

Each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations but of the history of these relations.

—Antonio Gramsci, “Notes for an Introduction and Approach to the Study of Philosophy and the History of Culture” (ca. 1932)

An image is nothing more than a relation.

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary* (1940)

A Feminist Transnationality

2

In this chapter, I examine a particular kind of transnationality in its intersection with feminist subjectivity in what may be called a feminist transnationality. The two terms here, *feminist* and *transnationality*, are not givens but points of interrogation. I say “a particular kind of transnationality” as a way to circumscribe my discussion of transnationality as a *mode of representation* constituted by immigration, not the feminist transnational collectivity or coalition that engages in feminist work across national borders. Thus feminist transnationality should be distinguished from transnational feminism or transnational feminist practice.¹ In designating the work of Chinese immigrant artist Hung Liu as working through a particular kind of feminist transnationality, my intent is to register the location of the immigrant artist articulating a gendered visual economy deftly negotiating multiple cultural and cross-cultural nodal points of meaning and signification, inflected by transnational crossings through immigration, returns to China, and returns to the United States.

Liu is not merely an ethnic minority subject as a consequence of immigration who maintains a racialized, minor perspective in her relationship with majority culture; she is also a Chinese national subject who keeps the category of China's national culture alive in her work as a form of cultural capital, very similar to that in Ang Lee's early work discussed in chapter 1. Both of these subject positions are underscored by what may be called a strong liberal, humanist, and feminist sentiment, which sets up a binaric structure of criticism of various forms of oppression. The becoming of this feminist subjectivity after immigration, based largely on a logic of antagonism against multiplex agents (Chinese patriarchy, the Maoist state, the U.S. state, and the Western gaze), poses a certain narrative of liberation which itself needs to be interrogated critically. In this sense, this chapter can be read as a twin to chapter 1: the concern in both of these chapters is the logic of travel of culture across the Pacific, that is, a transnational political economy of Sinophone visual representation. A gendered structuration—one male and so-called popular artist, and one female and so-called serious artist—is revealed within this transnational economy, with one mirroring and implying the other.

A first step in a critical analysis of feminist transnationality therefore must examine its position within what I have been calling a "global multiculturalism,"² or what Kobena Mercer calls, unambiguously, "multiculti-commodification of 'difference' in U.S.-centered global capitalism."³ By global multiculturalism, I mean the process in which national cultures of the globe are often reduced to ethnic cultures in the political economy of transnational representation. Hence, the domestic, American-style multiculturalism takes on a global form and sometimes functions as the model for understanding other national cultures. The world of nations and national cultures appears increasingly to have become the world of ethnicities and ethnic cultures in the new global regime of multiculturalism. Insofar as Hung Liu as an artist practices a kind of feminist transnationality as implied within the logic of both national (as a Chinese immigrant in the United States) and global multiculturalisms (as someone who flaunts Chinese cultural capital in the global terrain), we need to ask questions about what happens *after* the normalization of multiculturalism in both contexts. When diversity is the predominant term of value in these multicultural contexts, which manifest a more complex management of culture and ethnicity, we need to look for possibilities and complicities in unpredictable places. We may well ask the question, When criticism as a mode of representation becomes obligatory, predictable, or fulfills

a certain expectation for a minority, ethnic, or national cultural worker, can criticism itself be complicit?

If my discussion of Ang Lee's flexible subjectivity (as a Taiwanese and a Taiwanese American simultaneously) in the context of the transnationalization of the popular film market has shown that promises of different scenarios of identity may in fact resuscitate many of the old binarisms and hierarchies constructed along national and gender lines, what can the so-called high art of Hung Liu promise? Can the negativity of high art—as that which negates popular culture and thus rejects and prevents the reification and instrumentalization of culture in a logic of negative dialectics made famous by Frankfurt school thinkers⁴—itself be commodified? Would it be surprising if the trump card of high art, that is, its autonomy, is itself precariously related to instrumentalization and commodification precisely by way of a pretense to autonomy?

As was the case for analyzing Ang Lee's work, the frames of my analysis will move back and forth between what are traditionally called ethnic studies and area studies. This is necessitated by Hung Liu's work, which addresses both the condition of being an ethnic minority in the United States and the condition of being a national subject from China deeply invested in Chinese history and culture. This crossing over, or straddling, has of late become increasingly commonplace as more and more Chinese immigrant artists continue to draw from the vast resource that is "China" for their art rather than cutting it off as the land and experience of the past as would have been more likely the case during the Cold War years. The specific globalizing context of China's rising political and economic power is the juncture for this emerging transnationality where Chinese national culture is increasingly seen as a cultural asset rather than a liability. Tired of the usual fare of ethnic Chinese culture as food, attire, and mores of urban Chinatowns, the mainstream American viewer is also ready to venture into the more "authentic" Chinese culture in and from China, since China-knowledge is increasingly seen as crucial to continuous American economic advantage in the twenty-first century. That China is the largest market in the world is a powerful reason to enlarge one's cultural knowledge about a venerable civilization. As to how this "authentic" Chinese culture becomes subjected to a representational economy that is nonetheless circumscribed by a politics of ethnicity and minoritization is the process of global multiculturalism. However, when this subjection becomes an enabling mechanism in the classic Foucaultian scenario of subjectivity,

we might find that this logic of subjection can itself be strategically utilized to gain subjectivity for the immigrant artist. The question at stake is therefore a very different one from those we usually expect: *What if this process of subjection and subjectivization is anticipated prior to the event?* Our postmodern historicity challenges us to think beyond tired structures of opposition here.

To analyze, specifically, Hung Liu's artwork and its politics of feminist transnationality in the context of globalizing multicultural formation, I propose two other operative concepts: assemblage and antagonism. I propose to read Hung Liu's work from different periods dealing with different subject matters as constituting a metaphorical assemblage of identities. Second, together or separate, these identities pose various kinds of resistances, or antagonisms, against different agents of power.

Assemblage: The third edition of the *American Heritage College Dictionary* gives the following definitions of *assemblage*: "Assemblage: n. 1a. The act of assembling. b. The state of being assembled. 2. A collection of people or things; a gathering. 3. A fitting together of parts, as in a machine. 4. A sculptural composition of miscellaneous objects." According to the first definition, assemblage has both voluntary and involuntary dimensions. This is useful in thinking about how identities can be actively formulated by the artist (through practices of identification), and yet at the same time how identities may be ineluctable constructs of historical imposition beyond one's control (one is being identified as such). In the second definition, the idea of collection, of juxtaposition, and of gathering of people, things, and also fragments is emphasized. This gathering of things can constitute an organic whole, such as a machine, as in the third definition, or a three-dimensional sculptural art, gathering various objects together in a meaningful composition as in the fourth definition. In this case, then, identities can be understood as fragments (Hung Liu actually calls her art "identity fragments"), and their various relationships can be understood in terms of gatherings, mechanical organicism, or artful, self-conscious composition. Assemblage as metaphor provides a good working formula for understanding the complexity of identity formation as well as the multiplicity of identities and their interrelations.

