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### **Four Seasons of Race, Color, and Representation in China**

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## Four Seasons of Race, Color, and Representation in China

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### Abstract

When school kids represent a global icon in a play, it prompts a foreign teacher's reflection of racial attitudes shaped by performance, trends and traditions. Researched and composed during a China residency without the aid of VPN, the article serves a metanarrative model of intellectual imperative under intercultural compromise.

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**Keywords:** Performance Studies, Autoethnography, Critical Race Theory, Anti-Apartheid Movement, Race and Racism in International Relations, Reflective Teaching, Chinese Opera, Scholarly Personal Narrative, Cultural Intersectionality, and Etic Vs Emic Perspectives.

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“His dressing table was alive with color. Vials containing vividly hued powders—reds, vermilions, greens, blues, turquoise, yellows—sparkled like assorted jewels.... From these essential ingredients were to come a multitude of faces...”

—Sophia Delza,

“A Picture of the Art of Face Painting and Make-up in Classical Chinese Theatre”

“Indeed, racial imagery and race-play are so much a part of our lives that we sometimes cease to view them as racial at all, or deny their racial origins and implications.”

— John G. Russell,

“Playing with Race/Authenticating Alterity”

**W**hen I arrived, Hunan Province was *sweltering*; don't even get me started on the mosquitos. People brandished parasols against the sun. Neither suntan lotion—nor sunblock—dotted the cityscape, the way they do seasonally in my North Carolina hometown. By September, I had watched hours of Chinese television commercials, including spots for whitening creams, some with American corporate cosmetics logos. A co-worker helped me locate (bleach free) Nivea for my skin, but when I ran out of toothpaste in October, I was on my own. Something curious was shelved among boxes of Colgate and Crest. Darlie, “owned 50 percent by Colgate-Palmolive,” is provocatively identifiable by “a stylized man in a top hat [who] replaced the previous racial stereotype” in 1990. The toothpaste originally named “Darkie” in the 1920s, and continuing to invite “different perspectives on the Chinese language brand” (Colgate-Palmolive), was inspired

by “blackface performer Al Jolson, a White man” (Chandler). Everyone stocks it, from Carrefour Changsha to the teeny bodega just outside my school gate. It’s just something I reflexively boycotted, like walking with friends but declining their shade, or switching the channel when its commercials air on TV. I wouldn’t be here long enough for it to matter, but assuming this and the concomitance of white predilection/black affirmation grew more unlikely as the seasons changed again.

By winter, I was invited to evaluate postmodern skits about the early career, imprisonment, and political triumph of President Nelson Mandela, South Africa’s late freedom fighter. The shows had free admittance and used minimal props, no stage sets—privileging “peace on earth/goodwill to all men” over Santa Claus and materialism. Nelson Mandela, it turns out, had been to China, “[a]fter his release from prison in 1990” (Zhang). He sustained international relations with China, on complex and some argue contradictory terms, for decades including the visit of Vice President Zeng Qinghong to South Africa in 2004. (“China inspires”) Mr. Mandela, who “met with a number of Chinese leaders, including former Presidents Jiang Zeming and Hu Jintao,” visited China more than once and “walked on the Great Wall in Beijing” (Zhang). This champion of “a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world” (Mandela), and present-day subject of Chinese tribute and curriculum, made a refreshingly suitable reason for the season.

Opening Night: The performers wore black t-shirts screen-printed white “I CAN’T BREATHE,” evoking the heart-breaking, final words of Eric Garner, an African-American father whose tragic passing away preceded and was followed by multiple forms of excessive force in America, igniting demonstrations that crisscrossed my country (and others). The marches of summer I had learned of from CCTV, but not the “die-ins” of autumn. I was surprised to find local play makers emblazoned with black politics, particularly from a place where Instagram had been blocked mid-way into the Hong Kong protests. It simulated black lives matter in the complex terms of diaspora positioned in African insurgent context.

The face paint, however, initiated another narrative entirely, although there was nothing remarkable about it besides being black. Applied monochromatically and evenly, it had rounded edges on the faces of the teenagers who carried on (in absence of irony and malice), propelled by determinations of English language line recall, enunciation, and projection out through the standing room only theater hall crowded with their peers. With everyone but the performers behind us (judges’ panel was out front, seated closest to the stage), I was unable to do much scanning of audience reaction, so I gauged the situation internally, and tried settling back into the enthusiastic tension familiar to me as a lifelong patron of concerts and plays.

