Trans-Ethnic Themes in Contemporary British Chinese Literature

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Humanities

2021

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List of Contents

Word count: 79801

Abstract

English literary circles have long emphasised the influence of Chinese ethnicity on literature by writers of Chinese descent. Yet, the acceleration of global migration by the increased mobility of labour and capital since the latter half of the twentieth century has endowed Chinese minority group with broader identities beyond just ethnicity. This thesis turns to trans-ethnic themes in contemporary British Chinese literature and reads it as a hybrid genre of Deleuzian minor literature and ethnic literature. In this context, this thesis particularly focuses on the manner through which British Chinese writers deterritorialise the dichotomy between the East and the West, to seek for a cultural hybridity and critical syncretism. Through examining literary works by Timothy Mo, Xiaolu Guo, Hong Liu, Helen Tse and PP Wong, this thesis elucidates how British Chinese writers engage with diverse literary and aesthetic discourses, rather than solely basing their writing on the proclamation of the homogeneity of Chineseness. Although these writers are still used to create protagonists of Chinese/Asian descent to negotiate with the publishing market's expectation for ethnic minority writers, some of these characters are in common with cosmopolitan figures who refuse to identify themselves with any one nationality, race, or ethnicity. Analysis of the trans-ethnic themes reflected in these works in turn demonstrates a crossing of ethnic boundaries of contemporary British Chinese literature, which is not as ethnically shaped as conventionally assumed. This research further suggests a deconstruction of the dominant literary categorisation in terms of the authors' ethnicity, highlighting the necessity of equal power for both majority and minority cultural discourses.

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Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Christopher Payne, whose expertise was helpful in formulating the research questions and theoretical framework of my thesis. Whether he was in the UK or has moved to Canada, his insightful feedback pushed me to sharpen my thinking and develop my work.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Gregory Adam Scott, for his valuable guidance throughout my studies. His passionate participation in my research assisted me to choose the right direction and successfully complete my thesis.

In addition, I could not have spent such three plus years of happy time without the companionship of my friends, Yi-Chi Qiu and Congshuo Li, who provided stimulating discussions as well as soothing distractions to rest my mind outside of my research.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to my parents for their support and kindness. They are always there for me.

This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. Many thanks again.

Introduction: Interstitiality between Minor Literature and Ethnic Literature

Since the end of the twentieth century, the increasing transnational migration of highly educated Chinese has diversified the contemporary cultural practices of overseas Chinese and their descendants. Consequently, these practices have become a compelling topic of research into ethnic minorities' communities and their respective histories and cultures. However, due to the relatively short history of British Chinese literature as a manifestation of Chinese minority culture in the United Kingdom, previous research in this field has predominantly been restricted to the process of ethnification, whereby only its ethnic ties gain salience. In contrast to this lack of attention to British Chinese literature, studies in North America of Chinese and Asian American literature have addressed a greater range of topics and demonstrated the vitality of this literary community amidst more mainstream (read: White) literary accomplishments.

As a cultural practice that represents the Chinese minority in the UK, British Chinese literature is initially created within the conventional patterns of ethnic literature; however, throughout the course of its development, various literary forms and narrative strategies serve to enrich this cultural practice, thereby negotiating its ethnic status. This thesis focuses on the aesthetic aspect of British Chinese literary creation to illustrate the manner in which it transcends ethnic territorialisation and its engagement with Deleuzian minor literature. Reading contemporary British Chinese writing as a hybrid genre of minor literature and ethnic literature, the thesis examines the writers' deterritorialisation of ethnicity. This process reveals that their perception of being Chinese encompasses ongoing and generational change, which demonstrates a trans-ethnic concern with regard to British Chinese literature.

Conceptualising "British Chineseness"

Overseas Chinese minorities receive considerable attention from academic circles examining the influence of ethnicity on their cultural practices in contemporary

society. Studies of the Asian American community (Lowe, *Immigrant* 4), the Asian Australian group (Khoo 6), and the Asian Canadian minority (X. Li 3) all regard variant forms of Chinese identity as an important subject in the discussion of their artistic creations. In the United Kingdom, there has been an upsurge in critical works on Black British and British Asian cultural practices since the 1980s. However, in contrast with their counterparts in North America and Australia, Chinese people in the British Isles are still largely absent from research. In the United States, Canada, and Australia, Chinese and other East Asians are most visible in the diasporic Asian cultural landscape; yet, in the UK, as a direct legacy of the British Empire, the term "Asian" usually refers to South Asians from the Indian subcontinent, excluding Chinese people and other East Asians (Murphy and Sim 3). Recognising this omission, scholars have recently drawn attention to the diasporic Chinese community "under erasure" in Britain (Thorpe and Yeh 2-3). Research on their negotiation of ethnic status in literary creation manifests the heterogeneity and complexity of the cultural discourse of "British Chineseness".

Discourses of "British Chineseness" emerged in the late 1980s, under the aegis of multiculturalism, and attracted further scholarly attention in the 1990s. David Parker's 1995 monograph *Through Different Eyes: The Cultural Identity of Young Chinese People in Britain* is one of the earliest studies on this community; young people with a Hong Kong background are the overwhelming focus of this research. Due to its particular relation to the recent British colonial past, the migration of Hong Kong Chinese in the 1950s and the 1960s often obscures other Chinese diasporas from the former colonies and beyond within dominant discourse in Britain. While Timothy Mo, examined in Chapter 1, is generally considered a British Chinese writer, his multiracial milieu and multiple displacement reflect the complexity of British Chineseness, which is not restricted to a postcolonial context. In this sense, although the term "British Chinese" usefully distinguishes the cultural practices of writers of Chinese descent from those of other minority groups, the current thesis specifies its heterogeneous implications in discussing different writers. Given "shifting conceptions of 'the Chinese' and 'Chineseness' across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (Yeh, "Belongings"

301), the boundaries of this literary category are not so absolute as to not be disputed and crossed, especially when reviewing the development of British Chinese literature.

The history of Chinese immigrants to the UK can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, when most were seafarers employed by the East India Company (Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain* 22-25). In the modern United Kingdom, Chinese people represent the third largest minority group, after Black people and South Asians (Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain* 52). However, British Chinese literature has a comparatively short history. The earliest cultural production in English by Chinese in the UK occurred in the 1930s, when the rise of business interest in China and growing British antifascism, which prompted sympathy for the Chinese during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), stimulated "China fever" once again. In 1934, Shih-I Hsiung (1902-1991) published his play *Lady Precious Stream* (based on the Chinese folklore Wang Baochuan and Xue Pinggui), becoming the first Chinese stage director in the West End and on Broadway. Yee Chiang (1903-1977) came to prominence for his writings on Chinese art, namely *The Chinese Eye* (1935) and *Chinese Calligraphy* (1938). His series of travel books, beginning with *The Silent Traveller: A Chinese Artist in Lakeland* (1937), were also popular with Anglophone readers. The success of these works reflected the acceptance of Chinese artists into British cultural circles. Their authors' popularity was equal to that of Lin Yutang (1985-1976), whose historical novel *Moment in Peking* (1939) was published in New York. Hsiung and Chiang came to the UK as travellers and writers with a shared intellectual identity and took responsibility for introducing Chinese history and culture to the Anglosphere. Hsiung's adaptation of the momentous *Lady Precious Stream* was closely associated with British cultural elites' interest in China. Hsiung thus became a cultural ambassador, seeking to correct Britain's "false suppositions about China" and "negotiate Chineseness" (Yeh, *Hsiungs* 43). Precisely, the "Chineseness" refused by Hsiung is the mysterious "all things Chinese" in Orientalist imagination; in this sense, Hsiung's effort resonates with that of Chiang, whose travel writings deny that China and Chineseness remain a fixed, unchanging Other. As a cross-

cultural translator who "travel[led] in search of similarities between peoples rather than peculiarities", Chiang devoted himself to making China more comprehensible and relatable to Western readers (Zheng, *Chiang* 138). Notably, Hsiung's and Chiang's writing does not aim to represent a "real" China; rather, by "demystifying Chinese culture" and rendering Chineseness acceptable to the foreign land they had travelled to, they create "an imaginary form of homecoming" to counteract the diaspora's dream of return (Zheng, "Foreword" xiv). The cases of these two pioneers in British Chinese literature suggest that meanings of Chineseness are always intertwined with the Western Other in terms of its recognition and resistance, setting the tone for the discussion in this thesis of diversified Chineseness.

From the 1940s, the Chinese-born Eurasian physician and writer Han Suyin (1917-2012) authored a range of autobiographical fictions, including *Destination Chungking* (1942), *A Many-Splendoured Thing* (1952), and *The Crippled Tree* (1965). Echoing her experiences of multiple migrations in and out of China, Han positioned her characters against the background of the Second World War to win public opinion. Chineseness thus represents an alliance within international antifascism. Inspired by her correspondence with Virginia Woolf, Ling Shuhua (1904-1990), a Chinese modernist writer and painter, having moved to London, published her English autobiography *Ancient Melodies* in 1953. Ling's literary activity made a connection between Bloomsbury figures and the Crescent Moon Group in China, through which Chineseness and its aesthetics played a significant role on the stage of international modernism. The life-writing of Han and Ling is closely related to their feelings of distancing and displacement, which define features of modernist autobiographical experimentation (Marcus 301). This contributes to the prevalence of the narrative pattern of integrating personal migration with a certain historical background in the representation of British Chineseness. The phenomenon of internationalisation in the British cultural scene continued in the early post-war period, with mass migration from the former colonies or beyond into Britain. Born in mainland China, educated in Taiwan, migrating to Milan, Bologna, and then London, and finally settling down in northern England, Li Yuan-

chia (1929-1994) was recognised as a Chinese artist, poet, and curator during this period. In the interpretation of a collection of Li's poems (*Li Yuan-chia: Tell Me What is Not Yet Said* [2000]), Diana Yeh links Li and Chiang in their "creat[ion of] the freedom and sense of home that has everywhere been denied" ("Belongings" 319). In other words, the two poets suggest a decentring of cultural oppositions in discussion of in-betweenness and transform Chineseness beyond the hegemonic structures of nation-states, compatible with the internationalised British artistic landscape.

However, the moment of cultural cosmopolitanism was short-lived, as few English-language Chinese writers became visible during the 1950s and 1960s. Public and scholarly interest in Li and his predecessors did not grow until the late twentieth century, within the institutionalisation of "British Chineseness". Indeed, due to restrictions placed on emigration from mainland China and the shortage of labour in the UK, most British Chinese immigrants were from rural areas of Hong Kong. Most sought jobs in the catering industry; Chinese intellectuals were no longer predominant. From the 1970s, these economic migrants were joined by Southeast Asians of Chinese descent, particularly those from Malaysia and Singapore, being multiply displaced. Their numbers surged until the early 1980s, when Britain began to gradually tighten its immigration policy. Exceptionally, the Hong Kong-born Britain-educated Timothy Mo (1950-) made up for the general lack of Chinese voices in British literary circles at this time, although he initially chose to claim Britishness. Mo's writing career began in the late 1970s, with the boom in postcolonial attempts to write back to the British Empire; the Chineseness represented in his early works seems to be a return to the strain of Orientalist melancholia, but actually functions as a parody or satire of those ethnic stereotypes. Such binary oppositions between China and Britain are common in *The Monkey King* (1978), *Sour Sweet* (1982), and *An Insular Possession* (1986), followed by the cosmopolitan emphasis on crossing the boundaries of race, nation, and ethnicity in Mo's later writings. In *The Redundancy of Courage* (1991), *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* (1995), *Renegade or Halo[2]* (1999), and *Pure* (2012), Mo turns his focus to Southeast Asia and explores how Englishness and

Chineseness both feature in this area with a particular movement of deterritorialisation. Mo's single case demonstrates the shifting recognition of "British Chineseness" in different cultural contexts, reminding us that the "British Chinese" are "by no means a homogeneous ethnic group" but "instead a complex compound group that shelters under a single umbrella census term of 'Chinese'" (Luk 209).

In parallel with Mo's emergence, the number of British long-term residents from mainland China increased after 1978, when the policy of reform and opening-up allowed Chinese people to come to the UK to seek education or employment. Some decided to remain permanently. These Chinese immigrants were taken for granted as victims of a totalitarian communist state by the British public, resonating with the Western imagination of Maoist China behind the "iron curtain" of the Cold War. The rise of "identity politics" within neoliberal capitalism from the late 1970s has also drawn much attention to the genre of trauma autobiography, especially stories of Holocaust survivors. This schema is pertinent when engaging with Jung Chang's (1952-) 1991 bestseller *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (hereafter *Wild Swans*): to elicit recognition, Chang highlights her trauma during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and identifies herself as an innocent victim consigned to misery before escaping to the UK. Inheriting Han's and Ling's autobiographical genre, Chang established a paradigm for representing the Chinese diaspora in her narrative mode – which, together with that of Chang's American counterpart Amy Tan, is classified as "ethnic romance" in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (2008) (McCracken 629). Chang's success encouraged many of her contemporaries to create similar bestsellers: after Ying Hong (1962-) published her fictionalised autobiography *Daughter of the River* in 1997, Anhua Gao's (1949-) and Aiping Mu's (1951-) memoirs, *To the Edge of the Sky* and *Vermilion Gate*, respectively, appeared in 2000, followed by Xinran Xue's (1958-) *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices* (2002), which is composed of her interviews and own memories. These writers integrate the narrative of national trauma into autobiographical memoirs; China is usually described as a despotic and brutal world full of suffering and hardship, with migration to the UK

offering the promise of a better future. In these memoirs, Chineseness is thus self-Orientalised as the Other, satisfying British publishing interest in the "exoticisation" of ethnic minorities. This reification of British Chineseness as an exile's celebration of rebirth and regeneration continued into the early post-Cold War era but gradually lost its dominant position after the turn of this century.

The increasing number of skilled and investment-oriented immigrants from mainland China in the twenty-first century has further diversified and complicated the British Chinese community. Scholars have begun to acknowledge the relevance of these individuals, especially those who lack any previous migratory links to the UK. This increase in attention has led academics to explore how the changing identities of the British Chinese community facilitated the formation of the "new" Chinese diaspora (Parker, "Emerging" 91; Song, "British Chinese" 68-69). Unlike the earliest Chinese intellectuals, "re-imagining" a home after losing their home in China (Yeh, "Belongings" 308), a symbol of being a "new" migrant subject is the refusal of "the 'diasporic formula' of a return to some putative 'homeland'" (Madsen 46). Moving away from the nostalgic theme of "where they are from", members of the new Chinese diaspora care more about "where they are" and adopt "flexible citizenship" to embrace the fluidity of their living conditions (Ong 6). Concurrently, the globalised English-language cultural production has destabilised "the scenario of national ideologies linking language, literature, culture, and territory in one homogeneous whole" (Mignolo 219). Following this trend, the "new" diasporic Chinese writers reveal growing transnational links, substituting for the dominant narrative of China's national trauma in the Anglophone publishing market. A series of literary works by Hong Liu (1965-) and Xiaolu Guo (1973-) published within the last two decades represent a heterogeneous understanding of Chineseness to reshape the Chinese minority in the UK while satisfying British publishers and their core readers' expectation of "ethnic" elements. Regarding English as the language that gives her freedom of expression, Liu affiliates things Chinese with symbolic aesthetics rather than with ethnification and illuminates an aesthetic universality via cultural translation. As a member of the Hui minority adopting a British nationality, Guo identifies herself

as a world citizen and reconstructs symbols of Confucian culture with transnational meanings to diversify the implications of being Chinese. Liu's and Guo's articulation of deterritorialised Chineseness echoes the contribution to border crossing in Mo's most recent work. "British Chineseness" thus reflects a resistance to both ethnic territorialisation and the long-standing Western stereotyping of this minority group.

Compared with minority groups such as African-Caribbeans, who are often perceived as "problems" or "victims", the "unproblematic" Chinese have become the "invisible model minority" and "are disregarded within cultural diversity" in in the longstanding racial ideas of British society (Yeh, "In/Visibility" 35, 41). Echoing the limited reception of first-generation writers' diversification of being British Chinese, their cultural practices for a long time appeared, to quote Rushdie, to be "visible but unseen" (*Satanic Verses* 241). Against this backdrop, the descendants of the aforesaid economic migrants tend to be visible in the British cultural scene in the new millennium. While discourses of a "post-race" era further deny the significance of racism, race/ethnicity has been endowed with a brand label for consumption in multicultural marketing against the trend of neoliberal capitalism. As Euro-American societies commodify the margins as a means of affirming the security of a lost yet longed for authenticity (Huggan ix–x), young British-born Chinese (BBC) have been reterritorialised as model minorities who do not experience racism as a result of their outstanding academic and professional performance (Song, "Chinese Black" 3). Helen Tse (1977-), who grew up in a typical Hong Kong immigrant family running a Chinese takeaway, claims that "[b]eing Chinese in Britain is not problematic" in her family memoir *Sweet Mandarin* (2007). By reifying Chineseness in the form of Chinese food, which can be consumed by customers regardless of race, nationality, or ethnicity, Tse offers a literary example of creating a model minority to negotiate with the publishing market. Nevertheless, the intense desire for capital as a result of the ruse of neoliberal capitalism is likely to "obscure the intricate imbrications of relations of race, gender, sexuality, and class in the institutions of capitalist modernity" (Duggan 83). As Yeh argues, the model minority discourse denotes "a specific form of

contemporary racialization" as an alternative to the Orientalist alienation of Chineseness, and by limiting ways of imagining the self, it constrains young people (especially men) as embodied subjects ("Model Minority" 1198). The refusal to be subject to the normative expectations of a model minority is heard in PP Wong's (1982-) fictional work *The Life of a Banana* (2014). Taking a child's perspective, Wong not only exposes the bullying suffered by young people from minority groups at school but also, ironically, mounts a counterattack on the stereotype of the "silent Chinese", thereby revealing different conditions of being BBC. In addition, Wong's Singaporean background links the concept of "British Chinese" with that of "British East Asian", which challenges the claim to Chineseness in the sense of nation-states. This resonates with the recognition of a pan-ethnic identity beyond the hyphen in recent Asian American literary studies (Portes and Rumbaut, 160).

Based upon the literary field where writers share the label of "Chinese" and were published in Britain, the current thesis conceptualises "British Chineseness" per the changing geo-political conditions in different historical periods, seeking to map out its heterogeneity and specificities, rather than treating it as just another static or binary discourse. Focusing on contemporary writers who broach trans-ethnic themes and have no illusion of a Chinese home, the thesis expounds on the process of negotiating Chineseness embodied in a selection of works. Previous research on British Chinese literature is usually restricted to a single work or writer, lacking a comparative focus. In order to explore how changing Chineseness has influenced British Chinese literary creation, the thesis offers both a chronological and a comparative reading of these works, occupying the space left in systematic studies of this field. Moreover, as Berndt Ostendorf claims, the "ethnic" label, placed on literature by minority writers causes a tension between self-determination and the pursuit of aesthetic autonomy (578). The Anglosphere generally reads British Chinese writing as a branch of ethnic literature, without regard to its literary function. Yet the selected writers engage with literary modernism in ways that contest Chineseness in both language and form; they remain vigilant against ethnification and reveal a cosmopolitan aesthetics. These

literary functions allow British Chinese literature to tear off its "ethnic" label and display its deterritorialisation, inspiring this thesis to examine it within the Deleuzian context of minor literature. Motivated by the lack of research on the aesthetics of British Chinese literature, this thesis explores its negotiation of social ethnification via literary deterritorialisation by reading it as a hybrid genre of ethnic literature and minor literature.

A Hybrid Genre

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari first developed the concept of "minor literature" as a method of interpreting Kafka's writings: a diary entry entitled "The Literature of Small Peoples", written on the 25th of December 1911, is likely to have inspired their formulation of this theory (39). Intrigued by Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari claim that "minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature", thereby highlighting the revolutionary significance of minor literature towards great literature (*Minor Literature* 18). In order to demonstrate that minor literature is "a collective machine of expression", which possesses a revolutionary function, Deleuze and Guattari explain its three characteristics and the close relationships between them (*Minor Literature* 18). The first is that minor literature's "language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialisation", meaning that this form of literature does not come from a minor language, but rather from a minority creating within a major language (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 16). Specifically, as a Jewish man who lived in Prague but wrote in German, Kafka is regarded as a typical writer of minor literature. Furthermore, Prague German is used as an example of a deterritorialised language employed for minor purposes, in which an uncertain or oppressed national consciousness; feelings of distance from Czech territoriality; and the deterritorialisation of the German population itself are expressed.

As seminal concepts of Deleuzian philosophy, the term "deterritorialisation" and its opposite, "reterritorialisation", are used in a number of ways in the work

of Deleuze and Guattari. As Eugene Holland notes, derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, they function as "hinge" terms, connecting Marx and Freud to "articulate the concepts of libido and labour-power" (57). In Lacan's analysis of the imprint of parental caregiving on the child's libido, the term "territorialisation" refers to how maternal breast-feeding and cleaning map the infant's erogenous zones programming desire to valorise certain organs and objects at the expense of others. For Deleuze and Guattari, conversely, "deterritorialisation", in the psychological register, denote the process of freeing desire from established organs and objects: from the mother's breast, for instance, or from the family triangle of the Oedipus complex. Furthermore, as sexuality and desiring-machines are "one and the same inasmuch as these machines are present and operating in the social machines" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 294), "deterritorialisation" in the social register designates the freeing of labour-power from specific means of production. This is illustrated by the case of English peasants who were "freed" by the Enclosure Acts (1709-1869) from common land; when some peasants eventually found jobs in the nascent textile industry, their labour-power was thereby re-attached to new means of production, or "reterritorialised" (Holland 57). The processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation accompany the fundamental mechanism of capital, and the continuing development of capitalism integrates many other resource-flows – including knowledge, skills, and taste – into the production process. In this light, paying attention to the nature of deterritorialisation in discussing minor literature illuminates its intention to challenge the majority's cultural hegemony under the globalised capitalist value system.

This thesis uses the conception of deterritorialisation for the analysis of British Chinese literature's attempt to resist to Western-centric ideology while negotiating with the publishing market. Chinese descendants who write in English are "a sort of stranger within [their] own language" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 26), as the experience of diaspora engenders a feeling of distance from both British identity and Chinese territoriality. Therefore, their literary creation does not meet the expectations of major literature and shows the movement of

deterritorialisation through their choice of linguistic expression. The literary techniques of self-Orientalisation, or of cultural translation and language appropriation, defamiliarise Chinese images, which allows British Chinese writers to deterritorialise their ethnic identity. Moreover, Chinese descendants who produce literature in English, conforming with "the laws defining the social conditions of acceptability" of the dominant culture (Bourdieu, *Language* 76), obtain the symbolic power of being able to rearticulate their identity within British society. This is the "reterritorializing function of language", which "compensates for its deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 20) and participates in these writers' literary reconstruction of a trans-ethnic identity.

The second characteristic of minor literature, as per its definition, is that "everything in them is political" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 17). According to Deleuze and Guattari, Freudian psychoanalysis accounts for individual concerns from the perspective of the shortage and satisfaction of desires, while oedipalising individual desires by restricting them to Oedipal intrigues in the context of families, which "become as one in a large space" in major literature (*Anti-Oedipus* 51-2; *Minor Literature* 17). In contrast, the limited space allotted to minor literature makes individual concerns "all the more necessary" and forces each one "to connect immediately to politics" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 17).

The political nature of minor literature connects British Chinese literature with the context of writing back to the Empire, in which English is no longer seen as a tool for colonising language, but rather as an effective means of opposing colonial cultural oppression. The Occidentalism reflected in depictions of Euramerican society from the Asian perspective, which was employed by British Chinese writers, mounts a counterattack on Orientalist representations of the East. The symbolic power of language also demonstrates that, in addition to the function of communication, language is involved in the restriction of individual behaviour and the establishment of a social system, thereby formulating rule and order (Bourdieu, *Language* 41). In this sense, the various narrative strategies

represent the literary diversity of British Chinese literature, which dismantles ethnic stereotypes in major English expression and struggles against mainstream discourse's ethnification of literary creation by ethnic minorities.

The third and final characteristic of minor literature is that "in it everything takes on a collective value" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 17). In contrast with the literature created by great masters, which can be separated from collective enunciation, in "cramped" minor literature, "what each author says individually already constitutes a common action [. . .] even if others aren't in agreement" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 17). In order to convey the collective value, the writer "in the margins or completely outside of his or her fragile community" can express "an active solidarity" with another community (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 17). Thus, narration refers back to neither the enunciating subject nor the subject of the statement, as there are no subjects but only "collective assemblages of enunciation" in literary expression (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 18).

Its marginal position relative to major literature frees British Chinese literary creation from the "anxiety of influence" engendered by great tradition; British Chinese writers have the freedom to narrate subjects that are familiar to them. For example, attention to the Chinese catering trade mirrors the early hardships and successes encountered by Hong Kong immigrants seeking to establish a British Chinese community. Accounts of overseas Chinese students' adaptation to British society offer a vivid portrayal of contemporary migration between the two countries. The revelation of racial discrimination at elementary school offers a realistic depiction of the experiences of young BBC. These works, with their various perspectives, provide a voice for the Chinese community in the UK and, when integrated into the overall literary discourse, the collective value of British Chinese literature for both the development and the diversification of the community emerges.

In summary, the Deleuzian concept of minor literature offers insight into both the literary and social functions of contemporary British Chinese literature.

However, for British Chinese writers, individual will is of equal importance as collective value; in such Bildungsromane as *Startling Moon* (2001) and *Once Upon a Time* in the East: *A Story of Growing Up* (2017), which have been praised as outstanding coming-of-age works by minority writers, the authors even counterpose the two in pursuit of the former. In this sense, British Chinese literature does not entirely adhere to the requirements of minor literature because it emphasises individual value, in the same manner in which it diverges from ethnic literature through its resistance to ethnification. Therefore, to seek common ground while preserving differences, this thesis argues that British Chinese literature occupies an interstitial position between minor literature's deterritorialisation and ethnic literature's self-determination.

Varied "Chinese Identity"

British Chinese literature's trans-ethnic concern is reflected by the writers' deterritorialisation of ethnic identity, namely Chinese identity. In native Chinese culture, the concept of identity barely exists; instead, the concept of Chineseness is "a marker of and for identity" (Ang, "Migrations" 8). Originally, the Chinese claimed their Chineseness by emphasising traditional family values, clan origins, sub-ethnic loyalties, and China's glorious past, pointing to a "historical identity" (Gungwu Wang 2). This historical identity was then superseded by a "nationalist identity" in the first half of the twentieth century (Gungwu Wang 2). The latter was built upon Sun Yat-sen's concept of Chinese nationalism, *zhonghua minzu*, which emphasised the importance of uniting Han Chinese and four major non-Han ethnic groups (Man, Meng, Hui, Zang). The successive resistance to colonial aggression and the struggle to be independent strengthened the nationalist identity, gradually shaping the public's cognition of "Chinese identity" in the modern sense of a nation-state. However, as Stuart Hall suggests, identity should be considered as a form of "production" that is always in process, not as an "accomplished fact" ("Cultural Identity" 222); the connotation of "Chinese identity" has thus changed and continues to do so. With the establishment of the People's

Republic of China (PRC), national identity replaced the nationalist identity that had been oriented around a liberation movement, and legally cultivated Chinese citizens' sense of belonging to the state as controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The traditional historical identity has been absorbed by cultural identity, which, with regard to all forms of Chinese identity, has become the most flexible concept. However, it is less useful to "those who believe that racial origins are still important as determinants in the idea of identity" (Gungwu Wang 9).

According to Hall, cultural identity can be elucidated in two ways. First, it can be defined "in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true life'", reflecting our "common historical experiences and shared cultural codes" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 223). The majority of Chinese people who have been influenced by this culture at home and abroad claim this form of cultural identity. For overseas Chinese, however, the second perspective on cultural identity is more compelling, as it stresses the "critical points of deep and significant 'difference'" beyond that of similarity and determines "what we really are" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 225). Specifically, the recognition of Chinese cultural identity distinguishes Chinese people living abroad from the dominant culture of their adopted countries, where they may encounter various forms of difficulty due to their race. It is under these circumstances that ethnic identity becomes a facet to be emphasised, leading to the development of a cultural identity on the basis of racial origins. Above all, ethnic identity more specifically conveys "the idea of political purpose in the fight for legitimate minority rights" and is a concept which is more likely to attract attention in both the mainstream discourse and international opinion (Gungwu Wang 9). It is for this reason that numerous Chinese minority writers, exemplified by Jung Chang and her contemporaries' trauma narrative, attach importance to ethnic identity in articulating "British Chineseness" – to maintain their competitiveness in the publishing market.

In the same period, the development of mass media, booming commodity markets, and flexible capital flows, accompanied by worldwide migration, accelerated the process of globalisation, creating "transnational publics" in which

different kinds of information, ideas, and people interact (Nonini and Ong 25). The significance of nationality and ethnicity as substantially tied to a particular history and location has been undermined by the increasing instability reflected in their identity that "lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 235). The hybridity of transnational publics provides alternatives to state ideologies for remaking identity, thereby eroding not only the nation-state but also "the national identities which are associated with it" (Hall, "The Local" 25). Furthermore, as the emergence of transnational publics is partially attributable to global communication and the exploitation of labour resources, their participants tend to be regarded in terms of form rather than race. In this sense, Chinese migrants engaging in the process of globalisation can establish a transnational identity that emancipates them from the national and ethnic territorialisation of being Chinese and instead includes them in interactions with different cultures. The multiplicity and flexibility implicit in this form of deterritorialised identity, reflected in literary creation, aligns with the depiction of ongoing cultural collisions and fusions during various migration narratives by Timothy Mo, Xiaolu Guo and Hong Liu.

The rise of transnational networks has further developed different ways of being Chinese and fostered multiple subjective senses of Chineseness, especially for the descendants of Chinese migrants. Born with citizenship of the country to which their parents migrated, and growing up between at least two cultures, members of the second and later generations find it easier to disrupt the aforesaid connotations of national identity and infuse it with rich layers of complexity. As Benton and Gomez argue, the "national" identity that they construct is manifested as a new form beyond the level of nation-states, mixing the "cultures of their parents and their own places of birth" ("Belonging to" 1162). Despite with "some continuing allegiance to their 'traditions'", young people from all communities show "a visible decline in actual practice" (Hall, "Multicultural Question" 107); that is, they do reclaim a "Chinese identity", but on their own terms. In contrast with the close identification with Chinese tradition and culture that is exhibited by first-generation immigrants, the process of claiming Chineseness for those of Chinese

descent is intricately bound up by webs of power relations (Nonini and Ong 24). For example, in *Sweet Mandarin* by Helen Tse, BBC's perception of being Chinese is reified as an affiliation with Chinese food and family-run businesses. This not only elicits a negotiation with the multicultural marketing of ethnicity, but also deterritorialises the conventional recognition of Chinese identity. The diversity of Chineseness is particularly embodied in people of mixed ethnicity, and those with a background of multiple migrations, whose identities are less bound by physical territories (Song, *Ethnic Identity* 2003). As a writer of Chinese descent, whose parents migrated from Singapore, PP Wong describes a problematic Chinese identity which suffers racism in *The Life of a Banana*. The work satirises both the nostalgic stereotypes and the multicultural ethnification, revealing the negative effects of blindly emphasising ethnicity on young BBC.

The elaboration of different kinds of Chinese identities sheds light on the changing roles of ethnicity in British Chinese literature. The assertion of ethnic identity first catered to the majority's "deep-seated attitudes toward the 'alien'" (Ostendorf 583). This has been gradually replaced by the new Chinese diaspora's deterritorialisation of nation and ethnicity, followed by BBC writers' claiming a trans-ethnic identity to depict the multiformity of their community. The development of British Chinese literature demonstrates that the boundaries of ethnic collectivities are "a space for struggle and negotiation", in which "the cultural stuff often provides the credentials for being able to cross the boundary or being excluded" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 13). Through this process, the assumption of "ethnicity as a boundary marker" is no longer a chief project, and "the idea of hybridization as transethnicity" has evolved (Anthias 629, 632). Notably, hybrid cultural forms are not necessarily more progressive than others, without consideration of the extent to which the dominant culture is open to elements that may challenge its hegemony (Anthias 638). The acid test of hybridity resonates with the ethnic label attached to literary creations by writers of Chinese descent to marginalise this community in cultural hierarchies, despite the variation in their representations of Chinese identity. By focusing on trans-ethnic themes in British Chinese literature, this thesis treats transethnicity in terms of the

process of negotiating dominant literary categorisation rather than a possessive property. The specific context of each writer is examined in the following chapters.

The Trans-Ethnic Negotiation

The shifting connotations of claiming Chinese identity amongst writers of Chinese descent suggest that British Chinese literature underwent, to quote Ling's insight into Asian American literature, "a contested and multiply negotiated process of transformation" in developing a cultural discourse that is not solely dominated by ethnicity (9). As previously discussed, contemporary British Chinese literature conveys the collective value of an ethnic community, as well as hybrid positionalities resulting from individual differences, which interact with each other, such as cultural background, social class, and gender. The two concerns are mediated through ideological stances and formal choices (social and literary functions) in specific British Chinese works to achieve a "negotiation" – a term used in this thesis to articulate how the writers address ethnic identity.

The identity negotiation perspective is an integrative theory that reviews individuals' attempts to support, modify, and/or challenge their own and other's desired self-images in the process of cultural communication (Ting-Toomey, 26-7). In terms of the literary discourse of an ethnic minority, "negotiation" refers to confrontational strategies that are used by minority writers, who, in the face of dominant literary mechanisms, position themselves in relation to both the cultural conventions and the diverse voices within their own communities (Ling 11). On the one hand, the British Chinese writers discussed in this thesis are part of a self-referential narrative tradition; on the other hand, however, they present the discursive nature of their community to negotiate the literary discourse of ethnification. In this sense, British Chinese literature seeks to resolve the dilemma between self-determination and aesthetic autonomy faced by ethnic literature, while engaging with minor literature in the matter of deterritorialising ethnicity.

Discussions of overseas Chinese literature in academic history are predominantly connected to the "realist narrative" and "cultural nationalism" – two critical issues that contribute to the "ethnicity" of ethnic literature (Ling 18). Realist narrative refers to the autobiographical narrative tradition of minority groups, which represents their history of adventurous experience, as well as their quest for self-determination, and simultaneously makes their writing "ethnic" (Ostendorf 584). This tradition of literary creation was established prior to the 1980s, especially in Chinese American literature, and is exemplified by Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston. These writers assert ethnic identity to resist the mainstream silencing and marginalisation of the Chinese minority and attach an ethnic label to their works. Increasingly, minority writers have sought to express the multiplicity of the Chinese community beyond ethnicity, but abandoning the realist narrative is a difficult process and so they are instead forced to negotiate with this tradition. As realism is a historically and internally complex and contradictory representational strategy, an understanding of it should be related to its primary site of production and usage; that is, "its affiliations with the literary and with the aesthetic" (Ling 21). Although contemporary British Chinese writers adopt the realist narrative in the coming-of-age novel and in their depictions of collective memory, the form and content of the language that they use engage with minor literature's nomadic escape from ethnic territorialisation. Hence, they are able to explore trans-ethnic themes through literary creation, where minor literature's deterritorialisation negotiates with the realist narrative tradition while eschewing self-determining ethnification.

Representing and reminiscing about ethnic heritage in literary works by minority writers were once common means of claiming ethnicity (Ostendorf 584). Early Chinese American literature such as *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945) and *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) recount tales of Chinatown and constitute a series of ethnic writings in which Chinese images are consistently alienated as the Other. Motivated by the Fanonian mimicry of the dominant, this form of self-Orientalisation, which adopts the position of American cultural nationalism, intends to assert Americanness to negotiate ethnic status, whereas the Lyotardian

differend between the two cultures makes them susceptible to the criticism of ethnification by both sides (Ling 24). However, the increasing heterogeneity of overseas Chinese in recent decades has encouraged immigrant writers to escape the ethnic label. They remain vigilant, not only against Orientalist stereotypes, but also against Chinese cultural nationalism's affiliation with ethnicity. Rather than portraying otherness, contemporary British Chinese writers prefer to transgress ethnic boundaries and reveal a transcultural intercommunity, as their writing is affiliated with minor literature; its deconstruction of characteristic ethnic tropes breaks the connection between the presentation of Chinese culture and the claim to ethnicity. In this manner, the British Chinese literature discussed in this thesis is emancipated from dominant and ethnic cultural nationalism, and delves into an exploration of cultural interactions beyond the matter of ethnicity.

As well as the negotiated strategies inspired by study of early Asian American literature, British Chinese literature reveals peculiarities in its negotiation of ethnic status. Originating later than Chinese American literature, British Chinese literature developed and flourished in the late twentieth century, when ethnic studies turned away from an inherently Eurocentric perspective to emphasise the heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity of minority groups (Lowe, "Heterogeneity" 22). Even when including narratives pertaining to national trauma against a specific historical background, contemporary British Chinese works feature highly diverse migrant experiences of cosmopolitan mobility, which negotiates an imaginary unification via ethnic identity for political purposes. Moreover, to negotiate with the multicultural continuing marketing of ethnicity across generations, BBC writers utilise the duality of their national identity and reclaim a "Chineseness" that most never previously owned, in accordance with their personal preference, and with less reference to identity politics. Benton and Gomez consider the attitudes of young British Chinese towards nation and ethnicity as a form of cosmopolitan identity that can aid negotiation with nationalist/racial discrimination perpetrated by the majority ("Belonging to" 1162). Hence, the thesis takes transethnicity as a negotiated process in which British Chinese writers demonstrate the dynamics of identity formation and their

interactions with the publishing industry, revealing the need for the dominant culture to change its attitude towards this preconceived "ethnic" literature.

Overlapped Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism

The discussion of trans-ethnic themes links contemporary British Chinese literary creation with the context of cosmopolitanism. Within this context, certain writers, having relieved themselves of the burden of ethnicity, demonstrate their cosmopolitan mindsets from different perspectives. Cosmopolitanism in the Western tradition can be traced back to the Stoics – a pre-Socratic philosophical school that criticised the arbitrary nature of the boundaries of polities in differentiating between insiders and outsiders. This idea was extended by Immanuel Kant during the Enlightenment, advocating cosmopolitan rights as a guiding principle to help global society achieve enduring peace. In the late 1970s, partially influenced by the acceleration of globalisation, cosmopolitanism re-emerged and developed into a multilevel theory with legal, political, economic and cultural dimensions (Guibernau 159). Being cosmopolitan in contemporary society involves choosing "a transnational or international position situated at the crossing of boundaries" that rejects all forms of racial, ethnic, and national tribalism (Kristeva 16). Such a cosmopolitan figure is represented in Timothy Mo's *Renegade and Halo[2]* (1999), in which the migrant worker Castro is entitled with "a permanent emancipation from tribalism" by the education he received, and hails only from the tribe of mankind (40). Through this work, Mo highlights the sense of belonging gained by identifying with the world as home and with human beings qua human beings, irrespective of their origins. This reveals the cosmopolitan theme of Mo's works.

While cosmopolitanism attempts to eradicate a world in which Others are truly noncitizens, it becomes alien to the human community when that community is defined by those whose identities are normalised and naturalised features of the world (Hill 8). Consequently, cosmopolitanism has often been rejected by overt nationalists as being simply a facade for a Europhile, globalising or anti-

national attitude. Analogously, Mo's literary works, although remarkable for their depiction of the cosmopolitan ideal, have not received enough recognition in literary circles of different languages, as they lack a "natural readership" (Jaggi, "Mixtures") for their trans-ethnic themes. This is probably due to the potential risks of radically claiming cosmopolitanism, and later British Chinese writers have turned their focus to the cultural dimension of cosmopolitanism as a negotiation. "Cultural cosmopolitanism" refers to the phenomenon of cultural circulation in which national, ethnic and local cultures of all kinds, while retaining their indigenous features, are fully enmeshed in a world culture that may be either familiar or alien to their native traditions (Regev 29-30). Both Hong Liu's and Xiaolu Guo's literary works provide cases of cultural cosmopolitanism. Through translating Chinese cultural symbols into English literary context, Liu presents a transcultural intercommunity of symbolic aesthetics. Above all, Guo characterises herself as a nomadic artist to become emancipated from the cultural territorialisation of traditional Chinese symbols based on Confucianism, such as gender and home.

Identifying herself as "a nomad in both body and mind" (*OUT* 1), Guo expresses a cosmopolitan ethic, resonating with Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of nomadology: "it is possible to live striated on the deserts, steppes, or seas; it is possible to live smooth even in the cities, to be an urban nomad" (*Thousand Plateaus* 482). Although nomads need not move, while migrants travel from one fixed point to another within a predetermined grid; (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 380-81), both reject the idea of political ties to a particular location and distribute themselves across a territory, namely the aforesaid movements of deterritorialisation. Deleuze and Guattari insist on the *nomos–polis* (convention–city-state) dichotomy: "in every respect, the [nomad] war machine is of another species, another nature, another origin than the state apparatus" (*Thousand Plateaus* 352); this is distinct from the Stoic tradition that regards the cosmic *nomos* (cosmopolitanism) as an idealised *polis*. In the characterisation of the new Chinese diaspora, Guo adopts their shared concern with how individuals traverse spaces without dividing them, notwithstanding their inevitable

ontological differences. In other words, Guo devotes herself to a contemporary nomadic cosmopolitan philosophy whose key method is "an ethics of respect for diversity", which "produces mutually interdependent nomadic subjects and thus constitutes communities across multiple locations and generations" (Braidotti 24). Cosmopolitanism in this sense sheds light on the interactions of cultures with different origins and is more readily accepted by human communities that are consistently closely associated with certain cultural foundations.

Moreover, as previously discussed, the establishment of a transnational network renders impure the national identity of Chinese immigrants, whose descendants in the UK have developed a "British Chinese" identity. Indeed, as well as a sense of belonging based on a set of common features that bind the members of a nation together, national identity that is conceived as "a double-edged relationship" presupposes the existence of Others (Triandafyllidou 26). Specifically, claiming Britishness is an inward-looking position for BBC writers as both Helen Tse and PP Wong regard Britain as their homeland; yet, meanwhile, representing an element of their Chineseness shows their acceptance of, rather than resistance to, their ethnic heritage, adding hybridity to their national identity. As a result, an opposition between the role of the minority as the Other and the majority as the Self is no longer necessary for the transformation of national identity. Furthermore, the term "British" itself relates to a dynastic conglomerate instead of a strict nation-state, so immigrants prefer this term over the more ethnic and national term "English" (Betts 19-20). The multi-level understanding of BBC's identity of being British Chinese thus endows the minority's national identity with a cosmopolitan perspective, and cosmopolitanism and nationalism may coexist in a transnational context.

Nationalism, according to Guibernau, is not always associated with those who advocate xenophobia and ethnic cleansing; in other cases, it describes those who defend their right to cultivate a particular culture in a peaceful way (177). This attitude remains open to cultural interaction, allowing the uniqueness of every national culture to be revealed and made compatible with the interests of cultural

cosmopolitanism. Therefore, it is believed that cosmopolitanism and nationalism "agree in their commitment to human rights, tolerance, cultural interchange and international peace and cooperation" (Guibernau 186). In the cultural field in particular, they share sufficient aims to be able to coexist. Reading contemporary British Chinese literature as a hybrid genre of minor literature and ethnic literature works in concert with this concern. By exploring the role of Chinese ethnicity in literary creation by British Chinese writers, this thesis elucidates their approaches to crossing ethnic boundaries through negotiated strategies; the cosmopolitan theme, which is reflected in a selection of works, appears to be a peculiarity of literature by British Chinese writers.

The examination of an identity shift, from clinging to one's Chineseness to being transnational, or even cosmopolitan, is crucial for discussion about the diversified discourses and trans-ethnic themes of contemporary British Chinese literary works. These works involve both a break from postcolonial patterns and a deconstruction of cultural nationalism; above all, they show efforts of British Chinese writers in exploring a myriad of possibilities made possibly by their interstitial position in between different cultures. These wide-ranging subject matters illustrate that British Chinese literature is not confined to a unitary stereotype of ethnic writing, but rather represent the heterogeneity and multiplicity of the British Chinese community, wherein the minority discourse engages and interacts with the mainstream. By delving into and elucidating trans-ethnic themes raised by a selection of British Chinese writers, this thesis provides a broader space to discuss literature by minorities for both academic circles and the publishing market. Moreover, it highlights the necessity of equal power for both majority and minority cultural discourses.

Following a chronological order, Chapter 1 begins with an analysis of Timothy Mo. In Mo's literary career since the late 1970s, the theme of immigrants' illusion of an impossible-to-regain Chinese home, which predominates over his predecessors, has gradually dimmed. Regarding Mo's literary career as an

integrated whole that resonates with the aforesaid formulation of the "new" Chinese diaspora, Chapter 1 consecutively interprets his seven novels to date, examining their changing narratives of identity and ethnicity. Mo's early works address the British-Hong Kong relationship through colonial and postcolonial ties, and a Western perspective is adopted to represent an Orientalist China. The alienated Chinese images on the one hand indicate the white mask Mo wore due to his half-British descent, and on the other hand, they literarily satirise the stereotyping of things Chinese in the dominant discourse. After settling in the Philippines in the late twentieth century, Mo gradually paid more attention to the process of decolonisation in Southeast Asia, highlighting the hybridity and syncretism of native and foreign cultures. In his later works, citizens of the world such as Castro and Snooky invalidate the centre and marginal positions, rather than simply writing back to the Empire. Consequently, Mo's writing transcends the postcolonial context and displays a radical cosmopolitanism. This thesis reads Mo's cross-century literary creation as a microcosm of the overall development tendency of contemporary British Chinese literature. Later writers explore an increasing number of different ways to develop and enrich this literary discourse.

Exploring the trans-ethnic theme of contemporary British Chinese literature, this thesis omits works on totalitarian communist China (beginning with Jung's *Wild Swans*), although they were popular in the global publishing industry in the late twentieth century. The ideological imperative of East–West opposition overwhelms their narrators' self-creation as victims and survivors of the Cultural Revolution. Chapter 2 focuses on Hong Liu, whose writing career began at the start of the twenty-first century, when British literary circles' interest in the national historical trauma of Chinese writers had not yet waned. Despite following this trend, Hong Liu engages with the postmodern tendency to represent history according to the will of narrators, prioritising individual perception over the metanarrative of Chinese history. By diverging from literary production by minority writers inundated with collective narratives of ethnic community, Liu's literary creation refreshed the British book market. Meanwhile, the cultural translation of traditional Chinese *yixiang* 意象 (idea-images) into English cultural

symbols featured in the whole of her writing frees it from the territorialisation of ethnic culture and links it with a discussion of Symbolic comparative poetics. This chapter expounds on the transcultural intercommunity of symbolic aesthetics, based on the analysis of each of Liu's four novels – *Startling Moon* (2001), *The Magpie Bridge* (2003), *The Touch* (2005), and *Wives of the East Wind* (2007). Previous research, which tends to interpret Liu's literary creations merely as examples of ethnic literature, has long ignored this aspect. In fact, the narrative strategy and cultural translation approach that she adopts negotiate with her use of the historical theme popular with ethnic writing, through which she achieves a balance between aesthetic autonomy and self-determination.

For Chinese immigrant writers, representing traditional cultural symbols has proved to be an effective means of attracting mainstream readers, whether incarnated as Mo's Orientalist alienation or Liu's aesthetic analysis. However, the writer discussed in Chapter 3, Xiaolu Guo, attaches more importance to the ideological infiltration of a mutual interest in Chinese and so-called Western cultural symbols. In doing so, Guo shatters stereotypes derived from the Western-centric cultural unconsciousness, which are particularly self-ethnified in bestselling memoirs on the Cultural Revolution, contributing to a trans-ethnic theme in British Chinese literature. Guo is prolific writer, who has published seven works in English since 2007. Chapter 3 selects two of these texts, on the new Chinese diaspora, to shed light on a cosmopolitan redefinition of the notion of "home" from a fixed place to the place to which one travels and in which one settles. Beginning with the fictional work *A Concise Chinese and English Dictionary for Lovers* (2007), which alternately adopts anti-Orientalist and anti-Occidentalist perspectives to modernise cross-cultural impressions, Guo's literary creation is subversive from the outset. Her recently published *Once Upon a Time in the East: A Story of Growing Up* (2017) is an autobiographical memoir in which the negotiated balance reappears: while the form is compromised by the self-determination expected by the publishing market, Guo deterritorialises her ethnic identity in the narrative. Claiming to be "anti-family – a hardcore militant feminist" (Jaggi, "Xiaolu Guo"), Guo frees herself from the gender and family constraints

rooted in traditional Chinese values, which are based on Confucianism, and characterises herself as a cosmopolitan nomadic artist. Above all, this chapter addresses the freedom of choice amongst the different cultural values enjoyed by Guo as an exertion of migrant subjectivity of contemporary Chinese diasporic writers; they are able to separate from cultural nationalism and adopt a trans-ethnic perspective in their works.

In order to further examine the negotiation involved in diversifying the representation of being British Chinese, Chapter 4 shifts its attention to BBC writers who are taken for granted as expressing a "hyphenated" identity in the multicultural context. As British-born Chinese tend to be invisible within youth cultures and rarely receive public attention, except as a model minority, Chapter 4 selects two BBC writings published in the twenty-first century, whose different responses to this construction offer a reflection on the development of British Chinese cultural discourse. The first is Helen Tse's family memoir *Sweet Mandarin* (2007), which, in paying tribute to the achievements of the British Chinese community in the catering business, caters to the multicultural marketing of ethnicity and regrettably becomes trapped in the newly racialised stereotyping of a model minority. In contrast, the fictional work *The Life of a Banana* (2014) by PP Wong, who was born to a Chinese-Singapore immigrant family, is based on the author's unsettling experiences. This reveals the numerous issues faced by young British Chinese while growing up and subverts the narrative mode of a model minority. Through a comparative reading of the two works, this chapter presents a discursive development in depicting the Chinese minority, which enriches British Chinese literature and suggests the need to contest the idea of a model minority when conceptualising the term "British Chineseness".

The selected writers elucidate trans-ethnic themes by representing the heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity of the contemporary Chinese minority in the UK, thereby diversifying and developing the cultural discourse of "British Chinese". On this basis, the concluding chapter reiterates the interstitial position of British Chinese literature between ethnic literature and minor literature, as well

as demonstrating the way in which it crosses ethnic boundaries. It reanalyses how these works' deterritorialisation of ethnicity contributes to the negotiated process of modernising China. Although the theme of individualism prevails over that of collectivism among these writers, the effort to de-Orientalise China, which is always intertwined with the Western Other, has been shared by most Chinese intellectuals who have become visible in the Anglophone cultural landscape. By discussing the development of British Chinese literature within the context of literary modernism, the conclusion illuminates its cosmopolitan aesthetics and contributes to efforts to anti-ethnify literary works by minority writers. The cosmopolitan tendency not only echoes the conceptualisation of a migratory Chineseness but is also interwoven with the discourses of "Asian Englishes" and "British East Asian", moving beyond ethnic territorialisation. Through the decades-long efforts of these British Chinese writers, their works are able to shatter the stereotypes produced by racialised discourse and transcend the traditional literary categorisation of cultural practices by minorities in terms of their ethnicity. This is also the current thesis's expectation of the future development of British Chinese literature.

