like their parents, eat a low-caloried American breakfast, try to maintain their energy by consuming daily two low-caloried Chinese meals, but expect to work and play like Americans. [A medical doctor] emphatically attested that the Chinese-Americans have more ‘jitters’ than their parents because of their more complex life, i.e., trying to live both ways and doing well at neither” (p. 24; emphasis mine).

The second-generation immigrant children’s conflict of assimilation was well documented in Lee’s paper on the aspects of education, language, diet, values, and social affiliations with the majority society. While these second generation immigrants’ obstacles of acculturation and biculturalism remain to be one of the major psychological concerns in the present, these issues were largely considered as spatial, that is, caused by the physical segregation of racialized spaces, instead of merely cultural. Lee observed:

“Inadequate housing conditions are frequently mentioned as contributory reasons [for distorted child-parent relationship]; children regard their quarters as being too crowded or too unkempt for entertaining their companions. Thus, they connive to see their
companions outside of the home, while parents blame the children’s misconduct on ‘bad associations.’” (p. 24)

In Lee’s analysis, the segregated racialized space was a significant if not the primary problem that the Chinese communities faced in the process of assimilation. Noted here that the descriptions about Chinatown were drastically similar to W.E.B. DuBois’ depictions of the “Black ghettos,” which were conceptualized as the roots of the “Negro problems” (1899, p. viii). It indicates how the process of racialization in the US always undergoes a spatial arrangement. The urban restructuring of populations requires not only the institutionalization of racial hierarchy but also a geopolitical imagination of ‘the American versus the un-American.’ The issues of juvenile delinquency that Lee identified, was not only a single case-based issue, but was framed as a “crisis” in the Bay Area Chinese communities in the early 1950 (Wu, 2014, p. 183). The shifting focus from the ‘foreign enemy’ violently demonstrated in the Japanese internment to the ‘urban social problem’ domestically must be understood in a transition in the realization of the Asian populations from temporary migrants to permanent residents of the US, where there was an increasing number of native-born, second generation immigrant children postwar (Lee, 2015, p. 259). The blatant form of othering Asian communities as the ‘Oriental outsiders’ was thus transformed to a domestic spatial management in the ‘ethnic enclaves’ of the American cities. Indeed, Chinatowns were not only defined as an urban social problem in the postwar America, but also the embodiment of crimes and deviances that were associated with the immorality, vice, and diseases—the general unfitness in the American life—in the public’s spatial imagination. The geographical separation of the racialized communities due to the effects of war intensified the crisis of the American urban spaces particularly during this period.
The frontier of multiculturalism. While the mainland of the US was fueled with the postwar anxiety of urban regeneration and reform, there was another form of spatial articulation of Asianness taking shape in Hawaii. The wartime conceptualization of Asianness as a position outside and in the opposite of the West rather than a raced population was present in the psychological studies in Hawaii during this time. Hawaii, as the frontier of WWII between the US mainland and Asia Pacific became a state in 1959 and embodied the “foreign within” position in relation to the US mainland, and even an experimental ground for multiculturalism prior to the second largest wave of Asian immigrants post-1965. Published in Social Process in Hawaii, Yamamura’s (1956) study examined the experiences of “Asiatic students” on Fulbright scholarship in Hawaii—which was the only psychological study that referred to the Asian subject in the 1950s. Hawaii was described as the “meeting place of peoples of the East and West” and “the area in which American democracy demonstrates to peoples of Asia what it can do for Asiatics” (p. 73). The study consisted of eight in-depth interviews of the Asian Fulbright grantees from various Asian Pacific countries including Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Korea, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam not only about the academic matter but also about the host site in Hawaii in general.

While the study largely framed the Fulbright orientation program as a success of cultural mixing and a preparation site for the grantees to adjust the life in the American mainland, it also documented some discontents around the imposition of American assimilation. A Japanese grantee mentioned in the interview: “Some of our boys feel that we are being Americanized—by this I mean, in class we are taught how to behave in the dining room, answering telephones, and such. Some feel this is not orientation, but an attempt to convert us into Americans. We have no wish to become Americans” (Yamamura, 1956, p. 62). From this Japanese grantee’s testimony,
we may get a sense of how Hawaii was constructed as an experimental site of the American assimilation program for the professional migrants just prior to statehood. Similar to the other two studies about the Japanese and the Chinese, the barriers and possibilities of assimilation were the dominant psychological concerns postwar. While WWII separated the Japanese as a particular unassimilable group and the association with crimes made the Chinese morality questionable in the mainland, it also enabled new spaces of intergroup racial contacts. As this study indicated, Hawaii and the Asian foreign students were both a display of the crossing between the East and West. However, this particularization of Hawaii as the Pacific frontier outside of the US, left the wartime spatial configuration of the US and Asia intact. The intra- and inter-racial conflicts in the US again remained unresolved at this time.

Despite the heterogeneity and multiplicity in the ways that Asian ethnic groups were considered, the themes of racial formation during the immediate postwar period was a framing of nationality as culture—of loyalty and disloyalty, hardworking and untrustworthy, morality and immorality—that marked one group as American and the other un-American. Most of the studies at this time period were also conducted from a standpoint of the White gaze that treated the Asian subject as a ‘scientific object’ that would either verify or problematize the generalizable psychological processes, rather than interrogating their subjectivities and narratives. While Asianness was not conceptualized as homogenous race with common physical attributes or shared culture, they remained to be spatially segregated entities in the minds of the psychologists and the American public. The wartime pressure of conventionality and homogeneity demanded the one and only way of being American through the path of assimilation. However, geopolitical tensions and domestic segregation marked Asianness as an unassimilable other in the race making of the US.
“The Model Minority”: Homogenizing the Asian Race in the 1970s and 1980s

“No other group has moved so quickly upward in the United States with the possible exception of the Jews” (Lee and Rong, 1988, p. 545).

At the end of the 1960s, psychology in the US had undergone a transformation on the subject of race, prejudice, and discrimination. The Society for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues (SPSSI) within the American Psychological Association (APA) was the forerunner that began to publish race-related topics such as policy issues of around desegregation in its *Journal of Social Issues (JSI)* (Richards, 1997, p. 237-238). In 1967, the SPSSI invited Martin Luther King Jr. to deliver the “Distinguished Address” on the topic of “The role of the behavioral Scientist in the Civil Rights Movement.” The irrefutable presence of the Civil Rights movement combined with the decades of Black psychologists’ effort of challenging the apolitical stance and Whiteness in the APA eventually opened up a space in the mainstream psychological circle to address racial justice issues more directly. However, preoccupied with the dueling debate of nature versus of nurture in intelligence, racial discourse was attached to differences between the bio-genetic bodies of “Caucasians” and “Negroes” (Richards, 1997). Race was thus fetishized as a problem located in the bodies of Black Americans, while other racial minorities were rarely addressed in this Black-White binary paradigm.

The psychological production of Asian Americanness as a racial population only started to gain momentum in the 1970s. One of the primary reasons for such emergence of Asian American consciousness is the broader social context of the shift in immigration patterns. Since the 1965 Immigration Reform Act, the demographic profile of Asians in the US has steadily shifted from a previously majority US-born population that came with waves of labor demands to a primarily foreign-born, highly skilled population due to the economic demands of the
postwar US society (Parreñas and Siu, 2007). Whereas in the early 1960s, only about seven percent of all immigrants, approximately 20,000 per year, came from Asia, since the Immigration Reform Act, by the mid-1980s, the number had increased by tenfold, in which Asian immigrants made up 44% of the total annual immigrant influx (Wong, 1986). Secondly, the Civil Rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement inspired widespread political participation across diverse groups, including Asian American activism across campuses in the West Coast that addressed specific issues of racial inequalities related to the Asian American experiences (Lee, 2015). Thirdly, entering the Cold War, the geopolitical relations along the Pacific have been reshuffled and realigned. The postwar emergence of “Pan-Asianism” developed through the wave of Third World national independence struggles against Western colonization was solidified into formal organizational structures such as The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967 which led to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989 as attempts to redefine Asian regionalism in the global stage through strategies of economic interdependence. The dramatic economic developments in the “Four Asian Tigers” of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea since the 1970s through the alignment with the postwar free market economies of the US and UK gave birth to the idea of “Asian values” as synonymous to Confucian ethics of hard work, discipline, and respect for authority (Hoskins and Nguyen, 2015, p. 6).

All these domestic and global factors combined made the amalgamated notion of Asian American possible, but also subjugated its definitions to discourses of cultural essentialism and the Western vision of capitalist success. Moreover, this widespread social, cultural, and political transformation of the notion of Asia as a region eventually led to its separation from the previous Oriental conception of Asia as merely external and exotic to the West. But rather, particularly to
the US, Asia has formed intimate economic and military partnership that together facilitated the establishment of the US as the global superpower and dominant economy in the world stage. In this sense, Asian Americanness has always been a transnational and transpacific construct and cannot only be examined as a category within the US domestic relations. The seemingly separate and disconnected geographical regions of Asia and America have become an integrated part of global political economy as well as a new form of entangled racialized subjectivity.

**Minoritizing Asian Americans.** During this time of rapid immigration expansion and Asian economic successes, new questions of assimilation and integration had arisen with this multigenerational and mixed social economic status group that were roughly lumped into the category of *Asian*. Scholars from psychology, sociology, and the new fields of Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies formed through civil rights activism started to be concerned with how the Asian population could be integrated into the American cultural citizenship. Vocal Asian American psychologists were particularly concerned with the establishment of Asian American as a racial minority in the US. In the search of *PsychInfo*, there was an emergent production of literatures that addressed Asian Americans (or Asian-Americans) as the primary research subjects during the 1970s and 1980s, which included a total of 90 peer-reviewed journal articles, as well as the steady increase of the amount of papers on the subjects of Japanese Americans (n=152) and Chinese Americans (n=71). While the ethnic specific articles engaged with the ongoing issues of assimilation and acculturation of these immigrant groups, the articles on Asian Americans illustrated two new and distinct discourses of the Asian American *common racialized experiences* and *the success story*. While these discourses of discrimination and success seem divergent and unfitting, they in fact work together to accomplish the construction of Asian Americans as a legitimate racial minority group in the US racial paradigm. The
psychological knowledge production particularly emphasized the homogenization of different ethnic groups by demonstrating the evidence of cultural similarity and shared oppression, creating a new psychological category of the Asian Americans that now can be measured, compared, and accumulated through its knowledge of race, culture, and biology.

This minoritizing process officially began with the established of the Asian American Psychological Association in 1972 with the leadership of Derald Sue. Its initial interests were in dealing with the mental health issues in the communities. Stanley, Derald, and David Sue’s (1975) paper, “Asian Americans as a Minority Group” in *American Psychologist*, set forth the notion that Asian Americans are in fact not only a social group, but a racial minority group that faced distinct patterns of oppression and discrimination in the US. Beginning in this period, the scientific study of Asian Americans were gradually taken over by psychologists who identified as Asian Americans, where questions of racialization, discrimination, and identity development were foregrounded by these engaged participants in the communities instead of distant observers. The elevation of the category of Asian American by these psychologists was a critical eruption in the field where the Orientalist tropes of the ‘perpetual foreigner’ and ‘unassimilable Other’ were temporarily suppressed and became covert in this period of politicization. It was not until two decades later where these tropes about the cultural Other were rescued by more sophisticated cognitive psychological techniques and seemingly politically neutral discourse of ‘cross-cultural differences’ in the age of rapid globalization.

In the paper, the Sues pointed out the controversy surrounded the qualification of Asian Americans as a “minority group.” They asserted that, on top of their race, Asian Americans had to demonstrate “evidence” of oppression by proving that they were “poor or raised in the ghetto,” whereas “[members] of more ‘recognized’ minority groups were not asked for such information.
Their disadvantage status was assumed” (p. 906). The authors called out the problems of “poverty, unemployment, ill health, suicides, youth gangs, crimes, sweatshops, and immigrant survivals” (p. 908) seen in the ethnic enclaves of Chinatowns and Manilatowns. These previously separated ethnic issues were now identified as shared experiences of Asian American discrimination. The high attrition rates from in mental health services among Asian Americans was also demonstrated as one of the urgent issues of racial discrimination as well as the limits of the psychotherapeutic paradigm in fitting Asian American needs. In a way, Asian Americanness posed an unresolved dilemma for psychologists during this period, because it demanded a new paradigm of racial theory that was capable of addressing ambivalent and incomplete minority inclusion, which called for the recognition of Asian American as a coherent racial minority group instead of scattered and separated foreign Other.

**The success story.** Despite the critical efforts of some psychologists to claim common experiences of racial discrimination of Asian Americans, some were constructing the Asian American experiences as the ‘unprecedented’ story of minority success comparable to Ashkenazi Jewish Americans. Due to the reason that the 1965 waves of professional class of Asian immigrants were still very recent history at this moment, the scholars who were interested in the ‘Asian American success’ relied mostly on migration theories to explain the phenomenon. In highlighting the outstanding achievements of Asian Americans, Lee and Rong (1988) stated,

“Asian children, only a few years off the boat, have won national spelling bees. They have taken a major share of Westinghouse Science Awards, are disproportionately represented in the student bodies of prestigious colleges, and sometimes outnumber non-Oriental students in mathematics and science classes” (p. 546)
Not only were their achievements in academics a subject of scientific investigation, the economic upward mobility was also largely documented in comparison to other racial minority groups. Drawing from the “middleman hypothesis” of migration originally developed by sociologists Bonacich (1973), the authors argued that the Asian American success was an accumulation of social and economic resources by the previous generations, the “middleman” who were not invested in the host society yet heavily invested in their next generations: “Although the parent generations had moved little up the socioeconomic ladder, an expectation of good returns from education may have led to heavy investments in children’s education” (1988, p. 548). In some sense, at this point of the history, the Asian American success was understood as part of a general framework of selective migration, where structural opportunities, the accumulation of capitals, and emphasis on education led to the story of success that was “like Jews” in many aspects (p. 559).

By the time of the 1970s and 1980s, Asian Americans as the model minority had become a fixture of the national racial imagination. From the earlier wartime construction of race where Asian immigrants were understood as separated social groups that were “definitely not-white,” the model minority discourse not only solidified Asian Americans as a distinct racial group that were “definitely not-black” (Wu, 2014, p.2; emphasis original). Indeed, the Asian American cultural values and the Confucian ethics of family honor were often used to demonstrate the racial distinctiveness of Asian Americans in contrast to not only the statistical national average of White normatively but also the relatively poorer performances of other racial minorities (e.g., Crystal, 1989; Lee and Rong, 1988; Sue, Sue and Sue, 1975). While the scholars at this time did not have consensus on what Asian Americanness is as a race, the discourses of both discrimination and success achieved the homogenization of Asian Americanness at this point in
contrast to the previous wartime race making that separated the different ethnic communities. Whereas the sociological analysis of migration dominated the theorization of Asian Americanness in the 1970s and 1980s, it wasn’t until the early 2000s, the cultural and hereditary arguments emerged as two of the contrasting and dominant theoretical paradigms that attempt to theorize the Asian American success (Sue and Okazaki, 2009), where Asian Americanness began to undergo a new process of *particularization* at a culturally essentialist level.

**Post-Civil Rights racial hegemony.** This paradoxical and flexible racial position of Asian Americanness as simultaneously oppressed yet assimilable mirrors the trajectory of racial formation postwar from *racial repression* to *racial hegemony*, that is, the racial strategies of the state has moved from the enslavement, segregation, and violent disruption of racial movement to a coercive, inclusive tactics of neoconservative colorblindness (Omi and Winant, 2015). This “Great Transformation” of racial politics post-Civil Rights, as Omi and Winant name, rearticulated racial meanings and identities emerged in the movements to an ideological form of liberal governance based on equality and redistribution, but not necessarily in any substantive form. Hegemony, originated from Antonio Gramsci, is characterized by its capacity to incorporating the subject and its opposition into state governmentally. Nguyen (2002) points out that part of the hegemonic governance was done through the “bureaucratization of race” (p. 15), where Asian Americanness was integrated into the state via the newly developed bureaucratic measurements such as the census and affirmative action, producing statistics of opportunities and inequalities. The Asian American desire of seeking state inclusion by identifying as an *oppressed* group, may not be seen as so paradoxical in the context of racial hegemony after all, as the state demanded a pluralistic representations of racial liberal inclusion and at the same time the domestication of racialized Other by issuing pragmatistic institutional reforms.
The psychological scholarship on Asian Americanness in this period thus often incorporated the national demographic data to position the status of Asian Americanness as a racial minority in the interest of combating the model minority image. For instance, both of Stanley, Derald, and David Sue’s (1975) and David Crystal’s (1989) papers consecutively utilized various nation-wide comparative statistics of medium income, education level, and mental health rates to illustrate the questionable success image of Asian Americans. They both pointed out that while Asian Americans’ medium income was higher than the national average, it did not account for their number of dual-wage-earner family that was above the national average. Moreover, the educational achievement did not necessarily guarantee Asian Americans to obtain secure jobs. Finally, the lower level of psychopathology as measured by hospital admission rates was highly misleading because it neglected Asian Americans’ cultural attitudes towards Western psychiatry and medicine. As Crystal (1989) stressed this success image of Asian Americans was “only the deceptive shimmer of a mirage—the dreamy gossamer arising from a mathematical bog,” and he warned the readers that, “A superficial reading of the statistics suggests that not only peoples of color but the white majority, too, may very well envy the material and psychological well-being of Asian Americans” (p. 406). These psychologists were definitely aware of how the model minority discourse was a myth and recognized its potential danger of racial division among other racial minority groups. However, their efforts were not aiming at deconstructing Asian Americans as a racial group, but precisely the opposite, to stress on the collective hardships, discrimination, and barriers to opportunity to solidify Asian Americans as a legitimate racial minority subject at this point of history. This minoritization of race making allows the transition of Asian Americanness from the “perpetual foreigner” in the wartime
toward a kind of racial subjectivity driven by institutional inclusion and survival, that is, the desire to be fully incorporated into the US society.

“The Flexible Citizen”: Neoliberal Racial Citizenship in the 1990s and 2000s

“Compared with other racial minorities, perhaps Asian Americans are less likely to psychologically differentiate feelings of confusion with feelings of idealization for Whites.” (Julian, McKenry, and McKelvey, 1994, p. 258).

The representational paradox of the Asian American subject post-Civil Rights era to define its own position neither as a raceless population ‘like White’ nor as a racialized population ‘like Black’ has indeed become an opportunity for the professionalization of Asian Americanness, to rearticulate racial formation in the US beyond the Black-White binary. According to Omi and Winant (2015), since the early 1990s, driven by the neoliberal needs to generate profits in the increasingly globalized market and to expand consumer basis and to cut down social services, colorblind discourses were adopted to recategorize low-income people of color as the new consumers. Under this post-racial neoliberal regime, the US racial politics is marked by the rearticulation of racism as a “race-neutral matter” (p. 219), that is racism is now detached from its structural roots and considered as a rhetorical object that can be deployed by any subject, including whites. The popular discourse of “reverse racism” that punishes people of color for getting “unfair advantages” shows the shifting meaning of racial ideology beyond the Black-White logic and demanding a defensive response to contain racial equality progress from “going too far.”

Asian Americanness, as the post-racial ideal citizen, not only surpasses the decades of Black-White racial antagonism but also demonstrates the ‘success’ of the multicultural governmentality. Seizing the moment of the diminished and institutionalized Black struggles,
Asian American elites occupied the position of political leadership by manufacturing a unified front of Asian American representations that is extremely flexible in terms of their economic mobility but also position in the racial hierarchy. This post-racial Asian American political consensus is done through what Nguyen (2002) calls the strategy of “territorialization” (p. 20) where the previous segregated ethnicities are constructed under the language of nationalist identification and assimilation and the commodification of racial identity that can be integrated as part of the now acceptable US multicultural regime. 

**Normalizing Asian Americanness.** Under this process of normalizing Asian Americanness into the nation-state, in psychology, there has been a diversification of Asian American scholarship on a variety of topics from academic achievement, mental health, and acculturation to experiences of racial discrimination and intergroup conflicts. In the *PsychInfo* search, there were a total of 843 peer-reviewed journal articles published about the subject of Asian Americans during the 1990s and 2000s—accounting for more than eight times of the amount in the 1970s and the 1980s. This is partly due to the increasing effort of professionalization since the establishments of Asian American psychological networks in the 1970s (see Leong and Okazaki, 2009), but also the broader social imagination of Asian Americans as a *normative population* in US racial relations that is comparable to others. Among the 849 citations, Asian Americans were most often used to compare with White Americans (aka. European Americans) on general social and cognitive process such as self-concepts, perception of identity, mental health, and parenting attitudes (n=437), while occasionally compared with other racial minority groups (African American n=49; Latino American n=32).

The *flexibility* of Asian Americanness that traverses between the borders between ‘like White’ and ‘like Black’ is the most visible tension during this period, when the group is
compared to other racial groups in psychological literature. On one hand, when compared to other racial minorities, Asian Americans are often considered the most similar to Whites, especially when socioeconomic class is considered as a mediating factor for parenting and academic achievement outcomes (Julian, McKenry, and McKelvey, 1994); on other hand, there has been a continued effort of including Asian Americans in the framework of people of color since the 1970s. For example, in Perry, Vance, and Helms’ (2009) study, they applied exploratory factor analysis of the People of Color Racial Identity Attitude Scale (PRIAS; Helms, 1995) among a sample of Asian Americans to understand how “the racialized experience of Asian Americans...may or may not be different from other POC.” (p. 252). The fact that whether Asian Americans should be included as part of people of color is a question of investigation is an interesting phenomenon. The authors also must deal with this paradox in the study’s rationale, in which they argued that “no sweeping statistic of ‘success’ should overshadow the continued nature of racism and prejudice that they still experience today” and how “a historical legacy of being treated as ‘non-White’ binds them together” (p. 253). The results, however, were inconclusive. While the sample of Asian Americans displayed similar patterns of racial pride and White anger to other racial minorities, they showed a distinct characteristic of racial identity formation and conformity to the White race:

“Compared with other racial minorities, perhaps Asian Americans are less likely to psychologically differentiate feelings of confusion with feelings of idealization for Whites. Said another way, ambivalent or anxious thoughts about racial group membership might represent a natural starting point of racial identity development in concert with traditional aspects of Conformity” (p. 258).
In some ways, while Asian Americans were finally normalized as part of the racial minority groups, they still were used to demonstrate a distinct pattern of racialization that was not quite White or Black. As the study illustrated, their *ambivalence* or *anxiety* over their racial group identification led to a stronger affiliation with the White ideal. In other words, to the psychologists, Asian Americanness posits a problem in the racial identity development, precisely because of its ambiguous and flexible status. On one hand, Asian Americanness represents the generalizability and normalization of the racial minority framework in understanding various racial groups. One the other hand, Asian Americanness continued to embody the tendency of White idealization, which again, constructed Asian American subjectivity as the epitome of racial assimilation and colorblind citizenship for the multicultural America, where as other racial minorities—particularly Black Americans—were marked under the discourse of ‘racial opposition’ and deemed to be unfit for multicultural citizenship.

**From minoritization to particularization.** This flexibility of Asian Americanness beyond the traditional Black-White racial paradigm became a useful strategy for psychologists to craft out new discourses of racism of the ‘unconscious.’ What is specific to the psychological construction of Asian Americanness as a racial category at this period can be found in the rearticulation of racism from the previous outright exclusion and blatant prejudice to the subtle and unconscious harmful exchanges of *microaggression*. First coined in 1970 (Pierce, Carew, Pierce, Gonzalez and Willis, 1978), Sue et al. (2006) elaborated that microaggressions can be defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group” (p. 271). Initially emerged in the clinician and client interaction in the
therapeutic setting, racial microaggressions have been broadly applied to practically all aspects of lives where racial minorities experience invalidation and depersonalization by seemingly inconsequential racial comments. Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal and Torino (2009) emphasized how the Asian Americans experience is a qualitatively different form of racism that can be better captured through the framework of microaggressions due to their model minority stereotype, depicting Asian Americans as a group that had already “made it” and “immune to racism” (p. 89), unlike African and Latino Americans. Verbal statements such as “You speak such good English” or “Where are you really from?” can be incidents of microaggressions that invalidate the identity of Asian Americans that treat them as aliens in their country. While concepts including modern racism (McConahay, 1986), symbolic racism (Sears, 1988), and aversive racism (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002) have all illustrated the shifting forms of racism that have become more difficult to be identified and qualitatively different from the “old fashioned” expression of racial bigotry and hatred, microaggressions are considered even more subtle and covert, where the (White) perpetrators themselves are not even aware of their racist attacks (Sue et al., 2006).

