

All that Matters does not Matter: The Politics of Dehyphenation in Wayson Choy's *All That Matters*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Chinese Canadian writer Wayson Choy's *All That Matters* (2004), the sequel to *The Jade Peony* (1995), by proposing a new reading of dehyphenation in the narrative. In *All That Matters*, Choy, continuing the family saga from the previous novel, foregrounds the moments of contact between China and Canada and transports the Chen children's stories to the "seemingly" binary existence. However, moving beyond an "affect-identity," the narrative is fraught with dehyphenated realities and ostensibly unimportant events for the narrator to conceptualize subjectivity in more fluid and elastic terms. Slightly different from *The Jade Peony*, where the narrators grapple with their identity/identification in the dominant Canadian society, *All That Matters* exposes the complexities of dehyphenation—not necessarily conciliatory and apolitical—to ultimately reveal what Daniel Aaron (1964) calls "universalist humanism" as well as "humanism" expounded by Edward Said (2004). Choy's writing agenda, in his own words, "transcends rules" to write about human decency and love in the new millennium. Choy uses a simple yet incisive metaphor, the butterfly, to symbolize the significant impacts of small acts of humanism. The essay also interrogates the question, in a broader theoretical sense, of how the transfigurations of dehyphenation delimit the emergent Chinese space and the national Canadian space by asking what is emergent within the emergent, with all the multicultural writings in Canada. Transcending the hyphen, Choy's novel, through dehyphenated poetics—through such ordinary act as the flapping butterflies—is causing a new "tornado" in today's Canadian literature.

Text

Too much has been made of origins. All origins are arbitrary. This is not to say that they are not also nurturing, but they are essentially coercive and indifferent. Country, nation, these concepts are of course deeply indebted to origins, family, tradition, home. Here at home, in Canada, we are all implicated in this sense of origins. It is a manufactured origin nevertheless playing to our need for home, however tyrannical. This country, in the main a country of immigrants, is always redefining origins, jockeying and smarming for degrees of belonging.

--Dionne Brand,

A Map to the Door of No Return (64)

The "manufactured origin" in the passage above accurately depicts the generic sentiment of constant

identity making and remaking for many immigrants in the host culture. In *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen* (2004), editors Eleanor Ty and Donald Goellnicht, however, remark an important shift of identity politics in Asian North American Studies in the new millennium: the discourse of "beyond-the-hyphen."⁽¹⁾ In the post-millennial era of globalization when national borders become porous and cultural differences blurry, is probing hyphenated realities in the typical or blasé "between-worlds" liminality still a productive way to articulate identity formation? The origin of the adjective "hyphenate" can be traced back as far as the late nineteenth century (Hallissy 30-32; Aaron 69-70). During World War I, it referred specifically to American citizens of foreign birth or descent (e.g., Irish-American). Today, in pedagogical terms in formal writing, using a hyphen between compound nouns (e.g., French Canadian) can be labeled as "politically incorrect."⁽²⁾

The general acceptance of the inaugural scholar-

ship on ethnic minority studies in North America started from the pivotal year 1965, during and after which the third world movement on the West Coast gave birth to Asian American Studies, African American Studies, Chicano Studies, Native American Studies, and GLBT Studies. The change in the U.S. immigration laws in 1965 coincided with the establishment of worldwide jet travel,⁽³⁾ and 1965 also marked an important shift in the American immigration policy, nationality, nationalism, and exclusion (Luibheid 501-22). After more than half a century when the field of minority studies has flourished with more institutionalized compartmentalizations, in what directions can we push further the discipline in conjunction with postcoloniality, diaspora, globalization in the study of *minority* discourse that has procured an important place in literary scholarship? Has *minority per se* become another hegemonic discourse in today's literary studies? To project future developments, I wish to go reversely back to ante-1965 and attempt to examine the applicability of the nascent consciousness of multiculturalism in North America and see if such emergent literature circuits itself in an epochal loop.

