

## Theresa Cha's *Dictée* as a Montage: A Visual Postcolonial-Feminist Transnational Reading

Abeer A. Al-Sarrani  
Taibah University, Saudi Arabia

Theresa Cha's experimental text *Dictée* and its unique composition from fragments of different literary genres, languages, pictures, handwritten memos, and scientific diagrams have inspired the scholarly conversation surrounding it to focus on the reading experience. Scholars especially critique the text's limited and difficult accessibility to readers and/or readers' corresponding level of psychological identification with it, situating their linguistic skills, knowledge, and identity in an uncomfortable and challenging position. Thus, due to the amount of difficulty exploring *Dictée*, especially when it comes to the many languages it is written in, let alone all the other different fragments, many readers had come to assume that they are not the text's targeted audience and that it is aimed at a highly educated multilingual audience. L. Hyun Yi Kang explains the dilemma she had faced during her reading experience and attempt to identify with *Dictée*. She states,

[i]t angered me that the text was not always accessible, that it seemed to speak to a highly literate, theoretically sophisticated audience that I did not identify with... Subsequent readings and other illuminating experiences enabled me to understand this anger and frustration as stemming from my own narrow, fixed and rather homogenous definitions of Korean/American identity and collective experience. I believed that I, as a Korean/American woman, should be able to immediately understand and identify with the work of another Korean/American woman. (76)

Indeed, being a multilingual educated reader might help making *Dictée* partially accessible but the ability to psychologically identify with it remains limited and weighed with challenges. *Dictée*'s different fragments refer to several ethnic, religious, cultural, educational, linguistic backgrounds and origins which prevent full access to it. Carol Noreen Moe claims that "[w]hatever background the reader may have - as a Korean, as a Korean American, as a scholar, as a linguist, as a historian, as a Catholic missionary, or as some or all of the above or other categories, this position still only allows for partial identification with the text" (34).

Several critics argue that the text offers numerous points of access to readers and therefore the possibility of partial psychological identification with *Dictée*. The most important scholarly demonstration of this is *Writing Self, Writing Nation: Essays on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Dictée*, edited by Elaine Kim. Anne Anlin Cheng, for example,

in her essay, “Memory and Anti-Documentary Desire in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*,” explains that, “*Writing Self, Writing Nation*, in turn, offers the most sustained practical example of what it means to perform a transnational analysis” (216). She argues that *Dictée* transcends the national limits of identification. Thus, Cheng does not limit the possibility of accessing and identifying with the text to Asian American women; instead, she celebrates *Writing Self, Writing Nation*’s demonstration that *Dictée* can cross national boundaries and be read and identified with on a global, multi-ethnic scale.

However, other critics dispute Cheng’s claim and argue that *Writing Self, Writing Nation* limits access to and identification with *Dictée* to Asian American readers only. Kristen Twelbeck argues that the contributors to *Writing Self, Writing Nation* are optimistic about the possibility of identifying with Cha and *Dictée* due to their shared culture and heritage and are thus *Dictée*’s only possible readers. Twelbeck explains:

By means of cover-design, the organization and linear order of the texts, a very emotional, politically tinged preface and an introductory essay which embraces *Dictée* as a kind of personal secret told forth, *Writing Self, Writing Nation* is dominated by a claim to cultural ownership. (227)

Twelbeck argues that access to *Dictée* and the experience of psychological identification should not be limited to Asian American readers. Therefore, I believe a certain reading approach must be adopted to link these fragments together to gain a holistic understanding of the text without being constrained to a certain ethnicity, educational level, or multilingual ability. So, while recognizing the difficulty of reading *Dictée* and the text’s limited audience, we must encourage the possibility of discovering new approaches to reading the text and the unlimited audience it could address, which would allow readers on a transnational level to experience a greater degree of identification with it. Thus, in this essay I argue that *Dictée*’s accessibility to transnational readers and the possibility of psychological identification with the text can be enhanced when the work is approached as a montage that documents some parts of Korean women’s colonial experience.

In his work titled *The Technique of Film Editing*, Karel Reisz gives a comprehensive explanation of the term “montage” and its different types and contextual uses as a technique in the filmmaking industry. In general, it is a film editing technique in which a group of film shots with special effects including split screens and fades; blurs are put into a sequence to point to the passage of time and motions of space. He specifically refers to the intellectual montage originally presented by Sergei Eisenstein in which the viewer is “free to associate any two images to communicate an idea about a person, a class, or a historical event” (25). Indeed, I believe that the cinematic techniques Cha uses in her text invite readers to view *Dictée* as a complete, (un)fragmented montage composed of pictures, photos, film shots, and

scientific diagrams. Moreover, the various structures, arrangements, and juxtapositions of a significant portion of the text suggest that some pages can be viewed as independent graphical images. In this essay, I also claim that the fragmented structure of *Dictée*, with its many photographs, diagrams, and multiple languages, reinforces and intensifies readers' psychological identification with the text because *Dictée* creates a reading experience in which the reader feels alienated, lost, confused, and sometimes helpless, mimicking some incidents of the colonial experiences of some Korean women including the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon, and Cha's mother Hyung Soon Huo. Cha presents their stories as transcending examples of the revolutionary experience of different famous women throughout history including the French revolutionary heroine Joan of Arc, and the ancient Greek goddesses Demeter and her daughter Persephone which, I believe, strengthens the feminist transnational reading of her work. In the section discussing the story and revolutionary trajectory of Guan Soon, Cha states that "the identity of such a path is exchangeable with any other heroine in history, their names, dates, actions which require no definition in their devotion to generosity and self-sacrifice" (30).

