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If America Were Really China or How Christopher Columbus Discovered Asia

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> They have not yet realized, that time having manufactured time, that we have finally become them. Rafaël Confiant *Case à Chine*[1]

The Chinese first populated America 3 millennia ago, and have been going there regularly ever since. Chinese American author Shawn Wong's hero in *Homebase* gets this story from an old Native American encountered on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. Angel Island was the "back door" Ellis Island, a detention centre where would-be Chinese immigrants were held in the early twentieth-century, while their family affiliations and right to immigrate were verified; "normal" immigration procedures for Chinese were suspended by the 1882 Exclusion Law. The legislation denied right of entry and American citizenship to all Chinese except those who were close relatives of existing American citizens. When the hero of Wong's novel visits the detention centre on the island in the 1970s it is abandoned, derelict and about to be demolished.

> 'You know people say I look Chinese.'...[said the old Indian]
> ...
> 'People say I look Chinese,' he repeated.
> I looked at him in the dim light. He did look Chinese.
> 'Where are you from,?' I asked.
> 'Acoma'.
> 'Lots of Chinese in New Mexico?'
> He started laughing and lit up another cigarette. 'Where are you from?'
> 'Berkeley.'
> 'Where are you from originally?'
> Berkeley.'
> 'How long you been here?'
> 'Three days.'
> 'No. How long you been in the United States?'
> 'All my life.'
> 'You mean you ain't born in China.'
> 'What do you mean? Don't I look like I come from Gallup?'
> 'You ain't Navajo. You Chinese. You like me.'
> 'You ain't Chinese, though.'
> 'My ancestors came from China thirty thousand years ago and settled in Acoma Pueblo.'
> 'Is that why you look Chinese?'
> 'Naw, my grandfather was Chinese.'
> 'Your grandfather was Chinese?...'
> 'He wandered into New Mexico and married a widow before anyone knew he was Chinese.' [2]

1 Paris: Mercure de France, 2007, p. 279.
2 Shawn Wong, *Homebase,* New York: Penguin Books, pp. 82-83.

An old “Indian,” a “native” American, Chinese because his ancestors immigrated tens of thousands years ago, but also Chinese and “native” because his grandfather in the nineteenth-century immigrated to California and married a “native” American.

In between the two migratory moments, according to a Chinese seventeenth century history book, America was “re-discovered,” and named Fusang 扶桑, the equivalent, in the pre-modern Chinese world-vision of the lost continent of Atlantis. The Chinese Buddhist missionary Hui Shen 慧深 (in Japanese, Kei-shin) around the year 500 had set sail from China's eastern seaboard and hit land 10,000 kilometres east of China.[3] Once he had returned to China Hui Shen made a report of his discovery to the Emperor who reacted with some indifference to the news;;[4] what interested the supreme rulers of China more than finding a continent, was finding the substance that would give them longevity, if not eternal life, and indeed in the third century before our era numerous maritime missions had been dispatched in the vain search for plants that would enhance life expectancy. Of what interest was Fusang, yet to be named America, if it could not provide this?

Almost a thousand years after Hui Shen's voyage, Chinese ships again arrived in America, beating Columbus to the post by a number of decades. The Chinese explorer was Zheng He, an imperial eunuch appointed admiral of the fleet by the Ming Emperor Zhu Di. However, once again the Chinese sailed away, and that is why there is today no United States of Fusang, and also why the capital is not Zhu Di City, District of Zhenghe, but rather Washington, District of Columbia, USA.

It was in the mid-to-late nineteenth century that the dream of America, of California, of the Gold Rush, that gave us the Chinese translation of San Francisco – Old Gold Mountain 舊金山- became immensely attractive to a southern Chinese population devastated by the economically ruinous

3 The French orientalist Joseph de Guignes in his *Recherches sur les navigations des Chinois du côté de l'Amérique, et sur quelques peuples situés à l'extrémité orientale de l'Asie* (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 1761) was the first to evoke this “discovery,” but later European sinologists were to discredit and denigrate his findings. However, twentieth-century specialists such as Joseph Needham accredited the theory of visits and migrations to the Americas by Asians over a sustained period of time lasting two millenia starting in the the 3rd century before our era. Needham also supports the theory that earlier migrations from Asia to the Americas had taken place some millenia before; see Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, IV:3, 548-549 (Cambridge: Cambrige University Press, 1971) and see also the study in Chinese by Wei Junxian, *Zhongguoren faxian Meizho chu kao* (Taibei: Shshi chuban gongsi, 1975). Thus Gavin Menzies' book *1421: The Year China Discovered the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002) is just the latest in a long series of texts recounting the prowess of Chinese mariners and promoting the claim that “the Chinese discovered America.”

