When Third-World Expatriate Meets First-World Peace Corps Worker: Diaspora Reconsidered in Shirley Lim’s *Joss and Gold*

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Abstract
This paper addresses the undoing of hierarchies in the context of the Chinese diaspora. In Shirley Lim’s novel, *Joss and Gold*, the race riots that occurred in Malaysia on May 13, 1969 serve as a pivotal event that thereafter disperses all the characters to various places. Li An, the female protagonist, succeeds in her career and satisfactorily settles herself in Singapore, while the male protagonist, Chester Brookfield, arrives in and departs from Malaysia as a confused and naïve American; instead of “rescuing” anyone in Asia, he finally finds his salvation through fatherhood in Singapore. When the third-world expatriate meets the first-world Peace Corps worker, the images of the vulnerable East and the heroic West are demystified, the impracticality and institutionalization of academic studies in the humanities are exposed, open family kinships that disregard blood relations are created, and virtues such as forgiveness, mutual understanding and support are exalted. Diaspora as such proves to be not a forced and tragic leaving of one’s home, but a saving grace for many of the characters. Lim has treated her diasporic characters with leniency, but several questions raised in this book are critical and sharp.

Keywords
Asian American literature, diaspora, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, *Joss and Gold*, East and West
Oh, East is East, and West is West,  
and never the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great  
Judgment Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West, Border,  
nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face,  
 tho' they come from the ends of the earth!  
—Rudyard Kipling, “The Ballad  
of East and West”

When English novelist Rudyard Kipling lamented in the end of the nineteenth century the incompatibility of the East and the West, he hardly expected the interaction between the East and the West to be so astonishingly vigorous in the following century, or that once this interaction started, it would never stop. In fact the contact between East and West, even though inscribed by innumerable invasions, occupations, colonizations and incidents of suppression and resistance that led in many cases to cultural extermination and the loss of human life, did not portend an end to but rather a spanning of the world: continents connected, languages translated, races mixed, and differences obscured. In terms of world history and geography, Southeast Asia has been caught up in a dynamic contention between East and West, featuring foreign domination and local revolution. Enticed variously by economic governance, imperial conceit and capitalistic politics, different foreign regimes, Eastern and Western, including those of Portugal, Holland, Great Britain, Japan, Spain, and America, have intruded into and claimed sovereignty over Southeast Asian nations. Frequent transfers of political power have resulted in tremendous racial, linguistic and cultural variety, and therefore in incessant social fluctuation compelled by interior and exterior conflicts. Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s novel Joss and Gold, a work set in Southeast Asia and the U.S., embroiders various historical events and myths to present an allegory of this epic interaction between the East and the West. In addition, though diaspora, as exemplified by the Jewish diaspora, mostly suggests a sense of alienation, the pain of loss, marginality, discrimination and exploitation, Joss and Gold reconsiders the conventional meanings of diaspora and presents a version of the diasporic experience which emphasizes placement rather than displacement, advancement rather than confinement, affiliation rather than dissociation.

1 William Safran considers the Jewish diaspora the “ideal type” of diasporic experiences. He asserts: “through the ages, the Diaspora had a very specific meaning: the exile of the Jews from their historic
In the novel, the race riots that occurred in Malaysia on May 13, 1969, serve as a pivotal event, one that thereafter disperses the characters throughout the world. The female protagonist, the Chinese Malaysian Li An, leaves Malaysia after giving birth to her daughter, a child conceived adulterously on the day of the riots; she finds shelter and professional success in Singapore, a prospering country gradually upgrading itself from a third-world weakling to a strong player in the world economy. The male protagonist, Chester Brookfield, biological father of Li An’s child, with all the superior trappings of a Princeton graduate, anthropology major and American Peace Corps volunteer, arrives in Malaysia believing he will be helpful to the needs of third-world people, but departs after May 13, returning as a still naïve and confused person to America, where he marries. Vexed by marital frustrations, he returns after 12 years to find Li An, and finally in Singapore redeems his fatherhood.

