

**LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: SKY LEE'S *DISAPPEARING MOON CAFE* AND
WAYSON CHOY'S *THE JADE PEONY***

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN ENGLISH
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

SEPTEMBER 2019

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Abstract

Many critics recognize Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* for breaking the silence over issues that Chinese Canadians faced in the 1990s such as racism and lack of representation. However, there has not been much discussion on Lee and Choy's exploration of language and identity. These issues are important as they continue to impact Chinese-Canadians and other diasporic communities today.

The thesis explores how language in the two novels reveals that Chinese Canadians have complex and mutable identities and how notions of identity challenge the control the hegemonic powers seek to construct and restrict the Chinese identity, which in turn also restricts ideas of language. I attempt to demonstrate how these two novels resist a generic, one-dimensional view of Chinese Canadian identity and language. I conclude that Lee and Choy's novels imply that both Canadian and Chinese hegemonies influence Chinese Canadians' language and identity.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my 婆婆 Poh-Poh.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible were it not for my thesis supervisor, Professor Arun Mukherjee. Many of my insights captured in this thesis came to me as I sat in her class *Simulating Translation* during the first semester of my Master's program. Dr. Mukherjee's forward-thinking theory and practice paved the way for my thesis, and her guidance, recommendations, and patience honed my ideas about language and literature.

I am also grateful to my other committee member: Dr. Lily Cho. Dr. Cho's expertise of Asian Canadian literature and constant encouragement made this thesis possible.

My special appreciation also goes to my external examiner, Dr. Allan Weiss. Dr. Weiss's criticism and expertise have been invaluable to this project.

I would like to thank my parents, my partner, and my friends in the program for their understanding, support, and kindness.

Last but not least, I am indebted to my maternal grandmother (婆婆 Poh-Poh) for her support and her help. When she heard about my project, the oral tales, myths, and poetry of Gold Mountain that she heard as a young girl growing up in Taishan came to her, and she told me. One story involved a Chinese sojourner exchanging letters to his wife back in China, but they both could not read and write Chinese, so they wrote symbols to each other instead. When the wife received some Canadian money, she could not understand the strange pictures on the bill, and thinking it is the same "ghost money" for ancestral worship, she burned the bills. From hearing these stories, I realized that there were so many stories at one point shared among the Chinese diaspora in Canada, but much of them are inaccessible or lost. This fact made me appreciate how important *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* are.

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Introduction: Weaving in and out of Historical and Present Silences

Towards the end of Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, narrator Kae reflects on her newly excavated family history of first and second-generation Chinese Canadians; she considers why their identities and histories have been cloaked in silence:¹

Maybe this is a chinese-in-Canada trait, a part of the great wall of silence and invisibility we have built around us. I have a misgiving that the telling of our history is forbidden. I have violated a secret code. (Lee 214)

This significant moment in the novel is indicative of the interplay among language, identity, and silence in Chinese Canadian history, literature, and criticism. What Kae names “the great wall of silence and invisibility”, she is referencing the way the hegemonic state has silenced Chinese Canadian identity, language, and history. For most of the twentieth century, Chinese Canadians were systematically excluded from Canadian society. They were prevented from entering the dominant Canadian economic and social space as they were barred from obtaining work they were qualified for and denied access to literary self-representation (Johnson 360). The hegemonic Canadian state and mainstream Canadian culture saw Chinese Canadian identities and languages as alien to the Canadian state and society.

Paradoxically, the insular Chinese community in Canada also played a significant role in silencing Chinese Canadians. Traditional Chinese culture has an ethos of silence when it comes to displaying private or personal issues in the public sphere. It is deeply taboo in Chinese culture to exhibit any family or personal ugliness, especially on subjects like domestic abuse, adultery, and incest. In written Chinese, some sayings typify this ethos of privacy. The first is 家醜不可以外揚, which translates to “family ugliness should not be

¹ Though Sharon Lee or SKY Lee may also be commonly seen in literary criticism, I use Sky Lee for my thesis as a respectful gesture towards Lee's self-identification since Lee states in *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women*, “It's my actual name, not a pseudonym - Sharon Kwan Ying Lee - my initials” (96-97).

aired publicly”.² The second is 清官難斷家務事.³ This means, “an impartial judge will find himself worthless in hearing a case of domestic disputes”. Accordingly, Kae’s “secret code” that she references is Lee drawing attention to the unspoken cultural rule shared among many Chinese Canadians that sustains silence (Lee 214).⁴ This Chinese cultural norm deters Chinese Canadians from speaking publicly about their private matters even if they are taking a stand against injustice because speaking out may bring shame upon the family and the community.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the “wall of silence” was the work of two hegemonies. The hegemonic Canadian state’s racist legislation such as *The Chinese Immigration Act, 1885* and *The Chinese Immigration Act, 1923* fortified the foundations of the “great wall of silence” (Lee 214). These legal forms of ostracization strengthened the Chinese associations; though they were measures of political and economic protection for Chinese-Canadian against the racist state, these associations became increasingly hegemonic and they were influenced by the rise of ethno-nationalism in 20th century China (Johnson 362). These laws also drove Chinese-Canadians to maintain a strict code of silence so that families could remain together with less of a risk of deportation. Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony* exemplifies the feeling of fear that spurred the collective ethos of self-exclusion and silence in the community: “one careless word - perhaps because a *mo no* girl or a *mo no* boy was showing off - and the Immigration Demons would come in the middle of the night” (Choy 228). Silence secured ethnic loyalty and ensured the survival of the group.

² The Pinyin for 家醜不可以外揚 is Jiāchǒu bùkě yǐwài yáng, and the Jyutping is gaa¹cau²bat¹ho²ji⁵ngoi⁶joeng⁴.

³ 清官難斷家務事 is qīngguān nán duàn jiāwù shì in pinyin and the jyutping is cing1gun1naan4dyun6gaa1mou6si6.

⁴ Lee’s “I have violated a secret code” is translated as 我違背了家法 by Wai Kam Lau (劉慧琴) in Traditional Chinese in *Anthology of Chinese Canadian Writers* (Lee 214; Lau 42). “Code” is 法, which means law or convention in written Chinese.

The silence remained even after World War II, when Chinese Canadians were recognized as legal citizens. The push for acculturation by the Canadian state and the closing of China's borders meant that Chinese Canadians had to accept the inevitable. To acquire economic opportunities, Chinese Canadians had to adapt by learning the national language(s) of Canada and partake in normative cultural practices of Canada. Despite official citizenship, Chinese Canadians lacked substantive citizenship because during this period the Canadian state largely ignored Chinese Canadians' political and social issues, or these issues were seen as "private" matters delegated to and managed by the ethnic community.

In the 1980s, it became politically necessary and possible for Chinese Canadians to break the silence. Chinese identities and cultural norms, which had been limited by the great wall of silence, could now be expressed publicly. What is significant about Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and Choy's *The Jade Peony* is that they were a part of a collective movement of texts and voices that bravely penetrated and represented the silence, giving materiality to the hidden history, identities, and languages. As language is the means to construct identity through naming and literary representation, the two novels employ the resources of different natural languages to name and illustrate the depths of the Chinese Canadian identity and history, which have been doubly silenced. The two novels show that the long-silenced Chinese Canadian community had not always just been simply speaking "Chinese". Utilizing their aesthetic prowess and knowledge of languages, Lee and Choy reveal a diversity of Chinese languages that the earlier generations of Chinese Canadians spoke and expose the plethora of identities muted by the hegemonic Chinese and Western generic ideas of 'Chinese'. The first generation of Chinese Canadian "sojourners" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, who are represented in the two novels, came from Canton province in southern China and they spoke Taishanese (Toisanese), Xinhui dialect

(Sanhui dialect), Kaiping dialect (Hoiping dialect) and Cantonese.⁵ Lee and Choy often inject phrases and expressions that are Taishanese and Cantonese. Unfortunately, many critics have under-examined or overlooked the linguistic diversity and its connection to a broader discussion of silence and identity in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*.

While many critics acknowledge that the two novels challenge the hegemony of the Canadian state, there has been little discussion on how the *two* hegemonic forces of the Canadian state and the Chinese community maintain the “wall of silence”. *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* depict how Chinese cultural and national hegemonies in the Chinese Canadian community control what language and identity Chinese Canadians can express, which critics have not explored. The Chinese hegemony continues to affect Chinese Canadians today and uphold the “wall of silence”. Even though the hegemonic power of the Chinese community today has vastly changed from the depicted community in the two novels, the Chinese Canadian community of the twenty-first century is now silenced by its own internal cultural hegemony and the external hegemony, the Chinese state. In the past, many Chinese Canadians self-censored because they feared alienation and shame for breaking the silence, but now, Chinese Canadians have one more thing to fear: retaliation from the Chinese government. Hence, there is an urgent need to explore the complexities of the evolving silence.

Without engaging with how these two hegemonic forces work to generate the present silence, critics are celebrating a new era of Chinese Canadian literature written by newer generations of Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China on the grounds that they write more diversely and more authentically, compared to Lee and Choy, who are descendants of early Chinese immigrant at the beginning of the twentieth century. In promoting a new generation of authors, critics also emphasize the differences between Lee

⁵ The one in the parentheses are the Cantonese romanization of the words, and the non-parenthesized are the current official names for these dialects and geographical areas in Mandarin Chinese.

and Choy's generation and newer generations by depreciating the former's artistic approaches. As early as 1999, Maria N. Ng's essay "Representing Chinatown: Dr. Fu-Manchu at the *Disappearing Moon Cafe*" calls Ying Cheng's *Ingratitude* (1998) "a refreshing original novel by a Chinese writer who came to Canada in 1989" in comparison to "Canadian-born ethnic writers" like Lee (173). While there is certainly a difference in concerns and perspectives between Canadian-born Chinese writers like Lee and Choy and newer Chinese immigrant writers like Ying Chen, it is troubling for Ng to mark this difference by suggesting that *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is a novel "[encumbered] by a history of stereotypes about the Chinese" as well as "presenting easily recognizable locations and plotlines" ("Representing Chinatown" 173). Ng argues that newer Chinese Canadian literature can reflect the social reality of Chinese Canadians better and that Lee is a cultural outsider who appropriates her own culture, and in doing so, Ng undermines and oversimplifies the historical, social, and political value of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* ("Representing Chinatown" 173). Critical approaches like Ng's ignored how Lee and Choy's novels continue to be relevant in present-day Canada, and they disregard the genealogical and sociopolitical connections between the Chinese sojourners and the new generation.

While less derogatory, many other critics in recent years have introduced newer literature by downplaying the significance of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*. In a 2012 review of Yan Li's *Lily in the Snow* critic Shao-Pin Luo rightly categorizes *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* as works by children of earlier immigrants in juxtaposition with "those by recent immigrants from China and elsewhere", but when Luo contends that literary writing by recent Chinese immigrants has become more diverse in terms of "subject matter, genre, and style" because the newer immigrants write with more

languages, she completely overlooks the fact that *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* also contain diverse languages and styles.⁶

Similarly, published two years prior to Luo's piece, Eleanor Ty's 2010 book *Unfastened* declares that the last decade or so of Asian Canadian literature has moved from themes of "assimilation, racial prejudice, or [...] cultural hybridity" and forms of *Bildungsroman* and emigration narratives to "global narratives [that] highlight movement, instability, and the importance of standpoint or location". For Ty new Asian North American literature "reveal[s] the ways globalization, colonialization, and media technology has shifted and changed the meaning and signifier *Asian North American*" (131-132).⁷ Ty masterfully provides many contextual and stylistic differences between "new" Asian North American and the older generation of texts like *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, but she fails to consider that *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* do not contain global narratives of instability. In fact, the central concern of the two novels is the formulation of the Chinese Canadian identity, and this identity has been shaped and created by globalization and colonialization in the twentieth-century. Globalization is not a new phenomenon even though the name has become more widely used in the twenty-first century. The practice of "globalization" came before the term. After all, it was globalization and colonialization that saw thousands of Chinese labourers travel from southern China to San Francisco and to Vancouver to build the infrastructure for greater North American economic integration and success. The demand for cheap labour from elsewhere was what promulgated the emigration narratives and unstable, fluid identities in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*.

Reading Ty's book, I questioned whether much in Canada has changed as the Canadian

⁶ Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn's edited 2008 *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography* concurs with Luo by asserting that the "recent works by ethnic, multicultural, or minority writers in Canada have become more diverse and experimental in form, theme, focus, and technique" and that these new writers are no longer "identifying simply with their ethnic or racial cultural background in opposition to dominant culture" (3).

⁷ In *Unfastened*, Eleanor Ty addresses not only Asian Canadian literature in the twenty-first century but also Asian American literature; hence, she classifies them as "Asian North American".

state's thirst for cheap, efficient foreign labour and capital underlies the Chinese labourers' journey to Gold Mountain in the early twentieth century and the subsequent waves of immigrants moving to Canada after World War II.

Considering the similarities between the circumstances of the Chinese sojourners and the new Chinese immigrants, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* are not obsolete texts. A more sensible approach would be to position the embedded memories and perspectives in old and new English Chinese Canadian literary texts multidirectionally rather than competitively.⁸ One example of this is to consider how the two novels embody crucial Canadian and Chinese historical memories that are connected to the present. In her book *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada*, Lily Cho does not see the past as completely distinctive from the present but “constitutive” of the present even though the “new” diaspora often presents itself as the most dominant or relevant (11). Many of the issues addressed by the two novels like what constitutes as authentic “Chinese” culture, the disputes about the identity and naming for “Chineseness”, and the ever-shifting hierarchy of Chinese languages still haunt the present, yet criticism of the novels does not adequately address these topics.

I do not suggest that the emerging Chinese Canadian literature is the same as Lee and Choy's works or that the two novels are better or, to borrow an often-used phrase in this field, “more diverse”. There are some differences between the old and new diasporas after all. One way to think about them, according to Cho, is to mark “distinction(s) between old and new diasporas [...] [as] involuntary displacement and voluntary displacement” (11). Many critics, however, are not making these kinds of distinctions. They are evaluating without reflection on their biases, and they are unjustifiably dismissive of the two novels. I see the *evaluative*

⁸ The term “multidirectionally” comes from Michael Rothberg who first uses the term “multidirectional memory” in his book *Remembering the Holocaust in the age of Decolonization*. In addressing how people seem to attack Holocaust museums, Rothberg writes about how collective memories should not be positioned in a logic of scarcity as collective memory does not work like real-estate development.

differences between older Chinese Canadian literary texts by Lee and Choy's generation and the literature by new immigrants as indicative of unspoken and fraught conversations about authenticity, identity, and language. In the twenty-first century, the debate about what constitutes as authentic "Chinese" identity and language foregrounds the growing hegemonic nationalism of China and competing national consciousnesses of immigrants from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Another layer to these sets of tension is the role of the Canadian hegemonic state and the insidious ways that state policies like the multiculturalism policy work against the interests of the Chinese diasporic community as they compete for cultural representation in scarcity.

THESIS STATEMENT

I argue in my thesis that the language, as in the names/terms, discourse, and natural language fragments, in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* plays a central role in revealing the complexities in the ever-evolving identities and histories of Chinese Canadians. These notions of identity and language challenge the evolving hegemonic Canadian and Chinese rhetoric about identity, but there has been no attention paid to these aspects. What is particularly novel about my thesis is the study and analysis of languages other than English in Lee and Choy's texts because language in these texts does not merely function as the aesthetic choices of Lee and Choy; language is used to engage with the complex, transforming identities and the social relations of class, race, and gender.

While there are relevant comparisons to be made between old and new Chinese Canadian literature as well as other emerging non-national diasporic literature, the main scope of my thesis is limited to *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*. For one thing, they are both novels, so their formal features and structure are similar, making comparative analysis feasible. They are also considered canonical texts of Asian Canadian literature and Chinese Canadian literature that started and shaped the two domains in the 1990s. Therefore,

the existing gaps and silences in literary criticism about the novels' engagement with language and identity indicate the limits of critics' existing theoretical paradigm and approaches: there is insufficient interest in translation in the field, and there is not enough dialogue between Chinese Canadian writers and Anglophone critics. In response to this, my thesis contains many of my translations, and I have embedded traditional Chinese characters and their Jyutping/Pinyin to allow room for future research.⁹ Despite their popularity, much of the literary criticism has unduly dismissed these two novels, even though they offer interpretive perspectives in the present. Consequently, this thesis aims to strengthen the connection between the ideas in the two novels to the current times.

The language in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* is what characterizes the texts as silence breaking because it disrupts the evolving hegemonic narrative of the Canadian state and Chinese communities about language and identity. The two novels' use of Chinese languages certainly calls into question the "multicultural" present and the past that the Canadian state claims and advocates for. "Multicultural" Canada predominantly maintains an anglophone space, and the state-sanctioned multicultural ideal stipulated in both the *Canadian Multiculturalism Policy, 1971* and *Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988* only sees English and French as official languages, maintaining a hegemonic national identity with a nucleus made out of French and English. The two novels' incorporation of Chinese languages is a form of critical intervention into the predominantly anglophone space of Canadian literature and history. To clarify, I am not against the idea of multiculturalism if it genuinely means that cultures receive equal respect; however, as the novels imply, the actual state-sanctioned practice of multiculturalism in Canada is far from the Canadian state's multicultural ideal. The novels also underline how heritage identity, culture, and languages

⁹ Jyutping is the romanisation system for Cantonese developed by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong, and Pinyin is the official romanization for Mandarin developed in the 1950s.

disappear because the Canadian state demands cultural assimilation of Chinese Canadians to English while denying them full structural integration in society.

Concurrently, the texts are also highly critical of ever-changing power structures of Chinese communities in Canada that dictate the definition of “Chineseness”. As the internal power structures in the community change to concur with China’s nationalism, the community has endorsed different Chinese languages and identities. Chinese languages in the two novels play a role in gatekeeping truths and managing social positions in a community. As Lee and Choy’s novels suggest, “Chineseness” is highly polysemic and loaded with ethnic, cultural, ideological, and national ideas. English as a language is fraught for Chinese immigrants because it does not naturally communicate Chinese Canadians’ expression and claim of individual Chinese identity, but using English does not necessarily mean that “Chineseness” is contaminated by Western ideology. Ideas of “Chineseness” are highly contentious, and the novels illustrate how the rise of Chinese nationalism makes efforts to identify as a Chinese Canadian even more difficult and complicated. In the present, “Chineseness” continues to be homogenized by the two hegemonies into a singular set of ideas that works against Chinese Canadians, thereby furthering the interests of the hegemonies. Whereas the Chinese Canadian associations and wealthy individuals maintained the power structure of the mini-hegemony in the past, Chinese nationalism is what governs the Chinese hegemony now in Chinese Canadian communities.

The classification and recognition of Chinese languages exemplify one such form of homogenization. Dominant cultural hegemonies call Mandarin a language or simply “Chinese” whereas cultural prejudices codify Taishanese and Cantonese as dialects. In actuality, all of these are respective languages that can all be classified linguistically under the hypernym of Chinese languages because these linguistic varieties are generally mutually unintelligible. My thesis is different from most literary criticism because I reveal linguistic

nuances of Chinese languages embedded in the two novels, and I show the significance of each Chinese language therein.

Given that the two novels use language to engage with how two hegemonies control and impose identities through language, my thesis seeks to address whether self-identification is genuinely possible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As for the state of the research into this field of study, many secondary sources deal exclusively with *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, but there are many enduring gaps and silences that need to be addressed or redressed.

Arun Mukherjee's 1996 essay, "Teaching Ethnic Minority Writing: A Report from the Classroom" constitutes one of the few texts which recognize that the language in Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* may not be just "Chinese". In a refreshing deconstructive approach, Mukherjee illustrates the thought process and research steps taken to understand the foreign language displayed in the book. Mukherjee examines the traditional Chinese characters on the cover of *Disappearing Moon Cafe*'s first edition. The Chinese characters are 殘月樓, which is the traditional Chinese characters for *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Mukherjee questions, "Mandarin? Cantonese? - since I do not really know, I will call them Chinese" ("Teaching Ethnic Minority Writing" 41).¹⁰ Mukherjee's inclusion of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is part of her larger pedagogical argument that illustrates how important decoding the textual elements of the bilingual and bicultural books is for readers, who are cultural outsiders, to experience the multicultural and multilingual world of these novels. The process of unpacking the foreign language is central to the illustrative process as opposed to the

¹⁰ The Chinese name for *Disappearing Moon Café* is 殘月樓, which corresponds to *Cányuè lóu* in Mandarin Pinyin and *caan⁴jyut⁶lau⁴* in Cantonese Jyutping.

foreign language itself, so Mukherjee does not engage with all of the textual elements, giving more room for exploration and analysis.