Chapter 1: Deterritorialising Postcolonial Patterns in Timothy Mo's Writings

Originating in the early twentieth century, literary production in English by Chinese did not at first gain a wide readership in the British cultural field, due to the limited number and particular subject matter of these works. It was not until the post-war period, when a multitude of economic immigrants from Hong Kong established their own community in the UK, that an initial British Chinese cultural discourse emerged, based on colonial/postcolonial ties. Timothy Mo is one of the earliest novelists of Chinese descent to have entered the mainstream British literary scene; for example, he was selected as a representative writer in discussion of "postcolonial fictions" in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (2008) (Woods 744-45). Postcolonialism, a critical theory tied to Edward Said's landmark publication *Orientalism* in 1978, was understood to be a subversive discourse within the dominant Eurocentric culture when it was first published. Robert J. C. Young described it as a project to "turn the world upside down" (2). Through its usage in literary circles, postcolonialism has developed writing patterns that pay close attention to ethnicity to account for variations in culture, society, and ancestry between Euramerica and much of the once colonised world. In other words, the assertion of ethnic identity forms a predominant theme in postcolonial writing, which is embodied by Mo's representation of and reflection on the relationship between Britain and Hong Kong in his early novels.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, Chinese identity is not always a stable construct in the context of diaspora, and ethnicity is not the only focus of contemporary British Chinese cultural production. The subject matter that Mo writes with regard to the Chinese community at home and abroad manifests his contribution to British Chinese literature. However, Mo's shift in focus to Southeast Asia in his later works not only constitutes his farewell to the claiming of Chinese identity, but also problematises the label of "British Chinese" as applied to him. The Deleuzian concept of deterritorialisation is operative in Mo's writing, which is inspired by his Chinese ethnicity but evolves into a narrative of pan-Asian

experience. Bruce King attributes a "heightened awareness of difference to assert identity" to postcolonial literature in the late twentieth century (3), which Mo moves beyond by presenting a series of more flexible identities to examine both the differences and similarities between cultures. Finally, through a sequence of narratives of deconstructed purity and emerging hybridity around Southeast Asia, Mo deterritorialises the desire to express ethnic identity within a postcolonial setting in his more recent novels.

Born in 1950 to a Chinese father and British mother, Timothy Mo spent his first nine years in Hong Kong, where he successively attended two schools whose mediums of instruction were Cantonese and English, respectively. At the age of ten, he left for England and, after completing his secondary education, went on to study History at the University of Oxford. Upon graduation, Mo worked as a journalist for various periodicals, before launching his literary career in 1978 with the publication of *The Monkey King*, for which he won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. His second novel, *Sour Sweet*, appearing in 1982, was short-listed for the Booker Prize and awarded the Hawthornden Prize; it was later also adapted into a British film of the same name by Ian McEwan. In the following years, Mo published *An Insular Possession* (1986) and *The Redundancy of Courage* (1991); both were also short-listed for the Booker Prize, and the latter earned Mo the E.M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1995, after over twenty years in London, Mo moved to Southeast Asia and established Paddleless Press, his own label which published his next novel, *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* in the same year. This was followed by *Renegade or Halo[2]* in 1999, which won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. Mo then disappeared from the literary scene for nearly twelve years. In 2012, he published his most recent novel, *Pure*, through Turnaround Books in the UK.

The focus of Mo's writing career has shifted with the physical relocations he has experienced. In the novels written during his early immigrant experience in the UK, the protagonists are from the Chinese diaspora; they are sojourners who often find themselves on the margins of mainstream societies on account of their

ethnic identity. Set in Hong Kong between the 1950s and 1960s, *The Monkey King* (*MK*) chronicles the fortune of a Cantonese family, the Poons. Narrated from a third-person perspective, the novel explores the cross-cultural experiences of the Sino-Portuguese Macau-born Wallace Nolasco, the son-in-law who struggles with the patriarch of the Poon family. Mo's next novel, *Sour Sweet* (*SS*), is set in 1960s London. It represents another Chinese family, the Chens, who live a sheltered life and prefer to have minimal contact with British society. The later work undeniably characterises a set of ethnic stereotypes with regard to Chinese people who migrate from Hong Kong to the UK to work in the catering industry. Nevertheless, as Elaine Yee Lin Ho comments, Mo's early novels "added an ethnic Chinese contour to the new literary map of British fiction" at that time (*Timothy* 2). These two publications in the late 1970s and early 1980s represent compelling landmarks in the incorporation of postcolonial discourse into the discussion of contemporary English literature, which comprises a certain proportion of works composed by writers from former British colonial outposts.

Mo's third novel, *An Insular Possession* (*IP*), is a fictional account of the historical conflict between China and Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century that led to the first Opium War (1839-1842) and the colonisation of Hong Kong. Mo narrates the story from the perspective of two American characters. This third-party perspective, separated from both a Chinese and a British stance, suggests a form of neutral narrative that is again rehearsed in his later writings.

The Redundancy of Courage (*RC*) is Mo's first novel to have a first-person narrator, Adolph Ng. Ng is of Chinese ancestry but is forced to participate in anticolonial conflict in the fictional location of Danu. His loyalty to Danuese liberation changes depending on the course of events, just like his hybrid identity in his displaced experience. To a certain extent, this work not only concerns the non-aligned, marginal character himself, but also casts doubt on Mo's own career in fiction by calling into question its ethics and authority (Ho, *Timothy* 7). Since his fourth novel, Mo's leading characters possess even more plural ethno-cultural allegiances, often finding it difficult to identify with any one ethnicity. This echoes

Mo's own escape from Britain as well as his return to Asia (but not Hong Kong). The deterritorialisation of the aforesaid postcolonial pattern found in his later works is elucidated below.

Having settled in Southeast Asia, Mo's focus shifted to the Philippines. This setting provides the social background for his next novel, *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* (*BBB*), which is riddled with scepticism about those who self-consciously claim a marginal status in the contemporary global conflict between cultures. The novel mimics their self-righteous rhetoric and pierces through the facade of radicalism, namely the continuing legacy of ancient corruptions caused by power and unabated greed. Mo's second work set in the Philippines, *Renegade or Halo²* (*RH*), has a first-person narrator, Rey Castro, the son of an African-American serviceman and a Filipina bar-girl. Living as an illegal international migrant worker, this character seeks to relate to a marginal group at the end of the twentieth century. The way in which Castro is characterised as a contemporary picaresque figure, by virtue of his complex interiority, becomes the emphasis of this work.

After more than a decade of silence in Asia, Mo's latest novel to date is set in southern Thailand, where Islam holds sway with various forms of resistance to the Thai authorities. *Pure* presents the world of Snooky, a Muslim born in the 1980s and originally named Ahmed. Snooky is now a Thai ladyboy who refers to himself in the third person, a habit originating from Siamese. Snooky believes that even the so-called West is somewhat Eastern, reflecting and exploring innumerable instances of East-West imbrication and exchange. In this way, as well as giving a voice to subaltern subjects in postcolonial societies, Mo's more recent literary creations gradually separate from his earlier works, wherein characters cling to their ethnic identity. Moreover, they also engage with the deterritorialisation of ethnic and cultural clichés within the context of minor literature.

Mo's thematic shift across his decades-long literary career, from claiming Chinese ethnicity to showing multiple minorities with different backgrounds, reflects the diversified nature of the British Chinese cultural discourse. This chapter thus argues that Mo's writing career embodies a strategy of

deterritorialising the varied after-lives of populations who have been subject to the problematic of colonialism. His struggle within, followed by his removal of, ethnic labels appears to be a microcosm of the development of contemporary British Chinese literature.

The aim of the first section is to build a theoretical framework that can be applied to the East Asian cultural context to examine its engagement in and transcendence of postcolonial writing. Drawing on scholarly research in the field of postcolonial studies, combined with discussions of representations of Chineseness at home and abroad, this section illustrates the sequential stages in which postcolonialism is demonstrated and then deterritorialised. The chapter next addresses Mo's novels from these two perspectives. Section Two interprets the alienated portrayal of Chinese identity in Mo's earlier works. The focus of the third section is an analysis of how ethnic boundaries are crossed and blurred in his later works. Finally, after illuminating the shifting relationships of these literary texts with the postcolonial context, the chapter concludes that Mo's writing career achieves the goal of ridding himself of ethnic labels.

Within and Outside Postcolonial Writing

The term "postcolonial" denotes a complicated and open-ended concept. Although the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* is widely regarded as a landmark in postcolonial studies, the origin of the term and concept can be traced back to European colonial discourse. As Bill Ashcroft et al. argue, given the troubled relationship in the history of postcolonial studies between postcolonial theorists and postcolonialism, it might best be treated as "a term for a body of diverse and often contesting formulations", rather than as a discipline or methodology per se (198-99). More recently, as an increasing number of former colonies/semi-colonies in East Asia have taken a different path towards independence from earlier cases that occurred in South Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa, postcolonial studies have become multifaceted. Moreover, the cultural

production of colonised people of Chinese ancestry has become variously compelling to British literary circles.

Before the widespread formal adoption of the term "postcolonial", Frantz Fanon had already displayed interest in the relationship between colonised people and the coloniser, carrying out social historical research on his hometown in the French Antilles. As a psychiatrist and political philosopher from the French ex-colony of Martinique, Fanon pays close attention to the complex ways in which identity, particularly Blackness, is constructed and produced. In his monograph *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952), Fanon argues that Black people usually perform a certain sensitising action when they encounter the White world. Inspired by Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, Fanon employs psychoanalysis to explain the senses of dependency and inadequacy that Black people might feel in the face of Whiteness. Lacan describes the mirror stage as a drama in which the internal thrust of the Subject is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation from the Other, generating an "alienating identity" and "inexhaustible quadrature of the ego's verification" ("Mirror Stage" 3). This aligns with the psychological state of Blackness in the process of seeking recognition from Whiteness. According to this model, the Black Subject develops an inferiority complex regarding his native culture and then tries to imitate and appropriate the culture of the coloniser, but their "white masks" cannot collapse the colonial racism nourished by the European cultural unconscious (Fanon 144-45). Having been born in Hong Kong before migrating to the UK for higher education, Mo shares the situation of the alienated Black communities described by Fanon to a certain extent. Writing in English and behaving as a British would reflect Mo's pursuit of a "white mask". This, together with the estrangement from Chinese culture revealed in his novels, illustrates the schizophrenia of the colonised when confronted by the culture of the coloniser.

Whereas Fanon focuses on the psychological state of colonised people, Edward Said turns his attention to colonisers' discourse and how it functions. Said's criticism of this discourse, which he labels "Orientalism", provides the

theoretical foundation for postcolonialism. Having absorbed Michel Foucault's theory of discourse on culture and politics, Said defines Orientalism as a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient", which, during the colonial period, stood for a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (*Orientalism* 3). This explanation embroils Orientalism in an opposition between the coloniser and the colonised. Above all, across these three kinds of Orientalism, Said delineates the Westerner as the subject, with reference to Karl Marx's description of Easterners: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (*Orientalism* qtd. in Preface). Due to Orientalism, "the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action" (Said, *Orientalism* 3), and due to the fact that the Orient has been silenced, it can only be represented as and by the Other. In Mo's case, who was originally from a British former colony, his affiliation with the discourse controlled by the coloniser leads him to approach his native culture from the Orientalist perspective. Consequently, this results in a distorted and even excessively negative representation of China in his writing.

The context that Said provides for Orientalism reveals significant insights into the interaction between the East and the West, which has stimulated continuous debate in related fields. However, as James Clifford notes, Said gives "his attention almost exclusively to statements about the Arab Middle East; the Far East, India, the Pacific, and North Africa are omitted, regretfully but firmly" (215). On the basis of reception studies on the Occident/Orient distinction, Arif Dirlik interrogates "whether orientalism was just the autonomous creation of Europeans, or whether its emergence presupposed the complicity of 'orientals'" ("Chinese History" 100). Hence, Dirlik claims that Orientalism, "regardless of its ties to Eurocentrism both in origin and in its history, in some basic ways required the participation of 'orientals' for its legitimation" ("Chinese History" 112). Dirlik emphasises the vital role played by "orientals" themselves and extends the usage of the term "Orientalism" to "Asian views of Asia, to account for tendencies to self-Orientalization which would become an integral part of the history of orientalism" ("Chinese History" 104). Dirlik's discussion of self-Orientalisation extends beyond

the sharp binary opposition between the Occident and the Orient, the coloniser and the colonised, and the conflicting discourses are no longer easily identifiable as Eastern versus Western, Chinese versus non-Chinese. Furthermore, Dirlik offers the revival of Confucianism as an example of self-Orientalisation, during which scholars from both the East and the West attempted to conceptualise Confucianism. This was reminiscent of earlier Orientalists' efforts to render Confucianism "synonymous with Chinese culture" (qtd. in Dirlik, "Chinese History" 109). Confucian images, as a series of significant symbols of traditional Chinese culture, appear frequently in British Chinese literary creation, but are represented in different ways; the concept of self-Orientalisation offers insight into the alienation of Confucian culture in Mo's early works.

Easterners' self-Orientalisation, echoing Black people's desire for white masks, makes a conscious effort to pander to a discourse that remains dominated by Western ideals. Homi K. Bhabha terms this phenomenon "mimicry". Extending Fanon's focus on the dependent colonial relations reflected in the identity of the colonised, Bhabha explains the schizophrenic state of the former in terms of ambivalence: "not Self and Other but the otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity" (*Location* 44). It is around this ambivalence that the double vision of the menace of mimicry is disclosed, finally disrupting the authority of colonial discourse. As Bhabha expounds, an interdependent relationship occurs between the colonised and coloniser in the Third Space, in which they each construct the other's subjectivity (*Location* 37). With a colonial or postcolonial provenance, the Third Space of enunciation generates the possibility of conceptualising an international culture that is not based on "the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures", but rather on "the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (Bhabha, *Location* 38). Bhabha argues that hybridity, as "the sign of the productivity of colonial power", is also "the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" in its shifting forces (*Location* 112). Through this process, the narcissistic demands of the coloniser are unsettled and the gaze of the colonised, accustomed to being discriminated against, is turned back on those in power. Thus, hybridity breaks

down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside, demonstrating its articulation of the liminal Third Space (Bhabha, *Location* 116). In this sense, uncontainable hybridity, together with the subversive nature of mimicry, deterritorialises Orientalism in the postcolonial context, where the colonised and the coloniser are categorically antithetical. Given the thematic diversity and shift of focus of Mo's literary career, the notions discussed above together provide a thread to tease out his engagement with and transcendence of postcolonial writing.

Bhabha's hybridity offers a new way of examining the cultural interaction between the West and the Third World, inspiring Kuan-Hsing Chen's point regarding syncretism in his discussion of decolonisation and deimperialisation in East Asia. As K. Chen argues, the difference between syncretism and hybridity is that syncretism denotes "a subject who is highly self-conscious when translating the limits of the self", whereas hybridity is simply "a product of the colonial machine's efforts toward assimilation" (98). In practice, the West should not be the only subject of identification in the formation of the subjectivity of Asian countries; instead, critical syncretism presupposes a diversified selection for the self. K. Chen argues that the direction of identification is "to become others", to interiorise elements of others – especially minor groups, regardless of ethnicity or hierarchy – into the subjectivity of the self, and to move beyond the boundaries and divisive positions historically constructed by Western colonial power (99). In short, Asia's task is to multiply its frames of reference, in order to dilute the anxiety over the West and move productive critical work forward (K. Chen 223). Initially motivated by representing Chinese identity but turning attention to wider Asian subjects later, Mo's writing not only self-consciously performs decolonisation, but also destabilises the postcolonial pattern and deconstructs ethnic boundaries in the characterisation of minorities. It thus qualifies as an active practice of contemporary British Chinese cultural production in developing Asian subjectivity.

Previous Research on Timothy Mo

As a writer of Chinese ancestry entering the British literary scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when English literature was in the course of becoming internationalised, Mo elicited immediate concerns about his debut novel, *The Monkey King*, in spite of minimal literary criticism beyond newspaper reviews. In one review entitled "The Hongkong Beat", Michael Neve expressed a form of Western shock at Mo's description of a Cantonese family living in Hong Kong in *The Monkey King* (757). In *Sour Sweet*, a tale that ingeniously tells the story of a Chinese family living diasporically, Mo's writing began to garner attention from Anglophone academics. John Rothfork explores Mo's use of Confucianism in the portrayal of the Chen family, arguing that they are able to adapt to British life by adopting the Confucian viewpoint of "the rectification of names" (58). Faruk Bajraktarevic and Stefanus Suprajitno discuss the Chen family's identity with reference to Bhabha's theory of the Third Space and hybridity, suggesting that the family is seeking a suitable position within the British-Chinese cross-cultural environment (35; 75). Turning to *An Insular Possession*, scholars such as Ho, John McLeod and Jennifer McMahon analyse this novel from the perspective of historical representation in fiction ("History" 53; 62; 123). Moreover, to a certain degree, they consider Mo's writing strategy in light of the notion of historiographic metafiction, as proposed by Linda Hutcheon in her studies on postmodernity. Critics of *The Redundancy of Courage* observe that, in this novel, Mo's writing begins to address a pan-Asian experience. Rajiva Wijesinha and Ho scrutinise the multiple identities adopted by Adolph Ng and emphasise his status as an outsider in Danuese society (29; "Satire" 77). J.M.Q. Davies continues this conversation by interpreting the novel from a historical point of view and discussing the refractions that it creates between fiction and historiography (985-86). The majority of the reviewers for *Brownout and Breadfruit Boulevard* concentrate on the fact that the novel was self-published, which is due to Mo's break with the publisher Chatto & Windus. Yet, they also note that the novel has rid itself of Chinese elements which, as represented in his previous works, cater to the publishing market (Lezard; Beckett). As Barnacle suggests, due to its lack of censorship, the novel is a stinging

satire on Philippine politics. The picaresque narrative in *Renegade or Halo*[2] allows it to attract more literary criticism. Douglas Kerr compares Mo's Man Sundae with Daniel Defoe's Man Friday and links them with other overseas workers (15-6). Finney Brain correlates migrant workers with the picaresque tradition in Western literature and reveals a connection between the narrative mode, which is not driven by plot, and thematic concern over identity separate from the tribe (62). With regard to Mo's latest novel, *Pure*, which was published after more than a decade of silence, many commentators have expressed great expectations (Abell; Deveson; Foran; Lawson; Tonkin; Wigston), but few critical articles on the novel have been published to date.

Beyond these reviews and academic articles, Elaine Yee Lin Ho's *Timothy Mo* is the first and only monograph to systematically analyse Mo's first six novels within a postcolonial context. She interprets Mo's identity as ambivalent – situated between Britishness and Chineseness. Indeed, Mo is regarded as an ethnic Chinese writer within the circle of English literature. Yet, as argued and demonstrated in this chapter, he has gradually sought to rid himself of this label as his writing has developed.

Mo was acknowledged much later in the Chinese-speaking world, whose criticism has a narrower focus on ethnicity due to the influence of censorship and nationalism. In 1991, *Su Yeh Literature* released a book review entitled "Marginal Perspective – British Novelist Timothy Mo from Hong Kong" written by William Tay. This was possibly Mo's earliest introduction to Chinese readers. Subsequently, in 1995, Ho continued the discussion of Mo as a marginal writer in *Today: Hong Kong Culture Album*. Due to the lack of Chinese translations, it was not until the early twenty-first century that scholars in mainland China showed interest in Mo's works. In the first issue of 2012, *English and American Literary Studies* published two critical articles on *Sour Sweet* by Wei Ruan and Caiyun Huang, and Guanglin Wang, respectively. Since then, discussions of Mo's writing gradually increased, with *Sour Sweet* becoming the most popular work among Chinese Mo scholars. However, there are two deficiencies in Chinese interpretations of Mo's novels. The

first, probably stimulated by nationalism, is such an excessive emphasis on the novels' self-Orientalisation (Ruan and Yang 77; Ruan 91) that Mo's efforts to cross ethnic boundaries have occasionally been ignored. Moreover, only Mo's first four novels related to China have been discussed to date; his later, more innovative works have yet to receive attention from Sinophone scholars.

Previous research affirms Mo's contribution to British Chinese cultural production, despite the lack of a systematic study of his writing career. Examination of the thematic shift from postcolonial to trans-ethnic in Mo's literary creation is not only a highlight of this chapter, but also a critical argument throughout the thesis. Drawing on the discussion of the relationship between the colonised and coloniser, which has developed into the deterritorialisation of postcolonialism, this section builds a theoretical framework for illuminating the dynamic change that extends beyond ethnification in Mo's writing. The next section focuses on textual analysis of his early novels, which address the people of Hong Kong's identity formation between China and the UK at home and abroad. These novels constitute Mo's first engagement with the postcolonial pattern.

Alienated Representation of Things Chinese

Asserting that "I'm a Brit" and "I don't have a problem with that", Mo prefers to identify himself as a novelist of Britain rather than of China (Hughes-Hallett 150; Lim and Mo 561). In accordance with this claim, Mo, particularly in his first three novels, shows a strong interest in depicting the eccentricity and mystery of Chinese culture under a Western gaze. This behaviour resembles the desire of colonised people for a white mask of suzerainty, as remarked upon by Fanon; as "The Other", Mo is in the position of a "beggar" who "looks for appeasement, for permission in the white man's eyes" (Fanon 55). This section thus links the alienated representation of things Chinese with Mo's participation in Orientalist discourse and self-Orientalisation. Notably, as Said points out, analysis of Orientalist texts should place an emphasis on "such representations as representations, not as 'natural' depictions of the Orient", which is premised on

the intentional construction of the Orient (*Orientalism* 21). This is to say, literariness that manifests as a style of speech, narrative devices, and archetypal images, as well as historical and social circumstances, helps to render the "mystery" of the Orient plain for and to the West by the poet, scholar, and Orientalist. In this sense, the section reads Mo's quasi-Orientalist description of Chinese culture not only as catering to the way in which the West imagines the Orient's exoticism, but also as a form of literary satire through the mimicry of ethnic stereotyping, thereby elucidating Mo's struggle with his double ancestry in the earlier period of his writing.

The Monkey King Assuming to be White

The Monkey King, as a popular archetypal hero of Chinese literary tradition, has long appeared in artistic productions by overseas Chinese via different methods of adaptation to represent so-called Chineseness. For Mo, the Monkey King is not truly an explicit symbol of traditional culture, but rather a component of his Chinese literary inheritance, which is aroused by his deepest childhood memory and contributes to his literary debut. Telling the coming-of-age story of a young man who sets out in an unfamiliar world with little to rely on except his native wit, *The Monkey King* (1978) is an adult rehearsal of the adventure experiences that echo Mo's own early years (Ho, *Timothy* 31). The protagonist, Wallace Nolasco – a Chinese Portuguese born and living in Macau – insistently identifies himself as a member of the White world, performing the role of an alienated Monkey King. However, the representation of Wallace's struggle with his hybrid ancestry in turn satirises the ethnic boundaries he marks between himself and the local Chinese community. *The Monkey King* has a tripartite structure, interweaving related strands of this defamiliarised character. Part One focuses on Wallace's life on Hong Kong Island as the son-in-law to the Poon family, and his rebellion against the authority of the patriarch, Mr Poon. Part Two relates his self-exile, with his wife, May Ling, to the New Territories and his transformation there into a community leader and entrepreneur. Part Three concludes with his return and his triumphal

succession of Mr Poon as patriarch and head of the family business. As the story develops, Wallace's visible White identity first serves as a foil to the otherness of the Poons, but gradually blurs with his paradoxical integration into the Chinese community around him.

The beginning of the story is set in Macau, the now former Portuguese colony proximate to Hong Kong; its presence in the novel is used to highlight the relations between Portugal and China. As the plot unfolds, Mo tells of how centuries of mixed marriage between Portuguese and Cantonese people have produced a racially mixed population, with families like the Nolascos living "cheek by jaundiced jowl" with the Chinese in Macau (*MK* 5). For Wallace, a man with the "blue-black hair and flattened nose of any Cantonese", who is scarcely distinguishable from other Chinese, Mo writes that he is still proud of "the dimpled cleft in his chin" and has a habit of "thrusting his neck forward in conversation, especially when challenged", an inheritance from his Portuguese progenitors (*MK* 6). Despite having mastered "impeccable Cantonese", he "affect[s] not to understand that vulgar, braying dialect" (*MK* 5). These are self-distinctions in terms of both appearance and culture, as Wallace evidently views himself as superior, unmistakably convinced of his manifest superiority in comparison to Chinese people.

In a cultural sense, the attitude that Wallace has towards China parallels that of the Black man who has lived in France for a length of time and looks back at Martinique (Fanon 10). When Wallace expresses his sense of superiority over his Chinese compatriots, the Chinese element within himself is treated as the Other (E. Cheung 136); thus, from Wallace's emotional perspective, things of China must always be questioned, or perhaps even better, avoided. However, the marriage with May Ling, which was arranged by his father, Mr Nolasco, engages Wallace in relations with the entire Poon family and the Chinese business community. In a manner of speaking, he is like the Monkey King, who is pushed into a pilgrimage full of struggles. Through Wallace and his adventures, Mo relocates *Journey to the West*'s legendary model of selfhood and society to the modern colonial periphery

(Ho, *Timothy* 32). In his resistance to the authority of Mr Poon and his multiple transformations, Wallace is the eponymous Monkey King.

With the uxorilocal marriage between Wallace and May Ling, the geographical setting shifts from Macau to Hong Kong, where the same ethnic boundaries pertain to the British colony. In the novel's narrative of the Poons, Mo capitalises on his own experience of the Chinese family.[1] Yet, in offering a satiric observation on this family from Wallace's viewpoint – that is, the intended alien perspective – Mo self-Orientalises things Chinese. As a result, readers are encouraged to see the Poons' alienated rituals and everyday life through the eyes of an outsider, and the interior hierarchies of the family are revealed with comic relish. As Ho reminds us, to "keep the colonial background as accurate as possible", the fiction must be supplemented by "sociological and anthropological studies" (*Timothy* 29). The representation of family life in Hong Kong at that time, based upon Mo's "personal knowledge", is oriented towards literariness, instead of reality, in order to reflect Wallace's dilemma when first joining the Poons.

Specifically, not only is Wallace shocked by the sight of how a new "mouth" is fed, but so would be readers:

> The amahs [. . .] were dropping morsels into the child's mouth from their chopsticks. They first took a tit-bit from the dish and put it in their own mouths, masticating slowly and thoroughly. Then the mashed nourishment would be shaped into a ball by rolling it with the tip of tongue against the barrier of the front teeth. The amahs forced the food out through pursed lips, gathered it in their plastic pincers and transferred the pre-masticated pellet into the child's mouth. (*MK* 15-16)

The child being fed in the scenario is immobilised against his will, reminding Wallace of his passive position in the Poons as its latest newcomer: getting "a dirty bowl" at meals filled with "burnt rice, welded together into balls, from the bottom of the tureen" (*MK* 14, 18). Yet, despising the numb Chinese style, Wallace plays

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[1] See the preface of the paperback edition of *The Monkey King*. London: Abacus, 1984.

the role of modern revolutionary when he physically intervenes to stop Mr Poon from savagely beating his eldest son, Ah Lung. In the heat of the moment, Wallace rounds on Mr Poon, "You couldn't behave like this in the modern ages. You thought you was the god of us all or something? [. . .] You never would oppress anybodys with that again" (*MK* 26-27). With this direct challenge, Wallace echoes the simian action of the Monkey King creating a tremendous uproar in straining against sociocultural orthodoxies, eager to slip the leash of the Chinese familial system.

Out of/Within the Traditional Sociocultural Order

Wallace's desire to be unfettered is stimulated by his defiance of traditional Chinese ideology, in which the concept of family is crucially related to the core of the sociocultural framework that dominates his fate throughout. Despite debate surrounding whether Chinese society is family-based or relation-based, the essence of the role played by family ties is undoubtedly an aspect of Chinese social relationships (qtd. in K. Yu 97). The traditional Chinese understanding of family diverges from the Western perception of home as a private place, and its intricate connection to the entirety of society becomes an unavoidable issue in Chinese studies. Writers of Chinese descent are also passionate about representing this relationship as a typical cultural symbol, exemplified by Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, who self-Orientalise the traditional Chinese family system to attract Anglophone readers. In *The Monkey King*, the representation of the hierarchies, rituals, and everyday life of the Poon family miniaturises the othering of Chinese sociocultural order from Wallace's White perspective. However, Mo binds Wallace's fortune to the destiny of the family dynasty in order to highlight his confused identity within deep-rooted ethnic boundaries.

It is Wallace's marriage to May Ling that makes him a member of the Poon family; this marriage, however, is described from its inception as a mutually beneficial exchange in accordance with Chinese custom. The patriarch, Mr Poon, patronised by his father-in-law, becomes an emerging merchant prince in Hong

Kong after the Second World War; after his lineal son marries a girl with a large dowry, he also requires a son-in-law for his daughter, born of a concubine. Benefiting twice from profit-oriented marriage, Mr Poon knows that it would be impossible to marry May Ling into a respectable Cantonese family without a claim to a substantial dowry. "Under the circumstances", Mo drily notes on Mr Poon's behalf, "a poor Portuguese was a creative solution", and securing Wallace achieves his "political system" within Chinese tradition, which centres on "compromise" and balance (*MK* 11). From Mr Poon's perspective, Wallace is merely a disembodied "additional mouth", and their prospective familial relations are demarcated as those between consumer and provider, subject to the principle of use value (*MK* 11). Indeed, Wallace, who lives among the impecunious Nolascos, has no other choice, as Mr Poon agrees to pay for the funeral of his dying father. Therefore, Wallace occupies a subjugated position in Chinese social relations from the outset of his marriage.

Mr Poon is characterised by a complex interior exchange of patriarchal, materialistic, and political forces that determine his self-identity and sociality (Ho, *Timothy* 34). Performing this role, Mr Poon deliberately quells Wallace's rebellion against his authority by means of the infusion of "old Chinese custom" and, above all, the irresistible temptation of economic stability (*MK* 26). This is followed by Wallace submitting to petty favours, leading him to become the unwitting agent of Mr Poon's design to secure the finances and the future of the family dynasty. A position is found for him in the Public Works Department, where Mr Poon's secret plan is for Wallace to ingratiate himself through the selection of construction contracts, whose enormous profits will indirectly benefit the family business. When Wallace indicates that the plan is "corrupt", Mr Poon emphasises once more that this is the "Chinese way", stressing the age-old "customs" of doing business (*MK* 95). Wallace, albeit unwillingly, is persuaded to accept the job, from which he will gain certain benefits from Mr Poon. In this sense, through his progress from being an "additional mouth" to a member of the family whom Mr Poon can "depend on", Wallace shifts from withstanding the traditional Chinese sociocultural order to being its co-conspirator (*MK* 11, 96).

Wallace's affinity with the Poons does not begin until Part Two, in which he and May Ling leave the family home for the rural New Territories to escape from a government investigation into corruption in his job and his collusion with Mr Poon. This pastoral self-exile takes shape as "a journey of liberation" to a certain degree, as Wallace is released into an uncharted space with opportunities to redefine his relationship with the Chinese community (Ho, *Timothy* 46). Faced with the effects of typhoons, Wallace draws upon his early training as an engineer to persuade villagers to dynamite the sides of the valley where the fields can drain the flood and leave a small lake (*MK* ch. 20). He ingeniously transforms the lagoon into a vacation site where people from the city can row and fish (*MK* ch. 23). These ventures generate material improvements to village life; thus, unintentionally, Wallace proves himself to be the "creative solution" for Mr Poon and a worthy heir (MK 11). Above all, the rural village provides a site for Hong Kong society that still functions by way of a traditional Chinese system, to which Wallace, who initially expressed a dismissive attitude, gradually becomes accustomed to in the process of growing into an autonomous agent. Engagement in the traditional Chinese sociocultural order disrupts Wallace's recognition of Whiteness, leading to his unremitting entanglement with race, ethnicity, and identity.

In the final part, the rapid succession of Mr Poon's illness and then sudden death, combined with Ah Lung's disgrace, leaves Wallace as the successor. This places him in the position of patriarch, and subsequently the leader of the family business, with little effort. It seems that Wallace has fully integrated into the Chinese sociocultural milieu, but Mo adds a highly literary coda to problematise his identity. At the very end, Wallace has a dream in which he feasts at a banquet where the main delicacy is the brains of a young, living monkey. This grotesque ending is blamed by Eastern scholars for the barbaric self-Orientalisation of Chinese food culture; they claim that there is "[no] future in putting it out" (Ruan and Yang 79; MGH 13). Nevertheless, Wallace is both attendee at and observer of the banquet. In terms of the seating order, he sits in "the place of honour", but the shadowy "diners", whom he cannot see, intimate his isolation on this collective occasion (*MK* 254). Although the focus then shifts to the monkey, a

horrifying third perspective for Wallace appears: the hammer-head "came down in a silver blur" (*MK* 255). This narrative carries a suggestion of the monkey's point of view, looking upward at the descending instrument, which builds a tentative connection between Wallace and the monkey. Although there is no other implication of Wallace-as-monkey, as he immediately wakes up from the nightmare, this dream hints at Wallace's uncertain fate, trapped in the Chinese sociocultural order. The decidedly literary coda not only reveals the struggle between the two identities that torture Wallace, but also mirrors Mo's ambivalence about positioning himself when entering the literary world.

Frustrated Yin-Yang Equilibrium

The anxiety over identity is continued in Mo's second novel, *Sour Sweet* (1982), in which he shifts his focus from exterior family-society connections to the interior family role of yin and yang, specifically in relation to gender. In Chinese culture, yin is associated with "darkness, coldness, female gender, night, the moon, the earth", whereas yang is related to "light, warmth, male gender, day, the sun, the heavens", and the yin-yang equilibrium is the basis for the Confucian family order (S. Chan 313). Yet, in Lily's pursuit of a yin-yang equilibrium within her family – the Chens – Mo displays an identity dislocation within this traditional Chinese family, whose members find it difficult to position themselves in London. According to Colin MacKerras, the presence of Confucianism at the heart of the family is central to Western perceptions of traditional Chinese culture (136). In this sense, the alienated representation of the yin-yang equilibrium in Mo's writing constitutes an Orientalist portrayal of Confucianism as the Other, deliberately catering to the publishing market. Furthermore, having been educated within the traditional Chinese culture found in Hong Kong in his childhood, Mo himself seems to dislike this kind of educational pattern, calling it "Rigid Confucianism"; he feels lucky to have received higher education in Britain and to have become an Anglophone writer (Lim and Mo 557-58). Hence, as well as functioning as a satire on Confucian

thought, the failed yin-yang equilibrium in the Chen family echoes Mo's claim to a British identity between the two cultural milieus.

In Chinese tradition, the balance of yin and yang in a family means a harmonious relationship between wife and husband, and the frustrated yin-yang equilibrium in *Sour Sweet* indicates a dislocation in the Chen family. As K. Cheung claims, a common characteristic of Asian American literature is the marginalisation of Asian men, who are regularly represented in a negative and oppressed way ("Woman Warrior" 239). *Sour Sweet* shares this feature, as it depicts the male character, Chen, as being closer to the role of yin in his family. At the beginning of the novel, Chen is described from a third-person perspective: "His skin [is] as smooth as a child's. Apart from some down on his cheeks near the ear he [is] free of facial hair; he [has] never shaved in his life" (*SS* 20). A moustache is supposedly a symbol of masculinity, but Chen lacks any facial hair, indicating that the narrative voice characterises him as a feminised version of the male image from the outset. Within the framework of the yin-yang equilibrium, as the sole male character in his family, Chen should play the role of yang. Yet, his lack of masculinity means that he cannot take on a man's responsibility for his family. This incapacitation of the Chinese male character embodies Mo's writing strategy as "a willing partner in latent Orientalism"; herein what Said calls "the racial classification" (*Orientalism* 206) echoes the colonial inferiority complex described by Fanon.

Ironically, the only razor in the house belongs to Chen's wife, Lily, who is the centre of the novel and is portrayed as being similar to the role of yang in the family. Lily was raised in a traditional Chinese family, where she was taught the concept of the yin-yang equilibrium by her father Master Tang, a part-time bonesetter and Chinese boxer. However, trained to be the heir of the Tangs, "at the age of five [Lily begins] her instruction in Chinese boxing", the Hung Gar, which has "no 'soft' or 'internal' style" designed for females (*SS* 15). Under these circumstances, in contrast with Chen's, Lily's personality is rooted in yang, and she becomes the real decision-maker in the family. In a similar manner to that of K. Cheung's argument, the highlighting of Asian women serves as a foil to the

marginalisation of Asian men. Such weakened images of the Orient, as Said argues, exist solely in the West's imagination, "with no parallels in Oriental society" (*Orientalism* 205). In this sense, Mo's portrayal of the Chen family is more akin to a parody of Orientalist literature, in which the emasculated Asian man symbolises his difficulties with ethnicity, leading him to be treated as the Other in British literary circles.

Despite the dislocation of yin and yang in the Chen family, Lily still tries to balance her relationship with Chen, and an eccentric yin-yang equilibrium thus develops in their diasporic life. Performing a wife's duty, Lily prepares a bowl of broth for Chen every evening, failing to realise that this midnight snack will make her husband put on a great deal of weight and harm his health (*SS* 6). Although Lily sees Chen as the head of her family, her strong-minded personality makes her incompatible with playing the role of yin, and the fact that Chen cannot assume the family responsibility lead to the automatic assignation of the role of yang to Lily. Sparing no effort to persuade Chen to "start up his own business", Lily still needs to ensure that Chen feels himself to be the real decision-maker who "[finds] what he want[s]" (*SS* 11, 92). On the surface, the opening of Dah Ling Restaurant seems to maintain the harmony of a traditional Chinese family, but in truth it strengthens the displacement of yin and yang, as the main business is managed by Lily. As the title of the novel suggests, like the typical sour and sweet flavours of Chinese cuisine, the running of the restaurant contains an excess of both Lily's sour and sweet experiences. Consequently, the measures that Lily takes to maintain the yin-yang equilibrium unbalance her family even more, indicating an irreversible dislocation, not merely in terms of gender, but also in terms of their diasporic identity.

Under Lily's strong influence, Chen gradually loses the power of discourse within the family and pays less and less attention to domestic affairs. Gradually, Lily realises that "she [is] now actually less dependent on Chen", who is eventually secretly murdered by the Wo gang because of his debt to the Triad, vanishing from her life completely (*SS* 45). The plot of Chen's disappearance represents a point of

climax in the frustration of the yin-yang equilibrium, in which Chen's over-reliance on ethnic networks – incarnated as the stereotypical Triad – discourages him from adapting to life in his adopted country. As Chunduan Xiao argues, the pursuit of the yin-yang equilibrium depicted in *Sour Sweet* is sufficiently formalist to provide an Orientalist misreading of Chinese culture for the English-speaking world ("Reading" 53). Indeed, the gender allocation within the yin-yang equilibrium is deconstructed in Xiaolu Guo's writing on the new Chinese diaspora (see ch. 3); the migrant subjectivity beyond ethnic territorialisation is also reflected in Mo's later works, as discussed below. Yet, in *Sour Sweet*, the alienation of Chinese culture still intimates Mo's schizophrenia in the face of the Anglosphere, which involves his writing in a postcolonial milieu.

Extreme Cross-Cultural Identity Construction

The social circle of immigrants pertains to an important standard for examining the construction of their identities in a new culture; the circumscribed Chinese community in *Sour Sweet* indicates the troubles faced by the Chen family when they come into contact with British society. Benton and Gomez describe the following cultural stereotype: "Chinese society overseas is introverted and self-reliant, resting on extensive ethnic and familial networks that cater to their members' every need, ranging from business and employment to fellowship and leisure" (*Chinese in Britain* 335). Although this form of representation has been challenged and shattered in most of the recent works discussed in this thesis, it is reinforced by Mo's depiction of the Chinese minority in his early writing. Although the novel is set in London, there are few descriptions of things British in *Sour Sweet* because it focuses on the life of the Chen family; they are secluded within their ethnic ghetto and show little interest in communicating with the locals, asserting instead their Chinese identity regularly. Notably, conversations that occur within the Chen family and between family members and Westerners are in Chinese Pidgin English, while the omniscient narrator uses Standard English. This

strengthens the sense of otherness ascribed to the ethnic Chinese family and satisfies mainstream readers' curiosity.

Chen, similarly to numerous Chinese immigrants before him, regards the UK as a "land of promise" in which to make money, but still thinks of himself as an "interloper", despite having lived there for four years (*SS* 1). Although Chen has acquired a certain level of English in his first job at Ho Ho restaurant, he refuses to interact closely with British people because of "his foreignness", engaging only when necessary on business occasions, during which he solely focuses on the "various idiosyncrasies" of his customers (*SS* 9, 34). It is the excessive emphasis on his Chineseness as an important part of his daily routine that relegates Chen to his ethnic ghetto and obstructs his construction of a diasporic identity. In order to maintain a connection with his true home, Hong Kong, Chen enjoys going to the cinema club, which shows "mostly modern Cantonese dramas", where he indulges in nostalgia (*SS* 34). When he opens his own catering business, Chen even claims that a little bit of dirt will make it "seem more like a proper Chinese restaurant" (*SS* 141). This alienated representation of Chineseness undoubtedly results in the typical ethnic stereotype that has been criticised by later writers. However, the character of Chen literarily generalises early Hong Kong immigrants, who, working in the catering trade, are unable to effectively acclimate themselves to life in the UK. In this sense, Mo is among the first to reveal the emerging Chinese minority, via the Orientalist discourse accepted by the mainstream, to the English cultural field.

Unlike Chen, as the landlady of Dah Ling Restaurant, Lily does not evade speaking English, as she is required to interact frequently with English people for business purposes. However, from the perspective of the narrator, Mo makes an estranged evaluation of Lily's English:

> Her voice, so expressive and alive in her native Cantonese, became shrill, peremptory, and strangely lifeless in its level pitching when she spoke English. She would have sounded hostile and nervous; a cross between a petulant child and a nagging old shrew, neither of which descriptions

adequately fitted the mature and outward-going young woman who was
Lily Chen. (*Sour Sweet* 141)

The comparison here alienates Lily as the Other in her exposure to British society, which uncompromisingly separates her from the English-speaking world. As a result, "she and [the] customers ignored each other; [. . .] each regarded the other as a non-person" (*SS* 142). The cashier counter in the restaurant shields the Chen family from their customers, symbolising an insurmountable barrier for Lily and her husband between the two worlds. Therefore, in the Orientalist representation of the East-West relationship, Lily and Chen are confined to an ethnic enclave, where they are deprived of their ability to construct a cross-cultural, diasporic identity.

On the contrary, Lily's elder sister, Mui, is the only character who does not refuse to participate in British culture and thus becomes fully assimilated; so much so, in fact, that she even loses her native cultural identity. When she first arrives in the UK, Mui also displays such resistance to contact with the local community that she "hardly [leaves] the house", which "disquiet[s] not only Lily but her brother-in-law as well" (*SS* 11). Thanks to the basic English she previously acquired when working for a foreigner in Hong Kong, Mui then becomes obsessed with a variety of English TV programmes and, staying at home all day, "she watch[es] with a fascinated interest" (*SS* 14). Although Mui's addiction to television appears to be attributed to an escape from real life in the UK, her immersion in an English-language environment while watching gives her an insight into British culture that later help her to interact with Westerners. Gradually, Mui finds that she "[is] able to tell even similar-looking individuals apart" when faced with Western customers, while Chen and Lily still have difficulty distinguishing between them (*SS* 143). It is the language proficiency she acquires that enables Mui to integrate into British society, and her resulting sense of achievement triggers her radical cross-cultural identity construction.

By communicating affably with the local people, Mui not only gets more tips from regular customers, but also solicits more business for the family's restaurant.

During this process, she moves outside of the limited ethnic community and rapidly develops a British identity. Differences then arise between Lily and Mui, as the latter begins to see things from a White British perspective and criticises the former for not changing her Chinese thought pattern. At the end of the novel, Mui's decision to open a fish-and-chip shop with her Western husband indicates the submergence of her Chinese identity, as she places all of her hopes on a promising life in the UK. By contrast, Lily, having lost her husband, has to move towards an unknown future of running the Chinese restaurant and bringing up her young son by herself. Through her desire for a British identity, Mui shares the inferiority complex of the colonised in the pursuit of the "white mask", and Lily's clinging to Chinese identity leads to irreconcilable contradictions between the colonised and their coloniser. The inverted fate of the sisters illustrates *Sour Sweet*'s devotion to the postcolonial pattern, where the opposition between the West and the Third World is evident. Indeed, representing British-Hong Kong colonial and postcolonial ties is one of the foci of Mo's early writing, which is continuously embodied in his attention to Hong Kong's colonisation in the history in *An Insular Possession*.

The Opium War from a Marginal Perspective

Addressing a colonial history, *An Insular Possession* (1986) extends its horizon beyond domestic chronicles and adopts a third-party narrative strategy, which represents the first turning point in Mo's writing career. The subject matter of this novel is the Sino-British conflict that led to the First Opium War and the establishment of Hong Kong as a colony, as well as a city port in the Far East in the nineteenth century. It differs from traditional historical novels as, rather than providing a grand narrative of the past, *An Insular Possession* is metahistorical and full of parody and self-reflexiveness, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. In a number of discussions of this kind of writing in the 1970s and 1980s, Hayden White argues that histories and novels that employ literary writing techniques at the same level are indistinguishable from one another on formal

grounds. With the claim to "a verbal image of 'reality'", both manage to meet standards of "truth of correspondence" as well as "truth of coherence" (White, *Tropics* 122). More recently, Hutcheon draws on White's viewpoint to explain historiographic metafiction, in which "auto-representation" and "historical context" are distinct, and problematises the very possibility of historical knowledge, leaving the unsolved contradiction centred on by postmodern discourse (106) (see more on the historical narrative in ch. 2). *An Insular Possession*, implicitly the opposite of these truth-bearing writings, could be read as a fictional demonstration of how historical fact is created and represented by different narrative and rhetorical strategies.

The "history" in *An Insular Possession* is not written from the perspective of a single authority, but rather is narrated in the form of parody. It consists of multiple voices: journalistic publications, personal letters, first-hand or eyewitness accounts, all of which jostle with each other for supremacy. The primary narrative of *An Insular Possession* is occupied by editions of two newspapers, *Canton Monitor* and *Lin Tin Bulletin and River Bee*. Stimulated by the commercial and imperial interests of British authorities, especially the opium trade in the Pearl River Delta, *Canton Monitor* is run as a daily paper on behalf of the colonialist machine. In defiance of the former's reportage of "facts", *Lin Tin Bulletin and River Bee*, which is individually cofounded by Gideon Chase and Walter Eastman, publishes numerous reports of the opposite opinion. Furthermore, it also publishes features on Chinese culture and rituals. They are always arranged successively in the text, but provide contrary versions of the same event, suggesting that the "truth" of history is being questioned. Thus, Mo's writing, while examining the formation of Hong Kong's colonisation, engages with a postmodern context in terms of the creative historical narrative he presents.

Notably, Chase and Eastman, founders of the folk newspaper as protagonists, consistent with Mo's interest in marginal subjects: their American nationality places them as outsiders to the Sino-British conflict and indicates their perspective as disempowered third parties. In this respect, the novel positions itself as the

fictional alternative to both imperial (British) and nativist (Chinese) versions of history, presenting a voice whose possibility has rarely been previously imagined (Ho, *Timothy* 73). As Mo acknowledged, he "changed direction" after his first two books when generalising about the colonisation of Hong Kong (Lim and Mo 567); *An Insular Possession* neither shows interest in the account of colonial victimhood, nor invests in postcolonial cultural reconstruction within an uneasy community. Concern for a third-party narrative correlates with the intention of tearing off an ethnic label, which, as a vital goal in Mo's later writing, is first reflected in this novel. Meanwhile, the choice of American subjects hints that Mo is likely to take into consideration their ambivalent position as the ex-colonised during the period of the novel, thereby raising two important questions. Is there a mimicry of Orientalism in Chase and Eastman's representation of China? Regarding Mo's arrangement of characters and his British-Hong Kong background, is a latent mimicry of the Western perspective reflected in his historical writing?

The answers to both questions may be yes, as the Chinese characters in *An Insular Possession*, while having a minimal presence, are still disheartening stereotypes. Ah Cheong, the servant of the Irish painter Harry O'Rourke, is the most frequently occurring Chinese individual in the novel, but he is portrayed as abject on each appearance – he speaks in rough pidgin, always displaying a cautious grin (*IP* ch. 2). In addition, the impression created of the whole Chinese community is conservative and xenophobic, leading almost all Westerners in the novel to complain about the jealous government and restricted foreign trade in China (*IP* ch. 3). In this sense, the novel looks back at an Orientalist tradition for the West through its representation of China, and evidently Mo's intended directional change has not yet been completed. Furthermore, with the title "An Insular Possession", it is intimated that Hong Kong has no presence in the novel as a community or as a culture, except in the final moments, as the haven or retreat for foreigners displaced from one trading outpost to another. The vast majority of the story takes place in the city of Canton in the Qing dynasty, in the Portuguese colony of Macao, or on the Pearl River connecting the two. Yet, Hong Kong's identity is predicated on its history and on its coming into being as a colonial

possession: the moment at which the city comes into being in the narrative is the moment of its colonisation. In fact, regarding the relationship between reality and strategic historiographic metafiction, Mo's identity is self-reflexively manifested in his silence on the topic of Hong Kong. Analogous to the account of Hong Kong, which has only appeared since its colonisation, Mo, having been born there, also develops his colonial identity under the dominance of Britain, responding to the Western-based identification and perspective in his work.

In short, Mo's first three novels maintain an association with the postcolonial pattern that centres on the ethnic and cultural differences between the Third World and the West. The incomplete diversion from this mode in *An Insular Possession* foreshadows the third-party narrative in Mo's later novels, where ethnicity is no longer accentuated; instead, Mo emphasises the hybridity of various cultures in a seeming effort to deterritorialise ethnic boundaries that are closely linked to colonial power.

Diversity in Pan-Asian Experiences

Regarding his literary career, Mo emphasises the "self-renewal through different creations" that should be reflected in a writer's development (qtd. in Ho, *Timothy* 125). He also declares that "I try my best to change, to create what's new. I could have written more books in the past fifteen years, but I have chosen every time to break new paths instead" (qtd. in Ho, *Timothy* 126).[2] Correspondingly, having finished his first three novels, Mo shifted his attention from Chinese people and things to a Pan-Asian perspective, and even a globalised identity if we consider his most recent work. Beginning with his fourth novel *The Redundancy of Courage*, which portrays a Chinese descendant born and growing up in the Pacific Islands

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[2] The original source comes from: Shu, Ming. "I Only Want to Travel: An Interview with Timothy Mo." *Unitas: A Literary Monthly* (Taiwan), vol.7, no.12, 1991, pp. 21-25 (in Chinese). Elaine Yee Lin Ho translates it in English in her monograph *Timothy Mo*.

but embracing Euramerican thoughts, all of the characters, settings, and even keynotes are new to his readers. The appearance of an African-American serviceman and a Filipina bar-girl's child, and the Thailand ladyboy swaying between Siamese Islamism and Western liberalism in his following works, further blur the boundaries between the East and the West. The three figures are diverse and situated in environments analogous to Bhabha's Third Space: due to the legacy of Western colonisation, no culture can remain pure, and their characterisation and development display hybridity (*Location* 38). In this sense, the subjectivity of these protagonists can be distinguished from that of the protagonists in his first three novels, which are primarily established on the basis of alienated otherness. Focusing on "the reconstitution of subjectivity" (K. Chen 166), this section elucidates the hybridity and syncretism embodied in the characters of Mo's later novels, demonstrating his transcendence of a postcolonial paradigm in terms of his writing.

