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Rice Culture, Buddhism, Wars, and Diaspora: Mutual Legacies in Heterogeneity in Southeast Asian American and Diasporic Literature

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RICE CULTURE, BUDDHISM, WARS, AND DIASPORA: MUTUAL LEGACIES IN HETEROGENEITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN AMERICAN AND DIASPORIC LITERATURE

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Title: Rice Culture, Buddhism, Wars, and Diaspora: Mutual Legacies in Heterogeneity in Southeast Asian American and Diasporic Literature

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This dissertation studies mutual legacies under the context of heterogeneity of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, including rice culture, Buddhism, wars, and diaspora, all of which play a significant role in configuring Southeast Asians' lives, identities, societies, and ontology in both their home countries and the new world. The selected authors employ writing as a means to assert their identity and connect their old world with the new world. Their literature also transplants their culture on the new world's land by inscribing rice culture and Buddhism. This type of literature also articulates that the traditional, tranquil lives of its people are disturbed and altered by Western colonialism. Portraying their memories of homelands, some authors reveal that the attempt to decolonize leads to several wars, providing chances for Communism, which supports decolonization and eradication of classism in the society, to penetrate into the region and finally take over some countries. The ruin of the nations as a consequence of the wars and the persecution from the totalitarian Communist regimes result in great diaspora of Southeast Asian refugees. The literature by this group of people serves as an arena where they recount these tragic stories, asking for understanding from the audience and negotiating their existence in the new world. In addition, this type of literature is also informed by the authors' experience in the new world, where they encounter difficulties, grappling with several conflicts including the ambivalence of identity, cultural clashes, sexualization, and racial discrimination.

This dissertation establishes Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature as a subfield of Asian American literature. Its heterogeneous quality constitutes the heterogeneity of Asian American literature as a whole. The new voices from this type of literature also introduce new themes—e.g. the themes of rice culture, Buddhism, wars, and Communist persecution—to readers in the field of Asian American literature. Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature also serves as self-articulation for its people, as a minority group in the new world, to represent themselves.

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Kittiphong Praphan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: SOUTHEAST ASIAN AMERICAN AND DIASPORIC LITERATURE

Diaspora is a world phenomenon. In many parts of the globe, there has been great transnational mobility of people, e.g., the Normans settlers in Britain, the Huguenots refugees in South Africa, the Iraqi Sunni escaping from religious persecution in contemporary Sweden, and the Irish fleeing from famine to the United States during the nineteenth century (Esman 3). The diaspora of these people stemmed from different roots including desire for new settlements, wars, political and religious persecutions, economic pressure, and so forth. Apart from the mobility of people, diaspora also connotes several more significant meanings, which can be construed through Lingyan Yang's definition of this term: "the materialist conditions and dialectical process of negotiating with the historical conditions, geographical relocations, cultural displacements, artistic imaginations, philosophical conceptions, or political dispossessions of leaving homes, homelands, home cultures and mother tongues, by necessity or by choice, due to a variety of reasons in different historical epochs" (153). Through this concept, the term diaspora embraces all groups of people who relocate from their initial homes, willingly or unwillingly, to new territories. Besides geographical relocations of people and demographical fluctuations, this social phenomenon also instigates many consequential discourses, such as history, politics, culture, knowledge, and literature. The United States serves as a great example to clarify complex relations between these issues, as it is home to diverse ethnic groups of diasporic people who have brought along their cultural heritages which constitute the present American national ontology, identity, history, economy, culture, and literature.

Southeast Asian diasporic people are among those who historicize the legend of world diaspora. This group of people is heterogeneous, arising from diverse ethnicities, cultural and

historical backgrounds, languages, religions, and homelands. Their home countries are geographically divided into two groups. The first group consists of the mainland countries known as the Indochina, including Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The other group is referred to as the maritime countries consisting of Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, and East Timor. People in different countries speak different languages, have their own distinctive cultures, and belong to different religions. Under this heterogeneity, Southeast Asian diasporic people share mutual legacies among themselves, including rice culture, Buddhism, colonialism, class struggle, wars, and diaspora. Due to various culprits, such as wars, political oppression and persecution, and economic pressure, a huge number of people from this region migrate or immigrate to different parts of the globe. More than a half of them resettle in the United States, while the rest of them rebuild their life in other Western countries including England, France, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Among mutual legacies shared by diasporic Southeast Asians, literature is marked as an important one, in which they portray their lives, society, and experiences in both their home countries and destinations.

Due to the diverse destinations of Southeast Asian diasporic people, in this dissertation, I define Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature as literary works written by Southeast Asians who have migrated or immigrated to other countries, not necessarily confined to the United States. The diasporic writers selected for this dissertation are of Filipino/Filipina, Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese, Cambodian, and Hmong (immigrated from Laos) descent. Although diasporic Southeast Asians also include those from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, and East Timor, their works are not included because they are beyond the scope of this study. As discussed above, Southeast Asian diasporic people share mutual legacies under the concept of heterogeneity. They possess a long history of rice culture and Buddhism. Most countries had

been colonized by Western colonizers; the attempt in decolonization led to several wars in the region. Several countries in the Indochina had to suffer from the persecution by Communist regimes. These significant incidents have left mutual legacies on people in Southeast Asia.

This dissertation defines Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature and establishes it as a subfield of Asian American literature through the study of major authors from various origins. It is probably the first book-length study on this field, which argues that the ontology of Southeast Asians is shaped by the mutual legacies mentioned above. The authors in this dissertation employ literature as a means to assert their existence in the new world and to connect their old world with the new world. This is done through the portrayal of their mutual legacies, which inform their identity, in their literary texts. Doing so, they offer better comprehension about their people as a minority group in the new world. In the case of the United States, a great place in terms of ethnic diversity, this type of literature constitutes the heterogeneity in literary canon and at the same time serves as an arena for new cultures to grow on the American land. As Salman Rushdie argues, "America, a nation of immigrants, has created great literature out of the phenomenon of cultural transplantation, out of the ways in which people cope with a new world" (20). Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature becomes an integral part of such cultural transplantation, as it is considered a product of the transplantation of Southeast Asian culture on the American land. While this type of literature is growing, it creates knowledge about its people and culture, and transmits such knowledge to readers who will better understand them. In the cultural aspect, Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature portrays rice culture and Buddhism as two important forces that maintain the existence of body and souls of its people. Rice serves as the staple in Southeast Asian eating culture, while the rice farming culture is marked as spiritual sustenance of people. Similarly,

Buddhism offers spiritual sanctuary to people, helping them to make sense of the trouble happening in their lives and offering solutions to it. My dissertation further argues that the primary texts also critique Western colonialism by articulating that the long-established lives of people in this region are altered by Western colonialism, which comes in the form of traditional colonialism and neo-colonialism. The attempt to decolonize leads to the Communist wars known as Indochina War. The victories of the tyranny Communist regimes bring about their oppression and persecution of a huge number of the indigenous who are accused of being enemies. All of these incidents result in the great diaspora of people from Southeast Asia, some of whom become writers inscribing their diasporic contexts in the form of literature, which asks for understanding and compassion for their existence in the new world from the audience. Based on these notions, not only do these mutual legacies shape the lives of Southeast Asian diasporic people, but they also inform their literature.

An important characteristic of Asian American and diasporic literature, as can be dissected from the primary texts in this study, has to do with the influence of the past memory of the authors. All of the texts, which include autobiographies and novels, are constructed through past memories of the authors' homelands. For the authors with Vietnamese, Cambodia, and Laotian descent, the memories of wars, totalitarian regimes, and flights from their homelands were transformed into the main body of their writings. In a similar way, for Sudham, Somtow, Bulosan, Hagedorn, and Law-Yone, who are outside the theater of the Indochina War, the memories of their homelands as well as the social context also characterize their writings. For these diasporic writers, they are foreigners on the new world who cannot separate their past from their physical and mental being of the present time. Their status on the new world is similar to that of Rushdie, who, despite his new identity as an Indian with British citizenship, always views

himself as a foreigner in England, his new world, as he writes in *Imaginary Homelands*, "it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (9). Rushdie as well as the above diasporic writers cannot separate their past from their present existence, so their past memories of the homelands become an important impetus for their writings. Especially for diasporic writers who lost their homelands during the Indochina War and the totalitarian regimes, writing serves as a crucial vehicle, which they employ in claiming their past and inscribing their history. Even though they have lost their homelands through the legend of wars and political oppression, they still desire the possession of the homelands in their imagination.

This dissertation contributes to literary studies in that it establishes Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature as a subfield of Asian American literature, since this literary area is new and understudied. A large amount of existing scholarship on Southeast Asian American and diasporic writing focuses on the literature penned by Filipino/Filipina and Vietnamese Americans. However, very few studies are dedicated to writings by other Southeast Asian diasporic writers, as King-Kok Cheung states that she has "been unable to find scholars who feel equipped to discuss writings by Americans of Burmese, Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, or Thai descent" (*An Interethnic* 21). As a literary study, this dissertation argues that Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature brings new voices to Asian American literary field. These new voices are uttered by new immigrants comprising mostly refugees who have left their home countries after the Communist regimes gain power. In addition, there are also new voices from other groups who leave their countries for other reasons such as the pursuit of education, as shown in Sudham's *Monsoon Country*, and the struggle against economic conditions, as portrayed in Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*.

The new voices of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature introduce new themes to Asian American literary canon, as Lisa Lowe contends, "Southeast Asian writing introduces new themes to and emphasizes concerns different from those in the existing body of multigeneration Asian American literature" (53). According to Lowe, Asian American literature is an unclosed field because there are new voices from different Asian American groups emerging in the canon, such as voices from Southeast Asian diasporic groups as mentioned above. The new themes which they contribute to the existing themes in Asian American literature "focus on deracination and displacement" (53), resulting from their long history of being uprooted and dislocated by wars and totalitarian regimes in their homelands. The themes stemming from deracination and displacement include family split, loss of loved ones and homes, abandonment of homelands, and the suffering of refugees. Apart from that, I also found the theme concerning the relationship between people and rice culture and Buddhism, which are portrayed as essential parts of their physical and spiritual existence in both their home countries and the new worlds. In fact, the theme of rice culture and Buddhism is very unique to Southeast Asian diasporic people, since rice culture and Buddhism are marked as their distinctive cultural heritages.

Although Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature contributes new voices and themes to Asian American literature, it is still marginalized by the mainstream. Diasporic literature, as Shirley Geok-lin Lim maintains, is "usually excluded from a U.S-based grouping for extraliterary, ideological, and political reasons." Therefore, it is "often seen as falling outside U.S. canonical work" (290). Based on this idea, Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, as part of diasporic literature as a whole, is inevitably placed outside the U.S. literary canon. This is a significant reason why it is urgent to study and celebrate this group of literature,

in order to bring it into the canon, since it also constitutes American literature. Analyzing a wide variety of literary works by diverse authors with different ethnic origins, this dissertation is probably the first book-length study of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature.

In the field of Asian American literary studies, except literary works by writers of Filipino and Vietnamese descent, those written by writers of other ethnic origins in Southeast Asia are studied on a relatively small scale, as evident in Cheung's statement above. In fact, based on my research, the number of literary works by this group of people is large enough to be established as a subfield of Asian American literature. To fill the gap and expand the studies in this field, I explore and study more diverse literary works from Southeast Asian diasporic writers. The primary texts that this dissertation examines include:

1. *America Is in the Heart* (1946), an autobiography by Carlos Bulosan, a Filipino diasporic writer in the U.S.
2. *Dogeaters* (1990), a novel by Jessica Hagedorn, a Filipina diasporic woman writer in the U.S.
3. *Monkey Bridge* (1997), a novel by Lan Cao, a Vietnamese diasporic woman writer in the U.S.
4. *Perfume Dream: Reflection on Vietnamese Diaspora* (2005), an autobiography by Andrew Lam, a Vietnamese diasporic writer in the U.S.
5. *Monsoon Country: Thailand in Transition* (1988), a novel by Pira Sudham, a Thai diasporic writer who has spent his life in several countries including New Zealand, Australia, England, and now back and forth between Thailand and England
6. *Jasmine Nights* (1995), a novel by S.P. Somtow, a Thai diasporic writer spending his life in England and the U.S.

7. *Golden Bones: An Extraordinary Journey from Hell in Cambodia to a New Life in America* (2008), an autobiography by Sichan Siv, a Cambodian diasporic writer in the U.S.
8. *Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America* (1994), a collection of Hmong diasporic autobiographies edited by Sucheng Chan, a Chinese diasporic woman historian in the U.S.
9. *The Coffin Tree* (1983), a novel by Wendy Law-Yone, a Burmese diasporic woman writer in the U.S.

Since most of the above writers are new and might be unknown to some readers, I will provide brief information of their backgrounds. Carlos Bulosan is a renowned writer in Asian American literary canon, who serves as both a critic and a literary author. His autobiography, *America Is in the Heart*, in particular, has been widely studied. Jessica Hagedorn is also another prominent Asian diasporic writer and scholar. Her *Charlie Chan Is Death: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction* is also an important text in the canon. Lan Cao is a Vietnamese refugee successfully resettling in the United States. She is a professor of law at the College of William & Mary in Virginia. Her novel, *Monkey Bridge*, is well received in the field. Andrew Lam is a Vietnamese diasporic journalist. He works for PBS documentary and is a contributor to National Public Radio's "All Things Considered." Through *Perfume Dreams*, he received the PEN Open Book Award in 2006. Pira Sudham, a Thai diasporic writer, has spent his life in several countries, such as New Zealand, Australia, and United Kingdom. Most of his works represent lives of rural people in his home region in Thailand. He was nominated a Nobel Prize in literature in 1990. S.P. Somtow, also a Thai diasporic writer, has spent his life in Thailand, England, and the United States. Besides his writing career, he is also a music composer

and symphonic conductor. Most of his works deal with fantasy and vampires. He won the World Fantasy Award for best novella in 2002 and several awards dedicated to horror fiction, and was nominated five Bram Stoker Awards. Sichan Siv is a Cambodian refugee who has professionally succeeded in the United States, becoming a U.S. ambassador in the United Nations and deputy assistant to President George W. Bush. His autobiography, *Golden Bones*, is an international bestselling published by HarperCollins. Sucheng Chan, a Chinese diasporic female scholar and historian in the United States, is now working as a professor in Department of Asian American Studies at University of California, Santa Barbara. She is currently chair of the program. In *Hmong Means Free*, she collected and edited autobiographies of Hmong refugees immigrating from Laos to the United States. The last selected writer, Wendy Law-Yone, is a Burmese diasporic woman leaving her country to the United States as a stateless person escaping from the political turmoil in Burma. In 1987, she received a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Award for Creative Writing.

The nine selected texts reflect the social context and conditions in several countries in Southeast Asia. Most of them reveal culprits of people's exodus and diaspora, including oppressive systems and totalitarian regimes, political persecutions, wars, and poverty. In addition, they portray the social context in the destination countries of their authors, indicating how they struggle in their new worlds. Four of these texts—*America Is in the Heart, Perfume Dreams*, *Golden Bones*, and *Hmong Means Free*—are autobiographies, thus providing firsthand, authentic experiences of the authors. Four of the rest are fiction based on realistic and historical context. Only Somtow's *Jasmine Nights* seems to be imaginative, which is influenced by the author's writing style replete with imaginative and fantasy elements. In spite of that fact, this

novel vividly portrays the Thai society in the 1960s, dominated by the class system and American imperialism.

In terms of genre, the autobiography and the novel, as forms of narration, share similar elements, comprising settings, characters, plots, and themes. As Wallace Fowlie puts it, an autobiography at least "uses all the devices a novel does: characters and the chronicle of a family, maxims and lyric passages, confession and narrative" (166). These devices are needed in order to make the narrative complete. The general purpose of these two types of literature is to tell stories, to reflect the life of particular persons through the characters in the narration. In the sense of authenticity, however, the autobiography offers more realistic experiences than those presented the novel, which is often referred to as a work of invention. In spite of that fact, as argued by scholars in the area of autobiography, both genres still need to rely on imagination in constructing the story. In *Autobiography: The Self Made Text* (1993), James Goodwin maintains that "The power of imagination and invention can be as important to the autobiographer as they are to the novelist, dramatist, or poet. Indeed, the autobiographer commonly uses the same techniques of fiction and drama to shape personal experience into meaningful narrative" (12-13). An autobiography is constructed through memories, which sometimes might be shattered, fragmented, and fading. In order to assemble such memories to be a complete narrative, imagination is indispensable in filling gaps between the shattered memories and gluing them together. Some elements derived from imagination such as invented incidents, characters, and settings are sometimes needed to seam the authentic memories together. Imagination, therefore, becomes a significant device in the process of writing for both autobiographers and novelists. The latter group, however, rely on imagination more than the first group does, since novels are categorized as fiction, which is mostly constructed through imagination and invention.

Based on a definition of autobiography, it is obvious that this literary genre offers a high sense of reality, as it portrays the first-hand experience of the autobiographer. As stated by Goodwin, "Most readers are familiar with such definitions of autobiography as 'the biography of a person narrated by that person' and 'a biography of written by the subject of it'" (2). In a similar way, Philippe Lejeune, a renowned French critic, defines autobiography, with more details, as "Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning this own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his own personality" (qtd. in Brunner 41). According to this definition, the autobiographers are supposed to be true to themselves, as autobiographies serve as a form of self-representation, despite the need of imagination in the composing process. Since the autobiography reflects its author's own existence, experiences, and personality, it inevitably reveals the identity, image, and pattern of life of the author. In addition, a significant difference in terms of sound and authenticity between autobiographies and novels is also one of the factors distinguishing these two genres from each other. As discussed by Patricia Spacks, "Autobiographies sound different from their novelistic counterparts sentence by sentence because they employ, by and large, a different rhetorical and a different narrative atmosphere." While autobiographies rely on "rhetoric of explanation" to move towards self-justification, novels "rely on a more dramatic rhetoric" (313-14). Spacks' ideas suggest that autobiographies offer more authentic experiences to readers than novels do, and those experiences are presented in a more realistic tone in autobiographies.

While fiction refers to unreal stories, autobiography presents stories of real life. In *Reading Autobiography*, Smith and Watson use the term "life writing" as another way to call autobiography. They further elaborate that although fictional writing and autobiography share similar structures, such as plot, setting, dialogue, and characters, "they are distinguished by their

relationship to and claims about a referential world. We might helpfully think of what fiction represents as '*a* world', and what life writing refers to as '*the* world'" (9-10 emphasis in original). That is to say, albeit with fictional structures and elements, autobiography offers the realistic tone and sense. Similar to Smith and Watson, Barros asserts that autobiography and fiction differ from each other in terms of the quality of the stories they present, as she argues, "unlike fictive discourse, in which the narrating situation—the act of telling—is simulated, with autobiography the narrating situation is actual" (12). In a similar way, Marlene Kadar proposes that "Life writing comprises texts that are written by an author who does not continuously write about someone else, and who also does not pretend to be absent from the […] text himself/herself" (10). Not only does the author have to be continuously present in the text, but he or she also has to be true to his or her actual life at a considerable degree. These qualities of autobiographies are crucial in providing the author with the sense of self, since this kind of writing also functions as self-representation. At the same time, such qualities also promote the authenticity of the experiences and incidents presented in the text, increasing the sense of reality, which is different from the dramatic tone of the novel.

While autobiography offers more sense of truth and reality, it is not necessary that all details in this kind of writing are real. It is true that autobiography is created by the author's memory. However, as Couser puts it, "Memory is not a stable, static record that could ground a reliable written narrative; rather, it is itself a text under continuous revision" (17). In addition, such revision tends to emphasize positive outcomes over negative outcomes about the self. This is because "people readily perceive themselves as responsible for positive outcomes [but] tend to deny responsibility for negative outcomes … [and] tend to seek information that confirms their theories about themselves and to revise their autobiographical memory so that it accords with

their current self-concept" (qtd. in Couser 20). As a result, there are probably some details or incidents in autobiographies which are altered from reality. These ideas prevent autobiography to claim full credit in authenticity.

Although the novel has a label of imagination and invention, the selected novels in this dissertation are based on historical facts. They honestly reflect authentic situations in the home countries of the authors, as well as their new worlds; historical facts are transformed into important components in the stories, such as settings, characterization, conflicts, and major incidents. In fact, Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree*, Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Sudham's *Monsoon Contry*, and Somtow's *Jasmine Nights* are considered realist novels, since they portray the truth and reality in the society. Realist novels reflect the truth and real incidents and experiences of common people through common characters, without false painting of the text. William Dean Howells, a very influential realist writer and critic in American literature defines the realist novel, valuing the truthful presentation of the text: "the realism was 'nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material'" (qtd. in Quirk ix). That is to say, the experience as the material of realist authors must be honestly portrayed in their literary works. Realist novels present social issues and problems in several dimensions through honest voices depicting ordinary activities of ordinary people. The authors use common language and colloquial to tell stories. In realism, there is "the need for literature to serve a social purpose rather than fulfill an aesthetic need" (Pizer 4). As a result, realist novels focus on the social issues rather than the literary beauty. As James Nagel puts it, realist literature is "fundamentally democratic, dealing with average characters in mundane situations, struggling with the social, racial, economic, and moral issues of terrestrial life" (xxv). Realist novels, therefore, aim at raising the reader's awareness of social problems and the struggle of common people against

those problems. Although these concepts are employed to address the American Realism during the nineteenth century, they can also be applied to the literary works in this dissertation. The above novels have these important characteristics of realism. Although Somtow's *Jasmine Nights* is imbued with fantasy and imagination, it also portrays social reality in Thailand in the age of neocolonialism, when the United States expands its power to Southeast Asia. In fact, imaginative novels can also serve the same purpose as realist novels, as Quirk contends, "Fables, parables, burlesques, parodies, ghost stories, satires, utopian novels, fantasy, science fiction, and other fictive forms might participate in the realist cultural agenda by awakening readers to the truth of life as they knew it" (xiii). Despite its elements of fantasy, therefore, *Jasmine Nights* offers a sense of realism to readers. The truth of life serves as an important characteristic to categorize this novel as realist.

Autobiographies and realist novels above, thus, share an important characteristic, honest representation of reality. All the primary texts in this dissertation are created through facts informing readers of social issues and problems in the authors' old worlds as well as new worlds. The stories are formulated through the authors' memories under the frame of realism. To a considerable degree, these primary texts are viable sources for the study of life and social context of Southeast Asian diasporic people in both their homelands and destination countries. In the broad picture, this dissertation examines the mutual legacies under the concept of heterogeneity of these people through literary approaches. It analyzes how such mutual legacies, which include rice and Buddhist culture, colonialism and imperialism, and wars and diaspora, shape their life in both their countries and their new worlds. As a piece of literary studies, this dissertation explores literary elements and characteristics appearing in this group of works. It also encompasses the

discussion of writing styles, forms, structures, common themes, and the contribution of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature to Asian American literary canon as a whole.

Historical Context of Southeast Asian American and Diasporic Literature

The primary texts in this study are heavily based on the history of Southeast Asian diasporic people. To thoroughly understand and effectively analyze them, the knowledge about their historical context is of great importance. Moreover, the comprehension of the social context in their countries of destination is also necessary. The United States is marked as the major destination of Southeast Asian diasporic people, due to its history of colonization in the Philippines and wars in Indochina. In fact, Asian diasporic people as a whole have played a significant role as a group contributing to the nation of America, materially, socially, and culturally. Since the early nineteenth century, there have been huge waves of Asian diaspora moving into the country, especially as imported laborers. According to Sucheng Chan, between the late 1840s and early 1880s, there were approximately 370,000 Chinese arrivals in Hawaii and California. This group was followed by about 400,000 Japanese, 7,000 Korean, 7,000 Asian Indians, and 180,000 Filipinos (*Asian Americans* 3). Laboring in several areas of the United States, such as sugar plantations in Hawaii, agricultural sites in the West Coast, transcontinental railroad construction, or even service business in urban areas, these immigrants "have historically participated in the construction of what 'America' was and is at any given moment" (Palumbo-Liu 2). Despite their great contribution, Asians were exploited, discriminated against, and excluded from American society. In terms of exploitation, they "were sought as workers who would work at low wages and set a model of hard work for other groups" (Feagin 213). In terms of exclusion, they never seem to be recognized as Americans, as Lisa Lowe writes, "Asian Americans, even with the U.S. citizenship, continue to be located outside the cultural and racial

boundaries of the nation" (6). Lowe further explains that immigration laws were legislated to bar Asians from entering the country and prevent their integration into American society. These laws included the Exclusion Acts, which affected the Chinese in 1882, Asian Indians in 1917, Koreans and the Japanese in 1924, and Filipinos in 1934 (7). These Exclusion Acts aimed at disenfranchising Asians and preventing them "from moving out of the sphere of the 'other' and into the sphere of 'American'" (Wong 5). Based on these arguments, it can be said that Asian immigrants were viewed as only economic value. Although they seek inclusion in American community which they greatly contribute to, "when no longer needed, they are excluded" (Okihiro 156). They are viewed by the mainstream as the margin who do not deserve national recognition. Outside the working sphere, they never exist, or exist in the form of "unassimilable aliens," as can be discerned through the portrayal of Asians in Anglo-American literature and media analyzed by Elaine H. Kim (9). Kim's study reflects that in Americans' perspectives, Asians are incompatible with and cannot be assimilated into white American society.

Southeast Asian immigrants are among important groups of Asian Americans as a whole. Except Filipinos, all immigrants from other Southeast Asian countries are considered a newer group compared to the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Asian Indian immigrants, whose numbers had increased dramatically since the nineteenth century as mentioned earlier. A significant number of Southeast Asian immigrants (except Filipinos) in the United States emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, by the end of the Indochina War after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. The first wave of Vietnamese refugees "were placed on military aircraft, transported to the United States, kept in camps, and eventually resettled" (Tenhula 6). Then, other waves of refugees, not only from Vietnam but also from Laos and Cambodia, began their exodus to escape from desperate conditions—wars, totalitarian regimes, and famine—in their

countries. To better understand the background of these people, I will provide a brief history of Southeast Asia, as well as important events involved with world history and diaspora of people from this region, as historical context of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature.

Under the concept of heterogeneity, Southeast Asia is marked among the regions with a great amount of ethnic groups of people, religions, cultures, and ways of life. In terms of religion, "There are at least four different religions in Southeast Asia: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity" (SarDesai 5). However, people in some countries, especially those who are neighbors, also share some similarities which have become their mutual legacies. For example, Buddhism serves as the major religion in the mainland countries, such as in Thailand, which has been deeply rooted in this region since the ancient time. In literature, Buddhism also plays an important role as a motive of stories, as can be seen in Sudham's *Monsoon Country*. Meanwhile, most citizens in the maritime countries are Muslims, except for the Philippines, where Catholicism is the predominant religion introduced by Spanish and American colonialism. Another significant legacies shared among Southeast Asians, as well as East Asians, is that they possess a long history of rice culture, since rice serves as staple food for the majority. People in this region were regarded by historians as pioneers of rice farming, as stated by Craig Lockard, "Thailand, Vietnam, and Burma were among the world's earliest farmers" (7). At present, rice paddies are scattered in almost all Southeast Asian countries, yielding the major crop not only for domestic consumption but also for the nations' revenues. In Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*, Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Sudham's *Monsoon Country*, and Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree*, rice culture is incorporated as a significant component of the stories.

Another important mutual legacy of Southeast Asian countries deals with the experience of Western colonialism, which has played a significant role in shaping the whole region in many

aspects including politics, economics, culture, ways of life, and society. Thailand was "the one country in the whole Southeast Asia that was able to avoid the experience of colonial rule" (Osborne 80). All other countries were colonized or ruled by Western countries at some points of their histories. According to Lockard, the Portuguese were the first group conquering part of Southeast Asian territory, starting from 1511, when they sent a fleet of about 40 ships to capture Melaka (or Malacca), a part of the present Malaysia (77). Since then, other powerful Western countries—Spain, Holland, England, France, and finally the United States—marched into the region and had existed for the next four centuries (78). According to the timeline, the maritime countries were the first group in Southeast Asia to experience Western colonialism. The Dutch, as the second Western group exercising power in this region, "used military force to take Melaka from the Portuguese in 1641" (79). After a very long period of their conquest, the Dutch were superseded by the British: "by the 1830s the British had advanced to the point that they held three settlements on the fringe of the Malayan Peninsula, Singapore, Penang, and Malacca" (Osborne 86). Despite the loss of Malacca, the Dutch did not give up their attempt in maintaining power in Southeast Asia, and before World War II they succeeded in conquering Indonesia (Osborne 71). The Philippines, another maritime country, also underwent a long history of colonialism. The era of colonialism in this country commenced in the sixteenth century when Spain took control of the nation. According to Osborne, "spanning eight decades beginning in 1565, the Spanish imposed many aspects of their culture on the local, in a process known as *Hispanization*" (80). This included the imposition of Catholicism, which has become the major religion of the Philippines at the present time. During the nineteenth century, the United States expanded its power to Southeast Asia, and in 1898 the powerful American fleet "sailed into

Manila Bay and destroyed the Spanish navy" (Lockard 114). Defeating the Spanish who had conquered the Philippines for over 300 years, Americans superseded them as new colonizers.

On mainland Southeast Asia, France and Britain, two powerful Western nations in the age of colonialism, dominated the region. After the French attack of Vietnam in 1858, France had ruled this country for almost a hundred years and expanded its colonialism to Cambodia and Laos during the same period (Lockard 93). Meanwhile, competing against France, Britain had attempted to rule Burma for several years, and by 1886 it completed the conquest (Lockard 109). As mentioned earlier, Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that successfully maintained its freedom, which was done through diplomatic and political strategies. However, an important factor underpinning this freedom was that for the British and the French, "Thailand came to be seen as a buffer zone between their conflicting interests" (Osborne 82). This is because Thailand is located between Burma, which was conquered by the British, and Cambodia, which belonged to the French. In most of the primary texts in this dissertation, traits of colonialism as well as neocolonialism are portrayed through characters and incidents in the stories. For instance, Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree* presents to the reader legacies of the British colonialism in Burma. In a similar way, Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* vividly depicts the Philippine society highly influenced by American colonialism and neocolonialism.

Apart from the legacy of colonialism, a set of very significant historical events, known as the Indochina War in Southeast Asia, had happened during the 1940s and 1970s. The historical context of the Indochina War is crucial for the understanding of Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Lam's *Perfume Dreams*, Siv's *Golden Bones*, and Chan's *Hmong Means Free*, since they are heavily based on historical facts. The Indochina War started with insurgent and guerrilla fights by Vietnamese nationalists who desired liberation from French colonialism. However, the fights—

led by Ho Chi Minh, a Vietnamese nationalist who spent several years with the Communist party in France—were not sufficiently effective to eradicate the French presence there. It was the Japanese who demolished the French power. During the World War II, on "March 9, 1945, nearly ninety years of French rule came to an end when Japanese troops took over Viet Nam [sic]" (Vadas 4). Although the French were defeated, they still retained their power in some parts of Vietnam. Thus, the Vietnamese were now practically dominated by two powerful countries. Resisting the Japanese and the French, the Vietnam Independence League, known as the Viet Minh, was formed, continuing their guerrilla fights around the nation sporadically.

Since the Viet Minh was fighting against the Japanese, it was initially supported by the United States. After the Japanese lost the World War II, Vietnam gained independence. On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh announced to a large, ecstatic crowd in Hanoi "that Viet Nam [sic] was a free and independent nation" (Vadas 5). Despite Vietnamese independence, the French kept trying to reinstate their domination over Vietnam. The French were now supported by the United States. There was a tension between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War and "Washington saw Ho as Moscow's puppet" (Vadas 7), since he and his followers were supported by Soviet Union. During this period, since the communist doctrine influenced by Soviet Union had already expanded to North Korea and some parts of Southeast Asia, it was evident that "the primary objective of U.S. foreign policy has been to prevent the expansion of communism" (Duiker 1). Although the French were supported by the United States, they were completely defeated by the Viet Minh on May 8, 1954 at Dien Bien Phu, an area in the northwest Vietnam, which has become an important historic site of both Vietnam and France.

After the Dien Bien Phu event, a peace talk followed in Geneva in 1954, resulting in the Geneva Accord, in which Vietnam was divided into North Vietnam and South Vietnam. This

division can be viewed as a tearing of Vietnam as a result of the global power contest between the two superpowers, the United States and Soviet Union. While North Vietnam was backed by Soviet and China, South Vietnam was backed by the United States. The split of the nation generated a great conflict between the two poles. The north was led by Ho Chi Minh, who was viewed by the south and the United States as Moscow's puppet. On the opposite side, the south was let by President Ngo Dinh Diem, who was viewed by the north as a "foreign puppet" (Vadas 6), since he was backed by Americans who were referred to as foreigners. Diem referred to the Communist army in the north and Vietnamese people in the south who opposed him as Viet Nam Cong San or Vietnamese Communists since 1956, and the term was shortened to Vietcong (Vadas 14). This word also became the common term used by Americans to refer to their Vietnamese enemies. With the Communist containment policy, the United States escalated its roles in Vietnam; as President Lyndon B. Johnson stated, "if we don't stop the Reds [Communists] in South Vietnam, tomorrow they will be in Hawaii and next week they will be in San Francisco" (qtd. in Stavrianos 712). Around that period, Communism expanded its power to several countries in Asia, such as North Korea, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The United States was afraid that other parts of the world would also fall to Communism, so it was urgent to stop this expansion. In order to destroy the troops of North Vietnam, American troops intensified the attack. A huge amount of bombs were dropped on the Vietnamese soil. Moreover, the war theater was expanded to some areas of Cambodia and Laos; the suspected Communist trails in both countries were severely bombed. To complete their mission, "the U.S. Air Force dropped over half a million ton of bombs on Cambodia, more in six months of 1973 than had been drooped on Japan during World War II" (Kiernan 9). Laos also tragically encountered destructive bombardment as Noam Chomsky contends that in order to deprive the Communist of

food and transportation, "Laos has been bombed more intensively than Vietnam" (xvi). In contrast to its massive destruction, the bombing in Cambodia and Laos had "been done in secret" (xxi). This mission was not publicized, and during that period "few Americans knew about it" (Clymer 363). The U.S. bombing mission ravaged both lives and property of the two countries on a massive scale. Nowadays, remains of B-52 bombs are still discovered in some areas of Laos and Cambodia.

The United States had escalated the capacity of its troops throughout the war, but it simply could not defeat North Vietnam. After a very long period of the unsuccessful attempt, since the United States first stepped into the conflict by supporting the French in the 1940s until the Paris Accord in 1973 (Vadas 7, 46), the U.S. Army began to retreat from the war. After the Paris Accord, "with exception of special units, the remaining U.S. troops in Viet Nam [sic] were sent home" (Vadas 47). South Vietnam, without the U.S. support, fell in April 1975. As stated by Stavrianos, Vietnam War is the longest war in American history, resulting in 56,717 American deaths, over 180,000 South Vietnamese deaths, and over 925, 000 North Vietnamese deaths (726). The war also caused massive destruction of Vietnam and dislocation of a large number of Vietnamese. The fall of South Vietnam, also known as the fall of Saigon, resulted in a great number of refugees starting to leave the country during this period.

Another devastating event happening around the same period took place in Cambodia, causing a huge number of deaths and great diaspora. During the Communist Khmer Rouge (Red Khmer) regime, led by General Pol Pot, from 1975 to 1979, more than 1.5 million Cambodians, which was approximately one-third of the country's populace, had been killed through hard work, starvation, illness, and outright execution (Hinton 1). In literature, the brutality of the Khmer Rouge is portrayed through many important texts, such as Siv's *Golden Bones*, which

illustrates that the author's life and family are shattered by this Communist regime. The Khmer Rouge was originally an underground organization aiming at social revolution through Marxist-Leninist tenets. In 1970, Marshal Lon Nol, backed by the United States, led a coup overthrowing King Norodom Sihanouk, which brought about commotion in the country. Sihanouk, then, allied with the Khmer Rouge in order to fight back his rule, at the same time providing an opportunity for the Khmer Rouge to employ his popularity among his supporters in gaining more advocates (Frieson 34). After the coup, the Khmer Rouge was also supported by other countries under Communist regimes, including Soviet, China, and North Vietnam, who provided "massive amounts of assistance to Cambodia's struggling revolutionary movement" (Etcheson 6). During that period, Cambodia sank under catastrophic conditions, economically, socially, and culturally. As Hinton argues, the Khmer Rouge attributed the ruin of Cambodia to the avarice of oppressors including native elites, French colonists, American imperialists, and foreign-controlled capitalists (54). With the aim of social revolution, the Khmer Rouge declared that these groups of oppressors needed to be eradicated.

After a very long period, from 1970 to1975, of the civil war between the Khmer Rouge and the Lon Nol's Khmer Republic, the Khmer Rouge gained victory and seized power on April 17, 1975. Then, "the killing began in earnest" (Etcheson 7). The first target consisted of the Khmer Republic's military officer corps, from the highest rank to the lowest one. Then, rich capitalists and the civil servants of the previous regime were exterminated; these also included intellectuals and professionals. Apart from that, all residents in the cities were evacuated to the countryside, "where their biographies were repeatedly scoured for signs that they harbored enemy virus within. Anyone with any education, even wearing eyeglasses, was considered a class enemy and was vulnerable to summary execution" (Etcheson 7). In addition to the mass

killing, the Khmer Rouge forced people to work hard under the policy of collectivization. Hard labor, food scarcity, and insanitary living conditions immensely added up the number of deaths. It is obvious that the Khmer Rouge, instead of liberating Cambodians from oppression, transformed themselves into a greater group of oppressors who not only destroyed the nation abut also slaughtered a huge number of their own people.

A few years after the Khmer Rouge gained control of the nation, Cambodians were finally liberated by the Vietnamese army. After the fall of Saigon, the Communist North Vietnam conquered both the north and the south, which borders Cambodia. Although the Communist parties in both countries were moving towards the same direction, to fight against the United States, there was a tension between them. The Khmer Rouge feared that the Communist Vietnam would expand its power and finally took over Cambodia. As a result, it had tried to attack the southern part of Vietnam. Counterattacking, on December 25, 1978, Vietnamese troops marched into Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge "crumbled before the advancing Vietnamese troops, and in a mere two weeks, Cambodia had been 'liberated'" (Etcheson 8). Despite the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodians still suffered from the ruined nation. Nowadays, Cambodia still remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

The atrocity of the Indochina War and the Communist regimes resulted in an immense number of refugees escaping from their countries through several routes. In fact, Cao, Lam, Siv, and the Hmong autobiographers in *Hmong Means Free* are refugees who seek refuge from wars and the totalitarian regimes. Based on the history, from 1975 to 1990, "more than 2 million refugees left Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and about 1.5 million eventually resettled in Australia, Western Europe, and North America" (Hein 1). Those refugees took their journeys to refugee camps in neighboring countries before being transferred to their designated destinations.

According to Tenhula, by "the late 1989, Hong Kong reported 54,000 Vietnamese in camps seeking political asylum" (54). This number included the "boat people" who escaped by fishing boats, which were "estimated at 300,000 by the middle of 1979" (Hein 35). Reaching their neighboring countries, some of them had to be confined in refugee camps for a few years before being transported to resettle in other countries, while some of them were repatriated. Huge waves of Cambodians also escaped to Thailand during the Khmer Rouge regime. Even after the end of this regime, a large number of them still fled the country, as Tenhula states that in 1979, "more Cambodians began crossing into Thailand because of famine" (58). In the case of Laos, after Americans left the country and the Communist party seized power, approximately 310,000 Laotians including Hmong people, who helped the U.S. troops during the war, crossed the border to Thailand during 1975 to 1985 (Tenhula 228). Those people fled from the persecution and repression by the Communist party in Laos. As stated by Chan, more than half of Southeast Asian refugees have "ended up in the United States because of American military involvement in the wars that ravaged those countries" (*Asian Americans* 152). In the United States, Southeast Asian refugees were the largest group of Asian refugees ever admitted into the country (Tenhula 5). With the existence of Asian Americans, the diaspora of Indochinese refugees added up the number as well as the diversity of Asian immigrants.

Although there were a very large number of Indochinese refugees in the United States, it must be noted that those people were not the first immigrant group from Southeast Asia. In fact, an influx of Filipinos had started to immigrate to the United States since the second half of the nineteenth century until the first half of the twentieth century, due to the demand for cheap labor. This issue is also portrayed in Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*, in which the author depicts the hardship, oppression, exploitation, and exclusion which Filipino immigrant encounter in the

United States. Statistically, Filipinos were among the biggest groups of Asian immigrants: "By the end of 1910, more than 4,000 Filipinos sailed to Hawaii. Total Filipinos arrivals in Hawaii numbered 28,500 between 1907 and 1919, 29,200 during 1920-24, 44,400 during 1925-29, and almost 20,000 during 1930-35" (Chan, *Asian Americans* 18). With this statistics, the history of the Filipino in the United States is considered longer than those of other ethnic groups from Southeast Asia.

Apart from the Indochinese refugees and Filipino immigrants, there are also Thai, Burmese, Malaysian, and other Southeast Asian immigrants in the United States and other Western countries, such as England, France, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Based on my research, however, these groups make a smaller number of immigrants, compared to the previous groups. Thai people, for instance, do not immigrate in large numbers (Kislenko xv). Similar to other Asian immigrants, Southeast diasporic subjects underwent hostility in their new world. Indochinese refugees in the United States, for instance, encountered harsh racism and discrimination from whites. Apart from everyday racism, more serious hostility occurred in many forms including "destruction of property, harassment, assaults, and murders" (Hein 73). The legacy of wars seems to be an important cause of racism against the Indochinese refugees. In the case of the Vietnamese, for example, they "were not welcomed. They are reminders of a war that Americans should never have fought" (qtd. in Palumbo-Liu 245). Since there were a large number of American deaths, along with a huge amount of budget dissolving in the war, many Americans developed negative attitudes towards Indochinese refugees, which have become a great obstacle to the rebuilding of their lives.

Some of Southeast Asian diasporic subjects have become writers, and some of these writers have already earned public acclaim, such as Carlos Bulosan, a Filipino writer and Lan

Cao, a Vietnamese writer. Bulosan, in particular, remains the most successful and amazing Filipino writer in English among his counterparts (qtd. in McWilliams vii). In fact, he is also among the major writers in the broad area of Asian America literature. Although most writers in this group are Southeast Asian Americans who permanently reside in the United States, there are some who do not resettle in this country, such as Pira Sudham and S.P. Somtow, Thai diasporic writers who have spent their lives in several countries before returning to Thailand. Similar to other Asian American writers who portray social conditions and experiences in both their home countries and the United States—as evinced in Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan's writings—Southeast Asian American and diasporic writers depict social context in two worlds, their homelands and countries of destination. Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* serves as an epitome of this argument, as this autobiography depicts life of Filipinos and social conditions in both the Philippines and the United States. In the same way, Cao's *Monkey Bridge* also portrays lives of Vietnamese refugees in their own country during the wars in Vietnam and new life in the United States. In addition, there are those who portray life and social context in other countries apart from the United States, such as England, which is a setting of Sudham's *Monsoon Country*. Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature also functions as a negotiation of their existence in their destination countries, involving the issues of race, identity, gender, class, and other forms of struggle. Based on these characteristics, I consider it a subfield of Asian American literature, contributing to this literary cannon just similar to other groups, such as East Asian American or South Asian American literatures, which are already prominent in the field.

Theoretical Approaches

According to the historical context discussed in the previous part, people in Southeast Asia have been through several events that inflict deep impacts on their lives and society.

Colonialism, wars, and the totalitarian regimes, in particular, are major culprits of great diaspora of people from this region. In their new world, they still have to struggle for survival and assertion of their existence as human beings. These people have arisen from very the complex social context which also results in the complexity of their literary works. In order to rigorously critique these works and better comprehend the life of Southeast Asian diasporic people, I employ two important theoretical approaches—Asian American criticism and postcolonial criticism—in analyzing them.

Asian American Criticism

Since this dissertation aims to establish Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature as a subfield of Asian American literature, Asian American criticism is deployed as background and foundation of the study. In addition, as seven out of the nine authors of the primary texts have resettled in the United States, their context of diaspora is mostly centered in this country. Therefore, Asian American criticism also functions as a tool in the discussion of issues about Asian immigration, such as the culprits of diaspora, assimilation, exclusion, politics of nationality and identity, cultural politics, and struggle against racism. This criticism also helps with the comparison between Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature and Asian American literature as a whole. The major ideas and concepts from Asian American criticism that I borrow to use in this dissertation are as following.

In "Re-Viewing Asian American Literary Studies," the introduction of *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (1997), King-Kok Cheung elaborates on the evolution of Asian American literary studies. She contends that literature and studies in this field have shifted from identity politics to heterogeneity and diaspora, from seeking to claim America to forging a connection between Asia and Asian America. Several authors offer imaginary and

cultural connection through their writings. This is different from Asian American literature in the earlier age, when writers centered their themes in claiming America because they wanted to be recognized as Americans, as a result of the discrimination against Asians as well as racial ideology. In so doing, they tried to abandon their heritage while embracing the culture and identity of America as their new world. However, in the later stages, Asian American literature has been enriched by voices of writers from diverse ethnic origins who integrate Asian legacies in their writings. Thus, there is a phenomenon of transnational consciousness in Asian American literature. The themes also expand to cover the issues of race, gender, sexuality, class, and so on. These issues also emerge in the primary texts in this dissertation, which will be discussed in the chapters that follow. Nowadays, Asian American literature breaks out the mainstream's perspective towards its characteristics. As argued by Hagedon, since Asian American literature is characterized by great diversities in forms, contents, or contributors, it can be called world literature: "Asian American literature? Too confining a term, maybe. World literature? Absolutely" (qtd. in Cheung 16). Nevertheless, American mainstream media still perceive Asian American literature as "less evolved, unclean, unknowable, and unassimilable" (24). This subjugating, discriminative categorization is obviously correlated with the concept of postcoloniality, as Stephen Sumida argues, "Asian American as a whole […] is still a literature of internal colonization" (qtd. in Cheung 24). Ideologically, Asian American literature has not been ultimately liberated from racial and cultural colonialism, since it is dominated by literature of white people. However, at present, Asian American literature is studied on a much wider scale than in the past, and a large number of Asian American writers continuously emerge in American literary canon. In spite of that fact, I would like to reemphasize Cheung's statement that except Filipino and Vietnamese diasporic literature, literary works by other ethnic groups from

Southeast Asia, such as Thai, Cambodian, Burmese, and Laotian, are understudied. Since these groups of people also contribute to Asian American literary field, they should receive more attention from scholars.

