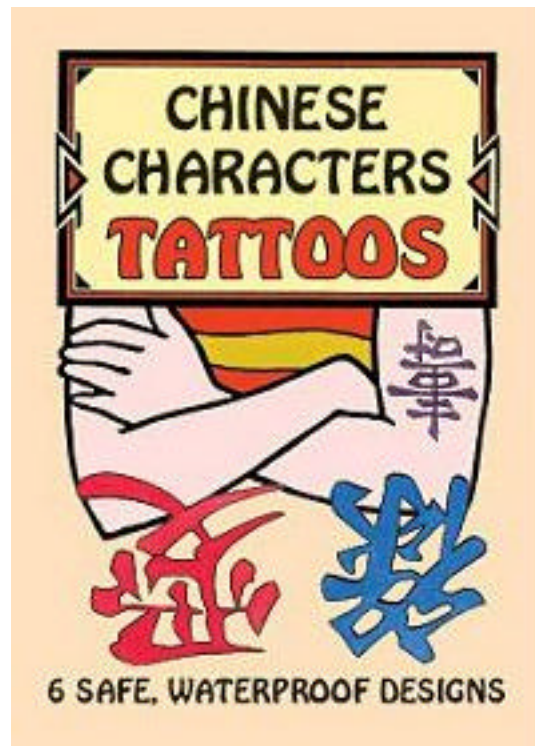


**BADGES OF MISKNOWLEDGE:  
INCORRECT CHINESE AND JAPANESE  
TATTOOS IN AMERICAN CULTURE**



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*“For westerners, the tattoo has always been a metaphor of difference.”<sup>1</sup>*

A thorough examination of writing systems will always lead one to manifestations or visions of that writing system in other cultures. Over the past several decades, American tattoo culture has emerged as a site of such an appropriation, namely of Chinese and Japanese characters. It is rare that such transfers of cultural facets to new contexts are without some kind of dilution of the original, and this is no exception. These tattoos are quite often written incorrectly, endemic of a people who, for obvious reasons, have no experience with the script. The curiosity here is not that the characters are written wrong, but that they are written at all. It is a strange phenomenon that symbols of another culture would be recorded on such an intimate, and utterly permanent,<sup>2</sup> medium as skin. This paper will be an exploration of different social and conceptual problems raised by this trend, and an invitation for further research in what is a relatively unexplored field.

Tattooing has a rich and far-reaching history which touches on numerous countries and artistic traditions, but the legacy of appropriated iconography is considerably shorter. Dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European sailors made use of extensive tattoos to visually chronicle their travels, often borrowing from the aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> Margo DeMello. Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community, 2000. Cited on <<http://www.quote garden.com/tattoo.html>>. Website last accessed December 21, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Although recent technological developments have made tattoos removable, it remains, in the popular conception of the process, a thoroughly permanent commitment. Thus, even if cases mentioned in this paper *could* remove the tattoo, they no doubt chose to be tattooed with the intention of keeping it forever.

designs of the exotic cultures they had seen. William Cummings points out that this trend came into existence during what Edward Said called a critical juncture in the development of Orientalism. Those European travelers who bore markings of the indigenous peoples of the countries they had visited “had literally incorporated something of the otherness of Polynesians into their bodies, thereby introjecting this otherness into European society.”<sup>3</sup> Cummings argues that this visible personalization of Polynesian ritual was instrumental in the formation of Europe’s vision of the other. Beyond this, the sailors were also placing themselves in between the two cultures; they were of European providence yet wore borrowed identities of the other places they had seen, of the other lives they had led. Whether it was for them merely an indexing of adventures or a self-generated induction into those cultures is unknown. Whatever the impetus for their actions, these sailors opened the possibility that writing on the skin could serve as a signifier for extracultural (albeit personal) experiences.

Although this subculture is more or less defunct, it still has traces in contemporary culture, as the website [Hanzismatter.com](http://Hanzismatter.com) can attest. This website functions as a sort of intersection between those aware of the writing systems of Chinese and Japanese and those who consume the symbols of those writing systems without such awareness. The result is a combination of advice-seekers (before the tattoo) and repentant recipients (afterwards). Promoting the project as “dedicated to

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<sup>3</sup> William Cummings. “Orientalism’s Corporeal Dimension.” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 4 no. 2. Johns Hopkins University Press: 2003, p. 7.

