

## **Cultural Memory/ Collective Memory as a way of Resistance to Traumatic memory**

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### **Abstract**

*The poem “ The Country of Dreams and Dust” in the collection of the same name by the Chinese American writer Frank Chin draws the traumatic memory of Chinese Americans and gives a clear account of the collective/ cultural memory as a way of resistance to acculturation and cultural indoctrination. The immigrants’ trauma in Russell Leong’s poem takes various forms of remembering and commemorating, most of which focus on the immigration experience. The process of indoctrination including religious conversion presents one of the dynamics of the traumatic memory of the speakers. So, cultural memory continues to exist because it feeds a basic need for identity, salvation, hope and resistance to annihilation. The cultural memory of Buddha exists because there is a need for it whereby the speakers speak and continue to speak of a shared experience of marginalized people in US. Accordingly, in this paper, I will approach memory in a manner that highlights the power of culture as an organizer of resistance.*

**Keywords: Collective memory/ Traumatic Memory/ Resistance/ Indoctrination.**

Memory is frequently defined as the creation or recreation of the past. In fact, there are many different meanings of the term memory that do not actually overlap. Some argue that memory can become a strategy for social justice by recalling the forgotten or suppressed to bear witness, yet it is a strategy that requires reading history away from a linear positivist narrative to a history of mnemonic traces, each endlessly recited, reiterated, recombined (Rodriguez Jeanette and Ted Fortier 198). That is to say, memory becomes the haven of political potential. Others see that memory refers to the “capacity for conserving certain information or a group of psychic functions that allow us to actualize past impressions or information that we represent to ourselves as past” (Rodriguez Jeanette and Ted Fortier 196). What is worth noticeable is that memory’s meanings and values transform radically in different historical periods. In this sense, as Susannah Radstone has succinctly observed “memory means different things at different times” (qtd. in Whitehead8).

In tracing the traits of memory and mainly its multi-dimensional meanings throughout different ages, the present paper is going to move between philosophical texts and a literary text that of *The Country of Dreams and Dust* by the Chinese American poet Russell Leong. I regard both discursive modes as important to the theorization of memory and seek to demonstrate that memory’s history is as firmly embedded in the literary texts as in the philosophical texts. Russell Leong’s first poetry collection *The Country of Dreams and Dust* (1993) won the Oakland Josephine Miles Literature Award in 1994 ( Tian 164-165). It contains different poems that draw the dynamics of Chinese immigrants’ lives in the US. Leong’s poems clearly unravel the traumatic memory of Chinese Americans and give a clear account of the collective/ cultural memory as a way of resistance to acculturation and cultural indoctrination.

As far as Chinese American writers are concerned, their writings, “as Elaine H. Kim finds, function as a social statement and historical document and reach beyond the realm of literary and artistic values. They provide unique access to understanding the sensibilities of a frequently misunderstood group” (Yin 14). In this respect, Russell Leong’s collection *The Country of Dreams and Dust* illustrates Elaine H. Kim’s view about Chinese American literature. Each poem in the collection gives its readers an authentic factual account of Chinese American life and presents a version of the Chinese traumatic memory as it is recollected by different social and gender categories at different ages.

Accordingly, trauma is “invented” or “revealed” as a development of the psychiatric gaze, but it soon penetrates other areas of social life and is “borrowed” to explain a broad spectrum of phenomena including the collective subconscious, cultural identity and contemporary ethnic and political struggles. In this context, one can explain the writing of history as being driven by the traumatic experience of the community, the phenomenon of immigration can be analyzed through the lens of trauma (Sarat et.al 7).

The study of collective trauma is influenced by a rich tradition that can be traced to the second half of the twentieth century, and which is still very influential. It begins with a critique of Liberalism and its over-emphasis on individualism. Although the origins of such a critique may be found in Nietzsche and even as far back as the pre-Socratics, as a broad, distinctive cultural phenomenon, we can point to conditions after WWII as the background for the strengthening doubts about basic liberal tenets such as reason, autonomy and progress. The inability of the old liberal world view to address the horror of WWII, especially the

