



## CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374

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Volume 19 | (2017) Issue 2

Article 3


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### Adoption, Cynical Detachment, and New Age Beliefs in Juno and Kung Fu Panda

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### Recommended Citation

Chen, Fu-jen. "Adoption, Cynical Detachment, and New Age Beliefs in Juno and Kung Fu Panda." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 19.2 (2017): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3069>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3069)

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**Volume 19 Issue 2 (June 2017) Article 3**

**Fu-Jen Chen,**

**"Adoption, Cynical Detachment, and New Age Beliefs in *Juno and Kung Fu Panda*"**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol19/iss2/3>>

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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 19.2 (2017)**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol19/iss2/>>

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**Abstract:** In his article "Adoption, Cynical Detachment, and New Age Beliefs in *Juno and Kung Fu Panda*" Fu-Jen Chen situates his study within today's prevailing climate of global consumption to argue that the 2007 film *Juno*—featuring an unconventional portrayal of the adoption triad and a cynical detachment from public values—not only trivializes and depoliticizes the practice of adoption but also serves as an ideological supplement to today's global capitalism. Furthermore, *Kung Fu Panda 1 & 2* (2008; 2011) provide two ideological messages of contemporary New Age spirituality—"the belief in nothing" in part I, and "the attitude of inner peace" in part II —that fit with and even fuel the world market economy.

**Fu-Jen CHEN**

### **Adoption, Cynical Detachment, and New Age Beliefs in *Juno and Kung Fu Panda***

Emerging as a serious subfield of study over the past decade with the expansion of the global economy, adoption (either domestic or international) offers a new means to probe identity with reference to gender, race, and class in the contexts of diaspora, post-colonialism, and the new global market. In comparison to literary studies or critical analysis of adoption, the visual representation of adoption is actually more extensive and influential, though perhaps less substantive. Adoption-themed documentaries, television shows, and particularly blockbuster movies—all have served primary source of information about adoption to the general public, shaping their perception of members of the adoption triad (including the birthparents, adoptive parents, and adopted children) and adoption-related issues (economic, political, or psychological). Yet, substantial studies on the effect of visual representations of adoption are very scant.

Selecting recent blockbuster movies about adoption as my primary texts—*Juno* and *Kung Fu Panda I & II*—I explore in the paper the underlying value assumptions inherent in their representations of adoption and the political-ethical implications of the gaze positioned in them. Situating my study within today's prevailing climate of global consumption, I argue that the movie *Juno*—featuring an unconventional portrayal of the adoption triad and a cynical detachment from public values—not only trivializes and depoliticizes the practice of adoption but also serves as an ideological supplement to today's global capitalism. Furthermore, *Kung Fu Panda 1 & 2* reflect two ideological underpinnings of contemporary New Age spirituality—"the belief in nothing" in part I and "the attitude of inner peace" in part II—that fit with and even fuel the world market economy. In our allegedly "post-ideological" era, these films enable a non-recognition of one's own participation in structures of dominance and bind one to the fundamental antagonism that conditions the social as such and makes adoption possible in the first place. Self, desire, and reality are either treated frivolously or unmasked as contingent and fictional.

Receiving widespread national and international attention, *Juno*, since its release in 2007, has won the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. *Juno* tells the story of the titular protagonist Juno MacGuff, an unconventional sixteen-year-old high school girl. Juno discovers she is pregnant after a single sexual encounter with her best friend, Paulie Bleeker. After considering an abortion, Juno decides to continue the pregnancy to adoption. In the adoption-wanted ads of the *Penny Saver*, Juno finds a picture-perfect couple to be the adoptive parents of her baby—Mark and Vanessa Loring, affluent suburban professionals living in an idyllic gated community. Though Juno herself opts for a closed adoption, she forms a deep attachment to the would-be adoptive parents. With Mark, a composer of commercial jingles, Juno not only shares an affinity for punk rock and horror films, but enjoys their playful flirtation. With Vanessa, who thinks of herself as "born to be a mother," Juno bonds through the joy and excitement generated by her pregnant state. Seeing the Loring's marriage falling apart, Juno, still willing to go through the adoption, leaves a note to Vanessa: "If you're still in, I'm still in." The movie ends with a scene in which Juno, post-birth, and Paulie are together playing their guitars in a happy duet, immediately before which Vanessa is blissfully holding the new baby in her arms at home.