Furthermore, instead of a static conception of identity as multiplicity and hybridity—or to use art terms, of montage and collage—*assemblage* has a more active dimension. For instance, the form of *assemblage*, as sculptural composition of miscellaneous objects, can be distinguished from both the *montage* and *collage*. *Montage* comes from the French term *monter*, meaning "to mount," and refers

to a two-dimensional art; collage comes from the French word *coller*, meaning “to paste,” and is also mainly two-dimensional and only occasionally uses low relief; assemblage comes from the French word *assembler*, meaning “to collect,” and is a mixed-media construction that is always three-dimensional. It can be freestanding or mounted onto a panel and framed.⁵ The three-dimensional properties of assemblage allow us to conceptualize identity fragments as having both temporal and spatial dimensions, hence not only the presence of history but also the spatial, geographical contexts of the formation, configuration, and production of identities. I suggest that the totality of Hung Liu’s oil and mixed-media paintings also enact an assemblage, each painting a historical and spatial fragment, constructing and enacting different narratives of identity.

Antagonism: Using Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s notion of antagonism, with which they refer to the expression of “forms of resistance,” such as feminist resistance toward patriarchy, lesbian resistance to heterosexual hegemony, minority resistance to racism, and others such as urban, ecological, antiauthoritarian, anti-institutional struggles,⁶ I view Hung Liu’s work as an assemblage of identities that express multiple antagonisms against different agents of power in different contexts. Hence, in one painting she may criticize Chinese patriarchy’s oppression of Chinese women, in another painting she may criticize the dominant American culture’s minoritization of Chinese immigrants, and in yet another painting she may criticize the Western exoticization of Chinese women. These different antagonisms, sometimes separate, sometimes overlapping and intersecting, sometimes even contradictory, are made possible by the assemblage of identities her works construct, moving freely within a vast resource of Chinese culture and history, particularly in its encounter with the West and its recent history of Cultural Revolution, and to a lesser extent, Chinese American culture and history.

Hung Liu was born in 1948 and came to the United States in 1984, with the accidental historical dates of 48 and 84 in a perfect mirror reversal. Very accomplished and by all measures considered a successful artist, Hung Liu has held numerous individual and group exhibitions and has been the subject of many interviews, articles, catalogs, and videos. As a matter of practice, Hung Liu works with photographs to problematize the authenticity of photographic representation of reality (a metaphor for her critical approach to her training in socialist realism in China, since she was taught that art can only be drawn from real life, not another representation) and to deal with the effects of memory, time, and history,

as well as a multitude of other issues. She projects photographs onto a canvas using a slide projector, then paints the photograph onto the canvas, making her own revisions and modifications to the image along the way. Then she often adds sculptural relief objects or frames to the piece and drips linseed oil over the finished piece for specific effects. These works all tend to be of monumental size. Broadly, I will divide a decade of her work (from the late 1980s to the late 1990s) in terms of their objects of antagonism into four categories or identity fragments in order to more fully analyze the paradoxes of feminist transnationality.

IDENTITY FRAGMENT 1:

FEMINIST ANTAGONISM AGAINST CHINESE PATRIARCHY

Hung Liu based a series of paintings on photographs of late nineteenth century prostitutes contained in a book that she discovered in the Beijing Film Archive. Supposedly, a book such as this one served as a catalogue of available prostitutes for customers, in this case, the more high-class courtesans. With these paintings, Hung Liu makes unambiguous statements about the commodification, eroticization, and objectification of women in Chinese society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, thereby stating a clear antagonism against Chinese patriarchy. In view of a politics of feminist transnationality as well as the seductive surfaces of these images, these portraits suggest a much more complicated structure of desire across China and the United States, however. Since Liu's paintings are meant for exhibition and consumption in the United States, the Western gaze is anticipated even prior to the Chinese gaze and this anticipation necessarily triangulates the structure of desire and makes ambiguous the question of female agency.

With *Olympia* (1992, 50 × 85 × 11, figure 7) and *Olympia II* (1992, 34 × 86 × 7, plate 1), an unequivocal feminist reading can be readily offered: Here the women are not only the objects of gaze but also the literal objects of commodification, since they are originally offered as sexual goods in the flesh market. Liu reinforces this interpretation by placing artificial flowers on a shelf in the former, suggesting a metonymical relationship between the woman and the flowers, sharing the same purpose as display.

Similarly, in the second assemblage, a shelf in the same design holds up ornamental vases as well as an intricately carved wood window panel. The vases and the carved wood panel both serve decorative functions, while the empty bowls

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Oe315cd8b59286d4a55db1037dbcc316
ebrary

7 Hung Liu, *Olympia* (1992, 50 × 85 × 11). Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

(found also in *Olympia*) under the vases are Liu's frequently used code for the Chinese patriarchal conception of women as empty or valueless.⁷ The unambiguous subtext to these paintings is Manet's famous painting by the same name that was a sensation when it was first shown in Paris. Instead of depicting passive, eye-avoiding female nudes, Manet painted a woman who looked back directly at her gazer. Likewise, in this and subsequent paintings with the same theme, Hung Liu's prostitutes all gaze back, reputedly coached to do so by their photographers. Hung Liu has remarked on their gazing back as suggesting the possibility of agency in the vein of Manet.⁸ In this basic structure of gaze, the object of the gaze (Chinese prostitutes) gazes back and even preempts the gaze by the gazer (Chinese male customers), turns him into an object, whose voyeurism is then theoretically unsettled. This is the most predictable level of reading of this series, which we may call the first level of interpretation for which the object of a feminist antagonism is Chinese patriarchy.

What about the anticipated gaze of the West? The artist's silence about this

gaze is intriguing, insofar as this gaze is what determines the paintings' marketability, collectibility, and their status as art in the United States, where the artist is situated. We may evoke here Gayatri Spivak's trenchant critique of colonial gender dynamics, where white men may be seen as saviors of native women, hence the ironic formula that "white men are saving brown women from brown men."⁹ More than anything else, this poses an ethical ambiguity of a Third World or transnational feminist whose goal of overturning native patriarchy may become complicit with white male colonial patriarchy. For Hung Liu to be silent about the anticipated Western gaze and its implications, therefore, can be troubling. This silence absolves the Orientalist viewer from worrying about his or her voyeuristic pleasure derived from gazing at these Chinese Olympians in their exotic and sexual allure; the object of criticism is Chinese patriarchy, not the Orientalist viewer. Having been placed outside the hermeneutic circle, and thus without the *burden of critique* or *the burden of rescue*, the Orientalist can suspend any self-reflexive judgment, thus giving the pleasure principle its reign during the experience of viewing.

As Algerian scholar Malek Alloula has shown in a different context, the prostitute gazing back in colonial photography can reinforce, not undermine, Orientalist narratives of the sexually promiscuous women.¹⁰ The fact that the prostitutes were originally directed by the photographers to gaze into the camera corroborates this. The selling point here is the prostitute who gazes daringly, encoding transgression as erotic appeal. This puts into doubt whether such a gaze of the Orientalized woman, whether it be looked at by Chinese patriarchy or the West, can escape the circularity of the masculinist and Orientalist economy of desire. Even though Hung Liu intends to reinscribe the masculinist economy of desire in the Chinese context, the question is whether reinscription can be automatically determined as a form of critique. With this reinscription being more or less stereotypically liberal feminist in orientation, we ask instead whether reinscription reinforces the original by extending the life of the original in the act of translation. By reproducing the image of the courtesan in the Western context, Hung Liu has retained the Oriental allure and seductive materiality of the image, whose viewers have been increased by this act of translation. On the one hand, the two basic layers of discourses here—the photographic objectification and commodification of the Chinese courtesan, and Hung Liu's copying and translation of the photograph—remain complimentary layers that do not cancel each other out. There is an overlapping or a duplication of male desire from China to the

United States. Here a putative feminist intent may just be a tired gesture, long ago anticipated by the most basic theory of gaze, retaining no ambiguity for genuinely critical possibilities.