The association between Li An and Chester is literally an extra-marital affair but allegorically the site of contact and contention between different cultural, racial and national forces. The pair are first attracted to each other, ironically in a quite superficial way by the cultures they respectively represent. Respecting Malay culture as “the only real culture” in Malaysia (33), Chester can read Malay better than Li An can, and in Li An’s eyes could “have been Malay in another life” (54). However, Chester is but a visitor, and this trip to the East is in reality his escape from a sense of bewilderment as a young man in the States; it is a journey sanctified by the humanistic mission of the homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands, signifying as well the oppression and moral degradation implied by that dispersion” (83). He also specifies the characteristics of the members of expatriate minority communities:

(1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original “center” to two or more “peripheral,” or foreign, regions; (2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; (3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; (4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; (5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and (6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (83-84)

In fact, Safran’s proposal of the diaspora paradigm has undergone revisions by different theorists from various perspectives. As James Clifford comments, “Diasporic subjects are, thus, distinct versions of modern, transnational, intercultural experience. Thus historicized, diaspora cannot become a master trope or ‘figure’ for modern, complex, or positional identities, crosscut and displaced by race, sex, gender, class, and culture” (319).
Peace Corps. He admits later: “I was very young then, looking for adventure—you know, fun, tropical paradise” (157). As a Malay friend, Abdullah, perceives: “He try [sic] to be Malaysian, but it’s only playing. He’s not serious” (62).

In fact, Chester’s understanding of the racial and political situation in Malaysia is shaped by his American ideology. The death of Li An’s confidante, Gina, who commits suicide because her Chinese family cannot agree to her romance with an Indian man, provides an example. Gina’s death results from a convergence of longtime strife among different races and cultures in Malaysia, but Chester considers it solely a reflection of Gina’s “Electra complex,” a comment innocent of local context and tainted by Western centrism. Besides, Chester has advocated that Li An, then a university English department tutor, teach the literature of her own culture rather than British culture. He questions Li An in a despising tone, “What can your students learn from this?” (32). In Chester’s opinion, English is the “language of the bastards” (37), in the West imposed on the British colonies in America and in the East on the British colony of Malaysia. Therefore Chester believes that the use of English signifies the disgrace of losing one’s originality and autonomy. Yet Chester is unaware that while he is urging Li An to forego British dominance, he is at the same time promoting American ideology in Malaysia. Language here reveals itself to be where Western influence, loaded with the prospect to transmit cultural and political power, contends with local resistance.

Chester once says to Li An, “You don’t understand. I’m just visiting. I don’t live here. Hell, I don’t want to be responsible for anything here. In the Peace Corps we’re not supposed to interfere with a country’s politics” (37). Therefore it is not surprising that after May 13, Chester decides to cut short his stay in Malaysia. Like other visitors, he is free to come and go at will. Chester comes as a tourist instead of an explorer, so his attempt to participate in Malaysian culture is merely contingent, without depth, and is aborted right after the Malaysian national crisis. Jennifer Craik notes that tourists continue to indulge in the myth of the Other offered by tourism—and signaled in terms such as primitive, native, exotic and different. [...] Although tourists think they want authenticity, most want some degree of negotiated experiences which provide a tourist “bubble” (a safe, controlled environment) out of which they can selectively step to “sample” predictable forms of experiences. (115)

Chester’s involvement with the Malaysian culture is skin-deep, a form of superficial
mimicry. The “bubble” in which Chester dwells is his fantasy of Malaysia as a “tropical paradise.” Once the bubble is gone, his visit will be terminated. Rudolphus Teeuwen, targeting the tourist’s lack of solid understanding of and sincere concern for the place and people that he or she visits, regards the tourist’s “luck” in being able to get away as “a sign of naïveté” or of “shamelessness” (5). Chester is also what Lim categorizes in a critical essay as “the first-world expatriate,” for whom expatriation is “a privilege” and “homecoming is always possible” (“First-World ‘Expats’” 13).

