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Mystic Identifications: Reading Kenneth Burke and
“Non-Identification” through Asian American Rhetoric

Nathan D. Wood

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Mystic Identifications: Reading Kenneth Burke and “Non-Identification” through Asian American Rhetoric

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Krista Ratcliffe’s term “non-identification” offers a version of identification that assumes identity is not always identifiable. As an attitude that fosters cross-cultural listening, non-identification asks us to listen to others from a place of “neutrality,” with “hesitancy,” “humility,” and “pause” in order to consider identity’s fluid nature (73). This thesis first argues that this term might also describe speaking strategies premised on non-identifiability. As I will show, an inventive non-identification would articulate some rhetorical strategies that neither “identification” nor “disidentification” currently articulate. However, rhetorical scholars need more theoretical and practical guidance for what this kind of speech looks like. So, this thesis also argues why, despite criticism to the contrary, the writing of Kenneth Burke offers an ideal account for inventive non-identification. Burke’s descriptions of the terms “synecdoche function,” the “mystic” and “poetic language” achieve the same effects as Ratcliffe’s non-identification, yet Burke describes these same effects from the perspective of the speaker. Following my re-reading of Burke, I ground the theory of inventive non-identification in a brief rhetorical analysis of Yan Phou Lee’s 1887 autobiography *When I Was a Boy in China*. By showing how this theory applies to Asian American rhetoric, I conclude that inventive non-identification has utility for the field of rhetoric more broadly.

Keywords: Asian American rhetoric, Kenneth Burke, non-identification

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Introduction

Asian American rhetoric is searching for an identity. In *Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric*, LuMing Mao and Morris Young ask us to consider what a scholar of Asian American rhetoric should do. Certainly, much like literary or historical approaches to Asian America, the rhetorical scholar should pursue the “recovery and discovery” of previously elided Asian American voices and texts (325). Yet Mao and Young urge us to consider how we might recover these voices from an explicitly *rhetorical* approach. In fact, the explicitly rhetorical approach to Asian America has also been elided and ignored. “Dominant disciplinary discourses,” such as literature or history, “have often marginalized rhetoric as a discipline and mode of inquiry,” say Mao and Young (327). As a result, these two leading Asian American rhetorical scholars encourage rhetoricians to investigate what a distinctly rhetorical approach adds to the understanding of Asian American studies in general (327).

This thesis argues that rhetorical scholars can study Asian America from a distinctly rhetorical perspective by reconfiguring rhetorical scholar Krista Ratcliffe’s listening strategy, “non-identification,” into a what I will call “inventive non-identification,” which might complement the use of two extant figures of speech, “identification” and “disidentification,” commonly employed in Asian American studies. Whereas many Asian American scholars typically use identification to describe the interpolative effect of dominant discourse on minorities, and whereas disidentification typically articulates the minority attempt to revise these interpolative discourses, reconfiguring Ratcliffe’s non-identification as a figure of inventive speech might articulate the ways speakers draw audience attention to identity’s fluid, multiple, and heterogeneous character. So, if inventive non-identification manages to make such a new tool, the central focus of this paper is fashioning a theoretical and practical precedent for the term.

Several notable Asian American literary critics have documented the representation of self as fluid, multiple, heterogenous, invisible, or ambiguous through many different theoretical frameworks and terms, which suggest Asian American scholars of all disciplinary stripes might also put non-identification to use. For example, among other considerations, King-Kok Cheung's *Articulate Silences* analyzes how the ambiguous "silence" of twentieth-century Asian American female authors disrupts "monologic" discourses such as racism or sexism (15). And Jennifer Ann Ho's *Racial Ambiguity* documents how mixed race Asian American subjects refuse to identify with one singular racial heritage, and in so doing, subvert binary or hierarchical conceptions of race (21). Perhaps influenced by poststructuralist thinkers such as Hélène Cixous or Gloria Anzaldúa, many other Asian Americanists have shown how, if racism relies on singular or essentialist understandings of identity, radical Asian American subjecthood should be understood as ambiguous, fluid, or heterogenous (Lowe 24).

It appears Ratcliffe's account of listening begins to equip non-identification to articulate similar strategies. Non-identification asks listeners to communicate with the "cross-cultural other" with an attitude of "hesitancy," "humility," "pause," and further asks them to seek a place of "neutrality" (73). Neutrally situated, listeners might better remember the inherently partial nature of language and listen for "that- which- cannot- be- heard," which may well include the multiple, ambiguous, or heterogenous discourses out of which identity is comprised. Put most succinctly, non-identification appears ready to describe any approach to rhetoric, not just listening ones, that assumes identity may not always be identifiable (78).

However, because Ratcliffe explores the term principally as a listening strategy, rhetorical scholars should investigate ways to fashion the term so that it also articulates invention strategies. Especially because the terms identification and disidentification describe not just attitudes towards listening, but also inventive speech, non-identification should also describe

speech if rhetorical scholars want to employ the term as a new, third option to these previous two terms. How should inventive non-identification be defined? What figures of speech might it describe?

So, if an inventive version of the term would provide Asian American scholars a new theoretical vocabulary, one that articulates what neither identification nor disidentification can, and if Ratcliffe's work *almost* provides such vocabulary, this paper non-identification refashions non-identification as an invention strategy that might specifically describe resistance strategies of racial minorities. To provide a theoretical and practical guidance for the term, this paper looks back to the rhetorical tradition and Kenneth Burke to provide a re-reading of a few of his commonly overlooked insights on identification. Such a re-reading of Burke indicates that his version of this term might actually apply to many approaches to rhetoric, outside of those described in his more commonly cited definition of the term in *A Rhetoric of Motives*. In fact, through various other terms such as the "synecdoche function," the "mystic," and "poetic meaning," Burke describes how rhetors might identify themselves as anything but identifiable in a way that complements Ratcliffe's non-identification as listening. Like Ratcliffe, Burke's description of these terms valorized careful and hesitant approaches to rhetoric, since language offered not a "reflection" of reality, but a "selection" (*LSA* 45). Yet unlike Ratcliffe, Burke's rhetorical theory explores and defined not one but many patterns of speech that appear to achieve this same careful and hesitant effect. As rhetors employ the "synecdoche function," they identify themselves as one part of a greater, non-visible whole, and in so doing, emphasize their slippery and non-identifiable character (*PLF* 510). And, as they practice "poetic meaning," rhetors approach language and meaning dialectically, and thus invite listeners to identify others by what cannot be identified (*PLF* 147). As I will show, these figures of speech inform what Burke means by his elusive metaphor, "the mystic." Just as the eastern mystic transcends the realm of

desire and transience, rhetors should transcend the ultimately shallow realm of signification and identify themselves as non-essential entities using language and symbols that directly refers to such non-essence (*P&C* 95). And although I make no connection here between Burke's eastern mystic and the easterner's experience in America, these mystical, inventive non-identifications offer scholars or marginal identities a new term to analyze very similar resistance strategies.