Resistance to Neo-Colonialism

Extending the interior disharmony of the family as community in his first two works, Mo continues to deepen the theme of struggles between nation-states witnessed in *An Insular Possession*. Yet, he turns his attention to the hybridity of pan-Asian districts, where the historical experience of East Timor is fictionalised in *The Redundancy of Courage* (1991). Set on the fictional island of Danu, an ex-colony of Portugal that had been invaded by its neighbour, the Malais, before gaining autonomy, this novel centres on the conflict between Danu and the Malais in the late twentieth century. More precisely, it explores the transformation of a new nation under the dominance of imperialism and neo-colonialism. Mo tells the story of Danu as a nation-community, which does not merely possess the characteristics of the family-community in *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet*, but also has horizontal relations beyond it. According to Benedict Anderson, the idea of "nation-ness" is a series of "cultural artefacts of a particular kind", and "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by

the style in which they are imagined" (4, 6). In this context, as an imagined union, a nation-community, a nation-state, and a resistant collective, Danu is interiorly characterised by fraternity and comradeship, accompanied by participants that can be considered its internal Others, such as Adolph Ng and Dr Maria Nolasco da Silva. From its external relations, the quasi-allegory of the Timorese event places an urgent postcolonial spin on Danuese issues, where the projects of nation-building and developing subjective consciousness in Danu adopt the role of fighting against neo-colonialism.[3]

At the beginning of the novel, the Malais, a new nation-state independent of the British Empire, rapidly recolonises Danu – in which Malai military forces move to fill the space vacated by European imperialism – after its short-lived independence from Portugal. This act of aggression is ultimately disclosed as being implicitly sanctioned by the American and Australian capitals, which are eager to exploit Danu's offshore "oil" reserves while ensuring that the "deep-water channel off Danu" does not fall into the hands of a "new left-wing government", FAKOUM (*RC* 445). For Danu, whose fate is determined "not by [themselves], not locally or by the invader even, but abroad, in Canberra and Washington", the nation-state is forced under the yoke of colonialism and neo-colonialism once again (*RC* 122); its resistance stands as a nationalist movement for independence. The Malai invasion of Danu, however, coupled with the imperialistic will of a new nation-state, portends the betrayal of liberationist thought. As Ho comments, the double moves reflected in the Malai invasion telescope the historical time and space of postcolonial fictional discourse for the last fifty years since the mid-twentieth century (*Timothy* 90). Hence, after showing the process of Hong Kong's colonisation under feudal rule, Mo's representation of the development of a modern nation-state invests more in postcolonial discourse.

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[3] East Timor was colonised by Portugal in the sixteenth century and was known as Portuguese Timor until 28 November 1975, when the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin) declared the territory's independence. Nine days later, it was invaded and occupied by the Indonesian military. Mo's story of Danu is a fictional adaptation of this historical event.

In his description of the Malais, Mo first represents an earlier period of decolonisation when celebrating its liberation and justifying the nation-state. Yet, when nationalism seems to become a dominant ideology in the development of the nation-state, the Malais becomes the site of hegemonic and neo-colonial practice. Above all, by showing how the nationalist project is incorporated into the global strategy of developed Western countries, Mo reveals capital-oriented political and cultural preoccupations in contemporary international relationships. The complicity of nationalism and neo-colonialism is further expounded in Kuan-Hsing Chen's discussion of the case of Taiwan – first colonised by Japan, then dominated by American imperialism before developing the southward-advance discourse that shows its subimperial imagination in Southeast Asia – which deals with the situation of both sides depicted in the novel.[4] Chen ascribes Taiwan's "subimperial desire" to "[a lack of] critical reflection on decolonization", which leads "the imperialist cultural imaginary to be so effortlessly inherited by the colonized", focusing on solutions that are opposite to neo-colonialism (63). In this way, regardless of either Danu's or the Malais' perspective, *The Redundancy of Courage* aggregates the hardship of decolonisation under the influence of imperialism when building a new nation-state in the Third World.

Stimulated by nascent nationalism, Danu's resistance to Malai recolonisation, embodied in a quasi-heroic account of the FAKOUM guerrillas, is full of suffering. In the narrative of the fight against neo-colonialism, Mo strategically relocates the heroic epic in the late twentieth century through the voice of Adolph Ng, a self-reflexive character claiming a hybrid identity, who also questions so-called heroism. Through Ng's eyes, Osvaldo, the leader of the Danuese guerrillas, is a unified subject who, immune to pain, seems to "have consumed all that [is] comfortable about his own body, and then have discarded it with contempt" (*RC* 69). A model of heroism is drawn, which, however, is impenetrable to Ng who claims an unheroic hybrid identity. More often, Ng is baffled, "There were times when Osvaldo asserted himself and there were times when he didn't, but his

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[4] See K. Chen *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, ch. 1.

choice of moment always surprised me" (*RC* 238). The contradiction between the narrator and the heroic character renders the epic of the nation a parody, resonating with Hutcheon's account of creating historiographic metafiction as "postmodernist contradictory texts" (20). Thus, the significance of both heroism and nationalism in the independence campaign of Danu is deterritorialised through Ng's narrative.

From this perspective, the title of the novel, "The Redundancy of Courage", can be read as a satirical comment on the pointlessness of Danuese resistance as represented by Osvaldo's heroism. At the end of the novel, the Malais still occupy Danu; Osvaldo is captured and then killed in an explosion that he arranges himself; and Ng goes into exile, eventually relocating to Brazil. The resistance to neo-colonialism provisionally fails with the tragic fate of the guerrillas, but Danu's history is unfinished: as a survivor and defector, Ng strategically exposes the hegemonic realpolitik behind this event and remembers the nationalist spirit. In *The Redundancy of Courage*, Mo reveals the trouble caused by the latent neo-imperialist/colonist hegemony in the process of decolonisation and the building of a new nation-state on the one hand; and on the other hand, the characterisation of Ng's hybridity moves Mo's writing out of the typical postcolonial pattern in which the binary opposition between the colonised and coloniser predominates.

Flexible Identity within Hybridity

Continuing the third-party narrative in *An Insular Possession*, *The Redundancy of Courage* relates Danu's struggles for independence to the protagonist Adolph Ng, who has Chinese ancestry but claims a hybrid identity. Although the narrative unfolds as a first-person narration, Ng has no investment in the questions of Chineseness found in *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet*. Refusing to succumb to nostalgia like the Chen family, Ng devotes himself to a flexible identity with regard to his survival, leaving the numerous roles he has played in his life in Danu behind him. Indeed, the multiple slippages in Ng's identification reflect the constructive

process of cultural identity as described by Hall (see Introduction), and every single moment of its change is triggered by his tripartite hybrid milieu.

The hybridity in the first level is that Ng is a Danuese citizen of Chinese ancestry, and he acknowledges his Chinese identity from the outset. While introducing the pronunciation of his Chinese surname with self-mockery, Ng describes himself as being "of Chinese race" and characterised by what he calls "Chinese pragmatism" (*RC* 30). However, Ng has so little connection with the diasporic Chinese community of Danu, other than the Poons and the Chens, that when he seeks refuge in the Chinese quarter on the day of the Malai invasion, he is refused (*RC* 13). Indeed, for Ng, "Chineseness" only makes sense as a characteristic that distinguishes him from mestizo and being native Danuese; this distinction is also attributed to his alliance with Western civilisation, wherein Ng's second level of hybridity manifests. As the descendant of Chinese immigrants in Danu, Ng – unlike his mestizo friends, most of whom show affinity with their former suzerain and wish to go to Portugal for college after finishing high school in Danu – attends a private high school in Macao where the overwhelming majority are Chinese people, and then goes to university in Canada to study engineering. After graduation, he returns to the island but feels "numbed" and "lost", as he sees it displaying traits of "barbarism" compared with the "big world" (*RC* 35). The educational experience gives Ng a route to what lies outside both China and Danu, through which his identity construction transcends ethnic and national boundaries.

However, refusing to indulge the desire for a "white mask", Ng clearly realises that he is "not a citizen of the great world" (*RC* 35); just as he is defined as Chinese in Danuese society but not welcomed into the Chinese community. Although Ng finds an identity as "a Chinese entrepreneur with capital", this seems to be merely a medium of ethnic ties, allowing him to situate himself in Danuese society (*RC* 60). The imposed "Chinese" position reflects Ng's "dubious ethnicity", but it is shortly deterritorialised by his participation in resistance to the Malai invasion. During this period, he identifies with the Danuese, rather than with the nebulous identity of

being "a citizen of the world" (Ho, *Timothy* 90). Analogous to the estrangement from his Chinese ethnicity, Ng's place in Danuese society is not undoubted and unalterable, and consequently he adopts an ambiguous position in the struggle between Malai imperialism and Danuese nationalism. This constitutes the last level of Ng's hybridity. Notably, Mo parallels Ng's tripartite hybrid milieu beyond the postcolonial pattern embodied in his first three novels, where a clear subordinate relationship remains predominant in Hong Kong's interaction with Britain. In this manner, Ng develops a flexible identity that both enables him to shift among the three sides and rationalises his final settlement in Brazil where, despite also being a former Portuguese colony, there is a new environment without direct ties to his previous life experience. The characterisation of Ng thus involves Mo's writing in a cosmopolitan context for the first time.

In the fight for national independence against the Malai invaders, Ng's Danuese identity is aroused and strengthened, but only passively. When the Malai invasion drives the Danuese leaders into the jungle, where the latter organise guerrilla units, Ng is unwittingly abducted by them, and thus participates "half as prisoner, half as guide, maybe something of a hostage" (*RC* 146). In this ambivalent role, Ng finds himself forcibly incorporated into the resistance as an expert on explosives and sabotage, satirising his education as an engineer, which was originally expected to lead him to a safe and prosperous career. Meanwhile, Ng realises that he has always behaved "according to the notions and expectations of others, rather than [his] own", indicating the contingency and groundlessness of his Danuese identity, which he subsequently betrays (*RC* 193). Shortly after being captured by Malai soldiers, Ng defects to the Malai authorities and is happy to become a servant in the Colonel's household, rather than being executed. From then on, Ng helps Mrs Goreng – the Colonel's wife – successfully cover up the truth that Danu has been invaded by the Malais in front of Western right-wing journalists and points out the recalcitrant guerrillas among prisoners at the command of the Colonel (*RC* ch. 25, ch. 28). Through these actions, Ng transiently changes his identity as an accomplice of Malai imperialist aggression, during which the flexibility of his identity secures his survival. Ng's hybridity breaks down the

binary opposition between the native and the foreign in the typical postcolonial pattern previously adopted by Mo, who writes an intriguing coda of escape to open up a cosmopolitan possibility, simultaneously sparking a discussion of Ng's morality.

Through his dedication to the Malai authorities, Ng is eventually capable of persuading the Colonel to allow him to live beyond Danu and the Malais and bid farewell to his past. However, at the moment of his acceptance as a Brazilian citizen with the Japanese surname Kawasaki, Ng recognises that "[a]n identity and a history cannot be obliterated with a switch of [a] name or the stroke of a pen" (*RC* 446). Here, "identity" indicates that Ng reclaims his so-called Danuese identity in the already independent country that shares the experience with Danu of having been colonised by Portugal; yet, it also suggests that the hybridity of different identities in Ng coexist and co-affect his life in the new world. Mo confessed to difficulties and a lack of enjoyment in the writing of Adolph Ng, a character that is shaped by plural hybridities: "He's my nightmare of what I might [become]" (Pullinger 6). Indeed, it is easy to connect Ng with Mo; although Ng is not always morality-oriented and is seen as a controversial character, to a certain extent his complexity echoes Mo's struggle to break through postcolonial constructions of diaspora in his early works.[5] Furthermore, the ambivalent hybridity centring on Ng not only makes him "a misfit for ever" (*RC* 30), but also separates Mo from writers who are suited to ethnic categorisation. In this sense, *The Redundancy of Courage* symbolises a critical step that Mo took to transcend the ethnic label of "British Chinese" in his middle and later literary career, followed by his next work, in which he turns his attention to the nation-state of the Philippines and provides another possibility for writing about the diversity of the Asian experience.

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[5] On criticism of Ng's morality, see Ruan and Ni "Redundant 'Courage': On Mao Xiang-qing's *The Redundancy of Courage*" 122-27.

Polyphonic Narrative of "Filipino" Society

The publication of *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* (1995) marks another turning point in Mo's literary career, signifying a farewell to his previous works. There are two dimensions to this shift: the first is his controversial and risky decision to privately publish the book due to his reluctance to create more literary products labelled "ethnic" to satisfy the mainstream publishing market; the second is his non-protagonist narrative strategy, separating this novel from those that unfold with the changing experiences of a leading figure. Set in the Philippines, where Mo himself settled down after decades of life in London, the novel is narrated from a third-person point of view, which roams from one group of characters to another.

Divided into two parts, preceded by a prologue and followed by an epilogue, its first part focuses on native characters and their quotidian lives. This engages in a dialogue with the second part, which involves an international academic conference showing foreign participants a more exquisite and yet more artificial environment. By means of the dialogical narrative between them, Mo shapes a "Filipino" society. Dialogism, as Mikhail Bakhtin argues in his analysis of Dostoevsky's works, is the most striking feature of the polyphonic novel: "the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony" (21). In this sense, *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* can be seen as a novel that employs the artistic style of polyphony, through which Mo complicates his fictional discourse on the influence of global capital on "Filipino" society in the postcolonial era.

The first part primarily portrays two families, the Boyets and the Inits, both living in the fictional provincial city of Gobernador de Leon. Boyet is a typical middle-class Filipino, who is married with two children and works as a lawyer for a timbre company dealing in illegal logging. He simultaneously works as a journalist for a regional newspaper. In spite of the Philippines' colonial past and corrupt present, this is a comfortable setting for Boyet, as "[his] part in all this [is] that of Greek chorus, free in his commentary but as powerless against the

unrolling circumstances as the protagonists" (*BBB* 21). Although Boyet lives like an outsider, he is not a victim, because his marginalisation in the community is framed by his vain self-delusion, rather than by exterior events or persons. Sharing neither the hybridity of Adolph Ng nor the nationalism of the Danuese, Boyet becomes a typical character representing the disempowered subject in the postcolonial era, helpless against both history and the present injustices of his society.

In the delineation of social hierarchy, Congressman Init and his wife, Victoria – politicians and patrons of most local artistic activities, alluding to the Marcos family in the Philippines – are representative figures of upper-class society. Whilst the "essential menace" of Mr Init "[resides] in his stolid ordinariness", Mrs Init, "unlike her Mister", has "charisma" and is "not frightened to delegate" (*BBB* 219). She looks upon her marriage as a quasi-political alliance, in which her husband becomes the channel for her ambition, and in return she gratifies him with her consummate social skills. As a contrasting figure to the phlegmatic Boyet, Mrs Init is passionate, almost another version of Lily Chen: both seek self-realisation on their own terms, partly as a result of their husbands' incapability. Yet, consistent with his cynicism about the "heroic" in *The Redundancy of Courage*, Mo connects the women's efforts with their goals of achieving more fulfilling personal life and greater power respectively, rather than to any manner of social reform (Ho, *Timothy* 114). For example, although Boyet has previously written a sarcastic article about Mrs Init, she soon receives his flattery when she becomes his patron and he one of her minions. Through the connection between the characters, systemic dysfunction emerges in "Filipino" society which, accompanied by lopsided development initiated by globalisation, moves towards a "brownout".

In the second part, the native and the foreign meet in a conference sponsored by Mrs Init. As the opening event of the new convention centre of Gobernador de Leon, the conference becomes a fictional site at which Mrs Init attempts to achieve her grandiose ambition to have her city recognised by international academics and cultural workers. Yet, ironically, for these foreign characters from different cultural

backgrounds and with different political views, the only thing they have in common is that "no one [seems] to know much about the country they [are] in", except as the destination at the end of a plane journey (*BBB* 214). The dramatic contrast not only satirises Mrs Init's aspiration as the city's moderniser but also forecasts a satire of the globalised "progress" in "Filipino" society.

Furthermore, Evergreen, Boyet's employer, ships toxic waste from Germany to the Philippines and colludes with the First World in making the nation a dumping ground. In a grotesque scene, three members of the Triad appear in order to discuss ways to invest in the city with Mrs Init, driving a hard bargain whereby they can launder the proceeds of drug trafficking. The encounters between the local elements and the worst aspects of globalism, which guarantee "development" in the Third World, connect native corruption with international corruption in a "moral brownout that [is] the totality of society" (*BBB* 207). Executing poetic justice, Mo develops radical solutions at the end of the novel: the convention centre is wrecked by grenades, and Congressman Init is shot dead by his political enemies. Wrapped in a comic guise, this quasi-apocalyptic punishment insinuates the implosion of a society no longer able to sustain the burden of "development", alerting the native and the foreign alike to the final "brownout". In this novel, Mo eschews the conventional issue of identification in terms of nation and ethnicity, disclosing instead social problems under the pressure of globalisation and the developmental influence engendered by capitalism. Combined with the resurgence of radical nationalism and the prevalence of anti-globalisation, Mo's practice critically presents a thought-provoking perspective on the potential dilemma of writing Asian experiences within a cosmopolitan context.

Blurred Ethnic Identity in the Picaresque

In *Renegade or Halo²* (1999), there is another stylistic departure from Mo's previous novels, due to its frequently changing locations mirroring the protagonist's changing life experiences. Beginning in the Philippines but moving across a multitude of societies and cultures, the novel unfurls by means of a first-

person narrator, Castro, who, as the offspring of an African-American serviceman and a Filipino bar-girl, survives as an illegal migrant worker at the end of the twentieth century. Castro grows up in the Philippines, where he receives a Jesuit education and then studies law at a public university, before becoming involved in a brutal fight against fraternities and being framed for murder. Fleeing his homeland, Castro joins the global underclass of illegal workers, roaming Hong Kong, the Gulf, England and Cuba, and eventually returning to the place from which he starts. Intrigued by his worldwide adventure, Ho and Finney successively interpret Castro as a picaro character (*Timothy* 127; 63); from Finney's perspective, he shares a commonality with Daniel Defoe's picaresque protagonists, who "struggle for survival in a marginal situation" (Paulson 44). In reference to literary tradition, the picaresque novel is seen as the response of compulsorily converted Jews to their disempowered position in Spanish society during the reign of Philip II (1556-1598), with "picaro" denoting a "member of a caste subject to intense scorn and suspicion, forced into a marginal position within his world, and reacting to persecution in a number of characteristic ways, among them cultivation of irony" (Blackburn 9). Turning his gaze towards contemporary postcolonial society, Mo provides a transformative portrayal of his picaro, Castro, as a marginal but cosmopolitan subject in terms of race, ethnicity, and identity.

On the issue of being cosmopolitan, Castro can be understood as an extension of Ng, as they share a similar environment. Near the beginning of the novel, Castro reminds the reader of the long history of colonial occupation in the Philippines: "Three hundred years of Torquemada [Spain] and fifty of Loony Tunes [American] – man, we had no idea who we were any more" (*RH* 31). Castro's uncertain identification, combined with his mixed heritage, prevents him from claiming any pure group identity. As a result, he learns to construct an identity without recourse to an imaginary Other; that is, a cosmopolitan identity. In contrast to Ng's struggle between different identities, Castro is pleased to accept this condition, if only with self-mockery: "On the whole I liked Cuba but I disliked the Cubans. This was one better than the Arabian Peninsula where I disliked both Bohaiden [modelled on Kuwait] and the Bohaidenese but a reversal of the

situation in Britain where I disliked England but liked the English" (*RH* 480). In these two sentences of perfect symmetry, Castro illustrates a critical syncretism, which extends beyond hybridity, as divergent identities interact and coexist peacefully.

This critical syncretism, as argued, is a transcendence of the postcolonial paradigm, and is ingeniously embodied in the novel's name. Halo[2], or halo-halo in its complete form, is a kind of many-hued and multi-textured dessert with mixed ingredients in Southeast Asia, and it functions as a thematic metaphor in the novel. Adopting it as the title, Mo explains that it alludes "to variety, to delicious hotch-potch and inspired mixing" reflected in the characterisation of Castro, who regards himself "as Man Sundae" (*RH* 11). Punning on Robinson Crusoe's equally exploited Man Friday, and the Western dessert as the counterpart of halo-halo, this rhetorical self-definition implicates Castro's syncretism of the East and the West in the process of becoming cosmopolitan, also contributing to Mo's deterritorialisation of the postcolonial pattern.

In addition, Castro explains Halo[2] as "a whole bunch of ingredients that shouldn't belong together but work when you combine them", which resonates with his perception of tribalism throughout the novel (*RH* 261). In his early Jesuit education, the fatherless Castro is taught by Father Paul to develop "a cool heart" and "permanent emancipation from tribalism" (*RH* 40). Inheriting his biological father's skin colour and muscular physique, Castro is out of place in the Philippines, and his detachment from this tribe results in him being seen as alien. However, his youthful attempt to become a member of a tribe – a fraternity of young lawyers committing the crime of gang rape – leads to his becoming an illegal migrant who is subject to the exploitation of other tribes (*RH* 130). In this sense, Mo uses the concept of tribalism throughout the novel to signify the negative side of nationalism – being racist, overly religious, and culturally exclusive – which is based on defining oneself by alienating the Other in contradiction with cosmopolitanism.

From then on, what Castro seeks in the course of his picaresque wanderings around the globe is an identity that avoids tribal or racial connection. Finney suggests that this non-offensive identity, functioning beyond a certain tribe, should be established by affiliating oneself either with no race or with all races together (68). It seems that the only moment at which Castro positions himself as opposite to another is when he meets two Finns who fail to react to his Black physique with the usual, stereotypical prejudice and fear: "If I was special blend, the ultimate in Halo^2, they were uncomplicated, unadulterated, homogenous essence [. . .] because they had no races" (*RH* 524). Claiming to belong to all races, just like halo-halo, Castro states, "I was a man, that was my primary visible tribe, but I was also underdog by birth and by temperament. That was my real tribe, that of the despised outsides, trying to get in from the cold" (*RH* 190). In this respect, Castro's tribe is culturally unbound, and is a cosmopolitan identity that, as explained in the Introduction, is situated at the crossing of boundaries of all forms of race, nation, and ethnicity. Thus, despite being deeply enmeshed with postcolonial society, the protagonist of *Renegade or Halo^2* is no longer anxious about his identity as a native or a foreigner. Through this novel, Mo seeks to blur his own ethnic identity as much as that of the characters he creates, preventing the label of "ethnic" from being attached to his literary creations.

The Impossibility of Remaining Pure

Published without professional editorial attention, *Brownout and Breadfruit Boulevard* (1995) and *Renegade or Halo^2* (1999) received inadequate reception, followed by a stagnation in Mo's literary career at the end of the twentieth century. After a twelve-year silence, during which Mo moved between Hong Kong and Southeast Asia to prepare his new book, the publication of *Pure* (2012), with the support of the British sales and distribution company Turnaround, symbolised his return to English literary circles in the twenty-first century. *Pure* ranges across Southeast Asia in both a comic and an ambitious set of interlocking stories. Its protagonist, a bawdy Bangkok ladyboy called Snooky, lives in the shadow of his

origins as a Siamese Muslim, eventually serving as a spy for the British Empire, complete with a Western liberal named Victor Veridian as his handler. Trained as a secret agent in southern Thailand, a place full of disaffections among the Muslim population in the region bordering Malaysia, Snooky witnesses the ultimate explosion of contradictions into an insurgency in 2004, linking the novel to current anxieties surrounding global jihad. Foran considers *Pure* a 9/11 novel that is expected to interpret or narrate the "incomprehensible" and "unimaginable" events analogous to 9/11, along with the trauma they incurred (Keeble). Indeed, through a series of parodies and satires elucidated in *Pure*, Mo represents the dramatic religious tension between Islam and liberal ideals in the frame of global cultural wars and its outburst in Southeast Asian society.

Named "Pure", this work of fiction starts with the ironic claim of a "distillation" of its "principals" (Preface); that is, the impossibly pure Thai katoey, who shuttles between different "places and personages, dates and dialects", and is thereby entangled within intricate political and religious relations. As a descendant of Thailand's southern Muslim community, Snooky, however, has "an affinity for the English language" (*Pure* 9). This is due to his educational experience, which is similar to that of Adolph Ng. He is a boy by birth who is "striving to look more female"; self-deprecatingly, he describes his existence as follows, "the sum of me has never equalled my hopes" (*Pure* 7). His nickname, Snooky, which comes from the Thai word denoting "fun", reveals an apt choice for one who is seemingly so confused and impure (*Pure* 34). Educated in the Philippines and residing in Bangkok, he reviews films in English for a local daily newspaper while passing dissolute nights with transvestite friends. Undoubtedly, Snooky is characterised as a subject full of impurity, which, as he acknowledges, "cosmopolitanised" him (*Pure* 8). It is this cosmopolitan impurity that leads him to the context of critical syncretism and the advocation to "become others" instead of alienating the Other, explaining why he feels comfortable with "becom[ing] female, aboriginal, homosexual, transsexual, working class, and poor" (K. Chen 99). In this sense, Snooky's impurity provides a viable approach to deimperialisation in the process of developing Asian subjectivity, which is the reason, echoing the claim in the

preface, that both the power of his native Muslim community and British imperialism treat him as an impure subject that must be distilled.

When Snooky is caught in a transvestite orgy and apprehended by the secret police, he is co-opted into the espionage division and soon sent to the south to infiltrate a jihadist training camp. Coerced into playing a secret agent in a madrassa, Snooky sheds her/his female identity, grows a beard, plants bombs, and, even more injurious to the character s/he has tried to create, is addressed by his/her birth name Ahmed, which s/he regards as "a fricking uncooler appellation" (*Pure* 34). This abrupt shift is a disguised conversion compelled by exterior forces, as Snooky plots to escape from "this nightmare fix" and supplies her/his handlers with "a surfeit of information or, even better, a slew of lies", paving the way to retain impurity among conflicting voices (*Pure* 101). The final elaboration of his escape from the madrassa, along with his true identity as a British spy, to a great extent satirises the Muslim "distillation" of Ahmed, the religious figure that Snooky is expected to turn into. Notably, in Snooky's critical syncretic identity of being cosmopolitan, his affinity with so-called Western liberalism, which is formed in comparison with the religious dogma of Muslim territorialisation, is distinguished from the pursuit of a "white mask". That is to say, the belief that Snooky embraces continues Castro's faith in the freedom to construct his own subjectivity regardless of gender, race, nationality, or ethnicity. Through Snooky's characterisation, Mo increases the cosmopolitan engagement of his writing.

Accompanied by the British Imperialist and Muslim voices that participate in the plot development, *Pure* is primarily told from Snooky's perspective. Despite being the first-person narrator, Snooky is accustomed to referring to himself in the third person, based on the Siamese habit of substituting one's own first name for "I". Using the "incomprehensible Southern language" (*Pure* 42) contrasts with Snooky's preference for English expression, which does not symbolise the "white mask" in this manner. Instead, this demonstrates his possession of a cosmopolitan identity that cannot remain pure within any single culture. Infatuated with contemporary cinema, where various styles of culture blend, Snooky observes all

of the people he meets and all of the events he encounters, commenting on them with cultural – specifically, cinematic – references. For Victor, Snooky's handler, his lengthy overview of regional politics, counterinsurgency, and religion is described as "the plethora of silly mid-ons" (*Pure* 313). On meeting Shaykh, a charismatic Pakistani who is planning a new Caliphate across Muslim Southeast Asia, Snooky uses the word "Magic Kingdom" to describe his efforts (*Pure* 104). With their highly literary representations, the narratives of Victor and Shaykh constitute a cosmopolitan satire on the clashes between fundamentalist Islam and Western liberalism, as well as Eastern democratic values, in Southeast Asia.

In *Pure*, whilst battles are fought for the control of Snooky's heart and mind, he deteriorates physically and mentally. For example, he says of himself, "She was one of the crowd and she was a stand-out, too" (*Pure* 174). Asked if he is a Muslim, he replies, "It's part of who I am, even as I fight to reject that identity" (*Pure* 43). Deveson argues that both Snooky and this novel are a deliberate attempt to create ambiguity (49). Indeed, through the ambiguity that rejects any absolute identity, Snooky becomes cosmopolitan. Moreover, in spite of being a non-mainstream subject, he aims to oppose the so-called orthodox culture, instead of serving as the alienated Other to consolidate powerful discourse. Hence, by creating a fiction of contemporary schisms in his exploration of postcolonial Asian society, Mo, borrowing the insightful words of Snooky, becomes "Parodist. Inventor. Homage-payer. Satirist" (*Pure* 72).

It is a hybrid and cosmopolitan identity, as well as a shifting and turbulent world, that constitutes the key theme of Mo's later works, from *An Insular Possession* onwards. Through the expansion of his subject matter from the Chinese diaspora to pan-Asian experiences, Mo not only breaks away from the typical postcolonial pattern related to Orientalism, but also spares no effort to cross and blur ethnic boundaries in his writing.

Timothy Mo is undoubtedly a prolific writer, who enriches British Chinese cultural production; meanwhile, due to the thematic diversity of his literary creation, he particularly stands out in this field. A puzzling question in the study of Mo is the category of his writing, as he seems not to fit readily into any existing academic field of research. Despite his half Chinese ethnicity and contribution to British Chinese literature, Mo is not often considered as a part of overseas Sinological studies, because his fictional English compass far exceeds the general Chinese milieu. However, ironically, the element that positions him within the circle of contemporary English literature is his Chinese ancestry. In categories such as "Commonwealth literature" or "post-colonial literatures", where his hybrid provenance is not an issue, Mo is still singular, especially when compared to the increasing numbers of Anglophone writers of South Asian, Caribbean, or African ancestry.[6] The shift in focus to hybridity in the pan-Asian area and the engagement in cosmopolitanism separate him from contemporary immigrant writers such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, and Kazuo Ishiguro. In this sense, Mo's literary career provides a convincing case with regard to tearing off ethnic labels and deconstructing ethnic boundaries, echoing the growing appeal of anti-ethnification by minority artists in contemporary literary and cultural fields.

At the end of her full-length monograph on Mo, Ho proposes a future research direction to position him in comparison with other writers of Chinese ancestry who have written in English, especially on their shared cross-cultural experience between China and the West (*Timothy* 146). Partially inspired by this point, apart from the chronological analysis of his works, this thesis also draws connections between Mo and later British Chinese writers regarding the shared trans-ethnic themes in their literary creations. As previously discussed, the subject matter of Mo's writing can be divided into three dimensions: the initial alienated Chineseness resulting from identity anxiety is replaced by an interest in the

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[6] On the discussion of "Commonwealth literature" and "post-colonial literatures", see Ashcroft et al. *The Empire Writes Back*, ch. 1.

metafictional narrative of historical events, which is in parallel with an emphasis on hybrid forms of identity with his growing cosmopolitan consciousness. Coincidentally, the theme of the three dimensions reappears in literary works by later writers who are also discussed in this thesis. Engaging in a postmodern narrative to highlight individual will within the course of history, Hong Liu's writing extends Mo's interest in historiographical metafiction while telling the story of her mother country from an aesthetic rather than an ethnic perspective. Mo's cosmopolitan pursuit is continued by Xiaolu Guo, whose works represent the established migrant subjectivity that frees the younger generation of Chinese diaspora to be citizens of the world, beyond national and ethnic territorialisation. Moreover, the ethnic stereotypes characterised in his early works are shattered in Helen Tse's and PP Wong's reconstructions of British-born Chinese people, and the latter's Singaporean background interacts with Mo's dedication to the discourse of "Asian English". Mo's literary production, so to speak, provides a string of insightful approaches that are linked to later writers through the crossing and blurring of the boundaries of race, nation, and ethnicity in representing the British Chinese community. Therefore, it is precisely because Mo is not regarded as a typical "British Chinese" writer, that his writing initiates and contributes to a trans-ethnic and diversified discourse of contemporary British Chinese literature.

Chapter 2: Deterritorialising the Chinese National Narrative through Hong Liu's
Intercultural Symbols

While Timothy Mo represents and deconstructs postcolonial ties between the UK
and its ex-colonies, writers from mainland China pay greater attention to a
national narrative and display different attitudes towards it. "National narrative"
refers to the representation of the history of a nation through the description of
specific characters or stories as a microcosm of the larger social background; it is
a form of writing that shapes national identity and consolidates national unity. In
China, a series of historical and political upheavals over the last hundred years
have aroused an intense national consciousness among its people, and national
history and trauma have inevitably become prominent themes for Chinese writers.
As Rong Cai argues, the national narrative is what "Chinese intellectuals have been
writing since the country's entry into the modern world" (224); it has developed
into an important narrative tradition in Chinese literature. Writings on the Xinhai
Revolution of 1911, the New Democratic Revolution (1919-1949), the Cultural
Revolution (1966-1976), the reform and opening-up (post-1978), and other
notable historical events have contributed to the formation of mainstream
narrative discourse in contemporary Chinese literary circles. This discourse
influences every individual within this cultural context – not only in mainland China,
but also overseas, where the national narrative of Chinese history flourishes in the
self-determined writings of Chinese emigrants.

However, this form of narrative has had a tendency to alienate China by
depicting it as a radical Other – a despotic and brutal world – due to a particular
preference for accounts of suffering and hardship under communist rule in the
contemporary English-speaking world. As Harriet Evans notes, publishers are
eager for writings that chronicle "family misfortune, emotional and cultural
deprivation, and political victimization by a totalitarian regime", reinforcing the
mentality of self-Orientalisation among overseas Chinese writers (29). In contrast,
Hong Liu's intercultural writing, which is discussed in this chapter, illustrates the
literariness in historical discourse. Adopting a postmodern approach that is

involved with Mo's historical narrative as well, Liu provides an original perspective on the narration of Chinese history in English. Above all, by developing a dramatic individual narrative full of classical Chinese aesthetic elements, Liu deterritorialises the national narrative and weakens references to national identity and unity when describing China's past.

Hong Liu was born in a town in Liaoning province near the Chinese-North Korean border in 1965 and was raised in a typical intellectual family, with an engineer father and a teacher mother. These origins laid the foundation for advancement in both her academic and her writing career. She studied English language and literature at university before moving to Beijing, where she worked as a translator for Channel Four and other Western television outlets. Supported by an academic scholarship, she came to England in 1989. She first studied at Oxford and then obtained a master's degree in social anthropology in London. Liu has since settled in England, working as a Chinese teacher and a translator. She has published four novels in the UK to date: *Startling Moon* (2001), *The Magpie Bridge* (2003), *The Touch* (2005), and *Wives of the East Wind* (2007). Her writing focuses on the emotional upheavals of ordinary Chinese people in recent decades.

Liu's literary debut, *Startling Moon* (*SM*), is a *Bildungsroman* describing the growth of the protagonist, Taotao, in Chinese society in the second half of the twentieth century. This growth is specifically represented as an aesthetic journey. Although confused by her mother's decision to send her to live with her grandparents after her fifth birthday, Taotao enjoyed a happy childhood. Only in later years did she learn that her Laoye (maternal grandfather) fell from grace in the Cultural Revolution and understand the sacrifice her mother had made for her. Living with her grandparents opened Taotao's eyes to a rich tradition of folk tales, Peking opera, and classical poetry, whose cultural elements lay the foundation for the aesthetic tone of this novel. When growing up, she attended university to learn English and worked as a translator in Beijing after graduation, witnessing the democratic movement of the late 1980s. In the story of Taotao's quest for aesthetic experience, depicted against the backdrop of social and political

upheaval in China, Liu portrays a character who holds multiple values and, in doing so, seeks to challenge the stereotype of the oppressed Chinese people.

Of all Liu's novels, *The Magpie Bridge* (*MB*) most evidently represents the experience of the Chinese diaspora. Jiao Mei is a Chinese student studying in London, subsidised by Barbara, who became infatuated with Jiao Mei's now-deceased father when travelling in China. Jiao falls in love with Ken, an English architect, and becomes pregnant with his child; at the same moment, she begins to receive nightly visits from the ghost of her grandmother, Tie Mei. Tie Mei urges Jiao Mei to abandon her life in London and return to China, due to their painful family history during the Second Opium War. In Barbara's room, Tie discovers her family's heirloom – a bronze mirror that holds a curse for anyone who takes it illicitly – that was stolen in 1860 from her great-grandmother by a Western soldier. The novel describes the efforts made by Jiao Mei to persuade Tie Mei to put aside her enmity towards Westerners. The eponymous "magpie bridge", finally built by Ken, simultaneously becomes a symbol of their love, the mitigation of Chinese-English conflict, and a form of communication between Chinese and English culture.

Subtitled "Every Secret Has its Price", *The Touch* (*TT*) is a story about running away and returning. As a Chinese acupuncturist living alone in a southern English town, Lin Ju has travelled thousands of miles from her home to escape a failed marriage and feels guilty about her unwitting betrayal of her beloved Laoye in childhood. When a young English mother named Lucy walks into the clinic and trusts in Lin Ju's medical expertise enough to finally open up to her, Lin's narrow world is transformed. They connect immediately, but as their friendship deepens, Lin finds her heart stirred by memories of Laoye, an herbalist doctor who taught her his medical skill during the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, Lucy's intimacy with her four-year-old son reminds Lin of her young daughter, Tiantian, who has returned to China with Lin's estranged husband. Once all of the secrets about Lin Ju's past have been uncovered, she leaves the UK to reunite with

her daughter, whom she takes to pay respects at Lin's Laoye tomb and commemorate the "secret" history of their family.

Spanning four decades of Chinese history, *Wives of the East Wind* (*WEW*) is an epic tale of friendship, love and idealism betrayed. Two couples – Wenya and Zhiying, Zhenzhen and Lao Gao – met, married, and became inseparable just as China was shaking off the memory of the second phase of the Kuomintang-Communist Party Civil War (1945-1949), and the brightest of its youth were seeking to build a vibrant future. Their faith in the future deepened the bond between the two families and sustained them through years of famine and the terror of the Cultural Revolution. Yet, as a new, more affluent China emerged and the struggle for survival gave way to an equally fierce battle to remain loyal to each other, Zhiying's betrayal of Wenya tainted their relationship for decades. Regarding her adaptation of historical events, Liu explains that this novel seeks not only to reveal the cruelty of Chinese political movements, but also to reflect the confusion of this generation's values in the face of a new era (*WEW* 402).

Although each of four novels offers an account of Chinese history, Liu dilutes the sense of a grand, expansive narrative by highlighting individual experience and personal emotion in the turbulent environment. In addition, in order to relieve the sense of heaviness engendered by talking about the past, Liu integrates several elements of Chinese culture into her writing, which introduces readers to a world of classical Chinese aesthetics. Rarely have scholars or reviewers from English literary circles paid attention to this aspect of Liu's works, yet most of the titles of her novels, as well as many of the symbols therein, come from Chinese literary history. These intercultural allusions are illustrated in later sections of this chapter. It would not be sufficient merely to read Liu's works as historical texts revealing the hidden past of a country. Therefore, this chapter argues that Liu's historical narrative engages with a postmodern approach of anti-metanarrative, which not only releases her writing from the burden of self-Orientalisation in depicting Chinese history, but also deterritorialises the national narrative. Liu's representation of the shared symbolic aesthetics between Chinese and English

culture, instead of potential othered differences, contributes a trans-ethnic theme to British Chinese literature.

The aim of the first section is to build a theoretical framework for examining Liu's intercultural writing within its historical background. Building on scholarly discussions of the negotiation between self-determination and aesthetic autonomy, it elucidates the symbolic aesthetics of "idea-images" in a transcultural context and the role of historical narratives in postmodern literary discourse. The second section further explores the Chinese idea-images in the four of Liu's novels and explains how they operate within English. The third section shows how Liu deconstructs the grand significance of the national narrative and engages with Deleuzian minor literature by rearticulating Chinese history. Finally, the chapter demonstrates that these two aspects make Liu's writing less "ethnic", thereby illustrating the characteristic of anti-ethnification of contemporary British Chinese writing.

Aesthetic Autonomy to Negotiate Ethnicity

As discussed in the introductory chapter, negotiation is a critical strategy used in British Chinese literature to reconcile the contradiction "between the ethnic community's demands for recognition of the validity of its literary voice and the cultural establishment's demands for aesthetic conformation" (Ling 16). As exemplified by Liu's novels, the use of Chinese cultural elements can be understood to be more than a reflection of ethnic identity; they are also a form of aesthetic expression in intercultural writing. Furthermore, the postmodern narrative strategy which, adopted in Mo's middle and later works, reappears in Liu's account of Chinese history, provides a meaningful approach to deterritorialising the national narrative for her literary creation.

Chinese Idea-Images in English Literary Texts

The translation of Chinese *yixiang* into cultural symbols is a unique aesthetic phenomenon in Liu's English-language literary creations, which convey the universal symbolic aesthetics of different cultures and are distinguished from the historical narratives of alienation and self-Orientalisation labelled "ethnic". In classical Chinese literature, an image is called *yixiang* 意象. The concept of *yixiang* was first proposed by Xie Liu in *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind* (around 501-502) in expounding on the significance of an image to literary creation.[7] X. Liu argues that "with a mind of unique perception, one can wield the writing-brush to capture the images in one's vision", constituting "the foremost art of writing and a main feature of composition" (377).[8] In order to better understand the connotation of *yixiang*, Shuen-fu Lin translates the term as "idea-images", merging *yi* 意 (idea) and *xiang* 象 (image of an object) (145). This distinguishes *yixiang* from *wuxiang* 物象 (thing-images): if the latter points to representations of external things, the former emphasises emotional aspects, such as the subject's feelings and wishes.

According to X. Liu, the emergence of idea-images incarnates an interactive connection between the physical and spiritual world: "The mystery of imagination lies in the merging of the spirit with the physical world. [. . .] The spirit enters the world by way of images; thus the multitudes of feeling and emotion are born in literary writing" (375, 387).[9] In other words, thing-images that appear at the beginning of the process of literary thinking can develop into idea-images when infused with the beliefs and spirit of the author. Hence, rather than impressions of things being passively or objectively received, idea-things embody a person's intentions (S. Lin 145). The use of idea-images to express emotions is a traditional

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[7] The original work, written in ancient Chinese, is entitled *Wenxin Diaolong* (《文心雕龍》). There are three English translations, and the quotations selected in this chapter are translated by Guobin Yang.

[8] The original Chinese is 獨照之神, 窺意象而運斤. 此蓋馭文之首術, 謀篇之大端.

[9] The original Chinese is 故思理為妙, 神與物遊 and 神用象通, 情變所孕.

component of Chinese literature, especially classical Chinese poetry, in which idea-images create a *yijing* 意境 (ideorealm) that "entails a fusion of feelings with the natural setting" and provide readers with a unique aesthetic experience (Y. Chen 281). Delineating the role of idea-images in literary creation, X. Liu explores the relevance of natural processes to artistic practice, not the usefulness of literature in regulating those natural processes for the sake of growth and prosperity. X. Liu's literature view thus stands in sharp contrast with earlier criticism, which, particularly during the pre-Qin and Han Dynasty (pre-220), emphasises the social function of literature and suggests that literature should be used to rectify human relationships, harmonise natural forces and processes, and bring man in accord with the spirits. Although acknowledging that "[p]oetry has long been used to commend the good rectify wrongs" (63), X. Liu regards literature as an autonomous process whose value is primarily embodied in its beautiful configurations, in comparison with certain socio-political judgements.[10] In fact, X. Liu represents the shift of attention from practical didactic concerns to mental activities in creating a belletristic work during the Six Dynasties (220-589), the formative period in Chinese literary thought and criticism. Notably, X. Liu's discussion of a spiritual world in the entire literary creative process is to a certain degree similar to the Western notion of imagination in the construction of images (S. Lin 133). This chapter thus links the two in interpreting Hong Liu's transcultural writings, which not only uses idea-images to present the characters' subjective thoughts but also quotes several classical Chinese verses in an attempt to convey the idea-images they contain as cultural symbols to readers in the English-speaking world.

In the development of Western aesthetics, discussion of the symbolic has long been linked with studies of the sign. Numerous scholars agree that symbols and semiotics coincide in the representation of images. Charles Sanders Peirce, for example, defines a symbol as "a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause

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[10] The original Chinese is 顺美匡惡, 其来久矣.

the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object" (143). Umberto Eco extends and develops Peirce's insight into symbols as "conventional expressions" that directly and univocally mean what they are designed to signify (136). This kind of symbol shows similarities in its indicative function with the concept of thing-images in X. Liu's literary creation. Furthermore, Raymond Firth notes that one way of distinguishing between signal and symbol may be "to class as symbols those presentations where there is much greater lack of fit – even perhaps intentionally – in the attribution of the fabricator and interpreter" (67). Drawing upon Firth's attention to the interpreter, Eco classifies another kind of symbol as "expressions conveying an indirect meaning", which can only be realised through "inferential labor on the part of the addressee" (136-37). Both emphasise the importance of interaction between the sender and the interpreter in making a device symbolic. Due to this emphasis on the subject's intention, symbols with an indirect meaning resemble idea-images that manifest the creator's intention. In this sense, it is feasible to read the numerous Chinese idea-images in Liu's novels as aesthetic symbols in English. The intercultural allusions made in these novels are the focus of the next section.

In the process of transforming Chinese idea-images into English expressions, it is vital to translate cultural references. Liu is not only a writer, but also a translator of Chinese literary works into English, meaning that her own writing can be understood as an example of cultural translation.[11] In an essay that reflects the rise of cultural translation, Bassnett and Lefevere note that the cultural significance of literary translation is different from that of linguistic translation, that is, the idea-images/symbols in Liu's writing should be explored within the aesthetic space of Chinese culture, rather than merely being treated as ethnic stereotypes with a literal meaning. By taking culture as the operational unit of translation, Bassnett and Lefevere distinguish between "intracultural" and "intercultural" translation (8). The latter is doubly contextualised, as the text has

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[11] Liu Hong is the English translator of the Chinese novel *The Concubine of Shanghai* (2008) by Ying Hong.

a place in two cultures, indicating an intermediate position in dealing with the translation of culture. Indeed, Liu's writing is not a monologic narrative of Chinese history and society, but rather a polyphonic statement moving between distinct discourses. Furthermore, as many literary texts have little relation to cultural beliefs, "translators are likely to be given much more leeway" in terms of cultural demands, which reflects the important "function" of cultural translation (Bassnett and Lefevere 7). In her narratives of Chinese history in English, Liu not only retains the aesthetic values of Chinese literary idea-images but also deconstructs the grand significance of nation and ethnicity, thereby deterritorialising the national narrative through cultural translation. Additionally, Snell-Hornby views the text as an "integral part of the world", rather than as "an isolated specimen of language", indicating an interaction between a translation and its context's theoretical discourse (83). The intercultural symbols involve Liu's literary creation in cultural cosmopolitanism that prefers transcultural aesthetic intercommunity to otherness (see Introduction,). Consequently, featured with cultural translation, Liu's writing about Chinese history, without including reference to the grand significance of nation and ethnicity, fits within the postmodern historical narrative in contemporary literature.

Postmodern Historical Narrative

Jean-Francois Lyotard defines the term "postmodern" as "incredulity toward metanarrative", a philosophy of history used since the Enlightenment to legitimise such grand narratives as "the dialectics of Spirit" and "the emancipation of the rational or working subject" (xxiii-xxiv). With the decline of metaphysical philosophy in the late twentieth century, the narrative emphasis on a great hero or a great goal was dispersed into heterogeneous language elements, and the voices of minorities emerged, even if they were not always heeded. As Lyotard states, postmodern discourse is not a tool of authority: its validation no longer resorts to grand narratives, but rather, "the little narrative [*petit récit*] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention" (60). Instead of "the expert's

homology", the principle of postmodern knowledge is "the inventor's paralogy", with which our sensitivity to differences can be refined and our ability to tolerate incommensurability can be reinforced (Lyotard xxv). The deconstruction of metanarratives provides an illuminating perspective on Liu's writing, as different individual interpretations of history may be seen as various "little" narratives, deterritorialising national significance within a historical account.

Michel Foucault regards "historical descriptions [that] are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge" as a discourse of power, "increase[ing] with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves" (5). As the metanarrative in the historical field is deconstructed and further levels of analysis arise from its peculiar discontinuities and patterns, the little narratives of history in Liu's writing are established via such marginal perspectives as those of a child, a ghost, a bastard, and women. Following Foucault, Hayden White considers historical work as "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse" (*Metahistory* 2). Narrative, in either historical or fictional works, is "a process of decodation and recodation" wherein a set of events originally encoded in a certain mode are deconstructed, and those in another mode are then reconstructed (White, *Tropics* 96). The language behind narrative prose and its poetic nature represents the only access to history, providing subjective representations of events that have already happened. Moreover, "most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways", and consequently, a historical narrative is a representation and an interpretation of the entire process it mirrors (White, *Tropics* 85). Analogous to literary creation, historical narratives also offer different interpretations of events that are endowed with multiple significances based upon the authors' subjective intentions. Although each of Liu's fictional works contains a representation of the Cultural Revolution, this historical event is depicted in diverse ways, with different causes and effects. The desire to "determine what certain events might mean for a given group, society, or culture's conception of its present tasks and future prospects" leads to a specific historical inquiry (White, *Fiction* 230). Linda Hutcheon develops this pluralist view of historiography in her discussion of historiographic metafiction, the approach of which is adopted in Liu's

historical narrative to analyse personal construction in opposition to the so-called collective memory.

Hutcheon cites theories developed by postmodern architects like Paolo Portoghesi and Charles Jencks as a model for her discussion of postmodern artworks, which are usually historically and politically parodic and possess the characteristic of contradiction (22-23). The term "parody" is used to describe this ironically recontextualised echoing of the forms of the past, which is not the "ridiculing imitation" of eighteenth-century theories of wit, but rather a "repetition with critical distance", allowing for the ironic signalling of difference at the heart of similarity (Hutcheon 26). The explanation of parody facilitates the understanding of Liu's references to social upheavals in China in various forms of little narratives that are "intensely self-reflexive" in their claim to historical events and personages (Hutcheon 5). Notably, although rejecting a metanarrative, historiographic metafiction does not move the marginal toward the centre; instead, it utilises its paradoxical doubled positioning to "critique the inside from both the outside and the inside" (Hutcheon 69). The role of historical context in Liu's fictional works is not to arouse ethnic identity, as conventional diasporic writings did, but to provide a polyphonic narrative to contradict the taken-for-granted alienation of things Chinese as Other. Therefore, Liu's cultural translation not only parodically represents the past of China from the protagonist's individual perspective, but it also deterritorialises the historical narrative of national trauma, depriving it of grand significance.

Previous Research on Hong Liu

The narration of history has always been a dominant component of British Chinese literary practice, providing a basis for diasporic authors to affirm their ethnicity. The frequent emergence of national narratives in both fiction and non-fiction by contemporary British Chinese writers indicates a dilemma of identity construction and self-determination in a foreign land (Xiao and Pu 23-24). The Cultural Revolution, the historical event that most frequently appears in contemporary

British Chinese literature offers a prime example. Revealing the "truth" of the Revolution, as well as reviling its atrocities, has always been an effective way for British Chinese writers to obtain acknowledgement from Anglophone readers (Xiao, "Narrating" 67). Through the self-Orientalist representation of the Cultural Revolution and other aspects of Chinese history, this strategy is successfully utilised by such aforementioned authors as Chang, Hong, and Xue, whose works have become best-sellers in Europe and North America. Compared with these writers, Liu receives less attention from both the publishing market and academic circles, potentially because she does not alienate China by othering its historical development as conventionally expected, but rather rearticulates Chinese history from different "little" perspectives, thus disappointing certain readers.

To date, Anglophone critics have only paid attention to Liu's first two novels. In an interview conducted by David Wilson, Liu asserted that "individuals are more important than nationality and culture", showing impatience with "those determined to depict her mother country as locked in the Dark Ages". Following Liu's thought process, Wilson interprets *Startling Moon*, which depicts the Cultural Revolution through the tender eyes of a child, as an attempt to challenge the opinion that all Chinese people feel oppressed. For Wilson, whose commentary inspires this chapter's interpretation of Liu's attitude towards ethnicity in her writing, *The Magpie Bridge* reveals Liu's openness to history. Yet, not all reviewers accept the claim that Liu deconstructs a national narrative. Woollard, for example, thinks that the fantastical style of representing history in *The Magpie Bridge* is strangely lifeless (414).

As Liu uses many Chinese traditional idea-images with strong symbolic connotations, scholars from the Sinosphere pay particular attention to issues of cultural conflict and integration in her novels. Red Chan interprets that *The Magpie Bridge* is a metaphor for the evolution of migrants in contemporary society in an organic field of intercultural conflict and reconciliation (398). Connecting with Ashcroft et al. 's discussion of ethnic literature's "writing back to the centre", R. Chan argues that the novel pushes beyond the common themes of

postcolonial literature, such as reclaiming history and justice or advocating nationalism, because it presents forbearance and hybrid cross-fertilisation as the means of reconciling oppositional cultures, values, or beliefs (409). Focusing on the encounter between *The Magpie Bridge*'s two narrators, Jiao Mei and Tie Mei, Yun-Hua Hsiao offers a close reading of how cultural conflict between countries is defused through communication between generations (15).

