

7. The “Phantasmatic” Chinatown in Helen Hunt Jackson’s “The Chinese Empire” and Mark Twain’s *Roughing It*

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Abstract

This chapter explores Chinatown as an ephemeral site of visual indeterminacy in the 1870s by looking at a number of Californian Chinatown accounts in Helen Hunt Jackson’s “The Chinese Empire” (1878) and Mark Twain’s *Roughing It* (1872). Late-nineteenth-century Chinatown as an exhibitory locus of authentic Chinese-ness for Western tourists is paradoxically characterized by its mutability rather than realism. By examining the accounts of Jackson and Twain about the Chinese in the 1870s, the decade before the passing of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the paper rethinks the “virtual” existence of Chinatown, its contested nature as a “phantasmatic site” for Western projections and visual consumption, which manifests the potential realization of national transformation in the mythic Orient of the new West.

Keywords: Californian Chinatowns, Helen Hunt Jackson, Mark Twain, Virtuality, Orientalist Discourse

Introduction

Before the popularity of urban ethnic tourism in the 1880s, Californian Chinatowns were often considered as a political difficulty as well as an ethnic curiosity, positioned haphazardly halfway between Oriental fantasy and authentic “Chineseness.”¹ In his groundbreaking 1978 book *Orientalism*,

1 Marquerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880–1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 6.

Edward Said explains the philosophy of orientalism as “a form of radical realism:” “Anyone employing orientalism [...] will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality. The tense they employ is the timeless eternal; they convey an impression of repetition and strength.”² The systematic operation of repetitive and stereotypical images in orientalist discourse is elaborated by Homi K. Bhabha in “The Other Question,” in which Bhabha argues that colonial discourse as “the site of both fixity and fantasy” is deeply problematic, in which “a repertoire of conflictual positions” is played out and led onto “a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes,” giving “the stereotype both its fixity and its phantasmatic quality.”³ Late nineteenth-century Californian Chinatowns complicated such a “phantasmatic quality” of “fixity and fantasy” for its Western viewers. Characterized by both myth and reality, visual authenticity and semiotic indeterminacy, accounts of Californian Chinatowns emerged in the late-nineteenth-century US as a mobilized form of aesthetic “realism,” with its geographical concreteness paradoxically containing a plastic, ephemeral quality and pointing toward the arbitrariness, opacity, porosity, and contingencies of historical and political positioning.

As a racialized space in the late-nineteenth century, Californian Chinatowns were mostly located outside the cultural comfort zone of many American visitors. In particular, they were positioned in a threshold space between fiction and reality. They were actual places inhabited by or quarantining Chinese immigrants, but they were also perceived as an exhibition site of oriental fantasy. In her 1996 book *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe remarks that, throughout the twentieth century, Asian immigrants were seen as “a screen,” “a phantasmatic site,” onto which America “projects a series of condensed, complicated anxieties regarding external and internal threats to the mutable coherence of the national body.”⁴ As Lowe explains, the “unfixed liminality of the Asian immigrants” in America “has given rise to the necessity of endlessly fixing and repeating such stereotypes;” “Stereotypes that construct Asians as the threatening ‘yellow peril,’ or alternatively, that pose Asians as the domesticated ‘model minority,’ are each equally indices of these national anxieties.”⁵ In a way similar to the

2 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1979), 72.

3 Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question,” *Screen* 24, no.6 (November 1983), 29.

4 Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 18.

5 Lowe, 19. Recent scholars have noted the “representational uncertainty” of China – the “elasticity” of oriental representations in the eighteenth and nineteenth century West. See, for example, Colleen Lye’s *America’s Asia: Racial Form and American Literature 1893–1945* (Princeton,

mobile status of Asian immigrants in America, Chinatowns in California also serve as such a liminal space of ephemeral existence. Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen comment on the "plastic quality" of orientalist discourse that "the Orient emerges as a material and theatrical space, which in turn enables Orientalist fantasies and imaginations to emerge and be played out."⁶ Californian Chinatowns in the late-nineteenth-century present such a "material and theatrical space," exerting "plastic" Orientalist authority through its alleged cultural and racial authenticity. If, as Said has powerfully argued, the notion of the Orient is a Western construct, based upon its essentialism, otherness, and absence, Chinatown occupies a geo-symbolic middle ground in the process of Western projection.

This paper draws upon the notion of the "phantasmatic site" of Asian America, and proposes examining a number of accounts about Chinatowns in California in Helen Hunt Jackson's "The Chinese Empire" (1878) and Mark Twain's *Roughing It* (1872). It explores how their spatial depictions evoke Californian Chinatowns as an immersive exhibition site of both ethnographical observations and oriental projections, a problematic locus of both authenticity and mutability that magnified the constructedness of racial and national anxiety at a time when American writers were traveling westward in pursuit of their American dreams in the mythical "West."⁷ Written a few years before the Exclusion Act, the accounts of Jackson and Twain allow us to rethink the East–West encounter as a racial contact zone with their temporal and multi-layered spatial existences. Their Californian Chinatowns were experiential sites of "authentic" Chineseness, in which

NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Hope, Chang's *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Chi-ming Yang's *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660–1760* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Peter J. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and Andrew Warren's *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

6 Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen, *Tourism, Performance and the Everyday: Consuming the Orient* (London: Routledge, 2010), 80.

7 In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner would still remark that American development could be explained through "the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement, westward." Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *The American Frontier: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Mary Ellen Jones (San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 1994), 25. Critics have pointed out the importance this mythical West plays in the formation of American literature. See, for example, Myra Jehlen's *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986) and William G. Robbins, *Colony & Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

their orientalist discourses were mobilized, projected, contradicted, and contested. It was also through their visual (and virtual) consumption of Chinatown these two writers participated in the wider national debate about the Chinese question, respectively.