Through *Dictée*, Cha wanted to give her readers an access to some Korean women's harsh experience under Japanese colonization from 1910 until 1945. She specifically wanted her readers to feel their pains and harsh memories on a psychological level. Pyong Gap Min states that "the Japanese government mobilized approximately 200,000 Asian women to military brothels to sexually serve Japanese soldiers. Most of these victims were unmarried young women from Korea, Japan's colony at that time" (938). Of course, not all Korean women, whether mothers, wives, sisters, or daughters, were subjected to the same colonial experience as some ended up being "comfort women" to the Japanese army, while others were torn away from their families, and others still had no other option than to collaborate with the enemy to partially survive at the expense of their own country and people. Some chose to lead their people, especially women, to revolt against Japanese colonization.

Accordingly, Cha must have wanted her readers to psychologically identify with some of these women to the highest possible extent. Kaja Silverman defines the aspect of identification "as the product of a process whereby the other is interiorized as the self" (32). Silverman specifically argues that "this kind of identification is familiar to all of us through that formula with which we extend sympathy to someone less fortunate than ourselves [where one can say] I can imagine myself in his (or her) place" (35). Through this aspect of identification, she further claims that there lies the possibility for each of us of having psychic access to what does not "belong" to us- of "remembering" other people's memories. And through these borrowed memories, we can accede psychically to pains, pleasures, and struggles which are far removed not only from our own, but from what normative representation validates, as well. (10)

Of course, both women's writings and reading experience stand as the mostly discussed topics concerning the issue of psychological identification. Trinh Minh-Ha's profound work *Woman, Native, Other, Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* cites Clarice Lispector's statement that "[e]very woman is the woman of all women." Taking in any voice that goes through me, I. One woman within another, eternally" (33). In the same vein, Julia Kristeva also explains in an interview that "in social, sexual, and symbolic experiences being a woman has always provided a means to another end, to becoming something else: a subject-in- the-making, a subject on trial" (qtd. in Trinh Minh-Ha 98). In light of these comments, *Dictée*'s different fragments should be viewed as a montage instead of being read as a text because images play a vital role in that "the successful imaginary alignment with the image evokes values like 'wholeness' and 'unity'" (Silverman, 29). More importantly, "the conventional female spectator enjoys greater identificatory freedom than does the male counterpart" (Silverman, 49). Indeed, I believe that the images in *Dictée* evoke female readers in general because of the many female pictures of women in it compared to that of men while being a text written by a woman intensifies the female readers' psychological identification with it.

Trinh Minh-Ha explains that "[t]he writing of women is really translated from the unknown, like a new way of communicating rather than an already formed language" (39). Cha presents a new way of communicating to her transnational readers. At the beginning of *Dictée*, on an unnumbered page, Cha invents the following epigraph, which she attributes to Sappho, the Greek female poet, many of whose poems and life details were lost and undocumented: "May I write words more naked than flesh, stronger than bone, more resilient than sinew, more sensitive than nerve." I believe that Cha's decision to attribute this epigraph to Sappho is to point to the common fate of exclusion from the official historiography which women faced throughout history regardless of their different ethnicity, religion, culture, or education. This attributed statement by Sappho could be intertextually linked to Helene Cixous's statement in "The Laugh of the Medusa," in which she directly urges women: "[w]rite yourself. Your body must be heard" (880). This allusion suggests that what is meant to be heard in *Dictée* is the Korean woman's physical and psychological suffering. Indeed, many critics argue that Cha's quoting of Sappho indicates that she intends to write some of the painful stories of the Korean woman's body. Mahwash Shoaib, in her analysis of Cha's work in *The Arts of the Impossible: The Transnational Poetics of Etel Adnan, Agha Shahid Ali, Theresa Kyung Cha, and Kishwar Naheed*, claims that "[t]he grounding of the text in the body is evident [and this quotation] reveals a sensuous acknowledgment of the organic nature of corporeality." Shoaib continues: "Cha's translation of the body into words is a manifestation of the painful process of embodiment" (148). Indeed, I claim that Cha specifically and clearly visualizes her grounding of the text in the body by including images of diagrammed bodies in the "Urania/Astronomy section" (63) (Figure 1).

The two diagrammed bodies are labeled with small Chinese symbols that are difficult to read. Hilary Jennifer Marcus describes a common reader response to this image:

We recognize, visually, that these are diagrams and the bodies and words are there, but we cannot "read" them and because of the words, and we know we should be able to do so. In this sense, these images become "material" bodies to which we seem to have no access. When we encounter these images, we cannot bracket off the visual aspect of the text because it is the only thing we have to rely upon. Cha has not provided any other writing that accompanies this image and we are forced back on a material reading of those bodies. (107)