Regarding the shared first-person female narrator in the four of Liu's works, which are closely related to each other in their common attention to cultural translation, certain Chinese scholars view her writings as a whole and discuss them together. Jing Li argues that in *Startling Moon*, *The Magpie Bridge*, and *The Touch*, Liu defamiliarises traditional Chinese idea-images in English and rejuvenates these conventional symbols in a new cultural context (66). By analysing Liu's cultural translation, J. Li demonstrates the poetic qualities of aesthetics, especially their Chineseness, embodied both in the poems she quotes and throughout each of her novels (74). Lin Lin and Wang Hui approach Liu's novels from the perspective of cultural memory studies proposed by Jan Assmann, focusing on the contrast between traditional and modern female identity embodied in these Chinese cultural elements (127).

Previous research shows scattered interest in references to ethnicity in Liu's novels, particularly from two main perspectives – historical narratives and the translation of idea-images to cultural symbols. Yet, integrating the two within the context of minor literature offers more significant insights into her writing. No journal articles or reviews comment on *Wives of the East Wind*, which adopts a critical standpoint in depicting the impact of the reform and opening-up, while breaking from the wholly positive narration of the post-Cultural Revolution era in British Chinese literature (see works by Chang, Hong, and Xue). Consequently, the framework of this chapter correlates Liu's cultural translation of Chinese idea-images with her deterritorialisation of the national narrative, illuminating the negotiation of ethnic identity with aesthetic autonomy in her literary creations. The next section illustrates the main idea-images in each of Liu's novels and

analyses how these intercultural symbols convey aesthetic connotations in recounting the past.

Chinese Symbols through Cultural Translation

The characterisation of minorities in contemporary literary discourse has long been associated with such attributes as ironic self-consciousness, internal contradiction, and irreducible marginality, rather than with cultural autonomy and political viability. However, the neglect of aesthetic playfulness in the discussion of literature by minority writers constitutes an "expression and sublimation" of racial minorities' social deformation (JanMohamed and Lloyd 5-6). From this perspective, the aesthetic autonomy of minority writers should be explored in parallel with analyses of their quest for self-determination, balanced in their pursuit of acknowledgement from mainstream society.

The translation of Chinese idea-images into cultural symbols is a unique aesthetic phenomenon in Liu's works of fiction, which convey classical Chinese aesthetics through English literary creation, while incorporating the interstitiality and hybridity of British Chinese literature. Yet, as Bhabha argues, the articulation of "incommensurability" structures all acts of cultural translation, wherein conventional meanings that exist in the original language may need to be rearticulated in a new context ("DissemiNation" 319). With the faith that she can "immerse [her]self and be free" in English (*MB* 245), Liu is entitled to the "leeway" of translators (Bassnett and Lefevere 7) to reexplain the cultural connotations of those Chinese symbols beyond ethnic territorialisation. Each of Liu's four novels features a specific Chinese symbol throughout the English text, manifesting the shared symbolic aesthetics between the two cultures.

Classical Chinese Poetry in "Startling Moon"

Classical Chinese poetry makes extensive use of idea-images, whose aesthetic function is equivalent to that of the "objective correlative", a method proposed by T. S. Eliot to convey poetic sentiment in modern English poetry (124). The use of idea-images aims to create an ideorealm, which, as "the most important aesthetic concept in Chinese poetics", indicates a fusion of "the objective reflection of images in life and the subjective creation of the author's feelings and thoughts" (Y. Chen 280, qtd. in Y. Chen 281). In *Startling Moon*, Liu, not focusing on literally translating idea-images, creates an ideorealm of classical Chinese poetry. Liu's translation is based upon not merely language; rather, it is contained in the entire classical Chinese culture, and the Chinese poem throughout the text becomes the characteristic cultural symbol of this novel. The title of this novel is derived from a line of verse: "The moon emerges, startling the birds" (*SM* 101).[12] The image of the moon in Chinese culture is often associated with homesickness and loneliness but in this case, connecting with the whole poem, it symbolises the growth of the protagonist. Taotao's entry into adulthood is compared to the quietly rising moon, whose emergence is startling to the birds. The headings of the five parts of the novel also hold different symbolic meanings for Taotao. Via poetry, classical Chinese aesthetics infiltrate the descriptions of Taotao's life experience. In this way, classical Chinese poetry in *Startling Moon* functions as a cultural symbol that gives readers from the English-speaking world an intercultural aesthetic experience.

As a coming-of-age novel, *Startling Moon* begins by narrating the protagonist's early years from a first-person perspective. At the tender age of five, Taotao was confused as to why her parents decided to send her to live with her grandparents. As the title of the first part of the novel – "Not knowing the true face of Mount Lu because you are in it" – indicates, those who are closely involved

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[12] The original Chinese is 月出驚山鳥.

with something cannot see it as clearly as those outside it (*SM* 1). [13] Taotao's confusion foreshadows the remainder of the novel, which intrigues the reader. However, the sorrow of leaving her parents soon faded as she enjoyed a contented and happy life at her grandparents' house. On attending primary school, Taotao learned about phenomena such as the Red Guards and counterrevolutionaries, reflecting the background of China's Cultural Revolution, during which pupils were indoctrinated with ideological dogma in class. Yet, her interest in the "cow-head devils" and the "snake gods" described by her political teacher was far weaker than her interest in the stories of the twelve animal horoscope signs in traditional Chinese culture told by her great-grandmother (*SM* 65).[14] The joy, fun, and mental nourishment associated with these charming folktales, combined with the love and care of Taotao's family, protected against the anxiety caused by the uncertainties of the external environment, helping to ensure that Taotao enjoyed an innocent and light-hearted childhood.

The title of the second part is "However beautiful the sunset is", an unfinished sentence that is usually completed by "it is still near the dusk" (*SM* 98).[15] This conveys a sense of regret at both the fading daylight and something glorious passing away, with reference to the happy but transient closeness between Taotao and her Laoye. When Taotao moved on to middle school, she returned to her parent's home, where she first met Laoye; he passed on knowledge of classical poetry and novels to Taotao, becoming one of her most important mentors. Laoye taught Taotao the poem from which the title of this novel, "Startling Moon", derives. When she thought about how the moon could startle a bird, she felt that "the night on the hill became more vivid" and that she had been given "an extra pair of eyes and ears" (*SM* 101). It was at that time that Taotao recognised the beauty of classical poetry and acquired an aesthetic experience that, in her later

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[13] The original Chinese is 不識廬山真面目, 只緣身在此山中.

[14] The original Chinese of "cow-head devils" and "snake gods" is 牛鬼 and 蛇神, referring to people blamed for damaging the government's establishment of socialism in China.

[15] The original Chinese is 夕陽無限好, 只是近黃昏.

life, could emancipate her from the triviality and rigidity of real life by allowing her access to an aesthetic world.

Entitled "A small lotus blossom has just shown her tiny shoot", the third part compares the grown-up Taotao to a young lotus that captivates "dragonflies" nearby (*SM* 119).[16] After the college entrance examination, Taotao was admitted to the English department of Yi Cheng University, a fictional school situated by the beautiful West Lake, which is a scenic spot in southern China famous for its lotus flower in full bloom in summer. Taotao's literary nature attracted her classmate, Steel, who shared her interest in classical Chinese poetry and often discussed poems with her. The friendship between them deepened Taotao's perception of poetic aesthetics. Meanwhile, studying English literature offered her a different aesthetic experience, enabling her to compare the evil snake in the Garden of Eden with the powerful and seductive snake of Chinese folklore (*SM* 150). The integration of and collision between the two cultures provided a broader horizon for Taotao; she thus hoped to "have a taste of the unknown" and enjoyed "living between worlds" (*SM* 145). Accordingly, although she had to "live in the real world like everyone else" after graduation, she was able to become more intuitive and to experience her life more aesthetically (*SM* 168).

The rest of the novel describes Taotao's experience of love after starting work, and its title is taken from the literary quotation "butterfly dreams", a metaphor comparing Taotao to the butterfly hovering between dream and reality (*SM* 187).[17] Working as a translator for a film company in Inner Mongolia, Taotao regarded herself as a butterfly living for the moment, falling in love with the character of David:

"How could the moon startle?" I asked.

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[16] The original Chinese is 小荷才露尖尖角, followed by 早有蜻蜓立上頭, which means that dragonflies are attracted by the beautiful lotus as soon as it emerges from the water.

[17] The original Chinese quotation is 不知周之夢為蝴蝶與？蝴蝶之夢為周與?, quoted from *Zhaungzi: Qiwu Lun* 《莊子·齊物論》.

He looked up at it. "It can, just like that. I would say it's startlingly beautiful."

Again, we had communicated [and] discovered the sacred kingdom of beauty. [. . .] [H]e was a soulmate. (*SM* 212)

It was this aesthetic empathy within classical Chinese poetry that met Taotao's expectations of life and connected her with David. Yet, the vast grassland was more like an "exotic dream" for foreigners, making it impossible for Taotao to always be the butterfly in David's dream (*SM* 225). Indeed, their love ended with a mutual farewell in Beijing after their film work, but the pursuit of an aesthetic experience in love became an indispensable part of Taotao's world. Although Taotao lived in an era of profound social and political upheaval, in this novel the upheaval is decentred and diluted by Liu, who creates an atmosphere of classical Chinese aesthetics and shapes Taotao as a perceptual character.

The Mirror as the "Magpie Bridge"

The use of the mirror, one of the most common idea-images in traditional Chinese culture, usually conveys the symbolic meaning of historical prosperity and decline for a certain group of people.[18] Maintaining its connection to history, the mirror as a Chinese symbol in Liu's intercultural translation is endowed with fantastical connotations in the context of Western literary tradition. Fantasy/the fantastical, as Tzvetan Todorov defines it, is a genre of literature that represents the "hesitation" experienced by characters and readers between the realistic and supernatural explanations of the strange events that they encounter (136). In *The Magpie Bridge*, the dubious ghost of Tie Mei uncovers the curse of misfortune placed by her ancestor on anyone who improperly possesses the family's heirloom

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[18] A famous reference to the connection between the mirror and history in the Chinese context is made by Li Shimin 李世民, the second emperor of the Tang Dynasty: "taking history as a mirror, master can understand the rise and fall of a nation" (以史為鏡, 可以知興替). This quotation comes from *Jiu Tangshu: Weizheng Zhuan* 《舊唐書·魏征傳》 by Liu Xu 劉昫.

– a mirror – adding a fantastical element to this symbol. Meanwhile, in this novel, whose title represents a traditional Chinese love story about reunion, the mirror that is finally returned to the family not only stands for Jiao Mei's happy life in England, but also becomes a bridge facilitating connection and communication between China and England.[19] Through the Ulyssean journey of the bronze mirror, linking past and present, Liu transforms classical Chinese idea-images into English, giving them new significance and aesthetic value through defamiliarisation.

The mirror plays the role of agent in narrating the history of suffering in modern China and the revenge of Tie Mei's family. As an heirloom, the "round bronze mirror decorated with Mei blossoms and a dancing dragon" should have brought good fortune to its descendants (*MB* 31). During the Second Opium War, however, the treasure was stolen by a "foreign devil" who murdered Tie Mei's great-grandmother; before her death, the mirror was cursed with "misfortune on all into whose hands it falls" (*MB* 35). The magic mirror becomes a symbol that performs vengeful poetic justice until it is returned to this family, set against the backdrop of an unjust historical conflict. Tie Mei attributed the drowning of the English soldier to retribution for his greed; she saw this scene in the magic mirror after it was unexpectedly returned to her widowed mother by an unfamiliar and mysterious man in a black robe. The mirror was plundered by a Japanese solider again in the Second World War and Tie Mei's mother, who was raped by the invader, hanged herself on the day of her daughter's wedding (*MB* 78). Finding the heirloom and pursuing justice for her mother became a driving force in Tie Mei's life. When she finally found the mirror, it showed that her mother had become a vengeful spirit obsessed with hunting down her rapist.

Whereas her ancestors sought to avenge their family's suffering, Tie Mei's search for, and connection with, the mirror is more closely aligned with her personal emotions. Illiterate and having lost her parents, Tie Mei always felt "inferior and unlucky" until she met Zhi Ying, one of her husband's friends, who

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[19] The Chinese literary quotation of the "magpie bridge" is 牛郎織女鵲橋相會.

encouraged her to learn to read and write as an adult (*MB* 141). This encouragement led to her falling in love with him. It is no coincidence that the name "Zhi Ying" also appears in Liu's subsequent novels, usually portraying a cowardly male character. Zhi Ying left the pregnant Tie Mei to escape potential political prosecution, indirectly causing their illegitimate daughter Yingzi to die young due to insufficient care during her illness. Although devastated, on reading a book about "female warriors" given to her by Zhi Ying, Tie Mei decided to seek her own sense of power and to fight injustice (*MB* 142). Tie Mei's revenge occurred posthumously when Zhi Ying, who became a senior government official, received her family's mirror from his subordinate as a bribe. Tie Mei's ghost found the cowardly man by means of her heirloom, which again performed poetic justice and guided her to kill him: "Nobody could have released me from him except myself" (*MB* 213). Hence, the mirror as a symbol of protection for the family not only reveals the past, but also gives Tie Mei the power to emancipate herself from an unjust historical burden, so that it can travel across the ocean to her granddaughter Jiao Mei's side and fulfil its function.

The encounters between the two narrators integrate Tie Mei's memories of China with Jiao Mei's present life in Britain and bring the symbol of the mirror from the East to the West. When Tie Mei came to England to look for Jiao Mei, she was surprised to find the heirloom "alongside [her] precious girl" but now belonging to Barbara, who had inherited the mirror from her deceased aunt (*MB* 5). As the lover of Jiao Mei's deceased father, Barbara brought Jiao Mei from China to the UK and subsidised her studies. Therefore, Jiao Mei hopes to protect Barbara, towards whom Tie Mei is hostile, from being cursed by the mirror and bearing her family's suffering. The divergent attitudes that Tie Mei and Jiao Mei hold towards Barbara indicate the beginning of a change in the desire for vengeance contained in the symbol of the mirror. In order to save Barbara, who has lost her sense of smell, and break the curse of the mirror, Jiao Mei asks Barbara for the mirror as her birthday gift and prays for Tie Mei's forgiveness: "if she cannot learn to forgive, Barbara will never be cured and I will never be free" (*MB* 182). In contrast with Tie Mei's revenge, what frees Jiao Mei from her family's heavy history is forgiveness,

and Barbara's recovery completes the change of the connotations associated with this heirloom, which, returned to its rightful owner, regains its initial symbolism of good fortune for Jiao Mei.

Echoing the title of this novel, the symbol of the mirror also carries the meaning of being a bridge, through Jiao Mei and Ken's international love. It was the realisation that Jiao Mei was pregnant by her English boyfriend that drew Tie Mei to England in order to persuade her granddaughter to return to China to escape the "foreign devils" (*MB* 3). The peaceful return of the heirloom, however, shows her the importance of forgiveness and teaches her that Jiao Mei's love contains the mirror's magic power. Having heard the family story about the mirror, Ken apologises: "There's a lot of truth in it, and I'm ashamed of what my ancestors did" (*MB* 200). Ken's acknowledgement of history, along with Jiao Mei's forgiveness, manifests the possibility of reconciliation between the two nations and indicates their promising relationship. Furthermore, the mirror is imbued with a romantic meaning and is seen by Ken with gratitude as the "matchmaker" of their love. His perception is due to the fact that, as an architect, he has built a Chinese-style bridge in an English garden and calls it "magpie bridge", the name of the love story that Jiao Mei told him (*MB* 201). As time goes by, the mirror recovers its original meaning of being a blessing and becomes a symbol that connects lovers from different backgrounds – a newly developed connotation of this intercultural symbol. In this way, both historical conflict and cultural communication are reflected through the mirror, whose representation throughout the text thus demonstrates the symbolic aesthetics of *The Magpie Bridge*.

Traditional Chinese Medicine through the "Touch"

Representations of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as an incarnation of Chinese culture in the English-speaking world easily and habitually "incorporate stereotypically 'Asian' imagery" (Bivins 95-96). As exemplified in *The Touch*, the Chinese acupuncture treatment offered by the protagonist, doctor Lin Ju, is advertised as a mysterious and exotic therapy by Mr Cheng, her boss, who deploys

Orientalism for commercial gain. Based on cultural translation, however, Liu's writing satirises the Orientalist depiction of TCM, showing how the practice of acupuncture infiltrates Lin Ju's diasporic life and supports her growth, rather than merely indicating Oriental exoticism. The title "The Touch", which refers to the diagnostic method in TCM of feeling the pulse, and which is the first step in Lin Ju's work, symbolises Chinese culture. In addition to denoting physical contact, the word "touch" in English has rich spiritual connotations, such as "producing an effect", "handling to manipulate", "feeling empathy", and "being moved". These meanings are also reflected in Liu's characterisation of Lin Ju's multiple emotional experiences. Integrating Chinese culture into an English text, Liu not only shapes "touch" as an evocative bilingual symbol of TCM in British society, breaking away from self-Orientalisation, but also produces an intercultural aesthetics through translation.

For the young Lin Ju, touch recalled her own treatment through TCM by her Laoye, a venerable herbalist doctor. Suffering from asthma in her childhood, Lin Ju was glad of Laoye's care for her, as he treated her with acupuncture, took her to the countryside to enjoy the fresh air, and taught her how to use various herbs to regain her health (*TT* 11). The frequently recurring image of herbal medicine not only mirrors Lin Ju's happy times with her Laoye, such as gathering herbs and selling them in the market, but also demonstrates her grasp of the fundamentals of TCM. Inspired by these experiences, Lin Ju attended medical college when growing up and inherited her Laoye's mantle after graduation. However, by the time presented in the novel, she has buried memories of her Laoye, which she regards as "the wound that had eaten away a large chunk of [her] childhood" (*TT* 18). Although moving to England, where she takes up work as an acupuncturist, helps her "relieve the nightmare", the "pungent scents" of the herbs in her clinic still reminds her of the past she is determined to avoid (*TT* 93, 3). The shift in Lin Ju's attitude towards her childhood from happiness to the refusal to remember points to a buried secret. Herbal medicine functions as the medium that connects the present with the past.

Unexpectedly, Mr Cheng comes closest to revealing Lin Ju's secret. As the boss of the clinic she works for, he tries to manipulate Lin Ju to Orientalise her experiences in China in order to attract more English customers. Driven by profit, Mr Cheng says to Lin Ju, "Get a journalist to write an article about you. Tell them stories about China – the English love them" (*TT* 33). Mr Cheng's attempt to cater to British taste embodies the commercial deployment of Orientalism, which, in line with the marketing of ethnicity in contemporary consumerist society, has helped to shape an exotic Orientalist image of TCM. Although reluctant, Lin Ju agrees to be interviewed by the *Gazette*, but tells an adapted version of her own story. She stresses that, "no one will ever know what I have kept to myself" (*TT* 35). Lin Ju's negative response demonstrates her determination to keep her secret on the one hand, and stands for her denial of self-Orientalisation in her representation of TCM on the other. In this light, as an essential principle of TCM, the titular touch indicates both Lin Ju's inheritance of Chinese culture and her antagonism towards those who attempt to alienate this cultural heritage in a foreign land.

In addition to echoing the past, the "touch" signifies Lin Ju's contact with her English patients, which not only ensures recognition for her medical skills but also satisfies her emotional needs. Regarding England as a place where she can keep her past separate and begin a new life, Lin Ju even stays there alone after her husband Zhiying has taken their daughter back to China. This leads to her leading a solitary life but the appearance of Lucy, a patient who, tortured by asthma just like the young Lin Ju, believes that acupuncture and herbal medicine can help, tugs at her heartstrings: "Something about Lucy touched me. I wanted to protect her, to cure her, and I was sure I could" (*TT* 4). This touch begins with a feeling of mutual empathy between doctor and patient through their shared acknowledgement of TCM, and then extends to other aspects of Lin Ju's diasporic life. Meeting Lucy's four-year-old son Conner reminds Lin Ju of her daughter Tiantian, who is the same age, and talking about how to treat Conner's eczema strengthens her empathy with Lucy through their shared experience as mothers

(*TT* 114). Through the medium of TCM, Lin Ju befriends both Lucy and her family, building relationships that continue to touch her.

For example, Lin Ju is deeply touched by Lucy's husband Mark, whom she meets on a spring excursion organised by Lucy. Mark, fascinated by Lin Ju's description of the differences between spring in England and in China during their hike, gives her a sense of excitement that she has not experienced for a long time. As she claims, "My patients, like Lucy, hang on my every word, but that is because of my profession, [. . .] but this man suggests I am interesting as a person" (*TT* 66). Thus, distinct from the closeness between Lin Ju and Lucy, which derives from doctor-patient empathy, Lin Ju's foremost feeling about Mark is that she is moved by this light-hearted but sincere person who treats her as a human being. After a night out, when the drunken Mark mistakenly takes Lin Ju's hand instead of Lucy's, Lin Ju realises that she wants to "touch it again" but stops herself for moral reasons (*TT* 137). The "touch" that Mark gives Lin Ju is both emotionally and physically attractive, but the beauty of the word lies in its complexity. Finally, leaving England and breaking off her contact with Mark, the fact that Lin Ju ends their relationship with a sense of ambiguity responds to the aesthetic connotation contained in "touch". Using the concept originating from TCM and then transcending it, Liu not only represents Lin Ju's multiple emotional experiences as being intertwined with the past and the present, but also locates every "touch" within a bilingual context to display the aesthetics of this intercultural symbol.

Symbols Gathering round "Wives of the East Wind"

In each of Liu's first three novels, a focal Chinese idea-image performs its symbolic function throughout the text. In *Wives of the East Wind*, however, Liu presents a range of symbols instead of solely highlighting a particular one. "East Wind", the name of the largest factory in the local town in the novel, is a symbol that is closely related to spring in ancient China; it also extends to connect with the meaning of vitality in Chinese culture (R. Chen 27). With a husband working in the East Wind factory, the protagonist Wenya uses different cultural symbols to represent and

summarise various aspects of her past life in this factory, allowing symbolic aesthetics to infiltrate the historical narrative. Several symbols in this novel are less typical than those in her previous works, but Liu endows them with specific aesthetic connotations in a transcultural context with regard to referring to a particular phase of Chinese history.

The first emerging symbol is the flute, a traditional instrument which, to the Chinese ear, has a melancholy sound. It is closely related to two male characters in *Wives of the East Wind*. First, Wenya's father, a proficient flute-player, disappeared from his daughter's life years ago when he left for a job interview, leaving the melody "Erquan Yingyue" unfinished (*WEW* 30). The role of the absent father maintains the melancholic temperament of this symbol in Chinese culture and sets a mournful tone for the following characterisation of the two men who play the flute. Furthermore, Wenya's mother sarcastically called her husband "wenruo shusheng", a Chinese idiom referring to a "delicate scholar", complaining that she could not "afford such a man as the main rice-winner" (*WEW* 29). This description of Wenya's unmanly father accords with the European perception of the flute, which "in form is phallic and masculine, whereas its sound is feminine" (Cirlot, xxxviii). The symbol of the flute in this text thus carries different cultural connotations via Liu's translation. Yet, the portrayal of Wenya's father emphasises not his lack of masculinity, but rather how the sound of the flute brought Wenya "out of the mundane, everyday world" into an aesthetic experience (*WEW* 29-30). Namely, it reflects both the profound influence Wenya's father had on her and her pursuit of the aesthetic world, in opposition to trivial life. Hence, almost all of the symbols that arise in her narration of the past are those that she had learned from her father.

The other man who excels at playing the flute is Cheng Ming, whose performance for Wenya of the entire "Erquan Yingyue" reminded her of her father, and their shared aesthetic experience based on the flute strengthened their friendship. However, following her mother's advice ("Never marry a flute-player"), Wenya married Zhiying, a relatively realistic man who could support his family

(*WEW* 75). Indeed, time demonstrated Cheng Ming's unreliability, as he framed his leader when being persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, became an unscrupulous trader after the reform and opening-up, and was finally killed by the woman he loved. The opposite depictions of Zhiying and Cheng Ming reveal the era's suppression of the value of aestheticism, shedding light on one of subject matters discussed in the work. Wenya's affiliation with the flute expresses her yearning for aesthetic experience in the struggle against pragmatism, which continues with other symbols when the flute-players are no longer in focus.

Usually thought of as a symbol originating from Asia, the peach blossom and the peach itself, tend to be interpreted as indicating "traditionally feminine qualities" and "fertility and happiness in marriage" in the English-speaking world (Thompson 177). Liu uses this symbolic meaning to refer to Wenya, who became pregnant with Xiao Tao and consolidated her relationship with Zhiying after being sent to work in a village temporarily, which was called Peach Blossom. As noted by Wenya's father, peach blossom in Chinese culture is associated with the notion of "Tao Yuan", the earthly paradise, which "symbolises good fortune and abundance" (*WEW* 51).[20] However, in Peach Blossom Village, Wenya saw awful poverty and famine as a result of the Great Leap Forward (1958) in China. Approaching "Tao Yuan" should have been an aesthetic experience, but the brutal reality destroys the positive symbolic meanings of peach blossom. After Wenya finished her second assignment in Peach Blossom Village, Zhiying gave her the tragic news that their son had been accidentally drowned (*WEW* 143). In this sense, the symbol of peach blossom connects not only with the bilingual context but also with the historical background, and the dysfunction of its symbolic meaning indicates Wenya's difficulty when pursuing aestheticism in that era. In addition, Peach Blossom Village is where Zhiying was imprisoned for accepting bribes in his later years, marking the end of the relationship between him and Wenya. The fall

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[20] The Chinese characters of "Tao Yuan" are 桃源, derived from *Taohuayuan Ji* 《桃花源記》 by *Tao Yuanming* 陶淵明.

of Zhiying at the end of this novel in fact reflects the ultimate collapse of pragmatism without aestheticism to balance it.

Wenya did not recover from the grief of losing Xiao Tao until the end of the Cultural Revolution, which appeared to be a good omen for the future. However, when walking by the lake one night with Zhiying, a place where they used to date, a verse popped into Wenya's mind: "A freezing pond reflects the shadow of a crane; Cold moon buries the souls of the blossoms" (*WEW* 267).[21] This line belongs to "a proleptic narrative in the form of poems" from the classical Chinese novel *The Dream of the Red Mansion*, hinting at the tragic fate of two lonely women (Huang 84). Liu borrows its sorrowful meaning and quotes it to describe Wenya's reflections on her marriage with Zhiying, making this poem a symbol of the collapse of their relationship. Correspondingly, this poem is usually regarded as a paradigm for the construction of the ideorealm in Chinese aesthetics; yet, hearing Wenya's murmur, Zhiying showed no interest. Zhiying's indifference separated him from his wife's aesthetic experience, as Wenya found it "harder and harder to communicate [her] feelings to Zhiying, who would dismiss what [she] said as sentimental and bourgeois" (*WEW* 239). Eventually, this distance between them led to Zhiying's betrayal of Wenya. Through the symbol of the tragic poem, Liu locates this couple's division in the preliminary stage of China's reform and opening-up, during which the pursuit of aesthetics was always overwhelmed by efficiency-oriented concerns. From that moment onwards, Wenya's aesthetic world became empty until she heard the news of her father's death years later from her half-brother. The newly aroused memories of her father, the flute-player, encouraged Wenya to recount her past experience of negotiating pragmatism with aestheticism. Beginning and also ending with the symbol of the flute, *Wives of the East Wind* conveys the significance of aesthetic experience to the protagonist and symbolically provides an individual perspective on Chinese history in the second half of the twentieth century.

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[21] The original Chinese is 寒塘渡鶴影, 冷月葬花魂.

The analyses above have shown how Liu develops an aesthetic space in each of her works by designing a great number of intercultural symbols to tell past stories. Coincidentally or not, the last non-repetitive symbol in her most recent work is classical Chinese poetry, echoing the systematic use of this symbol in her debut novel, and again highlighting cross-cultural symbolic aesthetics as a powerful strategy to negotiate ethnicity. Liu's expounding upon the aesthetic connotations of those symbols is individually oriented rather than nation-oriented; her historical narrative focuses more on personal behaviours and emotions, thereby endowing her writing with the characteristic of "dissemiNation".

DissemiNation in Historical Narrative

Partially inspired by Jacques Derrida's discussion of dissemination, Bhabha coins the term dissemiNation to deconstruct the "historical certainty" presupposed in the concept of a nation ("DissemiNation" 292). Bhabha understands nations as being the same as narratives, which "lost their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" ("Introduction" 1). In the production of a nation as narration, the "nationalist pedagogy" that provides an authoritative discourse of the continuous history is not denied, but a "narrative performance" of recursive strategy displays a double movement, wherein dissemiNation arises ("DissemiNation" 297). The process of dissemiNation provides the possibility for the radical alterity of national culture to create new forms of living and writing ("DissemiNation" 317). In Liu's writing, the performance of narration through various non-authoritative and individual perspectives deterritorialises the national narrative and rewords history.

The attempt to shatter the historical nature of the discourse of nationalism through narrative performance links Bhabha's discussion with the postmodern deconstruction of metanarratives. Furthermore, the idea of dissemiNation works in concert with the art form of historiographical metafiction, which, regarding

both history and fiction as human constructions, rethinks and reworks the forms and content of the past (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 5). As Liu emphasises "individuality" in her historical narrative, a number of the characters in her novels possess metafictional self-reflexivity, making what they narrate about history paradoxical and "unbelievable" (*WEW* 402). In this sense, this section analyses how the significance of the nation is disseminated in her writing through a postmodern narrative technique.

Parody of Historical and Political Events

In *Startling Moon*, Liu not only avails herself of classical Chinese poetry to develop Taotao's aesthetic experience, but also parodically integrates relevant historical and political events into her perception of the world. As previously illustrated, postmodern parody is not a ridiculous imitation; the past, as a referent within it, is incorporated and modified, given a new and different meaning. Hutcheon believes that parody, self-consciously pointing to a "critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past", is an essential mode of expressing postmodernism (*Poetics* 23). Indeed, the representation of historical and political events from Taotao's perspective is a production of parody, as Liu characterises Taotao's understanding of them via the Lyotardian little narratives, paying attention to negligible topics, such as changes in the weather. Above all, although parody appears to be an introverted formalism, it can in fact engender a direct confrontation with "the relation of the aesthetic to a world of significance external to itself [and] to the political and the historical" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 22). By aesthetically constructing Taotao's interpretation of the real world, Liu's writing rearticulates the upheavals in China in the second half of the twentieth century from both a personal and an unofficial perspective, collapsing the presupposed nationality in historical narratives.

As mentioned in the previous section, *Startling Moon* begins with the historical background of the Cultural Revolution. Liu does not provide a panoramic description of this period, but rather presents minor details reflected in daily life

from the viewpoint of the little Taotao. As the child's perspective possesses irony (see ch. 4 on Wong), the historical and political events that Taotao recognised appear to be parodic. Hearing her parents' conversation about the current situation, Taotao regarded words that she overheard, such as "movements", "storms", and "background", as referring to the weather (*SM* 11). On hearing her mother crying, however, she realised that she must have missed something: "Why was it that things I did not understand were always expressed in meteorological terms?" (*SM* 56). That night, Taotao dreamt of a storm, "heavy and frightening, with lightning and thunderclaps", and her mother "cried as she walked through the storm" (*SM* 11). It was not until many years after the end of the Cultural Revolution that the heavy metaphor in the dream, relating to this political event, was revealed and the true reason why Taotao was sent to her grandparents' house was uncovered. The depiction of changes in the weather in Taotao's dream becomes a parodic way of representing these upheavals in Chinese society; this strategy is also used again later in the novel.

Taotao's return to her own home is a reflection of the end of the Cultural Revolution; at that time, many of her puzzles in childhood were gradually solved through her maternal grandparents' visit. Having learned of the beauty of classical Chinese poetry from her Laoye, Taotao held him in such high esteem that she resented knowing that he was making a living as a hawker: "my grandfather, so learned, with his fine calligraphy hands, reduced to selling cigarettes" (*SM* 106). She was even more surprised to learn that her Laoye once worked for the Nationalist Party and was labelled a counterrevolutionary during the Cultural Revolution, which was why she was sent to live with her grandparents – to separate her from such "disgraced categories" and provide her with a better future (*SM* 158-59). The dream in which Taotao's mother desperately struggled with the storm echoes her keeping the secret of Taotao's relationship with her disgraced Laoye. In the portrayal of Taotao's growth, the Cultural Revolution, which is usually represented as a political movement during which any privacy was invaded and human rights were scarcely retained, is parodically described as a period of carefree childhood due to her family's white lie. In this sense, the grand

significance of narrating Chinese history is deterritorialised and personal perceptions of the changing world are emphasised in Liu's writing.

Taotao went to university after China had entered the period of reform and opening-up, which is parodically embodied in her ambivalent attitude towards the unknown. Studying in the English department brought her into contact with a foreign teacher, Lucy, to whom she was politically required to show respect without flattery or arrogance, as students were expected to be "both red and expert" at that time (*SM* 142).[22] Hovering between the two cultural contexts, Taotao expressed mixed feelings towards her: "Lucy represented the femininity and sophistication I was curious to experience, but when she had shown them to me, I had run away" (*SM* 145). Taotao thought of herself as Lord Ye, who loved only pictures or carvings that look like dragons, not the creature itself.[23] In fact, the metaphor of Lord Ye is an ingenious allusion to the policy of openness propagandised by the authorities, as Taotao related, "It was 1988: China's door was wide open to the outside world, or so the radio kept telling us" (*SM* 175). Lucy, although discriminated against in comparison with other Chinese teachers and finally fired by the university, played an irreversible role in developing Taotao's spirit of discovery. The influence of the reform and opening-up policy on Chinese society is thus manifested through the description of Taotao's compelling university experience.

After Taotao returned from Inner Mongolia to her work in Beijing, the political turmoil in 1989 worked in concert with her dreamlike relationship with Robert. She first became acquainted with this American journalist who was interested in Chinese politics at work, during a demonstration at Tiananmen Square, when she assumed the role of his temporary interpreter. The "spontaneous" Robert freed Taotao from her humdrum routine and their kiss at

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[22] The slogan "both red and expert" was proposed by Mao Tse-Tung in 1957, encouraging all comrades to not only keep faith in socialism but also master professional knowledge in a certain field; see Mao pp. 488-89.

[23] The Chinese literary quotation is 葉公好龍.

the Temple of Heaven aroused her aesthetic experience: "a bird disturbed us; it cried, flew swiftly past us and out of the round of enclosure, startling the moon" (*SM* 288, 275). However, on a night when they separated after a quarrel, Taotao – half-asleep and half-awake – noticed the weather once again and felt a deep sense of foreboding: "[T]here was thunder, lighting, and raindrops hammered at the window. [. . .] I was now being given a glimpse of hell" (*SM* 303). This was the night of the June Fourth Incident. Liu avoids directly describing the event, but it is compared to the reappearing narration of changing weather in Taotao's dream, which also suggests the breakdown of her relationship with Robert. After the upheaval, with China at the crossroads of exploring its path of development, Taotao was primarily concerned about when Robert would return home at the end of the novel. In short, Liu presents different kinds of individual recognition of historical events to parody the social environment of Taotao's growth, whose influence is still overwhelmed by her aesthetic perception of the world, thereby deconstructing the metanarrative of Chinese history.

Fantastical Elements of the Narration of History

In contrast with the parody in *Startling Moon*, *The Magpie Bridge* offers a fantastical narrative of modern Chinese history through the ghost of Tie Mei, which is integrated in her family history with the magical power of the bronze mirror. The dual perspective of Jiao Mei and Tie Mei, with the latter as the storyteller of the past events, responds to two dominant narrative modes of historiographic metafiction: "multiple points of view" and an "overtly controlling narrator" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 117). The ghost of Tie Mei, appearing as mysterious and supernatural as the fantastical images of the deviant language of decentring in postmodern art forms, cannot be treated as a subject that is able to confidently prove her ability to know the past (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 61). This family's fantastical narrative of Chinese history thus problematises the entire notion of subjectivity. Yet, as Hutcheon claims, this "inscribing of subjectivity into history" rethinks the past in non-developmental and non-continuous terms, as "postmodernism

establishes, differentiates, and then disperses stable narrative voices" that try to make sense of it (*Poetics* 118). In this way, the history of both this family and modern China is turned into fantasy through the "unbelievable" subject of this fiction, whose voice diverges from the national narrative of Chinese history.

Jiao Mei first regards her encounters with Tie Mei as "bad dreams", but the lingering of the Mei blossom's "strong fragrance" in the morning leads her to suspect that her grandmother, or the ghost of Tie Mei, truly appeared (*MB* 7, 16). Jiao Mei's doubt as to Tie Mei's existence questions the authenticity of the subject and makes her narrative of family history full of fantastical elements. Furthermore, in explaining how she was able to come to England after her death, Tie Mei compares herself to the rebellious Monkey King, who is reborn of fire in the flaming furnace. The Monkey King, a fictional character in Chinese mythology who is also utilised in Mo and Guo's writing, is related to Tie Mei through his magic power: "[i]nstead of destroying him", the heavenly fire "made him stronger" (*MB* 50). Hence, the description of Tie Mei is more similar to a fantasy than to a realistic narrative in this novel. In the end, Tie Mei, possessing an omniscient perspective of the past, is left with a Mei blossom: "Fragments of dreams stay with me, but as each new petal opens, they disintegrate" (*MB* 241). The repeated entanglement of dream and reality highlights Tie Mei's self-paradoxicality, which deterritorialises her subjectivity and deprives her of her position as a reliable narrator.

Through her questioned and fractured subjectivity, Tie Mei's account of the past deconstructs history while revealing its unrecognised facts in a fantastical literary manner. The first time that Jiao Mei learned of her family's history was in her childhood, in the form of the "mirror story" told by her grandmother (*MB* 30); Tie Mei admitted that she told "too many stories and too few truths" (*MB* 49). However, when Tie Mei decides to disclose "everything" that happened in the past to her family, the historical "truth" that she uncovers perfectly aligns with the story she told about how her great-grandmother had been murdered and the mirror had been plundered by an English soldier (*MB* 49). Moreover, "everything" about the past concentrates on the three instances of revenge that were reflected

in and took place by virtue of the medium of the mirror, introducing readers to a world brimming with fantasy. Tie Mei's historical narrative thus overlaps with the literary narrative contained in her stories about past events, reflecting Liu's participation in postmodern discussion of the role of the rhetoric in narrating history. In fact, the "truth" narrated by Tie Mei represents a historical construction based upon the mirror's symbolic connotations. Although in some ways it refers to certain important events in modern Chinese history, it does not contribute to the sense of imagined community emphasised in a national narrative.

According to Tie Mei's story, the curse of the mirror will be removed if it is returned to the family, so Barbara's recovery of her sense of smell seems a good omen. As Jiao Mei asks, "doesn't [the return of the mirror] mean that there will be peace, no more death?" *(MB* 177). Tie Mei, however, becomes unsure about the Englishwoman's fate. The emphasis on Tie Mei's own hesitation deepens the doubt as to the reliability of her narration, particularly as the narrative shifts focus from fantastical history to present life. On learning of Barbara's unfortunate death due to a tumour, Jiao Mei is confused, asking, "what killed her: the curse or the illness?" (*MB* 236). Jiao Mei regards Barbara, who once possessed the mirror but has sent it to her as a gift, as family and thus she should have been blessed (*MB* 176). Therefore, regardless of what the answer is, Barbara's the death and Tie Mei's disappearance invalidate the fantastical elements of the heirloom and relocate the narrative discourse in the real world. Barbara is the character who, unaware of the mirror's history, has nevertheless been involved in its fantastical narrative. The dysfunction of the mirror's magical power highlights the self-contradiction of Tie Mei's historical narrative and shifts readers' attention to the realistic meaning of the mirror.

Tie Mei's "mirror story" provides a fantastical narrative of such historical events as the Second Anglo-Chinese War and the Second Sino-Japanese War, and delineates how Chinese people suffered as a result of them. The apology that Jiao Mei's English boyfriend made on behalf of his ancestors symbolises a kind of reconciliation of the historical ethnic conflicts between China and England, as what

they regard as important is not the past but the present. Jiao Mei's forgiveness implies that the difference in ethnicity has finally been overwhelmed by cultural communication, and she thereby develops a trans-ethnic identity. Moreover, after giving birth to a baby, Jiao Mei donates the bronze mirror to a museum instead of handing it down to her son Thomas: "Things might have been so different. I stare at the mirror, feeling its unaccustomed distance from me" (*MB* 243). The difference and distance indicate that the mirror, now a valuable antique displayed in a museum, has lost its status as this family's heirloom, and Jiao Mei has been relieved of its burden with regard to national history. In this way, Liu incorporates certain fantastical elements into the representation of the symbol of mirror, during which the grand narrative of nation and history is deterritorialised as the magic transoceanic journey of an unbelievable subject and the promising international relationship of the strong-minded protagonist.

History as the Bastard's Revenge

History is an important subject in Liu's literary creations, but she prefers to highlight minor details about individuals in fragments of history, rather than narrate an ethnic epic. Subtitled "Every Secret Has its Price", *The Touch* interweaves Lin Ju's childhood memories with her present diasporic life and represents a segment of the past, and as a result the secret that has kept her away from her motherland is revealed. This secret past event occurred during China's Cultural Revolution; however, the narrative of a national trauma does not appear. Instead, Liu creates a bastard figure, Steel, and this historical event is described from the perspective of his revenge. As White argues, a historical narrative is "a complex of symbols" that points to "an icon of the structure of those events" in our literary tradition (*Tropics* 88). A central function of the bastard figure in literary tradition is to challenge patriarchy and threaten nationality through his illegitimacy (Fagley 16). In *The Touch*, this is incarnated in the revenge of Steel, who is a barefoot doctor and whose biological father is the experienced herbalist doctor, Lao Lin (Lin Ju's Laoye). Representing the Cultural Revolution in the context

of the bastard's revenge provides an unorthodox and unofficial perspective on Liu's exposure to the past, by which she separates *The Touch* from a grand narrative of nation and history.

The story of the bastard unfolds within interactions between two sets of relationships across generations, in which Lin Ju and her Laoye each find a particular person for mutual "touch". As Lin Ju admitted, it was a mistake "to believe that that old man had no other role in life" except acting as her Laoye, because, for Auntie Hu, the widowed Lao Lin was her secret lover (*TT* 110). Auntie Hu was born to a family of herbalist doctors, but kidnapped to be the wife of a bandit leader until his death, and finally married to a bedridden man. She first aroused Lao Lin's sympathy for her misfortunes, and then gained his affection due to their shared interest in herbs (*TT* 194). The narration of Auntie Hu's suffering mirrors the preliminary stage of the communist government's suppression of bandits across China. Furthermore, her background explains why she cannot be with Lao Lin, foreshadowing the possibility of their illegitimate child. Although their relationship was clandestine, Lin Ju believed that "something bad had happened" between Auntie Hu and her Laoye, due to their unusual closeness (*TT* 127). Lin Ju's sensitivity and curiosity push her to uncover her Laoye and Auntie Hu's secret, during which she appears as a witness to the bastard's revenge.

Steel's appearance confirms Lin Ju's conjecture: this character, finally revealed to be the illegitimate child of Lao Lin and Auntie Hu, is, from another perspective, the person whom Lin Ju admired in her youth. When Lin Ju first ran away from her stepfather's abuse to be with her Laoye, she met Steel on the train, where his words – "In the wide world of the countryside, we can achieve a great deal" – touched her and rationalised her decision to leave home (*TT* 117). Here, Steel, quoting the slogan of China's Movement of Going Down to the Countryside (from the late 1960s to the early 1970s), was a Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution. More than that, Liu connects this historical background with the bastard's secret – what Lin Ju truly learned from this event. Although suspecting that Steel was hiding something, Lin Ju did not care until he told her that the

purpose of his coming to the countryside was to "find [his] birth parents" and "make them pay", giving her the same sensation that she felt when she guessed her Laoye and Auntie Hu's secret (*TT* 211). Lin Ju's perception of both secrets correlates with the two contrary sides of the bastard's story: what Steel managed to uncover is the secret that Lao Lin and Auntie Hu tried to keep. Yet, Lin Ju's admiration for Steel foreshadows her different position from her Laoye and her function as a catalyst in the process of revenge.

The description of Steel's revenge overlaps with the background of the Cultural Revolution, but the series of sufferings that Lao Lin experienced during this event are explained as Steel's means of retaliation. As a reputable herbalist doctor, Lao Lin, distrusting the inexperienced Steel as a representative of young barefoot doctors, was himself forbidden to treat patients because he did not have the "formal medical qualification" held by young people (*TT* 187). The notion of the barefoot doctor, which played a significant role in the history of public health in the PRC, is utilised by Liu to present Steel's revenge, that of the bastard who challenges Lao Lin on behalf of traditional patriarchy. Responding to Lao Lin's criticism of Steel's inexperienced companions for letting a baby die during delivery, Steel looked Lao Lin in the eye: "So experienced that [you have] never made a mistake and lost a baby in [your] care, [. . .] have you?" (*TT* 178). Steel's query connects him with the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, deserted by Lao Lin years ago, and allows his plans for secret revenge to surface. In this sense, the set of historical references in *The Touch* contributes to the literary narrative of the bastard's revenge. The grand significance of the national narrative is thus deterritorialised within the representation of history as a set of individual behaviours.

Lin Ju depicts the climax of this revenge plot through a child's perspective, without historical reference. Talking with Steel, Lin Ju imparted information about which she had been "sworn to secrecy" – a cave on the cliff discovered by her Laoye, where he built a mini shrine and buried pairs of baby shoes (*TT* 208). This information helped Steel to confirm that Lao Lin was his birth father, but Lin Ju did

not know the truth until Auntie Hu told her the whole story. Finally, Steel died while climbing up the cliff to ask why his birth father deserted him, and Lao Lin slipped and broke his leg in an attempt to stop his son from falling (*TT* 244). Steel's death indicates the end of the historical narrative that, in *The Touch*, does not serve to evoke national memories, but rather to highlight the effect that an individual can have on the course of history. Due to Lin Ju's betrayal of her Laoye – her participation in the bastard's revenge that ended in tragedy – the memory of the Cultural Revolution becomes a guilty secret for Lin, instead of a piece of ethnic history worth making public. Similarly, uncovering this secret is represented as a personal choice: avoiding being forced by her boss to Orientalise her experiences, Lin Ju narrates her past, returns to China, and relives herself of her guilt. In summary, by making use of the reflexive literary image of the bastard, Liu integrates the historical event with both the revenge story and its influence on the protagonist's present life, thereby offering a non-national perspective on speaking of the past.

From History to Herstory

Compared with Liu's first three novels, *Wives of the East Wind* represents Chinese history in the second half of the twentieth century in a more continuous way; it may appear to be an epic work in the conventional sense. Yet, instead of a "history", it offers a "herstory" of the wives of the East Wind. As a term coined by second-wave feminists in the 1970s, "herstory" designates "women's place at the center of an alternative narrative of past events" (Looser 1). As illustrated in the previous section, Liu describes the past from Wenya's symbolic perspective and displays her aesthetic pursuit in contrast with Zhiying's pragmatic standpoint, decentring both the male subject and history. Furthermore, Hutcheon argues that the unified male writing subject is "not only decentred and radically split, but is actually splitting" in postmodern historical narratives (*Poetics* 163). This is reflected in the usage of the name "Zhiying", which, as previously mentioned, is attributed to various cowardly male characters in Liu's novels (Tie Mei's lover and

Lin Ju's husband). With the statement made by one of the Zhiyings that "we men are cowards", the authority of the male subject is questioned (*WEW* 400). Thus, Liu's writing deserves to be interpreted as a whole to discuss its deconstruction of the male narrative and national history; it is herstory that is highlighted in *Wives of the East Wind*.

Zhenzhen, Wenya's best friend, is another leading figure in this novel, whose characterisation, along with that of Wenya, provides a perspective that diverges from that of the "coward" Zhiying in the face of the age's social upheavals and contributes to the narration of herstory. As the wife of the director of the East Wind, Zhenzhen did not care about leader-worker relations and had been close to Wenya since they first met. Wenya enjoyed the time they spent together outside the factory as "an escape from the bleakness of everyday reality" (*WEW* 124). According to Wenya's life aesthetics, the friendship between them mirrors that of female networking, which attaches more importance to personal experience and emotional needs than to social hierarchy. On the contrary, the male subject, which plays an irreplaceable role in the conventional narration of nation and history, exists in the double condition of both dominating and being subject to the hierarchical order of the social system. Zhiying, although disturbed by the noise made by one of his neighbours, silently endured it, making him a coward in Wenya's eyes: "You don't dare say anything because he's an official" (*WEW* 151). This dissatisfaction with Zhiying's cowardice stands for the abandonment of a national narrative in Liu's construction of herstory, which is also reflected in the comparison of their different attitudes towards significant life events.

The factory's director Lao Gao, who was also a war hero, committed suicide during the Cultural Revolution because of political persecution; a female perspective on narration also emerges from the various attitudes towards his death. After taking the risk of punishment to cherish the memory of her late husband in a public performance, Zhenzhen, a singer in the East Wind entertainment troupe, said to Wenya, "No more memories. Let's live" (*WEW* 214). Thus, the character of Zhenzhen is represented not only with great emotional

depth but also with the courage to bid farewell to the past; in this manner, Liu endows herstory with the value of individualism. However, on the side of collectivism, Zhiying disapproved of Zhenzhen's risk-taking behaviour and planned to "settle the score" later, keeping his silence until the day he was promoted to the role of director of the factory (*WEW* 206). The experience of Zhiying, who becomes the new dominating force in the social hierarchy, appears to be an incarnation of the national narrative in a developmental and linear way; nevertheless, as he accepted bribes and was imprisoned in the era after the Cultural Revolution, his lesson offers a satire on that view of history. In this sense, the character of Zhiying functions as a contrast in Liu's narration of herstory, which, structured on the basis of female personality and emotion, hardly involves national significance.

In essence, except for the fall of the traditional sense of the male subject, the representation of feminine destiny in Liu's herstory is an embodiment of a little narrative, deviating from the grand idea of historical development. Thinking, "Enough of the past! [. . .] Let's live in the present and be beautiful", Zhenzhen freed herself from the burden of being the widow of a hero and fell in love with Cheng Ming after the Cultural Revolution had ended (*WEW* 235). Zhenzhen's courageous decision to be with Cheng Ming, irrespective of the expectations of mainstream values, once again reflects the emphasis on female subjectivity in herstory. It also presents the possibility of progress in historical narratives, if Cheng Ming were not exposed as the person who "had turned in Lao Gao" due to his infatuation with Zhenzhen, disappearing from public view. Cheng Ming then came back as an upstart entrepreneur to take over the East Wind, convincing Zhenzhen to come back to him. This caused her to feel helpless, leading her to kill him and drown herself in a river (*WEW* 269). Cheng Ming's transformation from being a flute-player, an aesthetic symbol, to a greedy businessman who only worships money, reflects his submission to pragmatism in the period of reform and opening-up. The tragic end, differing from the common national narrative that affirms Chinese resurrection and achievement in the post-Cultural Revolution era,

expresses a disillusionment with life and the future due to a lack of aesthetic experience.