Indeed, Californian Chinatowns in the 1870s were treated as an ethnographic site and a racial laboratory for “the Chinese question,” a nationwide debate about the restriction of Chinese immigration to the US.⁸ The late-nineteenth-century depictions of San Francisco Chinatown in particular were fraught with issues of racial anxiety and labor tension. In her discussion of the rise of urban tourism in late-nineteenth-century United States, Catherine Cocks notes that writing about San Francisco Chinatown “apart from a more or less impassioned discussion of ‘the Chinese question’ had been nearly impossible in the 1870s.”⁹ The decade before the legalized discrimination against Chinese immigration by the national congress witnessed the embittered intensification of such a social-political entanglement, from the 1868 treaty of Burlingame guaranteeing equal treatment between China and the US, to the 1875 Page Act prohibiting Asian women from immigration to America, to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act against Chinese immigration. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Californian Chinatowns gradually became one of these cultural

8 For recent scholarships on the Asian American history in the nineteenth century, see, for example, John Kuo Wei Chen's *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) and David Palumbo-Liu's *Asian-American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). For more on the Chinese question, see, for example, Stuart Creighton Miller's *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785–1882* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), Roger Daniels's *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850–1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2000); Moon-Ho Jung, “Outlawing ‘Coolies’: Race, Nation, and Empire in the Age of Emancipation,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (September 2005): 677–701; Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007) and Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). On the shifting Sino-American immigration policies, see, for example, Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850–1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964) and Gregory Blue, “Gobineau on China: Race Theory, the ‘Yellow Peril,’ and the Critique of Modernity,” *Journal of World History* 10, no.1 (1999): 93–139.

9 Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850–1915* (Stanford, CA: University of California Press 2001), 189. See also K. Scott Wong, “Chinatown: Conflicting Images, Contested Terrain,” *Melus* 20 (Spring 1995): 3–15.

(and commercial) institutions that informed the American public about the "real" China.¹⁰ However, at the completion of transcontinental railroads and the inception of "westward" tourism, Californian Chinatowns stood for an opaque (and somehow more disorderly) type of exhibition site and an almost unknowable space of shifting shapes and mirages. In the 1860s and 1870s, in particular, Californian Chinatowns were undergoing a transitional phase in the midst of radical urban development. In the 1850s and the 1860s, Chinatowns were, as Anthony W. Lee remarks, "construed as an effect" since "what seemed to bring the small quarter into existence was the promise of wealth elsewhere in the state."¹¹ Most Chinatown residents were "birds of passage" and "so-journers" in America, who intended "to stay a little while, save a little money, and return to the nest."¹² Chinatowns in the 1850–1870s remained a temporary makeshift for many Chinese immigrants. It was not until the 1880s, as Marquerite S. Shaffer observes, with "the expansion of the railroad network" and "the development of packaged tours," that transcontinental travel started to emerge, potentially bringing in more eastern tourists to the West and contributing to the popularity of Chinatown tourism.¹³ In his 1904 guidebook *To California and Back*, C. A. Higgins would still describe Chinatown as "a panopticon of peep shows."¹⁴

Helen Hunt Jackson's "The Chinese Empire" (1878)

It was around this time that Jackson and Twain published their Chinatown accounts, which show these two writers negotiating their aesthetic and political positions with regard to what they saw as authentic "Chineseness." A few years after the completion of the transcontinental railway in 1869, Jackson took a one-year trip, from 1872 to 1873, to the American West. In her travelogue *Bits of Travel at Home* (1878), Jackson devoted one chapter, titled "The Chinese Empire," to her experience in San Francisco Chinatown.

10 Critics such as John Kuo Wei Chen in *New York before Chinatown* and John Rogers Haddad in *The Romance of China: Excursions to China in US Culture: 1776–1876* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018) explore the roles of museums and fairs of foreign objects and curiosities in nineteenth-century US.

11 Anthony W. Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 38.

12 Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 17.

13 Shaffer, *See America First*, 21.

14 Charles A. Higgins, *To California and Back: A Book of Practical Information for Travelers to the Pacific* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1904), 242.

It began the East–West / West–East encounter with a sense of familiarity and condescension. “The sight had nothing novel in it,” Jackson noted, since the supposedly “spectacular” sight of SF Chinatown appeared more mundane than sensational:

Those who are unable to visit it in person, as we did, can learn just about as much by a careful and imaginative study of Chinese fans and the outsides of tea-chests. Never did an indefatigable nation so perpetuate faithful facsimile of itself, its people, customs, and fashions as the Chinese do in the grotesque, high-colored, historical paper with which they line, cover, and wrap every article of their merchandise.¹⁵

Here, Jackson prioritizes art, imagination, and virtual travel over authentic experiences proffered by real travel. The mimetic effect of Chinese art, through its “faithful facsimile of itself” in its artifacts, rendered traveling to the actual site banal or even obsolete. Not only did the Chinese “act” of image reproduction “in the grotesque, high-colored, historical paper” seem more realistic than “the real thing,” but its “grotesque” artisanship was devalued, commercialized, trivialized, (and even vulgarized) in Jackson’s quotidian practice as a white, middle-class, female consumer of oriental goods: “In my seventh year, I possessed his portrait. It was done on rice-paper, and set in the lid of a box. Afterward, I had him on the outside of a paper of crackers, and fired him off to celebrate our superiority as a nation.”¹⁶ Jackson celebrated her sense of national “superiority” through this act of “performing” and “consuming” Chinese products – in the case, Jackson literally burned and set the Chinese firecrackers into the sky, turning the consumption of oriental goods into an American spectacle (“celebrate our superiority as a nation”).¹⁷

Jackson’s initial impression of Chinatown not only speaks to the materiality of orientalism as a cultural performance, but it further reveals the prevalence of “mass-media visibility” – the “aesthetic environments marked by convergence, immersion, illusion, and virtuality” that Shelly Jarenski analyzes in the era of technological advancement after 1839 in America; examples of visual convergence include “panoramic daguerreotype

15 Helen Hunt Jackson, *Bits of Travel at Home* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1890), 62.

16 Jackson, *Bits of Travel at Home*, 62.

17 In *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17–18, Mari Yoshihara observes that white upper-middle-class women in America between 1870s and 1920s developed a special relationship with Asia through their collection and consumption of Asia as “spectacle” and “commodity.”

photographs and advertisements, as well as narrative sketches, *ekphrasis*, and textual portraits."¹⁸ Gillen D'Arcy Wood also notes how the mimetic effect of the technological wonder, especially panoramas, became "the shock of the real" for many nineteenth-century viewers.¹⁹ The immersive illusion created by virtuality, predicated upon the absence of the real, radically transformed the aesthetic experience of the modern viewer. Peculiarly, this sense of "technological wonder" that mass-media visuality brought about was associated by Jackson not with the emergence of technological development or modernity, but with the "indefatigable" perpetuation, objectification and reenactment of Chinese tradition and antiquity. San Francisco Chinatown appeared for Jackson as a uniquely spectatorial combination of pictorial fixity and oriental virtuality, in which the repetition of cultural stereotypes ("faithful facsimile") intermingled with the fantastic ("the grotesque, high-colored, historical") oriental fable. Her initial account thus asserted the Saidian radical form of realism, in which the hybrid accumulations of stereotypical images on display in one's everyday practice was solidified into a firm sense of reality for white, middle-class, female consumer-tourists like Jackson.