the misuse of Chinese characters (Hanzi or Kanji) in Western culture,”<sup>4</sup> creator Tian Tang has amassed a legion of fans, both fellow amateur language consultants and those who submit tattoos for analysis. Tang presents the site didactically, outlining where the mistake occurred for the benefit (and entertainment) of readers. Beyond this, the site is a record of the systematic mistakes made by Americans in their use of hanzi and kanji. One such example<sup>5</sup> offers a man who has cleaved the character “jing” into two, tattooing the left radical on his right forearm and the right radical on his left (Figure I). The result is “rice (mi)” and “green (qing),” rather than the desired “essence.” This error stems from a complete ignorance of the basic truths of writing Chinese, such as the concept of radicals, and the semantic sensitivity of characters which lack even a single stroke. It is not to be expected, of course, that every American understand even the basic mechanics of Chinese, but it is surprising that someone who would transform their body with a certain concept in mind would have so little understanding of it.

In United States tattoo culture, Chinese characters seem to have been ascribed a semantic currency unrelated to their function in Chinese or Japanese writing. Most often referred to on websites as “symbols,” these characters have been absorbed into tattoo iconology along with the anchor, the eagle and the name of a loved one. The difference lies, of course, in just what that currency is. Cummings cited the early instances of the tattooing of Europeans who had never visited Polynesia, saying that “Westerners who chose to become tattooed without voyaging overseas did so fully

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<sup>4</sup> “Hanzi Smatter.” Website last accessed December 14, 2004. <<http://www.hanzismatter.com>>.

<sup>5</sup> “Hanzi Smatter: Green Rice.” Posted on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004. Website last accessed December 14, 2004. <<http://www.hanzismatter.com/2004/12/green-rice.html>>.

confident that they were immersing themselves in the authentically Oriental.”<sup>6</sup> This hallucination of the East as easily distilled and ultimately consumable is as true today as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Like the Polynesian patterns, these Chinese “symbols” carry a promise of authenticity, and regardless of the meaning of the character itself, they all work as signifiers for a general and utterly fabricated idea of Asia.<sup>7</sup> The American function of the characters as tattoos works independently of their pragmatic use as units of a logographic script.

The danger lies in the fact that this discrepancy is absent in the minds of many tattoo bearers. This can be seen in a statement posted by a tattoo artist, Devin: “A kanji is the cheapest thing that you can get at the tattoo parlor. For the most part they require no thought and are chosen on impulse right before getting tattooed. Most of the people who get these tattoos don’t care what it is, they just want to be ‘cool’.”<sup>8</sup> Devin points out that whatever currency of “cool” is given to Chinese characters, that value is identical regardless of which character is chosen. One might say that their tattoo means “love,” or “strength” but by virtue of the choice to express (or attempt to express) that concept in Chinese characters, a script unreadable to them, we see that in the American imagination, the connotations of Chinese characters as a group reaches far beyond their individual meanings. Most bearers of these tattoos will have an idea of what it should mean in English (presuming that the translation given to them is correct), but very few would be able to pronounce it in Chinese.

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<sup>6</sup> Cummings, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Given the constant confusion between China and Japan, it seems far too generous to describe this as anything other than a general fetish for “the Orient.”

<sup>8</sup> “Hanzi Smatter: Clarification” Posted by “Devin” on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2004. Website last accessed December 18, 2004. <[http://www.hanzismatter.com/2004\\_11\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.hanzismatter.com/2004_11_01_archive.html)>.

Many of the most awkward tattoos featured on Hanzismatter.com stem from a belief that Chinese characters are moldable to the English language, either phonetically or semantically. A particularly striking example is a posting of a tattoo (not posted by the bearer) which read “kuáng xiè,” or “insane diarrhea” (Figure II).<sup>9</sup> Dozens of comments postulated as to whether the artist had accidentally added a water radical, had picked the characters at random, etc. One astute reader commented that it was most likely a requested translation for “mad flow” or perhaps “crazy shit.” This is characteristic of the misguided concept that there is a one-to-one translation ratio between Chinese and English, or that culturally-specific concepts (such as one’s fluidity in rapping or a slang term for audacious behavior) can be easily represented by a writing system used by completely different languages with different cultural grounding. Perhaps the Chinese used by Americans is thus different from the Chinese used in China. The signified referred to by the signifying characters is not in the same language. This leads to inevitable confusion for readers of Chinese or Japanese not aware of the specific meaning intended by the bearer; Americans are writing a different Chinese. Somewhere in this process there is a transformation of the character’s semantic value, going from a Chinese character to something completely new.