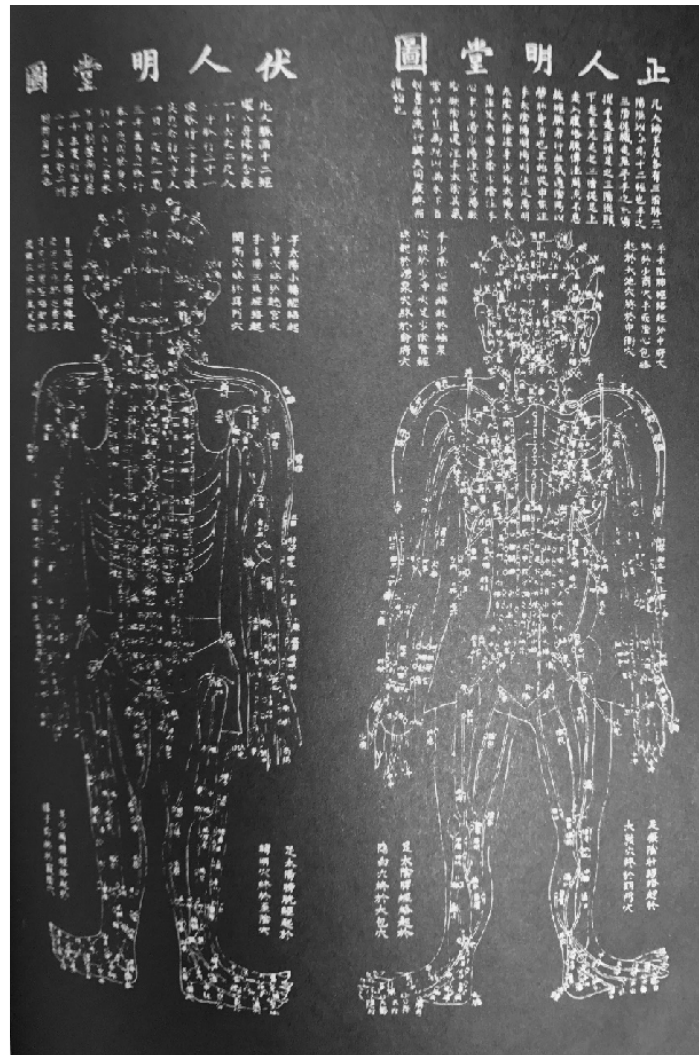


Figure 1

However, Marcus, like most of the critics who acknowledged the visual aspect of *Dictée* and the need to rely upon it when reading the text, still appears reluctant to present a comprehensive analysis of the text which could grant readers some level of access to and identification with *Dictée*. In fact, this image of the diagrammed bodies, I claim, could be regarded as representing *Dictée*. The intertextual link between this image and both Sappho's and Cixous's statements

reinforces the validity, let alone the necessity, of a visual approach to reading/watching *Dictée* and considering it as a montage that captures Korean women's colonial experience. Therefore, this image informs readers of the approach that they should use to access the text. It tells them that what should be read are the images and not the words, as if Cha tried to tell her readers/viewers that images speak louder than words so that readers/viewers on a transnational level will be able to acknowledge Cha's embedded message without the necessity of knowing many languages, let alone reading the whole text.

It is important to note that the cinematic techniques found in *Dictée* have also been acknowledged by many scholars, who attribute their presence to Cha's film-making studies in Paris. Yet, they have not fully explored these cinematic elements and *Dictée*'s resemblance to a montage. Mahwash Shoaib argues that "Cha attempts to go beyond the limits of language by utilizing the cinematic techniques she learnt during her film making background, but the attempts are thwarted by the equal failure of images to capture history as much as words" (138). Shoaib is correct in claiming that Cha "goes beyond the limits of the language," but is not accurate in her claim that the cinematic techniques she uses are "thwarted by the equal failure of images to capture history as much as words." On the contrary, both the cinematic techniques — including the blurring quality of some images and the film screen-like opening and closing of the work and all the images in *Dictée* — can be visually analyzed as part of a postcolonial-feminist montage about the history of Korean women under Japanese colonization. Furthermore, by considering the odd juxtapositions of the text to other sets of images in this montage and by acknowledging the links among them, access is granted to, and facilitates psychological identification with, *Dictée* without the need to either read all of the written text or have the ability to read all of the languages in which it is written, or to come from an Asian American ethnicity. As Stephen Joyce explains,

[o]ne of the most fascinating aspects of *Dictée* is how it mirrors our own attitudes and beliefs. The broken style of writing and odd juxtapositions of textual and visual fragments leave gaps that can be completed only by the reader's active participation. Reader participation in meaning construction is, of course, true of all texts but is emphatically true of *Dictée*. Every reading of the work ultimately reveals more about the reader than about the book, and as the number of readings grows, so too does interest in Cha's work. The strength of *Dictée* is how it reveals the prejudices of its readers and thus each reading affords another example of one of the work's primary themes. (sec. 2)

Stephen Joyce highlights how readers' active participation produces unlimited readings and ultimately different forms of psychological identification with *Dictée*. Thus, approaching *Dictée* visually as a postcolonial-feminist montage reveals another but most importantly unified theme of the work which arguably grants more access to the text on a transnational level.

The call for a new reading of *Dictée* was first made by Cha herself as the narrator of the work. While a significant amount of research has been done to identify the narrator of the text and confirm her/his

existence, in this essay I assume that Cha herself is the narrator of the text. Cha is continually calling for unconditional creative approaches and active readings of *Dictée* from all her readers, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds or knowledge of languages. She directly addresses them in the following manner at the beginning of *Dictée*: "Tell me the story / Of all these things / Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us" (11). These lines will be discussed in depth later in the essay. Cha challenges the narrative linearity of the work and calls for an active and creative reading experience that specifically focuses on *Dictée*'s visual features. These features create a montage that allows for different forms and levels of psychological identification.

*Dictée* opens with an unnumbered black page similar to the black screen that appears at the beginning of a movie (Figure 2). The facing page is partially black and has a picture in the middle that spans the width of the page/screen (Figure 3). The shape of this page/screen could also refer to the open eye of the reader/viewer. The picture in the middle of this page/screen/eye is of a desert scattered with large rocks. Thus, it is as if Cha tried to tell her readers/viewers that they have to look at the pictures instead of words to understand the hidden, buried, and dark history of the colonial experience Korean women suffered.