I organize this paper by first offering a brief review of the early-twentieth-century understanding of identification as well as the late-twentieth-century understanding of disidentification. This initial segment suggests that neither term has articulated the strategic presentation of non-identifiability, and that Ratcliffe's non-identification begins offers rhetorical scholars a term that can. Next, I address some general objections to Burke's rhetorical theory in general, and then provide a piecemeal reading across several of Burke's key works to explain what he may have said about inventive non-identification. I conclude with a close reading of Yan Phou Lee's important early Asian American autobiography *When I Was a Boy in China* (1887) to show how Asian American scholars of all disciplines might use inventive non-identification to illuminate similar texts. As I'll show, inventive non-identification provides a more expansive understanding of Lee's text than does the modernist understanding of identification or the poststructuralist understanding of disidentification. Ultimately, I will argue that expanding and applying Ratcliffe's term to Asian American concerns through Burke, a uniquely rhetorical theorist, exemplifies similar kinds of recovery efforts other Asian American rhetoricians might perform hoping to define Asian American rhetoric.

Identification's Demise

In its late nineteenth-, early-twentieth-century conception, identification referred to the conscious and unconscious psychological process by which an individual assimilates foreign properties, aspects, or characteristics into the self (Meissner 563). Influenced by Freud, Kenneth

Burke described in particular how rhetorical symbols assist in this process (Davis 124). Because you “persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality,” rhetoric was only effective inasmuch as it influenced identity (*RM* 55). Replacing “persuasion” with “identification” was Burke’s way of emphasizing that all forms of persuasion performed a “naming and changing” effect on identity (*RM* xiv, *ATH* 285).

Identification has remained an important critical heuristic in rhetorical studies. Many rhetorical scholars use the term to describe a wide variety of rhetorical processes. Identification has been used to describe instances of successful rhetorical interactions, as when speakers find “common ground” with their audiences (Cheney 143). Gregory Clark says identification can also describe deliberation and dialogue. Through identification, nineteenth- and twentieth-century Americans negotiated their national identification both individually and collectively (Clark 136). Identification has also been used to describe ways minority rhetors resist hegemonic discourse. Asian American rhetorical scholar Bo Wang uses identification to describe how fictionist Sui Sin Far subverted “stereotypical expectations” as she offered alternative images of Asian women in late-nineteenth-century America (254). Today, rhetorical scholars appear committed to continue using identification to understand resistance. Rhetoric Society of America’s 2012 biennial conference was titled “Re/framing Identification.” Michelle Ballif reflects that this conference investigated identification as a distinctly political “place of perpetual reframing,” which “affects who, how, and what can be thought, spoken, written, and imagined” (Ballif 1).

However, in the majority of contemporary uses outside of rhetorical studies, the term identification (not just Burke’s version) rarely, if ever, articulates resistance. Identification today especially articulates the workings of “hegemony,” “interpolation,” “enculturation,” or other terms that describe the means by which individuals become subjects within a cultural order (Wess 9). In *Identification Papers*, Diana Fuss explains that Freudian identification best lends

itself to cultural and psychological attempts to consolidate power because the term maintains a binarized hierarchy that separates outside from in. Necessarily, identifications cannot exist without the creation or “detour through” the “other,” not even apparently benign or apolitical identifications (Fuss 143). Consequently, for Fuss, the term does not readily articulate resistance strategies that seek true, non-binarized inclusion: any “serious [recuperation] of a politics of identification” must eschew this hierarchical tendency (141).

But Burke’s version of the term in particular has also received critique. Rhetorical scholar James Zappen argues that Burke’s description in *A Rhetoric of Motives* relies on a similar hierarchy. There, Burke described identification as “compensatory to division,” by which he meant identification could bring people closer together, as Clark describes, yet in his critique, Zappen says that unity in one place breeds division in others (*RM* 22). While it is true that “when we identify with another person, idea, or group, we overcome our divisions,” we also “thereby...divide ourselves from someone or something else” (289). Like Fuss, Zappen concludes that any truly inclusive political program must find a way to unify people without dividing them hierarchically, and so neither can Burke’s identification serve as a basis for any truly emancipatory resistance politics.

Although these analyses of identification might ignore other important aspects of Freud and Burke’s work, even Clark notes the process of identification has some exclusionary effects (63). In most cultural studies scholarship today, perhaps because of these critiques, “identification” actually describes the structures minority subjects oppose, not the means those minorities employ to subvert them. Identification stands in for terms like heteronormativity, patriarchy, or other processes that uphold racism, sexism, and even ableism. For example, in Asian American literary studies, Viet Nguyen uses identification to describe how fictionist Onoto Watanna navigated the American reading public. Watanna could “pass” as white, which

would grant her the “social license to be... ‘free’” (36). Or, she could emphasize her Asian heritage and face “racial identification” (36). In this use, Nguyen employs identification to highlight Watanna’s restricted authorial choices, and many other cultural studies projects use identification in similar ways.

Besides critiques like Fuss and Zappen’s, identification may not readily articulate resistance because of increased popularity of an alternative term: disidentification. In fact, this term was theorized in the 1990s as a direct response to the shortcomings of its antecedent term. Strongly leading off of deconstructive thinkers like Jacques Derrida, scholars across all disciplines first employed the term to highlight the inevitable othering tendency of identificatory discourse. Rendered (dis)identification, the term reminded us that although the identifier may fantasize otherwise, we cannot identify an “ingroup” without necessarily (dis)identifying an “outgroup” (Fuss 10, Butler 63). In this sense, the term was used to describe the behaviors of hegemonic forces as identification does now, yet using (dis)identification underscored that such attempts to fix identity represent the ruling class’s power fantasy.

Today however, the term signifies minority resistance. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler agreed that (dis)identification can be used to designate identification’s naive power fantasy, but also explores the “possibilities of politicizing disidentification” as means of resistance (Butler 219). If (dis)identification is in fact an act of fantasy, we should reason that those in power cannot sustain it. Logically, such fantastical thinking must leave open some window of opportunity through which minority subjects might “disidentify” the means of their oppression (Butler 219). José Esteban Muñoz takes off with Butler’s disidentification and fashions it into a fully systematized theory of resistance. Now rendered without the parenthesis, Muñoz’s term primarily articulated how minorities exploit such power fantasies: it is through the inside of the dominant majority, rather than from without or against, that minorities reinterpret

oppressive cultural forms (21). Disidentification thus “neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it,” but rather “tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form” (11). Many scholars reading Muñoz alternatively used the term “queering” to describe this kind of revision, yet both terms articulate something similar: that real cultural revolution occurs through *revision*, *reconfiguration*, or *reinterpretation* of the *existing* terms of oppression. Especially because so many resistance strategies can be described as revisionary (representation might as well be articulated *re-presentation*), disidentification has become preferred over identification to describe how minorities self-authorize identity. In fact, disidentification and identification often get used in tandem, and in such cases, disidentification almost always describes the resistant strategies of the minority, and identification almost always describes the strategies of those in power.