We can see through tattoo culture that Chinese characters have been adopted as a new writing system for American concepts. This writing system is exclusively used on the canvas of skin, or on clothing (which may be considered a similar

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<sup>9</sup> “Hanzi Smatter: Insane Diarrhea.” Posted on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004. Website last accessed December 18, 2004. <<http://www.hanzismatter.com/2004/10/crazy-diarrhea.html>>.

costuming or “second skin.”) It is also used to represent, without the intermediary of sound, concepts or cultural indicators which are native to the United States. In other words, through their very usage in the United States, these logographic characters have truly become icons with no real linguistic value. Take, for example, the plus-sign (+) and the Greek Orthodox cross; both can be seen as nearly identical shapes, but in some contexts (textual) it could be pronounced “plus,” but in others (within a Church, in art, etc.) it has no pronunciation and simply represents that sect of Christianity. This is of course no real link between the two shapes, but the link between characters’ use in China and their appropriation in the United States is analogous. A character on a sign in Chinatown or on a Chinese restaurant’s menu is seen universally as holding semantic value (like the plus sign). On the specific surface of skin, however, it is read as decoration or it is wordlessly coded with cultural value (the Greek cross). This is not to say that bearers will not look for the meaning of the tattoo, but the meaning is learned in the way that one would learn the “meaning” of a glyph or a totemic symbol. Thus the character for “àn” means “peace” in the way that a peace-sign means “peace.” Perhaps the popular terminology of Chinese characters as “symbols” is in fact more accurate given their usage in this country. Tattoo culture transforms all representations into body-specific icons, and just as one might ask what a given tattoo *means* to its bearer (“I got this turtle to remind me to take it slow”), the personalization of the Chinese characters imbues them with a personalized / cultural meaning more immediate than their linguistic meaning.

While tattooing has been used in East Asia for a considerable amount of time, there are much more numerous occurrences of design-based tattoos than character-


based ones. In 18<sup>th</sup> century Japan, the characters for “dog” and “evil” would occasionally be tattooed on the foreheads of convicted felons.<sup>10</sup> It would seem that although characters were used in tattoos, they lacked the voluntary nature or personalization which are the core of American tattoos. Tattoos were at that time a kind of brand which externalized the shameful interior truths of one’s role in society. In the United States, such tattoos could be seen as either internalizing an idea of Asia, or as externalizing a personal truth in an ostensibly indecipherable manner. One might even see people with the same tattoos (“dog” or “evil”) chosen voluntarily as a part of the subculture which allows for tattoos as displays of one’s toughness.

This process of adaptation causes considerable variations or mutations of Chinese characters, but they are not the only writing system absorbed into this trend. If we examine this tattoo of “om,” we see a distinctly kanji-esque style to it (Figure III). This tattoo was even listed on a kanji tattoo website,<sup>11</sup> despite the fact that this is an Indian symbol. The left part of the symbol, similar to the walking radical<sup>12</sup> and distinctly “foreign” flavor of this symbol have made it seem more Chinese than not, and thus, in the binary system of foreign/native style, has become a kind of Chinese character. Suddenly the danger implicit in this trend is made more visible. In the ignorant vacuum of pop culture, anything and everything curiously foreign is being transformed into a homogenous style of the “other.” Another example, that of the

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel V. Botsman. Punishment and Power in the Making of Japan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Shannon Larratt. “BME Zine.” Website last accessed December 20, 2004.  
<<http://www.bmezine.com/tattoo/kanji001.html> .>

<sup>12</sup> Walking radical:  (See Figure IV for an example)

character “jìn,” is shown in what was listed on the website as “tribal style.”<sup>13</sup> (Figure IV) This image comes from a website which sells kanji print-outs in an effort to ensure that tattoos are written correctly. And while this tattoo is not wrong in any real way, the stylization in the manner of Polynesian tribal tattoos reinforces the idea that there is an interchangeable visual vocabulary for what is perceptibly foreign.