However, this perpetuated visuality of Chineseness, embedded in these artifacts, was also predicated upon their consumability and dispensability. While these Chinese fans, tea chests, rice papers and wrapping papers provide a seemingly "faithful" visual rendering of Chineseness, their ubiquity and permeation in her everyday practice were characterized by their collectability, portability and commodifiability, and thus also point to the fragility and temporality of San Francisco Chinatown as a consumer-oriented theatrical spectacle rather than an inhibited, actual living space. Not only were the fabrics of fans and rice papers extremely delicate and inflammable materials, but the reference to "fir[ing] him off" in Jackson's account also evoked an objectified and effigy-like existence of Chinese presence, foreshadowing its almost martyr-like endurance of brutal racial attack in the 1860s and 1870s, and its eventual exclusion in the 1880s. Jackson's apparent elation about American supremacy, with its subordination of Chinese culture through the consumption of oriental firecrackers, was thus embraced not without its underlying tension, of which Jackson was aware. When responding to the comment of her policeman-tour guide on

18 Shelly Jarenski, *Immersive Words: Mass Media, Visuality, and American Literature, 1839–1893* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2015), 3–4.

19 Gillen D'Arcy Wood, *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760–1860* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

the suspicious attitudes the local residents held towards foreign visitors, Jackson replied sympathetically that “[t]hey have been so hardly treated, it is no wonder.”²⁰ The eternal “self-duplicability” of Chineseness through its self-Orientalized facsimiles and duplications came into conflict with the mutable materiality and consumable vulnerability embodied by these merchandises and artifacts.

The duplicability and banality of San Francisco Chinatown soon morphed into spectatorial fascination for Jackson. The “dignity and equilibrium” of Chinese shoes, the “general neatness and cleanliness” of Chinese attires, and the “Christian patience under the insulting and curious gaze of many strangers” compelled her to exclaim that “I did not feel so sure of our superiority when I came to walk behind” a Chinese man.²¹ When Jackson found herself observed by a Chinese woman on the street with “a quick look of such contempt,” she took revenge by laughing at the “hideous” and “grotesque” fashion of her hair, which was never seen even “on the heads of peasant women in the German provinces,” the “queer black, junk-like shoes, turned up at the toes, and slipping off at the heel at every step,” and the “monstrosity” of her children.²² The clothes of the Chinese woman and her children became part of the oriental objects on display, and yet they served as one of those funhouse mirrors that reflected Jackson’s own sense of unease back onto herself: “In the sunless recesses of Quong Tuck Lane, I trust thou hast had many a laugh with thy comrades over the gown and hat I wore on Dupont Street that day.”²³ The chimerical visions of San Francisco Chinatown ricocheted into a proliferation of images accommodating Jackson’s self-deprecation as well as oriental projection. The “dignity and equilibrium” of the Chinese attires contrast with the “monstrosity” of the appearance of the Chinese woman and her children, Jackson’s own sense of superiority in juxtaposition with the imagined absurdity of her western gown. Christine Holbo calls this double consciousness of Jackson her “modern perspectivalism,” a technique employed to cater for the “cosmopolitan sophistication” of her reader.²⁴ In the context of her Chinatown visit, this multi-perspectivalism can also be seen as forming a multi-layered textual site of “phantasmatic” orientalism, which is unsettling and yet transient (“when” and “that day”). While these conflicting images speak to Bhabha’s

20 Jackson, *Bits of Travel at Home*, 63.

21 Jackson, 62.

22 Jackson, 64.

23 Jackson, 64.

24 Christine Holbo, “Industrial and Picturesque Narrative’: Helen Hunt Jackson’s California Travel Writing for the Century,” *American Literary Realism* 42, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 245, 250.

so-called "hybridity," which threatens to undermine colonial discourse, they are presented in such a prescribed, well-contained exhibitionary manner that they seem securely "cosmopolitan" and thus less disruptive.

The sheer physicality of San Francisco Chinatown evokes a further sense of virtual reality for Jackson once she stepped onto Jackson street: "The street was suddenly becoming like a street of Peking, and that the trades of Hong Kong, Canton, and their suburbs were buzzing on either hand of me."²⁵ The proximity of Chinatown to downtown San Francisco disoriented Jackson's sense of place: "There we are in America again. We turn back in bewilderment, and retrace our steps a little way into the Empire again, to make sure that it was not a dream!"²⁶ This delayed sense of shock deepened when she struggled for words to describe one of the "picturesque" shops on Jackson Street: "It is neither grocer's, nor butcher's, nor fishmonger's, nor druggist's; but a little of all four. It is [...] part cellar, part cellar-stairs, part sidewalk, and part back bedroom."²⁷ This spatial hybridity of the store's architectural structure corresponded with the visual ambiguity of its contents: "There are things that look like games, like toys, like lamps, like idols, like utensils of lost trades, like relics of lost tribes, like – well, like a pawnbroker's stock, just brought from some other world!"²⁸ This cognitive "likeness" of these mental analogies escalated into a moment of panic. Jackson was "seized by horror" when she touched a piece of artefact hanging outside the shop and imagined that it might be "a piece of an ancestor of Moo's, doing ghostly duty at his shop-door:" "It is not paper; it is not cloth; it is not woolen, silk, nor straw; it is not leather; it is not cobweb; it is not alive; it is not dead: it crimps and curls at my touch; it waves backward, though no air blows it."²⁹ Vacillating between amazement, confusion and terror, Jackson's Chinatown experience foregrounded a highly mutable site of both hyperreality ("the sight had nothing novel in it") and unreality ("We turn back [...] to make sure that it was not a dream!"), normative repetition ("faithful facsimile") and uncanny otherness ("like [...] like [...] it is not [...] it is not").³⁰

San Francisco Chinatown in Jackson's account transforms from a manageable and reproducible spectacle of oriental fixity into a more dynamic,

25 Jackson, *Bits of Travel at Home*, 63.

26 Jackson, 69.

27 Jackson, 63.

28 Jackson, 63.

29 Jackson, 67.

30 I borrow the term hyperreality from Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations* (Semiotext[e], 1983), in which he discusses the connection between reproduction of the real and the potential absence of truth.