In the microaggressions framework, Asian American racial formation is portrayed as distinct and outside of Black and White racial conflict, which allows the paradigm shift in psychological prejudice studies toward the unconscious and unintended “mishaps” of racist acts. Sue et al. (2009) argued, “Because microaggressions often occur outside the level of conscious awareness, well-intentioned individuals can engage in these biased acts without guilt or knowledge of their discriminatory actions” (p. 89). Removed from the structural roots of dominance and White supremacist violence that have established the racial hierarchy of exploitation and spatial segregation, racism is further disembodied from a particular subject
CRUISING BORDERS UNSETTLING IDENTITIES

location—it is simultaneously everywhere but nowhere, and could be committed by any person without explicit motivation. The concept of microaggressions, distinct from the claims of Asian American racial discrimination that was still largely rooted in structural inequalities such as income level and access to resources in the 1970s and 1980s, becomes an exemplary expression of ‘post-racialism’ as it is more concerned with regulating people’s performance rather than examining the total racial relations. Through the psychological popularization of the microaggressions framework, Asian Americanness has allowed the production of a new paradigm of race that is no longer “burdened” by the definition of racism situated in the structural relations of anti-Black racism. It is a flexible position that does not challenge the White supremacist effects of racial oppression, but instead, a position of Otherness, which is never completely inside nor outside and always in-between, triangulating the structural position of Blackness and Whiteness.

Stratified incorporation. With the normalization and particularization of Asian Americanness in psychological literature, another tension around the internal splits of the racial group also emerged during this time, specifically between the East Asians and the Southeast Asians. Much scholarship addressed the internal ethnic plurality and diversity of the Asian American category, but also questioned whether the category could be unitarily applied for all Asian ethnic groups with drastically different culture, language, and history (e.g., Agbayani-Siewert, 2004; Tsai, Mortensen, Wong, and Hess, 2002). Southeast Asian American groups were particularly constructed as “the Other Asian” (Reyes, 2007), who faced a distinct process of racialization and forms discrimination that were not comparable to the prototypical representation of Asian Americans as high income earning and high academic achieving (Gloria and Ho, 2003). This splitting of the Southeast Asian from the traditional conceptualization of the
Asian American category results in an invisibilization of the unique challenges and barriers of inclusion of the group. Nonetheless, it legitimatizes a different position of flexibility for the Southeast Asian to escape the stereotypical classification of Asian Americanness as rooted in the Asian values of Confucianism and hard work, which used the Chinese Americans as the prototype of Asian Americanness.

For instance, in Agbayani-Siewert’s (2004) study, to examine cultural variation within and between racial groups, Filipino students were found to have more similar gender attitudes and beliefs with both White and Hispanic students in contrast to the Chinese students:

“Regarding attitudes toward women and justifications for violence, Chinese students were less egalitarian and tended to justify abusive behavior more than the other three groups. This finding is consistent with research that found Chinese people to be more conservative than U.S. society in their attitudes toward women” (p. 44).

According to the authors, due to the common lineage of Spanish colonialism and Westernization, it was predicted that Filipino and Hispanic would have much more similarity to one another than to the Chinese, which completely ignored how colonial governance imposes racialized patriarchal violence to the colonized communities in its logic of dominance.

It’s significant to note that this study showed that the stratification of Asian Americanness goes both ways—while Southeast Asians are split off from the model minority ideal, they were also released from the stereotypical burdens of the ‘traditional Asian values’ of Confucianism that were imposed on the East Asian subjects. This tension of ethnic territorialization and segregation of the category persists today in the debates of affirmative action. Whereas the dominant group (i.e. East Asians) demands institutional access through the homogenization of the Asian American racial category, the other Asian ethnic groups demand
visibility and recognition of their particular experiences unintelligible under the umbrella category of Asian American. Such paradoxical subject construction is most apparent in the affirmative action debate, where Asian American elites would claim a broader ethnic and class diversity to include the relatively more disadvantaged Southeast Asians to strengthen the legitimacy of Asian American as an oppressed category and demand institutional access through affirmative action (Park and Liu, 2014), yet disregard such internal contradictions when declaring racial success, particularly in the realm of academic achievement.

Nguyen argues (2002) that ethnic territorialization strips off the internal contradictions of Asian Americanness and creates a class of Asian American bourgeoisie who assumes the political leadership of the communities. As we see in psychological production of knowledge, while pan-ethnic pluralism provides political and moral access, much of the scholarship today still focused on the experiences of Chinese Americans—accounting for 15% of the studies among the 35 different Asian ethnicities (see Kim et al., 2015). This flexible subject construction is made possible by the conflation of race and culture under post-racialism, that is, Asian Americanness is only solidified as a racial subject to construct a unified racial victimology when its class privilege is threatened, whereas the narratives of model minority success are largely justified by the lens of culture—the dogma of the “Asian values” of collectivism, Confucian ethics, filial piety and authoritarian parenting continually dominated in psychological literature since the 1990s despite the rise of Asian American racial consciousness (e.g., Kim and Chun, 1994; Peng and Wright, 1994; Yeh and Huang, 1996).

These two frameworks of racial victimology and cultural success coexist in the current psychological formation of Asian Americanness, shifting the racial paradigm from the immediately post-Civil Rights racial liberalism to the flexible position of post-racial neoliberal
multiculturalism. As Jodi Melamed (2006) notes, the neoliberal US racial relations are managed by cultural discourses that have replaced the centrality of race and realigned power beyond conventional racial categories, where certain racial minorities are granted access to White privileges through cooperating with elites of color and neoliberal values. In other words, race can be demonstrated as part of the neoliberal multicultural performance of governmentality whenever profitable and where class interests converge and not be seen as threatening. Appropriating the revolutionary origin of Asian American political ideology as a broader racial solidarity movement against white supremacy, the contemporary Asian American position is unified to lessen racial discrimination in order to protect the accumulated class privileges and ensure the continuous path of assimilation into the US society.

**Appropriation and Liberation in Neoliberal Time**

As we see in the historical shifts since the postwar period of the 1960s, the psychological making of Asian Americanness has been a process of detaching racial claims from its geopolitical origins and war epistemology, firstly through the legitimatization of Asian Americanness as a racial minority in the US and later as a flexible subject position regulating the domestic racial relation between blackness and whiteness. Asian Americanness is simultaneous “just like” any other racial group yet surpassing its racial category with its distinct cultural traits. As Asian Americanness was distanced from its colonial and geopolitical context and more depoliticized, it becomes easily recruited into the current neoliberal multicultural project, where its longstanding cultural discourses have depicted them as the perfect exemplars of immigrant work ethics and racial self-regulation. While the rise of Asian American consciousness and resistance to White supremacist norms shortly crafted out an alternative and broader racial justice framework, we must be cautious of the Orientalist epistemology of psychology that
continuously constructs Asian Americanness as not just the racial Other but the cultural Other juxtaposed to White Western norms. The analytical separation of race and culture that is prevalent in psychological production of Asian Americanness can be dangerous when scholars selectively critique the homogenization of Asian Americans as a racial category but overlook the hegemonic assumptions of ‘Asian values’ that are continually used to demonstrate the distinctiveness of Asian Americanness as bio-cultural population superior to other racial minorities.

The co-optability of Asian American subjectivity is not to be blamed on the essentialist characteristics of Asian culture or biological traits of Asian American individuals, but must be situated in the geopolitical and wartime psychological construction of Asian Americanness as the “foreign within” (Chuh, 2003, p. 12)—a measurement of assimilability of US subaltern nation-states and racial minority, the space between Asia and America, and the shifting possibility between whiteness and of color. Whereas the 1970s Asian American civil rights movement emphasized overtly on the side of “Asians in America” nationalist politics to overcome its initial Orientalist subject construction, it largely omitted the latent imperialist agendas in such strategy. This paradigm shift of Asian Americanness from the foreign Other to a domesticated racial subject is made possible through the psychological production of a distinct experience of racial victimization and the territorialization of Asian Americans as a coherent racial population, while overlooking the internal contradictions of class privileges and ethnic identities.

The unresolved tensions from both within the Asian American category and between Asian Americans and other racial subjects have placed Asian Americanness in a constantly unstable yet flexible racial subject position—that could be easily appropriated by neoliberal
governmentality, but may also be the potential site for an anti-essentialist racial critique. The unhinged category that moves across geographical position, racial identification, and cultural identity signifies its possibility for cooptation and radical catalytic possibilities. Borrowing from Chuh’s strategy of Asian Americanist critique (2003), to achieve the project of racial justice and deimperialization here is not to neutralize the unsettled meanings of Asian Americanness to an uniform demand, or to simply assert critiques of epistemological violence done to the Asian American subject, but to highlight the limits on subject construction and representation. To deconstruct Asian Americanness is thus not to claim the internal diversity as yet another form of identitarian essentialism, but to make explicit the technologies of imperial domination, assimilation, and neoliberal multiculturalism in the very formation of Asian Americanness.
Asian Americanness, like other hyphenated identities in the US, is the exemplar of the American exceptionalist discourse of multiculturalism and an assemblage of racial and ethnic national inclusion. It exists as both a theoretical and political contradiction, because on one hand, the racial and ethnic part of the hyphenated term signifies the inclusionalist ideal, and on the other hand, the *American* in the hyphen represents the universal principals of democracy, human rights, and equality. John Stratton and Ien Ang (1994) have pointed out that the violent discrepancy between the American ideal and the social reality of racial antagonism in the US is not a gap to be ameliorated over time, but the very effect of hegemonic universalism that obscures the fact that structural inequality and political exclusion of the racial and ethnic other are the foundation of the American nation-state. Because of this hegemonic universalism that pushes for ideological integration, Asian Americanness is always “future-oriented,” as Rey Chow (2002) articulates: It must be “always looking ahead to the time when the United States will have fully realized its universal ideals—that is, when ethnic particulars, while continuing to exist, no longer really matter” (p. 30). To constantly look forward is not only to neglect issues in the present, but also to overcome the past. In other words, for the hyphenated identity not to be a burden, to the self and to the nation, the ideal racial subject must surpass her racial past and bear just enough cultural aesthetics to be multicultural. In this hegemonic ideal, the “ethnic particulars” become the added accents to American nationalism, which contain merely performative and aesthetic values but no political substance. This disembodiment and reduction of the mattering of race to cultural mimicry of the past is the core of neoliberal multiculturalism. It obscures the
mattering of race at the center of global capitalism, that is, to produce different classes of labor and secure white domination and interests internationally.

To be future-oriented, an act of faith in the beneficence of the nation-state, seems to be a particularly strong force in the formation of Asian American subjectivity. As the tokenized or imagined post-racial future of US racial formation, Asian Americanness has created a kind of Asian American body politic that is easily recruited by neoliberal governmentality, in which individual success trumps collective survival. The concept of the body politic I use here considers not only the representations of Asian Americanness in the political realm, but the political acts of the material body that cannot easily be dissolved into a single locus of racial representation that often reifies the binary of oppression and the oppressed. Asian Americanness is constantly struggling against the dominant White norms that attempt to represent it as a unified body (Lowe, 1996, p. 26), but such an abstract, legalistic ideal can also be appropriated by Asian American elites to advance their class and national interests at the expenses of the racialized Other who are rendered unassimilable, backwards, and antagonist to the state. Through the focus on the political enactments and corporeal visibility of Asian American body politics for and against the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, I critically examine how Asian Americanness is appropriated by colorblind racial agendas but also how it may provide an alternative way of undoing racial antagonism and creating new forms of solidarity.

The recent waves of Black Lives Matter movements have become a critical force that confronts the post-racial regime of the US by making the militarized state violence upon Black and Brown bodies visible and urgent. While BLM becomes widespread and endemic to the social and political life of Americans, Asian Americanness has turned into a more contested and fragmented category as the different factions of communities are claiming their own positionality
for or against the radical racial struggle. The flexibility of Asian Americanness as an unhinged and floating signifier enables a dialectic movement between colorblind racial assimilation or anti-identitarian alliance. This chapter ethnographically examines the divergent claims of the Asian American body politic in the context of BLM, within the context of a Chinese American policeman, Peter Liang, who shot and killed an unarmed black man, Akai Gurley, at a stairway alley in Brooklyn, New York and became the first officer to be indicted since the movement’s call for police accountability began. The pro-police Chinese American communities that call for Asian Americans’ liberal racial recognition and the Asian American BLM allies that demand an anti-nationalist Afro-Asian solidarity ran into direct conflict as the case evolved. These two fractions represent not only the different ideologies of assimilation and opposition in the Asian American body politic, but two kinds of temporality that have at once taken shape in the racial formation of Asian Americanness of fitting into a ‘raceless’ future or reclaiming a cross-racial alliance of the past. While the previous chapter focuses on the spatial arrangements of Asian American, this chapter traces the divergent routes of becoming Asian American, troubling the liner narrative of gaining collective racial consciousness as always progressive and unproblematic. The case, indeed, presents not only the everlasting hegemonic paradigm of model minority Asian Americanness that is inherently antagonistic to Black racial struggles, but also its radical and nostalgic discontents. It highlights the failure of the seeming political consensus of Asian American racial formation that has taken the minoritarian discourses of racial liberalism and US nationalism for granted.

**Doing Feminist Activist Ethnography in Neoliberal Times**

Being part of the diasporic Asian activist milieu in the US, I was involved in a pan-Asian coalition of progressive NGO leaders in New York City, Asian and Pacific Islander Peoples’
Solidarity (APIPS), from 2013 to 2016. APIPS is a grassroots coalition specifically formed to oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a neoliberal trade pact called “the Pivot to Asia” by the Obama Administration, which is now defunct under the new Trump administration. It aimed to counter the growing economic and political influences of China in the Asia Pacific region by forming a trade block in the region and reinserting military intervention and presence. This anti-TPP coalition provided a rare opportunity in which these ethnically oriented diasporic organizations, which primarily worked on shaping the bilateral relations between the US and their respective nations in the Asia Pacific (including South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, and China), joined forces to counter US capitalist expansion and imperialist adventure. The group not only represented the common experiences of racialization in the US domestically, but also attempted to build a new form of pan-Asian diasporic solidarity in opposition to the US global hegemony.

This pan-Asian diasporic formation can be understood as an insurgence that not only rejects US nationalism, which propagates middle-class assimilation values for minority citizens, but also opposes the neoliberal multiculturalism that attempts to decentralize the issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation. The coalition became an entry point for me to begin my ethnographic fieldwork when the controversial shooting case of Peter Liang and Akai Gurley shocked the Asian American communities in the greater New York area, where there are historically accumulated conflicts between Asian and African Americans (see Kim, 1999), and between the fractured political ideologies within Asian American communities. During my fieldwork I had seen my close comrades and friends split on different sides of the issue around the political position of Asian Americans—one side holding on to the radical racial justice goal of Asian and Black solidarity, and the other demanding an apology from the state for decades of
Asian victimization and marginalization. To engage in fieldwork on the issue for me was not only politically charged but deeply personal and emotional.

For this study, I have employed a feminist activist ethnographic method (Craven and Davis, 2013) precisely to counter the neoliberal tendency of individualizing conflicts and neutralizing differences and to reject the removed stance of the scientist on objectivity. Feminist activist ethnography stresses making explicit the neoliberal technologies of assimilation and regulation based on the transitional and intersectional matrix of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation subjectification, and how the neoliberal regime slips through political ideology and policy decisions to the everyday experiences of individuals and their narratives. It holds on tightly to the “friction” (Tsing, 2005) of the awkward and unstable encounters of subjectivities on the global stage, as well as provides a lens to understand the “flexibility” of neoliberal governmentality (Ong, 1999, 2006) that can recruit progressive political rhetoric under market logic.

The concept of neoliberalism I examine in my ethnographic context addresses several levels of processes: firstly, at the global policy level, the US government’s implementation of the neoliberal trade deal TPP in the Asia Pacific and the ways in which affiliated countries were pressured to comply with the neoliberal political and economic standard; secondly, in the post-racial ideology of neoliberal multiculturalism (Omi & Winant, 2015; Melamed, 2006), where race is neutralized and appropriated for the purpose of global profit accumulation and racial stratification is discursively rearranged and detached from its structural roots in colonialism, imperialism, slavery, and the prison industrial complex; and lastly, in the construction of the neoliberal subject through the logic of “bootstrap” ideology (Kingfisher and Maskovsky, 2008) and assimilation, which have been the dominant technologies in the racial formation of Asian Americans as the model minority. Considering neoliberalism in this way
carries on the transnational feminist concerns with how power disseminates across global and local borders, and the ways in which all actors are implicated in neoliberal processes, including activist communities (Juris and Khasnabish, 2013). Feminist activist ethnography offers a lens to raise important critiques of not only the structural processes we examine but also the social movements we are embedded in, as a counter strategy against the neoliberal hegemonic forces that aim to erase differences and neutralize equalities. In this sense, the method demands strong reflexivity around the researcher’s own subject position as well as the subject-object duality in mainstream positivist epistemology.

**Key ethnographic events.** During my fieldwork between November 2014 and June 2016, I attended numerous events and protests hosted by both sides of Asian American political spectrum in New York City, the BLM multiracial activist community and the pro-Liang Chinese American community. I have decided to focus my ethnographic analysis on four particular events because of the drastic contrasts in the demographics of the participants, the narratives put out by the organizers, and the level of affective intensity of the events: 1) a vigil for Akai Gurley and his family hosted by a coalition of pro-BLM Asian American organizations on March 15, 2015, 2) a “Support Your Local Police” rally hosted by CAACR on March 8, 2015, 3) a “Justice for Peter Liang” march hosted by Coalition of Asian American for Civil Rights (CAACR) on April 26, 2015, and 4) a protest in front of the Chinese press company, Sing Tao Daily, led by a fraction of the Asians for Black Lives group in New York City on May 20, 2016. I am particularly interested in the performance of Asian Americanness across these actions and how these various groups utilize Asian Americanness as political leverage to claim the legitimacy of representation. Furthermore, a significant part of the battle over representation in this incident has also been online, via the transnational Chinese social network app WeChat as well as the
bicoastal #Asians4BlackLives activist alliance on Twitter and Facebook. I have paid close attention to these online spaces to examine the scope and the effects of Liang’s shooting and its aftermath, and how the incident has incited critical debates around Asian Americanness in the US and beyond.

**Racial discourse analysis.** My analytical approach draws from Wetherell and Potter’s (1992) discourse analysis, which sees racial discourses as actively constitutive of both social and psychological processes. Discourses are not merely reflections of reality but an agentive power structure that constructs the subjectivities of groups and individuals. Under neoliberal multiculturalism, racial discourses have become increasingly versatile and often adopted a seemingly political progressive rhetoric to disguise White supremacy and colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Omi and Winant, 2015). The discourse of “reverse racism” (Omi and Winant, 2015, p. 218), for instance, is constantly deployed in post-Civil Rights racial politics to dismiss racial equality measures, and to preserve White privilege in the name of being “fair” to Whites. Such racist discursive strategies are not bounded by White bodies only but can be performed by racialized bodies. Discursive power is constantly shifting and moving, creating new subjectivities that are capable of performing and adopting racist discourses in a seemingly politically correct manner to maintain the structure of white supremacy. In my study, I am particularly interested in how Asian Americans—the pro-Liang groups and the Asians for Black Lives groups—deploy different discursive strategies to legitimatize their claims and demands in the Liang-Gurley case. While both sides employ the language of rights and justice, as well as the body politic of Asian Americanness, they signify divergent ideologies of power and contrasting views of history. Reading these discursive acts in the context of neoliberal multiculturalism
enables me to examine how racial power works at the level of social interaction and to illustrate how multilayered and antagonistic forces shape Asian Americanness.

My analysis started with an open coding process of my field notes of the four selected key events and related media exposure of these events. The ideas of rights and representational legitimacy became salient for both of the groups. Visual signs, protest chants, and the contrasting ethnic and cultural demographics stood out and were incorporated into my codes regarding how each group attempts to demonstrate their justification of the claims in the Liang-Gurley case. I then identified various different discursive strategies utilized by each of the groups, which I will discuss these strategies in detail in the later sections.

Table 2

Discursive strategies of the pro-Liang and Asians for Black Lives coalitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Discursive Strategies</th>
<th>Main discourse of the Liang-Gurley case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Liang Group</td>
<td>First generation Chinese Americans/Chinese immigrants</td>
<td>Chineseness is more prioritized than Asian Americanness</td>
<td>1) Racial victimology 2) Ethnic empowerment and deservingness 3) American Dream 4) Anti-Blackness</td>
<td>It was an accident in which Liang was scapegoated because of his race. Police as innocent and protector of civilians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians for Black Lives Group</td>
<td>Mixed generational and multiethnic Asian Americans</td>
<td>Asian Americanness is more prioritized than other ethnicities</td>
<td>1)Historicized Afro-Asian solidarity 2) Cultural authenticity</td>
<td>It was a result of systematic violence against Black bodies. Need for police accountability and reforms.</td>
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**Asian Americanness For and Against Black Lives Matter**

During the Black Lives Matter movements across the United States, from Ferguson to Baltimore, activists and regular civilians converged to denounce systematic racialized police violence. In the wake of this movement, a new chapter is emerging in US racial relations, where
post-Obama colorblindness has shown to be a failure of national fantasy and Trump’s administration continues to propagate Black and Muslim criminality. Tens of thousands of protestors across multiple cities have put their bodies in the streets to demand racial justice and hold the state accountable. We often hear the phrase “Black and Brown Lives Matter” (and sometimes “Muslim” as a category is added to the phrase) in the current movement, where an anti-state racial subjectivity is defined by shades of skin tone but also the disproportional police violence against particular racialized bodies, including African Americans, Latino Americans, and South Asians. This political message in a way singles out Asian Americans—especially East Asians—as a differently positioned group in US racial relations that is absent from racial struggles and often actively embracing racial assimilation.

Statistically speaking, Asian Americans, particularly East Asians, are not as likely to be targeted by direct police violence in contexts such as stop-and-frisk, compared to people of African and Latino descents. Asians also have the lowest incarceration rates of any racialized group, Whites included. In 2016, African and Latino Americans made up 71.4% federal incarcerated populations, Whites accounted for 25%, and Asian Americans only accounted for 1.5% while representing around 4.8% of the total populations in the US (World Atlas, 2016). However, it should not be interpreted that Asians have not been subjugated to police violence throughout the US history. The cases of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, and the murder of a Chinese American man, Vincent Chin, in Detroit in 1982, were both tragic events with highly racialized intent. Despite these acts of violence against Asian bodies, a “machinic assemblage” of statistics and information, which Jasbir Puar termed “data bodies” (2011, p. 73) continues to produce the biopolitics of Asian Americans as high-income earning, upwardly mobile, and ultimately apolitical. State violence against Asian bodies is actively erased in order to cultivate Asian
American as a legitimate citizen subject under the beneficence of US multiculturalism. This mechanism of subject making obscures the ongoing racial antagonism in the US, and grants the US cultural and moral legitimacy to continue dominating global neoliberal affairs in the Asia Pacific, to which Obama’s TPP neoliberal trade attested and meant to counter China’s military and economic influences in the Asia Pacific.

This racial antagonism between Asia and African American communities, which resulted in accumulated transnational geopolitical conflicts, reached a peak in one recent incident: Peter Liang, a New York City rookie police officer, shot an unarmed African American man, Akai Gurley, to death near his home in November 2014. This incident, occurring during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests in Ferguson, became quite a controversy in the movement. The controversy was raised and then became a division between African and Asian Americans but also within Asian American communities because Liang, a young Chinese American man, was the first police officer indicted among all of the otherwise White police officers who had abused police powers in the line of duty resulting in the deaths of many unarmed and innocent Black men and women.

It became apparent to Asian Americans that the government was using Liang as a scapegoat to try to alleviate the national racial ‘crisis’ highlighted by the BLM activists and their demands to reform and abolish the police system built on the practices and ideology of White supremacy. This targeting of an inexperienced Asian American officer, amidst the non-indictment of far more clear-cut cases of intent to harm by White police officers, offended many Chinese Americans. Within a few months of the incidents, two large-scale rallies and several press conferences were mobilized by Chinese American business leaders and local politicians in support of Peter Liang, accusing the city’s indictment of officer Liang as ‘racist.’
This seemingly defensive mobilization against Liang’s indictment was quickly appropriated by conservative elites and politicians and turned into an offensive, anti-black critique of BLM’s racial justice vision.

In this chapter, I identify four distinct discursive strategies that the pro-Liang groups adopted to turn BLM’s critique of the state’s racism in police violence into racism against Chinese Americans: *racial victimology, ethnic empowerment and deservingness, the American Dream, and anti-Blackness*. These discursive strategies allowed the pro-Liang groups to shift the attention away from BLM’s broader demand for racial justice and toward intergroup Chinese-Black conflicts. I will elaborate on each of them in details in the following sections.

**Racial victimology.** The pro-Liang coalition mobilized Chinese immigrant communities not only in New York City and its surrounding suburbs but also transnationally. An online petition opposing Liang's indictment started by a Chinese American community member quickly reached almost 120,000 signatures from the US and in China via the Chinese social networking app WeChat. A self-proclaimed “civil rights” organization called Coalition of Asian American for Civil Rights (CAACR) was quickly formed after the incident. The coalition organizers, mostly Chinese American businessmen, saw this as a chance to inject the rarely visible Asian American agendas into mainstream politics and strengthen the community's ties with the police and the state. Thousands of Chinese American protestors gathered on the lawn of Cadman Plaza in Brooklyn, waving the American flags and bilingual signs in support of Peter Liang on April 26, 2015. The crowd largely consisted of middle-aged, first-generation Chinese Americans and their young children. Many people wore red clothes as a symbol of Chinese national pride. While the event was set as a protest against the “unjust treatment” of the state and many were chanting “No Scapegoats!” along with the organizers on the stage, the tone of the event was strangely
celebratory. Some families brought picnic snacks and speakers to play Chinese music in the park, as if it were an extension of the Lunar New Year celebration that just happened earlier in the month.

