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

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2015
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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.