Like Mukherjee's essay, Lien Chao's *Beyond Silence: Chinese-Canadian Literature in English* (1997) addresses the linguistic interaction between English and Chinese in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Chao states that the book "posits a linguistic hybridization between the two languages and two cultures" (102). While useful and valuable at the time, Chao's language analyses are minimal because after all, her goal was to argue for the emergence of the Chinese Canadian writers' "collective self" in Canadian literary production in English as opposed to Chinese. Some of the Chinese language analyses that Chao mentions need to be further scrutinized. Chao states the *gum-shan* is the "colloquial Chinese phrase" for Gold Mountain (26). In actuality, *gum-shan* is not "colloquial": it is the Cantonese phrase for Gold Mountain. By using "colloquial", Cantonese is overtly emphasized by Chao as an oral language when it is a standardized language that corresponds to a writing system. In written Chinese, regardless of traditional or simplified, it is written as 金山, but the oral pronunciation of the word varies drastically among the Chinese diaspora, which is comprised of different speech communities and languages.¹¹ The use of *Gum-shan* mixes two linguistic systems of Cantonese and Mandarin. The *gum* 金 in 金山 is the Cantonese word for gold because Mandarin pronunciation of it is *jīn*. *Shan* (or *shān*) is Mandarin. The "sh" sound does not exist in Cantonese nor Taishanese phonology, but "sh" is a sound in Mandarin. In Cantonese, Gold Mountain is often called *gum-san*, not *gum-shan*.¹²¹³ In another section,

¹¹ To clarify, even though "written Chinese" may some homogenizing, it is because there are only two standardized written scripts - the traditional Chinese script and the simplified Chinese script. Most Chinese languages like Cantonese, Mandarin, Shanghainese, and other spoken Sinitic languages (or Chinese languages) roughly correspond to the characters in the two scripts, although some words must be Romanized.

¹² The IPA symbol of "sh" is ʃ, which is a post-alveolar sibilant fricative.

¹³ Lien Chao might have used *gum-shan* because one of the heavily cited texts is Anthony B. Chan's 1983 book *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World*. On page 32, Chan writes, "America became known as Gold Mountain (*gumshan*) and was synonymous with hope, prosperity and stability. From Chan's bibliography, this

Chao transcribes the words of Mui Lan, “a wolf's heart and a dog's lung” as the Chinese metaphor *langxin-goufei* or *Lángxīngǒufèi* (狼心狗肺) (Lee 61; Chao 102). This transcription is in Mandarin Chinese, which should be acknowledged as a language variety foreign to both Sky Lee and the character Mui Lan. Despite this, Chao’s Chinese literacy allows her access to the cultural codes like the Chinese idiom of “a wolf's heart and a dog's lung”, and her subjective understanding of Chinese knowledge is valuable.

Three years after Chao’s text, Susanne Hilf’s 2000 book *Writing the Hyphen - The Articulation of Interculturalism in Contemporary Chinese-Canadian Literature* focuses on the language used in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*. Hilf situates the use of Chinese and English languages in these texts through the theory of interculturalism, providing an excellent and valid view towards the issues focalized in the two novels. However, I have some issues with Hilf’s claims and analysis. Hilf dismisses Chao’s *Beyond Silence*, calling her tone “marked by too much emotionalism” and her writing marred by an “extremely subjective point of view” (24). Yet, Hilf does not acknowledge that it is Chao’s subjective viewpoint that allows an unravelling of these very cultural-specific codes. Interestingly, most of Hilf’s analysis of Chinese in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* such as “a wolf’s heart and a dog’s lung” and the ominous Chinese number “1414” are dependent on Chao and Lee’s analyses. Like Chao, Hilf does not stipulate that the Chinese in Lee’s text is a mixture of Cantonese and Taishanese (97). Hilf also seems unable to name or define Chinese cultural codes beyond calling them “Chinese”:

Allusions to motives of European fairy tales (82, 199, 216), to the story of Pinocchio (130), to Tonto and the Lone Ranger (131), to Peter Pan (213), classic Greek mythology (203) or the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (185) stand next to

came from a book called *Chinese America* where a prospector named Zhang Deming created the myth, and from the pinyin romanization of the name Zhang Deming and the book’s title, it can be proposed that the emergence of *gumshan* may be a term more relevant to Chinese-American history and there could be code-mixing involved.

Chinese wisdom (31, 52, 61, 137, 164) and Chinese poems (44, 78), to references to Chinese mythology (223). (Hilf 115)

As shown by the repeated use of the phrase “Chinese”, Hilf does not give Chinese traditions the same specificity as the Western traditions. Though Hilf strongly disregards John Chen’s essay “Mouthing Differences in a Postcolonial Age: Towards a Literary and Cultural Poetics of Emergent Chinese (-) Canadian Sub-Literature” for being “inadequately explained”, Hilf could have extracted some useful cultural ideas about Taoism from Chen’s essay that would have added more depth and specificity than just calling it “Chinese mythology” (25). The biggest problem of Hilf’s work is her claim that *The Jade Peony* is not “as complex and hybrid as [*Disappearing Moon Cafe*]” because Choy, unlike Lee, writes with “a view to public appeal”, uses the tradition of delimitation, and makes concessions to the reader by translating (77).¹⁴ Hilf further claims that “Choy explain[s] all non-anglophone expressions, [while] Lee plays with hidden cards by using linguistic phrases or cultural allusions that only an insider recognizes” (97). This is inaccurate. At the end of the Chapter “Jung-Sum, Second Brother”, Jung-Sum says to Dai Kew, “this *low fan doy* here, this foreign boy, said it was a *low fan turtle*” (Choy 94, emphasis his). *Low fan doy* is Taishanese for 老番仔, which means foreign boy, and Choy does not transcribe it into English.¹⁵ There are also many other instances of this. In terms of the Chinese cultural allusions, there are plenty in *The Jade Peony*. In the Chapter “Jook-Liang, Only Sister”, Jook-Liang calls Wong Suk the “Monkey Man”. This is an allusion to the protagonist in *西遊記*, which is a novel also known as *Journey to the West* written by Wu Cheng’en during the Sixteenth century Ming dynasty and is seen as a classic novel of Chinese literature as well as the first Chinese illustrated fiction.

¹⁴ More specifically, Hilf states, “neither *The Concubine’s children* nor *The Jade Peony* are as complex and hybrid as the three books which form the centre of the second part of the study”, and *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is one of the three books (77).

¹⁵ The Taishanese is most prominent in the use of the *doy* because the pronunciation for this in Cantonese is *zai2*.

The protagonist is 孫悟空 or Monkey King who must atone for his sins by accompanying a monk to bring the Buddhist scriptures from India to China. This is significant because Jook-Liang's naming of Wong Suk as "Monkey Man" connects Wong Suk's journey of retrieving the bones to Monkey King's redemptive journey to retrieve Buddhist scriptures. While it is unnoticed by Hilf, the Chinese Canadian Writers' Associations' 1999 publication *Anthology of Chinese Canadian Writers* notices this allusion, albeit in written traditional Chinese.

Whereas Mukherjee, Chao, and Hilf generally value the use of Chinese languages in the two texts, the author's inclusion of Chinese language has met disapproval from some critics. Reviewing for *Canadian literature*, Joshua S. Mostow states that the language may "trouble the reader" because Lee's type of translation makes "her characters' speech [verging] on pidgin" (175). Mostow's use of the word "pidgin" to describe the Chinese in Lee's novel is a loaded suggestion that the Chinese language is somehow simple and limited. Mostow's attitude, unfortunately, is rather prevalent in criticism. In Rey Chow's "Seeing Modern China: Towards a Theory of Ethnic Spectatorship", Chow states that Chinese language's tonality makes it easily susceptible to be classified as a language that preserves "an archaic" "pre-Oedipal" state by critics, who "overlook[s] the uses [of Chinese] by its speakers" (*Writing Diaspora* 333).¹⁶ Like Maria N. Ng's criticism of *The Jade Peony* in "Chop Suey Writing: Sui Sin Far, Wayson Choy, and Judy Fong Bates", Mostow is concerned that the non-English language makes Lee's novel unintelligible because he assumes that every reader must be English-speaking and that every novel must be fully apprehensible.

Another negative response comes from an alleged cultural insider. Maria N. Ng's "Representing Chinatown: Dr. Fu-Manchu at the *Disappearing Moon Cafe*" contends that Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* resurrects the old racist stereotypes of Fu-Manchu. Ng sees

¹⁶ Rey Chow was writing against the unnecessary ways Julia Kristeva read China as an absolute "other".

Lee's work as egregious because it "[wallows] in [a] nostalgic recapitulation of what the white community has done to the Chinese, instead of actively accepting the Chinese now living in Canada" ("Representing Chinatown" 164). Ng shows more concern for literary representation for the new Chinese diaspora community in the 1990s - what she calls as "the Chinese now", and in branding *Disappearing Moon Cafe* as "nostalgic", Ng diminishes the relevance of the old Chinese diaspora's history, identity, literature, and language to present-day Canada. *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is further dismissed by Ng when she advocates that Chinese Canadian fiction must match with the social reality of newer immigrants' lives because she reasons that these newer diasporic Chinese communities have "economic profiles [that] are quite different from the Chinese labourers at the beginning of the century" ("Representing Chinatown" 168). In a conspicuous tone of elitism, Ng invalidates the Chinese identity in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* because it does not match with the economic identities of wealthy Hong Kong immigrants in the 1990s. Though there is much to be said about the truth of the economic profiles of Hong Kong immigrants in the 1990s (since it was often a stereotype used by the media), what Ng fails to recognize are the historical, political, linguistic, and economic connections between the old and new generations of Chinese Canadians. Few examples include how the old generations of Chinese diasporic communities sent remittances to their relatives in southern China in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and some of these relatives escaped to Hong Kong in World War II, 1949, and the Cultural Revolution (Johnson 368). Old Chinese diasporic communities aligned and new generations of Hong Kong Canadian in the 1990s to advocate for the recognition of Chinese Canadian rights.¹⁷

More importantly, Ng fails to acknowledge the significance of the language in Lee's novel, and instead, she goes as far as to claim that Lee's inclusion of foul language "feeds off

¹⁷ For the coalition between old and new diasporas in the twentieth century, see *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women*, especially 203-218; for a more recent view, see Fernando 44-73.

the stereotypes created by [the racism against the Chinese] ("Representing Chinatown" 166). With a particular focus on the scene when members of the Chinese Benevolent Association interrogate the houseboy after the Janet Smith murder, Ng states, "the Chinese characters in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* are certainly not silent, but the language is a string of obscenity" ("Representing Chinatown" 167). While I can certainly agree that the novel includes profanities, Ng's article still demonstrates its myopia by failing engage with the other parts of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* where Chinese men, who are multidimensional characters in the text, are not swearing, and even though these negative portrayals may be co-opted by racist interests, Ng also does not consider that Lee is trying to expose the dangers of the Chinese cultural hegemony in this scene. After all, Chinese Benevolent Association and other Chinese associations back in the day were to some extent what Ng calls "patriarchal, paranoid, potentially violent, illegal, and [...] misogynistic" ("Representing Chinatown" 165). Moreover, while the profanities that Ng has problems with are mostly the words in Cantonese, Ng does not care to tell us. Nonetheless, Ng translates for us as she states that Lee's use of "a rotten fish matched with a stinky shrimp" to be a "vulgar reference to the male and female private parts" ("Representing Chinatown" 165). However, she deduces that the verbalization of vulgar, sexual references amounts to "men obsessed with fornication" ("Representing Chinatown" 166). Her claim is limited by the fact that it just so happens that many of the Cantonese profanities are related to genitalia. She also fails to notice Lee's larger message. By including these vulgar sexual references in the ugly confrontation with the houseboy, Lee is criticizing the violent and racist fear towards miscegenation in the Chinese communities at that time, which drew strict and hypocritical boundaries against mingling with non-Chinese. If we consider the vulgar expressions of sex in the interrogation scene in concert with the greater plot of the novel, it seems that Lee is exploring the hypocrisy of the internal Chinese hegemony in the association because Wong Gwei Chang is now the rich

patriarch in the community leading the illegal and abusive interrogation of Foon Sing, the houseboy, and all of the community's woes is placed on Foon Sing's shoulders. At the same time, Lee shows how Wong Gwei Chang has an interracial relationship and fathers an illegitimate child, Ting An, but he is beyond reproach because of his wealth and power in the community. Thus, Ng's moral outrage at the obscene language of the novel overlooks key concerns of the novel.

Not all criticisms about *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* need to acknowledge the use of language, but in certain cases where the analysis draws heavily on a phrase that is not English, it should demand a more thorough reading. In Deborah L. Madsen's essay "'Mo no boy': The Negative Rhetoric of Nation in the Work of Wayson Choy", her main argument is that Choy's rhetoric of nation in *The Jade Peony* is "consonant with 'dominant ideologies'" (102). For Madsen, Choy proposes a rhetoric of non-belonging and double exclusion that Chinese Canadians experience, and it is this kind of rhetoric, Madsen believes, that "works with rather than against systemic forms of racism" and "accounts in part for the popularity of [...] writers [like Choy]" (102). To prove her point, Madsen focuses on Choy's inclusion of the term "*mo no*", which he translates as brainless in English in the novel, to describe the Chinese Canadian characters. Without paying much attention to the fact that "*mo no*" is Cantonese and the way the novel presents the word, Madsen takes issue with the term's sense of liminality because she believes it promotes a world of migrant rootlessness, which Madsen calls "mythical" (110). What Madsen contends is largely justifiable; emphasizing notions of liminality in Asian Canadian and Chinese Canadian literature makes these texts easily co-opted by hegemonic powers. However, I question how she places the onus on the literature and author as opposed to critics and critical frameworks. This is because when we consider *who* is speaking, "*mo no*" does not suggest that Choy has a rhetoric of liminality and non-belonging. In the novel, Choy presents the

phrase as one that is used by Poh-Poh and other older generations of Chinese Canadians to describe their descendants. These older generations are anxious that their grandchildren and children lack Chineseness because they are brought up in Canada and speak English. Choy's inclusion of the word gives a glimpse into how second and third generations of Chinese Canadians grow up to believe they do not belong because of the older generation in the community *and* anti-Chinese racism. As Roy Miki's 2011 *Influx* reminds us: "language is heavily invested with the power-suffused networks of production and consumption that mark both the intimate and broader currents of our lives" (149). "*Mo no*" marks the second and third-generation Chinese Canadians' lives as it is invested by the power structures within the community that regulates Chineseness. Additionally, by considering *how* "*mo no*" is presented to readers as a mixture of two languages, we can see that Choy uses his literary flair to propose that it is possible to belong to two cultures, which are not mutually exclusive.

Mo no transcribes to 無腦 where the first character *mo* means "lack" and *no* means "brain".

No simultaneously points to the Cantonese referent for brain and the English transliteration of the word in Cantonese that sounds and spells like the negation. The phrase "*mo no*" can actually be read as an example of Choy's witticism and wordplay as Choy has created a new word in the target language of English which must point back to Cantonese for its generative meaning. Rather than being a liminal word "*mo no*", being of neither English nor Cantonese or even embodying the in-betweenness, the phrase embodies both. Choy avoids reiterating the older generation's ideas of non-belonging by negotiating the two language and cultural systems; this process of negotiation and circumventing rigid linguistic boundaries typify the actual lived experiences of Chinese Canadians.

Disappearing Moon Cafe and *The Jade Peony*'s use of languages and specific cultural systems have yet to be fully explored. It is important to engage with the language because the two texts are by no means the only texts in Chinese Canadian literature in the 1990s to insert

Cantonese or Taishanese phrases.¹⁸ Other fictional texts include Paul Yee's *Ghost Train* (1998) and Judy Fong-Bates' *China Dog* (1997). For non-fiction texts, notable usage of Chinese languages and translations can be found in *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* (1992) and Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children* (1995). There is an abundance of rich linguistic usage in these texts, which is seldom studied.

In contrast, themes such as spatiality and liminality are frequently examined in literary criticism. Many of these criticisms share similarities in advocating that the two novels reject place as a primary signifier for identity and that diaspora is a processual notion focused on the desire to find a home. Rocío G. Davis proposes in the essay "Chinatown as Diaspora Space in Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*" that Lee and Choy re-conceptualize the connection between place and subject by presenting Chinatown as a rigid yet fluid space, problematizing the traditional nostalgic definition of "home" in diaspora literary theory (120). The concept of liminality and space is also seen in Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu's "Dystopic Here, Utopic There: Spatial Dialectics in Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*". Fu focuses on the way Lee redefines racialized and sexualized spaces by using displacement and argues that Lee uses spatial dialectics as a form to bring alternative sexualities (63). Using the same concept of "dialectics", Nathan Jung emphasizes the diasporic dialectics, the cultural negotiations between "debt and inheritance" in *The Jade Peony* through a focused examination on ghosts in the article "Jaded Ghosts in the Writings of Wayson Choy" (55). Much like Davis' and Fu's respective essays, the overarching argument boils down to liminality, as Jung states that diaspora is "an impossible, decentered political project, projecting at once forwards and backwards, and predicated on the pursuit of an eternally unrealizable desire" (74).

¹⁸ They are also not the first. Texts in the Chinese-American canon codemixed Chinese and English languages. Louis Chu's 1961 novel *Eat a Bowl of Tea* and Maxine Hong Kingston's 1976 *The Woman Warrior* are notably mentions.

Chinatown is viewed as an important diasporic space in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* where cultures are formed and disseminated, but whether Chinese and English languages play a role in this procedural process of formation is not considered. The abundance in the emphasis on liminality, on the other hand, is the result of the move towards an aesthetic approach to Asian North American literature instead of an ethnographic approach and North American universities' growing acceptance of poststructural theory (Madsen 102; Lai *Slanting I, Imagining We*, 1). Like Madsen, I am skeptical about the promotion of liminality as the *de facto* defining element of Asian North American literature. However, I do not think that any aesthetic discussion implies an uncritical celebration of multicultural diversity. The problem with a purely aesthetic discussion of liminality which emphasizes Chinese Canadians' feelings of alienation and non-belonging is that it ignores how liminality is just one of the many dimensions of the Chinese Canadian identity (Davis 119). An overly aesthetic discussion may also omit the critical socio-political functions of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, which also dampens their importance in the present.

The recognition of the historical value of the two works in criticism has not been insignificant. Many critics have rightly recognized that *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* are historically valuable, and these texts are seen as remembered histories of racism towards Chinese Canadians in Canada, rupturing the enduring silences in mainstream Canada. These critical writings, however, do not always integrate the remembered racist past in the novel with the present-day issues of Canada. Lien Chao's *Beyond Silence: Chinese-Canadian literature in English* began this appreciation by classifying *Disappearing Moon Cafe* among other published Chinese Canadian works in the 1990s as texts that reclaim the Chinese Canadian community history (27). For Chao, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* like many other contemporary Chinese Canadian literary texts places importance on the role of the community's history, blends family genealogy and community history into one narrative

space, and uses narrative techniques to connect community and individuals into one historical reality that is the “collective self” (93). Chao wrote at a time when the mainstream recognition of Chinese Canadian writers and their efforts to record Canada’s racist past was very significant considering the sociopolitical and sociocultural climate of Canada in the 1980s and the 1990s. Because there was a dearth of Chinese Canadian literary criticism at Chao’s time, Chao’s goal was for Chinese Canadian literature to be appreciated and recognized. Therefore, Chao gives great weight to the parallels between the real historical collective struggle of Asian minority writers with the literary texts themselves: she saw a similarity between the writers’ reterritorialization of Canadian literature and the way the texts seem to reclaim history. In tracing the historical struggles of Chinese Canadian sojourners and Lee’s literary recording of this, Chao asserts that Chinese Canadians deserve the title of “pioneers” and “nation builders”, and optimistically claims that if they were seen as such, “legends and mythologies would have been incorporated into Canadian culture long before the 1990s” (17). I agree with Chao that the narrative of Chinese Canadians as “nation builders” certainly disturbs the claims of conventional Canadian historical narratives, but an analysis of the present is missing in her critique. Race needs to be considered as a factor that prevented and continues to prevent the successful integration of these Chinese Canadian stories with Canadian culture. Perhaps, it is because the parts that reveal 1990s Canadian society in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* are not as explicitly racist as the sections that discuss the Janet Smith murder case. One example of this is the chapter “Ties to the Land - A Ticket Out” when Kae reveals how her ethnicity is tokenized by Canadian companies to do business in the booming economy of Hong Kong in the 1980s: “Naturally, my bosses figured out that it would be comely if a nice-looking chinese junior sat beside one of the senior partners at the meeting” (Lee 195). Tokenization continues to confront Chinese Canadians, a topic often omitted in criticism.

In comparison to *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, *The Jade Peony* is understood more as a historical literary text than a contemporary text even when issues like ethnic subjectivity and construction of identity are discussed. The inclination to restrict the insights of the narrative to the past may be partially due to the novel's setting in the Vancouver of the 1930s and 1940s (Hilf 77-78).¹⁹ Though the novel certainly has historical significance, the over-emphasis on the past can result in the assumption that there has been progress when the same issues have merely morphed and got buried; the past still haunts the present. We can see the assumption of progress in Christine Lorre's "The Healing Effects of Childhood Narrative in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*". Lorre focuses on the narrative structure and the changing narrative voices to assert that the three narrators' storytelling produces healing effects because fragmented history is recognized and recovered through the overall cohesive text (71). Lorre's conclusion is somewhat applicable if we limit our perspective to the world within *The Jade Peony*, where there are moments of losses and gains in the process of self-identification for the characters. However, if we expand our conceptualization of storytelling to include the act of Choy writing *The Jade Peony*, the restorative effects of recognition are limited in many ways considering how sinophobia still exists and the way that new Chinese diaspora dismisses the language and identity of old diaspora.