As another important scholar in the field of Asian American literature, Lisa Lowe vigorously addresses the racial and gender politics regarding Asian immigration in the United States. In her *Immigration Acts* (1996), through the lens of Marxism, she argues that Asians are employed in the development of American as well as global capitalism, but are denied to be included in American polity. In the United States, particularly from the 1850s to the World War II, Asians were imported as cheap laborers to foster the economy and maximize the profit of the production. It is obvious that Asian immigrants were included in the working sphere, but were excluded from American culture, citizenship, identity, and national polity. The exclusion was operated through racialization and the institutionalization of exclusion laws, with the aim to marginalize Asians in the United States and retain their alien origins. Those laws prevented them from becoming American citizens or even barred new immigrants from entering the country. Apart from being racialized, they were also gendered, when citizenship was exclusively granted to white male immigrants. Asian females were barred from entering the country, while Asian males were suppressed by the anti-miscegenation law and also forced by racial discrimination to work in feminized careers, such as laundry and restaurant workers. Through the exclusion acts and naturalization laws, Asian immigrants were disenfranchised and thus remained a cheap labor force to be exploited in the mode of production. Legal institutions in the United States, therefore, reproduced capitalist relations of production; that is, immigration laws reproduced cheap labor force for capital's needs. In addition, in terms of orientalist discourse, the institutionalization of

anti-Asian laws caused Asians to be viewed as culturally and racially other, denied to assimilate in American national sphere.

In critiquing the crisis of Indochinese refugees and their diaspora, Lowe attributes the Indochina War to global capitalism. She asserts that American involvement and escalation of military action during the war stemmed from not only the Communist containment policy but also the expansion of capitalism: "as the United States sought to address the imperatives of capital through the expansion of markets and labor supplies, it also sought hegemony internationally through foreign wars in Asia" (17). Apart from the destruction of Southeast Asian countries, especially Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, diaspora became a phenomenal consequence of the wars in which American imperialism and capitalism serve as major triggers. A large number of people from those countries have become refugees. In the United States, they undergo similar experience as the previous groups of Asian immigrants. Through Marxist lens, therefore, Southeast Asian refugees were victims of global capitalism.

Another set of concepts about Asian Americans is derived from David Palumbo-Liu, an important scholar in the area of Asian American studies. In the first chapter of *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (1999), Palumbo-Liu maintains that anti-Asian sentiments as well as policies and laws stemmed from "America's obsession with redefining its national body" (30). In the modernization of the United States, it is viewed that the country must preserve its national identity by the exclusion of immigrants. Asians, of course, were among this group. In so doing, "the United States rushed to establish and legitimize its powers to exclude and expel" (23). Immigrants were excluded from the national body, while a large number of them were expelled from the nation. Eugenic reasons were claimed in the construction of racial ideology to legitimize exclusion and deportation, in order to prevent the demise of the nation.

Those immigrants were viewed as intellectually and culturally inferior, and would degrade the American white race. As a result, they were not worth to be integrated in the national sphere. Similar to Lowe's argument, Palumbo-Liu argues that the institutionalization of power to alienate Asians resulted in American perception of Asians as the other. Indochinese refugees, in particular, were viewed as a burden on American economic development, since the United States had to allocate huge budgets in providing welfare for them. In addition, a large number of Americans also saw them as a reminder of the war that America lost, the war that brought shame to the nation, intensifying the existing anti-Asian sentiments.

Palumbo-Liu also addresses another important issue: the crisis of identity of Asian Americans who struggle with "double consciousness and dual personality" (300). This is another important identity issue apart from the predicament of citizenship that Asian immigrants had to grapple with. According to Asian American psychologists, the identity conflicts encountered by Asian Americans are attributed to three forces: traditional family of the homeland, Western influences, and racism. These forces cause stress in Asian Americans; "When these sources of stress become to great, mental health problems are frequently the results" (qtd. in Palumbo-Liu 301). Immigrating to the United States, Asians bring with them their traditional values, which often clash with Western values. Such clashes result in internal conflicts of individual Asian immigrants, conflicts between generations, and conflicts between them and American society. Moreover, these people need to cope with racism in their everyday life, since they are marked as the other. As a result of these cultural and racial conflicts, they are caught between two worlds, perceiving themselves as neither fully American nor completely Asian.

Since Southeast Asian refugees are the largest group among all diasporic people presented in the literary texts selected for this dissertation, particular concepts and historical

background about these people are incorporated in this dissertation, in order to enhance the comprehension about them. In *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (1991), Sucheng Chan, besides historicizing Asian American past as a whole, elaborates on the background of Indochinese refugees. Particularly in chapter eight, "New Immigrants and Refugees," Chan discusses the experience of refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, exploring their journey to the United States and how they were received in this new world. The great diaspora of Southeast Asians emerged during the fall of Saigon in 1975, when a huge number of South Vietnamese, known as the "first wave" fled from their country, being transported to the United States. This group was comprised of upper class Vietnamese and the families of high rank South Vietnamese military officers who had connections with the United States during the Vietnam War. Apart from the first wave of refugees, the other group, referred to as the "second wave," which included Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees, trekked or sailed across their nations' boundaries to refugee camps in neighboring countries, before being transferred to the United States and other Western countries. The most important reason for the escape of both groups was the fear of persecution by the Communist regimes. In her critique of the policy dealing with the refugee crisis during the Cold War, Chan contends that the United States "as a leader of the 'free world' […] had to eliminate racial discrimination not only in all domestic aspects of public life but also in its immigration policy" (145-46). That is to say, willy-nilly, America had to welcome refugees in order to maintain her image. This is one of the significant reasons why the United States has become the main destination of Indochinese refugees. The 1980 Refugee Act was legislated in order to cope with the refugee crisis. According to this Act, a refugee is defined as "'any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political

opinion,' seeks refuge outside of his or her country" (161). Based on American ideology towards refugees, Chan argues that "Political considerations, as well as humanitarian concerns, have prompted the United States to take in half of the refugees who have poured out of Southeast Asia" (164). Despite the claim of humanitarian concerns, a large number of Americans resented that part of their tax paying was used in the resettlement programs for refugees from the countries that American soldiers fought against. The refugees needed social welfare and training programs before they could be able to support themselves, and the American government had to allocate budgets to administer those programs. This became one of the reasons why a lot of Americans developed anti-refugee sentiments and racism against those whom they perceived as subjects from their enemy countries.

Postcolonial Criticism

Colonialism and imperialism have played an important role in contextualizing Southeast Asian society. The three most important Western powers involved with the formation of life and society of Southeast Asian diasporic subjects included the French, the British, and the American. In the interrogation of the domination of the Western powers and its repercussions, ideas and concepts from the following prominent postcolonial scholars are employed.

Edward Said theorizes the concept of Orientalism and critiques the politics of knowledge and its effect on the relation between the East and the West. In *Orientalism* (1978), he maintains that the Orient is the greatest source of European colonies. Therefore, the colonization of Southeast Asia, as part of the Orient, can also be explained through Said's concepts. Based on his discussion, Orientalism refers to the creation of knowledge about the Orient by the Occident or the West. Through the dominating Western epistemology, the Orient is invented as an uncivilized place of darkness, which needs to be controlled and recreated by the European.

Under the concept of Orientalism, "the Orient is not a free subject of thought or action" (3) because the West deploys the power of knowledge to subjugate and recreate them. Orientalism, as a created body of theory and practice, portrays the East as uncivilized and backward, which opposes the nobility of the West. The negative portrayal of the Orient can be discerned through historical texts, literature, and media invented by Westerners. Said further explains that the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is the "logic of power, ideology, and politics" (24), in which the West is in a superior position. In the relation of power, the West is always associated with strength while the East connotes weakness, resulting in the notion that the East must be protected and rescued by the West. According to Said's argument, the manipulation of knowledge and the invention of Orientalism are deployed to legitimize the colonization of the East for the expansion of political, cultural, and economic power of the West, with the claim of the mission of enlightenment and civilizing.

Robert Young, another important postcolonial theorist, provides detailed background of postcolonial theory with an important argument that this theory is "the product of resistance to colonialism and imperialism" (15). In the traditional form of colonialism, the desires for settlement and the pursuit of wealth were two major motivations of the colonizers. With their superior power, they oppressed and exploited the indigenous in order to achieve their goals. Along side with the material oppression, the colonizer also imposed their culture on the colonized and subjugated the indigenous ones. Despite the end of traditional colonialism, at present, struggles of a large number of nations "for autonomy, real independence and self determination have to contend with a complex adversary whose power is dispersed through a wide range of globalized institutions and practices" (59). This new form of adversary comes with the term neocolonialism, the situation in which a dependent nation does not possess true

freedom, as it needs to rely economically on powerful countries and thus lacks autonomy to govern itself and determine its own political, economic, as well as cultural policies. Postcolonial theory, as proposed by Young, encompasses the critique of numerous issues resulting from colonial oppression: "the colonial, imperial and anti-colonial past, the postcolonial present, the international division of labour […], people's and cultural rights, emigration and immigration, forced migration, migrancy, nomadism, settlement and diaspora in both western and tricontinental [Latin American, African, and Asian] societies" (66). According to this concept, postcolonial theory is intertwined with numerous other social phenomena including migration and diaspora, a main focus in my dissertation. As discussed in the historical context, the diaspora of Southeast Asians has an important root in colonialism as well as imperialism.

Another important postcolonial scholar, Neil Lazarus, addresses the insurgent movements against colonialism and neocolonialism during the post-1945 era, stating that there was an increasing demand for dependence and self-determination among the colonized or newly independent countries. This is evinced in several important incidents, such as the defeat of the French by the Vietnamese at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and the Bandung Conference of 25 newly independent countries from Asia and Africa, held in 1955 in Indonesia, with the purpose to oppose imperial power and neocolonialism. Despite the fading power of the previous colonizers, the indigenous leaders and ruling elites superseded them, deploying state apparatuses to maintain their power and repress opposition. In addition, those nations, albeit with their independence, still needed to rely on foreign capital or loans from global monetary institutions, which always came with Structural Adjustment Programs. These programs allow transnational institutions as well as corporations to gain control over economic policies of the nations that were in need of financial assistance. Thus, practically, those countries were not free to determine their own

economic policies as well as other related issues. Meanwhile, the end of World War II came with the United States' attempt to gain global political hegemony. Taking the place of European power, it had tried to "export counter-revolution, working ceaselessly, sometimes directly, sometimes covertly, to undermine, subvert, and overthrow regimes and movements which it deemed to stand in opposition to its interests and political philosophy" (6). That is to say, the United States was and is trying to reinvent colonialism on a global scale. The situations in the Indochina War, resulting in mass destruction of Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian people as well as their countries, are well described by this notion. Recently, the American exercise of power in undermining its opposing regimes is evident in the U.S. intervention in the Middle East, instigating wars in some countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. With the above phenomena, postcolonial studies, as explained by Lazarus, "emerged as an institutionally specific, conjuncturally determined response to these global developments" (9). Postcolonialism asserts that several parts of the world are still struggling against imperial dominance, yearning for their right of self-government and the right to control their economic policies.

The deployment of postcolonial criticism in this dissertation is aimed to indicate that colonialism and imperialism have sculptured the life and society of Southeast Asians, inscribed their history, reshaped their nations, and taken a major role in the configuration of the life of diasporic people from this region. Specifically, Postcolonialism is employed in the discussion of how the French colonialism and the American imperialism serve as significant culprits of Indochinese refugees, the largest group of Asian refugees in the United States.

Studies on Southeast Asian American and Diasporic Literature

There are several studies on Filipino and Vietnamese diasporic writers. However, there are only a few studies on writers of other ethnic groups under Southeast Asian diasporic sphere.

Cheung herself cannot find any expert in literary works written by Thai, Lao, Cambodian, or Burmese diasporic writers. The studies on this area that I found are mostly about the life of diasporic Southeast Asians in the United States. These studies address several issues regarding resettlement of these people, such as politics, discrimination, struggling for voice, gender discourse, identity, and assimilation. These studies also indicate that Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, which also portrays similar issues, shares some important characteristics with Asian American literature as a whole. The following part presents studies on literary works written by Southeast Asian diasporic authors, addressing various matters encountered by these people in both their home countries and the new world.

Filipino American writers are regarded as the first group from Southeast Asia to emerge in the field of Asian American literature. Carlos Bulosan, an acclaimed Filipino writer as mentioned earlier, has been widely studied, especially through his masterpiece, *America Is in the Heart*, an important text portraying several issues about Asian American politics. For example, in "Colonial Education and the Politics of Knowledge in Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*," Meg Wesling studies how politics of knowledge is employed by American colonists in dominating the Philippines, and how Bulosan, as a character in the book, utilizes politics of knowledge to pursue the promised American Dream. Wesling contends that Bulosan illustrates how the U.S. educational system functions as "a violent regime of colonial dominance" (59). Schools are built, and American educational system is introduced in the Philippines, but it turns out that only privileged groups can obtain education, due to its high costs. To gain educational privilege for Macario, Bulosan's brother, the family has to sell its properties including the land, thus sinking deeper into poverty because they no longer possess their own land to farm on. However, Bulosan himself also employs politics of knowledge to pursue his dream. He learns

about the promised American Dream through self-education, reading American literature. Doing so, he is able to understand and interpret his own experiences. After he has immigrated to the United States, literature becomes the venue for his "participation in the idyllic American national dreams" (69), as he uses literature in fighting for freedom and equality. Bulosan invests a huge space in this book to discuss politics of knowledge, as can be seen that the appreciation of self-education appears in several scenes. To him, self-education functions as a powerful apparatus in fighting against exploitation, racism, and injustices encountered by himself and other immigrant workers in the United States.

Besides politics of knowledge, *America Is in the Heart* also portrays other significant issues regarding the life of Filipinos and Filipinas, such as the class struggle in both the Philippines and the United States, the exclusion in the new world, the feminization of Filipinos, and the fight for better living and working conditions. Among these topics, an important mutual legacy that this autobiography shares with other works by Southeast Asian diasporic writers is the portrayal of rice culture, an integral part of the Philippine society. My dissertation examines this cultural heritage and points out that it functions as an important factor for the ontology of Filipinos and Filipinas.

Another study on Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature explores the experience of Indochinese refugees. The majority of Indochinese immigrants in the United States have the root of their diaspora in the Indochina War. In *Portrayal of Southeast Asian Refugees in Recent American Children's Books*, Michael M. Levy discusses the experiences of refugees with Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong ethnicities, who resettled in the United States. Through studying several children's books, which are nonfiction or fiction based on facts, Levy finds that there are many characters suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from

horrible war experiences, such as the loss of loved ones and incomplete families. The best way for those characters to cope with such disorder is to talk about the trauma and share the experiences with others. Some use the return home in search of lost roots as a step to heal the trauma. In the United States, they also undergo hostility from Americans in the form of everyday racism. Although the literary texts in this study deal with war aftermath, they provide little details about the war itself. There is no interest in discussing complex political ideologies behind the war or in blaming who should be responsible for it. This is because the target group of those books includes children between 6-10 years of age. Thus, the books rather focus on honest portrayals of common people through children's points of view.

Levy's study is quite similar to some parts of my dissertation, as it analyzes literary works by Indochinese refugees, discussing their experience, particularly the traumatic issues. This study is a great contribution to the field of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, but it only focuses on children's books. The perspective towards the refugees' experience is, therefore, from children's points of view. In addition, this study is confined to the experience of Indochinese refugees, who are only a part of Southeast Asian diasporic group. In my dissertation, I increase the diversity of the study in this area by examining literary texts for adults, which provide different perspectives towards the refugees' experience. I also add more literary works from other Southeast Asian ethnic groups, rather than focusing on the Indochinese refugees. The more diverse works in my dissertation expose us to experiences of other groups of diasporic people from Southeast Asia.

Another study on Southeast Asian diasporic literature focuses on the Vietnamese group. In "Vietnamese American Literature," Monique T.D. Truong contends that Vietnamese American literature is contextualized by wars and their aftermath. The presence of Vietnamese

was of little interest for Americans especially in the period before the fall of Saigon in 1975, since there were a very small number of them in the United States. In the early stage of Vietnamese American literature, oral tradition—oral histories, folklore, song lyrics, and other oral narratives—was employed to transmit stories of Vietnamese refugees. Some oral histories were compiled in two books, *Hearts of Sorrow* (1989) by Freeman and *Shallow Graves* (1981) by Larsen and Nga, in which Americans are either an editor or a coauthor. According to Truong, these two books are U.S.-centric; Vietnamese voices are manipulated by the American editor or coauthor and, as a result, lack autonomy. In the latter part of her study, Truong analyzes two autobiographies, Jand Ngoc Quang Huynh's *South Wind Changing* and Qui Duc Nguyen's *Where the Ashes Are*, which were published in the same year, 1994. Both of them depict the exodus of Vietnamese refugees escaping from the persecution of the Communist regime. These two autobiographies are free from the tension of coauthorship or manipulation by editors, so they are regarded as true voices of Vietnamese Americans.

In this study, Truong focuses her discussion on the voice in Vietnamese American literature, indicating that there has been development of this literary group as well as the struggle for autonomy of Vietnamese American writers. She slightly touches upon the social context of Vietnamese refugees, especially wars and diaspora, which are important points that my dissertation contributes to this area. I dig deeper into these social issues through the discussion of Cao's *Monkey Bridge* and Lam's *Perfume Dreams*, both of which deal with the Vietnam War and its tragic consequences.

Although Thai diasporic writing is not very conspicuous, compared to Filipino and Vietnamese diasporic writing, there is at least one study on the autobiography by a Thai woman who immigrated to the United States. In her dissertation studying race and identity in Asian

American literature, Rapeepanchanok Malinee Thongthiraj includes Wanwadee Larsen's *Confessions of a Mail Order Bride* as a primary text. Thongthirat examines the identity formation of Wanwadee, a mail order bride from Thailand, who decides to marry an American man and leave her home country for the United States. Thongthirat argues that amidst the white dominating culture in which Wanwadee is "othered" (132), she attempts to assimilate herself as well as to assert her own subjectivity. As a woman from Thai patriarchal society, she represents the racial and gender stereotype of Asian women with the quality of passivity, docility, submission, and gentleness. In American society, thus, she is both racialized and gendered. Thongthirat conceptualizes the situation endured by Wanwadee as "double marginalization" (133), being a minority woman in the white supremacist society. In spite of the manipulation from her husband and the racialization from his friends, who treat her with racial ideology, she suppresses her emotions in order to maintain her family. However, when her husband is caught in an extreme condition, addicted to cocaine and marijuana, she reveals her inner strength and helps him to overcome addiction. This illustrates "her 'inner selves'—assertiveness, perseverance" (168). While she is trying to conform to her husband's desire, she also maintains her subjectivity, especially when she and her family are in a critical situation. That is, she possesses multiple layers of Asian women's identity, masking herself in some situations and unmasking in different situations.

Thongthirat examines *Confessions of Mail Order Bride*, a Thai diasporic writing, through the lens of feminism as well as racial ideology, dissecting essential components of writing by a minority woman. She brings the voice of a Thai female diasporic writer, which is not very visible, into the Asian American literary canon. Her discussion focuses on the experience of a Thai mail order bride in the United States. In my dissertation, I include two texts from Thai male

diasporic writers—Pira Sudham and S.P. Somtow—in my analysis, with the aim to enhance the visibility of Thai diasporic writing. My emphasis is different from Thongthirat's; I center my discussion in the context of Thai society, since the major settings of the two texts are in Thailand. My dissertation, therefore, reveals another context of Thai diasporic writings and presents voices of other groups apart from those of Thai female diasporic subjects, which are rendered audible by Thongthirat.

In addition to the above studies, there is also some research on Hmong American literature. Autoethnographic stories are among the narratives studied by scholars. This type of narratives refers to "stories of/about the self told through the lens of culture. Aotoethnographic stories are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience" (Adams, Jones, and Ellis 1). Telling stories through the lens of culture makes the autoethnographic writing different from autobiographical writing, which is not necessarily told through this lens. In "'I salute the spirit of my communities': Autoethnographic Innovations in Hmong American Literature," Jeannie Chiu explores how Hmong autoethnographic stories endow Hmong refugees with voices to represent themselves. She argues that ethnography, the study of culture by including the observation of participants, tends to "dramatize their [Hmong's] exotic qualities" (46). Ethnographers often portray them as primitive, inassimilable, illiterate, and problematic. Hmong diasporic people tend to be painted with the image as sources of social problems in the United States. Chiu examines Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* and contends that this ethnography has the tendency to generalize Hmong, emphasize their cultural differences, and suppress their creativity. Hmong struggle to obtain their own voice, and autoethnography, a study of their culture by themselves, becomes an innovative medium for them to assert their ontology in the white dominant culture.

Autoethnographical narratives, such as those collected in Moua's *Bamboo among the Oaks*, are effectively employed in negotiating cultural differences, indicating Hmong's hybridization and adaptation, and asserting the significance of their cultural identity. Their autoethnographical narratives also incorporate folk tradition, oral storytelling, and art in transmitting their stories and experiences from Laos, refugee camps in Thailand, and the new home in the United States. Incorporating traditional modes of narration, authoethnography also functions as their cultural continuation and hybridization of Hmong American culture.

Chiu's study focuses on the representation of Hmong through narratives written by others and those written by themselves, which is a fascinating point to explore. Since Hmong refugees are in the world of white domination, they are likely to be suppressed by the dominating voice. As a result, they need to seek their own voice to assure that they are represented correctly without any racial bias. In my dissertation, I further develop this idea by analyzing how Hmong Americans use autobiography to assert their voice and ontology in not only the United States but also Laos and Thailand, where they are viewed as minorities and thus represented through the voice of the majority.

Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature provides large space for scholars to explore and conduct research studies. The existing studies show that this field of literature is also an important hub of a variety of discourses regarding Asian immigration, such as class struggle, surviving in the new world, gender and racial oppression, politics of identity, yearning for self-representation, and so forth. In addition, all of the above studies have been done on autobiographies or other kinds of texts portraying the first-hand experience of their authors. Based on the above studies and the primary texts in my dissertation, autobiographical writing seems to be the most significant literary form employed by Southeast Asian diasporic people in

portraying their experience, giving them a true voice for self-representation. Some parts of my dissertation address the same issues as shown in the previous studies discussed above, but I expand my discussion to different literary works, including both autobiographies and novels. In addition, there are new topics that I include, such as the legacy of rice and Buddhist culture, the legacy that cannot be abandoned by Southeast Asian diasporic subjects. The overview of this dissertation, which consists of five chapters, is elaborated as following. All chapters have their own unique focus, discussing specific issues regarding the diasporic lives of the authors of the primary texts as well as the lives of their people.

Chapter Overviews

This dissertation is divided into five chapters focusing on the mutual legacies under the concept of heterogeneity of Southeast Asian diasporic people. In chapter two, "Writing Rice and Buddhist Culture: Foods for Body and Souls of Southeast Asians in Sudham's *Monsoon Country*, Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*, and Siv's *Golden Bones*," I examine how rice and Buddhist culture, as the first mutual legacy of Southeast Asian people in this study, are portrayed in these texts. Rice is a staple food of people in Southeast Asia, while Buddhism serves as the main religion on the mainland including Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. (Although Buddhism has spread to Vietnam, the majority of Vietnamese claim Confucianism as their religion.) There are significant relations between people and rice and Buddhist culture. The discussion in this chapter encompasses the influence of this cultural heritage on people's life and society: how it shapes the society and nurtures people in the region, physically and spiritually. In addition, I discuss how rice and Buddhist culture is still persistent in the memory and imagination of Southeast Asian diasporic people, although they have already left their homeland and resettled in the new world. The persisting memory of rice and Buddhist

culture emerges in the form of the longing for the past when these people were in their homelands surrounded by rice and Buddhist culture. My discussion in this chapter indicates that there is an inextricable relation between diasporic people from Southeast Asia and rice and Buddhist culture they practice in their home countries.

The customary life of farmers and other groups of people in Southeast Asia is disrupted by Western colonialism and imperialism, another important legacy shared among these people. In chapter three, "Critiquing Colonialism and Imperialism in Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree*, Somtow's *Jasmine Nights*, and Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*," I discuss how the invasion of Western colonialism and imperialism has altered traditional ways of life of the indigenous. I focus my analysis on three important Western colonizers, the French, the British, and the American. In Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, I discuss French colonialism in Vietnam. British colonialism in Burma is analyzed in Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree*. American imperialism is critiqued through Somtow's *Jasmine Nights* and Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*. Through these works, I interrogate how colonialism and imperialism have reshaped or influenced Southeast Asian nations, people, and society. I borrow concepts from Said, Bhabha, Young, and a few other postcolonial theorists as major tools in the analysis. The discussion in this chapter also leads to the trope in the next chapter, which deals with wars and diaspora, since colonialism and imperialism serve as an important culprit of wars in this region, especially in the Indochina. Towards the end of the chapter, I discuss how the authors of the primary texts employ writing as an apparatus in responding to and resisting colonialism and imperialism. Viewing these texts as postcolonial literature, I employ ideas from Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, and Spivak to analyze the postcolonial characteristics and functions of these literary works.

Due to catastrophic consequences of colonialism and imperialism, the attempt to decolonize becomes a phenomenon in Southeast Asia. In chapter four: "Remembering Wars, Totalitarian Regimes, Diaspora, and Trauma in Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Lam's *Perfume Dreams*, Siv's *Golden Bones*, and Chan's *Hmong Means Free*," I discuss the legacy of the wars and Communist regimes which results in diaspora and trauma of Indochinese refugees. I explore the relation between colonialism and the Indochina War and indicate that this war greatly disrupts the normal life of people and inflicts devastating consequences on them. I analyze characters' experience during the wars and the Communist regimes, the period when they have to endure loss, dislocation, hardship, and brutality of the totalitarian regimes. I also discuss their flight from home countries and their experience in refugee camps where they have to struggle for survival. As background of my analysis in this chapter, I include Lazarus and Fanon's ideas about the movement of decolonization after World War II and discuss how the United States, as a new imperial power, gets involved in the Indochina War. I also employ concepts from Marx to analyze the Communist regimes' movement towards classless, utopian society. Althusser's ideas about Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatuses are also engaged in the discussion of the repression by the Communist regimes. In the final part of this chapter, I examine war trauma and post-traumatic disorder as evident in major characters after they have escaped from the war zone and the totalitarian regimes. I discuss how trauma becomes an important impediment in rebuilding their new lives, and how they suffer from the post-traumatic stress disorder which affects not only themselves but also their loved ones and the society in their new world.

Resettling in the new world is not an easy task for Southeast Asian diasporic people, as there are many personal and social conflicts they have to encounter. In chapter five: "Narrating Diasporic

Experiences in the West: Subjects of Two Worlds in Lam's *Perfume Dreams*, Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree*, and Chan's *Hmong Means Free*," I discuss internal and external conflicts regarding diaspora undergone by major characters. I also explore how those characters struggle to survive the harsh living conditions as well as racism they encounter in the new world. These conflicts are also regarded as their mutual legacies they share in their destination countries, especially in the United States, the major destination. In addition, cultural conflicts, psychological states, and politics of identity are discussed. In the second half of this chapter, which is the conclusion of this dissertation, I elaborate on the literariness of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, as a new voice in Asian American literature. I discuss characteristics, writing style, language, and common themes shared by authors in this group of literature. I also interrogate how Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature is similar or different from literature of other groups in Asian American literary canon. The final part of this chapter concludes how Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature contributes to the field of Asian American literary studies. I conclude that Southeast Asian diasporic people and their literature are heterogeneous. Under such heterogeneity, there are mutual legacies which constitute their unique identity. This identity also serves as an integral part of the heterogeneity of Asian diasporic subjects as a whole. Besides, the literature of Southeast Asian diasporic people serves as part of the heterogeneity of Asian American literature.

CHAPTER TWO

WRITING RICE AND BUDDHIST CULTURE: FOODS FOR BODY AND SOULS OF SOUTHEAST ASIANS IN SUDHAM'S *MONSOON COUNTRY*, CAO'S *MONKEY BRIDGE*, BULOSAN'S *AMERICA IS IN THE HEART*, AND SIV'S *GOLDEN BONES*

Throughout the history of human beings, food and religion are marked as crucial factors for their existence. Food functions as fundamental nourishment for people to mature, develop, exist, and produce social cultures. The body's need of nutrients and hunger necessitate food and bring about modes of food production, resulting in varieties of foodways in human society which have evolved until present. In the prehistoric era, human beings relied on hunting to survive before developing agricultural practice. Nowadays, the advancement of technology enables them to produce not only for consumption but also for trading or other kinds of economic transactions. Apart from bodily needs, human minds also desire for nourishment, as sometimes bodily gratification is not sufficient for lives to carry on daily tasks or fully exist in the society. Under this concept, religion plays a significant role in fulfilling mental needs, providing food for human souls. Religion can be regarded as spiritual refuge and mental nourishment when a person has to escape from spiritual threat or when that person hungers for moral support. Bodily and mental hunger instigates distinctive cultural practices in different societies, evident in a diversity of food cultures as well as traditions and beliefs related to religion.

Comprised of numerous ethnic groups, Southeast Asia houses varieties of food cultures maintaining physical wellbeing of the populace. At the same time, various religions also nourish people's souls in different areas in the region. Among the cultural varieties concerning food and religion, Southeast Asians share rice and Buddhist culture as an important mutual legacy. Rice has remained the staple food for the majority in this region since the ancient time. Rice generates

several cultural practices involving production, preparation, and consumption. For the mind, Buddhism plays a major role as spiritual sustenance, especially for people in the mainland Southeast Asia. Rice and Buddhism, thus, are considered staple foods for body and souls of people in this region. Even after they move from their home countries and become diasporic subjects, rice and Buddhist culture persist in their consciousness. This cultural trait also becomes an important part of their writing, which portrays the strong relationship between people and rice and Buddhist culture in both their homeland and the new world. In this chapter, I discuss significant roles of rice and Buddhism in Southeast Asian society through the examination of four literary texts: Pira Sudham's *Monsoon Country*, Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*, and Sichan Siv's *Golden Bones*. I argue that these texts function as arenas where the authors represent themselves, announcing how rice and Buddhism, as cultural phenomena, take part in the determination of their lives as well as those of other people in the same region. In addition, I also analyze how this cultural legacy persists in Southeast Asian diasporic people after they have left their home countries, and how it helps or impedes the construction of their new lives. I also propose that writing rice and Buddhist culture serves as a means to assert their existence in the new world, with their initial identity they bring along from their homelands. Instead of focusing on the issues of assimilation into the new world and adoption of a new identity, the authors above choose to treat rice and Buddhist culture as major themes of their writings in order to represent themselves and their culture. This cultural legacy from the old world constitutes their identity, and they refuse to abandon it, even though they have rebuilt their lives in the new world and acquired a new identity as Southeast Asian diasporic subjects.

Rice: Food for Body and Souls of Southeast Asians

Food, albeit with its association with physical sphere, connotes important meanings far beyond the boundary of physical needs, encompassing many aspects of people's lives and society. Roland Barthes, in "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," views food as a form of communication and representation, as he states, "For what is food? It is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior" (24). According to this argument, food can be construed as a means to convey messages, information about particular groups in the society, social practices, and the articulation of self. The great extent of food boundary is also underlined by Barthes' statement that "food is becoming incorporated into an ever-lengthening list of situations" (25). That is to say, food is involved with a countless number of human activities, such as food production, food culture, and the interaction between groups of people. Apart from that, food is also associated with the history of human beings, as stated in Sidney Mintz's *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom* (1996): "The foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them; the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve, and consume the foods are all culturally variable, with histories of their own" (7). The food culture of a particular group of people constitutes the uniqueness of their culture as a whole. Through the study of food, therefore, we can also comprehend the history and other cultural aspects of people who consume it.

The concept that food does not simply mean something people eat draws great attention from scholars in various disciplines. As Counihan and Esterik write in the introduction of *Food and Culture* (1997), "an interest in food studies has recently burgeoned in other scholarly disciplines, such as history, sociology, philosophy, and literary criticism" (2). It can be said that

food studies is an interdisciplinary academic area that needs contributions from other areas and, at the same time, contributes to those areas. Altogether, they produce a body of knowledge that helps us to understand ways of life and cultural practices of particular groups of people. This is in agreement with Sara Sceats, who proposes, "The central role and multiple significances of food and eating entail a link with epistemological and ontological concerns" (1). Food and eating culture, therefore, involve a science of knowledge and the human concept of being. Food also functions as a cultural marker which constitutes distinctive identities of people in different groups. In *Eating Identities* (2008), Wenying Xu argues that "food operates as one of the key cultural signs that structure people's identities and their concepts of others" (2). Food stands among significant cultural traits which help particular groups of people to gain perception about their ontology and identities. In a specific part of the globe, such as Asia, food "is one of the most important cultural markers of identity in contemporary Asian society, and it has provided a medium for the understanding of social relations, family and kinship, class and consumption, gender ideology and cultural symbolism" (Cheung and Chee-Beng 2). As a result, food studies helps us to comprehend the social fabric interwoven by different but correlated social dimensions.

The United States is rich of food cultures, as it houses diverse ethnic groups who bring along eating cultures with them. For instance, the advent of Asian immigrants, such as the Chinese and the Japanese, has introduced Asian food cultures to American society. Chinese food, for example, has emerged as one of the most popular choice for diners in the United States since the nineteenth century. In *Dubious Gastronomy* (2014), Robert Ji-Song Ku argues, "American diners have had a love-hate relationship with Chinese food since the nineteenth century, when Chinese immigrants first arrived on the West Coast. Although among the most popular ethnic

foods in America, Chinese food is perhaps the most pilloried." That is to say, in spite of their complaints of the lack of sanitation, unhealthiness, and the undesirability of Chinese immigrants, a large number of Americans still rely on Chinese food in satisfying their hunger (7). This is the reason why Ku maintains that American diners have the love-hate relationship with Chinese food. Nowadays, Chinese food, with its quick preparation and comparatively cheap prices, stands among the most popular and convenient choices for both dine-in and take-out customers for their lunch or dinner.

Southeast Asian diasporic people are among ethnic groups who greatly contribute to food diversity in the United States. As Xu puts it, these people bring "new 'exotic' cuisines with them. Vietnamese restaurants began to appear in cosmopolitan centers, many of them 'pho restaurants,' which serve as their signature entrée rice noodles in beef broth heavily flavored with star anise. Thai cuisine has been a rage in America for over three decades" (12). Apart from business purposes, these restaurants also disseminate food cultures of Southeast Asia to American people and assert the ontology of Southeast Asians on the American land. For Southeast Asian diasporic people as well as other diasporic groups, their foods play a significant role in the perception of their race in the new world, as Anita Mannur maintains, "Food, as a central part of the cultural imagination of diasporic populations, becomes one of the most viable and valuable sites from which to inquire into the richly layered texture of how race is imagined and interpreted within the cultural arena, both to affirm and resist notions of home and belonging" (8). By pondering their food and food culture, they as well as other groups in the new world can gain more perception about their race. Food and self-assertion is a topic presented in Asian American literature. In a study of consumption and identity of Asian Americans through their literature, Jennifer Ann Ho contends that these people use "their relationship with food and consumption as

a means for asserting themselves as both Asian *and* American" (4 emphasis in original). Ho's argument suggests that foodways serve as an integral part of Asian American identity, helping them to assert their existence in the United States. Therefore, food also serves as mental nourishment for these people, as it provides the sense of self which is part of their spiritual ontology. Ho's concept of food as self-assertion is also supported by Mannur's statement: "food is more than just a source of psychic sustenance; it also feeds into the literary rendering of Asian American subjectivity" (13). Based on these ideas, food and foodways offer an arena for Asian American to assert their existence on the American land. The prosperity of Asian restaurants also suggests that to a considerable degree American mainstream embraces the food culture of these people and accept their existence on the American land.

For Southeast Asians in general, rice culture, considered the most common foodways that link people in different ethnic groups, serves as symbols of social relations as well as a marker of people's identity. Besides the consumption of rice as the staple food, Southeast Asians boast a long history of rice culture. The majority in several countries in this region, such as Thailand, Vietnam, Burma, and Cambodia, earn their living by rice farming, an occupation passed on from generations to generations. Ancestors of people in Southeast Asia are regarded by historians as pioneers of rice farming, as stated by Craig Lockard: "Thailand, Vietnam, and Burma were among the world's earliest farmers" (7). For people in this region, rice farming can be regarded as a foundation of other social aspects. In addition to providing subsistence, it "produces surpluses that allow many people to engage in non-agricultural pursuits: government, religion, handicrafts or art, all useful to early land-based kingdoms" (Heidhues 35). Based on this idea, rice is an important factor for the genesis and development of other social and cultural products. Historically, rice cultivation in Southeast Asia fed not only people in this region but also

Westerners. During the era of colonialism, Westerners sought spices and ingredients as tributes from their colonized countries in Southeast Asia. Along with these, rice was "one of the greatest gifts to the West" and "became well known in the Americas by the nineteen century" (Mintz 104-05). It is obvious that Southeast Asia, as one of the destinations of colonialism, contributed greatly to the wellbeing of Westerners through their rice. Nowadays, since a larger number of people around the world consume rice as a major source of carbohydrates, rice has become a major cash crop generating huge revenues for Southeast Asian countries.

In Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, the portrayal of rice and rice culture has become a distinctive characteristic, depicting how people and society are forged by this cultural aspect. In several literary works, the authors employ stories related to rice in portraying lives of people in their home countries, indicating how they struggle in the society and how rice culture constitutes their identity. Pira Sudham's *Monsoon Country* is marked as an important representation of several dimensions of Thai society, particularly lives of Thai farmers, social hierarchy, struggle against oppression, and political situations during the 1970s. In this novel, several facets of rice culture as an integral part of Thai society are portrayed through a dramatic life of the protagonist.

Sudham was born in Napo, a small, remote village in the northeastern part of Thailand, which is known as Esarn. He spent his childhood in the rice field before migrating to Bangkok to be a servant of a monk in order to make a living and pursue higher education. Sudham entered Chulalongkorn University, a prestigious institution in Bangkok before winning a scholarship from the government of New Zealand to study English literature at Auckland University and Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. He had spent over 20 years in New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, and Hong Kong, where he wrote several short stories, poems, and

Monsoon Country, his first novel. Being a prominent Thai writer using English to represent his country, Sudham was nominated for the 1990 Nobel Prize in literature. He is the first Thai writer to be nominated for this prestigious prize.

Monsoon Country is more or less Sudham's autobiography. This novel narrates a story of Prem, a boy from the village of Napo, which is Sudham's home village, who comes to be a monk's servant in Bangkok in order to pursue higher education. He has to struggle this way because his family is unable to support him financially. The initials of this character's name, Prem Surin, coincide with the initials of Pira Sudham. Similar to Sudham's scholarship to New Zealand, in the story, Prem also wins a scholarship to pursue a degree in England, but does not finish it. Prem's life is in the period of a political turmoil in Thailand in 1976, in which a large number of students are slaughtered during their demonstration against the government. Being disappointed and outraged by social injustice, Prem terminates his education in England and returns to his home village, where he enters monkhood. Many parts of this novel are similar to Sudham's personal life, so it is his self-representation, although it is a fictional work.

Monsoon Country describes the life of the majority in Esarn, who earn a living by rice farming. Actually, rice farming has been the main occupation of most Thai people from the ancient time, and still fosters the country's economy. As stated in *A History of Thailand* (2005), rice farming has played a significant role in sustaining the economy of the whole nation: "Everywhere […] farmers produced first for their own family needs and sold only what surplus that remained. According to the local saying, the household waited until it saw the yield of the current harvest before selling off the surplus of the previous one. Food security was priority" (Baker and Phongpaichit 86). This traditional practice is also evinced in *Monsoon Country*; after the harvest, farmers divide their produce into two portions for family consumption and selling.

Prem's family also conforms to this way of life. Keeping the first part to feed the family members, they transform their surplus into money for other expenses as well as children's education. This portrayal suggests that rice is part of the physical existence of people in this area, serving as their staple and a major source of income. Moreover, rice is regarded as their future, as children rely on the money from selling it in obtaining education.

During the 1970s, when *Monsoon Country* is set, Thai farmers still practiced the traditional way of rice farming, a system that can be viewed as an important relation between human beings and nature. As can be seen through this novel, Thai farmers have a strong relationship with nature, since they need to rely on the natural cycle, especially the seasonal rain, the major source of agricultural irrigation. Without any kinds of modern machines, villagers use water buffaloes as supporting labor. The rain represents farmers' hope as well as the commencement of their life cycle, as Sudham explains, "The rainy season had commenced. The rains poured down day and night, promising and bountiful. Like most village inhabitants, the Surins [Prem's family] looked hopefully and gladly upon the surrounding rice fields, which were now inundated and workable. Another rice planting season had come. They were ready to plant rice" (5). This descriptive excerpt is a great depiction of ways of life of Esarn people, who seem to live tranquilly under their traditional practice and natural cycle, far from the busy life and commotion in big cities. Unfortunately, as portrayed in the story, most of them still live in the abyss of poverty, since they are not engaged in other occupations. During the dry season, farming is not possible, due to severe drought and a lack of irrigation system. Moreover, the poor farmers possess very small pieces of land, which sometimes yield insufficient crops even for family consumption. In the story, because of the drought and failing crops, Prem and his brother have to wander to other villages to beg for rice to feed their family:

> Once or twice Prem, like most boys, did not attend his class because he had to travel with his brother to distant villages to beg for rice. He had become a beggar, travelling from village to village, from hut to hut, with Kiang. Suffering had made the two boys less self-conscious and their begging voices had a ring of truth, even though they tinged it with pathos. They stood at the bottom of the ladders and pleaded: "Just a handful of rice. Drought hit us so hard this year and last." (36)

This situation indicates that Mother Nature determines the life or death of Esarn people. When they encounter the scarcity of food, which is the most prioritized among human needs, the less important needs have to be deferred or even terminated. In this case, Prem and other boys in his village have to abandon school in order to search for the most important factor for their survival, rice. Although Prem always dreams of education and aspires to improve himself intellectually, he cannot resist the hunger of his family and watch them starve to death. Rice, as their staple food, is more urgent than education.

Another important aspect of food culture that can be dissected from the above excerpt is food sharing. As stated by Miller, Rozin, and Fiske, food sharing "is a social symbol which can be used or understood in the same way as all other social symbols" (426). Giving rice is considered a form of food sharing, which has a significant meaning. In *Monsoon Country*, this cultural practice symbolizes the bond and relationship between people in the northeast of Thailand. In addition, it also unites people together and promotes the sense of group among themselves, as Lukanuski argues, "In the sharing of food, the sense of community is continually defined and maintained" (qtd. in Xu 3-4). This cultural characteristic indicates that these people live in a collective society, in which all are regarded as relatives under the nation as a family network. When other members in their community suffer from famine, they help to alleviate this

difficulty through food sharing. Rice, in this case, serves as a medium through which this culture is practiced and thus functions as social fabric that interweaves people, uniting members of the community. Food sharing can be viewed as the most important form of sharing, since it determines physical ontology of the receiver, which is the fundamental state of existence. According to this significance, the sharing of rice, a salient factor for physical ontology of Esarn people, results in a strong bond between the giver and the receiver. When the situation is reverse, the receiver will not be reluctant to help the giver in return. Based on this analysis, Sudham's *Monsoon Country* reaffirms that rice as a kind of food does not simply refer to important substance needed by the body, but also represents cultural markers that indicate social relations and unity.

The strong bond between people in this area, which is instigated by rice culture, can also be discerned through Prem's desire for education. He witnesses his family and other people suffering from poverty, which is partially a result of their ignorance, a hindrance to their life improvement. Most of the villagers lack education, since they live in a remote area neglected by the government, especially in the education aspect. Illiteracy is common in the area as can be seen when Kum, Prem's father, names his son: "Kum repeated the name and the day of birth with some confidence. He had spent days trying to commit the facts to memory. He could not read or write" (7). With the bond between Prem and people in the community, he aspires to help those people to ascend from the well of ignorance, and the only thing he can do is to develop himself first. He views that the acquisition of knowledge is not only for his own development, but also for the betterment of his homeland. As a result, he decides to go to Bangkok, where he can pursue higher education, and is determined to come back to help his people after achieving an educational goal. His strong determination to help the poor in his homeland also becomes a

driving force for him to apply for a scholarship to pursue a degree in England. His consciousness towards the poor people in the village of Napo is an important factor encouraging him to win the scholarship. During his interview, he states:

> I've arisen from the mud, from a mire of ignorance and darkness, to catch a glimpse of light to free myself and to walk in daylight. I was, and still am, that buffalo boy who alone boarded a train bound for this city in May 1965 so that I could go to a secondary school. Now eight years later I am ready to brave the flight towards an unknown country to encounter all sorts of new experiences, to learn, the hear more, to read more, and to look from afar so that I may see my own country in a truer perspective. When I achieve my goal, then I shall return to help my country and its poor. (78)

Prem's speech during the interview is influenced by rice culture, which has forged his life and process of thinking. He identifies himself as a "buffalo boy" rising from the "mud," whose identity is developed through rice culture. Both "buffalo" and "mud" serve as pivotal elements of rice culture. Farmers in Esarn practice wet rice cultivation, in which water buffaloes are employed as natural machines for plowing the land before planting rice. The planting area has to be turned into mud, so that farmers will be able to insert the root of young rice into the soil. In this environment, the scene of children riding or tending buffaloes and playing in the mud is commonly seen. Therefore, buffaloes and mud become parts of the identity of Esarn people, including Prem. This identity is deeply rooted in his consciousness, so when he has to identify himself, those images—buffaloes and mud—automatically arise in his thinking mechanism. Prem takes pride in this identity, although it might be devalued by others, especially those in Bangkok, who assume that they are more civilized. An important reason for his pride also

involves eating culture. People in Thailand, no matter where they live, rural or metropolitan areas, consume rice as their staple food. The rice that they consume is derived from the sweat of Prem, his family, as well as other farmers in the rural areas, who labor for the wellbeing of all people in the country. Therefore, to him, being a buffalo boy in the mud is a prestigious identity which he will never abandon. This image is also part of a collective identity of all people in his homeland, constructed by rice culture.