4 Why do we talk of Chinese emperors and of a Chinese Empire? Quite simply because the West decided to imagine China that way. Before the modern West imposed its epistemology on China those inhabiting and ruling the space now called the Chinese Empire, called it simply *tianxia*, meaning literally “what is under the sky,” in other words 'the world,' the known world.

impact of British imperialist encroachment. The opium trade which Britain and other powers had forced upon China, waging the Opium Wars in order to prise open its ports and hinterland, literally impoverished southern China and led millions to seek economic refuge overseas.[5] Many were tempted by contracts which left them virtually enslaved as coolies in foreign lands. Their preferred destination was America, country of the *Fakei/Huaqi* 花棋 «flowery flag», as the Stars and Stripes were called by the Chinese. The United States were also known as *Meiguo* 美國 «the beautiful country», or again simply as America, transliterated as *A-mei-lei-ga* 亞美利加 in Cantonese.[6] It was a land, particularly after the Rush following the mid-nineteenth-century discovery of the precious metal in California, where the streets were reputed to be paved with gold. For the Chinese America was not a utopian refuge from persecution as it was for many European immigrants, but rather rather a temporary detour made necessary by economic hard times in China, as the straightforward lyrics from a nineteenth-century Cantonese folk song illustrate:

爸爸去金山
快快要寄銀
全家靠住你
有銀好寄回

Father has gone to Gold Mountain
Hurry up and send money
The whole family is counting on you
When you have money send it back quick.[7]

But the Chinese need to find alternative sources of income and wealth by emigrating to California also coincided with mid-nineteenth century America's need to rebuild itself as a nation-state.

When Baudrillard declares in his *Amérique* (America) that twentieth-century America has no problem of identity, and that it does not "cultivate origins and mythic authenticity," he neglects the ideological work of the nineteenth-century that inscribed the myth of America as the land of refuge welcoming those seeking justice and liberty.[8] The historical reality is that that myth of America as a generous haven for all the world's downtrodden which is so much a part of its modern identity, and is even inscribed in the form of the words of Emma Lazarus on the base of the Statue of Liberty, is

5 See Gregory Lee, *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness*, Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2003, passim.

6 Since most contacts with China before the twentieth century occurred via the Cantonese-speaking ports of the south, Canton, Macau, Hong Kong, many Western names and terms were transliterated into Cantonese, when these were subsequently pronounced in Mandarin the sounds were frequently quite distant from the sounds of the original European language and their Cantonese transliteration. For instance, America, A-mei-lei-ga in Cantonese, becomes Ya-mei-li-jia in Mandarin or "modern standard Chinese."

7 Cited in Marlon K. Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, p. 41.

8 Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique*, Paris: Grasset, 1986, p. 76.

founded on a lack of memory, not to say a lie.

America had to re-imagine and reconstruct itself: to institute the imaginary America that Walt Whitman had mapped out in verse. In order to do so post-bellum America, now settled within its new northern and southern borders, and which had now "pacified the Far West" by practically annihilating the indigenous population, was in need of another vision of alterity against which to construct itself. This Other was to be found across the "American lake," across the Pacific, in the form of the Celestial Empire, China.

Thus, China was imagined and represented as decadent, old, decrepit, a faded civilization ill-adapted to the new industrial and scientific world of which America would become the herald and the embodiment. But if China was decadent and backward so must be its people. So how was it possible to denigrate China without denigrating its people, and indeed its emigrants? And what place could such degenerate "untouchables" have in the new consolidated United States of America?

And so over a period of several decades propagandists and politicians militated for the legal and actual exclusion of Chinese from America. The project to exclude Chinese people from America, from citizenship, and from simply being American, started around 1850, was partly accomplished by 1870, with the Naturalization Act which denied the right of naturalization to Chinese, and was formally concluded with the adopting of Exclusion Act of 1882.[9]

Furthermore, so as to protect Americans and Americaness in China, a legal and jurisdictional cocoon was constructed. In 1844 the United States became the first nation to demand and obtain extra-territorial rights for its citizens in China; a situation which ensured their immunity from Chinese law. Americans thus removed themselves from Chinese jurisdiction. Juridically Americans when in China were in America. By the same token, the Chinese were excluded even in their own country. By the turn of the century so naturalized and legitimate had this system of extraterritoriality become that Congress, in 1906, established the United States District Court for China.[10]

Academia made its contribution in the person of Andrew D. White, president of Cornell University, who lent his support to Senator Sargent, the prime advocate of the exclusionists in Congress. According to the 1877 congressional record, White expressed a "deep-seated dread of this influx of

9 See Gregory Lee, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers: Lyricism, Nationalism and Hybridity in China and Its Others*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996, chapter 7.