The deconstruction of the narration of history from a developmental perspective is also embodied in Liu's description of the collapse of Wenya and Zhiying's relationship. Having been attracted to his youthful secretary Xiao Wu, who admired him, Zhiying confessed to Wenya, "Sometimes I think there are two Zhiyings, the Zhiying that remains truthful to you, to the past, and the Zhiying who lives in an exciting new world that sometimes disgusts me" (*WEW* 382-83). Zhiying, the male subject of that age, splits and becomes self-reflexive; his betrayal of Wenya casts doubt on the role played by the post-Cultural Revolution era in individual development, whose beneficial effect is usually emphasised in China's official discourse. However, whereas Zhiying valued "public recognition", Wenya thought herself more "private" (*WEW* 268). "How had my pure, idealistic man changed so much?" she asked, expressing her denial of and disappointment in that era (*WEW* 383). Liu focuses not on a grand narrative of nation and history, but on how the individual feels about the period of change, which is not always considered to be positive from the female perspective. By representing a herstory in which female characters question both the male subject and historical influence in pursuing their life aesthetics, Liu deterritorialises the national narrative and its linear view of development.

In summary, Liu's intercultural writing largely engages with historical themes which, as a prevalent subject matter in ethnic literature, are often utilised by minority writers to affirm national identity in narrating the historical development of a nation. Yet, in accordance with her construction of symbolic aesthetics, Liu's writing presents various little narratives of Chinese history from individual perspectives, rather than focusing on nationality and ethnicity. Different writing strategies strongly connect Liu's literary creation with the postmodern context of minor literature, and each of her works thereby deterritorialises the grand

significance of historical narratives and demonstrates the characteristic of dissemiNation.

Hong Liu's literary creation manifests a set of remarkable aesthetic features, as she translates Chinese idea-images into English cultural symbols, using them to negotiate ethnicity. The intercultural symbols appearing in her fiction rarely refer to a Chinese national identity, but rather provide abundant aesthetic experiences for her characters that free them from trivial everyday life. Whether the ideorealm of classical Chinese poetry, historical events reflected in the mirror, connotations of touch in a bilingual context, or a flute and peach blossom as an aesthetic medium, these symbols construct a transcultural symbolic aesthetics throughout Liu's writing. Meanwhile, Liu endows the symbolic aesthetics with a historical dimension, engaging in postmodern historical narrative by highlighting the personal perception of historical development. Whether offering a parody of social upheavals from a child's perspective, a fantastical narrative of family history, an interpretation of the past as a bastard's revenge, or the questioning of historical development through herstory, each of Liu's novels displays incredulity towards metanarratives. In this manner, national and ethnic significance is deterritorialised within Liu's historical narrative, which occupies an intermediate point between ethnic literature and minor literature.

Representing past stories from China is common in contemporary British Chinese literature; this self-determined narrative mode satisfies the market's expectation for literature by ethnic minority writers to a certain extent. The historical narrative of Liu's works, however, breaks away from ethnic territorialisation and performs a bidirectional function. On the one hand, Liu takes advantage of Chinese elements to express her cultural identity; on the other hand, the postmodern approach that she uses to construct symbolic aesthetics, along with Mo's historical adaptation, helps to illuminate the decentring of ethnic issues within contemporary British Chinese literature. Although Chinese history assumes

a considerable role in Liu's literary creation, she narrates the past from individual perspectives and connects it with the present diasporic life through intercultural symbols. The illumination of the shared symbolism between different cultures and the deterritorialisation of the national narrative demonstrate her negotiation of ethnic status and her presentation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Liu's writing represents a mild way of engaging in trans-ethnic themes in British Chinese literature. A more radical deterritorialisation of ethnicity is offered by the writer discussed in the next chapter: Xiaolu Guo, who shares a strong interest in cultural symbols with Liu, further deconstructing both Chinese and British symbols from a diasporic perspective.

Chapter 3: Deterritorialising Typical Cultural Symbols in Xiaolu Guo's Writing on the New Chinese Diaspora

The last chapter illustrates how symbols bridge the gap between cultural contexts, forging connections through translation. Indeed, symbols are, above all, "a means of communication", during which multiple levels of meaning of images, words, and behaviours express various cultural connotations (Womack 1). People in a group with a common history and shared experiences communicate more easily and form closer relationships with each other through their shared identification with particular cultural symbols. For individuals who have left their native culture and live as part of a diaspora, displaying those symbols they have been familiar with is able to highlight their ethnic affiliations. This approach is thus widely adopted by immigrant communities, especially those who seek to represent their cultural attributes in new environments. Since the earliest British Chinese works were created to introduce Chinese history and culture to British society, the use of cultural symbols has been common in British Chinese literature. Although most of the works discussed in this thesis have turned their attention to trans-ethnic themes, few British Chinese writers are able to avoid referring to Chinese cultural symbols when depicting the transnationality of the new Chinese diaspora.

Notably, the meaning of a specific cultural symbol can change over time, depending on its historical background and social environment (Dollar 250). Reflecting on the development of British Chinese literature, representations of Chinese symbols have engaged with various literary discourses, and thus usually deviated from their original purpose of cultural identification. As referenced in the first two chapters, Orientalist discourse, which is incarnated in both Timothy Mo's early works and the national narratives of Chang, Hong, and Xue, alienates Chinese symbols as the Other and produces a series of ethnic stereotypes, such as rigid Confucianism and gender inequality. However, Hong Liu's cultural translation, as shown in Chapter 2, invalidates this binary opposition, as her works reveal the aesthetic commonality of symbolism between Chinese and English culture and explore the interaction of different meanings of the same symbol. This chapter

focuses on Xiaolu Guo's writing, which further illustrates the influence of contemporary diasporic experience on representations of Chinese symbols. Guo not only deterritorialises those stereotypical Chinese symbols, originally dominated by Orientalism, but also reconstructs them from a transnational perspective, manifesting the trans-ethnic awareness of her literary creation. In addition, Guo's works represent an Occidentalist discourse by describing a Chinese character's imaginings of and disillusionment with so-called Western symbols. This doubly demonstrates the multiple and hybrid meanings that a symbol may be given in transcultural communication.

Born in mainland China in 1973 in the Chinese coastal province of Zhejiang, Xiaolu Guo was first raised by her illiterate grandparents in a fishing village, before joining her parents and brother in the city of Wenling at the age of seven. In 1993, she was admitted to the Beijing Film Academy, where she later served as a lecturer in the Department of Literature, after graduating with her master's degree. In 2002, she was awarded a scholarship by the British Council to subsidise her study at the National Film and Television School in the UK. Soon afterwards, she settled in London. Published in 2007, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* (hereafter *Dictionary for Lovers*) was her first novel written in English. It was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction in its year of publication and had been translated into 24 languages by 2014 (Jaggi, "Xiaolu Guo"). Having drawn much critical attention from British literary circles, Guo was selected as one of Granta's Best Young British Novelists in 2013. In 2017, she laid bare her first 40 years in a single book, *Once Upon a Time in the East: A Story of Growing Up* (hereafter *Once Upon a Time*; with an American edition: *Nine Continents: A Memoir In and Out of China*). It became the winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award and A Sunday Times Book of the Year in 2017, before being shortlisted for the Rathbones Folio Prize 2018.

Dictionary for Lovers (*DL*) tells the story of a young Chinese student's year-long study of English as a Second Language in London, during which the protagonist, Z, falls in love with an unnamed eccentric Englishman, who is almost

twice her age. Written in the form of a dictionary, the novel begins with the heroine's broken English; with each chapter her intercultural relationship with the Englishman develops, and so does her language. Despite being a work of fiction, the narration of Z's overseas experience epitomises Guo's early years in the UK and echoes her own migrant subjectivity. The portrayal of Z as a non-stereotypical Chinese character suggests Guo's deterritorialisation of Chineseness and the construction of her transnational identity. Moreover, the refusal to characterise Z's British lover as a traditional gentleman implies a Chinese counterattack on representations of the West.

In *Once Upon a Time* (*OUT*), Guo autobiographically presents her life experience – moving from the East to the West – through a narrative that oscillates between realism and myth. The memoir reveals that, in contrast with her international success in print and celluloid, her story of growing up is a raw record of detachment, shame, and suffering. Divided into five major sections, each representing a new geographical and emotional dislocation, Guo prefaces each with glimpses of the sixteenth-century Chinese classic *Journey to the West*. This relates the myth of the monk Xuanzang's pilgrimage from China to India and back to gather sacred Buddhist texts, accompanied by his three disciples, the most notable disciple of whom is the Monkey King, Wukong. Guo seemingly compares herself to the powerful monkey, but it is defamiliarised as a symbol of "parentless, self-made hero" to depict and construct her personal "journey to the West" (314).

Dictionary for Lovers and *Once Upon a Time* show commonalities in their reconstruction of cultural symbols and their narration of the new Chinese diaspora, even though the former is a work of fiction and the latter an autobiography. Belinda Kong describes *Dictionary for Lovers* as a paradigmatic account of intercultural communication that provides a means of rethinking contemporary Chinese Anglophone writing (477). Indeed, this work of fiction shows how the cultural unconscious of Western centralism shapes many Chinese and British people's perceptions of each other, seeking to shatter such cultural stereotypes, at least on a general level. Described as "[t]his generation's *Wild Swans*" by the

Daily Telegraph, *Once Upon a Time* in fact provides a case of counter-stereotyping relative to Chang's work. In its autobiographical depiction of the new generation's diasporic experience, more specific Chinese symbols are characterised from a transnational perspective, indicating Guo's self-creation as a citizen of the world. In this sense, reading *Dictionary for Lovers* and *Once Upon a Time* together can help to examine Guo's strategy of highlighting changes in the meanings of both Chinese and British symbols in transcultural migrations. This chapter argues that Guo deterritorialises various forms of cultural unconsciousness rooted in interaction between China and the West and reconstructs typical cultural symbols through presenting the migrant subjectivity of the new Chinese diaspora. Her efforts develop the endeavour that began with Mo's production of British Chinese literature: to remove the ethnic label attached to writers of Chinese descent.

The aim of the first section is to build a theoretical framework for the transcultural study of both Chinese and British symbols in British Chinese literature. Drawing on scholarly research into the cultural unconscious, combined with discussion of the reconstruction of cultural symbols in contemporary literary discourse, it explains the shift in focus of representations of China in the Western world. The second section addresses the portrayal of non-stereotypical British and Chinese symbols in *Dictionary for Lovers*. Turning to *Once Upon a Time*, the third section explores the defamiliarisation and self-referential juxtaposition of the story of the Monkey King in Guo's autobiographical narrative. Finally, the chapter demonstrates the significance of Guo's representation of a new migrant subjectivity, which performs the important function of writing against the Western-centric cultural unconscious and deterritorialising ethnic stereotypes; Guo's writing thereby engages with the process of anti-ethnification in contemporary British Chinese literature.

Writing against the Cultural Unconscious

The "unconscious" is a foundational concept stemming from psychoanalytic psychology. Systematic study of this concept can be traced back to Sigmund Freud.

Freud defines the term as "the dynamically unconscious repressed", reflected in instinctual desires that seek fulfilment in objects and predominantly fall into socially and morally unacceptable categories of a sexual nature (6). Having learned from Freud, Carl Jung nevertheless disagrees with the former's negative conception of the unconscious. Noting that Freud places great emphasis on the "personal unconscious", Jung argues that human beings also have a deep common psychological foundation, inherited from ancient times and applicable to all individuals; that is, a "collective unconscious" (3-4). Opposing Jung's formulation of the unconscious, Lacan integrates psychoanalysis into the study of structuralism and revises Freud's theory of the unconscious from the perspective of linguistic structure. Lacan redefines the sign: the signifier is a conscious language, while the signified is an unconscious desire ("Letter" 418). The meaning of the signifier is continuously transferred from the signifier to the signified, which is correspondingly transformed into another signifier; signification is always deferred in the chain of the signifier until an anchoring point appears (Lacan, "Letter" 419). Lacan extends the theory of the unconscious to a broad cultural context and contributes to the postmodern discussion of the symbolic.

Inspired by Lacan, Ming Dong Gu further expounds on "the cultural unconscious", in which "culture" refers to the visible signifier and "unconscious" denotes the invisible signified (30). Gu represents the cultural unconscious as a "Western centric ideology", operating out of sight but unconsciously influencing, shaping, and controlling Chinese knowledge production by not only Westerners but also Chinese people themselves (6). Analogous to Black people's desire for a "white mask" and the self-Orientalist othering of things Chinese (see ch. 1), Gu's discussion of the cultural unconscious specifies a hidden inferiority complex shared by people of Chinese descent that induces them to present alienated knowledge of both China and the West in their interaction with each other. Notably, diverging from Freud's and Jung's psychological characterisations of the unconscious as being deeply rooted in the origin and development of human beings, the cultural unconscious "does not take a long time for itself" (Gu 33). Despite remaining stable in a specific historical period, it is not difficult to change.

As the Western-centric ideology has been increasingly challenged by a gradually developing subjective consciousness since the end of the Second World War, the burgeoning English literature that was being written from the margins thus constitutes "the Empire writ[ing] back to the Centre".[24] Although China was never wholly colonised, as discussed in Chapter 1 regarding Mo, postcolonial studies provide an insightful approach to withstanding the discursive control of Western centralism, which is also pertinent to interpreting Guo's portrayal of the new Chinese diaspora.

In their important work *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Ashcroft et al. argues that world literature written in English provides an effective means of opposing colonial cultural oppression, in which English is no longer seen as a tool of language colonisation, but rather plays a crucial role in the ideological emancipation of the Third World (2). Ashcroft et al.'s attention to marginality not only overturns the Western-centric ideology, but also recalls Deleuze and Guattari's interest in minor literature. Both provide a theoretical context for the study of Guo's writing, which stands in opposition to "Received Standard English" and poses challenges to traditional English literature. Furthermore, according to Bourdieu's discussion of cultural production, the authorised language (Standard English) contains no power within itself to ensure its own perpetuation over time; only the unceasing struggles between authorities can ensure its permanence and value (*Language* 58). Struggles in the literary field not only confirm a given language as legitimate in the art of writing, but also allow for the possibility of producing performative utterance with a new authority and belief in its legitimacy. Among Chinese immigrants writing in English, Mo (in his early works), Chang, and Hong follow a Western-centric ideology in their representations of Chinese symbols. In contrast, emerging writers, such as Liu and Guo, illustrate Chinese symbols beyond this cultural unconscious – "setting up a minor practice of major

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[24] "The Empire Writes Back" was a phrase originally used by Salman Rushdie in a newspaper article published in *The Times* in 1982. In addition to being a pun on the film *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), the phrase refers to the ways postcolonial voices respond to the literary canon of the colonial centre.

language" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 18) – to deterritorialise the absolute legitimacy of Western centrism in Anglophone writing. Whereas Liu creates an aesthetic world to counteract this cultural unconscious, Guo intentionally and directly makes readers conscious of how Western centrism affects Chinese and British perceptions of each other's symbols. Moreover, following market requirements for the autobiographical narratives of minority writers, Guo's deterritorialisation and reconstruction of these symbols has received widespread recognition from English literary circles, in which Western centrism is losing its dominant position. Therefore, although a Western-centric ideology has long influenced the representation of cultural symbols in British Chinese literature, the "writing back" movement and the persistent struggles in the literary field reveal that the younger generation of Chinese immigrant writers are able to write against this cultural unconscious.

According to Gu, the best way to overcome the cultural unconscious is "to [make] the unconscious culture conscious" (218). This involves "a process of intellectual emancipation of a mind shackled by Western perception, conception, and generalization", as well as an effort to "produce knowledge and scholarship on China in as objective and scientific a manner as possible" (Gu 219). Echoing K. Chen's emphasis on Asian subjectivity (see ch. 1), Gu's appeal to "consciousness" represents a Chinese approach to decolonisation and deimperialisation. Guo adopts an anti-Orientalist perspective to manifest the subjectivity of the new Chinese diaspora, during which she writes against various forms of cultural unconsciousness that have shaped the stereotypes of things Chinese. Furthermore, Guo's works engage with the collapse of the so-called Western myth by ironically revealing how Chinese people first imagine and then become disillusioned with British symbols in their diasporic lives, questioning the discourse of Occidentalism. As Said notes, Occidentalism is not the answer to Orientalism (*Orientalism* 328). The former term in fact sums up the privilege of "the becoming-modern of the world and the becoming-West of Europe", tied to a particular trajectory of modernity impacted by the facts of colonialism and capitalism, as well as by the Third World's image of the West (Venn 19, 44). Thus, the utter deconstruction of

the "Western myth" and the representation of an unexpected British society in Guo's writing illustrate the "emancipatory ideal" – freedom from Occidentalism (Venn 19).

The emergence of Occidentalism in Chinese society, analysed by Xiaomei Chen in a work of that name, reflects the cultural phenomenon of alienation in post-Mao China–West studies. According to Chen, Occidentalism has two forms: official Occidentalism, which describes the Occident as wicked to justify the political regime at home; and non-official Occidentalism, relied upon by Chinese intellectuals to idealise the Western world in order to oppose cultural oppression in China (6). Although the two kinds of Occidentalism may seem contradictory, they are closely related in describing the Occident as "its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said, *Orientalism* 1), constituting "a counter-discourse, a counter-memory, and a counter-'Other' to Said's Orientalism" (X. Chen 6). X. Chen examines literary representations of Occidentalism, exemplified by *Manhattan's China Lady* (1992) by Zhou Li and *Immigrating to America* (1997) by Hu Ping, in which Chinese people's "American dream" accelerates the construction of the "Western myth" (ch. 7). Yet, criticism of the "almost embarrassingly positive evaluation" of American society in these two works elucidates their othering the West and deconstructs the so-called Western myth (X. Chen 31). Reflecting on Occidentalism further, Guo highlights the contrast between the imagined and real London in Chinese eyes, thereby writing against the Western-centric cultural unconscious.

The resistance to both Orientalism and Occidentalism reflects a "new migrant subjectivity" (Cho 75), which – by arguing that archaic representations of Chineseness are not representative of the Chinese diaspora today – enables an emancipation from the Western-centric cultural unconscious. As discussed in the Introduction, the contemporary diasporic practices of travel, displacement, and capital mobilisation have contributed to the transnationality of Chinese migrants. As a result, being Chinese has come to involve multiple shifting statuses; Chineseness has become "an open signifier", compatible with the growing

pluralisation of Chinese identities (Ang, "To Be Chinese" 13). Oscillating between belonging and not belonging, and between the local and the global, a large number of transnational publics reveal a "cosmopolitan Chinese subjectivity" that "subvert[s] the ethnic absolutism born of nationalism and the processes of cultural othering" (Ong 24). This subjectivity progressively protects the new Chinese diaspora from the unconscious cultural inferiority complex suffered by their predecessors, offering them greater freedom of choice in the face of various cultural differences. By characterising the non-stereotypical diasporic Chinese people who actively interact with British society, Guo's writing both reshapes the bidirectional impression of cultural symbols and presents the process of becoming a transnational cosmopolitan with a new migrant subjectivity.

As the "new" Chinese diaspora, they neither self-position as the Other to assert Chineseness, nor represent the West as the imaginary myth, but rather play the role of a bridge that enables mutual understanding. The Chinese word for "bridge" – *qiao* 桥 – is echoed by the term *haiwai huaqiao* 海外华侨 (overseas Chinese). As the pun suggests, this group of people in the first half of the twentieth century built a bridge for the embryonic modernisation of China by virtue of the scientific knowledge and capital they had accumulated overseas (Ong 133). In a keynote speech delivered at the Asia Society conference, Michael Woo proposes that, with an increasing number of Chinese people settling overseas, the Chinese minority has become "bridge builders". Here, the term "bridge" gains bidirectional resonance due to these individuals' current prominence in transnational cultural communication and capital flow. Guo's writing diverges from both the long-lasting nostalgia of Mo's *Sour Sweet* and the celebration of immigration of Chang's and Hong's autobiographical memoirs. Instead, it focuses on the in-between status of the new Chinese diaspora in the UK through the metaphor of bridging differences.

Discussion of the cultural unconscious, as well as the strategy of writing against it, provides an insightful framework for the exploration of Guo's writing on the new Chinese diaspora, which distinguishes itself from the conventional mode of representing an ethnic minority within a Western-centric ideology. Guo's

literary creation not only writes back to the British Empire, but also challenges the stability of Chineseness which has been solidified by Confucianism, manifesting her migrant subjectivity in transcultural communication. Whereas Liu offers a mild cultural translation, Guo shows a more incisive consciousness against stereotyping and reconstructs cultural symbols from a transnational perspective. Her writing thereby contributes a new and fresher trans-ethnic theme to contemporary British Chinese literature.

Previous Research on Xiaolu Guo

Xiaolu Guo, a prolific British Chinese writer, has drawn much attention from contemporary literary circles; the two of her works discussed in this chapter have both received several critical articles and reviews since their publication. As previously mentioned, *Dictionary for Lovers* characterises its protagonist, Z, and her British lover as non-stereotypical Chinese and Western characters, respectively. Many scholars approach this novel from the perspective of a rebellion against the conventional narrative mode of ethnic writing. Weimin Delcroix-Tang reads Guo's characterisation of Z within the context of anti-Orientalism, arguing that this novel satirises the obsolete Chinese images cemented by previous Anglophone writings (74). Xing Yu and Kaiyi Zhang interpret the novel with reference to the "new woman", distinguishing Z from those female characters framed as the Other, and demonstrate the shrinking difference between China and the West in contemporary society (56; 81). Furthermore, Kong examines it "within [a] biopolitical and geopolitical perspective", thereby offering a "rethinking of the politics of the Anglophone novel" (476).

Beginning with only broken English and ending with fluency, the language improvement traced through the novel epitomises Z's active adaptation to British life and the process of her identity construction. A certain number of scholars thus treat the transcultural communication lying behind the language as an entry point to the novel. Z's experience is used as a case study by Rachael Gilmour to illustrate the complications of "translational writing" and to examine the possibilities and

limitations of a translingual identity living between languages (207). Eunju Hwang attributes the failure of Z's love to ineffective transcultural communication, using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of language and culture, as well as Silvan Tomkin's theory of emotion, to cast light on the reasons for this failure of communication (69). Analysing the focus on linguistic phenomena in the novel with reference to the impact of globalisation, Ania Spyra elucidates Guo's attempt to rewrite the monolingual family romance (445).

Guo's autobiographical memoir, *Once Upon a Time*, which presents her life experience from the East to the West, has drawn comments from two different standpoints. Focusing on the suffering Guo experienced in China, Rose George sympathetically compares her to a Chinese Cinderella and considers her emigration to the UK as an admirable tale of survival (32). Similar opinions have also been expressed by Terry Hong. This may seem like a high-minded evaluation of the memoir, but such comments reflect the stereotypical assumption that the West is an ideal refuge for immigrants exiled from their homeland, driving the process of ethnic labelling. This pattern of thought is still in the shadows of Orientalism, placing the West in a superior position to the East, and ignoring the author's deterritorialisation and transcendence of such an outdated discourse.

In contrast, Megan Walsh interprets this memoir from a trans-ethnic standpoint, arguing that *Once Upon a Time*, unlike conventional immigrant memoirs of exile, neither romanticises Guo past nor glorifies her new home (51). Walsh pays greater attention to Guo's identity as a lonely artist, and emphasises her self-characterisation as an "orphan" in Europe much like she was in a village in south-eastern China (51). Similarly, Lara Feigel titles her review of Guo's work "Neither Here nor There" to underline the author's rootlessness, and notes Guo's reference to the myth "Journey to the West" (8). Indeed, Guo's literary adaptation affiliates her not with Cinderella but rather with "parentless, self-made heroes", such as the Monkey King (*OUT* 314). Furthermore, Sarah Howe reminds us that a crucial reason for Guo's decision to leave China and write in English was to escape China's strict censorship regime. Howe concentrates on the latter part of the

memoir, which presents the process by which Guo became an international writer and filmmaker (27).

Previous research on Guo's writing considers both her resistance to old-fashioned representations of the Chinese diaspora and the lingering Orientalist craze in English literary circles. These two opposing streams illustrate that Western centrism, as the legacy of colonialism and a conspirator in neo-imperialism, still plays a considerable role in the discourse surrounding China–West communication. The perspective of writing against the cultural unconscious explains why cultural symbols in Guo's works – which are not as conventional as they are often understood to be – are endowed with transnational meanings. Moreover, Guo's reconstruction of traditional Chinese symbols reflects the process of anti-ethnification in contemporary British Chinese literature. The next section elucidates changes in the meanings of typical cultural symbols in *Dictionary for Lovers* through its representation of non-stereotypical British and Chinese characters.

Non-Stereotypical British and Chinese Symbols

In conventional overseas Chinese writings, such as Mo's early works, Chinese symbols are normally used to emphasise ethnic identity. This kind of representation is likely to be influenced by the cultural unconscious of Western centrism, and it alienates knowledge of China in a self-Orientalist context. However, in *Dictionary for Lovers*, Guo deconstructs the connotations of many Chinese symbols, whether familiar to Chinese or to Westerners, and interprets them from a transnational perspective. Furthermore, Western symbols, which are represented less positively than usual, appear as the Other from the Chinese perspective, inducing a reverse cultural shock. Through the bidirectional interpretation of cultural symbols, Guo's work of fiction reveals the effect of the Western-centric cultural unconscious on knowledge production, arouses the consciousness needed to resist it, and contributes to writing on the migrant subjectivity of the new Chinese diaspora.

Collapsing the "Western Myth"

> "Before the meeting, they're thinking, I must be quite cute, sweet – a
> cute Oriental," she says. "But I'm much heavier and angrier than people
> imagine. I'm much more anarchist than classical writers – not a little
> Chinese peasant writer." Cute isn't the word for Xiaolu Guo; acute
> definitely is. (Tonkin, "Xiaolu Guo")

Due to the Anglosphere's market expectation of Chinese fantasies, the representation of Western symbols is not predominant in most overseas Chinese writings, just as Mo's *Sour Sweet* offers few descriptions of the local equivalents in London. However, in *Dictionary for Lovers*, Western symbols are frequently portrayed via Z's growing awareness of the British Isles. Undoubtedly, Occidentalist discourse has exerted a powerful influence on Chinese impressions of the West; yet, with rapid globalisation narrowing the gap between China and Euramerica, Chinese Anglophone writing has developed a greater diversity of voices in depictions of the West (Kong 476). As a new-generation British Chinese writer, Guo deconstructs the "Western myth" established by Occidentalism by pinpointing the disparity between the imagined West and the real West. Indeed, Guo's writing constitutes a form of "writing back", as it "question[s] the bases of European and British metaphysics" and "challenge[s] the world-view that can polarise centre and periphery in the first place" (Ashcroft et al. 32). Therefore, in *Dictionary for Lovers*, British symbols appear in the minor use of a diasporic subject, which, by virtue of the perspective of minor literature, provides a counterplot to the Western-centric cultural unconscious.

At the beginning of the novel, Guo describes the West as an ideal Other through Z's imagination. Before coming to the UK, Z heard about an excess of magnificence about the Western world, but she gains an unexpectedly awful first impression of London. As Delcroix-Tang claims, a reverse cultural shock is presented, mimicking how a coloniser or Westerner feels when he visits a quondam colony or the underdeveloped Orient (76). On Z's first night in London –

a prominent symbol of Western society – she stays in an old and shabby British hostel. "Standing middle of the room, I feeling strange. This is *The West*" (*DL* 13).[25] From that moment onwards, Z starts to compare what she sees in the West with how the West is taught and understood in China. On seeing an angry beggar staring at her, she feels confused: "<u>I am taught</u> everybody in West has social security and medical insurance, so, why he needs begging" (*DL* 14). In her preformed opinion, "London <u>should be</u> like emperor's city", but "[she] cannot feel it", as she cannot see the big posters of David Beckham or the Spice Girls that are hung everywhere in China (*DL* 14). Learning from a "<u>middle school textbook</u>" that "London is the Capital of fog", Z has to accept that "I waiting two days already, but no fogs" (*DL* 21). After making contact with British-Arabic agents "[whose] English no good too", Z expresses regret that "London, <u>by appearance</u>, so noble, respectable, but when I follow these Alis, I find London a refugee camp" (*DL* 22).

The underlined words in excerpts above indicate Western centrism's unconscious ideological infiltration into Chinese perceptions of the West, but the disparities highlight Z's confusion and disappointment with London. The function of Z in the novel is to deconstruct the "Western myth" and replace it with the "real" West, thereby representing a deterritorialised West from the perspective of minor literature. Encountering many other minority groups, such as Arabic agents, Z becomes aware that immigrants from British ex-colonies and elsewhere are transforming London into a multicultural metropolis and gradually blurring the boundary between the East and the West. Consequently, this process is constructing a new meaning for this "Western" city. In this sense, Guo's representation of London through the eyes of a Chinese girl distinguishes it from the British symbols that have been canonised in Occidentalist discourse "as modern, as civilised, as superior, as developed and progressive" (Venn 3). The deterritorialisation of the "Western myth" not only accelerates the process of

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[25] *Dictionary for Lovers* begins with broken English, so a variety of grammatical mistakes may appear in quotations. Guo's language usage will also be discussed in this section.

"writing back", but also suggests a way to free Chinese people from their unconscious "inferiority complex" in the face of the West.

Correspondingly, Chinese symbols in *Dictionary for Lovers* are not characterised ethnically, as is familiar to most Westerners. Instead, Z uses them to break down Western centrism. As MacKerras claims, communism, together with Confucianism, occupies a significant position in Western images of modern China (151). In early British Chinese writings, this symbol is usually linked with Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution to represent China negatively (Xiao, "Overview" 152). In *Dictionary for Lovers*, however, Z states that "in West, Mao's words work for me, though they not work in China now" (*DL* 28). Through Z's statement, Guo invalidates the symbolic power of Mao's words, while using them as a form of pastiche to satirically comment on the fact that Chairman Mao still enjoys a personality cult in contemporary China. For example, Z cannot understand that demonstrations in Britain are held to stop wars, as Mao's mandate is to "oppose unjust war with just war, whenever possible" (*DL* 30). Demonstration is a common mode of expressing dissatisfaction and appeals to power in Euramerican countries, but not in China. By quoting the *Little Red Book*, Z describes the act of demonstration as the Other from the "typical" Chinese perspective. Thus, through the reverse alienation of knowledge of the West, Guo's writing shows the character of anti-Orientalism.

Moreover, faced with Westerners' solidified impressions of things Chinese, Z's response reshapes their perceptions and reflects the subjectivity of the new Chinese diaspora. When her British lover describes Chinese people's "worship" of Mao, Z is not even willing to deny this claim, but merely replies ironically, "Don't you know now we worship America?" (*DL* 78). Z's parody of Occidentalism on the one hand mounts a counterattack on her lover's Orientalist interpretation of China, and on the other hand reminds us of the Western centrism that still obstructs the development of a Chinese subjectivity. On discovering that Tibet is understood not as a component but as a colony of China, Z realises that her lover "see[s] things from a White English's point" and states that "nobody in China wants go to that

desert" (*DL* 181-82). Here, Z describes Tibet, which has long been linked to the debate on its sovereignty in international (predominantly Euramerican) opinion, as a place to which Han Chinese show little interest in moving. By expressing an individual opinion that satirises the mainstream Western perception of China, Guo reveals the diversity of contemporary Chinese culture. In this way, things Chinese are displayed vividly and concretely, compared with their distorted and stereotypical representation in Orientalist texts. Through the coexistence of Western and Chinese symbols in *Dictionary for Lovers*, not only does a Chinese minority participate in "writing back" to the British Empire, but Guo also exerts her migrant subjectivity to bridge the cognitive differences between the two cultures and shatter the stereotypes pertaining to them.

Disillusionment with British Gentlemen

In addition to the disappointing impression of London, the relationship between Z and her British lover becomes another focus in Guo's deconstruction of the "Western myth". Here, Guo deterritorialises the symbol of British gentlemen by othering Z's lover. In Orientalist texts, British men are usually characterised as a symbol of the wealthy and powerful gentleman. Moreover, it is often the case that these supposedly superior qualities are what allows them not merely to possess Oriental women, but also to speak for them and inform readers that they are "typically Oriental" (Said, *Orientalism* 6). The Orientalist tradition in English literature resulted in descriptions of Asian women as tame, tender, disciplined, and obedient to the Western civilisation dominated by White men. However, to break down the dichotomy between British gentlemen and compliant Asians who were shaped by the Western-centric cultural unconscious, Guo portrays Z's British lover as an ordinary forty-four-year-old man, without advanced education or particular wealth, who does not even identify with mainstream values. Encountering various points of divergence between the East and the West, Z does not cater to Western values in the Orientalist manner, but rather consciously rethinks the relationship between herself and her lover, as well as that between

China and Britain. The figure of the British gentlemen in the dominant position is thereby destroyed, and the symbolic power and reliable subjectivity of the new Chinese diaspora develop in Guo's writing.

In Guo's description of Z's British lover, both words and actions are used to represent him as the Other. This anti-Orientalist strategy deterritorialises the symbol of British gentlemen and reverses the positions of Western men and Oriental women formed by Orientalist tradition; in *Dictionary for Lovers*, it is Z's British lover, rather than Z, who is depicted as being mysterious and thus drawing in readers (X. Yu 82; Zhang 58). The first time they meet, the otherness of this British man from Z's perspective is emphasised: "You tell me your name, but how I remember English name? Western name are un-rememberable, like all Western look the same" (*DL* 48). The name of Z's lover is never provided in the novel, and this intentional namelessness can be interpreted as a counterattack on Western centrism. As they learn more about each other, Z discovers that her lover is bisexual and has a troubled past; he is also a sculptor with an artistic temperament as well as a farmer with fascinating charm. In this sense, Z's lover is portrayed as a male character distinct from, and even contradictory to, the dominant Western masculinity associated with Orientalist discourse. Faced with her lover's world, which is so distant from hers, Z feels, "You quite Yin, and I very Yang" (*DL* 73). As explained in Chapter 1, traditional Chinese culture specifies yin as female and yang as male, strengthening the Orientalist representation of Chinese women. Z's direct dislocation of this system, connecting her male lover with yin and herself with yang, presents both her British lover and herself as non-stereotypical gender symbols.

What confuses Z the most is that her lover seems to reject most aspects of the modern world. He has no passion for material life, dislikes metropolitan cities such as London, and is particularly ill-disposed towards intellectuals, wishing to "go back to the life of a farmer" (*DL* 153). Guo's representation of the British man thus deconstructs the emphasis on modernism, internationality, and civilisation in descriptions of the West in Occidentalist discourse. Ironically, however, Z's lover illustrates the cliché of modern, bourgeois culture, expressing a desire to leave the

urban and return to the rural. This, contradicting the long-standing Chinese image of the West, represents the stereotypical symbol of urban angst in modernist English literature (Madden 62). By portraying a "strange" British man through the eyes of his Chinese lover, Guo's writing not only deterritorialises the absoluteness of British gentlemen, but also frees itself from the Western-centric cultural unconscious. The reverse shock causes Z to become disillusioned with her lover – his role as one who is White British, but not a gentleman, and the increasing cultural misunderstandings lead Z to break off their relationship. The resistance to romance demonstrates Z's subjectivity both as female and as diasporic, separating her from the stereotype of the subordinate female in Orientalist discourse.

The differences in the symbol of love between Z and her British lover further collapse the idea of the superiority of Western civilisation, as well as the couple's relationship. Meanwhile, the Chinese connotation of love cannot exert symbolic power in a diasporic context without transnational reconstruction, as Z's reference is presented as ironically stereotypical. Ineffective transcultural communication is regarded as the primary cause of their broken relationship (Hwang 69). In other words, as a Chinese person, Z does not abandon her native culture while being with her British lover, and their irreconcilable cultural differences lead to their separation. Z thinks that lovers are supposed to always be together, but the British man claims that he has "[his] own life" (*DL* 83). While he believes that privacy should be respected, she wonders "how can intimate live with privacy" (*DL* 109). Confronting these differences, Z tries to see from a Western perspective but finds that they have exceedingly different definitions of family, which means everything to the Chinese understanding of love. Guo adopts a relatively stereotypical meaning to generalise Z's perception of love, which (discarded in her most recent autobiographical work) here indicates the transcultural gap between Z and her lover. In Z's opinion, the distance and independence emphasised by her British lover explain "why Westerners much more separated, lonely, and have more Old People's House", which is not what she expects in the future (*DL* 109). By mingling family love with romantic love from the typical Chinese perspective, Z misinterprets and deterritorialises Western values regarding love, which

disappoint her. Z's questioning of so-called Western values denies the characteristic of silence traditionally bestowed on Chinese characters, echoing the achievement of Guo's own writing against the Western-centric cultural unconscious.

As their differences accumulate, their relationship can be encapsulated as follows: "I say I love you, but you say you want to have freedom" (*DL* 197). On realising that the British man has "never really [paid] attention to [her Chinese] culture, Z chooses to leave him and return to China at the end of her English course (*DL* 289). The failure of their love not only entails the separation of two individuals, but also reflects a mutual disidentification with the same symbol, which holds different meanings in different cultural contexts. Therefore, Guo's description of this broken transcultural relationship offers a deterritorialised Chinese reading of British symbols on the one hand; yet, on the other hand, it demonstrates the need to reconstruct Chinese symbols from a transnational perspective, as this helps to establish effective transcultural communication. By representing a non-stereotypical British gentleman as the Other and stressing an Asian woman's disillusionment with his otherness, *Dictionary for Lovers* deprives British symbols of their conventional superiority and collapses the "Western myth" of splendour once again. Reviewing Guo's characterisation of the unconventional Z, and how it is heightened through its contrast with Z's British lover, it seems that the character Z herself is critical of Guo's reconstruction of Chinese symbols with transnational meanings.

Expanding Social Circles

In outdated characterisations, such as that of Mo's *Sour Sweet*, overseas Chinese are usually regarded as an "introverted and self-reliant" group who are extensively dependent on their "ethnic and familial networks", "ranging from business and employment to fellowship and leisure" (Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain* 335). This account of the Chinese minority, as well as the presupposition of their poor English, was long associated with an unsettled and displaced stereotype of the

Chinese diaspora. However, Z's characterisation transforms this symbol of stable Chineseness and manifests a transnational identity in her interaction with the locals. Therefore, she and the Western world influence each other. Z's initiative in making contact with Westerners is consistent with recent findings regarding the social networks of British Chinese: "relations with friends and neighbours [are] far more frequent than with relatives, especially for younger Chinese" (Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain* 335). The relationship between Z and her British lover represents a significant site at which Chinese identity and British identity interact. During her travels in continental Europe, Z gains multiple perspectives that further help her learn to negotiate different identity orientations. Whilst her perception of European countries from the Oriental perspective reminds her of her inherent Chinese identity, her realisation of her bond with London confirms her identification with Britain. By engaging with these social circles, Z completes her identity reconstruction.

Z's British lover plays a significant role throughout the novel in expanding her social circle in the UK. Following his appearance, Z moves out of her original Chinese host family's house to live with an English one, and her relationship with her lover helps her to form a British identity. At the beginning of the relationship, Z feels a sense of ethnic inferiority when she encounters her lover's British identity: "My bad English don't match your beautiful language. I think I fall in love with you, but my love cannot match your beauty" (*DL* 61). An unequal relationship develops in this respect because he is a native English speaker and she is not. This form of hierarchical positioning seems to be dominated by self-Orientalisation. When Z states that "[m]y whole body is your colony", her self-colonisation is strengthened due to her inferior Chinese ethnic identity (*DL* 132). In this way, as a crucial tool for social contact, the importance of language proficiency to the reconstruction of identity is presupposed.

Fortunately, with the progression of Z's English, her relationship with her lover changes, as does her identity. When Z starts to "speak English properly", her lover becomes weary of the role of an intimate English tutor, which, he feels,

impairs his own linguistic expression: "Now when I talk to other people, I become slower and slower. I am losing my words" (*DL* 177-78). The lost language, in Guo's strategy of writing back, symbolises the disempowered position of Z's British lover. Therefore, Z becomes capable of escaping the complex of ethnic inferiority and begins to re-examine her relationship with her lover from a transnational perspective. In one relatively Orientalist episode, he asks her, "How did you burn the rice again? A Chinese woman shouldn't burn rice again, you eat it everyday" (*DL* 193). From frequent scenes such as this, Z realises the communication dilemma they face: she transnationalises her identity but he does not, which is described as the reason for their disillusioned love (Hwang 69). In these circumstances, their failed love is not only a manifestation of Z's dissatisfaction with a single Chinese or British identity, but also a reflection of Guo's negotiated strategy for reconstructing Chinese symbols beyond ethnic territorialisation.

Z also meets more people with different backgrounds on her journey to continental Europe, during which the transnationality she has begun to form is strengthened. Although previous research pays little attention to her experiences of travelling, this in fact occasions a double diaspora for Z – being away from both her motherland and the UK, which has become relatively familiar to her. Due to her attachment to her British lover, London becomes the place she misses the most while travelling through Europe. As she states, "My body is in Berlin, but my heart is left in London, left for you" and "I just want go back to London, to my lover" (*DL* 222, 212). Through her strong connection to London, Z feels so accustomed to Britishness that she gains an unprecedented affinity with the English language in comparison with French, which she finds stranger. When communicating with European people, she does not even "need to remember how to speak Chinese" (*DL* 215), at which point Z's identification as being British reaches its peak.

Meanwhile, the Chinese identity rooted in Z's consciousness never wholly disappears, whether she is in the UK or in continental Europe. Influenced by her education in mainland China, whenever Z thinks of Europe, she involuntarily recalls that "[t]he size of China is almost the size of the whole [of] Europe",

accompanied by a sense of pride in her motherland (*DL* 214). However, the moment that she sets foot on the continent, "many problems to understand this world around [her]" replace Z's feeling of pride with a sense of estrangement from her Chinese identity (*DL* 212). During her visit to Berlin, for example, words and expressions such as "the Wall", "the Socialism", "the Second World War", and "Fascist" found in Chinese stereotypes of Germany do not leave an impression on Z (*DL* 221). In fact, her "problems" come from her broadened transnational perspective, where the disparities between what she sees in and what she imagined about Europe destabilise her Chinese identity as her cognitive basis for the world. By pinpointing these disparities and problems, Guo develops Z as a transnational character who becomes able to perceive the Western world free from the outdated cultural unconsciousness rooted in China–West interaction.

Constructing a Transnational Identity

> Ms Z's mobility beyond her own city is dangerous for her cultural identity, from which she is estranged by the end of the book. Her experience of London has robbed her of her identity and has rendered her homeless in the world. (Murray and Vincent 76)

In their studies on migration, Benton and Gomez state that habits of language use are "at the heart of identity and linguistic practices and can be a telling measure of ethnic loyalty" (*Chinese in Britain* 335). In a similar manner, Ostendorf argues that, to be accepted by a host culture, minority writers are accustomed to avoiding language experimentation and creative literacy (581). Nevertheless, Guo claimed in an interview that *Dictionary for Lovers* marked a "turning point" in her writing, as it took an "experimental form" and resembled a "character's monologue" (Ang and Guo). Indeed, *Dictionary for Lovers* starts with broken English but ends with perfect expression as Z gradually acquires the English language. As the protagonist of this novel, Z is the representative of Chinese symbols, and her language improvement points directly to the initiative of members of the new Chinese diaspora, who seek to transcend their ethnic identity. Ironically, compared with

Western acceptance of the use of Chinese Pidgin English in early immigrant writings such as *Sour Sweet*, *Dictionary for Lovers* has been criticised for its language experimentation (Mirsky; Cadwalladhr). This contrast suggests that Westerners tacitly approve the ethnic label reflected in literature by Chinese minority writers, taking the Chinese characters' poor English for granted. However, this cultural unconsciousness is deterritorialised through Guo's portrayal of Z, who represents a non-stereotypical Chinese symbol.

In accordance with its title, the novel presents the character's diasporic life in the form of a dictionary, as Z records new words and phrases alongside the experiences from which she has learned them. In this process, the improvement of her English helps her to develop a transnational identity. Due to the bilingualism of the writer, *Dictionary for Lovers* rewrites the monolingual family romance within the context of globalisation (Spyra 445). Indeed, the purpose of Z's coming to the UK is to meet the requirement of international trade: "studying how speak and write English in England, then coming back to China [and] making lots money for [her parents'] shoes factory by big international business relations" (*DL* 12). Due to her specific goal of transforming education into profit, Z's studying abroad constitutes an accumulation of cultural capital, which is "convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital" (Bourdieu, "Forms" 243). This is also seen an impetus for transnational publics. In this sense, Z's migrant subjectivity separates her from early immigrants, who, as represented in Mo's *Sour Sweet*, were only able to make a living via ethnic food businesses. It also explains her active adaptation to British society, bringing transnationality into the contemporary Chinese diasporic symbol.

Z's ambition is referenced within the content of the novel itself: "now I studying hard on English, soon I stealing their language too" (*DL* 18). In the process of her learning, Z, as the symbol reflecting the positive subjectivity of the new Chinese diaspora, masters the English language little by little. One day she finds, "I must be a bit English now" (*DL* 267); this feeling of being English reflects her preliminary acquisition of a transnational identity, making her more confident

when communicating with British people. At the end of the novel, Z recognises that "I talk and talk, more and more. I steal your words. I steal all your beautiful words. I speak your language" (*DL* 293). The repeated metaphor that compares language to stolen goods suggests Z's desire to possess English proficiency in order to fully and coherently represent herself. This scramble for language echoes Bourdieu's discussion of cultural production as a field of struggle in which, "what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer" (*Field* 42). Therefore, in *Dictionary for Lovers*, Z's constant improvement in English not only shapes her transnational identity, but also suggests that Chinese people who accumulate cultural capital in the UK are able to represent Chinese symbols by themselves to the Western world.

Furthermore, as she understands an increasing number of English words, Z becomes more deeply integrated into British culture, displaying an open-minded and analytical thinking. In this process, she clings less and less to her Chineseness and her identity thus becomes a negotiated one. The transformation of Z's attitude towards the English language, and to the British Isles as a whole, is embodied in the step-by-step changes in the entries of her "dictionary". The word "alien" is the first entry in the dictionary, which is also the first expression that Z gains in the UK when people split into two lines according to the instructions of "ALIEN and NON ALIEN" at Heathrow Airport (*DL* 9). To describe an alien identity, Z quotes a Chinese proverb – "Birds have their bird language, beasts have their beast talk"[26] – followed by the original Chinese in parentheses to express the idea that "English they totally another species" (*DL* 10). Therefore, upon her arrival in Britain, Z's ethnic identity makes Chinese the first reference point in her efforts to domesticate the English language and understand British culture.

However, as Spyra claims, the labour of language learning demands of Z a flexibility of attitude and a willingness to reshape the identity she has built in Chinese, as revealed in the entry for "isolate" (454). In this entry, Z admits that she

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[26] The Original Chinese is 鸟有鸟语, 兽有兽言.

is losing her Chinese frame of reference: "But here, in this place in the West, I lost my reference. And I have to rely on my own sensibility. But my sensibility toward the world is so unclear" (*DL* 157). Most notably, in the entry for "identity" Z is struck by the phrase "identity crisis", due to her increasing sense of being English, and tries to think about her own identity "in an intellectual way" (*DL* 186). Her subsequent statement that "I want to be a citizen of the world" foreshadows both her departure from Britain and her sense of being "out of place" upon returning to China (*DL* 187). Hence, by authorising Z with the symbolic power of a "world citizen", Guo takes the transcendence of ethnic boundaries as a critical characteristic of the new Chinese diaspora. This is echoed in the cosmopolitan pursuit discussed in her latest autobiographical memoir.

Represented as a non-stereotypical Chinese character, Z experiences difficulties with her identity and undergoes more than one identity transformation while developing her migrant subjectivity. Unlike the characters in Mo's *Sour Sweet*, although Z shares identity troubles with the Chen family when first arriving in the UK, she is able to reconstruct a transnational identity in negotiation with both ethnic territorialisation and Western cultural hegemony. Indeed, Z's identity is dynamic. Through a series of pastiches that satirise obsolete Chinese symbols, she changes from a typical Chinese person into a transnational subject, and finally into a world citizen. In this sense, *Dictionary for Lovers* overturns the outmoded stereotypes of the displaced Chinese diaspora found in Mo's early works. Nevertheless, as Guo's first work in English, *Dictionary for Lovers* reflects her tentativeness and ambivalence when entering British literary circles; despite claiming to be a world citizen, Z eventually returns to China, leaving her future ambiguous. Ten years after the publication of this novel, Guo becomes more confident about being a citizen of the world. She thus narrates her immigrant experience in *Once Upon a Time*, which extends the cosmopolitan pursuit in Mo's later works and represents a significant trans-ethnic theme of contemporary British Chinese literature. The next section discusses this most recent work by Guo,

focusing on how more specific Chinese cultural symbols are reconstructed from a transnational perspective via her autobiographical narrative.

Autobiography Echoing Myth

According to Ostendorf, autobiography and the Bildungsroman are the foremost literary genres mastered by minority writers, as their shared drive towards self-determination meets the market expectations of ethnic writing (584). In terms of overseas Chinese writing, auto/biographical narratives of individual or collective experiences map the literary history of diasporic Chinese groups in the West and are favoured by both writers and readers. Filled with self-Orientalist representations of Chinese history, Chang's bestselling *Wild Swans* depicts the story of three generations of women in the author's family and her subsequent emigration to the UK. The book established a paradigm for family memoirs of the Chinese diaspora. An increasing number of immigrant writers have turned to family stories, accompanied by various Chinese symbols as a source of personal, historical, and ethnic understanding of China, and this literary genre has become predominant in British Chinese literature.

Although described as "[t]his generation's *Wild Swans*" by the *Daily Telegraph*, *Once Upon a Time* diverges from the former's obsessive reminiscing about the author's homeland and the depiction of fantasies about China. Guo utilises the English language as a source of cultural power to deconstruct typical Chinese symbols in the representation of her migration, and re-examines them from a trans-ethnic perspective. Whereas *Dictionary for Lovers* rereads general Chinese symbols and tells a story lasting just one year, *Once Upon a Time* pays more attention to specific traditional symbols, culturally deterritorialising and reconstructing them through a successional narration of Guo's diasporic experience. In this way, Guo's rearticulation of Chinese symbols not only goes beyond the Western-centric cultural unconscious, but also tears off her ethnic label and engages with a cosmopolitan context. Most importantly, Guo's use of the popular autobiographical narrative on the one hand ensures that her writing

satisfies the publishing market, and on the other hand enhances the thematic diversity of this literary genre through a counter-stereotyping memoir.

In and Beyond Chinese Culture

> Unlike with so many memoirs of exile or immigration, she neither romanticises her past nor glorifies her new home. Guo is as lonely and culturally dislocated as an "orphan" in a village in south-eastern China as she is in Europe. (Walsh 51)

Writers of Chinese descent are accustomed to recounting traditional myths as a means of self-determination to attract Western attention. In *Once Upon a Time*, Guo treats the tale of the Monkey King self-referentially. The Monkey King, the most striking character in *Journey to the West*, has gradually become a prevailing Chinese symbol in the West; it provides the space to preserve the collective memory of overseas Chinese and represents their cultural identity (Assmann 128). The Monkey King is a relatively complicated symbol in both traditional and contemporary Chinese contexts; originally a simian image derived from religious culture, it has evolved into a heroic character over the centuries. However, in writings by overseas Chinese, the complexity of the symbol of the Monkey King has been defamiliarised during its transcultural migration: whether in the inchoate *The Monkey King* (1978) by Mo and *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989) by Maxine Hong Kingston or in *Once Upon a Time* (2017), the heroism of the character is highlighted for different purposes. Other connotations are simplified, or even omitted, affecting Western perceptions of the symbol. In a report by the British Council, the Monkey King is described as "the archetype of the folk hero, or in modern terms, the superhero", which does not have a single Western equivalent, summarising a deterritorialised representation of this Chinese symbol in the West (Trapp).