The erotic allure of these prostitutes for the Chinese male customers partly arises, furthermore, from their Western accoutrements. With the upholstered couches upon which they lie and the cultural meanings of photography in the last turn-of-the-century China as a specifically Western product, these photographs are themselves Western mediated diagrams of desire for Chinese men. It was common practice, for instance, for certain high-class prostitutes to wear Western clothes and to show off their use of Western technology (such as the telephone), thereby eliciting transgressive desire.¹¹ A typical Cantonese song from turn-of-the-century San Francisco Chinatown written from the perspective of a prostitute illustrates this nicely:

Yes, it tickles my funny bone to tell you;
The fashion now is Western.
We in this business of pleasing men must keep up with the trend.
Our dresses must be new and in style,
Even if we have to sell and pawn.
We'll buy all the clothes we want.
Doll ourselves up like beautiful American-borns;
Surely the men will find us very pleasant.¹²

Recall that in colonial India, Westernized women were condemned by male nationalist narratives as being like prostitutes.¹³ Similarly, both Westernized Chinese immigrant women and American-born, second-generation Chinese American women were criticized by their male immigrant community as acting like prostitutes in turn-of-the-century San Francisco Chinatown.¹⁴ Native patriarchy under threat, whether under colonialism or minoritization, oftentimes reacted similarly to those women who transgressed the boundaries of native culture. The converse of that—that prostitutes were *expected* to be Westernized—spells out the double logic of male desire with two divergent expectations for wives/daughters and prostitutes. As figures of transgression, prostitutes can dress their part; their Westernization adds to their erotic capital. It is a process of selective endorsement of Westernization to which even the Chinese men themselves secretly or openly aspire.

Taken to the transnational context, or more specifically, the context of the

American art market and viewership, the relationship among gender, desire, and Westernization is further mediated. Sufficient similarity in the body of the exotic—or hybridity of a nonthreatening sort—can replicate the same logic of desire for the Western male viewer. She is Chinese and yet is surrounded by some familiar Western objects. Distance between the object of gaze and the Western subject of gaze is momentarily bridged through such an act of recognition of familiar objects. This recognition is historically specific, but also translates easily across time and space. The fact that these paintings are colorful and visually pleasing works of art helps underscore this translatability.

When sexism and Orientalism have all supposedly been dealt with from decades of rigorous critiques, a stereotypical antisexist or anti-Orientalist position can easily become a marketing strategy or an empty gesture that serves as an alibi for purposes that might resolidify Orientalism. By not asking the viewer too much beyond an expected critique of sexism and Orientalism, the paintings become glossy surfaces upon which we witness the collusion of male desire on both sides of the Pacific.

Although the images of these women may be made faint by the dripping effects of linseed oil, which Hung Liu used to mark the passage of time, the nonetheless glossy, colorful, ornate, exotic, and stunning images of these women in their complete ornamental regalia seduce their viewers to peep into the hidden spaces of Chinese femininity in courtesan quarters and the imperial harem, affording them the pleasure of voyeurism. These women's gazing back, as mentioned above, is back at the Chinese patriarchy within the diageitic frame of the works, not the American viewers, who then can assume an innocent pleasure of a renewed sort of Orientalism freed from the fear of accusations of sexism or racialized eroticism. Here the structure of gaze absolves the Western gazer, whose chief experience is pleasure and voyeurism, one that is paradoxically legitimized by Hung Liu's feminism. A new Orientalist viewer, male or female, who is superficially feminist, is thus successfully constructed outside the frame.

IDENTITY FRAGMENT 2: LIBERAL ANTAGONISM AGAINST THE MAOIST STATE

In a series of paintings and assemblages created between 1993 and 1995, Hung Liu articulated a clear intent of critique against Maoism and the Maoist state (1949–76)

A Feminist Transnationality

from a more or less liberal and feminist perspective. This involves a liberal perspective on Maoist politics and a feminist perspective on the particular form of gender suppression in Maoist China, with the two reinforcing each other. Representative of this set of works, *Swan Song* (1993, 61 × 91 5/8 × 3, plate 2), consists of two panels of musical scores from the Cultural Revolution model opera *The Red Lantern*, entitled *A Proletarian Fights All His Life for the People's Liberation*. In the middle are two ballet dancers from the ballet version of the model opera *The Red Detachment of Women*. Here the song lyrics and the androgynous dancers emphasize the primacy of class struggle and the repression of femininity. Hung Liu has mentioned in interviews that she considers the Maoist state to be authoritarian, in which class has taken over individual identity such as the gender identity of the dancers. Allegedly liberating women from traditional patriarchy, the Maoist state instead inculcated them into a Maoist patriarchy in which the gender of women is repressed, and familial and romantic love is displaced by class love. May-fair Yang has, in this regard, called this procedure of gender suppression in the name of gender equality that hides a male norm "gender erasure."¹⁵

Upon closer inspection of *Swan Song*, one notices small inserted circles depicting a pair of bound feet and dainty hands, two symbols of hyperfemininity celebrated by pre-Mao, traditional patriarchy. If traditional patriarchy valorized and fetishized bound feet and dainty hands, Maoist patriarchy fetishized masculine women whose feminine features were erased. This is clearly a reactive reversal and thus replicates the logic of oppression by taking it to the other extreme: under traditional patriarchy women can only be feminine; under Mao, women must suppress their femininity. These are two different, but nonetheless equally problematic, regimes of domination. The woman's bound feet may have been "liberated" in Mao's China,¹⁶ but the woman has become more like a man devoid of gender subjectivity. In an earlier painting entitled *Golden Lotus/Red Shoe* (1990), an overgendered foot-bound woman is similarly juxtaposed with a degendered woman revolutionary to similar effect. Just as the contrast is dramatic, the underlying critique is provocative.

Liu extends this critique into a cross-cultural one in *Reddest Red Sun* (1993) where, onto the printed score of *My Spirit Storms the Heavens* (also from *The Red Lantern*) was superimposed a Victorian lady carrying a parasol. Here Maoist discipline of sexuality through its displacement by revolutionary discourse is literally coincided and overlapped with Victorian prudishness and denial of sexuality,

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

8 Hung Liu, *Father's Day* (1994, 54 × 72). Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

thereby deparicularizing the patriarchal management of women as a prevalent condition across the cultural, geographical, and ideological divides between Maoist China and Victorian England. In the way in which these two works are difficult to read without a knowledge of Maoist gender politics, they maintain the need for a degree of labor in the act of interpretation. In other words, they are not as readily consumable as the first set of paintings of prostitutes, and they are also not as translatable into an obligatory and predictable feminist critique.