Traditionally conceptualized in minority literature, the hyphen, a mark that simultaneously conjoins and separates, is a central trope in Chinese(-)Canadian – or Asian(-)American – literature in general. For many Chinese Canadian writers, hyphenation, a both empowering and scarred space, perpetuates their writing that attempts to transcend the scarred space or to return to the hyphenated scar marking their difference. The hyphen used to designate different Asian Canadian groups, thus functioning as a paradoxical boundary continuously mediating between the two disparate cultural impedimenta imposed on the individuals living in between. This contradiction, complicated by Canadian multicultural imperatives, has produced the unforeseen effect of underscoring stereotypical markers of cultural difference of imposing stock images of otherness on the public imagination while tending to erase its signs of cultural belonging.

Before proceeding to the main argument on dehyphenation in my paper, I wish to pose several questions here. What does it mean for a Chinese Canadian writer in the new millennium to return to the ante-1965 historical moments when ethnicity or racial difference in North America was just about to emerge

in the national consciousness? How does the writer Wayson Choy, the second-generation Chinese Canadian, orchestrate racial inscription or racial erasure in his own writing agenda? How should we read the novel, fraught with racialized inscription or erasure, along the vein of dehyphenation? Choy's previous novel, *The Jade Peony* (1995), and memoir *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood* (1999), as indicated by many critics (see Ty, 2004; Davis, 2001), are imbued with explicit friction for the characters between their Chinese ethnicity and Canadian citizenship. It would be indeed too simplistic to argue that *All That Matters* simply leaves out any possible interpretation on race politics. In partial response to John Zhong Ming Chen's call for paper "The New Challenges, Changes, and Chances" in the 2008 ACCUTE conference on the new ideologies and directions of Asian Canadian literature, the major concern of this essay returns to the aesthetical, individual engagements that the scholars of the ethnicity studies nowadays are reluctant to tackle. Choy's post-millennial novel signals a new direction in Asian North American literature in its new take on conceptualizing identity through the relationship between aesthetic and social modalities of form.⁽⁴⁾

Several scholars have taken up useful approaches to reading Choy, mainly from a postcolonial, diasporic perspective (see Ang, Chercover, Cho, Ty), and these theoretical claims, though contributing considerably to Asian North American Studies, somehow are confined to issues on "migration" (Cho), "diaspora" (Ang, Chercover); "border crossing" (Ty). Few look beyond a national context or beyond an ethnographic or racialized framework. While postcolonial studies and debates are reaching a kind of "cultural fatigue," in French Canadian critic Hubert Aquin's phrasing,⁽⁵⁾ we may try to read fictional work from the vein of *universalism*, proposed by Aquin, believing that "humanity is involved in the process of convergence and unification" (45). It is from Aquin's vantage point that I see an alternative altering such identity fatigue to a universalist project in reading Choy's novel to strip ethno-racial identities from reading a "minority" text in contemporary metropolitan societies. Drawing on the ongoing identitary shift, the concept already addressed by Ty and Goellnicht, this essay analyzes Chinese Canadian writer Wayson Choy's *All That Matters*, a sequel to *The Jade Peony*, by proposing a

new reading of dehyphenation in the narrative. In *All That Matters*, Choy, continuing the family saga in its previous novel, foregrounds the moments of contact between China and Canada and transports the Chen children's stories to the "seemingly" binary existence (e.g., Chinatown Chinese vs. white Canadians). However, slightly different from the multiple narratives in *The Jade Peony*, the story in *All That Matters* is narrated through the first-person Kiam-Kim Chen, the first brother missing in *The Jade Peony*. Set in Vancouver's Chinese community during the period 1926-1941, the novel reveals that the community is individualized through its focus on the Chen family, particularly through Kiam-Kim's eyes to look at reality.