Upon its release, *Juno* immediately attracted critical attention in popular and scholarly publications. It has been extensively examined with regard to its highlighting both adolescent sexuality and the female pregnant body with regard to its challenge to notions of girlhood and motherhood and, yet, its re-submission to conservative discourses of femininity, with regard to its shifting between (non)-stereotypical modes of gender expression, with regard to its appeal for women's agency viewed merely as the exercise of choice, and with regard to its absence of critique of reproductive consumption and global economic inequality. In addition, some criticism of the film centers on its language (e.g., its heavy use of slang in dialogue), its social impact (e.g., "the *Juno* effect,"), or its genre as coming-of-age narrative. Critics-reviewers also debate its ambivalent position between pro-life and pro-abortion, or whether it actually takes a position beyond that duality to reveal the multiple conflicting ideologies millennial teenagers encounter today. Though met with much mixed reception, *Juno* is rarely seen as an "adoption" movie per se, or examined intertextually in relation to other adoption-themed movies. Rather, it is usually within the neo-liberal discourse of (post)-feminism that *Juno* is situated and considered. The adoption-related issues in the movie, nonetheless, fade from view—issues including the representation of the adoption triad, adoption parenting, search as well as reunion, or closed as well as open adoption arrangements (terms that refer to the degree of contact between the adopted child's birth family and the adoptive family).

Observed through the lens of adoption, *Juno* is seen to be quite unconventional in its offering a cinematic alternative to the reality of adoption. For instance, in comparison with other visual or verbal representations of adoption in either films or personal narratives, *Juno* presents a unique portrayal of the adoption triad. Unlike many birth mothers-narrators, Juno never sees herself as a victim of her male partner or as suffering a traumatic accident, much less as a sinner exposed to judgment. For instance, some birth mothers in their personal accounts may focus on their personal "sins" and expect another chance of being accepted in society as well as forming better representations of themselves. Or some try to reason out their traumatic experiences through their relationships with significant others or through the socio-cultural-political lens. But how to end the lingering excess of the trauma or what they aim to change—except recovering "the fact" of the traumatic past—seems as unclear to the reader as, perhaps, to the writers-birth mothers themselves.

Instead, in the movie, Juno is an atypical birthmother. She is the one to initiate the sexual contact with the birthfather, Paulie, and to exercise rights of ownership over her body and a decision for adoption. She finds, chooses, and evaluates her child's adoptive parents, then decides on a closed adoption. In dialogue with the adoptive parents about the closed arrangements, she is ironical: "Can't we just, like, kick this old school? You know, like I stick the baby in a basket, send it your way, like Moses and the reeds?" Juno is unabashed about her lack of interest in bonding with her child and shows no desire for a future reunion—an attitude shockingly opposed to the collectively-held image of birth mothers represented in many confessional narratives. To Juno, intractable debates or difficult decisions could be eased away: her presentation of pro-abortion and pro-life does not offer "more insight than perhaps a quick laugh" (Hoerl and Kelly, "The Post-Nuclear" 369) and her decision to "procure a hasty abortion" is made casually on a "hamburger phone." Though as painful and offensive as it is for birth mothers and adoptees to watch the movie, such a birth mother as Juno is widely hailed as a witty, outspoken heroine: she suffers no remorse, no guilt, no shame.

Apart from its unusual image of a birth mother, *Juno* features a different representation of other members of the adoption triad. Conventionally, adoptees are often oversimplified as good or bad characters. On the one hand, they may be seen as a loveable angel or a blessing-gift for adoptive parents as depicted in many personal narratives by adoptive mothers. On the other, adoptees may be characterized as a "bad seed," a "demon-child" due to the public's suspicion and fear of unknown genetic heritage—a recurrent theme in many adoption-related thriller films, notably from *The Bad Seed* (1956) through *The Omen* (1976) to the recently released movie *Orphan* (2009) about an adoptive girl represented as a natural born killer. But in *Juno* such a fervent binary of good and evil is absent. Instead, the pre-birth baby is merely trivialized as "a thing" or "a Sea Monkey" by the birth mother, Juno, who frivolously tells her boyfriend that she plans to "nip it in the bud" (namely, to abort the baby).