Prem wins the scholarship, which brings about both good and bad news for his family and himself, as this precious educational opportunity also affects their farming life. This incident also illustrates the relation between farmers and buffaloes. Prem's family has to sell some of their buffaloes because Prem needs money for the preparation costs, including buying suits, a suitcase, new shoes, as well as other expenses: "We can sell one or two buffaloes, so we can raise the amount of money you need" (80). Buffaloes are regarded as an important part of rice farming culture because they are used in plowing rice fields. With their usage, they also provide monetary value. In fact, rice culture helps transform buffaloes from wild animals to domestic animals. In this case, the loss of buffaloes as part of rice culture, however, is traded for the promising life of Prem as a farmer boy and other farmers who wait for his return to his homeland.

Alongside the relation between people and rice culture, Sudham also represents rice as a medium through which farmers in the village of Napo are exploited. The farmers' poverty is aggravated by the exploitation of capitalists, who appear in *Monsoon Country* as middlemen. It is easy for farmers to be cheated when they sell their product, since they are not educated and thus can neither read nor write. Sudham depicts this injustice in the scene when Kum, Prem's father, sells his rice: "The mill owner, the traders, the middlemen and the shop-keepers who were

mostly Chinese and become powerfully wealthy, dealing with the illiterate peasants who squatted on their heels like beggars, watching sadly as their products were weighed and valued" (34). The total sum of Kum's rice for the whole year—after dividing some for family consumption—is worth only 280 baht (approximately nine to ten U.S. dollars). As middlemen, Chinese immigrants are an economically powerful group of people in Thailand. As stated by Baker and Phongpaichit, a large number of Chinese escaped from poverty and disorder in southern China and settled in Thailand: "By the 1880s there were regular steamship services between Bangkok and the southern China ports, and a regular supply of the poor and desperate ready to make the unpleasant trip. Between 1882 and 1910, one million immigrated of whom 370,000 remained permanently" (93). The Chinese immigrants scattered throughout Thailand, and most of them were engaged in mercantile occupations. There were also a lot of economically powerful Chinese immigrants in Esarn, where Prem's family is exploited. Apart from Kum, other farmers also suffer from the same exploitation, due to their illiteracy and lack of power to negotiate. In addition, they have no other choices in selling their rice, since it is impossible for them to transport it to sell in other towns because of poor transportation, which will substantially increase the cost. Even though they can bring their rice to sell in other towns, it is not guaranteed that they will be offered better prices, as it seems that capitalism is pervasive in the region. Therefore, the farmers' choice is to "take it or leave it" (34), as evident in the Chinese middleman's yelling at the farmers when they try to ask for slightly higher prices. The discourse between the middlemen and the farmers in *Monsoon Country* is similar to the discourse of the Bourgeois class and the proletarian class, the discourse of exploitation proposed by Marx. While the middlemen gain wealth from the surplus produced by the farmers, the farmers receive only

small portion of their products, sometimes not enough for their consumption, as is evident in the scene when Prem has to abandon school to beg for rice.

As discussed above, *Monsoon Country* reflects rice culture and other related issues in the northeast of Thailand, portraying how the people in this area are influenced by this cultural aspect. For them, rice serves as not only bodily nourishment but also social relations and identity. Sudham himself also arises from rice culture as an important background of his life. Therefore, this novel serves as social representation as well as self-representation. Based on Roland Barthes's concept about food as a form of communication, rice in this novel is also a medium through which Esarn people use to communicate with one another. Rice sharing, as discussed above, can be construed as a form of nonverbal communication, indicating that people understand the plight of one another and are willing to give a hand. Rice is also a message informing Esarn people that they share the same identity and belong to the same social unit, which they take pride in. By portraying rice culture in this novel, Sudham asserts his initial identity as a Thai farmer, even though he has become a diasporic subject.

Besides Thailand, Vietnam also possesses a long history of rice culture. Rice farming in this country provides fundamental subsistence for its people and fosters the nation's economy. The Mekong delta area in the south of Vietnam is one of the greatest rice farming lands in Southeast Asia alongside with Thailand and Burma (Osborne 102-03). Furthermore, in Vietnamese eating culture, rice is treated as the most important food in each meal. People show "respect for food in general and toward rice in particular (rice is served and eaten first and foremost; children are require to finish each and every grain of rice)" (Avieli 58-59). Apart from being staple food for Vietnamese people, rice is intertwined with other cultural aspects, especially the culture of food production. In earning a living, most Vietnamese are engaged in

agricultural practices with rice as the main crop. For example, in Hoi An, one of the major cities of Vietnam, which is well-known for tourism, most people nowadays still rely on rice farming, particularly in traditional ways, as Avieli explains, "all the villagers grow rice as their main agricultural product, supplemented with fishing and aqua-culture. […] Though machines are sometimes used, most rice cultivation is still powered by these gentle bovines [buffaloes] whose enormous gray bodies dot the rural landscape" (5). The traditional practice of Vietnamese people indicates that even in the age of modernization, when machines become crucial part of agriculture, the primitive rice culture is still an important part of their lives.

As portrayed in Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, rice culture takes a significant role in shaping the life and society of the Vietnamese, which can be seen through the lives of several characters as well as the depiction of rice culture in the novel. Rice is a significant representation of the country, a center of cultural practices, a body and soul of the nation, and a heritage of all Vietnamese people. In Thanh's diary to Mai, her daughter, she writes, "To know a rice field is to know the soul of Vietnam" (172). Thanh has a strong relationship with the rice field in the province of Ba Xuyen, since she was born and grew up there. Throughout her life in Vietnam, she witnesses a lot of social incidents and changes happening in the rice field, from the time when people live a tranquil life until the periods of wars. This is the reason why her memory is replete with images of the rice field, its atmosphere, and incidents happening there. The rice field is an important root of her life, so when she is uprooted by the war and becomes a diasporic subject in the United States, she cannot manage to survive. Apart from her desire to bring Baba Quan, her father whom she leaves behind in Vietnam, to the United States, she also struggles with the recurring memory of the rice field, which intensifies her yearning for homeland and hunger for the past. Although the new world provides her with a refuge from the war and food

for her hunger, it cannot offer her the sense of home where she used to be surrounded by the rice field. Therefore, her longing for homeland and the rice field always emerges in her imagination, as she writes to her daughter:

> Everything took place by the rice fields. It was by the rice banks, where a coolness congregates near a coconut grove, that I took my afternoon nap. Brown vertical trunks absorbed the righteousness of the fields and shot heavenward like sacred pillars of an ancient pagoda. Husky grains dangled from the rice plants, so fragile and awkward they almost looked bashful. […] Boys and girls on water buffaloes' backs shielded themselves under conical hats etched by the hat weavers with poems and watched the progress of the fields, singing an occasional midday ballad. (172-73)

Apart from representing Thanh's imagination, the above excerpt also offers the sense of literariness to readers. The beautiful, vivid description of the rice field and the tranquility derived from this description indicate the high literary talent of Cao, the author. Besides historical value, this writing also provides readers with literary value.

Thanh fails to adjust herself to the new world because the rice culture is an important element of her life. Unfortunately, she cannot find this culture in the new world to fulfill her life after she has left Vietnam. Another important factor for her failure in the adjustment has to do with the mental wound engraved in her heart at the rice field. She leaves her mother's body in a rice field while trying to bury her. After her mother's sudden and unexpected death, she brings the body to her home village, which is assigned as a free-fire zone, and is attacked by napalm. On this rice field, she receives both a physical scar from napalm burning and a mental scar from leaving her mother's body without a proper burying. It is the mental scar that torments her the

most, since she is unable to complete one the most important duties of a Vietnamese daughter, managing a proper funeral for parents. In her diary she writes, "I learned that my mother's body, your grandmother's body, was never found and must have remained exposed, soulless, forever hungry and forever wandering by the waters of the Mekong where I had abandoned her" (251). All these incidents, which greatly affect Thanh's life, take place in or by the rice field. As a result, the rice field becomes the center of her memory and a medium through which her stories are transmitted. The rice field provides rice for her to consume and functions as the focal arena of her past. For her, rice, a significant product from the rice field, serves as food for both her body and soul. Being dislocated from the rice and rice field in her homeland, she fails to rebuild her life. While her daughter can consume hamburgers or sandwiches and successfully adjust to American life, Thanh cannot abandon Vietnamese rice culture and the memory it conveys, which finally lead to her death. Metaphorically, the monkey bridge that brings her across the ocean to the United States does not bring the rice field and rice culture, which are her roots, with her. Without these roots she cannot survive, in spite of the abundance of food in the new world.

The life of Baba Quan, another major character, also intertwines with rice and rice culture in Vietnam. Throughout the novel, Thanh conceals the truth from Mai that Baba Quan is not Mai's real grandfather. She reveals this truth at the very end of the novel, saying that actually Uncle Khan, a wealthy landlord in Ba Xuyen, is Mai's real grandfather. This dramatic and complicated story also results from the conflict of rice and the survival of poor farmers, created by Cao as an important subplot of the novel. The tragic story of Baba Quan also helps to explain an important conflict between farmers and landlords in Vietnam, which is also an important element that fuels the fire of war between North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

Baba Quan is a devout Confucian who has a strong bond with his homeland where he has grown rice for all his life. He is described as "a farmer who tilled the land with patience and dignity" (229). Rice culture circulates in his veins, being an inextricable part of his life. This is an important reason why he refuses to leave his homeland for the United States when he has a chance, a chance that people severely suffering from war will not pass. He has grown up in the rice field and built his life and family there, so this place is, similar to Thanh, the root of his life. He is acutely aware that if he is uprooted, it might be impossible for him to survive. Therefore, if he will die, he will choose to die on his rice field, rather than on an unknown land.

Seeing Mai's attempt to bring her grandfather to the United States, Uncle Michael, Baba Quan's American friend, comments that Baba Quan will never abandon his homeland: "I would be surprised if someone like your grandfather would even want to leave his homeland" (215). As an American soldier in the Vietnam War, Uncle Michael learns and perceives how much Vietnamese farmers are bonded with their land, especially in the case of Baba Quan, who inherits the dignified rice culture. His relationship with rice is beyond the fact that he is only a tenant farming on a land rented out by Uncle Khan, who is "the richest of all landlords, not just landlords from the province of Ba Xuyen but from all the Mekong Delta combined" (173). The land that Baba Quan plants rice on, no matter whom it belongs to, provides rice, the most important subsistence for his family. He is very grateful to the land and the rice that nurture him and his family, so it is impossible for him to abandon them.

Baba Quan's tragic story stems from the issue of rice as a salient factor for survival. Like farmers in Thailand, those in Vietnam also rely on nature in the process of rice farming, and it seems that Mother Nature is not always kind to them. Some years, they experience drought, while other years they encounter flood, both preventing them from fully harvesting their crops.

These situations are overwhelming for tenants, since they have to struggle with their subsistence as well as the rent for their landlords. Similar to the discourse between middlemen and farmers in Sudham's *Monsoon Country*, the discourse between landlords and farmers in *Monkey Bridge* is clearly discourse of exploitation, compared to the relation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as discussed by Marx. Baba Quan and his wife are driven into a desperate condition by the merciless of both nature and Uncle Khan: "plagued by drought and flood, they had had difficulty paying Uncle Khan his share of the family's harvests. After four years of failed crops, the plot of earth they leased, a vacant field of hard brown earth, was slipping irrevocably beyond their grasp" (230). The need for food to nurture and sustain the life is marked as the fundamental need of human beings and other living creatures. When the body is in a desperate need of food, they will try all means to obtain it. For Baba Quan, the lack of rice, a subsistence for the survival of him and his wife, corners him to commit a sin, a crime against his wife and his own conscience, destroying the honor of his wife as well as his own dignity. After "another month of sucking on rock sugar for breakfast, lunch, and dinner" (234), he prostitutes his wife to Uncle Khan in the pursuit of subsistence. It is Uncle Khan, who impregnates Baba Quan's wife and begets Thanh, so he is the real grandfather of Mai. Baba Quan develops great revenge in his heart and finally becomes a Vietcong with the aim to take a vengeance on Uncle Khan. His story also reflects an important historical fact that a lot of farmers in South Vietnam joined the Vietcong out of their revenge on landlords who oppressed them. When the Vietcong propagated their policy to eliminate landlordism, some farmers in the South collaborated with them, either directly joining the army or providing intelligence. This collaboration was among the reasons why South Vietnam was defeated by North Vietnam.

The portrayal of Thanh and Baba Quan reflects on how the lives of Vietnamese people and their society are configured by rice and rice culture, the roots from which they arise. Rice, as the staple food and cultural representation, is part of their identity, which they refuse to abandon. Such identity is a significant element under the ontological concept, which sustains their physical and spiritual existence. In the United States, Thanh's inability to survive is attributed to the fact that she has only physical existence; her spiritual existence has died since she has left the rice field in Vietnam. In addition, the memory of her rice-influenced past keeps haunting her, urging her to return to the homeland and finish incomplete tasks, reuniting with Baba Quan and properly burying her deceased mother. Meanwhile, Baba Quan even refuses to leave his homeland to seek refuge from the war and start a new life in the new world, since the bond between him and the rice field is too strong to break. The land where he used to grow rice is an important part of his unforgettable past and present, so he is determined to make it his future, no matter how perilous it will be. He is acutely aware that to abandon his homeland is to abandon his life, so he is not afraid if he would die on the rice field.

Unlike Thailand and Vietnam, which are located on the mainland, the Philippines rests on the maritime area of Southeast Asia. In fact, people's cultures and ways of life among these three countries are different from one another. However, there is at least one cultural heritage that they share: rice culture. Like the Thai and the Vietnamese, majority of the Filipino consume rice as the main staple and earn a living through rice farming. As portrayed in Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*, rice culture has shaped the life and society of Filipinos in several aspects. Most of the characters in the first part of the book, which recounts stories in the Philippines, arise from rice farming background, including Carlos Bulosan, the main character and the narrator. Rice, as the major factor for his family's survival, is involved with many important incidents in their lives,

which represents the lives of many families in the Philippines. Rice, in terms of consumption, is prioritized among other foods as Bulosan states, "Rice was the main staple and the peasants could not exist without it" (58). Apart from its significance in body nourishment, this statement suggests that rice is an important part of the ontological concept in the Philippine society. A reason supporting this argument is that the existence of a person is based on the food, and for Filipinos, rice serves as the salient element of consumption in every meal. The first point to be discerned is the eating culture of people in this country, which involves other related cultural aspects. As evinced in many scenes of *America Is in the Heart*, the significant roles of rice in the Philippine food culture are portrayed through the characters' food preparation and consumption, as well as their pursuit of food.

For the food preparation and consumption, Bulosan demonstrates that rice is the first element of the meal that must be prepared before other side dishes. This is to ensure that at least the family will have the staple for that particular meal; that means they are secure in the consumption aspect. Explaining his routine when he still lives with his family in the Philippines, Bulosan states that the first thing he does when he comes back from working in the field is to cook rice: "There was no food left. I went to the rice bin and filled the cooking pot. I prepared string beans and mixed them with small slices of beef" (11). After the hard work throughout the day, people need food to regain the energy. According to the above excerpt, rice is the first thing to be prepared, since it is perceived as the most important part of the meal. The significance of rice cooking is emphasized in Bulosan's narrative, since it is a part of people's ways of life and a factor for their existence, reflecting that rice cooking is one of the most important activities in a family. In the scene when Macario, Bulosan's brother, comes back after leaving home for education, Bulosan writes, "My mother was boiling rice, but she came running to meet my

brother at the door, uttered a few words of affection, and returned hastily to the stove" (21). Again, rice cooking is prioritized by Bulosan's mother. Although she has not seen Macario for a long time, she greets him with a few words and hurries back to her important task, rice cooking. The reason why Bulosan incorporates rice cooking in his narrative is that it resides in his consciousness as a permanent memory, suggesting that in the Philippine foodways, the image of rice cooking is the everyday picture seen by Bulosan as well as other Filipinos and Filipinas. It is a common, repetitive scene in their daily life.

Apart from food preparation, in which rice cooking takes the major roles, Bulosan also depicts the pattern of food consumption of his family as well as other Filipinos. Again, rice is treated as the most important element in their consumption pattern: "We spread the salted fish on the steaming rice and soaked it with the broth from the vegetable pot" (11). Other complimenting foods or side dishes for a meal might be varied, depending on what they can obtain, but rice remains an indispensable part of the meal. Besides his family, Bulosan also describes the similar consumption pattern of people in another village where he and his mother go for trading. Rice, for these people, also functions as the foundation of the meal with the compliment of other foods, as Bulosan explains, "They spread it [salted fish] thinly on the rice, if they have nothing else to eat; but most of the time they mix it with vegetables" (33). As the major source of carbohydrates to nurture the body, rice is an important part of consumption pattern of Filipinos and Filipinas and becomes a conspicuous cultural trait in their society. With this significance, rice also becomes an integral part of people's activities, as an important provision. For instance, they go hunting with "a week's provision of rice" (25). When Bulosan's father travels to the city of Lingayen to fight for his land, rice is one of the important things he brings with him: "my father filled a sack with rice and fresh vegetables and walked to Lingayen to fight for the repossession

of our land" (28). For Bulosan himself, during the period when he has a chance to attend school, rice helps him to survive the day, as he says, "I limped to school every day carrying my boiled rice and salted fish" (48). This evidence confirms that rice, the most important subsistence for Bulosan's family and other people in the Philippines, inextricably intertwines with other activities in their lives and thus becomes a dominant trait of their communal eating culture.

The pursuit of food, another pivotal factor for human survival, is also portrayed in *America Is in the Heart*. The pursuit of food functions as an important cultural aspect of human beings and a unique feature that distinguishes them from animals. As Marx contends, human beings "begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence" (160). While animals rely on hunting or natural plants to satisfy their hunger, human beings learn to practice agriculture, planting and raising animals for their subsistence. For Filipino farmers, as depicted in *America Is in the Heart*, rice growing is marked as a means of producing subsistence, as evident in Bulosan's family. Rice, for them, is not only subsistence but also hope for a better life. After the harvest, they save part of their produce for family consumption and sell their surplus for Macario's education, wishing him to earn a good job and rescue the family from poverty. In supporting Macario, the family has to sell their land, since their crops do not yield adequately to cover educational expenses, causing them to lose their land to a moneylender. This situation greatly affects their pursuit of food or means of producing rice as subsistence. Without the land, they cannot grow rice, so they have to find a new way to pursue it. Bulosan and his father have to help other farmers in order to receive some share of rice to feed his family: "Because our own land was still in the possession of the moneylender, there was no longer anything to do in the village. […] For a long time it seemed that my father and I could find nothing to do except to go to some farmers' rice field and help in

harvesting" (29). Although working for others in exchange for rice hurts his father's pride, it seems that he has no other choices, as he needs rice for the family's survival.

Bulosan's mother also needs to help the family in the pursuit of rice through trading. She makes *boggoong* or salted fish and brings it, along with salt, to trade for rice or other crops in other villages, with Bulosan accompanying her. Their trading also indicates that without the usual means of producing subsistence, which is the land for growing rice, they need to struggles in another way to assure the survival of her family. Again, rice is prioritized in her trading, providing more value than other crops as Bulosan writes, "For one cup of salt we would get three cups of rice, or four cups of beans; but for one cup of salted fish, which was more valuable than salt, we would get five cups of rice or six cups of beans" (33). The depiction of this trading also illustrates that in the farmer society, money is not the most important thing. People can exchange their products among their communities, suggesting that they value the survival and existence of community members more than monetary gain. This activity is considered a form of food sharing which maintain the sense of unity among people, as discussed earlier. Food exchange is a traditional way of life of Filipinos and Filipinas before the nation's policy of transformation of the national base from agriculture to industry, which is called by Bulosan as "malignant cancer" (24) causing suffering for people and sporadic uprisings in the Philippines. An important effect of this transformation is that capitalists gain power over farmers and begins to appropriate their surplus as well as their land, the most important factor in the pursuit of their subsistence.

Bulosan and his mother also need to help other farmers with the harvesting in order to receive a share of some rice: "My mother and I went to the town of Tayug, a rich rice land, and helped in the harvest" (58). The ensuing incident indicates that rice is so meaningful for them that they are willing to risk their lives for it. On the way back to their village, they run into a fatal

fight between the police and an uprising group. Although Bulosan and his mother are surrounded by a thunder of gunshots, they refuse to abandon their rice and run away as fast as possible to save their lives. Instead, they drag their bundles of rice everywhere they seek refuge, as Bulosan explains, "We crept through the bushes, dragging the bundles of rice" (61). During the moment that can determine their life or death, they choose to save their rice because rice is also an important factor to determine the survival of themselves as well as their family. The pursuit of rice is done through their labor and sweat; they need to bring it to moderate the hunger of all family members. For these reasons, they are willing to risk their life in saving their rice, and in return, rice will save their lives.

As illustrated in *Monsoon Country*, *Monkey Bridge*, and *America Is in the Heart*, rice and rice culture are closely interrelated with Southeast Asians and their ways of life. They are an integral part of their existence, serving as bodily and spiritual nourishment. Therefore, rice and rice culture become their mutual legacy which constitutes their identity. Such identity resides in their consciousness and refuses to be vanished, even though they have left their home countries and permanently settled in the new world. That is why writers such as Sudham, Bulosan, and Cao transform rice and rice culture into an important element of their writing. By doing so, they represent themselves and their people in the home countries, offering cultural understanding to the audience in the new world and asserting their initial identity shaped by rice and rice culture. For a large number of Southeast Asians, especially those on the mainland, besides rice and rice culture as part of their existence, Buddhism serves as another form of spiritual nourishment. For these people, Buddhism is as important as rice culture in nourishing their souls. The significance of this religion in shaping the life of Southeast Asians as well as Southeast Asian diasporic people is discussed in the following section.

Buddhism: Spiritual Sanctuary of Mainland Southeast Asians

Southeast Asian is home to several religions; at least three major religions—Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity—dominate this region. Based on this fact, Heidhues maintains that "The world's major religions meet in Southeast Asia" (65). Apart from these major religions, other minor religions such as Hinduism and animism also exist. Therefore, this region is marked as an important intersection of different religions that coexist in the society. Regarding major religions, while Buddhism is the main religion of most mainland countries, the maritime region is greatly influenced by Islam (Osborn 16). However, the Philippines, as one of the maritime countries, is dominated by Catholicism, which is influenced by Spain, their previous colonizer. In spite of the diverse religions on this part of Asia, the portrayal of Buddhism is regarded as a distinctive feature of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature.

There are two schools of Buddhism, Mahayana and Theravada, that spread to the mainland Southeast Asia. As stated by Lockard, they "existed alongside, rather than replacing, earlier religions" (35), including Hinduism and animism. Although Mahayana Buddhism arrived in this region earlier, it is the Theravada Buddhism that has dominated people's lives until the present time. Theravada Buddhism has a long history in Southeast Asia. According to Lockard, "By the 1300s, most of the Burman [Burmese], Khmer, Siamese, and Lao peasants had adopted Theravada Buddhism as well as blended it with animism" (49). Theravada Buddhists pursue the ultimate goal to attain Nirvana or enlightenment, the transcendence from all forms of suffering and the cycle of rebirth. As stated by Heidhues, "Only a select few who have lived as monks can achieve enlightenment, not the laity, and not women, who must be reborn" (69). This is an important difference between Theravada and Mahayana, as the latter believes that laypersons are able to reach Nirvana. In addition to Nirvana, which might seem unattainable for a lot of people,

especially those who are not in a monkhood, “Southeast Asian Buddhism also provides the means by which people cope with day-to-day problems of life as well as a rationale to justify worldly pursuits” (Swearer 2). In this way, Buddhism functions as spiritual refuge for those who are overwhelmed with secular problems, suggesting ways to overcome their suffering. At the same time, this religion also helps maintain social harmony, as it inculcates people with proper self-conducts and the concept of merit.

A significant belief in Theravada Buddhism has to do with the accumulation of merit. The Buddhist followers believe that this action will help them to ascend from suffering and gain happiness in both this life and the next incarnation. The merit can be acquired not only “through devotion and meditation but also through good works, such as feeding monks or supporting temples” (Lockard 23). Theravada Buddhists strongly believe in the cycle of karma or the karmic cosmos, which explains that if people do good deeds, they will receive good deeds in return, in either this life or next life. On the other hand, if they are engaged in bad deeds or commit sins, as a consequence, they will have to suffer from their actions, again in this life or next life, or both. The concept of karma can also be understood as the idea of causality, as Kyabgon explains, “Nothing can exist of its own accord. Therefore, everything that exists is causally dependent, either in physical or mental realm” (30). However, there might be a lot of good people who do only good deeds but still endure suffering. This situation can also be explained through the concept of karmic cause of effect, which is interrelated with the concept of reincarnation or rebirth. Buddhists also believe that one’s good or bad rebirth results from what one had done in the previous life (Kyabgon 31). The concept of karma has significance in social dimensions in Buddhist community, since it explains various situations happening to people. Jonathan Walters, based on his research on Theravadan Buddhism in Southeast Asia, argues that karma “has social

dimensions because the goodness or badness of a good or bad rebirth is largely conceived according to social categories such as family, status, wealth, caste, power, and/or political situation" (10-11). Through the concepts of merit and karma, Lord Buddha aims at encouraging people to conduct themselves under moral and ethical realm by the promise of "a pleasant and fulfilling future life" (Kyabgon 35). An important product of the concepts of karma and rebirth in this life, therefore, is the promotion of social harmony.

Once people understand the cause of their suffering in this life, Buddhism does not teach them to only accept and endure it, but they should do something to fix it. To alleviate the power of the bad deeds they have committed either in the previous life or in the present life, which results in their suffering, merit making is suggested for all Buddhists. Based on this belief, the form of merit making is considered "reciprocal exchange," as when people make merit—e.g. by support the religion through offering food to monks or other forms—they believe that this practice will help balance their karma and lead them to a happy life (Swearer 19). In the same way, Robert Lester suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship between the monk and the layperson, as he states, "The monk exists to support the lay society as much as the layman exist to support the monk. The layman and the monk define each other's existence, exist for each other, and are catalysts to each other's way of life" (130-31). While the layperson provides basic necessities to the monk and support the religion, the monk offers them merit and Buddha's teaching to cope with secular problems and maintain social harmony. Therefore, the scenes of people offering food to monks in the morning are common in the mainland countries of Southeast Asia. Other methods to accumulate merit include helping other suffering people or animals, taking care of parents, following Buddha's teaching, and attending preaching as well as other religious activities.

Earning merit serves as one of the most important Buddhist values, which the layperson has to practice. To reach this goal, "he should keep the five precepts (refraining from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and partaking of alcoholic beverage); he should honor and serve parents, teachers, husband, wife, children, friends, servants, and especially the monk; he should work hard, propitiate the spirits, amass wealth by honest means, live moderately, and give generously" (Lester 132). As Buddhists in Southeast Asia have grown up with these values, there is a strong bond between people in the family as well as the community. The five precepts, regarded as social apparatuses, help prevent problems in the society. Violation of the precepts is marked as a sin, and those who violate them will suffer from the consequences in either this life or next life, or both. On the other hand, those who maintain the five precepts and proper self-conducts as elaborated above believe that they will be rewarded with merit leading to happiness.

Throughout the history, there have been several incidents affecting Buddhism in the mainland Southeast Asia, such as the invasion of European colonizers, who attempted to impose Christianity on the people. However, Buddhism persists in the society as Heidhues notes, "Though many factors have changed the position of Buddhism in society, it continues to be a part of the life of most Thai, Burmese and—despite cultural upheaval, war and ideological struggles—Khmers and Laotians" (74). The influence of Buddhism can be perceived through people's ways of life, the abundance of Buddhist temples, and important festivals and rituals associated with Buddhism in this region. Nowadays, Buddhists still enthusiastically go to temples, support the religion, and follow the teaching of Lord Buddha, as they strongly believe that these practices will lead them to a happy and peaceful life. In addition, when they experience physical or mental suffering, Buddhism offers them solution, suggesting ways to alleviate the torment. The monk, who represents Lord Buddha, has a significant role in helping people from

suffering, as he serves "his community as preacher of the Buddha-word; teacher of youth; healer of the sick; respected counselor of all kinds and conditions of men […]" (Lester 6). With all these functions, Buddhism can be regarded as significant spiritual sanctuary of Southeast Asian Buddhists, especially in the mainland countries.

The great influence of Buddhism on people's lives is portrayed in Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature. Several writers, such as Sichan Siv, Lan Cao, Pira Sudham, and S.P. Somtow incorporate Buddhist beliefs in their writing, explaining how their characters understand the courses of their lives through Buddhist notions. For example, in "A Bridge between Two Worlds: Crossing to America in *Monkey Bridge*," Nguyen and Lutz explains that Thanh attributes her tragic experience in both Vietnam and the United States to the course of karma, the law of cause and effect which helps her to make sense of her suffering. However, when she arrives at the United States, Buddhism seems to be a barrier between herself and the new world. During the 1970s, when she arrives at the United States, Buddhism was still exotic and mysterious to Americans, and this is a significant reason why there is a gap between Thanh, who carries Buddhist beliefs with her, and her American neighbors. As analyzed by Nguyen and Lutz, "Rather than trying to live according to the terms of a new society that is at best benignly indifferent to her belief, Thanh chooses to retreat deeper into her faith, whose practices guide her life even more strongly" (191). Thanh's submission to her faith can also be described by her desire to end her karmic cosmos and transcend the cycle of suffering. Apart from Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, other writers mentioned above also interweave their characters' lives with Buddhism in their literary works. However, in my discussion that follows, I focus on two books, Siv's *Golden Bones* and Sudham's *Monsoon Country*.

Cambodia is a great land of Buddhism, as evinced in the marvelous Angkor Wat, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. This historical site was built as the most important religious center in the Kingdom of Cambodia, for hosting sacred rituals in Hinduism and later Buddhism. In Siv's *Golden Bones*, significant roles of Buddhism in Cambodian society are prominently portrayed through people's traditions and practices. As discussed earlier, Buddhism is considered spiritual sanctuary for mainland Southeast Asians. Whenever they suffer from either physical or mental suffering, Buddhism serves as a sanctuary where they can seek refuge and gain spiritual power. This notion is also applied to Cambodians, as can be seen through Siv's autobiography indicating that his family is greatly influenced by Buddhism. For example, after the death of Siv's sister, which keeps the family in great mourning, a spiritual suffering, Buddhist ritual is held in helping the family to overcome their sadness from the loss. Merit making is also employed to ensure that they will live a happy life after the tragedy: "We invited Buddhist monks to our house every night to give blessings. We bought a lot of Buddhist books to offer to the monks and other friends as a good deed on the 2,500th anniversary of Buddha's birthday" (14). Supporting the religion is believed as a great form of merit making, which is considered "reciprocal exchange" as mentioned above. In addition, merit and Buddhist rituals are believed to be a vehicle to "access power," a spiritual power to overcome evil and the consequence of the bad karma (Swearer 19). In supporting the religion, Siv's family believe that their merit, in return, will rescue them from the abyss of sadness and enable them to ascend from the suffering they are enduring. The merit, for them, is also believed to be spiritual power in fighting against any forms of evil, which is the major cause of their misfortune. Siv's sister has left her three daughters behind; this situation is also construed as a consequence of karmic cosmos, or a consequence of bad deeds they might have committed in the past or even in the previous life. As

a devout Buddhist family, the Siv believe that merit making is necessary for them to balance their karma and ultimately to terminate the persecution of their bad karma.

After the first tragedy, another miserable story follows; Siv's father passes away. Buddhism, again, offers a sanctuary for him and his family to cope with their grieving. His mother, a great Buddhist believer, functions as an important person to hold the family together, understanding the misfortune through Buddhist concept of karma. This concept is employed to describe the situations in her family, and the only way to transcend the curse of karma is merit making. Apart from supporting the religion, Buddhists can also accumulate merit through following Buddhist principles. Siv's mother maintains the family's morale amidst the melancholic situation by instilling Buddhist principles in her children: "my mother taught us some important Buddhist principles: honesty, love for your neighbor, and respect for all living things. She held us together with her love and strong will, as we endured the loss of our father and moved on with our lives" (29). Following Buddha's teaching, as a form of merit making, establishes fervent hope in attaining a happy life, and especially in this case, empowers her and her children to overcome their sadness during this difficult time.

Although Siv and his family try to accumulate as much merit as they can, it seems that the merit they acquired is not sufficient for them to fight against the bad karma they might have committed in the previous life. After the Khmer Rouge comes to power and gains control over Cambodia, a huge number of people are slaughtered, while others are exiled from their homeland. Siv's family is among the victims who are forced to abandon their home, since they are engaged in the previous government, which is the main target of extermination. In the departing scene, Siv tragically explains:

> We left in two cars overloaded with our meager possessions and food supplies. The Young members of the family and the older women rode in the cars. The strongest ones pushed them. We were among the first of some 3 million who tried to leave at the same time. At Pochentong, we found that our house was occupied by a few families. We went to Wat [temple] Pothisataram, our village temple. The monks were already gone, and there were bodies lying around. Mother was sobbing. The women and girls were choking. The boys and men were all silent. (101)

As can be seen in the above excerpt, not only laypersons were victimized by the Khmer Rouge regime but also monks were forced to escape from the persecution. In order to comprehend their miserable fate, Siv's mother still believes that the karmic cosmos causes the misfortune they are encountering, as she says, "This is our bad karma. We must have done something vary bad in our previous lives to have to go through this kind of suffering" (101). Her statement indicates that in all situations, either good or bad, the Buddhist notion about karma can be employed to explain why certain things happen. Nobody can escape from the course of his or her karma. Even though Siv's family is well-to-do and has done a lot of good deeds to increase their merit, his mother still believes that the family karma in the previous life serves as the cause of their great suffering. In fact, people all over Cambodia are tragically suffering from the atrocity of the Khmer Rouge. Through Buddhist belief, this situation can also be comprehended as a result of collective bad karma of the nation. In their previous life, they must have done something bad together, so they have to suffer the consequence of it in this life. This situation is also explained as "national karma" which sometimes results from "pious or impious kings" (Walters 12). The king's good

deed and bad deed also affect the life of his subjects. Therefore, the suffering of Cambodians can be attributed to either their own bad karma or their king's bad karma, or both.

Siv's mother might not be able to do anything to rescue the family from this suffering, but at least the Buddhist concept of karma helps her to make sense of how this terrible fate comes to her family. Understanding it this way, she can also hold on to the hope that this suffering will be over, and she as well as her children will be able to return to their normal life, as a result of the good karma that they have done in this life. However, by the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, almost all people in her family including herself cannot manage to survive; Siv is the only one who can escape and build a new life. By using the concept of karma to explain the tragic story of Siv's family, it can be said that their bad karma is much stronger than their good karma, resulting in their loss of loved ones or even their own lives. For Siv, his good karma designs a passage for him to escape to Thailand and later to the United States, where he successfully rebuilds his life.

In addition to the Buddhist concept of karma as discussed above, Siv also portrays Buddhism as a significant source of spiritual power. According to the notion of "reciprocal exchange," when Buddhists make merit, they believe in a kind of spiritual power that will encourage them to transcend suffering as well as to succeed in life. This power can also be attained through Buddhist rites, which are widely practiced in the mainland Southeast Asia. In his autobiography, Siv elaborates on this belief when he is applying for a job as a flight attendant for the national airline of Cambodia before the Communist crisis. Prior to the examination and the interview, he goes to his family's temple, where they often come for merit making through offering food to monks and building a *chedey* or a stupa, and asks for a blessing rite: "The abbot chanted some prayer in Pali, the counterpart of Latin of Theravada Buddhism, and poured holy

water over me. As I was receiving the blessings, my mind began to wander to Hong Kong, Singapore, Tokyo, and Paris. […] The blessings made me feel good. I presumed that every other candidate must have gone for the same thing" (61). Although this blessing rite does not guarantee the success of the receiver, it provides spiritual power as explained in the excerpt. At least, it helps to boost the confidence in the receiver. Spiritual power and confidence play an important role in promoting competitors' morale in any kinds of competition. In Siv's case, after the recruiting process, he is among ten or less people out of a few hundreds who secure the job. For Buddhists, his success can be attributed to the good deeds that he has done, the merit that he has accumulated, and also the blessing rite that bestows spiritual power on him.

The spiritual power has also become a significant factor for Siv's survival through the period of suffering under the merciless Khmer Rouge regime. After he has to separate from his mother and other family members, there are no other people for him to share his fate and offer him moral support. Therefore, religion becomes the only source that can provide him with spiritual power, as he explains, "Every day since I left my family, before I had my meals I always put a few grains of rice on a tree leaf as an offering to supernatural power, seeking their protection. Cambodians believe that there are protective spirits who live in the trees and forest. They are known as *rukha tevoda*" (110-11). The *rukha tevodas* are forest angels in Hinduism, a religion that existed before the advent of Buddhism in Cambodia. In spite of the fact that Siv is a Buddhist, Hinduism still influences his belief. His ritual reaffirms the fact that Buddhism does not replace Hinduism, an earlier religion in the mainland Southeast Asia, but coexists with it, as discussed in the earlier part. During his perilous journey when he encounters fatal threats, he prays "to Lord Buddha, to *Mae*'s [mother's] merit, to the *rukha tevodas* […]" (121). Apart from offering him spiritual power, it seems that these supernatural power figures miraculously save

him from being executed. Most importantly, they, especially Buddhism and its concept of merit, keep his morale high, encouraging him to fight against his own fate and successfully escape from the killing field in Cambodia. In fact, Siv's reliance on religion represents the practice of other Buddhists who are in a desperate condition, as they will pray to Lord Buddha to rescue as well as to bestow spiritual power on them in fighting such a condition.

After Siv has managed to escape to Thailand, his new life begins. It can be said that he is reborn after enduring physical and mental suffering from the brutality of the Khmer Rouge, resulting in his loss of home and family and finally his diaspora. On the soil of Thailand, Buddhism still takes part in the commencement of his new life. A Buddhist ritual is arranged for him at a Thai temple near the border of Thailand and Cambodia: "the abbot blessed me with some prayers and holy water" (146-47). This ritual is held to ensure that his rebirth will be replete with auspiciousness and free from evil or unpleasing future. The holy water poured on him is meant to wash away both blood from physical wound and his bad karma, which might keep haunting him and cause further suffering and difficulties in his new life. In addition, it is aimed to nurture his weary soul as a result of physical and mental torment he has experienced, providing spiritual power for him to carry on his life. According to Swearer, in the mainland Southeast Asia, Buddhism also functions as a significant element in the passage of life of people. From the day they are born, to the day they metamorphose, and to the day they die, Buddhism is closely involved with this passage, in order to ensure that they will experience only auspiciousness (50-51). For Siv, Thailand provides him with physical refuge from the persecution in Cambodia and at the same time offers him spiritual sanctuary through the shade of Buddhism, which carries him to his next passage of life.

Apart from offering spiritual nourishment, another important role of Buddhism as portrayed in Siv's autobiography is to provide physical help and refuge for the desperate. Since monks are considered religious leaders and thus great believers of the power of merit, they must conduct themselves as epitomes of great Buddha's followers. Monks, as well as laypersons, can earn merit through meditation, following Buddha's teaching, and help other people or animals when they are in need. In the story, when Siv is suffering from malaria and sent to a hospital in Thailand, he is refused to be treated because he is a refugee and cannot communicate with nurses or doctors due to the language barrier. In addition, the beds in the hospital are reserved for Thai patients only; in other words, he is discriminated against. He is finally transferred to a temple where he receives care from monks who help him to recover: "My fellow refugees decided to bring me to the *sala* [pavilion] at Wat Koh, the temple near the camp known in Thai as Wat Chana Chai Si. The monastery was more peaceful and quiet, an ideal place for sick people to recover. The abbot not only let me sleep there but asked a novice to bring me some medicine" (155). Through the embrace of Buddhism, Siv survives the malevolent malaria and can maintain his dream to be resettled in the United States. The benevolence he receives from the monks illustrates that Buddhism does not discriminate against people, especially those who are desperate. Helping these people from their suffering, which is also a main duty of Buddhist monks, is believed to generate great merit for helpers. This incident proves that Buddhism functions as both spiritual and physical sanctuary for Siv and other people.

Siv's recovery from his illness is also considered his second rebirth, an important incident in his passage of life based on Buddhist belief. Shortly after this rebirth, he is engaged in the most important Buddhist ritual in his life, ordination. According to Buddhist principles, for males, ordination is one of traditional rituals that "ensure a safe transition from one stage of life

to another" and to protect them from unseen powers, such as karma, spirits, and other evil threats (Swearer 50-51). Importantly, ordination "is perceived as a singular way of repaying a debt to one's parents, especially one's mother" (53). Buddhists strongly believe that they owe their parents, especially their mothers, an enormous debt, as their lives are given by their parents who then rear them until they are ready to brave the world by themselves. Apart from taking care of parents when they reach their elderly age, being ordained is an important duty of every Buddhist son in mainland Southeast Asian society. Being ordained as a novice or a monk, a Buddhist son believes that the merit from this practice will send his parents to heaven after they die. This belief also includes the ordination of a daughter, as Crosby writes, "Other forms of behavior that lead to heaven […] include honoring one's parents and having one's son or daughter ordained as a novice" (182). However, to become a monk or a novice in Theravada Buddhism does not necessarily mean a lifetime commitment, as practiced in Christianity; a monk can have a ritual to disrobe and transform himself back to a layman after a certain period of time (Swearer 52). In spite of that fact, there are a large number of monks who desire to follow the steps of Lord Buddha and seek nirvana and thus decide to be in a monkhood for their whole lives. In the story, Siv's elaborates that his ordination fulfills the most important duty of a Buddhist son, dedicating merit to his mother. Additionally, he also provides information about the function of ordination, which is in accordance with the above discussion:

> Most males in a Buddhist society spend a period of time in a monastery learning precepts and scriptures. This period can last from a few days to a few years, unlike the priesthood or a rabbinate which is quite permanent. It is a rite of passage to complete manhood. By becoming monks, we believe that we earn merits and do deeds which we dedicate to loved ones. Since my painful separation

> from Mother, Sarin, and Sichhun, I had prayed daily that if I managed to escape to Thailand, I would become a monk. I would dedicate all the merit to them and to the rest of my family. (157)

At this point, Siv does not have any knowledge about his family captured in Cambodia. He does not know if they are still alive and cannot do anything physically to help them. The only thing he can do as a male Buddhist is to attain merit through ordination and dedicate the merit to them, so that they will be liberated from their bad karma, which is believed to be the cause of their suffering. Therefore, his ordination serves at least three purposes: to complete an important rite of passage of life and ensure the safety of his future journey, to repay the debt of life to his mother and deceased father, and to save his family through the dedication of merit. To Siv, safety in life is on top priority, since he and his family have been through a lot of life-or-death situations. His ordination might not offer the material concept of safety, but it endows him with mental tranquility, spiritual power, and the sense of safety derived from the perceived merit. Siv's ordination takes place in Thailand, also the land of Buddhism, suggesting that people in the two neighboring countries—Thailand and Cambodia—share the same religious belief. More details about Buddhism in Thailand will be discussed in the following part.

Not only does Sudham's *Monsoon Country* portray rice culture as a part of Thai identity as discussed in the first part of this chapter, but this novel also incorporates several Buddhist concepts as important elements. For several characters, Buddhism plays a significant role in shaping their lives and ways of thinking, being an inextricable part of their community. Similar to Siv, Sudham emphasizes the belief of karma which is deeply rooted in the Buddhist society of Thailand. Thai Buddhists, under the school of Theravada Buddhism, perceive incidents happening in their lives as consequences of the karmic cosmos. Both good and bad deeds they

committed in the past become causes of what are happening in their present lives, and their present actions will result in their good or bad lives in the future or even in the next life. In the story, the devout Liang, the mother of Prem, the protagonist, strongly believes in the power of karma and views it as the basis of her family's misfortune. For instance, when Prem is a little boy, he has difficulty in uttering words or speaking, so he becomes a timid and quiet boy. Accordingly, he is called "Mute" by his friends. Instead of protesting or being angry that her son is called by this word, Liang manages to understand the situation through the Buddhist concept of karma: "She thought that such deficiency, if it was one, could be due to the boy's own retribution or *karma*" (8 emphasis in original). The story is set in the rural area in the northeast of Thailand during the 1970s, the period when scientific or medical knowledge seems to be out of reach for the villagers. Therefore, Liang cannot employ this knowledge to analyze Prem's disability in speaking. Buddhist belief of karma, as a result, becomes the only explanation of this incomprehensible misfortune. For Liang, the concept of karma helps her to make sense of how her son's disability occurs and at the same time maintains the harmony in the community, preventing conflicts between her and other community members who make fun of her son.

Merit as an important concept in Buddhism is also portrayed in *Monsoon Country* as a solution to issues which cannot be resolved or described by human beings. This novel also indicates that the Buddhist concept of merit also coexists with the belief in animism, an ancient religion that has existed before the coming of Buddhism in Thailand. Under animism, people believe in spirits and supernatural power. Similar to the concept about karma, these figures also function as causes of incidents happening in the world. As described in the story, Prem accidentally falls into a lotus pond and drowns himself, being in a coma. This incident is attributed to an action of a bad spirit that wants to take Prem's life. To save him, the sooth-

sayer—the medicine man who treat people by rituals—and the villagers pray for that spirit, hoping that it will be happy and spare Prem's life. This animist ritual coexists with the Buddhist concept of merit, as the villagers agree that if Prem's parents dedicate their merit to the spirit, it will return his life to him. Therefore, another ritual is conducted: "The Surins [Prem's family] promised that they would make 'merit' at the temple and transfer the merit gained to the Spirit, that they would prepare food for monks and donate funds and yellow robes to the temple" (16). In spite of this ritual, it seems that the spirit is not happy with the merit and refuses to return life to Prem, who recovers after another ritual to offer him to the spirit. The last ritual is believed to be fruitful, as he not only returns to life but can also speak as if he had never been a mute. Although there is no scientific evidence or knowledge that can describe this incident, the coexistence of beliefs between the two religions at least provides hope for Prem's parents in gaining back their son's life. Therefore, the Buddhist concept of merit is clearly a great source of spiritual power for people when they need to struggle against any forms of misfortune. An important reason underpinning this belief has to do with the lack of advanced knowledge and technology. These people live in a remote, underdeveloped area, where modern medicine is out of reach. Therefore, the Buddhist concept of merit, interwoven with animism, becomes an important figure that they are able to rely on.