“Dominant foreign groups”/“subaltern classes” (Spivak 284) overlap ‘when and where I enter’ for a number of reasons. Since there seemed no Pan-African awareness of blackface as *caricature*, despite an ethos of camaraderie, “I felt as though I was in a colonial ‘Twilight Zone’” (Attiah). I wondered how, *and if*, I ought to work around my African American perspective on race, which was outnumbered by other dynamics two to one. At the eye of this storm, a discomfiting swirl of Asian performance, African history, and American racism, I marveled at the “authentication of alterity” (Russell82) and the deployment of race “as ‘resistance’” (Russell 45). These students were so earnest and nervously passionate in their synchronized delivery the first night and so anxiously giddy the second night. Their t-shirts reminded me of different days

spent relenting to student requests for choices along a spectrum of dynamic “English Names” including *Ice Cube*, *Iverson*, and *Kobe*. At the risk of inadvertently bolstering “European material civilization and culture” (Said) with “the unconscious slips and blind spots” (Kapoor 19) of my “affirmative deconstruction” (Chakrabarti 6), *Obama/Lebron* became invitation for me to reevaluate “the Orient”/ “the Occident” (Said) informed by Chinese cultural perceptions of color.

Against a national backdrop of China’s, some suggest, colonial economic patterns (Finighan), the use of black-facing today to outline Chinese admiration for (South) Africa reads oddly, even when adopting “Of Mimicry and Man” for rhetorical exercise. Defined in context by biographical content, blackface was a “sign of the inappropriate” that re-signified the “‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers” (Bhabha126) maneuvers like excess and double articulation seek to undo. As a result, the t-shirt (insurgent optics) and simulated melanin (inscrutable deconstruction) were more than juxtaposed, they were contradicting. What could be made of mimicry performed at the critical “crossroads... between the lines... both against the rules and within them”? In other words, is it minstrelsy if participants are “*Almost the same but not white*” (Bhabha130) in a homeland that was neither America nor postcolonial?

Night Two: The teens assembled before us to perform their Mandela biopic in a smaller, more intimate space; we were almost in the round. A Christmas tree with presents stacked beneath stood to one side of the stage area. Schoolmates and well-wishing buddies huddled and texted from the shadows of the other. No one bothered about the cold as together, in Chinese fashion, our bodies heated the room. A *Glee*-like electricity charged the air along with the buzz of socializing teachers and parents and the yelps of laughter from little siblings high on candy and abandoned bedtimes on a school night. The lights dimmed and the stage lights came on. One student wore the t-shirt quote. The rest had on street clothes. The entire cast was in white paint.

“What’s with the whiteface?” I asked one of their advisors.

“Chinese theatrical custom,” she said.

*If whiteface was Chinese was blackface Chinese too?* Socially, this promised to be a difficult consideration, but after we left, I still wanted to explore. My campus library is a source of 100% Chinese language holdings, so I turned to what was left of the Internet. I learned that painting faces different colors has cultural roots in China and attempted to navigate through.

It is generally referred to as *liǎnpǔ* (脸) “types of facial makeup in operas.” As practice, it acts as “cultural language” and “bridge between the actors and the audience” that “reflects many aspects of traditional Chinese culture... [and] has some resemblance to calligraphy” (Huang). It is deliberate, cherished, and moreover, a signpost when staged: “The moment an actor steps onto the stage, his lianpu [sic] tells the audience clearly what his character is like” (Huang).

Which whiteness had I seen on kids reenacting apartheid guards, a Greek chorus, and Nelson and Winnie Mandela ‘in pancake’? “White when shiny indicates health and youth. When it is powdery, matte, and leaden, it symbolizes a negative condition: deceitfulness, cunning, treachery, with elements of alertness and cleverness; the larger the area of chalky white the greater the villainy” (Delza 9). Was I supposed to read the face against the vocalized content? Or, see through to an allegorized national or dynastic history during the month of Nanjing commemoration? And why was each performer’s whiteface identical? The better to project, in order to destabilize, Afrikaans, colonial mimesis?

It is as if the very emergence of the "colonial" is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition within the authoritative discourse itself. The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha127).