Similar to Lorre, Eleanor Ty's essay "'Each Story Brief and Sad and Marvellous': Multiple Voices in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*" in her book *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* focuses on the significance of the many voices in the narrative and the structure of the novel (117). Rather than arguing for the restorative effects of narration, the point of Ty's essay is to show how these literary elements illustrate the complexities of racialized subjectivity even among those in the same generation (116). While Ty's essay should be appreciated for the acknowledgement that the Chinese ethnic identity is

¹⁹ Hilf claims that Choy's novel is one-dimensional and that *The Jade Peony* "is not as politically charged" because of the historical nature of the text that primarily serves as documentation and construction of the past (77).

far from one homogenized entity, Ty does not address how these very racialized subjectivities continue to be significant in the present, and the essay ends by comprehending Choy's work as a gesture towards optimism and progress:

But instead of reacting with nostalgia to the loss of old Chinese ways, Choy's work suggests a quiet acceptance of change. [...] There is a hint that what gives happiness to the young children growing up in Canada is not the complexities of the past, but a sense of simplicity, or belonging, and the chance to start afresh. (Ty 132).

Resembling Lorre's positive tone in the phrase "healing effects", Ty's "happiness" implies the narrators in *The Jade Peony* can be free from their heritage culture as long as they adopt Canadian culture and language. There are, however, many instances in *The Jade Peony* that would subvert Ty's point such as the part where Sek-Lung adopts an increasingly racist gaze towards his Chinese culture and languages as he begins to valorize English, and what this suggests is that this "quiet acceptance of change" comes with compromises and being infected by some of the old colonial ways embedded in Canadian culture. Even though Lorre and Ty underline the historical significance of the text, they do not show how marginalized voices and experiences of the past are relevant to the present.

One essay that does not restrict *The Jade Peony* to the past is Christopher Lee's "Engaging Chineseness in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*". Despite the fact that Lee bases his essay mainly in the past by contending that *The Jade Peony* is a "re-reading of Chinese Canadian history" that rethinks the World War II period in Canada, Lee is primarily interested in how the novel discusses how power structures in the Chinese community construct and maintain Chinese identity (19). By engaging with the issues of "Chineseness", Lee's essay bridges the gap between the past and the present because "Chineseness" is not just an issue affecting the characters in the 1930s and 1940s within *The Jade Peony*. The sense of perpetuation is emphasized when Lee states that "ethnic subject formation is

therefore presented as a dynamically contested process” (31). What is especially exceptional about Lee’s essay is also the acknowledgement of the hegemonic structures within the Chinese community. However, there are some gaps in Lee’s essay. While Lee strongly explores the internal conflicts, Lee does not underscore how the tensions with constructing a Chinese identity is really a struggle between the unification and instability of identity and identification. Lee does not consider how names referring to “Chinese” in the novel structure the characters’ claims to Chinese identity. *The Jade Peony* also implies that the hegemonic structures in the community shift, whereas Lee sees these structures as one unified ideological apparatus. These limits are addressed in my second chapter to expand on the arguments of Lee's insightful essay.

While Lee and Choy certainly recognize the very racist past of Canada, there is a need to go beyond recognition of the past and look at how this past illuminates the present. The lack of connection between the past and the present may risk abstracting the critical ideas and depoliticize the messages in the two texts. In the “Afterword” of the re-publication of *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Christopher Lee suggests that the novel must be brought to the more contemporary socio-cultural context of Canada.

Disappearing Moon Cafe needs to be read “with the times,” which means that it is neither stationary nor static: instead, it signifies differently with the passing of time, and with each new reader. (Lee 382)

Only some critics have recognized this need to integrate the past into the present. Though focused on spatiality, Daniel Martin’s “Ghostly Foundations: Multicultural Space and Vancouver’s Chinatown in Sky Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe*” reasons that Lee uses the disappearing architectural foundation of Chinatown to respond to the present postmodern narrative of Canada that renders Chinatown as a tourist attraction “ready to be consumed by global economy” (87). Martin is critical about the way Canada’s multicultural policy has

turned ethnic spaces and histories into an “ethnic experience” to be consumed and sees Lee’s narrative as a disruption of confining “Chineseness” to local spaces (103). My thesis is connected with Martin’s concerns as I focus on how the two texts relate to the multiculturalism policy, but I do not focus on space but language.

Though not specifically focused on *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, Larissa Lai’s 2014 book *Slanting I, Imagining We* constitutes one of the recent books that look back at the Asian Canadian literature published in the 1980s and 1990s. In calling attention to activism in the specific historical period of the 1980s and 1990s which gave birth to Asian Canadian literature, Lai shows the necessity of the continuity of critical anti-racist practice in Asian Canadian literary criticism (7). Like Smaro Kamboureli’s 2000 *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*, Lai moves away from a progressivist view of history. By illustrating the similarities between the racist Canada that Asian Canadian writers fought against in the 1980s and 1990s and present-day Canada, Lai advocates for a different engagement with the history of Asian Canadian literary production that is neither progressivist nor linear because the multicultural fantasy and continued colonial legacy still remain in twenty-first-century Canada (7). In her introduction, "Asian Canadian Ruptures, Contemporary Scandals", Lai argues that the remnants of the past are seen in the following three scandals: 1980 CTV’s “Campus Giveaway”, the 2010 *Maclean’s* “Too Asian” Controversy, and the alleged copyright infringement from the 2011 English publication of Ling Zhang’s *Gold Mountain Blues* where Orientalist tropes pervaded in all instances. In the first chapter, "Strategizing the Body of History", Lai discusses the prevailing fraughtness in self-writing for Asian Canadian writers and the ambivalence in "breaking the silence" because the discourse of national belonging in Canada is still working to co-opt the marginalized subject (37).

The *Gold Mountain Blues* scandal started in 2011 when Wayson Choy, Sky Lee, and Paul Yee sued the Penguin Group Canada, the author of *Gold Mountain Blues*, Ling Zhang, and the English translator of the novel Nicky Harman for copyright infringement (Lai 32). While there is much to be said about whether the claims of plagiarism are true, what is particularly important in Lai's analysis of the *Gold Mountain Blues* scandal is how she underlines the tension between the old and new Chinese diaspora. This is exemplified by the distinction she makes between the author, Ling Zhang, and the authors suing her: Lee, Choy and Yee. As Lai observes, the case "forces a distinction between different kinds of Chineseness" since Ling Zhang works in "Chinese" whereas Lee, Choy, and Yee work in English (32). Ling Zhang is part of the newer immigration to Canada while Lee, Choy, and Yee are part of the earlier generation. The unrepressed Chinese language that Ling Zhang uses is the result of what Lai calls "[the] major shift in global power since the turn of the millennium and the rise of neoliberalism" (32). What Lai so very subtly hints at is that the rise in China's national hegemony has made Ling Zhang's writing more legitimate than Lee, Choy, and Yee. Here is where Lai's analysis begins to falter. She does not emphasize that this "Chinese language" that is so unrepressed is a particular kind of Chinese that has legitimacy in China. Ling Zhang is a predominantly Mandarin speaker writing in simplified Chinese writing, and this differs from the Chinese varieties of Lee, Choy, and Yee's generation. Distinguishing the difference in languages is essential, seeing as Mandarin gained official status in the PRC since 1949, and the rise of PRC in global power has only benefitted the identity of Mandarin.

Though Lai rightly sees how the West exposes its Orientalistic views when it came to defining the tension between Ling Zhang and the earlier generations of writers like Lee, Choy, and Yee, Lai overlooks how Chinese national hegemony and other Chinese cultural hegemonies have played a role in dividing the Chinese diasporic community since the

twentieth century. This is apparent in her statement that "the embodied form that the *Gold Mountain Blues* conflict takes, however, is new" (31). I find the use of "new" questionable. Lai only reasons that it is new because she observes that "prior to the turn of the millennium, forms of non-white difference tended to be lumped together as consistent with one another" (31). In other words, Lai asserts the tensions are "new" because white Canada has always conflated the identities of non-white people until the *Gold Mountain Blues* scandal. However, what she misses is that not only the Canadian hegemonic culture that lumps together Chinese Canadians, but it is also the work of evolving Chinese hegemonic power structures to essentialize Chinese diasporic subjects strategically. Though unnoticed, the tension in the Chinese Canadian community is not exactly new, and this silent tension has been brewing for a long time because of the internal disagreements within the community about strategic essentialism going back to the nineteenth century. Let's take the history of the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver (CBAV) by way of example. The CBAV was at one point formed by the Chinese sojourners to combat white Canadian state's discrimination against Chinese Canadians (Young). Their strategic essentialism broke down in the 1970s when pro-Taiwan members broke away, and now the CBAV is catering to pro-Beijing views, taking a strong political position against Hong Kong Canadians and Taiwanese Canadians (Young). Such a narrative of history undermines the usefulness of the term "Chinese Canadian" to account for the felt national, cultural, and linguistic differences among Hong Kong Canadians, Taiwanese Canadians, and Mainland Chinese Canadians. Therefore, contrary to Lai's point, *Gold Mountain Blues* is only "new" to the extent it ruptured existing Orientalist understanding of "Chineseness" and Asian Canadian literature rather than being "new" in terms of the evolving Chinese Canadian history. How much more powerful would Lai's book might have been had she questioned Chineseness more critically.

Nonetheless, Lai's book certainly invigorates the study of Asian Canadian literature by critically questioning the field's political trajectory. My project inherently has the same premise as Lai inasmuch as we see the past in the present and value an anti-racist approach to literature. On the other hand, although Lai deals with specific issues like language, "Chineseness", and Chinese nationalism, she does not challenge these issues as seriously as the racist discourse of Canadian nationalism. I am more critical of Chinese nationalism and the prevailing Chinese mini-hegemonies in the community, which I believe infringe on the ability of Chinese Canadians to construct their identities, and I address these issues by orienting my examination of the two novels on language and identity. Unlike Lai, I do not see the issues arising from *Gold Mountain Blues* scandal as "new". In chapter two and chapter three, I use *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* to examine the felt and perceived differences of Chinese identity and Chinese languages even before the rise of Chinese nationalism in the 1950s.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

Before speaking of my thesis' structure, I offer some explanations about the theoretical and methodological framework of my study to clarify certain terminology and provide the rationale for its use.

My study leans heavily on cultural theorist Himani Bannerji and her two books *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism* and *The Dark Side of the Nation*.²⁰ In these two texts, Bannerji tackles issues of hegemonic powers in Canada, language, and identity, which I find highly relevant to Lee and Choy's works. Bannerji's praxis of story-telling, which shows how the inclusion of subjective experiences in critical pedagogy can be informative, also provides us with a set of vocabulary to understand the

²⁰ To limit the scope of this essay, I have not included Bannerji's edited book *(Re)turning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics*, which contains essays from many women writers in Canada that powerfully reveals how women of colour are often denied their subjectivity in dominant discourse, even though it is often cited in Asian Canadian literary criticism.

following: how minority writing can lead to political agency and consciousness, and how minority communities can be co-opted by hegemonic powers.²¹ For instance, Bannerji's chapter "The Passion of Naming" from *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism* also brings forth important questions about the expressions Chinese Canadian and identity, which are continuously used throughout this thesis.²² As a term, Chinese Canadian can be criticized as "regressive, divisive, and individualistic" because its hyphenated nature suggests that Chinese Canadians are in a continual state of non-belonging to either side of the hyphen (Bannerji, *Thinking Through* 17). However, as Bannerji suggests, there is a power in the name Chinese Canadian so as to give a specified agency to the members; names give roots and anchors to a specific geography and history that is necessary to relate one's self to the world across time and space (*Thinking Through* 19). Naming is also relevant to identity. Bannerji states, "naming is individual, historical, and collective" (*Thinking Through* 21). Self-naming is also an exercise of self-agency and a way to visibilize a person's connections to history and culture (*Thinking Through* 38).

Naming is also a form of control, which can be seen in the word "Chinese"; does "Chinese" relate to the nation of China, the ethnicity (Han Chinese), the linguistic group, or the culture? Interestingly, we can see that the Canadian state sees "Chinese" as a nationality category by categorizing Taiwanese Canadians as a separate group apart from Chinese Canadians. Inside and outside of the Canadian border, "Chinese" as a nationalist category has become increasingly unfavourable to generations of Chinese Canadians that came from Hong Kong and Taiwan, who may see themselves as Chinese in terms of ethnicity but not in the nationalistic sense. The problem lies in the limits of English in expressing the nuances of

²¹ The "Introduction" chapter in Larissa Lai's 2014 *Slanting I, Imagining We* and the "Introduction" in Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn's 2008 edited *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography* address the importance of names and cite Himani Bannerji's text.

²² Bannerji's text also highlights the fraughtness of the terms "Asian Canadian literature" and "Asian Canadian", but in this thesis, I would see Chinese Canadian literature in some ways as a part of the overall Asian Canadian literature.

identity. In written Chinese, there are actually a few more terms for “Chinese” like 華人 and 中國人.²³ The first means “ethnic Chinese” or “overseas Chinese”, while the second refers to “a resident of China”. 華人 (or 華僑 or 華裔) is a politically neutral term that classifies anyone who emigrated from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau as being culturally Chinese (Chun, *Forget Chineseness* 198).^{24,25} Competing in this self-identification is the Chinese Communist Party’s more recent use of 中華民族 in political speeches, which collapses the meaning of “Chinese” race” and “Chinese nation” all together in an ethnonationalistic attempt to control everyone of Chinese descent (“Resolution of the 19th National Congress”).²⁶ (老)華僑 *lao wah kiu* is a term used in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, and it is a term seen in many Chinese associations in Canada from the past to present. Like Asian Canadian literature, Chinese Canadian is a fraught term. I acknowledge that though it may be provisional, it has legitimacy in my present study because Lee and Choy both find self-identify as Chinese Canadians, and the term denotes the two hegemonic cultures and languages that my study examines.

As for identity, my study illustrates how hegemonic Chinese and Canadian cultures seek to control individual identity through language, and individuals *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* react against this and establish their own identity by processes that also involve language. Identity, as argued by Bannerji in “The Passion of Naming” and

²³ 華人 is *waa⁴ jan⁴* (*Huárén*), and 中國人 is *zung¹ gwok³ jan⁴* (*zhōngguó rén*).

²⁴ 華僑 *waa⁴ kiu⁴* and 華裔 *waa⁴ jeoi⁶* both mean “overseas Chinese”.

²⁵ It is a politically neutral term now, but during the Qing dynasty, 華僑 was synonymous with being the enemy of the Chinese imperial state. See Chan 37-39 for more information.

²⁶ 中華民族 is *zung¹ waa⁴ man⁴ zuk⁶* and *zhōnghuá mínzú*. In 2017, Xi Jinping’s 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China declares that all Chinese people to strive for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese race. The same year, Premier Li Keqiang also declares the Chinese race as a “big family”. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/no-mr-xi-chinese-canadians-arent-agents-of-your-party/article36749313/>

“Introducing Racism: Silence” in *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism* involves complex social relations, dynamism, and moments; Bannerji argues that a theorist should think through these categories (50). The complex social relations and oppressions depicted in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* are not segmented into mutually exclusive, neat categories of race or class or gender. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Song An, Kae’s paternal grandmother, is not marginalized by the Chinese Canadian community just because she is a woman, but because she is both a Hakka and a woman. In *The Jade Peony*, the stepmother who is controlled by her mother-in-law is seen as inferior because she came from the Four Counties. In both cases, Lee and Choy present complex social dynamics of exclusion and inclusion amongst Chinese Canadians through language.

Bannerji’s “The Sound Barrier” in *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism* is particularly illuminating at identifying the challenges that Chinese Canadian writers face in transposing Chinese cultural elements and linguistic systems into the dominant anglophone space of Canada (164). Bannerji writes that they are “struggling with the realization that [they] are self-alienated in the very act of self-expression” (*Thinking Through* 164). In the 1990s, self-expression of Chinese Canadian writers was celebrated by Canadian society and critics in what Guy Beauregard calls a “coming to voice” narrative (Cuder-Domínguez, Martín-Lucas and Víllegas-López x). Indeed, self-expression was rightly celebrated in the 1990s. One of the enduring silences that *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* overcame is literature. Until the late 1980s and 1990s, even though minority texts were published, many, especially Chinese Canadian literature, were not considered Canadian literature. The lack of access to publishing was a significant systemic exclusion that Chinese Canadians faced. Despite being given formal citizenship, minority writers in Canada, denied of their substantive citizenship, had been systematically excluded from Canadian literary production until the 1970s when Asian minority literature proliferated (Fernando 10; Lai,

"Corrupted Lineage" 1). Until the 1970s, Chinese Canadian literature only consisted of some writings by Edith Maude Eaton (also known as Sui Sin Far) and a large collection of writings in Chinese. Therefore, when the protagonist Kae, who is a fictional character trying to be a writer, in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* talks about the "great wall of silence" mentioned earlier, it can be read as Lee's self-referential attempt to acknowledge the struggles that Canadian minority writers to find a space within Canada's dominant white anglophone literature (214). Having endured years of invisibility, Chinese Canadian writers wanted to push for visibility in the 1970s. Starting in the 1970s, Chinese Canadian community activists started to break through the wall of alienation and isolation through an alliance with other Asian Canadian, Indigenous, and Black Canadian writers. These efforts led to the respective releases of the 1979 *Inalienable Rice - A Chinese and Japanese Anthology*, Fred Wah's 1985 *Waiting for Saskatchewan*, and Paul Yee's 1988 *Salt Water City*. Chinese Canadian literature was born along with other Asian Canadian and Canadian minority literature. Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* was particularly significant for Chinese Canadian literature. Published in 1990, the novel was a commercial success, arousing public attention and paving the way for other Asian Canadian writers (Chao, *Beyond Silence* xi). Equally important, Wayson Choy's 1995 *The Jade Peony* had commercial success and critical attention, winning the Trillium Book Award in 1996. The commercial and critical success of the two books in the 1990s was seen as a sign of progress for Asian-Canadian literature (Chao, *Beyond Silence* xii). Even decades after their publication, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* are still seen as silence-breaking texts which paved the way for Asian-Canadian literature and minority literature in Canada. They are now canonical texts that represent Chinese Canadian literature (Lai, *Corrupted Lineage* 1-2).

Despite the mainstream success, the risk of alienation and reification through self-expression, which is the inherent paradox Bannerji's "The Sound Barrier" illustrates, trouble

many minority writers. With increased visibility and attention, misconstruction and silences in the literary interpretations of the two texts grow. While Bannerji's essay does not see the reconciliation between the need to translate with the risk of exoticization as an easy feat, Bannerji is more sympathetic towards the fraughtness to reconcile the two for minority writers, unlike subsequent critics. Some critics like Lindsay Diehl and Maria N. Ng provide reasons to account for the institutional approval of the two novels. In "Disrupting the National Frame: A Postcolonial, Diasporic (Re)Reading of Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children*", Lindsay Diehl argues that the theoretical approaches behind most criticism understand *Disappearing Moon Cafe* as a cohesive and progressive text, and this coincides with the existing Canadian hegemonic rhetoric about progression with acculturation. Diehl states, "[*Disappearing Moon Cafe*] [has] been interpreted as expressing a progressive notion of history, one that does not necessarily contest idealistic notions of Canada's multiculturalism or the colonial binaries of East and West" (102). For Diehl, the identifiable plot structure of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* along with a "recuperative model" of feminist criticism drive critical interpretations that "reify East-West distinctions by projecting Orientalized differences onto the [first generation Chinese Canadian characters] (101). Similarly, in "Chop Suey Writing: Sui Sin Far, Wayson Choy, and Judy Fong Bates", Maria N. Ng sees *The Jade Peony* as perpetuating the historical exoticization of Chinese Canadians in literature by writing that "fictional Chinese are still confined to Chinatown, and sometimes these Chinese are just as exotic as Mrs. Spring Fragrance of 100 years ago" (182). Both Diehl and Ng adequately underline the risks of critical interpretations through orientalist lens that exoticizes the narrative techniques and characters, but there are several flaws in their essays that point to a general unawareness of Asian Canadian writers' inherent fraughtness in self-representation. Though Diehl pronounces somewhat vaguely that Lee critiques the westernized judgments of newer

generations of Chinese Canadians towards older generations like Mui Lan, Diehl's assertion that "Kae's strategy [abstracts] Mui Lan from the intricacy of her village beliefs and [inscribes] her within the concerns of Western individualism" appears to operate under the same binary East-West logic that Diehl is critical of in Asian Canadian studies (109). Even though Kae's criticism is often westernized, the narrative, or Lee, for that matter, does not completely delegitimize her criticism of Chinese heritage and her issues with the unsavoury truths about the older generation. The unacknowledged fact is that Chinese women were historically oppressed because of traditional Chinese culture, a fact that does not necessarily engender the notion that Western ideology is superior or that any criticism of this fact should be denounced as western. What is silent in Diehl's criticism is also the fact that violence, racism, and ugliness are maintained by a plurality of forces and cultures in a complex and shifting dynamism; hegemonic white Canadian culture *and* Chinese culture.

In a more straightforward manner, Ng's essay challenges Choy's representation of Chinese language and proposes the inclusion of non-English words as ripe for cultural appropriation. Despite the disparity in socio-historical contexts and motivations, Ng unreservedly equates fictional worlds depicted by Edith Eaton (Sui Sin Far), Judy Fong Bates, and Wayson Choy to buttress her contention that these texts uphold stereotypical images of Chinese Canadians. Out of the three texts, Ng is most lenient towards Choy's *The Jade Peony*, but she does not like the linguistic diversity and untranslated terms in the novel. She asks rhetorically, "can this insertion of untranslated terms not be read as a new strategy of exoticizing the Chinese culture?" (181). Ng feels that "the linguistic universe of different dialects from the southern provinces has no meaning for non-Chinese readers" (180). Ng unreasonably imagines that all readers of *The Jade Peony* are Western and speak only English. Ng's ideal of a reading practice where every word must be intelligible is also disputable. For writers like Choy who must translate a personal experience that involves non-

English languages and non-Western cultural values, the untranslatable is inevitable, and in the case of *The Jade Peony*, a 1995 novel that addresses the failures of the Canadian state's "multiculturalism" to address past historic injustices towards ethnic minorities, could allowing readers who are English-speaking Canadians to read non-monolingually be a genuine practice of multiculturalism? As Reed Way Dasenbrock notes in his essay "Why Read Multicultural Literature? An Arnoldian Perspective":

The best arguments for [why we should read multicultural literature] do not depend on giving minority students writers in the curriculum to relate to, nor on making sure that the diversity of the world's population is represented in the canon.