10 There also existed a "US Postal Agency Shanghai China" which issued stamps sold in local currency. The stamps were valid for mail dispatched to the United States.

Asiatics of a type which it seems to me can never form any hopeful element in this nation."

In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act passed the House of Representatives with 201 votes in favour and a mere 37 against the measure. It thus became practically impossible for new Chinese immigrants to enter the country. After the 1882 Exclusion Act had been passed, there followed a second set of measures aimed at maintaining American "purity" : almost every state in the union passed anti-miscegenation laws preventing the marriage of whites with non-whites. As for the Chinese Exclusion Act, it was not finally repealed until 1943, and not until 1967 did the US Supreme Court declare anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional.

In the late nineteenth-century, for the millions legally excluded from the United States, the dream of America was displaced onto other regions in need of cheap labour: Australia, Canada, South Africa. But all of these would eventually put up barriers too. And then there were those Chinese who naively and unwittingly signed contracts which promised them America, but which in reality took them to European colonies off the coast of the Americas where in the wake of the abolition of slavery Chinese and Indian coolies were used to replace the former African slaves.

The story of the exclusion of the Chinese is now well-known to those taking introductory courses in Asian American history in US universities which over the past thirty years have developed ethnic American studies departments. They would also study that other history that is increasingly included in such courses: that of the unjust, and even illegal, internment of Japanese Americans during the Second War in concentration camps in the American desert. While Americans whose forbears hailed from other belligerent states such as Germany and Italy did not suffer such a fate, Japanese Americans were not only denied their liberty but had to wait forty years for an apology from the American government. That these narratives should be part of “mainstream ” American studies today seems self-evident, but they are not.

But what about the fate of those attracted to but yet spurned by the dreamland that was America?

The Caribbean Road to New York

> “Martinique is a part of America. You just need to find the road to New York and walk straight ahead, I tell you.”
>
> Raphaël Confiant, *Case à Chine*[11]

Raphaël Confiant has recently told the story of the Chinese coolie in the French Caribbean, the

11 P. 102

Chinese coolie who had “signed up” for America but found himself imprisoned on an island.

Raphaël Confiant, spent the first half of his literary career crafting a literary language out of the spoken language of the people of Martinique – a language shared by the descendants of white colonials, black slaves, the half-black bourgeoisie, and the descendants of Indian and Chinese migrant labourers.

Confiant now writes in French so as to reach a wider public, but still weaves Creole into his narratives. His latest work tells the story of the Chinese presence in Martinique, the story of the desperate economic and political conditions of mid to late nineteenth-century China that led many Chinese to leave for what they thought was America. The book is called *Case à Chine* (Chinese shack), in Creole: *“*Kay Chine*”*.

At the outset the young hero, Chen Sang, who, like a character in the fiction of magic realist Garcia Marquez, lives to a venerable old age of around a hundred years, is obliged to leave southern China and finds himself, having crossed three oceans, on Martinique. As Chen Sang's grandson is told in the narrative:

> You should know young man...that in our race the men have always dreamed of returning to their homeland, whereas the women, being more realistic, have preferred to confront the real world. There are those, like your grandfather who went even further in his fantasies, since it is told that *he* actually tried to get to New York. New York no less! It's true, of course, that in Canton and Shanghai the [coolie] traders had seduced our ancestors with the word “America”. My mother often said that many emigrants had accepted to sign a contract because the word sounded sweet to their ears. Laughable, isn't it?” [12]

Like his fellow immigrants, Chen Sang had indeed signed a contract as an indentured labourer for a period of five years after which time he would theoretically be free to go back to China, almost no-one ever did. Side by side with his Indian counterparts, he cut the sugar cane that used to be cut by the African slaves, before the abolition of slavery.

Chinese and Indians were brought to numerous destinations in the Caribbean. The British, needless to say, brought in coolies to Jamaica and Trinidad, and the Spanish to Cuba. but also, as the dominant maritime power of the moment to Cuba. In 1858, the *London Illustrated News* reported:

> Between November, 1854, and September, 1855...nearly 11,000 embarked for Cuba...and amongst them the mortality before they got to the end of their voyage was 14 ¾ per cent. Our laws, though well intended, could not cover the whole case, and it is somewhat remarkable that the mortality on board British vessels engaged in this traffic was greater than the mortality in other vessels. When we find legislation attains very imperfectly the objects it aims at more immediately within its scope, we cannot be surprised that it should not be successful in dealing with things so strange and

12 Confiant p. 344.

> so remote as the emigration of crowds of Chinamen.
>
> ...The mode, too, in which they are sometimes collected is not creditable. Chinese passage-brokers residing at Hong-Kong, often men of straw, dispatch agents to the mainland, who seem to find plenty of persons desirous to emigrate, or whom they tempt to emigrate, and who buy of them, at five dollars a piece, a bargain-ticket signed by the broker. The emigrants then repair to Hong-Kong, where they receive, on paying the balance, a passage-ticket for California or Australia. The brokers thus collect a great number of emigrants; and, having got their money, do not always provide the passage, or they take up any old ship that offers. Our Government, in spite of its many precautions, seems sometimes to be made instrumental in helping the brokers to impose on the emigrants. As it can scarcely prevent all abuses, it seems doubtful whether the Legislature should not withdraw from the attempt to regulate and organise the emigration of the Chinese.