Hung Liu added autobiographical elements to her critique of Maoism in *Father's Day* (1994, 54 × 72, figure 8), *Grandma* (1993, 101 1/2 × 60, figure 9) and *Avant-Garde* (1993, 116 × 43, figure 10). In the first of these three paintings, Hung Liu begins with a photograph of her first meeting with her father. Hung Liu's father was in the Guomindang military and was imprisoned after the establishment of the People's Republic of China for the rest of his life. Hung Liu's mother had to divorce him in order not to be persecuted by association. Hung Liu never saw her father when she was growing up, and decades later, when she was in the States,

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

0e315cd8b59286d4a55db1037dbcc316
ebrary

- 9 Hung Liu, *Grandma* (1993, 101 1/2 × 60). Courtesy of the
Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

0e315cd8b59286d4a55db1037dbcc316
ebrary

she discovered that he was still alive in a labor camp. She negotiated his release, and this is the painting of herself holding her fragile father, a strong protest against political persecution. The door frame carving on the upper right denoting objecthood and decorative function here suggests a different function from those in the prostitute paintings: A fragment tossed around by fickle political and ideological changes, her father is like a forgotten object, a tiny mark used only to decorate the annals of history, if at all.

Here Liu uses the cutout method, which eliminates background and focuses the viewer's attention on the persons thus emphatically presented. This method adds a strong emotive quality to the work, which hopes to move the viewer. Cutout figures are usually the domain of propagandistic hagiography, hence Liu's intentional use of this method in this and many other works registers a formal intent to critique the ideological use of art. In *Grandmother*, Liu again reinscribes the

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

- 10 Hung Liu, *Avant-Garde* (1993, 116 × 43). Courtesy
of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

cutout form to celebrate an ordinary person, her grandmother. The sculptural quality of the cutout brings special attention to the wrinkled hands of the grandmother, which visually signify the hardships she has endured. For both works, cutouts eliminate the immediate context or background of the images presented and thus make them transportable to other contexts. The portability thus implied adds a uni-

versal dimension to the oppression of ordinary people, as something that could happen anywhere.

It is the use of the cutout form in the third of these works, *Avant-Garde*, based on a photograph of Liu as a young woman in military uniform, that brings out her ambiguous stance on Maoist gender politics. If the cutout figure is celebratory, as in the logic of the two works analyzed above, the militarized figure here suggests a degree of agency that transcends the capitalist gender binarism between the masculine and the feminine. Can there be agency in degendered womanhood? This is a question that we can fruitfully ask of Maoist China, where the gender norm hid a masculinist premise but where women were legally and otherwise more equal to men than in capitalist societies.

If recognizably essentialized Chinese culture can serve as cultural capital for the artist in the prostitute paintings, it may be fruitful to ask whether Maoism or Chinese political history can also serve as cultural capital. In the spate of trauma narratives set in Maoist China and written in English by Chinese immigrants, it has become obvious that this particular form of historical trauma renders itself to easy commodification.¹⁷ One cannot but be reminded of Frank Chin's lament that ethnic autobiographies are a genre for sellouts as only the minoritized will confess.¹⁸ Though highly problematic in its masculinist premise when Chin prescribes what ethnic writing should be, Chin's critique might also contain a grain of truth. Why else is there such a prevalence of memoirs and autobiographies if the market cannot sustain them, and why not as many in other genres? Hong Kong writer Wong Bik-wan has this to say about these writers: "Those Chinese who write in English write about the Cultural Revolution, big persecutions, footbinding, feng-shui, searching for [cultural] roots, like ancient spirits and ghosts in a cave of horror inside a cheap entertainment park. Very cheap, very fake."¹⁹ Without mincing her words, Wong accuses these writers of a showy victimology that "by displaying their wounds and suffering, they ask, 'How would you help me?'"²⁰

This is not to say that trauma under Maoism cannot be written about or represented visually, but that it is in the *how* of the representation that one's ethical stance can be determined. The narratives that clearly cater to either the paranoia about China or the "China threat" for purposes of financial gain are to be distinguished from the more complex and ambiguous narratives that show multiple perspectives on a complex phenomenon. Some of Hung Liu's paintings about Maoism may in this sense be seen as ethical constructs that maintain a degree of

ambiguity even while other works of hers may appeal to a liberal feminist universalism through hyperfeminized and hypervisualized Chinese womanhood.

**IDENTITY FRAGMENT 3:
ANTAGONISM OF A MINORITY SUBJECT**

Of all of Hung Liu's works, this set of paintings dating from 1988 to the mid-1990s has received the most favorable attention in studies of multicultural art.²¹ Explicitly positioned as an immigrant and a minority subject in the United States, Hung Liu registers the process of immigration as a process of minoritization with all its attendant implications of subjectivization in the Foucaultian fashion of subjection, which in the U.S. context refers to a history of racialized exclusion and stereotyping. Rather than flaunting Chinese cultural essentialism as cultural capital, in these works that are mostly created simultaneously with, and some slightly earlier than, the previous two sets of works, she focuses on her minority status and situates it in terms of the history of Chinese immigration to the United States. She examines the history of Chinese immigrants who were detained at Angel Island via a painted photograph from that era (*Customs*, 1996), the fantasy of the Gold Mountain by the early immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century in an installation made up of two hundred thousand fortune cookies in the shape of a mountain left to rot in the exhibition hall (*Jiu Jin Shan*, 1994), the trade route between Baltimore and China in an exhibition focused on Baltimore's role as America's Canton, and various racist stereotypes of the Chinese people in the United States.

The much-reprinted and talked-about painting *Resident Alien* (1988, 90 × 60, figure 11), shows a parody of Liu's green card. Although she was born in 1948, she marks her date of birth as 1984, the year she came to the United States. The new date of birth in a sense marks her rebirth in the United States, where she has repeatedly announced in numerous interviews that she found artistic freedom and liberation; for her, 1984 marked "the birth of an independent artist after reaching the States."²² But the moment we note the conjunction between the liberating potential of her immigration and her criticism of the Chinese state's repression of artistic freedom, we are confronted with her new name, "Fortune Cookie," an American invention, a cliché about Chinese culture, a trivialization of Chinese tradition, and a racial stereotype. She is not only collapsed into a stereotype, she

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

11 Hung Liu, *Resident Alien* (1988, 90 × 60). Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

is also marked as “alien.” The naturalization and immigration agency and its green cards represent the U.S. state, that which circumscribed the potential freedom from Maoist repression. Three identities collide: her Chinese identity, the American identity she would like to claim, and the American identity she is assigned. The painting is also uncannily Orwellian; George Orwell wrote his novel *1984* in 1948.