Likewise, the birth father, Paulie Bleeker, also undermines the stereotypical profile of the birth father as a feckless or irresponsible young man. An athletic runner wearing his bright golden uniform throughout the film, Paulie is seduced by Juno instead of the other way around. Innocent, sensitive, and sweet-natured, he "embodies a type of newly emerging alternative 'masculinity'" (Willis 251). The adoptive parents in *Juno* appear conventional at first—they are an upper-middle class, white, educated, infertile couple with an apparently stable union. But toward the end of the movie, we find out that Juno's baby is not adopted by an adoptive couple but by a single mother as the couple splits up during the process of adoption.

While the film centers on the birth and adoption of Juno's baby, it gives a trivial and depoliticized treatment of the process and practices comprising adoption. Juno's decisions on either abortion or adoption, either closed or open adoption, are made rashly. Her reason for giving up the baby for adoption—that she is simply "ill-equipped" for child-rearing—has nothing to do with moral responsibility or emotional engagement. Consequently, psychological costs, conscience-based struggles, legal controversies, and crises of identity—all of which are faced by birth mothers and adoptees—are absent from the film. The movie further depoliticizes controversial issues surrounding the discourse of adoption through a tone alternately "light and playful" ("Juno") or through one that is "relentlessly up-beat and jolly" (Boycott) or through the traditional narrative elements of the coming-of-age story, or encompassing all within the classical rebirth narrative of the four seasons, running from autumn to spring, with the first three corresponding to Juno's trimesters (Valentine). Flippant in tone, conservative in form, indifferent to any serious debate, *Juno* represents a Hollywood treatment of today's adoption and shows the changing perception of sex, parenthood, and adoption. The emphasis on adoption, writes Kathleen Riley, has shifted "from secrecy, shame, and stigma toward openness, honesty, and pride," and from "something to be ashamed of" to a story moving "toward celebration" ("Real" 168).

In addition to capturing the changing culture of adoption at home and abroad, *Juno* demonstrates how contemporary adoption has given way to choice, consumption, and agency in a global-capitalist-post-ideological world characterized by a cynical distance toward public values. It is this framework that sustains its treatment of adoption and makes sense of its other features. Set in such a world, the movie portrays the title character, Juno, as alternately fanciful, playful, and cynical. She goes so far as to quip to the Lorings, "You should have gone to China. I heard they give away babies like free iPods. They shoot 'em out of those T-shirt guns at sports events." She is cynical about all ideological calls and any serious discussion, as Kristen Hoerl and Casey Kelly observe, frequently using "sarcasm or . . . jokes to disrupt adults' earnest conversations with her" ("Post-Nuclear" 366). For instance, with her "flip, pop-cult, high-school sarcasm," she responds to Vanessa's offer of a glass of vitamin water or orange juice by saying that she would rather have a "Maker's Mark" (Denby, "The current" 106). In today's so-called post-ideological era, unifying doctrines have failed and people no longer care about ideological "truth" because they have seen through the strategies by which "reality" is constructed. But, ironically, such an attitude of mocking disbelief at a distance is how we bind ourselves to the structuring power of the dominant capitalist society. In explaining how ideology functions today, Slavoj Žižek holds that "in our self-proclaimed postideological universe . . . we perform our symbolic mandates without assuming them and 'taking them seriously'" (*Welcome* 70). Today, ideology depends upon a subject's ability to distance himself not only from any ideological demand but also from his own investment in the object of desire. Such a cynical detachment or non-conformist position enables us to continue to operate within the ideological structure and, yet, conceals our much deeper commitment to it. The prevailing ideology that emerges at the end of ideology is cynicism. For Žižek, cynical reason is "a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it" (*The Sublime* 29).