In *Once Upon a Time*, differently from *The Monkey King*, in which the superhero of Chinese fiction is assumed to be a White subject (Wallace), Guo

transforms the Monkey King, in line with herself, into a "parentless, self-made hero" (*OUT* 314). The prevalent Chinese version of *Journey to the West* narrates the Monkey King's story in four parts, [27] but Guo's version splits it into five. The former's first part introduces the birth of the Monkey King, who then creates a tremendous uproar in the heavenly palace before converting to Buddhism (chs. 1-7). Due primarily to his chaotic behaviour, the monkey is punished by Buddha by being forced to follow Xuanzang to the West. Guo, meanwhile, depicts his decision to join Xuanzang's pilgrimage as inspired by a voice inside his heart, as a heroic mission to give his life meaning (*OUT* 6). Guo's endorsement of the monkey's initiative thus reflects a spontaneity glimmering in her own pursuit of art, just like her statement at the age of seven: "I wanted to become an artist. I would devote my entire life to that end" (*OUT* 59). The symbol of the Monkey King thus invokes a metaphor for Guo, who has created herself as an art seeker since childhood.

Next, the Chinese classic explains why Xuanzang embarks on a pilgrimage to India: to obtain Buddhist scriptures (chs. 8-12). Xuanzang is alone at his journey's start, and a great deal of ink is expended on descriptions of how he turns the Monkey King, Pigsy, and Sandy into his disciples. To highlight the monkey's heroism, *Once Upon a Time* simplifies the portrayal of other characters and focuses on the monkey's conversion. In Guo's representation, Xuanzang is initially assisted by Pigsy and Sandy; the Monkey King emerges to help them when they encounter a terrible yellow-pink sandstorm, and he is asked by Xuanzang to "tame his cunning trickster" if he wishes to accompany his master (*OUT* 71). In terms of Guo's growth, the Monkey King, who appears with a heroic gesture, symbolises her efforts to be admitted by the Beijing Film Academy to "see the world beyond Wenling" (*OUT* 115). However, Xuanzang's stipulation for the Monkey King suggests that Guo has had to adjust on her journey towards art, restricted by both her family and external factors.

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[27] On the prevalent Chinese version of *Journey to the West*, see the 100-chapter version provided by People's Literature Publishing House in 1980; the equivalent English version is translated by W.J.F. Jenner.

The classic's third part recounts the eighty-one difficulties suffered by Xuanzang and his three disciples (chs. 13-99). Due to their enemies' strength, the Monkey King and his partners occupy a passive position, which may be why they are reduced in Guo's subsequent narration. Having understood that the creature is too wild to be disciplined, Xuanzang places a magical band on his head that deprives him of "his immense power while the master chant[s]" and forces him to "obey his master's authority" (*OUT* 175). The monkey's headband corresponds to the "different stages of censorship" inflicted upon Guo's literary creation in China (*OUT* 223); these limitations, among other setbacks, prompted her to leave for the UK. Surprisingly, in the fourth part, when the pilgrims arrive in the India of legendary "fabulous wealth", they are surprised by its poverty, "brought on by drought" (*OUT* 240). This observation is not in the original work; Guo adds it as a reflection of her disillusionment with the West – "a world of practical problems and difficulties" (*OUT* 245), echoing the collapsed "Western myth" presented in *Dictionary for Lovers*. When prevented from accessing their destination, Vulture Peak in Rajagaha, it is Xuanzang's sincere request, not his disciples' violent hostility, that moves the gatekeepers to "give [them] permission to enter the tower" (*OUT* 241). The gatekeepers here indicate the British publishing industry's market expectations that Guo is supposed to satisfy, and the pilgrims' eventual access to the pagoda mirrors Guo's ultimate realisation of art through her acknowledgement in the West.

In the last part, Xuanzang and his disciples return to Chang'an, receive rewards from the emperor, and disseminate Buddhism throughout China (ch. 100). The Monkey King settling in Chang'an implies a submission to both religion and tradition, which is inconsistent with the symbol of the "parentless, self-made hero" (*OUT* 314). Thus, in Guo's writing, only Xuanzang decides to "dedicate his life to the translation of the scriptures", while the monkey prefers to "return to being a free creature", going back to "the wild without seeing another human being" (*OUT* 301). This freedom is both the monkey's and Guo's, for she has become "free from the burden of [her] family" and able to continue her tour of art (*OUT* 314). In summary, Guo's deterritorialisation and adaptation of the Monkey King story

reflect her quest to become an artist, as she disposes of negative allusions and represents the symbol as that of a hero granted the freedom to realise the value of his life. The use of metaphor to link a myth with oneself is a peculiar writing strategy of the Western Bildungsroman – the coming-of-age novel dealing with how and why the protagonist develops as he does, both morally and psychologically. Above all, paying great attention to the protagonist's pursuit of art, *Once Upon a Time* diverges from the paradigm of ethnic romance to create Chinese fantasies: it can be read as a Künstlerroman (Feigel 8), a common variation on the Bildungsroman, which addresses the formative years of an artist. Despite being an autobiographical memoir, a genre popular with ethnic writing, *Once Upon a Time* is able to deterritorialise its literary categorisation in terms of ethnicity, demonstrating Guo's engagement with minor literature.

Deterritorialised Gender Symbols

According to Guo's autobiographical narrative, as well as the aspiration to become an artist, a feminist consciousness also plays a critical role in her growth. Her perceptions and representations of herself and different male characters break down the Chinese stereotypes of gender symbols. In the Chinese cultural context, people's cognition of gender is profoundly influenced by Confucianism; [28] in addition to the yin-yang metaphor delineated in both *Sour Sweet* and *Dictionary for Lovers*, the nei-wai binary opposition signifies the strict segregation of women and men into two conflicting spheres (Rosenlee 6). The nei-wai boundary formally confines women to the familial realm of nei, or "domestic skills and household management", and men to wai, or "literary learning and public services" (Rosenlee 6-7). This distinction and Confucian discipline of women have been deeply rooted in Chinese people's cultural unconsciousness. However, in her self-creation, Guo

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[28] Although Confucianism was severely criticised by Chinese intellectuals and elites during the May Fourth period (from around the 1910s to the 1920s), and by authorities of the PRC during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the ideology has still had a considerable impact on quotidian life in China.

detaches the label of family attached to the Chinese women, severing the necessary connection between love and family as emphasised in Z's transnational relationship. Moreover, Chinese men in the West are intentionally marginalised and regularly represented as oppressed symbols, lacking masculinity (J. Chan 119-20). They thus serve as a foil to the absolute power of White men within the cultural unconscious of Western centrism. This is not only common in early Asian American writings by Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and David Henry Hwang, but also appears in Mo's characterisation of Chen in *Sour Sweet*. In response, writers such as Gus Lee, Shawn Wong, and Frank Chin seek to resist creating stereotypes, and Guo follows in portraying various kinds of Chinese male symbols to deterritorialise the rigid Western impression.

Abandoned at birth by her parents for her gender and brought up by her poor grandmother, Guo's early realisation of the difficulties of being a woman affected the course of her life for decades. In the 1970s, the residents of her hometown Shitang (a fishing village in the east of Zhejiang Province) were still chained to a feudal social system, in which "women continued to be treated like cheap goods" (*OUT* 18). Learning that her grandmother was married to her grandfather as a child bride and never gained his affection, Guo was aggrieved at the unfairness meted out to women in the institution of marriage, in which "every man beat his wife and children" as seen through her tender eyes (*OUT* 19). To keep herself safe from domestic violence, Guo decided in her young heart to "remain unmarried" (*OUT* 19). Feigel praises Guo's courage for "reject[ing] her destiny as a woman" (8); to be precise, the role that Guo opposes is the traditional model of women restricted to the Confucian idea of nei. Furthermore, Guo represents Guanyin – the Goddess of Mercy in Chinese mythology, prayed to for happiness – as a symbol of an independent woman who does not establish a family of her own (*OUT* 21). By removing the necessity of marriage and family for female happiness, *Once Upon a Time* reveals Guo's feminist self-creation in opposition to Confucian patriarchy from its inception.

At the age of seven, Guo's parents retrieved her to receive education in Wenling (a mid-sized town in Zhejiang Province). However, her mother favoured Guo's elder brother and forced Guo, as a girl, to do a vast amount of housework (*OUT* 79). Confucian thought deems it natural for a female to attend to household duties; yet, Guo's resentment of nei foreshadows her rupture with traditional Confucianism. Upon reading Confucius' *Analects* in a Chinese class that "Wei nü zi yu xiao ren nan yang", Guo attributed the suppression of females to Confucianism, which resulted in the brutal treatment of women and the relentless prosecution of nonconformists (*OUT* 159).[29] Consciously resisting Confucian thought, which bored her, Guo immersed herself in Western modern poetry, which, widely translated and introduced to Chinese readers since the 1980s, "re-energise[d]" her (*OUT* 160). Western culture, emerging in Guo's world with an Occidentalist gesture, was considered as a representation of modernity and superiority opposite to Confucianism, until Guo realised, after reading a series of feminist works, that gender issues were common in both the East and the West. By characterising herself from a radical feminist perspective, Guo not only deterritorialises stereotypes of Chinese women, but also transcends the Occident–Orient/Self–Other binary opposition in conventional immigrant narratives.

As time goes on, Guo develops relationships with different men, based on whom she represents diverse Chinese male characters that shatter the aforementioned emasculated stereotype. Guo reports her first sexual experience in her early teenage years at which she was abused by one of her father's colleagues, who instructed her, "Stop crying! Every girl has to go through this!" (*OUT* 134). As the idea of sex in 1980s China was "an ordeal endured at first with terror, then with mute disgust and finally numbness", Guo, as well as numerous other suffering girls, was too scared to fight back (*OUT* 133). The characterisation of a rapist who takes sexual assault for granted comments with cruel irony on

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[29] The original Chinese is 唯女子与小人难养. Guo translates this sentence into English herself: "Of all people, women and petty servants are the most difficult to deal with. If you are close to them, they lose their humbleness. If you maintain a reserve towards them, they grow discontented and complain" (*OUT* 159).

China's poor sexual education. The experience of physical invasion also elicited fear and shame in Guo. Fearing further violence, she then fell in love with her teacher, Mr Lin, for "his manner was so gentle", unlike that of the "macho, rough and insensitive" adult men she had encountered (*OUT* 153). Unfortunately, Guo's first love ended when she got an abortion; she realised that she had to leave her lover for the sake of "[keeping] larger goals in sight" (Feigel 8). Guo's infatuation with a "gentle", perhaps even slightly feminine, man hints at her disgust with the violent masculinity of Chinese men, and her break with him reflects her refusal to emotional entanglements that may frustrate her ambition to become an artist and embrace a wider world.

Subsequently, while at college in Beijing, Guo began a relationship with a young man named Jiang, only to find out that he was "a very jealous person" with a vicious temperament and violent tendencies (*OUT* 203). After breaking up with Jiang, Guo was attracted to a Western film producer, Paul, who "spoke and acted with a kind of freedom and curiosity" (*OUT* 204). After having sex with him, she thought for the first time that "love and sex could live together without becoming each other's enemy" (*OUT* 206). Guo's sexual enjoyment with Paul not only breaks the emotional pattern of fear formed in her childhood, but also explains why she decided to reject Chinese men afterwards. Not long after Paul left, she dated another American boy, Andy. Guo soon realised that her interest in non-Chinese men was in fact her way to revolt against "the culture of masculinity in China"; this rejection, moreover, was inextricably linked to "all [her] bad experiences with the old traditions" (*OUT* 213). This statement ironically destroys the symbol of Chinese men as lacking virility in Orientalist representation and furnishes them with an updated symbolic power associated with Chinese orthodoxy – even if some are characterised negatively.

Ultimately, having made her own way for many years, Guo settled down in London and built a home with Steve, an Australian philosopher who is "on one planet" and does not experience a "profound disagreement" with her (*OUT* 282). In this way, Guo's depiction of her emotional experience represents a counter-

stereotyping symbol of contemporary Chinese women, transcending both gender and ethnic territorialisation. Her affiliation with and final choice of a non-Chinese partner reflects the transnational identity she has developed.

The Quest to Become a Nomad

> While Guo strategically invokes the category of Hui in this essay to ironize her identification with Chineseness within the PRC, when facing the Western media she does not insist on her Hui difference but readily assumes the label of Chinese in order to speak out against prevailing clichés about China. (Kong 476)

En route to becoming an artist, Guo not only fights against gender oppression but also slips the leash of the symbol of "home" valued by Chinese tradition since her youth. In the traditional Chinese context, the concept of "home" signifies a fixed place in which moral discipline and training in public behaviour are carried out, as Confucians require "public and private spheres to be in harmony rather than in conflict", provided "nei" and "wai" perform their respective duties (Lew et al. 215). The Confucian definition, however, contradicts the modern understanding of "home" as a shelter from the impersonal public realm where emotional connections are cultivated and strengthened between close companions (Duncan 38). Disgusted with Confucianism, Guo compares herself to an uprooted and displaced "nomad in both body and mind", in order to withstand the territorialisation of the traditional Chinese formulation of "home" (*OUT* 1). Moving her home from the "Far East" to the East End and dividing her time between London and Berlin, Guo physically lives a nomadic life. More importantly, writing in English makes Guo a mental nomad in relation to her own language, which echoes Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation of Prague German as "a nomadic movement of deterritorialisation" (*Minor Literature* 25). Hence, the reinterpretation of the symbol of "home" from a nomadic perspective illustrates a trans-ethnic theme in Guo's autobiographical narrative, which is separated from

the quest for ethnic ties in conventional immigrant memoirs exemplified by *Wild Swans*.

Despite living in a small village, Guo's desire to become an artist was formed at a very early age, influencing many of her life decisions. Two memories from her time in Shitang are represented as fuel for her adult development; the narrative logic reveals the process of self-discovery and self-creation in autobiography (see more discussion on autobiographical truth in ch. 4). The first is a Taoist monk's promise that she would "cross the sea" and "travel to the Nine Continents" as a "peasant warrior" (*OUT* 55). Although Guo was too young to clearly understand the meaning of such a future, the monk's words suited her original aspiration to be "free to go wherever [she] wanted" (*OUT* 30). By emphasising the significance of the Taoist monk's prophecy for her entire life, Guo shapes her identity as a nomad in a predestined and presupposed narrative manner. Guo's second remarkable experience is an encounter with a group of art students by the seaside; their paintings inspired her to believe that imagination had the power to "reshape a drab and colourless reality into a luminous world" (*OUT* 314). From that moment, she knew she needed to wait for her chance to leave the village, and "wanted to become an artist" for the first time (*OUT* 59). The two scenes rationalise her self-characterisation as a nomadic artist, which expands the understanding of the Chinese diaspora nowadays beyond the stereotypical pattern of escape and survival.

In adolescence, while Guo maintained a strained relationship with her mother, Guo's father provided her valuable guidance on art. Influenced by her painter father, Guo read Walt Whitman, whose line – "You must travel it by yourself" – deeply touched Guo in an age when "Chinese people barely travelled" (*OUT* 143, 55). By comparison, Guo was sick of the Confucius quote "Fu mu zai, bu yuan you, you bi you fang", which means, "While his parents are alive, the son may not venture far abroad. If he does go abroad, he must have a fixed place of abode"

(159).[30] "A fixed place" reflects the significance of "home" in traditional Chinese values, which essentially restrains its people, especially women, from travelling freely, annoying Guo. Thus, excited about Whitman's verse, through which her two desires – to become an artist, and a nomad – are perfectly combined, Guo argued that "home would be travelling with you", indicating a contemporary approach to diaspora (159). In this light, Guo fundamentally deterritorialises the symbol of "home", unmooring it from Chinese tradition, and seeks a nomadic state both in real life and in her writing, through its affiliation with minor literature.

Certain that "home" travels with her, Guo first departs Wenling for Beijing and then leaves for London, during which she continually deconstructs the traditional cultural significance of this symbol. Aged eighteen, before she applied to study at the Beijing Film Academy, Guo published a poem titled "Nomad Heart"; its last lines are significant:

I don't like living in a house:

[. . .]

A house is not a place for a nomad heart

Only the road can be its home

Only the bare fields its abode (*OUT* 164)

Reformulating the notion of "home" for a nomad in the form of her own art, this poem is positioned as a manifesto for living like a nomadic artist in Guo's life. While living in Beijing, Guo realised that she wanted to "go beyond all tradition, conversation and its history", only to find that her film script did not meet China's censorship rules (*OUT* 177). Representation of the strong resistance to tradition explains why Guo is likely to break ethnic ties in her writing. With ever-stricter restraints on her artistic creation, Guo urgently sought an escape (*OUT* 232); when the Chevening Scholarship offered her an opportunity to go to the UK to study

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[30] The original Chinese is 父母在, 不远游, 游必有方.

filmmaking, she decided to leave China (*OUT* 233). Guo's transnational migration finally fulfils both the Taoist monk's prediction and her childhood dream, working in concert with her self-characterisation as a nomadic artist throughout.

Unexpectedly, during only her first week in the UK, Guo felt that London was not as pleasant as she had imagined, seeming to be "no more spiritually fulfilling than home" (*OUT* 245). Howe attributes this inability to adapt to Guo's linguistic and cultural disorientation (27). Indeed, the cultural shock not only pulls Guo out of the blind affiliation with the "West" conceived by her cultural unconsciousness, but also inspires her to develop a transnational identity to acclimatise herself to diasporic life. Before the end of her scholarship, Guo was determined to write in English to extend her stay in the UK, and having published *Dictionary for Lovers*, she felt that she "had made London [her] home" (*OUT* 269). Adopting a new language through literary creation is part of Guo's role as an artist, according her a form of cultural capital to authorise her writing in the English-speaking world (Lennon 28); her preliminary recognition of London epitomises the initial achievement of her identity formation as a nomad. With the release of more books and the acquisition of a British passport, she managed to "transplant [herself] into this land", where "[she] had made [herself] a home" (*OUT* 272, 303). By representing the acknowledgement she acquires from the publishing industry, and by repeatedly identifying London as her home, Guo completes the construction of herself in her autobiographical narrative as a nomadic artist, or to be specific, a transnational writer. Guo's redefinition of the concept of "home", from a fixed place to the place to which she has travelled and in which she has settled, highlights a migrant subjectivity in her representation of the new Chinese diaspora.

Defamiliarised Chineseness

By claiming to be a nomad, Guo becomes free from ethnic territorialisation, which in turn destabilises her identification with Chineseness. As mentioned in the Introduction, Chineseness as a marker of and for Chinese identity is not a stable concept; it behaves flexibly depending on the context. With the increasing

transnational movement of people after China's reform and opening-up in the 1980s, an official Chineseness developed, which is aimed to territorialise ethnic Chinese at home and abroad and reinforce their sense of rootedness (Dirlik, "Introduction" 11-12). However, this official discourse overlooks the complex ways in which Chineseness as "a form of identification can work as both a unifying and differentiating factor" (Louie 21-22). Overseas Chinese use a transnational perspective to reconsider this idea in terms of the patriotic complex, cultural identification, and ethnic affiliation contained within it, and, above all, to negotiate their reinforced ethnic identity. Indeed, as a Hui person who crosses multiple ethnic boundaries in her nomadic life and finally gives up her Chinese nationality, Guo defamiliarises the official discourse of Chineseness in the construction of her transnational identity.

As a member of the Hui minority, not a Han Chinese, Guo remains uncertain about her ethnic identity, contradicting the sense of rootedness underlined in the official discourse of Chineseness. At the age of six, Guo's neighbours told her that the Hui are descendants of Mongols or Turks from far away, reminding her that her family were outsiders in Shitang (*OUT* 269). The imposition of the label of Hui on Guo indicates the paradox in the territoriality of Chineseness, which is essentially formed by the Han majority. Through this approach, Guo acquires an incisive tool to question her ethnicity. When her father explained that the family's ancestors may have been Hui Muslims or Persian Mongols, and there was really "no such clean-cut thing called the Chinese" in either religious or cultural terms, she wondered "what belonged to [her]" and "what [she] could really call [her] own in the end" (*OUT* 97-98). This ambivalent identification with Chineseness, dating the origin of Guo's family to nomadic central Eurasia, ingeniously annotates her dream of living as a nomad.

Notably, Guo designates her Hui background not to highlight her difference, but rather to better present varieties of Chineseness and speak out against prevailing clichés about China (Kong 476). Her purpose in representing herself as Hui and as nomadic is to go beyond the conventional perception of Chineseness

and rearticulate it with more than ethnicity-related implications. Flying from Beijing to London, Guo peered out of the window at the great Mongolian plains and desert mountains below, and thought of her people originating there, providing her with a connection to her migration from the East to the West (*OUT* 243). This connection suggests that, although Guo seems to accept the ethnic alienation conferred by her Hui descent, she does not deny her closeness to Chinese culture, which also characterises Hui Muslims. Her family name "Guo" 郭 signifies the space between the two walls that surround ancient Chinese cities (*OUT* 97). The walls can be amplified to represent the distinctive cultural patterns of the East and the West; the "in-between zone" represented by "Guo" is easily associated with Bhabha's discussion of the "Third Space", which lies "between fixed identifications [that] open up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (*Location* 4). Accordingly, despite sharing the label of Hui, Guo shows no interest in belonging to a specific ethnic group, as she enjoys the interstitiality of being a "world citizen" ("Fragments"), which is consistent with her self-characterised identity as a nomadic artist. In this sense, the idea of Chineseness is defamiliarised and extended to a trans-ethnic context to examine the cosmopolitan pursuit of the new Chinese diaspora.

Guo's identity formation incarnates a separation from the official Chineseness and wider connotations of this symbol. In the process of becoming an artist, Guo was deeply influenced by her father, a talented painter who was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution for creating comics that satirised the "collective farming" policy, but who nevertheless continued to work for the CCP after rehabilitation (*OUT* 81). Learning from her father's experience, Guo interprets the socialist realism advocated by communism as a suppression of the freedom of creation. Meanwhile, the Western movies and television series introduced to Chinese people in the 1980s provided Guo with an attractive world where the space for "human rights and political freedom" affected her artistic practice (*OUT* 115). Guo's earlier affiliation with Western culture and thought, though indulging in the Occidentalist imagination at that time, intensifies her

identity crisis vis-à-vis Chineseness. Finally, with the repeated rejection of her film script by the Chinese Film Censorship Bureau, Guo realised that "[her] mind wouldn't conform to the Chinese Communist Party way of thinking" (*OUT* 225). In this sense, Guo defamiliarises the idea of Chineseness in official discourse as representative of strict censorship that frustrates Chinese artists, which deviates from its original intention of unification towards centralisation.

It was not until she left China that Guo affirmed the significance of Chineseness to her in the West; Guo's ambivalent relationship with her homeland is seen as one of thought-provoking aspects of her work (Feigel 8). While culturally and geographically marooned in south-west Wales, she realised that she could not "cut [herself] off from China forever", as the country was "the driver of [her] imagination" (*OUT* 257). It is in the official discourse of Chineseness that Guo develops her imagination of the West, yet as she overcomes her ethnic inferiority in Britain, her perception of Chineseness is reconstructed. Afraid of the possible negative repercussions of her work, *I am China*, which addresses the student massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the nature of totalitarianism, Guo applied for a British passport and cut herself off from her Chinese nationality (*OUT* 270). The decision to give up her Chinese passport in favour of freedom of creation reflects Guo's ultimate failure to submit to the official Chineseness. Yet, she still believes she is Chinese rather than British, soon coming to the revelation that "nationality didn't declare who [she] was" by defining herself as "a woman raised in China and in exile in Britain" (*OUT* 272). On the one hand, by escaping from Chinese censorship and Chinese nationality, Guo defamiliarises the official Chineseness that aims to territorialise all people sharing this ethnic label with a single value. On the other hand, she remains in contact with the culture she grew up with and reclaims a diasporic Chineseness, with which she is able to reconstruct the symbols analysed in this chapter.

In short, creating such an anti-stereotypical text in a literary form popular with ethnic minority writers reflects both a negotiation with the publishing market

and an attempt to overturn the paradigm of autobiographical narrative built by Chang's *Wild Swans*. Characterising herself as a nomadic artist in *Once Upon a Time*, Guo makes full use of the genre of autobiographical Bildungsroman, and in particular the Künstlerroman, thereby transcending the ethnic boundaries of literary categorisation. Her efforts to resist the ethnification of cultural production by minorities demonstrate her identity as a nomadic artist. In Mo's novels, characters such as Ng, Castro, and Snooky, echoing his own life experience, largely become cosmopolitan because their hybridity makes it difficult for them to integrate into most communities connected with a certain identity. In contrast, Guo highlights a migrant subjectivity in her cosmopolitan pursuit, as her detachment from race, nation, and ethnicity is driven by her self-conscious endeavour to live a nomadic life. This migrant subjectivity frees her from various forms of cultural unconsciousness, whether from China or the West; accordingly, her writing focuses more on the rootlessness and transnationality of the new Chinese diaspora, introducing a trans-ethnic theme to contemporary British Chinese literature.

The representation of typical cultural symbols in a non-stereotypical way is the key achievement of Guo's writing about diaspora, which overcomes both Orientalist and Occidentalist perceptions between China and Britain. *Dictionary for Lovers*, Guo's first published book in English, amazes readers by unconventionally characterising a series of Chinese and Western cultural symbols from the perspective of Z. Echoing Guo's own early diasporic experience in and adaptation to British society, it is full of surprise and astringency. The themes Guo explores in this work of fiction – the questioning of a single identity, the construction of a transnational identity, and the attempt to become cosmopolitan – are deepened in her recently published *Once Upon a Time*. Having gained more life experience, Guo endows Chinese symbols with transnational meanings and shows the determined process of her emancipation from ethnic territorialisation

as a nomadic artist. The two works illuminate the strong subjectivity of the younger generation of immigrant writers, who are capable of writing back to the cultural unconscious of Western centrism and representing the multiplicity and complexity of the new Chinese diaspora to the Anglosphere. In this sense, Guo's writing diverges from literary creation categorised as "ethnic" and engages with minor literature, thereby developing a trans-ethnic discourse for contemporary British Chinese literature.

The depiction of various Chinese symbols has long played an indispensable role in British Chinese literature, as it caters to most Anglophone readers' interest in ethnifying minorities. To remove the resulting ethnic label, the writers discussed in this thesis take different approaches to negotiating ethnification when representing Chinese symbols. In his early works, Mo characterises a series of ethnic stereotypes that work as a satire on Orientalist alienation; this parodic manner reflects a negotiated strategy in the establishment of the discourse of "British Chinese". As the British Chinese community has multiply developed, Guo, along with BBC writers (see ch. 4), reconstructs typical Chinese symbols from a transnational perspective. This breaks down those stereotypes initially shaped by Mo, who, in his later works, turns to integrating symbols related to China into a pan-Asian context and fosters a trans-ethnic hybridity in contemporary British Chinese discourse. The trans-ethnic interpretation of Chinese symbols is also reflected in Liu's cultural translation, which, linking Chinese idea-images with comparative poetics, reveals the aesthetic commonality rather than the ethnic differences between classical Chinese poetry and Western symbolism. Yet, the aesthetic connotation of intercultural symbols is difficult to appreciate without certain literary knowledge. Liu's works may therefore be more limitedly disseminated than those of other writers. In contrast, as Guo focuses on typical cultural symbols and uses a typical genre of ethnic writing, her works gain a wider readership while deterritorialising the official discourse of Chineseness. Conflicting interpretations of her autobiographical memoir in previous research demonstrate her crossing of ethnic boundaries. The case of *Once Upon a Time* suggests different possibilities for this literary genre, but the biased attention given to her

autobiography reveals the limitation of the publishing market's perception of literature by the Chinese minority. Hence, the next chapter continues to deal with autobiographical narrative, in which BBC writers claim a transnational identity from the stance of being descendants of first-generation immigrants. This further enhances the thematic and discursive diversity of British Chinese literature.

Chapter 4: The Developmental Discourse of "British Chinese" in the Writings by
British-born Chinese

In the history of Chinese migration to the UK, the earliest fixed group of British-raised Chinese formed in Liverpool in the early nineteenth century, as the descendants of settled seafarers (Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain* 331). At that time, few Chinese children were born in other cities. It was not until the mid-twentieth century that Britain's Chinese community began to flourish, with an increase in second-generation Chinese immigrants growing up in the UK, constituting the group of British-born Chinese. Subsequent policies aimed at reducing immigration prompted a great wave of reunions of husbands and wives before the new guidelines came into effect and, by the 1980s, BBC children had become the third largest ethnic minority in British schools, after children of African descent and South Asians (Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain* 351). Born with their ethnic label, members of the burgeoning second generation of Chinese immigrants represent the hybridity of the concept of "being British". The interface between these two identities, British-born and Chinese, combined with the new Chinese diaspora discussed in the last chapter, bridges ethnic divides through contemporary transcultural communication.

In previous chapters, discussing works by Timothy Mo, Hong Liu, and Xiaolu Guo, the thesis illustrates first-generation immigrants' efforts to emancipate themselves from their ethnic territorialisation in the field of cultural production. One might assume that, compared with their predecessors, British-born Chinese are less troubled by their ethnicity, as they usually receive a British education and some have even been brought up without contact with other Chinese families. However, due to their family history and the prevailing trend of multiculturalism, few BBC would deny their Chinese ancestry despite their on-going integration into British society. Examining the self-perceived identity of British-born (or British-raised) Chinese adolescents in 1999, Verma et al. reported that sixty percent of the respondents described themselves as "British Chinese", compared with thirty-six percent who identified as "Chinese" and only three percent as "British" (152).

David Parker proposed that "British Chinese identities", which have been framed by comparison both with other minority communities in Britain and with Chinese Americans, influenced the emerging generation of BBC people ("Emerging" 91). Benton and Gomez further read this dual identity as a new form of national identity for Chinese descendants in the UK, enabling them to integrate into mainstream society while connecting with their ethnic community ("Belonging to" 1162). Claiming a transnational identity in their works, the BBC writers examined in this chapter negotiate with the multicultural celebration of minority groups' ethnicities and represent the heterogeneity and complexity of their community, further diversifying the cultural discourse of "British Chinese".

This chapter compares two works by authors who are of Chinese descent but come from families with widely divergent immigration backgrounds. Both *Sweet Mandarin* (2007), an autobiographical memoir by Helen Tse, and *The Life of a Banana* (2014), a work of fiction based on the author PP Wong's personal experience, describe the author's/protagonist's family migration to the UK and elaborate upon their individual adaptation to a new diasporic environment. The family narrative provides a pathway connecting BBC writers' relations with both the Chinese community and British society. However, while representing their families' histories of migration, they express different feelings about being British-born Chinese in terms of their experiences of growing up in the UK. Whereas the food business represents the most important collective memory linking the Tse family with British society, the equivalent medium for Wong is racial bullying.

Helen Tse was born in 1977 and grew up in Middleton, England; her milieu is representative of those descendants of Chinese families that have migrated from Hong Kong and worked in the catering business in the UK. Tse did not recall having been a victim of racism during childhood; instead, she accustomed herself to British life. After graduating with a law degree from the University of Cambridge, she became a finance attorney in London. In 2004, however, out of affection for her grandmother and in order to further her own interest in Chinese food, Tse left her job to open a Chinese restaurant in Manchester called Sweet Mandarin with

her siblings. In 2007, she wrote a family memoir with the same name, paying considerable attention to the cooking and the culture of food. *Sweet Mandarin* has since gained global acclaim: it has been published in 33 countries and Tse has been awarded an honorary doctorate from Staffordshire University in recognition of her contribution to literature (Wong and Tse).

Spanning almost a hundred years, *Sweet Mandarin* describes a family's extraordinary journey over three generations, with many fictionalised elements. The story moves from the brutal poverty of village life in mainland China in the 1920s, to a newly prosperous Hong Kong in the 1930s and finally to the UK after the 1950s. A love of food and a talent for cooking pull each generation through the most devastating of upheavals. Tse's grandmother, Lily Kwok, earned a living as a young amah serving a Western family in Hong Kong after the death of her father. Crossing the ocean to Somerset with her kind employer, Lily was able to hone her famous chicken curry recipe; after the end of her job as a maid, she opened one of Manchester's earliest Chinese restaurants, which her daughter, Mabel, helped to run from the tender age of nine. Unfortunately, they lost the restaurant because of Lily's gambling addiction. It was up to Helen and her sisters, the third generation of this family, to restore and realise their grandmother's dream.

PP Wong was born in London in 1982. Her parents, both Chinese and originally from Singapore, moved between London and Asia during her childhood. Despite experiencing racial prejudice throughout her schooling in the UK, she completed an undergraduate degree in anthropology and law at the London School of Economics, followed by a postgraduate diploma in journalism. Later, Wong worked as an actor, a screenwriter, and an editor before founding the online magazine *Banana Writers*, a platform for new Asian writers to share their work with the world. Her debut novel *The Life of a Banana* appeared in 2014 and was longlisted for the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction in 2015. It was translated into different languages and was well reviewed in publications of different countries, including *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Corriere Della Sera*, *The Straits Times*,

Bangkok Post, and *Vanity Fair*. Wong is currently working on her second novel and a television adaptation of *The Life of a Banana*.

The protagonist of *The Life of a Banana* is Xing Li, a fictional version of Wong. Like many other British-born Chinese, Xing is described as a "banana" – Yellow on the outside and White on the inside. Although born and raised in London, she does not find it easy to fit in. Xing Li and her older brother, Lai Xing, are orphaned when their mother dies in a freak accident on Xing's twelfth birthday. They move into the Wu household in Kensington, presided over by their cold, matriarchal grandmother and shared with their actress Auntie Mei and "strange" Uncle Ho. The foreignness Xing feels in her new home, combined with the grief of losing her mother and the racial bullying at her new school, illuminates the harsh reality of being a member of an ethnic minority in Britain. Accompanied by her only friend, Jay, a Chinese-Jamaican boy who is better acclimated than Xing to British life due to his family's efforts, the protagonist tries to find her own identity and discovers what it means to be both Chinese and British.

As descendants of first-generation Chinese immigrants, Tse and Wong narrate both their families' migrations from Asia to the UK and their own experience of being British-born Chinese from divergent perspectives. *Sweet Mandarin* offers a relatively positive spin on the family migration tale and demonstrates the initiative of the Chinese minority to acclimate themselves to British society. Seemingly breaking down ethnic stereotypes of the Chinese catering industry, as exemplified in Mo's *Sour Sweet*, Tse, however, characterises her family as an example of model minority. What is passed over in *Sweet Mandarin* is accentuated in *The Life of a Banana* – namely, the racism experienced by Chinese immigrants, and specifically the racial bullying suffered by BBC schoolchildren. Having exposed the suffering of young British Chinese, the protagonist, inspired by her family members' resistance to racial discrimination, seeks her own way of fitting in. Little previous research addresses BBC writers, and a comparative reading of *Sweet Mandarin* and *The Life of a Banana* offers an effective way to explore the multiplicity of being British Chinese nowadays. This

chapter argues that the two works together reflect BBC writers' struggles within and departure from a "model-minority" narrative, suggesting a diversified development of the British Chinese cultural discourse. Exploring this dynamic change provides further insights into how ethnic boundaries are crossed in contemporary British Chinese literature.

The aim of the first section is to build a theoretical foundation for examination of the construction of "British Chinese" in both mainstream discourse and cultural production by BBC themselves. Exploring representations of collective memory which are interwoven with autobiographical narrative and a child's perspective, combined with scholarly studies of minority groups in the UK in the context of multiculturalism, this section explains the role of anti-ethnification in shaping the cultural discourse of "British Chinese". The second section compares divergent attitudes towards family migration in the romanticised *Sweet Mandarin* and the ironic *The Life of a Banana*. The third section focuses on the transformation of a "model-minority" narrative into a counter-stereotypical characterisation of being British Chinese in the two works. Finally, the chapter shows how BBC writers' efforts to represent the multiplicity and heterogeneity of their community help to resist the ethnification of the term "British Chinese". This supports the argument made in this thesis for the trans-ethnic trend of contemporary British Chinese literature.

Constructing "British Chinese"

The writers discussed in previous chapters are first-generation immigrants who arrived in the UK by virtue of half-British descent or higher education opportunities. Seeking to remove their ethnic label, they successively contest Chineseness by expressing their cosmopolitan pursuits as "transnational publics". In contrast, growing up in Chinese families that have settled down in Britain, BBC writers interconnect with both their ethnic community and mainstream British society, making it difficult to position themselves firmly in either one. Against this backdrop, BBC writers are more receptive to the term "British Chinese" to achieve

a negotiation between their two identities. By claiming a transnational identity, BBC writers deterritorialise the close affiliation with ethnic tradition contained in a single identity, and their identification with both Britishness and Chineseness is thus reconstructed from a trans-ethnic perspective. In their construction of being British Chinese, they not only recall the collective memory of their families' migrations but also engage with various literary discourses to manifest the diversity of their community. Their works thus occupy an interstitial position between ethnic literature and minor literature.

Collective Memory in Personal Narrative

Maurice Halbwachs advances the concept of collective memory to expound upon the dependent relationship between individual and society, whereby any collective group, such as a family, has its own exclusive memory. According to Halbwachs, as the individual consciousness of a family member is not always penetrable, the collective memory of the family is activated at the moment when "one brings all these thoughts closer together and somehow rejoins them" (Halbwachs 54). It is within this framework that various figures and experiences serve as landmarks in the collective memory of a family, and the unique mentality that defines the nature and quality of each family takes shape. In the works explored in this chapter, these landmarks take the form of the food business (in *Sweet Mandarin*) and racial bullying (in *The Life of a Banana*), which activate BBC characters' Chinese identity, strengthening the connection between the collective memory of their families and their own personal narratives. Moreover, when a family member recalls an event in family life, what is represented is a "reconstructed picture" that reflects certain physical traits or particular customs of the family (Halbwachs 60). In writing the story of one's family, the selection of a personal narrative among interactive discourses performs a discerning process of reconstructing the images of people and facts. In this sense, family stories narrated from a personal perspective involve a form of historical mediation, wherein identification with the collective memory "is not only shaped by the

stories we have been told, but also, and more importantly, by the stories we tell" (Davis, *Relative Histories* 4-5). Tse's *Sweet Mandarin* is an autobiographical memoir representing a minority group's achievement through family migration. In the fictional work *The Life of a Banana*, Wong adopts a child's perspective to satirise racism. The contrast reflects the authors' different priorities when constructing "British Chinese".

The traditional approach to autobiography, based largely upon what Lejeune calls the "autobiographical pact", requires the author to present the text as a historically accurate version of their past life, encouraging the reader to believe the events and accounts in the work as "true" (11-12). However, as discussed in Chapter 2, postmodern discourse emphasises the rhetoric in all narrative texts and challenges the reliability of historical narratives. It treats fiction as an inevitable constituent of "autobiographical truth". Paul John Eakin interprets fictions in autobiography as the unreliability of recollection, arguing that "the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness" (5). Autobiographical truth thus denotes "an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation", and the representation of the self – as the centre of all autobiographical narratives – is necessarily a fictive process (3). In this referential text, the autobiographer's inner self and narrative quest become visible through an examination of how their life is re-organised. Tse narrates her identity formation against the backdrop of the development of her family's food business to negotiate the static understanding of Chineseness. Moreover, the autobiographical narrative plays the communicative roles of meaning-making and tone-setting, which depend on the social norms and expectations of a given time, regarding acceptable lives and stories about them (Pascal 69). In this process, the autobiographer becomes a narrator who is not identical to the author, and the autobiography becomes a product of literary creation with fictionalised elements. As well as telling her family's story, Tse consciously makes *Sweet Mandarin* an account of the collective memory of the Chinese community's success in the British catering trade. This is somewhat involved in the construction of "British Chinese" as a model minority in mainstream discourse.

Rather than satisfying the publishing market's expectation that minority writers undertake autobiographical ethnification, Wong produces a counter-stereotyping work of fiction with a child narrator. The use of the child's perspective derives from the late eighteenth century, when the child began to work as an important theme in English literature, ultimately becoming an oft-repeated focus within a matter of decades (Byrnes 7). For contemporary writers from minority groups, the child character is repeatedly used as a metaphor for their own experience when shaping a transcultural subject (Davis, *Transcultural Reinventions* 28). In her study of Asian American literature, Alicia Otano expounds on the use of a child's perspective as a narrative strategy for both engaging with minority discourse and negotiating with the mainstream. First, telling a story from the perspective of a child provides an ingenious way of conveying irony, because a child's supposed freedom from preconceived notions helps to "shed an ironic light on behaviour or institutions which are normally taken for granted" (Otano 12). *The Life of a Banana* expresses a child's consciousness and behaviour, distinct from the stereotypical impression of the Chinese minority, to satirise racism and resist ethnification. Furthermore, as the archetypal child is able to "reconcile contrary forces and grow from immaturity to maturity", the use of a child's voice may also adumbrate a narrative of development, moving from a naive vision to a more mature one in order to gain acceptance from the mainstream (Byrnes 36; Otano 14). The former and the latter represent different identities in Xing Li's growth; they oppose and contradict each other, but are finally reconciled as she grows up, echoing her construction of a transnational British Chinese identity. Combining the two points above, the child's perspective allows the narrator to juxtapose the child focaliser with an adult self. How the child perceives the world may be irrational and parodic, but an older version of the self "controls past, present, and future", revealing a negotiation between the two separate agents (Otano 15). In *The Life of a Banana*, Xing Li's current life is interwoven with narratives from the past lives of her relatives, which offer glimpses of their collective memory of fighting against racism, while exposing it from her child's perspective. In this way, *Sweet Mandarin* and *The Life of a Banana* show divergent

discourses of being British Chinese in their recollection of family migration; the chapter contextualises this contrast in relation to the double impact of multiculturalism.

Reflecting on Multiculturalism

The recognition of the collective memory of minority groups is closely bound up with the rise of multiculturalism, which can be traced back to the proposal of "cultural pluralism" by the Jewish American philosopher Horace M. Kallen. In his essay "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot", first published in 1915, Kallen argues that the United States should not be a "melting-pot" created by the assimilation of immigrants, but rather a "federation or commonwealth of national cultures" (108). In this context, the notion of assimilation designates a relative racialised discourse, inducing a minority group to completely assimilate into the dominant culture in which defining characteristics of the minority culture are less obverse or outright disappear. In the United Kingdom, the idea that Britain has long been a "multiracial society" fostered its multiculturalist policy after the Second World War, seeking to integrate the growing number of immigrants from ex-colonies and the Commonwealth. The British Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, speaking in 1966, is often quoted on this issue: "I do not think that we need in this country a 'melting pot'. [. . .] I define integration, therefore, not a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance" (267). In this context, the term "multiculturalism" has been used both descriptively and normatively to deal with race relations. Whilst multiculturalist policies on education, health care, housing, and other social issues has been shown to facilitate cultural recognition and support minority rights, critics have also noted its negative effects. Highlighting the group identity of different minorities, the core idea of multiculturalism is that personal identity is embedded in collective identity. This not only threatens individualism but also intensifies ethnic stereotypes. Moreover, by virtue of its emphasis on cultural distinctiveness, multiculturalism serves to divide, and therefore weaken, people

who have a common economic and political interest in alleviating poverty and promoting social reform (Barry 12). Deeply rooted in the practice of multiculturalism, the development of the British Chinese community is closely associated with both the advantages and disadvantages of this policy. In representing the Chinese minority's integration into British society, BBC writers' constructions of being British Chinese on the one hand display the positive role of multicultural diversity, and on the other hand struggle with the multicultural ethnification of their community.

In practice, the ideal of multiculturalism – deconstructing the ideology of racial inequality by celebrating diversity – encourages minorities' enthusiasm for genealogy and boosts public interest in ethnic language, literature, culture, and related commodities on the market. Since the late twentieth century, ethnicity has been increasingly manifested through the self-conscious consumption of goods and services and, without this consumption, certain acts of self-definition would be impossible (Halter 7-8). Ethnic identity, originally developed to articulate minorities' difference from the majority (see Introduction), has thus been deterritorialised and reconstructed as a generalised form of consumption, independent of the recognition of a specific cultural tradition. Ethnic goods and services aim to attract not only customers from minority groups but also the majority who, at least on the surface, wish to appear non-racist and to embrace cultural diversity. As Parker suggests, for example, "eating multicultural variety is often easier than practising a real politics of ethnic desegregation and inter-racial contact", as though problems of cultural difference might be solved by eating the same food ("Chinese Takeaway" 88). As a result, the claim to an ethnic identity of the descendants of immigrants may replace the traditional claim in social settings that are "sharply organized around ethnic group boundaries and the migration experience" (Halter 7). That is to say, rather than asserting ethnic differences, Tse's presentation of a reified Chinese identity via food illustrates a case of negotiating with the multicultural marketing. Yet, Tse's desire to demonstrate the Chinese minority's initiative to integrate into British society is entangled with the model minority discourse.

As explained in the Introduction, by assuming young people of Chinese descent in Britain are exempt from racism, the model minority discourse conceals racial problems that they encounter in business, employment, and, in particular, education. Multicultural education, with its emphasis on "teaching to solely embrace all cultures" to fight against racism (Qureshi 114), is not fully implemented in many White-dominated schools in the UK; school bullying based on racial difference is still a common problem faced by ethnic minority youths. Above all, having adopted the policy of multicultural education, British schools prefer to take a "no problem here" attitude, rather than develop proactive strategies to address issues such as racism and xenophobia (Woolfson et al. 16). Thus, although students today are more keenly aware of racist incidents than their predecessors were, victims of school bullying have become increasingly reluctant to report such incidents. Indeed, compared with young British African-Caribbean students, who are often perceived as "problematic", most young people of Chinese descent in the UK focus on achieving good results at school and are not willing to disclose their experiences of being bullied (Archer and Francis 146). This reluctance to speak out has led mainstream society to label British Chinese people as a "model minority", whose members are excluded from discussions of racism's victims. Subversively, *The Life of a Banana* exposes the racial bullying suffered by different ethnic minorities in the British education system, and thus challenges the multicultural construction of the "unproblematic" British Chinese youths. Proposing the ironic slogan – "Chinks Have Mouths" (24) – from a child's perspective, Wong strategically reminds of the unacknowledged racism suffered by young BBC and develops an anti-stereotyping discourse to demonstrate the multiplicity of the British Chinese community through her work of fiction.

Engaging with the multicultural context, both of the works discussed in this chapter deterritorialise the Chinese identity recognised by their parents or grandparents, and reclaim it in view of their own. Examination of the different standpoints adopted by the two BBC writers to represent the collective memory of their family migrations indicates the development of British Chinese discourse. From highlighting the achievements of the Chinese minority to articulating the

heterogeneity of this group beyond ethic territorialisation, the shift echoes the trans-ethnic theme manifested in the literary creations of first-generation British Chinese immigrant writers.

Previous Research on BBC Writers

The last chapter illuminates the diversified literary categorisation of an autobiographical Bildungsroman by Xiaolu Guo; this example demonstrates that British Chinese writers are able to resist the mode of self-ethnification when adopting literary genres popular with minority writers. This chapter shows how, in the process of constructing "British Chinese", to rationalise their so-called Chinese identity, BBC writers integrate the collective memory of their families into an autobiographical memoir and a coming-of-age novel. In both cases, the combination of a family and a personal narrative attracts attention from English literary circles.

Reviews of *Sweet Mandarin* centre on its depiction of family migration and the food business. Rocío G. Davis interprets it as both a family memoir that celebrates the courage exhibited by all three generations of the family in their immigration and re-settling and a food memoir foregrounding the role of food in representing ethnic identity (Davis, "Family History" 145-50). Furthermore, as "Sweet Mandarin" is the name of both Tse's family memoir and the restaurant she operates with her siblings, Davis describes it as a dual commercial venture, "a book that sells a restaurant and a restaurant that sells a book" ("Family History" 159). Davis provides a critical perspective on Tse's strategy of ethnic marketing; however, she does not further explain how Chineseness is deterritorialised as a form of consumption and loses its original meaning in this work. In addition, Yun-Hua Hsiao places particular emphasis on the close relationship between food and identity in *Sweet Mandarin*. Hsiao not only admires Lily, Mabel, and Helen's successful running of the food business, but also remarks on their female subjectivity – making use of their cooking skills to support themselves and transform the domestic into the public (54). She argues that hybridity emerges

from the transplantation of culture, interpreting "Sweet Mandarin" as both a memoir and a restaurant, and describing it – along with Tse's family history of migration – as a product of cultural hybridity (61-62). Inspired by the two scholars, this chapter reads *Sweet Mandarin* as a market-oriented cultural practice which, despite showing intention of crossing ethnic boundaries, ultimately engages with the model minority discourse.

Although few critical articles have yet been written on the recently published *The Life of a Banana*, several insightful reviews have applauded this distinctive work of fiction and its writer. The poignant but uncommon topic of racial discrimination, combined with the protagonist's life experience, is the focus for many reviewers. Claire K. Hazelton claims that Wong's ultimately optimistic exploration of cultural and generational conflicts allows her to ensure that the young Xing Li remains hopeful and light-hearted, even while dealing with racism, bullying, and abuse. Kate considers Xing Li a strong narrator through whom Wong connects the theme of race with family trust and understanding to elicit readers' interest in the possible experience of Chinese people in the UK today. Several reviews focus on the emotional highs and lows of the story. Sharil Dewa reads the accidental death of Xing Li's mother and her consequent sufferings as dramatic elements in the fiction that is introduced and unfolded within the simple language of a twelve-year-old girl. Virginia Croft compares this twenty-first century tale to a Victorian melodrama full of humour and irony, in which Xing Li and her brother "are packed off to live with evil grandmother, strange uncle and flighty aunt". With such a dramatic plot, however, Rita Carter describes Xing Li's life as a combination of comedy and horror, "like contrasting flavours in some complicated Chinese dish" – a troublingly Orientalist comment. Conflicting views of *The Life of a Banana*, like those of *Once Upon a Time* (see ch. 3), reveal Wong's anti-stereotypical characterisation of the Chinese minority in Britain, which is expounded in this chapter.

Previous research demonstrates the significant relationship between individual development and the history of a family settling in both works, even

though this link adopts very different forms – the food business for Tse and racial bullying for Wong. However, existing studies treat each as a single case representing a Chinese family's integration into British society, usually ignoring a discursive development in claim "British Chinese", which is examined in this chapter. By comparing the different ways in which BBC writers engage with the multicultural context, the next section elucidates the profound influence of collective memory of families' migrations on their descendants' constructions of being British Chinese, which take divergent forms.

Different Attitudes Towards Family Migration

> "The mountain that Leung told Lily as a child has been levelled to the ground and the road to prosperity built. It's up to my sisters and me to find our mountain now, and to make good on the tremendous legacy that Lily and Mabel have handed us." (Tse 271)

> "Grandma left Singapore as a dainty quiet girl but had changed into a loud-mouthed lion. The gritty London air changed Grandma just like it had changed Lai Xing and just like it had changed me." (Wong 266)

Having described decades of Lily's difficult but hopeful life since her first sight of Britain, Tse reflects with some degree of optimism on her family's several migrations. The image of a mountain comes from the Chinese tale of the "Foolish Old Man", an eccentric old man who decides to remove the mountain outside his house, believing that his dream will come true with the efforts of several generations.[31] Integrating this tale into the representation of collective memory in Tse's family, *Sweet Mandarin* serves as an autobiographical work of self-determination. In the 1920s, Tse's family departed from their extremely poor village near Guangzhou to settle in Hong Kong, where Lily experienced both joy and sorrow. In the 1950s, when her life in Hong Kong was at its lowest point, she

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[31] The Chinese literary quotation is 愚公移山.

left for the UK and was finally able to envision a promising future in a new land. Tse compares the difficulties experienced by her family to the mountain in the Chinese folk tale, which motivated their every relocation for survival via the food industry.

In contrast with Tse's affirmative attitude towards family relocation, Wong holds a fairly ambivalent stance in representing how Xing Li's family members gradually accommodate to their life in Britain, which is continuously troubled by racism. An elaborate child's perspective, featuring dramatic elements and plot conflicts, is employed to depict Xing Li's family's immigration experience. Self-mockingly entitled, *The Life of a Banana* reveals the various problems Xing Li and her brother face in a coming-of-age story. Xing Li's grandmother was born to a wealthy Chinese Singaporean family and reluctantly came to London in the 1960s to join her husband, who was studying there. Whereas she and her children finally settled down in the UK, her husband returned to Singapore because his practical jokes led to their son being bullied by his classmates. Racial bullying – suffered not only by Xing Li and her uncle, but by every member of her family – becomes the work's deepest collective memory of living in Britain.