*Figure 1. Pro-Peter Liang protestors and signs. Photo by author.*

Due to the sheer number of people present in the crowded space, it was difficult to listen to the speeches from the politicians and business leaders on the main stage. Most of the participants were chatting among themselves in different Chinese dialects. Although people were carrying signs to support Peter Liang that said, “No Scapegoat,” “Justice for Peter Liang,” or “Accident ≠ Crime” and the American flags distributed by the coalition leaders, the political contents in the rally were not clear to me. It seemed much more like a social gathering of Chinese immigrants for some sort of national holiday. My conversation with a Chinese woman in her 30s confirmed at least a segment of ambiguous political motivation of the participants. Coming from a suburb of New Jersey via a neighborhood organized bus ride, the woman told me that she was not familiar with the details of the Liang-Gurley case. The reason that she decided to come was because of a message in her WeChat group encouraged people to show up to
demonstrate “Chinese unity.” Also, she said, “all her friends were coming to the event anyway.” The themes of Chinese unity and pride seemed collectively shared among the participants. Among the few participants I exchanged quick conversations with, regardless of their different familiarity or ideas about the Liang-Gurley case, all of them expressed a sense of urgency to show up and to “not get looked down by the Americans,” the mainstream society that they felt have silenced their political views for too long.

The reason that the mobilization was successful and effective should not be attributed to the significance of the Liang-Gurley case alone, but examined in the context of an accumulative organizing effort within Chinese American communities. There were several precursor events that contributed to the turnout at Liang’s rallies. Firstly, in October 2013, the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) “Kid’s Table Government Shutdown Show” on Jimmy Kimmel Live aired an episode in which four children were discussing how the US should solve the problem of its massive national debt to China. One child suggested that the government should build a big wall, and another six-year-old child laughed and said, “kill everyone in China” (Schiavenza, 2013). The remarks infuriated Chinese American communities. Soon after, a petition² was sent to the White House’s “We the People” online initiative by a group of Chinese Americans to demand that the US government investigate ABC’s racial hatred—“the same rhetoric used in Nazi Germany against Jewish people.” It reached 100,000 signatures in the three weeks following when the show aired. While the White House used the argument of free speech to deflect the demand, a new online network of Chinese Americans emerged and carried a sense of political purpose to challenge racism against the Chinese in the US, which was not attached to

the existing non-profit structure of Asian American networks. In a sense, the previously largely apolitical immigrant Chinese American communities utilized Chinese language–based social network sites to organize these communities and attempt to influence the American public. These efforts galvanized a Chinese American collective identity as racial victims.

Secondly, this insurgent political consciousness of middle-aged Chinese Americans, traditionally thought of as silent in American mainstream politics, was mobilized due to their desire to preserve their children’s educational privileges in higher education, as many institutions now do not consider Asian American as a protected racial category. A coalition of 60 Asian American groups, primarily consisting of Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani American organizations, filed suits against Harvard in 2015 and several other Ivy League universities including Yale, Dartmouth, and Brown in 2016 regarding their racial quotas in admission processes (Fuchs, 2016; Guillermo, 2015).

Asian Americans’ relationship to affirmative action has always been complicated. Progressive affirmative action activists have been adapting the category of Asian American to argue that not all Asian Americans fit into the high-achieving stereotype, especially when Pacific Islanders and Southeast Asian Americans are considered. However, the complaints from Chinese American communities in recent years are not based on the same pan-Asian racial rhetoric. Their primary concerns are based on the ideology of meritocracy and suggest that students with high SAT scores should deserve the right to be enrolled in prestigious institutions and not be limited by their race. To put it concisely, their demand is about eliminating the Asian racial category as a protected measure as they no longer need it—to adopt a colorblind approach—instead of demanding the institutions create more inclusive admissions policies that would raise enrollment of disadvantaged racial minorities. Yet, languages of “discrimination” and “procedural justice”
were repeatedly used to bolster the moral legitimacy of their demands. Through these events regarding educational access to elite institutions, a colorblind racial rhetoric packaged in discourses of rights and justice has emerged in conservative Chinese American communities.

These two political mobilizations together became the background driving forces for a solidified Chinese American subjectivity in the Liang-Gurley case, which is built upon a form of racial victimology. The Chinese protestors, particularly the leadership, called out the state’s scapegoating tactic against Liang and labeled the incident “racial discrimination,” “unfair treatment,” and “selective treatment,” as many White officers have killed innocent people and were not charged with manslaughter. Signs depicting Martin Luther King and speeches about the killing of Vincent Chin in the 1980s were highlighted in the rallies in March and April 2015, drawing thousands of Chinese American participants to each of the events. While Vincent Chin’s murder has often been referenced as sparking a pan-ethnic Asian American Civil Rights movement, the appropriation of the case to parallel Liang’s shooting is ultimately ahistorical, transforming the original narrative of racial injustice to be about Chinese victimology, regardless of whether the state was particularly attacking the Chinese American communities or the state was Chinese American, in Liang’s case. While the Chinese American groups in a sense demanded state accountability to Chinese American lives, which was part of the goals in Chin’s case, they neglected the role that Liang as a police officer in inflicting violence on other racialized bodies.

Ironically, the call for state accountability became a defense for police violence. The discourse of racial victimology that the pro-Liang coalition deploys allows the protestors to shift the focus from the devaluing of Black people to the “discrimination” of the Chinese American policeman. In doing so, Akai Gurley’s death was no longer a central political and moral concern
in this controversy and treated as merely another unfortunate “accident” of collateral damage. Whereas the death of Akai Gurley and many other Black lives were not fairly addressed by the state, as the BLM movement continued to call out, many Chinese publications in the US portrayed the Chinese American mobilization in an unilateral celebratory tone. *World Journal* and *Sing Tao Daily* called the pro-Peter Liang movement, which started in New York and spread across cities including Boston, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle, a “historical” phenomenon and the “largest” Chinese American gathering in the US, showing an “unprecedented unity” and “solidarity” as well as the “mature and rational” image of the community (Chang and Hsu, 2016; Wei and Lo, 2016). The progressive Asian American rhetoric from the Civil Rights movement was largely appropriated to manufacture a united front of Chinese American body politic as the racial victim, and again, a legible racial minority that should be granted institutional access.

This celebratory narrative of the newly emerged Chinese American “political unity,” however, left Akai Gurley’s death unaccounted for and silenced the other Asian American activists’ broader racial justice demand for state accountability over police violence. Furthermore, the Chinese American mobilization, based in a politic of racial victimology, quickly turned into a political opportunity for the Chinese elites to form a ‘rainbow coalition’ with local Republican politicians, Asian and White, seizing the moment to condemn the current Democratic government and forming stronger ties with the City’s Police Department. Joseph Concannon, a White retired NYPD captain, failed Senate and city council candidate, and president of the Tea Party–aligned Queens Village Republican Club, was a major force behind the pro-Liang rallies. Concannon, along with his Chinese American politician friends from the Republican Party including Phil Grim and Doug Lee as well as *qiaoling* (僑領), the overseas Chinese business
leaders, worked hand-in-hand to push for their anti-police reform agendas as a means to not only undermine the government of the more liberal-leaning mayor Bill de Blasio but also to unite their Asian American voters for the upcoming local elections, as voter registration forms passed through the rally crowd.

In the March 9, 2015 “Support Your Local Police” rally to protest the indictment of Peter Liang, Concannon implicitly condemned BLM activists as “racial arsonists” and “professional agitators” who were “turned loose” under de Blasio’s leadership (Wang, 2015). He and other Republican politicians addressed the Chinese American community as the “natural ally” for the pro-police and conservative agendas that “cared for the advancements and the future of the next generation.” There is a ‘promiscuous allyship’ between the conservative Chinese and White Americans who share deep investment in preserving class privileges and status in the name of ‘racial justice.’ This allyship, however, is far from a cross-racial solidarity, but White assimilation in disguise. Similar to the suits against Ivy League institutions, the motive is not about advocating for more inclusive admission policies for underrepresented racial minorities, but demanding that Asian Americans be granted equal privileges to Whites at the expense of other racial minorities, reinforcing hierarchy of race relations. The discourse of racial victimology, in both of these cases, allows a conservative coalition of White and Asian politicians and business elites to gain moral legitimacy and denounce both the liberals and a more radical vision of racial justice.

Ethnic empowerment and deservingness. While securing the Asian American voter blocks seemed to be the ‘rainbow coalition’s’ primary motive in participating in the pro-Liang rally, to many of the Chinese American participants, it was a rare opportunity to express their pride in their identity and power as an ethnic group that has been long overlooked. In the rally on
April 26, I spoke with a Chinese woman in her forties who had driven from Pennsylvania that morning and was waving an American flag in the crowd. She said that she came out to the rally because “the Chinese voice needed to be heard by the Americans” and that “Chinese people have been silenced for more than five decades.” She felt that other immigrant communities have gained their status in the US while the Chinese were not unified enough to fight for their rights. She in particular called out the Democratic council member Margaret Chin, who was vocally in support of Liang’s indictment, as a hanjian (漢奸) or traitor to the Han race and to China. This intensified sentiment of Chinese nationalism became very salient to me in the rally, especially among the participants. Whereas the coalition leadership was drawing from a more multicultural, pan-Asian discourse to put forth their demands to drop Liang’s charges, the conversations I had with the participants reinforced this Chinese woman’s idea that Chinese people should stand up for themselves and not get “harassed” or “put down by the Americans” anymore—meaning not only the White Americans who occupy a superior position in society, but also other racial minorities, particular Blacks whose demands seem to be taken more seriously by the state. Ironically, the sense of Chinese ethnic pride did not necessarily come with a sense of anti-Americanness. Rather, most participants and same as the leadership, advocated the Chinese communities to increase their practice of civic participation. In other words, rather than illegitimatizing the American political system as fundamentally corrupt or racist, the narrative of the participants was about reinforcing its significance and utility for the Chinese immigrants; seeking opening spaces for incorporation.

The Peter Liang incident becomes another classic example of how Asian Americanness is lifted up to perpetuate model minority success in order to deny the institutional access of other marginalized racial subjects such as in the affirmative action debate. It is ironic that the
Mobilizing coalition territorialized the representation of “Asian Americans” as a way to reappropriate the current racial crisis for ethnic-nationalist concern, though it is composed of only Chinese American leaders. The discourse of Asian racial victimology was mostly present in the official rhetoric of the Chinese American leaders, but to the Chinese American participants, especially for the first generation and older participants, it was more of an issue about Chineseness. To some, it was not even about Peter Liang or the trial. Many retained a more neutral stance regarding whether Liang was responsible for the crime or not. One older Chinese man I spoke to said, “This a tragedy by both sides—they (Peter Liang and Akai Gurley) are both someone’s son.” However, the utmost important reason that many of the participants stood up and joined the rally was an urgent need to express political power as a people to the American public after decades of being silenced as a population.

The American Dream and the Chinese Dream. The discourses of the American Dream were everywhere in the pro-Liang rallies. Chinese American families were waving American flags while marching across the Brooklyn Bridge on April 26, 2015. The American anthem played before the speeches. Interestingly, the participants who were largely native Chinese speakers seemed uninterested in the American anthem, and there was hardly anyone who sang along the song. Most of the participants, Chinese families and their young children, gathered in small groups to take pictures with the American flags given by the coalition leaders, full of smiles and joy. I asked one particular family why there were taking pictures in the rally, and a middle-aged Chinese man said to me in Mandarin Chinese, “Because it feels like a family reunion! You don’t get to see so many Chinese people together except for the Chinese New Year.” For any pedestrian who just happened to walk by the bridge on that day, it would be difficult to recognize this gathering as a ‘political protest,’ as many participants treated the event
more like a social celebration of some sort. Some participants were waving heart-shaped signs with the Chinese letter ‘love’ (愛) in red along with the American flags.

Figure 2. Chinese American family taking group photos at the pro-Liang rally. Photo by author.

As I marched through the bridge, I was worried that others would recognize my tense body and affect as someone who did not belong in the crowd. My otherness was indeed quite apparent. Despite being ethnically Han, my queerness and age drastically singled me out from the crowd of middle-aged parents and their young children. I felt as though I was a ‘race traitor’ and consciously distanced myself from the crowd so that they would not recognize my ulterior emotions. At the same time, I recognized the very flexible capacity of my Asian Americanness that blended in the collective expression of Chinese American body politic to the non-Chinese spectators, yet my queer gender expression continued to signify a stance of dissidence and protest—an opposition to the American and the Chinese ideal. However, without the presence of other dissidents, my race and ethnicity were quickly absorbed and territorialized by the collective body politic in the event—a thick, impenetrable force of Chinese nationalism, masking in total consensus by the bodies, the chants, the redness everywhere on participants’ signs, banners, and
clothes. The collective political narrative of Chinese ethnic empowerment supersedes the more nuanced ways the participants understood the Liang-Gurley incident.

On the bridge, one group of middle-aged Chinese people started singing a song together in Mandarin Chinese. Written in a heart-shaped poster, the lyrics were about Chinese national pride, the anger of the Han ethnicity, their support for the police, and the hope for Chinese businessmen to transform their image for the Chinese communities. At one point the redness of the American flags and the redness on the participants, which symbolized Chinese unity, merged in the scene. It became clearer to me as I marched ‘ethnographically’ with the crowd that the American Dream was actually aligned with an equally powerful, affective Chinese Dream and a neoliberal transnational dream of class advancement—one that requires exclusion and stratification of the classed and racial Other.

![Figure 3](image) Chinese Americans marching across Brooklyn Bridge with the American flags. Photo by author.
For the participants, the American flag did not only symbolize a loyalty or allegiance to the American state, but an aspiration of becoming successful as Chinese people in the country. During the midst of my fieldwork on the bridge, another middle-aged Chinese woman told me that she took her son to the rally because she wanted him to “learn democracy” in order to be “successful in this country.” As much of the Chinese press that covered the pro-Liang mobilization as a historical event has shown Chinese solidarity and Chinese people’s capacity to participate in civic actions in a “mature and rational” manner (Wei and Lo, 2016), the subjectivity that emerged in these events was less about a demonstration of American patriotism and more about Chinese modernity and desire for a new nation as a people.

As the previous Asian American assimilationist politics in the post-Civil Rights period emphasized American national and cultural identity, that is, a liberal racial ideology of national belonging, the pro-Liang coalition expressed a qualitatively different kind of national belonging grounded in a moral and cultural ethic of economic advancement, civic respectability, and a dream of Chinese modernity. Ong (2006) has defined neoliberalism as a technology of governance that rearticulates the social criteria for citizenship for the purpose of optimizing the effects of the market and demoralizing economic activities. Citizenship is thus no longer strictly attached to national identification but defined by economic productivity. Only the flexibility of such neoliberal citizenship can explain that the pro-Liang rallies were attended by almost all first generation Chinese Americans, displaying a strong affinity toward and desire for American nationalism, instead of the second or third generations, who were often thought of as more inclined toward an American national identity. The participants’ desire for American nationalism seems to be less about being seen as “Americans,” but rather, a longing for continual economic prosperity and political opportunities for their communities and their next generations. In other
words, the discourse around Peter Liang’s “unfair” indictment was about not how he was not treated equally as an “American,” but that the promise of model minority advancement was temporarily shattered by a state-inflicted racial crisis.

Historically, the post-WWII America as a place that signifies freedom and liberty is in fact deeply connected to the rise of liberalism in China since the 80s, where socialism was seen as a backwards ideology as the Soviet Union regime deteriorated. As Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy started to welcome foreign investments when he took office in 1978, the Chicago School's ideology of neoliberalism significantly impacted the political economic directions that China undertook in the following decades. As a Chinese New Left intellectual Kuang Xin Nian observes, “Just like how the Chinese Dream in the 50s was ‘today’s Soviet Union would be tomorrow’s China,’ ‘today’s America will be Tomorrow’s China’ is the new Chinese Dream since the 80s” (2015).

The American public’s fetishism of China as a nation-state that lacks individual freedom and democracy and is in direct opposition to American modernity has failed to account for how ideology travels across national boundaries and produces subjectivities not simply based in ethnic categories. As in the case of Peter Liang mobilization, the American Dream and the Chinese Dream in the diaspora are not at odds—they share the neoliberal desires for free market, individual freedom, and liberal democracy. The Asian American subjectivity that was once born out of a racial solidarity movement and the Third World independence movement in the 60s is now given new articulations within neoliberalism.

The racial victimology of Asian Americanness works hand-in-hand with Chinese ethnic nationalism to craft a new form of assimilationist body politic under the rhetoric of “civil rights” to secure conservative agendas. Yet, the present Asian American body politic in the pro-Liang
mobilization is distinct from the previous Asian American demand for institutional access that was largely consolidated by an American identity and US-centrism. However, the body politic that has emerged here must be examined under the rise of China and Chinese nationalism transnationally. As I stated earlier, the ‘success’ of the Chinese mobilization was not only a domestic yet transnational effort through online social media platforms. The Chinese media, both the transnational ones in the US and within China, carefully monitored the US racial conflicts since Black Lives Matter unfolded. The Chinese Communist Party’s major news organ, People’s Daily, published comments that critiqued the failures of racial liberalism and multiculturalism as an American project: “Each time, when the hatreds old and new of U.S. racial contradictions boil over...it clearly tells the world that the declaration ‘all are born equal’ in this so-called ‘field of dreams’ still has yet to take root.” (Wu, 2015, translated in Rothschild, 2015). The Chinese media was particularly cynical about the ongoing criticisms of China’s human rights abuse by the West. This episode of the racially instigated “social unrest,” to the Chinese public, signified the “vulnerability of American social structure” (Wu, 2015, translated by me) and thus reaffirmed the Chinese vision of governance that had more advantages to the US without such problems of “racial inequalities.” Ironically, this line of argument for Chinese nationalism erases China’s internal conflicts of racial and ethnic minorities, and especially the social tensions and discrimination against the recent influx of African immigrants due to the rapidly increased Sino-African political and economic ties.

The shattering and the betraying of the American ideal in light of the US racial ‘crisis’ reaffirms the larger Chinese state project of building a strong Chinese national identity that does not rely on the West or replicate the problems of the West. That is, the body politic in the pro-Peter Liang mobilization shows both an alliance with the American state but also a
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distinction from the state’s racial burden. It presents a particular colorblind narrative of overcoming race as the highly assimilable, and upward mobile Chinese American subjects. This intensified Chinese nationalism through the state construction of the Chinese Dream is particularly evident under Xi Jinping’s leadership, which also allows for a transnational discourse of Chinese deservingness and ethnic empowerment in the diaspora. In Xi’s speech in Seattle in September 2015, during a diplomatic trip, he described all the prosperity that China now enjoys, where millions of people now can enjoy a “better life” because of the steady economic growth:

At the spring festival earlier this year, I returned to the village. It was a different place now. I saw black top roads. Now living in houses with bricks and tiles, the villagers had Internet access. Elderly folks had basic old-age care, and all villagers had medical care coverage. Children were in school. Of course, meat was readily available. This made me kindly aware that the Chinese dream is, after all, a dream of the people. We can fulfill the Chinese dream only when we link it with our people’s yearning for a better life (Soper, 2015).

The captivating and at times sentimental speech illustrates the rapid class transformation under Xi’s governance. But what underlies the subtext of the speech is the necessity of continual economic liberalization and trade cooperation between the US and China, which according to Xi, has made the class transformation possible. Xi states, “Opening up is a basic state policy of China. Its policies that attract foreign investment will not change, nor will its pledge to protect legitimate rights and interests of foreign investors in China,” and that China will continue to ensure the “common progress” in the areas of Asian Pacific free trades and counterterrorism.
What the Chinese Dream promises to accomplish is not only the sense of ethnic empowerment and deservingness for a middle class life, but also the elevating of Chinese national identity to a level playing field with Americanness in the consciousness of diasporic Chinese immigrants. The Chinese, as a people, whether in the US or in China, are no longer to be looked down on by the West, but are to be seen as mutual partners at the scale of the nation and individual subjectivity. Therefore, as China struggles to be recognized as a normative nation-state on the global stage, its people, too, feel the sense of urgency to move beyond the image of Oriental Other, striving to be an equal counterpart to Americans, and specifically, White Americans.

Overall, in the pro-Liang mobilization, what can easily be read as simply a moment of integration in acculturative terms throughout, in which the Chinese Americans subject follows a pathway toward American cultural citizenship through civic participation and immersion in racial minority discourse, needs historical and transnational articulations. The American Dream is not just about crafting the American nation-state as an exceptional place upholding “democracy” and “freedom,” but an imperialist ambition. These ideologies indeed travel across national borders as transnational capital moves through geopolitical spaces, demanding an open market and culturally equipped consumers, building a parasitic ideological relation between the two nations. The neoliberal form of the Asian American body politic is fused with the model minority ethics of hard work and deservingness, as well as a post-racial form of anti-Blackness that treats any political outcry against racialized state violence as a performance of political correctness.

**Anti-Blackness as a strategy of assimilation into Whiteness.** What mobilizes the highly nationalistic, patriotic pro–Peter Liang rallies are not just the discontents of Asian
Americans' “not quite White”-ness, but also anti-Blackness, which justifies Blacks’ criminality and Asian deservingness through the ethics of hard work. Anti-Blackness is not just a prejudicial attitude against Blacks, but a performance of Whiteness. The substitution of racial inequality with cultural difference allows Asian Americans to remove themselves from the broader racial justice demands and functions effectively to reinforce White dominance. In other words, presenting as “non-Black” and thus not antagonistic to US nationalism allows Asian Americans to bargain for partial privileges that previously belonged to Whites. During Peter Liang’s trial, he was repeatedly painted by the media as the model minority, striving from his humble immigrant family origins, and an inexperienced, harmless “rookie cop,” whereas Akai Gurley was criminalized as the “drug dealing thug” who had a damaging criminal record (Greenfield, 2015). These racialized portrayals certainly fit into the stereotypes of Asians and Blacks and were intended to incite racial conflicts. However, in the scenes of the pro-Liang rallies, the politics of anti-Blackness follows a different kind of post-racial logic. It was not about highlighting the difference in racial citizenship between Asians and Blacks, but refusing to acknowledge the significance of race in the Black body politic. Indeed, the dominant narrative behind the pro-Liang rallies was to express anger toward the silencing of Asianness in the hypervisible Blackness in US politics—refusing to be the “silent Asians” (啞裔; the pronunciation of “Asian” and “silence” is the same in Chinese, and thus the phrase has been popularized around the pro-Liang actions by the Chinese press). This discourse is congruent with the post-racial discontents of Black Lives Matter, in which Chinese American protestors hold signs that say “All Lives Matter” in pro-police rallies, endorsing the White supremacist structure of racial hierarchy that is built on Black criminality.
“No Skin Color Act 5.” The new post-racial articulation of Asian Americanness is not a one-time event that came out of Liang’s actions; it has been gradually accumulating in the struggle against affirmative action by Chinese American communities, particularly in California, where Chinese Americans are mobilized against the Senate Constitutional Amendment No. 5 (SCA-5). The bill, introduced by Democratic Senator Edward Hernandez in December 2012, would allow the California state to consider race, sex, color, ethnicity, and national origin in particular regarding admission to California’s public universities. Chinese American communities protested the initiative out of the worry that it would significantly reduce the rate of admission of Chinese students, American born or foreign born, in California’s public university system that is already disproportionally populated by students of Chinese heritage. The discourse of the mobilization against SCA-5 is drastically similar to the one for Officer Liang—the image of Martin Luther King Jr. and the rhetoric of civil rights are used alongside colorblind political statements such as “dream that my [children] will one day lie in a nation where they will not judged by the color of their skin, but the content of their character,” “stop race-based college admissions,” and “No Skin Color Act 5” (Huang, 2014). However, the consideration of “race” among the Chinese American protestors is inherently about Chinese American communities’ ethnic advancement instead of a pan-Asian American concern in ways that it does not address the disproportionally low college admission rates of Southeast Asians, Pacific Islanders, and other racial minorities. This ethnic nationalism complicit with the discourse of model minority is certainly not new. But, what is paradoxical in the current period is that this post-racial Asian American body politic must dress itself with the narrative of racial inequality and victimology in order to cover its inherent anti-Blackness toward the more economically disadvantaged Southeast Asians and other racial minorities.
Neoliberal dreams. This anti-Blackness in Asian American subjectivity allows for the co-existence of the American Dream and the Chinese Dream in neoliberal times, when patriotism is no longer attached to a fixed site of governance but the national promise of advancement and success. As the energy around Peter Liang’s case slowly dwindled after his official charge came out in June 2016, I noticed that a significant proportion of the online activities via the CAACR WeChat group turned into a campaign for Donald Trump for the US presidential election this year. Initially, I was shocked by the transition, as Trump repeatedly expressed his anti-Asian and anti-immigrant stance in his campaign, which I thought would be repulsive for Asian American communities generally. The discourses in the WeChat group revealed that what attracted these Chinese American voters to Trump was precisely his anti-political correctness. Wang Tian (王湉), the founder of the social group “Chinese American for Trump Movement,” a venture capitalist who was also a significant player behind the campaign for Peter Liang, stated that he supports Trump is precisely because he is a profit-driven man. Wang is not as concerned about his prejudicial views on Chinese Americans or China, because he believes that once the US economy needs China, Trump will be friendly toward China again. Wang and his other Chinese American campaign members strongly disagree with the Democrats’ support for affirmative action measures, as they saw initiatives such as the SCA-5 as directly anti-Chinese and against the ideology of meritocracy in the US (Zhu, 2016).