Unsurprisingly, Juno, as a post-ideological cynic, belittles the practice of adoption, roams freely between biblical allusions and secular culture, distances herself from any engaged position, and renders all ideological commitments meaningless—including causes such as feminism, advocacy of either pro-life or pro-abortion stances, open or closed adoption, or representation of the conventional adoption triad. It is no wonder that Juno's overt transgression of the gender norm amounts to cynical submission to the dictates of patriarchal gender ideology. On the one hand, she not only exhibits her unconventional gender expressions through her raucous tone, unusual wording, and loose fitting shirt—each of which "distances her from prototypical soft feminine characteristics" or "disguises her feminine attributes" (Haas; 139; 140)—but also does so through her pseudo-masculine performances, as in her pipe-smoking, her armchair-sitting posture, her initiation of sex with Paulie, and her objectification of the "male body through her gaze and her voice-over remarks about the genitalia of the men running down the sidewalk behind her" (Tarancón, "Juno" 460). On the other hand, beneath her open challenges to the gender norm, Juno privately submits herself to the patriarchal demand. Prior to visiting Mark, she in several scenes applies lipstick and adjusts her skirt in order to appeal to him, a representative of the patriarchal Other. In addition, the movie ends with a love duet between Juno and Paulie and a kiss. In such a common scenario of the romantic comedy, Juno does after all assume the role of the proto-typical female. Indeed, Juno acts in accordance with Žižek's critique of cynical compliance today: "If, once upon a time, we publicly pretended to believe while privately we were skeptics or even engaged in obscene mocking of our public beliefs, today we publicly tend to profess our skeptical, hedonistic, relaxed attitude while privately we remain haunted by beliefs" ("Suspension" 7).

Not only does the movie feature Juno's submission to the patriarchal demand, but it also shows how she and other characters submit to the ideology of capitalism. Their submissions, however, are demonstrated as an exercise of agency, choice, or consumption. In the movie, the emphasis on women's reproductive agency can be read in terms of post-feminism's celebration of the right to "choose something, anything, as a feminist principle" (Vavrus 52)—that is, "choice" is coded as a post-feminist expression of "agency." Moreover, while our lives are often viewed as being full of choices in today's consumer society, our "life choices" are described in the same terms as "consumer choices," as Renata Salecl notes in *The Tyranny of Choice* (8). Within such a post-feminist and capitalist paradigm, women's agency amounts to nothing more than the right to choose and to consume.

Juno is precisely both "the adolescent embodiment of post-feminist sensibilities," as maintained by Hoerl and Kelly (366). That is, as her reproductive agency is treated not as right but a choice, she retreats from the political to the individual and further to the realm of consumption. Juno exercises her agency by choosing her sexual partner, by choosing to give up her baby for adoption, by choosing a closed adoption, and by choosing her child's adoptive parents. Though she claims to prefer "something a little more edgier" for her child's adoptive parents, such as "a couple of nice lesbos," she eventually chooses from the ads a white, middle-class, "educated, successful" couple, who appear, in her words, "beautiful even in black and white." In addition, Juno chooses to commodify her child as a gift, presenting herself as a giver, one capable of participating in the capitalist market system. In a similar vein, Vanessa demonstrates her agency through her choice in reproductive consumption. She desires or, rather, demands to have a baby and becomes a mother. Her decision to reclaim the traditional gender role indicates not so much her submission to the patriarchal demand as her embrace of capitalist consumption: customize one's life and make it whole. Or, in the case of Vanessa, "to have it all—autonomy, career, and child—" reflects the range of choices for such a white, professional, female customer as Vanessa (Hoerl and Kelly 373).

At the same time, in the name of a consumerist model of agency and choice, the movie dismisses both personal and social antagonism and, in particular, the fundamental antagonism—class struggle. Downplaying such flaws or inconsistencies of global capitalism, the movie highlights the rhetoric of agency as well as choice, obscuring the class distinction between Juno and Vanessa by their forming a sisterly bond between them across the class divide. The movie deflects attention both from how "the child becomes a locus of desire and value" (Taylor 151) and from the worldwide phenomenon of motherhood as a class privilege both in domestic and global contexts. As Karen Dubinsky argues in *Babies without Borders*, "Children move from south to north, east to west, poor to rich, brown [or colored] to white; over 50 percent of them end up in one country alone, the United States" (20). In this sense, the movie *Juno* not only reveals individual or familial concerns, but it itself stands for a problematic production of the global-capitalist world; Juno is not simply a pregnant teenager or a witty heroine. Rather she is the most exemplary representative of cynicism in today's post-ideological era.

While the movie *Juno* downplays socio-economic class privilege as negligible in adoption practice, *Kung Fu Panda* further shows how the discourse of adoption can be easily and successfully appropriated, commodified, and marketed under global capitalism. While *Juno* is characterized by postmodern cynicism, *Kung Fu Panda*, even described by Žižek as a "dangerous ideological film, for ideology at its purest," features the perfect ideological supplement to virtual capitalism, and the movie itself witnesses the globalization of the film industry. To be exact, *Kung Fu Panda* conveys two specific ideological messages of contemporary New Age spirituality that fit with and even fuel today's global capitalism: respectively, in part I "the belief in nothing" and in part II "the attitude of inner peace."