Analogous to *Golden Bones, Monsoon Country* also presents merit making as a promise of a better life in the future as well as in the next incarnation. Especially for the poor, this practice seems to be a major source of their happiness, since they perceive that they will not suffer from poverty or insufficiency in the future. This concept is deeply instilled in the minds of Buddhists, as can be seen through Liang. Although her family is poor, working for only day-to-day subsistence, she always tries to accumulate merit as much as she can afford:

> To her, life was in itself a bank in which people accumulate merit. For this reason, she offered food to the monks every morning, and went to the temple every so often to pray and to hear more of Buddha's teaching. Once a year she donated a set of saffron robes to the abbot and would continue this merit making so that she would be born with better fortune and luck in the next life. There were so many poor people in this world because they had not made merit in the last life, she believed. (35)

Despite her family's poverty, Liang shares part of their meager income to make merit to ensure their better future and next life. Again, merit making can be construed as a process of creating hope, an important factor for people to carry on their life. This practice also indicates that Buddhism greatly influences the way Liang understands her situation; her poverty results from her lack of merit. Therefore, she prioritizes merit over the hunger of her family which might ensue as a repercussion of sacrificing money and food for her belief. Other forms of merit making, as elaborated in the above excerpt, include praying and listening to Buddha's teaching performed by monks. Through these activities, Buddhism maintains social harmony and order, since Buddha's teaching encourages people to behave themselves, and they will be rewarded with merit. As a result, this relation is, again, considered as a "reciprocal exchange" as discussed in the previous section: people help to maintain Buddhism, and Buddhism in return fosters social harmony.

Apart from instilling sets of belief in people's minds and maintain social harmony, Buddhism also functions as a significant venue where knowledge is distributed, especially for Thai people. As can be seen in the *Monsoon Country*, the only school for children in the village is in the temple. The government cannot afford to build enough schools in the rural area, so the

temple, as the center of the village, has to serve the educational mission in rescuing children from ignorance. The *sala* or pavilion of the temple is used as the classroom: "The school building was on the temple ground. To claim it a school would be only partially true because the old thatched *sala* (italics mine) was also used for holding religious ceremonies. In fact it belonged to the temple and the abbot allowed it to be used for the Napo Primary School until a proper school site and building could be found" (20). Besides offering places for the intellectual improvement of children, Thai temples also offer other educational opportunities to poor students who cannot afford their education. A large number of these students are ordained in order to be able to obtain education. As stated by Swearer, being ordained as novices, these students are provided with material necessities for education (52). Moreover, temples also offer shelters and food for rural students coming to cities for education. As evident in the story, Prem becomes an acolyte, or more directly a "temple boy," when coming to Bangkok to pursue higher education. Even for Kumjai, Prem's former teacher at the village, he had to become a temple boy in order to be able to continue his education before becoming a teacher: "He had stayed in a Buddhist temple where he sought free lodging and food by becoming an acolyte to serve a monk so that he could attend a city school" (50). Since Kumjai is acutely aware that Prem cannot afford to obtain education in Bangkok, he sends him to the temple where he had stayed, so that Prem will be able to follow his steps. For both of them, Buddhism is regarded as their great benefactor supporting their educational pursuit. In addition to the shelter and food, they also absorb Buddha's teaching and learn *Vipassana* or meditation, which becomes strategies for them to cope with problems in life. For instance, when Prem is enduring the disorder in his mind while he is in a predicament during his visit in Germany, he tries "to put his mind in order by using the techniques of *Vipassana* (italics mine) learned and practised in the *Wat* [temple]" (131).

Vipassana has been taught in Buddhism since the inception of this religion. Lord Buddha attained enlightenment through *Vipassana* and included it as one of the essences of Buddhism. As stated by William Hart and S.N. Goenka, "the common impression of meditation [*Vipassana*] is that it is a withdrawal from the world. […] It can also be a means to encounter the world in order to understand it and ourselves" (5). *Vipassana* helps Prem not only to save the day but also to contemplate the situation, understand himself, and seek solution to the disorder of mind, bringing his thoughts back to the tranquility of his home village and offering spiritual refuge form the worldly commotion.

Prem, as a Buddhist son, also tries to understand his life, especially regarding his diaspora, through the Buddhist concept of karma. The diasporic life of Prem is made by choice, not by force, as he desires to improve himself intellectually and makes his own choice to become a diasporic subject in pursuit of knowledge. He leaves his home village to Bangkok and later wins a scholarship to pursue a college degree in England. Although his diaspora offers him self-improvement opportunity, there are several negative sides. Nostalgic moments seem to be great torments he has to endure; longing for his family, home, and life in the rice fields are sometimes almost intolerable. In addition, Prem is confused with his own life when being involved with Western luxurious lifestyles—partying, drinking, travelling, and sleeping with girls—while sharing an apartment with Dhani, a wealthy, high-class Thai student in England. Prem is getting lost, cannot find the meaning of what he is doing, and suffers psychological repercussions of his actions. To comprehend and cope with his mental suffering, he recalls his mother's saying about the karmic cosmos: "One day you will be taken from home to live in a far-off place because you have taken the little birds away from their mothers and their nests. You have been cursed by the mother birds! You will have no home of your own, travelling from place to place all your days.

Wretched and fearful you will be, like the little fledglings you took away from their nests" (171). The feeling he is enduring at the moment is similar to that of the little birds he used to steal from their mothers. He is fearful, confused, and helpless, perceiving that London is not a place for him and regretting that he has left his home, his rice field, and his people, as he explains, "Forgive me, Prem cried out to them. Forgive me for not being there when the land needs plowing and the rice needs to be reaped, when the monsoon did not come. Forgive me. For I'm a stolen nestling. I too am suffering" (172). The suffering he has to endure is construed as a consequence of the bad karma he committed in the past, including stealing little birds from their mothers as well as leaving his own parents whom he is supposed to take care of. As portrayed in the novel, both Prem and his mother rely on Buddhist concepts in understanding their situations. This portrayal suggests that Buddhism has the same spiritual influence on both men and women in Buddhist society.

The perception of Prem's own suffering leads to his decision to abandon his education and return to his homeland. Apart from realizing his bad karma in the past, he also contemplates his misconducts in London and is finally enlightened, coming to see that he has broken a lot of Buddhist precepts through sinful actions. Repenting this, he longs for returning to his home village: "What I want now is to return to my home village, to the peasant life and to my beginnings" (185). After being overwhelmed with sinful experiences and temporary contentment they offer, he realizes that he will never attain genuine happiness, as long as he is dislocated. His return can also be interpreted as a form of redemption for the perceived sin against his people and particularly Buddhism, which is an important root of his life. Therefore, it is imperative for him to return to his origin, to help his family with hard work in the rice field and repay the life debt that he owes his parents. The return to his beginnings is also an important part of his

passage of life, as it can be viewed as a rebirth or a form of purification under Buddhist concepts. The first point to be discerned is when Prem truly understands the concept of detachment. When he was born on this land, he possessed nothing other than his body and soul, so he should not be attached to any materials. Understanding this concept, he burns all his luxurious clothes and other belongings from England. In addition to the concept of detachment, he also perceives that all luxurious items from Europe are meaningless in his rural village: "A pair of English shoes created for elegance is out of place here when everyone goes about bare-footed. […] I will also burn all my clothes brought from England" (218). Detachment is marked as an important stage to liberate oneself from the material world, which will lead to the freedom of mind: "If you can detach yourself completely from sensual thirst, from physical attraction, you will be free; this is freedom or liberation, a tiny slice of the total liberation […]" (225). Prem reaches the ultimate detachment when he finally throws his valuable watch into the fire and then is ready to take another journey in his passage of life.

Prem reaches the culminating point of detachment when he decides to enter monkhood, being ordained by the abbot of the temple in his village. According Buddhist principles, to become a monk, one must detach himself from all worldly materials, physical desires, and secular activities, moving towards the path to nirvana as the ultimate goal. Buddhist monks are "expected to minimize material attachments" (Swearer 53) and seek only subsistence through donation from Buddhists. In order to achieve the goal of nirvana, a monk has to solemnly follow Buddha's instruction and adopts the triple gems—Buddha, dharma, and Sangha or monks—as the paradigm of self-conduct. Being ordained, Prem announces, "I take the Buddha as my guidance. I take his teaching as my guidance. I take the order of monks as my guidance" (228). Entering the world of monkhood, Prem can be attached to only the triple gems which will lead to

the liberation of his mind from the worldly attachment, as the abbot states, "Through his [Buddha's] teaching, you will realize the extinction of Thirst, of Craving, and of Passion, and the renunciation of the world of the Flesh […]" (230). While studying in England, Prem has experienced numerous worldly pleasures and sufferings, and learned that they are significant culprits of mental disorder, a great suffering in his life. The root of this suffering stems from his attachment to Thirst, Craving, and Passion, which provide him with only temporary pleasure and happiness. Therefore, to attain genuine and permanent happiness, he has to detach from all of them and seek spiritual liberation. In fact, the attachment to Thirst, Craving, and Passion results in suffering for general people. Once they hunger for such things and are unable to control their desire, disorder and social problems might ensue. The concept of detachment, therefore, serves as universal apparatus for not only Buddhists but also non-Buddhists to control their desire in preventing possible trouble as a result of their attachment.

Apart from moving towards the path to nirvana, the ultimate liberation of Buddhists, being ordained also serves as a great way to repay life debt to one's parents, as previously discussed in *Golden Bones*. In *Monsoon Country*, Prem, after becoming a monk, has completed this important duty of a Thai male by dedicating merit gained from living a monk's life to his parents, as the abbot talks to him, "You have blessed your parents with great happiness by becoming a monk. It is one of the highest acts of gratitude towards the parents who share the merits gained from your ordination" (231). During his pursuit of education, Prem has left his parents and thus lost some chances to take care of them. As a result, to become a monk and dedicate merit to his parents serves as at least a way to compensate his incomplete duty of a son. He regrets that he has left them to work hard in the rice field while he was entertaining himself with extravagant activities during his student life in England. He finally repents and realizes that

he has to complete his duty by offering them great happiness of being Buddhist parents, which is to see him being ordained. Although there might not be obvious material improvement in the parents' life, "the ordinand gains spiritual benefit for his parents" (Swearer 54). For Prem's parents, this ordination is believed to bring them merit, and based on Buddhist belief, the merit will balance their karma, the cause of the difficult life they are enduring, and lead them to a happy life. That is to say, the ordination offers them spiritual power to carry on their lives under the desperate economic conditions.

Both rice and Buddhism serve as distinctive representation of Southeast Asians as well as Southeast Asian diasporic people through literary works. As portrayed in the writings above, rice and Buddhism are integral parts of Southeast Asian identity, especially for people in the mainland countries whose lives are firmly bonded with these cultural traits. Rice, as their staple food and major crop generating income, offers them both physical nourishment and mental sustenance, as can be seen through the richness of their rice culture which is a collective heritage they share in their society. As a result, rice serves as important societal bond between different groups of people in their area. For Southeast Asians and diasporic subjects who move to other parts of the world, rice and significant meanings it connotes are inscribed in their consciousness, inextricable from their body and soul. This is an important reason why the memory of rice and other related circumstances never fades away from their consciousness, but recurs in their imagination, particularly when they long for spiritual nourishment amidst adversary situations. Similarly, Buddhism functions as spiritual refuge that houses mainland Southeast Asians together, endowing them with faith and spiritual power in their daily-life struggle. Through the concept of karma, rebirth, and merit, Buddhism helps them to understand incidents happening in their lives and fosters social harmony, preventing conflicts between members inside their groups

as well as between different groups. Therefore, Buddhism is also regarded as nourishment of social harmony. With the significance that rice and Buddhism contribute to the society, they have become essential foods for body and souls of Southeast Asians and at the same time serve as an important mutual legacy share among these people.

According to the discussion in this chapter, rice and Buddhist culture greatly influences Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature and becomes an essential component of this literary group. The recurring of issues regarding this cultural trait in the literary texts indicates that rice and Buddhism, as important roots of Southeast Asian diasporic people, are engraved in their consciousness and become part of their transnational identity. The representation of this identity reaffirms Cheung's idea about the shifting trend of Asian American literature from claiming "America to forging a connection between Asia and Asian America" (1). In claiming America, Asian American literature portrays the Asians' attempt to be American, which might be accomplished through the adoption of American heritage, culture, lifestyles, and identity, with the purpose "to be recognized as fully 'American'" (5). In the same direction, Ho argues, "Of all the major racial groups in the United States, Asians in America have had to self-consciously transform themselves into Americans" (3). However, as can be seen in the above discussion, Southeast Asian diasporic authors do not fully claim America, but represent their Southeast Asian identity through the manifestation of rice and Buddhist culture, which is a mutual legacy shared among themselves as well as people in their homelands. My discussion indicates that the above authors do not hunger for claiming America but they yearn for the rights to claim their cultural heritage and assert their initial identity. The representation of rice and Buddhist culture, therefore, serves as a bridge to connect Southeast Asia and America and to create cultural understanding between the diasporic people and the mainstream. This also includes the

connection between Southeast Asia and England, where the story of Prem in *Monsoon Country* takes place. That is to say, no matter where the destinations of Southeast Asian diasporic people are, writing rice and Buddhist culture forges the connection between their old world and new world. Based on my analysis, this is an important function of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature. The authors' persistence in preserving their identity indicates that although they are trying to assimilate into the mainstream in their countries of destination, they refuse to abandon their roots and genuine identities. They desire to co-exist with the mainstream and at the same time urge the mainstream to recognize as well as to embrace their ontology as diasporic Southeast Asian.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITIQUING COLONIALISM AND IMPERIALISM IN CAO'S *MONKEY BRIDGE*, LAW-YONE'S *THE COFFIN TREE*, SOMTOW'S *JASMINE NIGHTS*, AND HAGEDORN'S *DOGEATERS*

In Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, the legacy of colonialism is a prominent trait emerging in several writings. Authors inscribe experiences of the indigenous under Western conquest and domination in their works, depicting the changing society and devastating effects of colonialism and imperialism on people and their nations. The portrayal of colonial legacies in literature indicates that colonial experiences are engraved in their imagination, which has been transformed into historical materials for their writings. That is to say, an important characteristic of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature is that it is informed by experiences of Western domination. The colonial and imperial oppression and subjugation result in the struggle of the indigenous to liberate themselves through political, social, cultural, and literary movements. Through literary movements, in particular, they accuse, condemn, protest, and respond to colonialism and imperialism by depicting their devastating effects on people, culture, and society. In this chapter, through the discussion of four primary texts, I propose that Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature provides a stage for writers to critique Western colonialism and imperialism and depict how these two forms of domination affect as well as reshape Southeast Asian society and the lives of indigenous people. In doing so, they respond to and resist Western domination of their countries. In Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, French colonialism in Vietnam is analyzed, while British colonialism in Burma is discussed in Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree*. In Somtow's *Jasmine Nights* and Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, I examine American imperialism in Thailand and the Philippines, respectively. In the

last section of this chapter, I discuss how Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature as a form of literary art also functions as postcolonial literature, which refutes Western colonial concepts about their people and homelands.

As discussed in the historical context in the first chapter, a significant mutual legacy shared by Southeast Asian diasporic people as well as other Southeast Asian people has to do with Western colonialism and imperialism. Since the sixteenth century, except Thailand, all other countries in Southeast Asia had been colonized by Western countries including Holland, Spain, England, France, and the United States. After the fading of traditional colonialism at the end of World War II, neocolonialism and American imperialism took its place as a new form of domination. The terms colonialism and imperialism share similar meanings and sometimes overlap each other, since they refer to the domination of less powerful countries by the more powerful ones. However, in distinguishing the term imperialism from colonialism, particularly to set the scope of the study of these two dominating phenomena by using the end of World War II as historical division, I employ Robert Young's concepts about these two terms. Young elaborates that "'imperialism' signified an ideology and a system of economic domination, identified with the USA; 'colonialism', by contrast, emphasized the material condition of the political rule of subjugated peoples by the old European colonial powers" (26-27). In this dissertation, the term colonialism signifies the traditional form of colonization operated by England and France, as two major colonizers in Southeast Asia. The term imperialism, on the other hand, refers to the new form of colonization, which operated through ideological, economic, and cultural domination. Based on Loomba's ideas, for imperialism, "Direct colonial rule is not necessary […] because the economic (and social) relations of dependency and control ensure both captive labour as well as markets for European industry as well as goods.

Sometimes, the words ‘neo-imperialism’ or ‘neo-colonialism’ are used to describe these situations” (11). In a similar way, President Sukarno of Indonesia during the era of struggle for independence from the Netherlands argues that colonial powers refuse to end their domination but maintain it in other forms: “Colonialism no longer came in sofa topees but had ‘its modern dress, in the form of economic control, intellectual control […]. It does not give up its loot easily’” (qtd. in Prashad 34). These concepts are applied to the domination operated by not only European countries, but also the United States, who has been significant dominating power in Southeast Asia. Based on the above scholars, imperialism and neo-colonialism radically refer to the same form of domination. Although the concepts of imperialism encompass the domination by European powers, in the case of Southeast Asia after World War II, the United States has been the most powerful and dominating imperialist country. As a result, in analyzing imperialism in this region, I focus on American domination.

As portrayed in Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, both colonialism and imperialism have altered the lives of people in Southeast Asia in many aspects, as a result of the oppressive, exploitative systems imposed on their countries by the dominating colonizers. This portrayal is in good agreement with the historical context, as discussed by several scholars. In expanding political and economic power of Western countries, Asia, or the Orient as called by Said, was the “greatest source of European colonies” (*Orientalism* 1). Being part of Asia, Southeast Asia was also victimized by Western colonialism. Most countries in this region “faced various crises, leaving them less able to thwart the more intensive European penetration made possible by the military, technological, and economic power generated by the Industrial Revolution” (Lockard 93). Southeast Asia, with its rich natural and agricultural resources, became a very important source providing materials to feed the industrial and economic

development of Western countries which pried into, invaded, and finally colonized almost all countries in this region. Based on the relation of power describing the West as strength and the East as weakness (Said, *Orientalism* 45), it was impossible for Southeast Asian countries to resist the colonizer's invasion, which came with both military and ideological forces. All populace in this region were affected by colonialism at least in one or another way, from the early sixteenth century when the Portuguese conquered Melaka until the end of Vietnam War in 1975 when the U.S. Army retreated from Indochina. They possessed few political rights and lacked autonomy to govern themselves, as Lockard writes, "outlines of colonial policy were developed in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Madrid, and Washington" (118). In the economic aspect, subsistence agriculture which had been practiced in Southeast Asia for centuries was transformed into agribusiness producing cash crops to serve the colonizer's desire for economic and industrial expansion and development: "Even rice, the basic of survival for millennia, became a cash crop in Burma, Vietnam, and Siam [Thailand]" (Lockard 121). In the cultural aspect, the colonizer imposed Western values and cultures on the indigenous, changing their traditional ways of life and leading to the decline of their culture. As contended by Young, cultural imposition was not the primary goal of colonialism but "came as a by-product of its real objectives of trade, economic exploitation and settlement" (24). In spite of the colonizer's claim of civilizing mission, the colonized countries were unimaginably ruined, as I will elaborate in this chapter. The shattering experiences under colonial and imperial rules are a common past Southeast Asian people share among one another. For diasporic writers from this region, literature provides them with an arena to critique, protest, and resist colonial activities.

The Legacy of French Colonialism in *Monkey Bridge*

In *Monkey Bridge*, Cao paints the Vietnam War as the backdrop of the novel and the impetus of the diasporic life of the main characters, Thanh and her daughter, Mai. According to the history of Vietnam, colonialism was a significant trigger of this lengthy war of about three decades. During the French conquest of Vietnam, the French colonists had oppressed the Vietnamese and taken advantage of their resources in many ways. For instance, "To pay for the high cost of colonial administration, taxes on salt, opium, alcohol, and land were collected, and a system of forced labor known as *corvee'* (korh-Vey) was established" (Seah and Nair 22). To liberate Vietnam from the severe exploitation, Ho Chi Minh, an important initial leader of the Vietnamese Communist party, led many insurgent fights against French colonizers who had ruled Vietnam for almost a century. The war was intensified when the United States declared the anti-Communism policy and intervened the internal affairs of Southeast Asia. Recounting the story of Thanh and Mai through the legacy of Indochina War, Cao incorporates the colonial experience of Vietnamese people in *Monkey Bridge*, indicating that French colonialism has reconfigured their society, values, culture, and economy. As a repercussion of this domination, the gap between the rich and the poor is also widened, since the French colonizer confers more power on the indigenous elite, facilitating them to proliferate their wealth on the suffering of the poor. These social phenomena, portrayed through *Monkey Bridge*, are elaborated as follows.

Vietnam is situated in the Orient, an area viewed by Westerners as weak and underdeveloped. This part of the globe was perceived as "something inviting French interest, penetration, insemination […] and colonization" (Said, *Orientalism* 219). The coming of the French in Vietnam was accompanied by the imposition of French values, such as French culture, French self-conduct, and Christianity, which interrupt Vietnamese ways of life influenced by

Confucianism. In *Monkey Bridge*, the imposition of French values is portrayed as part of social conflicts in Vietnam and internal conflicts of some characters. Before the advent of the French colonizer, Confucianism played an important role in shaping the values of Vietnamese people. Some important Confucian doctrines influencing Vietnamese people include the respect for one's ancestors and the bond between people and land. As elaborated in *The Religions of South Vietnam in Faith and Fact* by the Department of the Navy of the United States, "Confucianism [...] is vividly seen throughout Vietnam in the worship paid to ancestors […]" (12). Confucians also believe that they are bonded with and indebted to the land where they practice agriculture to support their families. This is the reason why they have several ceremonies to worship the land, as stated by the Department of the Navy: "The other worship occasions involve the worship of the land. Such ceremonies include the Festival of the Beginning of Plowing and the Rice Festival, the Harvest Festival and the Festival of the First Fruits. […] The land is given honor in seasonal festivals which expressing hopes and efforts of the past and for the future" (12). These two distinctive Confucian beliefs indicate the strong bond between people, ancestors, and land, which is portrayed in *Monkey Bridge*. In the story, Baba Quan is an exemplar of devout Confucians, tightly bonded with his land and the spirits of his ancestors who are believed to reside on it. Such bond is a typical trait of Confucianism and an important reason why he refuses to leave his homeland when South Vietnam is falling to North Vietnam. Vietnamese people have lived with Confucianism as a significant cultural value which has shaped their belief for centuries.

Unfortunately, the Confucian belief is shaken by French colonization. When the French colonizers come to Vietnam, they also introduce Christianity to the indigenous people, attempting to entrench Christian belief in Vietnamese society. The imposition of Christianity and

French values is evident in Thanh. Unlike Baba Quan, Thanh, who is revealed at the end of the novel as the daughter of Uncle Khan, a wealthy landlord, is a Catholic: "she had become a Catholic in a French boarding school" (59). In fact, Christianity always came with colonialism, as can be seen in many countries in Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines, where Catholicism has become a dominant religion. In Vietnam, as elaborated by Karnow, the Catholic Church greatly influenced Vietnamese society; since the seventeenth century, a huge number of Vietnamese people have embraced this Western religion (58). In the novel, Catholicism as a Western value is an important factor for Thanh to make a decision to leave her homeland. She is not a Confucian like Baba Quan. Although she has a bond with the Vietnamese land, such a bond is not as strong as the one engraved in Baba Quan. In addition, since she has become a Catholic, part of her spiritual being, belief, and faith belongs to the Western world. Therefore, she decides to leave Vietnam with sanguine hope to rebuild her life in the United States, but she fail to do so because she always longs for her homeland, as discussed in the previous chapter. Her failure indicates that despite her conversion, the Vietnamese Confucian value, which brings about her bond with the land, still has power over her. In this way, being converted as a Catholic instigates an internal conflict in Thanh. Although she perceives herself as a Catholic, part of her body and soul still remains a Confucian. Therefore, relocating to the United States is marked as her dislocation which prevents her to rebuild her life and finally leads to her death on the new land. Her tragic destiny results from the cultural conflict, the internal conflict between being a Confucian and being a Catholic.

Along with Catholicism, the French also bring to Vietnam another important change, the French educational system. The introduction of the new educational system can be viewed as beneficial for the intellectual development of Vietnamese people. However, based on Young's

argument above, it is considered only a by-product of the real intention of the colonizer, which is to economically exploit the colonized (24). Moreover, the educational development is regarded uneven in Vietnamese society, since only privileged groups can obtain it, due to its very high expenses. Thanh is able to attend the French boarding school because Uncle Khan supports her. He willingly spends a huge amount of money on her education, since he is acutely aware that she is his own daughter. Recalling her educational path, Thanh explains, "with all expenses paid in advance, in one lump sum, to the Providence Boarding School, run by a French convent, I was immediately enrolled in this walled compound […]" (176). This educational opportunity is unaffordable for typical Vietnamese people who live under poverty and struggle for merely subsistence. The unequal educational opportunity indicates that while extracting material resources such as rice and other agricultural products from Vietnam, the French colonizer offers only artificial goodwill to the indigenous, since not all Vietnamese can access the French education. The walled compound clearly separates the privileged and the underprivileged from each other. It is clear that this unequal opportunity also widens the gap between the rich and the poor, exacerbating the conflict between different classes of people, which is a rationale behind the fighting of the Communist North Vietnam.

Under the French educational system, another cultural imposition is also enforced; students must learn and adopt French values such as self-conducts, manners, and French-style daily routines. That is to say, in order to acquire advanced Western knowledge, these Vietnamese students are compelled to adopt Western values and abandon the indigenous ones. Apart from being converted to Catholicism, Thanh and other students have to conform to the rules and schedules of the school, including ways to conduct themselves in accordance with French values:

> We had to be tightrope walkers to please the nuns. I settled easily enough into the ways of the school, the stiff-jawed, erect-postured manners of the sisters. I was touched by the rhythm and dignity of convent life, actually. […] And it was easy for me, because I already had the rice cycles running like warm blood through my veins to guide me through the implacable daily routines of a Providence day: morning prayer, the doxology and the book of catechism, reading and writing (my five favorites, Corneille, Racine, Bruyere, Boileau, and Moliere), poetry recitation […], milk and chocolate croissants with white tablecloths and polished cutlery and fresh flowers […]. (177)

As discussed by Said, Westerners view themselves as far more superior than Easterners, who oppose the "nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race" (*Orientalism* 39). Therefore, one of the justifications of Western colonialism of the East is to elevate them to such perceived nobility and civilization. The above excerpt attests to this notion. The French colonizer imagines Vietnamese people uncivilized, far from French nobility, and thus tries to recreate them by imposing French values on these people. Under the roof of the boarding school, Thanh and other Vietnamese students cannot represent Vietnamese Confucian values, but are taught to represent French values, conducting themselves under the French norms of nobility. The transformation of Vietnamese students' values can also be construed as the emphasis of the distinction between the noble French and the condemned uncivilized Vietnamese. Through the process of transformation, these Vietnamese students are inevitably forced to view their indigenous values influenced by Confucianism as inferior. Such values include the bond between people and their ancestors as well as the land. Meanwhile, they are compelled to accept as well as adopt the French and Christian values as evident in the above excerpt. In the future, when these students

graduate from the French school, they will also become products of French colonization, representing the superior French values which contrast with the indigenous ones. The representation of French values by Vietnamese elites who are educated through French education will compel typical Vietnamese subjects to ideologically accept their inferiority, making them easy to be subjugated.

Thanh's adoption of French values can be described by the concept of mimicry defined by Homi Bhabha as "the sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" (86). As the colonizer represents power and superiority, the colonized do not want to be different from this powerful group and thus try to imitate the colonial values in order to be the same as the colonizer. However, Bhabha further argues that "Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*" (88 emphasis in original). In the case of the non-white who mimic the white powerful group, Bhabha contends that the mimic group is "*Almost the same but not white*" (89 emphasis in original). That is to say, however hard the colonized try to imitate the colonizer, they will never be fully accepted and recognized. At best, they can become only products of hybridity, the subjects derived from the mixture of cultures of the colonizer and the colonized, which instigates the ambivalence of their identity. In *Monkey Bridge*, Thanh does not resist the imposition of French values, indicating that she willingly imitates and adopts them, since she is ideologically compelled to understand that her Vietnamese values are inferior, and she does not want to be different from the French as a superior group. Based on Bhabha's concept of mimicry, Thanh also desires to represent power and avoid being viewed as weak, due to her Vietnamese origin.

Even after Thanh finishes school and gets married, the French values still overshadow her life. She speaks French with Binh, her husband, and rides in the French Citroen family's car.

Binh also arises from an elite family, so he is able to acquire privilege over the typical Vietnamese, especially in the educational aspect. Obtaining French education, he masters the French language and becomes a professor of French philosophy who has "a love for Rousseau and Voltaire" (179). However, although both Thanh and Binh are engaged in mimicry, adopting French values, they are unable to give up their Vietnamese essence. As discussed in the previous chapter, Thanh still yearns for the Vietnamese rice culture when trying to rebuild her life in the United States. In a similar way, her husband, learning about the French Revolution and the uprising of farmers against landlords in France, has a dream to liberate the oppressed Vietnamese farmers from the landlord's exploitation. Both cases illustrate that Thanh and Binh cannot deny and abandon their Vietnamese national heritage. It is obvious that these two characters are products of hybridity with ambivalent identity. On the one hand, they embrace French values; on the other hand, they are unable to fully abandon their Vietnamese origin.

French colonialism, apart from imposing French values on Vietnamese people, also alters economic structure of Vietnamese society. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, before the colonial era, people in Southeast Asia practiced subsistent agriculture. Under the colonial rule, unfortunately, the traditional form of agriculture was transformed into agribusiness to serve the economic development of the colonizer. As the historian Osborne puts it, "Southeast Asia could, like Africa, supply many of the materials that became, during the 19th century, essential to the needs of modern Europe and America" (99). The colonizer's need of materials from Southeast Asia instigated several changes in the economic system of the region. An important change was that colonialism introduced capitalist economy to the colonized country. Colonialism and capitalism worked hand in hand in fostering the economic and industrial development of the colonizer as well as the indigenous elite. As stated by Young, "Marx regarded colonization and

global trade as playing a much more significant role as part of the necessary process of the transformation of the world economy from a feudal to a capitalist mode of production" (105). In Southeast Asia, similarly, the subsistence agriculture was transformed into agribusiness under capitalism. This transformation also promoted the landlord system which generated wealth for a certain group of people, while the majority sank deeper into the abyss of poverty. In the case of Vietnam, before French colonialism, most Vietnamese farmers possessed their own land. Unfortunately, "a century of French rule had dispossessed them. […] By expanding cultivated acreage to stimulate production, the French spurred land grabbing by French speculators and prominent Vietnamese families at the expense of the peasants" (Karnow 117). The fact that rice became a cash crop was a significant reason why landlords increasingly exploited peasants by appropriating their land as well as their products. *Monkey Bridge* portrays this changing economic system through Uncle Khan, a wealthy landlord, and Baba Quan, a helpless peasant.

Uncle Khan, regarded as a product of capitalist economy fostered by colonialism, is "the richest of all landlords, not just landlords from the province of Ba Xuyen but from all of the Mekong Delta combined" (173). The path to his extreme wealth is paved with the suffering of tenant farmers. He is far wealthier than other landlords because he is more ruthless, having no pity for the wretched tenants:

> Uncle Khan was a landlord with a relentless passion for raw, hard numbers. Like rent paid to other landlords in the area, the rent paid to Uncle Khan consisted of half a tenant's rice crops, several days of free labor each month, routine offerings of the firstborn goose or the first harvest of fish from a tenant's fish pond. But unlike other landlords, he had little patience for and little faith in second chances. (232)

As evident in the above excerpt, Uncle Khan's system is not simply exploitation but super-exploitation. Tenants not only have to sacrifice half of their crops for the rent but also must serve and satisfy this landlord in other ways. This exploitative system offers no chance for tenants to ascend from abject poverty. While the landlords dramatically increase their wealth through the appropriation of surplus of the tenants' production, those tenants are able to earn only subsistence.

Among the helpless tenants, Baba Quan is possibly the most wretched of all. He rents a piece of land from Uncle Khan to farm for survival. Unfortunately, his tragic fate is aggravated by natural disasters, drought and flood, which make his farming impossible. Unable to pay the rent and obtain subsistence, he desperately prostitutes his own wife to Uncle Khan. His crime against his own wife and his dignity is by force, not by his own choice, as he lacks power to determine his future, which depends on the landlord as well as the mercy of nature. Under the super-exploitative system, he will never transcend poverty, even though he devotes his life to "days and nights of hard work" (108), because all surplus derived from his labor is appropriated by Uncle Khan. His tragedy stems from capitalist economy sustained by colonialism. He and his family are victimized by colonialism which empowers capitalism in Vietnamese society. Through this super-exploitative system which subjugates all opportunities for tenants to improve their economic status, again, the distinction between the rich and the poor is widened, elevating the conflict between different classes of people.

As portrayed in *Monkey Bridge*, French colonialism is responsible for the changing of Vietnamese social structure in several aspects. The imposition of French values through education benefits the Vietnamese in some ways, but at the same time generates both internal conflicts in individual Vietnamese people and conflicts between different classes of people. In

addition, most Vietnamese are not free to determine their own lives and future, and thus inevitably suffer from economic exploitation. The stimulation of global market as a result of colonialism increases the demand for crops in commercial transactions and aggravates the exploitation in the Vietnamese nation. Apart from the French colonialism, Vietnam also suffers from American imperialism. The American intervention in Vietnam will be discussed in the next chapter, which deals with war.

The Legacy of British Colonialism in *The Coffin Tree*

The Coffin Tree, Wendy Law-Yone's first novel, is set in both Burma and the United States during the transition between the 1960s and 1970s. The novel has a backdrop as the conflict and the war between the totalitarian Burmese central state and hill tribes. This war forces the unnamed female narrator and her brother to leave the country and seek refuge in the United States, becoming diasporic subjects. Besides the conflict and the erupting war in Burma, Law-Yone incorporates the legacy of British colonialism in this novel, portraying the influence of the British on Burmese people and society. In the history, after several wars between Burma and the British, who expanded colonial boundary from India, the Burmese were militarily forced to surrender in 1885. The British abolished the Burmese monarchy, the system that had governed the country for centuries. Employing indigenous elites in the governing, the British turned the palace into a British headquarter and transformed the "principal throne rooms" into the '"Upper Burma Club and the garrison chapel" (Myint-U 4). Under the British rule, the old institutions were superseded by British bureaucracy, causing enormous changes to the Burmese governing structure. Apart from the indigenous elites, landlords and tribal chiefs also rose into power with the British support. As contended by Myint-U, "The political boundaries of twentieth-century Burma are, of course, entirely colonial creations" (220). The alteration of governance and

politics also had an impact on other related aspects, such as policy, economy, education, and culture, all of which directly affected the life of Burmese people. Some of these issues are portrayed in *The Coffin Tree* as important influences shaping the life of main characters.

The first colonial influence to be discerned, which is common in all colonized countries, has to do with religious aspects. Similar to what is portrayed in *Monkey Bridge*, in which the French introduce Catholicism to Vietnam, *The Coffin Tree* also reflects the advent of this Western religion accompanying the British colonization dominating the Burmese Buddhist society. Based on the history, besides being the main religion, Buddhism played a significant role as a major figure in Burmese governance. For instance, laws were written by Buddhist monks along with government officials (Myint-U 88). Although Buddhism was a very firm institution in Burma, it could not withstand the penetration of Catholicism. The British colonizer succeeded in Catholicizing a number of Buddhist Burmese and instilled a new faith into their society. In *The Coffin Tree*, the expansion of Catholicism is evident in the narrator's family; almost all family members are Catholic. Her mother, grandmother, and aunts are converted to Catholicism. Her mother, in particular, possesses strong faith in God, whom she believes to be a great protector, as she tells the narrator, "God is watching over you" (25). In Buddhist society, Lord Buddha serves as a great protector. When Catholicism penetrates into this society, however, the faith of some people has shifted from Lord Buddha to God.

The narrator's family belongs to the elite group in Burma, which has a relation with the British colonizer. According to the analysis of *Monkey Bridge* in the above section, mimicry, an important social issue in the colonial discourse, is practiced by the indigenous elite. In *The Coffin Tree*, the religious conversion of the narrator's family is also regarded as mimicry with the motive of the desire to be like or to be the same as the colonizer who possesses more power and

superiority. As Said contends, one of the reasons why the Orient are represented or created as inferior and uncivilized is the accusation of their ignorance of Christianity (*Orientalism* 69). As a member of the elite group in Burma, the narrator's family tries to avoid being viewed as inferior and employs mimicry in elevating their image as the civilized, in order to be accepted and recognized by the superior group. They want to be the same as the white British. For the British colonizers themselves, the penetration of Catholicism into the Buddhist society can be construed as an attempt to substitute Burmese values with Western values. Some important purposes of this imposition include emphasizing their superiority and nobility, and ideologically compelling the Burmese to accept their inferiority. With this rationale, it is understandable that the expansion of Catholicism is partially motivated by politics of power.

The entrenchment of Catholicism in Burmese society generates some conflicts among the indigenous. Similar to what happens in Vietnam, the class distinction between the elite and common people is widened, causing one group to see another group as the other. The othering of a different group is evinced through the way the narrator addresses her friends as "My Buddhist friends" (25), indicating that she and those friends belong to different groups. The separation of herself from her Buddhist friends implies that the conversion from Buddhist to Catholic also functions as the process by which the colonizer instigates the distinction between groups of Burmese people, based on religious orientation. This process can also be viewed as a way to weaken the unity of Burmese people, undermining their power to resist the colonization. In addition to the distinction between groups, Catholicism also generates an internal conflict in some Burmese people, as can be seen through the narrator. A member of a converted family, she is inevitably converted to Catholicism to be like her mother and other family members. In fact, the narrator's character is very complex regarding religious belief. On the one hand, she

perceives the distinction between herself and her Buddhist friends. On the other hand, she refuses to fully embrace Catholicism. In spite of her conversion, she resists Catholicism and seems to conform to this religion simply to please her family. In other words, she does not want to be the other in her Catholic family. Her internal resistance of Catholicism is revealed during the congregation. Instead of appreciating the ritual, she detests it:

> Inside the Church of St. Teresa, the priest leading us through our First Communion performed his own brand of black magic, heartily swirling the blood of Christ in the shiny goblet, downing it with relish, and wiping his stained lips with a crisp napkin, as after a robust meal. And there we were, the children of God, throwing our heads back and our tongues out to receive the flesh of our Father's son, transformed by some abracadabra into blank coins of bread. (26)

Instead of seeing this ritual as sacred, the narrator views it as disgusting. Every time she attends this ritual, her resistance transforms itself into the symptom of nausea causing her to "choke and spit up the host on the creamy marble floor" (27). Apart from this reaction, she also refuses God and is confused by Him, since He is represented as "all mystery and teaser: a God with many masquerades, disguised now as dove, now as mistreated man, now as king; a God that spoke in riddles to be accepted, not solved; a God that dreamed us up, let us loose, sat back to watch our mistakes, then held them against us, knowing all the while that we never stood a chance" (27). The narrator's critique of God reveals that she is converted only on the outside. On the inside, she denies the faith in God, whom she views as a foreigner in her world. He is the one whom she will never understand, and at the same time the one who will never understand her. Although she never indicates that she was a Buddhist before, Catholicism is new on her land. Therefore, it is not easy for her to fully embrace it, since she arises from different cultural background. Her

internal conflict regarding religious orientation attests to the fact that not all Burmese Catholics are converted on their own will, but there are reasons behind it, such as the desire to be accepted. Similar to Thanh in *Monkey Bridge*, the narrator in *The Coffin Tree* is a product of hybridity who has cultural conflicts inside her body and soul.

As depicted in *The Coffin Tree*, along with Catholicism, the British colonizer also establishes the British schooling system in Burma. The church, as a religious institution and a representation of the colonizer, fulfills this mission by offering British educational system, which is part of the civilizing mission of the British colonizer. This new educational system supplants the old system in which "Buddhist monks were among the most important vehicles through which knowledge circulated" (Myint-U 92). British education also represents the Western advanced knowledge which is perceived as far more superior to that of the East, as Said states, "The Orient is outdated by Western science" (*Orientalism* 65). The coming of British educational system operated through the church undermines the role of the Buddhist monastery as the major source of knowledge in Burma. Again, the establishment of British education can be read as the articulation of British superiority and the representation of power. In addition, those who benefit from the British education consist of only the elite who are affluent and able to afford the pricey education. Therefore, British schooling in Burma can be considered only a project of uneven development. Fortunately, the narrator and her brother belong to an elite family, so they are privileged to attain British education. The narrator herself is "sent to a school run by the Irish nuns" (25), where she experiences the unpleasant ritual as discussed above. Although the advent of British education undermines the role of Buddhist monasteries, it brings gender revolution in Burmese education. In the history, Burmese women's educational right was subdued through patriarchy; education was granted exclusively for men (Myint-U 240). In the

novel, the fact that the narrator, who is a girl, receives educational opportunity proves that the British colonizer attempts to demolish the patriarchal system, at least among the elite group.

At the British school, Burmese students undergo another cultural subjugation, the imposition of the English language which comes with the Western advanced knowledge. All students in the Catholic school must learn the language of the colonizer. Moreover, they must learn to speak the perfect, standard British English or the "King's English"; otherwise, they will be punished: "At school, any lapse into pidgin was punishable by one hundred corrective lines in the King's English" (9). This becomes the reason why the narrator has to correct her brother whenever he speaks ungrammatically: "Not *me* father, *my* father" (9 emphasis in original). In the governing aspect, the imposition of English helps facilitate the British rule of their colonies. As Innes puts it, "the British sought to establish an intermediate class of English-speaking people who could act as interpreters, teachers and lower grade civil servants, and so provide support for British cultural, military and economic domination" (3). In addition, the imposition of English is also marked as a form of cultural domination which is perceived as an effective strategy in the colonizing process. Analogically, Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues that "Berlin of 1884 was effected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. […] The bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation" (287). This argument suggests that the colonization of the body must be operated alongside with the colonization of the mind, which is even more important. In Kenya, Ngugi's country colonized by the British, English was marked by the colonizer as the language of civilization and superiority. It substituted the Kenyan language at school and other institutions, becoming "more than a language: it was the language, and all others had to bow before it in deference" (288). The imposition of English as a form of

cultural subjugation can be construed as a means to generate the colonized subjects' perception of their inferiority, in order to make them consent to be colonized. The imposition of the King's English in *The Coffin Tree*, thus, functions as the process by which the Burmese are spiritually subjugated, since they have to accept and respect the colonizer's language. The narrator mentally denies Catholicism, but she accepts the King's English and encourages her brother to conform to it, implying that in some aspects she consents to be colonized. In addition, her imitation of the King's English is an act of mimicry. Not only does she try to avoid punishment, but she also attempts to be like the colonizer and wants to be accepted by the teachers at her Catholic school.

Apart from cultural subjugation, the British colonizer also generates miscegenation, a union between the British and the Burmese, especially a British man with a Burmese woman. In fact, sexual fantasy and sexual adventure are also discussed by Said in *Orientalism*. Analyzing Western literature, which is a form of Western epistemology, Said contends that along with its inferiority, the Orient is also represented as a "place for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe" (190). Western men imagine Oriental women as a great source of sexual pleasure, since they are viewed as submissive, docile, and loving. The Oriental world is associated with femininity, as elaborated by David Eng in *Racial Castration* (2001). Apart from the ideological castration of Asian men, Eng also argues that Western men construct sexual fantasy towards Oriental women referred to as "lotus blossom" (158). In the imagination of Western men, "Oriental women make the best wives" (qtd. in Eng 158) because of their submissive quality. Based on this imagination, Western men desire for sexual experience and demand fetish from Oriental women. *The Coffin Tree* reflects this social issue through the life of the narrator's grandmother. Even though it is unclear if she has a formal marriage, she states that she is a Western "police inspector's wife" (8). Based on the historical context, it is certain that her

husband is British, since the British would send their officers to supervise the colonized countries. This issue is also shown in other literary works. For example, the British supervision is also clearly depicted in E.M. Forster's masterpiece, *A Passage to India*, in which British officers are sent to govern India and encounter exotic experiences in their colony. Those officers, along with their families, encounter cultural misunderstandings and assume that they are more civilized than the Indian, as evident in event at the cave where Adela accuses Dr. Aziz of sexually harassing her.

Back to *The Coffin Tree*, the miscegenation between the grandmother and her British husband is probably not derived from love but sexual fantasy. After impregnating her, he leaves Burma and never returns even to see his own daughter. His departure suggests that the union between him and the grandmother is simply for the sake of fetish. In spite of that fact, the grandmother still buries herself under fantasy, imagining that he leaves her without returning because he is a good son who has to take care of his sick mother: "I understood. He was a good son; that's what sons are for" (8). This fantasy also indicates that the grandmother acknowledges the moral superiority of Westerners who colonize her own country. In fact, she is the one who is most colonized in the story, as she is a converted Catholic and has full trust in God; she also accepts a British man to be her husband and admires his moral superiority. Miscegenation between the British and the indigenous yields hybrid products as mixed race offspring. The grandmother's miscegenation produces a hybrid-race daughter, and then her daughter gives birth to the narrator, who has a quarter of the British race in her body.

Miscegenation also happened in other parts of Southeast Asia during the colonial and imperial era. In Vietnam, for instance, there were a large number of hybrid offspring, products of American fathers and Vietnamese mothers. Those children had to live without fathers, since they

were not admitted to the United States until 1987. As stated by Chan, after an Amerasian Homecoming Act was passed in that year, approximately 4,500 Vietnamese children begotten by American fathers had been admitted into the United States to reunite with their fathers (*Asian Americans* 163). This fact indicates that sexual exploitation as a result of colonialism and imperialism took place in many parts of Southeast Asia. Alongside with this historical account, therefore, the issue of miscegenation and hybrid offspring in *The Coffin Tree* is not surprising, as Burma is part of Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, the narrator's mother does not have any chance to reunite with her father like the Amerasian kids in Vietnam, since she dies after giving birth to the narrator.