transient, and disorderly existence that speaks to the experience of modernity. While these shops might seem quaint, ghostly, or “picturesque,” when Jackson tried to classify what she saw, the images became visually jarring, confronting the epistemological limitation on the part of its Western visitor to decipher what appeared to be indecipherable. Her attempts to produce a systematic depiction of these oriental commodities by recreating an immersive, virtual experience and an encompassing view deteriorated into a sequence of repeatedly parallel analogies and linguistic negations (“nor,” “part,” “like” and “not”). These repeated syntactic patterns of negation revealed multiple visual difficulty in distinguishing the original from the copy, the real from the unreal (“We turn back in bewilderment, and retrace our steps a little way into the Empire again, to make sure that it was not a dream!”).³¹ Visiting Chinatown became an alternative type of virtual travel that is both consumable and unsettling. Its physical and visual stimulation mentally transports Jackson across the Pacific Ocean to Peking, Hong Kong, and Canton spontaneously. The materiality of the oriental goods, the nearness of these unknown objects and Jackson’s touching of the piece of Moo’s artifact further excavated the ancestral past of China in a gothic manner that disrupted one’s sense of temporal continuity (“utensils of lost trades,” “relics of lost tribes,” “a piece of an ancestor of Moo’s”). Leonard Cassuto notes that the cultural grotesque “occurs when an image cannot be easily classified even on the most fundamental level” and thus “has a peculiar disruptive power.”³² In the case of Jackson, the grotesque “monstrosity” of these artifacts works along with the hallucinating hyperreality of the street views to shock Jackson into a psychological state of temporal and spatial disorientation.

While such a chaotic moment of temporality points to the emerging condition of modernity, with which many contemporary visitors of Jackson’s time might become increasingly familiar, it harkens back more to the “shock of the real” for many nineteenth-century museum visitors. In his discussion of the impact of panoramas in the early nineteenth century, Wood notes that “the shock effect of the panoramas lay not with the scope and variety of their marvelous scenes – which could, conceivably, be experienced by a conscientious traveler over time but with their instantaneous viewability.”³³ Jackson appears to experience an alternative kind of “shock effect,” since

31 Jackson, *Bits of Travel at Home*, 69.

32 Leonard Cassuto, *The Inhuman Race: The Racial Grotesque* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 6, 8, 27.

33 Wood, *The Shock of the Real*, 106.

the "instantaneous viewability" of the spectacle is not produced by the realism of its representation, but by her physical proximity to the replica of "the real thing." Such a "reverse" shock effect is, nevertheless, similar to the one produced by these panoramas in the sense that the very nearness of these objects, their closeness to the "original," and their unnameability make this "viewability" startling. In this case, seeing is not believing, but disbelieving. Despite their tangibility and accessibility, such closeness through sight and touch only reaffirm the spatial and semiotic opacity of oriental commodities as if they were "just brought from some other world!" Ralph O'Connor remarks on how panoramas "embodied a dominant Enlightenment attitude to nature" and thus "ended up providing a metaphorical resource for natural science."³⁴ Jackson's intent to draw a scientific picture of a panoramic Chinatown shows a similar enlightenment attempt to cope with the "viewability" (and accessibility) of the oriental spectacle by categorizing, labeling, and even touching the specimen she saw, to no avail.

Michael Foucault's exploration of spatial order in *The Order of Things* (1966) might still be useful in reading this spectatorial fuzziness and cognitive ambiguity of Jackson's Chinatown account. In his preface, Foucault discusses the spatial fixity of China by dividing locality into utopias and heterotopias: "Utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the fabula; heterotopias [...] desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences."³⁵ For Foucault, the notion of China is emblematic of such a utopic fabula, since "the Chinese culture is the most meticulous, the most rigidly ordered, the one most deaf to temporal events, most attached to the pure delineation of space."³⁶ While Foucault associates Chinese culture with "the most rigidly ordered" and "most attached to the pure delineation of space," Jackson's spatial depiction of Chinatown presents an epistemological shift from the static, "eternal" utopic space of China as a picture and a piece of commodity, towards a heterotopic space of contradiction, inconsistency, and paradox that defies linguistic inscription and syntactical coherence. Foucault explains that "heterotopias are disturbing,

34 Ralph O'Connor, *The Earth on Show: Fossils and the Poetics of Popular Science, 1802–1856* (Chicago, IL/ London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 271.

35 Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge 2005), 19.

36 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 20.

probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together.'³⁷ Jackson's repeated pronouncement of her inability to name what she saw or heard shows such a linguistic-spatial movement from the knowable to the unnamable that "desiccate speech," "stop words in their tracks," thwarting her attempt to textually (and visually) reconstruct a real Chinese vision.

Jackson's Chinatown account thus exposes more cognitive gaps than the "faithful facsimile" could initially placate; it also shows the disturbingly reversible relationship between the imagined and the real in a hyper-stimulating environment of image, sound, and touch. Towards the later part of her trip, Jackson's notion of Chineseness, which seemed duplicable and repetitive, evolved into a mobile and non-representable (or even anti-representational) space of heterotopia, resisting her static, "picturesque" linguistic inscription. Jackson's Chinese theater visits further such spatial disorientation and temporal disorder. The orchestra the Chinese played was compared to "one frog-pond, one Sunday school with pumpkin whistles, one militia training, and two gongs for supper, on a Fall River boat, all at once."³⁸ As Jackson complained about the noise on the stage: "It was so loud we could not see; it was so loud we could not breathe; it was so loud there didn't seem to be any room to sit down!"³⁹ One's sense of space was distorted, or even eliminated by the loudness of the sound. Another "fierce spectacular play" was similarly described as "dazzling as a gigantic kaleidoscope and deafening as a cotton-mill."⁴⁰ Jackson's technological references such as "a gigantic kaleidoscope" and "a cotton-mill" were explicitly associated with

37 Foucault, 19.

38 Jackson, *Bits of Travels at Home*, 69.

39 Jackson, 70. Jackson's reaction towards Chinese theatre was not uncommon among her contemporaries. As Raymond Schwab explains, "China's linguistic instrument appeared in a formidable solitude, bewildering the mental habits of the West, rendering the problem of equivalences among languages almost absurd, and refusing to allow its closed system to be drawn into the comparative school." See Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 6. See also Donald Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams: Music in the Life of San Francisco's Chinese* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983) and Daphne Pi-Wei Lei, "The Production and Consumption of Chinese Theater in Nineteenth-Century California," *Theater Research International* 28 (2003): 292–298.