Disidentification’s Limits

However, there are still some forms of resistance that scholars do not use disidentification to articulate, such as the portrayal of the self as fluid, ambiguous, or non-essential. This kind of strategy is in fact well documented throughout the humanities. Many literary and rhetorical critics have demonstrated how the portrayal of identity in such ambiguous, fluid, or invisible ways might yield political benefits. Riding the impetus of Derrida, Foucault, and Barthes, poststructural feminists of the 1960s and 70s considered how female authored texts, once silenced and ignored, might reassert political visibility by asserting *invisibility*. As one literary anthology has summarized it, presenting the self as a “splintered multiplicity” creates “an indifferent identity” that questions forms of power from an ambiguous, askance position (Ryan 897). What Julia Kristeva finds in the French poet Comte de Lautreamont, Helen Cixous finds in James Joyce: rather than projecting definite or legible identities, *écriture féminine* projected ambiguity, multiplicity, fluidity, or in other words, inessence. Later feminists like Gloria

Anzaldúa would later work towards a writing approach that disrupted both patriarchal and feminist hegemony marked by a “tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (101).

These resistance strategies also seem commonplace in Asian American studies. Heavily influenced by these poststructural and feminist scholars, King-Kok Cheung says in *Articulate Silences* that as Asian American authors such as Maxine Kingston, Joy Kogawa, Yamamoto employ indirect or silent strategies such as “double voiced discourse” and “coded speaking,” their characters “subvert a monologic reality” (5,19). In *Racial Ambiguity*, Jennifer Ann Ho has described how being of mixed race, or “hapa,” descent enables resistance. As Asian American hapa refuse simple racial categorizations “predicated on binary constructions and fixity,” such as white or non-white, they refute not just specific stereotypes about race, but the very hierarchizing and fixating force of racial discourse itself (21). Cheung and Ho are just two examples of this general strategy. Especially following Lisa Lowe’s 1991 noted critique of simplistic conceptions of Asian American identity, countless Asian American literary, historical, anthropological, and linguistic scholars have documented intentional indirectness, ambiguity, or multiplicity as forms of resistance. In fact, the very term “Asian America” does not always adequately describe the truly eclectic and heterogeneous demographic it represents (Palumbo-Liu 1). In whatever the discipline or context, this brand of Asian American scholarship assumes the poststructuralist maxim that, if discursive powers such as racism, sexism, or heteronormativity assume fixed and hierarchical conceptions of identity, then truly subversive strategies must not re-assert more fixity, coercion, or hierarchy, but instead polyphony, heterogeneity, fluidity and non-essence.

And yet, disidentification, a distinctly poststructural creation, only *sometimes* articulates the portrayal of identity as non-essential in the ways these scholars—whether influenced by Kristeva, Cixous, Anzaldúa, or Lowe—describe. Most uses of disidentification in literary,

rhetorical, or performance criticism use the term to emphasize the *ends* of resistance, not the means. As disidentification emphasizes that truly emancipatory subversion takes aim at hegemony from *within*, on already existing forms of culture, it places stronger emphasis on the centrality of revision in emancipatory strategies than it does the means by such revision occurs. For example, communication scholar Anjali Vats describes in 2016 how Andy Warhol's painting entitled *Mammy* "reifies...remakes," and "reimagines" (notice the common pre-fix re-) existing racial and gender stereotypes (237). While Vats does not deny that such reimagining may occur by presenting the self as non-identifiable, her use of disidentification does not emphasize this detail. Similarly, rhetorical scholar Ashley P. Farrell has described the revision of an American policy decision that disproportionately favored white Americans ahead of other minorities, and her use of disidentification primarily explores the fact such emancipatory rhetoric occurred through revision. Like Vats, no hint of multiplicity, invisibility, or non-essence plays a part in her analysis (533).

Interestingly, Butler and Muñoz *do* explain in their systematic formulations of disidentification that the presentation of identity as non-identifiable may be considered disidentificatory. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler implies that a truly inclusive and intersectional feminism requires that we represent womanhood ambiguously, as not simply a revision of the signifier "woman," but of a perpetually revisable, and thus indefinitely ambiguous, representamen. Instead of revising the patriarchy with an essentialist definition of Woman, we should instead revise it proffering a more open-ended concept of "woman" (239). Muñoz also illustrates a version of disidentification he calls "performing disidentity" (161). Performing disidentity revises existing cultural forms while "refusing to participate in a particular representational economy" (165). For example, performance artist Félix González-Torres revised heteronormative stereotypes without asserting any kind of legible identity markings. González-

Torres absented traces of his LGBT, Cubano identity, which refused to “simply invoke identity, and instead to connote it” (165).

If Vats and Ferrell’s use of disidentification is in any way indicative of the term’s general use, it appears disidentification has not lived up to its theoretical potential as detailed by Butler and Munoz. Fuss and performance scholar Amelia Jones also indicate there may be forms of resistance “disidentification” does not always articulate. Both have employed disidentification in their approaches towards literature and performance studies, yet both still imply we look for yet other terms to describe identificatory politics. Although Fuss spends much time in her book, *Identification Papers*, with disidentification, she also hopes we “take seriously the poststructuralist notion that our most impassioned identifications may incorporate *nonidentity* within them” (Fuss 10, emphasis mine). And Jones asks that we continue to look towards a way of “seeing differently,” by recognizing the “multiple, ambiguous and sometimes contradictory ways” identity manifests itself (7). Jones also cites disidentification as one of the main theoretical rationales upon which we should revise this new way of seeing, yet, like Fuss, she looks towards a term disidentification cannot fully articulate (2). We need a version of identification that centrally articulates the portrayal of identity as non-essential.

Rhetoric’s Opportunity: Ratcliffe’s Interpretive Non-Identification

Disidentification’s inability to articulate intentional ambiguity grants rhetorical scholars a window of opportunity. Non-identification might pick up precisely where disidentification has become delimited. Although this difference may seem like a small squabble over semantics and vocabulary, it implies real disciplinary consequences. We should note that as employed in disciplines such as literature, history, philosophy, and communication, disidentification is almost always credited as a distinctly performance and queer studies creation. So, if it is true that humanist scholars see disidentification as performance studies’ contribution to our pan-

disciplinary understanding of resistance, non-identification might also be recognized as rhetoric's contribution to this same pan-disciplinary endeavor.