(700)

According to Dasenbrock, the value in multicultural literature is not about giving texts that represent the reader's world. The value in multicultural literature for Dasenbrock is an opportunity for readers to be confronted with "things [they] haven't [been] confronted before" regardless of the reader's ethnic identity. English texts that use non-English languages like *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* can certainly challenge and confront readers' values and assumptions about language and even identity, so Ng's apprehension seems unfounded.

Though the publication of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* may be aided by the 1988 revision of the multiculturalism policy which advocated for Canadian society to display its pluralism of cultures, Lee and Choy are not uncritical of the state apparatus that permitted the visibility of their texts, a fact that critics often ignore (Cuder-Domínguez, Martín-Lucas and Víllegas-López viii). As Bannerji's *The Dark Side of the Nation* suggests, multiculturalism as state practice often reduces ethnic groups' demands as "cultural demands" when their demands are related to issues of gender, class, and race (8). As Lee and Choy's texts show, the struggles of Chinese Canadians in the past were never merely

cultural. Bannerji further states that even though multiculturalism seems to acknowledge “cultural” differences, these differences are merely peripheral to the legitimate nucleus of Canadian identity and culture that is English and French as shown by the language policy of English and French (*The Dark Side of the Nation* 8). Lee and Choy’s use of Chinese also illustrates that the early immigrants and settlers of Canada spoke languages that were neither English nor French. More importantly, Bannerji’s criticism of the way multiculturalism leads to neocolonialism amongst communities is seminal to illustrate the intracultural struggle depicted in the two novels about the Chinese Canadian community, and one that is highly relevant to understanding the problematic way *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, as well as the other Chinese Canadian descendants of the sojourners, are compared to Chinese Canadians from more recent immigration. The study will show how Bannerji’s concept of “double reification” applies to “Chineseness” in the two texts as one that comes from not only the state but also their communities in order to control individual identities and destinies. This is relevant in unpacking the way *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* are measured against newer Chinese Canadian literature as being less diverse and less consistent with the social reality of today’s globalization. It assumes that the historical injustices that Chinese Canadians had faced have been totally eradicated. What Bannerji’s *Dark Side of the Nation* and her practice of critical, anti-reificatory stand on cultural identity can illuminate about the two texts is that the essence of the historical injustices still lingers, but the appearances have been more well-masked.

As stated before, the focus of my thesis is the study and analysis of languages in literary texts. I show how the texts’ use of language reflects and constructs structural patterns of oppression and power that had silenced them. I also examine why there has been enduring silence about the way authors use Chinese languages as a strategy for resisting hegemonic structures. Throughout the study, I unpack and analyze Lee and Choy’s uses of Cantonese

and Toisanese phrases and Chinese cultural reference systems. I unravel the strategies of translation and transcription that Lee and Choy undertake. To do this, I use some traditional Chinese characters to translate the Cantonese phrases that Lee and Choy insert in order to point at their historical, semantic, and aesthetic significance. Throughout the study, moreover, “Chinese language” is used to signify a family of languages that sees Mandarin, Cantonese, Four Counties dialects like Toisanese, Xinhui, Siqian, Guzhen, Enping, and Kaiping as language varieties. To clear up misconceptions of Chinese as one homogenized language, when it comes to orality, all of these varieties are mutually unintelligible.²⁷ It becomes a different matter for Chinese in terms of writing because there are two standardized writing systems: traditional and simplified. These systems are generally mutually intelligible, and only Cantonese and Mandarin's spoken words have adherence with these two writing systems. I want to make my study accessible to English readers and readers not from linguistic backgrounds while remaining relatively faithful to the linguistic variety that Lee and Choy draw from; I add a footnote to word using Jyutping, a romanisation system for Cantonese developed by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong in 1993, as opposed to the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). Bannerji's “The Sound Barrier” underlines the need to translate using a language other than English, but the strategies of translation and transposition of cultural elements can best be drawn from translation and world literature theories.

The investigation of language in literature had always been relegated to translation studies until the emergence of world literature. As Susan Bassnett's *Translation and World Literature* argues, literary criticism that investigates texts dealing with two cultures and

²⁷ While many take Mandarin Chinese for granted as the natural language of China, it should be noted that it started as a language variety spoken by northern Chinese people in the Song dynasty, and it became an official national language after the overthrowing of the Qing dynasty. The Mandarin speakers at that time did not outnumber those of the major dialects like Cantonese and Wu. The political reason why Mandarin was chosen is because most of the ancient regimes for the past three thousand years had set the capital in the North around Beijing, and it is also the capital for the Republic of China started by Dr. Sun Yat-Sen.

linguistic reference systems often fails to engage with the languages and translations while advocating for multiculturalism (4). Bassnett suggests that this is the result of the lack of dialogue between literature and linguistics, and the structures of the academy that look down on translation and keep literature monolingual (3). In the case of Canada, translation studies and funding for translations have only been between English and French texts, which means most Chinese Canadian literature and criticism in Chinese (and even in French) remain untranslated and inaccessible to many critics of Chinese Canadian literature.

Though I use Jyutping to show that Chinese words embedded in Lee and Choy's texts belong to Chinese sociolects intelligible only to certain social groups, my thesis is not an ethnographic project. Lee and Choy's idiolect and personal critiques of the terms used are subtle but important, and this is the central focus of my first chapter. This is because I am more interested in looking at the significance of the Chinese words and languages in Lee and Choy's novels as opposed to investigating how authentic these words and phrases are. Multicultural texts are often included and studied for their representativeness and authenticity, and these reasons, while valid to an extent, often overshadow all other possible values of the texts. Going back to Dasenbrock's text, he says, "we have something to learn from these other voices, which suggests, in turn, a far more dynamic interplay of perspectives than the jargon of authenticity so prevalent in the discourse of multiculturalism would seem to allow" (695). Multicultural texts, which include *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, should be studied because the texts' many non-English voices offer interesting and nuanced perspectives towards history, language, identity, and power. When it comes to language and translation in literature, moreover, an analysis that seeks to undermine or glorify the authenticity of works often relies on Manichean arguments of universalism or ethnocentrism, and this is something I address extensively in chapter 1. Rather than focusing on fidelity, as Rebecca L. Walkowitz's *Born Translated* advises, the analysis of

translation and language should be about “the innovations that shape the works’ ongoing production” (45). Such an analysis should embrace robustness presented in the language as opposed to being anxious about untranslatable words (Walkowitz 45). As expected, there are words and expressions in the two texts that are idiomatic and natural to a native Cantonese/Taishanese speaker, so some words inevitably may be untranslatable. For one thing, the untranslatability of these Chinese words like the many names for “Chinese”, as I show in my second chapter, is necessary to resist assimilation into hegemonic narratives. Only by engaging with untranslatable words as they are can we begin to unravel the important retained historical information and identities behind the words.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is organized into three chapters. Each chapter discusses a different dimension of the cooperative, yet paradoxically conflicting relationship between language and identity.

The first chapter “Names and their Referents” deals with how cultural identities are often judged according to a “myth of authenticity” that ignores issues of subjectivity, language, and translation. By considering the two novels’ act of naming, according to Bannerji’s theory, I attempt to avoid a Manichean argument of the myth of authenticity, which often either silences historical memory or criticism about heritage culture. My discussion of these Chinese words and their evolving semantics attempts to reach a commensurability between the represented shared histories and the authors’ critical interrogations of these histories. I show that there are non-English names and phrases in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* that encode important social realities and historical perspectives about the Chinese diaspora, and these terms can be understood as critical interventions to interrogate inherent problems with identity, race, and culture in the Chinese Canadian community.

Though my first chapter shows how naming can be a powerful way to "break the silence", my second chapter "Expressions of 'Chineseness'" explores another dimension of language, namely discourse, to contend that the different competing discursive constructions of Chinese identity are dependent on the power structures of a particular time and place. I trace how the two novels engage with multiple linguistic representations of "Chineseness", and I argue that the language of "Chineseness" not only constructs identities but also restricts them.

The novels demonstrate that the Chinese terms for "Chinese" can construct as well as restrict ideas of the Chinese identity. Added to this complexity is the way the novels illustrate how natural languages also have perceived identities. In my third chapter "Languages and identities", I am concerned with how the two novels discuss the way in which the Canadian state and the Chinese community work together in a two-fold hegemony to create a hierarchy of languages based on the economic and national status of the language speakers. Even though using an alternative language may give a sense of fluidity, I examine how the novels illustrate the potential limits of forgoing or adopting languages to shift identity.

As widely recognized texts, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* risk being disempowered through critical interpretations by the very hegemonic ideologies they wish to resist in the first place. Critical interpretations and methods of circulation, not literary texts, should be more carefully examined as a source of the orientalism and exoticization. After struggling to be included in Canadian literature, Lee and Choy's strategies of writing can become depoliticized and dehistoricized through universalist interpretations. One example is to turn the subjectivities of Lee's and Choy's respective work to universal themes or tropes. As Arun Mukherjee's *Oppositional Aesthetics* notes, a universalist reading "devalues the political, racial, and national problems" embedded in minority literature (18). Tropes, on the other hand, may be useful at distinguishing the difference of minority literature, but an over-

reliance on tropes leads to oversimplification of subjectivities. Larissa Lai states that Chinese Canadian literature has become associated with “tropes of violence, outsidership, and abjection” (“Corrupted Lineage” 3). For Lee and Choy, there is an obvious risk to representing the truth of the historical experiences of the Chinese Canadian that involves gambling, misogyny, infidelity, and illiteracy because these representations may be wrongly interpreted by critics as feeding into the existing negative western stereotypes of Chinese Canadians. However, as I show in subsequent chapters, these depictions, aided by Lee and Choy’s utilization of multiple languages, are treated in a nuanced manner that humanizes the Chinese Canadian experience, and they cannot be read as just tropes because they are rooted in history and culture. Another common critical approach is to examine the texts through generalizing ideologies such as hybridity. Hybridity as a term may be useful at describing the fraught liminality of the represented Chinese Canadians in Lee and Choy’s texts, but when “hybridity” is used, it is, at best, redundant, and at worst, contradictory because its meaning derives from the concept of racial purity. “Hybridity” is a term that often describes the mixture of occidental-oriental cultures or the racial combination of white and non-white lineage. What is presumed by hybridity is that purity exists in occidental cultures and oriental cultures before the two meet. By consistently using “cultural hybridity” as a blanket, homogenizing term, what is ignored is the inherent pluralities and cultural differences within one individual racial group. In Canada, there is the white anglophone Canadian culture with roots in British culture, and francophone culture rooted in French culture. The overall “white Canada” is an assemblage of European cultures often borrowing from mainstream American culture. Similarly, as a racial and cultural category, Chinese encompasses a multitude of ethnic groups, each with their own cultural practices and unique linguistic characteristics. Many critical interpretations often use cultural hybridity to describe *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* and interrogate the interactions between Chinese and Canadian culture,

but they fail to acknowledge the nuances in white Canadian and Chinese cultures let alone engage critically with how the rigid maintenance of the two cultures in the two novels exclude and isolate certain individuals. It is when critical interpretations resort to generalizations in interrogating the complex meanings of the two texts that they do become tokenized, and Chinese Canadian literature and experience become homogenized. The sharp, critical edge of the texts becomes dull, and the central concerns of the two texts, which are to illustrate the historical and political problems of silence rooted in the past and current forms of injustice experienced by Chinese Canadians inside and outside their communities, remain unexplored and silent. Therefore, this thesis is a response to the urgent need to redress the existing silences and gaps that the two texts represented decades ago.

Chapter One: Names and their Referents

The myth of authenticity is symptomatic of hegemonic constructions of identity and language, and it deters critical and etymological unpacking of identities, histories, and values embedded in the significant words and phrases in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* because these words exist as both English and Chinese, and the Chinese form of the words are orally transmitted, existing outside of official Canadian and Chinese national history. In questioning the myth of authenticity in this chapter, I do not suggest that there is no such thing as real culture or cultural appropriation. My contention in this chapter is that underneath most critical evaluations of the authenticity in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*'s cultural expressions is a set of preconceived and subjective notions of what Chinese and/or Canadian culture should be like. Whenever myth of authenticity pops up about what constitutes as authentic "Chineseness" and "Canadianness", it ignores the inherent fraughtness in Canadian literary production and criticism caused by issues of language and identity. Criticism, like literature, is at times unable to circumvent politics and hegemonic ideologies that have an inherent understanding of what authentic "ethnic" cultures entail and these ways of thinking affect the level of tolerance towards certain languages and translations in the two novels. While Sky Lee and Wayson Choy certainly broke the silence in terms of literary representation in the 1990s, their use of Chinese-English names in the novels and their act of naming to critically interrogate the myth of authenticity have been largely ignored in criticism. There is hardly any criticism of this literature that goes beyond perpetuating nationalism and/or Orientalism.

In this chapter, I want to bring out what has been absent in the discussions about *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* by using Sinology and English as critical tools. I analyze how Lee and Choy use English to encode Cantonese and Taishanese words and phrases in the two novels to offer a contentious reading of Chinese Canadian history and

identity. This act of naming resists pandering to a myth of authenticity. On one level, these words are mimetic because Lee and Choy must, as Himani Bannerji calls it, “[go] beyond authorial convention” in using Chinese languages to reflect a shared sense of history in the diasporic Chinese community from the early twentieth century (164). The etymological origins of these words point to a collective history of the Chinese diaspora that shares multiple places and temporalities dealing with colonialism beyond China and Canada, and these words disrupt the easy containment of the novels in nationalistic frameworks. At the same time, by engaging with the semantics and phonetics of English, Lee and Choy add an idiolectic dimension to these words, and these additions represent Lee and Choy’s critical intervention about their community, which suggests that these words are not just ethnographic.

As much as Lee and Choy’s respective novels resist the myth of authenticity, much of the criticism of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* seems unable to escape it. It is not surprising considering how it was the discursive politics behind Canadian literature and the Canadian state that first silenced Asian Canadian literature, but then endorsed authors like Sky Lee and Wayson Choy in the 1980s and 1990s. These two seemingly oppositional events are not entirely mutually exclusive when the developmental history of Asian Canadian literature is taken into account.

Before the 1980s and 1990s, the myth of authenticity emerged with literary texts that entrenched the national myth of “Canadianness”, and part of this process was defining identities that lay on the border of Canadian identity - the “others”. As Lien Chao’s *Beyond Silence* and Larissa Lai’s *Slanting the I, Imagining the We* both show, Canadian “minority” literature emerged at a time when there was not only active racial discrimination against Indigenous, South Asians, East Asian, and Black Canadians during this period, but there was also a dearth of Canadian literature detailing their histories, identities, and experiences. If

there were any texts portraying them, most of these texts were written by white Canadian authors and either resorted to cultural appropriation or stereotypes. For many non-white Canadian authors, the silence during this time was hypocritical because the Canadian state passed the Multiculturalism Policy in 1971, which promoted the respect for cultural diversity and the right for ethnic groups to preserve and develop their own cultures within Canadian society. In reality, the Canadian state's practices of this policy were limited when it came to the level of commitment and financial backing (Wardhaugh 208).²⁸ The Canada Council for Canadian literature gave funding mostly to translate French Canadian texts as a way to monitor the growing Quebec nationalism (Shouldice 74). The broader Canadian society also did not act in line with this rhetoric of tolerance during the 1970s. Even with the new updates to the Multiculturalism Act in 1988, the state's rhetoric of multiculturalism has never been exactly multicultural. An example of this is the official language policy that stipulates French and English as the only two official languages. The recognition of French as an official language and French Canadians as one of the original pioneers of Canada in the policy was a move that some Canadian critics like Himani Bannerji in *The Dark Side of the Nation* saw as a form of management. It maintained a unity of one Canada by placating the nationalism of francophones in the 1970s (Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation* 95). It managed the growth of new immigrants who were not white and did not speak English and French by maintaining a nucleus of Canadian identity that was English or French-speaking white European and a peripheral space where "other" social groups belonged (107). As far as authenticity goes, the recognition of French and English as the languages of the "pioneers" becomes deceptive considering how the many social groups who have contributed to Canada spoke neither French nor English. In practice, moreover, many Canadians in the 1970s until the 1990s did not speak English or French. As Marnina Gornick aptly puts it, this very policy is "a souvenir

²⁸ Wardhaugh provides some statistical information: "In 1980 the federal government's budget to support its policy of multiculturalism came to \$10.8 million, that is, less than one cent per person per week throughout Canada" (208).

and an erasure” to symbolize Canada as "a society of two languages” and two nations while it erases the many groups that helped lay the foundation of Canada’s success (qtd. in Cuder-Domínguez, Martín-Lucas, and Víllegas-López vii).

Moving beyond the problems with symbolizing core Canadian identity with English and French, many Canadians whose first language was neither French nor English in the latter half of the twentieth century realized that even by linguistically assimilating to the two languages, they could not bypass race, class, and gender discrimination. The 1971 Multiculturalism Act added more political and cultural capital to French and English in making the two languages official. The two languages’ official status demonstrates to Canadians that Canada had an absorptive capacity and guaranteed respect as long as there was cultural and linguistic assimilation (Elliot 168; Wardhaugh 149).²⁹ In the case of Indigenous Canadians who were being sent to residential schools, cultural assimilation was not even a choice. Despite acculturation through language acquisition, the absorptive capacity of Canadian society had limits: there was no guarantee of structural assimilation even when a person gave up heritage cultures and languages. Many Canadians were not included in the social structures of society, or worse, they faced violence and harassment (Wardhaugh 146).³⁰

Once Indigenous, South Asians, East Asians, Black Canadians, and even Ukrainian Canadians and French Canadians became disillusioned with the state rhetoric of “tolerance” and “multiculturalism”, they began to protest. They wanted participation in Canadian society, such as access to employment, freedom from discrimination, and control of literary representation. Political activism and literature were deeply intertwined. Indigenous activists

²⁹ Wardhaugh’s term “absorptive capacity” defines Canada’s immigration policy as one that is not entirely assimilationist but a policy of “Anglo-conformity” that elevates “Englishness” as a goal for all Canadians to desire (129).

³⁰ Writing in 1983, Ronald Wardhaugh acknowledges that “Canadian society is more tolerant today than it has ever been”. However, he states: “people are still assaulted because they are South Asians, do not get jobs because they have this or that characteristic, cannot easily buy property because they do not reside in a particular province, cannot be educated in their mother tongue because they speak English within Quebec or French outside, or are deprived of some benefit or respect because they are from Poland or Hong Kong, or are Black or female, or lack ‘Canadian experience.’ And many think this situation is as it should be, that language, ethnicity, color, sex and so on should still be used to apportion opportunities in Canada!” (146-147).

and authors protested the cultural appropriation of Indigenous texts and authors, and this gave space and agency to other groups. As a result, Asian Canadian literature, along with Indigenous, Black, and South Asian literature ruptured the silence (Lai, *Slanting the I* 1). The publication of Asian Canadian texts, which include *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* in the 1980s and 1990s, was closely associated with the political activism of authors, who were deeply involved in anti-racist feminist conferences, publications, and protests (Lai, *Slanting the I* 4). In the 1980s and 1990s, Asian Canadian literature was an appraisal of what “Canadianness” and their heritage culture was.

Even though it was a struggle for Asian Canadian authors like Lee and Choy to break the silence on their racialized subjectivity and the issues within their community, many critics (which include other Asian Canadian authors) saw the acceptance of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* as evidence that these narratives support the nationalistic project of Canada and that they have been co-opted to perpetuate the myths of “Chineseness”. These claims are often based on the observation that Canadian state, which these authors initially protested against, suddenly became supportive of Asian Canadian literary texts like *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*. After all, these texts were given recognition and attention. Canadian universities began to also incorporate *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* as texts representative of Chinese Canadian literature or Asian Canadian literature.

Claiming that Lee and Choy assimilated to the demands of the state greatly ignores contradictory thematic and linguistic concerns that the two authors had to navigate in their writing. Thematically, Lee and Choy had to deal with the legacy of white Canadian literature that concretized Western gaze towards “Chineseness” based on binary principles of philia or phobia; “Chineseness” was either overly fetishized or associated with fear. The older stereotypes of China doll and Fu-Manchu had been entrenched and circulated by the North

American racist discourse. The emerging “Model Minority” stereotype in the 1980s and 1990s as shown in the *W5* “Campus Giveaway” episode is a mixture of philia and phobia (Wardhaugh 140). This existing racist sinophobia and sinophilia in Canada is the fraughtness that confronted Lee and Choy, who could not portray their community too harshly, nor could they overly fetishize the Chinese community. The nature of Lee and Choy’s tasks are already predefined in terms set by the West. Lee and Choy must avoid the situation where their “knowledge itself becomes *either* ornamentation *or* the military weaponry of instrumental reason” (Chow, *Writing Diaspora* 137).