Holocaust, brought about efforts to expose the collective ideological foundations of racism and prejudice and to emphasize the dynamic that enables trauma to emerge and be reproduced in various cultural contexts. Emphasis on social construction and the use of cultural narratives as a means to explain the self produced a shift in trauma analysis by trying it to broad social structures (including structural violence) and moving it away from individual as a primary unit of inquiry. Instead, collective identity becomes the unit of analysis and a group that share an identity such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, or religion is considered as the primary unit that experiences trauma. The focus on collective trauma is an important step within the critique of liberalism, but our analysis takes this critique a step further by coming back to interaction of identities and narratives. The notion of identity in trauma embeds at least three phases of liberal thinking: First, there is the classic idea of autonomy and identity as a secret of the self, which can be invaded and exposed through traumatic events. Second, it carries with it the collectivist notion of identity as constructed by culture and society, explained by narratives and texts that shape the horizons of perceptions and influence entire societies. Under the notion of identity, trauma is indeed explained by a rift in the collective texture upon which all individuals depend. Third, the “multicultural identity” perspective, as developed in the late twentieth century introduces the notion of multiple identities and assumes that individuals are not fully autonomous, but rather carry the unique stamp of cultural interaction that conditions them ( Sarat 8).

Interestingly enough, the immigrants’ trauma in Russell Leong *The Country of Dreams and Dust* takes various forms of remembering and commemorating, most of which focus on the immigration experience, rather than preserving an image of the lost past. The collection contains poems that sketch the traumatic memories of Chinese Americans as an ethnic group in the United States. Each section presents a voice that recollects his/her history or his/her story in the United States. Accordingly, Leong gives voice to different social categories that share the same ethnicity to articulate the Chinese harrowing ethnic experience and unravel their agonizing history as it is engraved in their memories.

In fact, in Leong’s poems, the feelings of dislocation and suffering are not represented as exclusively male or female. The diversity of voices helps emphasize that the feelings of trauma and agony permeates the whole ethnic group without exception. Hence, men, women and even children have something to remember about their “nomadic experience.” The sixteen sections in the poem “The Country of Dreams and Dust,” which are told by different sixteen voices, blend into each other and draw the dynamics of one trauma, the trauma of being Chinese in the US. As a point of fact, the sixteen sections are of paramount significance in the depiction of the experience and history in the US, but focus in this paper is dedicated to the second, the fifth and the eighth which are entitled “ Fire,” “Tet,” ad “Ideographs” respectively. Actually, the rationale behind the choice of these three sections is that they allow us to get the voices of anguish and the different dimensions of their traumatic memories from the point of view of different sexes and from the perspective of people in different ages.

In the section titled “Fire,” Leong delves into the lives of early Chinese American women and voices a strong feminist concern. He gives them a voice and lets them express themselves. In this section, which is told by a female voice, the female speaker lays bare her traumatic memory and tries to give an account of the origin and the history of her entrapment in “The brick- roomed asylum”(11). She tries to historicize her story with her “sister slaves” (31). By stepping away from the section, we should mention the historical background of the Chinese women immigration in the nineteenth century. Actually, it was not acceptable for single

women to immigrate. Some who did were actually seized from their families or sold to merchant who brought them to America to become prostitutes. Hence, these Chinese women were stigmatized as representative of all the Chinese and encouraged charges of the Chinese as immoral and unworthy of being American citizens (Dunnerstein and Reimers 26). Thus, the history of Chinese women is a history of exploitation that was marked by the fact that these women were "bartered" (14) as commodities "in disgrace" (13).

Accordingly, the speaker unravels the reality behind the Chinese "women's mission" of prostitution. By trying to assert that she, with the women of her race, was forced into brothels and were confined behind "barred windows," (19) the speaker seems to display a tone of protest against the grotesque and humility of image depicting the Chinese women as prostitutes. The speaker wants to highlight the fact that her body, which is supposed to be intimate, becomes the possession of others and at the service of "men's carnal desires" (25). Accordingly, the experience of immigration becomes very appalling to the extent that it strips the Chinese female of her body as she becomes the haven of others' desires and becomes estranged from her body.

The speaker also goes on to draw her experience of escape from the vicious circle of prostitution through the assistance of Donaldina Cameron, who was a Presbyterian missionary, brought to the mission in 1895. Her prime objective was the destruction of the Chinese trade slave. Indeed, she rescued thousands of Chinese slave girls and women from prostitution during her ministry in San Francisco from 1895 to 1934 (Sheman 131). The female speaker seems to be in a hellish situation and longs badly for Cameron, the savior, "to open heaven's gate" (18). Not only did Cameron save the speaker's body from the quagmire of prostitution, but also "spirited off her powder and paint" (35). And taught her "how to pray" (37), a reference to her conversion to Christianity in the Mission Asylum. However, the image of Cameron as a living legend and a crusader of good is deflated in the memory of the speaker who highlights Cameron's wicked intention to indoctrinate Chinese women, Christianize them and obliterate their religion which is Buddhism. Accordingly, the process of indoctrination including religious conversion presents one of the dynamics of the traumatic memory of the speaker.