Krista Ratcliffe nudges rhetorical scholars towards making this contribution. Her description of non-identification appears to pick up right where disidentification leaves off. Whereas disidentification, now primarily foregrounding revision, only secondarily indicates strategic ambiguity, non-identification might primarily document strategic ambiguity. Put differently, non-identification might describe not the *target* or *site* of subversive acts (i.e. towards the revision of *existing* cultural forms), but the *means* by which this subversion occurs, specifically through strategic “disharmony” or through the presentation of self as “complex and multiple” (Ratcliffe 74, 76).

Ratcliffe's listening leaves us with a few important clues for creating an inventive version of the term. Ratcliffe outlines three principal listening strategies, all of which invoke non-identifiability in different ways and to different extents. First, Ratcliffe explains how listeners practice non-identification by simply loosening the interpretive grip with which they listen to their interlocutors. This is what it means to listen metonymically. “Metonymic listening” assumes that identity can be at least somewhat identifiable, yet less identifiable than we might immediately expect (Ratcliffe 78). For example, metonymic listening means translating what “to be” into “might be,” or “will not” to “not necessarily.”

Ratcliffe says non-identification might ask listeners to consider ambiguity to a greater degree, through “eavesdropping.” Eavesdropping asks us to listen to interpretants as composed of “multiple” or plural discourses (76). Ratcliffe says we can listen this way by pushing ourselves to stand back far enough, as it were, to recognize that those we listen to are composed of multiple discourses simultaneously. This listening requires “multiple hearings” (Ratcliffe 76). The crucial habit here is finding a wide enough vantage point so we can “[listen] to learn,” and

therefore “[grant] others the inside position” (105). In practice, this habit has an expanding effect on our interpretation, which allows us to see how race, gender, and sex function as only one of many other discourses that inform personhood. Most succinctly, we practice eavesdropping when we change our listening vantage point and in so doing recognize how identity might be seen as too expansive or complex to be reduced to singular identifications.

Ratcliffe describes yet a third way to practice non-identification. Whereas the second type of listening asks us to consider identity’s complex nature, this third type of listening asks us to consider language’s inadequacies. This listening assumes that identity is not multiple, but whole, and that consequently we should see all identity markers as artificial or false. These two final strategies may seem like two sides of the same coin, but they make two different assumptions about the nature of the self and of language. Whereas the former strategy sees identity as multiple, this third strategy sees identity as whole; and, whereas the former assumes language sufficiently articulates the self if only we provide “multiple hearings,” the third sees language as mostly destructive or ultimately inadequate. In practice, Ratcliffe says this third type of listening asks us to distrust the realm of signification. This type of listening imagines “X and Y... not as subject and object but as two very different subjects” that may not ultimately be mutually interpretable, identifiable, or communicable (73). This listening admits that cross-cultural identification may remain perpetually ambiguous because it “may not succeed” (76).

The fact that Ratcliffe details these three forms of non-identification guides what an inventive version of the term might look like. But, as Ratcliffe explains, non-identification for her applies only to listening, and further, non-identification describes the listening habits of those in power. Guidance on the rhetorical art of listening *should* be directed to those charged typically with not listening, which are, almost by definition, those in power. But applying non-identification to Asian American studies should approach the term from the converse

perspective. If people of privilege should listen tenuously, for multiplicity, or holistically, how should minorities speak if they wish to achieve these same effects? Specifically, what figures or tropes of speech can inventive non-identification be defined by? And, how can we articulate non-identification on a theoretical level? What can we offer by way of coherent definition?

Burke's Inventive Non-identification

Kenneth Burke speaks to all three main registers of ambiguity both Ratcliffe and Asian American scholars describe. Whereas Ratcliffe describes tentative and careful listening, Burke describes how minorities present themselves with this same tentativeness through the “synecdoche function” (*PLF* 27). And whereas Ratcliffe asks us to listen to multiplicity, Burke describes speech that relays multiple discourses simultaneously through “poetic meaning” (*PLF* 147). Lastly, whereas Ratcliffe asks listeners to consider how individuals may be considered whole without our interpretive identification of them, Burke calls speaking in a way that dissolves language’s sometimes delusionary effect the “disintegrating art” (*CS* 105)

However, there are plenty of rhetorical scholars who would argue Burke does not complement Ratcliffe. We need to first consult these critiques, especially since Burke’s version of identification has been described with adjectives antithetical to the ones Ratcliffe uses. Rhetorical scholars often turn to the same rather slim description of identification in *A Rhetoric of Motives* to rationalize these critiques. “To identify A with B is to make A ‘consubstantial’ with B,” Burke says, and such consubstantiality is the key to “overcoming” our “division” (*RM* 22). On top of observing Zappen’s critique regarding identification’s hierarchical tendency, Janice Odom points out that “consubstantiality” restricts the range of rhetorical activity that can be described as identificatory, especially persuasion that does the opposite of consubstantiate, that is, to divide or make dissimilar (245). Dominic Ashby says that, as he “supposes a relatively static self,” Burke did not envision the kind of poststructuralist identities many of the

aforementioned Asian American scholars emphasize. Consequently, using identification better describes the ‘consubstantiation’ of simpler, less complex identities (312). In fact, Krista Ratcliffe comes up with non-identification specifically because she finds Burke’s identification insufficient as a model for listening (53). Burke’s term functions as a “coercive force” that “demands commonalities” between individuals “at the expense of differences” (47). Ratcliffe concludes that, as Zappen and Fuss point out, Burke’s term better lends itself to describe the techniques of those in power (58).

All of these critiques seem to point us away from Burke as we search for a precedent for non-identification as invention. However, “identification” was Burke’s central term, which means *all* of his vast collection of writings should be seen as an approach to it, not just the section in *A Rhetoric of Motives* he dedicates to defining it (RM xiv). Approached from this wider view, Burke’s other writing, writing that may be considered secondary descriptions of identification, can hardly be labeled essentialist, and further, complements Ratcliffe’s listening with thorough description of non-identificatory speech.