Linguistically, it is more fraught. The community history and individual experiences of Chinese Canadians in the past that Lee and Choy wanted to represent can be what literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak classifies as “subaltern discourse” (24). The Chinese sojourners can be seen as “subaltern discourse” because they did not speak English, they were silenced, and they were not given much representation until the 1980s and 1990s. As Lien Chao's *Beyond Silence* implies, the use of English for Asian Canadian writers should be seen with cautious optimism. It was politically necessary for Asian Canadian writers like Lee and Choy “to have a voice”, so they must mainly use the “official language” of Canada to be recognized (17). At the same time, Lee and Choy’s texts did not totally leave behind Chinese languages, cultural practices, and non-Western people. Lee and Choy must choose how to represent them linguistically in a faithful manner, yet avoid being unintelligible. The two novels translate the experiences of past Chinese Canadian inhabitants and made space for their values and identities, which had been silent for so long.

Apart from ignoring the fraughtness that the two authors face, much of the critical observations of the two novels so far have been limited in their ability to circumvent the myth of authenticity, and instead, most criticism perpetuates the same myths and silences the important critical interventions of Lee and Choy. This myth of authenticity contains an all-

too-easy binary of Westernness and Chineseness, and it also contains the same desire as the Canadian state apparatus, oscillating between denouncement/silencing of them or acculturation of them. Put differently, many critics can no longer engage with the intrinsic value of the works without escaping the dialectic tension between “Chineseness” and “Westernness”, and consequently, the criticism often goes nowhere, avoiding to engage with the socio-historical issues embedded in the texts about identity and language.

The first set of criticism, which was mostly released before the twenty-first century, had an uncritical, celebratory tone towards the emergence of these novels, revealing sanitized politics towards these books. The celebratory tone towards these two novels revealed either a universalist reading of the books that sees a fulfilled critic, satisfied that the books ticked all the right boxes to be classified as a Chinese-North American novel. Or, the two novels are celebrated for their ethnographic nature and specificity, which can reterritorialize Chinese Canadian literature. The 1995 piece “Imagined Cities of China” by A. Robert Lee is the former. In the article, Lee gives his opinion on the protagonist of *Disappearing Moon Cafe*: “for she it is, the ‘free’ daughter in all senses, both Chinese Westerner and Western Chinawoman, who now authors the very dynasty which once authored her” (28). Indeed, Lee’s terminology of “Chinawoman”, a historically offensive word, and “dynasty” already speaks to the exaggerated sense of “Chineseness” from a Western perspective, what is now called Orientalism (A Lee 28). More importantly, Lee emphasizes free in an unironic manner because he sees Kae’s authorship, which juxtaposes with her ancestors’ silence, as sufficient evidence of her transformation to liberation. By not questioning moments where Sky Lee negotiates between Kae’s authorship versus her silent relatives, A. Robert Lee’s idea of “free” expresses the fulfilment of a Western liberal humanism where the subject is unconstrained of meaning and action and the origin of her own history. In contrast, a less universalistic stance resorts to an ethnographic gaze that overly celebrates particularities.

Writing two years later, in the 1997 review of *The Jade Peony* titled “Hyphenates”, Philip Gambone acknowledges the universalistic qualities of the book, stating that the novel is “traditionally associated with novels about the immigrant experience”, but Gambone adds that Choy can “[disclose] universal themes in the particularities of the Asian-American life of half a century ago” because *The Jade Peony* “resembles a memoir in its texture”. As far as particularities are concerned, to classify *The Jade Peony* as “Asian-American” without acknowledging the novel’s setting of Canada would be inaccurate. Gambone’s appreciation of *The Jade Peony* also needs to be questioned because its authenticity is judged by it being a “memoir” and its ethnographic nature to depict life “half a century ago” makes a museum piece out of the novel. The novel is rendered too historical under this critical lens, making the political injustices in the novel seem like a distant past that Canada truly overcame.³¹ An uncritical Western ethnographic gaze may produce with it a deluded sense of ethnocentrism that essentializes Chinese Canadian literature further.

It is not only Western critics who erroneously advocate for ethnocentrism. In John Chen’s 2008 *The Influence of Daoism on Asian-Canadian Writers*, Chen argues that Daoism (or Taoism) is enormously influential in Chinese Canadian literature. His methodology is to keep “a certain distance from Euro-centric or Theory-oriented approaches” (201). While there are certainly Daoist influences, Chen often uses Daoism as a way to authenticate Chinese culture in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, and this claim to the cultural authenticity of Chineseness through Daoism distorts the authors’ critical observations of the Chinese Canadian community. As a matter of fact, Chen seldom calls Chinese culture, identity, and philosophy into question. To prove the salience of the yin-yang principle in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Chen focuses on the relationship between nWong Gwei Chong and Kelora especially when it comes to the phrase “yin chin”:

³¹ Marie Vautier’s 1999 piece “Canadian Fiction Meets History and Historiography: Jacques Poulin, Daphne Marlatt and Wayson Choy” talks about how Wayson Choy helps us remember racist history, yet draws no connection to how this racist history continues to play out in the present.

Lee links closely the Daoist philosophical view of the universe and of people to those of the First Nations people in Canada, the “yin chin” (4) as the Chinese call them historically. In fact, the term is still in currency in twenty-first century. Here lies the solidarity among the Chinese and the First Nations peoples. (71)

“Yin chin”, for one thing, is not as innocuous as Chen makes it out to be. In the novel, Lee writes: “‘But you’re a wild injun.’ [Wong Gwei Chong] spilled out the insults in front of her, but they were meaningless to her. In Chinese, the words mocked, slanglike, ‘yin-chin.’” (4). As the novel explicitly states, “yin-chin” is a Chinese mispronunciation of the very pejorative word “Injun”, and Wong Gwei Chong means it as an insult to use the stereotypical ideas of Indigenous unruliness against Kelora.³² In a sense, the Chinese mispronunciation carries on a colonial racist legacy, as “Injun” was a historical mispronunciation for “Indian” back in the 17th century. Far from Chen’s claim of “solidarity”, “yin-chin” exemplifies the racial tension between the Canadian Indigenous and Chinese sojourners (71). Chen’s use of Daoist principles in linking the derogatory “yin-chin” to the “yin” of yin-yang in order to reference one aspect of Chinese traditional culture distorts the actual represented relationship between Chinese Canadians and Indigenous Canadians in the novel and in Canadian society. Chen sees Wong Gwei Chong’s relationship with Kelora as symbolic of the harmony between Daoist naturalist vision and the moral-cosmological worldview of the Indigenous, and this assertion downplays how Wong Gwei Chong, acting very much like a colonizer, irresponsibly leaves Kelora after she heals him and helps him in his quest for bones. Ignoring the fact that Kelora can speak Cantonese, Chen co-opts Kelora's indigeneity as a vehicle to argue for Daoism's primordial nature and authenticity, and since Daoism is now the root of

³² While Lee shows the Chinese perspective in the tensions between the two groups, Indigenous Canadian author Lee Maracle’s 1990 short story “Yin Chin” captures the Indigenous perspective when it comes to the fraught relations between the Chinese and the Indigenous communities. The story discusses how the Indigenous had stereotypes about the Chinese community as well. The story is dedicated to Sky Lee and Jim Wong-Chu, which is evidence of the coalition formed between them, and this dedication may be evidence that her short story title is borrowed from Sky Lee’s novel.

everything, Chen can unquestioningly suggest that Daoism is fundamental characteristic to the pan-Chinese identity, thereby fastening Chinese Canadian identity to a philosophy.

For *The Jade Peony*, Chen completely ignores how Daoist philosophy is used by Choy not only to reveal old cultural practices forgotten by the community but also to criticize the Chinese community. In many ways, Chen rightly draws out the Daoist elements: the novel's structure and its references to the yin-yang principle and Daoist cultural practices such as worshipping the dead and the gods. However, when Chen discusses Poh-Poh, he suggests that Choy is nostalgically using Poh-Poh to reinstate past customs:

It is as if layer upon layer of the onion were being peeled to reveal the depths and lessons of Poh-Poh's hidden and slowly revealed Daoist holistic philosophy of life: recycling old wisdom and returning to ancient, organic, environmentally friendly, and holistic way of life. (184)

Chen ignores how the many moments of the novel call to question what "old wisdom" of Poh-Poh should be recycled. In actuality, Poh-Poh herself is selective about the old ways. Even though she berates her granddaughter Jook-Liang for being useless, Poh-Poh avoids teaching her the feminine chores and skills she learned as a servant in China. Oddly enough, Poh-Poh's "old wisdom" accounts for her continual mistreatment of her daughter-in-law, or Stepmother in the novel. As far as Chen's nostalgic understanding of the novel in "returning to ancient, organic, environmentally friendly, and holistic way of life" goes, the novel shows that there was little of an idyllic past for Chinese Canadians except for a poverty-stricken China or racist Canada (184). The only significant return to the past in Choy's novel is how racism keeps coming back to haunt Chinese Canadians as Choy parallels the racism towards Chinese sojourners and the racism towards Japanese Canadians. Chen's ethnocentric argument, therefore, fails to address these gaps and cannot go beyond proving that the novel contains Daoism elements.

On the other side of the spectrum, the critical responses that denounce the two novels come with a different brand of cultural imperialism and hegemony. These criticisms reflect troubling and subjective understandings of “Chineseness” and identity. Like A Robert Lee, Marie Condé in her essay “Marketing Ethnicity: Sky Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe*” focuses on the protagonist of the novel to expose her ideas about authentic Chinese identity. Unlike Robert Lee, Condé’s main argument is that Sky Lee is pessimistic about whether ethnic writers can write about themselves by showing how the novel’s characters do not fulfill her expectations of what constitutes a Canadian and a Chinese. On Kae, Condé notes, “Kae has no valuable links with China, she is successful as a Canadian only by selling a Chinese identity she does not really possess” (182). For Condé, one is only successfully and authentically Chinese when they have existing connections to China, even though the China in Kae’s time is vastly different from the China in her mother’s and grandmother’s time. Condé’s claim that Kae does not possess her Chinese identity conflicts with the facts of the novel: Kae is a descendant of Chinese sojourners, who did indeed come from China when the country was still governed by the Qing government, and Kae is very much affected by her Chinese identity in Canada. Condé’s rubric for determining Chineseness further develops when she doubts the Chineseness of other characters. She sees Mui Lan, Fong Mei, and Beatrice as not Chinese because “they have ‘no traditional Chinese values’ nor ‘ancestral wisdom,’ and China exists for them only as a blank, a denial” (Condé 185). Condé does not tell us why Chinese identity is only validated by following traditional Chinese values, and what these traditional values consist of, Condé does not tell us. Condé’s reading of “Chineseness” freely inscribes and prescribes ideas of identity without scrutiny. Condé’s definition of what “Canadianness” fares no better. In Condé’s romanticization of the lost opportunity for Gwei Chang to be with Kelora, Condé states, “Gwei Chang had the chance with his first wife Kelora, a woman both Chinese and Native Canadian, superbly at home in

the Canadian wilderness, truly to inherit Canada (186). Interestingly, Condé's Eurocentric and John Chen's ethnocentric approaches use Kelora's identity as a means to prove Gwei Chang's, though reaching different conclusions. This uncritical reasoning about the true Canadian identity can only draw its power from associations from the Indigenous and being in the wilderness, especially in the phrase "inherit Canada". Ironically, it is similar to the evolving Canadian colonial practice and rhetoric which claims territorialization of Indigenous lands and culture as a form of righteous nationalism and claim to "Canadian identity".

Likewise, Maria N. Ng's "Chop Suey Writing: Sui Sin Far, Wayson Choy, and Judy Fong Bates" takes issue with *The Jade Peony* because of the novel's depicted "Chineseness" in describing the lives of those living in the 1930s and 1940s Chinatown completely threatens Ng's conceptualization of "Chineseness". Ng's essay articulates her myth of authenticity explicitly:

As an immigrant from Hong Kong in the 1970s and an acculturated Canadian, I have been witnessing significant changes within the Chinese immigrant communities, especially those in British Columbia, changes that in my view are not sufficiently reflected in recent writings by Chinese Canadians. Because writing is a powerful tool, and because writers have the burden of responsibility in representation, writing, especially writing concerned with cultural (hi)stories and identities, should ideally provide readers with versions of fictional reality that correspond to the myriad layers of social reality. ("Chop Suey" 171)

Here, the "burden of responsibility" becomes unfairly shifted from critics, who should seek to always understand first before judgment, to writers (171). Though Ng clearly demonstrates her subjective position as a Hong Kong immigrant, Ng fails to draw connections between her evaluation of *The Jade Peony*'s "Chineseness" and her subjective understanding of what "Chineseness" is. For Ng, the acceptable "Chineseness" that should appear in Canadian

literary texts is a Chinese subject who is “acculturated” in juxtaposition to the inassimilable Chinese sojourners that Choy writes about. Epistemic violence occurs in completely divorcing the fictional reality of *The Jade Peony* with the social reality of 1990s Canada, which like the ethnographic gaze of the West, places *The Jade Peony* far into the recesses of the realm of museum history.

An uncritical celebration of the universality and/or the authenticity of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* silences the critical interrogation of language and identity in the text, and so does the uncritical suspicion of the texts’ authenticity. As Rey Chow’s *Writing Diaspora* argues, these two positionalities comprise the two faces of Janus that fuels the myth further. If it is not Western critics with preconceived notions of Chineseness and authenticity, it is “nativists” or fellow Chinese Canadian authors who begin to pass moralistic judgments about the taint of Lee and Choy’s works. The taint may be the Westernness of Lee and Choy’s subjectivities and their texts that ruin the authenticity of “Chineseness”. Though I do not agree with A Robert Lee’s reading, his phrase earlier “Chinese Westerner and Western [Chinese]”, which I corrected, aptly expresses the dialectic tension in classifying the two novels (28). In translating the experiences of the Chinese Canadian community so as to combat the racist rhetoric towards Chinese Canadians in the 1980s and 1990s, Lee and Choy end up becoming seen as “sellouts” who sell their ethnicity and commodify their culture and experiences of victimization. Ironically, they are accused of doing Orientalism in the same fashion as the North American state-sanctioned racist, Orientalist popular narratives about the Yellow Peril of yesteryears because the two novels in their Westernness become seen as conforming to a pre-existing cultural narratives of a “gender-enlightened, free West against a backwards and repressive East” (Diehl 116). What becomes conveniently silenced in being branded as “Western” is any legitimization of Lee and Choy’s subtle critique of their own Chinese Canadian culture. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, critics who either celebrate

or denounce *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* fail to notice that they are operating under the same principles of contradictions as Asian Canadian literary writers. Failure to acknowledge this perpetuates the continual assimilation of these literary texts into nationalistic frameworks that rely on dubious criteria of authenticity on what can be “definitive” of Asian Canadian or Chinese Canadian literature.

Also absent in these critical spotlights is the acknowledgement of the inherent difficulty in language and translatability in literary production that can completely overcome nationalistic frameworks or Orientalism. Authors who represent non-English cultures using English are often viewed with suspicion of fulfilling nationalistic and/or colonial projects. English, after all, is associated with the long history of British colonialism. As a national language of Canada, English was (and still is) used as a tool of the Canadian state to fulfill its nationalistic projects of assimilating everyone within the national borders. As Rey Chow’s *Writing Diaspora* notes, there is a danger for authors to transform their community histories and translate their memory into English because it can be seen as the transformation of imperialist discourse which neutralizes the untranslatable power in the experience and the history (35-36). However, maintaining that these narratives *must* be untranslatable may cater to Orientalist ideology. Chow provides the reasoning behind Western criticism, which maintains that East Asian literature remains untranslated:

One has the sense that in order to be good, poetry must be untranslatable because any translation would be suspected of *betraying* the truth. By implication, human language itself is a prime traitor to preverbal phenomena/sentiments.³³ (4-5)

As Chow notes, the anxiety and suspicion towards translated texts submit to orientalist ideology which believes that the untranslated, Asian language is the only authentic “truth” or origin. Indeed, in regards to *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, the social

³³ Rey Chow uses the instance of Stephen Owen, a sinologist criticism of Bei Dao’s *The August Sleepwalker* as “pandering to the tastes of Western audiences” to instantiate the Orientalist undertones in Western criticism of East Asian literature.

moments that they represent occurred in another language and culture with different subjectivity that is neither English nor Western. A text too untranslatable in Chinese languages may be silent and exotic, and a text that is too translated is either Western, universal, or inauthentic. Himani Bannerji captures this tension in her essay “Sound Barrier” in *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism*. Bannerji sees the process that Asian Canadian writers like Lee and Choy go through as executing “a massive translation project of experiences, languages, cultures, accents and nuances” (*Thinking Through* 164). Related to Chow’s warning about translation, Bannerji acknowledges how Asian Canadian writers are often “worried about sounding abstract and inauthentic” (*Thinking Through* 164). However, Bannerji argues that since these experiences take place in another time and space and in another language, it is beyond authorial convention because language is “a substantial and material part of [the author’s] reality” (*Thinking Through* 168). The translation process is stressful and necessary for Lee and Choy because there is something deeply personal yet communal in this process of writing. As Bannerji illustrates with the stories of her mother and grandmother, the allusions to non-Western cultural systems are often not always nostalgic, reification gestures that seek to return to a golden age but “involuntary gesture[s]” to a world that belongs to the writer’s relatives (*Thinking Through* 164; 170). As Bannerji shows, Lee and Choy are brought up with cultural systems and languages that are not English. The process of their writing is inevitably an act of translation, transplanting memory into words and from Chinese languages (such as Cantonese and Taishanese) to English. The fraughtness with language and translatability intensifies because of two national frameworks. Bannerji notes that gestures to the other world that is non-Western can lead to alienation from both heritage culture and Canadian culture. Bannerji states, “you are self-alienated in the very act of self-expression” (*Thinking Through* 164). Lee and Choy use Cantonese, which is a language established literature in China and Hong Kong.

By presenting their culture and language in a mostly English text, a language that is arguably more familiar to Lee and Choy than written Chinese, Lee and Choy are breaking unwritten rules of cultural politics and linguistic boundaries that maintain what Rey Choy calls “the myth of authenticity”, dictating that Chinese literature should be in Traditional or Simplified Chinese and English literature should be in English. It is this act of translation that blurs the boundary of what constitutes a true Chinese or Canadian national identity (Chow, *Writing Diaspora* 1).

Also silent in critical discourse is the extent of Lee and Choy’s agency, which they exercised by using Chinese and English names that continually oppose and identify with Chinese Canadian experiences. This act of naming by Lee and Choy throws a critical spotlight on the cultural hegemonies of Canada and China that seek to restrict Chinese Canadian identities. Bannerji’s essay “The Passion of Naming” in her book *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism* states that the act of naming is politically necessary to exercise a consciousness of one’s identity and reclaim it in a place within the scheme of history and society. For Lee and Choy, the use of names such as “Gold Mountain”, “pigs”, and “ghost/demon” grounds Chinese Canadian experiences within history, and naming becomes a way to claim that history.

Yet, it must be emphasized that Lee and Choy use these names to also *oppose* essentialism, and by “essentialism”, I mean the fixedness or essence attached to names. With specificity through names, fraughtness or silence does not disappear. As Bannerji notes, naming must be reflexive to prevent concretization that can abstract or essentialize because there is neither pure essence to escape to nor are there false dichotomies to separate consciousness (30).³⁴ An emphasis on specificity may lead to a nativist cultural approach to

³⁴ Like Bannerji, Rey Chow also cautions the use of naming: “the act of naming, then, is not intrinsically essentialist or hierarchical. It is the social relationships in which names are inserted that may lead to essentialist, hierarchical, and thus detrimental consequences” (Chow, “Writing Diaspora” 105).

understanding Asian Canadian literature. There is a danger of seeping into a sort of cultural imperialism about valorizing “Chineseness” or “Chinese perspectives” as the only way to interrogate these novels since these terms come with multiple perspectives that are contentious and ever-changing. A more culturally essentialist or geographically deterministic reading, as Chow notes, works to propel the same myth of authenticity (*Writing Diaspora* 23). Even if we adopt an approach that is purely non-Western but Chinese, which Chinese ideological framework do we use? Chinese philosophy, culture, and ideology are not monolithic. The purpose and uses of language, for example, has long been debated amongst Chinese philosophers throughout the centuries. Out of the Hundred Schools of Thought, Confucianism, which is often seen as representative of Chinese culture, sees correct names (正名) as important to allow to flow smoothly, so affairs (of home and state) can be accomplished and for rituals to succeed (Riegel).³⁵ The Mohists, who were against Confucianism, had a utilitarian view and saw that words should be natural to be used in a way that promotes the most beneficial behaviour for all of society (Fraser). Taoists like Zhuangzi, on the other hand, were more flexible. Zhuangzi believed that all language expressions are equally natural, but language is indexical, so it depends on the user’s relationship with it (Hansen). Consequently, Zhuangzi argues that it is difficult to prescribe one set moral path because language is not always stable but personal and contextual (Hansen). Legalism represents the most extreme school of thought as it places importance on the rectification of names so as to connects names with rewards and punishment in society (Pines). My point is that claiming to recover an original meaning based on “authentic” nativist Chinese philosophy fails to acknowledge the diversity of Chinese culture. Even though Confucian values are certainly pervasive and have been revived by the Chinese Communist Party after

³⁵ 正名 in Jyutping is *zing³ming⁴*, and the Mandarin pinyin is *zhèngmíng*.

the purging of them in the Cultural Revolution, it would be erroneous to define Chinese culture and identity based around a single philosopher and his philosophy.