The drive of profit, middle-class promises, and the post-racial ideology infused with anti-Blackness have assembled together to formulate a kind of Asian American body politic that treats race as a flexible position from which to demand access to Whiteness and participation in the neoliberal economy, erasing any internal contradictions of class, ethnicity, and skin color privileges. Contrasted to the kind of Asian American subjectivity that emerged during the Civil
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Rights struggle, with emphasized pan-ethnic solidarity and allegiance to the promise of US liberal multiculturalism and racial equality, the neoliberal articulation of Asian American subjectivity has no particular allegiance to the nation-state.

In a sense, this new form of subjectivity has bypassed the previous bifurcated representation of Asian Americanness as either a foreign threat or desire for domestic integration. It’s neither threat nor desire, yet both, and motivated by a neoliberal kind of flexible pragmatism instead of stubborn ideology. The US, if anything, is a vessel toward profits, a good middle-class life, and a temporary container of the desire for Chinese modernity. The Chinese Americans pledge allegiance to transnational capitalism, which the US is a signifier of, not as nation-state but corporate body.

The post-racial Asian American subjectivity is also heavily influenced by Chinese neoliberalism and must also be examined in its transnational context. As China has shifted from a production vessel to venture capitalist investor in the past decade, Beijing is now heavily invested in building an economic empire in African countries. Whereas Beijing develops an official rhetoric of “South-South” cooperation that positions itself as a developing country helping another developing country in its economic intervention, the anti-Blackness expressed in Asian American subjectivity is circulated transnationally and appropriated by Chinese capitalism as a capacity to justify the devaluation of African laborers and ensure Chinese superiority and dominance on the continent. To put it in another way, while Black Lives Matter signifies a failure of racial equality domestically, the Asian-Black conflicts manufactured and intensified by the neoliberal elites produce anti-Blackness to be again circulated for capital accumulation on a wider geopolitical scale. The self-making and being-made of Asian American subjectivity has
come to a historical conjuncture that can be effectively used to optimize neoliberal capitalist goals.

**Asian American Counter Body Politic**

The Asian American body politic is in no way a singular construction. As I have articulated previously, the pro-police Chinese American mobilization emerged precisely out of the crisis of representation of Asian Americanness, in which the model minority promise of success is threatened and pan-ethnic solidarity is crumbling. Whereas the pro-police Chinese Americans seized the moment to insert a post-racial agenda, other Asian American community organizers aimed to repopularize a nostalgic sense of Asian-Black solidarity and pan-ethnic Asian Americanness to counter the ethnic nationalism of the Chinese American mobilization and support the broader racial justice demands of Black Lives Matter.

**Historicizing Afro-Asian solidarity.** Soon after Peter Liang was indicted, a coalition of Asian American community-based organizations, led by Organizing Asian Communities (CAAAV), mobilized a vigil for Gurley’s family in front of the Police Plaza in NYC on March 15, 2015. The number of the participants at the vigil was small compared to the pro-Liang mobilization that would occur the year after, approximately 40 people on a chilly, rainy spring afternoon, but the crowd was in all definitions a diverse group of individuals: members of Korean, Filipino, South Asian, and other Asian American nonprofit organizations; Gurley’s family including his aunt, daughter, and partner; and other members of BLM, socialist, and anti-war leftist organizations also participated in the event. It was undoubtedly a multiracial and multiethnic gathering that demonstrated an image of cross-identity solidarity at the time of tragedy.
Figure 4. Vigil for Akai Gurley’s family. Photo by author.

This image of cross-racial and cross-ethnic alliance was intentionally delivered. It was present in a speech from the organizer from CAAAV, which called attention to the importance of standing in solidarity with the broader racial justice demands of BLM, to counter the numerous deaths and unnamable violence with the persistence of valuing lives, particularly Black lives. Cathy Dang, the director from CAAAV, drew from the organization’s experiences of working alongside Black and Brown communities in the past 20 years to demand justice from the police and judicial system. Specifically, she referenced the case of an immigrant Chinese boy who was killed by NYPD in the 1990s, and how the incident has bridged activists across racial lines:

This year marks the 20th year anniversary of the death of Yong Xin Huang. In the mid 90s, the media started to finally cover police brutality cases when Anthony Baez, Hilton Vega, and Nicholas Heyward were killed. Then there was Yong Xin Huang, 16-year old Chinese immigrant boy from Bushwick, Brooklyn who was killed by the NYPD. The Huang family and CAAAV organized alongside with the other families to demand justice from the NYPD and the judicial system. Black and Brown communities were the first
ones there for the Huang family and as our member said—I believe that the Chinese community should stand on the side of justice. Our hope is that the Chinese community, Asian communities, and all communities come together for justice.

This cross-racial representation is not just crucial but necessary to the Asian American body politic—to signify that Asian Americans, too, have had a history of violence inflicted by the state. It argues against the persistent image of model minority success and proximity to Whiteness. It relies on the temporary shift back to the time of violent state exclusion to reinstate an Asian American racial position that is closer to Blackness.

*Figure 5.* Flowers with Chinese sign that says #BlackLivesMatter. Photo by author.

**Anachronism.** The #Asians4BlackLives contingency that emerged out of the Peter Liang controversy organized a platform on Tumblr\(^3\) specifically to counter the conservative representations of Asian Americanness dominated by the Chinese American pro-Liang mobilization. They call out the anachronistic reference of MLK’s speech as being ignorant to Black history and the broader implications of the Civil Rights movement in the US. The

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\(^3\) #Asians4BlackLives on Tumblr. Retrieved from http://a4bl.tumblr.com/
Afro-Asian solidarity images of Asian American activists protesting alongside Black Power activists against police violence spread across different #Asian4BlackLives blogs such as the #Asians4BlackLives and #APIS4BlackLives to stress the interdependent histories of the communities. MLK’s and Malcom X’s speeches against the Vietnam War and calls for Third World solidarity were repeatedly cited on these platforms to highlight the important intersection of domestic racial violence and imperialist wars abroad. To historicize Afro-Asian solidarity is not only important to show that the perspective of Asians for Black Lives is indeed temporally legitimate and morally justifiable, but it is also the only way to bring a sense of urgency to rescuing pan-Asian Americanism from prior to the neoliberal disfranchisement of the category of Asian American itself. The widened class and ethnic division within Asian American communities in recent years have reduced the political power and racial legitimacy of the category as a whole. Only through claiming its proximity to Blackness can Asian American move outside of the awkward position of neither white nor black, and continue to exist as a relevant and legible racial community.

Anti-Blackness as internalized racism. To historicize a sense of Afro-Asian solidarity, the Asians for Black Lives activists also must address the problem of anti-Blackness in the Chinese communities in the first place. The groups rely upon the concept of internalized racism in the ways that Asian Americans have uncritically accepted the anti-black messages circulated in the American public and the idea that the only way out of their own racial baggage is to identify with whiteness. A Vietnamese American blogger notes,

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“It is not unheard of that some Asian Americans have participated in anti-Blackness. This goes back to the fact that the Asian American community is a complex conglomerate that cannot be characterized or defined as one. Without making excuses, anti-black racism by Asian Americans could be attributed to internalized racism from media and also the varying degrees of relationship to authority due to immigration and refugee backgrounds” (Nguyen, 2015).

In a sense, there is a general belief on these #Asian4BlackLives blogs that if Asian Americans receive the correct messages about their race, and the truth about their history with the Black communities, there is possibility for a change in ideology. The Asian American activist group I work with in New York also put a lot of effort into translation work, that is, literally translating these blog posts and essays written by mostly second generation Asian Americans in English to Mandarin Chinese in the hope that they could counter the dominant pro-police, anti-Black narratives propagated by the Chinese media.

Nonetheless, almost none of the platforms addressed the drastic changes in the conditions of the so-called “Third World”—that the Cold War framework that allowed the formation of a Capitalist West and a Communist East has completely collapsed. Neoliberal capitalism has trumped the ideology of liberal racialism and recruits developing nation-states to the competition of multilateral free trade zones. China is no longer the Maoist China that stood as a socialist vision of alternative Third World development prior to the 1970s.

The anachronistic interpretation of the past is when the flexible position of Asian Americanness becomes troubling. The nostalgic temporality of a time in which Blackness and Asianness stood in alliance has become largely irrelevant under the hegemony of neoliberalism, in which access to class advancement has replaced the collective resistance against Western
imperialism as the primary drive in Asian American construction, in terms of not only individual subjectivity but also national consciousness in Asia Pacific.

**Cultural authenticity as political leverage.** The obstacles in front of the BLM Asian American activists are thus messy and multilayered. I recall many times when my Asian American comrades were frustrated by their inability to properly communicate with the pro-police Chinese American groups. The BLM activists made tremendous efforts to cross the linguistic and cultural barriers by doing bilingual outreach on multiple online social networks. However, there was a gap that seemed impossible to bridge—a gap that is beyond racial or ethnic identification, which I later realized is perhaps a fundamental difference between the *dreams*—the ultimate goals and outlooks of their imagined communities—of these two groups. The activists who had worked on gentrification issues with residents in Chinatown, Manhattan, particularly, were saddened by the fact that the residents they worked and fought with chose the opposite side of racial justice they believed in on the Liang-Gurley case. Many have decided not to mobilize any direct confrontation with the pro-Liang rallies, as they believed that it would only agitate the division that already exists among Asian American communities. In a phone conversation on national coordination for #Asians4BlackLives mobilization regarding the Liang-Gurley case, a Chinese American activist based in New York City expressed her concern:

“I’m against counter protesting in the Peter Liang’s rally. As frustrated as I am about the whole case, we can’t see the Chinese communities as our enemies—the state is. We can’t diverge from our real focus.”

While as a coalition the #Asians4BlackLives activists in NYC reached a consensus not to officially mobilize against the pro-Liang actions, some of those who went to the March 8, 2015 pro-police rally out of the demand of Gurley’s family and intense confrontations occurred
between the multiracial BLM activists and the Chinese American protesters. The BLM activists reported that racial slurs were exchanged between some Chinese American protestors and counter protestors, where both anti-Blackness and anti-Chineseness were violently expressed. A Korean American BLM activist who witnessed the confrontation said, “I feel like we have retreated back in time...Black and Asian folks hating each other, and the White men just walk free” (emphasis mine). White supremacist racial violence instigates the ugliest form of racial antagonism. The feeling of going backward in time not only pierces through the illusion of racial progress but also illustrates that raw, blatant racial hatred coexists with the normalized discourse of civil rights.

**Beyond the generation gap.** The mainstream media, both English and Chinese, has framed this divide among Asian American communities as an issue of the “generation gap.” A Hong Konger who immigrated to the US in 1970 was quoted in an article by NBC News (Fuchs, 2016) to explain the divided opinions on Liang’s case:

The young Chinese generations do have local education, and they do tend to be taught more about police brutality and abuse. For the older generation, however, there’s a lot more appreciation for law and order, particularly for people who have come from China who experienced older regimes that did not supply stability.

It was not difficult to notice the disproportional representation of older, first generation Chinese immigrants whose primary language is Chinese at the pro-Liang rallies. However, the “divide” cannot be merely explained as a generational difference, thus naturalizing the ideological split as something that can simply be eliminated or repaired over time.

On May 20, 2016, a fraction of the #Asians4BlackLives activists organized a protest in front of the headquarters of *Sing Tao Daily* newspaper in New York City. Frustrated and angered
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by the widened splits and heightened racial tensions provoked by Liang’s case, the group decided to target one of the major Chinese news sources, *Sing Tao Daily*, and demand they cover an unbiased perspective on the case, that is, to include the voice of Akai Gurley’s family and the BLM’s critique of racialized police violence. The group consisted of mostly college-aged Asian Americans, who wrote bilingual messages such as “Akai Gurley’s life matters” on top of the *Sing Tao Daily* newspapers and prepared to deliver them to the chief editor as a way to demand media neutrality and transparency about the Liang-Gurley case.

![Figure 6. #Asians4BlackLives protesters’ bilingual messages written on Sing Tao Daily. Photo by author.](image)

As the protestors were reading their demands in front of the headquarters in both English and Mandarin Chinese, a middle-aged Chinese woman stepped into the crowd, interrupted the chants, and started a series of confrontations with the protestors. We later found out that she was
indeed the chief editor of *Sing Tao Daily*. A Chinese American woman in her mid-20s named Dana (pseudonym) stepped up from the crowd and addressed her confrontations in English:

Editor: “Do you read Chinese?”

Dana: “Yes.”

Editor: “Do you read every single article from *Sing Tao*? Why are you targeting us?”

Dana: “We have read your coverage on Peter Liang’s case, and we think it’s very biased.”

Editor: “What you should do is to organize a press conference and call out all the Chinese press, like *World Journal*. You shouldn’t target us. Did you read the *New York Times*? Why don’t you attack them too?”

Dana: “We read the newspaper. Our parents read your newspaper. Your paper is influential in the Chinese community and so it’s important for you to have a more diverse coverage.”

Editor: “Yes, the problem is that your parents read the papers, because they are Chinese.”

Despite Dana’s efforts to stress that members of the group have Chinese reading capacity and identify as Chinese, the editor uses generation as a leverage to claim Chinese authenticity, and thus to reject any responsibility in including a different perspective on the issue. In other words, the BLM protestors’ view does not represent the legitimate Chinese voice; it represents the *New York Times*, the Americanized version of racial reality, unlike their parents, who represent the authentic Chinese subjectivity that is not contradictory to the viewpoint of the press itself. Here, the editor leveraged *Sing Tao Daily*’s cultural and proximity to the first generation Chinese immigrants as a way to declare the paper’s authenticity in comparison to the second generation Asian American activists, despite their fluency in the language. The second generation Asian
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Americans are portrayed as the agitators who attempt to disrupt the ethnic harmony of Chinese communities, whose acculturative viewpoints make them no longer suitable as the legitimate actor of Chineseness, despite the fact that many of them have language capacity in Chinese and strong identification as Chinese Americans. This manufactured divide between the generations, similar to the split between pro-Liang Chinese American groups and the BLM Asian American activists, again, projected racial antagonism onto the Asian American body, leaving Whites untouched by the consequences of racial violence.

Splitting Temporalities

The counter mobilization of the Asians for Black Lives activists highlight the incompatible temporality of a future-oriented neoliberal Asian American subjectivity and the nostalgic Asian American subjectivity rooted in Third World anti-imperialist struggles. While both groups recruited the discourses of ‘civil rights,’ the epistemologies they rely on are drastically different. The pro-Liang mobilization takes civil rights as the American promise of racial advancement, the model minority, bootstrapping ideology that is built on hard work and merits. In contrast, the BLM activists demand a radical restructuring of racial relationships deeply rooted in anti-Black violence and minority complicity. This shows how ‘civil rights’ is also a dialectically complex assemblage that bends toward either cooptation or radical transformation. To counter the pro-Liang groups’ body politic of Asian Americanness, the Asian American BLM activists deployed two distinct yet related discursive strategies, including: historicizing Afro-Asian solidarity and cultural authenticity. These strategies were adopted by the Asians for Black Lives activists not only to distinguish themselves from the pro-Liang groups, but to signify an alternative vision of racial history and futurity against the dogma of post-racial neoliberalism.
Conclusion: Reclaiming Life, Against Multiculturalism

During my fieldwork, I constantly sensed an intense affect of frustration and hopelessness from my fellow Asians for Black Lives activists. Many have worked side-by-side with Chinese immigrants in their respective community projects on housing or workplace discrimination. Yet, on the Liang-Gurley case, they stood on the opposite side of what they understood as racial justice. This is indeed a disheartening historical moment for progressive Asian American politics. However, the Liang-Gurley case is only a symptom of the larger process of transformation of Asian American subjectivity. As neoliberalism exerts its hegemonic power that shatters previous forms of solidarity and demands nations and individuals to express loyalty to the market, simply examining the domestic racial relations and intergroup level of anti-Blackness does not sufficiently explain the global geopolitical shifts that account for the changing subjectivity of the Asian American body politic. The Asian-Black antagonism, whether imposed by the White and Asian elites to instigate racial conflicts, or reified by some of the Asian American protestors as the ‘internalized racism’ of the Asian American psyche, prevented them to ask more nuanced question about the Liang-Gurley case. While the violence against Akai Gurley was simply erased by the former group, I found that the #Asians4BlackLives activists were also silent around the state’s treatment of Peter Liang.

In a sense, the motivation to overcome the model minority stereotype has become so dogmatic for the Asian American activists that they had to overlook the systematic racism that has also determined the state manipulation of Peter Liang as an easy target to mitigate a national racial crisis perpetuated by White supremacy. Despite the #Asians4BlackLives activists’ efforts to bypass the Asian-Black antagonism, they continue to be trapped in the sticky affects of guilt and shame, which have been conspired by the model minority representation of Asian
Americanness as a race that has ‘moved ahead.’ Therefore, to reclaim the history of a timespace where Asian and Black relations were amicable and comradely has become a dominant narrative in the solidarity protest.

However, I have begun to wonder whether holding on to the nostalgic sense of pan-Asian Americanness is still politically productive, as the access gap widens between East Asian and Southeast Asian communities. In a recent survey conducted by Asian and Pacific Islander Americans Vote on Asian Americans’ attitudes toward various policy measures, 63% of Chinese American participants thought that the “affirmative action programs designed to increase the number of black and minority students on college campuses” were a “bad thing” (2016, p. A25), whereas other Asian American participants including those who were Korean (55%), Japanese (60%), Filipino (67%), Vietnamese (78%), and Asian Indians (52%) considered affirmative action a “good thing” on average, noting that an even higher percentage of people among the Southeast Asian groups (Filipino and Vietnamese in this case) viewed affirmative action positively. These phenomena necessitate a radical break from the traditional conceptualization of Asian Americanness as an intelligible racial population that shares similar experiences of racialization and immigration. The deterritorialization of ethnicity is an inevitable move in the context of changing Asian immigration and polarization of class among Asian American communities (Nguyen, 2002, p. 21). That is, the previous shared experiences of racialization are rapidly taken over by the disproportional opportunities of mobility and survival—those who benefit from the flexible movement of capital and national borders and those who are further exploited by such flexibility. To speak of Asian Americanness without addressing the paradox of these material realities is to bolster the false imagination of multiculturalism, where Asian
Americanness can serve to perpetuate the fantasy of politically neutral and culturally pluralistic racial relations.

In the midst of the controversy, the most pressing issue is not to debate the accurate or authentic representation of Asian Americanness, but to return to the demand that the Black Lives Matter movement calls for in the first place, that is, to reclaim what a livable life is. To denounce the political possibility of Asian Americanness is not to turn back to the binary paradigm of Black-White racial antagonism, or to speak for the Other as an authentic, deserving racial subject. Rather, it is critical to challenge the moral and political legitimacy granted through Asian Americanness and to expand the narrow tunnel of survival that has increasingly become restricted by intensified racial profiling and surveillance. As an Asian for Black Lives activist said at Akai Gurley’s vigil,

We must remain vigilant and not let systems divide our communities in what is right—valuing life. At the end of the day, it is about valuing life—Black lives—and finding humanity. Akai’s life, along with countless other Black and Brown lives, have been stolen by the NYPD. They leave behind grieving friends, family, and loved ones.

In recognizing our shared vulnerability to White supremacy and the unstable structures of privileges based on race, we can move forward from a racial politic that only makes life livable for some and unlivable for the rest.
CRUISING BORDERS UNSETTLING IDENTITIES

CHAPTER 5

NARRATING QUEER ASIAN MELANCHOLIA

On October 9th, 2016, the New York Times deputy Metro editor, Michael Luo was strolling on the sidewalk on the Upper East Side of Manhattan with his family, and a woman suddenly yelled at them, “Go back to China…go back to your fucking country!” Luo protested, “I was born in this country!” (Luo, 2016). After this racist encounter, Luo started a tweet to describe this experience with a hashtag #thisis2016 which soon went viral on multiple social network sites. Asian Americans came forward and speak about the similar form of racism they face in their every day life with the same hashtag (Woo and Al-Hlou, 2016). It certainly felt like this was an overdue public exposure of such common racism against Asian Americans for decades. Speaking from Michael Luo, an Asian American man with a prestigious job that symbolizes literacy, intelligence, and liberal values of the multicultural America, together with the fact that it was an incident occurring in the context of one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the country, make this incident much more ironic, intolerable, and theatrical in a sense. It would probably not have the same social effect if it happened to an immigrant Chinese man working in the Chinatown, because his foreignness would have been considered as a given. In fact, he may not even protest, due to the lack of social capital to deal with the consequences, but also the lack of urgency to argue against one’s national affiliation—after all, he might have really been from China. But, under what conditions would one feel offended by such a statement about one’s nation history? How has feeling offended by one’s national history become a precondition of being Asian American now?

As an Asian immigrant myself who has deep commitments to both the US and my country of origin, I began to wonder about the limits of the dominant Asian American
subjectivity that overwhelmingly emphasizes the need to claim loyalty and citizenship to the US, which inevitably comes with separating and detaching one’s other history that is linked to immigration, imperialist wars, and economic exploitation. In many ways, forgetting one’s history turns to be the precondition of achieving the “good Asian American life” that is inseparable from the promise of the American Dream: hard work, family values, economic advancement and the promise of future prosperity for the next generation. The rhetoric of the good life is indeed implicitly addressed in the hashtag campaign of #thisis2016, that is, aren’t we over this old image of the perpetually foreign, unassimilated, non-English speaking Asian American already? The urgency to move forward and to have a closure in the past is ingrained in the Asian American subjectivity that regulates one how to perform, feel, and act as a multicultural citizen.

To become Asian American means the gradual erasure of one’s racial past under the disguise of multiculturalism and thus entails a sense of loss and disconnection to one’s bodily matter, the skin and blood, and to exist in-between the racial segregation of Whiteness and Blackness. This sense of loss is carried out and performed everyday in a casual encounter where Asian Americans’ place of origin is challenged and questioned. The typical conversation would run like this:

“Where are you from?”

“I’m from California.”

“No, where are you really from?”

The emphasis on the “really” aims at revealing a particular imagined geographical site outside of the US, a location that can trace a non-White racial origin. This kind of incident is so pervasive and normalized as a quintessential enactment of the perpetual foreigner stereotype that it has been repeatedly used as a script to prime Asian American stereotype threat in
psychological studies (e.g., Cheryan and Monin, 2005). The script is not only significant because it indicates the impossibility of complete integration, but also highlights the racial dilemma for Asian Americans, that is, how to be and live steadily on the hyphen? Oftentimes, the underlying distaste for the encounter comes from a sense of belonging to the US and an identification with the American citizenship, in which the Asian American subject who is provoked by such racist statement may resist and counter it with the identification that she is obviously from here and thus there is not a “place of origin” that needs to be explicated. The irony of the script is that it would only be recognized as a condition of stereotype threat or prejudicial statement if the subject in question assumes an inherent and natural belongingness in the US, in which any additional tracing or explanation of immigration would only be excessive.

**On Racial Loss and Melancholia**

The Asian American racialized process is inevitably intertwined with a loss of place, a lack of origin. In *The Melancholy of Race*, Anne Anling Cheng depicted this unique racialized subjectivity of American Americanness as a “ghostly position” (2001, p. 23) in which one is forcibly attached to the fantasy of the “East” yet constantly under the pressure to pass as American and non-Black in order to sustain life. The ghostly position and the erasure of a sense of place are not merely a psychological perception of racial otherness, but essential to the building of American nationhood in the early 20th century. In *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe (1996) articulated that this persistent tension between racial inclusion and racial erasure in the project of US nation-making “requires the orientalist construction of cultures and geographies from which Asian immigrants come as fundamentally ‘foreign’ origins anti-pathetic to the modern American society that ‘discovers,’ ‘welcomes,’ and ‘domesticates’ them” (p. 5). The uprooting of Asian origins must be understood as an intentional process of effacing the history of exploitation and
colonial conquest. To become Asian American is to move beyond this past, to take American as the natural place of origin, as in Lowe’s term, to be “domesticated” into a citizen within the national borders.

The subjectification of Asian Americans is therefore wrapped with narratives of losses and mourning linked to histories of dispersal as well as a yearning for belonging. Cheng (2001) coins such racial identity construction attached to the lost object as “racial melancholia,” a state that describes a process of becoming consumed by one’s loss, “swallowing” the object, and turning into a subject defined by the possession of loss:

“The melancholic is not melancholic because he or she has lost something but because he or she has introjected that which he or she now reviles. Thus the melancholic is stuck in more ways than just temporally; he or she is stuck—almost choking on—the hateful and loved thing he or she just devoured” (p. 9).