Wendy Law-Yone sets the second half of her novel in the United States, the new world of the narrator and her brother. It can be said that British colonialism plays an important role in leading them to the new world. The English language and Western culture they adopt are among important factors for their father to make a decision to send them to the United States. Another important reason behind this decision stems from American imperialism. The United States expands her imperial power and sends some journalists to Burma. With his political activities, the narrator's father builds connections with American journalists who become his friends and later help his children to escape and settle in the United States. The diasporic experience of the narrator and her brother will be discussed in the final chapter.

The Legacy of American Imperialism in *Jasmine Nights* and *Dogeaters*

The United States is marked as one of the greatest Western countries exercising power in Southeast Asia, especially after World War II. While other countries were colonized by European countries, the Philippines is the only one country in this region that officially fell under American colonization. At the end of World War II, traditional colonialism began to decline and

Western colonizers gradually retreated to their countries. The United States, however, emerged as a new power to dominate this region in the form of imperialism or neocolonialism. As stated by Young, after 1945, direct colonialism and domination by Europeans was no longer tenable. Unfortunately, the independent countries encountered a new form of domination, which still prolongs capitalist exploitation. Young further explains that the term neocolonialism was introduced in 1961, the essence of which is that "the State which is subject to it, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus political policy is directed from outside" (46). Therefore, neocolonialism—or imperialism based on the definition of terms at the beginning of this chapter—is the ruling of the less powerful countries by another means, not by the direct rule with authority control like in the past. Instead, it comes in the form of economic, cultural, ideological, and political control, with the aim to maintain the benefit of transnational corporations and internal elites. Based on Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Young argues, "the colonist already established a cultural, ideological, economic, and political force to the colonized to consent" (45). That is to say, after the independence, the former colonized countries were not yet ready to fully govern themselves, due to the lengthy subjugation and institutionalization of colonial economic structures by the colonizers. Moreover, those colonizers still maintained their domination for the sake of global capitalist exploitation, which returns the interest to the mother country. It is clear that colonialism has developed itself, as Ania Loomba contends, "modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered—it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries" (9). With their new forms of conquest, the colonizers reshape the colonies in

several aspects, such as politics and governance, education, policies, and most importantly economics, in order to facilitate the exploitation. Therefore, in terms of oppression, subjugation, and exploitation, neocolonialism or imperialism does not much differ from the traditional colonialism.

In Southeast Asia, it can be said that the United States has the greatest dominating power in the age of neocolonialism. The expansion of American transnational corporations and cultural domination are evident in several Southeast Asian American and diasporic writings. Thailand, in spite of the fact that it has never been colonized by any Western country, is also tremendously affected by American imperialism. As Said states in *Culture and Imperialism*, at present, "imperialism is not about soldiers and cannons, but about ideas, about forms, about image and imagining" (7). This concept is related to the idea of representation he discusses in *Orientalism*. The colonization of ideas, forms, and image confers power on the imperialist. With the superiority in military, economic, and ideological aspects, the imperialist dominates the inferior countries, changing their social structures for the imperialist's interest. The relations of power and domination between the United States, as a new imperialist, and Thailand, which instigate several changes in Thai society, are reflected in Somtow's *Jasmine Nights*, a novel set in the rising age of American imperialism.

Jasmine Nights depicts stories of Justine, a 12-year-old, Thai boy born in the United States. His parents, who are CIA officers, send him back to live with his aristocratic relatives in Thailand, where he learns many dimensions of Thai society. Through Justine's experience, many aspects of Thailand during the 1960s are presented. Among the most important issues, Somtow includes the influence of American imperialism as a major element of this novel. Justine, the most important character in the novel, has a background involved with American imperialism,

which is expanding its territory to Southeast Asia during that period of time. The Vietnam War with American involvement forces Justine's parents to send him back to Thailand, since they, as CIA officers, have to leave him for important missions: "They're doing very important work. Very secret work. […] They've had to be in disguise most of the time" (334). This truth is concealed from Justine until the very end of the novel. He receives a deep impact from American imperialism, having to part from his parents and brave the unfamiliar world in Thailand by himself. In creating this plot, Somtow incorporates historical accounts of the Indochina War, which the United States was closely involved with. During the 1960s, the United States deployed several troops into Southeast Asia, where American military bases were situated. Apart from the troops, several organizations, including the CIA, were sent to the war zone. In Laos, for example, thousands of Americans penetrated into the country: "CIA operatives, USAID bureaucrats, International Voluntary Services (IVS) volunteers, Air America pilots, Air Force ground technicians and Blue Berets […]" (Branfman 219). The CIA, in particular, had an important mission to acquire and provide military as well as political intelligence for the U.S. army. Based on this historical account in which CIA officers had to conceal their identities, Somtow hides the identity of Justine's parents from him and the readers until the end of the novel. Somtow is very creative in outlining this plot; he assigns the CIA to employ Justine's parents, who are Thai, to work as spies, since they can easily assimilate with people in Laos, Vietnam, or Cambodia, which are in the war theater. This plot also implies that to win the war and expand its imperial power, the United States employs several military strategies, even the secretive ones. The Indochina War affects not only people in the war zone but also those in neighboring countries. As can be seen through Justine's separation from his parents, American imperialism has a deep

impact on a large number of Southeast Asian people, even though they are not directly involved with the Indochina War.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Americans' attempt to win the war and policy of Communist containment brought a large number of American citizens into Thai society, including military officers, diplomats, and other officials, sometimes along with their families. Thailand housed several important military bases for the United States, and in July 1953, officially, "the US [sic] National Security Council proposed developing Thailand as an 'anti-communist bastion in order to extend US [sic] influence—and local acceptance of it—throughout the whole Southeast Asia" (qtd. in Baker and Phongpaichit 146). After this establishment, the number of American troops in Thailand increased to 10,000 in 1962 and reached 45,000 in 1969. Baker and Phongpaichit also state that "The first air strike on North Vietnam was flown from Thailand in December 1964" (148-49). It is obvious that Thailand was among the most important hubs of U.S. military bases in Southeast Asia, although this country was not directly involved with the Indochina War. The establishment of Thailand as an anti-communist bastion showed that the United States was dominating the political affair and foreign policy of the Thai government, which consented to facilitate the military mission of the United States, since the Thai could not possibly resist the American superpower.

The coming of Americans as a consequence of these military and political affairs is also pictured in *Jasmine Nights*. Besides military officers, American civilians also come to Thailand as their dependents or other important professionals. Virgil, another important character, along with his mother, and his sister—all are African American—has to follow his father, an American military officer, to Thailand. While his father is in the battle in Vietnam, Virgil and the rest of the family stay in Bangkok. Being introduced to Justine's aunts, Virgil explains in his black

vernacular, “My father a military advisor. He a air force colonel. He in Saigon now” (64). The coming of Americans exposes Thai people to those of other races, increasing ethnic diversity in Thai society. Being African American, Virgil’s family is exotic in Thailand. The novel indicates that during that time, there are very few African Americans in the country. Most Thais have not yet seen people with the black race before, so when the aunts first see Virgil, they are so startled that one of them exclaims in Thai, “My word! I’ve never seen one up close before. Do you think he’ll bite?” (63). Actually, as members of the aristocracy, the aunts are familiar with white Americans coming to Thailand for military missions or for other professions, such as doctor or ambassador. One of American doctors also serves as a family doctor for the aunts. However, African Americans are still very rare in Thai society, so the presence of Virgil causes an astounding feeling to them. Apart from Virgil’s family, there are also other minor American characters, such as the white American boys and their families who are racist against Virgil. As evident in the historical account and the depiction of the Americans in *Jasmine Nights*, American imperialism dramatically increases American populace in Thailand.

According to the history, the advent of Americans inflicted several changes on Thai society in many aspects: “The city changed in shape, style, and taste. New suburbs clustered around the schools, shops, cinemas, and club catering for westerners. Elite Thai families were attracted to the same areas because of their perceived status and their rising property values” (Baker and Phongpaichit 149). These changes served not only the needs of Westerners and Thai elites, but also the development of private capitalists pushed by American imperialism. New kinds of business, such as “bars, nightclubs, brothels, and massage palours” were established especially on the “American strip,” a road in Bangkok, since Thailand was “chosen for the GIs’ R&R (‘rest and recreation’) tours” (Baker and Phongpaichit 149). Bangkok became a major

place for American soldiers and officials to take vacation from the battle in the war zone, attracting a large sum of U.S. dollars to Thai economy each year during that era. In spite of the flourishing economy, these businesses, in some ways, introduced degraded American values to Thai society. Thai people were introduced to nightclubs and bars, increasing alcohol consumption in Thai society. The Thai elite perceived these values as Western superior culture adopted them as part of their lifestyles. In addition, they spent an extravagant life, such as partying and joining expensive foreign clubs, since they viewed these activities as ways to show off their high social and economic status. These social issues are also vividly portrayed in *Jasmine Nights*. Justine and his aunts, who belong to the elite class, also adopt Western lifestyles. For instance, they go a cinema to watch *Cleopatra* starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. In addition, they join the Sports Club, which is described as highly luxurious and extravagant in Western styles:

> We sweep into the club like an animated Chagall, an eye-popping contrast to the off-white walls, the white uniforms, the white tablecloths of the dining room, the elegantly colonial rattan of the veranda sun-chairs. The only thing gaudier than our eccentric assemblage is the spectacular twenty-two bath all-you-can-eat buffet which seems to stretch as far as the eye can see. There are hams, joints of beef, turkeys, pastries, assorted Siamese dishes, vegetables of every conceivable ilk, and an ice-cream sculpture as tall as myself, in the shape of a recumbent swan. There are rock lobsters on beds of lettuce, pates, cheese and fruits. The muffled soundtrack of a Bugs Bunny cartoon, being screened in some inner room to entertain the younger children while their parents are golfing, provides a kind of chamber music to accompany our repast. (133)

As can be seen through the excerpt above, Americans bring their culture into Thai society, including food culture, Western decoration style, popular culture, and sports. In addition, as portrayed in another scene, American fashion—with Jacqueline Kennedy as a model who always appears at the front page of newspapers—greatly influences the ways high-class Thai ladies dress up themselves. Even Samlee, a servant who upgrades herself as a mistress of Justin's uncle, also dresses up and puts on makeup in American style: "She has a Cleopatra hairdo. She has shocking pink lipstick and rouged cheeks, above which she sports a pair of gilt-edged dark glasses. She wears a floral sundress and one of those hats popularized by Jacqueline Kennedy" (52). The extravagant life and Western costume and makeup adopted by Samlee and other Thai elites are considered mimicry. Those Thai people view American imperialist culture as superior and more civilized. This can be described by Said's concept of the power of representation in which the West employs "a whole set of forces," such as military, knowledge, and politics, to create itself as superior to the East (203). In Thailand, although the U.S. army does not physically harm the country, it represents enormous military force. Moreover, as shown in the novel, the American seems to dominate Thai mass media and use them as tools in representing themselves and their culture. This can be seen through "the Sunday edition of *Bangkok Post*, which has a picture of Jacqueline Kennedy on the front page" (22). Being the first lady of the United States as the superpower during that time, Jacqueline represents power, elegance, and modern civilization. As Thai ladies see themselves as inferior and thus desire to be like or to be the same as superior American ladies, they employ mimicry as a means for themselves to uplift their appearance.

However, due to the high cost of the above Western cultures, only elite, wealthy Thais are able to adopt them. For the poor, who are the majority of the country, these extravagant

cultures are beyond their imagination. In the novel, Somtow also emphasizes this social contrast. While the rich are playing golf in the club's golf course or swimming in the club's pool, a lot more people are swimming in a *klong*, or a canal just next to the club. While the rich are dining in luxurious restaurants, the poor are eating from street venders. These different lifestyles indicate a huge gap between the rich and the poor in Thai society. This gap is also widened by American imperialism, which espouses the development of capitalism. As explained by Baker and Phongpaichit, American imperialism helped capitalists and the elite to increase their wealth by transforming traditional agriculture into agribusiness. However, farmers still struggled with poverty, since "they needed to buy seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, and perhaps hire equipment for land preparation and harvesting" (158). Although agribusiness increased the products, it demanded larger investment. It turned out that after paying all production expenses, farmers obtained less surplus causing them to be overwhelmed by debt. The contrast between the rich and the poor contradicted the mission of development proposed by the American, as it was proved to be merely uneven development which helped only the rich to be richer and able to spend an extravagant life as illustrated above. In contrast, the poor still struggled for subsistence, since their surplus was appropriated by the rich through the production costs.

As depicted in *Jasmine Nights*, another serious social degradation is inflicted on Thailand; American imperialism promotes prostitution in Thai society. This immoral business extremely flourishes during this era. Brothels are openly operated especially to attract foreigners, Americans in particular. As young boys in their transition to the teenagers, Justin and his American friends desire sexual experience. Their desire leads them to a brothel district in Bangkok, where GIs visit for their recreation, as Wilbur, one of the boys explains, "I've heard my dad talk about them [the brothels]. They're R and R places" (287). As discussed above, "R

and R" refers to "rest and recreation," so those places are especially established for American soldiers and officials to unwind from their duties. Justin describes the scene in a brothel where he and his friends visit as following:

> Seated at the tables in the room are about a dozen male *farangs* [a Thai word for Westerners], many in military uniforms. Mostly they are alone or in pairs. Each one has a drink in front of him, which he is ignoring. Each one has a hostess, scantily clad, who is making eyes at, massaging or attempting to converse with him. Some of the women wear rabbit-ears, others have little helmets that resemble the heads of cats. They are all heavily made up, but some are little older than ourselves. (287)

As reflected in this novel, prostitution is an important change in Thai social structure, since it becomes prosperous business generating huge income for particular groups of people. The rising of this immoral business also indicates that money becomes an important factor for survival in the changing socio-economic condition. A lot of Thai women have to reduce themselves to prostitutes to gratify American soldiers' lust in order to earn money because the changing economy forces them. Agriculture under capitalism drives them into poverty, since they need to rely on capital for seeds, fertilizers, and other supplies. Therefore, there are not a lot of choices for them to choose from. The last sentence of the above excerpt also reveals that teen prostitution also emerges in Thai society during this era. In fact, as contended by Baker and Phongpaichit, the number of prostitutes increased to approximately 300,000 in Bangkok during that period. Embarrassingly, "The interior minister, General Praphat Charusathian, wanted even more because they attracted tourists and boosted the economy" (149). When American soldiers came to Thailand, they also spent their money on other things, not only on women. It is obvious that

people in the governing class denied moral ethics and ignored the bad reputation of the nation, but aimed at only attracting money to the country. According to these changes, it can be said that Thailand was plagued by imperialism and capitalism, since money became prioritized in ruling the country. The Thai government even turned itself to be a capitalist appropriating the surplus generated by the prostitutes. This might be one of the facts that most Thai people want to ignore, although it really happened.

On the other side, as evinced in the novel, Americans, especially GI customers of prostitution, view Thailand as a paradise for sexual indulgence and perceive Thai women as merely sex objects. Although this sexual exploitation happens in the period of the modern colonialism, it is similar to what happens during the traditional colonialism. In Joseph Conrad's classic novella, *Heart of Darkness*, this issue is also made visible through sexual exploitation of an indigenous woman by Kurtz, a Western colonist in Congo. He keeps her as his mistress, although he has already been engaged to a woman in his home country. This indigenous woman is viewed as only an object with no more value than a thing to gratify Kurtz's sexual desire. In both two cases, traditional colonialism in Congo and modern colonialism in Thailand, therefore, the colonizers' perspectives toward colonized women are not different; they are viewed as only sources of sexual pleasure. The East, in particular, is represented through Western literature as a place that offers "the freedom of licentious sex" (Said, *Orientalism* 190). Sex in Thailand, as portrayed in *Jasmine Nights*, can be bought openly by money. Due to economic pressure instigated by American imperialism, a lot of Thai women have to walk into prostitution in order to survive the changing Thai economy and society. Compared to the traditional colonialism, the sexual exploitation of women in the age of American Imperialism is operated on a much larger scale, since it becomes a kind of business victimizing many more women. More terribly, instead

of preventing prostitution, the ruling class supports it, viewing it as beneficial to the improvement of the nation's economy.

In addition to the reflection of the above social changes, Somtow also touches upon other issues regarding American imperialism. Another important point, American corporations and business chains are introduced to Thai society. When Justin describes a canal beside his residence, he explains, "There will be s shopping plaza, a five-storied mall, a hotel, a McDonald's, a Pizza Hut, a condominium-in-progress" (39). This depiction suggests that global capitalism has already expanded its territory into Thailand. This expansion will change lifestyles of Thai people, such as their recreational activities and their eating culture. They will spend their free time strolling around the shopping mall and consume American fast food. While they are enjoying these new cultures, the profit from these business chains is sent back to the mother country, the United States. To promote the business, the Americans also employ their mass media in representing themselves. Magazines are examples of important American mass media brought into Thai society. American magazines also become indicators of high social status; Justin's aunts read *Life* magazines, while his Christian school subscribes to *The Times*. Supporting global capitalism, these media function as channels for Americans to promote their image and business through both explicit and implicit advertisements, instilling American values into Thai subjects. Through *Jasmine Nights,* Somtow illustrates these changes in Thai society, instigated by American imperialism. These changes might be viewed as progress of development, but Thailand has to pay high prices to attain it. In fact, many countries in Southeast Asia are affected by American imperialism. They encounter similar changes as what happen in Thailand. In the following section, I expand my analysis of American imperialism to the Philippines through the discussion of Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*.

The Philippines is the only one country in Southeast Asian that officially fell under American colonialism. For many Filipinos, the United States had two important roles in the Philippines, the liberator and the exploiter, as it rescued the Philippines from Spanish colonialism but later transformed itself into a colonizer. To expand its power and economy, the United States, as a highly advanced country with an industrial economy, penetrated into Southeast Asia, and in 1898, "the U.S. fleet […] sailed into Manila Bay and destroyed the Spanish navy" (Lockard 115). Although the Philippines gained independence, it was proved to be only temporary, since the United States turned itself to be a new colonizer after defeating Filipino nationalist revolutionaries. By1902, the United States began its new role as the new colonizer ruling the Philippines as its colony. During the colonial era, the United States administered a significant policy, "known as benevolent assimilation" which prioritized "reshaping Filipino society, with the United States as the preferred model for what some people in the United States sometimes called 'our little brown brothers'" (Lockard 117). The United States restructured the Philippines in many aspects, such as economy, education, religion, and health care, as contended by Bresnan: "The impact of the United States on the Philippines has been truly enormous, extending not only to political and economic values and institutions, but also to language, literature, the graphic and performing arts, even religion" (xii). The United States lost the Philippines to the Japanese Empire in 1942, but liberated the Filipino again in 1945, after the end of World War II. It was so unfortunate for Filipinos that they had been colonized by so many countries, all of which sought to exploit, oppress, and destroy their nation. Although the Philippines finally attained formal independence, a lot of consequences of American colonialism perpetuate in the Philippine society. The new form of colonialism as neocolonialism, or more specifically American imperialism, still exerts its power in determining

the economy of the country and the life of Filipinos. As stated by E. San Juan, a prominent Filipino diasporic scholar, although direct colonization of the Philippines has ended, "the cultural and political hegemony of the United States persists to this day" (*U.S. Imperialism* 24). Several Filipino diasporic writers portray the legacy of American colonialism and imperialism. Carlos Bulosan, for example, recounts his diasporic life through *America Is in the Heart*, indicating that American colonialism and imperialism is an important culprit of the hardships of a large number of Filipinos in their countries, resulting in their diaspora to the United States. Similarly, the effects of American imperialism on the Philippines are also portrayed in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, a powerful novel depicting the degenerating Philippine society.

Published in 1990, *Dogeaters* is set in the 1950s, when Ferdinand Marcos was serving as the President of the Philippines after the retreat of American colonialism. Hagedorn constructs this novel through intertwining stories of different characters from different classes in Philippine society, including the corrupt ruling class. Different stories indicate the drastic contrast between upper-class and lower-class lives, and the struggle of people during a social turmoil in the Philippines, alongside with guerilla fight of the leftist opposing the assumed Marcos' power. In addition, the novel vividly portrays the changing Philippine society in economic, cultural, and political aspects, as a result of American imperialism as well as the dictatorship under Marcos' presidency imbue with corruption.

An important theme of *Dogeaters* holds onto the fact that American imperialism prompts enormous changes in Filipino economy. Throughout the novel, global capitalism plays a significant role in shaping the lives of several characters and entrenching American socio-economic values in the Philippine society. While the Filipino elites and ruling class dramatically benefit from global capitalism and increase their wealth, the working class can only struggle for

survival and unsuccessfully chase the American Dream. Based on the history, the economic gap between the rich and the poor in the Philippines was very huge because American imperialism restructured their economic system. After the Philippines gained independence, "Neocolonial 'Americanization' plus a continuation of 'free trade' and privileges for a minority elite intensified the impoverishment of the peasantry, women, petty bourgeois entrepreneurs, government employees, professionals, and urban workers" (San Juan, *U.S. Imperialism* XIX). Moreover, global capitalism immensely prospered, since the Philippines needed to rely on global funding resources. The IMF (International Monetary Fund), WB (World Bank), and WTO (World Trade Organization), which provide funding, came with structural adjustment which benefits "the local reactionary compradors, landlords, bureaucrat capitalists, and their military henchmen" (San Juan, *U.S. Imperialism* 23). Through this process, the exploitative system was amplified in the Philippines, encouraging the affluent to be more affluent. In *Dogeaters*, the story of the Alacran family attests to the prosperity of global capitalism, which endows this family with economic and political power to maintain and proliferate their wealth. Severo Alacran, the head of the family, is described as "The King of Coconuts" (18). Although Hagedorn does not elaborate on his coconut business in the novel, through the history of the Philippines, it can be inferred that his wealth also stems from this business. During that era, the United States greatly influenced the Philippine economy: "the trade patterns fostered by American legislation pushed the external economy into further dependence upon sugar and coconut exports, while allowing preference for American manufactured goods" (Friend 10). The American legislation benefits the Filipino elite like Severo, who has power to trade with Americans, who also benefit from the distribution of American manufactured goods in the Philippines. This relationship is allowed to exist because the Philippines' economic development highly depends on global funding

resources as elaborated above, and the United States is greatly influential over these funding or trading organizations. Due to the enormous relations between the Philippines and the United States, Filipinos who commercially deal with Americans have high potential to succeed; Severo is among these people. With his coconut business, he becomes a tycoon in the Philippines.

Apart from the coconut business, Severo also owns many firms, corporations, and mass media. Actually, he is also the king of other businesses: "Because he owns *The Metro Manila Daily*, *Celebrity Pinoy Weekly*, Radiomanila, TruCola Soft Drinks, plus controlling interests in Mabuhay Movie Studios, Apollo Records, and the Monte Vista Golf and Country Club. Because he conceived and constructed SPORTEX, a futuristic department store in the suburb of Makati" (18). This whole set of business can be regarded as a private-owned corporation operating several kinds of business under the supreme owner. Each of these businesses supports the others. The relations between these businesses guarantee the economic and marketing power of the corporation and Severo himself. For example, Severo can use his mass media to promote his business. In addition, he can use his golf club as a place to build and maintain his relationship with politicians and high-rank officers in order to earn privileges in doing business. In fact, he seems to be even more powerful than the President of the Philippines: "Because he tells the President what to do" (18). This statement suggests that capitalists are so important and powerful that the governing class people have to listen to them and follow their instructions.

In order to become a great, powerful tycoon, Severo has been "a wheeler-dealer, ruthless and ambitious. He does business with everyone. Japs, GI's, guerillas in the jungle" (20). The advent of Japanese imperialism and American imperialism provides him with opportunities to make his business prosperous. The fact that the Japanese, the American GIs, and the guerillas are all enemies to one another indicates that he ignores business ethics and cares for only profits,

doing business with anybody who can provide him money. Especially in doing business with the Japanese and the American, who are regarded as great enemies of the Philippines, it is proved that he can betray his own country just to gain his personal wealth. Dealing with the guerillas is also illegal, in spite of the fact that they intentionally fight for the country's liberation from colonizers as well as dictatorship. Although it is not stated in the novel what kind of business he does with these people, he obviously supports these people by doing business with them. Therefore, directly or indirectly, his business supports the American war, the Japanese war, and the guerilla war in the Philippines, resulting in a million of deaths and the war-torn nation. After the end of Japanese colonialism and the decline of traditional American colonialism, which impoverish the Philippines and the majority of Filipinos, he still maintains his wealth and economic power, which are even greater than before. This is because he is a real capitalist willing to do anything simply to gain personal profit. Most important, American imperialism imposes a corruptive system on the Philippines, helping him, as an elite, to maintain exploitative power.

American imperialism greatly contributes to Severo's business prosperity. This new form of colonialism brings about American values which foster global capitalism. The success of TruCola, for example, results from the drinking culture of Americans piercing into the Philippine society. In fact, TruCola can imply the coming of Coca-Cola, a giant, transnational American corporation, which never existed in the Philippines during the pre-colonial era. Apart from TruCola, SPORTEX features American products which attract hi-class customers: "'Made in de USA!' The cheerful cashier jokes as she totals the enormous cost of my mother's purchase: small cans of Libby's succotash, Del Monte De Luxe Asparagus Spears, two bottles of Hunt's Catsup, one jar of French's Mustard, Miracle Whip Sandwich Spread, Kraft Mayonnaise […] Johnson &

Johnson's Baby Powder" (234). This long list of U.S. products indicates that American corporations have expanded their global market to the Philippines. The cashier's exclamation also suggests that these products are viewed as extraordinary, and with their enormous cost, only wealthy, upper-class people can be their customers. The desire to consume the U.S.-imported products can be interpreted, like in the previous novels, as mimicry, the desire to be like the superior American, who is exerting its imperial power in the Philippines. The customer's willingness to pay more also shows that American values have been institutionalized as superior culture in the Philippine society, causing Filipinos to imitate American styles, especially for the elite who want to show off their high social status. The high prices of American products do not impede Filipino elites from adopting American values. Eventually, the enormous amount of money, as a surplus derived from the Filipino's desire to be like the American and consumption of U.S.-imported products, is returned to the United States as the mother country of these products, increasing the U.S. economic power to dominate the Philippine economy.

The adoption of American or Western values can also be obviously discerned in the lifestyles of the top ruling class. In the novel, the First Lady, implying Imelda Marcos, spends an extremely extravagant life, using expensive imported products: "She douses herself from head to toe. She orders perfume by the gallon […]" (140). When she gets bored with her expensive clothing, she gives it away as if it cost little money: "That's a fortune in swimwear—and you're just throwing it away!" (82). Imelda Marcos is well known for her extremely large collection of shoes with over 3,000 pairs, and this issue is also reflected in the novel, as she always gives her transvestite friend "almost new high-heeled shoes after she tires of them" (81). A similarly extravagant lifestyle is also practiced by Isabel, Severo's beautiful wife who ascends from a very humble background as a hostess at a nightclub. After her marriage with Severo, it seems that she

is liberated from poverty and starts to fulfill her dream of living a Western lifestyle. With her husband's money, she is promoted as a movie star and then a movie producer. Although Severo buys her a studio for movie production, "She stops making movies, spends her time shopping for clothes. She takes a lot of airplanes, perfects her English. She is terrified by New York, intimidated by Paris, at home in Rome and Madrid. She develops a Spanish accent, and learns to roll her r's" (20). Depicting the lives of these upper-class ladies, Hagedorn sends a message to readers that many women in the Philippines are venerable to Western values. They are ready to adopt these values, since they are ideologically forced to perceive that their own values and cultures are inferior. Americans always represent themselves as more civilized and as saviors to help Filipinos from barbarity and backwardness. To emphasize this point Hagedorn includes in this novel a speech from President William McKinley of the United States, indicating American perspectives towards Filipinos: "we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government […] there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them […]" (71). Although this part of the speech denotes the United States' attempt to create justification to rule the Philippines, to some extent, it compels Filipinos to perceive their own inferiority and desire for an uplift of their image, as can be seen through the characters above. Critiquing American cultural domination, Friend states, "the Philippine population in general was swayed, even captivated by American culture" (11). This is a significant reason behind their adoption of American or Western values through the consumption of U.S. products or perfecting their English as elaborated above. During the neocolonial era, as a result, the United States greatly benefits from such adoption in the economic aspect, since the made-in-USA products dominate Filipino domestic products.

American values which signify civilization also have an impact on working class people who desire to adopt these values. These people have to struggle hard under the changing socio-economic conditions in which luxurious life becomes a new social value. That is to say, American imperialism causes indigenous people to be materialistic. They are in need of expensive materials to escape from their inferior status and to uplift their image. In order to attain this lifestyle, they are willing to overwork or to be exploited. Hagedorn informs readers of this issue through the story of Trinidad, a working class woman who has a dream of attaining luxurious life. She wants to work "as salesgirl at SPORTEX, the department store owned by the prominent Alacran family. […] She spent long hours browsing through the chilly, air-conditioned floors, avoiding the scorching heat outside. She fingered the overpriced dresses and tried on patent leather shoes, dreaming of the day she could use a salesgirl's twenty-percent discount" (53). Trinidad is victimized by the new socio-economic condition and Western values in the Philippines, dreaming of high-class products, despite her meager salary. Therefore, the Alacran, as a capitalist and an exploiter, employ her vulnerability in this point to take advantage of her. After she obtains a job in SPORTEX, she has to work for long hours without any breaks. She also works overtime without extra payment, although she earns a very low wage. However, she is very happy with her job, since it offers her discount in purchasing products in the department store. Her pleasure in working at SPORTEX indicates that she is not aware of or ignores the fact that she is being exploited. She is simply content to be around by expensive goods and upper class people who are target customers of SPORTEX. Her victimization has the root from the imposition of Western values through American imperialism, which brings American culture into the Philippine society. It is difficult for Filipinos to resist American cultural domination, since it is represented through many forms of media, as stated by Friend, "In

movies, television, popular music, pulp fiction and comics, American influence has been and remains overpowering" (20). This influence refers to not only the influential popular culture, but also other forms of culture presented through American popular culture. With the cultural domination and the desire to be like Americans, Filipino people like Trinidad consent to be exploited and victimized by capitalism.

Apart from Trinidad, other characters in the novel also suffer from the deep impact of American imperialism. Joey, a DJ at a gay club, is actually a product of American imperialism. He is the only son of a prostitute whom he describes as "a legendary whore" (42). Joey has a Negro blood, which means that his mother, who drowned herself to death, was impregnated by a black American man coming to the Philippines during the American colonialism era before leaving her. This irresponsible action indicates that as a colonizer, this black man just indulged himself in "the freedom of licentious sex" (Said, *Orientalism* 190) in the Philippines and denied its consequence. As a product of this miscegenation, Joey—born to the lowest rung of the social class—has become an underprivileged Filipino with no education. He is illiterate and lacks social opportunity to ascend from his helpless conditions. His lack of education contradicts the claimed mission of the American, which promises to educate and civilize Filipinos, as evident in the speech of President McKinley mentioned above. The American education project turned out to be a sheer means of oppression, since only privileged upper class Filipinos could obtain it, due to its high expenses. As a result, American education in the Philippines is called "a violent regime of colonial dominance" (Wesling 59). Lower class Filipinos who wanted to acquire educational privilege had to borrow money or sell their properties, as can be seen in *America Is in the Heart*, in which Bulosan's family have to lose their land in order to support his brother's education. Based on these stories, American education project is marked as uneven development—it also

happens in Vietnam and Burma as discussed above—which benefits only the elite, equipping them with more power to oppress the lower class Filipinos.

Without educational opportunity and other choices in the society, Joey inevitably lives as a low life and becomes his uncle's tool to earn a living. When he was a child, his uncle forced him to wander on the street, selling cigarettes, newspapers, and so on. More terribly, his uncle taught him to be a criminal stealing everything possible:

> When I was seven, Uncle taught me to steal. I was wiry, fast, and fearless. […] I was one of the best pickpockets in Manila; just ask anyone around here. Ask Uncle. I enjoyed stealing, the heady rush that hit me as I disappeared into a crowd, stolen goods burning in my hand. A ring, a watch, a chain around someone's neck. The money sometimes still warm from someone's back pocket. A heady rush of triumph like dope, a pleasure so private, delicious, and powerful. I never once got caught—that's how good I was. (43)

Instead of receiving proper education, Joey was in a school of criminals and became a professional one. He did not choose to walk on this path, but American imperialism paved this way for him, cornering him to walk on a criminal road and become a social problem. Comparing his life with the Alacran, a huge gap between the rich and the poor is undeniable. There is no surprise why he ends up working at a gay club and becomes a male prostitute as his sideline job. Moreover, he is addicted to drugs and refuses to abandon his stealing habit, as can be seen when he steals money and drug from Rainer, a German film maker who deeply falls in love with him. This crime also reveals his ungratefulness towards someone who loves him truly. According to his background, it is legitimate to states that his criminal life and catastrophic fate stem from American colonialism as well as imperialism.

As portrayed in *Dogeaters*, many characters receive deep impact from American domination of the Philippines. While the elite greatly benefit from the socio-economic conditions influenced by the American, the lower class people sink deeper into poverty. The huge gap between the rich the poor is also evident in the novel. In addition to the story of Joey, those of other characters also emphasize this social inequality. For instance, while Severo is playing golf with his American counterparts, poor caddies have to work hard to serve them: "In their torn and muddy Converse sneakers, the caddies lag behind respectfully, hauling cumbersome leather golf bags and oversized golf umbrellas on their bony backs" (184). While the elite are enjoying luxurious life and the adoption of Western values, a large number of people have to struggle for merely subsistence. The interwoven stories in this novel reflect the threat of American imperialism to the Philippine society. Apart from reshaping the economic structure, this threat also configures the life and society of Filipinos. Overall, American imperialism inflicts enormous painful experience on Filipinos, as San Juan argues, "The United Imperial state and its ideological apparatuses, in particular the scholarly legitimization of the West's 'civilizing mission,' have inflicted incalculable damage on most Filipinos to the point at which it is not possible at all to call Filipino society 'postcolonial'" (*Beyond* 15). For San Juan and other Filipinos victimized by American imperialism, the destruction of their life and society is beyond the word "postcolonial," which is used to describe devastated countries after being colonized. As portrayed in *Dogeaters*, San Juan's argument is not an overstatement; many aspects of the Philippine society are still influenced by American imperialism. It seems that this country has not been liberated from colonialism. This is an important reason why San Juan argues that the word "postcolonial" should not be applied to the Philippines.

Southeast Asian American and Diasporic Literature as Postcolonial Writing

Colonialism and imperialism have greatly influenced people's life and society in Southeast Asia for centuries. Although in some aspects, the dominating powers move the indigenous society towards development and modernity, the devastating effects of the colonial operation are incalculable. The above literary works, as part of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, function as a means to portray detrimental changes as a result of Western domination. These works give voice to the indigenous Southeast Asians, who are marginalized by the colonizer, in order for them to represent themselves and inscribe their own history. During the colonial age, these people were represented through Western knowledge constructed by Western imagination. According W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness, they always see themselves "through the eye of others" (3), since they lack power to represent themselves. Those "others," or Western colonizers in this sense, create Southeast Asians under the influence of Orientalism, "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (Said, *Orientalism* 2). As Said maintains, the epistemology of the Orient is imbued with politics which fosters European and American interest. The creation and portrayal of the Orient as opposite to the noble and civilized Occident are evident in Western "aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philosophical texts" (Said, *Orientalism* 12). The production of knowledge by the Occident makes the Orient visible to Westerners as well as to themselves, but they are visible in inferior ways. Therefore, the real purpose behind this production of knowledge is to justify the Western rule over the Eastern world for the sake of Western interest.

In the field of Asian American literature, moreover, several scholars also discuss the creation and representation of Asians through American pop culture. Elaine Kim, for instance,

argues that "Caricatures of Asians have been part of American pop culture for generations" (3). Most of the time, Asian image is far more inferior to that of the American; they are created as the uncivilized, the heathen, the immoral, the docile, the comical, and so forth. Some people might be familiar with the Chinese Fu Manchu, the cunning, dangerous master of criminal in a series written by Sax Rohmer, a British writer. In American pop culture, Charlie Chan was also created for a TV series as a sexless and subservient Chinese detective who speaks broken English. Both Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan exemplify the creation of Asian image through Western imagination. The representation of Asians through pop culture leads to the stereotypes of Asians as a whole, since Asians are homogenized by the mainstream. During the setting period of *Monkey Bridge*, *The Coffin Tree*, *Jasmine Nights*, and *Dogeaters*, American pop culture had already reached Southeast Asia with the advent of American imperialism. People in this region watched Western movies, read Western literature and other genres of texts, and consumed news or other information through television or other mass media dominated by the West. As a result, they unavoidably saw themselves, as part of the Asian group, through those media which create them in either positive or negative ways. No matter how they are represented, the ideas from both Said and Kim emphasize that the Orient, or Southeast Asians in this case, inevitably saw themselves through the eyes of others.

In terms of Postcolonialism, Southeast Asians are constructed and represented through the colonial discourse inserted into a variety of texts as part of Western epistemology overshadowing the indigenous' self-representation. Therefore, postcolonial writers "wish to speak for themselves, to tell their own stories, including the story of the colonial encounter and its consequences, and so to create the psychological base and historical understanding which will encourage wise choices in self-government" (Innes 4-5). To free the colonial subject from

colonial discourse, postcolonial literature also functions as a tool to represent the indigenous by themselves and to create the postcolonial counter-discourse. As stated by Helen Tiffin, the postcolonial "counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified 'local'" (98). In other words, postcolonial writers, on their local standpoint, employ literature as an apparatus in arguing and refuting Western knowledge on colonial subjects as well as the colonial world. The authors of the literary works above—Cao, Law-Yone, Somtow, and Hagedorn—integrate postcolonial counter-discourse in their writings and produce knowledge on their world based on the actual ontology of people and social circumstance. The epistemology in their works is independent from the politics underpinning the colonizer's interest, but it is built upon the interest of the indigenous people. All of these writers critique the politics of interest of Western colonizers in their countries, refuting the claim of civilizing mission which legitimizes domination by the West. As illustrated in the discussion of the above novels, devastating changes in people's life and society in at least four countries of Southeast Asia stem from Western colonialism and imperialism. For instance, Somtow portrays the prosperity of prostitution in Thailand as a repercussion of American imperialism. Similarly, Hagedorn illustrates that the impoverishment of a large number of Filipinos results from the U.S. intervention in the Philippines. These texts show that for a huge number of people in this region, the coming of Western people does not mean the improvement or development, but the degradation of their lives. This fact contrasts with the civilizing mission of the West. Read as postcolonial texts, *Monkey Bridge*, *Jasmine Nights*, *The Coffin Tree*, and *Dogeaters* provide places for their authors to reveal the dark side of Western domination and to literarily inscribe their history by themselves. Therefore, these novels

function as both postcolonial counter-discourse and self-representation. These two functions are accompanied "by the demand for an entirely new or wholly recovered 'reality', free of all colonial taint" (Tiffin 95). Since the writing about the Orient by the colonizer is laden with political interest, the knowledge derived from such writing inevitably deviates from reality or truth. Cao, Law-Yone, Somtow, and Hagedorn, as postcolonial writers, employ their novels as channels to present reality or truth about their people and countries. Through these novels, they are able to see themselves through their own eyes.

Southeast Asians' lack of power to represent themselves can also be described by Spivak's concept about the voice of the marginalized. The term "subaltern" as defined by Spivak encompasses Southeast Asians, especially the underprivileged or the marginalized who are outside the elite sphere. These people are silenced by the epistemological domination of the West, which Spivak calls "epistemic violence" (24). The subaltern in this sense refers to "the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat" (25). In colonial discourse, their voice is suppressed, so they are inevitably represented by the colonizer. Spivak poses the question, "Can the subaltern speak?" Of course, they can, but who will listen to them? The production of knowledge by the West—more directly the epistemic violence—suppresses their voice from being heard and recognized. Without voice, these people also seem to be invisible; their existence is denied. Therefore, it is the job of the intellectuals from the subaltern group to contend with Western epistemic violence, speak for their people, and make them visible in the society. For Southeast Asian subalterns, Cao, Somtow, Law-Yone, and Hagedorn represent their intellectuals, being their voice and grappling with Western epistemological institutionalization. Their literary works are regarded as

production of knowledge battling against the Western knowledge which suppresses the authentic voice of Southeast Asian subalterns.

Postcolonial literature, as part of hybridized postcolonial culture, is considered hybridized literature. The hybrid character of postcolonial culture involves "a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity" (Tiffin 95). This hybrid character suggests that under the domination of the colonizing culture, it is impossible for the postcolonial culture to be totally free from the hegemonic nature of colonizing culture. The relation between Western domination and the impulse to maintain cultural independence results in the hybridized culture which contributes to postcolonial identity, the identity constructed through colonial influence and indigenous heritage. In the literary aspect, postcolonial writing also adopts literary tradition, forms, and styles of Western literature. As contended by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, the postcolonial "writer is consigned to a world of mimicry and imitation" in order to access "the world for the writer subject to a dominating colonial culture" (87). Such mimicry and imitation result from the marginalization of indigenous literature by the center. Therefore, to be accepted, postcolonial writers have to imitate or adopt literary tradition of the West. *Monkey Bridge*, *The Coffin Tree*, *Jasmine Nights*, and *Dogeaters*, adopt the literary tradition of Western literature, since their forms as novels are considered a Western literary form. These novels have evolved or even moved away from oral tradition and folktale, which are indigenous literary traditions. Adopting the form of Western literature, however, they refuse to adopt the politics and colonial discourse of Western literature, but substitute them with apolitical truth or politics for the indigenous' sake. These works refute the colonial discourse with postcolonial counter-discourse. More precisely, they use the same literary form as Western literature but exhibit different contents and intention.

Regarding the means of transmission, the authors of these novels employ English, the language of the colonizer, to create the postcolonial counter-discourse and dismantle Western politics. Among the prominent characteristics of postcolonial writing, the abrogation and appropriation of English, the language of the center, always appear in several works. Although post-colonial writing appropriates English, it "abrogates the privileged centrality of 'English' by using language to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 50). This abrogation is done by the violation of grammar or standard use of English, which can be viewed as a rejection of absolute colonization by the center in linguistic aspect. However, the four novels above only appropriate English, but do not abrogate it. They follow the standard use of English. A reason why these novels do not abrogate English is, perhaps, because they are written at the center, the destination country of the diasporic writers. In contrast, the works analyzed by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin are written from the empire, or the colonized countries. As a result, these two groups of works have different audiences. The major audience of Cao, Law-Yone, Somtow, and Hagedorn consists of people in the center who are familiar with standard English. Meanwhile, the main audience of the works written at the empire includes people in the colonized countries who are familiar with the abrogated English, which is part of their postcolonial identity. These factors result in the difference of English used in the works by these two groups of writers.

Writing in English also helps Cao, Law-Yone, Somtow, and Hagedorn to disseminate the knowledge about their people and societies in their home countries to audience groups outside their racial boundaries. All of these writers spend their diasporic lives in the United States, so their target readers are Americans or other ethnic groups in this country. Most of these readers cannot read Southeast Asian indigenous languages, so they consume only texts written in the

language of the center, English. As a result, they have almost never heard the voice from Southeast Asians, especially in the literary aspect. Writing in English, Southeast Asian American and diasporic writers dismantle the language barrier which closes the audience's eyes and ears, preventing them from hearing and listening to the voice of Southeast Asians. The appropriation of English encourages these writers to speak directly to Western readers, not through the voice of Western colonizers. The imitation of Western literature in both form and language, therefore, is political, since it is an apparatus for Southeast Asian diasporic writer to struggle for self-representation. Through this whole process, the novels by Cao, Law-Yone, Somtow, and Hagedorn as discussed above are hybridized in nature. However, the essence of these novels is that although they are not genuine Southeast Asian literary works due to its hybrid nature, they function as means of decolonization, asserting the authentic ontology of people and society in their countries of origin.

Colonialism and imperialism, as a significant mutual legacy of Southeast Asian diasporic subjects as well as the indigenous people in the region, have played a significant role in constructing their life, society, and literature. With their lengthy colonialism, the French and the British transformed the traditional world of the indigenous, causing a lot of social conflicts in their society. American imperialism, as a new form of domination, even destroyed their countries on a larger scale. Until this day, the legacy of colonialism and imperialism still influences and dominates Southeast Asia in several dimensions. As Young puts it, "history has not yet arrived at the post-imperial era" (27). Despite the demise of traditional colonialism, imperialism persists in the global society, exerting its power to seek as well as to protect the interest of transnational capitalists and the imperial countries, especially the United States. Political and economic power is employed as an apparatus for the American "to reinvent colonialism" (Lazarus 17). The

penetration of the United States in many countries causes poverty, suffering, and other forms of degradation for a huge number of indigenous people throughout the world. In Southeast Asia, as indicated in the discussion of *Monkey Bridge*, *Jasmine Nights* and *Dogeaters*, the United States dramatically intensify its military, economic, political, and cultural roles in this region. Not only does the United States demolish the traditional socio-economic conditions in Southeast Asia, but it also subjugates native culture and values, imposing Western values on the indigenous. This form of domination is similar to what had been done during the colonial era. Therefore, essentially, Southeast Asia has not yet liberated from Western domination.

As Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree*, Somtow's *Jasmine Nights*, and Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* increase the reader's awareness as well as consciousness of both colonialism and imperialism which impose unjust changes on Southeast Asians on a massive scale. The alteration of the socio-economic conditions, as a result of Western domination, brings about degeneration of life and society of the majority, while only a few benefits from it. The destructive force of colonialism and imperialism in Southeast Asia is portrayed in not only the above four novels, but also the rest of the primary texts in this dissertation. Chan's *Hmong Means Free*, for instance, depicts French colonialism and American imperialism in Laos, illustrating their effects on Hmong and Laotian people. In a similar way, the domination of the above two powerful Western countries in Cambodia, which leads to the ruin of Cambodian people and their nation, is an important motive behind Siv's *Golden Bones*.