Set in an imaginary town of ancient China called "the Valley of Peace," *Kung Fu Panda 1* tells the story of three adoptees: Tai Lung, Tigress, and Po. A muscular snow leopard, Tai Lung is the primary antagonist, taken in by Master Shifu as a baby, treated like a son and trained to be the Dragon Warrior. Also adopted by Shifu as a foster daughter from an orphanage, Tigress—direct and commanding—is the strongest of the legendary Furious Five (along with Viper, Mantis, Monkey, and Crane). Though Tigress resents Po at the beginning of the movie for his being chosen as the Dragon

Warrior instead of her, her contempt for Po progressively grows into respect. The protagonist panda, Po, is adopted by Mr. Ping, a goose, in an allegory for transracial adoption. The only one of his species in the Valley of Peace (populated mostly by anthropomorphized animals such as pigs, rabbits, and geese), Po, though raised in a noodle shop, dreams of becoming a celebrated kung fu master, fighting to protect the village against the villains. A gluttonous, clumsy, and portly bear, he is yet fatefully chosen by Grand Master Oogway to be the Dragon Warrior to fulfill an ancient prophecy. His selection of Po is, however, lacks support from anyone, especially from Shifu—the one responsible for Po's training—and even from Po himself, who is filled with self-loathing for his girth and clumsiness. Profound and persistent, Grand Master Oogway persuades Shifu to believe in Po as the Chosen One. Thereafter, Shifu in turn requests that Po believe in his master as Po quits and is leaving the Jade Palace: "now I ask you to trust in your master as I have come to trust in mine." "The belief in belief" or, rather, in "nothing"—the most vital lesson Po has to learn in order to become the Dragon Warrior—is clearly demonstrated by the secret of Mr. Ping's noodle soup and, next, by the secret of the Dragon Scroll, which promises limitless power because it holds the sovereign secret of Kung Fu. To his adopted son, Mr. Ping reveals the secret ingredient of the family soup: nothing. Mr. Ping explains that he only needs people to believe that it is special. Suddenly Po realizes that "nothing" is also the exact point of the Dragon Scroll since the scroll discloses nothing but a black, reflective surface. The movie ends happily with Po's victory over Tai Lung. The evil snow leopard Tai Lung is defeated simply because he is still convinced that the scroll can grant one unlimited power and because he still believes there is something inherent in the scroll instead of nothing.

"You just need to believe," Grand Master Oogway asserts; again, Po's father, Mr. Ping, echoes the same concern: "To make something special, you just have to believe it's special." It is precisely "to believe" that sustains the cinematic reality of *Kung Fu Panda 1*, namely, a New Age reality that is virtual, existing only insofar as we act as if it exists. In the movie, such an inter-subjective belief is grounded in a belief in "nothing"—the belief in nothing is evidently demonstrated in the "nothingness" found in the scroll or "the secret ingredient" (nothing) added to the soup. "The belief in nothing" suggests that the reality of the movie is dismissed as a mere texture of semblance, every object of desire is a lure, and, as Žižek describes the universe of *Kung Fu Panda 1*, "there are only everyday objects and needs, and the void beneath, all the rest is illusion" (*Living* 70). In short, in the world of *Kung Fu Panda* there exist only flat appearances and the void.

The illusory nature of desire and the non-substantial character of reality exist with a concomitant circumstance: both subjective libidinal excess and structural ideological antagonism are either externalized or disavowed. Unsurprisingly, we see in the movie a happy, playful protagonist Po, an asexual female protagonist Tigress, and no sexual relationship between them. Libidinal excess is, however, externalized into the villains (played mostly by wolves), whose heartlessness is simply driven by innate urges rather than ambitious desire. What's more, the disavowal of structural antagonism is illustrated by the Valley of Peace in which class antagonism created by capital-based economic systems or the social hierarchy based upon their Kung Fu skill are all disregarded. In the movie, the class hierarchy is hardly visible. And Kung Fu skill is achieved via excessive time or effort spent, as the Furious Five, Bruce Lee, and Jackie Chan have demonstrated. Yet, while seen as an illusion of desire, the mastery of Kung Fu in the movie can also be realized immediately and appears as a magical power simply by means of our social exchange of belief.