Despite the generally sloppy understanding of Chinese characters most of these tattoo-bearers have before they go under the needle, there is still a ubiquitous terror of the character being incorrect. Hanzismatter.com receives most of its posts from tattooed individuals looking to verify that the permanent choice they made was a wise one. Why they ask this information after the fact is unclear, but there must be, in the moment of choice, an assumption that the tattoo parlor has it right. When asked about the general reaction to this horrible discovery that self-decoration is really self-mutilation, Tang said that they look “like they ate garden salad with slug worm in it. [A]nd the waiter has just came back and reassure[d] them that, it was indeed slug worm.”<sup>14</sup> The question that comes to mind is “What did they expect?” Clearly, that the writing of Chinese characters was not so delicate or precise, that they were not so easily miswritten. Hanzismatter.com is a record of the nemesis after such hubris, the fall after the pride. Internet users, it would seem, cannot get enough of seeing self-assured people knocked down a peg and shown their own ignorance. One joke website offered a particularly cruel exercise in this, describing one man’s torment of a

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<sup>13</sup> “TattooFashion.com: Temporary Tattoos.” Website last accessed December 20, 2004.  
 <[http://www.tattoofashion.com/acatalog/Tattoo\\_Shop\\_Small\\_Medium\\_11.html](http://www.tattoofashion.com/acatalog/Tattoo_Shop_Small_Medium_11.html)>.

<sup>14</sup> Tang, Tang. Personal correspondence. December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

woman with a Chinese character tattoo.<sup>15</sup> Although the deeply offensive details will not be written out here, the man makes the woman break down into tears when he tells her that her tattoo means “bean curd.” There is a self-consciousness of Chinese tattoos use in the United States; because they are never *fully* understood by the bearer, they remain a site of uncertainty and potential humiliation.

However, for tattoo enthusiasts with more gall, Chinese characters contain a fundamental mystery which, when committed to their skin, endows them with similar mysterious power. One particularly head strong bearer showed his tattoo on a website, bragging “Here are my tattoos, the [C]hinese symbols, you'll never find out what they mean, ha ha!” (Figure V).<sup>16</sup> Hanzismatter.com revealed the tattoo to be a phonetic writing of Melanie (with characters meaning “plum,” “orchid” and “maid”). Viewers seemed to take particular pleasure in the disarming of such confidence, suddenly emasculating the man’s tattooed bicep.<sup>17</sup> For the Chinese or Japanese-literate subculture, character tattoos have emerged as a potential source of weakness or intellectual defeat of the bearer. The search for authenticity in these tattoos divides society into those who know and those who don’t. For “those who know,” the subculture of Chinese tattoos has manifested itself as a subculture of ignorance.

There is something particularly capitalist about the entire endeavor of tattooing. Just as the sailors showed, a tattoo is a memento or an idea given to the body through the intermediary of iconography. A tattoo is the ultimate possession,

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<sup>15</sup> “The Chinese Tattoo Prank: Making Fun of People with Asian Tattoos.” Website last accessed December 20, 2004. <<http://www.zug.com/pranks/tattoo>>.

<sup>16</sup> Posted by “Strange\_tag” on Herzeleid.com. December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004. <<http://herzeleid.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=16570>>. Website last accessed December 18, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> “Hanzismatter.com: Melanie Or Plum-Orchid-Maid?” <<http://www.hanzismatter.com/2004/12/melanie-or-plum-orchid-maid.html#comments>>

because the idea made flesh can never be detached from the person. One has paid not only in money but in corporeal surface and, to a degree, in pain. There is no greater unity between consumer and commodity. French structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss spoke about the nature of the body as a product:

The publication of International Archives of Body Techniques...would also be a project eminently well fitted for counteracting racial prejudices, since it would contradict the racist conceptions which try to make out that man is a product of his body, by demonstrating that it is the other way around: man has, at all times and in all places, been able to turn his body into a product of his techniques and his representations.<sup>18</sup>

Lévi-Strauss' optimism is reassuring, especially because he sees in the very nature of body manipulation a destruction of the sanctity of appearance and by extension the death of racism. However, given the capitalist nature of tattoos discussed above, the problem becomes more distressing. If man's body is a culmination of his "techniques," then what technique is manifesting itself in borrowed Chinese iconography? Perhaps the technique is one of appropriation and consumption. If man is not the product of his body, but rather his body is the product of him, then these tattooed bodies are products of men and women who see that Asia is able to be consumed, dominated, owned.