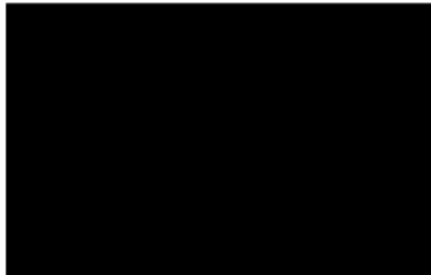


Figure 2



Figure 3

Turning to the second unnumbered next page/film shot, the reader/viewer discovers a picture of Korean characters engraved in white on a black wall or a black rock (Figure 4). The characters form sentences, including "I want my mother," "I want to eat," and "I want to go home." This image has also been given cinematic treatment to resemble a blurry flickering screen. Two pages later, the reader/viewer encounters Sappho's quotation, which prepares and alerts the reader to the intense and material nature of the work's contents. However, the next page does not meet the expectations raised by Sappho's quotation because the reader/viewer finds two columns presenting *Dictée*'s table of contents. The first column lists the nine Greek Muses, which may be unknown to some readers/viewers, while the second column, instead of showing page numbers, lists different types of poetry and literary genres. On the next page, the first numbered page of *Dictée*, the reader/viewer sees two identically formatted paragraphs, the first written in French and the second in English. This page therefore seems limited to readers who understand either French or English or both because the second paragraph is formed to appear like a faithful English translation. However, the ability to read both or one of these

languages does not guarantee a complete access to or understanding of the written content because the two paragraphs are composed of fragmented parts of sentences in which the punctuation marks are spelled out. Not only does this page fail to fulfil the expectations created by Sappho's quotation, it also confuses *Dictée*'s reader/viewer. Several scholars have discussed their confusion as they attempted to read these first two pages of the text and, accordingly, their inability to understand the rest of the book, which is full of content written in one language and supposedly translated into another.

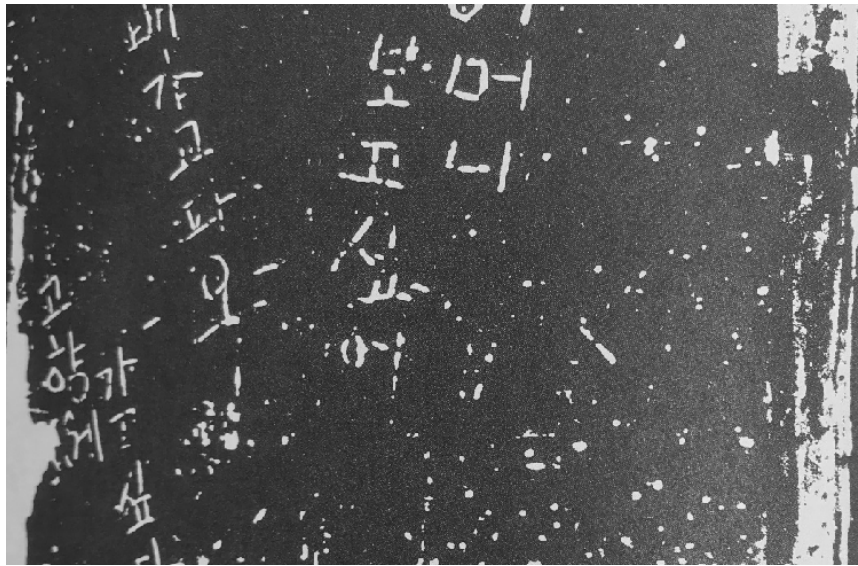


Figure 4

More importantly, these scholars have written about their urge to skim through the whole book backwards and forwards in an attempt to make sense of *Dictée* and remarked that they only grew more confused. They specifically noted that the different images caught their attention and described how they tried to imagine any link among these fragments in an effort to piece them together. For example, Moe describes her first reading experience of *Dictée* in the following interesting statement:

When I first picked up Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*, I immediately became enchanted by the poetic inscription attributed to Sappho on what I considered the first real page of the book... The potential of the book resounded in these words; I felt that this novel would be profound. I quickly skimmed the next page - a table of contents that listed no page numbers, and I delved into the passage in French on the following page. Checking myself against the English, ... The rest of the pages were games, and I was proud of myself for the references that I understood and the associative jumps in the text that I could recognize and piece together. Some pages didn't interest me, like page 63 with the diagrams of 2 bodies covered with Chinese characters, or the imprint of a hand on page 134, some of the other fuzzy pictures or writing I couldn't read (26).

Confusion about and frustration with the written content is exactly what Cha wants her readers to experience first so that they are spontaneously driven to focus on the visual content instead. This is