Ironically, in such a transient and non-substantial reality, there is a deeply rooted communal belief in "fate." To illustrate, it is foretold that Tai Lung will escape from prison and that Po is destined to become the fabled Dragon Warrior. The ideological function of predictable fate is to render characters in the movie blind to their own participation. Tai Lung's escape from prison is not predestined as such, but is made possible by a collective participation in this plot. It is Grand Master Oogway who first has to foretell the future; next, it is Master Shi Fu who has to send his goose messenger to fly to Chor-Gom Prison to ensure that security is increased; then, it is the goose messenger who leaves one of his feathers within Tai Lung's reach, and it is with the help of the feather that Tai Lung removes the blockers on his back and breaks free. Due to the active participation of all of them, Tai Lung, as foretold, does indeed finally escape from prison. Likewise, in the sequel, Po can become a "warrior of black and white" as prophesied only after Lord Shen has come to believe the prediction and thus execute a genocide against all of the black and white in order to prevent it. An effect thereby retroactively posits its own cause. Moreover, it is in such a temporal, fated loop that one's participation is disavowed.

Does the belief in nothing—or, in other words, the conviction of the illusion of desire and the non-existence of the Other—accomplish an equivalent of "traversing the fundamental fantasy" and "confronting the void" in the sense of Lacanian psychoanalysis? The answer is negative. First, just as Jacques Alain-Miller explains, while "The Other does not exist, [this] does not prevent the Other from functioning, for many things function without existing" ("Extimity"). Besides, even if the object of desire—including the secrets of Mr. Ping's noodle soup and the Dragon Scroll—is illusory, there is a real in this illusion. As Žižek maintains, "the object of desire in its positive content is vain, but not the place it occupies" (*Less* 133). Also the very gesture of desiring nothing can create a new desire, oozing some surplus-enjoyment out of this act of renunciation. When desire stops, drive is still going on. Different from the New Age concept of "nothingness," the "void," as the kernel of Lacan's Real, is not empty but generative, a kind of present absence.

Even more problematic is how "the belief in nothing" foregrounds the issue of adoption in the context of global consumption of film entertainment. A PG-rated animated film, *Kung Fu Panda* targets the global audience and the world market. The movie both opens and ends with an act of consumption—of eating—and throughout the movie are shown recurrent sensory stimulation for food. In the movie, Kung Fu (Chinese martial arts) aims to protect widespread access to consumption in the

free market economies of the Valley of Peace. Targeting global consumption, the movie features as protagonist a giant panda, one—though traditionally mythologized as a Chinese national symbol—that is, as Chung writes, "devoid of any ethnic or racial markings" and "easily translatable and mobile" (*Kung Fu* 32). Though some reviewers elaborate "Chinese elements" or "American values" in the movie and their arguments often involve a debate on authentic representations of Chinese culture or a disclosure of American ideologies (e.g., Guo and Wang), *Kung Fu Panda 1* cannot be confined to such a binary treatment because it is indeed a product of global capitalism. Subsumed into the capital market, both Chinese elements and American values are detached from their geographical location and historical time so that they can be commodified and resold to global audiences, including the Chinese and Americans. As a case in point, in the movie, while the names of characters such as Oogway (turtle) and Shi Fu (master) are spelled and pronounced according to the Chinese phonetic alphabet, it is such authentic representations of cultural differences that, ironically, sound the most exotic to the foreign ear. Indeed, genuine pronunciations of characters' names show how easily we are ready to commodify local features in today's world market and to surrender a possible cultural translation at the time of the declining efficiency of symbolic authority.