This allegation is not exclusive to abstract theoretical reasoning. Tian Tang sees a fundamental sense of American nationalism in this trend. He states that, envious of other countries which have considerably longer and more visually rich histories, the United States will transform any other culture into a consumable

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<sup>18</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss. Cited in: Shields, David. "36 Tattoos." *The Village Voice*. October 16-22<sup>nd</sup>, 2002. <<http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/02420/shields.php>> Website last accessed December 21, 2004.

commodity. He sees this as a microcosm of a more pronounced national trend, namely the feeling “that this country is so good that we can use another language without knowing what it means.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, there is a sense that the writing system, once in material and accessible form, can be appropriated much more easily than the spoken language. Because the writing system is a passive collection of images (and not an active native speaker, for example), it can be manipulated ad nauseam to suit the desires of anyone with access to a dictionary or computer. Because this subculture can operate without any interaction with actual Chinese speakers, it is a closed system, albeit a degenerative and repugnant one. As “Brendan,” one Hanzismatter.com commentator put it so succinctly: “the problem is not that people are getting characters tattooed on them; it's that people who *don't understand the characters* are getting characters tattooed on them *by other people who don't understand the characters*.”<sup>20</sup> Brendan cites the tacit understanding that Chinese writing are within the cultural jurisdiction of American non-native speakers and thus “fair game” for blind appropriation.

The double-standard is visible in websites like Engrish.com, which chronicles the awkward and often incomprehensible English used on Japanese products. The difference is that Engrish.com represents a more general consensus in the United States: that people shouldn't use English unless they speak it, and that anything else is subject to ridicule. However, because the Chinese characters are detached from a

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<sup>19</sup> Tang, Tang. Personal correspondence. December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> “Brendan.” Posted on Hanzismatter.com on Monday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2004. Website last accessed December 18, 2004. <<http://www.hanzismatter.com/2004/11/exile-husband-retrievable-arrow-with.html#c110118912997856344>>. His italics.

voice (having, to uneducated viewers, no phonetic value) there is also no voice for dissent. Tattooing Chinese characters as trophies of one's mystery, Zen-ness, worldliness, or (most likely) coolness is a gesture rife with pejorative, or at the very least reductive, views of East Asia. This is full-blown Orientalism, and nothing less. To presume that one has the agency, or even the right to borrow from another culture without so much as an hour's worth of research is sheer cultural arrogance. This is not the natural cultural transference which comes with benign multiculturalism, but a theft of one culture's language to be used as another's subcultural currency. Tang is perhaps right to say that this trend is proof of America's cultural self-importance which claims as victims every foreign cultural which is brutally absorbed into its bubbling melting pot.

Like every other foreign-inspired trend, this one is highly visible. Countless pop icons sport kanji or hanzi tattoos, including Sporty Spice (Figure VI), singer Erik Shrody aka Everlast (Figure VII), and Marcus Camby (Figure VIII). Sporty Spice's tattoo is a direct translation of "girl power" which is homophonous to "diligent" ("n u li"). The tattoo literally reads "woman strength" but does not carry the same connotations in Chinese as in English. Everlast's tattoo, according to Tang and several commentators, says simply "Ideology" or "-ism."<sup>21</sup> Most interesting is Camby's tattoo, which is described variously as "encouraging the family"<sup>22</sup> or as "defending the clan,"<sup>23</sup> and about which Camby says: "One of them deals with love of

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<sup>21</sup> "Hanzismatter: Everlast." Website last accessed December 20, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> "E-Tattoos" Website last accessed December 20, 2004.

<[http://www.etattoos.net/tattoos\\_designs\\_Chinese.htm](http://www.etattoos.net/tattoos_designs_Chinese.htm)>

<sup>23</sup> "Le Chinois: Marcus Camby Tattoos." Website last accessed December 20, 2004.

family and the other is about striving to be your best.”<sup>24</sup> The top character “mian,” does in fact translate as “strive” or “encourage.” However, the bottom character, “zú,” is an indicator for an ethnic group or specific heritage. It is used in phrases such as “genealogy,” “the Manchu people” etc. Tang says that this tattoo can be read as a statement that Camby belongs to the clan of Mian, which does not exist.<sup>25</sup> This example shows the idea that each character represents one pure idea unchanged by context. Given the tremendous visibility of tattoos like Camby’s and the subsequent media attention around it, we see how quickly the misinformation about Chinese characters spreads.

Curious developments occurred with the arrival of Yao Ming, Chinese center for the Houston Rockets. Ming already holds special status as the first international player to be named number one pick in the NBA draft. However, he is also the first sports figure to mention the often illegible Chinese character tattoos of his teammates. In his book, Yao: A Life in Two Worlds, he states: “Allen Iverson's tattoo means 'loyalty'. That's the only good one I can remember seeing.”<sup>26</sup> It is notable that Ming is a famous sports figure who also represents a certain body of knowledge. He is living proof that physical presence and an actual voice are essential to the vitality of a truth. Hundreds of millions of people in the world know that many of these characters are wrong, but *they* do not receive popular attention. By ignoring the voice of truth, one

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<<http://www.lechinois.com/tattoo/tattoostarmarcuscamby.html>>.