40 Jackson, *Bits of Travels at Home*, 74.

optical illusions and industrial advancement common in a time of "the emergence of media ubiquity."⁴¹ The hyper-sensorial stimulation of the Chinese operas created an environment of multi-medium convergence that, ironically, disrupted her experience of sound, sight and space to the point that "words and things" couldn't "hold together."⁴² It was not surprising that Jackson's Chinatown journey ended with her being speechless when she was asked to take charge of a Chinese Sunday school class and explain the word "tradition" (spelled as "tradition" by Jackson phonetically in a local color fashion) in the fifteenth chapter of Matthew in *The New Testament*: "What are tradition? Arx-play-in!"⁴³ Finding herself "in so utterly desperate a dilemma," Jackson wished "the floor of that Sunday-school chapel would open and swallow me up."⁴⁴ Jackson concluded the episode with a temporary solution – her metaphoric (and virtual) escape from that pedagogical space and the question of "tradition." Linguistic definition appears problematic in a space where mediation and negotiation between cultural difference fall apart.

The "mass-media visuality" or "viewability" of Jackson's Chinatown experience unsettled the nationalist narrative that she initially pursued as delineating the US "superiority as a nation." In "The Chinese Empire," Jackson claimed herself to be a "uncommercial traveler" that "had not come to buy, but simply to look at, to lift, to taste, or to smell the extraordinary commodities offered for sale in the empire."⁴⁵ And yet, this seemingly disinterested attitude towards materialistic transaction and her enthusiasm in the "genuine" experience of Chineseness spoke to a more abstract type of commodification – consumptions that confirmed her republican vision. When she saw a "poor, wrinkled, forlorn old creature, sewing away on the hopelessly ragged garment," Jackson called it "a Chinese toga;" while the old woman chanted a few words, Jackson again evoked the picture of a political imagination: "If there is such a thing in the Chinese Empire as a constitution, and if they have a Woman's Rights party, perhaps some wag has taught her to call. 'Here's your Sixteenth Amendment.'"⁴⁶ However, when Jackson was

41 Colette Colligan and Margaret Linley, eds. *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 1.

42 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, XIX.

43 Jackson, *Bits of Travels at Home*, 75.

44 Jackson, 75.

45 Jackson, 64.

46 Jackson, 67–68. Critics have shown how Jackson negotiates between the public and the private as a white middle-class female writer. See, for example, Bryan Wagner, "Helen Hunt Jackson's Errant Local Color," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 58,

asked to explain what defined the English word “tradition” in the Chinese Sunday school, her earlier patriotic conviction about American superiority was shaken facing the potentiality of Chinese assimilation. Shaffer notes that towards the end of the nineteenth-century tourism was seen as “a kind of virtuous consumption” that “promised to reconcile this national mythology, which celebrated nature, democracy, and liberty, with the realities of an urban-industrial nation-state dependent on extraction, consumption, and hierarchy.”⁴⁷ Jackson’s Chinatown account showed this underlying tension between the American celebration of republican values and the asymmetrical power relation that Chinatown embodied as a contested site of ideological as well as visual hierarchy. Jackson’s observation anticipated what Shaffer calls “mobile citizenship that redefined political rights in consumer terms, celebrating seeing over speaking, purchasing over voting, and traveling over participating.”⁴⁸ However, Jackson became “immobile” with the “desperateness” she felt in her inability to account for “tradition” in a heterotopic transcultural space like San Francisco Chinatown. Her “visual consumption” of Chinatown highlighted the irreconcilability between Chinese “authenticity” and the “virtuality” of her own white middle-class national fantasy. Jackson might have set out to “virtuously” affirm the hierarchal order of the US through her subordination of the “virtual” China, but her Chinatown account subverted such a nationalist affirmation.

Mark Twain’s *Roughing It* (1872)

Mark Twain’s Chinatown account informs an alternative spatial and temporal imagination towards the “phantasmatic” site of Californian Chinatowns, with its focus on the mundane details of these Chinatown residents. Twain had been vocal about his sympathy towards the ill-treatment of Chinese immigrants early on.⁴⁹ In his 1872 *Roughing It*, he reminisced about the

no.4 (Winter 2002): 1–23; John M. Gonzalez, “The Warp of Whiteness: Domesticity and Empire in Helen Hunt Jackson’s ‘Ramona,’” *American Literary History* 16, no.3 (Autumn, 2004): 437–465 and Kimberly E. Armstrong, “A Failed Uncle Tom’s Cabin for the Indian: Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona* and the Power of Paratext,” *Western American Literature* 52, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 129–156.

47 Shaffer, *See America First*, 5.

48 Shaffer, 6.

49 Critics have shown how Twain’s anti-imperialistic sentiment was formed during his Californian stay in the 1860s, and how the racial violence he witnessed there shaped his later career as a satirist. See, for example, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1985) and “Mark Twain and Race,” *A Historical Guide to Mark Twain*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002);

brutal attack against Chinese immigrants on the street and accounted for racial oppression and social immobility imposed upon them. Depicted more as an ethnographic site of Chinese quotidian existence rather than a spectacle of "incomprehensible" oriental goods, Chinatowns in Twain were characterized by their daily practices, such as gardening, laundry, and mining business, the worshipping habits of local residents, opium-smoking, and "the genius" of Chinese book-keeping.⁵⁰ Twain commented on the frugality and pragmatism of Chinese daily practice thus: "In California they rent little patches of ground and do a deal of gardening. They will raise surprising crops of vegetables on a sand pile. They waste nothing. What is rubbish to a Christian, a Chinaman carefully preserves and makes useful in one way or another."⁵¹ Twain emphasizes the industrious side of Chinese cultural behavior, speaking implicitly to the prevalent public perception of Chinatown's density, enclosure and its labyrinth – all of which were considered a threat to the public health of American urban environment.⁵² Twain's observation shows the effective use of the land resources ("They waste nothing") in Chinatown, which ties into the stereotype of Chinese workers as being economical, and yet it also makes the perceived visual opacity of Chinese spatial practice appear more transparent.