Kiam-Kim travels as a young "alien resident" to Vancouver from China along with his father and grandmother to begin a new life. Escaping the turbulent China under economic pressure and civil wars, the family comes to a new country still unsure how to handle a growing Chinese presence and xenophobia.⁽⁶⁾ Eventually the family invites new members into their home: a stepmother (*gai mu*) from their native land to take the place of a wife and mother who has died, and an adopted son. Each member of the family comes to Canada with a different purpose. The father hopes to earn a comfortable living for his family and to provide a mother to Kiam-Kim as well as additional children. Poh-Poh seeks to escape her haunted past as a child slave while reminding her family to remain Chinese. Kiam-Kim simply longs to fit into this new land. Like his brothers and sister in the previous novel, Kiam-Kim is caught between two very distinct cultures. His family endeavors only to honor their Chinese heritage, yet Kiam-Kim is also fascinated by all things North American and non-Chinese. He becomes the fulcrum between the father's adoption of Western views and the grandmother's ties to traditional Chinese values. While working to find a comfortable medium, he is pulled in both directions – between choosing Jenny, daughter of Poh-Poh's mahjong companion, and keeping his friendship with Jack O'Connor, the Irish neighbor's son. Kiam-Kim's history grows into a novel about the boundless power of love and decency, an ultimate pursuit of dehyphenation, I would argue.

Despite a host of valuable critical contributions over the past decade(s) by important scholars on Asian North American Studies (e.g., Chiang, Chuh, Lee),

mostly elaborating within an ethnographic or racialized framework, I swerve slightly and re-appropriate "dehyphenation" from Daniel Aaron's important essay "The Hyphenate Writer and American Letters" (1964), which explores multiculturalism in American literature. Aaron's essay interestingly uses "de-" as a prefix signaling a removal from "hyphenation" used widely in designating minority writers' background after 1965. The theoretical idea is also inspired partly by social scientist Timothy Mitchell, who employs dehyphenation in a post-foundational sense, with the assumption about the spatial coincidence of state and nation that is difficult to sustain in the context of today's transnationalizing capitalism.⁽⁷⁾

At first glance, it would be easy to situate Kiam-Kim between retaining a native culture and embracing the host culture, or, as some critics might suggest, the novel serves as a Chinese Canadian *roman à clef* to foreground the narrator within the Chinatown community as part of the protagonist's itinerary of self awareness. Choy, however, does not try to highlight the hyphenated tension in the story (i.e., whether Kiam should be more Chinese or more Canadian). A clue to reading dehyphenation is from the central metaphoric *juk-sing* (bamboo stumps), as Kiam-Kim calls himself: stalwart outside and hollow within (71, 170). Contrary to his adopted brother Jung-Sum, who tries hard to be non-Chinese but "to be like Jack O'Connor" (171), and his third brother Sekky, who prefers using English and wishes his skin to turn white and eyes to become blue (*The Jade Peony* 133-4), Kiam-Kim, nevertheless, follows the universal values of acting to its best his role as a "wise and all-seeing" *dai-goh* (big brother) to his siblings, as a faithful friend to Jack, as a dutiful son to Dad, and a filial grandson to Poh Poh. For Kiam-Kim, his identification or identity with either China or Canada emerges out of humanistic concern (215), rather than skin color. Seeing beyond "autoethnography,"⁽⁸⁾ Kiam-Kim, or the narrative itself, poses the central question: "What world did any of us belong to? What world would we fight for?" (281).

I am also arguing that instead of pulling the reader's attention to either side or both sides of the hyphen, as conventionally implied in reading Asian American literature, the "emptiness" of the metaphoric *juk-sing* is filled in the narrative with universal truth as the word *truth*, throughout Kiam-kim's narration, is con-

stantly emphasized either by the narrator or by his family (111, 113, 122, 298, 302, 371). A clue to reading the novel as a dehyphenated narrative is suggested by the novel's opening quotation from *The Analects of Confucius*: "With words, all that matters is to express the truth." The story thus evolves from various manifestations of *truth*. If the doctrines of *The Analects of Confucius* are applicable to one's decent way of life, all that matters is "to express truth." Thus, for Choy as a writer transcending skin colors and national boundaries, what matters is "to do the right thing" (116). What matters between two true friends is that they "earn a reputation for sticking together" (235) and "share the glory together" (260). What matters to Kiam-Kim is that "I" matters, "that in some ancient way, order prevailed amid the growing darkness" (287). Finally, what really matters is the belief in human decency. As Kiam-Kim tells Jack, "What truths were being told between us, what I could understand of them, I did not think should take away everything that I found impossible to surrender. No, I did not want to surrender what was still god and decent among us" (391). Beyond national borders and racial backgrounds, Kiam-Kim further reiterates truth as a universal concept that "every citizen should understand clearly what was happening in the *world* [my emphasis] conflict" (298).