Before I discuss why Burke provides the ideal inventive complement to Ratcliffe’s non-identificatory listening, I need to briefly sum up some of Burke’s big themes. Most broad overviews of Burke’s work argue Burke was most centrally concerned with the epistemological function of language (Wess 2, Wolin 204). Burke was a constructionist: “what we mean by ‘reality’ has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems” (*LSA* 5). Language did not merely “reflect reality”—it constituted it (11). Much like the many postmodernists to whom he has been compared, Burke saw this as reason to grow cautious. Any rhetorical utterance constituted only one ‘selection’ among many other possible interpretations of reality (11). These rhetorical selections were often based only on the “tiny sliver of reality we [have] experienced firsthand” (*LSA* 5). In most cases, to use language was to simplify the complex “discrepant and

conflicting stimuli” it hoped to describe (*P&C* 45). Most dramatizations were in fact “a reduction” more than a representation (*GM* 64).

Consequently, Burke continually expressed frustration, both in his formal rhetorical theorizations and his public writings, towards approaches to language that failed to consider the “discrepant and conflicting stimuli” our speech and listening acts frequently excluded. For Burke, there was always more to what immediately met the eye, to what was presented through our “terministic screens” or interpretation (*LSA* 5). Burke censured attitudes that guaranteed any kind of easy certainty, such as “positivism” (*GM* 275). Conversely, Burke praised attitudes that considered complexity and ambiguity. If language’s primal sin was the too quick and too routine essentialization of reality, the answer was to introduce complexity back into consideration. If language essentialized that which rhetoric kept within the dramatic frame, we must cautiously and hesitantly figure out what it kept without. “Accordingly,” says Burke, “what we want is not terms that avoid ambiguity, but terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities arise” (*GM* xvii).

From this brief summary, we should see that he and Ratcliffe share similar concerns. The same hesitancy and humility that characterize Ratcliffe’s non-identification also describe Burke’s injunction to “understand a motive where it is not normally recognized” (*RM* xiv). Historically speaking, Burke had great reason to become skeptical. After living through the World Wars and the Great Depression, Burke pleaded with the American public in a 1969 *the Nation* column to “consider the puzzlements of identification as they affect our sense of citizenship” (“Responsibilities of National Greatness” 46). This was because rhetorical communication confused as much as it clarified, obfuscated as much as it elucidated. After all, rhetoric was the tool Hitler used to mobilize Germany and bring the world into war (*PLF* 191).

Yet Burke did not simply theorize how to interpret or listen to others. Burke's response to the puzzlements of identification was not only to listen with pause or caution, but also to speak in a way that invites this same kind of reflection. This meant that, although identification was Burke's key term, he spent much of his writing career describing how the presentation of self as anything but identifiable might produce this kind of reflection.

First, like Ratcliffe, Burke foresees the ways Asian Americans imbue some amounts of ambiguity into their self-presentation. Burke articulated this form of directed ambiguity through the "synecdoche function" of language (*PLF* 28). Speaking synecdochally would encourage us to recognize that linguistic symbols function only as "rough, shorthand descriptions" that stand in for, but do not fully represent, a greater, "discrepant and conflicting," whole (*P&C* 45). Seeing language as synecdoche helped us see language as "suggestion," which discouraged essentialist approaches that saw language as "strict definition" (*P&C* 55). Synecdoche provided "self-interference" which reminded us that language reported reality only anecdotally (*P&C* 346). Yet, ironically, as it brought us further up into the realm of ambiguity, it brought us closer to the dramatic truth ("Four Master Tropes" 421).

What results from the use of the synecdoche function is a certain metadiscursive, hedging effect that calls attention to its own inadequacy. Burke describes what this hedging looks like in detail in *Attitudes Towards History*, through a reading of American philosopher William James. Per Burke, James assumed that knowledge could not be conveyed wholly or self-identically. "The morality of [James'] craft," Burke reports, "required that all assertions be checked," since "naming could be of too readily consolatory a nature" (*ATH* 10,7). Consequently, James constantly conditioned all notions of "truth" with "truthfulness" (8). Burke demonstrated James' hedged approach to language through his caricature of scientist Herbert Spencer. We should not say that "evolution," as Spencer said, is the process "during which matter passes from an

indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity.” We should instead say, as James hedges, that “Evolution is a change from a no-howish untalkaboutable all-alikeness to a somehowish and in general talkaboutable not-all-alikeness.” (11).

This sort of hedging mirrors the kind of interpretive hedging Ratcliffe says defines non-identification, yet this explanation gives guidance to what non-identificatory speech might look like. Although there may be small technical differences between metonymy and synecdoche, both provide “a place wherein people may consciously choose to position themselves” so that they consider partiality of identifications (Ratcliffe 72). It also appears to parallel what some scholars of early Asian American literature explain how rhetors project images of Asian America. For example, Floyd Cheung argues that Yung Wing’s autobiography *My Life in China and America* affirmed typical identificatory narratives told about Asian Americans but then subtly demonstrated why the Asian American experience should not necessarily be identified homogeneously as white Americans tended to (31).

Burke described another form of inventive non-identification as he described rhetors who insist on the boundless multiplicity of their personhood. As part philosopher, Burke saw the self as a compilation of not singular identifications, but of a plurality of identifications. Says Burke, “the so-called ‘I’ is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting ‘corporate we’s’” (*ATH* 264). Accordingly, to Burke, we should speak in a way that considers the multivalence of our identities and of our subject matter. As he says in *PLF*, “poetic meaning” was one way we could speak in a way that invited heterogeneity. Poetic meaning “would attempt to attain a full moral act by attaining a perspective atop all the conflicts of attitude” (147). By attaining a perspective atop all the conflicts of attitude, Burke refers to the many ‘corporate we’s’ of which the I is comprised. Using speech that achieves poetic meaning “might take many courses” to portray subject matter sufficiently and might take lots of intense dialogue (143). Conversely, “semantic

meaning” flattened and simplified subjects by “the elimination of attitude” (147). “Semantic meaning” would insist that conveying the full meaning of “a chair” would simply require “pointing to a chair” while saying ““That thing is a chair”” (143). Semantic meaning fantasizes that language always faithfully adheres to authorial intentions, or as Burke says elsewhere, semantic aspires towards the “bureaucratization of the imaginative” (*ATH* 141). As the much more preferable option, says Burke biographer Ross Wolin, “poetic” meaning is “language that allows otherwise different or even contradictory statements to exist side by side” (64).