Speaking of menace, in this play was it relayed with all the characters painted homogenously? How were character distinctions meant to register when performers' liǎnpǔ had the same degree of sheen? The cast had draped suspension of reality beneath a cloak of uniform racial construction that would have to be pushed through without the aid of Chinese aesthetic paradigms. Unicolor face painting, as distant successor to mask wearing, was full-tilt method acting, to say the least.

Shen tou gui mian, or "masks for gods, make-ups for ghosts," is an old saying prevalent in the theatrical circles of the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties. It means to play a god you have to wear a mask, but to play a ghost you can just paint that likeness directly onto your face.//The custom reflected an even more ancient belief of Chinese people: The images of gods are sacred, and it would be a dangerous thing for mortals to mimic them. When ancient craftsmen created the images of gods on sculptures or masks, they would take great pains to execute their jobs well. Some even believed that as soon as the eyes of these sculptures and masks were carved open, the works would assume a certain supernatural power. ("Tracing")

Here, "masks for gods, make-ups for ghosts," potentially elucidates the kids' points of view about their means of staging Mandela. His courage was revolutionary (or superhuman) on the one hand, but on the other, time bound, human. Plotting gods/ghosts coordinates, they cast him in their own image of him. They painted "directly onto" their own faces to relay the heroism of a lawyer who saved a nation, endeared himself to the entire world, thereby exceeding mortality ("images of gods").

For China, this revolutionary character is culturally consistent on a literal level: "Face-changing was first used in a story about a hero who stole from the rich to help the poor" ("Mask"). Robin Hood changes his face to evade capture. Generally, the theatrical hero's complexions convey a spectrum of associations and are meant, as *biànlǎn* (变脸), to change throughout production: "face changing, a device of Sichuan Opera, [is] a dramatic change of attitude expressing fright, anger etc."

For example, red represents royalty and courage, while black is the color for a bold and headstrong character. Blue says the man is shrewd and rebellious, while white symbolizes a treacherous personality. Gold and silver are only used for gods and spirits.//The "black face" suggests either a rough and bold character or an impartial and selfless personality. Typical of the former is General Zhang Fei (of "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms") and Li Kui (of "Water Margin"), and best example of the latter is Bao Gong (alias Bao Zheng), the semi-legendary fearless and impartial judge of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). (Huang)

In Nelson Mandela, who embodied African blackness, young scholars found a relatable role model. For performers seeking to paint heroic courage and rebellion, their classical arts offer

extensive procedures. How had the opportunity been missed to translate Madiba (Mandela's *nìchēng*) in red, blue, silver and gold? It took two nights and they'd used two colors, but had the students produced "face changing, a device of Sichuan Opera"?

"The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards."

— Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

"Lien P'u" is a malleable form receptive to collaboration and social change, "tempered not only by the inevitable developments in society, culture, and conditions of the times but also by the creative interaction of the styles of the various regional theaters" (Delza4). Moreover, "quite unlike our contemporary paintings, these face pictures were never without content. Colors, designs, lines, all contained implications of a very definite nature—emotional, temperamental, intellectual—and reflected breeding, education, morality, and status" (Delza3). Wielded expertly, face painting is complex when most traditional: "No temperamental indisposition, no accident of hand or mind could become an excuse for creativity" (Delza3). The high standard is historical. "Face-changing first appeared in Sichuan Opera during the reign of the Qing Dynasty Emperor Qianlong (1736-1795)" ("Mask"), but gave over to paint as performers reached for faster face changing methods easier to do on stage. ("Face").

Mask and paint changes are difficult to achieve and remain highly valued, secret, national treasure. ("Mask") I hope its traditional expression continues in Asia by artists who take care to safeguard their technique and differentiate it from minstrelsy. Of minstrel side effects, America has much to teach: "I think there are still the lenses white people put on when they look at black Americans, and it's sad but it's kind of desperately indicative of the way in which this country still hasn't surmounted the kinds of feelings that gave rise to minstrelsy in the first place" (Lott). Free of this imprint, (Darlie excepting), China has no cause for propelling down the intergenerational pipeline traces of transgression. Why should it default in ways that alienate whole communities and flatten the multifaceted quality of her arts? "The art of face painting (Lien P'u) and make-up (Hua Ch'uang) are to be considered separately as stylistic techniques for 'changing the face'" (Delza8). Realistic, Three Tiled, Big Painted, Assorted Color, Changing—all of these faces (Delza 8-16) provide possible starting points of color distinction and transformation.