Two Tickets to Another World

The incentive for creating an intergenerational narrative usually lies in "a complex sense of moral obligation" that encourages the writer to tell family stories from the perspective of history, ethnicity, and community (Parker, "Narratives" 150). Whereas the conventional mode of ethnic writing claims an ethnicity by integrating family experience with national history, Tse shapes her Chinese identity by recalling the collective memory of immigrants who "carved out a place in their new homeland through the catering trade" (4). As Parker suggests, "the memories of these forebearers in a sense are me, their languages partly constitute my speaking position" ("Narratives" 150). That is to say, authors can present their own narrative logic by telling family stories. In *Sweet Mandarin*, Tse characterises the history of her family's migration in terms of the achievements of the Chinese

catering trade in the UK, and her affiliation with Chinese ethnicity is incarnated as a recognition of its food business rather than its national history or cultural tradition. In representing Chinese immigrants seeking a living in the catering industry in the UK, Tse endows them with a migrant subjectivity, as discussed in Chapter 3, so that they are able to re-settle in a diasporic environment. Distinct from the alienation of the Chinese food business clinging to ethnic tradition in Mo's *Sour Sweet*, Tse's version highlights the reform of this trade during migration and integration. In this manner, the Chineseness of *Sweet Mandarin* is deconstructed as the skills of cooking and selling food, free from ethnic territorialisation. These skills give her family "two tickets", enabling them first to move to Hong Kong and finally to the UK, acclimatising to each new environment.

The family memoir begins in 1918, with the birth of Lily – one of six daughters – to a poor family living in Guangzhou. Against the backdrop of China's ubiquitous preference for sons, Lily's father, Leung, is depicted as a man "ahead of his time", who felt strongly "that his daughters were valuable in their own rights" (Tse 15). In contrast with Guo, who is disgusted by her mother's gender discrimination, Tse barely associates her family with ethnic cultural tradition, mirroring BBC's negotiation of the static Chineseness. Although the family's life was destitute because the harvests were poor, Leung told the tale of the Foolish Old Man, which kindled hope in Lily. Seeking to remove his own family's mountain, Leung started to sell soy sauce instead of the soybean crop itself. With the establishment of a tiny factory came his initial success; decades later, seeing soy sauce in a Chinese supermarket in the UK reminded Lily of "the fine line between ambition and greed in men", and of the profound effect that her father had had on her (Tse 54). The reappearance of soy sauce in Lily's memory, as depicted by Tse, is "replaced by the notion of [her] family" (Halbwachs 62); thus, this food product, interwoven with the history of Tse's family, is transformed from an everyday recollection into a family recollection. In this sense, soy sauce offers a ticket to a new world, facilitating the first migration of Tse's family.

To find a wider market for his product and secure a better future, Leung moved his family to Hong Kong, where the catering industry boomed in the 1920s. Over five years of travelling between his mainland factory and his Hong Kong customers, Leung's business grew exponentially, and his family were "able to see the benefits of their new prosperity" (Tse 49). Instead of emphasising Leung's Chinese origin, Tse shows appreciation for her great-grandfather's flexible acclimatisation, which benefited his descendants. Unfortunately, as Tse later remarks, Leung became "a victim of his own success": he was envied by his greedy competitors, one of whom made trouble for Leung and eventually murdered him in his factory (56). Leung's efforts to remove his family's mountain ended with his death, but his courage and faith affected Lily deeply. At the following Qingming Festival,[32] Lily returned to the village of her birth to visit Leung's grave and seize "her last chance to be close to his spirit", taking the blowing "leaves on the trees around her" as a sign that Leung had answered her (Tse 74). Depicted with a certain degree of subjective imagination and fiction, this romanticised scene indicates an intergenerational replacement of the narrative subject responsible for removing the mountain, and in doing so is central to Tse's representation of collective memory.

As her family slipped back into poverty and her mother sank into an ever-deeper depression, Lily became obsessed with finding a solution. While helping her father sell soy sauce in a little wooden cart on the streets of Hong Kong, Lily had gained a certain independence that made her "more and more determined and ambitious" (Tse 44). This experience not only increased her self-reliance but also exposed her to the colonial community of Hong Kong. Curious about that world, Lily started learning English via a language course provided by a local Christian church. By showing Lily's initiative in second language acquisition, Tse represents the subjectivity that leads her grandmother to depart from her ethnic enclave and integrate into a different society. For Lily, the most impressive place

[32] Qingming is a traditional Chinese Festival when people visit ancestral tombs and pay respect to the dead.

in the colonial community was Robinson Road, a grand Westernised area in which the only Chinese people were servants and maids. After her father's death, by virtue of the language skills she had acquired, Lily became an amah, responsible for looking after children and performing other domestic tasks for a Western family. This job enabled Lily to improve her own life and support her family, thereby removing the mountain that had once stood in the way of their happiness. Years later, when Lily revisited Robinson Road with her family, she explicitly described her work there as an amah as her "ticket to England" (Tse 47).

During this work, Lily learned about Western culture and, above all, how to cook – "[n]ot just Chinese food in all its forms, for many of her bosses were partial to the local cuisine, but also delicacies from all over the world, depending on the nationality of her employers" (87). Regarded as "an heirloom that triggers memories" (Tse 4), Lily's cooking skills were acquired from different cultures, anticipating the blurred ethnic boundaries of the Chinese food business she would later establish. Similarly, claiming her ethnicity through this family-run food business, Tse's recognition of being Chinese is deterritorialised as her transnational identity. Having survived the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, Lily was dispatched by her agency to an English family, the Woodmans, for whom she came to feel great affection (Tse 96). In 1953, when the Woodmans planned to return home to the UK, they asked her to move with them, providing her with a transoceanic ticket to another world. As her husband's situation was desperate and she had two children to feed, Lily accepted this generous offer and found herself "standing at the bottom of the mountain again, ready to begin work" (Tse 145). Far from the sorrows of her homeland, Lily finally flattened the mountain and built the road that led her family to a bright future in a foreign land. Therefore, by characterising Lily as having played a critical role in altering the destiny of her family, Tse expresses appreciation for her family's collective proactivity in adaptation, which enhances the flexibility of their identity. At the same time, Tse highlights the female subjectivity shared by the women of her family, which further separates *Sweet Mandarin* from the outdated narrative of the Chinese catering industry.

Female Subjectivity in the Catering Business

Historically, women played a more limited role than men in establishing the Chinese community in Britain, which is closely linked with the wide dispersal of Chinese restaurants and takeaways. As Miri Song notes in her research on Chinese women working in family businesses in Britain, her respondents usually spoke no English and were economically dependent on their husbands, subordinated and lonely ("Between" 296). The image of isolated Chinese women lacking subjectivity was once a long-held stereotype in the representations of the Chinese catering trade in the UK. The Chen family in Mo's *Sour Sweet* exemplifies this pattern to a certain extent. In contrast, in *Sweet Mandarin*, Tse not only acknowledges the significance of food to her family's migration, but also emphasises the role of women in the food business. Highlighting four generations of women in her family, especially her grandmother, all of whom acquire freedom and independence through food, Tse invalidates the unfavourable female stereotype observed in Song's research and affirms the subjectivity of her female family members.

In *Sweet Mandarin*, food and cooking not only constitute an important medium and skill enabling Tse's family to travel to another world, but also allow several generations of women to reclaim their female subjectivity to gain independence. Traditionally, cooking, especially domestic cooking, has been performed by females, who assume the role of "nurturing household manager[s]" and are expected to be "shrewd and capable wom[e]n" (Chow 136). By assuming responsibility for cooking, a woman is empowered. For example, Tai Po, Tse's great-grandmother, "found her freedom and independence in food" when she was forced to live in her uncle-in-law's house in Wan Chai (Tse 40). Furthermore, with the women in Tse's family going into the catering industry in Britain, cooking skills, which offer women a means of supporting themselves, are expanded from the domestic to the public (Hsiao 54). Lily's childhood dream of "open[ing] her own restaurant and cook[ing] her own dishes in her own kitchen" came true after she re-settled in Middleton, which increased her self-reliance in her adopted

country (Tse 174). Mabel, Tse's mother, who opened a fish and chip shop with her husband, became the hostess of the couple's food business, "free of Lily's control" (Tse 226-27). Tse, the author of *Sweet Mandarin*, operates a restaurant with the same name as the memoir. This not only expresses her admiration for her predecessors, but also shows her subjectivity in developing a transnational identity through the food culture inherited from her family.

Notably, in characterising Lily's female subjectivity as something that promoted the Tse family's emigration, Tse attaches particular importance to her work as an amah, during which period Lily gained cooking skills needed to start her own food business in the UK. Compared with the widely known situations of overseas Filipino maids, Chinese women who migrated to Britain with the Western families they had served in Hong Kong receive little attention from researchers. As Tse confesses, she had imagined professional maids "as characters in period dramas with white caps and aprons", before she became aware of Lily's past experience (79). It was "the idea of a group of [Lily's] relations, not the idea of a particular [matter], [that] illuminate[d] the image called to mind", and ultimately inspired Tse as the narrator to depict her grandmother's work (Halbwachs 62). In this light, the recollection of Lily's work as an amah in *Sweet Mandarin* confirms her independence, shapes a form of collective memory of her family, and, above all, provides supplementary material that offers a multifaceted perspective on the history of Chinese emigration from Hong Kong to the UK.

While working as an amah in Hong Kong, Lily encountered her future husband, Kwok Chan, when buying fresh seafood at the fish market; they fell in love at first sight. However, Tse does not mention her grandfather until rather late in the memoir; as she explains, Lily herself rarely spoke of her husband. The story of Tse's grandparents began with a romantic meeting, and they had two children after marriage, namely Arthur, born in 1947, and Mabel, born in 1950. Yet, their happiness was short-lived as, left unemployed after the war and feeling humiliated by the obligation to look after their children in his mother-in-law's house, Chan behaved abusively towards his wife, spending her money on gambling and

prostitutes. In contrast, to sustain her family, Lily "strove to advance herself in the Western world", serving different Western employers (Tse 138). Thus, Lily's work experience in Hong Kong becomes a medium for expanding her subjectivity beyond domestic cooking and into transcultural communication. Finally, after being forced to send her third child away as a newborn, Lily realised that "the marriage she had poured so much of herself into, was over" and accepted the Woodmans' suggestion that she accompany them to England (Tse 139). Described as "the biggest twist in [her] family's tale" (Tse 101), Lily's decision not only demonstrated the power of her female subjectivity to free herself from a broken relationship, but also anticipated the entire family's later emigration. In this way, Tse sublimates Lily's courage in bidding farewell to the past and embracing a new life as the collective spirit of her family, which encourages both Lily and her descendants to transcend ethnic territorialisation and adapt to British society.

Three years after Lily moved to Somerset with her kind-hearted employers, Mrs Woodman senior passed away and left Lily a generous bequest, enabling her to reunite with her family. Having gained her financial independence, Lily decided to bring her children to Britain, as "there was more opportunity there for a woman working on her own" (Tse 174). The British Isles, according to Tse's description, is incarnate as a promised land in which Lily's female subjectivity can be accepted, even enabling her to establish her own business. After moving to Middleton, a working-class town near Manchester, Lily set up her own restaurant, named Lung Fung. Befriending local residents and providing cheap but delicious food, Lily found that her hard work finally paid off: "Middleton got a taste for Chinese food" (Tse 185). Tse offers this comment from a wider social and historical perspective on Chinese immigrants in the UK, illustrating that tenacious women like Lily can exert their subjectivity and triumph in the traditionally male-dominated catering trade. Specifically, Tse links Lily's determination to re-settle in her adopted country with the post-war formation of the Chinese community in central England: "Lily was the only Chinese person in Middleton in 1959; [. . .] in Lily's day the cultural differences remained unbridged. She had to be an ambassador of sorts" (182-83). Approximately a decade later, inspired by Lily's success, "by the late 1960s some

other families arrived in the town and a small community was born" (Tse 182). Therefore, Tse's family story engages in "a direct dialogue with narratives of public histories" (Davis, *Relative Histories* 22), positively representing not only the subjectivity shared by female members of her family in their immigration and re-settling, but also the development of the British Chinese community through the catering trade. Yet, in *Sweet Mandarin*, the integration of Chinese immigrants is narrated from a relatively internal perspective, i.e. self-characterisation; in contrast, *The Life of a Banana* exposes the rarely referenced external racial tensions that discourage Chinese immigrants from adapting to British society.

Two Wars in Family History

Every family has its own logic and traditions. As Halbwachs claims, "the family progressively tends to interpret in its own manner the conceptions it borrows from society" as its memories become more precise, taking a fixed personal form for every family member (83). In contrast with *Sweet Mandarin*, in which Tse presents herself as a reliable author-narrator responsible for representing the achievements of her family in the food industry, Wong establishes a fictional child character, Xing Li, as the narrator of *The Life of a Banana*, to reveal the various racial problems that immigrant families encounter in their re-settling. To endow this child character with "higher narrational authority", as elucidated above, other focalisers – conveying adult voices – coexist with the perspective of Xing Li, who is thereby empowered to convey more information or let events speak for themselves (Otano 15). Specifically, *The Life of a Banana* represents both Xing Li's experience of growing up and the stories of various members of her family, which interact with her cognition and depiction of the world. What impresses Xing Li the most are the two "wars" between her mother and grandmother in relation to racial tension, which diversify her perception of being Chinese. Thus, by contextualising Xing Li's personal experience within her family history, Wong reflects problems such as immigrant adaptation, identity formation, and generation gaps that often face young British Chinese.

The Life of a Banana begins with an accidental oven explosion leading to the death of Xing Li's mother, who should have played a crucial role in explaining the family's history to her daughter. Instead, this role is filled by other family members. The family history presented to Xing Li is unlike the smooth and continuous story of immigration and integration narrated in *Sweet Mandarin*; rather, it is a mosaic collaged by different focalisers that illustrates various possibilities in immigrants' re-settling. From Xing Li's perspective, her mother's death transformed her and her older brother Lai Xing from the Kwans of Kilburn Road into members of the Wu house in Kensington, where they had to obey their grandmother's rigid family rules. Characterising Xing Li's grandmother – the first-generation immigrant in the Wu family – as a conservative matriarch not only reflects Xing Li's initial dislike for her, but also foreshadows struggles both within and outside the family in their adaptation to British society. Xing Li shouts at the authoritarian old lady when the latter scolds Auntie Mei for working as an actor, regarded as an indecent profession. This convinces Mei that her niece is "becoming extraordinarily brave, just like [her] mother always was" (Wong 95). In Wong's portrayal of the history of the Wus, Auntie Mei's words spark Xing Li's curiosity about the fight between her mother and grandmother, as well as other details of her family's past, especially the story of her grandfather – another person who was able to stand up to her grandmother. Borrowing the focalising position of Auntie Mei, Grandpa Wu is described as a lucky man who had a good sense of humour but was addicted to practical jokes that harmed his family; eventually, he was sent back to Singapore by his wife, and entered a local sanatorium (Wong 96-99). Through Mei's narrative, Wong reveals that there have been numerous quarrels and disputes in Xing Li's family throughout their life in the UK, which complicates Xing Li's own attitude towards her family's immigration.

The "root-seeking" journey to Singapore led by her grandmother unfolds the history of Xing Li's family. Grandpa Wu relates the never-ending battle over Xing Li's father between her mother and grandmother. The loving relationship of Xing Li's parents was considered especially problematic because her father was half-Japanese, an ethnicity deeply unpopular with her grandmother. By revealing the

descent of Xing Li's father and the problems it caused, Wong makes issues of race and ethnicity a vital thread to understand the logic of Xing Li's family. Furthermore, Wu's narration is set in a historical context, related to the racial conflict of the Japanese occupation of Singapore during the Second World War and the strong anti-Japanese sentiment in the post-war period. His daughter's battle with her mother to marry a Japanese man is thus described as "World War One" in Wu's family, to a large extent resulting in the current familial relationships (Wong 132). Hence, Mei and Wu, as mature characters in *The Life of a Banana*, successively perform the function of the adult focaliser, providing the broad family history for Xing Li. Above all, the race-related conflict delineated, echoing the racial problems Xing Li encounters in her own growing up, is represented as a collective memory unique to the Wu family.

Additionally, the narratives of Xing Li's family members offer her insight into the possibilities for her future. Uncle Ho is the most "dramatic" character in this work, and the stories told about his life brim with racial tensions. As a teenager who preferred to keep to himself, Uncle Ho used a "strange" disease as an excuse to protect him from being called "chink fag" by his classmates: "I got sick, they couldn't touch me any more. I know I can never be cured" (Wong 211-12). The shaping of Ho as a victim of school bullying provides a historical counterpart to Xing Li's current experience, indicating that their Chinese ethnicity has long caused trouble for members of the Wu family. According to Auntie Mei, encouraged by Xing Li's mother, Uncle Ho was once likely to recover and planned to apply to university, but was prevented from doing so by her grandmother, who intended to protect him from racism. As a result, he found that his world gradually closed down. Xing Li's mother blamed her grandmother's overprotectiveness, and Grandpa Wu compared the argument over Uncle Ho to the family's "World War Two" (Wong 132). Finally, Uncle Ho commits suicide, and "everything to do with [him] got erased from the house", leaving Xing Li's grandmother with a pale face and red eyes (Wong 218). The narration of Ho's suffering illustrates the tragedy of blindly seeking to escape from racism instead of standing up to it. This inspires Xing Li to construct a transnational identity, rather than clinging to her ethnicity.

By highlighting the two intergenerational "wars" over the issues of race and ethnicity that happened in her family, the child narrator, Xing Li, expresses a diversified perception of being British Chinese. The focaliser of Auntie Mei not only arouses Xing Li's interest in her family's history, but also inspires her to believe in the possibility of victory in the common fight against racism. Working as an actor in Britain, Auntie Mei is accustomed to playing lower-class Asian roles, such as those of a Filipino maid, a Thai prostitute, and a Chinese refugee, in accordance with the various requirements of White directors. These stereotypical roles, reflecting a racialised construction of Asian minorities, are still widely accepted in the mainstream discourse dominated by White British. Despite this difficulty, Mei keeps fighting to play more well-spoken Chinese characters on British television and hopes to "contribute to the stereotypes being overturned" (Wong 182). This encourages Xing Li to struggle against the racial discrimination she experiences at school. In this sense, Mei's characterisation provides Xing Li with a positive example of being British Chinese, beyond ethnic territorialisation.

Notably, as Wong admits, the protagonist Xing Li is "someone who in [her] youth, [Wong] would have loved to be friends with", and the racist incidents described in this work of fiction represent her own uneasy experience of growing up to a certain extent ("Peripheries"). Based upon this, and considering Wong's own experience of working as an actor, it is not unreasonable to associate the character of Auntie Mei with a certain part of the author. Indeed, Mei's efforts to demolish stereotypes and show the multiplicity of British Chinese are similar to what Wong aims to do through her writing. Therefore, on the one hand, by exposing painful experiences of racism, *The Life of a Banana* expresses a less optimistic attitude towards the current condition of the Chinese minority in the UK, in contrast with the previously analysed *Sweet Mandarin*. On the other hand, Wong indicates the need to fight against such racism, and integrates her narrative of Xing Li's growing up with the efforts made by young BBC to resist discrimination.

Developmental Narrative through a Fight against Racism

According to Davis, "in the fiction of ethnic authors who privilege the writing of childhood, the search for a valid beginning to the telling frequently mirrors the narrator's own for the stage at which they become the individuals they now feel themselves to be" (*Transcultural Reinventions* 30). In other words, after a series of events experienced by the child protagonist, a more mature perspective will appear and reconcile the contrary forces in the child's eyes, reflecting the developmental narrative. In *The Life of a Banana*, although upsetting, the successive hardships that Xing Li endures after the death of her mother push her to grow up. Influenced by her brother Lai Xing, who comes up with "Chinks Have Mouths (CHM)", Xing Li first literally puts this slogan into practice in the face of racial bullying.[33] Finding out more about her family, she learns different ways from them to shatter the stereotype of the "silent Chinese" in British society. When she finally realises her grandmother's manner of dealing with racism, Xing Li develops as a more mature narrator, understanding the struggle that all of her family members have endured when re-settling in the UK.

Having moved to the Wu house, Xing Li and her brother are transferred to private schools by their grandmother without being consulted. As mentioned above, her grandmother is initially perceived by Xing Li as a conservative matriarch. Contradictions between Xing Li and her grandmother lie in their attitudes towards the racial discrimination that the protagonist encounters in her new school. Encouraged by Lai Xing's ironic slogan, Xing Li gets down to striking back against her racist bully, Shirley, albeit in a child's naive way. However, her grandmother says, "As long you get good report card and no detention no need make big deal. Actions louder than words" (Wong 31). The two old-fashioned statements reflect the autocratic style adopted by her grandmother, who pays no attention to the

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[33] In *The Life of a Banana*, Wong usually presents this slogan, with its problematic language, in abbreviated form after its first appearance; both the full phrase and the abbreviation are capitalised, without quotation marks. To draw a critical distance from the author's original use, this thesis adds quotation marks when reproducing this ironic slogan.

children's adaptation to their new schools, let alone to how they can find their "mouths"; her only concern is their report cards. Therefore, the role played by Xing Li, as a child narrator, continues the intergenerational war over the racial problems faced by her family. She represents the antithesis of an "adult world" (the mainstream), in which the stereotype of the "silent Chinese", exemplified by her grandmother (as regarded from her naive perspective), is tacitly approved.

In a mid-term maths exam, Xing Li finds that Shirley is cheating and reports her to the headmaster; when her "enemy" is finally expelled from West Hill, Xing Li is overjoyed to have found her "mouth" (Wong 184). However, instead of truly ridding herself of racial bullying, Xing Li's childish response provokes retaliation. On the way home from school, Xing Li is assaulted by Shirley:

> Shils covers my mouth with the scarf and ties a double knot at the back. [. . .] Shils takes her knife and cuts into my leg. Blood oozes and trickles down my leg.
>
> CHINK
>
> "See if this teaches you a lesson, stupid chink." (Wong 187-88)

Depicting the horrible scene not only reveals the failure of Xing Li's first attempt to fight against racism, but also indicates the necessity for her to find her "mouth" in a more mature way. Yet, the attitude of Xing Li's grandmother towards this incident puzzles her more. Mrs Wu explains her granddaughter's injury to the outside world as having been inflicted by a car accident, because "by keeping [her] mouth shut, it will protect [her] future" (Wong 190). The divergence in terms of "mouth" between Xing Li and her grandmother tortures her; the latter thus comes to miss "the old Xing Li, [. . .] [t]he Xing Li who was not sad and the Xing Li who had not started to grow up" (Wong 195). This internal monologue demonstrates the conscious development of the character of Xing Li, allowing her to reflect on her relationship with her grandmother and realise different approaches to "CHM".

The revelation of Xing Li's incident and the reappearance of Mrs Wu's past make Xing Li reconcile with her grandmother and acquire a more mature

perspective from which to review her familial relationships. Xing Li is upset with her grandmother's decision to remain silent about her being bullied by Shirley: "[Grandma] made a sick deal with them. She was too scared to stick up for me" (Wong 251). At this moment, in order to disabuse Xing Li, Auntie Mei explains how the old lady fought in her own way:

> "Grandma made a watertight deal with the Teddinghams. They tried to negotiate but you know Grandma's stance on negotiations."
>
> "No negotiations."
>
> "Exactly. Grandma made them sign a document that would force Shils out of the country so you would never see her again." (Wong 251)

In this sense, Auntie Mei, a fictional version of the adult author, functions to fill Xing Li's naive cognitive gap and catalyse her growing up. Xing Li then understands her grandmother's solution as a rational and effective way to protect her from racism. Xing Li's initial characterisation of her grandmother as a conservative matriarch is thus negotiated with the impression of a woman who seeks to perform a compelling style of "CHM" via practical actions, eventually collapsing the stereotype of the "silent Chinese". Resembling the shared affinity with food of the Tse family, "CHM" symbolises a collective faith held by the Wu family that has been demonstrated by every generation since Xing Li's grandmother through their fight against racism.

Auntie Mei also shows Xing Li a box of letters exchanged by Mrs Wu with her only real friend, George, in Singapore over a period of forty years. This reveals how Mrs Wu's difficult life in Britain has shaped the strong woman she is now. Most of these letters record the racial discrimination she suffered in London; on reading them, Xing Li understands "why Grandma got into fights a lot; why she had to have CHM 'cos if she didn't shout, people would squish her down" (Wong 266). Having empathised with her grandmother, Xing Li no longer opposes her stance, acknowledging that she had done what was the best for her. Xing Li's reconciliation with her grandmother and appreciation of intergenerational

solutions to racism imply that her child's perspective has matured and that the narrative has developed. Above all, Xing Li develops her approach to "CHM", stressing the need to be not only "a Chinese person with a mouth", willing and able to speak up when things are not right, but also "a Chinese person with a heart", capable of feeling, understanding, and treating others well (Wong 266). Xing Li's changed perception of "being Chinese" reflects the shared characteristics of all kind people, regardless of race, nationality, or ethnicity, striking back at racist attempts to segregate the Chinese minority from majority groups. Therefore, by representing Xing Li's difficult experience of growing up in *The Life of a Banana*, Wong not only reveals the stereotyping of British Chinese in racialised discourse, but also shows the dynamic and diversified development of this community.

In her work of fiction, Wong notes the racial tension that emerges as the Chinese minority seek to adapt to British society. This contrasts with Tse's characterisation of a well-integrated British Chinese community in her autobiographical memoir. Compared with *Sweet Mandarin*'s multicultural claim to – and even marketing of – a reified Chinese identity, *The Life of a Banana* reveals the negative effects of excessively emphasising a specific ethnicity in a transcultural context and presents the heterogeneity and multiplicity of British Chinese beyond ethnic territorialisation. The next section elucidates the development in characterising being British Chinese through a comparative reading of the two works.

A Development in the Discourse of "British Chinese"

> "Being Chinese in Britain is not problematic. We're seen as hard-working, law-abiding, quiet people who just get on with our lives and pay our taxes. Sometimes we almost feel like an invisible minority that's just drop off the radar." (Tse 240)

"But how can I be proud of being Chinese. [. . .] If I weren't Chinese, I wouldn't have so much pressure to be good at Maths. I wouldn't have to worry about people not say my name correctly. I wouldn't have to always explain London is my home, not China" (Wong 44-45)

In order to display the initiative of the Chinese minority in acclimatising to British society, Tse claims that being British Chinese is unproblematic, but has usually been ignored and become less visible. *Sweet Mandarin*, as a literary creation by a member of the Chinese minority, might be expected to give a voice to this group, making it visible. However, it seems to become trapped by the multicultural characterisation of a "model minority" in narrating the Tse family's achievements in the food industry. Tse's construction of this British Chinese discourse echoes the dilemma between self-determination and aesthetic autonomy faced by ethnic minority writers (see Introduction). Moreover, as Tse represents the mix of different styles in restaurants operated by her family as a transcendence of ethnic boundaries, their Chinese identity has been reified and commodified. Nevertheless, asserting a transnational identity and highlighting the mix of different styles in restaurants operated by her family, Tse transcends ethnic boundaries in claiming "British Chinese", despite being commodified.

Contrastingly, the assumption that British Chinese should behave well at school, in the job market, and in ethnic businesses is satirised by *The Life of a Banana* from the perspective of its child protagonist, Xing Li. Based on her own childhood experience, Wong reveals various racial problems that are easily ignored within the multicultural celebration of ethnic diversity by describing Xing Li's growth. Furthermore, Wong shapes the experience of suffering racism as a collective memory shared by every member of Xing Li's family and expounds on different counterapproaches, thereby deterritorialising the recent stereotyping of British Chinese as a model minority. Moreover, the Singaporean background of Xing Li's family deconstructs their Chinese identity as a largely imposed form, rather than a reflection of ethnic tradition. This adds transethnicity to develop the British Chinese cultural discourse.

Non-Territorialised Chinese Identity

In *Sweet Mandarin*, food not only provides a medium for the females of Tse's family to exert their subjectivity while re-settling in the UK, but also plays a significant role in their identity formation. As Claude Fischler states, "food not only nourishes but also signifies" (276). For people who share the same dietary habits, food functions as a key cultural sign that structures their identity and maintains their sense of community. Meanwhile, the symbol of food can possess different meanings according to historical, social, gender, and ethnic contexts. For diasporas, cooking and writing about ethnic food provide "culture-tenders" that can present the community's values, rituals, and beliefs to people outside of that community (Waxman 359). In this sense, descriptions of food and cooking occupy a considerable position in diasporic writing and the cultural orientation of the resulting literary texts is shaped through various alimentary images. As discussed in Chapter 1, whereas "sour sweet" represents both an alienated Chinese dish and the unsettled Chinese diaspora, "halo-halo" indicates the hybrid nature of Philippine migrants and their culture. In Tse's memoir, the food businesses run by her family absorb different cooking styles, showing cultural integration in their diasporic identity, rather than a territorialised Chineseness. Above all, "Sweet Mandarin", a combination of the Manchester slang for "good" or "cool" and the designation of Standard Chinese (Tse 268), not only reflects a syncretism of the restaurant's British and Chinese background, but also echoes the transnational identity claimed in Tse's memoir of the same name.

On the ocean liner to Southampton, Lily had the chance to experiment with "new techniques and ingredients", creating "Lily Kwok's Chicken Curry" to "celebrate the journey and as a welcome home surprise for the Woodmans" (Tse 158). This dish combines Lily's Chinese cooking skills with international ingredients, symbolising the beginning of her freeing herself form a territorialised Chinese identity by embracing different food cultures. When running Lung Fung, in order to attract more customers, Lily provided both Chinese specialities and plain English

food, using English vegetables as substitutes for more expensive Chinese greens (Tse 182). Lily's efforts to make her food business compatible with British culinary traditions suggest the possibility of her transcendence of ethnic territorialisation and integration into the local community. Finally, Lily's restaurant became "something of a local institution" for residents of Middleton, who were especially delighted by her signature dish, with which Lily took Britain as her adopted home where she had "found her place" to "climb the social ladder" (Tse 194-97). In this way, echoing Guo's portrayal of the new Chinese diaspora, Tse also highlights a migrant subjectivity in characterising Lily, who is not territorialised by her Chinese identity in re-settling in the UK. Therefore, despite sharing the motivation for migration and survival with the Chen family in *Sour Sweet*, Lily represents immigrants who are able to step out of ethnic enclaves and more effectively adapt to British society through their livelihoods, thereby shattering the ethnic stereotype of the Chinese catering business exemplified in Mo's early writing.

For Mabel, as Tse recounts, "My mother had a foot in both camps"; that is, Mabel constructed her identity under the influence of both Chinese and British culture (209). Mabel helped out at Lung Fung from her arrival in England at the age of nine, devising her own recipe for claypot chicken; meanwhile, her English improved rapidly, and as a teenager she was just as enthusiastic about pop music as the other girls at school. Mabel's dual embrace of the Chinese food culture and Western pop culture indicates her acquisition of a British Chinese transnational identity. Meeting her future husband Eric, who is also of Chinese descent, helped Mabel to feel even further at ease with her transnational identity. Eric hoped to "be Chinese without being bound into living out every tradition like an obligation", which guided the couple in finding "their own way to ride two horses at once, Chinese and English" (Tse 214-15). Through Eric's words, Tse illuminates the Chinese identity that her family claim is a non-territorialised identity so that they can cross ethnic boundaries, whether in their food businesses or in their interactions with British society. Setting up their own business after marriage, Mabel and Eric opened a fish and ship shop combined with a Chinese takeaway,

which not only continued the style of cooking from different cultures adopted by Lily, but also produced a transcultural environment for the Tse sisters.

Tse describes her parents' food shop, in which she and her siblings grew up, as a "one-family melting-pot" (215). The conception of a melting pot, as mentioned in the first section, is closely associated with immigrants' assimilation into their adopted country without retaining their original culture. As Tse confesses, she and her siblings were happy to be English children: "we were barely aware of ourselves as 'different' to our white schoolmates and we shared all kinds of culture with our friends" (209). Tse and her siblings provide an example of "model" BBC who establish their British identity through education and integrate themselves with the culture and customs of the local community where they were born. In the meantime, nevertheless, their experience of helping out in the family-run food business taught the Tse sisters that "[they] cannot separate business and family in Chinese culture" (Tse 239). Thus, the food shop run by Mabel and Eric becomes the site for their children to inherit their family tradition and develop an identification with their parents' home culture. As a member of the group of third-generation British Chinese, Tse claims that their engagement with the two identities allows them to "hover somewhere in between", thereby "integrating into Britain while keeping the Chinese values that underline all [their] achievements" (240). This recognition of being Chinese, as stated by her father, endows Tse with the subjectivity required to claim a Chinese identity, according to what she is willing to accept, rather than the entirety of the Chinese tradition.

Specifically, Tse expresses her Chinese identity through her rice-based dietary habits. However, these do not prevent her from enjoying Western cuisines, as she feels confident enough to "choose how Chinese and how British [she] want[s] to be" (270). Tse's initiative in balancing her coexisting British and Chinese identities indicates both a transcendence of ethnic territorialisation and a settling in where she was born. One Christmas, Tse prepared two turkeys for the family banquet – one British-style and the other Chinese – to signify that she is at ease with her transnational identity:

> Both were delicious. [. . .] [T]here is a new Chinese identity here in Great Britain, founded on the efforts of immigrants like my grandmother. Her generation came here for better times and their dream has been validated by the lives of their children and grandchildren, who can move freely in their adopted society and take advantage of all it has to offer. (Tse 271)

Being non-territorialised, the "new Chinese identity" represented through food is an acknowledgement of the achievements of first-generation immigrants during their re-settling in the UK, encouraging their descendants to integrate into British society without being hindered by their ethnicity. Cherishing her double heritage, Tse returns to the catering trade as a tribute to her grandmother's and mother's labour, as she tells us in the preface to her memoir: "Her story is my story, and it's the story of Sweet Mandarin" (1). Therefore, by expanding the meaning of cooking and food to a broader context, *Sweet Mandarin* not only represents the Tse family's collective memory of "survival, adaptation, ingenuity, and hybridization", but also narrates "a triumphant history of overcoming adversities" (Xu 8). It is in this sense that Tse constructs "British Chinese" as part of an impassioned and inspiring discourse.

"Unproblematic" British Chinese

As illustrated in the Introduction, the development of the discourse of diasporic Chinese people manifests a process of negotiation and re-negotiation according to changes in the external context. Chinese immigrants in Britain have long been characterised as a silent group whose existence is linked solely with the catering trade, with nothing to do with political influence and artistic creativity. This invisibility is deepened in a multicultural context, which stereotypes Chinese immigrants as a "model minority" to partially recognise their achievements in ethnic business, without considering the various problems they may encounter during their re-settling in the UK (Yeh, "In/Visibility" 36). As Tse turns her family's history in the food business into an autobiographical memoir, members of the

British Chinese community shift from being represented to representing themselves; in this sense, Tse becomes a "visible" BBC writer. *Sweet Mandarin*, in both its form and content, conducts a negotiation with publishing interest in the multicultural celebration of ethnicity. It shows minority writers' self-determination by claiming that being British Chinese is not problematic and, combined with Tse's restaurant of the same name, engages with ethnic marketing. Nevertheless, although Tse has realised the condition of an "invisible minority", showing her sense of struggle, her self-characterisation still provides another example of becoming a model minority.

According to Tse, Sweet Mandarin was opened as a "bridge between [her family] that crossed East and West, uniting the present and the past" (1). Sweet Mandarin, following the restaurant operated by Tse's mother and grandmother, provides both Chinese and Western cuisines, illustrating Tse's subjectivity in developing a British Chinese transnational identity. As Tse explains, "There was no point in opening yet another restaurant in Chinatown – we were trying to do something new, and for that we needed a new place" (267). Sweet Mandarin, as a result, is situated in Manchester's Northern Quarter, which is on the front line of the city's urban redevelopment scheme and boasts a range of food stores belonging to different cultures, being essentially distinguished from stereotypical Chinese-run food business in ethnic enclaves. By crossing ethnic boundaries between China and the West, Sweet Mandarin more easily attracts both members and non-members of the Chinese minority to consume different styles of food. As people belonging to different races, nations, and ethnicities can share the same kinds of British and/or Chinese food in her restaurant, Tse constructs the discourse of "unproblematic" British Chinese people. In this light, despite demonstrating the compatibility of Tse's British and Chinese identities, *Sweet Mandarin* is created as a negotiation with multicultural marketing.

Furthermore, Tse interprets Sweet Mandarin as a restaurant to "express what [her generation] were – British-born Chinese in the twenty-first century – and where [they]'d come from" (264). Yet a recent observation illustrates that

young British Chinese are "generally upwardly mobile and lost to the family business, and this corresponds to the wishes of the parents" (Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain* 59). Indeed, as Tse acknowledges, her decision separates her from most of her contemporaries and is inconsistent with her parents' original expectations (265). In other words, Tse's trajectory is not representative, but she shapes herself as a "model" BBC – a graduate of law from the University of Cambridge – as returning to the catering trade to cater to the multicultural ethnification of the Chinese minority. Hence, although *Sweet Mandarin* shows Tse's family heritage of transcending ethnic territorialisation through the food business, it inevitably participates in the construction of British Chinese community as a model minority. As the model minority discourse represents "a specific form of contemporary racialisation that revives 'yellow peril' discourses on the capacities of particular 'Oriental' bodies" (Yeh, "Model Minority" 1197), Tse's memoir reveals the necessity to always contest the recognition of being British Chinese in its discursive development.

Notably, given that an acceptance of Asian food in Euramerican society seems to be an effortless form of cultural tolerance (Xu 4), the non-territorialised Chinese identity Tse claims through food is in fact reified. Claiming that "[b]eing Chinese in Britain is not problematic" due to British acceptance of Chinese food underestimates practical issues relating to race and ethnicity, which are almost completely passed over in *Sweet Mandarin* (Tse 240). Despite recalling a racist scene from childhood of her little brother being called "chink", Tse believes that it is "hard to see herself as a victim of racism" (236). As she explains in an interview, "It's difficult to control the situation but you can deflate them by putting yourself in the right position" (Appendix). To a certain extent, Tse's response echoes the assertion made by Xing Li's grandmother that "actions [are] louder than words" (Wong 31), regarding behaving well as the best way to strike back. This cannot be separated from Tse's self-characterisation as a "model" BBC, who is at ease with a transnational identity beyond ethnic territorialisation. However, not every young BBC can handle racial problems, and Tse's recommendation, i.e. keeping silent, does not help such unintegrated youths to thrive, but rather leads to the

stereotyping of a "model minority" and makes real racial problems "invisible". For example, Xing Li in *The Life of a Banana* is characterised as a young BBC who fully claims a British identity at first but is plagued by an externally imposed Chinese identity. In this sense, what is ignored in Tse's memoir is highlighted in Wong's work of fiction, which reveals the troubling racist social environment rendered "invisible" in the former work, and reconstructs "British Chinese" as a diversified discourse to re-negotiate the idea of the "model minority".

Imposed Chinese Identity

According to Parker, Chinese in British schools, workplaces, and other environments are commonly exposed to racial discrimination, and these experiences help structure the memories on which Chinese identities are based (*Different Eyes* 104). However, Anglophone literature on racism in schools has long ignored the very specific experiences of Chinese pupils. This is primarily because, as explained in the first section, the common pursuit of a good report card by most young British Chinese leads to their stereotyping as a "model minority" in so-called multicultural education, invisible in discussions of victims of racism in schools. As Wong notes, *The Life of a Banana*, offering a detailed description of a BBC girl's experience of being bullied in school, was once rejected, because the literary agent was "not sure [if] these kinds of racial tensions in twenty-first century Britain exist" ("Peripheries"). This illustrates one of the side effects of multiculturalism. Ultimately, the work was published through Wong's own efforts. Its discussion of school bullying, classism, and racial bias from a literary point of view, displaying irony, not only reflects a positive change in the publishing industry, but also challenges the stereotype of the "silent Chinese" in Britain by making their problems visible.

In *The Life of a Banana*, racial discrimination at school arouses Xing Li's identity of being Chinese, in contrast with *Sweet Mandarin*, in which Tse shapes her Chinese identity through food. As a child of Chinese descent born in London, although Xing Li prefers to define herself as British Chinese, speaking with a

cockney-Chinese accent, she is invariably regarded as Chinese by other (White) British. Welcoming Xing Li to her class, Mrs Wilkins introduces her as "a newcomer all the way from China", although Xing Li says "I was born in Hackney" in her heart (Wong 28). By showing her initial affinity with being British, Xing Li's characterisation implies that not every individual belonging to a minority group embraces the collective ethnicity celebrated by multiculturalism. Following her teacher's incorrect pronunciation of her name, Xing Li is given the nickname "Sing-Song" by a few of her classmates; the instigator is the racist bully Shirley. The group of students then spread rumours that Xing Li is "some refugee on an assisted place and the school only let [her] in 'cos they felt sorry for [her]" (Wong 29). Being repeatedly reminded of her difference from White British students marks the beginning of the process by which Xing Li comes to perceive her Chinese identity and "connect being Chinese to other forms of identification" (Parker, *Different Eyes* 137).

To protect herself from Shirley's insults during lunch break, Xing Li often rushes to the bathroom and eats there alone. This miserable routine gives her a strong sense of Chinese identity, leading her to consider the differences between her and her British classmates: "I start to daydream about what it would be like to grow up in a country where I am not seen as different, where I am popular and don't have to explain my name or that I'm Chinese, and where I was not seen as 'ethnic' or 'exotic' but just 'me'" (Wong 34-35). The desire "to be 'normal' and be accepted as "British" manifests Xing Li's initial reluctance to claim an imposed Chinese identity, establishing an ethnic boundary that prevents her from integrating with her contemporaries (Parker, *Different Eyes* 137). Moreover, the inevitable discrimination she faces and her inerasable "abnormality" complicate her identity construction: "[I]f I weren't Chinese, Shils wouldn't make fun of my Chinese name. [. . .] But then if I were English, I wouldn't be Chinese like Mama. I don't know - it's confusing" (Wong 44). The ambivalent attitude towards being Chinese indicates an imperative identity negotiation as Xing Li grows up, during which she must not only display initiative to fit in, but also learn to cope with racism. Thus, in portraying Xing Li as a member of a minority group troubled by an

ethnic label imposed by social environment, *The Life of a Banana* mounts resistance to multicultural ethnification.

Xing Li's only friend in school, Jay, a Chinese-Jamaican boy born and raised in London, understands her ambivalence, having also encountered racial bullying, and encourages her to clarify her confusion of being Chinese in Britain. Faced with Shirley's bullying in the dining hall, Jay takes Xing Li to the library to eat lunch, comforting her with words learned from his parents: "I know who I am and so should you" (Wong 49). Xing Li is inspired by these words: "Maybe one day when I become grown up and confident I will be also to say it too. Like I know I'm Chinese but then my only home is London and I can only speak English not Chinese" (Wong 51). Indeed, as a child character able to find a balance between his ethnicity and his nationality, Jay serves as an important reference point for Xing Li in deterritorialising her ethnicity and developing a transnational identity. Furthermore, after hearing Jay's family's story of a Jamaican man and Chinese woman settling in London during a visit to his home, Xing Li is encouraged by his father's words: "sometimes there're fights worth fighting for" (Wong 152). When reporting Shirley's cheating to the schoolmaster from the standpoint of "CHM", Xing Li is able to recognise her Chinese identity and fight against racism in her own manner. The way in which Xing Li claims her Chinese identity is distinct from the racist intention to strengthen ethnic boundaries to isolate minorities from White British people; it in turn strikes back against this racial discrimination.

When Xing Li, inspired by Jay's family's story, becomes curious about how family history functions vis-à-vis personal identity, her grandmother takes her and Lai Xing back to Singapore for Christmas, explaining that they are "becom[ing] too like English children" and "need [to] know where [they] come from" (Wong 107-08). This journey not only links Xing Li's individual experience with the collective memory of her family, but also emphasises a sense of family heritage in her Chinese identity. For Xing Li, Singapore is a place about which her mother complained a lot but still called home (Wong 120). Here, the sense of "home" lies in "returning" (coming) to a place where the dream of being "normal" can be

absolutely realised, enhancing Xing Li's awareness of being Chinese. For instance, in response to a Chinese hawker, Xing Li just nods, rather than speaking English, to conceal the fact that she does not speak Chinese, as she wishes to avoid calling attention to her "abnormality" (Wong 111). Her reluctance to be perceived and treated as an outsider, whether in Britain or Singapore, implies the completion of Xing Li's identity negotiation, after which she is able to avail herself of her transnational identity to fight against racism. Her changed attitude towards Chinese identity reflects Xing Li's process of growing up, which – differently from the "unproblematic" process described by Tse – is full of multifaceted negotiations of both Xing Li's inherent ethnicity and external racism.

"Chinks Have Mouths"

The Life of a Banana is full of dramatic depictions of racial bullying from the perspective of the child character Xing Li, serving as a counterpoint to *Sweet Mandarin* in its focus on the various problems that trouble young British Chinese. The first section describes the use of a child's perspective as a narrative strategy for conveying irony in literary creation, because children's immaturity and innocence allow them to express what they see and feel free from the embedded norms of mainstream society. Resembling many coming-of-age novels, *The Life of a Banana* begins with a childish conversation that sets the tone of racial tension for the entire work:

> "Just be glad that cat is in a better place. If this were Guangdong, she'd be in a peasant's belly by now." (Lai Xing)
>
> "That's s-o-o-o racist." (Xing Li)
>
> "I can't be racist to my own race. Mama said it ain't possible."
>
> "I don't remember Mama ever saying that."
>
> "Well, Mama did." (Wong 7)

Through his parody of Cantonese eating habits, followed by his denial of being racist, Lai Xing, Xing Li's older brother, fulfils the role of satirising racism from the outset.

Since the death of his parents, Lai Xing has always sought to teach his little sister what a "true" Chinese person should be: "If you want to be a proper Chinese you HAVE to be good at Maths. People always think Chinese people are working hard but they're smart and they've finished the work by lunch break so they can play games on their computer" (Wong 23-24). The portrayal of child speech is usually impelled by a particular motive, as the speech patterns adopted by children tend to reflect their personalities (Hurst 63). As a smart, confident, and even somewhat radical boy, Lai Xing is inconsistent with the stereotype of Chinese people as being hard-working and law-abiding but generally silent. Yet, the use of a child character makes this contradiction more humorous than jarring, offering readers a relatively easy way of thinking about the characterisation of the Chinese community in English literature. Lai Xing proposes his ironic slogan to ensure that he is perceived as a "Chinese person with a mouth" and is not "ignored by society" (Wong 24). "Standing up to white boys, cracking jokes mid-lesson and putting fingers up at racist sales assistants in posh shops" are all examples of "CHM" that quickly prevent Lai Xing from being called "yellow wanker" (Wong 24). Although few of them conform to mainstream values, these actions allow him to avoid racial discrimination on numerous occasions, especially at school. In this sense, the child character Lai Xing first stands as the opposite of the "model" BBC represented in Tse's *Sweet Mandarin*. Hence, *The Life of a Banana* both challenges the multicultural stereotyping of British Chinese as a model minority and develops a discourse of "problematic" British Chinese people to make them visible.

Furthermore, to make the problems faced by young BBC "visible", Wong presents the serious consequences of Lai Xing's fight against racism with "CHM", echoing the necessity of attention from the adult world to compensate for the weakness of a child's perspective alone. Passionate about making British Chinese people heard, Lai Xing and his like-minded friends are recruited to join an

organisation called the Chinese Alliance Group (CAG). The CAG was founded to defend the rights of Chinese people in society, but despite repeated efforts, its work did not bear the desired fruit. As a result, it slowly evolved into an association that believed in "getting the Chinese community heard through any means possible" (Wong 225). The CAG symbolises both an extreme incarnation of "CHM", extended from the immature view of a child to a radical social context, and one of the highlighted racial tensions in the fiction. To integrate Lai Xing into the group, he is assigned to draw graffiti on the outside walls of his classmate's father's restaurant, and what he chooses to spray is "Chinks Have Mouths" (Wong 157). The graffiti incident results in Lai Xing being beaten up, warned by the police, and cast out of the Wu house by his grandmother; above all, it brings him to a crossroads in his life in terms of his practice of "CHM". Lai Xing's frustrating situation reveals that the problems faced by young British Chinese are twofold: in addition to suffering racial discrimination, they may also inadvertently place themselves in a position of difficulty in the fight against racism. In this sense, Wong exposes the hidden problems with the idea of a model minority and thus with Tse's construction of an "unproblematic" British Chinese community.

When Lai Xing gets into trouble, Mr Haywood, the headmaster of Hampstead Independent School, cares for him when no-one else did by picking him up after his arrest. For the child characters in coming-of-age novels, fatherhood is usually vital to their development, and "the loss of the father [. . .] leads inevitably to the search for a substitute parent or creed" (Buckley 19). Mr Haywood becomes a "father figure" for Lai Xing and talks with him about how to behave as a Chinese person with a "mouth" to respond to racism (Wong 225). With Mr Haywood's guidance, Lai Xing cuts off contact with the CAG and amends his approach to "CHM". Concentrating on improving his mathematical ability and rugby skills, Lai Xing finally receives an offer to study mathematics at the University of Cambridge on a full scholarship, revealing himself as a "young man who could reach far" (Wong 223). Mr Haywood's helping of Lai Xing – providing him with the attention of an upper-class Englishman, the principal of a private school – indicates that Lai Xing's racism-related problems are being heard in mainstream society, albeit in an

extreme way. His offer of a place at Cambridge reflects the success of his improved "CHM" – behaving well to strike back, as stressed by his grandmother. The overlap of intergenerational approaches to "CHM" reflects a reconciliation with the adult world as the child character grows up, which, ironically, makes Lai Xing another "model" BBC. The character of Lai Xing illustrates that young British Chinese can become model examples; however, instead of stereotyping this minority, *The Life of A Banana* presents the various problems that they may encounter and the different possibilities for their future, via the divergent experiences of Lai Xing and his little sister. The aim of "CHM" is not limited to being visible and heard in mainstream discourse; above all, it involves finding ways to address racism with the joint efforts of both minority and majority groups. Therefore, by characterising Xing Li and Lai Xing as "problematic", Wong reconstructs "British Chinese" as a discourse to fight against racism in order to transcend ethnic boundaries and adapt to local society. In this way, *The Life of a Banana* breaks down the stereotype of British Chinese as a model minority and demonstrates the heterogeneity and multiplicity of this community.

A comparative reading of *Sweet Mandarin* and *The Life of a Banana* reveals a repeatedly negotiated process in which the discourse of "British Chinese" arises, develops, and is diversified, as BBC writers represent different processes of their identity construction. Both the non-territorialised Chinese identity asserted by Tse and the imposed Chinese identity discussed by Wong illustrate that BBC writers no longer share their ancestors' understanding of being Chinese. They avail themselves of a deconstructed form of Chinese identity to transcend the ethnic boundaries between the history of their family and their own experience, thereby rationalising the transnational "British Chinese" that they feel most comfortable claiming to be.

This chapter elucidates the negotiation and re-negotiation in BBC writers' narrative construction of "British Chinese" within and outside model minority discourse. They not only depict the Chinese minority's initiative in integrating into British society but also explore the discursivity behind this generalised term. *Sweet Mandarin* and *The Life of a Banana* show a generational change in the understanding of being Chinese. This understanding is embodied not in identification with China's history and culture, but rather in an affinity with food and struggles with racism, respectively. Hence, BBC writers have less in common with their first-generation counterparts, who express a cosmopolitan desire to rid themselves of ethnic traditions in their adopted country (see previous chs.). Through a market-oriented family memoir and a coming-of-age novel with a compelling title, BBC's concerns are heard in the literary field. The latter, *The Life of a Banana*, also makes their problems somewhat more visible. In this way, the stereotype of British Chinese as a "model minority" is challenged, and the diversity within the British Chinese community Wong highlights contrasts Tse's affiliation with multicultural ethnification.