Reterritorialization whether in criticism or literature under the guise of Chinese nativism or sinocentrism is also often prescriptive of what culture should be, and the unintended effect of this strategic essentialism results in the exclusion of those who do not fit into this native ideal and the continued oppression of other social groups. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, this strategic essentialism of “Chineseness” in Vancouver by the Chinese sojourners in the early twentieth century by creating associations or “tongs” was spurred by the racist exploitation and violence by Canadian state-owned enterprises and the Canadian government. The strategic alliance in Canada enacted the cultural imperialism of “Chineseness” at the detriment of groups that fell outside of this sphere such as Hakka Chinese, Indigenous Canadians, and Japanese Canadians. Before this, Western colonialists worked with oppressors within the community to subjugate Chinese sojourners into these exploitative circumstances. Many Chinese sojourners who voluntarily came to Canada and the United States borrowed money from their compatriots (usually landowners in their villages, towns, and provinces) to pay an unfairly substantial fee to Chinese agents to come to North America where they were duped into doing poorly compensated labour. While they were being exploited by white Canadians, their compatriot agents who brought them to North America refused to give adequate help or protect them against exploitation.

An example of this can be seen in the railway construction site in Yale, British Columbia in 1883. The living conditions were so bad for Chinese workmen that many died, without any sympathy or support from the Canadian railway *and* rich Chinese agents. The newspaper *Yale Sentinel* reported this:

We understand that Mr. Onderdonk declines interfering, while the Lee Chuck Co., that brought the Chinamen from their native land, refused, through their agent Lee

Soon, who is running the Chinese gang at Emory, to become responsible for doctors and medicine. (Con et al. 23)

As shown by the quote, taking responsibility for labourers is seen as “interfering” with the Chinese community. Under this logic, North American businessmen like Andrew Onderdonk who were responsible for the railway project in San Francisco and Canadian Pacific Railway can shirk any duty towards the Chinese workers they exploited. Simultaneously, Lee Chuck Co.’s refusal reveals much of the insidious exploitation and irresponsibility towards the welfare of Chinese workers. As one of the many examples, this instance shows it is irresponsible to hold on to the grandeur of Western liberalism or Chinese nativism. Chinese labourers were abandoned to their fates, and their labour was an economic contribution to Canada and China, which received money through remittances.

Chinese sojourners were certainly objectified in the eyes of the Canadian and Chinese state, but they were not completely silenced. Their agency did not disappear when they spoke of their experiences to their progeny using certain names, which are encoded in the language in the texts of Lee and Choy. In the two novels, these Cantonese and Taishanese words - “Gold Mountain”, “pigs”, and “ghost/demon” - were names about the past that refer to what Bannerji states as “difference, subjectivity, and agency” (*Thinking Through* 26). Like language, these words, along with the people that carried them, changing social conditions, and time, have been slipping from one culture or geography into another. The sounds and semantics that they carry reflect global histories of Western colonialism and Chinese nationalism. Their appearance in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* captures socio-historical moments, bridging a narrative of Canadian history with many other histories from elsewhere (Bannerji, *Thinking Through* 18). Naming is fraught with contradictory possibilities about identities since it can give agency or it can invisibilize identities, but as long as names can historicize and contextualize one’s identity in political economy and

history to make connections visible, they must be articulated (Bannerji, *Thinking Through* 31).

Because these words negotiate between English and Chinese as well as different spaces and histories, an approach that rests on cultural imperialist assumptions of fixedness in identity cannot do justice to these words. To effectively show how this works, my practice necessitates negotiating with languages and cultures.³⁶ This practice involves translations and incorporation of multiple narratives of histories evolving the terms “Gold Mountain”, “pigs”, “ghosts/demons”. The goal of this, however, is not to recuperate a lost history or to speak for the silent ethnic. The purpose is to reveal the politics of the past and present that can be drawn from the names in the two texts. I am not interested in how authentic the “Chineseness” displayed in the two novels is, but the way *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* show a critical understanding of identity and history through these use of names.

Because Lee and Choy have a better understanding of the oral nature of Chinese language, they use English as a vehicle to encode Chinese sounds of the words they do not know how to write. The methods of encoding include transliteration and translation. Transliteration is when the sounds and pronunciation of Cantonese/Taishanese words are converted into English. Transliteration does not tell you the meaning in Chinese. Translation is another form of conversion, but translation takes it further towards by transferring the semantics from Cantonese/Taishanese to English. The theoretical framework to negotiate Lee and Choy’s simultaneous use of English and Chinese languages requires an understanding based on translation theory, literature, linguistics, and languages. Linguistic systems of English and Chinese may seem inherently incompatible at first. Using Saussurean terms “signifier” and “signified”, Chinese, arguably, has two signifiers. The first signifier concerns the written system of Chinese, which is Traditional or Simplified, and this character is

³⁶ I do not call Cantonese and Taishanese dialects of Chinese but distinctive languages with some shared commonalities and considerable differences.

logosyllabic to represent one syllable of spoken Chinese and the signified meaning. As most Chinese speakers know, the character visually represents physical objects and abstract notions that do not naturally relate to the spoken sound. The spoken sound is another signifier that works with the written signifier and the signified. English, on the other hand, has a written system of signs that is more reflective of the spoken sound because of the alphabet. It is often assumed that Chinese has many “meanings” and that English is the only real language, but like English, Chinese meanings are dependent on the context, which determines its semantic nature. My chapter traces the encoded sounds to the Chinese words by taking a closer look at the contextual usage of it in the novel in order to link it with shared, written histories of Chinese diaspora, and I show that the use of the English which encodes the Chinese sound also engages with Western cultural systems. The linguistic and cultural negotiations in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* should undermine the easy assimilation of these texts into Chinese or Canadian national or cultural myths.

While Lee and Choy’s process of writing is an act of translation, the process of translating Chinese words into English signifiers may result in both losses and gains. The problem with translation in cultural studies and literature, which I avoid, is the overfixation on “loss” (Bassnet 2; Steiner 39). This chapter acknowledges that losses are inevitable, but there is more to be gained by focusing on what becomes revealed and illuminated in this process of translation. To gain the antecedents and referents that were lost in translation is also the work of reception. Such losses in translation can be regained through historical re-examination as Lily Cho’s *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada* notes in the chapter “Sweet and Sour: Historical Presence and Diasporic Agency” that sweet and sour pork may mean simply the Chinese dish in English, but “in Cantonese it tells a very different story” where the dish that was brought over from Hong Kong encoded a history of colonialism and resistance (20). The emphasis on loss, in Lee and Choy’s case, may also be

reflective of a problematic obsession with perceptions of authentic language expression. Lee and Choy can speak and understand Cantonese and Taishanese, but they cannot write and read traditional Chinese characters. Loss is inevitable because English is the only vehicle for them to encode specific linguistic and cultural elements of their heritage culture. As I show later, while some semantic losses are also inevitable because of the change in socio-historical conditions, Lee and Choy use creative ways to show the semantic shift.

That being said, there is something to be gained in using English as a channel for the Chinese words in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*. The use of English does not necessarily assimilate the Chinese language into an English space, but rather, it emphasizes the orality of Chinese words that become lost in Chinese characters. A good example of this, though not shown in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, is the last name 李. In Mainland China, the English word for this is “Li”. In Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea, it is “Lee”, not to be confused with the British surname “Lee” which is a derivative of the Old English *leah*. In Macau, it is “Lei”. In Indonesia, it is commonly spelled “Lie”. In Vietnam, it is Lý. My point is that the English encode with it a different set of histories and identities while the Chinese referent is the same. This negotiation of the two languages can reveal properties and agencies. Though English certainly carries with it a political-cultural capital in Canada, I do not want to situate Lee and Choy’s use of English to fit into a “progress” narrative about how the emergence of Asian Canadian reached full recognition as a branch of literature (Lai, *Slanting the I* 3). This rhetoric of progress ignores the fact that Canadian state saw the writing of “visible minorities” as an important display of the pluralist makeup of Canadian society in the 1980s (Cuder-Domínguez, Martín-Lucas and Víllegas-López vii). This rhetoric also privileges these texts rather than their referents, which reflect an existing, unofficial, shared history of communities who were wronged by the Canadian state. These narratives were silenced and ignored. Narratives about Gold Mountain existed before the

Disappearing Moon Cafe and *The Jade Peony*. These narratives were neither intelligible nor accessible to English speakers. They were often in oral form, shared amongst people who spoke Cantonese, Taishanese or the Four Counties dialect, or they were written in traditional Chinese characters, published in texts consumed by Chinese readers. While Lee and Choy amongst many other Chinese Canadian writers point at these existing narratives in another language, many critics, instead of doing more work at uncovering history, have blamed the authors for the erosion of subjectivities and nuances in the representation of minority communities.

Hope Elsewhere: Gold Mountain, 金山, gum-san, gim-san³⁷

In *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, the term “Gold Mountain” is used to describe the geographical location(s), the history of Chinese sojourners, and a metaphorical longing for socioeconomic wealth. “Gold Mountain”, as an English translation of the Chinese word 金山, embodies continual change of Chinese Canadian identity. As Lee and Choy show, the term was used in southern China as early as the nineteenth century to represent a desire and longing for something better beyond China, and Gold Mountain 金山 does not point exclusively to one referent, one fixed place of destination that is just Vancouver; it is altogether an embodiment of the many diasporic communities that the Chinese have settled in. The term depicts a larger history of imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. Lee and Choy also interject their perspectives about this historical lure of socioeconomic prosperity by adding distinct Chinese phonetic sounds using English transcriptions and adding semantic change.

In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, the use of “Gold Mountain” engages with an extensive history of the Chinese diaspora beyond just the early twentieth century West Coast Canada, and in doing so, the term “Gold Mountain” points to a multitude of geographical locations

³⁷ The Jyutping for 金山 is *gam¹saan¹*, and the pinyin is *Jīnshān*.

and histories tied together by theme of desire - the Gold Mountain Dream. This can be seen in the letters that Fong Mei exchanges with her sister back in China. In her 1919 letter to Fong Mei, who is in Vancouver, Fong Mei's sister talks about the wedding feast of Auntie Hwa in 1879, writing "they say that she married an american Gold Mountain sojourner, who came back to sire a son. Unlike you though, she never saw or heard from her husband ever again after he left" (Lee 82). The significance brought to Gold Mountain through capitalization contrasts with lower case nationalistic terms like "chinese" and "american" used throughout the novel.³⁸ The de-emphasizing of national terms in comparison to the "Gold Mountain" illustrates that national terms cannot capture the identities of the Chinese sojourners who historically cared more about the destination of economic prosperity than the boundary between these countries (Chan 36). "Gold Mountain" becomes a shared history in the Chinese diasporic community about going abroad for better financial security. The Chinese name "Gold Mountain" 金山 can be traced to specific geographical locations. It is used as the official Chinese name for San Francisco, the United States, and even today, it is called 舊金山, which means "Old Gold Mountain".³⁹ The Chinese name for Melbourne, Australia, is 新金山, which means "New Gold Mountain".⁴⁰ In the text, the specific reference to Auntie Hwa's wedding to an "american Gold Mountain sojourner" points to an earlier history of global Chinese labour affected by imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism that precedes yet is inextricably connected to the arrival of Chinese sojourners in Canada, which is done through the use of the word "Gold Mountain". Many of the Chinese sojourners who were a part of the Gold Rush and railway building in San Francisco were transported to Canada to do

³⁸ Christopher Lee also writes about the way Sky Lee uses lowered case for national identities in the afterword of the 2017 NeWest Press edition of *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, and while Christopher Lee argues that Sky Lee does this to de-emphasize the borders and restrictions on personal identity, he does not mention that "tang people" is also not capitalized and that in contrast, place names like "Gold Mountain" and "Tang People Street" for example, are capitalized.

³⁹ The pinyin for 舊金山 *Jiùjīnshān*, and the jyutping is *gau6 gam1 saan1*

⁴⁰ 新金山 *Xīn jīnshān*, and the jyutping is *san1 gam1 saan1*.

the same in order to fulfil the demand for labour. The sojourners also came to Canada because of the “tong wars” in San Francisco (Lee 8).

Though *The Jade Peony* mostly uses Gold Mountain to refer to Vancouver, Choy uses seafaring in a metonymic way to reflect on the multiple geographical locations of Gold Mountain for Chinese sojourners. In the Chapter “Jung-Sum, Second Brother”, the narrator Jung-Sum recalls how his maternal grandmother, Poh-Poh, told him about the perilous journey from China:

A long time ago before boats were powered by the breath of steam dragons - that is, before all ships were named *Empress* - the first Chinese came to Gold Mountain huddled in the smelly cargo hold of old sailing vessels like this ancient windjammer (Choy 173).

The reference to windjammer points to the class of sailing ship used to carry cargo and people in the nineteenth century for different Western empires that facilitated the long-distance travel from China to these multiple locations of “Gold Mountain” which were located in “The New World” . When Jung-Sum notes the change when “all ships were named *Empress*”, it marks the change of Gold Mountain to the more voluntary, indentured Chinese labour in the twentieth century who helped make the railroad, as most *Empress* named ships were operated by the Canadian Pacific Railway. As shown from *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, as a term for geography, “Gold Mountain” does not only refer to Vancouver. Other texts support this. In Denise Chong’s nonfiction text *The Concubine’s Children*, she writes, “the land the Chinese known as 'Gold Mountain' is Canada" (1). “Gold Mountain”, according to Chong, is synonymous to Canada, but in Anthony B. Chan’s 1983 historical text *Gold Mountain*, Chan notes how his grandfather and many ancestors see Gold Mountain as the plethora of cities: “for Chan Dun and thousands like him, Gold Mountain - the New World - was those cities alone, not what lay between them” (Chan 7). Though Fred

Wah's 1996 text *Diamond Grill* does not mention Gold Mountain, his discussion of the name Victoria from the perspective of Chinese sojourners also illuminates my point about Gold Mountain: "Both British Victorias, these new-world cities must have seemed to my ancestors two ends of the same rope" (Wah 22). While the use of "Gold Mountain" loosely connects with the geographical space of Vancouver, Chong, Chan, and Wah's understanding of names is that it does not and cannot be tied to one place.

The Jade Peony also engages with this expansive history of the Chinese diaspora through the metaphorical nature of the word - its lure of gold and economic prospects. In the first chapter, the impoverished circumstances of southern China in the late nineteenth century are described: "most Chinatown people were from the dense villages of southern Kwangtung province, a territory racked by cycles of famine and drought" (Choy 20).⁴¹ Choy alludes to the devastation of southern China wrought by Western colonialism and Chinese imperialism. Because of the declining power of the Qing Dynasty, the devastation of the Taiping Rebellion, the local Canton Hakka-Punti clan wars and the detrimental effects of the opium trade, the poor and unemployed people of southern China were driven to see Gold Mountain as a desirable ticket to a land of opportunity (Chan 32). The novel shows how the Chinese sojourners spread these rumours of something better: "'Go to Gold Mountain,' they told one another, promising to send wages home, to return rich or die" (21). While in this context, "Gold Mountain" refers to Vancouver, the metaphorical nature of the word in its promise becomes connected histories and geographies beyond Vancouver. The push and pull factors of the sojourners were controlled by forces beyond them. Unknowingly, the Chinese labourers became part of a migrant labour system that was supported by treaties imposed on China by the West (Chan 36). These treaties as colonial apparatuses continued to work into the twentieth century as the gold disappears. As Marlon K. Hom's *Songs of Gold Mountain*

⁴¹ Kwangtung province is Guangdong or Canton province.

shows, the emergence of Gold Mountain as a place for something better started with western capitalists working with American companies:

In recruiting Cantonese to work as labourers in America's West, Western capitalists preached the promise and glory of economic advancement. The possibility of attaining a better life was an irresistible temptation in southeastern China during the mid-nineteenth century, as many of the inhabitants of the region had been reduced to a marginal existence by natural and human disasters. (Hom 91)

Since Western capitalists could not communicate in Chinese, Chinese labour contract brokers had to lure these impoverished workers in southern China. Later, these labourers were hired voluntarily, and the benefits of those going to any of the Gold Mountains thickened the rumour, spread by oral literature:

Not only were the people's livelihood and education markedly improved with the inflow of remittances and other means of support from outside, but the emigrant experience also affected the literature of the region. The emigration created a new content for its oral literature of folk songs and other popular narrative rhymes. These works of folk literature were commonly known as *Gamsaan go* (*jinshan ge*, or "Gold Mountain songs"). (Hom 39)

Oral literature spread rumours about Gold Mountain in Canton. Not all of these songs showed a positive side, but it spread the promise of gold quicker, and many were willing to sacrifice to make the journey. It is this promise that makes "Gold Mountain" become what Lien Chao refers to as a "mythological setting" rather than a specific place (*Beyond Silence* 26). In both *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, the use of the term "Gold Mountain" in its engagement with the Chinese 金山 engages with a larger shared oral history of Chinese diaspora, an unofficial community memory that knows about the expansive migrations from China in the past and the mythical lure of gold, supported by the English and Chinese.

Therefore, Gold Mountain is not only metonymic of Chinese diaspora's perception of Vancouver as a place, but also of the multiple destinations of the New World of economic possibilities. From these narratives and histories, the use of Gold Mountain as a name does not easily recuperate just a history of Canada but has wider global history. "Gold Mountain" coheres within a larger Chinese diaspora metatext.

In using "Gold Mountain", Sky Lee is not simply mimetic of how people spoke in the past, but Lee uses this term to demonstrate her criticism of gender, class, and race issues. For instance, in a letter to her sister in 1919, Fong Mei states, "you used to be so proud of my betrothal to a rich Gum Saan Hock, you got me excited too" (Lee 78). *Gum Saan Hock* refers to 金山客, which means "guests of Gold Mountain", and it is a term used to refer to Chinese sojourners.⁴² Unlike previous use of "Gold Mountain", Lee transliterates the Cantonese/Taishanese sounds, refusing to translate fully.⁴³ The reason why it must remain untranslated is that *Gum Saan Hock* can engage with a different cultural system than "Chinese sojourners" or "guests of Gold Mountain". What *Gum Saan Hock* stands for is a man from Gold Mountain who was a desirable marriage prospect (Hom 42). Many recorded oral narratives spoke about this as Hom translates one oral song from Chen Yuanzhu's *Taishan geyao ji* where she uses "sojourner" in place of *Gum Saan Hock*:

O, sojourner returning from Gold Mountain:

If you don't have one thousand dollars,

You must have at least eight hundred. (Hom 41)

As shown, *Gum Saan Hock* is a term associated with money. *Gum Saan Hock* or even the English term for it "Chinese sojourners" is associated with hardship in building the railway, venturing for gold, doing servant labour, and collecting bones. The usage of it towards Choy Fuk is interesting as Choy Fuk is not the traditional sojourner who does backbreaking labour

⁴² 金山客's jyutping is *gam1 saan1haak3*, and its pinyin is *jīnshān kè*.

⁴³ *Gum Saan* is Cantonese. *Hock* is likely Taishanese or an alternative pronunciation of Cantonese.

for wealth but enjoys it through inheriting from his father, Wong Gwei Chong. In using the term for Choy Fuk, a son from a successful merchant, it becomes ironic. In the context of the novel, Lee shows through Fong Mei's characterization of Choy Fuk as a *Gum Saan Hock* that the desire is different for women. Whereas Chinese sojourners wanted to strike wealth through labour and mercantile trade, the desire for women is bringing money to the family through marriage, and for some women, through prostitution (Chan 20). From the way the letter talks about Auntie Hwa's case and the novel's depiction of Mui Lan's foul treatment of Fong Mei, wives of sojourners face considerable risks of abandonment and mistreatment. This can also be seen in Mui Lan's expectation and realization of being a wife of a *Gum Saan Hock*: "she landed in the Gold Mountains, full of warmth and hope. Little did she realize that people's most fervent hope can turn into their worst nightmare" (Lee 32). Lee is equally sympathetic to the Gold Mountain men. Using Mui Lan's perspective, Lee writes: "Gold Mountain men were like stone" (32). The deprivation and sacrifices have made the men traumatized and emotionless. In Chapter 1, Lee is critical of those like Wong Gwei Chong who gain the mythical promise of Gold Mountain by amassing enormous wealth. In order to elevate his class status as a sojourner, Gwei Chong endures physical destitution, and he has to sacrifice a relationship with Kelora, an Indigenous woman, to prevent being exiled from his community. In the narrative, the memory of this hardship is mediated through a flashback. Close to his death in 1939, Wong Gwei Chong remembers his time in 1892 when he desperately took on the task to collect bones:

And he was troubled because he was about to turn down a job as a servant in one of these grand houses in order to go on a dangerous, almost senseless expedition. Not only was it going to be gruelling hard work, but the pay was a bad joke. Of course he knew that the rewards for the performance of such work would come later, but his family in China needed to eat now. (Lee 7)

Before becoming a merchant, in 1892, Wong Gwei Chong is a labourer, but he sacrifices the normally abysmally paid servant jobs to do the “grueling hard work” of bone-collecting. This is because he knows the “rewards” of this work in the future come from the strategic alliances in the “tongs” or Benevolent associations, from business connections, prestige, and community respect. The short-term cost of this choice to his health is delirium, and Lee uses this delirium to uncover his unconscious desire: “He began to search the ground, hoping to spot a glimmer of gold in the dirt, convinced that the Gold Mountains weren’t a myth at all” (Lee 7). Though “Gold Mountains” indexically means the Rocky Mountains that Gwei Chong is situated in, there is a literal and metaphorical nature of “Gold Mountain” in gold and desire, illustrating Gwei Chong’s desperation for wealth. While Gwei Chong successfully completes his bone-collecting journey, Gwei Chong does so through the help of Lee Chong, Kelora, and the Indigenous community who aided him in transporting the bones, providing companionship and food. The success of Gwei Chong’s bone collection later paved the way for his rise to merchant status. However, Gwei Chong must sacrifice any relationship he has with Kelora to do so because of the pressure from his mother “pleading with him to come home and do his duty as the eldest son” (Lee 277). Gwei Chong also cannot pursue any further relationship with Kelora and their son because his economic clout is completely contingent on his identity as a patriarch of the Chinese association, which is formed as a strategic alliance based on essentialism of “Chineseness”, to combat the racism of white Canadian society. The inclusion of Kelora is not for Lee to authenticate Gwei Chong’s “Canadianness” in being associated with indigeneity; nor is it a way to situate Gwei Chong in history as a “nation-builder”. In Gwei Chong’s abandonment of Kelora, Lee proposes that the capitalist dream of “Gold Mountain” that Chinese sojourners succeed in is at the detriment of other social groups even though these social groups such as the Indigenous play a key role in facilitating this dream. Lee is also pointing at the problems with constricting “Chineseness”

that demands Gwei Chong to have a stellar reputation and abandon Kelora. Only nearing his death does Gwei Chong have this realization:

What is the price one should pay for being a do-gooder, a blind old fool? Blind to his own flesh and blood! Hardened against the people he loved! (Lee 273)

Ting An is Gwei Chong's "flesh and blood", but the acknowledgement of Ting An as his official son risks his reputation as a "do-gooder" because Ting An is half-Indigenous, and Kelora *cannot* be Gwei Chong's official wife in the eyes of the Chinese community. Not only is miscegenation in the past Chinese community in Canada criticized, but Lee also undermines "Gold Mountain" as a place of hope and desire. Gwei Chong must endure the restrictions both from white Canadians, who indirectly control his social mobility and economic prospects, and the Chinese community in Chinatown, who enforce cultural expectations of him.