The make-up is an intensifier, according to Delza; age lines are drawn deeper, natural hues are concentrated. These seem amenable to biographically marking time in the life of a staged hero. The more abstract challenge is face painting, during which "psychological truths" are symbolized and facial features are distorted as "actual face is effaced by the painted picture" (Delza8). The exception seems to be hues of melanin, for lack of a better term: "Black when it covers the entire face infers selflessness and dignity and is worn by persons who never deviate from the just law.... Brown is dignity and courage, and sometimes is used instead of black but only when the whole face is painted one color" (Delza9). Completely unproblematic until applied unaccompanied as ersatz Africana. "Blackface minstrelsy involved more than simply the ridicule and de-basement of black people and their culture. It provided, somewhat paradoxically,

an outlet for whites to re-imagine themselves as blacks, allowing them an emotional freedom and spontaneity they denied themselves as whites” (Russell58).

What makes this pattern exceed its American effrontery is that all minstrelsy shifts focus back to the doers instead of spotlighting the need of communication. When color signifies race adjacency, blackface is meant to stand for and out rather than resolve its dialectic. In show, it tips from Brechtian to Stanislav because it “*repeats* rather than *re-presents*” (Bhabha 128) character or characteristics, its presumed status under *liǎnpǔ*. Transported regionally, it has been spurned, testing “mutual goodwill.” Assumed minstrelsy on the part of China has not bode well for Sino-Indian relations (“UOB”), Sino-Malaysian adverts (“WATCH”), and Sino-Filipino communications (“After”) already strained by textbook misrepresentations (Trends). Without comparative analyses of all the work these signifiers do (or have done) to express racially, and without the mastery of artistic icons, blackface remains an historic maneuver problematically employed.

It’s doubtful the romp of power asymmetry socially regresses geopolitical strides met economically and politically. These include the 20th century resumption of “trade and other ties” with the Philippines (Prakash 213) and India, “*which it previously considered to be its chief rival or even enemy second only to the Soviet Union*” (Prakash 205). Intangibles such as perception and trust also affect international relations with India, though (Madan). “How the relationship plays out will depend on a number of internal, bilateral, regional and global factors” (Madan). With so much at stake, critiques of interracial “play,” of “entirely knowable and visible” othering (Bhabha in Chakrabarti8), beg “the splitting of colonial discourse” (Bhabha 132), (blacking up), so that the Chinese culture of an intelligent nation disassociates from racism exported by “the West,” the whereabouts of which, I realize, have all but vanished from many academic theories of interactions from long ago.

“The photographs shall be sun pictures, such as are usually known as card photographs, of sufficient size and distinctness to plainly and accurately represent the entire face of the applicant.”

— “Dog Tag Law,” The Geary Act of 1892 (Pfaelzer)

Bhabha critiqued it of Said; Chakrabarti critiques it of Bhabha (8), sending “The West” the way of “Africa,” doubly faulted. It’s called misnomer. (‘Due west depends on where you start.’) And monolith: (‘European multiculturalism is always already.’) “The much-publicized critique of the sovereign subject,” furthermore, “actually inaugurates a Subject” (Spivak272). I love the clever forays of poststructuralist logic. At the same time, the non-Western extreme(s) of its disappeared binary have been fully experiential for me. Among these remarkably is language. When all news—from broadsheets and national broadcasts to neighbors overheard—reaches me as not-English, there’s a rippling out from self and home, while facets of immigration close in.

When one is *the* “stranger in the village” of a few thousand, many details feel conceptual. That the village is a city of three million is one of many demographic truths processed rhetorically. Another is that my national host is home to non-Han “Muslims, Minorities, and other Subaltern Subjects” (Gladney), including an “underworld” of “rural migrant workers”

(Sun). Inside this matrix, tuned to the frequency of intersectionality, is a foreign teacher subaltern in China if she's of African descent?