I return here to Aaron's essay to cement my central argument. Aaron envisions the crucial moment of transition when the minority writer breaks out of himself – determined or enforced segregation into a larger United States – and from there into a universal republic (70-71). In the three-stage process "by which the 'minority' writer [passes] from 'hyphenation' to 'dehyphenation'," the writer, in the final stage, no longer feels hyphenated:

As a writer (if not necessarily as a private citizen) he has transcended a mere parochial allegiance and can now operate freely in the republic of the spirit. Without renouncing his ethnic or racial past, he has translated his own and his minority's personal experience... into the province of the imagination.... He no longer peers out from behind the minority barricade. In fact, he is no longer the *conscious* "representative" of a national or racial group, but a writer, a disaffiliate. Race and religion and ethnic origin are merely so many colors for his writer's palette.

(73-74)

Instead, as Choy says in an interview, for those who are struggling between cultures, "we're really at a kind of banquet table, a childhood place where we can eventually choose to be nourished by the best from all cultures."⁹ In another interview with Rocío G. Davis, Choy states that "no one belongs," a statement that one can break from hyphenated constraints. "What we have to do," Choy continues, "is build bridges towards each other through affection and understanding and the community working together. That implies respecting each other, learning about each other, identifying with each other" (275).

I am trying to provide in my essay a reading other than probing the hyphenated scars in many Asian North American narratives. As my title "dehyphenation" suggests, I would like to place dehyphenation in the context of "universalist humanism." Such humanism corresponds to what Choy bears in mind as a writer, not as an *ethnic* writer. *All That Matters* exposes the complexities of dehyphenation – not "necessarily conciliatory and apolitical" (Aaron 83) – to ultimately reveal what Aaron calls "universalist humanism." I am expounding dehyphenation from Aaron's definition that dehyphenation is not only a process of Americanization but also a process of individualization and universalization. Nevertheless, I am not suggesting that Choy eschews by any means ethnic implications and hyphenated politics in his writing, nor am I proffering that this work be read in the vein of humanism simply due to the fact that postcolonialism and other relevant ethnic studies in academia have reached a deadlock. Apart from the central narrator Kiam-Kim's struggle and negotiation between two worlds, corresponding to many of his public interviews of writing "great" literature, Choy deliberately deploys "humanism," stripped of racial coloring, to the narrative. Read in critical parameters, "humanism" in Choy's text resonates with how Edward Said defines humanism in relation to democratic criticism: "Humanism is about reading, it is about perspective, and, in our work as humanists, it is about transitions from one realm, one area of human experience to another. It is also about the practice of identities other than those given by the flag or the national war of the moment" (80). Choy's humanism attempts to refuse an identity "given by the flag" and stays away from certain racial stereotypes or nationalistic claims. Here it

is evident to see Choy's writing agenda situated in humanism, which is an integral part of great literature. My understanding of humanism is not so much of the Leavisian humanism of focusing on the normal subject in the Leavisian writing-reading context. My critical use of the term "humanism" in relation to great literature bears only on an essentialist understanding that the literary work adheres to universal themes regarding human existence.

Aaron's idea of universalist humanism was proposed in 1964, a year before the Civil Rights movement in 1965 in the United States. After half century, when ethnic studies and politics get heated and then blasé in academic debates, on the basis of Aaron's and Said's humanism, I attempt to return to a more traditional, humanistic account for fundamental concerns for great literature reflecting human condition. Choy's novel is not plot driven, but is personal revelations for readers to join the dots and come to the narrative line. It would be perfunctory to point that "nothing happens," as a reader reviews the book.⁽¹⁰⁾ As the Chinese writer Ha Jin comments on the book, "On the surface, the gentle narrative voice seems to belie the weight and power of the story, but as we read along, the energy accumulates and the momentum accelerates. The novel shows convincingly what is fundamental in humanity, and it also shows the author's firm belief in human decency."⁽¹¹⁾