Subsumed into market-oriented capitalism with a supplemental ideology of "the belief of nothing," the issue of adoption in the movie is trivialized and depoliticized. The movie presents Po as a happy adoptee, untroubled by his adoptive identity or unknown past (in part one). Po is taught by Grand Master Oogway to cherish the present rather than live in the past or the future: "You are too concerned with what was and what will be. There is a saying: Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That is why it is called the present." In other words, Po is encouraged to live in a perpetual present, a condition comparable to today's perpetual need of consumption. Doesn't a philosophy of living in the perpetual present perfectly fit with today's hunger for consumption? Don't the unfettered flows of today's virtual capitalism rely precisely on one's immersion into such a "perpetual present" deprived of the recognition of the past and the future (as, for example, virtual capitalism offers us on-demand consumption through online shopping)? As Oogway claims, today is a "gift" called "present," and in these terms we see two tropes of consumer capitalism. In this context, an adoptee today can be viewed as a subject of global consumption and also as an object of global humanitarianism (which often falls into the trap of a politics of pity, of merely spotlighting the spectacle of individual suffering). An adoptee like Po, on the one hand, is disconnected from the history of adoption and his bond of origin. On the other, one is discouraged from the pursuit of social and political causes in the future. In short, one is inspired to go for a dream but not to work from ambition or for a cause. Dreams come true (as Po does indeed become a dragon warrior); yet, desire is futile (as Tai Lung fails to become the Dragon Warrior), and causes can even be catastrophic (as Lord Shen fights for a cause even if it aims at a massive genocide of the panda species).

At the end of part one, Shi Fu thanks Po for bringing the village and himself peace as Grand Master Oogway had foretold. It is precisely the journey into "inner peace" that provides the narrative and thematic arcs of the sequel in which Po has to achieve inner peace to unlock fully the power within himself so that he is able to defeat Lord Shen, to protect the kung fu tradition, and, more importantly, to encounter his deeply traumatic origin (as in cases of adoptees). In the sequel, the new villain is Lord Shen, heir of the peacock clan, who strives to conquer all of China with his wolf and gorilla armies and to end the future of Kung Fu with his newly developed weapon, the cannon. When he learns from the elderly goat soothsayer that his ambition will be thwarted by "a warrior of black and white," he, in order to avert the prophecy, attempts the genocide of the pandas and almost succeeds. Years later, Po (at first thought to be the only survivor of the attempted genocide) is believed again to be the One, chosen to defeat Lord Shen. Po, however, has been plagued with disturbing dreams reminiscent of his childhood trauma and has endangered his life on numerous occasions when he is paralyzed at the sight of the symbol on Lord Shen's plumage. But with the help of the goat soothsayer, Po stops resisting the traumatic memories and attains tranquility. After acquiring the power of inner peace, he is able literally to grab the projectiles from Lord Shen's cannons and to redirect them against Shen's armada, thereby enabling him finally to win the battle.

As it sustains the cinematic world of *Kung Fu Panda*, "to believe" also provides fantasmatic and ideological support in its sequel. In *Kung Fu Panda 2*, Po again has to believe himself "a warrior of black and white" as the fulfillment of the soothsayer's prophecy. But his belief in himself (or in nothing) alone proves insufficient to defeat the new rival, Lord Shen. Not only does he have to believe himself to be the Chosen One, but he also has to achieve inner peace—the goal of one of Grand Master Oogway's final teachings. Inner peace enables Po to, in the words of Master Shifu, "harness the flow of the universe" through the power by which Po can further change the laws of nature. As Shifu says, "anything is possible when you have inner peace," and when in the ending scenes Po catches cannonballs and redirects them back at ships, it is by simply performing gentle tai chi movements.

But to achieve that inner peace itself, Po needs to encounter and re-experience his repressed memories in order ultimately to accept and overcome his traumatic past. Following the advice from the aged Soothsayer—"stop fighting [and instead] let it flow"—Po performs the special Tai Chi movements with a raindrop and finally sees the truth of his past. The Soothsayer further encourages him that it is his choice that determines his identity. Then Po decides to accept the present and to defeat Shen for good.

His quest for inner peace brings up sensitive topics, including adoptive parenting, abandonment, reunion, root search, trans-species adoption, and even genocide. When asked by Lord Shen, "How did you find peace? I took away your parents! Everything!" Po responds, "You gotta let go of that stuff from the past 'cause it just doesn't matter! The only thing that matters is what you choose to be now." While Lord Shen is caught up in a disgraced past, Po successfully overcomes the traumatic experience and its effects by choosing to live in the present. Such a strategy, however, again

trivializes and individualizes the difficult issues of adoption and renders invisible the structural and systematic destruction such as the Panda genocide. As a result, either Lord Shen's failure or Po's success is merely attitudinal.