Li An has a crush on Chester for the “Americanness” that he represents. She has long been dreaming of going to America: “Why not America? Isn’t that where everything is happening?” (11). To Li An, America is a symbol of hope, fun and escape from the dullness, arrogance and idiosyncrasy of Malaysia. For her Chester embodies everything American and shows up in her life like the answer to her dreams: “He seemed to her rich in experience, a prince passing through, while she was a frog sitting in a well” (38). Ironically, Li An does not know that Chester is in fact a wanderer urged to embark on a journey by his sense of restlessness and sense of loss in the place that he stays. Rather than a Prince Charming who is just stopping by, he is actually a gullible “Gulliver”—earnestly desiring a journey in order to escape from dissatisfaction with his current life, easily fascinated with and credulous of the exotic culture on a superficial level, and then quick to leave the visited country in disillusionment and melancholy to return to his native land in confusion and gloom. Li An has mistaken Chester for her agent of salvation; nevertheless, he is the one who needs help to get out of “the well” of dislocation, fragmentation, and disorientation. May 13 is a turning point in this fiction. Afterwards, Chester decides to move on to his next post to continue his pursuit of self-knowledge, and Li An, after giving birth to Suyin and being divorced by her husband Henry, moves to Singapore to escape social stigmatization and start a new life. In comparison to Chester who is a “first-world expatriate,” Li An becomes a “third-world expatriate” who withdraws from her native country upon recognizing these historical discontinuities and the psychological violence visited on whole groups of people through the tragic course of wars, famine, and economic dislocations” (Lim, “First-World ‘Expats’” 17).

Just as Chester’s and Li An’s understanding of each other is based on artificial constructions of the East and the West, so is their “illegitimate” child, Suyin. Suyin keeps Henry’s last name, “Yeh,” but her physical features are too visibly mixed-blood. Her allegorical significance is reflected self-evidently by her nicknames in school: “So-ying-yang,” “Sue-ing you,” and “Sinner Yeh.” She is a “chap cheng kwei”—a
“mixed-up devil” in the kids’ eyes (174). Suyin is discriminated against for two reasons: she comes from a family with no male patriarch, and she carries the features of two races, Chinese and Caucasian, an obvious taboo in the male-centered and Asian-centric society of Singapore. She combines the extremes of yin and yang, the seemingly incompatible elements of East and West, and therefore she is deemed a fruit of “sin.” Suyin grows up in a household with three “mothers”: Li An, Suyin’s biological mother; Grandma Yeh, Henry’s stepmother; and Ellen, Li An’s unmarried confidante who moves to Singapore with Li An and shares the responsibility of parenthood with her. The intimate bond among these female characters is marked. Even though Suyin is well taken care of and receives abundant attention and love, she cannot escape society’s derision until, unexpectedly, both Henry and Chester come to claim fatherhood at almost the same time. Chester arrives with a biological motive: he wants to rebuild connections with people after fulfilling the request of his American wife Meryl to have a vasectomy; Henry comes out of legal necessity: to attend the funeral of Grandma Yeh and to help Suyin secure her inheritance from her grandmother. Even though Suyin has been nurtured by all the impressively competent women in this novel, she can only be saved from her illegitimate status in society with help of the men. If Suyin has too many mothers and no father at the beginning, now after the death of Grandma Yeh she seems to reach a state of parental balance with two fathers and two mothers:

Grandma’s death seemed to have opened the door to a weird parallel world in which all kinds of relatives were possible. [...] Perhaps that was what it was to be a chap cheng kwei, to have all these strange relatives whose existence she had never known, living in Kuala Lumpur, in Singapore, in America. Here, there, and everywhere. (255)

After the appearance of Chester and Henry, Suyin is a sinner no more. Symbolically, this balance of ying and yang, with parents both male and female, and support from both the East and the West, helps her foster a legitimate societal identity in Singapore. The resolution of Suyin’s identity seems to resolve many conflicts in the novel. Her acceptance in Singaporean society demystifies the possibility of there being “a single people” in Malaysia. With the reality that Malaysia is composed of persons of many different races, the advocacy of “a single people” has been seen to imply exclusion and violence, with the May 13 event as the best example. Lin An has foreseen
the need to connect different races and cultures in order to dissolve conflicts: “For separation to be nurtured, there couldn’t be the possibility of love. Love broke down the purity of a vision of singleness. Hatred, then, was preferable to the breaking of the single self, to the possibility of a tearing down of race” (71). Li An, Henry and Chester are all allegorical characters in the novel who endeavor to “connect”: Li An through literature, which communicates feelings in words; Henry through chemistry, which combines different elements through chemical action; and Chester through woodcraft, which pieces things together without screws. However, Li An’s marriage with Henry does not work out; nor does her romance with Chester last. Not until she reconciles with both Henry and Chester, and allegorically not until the East reaches harmony with the West, can Suyin, the product combining the strengths of East and West, stop being an anomaly, a “chap cheng kwei.”