Poetic meaning complements Ratcliffe’s injunction to listen for multiplicity. Both thinkers assume that “a person’s identity encompasses more than a single identification,” and both describe how to listen or speak in a way that reflects this assumption (Ratcliffe 51). Whereas Ratcliffe says non-identification requires “multiple hearings,” Burke’s poetic meaning calls for multivariant speech. Further, poetic meaning might describe the Asian American portrayal of self as fragmented, multiple, plural, or otherwise too complex to be reduced to singular identification. Some Asian American scholars explain how speakers refer to themselves as “double” through “double voice discourse,” or as “multivalent” with terms like “palimpsest techniques” (Magosaki 11). Others explain some specific techniques speakers employ to portray this multivalent non-identifiability such as various post-modern approaches to narrative and point of view, by switching between dialects or languages, or even by blending fact and fiction. For example, K.K. Cheung’s influential book *Articulate Silences* documents how three Asian American women fictionists practice several of these approaches. Maxine Kingston “recreates the past” of her Chinese heritage “by presenting multiple, often mutually exclusive versions of ancestral stories,” while Joy Kogawa intertwines verifiable fact and with folk story and fable into her fiction, and further “deploys both Western and Eastern fables to connect past and present” (123,156). Both these writers, along with Hisaye Yamamoto, write characters marked more by

“provocative silence” than speech. As Cheung shows, this silence yields “multiple answers” and refuses to offer singular portrayals of self and ancestry (124).

Burke also described what appears similar to Ratcliffe’s third form of non-identification. In effect, this form of speech dissolves artificial or constructed identifications that obscure our view of the ultimately and already whole identities to which they refer. In *Permanence and Change*, Burke says that approaching language as “mystics” would dissolve our false interpretations of the world and lead to transcendence. If to practice mysticism was to turn from the realm of appearances, to dissolve the linguistic self was to stand apart from the realm of epistemology and experience reality holistically (95). As Burke says, seeing all language as non-essential would lead to “withdraw from the realm of appearances” and give way to a “sense of attainment” or “a oneness with the universal texture” (318). Importantly, linguistic mysticism involved paying close attention to both interpretation and speech. Making “assertions in vacuo” meant referring to the self as dissolved (319). “In vacuo” of course might be translated to “in a vacuum.” Asserting nothingness, or in other words, asserting non-essence helps us approach language transcendentally.

It is not exactly clear what specific behaviors Burke wants rhetoricians to adopt when he describes this mystic and very theoretical approach to language, since Burke invokes the mystic throughout his work vaguely and inconsistently. However, if accepting ambiguity defines the attitude of the mystic, other descriptions of ambiguity in Burke’s work might provide a more detailed account of how to use it in speech. In *Counter-Statement*, Burke describes a literary effect called “obscurantism,” which appears to achieve the same effect as mystical, epistemological transcendence. Various literary devices such as narrative style or point of view “convert each simplicity into a complexity...ruins the possibility of ready hierarchies,” and “concerns itself with the problematical [and] the experimental” (105). Here, although he does not

mention the mystic, we see the same type of dissolving effect. In fact, later, Burke calls this effect of fiction “a disintegrating art” (105).

This disintegrating tendency or mysticism roughly corresponds to another type of Asian American ambiguity. Contrasted against K.K. Cheung’s fragmented and multiple silences, other Asian American scholarship describes the self as already whole and complete, and therefore non-communicable. Similar to Jennifer Ann Ho’s racially ambiguous subjects, Leslie Bow refers to how mid-twentieth-century Asians in the American south presented themselves as “racial anomalies,” as neither white nor African American nor identifiable by any legible, embodied forms. These ambiguous subjects did not offer themselves as identifiable but preferred to position themselves outside the realm of signification altogether. One of Ho’s central anecdotes illustrates this third attitude. Artist-scholar Kip Fulbeck photographed several “hapa” Asians naked from the shoulders up, and then asked them the question, “Who Are You?” Ultimately Fulbeck presented these photographs in an exhibit called “Part Asian*100% Hapa.” Ho says, “None of the subjects has any other identifying marks: no names, birthdates, or places of residence accompany these images” (3). As a result, Fulbeck argues that mixed race descendancy “cannot be contained by the logic of mathematics but instead must reside in a seemingly paradoxical realm in which one can be,” for example, “both wholly black and wholly Japanese” (3).

So far, it appears an eclectic collection of Burke’s writings come together to form what non-identification as invention looks like. To Ratcliffe’s metonymic listening, Burke provides the synecdoche function of language. And whereas Ratcliffe’s eavesdropping asks listeners to see identity as multiple and boundless, Burke describes “poetic meaning” which offers the same invitation. Lastly, whereas Ratcliffe asks us to see how our interlocutors may already be considered whole without our interpretation of them, Burke asks us to disintegrate speech as

mystics. For both thinkers, regardless of the specific type of ambiguity invoked, these rhetors “give more prominence to the subjective elements of imagery than to the objective, or public, elements” which “[reveals]” the “symbolic quality... more clearly, precisely because the forensic superstructure erected above it is less firm” (*ATH* 60).

Non-identification in early Asian American rhetoric

With the help of Floyd Cheung, K.K. Cheung, and Jennifer Ann Ho, I have given just a brief taste of what non-identificatory speech might look like. So that Asian American scholars across discipline might continue to use the term, I conclude this paper with a very brief reading of Yan Phou Lee’s autobiography *When I Was A Boy in China* (1887). Burkean non-identification reveals important aspects about the text neither the traditional take on identification nor the post-structural take on disidentification avails. Whereas Asian Americanists may use identification to describe how Lee acts as an identificatory cross-cultural diplomat, and whereas they might use disidentification to describe how Lee revises harmful images of Asians in America, they might also use non-identification to describe how Lee posits images of Asian America as provisional, ambiguous, or already whole.

Lee’s late-nineteenth-century autobiography *When I Was a Boy in China* is the first book published in English on American soil by an author of Asian descent. Lee was a product of the Chinese Education Mission, a Chinese government program that placed Chinese students in American schools so they might receive a more western and technocratic education. Lee eventually graduated from Harvard and became a public intellectual, publishing editorials nationwide and serving as somewhat of an expert on Chinese-American relations. Written near the end of his life, his autobiography thus served as many American readers’ introduction to Chinese custom and culture. The book spans across Lee’s early childhood in China, which includes his first contact with America and the first few years of his education. However, Lee’s

narration clearly has a polemic bent—Lee desperately wants to humanize Chinese lifestyles to his American audience, especially as American fear Asian immigrants had escalated to sometimes violent extents.

Thus, the basic premise of this book alone indicates how the book lends itself to a classic or modernist understanding of Burkean identification. In many scholarly appraisals, Lee is commonly seen as a hybrid figure who blended East with West and provided white Americans with images of Asia that the American public would find assimilable. Literary scholar Floyd Cheung describes the autobiography as an “explanation of [Chinese] culture” and a “valorization of character” (31). As a member of a more mobile or elite class than many other contemporary Chinese American immigrants, Lee served as a cultural ‘ambassador of goodwill’ in order to improve an “image in order to win sympathy and acceptance” (Kim 24, Yin 53).