To further debunk the fortune cookie stereotype, Liu created the *Cookie Queen* (1995, 67 × 48). This cutout painting was first shown in the exhibition in Baltimore mentioned above, commemorating its bustling China trade in the nineteenth century. It was flanked by a painting of jazz singer Billie Holiday on one side and baseball legend Babe Ruth on the other. Holiday and Ruth are of course famous figures known to many, while the woman worker in the fortune cookie factory depicted here is anonymous. “Her identity—indeed, her fortune in life—is unknown to us, since Americans who go to Chinese restaurants have virtually no awareness of the workers who stuff glad tidings into fortune cookies.”²³ By the sheer act of juxtaposition and its ostentatious incongruity, the painting puts the nameless woman on an equal plane with the two celebrity figures, who are all equally memorialized in large cutouts. In similarly themed works such as *Chinaman* (1995, 75 × 36) and *Laundry Lady* (1995, 72 × 38), Liu provides constructive representations of racialized stereotypes. The title *Chinaman* refers to the racist

epithet used to denigrate Chinese men since the nineteenth century. By painting an ordinary lion dancer in monumental size, by unconventionally showing his face in an exalted gesture (hence he is no longer just an instrument that hides behind the mask and moves the exotic lion to dance), and by presenting him as a cutout figure, Liu ascribes heroic qualities to the racist stereotype of the “Chinaman.” Recall that Maxine Hong Kingston revised the term *Chinamen* into *China Men* in her book of the same title as an act of restoration of the manhood and dignity of those whose “M” was dwarfed in *Chinamen*. Hers was an arduous historical reconstruction as well as narrative representation of the history of Chinese men in all their multifarious and important contributions to the United States in order to reject the narrativizing of their history as emasculation. Hung Liu may be seen as following her footsteps here.

IDENTITY FRAGMENT 4: ANTAGONISM AGAINST THE WESTERN GAZE

Hung Liu created a series of paintings based on photographs about China and Chinese people taken by Western travelers, from a collection entitled *The Face of China as Seen by Photographers and Travelers, 1860–1912*.²⁴ This set of paintings offers a different structure of gaze than those about prostitutes as Liu’s reinscription is supposedly of the Western gaze on Chinese objects. In the paintings about prostitutes, a Chinese immigrant artist looks at Chinese men looking at Chinese prostitutes and anticipates the gaze of the Western viewer and art buyer; in these paintings, a Chinese immigrant woman artist looks at Western men looking at Chinese men and women and equally anticipates the Western gaze. In either case, we need to posit the shared, seeming external Western gaze inside the frame, its anticipation structuring the visual economy of the apparent and already multi-layered gazing.

The right panel in the diptych *Souvenir* (1990, 48 × 64 × 8, figure 13) shows the image of a few well-suited Western men posing in front of a Chinese prisoner locked in a wooden cage in a photograph shot in September 1904 in Shanghai. According to the exhibition catalog, the cage was a form of execution for criminals: “Major criminals were sometimes left to die publicly as an example to the innocent. A ‘cage’ was constructed so that the inmate could either stand on tip-toe to relieve the pressure around his neck or finally suspend himself until he is

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Oe315cd8b59286d4a55db1037dbcc316
ebruary

- 12 Original photograph depicting execution in old Shanghai, September 1904, from *The Face of China as Seen by Photographers and Travelers, 1860–1912* (New York: Aperture, 1978), 89.

strangled.”²⁵ The clean and well-dressed Westerners are in stark contrast with the prisoner and the few Chinese men shown partially on the edges of the frame. The facial expressions of most of these white men are rather hard to read, but the man second from the right wears a distinct grin under a well-shaped moustache. This man also gazes into the camera, self-consciously posing for the photograph. This posing accentuates the function of the caged prisoner as a spectacle, a “souvenir,” as Hung Liu’s entitlement of this nameless photograph implies, for the Westerners to be brought back home.

Hung Liu’s mimicry of this photograph into a painting suggests two simultaneous dynamics. On the one hand, there is the obvious critique of the voyeuristic gaze of the intended Western viewers of the photograph as well as the gaze of the Western men inside the photograph. These Western men had first gazed at the prisoner, posed with him, then anticipated the photography to be a record of

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

13 Hung Liu, *Souvenir* (1990, 48 × 64 × 8). Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

their witness of Chinese cruelty to be seen by other Western viewers. The gazes here are quite uniform in the sense that they are all positioned to turn China into the embodiment of otherness and difference. The few partial images of the Chinese men in the photograph, obviously showing curiosity at the photographer and not at the prisoner, suggest their own indifference to the prisoner as well. The dynamic here is reminiscent of that of the infamous photograph of Chinese onlookers gleefully watching a Chinese revolutionary being beheaded by a Japanese soldier that Lu Xun so viscerally criticized as a quintessential representation of characteristic Chinese apathy and ignorance in the early twentieth century. Hung Liu's critique does not seem to have centered so much on Chinese apathy as on the Western gaze as a modernizing and colonizing one.

On the other hand, the second interpretation takes into account Hung Liu's anticipation of the first dynamic being received and gazed at by American viewers of her painting based on the photograph. In other words, the question here is

the coincidence among all three layers of Western gazes: those within the photograph, those looking at the photograph, and those looking at Liu's reinscription of the photograph in the painting. For those critical viewers who are more adept at decoding Hung Liu's intention, the three layers of Western gaze would gaze back at them with a weighty ethical and moral question about their own positionality as the voyeur. For others, the three layers of gaze can easily collapse into the same voyeuristic gaze, constituting a triple form of violation of the gazed-at object from three different historical moments. The more Western gazes the photograph accumulates over the decades through its exhibition, circulation, and publication, the more powerful and solidified that voyeurism becomes. Farther and farther away from 1904, the image is more and more capable of becoming, for the Western viewer, the embodiment of Chinese cruelty and apathy. Its primitivism is reinforced by the passing of time. This voyeurism in turn inflicts wounds upon contemporary Chinese pride, which is exploding at the seams as China begins to ascend as a global power. The wounds easily become displaced as justifications for patriotic pride, which articulates itself through the vilification and vindication of the West's "demonization of China."²⁶ Liu's reinscription, therefore, may yet be caught in such an oppressive discursive and imagistic logic of otherness and nationalism and paradoxically extend its life.

The left panel of *Souvenir* is imbricated in a similar logic as the prostitute paintings from the first identity fragment. Here you have an image from Chinese erotica, popularly circulated in Western print over the last century, a classic example of the erotic Orient. Hung Liu placed a three-dimensional box and an empty bowl on the box to block the view of the erotic focal point. Ostensibly anti-Orientalist in intention (refusing to show what is most desired for viewing), the panel paradoxically also sustains the eroticization of the Orient, making it more suggestive, more hidden, hence even more desirable. This replicates the logic of desire of a striptease, in which the public is made voyeurs only for the duration it takes for the strippers to shed clothing. Roland Barthes has famously shown how the viewer's desire is aroused and maintained for the duration of the process of stripping, with its completion bringing forth an anticlimactic desexualization or de-eroticization.²⁷ The box that hides the essential parts from view therefore can function as the last item of clothing that stays on the stripper to sustain the desire of the voyeurs. A critical intention in the end may resuscitate an Orientalist

eroticism. This is what I mean by how an anti-Orientalist gesture can slip into a reconfirmation of Orientalism.