Ironically, this acceptance of individuals of different races in the same society seems to be realized only outside Malaysia. All the people involved in the story leave Malaysia after the May 13 riots: Chester for America, Henry for Germany, Li An and Ellen for Singapore, Muslim radical like Abdullah for Oxford, and Gina’s boyfriend Paroo for Singapore. The virtue of being able to stay away also helps the characters discontinue their conflicts with each other. Diaspora offers them a chance to temporarily escape the chaotic mess of contemporary life. Indeed, they represent a microcosm of post-May 13 Malaysia: people leaving for different places in the world—Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and so many other destinations—to escape racial hegemony and cultural bigotry. Then, twelve years after 1969 (a complete cycle according to the Chinese zodiac), all the characters meet again in Singapore, a city-state with a tolerance for different Asian races and an ability to accommodate different ethnic cultures, and certainly the ideal place for their reunion and reconciliation.

As the allegorical site for resolving the conflicts among these characters, Singapore however also embodies mercantile obsession. One of the “four Asian tigers” in the 1990s, this city-state is a promising land of opportunities in Southeast Asia. As Suyin says, “Singapore is money and home” (233). In other words, the guarantee of financial security, rather than birthplace or racial origin, determines where one’s home should be. As Doreen Massey notes: “The vast current reorganizations of capital, the formation of a new global space, and in particular its use of new technologies of communication, have undermined an older sense of a ‘place-called-home,’ and left us placeless and disoriented” (7-8). During the last two decades of the twentieth century, in an era of world economic explosion, Western imperialist and capitalist powers
successfully abolished the isolation and exclusion of the East, and interaction between the East and the West throve—especially in the economic sphere. However, underneath this glossy international success story lay a concern felt by many for the diminishment of human values. In Lim’s novel we find this description of the new image of Singapore and Malaysia:

Like Singapore, Kuala Lumpur has become a stony paradise. Concrete shelters—bungalows and two-storied terraces, flats and projecting condominiums—everything gated, walled, and fenced, a crazy territorial imperative where the sun and rain blasted everything into a green fungus frenzy. (171-72)

Territorial boundaries between nations may have become blurred, but psychological barriers between and among people within the nation are reconstructed as human civilization, which is pushed forward by the hand of capitalism in the name of progress and better life. When Chester returns to the East, racial contention has subsided (if not disappeared) by virtue of the statewide endeavor to make money. Li An, who used to write and appreciate poetry, is now like everyone else “trying to make a buck” (183). Her talent with language is now used for the production of business propaganda. Money talks, and literature is hushed. It is ironic that Henry reunites with his “daughter” Suyin also for monetary reasons—to help Suyin deal with her inheritance from Grandma Yeh. Family relationships are thus retrieved, recreated and demystified—all by money.

In Joss and Gold, Suyin’s relatives are kins more in a cultural than in a natural sense: Henry as father, Ellen as mother, and Mrs. Yeh as grandmother. When Suyin anxiously asks Ellen how to practice ancestor worship like others, Ellen simply replies: “You don’t have to do ancestor worship!” (195). The title of the novel, Joss and Gold, as Lim explains in an interview, pulls “two things together that are very important to the Chinese, ‘joss’ in terms of prayer and ‘gold’ in terms of money. [...] One has to do with worship and the past, particularly ancestral worship; the other has to do with the present and the future, working and hoping for gold” (Chang 239). However, ancestral worship in this book is more institutional than natural. In Suyin’s case, she does not have a specific ancestor she can burn the joss for, and since the decision as to whether she will stay in Singapore or leave for America lies in her own hand, the gold that she will pursue does not come from the blessing of an ancestor but from her own will.
Liew Geok Leong points out in the novel’s “Afterword” that *Joss and Gold* “interrogates stereotypes of Asian women and their identities, and provides a provocative alternative of the Madame Butterfly myth” (267). In the novel, Meryl drags Chester into the opera house to listen to Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, and he notes the “obscenity of the pathos” in the opera:

This was the West’s degradation of Asia, the imago of what had gone wrong in Vietnam. Asia was independent of the West, had been independent for centuries, did not need America to know itself. [...] Fantasies of their desire for us, our desire for them, grew, until the young Hmongs in their new American homes died of fear of images coming alive from their television screen, and the arias of an Asian woman dying over a careless American man sickened him. (202)