what Moe experienced in her first reading of *Dictée*. She explains that after experiencing difficulty reading the first two paragraphs and while skimming the rest of the book, she generally could not understand the other written content. Out of frustration, she tried to understand the meanings of the pictures that had first caught her attention instead. Similarly, Marcus, commenting upon her uneasy reading experience of *Dictée*, claimed that “[t]here is no payoff for starting at the beginning of *Dictée*, and in fact, our desire to start at the beginning is one reason *Dictée* seems so confusing” (83). Cha intentionally confuses and frustrates the readers and the first two short paragraphs are a deliberate challenge. In fact, Cha intentionally adds another layer of confusion by writing the following request on the next page: “O Muse, tell me the story / Of all these things, O Goddess, daughter of Zeus / Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us” (7). Cha repeats the request but without addressing the Greek Muses. Thus on page 11, she writes: “Tell me the story / Of all these things / Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us” (11). This sentence is a clear and an unconditional invitation and challenge from Cha to her readers/viewers to access the text and ultimately psychologically identify with it. Cha decides not to limit the act of telling to the Muses and opens the invitation to everyone and on a transnational level. Moreover, she gives anyone willing to read *Dictée* the freedom to begin anywhere they wish, contesting the typical practice of reading from the beginning of the book, confirming Marcus’s assertion that there is “no payoff for starting at the beginning of *Dictée*” (83). “These things” referred to in Cha’s previous sentence are likely *Dictée*’s visual images. Indeed, confused by the written fragments that include Sappho’s quotation, by Cha’s request to the Muses to tell the story, by her decision to ask the readers themselves to tell the story, by the image of the engravings, the fragmented French and English paragraphs, and the strange table of contents, readers/viewers are compelled to skim through the rest of *Dictée*. However, because nothing makes sense at first, many readers out of frustration and alienation will decide to begin again and try to make sense of the images in *Dictée*.

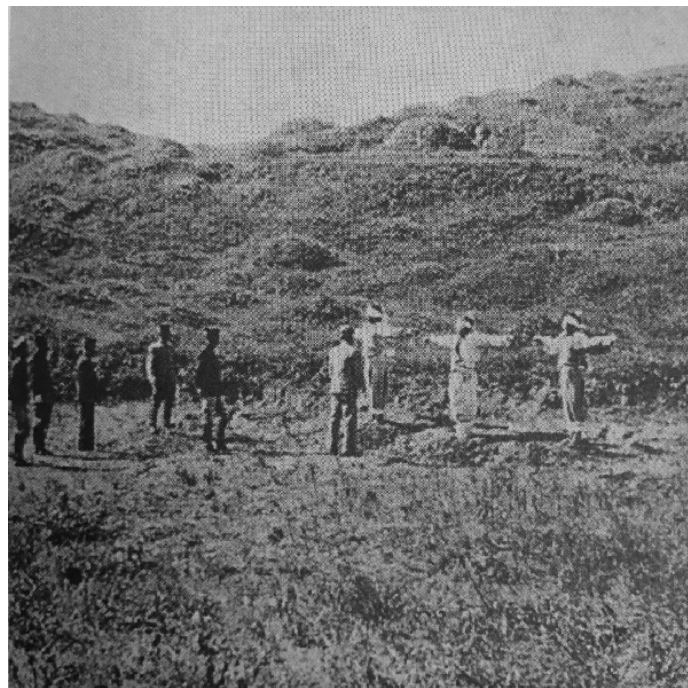
Accepting Cha’s invitation and challenge and participating as an active reader, a strategy advocated by critics including Stephen Joyce, in this essay I present a critical visual reading of *Dictée* as a montage about the history of some Korean women during Japanese colonization. The images are interpreted in a way that reveals their relationship to one another, concurrent with a discussion of readers’/viewers’ possible psychological identification with Korean women’s colonial experience. Thus, adopting a critical approach to reading *Dictée* as a montage is key to understanding the text and assembling its fragments in a way that grants unlimited and transnational access to some parts of the untold history of these women.

Thus, by beginning *Dictée* with a black unnumbered page, Cha not only invites readers to view *Dictée* as a movie but also presents Korean women’s neglected, lost, unseen, untold, and dark experiences during the Japanese colonial period (Figure 2). The second

unnumbered page representing the open eye also reinforces this feeling of loss because although the eye is open, what can be seen is only a dreadful desert containing shattered rocks (Figure 3). This desert represents a dead history and implies that readers dig deep to discover and revive the Korean woman's forgotten and buried colonial history. Indeed, this reading is further supported by the next picture, which shows engraved writings that may have been etched on a rock or a wall (Figure 4). The picture of the engraved Korean characters may be a close-up of one of the rocks in the desert. Readers who know Hangeul will be able to read some of these engraved Korean words. However, these writings reveal little because they are also of a fragmented nature and comprise only a few complete and unrelated sentences: "I want my mother," "I want to eat," and "I want to go home" (*Dictée*, third unnumbered page). On the next page, readers read Sappho's quotation again, view the table of contents, and see the two fragmented French and English paragraphs. As previously stated, all of these fragments generate more confusion, regardless of whether the reader knows one or even all of the three languages. This confusion, frustration, and helplessness is what Cha wants her readers to experience as it echoes the feeling of confusion, loss and helplessness felt by Korean women during the Japanese colonial period (despite being in their own land, where one would expect them to feel at least aware of their surroundings and able to make sense of them).

Moreover, several other pages written completely in English do not clarify the confusion readers feel because they have a fragmented, arbitrary structure. Some of these pages include lists of bizarre orders, others ask for translation to either French or English, and others are supposedly translations of the facing pages. After perusing these puzzling pages, readers turn the page to find a photograph of a Korean woman, one of five similar photographs that appear throughout *Dictée*. The facing page presents the woman's personal information: "Yu Guan Soon/ BIRTH: By Lunar Calendar, 15, March 1903/DEATH: 12, October, 1920. 8:20 A.M./She is born of one mother and one father" (25). The most unusual piece of information is the note that the woman was "born of one mother and one father." Because such a fact is common to all human beings, Cha's inclusion of it has caused many critics, including Mahwash Shoaib, Carol Noreen Moe, and Hilary Jennifer Marcus, to focus on this line, offering different readings of it and sometimes linking it to the following line in *Dictée*: "No more sentence to exile, Mother, no black crows to mourn you. Neither takes you neither will take you to Heaven no Hell they fall too near you let them fall to each other you come back you come back to your one mother to your one father" (53). Ching-Yu Wu states that including this detail of "normality" in *Dictée* not only "confuses the cultural identity of the female subject but also reduces the significant meaning of being the cultural figure" (23). Such details, therefore, I believe, pave the way for a greater degree of psychological identification with the text by indicating that the sacrifices of these women should be felt by all women because each woman collectively represents all other women regardless of their ethnicity and background. Karen Jane