A more stereotypical image of wounds is of course the bound feet as the emblem of Chinese women's oppression. Representing bound feet for Western view is like airing dirty laundry from the perspective of the Chinese nationalists; while for Hong Kong critic Wong Bik-wan, it is akin to succumbing to the logic of Western consumption, as the passage cited earlier shows. In a work with no name, *Untitled* (1991, 25 1/4 × 14 1/8 × 8), Hung Liu based the image of a bound-foot woman with her deformed feet exposed and displayed on a photograph taken by a Westerner. The protocol of decorum would have ordinarily prevented the woman from exposing her malformed feet, so this exposition was a rare instance of a "behind-the-scenes" image of Chinese womanhood. From an Orientalist perspective, bound feet represent both erotic fascination and perversion of the Chinese male, hence the epitome of China's backwardness in its inhuman treatment of women. Exposing the fetish, the Western photographer as Orientalist attains voyeuristic pleasure on the one hand, and attains the moral high ground on the other. By using her stock feminist images of a decorative glass plant and an empty bowl, Hung Liu's perspective seems to collapse for a moment with the Western photographer's critique of Chinese patriarchy.

A closer look at the Chinese discourse and practice of foot-binding, which started around the tenth century, however, may challenge the facile equation between bound feet and male domination. Historian Dorothy Ko's study of foot-binding has shown that foot-binding cannot be reduced to "a core of absolute and timeless meanings" and that the equation was very much a discourse constructed by Western missionaries in China in the nineteenth century, which in turn influenced reform-minded Chinese.²⁸ Prior to the nineteenth century, there were varying discourses about foot-binding, with opposing and approving voices, even with the Qing court banning it in the early years of its rule. There was never an imperial edict or rule imposing foot-binding on women at any time in Chinese history. Without going so far as to establish a blanket agency for foot-binding, which would be false, it may not be far-fetched to say that as a form of social practice, foot-binding itself may have granted women some form of small-scale agency, just as high-heel shoes may enhance certain women's sense of beauty and well-being. Both the Western photographer focusing on the deformation of the

bound feet and Hung Liu repeating this focus through an act of reinscription grant the bound feet a stock symbolic meaning. The multiple meanings of foot-binding within the Chinese context are thus simplified and made to cohere into one meaning: the oppression of Chinese women by Chinese men.

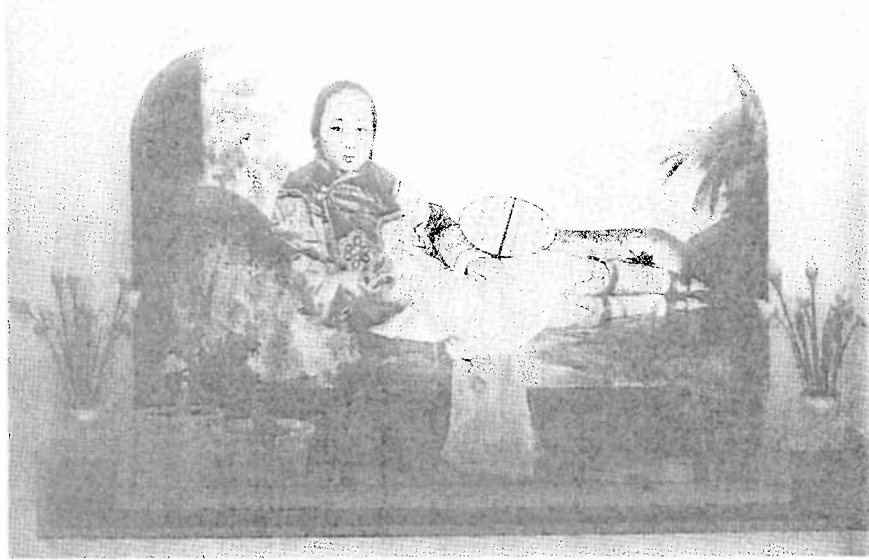
While the gaze of the Western photographer is criticized by Liu for its voyeuristic peeping into the inner sphere of Chinese culture but then subtly reinstated by the logic of the gaze, the gaze of the Westerner who looks at the artwork is again implied to be innocent. In the layering of these Western gazes, we find more of a coherence than a dissonance, where Liu's reinscription becomes a reinforced inscription of the same.

IF I HAVE BEEN successful, I have made a case about an assemblage of identity fragments in Hung Liu's work strategically articulated as multiple and shifting antagonisms against four agents of power. On one level, both Hung Liu's national subject position (as a Chinese national) and minority subject position (as a minority in the United States) can be seen as resistant positions against objectification and stereotypes. The intersecting point of these identities, subject positions, and antagonisms is what I would call the potential of a feminist transnationality. Such feminist transnationality makes possible taking multiple subject positions against multiple power agents, which reflects the increased complexity of contemporary experience of immigration as well as the scattering and multiplication of hegemonies that overdetermine the lifework of a transnational artist.

When art buyers and gallery goers visit the galleries, one may say that there are at least two levels of appreciation or reception. One is the visual, which refers to the surface look of the work: looking at most of Hung Liu's work from the 1990s, the visuals are strikingly Oriental. For some viewers, this is sufficient ground for their enjoyment of her works, which suggests a practice of self-Orientalization even though the artist may have a critical intent. The second level is the conceptual or the textual, that is, Hung Liu's explanations of her intent in creating such works, giving her works a critical edge that art critics and academics are very glad to see. For both sets of viewers, then, Hung Liu has something to offer. Her paintings sell extremely well—all of her paintings from the 1996 *Last Dynasty* exhibition were sold even before the show opened—and they have also garnered critical acclaim from such distinguished art critics as Norman Bryson. Here, then, is a different kind of flexibility in comparison with that of Ang Lee, discussed in

chapter 1. It is a kind of flexibility that works on different levels simultaneously to draw in the viewers, be they the more critically initiated or the more visually oriented. Liu's transnationally situated feminist subjectivity ironically makes this transaction among her work, the art market, and the critical discourse about her work possible. Gayatri Spivak has lamented in a very timely essay that, to her, the epistemics of transnationality as embodied in diasporic feminist work is highly problematic. She quotes Jean Franco approvingly when the latter notes: "speaking as a woman within a pluralistic society may actually reinstitute, in a disguised form, the same relationship of privilege that has separated the intelligentsia from the subaltern classes."²⁹ Hence Spivak's poignant question: What about those groups that cannot become diasporic?

I now come full circle in delineating the economy and the epistemics of feminist transnationality as seen through Hung Liu's work: the two imply each other in a dance that occludes class as a category of production, accumulation, and representation. Furthermore, I have shown that critique for the sake of critique is not always already ethical. When terms of resistance and critique themselves become scripted events, they can be deployed for other strategic purposes. The content of the political changes according to the times, and so must its tactics; to insist on a stereotypical anti-Orientalist critique is to risk falling back into Orientalism. The tendency toward self-ethnography in multicultural American art or immigrant Chinese art, at its worst extreme, can become a combination of victimology and self-Orientalization. Hal Foster satirically criticized certain American art of the 1990s as belonging to a "cult of abjection," where abjection is fetishized to the extent that it may reconfirm a given abjection.³⁰ He further noted the pitfalls of the artist as ethnographer, where "the quasi-anthropological role set up for the artist can promote a presuming as much as a questioning of ethnographic authority, an evasion as often as an extension of institutional critique."³¹ Through a different route, with a different accent, this chapter has hopefully called attention to one of the many transnational complicities that we live with today. Sinophone visual culture situated transnationally must reckon with its resistant and complicit implications across different contexts and against different agents of power.