The novel *Monkey Hunting* by Cristina Garcia tells a similar story to Confiant's about Chinese immigration to Cuba:

> The men [having arrived in Havana] were ordered to peel off their filthy rags and were given fresh clothes to present themselves to the Cubans. But there was no mistaking their wretchedness: bones jutted from their cheeks; sores cankered their flesh. Not even a strict regimen of foxglove could have improved their appearance. The recruits were rounded up in groups of sixty-wood haulers and barbers, shoemakers, fishermen, farmers - then parceled out in smaller groups to the waiting landowners.
> A dozen Cubans on horseback, armed with whips, led the men like a herd of cattle to the barracón to be sold. Inside, Chen Pan was forced to strip and be examined for strength, like horses or oxen that were for sale in the country districts of China. Chen Pan burned red with shame, but he didn't complain. Here he could no longer rely on the known ways. Who was he now without his country?
> One hundred fifty pesos was the going rate for a healthy chino. A Spanish landowner paid two hundred for him, probably on account of his height. His father had taught him that if you knew the name of a demon, it had no power to harm you. Quickly, Chen Pan asked one of the riders for the name of his buyer. Don Urbano Bruzón de Peñalves. How [in the world] would he ever remember that?
> ... Now there was no question of his purpose in Cuba. He was there to cut sugar cane. All of them were. Chinos. Asiáticos. Culís. Later, there would be other jobs working on the railroads or in the copper mines of El Cobre, five hundred miles away. But for now what the Cubans wanted most were strong backs for their fields.[13]

Chinese immigration to Cuba left its traces not only in Cuba but also in the Cuban émigré population in the United States; in New York for instance the Cuban-Chinese hybrid restaurant has been for decades a major feature of Manhattan's multicultural landscape.

But in Confiant's story the Chinese *never* get to New York. Sino-Caribbean hybridity remains sino-french, sino-Creole, sino-Martiniquais, finally just Martiniquais.

The Chinese coolie in Confiant's story, Chen Sang eventually runs away from the sugar plantation having slaughtered an intolerable overseer. Refusing to believe that he is on an island, still seeking his America, his utopia like a character in a frenetic and ex-centric version of the Wizard of Oz, he treks its length and breadth of the Caribbean island looking for the (yellow brick) road to America.

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13 New York: Alfred Knopf, 2003, pp 20-21.

> Chen Sang had roamed all over the southern part of the land, moving only by night and living off roots he found along the borders of the plantations. He almost gave in to despair when he realized that everywhere the sea presented an obstacle to his dreams....So this land was a an island after all, as the cane-cutters beside whom he had laboured so many years had always maintained....The Chinese had not believed them.
>
> [Chen Sang would tell them:] 'You are talking rubbish! Martinique is a part of America. You just need to find the road to New York and walk straight ahead, I tell you.'
>
> 'And there all he was doing was repeating what the recruiters heralded in the slum quarters of Canton they haunted offering to all who would listen lashings of rice wine. ... [All this was confirmed ...] by the famous Captain Morton. At the height of the storm which threatened to send the good ship Galileo to depths of the ocean, the British officer had endlessly harangued his crew and the emigrants:
>
> 'Courage! Once we get through this, the gateway to the New World will open wide to you!'
>
> And didn't the labour contract of the young Chen Sang not stipulate that he was emigrating to «America» for five years, at the end of which the company was meant to repatriate him?...[But try as he might he could not obtain from the locals the slightest clue as to how to find the road out.] New York, then, remained a big dream. He had been constrained to sign a new contract since he did not have the wherewithal to pay his debts at the plantation shop....'[14]

If the story of Chen Sang can be encompassed by the metadiscipline of American studies, and I suggest that it can, the question becomes one of its boundaries. Should they be spatial, physical? Should they be temporal? For surely implied in the question who is America, is embedded the question when was America? Or should they also relate to the imaginary, to the realm of desire, including unfulfilled desire? Is America not also the imaginary that drove, and still drives so many, to risk their lives to reach it? Is America not also the little Americas that those who cannot physically attain America construct themselves, with the aid of Hollywood and globalized consumption practices, in Asia, in Africa, in Europe ? Is America not rather the Americas, and its margins?