In the melancholic state, the subject and the object of loss are inseparable, and intrinsically merged. The object of loss is emotionally invested and becomes a new form of possession and obsession on its own. According to Cheng, the melancholic racial formation of Asian Americanness is constructed by its perpetual grief for the loss of place. Once consumed by her own melancholia, the Asian American subject will be defined by her own grief and will not be able to afford an imaged or real returning of the lost place.

**Bicultural Blues**

This melancholic state is widely demonstrated in the psychological literature of bicultural trauma and acculturative stress of the second generation Asian Americans (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Romero & Roberts, 2003), who have supposedly lost their place of origin and defined by the perpetual ghostly emptiness of racial positionality. Bicultural Asian Americans have been
found to report higher levels of acculturative stress and depressive symptoms compared to White Americans due to the pressure to adopt both majority and minority cultures (Benet-Martinez, Leu, and Lee, 2002; Romero, Carvajal, Valle, & Orduna, 2007; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Wei, Liao, Chao, Mallinckrodt, Tsai, and Botello-Zamarron, 2010). Instead of internalizing the positive aspects of being both Asian and American, the literature has documented the dilemma of the hyphenated subject position, where one is constantly haunted by the sense of being neither Asian nor American enough. The bicultural blues is thus tied to the sense of not fitting in to neither the host society nor the ‘home country’—now a lost object, ‘Asia,’ that becomes melancholically devoured and internationalized. Ien Ang (2001) has articulated such an absurd diasporic subject position of “looking Chinese but not speaking Chinese.” The bicultural Asian American subjectivity that feels alienated from both sites of belonging disrupts the naturalized immigrant linkage between culture and ethnicity, nation and allegiance.

Consistent with the theory of acculturation, the bicultultural framework has identified the capacity of integrating the mainstream and ethnic cultures as the ideal for immigrant identity construction. The well-adjusted immigrant switches her cultural frame depending on the context she is in, as a sort of “double consciousness” (cited in Benet-Martinez, Leu, and Lee, 2002, p. 490; Du Bois, 1903/1990):

“[These] biculturals do not perceive the mainstream and ethnic cultures as being mutually exclusive, oppositional, or conflicting. They integrate both cultures in their everyday lives, show behavioral competency in both cultures, and switch their behavior depending on the cultural demands of the situation (Benet-Martinez, Leu, and Lee, 2002, p. 495)”

Under the framework, being an ideal and healthy immigrant is to be unstuck—to let go of the object of loss, and to embrace the banal multiculturalism in the host society. However, the
biculturalism theory rarely recognizes the fact that the “mainstream culture” and the “ethnic culture” are not weighted equally in the host society. That is why to simply identify oneself as the hyphenated “Asian American” or “Chinese American” is never a satisfying answer to the Western spectators—it begs further explanations over one’s foreignness and non-Whiteness. Despite the scholars’ claims, this depiction of biculturalism is in fact incongruent to W.E.B. Du Bois’ original meaning of double consciousness. While biculturalism assumes that the well-adjusted immigration subject can switch back and forth between the equivalent sites of identification of the majority and minority culture, Du Bois’ double consciousness in no way assumes that “Americanness” and “Blackness” are situated on the same horizon where one can freely switch from one side to another. Rather, double consciousness is an effortful strategy to reconcile one’s identity in a racist society and to constantly negotiate with the White gaze’s perception of the self: “a ‘two-ness’ of being an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (2007, p. 2-3). Describing the opposite of being unstuck, Du Bois’ double consciousness indeed is about holding onto the “twoness” and to merge oneself with Blackness in order to attain a self-conscious personhood.

**Melancholic Attachment and Queer Backwardness**

To be continually stuck in the melancholic state of loss is troubling, but to deny loss and simply accept the banal multiculturalism can be equally problematic, because it rejects the necessity to scrutinize the nostalgic vision of culture that builds upon sameness and romanticizes racial exploitation. Rather than outright rejecting the process of grieving loss as psychologically damaging, melancholia—the attachment to the object of loss—may provide a more nuanced and productive conceptualization of Asian American subjectivity beyond the binary of assimilation.
and opposition and the bicultural blues of inadequate becoming. In seeking for the political and creative possibilities of loss, David Eng and David Kazanjian (2003) suggest a more nuanced and depathologized understanding of the melancholic attachments to loss that might generate a more productive conceptualization of temporality, where “melancholia’s persistent struggle with its lost objects not simply a ‘grasping’ and ‘holding’ on to a fixed notion of the past but rather a continuous engagement with loss and its remains” (p. 4). By holding onto the object, the melancholic subject may have a more sustained capacity and freer flexibility to represent history and the various forms of loss—as written by Freud, of a beloved person, or “an abstraction which has taken the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal, and so on” (2005, p. 203). In other words, the lost object becomes the creation and imagination of the melancholic that allows her to rewrite the past and her relationship with the lost object.

However, the risks of being stuck in the past or dwelling on losses are certainly not equal for all subjects, as one might be seen as the permanent outcast of the society or declared as utterly irrelevant to the present. In her book on the “backward turn” of queer theory, Heather Love (2007) indicates that “For those marked as temporally backward, the stakes of being identified as modern or non-modern were extremely high” (p. 6) The association of queerness with psychic immaturity and the perversity represented by the AIDS crisis have marked the queerness as particularly a backward and melancholic subject, where the losses and memories in the past continually haunt the present. With the growing legal measures to include lesbians and gays into the state protection, the queer future has become more foreseeable.

Nonetheless, such process of normalization is not without consequences: to move forward into the homonormative futurity is to leave the past behind, including its racialized remains. Many queer theorists have thus pointed out that a narrow tunnel of selection that is
determined by the dominant norms of Whiteness and the middle-class values constitutes queer assimilation, where queers of color are often excluded from the homonormative citizenship. Therefore, for queers of color, assimilation to the White queer future remains unattainable and unresolved, and thus continuously places them in the melancholic process, where their present is preoccupied with the feelings of ambivalence and estrangement (Eng and Han, 2003).

In the psychological literature, the experiences of queer Asian Americans are often described as a state of double losses—the racial loss of inability to assimilate to the White normative queer community and the fear of “loss of face” to the heteronormative immigrant family (Kimmel and Yi, 2004, p. 145; see also Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni and Walters, 2011; Chung and Katayama, 1998; Szymanski and Sung, 2010). The need for concealing one’s sexuality in the immigrant family household was found to be a common stressor among queer Asian American, where queerness is viewed as a Western construct and not fitting for Asian ethnic cultures (Bridges, Selvidges, and Matthews, 2003). The multiple minority status is described by this body of literature as a significant position of vulnerability, where queer Asian Americans would experience various minority stressors and have a particular difficult time to finding acceptance in either the queer or ethnic communities (Balsam et al., 2011). Their multiplicity of identity is constructed as a site of irrecoverable and unresolved losses, in which racist and heterosexist structures are thought to segregate and foreclose spaces instead of producing alternative possibility of belonging.

However, these losses documented in the psychological framework are only quantifiable when the queer space and racial space are considered mutually exclusive and inherently incompatible in the first place. By reading this racialized queer grief through the concept of melancholia, can we consider these losses and permanent attachments to both spaces as a form of
protest against the splitting of identity? That is, what if to grieve is a psychic and social process of rejecting being reduced to a singular space of belonging? Instead of regarding the negative affects of melancholia and grief as quantifiable damages or inconsolable wounds, it may be more productive to read melancholia as a refusal to “feel better” under the current condition of neoliberal hegemony where happiness is only narrowly defined (Ahmed, 2010; Love, 2007). The “unhappy queers” and “melancholic migrants” (Ahmed, 2010) hold onto the negative affects that interrupt the presumed route of assimilation, “allowing the body with another kind of desire…[that] may even queer our aspirations“ (p. 120). For queer Asian Americans, such alternative desire may be the one that allows the individual to not feel conflicted or ironic about the question—“where are you really from?”—as national belonging would no longer be restricted by eliminating the unhappy histories of exploitation and imperialist conquest.

**Methods: Grieving in Diaspora**

In the psychological documentation of queer Asian American experiences, ‘Asia’ can be a complicated site of belonging and burden, pride and shame, resilience and distress. The anti-essentialism of the diasporic paradigm opens up a symbolic space for the immigrant subject to navigate identity and positionality beyond the confined and bounded categories of citizenship and nationality, whereas queerness rejects the reproductive futurism pervasive in the immigrant acculturation narratives and demands a temporality elsewhere, away from the hegemonic neoliberal future, an alternative way of belonging beyond the constraints of biological and ethnic ties. Taking these articulations of the political possibility of queer Asian American subjectivity that are generated by the affective capacity of melancholia—to “get lost” and “dwell on” a timespace elsewhere and in another time—I am particularly interested in how queer Asian American activists negotiate losses and grief. More important, as Cheng asks, “How does an
individual go from being a subject of grief to being a subject of grievance?” (2001, p. 3) That is, rather than conceptualizing melancholic affect as antagonistic to political agency, how might it be generative to speak from a place of loss and grief? Can there be a productive attachment to the object of loss?

**On the context and participants.** The question of queer melancholia arose from my larger ethnographic research on Asian American political participation in Black Lives Matter. While queerness was not the central political demand of the Asian American activists involved in the movement, it was the social and material bond that brought us together in the coalition, Asian and Pacific Islander Peoples’ Solidarity (APIPS), of approximately 15 anti-imperialist activists working to connect issues of militarism and neoliberal trades abroad to racialized violence in the US. These Asian American activists in the coalition all have personal and political ties to their countries of origin, including South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, China, and the Philippines. Since I started to be involved in the coalition in 2013, I have become curious about their capacity of forging political alliances and psychological bonds across the US borders flexibly.

The conceptualization of *Asian Americanness* among these activists is distinct from the mainstream narrative of US-centrism and liberal multiculturalism, but a sense of obligation to defy the US nation-state and imperialist apparatus as individuals who have the privileges to reside within the border due to their various histories of migration. This attachment to Asia is not merely ideological, but deeply affective. As the Black Lives Matter movements intensified after the Ferguson incident, one conversation around the priority of organizational objective emerged in the coalition that clearly illustrated the political and psychological dilemma of activists in the diaspora: one member suggested that we shifted our focus to link militarism to the urgent issue of domestic police violence in the US, yet another member immediately responded defensively
by saying, “I feel deeply impacted by US imperialism everyday, more so than everything.” How does one afford to be continually attached to an object that is supposed to be gotten rid of in the interest of becoming Asian American? How do they negotiate these multiple spaces of loss and grief as queer Asian subject?

To answer these questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a total of nine queer-identified Asian/American activists in the coalition on the questions of their migration history, political development, and social identity and how these dimensions of their lives intersect with their queerness. Among these nine participants, there were people of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Taiwanese ethnicities; seven identified as women or gender-queer, and only two of them identified as men. Their ages ranged from early 20s to the late 40s. In this chapter, five narratives were selected to present here because of the richness of their stories, which travel across multiple geographical and temporal scales and where different forms of traumatic events were expressed from memories of the authoritarian regime to intimate partner violence. Additionally, the five narratives were selected because of the participants’ consistent presence from the initial formation of the coalition to the breakout of the Peter Liang and Akai Gurley controversy in New York City from 2014 to 2016, where the notion of Asian Americanness was directly challenged through the insurgent confrontations and protests from both sides. The five chosen narratives illustrated not only the participants’ negotiation between the LGBTQ and Asian American spaces, but also their reflection on the political role of Asian Americanness since the #Asians4BlackLives movement. In contrast, the other four narratives not presented here, were mainly conducted in early 2015, focused on the participants’ dilemmas around being a queer person of color in the age of legalized marriage equality and their
negotiation of their political life and family life, since I did not emphasize questions around racial relations as much as I did for the five selected narratives conducted in 2016.

During the semi-structured interviews, I asked the participants about their migration journey, political participation, and how their intersectional identities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationality impact their personal and political life. As the Liang-Gurley case became heated in NYC, I asked the participants their thinking around the notion of an Asian American identity, and how might an anti-imperialist vision of solidarity look like in their respective communities. Starting with their motives behind migration, the interviews gradually built on the critical events in their life that highlighted their central struggle or dilemma around their identities that cannot be easily fit into normative categories of race, gender, sexuality, or nationality. These critical events spread across both time and space, for some, they are related to the traumatic memories about leaving the country of origin, and for others, they are very specific moments that have politicized them. The semi-structured, phenomenologically focused method allowed me to facilitate a form of “sideways growth” (Stockton, 2009) in the participants narratives, which rejected a linear, vertically developed plotline and emphasized the connecting knots and lateral relations that the participants draw on to make sense of their own narrative identities.

On analysis: narrating trauma and loss. In my study I employed a phenomenological approach to examine these participants’ narratives. The phenomenological understanding of how one makes sense of experiences through time and order is indeed central to the approach of narrative psychology. According to scholars such as Carr (1986), Crossley (2000), McAdams (1996) and Sarbin (1986), narratives, the subjective accounts of life stories and events, illustrate how identity is configured through temporality, as individuals seek to apply structure on the flow
of experiences to reach self-understanding. While traumatic events such as experiences of violence, illness, and group-based oppression disrupt the linear sense of time, forcing the individual to relive the events repeatedly, narratives help to rebuild a sense of coherence and reestablish ontological security in one’s identity. This process of coping through narrative reconfiguration (Brody, 2003; Crossley, 2000; Viney and Bousfield, 1991), where the individual experiences a “renewed urgency” (Mathieson and Stam, 1995, p. 284) to make sense of life and develops strategies of resilience. In the context of historical trauma, trauma narratives are not only significant as a vector to carry over cultural and group identity, but also capable of “[transmitting] strength, optimism, and coping strategies” (Denham, 2008, p. 392-393) and “organizing life events into a coherent and ever-evolving story” (Neimeyer and Stewart 1996, p. 360).

While I did not probe for questions around trauma and loss initially, these subjects emerged as primary narrative themes that cut across their articulations of identities. Traumatic events of imperialist violence, racism, sexism, and heterosexism, whether one experienced it directly or indirectly, are powerful affects that move their stories across time and space, rescuing the objects of loss—the nation of origin, family, or the ideal self. Through critical narrative analysis (Langdrige, 2007), I examined how their narratives organize their multiple identities across different events of trauma and loss, but also sites of transformation and healing.

In analysis, I am especially interested in the narrative functions of queerness across the participants. I first looked at the narrative as a whole within the lifespace of the person, and then looked across the participants to seek common patterns and themes. As queer Asian women who must negotiate the complicated webs of violence and power across personal and political spaces, the subjects of trauma and loss dominated my conversations with these participants around
migration, nationhood, family, and intimate partnership. Their narratives were entangled by the inseparable spaces of identity construction and were impossible to be compartmentalized by a reductionist content analysis of mutually exclusive categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or nationality. Rather, the themes of violence, belonging, loss, and yearning threaded across these categories in their telling of the multi-sited journeys. Therefore, in my analysis, I departed from the conceptualization of queerness as a sexual identity, but rather, examined queerness as a narrative structure that makes the multiplicity of their identities intelligible, and in a sense, grievable to others (Butler, 2004, p. 30). That is, deviating from the hegemonic narrative of assimilation in which the subject must lose the nation of origin in becoming Asian American, I investigated how might queerness divert or transform the sense of loss? The thickness and stretchiness of the queer Asian American activists’ narratives challenging identity as noun, and reconceptualize queerness as a verb that invites transgression, contestation, and extension of boundaries.

Narrating Melancholia: National Loss and Leaving Home

As Anne Cheng argues, “Like melancholia, racism is hardly ever a clear rejection of the other” (2000, p. 12). The racial other in the white society is usually melancholily possessed and maintained, rather than an outright relinquishment or exclusion. Even under the colonial structure of segregation where the racial other is captured in a geographically separate site, the colonizers would invest an immense amount of psychic energy of fear and desire in the colonized subject (Hook, 2012). When it comes to facing discrimination and injury by the racial other, reducing their experience to an inevitable self-hatred or self-ostracism is thus too simplistic and prescriptive. Cheng points out that the subjective agency of the racialized subject should be considered as “a convoluted, ongoing, generative, and at times self-contradicting
negotiation with pain” (p. 15). My entry to the queer Asian American activists’ narratives begins with the exploration of a wide range of contradictory and interlocking psychical dynamics—guilt and pride, affirmation and rejection, trauma and healing—that weave into their agentive strategies of constructing and managing the self through and against the currents of White supremacy, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy. Under the nationalist pressure to assimilate, these activists illustrate alternative forms of subjective agency to live and resist in the colonized society beyond the binary of identification and negation.

The narratives I conducted with the participants started with their migration motives. While most of the participants—except one Korean adoptee—came to the US “voluntarily,” through familiar ties in the states or student visas, the narratives on migration soon follow a sense of intergenerational trauma that is linked to history of imperial conquest, state violence or patriarchal family conflicts. Across the participants, migratory stories overlapped with an urgency to reclaim national history to make sense of the shattered myth of “the better life” in the American immigrant narrative. They also frequently brought up traumatic events connected to the dysfunctional patriarchal relationship in their immediate families that became one of the driving forces of leaving home. The sharp splitting of spaces that migration brings makes the memory of the home countries much more dramatic and weighted in the becoming of the immigrant subject in the US. In their narratives of leaving and entering, migration not only serves as a distinct spatial and temporal split between the violent events they encountered, but also a vessel for containing the continuation of violence in different forms. These stories are not simply cut off as one leaves home, but continues to haunt them and creates an alternative understanding about the US as an inherently violent and imperialist state. They collectively narrated a strategy of ambivalent belonging as a way to hold onto both places and the lost times.
I will highlight each of their narratives about refusal, reclamation, rejection, reencounter, and reentering as the “queer regeneration” sites developing radical politics beyond assimilation and resisting to be sorted along the binarism of backward versus progressive, and the damaged versus the agentive in both queer and Asian/American politics (Haritaworn, 2015, p. 143).

Hye’s Refusal to Assimilate

“I’m not your usual Korean-American daughter.”

Hye, a Korean peace activist in her late 40s, expressed that coming to the US as a college student in the 1980s was “a big shock,” in which she felt that she “got dragged in here” by her family without much decision-making power. What she was leaving behind was not just a familiar place of home in South Korea, but a whole generation of student uprisings and labor movements against the authoritarian government at the time. Her descriptions of the movement in South Korea were incredibly vivid, infused with complex affects of excitement and hope as well as fear and guilt:

“In 1987, from March to May, it was like every single day we were doing a protest. Whenever I went to a rally, I had this huge fear for a military dictatorship that would form in the country. So then when I came the following year to the US, I had this mixed feeling of guilt that I abandoned everyone else and left it. Also, some kind of this indebtedness, that I owed them something. The events that happened just accumulated in you and then you became a different person.”

The sense of obligation and investment her country was central in Hye’s narratives. It was not only about her attachment to the place, but her “big sense of urgency in terms of responsibilities” to the movements and her comrades who were facing death threats from the government every day. Even three decades after it had happened, the events are still extremely clear in her mind,
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and has been consumed and absorbed as part of her identity. Hye recalled the nuances and details that happened during that time about the intense state violence and how the state was actively erasing information:

“So many people died, or people heard about so-and-so disappeared and then appeared again and was tortured, had bruises, or was choked to death, but the police said they don’t know the causes even after autopsy...All these stories were coming out, not on the newspapers, but on small flyers. We were delivering flyers all over the city. And after you read the flyer, the practice was that you either shred it or you eat it, so there would be no proof.”

Unlike her descriptions about the initial years in the US that were just about “studying and nothing else,” her memories of the past political events in South Korea were lively and dramatic with the embodied sensations of pain and ecstasy. These collective spirits she carried with her to the US, however, became a source of cultural shock as she realized how insignificant these events are to the American public: “Especially when I met with those [Korean] immigrants of my age, they had no clue about this. Everyone was talking about dating, who likes who, the classes, how to improve English and get a better job, or how to get an A. I just had a horrible transition time.” The contrast between the two places was not only drastic, making it difficult for Hye to fit in, but also increased her sense of urgency and indebtedness to her comrades in Korea.

Despite her family’s rejection of her participation in political activism and the general negligence that people around her, Hye’s memories of the democratic uprising drove her to engage in full-time political organizing in the US ever since she finished college. Conceptualizing leaving her country as a loss, or an indebtedness to a history and a collective, provided Hye with an understanding of her identity as intrinsically connected to imperialism and
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militarism in the US and abroad. Therefore, she considers the Asian identity also as a loss, a process of racialization where one must undergo to strip off differences in order to become an immigrant in the US: “In the American racism context, I identify as an Asian, because what’s Korean and what’s Chinese is no different when we are categorizing White, Brown, and Black. But I think I’m a Korean. I don’t say I’m an Asian American.” What Hye’s narrative illustrates is how Asian Americanness presupposes a kind of unity within experiences that simplifies the national particularity in relation to the US nation-state and its imperialist apparatus. She continues, “Because I think within Asian America, there is a Korea situation, a Japan situation, it’s all different. Only when we are talking about US militarism, it’s Asia Pacific wide. That is the one way I think Asian American has meanings.” Despite Hye’s strong identification with Korean nationality, the circuits of militarism produce a necessary pan-Asian identity. As a Korean peace activist, holding onto the national identity for Hye is not only a cultural sentiment against American assimilation, but a way of doing and living in anti-imperialist politics. Asian Americanness risks flattening out the national particularities of the different countries and effects of imperialism. The only way to identify as an Asian American, for Hye, was to truly understand the military effects in all of the Asia Pacific, as an identity of informed solidarity. Asian Americanness thus acts as a double-edged sword: it has the capacity of becoming a political productive identity but only under the conditions of not forgetting, or remembering history.

For Hye, who left South Korea during the peak of the 1980s student movement, emigrating to the US pushed her to internalize the dramatic and violent events of protest into her own psychological state as she refused to ‘let go’ or ‘put aside’ her involvement and attachment to the movement. This melancholic affect allowed her to examine how the US acts as an integral part of the imperialist apparatus that contributed to the crisis that South Korea has been facing in
the context of capitalist globalization. The sense of indebtedness also allows her to think of her queer identity in a drastically different way from the mainstream representations that emphasize forming partnerships, seeking love, and commodified entertainment. She says, queerness to her, “it’s a political choice of not dating. I want to provide that it’s okay to be a queer and yet not dating.” As a self-conscious leader in the movement, and has dealt with several sexual assault cases within her activist communities, she is very aware how sexual and romantic relationships can “get messy” in an intimate organizational space. Queerness, indeed, allows her to claim a political and moral space against assimilation: “I’m going to actively call myself queer. And, being different, I’m not going to be afraid. I’m going to withstand all the pressure.”

Queerness is also the refusal to choose either side of the binarism of belonging or marginalization, moving on or letting go: “I feel like we are always maneuvering throughout the multiple boundaries, queer or non-queer. Korean or American. A daughter or a son, maybe? A daughter who has to take care of your parents and yet a survivor of family violence.” Her experience as a survivor is only brought up toward the very end of our interview. She does not center her identity on this particular traumatic experience. It seems to me that her way of dealing with trauma is to rebuild her commitment to the context where she is hurt, and to find a sense of balance in her role, instead of escaping. She says:

“I’m pretty much a selfish person, I am an activist and I dedicate myself to it...I take care of my family with what they need, which is at least about 1600 dollars a month. So as long as I can give them that much money, they leave me alone...I make sure that I don’t sacrifice anything, so I wouldn’t be holding or storing any resentment. I do what I must do and I want to do.”
Although she describes herself as “selfish,” it seems to me what she does comes out of strong dedication and commitment. While both the contexts of political activism and family contain violent episodes and memories, she refused to just take off and leave them behind. “You can say, I’m not your usual Korean-American daughter,” Hye says. Her queer identity emerged later in her life in the context of political organizing, which did not push her to simply reject her family connection or ethnic identity, but rather, gave her agency to be with her family and ethnic communities in a different way.

Unlike the mainstream narrative about racialized queer subjectivity that is often about choosing between the queer life and the ethnic community and a sense of tremendous loss of family and culture, it is precisely this ambivalence that grants Hye freedom in navigating all these identity boundaries:

“Am I American? American life, when they generally say that, it does not ring any bell to me. Or Korean life, so if somebody says, ‘You are so Korean,’ I will be like, ‘I don’t eat spicy things, I can’t drink, I don’t think I am as a good Korean as you are.’ I try to distinguish myself. I’m not really comfortable being labeled purely as Korean or American.”

It’s in the ambivalence there is freedom beyond the binaries. Yet it also comes with a sense of permanent transience, in which every territory that one stands on is only temporary: “It’s like we live in a fine line on the boundary, you don’t belong to neither places. There’s no space for you. You just kind of have to manage at every moment which territory is the next stop.” For Hye, being ambivalent is not to escape, but a deep commitment to the multiple sites, of being Korean, an Asian American, a daughter, and an activist. Across these sties, queerness enables her to articulate a kind of diasporic consciousness that is not about claiming identity or territory, but an
investment and an obligation, to the multiple spaces and histories that have constructed her sense belonging in this particular moment.