Southeast Asians were aware of the exploitation, cultural destruction, and further potential detrimental consequences of colonialism and imperialism, foreseeing the ultimate decline of their countries under Western domination. If their countries reached that point, they

would completely lose their nation, identity, culture, and heritage. These national signifiers would not be left for the later generations, since everything would be Westernized through colonialism and imperialism. To prevent the ultimate loss of their nations, Southeast Asians, especially nationalists, attempted to dismantle Western domination and decolonize their countries through both force and ideology. This attempt led to several wars and great diaspora in Southeast Asia, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

REMEMBERING WARS, TOTALITARIAN REGIMES, DIASPORA, AND TRAUMA IN CAO'S *MONKEY BRIDGE*, LAM'S *PERFUME DREAMS*, SIV'S *GOLDEN BONES*, AND CHAN'S *HMONG MEANS FREE*

Colonialism and neocolonialism have had a deep impact on life and society of Southeast Asian people. As discussed in the previous chapter, Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature reflects socio-economic changes in this region as a result of Western domination, which impoverishes the majority, destroys their culture, and widens the gap between the rich and the poor. Besides portraying effects of colonialism and neocolonialism, this field of literature also depicts drastic consequences of these forms of Western domination, including wars, diaspora, and trauma. According to the history, a large number of the indigenous, especially the nationalists, viewed Western domination as an enormous threat to their nations' existence; such domination must be eradicated. This notion led to struggles for decolonization, which resulted in phenomenal movements in Southeast Asia even before World War II, as evident in the insurgency led by Ho Chi Minh, who wanted to drive the French away from Vietnam. Similarly, an important mission of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia was to eliminate French and American power, which they viewed as a significant cause of their ruined nation. The demand for independence resulted in several wars throughout the region, with the involvement of the United States. In particular, the Vietnam War was recorded as one of the longest wars the United States has ever fought (Stavrianos 726). The American role started in 1956, when U.S. military officers were sent to train South Vietnamese soldiers, and ended in 1975, when the last American troop was recalled from South Vietnam. The wars ruined several countries in Southeast Asia, especially Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos on a massive scale. Millions of people died, while the

economy and the bodies of the nations were destroyed, and people were dislocated. After the wars, people in this region suffered more from the Communist totalitarian regimes that incalculably oppressed them with the claim of rebuilding their nations and creating a classless utopian society. As elaborated in the first chapter, the desperate conditions as a consequence of wars and the totalitarian regimes forced a huge number of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians to become refugees in search for survival. Experiences during the wars, struggles for survival under the Communist hands, and refugee experiences have become important themes of literature by Indochinese diasporic people. In the case of Vietnamese American literature, which is more prominent than literature by other groups of Indochinese refugees, Truong maintains that this type of literature is contextualized by wars and their aftermaths (219). Similarly, in my dissertation, the primary texts by Indochinese refugees are derived from the experience of wars and totalitarian regimes. The authors rely on their personal experiences as the major source of materials for their writing. As a result, these works are highly historicized, functioning as testimonials of those who are victimized by the wars and totalitarian regimes.

In this chapter, through Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Lam's *Perfume Dreams*, Siv's *Golden Bones*, and Chan's *Hmong Means Free*, I discuss how the authors portray war experiences of Indochinese people and how the wars disrupt their normal life. I also examine the oppression of people by the Communist regimes, which supersede the Western colonizers after the wars. I discuss how those regimes are operated and how much they further ruin the lives of the indigenous, instead of improving the nations as they promise. As a result of the wars and oppressive system, the diasporic lives and experiences of Indochinese people as refugees is analyzed as to how they survive their perilous journey in escaping from their home countries and the hardship in refugee camps. Finally, I discuss their trauma instigated by the atrocity, loss, and

difficulties they have endured in their home countries, which occurs after they resettle in the new world. I interrogate how they suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, which inflicts dysfunctional psychological states on them. I also analyze how their trauma causes problems in the communities in their new world. Portraying the experiences of wars, diaspora, and trauma, the above literary texts explain the root of their existence in the new world, and at the same time, ask for more understanding and sympathy from the audience.

Wars and the Totalitarian Regimes: Narratives of Bitterness

As discussed in the historical context of Southeast Asia in the first chapter, as well as the literary analysis in chapter two, Western colonialism was dominant in this region. For a large number of the indigenous, decolonization was urgent, in order to reinstate national autonomy. The attempt to decolonize had been operating through force, resulting in great wars, which claimed millions of lives of both colonizers and the colonized. The colonizer's persistence in maintaining the domination versus the yearning for liberation by the colonized was a nonnegotiable conflict. Therefore, violence and wars seemed to be the only solutions to this problem. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Frantz Fanon discusses violence during the process of decolonization, arguing that "National liberation, national reawakening, restoration of the nation to the people or the Commonwealth, whatever name used, whatever latest expression, decolonization is always a violent event" (1). Fanon elaborates that violence came from both sides; while the colonizer employed violence as an apparatus to keep the colonized under control, the latter also deployed violence as a counter-action to liberate themselves and their nations. Actually, since the end of World War II, there had been global insurgents of the colonized fighting for their independence throughout the world. Apart from discussing several cases in Africa, Fanon also uses the case of Vietnam to consolidate his argument. To him, the

victory of Vietnam over the French was an exemplar of the struggle towards liberation: "The great victory of the Vietnamese people at Dien Bien Phu is no longer strictly speaking a Vietnamese victory. From July 1954 onward the colonial peoples have been asking themselves: 'What must we do to achieve a Dien Bien Phu? How should we go about it?'" (30-31). The answer to these questions is to fight and start a war against the colonizer who used violence to oppress the indigenous. However, the victory of Vietnamese people at Dien Bien Phu was not the end of their tragedy, but the beginning of a much bigger war, the Indochina War, in which the two superpowers during the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union, were behind the scene. While the United States supported South Vietnam, Soviet Union assisted North Vietnam. Later, the United States explicitly jumped into the war before retreating when seeing that there was no way to win over North Vietnam.

War experiences have become a prominent theme of literature by Indochinese diasporic people. Vietnamese American writers are the first group from Indochina to appear in Asian American literary canon. As Truong puts it, "Emerging out of social and historical moment of military conflict, Vietnamese American literature speaks of death and other irreconcilable losses and longs always for peace—peace of mind" (219). Vietnamese diasporic writers transform their experiences during the wars as well as other related issues into their literary works. Among the most prominent of whom, Lan Cao writes her *Monkey Bridge* through the intertwining of war memories with life in the United States, the biggest new world of Vietnamese refugees. The lives of the three major characters, Than, Mai, and Baba Quan, as well as other minor characters, are greatly affected, physically and mentally, by wars in Vietnam, which compel Thanh and Mai to be in an exile from their home country.

Cao sets the Vietnam War as a major backdrop of *Monkey Bridge*. The North Vietnam and the South Vietnam have battled against each other for almost three decades before the fall of Saigon in April 1975, when the South is defeated. Mai is sent to the United States before being reunited with Thanh, her mother. The Vietnam War, thus, is the culprit of their diaspora and at the same time the motive of this novel. In addition to this war, Cao also historicizes her novel by referring back to the war between the French colonizer and the Vietminh, a Vietnamese Communist organization fighting for independence. As discussed above, decolonization is a violent movement, which instigates enormous loss of life, properties, economy, and so on. The Vietminh's victory at Dien Bien Phu is celebrated by the Vietnamese and people of other races who view it as a sign of the decline of colonialism. However, for Thanh, it is a legacy of devastation, since Vietnam has been dramatically destroyed throughout the war period. In spite of her Vietnamese race, she views that not only the French but also the Vietminh are to blame of this destruction: "By the time the French lost at Dien Bien Phu, their troops and the Vietminh had devastated almost every city and even parts of the Mekong Delta, where we were constantly harassed, our villages burned, our bridges destroyed, our markets pillaged" (236). Although the major base of the Vietminh is in the North, the war theater is expanded into the South because this Communist organization aims to eradicate the French colonizer from all over Vietnam. Based on the history, at that time, Vietnam had not been separated into North Vietnam and South Vietnam yet. It was divided in the Geneva conference in 1954, after the loss of the French at Dien Bien Phu. In the story, as the Vietminh views that the North and the South belong to the same nation, they are determined to drive the French away from both the North and the South. As a result, Thanh and other people in the South inevitably suffer from violence triggered by the war of decolonization.

According to history, after Vietnam was divided, Vietnamese people suffered from a greater war, the war in which the North fights against the South, the war the superpowers were behind. Known as the Vietnam War, it destroyed Vietnam on a much larger scale. As mentioned in the historical context in chapter one, over 180,000 South Vietnamese and over 925,000 North Vietnamese lost their lives (Stavrianos 726). The rest of them were deprived of food, shelters, and other necessities. For the Communist North Vietnam, their motive of fighting was to liberate Vietnamese people, especially farmers, in both the North and the South from the oppression and exploitation by the elite. The Communist regime viewed that the Vietnamese elite group inherited power from the previous colonizers. It is obvious that the end of French colonialism did not mean the end of exploitation in Vietnam, since the elite still possess power to oppress the farmers. As evident in *Monkey Bridge*, some of the elite people become wealthy landlords, such as Uncle Khan, who sustains the exploitation of farmers, such as the wretched Baba Quan. Based on Marx's "Communist Manifesto," these landlords are regarded as the bourgeoisie while the farmers are considered the proletarians under capitalism. As discussed in chapter three, colonialism has transformed the feudalist mode of production into the capitalist mode of production. In the case of Vietnam, therefore, rather than being peasants under feudalism, Vietnamese farmers are considered proletarian workers under capitalism controlled by landlords as capitalists. The wealth of the landlords is derived from the appropriation of the surplus produced by the farmers' labor. Intolerant of this injustice, the Communist North Vietnam or the Vietcong aims to eradicate this exploitative system and distribute land to farmers, as evident in their slogan which Cao includes in her novel: "Land for the landless" (240). Seeing this movement as the only way to liberate themselves from oppression and exploitation, a large number for farmers in South Vietnam, including Baba Quan, join the Communist. They view the

landlord's avarice and exploitation as an unforgiveable crime. This is the main reason why Baba Quan has to kill Uncle Khan: "Let him know. Crimes against the people cannot go unpunished. Land to the landless" (249). It is clear that the oppression by the landlords has turned peaceful Confucian farmers, such as Baba Qaun, into violent subjects who have to protect their right to enjoy products from their labor. With this background, the war between the North and the South is obviously a form of class struggle against capitalism, which constitutes the history of Vietnam. This historical formation agrees with Marx's statement, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (222). However, as evident in *Monkey Bridge*, Vietnamese people pay a high price for this social movement towards the classless society, the movement that inscribes Vietnamese history. People's lives, economy, landscape, and peace are destroyed by the wars as a result of such social movement.

As portrayed in the novel, the Communist North Vietnam also has to fight against the United States, which is dominating South Vietnam under the Communist containment policy. Although South Vietnam is an independent nation, practically, it is under the U.S. control and intervention and thus lacks autonomy. The United States was expanding its power worldwide in order to obtain global hegemony and to contest the power of the Communist Soviet Union. As elaborated by Lazarus, the U.S. authorities "export counter-revolution, working ceaselessly, sometimes directly, sometimes covertly, to undermine, subvert, and overthrow regimes and movements which it deemed to stand in opposition to its interests and political philosophy" (6). The United States feared that Communism would expand its domination over all Southeast Asia, so it decided to fully step into the Vietnam War. Therefore, North Vietnam, apart from its determination to liberate Vietnamese from oppression and exploitation, also aimed to obtain true freedom from the U.S. domination. In fact, eradication of foreign domination is marked as one of

the most important missions of Communism, as evident in its philosophy, "Communists support the right of self-determination for all nations" (Sharnoff 211). Since they view that foreign domination results in the suffering of the indigenous and the demise of the nation in the future, they demand for absolute independence and autonomy in self-governance. In the case of the Vietnam War, despite their military inferiority, North Vietnam insisted on wresting against the United States.

In *Monkey Bridge*, through literary artistry, Cao indicates that apart from the physical fighting, both the United States and North Vietnam also battle in the war of ideology. Both of them want to win South Vietnamese hearts and gain support from them, so they try to instill their ideologies in people. However, for a large number of South Vietnamese, neither Americans nor Vietcong are welcome because these two parties are causes of the ruin of their homeland. In Ba Xuyen, the province where Thanh lives, both Americans and Vietcong are called ghosts. Americans, referred to as day ghosts, come during the daytime and propagate ideas of modernity. They bring modern items, such as stoves, soaps, and candies to Vietnamese villagers: "They were going from house to house, handing out goodwill: free modern stoves that were supposed to emit much less smoke than the ones we villagers had been using" (238). Americans also learn Vietnamese ways and try to assimilate into the tradition of Vietnamese people in order to win their hearts, as Thanh writes to her daughter, "They had learned to bow the Vietnamese way and immediately gave your grandmother a deep and respectful bow when they came by her house" (238). However, the real purpose of the Americans is to be accepted by the indigenous before instilling the anti-Communist ideology in their hearts, which will lead to their victory over the Vietcong.

While the Americans are referred to as day ghosts, the Vietcong is called the night ghost. The Vietcong comes during the night time to disseminate Communist ideology in the village with the same purpose as that of the Americans, to gain support from villagers: "the Vietcong too began their sundown visits, like swarms of invisible fleas, the very minute the day ghosts, as the Americans were called, left the village for the night. And suddenly there were Vietcong study sessions we were forced to attend, and fund drives we had to contribute to" (239). Unlike the Americans, the Vietcong does not provide material offerings, but promises the villagers life betterment, should they win the war. The Vietcong also try to create class consciousness in the villagers and convince them that they need a revolution to liberate themselves from oppression. However, since the Vietcong is referred to as the ghost, it proves that a large number of villagers in South Vietnam do not welcome Communism into their community. The portrayal of the day ghosts and the night ghosts not only offers historical context but also reveals Cao's literary talent. Amidst the melancholy tone of the novel, she inserts a sense of humor by using the above analogy. This humor greatly helps lessen the dark tone of her novel.

It is not surprising why the villagers have bad attitudes towards both the day ghosts and the night ghosts. While these two armies fight and try to win the war, the villagers suffer. The war exacerbates their existing suffering from the oppression by the landlords. The brutality of war drastically destroys their lives and properties, especially their rice fields, which serve as an important part of their existence. The Americans, in particular, trample on their rice plants with military jeeps and tanks, as Cao writes in a heart-rending scene, "The cars would cut right across our seedbed and kill the plants before they had a chance to grow. Baba Quan would stand on this brick patio, beating his chest, screaming that they were worse than the worst drought, more unforgiving than the fiercest flood" (242). As discussed in chapter two, Vietnamese people have

an unbreakable bond with rice, since it is part of their ontology. Therefore, to destroy their rice means to destroy their life because rice is treated as food for their body and souls. Especially for Baba Quan, who is willing to die for his rice field, when seeing the Americans destroy rice plants, he grows vengeance in his heart, intensifying his hatred towards the Americans and the landlords who take the American side. More terribly, in search for the Vietcong who might hide in rice fields, the Americans use chemicals to destroy the rice grown by villagers. For Cao herself, although the Americans provide her with shelter from war and a new home, this destruction is unacceptable, as she knows how much the Vietnamese are bonded with their rice fields. Therefore, she strongly condemns this unforgiveable crime through a vivid depiction with powerful descriptive writing:

> In their final and deadliest charge yet, the elephants [the Americans] rolled out their drum after drum painted with orange stripes and sprayed our crops overnight with a special kind of poison, a mixture so powerful that it could command even the most majestic of trees to prematurely drop their leaves […] and turn the green of our rice fields into the dead dead brown of stone. (244)

It is apparent through this powerful excerpt that all rice plants are killed, and the villagers will not have rice for survival. What is much more tragic is that the villagers, however hard they try, cannot regrow their rice because their land is contaminated with chemicals, as Thanh tragically explains, "the village soil remained dull and dead, an ungenerous gray that could keep raw ashes smoldering and hot but could neither keep nor sustain life" (245). Destroying the village in this way, the war interrupts the rice culture of Vietnamese people. Although the Americans claim to save the Vietnamese from Communism, this incident indicates that they exacerbate the suffering of those people. The tenant farmers will not have rice to pay the rent or even to satisfy their

hunger. The destruction of rice and the interruption of rice culture cause the economy of South Vietnam during that period to sharply deteriorate, further impoverishing the farmers.

Through *Monkey Bridge*, Cao points out the massive destruction of not only rice fields but also cities. Many big cities are turned into huge battlefields, unlivable places that have to be abandoned by its inhabitants. The fighting occurs sporadically throughout the nation and leaves the country ruined. In particular, Saigon, the capital of the South, becomes a hell burned by the fire of war. Cao does not state who should be responsible for this devastation but emphasizes the unsafe situation and the destruction of the city, which leave deep impacts on Vietnamese people. In the story, Mai, who leaves the country prior to the fall of Saigon, has witnessed the ruin of cities. In the United States, when she watches the war scene of Vietnam on television, her memory of the ruined cities is recalled. Again, Cao paints the scene of destruction through vivid and intense description:

> Cluster bombs left a trail of feathered smoke in the sky, while aerial helicopters wove in and out of the clouds like desperate dragonflies. Armored tanks, steel-treaded, thundered through the capital city. The country would have no choice but to stand still and take the bullets. Saigon, I almost smelled, was soaked in an inexhaustible odor of burnt chemicals, reminiscent of the dizzying outrush of heat and dust and smoke I had witnessed during the Tet New Year seven years before. (98)

Depicting the above scene, which happens during the fall of Saigon, Cao indicates that Vietnamese people—no matter if they decide to stay in their country or to become refugees—inevitably share the memory of war which never fades away. In fact, Cao constructs *Monkey Bridge* as a conversation between different memories of Mai and Thanh, which they carry with

them to the United States. These memories become obstacles for both of them to rebuild their lives, especially for Thanh, who dies of the haunting memories. The stories of Mai and Thanh suggest that Vietnamese refugees have to grapple with the memories of wars which make them different from other diasporic subjects who leave their countries for other reasons, such as escaping from famine or seeking fortune.

After the retreat of the Americans, which was followed by the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the Communist regime from North Vietnam rose to power and gained control over South Vietnam. The Communist brought concepts from Marx's "Communist Manifesto" into action to move the Vietnamese society towards the classless utopia. Based on Marxist concept of relations of production, the Communist regime in Vietnam is considered superstructure, which is defined by Terry Eagleton as "certain forms of law and politics, a certain kind of state, whose essential function is to legitimate the power of the social class which owns the means of economic production" (5). The Vietnamese Communist regime employed their power to institutionalize and enforce the policy of collectivization. One of the most important processes was the appropriation of private property, turning it into the state's property, since the Communist believes that private property is a significant tool for the bourgeoisie to exploit the proletariat. The elite as well as the middleclass people were captured and sent to the reeducation camps to be brainwashed and instilled with Communist ideology. As elaborated by Hein, the conditions in the camps were desperate; the inmates were forced to work extremely hard but received insufficient food for survival and rejected medical care. They had to live under strict rules, and violation of those rules could lead to fatal punishment. Meanwhile, people were forced to work for the state under the concept of collectivization, in which people could not claim the products from their labor (26-27). Since Vietnamese people lacked autonomy in spending their lives and

had to live under harsh rules, the Communist was considered the totalitarian regime in Vietnam. In constructing the ideal society through the above processes, it had turned itself to be a merciless oppressor, instigating incalculable hardship and suffering for Vietnamese people, especially those in the South, causing a large number of them to escape from their homeland where they could not find security in life.

The experience of Vietnamese people during the totalitarian regime is portrayed in Andrew Lam's *Perfume Dreams*. This book intertwines Lam's memoir of his diasporic life with stories of other Vietnamese refugees he collected during his career as a journalist. Lam himself does not suffer the atrocity of the totalitarian regime because he and his family leave Vietnam as the "first wave" group who escapes right before the Communist takes over South Vietnam. On the other hand, the stories of other refugees who cannot leave with the first wave recount the painful and resentful experience they have to endure during the oppression and persecution of the Communist regime. Lam includes a story of Lieu Tran, a 31-year-old refugee at a refugee camp in Hong Kong, who has undergone the brutality of the Communist regime before deciding to escape as a boat people. Lieu portrays his tragic life through a letter explaining that since his father, who has already passed away, was a South Vietnamese soldier, his family is targeted by the Communist. All officers and soldiers of the previous government in South Vietnam are accused of "having committed 'crimes against the Party and the People'" (78). Therefore, it is urgent for the Communist to get rid of them as well as their families. Their property is confiscated and they are evacuated to the New Economic Zone or the NEZ, where they have to work hard under the policy of collectivization. There is a contradiction in the mission of the Communist regime claiming to eradicate oppression and exploitation but treating people in such an oppressive way. Lieu's story suggests that in fact the Communist rules the country with hatred

rather than with ideology. They always view people in the South as their enemies who help the Americans to fight against the North. The mistreatment of South Vietnamese people is actually a form of taking revenge. Those who are sent to the NEZ have to endure desperate conditions, as Lieu writes, "How we suffered! Those years in the NEZ we were slaves. Each day we went into the forest to clear brush. We planted vegetables, which got taxed by the state so we had little left. We had to survive on tree roots and yams. We suffered diseases and many accidents. There was no medicine. Many who were sent there with me died slowly from malaria" (78). Although Lieu's description is not as poetic as Cao's as discussed above, it is very sincere and straightforward. It is clear that the Communist regime, which strongly opposes the oppression by bourgeoisie or capitalism, is imitating the system run by the bourgeoisie, appropriating not only the surplus but almost all products derived from the labor of others. While claiming to create a classless society, it clearly divides people into different classes. Communist people become the upper class, while those who oppose them are turned to be working class people serving the upper class who claims the benefit of the state to legitimize their oppression. Lieu's story proves that the victims are robbed of their basic human rights, and the operation of the Communist regime does not differ from the act of dehumanization.

Based on Lieu's story, the totalitarian regime in Vietnam simply employs the Communist ideology as an apparatus to take revenge on their enemies. Lieu's family is victimized because his father fought against the Vietcong, so they are viewed as having the blood of enemies. In addition, this totalitarian regime generalizes all middleclass and upper class people in the South as oppressors without any evidence. This is the reason why there are an unimaginably high number of people who are victimized. All refugees Lam meets in the camp share the horrible experience under the totalitarian regime, which forces them to leave their country. Another

example, Huong Nguyen, a female refugee, explains that she has "spent ten years as a forced laborer in the New Economic Zone clearing jungle and watching her fellow laborers get blown to bits by land mines. She was pregnant and had a one-year-old child. Her husband, a South Vietnamese lieutenant, had been killed while trying to escape from a reeducation camp" (73). Again, Huong's story reveals the evil of the totalitarian regime. In spite of being a woman, she is forced to labor on a dangerous land where she can be blown into pieces by land mines at any moment. As stated by Van Canh Nguyen, after the Vietnam War, the Communist regime was in need of labor to reinstate the economy. It had the labor force of about 22 million people whom the government intended to exploit "to the utter most." A large number of them were sent to reeducation camps where they had to clear jungle for cultivation and growing crops (28-29). The imprisonment of Huong and the killing of her husband also indicate that the regime employs repressive state apparatus to control the inmates. As critiqued by Althusser, Repressive State Apparatus is among the two apparatuses employed to assure the reproduction of "productive forces" and "the existing relations of production" (1336). The Repressive State Apparatus includes police, courts, laws, prisons, and army. In the New Economic Zone, Houng and other inmates are treated as prisoners, since they lack freedom to leave or follow their own will. Meanwhile, the totalitarian regime creates laws to control the inmates. One of the supreme laws is that anybody who tries to escape can receive a fatal punishment, as evinced in the case of Houng's husband. These people, therefore, are severely repressed by the regime's Repressive State Apparatus. As a result, when they successfully escape, no one wants to return to Vietnam, although it is their homeland: "we are determined to commit mass suicide here in Hong Kong, if necessary, rather than return to Vietnam where one has no right to be human" (80). The atrocity of the totalitarian regime has turned their homeland to be a cursed land where their existence as

humanity has been robbed. Therefore, they have no other choices but becoming diasporic people in search for a new land where they will be able to claim their humanity.

According to stories shared by refugees in the camp, the Communist regime forces people to work extremely hard under intolerable conditions, such as insufficient food, poor sanitation, and psychological oppression. The regime believes that this operation will dramatically increase the gross domestic product of the country which will elevate the economy. Unfortunately, this operation results in a wider and deeper scale of poverty among the citizens. Poor people in Vietnam need to rely on everything they can obtain, even trash or garbage, in order to survive. This issue is reflected in Lam's memoir when his cousin from Vietnam comes to visit him in the United States. When they walk past a trashcan, the cousin is startled by waste paper and other stuff American people throw away because those wastes means a lot for the survival of Vietnamese people. Lam points out the perspective of Vietnamese people towards wastes, as he explains, "But when we walked past a large garbage bin filled with papers and carton boxes, he paused. Pointing to the heap of trash next to the architecture building he exclaimed with a shocked look on his face, 'Brother, in Vietnam this stuff is money!'" (109). Lam's cousin is not an environmentalist, but he comes from Vietnam, a country where people suffer from abject poverty and cannot afford to waste anything possible to be transformed into means of survival. This indicates a drastic contrast between the United States, as a First World country where people throw things away, and Vietnam, a Third World country where trash can sustain people's life. Based on the cousin's experience in Vietnam, it is unbelievable for him that American people throw this stuff away, since it is viewed as valuable by the Vietnamese. This story proves that the attempt of the Communist regime in developing the nation simply turns out to be a failure.

Another sign of poverty in Vietnam is seen through letters Lam's relatives send to his family in the United States. Lam does not mention the details of the letters but reflects on the poverty of Vietnamese people through the quality of the paper, which is very poor, as he writes, "The letter itself is thin and shallow. Recycled for who knows how many times, the dark material reflects the poverty of the country from which it came" (109). Lam's Vietnamese relatives, who used to be wealthy, middle class people, are so poor that they cannot afford decent paper to write letters and send them to the United States. The reflection of poverty in *Perfume Dreams* implies that the Communist regime fails to improve the living conditions of Vietnamese people. Although the policy of collectivization promises life improvement and equality in society, it turns out that people still suffer from poverty. As stated in Marx's "The German Ideology," to exist, human beings need "before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing, and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself" (165). Since the Communist regime is adopting Marxist concepts, they should also seriously take the above notion about basic needs of human beings into consideration and provide Vietnamese people with those needs. Instead, the regime confiscates their property and appropriates their products, leaving them hungry by depriving them of the basic needs. There is a great doubt if the Communist regime in Vietnam sincerely employs the Communist ideology in ruling the country. The initial purpose of the Communist party led by Ho Chi Minh was to free Vietnam from foreign oppression. However, after the victory over South Vietnam and the Americans, it seems that the purpose has been changed—to oppress the Vietnamese, its own people.

During the second half of the 1970s, the Communist regime rose to power on the mainland Southeast Asia. Not only South Vietnam, but also Cambodia and Laos fell to

Communism. Cambodia, in particular, has a tragic history under the Khmer Rouge regime, during which at least 1.5 million people were slaughtered. Similar to the Communist regime in Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge claimed the Communist ideology in moving the Cambodia towards classless, utopian society, as discussed in chapter one. Instead of improving life quality of Cambodians, the Khmer Rouge committed a great crime against humanity, destroying people's lives and devastating the country. The majority of Cambodians dramatically suffered from the atrocity of this totalitarian regime. Their horrible experiences are portrayed in Siv's *Golden Bones*. The journey of Siv, from the period before the civil war in Cambodia until the time he crosses the Cambodian-Thai border and is admitted to a refugee camp in Thailand, articulates great suffering of Cambodian people whose humanity is robbed by the Khmer Rouge, the totalitarian regime in their country.

In Siv's autobiography, after the Khmer Rouge rises to power, it aims to destroy the class system and create equality in the society. It views upper class Cambodians and Western people as the most important culprit of poverty and social degradation in Cambodia. In the eye of the Khmer Rouge, these people are corrupt and spend the money from corruption on extravagant lifestyles adopted from Western culture. To improve the nation, the Khmer Rouge sees that these people must be exterminated, as Siv explains in the story that the Khmer Rouge "did their best to 'cleanse' the landscape of the educated middle class, and to replace it with a utopian agrarian society that would be free of 'western imperialism and corruption'" (133). Based on the history, after the Khmer Rouge had gained victory and captured Phnom Penh, the capital, the first mission they undertook was to kill all military officers and other officials serving the previous government. At the same time, they searched for middle class and upper class people and killed or evacuated them to labor camps. As stated by the historian Etcheson, "Anyone with any

education, even wearing eyeglasses, was considered a class enemy and was vulnerable to summary execution" (7). The Khmer Rouge condemned those who had education as the privileged group in the society, and such privilege was derived from corruption or exploitation of lower class people.

For Siv and his family, since they are middle class people, and his father was a police chief before his death, they inevitably become targets of the Khmer Rouge. They are evacuated to a slave labor camp, where they are forced to work under the policy of collectivization, which is believed by the Khmer Rouge to be the only way to move towards their utopian society. Siv vividly describes the routine in the camp as following:

> We got up before dawn and walked for one hour to join the huge forced-labor site. There were at least 5,000 people, all dressed in black. It was one of the Khmer Rouge dam construction projects. The sound of a drum started the working day even before the first ray of sunlight hit us. We were given only hoes and baskets. We formed antlike rows and passed the baskets of soil from one person to another. (104)

The collectivization and labor camp described in *Golden Bones* are similar to those in *Perfume Dreams*, which indicates the operation of the Communist regime in Vietnam. Siv, his family, and other Cambodians undergo the same process as experienced by the Vietnamese discussed in Lam's *Perfume Dreams*. As Siv explains, the Khmer Rouge has been assisted by the Communist parties in Vietnam and China since they were underground organization: "They [the Khmer Rouge] were trained and equipped by the Vietnamese and Chinese communists to fight against Lon Nol's government" (67). Therefore, it can be said that the oppressive system in Cambodia is adopted from the Communist regime in Vietnam, China, and Soviet Union, since these countries

support one another. Along with its assistance, the Vietnamese Communist party also passes its ideology on to the Khmer Rouge. This is why the harsh working conditions as shown in the above excerpt are inflicted on the inmates in Cambodia.

Apart from the hardship, Siv, a forced laborer, has to endure the lack of security in life, which always threatens him as well as his family. He has learned about the extermination of upper class people and realizes that he can be a menace to his family. He received high education and used to work as a teacher and a flight attendant for the Royal Air Cambodge. This profile indicates that he is a privileged Cambodian who used to work for a transnational company: "I was college-educated. I was a teacher. I had worked for the capitalists and imperialists. I had all the qualifications to be immediately eliminated. Thus I felt insecure; my presence could jeopardize everyone else" (105). With this background, not only Siv but also his family will be accused of being enemies of the Khmer Rouge, which can lead to their execution. Therefore, he decides to leave his family and escape, as he perceives this method as the most practical way to save as many lives in his family as possible. Similar to the Communist regime in Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge rules Cambodia with hatred. They generalize all upper class people as corrupt, and the only punishment for this crime is execution. As discussed by Hinton in *Why Did They Kill?*, "Khmer Rouge leaders directly and indirectly called for their followers to take vengeance upon the 'class enemies' who had formerly oppressed them" (46). Those "class enemies" included not only officials working for the previous regime, but also those who were associated with the French and the American, the imperialists who oppressed lower class Cambodians. The Americans, in particular, were regarded as the greatest enemies since they supported Lon Nol's government and massively destroyed Cambodians lives during their anti-Communist war. During the U.S. bombing of the Communist trails in Cambodia, approximately 150,000

Cambodian civilians were killed (Hinton 58). These were reasons why the Khmer Rouge and its followers developed great hatred towards their perceived enemies in their hearts. In Siv's case, since his background is involved with the upper class, the Lon Nol's government, and a transnational company belonging to imperialists, he can be put to death immediately if the Khmer Rouge discovers his background.

After Siv leaves his family and escapes from the first labor camp, he decides to change his identity for the safety reason. He throws away his glasses because he knows that they are a sign of education: "I could not be an educated person" (111). He rather lives with bad vision than dies with good vision. In addition, he changes his name from Sichan to Sok Chan because his initial name is a name of upper class people in Cambodia. When he is asked about his job by the Khmer Rouge, he answers, "*I was a taxi and bus driver*" (112 emphasis in original) instead of saying that he used to work for the previous government and an airline. During the totalitarian regime, sometimes lying is safer than telling the truth. Although identity constitutes the existence of a human being, being alive is more important. The fear of Khmer Rouge's persecution forces Siv to abandon his true identity, and throughout his journey to Thailand he has to conceal himself under a fake identity, masking himself as a lower class person. Under that mask, there is hope, the hope to celebrate his freedom if he successfully crosses the border and enters a refugee camp in Thailand. Masking himself with a fake identity, thus, is simply a survival strategy. He is acutely aware that that he can regain his true identity once he obtains his freedom.

Survival becomes the most important concern for Siv and other Cambodians during the Khmer Rouge regime, since they lack security in life. He has learned about the atrocity of the Khmer Rouge soldiers who can kill as many people as they wish without any feeling of guilt. In fact, based on the Communist ideology as critiqued by Hinton, those soldiers were implanted

with the notion that to kill enemies of the regime would help them to gain acceptance among themselves. Therefore, "killing enemies became an honorable thing to do" (215). The Khmer Rouge killed people arbitrarily by summary execution, which added up the number of deaths caused by hard work, disease, and starvation. In his autobiography, Siv indicates this brutal and barbaric action through the depiction of cities he passed while escaping. This horrifying depiction indicates Siv's literary ability in provoking readers' imagination, helping them to better understand how brutal the Khmer Rouge is:

> Charred cars and trucks were everywhere. More and more people died along the roads that seemed to lead nowhere. They died of hardship, exhaustion, and summary executions by the Khmer Rouge. We saw decomposing bodies with arms tied behind their backs. One had the throat slit open. One had a big black mark at the back of the neck. A woman had her baby still at her breast. (102)

The brutality of the Khmer Rouge brings the term Holocaust to Cambodia. The genocide in Europe during Hitler's regime aimed at exterminating Jewish people, while the purpose of genocide in Cambodia was to eradicate upper class people who are condemned oppressors and class enemies. While the Jews were killed by the Aryan race, the Cambodians were killed by people of the same race. For Siv, after he is transported to the United States as a refugee, he learns that all people in his family have died at the killing field in Cambodia. Along with other 1.5 millions of Cambodians, they die of the hatred instilled in the Khmer Rouge's heart.

Similar to the Communist regime in Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge regime employs both Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatuses to oppress people. For the Repressive State Apparatus, they use violence through military authority to keep people under control. The brutal killing as explained above generates fear in Cambodians and thus prevents

them from rebelling against the regime. The Repressive State Apparatus helps the Khmer Rouge to maintain the status quo of their oppression, since there is no Cambodian who successfully fights against their authority. The best choice for them—if they only dare to choose it—is to escape. Alongside with the Repressive State Apparatus, the Khmer Rouge employs the Ideological State Apparatuses to make people consent to work for the regime. As evident in *Golden Bones*, there are study sessions in the camps in which inmates have to attend and listen to lectures by Khmer Rouge leaders. To convince people to take their side and work under the policy of collectivization, those leaders promise life betterment and new society as an ideal utopia. Siv himself is also forced to attend the lecture, as he explains:

> In the evenings, we sat on the wet, muddy ground listening to communist propaganda about the 'new society' and the 'new revolutionary' person. You must clean yourselves of everything that has belonged to the old society and work hard to build a brand-new life. You must stop thinking of the evil life of the city. You must serve only the just policies of Angka [organization]. (105)

The Khmer Rouge condemns the old society under the previous regime as a rotten society plagued with corruption and the culture of the elite and Westerners. According to Hinton, urbanites are seen as "corrupt beings living in luxury and sin" (78). While the peasantry endured hardship, those urbanites lived in big house, eat good food, enjoy drinking, and visit prostitution. For the Khmer Rouge, the contrast life between the peasantry and the elite resulted from the "rotten culture" of U.S. imperialism (Hinton 78). Therefore, as shown in Siv's autobiographies, the Khmer Rouge tries to implant the idea of new, clean society into the inmates' hearts, so that they will consent to move into the direction assigned by the regime. However, the Ideological State Apparatuses cannot prevent Siv from escaping, since he is acutely aware that his own life

and his family are unsafe on the Khmer Rouge's hands. Although the Khmer Rouge promises an ideal society, in reality it is proved to be a totalitarian regime, forcing people to work hard, mistreating them, and persecuting them. As it is clear to the inmates that the Khmer Rouge is obviously a new oppressor, nobody consents to maintain the status quo. They remain in the camps simply because they fear the Repressive State Apparatus, the extreme violence which can be put into action at any time.

Wars and the totalitarian regimes on the mainland Southeast Asia have dramatically ruined people's lives and their nations. Based on the number calculated by Stavrianos approximately 1,105,000 North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese died during the Vietnam War (726). Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge regime has killed about 1.5 million Cambodians through hard work, starvation, illness, and outright execution (Hinton 1). Apart from these two countries, Laos also suffered the same situation. The wars in Laos and the operation of the Pathet Lao Communist regime instigated a high number of deaths of both Laotian and Hmong people who immigrated from the Southern part of China to the highland of Laos. The social context overshadowed by the Communist regimes has forced a large number of people to leave their countries and become refugee. The harsh journey and the tragic life of these people as well as their trauma are discussed in the following section.

Diaspora and Trauma: A Significant Literary Trace of Indochinese Refugees

As portrayed in the above literary works, wars and the totalitarian regimes in Indochina pose a lot of difficulties and sufferings to the populace. Their homelands are turned into hells as suggested by the subtitle of Siv's autobiography, *An Extraordinary Journey from Hell in Cambodia to a New Life in America*. This subtitle also suggests that the United States has become the main destination of Indochinese refugees. It is estimated that during 1975 to 1990,

the peaking period of the Communist regimes in Indochina, "more than 2 million refugees left Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia" (Hein 1). Although these refugees were sent to several Western countries, more than half of them resettled in the United States (Chan, *Asian Americans* 152). America had to receive these refugees because it was closely involved with the Indochina War. Apart from the Communist containment policy, the United States also aimed to expand its economic hegemony into Asia, as Lowe contends, "as the United States sought to address the imperatives of capital through the expansion of markets and labor supplies, it also sought hegemony internationally through foreign wars in Asia" (17). Since it is undeniable that the United States took part in the ruin of Indochina, it cannot deny responsibility to admit those refugees and provide them with refuge and new life settlement.

Indochinese refugees comprised two major groups referred to as the first wave and the second wave. The first wave included South Vietnamese government and military officials who collaborated with the United States during the war, including their families. Most of them escaped by air transportation before or right after the fall of Saigon (qtd. in Levy 40). Meanwhile, the second wave was comprised of those who escaped from the Communist regimes, including "the 'boat people' from Vietnam and the 'land people' from Kampuchea [Cambodia] and Laos" (Chan, *Asian Americans* 157). However, before these people, especially the second wave, reached their destinations, they had been through a long, perilous diasporic journey. While the boat people had to sail across the ocean, the land people had to trek through jungles, in order to seek refuge in refugee camps in neighboring countries. Some of them successfully escaped from the hell in their countries; on the other hand, a large number of them could not manage to survive and died on the way to pursue their new lives. Those who managed to resettle in the new world still have to cope with trauma instigated by the memories of wars and the totalitarian

regimes' persecution. The experiences during their diasporic journeys and trauma are vividly portrayed in their writings, becoming a significant trace of this group of literature.

Lam's *Perfume Dreams: Reflections on Vietnamese Diaspora*, as the title suggests, presents to readers the diasporic life of Vietnamese refugees. Lam depicts the life and journey of both the first wave and the second wave refugees. For the first wave group, he recounts stories of his own family, since they belong to this group. For the second wave group, he incorporates stories of refugees who are still contained in refugee camps in Southeast Asia. Lam does not articulate the plight of his journey to the United States, which is easier and more pleasant than the journey of the second wave group. Since his father is a high-rank military officer who collaborates with the Americans in fighting against North Vietnam, he and his family are airlifted from South Vietnam to the United States. Lam elaborates that the first wave is comprised of upper class people: "The first wave of refugees who came to America in 1975, my wave, comprised intellectuals, educators, army officers, skilled civil servants, professionals—Vietnam's best and brightest, those who had not experienced Vietnam under communist rule" (57). The first wave refugees are also luckier than the second wave in that they do not suffer the oppression from the Communist regime, so they are regarded as privileged among all Vietnamese refugees.

While the first wave is accommodated in their journey to the new world, the second wave has to experience a more tragic fate. First of all they suffer the oppression of the Communist regime, as can be seen in the story of Lieu and other Vietnamese refugees discussed earlier. Then, they have to take a treacherous journey, especially as boat people, to refugee camps in neighboring countries. As explained by Lam, "The later wave, the boat people who came in the eighties, were a different group—people who had been traumatized by reeducation camps,

cannibalism, rape, robbery, drownings at the hands of sea pirates, people who had suffered a chaotic and broken society back home under communist hands" (57). The boat people were robbed at least two times, and during 1980 and 1983 the pirates—mostly Thai—raped at least 2,200 female refugees and abducted about 500 of them to work as prostitutes in Thailand (Hein 35). The boat people, therefore, suffer double violence—from the Communist regime and from the sea pirates. Lam has a chance to work as an interpreter in a refugee camp in Hong Kong, where he learns that although the boat people there survive their perilous voyage, they are not guaranteed a further journey to rebuild their lives. In the refugee camp, all boat people are put through the screening process to separate economic refugees, who leave the country for economic reasons, from refugees seeking political asylum. A large number of them are repatriated to Vietnam because they are accused of being economic refugees, although they truly escape from the Communist persecution. Knowing that Lam is a journalist, they ask him to tell their tragic stories and injustice they encounter to the world: "The boat people wanted to convey the injustice they had suffered, first under communist hands and now from Hong Kong authorities in conjunction with the UNHCR—United Nations High Commission on Refugees—who screened them out and deemed them economic refugees ineligible for asylum" (72). This story indicates that the authorities and organizations dealing with refugee crisis are not sincere in helping those boat people. They do not welcome them but try to push them back to suffer the Communist rule in Vietnam. Actually, those organizations should be acutely aware that if the conditions in Vietnam were not desperate for those refugees, they would not have left their homeland and risked their lives on small boats in the vastness of the sea. For whatever reasons, it seems that those organizations refuse to fully help the refugees but try their best to repatriate them. They even destroy the refugees' dignity by seeing them as liars, as Lam writes: "Many

were called liars when they told of communist atrocities, of oppression back home" (72). This proves that those refugees are viewed as valueless and denied their humanity and rights to live as human beings under safe conditions.

As evident in *Perfume Dreams*, the screening process also offers chances for officials in the camp to exploit refugees through corruptive action. Those officials know very well that none of the boat people wants to be repatriated, so they will take any chance to be accepted as refugees seeking asylum. It is widely known among the refugees that to ensure that they will be selected as refugees eligible to be sent to a First World country to start a new life, they need to bribe screening officials. The request for bribery causes further suffering for the refugees, since most of them do not possess much money, while many of them have been robbed by sea pirates. Some of them even commit suicide to protest this injustice, as can be seen in the story of Diep Tran. He and his family have been through torturing processes in Vietnam—wars, reeducation camps, and exploitation at the New Economic Zone. More terribly, in the refugee camp they are accused of being economic refugees because they do not have money to bribe a screening official. The only thing they can do is waiting to be repatriated. This story ends up with the tragic death of Diep's son, the only family member who manages to survive the Communist regime with him. Through a very poignant and heart-breaking tone, Lam describes:

> When he and his son did reach Hong Kong, he was denied refugee status because he lacked $3,000 cash demanded by a screening official, he said. In protest, his son, Anh Huy, committed self-immolation in front of the UNHCR official. Tran showed me his son's photos. One is of a smiling teenager. The other is a picture of a burnt, bloodied corpse flanked by grim-looking Vietnamese men. (73)

This tragic depiction greatly generates deep dejection in readers, especially the contrast between the images in the last two lines. Diep does not state if the sacrifice of his son brings any change to the refugee's life in the Hong Kong camp. For him, bribery as a form of corruption has caused him a permanent wound, the picture of his son's burnt body. Waiting to be repatriated, he is encountering an endless catastrophic destiny. His diasporic life is going to end with mental torture and the return to the oppression by the Communist regime.

In fact, stories like the above will not be allowed by the camp authorities to be published. Refugees are rendered voiceless, denied the right to articulate the injustice they encounter. According to Spivak's concept, those people are doomed to be subalterns lacking an opportunities to represent themselves or tell their stories. In addition, as Lam explains, journalists are not allowed to work in the refugee camps, since they might release some negative stories like the above to the public. That means it is highly possible that there are a lot more tragic stories inside the refugee camp that people do not know. However, Lam manages to get access into the camp by disguising himself as an interpreter. He has become "the only source of communication they [the refugees] had with the outside world" (72). Therefore, when the refugees know among themselves that he is a journalist, many of them competitively offer to tell their stories: "His story is not as good as mine. He lies. I don't lie. Let me tell you mine" (86). It is obvious that those refugees yearn for voice to represent themselves and are desperately in need of attention from the outside world. Knowing that they might be repatriated back to the Communist hands, on which they can be executed at any moment, they do not want their stories to vanish with them. *Perfume Dreams*, thus, offers a space for those stories to survive. Writing this book, Lam assures those boat people that although they might not be able to make it to the new world, their stories will survive.

The stories of Indochinese diaspora are multinational, presenting the relocation and dislocation of people in several countries. Apart from the Vietnamese refugees, Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature also depicts another interesting group of refugees known as Hmong people. Hmong diasporic people in the United States have immigrated from Laos after the Americans retreated from the Indochina War. In fact, Hmong people are regarded as those who possess the longest journey of diaspora. As stated by Chan in the introduction of *Hmong Means Free*, these people originally lived in Southern China in the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Hunan. Due to the intolerable oppression by the Chinese, they immigrated to some highland areas of Laos, Burma, and Thailand (1). During the Indochina War, when the United States operated a secret war against Communism in Laos, the U.S. Army hired Hmong men as mercenaries, since the Americans could not fight explicitly. This restriction resulted from the declaration of Laos as a neutral country where none of foreign armies were allowed to operate any warfare. Hmong people agreed to help fight the Communist under the American's promise that "if the Hmong should suffer defeat, then the Americans would 'find a new place' where they could help the Hmong" (Chan, *Hmong* 30). Since the Hmong helped the U.S. Army to fight during the Indochina War, Hmong people in general were viewed as "traitors to the Communist revolution" (Fong 30). These people became targets of persecution after the Communist party gained power in Laos. This background describes why Hmong refugees had to escape from Laos and ended up their diasporic life in the United States. However, before they reached this destination, they had to brave a treacherous journey just similar to that of the boat people. Although some of them were airlifted from Laos to the United States, most of them had to trek through the jungle and cross the Mekong River, which borders Thailand and Laos, in order to

reach the refugee camps in Thailand. Their perilous journey and terrible experiences are collected and edited by Chan in *Hmong Mean Free*, a compilation of Hmong American memoirs. As portrayed in most narratives in *Hmong Means Free*, the majority of the Hmong refugees take their diasporic journey from Laos to the refugee camps in Thailand before being transported to the United States. These stories share the same structure, starting from their life in Laos to the Communist war, the escape from the Communist regime, life in the refugee camps, and new life in the United States. In addition to these issues, they also portray Hmong distinctive culture, gender hierarchy, economic conditions, and the oppression from the lowland Lao people. However, in this section, I focus on their journey and life in the refugee camps before discussing their diasporic life in the United States in the next chapter.

