

Monsters, Mothers, and Memories in Asian Diaspora Novels

Hannah Kim, 2024

This summer, I read a variety of works written by Asian diaspora writers, ranging from fantasy novels, poetry, and autobiographical memoirs. I approached these works with **biopolitical** and **postmemory** theories. Although these two theories are separate, I found it very insightful to consider them jointly. My method was heavily question-oriented – I would focus on one book and one theory source per week for a total of ten weeks. The readings would be followed by weekly written reflections.

Biopolitics: the politicization of biological life

A biopolitically-minded question may ask the following: Which bodies are granted self-agency and -autonomy, *and which bodies are not*? What virtues are upheld in the protection of life and one's rights? (In order to consider this question, one must consider the various definitions of "life" and its hierarchical implications.)

The questions that most intrigued me: Bodies that are suspended between or behind spatial and social barriers – how are these bodies permitted a place, *and in what ways are they not*? In the margins, how do these bodies respond? How do these bodies speak, and how are they heard?

Postmemory: memory "inherited" through intergenerational relationships

A postmemory-minded question may ask the following: Which memories survive into memorialized histories, *and which memories do not*? Which memories are "lost" – whether lost in transit, or lost in translation? In what way do the challenges arisen from intergenerational silence, migration, and trauma affect the memory transmission from one generation to the next? What is enhanced through these challenges?

The questions that most intrigued me: For the children of those who endure unspeakable histories, where is the line between survivorship and spectatorship? What is held in the distance between individual and collective memory, and what is held at their intersection? Writers who engage in postmemory work often play a dual role of the "child" (the oblivious, the spared) within their family histories and the "historian" (the trailblazer, the spokesperson) in the public realm. Considering this, what possibilities do writers encounter by speaking of or around estranged/unspeakable memories?

I am deeply grateful to have received summer funding for this project. Ultimately, the research grew into a long-term writing project about my own experiences with family, (mis)translation, grief, and memory. With inspiration from my readings and advisor feedback, I had the opportunity to experiment with my own style, form, and voice. Looking ahead—I have received a publication offer for excerpts of my summer writing, and I look forward to carrying my summer research into the upcoming fall term.

Faculty Mentor: Hilary Thompson

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