Like "the belief of nothing," a message prominent in *Kung Fu Panda*, "inner peace" in the sequel also functions as an ideological supplement to contemporary capitalism. Inner peace enables us to work within capitalism but "keep metaphysically outside of it, a serene way of participating by, so to speak, keeping one's fingers crossed" (Sheehan, *Zizek* 136). Inner peace allows us to distance ourselves psychologically from our engagement in the capitalist game and to disregard the ethical dimension of our participation. That is, we are able to profit from the capitalist economy at the same time we are indulging in the richness of inner peace.

Because of the globalization of the film industry and the world's passion for image-making and visual immediacy, Hollywood movies are more able than ever to flood the world market and reach mass audiences—local and global. As products of the global entertainment industry, *Juno*, *Kung Fu Panda 1 & 2* each achieves huge success: *Juno* earned a total worldwide gross of \$231.4 million; *Kung Fu Panda 1*, a gross of \$631.7 million, and the sequel, surpassing the original, a gross of \$665.6 million. These films have been effective not only in shaping people's perspectives on the practice of adoption but also in reconfiguring the very discourse of adoption, particularly in the current prevalence of international adoption. For adoption, these films create a new cinematic reality by way of an unconventional portrayal of the adoption triad. Nonetheless, they both trivialize the practice of adoption and provide ideological supplements to today's global capitalism (in *Juno* via the consumerist mode of agency and the cynical distance toward public values, and in the two *Kung Fu Panda* films by means of "the belief in nothing" and "the attitude of inner peace"). These films enable a blindness to one's own engagement with patriarchal sexual ideologies as well as to the inequalities in a global capitalist economy that makes (transnational) adoption possible. One's desire, the sense of self, and the outer world are all seen as unreal as well as contingent and are, accordingly, treated flippantly.

The problem today, however, is not that we dismiss reality as fiction, but that we do not take this fiction seriously. Like *Juno*, we may see reality at a cynic's mocking distance and disguise our engagement as a gesture of non-compliance; or like characters in the *Kung Fu Panda* films, we may withdraw into the depth of the New Ager's inner life and peacefully participate in a culture's dominant Symbolic fiction. Both attitudes serve "not [as] a brake" upon the structuring power of the symbolic fiction, "but [as] its engine" (McGowan, *The End* 125-26). Thus, we should not dismiss fiction flippantly. Instead, we should take seriously the coordinates of fictional reality, even those produced in the medium of cinema.

When we over-identify with the given ideological positions of these movies, we create a suffocating closure of the Other within its cinematic imaginary. We demand something outside the rosy picture of teenage pregnancy, a cinematic "reality" such as that found in *Juno* creates. We suggest a Vanessa and a *Juno* of color. We target a gap between one to glamorize teenage pregnancy as a passage to womanhood (as in the "Juno Effect") and in the other to see it as a symptom of a lack of competence attributed to people of color. Moreover, we would ask for an encounter between the two fathers—Paulie and Mark—to reveal the formal impasse. It is within and by the radically split Other (the capitalist world) that we are all castrated.

What is more, we visualize a *Kung Fu Panda* with real people and that exposes trans-racial/national (rather than trans-species adoption) and a scene of genocide of the human race (instead of the animated cartoon figure, Panda). We should question, isn't it more logical to socialize Kung Fu, rendering it accessible to everyone, so that each can become a Dragon Warrior to fight off evil? An interesting issue worth discussing in *Kung Fu Panda 3* (produced by DreamWorks' new Shanghai-based company) is if "the belief in nothing" and "the attitude of inner peace" still work consistently given the increasing wealth gap in China and around the world and with Western colonial history in the past of China itself.

To "traverse" the ideological fantasies presented in the movies, we identify with their calls absolutely, all the way through to remain in, not cynically out, and, certainly, not spiritually beyond. In a similar vein, over-identifying with the disturbing excess of the existing global order—adoption—, we insist on adopting ALL. It is a move from "A thing like this should not happen HERE!" in the words of Žižek, "to a thing like this should not happen ANYWHERE" (*Welcome* 49). In the face of the symptom of global capitalism, the last thing we need is cynical distance or inner peace. Rather, we need more anger, anger directed towards the entire ethico-political economic condition that allows adoption (either domestic or international) to prosper from the outset and covers up the mode of our own participation in it. As Žižek in *Violence* claims: "What unites us is the same struggle. [I]n the emancipatory struggle, it is not the cultures in their identity which join hands, it is the repressed, the exploited and suffering, the 'parts of no-part' of every culture which come together in a shared struggle" (134).



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