The terms we associate typically with identification certainly apply. As he entreated his American readership, one newly exposed to Asian culture through a sudden increase Chinese and Japanese immigration, Lee seeks common ground. We might say, like Floyd Cheung, that Lee’s “rhetoric of cross-cultural simile,” was “compensatory” to the “division” between East and West (28). And we might also say that as he bridged “Chinese and Chinese American culture...with language that alludes to Greek, Roman, and British cultures” he also made them consubstantial with one another (29). Lee ‘identified his way with theirs’ by “speaking their language...gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, [and] idea” (*RM* 55).

But negotiating between two worlds also certainly involved a great deal of revision, especially given the racist and even lethal anti-Chinese sentiment of the era. So, as he corrects erroneous identifications about Asians, Lee also invokes disidentification. Cheung also demonstrates Lee’s attempt to “change European American attitudes regarding the Chinese” (84, 31). Cheung particularly uses the word “reevaluation” to describe Lee’s attempts (36). In fact,

Cheung reads *When I Was a Boy in China* in the same way he reads Lee's revision of Denis Kearney's racist slogan "The Chinese Must Go!" in his polemic "The Chinese Must Stay" (47). In this essay, Lee lists eleven forceful and succinct reasons why American prejudice towards Asians is racist, baseless, and ultimately un-patriotic. As it revises these erroneous notions, Lee disidentifies Kearney's famous slogan into a more hospitable sentiment: "The Chinese Must Stay" (476). Within this autobiography, Lee consults many erroneous notions about Asians and offers with detailed explanation more self-authorized disidentifications. To the extent that Lee's entire work can be read as a reauthorization of Chinese immigrant identification, disidentification can continue to help Asian American scholars who want to understand him.

However, neither of these two terms explain the attempts many Asian Americans made, not just Lee, to absent themselves from the production or interpolation of identification altogether, not simply seeking cross-cultural identifications or revisionary disidentifications. Asian American writers such as Edith Eaton and Yone Noguchi sometimes preferred to withhold information about their race from their readers. The Japanese American poet Noguchi sometimes asked readers to ignore his prevalent identification as Asian in order to draw attention to the more heterogeneous aspects of his personality. Literary scholar Amy Sueyoshi explains that throughout his career, Noguchi "adamantly refused to allow whites to racialize him," even to the point that as he "answered requests for his pictures," he specifically asked not "to be photographed in his native dress" ("Miss Morning Glory" 8). Eaton was equally determined to keep her audiences from identifying her as a racial writer: "After all," she says in 1890, "I have no nationality and am not anxious to claim any" (230). While it would be wrong to say that Noguchi and Eaton totally ignore their racial identities, it would be equally wrong to say they offer those identities clearly or legibly—or identifiably.

Similarly, while it is obvious that Yan Phou Lee wanted either to successfully identify his mostly white American audience with the Asian experience or disidentify erroneous stereotypes, Lee also removed some traces of his Asian descent outside of his readership's interpretive grasp. In other words, even while he demonstrates why his experience does not fully translate (identify), and even while he passes on the opportunity to revise (disidentify), Lee instead preemptively prepares a way for a healthier communication between East and West through offering up three kinds of non-identification we find in Burke.

Lee practices non-identification through Burke's synecdoche function. While it is certainly true that Lee tells his life story to inform or 'identify his ways' with his American audience, Lee nuances, hedges and conditions his accounts by saying that his experience may represent other Chinese experiences, yet this is not always the case. As Burke and Ratcliffe understand, Lee recognizes the tenuous nature of cross-cultural communication. Throughout the story, Lee hedges statements that may be interpreted as wholly representative of Chinese culture *writ large*. Narrating the death of his father, Lee affirms that other family members step in to adopt their surviving children. Although such a practice "is common," Lee conditions his audience's understanding of this practice by saying that only "usually" do "adopted sons [remain] with the family or clan, but not always" (16). While Lee affirms other aspects of Chinese culture more decisively, for example, that Chinese people are not idolatrous, Lee hedges many other portrayals of China. About China's many national and cultural holidays, Lee says "It would be a matter of many chapters were I to describe all the holidays which we have in China" (25). Later, Lee says "active sports of the Chinese boys are few...But you must not suppose that the Chinese boy never plays at all" (34).

Lee even hedges the “exact date” of his own birth (8). Lee says, “On a certain day in the year 1861, I was born.” Even basic assumptions about how to keep time cannot be communicated cleanly:

I cannot give you the exact date, because the Chinese year is different from the English year, and our months being lunar, that is, reckoned by the revolution of the moon around the earth, are consequently shorter than yours. We reckon time from the accessions of Emperors, and also by cycles of sixty years each. The year of my birth, 1861, was the first year of the Emperor Tung-che. We have twelve months ordinarily; and we say, instead of ‘January, February,’ etc., ‘Regular Moon, Second Moon, Third Moon,’ etc. Each third year is a leap year and has an extra month so as to make each of the lunar years equal to a solar year. (8)

Amy Ling calls this description, because of its “bewildering complexities as accessions of emperors and leap year catch-ups,” a “minutely thorough” account of something so basic (280). According to Ling, this description comes as a result of being “caught between two incompatible systems,” and in fact “heightens the reader’s consciousness of the cultural constructedness of such a taken-for-granted thing as a calendar” (280). In Burkean terms, Lee offers a version of the Chinese calendar that identifies only synecdochally with the American one. Lee offers not a cleanly interpretable conception of Chinese time, but suggests a loose, rough hand sketch. This looseness does not persuade American readers that holidays, birthdays, or hobbies can easily be made consubstantial with American counterparts. A, Chinese culture, only provisionally identifies with B, American culture.

About midway through the text, Lee describes religion in China with the same careful tentativeness with which he describes its calendar, yet this description also demonstrates a second type of non-identification. After pointing out that readers cannot approach Chinese

religion the same way they approach Christianity, Lee explains that Taoism, for example, can only be identified multivalently. Taoism cannot be seen as organized or central, but as broad array of heterogeneous practices. “Taoism was formerly a pure system of philosophy, but...by degrees...[it] borrowed its doctrines from Buddhism and Confucianism and has had engrafted upon it from time to time innumerable” forms of belief (65). In fact, Taoism resists singular descriptors or labels, because “almost everything imaginable is worshipped by the Taoists and those who believe in the efficacy of their intercessions,” says Lee. (65-66). Further, there is no systematized way to indoctrinate nor interpolate children into religion in general, not just Taoism. Of course, “boys and girls pick up some religious ideas in their intercourse with those about them,” yet there is an “utter neglect of religious training of the young” (70). “Nobody ever deliberately sits down to tell them of this god and that god, their origin, character and power” (70). Here, Lee may hope to dispel myths regarding how Chinese idol worship, yet it is clear Lee identifies religion in China as expansive and heterogeneous, as identifiable only as multiple or plural.

