MINOR TRANSETHNICITY: CHINESE, FIRST NATIONS, AND BLACKS IN MULTILINGUAL CHINESE CANADIAN FICTION

by

Yan Lu

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for Comparative Literature
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Yan Lu 2015
Minor Transethnicity: Chinese, First Nations, and Blacks in Multilingual Chinese Canadian Fiction

Yan Lu

Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for Comparative Literature
University of Toronto
2015

Abstract

This dissertation was conceived in response to the recent paradigm shift in ethnic studies from the dominant vertical model of minority-versus-majority opposition to horizontal networks of minor-to-minor interconnectedness. It explores the diverse representations of cross-ethnic relationships between Chinese immigrants, First Nations, and Black Canadians in Anglophone and Sinophone Chinese Canadian fiction. At the centre of this dissertation is an examination of the contested interstitial space between “transversality” and “ethnicity,” a space which reveals the continuous formation and transgression of permeable ethno-racial boundaries. This transethnic space challenges the multicultural frame that ignores and discourages the study of interactions and relations between visible minorities and First Nations. It provides a vantage point from which to survey the coexistence of horizontal interconnections and vertical hierarchies still entrenched in the horizontal networks, a reminder of the asymmetrical power relations between minority groups that persist either unrecognized or in less recognizable forms. The multiple forces of race, gender, class, and relations to the state push and pull minority groups toward or away from each other, forcing them to reposition themselves under changing circumstances. Through a multidirectional critique of these shifting positions, I attempt to rethink personal and political alliances in contradistinction to the minor-against-major polarity without
ignoring the structural complexity within and the power imbalance between minority communities.

The first part of this dissertation examines the long and complicated history of Chinese-Native relations, as reflected in the narratives of Chinese-Native romance. These narratives reveal the closely related yet also conflictual and divided positioning of the two communities in the settler-state of Canada, especially with regard to the ambivalent formation of national identity. The second part moves to Chinese-Black encounters in new immigrant literature. Taking into account the racial hierarchy of Canada and geo-political changes in Asia, this new immigrant literature reveals how Chinese-Black relationships are mediated by the global movement of ethnicized labour and transnational capital, demonstrating fluid processes of “whitening” and “blackening.” Reading Anglophone and Sinophone Chinese Canadian fiction in conjunction allows us to dispute a homogenous Chinese or Chinese Canadian subject position and presents us with a more complex picture of cross-ethnic relationships.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the unwavering support and invaluable advice of my supervisory committee. My first and foremost gratitude goes to my supervisor, Professor Victor Li, for taking me on a remarkable intellectual journey under his mentorship and for guiding me through my confusion and difficulties with great insight and generosity. His theoretical rigour and meticulousness in writing made the dissertation a much better work than it might otherwise have been. I am also deeply indebted to my co-supervisor, Professor Xueqing Xu at York University, for introducing me to many important Sinophone works, writers, and scholars in Canada and China. She not only provided me with several Chinese-language materials that were hard to come by in Canada, but also showed me how to teach Chinese Canadian literature effectively to a diverse body of students. Professor Karina Vernon is a tremendous source of inspiration throughout my writing. Her extensive knowledge of Black Canadian and First Nations history and literature opened my eyes to cutting-edge issues I had not been aware of before. Her passionate critical engagement with my work helped ground it in a particular Canadian context, thereby considerably strengthening and nuancing my discussion.

I am most grateful to Professor Lily Cho at York University for serving as my external examiner and for her constructive and insightful feedback on my dissertation; to Professor Meng Yue in the Department of East Asian Studies for helping me shape the topic at an early stage of my project and facilitating an interdisciplinary dialogue between Asian Canadian studies with East Asian studies; to Professor Lisa Mar in the Department of History, for enriching my understanding of Asian Canadian history; to Lucy Gan at the Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library, for involving me in the development of the library’s special collections and web portal on Asian Canadian studies as well as conversations with Asian Canadian writers.
The Centre for Comparative Literature created a home for me when I was thousands of miles away from home. Professors Roland Le Huenen and Barbara Havercroft gave me a warm sense of community and assisted me in smoothly navigating the academic world. Professors Neil ten Kortenaar, Jill Ross, and Uzoma Esonwanne offered me caring help, much needed resources, and financial assistance for my academic and professional development, making my graduate studies a most rewarding experience that I will cherish forever. Aphrodite and Bao were always there whenever I needed them, putting up with all my questions and requests with smiles and patience.

I was very fortunate to spend one year in the Department of English at the University of Calgary as an exchange student during my master’s studies. Without the encouragement and strong support of Professors Shaobo Xie and Lorraine Markotic I would not have embarked on doctoral studies in the first place.

Over the past few years, I have presented parts of this dissertation at several conferences, workshops, and summer institutes. My thanks go to the organizers and audiences for their stimulating feedback. I have greatly benefitted from the Asian Canadian Studies Graduate Workshop as part of the Working the Frame Conference at McMaster University. The advice from participating professors, Donald Goellnicht, Eleanor Ty, Roland Coloma, and Thy Phu, were incredibly valuable.

Last but not least, my heartfelt thanks to my family. An intellectual partner and devoted husband, Yuanfang Zhang accompanied me through the most difficult time of my life with love, food, and fun. My parents do not know a single word of English, yet they have made every sacrifice so that I could pursue my studies in Canada and encouraged me along the path I have chosen. They made it all possible and without them I could never have achieved anything. This dissertation is dedicated to them.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgments........................................................................................................................................ iv
Table of Contents....................................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures........................................................................................................................................... vii
A Note on Terminology............................................................................................................................... viii
Introduction............................................................................................................................................... 1
Part I Chinese-Native Romance................................................................................................................ 57
Chapter 1 Alternative Contact: Interracial Romance between Early Chinese Immigrants and First Nations Women in SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café* and Ling Zhang’s *Gold Mountain Blues* .......................................................................................................................... 58
Chapter 2 Children of the Sixties: The (Im)Possibility of Alliance and Resistance in Kevin Chong’s *Baroque-a-nova* .................................................................................................................................................. 111
Part II Chinese-Black Encounters.............................................................................................................. 151
Chapter 3 The Ethnicization of Female Labour: Chinese and Jamaicans in Yan Li’s *Lily in the Snow* and Ling Zhang’s *Mail-Order Bride* .................................................................................................................. 152
Chapter 4 Volatile Crossings: Liminal Subjects in He Chen’s “I am a Little Bird” and Bo Sun’s *Tears of Little Overseas Students in the Foreign Land* .................................................................................................................. 198
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................. 241
Bibliography............................................................................................................................................... 247
List of Figures

Figure 1. The Family Tree of Fong Tak Fat 96

Figure 2. Table of Main Characters 97

Figure 3. Racial Triangulation 156
A Note on Terminology

The lack of a unified term for Indigenous peoples in Canada is a product of historical, legal, and political circumstances as well as the diversity of the groups subsumed under this term. Although the cluster of generic English terms for Indigenous peoples etymologically bespeaks a temporal or spatial “prior-ity”—“native derives from born (here); aboriginal means (here) ‘from the beginning’; indigenous means ‘begotten within’ (here)”—each term has its own ramifications and problems (Pratt 398, 404).¹

According to the 1982 Constitution Act, the term “Indian” refers to Aboriginal peoples in Canada who are not Inuit or Métis. Originating from Christopher Columbus’ misperception of North America as the land of India in his transatlantic voyages, this misnomer of Indigenous inhabitants came into use by European settlers since the sixteenth century. In 1876, the Canadian government passed the Indian Act as federal legislation for Indian affairs, which legally defined Status and Non-Status Indians. For some Status Indians, the Indian designation is favourable to resist potential assimilation into generic “Natives” and to prevent the loss of rights and privileges acquired through Indian status (Ponting xiii). For many Aboriginal people, however, the term “Indian” is often thought to be offensive “as a grating reminder of the colonizers’ ignorance and insensitivity in treating the highly diverse aboriginal peoples of ‘Turtle Island’ (‘the Americas’) the same” (Ponting xiii). In my analysis of Disappearing Moon Café and Gold Mountain Blues

¹ The initial usage of the term “indigenous” also strikingly converges with that of “ethnic” in being synonymous with “pagan,” “heathen souls to be saved through Christianity.” The pagan later evolved into “primitive,” “tribal,” “native,” or “aborigine” in colonial vocabulary, representing the uncivilized other (de la Cadena and Starn 4).
in the first chapter, I sometimes use this term to convey the pejorative connotations and juridical prescription associated with the term during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The term “Indian” has gradually been replaced by “First Nations” since the 1970s. Initiated by Aboriginal peoples, this recent term projects a more positive image and lends itself readily to the “nationalist political agenda” of Aboriginal leaders (Muckle 8; Ponting xiii). While the modifier “first” recognizes the Aboriginal population’s primordial existence on the territories before European invasion and colonization, the word “nation,” in its plural form, underscores the common rights to self-determination and sovereignty while recognizing the heterogeneity and diversity of this population (Muckle 8).

Compared to the more narrowly defined Indians and First Nations, the terms “Native” and “Aboriginal” collectively encompass all the three groups of Indigenous peoples in Canada in general: Indians, Inuit, and Métis. Though governed under separate statutes and regulations, the three groups share similar experiences of racism and discrimination different from non-Native people. Hence, I use “First Nations,” “Native,” and “Aboriginal” interchangeably unless context necessitates distinction. In certain circumstances I lean toward the latter two for the sake of brevity. For instance, I use hyphenated phrase “Chinese-Native” rather than the more cumbersome “Chinese-First Nations” as a modifier of the relationship between the two communities.

Finally, I use the term “Indigenous” to refer to Aboriginal peoples on an international basis striving for the rights and betterment of their communities. Identifying as Indigenous with their counterparts worldwide, Aboriginal peoples actively participate in the anti-colonial movement as
part of a Fourth World and gain a stronger voice in the global arena (Palmer 378; Muckle 5-6).

The global context of anti-colonial resistance calls for a decolonized understanding of Indigeneity that I wish to highlight in this dissertation. As distinct from “Nativeness (or Indianness),” Indigeneity, Bonita Lawrence maintains, “refers less to precolonial states of existence and identity than to a future, postcolonial refashioning of Indigenous identities that are truer to Indigenous histories and cultures than those identities shaped by the colonial realities that continue to surround Native people at present” (21-22).

Overall, my choice of terminology attempts to reflect the complexity and sensitivity of controversial issues at stake in the changing linguistic construction of Indigenous peoples in Canada.2 Occasional inconsistency in the terms being used may be found as I try to retain the preferences of the original authors whose works are cited or examined.

2 Also see An Evolving Terminology Relating to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada compiled by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
Introduction

In the inflections of what we declare here as our language, these “one must well” of the “one must well live together,” can therefore have heterogeneous values to the point of incompatibility. . . . On the one hand, the “one must well” can announce that one will have to live badly [mal] together . . . be it at the price of not well agreeing to “living together.” . . . But, on the other hand, the syntagma “il faut bien vivre ensemble” can let itself be otherwise accented in our language, and signal toward a “well [bien],” a “living well together [bien vivre ensemble],” that no longer incidentally qualifies a fundamental or previous “living together.” “Living together” then means living together “well [bien], according to the good [le bien]: not only some euphoria of living, of the good life, of the savoir-vivre or an art of living, but also according to a good of trust, of accord, or of concord.”

Jacques Derrida, “Avowing”

Shifting attention from groups to groupness, and treating groupness as variable and contingent rather than fixed and given, allows us to take account of—and, potentially, to account for—phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity, without implicitly treating high levels of groupness as constant, enduring or definitionally present. It allows us to treat groupness as an event, as something that ‘happens’. . . . At the same time, it keeps us alert to the possibility that groupness may not happen, that high levels of groupness may fail to crystallize. . .

Rogers Brubaker, Ethnicity without Groups

3 “One must well live together” is a translation of the French idiom “il faut bien vivre ensemble.”
My dissertation, *Minor Tranethnicity*, explores the diverse representations of cross-ethnic relationships between Chinese immigrants, First Nations, and Black Canadians in Anglophone and Sinophone Chinese Canadian fiction. The project was conceived in response to the recent paradigm shift in ethnic studies from the dominant vertical model of minority-versus-majority opposition to horizontal networks of minor-to-minor interconnectedness. As Stuart Hall warns regarding the promise associated with the “new” phase, this shift does not necessarily mean the “substitution” or reversal of the previous politics, given that “[t]he original critique of the predominant relations of race and representation and the politics which developed around it have not and cannot possibly disappear while the conditions which gave rise to it . . . not only persist but positively flourish” (443). The emergent emphasis on minor-to-minor relationships does not signal a decline in the legacy of vertical domination and the continuing necessity of resistance or struggle against the major. Tackling the question of the interactions between minorities means engaging, however obliquely, with different majorities who are in intricate entanglement with the minorities. In this dissertation, I do not seek to invoke the normative major-versus-minor dichotomy, nor do I, by way of subverting the dichotomy, relegate the vertical and horizontal models to yet another binary formation. Rather, I want to bring together the majority and minorities into triangulation, a mechanism used less in its numerical sense of three, but as “an effective heuristic device to bring into view relationalities that conventional binary models obscure or displace” (Shih, “Comparative” 1351). It is perhaps more productive to paradoxically

---

4 Sau-ling C. Wong points out when analyzing the simultaneous construction of the identity of yellow and black in the multiracial environment of the United States that “typically, the whites are implicated, even if not named” (“Yellow” 78).
include the majority out, to borrow David Der-wei Wang’s definition of Sinophone literature, and thus one can think outside the majority without divorcing from it entirely.⁵

A systematic theoretical investigation of the relationship among minority communities and cultures was initiated at the conference “The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse,” which took place in 1986 at the University of California, Berkeley. In the introduction to the collective volume of conference papers, Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd define the field of minority discourse as “a theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture” (Preface ix). The definition resonates with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s oft-cited concept of “minor literature” in foregrounding the political and collective nature of minority productions. In its singular form, minority discourse articulates the shared experience of the repression and marginalization of minority groups and their similar antagonism and struggle against the dominant culture. While underscoring collectivity, the singular form also uncovers the enforced treatment of minority communities by mainstream perception as a generic group (JanMohamed and Lloyd, “Introduction” 10). Their diverse, specific cultural modes are reduced to a single model of historical development, according to which other cultures always remain underdeveloped and inauthentic. The emphasis on common experience is not intended to homogenize differences among diverse minority cultures, but to form the basis for solidarity and

---

⁵ The paradoxical phrase “include out” first appeared in Eileen Chang’s short essay “Bawo baokuo zaiwai” (Include Me Out) as a misnomer made up by a Polish immigrant in the United States (123-24). David Der-wei Wang uses this phrase to describe the relationship between Sinophone and Chinese literature as opposed to Shih’s distinction of the Sinophone as minor literature from Chinese literature as major literature. Wang suggests including Chinese literature produced in China in Sinophone literature without according to the former more centrality and authenticity. As indispensable components of Sinophone literature, diasporic Chinese-language writing and Chinese literature should have dialogues with each other and strategically “include out” the sign of China and Chineseness (also see Lin 255).
coalition building across imposed identificatory lines (JanMohamed and Lloyd, Preface ix; “Introduction” 10). Hence, JanMohamed and Lloyd perceive “becoming minor” not as “a question of essence” but “of position,” a subject-position defined politically “in terms of the effects of economic exploitation, political enfranchisement, social manipulation, and ideological domination on the cultural formation of minority subjects and discourses” (“Introduction” 9).6

JanMohamed and Lloyd’s formulation of minority discourse deserves credit for promoting dialogue among minorities and transforming the inferior, generic subject-position in relation to Western hegemony into a positive, collective one on the basis of shared political, economic, and cultural oppression. However, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih caution that the laudatory effort to displace the core-periphery model through marginalizing the centre might initiate an insidious, if unintended, effect of perpetuating the centre. If minor literature is constructed within a major language and defined by “its critical function within and against the major,” minority discourse represents a similar model, within which minority subjects are always linked and mediated by their binary, and often oppositional, relationship with the dominant (Lionnet and Shih 2). The second limitation of minority discourse, as Lionnet and Shih note, resides in its exclusive framework of ethnic studies that suppresses multilinguality. This limitation mirrors the criticism of postcolonial studies in focusing on the hierarchical power dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized within one nation-state and leaving intact the hegemonic status of English (Lionnet and Shih 10-11). Preoccupied with vertical resistance and monolingual diversity, minority discourse may reify the existing socially constructed boundaries and overlook

6 For JanMohamed and Lloyd’s notion of minority discourse, see Preface and “Introduction,” in particular, section I and II.
interethnic alliances and dynamic forms of transnational participation against the backdrop of global multiculturalism.

Mindful of the inadequacy of conventional theorization, Lionnet and Shih propose the notion of “minor transnationalism” to make visible cross-pollinations of different minorities in relation to each other without being mediated by the major or the center. In “transcultural and transdisciplinary approaches,” this notion foregrounds various transnational and transcolonial experiences of minorities that postcolonial studies and ethnic studies fail to analyze (Lionnet and Shih 5, 10). Enhanced by global media and international migration, minor cultural formations are connected through productive networks traversing national and regional boundaries and produce hybrid cultural work. In recognition of the lingering presence of colonial power relations and global capital, minor transnationalism highlights the “transversal movements of culture” that “includes minor cultural articulations in productive relationship with the major (in all its possible shapes, forms, and kinds), as well as minor-to-minor networks that circumvent the major altogether” (Lionnet and Shih 8). Such movements yield “new forms of identification that negotiate with national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries” and uncover the complexity and multiplicity inherent in minority cultures on multiple socio-political and linguistic registers (Lionnet and Shih 8).

In titling my dissertation “Minor Transethnicity,” an explicit borrowing from Lionnet and Shih, I situate this work in the reorientation to the transversal movements of minority cultures beyond the normative structure of vertical struggle. At its most basic, the deployment of transethnicity corresponds to my circumscribed scope of cross-ethnic relations within the nation-state of Canada, although the project is in many ways situated within a transnational framework that
attends to the political and racial discourse of the United States and China. The object of the study here is the literary representation of interethnic relationships between Chinese, First Nations, and Black Canadians in terms of not only similarities and differences, but, more crucial for productive comparison, interactions which have been unduly neglected in spite of their enduring existence.  

On a deeper level, I wish to problematize the normative denotations of transversality and ethnicity and read the interstice between “trans” and “ethnicity” as a contested space which reveals the continuous formation and transgression of permeable ethno-racial boundaries. What is central to my critical project of mapping a variegated landscape of minor-to-minor relations is the tension underlying the expression of tranethnicity, a tension between transversality as a process of border crossing and ethnicity as a mechanism for boundary maintenance. “[T]here is no reason to assume,” James Clifford writes, “that crossover practices are always liberatory” (Routes 10). It is indeed valid for Chinese American scholar Amy Ling to contend that vertical crossings from minority to majority often prove detrimental and inflict shame and self-denial on minority subjects, whereas lateral crossings among ethno-racial minorities with a shared history of oppression, though less common, tend to be more fruitful in drawing on other cultural traits and developing self-identity (232). However, Ling’s paradigm of lateral crossings and interethnic identifications risks being placed under pressure by an equally “vertical’ social hierarchy among racialized minority groups themselves, and the inequities, conflicts, and rivalries that have existed among them” (Rody 47). While exploring the transversal praxis among minority groups

____

7 Lydia H. Liu suggests redefining the comparatist’s task as “the exploration of interactions, which is far more interesting than the evaluation of similarities and differences” (7).
and their solidarities in Canadian society, I will also attend to the perpetuation of hierarchy within horizontal minor-to-minor relationships, a reminder of the asymmetrical power relations between minority groups that continue to persist either unrecognized or in less recognizable forms. These power relations are largely shaped by historical specificities and material conditions in particular locales. The multiple and sometimes contradictory forces of race, gender, class, and relations to the state push and pull various minority groups toward or away from each other, forcing them to reposition themselves under new and changing circumstances and seek different directions.

The fraught transethnic space provides a vantage point from which to survey the coexistence of horizontal interconnections and vertical hierarchies still entrenched in the horizontal networks. This space allows us to critically examine minor-to-minor relationships beyond enduring oscillation between antagonism and solidarity, and work through the shifting positions of various minorities that occur in an uneven social or political field. With a commitment to a multidirectional critique of entangled, fluctuating cross-ethnic relations, *Minor Transetnicity* represents my attempt to rethink personal and political alliances in contradistinction to the minor-against-major polarity without at the same time ignoring the structural complexity within and the power imbalance between minority communities.

**Transversality in Latency**

In contemporary intellectual discourse saturated with the vocabulary of “trans,” the increasing attention to the transversal interactions among minority cultures is no surprise, offering an adequate, long overdue description of this fascinating field. While many are acquainted with transversality in association with the popular images of rhizome and movement, the initial usage
of “transversality” in psychoanalytic practice often passes unnoticed. Félix Guattari originally deployed the term “transversality” to replace the dual transference relationship between analyst and analysand in the traditional psychiatric hospital. The term contrasts with both “verticality, as described in the organogramme of a pyramidal structure (leaders, assistants, etc.)” and “horizontality, as it exists in the disturbed wards of a hospital, or, even more, in the senile wards” (Guattari 17). As a dimension that transgresses the demarcation line between verticality and horizontality, transversality “tends to be achieved when there is maximum communication among the different levels and, above all, in different meanings” (Guattari 18). Guattari deploys the “coefficient of transversality” to describe different degrees and levels of transversality, bringing us to the hospital where a variety of coefficients of transversality exist at various levels (18). Whereas the coefficient remains low between medical superintendents and house-doctors in their overt formal communication, the one at the department level, among the nurses, for instance, may be much higher. The potentially high transversality among those who have no real power in the operation of the institution, however, often remains latent and repressed, in that “the level of transversality existing in the group that has the real power unconsciously determines how the extensive possibilities of other levels of transversality are regulated” (Guattari 18).

The discrepancy between the high coefficient of transversality and its latency is noticeable among minority communities, resulting in the paradoxical phenomenon of living together apart.

In his last public appearance in the United States at the 2003 conference “Irreconcilable Difference? Jacques Derrida and the Question of Religion,” Derrida delivered a keynote speech “Vivre Ensemble—Living Together” in which he started by pointing to the tension between the dual reference of ensemble in English as an adverb, meaning “together,” and as a noun, meaning “the whole”:
The adverb, in the expression “living together,” appears to find its sense and dignity only where it exceeds, dislocates, contests the authority of the noun “ensemble,” to wit, the closure of an ensemble, be it the whole of something “living” [d’un “vivant”], of a system, a totality, a cohesiveness without fault and identical with itself, of an indivisible element containing itself in its immanence and simply larger, like the whole [tout], than its parts. The authority of the whole [ensemble] will always be the first threat for all “living together.” And inversely, all “living together” will be the first protestation or contestation, the first testimony against the whole [ensemble]. (“Avowing” 21)

The looming of the whole is rooted in what Arjun Appadurai calls the “anxiety of incompleteness” in democratic politics, an anxiety that leads to an endeavour to equate the majority with the national whole and turns the majority identities “predatory” in the pursuit of a pure, singular national identity (8, 52). The anxiety persists in global capitalism and is compounded by a myriad of forces that the whole may employ, especially the homogenizing power of transnational capital. What underlies cultural diversity and hybridity in multiculturalism is “the unprecedented homogenization of the contemporary world” brought by “the massive presence of capitalism as global world system” (Žižek, Ticklish 218; original emphasis).

Against the transforming conditions of the whole, the apartness of minority communities is not merely caused by the overt domination by the white majority established and consolidated through social and political institutions and policies. It can also, in the spirit of Michel Foucault, be traced to dispersed multiple locations in everyday life. What is distinct about the geometry of power relations between minorities is its insidiousness and fluctuation. It is, in many cases,
cloaked in an implicit form of what Raymond Williams terms “structures of feeling”—“a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis . . . has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies” (132). While distinct from other precipitated social formations and systematic formal beliefs or world-views, feelings are nevertheless not merely idiosyncratic or transitory, but a “structured formation” “with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension,” “a specific structure of particular linkage, particular emphases and suppressions” (Williams 132, 134). The structures of feeling are often ambivalent and undergo constant change at the crossroads of variant hierarchies of power where racial segmentation, gender stratification, and labour exploitation intersect. The varying positionalities of minority groups enmeshed in insidious, fluctuating power relations reduce transversality into further latency.

Under such circumstances, it must be acknowledged that the minor-to-minor relationship may turn out to be a failure; it may be close to impossible. These failures and impossibilities, often taking the form of conflict and distrust, are “as integral and formative a part of interracial histories as the convergences” (J. Lee 3). Considering the imbalance in the literature tilted toward the study of successful ethno-political mobilization, Rogers Brubaker in his *Ethnicity Without Groups* proposes shifting from fixed, given groups to variable, contingent groupness and treating the latter not as an enduring presence, but as an “event” (12). Such an event contains not only the positive moments of group formation and cohesion, but inevitably, the less glorified moments when groupness fails despite all efforts. “Sensitivity to such negative instances,” Brubaker maintains, “can . . . direct potentially fruitful analytical attention toward the problem of explaining failed efforts” (12). Following Brubaker’s attempt, it is equally indispensable to
attend to negative instances of alliance formation across minorities in addition to the positive ones. Moments of failure and compromise are necessary and potentially promising, providing alternative impetus for productive relationships and coalitions that can be forged between minorities.

As illustrated in the opening epigraph of the dissertation, the French idiom “il faut bien vivre ensemble” has dual implications that stand out as incompatible: living together is first and foremost a “necessity”: “one must, one might as well ‘live together’ [il faut bien ‘vivre ensemble’]” in all circumstances (Derrida, “Avowing” 23). There is no option but to live together in the common higher interest of surviving, even in disagreement, distrust, indifference, hatred, or war, “even if one does not know how or with whom” (Derrida, “Avowing” 23-24). Meanwhile, “bien vivre ensemble” also signifies “living well together,” “understanding one another in trust, in good faith, in faith, comprehending one another, in a word, being in accord with one another” (Derrida, “Avowing” 25; original emphasis). The overriding goal of Minor Transethnicity is to work toward the “well” through an exploration of the non-well, the apartness, when minority communities live together. We see in the literary works less of a neat vertical/horizontal division than forms of entanglement that complicate this division. Such entanglements produce a knot where “there are different rhythms, different forces, different differential vibrations of time and rhythm,” a rope “made up of several strands knotted together” with “an indeterminable number of wires moving or quivering with different speeds or

---

8 I use the term “entanglement” mainly for the purpose of complicating the vertical and horizontal division. For an epistemic sense of entanglement as “a derangement in the organization of knowledge caused by unprecedented adjacency and comparability or parity” and an affective sense as emotional attachment, see R. Chow, Entanglements 10-11.
intensities” (Derrida, *Negotiations* 29-30). To survive in the intricacy of entanglement, minority groups are in a constant process of negotiation not only with the dominant majority, but with each other. Etymologically as being *neg-otium*, or not-ease, not-quiet, and un-leisure, negotiation represents “the impossibility of stopping, of settling in a position,” and “of establishing oneself anywhere” (Derrida, *Negotiations* 11-12). It refuses to exhibit a comforting picture of stability and nobility, but reveals force, compromise, and other impure things in the constant mobility between several positions and places (Derrida, *Negotiations* 13-14). Like Michel de Certeau’s tactics, negotiation is “always different, differential, not only from one individual to another, from one situation to another, but even for the same individual, from one moment to the next” (Derrida, *Negotiations* 17). There are no general rules or prior norms for negotiation, but “only contexts” that require constant adjustment to each case and moment (Derrida, *Negotiations* 17). The “how” in “how to live together” thus “must be invented each time in a unique fashion, by each one, in a singular time and place” (Derrida, “Avowing” 34). *Minor Transethnicity* is the effort to provide some instances of the *how* for the problematic of minor-to-minor relationships at particular historical junctures and loci.

For the purpose of exploring the “how,” it is important to bear in mind that transversality is not simply a popular buzzword in postmodern vocabulary that enables us to establish a non-hierarchical, rhizomatic minority connectivity. The psychoanalytic usage of transversality is important in the present study, because it also gestures toward a comparative critique of power relations within which minorities are intricately embedded. In his study of transversality and “its capacity for analytical and comparative critique,” Ming Xie turns to the practice in the Clinique de la Borde organized by Guattari and his colleague Jean Oury (100-01). In order to effectuate the highest possible latent coefficient of transversality, the analytical practice sought to change
the structural distribution of roles among doctors, nurses, administrative staff, and patients, an official hierarchy that defined the institution’s manifest coefficient of transversality. Patients were exposed to different tasks, responsibilities, and challenges through role rotation and reversal. The role change did not create a power vacuum for patients, but gave rise, albeit temporarily, to a power shift. New contexts engendered by the rotation of roles in the hospital served, at a fundamental level, as “a self-reflective system for scrutinizing the institution, especially how its power relations enable it to function normally” (Xie 100-01). Through its capacity for a self-reflective practice of analytical and comparative critique, the transversal approach offers an opportunity to destabilize given hierarchies and to examine from alternative perspectives the fluctuating power relations between minority communities.

Ethnicity as Boundary Making

While the transversal approach opens up critical space for minor-to-minor relations, the highly disputable term “ethnicity” also serves as an analytical tool to unravel the boundary-making process that subjects ethnicity to state appropriation. Before proceeding to a theoretical investigation, I want to turn first to the pioneering Asian Canadian authors, the Eaton sisters, who opt for different ethnicities in spite of their shared bi-racial heritage. Born of a British father and a Chinese mother in the late nineteenth century, Edith Maude Eaton, the older sister of the two, identified herself with her Chinese inheritance and remained committed to the Chinese communities in North America. Under the Chinese pseudonym “Sui Sin Far,” she wrote a number of journal articles and short stories to contest anti-Chinese discrimination and Chinese

———

9 The Eatons are also classified as the first Asian American authors. Julia H. Lee considers them as hemispheric because of their personal lives across Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean as well as the diverse background against which their works are set (83).
disenfranchisement pervasive in early twentieth century North America. Edith is praised as a “resistant subject” and a “conscientious social critic;” her works are listed in the canon of Asian North American literature (J. Lee 81; Hattori 228). If Edith was Chinese by descent, Winnifred Eaton, most intriguingly, became Japanese by consent. 10 Claiming to be born to a Japanese aristocrat family, she adopted the Japanese pen name “Onoto Watana” and authored a number of novels and short stories set against the backdrop of Japan. Winnifred’s choice of becoming Japanese bestows upon her a radically different status in the history of Asian North American studies. She is often dismissed as “a sellout and a race traitor,” due to her blatant opportunism and complicity in the dominant ideology of racism (Hattori 228; J. Lee 81). Her stories are generally read as fake representation of Japan and Japanese culture and have received little critical appreciation.

Given the little contact that the sisters had with Asian people in Canada’s Victorian culture except for their English-educated Chinese mother, the Eatons’ opposing disposition toward Chinese and Japanese, according to Dominika Ferens, was heavily mediated by the images of China and Japan in nineteenth-century orientalist ethnography on the Far East (ch. 1). Protestant missionaries had carried out ethnographic work on China since the first half of the nineteenth century. They viewed the Chinese ambivalently as “the deserving heathen” with the potential for transformation. Although China represented a spacious land teeming with vice and irrationality, it could fortunately be saved through evangelism. As the nineteenth century drew on, Japan, in its rapid advance to industrialization and Westernization, became an exotic destination for

10 Werner Sollors understands ethnicity in terms of descent and consent and views “ethnicity” and “ethnic” as “vehicles” for the tensions and conflicts between the two (Beyond 39).
western travellers. In comparison with their economically weak, socially turbulent Chinese neighbours, the Japanese were thought to be “the desirable heathen,” featuring political and technological modernization and social refinement. Japanese cultural difference was essentialized and romanticized in travel narratives in order to present an exotic picture to readers through a subjective, emotional narrative voice.¹¹

The orientalist ethnographic images of the Chinese and Japanese as respectively deserving and desirable heathen trace “ethnicity” back to its original usage in English as “heathen.”

Etymologically derived from the ambiguous Greek root _ethnos_ pertaining to “people in general, but also to ‘others,’” the term “ethnic” initially refers to people or nations that are non-Jewish or gentile (Sollors, “Foreword” xi).¹² It is then shifted to non-Christian, or heathen, in English usage since the fourteenth century, as is seen in its alternative form of “hethnic” (Sollors, _Beyond_ 25). This early religious demarcation between Jew and gentile or Christian and heathen wanes in contemporary liberal democratic society. Ethnicity is gradually transformed from a term of exclusion to one of inclusion and boundary resolution, serving as a theoretical underpinning of multicultural policies that are promulgated as pluralist and equal for all the ethnics (see R. Chow, _Protestant_ 25-30).

¹¹ For the different views on the Chinese and Japanese, see, respectively, sections “The Deserving Heathen: Missionary Ethnography in China” (Ferens 25-33) and “The Desirable Heathen: Travel Ethnography of Japan” (Ferens 33-45) in chapter 1 “Two Faces of Oriental(ist): Missionary and Travel Ethnography in China and Japan.”

Not surprisingly, the semantic metamorphosis of ethnicity parallels that of racism from an exclusionary form of institutional racism to what Etienne Balibar calls “neo-racism” (also known as “differentialist racism” or “culturalist racism”), the dominant theme of which is not “biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences” (“Neo-Racism” 21). Race has been repressed in recent years due to its grounding in irreducible biological givens, such as skin pigmentation. If appearance, as Michel Foucault famously asserts, is already a historical representation that allows certain elements to emerge precisely by hiding and obliterating others, the biologism of race is the very process where “(s)imilarities . . . were deliberately obfuscated, while . . . difference in skin colour, the visible sign of variation, was highlighted” (Ty, Politics 6-7). The residual biologism entrenched in race contributes to the contemporary shift in emphasis from race to ethnicity, a relatively neutral term with its ostensible association to cultural traditions and rituals. The often neglected transformation of ethnicity to its inclusive usage helps to divest the term of the pejorative implications of race and bypass the structural conflict and unequal power relations embedded in racism. The discursive turn from race to ethnicity is thus made possible: ethnicity has come to serve, to some extent, as a euphemism for race and race is sometimes regarded as “one aspect of ethnicity” (Sollors, Beyond 39). The boundary between these two heavily loaded concepts in practice is increasingly blurred.

A universal understanding of ethnicity is, however, never free of interestedness. The term continues to be a boundary-maintenance process under the benevolent guise of a more inclusive liberal democratic politics. The all-embracing claim that “everyone is ethnic” disavows the fact that ethnicity is mostly reserved as the label for racial minorities to support the universal value of the white majority and leaves out the unfinished quest of Indigenous peoples for decolonization and sovereignty. In Canada, the language of ethnicity relate as much to those who are not seen
(or do not see themselves) as “ethnic” as to those who are. As identified in the 2011 National Household Survey, Canada has more than 200 ethnic origins, with Canadian, English, French, Scottish, and Irish at the top followed by German, Italian, Chinese, First Nations, Ukrainian, and East Indian (Dewing 2). In spite of their corresponding representation in the census, Canadians of different ethnic origins do not demonstrate the same degree of “ethnicity”. In the 1969 report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, “non-Aboriginal, non-French, and non-English ethnic groups” were singled out for contributing to Canada’s cultural diversity and recommended to be integrated into Canadian society as full-rights citizens and equal participants (Dewing 3). On the recommendation of the Commission, the Multiculturalism Policy was stipulated two years later, entitling some eighty ethnic or cultural groups to financial support, particularly from the new Ministry of Multiculturalism, for language and cultural preservation and enhancement (Mackey 64). The distinction of non-Aboriginal, non-French, and non-English ethnic groups from the rest of ethnic origins is readily, if only unavoidably, inherited in the 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act. Although the Act is designed to “[address] to all Canadians” “based on the idea that everyone, including the government, is responsible for changes in our society,” multiculturalism is, as the results of regional roundtable discussions on multiculturalism show, “still perceived as something only for visible minorities and non-European immigrants” (qtd. in Mackey 67; my emphasis; Kunz and Sykes 9).\(^{13}\) Hundreds of ethnic groups that inhabit

---

\(^{13}\) The Policy Research Initiative, in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Social Sciences and Humanities, Research Council of Canada, and the Metropolis Project, organized a series of roundtable consultations in order to address “how to foster diversity without divisiveness” and “whether Canada’s multiculturalism policies need review in light of today’s social and geopolitical realities” (Kunz and Sykes 3). The consultations were carried out in eight major Canadian cities and participated by “representatives from all three orders of government, community organizations, business, and the media, as well as experts on immigration and diversity” (Kunz and Sykes 3). Results of these roundtables were published in 2007 under the title “From Mosaic to Harmony: Multicultural Canada in the 21st Century.”
the country are deeply divided “along the lines of time of arrival in the New World, power, and skin tone” (Kunz and Sykes 9).

The multicultural principle for all Canadians and its violation in practice are emblematic of the ambivalent conception of ethnicity in Canada that set ethnic groups apart from “ordinary Canadians.” Unlike their ethnic counterparts in the multicultural policy exhorting the government for special funding and resources, so-called ordinary Canadians embody the neo-conservative ideal of Canadian citizens who are “disinterested, neither seeking special status nor treatment from the state” (Mackey 21). “[N]either raced, nor sexed, nor classed,” an “ordinary” Canadian can be, therefore, “only a white, heterosexual, middle-class male because in contrast to him everyone is ‘special’ in some way or another” (qtd. in Mackey 21). The important question is not simply whether white Canadianness, like Englishness, can be conceived of as a form of ‘ethnicity,’ or whether ordinary Canadians can be included as an ethnic group under the title of what Eva Mackey calls “Canadian-Canadians.” The problem boils down, Mackey argues, to “the combination of the dominant and unmarked nature” of this Canadian-Canadian identity; people who conceive of themselves as ordinary Canadians “do not think of themselves as ‘ethnic’, but rather, see their customs, beliefs, practices, morals and values as normative and universal” (157; original emphasis). The distinction between marked ethnic and unmarked ordinary Canadians unveils the profound split within the language of ethnicity between an overt elimination of racial hierarchy and an implicit resurrection of racial boundaries. The seemingly progressivist agenda of promulgating multicultural policies as pluralist and equal for all the “ethnics” ironically results in incessant violence and intolerance (R. Chow, Protestant 26-27). What emerges most clearly from the designation of multicultural ethnics in Canada is that although the sense of paganism or heathenism in the etymology of “ethnic” is ostensibly secularized, the underlying opposition
remains between the ethnic as heathens and the whites as chosen people (Sollors, Beyond 25).
The spectre of the term’s original function as a marker of otherness continues to haunt its liberal
descendants.

Ethnicity’s contradictory senses of “universal, inclusive peoplehood” and “exclusive otherness”
reveal that the investigation of interaction and solidarity does not mean the disappearance of
boundaries (Sollors, Beyond 26). As anthropologist Fredrik Barth makes clear, ethnic distinctions
do not mean the disappearance of mobility or interaction, but persist “despite changing
participation and membership in the course of individual life histories” (9-10; original emphasis).
Maintaining a boundary between members and outsiders is essential to the continuous existence
of ethnic units; it is “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it
encloses” (Barth 15; original emphasis).

The boundary-making process occurs not only between putative whites and racial minorities, but,
in a disguised way, among racial minorities realized through the intersection of ethnicity, race,
class, and gender. This process is best embodied by the Eatons’ opposing attitudes toward Afro-
Jamaicans during their brief stay in Jamaica. Julia H. Lee aptly captures such contrast in her
exploration of reciprocal representations in African and Asian American literatures (ch. 4). She
perceives much sympathy toward Afro-Jamaicans in Edith’s essay “Leaves from the Mental
Portfolio of a Euroasian.” Edith is enraged by the racist conversation at her boarding house in
Kingston that compares the degree of physical and spiritual repulsiveness of the Chinese and the
Blacks. The “comparative degradation” of Chinese and Africans evokes her compassion for the
African maid who shares “racial and class marginalization” (J. Lee 96-97). The Afro-Jamaican
characters mirror Edith’s status as a racialized working-class woman journalist and “her
alienation from the European colonial authority”: “Occasionally, an Englishman will warn me against the ‘brown boys’ of the island, little dreaming that I too am one of the ‘brown people’ of the earth” (J. Lee 97; Sui 225; also qtd. in J. Lee 97). On the contrary, Winnifred’s novel Me: A Rememberance provides a less friendly depiction of Afro-Jamaicans through the point of view of the Japanese protagonist, Nora. On her first arrival in Jamaica, Nora is frightened, in a familiar colonial manner, when she sees a crowd of black inhabitants gathering on the wharves and waiting for her boat. Her irritation at these “negroes” culminates in her almost “instinctive” fear of the approach and proximity of the Afro-Jamaican men, who are associated with rape and sexual predation (J. Lee 92-93).14

Behaving as an upper-class aristocratic Japanese lady, Nora, in Winnifred’s novel, conforms to the image of Japan as the desirable heathen in western travel ethnography. Given the superior status of Japan compared with the rest of Asia, Julia Lee ascribes Winnifred’s passing as Japanese partly to her adoption of “an aristocratic persona” (86). Nora’s intuitive resentment of Afro-Jamaican men implicitly sets her in the position of privileged white subject against the inferior black objects. To a certain degree, the Afro-Asian encounter is a way to rid her of racial otherness and fit into the white nation. For Edith, on the other hand, the interactions with Afro-Jamaicans remind her not of her claim to white womanhood, but of “how contingent and imperfect her own mimicry of white womanhood is” (J. Lee 85). Her lack of class privilege places her in a position much like that of the Jamaican maid; her claim to brownness partially identifies her with the Blacks and prevents her from passing as a white woman.

14 For J. Lee’s analysis of the Eatons’ opposing attitudes toward Afro-Jamaicans in “Leaves” and Me, see, in particular, 95-98 and 90-94 respectively in chapter 4 “The Eaton Sisters Go to Jamaica.”
As we have seen from the Eatons’ (dis)identification with Afro-Jamaicans, a biracial Chinese woman writer is not simply defined against whiteness, but, in an intertwined fashion, “against the trope of middle-class white womanhood” (J. Lee 84). Their different choices of ethnicity tell us much about the relationality of race, gender, and class that are implicated and coterminous with each other in the discussion of tranethnicity. Although some categories may receive more attention in one part of the dissertation than the other, what I want to foreground is precisely what Rey Chow calls “categorical enmeshment” or “categorical miscegenation” (Protestant 7). For the purpose of critical intervention, one not only needs to view different categories as formed through each other—“class must be seen as formed through gender and race, just as gender and race are formed through class processes, historically varying across time and space” (Acker 54)—but more importantly, one must not line them up with each other in a predictable refrain and attached to all investigations alike as packaging. Instead, as terms of intervention, they must be used to analyze, decode, and criticize one another, so that, for instance, “gender” is not only “gender” but what has been muted in orthodox discussions of class, while “class” is often what notions such as “woman” or even “sexual difference” tend to downplay in order to forge a gendered politics. (Chow, Writing 108)

The categorical enmeshment is a direct reflection of the “multiangled overdeterminations” of minor-to-minor relations (Shih, Visuality 7). As Lisa Lowe compellingly argues, the Asian American body politic is marked by multiplicity—“the ways in which subjects located within social relations are determined by several different axes of power, are multiply determined by the contradictions of capitalism, patriarchy, and race relations, with . . . particular contradictions surfacing in relation to the material conditions of a specific historical moment” (Immigrant 67).
The overdetermination by multiple axes of power leads to the situatedness of different marginalized groups at the intersections of manifold social forces at play in historically specific ways. It helps us understand ethnicity as a shifting relation formed in the process of ethnicization undergoing constant transformation. Rogers Brubaker grapples with the performative character of ethnicity and suggests moving away from what he calls “groupism” in the domain of ethnicity, nationalism, and race—the tendency to reify ethnic groups, nations and races as “internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups,” monochrome blocs in a multichrome social and cultural mosaic (8). He proposes that ethnicity, race, and nation be conceptualized “in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms”:

This means thinking of ethnicity, race, and nation not in terms of substantial groups or entities but in terms of practical categories, situated actions, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects, and contingent events. It means thinking of ethnicization, racialization, and nationalization as political, social, cultural, and psychological processes. And it means taking as a basic analytical category not the “group” as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable. (Brubaker 11)

Shifting attention from group to groupness, from ethnicity to ethnicization rejects an uncritical adoption of categories of ethnopolitical practice as that of social analysis; thus ethnic conflict, Brubaker argues, “need not, and should not, be understood as conflict between ethnic groups” but be better understood as “ethnicized” or “ethnically framed” (9-10; original emphasis).

Understood in the contradictory sense of boundary maintenance in the guise of inclusion, everyone is ethnic in contemporary liberal democratic society, not because, as the all-inclusive claim asserts, every human being naturally belongs to an ethnic group in both premodern and
modern, Western and non-Western societies.\textsuperscript{15} In line with Khachig Tölölyan and Lily Cho’s advocacy for a more stringent understanding of diaspora in association with homeland, loss, and dislocation, I want to return ethnicity to its original meaning as a mechanism for marking boundaries.\textsuperscript{16} Everyone is ethnic in that everyone in the modern nation-state, citizen or non-citizen, carries with him or her the potential to be ethnic in its etymological sense as a boundary marker for the purpose of exclusion. Gentiles and heathens opposing Jews and Christians find their modern versions in discrete minorities who are ethnicized directly or indirectly. For instance, the study of the relationships among minorities in the West is hardly complete without at the same time taking into consideration the “ethnics within” on the one hand, those who are discriminatorily thought of as “ethnics” within minority communities themselves (R. Chow, \textit{Protestant} 24), and the ethnics from the Third World, on the other, who are permanent migrants supplying the West with a minimally paid labour force without the privileges of citizenship. The expanding understanding of ethnics lays bare analogous structures of ethno-racial, class, and gender oppression in the West and the Third World. Deploying ethnicity as a central concept to capture minor-to-minor relationships is, therefore, not to downplay other factors—as the term in and of itself cannot attend to the complexity of social inequality and the continuity of colonization—but to use it as an analytic tool to unveil the persistence of boundary construction and the precariousness embedded in it while giving voice to marginalized communities.

Contesting Multiculturalism

\textsuperscript{15} Rey Chow quotes Thomas Hylland Eriksen’s statement that “every human being belongs to an ethnic group” in \textit{Protestant} 26.

\textsuperscript{16} See Tölölyan’s “Rethinking Diaspora(s)” and Cho’s “The Turn to Diaspora.”
The tension between transversality as a border crossing process and ethnicity as a mechanism for boundary maintenance is most prominent in the Canadian context as a result of its particular racial configurations. Sunera Thobani perceives the racial configurations of subject formation in Canada as triangulated among the national, the immigrant, and the Aboriginal. In this racial triangulation, “the national remains at the centre of the state’s (stated) commitment to enhance national well being” (Thobani 18). The national serves as the primary representative of minority groups, engaging in a continuous, if not impossible, attempt to achieve a singular identity and coherent unity of this imagined community conceived under white supremacy. The national unity is, however, put under constant pressure by Canada’s “dual state formation” of a settler colonial state and a liberal democracy, or what Himani Bannerji phrases as “a liberal democracy with a colonial heart” (74-75). These two distinct political impulses, irreconcilable from the start, coexist uneasily, thereby producing conflicting and sometimes contradictory ideological agendas and economic interests. Deeply split in governing values and principles, the national situates people of colour and Aboriginal populations against each other and governs them separately under different departments and legislation (Bannerji 74-75). Whereas immigrants gain “a tenuous and conditional inclusion” into Canadian citizenship, Aboriginal peoples are still “marked for loss of sovereignty” (Thobani 18).

Canada’s triangulated racial configurations manifest themselves in the official policy of multiculturalism that was initiated in direct response to the shifting demographics of Canada since the 1960s. In 1967, the universal points system of immigration was implemented in order to meet the labour demands for the growing capitalist economy and to measure up to the liberal democratic ideal of a just society. This points system changed the criteria by which prospective immigrants were selected from racial, ethnic, or national backgrounds to language competence,
professional skills, and family ties to Canada. In the following decade, the door was further opened to refugees and business immigrants with investment capital. Asian immigrants continued to increase in comparison with their decreasing European counterparts. Faced with the large-scale influx of third world immigrants, the Pierre Elliot Trudeau government replaced English-French biculturalism with multiculturalism in 1971 as a state policy. The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (also known as Bill C-93) was ultimately passed and enacted into law in 1988.

Canada’s multicultural turn provides a liberal solution to the increasing presence of diverse ethno-racial minorities and their request for recognition. Fundamental to the multicultural mosaic is an insidious depoliticization, a process achieved through “[p]luralism’s leveling of the material, and not simply aesthetic, unevennesses of racial, ethnic, and immigrant cultures, as well as its erasure of exclusions” (Lowe, *Immigrant* 90). The inception of multiculturalism, Bannerji reminds us, is not a demand from third world immigrants themselves; their primary concerns are not about culture but “about racism, legal discrimination involving immigration and family reunification, about job discrimination on the basis of Canadian experience, and various adjustment difficulties, mainly of child care and language” (44). Rather, multiculturalism functions precisely as an ideological apparatus that translates issues of social, economic, and racial injustice at the top of immigrants’ list into issues of cultural diversity and “limit[s] that diversity to symbolic rather than political forms” (Bannerji 44-45; Mackey 67). The multicultural aestheticization and decontextualization thus leave intact and unquestioned unequal material conditions. Systemic exploitation and structural inequalities recede into the background and political
claims from a heterogeneous population of competing interests are reduced to diverse, non-confrontational cultural pursuits.

Within the new Canadian mosaic, the inclusion of racialized immigrants occurs contemporaneously with their compartmentalization into distinct ethno-cultural communities. Collective cultural identities are reified in the name of multiplicity, creating a social space inhabited by “[p]olitically constructed homogenized communities, with their increasingly fundamentalist boundaries of cultures, traditions and religions” (Bannerji 48). Characteristic of ethnic and racial insularity, this rigidly scripted space is oftentimes unfavourable to cross-identification and interethnic contact between visible minorities. Not only are Asian and Black communities discouraged from relating to each other, a pan-ethnic Black or Asian identity is difficult to establish as well when ethnic Canadians are more likely to identify themselves as Chinese Canadian, Japanese Canadian, Jamaican Canadian and so on (Ty, “Complicating” 55-56). In the form of “pluralist universalism,” as the title of Wen Jin’s book proposes, the official discourse of multiculturalism summons ethno-racial minorities as cultural fragments under the sweeping banner of diversity, so that the power of a central Canadian culture is consolidated, especially at a moment of crisis concerning its universality and transhistoricity (Bannerji 10).

Aside from fragmenting racialized immigrants into isolated units contained within a white Canadian culture, multiculturalism also distances them from Aboriginal peoples. The line of demarcation between visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples is not only discernible in the geographical distance between the two communities along with the Aboriginal peoples’ relocation onto reserves, but is institutionalized in the Canadian Employment Equity Act (Thobani 96). Stipulated in 1986, the Act defines visible minorities as “persons, other than
aboriginal people, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-White in colour.” In view of this classification, visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples converge in embodying racial otherness in opposition to white Caucasians, yet are separated as distinct groups. Although Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, two years prior to launching multiculturalism, attempted to terminate the Indian Act as part of his assimilation project, visible minorities and First Nations had always been and continue to be governed respectively by the Multiculturalism Act and the Indian Act. The two communities are always imagined separately from each other in the national rhetoric. By looking at the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey and the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey with their exclusive focus on visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples in respective questionnaires, Karina Vernon finds that neither survey tries to envision or understand possible native-non-native “friendships, ethical or affective attachments, or practices of solidarity” (“To the End” n. pag.)

“Multiculturalism as a social policy,” she asserts, “has never been invested in fostering ‘inter-ethnic friendships’ between the groups it constructs as ‘visible minorities’ and aboriginal peoples” (Vernon, “To the End” n. pag.).

---

17 Funded jointly by Statistics Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Ethnic Diversity Survey aimed at better understanding “how people’s backgrounds affect their participation in the social, economic and cultural life of Canada” and “how Canadians of different ethnic backgrounds interpret and report their ethnicity.” The questionnaire was designed for “persons aged 15 years or over living in private households in the 10 provinces,” excluding “persons living in collective dwellings, persons living on Indian reserves, persons declaring an Aboriginal origin or identity in the 2001 Census, or persons living in Northern and remote areas.”

One year prior to the Ethnic Diversity Survey, Statistics Canada, in partnership with national Aboriginal organizations, conducted the Aboriginal Peoples Survey to “provide data on the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal people in Canada.” The survey covered adult and child population “living in private dwellings in the 10 provinces and three territories who are North American Indian, Métis or Inuit, and/or are a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian as defined by the Indian Act of Canada and/or are members of an Indian Band or First Nation and/or who have Aboriginal ancestry.” For further information on the two surveys, see the website of Statistics Canada.
Multiculturalism’s failure to cultivate native-non-native friendships and alliances is rooted in the unfinished project of Indigenous decolonization that continues to subvert the formal coherence and equality of the nation-state. The opposing positioning of immigrants and Aboriginal peoples in Canada’s triangulated racial configuration—the conditional inclusion of immigrants against attempted repression of knowledge about the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples—can be partly attributed to allegedly different degrees of assimilation with which the two communities are associated in the public imagination. Whereas immigrants appear to be more susceptible to change and assimilation to the so-called Canadian way of life because of their voluntary migration, Aboriginal peoples often come to be perceived as less assimilable because of their indigenous, and therefore pre-modern, identity. What underlies a kind of primitivism at work in the Canadian state is a deep-seated racism that is not only directed at visible minorities, but denies Aboriginal peoples as well political sovereignty, economic resources, and territorial rights. Along with their potential assimilation to the Canadian way of life, immigrants’ struggles for inclusion and equal access to citizenship, a conditional inclusion and access built on colonial formation, may in fact help develop the settler society and enhance the colonial project in the interests of the national (Thobani 95). In contrast, the economic development and political advancement of Aboriginal peoples pose more of a threat to the state for the potential risk of enhancing their struggles for self-determination and land restitution (Thobani 174). The dual gesture of the state—liberalizing immigration and citizenship policy for Third World immigrants, on the one hand, and limiting Aboriginal populations’ access to necessary

---

18 It should not be assumed too readily, though, that the liberalization of immigration and citizenship policy Thobani mentions here is always the case. Under the current Conservative government the policy has been tightened and made more difficult for immigrants from the Third World. The tightening immigration and citizenship policy may well be a warning about the ever-changing racial dynamics of Canada.
resources for the labour market, on the other—is yet another indication of the national’s surreptitious agenda intent on utilizing immigration to “further the political marginalization and economic underdevelopment of Aboriginal peoples” (Thobani 174). Multicultural depoliticization is not just a means to cope with challenges from visible minorities by eschewing their political and economic demands in favour of patronizing recognition from the state. Such depoliticization is, more importantly, a “diffusing,” “muting” device for the increasing tendency toward armed struggles exhibited by Quebecois and Aboriginal groups for the respective purposes of separatist nationalism and territorial claims (Bannerji 9). This multicultural division simultaneously recognizes and disavows Aboriginal peoples’ special status. As an ironic result, Aboriginal peoples, while imagined and governed separately from visible minorities, resemble the latter as being reduced to “‘just another cultural group’ within a multicultural mosaic,” “the bearers of a (far older) culture and history;” “Aboriginality is . . . devalued as only one among several cultures that needs to be harnessed for the cultural enrichment of nationals” (Amadahy and Lawrence 115; Thobani 174-75). Instead of facilitating intercultural exchange, such relegation establishes a barrier between decolonization and anti-racism such that, for Aboriginal peoples, to insist on their demands for socio-political rights is to lay themselves open to charges of racism toward Canadians and cultural Others (Thobani 174).

Despite the rhetoric of inclusive cultural pluralism, it has been clear that Canada’s liberal democracy in a colonial frame does not necessarily create a benign environment for solidarity building within visible minorities or between visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples. As one of the few laudatory efforts to build community across racial lines, the 1994 Writing Thru Race conference exposes the difficulties of coalition formation through its controversial policy of limiting daytime events to First Nations writers and writers of colour. In her meticulous analysis
of the conference, Larissa Lai notes that the policy was established at preparatory meetings in response to many attendees’ concerns over the conference’s association with the Writer’s Union and its race politics. The restriction enforced on conference participants was meant to produce a more generative discursive space for minority communities in which “white guilt, anxiety, anger, and apology did not need to be attended to” (Lai 215). If those who are historically racialized and marginalized, as Scott Toguri McFarlane maintains, constitute a “ghostly other community” upon which the operation of official state multiculturalism hinges, the conference then “represented a chance for that community to speak, listen, and begin to know itself, not as a ghostly force outside the nation, but as agented and acting both within and beyond it, though not necessarily following its rules” (Lai 215). Regrettably, this chance was closed to the public realm as the mainstream press sensationalized the conference policy of “First Nations and writers of colours only” based on self-identification as a policy of “no whites” (Lai 214). Such a translation enacted a charge of “reverse racism” against the conference organizing committee, a charge that not only undermined the historical racism of privileged whites in Canadian society, but overlooked the tensions within racialized groups as well (Lai 220-21). Employing the example of the tension between Black Canadian and Asian Canadian communities, Lai cites McFarlane’s argument:

The heterogeneous and silenced organizing committee of Writing Thru Race in a sense embodies these ghosts—present, unheard, and different from one another in ways that there was no space to articulate, far more different from one another than we were different from the white subjects so affronted by the one thing the committee could agree upon. All of us are called to fixate upon and mimic whiteness as much as we are called upon not to see or recognize a violently disparate and heterogeneous “one another.” (223)
By virtue of the media hijacking of the conference agenda, critical attempts to create a discursive space for First Nations and people of colour only ended up reproducing white people as the victims whose rights were violated by the racial others (Lai 215). The discursive context of the conference was then drawn “quickly back into the terrain of white hegemony, and a Eurocentric imaging of the nation, before much substantial coalition building work could even be laid on the table” (Lai 214). Lai’s analysis of the racial discourse centring around the “First Nations writers and writers of colour only” policy of Writing Thru Race reveals that the places of differentially racialized minorities remain largely determined in relation to the national and their relationships are still mediated through the ideological discourse of the ruling whites.

To challenge the multicultural frame that ignores and discourages the study of these interactions and relations, I foreground in this dissertation the transethnic space that attends to the possibilities and challenges of lasting bonds among racialized minority groups. The sweeping usage of ethnicity is not intended to flatten the difference between multicultural ethnicity and aboriginality and relegate Aboriginal peoples to being on a par with immigrant minorities without special status to sovereignty or nationhood. Essential to my critique of ethnicity—critique in Foucault’s understanding as “a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest”—is the historical shift in which visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples come to perceive themselves, or be perceived, as “ethnics” (or non-ethnics) in the racial politics of Canada (qtd. in Mackey 4). The study of transethnic relationship would lose its critical valence unless we seek

19 In her book *American Indian Ethnic Renewal*, Joane Nagel cites Vine Deloria, Jr.’s observation on the change of self-definition for American Indians as a minority group in the later decades of the twentieth century:
to understand the way that the national imagines First Nations paradoxically as both separated from ethnic minorities and “as one more ethnic group that just not learned well enough how to share” with immigrants in the multicultural mosaic (Thobani 173). The national’s paradoxical imagination exposes that “officially multicultural ethnicities, so embraced or rejected, are themselves the constructs of colonial—orientalist and racist—discourses” (Bannerji 9).

Viewed from the divisive landscape of multiculturalism, my conceptualization of minor transethnicity is more of a result of linguistic inadequacy to describe minor-to-minor relations. Thobani makes overt that the multiculturalist discourse appeals to many people of colour not because it is free of racism and exclusion, but because it is, in the limited public sphere for issues of difference and racism, the predominant framework “most readily available to them for staking their claims for inclusion” (172). Educated and formed in social institutions that discredit the historical and continuing racialization in Canadian society, people are deprived of “access to a vocabulary that can effectively address the complexities of contemporary nation-building and ‘culture talk’” and thereby forced to “contend with a vocabulary that explicitly suppresses knowledge about such complexities” (Thobani 172). As a convenient way to ignore fissures and divisions, multiculturalism “provides a language with which to talk about problems which are seen as threatening to the national fabric” (qtd. in Mackey 68), but

__________________________

Until 1960 it would not have been proper to have discussed American Indians in the context of American minorities because few Indians saw themselves as a minority within American society. . . . As Indians became more familiar with the world outside the reservation, there is no question that they began to see themselves as another minority group within American society. The activism of the 1970s only confirmed this viewpoint and made it a regular part of the Indian perspective, even of the reservation people” (qtd. in Nagel 8).

For the process of “[m]aking the ‘Indians’ ethnic” in 1960s Canada as a prelude to multicultural institutionalization of difference in the 1970s, see Mackey 60-63.
has given us no adequate language—no sign—for tracing or remembering the complex and subtly hybrid cultures that have arisen from the interaction of First Nations and Chinese diasporas. We are not encouraged by its discourses to think, for instance, First Nations-inflected-Chinese-Canadian, or First Nations-inflected-black-Canadian, despite the long and intimate interaction of these peoples. (Vernon, “To the End” n. pag.)

In the absence of an adequate language, it is not enough just to shift uneasily between outright rejection and tacit (or strategic) acceptance of the label “ethnic group” for Aboriginal peoples. Mapping out the tranethnic space between minority communities in Canada entails an integral understanding of Canada embedded in “a colonial history, an imperialist present, and a convoluted liberal democracy,” an intrinsically contradictory formation that leads to the complicity of the anti-racism project in the colonial ideology of the settler-state (Bannerji 10; Lawrence and Dua 238). Contextualized within the triangulated racial configurations of Canada, my analysis of minor tranethnicity does not so much offer a new vocabulary to overcome the ethno-racial cleavages in the national imaginary as serve as an intervention to make legible the cultural politics of the very language through which exclusion and divisiveness are sanctioned and perpetuated.

First Nations and Black Canadians: The Intertext of the Sinophone

The transversal minor-to-minor relationship provides a window into an emerging narrative that acknowledges non-white racialized groups as “an integral, albeit frequently obscured, component in the mechanisms of Chinese diasporic identity construction” (S. Wong, “Yellow” 78). Among a wide variety of minority groups in Canada, I position the Chinese in relation to First Nations and Black Canadians, two of the most important communities of the nation’s ethno-cultural
diversity. Canadian scholarship in the study of the relationship between Asians, Aboriginal people, and Blacks exhibits a dissimilar emphasis from scholarship in the United States. Whereas the reconfiguration of the black-white binary in American race studies leads to an expansive exploration of Asian Americans and Latinas/os in the absence of Native Americans (Shih, “Comparative” 1351), First Nations in Canada have received more literary and scholarly attention than Black Canadians in relation to Asians.

The encounter between Chinese and Aboriginal people dates back to the late nineteenth century when Chinese labourers first arrived in Canada, unfolding an alternative history of intimacy in a white settler society. Native presence can be found in Chinese Canadian writing such as SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café*, Kevin Chong’s *Baroque-a-Nova*, David H. T. Wong’s *Escape to Gold Mountain: a Graphic History of the Chinese in North America*, and Japanese Canadian writing such as Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* and its sequel, *Itsuka*. As shown in Rita Wong’s coined neologism “decolonizasian,” the discussion of the representation of First Nations in Asian Canadian literature has revolved around the issues of resistance and decolonization. Marie Lo reads Native figures as models of resistance for Asian Canadians by contrasting the roles that First Nations play for the majority whites and other minorities. In mainstream Canadian literature framed within the white-Native binary, Native people are frequently evoked to represent “the ultimate victim of social oppression and deprivation,” the role that Blacks fill in American literature (Atwood 116; Lo 98). As an embodiment of the “white settlers’ fraught relationship to a harsh landscape,” the Native plays a crucial part in defining Canadian literature—“to act as a foil for the rugged yet civilizing individual, to authenticate the settlers’ connection to the New World, or as the vanishing figure of nationalist nostalgia” (Lo 98). For minority communities, in contrast, Native people are perceived as models of resistance for their unceasing political and
legal struggle over sovereignty rights and self-government as well as resistance to land exploitation. Similar to the model effect of African American oppositional politics for Asian American cultural nationalists, Native resistance is inspirational for Asian Canadians in the context of Canadian anti-racist struggles. The struggle for Indigenous rights sets up the example “which other minorities striving to enter the legal and political process should follow” (Lo 99). In spite of their distinct histories and objectives, Asian Canadian anti-racism projects and Indigenous decolonization, taken together, enable an inquiry into “the complex relations between migration, settlement, and indigenous sovereignty” and “immigrant complicity in the colonization of land,” so that potential reproduction of colonial violence can be prevented (Lo 109; R. Wong, “Decolonizasian” 158-59).

In contradistinction to the increasing, albeit far from sufficient, study of the representation of Asian-Native relations, Asians and Blacks are seldom related in Asian Canadian literature and criticism. In “Complicating Racial Binaries: Asian Canadians and African Canadians as Visible Minorities,” one of the very few scholarly works devoted to Asian-Black relations in the particularities of the Canadian context, Ty attributes this rarity to “historical discriminations” and “the relative lateness of African and Asian immigrants to Canada” (55). She points out that unlike the longstanding history of Blacks in the United States who involuntarily migrated as slaves, Black Canadians are mostly immigrants from the Caribbean or Africa rather than the descendants of long-settled Black slaves and Loyalists, constituting only a small percentage of Canada’s population.20 Further, Ty cites Donald Goellnicht, who argues that unlike the civil

20 The history of Black Canadian communities dates back to the eighteenth century when Black Loyalists arrived in Nova Scotia in 1783. Black communities continued to migrate to Canada from the United States since then. While
rights movements, the Black Power movement, and the anti-Vietnam movement of the 1960s in the United States, Canada’s radicalism focused on the independence movement in Quebec. Asian Canadians and “less politicized” Black Canadians lack identificatory practices of their American counterparts based on “a history of resistance, solidarity, and self-empowerment” (Ty, “Complicating” 51, 55-56). Under the Multiculturalism Act that promotes cultural diversity based on essentially homogenous ethnic cultures rather than contentious political issues, a pan-ethnic sensibility and political coalition building are discouraged. Afro-Asian literary cultural encounters and collaboration are on the rise, yet remain relatively infrequent. Hence, Ty concludes, Afro-Asian encounters in Canada are largely theoretically constructed and often found in statistics, lists about minorities, and census (“Complicating” 59-60). The two groups are relegated to abstract entities that are analyzed in government documents, legal discourses, and studies about employment, immigration, and labour. Their grouping together as visible minorities “has the effect of designating a group of people in the country as unimportant players, or a subnormal group of people against a white group as unmarked or invisible” (Ty, “Complicating” 61-62).

Although Ty’s comment on the absence of black representation in Anglophone Asian Canadian literature is problematic in downplaying the early history and political activism of Black Canadian communities across the country, it does point to the relatively shorter history of the

British Columbia witnessed the settlement of Black Californians in 1858, the Canadian prairies were inhabited by more than one thousand Black Oklahomans between 1905 and 1912. However, as Ty points out quoting Will Kymlicka, “[t]he Black community in Canada in the nineteenth century—the descendants of former slaves and Black United Empire Loyalists—was never very large compared with the African-American population in the United States, and it shrank dramatically between 1870s and 1930 as Blacks moved back to the United States” (qtd. in “Complicating” 53).
The interdiasporic Chinese-Black relations in Canada compared with Chinese-Native contact.\footnote{For the history of Black Canadians and their political activism, see Robin Wink’s \textit{The Blacks in Canada} and Rinaldo Walcott’s \textit{Rude}.} The population of Blacks and Chinese remained small in size and their contact limited when non-European immigration was tightly restricted through exclusionary acts. It was not until 1967 that the universal point system was implemented in Canada and radically changed the immigration selection criteria. With that change, prospective immigrants were evaluated not so much by race, ethnicity, or nationality as by professional skills. The door of immigration was later opened to refugees, domestic workers, and businessmen with investment capital in the last few decades of the twentieth century. Chinese and Blacks became two of the largest immigrant groups drawn together by analogous immigrant status and issues. Chinese-Black encounters are thus not simply theoretically constructed as between abstract entities, but occur widely in everyday life in line with increasing ethnic diversity in Canada.

Existing research leaves Chinese-Native and Chinese-Black relationships inadequately probed, however, due to its exclusive focus on English-language texts at the expense of the proliferation of non-English texts produced by immigrants who live in the shadow of dominant linguistic and literary politics. The problem of linguistic limitation has troubled Canadian literature for decades. Ethnic writers who do not write in the national languages of English and French often go unheard and unnoticed in the Canadian literary landscape (Young 104). This limitation entrenched in Asian Canadian studies is noticeable from its 1979 landmark collection, \textit{Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology}, to vibrant literary works in the twenty-first century published by ethnically diverse Asian Canadian communities. In \textit{Beyond}
Silence, the first book-length criticism of Chinese Canadian literature as a crucial constituent of Asian Canadian literature, Lien Chao notes the significant number of Chinese-language journalistic and literary texts circulating in Chinese communities across Canada. She considers these writings in Chinese as a branch of Chinese Canadian literature and they “obviously deserve a separate and detailed study in their own right” (xiii). Unfortunately, the daunting task of translation leaves the substantial body of Chinese texts unexamined in Chao’s book, an occlusion that “might suggest that the heritage language still remains silent and invisible in contemporary Canadian society” (Chao, Beyond xiii).22

The undue neglect of non-English texts mirrors the aforementioned English-language hegemony in postcolonial studies. As part of the effort to challenge the linguistic hegemony of English and introduce multilinguality, Shih theorizes Sinophone Studies as a disciplinary field studying Sinitic-language cultures and communities on the margins of the geopolitical nation-state of China and Chineseness (“Concept” 710; “Against” 25). She differentiates the Sinophone from other postcolonial language-based communities in terms of coloniality or postcoloniality (“Against” 30).23 While sharing a colonial history with the Francophone and the Hispanophone worlds through its continental colonialism and settler colonialism, the Sinophone is largely divested of colonial underpinnings where overseas Chinese immigrants in North America are

22 A similar problem has also troubled Asian American literature. In her edited anthology of Asian American literature, King-Kok Cheung acknowledges its narrow concentration on English texts, thus precluding “a sizable body of literary production in the corresponding Asian language(s)” (20). Chao’s case reveals that if it was infeasible for Cheung to cover multilingual works in a single general volume of Asian American literature, her wish for a bilingual literary or critical anthology devoted to one subgroup is no less difficult to realize.

23 Despite the criticism of Shih’s concept of the Sinophone for its exclusion based on territoriality (see, for example, Y. Zhang 281-82 and Lu 21-24), I opt for this term because it best exemplifies the similarities and differences between the Sinophone and postcolonial communities. For historical processes of continental colonialism, settler colonialism, and (im)migration that form Sinophone communities, see Shih, “Introduction” 11-14.
concerned. The formation of Sinophone communities in Canada is a historical product of migration caused not so much by colonization as by the economic forces of the late nineteenth century, including the economic and social crises in China exacerbated by foreign invasions and the capitalist need for cheap labour during industrial expansion in Western countries. Accordingly, Sinophone literature is distinguished from its Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, and Lusophone counterparts in relation to the metropolitan centres. David Der-wei Wang points out that in the former colonies of Africa, Central America, and South America, writing in the metropolitan languages of French and Spanish is, at best, a forced choice. Despite the newly achieved political independence of these former colonies, the non-metropolitan population has often been deprived of their native languages by centuries of colonization and must resort to the colonizer’s language for literary writing. In contrast, most of the Chinese territories were never completely colonized during decades of imperialist invasion and occupation. Even in the colonized areas of Manchuria, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, colonial policies were never fully enforced in the cultural and linguistic fields. Many Chinese immigrants abroad, to various degrees, also bear the imprint of Chinese traditions and endeavour to preserve their heritage language. Imposed silence and alienation from the English-speaking community have also helped preserve the Chinese language as a live, functional tool in everyday communication (Chao, *Beyond* 17). This preservation not only indicates the survival of the heritage language that bonds the segregated Chinese community, but, more importantly, “guarantees the preservation of a minority culture from being assimilated by the powerful English environment” (Chao, *Beyond* 19). Sinophone literature is, therefore, not a minor literature written in the major language in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense, but “a minor literature written in a minority language within a given nation state, bidding for linguistic and cultural heterogeneity” (Shih, “Introduction” 8).
It must be noted that placing Sinophone Canadian literature side by side with canonical Anglophone Chinese Canadian literature is not meant to pose a clear-cut distinction between the two. From a historical point of view, the dividing line is not as definite as it appears to be. Always “geographically and temporally specific,” the Sinophone is “in the process of disappearance as soon as it undergoes the process of becoming, when local concerns voiced in local languages gradually supersede preimmigration concerns for immigrants and their descendents through generations” (Shih, “Against” 33). The continuous emergence and disappearance of Sinophone communities result in the heteroglossia of Chinese-speaking communities and bridge early Chinese immigrants, their English-speaking descendents, and new Chinese immigrants. The Chinese first came to Canada in the late nineteenth century mainly as illiterate indentured labourers with little knowledge of English. The second- and third-generations were largely born and raised in Canada with English as their native language and they endeavoured to assert their voice in mainstream discourse through literary creation in English. The implementation of the immigrant point system in the sixties dramatically transformed the demographics of Chinese Canadians. An unprecedented group of occupationally-diverse, highly-educated new immigrants adopting different literary genres enriched Chinese Canadian literature by their writings in Chinese (such as Ling Zhang, He Chen, and Bo Sun), English (such as Yan Li and Lien Chao), and French (such as Ying Chen).\(^{24}\) To a great extent, the multilingual texts of Chinese Canadian literature are not separate entities indicative of a home-host country spatial distinction; instead, they represent the evolving history of Chinese immigration in Canada. Of a “non-diasporic, local nature,” Sinophone literature and

\(^{24}\) The lack of correspondence between Anglophone/Sinophone writers and their writings is part of the reason that the literary texts under scrutiny are grouped thematically rather than linguistically. For instance, bilingual writers such as Yan Li and Lien Chao write in both English and Chinese.
culture constitute “an integral part of [the] nation-state’s multiculturalism and multilingualism” (Shih, “Introduction” 7). The once-critical distinctions in identity formation and disciplinary construction between Asian and Asian diaspora, between ethnic studies (Asian North American studies) and area studies (East Asian studies), are increasingly being blurred (Cheung 7; Jin 18-25).

I address linguistic multiplicity here not simply for the purpose of challenging the Anglo-centricism of Canadian literature and unfixing the familiar boundary of Chinese Canadian literature as incorporating multilingual Chinese Canadian literary texts does not lead directly to a heterolingual address.25 As Naomi Sakai compellingly argues, the key point of distinction between homolingual and heterolingual addresses in translation does not lie in whether the addressee and the addressees share the same language, but in whether the addressee “adopts the position representative of a putatively homogenous language society” and views the addressees in the same way (4). A more crucial step is to investigate, in Sakai’s word, “nonaggregate” minority communities as tension-ridden zones fraught with polyphonic voices (4). What is exigent is the effort “not only to multiply the number of languages recognized but also to theorize the controversial connections among language possession, ethnicity, and cultural value” (Chow, “Introduction” 9-10).

25 My study is limited to the texts written in standard Chinese at the expense of the linguistic multiplicity within the Sinophone even as I foreground Sinophone writing that is marginalized in Asian Canadian literature. Shih conceptualizes the Sinophone as distinct from its previous uses as “Chinese-speaking” in its multi-tonguedness and polyphony. If the dialects in the Sinitic language family can be regarded as different languages or topolects, she argues, “Sinophone literature is itself a multilingual literature.” Therefore, Shih suggests translating Sinophone literature as Huayu yuxi wenxue (literatures of the Sinitic language family) instead of Huayu wenxue or Huawen wenxue (literature written in standard Mandarin) (“Introduction” 9).
As a way to tease out heterolinguality, I read Anglophone and Sinophone Chinese Canadian texts as “intertext,” intertext not as a Kristevan poststructuralist high-theory concept, but, in Sau-ling Wong’s sense, as highlighting choice and praxis closely related to context. Whereas Julia Kristeva’s intertextuality regards any text as being “constructed as a mosaic of quotations” and “the absorption and transformation of another,” Wong singles out the phrase “any text” and specifically asks: “which texts, among many possible candidates in many possible discursive traditions, a given Asian American text is to be juxtaposed with and read against” (Reading 10). Wong cautions that the perception of the relationship between two texts, “that two texts are relatable at all,” is ideologically embedded (Reading 10). It is critically important to determine appropriate intertexts for minority writing like Asian American literature without reifying dominant literary tradition or replicating “the asymmetrical sociopolitical relationships in the extratextual realm” (S. Wong, Reading 10-11). Textual coalition is not pre-existing but “created by activists, critics, and scholars, in response to political, social, economic, demographic situations and concerns” (S. Wong, Interview 280). In line with Wong, I want to move Asian Canadian literature away from being an “obscene supplement” on the map of Canadian literature and read instead Chinese Canadian literature itself as intertexts, inquiring how multilingual texts “build upon, allude to, refine, controvert, and resonate with each other” (S. Wong, Reading 12).

Viewing Anglophone and Sinophone Chinese Canadian writing together provides us with fresh insight into minority relationships through the optic of language possession and disputes a homogenous, universalizing subject position for Chinese Canadians. The representation of First Nations in Anglophone Asian Canadian literature reflects compelling issues that have long plagued Canadian literature, in particular the issue of decolonization. Formed as the “cultural territorialization of space” that accompanies the geopolitical territorialization of Canada as a
nation-state in the process of colonization, Canadian literature assists in constructing a Canadian cultural identity as an innocent victim of American and British imperialisms in negligence of the internal colonization of the Indigenous population (Miki 131, 101). As a constituent that relentlessly troubles Canadian literature, Anglophone Chinese Canadian writing takes as its object of criticism the former’s uneasy relationships with Indigenous, diaspora, and postcolonial studies (Brydon 3). The study of Asian-Native relations situates Asian Canadian formation within a colonial settler history and gestures toward the possibility of a collaborative comparative work that contributes to broad coalitions and alliances working toward decolonization (Lo 109; R. Wong, “Decolonizasian” 158-59).

For new Chinese immigrant writers, the question of decolonization is undoubtedly an important one, yet they are more dedicated to exploring the many facets of immigrant life and the sentiments of Chinese immigrants. While sharing with their Anglophone counterparts the autobiographical use of family histories and memoirs and depicting the common theme of exile, displacement, and marginalization, new immigrant writers exhibit different characteristics in their literary productions given linguistic difference. The linguistic particularity not only arguably provides them relative freedom from the constraints of the mainstream social codes as cultural outsiders in Xiao-huang Yin’s view, but, more importantly, wields great influence in the domain of readership (177). Although it is appropriate to expect, as Pei-yin Lin does, that Sinophone literature is likely to reach out to global non-Sinophone readers through translation, its readership so far has been predominantly first-generation immigrants abroad and domestic
The deployment of the Chinese language renders belonging and attachment possible not only at the emotional level, but in a practical manner when Sinophone writers seek recognition beyond the rather limited overseas Chinese literary market. They increasingly cast their eyes to the enormous publishing market in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong and build their writing career through the readership there. If, as Wong problematically claims, Asian readers are “foreign” readers remote from the original Asian American cultural context, whose “superficial familiarity obscures the entire social, cultural and political matrix out of which the author operates and which profoundly alters their meaning,” Chinese readers in China might bear a closer resemblance to Sinophone readers abroad who are capable of performing a “proper” reading of Sinophone North American texts (S. Wong, “When” 33). With such target readers in mind, Sinophone writers, who often spend their formative years in China, consciously or unconsciously, use the West as “a new stage, background, and perspective to compare and reflect on China” (J. Chen 50). For instance, Native women in Ling Zhang’s *Gold Mountain Blues* are not represented as figures of resistance against capitalist logic and land exploitation, but appear as the compassionate other who helps preserve a heterosexual, patriarchal Chinese family order and recount a paternalist family-nation allegory imbued with patriotic sentiment. Similarly, the sporadic appearance of black people is by no means the focal

---

26 Though mainly based on the study of Taiwan writers, Lin’s conclusion is also applicable to Sinophone literature in general. In her clarification of overseas Chinese literature, Laifong Leung mentions that in addition to first-generation Chinese immigrants, many of their children are also able to write in Chinese, especially in Southeast Asian countries. These Chinese descendants not only learn Chinese in local schools, but may be sent to mainland China or Taiwan and continue to receive education. The situation is less favourable in English-dominated North America where Chinese immigrants are fewer and scattered (120).

27 Yin draws attention to an important reason why Sinophone writers have rarely published in English in the United States: “for Chinese immigrant writers, creative writing in English often demands suppression and distortion of the Chinese sensibility that does not fit into the stereotyped portrayal of ‘ Orientals’ that is popular in mainstream American culture” (179).
point of “little Chinese overseas student literature,” but serves more as a critical lens to interrogate class stratification and political corruption in post-socialist China and their economic and psychological effects on young Chinese overseas students.

Partnering Anglophone Chinese Canadian fiction with their Sinophone counterparts as intertexts presents a fuller picture of the complexity of cross-ethnic interactions. Chinese Canadian literature becomes more dynamic and vibrant with the contestation and polyphony posed by the other within its parameters, forming a “third space” that “would address . . . concerns around limiting experience and its telling to the works of native-born speakers, while excluding new immigrant writers, for example, or blindly viewing immigrant writing in the Americas as ‘diasporic,’ deriving its meaning solely from an original ancestral Asian homeland” (Leong and Hu-DeHart ix). Through that space we can have a better understanding of the minor-to-minor relationship as non-monolithic and even, at times, conflictual.

Multidirectional Critique

The Sinophone offers not only an expanded view of the interactions among minorities, but also a “method” for Asian Canadian studies (Shih, “Against” 39). When the formation of the Sinophone is conceptualized as an interlocking process of continental colonialism, settler colonialism, and immigration, Sinophone studies requires a critical position toward China-centrism, Eurocentrism, and other centrisms, thus being “always a multidirectional critique” (Shih, “Concept” 711). Critical multidirectionality is necessitated and enabled by the chronotopic nature of the Sinophone. The temporal and spatial specificity associates home-ness with the place of residence instead of origin; roots can be reconceptualized as “place-based rather than ancestral” and routes as “a more mobile conception of home-ness rather than wandering and
homelessness” (Shih, “Against” 38). The reconceptualization of roots and routes entails going beyond the divide between the home and host country and adopting a critical stance toward both places at the same time. In this way, Sinophone communities can “recognize the imperative of living as a political subject within a particular geopolitical place in a specific time with deep local commitments” and pursue “concrete political engagement in the local” (Shih, “Against” 38). The Sinophone as a concept, therefore, “allows for the emergence of a critical position that does not succumb to nationalist and imperialist pressures and allows for a multiply-mediated and multiply-angulated critique” (Shih, “Against” 39).

The simultaneous critique of the country of origin and the country of settlement renders multidirectional critique closely akin to Walter Mignolo’s model of “double critique.” Borrowed from Abdelhebir Khatibi’s critique of both Occidental and Islamic fundamentalism, double critique functions as both “a decolonizing deconstruction (e.g., from a Third World perspective) of Western logo- and ethnocentrism that has been exported all over the planet” and “a criticism, from the same perspective (e.g., a decolonizing deconstruction from the Third World) of the knowledges and discourses produced by the different societies of the Arab world” (Mignolo 70). Mignolo’s double critique has gained strong appeal in Asian North American studies. Wen Jin, for example, deploys the double critique framework in her comparative study of U.S. liberal multiculturalism and China’s policy toward minority nationalities. She regards the logic of double critique as essential to the discourse of comparative multiculturalisms, given its “practice of thinking from multiple discursive lineages and yet none of them, thus generating subaltern knowledge that did not previously exist before the very act of mediation” (Jin 8). Through a reading of Chinese American and Chinese immigrant writings that simultaneously problematize the configurations of race and ethnicity in post-Cold War United States and China, Jin contends
that the two forms of multiculturalism be read as “comparable, interrelated processes of mediation between the imperative of national coherence and minority demands for autonomy and equality” (7).

My use of multidirectional critique joins double critique in the sense of critiquing both Canada and China. As noted earlier in the introduction, Chinese Canadian literature, in its Anglophone and Sinophone forms, has as its targets of criticism the colonization and multiculturalism of Canada, on the one hand, and the social problems of China, on the other. In addition to the two recognizable entities of the nation-state, multidirectional critique explores, in a more subtle way, the “many more layers, scales, and contexts below, between, within, and outside of geographical and cultural units than we have allowed ourselves to recognize,” between “the global and the local,” “the universal and the particular,” and particularly pertinent to my project, the majorities and the minorities (Shih, Visuality 12). This approach grapples with the heterogeneity within minority groups. Whereas privileged academics, intellectuals, and businessmen may enjoy “flexible citizenship” and find movement an enabling voluntary experience, those who are disadvantaged such as unskilled workers may be constrained by migration and marginalized in both dominant and ethnic communities. It would be detrimental, Kimberlé W. Crenshaw cautions, to “[limit] inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group,” such as sex- or class-privileged racial minorities in race discrimination cases or race- and class-privileged women in sex discrimination cases (26). While Chinese Canadian literature can be read as a community-based minority discourse that recuperates Chinese Canadians from a
collective silence (Chao), other silences of less privileged members of the minorities may not be articulated and are subject to further neglect.28

Moreover, the flow of power among minority groups does not move in one direction. If, as is characteristic of Foucault’s thinking, “there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations . . . extending from the top down,” there is equally no unidirectional hierarchy between various minority groups (94). One may play changing roles and occupy not only exploited but exploiting positions when involved with others: “Victims can also be victimizers; agents of change can also be complicitous, depending on the particular axis of power one considers” (Friedman 48). To be sure, Chinese and black immigrants are marginalized minorities in the white nation. Yet understanding their relationship with First Nations in Canada demands, Lawrence and Dua assert, a keen alertness to the complicity that people of colour may have with “ongoing land theft and colonial domination of Aboriginal peoples” (249). As is demonstrated in Malissa Phung’s anti-colonial conceptualization of the term “settler,” Chinese and Blacks are more appropriately called “unsettled settlers,” who simultaneously benefit from the land and resources appropriated from Indigenous people and can work together toward the decolonization of the latter (295-96). There is no question the two communities of unsettled settlers are not assigned equal roles in the racial hierarchy of Canada. As a putative model minority, Chinese are likely to be placed at a superior position compared to their black counterparts, taking part in the ongoing discrimination and racialization of Black Canadians. The often unrecognized layers and silences in the shadow of

28 See, for example, Lai, chapter 1 “Strategizing the Body of History.”
the multidirectional flow of power make reflexive criticism and self-criticism an indispensable and urgent aspect of multidirectional critique.

My second use of multidirectionality is informed by Michael Rothberg’s conceptualization of multidirectional memory in the sense of productive cross-referencing rather than negative exclusion. Against Walter Benn Michaels’ criticism of the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. for overshadowing the history of the Black Holocaust (i.e., racism toward African Americans in slavery), Rothberg posits that the old model of competitive memory exhibited in such criticism literally views memory “as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources” (3). This old model parallels the boundaries of memory with that of group identity, and, thus, to proclaim one’s memories and identity will necessarily exclude that of others (Rothberg 5). In contrast, he suggests thinking memory “as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative,” because the borders of memory and identity are always jagged (Rothberg 3; original emphasis). In this light, the widespread memory of the Holocaust, in effect, contributes to the articulation of other histories occurring before and after the Nazi genocide, such as slavery and the Algerian War of Independence.

Rothberg’s conception of multidirectionality in memory is important for my study. To a great extent, this dissertation is my attempt to address what Rey Chow mentions in passing when she examines the curious mentality of ressentiment within Chinese people in her postscript to The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Chow ascribes ressentiment—a repressed rancorous hostility toward members of one’s own ethnic group, in this case celebrated Chinese writers and film directors—to the insidious effect of the Western gaze that “carries with it a kind
of power that matters” (188). “For the same reason,” Chow continues, “we almost never hear complaints about how Africans, Indians, Palestinians, or Native Americans see or stereotype Chinese people” (Protestant 188). I pick up from where Chow leaves off and study the perceptions and stereotyping by and between non-Western peoples with greater emphasis on Chinese immigrants’ perception and prejudice toward other minorities than the reverse. This imbalance occurs partly because the former has received more representation in a specific, circumscribed corpus of Chinese Canadian fiction—a corpus of Native and Black Canadian writing might yield different insights—partly because my training in Asian North American studies equips me with better knowledge of Chinese immigrants than the other two groups discussed in my dissertation: First Nations and Black Canadians.

The lack of equal representation and knowledge of both sides of the comparison is in danger of aggravating the uneasiness about marginalizing Indigenous peoples or relegating them to the past, as James Clifford reveals, in the triumphal celebration of diaspora and the normalization of traveling, displacement, and migration in contemporary discourses (“Varieties” 200). Chadwick Allen takes issue with Minor Transnationalism for its lack of sustained attention to Indigenous studies—the book contains no descriptions or analyses devoted to Indigenous peoples and their cultures, or any notes or bibliographies that suggest incorporating the Indigenous in future studies (4). Minor Transnationalism, he states in sombre tones, represents “a more narrow—and currently more fashionable—scholarly paradigm of ‘migration,’ ‘exile,’ or ‘diaspora’” (Allen 6).

It is worth remembering that as homeland nations whose ancestral lands have been forced into becoming part of the settler-state of Canada, Indigenous peoples have distinct political rights to nationhood and legitimate claims to land. Nonetheless, questioning the opposition between
Indigenous peoples and diaspora groups does not mean eliminating their historical differences or tensions, but attempts to work out the potential for building productive connections between the two communities. Although some Indigenous leaders reject the terms “minority” and “ethnic group,” Indigenous people do share “the felt need to belong to a group with common territory, traditions, laws, language, spirituality, and social institutions” and a “sense of oppression acquired through cumulative historical experiences of rejection or obstruction of group cohesion and survival by a dominant, alien political community” (Niezen 200). In exploring “diasporic dimensions or conjunctures in contemporary native lives,” James Clifford maintains that “identifications are seldom exclusively local or inward looking but, rather, work at multiple scales of interaction” (“Varieties” 200; original emphasis). Even though the language of diaspora “cannot transcend the tension between the material interests and normative visions of natives and newcomers, particularly in structurally unequal settler colonial situations,” it can help lay bare the complex range of Indigenous experiences (Clifford, “Varieties” 201). Hence, Clifford suggests crossing the boundary between diasporic and Indigenous paradigms and recognizing “diasporic displacements, memories, networks, and reidentifications . . . as integral to tribal, aboriginal, native survival and dynamism” (“Varieties” 201). In the meantime, the struggle and achievement of Indigenous peoples, such as the UN General Assembly’s adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, could also provide a model for sub-state and subaltern groups, including immigrants, who “may look to the Indigenous Declaration as evidence that international law can be enlisted to support their struggles for respect and emancipation” (Kymlicka 184).

One must, therefore, on the one hand, be careful not to collapse the conceptual and historical differences between indigeneity and ethnicity. Whereas ethnicity pertains more to cultural
heritages closely linked with “exclusion from legal, political, and cultural definitions of national citizenship,” indigeneity is a legally defined category that is often invoked in international law for the right to land and sovereignty based on territorial possession prior to forced integration (Jin and Liu 48). On the other hand, as Wen Jin and Daxian Liu have argued, ethnic studies and Indigenous studies can complement and learn from each other in terms of the common issue of “cultural and legally forced assimilation” and the complementary theoretical approaches of transnationalism and postcolonialism which “help link the conditions of Native Americans scattered outside of reservations to those of other racial and ethnic minorities in the United States” (48).

In light of Rothberg’s multidirectionality in the sense of productive cross-referencing rather than negative exclusion, I anchor my analysis of tranethnic space around the notion of boundaries, but not for the intention of division or exclusion. To quote Martin Heidegger, “A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing” (qtd. in Bhabha 1; original emphasis). Calling for a multidirectional critique is to develop an approach attending to the complexity and necessity for perpetual alertness without invalidating the solidarity and collaboration within, between, and among minority groups. The question that Homi Bhabha raises in the introduction to The Location of Culture is still pertinent: “How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?” (2). Precisely by grappling with the insidious persistence and multilayered
intricacy of prejudice and discrimination among the many layers within minority communities, we can effectively facilitate alliance building and coalition formation.

Chapter Outline
The dissertation is divided into two sections, the first on Chinese-Native and the second on Chinese-Black relationships. Part I, “Chinese-Native Intimacy,” explores the long and complicated history of Chinese-Native relations replete with melodramatic twists and turns. I use “intimacy” in its sexual and affective sense, referring to the private sphere of conjugal and familial relations, and address the question of ethnicity through the familiar idioms of home and family, which serve, in turn, “as essential metonyms for national concerns” (Sheffer 10).29 The interracial romance between Chinese men and First Nations women in Canada, in its particular pattern of gender asymmetry, reflects the racial and sexual politics in the ongoing transformation of Canada from a xenophobic nation to a multicultural mosaic.

Chapter 1, “Alternative Contact,” looks at romantic relations between early Chinese immigrants and Native women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century British Columbia, an alternative contact that has been overshadowed by European-Native “first contact.” The chapter begins with the historical context of Chinese-Native relationships in Canada. I discuss the socio-economic circumstances underlying romantic liaisons and the discriminatory laws that exacerbate the difficulties faced by interracial families. I then proceed to the literary

29 Lisa Lowe analyzes the multivalence of intimacy in her essay “The Intimacies of Four Continents.” My usage of “intimacy” also alludes to another meaning that Lowe puts forward, namely, “the volatile contacts of colonized people,” including African slaves, indentured Asian labour, and mixed-blood free peoples on the Caribbean Plantation, contact that leaves no explicit trace in the documents, yet is, “paradoxically, everywhere implicit in the archive in the presence of such ellipses” (203).
representation of these relationships in two family sagas, SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café* and Ling Zhang’s *Gold Mountain Blues*. As native-born and new immigrant respectively, Lee and Zhang reveal in their portrayals of Native women the same passion for the “primitive” that early Chinese immigrants showed. The two writers differ, however, with respect to the role that the First Nations play in the imaginary of the Chinese Canadian community. The absent presence of Kelora in Lee’s novel exerts a debilitating influence on the Chinese family through miscegenation and incest, forcing one to reimagine the nation as mixed-race. In contrast, the absence of Sundance in Zhang’s novel offers a sentimental, idealized resolution whereby patriarchal, heterosexual, and racially uncontaminated familial ties are preserved not only for the Chinese, but for First Nations and whites as well.

Chapter 2, “Children of the Sixties,” conducts a temporal shift to the descendants of early Chinese labourers and Native women living in Central Canada during the second half of the twentieth century. I examine the volatile relationship between Native woman, Helena Sinclair, and her Chinese ex-boyfriend, Nathan Shaw, in Kevin Chong’s novel *Baroque-a-nova*. As with the turn-of-the-twentieth-century romances in the previous chapter, this Chinese-Native union ends with an unpleasant break-up. The growing estrangement and lingering attachment that the couple have toward each other uncover racial and gendered violence against Native women as well as the dangers of cultural appropriation. The couple’s constant negotiations raise questions about the possibility and difficulty of resistance and solidarity building for minority groups in a media-saturated world. While the heritage of the Aboriginal population and the contribution of Chinese immigrants are increasingly recognized under the banner of cultural diversity, the romantic entanglement in the novel reveals the insidious racial ideologies of the settler-state of Canada in its ambivalent formation of a national identity.
The second part of my dissertation, “Chinese-Black Encounters,” moves to Chinese-Black relations during the era of global capitalism in Canada’s most populous province, Ontario. While narratives of Chinese-Native romance are limited mostly to the private space of the family, Chinese-Black interactions are mediated by transnational capital and labour. Often the works examined in this part are preoccupied with class, not cultural, differences which drive a wedge between the two communities. Chapter 3, “The Ethnicization of Female Labour,” focuses attention on the position of Jamaican Canadians in relation to Chinese immigrants from the perspective of social mobility and labour ethnicization. The chapter examines the hierarchical division of labour in the Canadian labour market, in particular racialized female menial labour, through the critical lens of what Chow terms “the ethnicization of labor.” By contrasting a Chinese single mother Lily and her anonymous Jamaican co-worker in the hotel cleaning team, Yan Li’s novel, *Lily in the Snow*, reinforces the persistent perception of Chinese immigrants as the model minority through their upward social mobility. In contrast, the status of Jamaicans is significantly elevated in Ling Zhang’s novel, *Mail-Order Bride*. The configuration of the love triangle between the Chinese immigrant couple and the Jamaican waitress, Tammy, alters with the revelation of Tammy’s prestigious family background, witnessing a more fluid process of whitening and blackening on the continuum of positioning visible minorities.

Chapter 4, “Volatile Crossings,” addresses the transient contact between overseas Chinese students and Black Canadians in the emergent literary genre of “little Chinese overseas student literature.” This genre unsettles the frame of Chinese Canadian literature by placing at centre stage young Chinese visa students who are dissimilar to the long-settled Chinese immigrants in the previous chapters. Sent abroad at a young age with heavy reliance on parental financial
support, little Chinese overseas students, in their liminal stage, contribute to a vexed Chinese-Black relationship in a different yet related fashion compared to overseas students in earlier times. In introducing what at first seems to be odd outliers to our discussion, I want to argue that He Chen’s novella “I am a Little Bird” and Bo Sun’s novel _Tears of Little Overseas Students in a Foreign Land_ demonstrate the distinct concerns of Sinophone writers in the new millennium marked by China’s so-called “rise.” As friends and accomplices of young Chinese overseas students, Black Canadians are not primarily deployed to reiterate a critique of the racial politics of the dominant white society or expand the reach of fiction to showcase Chinese-Black alliances. Instead, the inter-ethnic literary impulse is used to highlight economic power, new class divisions, and endemic political corruption in the People’s Republic of China that contextualize a new wave of Chinese migration to Canada. Contact between migrant Chinese and Black Canadians brings us closer to the economic and psychological costs imposed on young Chinese subjects in their liminality and exposes the dark side of the transnational movement of capital.
Part I Chinese-Native Romance
Chapter 1 Alternative Contact: Interracial Romance between Early Chinese Immigrants and First Nations Women in SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café* and Ling Zhang’s *Gold Mountain Blues*

The initial contact between Chinese immigrants and First Nations peoples in Canada can be dated back as early as the late eighteenth century when the Chinese first settled in British Columbia. In 1788, approximately fifty Chinese artisans and labourers disembarked from the British ship of Captain Meares at Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island. They received a friendly welcome from Chief Maquinna of the Nuu-chah-nulth people to a land of stunning beauty and richness. With the assistance of the local people, the Chinese crew helped Captain Meares build a fur-trading post at Nootka. In later years, the Spanish ousted Captain Meares from British Columbia fearing that the British would threaten their trade monopoly; the British post was thus abandoned. Many Chinese workmen stayed, however, scattering to the encampments of native tribes on the northwest coast of America. Thereafter, people heard brief accounts of their lives from the soldiers on the American sailing ship *Jefferson*, which took two Chinese workmen on board at Nootka Sound in 1794. Four decades later, a few Chinese survivors appeared unexpectedly at Fort Nisqually of the Hudson’s Bay Company, providing a more direct account of their experience in the Nootka settlement. According to these accounts, the left-behind Chinese were held captive or peacefully assimilated, raising children with First Nations women. The Chinese contact with First Nations peoples increased from 1858 onwards.

---

30 See the interview with Chief Michael Maquinna in the short documentary *Cedar and Bamboo*. Chief Michael Maquinna is the Tyee Ha’wilth of the Mowachaht tribe and a direct descendant of Chief Maquinna who welcomed the Chinese in the eighteenth century.

31 For the early history of the Chinese at Nootka Sound and their contact with the Natives, see Chao, *Beyond* 4; A. B. Chan 33; W. Lee 17. It is interesting to note the discrepancy between the English and Chinese versions of Wai-man Lee’s bilingual book *Portraits of a Challenge: An Illustrated History of the Chinese Canadians* regarding this history. The fact that “Some of the Chinese workers were assimilated by the Northwest Coast Indians” is translated
as the first wave of Chinese arrived in British Columbia during the gold rush. It persisted into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries along with the massive second-wave influx of Chinese workers in the construction of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s. The Chinese-Native interactions form an alternative contact from the first contact between European settlers and First Nations, telling a different set of stories of relations between minority groups at the margins.

These alternative stories find their way into Chinese Canadian literature and rise to prominence in SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990) and Ling Zhang’s *Gold Mountain Blues* (2009). A pioneering Chinese Canadian novel translated into Chinese in 2013, *Disappearing Moon Café* received the City of Vancouver Book Award and was short-listed for the Governor General’s Award. The novel is framed by a melancholic Chinese-Native romance based on Lee’s personal contact with a few Chinese-Native people and the church records of intermarriages around the 1890s. The prologue commences with the peril faced by young Chinese male protagonist Wong Gwei Chang on his journey in the wilderness of the Fraser Canyon searching for the bones of deceased Chinese railway labourers. On the verge of unconsciousness, Gwei Chang is saved by a half-Native girl Kelora Chen, who takes him to her cabin and nurses him to health. In spite of their mutual attraction and newly wedded bliss, Gwei Chang leaves Kelora behind and departs for China upon his mother’s request. When Gwei Chang marries a Chinese wife Lee Mui Lan and returns to Canada three years later, Kelora has died prematurely, leaving their mixed-race into Chinese as “Bufen huagong qie yu tuzhu yindi’an nüzi tonghun,” literally meaning “Some of the Chinese workers had intermarriages with native Indian women” (17, 19).

---

32 John Haugen showed Lee the records when she was first introduced to the Lytton Indian Band. See Lee’s interview with Michele Wong in “From Fiction to Film: Disappearing Moon Café” (M. Wong 23).
son Ting An in his care. Gwei Chang brings Ting An back as a servant to his family restaurant “Disappearing Moon Café.” The cover-up of Ting An’s identity, compounded by his affair with Gwei Chang’s daughter-in-law Fong Mei, sows seeds of destruction in the Wong family. Four generations of the Wongs are haunted by their veiled past of miscegenation and incest in a hostile Canadian society. It is not until the end of his life that Gwei Chang finally reunites with his long-dead lover in a dream and passes away with guilt and regret. This episode of imaginary reunion in the epilogue “not only expresses [Gwei Chang’s] longing to be reunited with Kelora, but also uncovers the lost kinship between the Chinese and the Native peoples in British Columbia that probably can be traced as far as the Nootka Sound settlement in 1788” (Chao, *Beyond* 96).

Compared with the oft-studied *Disappearing Moon Café*, Ling Zhang’s 2009 Chinese-language novel *Jin Shan* (Gold Mountain) remained largely unknown to an Anglophone readership until the launch of its English translation, *Gold Mountain Blues*, in Canada and Great Britain in 2011. The novel is set in South China and Western Canada, spanning the period from the 1860s to the new millennium. Through a series of dramatic stories about the five generations of the Fongs, this family saga epitomizes the struggle and sacrifice of Chinese immigrants seeking their fortune in North America with their families left behind in China. The story is introduced through the trip taken by Amy Smith, great granddaughter of the first-generation Chinese labourer Fong Tak Fat, to Hoi Ping County in Guangdong for the purpose of signing an agreement with the local government on its trusteeship of the Fongs’ fortress homes for heritage protection and tourism development. Instead of being embedded in a prologue/epilogue structure, the romantic subplot between Tak Fat’s first son Fong Kam Shan and the Native girl Sundance is inserted in the middle chapter, “Gold Mountain Tracks,” as a brief interlude against the
monumental historical backdrop of the 1911 Chinese Revolution. On his way home from a fundraising event for the revolution in the Canton Street Theatre in Vancouver’s Chinatown, Kam Shan falls prey to a plot by local Monarchists and is thrown into the Fraser River. Sundance’s father rescues him from the river and shelters him in his tribe. Under Sundance’s tender care, Kam Shan soon recovers and makes love with Sundance when they are alone together in the forest. However, with no intention of marrying a Native woman, Kam Shan escapes the proposed marriage and lives with a Chinese woman named “Cat Eyes” and their daughter Yin Ling. For years to come, Kam Shan is ridden with guilt and looks for Sundance through the classified ads in the newspaper in the hope of gaining her forgiveness. Though living on the same street in Vancouver, a less than fifteen minute walk apart, the two do not see each other for more than half a century. One day in 1971, Sundance drops by Kam Shan’s house on her way to collect her great-grandson from school. The photo of her son Paul on his fifty-seventh birthday that she leaves behind discloses Paul’s date of birth and Kam Shan’s paternity. After Sundance leaves, Kam Shan passes away without warning, thinking of the red kapok blossoms of his home village.

For Zhang, a new immigrant writer who came to Canada in 1986 as a graduate student in English at the University of Calgary, the early history of Chinese immigrants and First Nations in Canada was initially alien and distant. According to the author’s notes in the preface to the novel, the inspiration for the Chinese-Native relationship is derived mainly from her subsequent research of historical documents in the libraries and archives as well as personal communication with scholars in this field, such as David Lai of the University of Victoria and Henry Yu of the University of British Columbia (L. Zhang, Jin Preface 6-7, 11-12; Gold x-xi). By means of the
transgenerational transmission of knowledge and experience, Zhang is able to reactivate distant archival materials and engage with written and oral histories in a literary form.

The transient romance between early Chinese labourers and First Nations women in Disappearing Moon Café and Gold Mountain Blues discloses a similar narrative that might be formulated as “red women save yellow men from the whites and yellow men abandon red women for yellow women.” Or, to put it in a more elaborate way, endangered Chinese men are rescued and fall in love with compassionate Native women only to abandon them for Chinese wives and a return to the Chinese community. This narrative is by no means the only or predominant one in Chinese Canadian writing, yet it is critically important in our examination of Chinese-Native miscegenation as a product of social circumstances. The absence of Native women for the most part of Chinese life in Canada lays bare the unevenness inherent in the relations between the two communities. Such unevenness is the product of the racial politics and discriminatory laws that exacerbate the difficulties faced by Chinese-Native families. In a less

33 For instance, David H. T. Wong’s graphic novel, Escape to Gold Mountain: a Graphic History of the Chinese in North America (2012), is distinct from Disappearing Moon Café and Gold Mountain Blues in exploring the harmonious relationship between the Chinese and Aboriginal peoples in North America as an integral part of the history of Chinese immigration over the past century. Born and raised in Vancouver of a pioneering Chinese-Canadian family, Wong was acquainted with the stories about the Aboriginal peoples’ assistance of Chinese railway workers since childhood and learned from the elders of Native communities more stories about the enduring bond between the Chinese and First Nations during his research trip for the book in the Cheam nation by Hope and Chilliwack (Preface and Afterword). Based on these stories over many years, Wong delineates the mutual acceptance between the two communities in this fact-based fiction. When blasting off the mountain face to clear a passage for the railway near Castlegar, Chinese labourer Chan Ah Foo lapses into unconsciousness. Indian men give him medicine and food and return him to the Chinese community when he regains health. The gift of a cedar hat in the Coast Salish Nation style from the native people reminds Ah Foo and his mother of the kind-heartedness of native people and the spirit of brotherhood. The harmonious relationship continues when Gee-mun Ken, the second son of Ah Foo’s sister Mimi and Wong Ah Sam, is engaged to Heather from the Nootka people near Ucluelet, who is warmly welcomed into the Wong family in Victoria and included as a family member in the family photo on the Chinese New Year of 1920. The novel not only foregrounds the Chinese-Native liaison, but in its unique graphic form, continues the oral tradition of the First Nations people (See the review of Chief Leonard George of Tsleil-Waututh Nation on the back cover of the novel).
evident manner, the unevenness also reflects the dominant norms of racialized heterosexuality constructed within patriarchal frames and their exclusion of sexual and social alternatives.

Read in relation to and against each other, Lee’s Anglophone and Zhang’s Sinophone texts, on the one hand, work together to draw attention to the racial and gender prejudice and stereotypes present in both communities. The Chinese are in danger of re-directing and imposing the oppression and exclusion they suffer onto their Native counterparts. On the other hand, these two Chinese Canadian novels depart from each other in racial and gender politics when Anglophone and Sinophone writers offer different standpoints toward racial discrimination and sexual normalization in their texts. Examining the intersections of race and sex in the field of heterosexuality offers us new openings for understanding how normative meanings of family, gender, and nation have emerged at particular historical conjunctures. In what follows, I will take note of the absence of Native women for the most part of Chinese life in Canada and uncover the challenges and obstacles underlying the romantic liaisons that did take place. My intention here is to interrogate the role that the First Nations play in the imaginary of the multilingual Chinese Canadian community in their alternative writing of the history of Chinese immigrants through interactions with marginalized First Nations communities and white society.

**An Uncommon Past**

The sexual and marital union between early Chinese labourers and First Nations women is, in Henry Yu’s phrase, an “uncommon past,” “less common . . . in the sense of rarely remembered, ignored, or erased, but also uncommon in terms of being unique, different, or not assimilated into a common narrative” (“Refracting” 6). Official records of Chinese-Native intermarriages since the late nineteenth century existed sporadically, giving us only sketchy details. The Chinese
Canadian historian Lily Chow is among the first to systematically study the common-law arrangements and intermarriages of Chinese-Native couples in British Columbia from 1880 to 1950. She identifies several intermarriages in the Bulkey Valley and the Omineca region in the first two decades of the 1900s from the church records compiled by a Catholic nun, Sister Elaine. Chow also identifies a few cases in other regions like Prince Rupert through personal interviews with the descendants of Chinese-Native couples (L. Chow, “Interrmarriage” 349; Sojourners 110). Building upon the research of Chow and other scholars, historian Jean Barman documents Chinese-Native intermarriages in a more comprehensive manner. She draws approximately thirty records from miscellaneous resources of manuscript censuses, land records, school records, family stories, written and oral recollection, church records, and missionary accounts from 1865 to 1901 in the hinterland of British Columbia. The statistics demonstrate that at least “one in six Chinese men” in late-nineteenth-century British Columbia “engaged in intimacy leading to family formation . . . with an indigenous woman” (Barman, “Beyond” 47).

The first influx of more than four thousand Chinese in the early days of the gold rush, mostly in the regions of placer mines, created prime opportunities for Chinese-Native liaison in British Columbia. Nearly a quarter of the Chinese men who married Native women in the second half of the nineteenth century were miners. Unions with local Native women introduced newly-arrived Chinese men to the Indigenous community and enhanced their social life. Aside from being intimate partners, these women were useful helpmates (Barman, “Beyond” 54). Their daily

34 See Table 3 “Summary of relationships between Chinese men and indigenous women in nineteenth-century British Columbia” (Barman, “Beyond” 48-49).
35 Ibid.
duties may have included housekeeping, trapping fur, working at the mine, and running a family store that provided settlers and miners with groceries and horse supplies. As placer mining declined, fish canneries were established in the coastal areas in the 1870s, providing another major venue where Chinese men and First Nations women worked together. While First Nations men went fishing in the rivers and sea, Chinese men and First Nations women mostly stayed behind in the canneries. The Chinese took charge of butchering and cutting, and First Nations women were responsible for scrubbing, trimming, washing, and canning (L. Chow, “Interrmarriage” 348). First Nations women were sometimes the co-workers of Chinese men and sometimes their subordinates. Given the seasonal nature of fishing, most canneries implemented a contract system that subcontracted the work to the Chinese who dominated the cannery crew in order to shift the cannery manager’s burden of personnel recruitment and financial risks and resolve labour shortages (L. Chow, Chasing 27). The contract system allowed Chinese workers to employ Native women for cleaning and canning. Carrying out menial tasks side by side on a daily basis, the two groups developed mutual affection in the exchange of “‘cursing’, laughing, teasing and eyeing” (L. Chow, “Interrmarriage” 348).

If the workplace provided the immediate environment for the growth of loving relationships, discriminatory legislation and racist policies constituted the broad background against which Chinese-Native romance developed. The Chinese community in Canada has historically been infamous for its sex imbalance. A significant number of Chinese men emigrated to Canada in the

---

36 For the role that Native women played in the life of Chinese miners, see Barman, “Beyond” 51-55 and the audio records in the British Columbia Archives. For example, cassette T0315:0001, “The Riverboat Era on the Skeena River Period Covered: 1880-1912,” records Joe Merryfield’s story about a Chinese gold miner and his Indian wife, Emma, who cared for the household at Manson Creek.
late nineteenth century due to “pushing and pulling” forces. During the late Qing dynasty, Chinese people, especially in the disaster-stricken south, lived in a hostile domestic environment of internal strife and foreign invasions. They were meanwhile attracted by promising opportunities in North America made possible by the gold rush and railway construction.\(^\text{37}\) In this early wave of immigration, with the exception of a small group of merchants, Chinese men landed alone, either too young to marry or unable to afford to bring their families.\(^\text{38}\) Women did not exceed one percent of the 1,577 Chinese people on Vancouver Island in 1860, and they constituted just over one percent of the 10,482 Chinese people in British Columbia in 1885 (A. B. Chan 50; Barman, “Beyond” 42). Despite a slight increase in the early 1900s, the number of adult Chinese women admitted into Canada decreased in general.\(^\text{39}\) In 1911, the male-female ratio of the Chinese in Canada was 2,790 men to 100 women, about 24 times higher than that of the Canadian population in general (P. Li, Chinese 65).

The paucity of women can be partially attributed to traditional female obligations that circumscribed them within the domestic domain in patriarchal Chinese society. Women were born as daughters serving the parents or, in destitute circumstances, sold as servants, concubines, or prostitutes; they became wives at an early age and cared for husbands, parents-in-law, and children (A. Chan 31). Retaining women and children in the village was not only for the purpose

\(^{37}\) For pushing and pulling forces that drove the first wave of Chinese migration to Canada, see P. Li, Chinese 17-23; A. B. Chan, chapter 1.

\(^{38}\) Even among the few merchants, all of them did not arrive with their wives. While merchants constituted five percent of the Chinese admitted to Canada between 1885 and 1902, wives accounted for less than one percent (P. Li, Chinese 63).

\(^{39}\) For age and sex of Chinese immigrants admitted annually to Canada between 1907 and 1924, see Table 5.1 (P. Li, Chinese 66). For the sex ratio and nativity of Chinese in Canada from 1881 to 1991, see Table 5.2 (P. Li, Chinese 67).
of securing the continuous influx of remittances from male wage earners in North America, but also a practice closely aligned with the Confucian philosophy that centred around the harmony and stability of the family and, by extension, the broader socio-political environment (Go et al. 17).

However, the rigidity of sex roles based on Confucian family ideology is not the major reason for the dearth of Chinese women in Canada. What excluded Chinese women at a fundamental level were the formidable financial and social costs of immigration. For Chinese labourers with meagre wages (a Chinese labourer made less than half of what a white worker made), the enormous cost of cross-Pacific passages was prohibitive. With the completion of the transcontinental railway in 1885, an already difficult situation took a turn for the worse as the Chinese labourers began to be seen as dispensable and even as threatening to White Canada. The already limited opportunities for family reunion were further reduced by the increasing Head Tax imposed by the federal government to tighten Chinese immigration, from $50 in 1885 to $100 in 1900 and rising to the forbidding amount of $500 in 1903. The notorious 1923 *Chinese Immigration Act*, also known as the *Chinese Exclusion Act*, completely denied Chinese entrance to Canada during the 24 years it was in force. For the fortunate few who could afford the financial cost, bringing wives to Canada was not easy in such an inhospitable social climate. While Chinese men were the targets of abuse, attacks, and anti-Asian riots, Chinese women occupied an even lower social status and were stereotyped negatively as “slave girls, concubines, or prostitutes” (P. Li, *Chinese* 75; Go et al. 19). As Won Alexander Cumyow points out, “the Chinese have a very high regard for the marriage relationship. . . . A large portion of them would bring their families here, were it not for the unfriendly reception they got here during recent years which creates an unsettled feeling” (qtd. in A. B. Chan 50). The unwillingness of many
Chinese wives to join their husbands, therefore, does not indicate their reluctance for permanent settlement in Canada as anti-Chinese discourses claimed. Despite their long-term separation from their husbands and their high esteem for marriage and family, these women did not come to Canada for fear of racial bigotry and sexist discrimination (A. B. Chan 50).

The prohibitively high financial and social costs of bringing Chinese families into Canada were designed to control the Chinese population while meeting the demand for a continuous supply of cheap labour. The harsh restrictions on Chinese women enabled Canadian employers to lower the cost of reproduction and increase the efficiency of production. Once Canada procured the initial labour force by recruiting a large number of cheap Chinese immigrants, making it difficult for them to bring their families from China substantially cut down the expense of labour reproduction and relieved the state of the financial liability for sustaining families (P. Li, Chinese 76). Unlike the slave economy of the American south that sanctioned reproduction between black men and women, the late-nineteenth-century capitalist system in Canada precisely “benefited from the sexual subordination of Asian workers by passing on the costs of their social and sexual reproduction to their households in their homelands and profiting from their dependence on commercialized intimacies” (Koshy 8). In addition, as Peter Li points out, enforced bachelorhood exerted debilitating psychological effects on Chinese immigrants and turned them into docile, uncomplaining workers ready to toil through harsh conditions (Chinese 76).

Skewed gender ratios provided few marital options for members of the Chinese community, a predominantly bachelor society for nearly a century. Bereft of normal family life, Chinese men were compelled to turn to First Nations women to fulfill their sexual and emotional needs. Lily
Chow attributes the emergence of interracial romance to the loneliness and isolation that Chinese labourers suffered in their new surroundings and to the generosity and compassion of First Nations women. She maintains that even the strong, supportive bonds of kinship and friendship among the men could hardly compensate for the deprivation of familial warmth, female companionship, and loving intimacy (L. Chow, *Sojourners* 6, 110-11; “Interrmarriage” 348). In such circumstances, the care and affection shown by First Nations women provided single Chinese men with “a sense of belonging and acceptance”; various relationships were thus established from temporary cohabitation to long-term formal marriages (L. Chow, “Interrmarriage” 348-49).

While the isolation of Chinese men largely explained their inclination toward First Nations women, the picture would remain incomplete without asking why, apart from their generosity and compassion, the latter were willing to accept the Chinese. This oft-neglected side of the story is equally important, especially considering the sexist provisions of the *Indian Act*. There were few distinctions between male and female Indians in early legislation until 1850, when Indianness was first defined along gendered lines, “so that Indian status depended either on Indian descent or marriage to a male Indian” (Lawrence 50; Jamieson 8). After Canadian Confederation, the *Indian Act* of 1869 (also known as the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act*) initiated legal provisions that regulated Indian women under separate terms and penalized them for marrying non-Indians. Whereas an Indian man maintained his status and enabled his non-Indian wife to gain full Indian rights and status upon marriage, an Indian woman who married a non-Indian person would lose her Indian status and band rights, unless she was subsequently the
wife or widow of a status Indian (Jamieson 7-8; L. Chow, “Interracial” 353). The increasingly restrictive and repressive legislation was designed to diminish the Indian and half-breed population on reserves “as part of the government’s stated policy of doing away with reserves and of assimilating all native people into the Euro-Canadian culture” (Jamieson 13). The fact that some First Nations women voluntarily chose Chinese partners, at the risk of relinquishing their own and their offspring’s Indian status, is worth pondering.

In a public lecture delivered at the University of Toronto in 2011, Senator Lillian Eva (Quan) Dyck, daughter of a Chinese father Yok Leen Quan and Cree mother Eva Muriel McNab, revealed the reasons underlying her mother’s decision to become Quan’s second wife. Born on the Gordon reserve of Saskatchewan, McNab experienced the dire living conditions of the reserve. In order to protect her children from racism and abuse, she concealed their Indian identity, pretending they were Chinese, even as she presented herself as the descendant of her Scottish great-great-grandfather. Similarly, Maries Joseph Lee from the Qayqayt reserve in New Westminster, BC, also covered up her Coastal Salish identity and that of her children given her painful childhood experience in Kamloops Indian Residential School. A young orphan, Maries was sent to the residential school, which disciplined students by enforcing Christian morals and Victorian ideals and humiliated or even punished them for holding on to their native language and heritage. After high school, Maries went to Vancouver with her sister Dorothy. Because of their Asian-like appearance, the sisters were often mistaken for Chinese or Hawaiians of Asian descent. Maries tacitly acknowledged what people thought and passed for Chinese as a waitress.

---

40 Chinese women underwent similar treatment in the 1914 Naturalization Act, which stipulated the nationality of the husbands as the decisive factor in determining that of their wives. Accordingly, “a Chinese woman [sic] with Canadian citizenship automatically became an alien by marrying an alien Chinese” (P. Li, “Chinese” 370).
She started a family with Arthur Lee, a third-generation Chinese, and never disclosed her Native background or her life on the reserve to her children. Her daughter, Rhonda Larrabee, grew up in Chinatown without knowledge of her Native heritage. Not until Rhonda became a mother herself did Maries tearfully confess the shame “that she kept hidden to spare her children of that painful reminder of her past” (A. Lee 56). The stories of Eva Muriel McNab and Maries Joseph Lee illustrate that the Chinese-Native sexual and marital unions were not necessarily irrational acts of passion. The intentional concealment of Native identity reveals the dark side of the bond between the two minority groups forged not only for love and companionship, but, more importantly, for economic security and social advancement in the face of tremendous odds.

Unfortunately, compared with the relatively well-preserved history of European-Native intermarriages and their Métis descendants, the history of intermarriages between Chinese and First Nations people after Confederation, though not an uncommon phenomenon, has been insufficiently documented. This inadequate documentation is the result of a combination of factors, including “the ambiguity and disregard surrounding newcomer-indigenous relationships more generally, the dismissive attitudes towards both Chinese and indigenous British Columbians, most unions’ location in the hinterland, low English literacy levels among Chinese men and indigenous women . . . and the common use of shortened names for Chinese men” (Barman, “Beyond” 47). Most importantly, such a dearth is a direct consequence of the fact that

---

41 For Maries Joseph Lee’s story, see A Tribe of One, Wright, and A. Lee.

42 Similar phenomenon can be found in the intermarriage between the aboriginal Maori women in New Zealand and Chinese men in the early twentieth century. According to Manying Ip’s study, courtship did not play an important role in these relationships due to the language barrier, and Maori women usually knew the Chinese men’s customary practice of marrying young and sending remittances home. In this context, their willingness to marry Chinese men demonstrated the Maori community’s impoverished and insecure social conditions. Another reason for these intermarriages was the gentle and family-centred character of Chinese men as ideal fathers. See Ip 8-9.
these Chinese-Native liaisons were often short-lived. The obstacles to permanent union came from both sides, especially the Chinese side. Lily Chow observes that in spite of the discriminatory Canadian legal system, many First Nations families showed a more favourable attitude toward their daughters’ choice of marriage partners. In comparison, their Chinese counterparts were less open and tolerant and their opposition stronger. They often alienated their fellow countrymen who lived with First Nations women and dismissed such behaviour as “inconsiderate and immoral” (L. Chow, “Interrmarriage” 354). This prejudicial indoctrination rendered many Chinese men rather conservative in choosing marital partners. Dock Yip recollected that his merchant father Yip Sang once adored the Indian chief’s daughter who made him apple pies every time he visited the Chinese workers’ major encampment in Yale; yet Sang insisted that he would never marry an Indian woman and ended up with four Chinese wives (J. Li 18-19). Even though setting up a second family in Canada was an acceptable practice in light of the polygamous tradition in ancient China, the Chinese wife was always granted the privilege of being the first, legal wife and, accordingly, had the responsibility to manage the household with the remittances sent back by her husband while waiting for his eventual return.

The departure of Chinese men not only placed their First Nations wives and non-marital partners in vulnerable positions, but also victimized the offspring, who were bereft of connections to their communities of origin. When the relationship was discontinued, the children were mostly cared for by the mother or Native relatives. While sharing with other Native children the unfavourable conditions of the reserve, some of these mixed-race offspring were emotionally humiliated and even sexually abused because of their Chinese-Native parentage (L. Chow, “Interrmarriage” 355). The fragile ties to the Native community were further severed due to the loss of status from the gender discrimination of the Indian Act. Bonita Lawrence views the loss of status as having a
different, yet similar assimilatory effect on Native families as residential schooling: “While some individuals have family members who eventually returned to their reserves after years of dealing with the devastation of residential schooling, loss of status is a central reason why significant numbers of Native people are permanently urban” (112; original emphasis). Meanwhile, it was difficult for these children to be accepted by the Chinese communities in both Canada and China. For Vancouver-born Lil’wat elder Judy (Gum Fong) Joe, who was sent to her father’s village in Guangdong at the age of five, life in her Chinese step-family was unbearably tough. An unwelcome outsider, she was dominated by ten people in the household and frequently beaten like a slave. She made several attempts to run away after she was fourteen. Eventually, she stole her passport from her stepmother and returned to Canada via Hong Kong against all the odds. She confessed, “Although I am mostly Chinese, China is not my home; not my family” (Cedar).

More fortunate than Joe, Musqueam elder Howard E. Grant had understanding relatives on his father’s side. Nonetheless, he still sensed the strong feeling of the general Chinese community about the purity of lineage and the inferiority of mixed-blood offspring.43 Without support from the Chinese side, mixed-race children were severed from Chinese language, history, and cultural heritage.

The filmmaker’s notes on the documentary Canadian Steel, Chinese Grit recount a curious phenomenon in Lytton, a boom town during the years of railway construction and a gathering place now for First Nations people. When the production team was having dinner, the owner of the restaurant, a recent immigrant woman, told them about the absence of Chinese people with

---

43 For the stories of Joe and Grant, see their interviews in Cedar and Bamboo.
Chinese names in Lytton, though many of them possessed Chinese features and perhaps Chinese heritage. The team later learned the reasons behind this phenomenon from a senior Native guide in the museum, who offered tourists horseback rides into the mountains and related stories about the railway labourers. The old man was very familiar with the early history of Native people and Chinese immigrants:

I have heard about these people from other Indians who live here. When the railroad was built through here, the Chinese workers had no family with them. They weren’t allowed to bring their wives or children to Canada, so some of them lived with Indian women, had children with them. The children, born out of wedlock, took their mother’s name. So none of them had Chinese names. You’ll see that some of the people here have Chinese features. There are a number of families with Chinese blood. There [sic] ancestors were Chinese. But they don’t like other people to ask them about it. (J. Li 212-13)

The filmmaker’s notes close with genocentric assurance about the Chinese identity of the “descendants of the dragon” regardless of their name or generation based on their phenotypically “Chinese” features (J. Li 212-13). However, the very existence of people of Chinese-Native blood without Chinese names matters. It signals unsettling moments in Canadian history, when lonely, isolated Chinese men and poor, oppressed Native women sought each other out for intimate companionship, material goods, and social advancement against racist and sexist legislation. This history has receded into the background because so many Chinese men eventually abandoned their Native partners, and these women and their children suffered debilitating consequences as a result. The stories are not lost in the sense of perpetual removal from family traditions and memories; the loss is rather indicative of agonizing experiences that lead people to be ashamed of the past and believe that “it was better to never mention [it] . . . at all” (Wright 52). Senator Dyck made an appeal in her talk arguing that the Chinese-Native
intermarriages are a forgotten aspect of history that ought to be recovered and taught, so that the mixed-race descendants of these unions “can feel proud of their history and heritage.”

Primitivizing Natives, Declining Stereotypes

As part of the effort to retrieve this oft-neglected history, Ling Zhang’s *Gold Mountain Blues* won a series of Chinese literary awards and received international attention. In the same year of Penguin’s launch of *Gold Mountain Blues* in English, Claude Payen’s French translation, *Le rêve de la montagne d’or*, was published by Belfond. Though both translations stay close to the Chinese text, the English and French versions nonetheless present disparate representations of the Native girl Sundance. Watching Sundance wash her hair in the river in early spring, Kam Shan is taken aback: “Tianye, hongfan de nüzi zhen gou man, jinggan yong zheme leng de shui xitou, ye bupa de toufeng” (L. Zhang, *Jin* 227; emphasis added). The word “man” (蛮) originated in classical Chinese as a generic name for minority peoples in the south. The ancient Chinese conceived the world as a superior centre of Central States (*zhongguo*) surrounded by four regions on the periphery populated by barbarian peoples of man, yi, rong, and di from south, east, west, and north. According to *Liji*, “[t]hose on the south were called Man. They tattooed their foreheads, and had their feet turned in towards each other. Some of them (also) ate their food without its being cooked” (Legge 229). Eating raw food, the man people of unusual physical features straddled the line between human and animal and exhibited a low degree of civilization. Using the animal radical for reptiles, the ethnonym man unveils “a mentality that integrated the concept of civilization with the idea of humanity, picturing the alien groups living outside the pale of Chinese society as distant savages hovering on the edge of bestiality” (Dikötter 4). In modern usage, however, man is seldom associated with barbarism and the derogatory meaning is softened to rough, daring, or reckless.
The ambiguous meaning of *man* in *Gold Mountain Blues* is rendered manifest in its English and French translations. Harman makes visible *man*’s etymological association with barbarism in her English translation: “Good heavens, these Redskin women were *barbaric*! How could she wash her hair in such frigid water and not worry about catching cold?” (L. Zhang, *Gold* 272; emphasis added). Payen, in contrast, almost entirely rids the word of its derogatory barbarism in his French translation: “Ciel! Quel *courage*, soupira Jinshan, pour oser se laver ainsi dans l’eau froide, au risque d’attraper un rhume!” (L. Zhang, *Rêve* 312; emphasis added). The metamorphosis of *man* to the laudatory term *courage* in the French rendition recuperates Sundance from an uncivilized Native woman and resurrects her as a daring girl with bravery and strength. When put together, Harman’s and Payen’s divergent interpretations of *man* intriguingly reveal Kam Shan’s ambivalent attitudes to Sundance, and, by extension, that of early Chinese immigrants toward Native women. Such ambivalence emerges at a moment of identity crisis generated by the denial of full citizenship to Chinese immigrants by the Canadian government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the face of this crisis, Native women are deployed to perform paradoxical roles. On the one hand, whereas the antagonistic, oppressive white society views Chinese labourers in terms of the “yellow peril” and excludes them from entitlement to citizenship, Native people save the Chinese with generosity and audacity and admit them into harmonious Native communities as equal members. On the other hand, Native women are

---

44 The divergence recurs in the English and French translation of the novel. Another example can be found in Kam Shan’s thoughts when Sundance asks Kam Shan to buy her a present from the town, a round black hat with a turned-back brim and a feather: “*Jinshan xinxiang hongfan de nüzi shizai shi yanjie duanqian, zheyang xiaoxiao yi yang dongxi jiù dafaku guoqu le*” (Zhang, *Jin* 229). Whereas Harman retains the original meaning “Kam Shan thought to himself that these Redskin girls were too easily pleased by fripperies,” Payen changes it to “*Les jeunes filles peaux-rouges n’étaient vraiment pas exigeantes*” (These Redskin young girls are not really exigent) (Zhang, *Gold* 275; *Rêve* 315).
viewed as barbaric alien others who have to be abandoned and disavowed in order to uphold the purity of Chinese lineages. These women are at once generous saviours and nurturers as well as barbaric others who threaten Chinese purity.

To examine the ambivalent feelings of love and contempt exhibited in the two Chinese Canadian novels, I would like to employ the familiar notion of stereotype invented by the French printer Firmin Didot in 1798. Composed of its Greek roots “solid” and “type,” the word “stereotype” originated as a printing term to describe a mode of printing that used a solid plate or type-metal cast from the surface of mobile types into fixed form for mass reproduction (OED). Its usage was extended to the cognitive process in Walter Lippmann’s Public Opinion, designating “a form of perception” preceding “the use of reason” (qtd. in R. Chow, Protestant 52). Lippmann initiated the intersubjective turn of this technical term and deployed it in a descriptive sense; it remained an effective means of economizing information processing and mentally organizing the multifaceted, confusing realities of modern societies. While this neutral sense withered away, the term was rendered predominantly pejorative in the hands of social psychologists and saturated with biases and prejudices upholding the interests of certain groups. Stereotype then generally points to “[a]ttitudes which result in gross oversimplifications of experience and in prejudgets,” “an exaggerated belief associated with a category . . . to justify (rationalise) our conduct in relation to that category” (OED; Allport 191).

45 For Rey Chow’s examination of the evolving usage of the word “stereotype” by Lippmann and social psychologists, see Protestant 52-53.
In the course of the linguistic metamorphosis of the word “stereotype,” a paradox arises that might help the politics of stereotyping. Whereas one of the defining features of stereotype is the process of duplication and imitation in an unchanging, preconceived form, its operating mechanism precisely relies on what is contradictory to the presumed consistency and invariance. Rey Chow identifies the dangerous potential of stereotype in constructing racial stereotypes as its capability to engender new realities by “conflat[ing] these two realms of representational truisms—the conventional and the formulaic, on the one hand, and the creative and the original/originating, on the other” (Protestant 58). The generative function is largely realized through deliberate isolation and enlargement of certain components as the focus of attention. “[A]n essential untruth” is produced, as the American sociologist W. I. Thomas observes the method of the artist and caricaturist that the experts of the yellow press follow, “by isolating and over-emphasizing certain features of the original without getting clean away from the copy. By this principle an individual or institution is isolated for intensive and unremitting attention” (492-93).

I conceive Lee and Zhang’s portrayal of Native women as stereotypical, not necessarily in a pejorative sense, but as a way of centering on the visual images that are partially amplified and enlarged in the depiction, that is, the images concerning the Native women’s intimate association with animals and nature. Both girls are dressed in animal-skin clothes. Kelora “was wearing a crude cape made of a worn animal skin. A long blanket served as a skirt and covered her bare feet” (S. Lee, Disappearing 3). When Sundance gets up, she “put on leather boots, a sturdy linen skirt and a deerskin cloak dyed ochre yellow” (L. Zhang, Gold 256). The two girls’ appearance and movements are delineated in what Terry Goldie calls “soft primitivism,” primitivism that depicts the images of the indigene with reference to “the delicate birds, made pure by idyllic
communion with the beauties of the soft” instead of “the hardy bears and buffalos” (30-31). Kelora’s eyes are as friendly as “a deer’s soft gaze;” she sometimes “moved gracefully, swaying from side to side, small intense movements like a little brown bird,” and sometimes wandered at a brisk, buoyant pace “like deer foraging through new pastures, like children” (S. Lee, Disappearing 3,14). Sundance’s hearing is “sharper than an elk’s,” and, in Kam Shan’s dream, she runs “with the agile gait of a deer” (L. Zhang, Gold 260, 467). Moreover, both girls own a secret language to communicate with nature. Kelora possesses “a peculiar intuition for locating gravesites whose markers had long ago deteriorated” as well as “her own private language—neither chinese nor indian, but from deep within the wildness of her soul” (S. Lee, Disappearing 14). For Sundance, God is more likely to be found “in a bird’s wing than in church,” and she enjoys talking with blue jays: “What are you trying to tell me? Is my dad coming?” (L. Zhang, Gold 259, 260). Lying down on the ground, she recognizes the great Earth sighing for spring: “The Earth had been asleep for too long and needed to turn over. When that happened, the grass would green, the flowers would open, the brown bear and the elk would come out of the forests and the blue jay would no longer need to skulk amid the dark branches” (L. Zhang, Gold 261). In addition, her father’s canoe is “a simplistic evocation of nature in opposition to white technology” (Goldie 21). This is evident in that excellence of the canoe is attributed less to the technical skills of its builder than to the ram’s horn dance and hymn performed before its construction to express gratitude to the ancestors and the heavenly spirits of the earth, wind, trees, and water. Sundance’s father is one of the best craftsmen, because “[o]nly he could move the spirits of his ancestors with his chanting so that the ancestors became the knife and axe in his hand” (L. Zhang, Gold 257). The novelistic representation of Native women’s resemblance to animals and their close link with nature fulfills to a large extent both “the gendered stereotype of
female connectedness to the land” and “the racial stereotype of Native North American
correlation to the land” (Dariotis 193).

Such representations subject Native women to primitive status in the evolutionary landscape in
terms of Johannes Fabian’s concept of temporalization. In his seminal book *Time and the Other*,
Fabian critically examines the process of temporalization as “a complex praxis of encoding
Time” (74). He asserts the importance of time, not because it is necessitated by the spatial
dispersal of human cultures, but because of its distancing effect: “it is naturalized-spatialized
Time which gives meaning (in fact a variety of specific meanings) to the distribution of humanity
in space” (Fabian 25). Fabian analyzes the denial of coevalness, or what he calls “allochronism,”
exhibited in the disjunction between anthropologists’ research and their writing, a disavowal that
permanently excludes ethnographic intersubjectivity (72-74). While the intersubjective contact
occurring within the same temporal framework is a necessary condition for fieldwork, such
coevalness is nevertheless suppressed in the scientific report. In the systematic production of
“objective” knowledge, the use of “the Typological Time”—time measured by “socioculturally
meaningful events” and underlying the familiar binaries of “preliterate vs. literate, traditional vs.
modern, peasant vs. industrial”—reduces native people to primitives in the lower rank of
temporal hierarchies (Fabian 23). Despite the temporal or spatial “prior-ity” associated with the
etymological meaning of generic descriptors of Indigenous people, Mary Louise Pratt maintains,
the de facto priority lies in the settlers (398). The indigenous people were only “first” or
“already” there with reference to the settler’s temporality and the “relational status as
‘indigenous’ depends on the perdurance of that prior, nonrelational self-identity” (Pratt 398).
In the meantime, the temporal disjunction is spatialized through the geographical location of the Native tribes. In *Disappearing Moon Café*, Kelora and her father live a great distance from urban Chinatown and Wong’s family restaurant. Eleanor Ty discerns Lee’s use of a more “ornate,” “flowery,” “lyrical,” and “melodramatic” style in the parts of the novel that depict the romance between Gwei Chang and Kelora. She thus reads the romance as less a reality than a dream-like fantasy, resonating with seventeenth and eighteenth-century captivity narratives of American women captured by Indian tribes: “an encounter with noble savages” (Ty, “Revising” 178). If we view Gwei Chang as an accidental captive, then the location of the tribe provides a perfect spot for captivity. Situated “high up on the cliff side of a mountain overlooking the water,” Kelora’s cabin offers a stunning view with its “delirious heights and bottomless depths,” making Gwei Chang “dizzy with joy” (S. Lee, *Disappearing* 5, 10). The house is not only a place of captivity; more importantly, Marie Lo remarks, it is sustained by a reciprocal economy: Gwei Chang and Kelora provide a rest stop for passersby and share food with the impoverished, and these passing guests leave small tokens of appreciation in return. This two-way exchange is a fluid, equal one based on the seasonal cycles of nature instead of surplus value in capitalistic production and consumption (105-06; S. Lee, *Disappearing* 9-10). The Native land of romantic wilderness maintains a “delicate balance of ecology and economy” in stark contrast with the harshness and exploitation in the city, “where mobility is marked by the racialization of labour, gender, and capital” (Lo 105-06).

The ideological implication of this spatio-temporal alignment is more explicitly demonstrated in the revolution narrative that frames Kam Shan’s romance with Sundance in *Gold Mountain Blues*. Kam Shan falls into the hands of the Natives because of his political standpoint. With a vague idea of saving China from a corrupt dynasty, he attends a fundraising event of Chinese
revolutionaries in Vancouver’s Chinatown. In a burst of impulsive patriotism excited by Sun Yat-sen’s impassioned speech, he joins the Hung Mun (Chinese Freemasons) and cuts off his pigtail as an oath to sever ties with the Qing government and overthrow Manchu rule. But as a result, he is set upon by Chinese Monarchists and thrown into the Fraser River. It is at this point that he is rescued and taken to the village by Sundance’s father. After leaving the village, he comes across the news in *The Chinese Times* about the success of the 1911 Revolution and the Chinese people’s celebration of the first New Year of the Republic of China.

The 1911 Revolution not only overthrew the last imperial Qing dynasty and ushered in China’s republican era, but also marked the rising of *minzu zhuyi*, a racial nationalism that views the Chinese people as a homogenous Han race with “common blood, common language, common religion, and common customs” (Y. Sun 12). As the first doctrine in Sun Yat-sen’s guiding document of the revolution, the Three Principles of the People (*San Min Chu I*), makes it clear that racial nationalism is anti-Manchu on the one hand; the text depicts the Manchus as an inferior race whose rule resulted in the deterioration of the country. On the other, Han nationalism is aimed against foreign powers through racial solidarity. In the Three Principles of the People, Sun uses “red aborigines” repeatedly to warn the Chinese about the danger of racial extinction. In his eyes, the Indigenous people of North America are a vanishing race exterminated by “natural selection”: “Two or three hundred years ago, the American continent was entirely the land of the red aborigines. They were scattered everywhere in large numbers, but after the arrival of the white man on the continent they slowly disappeared until now they are almost extinct” (32). Sun reiterates this point when underscoring the importance of demographics by contrasting the stationary population of China to the rapid growth of the population in foreign countries: “If we can no longer find a solution . . . then, no matter how large China’s area or how
great her population, another century will see our country gone and our race destroyed. Our four hundred millions are not everlasting. Look at the red aborigines, once all over the American continent, now extinct” (54). In the racial hierarchy of Sun, people of colour always occupy the lower position. While the African Blacks and brown Indians were on the verge of decimation, the yellow races of Asia was also oppressed by the powerful whites of Europe and America and may be exterminated in near future like the red aborigines who “are gone” (Y. Sun 87).

Understanding race as biological discourse of lineage and political discourse of nation, Sun’s nationalist revolutionary ideology places Aboriginal people at the very bottom of the hierarchy and raises the spectre of racial extinction for the “civilized” Han Chinese.

Reading Chinese-Native romance in line with the 1911 Revolution, it is not difficult to detect two concurrent plots in Zhang’s novel. Parallel to the apparent plot line of Kam Shan’s eventful experience—his accidental rescue by the Natives, the romantic days with Sundance, and his reluctant departure in the end—is the development of the 1911 Chinese Revolution in its three major stages of preparation, advancement, and primary victory. In his trenchant criticism of “the historico-geopolitical pairing of the premodern and the modern” as an essential organizing apparatus in academia, Naoki Sakai notes that the discourse of modernity is established in opposition to both its historical nonmodern precedent and its geopolitical counterpart of non-West, thus denying “a simultaneous coexistence of the premodern West and the modern non-West” (153, 154). The intertwined narrative of revolution and romance in Gold Mountain Blues resonates with this slippery equivalence between nonmodern and non-West. The parts of non-West and West are now reassigned to the Native tribes and the Chinese respectively. The temporal gap caused by Kam Shan’s disappearance literally separates a premodern Native tribe—an idyllic Peach Blossom land in Canada, so to speak, guarding its tradition of a pastoral
and peaceful lifestyle—from a promising China on its way toward revolution, progress, and modernization.46

The above analysis of the representation of the Native women as stereotypes through temporal-spatial conception is not intended to reinforce the “stereotype of the stereotype” and reduce stereotypes to something always bad and pejorative (Rosello 32). Rey Chow rightly cautions us against a paradox in our act of criticizing stereotyping, that is, “in order to criticize stereotypes, one must somehow resort to stereotypical attitudes and presumptions” (Protestant 57). Our task, Mireille Rosello suggests, is to “decline” the stereotype, decline in its grammatical sense of declension by attending to “the formal characteristics of the stereotype,” and its interpersonal sense, as in declining an invitation, of “an ambiguous gesture of refusal and participation at the same time” (11-13). This dual reference of declining rejects easy denunciation and alerts us to the various forms that stereotyping can assume and different strategies that one should deploy accordingly. The fact that both of these novels exhibit passion for the “primitive” does not mean we are obliged to read this passion in the same way. In fact, although both writers engage in indigenization, very different power differentials underpin this move in the two novels.

The problem of power differentials in stereotyping raises two questions. One must consider, first and foremost, which characters are presented as subjects who impose stereotypes upon others. In Disappearing Moon Café, stereotyping is a mutual process marked by “the comic exchange of racial epithets,” a “parody of the White Man’s racial thinking” (Huggan 37, 38). The first

46 “The Peach Blossom Land” (Taohua yuan ji) is a classical Chinese prose written by renowned Six Dynasty poet Tao Yuanming. The prose recounts the experience of a fisherman who strays into an idyllic peach blossom land. The friendly villagers there live a secluded life and have little knowledge of the political upheavals in the outside world.
encounter between Gwei Chang and Kelora is “a meeting of the savage and coolie” (McKenzie 154). In Kelora’s eyes, Gwei Chang possesses the physical features of a typical “Chinaman,” a disparaging term for a Chinese person. As Chinese American writer Shawn Wong poignantly remarks, “When the Chinese came here they were no longer just Chinese because they threatened the white labor force, a way of life. . . . A ‘Chinaman’ threatened history, culture, and language the way a ‘Jap’ loosed chaos on the world” (69). Kelora internalizes the racial stereotype of the “Chinaman”; like Europeans who perceive the eye shape as the most distinctive physical feature of Asians, she immediately notices Gwei Chang’s eyes and mimics his eyes and accent: “‘My father is a chinaman, like you. His eyes are slits like yours. He speaks like you.’ She spoke deliberately and demonstrated by pulling back the skin beside her dark, round eyes” (Keevak 102; S. Lee, Disappearing 3). Gwei Chang is further associated with hunger—“‘You look hungry, chinaman.’ . . . ‘My father tells me chinamen are always hungry’” (S. Lee, Disappearing 3). For Gwei Chang, Kelora is a “wild injun,” insulting words that relegate her to the object of derision and contempt (3). This intended humiliation has little impact on Kelora, however, since Gwei Chang’s Chinese pronunciation of “injun” as “yin-chin” makes it impossible for her to understand what he means.47 Gwei Chang’s derision takes on an interesting twist when he is bereft of decorum and propriety in starvation. He is reluctant to concede his plight of hunger: “He could tell she was teasing him, and he was offended that she knew more than he did. She could tell he was hungry, that he had no more power left, that in this wilderness he was lost” (3). The threat that he feels does not stem from a fear that Kelora might do him harm but from the realization that he shares an uncanny resemblance to the very Indians he initially disdained as

47 In the Chinese translation of Disappearing Moon Café, “yin-chin” is omitted and expressed vaguely as “jige buxianggan de yinjie” (some irrelevant syllables) (S. Lee, Can 5). Aboriginal woman writer Lee Maracle singles out this word and writes a short story “Yin Chin” (1990) in dedication to SKY Lee and Jim Wong-Chu.
“uncivilized” and “uncouth”: “‘Ahh, he has no manners,’ she exclaimed. He could only blink, astonished by this elegant rebuke from a ‘siwashee,’ a girl, younger than he. It made him feel uncivilized, uncouth; the very qualities he had assigned so thoughtlessly to her, he realized, she was watching for in him” (3-4). Gwei Chang’s futile endeavour to distance himself from the uncivilized other undermines his sense of racial superiority. The derogatory attributes that he assigns to Kelora, ironically, can be applied to him as well, fitting him into the stereotype of the “Chinaman” that he seeks to shatter.

By comparison, in *Gold Mountain Blues* it is mostly the Chinese characters who traffic in stereotypes. Kam Shan is startled once he realizes that he has fallen prey to “Redskins.” He is extremely scared because he has heard stories about “how they scalped people, dug out their hearts, made necklaces of human teeth” (L. Zhang, *Gold* 262). He misperceives the cracked, calloused hand of Sundance’s mother on his forehead as a knife blade and becomes petrified at the thought of his imminent death. He prays: “If you’re going to kill me then do it with one slash, I can’t stand pain, I really can’t stand pain” (263). The Native people he encounters also appear to Kam Shan as simple-minded barbarians who may be easily duped by his lie about his ability to make charcoal: “Redskins were stupid: they had entire forests but they were willing to barter their excellent smoked fish for charcoal” (267). Without Sundance’s accompaniment, even their singing registers with Kam Shan as “the sounds of wild beasts—the roar of a tiger or the howl of a wolf” or “just ear-piercing shrieks or earth-shattering growls” (280). Conversely, one can hardly find any trace of stereotyping from the Native characters in the novel. They always address Kam Shan as Chinese instead of the pejorative Chinaman and treat him with generosity and compassion. Even at the moment of Kam Shan’s abrupt abandonment of her, Sundance exhibits unusual understanding and sensitivity and sends him away on her own.
The question of who stereotypes whom leads to our next inquiry of how stereotypes vary under historical and cultural conditioning. The progression of *Disappearing Moon Café* witnesses the perpetuation of the stereotypes about Native people as Gwei Chang’s ambivalent emotions toward Kelora progress from fear to attachment to repulsion. It is noteworthy that Gwei Chang’s growing attachment to Kelora cannot be solely and self-evidently attributed to her innocent beauty or to her symbolic harmony with mother earth as we might initially think. More importantly, she is an indispensable provider for the family thanks to the aid of her Native relatives, the wealthy, respected family on her mother’s side, who help her Chinese father, Old Man Chen, to live a comfortable life (7). Salmon fishing and processing as the backbone of the Indian livelihood make Gwei Chang “think that he might never starve like a chinaman again” (234). Gwei Chang’s abandonment of Kelora, too, should not simply be dismissed as boredom or unconditional subordination to the imperative of ethnic purity in traditional Chinese society. The turning point of their intimate relationship occurs at the fish camp when Kelora tells Gwei Chang about the coming famine in winter despite the abundant harvest of salmon. At that moment, he no longer esteems the Indian ways which had given him a glimmer of hope for “a rich life” (234). He flinches at prospective hunger and impoverishment with bitterness:

He could see how famine was the one link that Kelora and he had in common, but for that instant, it made him recoil from her as surely as if he had touched a beggar’s squalid sore. The memory of hunger flung him back to that other world again, where his mother’s wretchedness plucked at his sleeve and gnawed through his stomach. In the next instant, he looked at Kelora, and saw animal. His stare hostile, as if he had just recognized her for what she really was. Then in that case, what was he except her prey—
her trap so cleverly woven! He convinced himself that she had tricked him, and he willed himself to blot out those eyes of hers, already frightened and searching. (234-25)

Under the deteriorating economic situation of both Chinese and Native communities, the initial stereotypes that Gwei Chang and Kelora have of each other return in full force. Gwei Chang dehumanizes Kelora for a second time; he can see her only as a savage and an animal with the evil intention to capture some Chinese prey. The letter from Gwei Chang’s mother about a family-arranged marriage provides a convenient excuse that encourages him to leave this land of poverty and return to the land now inhabited by the whites. In this sense, Lee’s apparently contradictory attempt to restore both the Chinese and the First Nations to civility while ultimately reducing Kelora to the stereotype of a Native woman may not be as puzzling as Wei Ming Dariotis thinks (194-95). Due to the aforementioned discriminatory legislation at the end of the nineteenth century, the necessity to survive in the novel, finally, outweighs all other considerations of emotional attachment and spiritual nourishment. The reinforced stereotypes, then, gesture “not only to individual limits but also to the ways in which oppressive social norms and legislative measures—such as the Immigration Act and the Indian Act—have historically scripted and enforced divisions between First Nations and Asian people in Canada” (R. Wong, “Decolonizasian” 163).

Stereotypes of First Nations are, nevertheless, subverted in Gold Mountain Blues as Kam Shan’s contact with them increases. The kindness of Sundance’s mother soon assuages Kam Shan’s initial fears and anxieties. Before he voices his hungry eagerness for food, the mother “had gone to the fire and came back with another piece of fish, bigger than the first, which she put into his bowl” (L. Zhang, Gold 264). Such hospitality is grounded in the prosperity of the family which has access to large shoals of salmon. The racial stereotypes are overtly reversed by the contrast
between the Chinese and Natives. When he hears that Sundance’s grandmother forgave her Chinese grandfather when he left for China, Kam Shan changes his previous assumptions: “[S]ome Redskins had big hearts after all. It was that Chinese who had been heartless and fickle” (273). Back home, his perception of Native people evolves into a more considerate one. When Tak Fat grimaces at the suggestion of finding Kam Ho a “Redskin” wife—“He might as well marry a sow”—Kam Shan disagrees with his father: “Lots of Redskin women are good-looking and hard-working, and lots of Chinese women are ugly and lazy. Don’t tar them all with the same brush!” (357).

These literary representations of the Chinese-Native relationship through the use of stereotypes place into question an idealized vision of cross-racial solidarity based on common minority status. As Karin Lee, co-producer of the documentary Cedar and Bamboo, rightly reminds us, while we tend to pay attention to racism in the mainstream community, we should not ignore the fact that Chinese and First Nations communities may also be racist toward one another (B. Chow 61). It might be rather facile to turn the two communities from “dual outcasts” to “proud and dignified equals” (Cuder-Domínguez and Villegas-López 180-81; Goellnicht 306). The tendency I have tracked here to primitivize Native women as gendered subalterns, temporally and spatially distanced from Chinese men, may risk reproducing, explicitly or implicitly, a power structure not dissimilar to the one in white Canadian society.

When Hysterical Meets Sentimental

The stereotyping of Chinese and Native characters in Disappearing Moon Café and Gold Mountain Blues yields a revealing insight into the passion for the “primitive” these Chinese Canadian writers share. This shared interest, unexpectedly, led to sweeping accusations of
plagiarism against Zhang. In July 2010, some posts on the website “New Threads” claimed that Zhang plagiarized several Anglophone Chinese Canadian literary works about the early lives and experiences of Chinese immigrants in Canada, including Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café*, Denise Chong’s autobiography *The Concubine’s Children* (1994), Wayson Choy’s novel *The Jade Peony* (1995), and Paul Yee’s children’s literature collections *Tales from Gold Mountain* (1989) and *The Bone Collector’s Son* (2003). As the allegations spread rapidly in China and Canada, Penguin Canada commissioned *Gold Mountain Blues*’ English translator, Nicky Harman, to assess and prove them to be “baseless and unwarranted” (“Statement”). However, Penguin’s assessment was not seen as an independent, impartial one by the Anglophone Chinese Canadian authors involved given the potential conflict of publishing interest and corporate investment.

SKY Lee sent a personal request to Penguin to remove controversial passages related to her work, yet was given no satisfactory response (Lee and Yee). In October, Lee, Yee, and Choy filed a lawsuit against Pearson Canada Inc. (the parent company of Penguin), Ling Zhang, and Nicky Harman for copyright infringement.48 While Larissa Lai offers a trenchant critique of the controversy from the viewpoint of cultural appropriation, or what she calls the “protracted birth of Asian Canadian appropriation,” I am more interested in the deployment of the trope of indigenization by two writers for their own purposes (Lai 31). To facilitate my analysis, I would like to turn to Lee’s earlier request to Penguin to remove the contentious passages and to pose the question: What if the controversial scenes of Chinese-Native romance were removed from *Gold Mountain Blues*? This question yields fresh insights into the different roles that the same trope of indigenization may contribute to plot development in the two novels. Such a distinction presents

48 The Toronto Star provided detailed coverage of the *Gold Mountain Blues* controversy; see, for example, Bill Schiller’s report “T.O. Author’s Work under Fire in China;” Tony Wong’s “Zhang Ling’s *Gold Mountain Blues*” and “Seeing Red over *Gold Mountain Blues*.”
a more complex and nuanced picture of the interracial romance between the two minority groups in the early history of Canadian society. Before I proceed, I want to be clear that my interrogation here is not intended as a judgement on the *Gold Mountain Blues* controversy; I do not come down on one side or the other. Through the lens of Chinese-Native romance, I instead attempt to tease out distinct sentiments and concerns of Anglophone Chinese Canadian writers in comparison to their Sinophone counterparts.

In *Disappearing Moon Café*, Kelora’s absence is “hyperconspicuous” (R. Wong, “Decolonizasian” 164). Although the interracial romance lasts only three years, consisting of less than thirty pages in the prologue and epilogue, its impact is palpable throughout the story. Gwei Chang’s sexual relationship with Kelora and his subsequent abandonment of her constitute the roots of incest and miscegenation among the future generations, inducing a decades-long tragedy for the entire Wong family. When Kelora dies, Gwei Chang brings their illegitimate son Ting An back to work as a servant in the family restaurant. Gwei Chang and Mui Lan’s son, Choy Fuk, has been married to Fong Mei for a few years but has no child. Mui Lan places the blame on Fong Mei and arranges for Choy Fuk to sleep with the family maid Song Ang to produce a male heir that would carry on the Wong name. Humiliated and bullied by her mother-in-law, Fong Mei finds comfort in Ting An and gives birth to his children, Beatrice, Suzanne, and John. Meanwhile, Choy Fuk is frustrated by his inability to impregnate Song Ang. With his permission, Song finds another man Woo and bears a son Keeman. Against Fong Mei’s will, Beatrice marries Keeman when he returns from the battle field of World War II, and they have a daughter Kae Ying Woo, the narrator of the story. Ting An eventually discovers his true identity and defiantly rejects the surname of Wong. He leaves the family to marry a French Canadian woman and has a son Morgan. Suzanne, at the age of fifteen, crazily falls in love with her half-
brother Morgan and commits suicide when their deformed baby dies at birth. To a large extent, the plot would not be possible without Gwei Chang’s love affair with Kelora at the outset.

In contrast, Kam Shan’s transient romance with Sundance stands out against the rest of the novel as a rather pleasant interlude. Their out-of-wedlock child exerts no substantial effect on the Fong family and its pure Chinese blood. Not until Kam Shan catches a glimpse of Paul’s year of birth written on the back of the photo that Sundance leaves behind does he realize that he has fathered a son with her. As for Sundance, though we are not told about her subsequent marriage and family after her abandonment, we can infer from her final visit to Kam Shan that she probably lives a rather comfortable life. Her community is not stricken with hunger or poverty as Kelora’s is. She moves to Vancouver and lives with her husband till old age, producing a large family of three sons, two daughters, eight grandchildren, and one great grandson. To a degree, Sundance’s life embodies Fong Mei’s fantasy of “an Indian woman legend”—“If men didn’t make me happy enough, then I could have moved on” (S. Lee, Disappearing 188). One might argue that even with Kam Shan’s experience in the Native tribe removed, the novel would still be able to stand on its own as a relatively complete story.

However, the fact that this romantic interlude is a kind of narrative digression by no means renders it dispensable or superfluous to the larger scheme of the novel. It epitomizes, I contend, what one might call “sentimental survival” in preserving a patriarchal, heterosexual, and racially uncontaminated familial structure. Zhang attributes the alliance between men and women not simply to love but to survival, “drilling a path like an earthworm through the dark, hard life” (Interview by Southern 6). Against the background of the Head Tax, the Chinese Exclusion Act, World War II, and the Chinese Land Reform, what is foregrounded in the novel is “a Fong
family that strives to make a way out in the difficult living condition of poverty and resignation” (L. Zhang, Jin Preface 5). On the one hand, Zhang’s emphasis on survival as the basis of the man-woman alliance echoes Margret Atwood’s famous statement that survival is the primary symbol of Canadian literature. In spite of its multifaceted and evolving usage, the initial meaning of survival for early settlers persists, that is, “hanging on, staying alive” in an environment of danger and hostility (Atwood 41). On the other hand, survival in Zhang’s writing is different from survival that generates unbearable anxiety and fear; it becomes instead a sentimental ideal in Rey Chow’s sense of wenqing zhuyi (literally translated as “warm sentiment-ism”) (Sentimental 17). Chow reads wenqing zhuyi as a unique discursive mode in contemporary Chinese films, referring to “an inclination or a disposition toward making compromises and toward making-do with even—and especially—that which is oppressive and unbearable” (Sentimental 18). Contrary to a Freudian approach to the emotions as a hydraulic releasing of the repressed, the sentimental is “a mood of endurance” about preservation and holding together (R. Chow, Sentimental 18). Essential to it is accommodation—“being accommodating and being accommodated”—which stresses a homely interiority in resistance to an oppressive exteriority (R. Chow, Sentimental 19). In other words, the harsh environment of modern, exploitative cities and hostile, discriminatory host countries strengthens the affective bonds rooted in the household.

An understanding of Kam Shan’s relationship with Sundance in terms of Chinese sentimentalism can be facilitated by a look at some other minor characters, Cat Eyes and the members of the Auyung family. Despite being Kam Shan’s de facto partner, Cat Eyes has not lived up to the expectations of the ideal Chinese wife and thus has long been excluded from Kam Shan’s family in its class hierarchy. A young Chinese girl kidnapped and sold as a child prostitute in
Vancouver’s Chinatown, Cat Eyes escapes the brothel and hides in Kam Shan’s cart. Kam Shan accommodates her because of her persistent begging and her suicide attempt. Their union meets with the stiff opposition of his father, however, and they are forced to live away from the orthodox Chinese community for several years. As the story unfolds, Cat Eyes is gradually admitted into the Fong family. Such admittance is made all the more prominent when compared to May-ying’s experience in Denise Chong’s *The Concubine’s Children*. Like May-ying, Cat Eyes is a waitress in the Lychee Garden Restaurant. When Kam Shan becomes lame and his father’s farm goes bankrupt, Cat Eyes serves as the main provider for the families in Canada and China. However, she differs from May-ying in her relationship with her husband’s extended family. May-ying remains by and large a privileged outsider in her husband Chan Sham’s first family, a “foreign lady” (D. Chong 45). Her fair skin, stylish hair, and tiny figure separate her from the wrinkled, rustic first wife Huang-bo (D. Chong 46). In contrast, Cat Eyes tries to maintain a low profile in order to assimilate into the society of other village women. Although Spur-On villagers can detect her foreignness, to outsiders Cat Eyes seems, at first glance, to be simply one of the ordinary village women: “she wore a sprig of jasmine behind her ear, her blue cotton tunic fastened slantwise across her front, dark blue wide-legged trousers and wooden clogs that clip-clopped along the cobbled road. Even the sling in which she carried Yin Ling was a village-style one, made of black cotton and heavily embroidered with peonies” (L. Zhang, *Gold* 385). After several months’ stay in the village, she even learns to breastfeed like other village women in broad daylight, albeit in a manner where her breasts remain covered. Unlike the rebellious May-ying who frequently associates with various men against Chan Sham’s will, Cat Eyes “could only watch helplessly as Kam Shan caroused with rowdy Redskin women in cowboy boots and Stetsons who sat on his knee, rolling cigarettes for him and putting them between his lips,” and she performs her domestic duties as a wife, “[lighting] the stove and
heat[ing] up the porridge for breakfast” (388). Although later in the novel, Cat Eyes does indulge in mahjong gambling, she nevertheless endeavours to conceal her shame and uphold her reputation by leaving untreated the cervical erosion caused by her earlier life as a prostitute.

Cat Eyes perceives the first glimmers of recognition and appreciation for her efforts to be a good wife in Kam Shan’s home village Hoi Ping. Whereas the remittance to China of May-ying’s wages is taken for granted and her labour goes unnoticed, Cat Eyes’ contribution is acknowledged in public by Kam Shan when she is taunted for illiteracy: “She may be illiterate but she earns good money. Half the fields you bought these last few years came from her wages” (L. Zhang, Gold 391). These words of praise are a lifeline for her that lights up the trip and sets her heart at rest. Cat Eyes’ essential role in the family is further affirmed by Kam Ho, Kam Shan’s younger brother, in his first letter home since enlisting in the army in the Second World War: “Since I joined up, the whole burden of supporting our family has fallen on my sister-in-law, which I feel very guilty about. I do hope my brother will make allowances for her and that you will only be good to each other” (427). Kam Ho’s use of “sister-in-law,” instead of the awkward appellations (“she,” “Hello,” and “You”) he had previously used, acknowledges for the first time Cat Eyes’ wifely status. Cat Eyes sheds blissful tears on being addressed in this way. Cat Eyes’ abiding worry over never being formally married to Kam Shan is dispelled in death. The inscription on her gravestone, “Mrs. Chow, wife of Fong Kam Shan,” finally grants her the title she always longed for (470). The inscription ought not to be dismissed (as Amy tries to do) as merely the result of her grandfather not remembering Cat Eyes’ given name. Rather, it is indicative of Kam Shan’s realization of years of injustice committed against her when he looks through the few personal possessions that she leaves behind: “She had slaved away for the Fong family all these years, and not one of them had honoured her for it” (470). As opposed to
Sundance’s abandonment because of her racial otherness, the long overdue recognition that Cat Eyes receives from the Fongs, in spite of her marked class difference, supports the integrity of the Chinese family, fulfilling its role of legitimate social reproduction.

If Cat Eyes’ initial rejection and final acceptance by the family embody Chinese sentimentalism in its familial sense, the Auyung family elevates the sentimental complex to the level of the nation-state through its influence on the Fongs at critical moments of decision-making and transformation. A conscientious reader might notice that among the changes Nicky Harman makes in her English translation is to present the Auyungs in the opening table of main characters in addition to the Fong family:

Fig. 1 “The Family Tree of Fong Tak Fat” (L. Zhang, Jin n. pag.)
Fig. 2 “Table of Main Characters” (L. Zhang, *Gold* n. pag.)

The generation indicators added before the names of the Fongs and Auyungs provide English readers with a clear genealogy of the two families in the novel. More importantly, by counting Fong Tak Fat instead of his father, Fong Yuen Cheong, as the first generation, the Fongs’ five generations are reduced to four, thus forging a neat correspondence between the two family histories, histories in which the Auyungs repeatedly help to enlighten the Fongs.

The enlightenment tradition begins with the first generation, Auyung Ming. Versed in both Chinese classics and Western subjects, Ming is hired to tutor Fong Tak Fat.49 Under Ming’s teaching, Tak Fat becomes aware of opium’s detrimental effects on the spirit of the Chinese

---

49 In the Chinese preface to the novel, Ling Zhang explains how she came up with the idea of portraying Tak Fat as semi-literate. The initial image of Tak Fat as a stereotypical illiterate labourer in Zhang’s mind altered when she saw a historical photo of Chinese labourers arriving in Victoria. A Chinese worker stood out in the crew, wearing a pair of glasses which, unusually expensive back then, often suggested learning and education. Zhang then decided to give her protagonist some education and instil in him a yearning for knowledge (*Jin* Preface 5).
people and on the Chinese nation. After his father’s death by opium overdose, Tak Fat puts into action his vague idea of venturing to Gold Mountain, heeding Ming’s encouragement: “There’s nothing for you here. Over in Gold Mountain you can at least fight for your life” (L. Zhang, *Gold* 29). Ming’s influence extends to Canada where he himself lives in exile because of his article on constitutional reform. During the speech given by Liang Qichao, a celebrated advocate for constitutional monarchy on the wanted list of the Empress Dowager and her anti-reform supporters, Ming chances upon Tak Fat and expounds on Liang’s speech in language he knows Tak Fat can understand. Shortly after his return from this encounter with Ming, Tak Fat sells his prosperous Whispering Bamboos Laundry and sends the largest share to the North American headquarters of the Monarchist Reform Party. When China marches into the modern era, the mission of enlightenment is passed to Auyung Ming’s son, Auyung Yuk Shan. Yu Shan teaches Tak Fat’s daughter Kam Sau in teacher’s college and lends her a number of books about the people’s revolution as a viable way to resist oppression by imperialists, feudal compradors, and warlords. It is Auyung Yuk Shan’s belief that China’s defeat by the world powers is rooted in ignorance rather than poverty. With his support, Kam Sau, together with her husband and another student of Yuk Shan, build a school for children from destitute families, especially girls. When Kam Sau’s son dies in a Japanese bombing raid, Yuk San does not offer his condolences, but encourages her to teach more students to be heroic “gatekeepers of tomorrow” (461). He vehemently states that “You can’t have hair without a skin. When the eggs are in danger, you protect the nest. If you cried as hard for China as you have for your personal loss, you could save the whole country” (461). We are also told that he may have left Guangdong to join the Communist Party.
While the story of the third generation remains unknown, in the fourth generation, Auyung Wan On, enlightens Tak Fat’s great granddaughter Amy as to her family history rather than the noble ideals of reformation and revolution. Head of the local office for overseas Chinese affairs and professor of sociology specializing in local fortress homes, Wan On accompanies Amy throughout her trip to Hoi Ping and patiently helps her unravel the silent past. With Wang On’s assistance, Amy’s experience is distinct from that of Kae Ying Woo in *Disappearing Moon Café*. Kae’s search for a digestible herbal pill to swallow for enlightenment proves to be futile in the face of an intricate family history laden with infidelity, incest, and suicide. Through a first-person narration, Kae frequently expresses her frustration and apprehension about disclosing the secret in defiance of her elders—“‘You don’t know, A Kae,’ whispers my mother, ‘but there has been much trouble in our family. It’s best that what I tell you does not go beyond these four walls’” (S. Lee 23). Uncovering the dark past risks transgressing the taboo “jia chou bu ke wai yang” (roughly meaning “Don’t air your dirty laundry in public”), a Chinese phrase that pinpoints “the exact area that is being tabooed—not the ‘dirty laundry’ itself but wai yang, the act of showing, brandishing, exhibiting (to the outside)” (R. Chow, *Primitive* 153). In contrast, Amy’s journey into the past is a reassuring discovery. With emphasis on jia (family) instead of chou (dirty secret, shame), the Fongs’ family tree is clean and lucid. The omniscient third-person narration throughout *Gold Mountain Blues* guides readers through the ins and outs of the Fong family and facilitates Amy’s root-seeking trip.

In Zhang’s view, the patriotism inherited intergenerationally in the Fong family is very common among overseas Chinese more broadly. It is as intuitive as saving every cent to send home, since one must defend the country from foreign invasion just as one guards the family when bandits invade one’s home. These unselfish, non-utilitarian acts are only labeled as noble and patriotic
by later generations (L. Zhang, Interview by Southern 6-7). Although Zhang claims this patriotism is intuitive, she nonetheless has to have the Auyungs repeatedly point it out to the Fongs. Specifically, Auyung Yuk Shan lectures Kam Sau about it, telling her “When the eggs are in danger, you protect the nest.” Such identification of the individual household with the nation through the egg-nest metaphor points to the core of Chinese sentimentalism, i.e., “the idealization of filiality” that intimately connects individual households with the national and global map of consanguine communities:

as a predominant mode of subjectivization, filial piety is not simply a matter of respecting one’s biological or cultural elders but also an age-old moral apparatus for interpellating individuals into the hierarchy-conscious conduct of identifying with—and submitting to—whatever preexists them—from the ancestral family to the ancestral land, the province, the country, and the ethnic community in a foreign nation—as authoritative and thus beyond challenge. (R. Chow, Sentimental 22)

The individual’s identification with the family and the nation very much explains the criticism by Chinese critics and readers of the nationalist complex manifest in Zhang’s writing of Chinese immigrants’ history. Xinbang Chen problematizes Zhang’s attempt to enhance national identity in conjunction with the rise of China in the era of globalization. He argues that the novel “perpetuates the stereotypical imagination of the integration of family and nation-state within a grand narrative,” thus being “unable to tease out the heterogeneity of two Canadian-born characters: third-generation Fong Yin Ling and fourth-generation Amy” (X. Chen 111). Chen’s

50 There are quite a few patriotic acts in addition to the aforementioned in Gold Mountain Blues. For example, when Cat Eyes is pregnant for a second time with a possible male heir, Kam Shan secretly signs a contract that sells the unborn baby to a Toishan couple and donates the entire 70 dollars to the anti-Japanese war effort fund. Similarly, his younger brother Kam Ho donates 4,000 dollars that he receives as the sole beneficiary in Mrs. Henderson’s will to the Guangdong Nationalist government to purchase warplanes.
contention is a valid one. Though born and raised in Canada, Yin Ling completely loses her ability to speak English after her stroke and can only speak the Cantonese acquired at home during her childhood. Daughter of an absent father and a licentious mother, Amy initially has no intention to trace roots that are “in half an inch of poor soil on a rock” (L. Zhang, Gold 413). After reading the letters of her ancestors and acquainting herself with the family history, she changes her mind and realizes that “[s]he did have roots, after all” (L. Zhang, Gold 413, 414).

Whereas Disappearing Moon Café closes elegiacally with Gwei Chang’s remorse and wistful reunion with Kelora, Gold Mountain Blues reassures readers with a more cheerful ending, despite the tragic fate of the Fong family in China in the 1950s Land Reform. Amy ultimately overcomes her fear of marriage and decides to hold her wedding, with her Canadian boyfriend Mark, in Tak Yin House, the home of her ancestors. If Disappearing Moon Café is a story about disappearing, or can, in the sense of brokenness and deficiency, Gold Mountain Blues is about being full, or man, which, after numerous waxings and wanings, gestures toward wholeness and togetherness.

The absence of Sundance for most of Gold Mountain Blues not only makes possible an uncontaminated history of the Chinese family, it also contributes to the preservation of the Native family to some extent. While men in the Fong family inherit a common patriotic tradition, women in Sundance’s tribe are bound by a shared experience of abandonment. Sundance’s paternal grandmother, the daughter of a local chief, is married to an English man dispatched by the Hudson’s Bay Company. The marriage is contracted for the purposes of guaranteeing the goods supply for the company, and it lasts for fifteen years. After retirement, the man returns to England and his English wife, leaving behind the seven children he had with his Native wife. Sundance’s maternal grandmother, a Native woman from Barkerville, meets a Chinese gold
panner who often drops by her cake shop and lives with him for many years. When their daughter is born, the Chinese panner has finally found a gold ingot; he gives the mother of his child half the gold and returns to China. Like Sundance’s abandonment by Kam Shan, the Native women characters in *Gold Mountain Blues* are all abandoned by their non-Native partners.

Originating from the Latin roots *ad* (to) and *bandon* (power or control), the word “abandon” may convey two opposite meanings with the slight adjustment of the preposition “ad:” surrendering to power or achieving liberty from constraint (Lipking xvii). According to the duplicity of submission and freedom, the abandoned people “may be banished by the one who controls them (given up by) or they may take the reins entirely into their own hands (given up to)” (xvii; original emphasis). According to Lawrence Lipking’s study, the poetic images of abandoned women, ancient or modern, western or eastern, are mostly of women “both physically deserted by a lover and spiritually outside the law”; their act of letting loose and even shameless behaviour, as judged by orthodox morality and social norms, point toward the foundation of power (xvii). The dual sense of abandonment is most evident in Native women who are profoundly sexualized. “In the extreme case,” Barman points out, “their every act became perceived as a sexual act and, because of the unceasing portrayal of their sexuality as wild and out of control, as an act of provocation” (“Taming” 289).

For the Native women in Zhang’s novel who suffer the unfortunate fate of being abandoned, however, abandonment occurs only in the sense of being forsaken rather than being beyond restriction. Their power does not stem from self-indulgence or being undisciplined, but from the strength to hold together and pull through. With no trace of the surrender-versus-freedom polarization, the Native characters, like the Chinese characters, display a great deal of
moderation, a temperament that “readily translates into affiliate notions of being mild, tender, tolerant, obliging, and forbearing” (R. Chow, *Sentimental* 18). They willingly and faithfully abide by the rules of Native communities and the legacy of their husbands. Sundance’s maternal grandmother barely complains about the Chinese panner. In her eyes, “wherever your ancestors are, that’s your home, and you can’t stop someone going home” (L. Zhang, *Gold* 273). Though her English husband never returns, Sundance’s paternal grandmother never remarries. Instead of feeling desolate and forlorn, she assumes the mission to keep present her husband among their descendants, “her words like a hatchet rigorously chipping away until he was permanently carved into her children’s memories. / Those memories trickled gently into the bloodstreams of her grandchildren too” (260). Zhang understates the hardship that the grandmother experiences as a stranger struggling among her own tribal people when she uses up the money that her husband left with her. What is foregrounded is her contentment and gratification—“she wore a satisfied smile, knowing that she had fulfilled her mission: her children’s children and their children would keep the memories of that man alive a hundred years” (260). As an Aboriginal woman in the late nineteenth century recalled:

Oh, it was hard on Indian wives, I guess,

But they always managed

To raise their children

Even if their husbands finished with them. (qtd. in Barman, “Invisible” 166)

Like her grandmothers, Sundance quietly accepts her unfitness for the Chinese ancestors and understands Kam Shan’s desire to leave her. Her acceptance and understanding are rooted in her deep attachment to home, an attachment that is not exclusive to the Chinese community. Her loving intimacy with her parents arouses Kam Shan’s fond memories of home—“How could
your mum and dad let you leave home?’ . . . ‘Mine wouldn’t let me go far away on my own’” (L. Zhang, *Gold* 270). The strong bond to ancestral land and home that the Chinese and Native characters share, while connecting them affectively, foreshadows the premature end of the interracial romance. After all, “we Indians can never leave our native land,” and “[w]e Chinese can’t leave our native land either” (273). To a degree, Kam Shan and Sundance’s absence in each other’s lives after their separation honours the common commitment to land of the two communities and preserves their distinct life styles. Sundance’s unexpected visit years later is only a disappointment. This now wrinkled grey-haired woman shatters Kam Shan’s long cherished picture of a young, innocent girl—“He had engraved the image on his heart and was sure it would last forever—but with just a few words, this woman had shattered it into small pieces. Even if he picked them all up, he could never put that picture back together again” (511). The harmonious relationship between the Chinese and First Nations perhaps lasts longer in nostalgic imagination than in the harsh light of social reality.

The same yet different deployment of Chinese-Native romance is grounded in SKY Lee’s and Ling Zhang’s respective standpoints on the enduring issues of racial discrimination and cultural identity. Born in Port Alberni, B.C. in 1952, Lee spent her formative years in this “very racist community” (Go et al. 92). She keenly felt her marginality based on gender, race, and class in her “discouraging” pursuit of a Fine Arts degree: “Many instructors wouldn’t give me the time of day because I was a woman. Racist instructors wouldn’t give me the time of day because I was not part of the WASP mainstream culture. People thought I was too young, or too poor” (Go et al. 95). It was in such a sexist and racist socio-cultural environment that the idea of *Disappearing Moon Café* grew (S. Lee, “*Disappearing*” 10). “[Straddling] the shifting locations of being Chinese, Canadian, contemporary, woman, and feminist of colour (etc),” Lee writes the novel as
a “critical” history against “the white, middleclass, heterosexual, malestream perspective” that excludes nonwhite immigrant writings from the Canadian literary canon (S. Lee, “Disappearing” 11-12). 51 She employs language as a site of struggle to give voice to the unspoken. As part of the strategy to achieve this goal, she uses third-person and first-person narration alternatively, so that “the reader’s gaze is never fixed due to these multiple locations, and travels through time and space. This is also a strategy of disrupting the conventional way texts are written and read so that the reader can be made more aware of her subject position. This awareness subverts the tendency toward passive consumption and the colonizing gaze” (S. Lee, “Disappearing” 12-13).

Assuming a different valence from the Chinese-White dyad, the Chinese-Native relationship of intimacy might be read as Lee’s response to racist anti-miscegenation legislation. Immediately before Gwei Chang’s melancholic reunion with Kelora, Lee inserts a significant episode about the 1924 Janet Smith case, in which Chinese houseboy Foon Sing was accused of murdering white nursemaid Janet Smith. This sensational historical event led to the Janet Smith Act that outlawed the employment of Chinese men and white women in the same workplace. Together with immigration and naturalization laws, anti-miscegenation laws prohibited the reproduction of Chinese communities and protected the purity of white women and, by extension, the white nation from the threat of racial mixing (Koshy 2). The proscription of anti-miscegenation laws against white-non-white sexual unions, to a degree, fostered ties among marginalized communities, especially for male Chinese immigrants separated from Chinese female company (Koshy 9-10). However, the failure of the non-white interracial relationship between Gwei

51 Of Friedrich Nietzsche’s three versions of history—“monumental” history, “antiquarian” history, and “critical” history, SKY Lee assumes that “the practice of ‘critical’ history is attentive to the problematics of its production and the interests it serves” (“Disappearing” 11).
Chang and Kelora reveals the ramifications of systemic racism in both mainstream and marginal society and “brings home a self-imposed criticism of racial phobia in the Chinese community” (Chao, Beyond 97). As Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu contends, although the imagined reunion “embraces a dialogical fusion of the two concepts (Gwei Chang’s Chinese roots and Kelora’s indigeneity),” its surrealist nature “takes the reader beyond a physical, empirically perceived experience” and dematerializes “[c]elebratory interracial hybridity” (51). The premature death of the last Wong male child born of an incestuous relationship signals “the end of the patrilinear family line and the collapse of the community from within” (Goellnicht 316).

In contrast to the dystopia of the heterosexual relationship between Gwei Chang and Kelora, Lee envisions in Kae and Hermia’s same-sex relationship “a tangible, realistic lesbian utopic site” “beyond national borders, phallocentric prioritizations, and heterosexual exchange” (Fu 51, 49). As the material site for Kae and Hermia’s alliance, Hong Kong, on the one hand, represents a place of promise and enlightenment for Kae and Beatrice with “possible cultural and sexual alternatives” (Fu 48). On the other hand, Hong Kong’s liminal location at the crossroads of Britain and mainland China and its political uncertainty given the imminent return of the island to the mainland in the 1990s render “the utopian aspects of the implied narrative action highly provisional and far from ‘settled’” (Beauregard, “Emergence” 66). The possibility and failure of the Chinese-Native dyad not only reflect the transgression and entrenchment of racial boundaries in the context of anti-miscegenation statutes, but also challenge patriarchal nomination and sexual normality.

For Ling Zhang, a new immigrant who is not a descendant of Chinese labourers, the aim of her writing of Chinese Canadian history in Gold Mountain Blues is not to denounce racism. In her
eyes, the term “racial discrimination,” like the diagnosis of depression in clinical practice, might be overused in today’s multicultural Canada and is often superimposed upon multifaceted social phenomena in the absence of more accurate explanations (L. Zhang, *Jin* Preface 5; Interview by Zhao 293). While acknowledging racism as a constituent part of history, Zhang believes that reducing to racism the multifacetedness of a historical past risks oversimplification and abstraction. In depicting different racial communities, she considers it essential to focus on “the fate and stories of human beings” (L. Zhang, Interview by Zhao 295). For Zhang, *Gold Mountain Blues* is a story not only of Chinese but of human migration in the global twentieth century. The hardships endured by early Chinese immigrants has global significance, since at the same time, the Irish migrated on a large scale to every corner of the world, and Italians ventured into the New World and helped build the city of Toronto (L. Zhang, Interview by Rui). By examining the histories of human migration, Zhang gives the question of cultural identity so prominent in Chinese Canadian writings a universal, global dimension.

An important message that *Gold Mountain Blues* aims to convey is that peaceful coexistence is a practice that different groups need to learn by getting to know each other. This theme of learning to live together via encounters and communication threads its way through the novel. While Kam Shan differs from other illiterate Chinese labourers in seeing beyond ingrained stereotypes of non-Chinese others and gradually changes his view of Native people during his years in Sundance’s tribe, his younger brother Kam Ho dismantles the whites’ stereotype of the Chinese when working as a houseboy in the Henderson family. The sixth chapter that immediately follows Kam Shan and Sundance’s romance narrates a sexual affair between Kam Ho and Mrs.
Henderson. Set apart by their race and class difference, Kam Ho and Mrs. Henderson initially reproduce the typical Chinese-white hierarchy, which relegates “Orientals” to the position of exotic, inscrutable other with “peculiar” features, clothes, and diet (L. Zhang, *Gold* 315). However, the power dynamic is reversed when the superior white hostess is “conquered” by the houseboy of humble origin. Mrs. Henderson seduces Kam Ho during his sleep and, when he intends to leave, she attempts to commit suicide in order to make him stay. Addicted to opium to ease her bodily ailment, she also grows dependent on Kam Ho physically and emotionally, who becomes “her walking stick, the pillow she rested on, the handkerchief on which she dried her tears” (370). Kam Ho ceases to be a passive servant. Taking the initiative in their sexual relationship, he “stopped feeling that he was at her beck and call and started to feel that she should do things to please him” (360). Meanwhile, Mr. Henderson is no less dependent on Kam Ho, not simply for the latter’s willingness to “listen to his endless repeated jokes and laugh as if it was the first time he’d heard them” (371). Being homosexual in secret, Mr. Henderson is, surprisingly, as much attracted to Kam Ho as his wife.

Kam Ho’s increasing centrality in the Henderson family is built upon physical labour in cooking, washing, cleaning, gardening, and nursing, on the one hand, and, on the other, his mediating position between this often-at-odds couple: “Then he learned to interpose his energy between their conflicting energies, making these three forces instead of two” (346). His indispensible role after 25 years of service is best captured by the tree metaphor: “. . . this Chinese called Jimmy was only a seedling when he first came to her home. No one had expected that after all these

---

52 The sexual affair is highlighted in the English translation of the chapter title, “Gold Mountain Affair.” The Chinese title is “Jin shan yuan” which is less about sexual affair than *yuan* (“fateful affinity”) between two equals. For the potency of *yuan* in Chinese culture, see R. Chow, *Sentimental* 77.
years, this seedling has grown to a luxuriant tree, with branches permeated into every corner at home. If this tree were chopped down, her home would be left with the scars of the roots that cannot be filled out or smoothed” (L. Zhang, Jin 315). What the tree props up is not only a family wrenched by internal schism, but more significantly, a heterosexual, patriarchal family order. As Chunlin Wang aptly puts it, despite her privileged social status in comparison with those Chinese wives left behind in the home villages, Mrs. Henderson is, to some extent, a madwoman in the attic imprisoned in a luxurious house (72). Unable to disclose his sexual orientation, Mr. Henderson, too, can be regarded as an abandoned figure in a society that is not only racist but homophobic as well. One of the very few things the Hendersons share over the years is their love of Kam Ho despite the boundaries of class, race, and gender that separate them. Unlike the accused Chinese houseboy Foon Sing, Kam Ho gains admission to a white patriarchy in the preservation of its heteronormative bourgeois sexual mores and racially pure bloodlines.

A radical Chinese-Canadian, lesbian “separatist,” Lee turns socially imposed marginality into, in bell hooks’ words, “a site of resistance” and “occasion of radical openness and possibility” in her “mostly hysterical” narrative of Disappearing Moon Café (S. Lee, “SKY” 400; qtd. in “Disappearing” 10; “Disappearing” 13). The absent presence of Kelora through her mixed-blood son Ting An challenges the patriarchal normality of the Wong family and questions the entrenched racism in dominant white society, as well as, covertly, in the Chinese and First Nations communities. In comparison, by ending the Chinese-Native romance prematurely in

53 This passage is omitted in Harman’s translation and translated by myself.
Gold Mountain Blues and keeping Sundance mostly absent from the narrative, Ling Zhang preserves patriarchal, heteronormative, racially pure sexual practices and family values not only within the Chinese community but also for First Nations and white people. Through a realist tone, Ling Zhang and her controversial Gold Mountain Blues articulate a sentimental vision of normative family and patriotic values to Chinese Canadian communities and diasporas around the world.
Chapter 2 Children of the Sixties: The (Im)Possibility of Alliance and Resistance in Kevin Chong’s *Baroque-a-nova*

“These days you need to resort to vulgarity to be heard,” I said. “You have to bring the violence home. You’re a child of the sixties: I’d think you’d understand.”

Kevin Chong, *Baroque-a-nova* 4

“I like to think that I’m only being fire conscious,” Nathan continued, “more prescient in the arena of disaster. I know a thing or two about human nature. I was, after all, a child of the sixties.”

Kevin Chong, *Baroque-a-nova* 225

This chapter moves forward from the discussion of Chinese labourers and Native women in late nineteenth and early twentieth century British Columbia on the Pacific Coast to the respective descendants of the two groups who came of age during the turbulent years of the 1960s and settled in Ontario in Central Canada. The interracial romance in the sixties takes place against a social background distinct from the earlier period when Chinese-Native intermarriage was strictly forbidden. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed an increasing recognition on the part of the Canadian state of the heritage of the Aboriginal population and the contribution of Chinese immigrants. Compared with the racist society of the past with its discrimination and negative attitude to miscegenation, multicultural Canada is apparently now favourable to the idea of fostering love and friendship between the communities; miscegenation is also “casually approved” (K. Chong, *Baroque* 45). The more open social environment, however, does not make the Chinese-Native relationship an enduring, stable one. The ambiguous identity of the settler-state of Canada on the march toward a unified nationhood complicates the relationship that Chinese immigrants have with First Nations people within an insidious and often
unacknowledged colonial framework. The media frame of the new era further generates unforeseen predicaments of alliance and resistance for the two minority groups, demanding that the study of the minor-to-minor relationship continue to grapple with ways of resisting the dominant culture and society without losing sight of the risk of being co-opted by the existing power structure. My move from the turn of the twentieth century to late twentieth century in the current chapter does not simply represent a temporal shift in generational succession. To a great degree, this shift highlights enduring and new challenges to imagining and building the relationship between Chinese immigrants and First Nations people in the complex processes of subject and identity formation against the background of the configuration of a Canadian mosaic.

The convulsive birth of the sixties, Fredric Jameson points out in periodizing this momentous decade of sweeping revolution and social change, was signalled by the independence of African countries, such as Ghana, Algeria, and France’s sub-Saharan colonies, and ushered in an era in which “all these ‘natives’ became human beings” (181). Jameson’s use of the term “natives” here refers not only to native inhabitants of the colonies, but “those inner colonized of the first world—‘minorities,’ margins, and women” as well (181). While the populations of the South Asian and African colonies achieved national independence and sovereignty from Western imperialism, the inner colonized minorities in the West began to assert their demand for equality and enfranchisement through the women’s and civil rights movements. This unprecedented metamorphosis of natives in human history, Jameson notes, has been understood as a decisive and global chapter in Croce’s conception of history as the history of human freedom; as a more classically Hegelian process of the coming to self-consciousness of subject peoples; as some post-Lukácsean or more Marcusean, new left conception of the emergence of new “subjects of history” of a nonclass type (blacks, students, third world...
peoples); or as some poststructuralist, Foucaultean notion . . . of the conquest of the right to speak in a new collective voice, never before heard on the world stage—and of the concomitant dismissal of the intermediaries (liberals, first world intellectuals) who hitherto claimed to talk in your name; not forgetting the more properly political rhetoric of self-determination or independence, or the more psychological and cultural rhetoric of new collective “identities.” (181)

Notwithstanding the different visions of history offered by different schools of thought, these distinct readings of the sixties converge, at the most obvious level, in drawing attention to keywords such as subject and identity in the political, cultural, and psychological realms. What is repeatedly underlined, either explicitly or subtly, is the emergence of new subjects and collective identities in the struggle against military violence and the intellectual hegemony of the First World as the twentieth century moved to its end.

The formation of new subjects and collective identities also occurred in the Canadian context, yet it has taken a different twist in many respects with long-range implications. In his book *The Search for Identity* published in Canada’s centennial year of 1967, Blair Fraser views the mid-1960s as a critical period when a new Canada was born out of the disintegration of its past identity as a British colony, anchoring a fresh sense of nationhood.54 However, the turning away from long-standing ties to the British Empire and European traditions does not result in a clear self-conception of a particular collective identity, or “what it meant, exactly, to be Canadian” (Palmer 5). The irony of Canada in the sixties, Bryan Palmer maintains, resides in the uncertainty

54 For Bryan Palmer’s discussion of Fraser’s argument, see Palmer 415-17.
and ambivalence of a unique national identity distinct from British Canada: “while it [the Sixties] decisively declared the end of one Canada, it defeated, for a generation or more, the possibility of realizing a new national identity that so much of the decade seemed to both demand and promote” (429).

A crucial condition that accounts for the failed establishment of a new unified national identity is the colonial framework that Canada has inherited as a former colony and continues to exercise on Indigenous people long after Confederation. Unlike the African countries mentioned by Jameson, which emerged as independent nations through a process of decolonization and anti-colonial struggle, the Indigenous people of Canada have never experienced a decolonizing revolution, and are still grappling with a century-old colonial relationship with the settler-state. Deteriorated material conditions and assimilationist policies intensify Indigenous protests against the federal government. Inspired by the struggle against Western imperialism and internal colonialism—such as the independence movements in most African and Asian colonies, the Black Power and American Indian Movements in the United States, and Quebec’s nationalist struggle—Aboriginal activists and youth launched the Red Power movement under a new leadership in the late 1960s. They took a hard line against the government and authority and resorted to violence and militant protests in order to assert their rights and sovereignty. The 1960s thus signals a period of revival of Canada’s Aboriginal power on the global stage of Indigenous activism. With a long history of resistance dating back to the Riel Rebellions in the late nineteenth century, Aboriginal people then “began to conceive of themselves as part of a Fourth World of anti-colonial resistance”
The dynamic process of subject and identity formation is further troubled by another equally significant, albeit less pronounced, social transformation in the sixties—the growing prominence of a new type of social struggle for what Rey Chow calls “the media frame.” The sixties, Chow observes, marked a period in which the notion of struggle was embedded in media spectacles and shifted from “the plane of physical actions and conflicts” to “a political economy of representation and performance, whose actions and conflicts often preemptively determine the way we imagine our relation to the real nowadays” (R. Chow, Entanglements 161). By analogy with the commodity in Marx’s theory—commodity defined by Chow as “a product of labor that receives its stamp of value from a source other than itself, from circulation rather than intrinsic use”—media representation has advanced from a secondary, inferior position to the centre at a steady pace, superseding the authentic and the original in late capitalist society (Entanglements 162). Chow foresees that in a future when artificiality and artifactuality tend to predominate, people’s identities, histories, and agency will have to strive for legitimacy not simply through established physical institutions, but in terms of visibility as commodities (Entanglements 162). Therefore, the struggle for emancipation must attend to the media frame, now the de facto “political battleground” that permeates everyday life, and dismantle the existing improper, stereotypical representations in the public sphere by creating appropriate visual images and stories for distribution and circulation (R. Chow, Entanglements 161).

55 For the Red Power movement in the 1960s, see Palmer, chapter 10 “The ‘Discovery’ of the ‘Indian’.”
The media frame not only ushers in a novel form of battle during the sixties, but, more disturbingly, helps to uncover a less frequently explored aspect latent in subject and identity formation. If media representation resembles in many ways the commodity, one ironic fact remains that competition for more decent public images can only be successful when it lends itself to commodification in conformity with the consumerist logic of capitalism so as to attract media attention. In other words, the struggle for identity and agency in the visual field of representation, however empowering and liberating it appears, may be easily recuperated or co-opted by the commodified media frame. The self-conscious deployment of the media frame often coexists with simultaneous subjugation to capitalist commodification. Judith Butler’s psychoanalytic analysis of power has resonance here: What seems at first to be subject formation may be accompanied by the submission to the very power that forms the subject, signalling the paradoxical process of subjection as subordination and subject-becoming (2). In what Guy Debord terms “the society of the spectacle,” conferring the natives and minorities on the margin with legitimate identities may precisely be a means to “wipe out identity” and “take away [their] subjectivity” (Abbas 14).

For minority groups in the West, the dual sense of subjectivity as subjecthood and subjection in the context of media spectacle is encapsulated in the paradox of resistance with which the groups have long been associated. As witnessed in the majority-oppress-and-minorities-resist model at both the theoretical as well as the socio-political level, minorities now rise up as the subjects of resistance rather than passive objects of oppression, often standing in an antagonistic relationship to the dominant as the customary object against which they resist. However, the emergence of the resistant subject—or what Rey Chow calls “the protestant ethnic” in the literal sense of “protestant,” referring to “one who protests”—has, in turn, become the very subject of
commodification and appropriation in late capitalism (*Protestant* viii). The act of protesting is “perhaps less for actual emancipation of any kind than for the benefits of worldwide visibility, currency, and circulation” (R. Chow, *Protestant* 48). While competing for media representation, Chow borrows from Max Weber, the seemingly subversive resistance represents not so much a force of opposition and defiance as a “structural collaboration” between the culture of protest established upon the belief in salvation, on the one hand, and the state apparatus of interpellation and disciplining, on the other (R. Chow, *Protestant* viii). In a way, resistance sustains the development of capitalism, constituting “part and parcel of the structure of capitalism” (R. Chow, *Protestant* 47).

The ambiguous identity of the settler-state of Canada and the paradox of resistance within the media frame complicate the Chinese-Native relationship in an unprecedented era marked by the triumphant narrative of ‘Native’-to-human-being metamorphosis. On the one hand, like their Aboriginal counterparts, Chinese immigrants find themselves in a similar marginal position in the white settler nation as “the other” and outsiders. Yet, on the other hand, in their quest for equal rights and full citizenship, people of Chinese descent are inevitably involved in the unfinished colonial project of the nation-state and might be complicit in exploiting and oppressing Aboriginal people in a disguised way.\(^5^6\) The domination of media in commodity capitalism co-opts the resistance of minority communities and closes off effective opportunities for historical understanding and coalition building.

\(^5^6\) For the contradictory position of peoples of colour in relation to Aboriginal people in Canada, see Lawrence and Dua 251.
The closely related yet segregated positioning of immigrants and Aboriginal people in late-twentieth century Canada provides critical insights for understanding the turbulent relationship between two minority characters in Kevin Chong’s novel *Baroque-a-nova*: a Native woman, Helena Sinclair, and her Chinese ex-boyfriend, Nathan Shaw. Its brevity notwithstanding, Helena and Nathan’s romance remains “significant to the novel’s symbolic universe” and undergoes dramatic changes (R. Wong, “Provisional” 191). In contrast to the historical relationship in which compassionate Native women save yellow men from starvation and loneliness, assimilated Chinese Canadians now play the role of saving Native women in a metaphorical sense. Nathan first rescues Helena from the drudgery of the Hudson’s Bay Company department store in downtown Vancouver when she is eighteen. Although her initial intention is to prevent Nathan from stealing a five-ounce bottle of Chanel, Helena is attracted by the copy of Jacques Prévert’s *Paroles* he holds in his hand and ends up stealing the perfume herself and running away with him. When they move eastward to Toronto, however, the tension in their relationship escalates to the point of break-up. Helena then marries her Winnipeg-born white husband, Ian St. Pierre, and Nathan marries a white woman who supports him financially. Surprisingly, though, the two old lovers still miss each other after years of separation. When Helena becomes weary of endless tours and performances, she asks Nathan to assist her to run away from a concert and take a flight to Thailand. Unfortunately, Nathan is unable to save her life in the end. Living in Thailand in seclusion, Helena commits suicide when she fails to escape being besieged by the media crew.

In the discussion to follow, I will examine the two stages of Helena’s relationship with Nathan— their escalating tension when living together and lingering affection for each other after their break-up. By looking at what separates and connects Helena and Nathan, I want to uncover the racial and gendered violence inflicted on Aboriginal women by male Chinese immigrants. The
first stage of the relationship is marked by Nathan’s biased perception and misunderstanding of Helena. With limited knowledge of the colonial history and material condition of First Nations people, Nathan falls into settler colonial labour narratives in his attempted assimilation into mainstream society. Meanwhile, he exerts patriarchal domination over the Aboriginal female body in the domestic sphere, a body that has been publicly displayed in nudity and which gradually loses the potential for resistance and revolution. Notwithstanding their conflicts, the two are still connected emotionally after their separation. Helena’s resort to Nathan for help, without the knowledge of her husband, results from her dire predicament of being subject to commodification and appropriation in a media-saturated society. Nathan’s inability to rescue her from her plight is indicative of the difficulty of resistance and solidarity for minority communities in the context of the politics of cultural diversity and nation building. The romantic entanglement in Kevin Chong’s *Baroque-a-nova* demonstrates the constant negotiation between First Nations people and Chinese immigrants in search of their identity in a multicultural Canada ambivalent in its formation of a national identity.

**Artist or Whore**

Unlike the tightly focused depictions of Chinese-Native romance in *Disappearing Moon Café* and *Gold Mountain Blues*, the relationship between Helena and Nathan in *Baroque-a-nova* unfolds mainly in fragments throughout the novel. The story is structured around the seven days after Helena commits suicide one Monday in Thailand. As the narrator of the story, Saul functions as the key figure who helps elucidate her little known romance with Nathan. In the novel’s opening passages, Kevin Chong juxtaposes two seemingly irrelevant events in Saul’s life: the suicidal death of his birth mother and the controversy over book banning at his school. On the one hand, Saul remains surprisingly apathetic to Helena’s death, the news of which is
delivered in an indifferent tone: “Helena St. Pierre died one Monday. She was my estranged mother, a long-ago radio siren” (K. Chong, Baroque 1). Having been long separated from his mother and living with his father and stepmother since the age of four, Saul displays a calm aloofness as if her death was just one of the numerous daily events that occur in faraway places with little effect on his boring school days: “I was counting away the seconds of my last year of high school, of my last month, and while I didn’t learn about it until later, I was at school, in class staring at a metric ruler and sizing myself in millimetres, when she killed herself seventeen time zones away” (1). On the other hand, Saul demonstrates unusual anger toward the attempted banning of a book that he has yet to read: “I felt indignation welling inside me, struggling against my own natural apathy. Now I wished I had read the book, if only for the outrage it would have entitled me to” (3). With little clue about the book itself, Saul witnesses a series of anonymous toxic gas threat calls triggered by the controversy and participates in an anti-banning student protest. The two apparently independent events in Saul’s life become unexpectedly connected when it is revealed that the book at the centre of the controversy was written by Nathan and that Helena is believed to be the prototype for the protagonist. As the novel closes, Saul again serves as the link between his biological mother and her ex-boyfriend. In the process of coming to terms with his deceased mother and his family’s past, Saul visits Nathan in Toronto and drives through the Arizona desert, looking for his native heritage: “I felt my mother’s voice, felt it along the back of my neck, felt my heart pounding from caffeine, and I longed to be home for the very first time in my life” (230).

57 This connection is hinted at during various points of the novel, for example, through the juxtaposition of Helena’s biography and Nathan’s novel on Saul’s nightstand.
The fragmented narrative, to a large extent, mirrors the broken nature of Helena’s relationship with Nathan, symbolizing “another broken moment in the ongoing stream of broken relations” (R. Wong, “Provisional” 201). Admittedly, the intricate intertwining of Helena’s death and the sub-plot of Nathan’s controversial novel might cause confusion to readers who have been kept in the dark about the real reason behind the book banning. The sub-plot is not as well-crafted as the main plot and even “fails to convince” (Brouwer). Yet the importance of this sub-plot is hard to dismiss if we take into consideration of the title of the novel. In a telling coincidence, Nathan’s and Chong’s books share the same title of “Baroque-a-nova,” a name taken from a Mason Williams song found on the jukebox at Helen’s Grill in Vancouver (K. Chong, Baroque 232). The identical titles of the two books allow one to read “not only Nathan Shaw’s novel, but Kevin Chong’s novel as being secretly about Helena St. Pierre” (R. Wong, “Provisional” 199). Considering the significance of this sub-plot, it is fair to suggest that the double plot of the novel not only builds up narrative suspense, but, to a degree, emblematizes the often overlooked and broken Chinese-Native relationship, which may only be brought into connection through mediation by future generations in their quest for their heritage.

Even in the early days of their relationship, Helena senses Nathan’s distance behind their loving intimacies. Arrogance and wilfulness lurk behind his gentle manner; he always maintains “a wiriness in his body” and “a tenseness in his behavior,” preparing to react in a serious way even during the relaxing moments when she tickles him on the couch (K. Chong, Baroque 199-200). What contributes most directly to the failure of a lasting romance is the couple’s divergent views of life. One of the most important driving forces behind Helena’s decision to leave Vancouver is the monotony and boredom of her job at the perfume counter of the department store. For her, life is an art and art is play: “You lived art; you lived your life as art” (201). She shows great
interest and avid enthusiasm toward everything she sees and experiences. Like many passionate young people in the sixties, she likes wearing a Yugoslavian blouse, reading Kerouac, Hesse, the Brautigan pocket editions, and *Selected Quotations of Chairman Mao*, and watching Joe Orton’s plays and the movies of Antonioni and Godard (200-01).

In stark contrast to Helena’s passion for art and life, Nathan is more concerned with household economy, a practical concern that arises from the couple’s impoverished living conditions. Helena and Nathan both come from deprived family backgrounds. Born on a Shuswap reserve in British Columbia, Helena was raised by her maternal grandmother in a government-built house after her father’s suicide and mother’s remarriage. A descendant of early Chinese railway workers, Nathan too experienced a difficult life. He rented an attic room in a shabby, cold co-op house. During their last three weeks in Vancouver before leaving for Toronto, the couple sleep on a mattress and then on the floor when they sell the mattress. In Toronto, they live on the second floor over a bakery in Kensington market. During the day, Nathan works at his uncle’s restaurant, a job given to him mainly out of Chinese family good-will, “stealing singles and change from the till, reading newspapers, on the toilet downstairs or on an upturned milk crate in the back alley, left over from the breakfast rush” (K. Chong, *Baroque* 200). After finishing the not-so-glorious restaurant work, Nathan reveals his ambition and dedication at night. He would work from Monday to Saturday night for one year, jotting down notes and searching for words for his novel. For him, Helena does not make sufficient contribution to the household economy, and she is lacking in ambition: “‘If you’re going to get anywhere,’ he said, half joking, ‘you’ll need someone to run your life. And maybe lose five pounds’” (200). Helena is, as such, not a “Protestant ethnic” in Max Weber’s sense of Protestant. The “uptight,” “self-denying” work ethic
that Nathan expects from her is precisely “everything she wasn’t about;” his so-called dedication is simply “annoying” (200).

Nathan’s criticism of Helena for lacking in ambition and industry, while emerging out of a practical concern for household economy, resonates with what Malissa Phung calls “settler colonial labour narratives” that Chinese immigrants may risk reproducing for the purpose of self-indigenization and better assimilation. In her attempt at a nuanced anti-colonial understanding of the settler position of people of colour, Phung looks into nineteenth-century Canadian literature which is replete with stories and images of the vanishing race of Indigenous people in marked contrast to the burgeoning population of indigenized white settlers. This body of literature is dominated by an inclination to stereotype Indigenous people as lazy and uncivil in order to legitimize white settlers’ occupation of Indigenous lands when these settlers become increasingly indigenized by acquiring Indigenous skills. Phung attributes the inspiration behind such narratives to the notion of _terra nullius_ (land belonging to no one) that the French colonizers held upon their arrival in the New World, a notion that excluded Amerindians from the land. Based on the assumption that Indigenous people are barbaric nomads without the means of cultivation, the colonizers justify their right to the land in light of European laws on property and ownership (293-94). Phung is concerned that people of colour may also partake in the self-indigenizing process through their efforts at upward mobility and reproduce “similar settler colonial labour narratives of hard work and enterprise” for the purpose of asserting their place in Canada (294). “[S]uch narratives of immigrant origins and trials and tribulations,” she argues, “can construct people of colour as exemplary settlers who have been able to work hard to rise above their racialized immigrant origins and succeed despite all of the odds stacked against them” (Phung 294).
A model minority group among people of colour, Chinese immigrants are often deployed to form a contrast with Native people in terms of disposition to work. For instance, Canadian artist and writer Emily Carr once compared the industriousness and endurance of Chinese labourers to a perceived tendency among “Indians” to satisfy immediate needs: “The Indian squatted upon each doorstep to rest. The Chinaman never rested—he kept up his mechanical jog-trot all day. . . . The Indian wasted no sweat on labour—he took from nature those things which came easiest. What money he earned he spent in the nearest store immediately, exchanging it for whatever pleased his eye or his stomach” (155-56). Although Nathan had not yet achieved any success when he was with Helena, his hard-working mentality and commitment gave him a sense of moral superiority and earned him the right to teach his laid-back Native girlfriend about ambition and dedication in a condescending manner. Along with the change in clothing from a “ridiculous” boy in paisley shirts to a clean-cut young man in tidy dress shirt, he completes his apparent transformation to “a Chinese version of those young American men” prepared to be assimilated into, and contribute to, white society (K. Chong, Baroque 199, 135).

In spite of Nathan’s criticism, it is undeniable that Helena is “as ambitious as anyone” “though she wouldn’t have said it” (K. Chong, Baroque 109). Helena’s ambition is remarkable in a different sense. She views herself as a conceptual artist who can make a difference to the world through art—“She wanted to be an artist. / She wanted to reinvent it—the world. / She wanted to sing” (202). Helena manifests her ambition in the act of nude modeling. After moving to Toronto in 1969, Helena insists on displaying her nudity publicly in the name of peace. Her body is wrapped in papers with her breasts covered by black bars and is painted by one of the students at a co-op gallery. Having being arrested and fined, she defiantly continues to exhibit her nudity
after her release. She spreads out on a divan couch in front of the mannequins of the Bay display window around a busy street corner. With nothing covering the top of her body, she hangs a sign of “Invisible Mink Coat: $1,000” (108). Helena’s audacity evokes a growing sense of unease in Nathan. He frowns upon her nude modeling and becomes “livid when she did it in public” (201). When he visits her site and watches her “airing her naughty bits on a downtown street,” he almost punches the hooting men (201).

It is important to remember that the body is by no means “an inert, passive, noncultural and ahistorical term,” but “may be seen as the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual, and intellectual struggles” (Grosz 19). In a patriarchal society, women’s bodies are supposed to be viewed in the private sphere; the female nude is considered “pornographic or an object of art if painted and then displayed by a male artist” (Iudicello 120). Such perceptions betray the active/male and passive/female power relationship embedded in the pleasure in looking: “In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: . . . she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire” (Mulvey 19; original emphasis). Nathan’s disdain for Helena’ exhibition of the body is rooted in the transgression of the boundary between private and public. He considers her display of forbidden nudity in public space to be an indecent act and relegates her to the status of a licentious whore—“He thought she was loose” (K. Chong, Baroque 202).

From the perspective of Helena, however, the nude modeling, when situated in the context of the cultural revolution and the women’s movement in the sixties against patriarchal norms and
gender inequality, can be regarded as a form of explicit performance art. This act deploys the naked female body to challenge the dominant perception of women as passive, voiceless objects to gain agency and subjectivity as viewing, speaking subjects. In her perceptive analysis of Zhang Yimou’s film Judou, Rey Chow writes of the scene in which Judou deliberately turns around and reveals her naked upper body to her nephew who secretly watches her wash herself every morning through a hole in the wall:

As she confronts Tianqing with her naked body, Judou is, we may say, taking into her own hands the “to-be-looked-at-ness” that conventionally constitutes femininity. If the female body in its “to-be-looked-at-ness” is a cultural cliché, Judou’s move is that of quoting the cliché: she exhibits her female body for the male gaze literally, in the manner that one cites a well-used platitude. The effect of this gesture—of quoting the most-quoted, of displaying the most fetishized—is no longer simply voyeuristic pleasure but a heightened self-consciousness. (Primitive 167; original emphasis)

In Judou’s display, the conventional exhibitionist role of to-be-looked-at-ness in satisfaction of male voyeuristic desire is now transformed into self-conscious exhibitionism on women’s own initiative. Her act of quoting the cliché addresses the difficult question that Judith Butler raises given the ambivalence embedded in the formation of the subject: “how to take an oppositional relation to power that is, admittedly, implicated in the very power one opposes” (17). Butler locates the answer in the two temporal modalities of power: the power that comes before and initiates the subject and the power that comes after the subject and constitutes its agency. The subject is thus “a site of this ambivalence in which the subject emerges both as the effect of a prior power and as the condition of possibility for a radically conditioned form of agency” (14-15; original emphasis). The transformation of the two forms of power is accomplished by reiteration and performativity (Butler 16). The agential power emerges from the fact that at the
same time as the subject is forced to repeat the social norms—the fundamental conditions under which it is formed—it introduces difference and anomaly that oppose or alter the socially fixed terms and endow them with alternative meanings.

Helena’s display of nudity is considered to be “revolutionary,” given that she quotes the cliché of the female body and re-signifies it with different implications (K. Chong, *Baroque* 108). Her explicit exhibition of her body rewrites the patriarchal text, “challenging the very fabric of representation by refusing that text and posing new, multiple texts grounded in real women’s experience and sexuality” (Forte 220). Like Manet’s naked Olympia, the disruptive potential of Helena’s nude modeling does not simply lie in the nudity itself, but rather in “self-possession”: “‘look[ing] back’ at her audience not with seductive pleasure but with a pride that resembled disdain” (Schneider 25). Yet unlike Olympia whose disdain is framed by a potent male gaze without any actual agency, Helena takes her body at her own command and actively employs it according to her will. Her Aboriginal body problematizes the unmarked space of whiteness dominated by the “universalized” female body as “Anglo-American, heterosexual, able-bodied, and middle class” (Harris 260). If Helena were a whore and her performance art resembled abject prostitution as Nathan sees it, the potential challenges posed by the prostitute precisely reside in the dialectical image, Rebecca Schneider cites Walter Benjamin, as both “commodity and seller,” embodying “a bizarre and potentially terroristic collapse of active and passive, subject and object, into a single entity” (Schneider 24).

However, the efficacy of Helena’s nude modeling becomes susceptible to questioning given her alluring Aboriginal body. What distinguishes Helena and Judou in their subversive acts of quoting the cliché of the female body lies in the very kind of cliché that has been quoted. By
turning around her naked body, Judou cites “the brutality of the cliché,” “not simply the cliché of the female body but, crucially, the signs of violence it bears” (R. Chow, *Primitive* 167; original emphasis). In contrast, the body that Helena exhibits is a beautiful and sexy one, captivating Ian the first time he sees her in the nude: “you could tell she was the real deal. She was a tiny rail-thin creature, but when she looked in my direction—those eyes—I was swallowed alive, the way a snake swallows a goat” (K. Chong, *Baroque* 107). Although the gaze is reversed at an apparent level when Helena consciously seizes the act of looking, the familiar scenes of masculine desire and fantasies aroused in Ian and other men alike reveal the satisfaction that her body provides to the male imagination and the futility of her effort to return the gaze.

Bodily beauty aside, another disconcerting difficulty emerges when the self-conscious act of quoting the cliché evolves into a new cliché itself. Helena finds it discouraging to wake to the short-livedness of all the art that she has been conducting. Her performance art loses its revolutionary cutting edge when nudity “los[es] its novelty”: “Nudity was old. She’d needed something new” (K. Chong, *Baroque* 108). The new art, unfortunately, is short-lived as well. It is “all about saying, ‘Look at this, look how this is art. And if you don’t think it’s art, that it’s gorgeous, then you should be looking differently, you patriarchal fool’;” “people get tired of being told where and how to look” (108). The vanishing novelty of art may perhaps be inevitable under the all-pervasive power of late capitalism. As Theodor Adorno points out, the constant promotion of novelty in art constitutes “the aesthetic counterpart to the expanding reproduction of capital in society”: “As soon as capital does not expand, or, in the language of circulation, as soon as capital stops offering something new, it is going to lose ground in the competitive struggle. Art has appropriated this economic category” (31). Building on the work of Adorno and other thinkers regarding the similarities between artistic experiments in novelty and the
economic expansion of capital, Victor Li trenchantly criticizes the ironic fate of modernist resistance to bourgeois society; that is, modernism’s resistance to commodity becomes “the very production of a commodity” (35). Drawing one of his examples from the Situationist International in the fifties and sixties, Li discerns the change occurring to the strategy of *détournement* (39-42). Originating as a subversive poetics of displacement, *détournement* devalues or negates previous aesthetics and cultural expressions and reassembles them to create revolutionary discourse. While gaining novelty through its subversion of existing standards or commodities in the reified society of the spectacle, the initially progressive new situation, nonetheless, becomes another desirable commodity for profit-making. “[T]he shock of the new,” Li makes clear, “is precisely what the commodity thrives on in order to reproduce itself and market itself as new and different” (40-41). Like the *détourned* images of nude women in Situationist visual productions, Helena’s nude modeling, though reinscribed with additional layers of signification, cannot escape the commodification of the new. Even peace, the noble goal for which she poses, is relegated into a purchasable commodity, “something you bought at the deli with your coleslaw” (K. Chong, *Baroque* 107).58

Consequently, Helena’s relationship with Nathan does not experience the reversal as in the case of Judou’s to-be-looked-at-ness. The brutality of cliché changes Judou and her nephew into empathetic “fellow victims of the same feudal order” and their erotic relationship into a “lifelong alliance against the patriarchal order that sacrifices women and powerless men alike” (R. Chow, 58

58 The short cycle of the art that Helena conducts is also repeated in her singing career. Helena ceases to be the focus of media attention because the audience soon tired of her: “The network suggests I [Richard] focus on the group Urethra Franklin. They say there are two nine-year-old boys, little fair-headed boys, who will claim one band member fondled them. The network would be interested in that. Already, they have become tired of Helena St. Pierre” (K. Chong, *Baroque* 217).
Primitive 167-68; original emphasis). In contrast, Helena’s exhibition of her beautiful nude body reinforces her prostitute-like image in men’s perspective and is incapable of rescuing her from patriarchal perceptions of the racialized female body in commodity capitalism. Nathan’s attempt to protect Helena from other men is less out of care and respect initiated by an awareness of women’s rights and equality than the sheer desire to have exclusive possession of her body.

The tension between the couple flares up into open conflict when Helena discovers accidentally the manuscript that Nathan keeps in secret. The conflict is not simply about privacy—Helena’s invasion of Nathan’s privacy by reading his manuscript without his permission or his invasion of hers by writing about her private life in the first place—but is mostly invoked by the portrayal of the Native protagonist in the manuscript. Unlike the fictional imagining of beautiful innocent Native women in Disappearing Moon Café and Gold Mountain Blues, Nathan provides a blatantly biased depiction of the Native protagonist, who is believed to be based on the prototype of Helena. Helena becomes “shocked by how little he knows about her, how she’s portrayed, alternately, as shrew and fool” (K. Chong, Baroque 202). In the quarrel, Nathan repeatedly refers to Helena as a slut and whore:

She hasn’t said one word whether the book was any good.

Slut, he says. The space between them has been pregnant with that word.

Would it kill her to say one nice thing about the book?

You’re a slut, he says. Go off and sleep around. Fuck everyone in the city.

He sits down at the kitchen and starts tapping away again at the typewriter, maybe because she hates its sound.

Whore. (203)
The imaginary violence that Helena envisions when Nathan wrestles her down on the couch as she tickles him comes into reality. Unable to suppress his outrage at her defiance, Nathan hits her during their quarrel. “He throws her to the ground—it’s easier than he has thought it would be, and he’s thought about it more than once—then lands his foot between a couple of ribs” (203-04). Helena’s scream is at first taken almost as laughter: “He wants to kick her again, but then she really starts to wail, a scream like an angry tea kettle, like a startled cat, her hands in front of her face. She rolls way, flings herself against the arm of their upholstered loveseat” (204). This scene of violence places Nathan and Helena in an unequal Chinese-Native relationship within the patriarchal family structure. Nathan plays the role of the perpetrator of emotional abuse and physical violence. As he works toward a better financial situation, he nonetheless takes advantage of Helena’s vulnerability to sexual exploitation and, by hurling epithets like “slut” and “whore,” reinforces the overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in the sex trade. Helena’s battered body is but a living testimony to the domestic violence suffered by young Aboriginal women, who are, according to the 2009 General Social Survey, more susceptible to violent victimization than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Canada. Parl. 9-10).

In thinking through the estrangement and tension between Nathan and Helena rooted in their diverging views on life and ambition, I try to argue that the failure of Chinese-Native romance at the turn of the twentieth century reproduced itself in the new decades not so much as a result of anti-miscegenation racism as a product of the continuing racialization and sexualization of

59 The 2014 National Operational Review by Royal Canadian Mounted Police reveals that one of the vulnerability factors in the cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women is their involvement in the sex trade (17). For the overrepresentation of Aboriginal women and girls as victims of commercial sexual exploitation, see the report on missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada by the Special Committee on Violence against Indigenous Women (10).
Aboriginal women by other people of colour. In opting for economic assimilation into mainstream society, Nathan inherits colonial settler labour narratives and enforces a patriarchal family structure that confines the Aboriginal female body within the household. Helena chooses to leave Nathan in defiance of his entrenched stereotypical images and paternalistic treatment of her as an Aboriginal woman. However, in a society that never ceases to pursue the new for the sake of its expansion, she remains powerless in her endeavour to challenge the dominant social structure through the explicit performance of her body when the revolutionary power of such a performance is commodified in late capitalism.

Pepsi or Coke

Helena’s life after leaving Nathan assumes a certain liberty, yet remains profoundly unsatisfactory and unfulfilled. She marries Ian St. Pierre and they form a musical duo, the St. Pierres, with Helena singing and Ian playing guitar and writing songs. When one of their songs is remade into a top-forty hit by German band Urethra Franklin, the duo achieve fame and popularity and embark on a series of tours and performances. Nathan never forgets Helena in his heart. He gives special attention to her photos, interviews, and news through radio, newspaper, and magazines, and purchases her records. It is not until he notes from the photos her weakening health since she gives birth to a son that he begins correspondence with her; she then confides in him on the phone about her distress and difficulties. Despite his sense of guilt and the sometimes abrupt end to the calls when his wife awakens, for Nathan, talking to Helena “feels good, oddly good, invigorating” (K. Chong, Baroque 205). When Helena becomes increasingly frustrated with the impossibility of discontinuing the tour and divorcing her husband, Helena asks Nathan to meet her at the 1980 Labour Day show. Hiding the truth from his family, Nathan takes a flight to the show and drives Helena to the airport, from where she flies to Vancouver and then
Thailand. After this bittersweet reunion of old lovers, Nathan again loses contact with Helena since she settles in Thailand by herself. Without the opportunity to protect Helena from the pesterling of the media crew, what awaits Nathan in Toronto is the tragic news of her suicide followed by her funeral.

If the first stage of the Chinese-Native relationship mostly takes place between the couple within the domestic sphere, the second stage cannot be understood without delving into a broader social space. It must be noted that Helena’s lingering affection for Nathan does not make for a gradual healing of their previous rift, but largely stems from her helplessness and impotency in the face of her loss of autonomy. An ironic fact about Chong’s portrayal of Helena is the way in which he simultaneously gives her a voice and deprives her of it. Assuming centre stage in the story, Helena remains the focal point of people’s conversations, and her songs are always played on the radio. The Canadian ideal of an inclusive cultural mosaic provides her with opportunities to acquire money and fame. When she follows her high school history teacher to Vancouver, she is offered a decent job as a model in the Bay department store and receives benefits in housing, cosmetics, and education. For the manager, hiring a Native woman as the model is “like some test-tube experiment for the new cultural mosaic of the coming years. . . .Welcome to 1967” (K. Chong, *Baroque* 120). The promotion of Helena and Ian’s musical duo is made possible with the support of a government agency, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). The CRTC legislates and sets quotas for Canadian music for commercial radio stations in an effort to “promote homegrown talent;” one must meet two of the four criteria in order to qualify as Canadian: “your songs had to be written by Canadians, the music played by Canadians, recorded in Canada and produced by a Canadian” (109). In the emergent Canadian culture, so-called Canadianness supersedes the quality of the works as one of the prime
determinants of their value. Radio stations favour Helena and Ian’s music, “simply because we weren’t terrible. . . . the Cancon rules let a lot of shit slide by. Spectacular mediocrity. We were just a good group at the right time, and the legislation helped us out. Period” (109).

As the same time, even as Helena’s songs are frequently played on the air, her own voice has been silenced throughout the novel. Already dead from the outset of the story, this central protagonist of the novel becomes known to her alienated teenage son, Saul, and the readers exclusively through media representation and other people’s accounts. Helena’s complete lack of self-representation points to the paradoxical situation of Aboriginal people brought up by Diane Nemiroff, that is, “their mythic presence but real absence in contemporary consciousness” (qtd. in Mackey 83; emphasis added by Mackey). The problem of representation requires asking not only “Who shall speak for me?” or “Who should speak?,” but more crucially, Spivak reminds us, “Who will listen?,” or to be more specific, who will listen with seriousness instead of paternalistic benevolence. For Spivak, the conundrum is that “A hundred years ago it was impossible for me to speak, for the precise reason that makes it only too possible for me to speak in certain circles now” (qtd. in Mackey 83). Unable to speak for herself as an Aboriginal woman, Helena, together with her music, is often heard but never truly listened to, neither in her marriage nor in the entertainment industry.

In her failing marriage, Helena is always placed in a passive, objectified position. Her resort to Nathan can be considered first and foremost as an attempt to escape from her “domineering” husband Ian, with whom she is always seen together in media pictures (K. Chong, Baroque 32). The cover photo of the couple on the dust jacket of Leslie Erickson’s biography, The St. Pierres’ Story, is of Ian and Helena, but with “her chin obscured by a microphone, holding a tambourine
at her hip” (67). On the cover of the local morning tabloid is also a photo of Helena St. Pierre at an airport with her middle-parted hair dropping down to her waist and giving her a narrow face. Though it is one of the very few photos in which Helena seems to be alone without Ian, it merely presents a false impression to the public: “. . . not really—there he was, in the bottom left-hand corner of the photograph, a hand on my mother’s elbow, leading her away” (48).

Helena’s accompaniment by her husband at all times in pictures mirrors her being bound to him in everyday life. Initially entering the music industry because of his wish to wear a tuxedo like his idol, Ian views show business as being all about performance instead of art, offering the audience relaxing entertainment rather than unpleasant truth or revelation (K. Chong, Baroque 104-05). He insists that Helena sing the song “Bushmills Threnody” against her will, because he believes that the melodramatic style precisely suits her voice and image. In the eyes of Helena who lives life as art, the whole show business routine is “rotten” (32). She often sits by herself for a long time before a show and remains indifferent and blank-faced to the howls and applause of the audience. She also hides in closets and movie theatres in order to evade tours and concerts. Regardless of her protest and begging, Ian “has carried on as if they had no choice about the tour, the radio-station interviews and autograph sessions, that they are simply unable to walk away from it all” (162).

Although the marital relationship, by this point, exists in name only, it is almost impossible to terminate; it is hard “for them to divorce and skulk out of courtrooms with their collars turned up, for child custody to be established, bank accounts located and sorted and halved” (K. Chong, Baroque 162). Ian’s reluctance to free Helena betrays his reliance on her; his success depends
upon her voice. When he claims in retrospect his tender love and devotion to Helena and his willingness to let her go, Saul denounces him as a liar, making explicit the inconvenient fact that

Your career depended on her voice, her stage presence, otherwise you’d still be working at a shoe store in Winnipeg. You thought you were doing it for her, but she didn’t care about the music or the money, the things you got your kicks from. She loathed it. You did everything you could to keep her. You put her on anti-depressants, you told her she had contractual obligations to fulfill, you got her pregnant. (183)

What lurks behind the couple’s apparent interdependence as a musical duo is Ian’s profiting on Helena’s pain as she protests. His benign assertion about gaining fame and wealth for the sake of her happiness and contentment is at best an attempt to facilitate his own success.

Ian is by no means the only one who profits from Helena; the German band Urethra Franklin does as well. At first sight, Helena’s rise to fame is largely attributed to Urethra Franklin. Although the duo begin to gain popularity in the seventies through mid-tempo folk rock, their music is seldom heard until the chorus of “Bushmills Threnody” is sampled by the band into a top-forty hit. But it is really Helena on whom the song and the band depend, for her voice is irreplaceable by others: “Helena St. Pierre was that song. Everyone thought so. Or at least I did. You could sing the same words, but it was a poor impersonation, just like you could put on my mother’s clothes, her cowboy boots, her dashiki, her fringe jacket, the white gown she wore on her last tour, the one with the ruffled taffeta collar, but get it completely, perfectly wrong” (K. Chong, *Baroque* 87). The band acknowledges the native tradition mainly for the purpose of self-promotion, and they are criticized for “us[ing] ideology as a pose” without moral integrity or social conscience (131). In their popular remake of Helena’s “Bushmills Threnody,” the political issues of Aboriginal rights and unfair land treaties which are supposedly present in the song are
oversimplified and even caricatured. The slogan “Property is a crime” is mocked as “Poverty ice cream” and “Properly crimes” while rapped in the band’s “brutal, politicized English” (30, 21). The feelings conveyed by the original song are missing in Urethra Franklin’s version in the same way that nuance and texture in sound are converted into unicodes of ones and zeroes in the reductive encoding process of digital technology (26). In a sense, “everyone, including the author arguably, profits from Helena’s voice” (R. Wong, “Provisional” 194).

While Helena turns to Nathan to help her escape unethical cultural appropriation, she chooses to live a different life from him in resistance to the capitalist economy. To highlight this contrast, Chong takes her away from the reserve and relocates her to Thailand till she dies, not even returning her to her Native family to fulfil her grandmother’s dying wish. Since her withdrawal to Thailand in 1982, Helena lives alone in an apartment near a church. Her room merely contains a single bed with a board under the mattress to relieve her back pain, the Bible, an alarm clock, and a picture of Christ—the room is almost like a sty in Ian’s view. She lives on a simple liquid diet of rice porridge and boiled cabbage, hangs wet clothes in the crummy courtyard, and mends her old dresses and polyester slacks. A model missionary, she performs voluntary community service of choir singing, teaching children, running a home for orphans, and preventing villagers from selling their daughters (K. Chong, Baroque 38). She gives whatever limited money she has to the church as a way of returning love: “She wanted the love of the world, but she didn’t know what to do with it once she had it. She wanted to return it, I think; she wanted to give it back. She complained when we started making money. She wanted to give it away. Give it away” (109-10). Helena’s ascetic life rejects material comforts and capitalist accumulation, embodying “another way of being in the world” and embracing “alternative economies that might be unpredictable by capitalist logic and that might foster less exploitative relations” (R. Wong, “Provisional” 196).
Helena’s settlement and community service in Thailand, arguably a Third World country, might be read as embodying the alliance between First Nations people and people of colour. However, this Third World is decontextualized, serving “the assumption of the ‘Third World’ as a trope of victimhood or charity rather than signalling a space that has resisted and still resists economic violence, corporate theft, and neoimperialism” (R. Wong 196). It is noteworthy that Helena’s resistance against the capitalist logic of profit takes place precisely at a time when the Thai capitalist economy is thriving. Faced with the slow growth of the agricultural sector and urban economy since the early 1970s, the Thai government depreciated its currency and shifted toward service, manufacturing, and tourism in the 1980s. The urban work-force, once released from the agricultural sector, supplied cheap labour reserves for multinational corporations, especially the labour-intensive industries manufacturing textiles, garments, toys, footwear, electronics, and vehicles. In the context of Thailand’s export-oriented relationship with the world economy, Helena’s form of resistance through withdrawal is virtually impotent against capitalist expansion and the logic of profit.  

Now part of the globalized world, Thailand can no longer provide a safe refuge from media appropriation. When one of her students recognizes her through her voice on the radio, Helena writes to Ian for help and inadvertently discloses her address through the mail. Believing that she would be found eventually, Ian blatanty gives her address, in exchange for a paycheque, to Richard, a reporter who is obsessed with uncovering Helena’s life—the forced change of her

---

60 For the transition of Thailand’s economy, see Phongpaichit and Baker, chapter 5.
writing hand from left to right, her childhood pet, capped bad teeth, childhood experience of falling off a bike, first sexual experience, favourite colour, and so on (K. Chong, *Baroque* 65-66). Richard traces her from Bangkok to Potpang [sic], only to be greeted by an unexpectedly “unreasonable” refusal (147). While Richard deems such a reaction “lamentable” because he just “acted as would a journalist,” Saul immediately refutes his self-defensive explanation: “Do you think she moved to Thailand because she wanted you to find her?” (147). The media crew’s persistent hunting down of Helena leads to her suicidal death in the end. Curiously entering a sex club, she is confronted by two false tourists in the room, an Asian and a European: “The European pulled out a disposable camera, aimed and snapped. The announcer in the room eagle-clawed his mike, whispered over his shoulder, and the photographer was out on his rear, pushed through the bar, face down on the street” (58). This pursuit by the media reduces Helena to a voiceless object who is sacrificed to the ceaseless desire for novelty and scandal; “They—they—wanted humiliation memorialized. Their video tape slathered the air around them, around you, in formaldehyde. They were like ancient pharaohs: killing you as though to place you in their own graves, for you to serve them in the netherworld. Fearing death, they killed you” (58; original emphasis). Even after Helena’s death, her son Saul, who is interview-shy, is unable to avoid interviews with Richard who is interested in the children of tragic celebrities, because “their suffering illuminates. Their tragedy is much like an inheritance” (74). In the face of the unsatisfactory sales of its new single, the German band, Urethra Franklin, wants to turn Saul into a recording star and include his voice on a remixed version despite his complete lack of musical ability.

Outside the chapel during the funeral service, Saul recognizes Nathan as Helena’s old boyfriend: “She left my dad for you.” Nathan corrects him with a sick look: “No, she just left” (K. Chong,
Helena does not leave Ian and the tour to reunite with Nathan; she seeks assistance from Nathan in order to escape from a society guilty of cultural appropriation and racial misrepresentation. Unfortunately, her passive resistance via her withdrawal and austerity is shattered by the unprecedented media attention directed at her life. In the society of the spectacle, what is expected from her is not withdrawal, but the acceptance of her role as a celebrity, a star on stage who is wiped clean of all autonomous qualities as an individual. To some degree, Helena is unable to fulfil her wish of giving money away as an act of love. As an alluring image of a benevolent celebrity, her act of giving away money may precisely satisfy the demand of the spectacle as “the developed modern complement of money where the totality of the commodity world appears as a whole, as a general equivalence for what the entire society can be and can do” (Debord sec. 49).

Though differing from Helena in his effort to integrate into mainstream society, Nathan resembles her at bottom in his unfitness for the capitalist logic of modern society and remains powerless to save her from the media-saturated world. Despite his desire for assimilation, Nathan remains an outsider in society with a fear of the free enterprise system and crowds. He feels uneasy among the throng of spectators at concerts and always eats at home because of his dislike of the line-ups and crowds in the restaurant, especially when sitting away from the window. Nathan’s overwhelming preoccupation gives us a glimpse into the perpetual foreignness of Chinese immigrants as unsettled settlers. Even as he rids himself of the unbearable hardship that his ancestors have endured to make their livelihood in a white supremacist country, Nathan is unable to secure a steady place and a respectable vocation in mainstream society without the support of his white wife. His seemingly privileged and comfortable life risks being cancelled out by his economic dependency and social alienation.
Unfortunately, the quiet life that Nathan tries to live does not prevent him from being the target of appropriation serving different purposes for various groups. Nathan becomes involved in public events as a result of his book, *Baroque-a-nova*. Like Helena’s music, the book is promoted in the national attempt to establish a Canadian cultural identity. It makes its way onto the reading list of Canadian cultural institutions and is nominated in the seventies for an obscure award—“something awards that make you think of pregnant women in flares and kerchiefs”—because of its Canadian content (K. Chong, *Baroque* 154):

“I’ve been meaning to read it,” Louise said. “It’s Cancon.”

“What?”

“Canadian content,” Louise said. (72)

To the surprise of many, the book is banned all of a sudden for unexplained reasons and quickly pulled from the shelves at Saul’s school. The book banning triggers toxic nerve gas threats from a homeless man, Anders Wong, who produces toxic nerve gas in the shack of a deserted barn. He makes threatening calls in order to act out the anger he feels toward his obsessive love interest, the woman who works in the doughnut shop, for he believes that she has left him for the author of the banned book. Anders’ scheme turns into a farce as the identity of his love object is unveiled when she attempts to kill Ian. The woman turns out to be a man with a veil and wig who loves Helena. It becomes clear that the whole event, although set off by the controversial book banning, has less to do with the book itself than with personal obsessions. As is made explicit in Ian’s conversation with Louise, “‘Not that it’s a bad book. It’s all right; it’s a quick read. A first novel by any definition. . . . I really can’t say it’s worth public outcry—you know, toxic nerve gas threats. The public does what it sees fit.’ / ‘Just like fickle women’” (154).
The toxic nerve gas threats bring about the inspection of student lockers at Saul’s school and provoke a large-scale student protest organized by Saul’s best friend, Navi. A media-savvy Sikh student of versatile talent, Navi understands the power of the mass media and the spectacle. In order to achieve publicity, Navi and his friends stage a “street theatre,” a “counter spectacle” (K. Chong, *Baroque* 92):

Underneath the overcast sky, on the bleachers before the soccer field, sat Hedda, wearing a tiara made of aluminum foil, a huge costume-issue ruby necklace and a strapless ball gown, maroon and crushed velvet, with a sash across it reading, “Miss Police State 1998.” She held at her side a bullhorn, which she handed over to Navi, who proceeded to direct the thirty-five members of Rent-a-Mob in the middle of the field. Navi, in his bow tie and tuxedo shirt, looked underdressed. There were two or three men in dog collars, two women with neon-blue hair, a man wearing a rubber Pierre Trudeau mask, a woman with a “Take It Sleazy” T-shirt. They held signs carrying abusive slogans, some with no apparent political content, like “Eat My Ass.” Someone carried from a piece of cord a five-foot-tall inflatable pig, dressed in a blue policeman’s uniform and holding a club. Navi and a couple of Rent-a-Mobbers huddled around a box of fireworks, to be used as a sort of display once the entire crowd was assembled and Navi had given his speech. (130)

The hippie style of dress and actions of the protesting crowds are likely to remind readers of the 1967 Summer of Love protest in San Francisco, an event alluded to in the novel through Ian’s “tangly, Summer of Love hair” (23). The protest turns into a commercial service available for immediate purchase through enlisting “Rent-a-Mob” made up of university students who can be quickly assembled for any protest. Social activism is reduced to a staged performance driven by money. What Rey Chow observes about the protesting ethnics in the age of globalization is literally true in this case: “protesting constitutes the economically logical and socially viable
vocation for them to assume” (*Protestant* 48). Similar to the university students of Rent-a-Mob, half of the student population at Saul’s secondary school joins the protest out of practical considerations: “The walkout succeeded, if only because it had served as a good excuse to leave school early, much like the walkout we had two months ago, an official graduating class of ’98 event” (K. Chong, *Baroque* 138). To Navi’s disappointment, no one seems to be a hard-core social activist genuinely interested in his impassioned denouncement of decayed institutions.

In a world where public visibility is necessary to assert one’s presence, the mass media becomes a coveted resource which Native groups might also actively draw on. Saul asks Richard to tape the student demonstration to protest censorship on Friday, only to be told to put it off till Saturday, because Richard must tape the Friday event in which a large quiche will be baked by Helena’s cousins, Ricky and Ezra Sinclair. The Sinclairs intend to bake the largest quiche in the world in order to publicize their planned event of blocking a bridge in North Vancouver as a gesture against an unjust land treaty. They believe that fat as an essential component of one’s diet, like land, also receives unfair treatment (Chong, *Baroque* 81). Not until the quiche demonstration ends on Friday does the student occupation of the principal’s office receive coverage on three stations and “really made a point” (188). By relating the political issue of land to daily consumption of dietary fat, Chong’s humorous depiction of the quiche event seems to Rita Wong as disregarding those who may need to re-examine their tactics when standing out against land claims and body image oppression, especially in a consumerist and media-driven culture (“Provisional” 195). In seizing media attention, the political action of protest “seems to just feed the capitalist engine for spectacle, otherwise called the mass media, leaving oppressive relations firmly in place” (R. Wong, “Provisional” 196). Ruled by the dictates of capitalist commodification, the oppressive relations are played out against both innocent students and
Native people. Saul and the Sinclairs’s similar attempts to seek coverage from the mass media question how effective political engagement can be through media representation in an age of spectacle. Meanwhile, oppressive relations also lurk within Native communities in a more invisible manner. Whereas Ricky and Ezra portray themselves as representing Native people and voicing a common concern over territorial rights in public, it is less known that they, in private, take parasitic advantage of Helena’s generosity with her money. The nearly caricatured scene of quiche baking becomes a point of convergence where the three groups explicitly or implicitly participate in the oppression of Helena. Despite their distinctive and even contradictory backgrounds and motivations, the whites, Chinese, and Native men surprisingly—though perhaps not accidentally—converge in pointing us toward the appropriation and exploitation of Native women in a capitalist economy that enacts and sanctions such moves.

Put together, the series of events triggered by Nathan’s book illustrate that if Nathan previously appropriates Helena in his biased misrepresentation of her in his manuscript, his book, in turn, is subject to appropriation for other purposes beyond his control. During his visit to the school protest against the censorship of his book, Nathan is disappointed to find out that although his book is supposed to be at the centre of the protest, it merely provides an impetus for the protest and is barely read by the students. With no clue about the author, Navi eagerly asks Nathan if he is a reporter in need of a quote: “The man in the cardigan shook his head. Navi waved, then ran back into the crowd. He didn’t see the resemblance. No one here did, because no one had bothered to read his book, or even glance at its back cover” (R. Chong, Baroque 137). Even Saul, though recognizing Nathan from the author’s photo, admits that he has not quite finished reading the book. While the young generation, with a keen understanding of publicity and representation, employ social issues and mass media to enhance the efficacy of the protest and defy censorship
and social injustice, the protest may also be in complicity with the media’s desire for sensationalistic fodder and consumerist spectacle. Just as the First Nations’ province-wide protests in 1971 against the RCMP’s murder of Fred Quilt in Williams Lake are made meaningless for Saul (R. Wong, “Provisional” 192), the 1967 riot in Toronto’s Yorkville, where hippies blocked off the streets for three days to protest the turning of the area into a shopping centre, is seldom recalled along with the gentrification of the neighbourhood.

As I have noted, although Helena and Nathan differ in their beliefs, notably their respective choices of retiring to Thailand and assimilating into mainstream Canadian society, their Cancon works are, nevertheless, appropriated in a strikingly similar way. The similar processes of appropriation lay bare the predicament of resistance and alliance as they become entangled with representation and visibility in the media frame. The lingering affection between Helena and Nathan is not merely a continuation of the romantic infatuation that they had toward each other when they fell in love at the beginning, but results from their paradoxical positions as both beneficiaries and victims of the society of spectacle and surveillance. The freedom this society offers them is a highly regulated one, as is vividly shown in the Pepsi or Coke metaphor that Navi brings up in a discussion about the distribution of the Pig Abattoir magazine:

“Avenues of communications are being advanced, while our words—the substance of thought, the currency of imagination—are stripped away from us, by illiteracy and ad copy, because thoughtfulness, discretion, diversity stands in opposition to the profit margin. People opt for corporation-modulated, systematized living situations because they see no choice.”

“They give you a choice of Pepsi or Coke, as if those are your only two options. In place of choice, we get a soft-drink binary.” (K. Chong, Baroque 95)
The soft-drink binary is emblematic of the either/or choice with which minoritized groups, including Chinese immigrants and First Nations people, are often confronted. If we read collective identity as “scripts”—“narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories”—the recognition with which they are bestowed in a more tolerant, culturally diversified society is more positive than the negative scripts that constrained them before (Appiah 160). K. Anthony Appiah states explicitly that “If I had to choose between the world of the closet and the world of gay liberation, or between the world of Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Black Power, I would, of course, choose in each case the latter” (163). “But,” he continues, “I would like not to have to choose. I would like other options” (Appiah 163). Appiah’s argument for not having to choose echoes Neil Young’s standpoint in the song “This Note’s for You”: “I ain’t singing for Pepsi / I ain’t singing for Coke / I don’t sing for nobody” (K. Chong, Neil 242). A music icon for Kevin Chong, Young not only exhibits an “anti-corporate libertarianism” by rejecting the familiar soft-drink binary, his refusal to sing for anybody also suggests a radical renouncement of groupism that would force him to affiliate with reified homogenous identities in a social and cultural mosaic (K. Chong, Neil 242). What Indigenous and diasporic communities yearn for is perhaps the day when they can articulate their own voices and stories divested of the straitjacket of prescribed social scripts.

After the Sixties

In a not-too-optimistic tone, Jameson ends his periodization of the sixties with the eighties, a decade that witnesses a reassertion of many of the same issues. It is true that the sixties freed massive social energies and released unprecedented new subjects (e.g., people of colour, minorities, natives, students, and women), giving a sense of freedom and possibility beyond the grip of the economic infrastructure (Jameson 208). However, the sense of freedom and
possibility, which arose in the sixties, declined again by the eighties. The transition from the
sixties to the eighties, Jameson argues, may be better understood “in terms of the superstructural
movement,” representing a “transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to
another”:

The 60s were in that sense an immense and inflationary issuing of superstructural credit;
a universal abandonment of the referential gold standard; an extraordinary printing up of
ever more devalued signifiers. With the end of the 60s, with the world economic crisis,
all the old infrastructural bills then slowly come due once more; and the 80s will be
classified by an effort, on a world scale, to proletarianize all those unbound social
forces which gave the 60s their energy, by an extension of class struggle, in other words,
into the farthest reaches of the globe as well as the most minute configurations of local
institutions . . . . The unifying force here is the new vocation of a henceforth global
capitalism, which may also be expected to unify the unequal, fragmented, or local
resistances to the process. (208-09)

On the stage of global capitalism, Canada changed the style in which it imagined itself and
proclaimed its distinctive identity as a pluralistic yet unified nation through national legislation
on multiculturalism in response to the identity crisis of the sixties. As a gesture of goodwill,
multicultural Canada now embraces Chinese and Aboriginal cultures and heritages with love and
recognition. As is shown in the novel, a fire station is changed into a heritage museum in order to
inform the public about the history of the Native inhabitants of the area in the first part of the
nineteenth century and the settlement of early Chinese gold miners and railway workers (67).
People like Rob and Richard are beginning to articulate their strong connections to nature and
authenticity of the Native people and tout their belief in finding the Canadian soul in native traditions (80, 143).

However, as Sara Ahmed contends, this love-filled world is at best a “humanist fantasy” (139). The multicultural discourse of love is ideologically invested in the nation as the real love object (Ahmed 134). Love for difference is a “narcissistic” “desire to reproduce the national subject through how it incorporates others into itself” (Ahmed 138). The casual approval of miscegenation does not mean the affirmation of mixed-race love, but confirms the nation’s whiteness by assimilating others; the de facto agent of reproduction is still the nation (Ahmed 137). The ideological investment in the nation gives rises to a fundamental fissure at the root of the love for difference. Not unlike the deeply divided structure of social institutions like the National Archives of Canada that Karina Vernon perceives underlying a superficial unity, the construction of the nation-state of Canada is intrinsically problematic, as mentioned in the introduction (“Invisibility” 201-02). The all-embracing love offered by the nation is a love that covers up the great fissure in the Canadian national imaginary of minorities of colour and Aboriginal peoples, who are separated yet unified under the banner of a white Canadian culture. At the end of the novel, Helena dies alone in a Third World country while her Chinese ex-boyfriend continues to live a peaceful family life in the metropolitan city of Toronto. Chong’s inclusion of his Chinese character as part of the post-sixties landscape at the expense of the Aboriginal protagonist, to a large extent, mirrors the racial positioning of the nation which is eager to move beyond its colonial past and to celebrate a multicultural present. 61 The

61 I draw this idea partly from Guy Beauregard’s perception of a racist past and a multicultural present. In his comprehensive review of the criticism of Obasan by Japanese Canadian writer Joy Kogawa, Beauregard discerns a
transformation of the nation, however, has not been accomplished; Helena’s suicide still haunts. Colonization is not of the past—albeit pushed to the margins of our collective discourse and awareness—just as multiculturalism is not “a fait accompli” that “has already fulfilled . . . its mandate” (Kamboureli 83). The ideologies of colonialism and multiculturalism intertwine in the formation of Canadian national identity and ideal citizen-subjects. The fault lines inherent in the settler-state of Canada engender contemporaneously the possibility and difficulty of Chinese-Native alliance, a difficulty further compounded by the paradoxes of resistance in the media-saturated, consumerist world of late capitalism. While it may be reassuring to see the children of the sixties who struggled with ambition and commitment establish themselves in society in the eighties, the loving yet broken Chinese-Native relationship in Kevin Chong’s Baroque-a-nova continues to present us with a disturbing picture of insidious racial and gendered violence exerted on minority populations.

Three decades ago, Nathan took Helena out of her home province by rail and acquainted her with the early history of Chinese immigrants; both Nathan’s grandfathers and three great-uncles once participated in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. At the end of the story, Saul repeats the same railway trip across the country that Helena and Nathan once made and learns the story of his mother while staying with Nathan’s family in Toronto. Through a web of personal bonds, the histories of First Nations and Chinese immigrants are at last connected and commemorated. However, just like the lack of meaningful effect that the heritage museum has

shared tendency among the critics, regardless of their specific viewpoints, in asserting the abnormalcy and particularness of the internment in the 1940s in Canadian history. Such configurations, Beauregard suggests, are “a symptom of the cultural politics of contemporary Canadian literary studies, in which literary critics attempt to discuss a ‘racist past’ in a ‘multicultural present’” (“After” 6).
on the social lives of local residents, the land that the railroad runs on still remains silenced. While passengers on the train are impressed by the Canadian landscape, what is unheard is the voice of Native communities, whose indigenous ways of life and history are destroyed, on the threshold of modernity, by railway construction as part of the nation building process.

62 In his analysis of the urban spaces in Asian Canadian writing, Glen Deer questions the superficial recovery of a lost urbanity through reconstruction and renovation. He views the heritage museum in Baroque-a-nova as a means of containing the past without any real effect on the residents (Deer 136).
Part II Chinese-Black Encounters
Chapter 3 The Ethnicization of Female Labour: Chinese and Jamaicans in Yan Li’s *Lily in the Snow* and Ling Zhang’s *Mail-Order Bride*

This chapter features two female Chinese Canadian writers Yan Li and Ling Zhang, both of whom devote a small but vital portion of their novels to a focused portrayal of a specific group of Black Canadians: Jamaican women. Li introduces in her Anglophone novel *Lily in the Snow* a Jamaican woman who is a co-worker and trainer of the Chinese protagonist Lily in the cleaning team at Hotel Crystal Palace. Interchangeably referred to as “the Jamaican” and “the black woman,” the anonymous Jamaican woman is established, almost imperceptibly, as a synonym for and a representative of Black Canadians. The blackness of the Jamaican woman is further foregrounded in Li’s subsequent Sinophone rewriting of the novel entitled “Haidi” (*The Deep*). With black skin contrasting against clean white teeth, she is nicknamed “hei huan,” or “black ibis,” throughout because of her resemblance to a dancing black ibis by the creek when she changes the white sheets with raised arms. In Ling Zhang’s *Mail-Order Bride*, a Sinophone novel that has only been partially translated into English, Irish-Jamaican waitress Tammy is classified as Black in a more problematic manner. Her blackness is not only revealed through her dark skin, but is also made prominent by the pejorative label “nigger” in her contentious relationship with the Chinese emigrant Juanjuan.

---

63 There are three editions of Ling Zhang’s *Mail-Order Bride*: two mainland China editions entitled “Mail-Order Bride” by the Writers Publishing House in Beijing in 2004 and the East China Normal University Press in Shanghai in 2009, and a Taiwan edition entitled “Women from Wenzhou: A Story of Mail-Order Bride” by Asian Culture Press (*Yunchen wenhua*) in 2007. This chapter is based on the 2009 edition. Some excerpts from the novel, including the prologue and part of Chapter One, have been translated into English by Nicky Harman and published in *Peregrine: An English Companion to Chutzpah Magazine* (Issue 7, April 2012). The translation of the characters’ names is taken from Harman’s version and all translations of quotations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
Li’s and Zhang’s shared attention toward Jamaican women might not be coincidental given the demographic constitution of Blacks in Canada. Most notable among Black Canadians is a significant proportion of recent Caribbean immigrants, originating largely from Jamaica followed by Trinidad-Tobago, Haiti, and Barbados (Ty, “Complicating” 53; Mensah 101). The overwhelming majority of Jamaicans are Ontario residents, making up 1.6 percent of the provincial population (Mensah 110). Toronto, the provincial capital of Ontario, has witnessed a strong presence of Jamaicans since the massive influx of Caribbean immigrants to Canada during the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to the 2011 census of Canada, the Greater Toronto Area has the largest concentration of 81,380 Jamaicans, constituting 31.6 percent of the 256,915 Jamaicans residing in Canada. In contrast to their African counterparts among whom men outnumber women, the sex ratio of Jamaicans and other Caribbean immigrants is heavily tipped toward women (Mensah 110). Considering that Li and Zhang have long settled in southern Ontario, in Waterloo and Toronto respectively, it is perhaps not an accident that the particular demographics of Black Canadians in those areas find literary representation in their novels.

However, the designation of Caribbean immigrants as Blacks is not as clear-cut as the statistics might suggest. Although most Caribbean people are descendants of Africans due to the transatlantic slave trade, many other ethno-racial groups originating from different parts of the world also settled in the Caribbean. Since the early nineteenth century when indentured labour was recruited in large numbers from China and India to the sugar plantations after the abolition

---

64 For the overwhelming concentration of Jamaican immigrants in Toronto compared with other Canadian urban centres in Canada, see figure 1.1, Jones 9.

65 For reasons for the difference in sex ratio, see Box 5.1, Mensah 126.
of slavery, Europeans, Black Africans, Chinese, and East Indians have been intermingling with each other, producing a large mixed population in the Caribbean (Mensah 102). The “black” reference to any West Indian is thus clearly problematic. Puerto Ricans, for instance, “are referred to as ‘black’ without qualification” when a Sinophone writer depicts them as “black” (S. Wong, “Yellow” 221).

The problems associated with the blackness of Caribbean immigrants are manifest in the theoretical debate over the concept of blackness in Canada, which, similar to the ever-debated concept of Chineseness, is at once complex and multiple. Barbados-born academic Rinaldo Walcott maintains that blackness is an open-ended, malleable sign, a discourse embedded in contested histories of resistance and domination as well as interrelated black diasporic histories (27-28). He adopts “a deterritorialized strategy” of writing blackness with emphasis on transnational diaspora connections and identifications across borders, advocating that Black Canadians identify with their black counterparts in other parts of the world (Walcott 15, 147). Walcott uses the terms blackness and black Canadian instead of African-Canadian deployed by Nova Scotia-born writer and critic George Elliot Clarke, in that the latter term “distanc[es] oneself from the black urban poor and working class” (27). For Walcott, Clarke’s stress on the authenticity of an early African-Canadian presence in Canada opposes “an authentic older and rural black Canada” to “an inauthentic newer and urban” one (16). Clarke’s nationalistic Red Tory politics, as Walcott calls it, reveals the rhetoric of nativism that excludes the more recent,

66 Joseph Mensah cites Sivanandan and bell hooks, reminding us that the term “Black” is not necessarily negative but has various connotations in different time and places. For example, in contemporary Britain, “Black” is used in a non-racist way to refer to all non-Whites and is increasingly adopted by Asian and Afro-Caribbean youth to assert their identities. African Americans also use “black” or “blackness” for political purposes in the United States. See Mensah 24.
urban black people of poor and working class from constituting Canadianness and betrays his desire to seek recognition and acknowledgement of an “older” blackness from the nation that had once abandoned it (17). In contrast, Walcott brings into conversation the “many blacknesses” in Canada that risk being denied by the official discourse of multiculturalism, in particular “migrant forms of blackness” as exemplified by Caribbean immigrants in relation to pre-Confederation black communities (13-14). 67

The blackness of Caribbean immigrants compared with that of their African counterparts in Canada complicates the Chinese-Jamaican relationship in Li and Zhang’s novels, presenting us with the task of redrawing the triangulation of Black, White, and Asian present in the field of racial positions in the United States. In an attempt to move beyond Black and White bipolar racial dynamics, Claire Jean Kim proposes the notion of the “field of racial positions,” the model of which is constituted by two superior/inferior and insider/foreigner axes (see fig. 3). In this contested field, Asian Americans are racially triangulated vis-à-vis Blacks and Whites through two concurrent, interrelated processes:

(1) processes of “relative valorization,” whereby dominant group A (Whites) valorizes subordinate group B (Asian Americans) relative to subordinate group C (Blacks) on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to dominate both groups, but especially the latter, and (2) processes of “civic ostracism,” whereby dominant group A (Whites) constructs

67 In his recent book Directions Home: Approaches to African-Canadian Literature, Clarke vigorously contests Walcott’s charge of nativism and nationalism (4-7). Clarke reiterates his understanding of African-Canadian literature originally put forward in Odysseys Home as “encompass[ing] the new and the old, the come-from-away and the down-home, the urban and the rural, the pull of the regional and the equally irresistible seductions of African-American and Afro-Caribbean culture” (4). I cite Walcott’s criticism here mainly to put into perspective the migrant forms of blackness embodied by recent Caribbean immigrants.
subordinate group B (Asian Americans) as immutably foreign and unassimilable with Whites on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to ostracize them from the body politic and civic membership. (107)

Given its simultaneous emphasis on the racialization of minority groups both comparable with and different from each other, the field of racial positions is most pertinent to our study of the interrelationships among minority groups. However, racial triangulation relating to Asian Americans, Blacks, and Whites may not apply well with respect to more recent Black Canadians of Caribbean heritage given their newness and foreignness. Although the history of Jamaican immigration in Canada can be traced back to 1796 when Jamaican Maroons arrived in Halifax, Jamaicans only entered Canada in large numbers in the mid-twentieth century mainly as domestic workers or students. Experiencing a population surge between 1973 and 1977, Jamaican immigrants established their strong presence by the late 1970s especially in
metropolitan areas of Canada. Their emerging urban presence problematizes the traditional mapping of Black Canada, which posited a dominant African-Canadian presence. Unlike their African and Aboriginal counterparts in North America, Jamaican immigrants are barely viewed in Canadian society as occupying the position of an insider or native on the horizontal axis of the field. To a great extent, Jamaicans remain to be situated as outsiders, foreign and ostracized, in the similar way as Asians are because of their relatively recent immigrant status.

The polarized distinction between Asians and Blacks in the United States is further blurred by the classification of both Chinese and Jamaicans as visible minorities in Canada. The Black and White division in the United States and the generic grouping of visible minorities in Canada, Eleanor Ty notes, represent two related but different modes of ordering Asian Americans and Asian Canadians based on appearance and function, respectively (Politics 6-8). With reference to Foucault’s systems of classification, Ty maintains that the black-white division is largely built upon the old episteme in the classical age on the basis of appearance. Just as plants were classified by their structure and composition, people are classified based on the pigmentation of their skin. Such classification is actually a “representation,” in Foucault’s words, in that the visible only emerges in the process of obliterating what is not allowed to be seen. In reinforcing the black and white binary, the similarities between the two are intentionally undermined, whereas the phenotypic difference is brought to the fore to legitimize black oppression. In contrast, the Canadian system of classification is based on a modern episteme with emphasis on function. Widely used since the end of the eighteenth century, this classification underlines “the

---

68 For a comprehensive history of Jamaican immigration in Canada from 1796 to the 2000s, see Mensah 104-10.
coherent totality of an organic structure that weaves back into the unique fabric of its sovereignty both the visible and the invisible” (qtd. in Ty, *Politics* 7). Lumping together people of distinct histories, cultures, and languages as visible minorities, as I have shown in the introduction, does not in itself situate them in frequent and liberatory crossover relations in the multicultural mosaic. Such grouping is instead, Ty contends, an insidious strategy whereby the Canadian government organizes its citizens and immigrants according to their expected roles or functions in society (*Politics* 7). Difference aside, the two systems of classification based on appearance and function reveal the mechanism for naming visible minorities. In terms of appearance, subsuming people of different backgrounds and skin colours into visible minorities distinctly sets off racial minorities from Caucasians and whites. Function-wise, notwithstanding evident differences in appearance among different minorities, this inclusive grouping underlines the different socio-economic roles these minorities are required to play in the structure of Canadian society that privileges Caucasians and assumes homogeneity among non-Caucasians.

This chapter will discuss the relationship between more recent Jamaican and Chinese immigrants, mostly women, through the similar yet different roles that they play in the labour market as visible minorities with class distinction. I first focus on Yan Li’s *Lily in the Snow* and examine the position of Jamaican Canadian working-class women in relation to their Chinese counterparts along with the changes in the ethnicization of labour and social mobility. I explore the persistence of the model minority myth at the core of the processes of relative valorization on the vertical axis of superior and inferior in maintaining the equilibrium of the triangulation. Through an analysis of Ling Zhang’s *Mail-Order Bride* in the last section of this chapter, I argue that the distinction between insider and foreigner on the horizontal axis in Kim’s theorization is less associated with nativeness and authenticity than with more fluid processes of whitening and
blackening. The way that Chinese and Jamaicans perceive and interact with each other is overdetermined by racial and class stratification as well as labour exploitation, the intersection of which leads to the transformation of the relative positions of the two. A reading of the two novels through the lens of racialized female labour unveils Joseph Mensah’s conception of the umbrella term of visible minorities as a continuum of various minorities in different positions, who “face varying degrees of discrimination and social distance, not only from the White majority but also from the other minority groups that constitute the continuum” (260). These positions possess relative stability while allowing for ample flexibility to accommodate the ever-changing demands of the capitalist system.

A Model Minority Myth Retold

One of the very few bilingual Chinese Canadian writers, Yan Li follows a trajectory similar to that of many other Chinese immigrant writers of the same generation. A journalist and translator with bachelor’s and master’s degrees from China, Li emigrated from Beijing to Canada in 1987 and completed her second master’s degree in history at the University of Windsor. In 1995, she published an autobiographical novel Daughters of the Red Land, chronicling the eventful life of three generations of women in Peace’s family in twentieth-century China. Li’s first foray into English fiction writing, the novel was selected as a 1996 finalist for the Books in Canada First Novel Award. The success of the novel secured Li a lecturer position at the University of Waterloo, where she is currently the director of the Confucius Institute and the coordinator of the Chinese language program at Renison University College. Subsequent to her Sinophone novel Jiade xifeng (Married to the West Wind) in 1999, Li’s second Anglophone novel, Lily in the Snow, had a more muted reception in Canadian literary circles when it was published in 2009. Set in Mapleton, a small city west of Toronto, the novel vividly portrays the painful endeavour of
the heroine Lily and other immigrants to survive in the snowy land of Canada. In the tradition of *Daughters of the Red Land* and *Married to the West Wind*, *Lily in the Snow* exhibits Li’s persistent interest in women, especially “the strength and commitment that is required to become a fully self-aware and individualized woman” (Banks-Martin). In 2013, Li rewrote the novel in Chinese under the title of “The Deep,” maintaining the overall theme and structure of the English version with considerable changes in plotlines and content.69

Primarily a mother-daughter story, *Lily in the Snow* centres around a familiar plot of estrangement, conflict, and reconciliation between Lily and her mother Grace. The wide gap between Grace’s high expectations and Lily’s pathetic situation immediately becomes evident in the opening scenes of the mother’s visit to Mapleton after her retirement. Upon her arrival at Lily’s apartment in an “old, cockroach-ridden” building nicknamed the “refugee camp,” Grace is poignantly confronted with the dark side of the successful stories of her friends’ children in North America (Y. Li, *Lily* 5). In Grace’s eyes, Lily disgraces herself as “a worthless and incapable person who has no sense of shame” (2). Lily goes to the Government Human Resources Office wearing a plaid shirt inside a floral overcoat matched with blue jeans and an old pair of sneakers. Mostly collected from garage sales, this outfit appears so shabby to Grace that she worries that Lily would be treated with disdain by others. Lily’s successive failures in the job market further dismay Grace. A single mother, Lily has been out of employment since the birth of Baby and has no choice but to comfort her mother, in her letters home, with a fabricated

69 See Yan Li’s postscript to *The Deep* (*Haidi* 279). Rewriting is Li’s favourite way of translating her own work. Prior to *The Deep*, she also rewrote *Daughters of the Red Land* into *Hong fuping* (Red Duckweed) (2010) in Chinese. Li regards rewriting as a process of recreating preferably carried out by the writer. She believes that rewriting provides writers more freedom beyond the linguistic constraints and gives them a broader space of thinking and imagining in order to enhance the original text (Y. Li, *Haidi* 278).
story about being a secretary in a private company. Grace blames Lily for her decision to bear a child rather than pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. She suggests sending Baby back to the boarding nursery in Beijing in order to allow Lily to focus on her career and doctoral studies. This suggestion evokes Lily’s painful childhood memories of being left alone in the boarding school without a mother’s love and causes her to object vehemently. During Grace’s visit, their different views on childrearing and career are further polarized. While Lily insists on caring for Baby on her own, Grace considers Baby to be “the biggest hindrance” to career advancement and sees childrearing as time-wasting “worthless trivia” for an intellectual woman (3, 33). Grace can hardly stifle her irritation and disappointment: “I would never have imagined that you could have declined so fast! You have forgotten all my expectations, wasted all your education, and abandoned your career simply to be a mother! But that job doesn’t need any talent! Even a hen can carry it out perfectly!” (35).

A daughter’s failure to meet the expectations of her mother remains a recurrent theme in Chinese North American literature. Lily’s sense of inferiority before her mother and her painstaking efforts to achieve success are reminiscent of the daughters in Amy Tan’s classic novel The Joy Luck Club two decades ago. However, although Li’s novel narrates a familiar mother-daughter story, it varies from many of its precursors, in that the conflict does not mainly occur on the cultural level between Chinese mothers with limited English ability and their North American-born and -raised daughters steeped in Western culture. As shown in the opening scenes, which establish the mood for the entire novel, the mother-daughter tension is largely aggravated by Lily’s inability to land a decent job that matches her educational background and professional skills. It is disheartening that with two master’s degrees and a previous job as a journalist for a prestigious Chinese government news agency, Lily cannot even find a secretarial job because she
is overqualified. After her graduation, Lily works as a servant for the widowed Mrs. Fortune in the spacious estate of Deer Valley, carrying out household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and walking the dog. With Grace’s assistance in babysitting, Lily undertakes again a series of unskilled jobs to support the family. She first serves as the warehouse manager of a garment factory. Despite the euphemistic title of manager, her main job is sorting and piling up pairs of jeans according to size, “boring, back-breaking labour for minimum pay” (Y. Li, Lily 23). She is then employed by a lady with a European accent to clean the kitchen and other rooms in an ancient building, where she performs the daunting task of removing thick grease accumulated over twenty years. Lily’s Canadian work experience then secures her a cleaning job at the five-star Hotel Crystal Palace. She learns from a Jamaican woman there how to make beds and clean guest rooms properly. After leaving the hotel, she temporarily assumes the position of an office administrator at an immigration consulting office run by a Cantonese-speaking businessman, Mr. New. Her routine work includes taking phone calls, collecting information, and interpreting for clients during their meetings with the immigration officer or the citizenship judge. With the impending closure of the office, her short-lived joy of working as an office administrator is replaced with frustration. Although shortlisted for the position of Chinese-language news reporter at the British Broadcasting Corporation, Lily is nevertheless denied the job because of the prospective difficulty of balancing motherhood and demanding duties in London. Sinking into depression on her way home, Lily visits Mrs. Fortune’s house, only to discover that the old lady has been taken into a nursing home, and the estate is currently under residential development. Lily’s subsequent interview for a job as a nurse’s aid at a seniors’ home ends without success, because the continuous attacks of cramps on the day of the interview prevent her from moving and expressing herself eloquently. Even the hotel where she has previously
worked no longer hires new staff given the slow season. In spite of every effort, Lily falls back into unemployment as the novel closes.

Lily is not alone in this respect. Her Jamaican co-worker at the hotel finds herself in the same predicament. A single mother with two toddlers, she is one of the few cleaning women who has worked at the hotel for a long time. When praised for her good English, she reveals that she majored in child psychology in college back home. She, too, is distressed at not unfulfilling the expectations of her mother: “My mother never taught me how to clean the bathtub and toilet. She expected her first daughter to be a teacher. I know she would be heartbroken if she found out what I am doing in Canada” (Y. Li, *Lily* 28-29). The Jamaican woman’s apprehension strikes a chord with Lily, reminiscent of Grace’s sombre face.

The similar plights of Lily and the Jamaican woman take the novel beyond the familiar theme of mother-daughter relationships on the superficial level and alert us to a long-standing phenomenon in the Canadian labour market, that is, the hierarchical division of labour. Attributed with unequal social value in the labour market, non-White immigrants, Chinese and Blacks among them, experience significant income discrimination and receive lower average employment earnings compared to Canadians of European descent (P. Li, “Market Worth” 24; P. Li, “Market Value” 128; Mensah 169-74). One important factor that contributes to unfavourable employment opportunities and income discrimination for new immigrants is the process of de-skilling. De-skilling, or the erosion of skills, as Habiba Zaman defines it, refers to “the systematic and structural processes involved in eliminating educational and professional skills, whether by force, by constructing barriers, or by imposing government regulations/deregulations” (79). The de-skilling process in the labour market is realized mainly
by denying recognition of the educational credentials and professional skills that immigrants achieve in home countries. For immigrants from non-Western and non-English-speaking countries, the rejection of foreign credentials constitutes a major impediment to labour market access and places them in a disadvantaged situation (Zaman 62; Jones 159; P. Li, “Market Worth” 23). The entry of Asian women into low-paying manufacturing jobs after immigration results largely from “their immigrant status, racist and sexist hiring practices, and institutional barriers to recertification by professional licensing boards” (Kang 182). The devastating experience of Lily and the Jamaican woman in the job market despite their post-secondary degrees emblematizes the meaning of the title “Lily in the Snow” as emphasizing the sacrifice of new immigrants when they are forced to start from scratch in the new cold land of Canada with their previous education and work experience unrecognized (Y. Li, Interview 193).

Viewed in this light, the gap depicted in the novel between the mother’s expectation and the daughter’s unsatisfactory performance in both the cases of Lily and the Jamaican woman is not so much a problem of intergenerational communication and understanding as the inevitable product of the ethnicization of labour. The key to understanding ethnicity, Rey Chow astutely observes, does not, as one would assume, lie in an “a priori, essentialist condition of foreignness” or “empirically mobile experiences of migrancy, immigration, diaspora, exile, and so forth” (Protestant 34). More crucial is what she calls “the ethnicization of labor,” a process in which “certain people within a particular society, immigrants among them, become marked as ethnics at the same time that they occupy socially inferior positions as low-level laborers” (R. Chow, Protestant 33-34; original emphasis). Such correspondence, sustained by the experience of migration, systematically produces low-paid migrant workers and reinforces their migrant status even after their achievement of residency or citizenship. Therefore, the relationship between
ethnicity and labour is “not the oft-reiterated one of the existential uprooting of the migrant worker from home . . . but rather that the ethnic as such stands in modernity as the site of foreignness that is produced from within privileged societies and is at once defined by and constitutive of that society’s hierarchical divisions of labor” (R. Chow, Protestant 34).

According to Immanuel Wallerstein, the ethnicization of labour works exactly as the form through which racism operates in a capitalist society (‘Ideological’ 33). He defines racism not simply as an attitude of xenophobia, but rather a reconciliation of the contradiction generated by xenophobia. The contradiction lies in the fact that when the “barbarian” other is absolutely excluded from society, his/her labour-power and thus contribution to the production of surplus value are also no longer subject to appropriation. Such contradiction becomes particularly intense in the capitalist system, because continual production and accumulation of capital realized through labour are essential to the structure of capitalism and its expansion. In this system, racism serves as “the magic formula” that reconciles the double objectives of maximizing capital accumulation and, at the same time, minimizing the costs of producing labour-power and coping with labour disruption (“Ideological” 33). As one of the major means of reducing the costs of production, the ethnicization of the work force establishes a high correlation of ethnicity and occupation without the comprehensive protection of labour laws, thus permitting low wages for certain labour segments. Through the occupational-reward hierarchy, surplus value is redistributed to maintain capitalism as a system. A major segment of the work force is forced to transfer a larger proportion of their created surplus value to others, thus being exposed to greater
exploitation.\textsuperscript{70} As Mensah astutely states in examining the status of Blacks in the job market, “the real issue is not the misguided myths, malicious stereotypes, and racist predilections that many people have about Blacks. Rather, it is the colour line in the job market that relegates many Blacks to low-paying, dead-end jobs or excludes them from some segments of the labour market altogether” (139).

In Wallerstein’s view, the household serves as the key institution that sustains the occupation-reward hierarchy (“Ideological” 34-35). He draws attention to the often overlooked fact that the wage workers whose wage falls far below the cost of the reproduction of labour only partially contribute to the total income of the household. A large proportion of the cost of labour reproduction in the household is actually covered by non-wage labourers. In other words, the maintenance of the low-wage labour market is only possible because of the indirect compensation of the extensive labour input in non-wage work, especially domestic work. The largest source of non-wage labour is constituted by women, “the most palpable ethnics in the capitalist workforce, especially when they are doing underpaid or unpaid domestic work” (R. Chow, Protestant 34). Feminist economist Marilyn Waring cautions that although the word “labour” is originally defined as “the pains and effort of childbirth: travail,” the reproductive work that women perform is generally sidestepped as “unproductive”: “Growing and processing food, nurturing, educating, and running a household—all part of the complex process of reproduction—are unacknowledged as part of the production system” (28; original emphasis). In this line of thinking, Wallerstein argues that sexism is “not just the enforcement of different, or

\textsuperscript{70} For Wallerstein’s notion of the ethnicization of the work force, see “Ideological” 33-34 and “Construction” 83.
even less appreciated, work roles for women, no more than racism is just xenophobia;” it is as much an indispensable product of the capitalist system as is racism: “As racism is meant to keep people inside the work system, not eject them from it, so sexism intends the same” (“Ideological” 34).

In the face of racism and sexism, a tension, with which women of colour constantly struggle, is produced between wage work to sustain the family and the non-wage work of caring for children (Collins 51). Grace’s criticism of Lily’s opting for childbearing instead of a career opposes motherhood to work, overlooking the indispensability of motherhood, or more precisely “motherwork” in Patricia Hill Collins’ term, as non-wage labour that maintains a low-wage market. By assisting in babysitting and domestic work, Grace consequently replaces Lily as the provider of non-wage labour in order to release the latter to join the labour market. Once freed from household chores, Lily enters the Canadian labour market through underpaid domestic work.  

71 Like the Jamaican women recruited to Canada via the West Indian Domestic Scheme in the late 1950s, Lily becomes constitutive of the global workforce that liberates white women from domestic work and childcare in the “international division of reproductive labor” (Parreñas 61). In this way, First-World and Third-World women are brought together not “as sisters and allies struggling to achieve common goals” in the imagining of affluent second-wave feminists, but “as mistress and maid, employer and employee, across a great divide of privilege and opportunity” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 11). The increasing dependency of the West on Third-World migrants gives rise to a global relationship resembling the traditional patriarchal familial

71 It is interesting to mention that back in China, Lily once played a masculine part with little burden of housework in the relationship with her weak, effeminate ex-husband Prince.
structure: “The First World takes on a role like that of the old-fashioned male in the family—pampered, entitled, unable to cook, clean, or find his socks. Poor countries take on a role like that of the traditional woman within the family—patient, nurturing, and self-denying” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 11-12). Such a relationship provides the freedom for Lily’s advisor Helen to adopt babies from China at a time when Lily and her Jamaican co-worker can hardly afford one or two children. What Rhacel Salazar Parreñas calls the three-tier “international transfer of caretaking” is established here: while white women shift domestic work to materially underprivileged women from the Third World, Grace’s suggestion to send Baby to the boarding nursery in Beijing is an alternative way to procure the services of even less privileged women migrating from China’s provincial towns and the countryside to metropolitan cities such as Beijing and Shanghai (62).

While mirroring each other as impoverished single mothers performing unskilled labour, Lily and her Jamaican co-worker are, nonetheless, distinct from each other in various aspects. One can catch a glimpse of the divergence in their attitudes toward male strippers. Lily’s contempt for strippers is first shown in her stiffened body and puzzled eyes when she finds out that the rooms that she has been cleaning for the lady with a European accent belong to female strippers. Stunned by the shameless bragging of a stripper about the money made through this “evil” profession, Lily quits the job immediately (Y. Li, Lily 26). Lily expresses the same disdain at Hotel Crystal Palace when she is invited to watch the performance of French male strippers from Montreal at the male strip club downtown. The Jamaican woman is thrilled at the prospect of watching the show. She jumps up from her seat and eagerly sketches a map to show Lily the location. Lily, nonetheless, declines the invitation immediately: “Sorry. I am not going to that sort of place. Male strippers? How shameful!” (30). Her aversion to male strippers resonates with
the other Chinese women in the cleaning team. Whereas Lily feels sad for the strippers who “[make] a living by abusing their parents’ dignity,” the Jamaican woman experiences great fun in the club. Back from the show, she describes in detail the male strippers’ display of their sexual organs and their sexual advances to the white women audience; she “giggled and laughed, imitated and exaggerated, her dull look replaced by a youthful glow” (30, 31).

To understand the opposing attitudes of the Chinese and the Jamaican, one needs to probe into the more profound divergence between Chinese and black immigrants in terms of education and social mobility. Most notably, the Chinese cleaning women are predominantly composed of doctors: two former family physicians, one paediatrician, one gynaecologist, and one Doctor of Earth Science. The Chinese staff are frequently moving, leaving or joining the team every few months or weeks. In the latter part of the novel, two out of the five doctors have already resigned from their jobs. The geophysicist ventures into the business of assisting Canadians in their adoption of baby girls from China, and the gynaecologist receives a research position in a health study lab at Mapleton University. Lily is also about to leave shortly to join Mr. New’s immigration consulting office. The prospect of leaving uplifts her amidst tedious cleaning work: “The routines in the guest rooms didn’t feel suffocating anymore since she knew there was an end” (Y. Li, Lily 239). During the training, the Jamaican woman admits that she foresees Lily leaving eventually, “Well, I know, you Chinese are all intelligent and smart. This is only a temporary position for you. Sooner or later, you will all leave” (28). In comparison, black women appear to have more loyalty to the hotel. They are mostly “reliable long-time employees, regardless of their age, size, looks, and educational backgrounds” (28). The Jamaican woman, who becomes a representative figure for the other black workers, has been working at the hotel for a number of years and is finally promoted to sub-leader of the cleaning team since all the
Chinese doctors have resigned. Unlike the Chinese women who have started new careers, the Jamaican has no alternative but to remain in the same place: “I have nowhere to go and have to stay here forever” (238).

One may wish to question the higher social mobility of Chinese cleaning women, given that Lily’s social status appears little different from that of her Jamaican co-worker in the long run. The series of jobs Lily undertakes after her cleaning job are mostly forms of menial labour, and she falls back into joblessness as the story closes. However, a careful reader might detect another important profession for Lily in the midst of her job search, that is, writing. Lily’s writing project begins to germinate during her final year at the journalism school in Beijing. During her research assistantship for an American woman writer, Lily’s fifty-page family memoir impresses the writer, who encourages Lily to develop it into a book for publication. Lily starts working on the book when she settles in Canada. Literature opens up to her “a holy and magic world” “where she could create and feel great” and frees her from the “frivolous, impetuous, and materialistic world of today” (Y. Li, Lily 53, 257). She finds a sanctuary and refuge in her writing which helps her to resist captivity by menial work: “The blue light on the screen drew her into a world cut off from the depressing reality of her life. For years, this had become the only place where she could seek temporary release for her captive soul and peace for her troubled mind” (53). At Mrs. Fortune’s estate, the life of being a servant is made bearable and becomes fulfilling when Lily writes in the private library. She spends many nights there in front of her computer; “[h]er focused writing in this quiet library nourished her thirsty soul, allowing her precious moments to escape the hollow, blank life in the vast estate” (200). No matter how difficult and complicated her life becomes and however slow her progress, Lily never gives up writing. She declines all social activities and visitors in order to focus on her final draft in the last few weeks. After
rejections from prestigious publishers, some of whom may not have even bothered to read the manuscript of an unknown writer like her, she eventually receives cheerful news. The Eden Press expresses interest in the first three chapters and asks her to submit the entire manuscript. Hopelessness and despondence brought about by unemployment and rejection dissipate at that moment: “Lily held herself tightly, her mouth open wide. . . . She started to tremble at the unexpected news, and walked around the sitting room like a startled deer” (378-79). The prospective publication of the book bestows upon Lily with “a more meaningful life in Canada,” a goal she had pursued for years (345). This symbolic capital compensates for Lily’s lack of economic capital and elevates her from the disadvantaged status to a superior position in the field of racial positions, relatively valorized compared to her black counterparts.

In contrast to the “decent career” of writing, male stripper performance merely offers the Jamaican woman a temporary liberating experience of gender role reversal (Y. Li, Lily 330). The Jamaican woman has long been a sexual object of her abusive partner and only rids herself of the latter with the help of the feminist organizations in town. Attending the male stripper show serves as a special occasion to celebrate her sixth anniversary in Canada. For her, it is exhilarating to see that male strippers are reduced to sexual objects on display for women’s pleasure, for the simple reason that “The men make fun of us. Why can’t we make fun of them?” (30). The Jamaican woman fails to realize, however, that the subversion of the traditional, normative gender hierarchy in everyday life staged in the hyper-sexualized environment is temporary and illusory.72 Through displaying his penis and choosing some female audience to

72 For criticism of the gender role reversal of the male strip show, see Margolis and Arnold.
interact, the strong French male stripper still plays the role of an active sexual aggressor (Margolis and Arnold 347). With low social mobility, the Jamaican woman is not dissimilar to male striptease dancers; both are placed at the bottom of class stratification as commodified menial or sexual labour subject to exploitation.

The disparity between Chinese and black women in terms of social mobility hearkens back, to some extent, to the model minority myth of Asian immigrants. In his 1966 article “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” William Petersen valorizes Japanese Americans and Japanese culture for upholding family values and work ethic such as perseverance, hard work, and accommodation. Petersen believes that these values, similar to the Protestant ethic in Western culture, enable the remarkable success of Japanese Americans in the face of severe discriminations and lack of government welfare. Hence, they are “model minorities” distinct from problem minorities such as Blacks. Extended to Chinese Americans and Asian Americans at large, the model minority theory has at its core two questions embedded in the word “model,” namely, “Model of what” and “Model for whom?” (Wu 59). According to Petersen, Japanese Americans are a model of frugality, diligence, and self-reliance. These values are transmitted intergenerationally through two mutually reinforced institutions, family and religion. The major group that Petersen compares with Japanese Americans is Black Americans or “Negroes” as he calls them. Subject to colour prejudice like the Negroes, Japanese Americans demonstrate higher achievement orientation and better acculturation partly because of their links to Japanese culture. They serve as a model for Blacks to emulate, so that the latter should refrain from posing political demands and strive to achieve success without government assistance and social programs. In placing Asian immigrants in the ambivalent position of intermediary between whites and blacks, the model minority myth perpetuates the hard-work-pays-off American
dream. The myth reinforces racial hierarchies and the subordinate status of African Americans and Chicanos/Latino Americans, thus distancing Asians from other racial minorities and undermining their potential for cooperation or forming alliances (Chae 26).

Persistent in multicultural Canada, the model minority myth is best exemplified in the heroine Lily, who can be read as an ideal embodiment of that myth, entrenched as she is in Chinese culture, on the one hand, and Canadian values, on the other. Lily is moulded into a hard-working, self-reliant model minority figure through the influence of her mother Grace. Lily’s diligence in school is rooted in her lifelong sense of inferiority when she faces her mother. In order to meet Grace’s expectation and make her proud, Lily has been studying hard ever since she was in school and endeavours to earn extra marks to be at the top of her class. In her undergraduate studies, she utilizes every opportunity to practice English with the native English instructor and achieves the highest marks in all his classes. She alone receives all the English novels from the instructor when he leaves China, because she is the only one who does not nap in the dormitory but remains in the classroom to study. To prepare for the entrance exam for the competitive graduate program in journalism at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, she, by then a government translator, devotes all her time to study. As a result of her hard work, she succeeds in gaining admission to the program.

During Grace’s temporary stay in Canada, she provides vital assistance to Lily to achieve self-reliance without imposing a financial burden on the government. Unemployed since

73 Youngsuk Chae notices that racial conflicts between whites and blacks in the United States have gradually shifted to that between Asian Americans, on the one hand, and Chicano/Latino Americans or African Americans, on the other, or even within ethnic groups (24).
giving birth to Baby, Lily exhausts her maternity leave benefit and depends on social assistance. Upon her arrival, Grace immediately urges Lily to move the family from a two-bedroom apartment to a one-bedroom unit in the basement to “manage their limited financial resources independently” (Y. Li, Lily 5). She considers reliance on government aid an indecent practice no different from begging, declaring: “I didn’t raise you up to be a shameless beggar!”; “I’ll help you regain your long-lost decency” (5). To prevent Lily from applying for childcare subsidy and allow her to live “cleanly,” Grace takes over the task of caring for Baby when Lily is at work (33). Apart from assisting Lily to stand on her own feet without social welfare, Grace also demonstrates to her the power of individual effort to achieve success. Dissatisfied with Lily’s situation, Grace writes an article “Voice by a Mother” in the name of “Disappointed Heart” published in the Chinese newspaper The World Journal in New York. She proudly shows the article to Lily to demonstrate that one can find a decent job in Canada “as long as you make an effort” (222).

The strong influence that Grace exerts on Lily’s life is emblematic of Petersen’s view of family as one of the most important institutions for transmitting Asian values. Wallerstein uncovers the logic behind the importance attributed to the family as a basic unit of ethnic communities in the ethnicization of labour (“Construction” 83-84). He points out that normal behaviour of the work force is not biologically determined but acquired through training. Determining who assumes the task of teaching and socializing the work force into particular sets of attitudes appropriate for their expected roles is critically important. Few states or school systems are willing to take on this task overtly considering the potential violation of national equality. However,

[t]he ‘culture’ of an ethnic group is precisely the set of rules into which parents belonging to that ethnic group are pressured to socialize their children. . . . ‘ethnic groups’ not only
may socialize their respective members differently from each other; it is the very
definition of ethnic groups that they socialize in a particular manner. Thus what is
illegitimate for the state to do comes in by the rear window as ‘voluntary’ group
behaviour defending a social ‘identity.’ (Wallerstein, “Construction” 83-84; original
emphasis)

By constantly instilling in Lily contempt for welfare dependency, Grace downscales the
obligations of the state and brings up a model minority daughter much needed in a
neoliberal society that “increasingly defines citizenship in economic terms, by insisting that
citizenship is the civic duty of individuals to reduce their burden on society and to build up
their human capital” (Ong, *Buddha* 14). Grace’s emphasis on the prospect of achievement
through individual effort overlooks the structural discrimination and inequality in the
Canadian labour market toward immigrant women as the fundamental causes of Lily’s
unemployment as previously discussed. The model minority discourse by which the mother
abides consciously or unconsciously establishes the correlation between individual effort
and reward, literally “blot[ting] out the existence of society and the interdependence without
which no individual effort could lead to any results, let alone any reward” (Robbins 92). By
shifting the minority problem to individuals, such a correlation insidiously legitimizes the
underlying unequal power structure of the society and perpetuates material differences.

In addition to the influence of her Chinese family, what distinguishes Lily further from other
minorities is the moral capital that she acquires through upholding unwavering integrity in
compliance with Canadian values. In the garment factory run by a Hong Kong immigrant, Lily is
unsettled by the humiliating regulation imposed upon employees, who are required to have their
purses checked before leaving to prevent stealing. She finds the regulation “insulting” because
she believes that Canada is a country “with one of the highest standards of human rights” (Y. Li, *Lily* 24). Under the surveillance of video monitors in a panopticon-like environment, Lily lives up to such standards by challenging the regulation. In stark contrast to the obedient new immigrant women lining up to have their purses checked, Lily ignores the reminder of the Indian woman and the “frozen gaze” of the boss, “walk[ing] straight towards the door, head held high” (24). Although she is fired not long after, Lily, nevertheless, achieves moral superiority over other immigrant women for her defiance and undauntedness. She watches them “with a heavy heart” for their abject subservience and views herself as a black sheep sacrificed to “prevent the spread of some dangerous thought among the docile donkeys” (24). By readily pinning the blame on women workers in the garment factory, Lily fails to see through their apparent docility which is caused in part by their social vulnerability and employment precarity in a labour market where options and possibilities for racialized immigrant women (Lily herself among them) are often constrained.

Lily’s integrity is also in evidence in dealing with the immigration officer in the refugee case of her first client Beaver-teeth. A Chinese peasant from Fujian province smuggled to Canada, Beaver-teeth intends to claim refugee status under the excuse of prospective persecution in China for breaking China’s one-child policy. However, when the immigration officer asks him to confirm whether he would face persecution upon returning to China, Beaver-teeth quivers nervously, stumbling through a surprising reply: “I think, the situation . . . has changed . . . in China today. It’s better, for sure. . . . Perhaps . . . I will . . . not meet . . . severe punishment . . . anymore . . .” (Y. Li, *Lily* 321). Beaver-teeth’s unfavourable answer draws Lily, his interpreter, into an intense inner struggle between being loyal to her client and covering up his mistake or being an honest person and translating Beaver Teeth’s answer truthfully. At this critical moment,
a memory of her former graduate advisor, Helen, prompts her decision. Lily recalls that Helen once came across a $60 old Chinese vase in an antique store and turned it over to Lily for evaluation. The vase turned out to be of great value, for Lily discovered that the two Chinese characters at the bottom of the vase stand for a Ming dynasty emperor in the early fifteenth century. This situation landed Helen with the dilemma of whether or not to disclose the truth to the store owner who had also asked Lily to inform him of her evaluation. After a silent struggle, Helen allowed Lily to tell the truth to the store owner. As a result, the price of the vase rose to $360, and Helen could no longer afford to buy it. Lily regards Helen’s honesty as characteristic of most Canadians brought up in the Christian faith, despite the fact that Helen, like 80 percent of Canadians, is not a regular churchgoer. As Lily explains to an artist who does not observe church practices, “Whether you acknowledge yourselves as Christian or not, when you were young this was a predominantly Christian culture, and those values naturally have permeated your lives” (270). When Lily decides to translate Beaver-teeth’s reply truthfully after recalling Helen’s behaviour over the antique vase, she literally identifies with the predominant culture and values of Christianity to which she attributes the honesty and integrity of Helen.

As representatives of Chinese and black immigrant women, respectively, the superiority of Lily as a role model for her Jamaican co-worker does not so much depend on economic success and material accumulation as on moral capital. According to the dominant model of “ethnic succession,” Western society owes a moral debt to ethnic minorities given their accumulated “moral capital of suffering and contribution” (Ong, Buddha 3). Ethnic minorities are expected to achieve higher social status and full citizenship in successive generations through the exploitation to which the first- and second-generation of immigrants have been subjected and the contributions they have made (Ong, Buddha 3-4). As a first-generation immigrant, Lily’s moral
capital is not so much gained from the moral debt as it is built upon her integration of Chinese family values and Canadian Christian culture. She is instilled with the Confucian values, such as hard work, self-discipline, and frugality, which are regarded as “the most recent incarnation of neoliberal enterprise values” (Ong, *Buddha* 14). At the same time, she is also capable of identifying with dominant Christian values and assimilating into the mainstream society “in a particular economic, urban, white . . . way” (Bhatt 204). The integration of the two values does not resolve material inequality and social stratification, but works as a healing process that “reroutes social critique into introspective meditation” and sutures the ethnic subject “into an optimal position within the dominant culture” (Palumbo-Liu 397). In this line of thinking, constructing Chinese immigrants as a model minority is not to affirm the superior position of this particular minority group, but to instil in their Jamaican counterparts and other Black Canadians the normative work ethic and moral behaviour required by the capitalist system.

**Resurrecting Racialized Female Labour**

While the Jamaican co-worker remains an anonymous minor character in Yan Li’s *Lily in the Snow*, the Jamaican-Irish girl Tammy is brought under the spotlight in Ling Zhang’s *Mail-Order Bride*. Like Zhang’s many other novels straddling Canada and China, the last book of Zhang’s Shanghai Trilogy, *Mail-Order Bride*, is organized in an interweaving structure of multiple segments spatially and temporally separated yet intimately connected. The eight chapters resemble eight pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and, when put together, compose a complex picture that skilfully shifts back and forth between the cities of Toronto, Shanghai, and Wenzhou over a
century. In a non-linear narrative structure, the novel, if crudely summarized, recounts a love story of one man and two women. After his wife, Fan, dies in a car accident, the middle-aged Chinese immigrant Jamie Lin purchases a café in Toronto with compensation from Fan’s insurance company. Acting as a go-between, Fan’s mother, Snowflake Fang, brings Jamie into a relationship with Juanjuan, a 28-year-old girl from Wenzhou working for a Japanese garment company in Shanghai. After getting to know each other via phone calls and photos, Jamie visits Juanjuan in her hometown and brings her to Canada as his fiancée. However, when Juanjuan leaves everything behind and arrives in Toronto, Jamie finds himself attached to Tammy, an Irish-Jamaican waitress who is of great assistance in his café business. His rift with Juanjuan deepens when he decides to use his savings to purchase a new café instead of sending her to a fashion design program in a college as he had promised. In her disappointment and despondency, Juanjuan moves out of Jamie’s place and develops a romance with Xue Dong while working in Dong’s laundry. By the time Jamie marries Tammy and fathers their baby, Juanjuan is entrusted with the task of designing costumes for the play *Flower Drum Song* and eventually fulfills her dream of becoming a fashion designer.

Although the above summary barely does justice to the complexity of the plot in reducing the story to a banal love triangle, it helps us focus attention on the two female characters Juanjuan and Tammy. The titular protagonist, Juanjuan, undeniably occupies a central position in the novel. Three generations of women in her family have received much critical attention in recent

---

74 In the preface to *Mail-Order Bride*, Zhang uses the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle to describe the mixed arrangement of chapters; readers cannot solve the puzzle until finishing the whole book (2).

75 Juanjuan is Snowflake Fang’s daughter out of wedlock.
Chinese scholarship. In contrast, Tammy and her romance with Jamie, though constituting a most interesting and indispensable part of the novel, are often bypassed. In my view, what makes Zhang’s *Mail-Order Bride* unique in Chinese Canadian and diasporic Chinese literature is precisely the glimpse the novel gives of Chinese-Black relations unfolding through Jamie’s developing affection for the black woman Tammy as well as Tammy’s conflict and reconciliation with Juanjuan. The ambiguity of Tammy’s blackness and her social position in relation to Juanjuan complicate the love triangle in a way that recalls an intriguing aspect of the ethnicization of labour, that is, the flexibility of racial boundary lines.

It is important to note that the hierarchical division of labour in the operation of capitalism discussed in the previous section is never stable, but is simultaneously formed and transformed, perpetuated and subverted along with shifting boundary lines among different ethnic groups. The very first function of racism that Wallerstein points out is its ability to expand or reduce the number of the lowest rewarded labourers in accordance with current needs (“Ideological” 34). Constant in pattern as it is, the process of ethnicization contains a great deal of flexibility, given that the labour pool and the needs of the economy are always time- and place-specific. Racism works well in ethnicization because it “has always combined claims based on continuity with the past (genetic and/or social) with a present-oriented flexibility in defining the exact boundaries of these reified entities we call races or ethno-national-religious groupings” (Wallerstein, “Ideological” 34). In other words, racism allows the said flexibility to simultaneously affirm fixed ethno-racial boundaries of the past and readily redraw those boundaries to meet the needs of the present. As Wallerstein lucidly puts it,

They [racial and/or ethno-national-religious groups or communities] are always there and always ranked hierarchically, but they are not always exactly the same. Some groups can
be mobile in the ranking system; some groups can disappear or combine with others; while still others break apart and new ones are born. But there are always some who are ‘niggers’. If there are no Blacks or too few to play the role, one can invent ‘White niggers.’ (“Ideological” 34)

The phenomenon that Wallerstein puts forward has existed since the nineteenth century. Aihwa Ong observes that impoverished Irish and Chinese immigrants on the respective East and West coast of the United States were both situated toward the black end of the continuum at that time. The blackening of these groups is a product of the social order of the day which used “the Negro” as a “contrast conception” or “counter-race” against the free working man as an independent republican (Ong, *Buddha* 11). Immigrants are lowered to black status when they risk toiling in wage slavery bereft of independent livelihood under similar working conditions to that of unfree black labour (Ong, *Buddha* 11-12).

The whitening and blackening processes become more prominent under economic neoliberalism in Canada. Compared to the binary opposition between blacks and whites, the creation of “visible minorities” in Canada allows the flexibility within this highly heterogeneous group to cater to different needs in particular times and places. In other words, while the boundary between white and non-white is perpetuated through visible appearance, the boundaries within different racial minorities are subject to constant shifts and reconfigurations. On a continuum where the boundaries among visible minorities of diverse appearances and backgrounds are blurred, members of other communities may be readily moved to the black end to fill the role previously undertaken by black people as underpaid menial labourers.
From this perspective, the tension between Juanjuan and Tammy does not simply stem from their sexual jealousy as the novel apparently suggests. Rather, the tension is rooted in their shared status as racialized female labour and the mutual discrimination that results from this relegation to an inferior social status. While vying for Jamie’s affection, the two minority women also engage in the effort to live an independent, dignified life. Throughout the course of the story, the ethno-racial boundary lines are constantly negotiated and redrawn to produce ethnic labour on renewed grounds determined by shifting socio-economic conditions. The eventual reconciliation at the end of the novel is suggestive of Zhang’s idealistic recuperation of both women: while Tammy is resurrected from low-paid labour and poverty through her affluent family background, Juanjuan, like Lily in *Lily in the Snow*, realizes her dream of becoming a fashion designer after enduring hardship and many difficulties.

One can sense the first sign of the tension between Juanjuan and Tammy when Juanjuan accompanies Jamie to the café for the first time. Whereas other waitresses appreciate Juanjuan’s gifts of Chinese silk scarves and are curious about her new life in Toronto, Tammy “welcomes” her in a blunt, if not unfriendly, manner. When Tammy is introduced to Juanjuan after fixing the storm-damaged roof, Tammy sizes up the other woman from head to toe for a while, chuckling, “So you are that mail-order bride” (L. Zhang, *Mail-Order* 105). Juanjuan immediately blushes scarlet with embarrassment at the unexpected label of “mail-order bride,” recalling the book that she had read with the same English title about the struggle faced by a Russian woman to make a living in the United States.

Although Juanjuan is surprised by being labelled mail-order bride, this label may not be surprising to the readers. Juanjuan’s image as a mail-order bride has already been conspicuously
established on the title page. Zhang disclosed in an interview with Wang Hongqi that the novel was originally entitled “Xi liu shui,” literally meaning “water that flows westward” (160). The water metaphor vividly describes people in the East who emigrate to the West across the Pacific Ocean. After considering the book market, Zhang compromised on the title and changed it to the more eye-catching “Mail-Order Bride” as the editor had suggested (Interview by Wang 160). Deprived of its original poetic sentiment, the new title has not proven satisfactory for Zhang or for literary critics; given its lurid sensationalism, it is unfit for the refined style and weighty theme of this serious work (Gong).76 Literary considerations aside, such a change, however, serves an important function for the purpose of the current chapter in foregrounding Juanjuan as the undisputed heroine on the journey of Chinese immigrants to the West.

Strictly speaking, Juanjuan is not a mail-order bride in the contemporary sense. Reminiscent of historical practices such as the filles du Roy, picture brides, and arranged marriages, the mail-order bride phenomenon nowadays has developed into a lucrative matchmaking industry that creates a marital relationship between Third World women and consumer husbands in the West via business agencies (Langevin and Belleau 80-84). Juanjuan, however, differs greatly from her contemporary counterparts from the Third World. The daughter of a senior Chinese government official, Juanjuan is introduced to Jamie, a Chinese immigrant with a similar cultural background, by her birth mother Snowflake Fang. Instead of being an exploited commodity trafficked across national borders, she joins Jamie in Canada under the fiancée visa not so much for material security as to escape a defunct relationship with her ex-boyfriend.

76 Notably, Gong’s criticism of the title is removed when the article is published as the preface to the 2009 edition of the novel.
Nonetheless, Juanjuan resembles other mail-order brides not only in that her migration is linked to marriage, but, on a deeper level, in being an exploited female worker in Shanghai and Toronto. The repeated designation of Juanjuan as mail-order bride throughout the novel points not so much to the hierarchy between First and Third World countries as to the connection between the two in the commodification and exploitation of women under current conditions of global capitalism. Juanjuan’s failure in the Chinese college entrance exam leads her to study fashion design in the rented classroom of the International School for Arts and Crafts, one of the many emerging vocational schools in Wenzhou. She then takes a sewing job in a Japanese garment factory in Shanghai and is required to do collective exercises twice a day for the sake of efficiency. Her meagre income affords her only a bunk bed in a tiny student dormitory room together with seven other girls, all of them having to share a communal phone. In Toronto, Juanjuan’s ambition to become a fashion designer seems almost impossible to Jamie’s eyes. The famous fashion street in Toronto, Jamie explains, often comprises design sections upstairs dominated by white people and manufacturing sections in the basement with yellow faces behind sewing machines. As Jamie thinks to himself, even if Juanjuan completes the college program in fashion design, she would have to switch to another job eventually, since no one would buy Chinese designed fashion in the West. She will be, at best, one of the yellow faces operating sewing machines.

Read together, Juanjuan’s work and living conditions in China and her prospective occupation in Canada as a seamstress emblematize what Lisa Lowe has termed the “racialized feminization of labor,” in particular, the relationship between the Third-World “ethnics” and racialized minorities in the West (Immigrant 158). Lowe notes that in stark contrast to a Marxian
correlation between economic abstract labour and political abstract citizenship, capital’s profit-maximizing mechanism operates not through abstracting but differentiating labour “through the social productions of ‘difference,’ of restrictive particularity and illegitimacy marked by race, nation, geographical origins, and gender” (Immigrant 27-28). Capitalism in the contemporary era features not, as we often presume, the homogenizing process perpetuated by globalization, but “the differentiation of specific resources and markets that permit the exploitation of gendered and racialized labor within regional and national sites” (Lowe, Immigrant 161). “The transnationalization of production,” Arif Dirlik argues, renders untenable the conventional division of First, Second, and Third World: “Parts of the earlier Third World are today on the pathways of transnational capital, and belong in the ‘developed’ sector of the world economy. Likewise, parts of the First World marginalized in the new global economy are hardly distinguishable in way of life from what used to be viewed as Third World characteristics” (72). As a result of the restructuring of global capitalism, women are increasingly recruited into the labour force in the latter half of the twentieth century. Racial segmentation and gender stratification segregate Asian immigrant women in the marginalized space at the crossroads of “immigration, racialization, labor exploitation, and patriarchal gender relations” (Lowe, Immigrant 162, 158). The intersection of multiple axes of power helps link Asian immigrant and Asian American women with women working in the Third World as two kinds of major workforce intimately related in the global economy (Lowe, Immigrant 158). At the time when the novel’s foreign-invested garment factory in Shanghai employed a large number of migrant workers, the garment industry in Toronto, as Richard Thompson shows from the records of the Toronto local of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, recruited nearly half of its
6,000 workers from Chinese immigrants, mostly women (Thompson 222, 241). On a fundamental level, migrant women in the garment factory in Shanghai are not much different from the immigrant women working in similar sectors in Toronto who are similarly procured to satisfy the labour demands of capitalism.

Juanjuan does not end up becoming a seamstress in garment factories in Toronto. Instead, she remains one of the racialized female labourers in Jamie’s café. Although Jamie’s fiancée in name, Juanjuan is actually a waitress performing onerous duties. Such work is not temporary as she had expected but would probably last a year or even longer. Her fashion design studies are delayed not simply because of her late application and high TOEFL requirements, but also due to Jamie’s plan to invest his savings in a new café. Juanjuan’s subsequent entrance into the labour market alerts us to an often overlooked role of the wife as what Pei-cha Lan views to be an unpaid form of domestic and reproductive labor in marriage migration (1803). Unlike upper- or middle-class households who can afford to employ domestic maids to do housework or caregiving work, members of the working class may seek migrant women as wives to carry out reproductive labour (Lan 1803). In this sense, the mail-order bride is perhaps more appropriately termed the mail-order maid.

If the negative connotation of “mail-order bride” leads to Juanjuan’s immediate embarrassment, a more deep-seated reason is revealed when her embarrassment grows to resentment the second time Tammy calls her a mail-order bride. Juanjuan continues to disappoint Tammy during her

---

77 For the reasons behind the large recruitment of Chinese women in Toronto’s garment industry, see Thompson 222, 241-42.
training as a waitress due to her absent-mindedness. When Tammy is teaching her how to serve customers, Juanjuan’s mind drifts away and she almost falls asleep as Tammy’s English becomes too complicated for her to understand. Tammy coldly dismisses Juanjuan’s apologies: “There are only very few people can choose not working or sleeping during the work. Neither you nor I belong to them. So you can only choose one, working or sleeping” (L. Zhang, Mail-Order 107).

Tammy walks away afterwards, leaving the other waitresses giggling since they believe that Juanjuan’s sexual life is the cause of her fatigue. The next day Juanjuan fails to memorize the price list as required, and she attempts to defend herself through an English idiom that she learned in Shanghai, “Haste makes waste.” Tammy warns her that anyone training to be a waitress who says such things will be fired; Juanjuan is exempted, of course, because no one can fire her. Jamie overhears the last few words when he steps in, asking who will fire whom.

Tammy uses again the term “mail-order bride” to refer to Juanjuan in a sneering tone, “How dare I fire her? She may fire me sooner or later. Don’t worry, Jamie. Your mail-order bride’s English is not bad at all, especially in a quarrel. Did you work extra hours to teach her in bed last night?” (112). Tammy’s contemptuous sexual allusion arouses chuckles among the waitresses and infuriates Juanjuan. In a swift movement, Juanjuan takes off her apron and throws it at Tammy: “My name is Jiang Juanjuan—in case you have a poor memory and don’t remember. I am not called ‘mail-order bride,’ just as you are not called ‘nigger’!” (112). After the outburst, she runs out of the café, leaving the others gazing at each other in confusion and astonishment.

78 The original Chinese word for “nigger” is heigui, literally meaning “black devil.” The word also appears in Zhang’s Gold Mountain Blues, translated into English and French as “black devil” and “nègre” respectively. Here I translate heigui as “nigger” close to the French version in order to better convey the derogatory sense.
Juanjuan’s adoption of the racially derogatory term “nigger” is not simply an irrational remark made in a fit of rage, but betrays her long-held contempt for Tammy as a black person. Note that her absent-mindedness during training cannot be easily attributed to her limited English comprehension. When Jamie suggests asking Tammy to teach her English and customer service, Juanjuan disregards his suggestion and sarcastically retorts, “She teaches me? By what? By the face that can never be washed white?” (L. Zhang, *Mail-Order* 105). One fact that needs to be emphasized is Tammy’s mixed-race origin. Born to an Irish father and a Jamaican mother, she is actually more Irish than Jamaican according to the patriarchal lineage in traditional Chinese culture. During childhood, Tammy had fair skin and could completely pass as a white girl. Even though her skin turns darker when she grows older, she still appears fairer than other black people. In her contact with Chinese people, however, her mixed heritage is often overlooked and replaced with an assertion of her black Jamaican roots. Along with the gradual change in skin colour, whiteness is merely what she assumes temporarily and it eventually gives way to black *bense* (literally, “original colour”), her inherent quality (8). The blackness in skin colour is reinforced by Tammy’s indecorous attire and manner. When Tammy comes to seek a waitress job in Jamie’s café, Jamie finds her attire disconcerting: “Tall and rangy, she wears a short tank top and a pair of shorts, muscles on arms and legs tight and shining. The belly is partly exposed with belly button pierced by two silver rings. Curly hair is coiled up high at the top of her head” (8). Unlike “decent” women, Tammy’s manner is regarded by Jamie as uncouth and frivolous. While bargaining over her wage, she tilts her shoulder and lays her arm on Jamie, half her body clinging on his shoulder and exuding wisps of perfume. Jamie dismisses Tammy’s résumé and feels reluctant to hire her, because he regarded the few black waitresses who worked in the café before as lazy, ill-tempered, and difficult to order around. He sympathizes with Tammy only when she explains why she should be hired—“because my rent next month lies in your account,”
an explanation which makes Jamie recall the miserable days he too has experienced in his life (8).

The accentuation of the blackness of mixed-blood Tammy renders Juanjuan’s embarrassment and resentment more thought-provoking. To be fair, Jamie explains, attempting to comfort Juanjuan, Tammy’s calling her “mail-order bride,” “though not sounding good, is not really wrong” (L. Zhang, Mail-Order 113). A more vexing problem lies in the fact that Juanjuan has never been explicitly referred to as a mail-order bride until Tammy refers to her as one. The label “mail-order bride” is unbearable for Juanjuan not only because of the name itself, but more importantly, because of the person who calls her by that name, which, in this case, is a black woman with a status lower than herself. Chae notices that when Asian immigrants become profit-oriented business owners, they begin to hire Latin American immigrants, who come to fill the role of ethnic labour (29). As one of the cheap labourers in Jamie’s café, Tammy is paid the minimum wage of $6.85 per hour with no choice of shifts. Juanjuan’s resentment of the label “mail-order bride” reveals not only her rejection of dependency on others, but more insidiously, her ethno-racial prejudice toward Blacks, prompting us to reflect on the racialist mindset of Chinese immigrants who engage in the labour exploitation of Blacks.

While Juanjuan’s prejudice toward Tammy is fairly understandable, the latter’s insolence toward the former seems to be more puzzling. Whereas other waitresses remain polite and friendly to the proprietress-to-be of the café, Tammy’s careless and somewhat arrogant attitude toward Juanjuan seems to be at odds with the former’s inferior position as a waitress. The conspicuous factor of sexual jealousy aside, such insolence has its basis in Tammy’s affluent family background that sets her apart from Juanjuan. As the story progresses, Tammy’s privileged material condition
remarkably whitens her blackness. At one point, the novel seems to reinforce Jamie’s unfavourable first impression of Tammy by sketching out her unsightly residence. The rented apartment is located in a squalid neighbourhood in east Toronto populated by impoverished migrants. Smelly carton boxes are piled up in front of the sundry store on the ground floor, enticing buzzing flies. However, the novel soon changes its tone from a stereotypical description of Blacks to a portrayal of Tammy as an elegant beauty walking leisurely out of the lobby. Instead of tank top and shorts, she now wears an ankle-length dark black dress with a green ribbon in the middle. Her dress is nicely matched with black high-heeled sandals and her hair falls over her shoulders, loosely tied in a charming fashion.

The attire is just the beginning of Tammy’s transformation preparing readers for a more dramatic metamorphosis that will take place in the Blue Coral Reef Restaurant. Located at the prime section of Lakeshore Boulevard with a splendid view over Lake Ontario, the restaurant where Tammy takes Jamie for dinner is a first-class dining venue in the heart of downtown Toronto. The unique layout of the restaurant is carefully designed and furnished in a luxurious but low-key style. The hall is decorated from ceiling to floor with fine textured wood, which exudes a pleasant fragrance; all furniture and dinnerware are of supreme quality. Jamie and Tammy’s table is laden with exotic food, including soup made from a sea turtle imported from a farm in the Cayman Islands, Jamaican pineapple in a coconut shell, Mexican fried cactus, and Haitian chilli goat meat. The incredibly cheap bill of $41 reveals Tammy’s astounding secret: the restaurant is owned by her parents. Stupefied and speechless in amazement, Jamie jokes about other secrets that Tammy may be keeping from him: “Don’t tell me later that your grandfather was once Governor General of Canada” (L. Zhang, *Mail-Order* 94). Tammy discerns, from Jamie’s surprise, his stereotypical view of Blacks. In Jamie’s eyes, the parents of someone like
Tammy probably know nothing but how to smoke, take drugs, and live on the dole. The disclosure of the affluence of Tammy’s family not only dissipates Jamie’s racial prejudice, but also challenges his gender bias. Tammy’s father is not the one who operates the restaurant and transfers half of the property to her mother as Jamie assumes. Rather, it is Tammy’s mother who purchased the restaurant when her father was still an assistant cook.

The turning point that transforms Jamie’s relationship with Tammy occurs at the lowest ebb of his life. Jamie falls into despair when Café Desire, his sole source of income, is burned down in a fire in the middle of the night. Whereas Juanjuan is disappointed with Jamie’s failed promise and decides to move out before the fire breaks out, Tammy stays at Jamie’s place and cares for him in his desperation. Meanwhile, Tammy wins over $150,000 in compensation after intense negotiation with the insurance company of the next-door pet store where the fire started. With the large compensation, Jamie is now able to afford the first instalment on the renovation of a new café he had long wished for. After the accident, his growing affection for Tammy is elaborately captured in two poetic passages:

All the women that he has experienced in his life are like the moon—as feminine as silver, as soft as water, divesting one of courage and direction in deep attachment. Only the woman before him is like sunshine—ardent, warm, healthy, ubiquitous, and needless to seek.

All the women that once walked into his life remind him of flowers—delicate, gentle, impermanent, demanding his ever-present care and attention. Only the woman named Tammy reminds him of the tree—a tree that gathers sunshine, water, and the power of Mother Nature, a tree that lifts up spear-like branches and leaves in the storm, a
tree that breeds new life in ice and snow, a tree that he can cling to and rest on when
tired. (L. Zhang, Mail-Order 126)

The contrasting metaphors of moon and sunshine, flower and tree, while reaffirming Juanjuan’s
dependence on Jamie as a mail-order bride, reveals Jamie’s dependence on Tammy. In effect,
Tammy is not the only one on whom Jamie relies. Women always play an indispensable role in
Jamie’s life. Without them the opening and expansion of his business would be impossible.

Although Jamie initiates Juanjuan’s emigration to Canada, he follows his wife Fan in emigrating
to Canada using the spousal visa in the first place. While Fan, a doctoral student in chemistry,
works in the laboratory at the University of Toronto, Jamie deep-fries spring rolls in a Chinese
restaurant and assumes wifely duties in doing housework and warming the bed. After Fan’s
death, he takes up a series of short-term jobs as an insurance salesman, a plumber, and a
fisherman in various places, only to return to Toronto and open Café Desire using Fan’s
compensation. Similarly, the second café that Jamie is about to purchase would not have been
possible without Tammy’s assistance, first with money borrowed from her parents, then with the
insurance compensation that she manages to negotiate. As he regains his consciousness after
days in a coma, he realizes that in the bad dream that he had in Juanjuan’s hometown, he saves
Tammy from the fire, whereas in reality, Tammy is the one who saves him, his business as well
as his life.

In contrast, Juanjuan is increasingly alienated from Jamie and even becomes an obstacle to the
development of his business. While Juanjuan blames Jamie for being exclusively concerned with
his café—“In this world, the only thing you care is your café”—Jamie complains to Tammy that
Juanjuan never cares about other things except fashion design (L. Zhang, Mail-Order 113, 121-
22). Between the expansion of his café and Juanjuan’s college education, Jamie opts for the
former and, against his promise, postpones her study for a few more years. To some extent, Jamie and Juanjuan are different yet similar. Like Juanjuan who is in need of love and care, Jamie equally longs for help and support in his struggles in Canada; he yearns for a tree that he can rest against in his exhaustion. Jamie’s oscillation between Tammy and Juanjuan does not simply highlight the predicament of Chinese immigrant women who migrate by virtue of marriage; it also reveals, in a less conspicuous way, the vulnerability and insecurities of their male counterparts and the adversity faced by new Chinese immigrants in Canada as a whole.

Considering family background and circumstances, Tammy’s lack of deference toward Juanjuan is not difficult to understand. The conflict between these two women, as Xifang Zhao keenly observes, lies less in race and culture than in economic situation and personal capabilities (33). Though serving as a waitress like Juanjuan and the other waitresses, Tammy differs from them in her class mobility thanks to her well-off parents, which entitles her to independence and freedom to choose: “You [Jamie] like to be the president and I like to be a beggar. Each has their own preference. . . . Moreover, I didn’t say I’ll work for you for a lifetime” (L. Zhang, Mail-Order 94). In possession of substantial material wealth through intergenerational transmission, Tammy is expected to ascend to an enviable upper-middle-class status. Masquerading as an impoverished black worker, she literally enjoys the luxury of flexibility and choice that Juanjuan and Jamie do not own.

By placing Juanjuan in a losing situation in the love triangle, Zhang, nonetheless, does not lower her to the bottom of the social hierarchy. Though enduring the precarious state of isolation and dependence of mail-order brides, Juanjuan challenges the label by demonstrating her undaunted ambition and determination to succeed in the face of hardship and discrimination. Like Fan, who
leaves Shanghai for Toronto, Juanjuan leaves her comfortably-well-off family to live in squalid conditions in Shanghai in pursuit of her dream: “. . . she had left home, all on her own, for the bright lights of the big city. She must have been chasing a dream. Otherwise why would she be prepared to squeeze into a cramped bunk bed and fight over a shared phone with seven other young women? . . . Where she and Fan came from, women were famous for pursuing their dreams” (Zhang, “from” 9). Working at the garment factory is not the end point for Juanjuan but merely a way to familiarize herself with the manufacturing process. Juanjuan’s failed relationship not only leads her away from Jamie’s café to Xue Dong’s laundry, but serves as the catalyst to fulfill her ambition as well. Returning the costume that a drama student sends in for laundry, Juanjuan adjusts the left sleeve to the best fit and points out the inappropriate style of the costume for the Chinese cultural context of the play *The Flower Drum Song*. Amazed by Juanjuan’s knowledge of traditional Chinese folk costumes, the student invites her to design a new costume for the play. To Juanjuan’s surprise, the three new costumes that she makes are well liked by the student and her fellows, bringing Juanjuan eleven more orders. The orders affirm Juanjuan’s dexterity and talent, disproving Jamie’s premature conclusion that she has no choice but to work in his café because no one in Toronto will purchase her designs. On the day of the show, Juanjuan is no longer the gentle little girl in the school photo with a pile of books in front of her school, wearing a loose-fitting man’s jacket and stone-washed jeans. Instead, she wears a turtleneck satin jacket in apricot pink with a tight waist and wide sleeves, with shining silver asparagus ferns thickly embroidered on the collar band and wristband. The jacket is matched with a black tight-waisted long skirt with a square of pink flowers and coiled hair tied with a flowery pin. At this point, Juanjuan comes to embody an ideal form of Oriental beauty, a beauty of grace and poise different from the stereotype of the exotic Asian mail-order bride who is supposed to be erotic and subordinate to men. Juanjuan offers a ten percent discount in
exchange for two play tickets to fulfil her longing for recognition and affirmation. When she sees her name on the poster with the title “Fashion Designer,” a mixture of feelings overwhelms her: “It [dress designer] is an English phrase that she has learned so thoroughly by heart in China that she could almost shout it out in her dream. But at that moment, it becomes so unfamiliar. After a while, she finally comes to realize what it means. Warm sentiments well up inside her” (L. Zhang, Mail-Order 240). Like the Chinese girl May Li in The Flower Drum Song, Juanjuan, after losing Jamie’s love, wins the respect and affection of Xue Dong with her ability and talent.

If Zhang’s Mail-Order Bride begins with portrayals of Chinese and black immigrant women as part of a racialized female labour force in which different groups direct racial prejudice against each other, the novel proceeds to challenge the racial stereotypes by showing how the women, by struggling to achieve a more respectable life and a higher social status, also manage to overcome their initial prejudice. As Juanjuan and Tammy go beyond their associations with immigrant labour, their perceptions of each other also undergo a dramatic transformation. White replaces black as the dominant colour in Tammy’s wedding, or to be more exact, in Juanjuan’s imagination of Tammy’s wedding. Juanjuan envisions Tammy in a wedding gown: “Tammy’s stature and looks are always eye-catching wherever she is. The dress is bestowed with life and aura because of her. The dress benefits from her. The dress is merely the background, and she is the foreground forever” (L. Zhang, Mail-Order 187). After signing the paperwork, the couple will depart in a Lincoln Limousine for the garden villa of Tammy’s parents in north Toronto to attend a grand banquet with hundreds of relatives and friends. In the final scene at the airport, Tammy shows an unprecedented friendliness toward Juanjuan and the two reach an unexpected reconciliation. Coming with Jamie to send Juanjuan off, Tammy grasps Juanjuan’s hand and asks her to give a name to the baby girl that Tammy is carrying. Moreover, in recognition of her great
potential in fashion design, the café and the church jointly set up a special fund for Juanjuan to attend school or run her own company. At the very moment when she steps into the boarding gate, Juanjuan turns around all of a sudden, yelling out a cheerful name for the unborn baby, “Hope, call it Hope. Both English and Chinese names” (250). The optimistic ending marks the resolution of all the tension, and offers the satisfaction of Chinese-Black intermarriage and a new romance between two Chinese immigrants. Along with Tammy’s integration into the Chinese community, the novel’s delineation of ethno-racial and cultural divisions between Chinese and Jamaicans is balanced against its desire to perceive minority women in renewed relations that go beyond skin colour.

What we can perceive from the representation of Chinese and Jamaican immigrants in Yan Li’s *Lily in the Snow* and Ling Zhang’s *Mail-Order Bride* through the critical lens of migrant labour is a field of racial positions that remains somewhat indeterminate. As a form of mapping interracial relations, the field of racial positions is best conceived without a stable structure. On the one hand, the relations of superior and inferior as well as foreigner and insider between minority groups continue to persist and are even fortified. On the other, these relations are frequently subverted in the constant movement of minority groups toward the opposing ends of white and black status. The whitening and blackening processes situate racialized subjects “along the continuum of more or less likely to succeed,” evaluating them “as belonging to a category and inscribed with a radical indeterminacy in the game of becoming self-motivated, self-propelling, and freedom-loving . . . citizens” (Ong, *Buddha* 14). The insidious polarization guarantees the ethnicization of labour that occurs in a society “even when there are no migrants, even when migrants have become citizens” (R. Chow, *Protestant* 34). Yet a certain indeterminacy remains. Chineseness and blackness in Canada do not simply reside in skin colour
and the history of the group’s presence in Canada. Rather, Chinese and Blacks in their multiplicity are produced in interrelated and interactive formative processes and are influenced by the demands of the labour market and opportunities for social mobility.
Chapter 4 Volatile Crossings: Liminal Subjects in He Chen’s “I am a Little Bird” and Bo Sun’s Tears of Little Overseas Students in the Foreign Land

Back in China, we call Caucasians foreigners wai guo ren, they come from the West exotic-looking, self-congratulatory their politeness embarrasses a lot of Chinese

sometimes we also call white foreigners Big Nose, da bi zi, not in a derogatory manner but a rather humorous way to meet strangers by admiring their outstanding noses

however, if the foreigner is black, we say, hei ren, a black person, instead of a black foreigner, hei wai guo ren, as if their foreignness doesn’t matter that much when the colour of the skin becomes a definer

Lien Chao, “Foreigners”

The discussion of Chinese-Black interactions in Sinophone Canadian literature would hardly be complete without a reference to Sau-ling C. Wong’s “Huang yu hei: meiguo huawen zuojia bixia de huaren yu heiren (The Yellow and the Black: Chinese and Blacks in the Works of Chinese Writers in America). First published in a special issue of the Chinese-language journal Chung Wai Literary Monthly on Sinophone American literature, the article has been perhaps the most comprehensive study of the relationship between Chinese Americans and African Americans in
Sinophone literature. At the centre of Wong’s analytical attention lies a marked distinction between two sets of mentalities and experiences among the first-generation Chinese in the United States, namely, *huanghei yijia* (literally, “yellows and blacks are of the same family”), or “yellow-black solidarity,” and *huanghei shutu* (literally, “yellows and blacks take different paths”), or “yellow-black divergence” (“Yellow” 78). Whereas the familial metaphor for yellow-black solidarity suggests the potential for coalition building between subordinate groups, yellow-black divergence is manifested in the disdain and antagonism of immigrant-generation Chinese Americans toward their African American counterparts.

Wong views the coexistence of yellow-black solidarity and divergence as a product of the racial order in the United States and the identity negotiation of Chinese immigrants. She analyzes American racial order in light of Claire Jean Kim’s “racial triangulation,” a positioning that caters to the different ideological needs of white society (S. Wong, “Yellow” 84). When the socio-structural problem of racial injustice is swept under the carpet, yellow-black difference and the superiority/inferiority dimension are highlighted. Yellows are judged to be an industrious, disciplined, and law-abiding model minority in stark contrast to blacks whose failure is caused by personal attributes. When it becomes imperative to meet the threat of the “yellow peril,” however, the yellow-black hierarchy is reversed and the foreigner/insider dimension brought to the fore. Unlike long-settled blacks, yellows are represented as “culturally unassimilable and ideologically suspect perpetual foreigners” (S. Wong, “Yellow” 84).

Faced with unstable racial positioning, Chinese immigrants use African Americans as a “boundary-marker” and vacillate between the two attitudes in their negotiations over diasporic identities (S. Wong, “Yellow” 85). Wong notes that solidarity between the two communities is
likely to be facilitated by hostile social conditions. Transported to America through the “selling of pigs” and the Middle Passage respectively, Chinese labourers and black slaves shared a common historical trauma of forcible displacement. They were both treated as subhuman and inferior races by dominant whites in the building of the American nation. As “the Civil Rights, anti-war, anti-colonial, and ethnic consciousness movements” rose in the sixties under the influence of leftist thought, yellow-black solidarity grew as part of the broader “solidarity between peoples of colour,” protesting against the violence, discrimination, and labour exploitation that Chinese and African Americans have endured (S. Wong, “Yellow” 78-79; 82-83). In contrast, the Chinese tend to embrace yellow-black divergence when they are accepted into mainstream society as a model minority or are trapped in severe insecurity and must strive to dissociate themselves from “the lowest of the low” (S. Wong, “Yellow” 84). For working-class and middle-class Chinese immigrants with downward mobility who directly compete with African Americans in the labour market, yellow-black divergence is often deployed as a crude psychological safeguard against the threat posed by the “proximity to the most stigmatized racialized group in American society” (S. Wong, “Yellow” 84).

Although the two sets of experiences coexist among first-generation Chinese Americans, Wong evidently leans toward the yellow-black divergence that is more explicitly exhibited in Sinophone American literature. In a slightly abridged English translation of “Huang yu hei” entitled “The Yellow and the Black: Race and Diasporic Identity in Sinophone Chinese American Literature,” Wong removes the few literary works that demonstrate, often with subtlety, yellow-black solidarity and focuses exclusively on yellow-black divergence. The newly revised English version, “Generational Effects in Racialization: Representations of African Americans in Sinophone Chinese American Literature,” further posits the two attitudes as a
crucial difference between Anglophone and Sinophone Chinese American literature. Wong attributes the difference partly to the influence of the Asian American movement—a “Yellow Power” movement that drew upon the “Black Power” model in the cultural and political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s—on American-born writers. These writers often admired blacks for their “outspokenness,” “radicalism,” and repudiation of racist stereotypes, and portrayed them as protecting and inspiring the Chinese (S. Wong, “Generational” 375-76). In contrast, positive portrayals of blacks were seldom found in Sinophone literature for the most part of the twentieth century. Foreign-born first-generation Sinophone writers largely perpetuated the prevalent stereotypes by means of negative delineation, even dehumanized caricatures, of African Americans, operating on a racial code that “uses ‘blackness’ to define and enhance ‘Chineseness’” (S. Wong, “Generational” 376).

Wong’s increasing emphasis on yellow-black divergence serves as an apt description of the primary object of her study, overseas student literature (liuxuesheng wenxue). Flourishing in Taiwan during the study-abroad movement in the 1960s and 1970s, overseas student literature was written by the “rootless generation” of Chinese immigrants with study abroad experience (Chih. Wang 143). This body of literature is characterized by a melancholic sense of marginality, displacement, and alienation from both western culture and the culture of their homeland. Distinct from labour migrants, most of these writers belonged to a well-educated

---

79 The study-abroad movement in modern Chinese history was inaugurated in mid-nineteenth century. The movement continued in the republican period and produced western-educated intellectuals who aspired to revive debilitated Chinese nation. When the Communist Party came to power in 1949, mainland China closed its door first to the West and then to the Soviet Union in the 1960s; student migration was thus thwarted. In the meantime, the Taiwan government encouraged and sponsored a large number of undergraduate and graduate students to study in the United States. See Chih. Wang 141.
middle class with higher degrees from universities in Taiwan and the United States and occupied a privileged position of “transnational mobility and cultural elitism” (Chih. Wang 141). Their class interests were simultaneously served by the symbolic capital of the West and endangered by American imperialism, leading to “the intricate web of their own ‘overseas’ ‘nationalist bourgeois’ condition” and “cultural compradorism” (Chih. Wang 144; Ma 128-29). Of relatively elite status, overseas student writers, therefore, were inclined to identify with the image of the model minority and distanced themselves from blacks in their quest for an “idealized Chinese diasporic identity” (S. Wong, “Yellow” 90).

Following Wong’s study of overseas student literature through the lens of yellow-black divergence, I will examine in this chapter the representations of Chinese-Black encounters in an emergent genre of “little overseas student literature” (xiao liuxuesheng wenxue) in Canada. After a three-decade hiatus dating back to 1949, student migration regained momentum after Deng Xiaoping’s 1978 open-door and reform policy. Most noticeable in this now nationwide phenomenon is the increasingly lower age of the students studying overseas. Student migrants in the 1990s were comprised primarily of postgraduates with little work experience who either supported themselves or were funded by foreign scholarships. They were thus generally younger than their government-funded predecessors in the early 1980s. In recent decades, these postgraduates have been replaced by a growing number of children and teenagers. Through the facilitation of private education agents and the financial support of their parents, many young students are sent abroad to receive primary, secondary, and undergraduate education or to take
short-term language courses. “Little overseas student literature” arises against such a backdrop as a less established genre, loosely referring to the literary works written by those who grew up as young foreign students or by other, mostly immigrant, writers about this group of students.

My purpose in juxtaposing overseas student literature by Chinese American writers and little overseas student literature by their Canadian counterparts is not so much to draw a comparison between the Sinophone literatures of the two countries as between different generations of overseas Chinese students. This particular group of little overseas students is of critical importance to the present chapter given their liminality, a transitory stage or space between two relatively stable and culturally recognized conditions, or “state[s]” in Victor Turner’s word (93). Initially introduced in 1908 by French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep to identify rites of passage, the liminal represents the transitional stage between the preliminal rites of “separation from a previous world” and post-liminal rites of “incorporation into the new world” (21). During the liminal period of passage and transition, the ritual subject is in a state of ambiguity and indeterminacy, experiencing the disintegration of previous identity and detachment from pre-existing conditions together with the promise of transformation. The subject is bound to resume a stable, socially prescribed state and “behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards” upon the consummation of the passage (Turner 94). Little overseas Chinese students bear a close resemblance to the preceding generation of students in being located in a liminal space betwixt and between the home and host country. Visa students are not only treated as foreigners by white Canadians, but also sometimes viewed with ambivalence as new arrivals.

80 For the changing age pattern of Chinese student migration since 1978, see Xiang and Shen 515-16.
and sojourners by more assimilated native-born children of Asian descent and long settled Chinese immigrants (Zhou and Lee 13). The crisis of cultural in-betweenness in white society brought about by ethno-racial identity is further aggravated by the crisis in values that occurs in a liminal stage between childhood and adulthood. Ambiguities arise between “the dialectics of parental influence and individual freedom, dependence and independence, innocence and responsibility, and ultimately adolescence and adulthood” (Zhou and Lee 3). For many of the overseas students who are “parachute kids” sent off by upper- or middle-class families to study abroad, the crisis becomes aggravated by the absence of parental care and support. Representative of a unique age cohort, little overseas students are confused by their ambiguous identities, and they fit uneasily into the Canadian ethno-racial schema and the ideal of assimilated citizenship.

The double liminality of little overseas students in race and age complicates their position in Canadian society. They are distinct from the transnational capitalist subjects who profit from the mobility of capital and migrate by choice, on the one hand, and the poor, undocumented labourers who migrate out of involuntary necessity and are submitted to exploitation, on the other. Not surprisingly, these international students are desirable to the Canadian education industry as they possess substantial resources from their upper-middle-class parents to pay the high tuition fees and living expenses. Yet most of them cannot be classified as Chinese Canadians in the strict sense, since they may only temporarily reside in Canada on student visas. Their perceived lack of Canadianness, nonetheless, does not make this group less pertinent to my project especially at a time when the growing number of Asian students on Canadian campuses arouses considerable public concern. In November 2010, Maclean’s magazine published a highly controversial article “‘Too Asian’?” that expresses concern for the overrepresentation of
academically focused Asian students in Canada, as they might circumscribe the opportunities available for more versatile non-Asian students in post-secondary education, in particular at top universities.\textsuperscript{81} The “Too Asian” article is consonant with the notorious “Campus Giveaway” episode of CTV’s W5 program three decades ago which alleged that foreign Chinese students were taking away rightful places from white Canadians in university programs like medicine, pharmacy, and engineering. While the “Too Asian” narrative readopts the racist “yellow peril” trope in the W5 case, it, Larissa Lai discerns, varies from the latter by simultaneously distinguishing and conflating domestic and international Asian students. Whereas the W5 case misrepresents Chinese Canadian students, either Canadian citizens or landed immigrants, as “foreign” thereby disavowing the Canadian identity of nonwhite citizens, the Maclean’s article lumps together indiscriminately local students of Asian heritage and foreign students under the category of “Asian” (Lai 17-18; Heer 3-4). The article states that “many white students simply believe that competing with Asians—both Asian Canadians and international students—requires a sacrifice of time and freedom they’re not willing to make” (Findlay and Köhler 77). The overt conflation between local and international students reduces the two groups “as being equally threatening to white students” who “hold the trump card of valuing their freedom, that vaunted if nebulous characteristic that is supposed to mark Western democracy” (Lai 17-18). The racist discourse present in the Maclean’s piece gives us a clear picture of the fluid and blurred dividing line between Chinese visa students in Canada vis-à-vis their Chinese Canadian counterparts in the discourse of education. When Asians are needed to serve as the perpetual “other” to white

\textsuperscript{81} The original title of the article is “‘Too Asian’?: A term used in the U.S. to talk about racial imbalance at Ivy League schools is now being whispered on Canadian campuses—by everyone but the students themselves, who speak out loud and clear” (Findlay and Köhler 77). The article is retitled “The enrollment controversy: Worries that efforts in the U.S. to limit enrollment of Asian students in top universities may migrate to Canada” (see the magazine’s website http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/too-asian/).
students in Canada, the citizenship status and the degree of “Canadianness” of Chinese visa students are downplayed to foreground the Chinese heritage that they share with Chinese Canadian students.

I include the unique cohort of little Chinese overseas students at the end of my dissertation not only in response to their problematic conflation (and distinction from) with their Chinese Canadian counterparts, but also to break away from the myth of the model minority that surrounds Asian students. The Chineseness of little overseas students does not necessarily result in academic excellence, and these students pose a potential risk to the host society when they no longer fit into the category of highly-motivated, academically focused students. Rather than embodying the stereotyped merits of industriousness and frugality, a significant portion of these students turn out to be prodigal and lacking in discipline. A very few are even involved in delinquent and criminal activities, constituting a threat to society. These little overseas students are relegated to the role of bad subjects in the starkest sense, that is, failing to achieve success. These failures take readers on a journey into the pandemic social problems of a rising China that is fully implicated in the transnational movement of capital, the dark side of the country that never ceases to concern contemporary Sinophone writers.

This chapter focuses on young overseas Chinese students as liminal subjects in He Chen’s novella “I am a Little Bird” and Bo Sun’s novel _Tears of Little Overseas Students in a Foreign Land_. The liminal subjects in the two works contribute to a more vexed Chinese-Black relationship in a different yet related fashion compared to overseas student literature of an earlier period. These young Chinese students show fewer traces of ethnocentric tendencies and racial moral superiority than their early immigrant counterparts, and they do not seem to be badly
troubled by identity crises. A few anonymous black characters appear sporadically in Chen’s and Sun’s fiction under the generic name of “black person” (hei ren), introducing intermittent moments of Chinese-Black interactions that are rarely seen in overseas student literature. The ancillary black characters are not deployed to critique the racial politics of the dominant white society or expand the reach of fiction to showcase Chinese-Black solidarity and coalition. Staged in stereotypical, even racist images, black people represent the inferior groups that young Chinese students need to shun in order to complete the transformation from bad to good subjects that re-adopt social norms and moral standards. The inter-ethnic literary impulse of little overseas student literature is part of a larger transnational imperative that emphasizes the social conditions of China to contextualize the recent unprecedented migration. For the early generation of overseas students, China in its undeveloped backward state merely provides an imaginary nostalgic home that they are simultaneously escaping from and longing for. For new generations of little overseas students at the turn of the twentieth century, however, China is rising to global prominence as a world economic power, even as it faces new class divisions and endemic political corruption domestically. As an essential background for the volatile relationships between Chinese and black characters in little overseas student literature, the economic rise of China and its attendant problems situate the inter-ethnic dynamics in Canada within the geopolitical changes in Asia. For Sinophone writers like Chen and Sun, the ethnic comparison does not so much reflect on race relations in Canada as provide a better understanding of the economic and psychological costs imposed on young Chinese visa students in their liminal positions.

Blamed Victims
Sometimes I feel myself like a tiny little bird
Who wants to fly but never seems to get too high
Maybe one day I perch on a branch yet become the target of a hunter
I find myself all alone when I reach the sky

I always can’t fall into sleep in the stillness of the night
I doubt if only my future is not getting bright.
what the future will be like, who really knows
whether happiness is just a myth that I can never, ever find.

Lyrics of “I am a Little Bird”82

Originally sung by Taiwan pop singer Zhao Chuan in 1991, the song “I am a Little Bird” is woven through He Chen’s novella of the same title to convey a striking sentiment of disquiet and unsettledness. Like the vulnerable bird targeted by the hunter, He Chen once fell prey to a criminal gang and experienced a life-and-death moment that returned him to the path of writing. He Chen, previously named Xiaowei Chen, published his first short story “Sinking” in the Literary Youth magazine in his mid-twenties under the penname “He Chen” (literally, River Chen). He became a highly productive writer in the next few years and served as vice-chairman of the Writers’ Association of Wenzhou city. As his literary career reached its height in the 1990s, Chen, surprisingly, gave up writing due to its poor financial return and started a pharmaceutical business with his relatives in Albania. The handsome profit that he made in this business led him to an unexpected ordeal. Chen was kidnapped in 1998 and kept in an

82 The translation is mostly mine with slight reference to Xiaolu Guo’s translation in her novel Village of Stone (143).
underground bomb shelter in Albania’s capital city, Tirana, in exchange for a large ransom. During those sombre days, he recollected his affection for writing and decided to re-pursue this earlier dream. Not long after his rescue by the local police, Chen emigrated to Canada and wrote a number of fiction and non-fiction works inspired by his transnational experience and extensive readings.

The young overseas Chinese students in his novella are never given the second chance of redemption that Chen himself was. The young protagonists, Ma Hongbao and his roommate Yang Jingbang, are attending language courses at Victoria International College in Toronto. Born into affluent families, they have little interest in studying. Yang has switched schools several times, but barely improves his English. Because of his arrogance and low English proficiency during the immigration interview, his application for a visa renewal is denied. In order to extend his legal status in Canada, he pays $30,000 for a false marriage to a Mexican woman. While Yang is hard pressed by the problem of immigration, Ma has developed a crush on York University student Zhou Qin. He secretly follows Zhou to a suburban villa and inadvertently discovers her suspicious relationship with a group of middle-aged South Asian men. Shortly after they begin dating each other, Zhou is murdered near the parking lot on campus. Ma informs the police of Zhou’s surreptitious relationship with the South Asians in the villa and soon leaves for Ottawa fearing retaliation. Yang joins Ma in Ottawa and registers in a photography school that waives TOEFL scores. As the two students look for a fresh start in the new city, they are brutally shot by unidentified assailants in the Moon River karaoke bar. Just a few minutes before he was shot, Ma was singing the song “I am a Little Bird.” The song’s lyrical accentuation of the misery of the little bird metaphorically foreshadows the dreadful plight and premature death of the Chinese students.
In Ma’s tragically short life, Black Canadians are but a passing presence. At the outset of the novella, Ma, upon arriving at Toronto Pearson International Airport, is picked up by an old, tall black driver arranged for by the school. Of unknown origin, the driver is simply referred to as a “black man” (hei ren). He silently drives an old-fashioned car filled with cologne scent and jazz music, and drops Ma off at the Travelodge hotel. The next day at noon, the black man comes to drive Ma to the school, a dilapidated campus of several warehouse-like bungalows located in an industrial district. When Ma completes registration and a campus tour, the driver takes him back to his residence and wishes him good luck, marking an end to their brief contact.

The story then proceeds devoid of references to black people with the exception of an incidental encounter in a disreputable neighbourhood populated mainly by African refugees from Somalia and Uganda. When Ma is passing a street corner in the neighbourhood, he runs into a group of black youngsters who are first playing basketball and then dancing hip-hop. Ma’s interest in hip-hop dance grows as he prepares for the Sunshine Boy talent show organized by the Gold Mountain Lion Chamber of Commerce in Toronto’s Chinatown. He adopts the latest funky style of dressing, wandering around in a pair of low, baggy pants with his underwear exposed, plus a baseball cap and a do-rag. Fascinated by the black boys’ floor-lock moves, he lingers and watches them throwing themselves around like spinning tops, sometimes falling into a spasm like a rooster cut by a knife. Ma’s presence quickly attracts the attention of the black youngsters:

“Hey, guy, what’s up?” A black kid shouted at him. “I’m pretty good. Your dance is superb!” said Ma Hongbao. His English has improved greatly.

“Your shoes are very nice. My shitty shoes are broken. Are you Japanese?” The black kid stared at Ma’s brand new autographed, limited edition Jordan sneakers.
“No, I’m Chinese.” said Ma.

“I know Chinese people. They know kung fu, BRUCE LI, JACKIE CHAN.”

Another black kid chipped in. 83

“I also know that the Chinese eat dog meat!” A kid added. A bigger boy next to him slapped the back of his head, scolding, “You stinky ball! Should let the dog eat your asshole!” Everyone burst into laughter. (H. Chen 31-32)

The circumscribed knowledge of the other’s culture exhibited in the above scene points us toward the two most important sites of Chinese-Black convergence: hip-hop and kung fu. 84 While Ma praises black youngsters for their hip-hop dance, one of them drops the names of kung fu cinema stars like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan to showcase his knowledge about Chinese culture. The popular cultural forms of hip-hop and kung fu resonate widely with Asian and black youth as alternative spaces in which they can negotiate and contest everyday marginalization. The adoption of black cultural forms by young Asian people is, consciously or unconsciously, a gesture of rebellion against adult control and a rigidly structured parental value system. This gesture also counters the ascribed stereotypical role of the model minority in white society, a label that might have been internalized by older generations of Asians (Zhou and Lee 18). As a Chinatown boy confesses, whereas the cop asks Blacks and Mexicans to model themselves after the Chinese—“stay out of trouble,” “[m]ind your folks,” “[s]tudy hard,” and “[o]bey the laws” —Chinese boys tend to follow these “bad” kids, who “had a walk, a way of wearing their pants

83 The names of Bruce Li [sic] and Jackie Chan are originally written in English followed by their Chinese version in brackets.

84 LeiLani Nishime considers two of the most consistent sites of Chinese-Black convergence to be music and film, especially hip-hop, jazz, and kung fu cinema (44).
on the brink of disaster, a tongue, a kingdom of manly style everyone respected” “in a world where manliness counts for everything” (Chin 89). For oppressed young people, including Blacks, kung fu offers not only physical self-defense, but, more profoundly, “social self-defense—defense against the slights and larger injuries associated with social class” (Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 6; original emphasis). As a useful means to protect oneself with an empowered body, kung fu provides “sanctuary unavailable to those who cannot access other modes of social advancement such as a university education” (Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 6). Slavoj Žižek rhetorically asks, “So when, three decades ago, Kung Fu films were popular (Bruce Lee, etc.), was it not obvious that we were dealing with a genuine working class ideology of youngsters whose only means of success was the disciplinary training of their only possession, their bodies?” (“Lesson” 78). Representing subversive and resistant voices, hip-hop and kung fu appeal to a wide variety of young people and provide an enabling social space for dialogues between communities across racial and class boundaries.

However, the potentially positive Chinese-Black interactions fail to achieve the promising possibilities of cultural crossings as a result of the essentialization and reification of cultural difference. Ma is eager to learn from black youngsters because of the authenticity of their hip-hop dance. The hip-hop dance of his previous teacher from mainland China appears awkward to him; it seems to carry a trace of the Northeast Chinese folk dance yangkom. Ma, ill at ease with his low waist pants, is no less clumsy than his Chinese teacher. Although he may follow the basic beats and steps, he can hardly move his body as naturally and smoothly as these young black men. It is particularly difficult for him to acquire the movements of improvisation that constitute the gist of hip-hop. Ma’s frustration with improvised rhythmic movements in contrast to the rhythm and flexibility of the black body reinforces the old racial stereotype that Blacks possess a
natural sense of rhythm. Jane C. Desmond points out that movement style resembles Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of taste as a “naturalized” mode of distinction that unveils group affiliation and differences (31). A vital “social ‘text,’” movement functions “as a marker for the production of gender, racial, ethnic, class, and national identities” (Desmond 31). Hence Desmond believes that the assumption about blacks’ inherent aptitude for rhythm is not accidental in North America; “[t]his lumping together of ‘race,’ ‘national origin,’ and supposed genetic propensity for rhythmic movement rests on an implicit division between moving and thinking, mind and body” (41). Ma’s process of learning hip-hop, emphasizing the black youngsters’ skilful control of their bodies and rhythmic steps, again attributes, biologically, the defining characteristics of black dance to “a certain fluidity of muscular movement and a hypersensitivity to rhythm” (Hooton 343).

A further point to note here is that Chinese kung fu and black hip-hop do not necessarily oppose each other in style. Some of the kung-fu schools even share with hip-hop a focus on the spontaneous state of nature non-compliant with cultural conventions and predictability. Comparing Bob Mack’s description of Bruce Lee’s *Jeet Kune Do* with Neil Strauss’ discussion of hip-hop aesthetics, M. T. Kato highlights the common features between the two in autonomous self-expressions free from institutional demarcation of genre (177). Mack differentiates *Jeet Kune Do* from classical techniques by pointing to its pragmatic nature in response to street fighting. Classical disciplines are dissected and reconstructed with fluidity and flexibility for the sake of efficiency (Kato 176-77). In the same vein, Strauss notes that hip-hop draws from different musical genres from the beginning of its development, and it articulates a new identity from a creative sampling of pre-existing sounds (Kato 177). The two popular cultural forms exhibit a similar course of development shaped by improvisation, practicality, and
remixing. In the end, Ma’s attempt to pin down the authentic, or zhengzong, hip-hop is futile. Unlike the Chinese word zhengzong that etymologically refers to the most orthodox school of Chan Buddhism, it is almost impossible to trace the orthodox lineage of hip hop, an ever-changing product of repeated sampling and mixing which resists the authority of formalities and conventions.