From the ninth stanza onwards, we find ourselves embroiled in lines about the speaker's exhausted and traumatic memory, she recollects her Chinamen "who sold her for silver" (52) and the exploitation she was exposed to by "the white women" who looked down on her, despised her and even associated her with the devil. Ironically, the speaker criticizes the Christian women who "traded the devil out" (53) of her for "their own salvation" (56). The speaker tries to convey the idea that in order to keep themselves pure, Christian women send their males to Chinese women. So, the speaker sees that they are the accomplice of Chinese women in sin and they are not as pure as they intend to be. Throughout the section, there is a tone of protest and mainly rage that overwhelms the speaker's traumatic memory.

The traumatic memory related to immigration is not exclusive to adults; even children and mainly boys are not exempt from it. The section entitled "Tet" is voiced by a boy who has undergone the cruel fact of being Chinese in America. Actually, the section is entitled "Tet" after "the Tet Offensive" which was the pivotal event of the long Vietnam War. It is a military campaign during the Vietnam War that began on January 31, 1968, when regular and irregular forces of the people's army of Vietnam fought against the forces of South Vietnam, the United States and their allies (Wallbanks 8-15). In this narrative section, the speaker

remembers and tells his story which coincides with the historical appalling event of “the Tet Offensive”. He, then, combines his personal traumatic memory with the public history.

The speaker goes on to tell his story of sexual abuse and rape. This act of rape was committed by “the Reverend”, who has strong erotic love. In order to highlight the Reverend ‘crime, the speaker inscribes details that are still engraved in his memory and which draw a shocking image and a terrible scene whereby the Reverend, when sexually abusing him, is plucking his ribs, forking and cutting his intestines, entering the esophagus and plucking his tongue. Like an area being overtaken and depleted by an invading army, the boy’s body is invaded by the “mercenary’s hand”(14). For the boy, the act of his rape is as offensive and appalling as the operations of the Tet campaign. There is, hence, an affinity between the area invaded by the campaign and the boy’s body. Both of them are violated and raped whereby the similarity between the act of rape and the invasion resides in the atrocity of the act. Hence, crimes, like children’s sexual abuse which is still fixed in the child memory become recurrent and inevitable for Chinese Americans.

“The Country of Dreams and Dust” is mainly based on the inscription of Chinese history through the memory of each voice. In the section entitled “Ideographs,” the speaker laments the burial of “The lesson of Mao Zedong’s revolution” (26). Mao Zedong was a Chinese Communist leader and one of the most powerful people in the world during his lifetime. He controlled power in 1949 when China became a Communist leader and controlled all aspects of Chinese life (Stewart 8). Actually, his ever evolving legacy and bright image that stamped the Chinese mind was eroded by “Jesus,” (24) a reference to Christians and Christianity. Another element which contributes to erode the “lesson of Mao Zedong Revolution” (26) is Senator Joseph McCarthy who was totally against Communism and whose policy did affect the ethnic groups whose country of origin was Communist such as China.

Through the lamenting of the burial of the lesson of Communism and “Mao Zedong’s revolution,” (26) the speaker recollects a dark chapter in the history of Chinese during the advent of the Cold War and the US containment policy towards China. In fact, for Chinese “China . . . the homeland, the political entity, to which they had pledged their royalty and with whom the US had formed a political alliance during WWII, had overnight become an enemy of the US” (Wang 191). Hence, Chinese Americans themselves were compelled to bury the lesson of “Mao Zedong’s Revolution,” (26) break their loyalty to China and identify with the Capitalist nation.

Further, being a Chinese is tantamount to decadence and backwardness in the eyes of the mainstream Americans. Chinese are referred to in derogatory terms and labeled by racial slurs such as “Ching-Chong”(33) which is an ethnic racial slur directed to people of Chinese nationality or ancestry, and it is used to mock the language of a person of perceived Chinese, or east Asian descent (“Ching-Chong”). There is another racial slur namely “gook,” which is a powerful and revealing expression of xenophobia. Unlike most ethnic insults, it does not have a clear etymology, and its semantic history combines hostility towards outsiders with a great flexibility in application. It, thus, shows the dynamics of linguistic xenophobia, which include race ( Hughes 346). This slur, then, is endorsed by mainstream Americans to lay the Chinese out of the American soil and let them “go home” (37). So, these discriminatory racial slurs, “Ching-Chong” and “Gook,” develop out of a prevailing impulse on the part of mainstream Americans to expel the Chinese from America and underline also the xenophobia of Americans against the Chinese yellow race as a whole.