Since Laos is a landlocked country, the only available way for most Hmong refugees to escape from the Communist regime is to trek through mountains and jungles before crossing the Mekong River to Thailand. During the journey they have to be cautious of Communist attack and at the same time undergo other harsh conditions, such as starvation, illness, and fatigue. Since the Hmong refugees have encountered hardship and so much danger, their experiences during the journey become a significant element of their narratives, recurring in most of the stories compiled in *Hmong Means Free*. The Communist attack seems to be the most threatening danger for most of the refugees, since the Communist soldiers are equipped with totalitarian authority to kill any Hmong, especially those who try to escape. The brutality of the Communist, who can emerge at any moment in the jungle, provoke great fear in all refugees. To assure of their safety, silence is one of the most important things they must keep while trekking. The need of silence causes some tragic stories for those who travel with little children who are difficult to be controlled and always cry. Many times, parents need to abuse their children in order to stop them

from crying. In “Surviving the Storms,” Thek Moua recounts his journey in which he witnesses violence against little children, instigated by the fear of being caught:

> One of the terrible things we witnessed was that people whose children would not stop crying gave them opium. If the children got an overdose, they had little chance of survival. Some died within a few hours. These poor children looked as though the blood in their arteries and veins had become clotted. Their hearts began to beat more and more slowly until they stopped. Some of the children vomited blood and within seconds, their bodies became as cold as ice. Young babies especially, died instantaneously. Those parents with crying children who refused to give them some opium to keep them quiet were cast out of the group. People felt this had to be done to ensure everybody else’s survival. (226)

This excerpt is probably the most poignant depiction of all situations Hmong refugees have to encounter. Those children cry because of their fear, missing home, and fatigue. Some of them cry because of hunger, as food scarcity prevents them from satisfying their bodily need. Under these conditions, it is impossible to stop them from crying, so opium becomes the only tool to keep them quiet. Feeding children opium is a form of child abuse and violence. In spite of that fact, desperate refugees will take any chance to survive. Those children who die of opium overdose are victimized by the Communist regime, not by their parents, who do not have any choices. They have to ensure the security of the group. Those parents are forced into a great mental pressure, a dilemma which is hard for them to make a decision. In this predicament, the excerpt above indicates that many of them choose collectivism rather than individualism, as they prioritize the security of the group over the safety of their children.

The use of opium to keep children quiet must be a common method for Hmong to do, as it also appears in Maijue Xiong's "An Unforgettable Journey." Similar to Thek, Maijue portrays her horrible journey to a refugee camp in Thailand and emphasizes that safety is prioritized by refugees while they are trekking, and silence must be assured: "Children were very hard to keep quiet. Many parents feared the Communist soldiers would hear the cries of their young children; therefore, they drugged the children with opium to keep them quiet. Some parents even left those children who would not stop crying behind" (119). The reason why opium becomes available for Hmong to quiet children down is that before they become refugees, opium was their major cash crop. As stated by Chan, the Hmong grew rice and corn for family consumption and produced opium through poppy farming as a cash crop (*Hmong* 4). However, the fact that parents use opium with children or leave them behind because they do not stop crying indicates that to keep the group's security, those parents need to sacrifice their love towards their children. Leaving the children behind, in particular, suggests that those parents have to cut the bond between them in order to guarantee their own survival. That is to say, the atrocity of the Communist regime and the parents' desire for survival force them to be selfish and abandon the children in the jungle, although they know that those children, without a miracle, will not have a chance of survival. Apart from the issue of security which leads to the tragic stories above, starvation poses further hardship and difficulty to the Hmong refugees. Most of them inevitably experience food shortage which recurs in several narratives in *Hmong Means Free*. Even though they think they have prepared enough supplies for survival, the long journey has gradually deprived them of food. Therefore, they need to find strategies to survive the hunger. For instance, in "A New America" Vu Pao Tcha writes that he, his family, and his group inevitably endure hunger on the journey to Thailand and have to search for something to satisfy their bodily needs:

> Soon, we were short of food. All the rice we had brought had run out, and we went hungry. To satisfy our hunger, we had to feed on roots, leaves, fruits, and other edible plants we found in the jungle. […] Although some of us suffered from hunger and sickness, we never stopped to rest or sleep. We continued walking even when it rained. We did not want to be caught by soldiers and taken back to Laos. (193)

Food is the most significant fundamental need of human body; without food, the body will not be able to function. When the body is in need to of food, human beings and other animals will struggle to satisfy their hunger. For the above Hmong refugees, they can search for food in the jungle for their survival because they are highland people who are familiar with forest and know how to survive in it. However, the food they can obtain merely help them to survive, but does not fully satisfy their hunger. In spite of that fact, they cannot allow hunger to hinder their escape, due to the fear of being caught. These refugees have high natural instinct of survival, especially during their diaspora. Their ancestors have survived the long journey from Southern China, which equips them with endurance. In addition, they instinctively know that if they are caught, they will have less chance to survive under the Communist hands. These factors boost their inner strength and encourage them to continue their journey, despite discouraging circumstances.

All of the narrators in *Hmong Means Free* manage to trek through deep jungles, but the next obstacle they have to cross is the Mekong River, which separates Thailand from Laos. Crossing the river is one of their threatening experiences during the journey. Some refugees who still have money hire boats to carry them across the river. Those who do not have enough money have to swim, fighting against the strong tide of the river. In "Pang Yang's Life Story," Pang Yang, the narrator, explains that many people have lost their lives in the Mekong River: "They

were either shot by Communist troops or the Thai shore patrol or drowned while trying to swim across when the current was too strong. Some people bought rubber tubes from Lao or Thai merchants to help them swim across the river safely. But some were unlucky: they were caught between the bullets flying from both shore" (220). The Hmong's experience at the Mekong River not only manifests the formidable danger during their flight, but also indicates that they are among the most marginalized subjects in the world who are not welcome by many countries. They have left their homeland from China and again have to leave their new home in Laos. Being caught in the river between the Thai and Lao shores, they are obviously refused by people in both countries. The Communist in Laos hates them because they help the United States to fight against Communism. The Thai shore patrol forces them to return to Laos, since they view Hmong refugees as a burden that Thailand has to spend a lot of money to take care of. With the denial of both sides, the Hmong refugees become homeless and extremely helpless people.

Despite their arduous, perilous journey, a large number of Hmong refugees manage to cross the Mekong River and are admitted to the refugee camps in the Northeast of Thailand. Still, the life in the camps is full of hardship and difficulty. Several narratives indicate that the Hmong refugees have to struggle with day-to-day survival, since the living conditions are beyond desperation. There are too many refugees in each camp, so they are cramped into limited areas. In addition, they need to rely on food distribution by the camp authority, which is not enough for family consumption. These forms of hardship is explained in Vue Vang's narrative:

> Each family, regardless of how large or small it was, was put into one room. Every two weeks, trucks brought vegetables, fish, eggs, and rice to the camp. The food was given to two representatives from each apartment complex, who then divided it among the families. Each person was allocated a certain amount of rice

> vegetables, and meat. Although we were grateful for this free food, we never had enough to eat. (114)

In fact, these terrible living conditions are encountered by most of Hmong refugees, as reflected in their narratives in *Hmong Means Free*. Food scarcity, in particular, generates other consequential problems, such as starvation. For children, the power of hunger causes them to develop criminal habits, turning thems to be thieves. In his narrative, Vu Pao Tcha states that before he becomes a refugee and leaves Laos, he never goes hungry, but in the camp he has to live with hunger all the time and has to steal to satisfy such hunger, as he explains, "hunger was so common in the refugee camp that I got used to it. However, I would sometimes find myself staring at some kids who were fortunate enough to have a piece of doughnut in their hands. The thought of stealing crossed my mind many times. Eventually, I did steal" (195). Vu Pao and his friends steal powder milk from his neighbor's room. Unfortunately, his friends betray him, planning a scene so that he is caught alone. This crime brings great humiliation to his family, so he is severely punished by his father who whips him until he faints. Suffering from hunger causes behavioral problems in child refugees, as Vu Pao states, "Many hungry children would do whatever they could to satisfy their stomachs" (196). Aside from stealing, they are engaged in cheating to obtain food. Whatever they do in order to alleviate their hunger, the food is never enough for them, so malnutrition becomes a common problem in the refugee camps.

As portrayed in *Hmong Means Free*, apart from the above problems, Hmong refugees in the camps in Thailand also suffer the lack of sanitation. Toilets and bathrooms are not enough to serve all of them, while doctors are not provided for sick people. Clothes are not sufficient, and there is no school for children until the very last year of the Hmong refugee crisis. As a result, it is unimaginable how much they suffer while waiting to be accepted to resettle in the United

States. Some of them have to wait for several years and thus inevitably suffer the hardship and mundane life in the camps during those many years of their waiting. However, their narratives indicate that they possess high endurance, tolerance, and perseverance. These people have been through several diasporic journeys full of dangers, hardship, and discouragement, but they never give up. Hmong refugees who make it to the United States still have to struggle in rebuilding their life, facing further challenging experiences.

Although a large number of Indochinese refugees survive their diasporic journey, they still have to grapple with the aftermath of wars and the abuse by the totalitarian regimes. This aftermath persists in refugees in the form of trauma, the deep wound that leaves irremovable scars in their hearts. The wars and the totalitarian regimes have dramatically ruined their lives. They lose their loved ones, families, and homes, and have to leave their homelands. These people also suffer from the witness and direct experience of violence against themselves as well as their people. The mental and physical suffering they have undergone inflicts detrimental psychological effects on them in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder. As explained by David Kinchin, post-traumatic stress disorder occurs "when a person has been exposed to an event which is outside the range of normal human experience: an event which would markedly distress almost anyone." Such experience includes a huge threat to life of that person or his or her loved ones. The destruction of home or community can also cause post-traumatic stress disorder. Witnessing serious accidents, violence, or killings is another important trigger (2). Those who are found to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder include veterans, captives in concentration camps, rape victims, and those who are abused by totalitarian regimes. There are several symptoms showing in traumatized people. As studied by Judith Herman, a psychologist, people diagnosed with war trauma, for example, suffer from both emotional breakdowns and

physical shock: “They screamed and wept uncontrollably. They froze and could not move. They became mute and unresponsive. They lost their memory and their capacity to feel” (20). Many victims also suffer from flashbacks of traumatic experience and recurring traumatic nightmares; both of these symptoms are recognized as trauma intruding into consciousness (37). Herman also points out that Southeast Asian refugees are reported to have the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which persists in them for many years after they have been liberated from the concentration camps under the totalitarian regimes (86-87). The trauma from the Indochina War as well as the totalitarian regimes hinders them from regaining their normal lives and sometimes causes further social problems.

Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature provides a space for Indochinese refugees to portray their trauma as an aftermath of gigantic crises in their home countries. In *Perfume Dreams*, Lam recounts several stories of refugees who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, reflecting the unhealed wound that keeps disrupting their life. In Lam’s family, his father is the one who has to endure trauma. A general in South Vietnamese army, he is a hero before the fall of Saigon, but after becoming a refugee in the United States, he loses all his pride. He has experienced the violence and brutality of the lengthy Vietnam War and witnessed his comrade generals commit suicide after the Communist gains victory. As Lam’s explains in his book, committing suicide or *tu thu* in Vietnamese is marked as an honorable action for Confucian men to do when they lose the war. Lam’s father does not commit suicide but have to live with trauma from both losing the war and refusing to maintain his honor by *tu thu*. He suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and cannot rebuild his life for two years after his arrival at the United States. He always sits absentmindedly without doing anything. Sometimes, he is obsessed with the flashback of war experience and repeatedly tells his war stories to his

children. In addition, he has to depend on alcohol, drinking every evening to cope with his trauma. Apart from the war experience, an important reason behind his traumatic syndrome has to do with the drastic change in his life. Before losing the war, he is a glorious warrior who is named "the Black Panther of the South" (28) by the Vietcong. His name is formidable for his enemies. However, after the war, it can be viewed that he becomes a coward who has to escape from his enemies and abandon his soldiers as well as home country. He leaves them under the brutal Communist hands while being safe in the United States. His past in Vietnam eventually transforms itself into post-traumatic stress disorder which is difficult for him to get over. In his detailed and artistic depiction, Lam indicates important symptoms of post-traumatic disorder occurring to his father:

> His voice had once caused his soldiers to tremble. In America, however, it turned into a voice that gradually struck me as nostalgic and, despite its bravado, full of regrets. When drunk he exuded a certain kind of childlike excitement and, slurring, he would repeat certain words over and over again of emphasis, and his booming laughter over some event or another could be deafening. Forceful and loud, his voice nevertheless began to sound like an overture to unrequited longing. (29)

It is obvious that Lam's father has lost his identity and become somebody else. His pride of being a formidable general is destroyed by the losing battle. As Herman puts it, a traumatized person suffers from the damage of the self, and the experience of humiliation, guilt, and helplessness ruins his or her self-esteem (56). For two years, Lam's father has lost the sense of self and buried himself under regrets. Abandoning his friends, soldiers, and homeland, he suffers

from humiliation and guilt which cause the damage of his self-esteem. As a result, he lacks confidence to rebuild his identity and life but only submerges himself under grief.

Lam's father tries to mitigate his feeling of guilt and trauma by attributing the defeat of Vietnam to the abandonment by the United States. Right after the retreat of American troops, South Vietnam becomes powerless to defend itself and finally surrenders to the Communist army. Therefore, he claims that the United States should share some guilt from leaving South Vietnam helpless, as he explains, "We were abandoned by the US [sic]. So many of my friends sacrificed for nothing and Vietnam is ruled by a repressive regime" (47). However, when Lam asks why he does not stay and fight, he simply responds with silence. His inability to utter indicates that even though he tries to find somebody to share responsibility for the losing war and the tragic fate of people under the totalitarian regime, he is unable to escape from the guilt which has already become trauma in his life. As discussed by Kinchin, many traumatized people suffer from the guilt for being survivors while others have died. This form of suffering is categorized as the intrusive symptom (45). For Lam's father, his soldiers have lost their lives in the battle, and other generals have committed suicide to maintain their Confucian honor. In contrast, he survives and refuses to maintain his honor. It is obvious that he cannot avoid guilt, although he successfully avoids death. After spending two years as a disabled man, he gradually regains his sense of self and starts his new life. However, he is not fully recovered and is occasionally struck by his post-traumatic stress disorder. Because of the trauma, he is not brave enough to go back to Vietnam, where the trauma will be deepened by the past memory: "The wounds of defeat are still deep and unhealed. He longs for Vietnam but he remains forever an exile" (127). This poetic excerpt indicates that although he long for the return to his homeland, he refuses to be cut deeper by revisiting the venue of his defeat.

In addition to the story of his father, Lam also portrays Vietnamese traumatic syndrome through the story of the three Nguyen brothers and a Vietnamese friend who perpetrate a shocking crime in Sacramento, California. In April 1991, with their guns, they intrude an electronic store and hold forty-one hostages, demanding that the police provide them with "a helicopter to fly to Thailand and fight the Viet Cong, $4 million, four bulletproof vests, and forty pieces of one-thousand-year-old ginseng root" (51). This tragedy ends with three deaths of the gunmen and two deaths of the hostages with a lot of injuries, after the SWAT decides to attack. This story reflects the war trauma that obsesses Vietnamese refugees, persisting in their psychology, even though the war has been over for over 15 years. As described by Lam, the Nguyen family has severely suffered from the atrocities of the Vietcong. They originally live in North Vietnam, but has to abandon their home and escape from the Vietcong to South Vietnam. After the defeat of the South, they are captured and sent to a concentration camp before escaping again as boat people to the United States. Based on this long story of their being victimized, they are enormously traumatized by painful experiences, undergoing many forms of hardship and witnessing as well as suffering from the brutality of the Vietcong. According to the concept of trauma by Kinchin discussed above, they are exposed to several events, which are beyond the normal range of human experience, instigating trauma in their bodies and minds. This trauma develops great hatred and vengeance towards the Vietcong, as Lam explains, "The Viet Cong, whom the eldest Nguyen boy barely remembered, nevertheless figured as the prime villains in the household cosmology: they were the chief cause of their family's suffering in America, the robbers of their father's dignity, the blasphemers of the crucifix in their church called the Vietnamese Catholic Martyrs" (58). In fact, the Nguyen family has been catholicized since they were in North Vietnam, which is an important reason why they are persecuted by the Vietcong,

who are strongly against Westernization. With their long history of being victimized, great trauma develops and persists in their psychology, transforming itself to be enormous vengeance compelling them to commit such a tragic crime.

The great hidden vengeance in the Nguyen brothers and their friend arouses them to go crazy and take action. Their violent crime stimulated by trauma can be described as the reenactment of traumatic scene. Herman explains that this reenactment is a form of trauma reliving; traumatized people are "impelled to re-create the moment of terror, either in literal or in disguised form. Sometimes people reenact the traumatic moment with a fantasy of changing the outcome of the dangerous encounter" (39). In the case of the Vietnamese gunmen above, since they have experienced the killing of their people, they are trying to reenact the killing scene by demanding military supplies in order to kill the Vietcong. In their fantasy, they want to change the outcome of the traumatic scenes they have experienced, to kill the Vietcong, not to be killed. They also demand one-thousand-year-old ginseng roots because they believe that these items are traditional herbs with a legend of boosting human power, which will help them to be potent enough to fight the Vietcong and take revenge.

The death of three gunmen after being attacked by the SWAT has ended their traumatic lives. Unfortunately, the trauma of their parents, as a result of the wars and the Communist persecution, is deepened by this tragic event. Although they have successfully escaped from the Communist regime to the United States, the legacy of wars and the totalitarian regime, as a form of trauma, follows them and even develops after the death of their sons. Their trauma is also further exacerbated by the feeling of guilt they have towards the community of Sacramento, as their sons are important causes of this tragedy, in which two innocent hostages are shot to death. Although they can blame the Communist regime for all misfortunes in their lives, they cannot

avoid taking part of the responsibility for what their sons have done. They will have to live with this trauma, which grows much deeper, until the last moment of their lives. This is an important reason why the mother of the gunmen can offer only silence, without the ability to articulate anything, when Lam interviews her and her husband. She is acutely aware that she will never be free from this great trauma. To her, words cannot describe her great suffering resulting from the traumatic events she has to encounter.

Wars and the Communist regimes traumatize not only Vietnamese but also Cambodian people. In *Golden Bones*, Siv incorporates his trauma stemmed from the Khmer Rouge's persecution as an important element of this autobiography. Throughout his journey since he leaves his home until he reaches a refugee camp in Thailand, he has experienced and witnessed numerous traumatic events which are deeply engraved in his imagination. In addition, he has to be in the environment that embraces him with fear and shocking feeling all the time during his escape. Due to the social context in Cambodia during that period, he lacks security in life. This dramatically damages his psychological state and ultimately generates trauma in his life. The worst form of trauma he encounters is the extreme violence operated by the Khmer Rouge in slaughtering innocent people. Before he receives the first-hand experience of this violence, he learns about it, witnessing it through the news. In his autobiography, he inscribes the drastic atrocities of the Khmer Rouge through a very moving depiction. Innocent people, even babies, are victimized and killed in unimaginably brutal ways:

> Then came the gruesome descriptions of what had taken place: babies thrown into the air and caught with bayonet, children smashed into trees, villagers having their throats cut with the sharp thorns of palm tree branches, merchants clubbed to death with the back of a hoe. These were all the *streou* (enemies) of the Khmer

> Rouge revolution. In one incident at Phnom Baset, west of Phnom Penh, whole families were pushed off the mountain cliffs. (96)

This depiction provokes great terror in Siv, since he knows very well that he and his family are categorized as enemies of the Khmer Rouge, based on the family's background as privileged people, a target group of the extermination. As a result, it is unavoidable for him to imagine the gruesome killing of himself and his family. All the time he is in Cambodia, terror and fear overshadow his life.

Apart from learning about the traumatic event through the news, Siv also witnesses it himself while being evacuated to a labor camp. Along the way he and his family inevitably see, smell, and feel the grotesque and gruesome death through decomposing human bodies, which are scattered all over. The deadly scenes he witnesses cause him to describe Cambodia as hell: "Cambodia was slowly turning into a land of blood and tears. It was becoming *noruork knong lok*, a hell on earth" (102). Siv's experiences during the Khmer Rouge's persecution are clearly identified as traumatic events which instigate great terror in his psychology. As stated by Herman, such events include "physical violation or injury, exposure to extreme violence, or witnessing grotesque death. In each case, the salient characteristic of the traumatic event is its power to inspire helplessness and terror" (34). Siv does not describe his trauma while he is in escape, but reveals it when he returns to his homeland. Although Siv is threatened with great terror, he does not allow himself to be helpless but keeps struggling for survival until he is liberated, successfully escaping into Thailand and later relocating to the United States. His ability to overcome terror indicates his inner strength which supports him in carrying on his life and fighting all obstacles.

However tough a person is, he or she cannot avoid being traumatized by a long period of exposure to violence. Even a strongest soldier is broken down by the lengthy violence he experiences in the war (qtd. in Herman 25). For Siv, although he refuses to surrender to his traumatic experience, successfully rebuilding his life, he is unable to eradicate the great trauma engraved in his life. In his autobiography, he does not mention the psychological suffering which he has to undergo until he returns to Cambodia. Siv describes his return as "an emotional return" (273), since it brings back past memories to him. It has been sixteen years since he has left his hometown, but all vivid memories arise in his imagination as if all events had just happened. He recalls the moments when he is happy with his family and, inevitably, reimagines the picture of his village and other parts of Cambodia when they were turned "into horrifying killing grounds" (273). These flashbacks are regarded as a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. In the United States, Siv might be able to suppress it, but at the place where all his memories take place, it is impossible for him not to reimagine old pictures. Siv also visits the rice field where the villagers believe to be the spot where his mother, sister, and brother are killed. He does not describe his emotion or psychological state at this point. It can be assumed that he is overwhelmed by the trauma from his imagination of how his family is killed. For him, it is predictable how they are killed, since he has already witnessed gruesome scenes during his journey to Thailand. Siv has a Buddhist memorial service performed at that spot, as it is believed to send the spirits of his family members to heaven. This ritual can also be construed as a way to mitigate his trauma. Once the ritual is completed, he can be sure that his family spirits ascend to heaven, no longer existing as wandering spirits. Although he cannot manage to hold a proper funeral for them, he finally fulfills an important duty of a son and a brother.

During the second time Siv returns to Cambodia, he is still severely tortured by the trauma. He clearly describes that he can no longer hold his tears when the flashback of his happy life with his sister comes to his mind. He has a strong relationship with his sister who is so gentle, caring, and loving to him. She also saves his life when he is sick in 1975. They share many wonderful experiences together, so when he imagines how much suffering she has to endure while being a captive, he cannot help breaking down in tears: "The more I thought about her, the more tears came down" (309). This is a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder which Siv cannot suppress. This disorder results from trauma instigated by the death of his family through the Khmer Rouge's violence. As Herman contends, witnessing the violent death of family members is marked as a significant cause of trauma (54). One of the results of trauma as discussed above has to do with emotional breakdown. For Siv, although he does not directly witness the death of his sister and other family members, his experience during the Khmer Rouge regime compels him to vision how they would have been killed. The brutal violence causing the demise of his family, emerging in his imagination, stimulates trauma and finally brings him to emotional breakdown. Siv's success in rebuilding life in the United States, where he becomes an American diplomat in the United Nations after a long traumatic journey, proves that he is a very tough guy. Behind that toughness, however, resides a deep trauma which is ready to breaks him down when it is stimulated. In his case, the return to Cambodia is regarded as a significant stimulator which causes the hidden trauma to emerge and disrupt his psychological function, causing him, a tough guy, to cry.

Recovering from trauma is a long process which requires several factors. Some of the victims might not have a chance to recover, although the traumatic event has ended for many years. This can be seen through the Nguyen gunmen in *Perfume Dreams*, who commit a tragic

crime fifteen years after the end of the Vietnam War. They do not have a chance to recover, since they are shot to death at the crime scene. However, the above refugee narratives can be construed as a process of healing the trauma of their authors victimized by war and the totalitarian regimes. As Herman puts it, "Remembering and telling the truth about the terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing process of individual victims" (1). Narrating traumatic events might be against the will of the victims who do not want to re-experience the events in their imagination. In the recovering process, however, "traumatized people need to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and the future" (Herman 2). Telling stories of their traumatic experience provide them an opportunity to contemplate the events, which will lead them to a better comprehension of their past and finally help them to recover. At the same time, their stories help people in the society to better understand them and provide support. This support is also very crucial for the recovering process. Therefore, their narratives function as both self-recovering process and a request for support from the society.

Wars, totalitarian regimes, diaspora, and trauma serve as an important mutual legacy among Southeast Asian diasporic people, especially those who are from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. This legacy is transformed into an important element in their literature which is contextualized by their horrible, shattering experiences as a result of wars and Communist persecution. As evident in the literary works discussed above, the authors employ their memories as greatest sources of the material for the construction of their literary works, which become an intersection where the memories of family, homeland, wars, loss, suffering, dislocation, diaspora, and trauma meet. Therefore, these works are regarded as highly historicized, providing authentic details of Indochinese refugees' lives and at the same time inscribing their past in the literary form. The memoirs in *Hmong Mean Free*, in particular, recount stories of Hmong refugees in a

simple, sincere, and straightforward manner with little literary aesthetic. This is because the authors of those stories are not professional writers, but simply those who desire to pass on their stories to both insiders and outsiders. Meanwhile, Chan, as the editor of the book, wants to preserve the originality of the memoirs as much as possible, so she does not make a lot of changes in those works. There is the sense of realism in those works which represent the life of their authors and the social context as they are, rather than romanticizing or fantasizing them. Therefore, those authors can be regarded as realist authors. As Katherine Kearns puts it, "The realist author articulates multiple obligations: a duty of faithful representation, a duty to a truthful treatment of material, a duty to the everyday and the ordinary, and so on" (3). The Hmong authors in *Hmong Means Free*, as well as Lam and Siv clearly represent their stories based on these duties, the duties to articulate truth, faithfulness, and the ordinary, without overly aesthetical ornaments. As a result, their representations of the wars, totalitarian regimes, diaspora, and trauma are very realistic.

The literary works above can also be specifically categorized as refugee narratives recounting the long journey of their authors. These refugee narratives share some important characteristic with slave narratives portraying the lives of ex-slaves. As defined by Charles Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr., slave narrative refers to "written or dictated testimonies of the enslavement of black human beings" (xii). In a similar way, refugee narratives are regarded as testimonies of refugees. In fact, before becoming Indochinese refugees, these people have been enslaved in the concentration camps operated by the Communist regimes. Even though some of them are not put into the camps, such as Andrew Lam, they are ideologically enslaved, lacking freedom to spend their lives as normal people. Therefore, they are analogous to slaves. Another important similarity between these two types of narratives is that both of them portray the

characters' yearn for freedom and their struggle for liberation. Those characters might employ different means or travel through different routes, but they all struggle and move towards the same goal, to be free. In the case of Siv, for example, after he has braved a dangerous journey and successfully crossed the border into Thailand, he explains, "For the first time in a year, I felt safe and free" (150). He greatly celebrates his freedom on the soil of Thailand because it is impossible for him to obtain it in his homeland. Another important common characteristic, both slave narratives and refugee narratives portray traumatic events, as a result of extreme violence, encountered by their authors. While slave narratives depict violence from slave owners, as can be seen through Frederick Douglass' narrative or those written by other ex-slaves, refugee narratives portray violence from wars and totalitarian regimes which enslave their authors and kill their loved ones. No matter where the violence comes from, all sources of violence inflict severe trauma on the authors who write or dictate their testimonies.

The wars and totalitarian regimes have left deep trauma in Indochinese refugees. These diasporic people refuse to allow the trauma to hinder the construction of their new life, but grapple with it. However, the successful escape from the totalitarian regimes does not mean that they will have an easy life in the new world, since they have to encounter new obstacles in rebuilding their life. In spite of that fact, many of them highly succeed. Siv and Lam exemplify the successful group. Siv becomes a diplomat of the United States, while Lam becomes an outstanding journalist after struggling on the American land. All Southeast Asian diasporic subjects encounter many forms of hardship and difficulties. Their experiences and the social context in the new world are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

NARRATING DIASPORIC EXPERIENCES IN THE WEST: SUBJECTS OF TWO WORLDS IN LAM'S *PERFUME DREAMS*, LAW-YONE'S *THE COFFIN TREE*, AND CHAN'S *HMONG MEANS FREE*

Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature narrates the long journeys which have finally led its people to their new worlds, with the United States as the major destination. Their literature reflects the significant historical contexts of their diaspora which, in return, informs this type of literature. In their new worlds, as portrayed in their writings, Southeast Asian diasporic people inevitably encounter many forms of exclusion and discrimination. Moreover, they have to grapple with internal conflicts, such as the ambivalence of their identity, cultural clashes, and conflicts between different generations. In this chapter, I discuss the experiences of diasporic Southeast Asians in the United States, since this country is the main destination of these people. I examine three primary texts—Lam's *Perfume Dreams*, Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree*, and Chan's *Hmong Means Free*. The analysis is divided into the issues of identity and cultural conflicts, and surviving the harsh new world, which are encountered by Southeast Asian diasporic people. The above literary texts project that Southeast Asian diasporic people share mutual legacies in both the old world and the new world, informing the audience that their lives are difficult in both worlds. The texts also protest that their wounds from the old world are exacerbated by racist Americans who exclude them from the national sphere and treat them as the marginalized. In the second half of the chapter, as the conclusion of the dissertation, I discuss the literary aspects of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature as a new voice in the broad field of Asian American literature. I examine the common themes, important characteristics, literary representation, and its contribution to Asian American literature as well

as American literature. This conclusion asserts that this subfield of literature is heterogeneous by nature and constitutes the heterogeneity of Asian American literature.

Filipinos were the first largest group from Southeast Asia, who immigrated to the United States. In the late nineteenth century, about 180,000 Filipinos were admitted to Hawaii and the mainland as laborers, and from 1910-1935 this number had been increased by approximately 126,100 new Filipino immigrants (Chan, *Asian Americans* 3, 18). The other significant group of Southeast Asian diasporic people comprised Indochinese refugees fleeing from the Communist persecution in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos during 1975 and after. Between 1975 and 1990, about two million of these refugees resettled in Australia, Western Europe, and North America: approximately two-thirds of them ended up in the United States (Hein 1-2). Besides Filipinos and Indochinese refugees, there are also immigrants from other countries in this region, such as Thailand, Burma, and Malaysia, but they do not make significant numbers. Based on Lowe's argument, Southeast Asian immigrants are products of the U.S. expansion of global capitalism after World War II, which forced the Americans to struggle for economic power, leading to several wars in Asia, which resulted in a huge number of refugees. Meanwhile, the need for cheap labor also instigated the diaspora of the non-refugee groups (15-17). Similarly, through the lens of Marxism, Palumbo-Liu also views Asian and Southeast Asian diaspora as a consequence of the construction of America, as he maintains, "The location and dislocation of Asians in America were seen in conjunction with the way American space itself was reconstructed in late capitalism, and in the context of America's various engagements with East and Southeast Asia in the middle and late twentieth century" (296). In Southeast Asia, particularly, the anti-Communism policy caused the United States to seriously step into the conflicts in this region and admit refugees into to the country at the end of the war. The American involvement in this region

is clearly evident in Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Lam's *Perfume Dreams*, Chan's *Hmong Means Free*, Siv's *Golden Bones*, and Somtow's *Jasmine Nights*.

In addition, after the World War II, the structural barriers such as immigration laws which barred Asians from entering the United States have been removed, due to the need of labor to foster economic growth as a result of global changes. As argued by Li, a scholar in Asian American studies, the removal of restrictions provides opportunities for more diverse Asians including the middle class and the professionals to be accepted into the United States (8). However, as mentioned earlier, the United States is not the only destination of these diasporic people, since they also resettle in other Western countries. In addition, some of them do not reside permanently in their new worlds, but return to their home countries, as can be seen through the cases of Sudham and Somtow, the two Thai authors in this dissertation. The above historical context, along with the portrayals in Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, asserts that Southeast Asian diasporic people are heterogeneous, with regards to their ethnic origins, numbers, cultures, languages, and motives of their diaspora. Under the context of heterogeneity in the new worlds, however, they share similar experiences among themselves, as depicted in their literature.

In the United States, there are varieties of experiences that Southeast Asian diasporic people encounter as well as many conflicts they have to grapple with. Through writing, they recount those experiences, being treated as aliens, racialized, gendered, othered, marginalized, and discriminated against. The U.S. massive loss during the Indochina War serves as an important root of American negative attitudes towards Southeast Asian diasporic subjects. Apart from the legacy of war, the anti-Southeast Asian attitudes also stem from race and ethnic relations as well as economic competition (Hein 69-70). Arriving at the United States, those

people, viewed as the lower class, are willing to work hard for low wages, decreasing jobs for American laborers. Therefore, their experience in the new world is regarded as an arena where race, conflicts of interest, and class intersect. These issues are clearly portrayed in Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*, which narrates stories of Filipino immigrant laborers struggling against discrimination, oppression, and exploitation. Other literary works studied in this dissertation also reflect similar issues. Apart from the issue of exclusion and oppression, there are also the internal conflicts, such as the conflicts related to identity, culture, and different generations, presented in this group of writings.

Identity and Cultural Conflicts

The conflict of identity has been a serious problem that Asian immigrants in the United States have to cope with since the early stage of their immigration in the nineteenth century. Although they greatly contributed to the construction of the nation, they were barred from American citizenship. Lowe contends that the United States employed legal institution to prevent Asians from being naturalized as American. She elaborates that "Immigration exclusion acts and naturalization laws have […] been not only means of regulating the terms of citizen and nation-state but also an intersection of the legal and political terms with an orientalist discourse that defined Asians as culturally and racially 'other'" (5). Based on Lowe's argument, in terms of citizenship, Asian immigrants are denied the American identity. In terms of power relations, they are disenfranchised in the white-dominant society and kept in the position in which they are always oppressed by the white mainstream. Being refused to grant the American citizenship, Asian immigrants were obviously racialized. Their situation was in contrast with European immigrants who were welcomed by the immigration laws and eligible for being naturalized. This process can also be viewed as the politics of power relations. In describing these relations,

Palumbo-Liu applies the concept of double consciousness from Du Bois. His discussion suggests that Asians in America are like blacks in America who were "part of a nation without power, […] nationals without citizenship" (299). In his concept of double consciousness, which results from the racialization of blacks by whites, Du Bois writes, "One ever feels twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (3). In the same way, Asians also have to deal with double consciousness, sharing the same feeling with African Americans, since they are racialized by whites. In addition to double consciousness, Palumbo-Liu argues that Asian immigrants also struggle with dual personality, being American and being Asian in the same body. In the case of Chinese Americans analyzed by psychologists, this dual personality is attributed to the traditional Asian family, Western influences, and racism. If the forces from these factors are too great, "mental health problems are frequently the result" (qtd. in Palumbo-Liu 301). Apart from the mental health problems, this conflict of identity also causes other problems, such as the internal conflict of identity ambivalence and the cultural conflict between different generations. Like other Asian diasporic groups, Southeast Asian diasporic people also suffer from these conflicts as portrayed in their literature.

In *Perfume Dreams*, the conflict of identity is manifested in the story of Lam, the author himself. This conflict leads to other problems both inside his family and in his new community in the United States. His family leaves Vietnam two days before the fall of Saigon in 1975, and then they are contained in a refugee camp in Guam before being resettled in the United States. At that time, he was 11 years old, an age of the transition from a child to an adolescent. Being raised in the United States by a Vietnamese family with Vietnamese legacy, he admits that his identity is formed by both Vietnam and America: "Old enough to remember Vietnam, I was also young

enough to embrace America, and to be shaped by it" (7). He has been raised by his traditional Vietnamese family within American environment which endows him with American ways of life. These are important reasons why he grows up as a man of two worlds. He has to maintain his Vietnamese identity at home, since his mother "resists America as much as she can" (8). As a traditional Vietnamese mother, she expects her sons to maintain the values of the home country, including being an obedient son and speaking Vietnamese at home. In the outside world, however, Lam needs to adopt American identity in order to be assimilated into American society. With regards to the language, he has to communicate with his parents in Vietnamese, while he has to use English to communicate with his American friends. He has to maintain the familial value at home and at the same time desires to assimilate into the society of the new world. Lam views the adoption of English as a form of power relations that enable him to assimilate into American society:

> Speaking English, I had a markedly different personality than when speaking Vietnamese. In English, I was a sunny, upbeat, silly, and sometimes wickedly sharp-tongued kid. No sorrow, no sadness, no cataclysmic grief clung to my new language. A wild river full of possibilities flowed effortless from my tongue, connecting me to the New World. And I, enamored by the discovery of a newly invented self (I even gave myself a new name—"Andy, call me Andy," I would tell each new teacher and each new friend who had trouble pronouncing my Vietnamese name)—I sailed its iridescent waters toward spring. (7)

The adoption of English and the new name, which are parts of his new identity, empowers him to overcome the grief from losing his homeland and all his past in Vietnam. At the same time, it gives him the sense of being American and being accepted by his American teachers and friends.

Metaphorically, as described in the above excerpt, the adoption of new identity serves as a vehicle which ideologically transports him to the new world, connecting him with the American society. Using English in communication and the name Andy to represent himself, Lam wants the Americans to recognize him as part of the nation, not as the other in the concept of Orientalism.

With his physical existence in the United States and the adoption of American identity, Lam has become part of *Viet Kiew*, the group of people he describes as "Vietnamese nationals living abroad, especially those in America" (12). This term also signifies power relations, as the *Viet Kiew* people are always viewed as those who are successful in rebuilding their lives, while the majority of Vietnamese cannot secure power to be successful and thus suffer from poverty in Vietnam. Through the eye of the Americans, his identity as *Viet Kiew* might be inferior to the pure American identity. However, through the eye of the Vietnamese, he is in a superior position, due to his success in rebuilding his life, especially in his career as a journalist. With this identity and the superiority it connotes, he becomes a saint and hope of the boat people in the refugee camp in Hong Kong, coming to rescue them by spreading their stories.

Although being *Viet Kiew* in the United States offers a sense of superiority over common Vietnamese subjects, this identity sometimes brings about cultural conflicts inside the family. For Lam, his parents try to reject American culture as much as possible because they resent the fact that the United States abandoned South Vietnam, causing them to lose the war. While Lam tries to bring Americanization to home by speaking English with his parents, they simply reject it and demand that he speaks only Vietnamese at home: "'Stop speaking English in the house,' my father ordered over dinner one night. […] 'Speak Vietnamese or don't speak at all'" (37). This incident indicates that at home Lam has to abandon his American identity and represent himself

as a Vietnamese son. Although he sometimes protests, finally he has to behave as an obedient son, based on Vietnamese values. Unlike English, which offers him power to negotiate his existence as part of America, Vietnamese language places him at an inferior position in his family: "Growing up in America, Vietnamese began to represent not just a language but a power play, one in which my role as the youngest son was absolute obedience, always inferior, always deferring to everyone else" (37). Being diasporic Vietnamese in the United States, Lam's parents refuse to abandon their national culture and values and demand that he conforms to these customs. The fact that Lam accepts Vietnamese values and become an obedient son indicates that to some degree he still preserves his Vietnamese identity in his consciousness. This conflict proves that he is neither fully American nor fully Vietnamese. It is clear that Lam's dual personality and identity stem from the cultural conflict between the old world and the new world, as he explains, "I was growing up with two very different ideas of history, two sets of civilizations, two traditions, two languages, to sets of behaviors, and I was, for what seems now a long, long time, floundering between them" (34). He is caught between two different worlds; one resides in his psyche as past memory, while the other one is marked as his present and future. This contrast forces him to be American at school, but to be Vietnamese at home.

While Lam maintains Vietnamese values by being an obedient son, his older brother totally refuses them. He has come to the United State as a student several years before the arrival of the rest of his family. With more contact with Americans, he not only adopts American identity and values but also abandons Vietnamese values. This transformation causes serious conflicts and a wide gap between him and his parents, much severer than the case of Lam. Since they have different cultural perceptions, Lam's brother always has a fight with his father who insists on maintaining Vietnamese values. Their conflict culminates when a friend of his father

comes for a visit. His father asks Lam to tell his brother to come downstairs and honor the guest, but the brother simply replies, "Tell the old man I am not going down. […] Tell him I don't give a damn about his words" (31). For his parents, this act is considered the destruction of family's honor, since Lam's brother denies honoring the guest as well as being an obedient son. The consequence of this act is a serious punishment—harsh verbal reproach and a slap. For Lam's conservative parents, disobedience and dishonoring the family are regarded as a crime against Vietnamese values, a crime that needs to be punished. In fact, this incident results from the conflict of identity of both the son and the parents. All of them refuse to compromise and understand the context of their diaspora in which they must adjust themselves to. According to Palumbo-Liu's discussion, traditional Asian family, Western influences, and racism serve as causes of this familial conflict. To protect himself from American racism, Lam's brother needs to allow American values to influence him. At the same time, his parents want him to conform to Vietnamese values. There is no point where their contrastive desires meet. All of them are caught in the predicament of identity and culture.

The conflict of identity not only harms family relationship but also seriously jeopardizes the community, as it causes mental dysfunction. The tragic crime at Sacramento committed by the Nguyen gunmen as discussed in the previous chapter also has a root from the conflict of identity. These gunmen are raised by a traditional Vietnamese family, which contrasts to the American environment. At home, they might be obedient sons in order to meet their parents' expectations, but at other places they become someone else whom their parents never expect them to be, as Lam explains, "These parents are unprepared for children who lead dual lives, who may in fact commit rash and incomprehensibly violent acts—not at all the docile and obedient Vietnamese children they had hoped to raise. […] They are no longer really

Vietnamese, nor are they really American" (56). Living a dual life, as previously discussed, leads to mental health problems. In this case, such problems cause the dysfunctional psychology in the gunmen, which generates their desire to take revenge on the Vietcong and finally leads to the tragedy. It is clear that life is too extreme for them, since they have to cope with double pressures, one from trauma and the other from the conflict of identity. In the United States, they have to be Americanized in order to assimilate into the society, but based on this tragic incident Lam calls this process "crippled Americanization" (56). While trying to be Americanized, they are encumbered with both past memory and traditional values of the family. The transformation of their identity is incomplete because it is not a transformation of a subject free of any restrictions. In fact, both Lam and his brother are also hindered by these restrictions, resulting in their conflict of identity and familial conflicts. However, unlike the Nguyen gunmen, they do not suffer from the Communist persecution, since they leave the country before the fall of Saigon. Therefore, their trauma is not as deep as that of the Nguyen. This difference is a significant reason why it is more likely for the Nguyen, who suffer from more pressure, to have the psychological outburst driving them to commit such a crime.

Ambivalence of identity seems to be a common problem encountered by Southeast Asian diasporic people, as it is portrayed in several literary works. Similar to Lam's *Perfume Dreams*, which addresses the politics of identity of Vietnamese refugees, Chan's *Hmong Means Free* provides a space for Hmong in the United States to articulate their identity conflict. In fact, the Hmong have had to struggle with this issue since they are in Laos because they are also immigrants in this country, not natives. Instead of being call "Laotian," they are called "Hmong," which indicates that they are denied to be fully accepted as Laotian citizens. This distinction indicates that the Laotian mainstream views them as the other. Moreover, after they decide to

help the U.S. Army to fight against the Communist, their identity as Hmong causes them to become a major target of the persecution, especially after the Americans retreat from Laos. It can be said that their identity always puts them in an insecure position as a result of the lack of a genuine homeland where they can claim their true identity and freely live as Hmong.

In the United States, the Hmong refugees have to assimilate into American society, which instigates the ambivalence of their identity and other related conflicts. Especially for Hmong children, they desire for acceptance among American friends, so they enthusiastically adopt American values, allowing themselves to be Americanized. In "An Unforgettable Journey," Maijue Xiong portrays her struggle with the conflict of identity which also brings about a cultural conflict between herself and her parents. While she wants to be fully Americanized, her parents want her to preserve the Hmong identity, as they say, "Don't forget where you came from and who you are!" (128). This instruction poses a further conflict to her, since her identity is always unclear, being Hmong Laotian in the past and Hmong American in the present. She struggles with the problem in defining herself due to the long history of the Hmong diaspora. In the United States, however, since she longs for acceptance from American peers, her parents' words become meaningless to her. She simply tries to be fully Americanized and at the same time abandon her Hmong identity as well as cultural heritage:

> I was too busy trying to become a typical American girl, going out on dates, wearing nice clothes and makeup, and voicing my opinion when I felt my parents were wrong to tell me what to do and what not to do. I was ashamed of my heritage, of where I had come from, of who I was, and even of my parents who could not speak good English. I found it embarrassing and even shameful to speak my native language. I wanted so much to be like my "Americanized" Hmong-

> American friends. I felt I had to change my identity or risk rejection from my peers. (128)

In the white dominating society, Maijue and her Hmong friends feel that their identity as Hmong connotes their inferiority and the lack of power. In addition, being a daughter in Hmong patriarchal family, she is put in a voiceless position. Therefore, she yearns for the transformation of her identity from Hmong to American in order to negotiate power. She perceives that this transformation will endow her with power for self-representation and self-articulation in her family as well as in American society. At the same time, she views her Hmong identity and heritage as something to be ashamed of, something embarrassing, which will cause her American friends to reject her, seeing her as the other. Her way of thinking stems from racism, based on the critique by Palumbo-Liu as discussed above. The fear of being racialized and discriminated against forces her to abandon the Hmong heritage and adopt the American identity and values. This adoption serves as a means for her to be included in the American national sphere, based on Lowe's concept, and in the American national body, based on Palumbo-Liu's discussion.

