

Dancing Across Time: Ancestry, Diaspora, and Migration
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I spent this summer exploring the social, political, economic, and geographic forces shaping my mother's family's migration story, from Guangdong province in south China, to the Philippines, and eventually to the U.S. As a dance and anthropology double major, my research engaged an interdisciplinary approach—rooted in the fields of critical race studies, critical dance studies, and anthropology—that included interviews with my family alongside historical, theoretical, and embodied/dance research. Rather than arriving at conclusions, this research has constituted the source material for the dance honors project I will be choreographing throughout the duration of my senior year. My honors project is tentatively called *Jook-sing*, and will be a solo, evening-length dance piece that is an embodied exploration of how this specific, multigenerational migration path, from China, to the Philippines, to the U.S., places me and my family within larger structures of U.S. imperialism, racial hierarchies, and global Chineseness, as well as shapes our performance of Chinese-Americanness.

Jook-sing is a Cantonese phrase for an overseas Chinese person born and raised in a Western culture, which I learned through a family interview this summer. Derived from the word for bamboo rod, it refers to how, like one of the hollow segments of a bamboo stalk, these Chinese are cut off at both ends from both cultures; as with a bamboo stalk, the water cannot flow all the way through. *Jook-sing* thus grapples with my simultaneously tender and tenuous relationship to the histories I can only touch, not grasp; the legacies I can only inherit, not choose; the water that pours into me, but that I am still discovering how to let flow. My research this summer has revealed to me the profound tensions embedded in my family's history, and more broadly in what it means to be Chinese-American: to be caught between discursive oppositions of East and West, between the fundamental contradiction of U.S. empire to assimilate Asianness while maintaining it as an alien Other (Bascara, 2006), and between multiple emerging modernities centered in both the West and in Chinese transnationalism (Ong and Nonini, 1997). These tensions are particularly rich because my family spent about 2.5 generations in the Philippines, which was a U.S. colony for a long duration of that time (and maintained a neocolonial relationship with the Philippines for much longer), meaning that much of my family's history – economic choices my ancestors made, resources they had access to, how they were racialized, migration decisions – were all deeply intertwined with U.S. imperialism/colonialism.

In order to explore these tensions in an embodied way, I began collecting movement seeds this summer in response to both readings I was doing and interview audio clips. These movement seeds grew out of a practice of authentic movement, an improvisation technique guided by the body's intuitive impulses. Each of these movement seeds will grow into the choreography for *Jook-sing* throughout the coming year.

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Adanna Jones

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References:

Bascara, Victor. *Model-Minority Imperialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Ong, Aihwa, and Donald M. Nonini, eds. *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*. New York ; London: Routledge, 1997.