Much within the same vein, the fragile stance of Chinese and the pejorative image held of them by mainstream Americans, as it is conveyed through the voice in this section, emphasize the anti-Chinese sentiment. Chinese, thus, have no minority influence, which is according to *The Webster's New World College Dictionary*, takes place when a majority is being influenced to accept the beliefs or behavior of a minority. This type of influence, which is lacking within the Chinese Americans, is most likely to take place if a group is consistent and appealing to the majority. Conversely, through this section and the above-analyzed sections, we notice the precarious stance and the trauma that overwhelm Chinese in US.

What Chinese went through in the US ranging from laws that set them apart to attempts on the part of mainstream Americans to indoctrinate them presented real trauma for them that is still fixed in their memories and threatened their existence as a minority group in US. In this prospect, the single most adaptation for their survival in US is culture. Indeed, discrete Chinese culture has survived a plethora of threats to their existence through their ability to interpret, adapt to, and resist hegemonic American culture that is more "powerful". Culture is the very key to Chinese to survive, in a number of unique configurations because of the elasticity of culture, which enables groups to access stored wisdom and ways of coping with diverse patterns of existence. The mystery and the very core of this dynamism of culture rest in memory (Rodriguez Jeanette and Ted Fortier 4).

Memory is the capacity to remember, to create and recreate our past. "Cultural memory" is a concept introduced to the archaeological disciplines by Jan Ass Mann, who defines it as the "outer dimension of human memory," embracing two different concepts: "memory culture" and "reference to the past." Memory culture is the process by which a society ensures cultural continuity by preserving, with the help of cultural mnemonics, its collective knowledge from one generation to the next, rendering it possible for later generations to reconstruct their cultural identity. When we speak about cultural memory, we are including in this definition two distinct characteristics; the first is the survival of a historically, politically, and socially marginalized group of people, and the second is the role of spirituality as a form of resistance (Rodriguez Jeanette and Ted Fortier 7).

The definition of culture flows from an understanding that people develop unique sets of categories, including languages, political organizations, and rituals and ceremonies. Historically, marginalized groups have additional categories that reveal the cultural forces that have resisted annihilation from dominant groups by accessing forms of spiritual resistance. These are the issues of people who have historically had to fight for their community and maintain a social construct to exist in the world. For Chinese Americans, life in US is a struggle to find a place, that is, to establish their presence in the US and make known their rights not only to survive but to flourish apart from the dominant culture in US that has marginalized them. In this context, cultural or collective memory carries with it a certain degree of political force. As Michel Foucault (1975) argues "since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle. If one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism" (qtd. in Agnew 25).

Because cultural memory is political, and because different stories and representations struggle for a place in history, memory is crucial to understanding a culture since it reveals collective desires, needs, self-definition and power struggles. We contend that Chinese Americans in Leong's *The Country of Dreams and Dust* struggle to assert their identities is rooted in religious ideology. Religious ideology manifests a spirituality grounded on experience and is endemic to the continuum of self preservation and reproduction of human

beings. So, focus in this part is on how the religious ideology of Chinese Americans, which is part of their cultural memories, constructs pathways for resistance, infusing ideological faith with the implements for producing their ethnic identity. It is my argument that by examining the emotion-laden schemas of religious faith, we can begin to understand the powerful elements of memories of Chinese that resist assimilation, annihilation and cultural indoctrination in US.

The reproduction of cultural survival is then, biological and an ideological construction. Research in collective memory and historical identity recognizes that critical to the retaining of one's cultural identity, and assuring survival is religious practices. Religion is an attempt to filter meaning into the most difficult questions. As we seek to give meaning to everything we do, religion validates our existence. It deposits forces into the universe that sustain moral order; this in turn sustains the social order of people. Religion validates our existence by connecting us with ancestors, with spirits, with a god or gods. Religion mediates the dynamic of being here in the moment while also being part of an ongoing continuum. It firmly reinforces our human ability to ascribe meaning to all experience, such as death, illness, famine, birth, or suffering. Religion heightens our communal experience of life. It brings us together in a community that reinforces the events of our lives. Religious experience interprets the way a community defines the world and it does so in such a way that establishes its primary values, affects, behaviors and choices (Rodriguez Jeanette and Ted Fortier 3). Accordingly, in Leong's *The Country of Dreams and Dust*, Buddhism as the representative of a cultural memory is undoubtedly the most significant spiritual and cultural symbol for Chinese Americans. For Chinese in US, Buddhism represents an affirmation of their worth and a positive valuation of their own culture and tradition, thus being an empowering symbol that asserts their communal sense as people.