Apart from Maijue's story, Vu Pao Tcha's "A New American" also reflects a similar issue of identity. In fact, Vu Pao's situation seems to be more complicated than that of Maijue, since his diasporic journey is longer. Maijue is transported directly from a refugee camp in Thailand to the United States. In contrast, Vu Pao and his family, after being contained in a refugee camp in Thailand, are transferred to France, where they have spent several years, before moving to the United States. In France, Vu Pao highly succeeds in education: "I won the admiration of my teachers and friends. I excelled in almost everything and was among the top students" (200). In spite of his academic achievement, he does not participate in any other activities and refuses to adopt the French ways of life. This makes him realize that he is different

from other students. The feeling of being different results from his being Hmong in France, where the number of Hmong refugees is smaller than that in the United States. The Hmong community in France, thus, is smaller than their community in the United States. This difference creates a deeper sense of being minority in France, which causes him to close himself from the French environment. Except the adoption of French language and education, he denies to be assimilated into the French society, as he explains, "I never had any real friends. I didn't participate in any social activities, didn't date, didn't play any sports, didn't go to church, and didn't go anywhere interesting" (200). The denial of these activities indicates that he is not interested in adopting French identity. This denial results from the fact that he and his family do not want to permanently live in France. They always dream of America, where they can live in a bigger Hmong community with a lot more relatives and friends. In their perspective, America will provide more sense of community which also allows them to live under the concept of collectivism that they are used to when they were in Laos.

After Vu Pao and his family relocate again to the United States, he changes his perspective towards his identity. Resettling in California, he finds that people are more diverse than in France, in terms of ethnicity. With this diversity, he views America as the land that offers more freedom, which makes him realize that he was missing something when he was in France. He also finds that people in California are friendlier than those in France and "Not all people are racist" (204). Therefore, he begins to adopt American identity and lifestyles because he views that America provides him with a more promising chance to be integrated in the society, due to its diverse population:

> During my first year in college, I made friends with many people of different backgrounds. I found everyone very open and friendly. I did a lot of things that I

> had never done before with them—fun things as well as crazy things. We partied, drank, joked, and laughed. I became a brother to these new friends, and they, brothers to me. […] I am doing almost all the things that my American friends do. (204)

Based on the brotherhood Vu Pao creates in the new world, it can be said that he highly succeeds in being Americanized and assimilated into American society. In spite of that fact, he still grapples with the conflict of identity, as he writes, "Yet it is hard for me to consider myself an 'American.'" At the same time he feels that he is "no longer a Hmong of the mountains of Laos" and does not "hold strong Hmong cultural values" anymore (205). Based on this description of himself, he is still confused what he should identify himself, as he is neither totally Hmong nor fully American. It is clear that he has double consciousness, seeing himself as both Hmong and American. Despite this double consciousness, he does not states that he suffers from this identity ambivalence. In addition, he does not feel bad that he is not like other Americans, since he perceives that America is a country of high diversity in terms of ethnicity. He enjoys his life as part of the diversity and comes to understand that it is impossible for all Americans to be alike: "There are different kinds of Euro-Americans just as there are different kinds of Asian Americans and Afro-Americans. […] Americans can never be alike even if they are all Americans because America is a country of diverse people" (205). With this philosophy that he comes up with, he can exist in America as he is, mingling in the diversity of people as a Hmong American man.

As portrayed in the above writings, identity and cultural conflicts are among critical issues regarding Asian immigration. For Southeast Asian in particular, they do not have to struggle as much as other groups in obtaining American citizenship, since most of them enter the

United States after the removal of legal restrictions. In the case of Filipinos, who arrived during the anti-Asian laws, they were exempted from the restrictions because they were citizens of an American colony. They were privileged among their counterparts, as Chan states, "As U.S. 'nationals' they traveled with American passports, so that the existing immigration laws and the Gentlemen's Agreement, which barred other Asians, were not applicable to them" (*Asian Americans* 18). Based on these facts, Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature does not serve as an arena for Filipinos to negotiate citizenship. Instead, it serves as a means to address other racial issues, such as exclusion and exploitation as depicted in Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*. For Southeast Asian diasporic people as a whole, whatever identity they possess—Vietnamese American, Hmong American, or Cambodian American—they are part of the diversity of the national body of the United States. In spite of that fact, they have to struggle against many forms of difficulties, which are discussed in the following section.

Surviving the Harsh New World

Besides the identity and cultural conflicts, there are other aspects of experiences that Southeast Asian diasporic people encounter. Resettling in the new world is not an easy task to accomplish, since there are many obstacles that they need to get over, such as racism, language barrier, culture shock, and the haunting of past memory. These obstacles are not new, since other groups of Asian immigrants who arrived at the United States before the Southeast Asian group also struggled against the same discouraging factors. In the United States, Asians in general encounter seven categories of hostility: "prejudice, economic discrimination, political disenfranchisement, physical violence, immigration exclusion, social segregation, and incarceration" (Chan, *Asian Americans* 45). In a similar way, Ancheta argues that in the history, "Asian Americans for decades endured many of the same disabilities of racial subordination as

African American—racial violence, segregation, unequal access to public institutions and discrimination in housing, employment, and education" (5). All of these discriminating and oppressive treatments are regarded as strategies to undermine the power of Asian immigrants for economic reasons and to exclude them in order to purify the body of the American nation. Although most Southeast Asian immigrants, except Filipinos, are considered a new group in the United States, they are also affected by these mistreatments. Their literature becomes a significant arena where they articulate these issues.

Wendy Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree* presents readers with many dimensions of the diasporic life of two Burmese characters in the United States. The unnamed female narrator and Shan, her older brother from a different mother, escape from the civil war in Burma and have to brave the new world by themselves. Their father sends them to the United States with the hope that his American friends will help them in resettling. Although they are from a high-class family in their country and can speak English, their life in the United States is very difficult, since there are many negative sides of the American society they have to encounter. Law-Yone makes an excellent analogy in describing the life of these two characters who arrive at the United States three months after the three American astronauts landed on the moon. The narrator and her brother are unfamiliar with everything in the new world, which contrasts to their life back in Burma, causing them the awkward feeling: "Even when times were hard, the life we left behind had run along a groove cut by tradition, familiarity, and habit. But arriving in New York, my brother and I fell out of that groove, and finding our footing was nearly as awkward as the astronauts' first steps in the atmosphere of the moon" (44). For the narrator and her brother, being in the United States as a foreign land is like being on another planet, since everything is new to them, and at the same time they are new to the American environment. In Burma, they

used to call the Americans foreigners, but now they become foreigners on the American land. They have to adjust themselves to new culture, food, weather, and ways of life, which put them into difficult situations. For example, when shopping for sandals at a department store, they try to bargain, since they can do so in their country and think that they can also do it in American department stores. This cultural difference causes the saleswoman to be mad at them because bargaining is not allowed in the department store: "The saleswoman began to treat us like morons, shouting, 'Twenty-five! Twenty-five! Twenty-five!' Red-faced, we abandoned the sandals and the store" (45). This is the first major cultural difference they encounter, which brings them great humiliation. In spite of their high-class background, they are not prepared for cultural difference and have to suffer from humiliation as a result of this unpreparedness. The impolite treatment from the saleswoman can also be viewed as an insult. Instead of politely explaining to them, she intends to humiliate them in front of people. This insult stems from her perception towards the narrator and Shan. Seeing their different physical appearance, she views them as aliens from an underdeveloped world who lack knowledge about the perceived American civilized culture. It is obvious that the narrator and Shan are racialized and seen as the other who are inferior and do not deserve polite treatment.

Apart from the cultural difference, the narrator and her brother need to struggle by themselves for survival, since their father's American friends do not help them as much as they expect. In Burma, they are good friends, but in the United States, their American friends' attitudes towards them have changed. They are no longer good friends, and the narrator and her brother become merely someone they used to know. For example, Morrison, her father's old friend, completely changes and treats them as if they were strangers, as the narrator explains, "When I was growing up, Morrison had been an occasional visitor, always arriving crumpled and

sweaty from the long ride in from the airport, but full of laughter and loaded with presents. Now, on his turf, he greeted us at the door with brisk handshakes—not the exuberant embraces we were used to" (47). The friendship between them is obviously weakened, and Morrison and his family offer very little help to the narrator and her brother. The changing attitudes of Morrison can be viewed as a consequence of the changing identity of the narrator and her brother. In Burma, they are high-class, wealthy, and privileged people, but in the United States they are merely refugees categorized as lower class people. With this humble status, Morrison refuses to maintain the intimacy with them. They are treated with both racial ideology and classist ideology, as they are viewed as lower class Southeast Asian refugees. In addition, based on the history of the Southeast Asian refugees in the United States, a large number of Americans viewed that these people were economic burden on the nation, since budget was needed for their resettlement programs (qtd. in Palumbo-Liu 245). While Southeast Asian refugees in general are viewed as an economic burden of the nation, the narrator and her brother are viewed as an economic burden on Morrison's family. Therefore, except a dinner, in which he feels very uncomfortable, Morrison refuses to offer any help to the narrator and her brother.

Since their American friends do not lend a helping hand as much as they expect, the narrator and her brother need to struggle by themselves, although they are just teenagers. The life in the United States also reveals the narrator's inner strength as a strong woman who has to struggle for both herself and her brother, who is obviously weaker than her, physically and mentally. During the first few months, Shan is seriously ill with malaria and unable to work. Moreover, his mental state deeply sinks because of his changing status from an elite person to a helpless refugee. It is the narrator who always helps boost his morale in fighting their tragic destiny. Although the situation is very tough for her, she never gives up, trying to find a job and

make a living for both herself and her sick brother. She obviously possesses strong feminist inner strength. After a long search and many applications, she secures a menial job as a mail sorting person and a Xerox machine operator in an office. Despite her good educational background, she cannot obtain a better job. Her misfortune in obtaining a well-paid job indicates that good career opportunities are not open for her as a racialized woman in the white male dominating society. Her situation is also in good agreement with that of other groups of Asians in the United States, such as Chinese immigrants who can secure only menial jobs as laborers, such as the earlier Chinese and Filipino immigrants who arrived during the nineteenth century (Chan, *Asian Americans* 3). In fact, Asian women just gained opportunities to enter the United States after the World War II, when the War Bride Act was legislated in December 1945. This Act allowed American military personnel to bring their non-American wives to the United States. It is the first time in the U.S. history that Asian women arrived more than men (Zia 6, 44). The narrator of *The Coffin Tree* enters the United States in the 1960s, but not as a war bride. However, she is still racialized and barred from well-paid jobs.

The job that the narrator secures, despite the low wage it offers, helps her and her brother to survive their desperate conditions. For survival, she even abandons the pride of her past as an elite person, smuggling food from her workplace to fill two empty stomachs: "And from the coffee room I could smuggle out packets of hot chocolate, dried milk, coffee, tea, sugar, and Saltine crackers" (54). Stealing does not seem to destroy her self-esteem, since she has a huge responsibility to help her brother to survive, which is greater than her pride. In fact, it is considered a heroic action, since it helps to prolong the lives of both her brother and herself. She is not a thief by nature but is forced by the harsh conditions of the new world to commit this

petty crime. In order to commit this crime, she needs courage to break her pride and to take risk of being caught.

Before long, the narrator loses her job because she has to take care of her sick brother—the situation which causes her to come to work late and sneak out during working time. The loss of her job also reflects an important challenge most Southeast Asian refugees have to face: language barrier. While the manager is explaining why he has to fire her, he also picks on her imperfect English. He tells her that she does not "cut the mustard," but she has no idea what this expression means. The manager refuses to explain it to her but simply says, "Someday, when your English is better, you'll understand it" (56). This statement implies that the manager is insulting her, using the language imperfection to indicate his superiority. The manager's words also hurt the narrator's self-esteem, since they make her think that she cannot obtain a well-paid career because her English is not good enough. Although she has studied in Catholic schools in Burma, it is not enough for her to compete against American candidates who speak perfect English. This situation suggests that language barrier serves as an important obstacle in rebuilding her life in the United States. Although the manager does not states that he fires her simply because of her imperfect English, he sees it as one of her weak points which contribute to other reasons for terminating her job.

In the history of Southeast Asian refugees, language barrier was one of the most prioritized issues that needed to be assisted by the U.S. government. Most of the refugees arrived with no or very little knowledge of English, so it was very difficult for their daily-life communication with Americans. The English improvement programs became urgent in almost every settlement of the refugees. The Bureau of Refugee Assistance in the State of Washington, for example, had to "set up language classes under the state's English-as-a-second-language

master plan" (Chan, *Asian Americans* 162). Despite this assistance, many refugees, especially old people who have difficulty in learning, still suffered from their English deficiency. Many Hmong refugees in *Hmong Means Free* state that they are very frustrated that they need to rely on their children's help in their daily-life communication, such as in shopping or paying bills. For the narrator of *The Coffin Tree*, her English is more than enough for daily-life communication, but it is not good enough to compete against American candidates in obtaining a well-paid job.

The narrator's inner strength refuses to allow her to surrender to her language inferiority. She tries to improve her imperfection by conversing with her brother in English. Knowing that this is an important weak point of both of them, she also helps correct her brother's errors or mistakes. For instance, when he says, "I already ate," she corrects him, "'I've already eaten,' I corrected him as I piled my dish with rice and topped it with gummy soup" (57). Although this is not a serious error, she wants both herself and her brother to speak perfect English, as it is an important factor for them to obtain good jobs. In addition to her attempt in language improvement, she never gives up hope but keeps searching for jobs. She even tries to improve her typing skill by practicing it with an old, abandoned typewriter picked up from the street. Her strong determination and great effort yield a fruitful outcome, as she can secure a job at a bank after moving to South Carolina and then a permanent job, which she does not reveal what it is, in Chicago. Her success results from her strong will, determination, and perseverance. Although the conditions in the United States are harsh for her, she never allows them to prevent her desire for achievement.

While the narrator succeeds in her career, Shan has to face a tragic destiny. He is both racialized and sexualized by white males and finally dies of a virulent disease assumed as HIV.

After struggling for a long period, he obtains a job as a cook at Vermont, where he has to work and live with white male colleagues who bully him just because he is different. Instead of allowing him to share a room with them, his colleagues ask him to live in a separate room and bully him by pounding at the door and scratching the wall. Shan understands that his colleagues treat him this way because he is racially different, as he tells the narrator, "They ask me [to move to a separate room] because I was a foreigner. I was different. […] They punish you for being different" (73). Although Shan tries to assimilate into the group of his white colleagues, they still view him as the other and exclude him from their group. As critiqued by Lowe, this negative attitude towards Asian immigrants as a whole partially stems from the legalization of immigration laws which barred Asians from American national sphere as discussed above. In addition, the American involvement in the Indochina War also intensified their image as the "other" of Southeast Asians in the United States. *The Coffin Tree* is set during the transition from the 1960s to 1970s, during which the United States fully stepped in the Indochina War. Based on Lowe's argument, the exclusion and mistreatment of Shan by his white colleagues has a root from racial ideology instigated by the war. Although he is from Burma, which is outside the Indochina War theater, the homogenization of Asians causes him to be racially othered and excluded.

Shan suffers from not only being racially othered but also being sexualized. His white male colleagues feminize, emasculate, and rape him. Returning to the narrator with psychological breakdown, he tells her, "They raped me, you know" (73). This sexual abuse indicates that racism and sexuality are employed by his colleagues in undermining Shan's masculinity, as he is treated as the weak, the feminine, and the submissive. In *Racial Castration* (2001), David Eng maintains that the Eastern world is a place for sexual fantasy in Westerners'

imagination. Oriental males, in particular, are viewed as weaker than Western males, and are endowed with feminine quality. Moreover, when coming to the United States, "Asian American males are both materially and psychologically feminized within the context of a larger U.S. cultural imaginary" (2). In analyzing David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, Eng argues that in the context of Western colonialism while Gallimard, a French diplomat, is indulging in sexual affair with Song Liling, who is a Chinese man, Song is ideologically and psychologically castrated. As stated by Hwang, Gallimard places Song "in a position of lesser masculinity to secure for himself a position of greater masculinity" (151). Ideas from both Eng and Hwang suggest that in Western colonial imagination, an oriental man will never be endowed with full masculinity. As Cheung puts it, "Asian American as a whole is still a literature of internal colonization" (*An Interethnic* 24). In a similar way, Jinqi Ling contends that the "emasculation of Asian American men is intimately associated with the rise of modern Western colonialism" (314). In addition, based on Orientalist discourse, "Asian and Asian American men […] have been 'feminized' in American popular culture" (Cheung, *Articulate* 2). Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, as a subfield of Asian American literature, also portrays Western imagination towards Southeast Asian males under the shadow of colonialism. In *The Coffin Tree,* it is obvious that Shan is racially castrated by his white colleagues who sexualize him, place him in a feminine status, and rape him. Although he is not a gay man, they deny his masculinity. According to Eng, Shan is "barred from the normative conceptions of masculinity legally defined as 'white'" (17). His white colleagues not only destroy his pride in his manliness but also inflict a malignant disease on him, which can be assumed from this context as HIV. After struggling with mental and physical damages for a while, Shan dies and leaves the narrator to face the harsh new world alone. He is victimized by the racist American context, which refuses to offer him a job near his

sister and thus forces him to go to Vermont and work with those racist colleagues, who punish him for being different by raping him. Through Shan's tragic story, *The Coffin Tree* suggests that Southeast Asian men, like the earlier Asian male immigrants, are excluded from American racial boundary and normative masculine sphere.

The death of her brother and then of her father in Burma, coupled with the harsh social context in the United States, have driven the narrator into psychological problems. The second half of the novel depicts her life at a mental asylum after being found that she tried to commit suicide by cutting her vein at one of her wrists. While racism in the United States takes her brother's life, the war against minorities in Burma kills her father, who is from an elite family but determined to fight for minority people in Burma in claiming social justice. It can be said that the death of her father also stems from racial issues. Therefore, the narrator's life is always involved with racial conflicts in both her homeland and the new world. It is ironic that while her father is putting a great effort in eradicating racialization in Burma, she and her half-brother are racialized in the United States. Nevertheless, all of them are unsuccessful in fighting against racialization and inevitably suffer its ultimate consequences.

Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature serves as an arena for its people to articulate conflicts and difficulties they encounter in the new world. Although these issues are not new, this type of literature reaffirms that most of Asian diasporic people have had to cope with them, no matter which parts of Asia they are from. The Indochinese refugees, albeit with their status as new immigrants compared with other groups of Asian immigrants, still have to endure discouraging situations stemming from racial ideology. Their experiences in the new world, coupled with the traumatic experiences from their home countries, informs their literature which becomes a new voice in Asian American literary field. This new voice has broadened the

field and introduced new characteristics and themes, which are discussed in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Conclusion: Southeast Asian American and Diasporic Literature as a New Voice in Asian American Literary Canon

From the first chapter until this final chapter, I have elaborated on the mutual legacies in heterogeneity of Southeast Asian diasporic people portrayed in their literature. As elaborated in my discussion, rice and Buddhist culture, colonialism and imperialism, wars and totalitarian regimes, and the social context in their new world play a significant role in configuring and reconfiguring the lives of these diasporic people. These cultural and social legacies significantly constitute their literature which offers new voices and themes in Asian American literary canon. Except the Filipino who arrived in the United States during the late nineteenth century, all other diasporic groups from Southeast Asia are considered new immigrants, as the majority of them set foot on the American land after 1975, the year when Communism took over South Vietnam. Southeast Asian diasporic writers present new voices in Asian American literature, offering new themes and stories to readers. The new voices and themes contributed by the post-1975 Southeast Asian American and diasporic writers can be seen through my discussions in the previous chapters, which address the issues of rice and Buddhism, colonialism, wars, totalitarian regimes, and refugee diaspora. The voices from the Indochinese refugees, Burmese refugees, and other groups of diasporic people from Southeast Asia diversify the existing voices in Asian American literature. The legacies they carry with them also instigate new themes which are unique to their group. The themes of rice and Buddhist culture, for example, are very distinctive from the existing themes of assimilation into new society and struggle against racism as presented in the broad area of Asian American literature. The culture of wet rice farming and

other cultural aspects derived from the consumption of rice as a staple in Southeast Asia are transformed into important themes such as the relationship between people in the rice culture community and the yearning for the return to rice culture in the homeland, as portrayed in Sudham's *Monsoon Country*, Cao's *Money Bridge*, and Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*. For the main characters in these writings, rice is an integral part of their existence and their struggles in both their homelands and the new world. Thanh, in *Monkey Bridge*, fails to resettle on the American land because she yearns for her Vietnamese rice culture. Similarly, Prem in *Monsoon Country* has to return to Thailand, a land of rice culture, since this culture persists in his imagination and begs him to return to his origin. These literary portrayals reflect that Southeast Asian diasporic people are intertwined with rice culture and other related cultural issues. Overall, this type of literature is largely informed by rice culture, which resides deeply in the authors' psyche.

Besides rice culture, the Theravada Buddhism also serves as an important cultural distinction of the mainland Southeast Asian and diasporic people from this region. Buddhist culture also becomes a significant constitution of their literature. As depicted in the primary texts in this dissertation, Theravada Buddhism plays a significant role in Southeast Asian society and functions as spiritual sustenance for people. In the literary aspect, some Buddhist concepts and beliefs are also employed as new themes in Asian American literature, such as the themes about karmic cosmos and the power of merit making. In Sudham's *Monsoon Country* and Siv's *Golden Bones*, the diasporic lives of the main characters are attributed to the karmic cosmos, in which they believe that they must have committed bad karma in this life or the previous life. For Siv, such karma results in the loss of his homeland and family, as well as the departure from his nation. The above two writings also indicate that merit making offers people a kind of spiritual

power to overcome suffering and difficulties they are encountering. The main characters believe that the power of merit will lead them to a happy life. Similar to rice culture, Theravada Buddhism intertwines with Southeast Asian diasporic people and becomes an integral part of their literature.

Another set of new themes that Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature contributes to the broad field of Asian American literature includes the themes of Indochina War, totalitarian regimes, and refugee diaspora. Based on my discussion in chapter four, which deals with wars, totalitarian regimes, diaspora, and trauma, these themes are very specific to Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Hmong refugees. While other groups of Asian immigrants enter the United States for other motives, such as seeking fortune or being forced to be migrant laborers, Indochinese refugees seek refuge in this country from wars and tyrannical persecution in their home countries. The incorporation of the themes mentioned above indicates that these people are more desperate than the previous groups of Asian immigrants, especially those who flee their countries due to economic conditions. As depicted in Lam's *Perfume Dreams*, the Vietnamese boat people, in particular, have been physically and mentally traumatized by series of tragic events—persecution by the communist regime in Vietnam, loss of family and home, perilous journey across the ocean, and difficulties in refugee camps. The story of the Nguyen gunmen clearly exemplifies the tragic and desperate lives of these people. The Nguyen family leaves their home and escapes from the Communist regime in North Vietnam to South Vietnam. After the fall of Saigon, they are captured and sent to labor camps before deciding to escape again as boat people risking their lives in a trans-ocean voyage. They have been through many stages of suffering which become deep traumas causing them to struggle with psychological threats leading to their shocking crime in Sacramento. Apart from the boat people from Vietnam,

refugees from Cambodia and Laos also suffer from similar situations. In Siv's *Golden Bones* and Chan's *Hmong Means Free*, the major characters have undergone the brutality of the Communist regimes in Cambodia and Laos before deciding to abandon their homelands. Through these writings, the themes of wars, totalitarian regimes, diaspora, and trauma reflect distinctive experiences of Indochinese refugees and at the same time diversify the existing themes in Asian American literature.

Based on my research on Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature as well as the discussion in the previous chapter, most of the themes of wars, totalitarian regimes, and diaspora are presented in the form of autobiography. In this dissertation, Lam's *Perfume Dreams*, Siv's *Golden Bones*, and Chan's *Hmong Means Free* are autobiographical writings by Indochinese refugees offering their first-hand experiences. As discussed in the introduction, autobiography offers more sense of reality than fiction. Therefore, the portrayal of the incidents in these writings is very realistic. Apart from the authenticity, autobiography also functions as narrative of changes in a person's live. For this notion, Carolyn Barros defines autobiography as "narrative of transformation" or the act of someone telling someone else "something happened to *me*." In this sense, to write autobiography is to "inscribe the self as beginning, coming into conflict, and changing" (6 emphasis in original). The above autobiographies, according to this concept, function as narratives of transformation of their authors. Siv, Lam, and the Hmong authors narrate salient transformations in their lives, the life-or-death transformations which ultimately result in their new lives in the United States. Their writings present their lives from the beginning when they live tranquilly in their home countries. Then, the stories shift to the changing instigated by the wars and totalitarian regimes. This phase includes the loss of family and home and the departure from their homelands. Finally, their autobiographies present their

lives in the new world—the final phase of transformations—in which they need to struggle against the harsh conditions in the new society and environment. This series of events becomes the common structure of the above autobiographies. Since the transformations in their lives are extreme, these Indochinese authors desire to, based on Barros' idea, tell someone what happened to them. Autobiography is marked as a means for them to tell their stories in a realistic manner. These authors, as the real, are transformed into personae in their life writings.

In fact, many writings by Indochinese diasporic authors, apart from those discussed in this dissertation, are in the form of autobiography. These include Jade Ngoc Quang Huynh's *South Wind Changing*, which was the Time Magazine's best book of 1994 and Qui Duc Nguyen's *Where the Ashes Are*, which was published in the same year. Both of them portray the diasporic lives of the authors who suffer from the war and the Communist regime before escaping as boat people to the United States. Apart from these books, *The Far East Comes Near* (1989) edited Lucy Hong and Nhiem Nguyen is also in the form of autobiographical writing, recounting the tedious and perilous journeys of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees. The question posed here is why the themes of wars, totalitarian regimes, and diaspora are mostly presented in autobiographical forms? To use a theory of trauma in explaining this, it can be said that writing autobiographies serves as a way for these writers, who have been through many traumatic events, to cope with their trauma. Telling one's own stories is marked as an important process of recovery, as it is a form of restoration and healing of the mind. Herman explains that those who suffer from trauma "need to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and the future" (2). That is to say, to get over the traumatic memory and build the present and the future, traumatized people have to understand the roots of their trauma as well as to make sense of it.

For Indochinese refugees, writing autobiographies offers them opportunities to rediscover their past and to better understand their trauma which will lead to their recovery and normal lives.

In addition to the autobiographies by the refugee authors mentioned above, Sudham's *Monsoon Country* represents another interesting aspect of Southeast Asian people. This semi-autobiography does not represent refugees' lives, but farmers' lives in Thailand. However, this work shares an important similarity with writings by the above authors, as it presents the difficulty of the indigenous' lives or, more directly, lives of farmers. They have to struggle against harsh natural conditions, especially drought which makes their farming impossible. More terribly, those farmers are exploited by middlemen who gain wealth by appropriating their surplus. In a similar way, Bulosan's autobiography, *America Is in the Heart*, portrays the lives farmers in the Philippines who have to fight against harsh natural conditions and the exploitation by landlords. While farmers in these two books struggle against such conditions, the refugees in the previous books encounter similar situations but in a considerably higher degree. They have to struggle with the oppression and persecution by the totalitarian regimes that dehumanize them. Overall, this group of autobiographies represents traumatic experiences of the authors. All of them have deep wounds that need to be healed. This is a reason why they write autobiography; they have to revisit their past in order to recover.

Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature not only contributes new voices and themes to the big field of Asian American literature, but also serves as an intersection of identity, racialization, and class and gender conflicts. In fact, Asian American criticism itself, which serves as a significant tool in analyzing Asian American literature, has expanded its area to encompass many more issues, as Lee comments, "Although Asian American criticism, like other minority literature scholarship, began with race as its pivotal lens of analysis, it has moved

beyond the category of race to examine other social categorizations and institutions such as gender, class, sexuality, nation, capital, labor, and globalism" (2). This argument suggests that Asian American literature has also moved beyond the issue of race and addresses other social conflicts. Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, as part of the broad field, also breaks the boundary of the race issue. I have already elaborated on the conflict of identity in the previous section, in which characters in this literary genre reflect how diasporic people from Southeast Asia struggle with such conflict. Racialization of this group of people results from the conflict of identity. Since the identity of these people is marked as the other, they are racialized and excluded from the body of the nation of their destination. As explained by Michael Omni and Howard Winant, racial formation, or the way different groups of people are categorized according to their races, is determined by several forces. They define racial formation as "The process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by social meanings" (61). Through this definition, different racial groups have unequal rights to benefit from resources, political power, and social relations. In the history of the United States, "state racial policy's main objective was repression and exclusion" (Omni and Winant 75). Southeast Asian diasporic people cannot avoid being victimized by this racial formation. They are excluded from the American national sphere and treated with racial ideology. For instance, in *America Is in the Heart*, Bulosan and other Filipinos are racialized, mistreated, and exploited by Americans who view them as lower class people. American capitalists who own agricultural sites, in particular, take advantage of their minority status, limiting their rights in the workplace and preventing them from improving their lives. What this racialized group is encountering is in agreement with Omni and Winant's argument that "either capitalists or white workers 'gain' what minority workers 'lose'" (37). For

Filipinos in particular, they are extremely exploited through capitalism and racism, as Viet Thanh Nguyen argues, "Because their labor was inexpensive and the humanity was in question, Filipinos Americans' lives were, according to Bulosan, 'cheaper than those dogs'" (68). The oppression and exploitation of Filipino, as well as other racialized groups, lead to class struggle; Bulosan, his Filipino fellows, and other groups who are victimized by the oppressive system establish the union to fight against oppression and exploitation. For Bulosan, writing becomes an important tool for him to condemn the social injustice instigated by capitalists and racist white Americans, ask for rights and humanity, and inscribe the history of his struggle.

In the same direction, Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree* also portrays the Burmese characters' struggle with harsh conditions as a result of racial ideology in the United States, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter. The narrator is denied work sphere because she does not belong to the privileged white group. Her identity as a racialized female in a white dominant society places her at the lowest rung of the social ladder. She is oppressed by both racial and sexual ideologies. In addition, the raping of Shan, the narrator's brother in this novel, suggests that Southeast Asian men are emasculated and undermined through sexual and colonial ideology, since he is an oriental man on the Western dominating land. As can be seen through the texts discussed above, identity, racialization, class struggle, and sexuality are intertwined in Southeast Asian American and Diasporic literature.

As discussed in the first chapter, the primary texts in this dissertation are largely constructed by the authors' memories of homelands. Rather than focusing on their lives in the new world, which is an important character of Asian American literature in the earlier age, when the writers sought inclusion in American society, these authors focus on the context in their home countries. This is marked as a prominent characteristic of Southeast Asian American and

diasporic literature, which signifies that a new trend of Asian American literature is also practiced in the subfield of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature. This evolution agrees with Cheung's argument saying that the trend of Asian American literature is shifting from claiming "America to forging a connection between Asia and Asian America" (*An Interethnic* 1). Unlike the trend in the earlier stage, in which Asian American writers employed literature as a means to claim that they are fully American and want to be included as Americans, this new trend serves as a bridge to connect their Southeast Asian identity with the new identity as Southeast Asian American. The representation of their rice and Buddhist culture, as well as other memories of their homelands, indicates that they want to maintain their old identities instead of abandoning them and fully claiming a new identity. Through their writings, they urge the new world to recognize and accept them with their old identities. In this way, these authors connect their old world with the new world, asking the new world to understand their initial beings and embrace them as they are into the mainstream society.

Another important strategy that Southeast Asian American and diasporic authors employ in asserting their old identity has to do with the use of native languages in their English writings. Incorporating their own languages also characterizes the uniqueness of their literature. While English is used as the major language in narrating the stories, Southeast Asian native languages are inserted in several literary works. Siv, for example, uses the Khmer word *Mae* every time he refers to his mother and occasionally inserts other Khmer words, phrases, or sentences in his writing. Although his Khmer language is a language of a minority group in the United States, he takes pride in and exhibits it in his writing. This language is part of his identity, existing in his body in both his past in his homeland and his present in the new world. The use of his Khmer language indicates that he insists on preserving his old identity while embracing a new identity

as a Cambodian American man. The use of the word *Mae* not only emphasizes his pride in his Khmer language but also indicates that he desires to show intimacy between him and his mother. Using the word *Mae* brings him closer to his mother who has passed away during the Khmer Rouge regime. Siv has a choice to use the word "mother," but it is a foreign word and thus does not offer close proximity between him and his *Mae*. Using this word also helps to remind him that he belongs to the same group as his mother and other family members whom he has lost along with his homeland in Cambodia. Living in the United States, Siv employs Khmer language as a bridge to connect him with his old world and as a cultural marker to signify that he has arisen from the Cambodian root.

Somtow, another writer in this group, also inserts native language in his writing. In *Jasmine Nights*, a lot of Thai words are used to refer to cultural specific items or used in communication with cultural specific purposes. For instance, he uses the Thai word *Nam Pla* when referring to fish sauce, which is an item specific to Thai culinary and eating culture. In a similar way, Bulosan uses Tagalog, a Filipino native language, when he communicates with cultural specific purposes. In *America Is in the Heart*, he uses the word *Boogong* to refer to fermented fish, an important Filipino food which has a significant role in Filipino eating culture. He also uses the word *Carabao* in referring to water buffaloes, animals serving as important helping laborers in rice growing culture of the Filipino. These writers use native languages not only to assert their identity as Southeast Asian subjects but also to represent their distinctive cultures. Although they use English as a medium through which they transmit their stories, this language of Western people cannot adequately convey cultural meanings of the things they want to represent.

The use of native languages or dialects in Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature can also be analyzed through the lens of postcolonialism. There has been a struggle for decolonization by the colonized, and one of the significant strategies employed in this process is to deny the power of English, the language of the colonizer. Among the language issues, Madsen observes that the use of dialects is considered a form of power contest, as she writes:

> To deny the power of the English language is to deny the control of communication that is exerted by the metropolitan centre. Dialect, allusions, narrative intrusions, the refusal to translate key words, the strategic use of vernacular expression, the switching between languages or 'code switching' – all serve to undermine the assumption that English is an especially privileged agent of colonial control. (9)

As discussed in chapter three, Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature also functions as postcolonial literature, which serves as a means to resist the power of the colonizer. The use of dialects, as stated by Madsen, creates "resistant texts, texts that resist easy assimilation to a Western perspective" (9). The Southeast Asian diasporic writers studied in this dissertation have arisen from the colonial background, the past that leaves deep scars in their lives. While they are forced to abandon their homeland and assimilate to the new world, the world of their colonizers, they deny full assimilation through the use of dialects in their writing. In fact, not only Southeast Asian but also European immigrants have to assimilate into American society, as Piper puts it, "The notion of 'assimilation' was, for centuries, the focal point for American immigrants. Whether Swedish, Irish, French or the British, the idea of 'becoming American' meant leaving behind ethnic distinctions in order to embrace 'American' identity" (20-21). In spite of the desire for assimilation of all immigrants, the use of native languages indicates that Southeast Asian

diasporic writers refuse to fully assimilate as well as allow English, the language of the colonizer, to fully control their writing. Although they have to assimilate, they still resist the colonial power and desire to maintain their initial identity through the use of their native languages. In addition, since their languages as well as other cultural aspects have been suppressed by the language and cultures of the colonizer, those writers yearn to claim their cultural heritage, to emerge from the colonizer's control. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a leading African postcolonial scholar, states that writing in his native language also serves as a means to decolonize: "I believe that my writing the Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, and African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African people" (290). In the colonial aspect, Southeast Asian diasporic writers are not different from Ngugi, since their countries have been colonized. The use of dialects in their writing—despite English as the major language—serves as a tool in undermining the power of the colonizer's language. However, since they have moved to the countries where people use English as the major means of communication, they still have to write in English in order to reach larger groups of audience in those countries. Alongside this purpose, they present their native languages as cultural heritage which they carry with them to the new worlds. These languages also serves as an integral part of the new voice that Southeast Asian diasporic writers contribute to Asian American literary canon.

The intolerable conditions in their home countries as well as the perilous journey that Southeast Asian diasporic people have taken before resettling in the new world prove that they possess the quality of toughness and perseverance. Siv, for example, never surrenders to his destiny, even though he is amidst desperate conditions, as he says, "*I never gave up hope*" (275 emphasis in original). Hope encourages him to carry on his life in search for freedom from the

Khmer Rouge's persecution. These factors also support the survival of other groups, such as the Vietnamese boat people who sail across the ocean and the Hmong people who trek through the jungle to refugee camps in their neighboring countries. For the Filipinos, they also deserve profound admiration, as they are the very first group of Southeast Asians who arrive at the United States and fight against racism, classism, and capitalism. Carlos Bulosan, the author of *America Is in the Heart*, before becoming a celebrated writer, went through many stages of struggle against oppressive and racist society in both his homeland and the United States. Reflecting many significant dimensions of the Philippine and American societies, this autobiography has become legendary, as McWilliams maintains that it is "a social classic. It reflects the collective life experience of thousands of Filipino immigrants who were attracted to this country [the United States] by its legendary promises of a better life or who were recruited for employment here" (vii). In fact, all diasporic Southeast Asians share similar experience in the new world, which becomes one of their mutual legacies.

Surviving, Southeast Asian diasporic people employ literature as a canvas for them to draw, paint, and inscribe their history. That is to say, literature serves as a voice for them to represent themselves, since they are treated as a voiceless "subaltern" group, to borrow a term from Spivak, in the white dominant society. Although Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, as part of diasporic literature as a whole, is viewed as marginalized from the American canonical literature (Lim 290), it has its own values which contribute to both Asian American literature and the broad field of American literature. Apart from the new voice it contributes to the larger field of literature, it is also valuable in terms of historicization and cultural representation of Southeast Asia. The discussion in the previous chapters indicates that Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature represents rice and Buddhist culture and at the same

time provide the historical background of its people, telling stories of how they have become diasporic subjects.

The new voice that comes with Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature also helps celebrate the diversity in the literary canon and solidify the significance of diasporic literature. In the United States, in particular, diasporic literature should not be marginalized, since most of American citizens, based on the history, have arisen from the diasporic descent. As argued by Lim, "except for Native Americans, all Americans are descended from immigrant populations and are members of diasporas" (291). Undoubtedly, such members include white Europeans who have immigrated to the United States before the advent of Asian immigrants. Unfortunately, when white Europeans define themselves as the majority of the American nation, it seems that they ignore their diasporic background and treat other diasporic groups as well as diasporic literature as the marginalized. As stated by Feagin, white Americans have constructed racial hierarchy and white supremacy to alienate other racial groups from their national body. As the number of immigrants in the United States increased in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, white American officials put a great effort to segregate non-whites, including Asian Americans, from whites (85). This segregated group of people is also rendered voiceless, and their stories are ignored. There stories are always overshadowed by those of white Americans, as San Juan maintains, "Especially after the Civil War and the making of great fortunes in the late nineteenth-century period of industrialization, the history of the United States has been and continues to be narrated as the success story of white European immigrants" (*Racial Formation* 5). Although Southeast Asian immigrants, as part of the segregated group, also plays a significant role in constructing the American nation, their stories are rarely told and neglected by the mainstream. However, my dissertation has proved that this particular diasporic group

strongly aspires to tell their stories. Their literature serves as a significant channel for them to make themselves heard as well as to write their history in the new world. As argued by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, a main purpose of Asian American literature is "to ensure that Asian American voices are heard" (9). Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, as a subfield, essentially serves the same purpose.

The new voice of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature also creates a body of knowledge about its people, which is considered a way to contest the power of the white dominating groups who, according to Orientalist discourse, construct their superiority over Eastern people through epistemology. As contended by Said, Orientalism, a set of concepts and processes by which the East is created as inferior, is closely involved with "the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West" (*Orientalism* 40). That is to say, the inferiority of Eastern people is created by Western epistemology. This process has been operating in order to legitimize the colonization of the Eastern world by the West. The diaspora of Southeast Asian people, as discussed in chapters three and four, has an important root in Western colonialism and neocolonialism. The new and old forms of domination instigate wars and poverty in Southeast Asia, which force people to leave their homeland. Even though they have attained new identities in the new world, the image as subjects of colonized countries does not vanish from their body. In the case of Vietnamese refugees, they are still perceived as the other from the land of a lengthy war. As evinced in *Perfume Dreams*, Lam, the author with Vietnamese blood, is still viewed as a product of the war: "Refugee boy, which side were you on? The winner's or the loser's?" (61). It is known that Vietnam War was the battle between North Vietnam and South Vietnam, with the United States and Soviet Union as the superpowers behind the curtain. The war ended with the defeat of South

Vietnam after the retreat of the American. Lam and other Vietnamese diasporic people are branded with the image of refugees through Western media—news, TV programs, movies, and other forms of media. Lam mentions in his book that several Hollywood movies intensify the Vietnamese brand of the war: "As Rambo shooting down faceless Vietnamese and sleeping with the beautiful and mysterious Miss Saigon, Stallone led us to believe that he had single-handedly won the lost war for America and restored its pride. Audience cheered him on" (95). The representation of the Vietnamese through Hollywood movies is in agreement with Said's critique of the representation of Arab people in Western films and television. Through Western media, Arabs become figures of terrorists: "the image leads to the fear that Muslims will take over the world" (*Orientalism* 287). Such image is constructed to legitimize the invasion of their countries by the West; it promotes the sense that countries in the Middle East need to be controlled. In a similar way, the portrayal of the Vietnamese in Hollywood movies instigates negative attitudes towards people in Vietnam as well as Vietnamese diasporic subjects. Movies seems to be highly effective tools in representing different groups of people in either positive or negative ways; this form of media, as stated by Jessica Hagedorn, has a great influence on both literate and illiterate people; audiences are not required to read or write in order to consume the text (*Charlie Chan* xxi). Through the representation in the movie, stereotype or attitudes toward different groups of people are constructed. In fact, the image of colonized countries, no matter where they are, Africa or Asia, is created through Western imagination, which Hagedorn refers to as "colonization of imagination" (*Charlie Chan* xxii). For Africa, it never possesses a power in creating its own image, as Chinua Achebe argues, "It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination" (17). Said, Hagedorn, and Achebe all suggest that the colonized

countries are always painted by the predominant Western epistemology through literature in the forms of written texts as well as movies.

While Hollywood movies, as a form of Western epistemology, represent Vietnam as a land of legendary wars, Lam as well as Cao, another Vietnamese author in this dissertation, present another dimension of the same issue through literary voice. Their works indicate that it is the West that causes the catastrophe in Vietnam. As evident in their literature, Indochinese diasporic people do not deny their identity as refugees, but argue that an important culprit of wars in their countries which lead to their diaspora has to do with Western colonialism and neocolonialism. The wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos all stemmed from the desire for decolonization, the desire to be liberated, as discussed in the historical context of Southeast Asia in chapter one. For Southeast Asian diasporic people, consequently, their literature is considered a form of epistemology employed in creating knowledge about themselves and writing their own history, in order to contest Western epistemology. In addition, it is also marked as a form of power negotiation and a counter-discourse of Orientalism. While Innes argues that colonial subjects desire to speak for themselves in order to portray colonial encounter and consequences, moving toward self-governing (4-5), Tiffin also contends that those subjects employ literature as "counter-discursive strategies" in dismantling the concepts of the local created by the colonizer (98). In a similar way, Boehmer argues that "Counter-discursive strategies empowered the colonized to convert damaging stereotypes into positive images: to intrude upon and convert colonialist genres, to recover a displaced and fragmented native cultural integrity" (qtd. in Madsen 8-9). Based on these concepts, writing becomes a significant tool for Southeast Asian diasporic subjects in refuting the colonial notion about themselves and representation of their

homelands and people as shown in Western media. Based on this characteristic, Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature also functions as postcolonial literature.

Besides having an important characteristic of postcolonial literature, the new voice of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature as a subfield of Asian American literature is also heterogeneous by nature, since it is constituted by writers of various ethnical, national, and cultural backgrounds. In addition, this field of literature is still growing; it "is still being written—an unclosed, unfixed body of work whose centers and orthodoxies shift as the makeup of the Asian-origin constituency shifts and within which new voices are continually being articulated" (qtd. in Lowe 53). The growing Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature has become part of literature that celebrates the heterogeneity in both societal and literary aspects. In the United States, Asian Americans have been homogenized and misunderstood by the mainstream: "The [Asian American] sensibility that we share is not one that springs from our own cultures but from our shared experience of having our cultures misunderstood and lumped together" (qtd. in Dave 661). Therefore another important function of Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature is to dismantle this fallacy by voicing out the true concept about its people and culture.

Lim and Ling argue that "The term 'Asian American' implies a homogeneity of people and of purpose; in fact, it elides highly disparate peoples of different races and with diverse languages, religions, and cultural and national backgrounds" (3-4). Asian American body is derived from the "tension between American racism's efforts to construct Asians as a singular body and the Asian American response that there are instead multiple ones" (qtd. in Chiu 13). In other words, there is an attempt of Asian American subjects to assert their heterogeneity, resisting the force of the mainstream that tries to homogenize them. Southeast Asian diasporic

people, through their literature, are described by this concept of diversity. Apart from the heterogeneity in ethnical and cultural aspects, the literature of this group of people is also diverse, as it represents voices of different ethnic groups with different backgrounds from Southeast Asia, which contribute to the diversity and complexity of Asian American as a whole. Lim and Ling also discuss the diversity of Asian American literature, contending, "the diversity and range of subjects, critical stances, styles, concerns, and theoretical grids [compel] the heterogeneous, multiple, divergent, polyphonic, multivocal character of Asian American cultural discourse" (9). In a similar way, Ghymn, in her study of Asian American literary style and aesthetics, argues that "It is a fallacy to put all Asian American authors and audiences into one mold because there are important differences based on factors such as nationality and generation" (117). Southeast Asian American and diasporic literature, under the umbrella of the broad field of Asian American literature, is also characterized by the concepts above. Alongside the concept of heterogeneity, this type of literature reveals the mutual legacies which shape the lives of Southeast Asian diasporic people and the societies of their homelands. The mutual legacies of Southeast Asian American and diasporic people serve as an integral part of the heterogeneity of Asian American people as a whole. At the same time, their literature also constitutes the heterogeneity of the Asian American literature as a larger literary field.

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