The writing agenda, in Choy's own words, "transcends rules" to write about human decency and love in the new millennium.⁽¹²⁾ He uses a simple yet incisive metaphor, the butterfly, to symbolize the huge impacts of small acts of humanism. If truth is the basis of universalism, then Choy implies, or states explicitly, all that matters about this book is universal humanism, the truth. In the coming-of-age story, Kiam-Kim becomes an exemplar of questing and questioning humanity, despite his ethnic origins, to growing up as a complete individual. Choy's novel might look as a historical novel, but the narration tends to break from the past. In many interviews, Choy, seeing himself as a writer, rather than an ethnic writer, works to reveal in his book the universal values (e.g., loyalty, truth, respect). For Choy, the past, after all, is like the false *gai-gee*, "the immigration ghost papers" (367). Kiam-kim tries to break from the between worlds, the divisions (405) as "Chinese Canadian," a term not only imbued with two geographic locations and dis-

inct cultures, but also shadowed with historical specificities fraught with racial exclusions. It is precisely the rejection of "divisions" by people's "colour and fears, their language and beliefs" (405) that points to Choy's writing agenda of focusing on universal humanism.

Throughout the novel, the "Chinese" values reiterated are not peculiarly Chinese, but universal. Choy emphasizes these universal values such as "manners" and "loyalty" that one does not need to shed the ethnic heritage to become a *bona fide* Canadian. The Old One's constant reminding of *mo li* (no manners) in the interpersonal relations is a good example of such universality: "to have *mo li* meant not only to lack manners but to have little sense of social ritual, thus bringing a bad reputation to one's family" (56). Another pervasive value stressed by Choy is *jung-sum* (loyalty), which is also the adopted brother's name. In Kiam-Kim's words, what really matters between two friends is loyalty, that "they bloodied the noses of Strathcona recess bullies and earned a reputation for sticking together (235). Despite the estrangement of the two neighboring families, Kiam-Kim and Jack treat each other respectfully and faithfully. What really matters is that "Jack never deserted the core of our friendship: he shared the glory with me" (260). Kiam-Kim breaks from the between-worlds constraint, from the internal (fears and beliefs) and external (language and color) divisions (405). As a *dai-kou*, he is to "teach Jung-Sum how to be always patient, [to] set an example" (183). As Jack's faithful friend, even though Jack betrays him for Jenny, Kiam-Kim still wants things to be as they have been, believing there is "still good and decent among us" (391).

Choy stated that while writing the book, he had in his head the image of a butterfly flapping its wings, causing a tornado a thousand miles away.⁽¹³⁾ The flapping of wings may have minimal power, but such strife constitutes the everyday act, the true universalist poetics in good literature: a small act having a huge, unexpected impact on human beings. The image of the butterfly is implied insidiously throughout the narrative: from *gai mou's* first gift, a silver butterfly, to Kiam-Kim, to the metaphoric delicate butterfly wings picked by Sekky to Poh-Poh (294), to the butterflies pressed by Kiam-Kim and Jack into the snow (413). The flying butterfly perhaps replaces the fixed, rigid hyphen between the interpersonal relationships.

Transcending the hyphen, the novel, through the dehyphenated poetics – through such ordinary act as the flapping butterflies – is causing a new tornado in today’s Asian Canadian literature in that different from Asian Canadian writers selling on orientalism, engaging young writers such as the Toronto physician writer Vincent Lam and the poet Ray Hsu have written about human conditions in ER stories, in prison stories. With this ethnical transcendence in mind, is it then possible to break the impasse of hyphenation, a generally acknowledged idea of assuming that all Asian Canadians are split down the middle and made schizophrenic by white Canadian culture? In other words, is the process of dehyphenation both desirable and inevitable for ethnic writers who seek to be literary artists? Liberated from the hyphenated space, from the multiple voices and fragmented narratives pervasive in “representational” Chinese Canadian writing (e.g., *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, *When Fox Is A Thousand*), dehyphenation participates in the inquiry from culture and society to the individual, to the first-person narrator Kiam-Kim, who translates moments of social choice into moments of individual choice. Like Wayson Choy as an artist/writer, the characters would discover truths about their lives. Towards the end of the novel, as Kiam-Kim says, “All the talk had been about the truth, and it had mattered” (389). “What truths were being told between us [with Jack], what I could understand of them, I did not think should take away everything that I found impossible to surrender” (391). The author’s words would attempt to express those truths, the ultimate pursuit of great literature to discover what really matters.⁽¹⁴⁾