7 Hung Liu, *Olympia* (1992, 50 × 85 × 11). Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

(found also in *Olympia*) under the vases are Liu's frequently used code for the Chinese patriarchal conception of women as empty or valueless.⁷ The unambiguous subtext to these paintings is Manet's famous painting by the same name that was a sensation when it was first shown in Paris. Instead of depicting passive, eye-avoiding female nudes, Manet painted a woman who looked back directly at her gazer. Likewise, in this and subsequent paintings with the same theme, Hung Liu's prostitutes all gaze back, reputedly coached to do so by their photographers. Hung Liu has remarked on their gazing back as suggesting the possibility of agency in the vein of Manet.⁸ In this basic structure of gaze, the object of the gaze (Chinese prostitutes) gazes back and even preempts the gaze by the gazer (Chinese male customers), turns him into an object, whose voyeurism is then theoretically unsettled. This is the most predictable level of reading of this series, which we may call the first level of interpretation for which the object of a feminist antagonism is Chinese patriarchy.

What about the anticipated gaze of the West? The artist's silence about this

gaze is intriguing, insofar as this gaze is what determines the paintings' marketability, collectibility, and their status as art in the United States, where the artist is situated. We may evoke here Gayatri Spivak's trenchant critique of colonial gender dynamics, where white men may be seen as saviors of native women, hence the ironic formula that "white men are saving brown women from brown men."⁹ More than anything else, this poses an ethical ambiguity of a Third World or transnational feminist whose goal of overturning native patriarchy may become complicit with white male colonial patriarchy. For Hung Liu to be silent about the anticipated Western gaze and its implications, therefore, can be troubling. This silence absolves the Orientalist viewer from worrying about his or her voyeuristic pleasure derived from gazing at these Chinese Olympias in their exotic and sexual allure; the object of criticism is Chinese patriarchy, not the Orientalist viewer. Having been placed outside the hermeneutic circle, and thus without the *burden of critique* or the *burden of rescue*, the Orientalist can suspend any self-reflexive judgment, thus giving the pleasure principle its reign during the experience of viewing.

As Algerian scholar Malek Alloula has shown in a different context, the prostitute gazing back in colonial photography can reinforce, not undermine, Orientalist narratives of the sexually promiscuous women.¹⁰ The fact that the prostitutes were originally directed by the photographers to gaze into the camera corroborates this. The selling point here is the prostitute who gazes daringly, encoding transgression as erotic appeal. This puts into doubt whether such a gaze of the Orientalized woman, whether it be looked at by Chinese patriarchy or the West, can escape the circularity of the masculinist and Orientalist economy of desire. Even though Hung Liu intends to reinscribe the masculinist economy of desire in the Chinese context, the question is whether reinscription can be automatically determined as a form of critique. With this reinscription being more or less stereotypically liberal feminist in orientation, we ask instead whether reinscription reinforces the original by extending the life of the original in the act of translation. By reproducing the image of the courtesan in the Western context, Hung Liu has retained the Oriental allure and seductive materiality of the image, whose viewers have been increased by this act of translation. On the one hand, the two basic layers of discourses here—the photographic objectification and commodification of the Chinese courtesan, and Hung Liu's copying and translation of the photograph—remain complimentary layers that do not cancel each other out. There is an overlapping or a duplication of male desire from China to the

from a more or less liberal and feminist perspective. This involves a liberal perspective on Maoist politics and a feminist perspective on the particular form of gender suppression in Maoist China, with the two reinforcing each other. Representative of this set of works, *Swan Song* (1993, 61 x 91 5/8 x 3, plate 2), consists of two panels of musical scores from the Cultural Revolution model opera *The Red Lantern*, entitled *A Proletarian Fights All His Life for the People's Liberation*. In the middle are two ballet dancers from the ballet version of the model opera *The Red Detachment of Women*. Here the song lyrics and the androgynous dancers emphasize the primacy of class struggle and the repression of femininity. Hung Liu has mentioned in interviews that she considers the Maoist state to be authoritarian, in which class has taken over individual identity such as the gender identity of the dancers. Allegedly liberating women from traditional patriarchy, the Maoist state instead inculcated them into a Maoist patriarchy in which the gender of women is repressed, and familial and romantic love is displaced by class love. May-fair Yang has, in this regard, called this procedure of gender suppression in the name of gender equality that hides a male norm "gender erasure."¹⁵

Upon closer inspection of *Swan Song*, one notices small inserted circles depicting a pair of bound feet and dainty hands, two symbols of hyperfemininity celebrated by pre-Mao, traditional patriarchy. If traditional patriarchy valorized and fetishized bound feet and dainty hands, Maoist patriarchy fetishized masculine women whose feminine features were erased. This is clearly a reactive reversal and thus replicates the logic of oppression by taking it to the other extreme: under traditional patriarchy women can only be feminine; under Mao, women must suppress their femininity. These are two different, but nonetheless equally problematic, regimes of domination. The woman's bound feet may have been "liberated" in Mao's China,¹⁶ but the woman has become more like a man devoid of gender subjectivity. In an earlier painting entitled *Golden Lotus/Red Shoe* (1990), an overgendered foot-bound woman is similarly juxtaposed with a degendered woman revolutionary to similar effect. Just as the contrast is dramatic, the underlying critique is provocative.

Liu extends this critique into a cross-cultural one in *Redden Red Sun* (1993) where, onto the printed score of *My Spirit Storms the Heavens* (also from *The Red Lantern*) was superimposed a Victorian lady carrying a parasol. Here Maoist discipline of sexuality through its displacement by revolutionary discourse is literally coincided and overlapped with Victorian prudishness and denial of sexuality.



16. Hung Liu, *Father's Day* (1994, 64 x 72). Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

thereby deparitcularizing the patriarchal management of women as a prevalent condition across the cultural, geographical, and ideological divides between Maoist China and Victorian England. In the way in which these two works are difficult to read without a knowledge of Maoist gender politics, they maintain the need for a degree of labor in the act of interpretation. In other words, they are not as readily consumable as the first set of paintings of prostitutes, and they are also not as translatable into an obligatory and predictable feminist critique.

Hung Liu added autobiographical elements to her critique of Maoism in *Father's Day* (1994, 64 x 72, figure 8), *Grandma* (1993, 101 1/2 x 60, figure 9) and *Avant-garde* (1993, 116 x 43, figure 10). In the first of these three paintings, Hung Liu begins with a photograph of her first meeting with her father. Hung Liu's father was in the Guomindang military and was imprisoned after the establishment of the People's Republic of China for the rest of his life. Hung Liu's mother had to force him in order not to be persecuted by association. Hung Liu never saw her father when she was growing up, and decades later, when she was in the States,



9 Hung Liu *Granama* (1993, 101 1/2 x 60). Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery

she discovered that he was still alive in a labor camp. She negotiated his release, and this is the painting of herself holding her fragile father, a strong protest against political persecution. The door frame carving on the upper right denoting objecthood and decorative function here suggests a different function from those in the prostitute paintings: A fragment tossed around by fickle political and ideological changes, her father is like a forgotten object, a tiny mark used only to decorate the annals of history, if at all.