The Jade Peony uses English to express more explicitly other unique pronunciations of "Gold Mountain". In the novel, Choy borrows the phonetic resources of English to transliterate the full Taishanese expression for "Gold Mountain". The word appears to readers as *gim-san*. In the third part of the novel, Sek-Lung states, "I stumbled over calling my adopted *Gim San gons* (Gold Mountain uncles) their proper titles" (Choy 216). In this instance, transliteration is used rather than full translation to English or even to Chinese letters because it can capture the orality of Chinese sojourners. Sounds are lost even when Chinese characters are used because the written system corresponds to either Mandarin or Cantonese. The capturing of Taishanese language in words like *gim* and *gons* illustrates the difference in the language identity of Chinese sojourners as well in their culture, which disrupts hegemonic linguistic and cultural understanding of the Chinese. What it illustrates is also the fact that a large proportion of the Chinese sojourners in the past in Canada were

actually from Taishan.⁴⁴ This fact is often ignored as they are subsumed under the broad category of “Chinese”.

Choy also goes beyond mimetic usage of Gold Mountain and addresses the deceptive dream of Gold Mountain as a metaphorical concept of economic prosperity that drove Chinese labourers to build the Canadian Pacific Railway. The metaphorical economic lure becomes ironic in the 1930s Great Depression as “poverty-stricken bachelor-men were left alone in Gold Mountain, with only a few dollars left to send back to China every month, and never enough dollars to buy passage home” (Choy 10). Gold Mountain became a place of suffering where Chinese male sojourners could neither leave nor earn gainful employment. Though Gold Mountain is constructed as a place where Old China bachelor-men were doubly abandoned and neglected by Western railroad companies and Chinese labour contractors, Choy reworks the notion of Gold Mountain from the hope of economic prosperity (both in the English and Chinese sense) to a hope of potential coalition and friendship between Chinese sojourners and other social groups who have equally been abandoned (11). In the third chapter of the first part, Wong Suk tells his memory to Jook Liang. While working as a cook in the Canadian Pacific Railway, Wong Suk saves his old supervisor, Roy Johnson, who was left by his friend half-dead on the tracks. Johnson wants to repay Wong Suk, who refuses the gift of wool vest, food, and kerosene lamp by saying: “Wong come to *Gim San* - come for *gim*, for gold -”, and “-no gimme *gim*, no gimme thanks!” (Choy 56). “Gim” is a pun that blurs the line between the Taishanese word for “gold” and the English for “give”. The doubleness of the word crosses the semantic capabilities of both Chinese and English. At first, it may seem that Wong Suk wants the massive wealth that was promised. However, the

⁴⁴ To clarify, Taishanese accounted for a majority of the settlers, and this is taken from Con et al. on page 26. Con et al. also details more specifically that the Taishanese settlers in Canada worked mostly in mining rather than the railroad, and in fact, different settlements or work camps in Canada had a different demographic of people. Con et al. argues that though most contracting companies and agents were Taishanese, this had no correlation with the large amount of Taishanese. Moreover, even though Taishanese were the majority overall, some places had a higher majority of Chinese workers that were from Enping (or Yanping) and/or the Four Counties.

satisfaction with the payment of one American gold coin from Johnson illustrates that it is not the hope of mass wealth that is desired but the hope of a token of gratitude and respect. The newfound mutual respect between Johnson and Wong Suk draws connections between abandonment of Chinese sojourners, while much worse than the other labourers based on racial perceptions, and the overall exploitative practices of the Canadian Pacific Railway towards other workers, as Johnson is as impoverished from his experience as Wong Suk even though he is a supervisor. Using “gold” and “Gold Mountain”, Choy argues that Chinese sojourners like Wong Suk may never get what was *originally* promised to them as the restoration of the “authentic” and original desire is not possible nor even useful. They may get recognition and reconciliation may be possible between the Chinese Canadian community and other communities who were affected by the Canadian Pacific Railway company.

Both novels’ inclusion of the Chinese and English term Gold Mountain indexically refers to the stories’ narrative setting of Vancouver, and at times, the term encompasses the larger historical, diasporic sites where Chinese labourers settled. “Gold Mountain”’s origins may come from Western imperialists, Chinese labour contracts, or the sojourners themselves, but what matters is how the sojourners embraced the terms as a way to name their desire. In engaging with the metaphorical meaning of “Gold Mountain”, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* note how Chinese sojourners do not benefit from Gold Mountain. Have the metaphorical desire and perceptions of “The New World” totally disappeared? The books were published in the 1990s when many immigrants ventured to North America in hopes of a better life. Reading the book in the twenty-first century, we may ask, who benefits from Gold Mountain now?

Pigs, pigpens and 賣豬仔⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The term in jyutping is *maai6 zyu1 zai2* and *mài zhū zǎi* in pinyin.

While Gold Mountain was a term that meant desire both in English and Chinese, there were other terms that concealed the negative side of the historical experience. A phrase that represents the betrayal of the Chinese sojourners is 賣豬仔, which means “to be sold as pigs”. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, the term “pigs” engages with the Chinese and English connotations. The Cantonese reference 賣豬仔 recalls visceral imagery in Chinese culture where a pig is tied upside down to a bamboo pole with its four hooves tied up in ropes, to be sold at the market and butchered. Put differently, the phrase means betrayal, to play a trick on someone, and kidnapping. In English, “pigs” connotes something dirty, undesirable, and less than human. In the non-fiction book *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women*, a Chinese Canadian woman notes how white Canadians not only used “Chinaman” as a racial epithet but “pigs”: “In those days, we weren’t even considered human. People would say things like, “All you Chinese, you got pig eyes, pig noses, pig mouths” (*Jin Guo* 164). Similar to “Gold Mountain”, the expansive collection of histories that go beyond Canadian border is embedded in the term “pigs”, and it also embodies both the Chinese connotations of “betrayal” and the English of inhumanity. Lee and Choy also use “pigs” in the novels to discuss critically the issues of strategic essentialism in the Chinese Canadian community.

“Pigs” wraps up the whole history of Chinese labouring into one signifier. This term seeps through the history of colonialism. The 豬仔 in 賣豬仔 is translated as “piglets”. As early as 1519, the Portuguese kidnapped children in Fujian province to be sold as slaves in Indonesia. When the Portuguese colonized Macau from 1557 until the nineteenth century, Macau became a hub for labourers to be sold. The quarters where this business transaction took place was called 豬仔館, meaning “pig quarters” (Cheng 32).⁴⁶ The “little pigs”

⁴⁶ 豬仔館 is zhū zǎi guǎn in pinyin and zyul zai2 gun2 in jyutping.

encodes the historical haplessness of those being sold as there were rampant kidnappings of Chinese labourers, who were purchased by agents (often compradores), in the nineteenth century. In 1870, contract labour became the only legal way a Chinese labourer could work in the colonies (Chan 42). The phrase's usefulness did not cease, however, despite new legalities around involuntary labour. The connotations of the phrase in reflecting the continued sense of deception and trickery despite new legalities persisted because of the horrible, unjust conditions that Chinese sojourners continued to face in paying agents, travel conditions, and the maltreatment after landing by agents, foreign companies, and foreign governments (Chan 45).⁴⁷ After landing in Canada, many Chinese sojourners had to be processed in an immigration building, which was a claustrophobic space. Denise Chong's *The Concubine Children* notes, "The Blue Funnel Steamship stood dockside. The building known as the "pigpen" was boarded up, but it served to remind Chan Sam again of his first reception" (Chong 25). Chinese sojourners named the space "pigpen" to document the injustice against them.

Lee and Choy place this Cantonese phrase 賣豬仔 in direct and indirect ways, but it all has to do with the way they have placed the English word "pig" in the texts. The English word "pig" calls attention to the Chinese word which delineates the inhuman maltreatment of Chinese sojourners in coming to foreign countries. In *The Jade Peony*, the grandmother and her friend tell Sek-Lung about the heinous conditions of the ships in the nineteenth century; the Chinese male labourers were treated as cargo, being stored underneath the decks. Choy writes, "'many die,' Mrs. Lim said. 'Die like fish or pigs to market.' (173). *Disappearing Moon Cafe* engages with the conditions that Chinese travellers faced after landing as they

In English, the term is barracoon, which is borrowed from the Spanish. Though Cheng heavily castigates the Portuguese and ignores Chinese state in the history of Macau, see her *Macau: A Cultural Janus* for more historical information.

⁴⁷ The residuals of the phrase is also found in food names because in Hong Kong, we have something called "little pig bun", 豬仔包, which is a type of French baguette.

often slept in cramped spaces, waiting to be processed. Lee also notes that there is a different vulnerability with women travellers. In Fong Mei's letter to her sister in China, she writes, "At night, I was too afraid to sleep in their 'pigpens.' I was told horrible stories about other hapless women" (Lee 77). The "hapless" Chinese women were those who would be raped by immigration officials in Canada. Apart from gender, Lee also makes it clear that class matters. Fong Mei tells her sister, "I was the first to leave the 'pigpen' too, perhaps due to the Wong family's money under the table" (Lee 78). Money bought Fong Mei's safety in Canada.

Lee and Choy's authorial hand becomes clearer in the way they use "pig" to lexically and thematically integrate the historical maltreatment of Chinese in travel and immigration and to the instances of racial injustice after landing as one fragmented whole. "Pig" is used to refer to the hapless individual(s) faced with racial injustice in the foreign country. During the part when the Chinese Benevolent Association members discuss Wong Foon Sing's fate in the Janet Smith Case, they state, "he's like a caught pig. They'll hang him for sure!" (Lee 125). The word "pig" amalgamates the historical incidents of inescapable injustice that Chinese sojourner face. The sense of betrayal runs through here as Wong Foon Sing is "hung" here like a pig to the market, out to be inhumanely slaughtered as a scapegoat for the pleasure of White Canadians. In Part 3 of *The Jade Peony*, the narrator Sek-Lung discusses the whisperings in Chinatown:

'Years and years ago,' Third Uncle told us. 'Your bet they yank us Chinkee pigtails. Cut off, like this!' Years before that, there had been white mobs in San Francisco that left, some said, three China men, limbs and necks broken, hanging dead from lampposts. (Choy 371)

The repetition of "years" may give the impression that these are rumours, but the use of "pigtails", in referring to the old hairstyle of men in the Qing Dynasty which left hair long to

be tied in braids, alludes to the racial prejudice Chinese labourers faced due to their appearance in Canada. In 1878, Arthur Bunster, a member of Parliament, tried to introduce a bill forbidding the hiring of any labourer for the railroad who “wore hair longer than 5 ½ inches” (Con et al. 46). Choy also refuses to let the incident of injustice be contained within one historical moment by pointing to the Chinese massacre of 1871.

However, as the two novels move forward temporally, Lee and Choy trouble the use of the word “pig” and draw new boundaries. The English signifier is utilized with a greater distance from the historical injustice behind 賣豬仔 but engages closer with the residual meaning of hapless victimhood. In the above-mentioned cases, the perpetrator and victims of injustice are white individuals and Chinese sojourners, occurring in different places and times. To add to this one dimension of injustice and oppression, Lee and Choy use “pig” to refer to individuals inside and outside of the Chinese community who are victimized by racial injustice perpetrated by Chinese individuals. In the second chapter of *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, the reference to Wong Foon Sing as a “pig” comes after Fong Mei is characterized as a “pig”. As Fong Mei’s mother-in-law, Mui Lan wields patriarchal power over Fong Mei, threatening her for not producing a child so Mui Lan can convince her to accept the arrangement for Choy Fuk to start trying for a child with Song Ang. In her internal monologue, Mui Lan tells herself, “that despicable pig-bitch wouldn’t dare wrangle with her. Her standing as a human being was all but lost. She might as well die!” (Lee 99). As the diction suggests, Mui Lan must convince herself that she is right in her treatment of Fong Mei because Fong Mei is inhumane and unworthy. Mui Lan takes advantages of the social structure of the family and gender expectations in traditional Chinese culture that places a burden of duty on Fong Mei to reproduce and obey her inlaws. In this circumstance, Fong Mei becomes the “pig”, marked by a symbol of victimhood and betrayal. Fong Mei is not a victim for long and uses the same tools as Mui Lan to consolidate her power. Lee shows how

the structures of power mean that Chinese women oppress one another. After Mui Lan successfully gets her way to start the sexual liaison between Song An and her son, Choy Fuk, Fong Mei's hatred becomes directed toward Song An. She tells her husband Choy Fuk, "you want to go. You can't trick me! You enjoy rolling around in that pig-sty bed of hers" (153). Fong Mei takes her frustration at the situation by putting the blame on Song An, who is an easy target as she is of Hakka descent. Later, Fong Mei uses her newfound economic clout and social status to control Suzie's sexual relations, and Fong Mei is most displeased when her daughter decides to be with Morgan, who is half-Chinese. Fong Mei exclaims, "She had to make herself a piece of garbage in some white devil's pig-sty bed!" (Lee 276). The repeated "pig-sty bed" portrays both Morgan and Song An as pigs because they are outsiders of the community. Lee shows that structural boundaries and racial hatred are not controlled by one singular hegemonic force. Later, Lee foreshadows Suzie's death when she writes, "Suzie, a lonely little girl in pigtails, squatted, her tricycle beside her, staring intently at a squashed insect or something on the sidewalk" (297). The subtle characterization of Suzie with pigtails illustrates her inevitable death as she becomes victimized by Fong Mei's fear. Much like the characterization of Morgan, Choy uses pig to associate with the character Tammy Okada, who has mixed-raced heritage, to emphasize her marginalization, as he states, "Tammy Okada, of mixed parentage, had tightly braided brownish pigtails" (309). The visual stress on Tammy's pigtails is repeated later: "from my seat in the middle of the room, I could see Tammy Okada's braided pigtails visibly trembling" (312). Like Lee's characterization of Suzie, Choy places emphasis on the pigtails to draw a connection between earlier racialized victimization of Chinese immigrants in the Qing Dynasty and the ostracization of Tammy by the Chinese and Japanese community. Lee and Choy use the word "pig" to connect the global atrocity that Chinese sojourners faced and the prejudice wrought by Chinese individuals towards other people.

Even though the use of “pig” encodes historical allusion and residual connotation of 賣豬仔, the use of “pig” does not underline a universal theme of racism and/or injustice. Lee and Choy employ different means to add layers of complexity that disrupts the easy connection between “pig” to any referent. Lee is aware that criticism of past Chinese culture is fraught in the West. In a later part of the novel, the narrator Kae imagines a conversation among the generations of women where her mother Beatrice talks back to Mui Lan and says, “Love is the most fundamental and at the same time the most exalted purpose we have in this life [...] you [...] can’t ignore that noble principle, to breed men and women like they were cattle or pigs” (Lee 283). Though Beatrice uses “pigs”, Lee shows that Beatrice’s remark is unduly coloured by liberal humanism and romanticism to present Mui Lan’s forgoing “noble” principle of love as if Mui Lan had a choice. Lee also ironically shows that Beatrice “go[es] back to her grand piano” after scolding Mui Lan (283). Beatrice is limited in her judgment of Mui Lan as she grew up privileged and with a different sense of womanhood that allows for noble principles of love to matter. By presenting Beatrice’s criticism, Lee reveals that each dehumanizing action should be read with specificity and awareness to understand what subjectivities lie in the accusation and reception of “pig”.

Choy uses “pig” in an optimistic way in *The Jade Peony* by engaging further with its Chinese connotations. In Chinese culture, the pig is a part of the sexagenary cycle of the Chinese calendar or Chinese zodiac. The Xinhai Revolution that led to the overthrow of the Qing dynasty was named because it occurred in the year of the pig. At the beginning of the novel, before the Chinese community helped push the Japanese community out of Vancouver, the first part sees Poh-Poh telling Jook-Liang about the story *Journey to the West*: “this time, the Monkey King took on the disguise of a lost boatman, and with his companion, Pig, they rode the back of a giant sea turtle to escape the fire-spouting River Dragon” (Choy 29). Though the story *Journey to the West* was published in Chinese in 1592,

the character Pig, or 豬八戒, is an allusion to existing Taoist and Buddhist literature as well as other Chinese mythologies that preceded its publication. The figure of Pig in Chinese culture is balanced with its own merits and demerits, symbolizing intelligence, kindness, and optimism with sloth, lust, and greed. As mentioned in the “Introduction”, Jook-Liang sees Wong Suk as Monkey Man, comparing him to Monkey King, which is Choy’s way of associating the bone collecting journey back to China with the spiritual journey from India to China for Buddhist scrolls. The imaginary Pig enters the narrative to bolster the spirituality of Wong Suk’s journey back to China as well as the concept of home. When Jook-Liang envisions this Pig, it is during Wong Suk’s visit to her family for dinner. In her imagination, Jook-Liang searches for Wong Suk’s companion, Pig, and sees Wong Suk’s wiping of his eyes as “a signal to Pig, hiding under our porch” (36). This vivid position of the pig hiding under something is a reference to home. Lexically, the symbol 豕 which is embedded in the Chinese word pig 豬 is also a reference to the Chinese word for home, 家, which embeds pig. Even though Jook-Liang imagines this “signal to Pig”, Choy effectively follows the construction of the word 家 with descriptions of food: “the aroma of twice-cooked chicken filled the air” (36). Though “pig” engages with the historical word of 賣豬仔 and the residuals, Choy shows that it also signifies a deeper heritage culture and home.

“Pig” certainly displays the injustice of racism and colonial exploitation towards Chinese sojourners. However, as Lee and Choy also use the word for members within the community, they show that many of the oppressed Chinese sojourners also became oppressors when they call those in the margins of society “pigs”.

Ghosts/Demons 鬼, and *low fan* 老番

"Gold Mountain" and “pigs” are fraught terms that reveal mutable history, language, and identities of Chinese Canadians and Chinese diasporic subjects. Yet, the word 鬼 (or

“ghosts”) in the two novels is arguably more fraught in usage because it still exists in the Cantonese vernacular in Hong Kong to refer to foreigners or foreignness. Outside of Canada, the word sparked a heated debate after a British worker in 2018 filed a discrimination lawsuit because he was called “gweilo” by Chinese staff in Hong Kong (Lau).⁴⁸ It is interesting to see how criticism of Lee and Choy’s use of the word draws similar criticism in Hong Kong about the word in the twenty-first century. Both sets of criticism simplistically brand the word as either derogatory or acceptable, without considering the word’s historical origins and the contexts the word is used in. Those who claim that the word is derogatory and political incorrect do not acknowledge the word’s colonial heritage since the word came about when the Chinese were colonized by the Europeans. Those who say it is acceptable seem to ignore how the word is a conscious marking of someone’s lack of Chineseness culturally and/or racially that is a simultaneous assertion of the speaker’s own Chineseness. This marking of difference can be benign or in jest, or, it can result in an irrational and malicious fear of miscegenation and entrenchment of one’s own superiority. Rather than simply denounce this fear of Westernness, it must be negotiated with the colonial trauma and legacy and the authentic ideals with “Chineseness” as Lee and Choy have done, expressing its complexities. In the two novels, references to “ghost”, “demon”, or “devil” all go back to the Cantonese word 鬼佬 (*gwai²low*), and the different transliterations come from the semantic variation of the word 鬼 (*gwai²*). Apart from the Chinese word, Lee and Choy also play with the English semantics of the word in using it to refer to spectres and nebulous presences.