Chen Sang, exhausted, hunted and starving is saved by a black woman who is full of character with whom he goes on to found a hybrid dynasty. And finally generations later it falls to Raphaël, the namesake of the author, to tell the story of the Chinese on the island. Raphaël feels Chinese but also Martiniquais. The multiplicity, the singularity, the complexity of this mixed, intertwined ethno-linguistic community is foregrounded towards the end of the book when Raphaël tells the part of the story that takes place in the latter half of the twentieth century.

> The mystery of sounds, or more precisely, the relationship between sounds and the meaning of words, intrigued me greatly. Having always heard three languages at home – Creole, French and Chinese -, having become used to Spanish and English thanks to transistor radios that brought us the rumba and calypso all day long, having witnessed the arguments in Arabic between the Syrian shopkeepers along François-Argo Street as well as the prayers spoken to Hindu gods in Tamul in the Au-Béraud district, having heard all this had taught me the singularity of each, not in each, but in us. I mean to say that when my great grandfather hinted, *in Chinese*, that I should pay more attention to what he said, I who usually only half-listened to what he was saying, he was not the

14 Confiant pp. 102-103.

> same person as when he told me the same thing in his hesitant and sometimes jumbled French. As for Man Fideline [his very old black great grandmother], her incessant jabbering during our walks downtown, in Creole and in Banana-French, paralleled my grandfather's case. I was certain that changing language was equal to changing personality or inhabiting another part of oneself. Myself, in Creole, I was the little negro-Chinese bastard, a born vagabond, who took advantage of the absence of his teachers to explore, in a gang, the forbidden quarters of the neighbourhood. On the other hand in French, I became the good little boy who politely greeted the adults and obeyed without complaint their commands. And the few words of Chinese I could muster had the effect of transforming me into a warrior. What would my grandfather have said had he known that I would dream at night of being the sidekick of the legendary Chinese bandit [he had fled during his youth], that warlord of Yunnan he so cursed.[15]

Chineseness for Confiant is part of a larger composite universe that has coalesced in this officially French dominion, in this fictional, yet real, corner of France separated from Paris by an ocean and 8,000 kilometres.

Confiant, describing the way in which the Chinese community is now part of the general, now hybrid, community that is Martinique, the narrator tells us:

> When they [the majority] name us and nickname us all “China” --- Mrs. China, China-Chinese, China, Dr. China and so on --- they believe they are consigning us to what is indistinct, and of our lives, all they retain is what they believe is our eternal passivity.
>
> They have not yet realized, that time having manufactured time, that we have finally become them. Not the them they were before we landed in this land, this stump of earth that forms part of this arc that constitutes such a pretty eyelash for America, but a new “Us”.
>
> Our blood is mixed with theirs, against their will as much as in line with their desire, our voices blend in gradually with their songs, with their laughing...
>
> Because the rotten luck is still there...
>
> Because we have to get over the mourning for the Land Before This One,
>
> Because living together while being so different is such a challenge,
>
> Because to finally carry on one's back the improbability of the whole world, is no simple game, by God! [16]

Case à Chine focusses on the Chineseness of Martinique's community. But Confiant's universe is much larger, taking in France, Britain, European, Asian and African cultures in general. But his Europe and his France and his Africa and Asia are recounted spaces that are interweaved with strands of Chineseness, jumbled, left-behind, dislocated, an image of the history of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, the modernity of which colonialism was an intrinsic component whether in Havana, in Fort-de-France, or in Shanghai.

Yet was this very mixedness that late nineteenth-century scientific racism, which bolstered and justified colonialist practices, held responsible for the non-white peoples supposed incapacity to

15 Confiant p. 403.
16 Confiant p. 279.

govern themselves and to be intellectually productive. Legendre, for example, as late as 1925 was still profoundly attached to the scientific hierarchisation of races which accounted for racial degeneracy in terms of the "impregnation" by the non-white of pure racial national bodies. Thus, Chinese or "yellow" civilization can be discounted, and Chinese intelligence with it:

> There is, and there has never been, a yellow civilization, no more than there has been a negro civilization. The white race alone, constituted of Aryans and Semites, has been, in the history of peoples, a ferment of intelligence and activity….The Yellow is only a métis of conquering whites and negroids.[17]

The Chinese people's alleged mental weakness was also due to this wanton mixing of "races":

> To what then should this deficiency in the Chinese brain be attributed? Without doubt to the catastrophic reaction of this mass of negroids and métis - the Yellow - forming the majority of the population and whose blood, by dint of a widely practiced polygamy, impregnated the elite, originally of white race.[18]

But the fact that this very mixedness, this membrane of practices resulting from forced hybrid cultural matrices, whether individual or communal, have been a central constituent in the new writing of the late twentieth century is evident from the corpus of twentieth-century literature that starts with Joyce. That it may constitute the acknowledged vector of writing and representation of the twenty-first century depends on our capacity constantly to remember, to re-memorize, and to re-fashion its lessons in a constantly changing globalized socio-cultural environment.