Twain's depiction of Chinese opium-smoking further evoked layered cultural imageries that mobilize the Foucauldian "pure delineation" of Chineseness. His opium scene was associated not simply with the spectacle of the leisurely or the depravity of the poor, but more with the "comfortless" chores these Chinese laborers had to put up with in order to momentarily escape from their misery and poverty. The opium house was a "little cooped-up, dingy cavern of a hut, faint with the odor of burning Josh-lights and with nothing to see the gloom by save the sickly, guttering tallow candle."⁵³ The operation of opium-smoking was repulsive: "The stewing and frying of the drug and the gurgling of the juices in the stem would well-nigh turn the stomach of a statue."⁵⁴ Exercising some form of "cultural voyeurism,"

Hsin-yun Ou, "Mark Twain's Racial Ideologies and His Portrayal of the Chinese," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 36, no. 2, (September 2010): 33–59; Hsuan L. Hsu, *Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain's Asia and Comparative Racialization* (New York: New York University Press, 2015) and Selina Lai-Henderson, *Mark Twain in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

50 Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 369–374.

51 Twain, *Roughing It*, 370.

52 In *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*, Nayan Shah points out three characteristics of Chinatown in the American office Health report in the 1850s–1880s – its density, its enclosure, and its labyrinth (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 17–44.

53 Twain, *Roughing It*, 372.

54 Twain, *Roughing It*, 373.

Twain peeped into the domestic realm of the “little cooped-up, dingy cavern of a hut” and dreamed with “the soggy creature” about a brighter future: “Possibly in his visions he travels far away from the gross world and his regular washing, and feasts on succulent rats and birds'-nests in Paradise.”⁵⁵ Speculating on behalf of the Chinese smoker for “succulent rats and birds'-nests,” Twain’s visual consumption of the narcotic spectacle turned that “dingy cavern of a hut” into a “virtual” experience – his imagined dreamland of the eastern “Paradise.”

Undeniably, Twain’s “virtual” dreaming through the eyes of the opium-smoker is replete with stereotypes about the unsanitary conditions of Chinese food. In a later section of the same chapter of *Roughing It*, Twain described Mr. Ah Sing’s hospitality by bringing up rats and birds'-nests again: “He offered us a mess of birds'-nests; also, small, neat sausages, of which we could have swallowed several yards if we had chosen to try, but we suspected that each link contained the corpse of a mouse, and therefore refrained.”⁵⁶ Images like “a mess of birds'-nests” and “several yards” of sausages with “the corpse of a mouse” pointed towards consumable goods that are largely of speculative nature and potentially Orientalized. By mapping this half-shown, half-conjectured oriental “feast” onto the opium dream of the Chinese smoker, Twain re-enforced the fixity of oriental fantasy and enacted his own oriental fantasy simultaneously. Such a projection posed as an interface between his empirical observation and reality, materiality, and virtuality. It further manifested an exoticized American dream, since “succulent rats and birds'-nests in Paradise,” displayed in the food products of Mr. Ah Sing’s store, also suggested synecdochally the American promise of materialistic success that the opium-smoking Chinese laborer might have longed for. Susan Nance remarks that oriental tales in *The Arabian Nights* were “not in effect a protest against materialism or industrialism or capitalism but a way of participating in these developments in ways that seemed creative and authentic to the emerging identities of many individuals” in nineteenth-century America.⁵⁷ In a similar way, by conjuring up “succulent rats and birds'-nests in Paradise,” Twain’s orientalist discourse also participated in the capitalist fantasy of American dreams by mediating between the oriental other and the occidental viewer, between Eastern luxury and American success through his virtual enactment of a “spectacular” Chinese banquet.

55 Twain, *Roughing It*, 373.

56 Twain, *Roughing It*, 373.

57 Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790–1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 20–21.

Twain experimented with the multi-layered theatrical space of Chi-neseness in an earlier short story "John Chinaman in New York," in which dreaming with the Chinese other was exposed as a cultural imposition and oriental performance misconstrued.⁵⁸ In the article, Twain encountered a Chinaman "acting in the capacity of a sign" in front of "one of those monster American tea stores in New York." Feeling indignant towards his maltreatment, Twain wrote that "Is it not a shame that we who prate so much about civilization and humanity are content to degrade a fellow-being to such an office as this? Is it not time for reflection when we find ourselves willing to see in such a being, in such a situation, matter merely for frivolous curiosity instead of regret and grave reflection?"⁵⁹ In a way similar to his account of the opium-smoker in *Roughing It*, Twain evoked an oriental dreamland elsewhere, in the case of this story, the hometown of the Chinaman across the Pacific Ocean, to account for the experience of displacement for the Chinese stranger in the US: "Were his thoughts with his heart, ten thousand miles away, beyond the billowy wastes of the Pacific? And now and then, rippling among his visions and his dreams, did he hear familiar laughter and half-forgotten voices, and did he catch fitful glimpses of the friendly faces of a bygone time?"⁶⁰ This contemplative, orientalist projection was soon shattered when the true identity of the Chinaman was revealed in the end as an Irishman, not only turning the moral lesson of the story on its head, but also satirizing the widespread contemporary complaint made by Irish laborers about "cheap Chinese labor" in the 1860s and 1870s. The performativity of racial stereotypes was foregrounded here, in which Chinese identity became a disembodied experience to be masqueraded and enacted rather than authenticated and essentialized.

Like Jackson's account, Twain's Chinatown also exhibited conflicting images between a reproducible pictorial presentation of oriental exoticism and an ethnographical claim to cultural truth. While Jackson was confounded, embarrassed, and then paralyzed by her Chinatown experience, Twain's account demonstrated a more explicit investment in the social and emotional immobility experienced by Chinatown residents. In his portrayal of Virginia City Chinatown, Twain observed the shabby and makeshift situation of its narrow streets "scarcely wide enough for a wagon to pass through" and one-story wooden buildings "set thickly together."⁶¹ The Chinese quarter

58 Mark Twain, "John Chinaman in New York," *The Galaxy Magazine* (September 1870), 426.

59 Twain, "John Chinaman in New York," 426.

60 Twain, "John Chinaman in New York," 426.

61 Twain, *Roughing It*, 369.

was “a little removed from the rest of the town” and the Chinese immigrants were “penned into” the small space without given much choice.⁶² While Twain remarked backhandedly that this spatial confinement was “a thing which they [the Chinese] do not particularly object to, as they are fond of herding together,” in the previous paragraph Twain framed his ethnological observation with his editorial voice through the reportage of a racial hate crime in San Francisco at the moment of his writing: “As I write, news comes that in broad daylight in San Francisco, some boys have stoned an inoffensive Chinaman to death, and that although a large crowd witnessed the shameful deed, no one interfered.”⁶³ Twain might be referring to the event he wrote for *New York Tribune* on the racial attack in San Francisco, 2 June 1871: “The police are endeavoring to arrest a gang of boys who stoned to death an inoffensive Chinaman on Fourth St. yesterday afternoon. Dozens of people witnessed the assault, but did not interfere until the murder was complete. No attempt was then made to arrest the murderers.”⁶⁴ Since Chinese immigrants were banned from state courtroom testimony, along with the black, mulatto and Indian, against a white man from the 1850s to the 1870s, Twain invited his readers to virtually “witness” the assault with him.⁶⁵ Here, Twain introduced an alternative “shock of the real,” not through “the mimetic effect” of Chinese images, but by synchronizing the news reportage with the act of writing to produce a temporal space of visual protest (“witnessed the shameful deed”). Rather than impose “an imperial gaze” upon the racial other, Twain turned onlookers’ (and by extension his readers’) eyewitness into public testimony against the racial injustice conducted “in broad daylight.”