Read along a broader universalist vein, dehyphenation rejects the exoticizing implication that both sides of the hybrid ethnic/national equation have equal weight. In response to Canadian multiculturalist literature and criticism which argues that we must move beyond homogenous notions of nationhood “into a consideration of the complex traffic between and within cultures and regions” (Heble 27), the “minority” writing in the new narrative schemes should move beyond ethnic restrictions. If we see Choy as an important writer today, not just as an *Asian* Canadian writer, apart from engaging in a collective confrontation with Chinese Canadian history and placing the narrative in a broader socio-political context, Choy’s writing, if read carefully, deploys dehyphenation to

develop a sophisticated, pluralistic approach to Canadian literature, a literature that also goes beyond “national” categorization. Choy, through the eyes and action of the major characters in this sequel, reiterates the universal values such as respect and trust. The novel is a narrative with characters well articulating Said’s conclusion to “humanism”:

Humanism, I think, is the means, perhaps the consciousness we have for providing that kind of finally antinomian or oppositional analysis between the space of words and their various origins and deployments in physical and social place, from text to actualized site of either appropriation or resistance, to transmission, to reading and interpretation, from private to public, from silence to explication and utterance, and back again, as we encounter our own silence and mortality – of it occurring in the world, on the ground of daily life and history and hopes, and the search for knowledge and justice, and then perhaps also for liberation. (83)

Kiam-Kim breaks down these oppositional bulks – the hyphenated shadows and realities – and places the universal values “to transmission,” to “the search for knowledge and justice,” and to his own “liberation” from hyphenation. Returning to Aaron’s view to conclude my essay, I suggest that all that matters “in the hyphen” in the new era does not actually matter. In the end of another interview in 2002, two years before the publication of *All That Matters*, in response to Don Montgomery’s question about the role of ethnicity in getting published, Choy answers: “I think we’re entering this new period now where good writing is what will matter, and what will last and what will be reviewed... The categories don’t bother me because in the end, they will simply be a historical footnote. The good books will last, whatever the footnote” (Montgomery, “An Interview with Wayson Choy”). Choy’s view about de-racialization in getting published actually points to what matters is that “they are stories that can be read by everyone who believes that the human heart must survive the drama of living” (Montgomery, “An Interview”). In Aaron’s astute heralding of what constitutes great literature, undoubtedly it should be “the human condition and the human predicament which finally engage the writer” (83). This either/or

logic suggests that one can be either “hyphenate” or “American,” but not both, and that ultimately, to be a literary artist “from silence to explication and utterance,” one must be “neither.” This “neither” is precisely the politics of dehyphenation in Wayson Choy’s work.