A Film Yet To Be Made: *The Story of Chan/Chen*

I have made little reference to film so far, not because there have not been filmic representations of Chinese in America or of Chinese Americans, but because the film that would comprehensively relate the complexity of the story of Chinese (in) America has not been and perhaps could not be made. One Chinese American film in particular pointed to this probable impossibility: The film *Chan is Missing*, a mystery set in San Francisco's Chinatown, told the allegorical story of a Chinese cab driver who went missing with a large sum of money.[19] The film recounts and represents the fruitless search of two of his fellow taxi drivers, and business partners, for Chan Hung. The representation of the quest provides the opportunity to show aspects of Chinatown daily life that were, and for most remain, unknown to the American movie spectator. In American studies, and in American cultural production, Chan is still missing. S/he is still missing because "mainstream" America, and American studies while making a place for non-white America, for Ethnic Studies departments and Asian American studies programmes, is still, despite the rhetoric of tolerance and

17 Legendre, *L'Illustration: Journal Universel*, 26 December 1925.
18 Legendre, *L'Illustration: Journal Universel*, 26 December 1925.
19 Wayne Wang directed the, first Chinese American, feature film *Chan is missing* in 1981. Chan is the Cantonese reading of the surname 陳, and Chen its pronunciation in *putonghua* or modern standard Chinese.

multiculturalism, incapable of *integrating* Chinese American writing and history and film into its logic and its consciousness. What is more, the text below indicates, if the earlier racist discourse is now sublimated in the public media, there persists an exotic marginalizing vision of Chineseness in America indicative of an incapacity to see that what is at stake is not just minority history but a history that interrogates and calls for a revision of the story of the totality that would be American history were it written:

In Canton Chan had bought a ticket for California, but they had transported him to this overgrown island, a fact he did not understood until many years later having marched through the desert from Melbourne to Durban without finding the Old Gold Mountain, a much larger undertaking than circumscribing Martinique.[20]

Chan would played rugby in Australia, which was somewhat ironic since he had been banned and barred from the whites-only colony several times. Chan was playing a modern-day enforcer's role now, "physical presence combined with skill," said the sports paper, which was once again ironic since in previous decades not only was Chan classified a weakling but was also described as degenerate, unbalanced, demented and generally mentally deficient. A diet of Australian dairy food and organic barbecued tofu had evidently resulted in fortifying Chan's physique and in changing his mind. But what had changed the white Australian's mind? Never mind. The sports report described Chan as "a late bloomer." Very late in fact since he had not been allowed into the game for more than a century. "But this was not a gentleman's game." And Chan was still waiting to take a wicket.

The restaurant that Chan opened in Minnesota got mixed reviews – well, Chan had never been near up a wok before arriving in America.

> *"I've been three times and have had so-so to bad experiences. First time I had the 3 seafood combo. It was delicately flavoured, i.e., a little dull. Last time I had beef with Chinese broccoli. But the beef was a bit tough and flavourless. Am I ordering the wrong things?"*
> *" Oh no! Sorry to hear this as I was looking forward to trying Chan's."*

20 A notorious colour bar excluded would-be immigrants of colour from Australia for several decades in the twentieth-century, and the Chinese in particular had known this fate as early as the nineteenth century. See Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1989).

Chan was not cut out for catering. An illustrious moment in Chan's career came with the winning of a local foundation arts prize. Chan was acclaimed, mostly by family and friends, "a major Napa Valley poet and visual artist." Of course, Chan could not survive by poetry alone and had a day job as a visiting professor of the Hospitality Management Faculty of the Culinary Institute of America, Santa Barbara.

Despite not being a wizard with the wok, Chan was capable of making real fresh noodles from plain flour and water, just like grandfather had shown him. Flapping the elongated dough into longer and longer strips, he had looked like he was performing some elaborate kungfu exercise in the dimly lit scullery in the old Edwardian house which had once been a seaman's café for Chinese mariners who, legally obliged by British and American laws, had manned the transatlantic convoys during World War Two. But the café had closed when all its clientèle was deported back to China in 1946 for having dared to demand equal wages with white seamen during the war. The Blue Funnel shipping company collaborated with Britain's MI5 rounding up Chinese sailors in night raids and leaving thousands of white women to rear their children alone. And that was why Chan was now penniless and why his grandchild watched mesmerised as the noodles took shape.