<sup>24</sup> Marcus Camby on NBA.com. Cited on lechinois.com (ibid cit. 23).

<sup>25</sup> “Hanzismatter: I Strive for a Non-Existant Ethnic Group.” Website last accessed December 20, 2004.  
<<http://www.hanzismatter.com/2004/10/i-strive-for-non-existent-ethnic-group.html#comments>>.

<sup>26</sup> Yao Ming, Yao: A Life in Two Worlds. Cited in: “Yao Ming measures up in US and China.” *People’s Daily*, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004. Website last accessed December 20, 2004.  
<[http://english.people.com.cn/200410/12/eng20041012\\_159901.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200410/12/eng20041012_159901.html)>.

cannot be proved wrong. The bearers of these tattoos, particularly celebrities, are presumed to have knowledge of characters, although, as we have seen, this is rarely the case. It is as if consumption of a culture makes one a member of that culture.

It would seem that, harmless as these character tattoos are on their own, they are merely symptomatic of a more wide-spread problem in the United States. Clearly, most countries have at least some example of a butchered appropriation of foreign culture or language, but this seems to be specifically a result of America's sense of international entitlement. In a country with nearly daily affirmation that it is "number one," the appropriation of styles from cultures seen as lower on the echelon is to be expected. However, such a hierarchy is implicit in these kinds of appropriations and the propagation of this sentiment is irresponsible. It begins innocently enough, with a tattoo parlor catering to the popularity of Chinese style, followed by the individual clients presuming the authenticity of such an establishment. Already there is a problem here, in that the search for authenticity is imagined as being accessible within one's neighborhood. In the collective imagination, authentic China is easily found within the United States, and in cultural-capitalism authenticity *is* the highest commodity. There is no space in this thought process for the idea that authenticity cannot be bought or sold. The idea of the Orient cannot be accessed in the United States, or anywhere for that matter, because it is a mere hallucination.

How can it be argued, then, that these people should not be free to pursue representations of an aspect of East Asia which they find seductively beautiful? Language is, above all, a tool for communication; these characters, however, are being stripped of that very element. The beauty of a language cannot be appreciated

without understanding it. Were a non French speaker to hear the phrase “L’homme n’a pas été donné la parole; il l’a prise,”<sup>27</sup> he or she might comment on the beauty of the French language. However, without being communicated with, they are not receiving the language. Yes, they are appreciating it, but on a purely acoustic level. The phrase is processed not as language but as sound. For character tattoos, the aesthetic pleasure of the *visual* aspect of the language is being appreciated. With no real – or worse, with incorrect – communication, the characters are nothing but images. Characters are supposed to be a vessel for language, and are not meant to be visually representative of an entire civilization. There is nothing wrong with this appreciation of beauty, but it is merely a fragment of a far greater whole. In this model, Chinese is seen as easier to be consumed linguistically, lesser than English, and this extends to Orientalist views of Chinese culture. There is a powerful tendency to see the Other as easier to understand, to consume, but Chinese tattoos show us a strategy in this process: break the Other apart into pieces, deny it a voice. In American culture, Chinese writing is thus powerless, bare and vulnerable to any projected meaning from American culture. There is no linguistic, and thus no cultural communication.

It is not the goal of this paper to ridicule bearers of miswritten tattoos, but perhaps that tactic is not without value. Hanzismatter.com, by publicizing the pretense of uninformed “fans” of Asia, presents itself as a database of cautionary tales. If you wear your presumption of East Asia on your skin, you might just be humiliated. Were this to be a more publicized phenomenon then perhaps it would

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<sup>27</sup> Louis Aragon. (“Man was not given speech; he took it.”)

attain the faux pas status often granted to inappropriate cultural borrowing. Blind use of Chinese characters should be recognized as a social taboo akin to a white person's use of black culture's reclaimed discriminatory slurs. It is of course naïve to think that such borrowings will stop, given the ever more pronounced globalization of culture and language. However, there is room for an appeal to take more care in such appropriations. We will always be sold digestible, Americanized bits of foreign cultures, but we must take it upon ourselves to refuse shoddy promises of some pre-fabricated authenticity. We must not let a capitalist perversion of multiculturalism threaten the vitality of each individual culture by having it be lived for us; culture and language exist only in participation.

FIGURE I:



FIGURE II:



FIGURE III:



FIGURE IV:



FIGURE V:



FIGURE VI:



FIGURE VII:

