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# Bridging Representations of North American Chinese Diaspora with Homi Bhabha

Tsai, Sungfu

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Bridging Representations of North American Chinese Diaspora with Homi Bhabha

by

Sungfu Tsai

A THESIS

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## Abstract

This dissertation investigates how Wayson Choy and Laurence Yep deploy discursive strategies for increasing Chinese North Americans' visibility in North America. So far, there has been a tremendous amount of published research on their works, but very few scholars have considered their representations of North American Chinese diaspora through the lens of postcolonial theory. In response to this insufficiency, my dissertation examines their Chinese diasporic writings with Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory and addresses the inseparable link between postcolonial studies and Chinese North American literature. The dissertation argues that the liminal moment of cultural signification—"neither Chinese nor American/Canadian"—foregrounded in the works by Choy and Yep destabilizes the power of North American cultural hegemony and rearticulates the unsettling difference in the narration of the nations of Canada and the United States. This argument is developed in the course of four chapters: Chapter one theorizes postcolonial Chinese North American literature and argues that postcolonial theory offers a productive approach to the issues of transnationality and globalization represented in Chinese North American literature. Chapter two conducts a radical reading of Chinatown as "the third space" in Choy's *Paper Shadows* and Yep's *The Lost Garden*. The chapter argues that the memoirs of Yep and Choy reconfigure the image of Chinatown and reconstruct Chinese North American history through their childhood memories. Chapter three studies Jook-Liang's Hollywood fantasies in Choy's *The Jade Peony* and argues that her mimicry constitutes a double disarticulation of both Chinese and Canadian cultures and reverses the ideological and sexual gaze by Western male audience. Chapter four investigates how Yep's discursive strategies in *The Traitor* disrupt the normalization of the English language. The chapter argues that Yep consciously mistranslates both the Chinese and English languages to reconstruct the history of

Rock Springs Massacre in Wyoming. The dissertation concludes with the assertion that the writings by Choy and Yep represent the hidden or repressed voices of Chinese North Americans whose contributions to the development of North America must be properly recognized.

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For Patricia Haseltine

You started it.

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## Introduction

### Politics of Resistance and Visibility in North American

#### Chinese Diasporic Literature

In December 2011, cultural critic Timothy Yu's blog post titled "Has Asian American Studies Failed?" invited a myriad of responses from scholars across different disciplines.<sup>1</sup> Critiquing a biased review of Japanese internment published by *The New York Times* and the "tiger mom controversy" invoked by Amy Chua's "Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior,"<sup>2</sup> Yu asked, "why, after more than four decades of Asian American studies, wasn't there a wider public understanding of the most elementary lessons of our field? Had we fallen short in our goal of shifting the racial discourse around Asians in the United States?" (327). Yu's concern about the currency of the field was timely, for Asian American studies had indeed failed at communicating some critical issues in Asian American history with a wider audience. For instance, the murder of Vincent Chin in 1982 may still remain unfamiliar to many. Despite the overwhelming popularity and success, the NBA sensation Jeremy Lin was racialized as a "Chink in the Armor" by ESPN in 2012.<sup>3</sup> Considering the ongoing misrepresentations of Asian Americans, Yu noted the urgency of making Asian American studies more *public* by popularizing the insights of the discipline to attract wider or "mainstream" audiences (328).

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<sup>1</sup> A more extended version of the post was published in *Journal of Asian American Studies* in 2012. The formal responses by scholars, such as Minh-Ha T. Pham, Oliver Wang, and Moustafa Bayoumi, were collected in the same issue of the journal.

<sup>2</sup> Chua's "Why Chinese Moms Are Superior" is an excerpt from her memoir *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* published in 2011. The book was an instant bestseller and triggered much discussion on parenting and education.

<sup>3</sup> ESPN used the headline to call Lin after New York's loss to the New Orleans Hornets. Yu criticized the media's racial stereotype of Lin in his other blog titled "Jeremy Lin, Ping Pong Playa, and Asian American Dreams" available at <http://tympen.blogspot.ca/2012/02/jeremy-lin-ping-pong-playa-and-asian.html>. Also see his article "Will Jeremy Lin's success end stereotypes?" published by CNN at <http://www.cnn.com/2012/02/20/opinion/ty-jeremy-lin/>.

Although Yu provided some useful objectives for the field, what is missing in his discussion is *how* to make the lessons of Asian American studies more accessible to the public. My dissertation, though not a direct response to Yu's concerns, provides some viable solutions to the crisis of Asian American studies—that is, to restage the visibility of Asian Americans through postcolonial theory.

As the title of my dissertation suggests, I use Homi Bhabha's theory to frame my study of representations of North American Chinese Diaspora in the works of Canadian writer Wayson Choy and American writer Laurence Yep, both of whom indicated their desire of being a bridge builder in an interview (Choy 2006; Marcus 100). I choose to write about these two writers not only because their writings provide excellent literary articulations of Bhabha's third space but because few critics have considered their works in the context of postcolonial theories.<sup>4</sup> The discussion below will introduce why it is important to study North American Chinese Diaspora through the lens of Bhabha's theory and how the works of Choy and Yep urge a rethinking of Chinese North American studies.

### **Why Bhabha?**

Allow me to begin with a short introduction to my Taiwanese background. In 1999, former Taiwanese President Teng-hui Lee advocated "Two-Nation Theory" or "One Country on Each Side" policy to emphasize Taiwan's special political relationship with China. Under the perceived threat of China's military exercises, Lee's radical move incurred much resistance from those who were ambivalent about Taiwan's political sovereignty. In response to Lee's theory,

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<sup>4</sup> Eleanor Ty, for instance, did not consider the postcolonial aspect of Jook-Liang's mimicry in Choy's *The Jade Peony*. See her *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* (2004), p. 43. Celestine Woo argued that Yep's fantasy is a way to construct bicultural identity for his Asian American young readers. See her "Towards a Poetics of Asian American Fantasy" (2006).

Shui-bien Chen promoted the “Third Way” policy as a way to sustain the “non-independent, non-unified” state of Taiwan, which won him the presidential election in 2000. Adapted from Anthony Giddens’s theory, Chen’s version of the “Third Way” neutralized the resistance from both sides to reinforce the strategic ambiguity about Taiwan’s political stance. From “Two-Nation Theory” to “Third Way,” these slogans represented the government’s shifting policies with China, but the fundamental problem of Taiwan’s nation-state remained unchanged. What concerned me most was that the paradigm of Taiwan’s (in)dependence led to numerous conflicts among different parties whose political interest compromised the voice of the people in Taiwan. After I came to Canada in 2007, the ambivalence of my cultural identity became more perplexing. I taught Mandarin at Calgary’s Chinese Academy from 2008-2009, during which time the colleagues (mostly older Chinese immigrants) often complimented me on my “correct” pronunciation without a heavy Taiwanese accent. At the U.S. customs, immigration officers would tirelessly ask me more questions if my answer regarding my work status in Canada were “an English instructor at Bow Valley College” rather than “a student of English.” As much as I want to claim Taiwanese as my mother tongue, I cannot speak it fluently because the language was repressed and prohibited when I attended elementary school in Taiwan. The inability to feel comfortable with any of the languages makes me an outsider: In Taiwan, I am not authentically Chinese like Chiang Kai-shek or his followers whose contribution to the development of Taiwan is honored and recognized. In Canada, I am an immigrant who is marginalized by my cultural and racial difference. After being introduced to the world of postcolonial studies by my supervisor Professor Shaobo Xie, I have become fascinated by Bhabha’s theory which I think adeptly addresses the problem of my cultural identity.

Born in Mumbai, India in 1949, Bhabha is considered one of the most important figures in postcolonial studies. In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha discusses his theory of hybridity:

[H]ybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge.

This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (“Space” 211)

The unsettling difference of one’s race, national origin, and language constitutes what Bhabha calls *cultural hybridity* that not just offers a way to negotiate with any form of authority but opens up a space for the emergence of the newness of culture. Moreover, the presence of cultural hybridity registers “not simply the *content* of disavowed knowledges [. . .] that return to be acknowledged as counter-authorities” but the difference of cultures which “can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation”—“cultural differences are not simply *there* to be seen or appropriated” (*Location* 162-163). Hybridity, in other words, foregrounds the liminal moment in the process of cultural signification to destabilize the absolute authority of colonial discourse. Bhabha’s theory offers a language of and for those who do not seem to belong to a given culture and whose voices are silenced under the practice of hegemonic ideologies. Bhabha’s theory of the third space, I think, not only effectively describes the ambiguous status of Taiwan’s nation-state but also theorizes the insoluble paradox of my cultural identity—“neither Chinese nor Taiwanese” yet both. Speaking from the third space allows me to both reflect upon the contradiction of my cultural identity critically and view the contestation between two cultures with a *double vision*, a marginal position that impels me to observe the power relations from an alternative perspective.

As a postcolonial critic, I consider that my task is to introduce alternative knowledges to the West and to disclose the paradigms within a power structure. I share Bhabha's position articulated in his "The Commitment to Theory" that "in the language of political economy, it is legitimate to represent the relations of exploitation and domination in the discursive division between the First and Third World, the North and the South" (*Location* 30). I am in line with Bhabha that the circulation of signs and commodities in established multinational networks reveals the flow of First World capital to Third World labor markets. As such, international trades provide a conceptual framework to account for the inequalities between the center and the periphery: First World countries are rich, dominant, and developed whereas Third World countries are poor, dominated, and underdeveloped. My concern is that the uneven economic development reproduces a system of thought that perpetuates the hierarchies of race, nation, culture, gender, and language imagined by the West. Bhabha's theory unmasks the incongruities of institutionalized knowledges and ultimately reinstates other repressed histories or voices to the dominant culture. As Bhabha reminds us,

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. (*Location* 54-55).

Reading with Bhabha's theory of hybridity inevitably inscribes a condition that emulates my experience as a Chinese/Taiwanese postcolonial in North America. My journey to Canada is like what Edward Said terms an intellectual exile in a metaphysical sense, which is foregrounded by "restlessness, movement and constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others" and which can

“never fully arrive, be at one with [the] new home or situation” (“Intellectual” 53). The sense of *unhomeliness* articulates the marginality of an intellectual in exile who does not have the comforts of being at home but at the same time enjoys the pleasure of critical thinking as a figure of an outsider (Said, “Intellectual” 59). This unique position, *neither here nor there*, entails the alterity of the intellectual that disavows the homogenizing force of the dominant culture. For Bhabha, the conception of the unhomely furthermore operates as an activity of intervention by establishing a boundary or “a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness—that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (*Location* 13). Bhabha’s metaphor of the bridge demonstrates the relevance of his theory to the study of Chinese North American diaspora for it effectively conceptualizes the symbolic and ceaseless movement of Chinese North Americans who are situated in between two worlds. Bhabha’s postcolonial theory, as I will argue in this dissertation, is productive in unveiling the strategies that Chinese North Americans employ to transcend the national and cultural boundaries and to be recognized by the dominant culture.

### **Why Choy and Yep?**

Choy, born in 1939, is one of the most recognized and beloved Chinese Canadian writers in the twenty-first century. His *The Jade Peony* (1995) won him the Trillium Book Award and was selected as one of CBC’s Canada Reads books in 2010. His other works include *Paper Shadows* (1999), *All That Matters* (2004), and *Not Yet: A Memoir of Living and Almost Dying* (2009). In an interview conducted by Sarah Hampson in 2009, Choy revealed that he had developed his observation skills as an outsider because of his ethnicity and sexuality: “People marginalize you and you marginalize yourself. It is a way of keeping your place” (L2). This

marginal experience is best illustrated by his “banana complex,” which made him feel “a kind of internalized oppression” (“Interview” 40), and which interrupted his writing career until the age of 55. For Choy, writing was a way not just to find directions in his life, but also to reconfigure his identity struggles, for “I know I am a writer because until I’m writing I don’t know what I know” (“Lesson” L2).

Born in 1948 in San Francisco, Yep (pronounced [yip]) is a prolific writer who has published over sixty fiction or nonfiction books. His *Dragonwings* (1975) is often selected as one of the required texts in a high school curriculum in the United States. In addition to *Dragonwings*, *Dragon’s Gate* (1993) was also a runner-up to the Newbery Medal, a prestigious award in recognition of distinguished contribution to children’s literature in America. Growing up hearing his grandmother’s stories about magical creatures in China, Yep is especially drawn to dragons which inspire him to write and to look into his identity as a Chinese American. Yep writes, “Like many other Chinese Americans, I was invisible. Sf and fantasy were a way to express my feelings and develop thoughts about my identity. Wearing a dragon skin allowed me to start discovering the shape of my face if not its exact features” (“Dragons” 388). Yep is therefore nicknamed the “dragon writer” not because many of his books contain the word “dragon” in their titles but because his main characters undergo a phase of transformation to overcome their life challenges.

What distinguishes Choy and Yep from other Chinese North American writers is that their stories are often narrated by children or adolescents. The narrators in Choy’s *The Jade Peony* and *All That Matters*, for instance, are children who reveal their growing up experience as a Chinese Canadian in Vancouver’s Chinatown during the Second World War. Yep’s *Golden Mountain Chronicles* follows the Young family from China to America, documenting the

fictional Chinese American history from 1835 to 2011 through the perspectives of teenagers in multiple generations. For Choy, it is imperative that his stories are about survivors, for there is little literature focusing on ordinary people living with decency. As “a book of moments” (Choy, “Interview” 42), *The Jade Peony* strings three separate narratives together to capture their life as Chinese Canadians in fragmentary yet interrelated moments. As a young child in the 1950s, Yep could not identify with popular children’s literature. Nor could he turn to the limited and non-credible Asian American stories written by white authors. The lack of history books about Chinese Americans even in the 1970s eventually motivated Yep to become a writer for young readers and adults (“Dragons” 386-388). Based on their experiences as an outsider, Choy and Yep often write stories about Chinese North Americans who are alienated because of their cultural and ethnic background. This motif is similar to Yep’s confession in his memoir *The Lost Garden*: “I was the Chinese American raised in a black neighborhood, a child who had been too American to fit into Chinatown and too Chinese to fit in elsewhere” (frontispiece).

Regarding Yu’s concern about the visibility of Asian American studies, I think Choy’s and Yep’s stories should be more widely taught and appreciated. Their stories focalize the survival of Chinese North Americans who are able to transcend cultural boundaries to discover their self-identity. Moreover, the morals of the stories, in which the heroes use their wisdom to adapt and succeed, should be learned by all readers. The most important aspect of the works by Choy and Yep, for me, concerns how the voice of Chinese North Americans, who are caught in-between two cultures, has often been silenced or repressed in official history. Because the reconstruction of Chinese North American history is a predominant theme in their writings, I find the following questions pertinent to the corpus of this dissertation: How did the socioeconomic and political conditions in China inform an inherent part of Chinese North



American history? How did the geopolitical expansion of European colonial powers to Asia contribute to Chinese immigration to North America? When did the term “Asian” become a designated category that connotes racial and cultural inferiority? How do the historical narratives by Choy and Yep reshape the national histories of America and Canada respectively? Most importantly, what strategies do the agents of alternative histories use to open up possibilities of resistance to the ideological dominance of the West? To answer these questions, I will use Bhabha’s concepts of third space, mimicry, and cultural translation to conduct a systematic analysis of Chinese diasporic experiences represented in the two writers’ works.

This dissertation is comprised of four chapters. Chapter one, titled “Theorizing Postcolonial Chinese North American Literature in the Global Age,” investigates the discursive intersections of postcolonial theory and Chinese North American literature. The chapter begins with a response to scholars who declared “the end of postcolonial theory” during a roundtable discussion featured in a *PMLA* issue in 2007. The response serves as a point of departure for the critical review of the concurrent debates in the postcolonial field. The aim in this chapter, as the title suggests, is to theorize postcolonial Chinese North American literature in the global age. To consider Chinese North American literature in postcolonial terms, I am aware of some theoretical problems. First, Chinese North Americans are by definition not “colonized” in the normative sense of the term since classic colonialism involves the control of land. If so, in what sense are Chinese North Americans “postcolonial”? Second, to call Chinese North Americans postcolonial implies that the U.S. and Canada are both postcolonial countries. The Persian Gulf War and the ongoing conflicts in Pakistan illustrate that the U.S. has replaced Britain and become the new imperial power. Is the U.S. or Canada postcolonial? Third, based on the first two logical problems, other theories such as critical race theory or minority discourse may seem like more

reasonable approaches to Chinese North American literature, but why postcolonial theory? My argument in this chapter is that North American Chinese literature articulates a postcolonial condition arising from internal colonization as well as racial and ideological exclusion practiced and justified by North American regimes to preserve political and social dominance over minor communities. Postcolonial theories will be helpful to examine North America as a colonizing power that destroys or constrains the values of members of colonized groups in order to consolidate its social and political dominance. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the image of an immigrant in North America and the new challenges of Chinese North Americans in the global age.

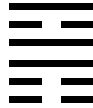
Chapter two, titled “Lost in Chinatown: Home, Memory, and History in Laurence Yep’s *The Lost Garden* and Wayson Choy’s *Paper Shadows*,” conducts a radical reading of Chinatown as “the third space” according to Bhabha’s theory. After the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in the mid 1940s in recognition of China’s contributions to WWII, Chinese North Americans were no longer constrained in small regions in cities like San Francisco or Vancouver. Chinatown may be a home for early Chinese immigrants, but it remains a culturally and historically ambiguous space for many second or third generation Chinese North Americans. As an empty structure, Chinatown is an elusive concept that conjures up “ghosts” or repressed memories that signify the indeterminacy of its spatial and historical significance. The haunted house in Choy’s *Paper Shadows* and the “lost garden” in Yep’s memoir are symbols of their lost *home*, signifying the sociopolitical oppression of the Chinese in North American history. By reading Chinatown as the third space, I argue that its imaginative, physical and geographical location is an ambiguous para-site that relentlessly challenges cultural hegemony. Chinatown is a space for the Chinese communities to remain economically and politically controlled from the

outside; the ethnic and cultural values, nonetheless, are not totally destroyed but repressed, constituting cultural and geographical ambiguity that questions the dominant narration of Canada and America as a nation respectively. I will inspect the ambiguity of Chinatown as the third space by way of Bhabha's theory and study the ambivalent sociopolitical diasporic experiences of Chinese North Americans.

Chapter three, titled "Hollywood Cinema and Mimicry in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*," studies the unsettling effects of mimicry performed by the granddaughter Jook-Liang who identifies with multiple Hollywood figures in the novel. In "Of Mimicry and Man," Bhabha argues that mimicry requires repetition while ironically mimicry is always a partial representation. It arises from the desire of the colonized to emerge as authentic though the result is "almost the same but not quite." I engage philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Lacan to examine colonial mimicry with an emphasis on the significance of repetition and the colonized subject's ambivalence. Following the introduction to Bhabha's theory is a study of three Hollywood films—*Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932), *Robin Hood* (1922), and *Bright Eyes* (1934)—in relation to Jook-Liang's mimicry of Tarzan and Jane, Robin Hood and Marian, and Shirley Temple. I argue that Liang's mimicry of these Hollywood figures is a double disarticulation of her Chinese and Canadian cultures and a reverse of the ideological and sexual gaze constituted by male fascination.

Chapter four, "Cultural Translation as *Myth*-Translation in Laurence Yep's *The Traitor*," examines the cultural politics of translation in the narratives by two fictional characters Joseph Young and Michael Purdy who witness the Rock Springs massacre in Wyoming. In many ways, this chapter is an extension of my master's thesis which studied the intertextuality of Yep's

*Golden Mountain Chronicles* and Confucius's *I Ching*.<sup>5</sup> *The Traitor*, like most of the novels in the *Golden Mountain Chronicles*, begins with a hexagram with an explanatory note translated from Confucius's *I Ching* on its frontispiece:



Lü, the fifty-sixth hexagram of the *Book of Changes*.

“Be silent, be cunning, but above all be invisible.”

*I Ching* is considered the oldest historical document that recorded human activities and natural phenomena with a sign system composed of solid or broken lines. It was not until Confucius (722-481 B.C.) who added the explanatory notes did *I Ching* become a book of philosophy. Even with Confucius's notes, the history represented by the linear lines may still seem too abstruse to follow. The hexagram and the translation of Confucius's note by Yep is what I call a “*myth-translation*,” a deliberate *mistranslation* by using the mythic code system to uncover the history of the Rock Springs massacre. In “How Newness Enters the World,” Bhabha argues that in cultural translation, there is always a moment of irresolution as an element of resistance that refuses to be translated. Bhabha proposes that the interstitial space produced by translation enriches one's own culture and creates a dual dimension that reveals the instability of meaning in a language. In the case of *The Traitor*, I argue that *myth-translation* is a necessary strategy for Yep to reconstruct the incommensurable history of the massacre and to reveal the insufficiency of both Chinese and English languages.

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<sup>5</sup> *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*, is one of the oldest Chinese classics (approximately 1000 B.C.), which was interpreted into a book of philosophy by Confucius, an ancient philosopher whose thoughts have profound influence on Chinese education and culture. More discussion on the connection of *I Ching* and Yep's *Golden Mountain Chronicles* will be included in chapter four of this dissertation.

The dissertation ends with a review of the four chapters and a critical reflection upon the postcolonial field and Chinese North American studies. It is my hope that reading works by Choy and Yep with Bhabha's theory will not only produce a new understanding of the two novelists' work but will enrich the postcolonial understanding of cultural hybridity in general.

## Chapter 1

### Theorizing Postcolonial Chinese North American Literature in the Global Age

The 2007 issue of *PMLA* featured a roundtable discussion on a thought-provoking yet controversial question: “The End of Postcolonial Theory?” The participating scholars unanimously found the field, as a category, to be “both too diffuse and too narrow” for postcolonial theory strives to critique Anglocentrism but universalizes itself to represent post- or colonial issues across different regions (643). Fernando Coronil, for instance, found postcolonial studies frustrating because the field focused exclusively on European colonialism through provincial lenses yet “erected itself as the postcolonial canon” (637). Simon Gikandi argued that postcolonial theory must be “transformed or disfigured” (635) for it to make sense to other cultural or literary scholars outside English. It is widely acknowledged that postcolonial theories or perhaps “postcolonial jabbering” by scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, are too abstruse to follow. However, if postcolonial theory is so inadequate that the scholars are considering pronouncing its death, what makes it a rigorous field that generates the most CFPs across different disciplines under the category of “postcolonial” around the world?<sup>1</sup> Gaurav Desai is right that postcolonial studies are heavily immersed in the English discipline and that “they are here to stay” (641), but the opposing views against postcolonial theory call for a careful reconsideration of the field in the age of globalization.

First, the question can be interpreted as a theoretical predicament originated from the internal contradictions of the term “postcolonial.” The prefix “post” suggests a meaning of

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<sup>1</sup> Examples can be easily found in University of Pennsylvania’s CFP archive. For instance, the 2014 international conference at Erciyes University in Turkey invites papers on inter-disciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity in humanities. The theme of the 2014 second global conference held in Lisbon is transmedia interactions with the intention to promote interdisciplinarity engagement.

“after” colonialism, but the influence of colonial culture is still noticeable in most post-independent states (Ahmad 2008; Shohat 1992). Attempting to critique various effects of colonization, postcolonial theory also risks the danger of universalizing the fundamental difference among the geography, history, class, gender, and race of diverse origins (McClintock 1995; Mohanty 2003). The term “postcolonial,” in other words, embodies the insoluble spatio-temporal paradoxes that are inherent within its theoretical apparatus. Second, the presence of a postcolonial scholar in almost every English department is evidence that postcolonial studies is far from being over yet, but the question signals anxiety towards the theory’s practice. Problems of poverty, inequality, exploitation, and oppression, moreover, continue to be prevalent around the world. The desire to announce the theory’s death, according to Robert Young, illustrates the ignorance of some U.S. and French academics who refuse to be reminded of the “distant invisible contexts” (“Remains” 20) that energize the transformative power of postcolonial theory. Considering the scholars’ resistance to postcolonial theory, one cannot help but think of Paul de Man’s words: “Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory is itself this resistance” (288). For me, the resistance to postcolonial theory is a sign of rebirth, for the postcolonial debate is the language of self-resistance that rejuvenates the discipline by pushing its boundaries to open up more possibilities, and “the more it is resisted, the more it flourishes, since the language it speaks is the language of self-resistance” (de Man 288). This chapter considers the theoretical intersections of postcolonial theory and Chinese North American discourse while new perspectives in the twenty-first century provide the necessary interventions that transform both disciplinary fields.

#### Globalization and the Postcolonial

The topic of the efficacies or pitfalls of the term postcolonial has already been exhausted by many scholars. What is under discussion in this section of the chapter is the relevance of the term postcolonial in the age of globalization. The term postcolonial is originated from colonialism. In his *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said distinguishes between the two terms “imperialism” and “colonialism”: The former suggests “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” while the latter “a consequence of imperialism” and “the implanting of settlements on distant territory” (9). Following Said’s definitions of the two terms, it can be roughly inferred that imperialism is the thinking or ideology of controlling the people and natural resources of a foreign territory. Colonialism is the realization or practice of imperialism in a colony where the colonialist’s sociopolitical system is imposed to establish a hierarchy of class, race, and culture. At some very basic level, colonialism differs from imperialism because of its exploitation of or settlement on land inhabited by others. Examples of colonialism and imperialism can be found in the histories of former colonies, such as India and Jamaica, where the British settlers governed the land and its people by practicing the British political system. In a colonial context, the oppositions, or “postcolonial clichés” for some, between colonizer and colonized, West and non-West, center and periphery, are the driving forces behind decolonization, which is best illustrated in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*:

The colonist makes history and he knows it. And because he refers constantly to the history of his metropolis, he plainly indicates that here he is the extension of this metropolis. The history he writes is therefore not the history of the country he is despoiling, but the history of his own nation’s looting, raping, and starving to death. The immobility to which the colonized subject is condemned can be



challenged only if he decides to put an end to the history of colonization and the history of despoliation in order to bring to life the history of the nation, the history of decolonization. (15)

Published in 1961, *The Wretched of the Earth* studies the relationship of anti-colonial sentiment and the task of decolonization. “The colonized man,” writes Fanon, “liberates himself in and through violence” (44). This combat spirit characterizes the confrontation against the colonial power and is the key to the liberation of many colonies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The decline of the empires signifies the termination of their territory expansion and the withdrawal of the colonial political regime from post-independent states. Very literally, postcolonial describes the problems after colonization or “the aftermath of the colonial” (Young, “Postcolonial” 13), but the “post” in postcolonial does not necessarily mean the end of the battle against colonial authority.

Considering the similarities between postmodernism and postcolonialism, Anthony Kwame Appiah asks in his essay, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” (336). Appiah observes:

All aspects of contemporary African cultural life—including music and some sculpture and painting, even some writings with which the West is largely not familiar—have been influenced, often powerfully, by the transition of African societies *through* colonialism, but they are not all in the relevant sense *postcolonial*. For the *post-* in postcolonial, like the *post-* in postmodern, is the *post-* of the space-clearing gesture I characterized earlier, and many areas of contemporary African cultural life—what has come to be theorized as popular culture, in particular—are not in this way concerned with transcending, with going beyond, coloniality.

The significance of the “space-clearing gesture,” in my understanding, is twofold in Appiah’s essay. First, space-clearing refers to the need to open up a space to incorporate something new so that the art work becomes marketable and distinguishable among other products. Space-clearing manifested in contemporary African art can be interpreted as a mode of distinction and as a production of difference. Second, the *post-* in postcolonial suggests the clearing of a theoretical or cultural space that undertakes the effects of colonialism. The *post-* in postcolonial, in this sense, is a signifier that marks the difference from but paradoxically exhibits symptoms of the colonial. The art work *Man with a Bicycle*, which Appiah uses to explore the articulation of the postcolonial and postmodern, implies pertinent questions regarding the task of the postcolonial discourse: At what point in history did colonialism start and end? Is it possible to reinstate a “pure” culture and history belonging to a former colony? In many ways, postcolonial culture is inseparable from the colonial, for it is impossible to erase the history of colonization. Appiah’s concern about *Man with a Bicycle* is not when it was made or by whom, but what makes it distinctive is that “it is produced for the West” (346). If colonialism has ended in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fact that African culture is still heavily under the influence of the West signals the reproduction of colonialism in different forms to continuously seek control through specific sociopolitical, economic, or ideological practices.

For Young, the formal “colonizer-colonized relation” is for the most part over although different versions of the relation still persistently inflect colonial attitudes in the settler colonies. “What we have instead is something almost more brutal,” argues Young, “because there is no longer even a relation” (“Remains” 27) for those who are stripped to nothing and forced into a new world to survive. In the age of globalization, the classic colonialism is replaced by neocolonialism or neoimperialism, through which global superpowers exercise their imperial

control over developing countries. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin define neocolonialism as “any and all forms of control of the ex-colonies after political independence,” forcing “the erstwhile so-called Third World economies to develop an independent economic and political identity under the pressures of globalization” (*Key* 146). As I have mentioned earlier, the traditional view is that postcolonial involves problems associated with the colonial whereas “postcoloniality” is commonly known as the condition of the postcolonial. Spivak’s definitions of colonialism, neocolonialism, and postcoloniality can furthermore illuminate their intricate connections:

Let us learn to discriminate the terms *colonialism*—in the European formation stretching from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries—*neocolonialism*—dominant economic, political, and culturalist maneuvers emerging in our century after the uneven dissolution of the territorial empires—and *postcoloniality*—the contemporary global condition, since the first term is supposed to have passed or be passing into the second. (*Reason* 172)

In summary, the term postcoloniality today is broadened to describe the contemporary conditions of globalization and (neo)colonialism. The word *today* does not imply that colonialism is no longer relevant. Quite contrary, it is in fact difficult to imagine European history since the 16<sup>th</sup> century without considering colonialism.<sup>2</sup> Some current problems associated with neocolonialism, as Spivak points out, can be traced back to the colonial times. The term

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<sup>2</sup> I am thinking about the European geographic exploration in the sixteenth century or commonly referred to as the Age of Discovery. Europeans “explored” or “discovered” Africa, the Americas, parts of Asia, and Oceania during this period.

postcolonial, accordingly, should be reconsidered in the context of globalization and (neo)colonialism.

Although published almost twenty years ago, Arif Dirlik's "The Postcolonial Aura" (1994) provides a useful overview of the term postcolonial:

(a) as a literal description of conditions in formerly colonial societies, in which case the term has concrete referents, as in postcolonial societies or postcolonial intellectuals; (b) as a description of a global condition after the period of colonialism, in which case the usage is somewhat more abstract and less concrete in reference, comparable in its vagueness to the earlier term *Third World*, for which it is intended as a substitute; and (c) as a description of a discourse on the above-named conditions that is informed by the epistemological and psychic orientations that are products of those conditions. (332)

Dirlik's definitions of postcolonial are certainly insightful since the term is notorious for its elusiveness. My reservation about his essay is that critical themes, according to Dirlik, have been dealt with by Third World academic intellectuals long before the appearance of the term postcolonial. It is a category rebranded in poststructuralist language that glosses over the opposition of the colonizer and colonized and avoids examining its connection to global capitalism. "[P]ostcolonial," Dirlik bitterly suggests, "rather than a description of anything, is a discourse that seeks to constitute the world in the self-image of [Third World] intellectuals" and is "not so much of agony over identity, as it often appears, but of newfound power" for them in First World academy (339). Among the postcolonial celebrities, Bhabha is perhaps Dirlik's favorite enemy. In his half-page long footnote, Dirlik criticizes Bhabha for creating "political mystification and theoretical obfuscation" (333) and reducing sociopolitical problems to

psychological ones in postcolonial writings. In 2008, Dirlik still outspokenly called Bhabha an opportunist with an expensive taste for brand name suits, who made a career at Harvard University with his incomprehensible academic language.<sup>3</sup> Postcolonial theory, for Dirlik, is nothing but a mode of self-legitimatization of the Third World theorists, who establish an academic enterprise by festishizing postcolonial issues in their analysis.

Considering the postcolonial intellectuals' self-justification on the one hand and the limits of postcolonial studies on the other, Eli Sorensen furthermore announces that the discipline has entered a stage of "postcolonial melancholia" (65), noted for the "ambivalence related to the problematic of institutionalization" and "a certain repetitiveness and predictability in many postcolonial analyses" (69). Sharing Dirlik's concern about the missing link of postcolonial theory and global economy, Nagesh Rao argues that postcolonial intellectuals have failed to comprehend the current world system in Marxist or non-Marxist terms, as specific historical conditions of different nation states have been compromised in their use of terms such as "neocolonialism" or "globalization" (365). But what is globalization? Is postcolonial theory inadequate in criticizing the current state of global development?

Let me first begin with a definition of globalization before I respond to the aforementioned critics' objections. Like postcolonialism, globalization is a highly contested and ambiguous concept. I view globalization, on a general level, as a world process centered in the West that seeks to eliminate local differences with economic, military, and cultural domination.

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<sup>3</sup> Dirlik's personal dislike for Bhabha or his theory is certainly not the point of discussion here. In fact, Dirlik ironically fits the description of the Third World intellectuals he disapproves—a distinguished scholar of Turkish descent, who previously held positions at Duke University and University of Oregon. I attended Dirlik's guest lecture in Dr. Shaobo Xie's graduate seminar and his public speech titled "Globalization and China" at University of Calgary in Fall 2008. During the lecture, Dirlik spoke trenchantly against Bhabha's theoretical position.

The teleological purpose of globalization is to establish the internationalization of world economy or a unitary social space in which the core-periphery hierarchy is perpetuated in the light of material inequalities. Globalization, as a system of thought, can be perceived from its economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions that do not necessarily divide but often sustain each other. From the social and economic perspective, Marxist theorists are among the most avid critics of capitalist development as a world phenomenon: globalization's time-space compression (Harvey 1989; Giddens 1990) or the production of a world system (Wallerstein 2004; Robinson 1996). Their major concerns can be roughly summarized as how world socioeconomic relations are signified by the commodity exchange and accumulation of capital. David Harvey, for instance, in his "Globalization in Question" asserts that the globalization process of capitalism can be traced back to 1492 and continues to operate as a political-economic system through geographical expansion and spatial reordering (3). Ankie Hoogvelt points out that the capitalist world economy operates under the control of a "global invisible hand" (15) that crosses any national boundaries. The much disputed G-20 summit annual meetings are a good example of how these superpowers promote an *international* financial system that secures their economic interests by subordinating other countries' political autonomy. Observe this photo below:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The photo is retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/g20-nations-to-focus-on-deficits/article490113.ece>.



(G-20 summit meeting in Toronto June 26-27, 2010)

This group picture features leaders from twenty elite nations, with Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper standing between Barack Obama and South Korea's President Lee Myung-bak on the front row. Other familiar faces include Britain's David Cameron, China's Hu Jintao, Germany's Angela Merkel, and India's Manmohan Singh. The meeting's theme "recovery and new beginnings" indicated the urgency of finding solutions to global recession and the European debt crisis. The Toronto meeting was criticized for its huge expense (approximately one billion) as some officials urged that the money should have been invested on the city's much needed infrastructure. The G-20 meeting concluded without an actual plan regarding the anticipated economic stimulus. What the meeting achieved instead was a masquerade of an *international* corporation comprised of world class actors smiling and waving to disguise their political

coercion over other nations. From the controversial Canada-America Keystone oil pipelines to the recent “free trade” agreement with South Korea,<sup>5</sup> these economic projects, furthermore, suggest that the financial stability that the meetings endorse exists *only* among G-20 members themselves.

From the cultural perspective, Stuart Hall in “The Local and the Global” ponders over the relation between globalization and the construction of the “identity of Englishness” (22). With its cultural and economic dominance in the last century, Britain eliminated the differences among regions, peoples, genders, and classes to prescribe a *global* identity. In *Tourists with Typewriters*, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan study the “[i]mperialist nostalgia” (29) manifested in travel writing. After the fall of the Empire, travel writers observe cultural diversities around the world with an imperial eye. The writing systematically obscures the economic motives and necessitates, if not mystifies, Britain’s glorious imperial pasts.<sup>6</sup> In the twenty-first century, Britain still maintains the sense of political supremacy through economic and cultural measures. The media consistently perpetuate the noble and graceful image of the British royal family to satisfy the public’s fascination. In 2011, the royal union of Prince William and Kate Middleton was lauded as the wedding of the century, and two years later, Middleton’s pregnancy and child birth were cheered around the globe. Souvenirs such as coffee mugs, key chains, accessories, and

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<sup>5</sup> Canada’s Prime Minister Stephen Harper signed the Free Trade Agreement with South Korea on March 11, 2014. The agreement, according to Harper, is an economic boost, which “gives Canadian businesses access to a booming G20 economy” and “the key supply chains that begin in Korea fan out all across Asia.” See more information about the details of the free trade at <http://globalnews.ca/news/1199895/south-korea-canada-reach-free-trade-agreement/>

<sup>6</sup> See Holland and Huggan’s excellent analysis on the figure of English gentleman in travel writing in the chapter titled “After Empire,” pp. 27-66.



royal baby items were manufactured and dispatched worldwide to commemorate their marriage.<sup>7</sup> While people were busy purchasing their share of the English identity, Syria's Civil War, in which 130,000 people were killed, did not headline many newspapers in 2013. Through the manipulation of media, English culture is disseminated as a world legacy that is to be honored and desired. Syria, along with other "underdeveloped" nations, remains a silent margin under the operation of globalization.

If globalization describes the creation of a *global* system, postcolonialism is the counter discourse that opposes such process. Simon During's "Postcolonial and Globalisation" can be read as a response to Dirlik's and Rao's charges against postcolonial theory. Drawing on his studies of Maori people's resistance to the global culture and economy, During affirms the dialectical relation of postcolonialism and globalization: The former can be considered as "a theory of de-historicisation" and the latter as "a theory of de-territorialisation" (34). Since postcolonialism investigates issues of the loss and recovery of time in a master-narrative whereas globalization articulates the collapse of geographical determination, the two terms are theoretically intertwined for their complicated time-space relations. Both postcolonialism and globalization are concerned with the transcendence of the boundaries of the nation-state and seek to provide a new understanding of the cultural phenomena that can no longer be easily accessed. Ashcroft asserts that the value of postcolonial theory lies in "its ability to comprehend the postmodern movement of culture beyond the nation state at the same time as it addresses the

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<sup>7</sup> The list can go on. Numerous websites carry the wedding-related merchandise and Middleton's outfit is highly sought after in Europe. About two billion people watched the broadcast of the royal wedding on TV or through the Internet. The story of the couple was adapted into a TV movie titled "William & Kate" (2011), with all of the scenes shot in the US. Is Hollywood trying to create a "local" version of the fairytale or to satisfy more people's fascination about the royal family? Is the US nostalgic about its mother culture? What can be inferred from this example is that the images of William and Kate are commodified to consolidate the cultural, political, and ideological dominance in the West.

particularity of the (largely non-Western) local” (89). In *Globalization Unmasked*, James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer argue that “the concept of imperialism fits the realities much better than globalization” (30) because of transnational capitalists’ systematic attempt to create a new world order. Shaobo Xie adeptly calls globalization “a euphemistic respelling of imperialism” (58) and finds postcolonialism a necessary counter-hegemonic discourse that interrogates issues of neocolonialism in the global system of capitalism. In other words, Postcolonialism exposes the structure of power relations and resists the homogenization of a world economic system within the ideology of imperial rhetoric.

As a student in the field, I have always found that postcolonialism involves resistance and addresses problems of representation. Postcolonialism displaces any institutionalized knowledge, whether it is culture, language, ideology, or political authority, and reorients the power relations to establish a space for invisible communities to speak for themselves. According to Young, the postcolonial is the product of human experience that has not been recognized at any institutional level. The task of postcolonialism can be outlined as follows:

Postcolonialism’s concerns are centred on geographic zones of intensity that have remained largely invisible, but which prompt or involve questions of history, ethnicity, complex cultural identities and questions of representation, of refugees, emigration and immigration, of poverty and wealth—but also, importantly, the energy, vibrancy and creative cultural dynamics that emerge in very positive ways from such demanding circumstances. Postcolonialism offers a language of and for those who have no place, who seem not to belong, of those whose knowledges and histories are not allowed to count. It is above all this preoccupation with the oppressed, with the subaltern classes, with minorities in any society, with the

concerns of those who live or come from elsewhere, that constitutes the basis of postcolonial politics and remains the core that generates its continuing power.

(Young, “Postcolonial” 14)

Postcolonialism can be considered as *a language of and for the invisible*, including the oppressed, subaltern classes, and minority communities. I use the term “postcolonial” to describe Chinese immigrants who are largely invisible in North American history for the lack of recognition of their socioeconomic contributions. The West has the tendency of discriminating or demonizing the Other to legitimize their cultural, racial, geopolitical, and ideological dominance. Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan are examples of how the West prescribed an “authentic” image or identity *for* the Chinese in early twentieth century. Said terms this type of institutionalized knowledge Orientalism—a “*distribution*” which administers Western imperialist ideology through different texts and an “*elaboration*” which establishes a geographical distinction by dividing the world into West and non-West (*Orientalism* 12). Orientalism, in other words, is to fabricate a knowledge about the Orient so that it remains a racial, geographical, and ideological conception that complements the imaginations of Western imperialism. Postcolonial theory, as a theoretical approach, examines binary oppositions as such and seeks to restructure the power relations. Moreover, the postcolonial in this dissertation examines the discursive mode of knowledge about Chinese North Americans, foregrounds the resistance of the community, and provides a language to negotiate with the dominant culture. Below is a brief review of the terms:

1. I define **postcolonial** as a language of/for the invisible or the oppressed. A postcolonial critic is concerned about issues of power, identity, and race emerging not just after colonization but also in the age of globalization.

2. **Postcolonialism** (or **postcolonial theory**) is a theoretical approach to the discursive articulations of an empire and subverts its power structure by locating the resistance from within. Postcolonialism investigates the cultural productions of the invisible communities with a view to giving them proper recognition for their socioeconomic contributions in history.
3. **Postcoloniality** describes the condition of postcolonial communities who are no longer directly “colonized” but remain under the ideological, economic, or geopolitical control of the Western center.

To consider Chinese North American literature in postcolonial terms, I am well aware of some theoretical problems. First, if colonialism in a traditional sense involves the control of land, Chinese North Americans are certainly not postcolonial as they, unlike Native Americans, did not experience the loss of land in North American history. Simply put, Chinese North Americans are fundamentally not “colonized.” Second, to call Chinese North Americans postcolonial implies that the U.S. and Canada are both postcolonial countries. This hypothesis contradicts Hall’s observation that “[t]he new kind of globalization is not English, it is American” (27). We are inarguably living in an era when the U.S. has already replaced the role of Britain and become the new imperialist power. From the Persian Gulf War (with Canada being one of its allies) to the ongoing conflicts in Pakistan, the U.S. has never been too hesitant when it comes to protecting its economic and political interests. To claim the U.S. as a postcolonial nation hence poses yet another internal theoretical problem. Third, based on the first two logical problems, other theories such as critical race theory or minority discourse may seem like more reasonable approaches to Chinese North American literature, but why postcolonial theory? In his *Power/Knowledge*, Michel Foucault reminds us how truth and power often operate hand in hand

in society, and truth “is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth” (119). Any discourse of power should not be viewed as a singular, one-directional, and self-contained system; it must be analyzed as a network of power relations. While postcolonial theory may not be a perfect vehicle that overtakes all of the issues in Chinese North American literature, it provides a useful theoretical framework to account for critical relations of identity, race, class, gender, space, language, and history represented in a particular context. Most importantly, postcolonial theory exposes the discursive practice of U.S. and Canadian imperialism to prescribe a unitary and homogeneous national identity through sociopolitical coercions over different ethnic communities. Upon further examination, Chinese North American literature reveals not just the history of Chinese immigration but also the making of the U.S. and Canada as a nation respectively. To arrive at this argument, I will address the critical relations of postcolonial theory and Chinese North American studies.

#### Is the United States or Canada postcolonial?

To posit that Chinese North Americans are postcolonial, we should perhaps first ask “Is the United States or Canada postcolonial?” The question of the postcolonial status of the United States and Canada has been explored by many critics (Sharpe 1995; Hulme 1995; A. King 1997; Singh and Schmidt 2000; Moss 2003). This part of the chapter will provide a brief survey of the relevance of postcolonial theory and the national histories of the United States and Canada. Historically, the United States and Canada became postcolonial nations after they gained political sovereignty in 1776 and in 1867 respectively. Thomas Jefferson’s *Declaration of Independence* can be interpreted as the first postcolonial North American literary text with its opening lines indicating the political separation from British governance. The remaining part of

the text indicates the causes of the separation, connoting the practice of British colonialism in America through “establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies” (1456). In the last section of *Declaration*, the representatives unanimously announced the United States as “Free and Independent States [. . .] Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown” and the dissolve of “all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain” (1457). According to Kariann Yokota, North Americans during the nation building phases of the seventeenth to eighteenth century struggled between “unbecoming” British subjects before independence and “becoming” citizens of a new country. British nationals viewed North America as an extension of their homeland, but the American settlers were confronted by the Natives in an unfamiliar terrain who distinguished them from those at home in England. The different vision of “home” forced the distant and displaced settlers to become “Americans,” a term suggesting “marginality and inferiority” and that “they had become something other than British” (10). In light of the declaration of its political independence and the ambivalence of people’s cultural identity, the United States is inarguably *postcolonial* in the early stages of its national development. The problem is that, when becoming Americans, these settlers inherited not just the language, culture, and tradition from Great Britain but also the psyche of European colonialism. In fact, the process of their nation building, according to Said, is similar to the making of an empire: North American territory must be fought over; native peoples must be “dominated,” “exterminated,” and “variously dislodged”; and then, distant lands were to be “intervened in and fought over” to safeguard American interests (*Culture* 8). The continuous domination over Native Americans and the possession of foreign territories (i.e. Liberia in early nineteenth century) suggest that the definition of postcolonial no longer applies

to United States because of its practice of colonialism. Similarly, concerned about the lack of discussion on the intersection of American literature and postcolonial theory, Amy Kaplan in “Left Alone with America” identifies the three absences in the U.S. studies: “the absence of culture from the history of U.S. imperialism; the absence of empire from the study of American culture; and the absence of the United States from the postcolonial study of imperialism” (11). Kaplan’s studies certainly points to the tension of inaugurating the American Empire among the U.S. scholars, but it also suggests that there is no clear-cut answer to whether the United States is postcolonial or not.

On a general level, Canada may share a similar nation-building process like the United States, but the involvement of the French settlers in the fifteenth century makes its national history more complex. Beginning in 1534, the French settlers established New France, occupying regions such as Newfoundland, Acadia, and Louisiana. Instigated by the conflict of fur trade in the eastern Canadian border, the Seven Years’ War (1754-63) saw the defeat of France and the ceding of its North American colonies to Britain. After 1763, Canada was completely under the British rule although the American Revolution and the War of 1812 raised consciousness of its own national identity. The *British North America Act* or the *Constitution Act* in 1867 granted the political union of the colonies—the Province of Canada (now Ontario and Quebec), Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick—under one Dominion. Canada was self-governed by its own Parliament, but Britain reserved the right to approve or amend changes in the Canadian Constitution. Considering the transition of Canada as a British colony to a full independent state, Pelham Edgar wrote in 1912: “The problems affecting Canadian literature are peculiar to all the outlying dependencies of our Empire, and are in part shared by the United States, though our neighbours have the advantage of being a distinct nation, whereas we are

neither, as yet, a nation nor quite an empire” (qtd. in Bennett 109). Edgar’s observation about Canada’s nationalism is still prevalent today: The passing of the *Canada Act* in 1982 officially terminated Canada’s political dependence on Britain, but its current bilingual status (endorsed by the *Official Languages Act* in 1969) suggests the internal linguistic and cultural antagonisms within the nation. Its strong historical and political tie with the United States makes it even more difficult to define Canada’s national culture. As a former colony of France and Britain, Canada can certainly be identified as *postcolonial*, but the term suggests the ambiguity of its historical reference. That is, when did Canada become postcolonial? Is it after the *Constitutional Act* in 1867 or the signing of the *Canada Act* in 1982?

The scholars in *Is Canada Postcolonial: Unsettling Canadian Literature* comprehensively address the postcoloniality of Canadian literature, but no consensus has been reached regarding the postcolonial debate. In her introductory essay, Laura Moss can only provide a tentative answer “it depends,” because the question is subject to whether or not you:

- focus on Canada as a member of the British Commonwealth; [. . .]
- view Canada as both an invader and settler colony; [. . .]
- see Canada as a nation of immigrants;
- see Canada continuing the colonization of First Nations people;
- isolate Canada as a member of the G8 and a powerful player in globalization (7-8)

Moss is right that the question is contingent on the specific historical, political, or cultural conditions in which Canada’s postcoloniality is considered. By answering “maybe,” Moss avoids the postcolonial paradigm by “foreground[ing] the impossibility of a simple answer to the question of Canada’s, or even Canadian literature’s, relationship with postcolonialism” (8).



Moss's indefinite answer may seem suitable, as "maybe" indeed articulates the ambiguous political and cultural status of Canada. I remain, however, skeptical of Moss's theorization of postcolonial Canadian literature because of its ambiguity and indeterminacy. In other words, how can postcolonial theory be a productive approach if the postcolonial condition of Canadian literature is questionable? Like the question "Is the United States postcolonial?" "Is Canada postcolonial?" may be equally unanswerable in the sense that both nations are arguably postcolonial and neocolonial at the same time. This theoretical paradigm suggests that the postcolonial condition of the United States or Canada cannot be analyzed simply from an either/or position. Rather than emphasizing the impossibility of answering the postcolonial question, I think the postcolonial condition of both countries can be more productively defined and understood. I propose that the postcolonial North American condition, particularly the United States, can be comprehended by how colonialism is practiced both internally and externally to solidify the national identity. More specifically, I argue that the *postcolonial* or *invisible* status of Chinese North Americans is informed by the *local* racial and socioeconomic policies that reflect the *global* relations with China. In the discussion below, I will address the significance of the Civil Rights Movement, which is considered as a response of the racial minorities to internal colonization. The analysis of the postcolonial condition of Chinese North Americans will be followed by an introduction to the history of anti-Chinese discrimination laws. My intention is to argue that the postcoloniality of Chinese North Americans is a result of institutionalized racism and internal colonization.

The term "internal colonialism" was adopted in the 1960s by African American and Chicano critics to theorize racial domination and subordination in the United States. Native Americans were the first ethnic community who experienced internal colonialism after the

European settlers conquered most parts of North America. The term “native” is used to describe the indigenous inhabitants who were “born to the land” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key* 142) but they appeared racially inferior, culturally uncivilized, and economically underdeveloped to the colonial settlers. Native Americans can be called *postcolonial* as the term points to the history of colonization in North America (Hutcheon 1989; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007) although their current social and political status may well indicate that “there is not yet a ‘post-’ to the colonial status of Native Americans” (Krupat 73). Similar to Native Americans, other ethnic communities can also be considered as subjects of *internal colonialism* because of their experiences of racial, cultural, sociopolitical and economic subordination. Charles Pinderhughes defines internal colonialism as

a *geographically-based* pattern of subordination of a differentiated population, located within the dominant power or country. This subordination by a dominant power has the outcome of systematic group inequality expressed in the policies and practices of a variety of societal institutions, including systems of education, public safety (police, courts and prisons), health, employment, cultural production, and finance. This definition includes the subordinated population—the colonized—and the land on which they reside within a former settler colony or settler colony system. (236)

My intention of using the term “internal colonialism” is not to conflate the different colonial experience among ethnic communities in North America. As a matter of fact, scholars, such as Jodi Byrd and Malissa Phung, contend that people of color can be also considered as settlers

because of their exploitation of Native Americans to gain access to power, land, and wealth.<sup>8</sup> Rather, I share the concern with Pinderhughes and use the term internal colonialism to address the problem of the exploitation of minority groups which produces *a system of inequalities* within a nation. Ramón Gutiérrez further argues that the model of internal colonialism explains the minorities' experiences of "territorial concentration," "spatial segregation," "external administration," "the disparity between their legal citizenship and *de facto* second-class standing," "their brutalization by the police," and most of all, "the toxic effects of racism" (282). In this sense, ethnic minorities can be considered *colonized* because of their experience of social, economic, racial, and political oppression.

The term *oppression* has been used quite loosely and sometimes interchangeably with colonization to discuss internal colonialism. I think it is necessary to make a distinction between the two terms. Theoretically *colonization* and *oppression* articulate two separate sets of conceptions: the former is associated with racial domination during the exploitation of a foreign land whereas the latter with the class system particularly in American history. On the one hand, *colonization* involves the exploitation of people and natural resources to establish a series of antagonistic relations (i.e. colonizer/colonized, white/non-white, center/periphery, West/non-West, etc.). On the other hand, *oppression* comes in different forms and is employed by the authorities to seek total control of the oppressed. Both *colonization* and *oppression* therefore intersect each other as they describe the sociopolitical inequalities produced by one's racial,

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<sup>8</sup> Phung in "Are People of Colour Settlers Too?" points out that people of colour are involved in land theft and colonial domination of Native Americans (291). In *The Transit of Empire*, Byrd focuses on the problem of settler colonialism which complicates the colonial issues of the indigenous peoples in North America. The goal of my current project is to consider the postcolonial condition of Chinese North Americans. For more information about the complex triangular relationship between Chinese settlers, white colonizers, and Native Americans, see Phung's discussion on p. 294 and Byrd's introductory chapter titled "Indigenous Critical Theory and the Diminishing Returns of Civilization."

economic, cultural, and linguistic difference. By looking at their theoretical intersections, I do not suggest that *colonization* and *oppression* mean the same thing. Rather, my point is that *oppression* is a methodology of totalization in the context of internal colonization. I use the term *colonized* to describe ethnic communities to foreground their experience of internal colonialism and to investigate issues of race, gender, culture, language, economy, class, and space.

The Civil Rights Movement can be interpreted as the minorities' resistance to internal colonialism in the 1960s. The protesters demanded better education, fair housing and employment, and equal civil rights. Affecting the lives of African Americans, Jim Crow laws (1876-1965) institutionalized the system of racial segregation by repressing one's access to equal housing, education, employment, and political rights. The teleology of Jim Crow laws was to legitimize white supremacy by politically, socially, and economically subordinating African Americans in the American South (Wilson 1). In the case *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court ruled that "separate but equal" facilities were constitutional, which legalized racial discrimination against African Americans and other ethnic communities. Attempts to overturn Jim Crow laws were futile until the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 in which the Supreme Court declared that founding public schools segregating white and black students was unconstitutional. The Court's monumental ruling renewed the hopes of African Americans for equality and laid the groundwork for the later Civil Rights Movement. In 1964, the Twenty-fourth Amendment to the Constitution was passed by the Congress to outlaw the arbitrary poll taxes which prevented African Americans from voting in the South. The Civil Rights Act was passed later in the same year to ensure equal access to voting, education, and public facilities among citizens (Gutiérrez 282). The pivotal moment of the Movement was the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis on April 4, 1968, which instigated race riots

not just in the American South but also in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and other major cities. On April 11, 1968, the Fair Housing Act (or Civil Rights Act of 1968) was passed in response to the assassination and race riots, prohibiting the refusal to sell or rent a property based on one's race, color, religion, or national origin.<sup>9</sup> In her "Teaching for the Times," Spivak interprets the Movement as the racial minorities' struggle against internal colonization to address issues of poverty, racism, unfair political rights, and spatial segregation. Moreover, *only* African Americans, Chicanos, and Native Americans can be considered postcolonial after the Civil Rights Movement (146-147).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Chinese Americans were not one of the "original groups" who experienced slavery or loss of land ownership, but they expressed their protest against internal colonization through other forms of equal rights movements.

Influenced by the Black Power movement, Yellow Power (1968-1974) was launched by Asian Americans to express their voice against institutionalized racism and social inequality. Amy Uyematsu's "The Emergence of Yellow Power" (1969) is often perceived as the founding text of the movement, in which she argues that

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<sup>9</sup> For information about King's legacy and the connection to Black Power, see Michael Ezra's critical introduction to the "King Years" in *Civil Rights Movement: People and Perspectives*, pp. xi-xiv.

<sup>10</sup> Spivak's essay "Teaching for the Times" first appeared in MMLA in 1992. With minor modifications, the essay was included in her latest full-length work *An Aesthetic of Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012). Although Spivak offered some analysis on Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* in the beginning of the essay, her focus was on the struggle against internal colonization through the perspectives of African Americans, Native Americans, and Chicanos. The history of Chicanos' internal colonization can be traced to the warfare in Latin America from mid-nineteenth century to the twentieth century, particularly the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) in which the U.S. gained large territory from Mexico. The residents (Mexicans and Native Americans) were granted U.S. citizenship but their land rights were ignored by Americans who moved to the new territory. See Spivak's analysis regarding internal colonization under "The Earlier Scene" section on pp. 145-149. For more information on Chicano activists' participation in the Civil Rights Movement and their history as a *colonized minority*, see Gutiérrez's discussion on pp. 287-291.

Asian Americans can no longer afford to watch the black-and-white struggle from the sidelines. They have their own cause to fight, since they are also victims—with less visible scars—of the white institutionalized racism. A yellow movement has been set into motion by the black power movement. Addressing itself to the unique problems of Asian Americans, this “yellow power” movement is relevant to the black power movement in that both are part of the Third World struggle to liberate all colored people. (9)

Embracing the ideals of Black Power, Yellow Power activists called for self-determination in order to eradicate racism. The problem of Asian American identity came from the myth of model minorities: Asian Americans have been economically independent and present no threat to the white majority. To gain full social acceptance, Asian Americans had to deny their yellowness—“They have become white in every respect but color” (Uyematsu 9). Mentally, Asians have become Americanized by giving up their language and cultural values; physically, yellow people wanted to be white with light skin and long legs. Along with other activists, Uyematsu advocated self-acceptance for Asian Americans to remove racial stereotypes and to actualize their self-identity.

Frank Chin is perhaps the most outspoken Chinese American writer in the era of Yellow Power and other civil rights movements. In “I’m a Chinaman” (1970), Chin asserts that Chinese Americans have been stigmatized by their submissive images. Although Chinese Americans are no longer waiters and laundrymen, they have become “good engineers,” “nice doctors”—“all very nice, all very conservative . . . all passive,” making them “the ideal subject race, the ideal employees, the ideal servants” (306). Chinese Americans, moreover, are forced to invent their own identity by imitating others:

If we consider ourselves to have no style of our own and are compelled, therefore, to imitate others—and this is something I think we’ve been taught from birth. We have to imitate English, or we have to imitate Chinese, though we’re neither. Then, when we hit puberty, to become men, we have to imitate the Chicanos or the blacks or the whites or somebody else. And this serves to keep us in Chinatown [. . .] when we adopt a role, when we imitate, we are also taking on a certain amount of self-contempt. And this is something the culture itself has taught us to do here. (Chin 306-307)

Chin’s observation signals three important identity-forming problems for Chinese Americans: (a) Identity construction through imitation—Compared with other ethnic groups, Chinese Americans have a shorter history in America. To be socially integrated, Chinese Americans have to imitate other cultures to create a false consciousness of their identity. Donald in Chin’s *Donald Duk* is a good example of this process of cultural reinvention, who suppresses his Chinese heritage by becoming “Chinese Fred Astaire.” (b) Identity construction through spatial segregation—most Chinese Americans were denied the opportunities to rent or purchase properties outside of Chinatown until the passage of the Fair Housing Act. Chinatown had been a socially, economically, and politically segregated space where Chinese Americans grew up without having access to their equal constitutional rights. For Chin, Chinese American identity is developed *within* Chinatown, an ethnic enclave that entails both prohibition and confinement, administered by the West as a racial coding to exoticize the space and its people. (c) Identity construction through negation—Chin notes that imitation should not be misunderstood as assimilation, for the latter suggests the ability to take “certain traits, certain values of the culture and turn them into your own” and then “turn them into something else” (307). African

Americans were able to transform the English language into Black English and demand others to learn the black experience. Chinese Americans, on the contrary, lack the ability to assimilate and the need to imitate registers an unsettling *double negation*—neither American nor Chinese—that endorses self-contempt in their process of socialization. These three identity problems indicate that Chinese Americans, like other ethnic minorities, are racially, socially, and economically marginalized but their historical *invisibility* is endorsed by anti-Chinese policies and immigration laws.

### The Background of Chinese Immigration and the Postcolonial Condition

The history of Chinese immigration is closely related to the emergence of capitalism and Western imperialism in the nineteenth century. The enforcement of the Canton system (1760-1834), or “single port foreign trades,” suggests that China had consciously been aware of the political and economic invasion from the West. The Chinese officials and trading companies like the British East India Company (EIC) profited significantly from the Canton system: Roughly \$7 million worth of Chinese merchandise (mainly tea and textiles) was exported and \$3.5 million of goods from other parts of the world was imported to China. Although the EIC was the major trader during this period, the first United States ship also reached Canton in 1785. After the American Revolutionary War, the privateers were out of work and the shippers from Salem, Boston, and New York were eager to trade with China. The Americans at this time were reluctant to get involved with the EIC; instead, they sought private dealers outside the Cohong (a guild of authorized Chinese merchants to operate the import-export businesses). The private dealers, corruption of the Chinese officials, and the conflict of economic interests ended the Canton system. The formerly banned opium was forced into sale in 1831 and by 1836 almost \$18 million worth of opium was brought to China through India by the EIC. Motivated by the



lucrative opium trade and the possibility of the internal market in China, the British launched the Opium War (1839-42) to demand open trade. The defeat of China led to the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing, by which Britain gained control of Hong Kong, an indemnity of \$21 million was paid in instalments, and five Chinese ports were open for trade (Wakeman 163-212). The Second Opium War (1856-1860) resulted in the Treaty of Tientsin by which more trade ports were open to Britain, France, Russia, and the United States.

The Opium Wars symbolized the beginning of European domination in China, driven by the desire of territorial expansion and economic exploitation. The defeat of China during the Opium Wars justified the imperative to establish a new world order centered in the West—China must ideologically dominated, geographically totalized, and politically appropriated under the mission of Western civilization. The Opium Wars moreover well testified to the operation of an empire through colonialism and capitalism: International trade permeated the expansion of the colonial powers of Europe to ensure the increase of imperial wealth. The transition from primary commodities to narcotics signalled the progression of economic control and the instigation of internal demand in China. The mass production of opium furthermore manifested the realization of capital accumulation and Britain's monopolistic ambition. Capitalism is always an integral part of colonialism. The capitalist mode of production serves the purpose of magnifying the economic gap between the colony and the empire whereas colonialism is the vehicle through which political and geographical domination reinforces the state of dependence in the subordinated nation. The invasion of the Eight Nation Alliance (Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Japan, the United States, Italy, and Russia) in 1900 signified the competing capitalisms in the form of colonialism and the rationalization of China and its people as economically, culturally, and socio-politically inferior.

The return of the Chinese immigrants to the imperial center demonstrates the economic and political involvement of the United States in Asia. The two defining features of immigration—inclusion and exclusion—shape what Dirlik calls a “spatial contradiction” (“People” 517) in Asian American history. Emigration from Asia suggests the extension of a moving Western frontier to the Pacific, but the arrival of Asian immigrants symbolizes a counter frontier, which must be suppressed by exclusion to conserve the totality of American national identity. The unwanted immigrants from China were thus culturally and racially rendered for the purpose of political domination and exclusion of the Orient. The discussion below will trace the history of Chinese immigration. By framing Chinese immigration as a labor issue, I argue that the racial and sociopolitical discrimination laws inform the postcoloniality of Chinese North Americans and the condition of internal colonization.

Chinese workers were first introduced to North America in the nineteenth century primarily because of their cheap labor and production. The California Gold Rush initiated the first wave of Chinese immigration in the 1850s. In 1852 alone, about 20,000 Chinese arrived in California to work in the gold fields. The large numbers of Chinese workers became a threat to the mining districts, to which California Governor John Bigler addressed the state legislature for an immediate measure against Chinese immigration. Bigler maintained that the coolie-like labor was undesirable and the Chinese workers could never become good citizens because of their racial and cultural differences (Yung, Chang, and Lai 9). The Foreign Miners Tax Act, originally targeted at Mexican and Latin American workers from 1850 to 1851, was re-enacted in 1852 to discourage the Chinese from entering California and competing for jobs with white Americans. For the next 18 years, the Chinese were the only foreign workers who stayed and contributed large revenue by paying taxes (\$4 per month) to the state government. The Landing Tax was

introduced in 1855 for the same purpose, by which the ship captain had to pay \$50 for each Chinese passenger brought to California. Paradoxically, intended to reduce the Chinese population in California, the Landing Tax made it more difficult for them to return to China. The Chinese had to borrow more money to pay the passage fares and eventually stayed longer in California to save enough to return home (Gendzel 77).<sup>11</sup>

Although the Chinese managed to be accepted by working in some marginal gold fields for a few years, anti-Chinese sentiment was renewed in 1860s during the construction of the transcontinental railroads. The Central Pacific imported more Chinese workers directly from China through contracting companies in San Francisco. Transporting the Chinese to California was so lucrative that the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and the Occidental and Oriental Steamship Company were established in 1866 and competed in the Chinese labor market. The Chinese played an important role in constructing the transcontinental railroads; the Southern Pacific Lines in California, for instance, were completed entirely with Chinese labor. Despite the businesses and profits generated by the drastic increase of the Chinese population, local workers blamed the Chinese for bringing down wages, especially during the depression in the 1870s. The Page Law was passed in 1875 to bar the entry of Asian women prostitutes and forced laborers, but anti-Chinese sentiment was already ubiquitous in America. In response to several race riots and anti-Chinese protests, a referendum on Chinese exclusion was held in California in 1879. 99.4 percent of all-white electorates voted to permanently exclude the Chinese from the state and adopted a new constitution (Article XIX) to evict or segregate the Chinese. The constitution was later invalidated by federal courts, but the Congress eventually passed the infamous Chinese

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<sup>11</sup> See also a Chinese merchant's account on the difficulty of paying off the passage fares and taxes in Ronald Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, pp. 81-82.

Exclusion Act of 1882, which terminated the entry of all Chinese immigrants (Gendzel 78-79).<sup>12</sup> The Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed in 1943 as the Magnuson Act permitted Chinese immigration again and the naturalization of Chinese immigrants who were already in the U.S.

The anti-Chinese policies in Canada were similar, if not worse, to those in the United States. Chinese immigration to Canada started in 1858 because of the Gold Rush in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. Before the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (1881-1885), the Chinese population increased slowly. Roughly 4,000 Chinese miners were reported in the 1860s, but the number rose to 8,083 in 1882. Like those in the United States, the Chinese were undesirable citizens who were considered useful only in the development of Western Canada. After the Gold Rush was over in 1865, the economic conditions in B.C. became worse and the White workers blamed the Chinese for their unemployment and lower wages. Acting on the problem of the “Yellow Peril,” the city government in Victoria, Nanaimo, and Kamloops decided that the Chinese should be segregated in a small region which later became Chinatown. In 1872 and 1874, unsuccessful attempts to levy a special annual tax on the Chinese were made. In 1878, a biannual tax of \$30 was imposed on each Chinese worker, and employers would be fined \$100 for hiring an undocumented Chinese worker. The provincial law was opposed by the Chinese who went on a five-day strike in September and by the white employers who were displeased with the hiring process. The act was later invalidated by the Supreme Court of British Columbia, but more unsuccessful attempts were made in 1884 and 1885 to prevent Chinese immigration (Li 32). In the same year when the CPR was completed, the first federal anti-

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<sup>12</sup> Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer offered a comprehensive study of Chinese American immigration history in *Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, especially the chapter titled “The Chinese Come to California,” pp. 12-24.

Chinese bill was passed to impose a head tax of \$50 on all Chinese immigrants entering Canada. In 1923, the Chinese Immigration Act (similar to the Chinese Exclusion Act in the U.S.) was passed to prevent further entries of the Chinese into Canada. It was not until after the Second World War that the Chinese Immigration Act was repealed in 1947 (Li 34-35).

Historically, labor importation and legal exclusions were the two contradictory forces that accounted for early Chinese immigration. Economically, Chinese immigrants were treated as human capital during the transformation of individual farms to large enterprises in the long nineteenth century. The construction of transcontinental railroads exemplifies how a capitalist development attempted to accumulate the most capital gain with minimum investment. The transportation of Chinese migrant workers to North America was deemed as an answer to the decline of slave trades and the high demand of cheap labor. The term “coolies” is often used to describe Chinese laborers as a distinction from African slaves. Because Chinese coolies were brought to North America as indentured laborers, it is a common myth that they came to North America voluntarily and that they, unlike African slaves, would be free once they fulfilled their work contract. These assumptions ignore the fact that not all Chinese migrant workers came to North America voluntarily and that many were unable to return to China because of heavy taxation. The receiving countries (particularly Peru and Cuba) could have such unfavorable working conditions that the contracting companies were unable to supply laborers. Some Chinese workers were reported to be kidnapped or deceived by recruiting agents and were eventually forced into the coolie trade (Sinn 50; Li 20).<sup>13</sup> The Chinese had no choice but to work

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Li notes that Chinese emigration was not entirely voluntary. Chinese workers came to North America as contract workers, but the precise terms under which the Chinese workers were contracted are unclear. See his studies on the history of coolie trade on pp. 20-22 in *The Chinese in Canada*.

in low-paying industries that white laborers were unwilling to be a part of. Among the 10,000 Chinese in British Columbia in 1885, it is estimated that 2,900 were railroad workers, 1,468 miners, 1,612 farm laborers, 700 food canners, 708 lumber workers, whereas there were only 121 store owners and merchants (Li 23). Early discrimination laws, such as the enactment of Foreign Miners Tax, Landing Tax, and Head Tax, authorized the image of the Chinese as lower class or underclass people who were associated with low wages and menial work. Although the Chinese played an indispensable role in the economic and geographic transformation of the American West, their presence was continuously perceived as a threat to the established social values in North America.

The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act represented that the level of discrimination had shifted from class to race in many perspectives. First, to constitute the Chinese as an inferior race, the Exclusionists argued that the immigrants were unable to assimilate because of their cultural and language difference. As not many Chinese were capable of speaking the English language, it was impossible for them to be socially and culturally intermingled with the local people. The Chinese therefore appeared to be uneducated and unintellectual for their lack of communication ability. Next, the Exclusionists were troubled by issues of gender and sexuality in the predominantly male Chinese community. After being excluded from mining camps, Chinese laborers flourished in businesses such as laundry, restaurants, and domestic services that were conventionally associated with women. Before the Chinese Revolution in 1911, it was customary for the Chinese to shave their foreheads and wear their hair in a queue as a symbol of loyalty to the Qing Empire. Their peculiar hairstyle and long loose garments subverted the gender codes of Western culture (Lee 146). Because of their outfit and physical appearance, the Chinese were categorized as racially weak, feminine, and domestic. Lastly, the Exclusionists

reconceptualized Chinatown as a source of contamination by centralizing the problem of prostitution and opium practice. In *Contagious Divide*, Nayan Shah points out that “dens, density, and the labyrinth” were the three architectural features of Chinatown, which was constructed like an “un navigable maze” with “subterranean passageways within the buildings” and “streets and alleys aboveground” (18). Inside the maze-like town were legitimate businesses such as restaurants, Laundromats, general stores, and drug stores, but it was the brothels and opium dens that disseminated the negative image of Chinatown as a morally and racially degraded space. Chinese laborers were not the only visitors of these business establishments; some White Americans frequented the opium dens, in which a blurring of racial, sexual, and cultural boundaries jeopardized the “purity” of American culture (Shah 77-78). These unethical businesses justified the stereotype of Chinese immigrants as infected by smallpox, syphilis, bubonic plague, and hookworm, which then caused serious concerns for public safety and epidemic outbreaks.<sup>14</sup> The systematic sexualisation and racialization of the Chinese not only consolidated the existing racial hierarchy but also perpetuated the binary distinction between White and non-White, superior and inferior, masculine and feminine to sustain white supremacy in the West.

As a law that singled out a nation and forbade its people from immigration, the Chinese Exclusion Act produced significant changes to the economic and racial policies in America. Gendzel correctly observes that the Chinese Exclusion Act was the first step toward immigration restriction on the federal level as a result of the national politicians’ determination to “respect the wishes of those who could vote rather than those who could not even become citizens” (79). The

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<sup>14</sup> More analysis on the interplay between race, sexuality, and public health can be found in Shah’s *Contagious Divides*, especially the chapter titled “The Dangers of Queer Domesticity,” pp. 77-104.

Chinese Exclusion Act was a discursive construction of the Chinese as *aliens*, *immigrants*, and *foreigners* who were differentiated from citizens. The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act paved the road to discriminate other undesirable immigrants based on their race and class and inaugurated a precedent for Canada to deal with the “Chinese problem” in 1923. For instance, targeting southern and eastern European immigrants who were “coolies, serfs, and slaves” like the Chinese, the Foran Act (1885) terminated the immigration of all contract laborers (Lee 148). Primarily directed at Japanese immigrants, California’s Alien Land Law (1913) prohibited “aliens ineligible for citizenship” (namely all Asian immigrants) from ownership of land for agricultural purposes (Gendzel 79). These discriminatory laws provided the framework of solidifying the U.S. as a racially and ideologically homogeneous nation, but the laws ironically registered the presence of the marginalized immigrants in American political history. In her seminal work *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe writes,

while immigration has been the *locus* of legal and political restriction of Asians as the “other” in America, immigration has simultaneously been the site for the emergence of critical negations of the nation-state for which those legislations are the expression. If the law is the apparatus that binds and seals the universality of the political body of the nation, then the “immigrants,” produced by the law as margin and threat to that symbolic whole, is precisely a generative site for the critique of that universality. The national institutionalization of unity becomes the measure of the nation’s condition of heterogeneity. (8-9)

To begin with, the legalization of immigration indicates the incomplete signification of the nation. The institutionalization of a national unity is only a discursive conception of ideology authorized by nationalists who narcissistically disseminate a self-image of an idealized nation-



state. The exclusion of the undesirable immigrants is a political measure to constitute a holistic and regulated Self in relation to a subordinated and illegitimate Other. The presence of these marginalized immigrants becomes an unwelcome reminder of the heterogeneity of the national history. Immigration, in other words, is a meaningful counter discourse that discloses the internal contradictions of the rhetoric of American nationalism. Immigration displaces the national knowledge which it administrates, a double articulation that paradoxically necessitates and negates the nation-state of America. The Chinese Exclusion Act hence fulfilled the imagination of a national unity by legitimizing racial, socioeconomic, and political discrimination against the Chinese and this has constituted their *postcoloniality* or *invisibility* in American history.

#### Chinese North American Studies in the Global Age

First appearing in 1995, Sau-ling Wong's "Denationalization Reconsidered" has been widely criticized for her radical analysis of the cultural production of Asian Americans. The increasing permeability between Asian and Asian American, according to Wong, articulates a postmodern condition in which the global movement of transnational capital makes it permissible to situate Asian Americans in a diasporic context. Observing the transnational influence on Asian American studies, Wong cautions that the "*diasporic perspective*" will compromise the "*domestic perspective*" which emphasizes the minority status of Asian Americans within the national boundaries of the United States (127). In other words, the consequence of denationalization points to a more diasporic or transnational view of Asian Americans whose domestic issues are depoliticized in the paradigm shift of Asian American studies. Although Wong's argument was timely and still is valid today, the problem of national border, identity, and culture in Asian American studies has become more complex twenty years

after the publication of her essay. Wong's essay will be used as a point of departure to investigate the global shift in Chinese North American studies below.

Inherent in Chinese North American studies is the debate on the significance of Chinese diaspora and border-crossing. Alluding to David Li's *Imagining the Nation*, Wong contends that the formation of Asian Americans "is not automatically a solution to, but rather a problem in and of, the contradictions of the nation" (125). Similarly, Rey Chow in *Writing Diaspora* argues that diasporic writings challenge borders by "destroying, replacing, and expanding existing ones" (15) so the margins can be incorporated as a part of the nation. Indeed, the border-crossing of early Chinese immigrants (particularly Chinese merchants) between Canada and the United States disrupts the definition of a national space. The recurrent theme in Chinese North American literature—being neither Chinese nor American/Canadian—registers the internal contradiction of a national identity. The question of national borders has always been central to Chinese North American studies. I understand that the borders or border crossing in the essays by Wong and Chow should be taken figuratively, but it is difficult not to consider the transformation of the physical borders since the 9/11. Passports are now always required to travel and Canadians no longer have the luxury of crossing the U.S. border by presenting a government issued ID. The security check at airports and borders have certainly escalated. In 2007, a Chinese painting from Taiwan's Palace Museum put me under immediate scrutiny because the scroll, according to the U.S. security, could potentially be a "lethal weapon" on the airplane. The extra discretion at borders is also implemented in immigration policies. Although immigration to

Canada ranged roughly 200,000 to 250,000 annually between 2000 and 2011,<sup>15</sup> the reduction of professional categories for skilled workers and the recent changes of required residency make it more difficult to obtain Canadian citizenship. In contrast, the U.S. had a drastic increase of immigrants from 373,326 in 1970 to 1,031,631 in 2012,<sup>16</sup> but the construction of a reinforced U.S.-Mexican border (a result of the Secure Fence Act in 2006) and the current pending Obama immigration reform reveal the changing attitudes towards the “immigration problem.”

It is, therefore, inarguable that immigration policies (like the predecessors in the nineteenth–twentieth century) operate again in a dialectical relationship of segregation and incorporation. The reinforced border promotes an enhanced image of the nation by intensifying the geographical distance from the neighboring country. The spreading concerns of terrorism and illegal immigration authorize the existing conceptualization of Mexico as a threat to national security. In the light of a stricter immigration process, North American citizenship becomes available exclusively to highly skilled foreign nationals. The U.S. Diversity Visa, furthermore, makes being selected feel like winning a lottery. Surprisingly, immigration to North America did not decrease because of the more conservative immigration policy or tightened border security. The number of immigrants actually climbed to 229,048 in Canada and to 1,059,356 in the U.S. even after the 9/11 in 2002.<sup>17</sup> The steady increase of immigrants in North America, for me, signals two important messages: the persistent need of cheap labor and the progression of U.S. imperialism. This observation may be similar to my analysis of the cause of Chinese immigration, but what we have now is a unique form of imperialism or an “empire-free

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<sup>15</sup> The statistics can be found on CIC’s website, particularly the graph on p. 2 in the 2011 annual report: [http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/201/301/facts\\_figures\\_immigration\\_overview/facts2011.pdf](http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/201/301/facts_figures_immigration_overview/facts2011.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> The number refers to the legal permanent residents in the U.S. See the statistics on p. 5 in US homeland security’s report: [http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois\\_yb\\_2012.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois_yb_2012.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

imperialism,” which describes a situation that “new Americans did not need to migrate to the United States because the United States had migrated to them” (Bascara 2000).<sup>18</sup>

What U.S. imperialism achieves in the form of globalization is the reproduction of economic, education, or sociopolitical structures according to North American standards around the world. One good example is the remake of *The Karate Kid* (2010), in which Dre Parker (Jaden Smith) and his single mother relocate to Beijing because of work transfer. The film seems like a typical Orientalist project, as the viewers are introduced to Smith’s new home, “Beverly Hills Luxury Apartment” (a suggestive name), with a shabby interior and a mysterious Chinese building manager Jackie Chan who plays the modern “Mr. Miyagi.” The stunning cinematography, from the Great Wall to the Forbidden City, provides an authentic view of China that enriches the imagination of the West. The values portrayed in the film are reproduced to the taste of its Western audience: Smith wins the heart of a girl by beating the evil forces of Master Li and his disciples. Besides the rich racial implications invoked by the coalition of an African American family and a Chinese/Chinese American widower, what the film achieves is the reinforcement of China as the exotic Other as Smith’s mother thoughtfully says in the film, “I feel like we’re on a *quest* to start a new life.” The “*quest*” as I will argue is the ideological repression of China’s insurgent political and economic power especially after the symbolic success of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Hollywood once again uses its power of media to disseminate the image of China as a country notable for nothing but its martial arts.

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<sup>18</sup> Victor Bascara uses the term “empire-free imperialism” to theorize the connection of U.S. imperialism and Asian American literature, especially in the context of the Philippine-American War in 1895. See his excellent analysis in “Follow the Money: Asian American Literature and the Preface to United States Imperialism.”

The response of Chinese North Americans to globalization can be accessed from the recent changes in the field. Yiyun Li's *The Vagrants* (2009), Janie Chang's *Three Souls* (2014), and Vivian Yang's *Memoirs of a Eurasian* (2011) exemplify that the scope of Chinese North American literature has broadened to incorporate China and its turbulent history in the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> Ha Jin's *A Free Life* (2007) and *A Good Fall* (2010) focalize the life experiences of legal and illegal Chinese immigrants in contemporary America. David Henry Hwang's play *Yellow Face* (2009) stages the participation of Chinese Americans in transforming the national identity. Amy Tan's *The Valley of Amazement* (2013) thematizes a half-Chinese girl's journey between China and America to unlock the secret of her family ancestry. The *global* shift of Chinese North American literature indicates that the movement between China and North America has become more frequent, and the perspectives are no longer limited to either the *diasporic* or the *domestic*. The incessant *border-crossing* articulates the opposing mode of cultural coexistence that unsettles the totalization of a nation. The ambivalent and hybridized identity suggests the internal contradictions of a nation or what Bhabha calls "dissemi-*nation*," a liminal space emerged from the "double writing" (212) of minorities that disconcerts the signification of the people as homogeneous. In other words, minorities occupy a marginal space of a nation that negates the nationalist or imperialist myths used to justify their cultural domination. "Counter-narratives of the nation," as Bhabha reminds us, "that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological

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<sup>19</sup> Yiyun Li's *The Vagrants* (2009) depicts varied responses of the Chinese to Communism in the 1970s. Janie Chang's *Three Souls* (2014) stages a ghost narrative of a woman who travels in time to revisit the history of the Chinese Civil War (1927-1950). Vivian Yang's *Memoirs of a Eurasian* (2011) tells the story of a half Chinese girl during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in Shanghai. Lisa See's bestsellers *Shanghai Girls* (2009) and *Snow Flower and Secret Fan* (2011) are also notable examples regarding the growing interest in modern Chinese history.

manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (213). The teleology of a *counter narrative* is to negotiate the repressed history and the liminal existence of minorities into presence. In the case of Chinese North American literature, it is a *double counter-narrative* that not only registers the plurality of a nation but also challenges the cultural dominance of China and North America respectively.

More importantly, a postcolonial reading of Chinese North American literature brings out the intimate relations of China and North America. Postcolonial theory concerns how different *alternative* histories are appropriated and how an individual’s voice is silenced in the dominant discourse. To provide a more holistic understanding of North American history, recent scholars have devoted their attention to the economic contributions of Chinese workers in the last century. For instance, historian Sue Fawn Chung’s *In Pursuit of Gold* (2011) traces Chinese miners and merchants in John Day, Oregon; Tuscarora, Nevada; Island Mountain, Nevada in 1850-1900. In contrast with other major American cities, these small and isolated towns had limited influence of anti-Chinese movement. During this period, the Chinese interacted with the locals peacefully and supported the economy by paying taxes and building the towns’ irrigation systems. These small towns in the American West illustrate the enduring and significant economic presence of the Chinese in their pursuit of the “elusive gold” (xxvii) despite the discriminatory laws or negative sociopolitical conditions. Paul Yee’s *Chinatown* (2005) studies the histories of Chinese communities in Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Halifax, and *Saltwater City* (2006) pays tribute to the Chinese immigrants who persevered during difficult times in Canadian history. The most recent project (2015) titled “The Chinese Railroad Workers in North America” launched by Stanford University commemorates the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Chinese immigrants who built the first transcontinental railway

across North America. The project leaders, Gordon Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, invite scholars from Asia and America to recover the history of Chinese migrant workers who helped transform the physical and social landscape of the American West. The researchers emphasize the *shared* past of China and North America; that is, the *transnational* history of the Chinese in North America should be told from both Chinese and North American perspectives.<sup>20</sup>

In 2004, 23 Chinese migrant workers were drowned in the Morecambe Bay cockling disaster in England. In 2012, Jeremy Clarkson, a journalist for *The Sun*, compared the cockle-pickers to synchronized swimmers, for “Chinese women in hats, upside down, in a bit of water. [ . . . ] You can see that sort of thing on Morecambe Beach. For free” (qtd. in Gayle, “Beneath Contempt” 2012). The racist misrepresentation reveals how immigration policies, as a cultural and social system, demonize immigrants and aggrandize the distinction between an immigrant and a citizen. In the U.S., it is estimated that ninety immigrants on average die per year from crossing the Mexico-U.S. border after the implementation of “Operation Gatekeeper” in 1994. Immigrants are associated as being ““reproductive, parasitic, benefit-taking, overrunning-the-nation villains”” (Espiritu 604) in the rhetoric of Proposition 187 in California. Ha Jin’s *A Good Fall* portrays the harsh life experiences of Chinese immigrants whose negative images are authorized by the immigration policies in America. The symbolic disappearance of the characters, particularly in “The House Behind a Weeping Cherry,” illustrates the invisible status of the undocumented immigrants whose contribution to the economic and social development of North America is unrecognized. The task of postcolonial theory is far from being over yet.

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<sup>20</sup> According to the researchers, very few documents regarding Chinese railroad construction workers were found. Although there were photographs, the workers’ life experience was not documented. For more information about this meaningful project, visit <https://www.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/wordpress/>

## Chapter 2

### Lost in Chinatown: Home, Memory, and History in Laurence Yep's

#### *The Lost Garden and Wayson Choy's Paper Shadows*

Since both Canadian and American governments repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act in the mid-1940s in recognition of China's contributions made during World War II, there have been notable positive changes of Chinese North Americans' sociopolitical and economic status in the past half-century. Chinese North Americans are no longer confined in small regions in major harbour cities such as San Francisco or Vancouver. Chinese owned businesses, such as Laundromats and all-you-can-eat restaurants in almost every city, account for Chinese immigrants' economic success and perseverance in North American history. Chinatown is a home for early Chinese immigrants, but it remains a culturally and historically ambiguous space for many second or third generation Chinese North American writers. Wing Tek Lum's poem "Translation," for instance, notes different connotations of Chinatown as a sign in the Chinese and English languages:<sup>1</sup>

*Tòhng Yàhn Gāai* was what  
we once called  
where we lived: 'China-People-  
Street.' Later, we mimicked  
Demon talk  
and wrote down only

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<sup>1</sup> "Translation" is a poem by Lum, part of which appeared in the frontispiece of Choy's *The Jade Peony*. I selected the same passage that Choy included in *The Jade Peony*. The entire poem is available in Yep's *American Dragons: Twenty-Five Asian American Voices*, HarperCollins 1995.



*Wàh Fauh*—‘China-Town.’

The difference

is obvious: the people

disappeared. (34-44)

In Lum’s poem, the change from “*Tòhng Yàhn Gāai*” to “China-Town” and the disappearance of Chinese people suggest the loss of Chinatown’s heritage because of the Western cultural influence. As an empty structure, Chinatown is an elusive concept that conjures up “[g]hosts” (3) that signify the indeterminacy of its spatial and historical significance. Similarly, the first part of Wayson Choy’s memoir *Paper Shadows* highlights his experiences of living with a “Keefer Street ghost” (30) in a house near Chinatown in the 1950s. These ghosts, whether real or imaginary, represent the incommensurable childhood memories that haunt Chinese North American writers and signify the urgency of retelling their past. Their writing process is like what Amy Tan confesses in her first nonfiction book *The Opposite of Fate*: The people from the past are like “ghosts” or “imaginary friends” (259) who constitute Tan’s fictional characters and compel her to tell their stories. Writing, furthermore, “creates the boundaries, aligns the details into a story, a framework that guarantees that all the pieces are related to a whole” (Tan 263) to represent the past. In Laurence Yep’s memoir *The Lost Garden*, his first home is compared to a “shadowy,” “lost garden” (xi) and the only way to revisit it is through his memories. In these texts, *home* is conceptualized as a haunted or lost place. It is arguable that writings about the ghosts or the “lost garden” are rhetorical strategies of summoning the past as a way of re-

examining the writers' childhood memories. The memoirs or "ghost writing"<sup>2</sup> as a work of historical nonfiction furthermore contests the official North American history. This chapter will consider how Chinese North American writers resist Chinatown as a culturally racialized space. My argument is that the memoirs of Yep and Choy reconfigure their lost homes by rewriting the image of Chinatown, reconstructing Chinese North American history through their childhood memories. The chapter will initially discuss space theories that provide a critical framework for discussing the socioeconomic and cultural implications of Chinatown's spatial constructions. My analysis of the memoirs will focus on the symbolic spatial transformations of Chinatown in their literary re-imaginings.

In "Dissemination," Homi Bhabha picks up the task of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and argues that nation is a narrative strategy or a narration. Bhabha is interested in the obscurity and temporality of the nation, which is "more mythological than ideology" and "less homogeneous than hegemony" (200). What Bhabha illuminates here is that nation as a myth requires discursive and cultural repetition, yet the impossibility of inscribing the nation as a whole produces the slippage, the displacement, or the rupture of the nation as a homogeneous unity. Because nation is essentially signified by a crack, the reinforcement and the reproduction of the myth is a continuous and necessary process with an aim to perpetuate its ideology. The locality of culture, therefore, is more "around temporality than about historicity" (Ibid), whose lack of permanence articulates the nature of nationness or the liminality of a national space. Bhabha's "third space," to put it simply, is the ceaseless oscillation between the signifier and the

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term "ghost writing" because Tan reveals that writing to her is a personal process with "memory added to imagination" (250) and there are unknown forces that help her write. Tan discusses how her novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* came into shape in the chapter titled "The Ghosts of My Imagination" in *The Opposites of Fate*.

signified, which disavows binary absolutism by focalizing the instability of the signification. The third space certainly exposes the inadequacies of the trope of a holistic nation, but as a Chinese North American diasporic literature critic, I am concerned about how the national space is redefined and reimagined by the writers. Alluding to Walter Benjamin's idea of the historical progress in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Anderson argues that the imagined community lives in the "homogeneous, empty time" (Benjamin 261; Anderson 33). For Bhabha, the non-synchronous time or temporality produced by minorities' cultural difference contests the imagination of a homogeneous nation. Nation, in other words, is constructed around the contingent and temporal present, but how do its space and people correspond to such a volatile and dynamic territory in time? Is the imagined national space that Chinese North Americans inhabit constantly shifting in significance and value?

Nation, according to Bhabha, operates on a double-time basis—the people, who live both in the past as an object and in the present as a subject, assume the pre-given position in history and perform the nation in the making. Bhabha elaborates on the temporality conceptualized in the "in-between":

The boundary that marks the nation's selfhood interrupts the self-generating time of national production and disrupts the signification of the people as homogeneous. The problem is not simply the 'self-hood' of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred Nation *It/Self*, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is *internally* marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories

of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference. (212)

By locating the internal and intrinsic split within the nation, Bhabha elucidates the heterogeneity of the nation's peoples. The nation cannot hold because its ideology is disrupted as a result of the people's performance in and through the narrative. The cultural difference among different communities marks the split—the nation is eventually an imagined reality and cannot perform “it/self” as a whole. Anderson provides a similar idea that the nation is imagined as a community, which wryly regulates national imagination, and which is distinguished, “not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6). I have no objection to the notion of difference among the communities by Bhabha and Anderson, for both critics accentuate heterogeneity to negotiate with the dominant discourse. What I am concerned about is whether the minorities represented as “imaginary” are, in a way, further marginalized. Bhabha's notion “cultural difference” should be treated with more careful consideration.

While cultural difference is paraded among the imagined communities, their difference is materialized to receive wider recognition. In “Ideology of Difference,” Edward Said argues that difference is a highly contested concept. On the one hand, it is uncontroversially agreed that all communities are “*in fact* mixed” and that a pure nation as well as a pure collectivity does not exist. On the other hand, any segregation, separation, or discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin is proscribed by the U.N.'s declaration on the elimination of racial discrimination (41). Difference accordingly is a political and historical paradox, for the celebration of difference *a priori* is a self-segregation, articulating the clash between cultural particularity and universality. Cultural difference moreover points to the premise of nationalism, which registers a sense of sameness across different communities but authorizes the segregation

of a particular group to eliminate the difference within a nation. Although cultural difference annihilates the ideology of a nation, the term should be discussed in a particular historical moment and a specific political context. No conditions are identical, as Said reminds us, so the term should not be used sparsely to criticize all of the communities. Although there is difference, there is also “counterdifference” (Said 46), the counter alternative practices that seek to homogenize the difference among the communities.

What is the “counterdifference” according to Said? My understanding is that the self-differentiation within a particular community articulates a form of difference from within, which is often neglected in discussions on cultural difference. For instance, in Yep’s *Thief of Hearts*, the narrator Stacy, an American born half Chinese girl, refuses to befriend her FOB cousin Hong Ch’un. In Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the Ouiji board Olivia purchases as a birthday gift is used to distinguish herself from Kwan, her “pure” Chinese sister who barely speaks any English. In Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese*, Danny finds his Chinese cousin Chin-Kea a threat to his all-American identity. The self-segregation of the main characters suggests their rejection of Chinese heritage and the counter-difference within the community. If the Chinese American community suggests the internal split of the nation, the *difference within* articulates the incongruity within the community, whose difference is evolving and transformative because of their radical Other and *Otherself*. The difference within is certainly different from Bhabha’s argument of the internal split of a nation within the nation-state’s territorial borders, but both point to a form of internal difference *among* and *within* the communities that discloses the ideology of a totalized nation. For Bhabha, it is through the liminal point in which the emergent and marginal communities displace the differentiated spatial boundary and authenticate the difference from the “outside” into the “inward time” of the nation’s territory (213). The

interconnection between the communities and history is clear—the difference outside is introduced to the inside of the national discourse whose history is reinscribed because of the enabling, uncompromising, and distortive force of the imagined peoples and their space.

Although Bhabha accentuates the unsettling difference internalized in a nation's time, space, and peoples, his theory about the liminal space has incurred much criticism. As a theory of intervention, the third space, "*neither the one nor the other*" (37), articulates the contradictory moment in the signification process and nullifies the binary opposition. The act of "*negotiation*" rather than "*negation*," for Bhabha, conveys "a temporality that makes it possible to conceive of the articulation of antagonistic or contradictory elements" and the advantage of the temporality of negotiation "acknowledges the historical connectedness between the subject and object of critique so that there can be no simplistic, essentialist opposition between ideological miscognition and revolutionary truth" (37-38). The overemphasis on negotiation, however, obscures the opposition between the colonizer and the colonized. The materialist reality of the colonial relationship is also missing in Bhabha's discussion. Abdul JanMohamed correctly observes that Bhabha conveniently constructs his theory of colonial discourse within a vacuum created by defacing the political and materialistic elements in a colonial context (60). Robert Paul Resch cannily asks, "If cultures are incommensurable, how [is] it possible for them to negotiate at all?" and concludes that "Bhabha's Postcolonial utopia is hopelessly muddled" (112). Indeed, the weakness of Bhabha's theory lies in the encompassing third space that includes all communities necessitated as a whole, and the irreducible heterogeneity is lost in the antagonistic, volatile, and interstitial space. Bhabha outlines the hybridity paradigm in the postcolonial location, according to Marjorie Perloff, where the binary opposition becomes irrelevant, with "performative contestation rather than ethnic or national separation and rivalry"

in the “new playing field” (124). I am mindful of Bhabha’s epistemological generalizations of the people’s cultural difference and of economic power relations. The discussion below will trace the trajectory of Bhabha’s space theory and seek to remodel it in order to conduct a productive reading of Choy’s and Yep’s representations of Chinatown.

### The Third Space and the Bridge

The third space originally derives from Renèe Green’s metaphor of a museum building in which the stairwell is a “liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness” (qtd. in *Location 5*). Bhabha interprets the liminal space as a “process of symbolic interaction,” or a “temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities” (*Location 5*). The concept of “liminality” is not new, and it can be traced back to Heidegger’s philosophy of space. In his “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” Heidegger ponders over the significance of building and dwelling, and uses the bridge as an example for his theory. “The bridge swings over the stream ‘with ease and power,’” Heidegger writes, “It does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge designedly causes them to lie across from each other” (150). Heidegger’s contemplation of the bridge resonates with Bhabha’s theory of the in-between space. The bridge is a powerful and subversive site, which both connects the banks and crosses the stream. The construction of the bridge also gives the banks new meanings, for the bridge joins as well as gathers the significance of both banks. The bridge not only serves as a disruptive space that intermingles the binary opposition, but also “guides” and “directs” the forces from one to the other (150). For Heidegger, the power of the bridge also comes from its imaginative and realistic nature, as we should not think of the bridge “as primarily and really *merely* a bridge”

(151); rather, it can also be a symbolic expression. The bridge itself also marks a boundary where new meanings emerge: “A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*” (152; also qtd. in Bhabha’s *Location 1*). The “*presencing*” of the bridge or the boundary is central to Bhabha’s theory for it is neither the beginning nor the end but at the immediate present. Heidegger further notes that “*spaces receive their being from locations and not from ‘space’*” for a location gives meanings to a space yet at the same time sets up its limitations. A space thus gains its significance when it is localized and domesticated by a location. In other words, a space in essence is never too far from a location, whereas a space is only meaningful with a boundary. In this sense, Heidegger’s philosophy again exposes the problem of Bhabha’s theory of the third space, for the “*presencing*” occurs only within the contestation between two cultures, which implies its dependence on the two polemics as well as the impossibility of the space’s self-signification. The third space is a paradox for its need to maintain cultural ambiguity arisen from temporality to interject the binary opposition. The consolidation of the space then becomes pointless because of the impossibility of temporality’s permanence as well as the loss of the edge of Bhabha’s postcolonial theory. Nevertheless, is the third space really an imaginative space? If a space receives its being from its location according to Heidegger, what is the being of the third space like? Can the third space be both localized and ceaselessly dynamic?

The third space is often posited in a metaphorical sense, as Bhabha seeks to undermine binarism by focalizing the space’s indeterminacy. Since Bhabha heavily ignores socioeconomic aspects in his theory, it may be useful to discuss the confrontation between the polarities by reconsidering the third space as a concrete and materialistic construction. After all, the third space is a bridge, a stairwell, or a liminal space that is situated in-between and within a structure.



The location, or perhaps the *locale*, of the third space essentially can be associated as a space within a system, with an undeniable and inseparable relation to other spaces. This *relational space* is both similar to and different from Bhabha's third space in that *it interrogates the authority of the colonial discourse with an emphasis on its economic inter-dependence*. My intention of considering the relationality of the third space is not to demolish Bhabha's effort in challenging cultural hegemony, but to include discussions on the socioeconomic contributions of Chinese immigrants to North American history. I find theories by Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey helpful in illuminating the socioeconomic aspects of space which complement Bhabha's third space in my analysis of Chinatown.

### The Theory of the Social Space

Influenced by Marx and Hegel, Lefebvre is a French sociologist of urban and rural life as well as a critic of capitalism and alienation.<sup>3</sup> In "The Everyday and Everydayness," Lefebvre argues that living is not subordinate to any system, which varies according to its region, country, levels and classes of the population, social and natural conditions. The diversified conditions of one's living, nonetheless, have never been acknowledged, and there is a worldwide tendency to uniformity. Lefebvre writes, "Rationality dominates, accompanied but not diversified by irrationality; signs, rational in their way, are attached to things in order to convey the prestige of their possessors and their place in the hierarchy" ("Everyday" 7). The hierarchy of class, society, and people is intensified because of the encompassing capacity of industrialization rationalized on the basis of the political economy during the mid-twentieth century. The concern about the

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed introduction to Lefebvre's works, see Andy Merrifield's *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge 2006. Rob Shields has also written vigorously on space and Lefebvre. See his *Lefebvre: Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics*, Routledge 1999, and his website under Carleton University: <http://www.carleton.ca/rshields/lefebvre.htm>.

“uniformity” of everyday living or “everydayness” is also present in his *The Production of Space*, in which Lefebvre observes the uneven development of space as a result of capitalism. “(Social) space is a (social) product” (*Production* 26), as Lefebvre keenly argues, and “spatial practice consists in a projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice. In the process these are separated from one another, though this does not mean that overall control is relinquished even for a moment: society as a whole continues in subjection to political practice—that is, to state power” (*Production* 8). Space, as a production of social and political practice, requires a means of continuous control, domination, or state power; space, hence, exposes not just the uneven distribution of power but also the impossibility of society’s totalization. The question, though, remains as how hegemony institutionalizes establishment of capitalism in space and how our reading of space unveils the contradictions of the inner workings within a social system.

Social space, according to Lefebvre, is informed by a “double illusion”—“the illusion of transparency” and “the illusion of opacity” (27), which go hand in hand and reinforce each other. The two terms illustrate the formation of social space under the codification of transparent and realistic illusions. On one hand, the illusion of transparency refers to a belief that space appears as intelligible and that there is nothing beyond the communicated. The illusion of opacity, on the other hand, articulates “the illusion of natural simplicity” (29) and an existence of a domain beyond reality. The “double illusion” may still seem abstruse, and I find Edward Soja’s analogy useful to explain the intricacies of the two terms. The illusion of transparency can be understood as “myopia,” which means “nearsightedness, seeing only what is right before your eyes and no further” and the other as “hypermetropia” or “farsightedness, seeing so far into the distance that

what is immediately before you disappears” (*Thirdspace* 62).<sup>4</sup> In other words, society seeks totalization of space through disparate means that create both imaginative and realistic illusions, providing one with *limited* vision of social reality.

The “double illusion” is fundamental in Lefebvre’s critique of social space, as he strives to transform the mental and physical space into one manageable social structure and to unmask the illusions produced by spatial practices. Lefebvre writes:

The fields we are concerned with are, first, the *physical*—nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the *mental*, including logical and formal abstractions; and, thirdly, the *social*. In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias.

(12-13)

This dialectical thinking of space (or perhaps trialectical by adding the social perspective to the two existing polemics) gives rise to Lefebvre’s theorization of social space as social production, which can be categorized as spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces (*Production* 33). The spatial practice of a society, in Lefebvre’s words, “secretes that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it” (*Production* 38). Representations of space refer to “conceptualized space,” in which one identifies “what is lived and what is perceived with what is

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<sup>4</sup> The analogy first appeared in Edward W. Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies*. Soja later provided an insightful interpretation of Lefebvre’s space theory in his *Thirdspace*. Though Soja’s term “Thirdspace” is influenced by Bhabha’s “third space,” I choose not to include Soja’s theory because the primary focus of this essay is on Bhabha’s postcolonial discourse. For more information about the analogy, see Soja’s “Reassertions: Towards a Spatialized Ontology” in *Postmodern*; for discussion on “Thirdspace” and Lefebvre, see his “The Trialectics of Spatiality” in *Thirdspace*.

conceived” (Ibid). Representational spaces are “directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users,’ but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe” (*Production* 39). Though seemingly puzzling, the three concepts can be apprehended as the perceived space, conceived space, and lived space, all of which illustrate different forms or levels of domination. First, the perceived space involves spatial practices, which embodies society’s continuous and accumulative operation in order to master the social space. The conceived space gains dominance through its design, language, or plan to represent the imposed values or traditions. Lastly, the lived space is a dominated space, for it is to be “passively experienced” (*Production* 39) and to be represented by writers and philosophers with their literary reconfiguration. The three concepts offer a profound way of observing power relations deployed in space. All in all, space for Lefebvre is more than just a locus; it is a productive site that discloses the contradictions of capitalism exhibited by its mental and physical social constructions.

As a Marxist geographer, Harvey has published broadly on space, urbanization, social justice, capital and capitalism. Most of his works, like Lefebvre’s, share a common theme of criticizing capitalism and its spatial developments; his most well-known book *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) defines him as a profound thinker who is devoted to reinterpreting Marxism and theorizing geography radically.<sup>5</sup> In an essay titled “Space as a Key Word” in

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<sup>5</sup> In an interview conducted by Jeffrey J. Williams, Harvey discussed the motive of writing *The Condition of Postmodernity* initially coming from his irritation with publications in the 1970s under the name of postmodernism, which he claimed “nobody knew what postmodernism was” (116). Besides noting the importance of geography for Marxist theorists, Harvey also talked about his experience of conducting research in France as a tenured professor at John Hopkins University. Because of his “American” status (Harvey was born in England), the French scholars were not allowed to talk to him in 1976 according to

*Spaces of Global Capitalism*, Harvey argues that space often calls for modifications, and it is necessary to contextualize space in order to render its significance. Because the meaning of space is contingent upon the context, Harvey offers three concepts of space to illustrate its implications. I am summarizing the definitions and Harvey's example below:

1. *Absolute space* has a fixed and standardized structure, or the space can be viewed independently, which implies that it is a "thing in itself" (121).
2. *Relative space* occurs when the objects exist in their relationship to other objects.
3. *Relational space* refers to its concept embedded in its process. In other words, the time-space relation is internalized, or external influences are internalized in time and space. A relational space manifests or indicates relations; it is itself a relation or relationship.

The three concepts can be exemplified by the lecturer's relation to the space and his audience: The lecture hall is an absolute space for it provides a fixed and particular space in which the lecture is held. The lecturer is in a relative space because of his audience: He is here and the audience is there. The lecture hall, in a more philosophical and abstract sense, is a relational space because the audience brings their own experiences and interpretations of the lecture. The meaning of the lecture then is contextualized and internalized within the space and time in process (126-127). Harvey's example illustrates the complexity of the three conceptions, and the meaning of space cannot be easily defined by considering one or the others alone. This tripartite thinking also implies that the meaning can be *overdetermined* because of the intricate interplay

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the Communist Party's ban. Harvey later moved into a squat owned by an American woman acquainted with Lefebvre in order to maintain "private property rights in a squat" (131). The experience inspired Harvey to write more on space and urbanization. For more information, see "The Geography of Accumulation" in *Minnesota Review* 69 (2007): 115-136.

among its location, people, and time in process. The meaning, thus, relies on the space's *relationality* in its specific context.

Following the tradition of Marx and Lefebvre, Harvey unsurprisingly argues that space is socially and historically conditioned. In the same essay, Harvey provides a very insightful figure in which he draws a 3X3 matrix of spatialities by interpreting Marx's concepts of use value, exchange value, and value, as well as Lefebvre's spatial practice (or material space), representations of space, and spaces of representation according to his three proposed spatial terms.<sup>6</sup> For instance, money, as Harvey argues, can be treated as the primary form of representation of value; the value of such, however, can be immaterial unless it is associated by the use value in a material form. The money commodity also emerges in absolute space through acts of exchange in relative space-time. The material use value consequently creates a paradox because of the commodity's need to represent the universality of value (or of abstract labor) while it is impossible to stabilize the value permanently. The value therefore not only fluctuates in relational space, but also implies that money as capital is appropriated and circulated in relative space-time by social power or private sectors (145-146). With all things considered, Harvey's model on space manifests the contradictions of capitalism, or perhaps, capitalism itself operates on its own negation. In *Capital*, Marx pungently observes the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation:

The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialization of labour at last reach a point where they become

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, see a general matrix of spatialities on p. 135 and a matrix of spatialities for Marxian theory on p. 143.

incompatible with their capitalist integument. [...] But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is *the negation of negation*. (237; my italics)

Capitalist society always performs with the quest for profit as an end in itself and with the monopoly as one of its goals. Because the monopoly can never reach its entirety, the capitalist mode of production inevitably incurs self-negation, for the existing system needs to be replaced when accumulation fails its purpose. As “[t]he expropriators are expropriated” (Marx 237), the system that capitalist society negates is the very same system that it creates—“the negation of negation” or the negation for negation’s sake. The theories of Marx, Lefebvre, and Harvey are useful reminders that the uneven and contradictory geographical development can be a result of the capitalist mode of production. In the memoirs of Choy and Yep, the aspects of political economy and race in their literary representations of Chinatown often intersect and the analysis of the texts should be therefore contextualized in its socioeconomic and historical background. I want to begin with an introduction to the implications of Choy’s and Yep’s memoirs as historical nonfiction.

#### Memoirs as Historical (Non)Fiction?

Perhaps because of its mature or “supernatural” subject, Choy’s *Paper Shadows* (1999) does not start with the story of his childhood directly. Rather, Choy proclaims that the memoir “is a work of creative non-fiction” and he is responsible for the choice of details and various accounts to “re-create past times and personalities” (author’s note). What follows this confessional note is a picture of Chinatown and a story of Choy recalling a phone call by a stranger in 1995 who claimed that she saw the ghost of Choy’s mother on the streetcar in Vancouver’s Old Chinatown. Intended for a younger audience, Yep’s *The Lost Garden* (1991)

does not have ghosts who visit from the past, but the image of his “lost garden” shares a similar uncanny effect: “Your first home will always be the one that you remember best. I have been away from it for over twenty years; and yet I still go back in my dreams” (ix). Although Yep’s family photos in the middle of the memoir increase the narrative’s credibility of his first home and Chinatown memories, Yep’s note reveals otherwise: “I have changed the names of my classmates because I imagine that they don’t want their children to know what they’ve done. I have felt a similar obligation to leave out the names of some of my teachers and neighbors” (afterword). Photos, newspapers, or letters are common materials to create historical connections in nonfiction writing, but the description of Choy’s ghost experience and Yep’s lost garden defeats the purpose of writing a “believable” story. The memoirs of Choy and Yep, hence, are written in an unconventional literary form that blurs the boundaries of fiction and nonfiction, storytelling and history. This writing technique may seem groundbreaking, but Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1975) has already aroused plenitudes of discussion regarding the categorization of the book as a work of fiction or nonfiction. Rocío Davis correctly asserts that Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* presents an important intervention, not just about “the definition of Chinese America” or “what it means to be Chinese American,” but it reveals the challenges of contemporary theories of criticizing autobiography in general (4). It is undeniable that Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* is an influential work that redefines the genre of nonfiction or “after Kingston, American autobiography was never the same” (Davis 4). Instead of regurgitating the contributions of *The Woman Warrior*, I think a more pertinent question to ask is why the memoirs by Choy and Yep still share the same motifs (i.e. ghost stories or talk-stories of Chinatown) twenty years after *The Woman Warrior* was published. Is there nothing new after



*The Woman Warrior?* How do the Chinatowns in San Francisco and Vancouver haunt the memories of Yep and Choy?

Like all buildings, Chinatown originates with a thought or an idea. In a recent publication, Bhabha mindfully explores the connection between architecture and thought:

The built environment is an ongoing, unfolding relationship between materials and humanity, between technology and psychology, between ethics and the environment. It is for this reason that architecture is amongst the most monumental of cultural constructions—functional, practical, durable, designed—and yet it only becomes Architecture when its presence is permeated with a ‘thought’ that overwhelms its physical presence. (“Architecture” 6)

Contrary to his habitual (and almost ritual) practice of post-structuralism, Bhabha upholds that the thought of architecture needs to be reconstructed, rather than deconstructed, to appreciate its significance. The design, function, and practice of a building manifest the transformation of a thought into a construction, and one cannot capture the thought without tracing its history. Bhabha’s agenda in this essay is clear: to “read” architecture as a text and to reconstruct its hidden meaning. This reading process, as Bhabha claims, “combines continuities of form and tradition—a shared language—with surprising, even subversive, contingencies of historical fate and contextual ‘meaning’ that require us to revise our methods of judgement and interpretation” (“Architecture” 7). Bhabha masterfully presents an insightful theory about architecture, and to understand Chinatown, we must first reconstruct the thought or unfold the hidden history of Chinese North American immigration.

### The Evolving History of Chinatown

To begin with, it is a difficult task to define the term “Chinatown.” San Francisco’s Chinatown can be traced back to the 1850s when 30,000 Chinese men from the Guangdong region came to California because of the gold rush. Historian Judy Yung notes that some Chinese men settled in the vicinity of Portsmouth Square, and it was not until the government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 did the Chinese men occupy the 12-block area, which remained the core of Chinatown to the present (1). The earliest Chinese migration in Canada started in 1858 because of the Fraser River gold rush. Most of the Chinese immigrants were also from Guangdong and participated in gold mining in California. They settled in Victoria and built Canada’s first Chinatown. In the early 1880s, almost 17,000 Chinese workers lived in Western Canada because of the construction of Canadian Pacific Railway. Many Chinese workers moved to Vancouver in 1885 after the city was included as the terminus of the Railway (Ng 10-11). Considering its functional and physical architectural features, David Chuenyan Lai, a geography scholar at University of Victoria, terms Chinatown as ““a town within a town”” (xv), an economic and ethnic enclave confined in North American cities. The immigrants occupied a street or two and called them *Tangren Jie* in Mandarin or Chinese street, whereas the local North Americans used different terms, such as ““Chinamen’s quarters,’ ‘Chinese community,’ or ‘Chinatown’” (Lai 3) instead.

As a concept, Chinatown embodies social and racial discriminations imposed by the West. The term “Chinatown,” argues Nayan Shah, is only a “generic naming” that “referred to a handful of buildings and in others to a set of streets” and that “signaled a potent racial designation of Chinese immigrant inhabitation” (18). Immediately, “Chinatown” suggests not only restrictions for Chinese immigrants’ mobility but also a term invented by the West to prescribe knowledge for the racialized Other. The thought embedded in Chinatown is what Said

argues in *Orientalism*—“a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts” in order to “control, manipulate, even to incorporate [. . .] a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world” (13). Kay Anderson in *Vancouver’s Chinatown* further elaborates on Chinatown or the Chinese race as a category for the West, for “‘Chinatown’ was not a neutral term, referring somehow unproblematically to the physical presence of people from China in Vancouver. Rather, it was an evaluative term, ascribed by Europeans no matter how the residents of that territory might have defined themselves” (30). Shah adds that the officials intensified American public’s fear by spreading negative views on the “filthy and diseased” Chinese, who “incubated such incurable afflictions as smallpox, syphilis, and bubonic plague” and “infected white Americans” (2).<sup>7</sup> Chinatown, either as an idea or a thought, is a racial coding for Americans to exercise and reinforce their knowledge to homogenize the “new.”

A few things are notable regarding the history of the Chinatowns in San Francisco and Vancouver: First, early Chinese immigrants were not, asserts Ronald Takaki, “coolies” (35) because they came to North America voluntarily. Their ability to travel across the border challenges the national boundaries between Canada and America. Second, the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and the construction of Canadian Pacific Railway in Vancouver in 1885 marked an important era in Chinese North American history, during which the Chinese immigrants built the Chinatowns and were prohibited to settle elsewhere in the cities because of government restrictions. The two Chinatowns, in this sense, were institutionalized as a racially

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<sup>7</sup> Shah discusses how Chinatown was recognized as a racialized and contaminated space through his historical studies on public health and sexually transmitted diseases. The same fear is also shared by Choy’s character Jook-Liang in *The Jade Peony*. For more information, see Shah’s award-winning *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown*.

and socially segregated space where white North Americans blamed their economic downturn or job losses on the Chinese immigrants. In his historical studies of Chinatown, Paul Yee documented the early confrontations against the Chinese workers in Vancouver:

In the 1880s the Chinese in the Vancouver area were employed at sawmills, dressing timber for export. After the CPR was built, the Chinese who came to Vancouver worked at the mills and cleared land. Racist whites chased them away twice. At the city's first election, one sawmill owner ran for mayor. He sent his Chinese workers to vote, but they were confronted by whites at the poll. A stagecoach driver whipped up four horses and chased them back to the mill. The following year, when 20 Chinese were clearing land, 200 whites marched to their camp, razed the shacks and pushed the workers to the docks. (41)

In the US, the earliest anti-Chinese movement happened in Los Angeles in 1871, during which 21 Chinese immigrants were killed by white agitators. In 1880, a mob in Denver destroyed many buildings in Chinatown and murdered a Chinese laundry man named Sing Lee. Three years after the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, Rock Springs Massacre broke out in Wyoming and about 28 Chinese miners were murdered. During the incidents in Denver and Rock Springs, although some rioters were arrested, no one was prosecuted for the deaths of the victims (Daniels 58-61). In the same year, the American public applauded the building of the Statue of Liberty, which symbolized love and liberty because of the torch lighting the passage for people of different nations coming to the US. For Saum Song Bo, the Statue was considered as an insult to the Chinese who were denied the right to become naturalized citizens. In an article published in the *New York Sun*, Bo asked, "But are the Chinese allowed to come? As for the Chinese who are here, are they allowed to enjoy liberty as men of all other nationalities enjoy it?"

Are they allowed to go about everywhere free from the insults, abuse, assaults, wrongs and injuries from which men of other nationalities are free?" (Yung, Chang, and Lai 56). The Statue was an ironic national icon, for it strived to resemble America's benevolent policy towards all immigrants excluding the Chinese. Since no one was convicted, the incidents in Wyoming and Colorado were like government permitted crimes that signified the legitimatization of the American public's anti-Chinese sentiment. After the Rock Springs Massacre and other anti-Chinese movements, some Chinese miners chose to return to San Francisco's Chinatown since they had nowhere to go. "For better or for worse," reveals Joseph Young after the Rock Springs Massacre, "Chinatown's my home, and I'm here to stay" (Yep, *The Traitor* 299). The term Chinatown, therefore, is encrusted with opposite meanings for Westerners and the Chinese. Sauling Wong asserts that Chinatown is a "*habitation*" and a "permanent home," "a locus of familiarity, security, and nurturance" even for Chinese North Americans who have moved outside of Chinatown. For Western tourists, Chinatown means "*spectacle*, a diverting, exotic show" and under their gaze, the Chinese are "reduced to a specimen of Otherness devoid of individuality and interiority" ("Ethnic Subject" 253). The two words "*habitation*" and "*spectacle*" may inform the two contested perspectives of Chinatown, but in the memoirs of Yep and Choy, the two perspectives often contradict and intersect each other to reveal the complex attitudes towards the Chinese. The discussion below will highlight the cultural and social spatiality of Chinatown to trace the economic contributions of Chinese North Americans to the development of North America.

#### Choy's Haunted Chinatown

In *Paper Shadows*, located a block east of a Chinese sausage factory on Keefer Street, the first house of Choy's parents registers an eerie and ambiguous image—"The house with the ghost" (18). Choy writes,

When I had just turned three, we moved into the narrow pine house on Keefer Street that was also home to a sort of ghost. Years later, Mother told me Father took that house because it was so cheap. No one else wanted to live in it. [. . .] Ghost or not, Father went to the bank and showed the manager his seasonal-work contract with the Canadian Pacific Railway. He came home with the rent deposit and told Mother to start packing. He might even have said, "Beggars can't be choosers." (18-19)

Living on Keefer Street near Chinatown perhaps resonates many Chinese Canadians' growing up experiences in the 1940s. The father's seasonal work with the Canadian Pacific Railway suggests the continuation of Chinese immigrants' work relationship with the company after the construction of the Railway (1881-1885). The family's reaction towards their narrow pine house reflects the poor economic conditions of Chinese immigrants who cannot afford better lifestyles with their limited income. What remains a mystery is the "ghost" of the house. Often interpreted as one's imagination, the ghost is assigned to a physical location in Choy's mapping of his home near Chinatown, which was "the second in a tight row of detached old two-storey houses on Keefer Street, just a few blocks east from the heart of Chinatown" (20). Inside the house, Choy offers more gothic descriptions of the front door:

During the war years, Chinatown women left alone commonly feared strangers appearing at their front doors, especially at night. Stories were told of wayward drunks slamming themselves against closed doors, clever hoodlums picking

flimsy locks, immigration officials showing up unannounced. [. . .] Our front door had one key lock; one inside chain lock; and two bolts, one ten inches from the top of the door and the other six inches from the bottom. (20)

This passage characterizes the common fear of Chinese immigrants in Chinatown in the 1940s. Not only were they worried about “strangers,” “wayward drunks,” and “clever hoodlums” on the street, but Chinatownners also lived under the constant policing of immigration officials who were chasing “*gai-gee yung*” or “*false-paper citizens*” (21). The narrow pine house was Choy and his mother’s shelter that separated them from the outside, with strangers knocking on the door and the air-raid sirens sounding during the war. Inside the house was the mother whispering to Choy to “keep as still as possible” and to “outwit the stranger with silence” (21), which constituted the image of Chinatown as a silent and uncanny space. Although the chain lock and double bolts on the door enhanced the house’s security, they could only safeguard the family from outer visible disturbances. Inside the house were supernatural forces that haunted Choy’s memory of Chinatown.

There were two categories of ghosts in Chinatown. Choy writes,

The Chinese who died in Vancouver became harmless, familiar ghosts and belonged to the first category. [. . .] Generally, Dai Yee and Third Uncle told me these spirits were “lost China people.” “Why don’t they go away?” “They wait,” Third Uncle explained, “for their bones to be ship[ped] back home.” “Home,” of course, was always a village or city in Old China, the place where you were raised, where they still wanted you, even dead; where you belonged. For ever. (31)

Until the late 1930s, early Chinese immigrants who died had been buried in the Pacific West or Northwest. Their remains were uncovered and shipped back to China. The Chinese believed they should be buried in their homeland so their graves could be attended by their families. The tradition of a proper burial in Chinese culture can be traced back to the second century B.C. when *Zhou Li* or *Rites of Zhou* first noted its importance: “All will eventually die and must return to the ground.”<sup>8</sup> The ritual represents the belief that people continue to exist in a different form after death. With a proper burial of the body, the spirit will go to heaven and rest in peace. The Chinese saying *rù tǔ wéi ān* [入土為安] or “the deceased rests in peace after the burial” is another example of how the Chinese value the ritual highly. Because early Chinese immigrants lived with the burden that “‘Canada no want you’ [. . .] ‘Go home, chinky Chinaman!’” (31), the bone shipment reinforces the history of the immigrants’ social exclusion in North America. Their “home” was always in China where they were raised, wanted, and belonged. The bone shipment could also be interpreted as a tribute the living paid to the deceased in the 1940s. A proper burial in China suggests the end of the early Chinese immigrants’ miseries on their journey so they can finally have rest and peace in the afterlife. Those who were prohibited from traveling and had to be buried in the alien land became *lost China people*, “harmless” and “familiar” ghosts who refuse to quit haunting the living because it is the responsibility of the living to bury the dead properly. The burial, in this sense, is a comfort for the dead and the living. As a second generation Chinese Canadian, Choy perceived his “home” as a part of Vancouver’s Chinatown, where a *bak kwei*, “a ghost from the second category—a *white man’s ghost*, an apparition full of spiteful trickery” (31-32), who haunted their house.

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<sup>8</sup> The translation is mine from the Chinese original: “眾生必死，死必歸土。” The book is heavily influenced by Confucius and is considered as an ancient Chinese classic ritual text.



The incident brought back Choy's memory of the house's small dining room, "with its shelved rows of wedding-gift silver, ornamental china, and English serving plates ranked according to size" and "gifts celebrating Mother's marriage to Father, and a half-dozen or so [coming] from birthdays and anniversaries" (24). The silver, china, and English serving plates were mementos of the family's important occasions, but they were shattered by the father who just returned from work at sea. Choy and his mother slammed the front door, fled upstairs, and hid in a small bedroom from his drunken father who was possessed by *bak kwei*. Choy's description of the one "key-lock" bedroom door, with two bolts and "a slot-lock above and below" (38), echoes that of the front door, bringing out another dimension of the pair's fear *within* the house. Although an inhabited space presents the essence of home or an image "of the non-I that protects the I" (5) according to Gaston Bachelard, this haunted house provides nothing but *false security*, with the two heavy bolted doors signalling not protection but the invisible and ideological penetration of Canadian culture. A door furthermore metaphorically indicates one's desires or temptations because of the possibilities of being "closed, bolted, padlocked," "open" or "wide open" (222), but Bachelard asks, "And then, onto what, toward what, do doors open? Do they open for the world of men, or for the world of solitude?" (224). The two locked doors, of course, do not open for the world of men but represent the psychological and social solitude, a *double alienation* constituted by the effects of Canada's Chinese Exclusion Act and the domestic relationship problems resulting from the father's long absence at home. If one's ontological existence, as Bachelard asserts, can be imagined from the dialectics between the outside and the inside (211), then, one can argue, Chinese immigrants' *being* is represented by the spatiality of the house: a closed space with no social or psychological attachments and a marginal space doubly divided by the two exterior and interior doors.

What remains to be discussed in the incident is the significance of the ghost. The drunken father pressed his body against the door, shouting ““*Damn you!*”” and leading to Choy imagining “a red-faced, horned creature forcing its voice through Father’s mouth” and witnessing “the muscles of a demon tearing through Father’s legs and arms” (38). Preliminarily, the white man’s ghost can be interpreted as a metaphor of the public’s anti-Chinese sentiment, which poses invisible threats towards the Chinese immigrants. The possession manifests the *bak kwei*’s desire of manipulating the father’s body and the competition of the ownership of the house. The father’s struggle with the ghost illustrates a set of oppositions: past and present, visible and invisible, body and soul, Canadian and Chinese, dominator and dominated, outside and inside. The ghost’s desire of occupying the body and the house reflects the Canadian government’s political practices towards Chinatown and its people: “Chinatown was ‘their’ domain, ‘their’ home away from home, ‘their’ doing, ‘their’ evil” (Anderson 106). The haunting presents the white ghost’s declaration of his authority and the image of Chinatown as an evil and subordinated space. Derrida’s theory in *Specters of Marx* can further illuminate the significance of the white ghost in Chinatown. Derrida writes, “What is a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up?” (10). Derrida’s exploration of the ghost is foregrounded by *being* and *time*. The *being* of a ghost always signifies an ironic *presence* or ambiguous substance as a disruption of any discourse of *time*. “Each time it is the event itself,” Derrida argues, “a first time is a last time” (10). *The ghost, therefore, suggests the repetition of an event and the representation of disjointed time*. In contrast with the Chinese harmless ghosts who longed for the journey back to China, the vengeful spirit, according to Choy’s mother, came from a white labourer who was wounded

during a robbery years ago and died banging for help on the front door of their house. Choy's mother and her relative *Dai Yee* concluded that the white man's ghost was meant to be a "curse" (33), which was an unwelcomed past interjected to the present by "forcing its voice through Father's mouth" (38). The white ghost's voice is certainly a reminder of Canadian history before Chinese immigration, but the expression "*Damn you!*" is both contemptuous and ironic. Like the attempt of possessing the father's body, the expression conveys disdain towards Choy's family and the desire of solidifying the ghost's authority. The irony is that the ghost is so insubstantial and ineffective that his voice must be spoken through the Chinese Other. "*Damn you*" creates not just an opposition but also a critical distance between "you" and "me." For the white ghost, the father may be nothing but a vehicle through which he vents the resentment of his murder; the father is, nonetheless, the only means for his story to be heard. The white ghost and the "*lost China people*" suggest the revisit of the unrestful past and the shared history in Vancouver's Chinatown.

In *Ghost Towns & Mining Camps of Vancouver Island*, T. W. Paterson and Garnet Basque's studies of the gold or silver mining history demonstrates the strong connection of the "ghost towns" and the economic development of British Columbia. Traces of Chinese workers were abundant in these deserted towns. Mining in Leechtown, for instance, contributed to the development of the city of Victoria. Robert Brown, a member of a gold exploration team, reported excitedly about his discovery in 1864: "I may add that there is any amount of 'five cent dirt,' and with proper tools the average prospect is about one bit to the pan. The gold will speak for itself" (Paterson and Basque 2). Leechtown was soon deserted in 1865 after the rush was over. By 1874 only some "patient Chinese" still visited the town and hoped to find gold. In 1916 some whites and Chinese recovered a little gold according to the B.C. *Minister of Mines*

(Paterson and Basque 10). Currently a residential and farming area, Extension used to be a crowded town because of its coal mining business in the late nineteenth century. Extension had its greatest growth from 1908 to 1912, but slowed down in 1913 as a result of several riots at the coal mines. After months without any settlement on their low wages, the strikers attacked those who continued to work in the mines. Extension's Chinatown suffered most from the riots and lay in ruins (Paterson and Basque 34). On April 17, 1879, Wellington Colliery's No. 1 mine explosion took away the lives of eleven people: seven white men whose names were documented in the government reports and four Chinese who were deemed "worthless" at that time and remained unknown (Paterson and Basque 39). These "ghost towns" present evidence of the participation of both Canadians and the Chinese in the development of Vancouver Island.

Choy's haunted Chinatown signifies the Canadian government's political practices of alienating the space and the Chinese communities whereas the ghosts inform the historical reality of Vancouver's Chinatown. From a psychological point of view, the "double haunting" may be Choy's projection of his own fears originated from living as a Chinese Canadian in Vancouver. On the one hand, like most Chinese immigrants at that time, Choy was haunted by the unfortunate stories of Chinese immigrants who were murdered during the race riot. It is arguable that the fear for the Chinese ghosts was caused by his sense of guilt, for the deceased were not properly buried in their homeland. More importantly, the ghosts summoned fears and worries on the living: what had happened to the dead, being abandoned and cut off from their homeland after their death, would befall on the living themselves. The worry of becoming solitary, homeless, and abandoned was transformed into the haunting by the Chinese ghosts. Choy's sense of guilt, moreover, pointed to the guilt of the white society, which was to be blamed for the sufferings of the Chinese severed from home. On the other hand, the white ghost represented

Choy's fear of Canada's anti-Chinese attitude in the 1940s. Choy was haunted by the immigration officers whose constant banging on the door was the only noticeable sound in his memory of Chinatown. It was a common fear among the Chinese who were worried about immigration officers chasing illegal immigrants or health inspectors hunting TB cases. This type of haunting brought out Choy's feeling of insecurity and fear of family separation. The white ghost's violence paralleled the white workers' attack on the Chinese during the race riot. The ghost's haunting of Choy's house, furthermore, suggested the desire to claim the space and to expel the Chinese from Canada. The voices of the two types of ghosts symbolize the competing histories in Canada: the presence of the former was erased in the national history whereas the outrage of the latter reflected the anti-Chinese sentiment of the white society. Choy's memoir faithfully articulates an alternative history that documents the unrequited socioeconomic contribution of Chinese immigrants and contests the official history of Canada.

In what sense can Choy's Chinatown be interpreted as the third space? From the celebration of the Chinese New Year to the religious belief in a proper burial, the cultural practice of the Chinese immigrants in Choy's memoir construes Chinatown as a non-Western space in Canada. Bhabha reminds us once again that the liminality of a Western nation is "the shadow of its own finitude" because of "the colonial space played out in the imaginative geography of the metropolitan space" and "the repetition or return of the postcolonial migrant to alienate the holism of history" (Bhabha, *Location* 241). Reading Chinatown as the third space foregrounds the cultural and racial difference of the Chinese community, which contradicts the imagination of Canada as a homogeneous or holistic nation. The haunting of the Chinese ghosts in Choy's memoir, however, illustrates Chinese Canadians' participation in the development of Western Canada. Although Chinatown is a space for the Chinese communities to remain socially

and politically controlled from the outside, their economic contributions reveal the interdependence of Chinatown and Canada. Chinatown is not just “‘supplementary’ to the metropolitan centre” (Bhabha, *Location* 241) as a postcolonial space; it manifests the socioeconomic relations with the dominant society as a relational space, which is never completely separate from but interconnected with it. If Vancouver’s haunted Chinatown is endowed with a repressed history of Chinese immigrants whose contribution to Canada is never recognized, Yep’s *The Lost Garden* presents more socioeconomic issues of Chinese Americans who lived under racial discrimination in San Francisco’s Chinatown.

### Yep’s Lost Chinatown

In contrast with Choy’s haunted Chinatown, Yep’s representation appears less “troublesome” for his young readers. Yep begins with the mapping of San Francisco’s Chinatown:

When I was a boy, Chinatown was much more like a small town than it is now. [. . .] Its boundaries were pretty well set by North Beach, Kearny Street on the east, Sacramento Street on the south, and Stockton Street on the west—an area only of a few city blocks. There is a stereotype that the Chinese lived in Chinatown because they wanted to. The fact was that before the fair housing laws they often had no choice. (62)

Growing up in the 1950s, Yep witnessed the transformation of San Francisco’s Chinatown.<sup>9</sup>

Although North Beach, Kearny Street, Sacramento Street and Stockton Street set its physical

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<sup>9</sup> I must note that Yep’s first home was located on the corner of Pierce and Eddy streets outside of Chinatown. Because of his grandmother and Chinese school, Chinatown was like his second home full of his childhood memories.

boundaries in the early twentieth century, San Francisco's Chinatown was no longer a small town thanks to the fair housing laws, which originated from the Rumford Fair Housing Act passed in 1963 in California. The Act prohibited landlords or property owners from refusing to sell or rent their property to minorities. Intended as a measure of eliminating racial discrimination in the housing market, the Rumford Fair Housing Act was nullified after the passage of Proposition 14 the following year. The success of overturning the Rumford Act empowered the conservative movement in California and led to Ronald Regan's victory over the Democrat candidate Pat Brown (Governor of California 1959-1967) in the 1966 gubernatorial election (Gibbs and Bankhead 177-178). In the same year, the California Supreme Court ruled that Proposition 14 was unconstitutional because it violated the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1968, the Congress passed the federal Fair Housing Act in support of the California Supreme Court's ruling. Despite the good intentions of the Congress, the effectiveness of the Fair Housing Act is in debate. Margaret Usdansky reported on November 11, 1991, that the law did not work after its passage, as mortgage applications of ethnic people were rejected up to three times more frequently than those of white applicants. Usdansky added, "The greatest discrimination in lending was aimed at blacks, followed by Hispanics and Asians—consistent with the three groups' levels of segregation" (02A). In their studies conducted in 2010, Law Professor Robert Schwemm and Attorney Jeffrey Taren also found that the minorities have often been charged higher mortgage interest rates through "discretionary pricing" (375), in which loan officers and brokers increase the borrowers' costs in addition to a base rate. The practice is a result of racial discrimination and affects the homeownership rates among the minorities. The critics question the equal provisions the law promises, or *the Fair Housing Act is not fair at all*.

Although the Act outlawed housing discrimination based on race in the 60s, there were still “invisible barriers” that divided the whites and Chinese Americans: “The rich white world began just on the other side of the [Stockton] tunnel. [. . .] The Chinese could see and even touch the good life; but they could not join in” (Yep 63). After the laws were passed, many Chinese Americans moved out of Chinatown which “has spilled out of its traditional boundaries” (63). San Francisco, however, had several projects to “improve” Chinatown a few years later, including an elaborate jungle gym which upset many older Chinese. Yep bitterly asks, “What do they think our children are? Monkeys?” (65). Considering the relocation of Chinese Americans and the Chinatown projects, Lefebvre’s theory of space can be helpful to illuminate the sociopolitical implications behind Chinatown’s spatial transformation. The fair housing laws and San Francisco’s imposed improvements suggest the changing attitudes towards the Chinese reflected in the spatial practice of Chinatown. On the one hand, the California government good-willingly passed the Rumford Fair Housing Act in response to the demand of equal housing opportunities for the minorities. The immediate passage of Proposition 13, proposed by property owners who wanted to protect the estate values of white neighborhoods, demonstrated the political dominance of the conservatives and the strong racial divide between whites and non-whites. On the other hand, the jungle gym, among other “improvements,” was the government’s attempt to perpetuate the Western image of Chinatown, which remained an exotic and underdeveloped locale years after the passage of the fair housing laws. The “jungle gym” projected Western representations of Chinatown, which is a *conceptualized space* in Lefebvrian sense, imposed on the Chinese to be identified according to the appropriated image. The older Chinese residents’ response to the gym illustrates Chinatown as a *representational space* in which Yep lives through the associated image and seeks to rewrite in his memoir. The images of



Chinatown as a conceptualized space and a representational space thus contradict and intersect each other. The antagonistic interaction between these two images constitutes Yep's mixed feelings towards his bicultural identity, as exploring Chinatown does not solve the puzzle of his identity but only increases the number of scattered pieces instead (62).

Another problematic issue is that the image of Chinatown as a *social space* is authorized by the government. The "Chinatown projects" (Yep 64) reveal the government's political agenda of making the space more "modernized," "livable," or simply *marketable*. The class difference between the whites and Chinese Americans is carefully noted in the memoir, as Yep reflects upon his paper delivery experience with his classmate Harold on Nob Hill:

Once I went along with him; and I followed him into one of the fanciest hotels on Nob Hill, past the elaborately uniformed doorman, over the plush carpets, under the ornate chandeliers, and around in back, down concrete hallways as bleak as the ones in the Chinatown housing projects that were painted a cheap, gaudy yellow—a shade which my friend referred to as "landlord yellow." Harold would deliver the afternoon newspapers to the laundrymen and other workers. And with my friend that day, I wandered all around the roots of that palatial dream of wealth. When the poncho was flat, my friend and I returned to his tenement apartment where there was only one toilet to a floor, and the toilet lacked both a door and toilet paper. Nothing could be done about the door except changing your attitude about privacy. (64)

The paper route from Nob Hill to Chinatown draws the invisible trajectory that circumscribes the geopolitical space of the upper class and the lower class. One of the fanciest hotels may refer to the legendary Fairmont Hotel founded in 1907 after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906.

Along with the Fairmont Hotel, other luxurious hotels such as the Mark Hopkins Hotel and the Stanford Court are considered the landmarks on Nob Hill. The “uniformed doorman,” “over the plush carpets,” and “ornate chandeliers” are symbols of wealth and a good life that seemed unattainable for Yep and his friend. The fancy hotels and tenement apartments are adeptly juxtaposed to illustrate the two diverse lifestyles of the rich and the poor. The “tenement apartment” can be interpreted as a compressed and divided space within a space, revealing the limited living quarters allotted by one’s low income. The toilet without a door and toilet paper represents not just the dilapidation of the apartment building but also the poor socioeconomic status of the Chinese in the 1960s.

For the two Chinese American boys, the paper route was their way of observing the capitalist system in San Francisco. The paper delivery illustrates the intrinsic connections among labour, commodity, and rental properties. First, a paper boy’s work is often unnoticed and underappreciated. The “paper boy” motif may allude to Horatio Alger’s rags to riches stories in which the main characters work hard to achieve their American dream. The paper route on Nob Hill initiated Yep’s “palatial dream of wealth” because of the hotels’ expensive furnishings whereas the return to Chinatown with “cheap” and “landlord yellow” paint brought him back to reality. The geographic locations of Nob Hill and Chinatown further coincide with the class system metaphorically, for the two boys delivered papers to the upper class on the hill and to the laundrymen and other workers who lived downhill in Chinatown. Going *uphill* to deliver papers strategically set the class stratification in motion, although the wages in exchange of their labour were only enough to sustain the life *downhill* in Chinatown. The two paper boys’ labour, ironically, set them apart from the life on Nob Hill, or the workers were further distanced from the actualization of their American dream.

Newspapers were perhaps the most important media before the digital era. *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Francisco Examiner*, both founded in the 1860s, were the two daily newspapers in the city. Chester Hartman and Sarah Carnochan observe that the two newspapers were strong proponents of the city's geographical development because of their connections to the local corporate, financial, and political organizations. For instance, the project of the Yerba Buena Center in the 1960s gained support from the two media. Their headquarters in downtown benefitted from the construction and the property value was assessed at \$46 million in 1981 (Hartman and Carnochan 35-36).<sup>10</sup> As commodities, the newspapers disseminated economic and geopolitical propaganda of the city's land development. Although the two boys distributed the newspapers, they were disassociated from the policy making of the city. The value of the boys was defined by the service of the commodity: they were never the subject of the commodity but an object of the labour they appropriated. The commodification of the two boys created a critical distance from the products they distributed. By commodification, I mean their social and cultural value was replaced by the economic value or their existence was reduced to the external value in a capitalist system. Their commodification points to the exploitation or marginalization of Chinese Americans whose contribution to the development of the city was never acknowledged. The two young Chinese Americans were nothing but paper boys who helped circulate the newspapers and accumulated more wealth for the newspaper companies.

Both hotels and apartments are short term or temporary rental properties which portray the concept of a temporary home. The expensive hotels on Nob Hill initiated the desire for a

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<sup>10</sup> The title *City for Sale: The Transformations of San Francisco* well summarizes Hartman and Carnochan's studies in this book. The authors argue that the spatial transformations of San Francisco in the twentieth century were highly political, with an aim to turn the city's land into a lucrative property. For more information about the influence of the two newspapers, see their chapter entitled "Superagency and the Redevelopment Booster Club," pp. 15-43.

better living space and the ownership of a private property. However, the return to the tenement apartment signifies Harold's status as a tenant who converted his wages to rent in exchange for a limited living space. In contrast with the hotel rooms designed for travellers to create a temporary home away from home, the tenement apartment was Harold's permanent home where he was confined and discriminated against like most Chinese in Chinatown before the passing of the fair housing laws. Harold's home therefore must be created inside Chinatown where he had no choice but to share a dilapidated bathroom and to change his attitude towards privacy. As a rental property, the tenement apartment as a permanent home suggests that Harold would have to pay rent permanently to live in a home that did not belong to him. Similarly, Yep's Aunt Mary could not rent a cottage above the Stockton tunnel near Chinatown simply because "she was Chinese" (Yep 63). Before the passage of the fair housing laws, Chinatown was reinforced as a racially segregated space because the privatization of a property was impossible for many Chinese Americans. *Harold's home was not a home; it is a spatial paradox that reflects the power of political economy and the conflicting sense of home in Chinatown.*

### The Unhomeliness of Chinatown

In "The World and the Home,"<sup>11</sup> Bhabha uses the term "unhomely" to describe the migrant's ironic perception of home, which is "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place" (141). The term "unhomely" is originated from Freud's "uncanny," which conceptualizes one's terror deriving from something strange and familiar at the same time. The "uncanny" can be frightening because the subject is surprised by what is

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<sup>11</sup> The essay is the transcript of a lecture given at Princeton University. A revised version of the essay is included in the introduction of *The Location of Culture* under the section entitled "Unhomely Lives: The Literature of Recognition," pp. 13-27.

familiar but also appears to be strange; therefore, “the word *heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*” and “[w]hat is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*” (Freud, “Uncanny” 420). In other words, *heimlich* and *unheimlich* are ironically joined by their contradictions, for the former implies (re)construction and the latter the repression in the unconscious. In a postcolonial context, the unhomely demonstrates that “the un-spoken” or “the unrepresented pasts” haunt the historical present through a signifying process in a language that is beyond control (Bhabha, “Home” 147). The unhomely aspect of Vancouver’s Chinatown is introduced through Choy’s encounter with the two types of ghosts whereas San Francisco’s Chinatown is persistently represented as a socially and economically discriminated space. If the moment of unhomeliness articulates the crossroads of the past and the present, I think the representations of Chinatown in the memoirs by Yep and Choy illustrate their concerns about the disappearance of the Chinese communities and the current spatial transformations in Chinatown. For Yep, Chinatown is full of memories of his grandmother, who had a strong influence on his writing and who represented a “Chineseness” that was both “unmovable and unwanted” like a mountain in a living room. The grandmother represented the foreign and unassimilable Chinese culture that Yep wanted to ignore, and visiting Chinatown to learn about his bicultural identity was like “strange, new pieces to a puzzle that made the picture itself take a new, unwanted shape” (46). However, with all of the geographical changes and the loss of the Chinese communities, Chinatown was like an insoluble puzzle that presented challenges to Yep’s understanding of Chinese heritage. For Choy, not only was the strong sense of a Chinese community lost in Vancouver’s Chinatown, but a phone call from Hazel also revealed the secret of his adoption, which reshaped the knowledge of his family history. The haunted Chinatown projected Choy’s ambivalence towards his past and the credibility of his memories: “One single

phone call had shifted all the pieces; I felt trapped between fact and fiction. [. . .] Suddenly, nothing of my family, of home, seemed solid and specific. Nothing in my past seemed to be what it had always been” (280). Similar to Yep’s metaphor of the insoluble puzzle, Choy’s childhood in Chinatown is “like a Chinese box that opens in a variety of ways, revealing different levels, each sliding compartment secret” (337). For both authors, the unhomeliness of Chinatown comes from their nostalgia of the past as well as the loss of their first homes. The memoirs are their ways of preserving their lost childhood and retracing the memories of their families and friends. Yep writes, “Memory never quite goes away. It is there, only hidden, like the laughter of unseen children in a garden. A home can be cemented over but never buried. Adults can put up steel and lay asphalt, but their buildings and streets can never outlast memory” (115). Bhabha’s theory of the unhomely describes the uncertainty of the two authors’ attitude towards Chinatown’s transformations and reveals the overlapping of their personal memories and the national histories. What still remains in our task is how the two authors also represent Chinatown as a space of resistance to Western domination and as a relational space that contributes to the economic development of North America.

#### The Economic Issues of Choy’s and Yep’s Chinatown

In contrast with Yep’s observation of the social system as a paper boy, Choy’s first taste of envy came from his visit to Chinatown’s Wing Sang Block in the 40s, built by Yip Ch’un Tien or Yip Sang, who was a successful Chinese merchant with a large family. Yip Sang had three wives and fathered twenty-three children, many of whom lived in the Wang Sang building (Choy 26). Compared with Choy’s small and shabby first house, Wang Sang Block in Choy’s imagination lived a king and a queen and was like “an emperor’s palace of countless rooms” (Choy 27). For a three-year-old boy, Wang Sang Block was all Choy ever wanted to live in.

After a Yip boy declared his ownership of the room, Choy thought: “A little boy just like me lived in this wonderful maze of rooms, and could dash about adventurously and see the world from high above Pender Street, higher even than our second-floor window. I wanted to live in countless rooms and roam miles of hallways and staircases—in a building like Wing Sang” (29). The scene comically ended with Choy’s punch on the little boy and the mother dragging Choy away from the building. “I would never forget Wing Sang,” Choy said thoughtfully after leaving the building. Getting lost in the maze-like Wing Sang with “countless rooms” and “miles of hallways and staircases” may suggest Choy’s economic envy, but the history of the building calls for more careful consideration.

Born in 1845 in the Shengtang Village, Guangdong province, Yip Sang traveled to California in 1864 to escape poverty. He worked as a cook, dishwasher, cigar maker, and gold miner. He returned to China to marry his first wife after he saved enough money, but the wife died when he returned to the United States alone. He then married his second and third wives to take care of the growing family. Yip Sang first came to Canada in 1881, but his work in the Cariboo goldfields was not successful. He moved to Vancouver and became a superintendent of Chinese workers for the Canadian Pacific Railway Supply Company. In 1885, Yip returned to China and married his fourth wife. Yip started the Wing Sang Company in Vancouver in 1888, excelling in labour contracting and trans-Pacific import and export business. He supplied workers for the Canadian Pacific Railway Company and his company became one of the largest Chinese companies in Vancouver, with an annual revenue of \$50,000 and its real estate worth over \$200,000. Yip was one of the founders of the Chinese Benevolent Association in Vancouver and the Chinese Board of Trade in the 1890s. The Wing Sang Block at 51 East Pender Street mentioned in Choy’s memoir was actually two buildings. Wing Sang was first

built in 1889. In 1901, Yip Sang added a third storey with bay windows and expanded businesses at the retail level. In 1912, Yip built another six-storey building behind and connected it to the main building with an elevated passageway. The two buildings were used to accommodate his three wives, 23 children, and close relatives. The first floors of the building were also used to house struggling Chinese immigrants until they could get work in Canada (Lazarus 153-155).<sup>12</sup>

The Wing Sang Block is a monument of Chinese immigration history and the immigrants' contribution to Canada's economy. Besides the labour contracting and trading businesses, Yip Sang ran a hotel and three canneries; his salted fish exporting business to China brought him significant revenue. In addition to the Sang Wing Block, he established the first Chinese school and hospital for the Chinese community. Because of his fluent English, Yip Sang played an important role in communicating with the Canadian Pacific Railway Company for the Chinese workers. During the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1881-1885, Chinese workers were given more dangerous jobs but were paid less than their white counterparts. Over 600 Chinese workers died building the railroad. As soon as the railroad was completed, the Canadian government passed the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885. To discourage Chinese immigration, the government charged a head tax of 50 dollars for every Chinese entering Canada. The head tax was increased to 100 dollars in 1900 and again to 500 dollars in 1903. The taxes effectively prevented Chinese immigration until 1908 while the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 eliminated all immigration from China until 1947 (Lazarus 156). During these difficult times for the Chinese immigrants, Yip Sang's Wing Sang Block, like

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<sup>12</sup> For more information about Yip Sang and the Wing Sang building, see Timothy J. Stanley's "Yip Sang" available at [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/yip\\_sang\\_15E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/yip_sang_15E.html) and Eve Lazarus's *At Home with History: The Untold Secrets of Greater Vancouver's Heritage Homes*, pp. 153-155.



his Chinese Benevolent Association, provided temporary shelters and care for the immigrants. The Block signified the formation of a large Chinese community in Canada, comprised of Yip Sang's over a hundred family members and Chinese labourers who Choy later called "uncles" or "bachelor men" (72) in the memoir. The Block, or the Wing Sang Company, was also a business center that sold Chinese silk and curios whereas opium was imported and processed before it was made illegal in 1908 (Lazarus 154). As one of the biggest traders in Vancouver, the Wing Sang Block represented the close economic ties or interdependence between China and Canada in early twentieth century. In the light of Harvey's theory, Wing Sang Block can be conceived as an *absolute space* in the light of its commercial functionality. The building's location illustrates the *relative* or *geographic* connection to the city as a whole. What is "see[n] of] the world from high above Pender Street" in a 6-storey building "higher even than our second-floor window" may give rise to the three-year-old Choy's first taste of economic envy, but the view reveals the operation of Chinatown's businesses *in relation to* other Canadian communities. The building's maze-like interior with countless rooms signified its complex structure and the internalization of the underrepresented Chinese Canadian history in Vancouver's Chinatown. Choy's description of the Wing Sang Block echoes Jook-Liang's observation of the Chinatown buildings in *The Jade Peony*:

I knew that every brick in Chinatown's three- and five-storey clan buildings lay like the Great Wall against anyone knowing everything. The *lao wah-kui*—the old-timers who came overseas from Old China—hid their actual life histories within those fortress walls. Only paper histories remained, histories blended with talk-story. (Choy, *Peony* 50)

The Wing Sang Block is impenetrable with life histories well hidden inside its building. With Choy's representation of the Block and Yip Sang's history, the voices behind those "fortress walls" are strategically restored in Choy's *Paper Shadows*.

In Yep's memoir, San Francisco's Chinatown was transformed into a tourist town in the 1950s. The stores were stocked with products from Hong Kong as well as geisha dolls and kimonos as souvenirs of Chinatown for white tourists. Regarding the commercialization of Chinatown, Yep reflects: "This could sometimes reach absurd lengths. One friend worked for a man who owned souvenir stores in both Japantown and Chinatown so my friend would alternate in the different stores. Both stores sold the same goods. The only difference for my friend was the type of coat he had to wear to wait on the tourists" (44). Under the Western gaze, Chinatown is an exotic space of consumption that fulfills the white fantasies. Graham Huggan defines exoticism as "a particular mode of aesthetic *perception*—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery" (13). Exoticism operates on the oscillating polemics of domesticity and strangeness, a process of "othering" foreignness by familiarizing it. In addition, culture, according to Fredric Jameson, has become a commodity in the postmodern age, and postmodernism is "the consumption of sheer commodification as a process" (x). Because of the overwhelming power of capitalism, the postmodern era is characterized by commodity fetishism, in which the abstract values of commodities are emphasized whereas the underlying social or historical significances are concealed. In the passage, Hong Kong products, geisha dolls, and kimono are commodified as foreign culture for consumption. These products can be culturally significant but they are reduced to only their commercial worth. In the 1950s after WWII, the Chinese were common targets under the assumption that they were Japanese.

The Chinese could be the “all-purpose Asian” (Yep 38), who could have been the Korean- or Chinese-Communist depending on the imaginary wars the children pretended to fight. Japantown and Chinatown become interchangeable categories because both spaces are universalized and perceived as a fetishized *spectacle* regardless of the fundamental difference between the two cultures. There is a clear link between the commodification of the cultural commodities in Chinatown and the postmodern subjects, to borrow Jameson’s words, who are “themselves commodified and transformed into their own images” (11). Yep’s friend may be the exotic human subject who reaffirms the Western stereotype of the Chinese as the service class and whose existence is constituted by the loss of subjectivity or the commodification of self. Alternating between two types of coat is a conscious act of *self-commodification* or *self-exoticization* according to the different cultural roles he plays at the store. The coats hence function as a code-switching device that both transforms and conceals the Chinese subject’s cultural identity to satisfy the tourist gaze. The white tourists remain the ignorant consumers who purchase Chinatown souvenirs, such as a plastic backscratcher with a note on the stem: “Souvenir of Chinatown (but in smaller print said, Made in New Jersey)” (Yep 45). In this cultural transaction, the image of Chinatown is reproduced by the commodification of both its space and people: the Chinese are a *category*, a *service class* for the white tourists in their imagination who consume the very culture they have created for Chinatown and celebrate their willed naivety with the power of purchase.

In an article published in the Time magazine in 1987, David Brand praised Asian Americans the “new whiz kids” (42) because of their academic achievement in major universities. Many of them were born to immigrant parents and were considered “model minorities” in the US. Both published in the 1990s, the memoirs of Choy and Yep could be

interpreted as their response to the new generations of Chinese North Americans who no longer live in Chinatown to pursue their American dreams. Both writers witnessed the disappearance of Chinese communities in Chinatown since the mid-twentieth century and expressed their concerns about the transformations of Chinatown. Vancouver's Chinatown in Choy's representation is a culturally and socio-politically segregated space haunted by ghosts whose voices are silenced by the official history. San Francisco's Chinatown is full of precious memories of Yep's grandmother and friends, but undergoes a spatial transformation because of the City's Chinatown modernization projects. Despite the geopolitical differences between San Francisco and Vancouver, the two writers' Chinatown narratives represent similar social and economic issues regarding the relocation of the Chinese communities and the loss of their first homes. Observe this memorable passage in the end of Yep's memoir: "*I look through the gate of the parking garage not at what is there now but at what was there before—and what is now within me.... Within my imagination, within my heart, within my soul, I feel the seeds of that garden stirring*" (116). Perhaps what the two writers try to strive for in their memoirs is not just the reconstruction of Chinese North American history but the negotiation with the past to cope with the loss of their childhood.

### Chapter 3

#### Hollywood Cinema and Mimicry in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*

The term “mimicry” is arguably one of Homi Bhabha’s most notable contributions to postcolonial studies in the last few decades. His theory of mimicry has been widely applied to literatures of different regions, and his renowned phrase “*almost the same but not quite*” (122) adeptly articulates the irony of a colonial subject’s adaptation or appropriation of the dominant culture. There are many instances of mimicry in Chinese North American literature, including Frank Chin’s celebrated novel *Donald Duk*, in which the Chinese American protagonist Donald identifies with the white culture by mimicking Fred Astaire and tap dancing. Wittman Ah Sing in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Tripmaster Monkey* mimics the monkey king purposefully in his play to demonstrate the absurdities of the white stereotypes of Chinese people. In Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony*, Poh-Poh, in “half-English pidgin and half-Chinese,” lectures her three grandchildren who fail to be Chinese: “*This useless only-granddaughter wants to be Shirlee Tem-po-lah; the useless Second Grandson wants to be cow-boy-lah. The First Grandson wants to be Charlie Chan. All stupid foolish*” (40). In her pidgin Chinese English, the hyphenated words fittingly reveal that the result of her grandchildren’s mimicry is a broken image, only “*Shirlee Tem-po-lah*” or “*cow-boy-lah*,” signified by the Chinese suffix “*lah*,” but never Shirley Temple or a cowboy. Charlie Chan, Earl Derr Biggers’s fictional Chinese American detective in *The House Without a Key* (1925), may be an amiable idol for her first grandson, but the film adaptations present problems of stigmatization of the Chinese and did not achieve any success until a white

actor played Chan in *Charlie Chan Carries On* (1939).<sup>1</sup> The grandchildren's identification with Western culture may be stupid, useless, and foolish to Poh-Poh, but their mimicry is a necessary strategy for their social survival and identity construction in Canada. Stuart Hall in "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation" reminds us that cultural identity should be considered as a production, "which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (68). Although it is no news to treat cultural identity as a production, Hall is helpful by arguing that cinematic representation provides a possible means to grapple with identity as an elusive concept. Cultural identity involves "the positions of *enunciation*"—that is, the subject who speaks and the subject who is spoken of. The significance of the grandchildren's mimicry of the Hollywood icons therefore must be understood in the context of how the subjects are enunciated and how they in turn renounce such enunciation by reappropriating their cultural legacy. My focus in this chapter will be on the granddaughter Jook-Liang, who presents the most disturbing and unsettling effect of mimicry because of her identification with multiple Hollywood figures. If cultural identity can be understood from cinematic representation according to Hall, Liang's mimicry of the Hollywood figures is a double disarticulation of her Chinese and Canadian cultures and a reverse of the ideological and sexual gaze constituted by male fascination. To stage this argument, I will first provide a review of Bhabha's theory of mimicry.

Mimicry and ambivalence are the two key concepts that Bhabha champions in "Of Mimicry and Man." Departing from Frantz Fanon's theory of Manichaeism, Bhabha argues

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<sup>1</sup> The first Charlie Chan film *The House Without a Key* came out in 1926, and there Chan was played by a Japanese actor George Kuwa. The sequel *The Chinese Parrot* (1927) featured another Japanese actor Kamiyama Sojin playing Chan. Charles Mitchell's *A Guide to Charlie Chan Films* (1999) provides a detailed introduction to the Charlie Chan movie series.

that mimicry can be a form of subversion because of its ambiguity and ambivalence, which reduces the dominance of the colonial culture. Mimicry arises from the colonized's desire for recognition, though the result is an "ironic compromise" (Bhabha 122) of both cultures. The colonial discourse is incumbent on its authority to prescribe the knowledge that the colonized is entirely knowable and visible through a system of instruction and repetition. Under this system, the colonized is subjected to the colonizer's discourse because of its total dominance with power and knowledge. To reveal the inadequacy of the colonial discourse, Bhabha employs mimicry to demonstrate the colonized's resistance within the system in which culture can be a duplication and hybridization, an indication of the loss of its colonial authenticity and authority. The loss is also essentialized in the third space, constructed upon temporality and liminality, opening up a possibility of negotiation and subversion, as well as the emergence of a new culture.

Ambivalence, on the other hand, articulates the psychological aspect of mimicry. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, colonial relationship is ambivalent in two ways: First, the colonized subject is never entirely opposed to the colonizer; rather, colonial discourse may both exploit and nurture the subject at the same time. Colonial discourse, moreover, wishes to produce obedient subjects that reproduce or mimic its values, habits, and most of all, assumptions, but the result is never too far from mockery. Ambivalence therefore is an unwelcome aspect of colonial discourse because of its self-contradictory nature or the inclination to producing "the seeds of its own destruction" (Ashcroft et al. 11).

Colonial mimicry very often strikes an ironic difference because of the colonized subject's wish to become the colonizer, though the result is a blurred resemblance of both. Although mimicry achieves the effect of camouflage, mimicry also accounts for the partial loss,

both absence and presence simultaneously, of one's self due to the desire of a full integration with the colonizer. Mimicry, according to Bhabha, always denotes ambivalence for its partial representation; "in order to be effective, mimicry continually produces its slippage, its excess, its difference" (122). Mimicry is a sign of a "double articulation"—the colonizer's appropriation of the Other and the recalcitrance to the prescribed knowledge. Because of the "slippage" and "excess" produced by the ambivalence of mimicry, the colonial subject's partial presence both disconcerts the coherence of the colonial discourse and authorizes the indeterminacy, which is "almost the same but not quite." Mimicry is also mockery for the enabling threat posed by its own double to the colonial appropriation so that mimicry is at once "resemblance and menace" (123), constituting a conformative and contestatory site in which the unsettling resemblance not merely disrupts the colonial discourse, but also questions the authorization of colonial representations (129). The ironic resemblance, or what Bhabha calls "the final irony of partial representation," disrupts the fixation of the colonial discourse whose knowledge is authoritatively prescribed "through a process of writing and repetition" (126). If considered in the light of its teleological practices, repetition is closely associated with mimicry and it can be roughly categorized into two levels of meanings: (A) the repetition of writing and knowledge; (B) the repetition of performance and difference. First, the knowledge is, to cite Edward Said's theory in his *Orientalism*, both a "*distribution*" and an "*elaboration*" of geopolitical awareness into texts that seek to "manipulate, to control, and even to incorporate" a different world (12). Because the colonial system is justified by the ideology according to which the Other is to be totalized, the repetition of its instruction is a mandate through language and education. The second kind of repetition, whether internal or external, involves the colonial subject's performance, which manifests as the *double* and penetrates colonialist authority. Although



Bhabha celebrates the power of mimicry by foregrounding its partial presence that menaces the totality of the colonial system, there is little discussion on the significance of repetition in his essay. The psychological aspect of the subject's mimicry can also be more thoroughly investigated. I want to first turn to Gilles Deleuze's philosophy, which I find indispensable in illuminating the concept of repetition in Bhabha's theory.

In the introduction to his seminal work *Difference & Repetition*, Deleuze provides the definition of repetition: "To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent" (1). Indeed, repetition begins with the assumption that what is being reproduced is a copy of the *original*, which denotes its presumed particularity and authenticity. In addition, as Deleuze offers the distinction between repetition and resemblance, "Repetition is not generality," for repetition always strikes with difference; hence, "[r]epetition and resemblance are different in kind—extremely so" (ibid). The purpose and practice of repetition thus work like a paradox, which Deleuze phrases effectively—"they repeat an 'unrepeatable'" (1), as repetition is to be "'represented' as extreme resemblance or perfect equivalence, but the fact that one can pass by degrees from one thing to another does not prevent their being different in kind" (2). Repetition, in this sense, is both "disguising and disguised" (17) for its formation a priori implies deformation, a result from its partial resemblance to the *original*. Like many other post-structuralists, Deleuze argues that the truth is often constituted by and disguised as a mask. *What is being repeated is not what it repeats*, or to put it more simply, *repetition is a reproduction of the truth under a mask*. Repetition, therefore, is a double bind both because of the impossibility of tracing the truth and because of the necessity of its reproduction. This double bind is inherent in the process of repetition, for the truth can only be signified by or projected onto the form of an object or a mask. Deleuze writes,

“I do not repeat because I repress. I repress because I repeat, I forget because I repeat. I repress, because I can live certain things or certain experiences only in the mode of repetition” (18). The subject can only “repeat,” “repress,” and “forget,” in order to justify the *truth* through the act of repetition.

Considering its paradoxical features, Deleuze asserts that there are two modes of repetition: The first mode of repetition “is repetition of the Same, explained by the identity of the concept or representation” whereas the second mode “includes difference and includes itself in the alterity of the Idea, in the heterogeneity of an ‘a-presentation’” (24). The first type of repetition begins with the attempt to repeat the Same, which can be treated as an identity process where its continuity is imagined in the relationship with the original. The second type is defined by negation because of its realization that it is impossible to be identical to the original. The negation, or more precisely the difference, is internalized within repetition that strives to become the same. The two repetitions convey a series of oppositions: One is affirmative and the other is negative. One is external and the other is internal. One is the cause and the other is the effect. One is developed, and the other is “enveloped” and “in need of interpretation” (Deleuze 24). The contestation between the two modes of repetition articulates the inseparable relationship between Difference and the Same, as the occurrence of Idea implies an internal split, in which Difference functions as an immanent supplementarity that helps both define and signify the subject. “Difference inhabits repetition,” or “[d]ifference lies between two repetitions,” for repetition acts as the “differentiator of difference” (Deleuze 76), which suggests the constant play and interaction between the two.

The concept of mimicry is closely related to repetition and difference. “Mimicry,” as Bhabha carefully observes, “*repeats* rather than *re-presents*” because it is always the colonizer’s

wish that the colonialist system be completely duplicated and practiced in their dominion, but mimicry “mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable” (125). In other words, mimicry displaces the colonial authority by repeating with difference, whose *partial presence* exhibits its corruption and absurdity. Moreover, mimicry presents the inner contradiction of the colonialist system, which cancels its own authority by rendering itself imitable—the very imitation incurs its own self-destruction. Mimicry, according to Bhabha, is also important in the colonized subject’s identity-construction, for mimicry through its repetition of partial presence “rearticulates the whole notion of identity” (127) by reversing the gaze of the colonizer. Because of its partial resemblance, mimicry presents a *double vision*, or, to coin Deleuze’s theory, a manifestation of difference internalized within or disguised as repetition. The colonized subject’s mimicry is *a repetition as negation* or *mimicry repeats to negate the colonial image and culture*. The colonized subject’s identity formation can therefore be roughly summarized as a process of deconstruction as construction, with ambivalence signifying its negative implications.

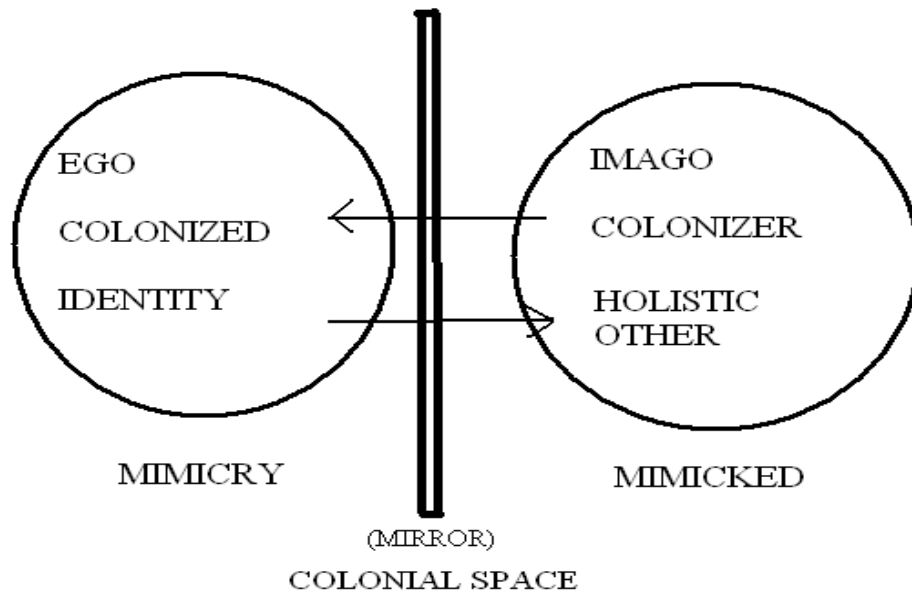
As a psychological term, ambivalence describes the mix of “repulsion” and “attraction” (Ashcroft et al. 10) of the colonial relationship. These conflicting emotions are a result of the subject’s partial loss through the act of imitation. To make mimicry successful, the subject must go through a phase of *depersonalization* to gain the approval from the colonizer. By *depersonalization*, I mean a process of transformation, in which the colonized subject transforms himself through mimicry by becoming the colonizer. *Depersonalization* is certainly ambivalent, because the subject has to *deface* and to *depersonalize* himself, so he can be transformed into another. The term *depersonalization* is not new. Roger Caillois in “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia” uses *depersonalization* to criticize the spatial aspect of mimicry and I think the

term can also effectively illuminate the ambivalent emotions of the subject. In the essay, Caillois notes that the purpose of mimicry, ultimately, is to “*become assimilated into the environment*” (98). Mimicry, in a broader sense, suggests the search for similarity or universality in order to blend in to the environment. The behavior depends on vision to create a “disorder of spatial perception” (Caillois 99) through action and representation. Associated with assimilation, mimicry denotes the creation of a vacuum *from within* to accommodate difference and to produce newness. This self-destructive act of mimicry can be so devastating that “it quite literally *no longer knows what to do with itself*” (Caillois 99), or for some schizophrenics that “*I know where I am, but I don’t feel that I am where I am*” (Caillois 100). Regarding the displaced symptoms of mimicry, Caillois contends that space almost “devour[s],” “entrap[s],” and “digests” the subject, and eventually takes over his place. Because of mimicry, the subject’s body and mind become dissociated so that he is similar in the environment—“not similar to anything in particular, but simply *similar*”—a process of which Caillois calls “*depersonalization through assimilation into space*” (100). Caillois is right that mimicry produces the spatial effect so *I know where I am, but I don’t feel that I am where I am*. Because of the contradictory and oscillating emotions of the subject who imposes a loss upon himself in exchange for the gain of assimilation, I think Caillois’s example can be revised to explain the ambivalence of the mimic. That is, *I know who I am, but I don’t feel that I am who I am*. By changing “*where*” to “*who*” in Caillois’s example, I suggest a return to the question of the subject’s identity. Mimicry can be so devastating that the subject essentially loses and questions his original *self*. Another keyword in the example is *feel*, which describes the psychological state of the subject as opposed to the ontological *know* or knowledge. He is no longer consciously aware of *him-self* and his perception of *self* is unstable. The point here is to consider the locale (*where*) in relation to the subject (*who*)

of mimicry and ambivalence. For this discussion, I must turn to Jacques Lacan, who is another philosopher that Bhabha is heavily indebted to in his theory of mimicry.

In “The Mirror Stage,” Lacan proposes that the formation of identity begins with the infant’s recognition of self in the mirror. The child’s ability to distinguish himself from the image in the mirror demonstrates an early stage of intelligence. The empty image that the child soon finds initiates a play between the “virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates—the child’s own body, and the persons and things, around him” (Lacan 190). Although the child still lacks motor capacity, the image projected in the mirror, however, appears unified and in control, the form of which is called the “Ideal-I.” The interaction between I and the Ideal-I creates a dialectical identification process, in which the two are perceived as identical. The child identifies with the image, which is the complete form, or “*Gestalt*” (Lacan 191), of self in contrast with his underdeveloped body. The child’s identity is therefore characterized by a lack, as the child always strives for the ideal *imago*, the completion, or the permanence of the *I*. The mirror stage also articulates a conflict between the *Innenwelt* (internal world) and the *Umwelt* (outer world), “precipitated from the subject’s insufficiency to anticipation,” “from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality” and “to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity” as “the subject’s entire mental development” (Lacan 192). Lacan’s mirror stage must be understood that it is situated between two phases: (A) the imaginary phase when the infant sees no clear distinction between subject and object before its linguistic development; and (B) the symbolic phase when the child assumes the given position as a result of assimilation or socialization (Abrams and Harpham 261). The significance of the mirror stage also derives from the mirror, acting as a social apparatus onto which the ideal form is projected. The subject is even placed in this *social space* where the opposition between *I* and the holistic *Other* takes place, constituting a

split within the subject internally. In my interpretation, what Bhabha tries to achieve in his theory of mimicry is a further interpretation of the social space *as* the colonial space where the subject performs mimicry in the colonizer’s language and image to subvert the authority of colonial culture. The following diagram may be helpful to illustrate the connection between Bhabha’s mimicry and Lacan’s mirror stage:



This diagram demonstrates how Bhabha adopts Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage and puts it in a colonial context. The arrows signify the ceaseless opposition or interaction between the colonized and the colonizer. The mirror is central to Lacan’s theory in which the subject finds his idealized image. The mirror, nevertheless, is transformed into different forms of ideology in a colonial context, with an aim to prescribe a holistic image for the colonized. Colonial mimicry betrays the subject’s desire of building an imaginative connection with the colonizer by reproducing the colonizer’s image. This mimicry process connotes moments of ambivalence in the colonial relationship, as the colonized subject exhibits irreducible recalcitrance because of his partial presence—almost the same, but not quite. In the case of Choy’s *The Jade Peony*, the

mirror is transformed into the film screen in a theatre, where the Hollywood culture continuously portrays different idealized images to control and dominate the children in their identity construction.

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Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*, published in 1995, is a compilation of three stories narrated by Jook-Liang, Jung-Sum, and Sek-Lung in Vancouver's Chinatown respectively. The novel begins with Liang's reminiscence of Wong Suk's first visit when she is five years old in 1933. Convicted of being a girl in the traditional Chinese family, Liang is the younger sister who is belittled and neglected by her Poh-Poh. Liang's only consolation is her performance of Shirley Temple's tap dance and her outing with Wong Suk. Because Poh-Poh always thinks of Liang as *mo no* and *mo yung* (a useless person with no brains), only when Liang mimics Shirley Temple can she feel "not ugly" and "not useless" (43). Since Hollywood culture plays a significant role in Liang's mimicry, I want to first introduce the importance of the mirror in mimicry and film studies.

Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz are among the theorists who first interpret the screen as a mirror. In "The Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," Baudry borrows Louis Althusser's theory and argues that cinema is an actualization of a specific ideological effect. Cinema is a reconstruction of a system of writing constituted by a material base, with its "counter-system" (an ideology) using this system while concealing it (42). In other words, a film always begins with a *thought*, which is disguised and embedded heavily within the material production of the image. In terms of the relationship of the spectator and the screen, Baudry argues that the film takes place in a closed space where the viewers are captivated with the mirror, a "framed, limited, and circumscribed" surface, projecting or reflecting "*images* but

not ‘reality’” (45). Because the images are not a reflection of the viewer’s self or body but of the world with a given meaning, Baudry proposes that there are two levels of identification: First, attached to the image is the portrayed character with an identity that must be constantly seized. Second, the prescribed image is transcended from its appearance to the viewer, so “the spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees” (45). Like a mirror, the screen projects a holistic image composed by its imaginary integration of the fragmented body (the false reality) and the viewer unifies the image’s meanings into an “‘organic’ unity” (46). Similarly, Metz in *The Imaginary Signifier* alludes to Lacan’s “The Mirror Stage” and adds to Baudry’s argument:

A strange mirror, then, very like that of childhood, and very different. Very like, as Jean-Louis Baudry has emphasized, because during the showing we are, like the child, in a sub-motor and hyper-perceptive state; because, like the child again, we are pretty to the imaginary, the double, and are so paradoxically through a real perception. Very different, because this mirror returns us everything but ourselves, because we are wholly outside it, whereas the child is both in it and in front of it. (49)

The screen, in this sense, *inter*-mediates between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, for the viewer knowingly and submissively perceives the projected image as the Real and “oblige[s] him to see what it sees.” Metz succinctly observes, “The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but at the same time stamped with unreality to an unusual degree, and from the very outset” (45). “*An infinite mirror would no longer be a mirror*” (45), writes Baudry, and the power of cinema lies in its ability to perpetuate or re-establish desirable images for the spectator to *identify with himself*.



Going to the movie theatre with Wong Suk is one of Liang's favorite pastimes. After Poh-Poh ties the ribboned pom-poms on Liang's tap-shoes, Liang is expecting Wong Suk in mid-spring Vancouver. Choy writes:

Everything seemed right that Saturday except Wong Suk was late. He usually appeared by eleven o'clock, latest. The spring sun overhead reminded me it was nearing twelve o'clock [. . .]. Wong Suk and I were, as usual, going to have a lunch of leftovers, then walk two blocks down Pender, cross Main, down to Hastings near Carrall, to the Lux movie house. Hastings Street, outside of Chinatown, was where people always stared at the two of us—stared at this bent-down agile old man with the funny face leaning on his two canes, at this almost nine-year-old girl with her moon face—but we didn't care. "Look," a teenage boy once said, loud enough for everyone walking by to hear, "Beauty and the Beast."  
(45)

With the theatre and the sun, it is difficult not to think of Plato's allegory of the cave, which is often interpreted as the archetype of modern movie theatres. In the allegory, the humans are compared to prisoners in an underground cave who only see the shadows of puppetry on a wall cast by the fire on the side. Derived from the allegory is the dichotomy of the original and the image, the sun of the truth and the shadows of the cave. The truth, to the prisoners, "is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things" (Plato, *Republic* 515c), so it is imperative that the prisoners be educated to distinguish the true from the false. In Choy's passage, the street directions—from Pender to Hastings Street—are the cognitive mapping and racial boundaries of Vancouver's Chinatown in 1939. Located outside of Chinatown, Hastings Street is a public space where Liang and Wong Suk are heavily scrutinized as "Beauty and the Beast" because of

their race and appearance. In *The Meaning of "Beauty and the Beast": A Handbook*, Jerry Griswold provides an excellent study of this well-known French fairytale published by Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont in the 1750s. The tale is rich in sexual and racial implications as exemplified by the relationship between a woman and a racial Other. Griswold observes that the tale gains its popularity by staging the overcome of differences with a conventional rise of love ending (17).<sup>2</sup> By referring to Liang and Wong Suk as "Beauty and the Beast," the teenage boy aggrandizes their sexual and racial difference to a cultural and universal level. But here is a twist: Liang and Wong Suk are no ordinary Beauty and Beast. Liang is the fake Shirley Temple, with the ribboned pom-poms on her tap-shoes, going to a movie theatre with Wong Suk leaning on his two canes as the fake Monkey King. The disguise of Liang and Wong Suk fulfills the racial and sexual fantasies of the local Canadians. Under the spring sun, what is revealed is not the truth as opposed to the shadows of the cave but the stigmatization of the Chinese immigrants. Outside of the cave, the local Canadians remain the ignorant prisoners who prefer the false images over a proper understanding of the Chinese, and who are blinded by their own vision legitimized by the Western racial ideology.

The Lux movie theatre is an important location in Liang's narrative. This 868-seat theatre was opened in 1939 as a replacement of the original Princess Theatre (built in 1934). The Lux theatre had its last showing in 1993 and was demolished around 1995-1996. In both of the

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<sup>2</sup> The union of the couple in the end of this romantic fairytale implies the transcendence of difference on many levels according to Griswold. First, the story is popular amongst the heterosexual couples because "hetero" suggests the gender difference in a heterosexual relationship. The gender difference is overcome by the couple's marriage, but in Disney's film adaptations, the gay writers use the film as an occasion to discuss the social intolerance of their sexual orientation. There are different versions of the fairytale rewritten by many writers, such as Angela Carter and American transgender writer Pat Calafia. Secondly, the tale can be read as a racial allegory because it focalizes the transformation of a man into a beast and deals with racial Otherness. See "The Importance of 'Beauty and the Beast,'" pp. 15-26, in Griswold's *The Meaning of "Beauty and the Beast": A Handbook* (2004).

photos,<sup>3</sup> we can see the “White Lunch Cafeteria” next to the theatre. The Cafeteria, as the name suggests, served and hired only white people. In 1937, the Vancouver government passed a law prohibiting white women from working in Chinatown as a “protection” from the male Chinese immigrants. The Cafeteria and its other locations were eventually closed in the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Although the restaurant is not mentioned in the novel, its historical presence reinforces Choy’s representation of Vancouver as a racially segregated city. In contrast, the Lux theatre is a space of consumption where Liang and Wong Suk purchase their share of Hollywood fantasies. If Liang has more coins from her father, she would choose the Odeon over the Lux, which “had a gold ceiling with painted angels, and between movies there were magicians, singers, a chorus of dancing girls and dog acts” (39). The description here is certainly unlike that of any conventional movie theatres. There is live performance inside a movie theatre, where reality overlaps fantasy and where Liang and Wong Suk’s racial and sexual difference is unnoticed by being in the audience. The image on the screen, of course, is equally as important as the location of the movie theatre. There are several Hollywood film references throughout the narrative, but the analysis below will focus on those related to Liang’s mimicry, including Tarzan and Jane, Marian and Robin Hood, and Shirley Temple. I will start with Tarzan and Jane, which is first mentioned in Liang’s narrative.

### **Liang and Jane**

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<sup>3</sup> Please see the two Lux theatre photos in 1939 and 1958 at [http://www.vancouverneon.com/page\\_q/lux.htm](http://www.vancouverneon.com/page_q/lux.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Besides the 57 East Hastings location mentioned in *The Jade Peony*, there were several other White Lunch Restaurants in Vancouver: 865 Granville, 124 West Hastings, 737 West Pender, and 714 West Pender. The information about the restaurant is retrieved from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/laniwurm/3387453625/> and <http://ahamedia.ca/2009/04/01/rediscovery-of-white-lunch-restaurant-on-hastings/>.

Early in Liang's narrative, we are introduced to the three grandchildren who are fond of playing make-believe games. Choy writes,

Watching Kiam<sup>5</sup> and Jung jump up and down was far better than having them force me to play dumb games like Tarzan and Jane and Cheetah. Kiam had seen the picture *Tarzan* three times. Kiam got to be Tarzan; Jung, Cheetah; and I got to be Jane doing nothing. I embraced my Raggedy Ann and watched another swing of Jung's sword *Whack!* take off Tojo's head. (20)

As a five-year-old girl, Liang has already been forced into a vulnerable and insignificant female role by her brothers. In contrast with Jung who uses a sword to take off a Japanese soldier's head, Liang gets to be Jane doing nothing with her Raggedy Ann. The doll is originated in John Gruelle's novels in the early 1900s, with red hair and a triangle nose. In *Racial Innocence*, Robin Bernstein traces the history and performance of the Raggedy Ann character and argues that Gruelle configures slaveholding and enslavement as "racially innocent fun" for white Americans. The doll can be racially ambiguous as the white color of Raggedy Ann, like her name, is not pure white but refers to the "black-and-whiteness of the face-painted minstrel performer" (149), which reveals the history of race and violence according to Bernstein.<sup>6</sup> What can be said about Liang's Raggedy Ann doll is the desire to domesticate her sexual and racial difference, which is especially eminent when Liang dresses her doll, touches her protruding tummy, and says, "I

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<sup>5</sup> Kiam is the oldest brother whose story is not available until Choy published *All That Matters* (2004), a companion novel to *The Jade Peony*. *All That Matters*, narrated solely by Kiam, is chronologically parallel to *The Jade Peony*.

<sup>6</sup> Robin Bernstein provides an excellent study of the history of the Raggedy Ann character. Starting from Gruelle's original design of the fictional character endowed with references to American nostalgia and patriotism to the marketing of the doll with material and cultural purposes, Bernstein presents a convincing argument about the racial implications of the Raggedy Ann doll. See the chapter titled "The Black-and-Whiteness of Raggedy Ann" in *Racial Innocence: Performing Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2011).

want[] the new baby all to myself” (14) and ““I need a girl-baby to be my slave”” (15) after Liang hears Poh-Poh’s story of being a girl-helper in China. In the passage, embracing the Raggedy Ann doll is certainly not Liang’s submission to the passive and vulnerable role of women but her protest of being the conventional Jane to fulfill the male fantasies of her brothers. It is little wonder that after their make-believe game, Liang puts “Tarzan’s Jane, whose doll legs would not bend, in the front room” (Choy 20) of a doll house. On Liang’s mind, Jane is only Tarzan’s possession and the unbent doll legs are symbolic of the limited freedom of a woman. Jane is not favorable for Liang, and putting the doll in the front room of the doll house is yet another gesture of Liang’s resistance to its docile image and her desire to domesticate her gender identity. The implications of Liang’s reference to Jane, however, become more complex when Liang identifies Wong Suk as Cheetah in the Tarzan movies.

Based on Edgar Rice Burroughs’s novel *Tarzan of the Apes*, the first film adaptation titled *Tarzan the Ape Man* appeared in 1932. Tarzan, a one-year-old child of British parents, is orphaned and raised by an ape in Africa. After twenty years of living in the forest, Tarzan rescues a group of explorers, including the American Jane Porter, whom he later marries in Wisconsin. The novel, as well as the film, is foregrounded by issues of heredity, but it is the colonial and sexual implications that draw critics’ attention. Richard Voeltz in “Still Dreaming of Africa” points out that Hollywood’s obsession with African themes initiated in 1929, exemplified by W. S. Van Dyke’s production of *Trader Horn* in 1930. *Trader Horn* received the Oscar nomination for the best motion picture, and following the success, Van Dyke produced another African film *Tarzan the Ape Man* which inspired the Tarzan series for decades to come (7). In “A Colony of Imagination,” Brady Earnhart provides a similar study of the Tarzan series and argues that the films essentialize colonial desire through the portrayal of Africa as a

primitive and exotic land. Interestingly, both Voeltz and Earnhart note that some of these African-themed films were entirely shot in Hollywood's studios in America, with "natives" (likely played by African American actors) performing uncivil roles.<sup>7</sup> These early African-themed films illustrate America's desire of colonization by perpetuating the negative images of Africa, and the shooting of the films inside the Hollywood studios well testifies to Said's theory of imperialism—the geographical imagination and ideological control of a foreign land.

The Tarzan series have been a popular cultural text for scholars in the gender studies field. Tarzan is one of the earliest male sex symbols in Hollywood culture. His exotic loincloth, physical perfection, swinging skills, and "wild call" are signs of masculinity and dominance, which distinguish him from other Hollywood heroes, as the trailer says, "Tarzan, [t]he Ape Man, knows nothing but the law of the jungle to seize what he adores!"<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Jane plays the female counterpart, who waits to be rescued in a foreign land and who "would delight in living like Eve—if they find the right Adam!"<sup>9</sup> In this sense, it is easy to mistake Tarzan and Jane as the modern Adam and Eve who play out the traditional roles of man and woman, but *Tarzan the Ape Man* and other Tarzan films in the 30s reveal something different: Jane is not as submissive

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Kane's *Round-Up Time in Texas* (1937), for instance, takes place in South Africa but the African scenes were shot in Hollywood's studios. In the film, the "natives" deliberately speak English with a foreign accent. Both Voeltz and Earnhart point out that part of *Tarzan the Ape Man* was also shot in America. See Voeltz's study on pp. 7-8 and pp. 341-342 in Earnhart's essay.

<sup>8</sup> The trailer of *Tarzan the Ape Man* begins with a suspenseful and mysterious soundtrack followed by the message from the producer announcing: "The demand of the picture public for another giant romance of primitive life and unfettered love HAS BEEN ANSWERED!" The caption of film title *Tarzan the Ape Man* is accompanied by Tarzan's wild cry, and the audience then sees half naked Tarzan swinging from one tree to another. Tarzan's masculine image is further amplified when he appears on screen holding Jane up with his arms while the caption says "Tarzan, [t]he Ape Man, knows nothing but the law of the jungle to seize what he adores!" The trailer captures the essence of the film and it can be accessed from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IloPPD0NKhA>.

<sup>9</sup> This is another line from the trailer of *Tarzan the Ape Man*. Played by Maureen O'Sullivan, Jane puts her hand on the bare chest of Tarzan after a chasing scene that contains sexual implications. The picture is available at <http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/tarzan%20the%20ape%20man>.

as she is portrayed in later Tarzan series. Barbara Creed in “Me Jane: You Tarzan!” points out that Jane’s entry into the jungle is a symbol of her entering the pre-feminine state or what she calls “the tom-boy era,” and it is Jane who plays the dominant role—Jane controls language or “woman teaches man to speak” (Creed 160). The issue of gender and language is similarly paralleled in *The Jade Peony*. Initially associated as the Monkey King because of his two walking canes and monkey-like face, Wong Suk is later identified as Cheetah by Liang under the influence of the Tarzan films. Wong Suk likes any old movies with Tarzan, but Liang secretly advocates that “to tell the truth, he identified with the smart and smart-alecky Cheetah” (Choy 39). The association of the Monkey King with Cheetah suggests Liang’s imaginary connection of Chinese and Western culture. Liang’s desire for possession of Wong Suk’s friendship is also amplified by calling him Cheetah: “*He’s mine*, I wanted to shout. *He’s mine!* Something old sprang from me, something struggled to defy even Poh-Poh. I pulled my head away from Wong Suk and looked back at her” (Choy 30). Liang enters the “something old” or the pre-feminine state to defy the social and ideological oppression of a woman. Liang also challenges Poh-Poh’s authority by reversing the gaze and by claiming the ownership of Wong Suk. Cheetah’s loyal companionship to Tarzan is what Liang lacks in her life, but the relationship of Liang and Cheetah also illustrates Liang’s linguistic dominance, just like that of Jane over Tarzan. As an older Chinese immigrant, Wong Suk speaks little English and communicates with Liang in Toisanese, a dialect in the Guangdong Province in China. Wong Suk has trouble understanding the meaning of “Beauty and the Beast,” but Liang knows both the words and the story from school (Choy 45). To help with Wong Suk’s English and also to create intimacy in their relationship, Liang uses “Chinglish,” the mix of Chinese and English, for their private conversations. Choy writes, “I wanted to hear him speak Chinglish—the mix of Chinese and

English we threw together for our own secret talks. I used Chinglish to tell him all the movie stories we ever saw” (63). “Chinglish” suggests not just the combination of the English and Chinese languages but also Liang’s ability to create a new language that binds Liang and Wong Suk in the fantasy world of the films.

Jane and Tarzan’s language exchange in *Tarzan the Ape Man* is widely discussed because of its rich implications. Observe this famous scene below:<sup>10</sup>

JANE: Thank you. Thank you for protecting me.

TARZAN: Me?

JANE: I said, thank you for protecting *me*.

TARZAN: (Pointing at her.) Me?

JANE: No! I’m only *me*, for *me*.

TARZAN: (Pointing at Jane again.) Me?

JANE: No. To you, I’m *you*.

TARZAN: (Pointing at himself.) You.<sup>11</sup>

In the dialogue, although it appears to be Tarzan who is re-establishing his identity, it is Jane’s “*me*” and “*you*” that are emphasized throughout the verbal exchange. Tarzan’s identity is also constructed upon the imaginative and linguistic transference of Jane, who acts as the signifier of this naming process—Tarzan must become Jane first to be Tarzan. Creed is correct that the popular phrase “Me Tarzan, You Jane” from the film can be misleading because Tarzan is presumably the subject of the sentence whereas Jane is projected as the object. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>10</sup> The pictures of this famous scene can be found at <http://retrogasm.tumblr.com/post/2949353971/me-tarzan-you-jane> and <http://michagalor.blogspot.ca/2012/02/part-7-me-tarzan-you-jane.html>.

<sup>11</sup> The words are transcribed from the video retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxSzcWLlhiQ>.



subject-object relationship is reversed because the names of Jane and Tarzan become interchangeable in the dialogue. *You* can easily be *me* and *Tarzan* can be *Jane*. This *you-me* and *Jane-Tarzan* relationship further implies the subversion of the traditional gender roles and the male-oriented language in Hollywood film industry—“Jane is not ‘spoken,’ she ‘speaks’” (Creed 166). This famous scene ends with Tarzan repetitively pointing at him and Jane and chanting “Tarzan, Jane, Tarzan, Jane” several times. Jane finally yells at Tarzan, “Please stop. Let me go. I can’t stand it.” Of course Jane cannot put up with Tarzan’s endless and senseless chanting because it is Jane who reconfigures her gender identity through the naming process and who very much wants to dominate Tarzan. The phrase “Me Tarzan, You Jane” therefore can be easily revised as “You Jane, Me Tarzan” or “Me Jane, You Tarzan” because of the interchangeable names and Jane’s desire for dominance in the relationship.<sup>12</sup>

Tarzan and Jane’s verbal exchange is similarly executed in Liang’s narrative. After Liang carefully observes Wong Suk’s monkey-like face, she tugs his large ears towards her and says, “‘You Tarzan Monkey,’ [ . . . ] ‘You Cheetah...’” (Choy 28). What makes the relationship between Liang and Wong Suk different from that of Tarzan and Jane is not only the identification of Wong Suk as “Tarzan Monkey” or “Cheetah” rather than Tarzan, but also the absence of “Me Jane” in this naming process. The phrase “You Tarzan Monkey” or “Cheetah” reinforces Liang’s strong desire for possession and domination. The absence of the phrase “Me Jane” suggests more than just Liang’s abomination of Jane’s gender role but her hidden or prohibited desire to identify herself with Tarzan. In Liang’s case, the phrase thus should be “*Me*

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<sup>12</sup> The role reversal of Jane and Tarzan has been widely studied among critics. I am especially indebted to Barbara Creed’s insightful analysis of the scene’s gender issues. See pp. 165-168 and 172-173 in her “Me Jane: You Tarzan!—A Case of Mistaken Identity in Paradise.”

*Tarzan. You Tarzan's Monkey. You Cheetah.*” However, after Liang fearlessly yells ““*Gene-goh Mau-lauh Bak!*”” or a “*for-real Monkey Man*” in English (28), the response she receives from Wong Suk is not “Me Cheetah” but his repetitive half-whisper, “*M-pai... m-pai... [. . .] Not afraid... you not afraid... m-pai...?*” (29). Wong Suk’s chanting “*m-pai not afraid m-pai not afraid*” resonates the “*Tarzan Jane*” in *Tarzan the Ape Man*. Very literally, the repetition of the phrase “*m-pai*” in Chinese or “*not afraid*” in English is a *double reassurance* of the binding of Liang and Wong Suk’s relationship. “*M-pai... not afraid?*” is also Wong’s Suk’s hesitation or his response in the form of a question to Liang’s strong sexual and domestic desire: “Are you *not afraid* of the consequences of our unusual relationship?” The scene ends with Wong Suk and Liang holding each other tightly, signifying the union of “*you-me*” and the justification of their gender and age difference. Choy writes, “It seemed he could not stop his chanting nor his heart’s rapid beat, nor could he let go his hold on me. I only knew to hold him tighter, lean into him like a cat, a tiger, catching the herbal scent of his body. The air felt hot” (29-30). The description of Liang and Wong Suk holding each other is full of sexual implications. Wong Suk’s chanting suggests his ceaseless questioning about the legitimacy of their relationship, whereas the change from a cat to a tiger points to Liang’s increasing desire for domination. The “hot air,” furthermore, indicates the anxiety of Liang and Wong Suk’s physical and sexual attraction. What can be said about Liang’s mimicry of Tarzan/Jane and her identification of Wong Suk as Cheetah is her sexual awareness and her disavowal of gender construction by society. The “unusual” relationship between Liang and Wong Suk, nonetheless, becomes more complex because of Liang’s mimicry of Marian in *Robin Hood*.

### **Liang and Marian**

Robin Hood is a legendary hero originated in English ballads in the fifteenth century. The version that people are most familiar with features Robin Hood as the heroic figure who robs the rich and helps the poor, and who defeats Prince John to help King Richard regain his power. Noted for his green suit and excellence in archery, Robin Hood lives in the Sherwood Forest with his fellow outlaws or the band of “Merry Men.” Maid Marian is often depicted as a vulnerable woman whose ultimate role is to be rescued and wedded by Robin Hood in the end, but this image, again, is reappropriated because of Liang’s mimicry.

Robin Hood gains its popularity amongst writers and film directors because of his egalitarian and anti-authoritarian appeal, and constructions of Robin Hood as a heroic figure, according to Dudley Jones in “Reconstructing Robin Hood,” reflect contemporary historical problems and cultural values (112). Considering the historical background of *The Jade Peony*, Allan Dwan’s *Robin Hood* (1922) may be the film that matches Liang’s reference in the narrative.<sup>13</sup> This classic silent film begins with Robin Hood (then Earl of Huntingdon) winning the joust and receiving the reward from King Richard. Upon learning that the “victor’s crown” is to be awarded by Maid Marian, Robin Hood wryly says to King Richard, “Exempt me, sire. I am afraid of women.”<sup>14</sup> Robin Hood tumbles backwards on the podium after receiving the crown, and jumps into a creek to avoid numerous women King Richard sends to congratulate his victory. The film ends with Robin Hood marrying Marian after helping King Richard regain his

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<sup>13</sup> Because the Lux theatre played double features or older movies, Allan Dwan’s *Robin Hood* (1922) and Michael Curtiz and William Keighley’s *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) may come closest to Liang’s Robin Hood movie reference in the narrative. I choose Allan Dwan’s *Robin Hood* (1922) for my analysis of Liang’s mimicry because it is arguably the first major Robin Hood film that examines issues of gender and sexuality closely. This view is also shared by Lorraine Stock and Candace Gregory-Abbott in their essay titled “The ‘Other’ Women of Sherwood: The Construction of Difference and Gender in Cinematic Treatments of the Robin Hood Legend.”

<sup>14</sup> The quotations and pictures from Allan Dwan’s *Robin Hood* in this essay are transcribed and captured from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x73nPX-06X8>.

kingdom once again. Often referred to as the Jazz Age, the 1920s saw the U.S. enjoy the economic prosperity before the Great Depression in 1929. Women had more work opportunities after WWI and were allowed to vote because of the passage of the nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Dwan's film obviously raises questions about sexuality and gender construction, and Robin Hood's "robbing the rich and relieving the poor" reflects the general public's sentiment towards the distribution of wealth in America.

Dwan's interest in issues of sexuality can be best examined in Robin Hood's interaction with King Richard, his squire, and Marian in the film. Robin Hood's fear of women sparks curiosity of King Richard, who asks, "Why hast thou not a maid?" Robin Hood dodges the question and walks to the top of the castle. He accidentally (or ineluctably) saves Marian from Prince John's harassment. The two pictures below illustrate the complexity of gender issues in

*Robin Hood:*



Although appearing feminine and marginal throughout the film, Marian is never passive in her relationship with Robin Hood. The picture on the left demonstrates that it is Marian who draws an image of Robin Hood and defines his manhood. The Crusade justifies Robin Hood's escape

from the idealized masculine image and Marian's active love persuasion. Marian's admiration for Robin Hood is clearly demonstrated in the second picture, but ironically the person whom Marian falls in love with is not Robin Hood but only an empty image that she creates. The ambiguous close relationship between Robin Hood and his squire is also highlighted when Robin informs him of his departure for the Crusade. Observe the two pictures below:



In the picture on the left, Robin Hood says to his squire: “I leave in your keeping my dearest treasure. Guard her [Marian] with your life.” After hearing the news about his master's departure, the squire lowers his head in disappointment as shown in the next picture. Robin Hood's thoughtful gaze with both hands clenching the squire almost appears to be a farewell bidden between two lovers. The squire's brief and awkward silence suggests not just the couple's homosocial intimacy but his unspeakable confusion about guarding Robin Hood's “dearest treasure.”

Fleeing from what Lorraine Stock and Candace Gregory-Abbott call the “fearsome women” who represent an alternative world in which men are never comfortable with (200), Robin Hood is most joyous in the Sherwood Forest with his band of merry men. The forest symbolizes the homosocial space in which Robin Hood takes his oath to help King Richard and

overthrow Prince John's tyranny. Here emerges Robin Hood as an outlaw and a trickster figure that disrupts the social order and robs the rich to help the poor. The film eventually ends with the marriage of Marian and Robin Hood, suggestive of the fulfillment of Robin's social gender obligations, but the ending is again full of sexual ambiguities:



On their wedding night, Robin Hood kneels down and is embraced by Marian. Their kiss is interrupted by King Richard's persistent knocking on the thick door, suggesting his desire to capture the "pre-Marian homosocial/homoerotic alliance." In addition to "a mother with [a] child at her knee" (Stock and Gregory-Abbott 201), I think what is also represented here is the feminization of Robin Hood who abdicates his gender role as a symbolic compromise of his sexuality. The irony of their marriage also lies in the function of the gigantic chamber, a sexualized space where Marian and Robin Hood's consummation never occurs. The King's repetitive pounding on the door is indeed a desperate reminder of Robin Hood's pre-Marian state, but his denied entry into the chamber, nevertheless, symbolizes his unsuccessful opposition to Robin's subservience to Marian and the rise of women's dominance in the 1920s. If Robin Hood films reflect particular social issues according to Jones, Dwan's adaptation perhaps is a

manifestation of the social anxiety towards women's political sovereignty and the crisis of masculinity in America.

In *The Jade Peony*, Liang makes numerous references to Robin Hood and calls Wong Suk the "bandit-prince" and her the "bandit-princess" throughout the narrative. Like Robin Hood, Wong Suk's sexuality is thematized and is a popular topic among the "*mahjong* ladies":

Stepmother and her friends sat around the *mahjong* table, slapping down the playing cubes, and giggled and wondered aloud about Wong Suk's *penis*. [. . .]

Half-nodding in my practiced faked sleep, I got to hear most everything

Stepmother and her friends shared:

"How long his penis, you think?"

"Like my old man's—long enough to have babies—"

"—and too damn short to have fun!" (Choy 59)

The gossip about the size of Wong Suk's penis presents the ubiquitous sexual stereotype about Asian North American men. In David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, the refusal of the white diplomat to see the penis of Song, a Chinese opera singer who cross-dresses as a woman, suggests a form of "racial castration" (3) according to David Eng. The term racial castration articulates the fetishization of Asian American men as the racial and sexual "other," normalized in different forms of representation to legitimize the false vision about the political and national body of the East. Through racial castration, argues Eng, "an Oriental 'could never be completely a man'" (2). Similarly, the "monkey-like" face and "half-functional" penis characterize Wong Suk as a racially castrated Chinese man whose subjectivity is defined by only his racial and sexual difference and who remains silent in the centre of the *mahjong* ladies' gossip. Like many of the early Chinese immigrants, Wong Suk remains unmarried throughout his life because of the

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923, which terminated Chinese immigration and prevented women from arriving. Choy carefully notes this part of history:

Poverty-stricken bachelor-men were left alone in Gold Mountain, with only a few dollars left to send back to China every month, and never enough dollars to buy passage home. Dozens went mad; many killed themselves. [. . .] In the city dump on False Creek Flats, living in makeshift huts, thirty-two old China bachelor-men tried to shelter themselves; dozens more were dying of neglect in the overcrowded rooms of Pender Street. (17)

Being racially castrated, Wong Suk represents the history of the early Chinese immigrants who are stripped of any physical or social connections. Chinese bachelor communities, according to Eng, can be interpreted as queer spaces that are “institutionally barred from normative (hetero)sexual reproduction, nuclear family formations, entitlements to community” (18).

Vancouver’s Chinatown constitutes a unique ethnic enclave institutionalized by the Chinese Exclusion Act, and represents a queer space in which Wong Suk and other Chinese bachelor-men are socially and economically internalized.

In the novel, Wong Suk’s only other close connection besides Liang is with Roy Johnson, his superior during the railroad construction. In Liang’s imagination, Wong Suk’s cape is evidence of her bandit-prince. Wong Suk inherits the cape from Johnson, his “Number Two Boss Man,” who is over six feet tall and “a *dai huhng-moh gui*” (“a giant red-haired demon”) (Choy 52), during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railroad in 1885. The image of Johnson establishes the racial and economic predominance, although it is Wong Suk who saves drunken Johnson from a robbery by “[knowing] enough to keep the half-conscious Johnson walking, back and forth, back and forth, happily slapping Number Two Boss Man, until his blood circulated



again and pain snapped him awake. The Boss Man never forgot” (54). Like Robin Hood, Wong Suk plays the trickster figure that “happily” slaps his boss, whereas walking “back and forth, back and forth” suggests their unstable and temporal homosocial intimacy. The cape, therefore, is a memento of the cross racial relationship between him and Johnson and his life experience with his fellow Chinese railroad workers. For Liang, the cape is “simply always a part of him, like his two arms and two crooked legs” (51) and it transforms Wong Suk into Robin Hood by masking his racial and physical difference. The cape, however, articulates more sexual, racial, and colonial implications because of Liang’s mimicry.

Choy writes,

I always leaned against [the cape’s] thick warmth and begged Wong Suk to let me drape it over my shoulders, to let me fly about, become Robin Hood’s bandit-princess, turning rapidly around and around in the imaginary forest of our backyard, the cape lifting, like wings, lifting above the earth. And the Monkey King would roar with laughter, clap-clap his two canes in a drumbeat; I was dizzy with pleasure. We would not stop until the neighbours loudly slammed their doors against such invading, clapping, joyful madness. (55)

Leaning against the cape suggests Liang’s desire for disguise and transformation. In Liang’s imaginative world, the cape magically transforms Wong Suk and Liang into Robin Hood and Marian respectively. The cape thus manifests Liang’s gender awareness and her desire for cross dressing, for she can easily become both by wearing the same costume. In this sense, the cape operates as a floating signifier, articulating the polarization of gender signification and the transcendence of Liang’s sexual difference. The cape furthermore creates a temporal space and reconstructs her backyard as the Sherwood Forest. In Dwan’s *Robin Hood*, the Sherwood Forest

is where Earl of Huntingdon becomes Robin Hood and resists any form of authority. Situated in the narrative, the reference suggests the symbolic transformation of Liang's home into the Sherwood Forest, which points to the history of Chinatown as a socially, politically, and economically isolated space, where Chinese bachelor-men, like Robin Hood and his band of merry men, are the outlaws prohibited from traveling and denied re-entry to Canada because of the Chinese Exclusion Act. The juxtaposition of the Sherwood Forest, moreover, suggests Liang's reappropriation of the English folklore and the reconfiguration of her backyard as a counter space, which annihilates the colonial reality in Chinatown with Liang and Wong Suk's uncompromising mimicry.

What is still lacking in my discussion is the material aspect of Liang's reference to Robin Hood. It is arguable that Wong Suk, like Robin Hood who robs the rich to help the poor, sends the railroad construction wages back to improve the living conditions in China. The dissemination of the money represents not only the denationalization of Canada as a holistic and independent nation but also the inseparable economic ties between China and Canada. In Liang's imagination, it is Wong Suk's generosity that provokes her Robin Hood association: "Wong Suk liked to irritate Grandmother, and when he succeeded, he always winked at me. [. . .] Wong Suk had promised me the ribbons many weeks ago, and my bandit-prince would never fail me; just as our hero bandit, Robin Hood, would never fail Marian, his fair maiden" (Choy 33). Wong Suk, of course, does not rob the rich in this passage, but he disrupts the authority of Poh-Poh and brings Liang expensive gifts. Liang's mimicry, therefore, manifests her material desire besides the historical and colonial significances I have discussed earlier. In the light of Dwan's *Robin Hood*, we can further argue that Liang's mimicry of Marian suggests her fascination about marriage and the ambiguous relationship with Wong Suk because of the homosocial

implications. Realizing the impossibility of her marrying as a six-year-old, Liang transcends her love for Wong Suk to a father-and-daughter relationship by mimicking Shirley Temple and becoming his favorite “princess.”

### **Liang and Shirley Temple**

Born in 1928, Shirley Temple starred in more than two dozens of films in the 30s and 40s that established her fame as America’s most beloved child. In an era when adult sexuality was forbidden on screen, Ara Osterweil asserts that Temple’s body was constructed as “an intensely erotic spectacle” (1) that projected adults’ obsession with child pornography and pedophilic gaze. Indeed, Temple lured her audience with her blonde curly hair and erotic costumes that satisfied the male fantasy of a woman’s body. By examining *The Little Colonel* (1935) and *The Littlest Rebel* (1936), Osterweil convincingly argues that the Temple films surreptitiously perpetuate racial ideologies in the US by romanticizing the relationship between Temple’s character and her black servant Bill “Bojangles” Robinson.<sup>15</sup> In contrast with Osterweil’s focus on race issues in Temple’s films, I will discuss the sexual and material implications in *Bright Eyes* (1934), which inspired the creation of Liang’s character revealed by Choy in a Canada Reads 2010 interview.<sup>16</sup>

Directed by David Butler, *Bright Eyes* starts with Temple playing Shirley Blake, a half orphaned child hitchhiking alone to meet her aviator godfather Loop Merritt at the airport.

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<sup>15</sup> Osterweil argues that the famous “Stair Dance” scene from *The Little Colonel* indicates the interracial desire with Temple learning black forms of dancing and Robinson showing her ““a brand new way to go upstairs”” (23).

<sup>16</sup> In the interview, Choy revealed that Temple’s renowned song “On the Good Ship Lollipop” in *Bright Eyes* was playing when he created Jook-Liang’s character. Choy may have modeled Wong Suk’s character after Uncle Ned Smith who appears as a handicapped person on a wheelchair throughout the film. Unfortunately, the interview was removed by CBC’s website, but Choy provided a list of songs from the period *The Jade Peony* covers on the publisher’s website. Temple’s song topped the list. For more information, visit <http://www.dmpibooks.com/event/197>.

Twenty minutes into the film, Shirley yet loses her mother in a tragic car accident. Old, wealthy, but crotchety Uncle Ned Smith, for whose family Shirley's mother works as a maid, joins Loop in a lawsuit to fight for Shirley's custody. The film ends with a happy resolution that Loop, his fiancée, and Uncle Ned all decide to live together with Shirley. Ubiquitous in other Shirley Temple films, the theme of Temple being a "little sexual object" is reinforced by her mother in the beginning: "She is sort of a pet" among the aviators. From Temple's choice of cars to hitchhike to the numerous gifts she receives from various men, the film faithfully represents the rising material desire during the Great Depression. Temple's "On the Good Ship Lollipop" performance, which Liang mimics in *The Jade Peony*, illustrates the overlapping of men's pedophilic sexual gaze and Temple's material desire. Observe the pictures below:<sup>17</sup>



The picture on the left shows Temple happily singing in front of the aviators on the "ship," a term often used to refer to an airplane in early twentieth century. In the other picture, Temple receives gifts from the aviators after revealing her wish to become a pilot by singing her tune: "On the good ship, lollipop / it's a sweet trip / to the candy shop / where bonbons play, / on the

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<sup>17</sup> The pictures are captured from *Bright Eyes* at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2cofIBTIWM>.

sunny beach of peppermint bay.” This troubling scene is comprised of Temple’s performance in a confined and predominantly masculine space, where the “sweet trip to the candy shop” is eroticized by her interaction with a dozen men. Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” argues that the cinema offers scopophilic pleasures, that is, “taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (713). The cinema provides a personal space in which the audience becomes the Peeping Tom who enjoys sexual (in Freudian terms) satisfaction from watching the other in a controlling manner. The film, in addition, gives “the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world” and “the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on to the performer” (Mulvey 714). What we have in the scene, however, is the privatization of Temple by the aviators who perform the role of cinematic spectators and actualize the pedophilic desire of the Peeping Toms in front of the screen. The aviators are the imaginary agents who fill in the spectators’ absence in the film, and endorse the legitimacy of male gaze upon a female body. The spectators’ position in objectifying Temple is not one of repression of their exhibitionism but of liberation through the aviators’ perverse interaction with Temple. In other words, the scene suggests *the gaze upon gaze*—the affiliation of the aviators and the spectators, whose perspectives coincide with each other to fulfill the male phantasy of Temple’s body.

Temple’s sexual image is often codified by what Graham Greene calls “her well-shaped and desirable little body, packed with enormous innocence” (234) in a review of *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), but in the Lollipop scene, the objectification of Temple is even more thought-provoking:



Temple is uplifted like a doll and passed on to one another among the aviators. The aviators' perverse admiration is accompanied by Temple singing the second part of the "Lollipop" song: "On the good ship, lollipop / It's a nice trip / into bed you hop / and dream away / on the good ship, lollipop." The scene highlights the complete objectification and sexualization of Temple's body, whereas the aviators' chorus at the end of the song, "a nice trip into bed you hop," can be taken to imply their sexual intercourse with Temple. The last picture shows Temple with a "tummy ache," sitting on Loop's lap and rubbing her stomach after eating too much "big bad devil's food cake." Once again, the over-consumption of the cake is sexually suggestive and her mournful expression is her silent response to the inconceivable social and ideological domination. The song ends dramatically with only the aviators' chorus, signifying the total domination of Temple and the vindication of the male gaze disguised as a gesture of fond admiration for Temple's not-so-innocent performance.

Temple, on the other hand, enjoys the materialistic and sexual attention, playing the traditional exhibitionist role of women who are fondled 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*" (Mulvey 715). On the screen, Temple is constructed as a "less problematic romantic

partner than her adult female counterparts” and manufactured by the Hollywood industry to disavow the threat of “mature female sexuality” (Osterweil 2). Temple’s orphan roles in *Bright Eyes* and many other films<sup>18</sup> conveniently rationalize the pedophilic gaze and the adult-and-child love relationship. In a separate scene, Temple escapes from the Smythes who Uncle Ned lives with and sneaks into Loop’s airplane on a stormy night. What surprises Loop is not just Temple’s sudden appearance on the plane but her wearing the “magic ring”:

Temple: Don’t be mad, Loop.

Loop: This is the first time in my life that I feel like spanking you.

[. . .]

Temple: I want to be with you, Loop.

[Radio announcement]

Loop: You know we are really in trouble.

Temple: Loop, you are not awful mad at me, are you?

Loop: Yes, I am very mad at you. But, I guess I won’t be very long.

(Temple throws her arms around Loop and kisses him on his cheek.)

The airplane is consistently portrayed as a sexualized space whereas the tempestuous weather signifies their passionate affection. Their supposed marriage is validated by the “magic ring,” which, Loop reveals earlier in the film, has powers like those in fairy tales and it is to be used “whenever you are in trouble or whenever you want me to do anything for you.” Loop is clearly aware of his repressed pedophilic desire, but he eventually surrenders himself to Temple’s

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<sup>18</sup> Temple plays an orphan or a father- or mother-less child in many of her films besides *Bright Eyes*, including *The Littlest Rebel* (1935), *Curly Top* (1935), *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1936), *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), *Heidi* (1937), *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1938), *The Little Princess* (1939), and many others.

irresistible charm or the “Temple trouble.” Temple sings the Lollipop song thoughtfully again at Loop’s request before they abandon their aircraft. The dramatic parachuting connotes the fall and the precarious state of their forbidden love. Following their landing, the film abruptly ends with a court scene in which the judge adorably holds Temple on his lap, ruling a joint custody of Uncle Ned and Loop. The court’s decision suggests the ironic legalization of the unlawful relationship and the authorization of pedophilic fantasies. In *Bright Eyes*, Temple, perhaps to begin with, never simply wants to become a “Daddy’s girl” but to subjugate men with her power of innocence that reflects the repressed sexual desires in 1930s America.

Liang’s mimicry of Temple first occurs as a response to Poh-Poh’s punitive remarks. Liang protests that she is not “*mo yung*” and puts on her tap shoes to feel “light as air, in control again.” Choy writes:

“Looks nice,” I said slowly, in English, catching a glimpse of myself in the hall mirror. The grey morning light softened everything into half-shadows. Poh-Poh refused to look at me. I took my favourite pose, the one Shirley Temple does with her tiny hands tucked under her chin; you know, bright eyed—*My goodness!*—just before all the grownups praise her for a song well sung and dance well danced. I could hardly wait for Wong Suk. (36)

The song, dance, Liang’s favourite pose of Temple and the “bright eyed” expression are direct references to *Bright Eyes*.<sup>19</sup> Like Robin Hood’s cape, the tap shoes are important costumes for Liang’s imaginative transformation, and the anticipation of Wong Suk reveals Liang’s desire for appreciation. The purpose of Liang’s mimicry also lies in her resistance to Poh-Poh’s authority

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<sup>19</sup> The original film poster shows Temple’s propping up her chin with both hands. The poster can be found at <http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/shirley-temple/images/6081364/title/bright-eyes-poster-fanart>.



as an attempt at regaining control of her cultural identity. Liang's mimicry at this stage is a form of empowerment, for the reflection that she has a glimpse of is her preferred and idealized image of Temple. The "grey morning light" and "half-shadows" denote the low visibility that prevents Liang from recognizing her self-image in the mirror, whereas Poh-Poh's reluctance to see Liang suggests her disapproval of the Hollywood fantasies.

The mirror, as aforementioned, is an important metaphor of the screen and central to my discussion of Liang's mimicry. The passage below exemplifies the oscillating conflicts of Liang's identity development process when she mimics Temple in front of her imaginary audience:

*I'm not ugly, I thought to myself, I'm not useless. [ . . . ] Suddenly, the light from the window brightened and poured over the crib; the sitting room and hallway became brilliant, full of sun. My heart almost burst with expectation. I looked again into the hall mirror, seeking Shirley Temple with her dimpled smile and perfect white-skin features. Bluntly reflected back at me was a broad sallow moon with slit dark eyes, topped by a helmet of black hair. I looked down. Jutting out from a too-large taffeta dress were two spindly legs matched by a pair of bony arms. Something cold clutched at my stomach, made me swallow. [ . . . ] I thought of old Wong Suk leaning on his two canes. And I danced. (Choy 43)*

In the light of Plato's cave, the sun continues to be a metaphor of the truth, and Liang's mirrored image represents the shadows of the puppetry. Liang's anticipated image and the mirrored reflection reformulate the existing dichotomy of the truth and the image derived from the allegory. On the one hand, Liang is searching for the idealized image of herself *as* Temple in the mirror. This is a prescribed image informed by the Hollywood culture that systematically and

persistently portrays Temple as a perfectly desirable girl-child. Because of the influence of Hollywood culture, Liang wishes to see Temple rather than herself in the mirror. In this sense, the mirror, like a movie screen, projects Liang's imaginary image of Temple, contrived as the ideological absolute, and substitutes Liang's own image. On the other hand, the mirror bluntly reflects the "truth" (as opposed to the sun) back to Liang. The result of Liang's mimicry is an ironic and partial resemblance of Temple—a broken image, "not quite/not white" (Bhabha 131). Bhabha's theory is certainly helpful here, for Liang's mimicry strikes an indeterminacy that disavows the authority of the Hollywood culture. Mimicry, as Bhabha reminds us, is "a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" (121). Liang's mimicry is her way of empowering herself by appropriating Temple's image and reforming her self-identity. It is a strategy to oppose Poh-Poh's cultural oppression so she is no longer "ugly" or "useless." Liang's mimicry is a double disarticulation of her Chinese and Canadian cultures, a counter discourse that emerges as a representation of her cultural difference and "poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (Bhabha 123).

What makes this passage so troubling is the discrepancy between Liang's anticipated image and the reflection in the mirror. Because the mirror registers a prior image of Temple, Liang's identity can be understood from the interaction between I (Liang) and the Ideal-I (Temple) or what Mulvey terms narcissism and scopophilia in film studies. Scopophilia, as I have discussed previously, refers to the act of peeping or active watching. The pleasure comes from the subject's use of another person as "an object of sexual stimulation through sight" (Mulvey 715). Liang's active searching for Temple in the mirror demonstrates her scopophilic desire or her attempt at subjecting her idealized image of Temple to a controlling gaze.

Narcissism describes the subject's identification of the ego with the image seen through his or her fascination with and recognition of the Other. Narcissism demands the subject's identification with the image whereas scopophilia implies the separation of the subject from the object on the screen. These two distinctive drives, according to Mulvey, are contradictory and interactive with each other. Scopophilia and narcissism "have no signification," and "they have to be attached to an idealization. Both pursue aims in indifference to perceptual reality, creating the imagised, eroticized concept of the world that forms the perception of the subject and makes a mockery of empirical objectivity" (Mulvey 715). The two psychological drives adequately criticize the interaction of Liang's idealized image and self-image. The pleasures of scopophilia and narcissism come from Liang's indifference to perceptual reality, which open up a space for negotiation within the colonial discourse. Whether it is scopophilia or narcissism, the fundamental motive of Liang's mimicry is to be accepted, to be adored, to be loved, or what Bhabha calls "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other" (122). The "too-large taffeta dress," "slit dark eyes," "spindly legs," and "bony arms"—almost the same but not quite—are the ironic partial resemblance that manifests the rearticulation of Liang's conflicting Chinese and Canadian cultural identities. The "clutching" of Liang's stomach and swallowing certainly signify her psychological revolt against the disturbing mirrored image, but they are also reminiscent of Temple's tummy ache in the "On the Good Ship Lollipop" song. Liang's re-enactment of Temple's Lollipop performance implies the desire to be "coddled" and "stroked" (Osterweil 4) by adult men. Mimicking Temple is Liang's only way to be appreciated and to become "Daddy's girl" in her mind for Wong Suk.

Liang's desire to become Temple is so strong that she fantasizes their friendship. This memorable scene in Liang's narrative demonstrates Choy's masterful skill in storytelling:

I started to daydream about my friendship with Shirley Temple. It was a fact we were both nine years old. If we'd had a chance to meet, it was a fact she would have been my best friend. Besides, Wong Suk, I mean. Of course, just as I got into sharing a double banana split with Shirley (and she was just about to tell me how pretty I looked), Poh-Poh's sharp voice intruded. (46-47)

For Freud, daydreaming is an important imaginative activity that conveys “the fulfillment of a wish” or “a correction of unsatisfying reality” (439). Daydreams reflect a repressed desire that must be concealed because it is deemed socially or culturally impermissible. In the passage, Liang constructs a world of phantasy separated from Vancouver Chinatown's colonial reality to resist Poh-Poh's cultural oppression. To justify the idealized image of Temple, Liang first seeks their connection by affirming their age similarity. The “double banana split” that they share is a powerful image and indicative of several meanings. Although commonly used to describe a North American Chinese (“yellow” outside and “white” inside), the banana is now “split,” insinuating not just Liang's split identity, but also the desire to break away from being a Chinese Canadian. The “double” portion implies Liang's “friendly” gesture to share with Temple or to appear as Temple's “double.” Conversely, Liang's desire to have Temple consume the banana split also suggests her intention of totalizing Temple, domesticating her foreignness, and reproducing her in Liang's image as a result of their imagined friendship. If mimicry is a counter-hegemonic discourse according to Bhabha, the “double banana split” is a *double* counter-hegemonic discourse. It is Jook-Liang's renunciation of both Chinese and Canadian cultural dominance: neither Chinese nor Canadian, and almost white but not quite. Liang's unrealized daydream implies her turbulent and unconscious desire to revoke any cultural hegemony. Considering Freud's theory of dreams, Slavoj Žižek notes, “what appears in the guise

of dreaming, or even daydreaming, is sometimes the truth on whose repression social reality itself is founded. Therein resides the ultimate lesson of *The Interpretation of Dreams*: reality is for those who cannot sustain the dream” (“Freud” 32). Poh-Poh’s sharp voice is more than an interruption to Liang’s Hollywood daydreams. The “braised chicken feet and cut-up sausage meat” (47) that Poh-Poh asks Liang to eat represent the introjections of Liang’s Chinese heritage and her refutation of Western culture as the constitution of reality in Vancouver’s Chinatown.<sup>20</sup>

### **Liang’s mimicry and Hollywood fantasies**

From Tarzan/Jane, Robin Hood and Marian, to Shirley Temple, Liang’s mimicry symbolizes her evolving sexual identity and gender construction. In her “perfect make-believe world before Wong Suk,” her “old guardian” and “adopted uncle,” Liang can become his daughter “Shirley Temple princess” (Choy 38) or his wife and “fair maiden” (33) Marian. In the context of *Tarzan the Ape Man*, *Robin Hood*, and *Bright Eyes*, these Hollywood references implicitly (or explicitly) convey Liang’s shifting imaginative roles in her relationship with Wong Suk. Inasmuch as the age difference and Wong Suk’s homosocial connections, what Liang pursues is perhaps a spiritual union in which she becomes a wife and a daughter without violating her chastity. Liang’s performance of these different roles further illustrates her exploration of sexuality and issues of gender politics. Judith Butler in *Undoing Gender* argues that gender is a repeated performance without one’s knowing or willing. Moreover, “it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint,” and “the terms that make up one’s own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author

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<sup>20</sup> The chicken feet and sausage meat are certainly symbolic of distinctive Chinese cultural heritage. Michelle Hartley provides an interesting reading of the food images in *The Jade Peony*. Her argument is that different responses to food illustrate the tensions between generations, cultures, and genders in Chinatown. See her studies in “Does Shirley Eat Chicken Feet? Consuming Ambivalence in Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony*.”

(and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself” (Butler 1). For Butler, gender is a construct that is socially and collectively determined. But as a performance, gender can be an act of contingency that incessantly resists any clear-cut categorization. Gender can also be a paradoxical concept because one acts according to prevailing social norms as a consequence of recognition, but contests to maintain a critical distance to them (Butler 3). Liang’s mimicry of the Hollywood figures attests to Butler’s theory of gender construction, for Liang can be Tarzan/Jane or Robin Hood/Marian in her imagination. The multiple gender roles switching in Liang’s mimicry symbolizes its transformative and transsexual performance that opposes gender legislation and the ceaseless reconstruction of her sexual identity.

As a process of depersonalization, Liang’s mimicry furthermore demonstrates her psychological loss and ambivalence towards her ironic image. Like the “*short’nin’...*” (38) in the tapdance song “Mama’s little baby loves short’nin’, short’nin,’” Liang’s identity is signified by the incapacity in her mimicry, which always articulates the mimetic failure in her “dreamer’s body.” Žižek’s psychoanalytic theory can be applied to illuminate the importance of fantasies and the psychological loss. Signified by the “\$,” fantasy “implies a crossed-out, blocked, barred, non-whole, inconsistent Other” and its purpose is to fill out “a void in the Other” (Žižek, *Sublime* 80). The Hollywood images compose Liang’s imaginary self, which exists “only on the basis of the misrecognition of its own conditions; it is the effect of this misrecognition” (Žižek, *Sublime* 73). In other words, the images provide the framework of Liang’s identity and the fantasies reflect her internal reconfigurations of the prescribed lack or loss, which suggests its need to be filled and reimagined. Žižek writes,

What, then, is fantasy? One should always bear in mind that the desire ‘realized’ (staged) in fantasy, phantasmatic formation, is an answer to the enigma of ‘Che

vuoi?' [What do you want?], which renders the subject's primordial, constitutive position. The original question of desire is not directly 'What do I want?' but 'What do *others* want from me? What do they see in me? What am I for the others?' ("I See You" 117)

Liang's Hollywood fantasies represent how she wants to be accepted, perceived, and assimilated. Her mimicry reappropriates the images she sees in the movie theatres and resists the colonial image and male gaze by performing the figures with her cultural and sexual difference. Perhaps only through becoming a Chinese Shirley Temple can Liang survive the cultural and ideological oppression in Vancouver's Chinatown.

## Chapter 4

### Cultural Translation as *Myth-Translation* in Laurence Yep's *The Traitor*

In the last few decades, we have witnessed a growing interest in the Chinese language and culture because of the rise of China's economy. Within the last few years, there has arisen a trend of people having Chinese tattoos. The most memorable instance was a student with the tattooed character “勇” which means bravery or courage in Chinese. The Chinese character, nevertheless, was missing a stroke in the word of the strength,<sup>21</sup> which can be taken as suggesting that the student's bravery was marked by insufficient strength. The translator withheld the message. Two things can be learned from this incident: the increasing popularity of Chinese characters practiced in tattoo industry and the danger of the misuse, or perhaps the mistranslation, of a language. Tattoo artists are not the only practitioners that incorporate the Chinese language in their work. The strong presence of cultural translation has always been noticeable in Chinese North American literary texts. Wayson Choy, for instance, included a Cantonese saying in his memoir *Paper Shadows* on its frontispiece: “三歲定八十” with the English translation “*At three, at eighty—the same.*” The translation, unsurprisingly, does not justify the saying as its meaning remains elusive. Let me offer a different translation of the proverb: one's character is determined at the age of three and it will remain the same even at the age of eighty. Choy's translation, in contrast, may seem more adequate because it mimics the word length of the Cantonese proverb, but some level of its meaning is accordingly sacrificed.<sup>22</sup> Because Choy

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<sup>21</sup> It was a clear error by the tattoo artist. Having Chinese tattoos is a growing fashion in North America. See more stories and examples from <http://hanzismatter.blogspot.ca/>.

<sup>22</sup> The word “定” is a verb, which means “to determine” in English. In Choy's translation, the absence of the verb, along with the subject, creates some confusion or ambiguity of the time, which may be intended for his work as a memoir.



chooses not to translate the Cantonese proverb explicitly, it is arguable that Choy, as a translator, appropriates and conceals its meaning for the purpose of his narration.

Similarly, Denise Chong in *The Concubine's Children* writes: "If there was one Chinese law of the universe, it was loyalty to *gee gay yun*, to one's own people" (21). In this example, "*gee gay yun*" represents "one's own people" in Cantonese. More precisely, "*gee gay yun*" is included in the English text with a translation "one's own people." This translation process may seem very straightforward as "one's own people" acts as the translation of "*gee gay yun*," but this observation ignores the significance of the Cantonese "original." In other words, the original is internalized or "absent" in the English text. I am adding the Chinese "自己人" as its "original" to further illustrate the complexity of this translation process:

自己人 → *gee gay yun* → one's own people

The Cantonese phrase "自己人" is transcribed into the English transliteration "*gee gay yun*" accompanied by the translation "one's own people." The inclusion of *gee gay yun* in the English text may lend credibility or authenticity to Chong's narration, whereas the English translation is evidence of her rendition of the Chinese linguistic heritage *into* the English culture. In the instances above and among many others, the Chinese language is either well preserved in the English text or transcribed into the English alphabet.<sup>23</sup> Whether the Chinese text is included in the narrative or not, the Chinese language is translated or transliterated in italics. This common device that Chinese North American writers use in their writing may have very visible use-functions. Conventionally, italics are used to add emphasis to the text, and can be further

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<sup>23</sup> Translation is frequently used in Chinese North American texts and examples can be found effortlessly. For instance, Judy Fong Bates writes, "*Nay sey gwei nah*, you dead ghost hag" (46) in her *Midnight at the Dragon Café*. In Frank Chin's *Donald Duk*, Donald Duk's father explains why some planes are burned because of God's will: "The mandate of heaven. *Tien ming*" (11).

interpreted as a defamiliarizing device to inform readers of the foreignness of the phrase. The latter interpretation, however, does not fully explain why Choy's translation of the Cantonese saying is in italics since the Chinese text alone appears *foreign* enough for English readers. We might easily conclude that italics represent a different language at work in English, or to put it more simply, italics are *a symbol of linguistic difference* that is normalized *within* a language. This device is so universal among writers that its significance is almost taken for granted. In this chapter, I argue that italics are more than a symbol of linguistic difference. They are a paralinguistic feature that manifests the irresolute moment during a translation process. This paralanguage both reveals and withholds a writer's intended meaning in translation. As Gayatri Spivak notes in her *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, all translations are mistranslations since meaning can never be fully grasped or totalized (162). In the case of Laurence Yep's novel *The Traitor*, my argument is that his translation is a *myth*-translation, an intentional mistranslation to uncover the history of Rock Springs Massacre in Wyoming. This myth creation must be accomplished through translation and inscribed in the English text. His use of italics not only exposes the limitation of language but also betrays the codification of both English and Chinese in different fonts. This *myth-mis-translation* is Yep's reconstruction of the incommensurable period in Chinese American history, the paralinguistic feature of which is also a challenge to both languages. In the analysis below, I will begin with an introduction to the features of translation in Yep's *The Traitor* followed by a review of some cultural translation theories, which I find useful to illustrate the significance of Yep's translation.

#### *The Traitor* and the History of the Rock Springs Massacre

Yep's *The Traitor* is set in Wyoming in 1885. The two narrators, Joseph Young and Michael Purdy, witness one of the worst race riots in American history—the Rock Springs

massacre, in which at least 25 bodies were found but the actual death toll is unknown (Yep 301). After the completion of transcontinental railroads, the government modified the Foreign Miners Act several times in the 1850s in hope that heavy taxation would prevent Chinese immigrants from working in the mines. The government further passed the Exclusion Act in 1882 to prohibit Chinese immigration to the States for ten years. Before the Rock Springs massacre, several anti-Chinese movements broke out in California and Idaho, in which over a hundred Chinese workers were murdered. The Rock Springs riot started with a dispute between the Chinese and American miners over who should work in the more desirable mines. The Chinese miners were severely beaten and the conflict became an overwhelming riot in town.<sup>24</sup> In Yep's retelling of the massacre, Joseph Young is a fictional character who has to deal with the prejudices from both of the older Chinese generation and the local Americans. Michael Purdy, on the other hand, is ostracized by his fellow Americans in town. The two characters, along with Joseph Young's father Otter, use their wisdom to escape from the massacre.

*The Traitor* is one of the ten novels in the *Golden Mountain Chronicles*,<sup>25</sup> documenting Chinese American history from 1835 to 2011. Each of the novels historicizes a particular event through the account of a member in the fictional Young family. In the "Afterword" of *The Traitor*, Yep shows his concern about the injustice of the Rock Springs trial: No one was prosecuted for the deaths of the Chinese workers because only "selected" witnesses were able to

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<sup>24</sup> I offered a detailed analysis of the historical background of the Rock Springs massacre in my MA thesis titled "An I-Ching Interpretation of Laurence Yep's *Golden Mountain Chronicles*." Please see pages 54-59 regarding the cause of the riot and its aftermath.

<sup>25</sup> The ten novels are *Dragons of Silk* (1835), *The Serpent's Children* (1849), *Mountain Light* (1855), *Dragon's Gate* (1867), *The Traitor* (1885), *Dragonwings* (1903), *Dragon Road* (1939), *Child of the Owl* (1965), *Sea Glass* (1970), and *Thief of Hearts* (1995). The original title for *Dragon Road* was *The Red Warrior*, but Yep modified it when the novel was published in 2008. *Dragons of Silk* came out in 2011, which is the latest work in the *Golden Mountain Chronicles*. It is notable that Yep's original plan was to include only nine novels in the *Chronicles* (*Traitor* 305-309), but his plan changed later in his career.

testify in court. Similarly, according to Judy Yung, Gordon Chang, and Him Mark Lai's historical studies, the riot broke out because the Knights of Labor (a mob of white men) attempted to eliminate Chinese competition for work and murdered twenty-eight Chinese workers while fifteen were injured during the massacre. Although Chinese minister Zheng Zaoru conducted an investigation of the riot and filed a detailed report to the Congress, none of the rioters were convicted. In the memorial dated September 18, 1885, Chinese Consul Huang Sih Chuen noted that both Chinese and white miners had worked together peacefully in "Whitemen's Town" (Yung, Chang, and Lai 50) or Rock Springs until their disagreement upon launching a strike if the Union Pacific Company rejected white workers' request for wage increase. Initially hired by the Company to break a strike and to replace white miners, the Chinese workers had no interest in cooperating with the white workers in their wage negotiation. The Chinese became the victims of the local workers' dissatisfaction towards the Company and the racial hatred was magnified during the massacre. Consul Huang's memorial recorded that the rioters, including males, females, and children, looted Chinatown and set fire to the buildings. Many Chinese were shot to death and some were burned alive in their houses (Yung, Chang, and Lai 52). In Yep's novel, the tragedy was even more graphic details, including a rioter Mabel dancing upon a Chinese worker's corpse like a ritual, which was based on an eyewitness's account.

As a historical novel, Yep's *The Traitor* inherits stylistic features of fiction and history. In fact, the historical novel is an ambitious literary form of two antagonistic literary genres, of the real and unreal, and of history and fantasy. Whether it is history fictionalized or fiction historicized, Yep's motive of writing *The Traitor* is highly political as he seeks to correct the wrongs in the official history or "to give voices to the ghosts from the past" (Yep, "True Heroes"

792). Yep's historical rewriting, of course, involves risks of appropriation and representation. Yep's ambivalence towards rewriting history is evident in the "Afterword" of *The Traitor*, which is almost like his confession of violating history. First, Yep admitted that he removed some gruesome details and changed the characters' names even though they were based on eyewitness accounts. Yep also carefully noted that at least 25 bodies were found after the massacre, but Yep's study contradicts the death toll of 28 in Consul Huang's memorial. One can defend Yep's decision to remove certain details as a way to protect his young adult readers from excessive violent scenes, but their elimination at the same time fails to represent the history truthfully. Similarly, Spivak in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" is concerned that the subject-constitution of the colonial Other is entirely imperialistic and such work of construction is a form of "epistemic violence" (90). Indeed, the articulation of the subaltern is almost always a reinforcement of the Western knowledge, and the essentialization of the Other is a displacement of the subject. As a result, the subaltern cannot speak because both the language and culture are prescribed to the subaltern by the West and their voice may be forever lost in the margin. Spivak reminds us that

In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual *systematically* 'unlearns' female privilege. This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized. ("Subaltern" 91)

In other words, postcolonial intellectuals must be aware of the limitations of their knowledge and represent the subaltern in a thoughtful and strategic way. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin interpret Spivak's concern accurately: "Her point is that no act of dissent or

resistance occurs on behalf of an essential subaltern subject entirely separate from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks” and “the dominant language or mode of representation is appropriated so that the marginal voice can be heard” (Key 201).

Rather than asking “Can the subaltern speak?” I think a more pertinent question regarding Yep’s representation is “How can the subaltern be heard?” Postcolonial intellectuals must diligently, and often painstakingly, re-appropriate the Western knowledge in order to achieve their purpose of representation. Robert Kroetsch in “Unhiding the Hidden” also identifies Canadian writers’ predicament as one of working with a language that appears culturally authentic and not a borrowing. The writers’ mode of representation, however, can be equally authentic and effective as “they uncreate themselves into existence” (396). In *The Traitor*, Yep is clearly aware of the impossibility of representing history, as well as of the necessity of providing justice to the victims during the Rock Springs massacre. With limited sources and documents, Yep must sacrifice a certain level of the truth in order to represent a holistic and authentic view of the Rock Springs incident. The historical fiction is his compromise of justifying the loss of the truth as the gain in *The Traitor*, for the two genres both contradict and complement each other in representing the horror of the incident. “Historical research,” recalled Yep in his process of writing *The Traitor*, “has always seemed like a treasure hunt to me” and his writing gives voice to one that has been lost or that has been deemed too insignificant by contemporary librarians and reporters (“Heroes” 792). Yep sees the urgency of representing Chinese American history, but how does Yep increase the credibility of his representation and, to borrow words from Kroetsch, uncreate himself into existence? Yep’s answer is through cultural translation.

## Cultural Translation in *The Golden Mountain Chronicles*

Instances of Yep's cultural translation in his *Golden Mountain Chronicles* are numerous. *Dragon's Gate* focalizes Otter's immigrant experience as a transcontinental railroad worker and Otter is compared to the fish in the Chinese folklore *yu yue long men* which undergoes transformation by leaping over the dragon's gate. In Yep's literary imagination, San Francisco is like the dragon's gate, through which many Chinese immigrants arrive and seek their success in America. In *The Serpent's Children*, Yep weaves another Chinese folklore, *Tale of the White Snake Madam* (bái shé chuán), into his representation of the 1840s China as well as the beginning of Chinese immigration to the US. Yep's *Dragons of Silk* retells the famous Chinese folklore of *The Cowboy and the Weaving Maid* (niúlángzhīnǚ) to illustrate the binding connections between China and America through the perspectives of four girls across a span of 75 years. In *Child of the Owl*, Yep alludes to a Cantonese story of the owl to demonstrate the common identity problem that Chinese Americans face when growing up. Yep's translation of the Chinese folktales is not just to reconfigure his Chinese heritage; the folktales, as a form of oral history, also strategically contest the official history of China and America by foregrounding the stories of common people. Although Yep does not retell a specific Chinese tale or legend in *The Traitor*, there are traces of Yep's cultural translation throughout the novel. First, the names of the Chinese characters, such as Otter, Squirrel, Spinner, Bull, White Deer, or Joseph's Chinese name Precious Light, are examples of Yep's direct translation from the Chinese language. Instead of transliterating the Chinese names (i.e. Shui-Ta for Otter or Song-Shu for Squirrel), Yep's purpose of literal translation is perhaps to make the Chinese names more accessible or easy to remember for his young readers. It is arguable that these animal names portray the animal-like experiences of the Chinese miners, but this interpretation does not apply to all of the

characters who bear animal names in Yep's other works.<sup>26</sup> A more appropriate interpretation may be that Yep follows the tradition of children's literature in which animal characters are commonly depicted with human qualities,<sup>27</sup> or the heroes, like animals, possess magic powers to overcome the hardships in their daily lives.

Dragon is another important symbol that appears persistently throughout the *Golden Mountain Chronicles*. In his essay "Dragons I Have Known and Loved," Yep shares his fascination about dragons and the influence of his grandmother who brought stories of dragons and magic creatures from China. Yep writes, "Dragons have not only been good to me as a writer, but also on a more personal level, they have given me my first insights into my identity as a Chinese American and then provided material for stories and the means to shape those stories" (390-391). For Yep, his growing up experience may be like a double-edged knife—"the knife that shapes us must also be the knife that cuts" (392), but the grandmother's Chinese folktales teach him how to always look for the positive in a dire situation. The dragon stories provide Yep guidance and on a semiotic level, the dragon symbol translates more than just his Chinese heritage but also the adaptation and survival of a Chinese immigrant in America. In *The Traitor*, after the long and frightening scene of the massacre, Yep still ends the novel on a hopeful note for his young audience. Now nicknamed "Dragon Man" rather than "Fish Man" (298) for his passing through the dragon's gate, Otter launches another journey with Joseph back to San Francisco. The dragon entails the perseverance of Otter during the harsh times and the

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<sup>26</sup> For instance, Squeaky Lau in *Mountain Light* struggles with the Manchu government and the internal conflicts in his village. Squeaky is depicted as a hero in his adventure and wins his lover's heart at the end of the novel.

<sup>27</sup> Yep's passion for telling animal stories is evident throughout his career. Here are some examples: *The Ghost Fox* (1997), *Angelfish* (2001), or *Tiger Magic: Tiger's Apprentice* (2006). It is notable that Yep playfully presents a Chinese version of *Little Red Riding Hood* in his *Auntie Tiger* (2008), which may be a spinoff of the Taiwanese folktale *Aunt Tigress*.



transformation from “fish” to “dragon” symbolizes the reinvention of his Chinese American identity.

Yep’s adaptation of the ancient Chinese classic, *I Ching* or the *Book of Changes*, is the most evident example of his cultural translation in *The Traitor*. Initially *I Ching* did not have any words. The book was full of linear symbols that were used to record the changes of natural phenomena, such as wind, fire, thunder, water, heaven, earth, and so on. It is the commentary *Ten Wings* (or *Shi Yi*) that Confucius (551-479 B.C.) wrote which turned *I Ching* into a book of philosophy. *I Ching* is considered as the most abstruse Chinese text, and numerous scholars have devoted their entire lifetime to the studies in the last few thousand years. Like each of the novels in the *Golden Mountain Chronicles*, a hexagram is placed on the frontispiece of *The Traitor*, followed by Yep’s explanatory note:



Lü, the fifty-sixth hexagram of the *Book of Changes*.

“Be silent, be cunning, but above all be invisible.”


In my master’s thesis, I argued that the hexagrams in the *Chronicles* are analogous to Chinese American history, and the intertextuality is symbolic of the intimate economic and cultural relationship between China and America. From the perspective of translation, Yep’s note on the hexagram presents a noticeable demonstration of cultural translation. Lü is a transliteration of the Chinese character “旅” which means “wandering” in English. Lü therefore denotes the theme of *The Traitor*, in which most of the Chinese immigrants or “wanderers” are forced to travel back to

San Francisco to seek protection from their community.<sup>28</sup> Quite obviously, Yep's explanatory note is also a translation from the Chinese original. Confucius's commentary is divided into six parts, each of which details the significance of each line in the hexagram. For instance, in the hexagram of Lü, the broken line below the first line, according to Richard Wilhelm's translation of Confucius's commentary, suggests that "The wanderer comes to an inn. / He has his property with him. / He wins the steadfastness of a young servant" (218). It is difficult not to notice that Yep's explanatory note follows the same convention of Confucius's commentary, composed of three short sentences. Unlike the Chinese original, which tackles a specific line in the hexagram in greater detail, Yep's note summarizes the significance of the hexagram. We can therefore comfortably argue that the explanatory note is more like Yep's adaptation of Confucius's commentary on *I Ching* translated into English.

Yep's explanatory note of the hexagram reveals a few messages that are central to my argument about Yep's *myth*-translation. As a documentation of natural phenomena, *I Ching* can be interpreted as a book that records early Chinese history and civilization. The book also convincingly exemplifies the origin of the writing system in Chinese history, with mythic symbols documenting human activities in nature. Despite Confucius's insightful commentary and thousands of publications on *I Ching*, the hexagrams still remain as a myth because the significance of the symbols cannot be easily deciphered. The title also suggests the nature of the book: *I Ching* is not just *about* but *of* changes. The meaning of the book is constantly changing and the effort of totalizing its meaning is fruitless. What makes interpreting *I Ching* such a

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<sup>28</sup> In the commentary, Confucius provides the significance of each individual line in the hexagram and Confucius's interpretation outlines the plot in *The Traitor*. For more information, see my analysis on pp. 61-66 in my MA thesis.

daunting task is that we are essentially making interpretations of Confucius’s interpretation of *I Ching*; that is, our interpretation is an *interpretation of interpretation* or a *meta-interpretation*. This *meta-interpretation* presents an innate paradoxical feature of the text: The messages of the hexagrams, coded in an almost incomprehensible and undecipherable sign system, are insoluble to begin with, but thousands of publications on *I Ching* demonstrate its need for interpretation. Ironically, the interpretations can never be accurate, for they are not interpretations of the “original” but of Confucius’s interpretations. The purpose of the scholars’ interpretations is to critique and modify Confucius’s commentary so that the hexagrams can more comprehensively illustrate the relationship of humans and nature during different periods in history. The meta-interpretations imply that the meaning of *I Ching* can never be exhausted or penetrated. The significance of the hexagrams remains well hidden inside the code system; it is incomprehensible as an aporia or a myth. Documenting human activities in nature with its aporetic sign system or language, perhaps *I Ching* elucidates that *history is a myth that requires narration and that can never be fully transcoded*. Yep’s translation of the *I Ching* therefore is a *myth-translation*, a myth construction that narrates the history of the Rock Springs massacre with the hexagram Lü or . From Yep’s explanatory note or Confucius’s commentary, we can see that Lü faithfully articulates the key to Chinese immigrants’ survival: to be “silent,” “cunning,” “invisible,” or just like *I Ching*, changeable and adaptable. The teleology of Yep’s translation is not just to expose the injustice of the incident. Yep’s translation of the *I Ching* is also a form of cultural critique: Chinese American history cannot be fully represented by Western knowledge. Yep’s *myth-translation*, of course, inherits the paradoxical features of *I Ching* and translation. The *myth-translation* denotes the impossibility to translate the hexagrams coded in an untranslatable language, and the necessity to (mis)translate the myth to represent history.

Although the two terms, representation and translation, are often used interchangeably in scholarly essays, a distinction should be made in my discussion of Yep's work. Judith Butler in her "Restaging the Universal" rightly cautions that the task of representing the subaltern will never be easy, especially when it involves elements of translation as "translation always runs the risk of appropriation" (36). Butler's concern here is a response to Spivak's argument about the importance and the risk of representing the subaltern, but her notion about representation through translation needs to be further addressed. In literature, translation can be viewed as a mode of representation through language, a literary expression that demonstrates the author's conscious appropriation of his or her language and culture. Moreover, Mary Snell-Hornby in *Translation Studies* points out that "[f]rom the point of view of the target literature, all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose" (22). Translation, in other words, always involves the process of adaptation, which modifies the culture, language, and history associated with the original in order to coherently represent the meaning for the target audience. By modification, I view translation as a form of adaptation, which according to Linda Hutcheon is "intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images)," and which is an act of "transmutation or transcoding," a necessary "recoding into a new set of conventions as well as signs" (16). For many ethnic and postcolonial writers, translation is a common strategy that they use to negotiate with the dominant language. The switch from one language to another, or code-switching, is evidence of the promotion of "the validity of the author's heritage language" (Martin 413). In the case of Yep's *The Traitor, myth-*translation manifests not only Yep's adaptation of his cultural heritage but also a process of language creation by deconstructing the English language. Before I discuss the features of Yep's *myth-*translation and language creation, I want to first provide a review of cultural translation

theories. The review will be crucial for my analysis of Yep's *myth*-translation and language politics in *The Traitor*. Let me begin with Homi Bhabha's theory.

### Bhabha and Translation Theories

As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin point out, translation has become increasingly important in postcolonial studies, especially concerning a literary text translated from a local language to a world one such as English (*Key* 215). It is often a debate whether the work of translation helps the survival of indigenous or local literatures or solidifies the dominance of the English language. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer and critic, who rejects the English culture by writing in his native language Gikuyu only, represents one side of the debate. Because the preservation of local literatures continues to be a problem, many postcolonial critics contend that the translation does not necessarily privilege the English language but reflects the power struggle between two cultures instead. Susan Bassnett in "The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies" asserts that both cultural and translation studies are concerned about "questions of power relations" and "textual production" (135) and studying the translation process is a way of "understanding the world we inhabit" (137). For Bhabha, the power struggle in translation is most evident when the translator encounters the impossibility of translating the foreignness into his own culture, which he interprets as the local resistance to the dominant culture. In "The Third Space," Bhabha returns to his argument about the third space and defines translation as "a process by which, in order to objectify cultural meaning, there always has to be a process of alienation and of secondariness *in relation to itself*" (210). The moment of the irresolute, or the process of alienation and of secondariness of cultural meaning, creates a paradoxical site that seeks to normalize the difference between two languages. Translation therefore is highly contradictory, because the cultural meaning is produced through the impossible normalization of

two languages and cultures. Articulating culture, for Bhabha, is a “symbol-forming” and “subject-constituting” practice, and “there is no ‘in itself’ and ‘for itself’ within cultures because they are always subject to intrinsic forms of translation” (210). This no “in itself” or “for itself” position is what Bhabha calls the third space, in which the hierarchy of cultures is cancelled by foregrounding their contestation and negotiation. The authority of the dominant culture is especially challenged because translation can be “a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense—imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it *can* be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum and so on” (210). This liminal and deconstructive thinking allows Bhabha to treat culture as an arbitrary sign or a form of representation, which strives to be original yet is never complete in itself. What interests me most about Bhabha’s theory of translation is that culture requires articulation and representation. If cultural meaning is produced through translation, what is lost and found in the process of translation? Also, how does translation articulate cultural difference and perform resistance? Does Yep’s *myth*-translation both preserve and cancel the authority of the “original”? Since translation must be practiced through language, I want to turn to Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of language to seek answers to these questions.

If language affirms human existence according to Heidegger, the significance of translation is multifold. Heidegger in “Language” suggests that there are three layers of meaning of language, which he argues is what enables man “to be the living being he is as man” (187). First, “speaking is expression,” and an internal idea is conveyed through speech or utterance by externalizing itself. Secondly, speech is “an activity of man”; lastly and most importantly, “human expression is always a presentation and representation of the real and the unreal” (190). For Heidegger, speech is in its completion of what is being spoken and in what is spoken;

speaking demonstrates its persistence and existence, or what Heidegger calls “presencing” (192). Existence is manifested through language while language is also a *double expression* that incorporates a presentation and a representation of the real as well as the unreal. Because of the contradiction of the representation, the produced meanings are always contested and characterized by language’s instability. To further illustrate his philosophy of language, Heidegger provides an analysis of a poem titled “A Winter Evening,” in which he argues that “the calling” brings the presence of the winter or “calls into a nearness” (196). The calling here can be interpreted as the act of calling, uttering, expressing, speaking, or composing meanings in the text. Although the calling brings together an image or the presence of the winter, what is being called still remains absent, for the composed meaning cannot be fully determined and it is “always here and there—here into presence, there into absence” (196). Heidegger’s notion of “presencing” is thus “absencing” because of language’s insufficiency.

“Language speaks,” as Heidegger repeats in the essay, and each time *language speaks*, a new meaning is produced and more complexity is added to the phrase. Despite Heidegger’s rigorous analysis of the poem, the imaging of the winter remains elusive and its meaning rests hidden inside language itself. Heidegger’s intention of ending the essay with the poem suggests that the meanings of a winter’s evening are *overdetermined* and can only be represented through its imaging. Language’s double expression, both internally and externally through speaking, characterizes the incongruity of meaning, which is heavily embedded within *the thing*. To understand it, we must situate the thing within the world, bid “things to come to world, and world to things” (199). The thing and the world are, of course, two modes of bidding that are different, yet they are closely related. The word “*dif-ference*,” according to Heidegger, denotes not just difference but also intimacy, a paradox that lies well inside the word itself. The relation

between world and thing “*disclosingly appropriates* things into bearing a world; it *disclosingly appropriates* world into the granting of things” (200). “*Dif-ference*” suggests a position that language adopts to create, to “appropriate” meanings into a world, and the world that language creates, in turn, *disclosingly* gives meanings to the world. To put it simply, what Heidegger underlines in the essay is that the meaning of a word always remains elusive and needs to be contextualized or situated in a semantic or social context. Roman Jakobson posits a similar argument in “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation.” Jakobson notes that the meaning of any linguistic sign is translated into a more fully developed alternative sign. For instance, the meaning of “bachelor” is translated into an alternative sign-phrase “an unmarried man” (Jakobson 114) or the word “ambrosia” (Jakobson 113) requires a mythical context. It may be easy to conclude that meaning is always deferred and always calls for translation, but this observation seems simplistic. I want to borrow Jacques Derrida’s theory of *différance* to address the significance of the alternative sign and meaning further.

In his “*Différance*,” Derrida creates the word *différance* to strategically negotiate with Hegel’s notion of speech over writing. The difference of *différance* can only be noticed in writing, for the change of spelling from “e” to “a” is indistinguishable for a French listener. *Différance* therefore is only present in writing but remains inaudible in speech. Because the difference between difference and *différance* cannot be easily determined, the order of speech/writing is cancelled. The opposition as such is located “*between* speech and writing” and “beyond the tranquil familiarity which links us to one and the other, occasionally reassuring us in our illusion that they are two” (398). The *a* in *différance* cannot be fully exposed and can only be presented as something partially present—thus “*différance* ‘ $\text{X}$ ’” (399) or *différance* is neither present nor absent. The word *différance* is neither a word nor a concept, according to Derrida,



and this impossible word has an irreducible relationship to the structure of thoughts (400). Derived from no category of being, *différance* signals two levels of meaning: First, *différance*, as a non-word and non-concept, destabilizes the structure of signs, for the *a* acts as a marker of differentiation (a vs. e) and as a process of neutralization within the word *différance*. Derrida calls this operation of the *a* “the middle voice,” for it is between passivity and activity, between “moving oneself and being moved” (401), and remaining undecided in the spatio-temporal movement.

Secondly, the verb *différer* or the Latin verb *differre* means “to be not identical, to be other, discernible” (401) or an implication of “a detour, a relay, a reserve, a representation” (400). The English verbs *to differ* and *to defer* combined may come closest to the French verb *différer*, but *différer* implies both meanings at the same time, or, following Derrida’s logic, *différer* differs itself. The following passage reveals the core of Derrida’s thinking and philosophy of deconstruction:

The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, “thing” here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We take or give signs.

We signal. The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence. (402)

Language is full of differences whereas meaning is constantly delayed, displaced, substituted, or relayed in the complex system of language. Language *a priori* implies a loss or a failure, for language strives to capture what is already absent or the “being-present”—*a representation of the unrepresentable*. Derrida has more to offer about the sign:

In a language, in the *system* of language, there are only differences. Therefore a taxonomical operation can undertake the systematic, statistical, and classificatory inventory of a language. But, on the one hand, these differences *play*: in language, in speech too, and in the exchange between language and speech. On the other hand, these differences are themselves *effects*. They have not fallen from the sky fully formed, and are no more inscribed in a *topos noētos*, than they are prescribed in the gray matter of the brain. (404)

Because of the chain of signs, words represent nothing but inscribed thoughts, both in speech and writing and through the play of differences. Derrida's theory of *différance*, the paradoxical presence of its absence, rejects the closure of any system, for *différance* "is not only irreducible to every ontological or theological—ontotheological—reappropriation, but as the very opening of the space in which ontotheology—philosophy—produces its system and its history, it includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return" (399).

The concepts of "movement" and "play" are central to Derrida's philosophy. As an ontological difference, *différance* is "the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences" and "the name 'origin' no longer suits it" (404). *Différance* is the play of trace, "which no longer belongs to the horizon of Being, but whose play transports and encloses the meaning of Being" and "[w]hich does not belong. There is no maintaining, and no depth to, this bottomless chessboard on which Being is put into play" (414). If Being, as Derrida declares, has never had any meaning, then his critique of Heidegger's philosophy is plausible:

What Heidegger wants to mark is this: the difference between Being and beings, the forgotten of metaphysics, has disappeared without leaving a trace. The very trace of *différance* has been submerged. If we maintain the difference (is) (itself)

other than absence and presence, if it *traces*, then when it is a matter of the forgetting of the difference (between Being and beings), we would have to speak of a disappearance of the trace of the trace.<sup>29</sup> (416)

Would the poem in the end of Heidegger's essay be a simulacrum of a winter's evening? Is it a presence that "dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers itself, it properly has no site—erasure belongs to its structure" (Derrida, "Différance" 416)? If difference is traceable, to use Derrida's language, we must consider the disappearance of the trace of the trace. The origin of *différance* is untraceable, or the origin is erased. The structure cannot hold; the meaning of the poem cannot be totalized. Derrida asserts that *différance* produces the movement, the playful transformation of the sign system, and the disconnection between the sign and the referent. Derrida's theory helps explain the trace of signs and meanings, but what Derrida cannot explain is why language speaks. Heidegger writes, "Language speaks. Its speaking bids the dif-ference to come which expropriates world and things into the simple onefold of their intimacy. Language speaks. Man speaks in that he responds to language. This responding is a hearing. It hears because it listens to the command of stillness" (207). Language pronounces the existence of man while man speaks and responds to language, not just to retrace his existence but also to speak what has been spoken. The word "dif-ference" is a split sign which Heidegger uses to remind us that language is full of differences as well as contradictions *within* itself. Similarly, Walter Benjamin dwells upon the distinction between a mental entity and the linguistic entity of language and calls the contradiction a "deep and incomprehensible paradox, the expression of which is found in the ambiguity of the word *logos*." Benjamin further accentuates that "this paradox has a place, as a

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<sup>29</sup> Derrida quotes a long passage from Heidegger's "The Anaximander Fragment" to elaborate on the concept of tracing the difference and to criticize Heidegger's notion of Being.

solution, at the center of linguistic theory, but remains a paradox, and insoluble, if placed at the beginning” (“Language” 315). The paradox is the irreducible solution, the *différance*, or the middle voice that disrupts the normalization of any sign system. I want to add that although language speaks, the colonial subject’s existence is being spoken in the colonial language. Translation is the performance of the resistance to the dominant language and the retrace of their existence in the world. This is a point I should return later in my essay, but before I begin my discussion of translation, below is a brief summary of what I have covered so far:

1. Language is full of irreducible difference, which triggers its instability and indeterminacy;
2. The meaning of a word cannot be totalized because of the play between the sign and the referent or between presence and absence;
3. The play suggests the difference and differentiation of meaning, produced by the internal split within a sign;
4. The play points to the transference or translation from one sign to another, the trace of which, while irretraceable or disappearing, gives rise to the meaning;
5. A text, therefore, cannot be totalized because of its semantic multiplicity, hence multitudinous interpretations.

Translation, very literally, is the (re)production of one language with and in another linguistic system. Benjamin reminds us that translation is a “mode” and to understand it, one must go back to the original for the original governs the text’s translatability (“Task” 70). Translatability is an important motif in Benjamin’s essay, but how can a text ever be translatable since language itself is unstable and insoluble? Translation is a double penetration of a text, the result of an impossible reading, and a paradox produced by another paradox. Why do we need translation if

it steers readers further away from the meaning, a detour that never reaches the destination, or a task that is doomed to fail? What is the value of translation if translation, above all, fails to communicate?

### The Task of Translation

During a conference held in Montreal in 1979, Derrida along with many professionals from different areas of expertise had an insightful discussion on translation, later titled “Roundtable on Translation” and published in 1985. One of the major issues that Derrida elucidates at length is the biblical allusion of translation, or the “Tower of Babel.” The story of the Tower of Babel verily offers a religious origin of translation, in which God condemns humanity to multiple languages and to the necessary yet impossible task of translation.

Translation is an impossible task, as translation deals with two languages at the same time. The task itself is impossible also because translation is trying to transcribe several languages into one linguistic system. Alluding to the story of the Tower of Babel, Derrida argues that translation articulates “a double bind,” as “[God] imposes a double bind on them when he says: Translate me and what is more don’t translate me. I desire that you translate me, that you translate the name I impose on you; and at the same time, whatever you do, don’t translate it, you will not be able to translate it” (102). The double bind refers to the paradox of translation, as God’s name itself is unnameable but it demands translation. “[R]espect me as a proper name,” and “translate me, understand me, preserve me within the universal language” (Ibid). Conventionally, the Tower of Babel symbolizes the greed of mankind and the origin of languages. In Derrida’s interpretation, “Shem equals name” (“Roundtable” 100), as the Shems attempt to build their own name by erecting the Tower as a passage to God’s realm. God therefore imposes confusion on the Shems and at the same time he chooses “Babel,” a proper name to mean confusion

(“Roundtable” 101). God’s chosen name thus can only be understood in confusion; yet the division of languages also suggests God’s demand that the name be translated in confusion, from “a proper name into a common name” (“Roundtable” 102). This translate-me-and-do-not-translate-me paradigm formulates the double bind, for “Babel” is understood confusedly *within* a language, the meaning of which is trapped *among* the multiple languages after the destruction of the Tower. It is difficult not to agree with Derrida that Babel signifies the impurity of every language, but a few things are lacking in his interpretation. With Derrida’s argument in mind, I am quoting this passage of the Tower of Babel below for further analysis:

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup>And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup>And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup>Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’ <sup>5</sup>The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD said, ‘Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.’<sup>8</sup>So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup>Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:1-19)

First, it is difficult to determine what language is the “one” language in the text. Does the one language refer to God’s language, which Adam and Eve use to communicate with God, or is it a language designated for the humans?<sup>30</sup> If the former is true, the Tower is the evidence of humans dismantling God’s authority by using His language. The latter indicates that God, in order to communicate with humans, has to translate His message in humans’ language. The Tower of Babel, in this sense, is not just about the origin of languages but about the beginning of translation. Whether it is God’s language or a language for the humans, the construction of the Tower signifies the loss of God’s total control of a language he has created. Secondly, the sentiment of fear is shared by both God and the humans. On the one hand, the Shems want to build a city and the Tower because they are afraid of being “scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” On the other hand, God is worried about his dominance, because the Shems, with the power of language, building the Tower “is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” Is God’s decision to separate the people and divide their language an indication that polarity is no longer repressible? Third, as a narrative, the text contains a few rhetorical devices. Apart from Babel/Babylon that Derrida already discussed in his essay,<sup>31</sup> the materials that the Shems build the Tower with represent a

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<sup>30</sup> This is an ambiguous line in the Bible. The “one” language, very literally, implies that God and humans share the same language. It is notable that the Bible never explicitly indicates whether the conversation is carried in God’s language or a language that He creates for humans. Observe God’s first words to Adam: “And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’” (Genesis 2:16-17). Whether God speaks in His language or in humans’ language, the purpose is to express warnings and orders, a means of consolidating God’s authority. Adam and Eve eventually disobey God’s order, and their consumption of the fruit of knowledge suggests the loss of God’s power and language, as well as the paradigm of good and evil.

<sup>31</sup> Derrida refers to Voltaire’s article “Babel” and the word can be translated as “the name of the father’s city” (101). Brent Strawn in “Holes of the Tower of Babel” also points out that the term Babel is used to describe “Babylon,” which foretells the Babylonian empire’s invasion of Israel in the early sixth century

parallel as “brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.” The brick/stone and bitumen/mortar are the mirrored linguistic signs of each other, which also imply that intralingual translation occurs even before the construction of the Tower. If the “one” language is God’s language, the brick and bitumen are the fragments that seek to become the “whole,” a split that is internalized within the Tower as well as the language. Ironically, the Lord “came down”<sup>32</sup> to destroy the Tower composed of the language that He creates—a construction of totality that is destined to be deconstructed.

Although Derrida’s discussion of the Tower, like many of his other articles, is another rehearsal of his philosophy of deconstruction, it is surprising that Derrida acknowledges Benjamin’s notion of the sacred text. Benjamin writes, “Rather, all suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole—an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language” (“Task” 74). Benjamin discusses at least three important things here: (a) the supplementarity of languages and the possibility of reaching for the entirety of meaning; (b) the “intention” or the underlying message in language; and (c) “pure language” or pure translatability—language adequately delivers the message. “In this pure language—,” Benjamin asserts, “which no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages—all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished” (80). In Derrida’s interpretation, an intralinear version of a sacred text is what Benjamin calls

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B. C. Strawn also provides some thought-provoking questions regarding this Biblical story. For more information, see his article from Oxford Biblical Studies Online, at [http://www.oup.com/obso/focus/focus\\_on\\_towerbabel/](http://www.oup.com/obso/focus/focus_on_towerbabel/).

<sup>32</sup> Strawn notes this illogical plot hole in the story, as the Tower is built to reach heaven so God should not have to “come down” to see the city and the Tower.



“pure translatability” or an ideal of translation. A sacred text cannot be translated because the meaning and the letter cannot be separated and “[t]he only thing one can do when translating a sacred text is to read between the lines, between its lines” (“Roundtable” 103). The “proper name,” God’s Word, and “pure language” all point to the ideal state of language, in which communication is perfect and translation is not needed. However, as I showed earlier, language is already not “pure” even before the destruction of the Tower of Babel. In addition, the biggest irony in the narrative is that God destroys a language that is internally split and creates more fragments out of a fragment. Pure language is never there—it begins with absence and is replaced by fragments. In this light, Paul de Man’s reading of Benjamin is deemed more accurate, as Benjamin uses a trope to convey the totality of a meaning in his work “in such a way that the traditional symbol is displaced in a manner that acts out the discrepancy between symbol and meaning, rather than the acquiescence between both” (89). In other words, Benjamin’s trope resists the very totality that it symbolizes. Below is perhaps the most discussed passage from Benjamin’s essay in the translation field:

Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way, a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. For this very reason translation must in large measure refrain from wanting to communicate something, from rendering the sense, and in this the original is important to it only insofar as it has already

relieved the translator and his translation of the effort of assembling and expressing what is to be conveyed. (“Task” 78)

If we follow Benjamin’s trajectory of argument in the essay, this passage suggests that there is an original (pure language). Translation complements the original and both act as “fragments of a greater language.” Alluding to the French philosopher Michel Serres,<sup>33</sup> de Man argues that the fragment is a fragment; it is no longer breakable. The fragments remain fragmentary, which will never constitute totality. De Man writes: “The translation is the fragment of a fragment, is breaking the fragment—so the vessel keeps breaking, constantly—and never reconstitutes it; there was no vessel in the first place, or we have no knowledge of this vessel, or no awareness, no access to it, so for all intents and purposes there has never been one” (91). There was never a vessel in the first place, just like the Tower of Babel, a symbol of totality that is composed of fragments of “one” language; its destruction undermines its very own creation, a meaning that is never meant to be deciphered—an aporia. This aporetic state of meaning is like what Benjamin creates with his tropes, but

he prevents them in a way, displaces them in such a way as to put the original in motion, to de-canonize the original, giving it a movement which is a movement of disintegration, of fragmentation. This movement of the original is a wandering, an *errance*, a kind of permanent exile if you wish, but it is not really an exile, for there is no homeland, nothing from which one has been exiled. (de Man 92)

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<sup>33</sup> De Man borrows Serres’s analogy to explain about the fragment in Benjamin’s essay. The fragments here can be compared to the broken pieces of a dish. If the dish is broken into fragments, the fragments cannot be broken any further.

Benjamin uses his tropes to displace the original so that both translation and the original are put in motion. There is “no homeland,” according to de Man, as the meaning is forever a trace. The following is a passage from Serres’s *The Parasite*, which I think echoes de Man’s reading of Benjamin:

I thought that the exchangers were intermediaries, that interference was on the fringe, that the translator was between instances, that the bridge connected two banks, that the path went from the origin to the goal. But there are no instances. Or more correctly, instances, systems, banks, and so forth are analyzable in turn as exchangers, paths, translations, and so forth. The only instances or systems are black boxes. When we do not understand, when we defer our knowledge to a later date, when the thing is too complex for the means at hand, when we put everything in a temporary black box, we prejudge the existence of a system. When we can finally open the box, we see that it works like a space of transformation. The only systems, instances, and substances come from our lack of knowledge. The system is nonknowledge. The other side of nonknowledge. One side of nonknowledge is chaos; the other, system. Knowledge forms a bridge between the two banks. Knowledge as such is a space of transformation. (73)

The passage shows an example of how Serres manoeuvres the concept of relationality and radically deconstructs the “original” and “the goal,” as they become “analyzable in turn as exchangers.” Because of this space of transformation, both the original and the goal are interchangeable, and the original is only *functional* as Benjamin says, “the original is important to it only insofar as it has already relieved the translator and his translation of the effort of

assembling and expressing what is to be conveyed.” Translation is impossible as the produced knowledge is “nonknowledge,” an aporia resulting from the confusion of language.

The task of translation is never easy as it involves cultural understanding, representation, and interpretation between two linguistic systems. The translator confronts two cultures (sometimes more than two) at the same time and the task, in a broader sense, is to translate the foreignness of a linguistic and cultural system into something familiar of his own. “While all individual elements of foreign languages—words, sentences, structure—are mutually exclusive,” Benjamin writes, “these languages supplement one another in their intentions. Without distinguishing the intended object from the mode of intention, no firm grasp of this basic law of a philosophy of language can be achieved” (“Task” 74). When I discussed Benjamin’s idea of “pure language,” I interpreted “intentions” as the underlying messages in language. Languages supplement one another in their intentions and such intentions are manipulated and operated in the realm of the translator’s consciousness. Translation can be treated as the result of the translator’s coming to terms with the foreignness after the confrontation with the new culture, therefore, as “the echo of the original” (“Task” 76). Translation is elusive for the multitudinous meanings that have been prescribed upon the linguistic system. However, Benjamin further cautions, “as regards the meaning, the language of a translation can—in fact, must—let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*” (79). Despite the attempt of localizing the foreignness in his own cultural context, a translator also needs to find harmony among cultures so that the translation not only serves as a supplement to the original, but also expresses itself for its own “*intentio*.”

Regarding Benjamin’s “intention,” de Man has the following to say:

But the problem is precisely that, whereas the meaning-function is certainly intentional, it is not *a priori* certain at all that the mode of meaning, the way in which I mean, is intentional in any way. The way in which I can try to mean is dependent upon linguistic properties that are not only [not] made by me, because I depend on the language as it exists for the devices which I will be using, it is as such not made by us as historical beings, it is perhaps not even made by humans at all. (87)

De Man's position against humanism is clear in this passage. Rules and functions of language are not made by humans, as language operates beyond one's capacity. De Man argues, "Intention is inseparable from the concept of meaning; any meaning is to some extent intentional. Any language oriented to meaning is at least intentional, precisely by virtue of the fact that it intends meaning. Intention is, therefore, not subjective" (94). What de Man is discussing here is *the intentionality of intention*, for intention can never be grasped in language whereas intentionality always points to the explicit meaning. Intention is, therefore, not subjective but only semantic or "semantically determined" (Ibid). In this sense, translation imposes intentionality on both the original and itself, as a form of interpretation and appropriation.

De Man's idea of intentionality is similar to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's argument about language. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari maintain that language implies a structure of commands and the act of policing because it is "made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience" (76). The authors believe that language is an indirect discourse used to convey order words and that "narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else said to you" (Ibid). The authors present an intriguing example to illustrate their argument: If a bee sees a food source, the

bee communicates the message to the second bee, and the second bee then transmits the message to the third bee. The second bee's transmission of the message suggests the problem of communication, as neither the second bee nor the third bee has actually seen the food source. Language is thus transmitting the word as "order-word" instead of communicating the information (77). This subversive view about language offered by Deleuze and Guattari is highly political as language does not communicate but transmit a command or an order-word. Language is an indirect discourse that "is not explained by the distinction between subjects; rather, it is the assemblage, as it freely appears in this discourse, that explains all the voices present within a single voice, [...] the languages in a language, the order-words in a word" (80). Indeed, if we trace history, translation for the Europeans in the beginning suggests violation and distortion of the original. Wang Ning in "Cultural Translation" reminds us that translation is "a matter of culture" and it exposes the political teleology of colonizing or decolonizing a certain culture (75). Derrida in "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation?" points out that a relevant translation is a good translation that "performs its mission, honors its debt and does its job or its duty while inscribing in the receiving language the most *relevant* equivalent for an original, the language that is *the most* right, appropriate, pertinent, adequate, opportune, pointed, univocal, idiomatic, and so on" (177). Derrida's idea of the relevant translation, unsurprisingly, remains an ideal, as everything can be translatable or untranslatable, but the matter is what is being "normalized" (181) in translation. Let me give an example of the "mistranslation."

On November 17, 2012, the British Magazine *The Economist* published an article titled “Ma the Bumbler: A Former Heart-Throb Loses His Shine”<sup>34</sup> which discussed the performance of Ma Ying-jeou as President of Taiwan since 2008. The article noted the popularity of Ma when he was first elected. In 2012, a few months after his re-election, his popular satisfaction dropped to 13% as a result of his poor economic policies and political incompetency. Many newspapers<sup>35</sup> in Taiwan translated the headlines as “笨蛋馬英九” or in English “Ma the Idiot.” The media’s translation of “bumbler” as “idiot” aroused a heated debate on its accuracy. Shen Lyu-shun (沈呂巡), a former diplomat and a current Taiwanese representative to the UK, publicly defended Ma by emphasizing Ma’s achievements and demanded that the word be put in quotation marks.<sup>36</sup> On November 23, Yu Guangzhong (余光中), a celebrated Taiwanese poet who published numerous books of poetry in both English and Chinese, commented during a meeting with Ma that the word bumbler means “拙” (clumsy), which comes close to “大智若愚” a Chinese saying referring to a person of great wisdom appearing dim-witted. Dominic Ziegler, chief editor of *The Economist*, responded to Shen’s criticism and stated that the media in Taiwan “irresponsibly mistranslated” the word bumbler as idiot and such translation was “gross mistranslations.”<sup>37</sup> But did the media “mistranslate” the word bumbler? According to the *OED*, the word bumbler comes from the verb bumble, which means “blunder” or “flounder.” Bumbler is someone who blunders, but is blunderer an idiot? The word blunderer refers to someone who is awkward in speaking and

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<sup>34</sup> The original article is available online: <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21566657-former-heart-throb-loses-his-shine-ma-bumbler>.

<sup>35</sup> The newspapers that used “Ma the Idiot” as their headlines included *China Times*, *Newtalk*, *The Liberty Times*, and many others.

<sup>36</sup> Shen wrote a letter to *The Economist*. For more information, see *Taipei Times*’s coverage on the story: <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2012/11/24/2003548487>.

<sup>37</sup> For more information about Ziegler’s response, see <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2012/11/21/2003548218>.

who does wrong things. Whether the translation of bumbler as “idiot” is good or bad, accurate or inaccurate, it works as an effective critique of Ma. I am not trying to defend or attack Ma in this case, but it is interesting to note that the translation, either positive (clumsy) or derogatory (stupid), was put into a Chinese context and the translation redefined the English original. The meaning of bumbler, therefore, changes from one Chinese word to another<sup>38</sup> and each alternative sign tries to rectify the “original.” Ziegler’s “official” clarification of the word or his condemnation of the Taiwanese media’s translation suggests the stratification of the two languages and his defense of the authority not just of the original but also of the English language. The translation of the bumbler further implies a few more things:

1. The word, in order to be understood, needs to be contextualized and yet the meaning changes over its context.
2. All translation is mistranslation. Different translations of the original unveil the instability of the original in different ways.
3. Translating the word bumbler is impossible, for the editor loses control over its meaning and the word, to borrow Benjamin’s phrase, catches fire in the translation.
4. Language is, therefore, impersonal and indirect, for the message is heavily codified in language. The translation of the word (or the order-word) is politicized and represents the contestation of one power over another.

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<sup>38</sup> I do not want to make a lengthy discussion of the Chinese translation here, but a couple things are worth our attention. The Chinese word “笨” literally means stupid and the counterpart of the word “拙” in English is clumsy. The two words together, nonetheless, may be close to Yu’s reference of the Chinese saying, which has more positive connotations. In Yu’s defense of Ma, he also used two more Chinese sayings “大巧若愚” and “愚公移山” both of which imply a person’s dim-wisdom with a positive result. The meaning of the word bumbler, in Yu’s translation, transfers from 大智若愚, 大巧若愚, to 愚公移山, which ends on a promising note encouraging Ma to use his wisdom to achieve more things as president of Taiwan. Yu’s translation contests the original and appropriates the meaning in to a different context.



5. Ziegler's critique of the translation, as well as the *The Economist's* article, signifies the policing of the West over the East, produced by the hegemonic practice of the English language.

These views relate to a question I raised earlier in this chapter: What is the value of translation if translation, above all, fails its designated task? How does translation perform resistance to the colonial culture?

Let me start with a classic view about the value of translation with Benjamin. The purpose of translation is to express the central reciprocal relationship between languages. The original and the translation are closely intertwined because of its translatability. Although such a connection becomes closer, translation is no longer of importance to the original as "the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife" ("Task" 71). Bhabha also discusses this idea of "afterlife" in "The Third Space," in which he draws a distinction between "original" and "originary." Bhabha asserts that translations are different representations of the "originary." Since the original never reaches its entirety, the originary is always open to translation. The originary thus offers an "essence" (Bhabha, "Third Space" 210), or "translatability," the law that governs the translation. Derrida notes the significance of translatability aptly in his "Des Tours de Babel": "For if the structure of the original is marked by the requirement to be translated, it is that in laying down the law the original begins by indebting itself *as well* as regard to the translator. The original is the first debtor, the first petitioner; it begins by lacking and by pleading for translation" (184). In this sense, the original loses its total dominance over translation as the original is signified by a lack. The original, thus, is a *topos* or "the myth of the origin of the myth" ("Tours" 165). The original

is characterized by inadequacy and incompleteness; translation complements the original and the original grows by its renewal. The original grows with its translation, and this dependence, according to Derrida, forms a “translation contract” (“Roundtable” 122), which reveals the purpose of translation. Its purpose is more than a representation, a reproduction, or a form of communication; it is to assure the sustainability, the survival, and the rebirth of languages. Translation, for this reason, fosters a doubling. The Tower of Babel articulates both the impossibility for one to translate the original into another linguistic system, and the necessity to revive the original so that languages persevere and survive.

De Man and Benjamin both believe that translation is more like criticism or like the interpretation of literature. Because the original demands translation, the original is not purely canonical and it cannot be definitive. As de Man notes in interpreting Benjamin, one can only translate the original and once one has a translation, translating the translation becomes impossible (82). In this sense, translation is like literary theory, which arises from literature and which cannot be possible without the literature preceding it. Translation also de-canonizes the original and questions the original’s authority, for translation can “disarticulate” the tropes in the original and “reveal that the original was always already disarticulated” (de Man 84).

Derrida and Benjamin also emphasize the moment of “untranslatability” during the process of translation. There is something that translation cannot “touch” or “attain”—“something ‘untouchable,’ something of the original text that no translation can attain” (“Roundtable” 114). Bhabha’s theory of cultural translation is appropriate in illuminating the moments of the untouchable or unattainable during the process of translation. In “How Newness Enters the World,” Bhabha theorizes the untranslatable moment as an “*element of resistance*” in the process of transformation, for “the subject of cultural difference becomes a problem that

Walter Benjamin has described as the irresolution, or liminality, of ‘translation,’ the *element of resistance* in the process of transformation, ‘that element in a translation which does not lend itself to translation’” (*Location* 321). Bhabha sees the moments of the untouchable or unattainable as resistance of a culture. This element of resistance refuses to be integrated or embodied in the translation and such resistance poses a challenge not only to the dominant culture but also to the task of a translator. The untranslatability becomes the “irresolution” or indeterminacy during the translation process, in which the foreignness of the culture cannot be interpreted, represented, or even replaced. Bhabha further asserts:

With the concept of “foreignness” Benjamin comes closest to describing the performativity of translation as the staging of cultural difference [...] The complementarity of language as communication must be understood as emerging from the constant state of contestation and flux caused by the differential systems of social and cultural signification. This process of complementarity as the agonistic supplement is the seed of the “untranslatable”—the foreign element in the midst of the performance of cultural translation. (*Location* 325)

The foreignness refers to the irreducible difference of or between languages, and because of this foreignness as such the text gives rise to or is potentially able to accommodate different translations or interpretations; therefore this moment of foreignness is a moment or space of cultural politics. The foreignness further “reveals the interstitial; insists in the textile superfluity of folds and wrinkles; and becomes the ‘unstable element of linkage,’ the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which ‘newness comes into the world’” (*Location* 326). The foreignness, which is where indeterminacy

arises, indicates an in-between space or liminality that founds the stage for the newness to enter the world.

Incommensurability, according to Bhabha, does more than create conditions for the newness. The foreignness moreover

destroys the original's structures of reference and sense communication as well not simply by negating it but by negotiating the disjunction in which successive cultural temporalities are preserved in the work of history and *at the same time* cancelled... The nourishing fruit of the historically understood contains time as a precious but tasteless seed. (*Location* 326)

Because the foreignness destroys the original's structure, it opens up a space for the newness not just to negate but also to negotiate with the original, so that cultural temporalities are both "preserved" and "cancelled" at the same time in the work of history. Judith Butler in "Restaging the Universal" poses a similar argument, for translation has the "counter-colonialist possibility," which exposes the limits of the dominant language and translation often disfigures the institutional terms in a "subordinated" culture (37). Bhabha's main interest is in the interstitial position, which he believes provides a space for negation and negotiation or cultural "negation-as-negotiation" (*Location* 326). Cultural translation, therefore, seeks to challenge dominant culture and provides a space that allows new cultural identities. Bhabha further argues that

[c]ommunity is the antagonist supplement of modernity: in the metropolitan space it is the territory of the minority, threatening the claims of civility; in the transnational world it becomes the border-problem of the diasporic, the migrant, the refugee. Binary divisions of social space neglect the profound temporal

disjunction—the translational time and space—through which minority communities negotiate their collective identifications. (*Location* 330)

Bhabha indicates that the purpose of cultural translation is for minority communities to negotiate and construct their identifications in a transnational, transitional, and translational space. Bhabha thus proposes liminality rather than dichotomy, interstitial rather than duality, in which he believes cultural identity is forming in progress. Bhabha's "newsness," unfortunately, is no news; I find Spivak addresses the moment of the irresolute in the translation progress more adequately.

As a follower of de Man and Derrida, Spivak in "Translating into English" expresses her concern of the responsibility of a translator. As a translator *into* English, Spivak calls translation "the most intimate act of reading" (94), for the translator grasps the writer's presuppositions, which inform the translator's use of language in the development of a singular code. Translators also "inhabit, even if on loan, the many mansions, and many levels of the host language" (95). For Spivak, this intimate act of reading also provides the trace of the Other: "If translation is a necessary impossibility, the thought of a trace looks like the possibility of an anterior presence, without guarantees. It is not a sign but a mark and therefore cannot signify an 'original,' as a translation presumably can, especially when assumed as definitively irreducible" (105). Spivak terms the moment of the irresolute as cultural difference, which is fundamentally different from culture to culture. This irreducible difference is located in translation and it has to be respected and not to be violated. In "The Politics of Translation," Spivak makes this point more explicitly: "I surrender to the text when I translate" (201) and "as long as you are with the text, you have to be in a different relationship with the language, not even only with the specific text" (205). This different relationship is established when the translator is confronted with the presence of the

irresolute, or the moment of alterity, which produces an opportunity to be closer to the Other.

The trace as such is not the process of reappropriating the original but the transformation of self because of the Other. Translation is the process of self becoming the Other, which is like a journey that never concludes; it is the guarantee of the incompleteness of self necessitated forever in the trace of the Other.

I cannot agree with Spivak more as a translator myself. The only way to understand or to appreciate a different culture is to establish that intimate relationship through translation. One learns while translating, but in many literary instances, the colonizer refuses to learn about the other culture. Below is a passage from Choy's *The Jade Peony*, which serves the purpose of examining the theories of cultural translation. When Sek-Lung's stepmother (his actual mother) receives a package from her friend in China, the mother is told to sign with an *X* by the postman:

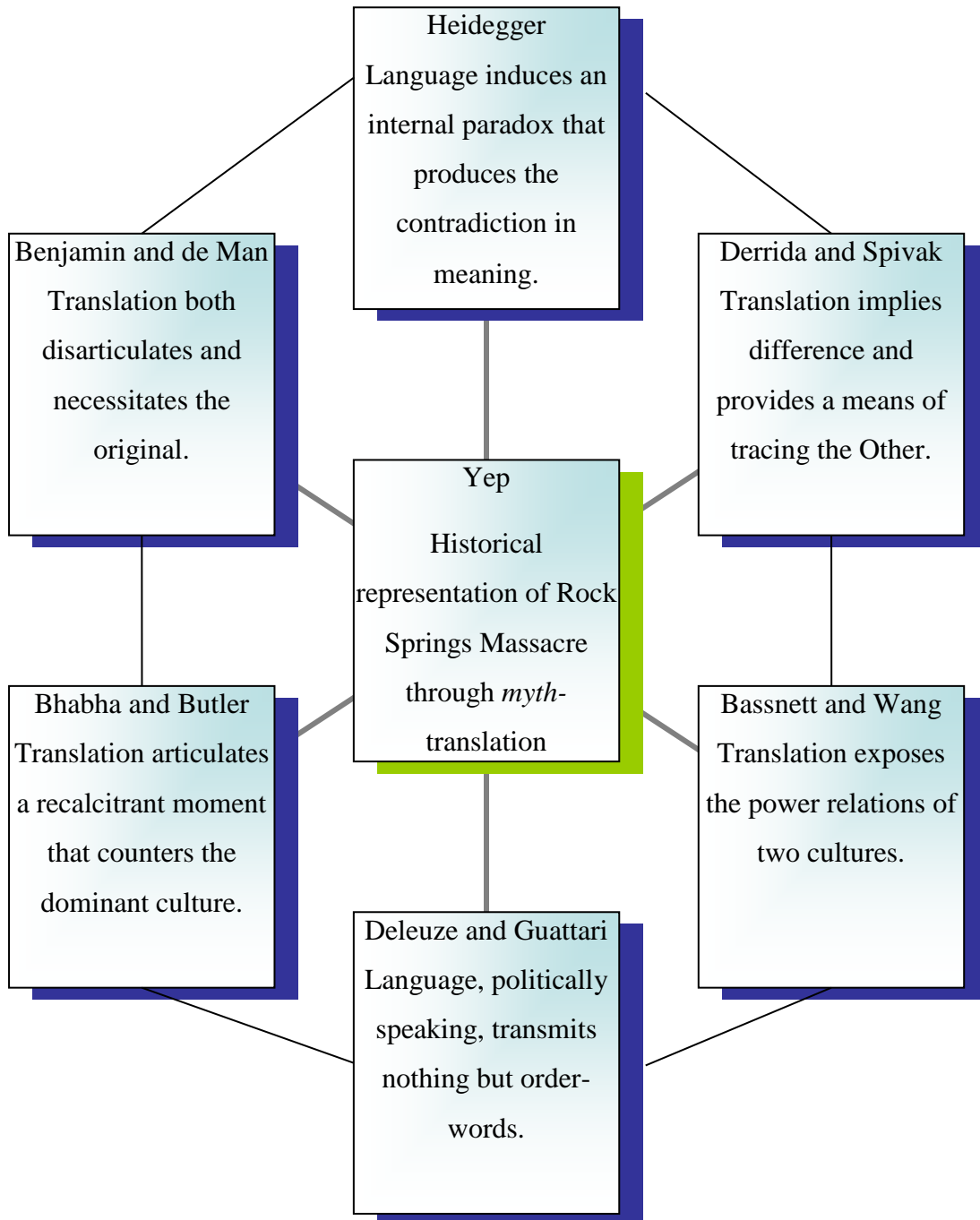
“Just tell your mom to make an *X*,” the man said, drawing in the air. I told Stepmother she must sign for it. Stepmother took the postman's pencil, and he pointed to the document in his hand. Carefully, Stepmother drew two lines, one crossing over the other. She could have written her name in Chinese ideograms, but the man only wanted an *X*. It was the first time I saw Stepmother write anything in English. *X*. She did not like the way the postman smiled at her. (140-141)

In contrast with Aimé Césaire's Caliban in *A Tempest*, who demonstrates the linguistic resistance to the colonizer's language and violence by calling himself “*X*” (1.2.238-243), the *X* in *The Jade Peony* can very much represent the postman's complete negation of Chinese culture by drawing the symbol in the air. *X* is also a catachresis, which symbolizes Stepmother's identity—her name is an *X*, but *X* is not her real name. *X* is an adequate paradox that articulates early Chinese

immigrants' political and cultural conditions in Canada, for the two lines can be taken as signifying the crossroads of two cultures, neither Chinese nor Canadian yet both. Stepmother's adoption of *X* is furthermore her adaptation of the dominant language, as her name has a new meaning in a different context: *X* is her given subjectivity, signified by both negation and undeniable existence. *X* is the silent *logos*, the impenetrable difference, which leaves a mark of presence as absence in Canadian history. It is difficult not to notice the act of translation in this passage. The postman's refusal to acknowledge early Chinese immigrants leads to the failure of translation, which is a form of communication between the postman and Stepmother, between Canadian and Chinese culture. Choy's *X* seems like a reasonable choice to represent the cancellation of both cultures, but why does Choy use a sign to describe the incommensurable past of the Chinese Canadian history? And most of all, why is the letter *X* italicized?