**Jin’s Reclamation of History**

“In my early years, I was an apologetic immigrant.”

As a Korean adoptee of White American parents in her late 20s, Jin’s relationship to immigration and the Asian American identity is “complicated,” as she says. She started to become aware of the intricacy of her identity in college, where she joined Asian American student organization and found her experiences were not comparable to others: “When I was around Asian organizers, they gave their family stories: ‘Oh, my family came as refugees and didn’t speak English.’ They had really arduous journeys here and I was like, oh, I just woke up and started remembering one day I was here.” The mainstream immigration discourse often entails a clearly defined movement from the nation of origin to the host nation, and the memories in the home countries become the background of how the immigrant subject contrasts and compares their experiences in the new society. This discourse of immigration made Jin felt like an “apologetic immigrant” in ways that she couldn’t own the identity. However, as an adoptee, Jin felt an extreme sense of loss not because she has left something behind, but because she didn’t have conscious memories of the journey in the first place. This disallowed her to claim the collective experiences of immigration with other Asian Americans. She elaborates,

“I grew up with a lot of privileges. Like I grew with the expectation that I would get good grades in school and that I would go to college and that wasn’t an expectation that is across the board, in the ‘Asian American’ experience. So there is that layer of privilege, that made it difficult for me—or I felt it wasn’t possible—for me to claim immigration.”
Jin’s lack of a ‘typical’ immigration narrative was understood as an immense loss, despite the privileges she had through her white parents. However, her deep curiosity and attachment to her migration past made her stay in the path of searching for her racial belonging. It was also this feeling of loss pushed her to join political organizing for racial justice goals every since college.

After college, she started full-time organizing work in Cop Watch to demand police accountability with a diverse, multiracial activist coalition in New York City. The questioning of the mainstream paradigm of Asian American identity indeed becomes a helpful standpoint for her to deconstruct *Asian Americanness* and examine it as a shifting historical discourse. Particularly, as an organizer in Black Lives Matter who is invested in combatting institutionalized anti-blackness, Jin questions the usefulness and radical potentials of the Asian American identity:

“It was a very radical idea at one point to be Asian American. Now it is no longer this way. I feel, at least in New York City, this movement was really strong in the 60s and 70s and really had built into something. But it’s been forty-five years, you know? You kind of get comfortable…So my question would be how do we shift the radical idea then to the conditions now?”

Since Asian American is not an identity that Jin ever takes for granted, she is also more attuned to the shifting meanings of the category. She calls her constant questioning of identity as her “rebellious tendencies” that not only comes from her adoptee identity, but also her queerness:

“Like my identity being queer and my identity being adoptee, I’ve kind of always felt in the middle. Or not quite fitting into what society tells you is ‘normal.’” Jin articulates how this perspective of being “in the middle” allows her to understand an event beyond the taken-for-granted assumptions of right or wrong, especially in social justice work, where there is
always not about the one individual to be blamed, but systematic violence that has resulted in a tragic event. She particularly related it to the controversy between the shooting of Akai Gurley, an African American man, by a Chinese American police officer in New York City:

“There is a reason that Akai Gurley was in the stairwell of the public housing building, and a reason that Peter Liang saw him and was afraid and jumped the gun. There are all these intersecting ideas, all these ways and reasons for which people are facing conditions that they are. That they’re not actually to be blamed for the fact that this person is homeless up in Harlem and maybe drug addicted or whatever. I feel like that’s how I think of my identity—growing up being adopted, I learned to not make assumptions about others. And queerness is a part of my politics.”

Jin connected the structural and historical forces that have constructed her adoptee identity to the way that many marginalized people have been misrepresented by only fragments of themselves. In other words, agency cannot be thought only individualistically—there are always webs of power and relations operating and accumulating in the background that have made an event possible. By drawing on her experiences as an adoptee, Jin’s narrative invites the listeners to think of identity as a pivot, where the background forces converge and solidify as a momentary representation in the way that Blackness is equated with criminality or Asianness is considered to be weak and fearful. Yet these representations are always unstable, and easily shattered when one examines the broader social context. While her adoptee identity helps her reject the normative representations of identities, queerness is a politics of interconnectedness of these events as orchestrated by powerful structural violence.

Although the lack of a common immigrant narrative was an emotional loss in some sense for Jin, she turns it into an opportunity to relearn and reclaim her history. She joined a diasporic
activist program that sends Korean Americans to understand the political conditions in North and South Korea with a mission of accomplishing tong-li, which is the peaceful unification of North and South Korea.

It was a particularly emotionally intense and difficult trip for Jin, because it would be the first time she went back to Korea ever since she was taken to the US as an infant: “I had a lot of feelings about getting on the airplane that would take me back. Where it had been a one-way ticket when I came to the US, and now I was like, doing the round trip. So it was really heavy.” The heaviness she describes occurs when she realizes that her lack of choice to be taken to the US as an adoptee on the “one-way ticket” was deeply connected to the difficulty decision of whether to give up their children for adoption that the unwed mothers in Korea who had to make. In her narrative, Jin highlights that the meeting she had with the unwed mothers in the adoption agency was “the most transformative moment,” which has shaped how she understands her own identity as “very connected to the Korean war, in which South Korea wanted to create better relationships and build good political relationships with the US.”

This sobering political analysis of her migration resists the romanticization of the possibility of ‘returning home,’ as the diasporic narrative often entails. Her resistance against returning also partly comes down to her politics of queerness to “not be boxed,” and her understanding of the queer reality in Korea which would not be as easy for someone who is gender non-conforming. She referred to a conversation she had with her partner then, who is also a Korean adoptee person and gender non-conforming: “We were talking about, ‘If we had babies,’ you know, how would we do the gender thing? In New York, we could do gender neutral parenting...But we’re like, we couldn’t do that in Korea.” While queerness to Jin is a politics of the “middle,” to not be forced to choose, and not to be “boxed,” it also puts a
perimeter around her experiences. In a sense that queerness helps her navigate the boundaries of her communities and commitments, that is, to have somewhere certain to return to, an assertion of agency, especially for someone whose migration was not necessarily out of her own will. While she is attached to her home country, being queer complicates the idea of home and rejects the romanticization of the concept of returning.

Queerness to her is more than just an identity, but a politic of building cross-identity alliance and of “chipping away at capitalism” for the future struggles to come:

“What I love New York City is that I feel there is such a majority of queer and trans identified folks within the pan-Asian organizing community and I think that’s not just coincidental, that speaks to a politic. I also think my focus is always kind of like what are we leaving for the folks who come after us. Although those spaces—the queer and trans spaces—feel important and I’m glad people do that work, I don’t see that as something that I want to invest all of my time in. Because I don’t know that I actually see those spaces as chipping away at capitalism. Like gay marriage is not doing that.”

Queerness provides a space for engagements beyond a reductionist identity politics. As Jin articulates, how she understands queerness is not about socializing in queer and trans circle, but an anti-capitalist politic. Queerness enables her to flight from categorical policing, and leads her to reenter communities of color while rejecting the mainstream immigrant narrative that does not leave room for adoptees. The reconceptualization of queerness as a politic through her adoptee experience has instead becomes a generative force that enables her to reinvest in the pan-Asian communities through anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist perspectives, instead of romanticizing the nationalism of returning.
Jin’s reclamation of history through the structure of queerness made her aware what she had really lost through her adoption was not necessarily a ‘home country,’ but her agency in defining her community of choice. Rather than being forced to become American through the “one-way ticket” and separate both sides of her families, queerness as a politic of identifying the interconnected of these spaces and events enable her to reinvest in her racial and national identity through anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist political organizing.

Akiko’s Rejection of Nation

“In the beginning I really thought, do I really look something like that, something they can buy?”

Akiko, a Japanese woman in her early 30s, came to the US as an international student. Right after Fukushima’s nuclear disaster in 2011, she started to join political work in the radical Japanese communities in New York City, which was the context that I got to know her. At that time, I was not aware that her initial motivation of coming to New York was indeed an escape plan from domestic violence. When I asked her journey to the US, she told me that her plan to come really started from almost ten years ago while she got married to a US marine while working as a waitress in Okinawa. They made plans to come the US after her husband got out of military, but it never happened because their relationship went downhill with her husband’s violence and abuse. When the domestic violence situation worsened, Akiko couldn’t wait any longer for her divorce to get resolved. She quickly applied for student visa in the US as her plan to escape from her husband. What made the whole situation harder was the absence of support from her family because they disagreed with her marrying an African American person from the very start. Being pregnant during the marriage also intensified the conflicts between Akiko and the family as well as between she and her husband. She said:
“During the marriage, I got pregnant. But we couldn’t just have the baby because…I think I wanted to have it, but I couldn’t. I couldn’t decide what to do because there was so much domestic violence. Then I ended up getting an abortion, and finally told my mother what happened. And she was like, ‘Your baby was going to be Black.’ She didn’t say whether it was a good thing or not, but her tone was dismissive. ‘Oh, your baby would have been Black.’ Somehow that’s what matters, right? She was like, ‘I told you. You should have married a Japanese guy.’”

Akiko was disappointed at her mother that what mattered to her was about Japanese nationality rather than her own happiness or safety. The level of racial and sexual violence Akiko witnessed first hand became so overwhelming to deal with that she had to leave the country. Further, her biological family’s home wasn’t necessarily a psychologically safe place to go back to, where she could just be without judgments. She also felt like she couldn’t share her experience with anyone around her, including her friends, because speaking about the domestic violence situation was “really kind of a shame.”

While she originally expected that migration would be a break from the violence and traditional patriarchal confines she faced in Japan, these gendered and racialized relationships were intensified as she moved to the US. Her burden of being a “good Japanese woman” who would marry a Japanese man and bear the shame of domestic violence became much more publicized and sexualized as her race turned her body into an exploitable subject in the US. When I asked her about the changes in gender dynamics since her migration, she said,

“I think that the gender stuff I experienced in Japan is different here, because the issue of race also came in. Let’s say, we have to do what rich White women don’t have to…I was asked many times by White men if I want to have sex with them to make money, in the
restaurant I work or just randomly in a bookstore. At the beginning I really thought, do I really look something like that, something they can buy? Is there something wrong with myself? ”

The intensified racialization process that Akiko encountered after coming to the US initially made her question herself as a person, whether she was only worthy as “something they can buy.” Yet through recalling the gendered violence she faced back in Japan, she started to question how the sexualized encounters with men came from the expectation of how women should perform their gender. She thus rejected the idea of womanhood and refused to perform as a woman. Yet the results had been limited, as if her gendered body was something that she could not let go or have control of: “Even though I’m not really trying not to be a woman and refuse to be recognized as a woman in any places, they still recognize me as a woman and they expect me to do something in the feminine role. And it’s really frustrating.” While Akiko’s gender, which is attached to the traumatic history in Japan that she seeks to get rid of, yet constantly being reinterpreted and renamed by others in the US, so is her identification with Japan. Her narratives about being a racialized woman and being Japanese equally demonstrated a deep sense of ambivalence that is filled with the desire of both rejection and reclaimation:

“I am not ashamed about being Japanese because I feel detached from it now. But simply rejecting my national identity as it is does not solve the problem. There are so many right wing Japanese people who want to maintain Japan as a nation. What we need to do is to make them feel uncomfortable. The Japanese people should be uncomfortable and ashamed when they hear about the country’s imperialist issues, like what it did to other Asian countries and the use of comfort women.”
CRUISING BORDERS UNSETTLING IDENTITIES

For Akiko, the Japanese national identity is an object she has to claim in order to undo its imperialist histories. What Akiko spoke about here is a politic of shaming to the country’s problematic history. It’s not a simple rejection of separating oneself from the place, but a call for critical reengagement. While the Japanese national and patriarchal ideal forced upon women once made her feel ashamed about her experiences of abuse, here she took back the agency to shame the country for what it has done to women in general. Queerness functions as a narrative strategy of transferring the shame back to the patriarchal gaze, to find identification with the place through “uncomfortable” encounter. In a way, for Akiko to hold onto Japan as a place of her political and moral concern is not necessarily about building an alliance or re-identifying with Japan, but to examine the shameful past and presence of the country’s imperialist projects.

Although the issues of gender and nationhood are two objects that Akiko tries to reject yet cannot fully dismiss through migration, her narrative started to shift toward a possibility of escape from these psychological and physical borders as she spoke about her desire of being with women, not only politically but intimately. She said, “I’ve never had a female partner. But since I experienced a lot of crazy stuff with men, I’m more inclined to be close to women. It really changed my thinking about who to partner with.” The questioning of her desire was the only hint of a possibility of escape from the cycle of patriarchal and racial violence she has encountered across space and time:

“I don’t know if I could say that dating women would make this better. But I think this decision is like how I have never dated White people, because both consciously and unconsciously, I don’t really feel comfortable being with White people. In my experience, they tend to think of me through stereotypes, like I am this or that, existing in their own
imagination. And now I think men in general do that too, whether they are White, Asian, or Black.”

For Akiko, queerness is not a solidified identity or even desire, but in her questioning and searching of her sexuality, it provides a possibility of what could have been without the burden of being that “good Japanese woman,” to feel less like an object or commodity. What is significant in Akiko’s narrative is that her home country is a symbol of patriarchy that she does not want to return to. Yet, it continues to act as a reference point in her life in the US. The racialization and sexualization she faced in the US made her realize how patriarchy travels across national lines, and thus neither of the national identification she found to be the rescue for her traumas. It is only through disidentifying with both places that constructed her as the kind of woman she has been seen, and through the potential of forming an alternative kind of intimate affiliation, that is, through queerness, she can find the route of escape and the possibility of a new self.

Gia’s Reencounter of Racial Trauma

“If I’m at a bar, sitting alone, and some White dude is coming on to me, trying to talk to me, there’s this really intense, a colonial relationship that’s understood popularly.”

Gia is a second-generation Korean American woman in her mid 20s, who grew up with a “typical LA immigrant experience” in the Korean ethnic enclave in the suburb. She articulated many aspects of her struggle as a racialized Asian woman during her young age, and her constant battle with the White male gaze in her social world. Being surrounded by White people in her middle and high school, she never felt that she fit in:

“A lot of my discomfort had to do with make-up and looking a certain way and having a certain kind of—Asian body. And even now I think that when I go back home, I just
don’t fit in with the girls there. Every time I try wearing make-up, I’m just like…I can’t, I’ve tried, I’ve really tried, and it’s too much. So traumatizing. And a lot of that has to do with the ‘monolids,’ you know? Like Asian eyes or whatever you want to call them. And I remember being in junior high and seeing everyone starting to wear make-up and feeling like maybe I should do the same, but realizing that it doesn’t look the way it does on TV.”

The racialization process came at a very young age for Gia, as a second-generation immigrant, who didn’t have adequate resources or support from her family to deal with the mainstream expectations of being a “proper Asian woman” in the White social world. The way she coped with the sense of alienation was reading British literature. She said,

“Straight-up all I would read was Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte. I took French in high school because I wanted to read Victor Hugo untranslated. Yeah, what I was doing? No relevance whatsoever to my life right now. But all I did was just cover myself in blankets and read all the time. And there’s beautiful sunny California outside and all I did was consume the British Empire! Essentially. So I made sure that no one could have ever assumed that I didn’t speak English. Which, of course, still isn’t going to happen.”

Gia’s feminized Asian body was not an object she could escape from, no matter how much she tried to perform Whiteness. In a sense, her Asianness associated with the heightened expectation of femininity was what she tried to reject in order to cope with the racial trauma she faced. Her choice of coping through literature and language was significant to her identity because she remembered that she was able to speak Korean very well to her parents when she was a child. Yet her attachment with the language and culture was lost during this time while she was
searching for a new identity to fit into the White norm. And that became an enormous loss for her in the present especially after she was politicized on anti-racist and anti-imperialist politics.

Her narratives took on a significant turn when she talked about moving to New York City for college and the freedom she felt in terms of gender expression and sexual identity:

“I became super queer as soon as I came to New York. What I loved about moving here was that I could just be whatever fucking woman I wanted to be, and I mean, I don’t identify as gender queer, I don’t identify as, like, not cis in any way. But it’s still that release from the expectations of femininity. It was enormously important for me.”

Gia’s “escape plan” seemed to be working at this point. She joined the queer people of color community in her college where she called her “home away from home.” Yet being part of the queer collective and embodying this new identity in her life did not end the kind of sexualized and racialized experiences. Gia’s sharpened awareness and identification with her Korean nationality made her realize that the level of sexualization she experienced was not only about her being an Asian woman, but her as an Korean immigrant and the racialized gendered politics of the US militarized conquer in Korea. This dynamics began to occur more frequently to her as an adult woman in New York City:

“What I have experienced was not so much being sexualized as an Asian woman…I mean, kind of? If I ever meet a guy, I screen men in a much more intense way obviously than anyone else. But it’s like, I never know if they’ve clicked that ‘Asian porn,’ category. I’m just not going to know. And for me it’s such a—it’s hard for me to even talk about it, because I haven’t thought through it myself. Particularly I think as Korean women, the relationship that we have with White American men in this country is unbelievably fucked up. I understand the first huge wave of Korean immigrants in this country being
military brats, camp town sex work. That kind of stuff colors everything that I feel and see in the city...If I’m at a bar, sitting alone, and some White dude is coming on to me, trying to talk to me, there’s this really intense, a colonial relationship that’s understood popularly. So that’s a bit difficult for me to think through, especially the military stuff.”

What Gia articulated is the militarized history that she is melancholy attached to, a reinvestment in the unspoken past in her family that has now constantly haunted her in her life even after she moved away from her family home. In a sense, her baggage of being an Asian woman took on a new shape as she became aware of the Korean-American colonial relationship. Her racial trauma is no longer just about the common narratives of Asian stereotypes such as the “Asian eyes” or not being able to speak English, but something deeply personal and historical, and much harder to escape from, in which she said that this lens “colors everything” that she felt and saw in the city. This intensity of racialization is beyond the appearance and the contour of her body, but a collectively shared colonial history, that was not simply comprehensible through an Asian American lens. It requires an engagement with the colonial and imperialist history of this country.

Deposit the tone of difficulty or even impossibility of “moving on” from this traumatic past in her narratives, this is also where her politicization really began, where she found troubles in the queer people of color space she was in: “I find it very frustrating when young queer people act as if queerness is the end of the line, that this it the final, ‘frontier.’ Some of them actually use the word ‘frontier,’ which is like, ‘Do you know where that word comes from?’” Although queerness was her first site of exile from the restrictive gender expectations she encountered, she realized the limits of it to transcend colonial relationships. The reproduction of colonial violence also happened in her intimate and sexual relationship with other queer people of color:
“It feels so hegemonic and I can’t really think about it for too long without just crying. All of my relationships that I’ve had with queer people of color have been intensely abusive. Obviously, not because they are queer or people of color, but because they come from cycles of violence. And it’s hard for people who come from cycles of violence to meet and actually be okay with each other and treat people better. It’s really difficult.

And that’s also, yes, a political practice. But day to day, it’s really fucking hard.”

What dominates Gia’s narratives is the theme of bodily traumas, from the stereotyping of Asian features to the fetishization and abuse in intimate relationships. Yet she spoke with these events with a high level of self-awareness as well as ceaseless self-analysis. I began to understand the Gia’s politic of dealing with the different layers of violence she encountered is not to find a ‘resolution,’ but to be in the constant tensions and form ambivalent attachments with the various identity spaces she exists in. She articulates this idea of tension in the way she understands her second-generation Korean American identity as well:

“I think what maybe marks US identity most is just a deep level of anxiety about your standing and your status and your categories. It’s always in tension. It’s what happens when you base a country and its ideals on genocide and slavery. So yea, it’s pretty much how I feel about my nationalism. I don’t feel like a sense of nationalism either way. It’s just an in between…It’s really frustrating with me. To get to a point of my self-analysis and my self-understanding and realize that at the end of it, there’s just tension. How cliché can that be.”

While she is very critical about how this construction of identity is “cliché” for second-generation immigrants, to be “in tension” seems to be a much more politicized position
compared to the ideal of acculturative integration, where she starts to question the history of the host country she is standing on as well as the colonial past she is attached to.

In Gia’s narratives, queerness does not alleviate her from such tensions, but instead, helps her to reengage and reexamine her experiences and her body. In a way, her real exile, at least temporarily, from these traumas is to practice “queer kink,” which has helped her make sense of the violence in her life and reshape her understanding of intimacy:

“I practice a lot of kink. Never racialized kink. I could never go that far. But for me, it has a lot to do with separating my desire and politic, perhaps. I think I’m coming from a space where my intimate relations with my family were all structured around silence, where ‘I love you’ being something very awkward to say and physical contact being very minimal. And to be practicing queer kink in my relationships is forcing myself to relearn how to be vulnerable with people. Relearn how to be intimate with people.”

For Gia, queerness is an exile from the cycles of violence not in the way of simply being queer, as queer spaces and relationships are in no way free of violence for queer women of color. The troubles in her intimate relationships and intensely racialized encounters she had have made her realize that the way to move beyond from her trauma is not to exile through rejecting her race or her past associated with her family. It is precisely the opposite, in which she had to reinvest in these questions and reengage with it through a queering of sexual practices and intimacy. In other words, queerness enables both an exile and reentering. Queerness contests the roots of bodily trauma and silence, and provides her a path toward reengaging with an alternative form of intimacy.

**Leona’s Reentering Home**

“Right after the [September 11] attacks, in Chinatown, there was a tank.”
Leona, a Chinese American organizer in her mid-30s who grew up on the Upper West Side of New York City, described several blatantly racist incidents she faced as one of the only Asian kids in schools including hair getting cut off by classmates and being shown the slant-eyed gestures. These incidents didn’t anger her at the point, but deeply “confused” her about her identity. When her classmates forced her to choose to be either Black or White, she responded: “I said I was Black but then I didn’t think I was Black, and I definitely didn’t think I was White, so I was just like, ‘Oh my God.’ I got confused, I think, than anything else.” The absence of a solidified Asian identity at the time during the 1990s when she was in the middle school, Leona said she just tried to be the best and the most obedient student, a “teacher’s pet,” so that she could avoid troubles. As a daughter of a hardworking Chinese family who owned a restaurant business, Leona didn’t remember her family speaking much about their immigration history. The family became more distant as her parents got divorced when she was young. Her first imagination of her family history indeed came from the Chinese drama she watched during dinner. Unlike Hye or Jin who had emotional and visceral memories about their home country, Leona almost displayed a sense of detachment from her immigrant past and identity. This detachment from one’s immigrant past initially seemed to be a typical experience of the second generation Asian Americans, where the assimilationist pressure to identify with the American identity overpowers one’s ethnic identity. However, as we began to talk about her entry into political work, her narrative tone suddenly shifted toward a heightened level of intensity, and consisted of much more condensed, opaque descriptions about a specific event, the September 11 attacks in 2001:

“I think September 11 really politicized me. I was around when the time it happened. It was crazy, because the first few days it happened...CAAAV (a pan-Asian political
organization she worked for) already knew that the US had a role in it, that there was going to be huge backlash, so within the first couple of weeks, CAAAV and a few other organizations called the Third World Within formed a coalition really quickly after September 11. We did a protest in the streets. And people were yelling racist shit and being really…people were visibly angry. And I remember when it happened, my brother actually said this, ‘The first thing I thought was please don’t let it be a Chinese person.’ That did it, right? I think, just on the race stuff, it kind of hit home, you know. Here. Yeah. And you don’t even realize it, but when something like that happens, you know.”

[Leona began to sob]

The rapidly intensified racialized process after the attacks, as Leona described, was what really “hit home” for her, despite home in the sense of her immediate family was not the most intimate or connected space for while she was growing up. When she came out to her family, she felt like her position as someone who was always the “good daughter” among the five siblings got “downgraded.” It was also the time she began to seek support outside of home and joined volunteer work at CAAAV. She emphasized that coming out to her family was “the beginning of a shift” where she was gradually politicized and became curious about an alternative identity beyond being a good daughter who cleaned the house, took care of siblings, and got good grades.

This desire of seeking a different space of identification that began from her queer consciousness in a way pushed her to reconceptualize the meaning of home to a broader racialized community and to be connected to an immigrant past that she felt she was alienated from through her work with the pan-Asian organization in Chinatown. The September 11 event was thus significant to her not only because of the sheer severity and drama of the attacks, but also the scale of its violence that escalated and expanded beyond the towers and onto Leona’s
“home”—both in terms of her biological Chinese American family and her political community of choice in the Chinatown. As Leona recalled, militarized police terrors spread across the city and especially to the Chinatown, which was in the immediate vicinity of the attacks and their aftermath:

“Right after the attacks, in Chinatown, there was a tank. And it was just sitting there. The air was bad. After September 11 was when we saw an increase in the gentrification of Chinatown. And with the economy decimated, the whole bus system took people to other parts of the US, all of that happened. Anyway, you know, I kind of feel like I began to understand the US empire and CAAAV really did something to me, because the analysis around the war at home and the war abroad was so clear to me.”