What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of "woman" seems most problematic in this context. Clearly, if you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways. If, however, this formulation is moved from the first-world context into the postcolonial (which is not identical with the third-world) context, the description "black" or "of color" loses persuasive significance. The necessary stratification of colonial subject-constitution in the first phase of capitalist imperialism makes "color" useless as an emancipatory signifier. (Spivak 294)

How about when volunteering in "the international division of labor" (Spivak 272) as an American? Neither I nor my people have known the colonization of a Chinese empire; we abolished chattel slavery and resist its permutations in the United States. Furthermore, beyond teaching English as a "first-world" "native speaker," I've disappointed my own students entirely, refusing to screen American movies in class and run through pop songs at English Corner. Out of deference to curriculum and culture, the change of pace, a Black History Month's worth of lesson plans, has been organically preempted by the schedule and routine of Spring Festival. As a Western visitor whose temporary residency is circumscribed by Chinese law, I accept opportunities to demonstrate cultural diplomacy. I saw firsthand that fist-pumping while shouting "FREEDOM!" at an audience of "tiger parents" becomes manageable from behind a self-disguising color-shield. On the other hand, it seems less than dutiful to look away as blackness of racial quality is unnecessarily commodified, micro-locally circulated, and coopted for inter-regional, Asian offense. In fact, this ideological arc suggests otherwise.

Observing, reflecting, and writing as an educator, conditions me to discern young people's efforts to, perhaps intuitively, enact the "double-vision" Bhabha writes about, "disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse [in ways that] also disrupts its authority" (129). Compromised communications and access to artistic and instructional resources affects not only me, but my colleagues and our students. The "great fire wall" is real (Wei). Bing.com is available, but "Some results are removed in response to a notice of local law requirement" shows up a lot. You'll see a lot of NBA and CBA at dinnertime, but you'll miss out on the global, celebrity hangouts everyone is talking about:

His Holiness the Dalai Lama will have a conversation with Archbishop Desmond Tutu by live video over a Hangout as part of the Inaugural Desmond Tutu Peace Lecture in Cape Town, South Africa, on October 8, 2011, starting at 10:30am South African time (GMT+2.00). A link to the Google+ Hangout will be available approximately 20-30 minutes before the event begins. (quoted in Macale)

YouTube is blocked. Hulu is banned. Little wonder young people end up at Tudou, where blackface videos have been homepage features, trying to spin attenuated cultural awareness into self-empowerment.

For the students attending more restrictive schools, surfing a vast spread of knowledge may be prohibited, which is actually on trend for the emerging "era of the neo-luddite" (Woollanston). But, richer self-knowledge is within reach and with it the full spectrum of Chinese colors. The complexities *biànliǎn* and *liǎnpūen* code mitigate the risk of scandalizing



someone else's face just because one's painted his own. Framed by Chinese heritage, and signifying cultural literacy, this is performativity primed to benefit all parties involved."Like the people of the East, Africans have a highly developed sense of dignity, or what the Chinese call 'face'" (Mandela quoted in Zhang).

We have to recognize that the very ideas, modes of discourse and conceptual schemes we use as thinking tools were virtually all defined by the West. This especially applies to such crucial concepts as human rights, democracy, freedom, justice, truth and ideology, which contain many difficulties and do not fit well with Chinese experience. Any new Chinese way of thinking must create social concepts and values that correspond to the Chinese way of life. They must also inform our outlook on the world and help us grasp global realities, because China can only become a strong nation again by shouldering responsibilities. (Daiyun)

Leading with "thinking tools" underscores investment in consciousness and contentiousness, well paired to debut the "crucial concepts," international commitments. These include "building good relations with Third World countries," as a Third World country (Prakash 217). For example, in 1990 "Prime Minister Li Peng expressed China's support to the leadership of Nelson Mandela who, as he expressed it, wanted to establish a just and fair society where all races would enjoy equal political and economic rights" (Prakash 216-217). With more of this to be had, among its iterations of globalization, China may find need to shed what doesn't work so well along the way. Fortunately, from the freedom to look within and look beyond empathetically, Asian societies find minstrelsy "contain many difficulties and do not fit well with Chinese experience."

Besides, the alternative has been bleak as racial constructs refracted internationally over time.