Here Liu uses the cutout method, which eliminates background and focuses the viewer's attention on the persons thus emphatically presented. This method adds a strong emotive quality to the work, which hopes to move the viewer. Cutout figures are usually the domain of propagandistic hagiography, hence Liu's intentional use of this method in this and many other works registers a formal intent to critique the ideological use of art. In *Grandmother*, Liu again reinscribes the



10 Hung Liu *Aunt-Garce* (1993, 116 x 43). Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

cutout form to celebrate an ordinary person, her grandmother. The sculptural quality of the cutout brings special attention to the wrinkled hands of the grandmother, which visually signify the hardships she has endured. For both works, cutouts eliminate the immediate context or background of the images presented and thus make them transportable to other contexts. The portability thus implied adds a uni-



11 Hung Liu, *Resident Alien* (1988, 90 × 80). Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery

is also marked as “alien.” The naturalization and immigration agency and its green cards represent the U.S. state, that which circumscribed the potential freedom from Maoist repression. Three identities collide: her Chinese identity, the American identity she would like to claim, and the American identity she is assigned. The painting is also uncannily Orwellian; George Orwell wrote his novel *1984* in 1948.

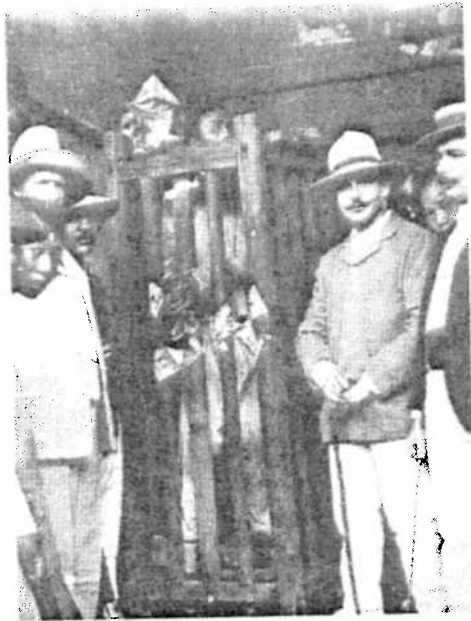
To further debunk the fortune cookie stereotype, Liu created the *Cookie Queen* (1995, 67 × 48). This cutout painting was first shown in the exhibition in Baltimore mentioned above, commemorating its bustling China trade in the nineteenth century. It was flanked by a painting of jazz singer Billie Holiday on one side and baseball legend Babe Ruth on the other. Holiday and Ruth are of course famous figures known to many, while the woman worker in the fortune cookie factory depicted here is anonymous. “Her identity—indeed, her fortune in life—is unknown to us, since Americans who go to Chinese restaurants have virtually no awareness of the workers who stuff glad tidings into fortune cookies.”²³ By the sheer act of juxtaposition and its ostentatious incongruity, the painting puts the nameless woman on an equal plane with the two celebrity figures, who are all equally memorialized in large cutouts. In similarly themed works such as *Chinaman* (1995, 75 × 36) and *Laundry Lady* (1995, 72 × 38), Liu provides constructive representations of racialized stereotypes. The title *Chinaman* refers to the racist

epithet used to denigrate Chinese men since the nineteenth century. By painting an ordinary lion dancer in monumental size, by unconventionally showing his face in an exalted gesture (hence he is no longer just an instrument that hides behind the mask and moves the exotic lion to dance), and by presenting him as a cutout figure, Liu ascribes heroic qualities to the racist stereotype of the “Chinaman.” Recall that Maxine Hong Kingston revised the term *Chinamen* into *China Men* in her book of the same title as an act of restoration of the manhood and dignity of those whose “M” was dwarfed in *Chinamen*. Hers was an arduous historical reconstruction as well as narrative representation of the history of Chinese men in all their multifarious and important contributions to the United States in order to reject the narrativizing of their history as emasculation. Hung Liu may be seen as following her footsteps here.

IDENTITY FRAGMENT 4: ANTAGONISM AGAINST THE WESTERN GAZE

Hung Liu created a series of paintings based on photographs about China and Chinese people taken by Western travelers, from a collection entitled *The Face of China as Seen by Photographers and Travelers, 1860–1912*.²⁴ This set of paintings offers a different structure of gaze than those about prostitutes as Liu’s reinscription is supposedly of the Western gaze on Chinese objects. In the paintings about prostitutes, a Chinese immigrant artist looks at Chinese men looking at Chinese prostitutes and anticipates the gaze of the Western viewer and art buyer; in these paintings, a Chinese immigrant woman artist looks at Western men looking at Chinese men and women and equally anticipates the Western gaze. In either case, we need to posit the shared, seeming external Western gaze inside the frame, its anticipation structuring the visual economy of the apparent and already multi-layered gazing.

The right panel in the diptych *Souvenir* (1990, 48 × 64 × 8, figure 13) shows the image of a few well-suited Western men posing in front of a Chinese prisoner locked in a wooden cage in a photograph shot in September 1904 in Shanghai. According to the exhibition catalog, the cage was a form of execution for criminals: “Major criminals were sometimes left to die publicly as an example to the innocent. A ‘cage’ was constructed so that the inmate could either stand on tiptoe to relieve the pressure around his neck or finally suspend himself until he is



12 Original photograph depicting execution in old Shanghai, September 1904 from *The Face of China as Seen by Photographers and Travelers 1860-1912* (New York: Aperture, 1978), 88.

strangled."²⁵ The clean and well-dressed Westerners are in stark contrast with the prisoner and the few Chinese men shown partially on the edges of the frame. The facial expressions of most of these white men are rather hard to read, but the man second from the right wears a distinct grin under a well-shaped moustache. This man also gazes into the camera, self-consciously posing for the photograph. This posing accentuates the function of the caged prisoner as a spectacle, a "souvenir," as Hung Liu's entitlement of this nameless photograph implies, for the Westerners to be brought back home.

Hung Liu's mimicry of this photograph into a painting suggests two simultaneous dynamics. On the one hand, there is the obvious critique of the voyeuristic gaze of the intended Western viewers of the photograph as well as the gaze of the Western men inside the photograph. These Western men had first gazed at the prisoner, posed with him, then anticipated the photography to be a record of



13 Hung Liu, *Souvenir* (1990, 48 x 64 x 8). Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery

their witness of Chinese cruelty to be seen by other Western viewers. The gazes here are quite uniform in the sense that they are all positioned to turn China into the embodiment of otherness and difference. The few partial images of the Chinese men in the photograph, obviously showing curiosity at the photographer and not at the prisoner, suggest their own indifference to the prisoner as well. The dynamic here is reminiscent of that of the infamous photograph of Chinese onlookers gleefully watching a Chinese revolutionary being beheaded by a Japanese soldier that Lu Xun so viscerally criticized as a quintessential representation of characteristic Chinese apathy and ignorance in the early twentieth century. Hung Liu's critique does not seem to have centered so much on Chinese apathy as on the Western gaze as a modernizing and colonizing one.

On the other hand, the second interpretation takes into account Hung Liu's anticipation of the first dynamic being received and gazed at by American viewers of her painting based on the photograph. In other words, the question here is