Chester detests this play because he knows he resembles the heartless Pinkerton who deserts Madame Butterfly. He knows the West has exploited the East, and is aware of his participation in the exploitation. Chester first comes to the East pursuing the very fantasy disclosed in *Madama Butterfly*: the notion of the first-world Peace Corps Volunteer aiding helpless third-world people. But ironically, he really comes to Malaysia because he feels lost and unsure of his future; his reason for joining the Peace Corps is not to help the people of Malaysia but to help himself. No wonder after he cuts short his service and returns to the States, he always feels “uneasy to think of his Peace Corps year again” (110); he is aware that he did not help but instead left a problem there.

A few years later, Chester goes to the East for the second time, ostensibly for anthropological research in Bali but in reality to escape his American marriage. Initially he is unsure whether he should marry Meryl, though she keeps pushing him to do it. Meryl says, “Why don’t you grow up, Chester?” (149). Chester’s problem is that he does not know how to face his responsibilities. Meryl finally succeeds in dragging him to the altar, which brings Chester relief, but marriage leaves his problem unsolved. As Meryl says, “you’ve never known what you want” (150), a question resonating like a variation on Freud’s archetypal question, “What does a woman want?” In order to “know,” Chester resumes his intellectual training in academia. He takes courses on ethnocentrism and Asian culture, and after a few years becomes a sociology professor. After his vasectomy he decides to go to find Li An—again in the name of research—
but the real purpose is totally selfish: to reunite with his illegitimate child. A paradox revealed in Chester’s return to the East is that, as a “big shot professor” in cultural studies, he appears sterile in his attempts to apply his professional expertise to his understanding of people in Singapore. He tells Li An: “I’m here to do research, a funded project. I’m looking at cultural transformations when populations move from rural to urban, and from industrial to technological bases, and what communication networks accompany shifts in kinship structures, [...]]” (204). Every word in this statement rings with satirical twist because Chester has separated his life experience from his academic knowledge so completely that he is totally unprepared for the new image of Asia that he is going to meet. This pilgrimage to Singapore changes him: he is not the white man coming to show his superiority and generosity to third-world people, nor is Li An the pathetic Asian woman at the mercy of his charity. The situation has been reversed. The new image of the East—rich, prosperous, active and full of opportunity and hope—has gradually begun to influence the West. Ironically, now it is the helpless and confused white man who comes to the East in pursuit of his salvation. As for Li An, after the birth of her daughter, salvation from social stigma and sense of loss no longer lies in the West, and it certainly does not lie in the myth that the reigning Western superpower will come to the rescue of the East. The destination of her expatriate’s exodus is not the West but the East—Singapore.

*Joss and Gold* perfectly demonstrates the global cultural flow delineated by Arjun Appadurai. Observing the unpredictability and discontinuity of global development, Appadurai has proposed a model for looking at the complex, overlapping and disjunctive order of global relationships in terms of five dimensions: *ethnoscape*, *mediascape*, *technoscape*, *financescape*, and *ideoscape*. Appadurai explains that the suffix “-scape”

allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles. These terms [...] are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements (whether religious, political, or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villagers, neighborhoods, and families. (33)
Joss and Gold richly presents us with an ethnoscape, as its characters include a moving group of tourists (Chester to Malaysia), immigrants (Henry to Germany), refugees (Li An to Singapore), exiles (Abdullah to the U.S.), and guest workers (Paroo to Singapore). They not only affect the national political dynamics (such as the monolithic policy of “national identity” in Malaysia) but reflect the international reality (and fantasy) of human motion. Joss and Gold also provides an examination of the technoscape, by which Appadurai means the fluid global configuration of technology: “the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (34). Interestingly, the “technology” featured in this novel is centered on Chester. During his first trip to Malaysia, Chester is asked to give up his plan to teach woodworking and instead to teach the world’s most popular international language, English, simply because he is an American. Then later, during his trip to Singapore, as an anthropology and sociology professor specializing in ethnocentrism and Asian culture, he arrives in the name of conducting research on the cultural transformations of the people of Southeast Asia; ironically, his academic learning proves too theoretical to be helpful in understanding Asians. The “low and high,” “informational and mechanical” technologies that Chester brings to and for the East (proficiency in English and analytical capability in ethnology) mark a problematic aspect of the technoscape, the flooding of technologies to a place where the technologies are unnecessary or impractical.