Buddhism today is a world-wide religion embraced by millions around the world. It is a complex system of beliefs, sometimes mystical in content with scores of different sects. Diverse societies with long histories are intimately associated with Buddhism. Some 2500 years of Buddhist thought have yielded seemingly endless variations on the core of Buddhist belief (Lyons et.al 4-5).

*The Country of Dreams and Dust* can be read as a work about immigration that is full of Buddhist terms and ideas. Many Buddhist notions and symbols are ubiquitous in *Leong's* collection of poetry, but they are strongly felt in "Sphere and Lotus" and "Unfolding Flowers, Matchless Flames" as they are juxtaposed with historical references and show the importance of Buddhism as a way of resistance. In this regard, *Leong's* "Sphere and Lotus" provides such an idea. In this short poem, yet full of cultural references, Leong clearly shows the importance of Buddhism as a cultural organizer of resistance for Chinese Americans.

"Sphere, a world of mud/ Molded between ten fingers" (1-2). The use of the word mud is tightly linked to the sphere of Buddhism. This word is very significant in Buddhist belief; it alludes to human existence which is initially muddy. The aforementioned image of existence is presented through the image of mud which connotes the Chinese American condition in America. Actually, Chinese have been traumatized in America and they seek spiritual outlet from the quagmire in which they have been held captive. So, the Buddhist images of "mud" and "lotus" are dominant to portray Chinese American condition. The Lotus flower is a water lily with its roots in mud and it is a common image in Buddhist teachings. It symbolizes that enlightenment can be achieved during human suffering symbolized through mud (Mc Guick et.al 251).

The speaker, then, evokes the image of the mind which refers to the notion of meditation in his life in America when “in such a world, his hope [the *immigrant*’s] is spiritual awakening” (Ito 101). Here, the speaking voice alludes to the significance of experiential dimension because Buddhism regards the religious life as essentially a course in self- transformation. Spiritual exercises such as meditation generate altered states of consciousness that can accelerate spiritual development. In terms of its importance, meditation may be likened to prayer in Christianity, although Christian prayer and Buddhism meditation usually have different objectives. When Buddhists meditate for example, they are not asking God to grant their wishes, but endeavoring to cultivate their wisdom and passion (Keown 9).

There is a clear mentioning of the name “Gautama,” the historical Buddha. Buddhists do show great reverence to Gautama as a supreme teacher and an exemplar of the ultimate goal that all strive for, so that more images of him exist in the poem than of any other historical figure. However, the emphasis in Buddhism is on the teachings of the Buddha(s), and the ‘awakening’ of human personality that these teachings are seen to lead to. Accordingly, the speaker says “Gather the folds of yellow cloth” (11). Here, there is a clear call to the commitment to the teachings of Buddhism to help Chinese immigrants in the USA to develop a calmer, more integrated and compassionate personality, and then ‘wake up’ from restricting delusions: delusions which cause attachment and thus suffering for immigrants in America. Chinese immigrants whose souls are smothered in racist and appalling situations strive to follow the path of Buddha to reach the spiritual awakening. Immigrants should follow the path of “Gautama” to attain spiritual liberation and reach ‘enlightenment’.

Following Buddha’s path, Chinese immigrants must get rid of craving and spiritual ignorance and seek spiritual liberation and awakening, and make “the word that gleams/ in the center be [Buddha’s]” (14-15). Just as the Buddha rose from the mud of ordinary world, which is characterized by fighting, hatred, wars, etc, the speaker in “Sphere and Lotus” seems to emphasize the idea that in spite of the “muddy” origin of the world in which Chinese are entangled in USA, spiritual transformation can be achieved through practicing meditation as a way to free oneself from suffering.

“Unfolding Flowers, Matchless Flames” is the last poem in *The Country of Dreams and Dust*. In this poem, Leong draws upon historical references to reflect his Buddhist views. In fact, despite Leong’s focus on historical events, allusions to Buddhism are dominant. Throughout the poem, the poet exhibits a variety of Buddhist aspects in such a way that he moves from historical documentation to stress important Buddhist notions.