Whereas in this second type of non-identification, Lee multiplies the identities he claims as his own, he also employs a third type of non-identification as he dissolves identifications that fail to articulate that holistic nature of the self. Throughout the autobiography, Lee portrays China not only through positive terms, such as ‘China can be seen as’ but through negative terms as ‘China cannot be seen as’ This negative tense functions as a means to dissolve erase an association between cultures as it insists on approaching each as two distinct, self-coherent entities without the assistance of language. For example, Lee describes what Chinese boys do with leisure time but dissolves any potential comparisons between American sports and Chinese hobbies. Chinese boys play nothing like American sports: they have “nothing according to baseball, foot-ball, cricket, bicycle riding, skating, sliding, or tennis” (34). Chinese boys instead

enjoy more leisurely forms of exertion such as “kite flying,” “penny-tossing,” “fishing,” or “quail-fighting” (36, 38, 39). Lee’s rhetorical decision to introduce these activities by what they cannot be identified as indicates that Chinese leisure exists as a distinct whole, and therefore shed light on what Burke meant by “assertions in vacuo” (*P&C* 319)

Lee continually describes China “in vacuo” throughout the autobiography. About religion, Lee says, “there is nothing in Chinese religion corresponding to the Christian Sabbath” (68). Interestingly, Lee describes even the very day of his birth “in vacuo.” After tentatively describing the complex and only roughly identifiable nature of the Chinese calendar, Lee concludes that now living in America, “I have been cheated of my birthday celebration” (8). Lee says that, like the mystic, his birthday has transcended the realm of language: “Therefore, although I am sure that I was born on the twenty-first day or the Second Moon in Chinese, I don’t know my exact birthday in English” (8). Here, Lee has barely introduced himself as the book’s autobiographical protagonist, yet already he asserts language cannot broach even simple concepts as his birth. In fact, although he mentions his name in American English may be referred to as “Yan Phou,” Lee never provides readers with his birth name. The only details Lee gives us is that he received his birth name one month after his birth, and that he now “[arranges his] name in accordance with American custom” (8-9).

These non-identificatory approaches to Lee’s *When I Was A Boy in China* at times appear subtle or brief. Ultimately, Lee hoped his American audiences would welcome Chinese immigrants, and he knew they would succeed to the extent they identified their culture with America’s. Yet, Lee recognized that greater cultural or racial identification sometimes came as Asians identified themselves as Americans only tenuously identified themselves, as plural and multiple, or sometimes, because of their holism, without identifying themselves at all.

Although Lee's text might be better served with a more panoramic analysis, the introduction I have provided to Lee's autobiography highlights patterns Lee turns to consistently. As a whole, Lee's text can be read as an attempt to simultaneously forge and complicate American identification of Chinese immigrants. While Lee hopes Americans embrace Chinese culture, he also hopes they do not come away from the text thinking they have understood what it's like to grow up a boy in China—he does not hope they have made 'A consubstantial with B.' Instead, he hopes that A has roughly approximated B, just as the human experience living in Asia roughly approximates the human experience in America, that A might be more polyphonous than B just as China is not reducible to America, and that A cannot be made consubstantial with anything, just as Chinese culture resists interpretation, signification, or identification.

Rhetoric's Relevance: Burke's identification

Lee is up to much more than simply rhetorical listening in his important autobiography. While Lee hopes his readers will apply the careful listening Ratcliffe describes, he also takes measures to write in a similar non-identificatory fashion as described by Burke. Reading Burke through Ratcliffe, and then reading both rhetorical theorists through Asian America, informs how this early Asian American immigrant navigates a skeptical, often racist, and sometimes violent American culture in order to provide a more hospitable and self-authorized image of himself.

But not only does non-identification per Burke and Ratcliffe inform Lee's strategic ambiguity, my reading of Burke in combination with Ratcliffe also informs Burke's original description of identification. Even though not all rhetorical scholars see Burke's "synecdoche function," a term he described in a *Philosophy of Literary Form*, in connection with identification, a term he described in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke may have seen these would-be disparate theories as two separate accounts of the same process. In the *Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke does not use the term identification, yet he does say that "The word 'identified' also

suggests the importance of the name as an important aspect of synecdoche” (146). In fact, Burke sounds much like his poststructuralist critics when he says that the “labeling” of “such protagonists as He or Man” constitutes the “problem of identity” (27). Although Burke may not answer this problem of identity in the same way as his critics, Burke hardly can be called an essentialist.

Accordingly, reading identification as non-identification reveals that Burke envisions identification to communicate much more than the workings of the powerful or hegemonic. In fact, although critics most commonly cite his description of identification in *A Rhetoric*, Burke says earlier in this work that identification can describe strategies of the mystic. Identification ranged “from the bluntest quest of advantage, as in sales promotion or propaganda, through courtship, social etiquette, education, and the sermon” (xiv). Identification ranges “from the politician” who, addressing an audience of farmers, says, “I was a farm boy myself,” and it might also describe the workings of power and hegemony through “the mysteries of social status” (xiv). But importantly, identification describes how “the mystic’ identifies “with the source of all being,” which includes the disintegrating tendency of art, the synecdoche function, or any other approach that refers to the self as non-identifiable (RM xiv). These descriptions of identification contrast harshly against later descriptions of identification as ‘compensatory to division’ through consubstantiation, yet here in *A Rhetoric*, Burke explicitly links what looks much like inventive non-identification to his key term identification. In this sense, what Asian American scholars call non-identification, Burke may simply refer to as identification.

Ultimately, my work reconfiguring non-identification demonstrates one way a rhetorician might practice Asian American studies or studies of any number of other marginal groups struggling to navigate the rhetoric of identity. Recovering Burke and then pairing him with Ratcliffe demonstrates a particular recovery methodology, one that illustrates how rhetorical

scholars might turn back to the rhetorical tradition to perform similar types of revision. The term Identification has been revised and revisited, ignored and revitalized continuously since Burke's introduction of the term to rhetorical studies, and scholars might well continue to interpret and reinterpret this term. Kenneth Burke is, in fact, the father of modern rhetorical theory, and his insights should continue to illuminate our investigation of rhetorical studies. In particular, Asian American studies might put a great deal of rhetorical scholarship from the rhetorical tradition to use beyond just Burke. Because rhetorical scholars, unique from the literary, the philosophical, or the historical, can claim the rhetorical tradition as their own, they should continue to show how its rich history continues to shed light on new topics, trends, and problems.

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