Meanwhile, in their development of the British Chinese cultural discourse, BBC writers demonstrate the coexistence of a British identity and a Chinese identity, echoing first-generation writers' emphasis on transcultural intercommunity, rather than on ethnic differences. Specifically, having deterritorialised ethnically prominent postcolonial patterns, Timothy Mo approaches ethnic minorities from a cosmopolitan perspective to represent the hybridity and syncretism of postcolonial society. Hong Liu's illumination of the aesthetic commonality between classical Chinese poetry and Western symbolism, and Xiaolu Guo's construction of the symbol of "home" with a nomadic mobility, further illustrate a cultural cosmopolitanism free from ethnic territorialisation. Similarly, a preference for a mixed cultural atmosphere, combining both British and Chinese, is expressed by Tse and Xing Li – a narrator and a protagonist devised by BBC writers – who assert their transnational identity. This works towards a cosmopolitan transcendence of ethnic boundaries. In this sense, although there is as yet no direct evidence of mutual influence between the writers discussed in this

thesis, their writings share an interest in exploring trans-ethnic themes and extending the discursive space of contemporary British Chinese literature.

Conclusion: Crossing Ethnic Boundaries

Having interpreted the five British Chinese writers' literary creations as a hybrid genre of minor literature and ethnic literature, the current thesis confirms their transcendence of the genre fiction of ethnic romance, which is used to represent group distinctions by strengthening ethnic ties. In other words, the trans-ethnic themes illustrate the heterogeneity and multiplicity of contemporary British Chinese literature, wherein ethnic boundaries are deterritorialised in the minority discourse's engagement with the mainstream. In reviewing the selected works, the shared intention to modernise China links them with the earliest cultural productions by Chinese intellectuals published in the UK. Both challenge understanding of things Chinese in the frame of colonial legacies and Orientalist stereotyping. This is, indeed, an enduring effort of British Chinese writers over generations, because they became visible in the British cultural scene with the rise of modernist literature, which has influenced participants of different ethnicities. Decentring the roles of race, nation, and ethnicity, the selected works offer readers a refreshing aesthetic experience in terms of its political, historical, and social implications, featuring a self-conscious break with traditional representations of China and the Chinese. The concluding chapter not only demonstrates contemporary British Chinese literature's crossing of ethnic boundaries but also positions it in the broader context of literary modernism, which is the main contribution of this thesis.

Negotiating the Modernist Contradiction

Following Ezra Pound's credo "Make it new", almost all modernists experimented with reinventing literary form and viewed themselves as outliers in some way. According to Josephine Park, Pound's Chinese ideogrammatic poetry thematises the social imaginary of the Western Self as the Eastern Other, in which Pound elides the cultural difference between China and America (25). This designates a representative characteristic of modernist works, whose articulation of

estrangement from the Self through alienating aesthetics was caused by a variety of factors: trauma from and concerns about worldwide wars, migration, the national acquisition of foreign territories, etc. In this context, Audrey Wu Clark conceptualises modernism as a tripartite set of contradictions – between high and low cultures; elite and mass magazines; leftism and Fascism; and, above all, the primary notions of the Self and the Other (174). Whereas Euro-American modernists possessed privileged mobility, capable of moving between the domestic, Western Self and the foreign, Eastern Other, Chinese diasporic intellectuals were perceived by Western audiences to statically represent the Other without the option of a domestic, Western Self. Nevertheless, the contemporary revivals of Chinese artists/writers in the British cultural scene have begun to examine these figures, exemplified by the earliest visible such individual, Shih-I Hsiung, with regard to the struggle for modernity (Yeh, Hsiungs 12). The current thesis focuses on more recent writers and elucidates the development of this theme. By reanalysing the selected works separately from their struggles with cultural hegemony, the ideological imperative, and neo-colonialism/liberalism, this section demonstrates how their authors negotiate the essential modernist contradiction between the Self and the Other by crossing East–West boundaries.

From Chinese Pidgin to "Asian Englishes"

The English language first arrived in China in the seventeenth century and developed as a form of Chinese Pidgin English (CPE) for the use of traders as a contact language in port cities such as Macao, Guangzhou, and later Shanghai (Bolton 122). As a cultural reflection of the global expansion of capitalism, modern British literature tends to address non-White people who fail to master English norms – whether speaking Chinese Pidgin or other Creoles – as the subordinate Other, suffering from linguistic deficiency. Created within the late twentieth-century trend of "the internationalization of English literature", to use Bruce King's book title, Mo's early works, *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet*, parody an Orientalist style. That is, the Chinese characters at both home and abroad speak

only CPE, in contrast with Standard English used by the omniscient narrator. The displacement and dislocation of Chinese characters shows not only as an expansion of capital, places, and even languages but also as an extension of modernist impulses and practices. The use of CPE represents the "tension" noted by Ashcroft et al. between the abrogation of received English from the centre and the appropriation of speech habits characterising the local tongue (38). A sense of alterity emerges in the process of making English strange. Specifically, CPE as a literary dialect that represents Chinese in the rhetoric of Orientalism echoes the traditional European imagination and literary construction of the Orient. Mo's alienation of China, as Ho argues, is in fact a satirical strategy, which is both a literary parody and a social critique, mounting a dramatic defence of the label of Chineseness attached to him by British society (13). Especially by virtue of *Sour Sweet*, Mo brings the stranded conditions of Hong Kong economic immigrants into the British mainstream, exposing the poignant Self–Other contradiction in the so-called multicultural society. In this light, the minor use of English by Chinese is consistent with Rushdie's argument that "we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes" ("Imaginary Homelands" 432). Although satirising obsolete aspects of Chinese culture, Mo shows empathy with the liminal status of the Chinese diaspora who are caught between rejection and assimilation. He inevitably writes back to the Empire due to his cultural hybridity; as a writer, he cannot escape the "specific circumstances that have made him" (Lim and Mo 561).

Resistance to English cultural hegemony has also boomed with the internationalisation of English literature, which is increasingly expanded by phrases from other languages, contributing to the advocation of "English Plus". Deriving from an 1985 American movement formed in reaction to the English-only movement, "English Plus" tended to promote greater acceptance of language diversity in the US, developing as a term to encourage more international perspectives. Applying it to the literary field, Doloughan Fiona uses the term "English Plus" to refers to the advantages of English texts by such bi-/multi-linguals as Guo, who integrate expressions from both Chinese and other Indo-European

languages in her writing to subvert assumed language hierarchies ("Translation" 160). Inheriting the language appropriation in Ashcroft's sense, this phenomenon is common in contemporary English literature by minority writers to continuously write back to the Empire, particularly contesting the English-only designation. Guo's portrayal of English-speaking Chinese characters is more multidimensional; in *Dictionary for Lovers*, which is interpreted as an anti-Orientalist novel in Chapter 3, Guo presents the process of Z's language acquisition as a learner of English as a Second Language (ESL). In the first half of the book, Guo gives a voice to Z's still imperfect ESL English and juxtaposes English with translated Chinese references, demonstrating the minor use of both languages and estranging English monolinguals. It is through this incommensurability that Guo makes Chinglish a legitimate language to express the intercultural poetry of incomprehension and attempts to construct a translingual literature through this mode of literary experiment (Spyra 453). Since language has a symbolic power, learning English is also "an act of desire" for "language as cultural capital" (Lennon 28). As her English improves, Z becomes increasingly conscious of how her language contradicts the British stereotypes of Chinese, negotiating not only a static Chineseness but also the Western long-standing modernist contradiction in the face of the Other. The novel thereby partially deconstructs the British comic norms that position the English language learner as a figure of fun. Furthermore, Guo proposes the word "steal" as a postcolonial metaphor for Z's English acquisition and uses the moniker "Oriental Globe" to parody the outdated central position of the British Empire (*DL* 232, 352). Guo's creative use of English not only mounts a counterattack against the Orientalist ethnification of the Chinese minority but also represents a strong subjectivity in establishing a discourse of the new Chinese diaspora.

In contrast with the former works' respective emphases on CPE and ESL English, Liu's Chinese characters master Standard English from the outset of each work. In Liu's writing, English functions as a lingua franca that provides a creative and productive linguistic space for flexibility and responsiveness "in accordance with the motivations and purposes of the particular writer regardless of place or places of origin" (Doloughan, *Narrative* 129). Specifically, Liu conveys Chinese

symbolic aesthetics in the medium of the English language, making English a literature of translation. With its inevitable distortions and infidelities, translation is a site at which, to quote Rushdie via Bhabha, "newness enters the world" (*Location* 227). The newness allows writers/translators to draw on a range of material resources and cross-cultural experiences in terms of their histories, biographies, and life choices to underpin the construction of their narratives in English. Indeed, cultural translation represents Liu's minor use of English, by which the shared symbolic aesthetics between China and the West negotiates ethnic differences and fashions the characteristic literariness of her works. Furthermore, echoing the statement at the beginning of the new millennium that "[n]obody 'owns' English now – not the British, with whom the language began 1500 years ago, nor the Americans, who now comprise its largest mother-tongue community", Liu demonstrates that everyone has a stake in it, "first-, second-, and foreign-language speakers alike"(Crystal 5). Contrary to Mo's silencing of Chinese people in *An Insular Possession*, Liu uses Tie Mei, one of the narrative subjects of *The Magpie Bridge*, to vividly narrate Chinese people's suffering and their hatred of invaders during the Opium Wars. Liu's historical account presents a version of alterity distinct from Mo's reproduction of Anglophone discourse, "rewriting of canonical stories" in the process of writing back to the Empire (Ashcroft et al. 96). With greater opportunities for writers to put their stamp on English rather than being constrained by Anglo-American sanctioned narratives, the Other and the Self encounter and contradict each other, but finally achieve a negotiation in Liu's writing. While Tie Mei denounces the British colonisation of China, Jiao Mei's donation of the heirloom that witnesses the suffering of her family to a museum, as elucidated in Chapter 2, symbolises a reconciliation of the historical conflicts between the two countries. In this sense, Liu's literary creation is not restricted to a modernist counterattack on Orientalism, but rather illuminates a transcultural intercommunity reflected in British Chinese writing.

Having portrayed old-fashioned Chinese immigrants who feel difficult to settle down due to their insufficient English proficiency, Mo's writing shifts its focus to "Asian Englishes", a term exploring the role played by English in

modernising Asian society. [34] Due to Asia's colonial past, English initially played a major role in altering the Asian identities of languages and modifying native Asianness, but has since shifted to the function of decolonialisation (Kachru 10, 21). Remaining vigilant to neo-colonialism in the practice of West-dominated globalisation, studies of "Asian Englishes" pay close attention to the interaction between the "functional nativeness" of English and negotiable Asian identities (Kachru 25). In his most recent work, *Pure*, Mo depicts the Thai ladyboy Snooky, whose great impurity with regard to hybrid cultural references illustrates the modernist contradictions in the Asian world of Englishness. As a talented linguist working as a free-lance writer, Snooky is fluent in English but maintains the native Siamese habit of referring to oneself in the third person, adding a sense of estrangement to the first-person narration. The self-conscious misuse of English as a result of the effects of contending modes of discourse reveals that English literature not only accepts participants from the Other but also absorbs its languages, thereby engaging with literary modernism to destabilise the imagined homologies of language and nation (Mignolo 219). Claiming to be a parodist and satirist, Snooky avails himself of English literary parody to produce a sense of strangeness and alterity in communication with his Western liberal Victor, trying to deterritorialise the imperial discourse behind this language. Self-reflexively, Snooky nevertheless acknowledges an affinity for English instead of Siamese or Thai; his ambiguous cultural identity gestures towards the impossibility of being purely Southeast Asian in the process of deimperialisation. Above all, not satisfying the superficial coexistence in which the Self and the Other are still differentiated, Mo positions Snooky in the further interstitiality of Asianness–Englishness, Islamisation–Westernisation, and cosmopolitan–nationalist relations. Snooky's ubiquitous heterogeneity results in hybridity, resonating with the strategy of "becoming others" in K. Chen's argument for "critical syncretism" as a compelling way to reconstruct Asian subjectivity after writing back to the Empire (99). In short, the changing role of English – from being passively accepted to being an active

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[34] On the conceptualisation of world Englishes in Asia, see Kachru 9-11.

output – elucidates a progressive crossing of ethnic boundaries among first-generation immigrant writers. Their deterritorialised uses of language heterogenise understanding of both Englishness and Chineseness/Asianness, which successively contest the modernist Self–Other contradiction.

Post-Cold War Narrative Transformation

As delineated in the Introduction, the imperative of ideological opposition between Chinese communism and Western liberalism predominated in cultural productions during the Cold War. Its influence has extended to literary practice by Chinese emigrants in the late twentieth century, particularly women writers' historical narratives. For Western observers, these writers became bona fide interpreters of the "real China", whose stories of the Cultural Revolution give the West "an insider's voice" from the "lost years" of Chinese historiography (Wakeman 9). The extraordinary success of *Wild Swans* and its successors is associated with the specific set of geo-political conditions in the early post-Cold War era, whose temporal and spatial materiality defines and determines the use and pertinence of the memoirs. Although Anglophone publishing interest in twentieth-century China has not waned, exemplified by Liu's related fictional works, the historical narrative she provides transforms the Cold War Orientalist construction of a totalitarian communist state into the postmodern deconstruction of an ideological Chineseness. Focusing on the growth of a child, for example, Liu's *Startling Moon* eschews the mode of representing ethnic suffering that was once popular with overseas Chinese writers. By unfolding the symbolism of classical Chinese poetry, this work of fiction highlights the aesthetic experience of Taotao's perception of the world, rather than charactering Taotao as an oppressed victim growing up in Maoist China. The narrative transformation thus manifests in Liu's representation of the Cultural Revolution, which no longer performs the role of the ultimate Other but works differently for every individual. Whereas Taotao represents a fortunate figure whose beloved families protected her from the upheaval, the character of Steel, a group leader of the Red Guards

221

(whose revenge on his biological father caused the tragedy in *The Touch*), reminds readers that self-labelled victims in misery memoirs may simultaneously play a victimising role. Growing up as a foundling, Steel inherits the illegitimate power of a bastard to transgress social rules, usurp power, rebel against the state, and create national disorder (Findlay 28), by which Liu's rearticulation of the Cultural Revolution offers an unorthodox expression of Chinese history. Above all, through a gendered narration in *Wives of the East Wind*, Liu describes the intimate relationship between Wenya and Zhiying, which smoothly progressed during China's hard times but broke down during the period of reform and opening-up, thereby shedding light on the feminist criticism of post-Mao Chinese women's literature at home and abroad.

Chinese women's liberation since the early stages of China' modernisation can be traced back to the May Fourth era, but it was largely used as a weapon against the Confucian tradition, obeying imperatives other than purely its own interests. As Cai argues, this movement, as well as the representation of women, was subsumed under other primary socio-political discourses – "nation building in the modern period and socialism in Communist China" (220). In other words, the problematic portrayal of women continued for a long time in Chinese literature, even among women writers, particularly when communist ideology deprived women of a subjective voice, forcing them to speak through official discourses. This is embodied in Anglophone bestsellers on twentieth-century China, in which female characters are still represented as either the oppressed Other or spokespeople for communism, whereas their women authors are usually the West/modernity incarnate. However, the female characters, Taotao, Jiao Mei, Lin Ju, and Wenya, in Liu's fictional works interact with real-life situations with distinct voices, resonating with the focus on "the right to enjoy romantic love and to be women" in post-Mao literary works by women writers (Wu 410). In the expression of Wenya's desire to regain femininity as human dignity that was devalued and lost during the Cultural Revolution in *Wives of the East Wind*, a divergence occurs between Wenya and Zhiying, who has an affair with his secretary, finally splitting up the couple. As the search for lost femininity is, ironically, accompanied by the

return to a sexist ideology (Wu 411), women's presence as sex objects is vastly abused for men's benefit, which seduces Zhiying into betraying his wife Wenya. By highlighting Wenya's broken relationship with Zhiying, Liu not only disengages her representation of women from the Chinese national narrative but also foregrounds the tension between the role of liberated woman and the traditional role of daughter, wife, or mother. Giving a literary voice to the emerging dilemma of women, which evolved from concerns about women amid socioeconomic changes in the post-Mao era, Liu directs us to new problems in the process of modernisation, which do not exclusively face China. In this sense, Liu's writing shifts attention to "common experiences" from a certain ethnic community to those beyond it, echoing the trend of boundary crossing in contemporary studies of Asian diasporas (Ty and Goellnicht 1-2). Through this narrative transformation, which elaborates the complexities, struggles, and diversities of British Chinese literary discourse, Liu reshapes a modernised Chineseness that loses "the familiar aura of other" to mainstream readers (Huggan 37).

Although literary policy was somewhat relaxed in the early post-Cold War China, political incorrectness or irrelevance was still publicly regarded as morally tainted or inappropriate and in need of control. As official judgements continued to play significant roles in the processes of literary publication and reception, most "[o]f the serious post-Mao works of literature [. . .] remain 'literature of purpose'" in which "[s]ociety is still the subject" (Kinkley 12). This phenomenon is represented in the ideological imperative of *Wild Swans*, which affirms Chang's identity as a survivor within its critique of China's Cultural Revolution to elicit recognition, albeit from the Western public. With the following negotiations with contemporary literary policy and mainstream literary practice, more and more post-Mao Chinese women writers have articulated their individual and gendered voices, constructing an alternative literary space (L. Wang 173). *Once Upon a Time*, by contrast, uses the mode of private writing via a coming-of-age narrative in which Guo's authorship develops continuously through her adaptation of the tale of the Monkey King. As the adapter, "the first interpreter" of an adaptation (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 18), Guo reveals her insight about the Monkey King as

belonging to a category of "parentless, self-made heroes" who have to "create themselves" (*OUT* 314). Guo's interpretation suggests a connection between the Monkey King and herself through individualism and rebelliousness. Adaptation is a "form of intertextuality"; according to Hutcheon and O'Flynn, "we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation" (8; emphasis in original). Chapter 3 has elucidated Guo's transformation of the Monkey King into a free creature emancipated from his master as well as his emperor, echoing her self-creation as a nomad free from familial, national, and ethnic territorialisation. By rewriting and adapting a Chinese classic, Guo links *Once Upon a Time* not only with the autobiographical Künstlerroman, rather than with the misery memoir, but also shows a strong gendered voice through the mode of private writing. Hence, whereas Chang narratively constructs the subordinate condition of Chinese women by "transcribing" her mother's memories of her grandmother, Guo's account is written based on her lived memory, which gave rise to her feminist thinking. Guo's engagement in women's private writing works in concert with Liu's literary voice for women's desire for femininity, which together involve post-Cold War British Chinese literary discourse with contemporary feminist criticism. This enriches the image of Chinese women in the Anglophone publishing market.

After the implementation of the reform and opening-up, China transited from the mode of planned economy dominated by the CCP to a still undefined mix of socialism and capitalist markets, urging its citizens to renegotiate norms and values concerning social development and their own roles. At the same time, China's growing participation in global commerce promoted the trend of non-official Occidentalism, which associates things Western with modernity, advancement, and power. The influence of free market capitalism on the Chinese literary scene has also been reflected in increasing attention to narratives of individual initiative and self-ownership since the 1990s (Knight 222). Having received an intellectual education at the Beijing Film Academy in post-Mao China, Guo represents her journey to the UK as a journey to art, to stabilise her self-identity as a nomadic writer, through which she empowers her self-ownership in

the West as in the East. Guo's trajectory ostensibly resembles the marketable formula of Chinese women writers creating misery memoirs to Western readers: "A young woman struggles but survives the Cultural Revolution in China [. . .] to find heath, happiness – and a husband – in the West" (Yoon 64). While linking the prospect of a new life abroad with a Western husband appeals to white-dominated readers' sense of moral superiority and desire for experiences of the Other, this modus operandi implicitly deprives women of their right to self-ownership. However, both Guo's autobiographical narrative and her life choice break this formula, showing a strong individual initiative. Able to apply for her British passport by virtue of her literary career, Guo disengages from the anthropological pattern of "global hypergamy" whereby "Asian women who marry western men marry 'up'" in favour of Western centrism (Constable 167). Building a home with an Australian philosopher in London, Guo, who remains unmarried, chooses to address Steve as her "partner" to show their equal status. Guo's devotion to women's right to self-ownership in *Once Upon a Time* reveals a narrative transformation away from *Wild Swans*, in which Chang assumes a Western gaze and contributes to an Orientalist spectacle of oppressed Chinese women. Moreover, Guo's self-creation as a radical feminist works in concert with the development of postcolonial feminism, which, by arguing that women living in non-Western countries are usually misrepresented, points out the universalising tendencies of mainstream feminist ideas (McEwan 96). Hence, the double contribution of Guo's autobiographical narrative to transforming British Chinese literary discourse lies in reshaping Chinese women writers in the West while modernising China.

Voicing the Exoticised Other

In his *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), Graham Huggan argues that Euro-American societies' interest in the exoticised Other has shifted in the late twentieth century "from a more or less privileged mode of aesthetic perception to an increasingly global mode of mass-market consumption" as a

result of the expansion of a worldwide market (15). Incarnated as a boom in the marketing of ethnicity, "strategic exoticism" has become popular with contemporary postcolonial authors, who no longer resist or oppose the process of commodification and consciously interact with the interpretation and reception of their texts. By representing her family's migration to the UK and the Chinese cuisine served in their restaurant as "exotic" experience and food respectively, Tse makes *Sweet Mandarin* a literary–commercial project that attracts both readers and diners to consume it. Claiming that "being British Chinese is not problematic", Tse enters into a multicultural discourse that might be read either positively, as a "synonym for cultural tolerance or 'reciprocal interconnectedness'", or negatively, as "a cover for new forms of ethnocentrism or as a mystification of the continuing asymmetries of power within inclusive conceptions of global power" (Huggan 11). Nevertheless, as the recent report *Rethinking "Diversity" in Publishing* (2020) notes, "publishers fear that books by writers of colour are too niche and will not appeal to their core audience" (Saha and Van Lente 2), suggesting the importance of achieving a negotiation between being "whitewashed" and "exoticised". Moreover, with regard to the "divide between the dictates of the market and the demands of a critical readership" in a discredited global sphere, Sarah Brouillette contends that the focus is "situating and understanding writers' troubled attempts at deliberate self-construction" in the international literary industry (4, 1). By exposing a series of problems caused by White people's exoticisation of young BBC such as Xing Li and his brother, Wong provides an ironic counter-narrative of the "model" Chinese minority in *The Life of a Banana*. Wong's fictional discourse not only contests the newly racialised construction of BBC as a model minority but also negotiates the exoticised Other in characterising a modernised and diversified British Chinese community to the mainstream cultural landscape. The comparative reading of *Sweet Mandarin* and *The Life of a Banana* in Chapter 4 has shown that voicing the exoticised Other is always a negotiated process, during which the selected writers make enduring efforts to present heterogeneous understanding of Chineseness/Asianness to Anglophone readers.

The loosening up of the Cold-War structure encouraged historiographic interest not only in China, but also in the broader Asian-Pacific region, to which Mo also shifted his focus, offering a critical perspective on the power of the media to shape people's ideas of history and culture, particularly the role of contemporary journalism. As Judie Newman observes, "postcolonial writers are [. . .] often at their politically sharpest, when they are also at their most literary" (4); indeed, Mo's poignant stance in historical narrative shares the features of diversification, deconstruction, and politicisation in postmodern critique (Currie 6). In the wake of the Joint Declaration (1984) over Hong Kong, Mo fictionally disassembles the history of Hong Kong entangled with various media coverage in *An Insular Possession*. Mo's political sensibility continues in his fictional construction of the history of a fictional island nation, Danu, in *The Redundancy of Courage*, which closely parallels the fate of East Timor after its invasion by the Indonesians in 1974. The events and atrocities that took place during the East Timorese struggle for freedom barely registered in the Western news media, except in nearby Australia and New Zealand. Indicating the possibility for the disappearance of a struggling nation to go completely unnoticed, even in an age of ever proliferating global media, Mo reveals the dilemma of a twice-colonised nation endangered by capitalist globalisation. After the publication of Mo's novel, East Timor finally caught the attention of the world media when Bishop Belo and the resistance leader Ramos Horta were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996. Independence followed in 1999, and the country has since been rebuilt with the assistance of the United Nations. In this sense, *The Redundancy of Courage* represents an effective postcolonial literary practice in making Asian voice heard. Furthermore, the aim of Mo's critique of contemporary journalism and engagement with historiographic metafiction is not only to uncover unreliable narrative subjects but also to demonstrate the necessity of rethinking Asian modernity in its transformation from decolonisation to globalisation. According to K. Chen, as the West, especially the US, has played a central role in othering the East Asian, the chief task today is to negotiate Westernisation in knowledge production to develop a new subjectivity with which to approach Asian modernity

(120). Dividing his time between different countries in Southeast Asia in his later years, Mo focuses on the reconstruction of Asian subjectivity. Until *Pure*, in which Snooky may provide a means of negotiation, the local and the West always collide.

With the questioning of the West-dominated Asian subjectivity, the traditional narrative subject is replaced by a third-person narrator roaming among a cluster of characters in Mo's *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*, which is set in postcolonial "Filipino" society. By the post-Cold War 1990s, however, the Philippines no longer held special geo-political significance in the gaze of the international media panopticon, offering only the occasional spectacle of volcanic eruptions, political buffoonery, and seemingly random and rampant violence and criminality (Hedman and Sidel 2). This tragi-comic image of the Philippines has been echoed and elaborated in lurid detail in fiction, film, and other realms of the global culture industry; similarly, *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* shows the aftermath of a people's revolution to overthrow the Marcos government. Chapter 1 has illuminated that this work shares artistic features with the polyphonic novel, in which a group of characters, possessing independent consciousnesses but equal rights, are "not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse" (Bakhtin 6-7). However, the unequal power of these discourses, reflected in the dialogue of social hierarchies inside and between divergent native and foreign forces in the novel, upholds Mo's satirical style. As satire respects neither national nor ethnic boundaries, none of the disempowered Boyet, the upper-class Inits, or various other spokesmen for certain discourses can escape the satirist's skewering of the human condition (Ho, *Timothy* 120). Mo characterises the Philippines as a nation that is transiting from traditional life to modernity completely at the mercy of globalisation. Not only does a large portion of its population migrate to other nations for employment, but global capital migrates to the Philippines to exploit the natural resources there. There are multiple collisions between home world and international world in *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*, in which capitalist hegemony renders any potential local subjectivity invisible, thereby leading to the final "brownout" of the whole society. Although Mo's literary career since this novel has moved increasingly away from

both the market and academia, his satire on the "Filipino" society reiterates the significance of a negotiated subjectivity in the representation of Asian modernity from the opposite side. Mo's attention to the marginalised condition of the Philippines and its people in the late twentieth-century globalised world continues in his next work, together offering a critical stance towards Western cultural domination in voicing the exoticised Other.

After tentatively discarding subject-driven narratives, Mo returns to the traditional mode of first-person narration. Used to depict the global adventures of Rey Castro in *Renegade or Halo²*, moving across a multitude of societies and cultures, this reflects the artistic nature of the picaresque novel. The picaro, originating from the ironic description of the compulsorily converted Jews of Spanish literature (see ch. 1), has developed as a marginal and disempowered literary archetype of Western civilisation. The gentle protagonist, Castro, half Filipino and half African-American, is treated by most strangers as a black hulk of muscle and is forced to exile to survive after being framed by his fraternity, thus serving as a doubly decentred picaresque Other. The picaro is both an observer of life from the underside and an ironic commentator on and satirist of what he observes, particularly of the upper classes (Finney 63). Castro represents a picaro who, despite living in a world of increasing modernisation in the last two decades of the twentieth century, leads a surprisingly low-tech life; his story takes place on ships – the preferred transportation for those on the bottom rung of global migration. This is the flip side of globalisation, far removed from the "global network of ambitious young people in business and the professions," the "yuppie" (Berger 4). In parallel with the nineteen unfortunate Chinese cockle diggers who died on the treacherous mudflats of Morecambe Bay in northern England (Oliver) in February 2004, Castro gives voices to the illegal migrant workers. Notably, focusing on "the utmost precariousness" of picaros (Elze 1), Mo cross-historically brings the aesthetic principles of this archetype from early modern texts into the globalised context to expose the sharp contrast between its two poles. By taking the picaresque narrative genre as a ready-made model to characterise the dispossessed Castro as a contemporary picaro, Mo comments on the failings and

hypocrisies of a wide range of contemporary societies, both Occidental and Oriental. In this sense, *Renegade or Halo²* voices a displaced Other, although physically exoticised, whose otherness is reinforced by his social hierarchy in the process of globalisation rather than ethnic belonging, disclosing the exploitation of labour and unequal distribution within neoliberal capitalism. Through the thought-provoking picaresque narrative, Mo reminds us that the internationalisation of English literature is not only a process of decolonialisation and deimperialisation; it should also provide insights into the dilemma of modernisation.

Modernist strategies responding to the experience of modernity have promoted a "spirit of critique," as Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar puts it, that scholars now associate not only with the past and with the West but also with emergent practices of "non-Western people everywhere" (3-4). Engaging with the process of modernising China via literary voices, contemporary British Chinese literature, by conducting continued negotiations with Western mainstream discourses, suggests an inclusive understanding of Chineseness in de-othering China and Chinese people. Although sharing the label of "ethnic", the selected writers represent the diversified experiences of the Chinese minority in British society and validate possible conditions beyond national and ethnic territorialisation. According to Rebecca L. Walkowitz, by replacing static models of modernist exile with more flexible, dynamic models of migration, entanglement, and mix-up, a "cosmopolitan style" develops from twentieth-century British culture as a supple and disputed concept to treat literary style politically (6). Created within the globalised context to demonstrate the impossibility of claiming a static and homogeneous Chineseness in contemporary transnational communication, the selected texts share an affiliation with the cosmopolitan style, although from different approaches.

The Cosmopolitan Style

After tracing the evolution of cosmopolitanism in the Introduction, this thesis uses the term "cosmopolitan" to designate the engagement in "thinking and acting beyond the local" (Pollock et al. 10) in literary practices that imagine collective affinities in retreat from the nation. Inspired by Walkowitz's study of modernist literature coinciding with thinking about political critique from a cosmopolitan perspective, this thesis takes her usage of "cosmopolitan style" to summarise the "persistent efforts to reimagine the centre in terms of peripheries" by selected writers (10). In spite of their divergent immigration motivations, the first-generation British Chinese writers under study self-consciously reflect the relationship between the Self and the location in their common condition of displacement, discarding the sense of nostalgia and exploring possibilities across ethnic boundaries. Contesting their affiliation with the ethnic tradition, BBC writers discuss the interaction between their two identities in a multicultural context. Through their negotiations with and of the model minority discourse, claiming British Chineseness no longer represents imaging the Self as an embodied subject. Untangling these writers' engagement with the cosmopolitan style supports the argument regarding the thematic diversity of contemporary British Chinese literature in this thesis, which thereby contextualises its interstitiality between minor literature and ethnic literature.

The shift in focus from British Chinese to "Asian Englishes" in Mo's writing career explores what Said calls "new and different ways of conceiving human relationships" in the literary field (*World* 17). These ways resemble the attributes of cosmopolitan consciousness: "a critical as well as self-critical sensibility allied to expansive moral and political sympathies" (Spencer 165). Represented by Ng in *The Redundancy of Courage*, Mo's literary creation tentatively develops an alternative form of postcolonial pattern, encouraging self-criticism without sacrificing the possibility of knowledge, communication, and even corrective political action. In this novel, Mo shows his determination to address and bridge the gap between the uncertain Western percipient and the largely unheeded historical events of East Timor's re-colonisation and resistance, featured in Ng's

irony and self-awareness. Being alert to the gulf that separates the puny powers of writing from the stifled voices of colonialism's victims, Mo not only discloses Ng's marginality via the latter's self-consciously ironic narrative tone, but also, more subtly, punctures Western complacency and incuriosity in addition to exposing the media's bias and self-interest. By reaching across ethnic boundaries, this novel reveals the violence perpetrated, legitimised, and eclipsed by dominant narratives penned in the service of colonial power. In this sense, Mo's portrayal of Ng as a cosmopolitan interlocutor who is as knowledgeable and sympathetic about other situations and cultures as he is critical of his own suggests a remedy for the prevailing cynicism.

As Calhoun Craig states, cosmopolitanism is most often invoked by those who see identity politics almost as a mistake, focusing on "the world as a whole rather than on a particular locality or group within it" (439). In his subsequent *Renegade and Halo*[2], in which Castro takes over Ng's role as a cosmopolitan interlocutor, Mo proposes an alternative criticism that seeks to change the world through a refusal of what it calls "tribalism". Assuming an outsider position with regard to all tribes or group identities, Castro develops a moral code of conduct that is not compromised by a self-aggrandising sense of his own people's cultural superiority. Through Castro's eyes, Mo challenges the entitlement of the tribe to a sense of belonging to existing communities that are constituted through separation and exclusion and organised by internal hierarchies. However, this is, as Castro reminds us, the perspective of a renegade, someone who does not like his own tribe and can keep a distance from its values but, meanwhile, is barely accepted by it. Moving too far away from each mainstream discourse has marginalised Mo in all literary circles, leading to the suggestion that he lacks a "natural readership" for his themes (Jaggi, "Mixtures"). Learning this, Mo consoles himself, "I will years from now: there'll be more halo-halos like myself" (Jaggi, "Mixtures"). Indeed, the increasing efforts to cross ethnic boundaries in British Chinese literature imply a certain inheritance of Mo's affinity for the cosmopolitan style. As a pioneer of Commonwealth literature, Mo gradually diverges from writers of his generation, such as Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul, because his radical deterritorialisation

of ethnicity has received a mixed reception. In effect, Mo provides a double case study for later British Chinese writers: despite sharing the aim of contesting Chineseness, they also seek a negotiation with their "natural readership", thereby more fully acknowledging and developing the discourse of "British Chinese".

While the term "Chineseness" has been repeatedly negotiated and is losing its traditional function of ethnic territorialisation in Anglophone Chinese studies, the global resurgence of nationalism in recent years has hampered the cosmopolitan style of border crossing. Nowadays, in mainland China, accompanying the identity politics of the party-state, cultural nationalism shows the ambition to unify intellects at home and abroad to embrace a pan-Chinese identity by essentialising the "ethnic core" of the nation (Y. Guo 2-3). In this context, Confucian revival becomes an efficient way of reclaiming national identity, because the dominance of Confucianism in Chinese culture provides a cognitive basis for uniting all ethnic Chinese people. Among the Chinese diaspora, although new Confucianism is devoted to identity politics, traditional Chinese ideologies, such as gender inequality and suppressing personality, lead to certain negative attitudes towards Confucian thoughts. For example, the frustrated yin-yang equilibrium in *Sour Sweet* not only satirises the Confucian conception of gender, but also suggests Mo's resistance to Chinese national identity. Moreover, describing herself as "anti-family – a hardcore militant feminist" (Jaggj, "Xiaolu Guo"), Guo further breaks down the gender stereotypes in Chinese culture and separates from the Confucian territorialisation of the concept of "home", which she endows with mobility. Guo's deconstruction of Confucianism prevents her writing from becoming entangled with ethnification and offers a discourse opposite to cultural nationalism. Above all, the officially advocated cultural Chineseness is "more Han than Chinese" and has little consideration for China's ethnic minorities (Y. Guo 47). Guo, albeit a member of the Hui minority, expresses no preference for either a Han Chinese or a Hui minority identity, thereby questioning cultural nationalists' ethnic territorialisation.

In her autobiographical narrative, Guo escapes from the Chinese cultural construction of the concept of "home" and identifies herself as "a nomad in both body and mind" (*OUT* 1). The introductory chapter has dwelled on the affiliation between a Deleuzian nomad and a cosmopolitan. Being a nomad is an important approach to withstanding the territorialisation of capitalism, as the "in-between" status provides nomads with the total consistency to enjoy "both an autonomy and a direction of its own" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 380). In fact, Guo resists the infliction of territorialisation – both English cultural hegemony and official Chineseness – on a nomad, who has "no roots, not in Shitang, nor any other town or village" (*OUT* 97). Thus, in her pursuit of becoming a nomadic artist, Guo neither romanticises her past in China nor glorifies her new home in the UK, but rather shows her desire to become "a citizen of the world" (*DL* 187). In this way, the cosmopolitan style that emerged in Mo's later novels reappears in Guo's literary creation. As both a nomad and a cosmopolitan, Guo comes closer to a "nomadic cosmopolitanism", whereby the community is enabled "to shift and move, to cross borders and ignore loyalties" with the subject (Berman 197), in contrast with the criticism for clinging to old fashions in Mo's works. Compared with Mo's radical satire, Guo adopts the literary genre of the autobiographical memoir, popular in ethnic writing, to balance her cosmopolitanisation of Chineseness. Therefore, Guo's literary creation, which satisfies both aesthetic autonomy and the demands of the publishing market, gains a wider readership and becomes representative of its author's contemporaries.

What Mo and Guo challenge in their writing is the "social and cultural matrix" of Chinese tradition, which is the focus of cultural nationalism's ambition to strengthen national identity (Smith 71). In comparison, Liu's works display a kinder attitude towards traditional Chinese culture and represent its aesthetic values from a transcultural perspective. The idea-images emerging in Liu's works convey the artistic aspect of Chinese poetry that shares aesthetic characteristics with Western symbolism. This has always been the realm in which scholars from different backgrounds have been able to explore the strong affinity between classical Chinese poetry and Western symbolist poetry (Lan 24). In this sense, Liu's

cultural translation of various traditional Chinese symbols into English does not reinforce ethnic territorialisation, but rather engages with the discussion of comparative poetics. Furthermore, Liu expounds on the symbolic aesthetics in the background of communist China, which allows her to reach a compromise with the market expectations for ethnic writers. Above all, believing that "individuals are more important than nationality and culture" (Wilson), Liu highlights individual aesthetic experience instead of ethnic identity in different historical periods, and in turn moves beyond the national narrative of Chinese history. This deconstruction places Liu's writing in the context of minor literature's resistance to metanarratives, connecting British Chinese literature with postmodern literary discourse. Ethnic studies have always been inclined to examine the uniqueness of minority groups and praise their constitution of multiculturalism, but Liu balances ethnification with the deterritorialisation of the Chinese national narrative and manifests the aesthetic universality of different cultures.

The presentation of transcultural intercommunity links Liu's literary creation with the context of artistic cosmopolitanism, which, as an expression of high modernity, signifies "the autonomy of art that [is] the product of a rebellion against both bourgeois and national culture" (Bielsa 72). The illumination of the commonality between traditional Chinese aesthetics and Western symbolism through cultural translation helps Liu to withstand the stereotyping of Chinese symbols when writing for the Anglosphere. As "an open conversation between the local and the global" and an "imaginative engagement" with the Other, artistic cosmopolitanism must be complemented by an examination of both the production and the circulation/reception of contemporary literature (Papastergiadis 9; Bielsa 72). In the same way that Mo's novels are marginalised relative to two literary circles and Guo's writing is accepted largely because it stylistically meets market expectations, Liu's works are barely ever acknowledged as aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Although cultural translation makes the Chinese idea-images analysed in Chapter 2 full of symbolic aesthetics, the transcultural intercommunity is ignored in previous discussions of Liu's literary creation. Most reviewers focus on the historical accounts in her novels, which, albeit exhibiting

various postmodern narrative strategies, are regrettably usually read as ethnic romances. Attention to "otherness" in the sense of "not being part of the dominant white culture" has dominated the study of diasporic Chinese literature over the years, but excessive entanglement has also strengthened ethnic boundaries that limit the diversity of approaches to this kind of writing (Ty and Goellnicht 3). Therefore, through their different methods of boundary crossing, first-generation writers not only adhere to a shared cosmopolitan style in negotiating the modernist contradiction between the Self and the Other, but also pursue the common goal of creating a trans-generic literature that defies classification based on authors' ethnicity.

The concept of "British Chinese", though objectively generalising people of Chinese descent who have settled in the UK, as discussed above, is usually controversial due to the complexity and multiplicity of "being Chinese". In recent years, cultural production in English by British Chinese has been compatible with the emerging practice of conceptualising "British East Asian" – which includes those from Southeast Asia but excludes from South Asia – outside the linguistic Sinosphere (Yeh, "In/Visibility" 33). Public discourse in the Anglosphere tends to indiscriminately regard East and Southeast Asian artists as having been shaped by Chineseness, although part of them attempt to combat their incorporation – and thus their erasure – into the Chinese category (Yeh, "In/Visibility" 50). Whereas Mo seems to resist this categorisation by self-publishing his novels in the Philippines, Tse and Wong rearticulate "British Chinese" as an inclusive and multifaceted identity and receive wider recognition as BBC writers, indicating the increasingly cosmopolitanised Chineseness. Previously, as certain people of Chinese descent have recently re-identified being Asian American and switched from a hyphenated American identity to a pan-ethnic identity, Asian American literature reflected a shift from "being concerned primarily with social history and communal responsibility" to "being caught in the quandaries and possibilities of postmodernism and multiculturalism" (K. Cheung, *Asian American* 1). The similar expansion of discourse from "British Chinese" to "British East Asian" coincides with the critical cosmopolitanism as opposed to an exclusively interpretative or

descriptive approach to the social world. In this sense, "Chinese cosmopolitanism" has developed within new diasporas whose numbers, despite not returning to their homeland, "embrace both a fundamental intellectual commitment to Chinese culture and a multicultural reciprocity, which effectively cuts across all conventional national boundaries" (Lee 215).

As elucidated in the Introduction, the hybrid identity that BBC claim beyond the sense of nation-states, in defiance of the racialised view of ethnic minorities, resonates with the emergence of Chinese cosmopolitanism. For most BBC, the Chineseness they have never truly owned is not one of instinctive identification, but rather passively distinguishes them from White British through visible differences. This recognition of being Chinese negotiates the significance of inheriting cultural traditions in perpetuating a homogeneous Chineseness and points to satisfaction with community development in British society. As a representative BBC to tell her family's story in literary form, Tse develops the discourse of "British Chinese" from displaced and unsettled stereotypes to independent subjects who are able to acclimate themselves to immigrant life. Tse's claim to a transnational identity shows her cosmopolitan transcendence of ethnic boundaries. However, as she reifies Chineseness in the form of food, her representation of "unproblematic" British Chinese people becomes trapped in the narrative mode of a model minority. In contrast, the ignorance of the problems of the Chinese minority within British mainstream discourse is exposed by Wong's literary creation, which partakes in the goal of subverting the stereotypes of a model minority. Adopting a child's perspective, *The Life of a Banana* characterises the "problematic" but invisible Chinese minority as both counter-stereotypes and anti-models in an ironic style; Wong thereby develops the construction of being British Chinese from an embodied subject into a more complex and heterogeneous discourse. Furthermore, by deterritorialising the racist intention to segregate ethnic minorities from the White majority, Wong engages with the modernist concern over writing the centre from the periphery. In this light, the negotiation and re-negotiation of Chineseness in literary productions by BBC

writers do not diverge from first-generation writers' cosmopolitan style, continuously enlarging the discursive space of "British Chinese".

In summary, a new understanding of Chineseness is central to British Chinese writers' engagement with literary modernism, and their successive crossing of borders of race, nation, and ethnicity reveals that a cosmopolitan style is also a modernist style. Chineseness, once a stumbling block in the representation of China's modernisation, is continuously contested by the selected writers, seeking to negotiate the Self–Other contradiction that has arisen since the modern encounter between the East and the West. By endowing the Chinese diaspora with transnational mobility and cosmopolitan diversity, British Chinese writers show their trans-ethnic concerns in performing aesthetic autonomy with regard to modernism. In this sense, the conclusion demonstrates that contemporary British Chinese literature has been relieved of its ethnic burden and rendered able to disrupt the traditional literary categorisation in terms of authors' ethnicity.

Overall, the thesis has conducted a diachronic and systematic analysis of contemporary British Chinese literary works by five writers with regard to their interstitiality between minor literature and ethnic literature. Previous studies tend to take this sort of writing as onefold ethnic literature but overlook their aesthetic aspect; this thesis compensates for the lack of trans-ethnic studies on British Chinese literature by additionally reading it as a certain kind of minor literature in its deterritorialisation of ethnicity. The four core chapters show first how Mo shifts his focus from "British Chinese" to "Asian Englishes" and endows his characters with racial hybridity to defy any single identity. Then Liu highlights the aesthetic commonality between Chinese idea-images and Western symbolism to resist ethnification when representing traditional cultural symbols. The ethnic territorialisation of typical Chinese symbols is further deconstructed in Guo's pursuit of artistic nomadism in the following chapter. A comparative reading of Tse's and Wong's literary creations in the last core chapter exposes the

hypocritical neoliberal multiculturalism that cannot conceal the racial problems of the so-called model minority. Having crossed ethnic boundaries, all of them rearticulate "British Chinese" in a cosmopolitan context struggling with resurgent nationalism. Therefore, "British Chinese", as concluded in this thesis, has become a more open cultural discourse that discards stereotyping and embraces diversification in reviewing literary creation by contemporary Chinese diasporas with multiple backgrounds.

Since the latter end of the twentieth century, with the ever-increasing number of Chinese overseas immigrants, literary creation by the Chinese minority has flourished in the British cultural landscape. Compared with Asian American literature, British Chinese literature is a newly emerging branch of contemporary diasporic literature, and the mismatch between the diversified literary works and the limited academic attention they have received motivates my research on this topic. Interpreting British Chinese literature from a trans-ethnic perspective, the thesis links with the emerging study of ethnic minorities beyond hyphenated identities. For example, discussion of people of Chinese descent in America has developed from "Chinese American" to "Asian American" and then to "Asian North American" over the past decades, during which intergenerational inheritance and development can be clearly traced in constructing a pan-Asian discourse. As the term "Asian" in the British cultural context designates minorities of predominantly South Asian descent, the discourse of "British Chinese", as discussed in this thesis, claims a broader identity of being cosmopolitan to cross ethnic boundaries. Yet, conceptualising "British Chinese" in connection with the category of "British East Asian" may also limit the scope of this thesis with regard to its selection of authors/texts. Although the thesis emphasises a deterritorialised understanding of Chineseness to convey criticism of "the dominance of 'Chinese' over other East and Southeast Asian identities within the British social imagination" (Yeh, "In/Visibility" 50), the selected writers undisputedly reflect something of a "Chinese hegemony". With the exception of Mo, Wong is the only writer studied here to fit the category of "British East Asian"; however, she still claims to be "British Chinese" and contributes to the diversification of this category. Other

British East Asian writers, such as Tash Aw, Chiew-Siah Tei, Hwee Hwee Tan, and Tan Twan Eng, are excluded from this thesis; how they address and negotiate Chineseness via Anglophone literary voices is worthy of future discussion.

In addition, the first draft of this thesis was completed before Guo published her most recent work, *A Lover's Discourse* (2020), which is to some extent a continuation of her English-language debut novel *Dictionary for Lovers*. Regrettably, therefore, *A Lover's Discourse* is not considered in Chapter 3. Reading the two works together to examine Guo's representation of the new Chinese diaspora will offer further insights into her engagement with cosmopolitanism. Focusing on British Chinese literary practices within the contemporary context, in which the number of new Chinese immigrants is growing and BBC are becoming more visible, this thesis has elucidated their successive negotiation of Chineseness and their ethnic status. However, as the number of literary works by BBC writers is still limited, and some such works may be "visible but unseen" in this research, it remains unclear whether British Chinese literature will experience an intergenerational change, as its Asian American counterpart has done. Furthermore, although the Introduction has explained that cosmopolitanism and nationalism may coexist in a transnational context, the rise of nationalism, which has been accelerated by Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, is likely to exacerbate nationalist tension and have an impact on cosmopolitanism. The changing international situation may influence not only transnational publics – the main contributors to the development of British Chinese cultural discourse – but also BBC writers' attitude towards the Chinese cosmopolitan identity. Examining how these developments are reflected in later British Chinese literary creations is a meaningful direction for subsequent studies. With the appearance of more British Chinese writers in the future, it remains to be seen whether and how the first-generation writers' cosmopolitan style will be extended or undermined by their successors.

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Appendix: A Talk with Helen Tse

In the spring of 2019, when I was working on the chapter of my thesis about BBC writers, I contacted Helen Tse, the author of *Sweet Mandarin*, and visited her restaurant of the same name in the Northern Quarter of Manchester, where we had this talk. She agreed to attach our talk as appendix.

Jin: As a leading British-born Chinese writer, how do you assert your identity? Would you like to accept the term "British Chinese"?

Tse: It should be half British, half Chinese. Yes, as claimed in my book, the idea of "British Chinese" can describe what we are; it's distinguished from simply being British or being Chinese. I was brought up in Britain, and in my family's Chinese restaurant; both influence me.

Jin: Do you think "Sweet Mandarin", I mean both the book of your Chinese family in British society and your return to the catering industry, can produce an effect on breaking down ethnic stereotypes?

Tse: Chinese people in Britain have always been thought of as the silent minority, and we've not really been represented in the media before. But China is a country with different languages and different kinds of food. By writing the book I think what I try to change is the stereotypes of our community as well as the journey we have in life, and how the food has been passed down from one generation to the next. I represent the Chinese minority through the medium of food; this is because, you know, almost ninety percent of Chinese immigrants are in the food business, and we have to do better and better.

Jin: What do you think the way of changing Western perception of the Chinese community through the representation of Chinese food?

Tse: When Chinese people meet, we won't say "how are you" but ask "have you eaten yet". Through food, we have a friendly way to discuss different cultures, and food becomes a special memory. Initially, this book would be a food book; behind each recipe there is a story. But the publisher wanted it to be a story book, so I

connected the food with every piece of my grandma's experience. What I want to remind readers of is that she is a very amazing lady. In the UK in the 1950s, there were very few Chinese people. When she came to open her restaurant in post-war Britain, people first thought she was the Japanese enemy. It was the food that bridged the gap and encouraged local Chinese restaurants. In those days, people had rarely tried Asian food and chopsticks before. She really introduced the whole new type of cuisine to the British pallet. This is why I think food is quite important.

Jin: You mentioned "[b]eing British-born Chinese is not problematic" in your book, I'm curious about if there is a moment you felt puzzled about being a British-born Chinese person?

Tse: When I was growing up, I once felt out of place with my own friends who were English. I still remembered reading the book *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott at that time. I won't describe it now as everybody else knows. I looked through it every night to make my dreams sweeter, and every morning I would be cured, as it flattened everything. That's my growing up. Are you used to being quite shamed by being Chinese? But you can't change your race. What I know now is that being born British-born Chinese is a great thing. It is my strength to know my Chinese culture and be able to understand British culture as well. So that's what I mean by the statement – being British-born Chinese is not problematic at all, and actually a benefit.

Jin: I have read an interview of you by PP Wong on *Banana Writers*. She wrote a book called *The Life of a Banana*, in which she paid much attention to racial bullying in school. I find you mentioned this issue suffered by your mother in her childhood, so I'd like to ask is there any similar experience for you? Do you think it will have a huge influence on young British Chinese?

Tse: My mother came to the UK when she was nine. She was the first Chinese kid in school, and her classmates had never seen Chinese youths before. This is an unfortunate issue and always an undercurrent, but the point is how you will deal with the problem. It's difficult to control the situation but you can deflate them by putting yourself in the right position. When I was eleven, I watched my mother

being attacked in the chip shop. I was helpless and could do nothing. From that moment, maybe the person I wanted to be was someone who could protect myself and my family from bullying. And the situation changes. If you faced racism today, you could tell people, "Don't do that. That's not right." Everyone gets a voice.

Jin: Is there any other issue you think I can discuss in my thesis on British-born Chinese writing and *Sweet Mandarin*?

Tse: You should be comfortable in your own skin. I don't want to be somebody else. Only when people feel at ease about their own skins, everyone is made the offer to be special. That's my advice.