Ohnesorge argues that “this statement of universal humanness [is] repeated visually in the next two pages, where Chinese calligraphy proclaims ‘woman’/ ‘man’” (51). These two observations could be taken a step further by linking them to other inscriptions and images in *Dictée*. Along with the two Chinese inscriptions of “woman” / “man” (26-27), *Dictée* includes Chinese inscriptions of “father”/ “mother” (54-55). These words may be linked to *Dictée*’s cover photo of a cross-dressed woman and mother, which appears again in the book exactly between these two sets of Chinese inscriptions. These indicate not only a ‘universal humanness’ but also women’s ability to fill the role of men and fathers, especially during the colonial period. *Dictée* includes two more single photographs of Korean women, each followed by a short biography, while the text includes only one photograph of men (Figure 5).



**Figure 5**

This photograph depicts a common scene from the colonial period in which one group of men is killing another group in cold blood (39). In putting the photographs of the women into perspective with this photograph of men, Cha makes the statement that despite this violent image of men losing their lives for their country, Korean women’s stories and sacrifices in the colonial period are more violent and dreadful and thus should be told and glorified. Although Korean women experienced atrocities during the colonial period, these women had never had the courage or the opportunity to talk about their suffering and sacrifices. Thus, Cha includes an image of her own scribbled handwriting (40-41) (Figure 6) expressing the hardship some Korean women underwent to speak out and record their experiences.

The two pages of scribbled handwriting seem to represent the visual and concrete evidence of such hardships.

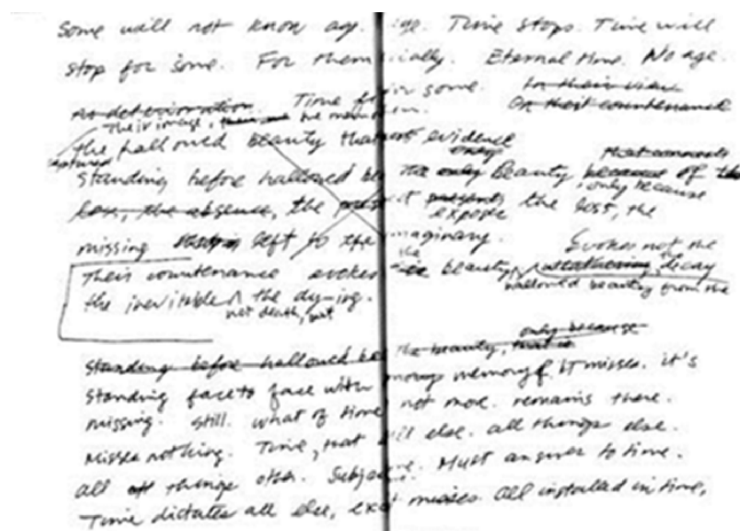


Figure 6

Without necessarily reading the written text, a critical analysis of how it is written reveals the condition of the writer. Many sentences are either crossed out, rewritten, or further explained, clearly indicating that the writer was scared, confused, and hesitant. This evidence of uneasiness suggests that Korean women did not feel free or safe to speak out. This image gives the impression of a person about to say and write something, and who then stops, takes a deep breath, and decides to start over. It shows the confused feelings of the person writing this text, her urge to speak although the fear, and probably danger, of doing so, made her unable to fully express herself. So, in representing a piece of her own scribbled handwriting, Cha here suggests how, while being hard for her to write and document what she found out or what some of these old women told her long after the end of the war, it must have been so much harder for these women to tell and record their stories.

This reading could be taken a step further by drawing a parallel between text and speech, and linking the image of the scribbled handwriting to the diagram of the vocal system (74) (Figure 7). By including this image, Cha reminds her readers that despite the universality of biological organs, structures and systems, each person's circumstances make these systems function insufficiently or differently. Indeed, Korean women experienced miserable conditions during the colonial period, including being raped and being forced to watch as their family were killed. These circumstances made Korean women terrified, shocked and unable to breathe easily to such an extent as to be hesitant and terrified to tell and write about their sufferings. Readers are further encouraged to see a relationship between the diagram of the vocal system and the text facing it. On the facing page, Cha includes the following text:

One by One. The sounds. The sounds that move at a time. Stops. Starts again. Exceptions Stops and starts again. All but exceptions. Stop. Start. Starts... Swallows. Inhales. Stutter. Starts. Stops before starts about to. Then, stops. Exhale... However, no more. (75)