Leona’s narratives about the aftermath of September 11 were incredibly physical and visceral—the acid in the smell, the greyness of the sky, the militarized policing, and the massive movement of people—as if it all just happened yesterday. She embodied the pains and traumas of the attacks in which the racialized communities in Chinatown collectively shared. To her, it was also the event that made her rethink her own Asian American identity as something intrinsically connected to the US-led imperialist wars. As an organizer, the attacks also marked as a shift in their organizing beyond conceptualizing the Chinatown as a ‘Chinese ethnic enclave,’ and began to include campaigns that addressed issues related to the Southeast Asian and South Asian communities in the crack down of civil liberty, immigration restriction, and increase of Islamophobia after the attacks. Leona’s grief, in a sense, was no longer the “confused” state of having to choose between being White or Black when she was bullied as a teenager, or about not fitting in to the mainstream racial paradigm. Rather, it was transformed into a collective grievance against the attacks in her community of choice.
I found this capacity of identification beyond one’s ethnic and national community as a pattern that is commonly shared among these activists’ narratives. For these queer Asian Americans who are committed to an anti-imperialist politic, LGBTQ rights are not their political priority, yet it acts as a curious engagement beyond what’s immediately attainable in the traditional family. Leona did not think it was necessary for her to claim a home country to grieve the traumas and discrimination she witnessed as a racialized immigrant in the US. What has grounded her is always her politics. When I asked her about her idea of home, she said,

“If I was asked about home before, hands down, I would have said home is New York City. And the apartment I was born and raised in the past thirty-five years. But now I would just say home is now mostly in my head, because it’s not like I have a connection to China, and ever since my father passed the other family members are fighting over the apartment on the Upper West Side and trying to kick each other out.”

The loss she felt from her biological family because of her queerness in fact became her initial drive toward politicization and creates a sense of empathy for her to bridge her experiences with the marginalized others. That is, even though to move on from one’s home is certainly not without costs or pains, queerness acts as a capacity of reentering and reinvestment that allows her to transfer her lost attachment with the family to an alternative space of racial belonging, and to take on the grievances of a broader community. Where her family home in NYC had been undergone a lot of changes and conflicts, Leona continued to search the meaning of home in this nontraditional sense of belonging. She said: “In some ways I don’t really feel settled and I feel like mostly that I guess I don’t even know what home is. I feel like home is where my body is at the moment…Basically wherever there is movement in the streets, I will be there.” Leona’s politics of rejection the traditional family life, and her reconceptualizing of home through her
political work that builds alliance across identity, creates an opportunity of reentering home in her own terms. Where September 11 was an immensely traumatic experience, it produced a window for to form new relationship with her racial identity, which was larger than her family, and the collective survival of a racialized civic community.

**Conclusion: Becoming Grievable Subjects**

In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud (2005) defines melancholia as a state of loss in which the subject is unable to choose a new love-object to invest in. Sometimes it is difficult to even identify what exactly the subject has lost; it is only through the process of mourning that the loss of an object surfaces onto the subject’s consciousness, and in a sense, *becomes grievable*. For all of the five participants, home—as home country, biological family, or the idea of national belonging—is a lost object that they have formed ambivalent attachments with. Their love and hatred for this lost object becomes part of their immigrant subjectivity—from Hye’s strong political attachment to Korea to Akiko’s firm rejection of Japanese nationalism, from Jin’s and Gia’s desire and fear for exploring their national origin to Leona’s redefining and reentering her racial community. Whereas the dominant immigration paradigm of model minority prohibits the racialized subjects to mourn, and coerces them to simply accept a new love-object of the American nation-state, these queer Asian women have resisted to comply with the subjugation and instead have sought new forms of belonging.

To become a grievable subject, that is, to be able to speak about one’s national loss and racial injury, is to find agency in rejecting the national ideal. Much of the trauma they spoke about is caused by a sense of detachment from their place of identification. From the scale of the nation to the body, they stated the pains of not fitting in in the host society and family or how racialization makes one’s body becomes a fetishized object detached from oneself. Across these
five narratives, I found that queerness served as a possibility of *reentering* to these lost spaces that were filled with violence and trauma with new kinds of identification. This queer reentering is not to return home, under the heteropatriarchal expectations, but to reinvest in these troubling spaces with different motives and affiliations. The perspective of reentering rejects the common narrative of queer migrants’ lives as a movement from repression to freedom, where queer migrants become agentive sexual subjects in the (Western) host society away from the burdens of (non-Western) traditional values (Luibheid and Cantu Jr., 2005). Migration, to queer people of color, is not a splitting between violent and non-violent spaces but a continuation of racist and heteropatriarchal oppression. The participants’ narrative strategies of coping and resisting violence through queerness are thus not simply about leaving, but embodying queerness as *a politic of alliance, reclaiming shame, and a willful commitment to intersectionality*. These are strategies of grieving as well as making grievances against the colonial splitting of spaces and subjects, the erasure of history, and segregation of communities. I will discuss these three narrative functions of queerness in the following sections.

**Queerness as a politic of alliance.** For both of Hye and Jin, the memories of Korea were the most vivid and emotionally charged. Their narratives drove back and forth to the site of remembrance, yet it’s not necessarily about their desire to return. Rather, through their politics of queerness against the splitting of identities—Korean vs. American, good vs. bad daughter, legible vs. illegible immigrant—Hye and Jin were able to reinvest their political lives in the Asian communities in the US diaspora as the atypical subjects of “not your usual Korean daughter” or the previously “apologetic immigrant.” Queerness as at the structure of their experiences, whether as an embracement of difference for Hye or a strategy of destabilizing assumptions for Jin, it becomes the core politic that composes the sense of personal coherence
and ties together the life events disconnected and split apart by migration. They rebel against the idea of authenticity of either Asianness or queerness, and instead seek a kind of intersectional alliance that would allow them to reattach their diasporic experiences to the lost site of “home,” reclaiming a sense of belonging that is not just about individual survival but collective healing.

**Queerness as reclaiming shame.** The notion of “Asia” for the Asian American subject is a complicated site of identification and belonging. For the participants, it is often be a site of judgment—to be a “good Asian woman,” a “good Korean daughter,” or a “good immigrant,” but through their politic of misidentifying, the site does not merely become the basis of identity escape, but an oppositional figure that one battles with. It is an object that one does not let go, and continues to hold onto as a basis of remembrance of what not to be. Whereas this idea of home country is commonly associated with a patriarchal figure that they have rejected, they carried it over across migration journeys and generations for ongoing reinvestment in the shameful pasts of these places to find alternative identification with them away from the judgments. For Akiko and Gia, particularly, their persistence of negative attachment to Japan and Korea allows them to critically evaluate the racial and gendered encounters they experienced across contexts and recognize the similar dynamics of regulation and control in the new place, instead of finding the West or the whitening queer space as the savior of their traumatic experiences. They both advocated for recirculating the national shame in the public consciousness, whether its Japan’s imperial conquer or the US-Korean colonial relationship, in order to move on from this melancholic loop of searching for a lost national ideal.

Furthermore, what I want to highlight in Akiko’s and Gia’s narratives are that migration is indeed not what makes their exile from patriarchal control possible—the burdens and traumas of their home country and family are persistently attached to them even when they moved way
from home. It is the capacity to imagine an alternative form of relationship and intimacy and an reengagement with what they found shameful through reclaiming these pasts—for instance, Akiko’s queering of her desire and Gia’s practice of queer kink—that allows their narratives to move toward both an exile from the cycle of patriarchal violence and reentering to these painful sites of identification.

**Queerness as a willful commitment to intersectionality.** Certainly not all Asian American activists consider their home country as a lost object, some simply focus more on their present lives and dedicate their political projects in the communities in the US. For example, Leona’s narratives do not involve detailed and emotionally charged descriptions about her home country or even their immigrant family, yet they display an intimate form of care and concern of others beyond their immediate identity categories after experiencing a collective traumatic loss at the scale of community. Despite her lack of identification with race and ethnicity, September 11 became an event that allowed her to form new affiliations with other racialized communities and motivated her to be a racial justice organizer. Across all five participants, queerness is often the initial drive toward politicization that leads them to challenge their own positionality and privileges, and later enables them to form attachment to new communities and to take on collective grievances beyond their personal traumas and injuries. The feelings of “not fitting in” and alienation many of these queer activists encounter not only politicize them to question the categories of their identities, but also create the capacity for them to empathize with others’ pains and injuries.

This vision of queerness considers identity as neither categorical nor additive, that is, one is capable of extend one’s attachment beyond a predetermined identitarian position. It puts forth a framework of intersectionality that is constituted not by similarity in experience or
identification, but by a willful commitment. According to Ahmed, to will something is to put one’s body behind, to orient oneself in a way that is prepared to move something from the back to the front. To will is different from to wish or want—it “implies a different kind of relation to futurity...[that denotes] a subject’s commitment to a future action” (2014, p. 32). A willful commitment to intersectionality is not only to ‘recognize’ similarity across categories or to conceptualize oneself as part of a common identity (Cole, 2009), but an energetic relation of actualizing a future possibility overtime. In short, willfulness is an ethnical commitment in time, where one places one’s behind the others rather than a cognitive acknowledgement of sameness. This willful commitment allows the queer Asian activists to assert alliance beyond the exteriority of identity and what is visible in the present, and foreground the vulnerable and traumatic parts to extend one’s body to the others. It a stubbornness of not settling down for the easier way out, and of bringing over the messy history again and again in collective struggles.

Grievable subjects and unresolved identities. The New York Times’ editor, Michael Luo’s, encounter and its following campaign #thisis2016 on social media highlight the inherent contradiction and insecurity of the Asian American identity; the Asian American is a subject whose past should not be named or spoken about. These mainstream Asian American discourses continue to articulate an urgency to move on from mourning of the losses of history, culture, and place and to embrace the US-centric hyphenated identity. What I present here with the narratives of five queer Asian American activists is the opposite of simply moving on, but rather, a process of dwelling in a lost time and place to mourn for their losses. Their identification with queerness, not only as a sexual identity but as a politic that allows them to emphasize with others based on their own alienation and eventually become grievable subjects who resist the disciplining of their identities and build political alliances across racial categories.
As Freud says, it is in the process of mourning that the lost object surfaces to the melancholic subject’s consciousness. Without mourning, what has been lost may never be accurately identified. Therefore, rather than prescribing how the public in general should ‘get over’ the fact that colonial and imperial histories are part of what constitutes Asian Americanness—to simply celebrate a multicultural ideal of the #thisis2016—the attachment to losses and the unresolved tensions of their multiple identities can be indeed the sites of regeneration, uncovering how the past is a fertile ground that composes the present mechanisms of racialized and gendered subject regulation.

The unresolved questions of immigrant identity, as social psychologist Kay Deaux (2008) has pointed out, come from an ontological anxiety over the issues of patriotism and nationalism. The hyphenated identities are challenged over and over again in social sciences, policy, and public representations precisely because the racial and ethnic identity and the American identity are thought as fundamentally incompatible. That is, even when the two sides of the identities are acknowledged, there is still pressure for the immigrant subject to declare allegiance and loyalty to one national identity only. This sense of nationalism is pervasive and deeply rooted in the US immigration discourse, despite the effort of multicultural rhetoric that proposes the framework of being on the hyphen. What the queer Asian activists’ narratives have highlighted was a perpetual sense of instability of the hyphen, in which it is not something one should simply resolve or ‘choose a side.’ Rather, the narratives indicate “a dialectic labor of psychological reconciliation” that piece together what Sirin and Fine term the uncompromising “hyphenated selves” (2007, p. 151) on the fault lines of geopolitical conflicts, colonial histories, and transnational struggles. In a sense, the activists’ melancholic attachment to the tension between mourning one’s national and racial loss and their extended concern toward a collective history of anti-imperialism and
anti-colonialism is the hyphenated site that regenerates radical possibility of affiliation beyond being subsumed to a singular national identity.

As I write in the present of Trump’s America, the boundaries of American nationhood have become even stiffer and more restrictive. The willfulness to hold on the hyphenated tensions between assimilation and opposition, as well as belonging and marginalization, becomes every more pressing. To trouble the hegemonic narrative of becoming (Asian) American in the theorization of immigrant subjectivity, as social psychologists we must create alternative frameworks that not only pay attention to the process of citizen formation, but also take into accounts the stubborn resistance against being subjugated to either side of the border, and the multiple commitments rooted in historical and ethnical relations.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: SIDEWAYS TO ASIAN AMERICA

Through tracing the twists and turns of Asian Americanness across the geopolitical history of US-Asia Pacific relations, I have sketched its contours as a shifting assemblage consisting of heterogeneous components that have made it into a intelligible social whole in the postwar scientific, political, and public discourses. In the framework of assemblage, neither the conceptualization of Asian Americanness as a sociological construct produced through the biopower of the state nor an essential racial population of certain genetic and biological properties is efficient to examine its dynamic relations of exteriority and interiority. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of assemblage, DeLanda (2016) specifies that the parameters of an assemblage are determined by its capacity of fusing and merging with other parts, which then define its temporarily spatial relations of the exterior and interior borders. What occurs in the postwar US is an orchestrated effort to territorialize Asian Americanness into a legible racial population through not only the exterior apparatus of psychological scientism, Black-White racial positioning, and the state’s immigration policy reforms but also its interior properties of the racial geography of *yellowness* as a residue from the war, the demand for a politicized collective identity, and the desire for inclusion after decades of structural segregation. All of these heterogeneous components have been congealed into an ontological entity of what we understand as the Asian American today. Yet, it is crucial to be reminded that the assemblage is produced by the historical interactions of all the components and thus is highly volatile and mobile. The properties that have composed the social whole are contingent, that is, as DeLanda argues, “if the interactions cease to take place the emergent properties cease to exist” (p. 12).
This framework of assemblage necessitates a different analysis of scale beyond the binary oppositions of ‘individual versus society,’ ‘agency versus structure,’ or ‘the psychological versus the sociological.’ Therefore, it is my effort to include a ‘tri-axial’ design of qualitative methods that can yield evidences across the scale of the textual, bodily, and psychical. It helps us to think both “below and above the subject”: in this case, below to the complex interaction of psychological affects and biological signifiers that constitute the assumed interiority of the subject, and above to the intermediate level of racial grouping and institutional systems (Protevi, 2009, p. 9). In this way I do not privilege any particular scale of the data as the ‘hard evidence’ of Asian American properties while marking the other only as the ‘additive descriptions’ on top of the essential parts; instead, in my analysis, I emphasize the oscillatory and circulator effects of the data across the scale, on how collective identity relies on scientific discourses, but also how subjective experiences resist the reductionist and unifying representations of scientific facts.

These perverse interactions of the assemblage permeate through the texts, bodies, and affects necessarily intervene the empirical assumptions of methodological units of the individual, group, community, national, and the global. Rather than starting from these scales to examine the social and group relations, the assemblage framework shows how these scales are indeed the products that are solidified and coalesced through social interactions. In other words, the raceness of Asian Americanness as both a group unit and an individual unit of analysis in empirical work do not presuppose its construction but is only made intelligible through the process of assembling, marking and defining its boundaries of its exteriority and interiority.

To unpack Asian Americanness as an assemblage, and perhaps to ‘return’ to the formation of the complex connected knots, the critical constructs of geopolitics, diaspora, queerness, and the sideways are particularly productive for me in this dissertation. There are the
key terms of ‘deconstruction’ I have employed throughout to tease apart the entangled histories, as well as destabilize the presumed boundaries of identity. Both of the geopolitical and diasporic lenses disrupt the spatial centrality of the US as the *homebase* in Asian American theorization, opening up the imperialist and colonial roots and examining how Asian American subjectivity swell up and slip out the borders of nations. Furthermore, queerness invokes a sideways epistemology and politic of solidarity that is not bounded by the vertical oppositions between the ‘oppressed’ and the ‘oppressor’ or identity-based collectivity. Queerness, rather, is a position of being *besides* the other and of not claiming categorical territory, and a verb of seeking reparative and liberatory relations in the unlikely contexts. I will elaborate on these critical constructs in the next sections in this concluding chapter.

*Figure 7. Asian Americanness as a timespace assemblage. Design by author.*
Geopolitical Racial Positionality in Neoliberal Time

Throughout this dissertation, I have stressed that the study of Asian American subjectivity necessitates a geopolitical analysis at the transnational scale. As I argued in Chapter 3, Asian Americanness emerged in the field of American psychology precisely as a concept of geographical significance originated in WWII, and later neutralized as an alternative racial position beyond the Black-White paradigm. However, the unyielding forces of US imperialism at large and in American psychology particularly provided the “perpetual foreigner” a path toward recognition and inclusion through an allegiance to the US nation-state. The anti-war and anti-imperialist origin of the Asian American civil rights movement has now become partly appropriated into a new bureaucratic structure of Asian American professionalization under the paradigm of US neoliberal multiculturalism, mitigating the crisis of racial relations domestically and globally (Melamed, 2004). While the earlier question of the Asian American unassimilability has largely been subsumed under the efforts of Asian American professionalization since the 1970s through the official discourse of multiculturalism (Lowe, 1996; Kim, 2004), the tensions of Asian American representations—as an invisible minority of racial discrimination or successful model minority, as a territorialized racial group with common experiences or segregated ethnicities—remain to be the primary debates over American racial discourses and policy debates today.

The racial ‘crisis’ that Black Lives Matter has highlighted and the interracial conflicts that the movement has made explicit between Asian and African Americans, were indeed not new, but the recycled racial contradictions lurking in the US society ever since the foundation of this country that is based in the racial stratification of labor, rights, and citizenship. By engaging in both a historical and geopolitical analysis, we can see how the flexibility of Asian
Americanness precisely resides in its capacity of regenerating from the position of the *foreign Other* to the *foreign within* ever since WWII, and continues to mediate the US relations with Asian Pacific nations simultaneously through military occupation and economic cooperation.

The rise of neoliberal governmentality since the late 1980s have been marked by increasingly privatization of social services, education, and the government, as well as the replacement of the commitments of racial liberalism for equal access and resource redistribution by market rationality. These dynamics are not contradictory to the race- and nation-making project of Asian Americanness; in fact, neoliberalism enhances the flexible racial position of Asian Americanness, particularly regarding its capacity of economic upward mobility and racial triangulation between Blacks and Whites (Kim, 1999). This neoliberal characterization of racial relations have resulted in the detrimental consequence of polarization among Asian American communities along the class line, where the Asian cosmopolitan class becomes part of the new global elites, traveling and moving capitals across national borders without restrictions, and the working class Asian migrants whose labor and body are exploited by precisely such flexibility of capital and border. At the same time, antagonisms among racial groups are also aggravated, as some Blacks believed that Whites favored Asians and Latinos and the unique obstacles that Blacks faced were not acknowledged (Cruz, 2000; Kim, 2004), whereas some Asians, especially the Chinese Americans, expressed the directly opposite sentiments in light of the Black Lives Matter visibility and public attention in my dissertation fieldwork outlined in Chapter 4.

These challenges of neoliberalism thus demand new paradigms to theorize racial relations beyond the Black-White binarism or the depoliticized multiculturalism. Neither should we move to the conservative post-racial vision that appropriates identity only as the ‘niche market’ in what Katharine Michelle (2003) calls the “strategic cosmopolitism,” nor should we simply resume to a
class reductionist argument about racial relations, as the Black Lives Matter movement has clearly illustrated the undeniable links between institutional violence, the prison industrial complex, and the Black identity. Despite the poststructuralist skepticism, the intersectional power hierarchy that is based on ‘old’ forms of domination—colonialism, imperialism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy—continues to regulate and manage relations of domination and submission (Mohanty, 2013).

However, according to Kim (2004), the notion of racial hierarchy, which depicts racial privileges and oppression as vertically situated along a single line of measurement where Whites are on top and Blacks are on the bottom, may be useful in highly specific contexts such as in a particularly industry where racial subjects are hierarchically distributed and assigned, yet it fails to address how different groups face distinct processes of racialization. For instance, despite Asian and Latino Americans are ranked higher on measures of residential and occupational integration compared to African Americans, they continue to be disempowered as the alien foreigners and denied access to full political and moral citizenship. In the 2016 Presidential Election, Trump’s campaign particularly singled out ‘the Chinese’ and ‘the Mexicans’ as racial groups that were antagonistic to American national identity and threats to the US economy, and ‘the Muslims’—of whom many were South Asian identified—have been segregated as a racial population that are suspects of national security.

Given the highly flexibilized positions of racial subjects, I extend Kim’s (1999; 2004) argument that rather than racial hierarchy, racial positionality can be a more useful concept to examine Asian American racial subjectivity on the axes of superior-inferior and American-foreign. Under this framework, Asian Americans can be understood as having occupied both sides of the spectrums of the superior/inferior yet always quite foreign in public
perceptions, while their material structural outcomes are mediated by factors such as the amount of social and financial capitals that the specific groups brought in through immigration. In addition, I argue that the axes need to be examined on the geopolitical landscape, where the superior/inferior and the American/foreign are not determined by domestic racial positions along, but the degrees of closeness to the Western ideological, moral, and economic center. In this sense, we can understand how the Asian American foreignness is never an expression of direct physical or social distance, but a cultural Otherness that remains ideologically and economically congruent to Western imperial and capitalist interests. The foreignness, is not a complete outsider status, but the position of ‘model minority nations’ in the postcolonial nation-state development, that is granted the status as a sovereign entity while residing within the global hegemonic regime and acting as the bargain chips for the imperial power center. This paradigm that emphasizes the unsettling racial position of the “foreign within” explains how Asian Americanness would be understood as simultaneously an aspiration and a threat to the American future.

Asian Americanness undeniably offers a spatial logic to the study of racial and national formation in interrupting the taken-for-granted concept of racial hierarchy that necessitates a closer analysis of geopolitical history in which the various racial positions are created and arranged. Yet in the mainstream Asian American narrative of anti-Asian discrimination, ‘Asia’ often remains to be a distant past and a location that is only invoked when one attempts to claim the collective racial injury as a result of immigration exclusion, wars, and colonialism. However, as the narratives in Chapter 5 have demonstrated, the place of ‘Korea’ or ‘Asia Pacific’ are not more distant in the experiences of the queer Asian American activists than ‘New York City’ or ‘Manhattan Chinatown.’ Queerness, as a promiscuous tendency toward overgrowing categorical
boundaries and a capacity of expending concerns beyond identitarian and spatial borders, troubles the naturalized distinctions between ‘Asia’ and ‘America,’ which is constructed through a heteronormative immigration narrative of crossing over and moving forward from one generation to another.

In the queering of im/migration, the transmission of culture and tradition through biological and ethnic linage is disrupted, and issues of trauma and losses are not alleviated by the banal trajectory of assimilation in the ‘progressive’ West. Rather, im/migration intensifies these activists’ experiences of racialization and sexualization as queer Asian women in the US and evoked questions of the enduring circuits of militarism, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy that extend beyond the “fictive unity” of America (Chuh, 2003, p. 111).

Queerness, in this regard, serves as a reflexive lens that destabilizes the very spatial imagination of the American/foreign sites on the racial positional axes. It demands a geopolitical analysis of race, nationhood, and identity not only through the material territories solidified through wars and colonial conquer, but also the ideological, discursive, and psychological arrangements of space and place in the construction of ‘Asian America.’

Sideways to Agency

Throughout this dissertation, I trouble the ‘radical outsiderness’ of Asian Americanness to the US racial order that is often portrayed in Asian Americanist Studies, as Nguyen (2002) has argued, where minor acts of agency by Asian American subjects are highlighted to justify Asian Americans as a central moral subject of the field. Rather, I stress the continuation of coloniality (Torres, 2007) in determining the racial positionality of Asian Americanness, not only through institutions and state apparatus, but the production of racial subjectivity through science, protests, and affect. By doing so, I demonstrate how Asian American subjectivity is not predetermined by
one’s race, biology, culture, or even the ‘shared experience’ of discrimination, because such conceptualization of agency often inevitably naturalizes the underlying narratives of masculinist racial victimhood, patriarchal family, heteronormativity, and American nationalism. Instead of thinking about power as functioning vertically between the oppressor and the subordinator and agency as ‘acting up’ against the top, I am inclined to adopt the “sideways” strategy of queer growth (Stockton, 2009) that allows the “back-and-forth connections and extensions that are not reproductive” (p. 13) and spreads “sideways and backwards—more than a simple thrust toward height and forward time” (p. 4). Sideways points to an array of possibilities and positions beyond the common immigrant narrative of ‘becoming integrated’ with time, the vertical approach up on the racial hierarchy ladder toward Whiteness, but a constant movement of leaving and reentering that builds upon the sticky, resistive forces besides the others. In other words, whereas the Asian Americanist approach to agency emphasize the group’s racial trauma, discrimination, and oppression that necessitates a solidifying collective identity as the source of political agency, the sideways approach rejects a singular point of identification and builds movements from multiple points of entries with others who may or may not be politicized through a unifying identity.