But Americans wanted real noodles, yellow noodles out of a packet.

> *"I'm not suggesting that Chan's is going downhill. It's probably that I'm ordering the wrong things."*
>
> *"The key is not to expect too much. or head to Vancouver or Toronto for the real deal."*

Chan indeed had frequented Canadian Chinatowns as early as the end of the nineteenth century. In 1883, Chan's Canton-San Francisco passage ticket had been converted without his knowing into a Vancouver passage after the passing of the 1882 US Exclusion Law rendered the landing of new immigrants impossible. Chan was later joined by other Chans. with great loss of face, since Louis, had not made good, they were obliged to work for Mr. Sin at number 7 Douglas St. They are all listed in the 1901 census:

08/19/14 ***Chan, Louis****, m, lodger, s, 10 May 1858, 42, CHN, to Can: 1884, Conf, Laundry hand.*
08/19/15 ***Chan, Long****, m, lodger, s, 4 Dec 1878, 22, CHN, to Can: 1899, Conf, Laundry hand.*

08/19/16 ***Chan, Foo****, m, lodger, m, 5 May 1864, 36, CHN, to Can: 1899, Conf, Laundry hand.*
08/19/17 ***Chan, Tong****, m, lodger, s, 1 Mar 1879, 22, CHN, to Can: 1899, Conf, Laundry hand.*
08/19/18 ***Chan, Ging****, m, lodger, s, 2 Jan 1877, 24, CHN, to Can: 1899, Conf, Laundry hand.*

Chan was averse to laundering and found it as humiliating as the intellectual Chinese poet Wen Yiduo who would construct one of his better known "patriotic" poems around the shame of China reduced to a laundry service for Americans. Moreover, Chan had already been the object of a hate-campaign in England, in 1906. Chan's laundry – accused of using Moonlight soap - was threatening English laundries that claimed that whites washed whiter.

> *"No laundry today," said the chorus girl to Detective Chan. "So I notice," retorted Chan, nodding towards the chorus girl's scanty costume.*

> *"I want to punch Charlie Chan in his too pregnant stomach that bellies out his white linen maternity suit."*

Chan went missing with the cab fare. And what a cab fare: $4,000!

> *"Nice set-up, but ultimately disappointing, but there were marvelous views of Chinese San Francisco."*

Chan was no peasant. He had studied for the Chinese civil service examinations, but found himself stymied by their abolition in 1905. He studied accountancy but found there was no post for a Chinese bank clerk in British Hong Kong. He had mastered English and even learnt French before shipping out. But somehow as hero of the Honolulu Police his linguistic skills disappeared to leave Chan talking like a fortune cookie (a great American invention, just like the chop suey roll):

> *"Dog afraid of losing job if make mistake, often fail to see tiger approach of not instructed to watch for tiger."*
> *"Old fashioned detective have own poor methods."*

In Hawaii, Chan also spent two years in gaol for laundering. Money that is. Chan had run a gambling operation from his back kitchen between 1987 and 1993. But Chan had been obliged to resort to such measures. Chan had been left penniless in California, all possessions having been lost when the family house had been burnt down in the arson attack on Santa Clara Chinatown during the late nineteenth-century Anti-Chinese Exclusion Campaign.
But undaunted Chan moved back to California. By 1997 things seemed to have changed for the better and Chan was elected California State Assemblywoman, even becoming Democratic Majority Leader in 2002.

There was the scenario. But the film has not yet been made.

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I have thus far discussed different kinds of yearnings for America, of those seeking utopia, and of those searching simply for temporary economic relief. For some the desire for America was consummated but then disappointment followed as they were subjected to racist exclusion or marginalization. For others the desire was frustrated as their voyage led them not to America but to substitute Americas.

There is one further category of migration to America I should liked to mention, it is an emigration that is perhaps the most pervasive in the modern world: armchair migration, or immobile migration. Elsewhere in this volume the importance of American cinematic production and the impact of its processes on Chinese cinematic production has been discussed. But, here I refer not simply to dubbed American movies that have encroached on, not to say dominated, world cinematographic and televisual consumption around the globe. In 2009, the Fall of the Berlin Wall was commemorated. In late 1989 the population of Eastern Europe suddenly had access to a way of life they had not experienced directly before. But what they had experienced, and what perhaps fired their imagination physically to enjoy more of it, was the access to the televisual representation

of Western consumerism and in particular of the American dream. East German had since the late 1950s watched what their western compatriots watched.