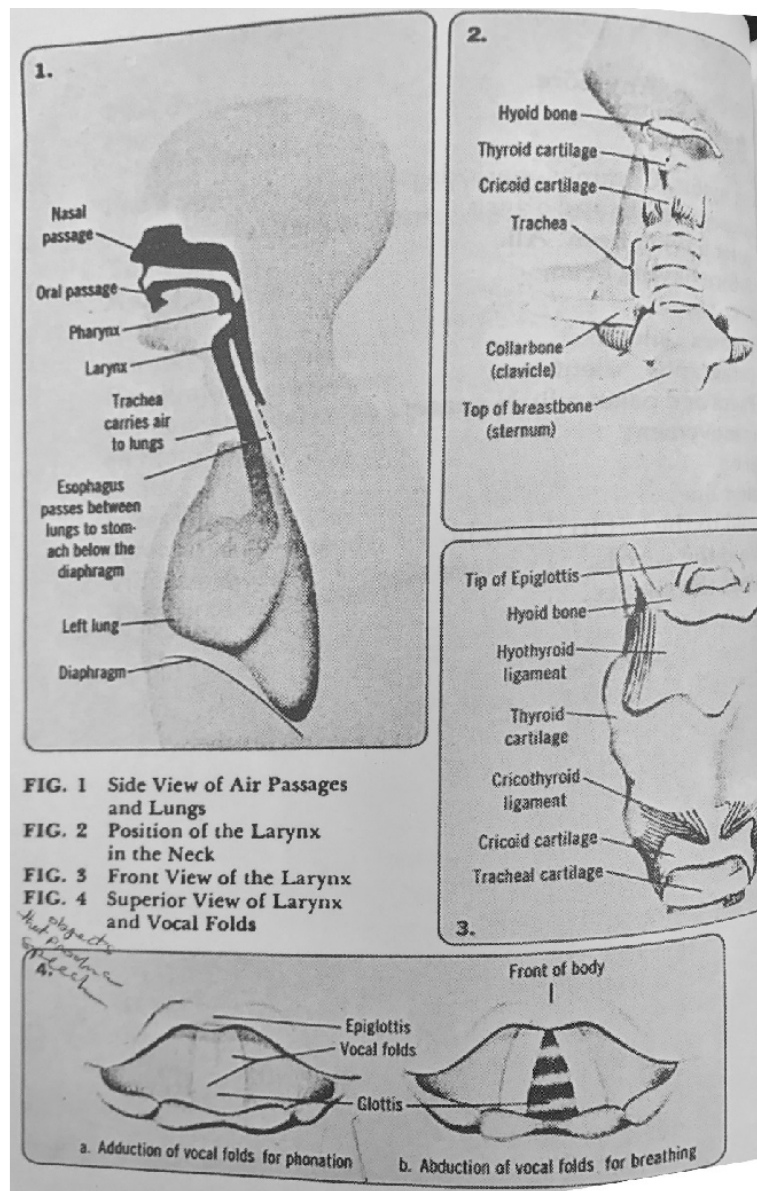


Figure 7

While this passage recalls women and especially women who have suffered, and highlights the difficulties of speaking out in a male-dominated zone, such as was the case in the colonial period, women must unite and support each other. Indeed, the importance of women's unity is further reinforced and visually presented in *Dictée* through the odd juxtaposition of lines in the "The Erato poetry" section (94-117). In this section, all of the sets of facing pages form a single complete page because the line/s left blank on the first page is/are actually completed on the second facing page. Therefore, it is as if these two

facing pages formed a single story told by two women. However, this pattern is disrupted in the final two pages of the 'Erato' section to indicate that the story is not fully told. Indeed, the final two pages reinforce the reality of colonization and its related circumstances, suggesting that even after colonization is over, some stories will be left untold, unrevealed, or unknown because those who knew the missing part of the story are either dead or are afraid to speak. It is also possible that no one actually knows the full story and that some historical facts will therefore remain a secret that might or might not be revealed. Another possible reading of this odd juxtaposition of lines is that it invites the reader to actively engage with *Dictée* by writing down her or his own reading and reflection in the empty spaces between the lines.

The remaining images in *Dictée* also reinforce the appropriateness of reading/watching *Dictée* as a montage. After the four single portraits of Korean women and the supposedly ongoing conversations among Korean women in the 'Erato' section, which brought all together, represent a unified voice, Cha includes a photograph of a crowd composed primarily of Korean women (122) (Figure 8). It shows rebellious, courageous women determined to speak up for themselves. This is the only photograph in *Dictée* that depicts anger, energy, activeness, plurality, and unity. Indeed, Cha clearly states that Korean women can reclaim their heroic roles and position in colonial history by uniting together and speaking as one.



Figure 8

This visual reading of *Dictée* can be furthered by examining the image of a hand imprint (134) (Figure 9). This hand imprint could be regarded as Cha's clever way of saying that she has finally laid her hand on evidence which reveals the truth about Korean women's experiences during Japanese colonization. The hand imprint image may also be related to the images of rocks at the beginning of *Dictée*. It suggests that Cha has put her hand on the truth and is able to bring Korean women's dead history back to life.



**Figure 9**

Not only does Cha bring colonial history back to life, she also allows Korean women to liberate themselves from the fear preventing them from telling their own version. Cha visualizes this truth through the image of a woman that could resemble either a Greek Goddess or the Statue of Liberty (138) (Figure 10). Although the image does not reflect a fully liberated, courageous woman, it could represent a good starting posture for a woman trying to recover her forgotten and underestimated past, as reflected in the mirror she is holding in which a dark, sorrowful face can be seen. This image may represent Cha's message to Korean women that they should not be scared or hesitant to tell their version of colonial history. Instead, they should be proud of their heroic sacrifices.



**Figure 10**

On the next page, Cha includes an ‘image’ of neat handwriting (146-148) (Figure 11), which could also be interpreted as a way to communicate Korean women’s ability to finally discuss their heroic role and suffering after unifying together and liberating themselves from fear and shame. Indeed, when compared to the previous image of scribbled handwriting, Cha seems to visualize the degree of confidence Korean women were able to gain to record their own colonial experience.