Minstrelsy is the first public commercial venue in which blacks, though of course, they're not blacks, are represented on the theatrical or musical stage. It's the arena, for better or worse, in which black people come to be displayed and black issues come to the floor, in the American culture industry, beginning in the 1830s and 1840s and extending all the way to our own day. (Lott)

"The identification cards" required of early Chinese-Americans also "had their roots in slavery" (Pfaelzer). "Before the Civil War, enslaved blacks had often been forced to carry identifying passes when they left their plantations — and free blacks were required to bear papers proving that they were not slaves" (Pfaelzer). After passage of legislation written by Congressman Thomas Geary (D-CA), possession of similar documents regulated Chinese life in 19th century United States and literally signified discriminatory public policy. "The Geary Act did more than require the Chinese to wear identification cards. It extended the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first law to ban immigration based on race, for ten more years and restated the ban against Chinese immigrants becoming U.S. citizens" (Pfaelzer). Along with "dog tags" the period's "trade cards, created during the highly politicized immigration of Chinese.... depicted the Chinese in America almost exclusively in the role of outsiders" (Metrick-Chen 125). Had students of any African descent attended the performances I had, I expect we all would have walked out. Nonetheless, in our absence, with no one left to translate a blackface signifier and

interrogate the racism it imports, the signified of “historical memory (race memory?)” (Russell 62) does not cease to exist.

In modern times, as our intercultural coexistence continues, everyone has been called to know and “do more.” For me, this has meant leading poetry recitation in Oral English class. On the South Africa front, it might look like establishing “Mandela Institutes” in China. According to University of Hong Kong Linguistics Professor Adams Bodomo, “This would be a cultural institute teaching South African languages and cultures and spreading Mandela’s policy of rapprochement between races and all peoples of the world” (175). He cites the example of Confucius Institutes, already a worldwide, “soft power” source of “Chinese language and culture” education (174). The solution seems aligned with intellectual identification of Chinese dream’s cultural, national, and global aspects with a subtlety that maintains a Chinese epicenter but sidesteps sheer East/West polarity. Growing and changing expression, similar to the esteemed arts of its cultural past, “dream is a cultural ideal – an ideal state of civilization resulting from progress and cultural cross-fertilization” (Daiyun). It endorses universal claims to uncompromised identity and integrity including of our self- and social representations.

The Lunar New Year has come to we who endeavor on local levels to “create social concepts and values that correspond to the Chinese way of life” while accommodating a flow of information currents in harmony with other nations’. To this end, I have opened each first class of the new term with a manifesto that I hope lends cultural voice to a face previously scanned as “*meiguoren?*” or “*Almost the same but not white*” (Bhabha 130).

Today you will learn African American poetry. I am African American. I’m from America and my ancestors were from Africa. Poetry is very important to African American culture. We like the sound of it. We like the imagery of it.

With my hands, I indicate the opening lines of “Ballplayer” by Evie Shockley and the lesson begins at the chalkboard.

i cop a squat on a squared-off log,  
to watch you ball on the community center court.  
butt numb, i shift my weight

and shake mosquitos from my ankles,  
but never take my eyes off the game.

Before we chorally recite its alliteration and “dribble-rhythm” iambs, I front load key words, idioms and other Americanisms: “cop a squat” means sit down. A “log” is thick wood cut from a tree. We spend some time with “shift”—“Let me hear the *fffff* sound”—because teenagers delight in pronouncing its f-vacated doppelganger. “Mosquito” is “the insect of summer that makes your skin itch after it bites you to suck your blood.” They teach me *wénzi* until I get around my ears’ illiterate phonetics of *guanzi* and third tone. I suggest Americans ask why use many words when a few will do and translate the verb in “you ball” in the context of an invitation that expands accordion-style to *do you play basketball?* “It’s slang,” I conclude, which cues pens and pencils upright at attention.

By the time the scene has come to life, and they’ve expertly assessed that “Ballplayer” is the antecedent of “you” not “i,” boys have scooted in to get the words down like rap MCs and girls are composing “what happens next” stanzas in their notebooks. As their imaginations

crosscurrents with an African American perspective of hometown courting, I circulate the room, watch them work, and hear cicadas from my own summer memories. I wonder how much more ground we'll cover together before Southern heat and light are my reality again and I am recalling how I 'repped' and claimed some cultural integrity without "killing a mosquito with a canon":高射炮打蚊子 —大材小用 *Gāoshèpàodǎwénzi – dàcáixiǎoyòng* (Confucius).

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