Buddhists are committed to their religion. They left China for America carrying with them their faith. Whatever the direction, Buddhists do not forget to worship. The Sifu takes the Lotus posture and says:

I turned my legs inward  
into a lotus form  
right foot over left thigh  
left thigh over right thigh.  
My thumbs traced  
a triangle just bellow my belly.(58-63 )

This mediating activity is an attempt to rid his mind of worry when he “met the hunger of pirates.”(65) That is to say, through meditation, he hopes to make himself calm and more aware of everything. His ultimate goal, of course, is to become enlightened. So, “it was not

[his] sight that saved [him]" (68) from the dangers of Pirates and suffering. It is the mind which is crucial in the act of meditation.

"Each day, dust gathers/ upon us; each day, / we forget his face," (119-21). By these words, the Sifu describes their state which is shrouded by dust. Dust in Buddhism is a metaphor for worldly things that include both intellect and five senses that can cloud our bright Buddha nature (Concepcion 130). So, there are beings with little dust in their eyes that, not hearing the teaching of the Buddha, are decaying. Accordingly, in order to avoid the state of spiritual blindness and attain spiritual growth, they have to "don gray robes/ and vow to uphold the Three Jewels" (123-24). The guide for this process of transformation is the three Jewels which are mentioned in the intertext of the seventh section of the poem which says: "In Buddha, I seek refuge. /In his teachings, I seek refuge. / In his community, I seek refuge . . ." (126-28). These three Jewels sum up the most important Buddhist beliefs. A Jewel is something that is beautiful and very precious. Buddhists feel that these teachings are like jewels that can soothe their pain and help them get out of the racist quagmire in which they are held captive. A refuge is somewhere which is very safe. Saying that Buddhists take refuge in these teachings from the harsh experience they have gone through in America is another way of showing how important Buddhists think the teachings are.

Following from this, "by upholding the Three Jewels/ gleaming in the dust" (124-25). Buddhists can "reach calmness" (130). This means that they have gone beyond the worldly life and reach transcendence. That is to say, they attain Nirvana. Asking a Buddhist to describe Nirvana is similar to asking a Christian, Jew, or Muslim to describe Heaven. Every person who contemplates heaven has a different idea about what it would be like (Kathy 123). Nirvana might be easier explained by what it "isn't" as opposed to what it "is". It is not a place comparable to heaven, where deserving people are believed to go and where they spend eternity. It is also not a place where the streets are gold and people want for nothing. It is rather a state of nothingness, in which a person escapes the wheel of rebirth and simply ceases to exist. The word Nirvana itself comes from the root word meaning "blown out" (Kathy 123). This is further accentuated by the speaker who says that:

On my hand and feet  
I carry the smoke  
of incense,  
exist the temple door.(136-139)

The incense here stands for the burning of desire and wrong thinking within the speaker where he "suspended/ between earth and sky" (148-149). Buddhists believe that one reaches the level where all greed and selfishness has ceased, the flame of desire and wrong thinking burns out. At this point, the person is released from all suffering and is said to attain painless and passionless peace (kathy 10).

To put it succinctly, cultural memory continues to exist because it feeds a basic need for identity, salvation, hope, and resistance to annihilation. So, the cultural memory of Buddha exists because there is a need for it whereby he speaks and continues to speak of a shared experience of marginalized people in US. So, in this paper, I've approached memory in a manner that highlights the power of culture as an organizer of resistance.

In conclusion, throughout this paper, I have tried to show the dynamics of memory in Russell Leong's text *The Country of Dreams and Dust*. Trauma for Chinese in US becomes the site and the preoccupation of their memories. Their memories become a kind of burden for them to the extent that each voice in the collection unravels dark sites of trauma which are still

engraved in his/her memory. However, Chinese Americans are not totally weakened by the burden of the past; they did not succumb to their history of discrimination and total marginalization. They have resorted to cultural memory as a means of resistance based on a faith response to American cultural hegemony by maintaining that Buddhism forms for them the very grounding for cultural memory. We can conclude, then, that there are different types of memory for Chinese Americans as an ethnic group. In this prospect, we might more pertinently talk of memories than of a memory for the concept at times seems to exceed the bounds of a singular identity. To this extent, then, we could question whether “traumatic memory,” “Collective memory,” or “cultural memory” can indeed be encapsulated by a single concept, or whether they might be more accurately considered in terms of plurality.

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