Notes

- (1) According to Goellnicht and Ty, the tendency to write “beyond the hyphen,” in many ways, resonates with what Sau-ling C. Wong calls “denationalization” in Asian American writing, which has created for Asian Americans to develop “new ways of perceiving and thinking about themselves, and along with new representations, new social psyches have emerged” (10).
- (2) See *The Chicago Manual Style Online* as an example: “CMOS prefers not to hyphenate Americans of any sort, even when they appear in an adjective phrase. See paragraph 7.90, section 1, in *CMOS 15*, under *proper nouns and adjectives*.” http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/CMS_FAQ/HyphensEnDashesEmDashes/HyphensEnDashesEmDashes47.html See another website on the usage of the hyphen between the compound nouns. <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/compounds.htm>
- (3) Since 1965, thanks to jet travel, such mobility has changed one’s identity, nationality, and citizenship. See, for example, Aihwa Ong’s important idea of flexible citizenship, whereby individuals could access multiple markets and thus accumulate capital gains. For the elaboration on transnational citizenship, see Michael Chang’s recent book *Racial Politics in an Era of Transnational Citizenship: The 1996 “Asian Donorgate” Controversy in Perspective* (2004), which articulates the flexible meanings of citizenship and challenges to community incorporation and empowerment regarding a highly transnationally-affiliated population. For the details of the Third World Liberation Front strikes and other engendered social movements in the 60s, see *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment* [2001]).
- (4) See Colleen Lye’s essay on the aesthetic engagement and new generic modalities in Asian American literature.
- (5) Here Aquin borrows the anthropological term to refer to the “minority position” of French Canada: “self-punishment, masochism, a sense of unworthiness, ‘depression’, the lack of lack of enthusiasm and vigour...” (35).
- (6) The Chinese presence was probably another form of the turn-of-the-century “Chinese question,” implying the sinophobic trends in North America. Seeing the increasing Chinese migrations to the United States since the California Gold Rush of 1849 and to Canada since the Fraser River Gold Rush of 1858, North Americans feared the perils the Chinese would bring: their “innate passion for gambling” and for opium. See, for example, Annette White-Parks’s *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography*, 73-76.
- (7) Timothy Mitchell argues that the hyphen in “nation-state,” for example, discloses critical geographies of displacement

and disjuncture that discourses of deterritorialization disassemble. Mitchell’s own argument depends on an assumption about the spatial coincidence of state and nation that is difficult to sustain in the context of today’s transnationalizing capitalism. In line with Mitchell’s assumption, I also use the concept of dehyphenation in a postfoundational sense.

- (8) The discourse of dehyphenation can loosely correspond to the general theme in the recent collection on Asian Canadian writing, *Asian Canadian Writing: Beyond Autoethnography* (2008), which addresses important theoretical challenges and praxis, generic transformations, and global affiliations in Asian North American literature.
- (9) This is the informal interview conducted between Choy and the author in Choy’s book launch in November 2004 at Indigo Bookstore in Montreal.
- (10) See Wever-Rabehl’s interview with Choy.
- (11) See Ha Jin’s brief review from <http://www.thebukowskianagency.com/All%20That%20Matters.htm>
- (12) More and more post-millennial writing in Chinese Canadian literary productions seems to return to this universalism. For example, Paul Yee’s new book *Shu-Li and Tamara* (2007), different from the previous juvenile novels on identity confusion or struggle, illustrates the current trend of immigrants moving out to the suburbs as they gain professional skills. Another good example is Vincent Lam’s *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures: Stories* (2005), in which Lam follows four Toronto doctors from promising undergrads to medical physicians. The collection paints a picture of physicians without direct *ethnic* reference, but only with *ethical* decision making. In light of genre, many works by Chinese Canadian writers also attempt to break from “ethnic” writing, works such as Kevin Chong’s debut novel *Baroque-a-Nova* (2001) and recent music memoir, *Neil Young Nation* (2005); Andy Quan’s gay erotica *Six Positions: Sex Writing* (2005); Lydia Kwa’s *The Walking Boy* (2005), the historiographic rewriting of famous 8th-century Chinese Empress Wu Zhao (a.k.a. Wu Ze Tian). Considering the evolving immigration policies in Canada since 1947 after the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, these changes of demographic recomposition are reflected in Chinese Canadian literary productions from the initial focus on identity formation in the 20th century to either developing new literary genres or turning to the basic concern of humanism and universalism in the new millennium. The changeover, expedited by frequent global exchanges and more common interracial marriage in Canada, has blurred national borders, thereby obfuscating the rigid identity issues for third or fourth-generation immigrants.
- (13) The informal interview in 2004 between Choy and the author of this essay. It is also very easy to associate this flapping butterfly image with the famous chaos theory, “the butterfly effect” by the meteorologist Edward Lorenz in his famous sentence “Does the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?” Translated into its fictive creation, Choy’s butterfly is a metaphor for the existence of seemingly insignificant moments that alter history and shape human development.
- (14) In his own writing agenda, Choy claims: “I wanted to write

a book about people who were decent and who survived. I think there is very little literature, other than sensationalist [books], that explore ordinary lives lived with decency" (Deer 41).

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