Language, as Heidegger reminds us, pronounces a person's existence through speech. Since speaking is expression and it is a (re)presentation of the real and the unreal, to communicate is through a person's appropriation of words or meanings. Through intimately reading the original, translation reveals the translator's linguistic appropriation as a result of his cultural awareness and consciousness. It is also through this linguistic appropriation that the translator witnesses his presencing both culturally and transnationally. Translation is a production of a translator's appropriation that demonstrates the translator's presencing in the transitional space. Re-appropriating the dominant language through translation is a strategy that not just Yep and Choy but also many other postcolonial writers use to negotiate with the "official" past. Choy's *X* is a symbol of Stepmother's assimilation into Canadian culture being denied. The *X* is also an empty sign which disrupts the authority of Canadian history and registers the ironic presence in his imagination of early Chinese Canada.

Before I move on to my discussion of Yep's *The Traitor*, below is a diagram that recaps the major arguments of cultural translation theories I have introduced so far. Please note that the lines that join the boxes demonstrate the connections of the theorists' arguments.





*Myth-Translation and the Language Politics in The Traitor*

To argue that *The Traitor* is a work of *myth*-translation, I must first demonstrate the connection between *I Ching* and Yep's representation of the Rock Springs massacre. In other words, what is being translated from *I Ching* to Yep's *The Traitor*? As aforementioned in this chapter, Yep places the hexagram Lü  on the frontispiece of the novel. The connection between *I Ching* and the Rock Springs massacre can be seen in Confucius's commentary on the hexagram: "The Wanderer. Success through smallness. / Perseverance brings good fortune / To the wanderer" and "A wanderer has no fixed abode; his home is the road. Therefore he must take care to remain upright and steadfast, so that he sojourns only in the proper places, associating only with good people. Then he has good fortune and can go his way unmolested" (Wilhelm 216-217). Confucius's commentary can be read as an overview of the Rock Springs massacre: Chinese immigrants are the sojourners who cannot reside in one place permanently and who must use their wisdom to persevere. Based on the above section, a few similarities between the commentary and the massacre are noticeable in Yep's *The Traitor*: First, the image of the wanderer in the hexagram is adapted by Yep to portray the Chinese immigrants who travel to "[s]trange lands" and experience "separation" (Wilhelm 216) from their families in Wyoming. Second, some immigrants were able to survive because of local Americans' assistance during the massacre. The "good people" may refer to Michael Purdy and his mother Mary Purdy whose character is based on Mrs. Williams who hid Chinese immigrants in her cellar during the massacre (Yep, *Traitor* 301 and "Heroes" 792). Lastly, the incidents which Confucius's hero (or the "superior man") experiences in the commentary are parallel to Joseph's story of survival during the massacre. The analysis below will introduce how Yep actively translates *I Ching* to

represent the history of the Rock Springs massacre through his appropriation of Chinese and English languages.

Yep's *The Traitor* is comprised of the two main characters' diaries, each of which recounts their experience during the 1880s. The novel begins with Joseph's Chinese diary entry of June 14, 1885, narrating his ambivalence as a 13-year-old Chinese American. Otter, Joseph's father, is belittled by his fellow Chinese workers because of his faith in "American justice" and his Western friends' plan of overturning the immigration laws on "the Land of the Golden Mountain" (4) during a time that Chinese miners are discriminated and work with unreasonable wages. Joseph's first diary entry notes the difficult work conditions for Chinese immigrants in Rock Springs, which recalls the wanderer who must be cautious and reserved on his journey in Confucius's commentary. To show the stylistic features of Joseph's diary entry, I am reproducing a passage below:

"Those immigration laws passed only because of ignorance. My Western friends are fighting to overturn them right now," Father said to the man. "Westerners" was Father's polite word for *Americans*. Calmly Father tried to assure the man that everything would work out for all of us eventually. He had such faith in *America* and in *American* justice. [...] All the Chinese were frustrated with what was happening; but since they couldn't take it out on the *Americans*, they looked for other targets. (4)

Because Joseph's entry is allegedly recorded in Chinese, we can see that two different fonts represent two languages at work. English, such as "*America*" or "*American*," is codified in italics

and Chinese in the regular font.<sup>39</sup> The normalization of Chinese in the regular font is perhaps a plausible strategy to reinstate the importance of the Chinese language and culture in Chinese American history. The play on the two fonts, accordingly, subverts the hierarchy of the dominant and the subordinated languages, as the English language is italicized and represented as difference in Joseph's narrative. The fonts, of course, are Yep's intentional re-appropriation of the English language as a way to disrupt its dominance and to represent Chinese immigrants' voice. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* remind us that the re-appropriation of the English language is an important and necessary strategy for postcolonial writers to break away from the European tradition. There are two distinctive processes for postcolonial writers to achieve the effect of displacing the dominant language: "abrogation" and "appropriation" (*Empire* 37). Abrogation refers to the denial of the imperial culture by rejecting the dominant language as a means of communication. Appropriation focuses on reconstituting the dominant language by remoulding it to new usages. Yep's use of the fonts, I think, may be a combination of abrogation and appropriation, for English is denied of its importance by being represented as difference in italics and also remoulded to represent the Chinese language. This process of deconstruction as language creation echoes Kroetsch's observation that postcolonial writers must "uncreate themselves into existence," and for Yep, this uncreation of the English language is a preparation for his *myth*-translation.

Joseph's diary entry presents more language issues from the aspect of translation. The entry can be viewed as a work of translation because it is, in a way, translated from Chinese into English. Like her argument in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak presents a similar concern

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<sup>39</sup> Yep's representation of the Chinese and English languages in different fonts appears to be consistent and ubiquitous in the *Golden Mountain Chronicles* and his other works.

about the representation of the subaltern in her *Postcolonial Reason*. Translation can be a violation of the original, according to Spivak, or a problem of “translation-as-violation” because translation violates the original by promoting “globality” (164) that erases the fundamental difference among all languages. In contrast, Yep’s translation demonstrates its counter colonialist ability by injecting different fonts in Joseph’s narrative. As a mode of representation, translation is a necessary strategy for Yep to represent the Rock Springs massacre from the Chinese perspective faithfully. Joseph’s diary therefore is a purposeful English translation of Chinese. Rather than “translation-as-violation,” Yep’s translation is a “translation-as-creation,” an intentional (*myth-*)translation to reconstruct the history of Rock Springs incident.

Yep’s play of the two languages resonates de Man’s critique of Benjamin: “Does translation have to be faithful, or does it have to be free? [...] The faithful translation, which is always literal, how can it also be free? It can only be free if it reveals the instability of the original, and if it reveals that instability as the linguistic tension between trope and meaning” (91-92). In the passage from Joseph’s diary, we see that “Westerners” is only a “polite word” that Otter uses to refer to “*Americans*” (4), but why does Otter use Westerners to refer to Americans and what is the connection to de Man’s “faithful translation”? Literally, Westerners and Americans apply to the same group of people, as Americans are Westerners or the word “Westerners” presents Otter’s understanding of Americans as Westerners. However, “Westerners” or *xifangren* in Chinese refers to white Americans or Europeans, but Westerners in English may refer to people who live on the West coast in America. The translation of *xifangren* as “Westerners” is thus a mistranslation, for “Westerners” and *xifangren* may mean different groups of people in Chinese and English respectively. For readers who do not speak Chinese, “Westerners” may even seem an odd expression to refer to Americans. Otter’s reference as such

may suggest his misconception that “Westerners” are all Americans,<sup>40</sup> but situated in a historical context, this “polite word” can further contain two levels of meaning: On the one hand, “Westerners” points to the immigration of Europeans to America. By calling Americans “Westerners,” Otter insinuates that the American politicians who pass the unfair immigration laws are also immigrants themselves from Europe. On the other hand, “Westerners” as a “polite word” (as opposed to an impolite word) suggests the repression of Otter’s ambivalence towards Europeans. It is a reminder of not just his “guest” or foreign status in America, but also the humiliating contact between China and the West during the nineteenth century. Otter’s use of “Westerners,” in other words, reveals the political history of Western imperialism in China and the frustration about the passage of Chinese Exclusion Act.

The three terms *xifangren*, Westerners, and Americans present complex interconnections with each another: Westerners is a mistranslation of *xifangren*; Westerners are not necessarily Americans in English; yet *xifangren* refers to Americans. Because of the absence of *xifangren* in the original, “Westerners” and “Americans,” though fundamentally different, ironically resemble and complement each other through translation. This “faithful” translation of *xifangren* points to the instability of the English language and unveils the linguistic tension between the two tropes “Westerners” and “Americans.” From this example, we witness the power of (mis)translation and the contestation between the two languages internalized in Chinese Americans’ thinking and speaking. If language pronounces a person’s presence according to Heidegger, Joseph’s identity is characterized by the ceaseless translation or code-switching between the two languages in his

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<sup>40</sup> This is also a common misconception about Europeans for people in Taiwan. Like *xifangren* or Westerners, the Taiwanese expression *adohah* generally refers to foreigners or Caucasians, but because the American armies stationed in Taiwan from 1955-1979, *adohah* applies to Americans mostly. The term has rich connotations about Taiwanese people’s view of foreigners as well as the colonial history in Taiwan.

diary. The two fonts are evidence of Yep's *translation-at-work* or *work-as-translation*, but Yep's translation strategy and font use become more complex when the narrative progresses.

The second entry has the same date, recorded by Michael, whose mother complains about the heat and the drought in Wyoming. The mother and her friends blame Chinese workers for local Americans' job loss, and in their eyes Rock Springs is paradise before Chinese immigration. My discussion in this part begins with an analysis of a passage in which Michael reflects upon the growing up memories without his father. Note the different font that Yep uses in Michael's diary entry:

**When we'd first moved into this house, Ma had even sketched out the outline of a fireplace in pencil. [. . . ] And then she had outlined where she would hang her pictures when we had the money and drawn a rug on the floor. [. . . ] And then on a fancy she had gone outside and drawn flowers and a picket fence on the front of our house. But Pa had always left, and then one day he never came back. [. . . ] We should have wiped [the sketches] off a long time ago; but first we still hoped. Then we were too busy. Now we were too tired. So the furniture and the garden and the future still hung around, reminding me of what could have been if it hadn't been my fault—like ghosts you see but cannot touch. Sad ones you can't get shut of.**

(12)

We are introduced to a house with pictures and sketches that substitute the real furniture and garden. The sketches are an ironic reminder of a traditional family ideal that the Purdys do not wish to erase. This house is almost anti-traditional not just because of its poor conditions but also

because of the absence of a father figure. The motif of a missing parent, according to Claudia Mills, dates back to the Romantic period when Wordsworth and Blake in their works of poetry celebrate children's innocence as a response to the monstrosity of the industrial revolution (227). Orphans invoke readers' sentimentality with the image of vulnerability, isolation, and insecurity on their quest for love and recognition.<sup>41</sup> This "ghostly" house may suggest Michael's feelings of emptiness, but can also be interpreted as a metaphor of the account of Rock Springs massacre from the American perspective. The lack of materials gives the reader to understand that the narrative is signified by a *loss*, denoting Yep's belief that the history of the Rock Springs massacre remains *unrepresentable* as a whole from a singular and monolingual American perspective. The history of the Rock Springs massacre can only be more faithfully represented, as illustrated by the diaries of Joseph and Michael, from both Chinese and American perspectives. But why does Yep change the font in Michael's narrative?

Almost like a rebel (or a "traitor") himself, Yep uses a different font to represent English, which is quite unorthodox in contrast with the convention of representing the foreign language in italics as exemplified earlier in this chapter. One can argue that English is the foreign language in Yep's *Chronicles* which focus on Chinese immigrant experiences in America. Generally speaking, the boldface represents a different language as opposed to Joseph's Chinese narrative in a "normal" font. Because the two diary entries are recorded in different languages manifested by Yep's play of the fonts, the representation of Michael's voice or the English language in boldface appears reasonable. What makes Michael's narrative so troubling is that Michael is

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<sup>41</sup> I use the term "sentimentality" loosely here. Nina Baym and Jane Tompkins are the leading scholars of Sentimental Literature in America. See Baym's *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* (1978) and Tompkins's *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (1985).

isolated or othered from his community; his reflection on the window looks “even more ghostly than the room” (13) and he is considered as a “bastard” (14) by his friends. If we interpret the boldface in Michael’s narrative by its common usage in writing, Michael’s experience as a fatherless child is accentuated or boldfaced. The font difference further aggrandizes both Michael’s isolation and the impossibility for the English language to faithfully document the Rock Springs incident from a singular and dominant American perspective. With the empty form and content considered, Michael’s narrative symbolizes the need to fill an empty structure, much like a half-orphan’s search for his belonging or his trace of the other. Michael’s narration of his childhood experience and the Rock Springs incident, to borrow words from Spivak, will be like a necessary impossibility, with a trace that “looks like the possibility of an anterior presence, without guarantees” (“Translating” 105). The empty structure of Michael’s narrative pronounces its insufficiency of representing the Rock Springs incident as a whole, and his encounter with Joseph promises a possible completion.

Below is a passage from Michael’s narrative, in which Michael is on the run to escape from the “hunting” of the bullies in town:

**I had to hide. If I could get to the pinnacle, I could hunker down among the boulders like a lizard. Getting down on my belly, I began to crawl. Like a snake. Like a worm. If I could have dug underground, I would have tunneled along like a gopher. I paused every now and then and listened to the voices. [. . .] I lay still like some bird trying to hide itself from wolves. (25)**

The images of a “lizard,” a “snake,” a “gopher,” and a “bird” may suggest Michael’s fear of the bullies and his desire to hide. The “worm” image intensifies his fear of being attacked or



consumed, but what is the relationship of these animal references to Yep's language politics? In "And say the Animal Responded?" Derrida questions Lacan's binary distinction of human and animal. Animals are unable to "*pretend to pretend*" or to "*erase its traces*;" they are, moreover, incapable of being a subject or "a subject of the signifier" (122). Michael's animal references suggest his inability to control his language. The wish to be hidden like a gopher underground indicates not just the deconstruction of the human/nonhuman dichotomy but also his incapacity for language and being "a subject" (or an agent) of his narrative. Michael must "pause[] every now and then and listen[] to voices" so that his language can undergo a phase of transformation to ultimately represent his experience of the Rock Springs incident in his narrative.

This passage below shows Michael's encounter with Joseph in a secret hideout called "Star Rock," which parallels the wanderer's meeting with his young servant in Confucius's commentary:

**At its base I started hunting around for a hiding place, when suddenly I saw the narrow hole in the wall. I'd never noticed it before. [. . .] Gratefully I felt the rim of the hole and hauled myself inside. The cave itself was low, so I crawled toward the shadows at the back. Suddenly I heard something scabble in the darkness. [. . .] Then, in the dim light falling through the cave mouth, I saw a Chinese about my age. He had his own rock in his hand and looked as dirty as I figure I did. "This is my hiding place," I growled in a low voice. He spoke English clear as a bell. "I was here first." I'd thought he'd talk broken, like the other Chinese. "You speak good," I whispered,**

**blinking my eyes in surprise. “I speak English well,” he corrected me all high-and-mighty-like. (25-26)**

We witness the consistency of Yep’s codification of Michael’s language as Joseph’s voice is also represented in boldface. Joseph’s correction of Michael’s English resists the stereotype of Chinese immigrants who speak “broken” English. It is, ironically, Michael’s English that is broken and needs to be amended. Michael’s broken English can be taken as Yep’s critique of the inaccuracy and insufficiency of the dominant language in accounting for the Rock Springs massacre. This secret hiding place, moreover, testifies to Bhabha’s theory of cultural translation. Michael and Joseph both claim their ownership of Star Rock, with its dim light and indeterminable location; neither time nor space can be easily determined. Bhabha argues in “The Commitment to Theory” that the third space is where the cultural performance of the linguistic difference is dramatized. The third space is “a juncture between the subject of a proposition (énoncé) and the subject of enunciation” and the production of meaning is never simply communicated between “the I and the You” but by the mobilization of the two as well (Bhabha, *Location* 53). Star Rock therefore can be interpreted as the third space, characterized by its transitional and interstitial time and space, in which Chinese and American cultures are negotiated through the linguistic performance between Michael and Joseph. Star Rock represents a discursive space particular to “borderline existences” or a “new world (b)order” (Bhabha, *Location* 312), where the emergence of newness becomes possible. This “cave”-like space is also symbolic of a womb. It is not just a place of their retreat but an imaginary space which initiates the transformation and the rebirth of the two cultures. Indeed, Star Rock is a site of rebirthing for Michael and Joseph, and their brotherhood illustrates the bond of Chinese and American cultures. The encounter between them at Star Rock initiates a change of their outlooks on life, as

Joseph reflects: “**When I’m in Star Rock, the outside doesn’t matter. [. . .] It feels... well, almost normal**” (33). The ellipsis here represents not just Joseph’s hesitation about his cultural identity but also a caesura that interrupts the fluidity of the English language. Star Rock is more than a shelter for Joseph. It is a temporal and transitional space that Joseph feels included inside, with the caesura signifying his resistance to the normalcy of Michael’s narration or the dominance of the English language. Michael, nonetheless, responds to Star Rock differently: “**No, more than that. Star Rock’s different. [. . .] And it’s like living in a new place with a new me**” (33). The emergence of a new cultural form is portrayed through the rebirth of Michael and the reconfiguration of the space. In contrast with Joseph’s uncertain attitude, Michael embraces the change that Star Rock brings in him. Their encounter signifies not only a journey of their search for the Other but also an ineluctable transformation or mobilization of the two cultures in order to represent their experiences during the Rock Springs massacre.

Joseph’s mastery in English is evident in the passage above, but it is difficult not to ponder why English is italicized rather than boldfaced in Joseph’s diary. Because the novel is comprised of accounts of Joseph and Michael alternately, M. M. Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia can offer an effective approach to accurately examining the dialogic structure as well as the “voices” of the novel. In his “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin contends that language is a production of social conditions and a result of a social process. Bakhtin argues that the novel is a hybrid construction characterized by the oscillation between the system of a unitary language and the individual speaking the language. A unitary language, for Bakhtin, “is not something given [дан] but is always in essence posited [zadan]—and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia” (257). Heteroglossia refers to the coexistence of different variations of the same language and it always contradicts the unitary

language. At this point, *The Traitor*'s use of the two languages of Joseph and Michael, the two voices of both Chinese and American and Yep's play of the three fonts, as a way to negotiate with the unitary language appears to be an illuminating illustration of the structure. This dialogic structure of the novel also lends credibility of Yep's reconstruction of the Rock Springs massacre through both Chinese and American perspectives. The different fonts manifest not just Yep's re-appropriation of the dominant language but also the heteroglossic realities in America.

Yep's literary representation of Chinese American history through cultural translation is most evident in Joseph's narrative. After the Rock Springs massacre breaks out, Joseph goes to Michael's house for rescue. Joseph observes that Michael's house is a "ghost garden" and "the pencil drawings [have] almost faded to the color of the gray, unpainted boards" (223). The dilapidated appearance helps Joseph recognize Michael's house in the neighborhood and foreshadows the house's transformation. Mrs. Purdy offers to let Joseph and Otter to stay in the cellar, which parallels to the wanderer who travels to a "shelter" in Confucius's commentary. Seeing the empty house and deserted garden, Otter offers to refurnish both with his paper cutouts. Yep writes,

"I used to think this was silly when I saw my uncle doing it." Father picked up another sheet. "I thought it was just purely decorative." "Well, you're making flowers, after all," I said, puzzled. He smiled. "No, I'm going to drive some ghosts from this house. [. . .] There's a whole garden of them sketched on the walls of this house. They're dreams that have never become real. And if dreams aren't allowed to become real, then all they can be are ghosts." (256-257)

Chinese paper cutting or *jiangzhi* originated in Han Dynasty (roughly around the first century) after the invention of paper by Cai Lun. Paper cutouts are symbols of good luck used at

weddings or celebrations of the Chinese New Year, characterized by the auspicious color red (McCormick and White 285). As a traditional folk art, Chinese paper cutting often finds its expressions from Chinese legends and mythologies.<sup>42</sup> From a semiotic point of view, Otter's paper cutting is another example of Yep's cultural translation. The Chinese art is practiced in an American context and Chinese history and family heritage is disseminated or translated through Otter's reference to his uncle. From the historical context, the paper trimming and cutting is symbolic of Otter's reappropriating the Chinese heritage. The function of the paper is certainly not purely "decorative." The transformation of the paper into flowers is so powerful that it "drive[s] some ghosts from this house." As a piece of paper, Otter's paper cutouts can also be a metaphor of Yep's literary creations. The paper cutouts imply Yep's belief in the power of artistic imagination, for the form and content of the grand American narrative is lacking, and it must be complemented by Chinese language and culture. The ghostly sketches are more than dreams that have never become real; they are a symbol of American national ideology that Yep seeks to subvert with his literary imaginations. Yep's message is clear: American history is *unrepresentable* without the trace of Chinese immigrant experiences, and the representation of Rock Springs massacre can become possible by weaving both Chinese and American perspectives into his narrative. It is, of course, arguable that Otter's paper cutouts are like the sketches without any substance, but Michael and his mother respond to the transformation of their house otherwise:


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<sup>42</sup> For examples of a Chinese paper cutout, please visit the Mimicri Art Studio's website: [http://www.mimicri.co.uk/chinese\\_paper\\_cuts.htm](http://www.mimicri.co.uk/chinese_paper_cuts.htm).

**Magic had changed the room from drab, unpainted boards into all the gardens I had ever read about—with all sorts of brightly colored flowers and even butterflies and birds. [...] ‘We would have put the garden outside if we could,’ Mr. Young explained. ‘But for obvious reasons, we can’t.’ (265-266)**


In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau argues that the ways of operating in the social or everyday practice provide a panoptic view of power relations in a social system. The countless ways of “making do” (29) with space reveal the manipulation of power and the creation of a system within a larger system. De Certeau writes, “These styles of action intervene in a field which regulates them at a first level (for example, at the level of the factory system), but they introduce into it a way of turning it to their advantage that obeys other rules and constitutes something like a second level interwoven into the first” (30). In this sense, the paper cutouts are Otter’s ways of recreating China in an American space or redistributing the power of American discourse. The brightly colored flowers, butterflies, and birds are Otter’s imaginations of China and his creation of a symbolic world. The cutouts are not simply decorations of an American space but the insertion of his marginal and invisible Chinese immigrant status into the symbolic space of American life through his practice of paper cutting. From the aspect of translation, the transformation of Michael’s house through Chinese paper cutting parallels the renewal of the American narrative structure through Otter’s translation of Chinese language and art. Benjamin’s concept of “afterlife” fittingly describes implications of translation’s transformative power: “For in its afterlife—which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living—the original undergoes a change” (“Task” 73). Like the Benjaminian “original,” the once empty and unpainted boards are now changing

into a garden with vivid Chinese images. The images of the house and garden metaphorically illustrate the content and structure of Chinese American literature. It is a Chinese garden inside an American house—Chinese culture is once rejected outside but is rigorously inserted into the American narrative. Yep strategically merges two cultures and creates a new form of American literature in his narrative. Michael’s house signifies the emergence of the literary form of Chinese American literature through Yep’s reconfiguration of the two cultures and languages.

The analysis above demonstrates how Yep appropriates the two languages to represent the massacre from both Chinese and English perspectives in *The Traitor*. I want to provide a passage from Confucius’s commentary to reinforce my argument about Yep’s *myth*-translation of the Rock Springs massacre. Observe Confucius’s commentary on the hexagram Lü  and its connection to *The Traitor* below:

If the wanderer busies himself with trivial things, / He draws down misfortune upon himself. / The wanderer comes to an inn. / He has his property with him. / He wins the steadfastness of a young servant. / The wanderer’s inn burns down. / He loses the steadfastness of his young servant. Danger. / The wanderer rests in a shelter. / He obtains his property and an ax. / My heart is not glad. [. . .] / The bird’s nest burns up. / The wanderer laughs at first, / Then must needs lament and weep. / Through carelessness he loses his cow. / Misfortune. (Wilhelm 216-219)

Confucius’s commentary effectively outlines the major events in *The Traitor*. Joseph, or the wanderer, who is troubled by his Chinese American identity, travels with Otter to Wyoming and befriends Michael at Star Rock. The “inn” symbolizes the spatial temporality of Chinatown in Rock Springs, which is burned down by the anti-Chinese protesters and the wanderer is forced to

be apart from Michael during the riot. Michael's basement can be interpreted as the "shelter" where the wanderer rests, and the "property" and "ax" are the tools of producing Chinese paper cutouts. The wanderer's loss and lamentation in the commentary resonates Joseph's response to the aftermath of the riot. From the analysis above, we see a clear indication of Yep's translation of Confucius's commentary on the hexagram contextualized in *The Traitor*. As the only source that records the history of early ancient China, the hexagrams in the *I Ching* can be interpreted as an "intersemiotic translation" (Jakobson 114) because of its codification of history in a nonverbal sign system. As a nonverbal sign, the hexagram Lü  presents an aporia that appears impenetrable without a commentary. The codification of meaning from a verbal sign to a nonverbal one articulates the paradoxical feature of intersemiotic translation; that is, history remains *unrepresentable as a myth* within the sign system but requires interpretation and narration. A translation of the hexagram, from a semiotic sign to a verbal language, therefore becomes an indispensable (mis-)myth-translation.

But why, if I may, *myth*-translate history? On September 3, 1885, a local newspaper *Independent* in Wyoming published an editorial one day after the massacre, commenting on the return of the Chinese miners. Rather than condemning the violence of Knights of Labor, the article reported that the Chinese hurried to the ruins of their houses and unearthed six thousand dollars in gold and silver which had been concealed before their flight. Below is how the article concluded:

It means that all the white miners in Rock Springs, except those absolutely required, are to be replaced by Chinese labor. It means that the company intends to make a "Chinatown" out of Rock Springs, as they proposed to the Almy miners



last Monday. It means that Rock Springs is killed, as far as white men are concerned, if such program is carried out. (Wu 167)

The description of the Chinese digging out their money was written as if the wealth had been stolen from the white men. The Chinese were to blame for the fact that “Rock Springs is killed.”

The article was intended to provoke more action against the Chinese who would “make a ‘Chinatown’ out of Rock Springs.” Yep’s *myth*-translation of the Rock Springs massacre is a counter-hegemonic strategy to correct the political misrepresentations of the Chinese and to reconstruct the history of the massacre. If language, politically speaking, transmits nothing but order-words according to Deleuze and Guattari, then the various fonts, whether Times New Roman, bold, or italics, are different paralinguistic materials that Yep appropriates to disrupt the normalcy of the English language and to counter the authority of the dominant culture.

According to Benjamin, “The translation of the language of things into that of man is not only a translation of the mute into the sonic; it is also the translation of the nameless into name. It is therefore the translation of an imperfect language into a more perfect one, and cannot but add something to it, namely knowledge” (“Language” 325). Yep uses English, **English**, and *English* to create a language for his *myth*-translation, to translate the unnameable experiences of the Rock Springs massacre into name, and to transform the imperfect English language into a more perfect one. Yep’s *myth*-translation represents the ineffable past of the Rock Springs massacre and resists the unitary language through deploying different fonts—it is the middle voice, the irreducible paradox, the *différance*, or the third space that destabilizes the English language and American national history.

Is *myth*-translation particular to Yep’s *Golden Mountain Chronicles*? I want to end this chapter with an example from Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese* to argue that *myth*-

translation can be a counter-hegemonic practice that effectively criticizes the language politics of cultural translation in Chinese North American literature. In this graphic novel, Yang tells the story of Jin Wang, a Chinese American boy who develops a complex relationship with his American friend Danny and Chinese cousin Chin-Kee. Jin must learn how to solve his identity crisis through the help of Chin-Kee, who later reveals his true identity as the Chinese mythic figure Monkey King. Yang ends the novel with Jin and Chin-Kee sitting at a Chinese diner. Note Yang's (mis)translation of “餐廳餅家” (restaurant and bakery) into “BAKERY CAFÉ” and the similarity to Yep's literary imagination of Star Rock foregrounded by the contestation of American and Chinese cultures:



## Conclusion

### Rethinking Bridging North American Chinese Diaspora with

#### Homi Bhabha's Theory

“The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony. [. . .] The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be ‘Oriental’ [. . .] but also because it *could be*—that is, submitted to being—*made* Oriental”—Edward Said, *Orientalism*

“Most of the world thinks of Asia still, or calls Asia the Far East. We call Asia the West. [. . .] Which is now, we believe, the centre of the world. [. . .] The decision to build relationships was eminently obvious for us.”—B.C. Premier Christy Clark, July 15, 2014

This dissertation studies politics of visibility of Chinese North Americans in the works by Wayson Choy and Laurence Yep. As the title of my dissertation suggests, I use Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory to frame my analysis of North American Chinese diaspora represented in the two writers' works. Because both writers focus on the transnational experiences of Chinese North Americans, I contend that Bhabha's postcolonial theory will be productive to investigate issues of class, race, identity, language, and culture exhibited in their works. As such, I use Bhabha's concepts of the third space, mimicry, and cultural translation to examine how both writers strategically essentialize and reinscribe cultural difference in their narrations of Canada and the United States as a nation respectively. I argue that the in-between space in which Chinese North Americans inhabit—“neither this nor that” or “neither Chinese nor Canadian/American”—articulates a cultural doubling that disavows the dominance of any cultural or political hegemony.

To study Chinese North American literature through the lens of Bhabha's theory, one must first address a few theoretical questions: What is the definition of the term postcolonial? Is the United States or Canada postcolonial? Are Chinese North Americans postcolonial? My intention in raising these questions is to indicate the relevance of postcolonial theory to North

American history and to theorize postcolonial Chinese North American literature. First, I share the same view with Robert Young who in “What is the postcolonial?” defines “postcolonial” as a language of/for the invisible or the oppressed. “Postcoloniality” describes the condition of postcolonial communities who are no longer directly colonized but remain under the control of the Western center in the age of globalization. “Postcolonialism” offers a theoretical approach to the cultural productions of the invisible communities with a view to giving them proper recognition for their socioeconomic contributions in history. I redefine these terms not only because the meaning of the “post” in postcolonial needs to be clarified but also because classic colonialism has been replaced by neocolonialism under the name of globalization through which the First World countries exercise their control over developing countries. Second, although Chinese North Americans cannot be considered “colonized” since they did not experience the loss of land in North American history, I argue that their postcolonial condition arises from internal colonization and institutionalized racism. Internal colonization refers to the exploitation of minority groups to produce *a system of inequalities*, such as in education, housing, employment, and finance, within a nation. In the case of Chinese North Americans, their unequal status is a result of anti-Chinese policies which inscribe the historical invisibility of Chinese North Americans. A study of Chinese Exclusion Act further illustrates that the law fulfilled the imagination of a national unity by regulating the Chinese as the racial Other so that they remain socially and economically marginalized. Although many scholars such as Jenny Sharpe and Laura Moss have considered the theoretical intersections between postcolonial theory and American/Canadian literature, a detailed discussion on the postcolonial condition of a particular ethnic group in North America is lacking in their works. Chapter one theorizes postcolonial

Chinese North American literature and contributes to the dialogue between postcolonial theory and Chinese North American studies.


The term “Chinatown” may be designated to describe a few buildings or streets in which Chinese immigrants inhabit but a study of its history reveals the racial and sociopolitical discrimination against the Chinese institutionalized by the white society. I interpret Chinatown, a non-Western space located in North America, as the third space to foreground its spatial and cultural ambiguities which contradict the imagination of a totalized or holistic nation. Bhabha’s third space emphasizes the heterogeneity of minority communities whose cultural difference registers an internal split within a nation. This liminal space, in other words, operates as a counter-hegemonic device that displaces the authority of a national culture so that the differentiated spatial boundary (the “outside”) is reintroduced into the “authenticating ‘inward’ time of Tradition” (Bhabha, *Location* 213). In *Paper Shadows* Choy narrates his memory of Vancouver’s Chinatown haunted by Canadian and Chinese ghosts. This “double haunting” reflects the anti-Chinese attitudes of the white society and the voices of Chinese immigrants whose contribution to the development of Western Canada was not recognized. Similarly, Yep in *The Lost Garden* recounts his paper delivery experiences in San Francisco’s Chinatown. The paper route scene reveals not just the operation of the capitalist system in San Francisco but also the exploitation of Chinese Americans whose service was never appreciated by the dominant society. In addition to my analysis of Chinatown as a culturally and socially segregated space in the light of Bhabha’s theory, I apply the concept of relationality by David Harvey to focalize the socioeconomic contributions of Chinese immigrants in North American history. My intention in selecting the two memoirs by Choy and Yep is to analyze the spatial transformations of Chinatown in Vancouver and San Francisco respectively and to study their reconstruction of

Chinese North American history. By investigating the cultural and socioeconomic implications of Chinatown, I argue that their memoirs subvert the national histories and reconceptualise Canada and the United States as culturally heterogeneous nations.

Among the children in *The Jade Peony*, Liang manifests the most devastating effects of colonial mimicry. In “Of Mimicry and Man,” Bhabha argues that mimicry is the desire for a reformed and recognized Other, but the result is the partial resemblance of the colonizer, which is “*almost the same but not quite*.” Mimicry essentially produces an ambiguous image with the resemblance of both the colonizer and the colonized—a double vision which “in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (*Location* 126). Although scholars such as Michelle Harley and Eleanor Ty have discussed Liang’s mimicry of Shirley Temple in their works, they fail to consider other Hollywood figures in Liang’s narrative. My project contributes to the study of Liang’s mimicry of multiple Hollywood icons, including Tarzan and Jane, Robin Hood and Marian, and Shirley Temple. First, in the film *Tarzan the Ape Man*, the ceaseless chanting “you-me, Tarzan-Jane” suggests that the reversal of the subject-object relationship and the subversion of traditional gender roles. Liang’s desire to become Tarzan/Jane therefore indicates her sexual awareness and the disavowal of gender construction by society. Second, the film *Robin Hood* presents complex issues of sexuality because of the ambiguous interaction between Robin Hood and other characters. It is arguable that Robin Hood is never comfortable with his sexuality: He appears the most joyous in the Sherwood Forest with his band of merry men. In the novel, Liang’s imagination of Wong Suk as her “bandit-prince” connotes the homosocial intimacy of the Chinese bachelor-men who were separated from their family in China as a result of the Chinese Exclusion Act. The reference to Robin Hood implies not just the issue of Wong Suk’s sexuality but also the racial castration of Chinese bachelor men who were

socially and culturally segregated in Chinatown. Since the cape that Liang uses to become Marian is also used by Wong Suk to become Robin Hood, Liang's mimicry reveals her desire for cross-dressing and articulates the transcendence of her sexual difference.

My analysis of Liang's mimicry of Shirley Temple is contextualized in the film *Bright Eyes*. Surrounded by a group of male aviators with presents, Temple's performance in "On a Good Ship Lollipop" suggests the overlapping of men's pedophilic sexual gaze and her material desire. Temple's joint custody with two older men further signifies the ironic legalization of the unlawful relationship and the legitimatization of pedophilic fantasies. In the novel, Liang mimics Temple for two purposes. Initially used to challenge the authority of her Poh-Poh, Liang's mimicry is a form of empowerment to regain control of her cultural identity. When performing Temple's tap dance in front of Wong Suk, Liang wants to be loved and adored by becoming "Daddy's girl." The reflection that Liang sees in the mirror well testifies to Bhabha's theory of mimicry: a broken image of both Liang and Temple, *almost the same but not quite*. The dialectics of self and image articulates a cultural doubling of Liang's identity, neither Chinese nor Canadian yet both. Liang's mimicry of Tarzan/Jane, Robin Hood and Marian, and Shirley Temple symbolizes her evolving sexual identity and gender construction. I argue that Liang's Hollywood fantasies represent her desire to be accepted and assimilated whereas her mimicry reappropriates the colonial images disseminated in Western culture. I submit that her mimicry is a means of survival as a Chinese Canadian girl in Vancouver's Chinatown.

Yep's *The Traitor* represents the history of Rock Springs massacre in Wyoming in 1885. *The Traitor* is Yep's most ambitious work in the *Golden Mountain* series not only because of its complex narrative structure but also because of the intertextual relationship between *I Ching* and Chinese American history. I argue that Yep's incorporation of the hexagram  and adaptation



of Confucius's commentary is a *myth*-translation that reveals the inadequacy of the official history of Rock Springs massacre. The two alternating diaries by Joseph Young and Michael Purdy are evidence of Yep's intention to reconstruct the massacre from both Chinese and American perspectives. In "How Newness Enters the World," Bhabha theorizes the untranslatable moment as a form of resistance that challenges the dominant culture. The untranslatability gives rise to an in-between space that cancels the authority of the original and accommodates the emergence of a new meaning. Bhabha's theory of cultural translation illuminates the significance Yep's *myth*-translation, for the different fonts that Yep uses to codify English suggest his conscious reappropriation of the dominant language and his intention to create a new language to represent the Rock Springs massacre. My purpose of studying *The Traitor* with Bhabha's theory of cultural translation is to investigate the language politics exhibited in Yep's *myth*-translation. My theory of *myth*-translation contributes to knowledge of the cultural translation field by providing an innovative reading of Yep's *The Traitor* with a focus on the intertextual relationship between *I Ching* and Chinese American literature.

My dissertation is devoted to examining how Choy and Yep use different tactics of intervention to revoke the authority of cultural hegemony and to restage the visibility of Chinese North Americans. Ultimately, my project offers a new understanding of their works through Bhabha's postcolonial theory. The current study, of course, does not allow enough space to address all of the issues in the works by Choy and Yep. The narratives by Jung-Sum and Sek-Lung in Choy's *The Jade Peony*, for instance, are not included in my project and they will be excellent texts to analyze the gender politics in Chinese Canadian literature. The aspect of education in the memoirs by Choy and Yep can also be more thoroughly explored. I will take up these tasks in my next project.

In May earlier this year, China was considering building a high-speed railway line from northeast China to the U.S. The project would include the construction of a tunnel underneath the Pacific Ocean to cut through Alaska and Canada in order to reach the continental U.S. Although the officials claimed that their technology was already in place, engineers and political analysts remained skeptical because of its enormous expense. On July 15, B.C. Premier Christy Clark announced her plan to build the first international trading centre for the Chinese currency. Clark called Vancouver “the most Asian city outside of Asia,” hoping to attract more investors from China to the province. These two news stories signal that China has established itself as one of the world leaders and is narrowing the gap between Asia and North America with its booming economy. Despite the unknown political agenda behind the project, the “China-Russia-Canada-America” railway is a sign of China’s ambition of connecting to and competing with North America. Will China’s new superpower status be able to redefine the power relationship between the East and the West? What should be the new strategies that Chinese North American writers incorporate to negotiate with the dominant culture when the deterritorialization of space has become more radical in the Digital Age? How do Chinese North Americans respond to China as the “new West”? It is my hope that these questions emerging from Chinese North American studies will be addressed in my next project and I will continue my task of giving voice to the invisible as a postcolonial critic in the future.

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