In accounts like this, Twain brought one’s attention to writing as a medium itself and added a physical and temporal dimension to his ethnographic depiction with his inter-textual intervention. He incorporated the seemingly

62 Twain, *Roughing It*, 369. As Hsuan L. Hsu notes, the institution of vagrancy laws in southern and western states in the postbellum United States was “removing or imprisoning racialized groups to more profitable locations, such as southern chain gangs, urban Chinatowns, and Indian reservations.” Hsu, *Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain’s Asia and Comparative Racialization* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 53–54.

63 Twain, *Roughing It*, 369.

64 On Twain’s newspaper reference, see Hsin-yun Ou’s “Mark Twain’s Racial Ideologies and His Portrayal of the Chinese,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 36, no. 2 (September 2010): 33–59.

65 Hsu, *Sitting in Darkness*, 28. More on the banning of Chinese immigrants to testify in state courts, see, for example, Hsu’s *Sitting in Darkness*, 28–30. See also Charles J. McClain’s *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 20–42.

abrupt declaration ("As I write") into his Chinatown account, creating a linguistic tension to accentuate the moral urgency of its racial protest. Twain's stress on the simultaneity of his writing this – the happening of the news – established a sense of veracity to the account and potentially corrected (or even subverted) his later racialized pronouncement about Chinatown's density and enclosure in the next paragraph ("they are fond of herding together"). In the footnote to "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy," Twain mentioned a similar report he wrote in 1864, "where the Brannan street butchers set their dogs on a Chinaman who was quietly passing with a basket of clothes on his head; and while the dogs mutilated his flesh, a butcher increased the hilarity of the occasion by knocking some of the Chinaman's teeth down his throat with half a brick. This incident sticks in my memory with a more malevolent tenacity."⁶⁶ Memoranda like this on "the hilarity of the occasion" added poignancy (and potency) to the "disgraceful persecution" of Chinese immigrants despite its pastness, since the condition evoked in Twain's memory persisted to the present moment of his writing.

Henri Lefebvre's notion of the production of space might be helpful in understanding Twain's aesthetic strategy to produce a dramatic textual space, in order to "interfere" with the condition of racial oppression. In *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Lefebvre states that the study of everyday life "exposes the possibilities of conflict between the rational and the irrational in our society and our time" and reveals "how the social existence of human beings is produced."⁶⁷ Through his evocation of those earlier witness accounts about street violence, Twain created a new editorial space to combat the "hilarity of the occasion." In this way, Twain's Chinatown was not simply an ethnographical site of scientific observation or a "phantasmatic" site of mirroring and projection that so dazzled and confronted Jackson. It also pointed to the radical possibility of producing new spatial practices for social and racial freedom through Twain's writerly intervention, through the transformation of curious gazes into virtual witness. When Jackson visited San Francisco Chinatown between 1872–1873, it was also the time when Twain's *Roughing It* was published.⁶⁸ In fact, Jackson also made a brief comment on the act of writing in her travelogue. Jackson relied on the assistance of "a very short policeman," a local friend, and a number of Chinese

66 Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Sketches New and Old* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1875), 119.

67 Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 23.

68 Although, as Kate Phillips notes, Jackson did not seem to be influenced much by Twain's work about Europe, she might have read Twain's sympathetic depictions of the Chinese in the 1870s. See Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life*, 161, 312.

interpreters to help her understand what she saw, and she digressed briefly to observe how the physical trait of her local policeman was part of the conditions of writing: “I have been impressed with the fact that good writers, in giving accounts of city experiences, invariably meet a tall policeman.”⁶⁹ In contrast to Jackson’s “cosmopolitan,” lighthearted, facetious remark, Twain syncopated the transient act of editorial writing with that of news reporting, bringing his reader to the scene of violent assaults to enhance the immediacy and authenticity of this virtual experience.

During his visit to the Chinatown in Virginia City, Twain was also impressed with the display of oriental goods and objects. The store of Mr. Sing, for example, contained “a thousand articles of merchandise, curious to behold, impossible to imagine the uses of, and beyond our ability to describe.”⁷⁰ The artifacts of Mr. See Yup were like “fans of white feathers, gorgeously ornamented; perfumery that smelled like Lim-burger cheese, Chinese pens, and watch-charms made of a stone unscratchable with steel instruments, yet polished and tinted like the inner coat of a sea-shell.”⁷¹ However, it seems to be the everyday spatial practice of the Chinese immigrants – particularly their physical and mental vulnerability as a “persecuted race” in the “land of the free” – that drew most of his attention. While Jackson was paralyzed by the heterotopic disorder of San Francisco Chinatown and became speechless towards the end of her Chinatown trip (“I wished the floor of that Sunday-school chapel would open and swallow me up”), Twain’s Chinatown writing was galvanized by the social and material immobility as well as symbolic “(self)-immolation” that the Chinese immigrants had to endure to survive, either through their avoiding racial violence by “herding together” or their mental escape “in their opium-dreams” (“in his visions he travels far away from the gross world.”)⁷²

Conclusion

Jackson and Twain experienced nineteenth-century Chinatowns as either a temporal exhibition site of spectacles and commodities, with mutable materiality and porous boundaries, or ephemeral street acts to be witnessed, memorized and eventually “intercepted.” Jackson’s immersive Chinatown