Ma’s failure to master hip-hop dance shows that cross-cultural exchange, in this case, a Chinese youth’s acquisition of black culture, is not as easy as it appears to be. As LeiLani Nishime observes about the film Rush Hour and its 2001 sequel Rush Hour 2, starring Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker, Hong Kong detective inspector Lee and black Los Angeles cop Carter’s inferior repetition and imitation of hip-hop and kung fu, respectively, literally reinforce the stereotypes of Asian and black culture within the public imagination. This oft-referenced buddy cop film series in the study of AfroAsian relationship discredits “the possibility of mutual growth and of the messy melding of two cultures” and the “complicated, interrelated development of subjectivities” (Nishime 54). The Chinese-Black cultural crossings in Chen’s novella are similarly problematic. Ma’s mimicking of hip-hop conducted through bodily movements is seen as an inferior copy; hip-hop is to the end a distinctly black cultural form. The two cultures are fixed in parallel trajectories that never meet, leaving intact racial authenticity and ethnic originality. The transient interactions are thus what Crystal S. Anderson calls “cultural emulsion,” an emulsion that “relies on monolithic perceptions of ethnic culture or national identity” and maintains a distance even when cultures engage with each other (4-5).85

85 Anderson sets cultural emulsion apart from cultural translation, “a cultural interaction contextualized by the transversal of national boundaries” (5).
At the root of cultural emulsion in Chen’s novella lies not cultural appropriation of hip-hop as a commodity in global circulation as discussed in the second chapter, but economic inequality between Chinese and black communities. Our examination of such inequality necessitates a return to Ma’s initial contact with the black driver in the opening paragraphs. On the first day of school after the departure of the driver, Ma and Yang take a three-hour walk to campus due to a bus driver strike, only to find their Chinese fellow students getting out of luxury cars in the parking lot. The contrast between the old black man as a humble driver and the proud Chinese owners of luxury cars serves as a prelude to the subsequent class distinction in the hip-hop scene. In striking contrast to Yang’s Chinese friend’s grandiose mansion located in a high-priced neighbourhood in Toronto with its private tree-lined boulevard, a colossal marble column porch, spiral stairs leading to a dozen rooms ornamented by deluxe furniture, a beautiful garden, and a swimming pool, the black youngsters live in an impoverished black neighbourhood of two-storey government-funded apartments under the surveillance of CCTV cameras. During the conversation, what first draws the attention of the black kid with broken shoes is Ma’s new limited-edition footwear. The expensive Dunhill cigarettes that Ma distributes among the boys and his brand name sports suit earn him the initial respect of the black street kids.86

What emerges most clearly from the black kids’ willingness to demonstrate their dance moves is not kindness or courtesy but admiration and envy of Ma’s economic privilege. This privilege culminates in a bar nearby where Ma invites the black hip-hop dancers for drinks at the end of

86 In a psychological approach to youth aggression and violence, Thomas G. Moeller argues that street children are socialized in light of the “code of the streets,” which is built upon the concept of respect. The respect that people receive is influenced by their demeanour and clothing, such as jackets, sneakers, and gold jewellery (157).
the dance demo. Enthralled by Ma’s affluence and generosity, these black youngsters, though shy at the beginning, take advantage of this rare opportunity and order pricey martinis and whisky. The situation escalates beyond Ma’s control when he acquiesces to their request for a second round. They order a whole keg of beer and start to call their friends:

He [Ma] saw quite a few black kids using their cell phones, speaking in some African indigenous language that he cannot understand. An ominous feeling struck him. He heard that in the jungle, Africans use a certain type of hand drum as means of communication. The beat of the drum signals many languages and can spread over dozens of miles to disseminate the news of wars and festivities. When these Africans arrive in the city, they replace hand drums with cell phones. To some extent, cell phones function similarly to hand drums, just with a further and broader coverage. (H. Chen 32)

The phone calls bring in more black kids from different neighbourhoods in a few minutes. As they trickle in to the bar seemingly from “faraway tribes in the jungle,” the night is transformed into an extravagant “jungle festival” teeming with singing, dancing, and drinking; the kids are singing “jungle songs” and taking huge gulps of beer (32). Chen’s repeated recourse to words like “drum” and “jungle” recalls the imagery of the benighted jungle resounded with primitive drumming in the African continent that characterizes Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In Chen’s description, black kids appear as inhabiting the wild jungle distant from urban civilization and maintaining tribal ways of life. Cell phones are not so much a marker of modernity as a modern version of primitive tools to disseminate messages through various rhythms and inscrutable languages. Although it might not be fair to level the charge of racism against Chen, the stereotypical and almost racist images in the novella betray the very prejudice and demeaning attitudes of Chinese students against which a writer should struggle.
As Ma’s admiration for the rhythmic body movement of the black kids is replaced with a dislike for their free-riding friends, this casual friendship draws to a disappointing end. After the night that cost him an unexpected $1900, Ma never dares to walk past the black neighbourhood again, although the black kids continue to hope that this wealthy, generous Chinese man will return. While the scene opens with the possibility of Chinese-Black connections via cultural contact and exchange, it concludes with stereotypical and even racist images reinforced and exchanges ceased. Cross-racial space is closed under the pressure of socioeconomic differences. The ephemeral practices of cultural exchange reveal exceptional boundary-crossing moments, even as these “exceptions . . . show us where the boundaries lie” (Nishime 59).

What remains unaccounted for in Chen’s juxtaposition between affluent Chinese and impoverished Blacks is, however, the class stratification within both communities. China has witnessed an unprecedented widening social stratification since the late 1990s. The advancement of economic reform has given rise to a concentration of socio-political power and economic resources in the hands of a few. The black community in North America has also undergone a growing disparity in wealth and social status. Upper- and middle-class groups move to mainstream professions and live in higher-level neighbourhoods in the city or suburbs, whereas disadvantaged lower-class groups without decent incomes are concentrated in inner-city ghettos and depend on social welfare. Regardless of the internal class stratification of the two groups, Chen deploys inner-city black youngsters as a foil to Chinese student migrants from wealthy families. The conspicuous gap between the two, to some extent, mirrors the class stratification to

---

87 For the class stratification of the Chinese and black community, see, for example, Xiang and Shen 513 and William Julius Wilson’s *The Truly Disadvantaged*. 
be found in an increasingly inequitable Chinese society. By reinscribing the racial hierarchy in the model of yellow-black divergence, Chen’s overriding aim is not to interrogate the root of black poverty but to address the social problems associated with little overseas Chinese students.

As Chen states at the end of the novella, the purpose of writing this story is to commemorate young Chinese students killed abroad (43). The inspiration of the novella comes from the shootings of 20-year-old Chinese college students Tailang Liu and Linhai Tian in the bathroom of the Fullhouse Karaoke Tea Café located in Ottawa’s Chinatown on December 5, 2005. In the extensive reports on the murder by the local newspaper the *Ottawa Sun*, the issue of public safety in the capital city aroused most concern. The shootings were suspected to relate to a turf war between Chinese and Vietnamese gangs, and the Chinatown neighbourhood was regarded as a deteriorating social space plagued by rampant gangs and drug trafficking. The incident also invoked heated debate on gun control and crime prevention in Canada. In the face of a series of recent shootings in Ottawa and other cities, people began to question whether the government should adopt a tough stance on crime and ban then-legal handguns to make Ottawa handgun-free. The gun violence exposed the dark side of Canada and broke down the myth of the country as an ideal safe place to live in the world.88

The concern with public safety persists in “I am a Little Bird” with an evident shift in focus. The *Ottawa Sun* mentioned in passing the Mercedes Kompressor and the Ford Mustang that Liu and

88 The *Ottawa Sun*’s reports on the shootings extended from December 6, 2005 to December 17, 2005. For the major issues of public safety and gun control, see Megan Gillis, “Biz Owner Eyes Turf War; Recalls Unruly Patrons Outside Café” (7 Dec. 2005, sec. 4) and “Murder Suspect in Sights; Bust in Karaoke Double Killings Coming ‘Soon,’ Top Cop Says” (13 Dec. 2005, sec. 3); Melissa Juergensen, “Grit Hopeful Admits Crime a ‘Concern’” (15 Dec. 2005, sec. 14).
Tian had parked across the street as pieces of evidence around the crime scene examined by forensic identification officers. In the novella, however, the ownership of luxury cars is foregrounded as a significant contributing factor to the death of the two young protagonists. The desire of Ma and Yang for cars emerges when they see the luxury cars of fellow Chinese students on the first day of school. At the birthday party of Yang’s classmate, they are further impressed by his silver-gray Jaguar sports car and a $200,000 deep blue Bentley. Ma and Yang eventually manage to obtain money from their parents and purchase a flashy ocean blue Ferrari and a stylish Mercedes-Benz respectively. After being fatally shot, Ma utters his last words on the way to the hospital: “Where is my car?” (H. Chen 41). In the media report of the shooting, the two students’ possession of luxury cars immediately makes the headlines. Although the murderers have not been identified and the details of the case remain undisclosed, the earliest report from the *Sun Post*, “Two Chinese students driving top-brand sports cars were shot,” is replete with detailed descriptions of the cars.

Readers will not find in the novella the sympathy for the students that were evident in the actual postings of Ottawa’s Chinese community forum after the murders of Liu and Tian; one such posting reads: “the two students were shot protecting a woman believed to be a waitress at the café.” The fictional reports, in contrast, tend to understate the criminal investigation of the shooting and engage instead in an intense questioning of the prodigal lifestyle of young overseas students: Why are they able to afford a Ferrari and a Benz? What are they doing in the karaoke

---

89 Megan Gillis and Laura Czekaj, “2 Dead in Hail of Bullets; Police Searching for Clues after Men Gunned down at Karaoke Café” (*Ottawa Sun*, 7 Dec. 2005, sec. 3).

90 Laura Czekaj and Nelly Elayoubi, “Rumors Fly on Website” (*Ottawa Sun*, 7 Dec. 2005, sec. 5).
bar after midnight? (H. Chen 42). A wave of public outrage sweeps the Internet in mainland China. Sporadic voices in Ma’s and Yang’s defence describing their loneliness and the necessity of owning vehicles in Canada are soon engulfed by a furor of criticism. A post by a self-styled educator names Ma and Yang “young overseas student scions” (liuxue kuoshao) of the nouveau riche families of businessmen and managers of state-owned enterprises. These scions have almost never experienced any hardship and thus squander money unrestrainedly (42). More visceral aversions are expressed by a netizen called “Anti-corruption Expendable,” who denigrates little overseas students as “garbage”: “A reminder to the overseas garbage who are still alive: no matter where you are, you are garbage. . . . The dignity of the Chinese abroad is ruined by you virtueless wastrels. The death of some of you does some good to the dignity of the Chinese!” (42). The post by the “Local Commission for Discipline Inspection” reveals the motives behind the criticism of the spoiled offspring who are lacking in manners and principles: “It is corrupt officials that the Chinese populace hates instead of the innocent children. The two students are, unfortunately, turned into scapegoats of this resentment” (42).

It is discernible from Chen’s shift of focus that underlying the public outrage widespread in cyberspace is resentment of the rampant spread of corruption among Chinese government officials and business elites in recent years. A sizable number of little overseas students are the offspring of wealthy entrepreneurs and businessmen (fu er dai) or, more alarmingly, of high-ranking officials (guan er dai). An inconvenient fact underlying the fashionable practice of sending young children abroad is its covert function as a key step in the chain of illegal overseas capital flight by means of the students’ residency in foreign host countries. In late capitalism, the flexible accumulation of capital is realized not only through the First World’s acquisition of labour and resources from the Third World, but, in a less evident manner, also through the illegal
practice of capital flight initiated by the elites in Third World countries. In China, while a segment of overseas capital flight is the result of the concern of private entrepreneurs over economic and political insecurity, an overwhelming proportion comes from élite government officials and managers of state-owned enterprises (He 256). The personal wealth of these officials is largely amassed through embezzlement and other dubious economic activities (He 256). Consequently, corrupt officials often have a passport, or sometimes multiple passports, and are ready for immediate departure to avoid investigation or arrest. Canada is one of the major countries to transfer illegal funds and assets because of its different political and judiciary systems. Sending offspring abroad is not merely for the purpose of gaining foreign credentials; it is an insidious way to achieve permanent residency for possible escape in future.  

The enormous cost of studying in economically advanced countries places the parents of prodigal overseas students, especially those in government positions, under the gaze of a sceptical public. The neutral tone of Tian’s former landlord on Tian’s wealthy family background and his father’s job in China Oil in the Ottawa Sun is replaced, in the novel, with an explicit criticism. Newly acquainted with Ma, Yang asks upfront whether his parents are wealthy business people or corrupt officials. Once he finds out that Ma’s father is a director in charge of equipment in the oil field of Qaidam Basin in Qinghai, Yang becomes mistrustful of the source of the money (H. Chen 18). The family wealth of Yang’s well-heeled classmate has been accumulated by the classmate’s father, a former vice-mayor in an old industrial city who brazenly engaged in corrupt practices and has transferred his illegal gains to Canada. The public indignation directed toward

91 For the situation and scale of the illegal flight of Chinese capital to overseas destinations, see He 255-58.
the victims of the shooting stems from social inequalities that anger the Chinese populace as their society struggles with the paradox of productive efficiency and inequitable wealth distribution. For ordinary Chinese citizens who are presented with few outlets for disaffection and limited power to transform the socio-economic structure, the children of the wealthy serve as convenient scapegoats for broader social injustice, “an anchor for negative feelings about societal, economic, and political conditions in today’s highly unequal China” (Hui).

The accumulation of wealth through corrupt means and the illegal flight of capital to foreign countries subject little overseas students to various social pressures and place them in a precarious state. On the one hand, the Ferrari and the Mercedes-Benz highlight the ways in which the new Chinese elites dominate economic capital, which can be converted into symbolic capital in the objectified form of material objects (Bourdieu 246-47). Symbolic capital, Aihwa Ong argues, is not just accumulated in a social system of relative homogeneity and stasis, but “in a cross-cultural, transnational arena where there is not one but many sets of competing cultural criteria that determine high symbolic value in multiple class- and race-stratified settings” (Flexible 89). Through the examples of Hong Kong emigrants in pursuit of internationally recognized and valued symbolic capital, Ong perceives a hierarchy occurring within the regimes of consumption and credentialization based on Euro-American cultural hegemony. The West always takes the lead in defining international middle-class style: “it is the cultural structuring of distinction and taste in the metropolitan countries and their global hegemonies that makes the snob value of a Harvard MBA, a Mercedes-Benz, or a Rolex watch effective in Beijing, Bahrain, Boston, or Buenos Aires” (Ong, Flexible 90). Taking advantage of their family wealth, young Chinese students can easily amass the cultural goods of metropolitan value that are unavailable to impoverished black youngsters at the bottom rung of the social ladder.
On the other hand, however, difficulties arise in the conversion to cultural capital in its embodied state acquired through hereditary transmission “in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body,” or “what is called culture, cultivation, Bildung” (Bourdieu 243-44). Although the well-off Chinese students outclass black youngsters in the acquisition of material goods, they are, nevertheless, overshadowed when compared with wealthy westerners in car purchasing. The contrast is signalled in the novella by the observation of a senior salesperson in a top-brand car dealership in Montreal. Wealthy Westerners purchase a car as if they are courting a woman. Before they make the decision to buy, they spend time familiarizing themselves with the history and specificities of the car and fondle its shining body as though caressing the figure of a nude woman. In contrast, the affluent Chinese, their most promising customers, tend to simply cast their eyes on the expensive luxury cars in the latest style. They often rush to sign the sales contract in the manner of brainless simpletons or tasteless nouveau riche with little knowledge about the car (H. Chen 28). For newcomer Chinese students who lack cultural familiarity with the aesthetic tastes, social manners, and sensibilities of Western upper-class society, it is particularly challenging to transmit extravagant symbols of wealth into appropriate upper-class social behaviour. The external trappings of material purchase do not bestow on them the proper style of consumption admired as a sign of good taste in Western society.

The convertibility of economic capital to other forms of capital in the host country is further impeded by the young students’ reliance on parental financial support. While enjoying a dinner of grilled snails, oysters, and an expensive Bourdeaux in an open-air French restaurant after purchasing the cars, Ma has a serious conversation with Yang about the power and precariousness of the wealth that they have. Ma is keenly aware that his hedonistic life of driving
a Ferrari and having a sumptuous dinner in contrast with the boring life of his classmates in Qinghai is attributed to his family rather than his own capability. And he knows that there might be an end to the money, for his father might be forced to step down in escalating power struggles (H. Chen 28-29).

A recurrent motif in He Chen’s novella, the song “I am a Little Bird” vividly conveys a state of precariousness—the precariousness of life and, more profoundly, the precariousness of the economic capital that these young Chinese students possess in a foreign society. Even though they possess economic capital and can afford material goods, it is difficult for them to acquire social capital, “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group” (Bourdieu 248). Racial and age liminality constitute an important obstacle for cross-racial interactions to develop into lasting connections. While Chinese students cannot gain membership in white society, they are unable to enter the black community either. The students have more opportunities to mingle with black youth and are more likely to open up alternative spaces than are available in a more rigidly ordered adult society. However, such contact is ephemeral and transient. The possibility of an equitable cultural exchange in an open cross-racial space comes to a close when Chinese and Blacks withdraw into their respective communities and normative social structures. The reinforced yellow-black divergence is not so much a reflection of the established racial order in Canada as a critical lens to examine social stratification, economic inequality, and political corruption in contemporary China.
While He Chen’s novella “I am a Little Bird” mainly focuses on the offspring of well-to-do Chinese officials and businessmen, Bo Sun’s novel *Tears of Little Overseas Students in the Foreign Land* extends its exploration into a plethora of students from more disparate social backgrounds. A Shanghai-born writer and newspaper editor residing in Toronto, Sun has long been concerned with the emergent groups of young overseas students. Based on interviews with a score of them scattered in various countries, he co-authored with Yu Yueying the reportage *Xiao liuxuesheng chuang shijie* (Little Overseas Students Venturing into the World) in 2001. The stories that Sun came into contact with and the realistic style of the reportage are carried forward into his subsequent novel, *Tears of Little Overseas Students in the Foreign Land*, which depicts the eventful lives of several Chinese students at Maple City College in Toronto. Among his peers, Zheng Zhiwen is undoubtedly one of the top students. From a not-so-rich household in Shanghai, Zheng works part-time at the student centre to support himself. He is untouched by the courtship of Ning Hong, daughter of a well-off businessman in Shenzhen with a spacious house and a BMW at her command, but develops a tender love for his housemate Feng Jiali as they study together. With a solid English foundation and disciplined motivation, Zheng and Feng achieve full marks in TOEFL and are admitted into Harvard University with handsome scholarships. In contrast, Zheng’s cousin Bai Yun steps out on a path of vanity and pride trusting in her radiant young beauty. She rejects Cao Junjie’s courtship with indifference and sarcastic remarks, leading to the tragic suicide of this introverted boy. Bai then begins a relationship with Ma Tao because of his promise to cast her as a leading actress in the TV drama directed by his father. When Ma fails to make good his promise, Bai turns toward Xia Xiaosong, only to discover the illegal source of Xia’s money from his corrupt father. Bai is then held captive in a cottage by two Vietnamese men that Xia has hired and is raped by one of them before the police can come to her rescue.
In Sun’s interrogation of the physical and psychological problems of little overseas students in the absence of parental care, encounters between Chinese students and Black Canadians are symptomatic of these problems and are seen mostly as undesirable experiences. The students become the victims of black muggers not long after they arrive in Toronto. One day, Ma, Tao, Bai, and Xia stay late in the library searching for Tao’s lost passport. In the darkness of a wild blizzard, they take the wrong way home. Suddenly, a minibus stops by the road and five hefty black men with fearsome eyes jump off. They surround the students at the rear of a high-rise building and demand money from them. When the students look through their wallets with reluctance, a large man quickly draws a gun from his pocket and rolls it in his hand, scaring the students. To the mugger’s disappointment, the newly arrived students do not have any debit or credit cards; the cash that the muggers find is less than $100. In exasperation, a tall black man grabs Bai’s shoulder and arm tightly, and with a leering smile, says: “No money? Then come tonight and sleep with me” (B. Sun 47). With no other way of rescuing Bai, Ma hands over the $2000 that he had hidden. The Blacks then set Bai free and disappear in the dark (B. Sun 46-48).

Black muggers are not unfamiliar characters in Sinophone literature. Wong’s study of overseas student literature examines two black muggers in Cong Su’s short story “The Chinese” (Zhongguoren) written in 1978. When historian Wen Chaofeng is dumped by his girlfriend, Shen Meng, who marries a computer scientist in New York, he wanders around the train station, where he catches sight of Chinese immigrant Ding Changgui fighting with two black muggers of Puerto Rican origin. Ding insultingly calls the muggers “bastards,” “devils,” and “monkeys,” and they are described as distinct from Ding physically and figuratively. The Blacks are not only “short and scrawny like ‘toy soldiers’ and like ‘flies around a piece of watermelon,’” but also
“shameless, lazy petty thieves and wannabe thugs” (S. Wong, “Yellow” 86). Ding defends himself bravely and appears to be growing taller and larger in Wen’s eyes like “an enduring, unmovable little mountain” (S. Wong, “Yellow” 86). For Wen, a middle-class intellectual, Ding is “a hero of action, rough and unlettered but filled with righteous integrity and a can-do spirit,” embodying the unadulterated Chinese ideal of dignity (S. Wong, “Yellow” 85, 86).

While Ding’s fighting spirit inspires in Wen the nationalist sentiment of being a real Chinese, the Chinese students in Sun’s novel are distinct from Ding in their vulnerability and weakness before the black muggers. Even worse, in an unexpected turn of events, they are later transformed from victims of mugging to wilful wrongdoers and criminals. Alone in Canada, Tao becomes addicted to gambling, first on the Internet and then in the casino, and squanders his parents’ hard-earned money. He ends up owing a debt of $30,000 and a usurious loan of $2000. By pretending that his laptop is lost, Tao swindles his parents out of $3000 only to lose $1000 in Niagara’s casino. At the same time, Ma runs short of money in a vain attempt to satisfy Bai’s demanding materialistic needs. He asks his parents for $5000 to buy a second-hand car but his request is rejected.

Without a legal work permit, Ma and Tao are unable to find a job in Chinatown’s restaurants or grocery stores which are suffering from the economic recession; as a consequence, the two fall into a severe financial predicament. In desperation, they seek assistance from Angus, a black young man with whom Ma had become acquainted in a strip club two months earlier. The three kidnap Chen Dekang, president of Maple City College, on his way home the day before he leaves for the Beijing International Education Exhibition. They seize the $50,000 cash that Chen carries and extort a $1,000,000 ransom from his family. Chen dies from an asthma attack on the fourth day of the kidnapping. Angus disposes of the corpse and sells Chen’s Benz. The police
manage to track down the suspects. Angus is shot to death on the spot, and Ma and Tao are arrested and sentenced to nine years’ imprisonment.

The victim-to-victimizer transformation of overseas Chinese students provides a useful avenue of inquiry into a traditionally racialized Asian-Black distinction in dominant white society. Claire Alexander makes clear the different and even opposing representations of Asian and African or African-Caribbean sexualities in mainstream discourse. In line with the orientalist discourse that constructs Asia as inscrutable and female, the images of Asians often appear to be passive, weak, and emasculated (Alexander 137). Henry Yu maintains that Asian men, despite their stereotypical image as sexually threatening to white women, are also feminized by their willingness to carry out domestic and laundry work that is mainly done by women (Thinking 131). In contrast to submissive Asians, black men tend to be portrayed as hyper-masculinized and are more often associated with violence and crime (Alexander 137). Despite their vulnerability to serious crime, Blacks, together with Aboriginal Canadians, are “much more likely to be depicted as criminal offenders than as crime victims” in the news media and popular culture (Wortley and Owusu-Bempah 16). Though opposing each other, the emasculation of Asian men shares with the hyper-masculinization of Blacks in constructing “marginalised masculinities” of racialized subjects (qtd. in Alexander 130). The contrasting set of representations literally “share the same denial of agency, the same objectification, the same very specific hyper-visualization, the same silencing” (Alexander 137-38).

The menacing presence of Chinese and black muggers in Sun’s novel obfuscates the division between violent Blacks and submissive Asians. In the configuration of a racialized masculinity centred on deviance and violence, Alexander argues that the emergent discourse of Asian gangs
“marks an explicit racialization (or re-racialization) of young Asian men which returns them . . .
to the position occupied for almost three decades by African-Caribbean black youth” (129).
Drawing on the prevailing discourse of black masculinity, the discourse of Asian gangs subjects
young Asian men to enhanced surveillance and discipline. “[A]ssumed raced, gendered and
generational deficiencies,” Alexander points out, are conflated to “constitute a ‘triple pathology’
of young black and Asian men and place them in the public imagination as fully-formed ‘folk
devils’” (124-25). If the Chinese-Black encounter reinforces the black muggers as emblematic of
folk devils—typically “young, black, bred in, or arising from the ‘breakdown of social order’ in
the city; threatening the traditional peace of the streets, the security of movement of the ordinary
respectable citizen; motivated by naked gain”—the Chinese-Black conspiracy of Ma, Tao, and
Angus relegates Chinese students to perceptible threats that endanger and undermine the stability
and well-being of law-abiding society (Hall et al. 160).

However, the novel’s Chinese-Black conspiracy tells a different story when it is compared to the
actual case on which the novel is based. When the reportage Little Overseas Students Venturing
into the World was conceived, the abduction and manslaughter of Thomas Ku, the owner of the
Great Lakes College of Toronto, by two young Chinese visa students, Zhiyang Suo and Feng
Wang, created a stir within the Chinese community. Having gambled away their tuition money
sent by their parents, Suo and Wang abducted Ku when he parked his car in the driveway of his
home in May 2001 and left him in the trunk of their car with hands bound and mouth gagged.
They took away the $5,000 that Ku carried with him and called his wife asking for a ransom of
$500,000 (the ransom was later reduced to $100,000). After Ku’s death, his body was ditched
and burned in the woods outside Peterborough. Suo and Wang were arrested by the police in late
May and jailed for fifteen years. Sun and Yu detail this case in the appendix of the reportage in
order to raise the alarm about the perils of young overseas Chinese students who lack self-discipline and the ability to adapt to local culture (219-20).92

While it is certainly a prototype of Ma and Tao’s offence in Sun’s novel, the Thomas Ku case undergoes significant modification in the novel’s characters and their dispositions. The most conspicuous change occurs when Angus, a jobless black man, is added as the principal criminal guilty of plotting and perpetrating the abduction. At the age of twenty-seven, Angus is on the police most-wanted list on suspicion of being involved in five major court cases of bank robbery, abduction, and murder. And he takes the most active and dominant part during the kidnapping. As soon as Chen pulls his car over, Angus quickly points a gun at Chen’s head and orders him to get out of the car immediately. Angus then handcuffs Chen, throws him in the back seat with Ma and Tao’s assistance, and drives the car away. When Chen dies, Angus offers to dismember the corpse and discard the remains in the woods and lake. Angus is also regarded as the main beneficiary when they succeed in abducting Chen. According to the agreement with Ma and Tao, he will receive half of the share, including $25,000 cash, $15,000 from selling the car, and $500,000 of the ransom money. In the end, Angus is gunned down by the police at the moment when he attempts to take Chen’s son hostage. The Chinese students, the novel tells us, consider his death well deserved, since “he is a wanted man, anyway” (B. Sun 202).

Though Angus’ co-conspirators, the Chinese students are described as first-time offenders. In contrast to the detached sketch of Angus’s previous criminal record, Sun narrates the motivation

92 Also see the reports of the Toronto Star, for example, Keung and Shephard’s “Two Former Students Charged in Slaying of School Owner” and Cohn and Mazurkewich’s “Secret Life.”
behind the Chinese students’ criminal behaviour in a sympathetic tone. Before resorting to violence, the two students tried to find a job in Chinatown and earn money in a legal way. They failed, however, due to the depressed job market and their lack of a work permit. Ma commits the crime for no other reason than to make more money to please Bai: “I adore her very much. I love her. I’m afraid she doesn’t like me because I’m poor. I want to buy her top-brand clothes and cars, and take her to fancy entertainment venues. I want to produce TV dramas for her and make her a star actress” (B. Sun 202). Ma does not blame Bai for his reckless act, but reiterates that she never makes unreasonable demands on him; everything he does for her he does out of his own will. Ma believes Tao to be an honest man, who is only tempted into trouble by Ma. In recognition of their wrongs, Ma and Tao remorsefully kneel before Chen’s family in court, kowtowing and apologizing: “Mrs. Chen, We’re really sorry! We’ve caused great harm to your whole family and deserve punishment. Even if we were imprisoned for a lifetime, it would be difficult to dispel the hatred of your family. Please forgive us and give us an opportunity to rebuild our life anew” (299). Their sincere apologies move the audience to tears. Given their great determination to change, Mrs. Chen forgives the two students: “Please stand up, young men. What happened is in the past. I hope you can truly turn over a new leaf!” (299). Ma and Tao are sentenced to a reduced term of nine years in prison.

The supplement of a black character as a natural criminal in contrast to repentant Chinese delinquents might not be unexpected, considering that black men appear in Sun’s novel mostly as lazy, degenerate, and violent. One week after the encounter with the black muggers, the landlady, Mrs. Lin, visits the students’ house. She frowns as she sees paper scraps and cigarette ends all over the floor and smells the stink of the washroom: “The floor is so dirty, and the washroom is full of urine smell. How can you live like this? You are even lazier than the Blacks!” (B. Sun
Though angry at the beginning, Ma and Tao soon admire Lin after watching her clean the washroom and attribute her success in business to “the hardship-bearing spirit of our Chinese nation” (56). Through such trivialities, the students distance themselves from the “lazy” Blacks and consciously identify with their hard-working Chinese upbringing. The stereotypical image of violent black men who attempt to gain money without honest work is reinforced by passing references to the intuitive responses of some of the Chinese characters to the abduction. When Chen detects the assailant’s black identity from the accent, a cold shiver runs down his spine. He deems the black criminal to be a cruel, desperate outlaw and is scared that he would be killed. When the news of Chen’s disappearance reaches the students, Xia never suspects his housemates, but imputes the incident to black men, who, Xia believes, abducted Chen for the purpose of ransom money just like the black muggers he had encountered previously.

Exemplary of Chinese-Black divergence, the Chinese students’ characterization as repentant delinquents in opposition to the hardened black criminal is particularly illuminating if we approach it from the perspective of guilt and forgiveness. The scene of repentance and forgiveness not only adds sentimental elements to the story, but, more importantly, reconstitutes Ma and Tao within the normative structure of Chinese society. It must be noted that forgiving is not simply a merciful response to wrong deeds, but a “performative utterance,” a reaction that “retains . . . something of the original character of action” (Haber 6; Arendt 241). What forgiveness does is not to dismiss the guilt that the wrongdoer has committed, but to reframe the context of his/her action by decoupling the action from wrongdoer, who is “not simply or solely a wrongdoer but is a person who has done a particular wrong;” in other words, the wrongdoing is simply a single action that the wrongdoer has conducted for a particular reason in a given context (North 26; original emphasis). Meanwhile, the wrongdoer re-establishes his/her standing through
repentance, “a morally regenerative process, enabling the wrongdoer both to see himself as someone who already has some moral worth despite the wrong which he has committed and, at the same time, to become more worthy of the respect and esteem which he wants the injured party to display toward him in forgiveness” (North 32; original emphasis). The forgiving and repentance perform a moral exchange: The offended party decides to cease blaming the wrongdoer on condition that the wrongdoer makes a determined effort to improve him/herself and avoid committing the wrong again in future (Ci 195).

The family plays an essential role during the reframing process. In a discussion of the core elements in the traditionalist ideology of crime, Stuart Hall and his collaborators regard the three social image clusters of respectability, work, and discipline as “inextricably connected with the fourth image: that of the family”; this is a traditional sphere “where moral-social compulsions and inner controls are generated, as well as the sphere where the primary socialisation of the young is first tellingly and intimately carried through” (143; original emphasis). As a fundamental social unit, family plays a crucial role in constructing “social identities, and in transmitting, at an extremely deep level, the basic ideological grid of society” (Hall et al. 143). Although regarded as less punitive now, the central image of the family is to invoke authority and discipline and indoctrinate children with socially sanctioned behaviours (Hall et al. 143).

If youth crime is the outcome of failed parental discipline, the correction of the crime begins with family members. After being arrested, Ma and Tao are possessed by guilt and remorse at the very thought of their parents. When Zheng visits Ma on behalf of Ma’s father, we witness an outpouring of apologies from Ma who deems himself an unworthy son, having brought shame and trouble to the family. He promises to confess everything in order to receive a commuted
sentence and makes a fresh start when he is released. Meanwhile, Ma shows great concern about his mother. Upon hearing the shocking news of his imprisonment, Ma’s mother experiences a nervous breakdown and becomes incontinent and insane overnight. She cuts off all her hair and gazes at Ma’s photo, repeatedly blaming herself for his downfall. Learning about his mother’s hospitalization in a psychiatric ward, Ma weeps bitterly and stomps in frenzy almost losing consciousness. Tao’s repentance culminates when he learns that his mother has become disabled for life and has to walk on crutches. To satisfy Tao’s persistent requests for money, Tao’s mother, a middle-school maths teacher, works as a tutor after school and only sleeps three or four hours every day. She is so tired and overworked that she has an accident cycling home at night and breaks her left foot. The accident also causes a decline in her health. In order to save money, Tao’s mother cuts down on nutritious food and in her weakened state passes out at home on hearing about her son’s crime. When Tao’s parents visit him before the trial, Tao cries aloud and kneels down, seeing himself as a guilty man who has disappointed his parents. At the end of the visit, he asks his mother whether she is still willing to have him as her son—“Of course, you are always my son no matter how many years you are sentenced in jail. . . . There are no parents who do not love their children” (B. Sun 296). This reassurance of Tao’s mother brings him to tears again. He is determined that he will not make the same mistake again and plans to take college courses through distance education in prison. The visit closes with his mother’s promise: “we are waiting for you”—“It seems that the whole detention house has heard her words. The whole building is shaking. Yes, the mother will wait for the return of her delinquent child. She will!” (296).

The sentimental mechanism of forgiveness and repentance reimagines the relationship among the parties involved and among family members, and grants the wrongdoer the opportunity to start
afresh. Rey Chow expounds on Hannah Arendt’s view on the liberating function of forgiveness which releases men from their prior behaviour and mindset so that they can continue to be free agents capable of beginning anew. Echoing Arendt, Chow underscores the significance of starting afresh through the ethical imperative of forgiveness in modern discourse, contending that “Far more than the pardoning of a particular debt, forgiveness is considered the kind of transmission and exchange that brings about a new beginning . . . . the lesson of forgiveness is about being able to start afresh, to inaugurate and imagine a new history of human collective life based on the transcendence or overcoming of (ethnic and linguistic) boundaries and conflicts” (Entanglements 127; original emphasis). From this perspective, a fundamental difference between the Chinese students and the black criminal lies in the former’s reassuring prospect of a new beginning. The nine-year sentence of her son brings a degree of comfort to Tao’s mother, as she realizes that the students are so young that they will still be in their twenties and will still be able to start a new life when they are released. The belief in reformed young men resonates among the parents. Ma’s father even plans to produce a TV drama about the students’ regretful past and a renewed future entitled “They Are Still Young.”

While the transformation that the Chinese students experience through repentance and forgiveness might be heralded as a return to proper social order, it lends itself to decontextualizing the crime by placing all the blame on individuals. Bernard Schissel’s study of youth criminals demonstrates that the modern discourse about youth crime is in line with orthodox criminology that is based on “individual blame”—“individuals gone wrong, either inherently or culturally” (105). He notes that the crimes are often framed at the level of individual pathology attributed to the weakened morality of the individual and poor parental supervision. The violent, defiant behaviour of the young people is seen as stemming from the
problems of the individual or family; larger social injustices and disparities are thus exempted from blame. The solutions recommended to prevent crime are predominantly discipline and punishment rather than social support and care introduced by reforming the socio-economic system (Schissel ch.3). As Hall et al. perceptively point out, one of the most important ways in which the media ideologically operate to simplify the complex causes of crime is to employ reductive “public images” like youth, family, and ghetto. Crucial questions about the “fundamental structural characteristics of society” are seldom asked and no interest is shown in “the unequal distribution of housing; the low levels of pay in particular industries; the nature of welfare benefits; the lack of educational resources; racial discrimination” (118).

When readers place blame on Ma and Tao who are led astray, they may overlook an indispensable cause of the abduction in the real-life case. In the Thomas Ku case, the target of public outrage was “the system,” in particular, the dishonest private agencies in China that arrange the admission of students to dubious overseas private schools at an exorbitant price (Cohn and Mazurkewich A16). Suo’s parents were duped by a local agency, which initially offered them an appealing fee of $22,000 for fast admission, work permits, and permanent residency. However, the agency went bankrupt after collecting the money, and they eventually had to pay $100,000 for Suo’s education in Canada. Despite Suo’s criminal offence, Suo’s parents still defended their son. In their eyes, Suo was a considerate boy, who pretended to be fine in order to reassure them. His motivation behind the crime was also understandable. Suo referred to Toronto Great Lakes College as a “garbage school” with an enrolment of an excessive number of students (Cohn and Mazurkewich A16). Led by the acquisitive Principal Ku, the school charged outrageously high tuition fees for high school and English-immersion courses as well as residence fees (see Cohn and Mazurkewich). The violence that Suo and Wang commit is
not so much a reckless act as a radical reaction to Ku’s greed and poor treatment of Chinese students when alternative solutions are unavailable.

In Bo Sun’s novel, the disreputable Ku is transformed into the respectable president of Maple City College, Chen Dekang (“Dekang” literally meaning virtue and health). Devoting his life to education, Chen is kind-hearted, generous, and solicitous about the well-being of faculty and students. He had offered a teaching position to an unknown literature lover fifteen years ago in order to ease the latter’s financial hardship, and this young person has now become a celebrated Canadian writer and poet and winner of the Governor General’s Award. Learning of the car accident of the new students, Chen pays a prompt visit to the injured students in the hospital and covers all the medical costs. Moreover, Chen operates the school in a decent, legal way. The school is repeatedly described as distinct from dubious agencies. Aware of the lies that the agencies fabricate to attract students, Chen tries to work with reputable agencies to protect the reputation of the school. Under his capable leadership, Maple City College earns the respect and admiration of the students. In their speech on the occasion of their admission to Harvard University, Zheng and Feng rank Maple City College as one of the top colleges worldwide in terms of faculty and facilities. They express deep gratitude for Chen’s care of the students and regard the college as their beloved home in a foreign land. Chen’s death invokes an explicit critique of the morality and self-discipline of the students rather than the credentials of private schools.

Further, the crime that the Chinese students commit reminds us of the recurring issue of corruption as described in He Chen’s “I am a Little Bird.” As we have seen, a motivating factor for Ma’s crime is his affection for Bai. Ma is at a disadvantage in the competition with Bai’s
other suitor, Xia, because of his lack of money. Whereas Xia frequently purchases Bai luxury goods and invites her to fancy restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues, Ma cannot even afford a lavish dinner in a restaurant, let alone luxury goods. In his rush to overtake Xia, Ma is, however, kept in the dark about the corrupt source of Xia’s money. Xia’s father Xia Yanfeng, the former vice mayor of Sanhe city in Northeast China, is listed as one of the most wanted high officials for his involvement in the large-scale smuggling of Chinese cultural relics. He transfers the illicit gains from the smuggling, the sum of US$3,000,000 and CA$500,000, to Xia’s bank account in Canada, preparing for his immigration to Canada through the immigrant investor program. Not until Xia Yanfeng is arrested by Chinese Interpol in Costa Rica do people find out that the vast sum of money Xia generously spends on Bai actually comes from the illegal funds of his father.93

By divorcing Ma and Tao’s criminal behaviour from the contentious issues of unscrupulous profit-seeking educational institutions and corrupt party officials, Sun points to a potential resolution realized through the ideal of Chinese masculinity in contrast to a violent black masculinity. In his book *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*, Kam Louie argues for the traditional masculine ideal throughout Chinese history as against the mainstream stereotyped representation of Asian North American masculinity. This ideal is based on the wen-wu paradigm that is composed of “cultural attainments” (wen) and “martial valour” (wu) (Louie 4). The literary-martial dyad “captures both the mental and physical composition of the ideal man” and is constructed through physical strengthening of the body and intellectual

93 Similarly, Cao Junjie’s father is charged with embezzlement and bribery not long after Cao’s suicide. The clues to corruption come from the evident fact that the cost of studying abroad far exceeds Cao’s father’s regular income as a deputy section director in Qingshan machinery plant.
cultivation of the mind (Louie 6). The \textit{wen-wu} ideal of Chinese masculinity is best embodied in the role-model character Zheng Zhiwen who is described as “Confucius with sword” (\textit{kongzi guadao nengwen nengwu}) at the opening of the novel (B. Sun 3). He not only displays intellectual talent in his study, but also practices Chinese kung fu and defends Feng from two Chinese assailants sent by Ning Hong. Using Zheng as an exemplary ideal for his Chinese readers, Sun leaves aside the nationalist complex in overseas student literature. Unlike in Cong Su’s short story where quintessential Chineseness is embodied by grassroots illiterate Ding in contrast to the middle-class intellectual Wen who is in danger of assimilation to western culture, for the younger generation of Chinese students, Chen envisions a happy marriage of western education and Chinese traditions as a potential solution to the social problems of materialism and violence.

Like Chen’s in “I am a Little Bird,” Sun’s representation of young Chinese overseas students’ complex and conflicted engagement with Black Canadians in \textit{Tears of Little Overseas Students in the Foreign Land} is not intended for reflecting on the minority experiences of Chinese and Black Canadians in a multiethnic context. The focus falls instead on the social discipline and moral regeneration of young Chinese students. By portraying Chinese students as timid and helpless victims of black muggers at the beginning of the novel, Sun jettisons the narrative of nationalist pride that accompanied earlier examples of overseas student literature. In the latter part of the novel, he reworks the real-life account of abduction and manslaughter by presenting the reader with a contrast between a hardened black criminal and repentant young Chinese students, thereby opposing the dominant images of Asian and black criminality reported in news media. Through the reframing process of forgiveness and repentance, the liminal Chinese
subjects distance themselves from black criminals and return to the normative Chinese family structure.

In He Chen’s “I am a Little Bird” and Bo Sun’s *Tears of Little Overseas Students in the Foreign Land*, as I hope to have demonstrated in this closing chapter, young Chinese students are urged to shy away from not simply those who are categorized as generic Blacks with the sweep of a hand, but rather Blacks as underclass or criminals. Viewing racialization as “a historical system of complementary exclusions and dominations which are mutually interconnected,” Etienne Balibar points out that what neo-racism tends to target is “not the ‘Arab’ or the ‘Black’, but the ‘Arab (as) junky’ or ‘delinquent’ or ‘rapist’ and so on, or equally, rapists and delinquents as ‘Arabs’ and ‘Blacks’” (“Racism” 49). Associating Black Canadians with poverty and violence, little overseas student literature in the new millennium returns to the familiar narrative of yellow-black divergence, however with a contemporary twist. Despite a fleeting glimpse into the opening of interracial space for cultural exchange, the Chinese-Black encounter in Chen’s and Sun’s writing is presented not as a pleasant experience, but as difficult dark moments that fall back on racial stereotypes of black people.
Conclusion

Is this a jade or a wooden canoe? Sailing through wails from both banks,
Only to be stranded near customs officers, amidst immigrants waiting in line.

Myths of Haida Gwaii at your elbow: Bear Father with young son sits at the bow
Looking back at the past; Bear Mother rowing hard, gazes into the future of her children.

The sharp-teeth beaver paddles away, the dogfish woman converses secretly with the mysteries of
the ocean.
The Wolf, vying for position, tramples on whose back? The reluctant recruit aids in silence,
clinging on.

Has our Chief with great vision disappeared from sight with his talking staff?
Under our eyes only the amphibious frog crosses over the boundary between two worlds.

Not an astronaut bringing home legends of space odysseys. Not at all.
Just a lonely father shuttling back with heavy twigs to build new nests.

Worries add to one’s age, diseases accumulate. Transit is never as smooth
As sages on blades of weed. See those mottled stamps on a suspicious passport?

Not so easy to roll a house into a backpack; lost forever are the familiar
Land and language. Departing, you imagined yourself a snow goose flying south,
Crossing the frozen earth in search of a warmer port? What one foresees
Are sneers from both soils: how can a leaf move that many woes?

Leung Ping-kwan, “Leaf of Passage”

This dissertation began with a reorientation to transversal connections between Canada’s minority communities in consonance with the paradigm shift proposed in *Minor Transnationalism* from vertical resistance to horizontal cross-pollinations of minority cultures. Laudable as its vision of minor-to-minor networks is, *Minor Transnationalism* is nonetheless criticized for its cover image, “Follow the Dreamboat,” an art installation created by Taiwan conceptual artist Wu Mali. Part of the 2004 interactive exhibit “Spaces Within” at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, “Follow the Dreamboat” stages an empty rowboat adrift spangled with colourful folded paper sailboats on which viewers can write down their dreams. By incorporating the participatory form from Asian cultural traditions of inscribing and folding within the transnational space of the U.S. museum, the way that the installation creates meaning unsettles Chadwick Allen (6). He finds it regrettable that such design erases once again “Indigenous counterclaims or counternarratives in either settler nation-state,” relegating Indigenous subjects to “the margins of even the ‘minor’” (Allen 7, 4).

Providing a contrast to the cover photo of *Minor Transnationalism*, I want to conclude my dissertation with Hong Kong poet Leung Ping-kwan’s poem “Leaf of Passage” that deploys the image of “The Spirit of Haida Gwaii,” a monumental bronze sculpture of an Indigenous canoe created by the First Nation artist Bill Reid. Leung wrote the poem in December 1998 in response to Andrew Parkin’s poem “Astronaut.” Whereas Parkin depicts new “astronaut” fathers, working
in Hong Kong while leaving their wives and “parachute” children in Vancouver, as
“irresponsible and hedonistic,” Leung has a different view (P. Leung 203). At the Vancouver
International Airport on his way back to Hong Kong, Leung saw Reid’s sculpture of the
mysterious journey of a jade coloured canoe crowded with figures from Haida myth, such as the
Bear father and mother, the beaver, the dogfish woman, the wolf, and the reluctant recruit. These
mythical voyagers witness day after day the passing-by of global travellers, among them
astronaut fathers who have to come under the immigration officers’ scrutiny and questioning
before dragging their luggage home for family reunions. For Leung, the problems that early
generations of Chinese immigrants experienced still persist in the lives of these more privileged
new immigrants. Underlying the latter’s apparent freedom of travel between Hong Kong and
Canada is an intensified anxiety of double alienation from both countries.94

While Wu’s dreamboat offers a fascinating blend of colourful dreams and promises, the
Indigenous canoe in Leung’s poem serves more as a reminder of the hardship and difficulties that
mark the centuries-long journey of Chinese immigrants to Canada. In this dissertation, I tried to
delineate through a critical lens this tumultuous journey in a chronological sequence starting
from the first wave of Chinese labourers in the late nineteenth century to young overseas Chinese
students of the new millennium. As the affinity between early Chinese immigrants and astronaut
fathers indicates, the chronological order does not signal a linear progression from the old to new
diasporas, from forced displacement by war, slavery, and indenture to the voluntary migration of

94 For Leung’s reflection on his writing of “Leaf of Passage,” see P. Leung 202-05.
transnational subjects. The early Chinese male workers of Wong Gwei Chang and Fong Kam Shan in nineteenth-century British Columbia find their return in the racialized female labour of Lily and Juanjuan in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Ontario under the rising force of global capitalism. Young visa students who now reside in Canada temporarily may in the long run become landed immigrants and even naturalized citizens like Nathan Shaw, carrying with them, nevertheless, the same sense of “precariousness marked by race, gender, sexuality, and class” (Cho 41). The chronological sequence does not suggest the anteriority of Chinese-Native interactions to Chinese-Black encounters either. My selection of certain groups for comparison at particular historical moments, one might say, is symptomatic of the articulation of minor-to-minor relationships in Canada that often relegates First Nations to the past and black communities to the present. Although this study engages, however briefly, with the longstanding history of First Nations and the more recent history of Black Canadians in order to examine the two groups’ racial positioning in relation to the Chinese minority in the settler-state of Canada, readers, I hope, will leave with a better awareness of the historical and contemporary dimensions of Chinese-Native and Chinese-Black interrelationships, interrelationships that deserve further exploration than what has been covered in this dissertation.

To some extent, the protagonists of this dissertation, members of minority communities in Canada, bear a striking resemblance to the passengers on the Haida canoe. Although the travellers might be biting and squabbling with their fellow occupants, competing for power and position on the boat, they have to depend on each other in order to survive in the harsh

---

95 For Vijay Mishra and Gayatri Spivak’s notions of old and new diasporas and Lily Cho’s critique, see Cho, *Eating* 10-11.
environment. The conflicts and interdependence of mythical Haida travellers on their way to a common destination in Reid’s sculpture mirror the curious phenomenon of living together apart for minority groups in Canada. My multidirectional critique of the literary representation of contested interracial or inter-ethnic space offers a vantage point to reflect on the way that the Chinese community in Canada perceives and interacts with First Nations communities and with Black Canadians under the influence of ongoing colonization, racial segmentation, gender stratification, and labour exploitation. The relationship between these groups can be seen to shift uneasily between boundary-crossing transversal interconnections and the perpetuation of boundary making. On the one hand, amicability and solidarity develop on the basis of shared racialized history and marginal status under white supremacy. The global movement of ethnicized labour and transnational capital further blur the traditional lines of racial demarcation and lend them more fluid processes of whitening and blackening. On the other hand, however, it is impossible not to notice the stereotypical behaviour and racialization that existed and continue to endure today. Chinese immigrants’ upward struggle for assimilation into the nation is too often accompanied by a complicity in discriminating against and appropriating other minority groups. Despite their emerging promise, alliance and coalition building remain infrequent and difficult.

Like the Bear father and mother in the boat, I have, in this dissertation, taken on the task of looking back to the past and contemplating the future through the unique lens of minor-to-minor relationships that risk being occluded or obliterated by the majority and the minority-against-majority opposition. What I have presented through close readings of Chinese Canadian fiction beyond its familiar Anglophone boundary is not a definitive answer to the problems facing minor transethnic relations in Canada. Entrenched in insidious, fluctuating power relations, there is no
universal minority position for those who are minoritized by different mechanisms; “not all multiplicities are multiple in the same way, and not all heterogeneities are heterogeneous in the same way” (Shih, *Visuality* 7). What I have sought is, at best, not a solution but a better understanding of the problems so that we may arrive at a solution at some indeterminable future. After all, as the Haida travellers suggest, on the journey to an unknown, and hopefully better, future, “we are all in the same boat” (Reid 246).
Bibliography


---. “To the End of the Hyphen-Nation: Decolonizing Multiculturalism.” Manuscript submitted for publication.