In China, where the Wall did not fall, the American model had been equally pervasive. Almost everything Western, including French critical theory that play an important part in the intellectual debate of the late 1980s, was filtered through America. And the tragic end to the democracy movement showed spectacularly the degree to which Chinese urban intellectual youth was wedded to the American ideology of liberty that was supposed to accompany capitalistic liberalization. When the Goddess of Democracy, a crude replica of the Statue of Liberty was, rolled into Tiananmen Square in late May, it was in ignorance of the historical context of China's relationship with America: the sad irony being that as the Statue of Liberty began her reign over New York's Ellis Island immigration station and welcomed the “huddled masses” of Europe, the Chinese had just been legally excluded from immigrating and from being American. On the other side of the continent would be Chinese immigrants were greeted not by Liberty but by the detention camp on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay.

Yet even after the the débâcle of June 1989, America remained the model of reference with which China's authorities would inspire and chivvy on the country citizens to enter into the spirit of market capitalism. While the dissemination of the Hollywood cinematic product was still strictly controlled, the authorities allowed superficially ambiguous representations of the American way of life to be screened. While seemingly warning about the negative effects of American culture on Chinese values, the mini-series *A Beijinger in New York* simultaneously introduced the early 1990s Chinese spectator to the wonders of American capitalist life.

The mini-series soap *A Beijinger in New York* (*Beijingren zai Niuyue)* showed the early 1990s Chinese television spectator besuited professional white men sipping diet Coke, and chain smoking 555s, a brand of American cigarette which was particularly popular in China.

Soft drinks and cigarettes were the entry point of the Chinese consumer, as early as the beginning of the 1980s, to the American-style consumer utopia to which the Chinese authorities wished their people to aspire. The domestic television soap opera *Beijingren zai Niuyue* (*A Beijinger in New York),* a twenty-one part television series, aired on Chinese television in the autumn and winter of 1993 was a Dallas-type soap opera, a text through which Chinese viewers could mediate their own popular ideology, which then was a collage of pre-Maoist "values" and remnants of post-1949 official Communist-promoted nationalist ideology. Then as today the officially inspired populist ideology emphasised, as had pre-revolutionary era Confucianism, the family unit.

In the mid-1980s, when American televisual products were still invisible on Chinese TV screens, Latin American *telenovelas* dubbed into Chinese were screened two or three episodes back to back, and proved extremely popular with Chinese television audiences. The soaps, in which the action took place principally indoors, lay great stress on apparent social mobility, the illusion of choice and practices of consumption, and, beyond the superficial ideological message, these were the very concerns that Feng Xiaogang's *Beijingren* represented and mediated.

Ien Ang, noted how "personal life" provided the "ideological problematic" of the soap opera, the inner world, the family being "regarded as the ideal cradle for human happiness."[21] The external world, society, was what threatened the ideal.

The classic TV soap, *Dallas* was exceedingly popular with British audiences in the 1980s, because the British TV spectator then possessed little knowledge of the reality of American life. Just as the Hollywood movies of the 1930s-1950s had successfully accompanied the spectators of Britain's cinemas through the Great Depression and the Second World war, *Beijingren* would nourish the secret yearnings of the long materially-deprived Chinese television viewer. Despite the ruin that his family and dreams of being a symphony cellist had become, the protagonist Wang Qiming's two-storey spacious modern home in the New York suburbs represented an attractive and powerful

21 Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination,* London: Routledge, 1985) p. 68.

vision for the Chinese urban dweller inhabiting a small and frugal apartment.

But American manners and customs were also explained and introduced to the then naive Chinese viewer. For instance, when Wang Qiming asked his white American competitor in the clothing business why his friend the buyer had not offered help when he was facing bankruptcy, Wang is given a lesson in the American way: "When you are in trouble you are on your own."

Wang's personal life also fell foul of American customs so alien to the early 1990s Chinese intellectual that he was. It was the love of his family that led him to give up his/her motherland and sacrifice his personal ambitions (his desire to become a professional cellist). But Wang Qiming lost his wife to his American business competitor, saw his daughter seduced by a young white high school student, and later become engaged to be married to the same student's father. But while the TV series was necessarily set in New York, Chinese capitalism, the message seemed to be, *will* be different. But, as China lurched into wild capitalist practices in the late 1990s the effects of Chinese capitalism did nor prove to be different, least of all for women. In capitalist China woman again became a commodity object as feudal attitudes towards women crept back into the male social imaginary.

Now a decade and half after *Beijingren* was screened, there is no longer any need to show the American capitalist model for it has already long since become the Chinese model. No matter now whether the supermarket be French-, American- or Chinese-owned, the model and the practices of consumption are those invented by America.

Now 1500 years after Hui Shen's ship sailed to America, Chinese ships queue up in America's ports to deliver the myriad consumer goods manufactured in China to satisfy the American consumer.

So has America Americanized China? Or is America simply becoming the China it has Americanized.

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