69 Jackson, *Bits of Travel at Home*, 63.

70 Twain, *Roughing It*, 373.

71 Twain, *Roughing It*, 374.

72 Twain, *Roughing It*, 369, 373.

experience unsettled her understanding of "authentic" Chineseness and the constructiveness of national supremacy, revealing the multilayered, prism-like effects of her own "phantasmatic" duplication and projection of the oriental otherness. Twain's Chinese account demonstrated an alternative approach towards Chinatown by presenting it as a space of imposed social enclosure, physical immobility, and emotional paralysis. In particular, Twain's Chinatown accounts were mobilized through its connections with scenes elsewhere, whether it was the public streets in San Francisco and New York, where physical or social aggression inflicted upon Chinese immigrants were sighted ("in broad daylight in San Francisco;" "one of those monster American tea stores in New York"), or imaginary lands elsewhere or across the Pacific Ocean ("succulent rats and birds'-nests in Paradise;" "ten thousand miles away, beyond the billowy wastes of the Pacific").⁷³ Through his virtual dreaming with and for the Chinese immigrants, Twain's Chinatown writing spoke to the transient and performative nature of his own oriental-American fantasy. His evocation of witness memory and syncopation of writing with seeing further showed an attempt to erase the mediating trace of writing to shock his reader into visualizing and believing the "actuality" of domestic injustice and racial violence in the US.

With what James Weaver calls the "anti-imperial impulses" in *Bits of Travel at Home*, Jackson's encounter with San Francisco Chinatown epitomized the intellectual ambivalence experienced by her contemporary Americans in the 1870s.⁷⁴ Although Jackson did not seem prepared to answer the Chinese question, in which racial assimilation played a central part in the early 1870s ("What are tradition? Arx-play-in!"), she was moved by the plight of Native Americans later, writing works like *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) and *Ramona* (1884) to defend Native American rights and promote their assimilation into American society. Joshua Paddison remarks that different racial and cultural perceptions about the Indians and the Chinese led to divergent governmental solutions in the 1880s – "exclusion and expulsion for the Chinese" because of their stagnancy and unassimilability, and "cultural extermination campaigns in the form of allotment and re-education for Indians" because of their "mutable" receptiveness of "Euro-American Christianity."⁷⁵ Indeed, Jackson's Chinatown account showed her hesitation to consider the possibility of Christianizing the

73 Twain, *Roughing It*, 373 and "John Chinaman in New York," 426.

74 James Weaver, "Being In and Not Among: The Anti-Imperial Impulses of Helen Hunt Jackson's *Bits of Travel at Home*," 221.

75 Joshua Paddison, *American Heathens: Religion, Race, and Reconstruction in California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 4.

seemingly uncontainable Chinese. Her shifting perceptions of San Francisco Chinatown exemplified such an experiential disruption that made visible the tension between the imposition of visual order and the ephemeral material presence of Chinese 'tradition' against Western inscription.

Around the time Jackson published *Ramona* (1884), a romantic novel that boosted southern Californian tourism and established her literary reputation as a popular writer, Twain also published *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884 in the UK and 1885 in the US), a regionalist novel challenging the preconceived notion of Christian "silvilization." Both books were set in a pre-Civil War era in the South and criticized post-war racial exploitation. They both incorporated local dialects in their writings, which, as Bryan Wagner suggests, "enabled certain types of political criticism, especially among those who were alienated from centers of power."⁷⁶ Both novels also shared the tradition of American protest novel that, according to Brian Norman, was characterized by "an awareness of and ability to address divided audiences within a nation that promises inclusion but enacts exclusion."⁷⁷ Despite their shared interest in the activism of minority right, the major difference of their aesthetic style – romantic novel vs. social satire – were already taking shape in their Chinatown encounter. It was not surprising that Jackson's *Ramona*, in a way similar to her Chinatown account, turned Southern California into a picturesque destination for visual consumption. Its literary and commercial success (and yet political "failure") depended upon the commodification of its virtual stimulation.⁷⁸ Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* took an alternative route by employing local dialects to excavate the antebellum memory of slavery and stimulate its readers to reflect upon the present-day persistence of racial oppression as an everyday occurrence.⁷⁹

76 Bryan Wagner, "Helen Hunt Jackson's Errant Local Color," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 58, no.4 (Winter 2002): 14. Wagner remarks on the changing function of local color writing in the postbellum years that "dialect generally lost its satirical edge and gained the luster of a tourist commodity (15)."

77 Brian Norman, "The Addressed and the Redressed: Helen Hunt Jackson's Protest Essay and the US Protest Novel Tradition," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 37, no.1 (2007): 114.

78 Wagner notes that "*Ramona* produces the nation [...] as a scripted encounter between a mobile consumer and a commodified local culture" ("Helen Hunt Jackson's Errant Local Color," 4). On the political "failure" of *Ramona* to promote and preserve Native American right and land, see also Kimberly E. Armstrong, "A Failed Uncle Tom's Cabin for the Indian: Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* and the Power of Paratext," *Western American Literature* 52, no. 2, (Summer 2017): 129–156 and Norman, "The Addressed and the Redressed: Helen Hunt Jackson's Protest Essay and the US Protest Novel Tradition."

79 More on "spatial possibilities" and *Huckleberry Finn*'s "negative freedom," see Hus's *Sitting in Darkness*, 55–73.

Californian Chinatowns in the 1870s were the meeting places between Chinese "Tradition" and Western "civilization." Their virtual reality (formalistic realism) for Jackson and Twain illuminated the social and aesthetic function of oriental fantasy as both an embodied and fabricated exhibition site for temporal spatial practice. Their early sketches spoke to the contested nature of Chinatowns as a "phantasmatic site" of Western projections and visual consumption, and their aesthetic attempts to write their ways into, as much as "out of" the textual space of "cultural grotesque," to quote Cassuto's words, in order to address the enmeshed issue of national values and racial inequality.⁸⁰ The Chinatown accounts of Jackson and Twain highlighted the spatial practice of Orientalism in the late-nineteenth-century US as both a palimpsest-like exhibition site of material and virtual consumption, and a mobilized temporal space for the cultural enactments of their own political agendas – in Jackson's case, rethinking the formation of the US nationhood, and in Twain's case, witnessing the immediacy of racial violence. The "viewability" of panoramic Chinatown played a crucial role in reshaping their conceptualization of racial encounters in the 1880s. Their accounts, opaque and multi-layered as they are, shed some light on how, in the decade before the passing of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, Californian Chinatowns were imagined and performed, witnessed, and reshaped by the two American writers in their search for a potential realization of national transformation in the mythic Orient of the new West.

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80 Cassuto, *The Inhuman Race*, 17.

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