Furthermore, Joss and Gold maps a financescape where “global capital is now a more mysterious, rapid, and difficult landscape to follow than ever before, as currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations move megalomaries through national turnstiles at blinding speed, with vast, absolute implications for small differences in percentage points and time units” (Appadurai 34-35). In Suyin’s case, big money suddenly arrives from Grandma Yeh’s death, in cash and stocks. As the wealth comes hand in hand with her winning a legitimate father, the longtime social stigma that she has suffered is magically erased. The power of money is candidly and sarcastically disclosed here. As for the dimensions of mediascape and ideoscape, they converge in the new logo of the company where Li An works, BioSyn-Sign. Just as the mediascape tends toward “image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality” closely related to the media, the ideoscape is associated with concatenations of political images closely related to ideologies (Appadurai 35). The logo BioSyn-Sign pictures a juxtaposition of the dragon and the phoenix, “something European and
medieval, yet Chinese in origin” (259-60). It is a perfect image allying elements of both male and female, East and West, and tradition and modernity. At the same time it still represents an attractive product created, manufactured and circulated out of a desire for mercantile profit. *Joss and Gold* ends with hope for Suyin. She is free to choose, once she reaches adulthood at 16, whether to stay in the East or to venture forth to the West, but the future remains unpredictable as it is stalked by the impact of capitalism.

Appadurai’s landscapes are the building blocks of “imagined worlds,” that is, “the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (33). From the perspective of fluidity we see that people, technology, money, the meaning of images, and ideologies are all mobile. In *Joss and Gold*, this mobility is not a one-way movement. Even as people may travel from West to East, from East to West, or migrate within the East or the West, so do technologies, money, images, and ideologies. The cultural influences and effects undergo a two-way interaction. When Chester returns once more to the States, he not only returns as a transformed person but also brings with him new ideologies, and that is how we find “transnationalism” to be meaningful in *Joss and Gold*. E. San Juan has spoken against this transnationalism in discussing the situation of Filipino Americans:

> [T]he theory of Filipinos as “transnational migrants,” or transmigrants […] assumes that all nations or sovereign states are equal in power, status, and so on. […] It assumes the parity of colonized/dominated peoples and the U.S. nation-state in contemporary global capitalism. […] This is not a bipolar state oscillating between nostalgic nativism and coercive assimilation; it is a diasporic predicament born of the division of labor in the world system and the racialization of people of color by capital accumulation (158, 165).

San Juan, seeing the reality that no two nations are completely equal, warns us against any euphoric view of transnationalism. However, Appadurai points out that “the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes” (31). *Joss and Gold* proves that East and West will not only meet but will also interact, mingle, compete and cooperate on a transnational level.

When third-world expatriate meets first-world Peace Corps worker in *Joss and
Gold, images of the vulnerable East and the heroic West are demystified, and the Madame Butterfly myth is inverted. The impracticality and institutionalization of academic studies in the humanities are exposed. Open family kinships which disregard blood relations are created, and virtues such as forgiveness, mutual understanding and support are exalted. As a result, “diaspora” is not a forced and tragic decision to leave one’s home, but a saving grace for many of the characters in this novel. As Clifford observes:

Experiences of loss, marginality, and exile (differentially cushioned by class) are often reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension. (312)

Joss and Gold refutes the gender and cultural dichotomies of man and woman and of East and West. It is a work of transnationalism which describes “a nexus of translocal phenomena born out of the contemporary conjuncture of migrations, dislocations, cultural reformulation, flexible accumulation and mobility of capital and labour in association with the ‘hypermodernity’ of late capitalism” (Smart 57). If we categorize Joss and Gold as Asian American literature, then the novel is unique in its concentration on the sentiments and sentimentality of people in both Asia and America. The multi-ethnic situation in Malaysia and Singapore mirrors that of the U.S., and therefore brings the issue of interaction among different races to a global level. As critic Lavina Shankar comments, “Asian American literature, in the last decade, is no longer charted only on American soil but on the landscapes of several postcolonial geographies” (285-86).

## Works Cited


**About the Author**


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