The sideways movement toward agency can also be understood through Eve Sedgwick’s (2003) metaphor of the “analog” relations of values instead of the on-off switch of the “digital” relations to affect. The “many values” model of theorizing drawn from psychologist Silvan Tomkins’ theory of affect opposes the binary logic of positivity versus negativity, and instead proposes an array of possibilities toward feeling, identifying, and experiencing affects. While the poststructuralist position of critical scholarship often relies on a paranoid attachment to the “strong theory” that structures around “one affect, or maybe two, of whatever kind—whether ecstasy, sublimity, self-shattering, jouissance, suspicion, abjection, knowingness, horror, grim
satisfaction, or righteous indignation” (p. 149), Sedgwick proposes the analogy style of relating to negative events that rejects the definite positions of the oppressor and the oppressed.

This sideways approach to agency is expressed by queer Asian American activists’ *backwards feelings* (Love, 2009) to trauma and violence, where shame, guilt, self-doubt, or the perpetual dwelling in the past, become regenerative affects that allow them to move away from the singular narrative of assimilating to the hegemonic identity of Asian American. Lee (2014) elaborates this sideways approach as method of the Asian Americanist critique that is “reparative in its distributed, complex settings of many distributed agencies and contingencies” (p. 243). Countering the “singular blame-agent” position, the sideways movement extends and expands with the others, detouring the trajectory of racial becoming toward the neoliberal future or the avenging path of racial injury. It demands a temporality elsewhere, and alternative way of belonging and growth beyond the constraints of biological and ethnic ties. To borrow from Chuh, she states, “Asian Americanist discourse must look to itself to ensure that the partial and variegated freedoms enjoyed by both Asian American studies and various Asian-raced peoples are not merely celebrated but are leading to an elsewhere” (2003, p. 145). The agentive potentials of Asian Americanness are generated sideways to the borders, in between the spaces of home, and in rescuing a geopolitical and anti-imperialist lens of understanding history, community, and identity.

**Marching With Suspicion and Faith**

In taking as the entry of this dissertation project into outlining a queer and diasporic vision of Asian America, I have indicated the limits to representational arguments, no matter how inclusive they could be. This is because the representational approach inevitably essentializes and legitimates the category of Asian Americans as a *race*, instead of
deconstructing Asian Americanness as a shifting assemblage that is diverted, arranged, and reshaped for different political and ideological purposes across history. As someone who has a rather personal and intimate stake in the theorization of Asian Americanness, I intentionally selected these cases of Asian American enactments in the dissertation across psychological science, Black Lives Matter protests, and queer activist narratives as the multiple openings and entries to different forms of ‘evidence’ that would evoke diverse and shifting meanings of the category. While the historical tracing and analysis of the Asian American category in psychological science bends more toward a “paranoid” approach, as it requires the “hermeneutics of suspicion” of the surfaced meanings of the scientific text, the ethnography on Asian American protests and the activist narratives function as the “reparative” sites of the project that stress the diverse types of agentive subjectivities of Asian Americanness (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 125). The cases interrupt the myopic approach in the field of Asian American scholarship that is often preoccupied with either Asian American racial injury or collective resistance. While the project is not meant to define what an Asian American subject is or who is included, it outlines what it can do and how it moves in the circuits of geography, nationhood, and racial positionality.

Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I engaged with the multifaceted subjectivity and shifting position of Asian Americanness with both a sense of anxious anticipation and strong faith of its becomings. As Fine writes, “In unjust societies, everyone is an insider. In systems of domination, no one is free of contamination. There are no bystanders, no witnesses and no positions of neutrality” (2006 p. 93). As an involved participant in the Asian American movements, my stance was in no way distant or neutral. The activist-scholar role I took on in the project indicates my motives of not only critically analyzing the field but also
transforming the present discourses during the process of research. This feminist activist methodology, according to Morgensen, only provides critical reflections of the social movements, but “carries a capacity to act as a corrective upon itself” (2013, p. 73, emphasis original). My intersectional standpoint, specifically, allows me to be particularly attuned to the queer opposition against the master structures of identity and belonging. Instead of merely seeing queerness as a ‘natural outsider’ to the dominant narratives, I understand queerness as a rather generative site of Asian Americanness that has always already been part of its promiscuous constitution. Queerness is my deliberate act of reaching and seeking for any liberatory potentials of Asian Americanness within its most unifying discourse or persistent binary.

In a way, it might be easy to read the Liang-Gurley case as merely yet another regressive or assimilationist enactment of Asian Americanness in an already divisive political climate. By being and marching in the protests organized by both sides of the political spectrum, with my bodily presence that was open to multiple forms of interpretations and affiliations, I recognized that the body politic of Asian Americanness is never fully formed or solidified, but determined by our very action and motion in the moment, altering its possible paths. As actors in the movements we have the power in creating new discourses and interactions that shift the affects in the field, galvanizing the queer resistive potentials by displaying discomfort, engaging in difficult conversations, or walking alongside a possible dissident. As Munoz said, “We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality” (2009, p. 1). Queerness is not yet here, and never a visible collectivity with unifying demands, but “always in the horizon” (p. 11). I seek queerness not in its visible identitarian form, but in the unlikely spaces where it is not yet formalized. Same as the queer Asian American activists interviewed in the project, I understand the Asian and immigrant communities as the
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more politically productive spaces for mobilizing in the presence of militarized policing targeting racialized bodies and the closing of national borders, instead of the traditionally recognized ‘queer space’ of LGBTQ rights and equality. This regenerative capacity of the queering of Asian Americanness is where my faith lies throughout the project. Below the coercive recruitment of nationalistic discourses or the painful narratives of trauma and pain, the reparative capacity of the immersive and engaged methods enable me to be optimistic about how the disobedient and stubborn subjects will emerge and find one another along the cracks on the unstable borders of identity.

Willful Commitment to Intersectionality

Writing in the beginning of Trump’s administration, we are witnessing a new era of total attacks on racial justice, gender equality, sexual autonomy, immigration, LGBTQ and indigenous rights. The American national identity has been rearticulated by this administration as synonymous to a powerful and violent White nationalism, where the stakes of swearing allegiance to the nation-state have become much higher especially for the ‘suspect subjects’ of Muslims, immigrants, queers, and communities of color. The iterations of women of color feminism and the queer of color critique can offer us critical insights to how the new phases of White supremacy and neoliberal capitalism create “categories of value and valuelessness” (Hong and Ferguson, 2011, p. 16) through necropolitical subject regulation, where chances of “premature death” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 28) and life are unequally distributed across the uni-dimensional conceptions of the racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized subjects. As I have argued in this dissertation, the claim over a singular Asian American identity is no longer unproblematic. New intersectional analytics are needed to tease apart those who are hijacking the
category for neoliberal advancement and those who are seeking coalitional possibilities of revaluing collective life beyond the boundaries of identities.

Our current troubling conditions necessitate a conceptualization of intersectionality not as a politic of recognition of similarity, but as a *willfulness* of putting one’s body behind the others, and to orient the body toward a definite trajectory (Ahmed, 2014). In a sense, one does not have to own the same body or experiencing the same event to be in solidarity. Rather, it is the stretchiness of the body that extends itself toward the same direction creates an energetic relation and commitment. From Black Lives Matter to protests against the Dakota Access Pipelines on native lands, from movements against Trump’s ‘Muslim Ban’ to the decolonizing struggles of sovereignty in Hawaii and other Asian Pacific countries, the notion of Asian Americanness must be reshaped and expanded way beyond the current debates about model minority or Asian-Black racial antagonism, and incorporate the “foreign-within” questions regarding deportation, mass incarceration, militarism and wars, land ownership, sexual and gender-based violence, forced displacement, surveillance, economic deprivation, and racial and religious profiling. To will for a queer and diasporic Asian America is to situate oneself in-between the spatial confinements of nation-states and the temporal boundaries of the past and future, in order to have an open and clear angle to the wide landscape that has constituted Asian Americanness. To will is to refuse the erasure of colonial and racial histories, and to create a horizon to extend one’s arms to the subjects at the margins, against the hegemonic current of becoming a singular identity. As Ahmed articulates, with willfulness, “You feel the momentum when you are going the wrong way” (2014, p. 144). We must become the bodies of persistence, growing sideways through our very effort of reaching arms toward something that is not yet present.

Transpacific Futurities
The subjectivity of Asian Americanness is inseparable to the history and fate of the Asia Pacific. While Trump’s presidency declared the end of the Trans Pacific Partnership—a gesture toward the end of the Obama-Clinton’s vision of “America’s Pacific Century” of neoliberal trades and strategic military alliance, the Asia Pacific remains to be not only a crucial site of geopolitical management and imperial competition but also the public’s projections of the military, scientific financial speculative futures (Mok and Bahng, 2017, p. 4). The aggressive neoliberal developmentalist ideology that has been dominated in the region ever since the end of WWII has contributed to the “slow violence” (Nixon, 2011) of labor exploitation, environmental destruction, and human rights suppression which were left unresolved since the colonial period and continually constitutive of the transnational imaginary of life and death.

To evoke the “transpacific futurities” (Mok and Bahng, 2017; Watson, 2017) is certainly not to glorify the prospects of the region’s social and economic advancements that have been repeatedly propagated as ‘threats’ to the downfall of the ‘American Century,’ but to highlight how it has always been a background to the imaginary of futurity itself, generating the ontological anxiety of the US nation-state and the aspiration for the unrestricted flow of global finance and technological growth. The transpacific bodies that carry these fears and desires have also become the futurity’s invested stakeholders, as immigrants, unprotected migrant workers, political refugees, and the most prosperous and mobile class of the cosmopolitans. Their movements and struggles for survival continue to reshape and rearrange the transpacific as a geographical, technological, and ideological space and time. What I have presented in this dissertation is only a tread of the multifarious becomings of the transpacific imaginary that has folded itself into a central aspect of Asian American subjectivity and politic today.
As China continues to be a pivotal target of the global regulation and speculation of the future of labor, racial, gendered, ecological relations, our analysis must decenter the US as the primary object of inquiry and comparison of non-Western spaces, but take into accounts the heterogeneous geopolitical networks and subject formation of the region itself to undo the intellectual imperialism in knowledge production. For instance, as I have indicated in Chapter 4, Black Lives Matter has instigated questions about race and nationalism with the rise of African migrants in Southern China with the increase of business transactions between the two continents (Rothschild, 2015). Future studies may consider how the subjectivities produced in both ‘Asia’ and ‘American’ serve as a feedback loop that reinforces and reconstitutes the Asian American assemblage in the diaspora.

While the US economic and military strategies in Asia Pacific are not yet solidified, what we can predict is that the transpacific will continue to function as a critical site of encounter, speculation, imperial competition and neoliberal desire. The often forgotten voices of the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial themselves create a kind of alternative horizon, bending the transpacific futurities away from the hegemonic path of the “slow violence.” To borrow from Munoz once again, “We must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there.” (2009, p. 1), the transpacific futurities are created and recreated in our resistance against the singular form of becoming, and our persistence in the radical uncertainty.
Asian and Pacific Islander Peoples’ Solidarity

The Asian and Pacific Islander Peoples’ Solidarity (APIPS) was a coalition of Asian and Pacific Islander grassroots activist organizations based in New York City that formed during the height of the TPP debate between 2013 and 2016. I joined the coalition as the co-founder of an anti-imperialist Taiwanese activist group, Island X, and was primarily interested in laying out an alternative strategy toward the Taiwan independence movement away from its right-wing tendency of collaborating with US imperialist forces in order to contain the Chinese imperialist ambitions. Besides Island X, the member organizations of the APIPS included CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities, BAYAN USA (an international alliance of Filipino organizations), Sloths Against Nuclear State (a Japanese based anti-nuclear organization), Nodutdol for Korean Community Development, Eclipse Rising (a Korean diasporic organization), and Iraq Veterans Against the War.

In the three years that we were active as a coalition, we organized solidarity rallies and teach-ins about the facts and consequences of Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). During the height of anti-TPP activities, APIPS met around once a month and held at least two coalition-wide events a year. Since the nature of the coalition functioned as a platform and resource center rather than a tight-knit organization, the members of the coalition remained high autonomy and used the coalition as a brainstorming space to bring ideas of organizing and action to build our own community organizations. Therefore, my interaction with the members was more sporadic than systematic. To me the coalition was a supportive space not only of politics but also a pan-Asian activist social circle that showed a critical mass of Asian American
subjectivity against the mainstream US centrism in Asian American representations. We chatted, cooked, made posters, and exchanged challenges of our organizing and personal lives during the meetings. There always seemed to be too much to accomplish in our cross-national solidarity work yet too little time and resources, as many of us were not ‘professional organizers’ in the sense that we held multiple jobs and obligations outside of our activist commitments. Therefore the APIPS was not my ethnographic field of inquiry but rather a space that helped me think through issues of US and Chinese imperialisms, racial formation, and queer Asian activist belonging. Thus, it was an intentional decision that I did not take notes or act as an observer in the space. While the social dynamics of how each member would react to our political discussions differently would be a fruitful research project in itself, the field of inquiry for me was about the enacted protests in the public but not at the level of the organization. It was a necessary decision for me as someone who juggled between the role of an activist and scholar to establish certain ethical boundaries and not turn the observer gaze on the intimate dialogues and internal functions of the coalition, though it undeniably impacted my analytical lens in the research process. Nevertheless, my understanding of Asian American communities was never monolithic but inherently transnational because of the cross-national solidarity building we engaged in through APIPS’s anti-TPP activist alliance. In a way, US imperialism has brought us together in a room and pushed us to map out the imperialist apparatuses at each locality in the Asia Pacific region.

**Ethnography on the Liang-Gurley Case**

As the Peter Liang and Akai Gurley case broke out in NYC toward the end of 2014, many of us decided to organize around the case with our respective organizations particularly to show the support for Black Lives Matter from diverse Asian communities. The deeply
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intertwined processes of US police violence and militarism in the Asia Pacific revealed in the Liang-Gurley controversy became the forefront of my dissertation inquiry and made me reshape the methodological design to focus the ethnographic field on the protests and counter-protests between the Chinese American and pan-Asian American communities, rather than on the individual lives of queer Asian American activists. While I did not locate the field in the APIPS coalitional space, the collective thinking process in APIPS provided me a specific anti-imperialist lens throughout my dissertation inquiry on Asian American body politics.

Numerous events were organized around the Liang-Gurley case between 2014 and 2016 mostly by CAAAV for Gurley’s family and the newly formed Coalition for Asian American Civil Rights for police Liang. The vigil for Akai Gurley on March 15, 2015 was selected as a case because it was the first event after Gurley’s death that mobilized a diverse range of pan-Asian grassroots organizations and NGOs. Many of the pro-Black Lives Matter Asian American organizers decided not to publicly confront the pro-Liang mobilization, but rather stood in solidarity with the losses and pains that Gurley’s family experienced that were actively ignored by public discourses. Almost all the APIPS member organizations were present in the vigil. Additionally, the Sing Tao Daily action that happened on May 20, 2016 was selected as another case of analysis because it took off in the low activity time after Peter Liang court decision came out and the initial mobilization momentum gradually slowed down. The Sing Tao Daily action drew out a younger crowd of mostly second generation Asian Americans from the communities of #Asians4BlackLives who focused more on the media representational issues of the Liang-Gurley case. It was also a relatively more direct confrontation to the Chinese American pro-Liang propaganda.
On the contrary, my interaction with the pro-Liang side was limited to the public actions that CAACR held and the public social network accounts on WeChat. As I noted in Chapter 4, the coalition leaders were an elite group of Chinese entrepreneurs and Republican politicians, and it was difficult for me to break into the internal organizational operations as a complete outsider to their networks. I tried my best to interact with the rank-and-file participants of the pro-Liang coalition during their public actions. Though I speak Mandarin, I think my ‘outsiderness’ as a gender non-conforming person who appears to be more second generation Asian American than Chinese prevented me from gaining trust from the participants in a short time period. As much as I wished to not Other the Chinese participants as a homogenous group, my restricted access to their narratives and thoughts certainly limited the richness of my ethnographic analysis on the Chinese communities who came out to support Peter Liang.

**Interviews**

Initially, my dissertation proposal included a series of interviews with queer Asian Americans in three different brackets—those whom have married, been active as anti-imperialist organizers, and socializing mostly in ethnic specific circles—as a way of understanding how neoliberalism has produced segmented subjectivities in the fragmented social scenes. As my committee had encouraged me to look beyond the three sites as mutually exclusive, my first round of interviews with five queer Asian Americans located in the three sites had shown that the participants’ narratives transgressed across the frameworks of assimilation, opposition, and marginalization that could not be restricted to the manufactured divisions in my design. Through my ethnographic fieldwork around the Liang-Gurley case, I gradually realized that my question about neoliberal Asian American subjectivity could not be adequately accessed by conceptualizing it as located in individual bodies in the first place, in which subjectivity would
be further essentialized and again treated as merely an issue of representation. Therefore, I redesigned the methods and focused the question of subjectivity through the lens of scale—not only how it moves across scales but also how it produces the scale. While the critical literature review on Asian American discourses in psychological discourses and the ethnographic case provide the historical and contemporary enactments of Asian American subjectivities through the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion,’ I conducted the narrative interviews with queer Asian American activists as a reparative space beyond the paranoid post-structuralist analysis of discourses and focused on the psychical and affective enactments of hope, dream, and desire of the participants.

I specifically wanted to conduct interviews with the activists because their lives embodied a very visible and apparent form of resistance and commitment in crafting an alternative path of being Asian American that is about simultaneously contesting and producing AsianAmericanness. In the one-on-one semi-structured interview, I often started by laying out my theoretical assumptions and questions on the limits to the US-centric Asian American representations I have seen in the mainstream discourse, and my desire to know about their journey that has informed their anti-imperialist political ideology and activist identity. In reflections, I think the interviews had become emotionally charged because the selected narratives in Chapter 5 all occurred during the midst of the Liang-Gurley protests and the participants were all invested in the movement in some way. During the peak of movement activity, there were seldom spaces for people to express emotions and reflect their experiences in a more reflective and supportive way. Perhaps the one-on-one interviews functioned as a space of affective release for both the participants and I, and thus in-depth narratives about traumas, pains, and losses emerged in the process, despite these concepts were not a part of my initial questions. Almost half of the interviews included moments in which the participants were close
to tears. As someone who is not a distant researcher but a friend and comrade to the participants, I felt deeply invested and implicated by the affects circulated between us, which has led me to adopt a reparative approach to read the narratives as productive instead of damaging.

The narratives presented in this dissertation are as much about the participants as about my experiences as a queer Asian American activist. The role of being a researcher and an activist was relatively blurry throughout my research process. Therefore, the analytical purposes of the data that are to respond to a set of theoretical questions as well as the urgent political needs in the field were difficult to tease apart at times. My close access to the Asian American activist community undeniably enriched my insights to the political assemblages of the protests and counter-protests, yet it also prevented me from employing an immersive method to understand the subjectivities coming from ‘the other side’ of the political spectrum, the pro-Liang Chinese American communities in this case. I hope to continue to address these questions through additional research, particularly with one-on-one interviews with the pro-police Chinese Americans in my future research to destabilize the rather homogenous portrayals I have painted in this dissertation.
APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Could you tell me about your immigration background? Where were you born if not in the US? Where did you grow up? When did you come to the US and what were the reasons for the move?

2. How do you identify in terms of sexuality? When did you come to terms with your sexual identity? How did people around you, for instance, your family and schoolmates, react to your sexual identity if they know?

3. How did you get into activism in the first place? And, what is the path that has taken you to the current anti-US imperialism work?

4. How do you understand the workings of US imperialism in your everyday life? How does it influence you, directly and indirectly?

5. Do you participate in any kind of LGBT activism? If so, what are the forms and goals of the activist groups you have participated? If not, any reason for that?

6. Can you tell me about a time when your sexual identity played a role in your political work?

7. Can you tell me about a time when your sexual, racial, and/or ethnic identities create tensions in your political work?
You are being asked to participate in a research study because you are a self-identified LGBT Asian individual who is between 18-65 years old and currently residing in New York, USA.

**Purpose:**
The purpose of this research study is to gain deeper insights into the lives of LGBT identified Asian immigrants in the US. You will be asked to talk about your journey to the US, your intimate relationship, and relationships with other people in various settings such as family, workplace, and political activity. The goal of the study is to identify the struggles and strengths of LGBT Asian immigrants in the US currently. Participation is completely voluntary and declining to participate involves no penalty.

**Procedures:**
If you volunteer to participate in this research study, we will ask you to do the following:

The PI will schedule a face-to-face individual interview with you that will take approximately 1.5 hours. You will be asked a series of questions regarding standard background information such as your age, gender, nationality, and educational background. You will also be asked to share your experiences of immigration and your understanding of your sexual, racial and ethnic identities. With your permission, I would like to audio-record our interview so I can record the details accurately. My advisor and I will be the only people who have access to the tapes. There will be approximately 45 people enrolled in the study.

After the interview, you will be asked to write a “post-card” for an imagined LGBT Asian friend who is coming to live in the US for various reasons. You may speak to this potential newcomer through their experience being in the US, and send it back to my personal address without writing your home address or name in two weeks. Again, your writing will be kept confidential, and my advisor and I will be the only people who have access to your writing.
**Time Commitment:**
Your participation in this research study is expected to last for a total of 1.5 hours for the face-to-face interview, and an extra half an hour if you decide to participate in the post-card activity.

**Potential Risks or Discomforts:**
The interview will address sensitive topics regarding your intimate relationship and your immigration experiences and may lead to minimal psychological discomfort. You are free to discontinue the interview at any point of the process and do not have to answer any question if you prefer not to respond to.

**Potential Benefits:**
You will not directly benefit from your participation in this research study. However, your participation can provide valuable knowledge to a rarely studied topic and population in social sciences broadly.

**Confidentiality:**
We will make our best efforts to maintain confidentiality of any information that is collected during this research study, and that can identify you. We will disclose this information only with your permission or as required by law.

To ensure that your confidentiality is protected your data will be assigned a code number, which will be used on all documents of your participation. This code number will be used rather than your name. Any document with identifying information such as this consent form will be kept separate from data so that they cannot be linked. I will keep your contact information for potential future study purpose. All information gathered from this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet, and the digital forms of data (e.g. audio recordings) will be stored in a password-protected file in my private computer. At the completion of the study all data for the study will be destroyed. Publications or presentations will only use assigned pseudonyms. Any identifying information will be omitted.

The research team, authorized CUNY staff, and government agencies that oversee this type of research may have access to research data and records in order to monitor the research. Research records provided to authorized, non-CUNY individuals will not contain identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not identify you by name.

**Participants’ Rights:**
Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You can decide to withdraw your consent and stop participating in the research at any time, without any penalty.

**Questions, Comments or Concerns:**
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If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to one of the following researchers:

Wen Liu, Principal Investigator, wliu2@gradcenter.cuny.edu (206) 696-1126
Michelle Fine, Faculty Advisor, mfine@gc.cuny.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or you have comments or concerns that you would like to discuss with someone other than the researchers, please call the CUNY Research Compliance Administrator at 646-664-8918. Alternately, you can write to:

CUNY Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
Attn: Research Compliance Administrator
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

Signature of Participant:
I have read the consent form and talked about this research study, including the purpose, procedures, risks, benefits and alternatives with the researcher. Any questions I had were answered to my satisfaction. I am aware that by signing below, I am agreeing to take part in this research study and that I can stop being in the study at any time. I am not waiving (giving up) any of my legal rights by signing this consent form. I will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for my records. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign and date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

____________________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

____________________________________________________
Signature of Participant
Date

Signature of Principle Investigator

____________________________________________________
Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent

____________________________________________________
Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent
Date
APPENDIX D
INFORMATION LETTER TO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

The participants who have already completed their interviews will be notified via their email contact regarding my presence in the upcoming public actions related to the Peter Liang-Akai Gurley trial:

“Hi, my name is Wen Liu and I am a graduate student in social personality psychology at the Graduate Center of City University of New York. I am contacting you because you have participated in my LGBT Asian Immigrant Narrative Research Project. Since the project has started last year, the Liang-Gurley trial has caught national attention and shifted the discourse of Asian American identity. Some of you have also been active in this movement. I am writing to inform you that you may see me participate in the future Liang-Gurley public actions such as rallies and press conferences as a participant observant to gather data for my research. I will only collect observational data in the public space and during the actions. If you have any concerns or questions regarding my participation or your right as a research participant, please feel free to contact me at wliu2@gradcenter.cuny.edu or call me at 206-696-1126.”
APPENDIX E

DEBRIEFING FORM

The purpose of this research study is to gain deeper insights into the lives of Asian immigrants in the US. In the context of global migration, immigrants are now embedded in the simultaneous interconnections between their home country and the host society. This dynamics constructs a unique sense of identity and political engagement for Asian immigrants in the US society. Specifically, this study is interested in identifying the struggles and strengths of Asian immigrants, and acquiring a better understanding of how they develop their sense of political belonging in the US.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to one of the following researchers:

Wen Liu, MPhil, Principal Investigator, wliu2@gradcenter.cuny.edu (206) 696-1126
Michelle Fine, PhD, Faculty Advisor, mfine@gc.cuny.edu (212) 817-8710

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