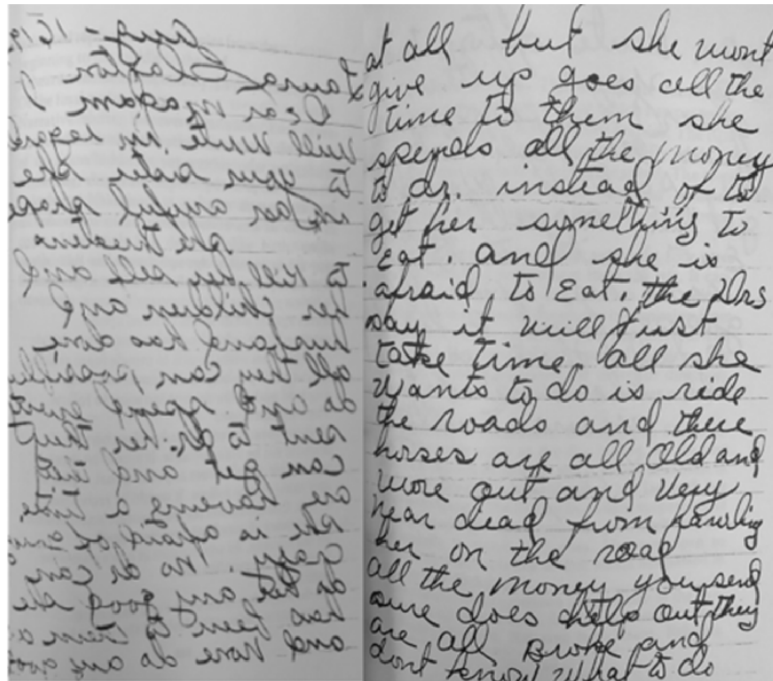


Figure 11

The image of statues near the end of *Dictée* (166) (Figure 12) could be linked to the images of rocks at the beginning, to the hand imprint, and to the image of the Greek Goddess/Statue of Liberty, to suggest that more dead and forgotten Korean women's colonial history needs to be brought back to life. The dead rocks transform into statues that could be brought back to life if other women are able to lay their hands on the colonial history of Korean women.

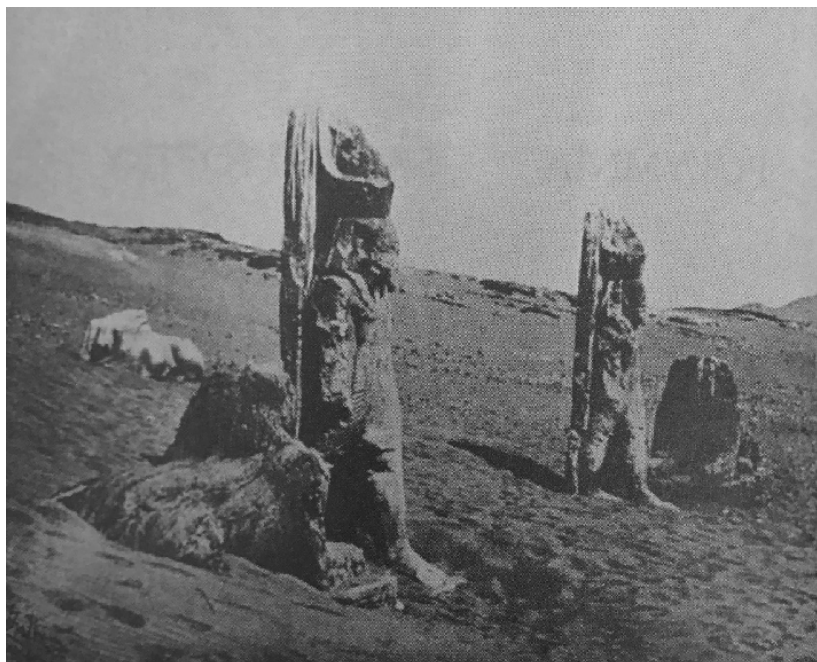


Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

Cha concludes her montage as she opened it. The penultimate black screen has a picture of young women in the middle of it. However, instead of having the image of these women as in Figure 3, in the middle and spanning the width of the page/screen in a figurative allusion to the open eye of the reader/viewer, Cha places the picture at the centre of the page, in a square that could refer to the heart of the reader/viewer (Figure 13). Therefore, though the movie/book ends with the black screen (Figure 14), the image of these heroic Korean women and their colonial experience will never be forgotten, even when the eyes are closed because it has been felt deep down in their hearts. This history should be engraved in the hearts of young women. A close examination of the image reveals that the girl standing in the right corner is Yu Guan Soon, whose story was previously documented in *Dictée*.

By accepting Cha's invitation and challenge and participating as an active transnational reader, this essay demonstrates that reading and adopting a critical approach to *Dictée* as a montage is key to understanding it and assembling its pieces, considering that "[e]very story is at once a fragment and a whole; a whole within a whole" (Minh-Ha, 119). Furthermore, such a visual reading enhances *Dictée*'s transnational accessibility and readers' complete psychological identification with the text regardless of ethnicity, language, or cultural background. Cha in *Dictée* actually affirms to her readers that

[u]pon seeing her you know how it was for her. You know how it might have been. You recline, you lapse, you fall, you see before you what you have seen before. Repeated, without your even knowing it. It is you standing there. It is you waiting outside in the summer day. (106)

Indeed, such visual reading eventually leads readers to "repeat upon the present" (Boehmer) and identify with the experience of some of these Korean women during the war, to the extent of being able to empathically claim, "I am that Korean woman."

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