In *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, the use of the word is a marker of the anxiety and fear of Chinese towards Western influences in the past, and it also reflects the distrust towards them. The historical origin of the word comes from the nineteenth-century

⁴⁸ The British worker, Francis William Haden, was a blasting specialist who worked in Leighton Contractors in Hong Kong. Haden claimed that he was called “gweilo” in the derogatory sense and that the workers in the company showed hostility to non-Chinese workers. When he complained about this along with other instances of exclusion, he was terminated.

foreign colonialization of China. During that time, Chinese and Western imperialists certainly benefited from the oppression of Chinese labourers. Those oppressed had a name for Western imperialists, and it was promoted by Chinese imperialists (the Qing Dynasty) who wanted to redirect the failure of the Chinese state to Western imperialists. Be that as it may, Western imperialists were strong-handed in their invasion of China and their exploitation of people. As Chinese sojourners left for the New World, they brought their distrust towards the foreign population, and the racism they faced in Canada certainly heightened the distrust. One such example of this distrust and fear towards foreignness is language. English is often depicted as “ghost-word” or “demon-word” because the Cantonese 鬼話 refers to the language that foreigners speak, and the use of English encodes the distrust in that sense of foreignness. As Fong Mei writes to her sister, “everything here is so ‘ultramodern.’ You don’t know what that means, but everyone here likes that ghost word” (75). In *The Jade Peony*, Stepmother recalls how Chen Suling learned English through the missionaries in China and the distrust her father had towards them: “for he was angry at the way she was taking in the Demon words and was horrified to see her believe that eating the flesh and blood of someone called Jesus was the only possible way to go to Heaven” (234). Distrust and hate towards foreigners were brought from China to Chinatown. It is a synchronous reminder of the scars of wars of colonialism, and it finds resonance in those who have to deal with a new form of colonialism in Canada. However, in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, the reference to demon or ghost to denote a white Canadian is not always hateful but matter-of-fact. In the former, Gwei Chong mentions to Old Chen that he had “a bowie knife [he] bought off a drunk demon in Spuzzum” (Lee 36). In *The Jade Peony*, Wong Suk tells Jook-Liang about an unlikely friendship he forms with Johnson in the Canadian Pacific Railway: “Johnson was over six feet tall, a *dai huhng-moh gui* - a giant red-haired demon - who, on his deathbed decades later, remembered Wong Suk as a friend.” (85). 大紅毛鬼 (*Dai huhng-moh gui*) is

the historical reference to Dutch people who colonized Taiwan in the 17th century. The word was passed on in Chinese literature and history to encode the arrival of Dutch colonists (Shi). However, Wong Suk expresses his reverence towards Johnson despite using this word. It states, “Wong-Suk told [Jook-Liang], ‘Johnson bess-see Boss Man,’ and with a flourish threw the cloak around himself, remembering why a demon on his deathbed would call him friend” (Choy 85).

The use of “ghost” and “demon” is not posited as a glorious return to the traditional views of Chinese sojourners because Lee and Choy are not uncritical of the Chinese community’s use of the word “ghosts” or “demon” to blanket anything Western to refer to those who are marginalized by the community. Though only noticing this in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Hilf says: “Lee goes one step further than [sic] most other Chinese-American authors. She does not restrict the usage of these expressions to whites alone, but also applies them, again metaphorically, to members of her community, thus, blurring boundaries once more” (114). Hilf does not show what critical interventions Lee is doing by “blurring boundaries”. Linguistics, racial, and semantic boundaries are being blurred by Lee and Choy. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, after Fong Mei feels trapped in her marriage to Choy Fuk, who collaborates with Mui Lan to oppress Fong Mei. Lee describes Fong Mei's anger when she writes, “Dead ghosts!” The curse flashed angrily through [Fong Mei's] thoughts” (Lee 68). In this, Mui Lan and Choy Fuk are not unlike the Western “ghosts” who oppress the Chinese. Working with the English semantics of the word “ghosts”, Lee characterizes Ting An as “ghost” because he is seen as racially Western in the Chinese community since he is mixed-race: “People remarked that he spoke English like a native speaker; he behaved much like a ghost too, never very visible” (179). Ting An is also compared to a “ghost” because he can assimilate in the white community. Ting An’s whiteness and language work to benefit Gwei Chong and the Chinese community, but his lack of Chineseness and his Indigenous heritage

mean Gwei Chong cannot acknowledge him as a legitimate son. These reasons also partly account for why Fong Mei rejects him as a marriage suitor even though he fathered all three of her children. Lee shows that this rejection of Ting An ironically ends up haunting the family as Fong Mei's daughter, Suzie, ends up with Morgan, Ting An's son, and Fong Mei disguises her fear of incest and shame of her lust with miscegenation, which all ends in tragedy with the deaths of Suzie and her child with Morgan. Choy, in a similar fashion, uses the word ghosts to reveal the racist fears of the Chinese community towards other marginalized groups. Choy states, "Japanese from Japtown and Indians from dark alleyways - like ghosts - could lurk in the woodshed" (Choy 123). From Jung-Sum's perspective, the Japanese and the Indigenous are fearful "ghosts" that haunt Chinatown and threaten the safety of the community. Choy's use of "ghost" here also foreshadows the disappearance of the Japanese in Vancouver to the internment camps due to racial fear from the Chinese community. Choy tells us: "People in the street suddenly appeared like ghosts, disappeared, and then noisily reappeared" (124). The Chinese community's fear towards the Japanese in Vancouver came from nationalistic ties to China and the essentialism of "Chineseness" and lead to one of the dark chapters of Canadian history. Lee and Choy's extension of "ghost" to the Japanese denotes that this racial fear is not only one-sided towards Chinese, but it is like a ghost that haunts and re-emerges from history to apply to other marginalized groups. As Lee and Choy show, there is a fine line between wanting to preserve one's culture by remembering historical injustice and expressing an irrational fear towards other social groups. In the 1990s non-fictional text *Jin Guo*, one woman expresses her fear towards exogamy: "My children are very active. They can mix with the gui very well. I certainly would not be pleased if my children married "foreigners." It's definitely better for us Chinese to marry Chinese. Those gui don't know anything (laugh)" (*Jin Guo* 194). Amongst many of the oral accounts in the text, the relationship between Chinese and foreigners becomes fraught. With

each subsequent generation, Chinese languages, histories, cultures, and identities become more ghost-like, and assimilation is inevitable.

鬼佬 (*gwai²lou²*) possesses a specific, colonial history. Confusion arises when this specific history is overlooked in criticism. Susanne Hilf does not think that Lee's inclusion of the terms in the novel is problematic in *Writing the Hyphen: The Articulation of Interculturalism in Contemporary Chinese-Canadian Literature*, Hilf strongly implies that these terms came from Chinese-North American writing:

While naming the Other and, sadly enough, especially derogatory name-calling, is certainly a phenomenon which exists and has always existed in nation and cultures all over the world, post-colonial and minority writers have tried to turn it into a literary strategy or tool to further counter conventional power structures. (114)

While I agree that derogatory name-calling is a universal phenomenon, the power structures underlying all of the instances of derogatory name-calling are not all the same, and the consequences of derogatory name-calling vary. As Lee and Choy show, *鬼佬* (*gwai²lou²*) is a term that does not penetrate the English speaking space, understood among Chinese speakers and by English readers only when Lee and Choy have translated it. Unlike "Chinamen" and "Chink", the term in the two novels is not supported by state violence that can effectively harm white Canadians. While Hilf notices that these terms are "found in most Chinese-North American writing", Hilf also does not consider the possibility that the term is not just a literary strategy to write back; the term is a literary strategy that reflects many Chinese people's attitudes in the past towards white colonizers, and it is a reference that is shared amongst members in the community (114).

Much less accepting than Hilf, Maria N. Ng takes issue with a section in *The Jade Peony* where it states, "the *lo fons* eat a lot of something called cheese. It stinks and has a taste that is even worse. It coats your mouth and you can't get rid of the taste" ("Chop Suey"

49). Not only does Ng fail to appreciate the way Choy gives another dialectic representation of 老番 in *lo fons*, a Sze-Yup dialectic of 老番 that is also seen in Judy Fong Bates' 2004 *Midnight at the Dragon Cafe*, Ng insists that these remarks "are just as offensive as some stereotypical remarks Westerners are inclined to make about the Chinese" (181). As a word on its own, *lo fons*, is quite respectful compared to "ghosts". The rough transliteration of 老番 (*low fan*) "old tomato", and the inclusion of tomato could possibly be a racial reference to skin colour. When the word is not deconstructed so bluntly, the translation means "aggressors of foreign colonialism". In usage, 老番 (*low fan*) is not derogatory, but it is expressed to things or people that are not Chinese racially or culturally. In the context that Ng describes, moreover, to equate a remark on cheese as an honest, sentiment of cultural difference to the stereotypical comments of Westerners is unreasonable.

In looking at the inclusion of 鬼佬 (*gwai²low²*) and 番 (*low fan*) as the naming of the "Other", Lee and Choy's engagement with these words does not suggest an ethnocentric valorization the historical hatred towards non-Chinese; nor do they suggest the universal conclusion that the words are racist. The inclusion of the terms is to reflect an honest depiction of the Chinese community's attitudes towards Western culture and foreigners in the past that was brought over from Old China. The Chinese community in Canada saw little difference between the racist injustice of white Canadians and white foreigners back in China. However, Lee and Choy show that this fear becomes contradictory because the Chinese racial and/or cultural identity becomes mutable in the new environment. Exogamy between Chinese and non-Chinese occurred. Chinese sojourners struck working relationships with other non-Chinese in Canada to survive. Chinese sojourners and their descendants adapt to the Western cultural space of Canada through language and cultural practices. By using the various representations of 鬼佬 (*gwai²low²*) in both texts to depict marginalized members in the community, Lee and Choy write metaphorically to represent how the Chinese

community's fear and trauma of Western imperialism in Canada drive Chinese subjects to blindly pursue their essentialism of "Chineseness" and sinocentrism at dire costs. The consequences mean the enforcement of endogamy and ostracization of mixed-race members in their own community. Even worse is the way this sinocentrism results in the historical violence of the Japanese internment as shown in *The Jade Peony* and the community violence towards those who seek exogamy in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. As such, the continual use of "ghost" and "demon" in representing the Cantonese phrase 鬼佬 (*gwai²lou²*) is a metaphorical engagement with the connotation of haunting. What haunts the community is the racial trauma that the Chinese community faced and the racial injustice the community inflicted on other marginalized people.

As I have illustrated throughout my chapter, the English encodings of the Cantonese (and sometimes, Taishanese) words of "Gold Mountain", "pigs" and "ghosts" preserve the cultural and historical specificity of the terms in order to prevent a possible sanitization of the Chinese Canadian community history. These Chinese terms are well-known in the Chinese diaspora, but they are not often highlighted in English literary criticism. While Lee and Choy are using Chinese names to represent the lives and subjective understandings of Chinese sojourners and the community, Lee and Choy's do not resort to a standardized pronunciation, reflecting their own unique idiolect, and most importantly, Lee and Choy also engage with the English semantics to critically interrogate the problems with identity, race, and culture in the Chinese community in the early twentieth century rather than facilitate an authentication of a fixed Chinese identity, history, and language. By analyzing how "Gold Mountain", "pigs", and "ghosts" are used by Lee and Choy, we learn that the individuals in the Chinese Canadian community are not always the victims, but they can become the culprit of racial discrimination, ostracization, and oppression of marginalized members in and outside of their community. As the two novels show, these phrases are not immutable but mirror the

changing circumstances of the community, and in fact, notions of “Chineseness” are also mutable, which I explore in my next chapter. In my next chapter, I show how the two novels use of the terms for “Chinese” illustrates that the discursive constructions of “Chineseness” has evolved in spite of the fixedness that the twofold hegemonies impose.

Chapter Two: Expressions of “Chineseness”

While naming is a vital self-identification process that provides groups of people a place and a voice in history and politics, discourse troubles identity. Discourses have the power to create meaning, yet through the knowledge they claim, discourses can state what is true and what is false. Discourses construct and restrict identity. In the context of Canada, as Himani Bannerji’s essay “A Rose by Any Other Name: Naming the ‘Others’” shows, the Canadian official/state discourse of multiculturalism uses terms like “visible minority” to reductively erase histories, languages, cultures, and politics of non-white subjects in Canada as a way to cherish differences by erasing antagonism, but in naming them “visible minority”, what becomes invisibilized is Englishness and whiteness as *de facto* hegemonic Canadian identity. Hence, a hierarchical structure is constructed where the non-whites are named, but white Canadians are not named. What Bannerji’s essay brings is also its ability to denaturalize these terms in order to show that the Canadian state uses its power to manufacture identity labels and their respective meanings. I do not suggest that we should ignore the presence of non-white Canadians, but the Canadian state discourse formulates and impose faulty ideas of identity on non-whites.

When it comes to being identified or identifying as "Chinese", differences in languages complicate the power of discourse. Whereas “Chinese” as an English word does not distinguish itself racially, culturally, ethnically or nationally, in Chinese, as in the written traditional or simplified script, there are multiple names available for an individual to declare themselves as Chinese distinctively, which provides more information on the individual's politics and perception (Wu 159). When the Chinese words for "Chinese" are scrutinized, the power of discourse becomes more apparent. In the 2017 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi Jinping fused his name into party ideology and advocated for sinicization of Marxism and economic modernization, collapsing traditional

Chinese thought under the umbrella term of “Chinese socialist progress” (“Resolution of the 19th National Congress”). The most repeated word in Xi’s speech and the constitution is “Chinese” (“Resolution of the 19th National Congress”). In an excerpt of the resolution, translated to English, it says, “a guide to action for the entire Party and all the Chinese people to strive for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese race, and must be upheld long term and constantly developed”. What is lost in translation is that Chinese phrase for the English “Chinese race” is 中華民族 (*zhōnghuá mínzú*), which collapses “Chinese nation” with “Chinese race” and “Chinese ethnicities”.⁴⁹ The ideology behind this new constitution is to entrench a new form of ethnonationalism that sees anyone of Han Chinese descent, despite having divergent political beliefs and living outside the borders of China, as part of the Chinese nation. The sinicization process is according to an ideal of “Chineseness” that is Han Chinese culture in language, diet, lifestyle, philosophy, and culture which absorbs ethnic minorities like Uyghurs, Tibetans, and Mongolians into a larger idea of national unity: one China, one people, and one dream. The ideal Han Chinese race that stands in for “Chinese” and “Chineseness”, which seems not only natural but also unquestionable, has a history. As Allen Chun’s provocative essay “Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity” illustrates, “prior to the Nationalist Revolution of 1911, there was no cognate notion in Chinese of society or nation as a polity whose boundary was synonymous with that of an ethnic group” (113). The consolidation of “Chineseness” as in Han Chinese was initiated by Sun Yat-Sen in his nationalistic efforts to unify China in reaction against the Qing dynasty, a regime governed by the distinctive ethnic group the Manchus, which defined and constructed “Chineseness” differently. It is a myth that Han people descended from

⁴⁹ The untranslated Chinese term 中華民族 (*zhōnghuá mínzú*) or “Chinese race” is in fact a mixture of words based different historical constructions of identity and culture that are homogeneous. 民族 (*mínzú*) is a term for “ethnicity” that is transplanted from Japanese. The phrase 中華 (*zhōnghuá*) has relationship with the Chinese name for “China” 中國 (*zhōngguó*), which translates to “Central Nation” or “Middle Kingdom”. The “Middle Kingdom” concept stemmed from Zhou Dynasty.

common ancestors (Djao 187). The epistemological erasure in ethnonationalist label of “Chinese race”, therefore, shrouds the historical fact that “Chineseness” has always been a conversation of discontentment and disunity, and its construction is dependent on the hegemonic centre in question. The hegemonic centre of Qing dynasty was replaced by the Chinese Communist Party, and they each have their own narrative of national identity and Chineseness.

As shown by the examples of “visible minority” and Xi’s Chinese word for “Chinese”, identity is constructed powerfully through state discourse, and identity is less about the actual truth or reality of social relations, but more so about the practices of power. As Chun notes in his essay, “identity is more than just a body of traits made conscious by ethnicity or rhetorically invoked by cultural discourse; it is a tie that binds people to communities through webs of power and meaning” (“Fuck Chineseness” 125). Because of these structures of power and meaning, discourse is often silent, and this is famously noted by Foucault who writes: “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (27). Discourse is silent because it seems like an invisible presence, but power-relations lie in discourses and can define what can and cannot be said, who can speak and who can remain silent. In the case of Chinese and Canadian state discourses about identity and multiculturalism, there are implicit rules that govern what a core and ideal Chinese/Canadian identity are ethnically, racially, and culturally speaking. Though constructed, these discourses possess very real consequences in shaping and reinforcing perception as well as state policy. Gayatri Spivak calls this the epistemic violence wherein violence comes from the infliction of harm against subjects through discourse, erasing cultural difference and individual autonomy for the sake of national unity and national benefits (26). The declaration of “Chinese” identity in the 2017 19th National Congress came in the midst of Chinese governments’ ongoing mass cultural genocide of

Uighurs and Tibetans, where Uighurs are being sent to Xinjiang re-education camps, and Tibetan languages and cultures are being suppressed.

By tracing the historical changes of the discursive construction of identity, it becomes more apparent that identity is constructed through discourse and is restricted by it in a seemingly natural way. Diasporic literature and communities undermine the seemingly unquestionable constructions because they often contain important cultural information like language and cultural practices that exposes the diachronic changes of heritage culture. For example, Quebecois French retains a version of the French language variety that is much older and unstandardized, unlike European French, and though mostly stigmatized, the language exposes a past variety of French. Diasporic literature and communities exist outside of the imposed boundaries of nationalistic frameworks, so they serve as important interventions into the same nationalistic frameworks by troubling the boundaries of ethnic identities set by cultural hegemonies in their new host countries and their heritage cultures. When it comes to Chinese Canadians in the early twentieth century who came from southern China, the “Chineseness” they claimed was certainly different from the “Chineseness” promoted by the Canadian state, Qing dynasty officials, Nationalist Chinese government, and the Chinese Community Party. “Chineseness” becomes more contentious and complicated as the new generation - the overseas Chinese progeny - grow up in English Canada, and their understanding of “Chineseness” and even “Canadianness” conflicts with that of their parents and grandparents.

As diasporic literary texts, Sky Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony* capture the contentions when there are competing discursive constructions of the Chinese identity. In this chapter, I intend to examine how each discursive construction of “Chineseness” in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* reflects an individual hegemonic centre, showing that the formation of “Chinese” identity is rooted in local contexts

of power-in-meaning and meaning-in-power. The significance of this critique is to underline that Chineseness is flexible and far from universal and that each definition of "Chineseness" reflects back on an authority of hegemonic centre. Whether Lee and Choy intentionally wanted to or not, both novels offer a critical evaluation and denaturalization of being "Chinese". In view of the rising ethnonationalism in China that has resulted in the cultural genocide of Uyghurs and Tibetans, the sweeping claim that "we're all just Chinese" as a way to strategically essentialize becomes a silencing gesture that epistemologically ignores real class, regional, and national differences.

Most critics have not engaged with how the two novels can show how restrictive discursive formation of ethnic "Chinese" identity is. Christopher Lee's "Engaging Chineseness in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*" is one of the few exceptions focusing on ethnicity and discourse, and it only focuses on *The Jade Peony*. He examines the ways Choy critiques the notion of Chineseness and the link between ethnicity and power structures. For C. Lee, Choy poses interesting questions about discourse by analyzing the way character Sek-lung is shaped to be Chinese by Chinese school, his family, and his location. Lee classifies these three sites as Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses, which constitute the external notion of Chineseness. After his convincing analysis, Lee puts forth an interesting conclusion that yields more questions than answers:

Choy's refusal to adopt an uncritical stance towards Chineseness alerts us to the fact that as the Chinese community continues to change, the expression of Chinese ethnicity is in itself (and always has been) a contingent condition. In making such connections, he ultimately expresses a renewed commitment to the discourse of Chineseness, to the possibility of a more enlightened and human expression of the same (C. Lee 31-32).

Syntactically, by stating that the “expression of Chinese ethnicity is in itself (and always has been) a contingent condition”, Lee indirectly expresses the very problem with identity and discourse: identification is a process mediated through expressions that can be susceptible to potentially unstable external environment (as in "condition"), yet it has an internal fixedness (in itself). As a vehicle for identification, language is also fraught with the tension between the intrinsic and extrinsic since meaning is actively constructed by the individual, but it is produced through the external power of dominant discourse. To a large extent, meaning is intrinsic as it resides in structures of language. However, meaning is generated through language by agency and power in the social world, so prevailing situational context such as power interactions and relationships between participants is what generates the semantics. While I agree that Chineseness is a concept that Choy is critical of, there is a need to ask bigger questions about the Chineseness in *The Jade Peony*. Lee amalgamates power structures of Chinese school, family, Chinatown as the external notion of "Chineseness" that Choy engages with, but the hegemonic centres in each structure seem complementary yet oddly different. One example of this is the spoken Chinese in these three spaces. In the novel, the Chinese school only institutionalizes Cantonese and Mandarin as acceptable language varieties for Sek Lung and his siblings to learn in. The family speaks a variety of languages, but from inferencing the interaction amongst the members, the most acceptable form of language for them is Taishanese. From this difference in Chinese languages, the power structure of the school seems to permit only the varieties with official language status back in China. Although the family valorizes Mandarin and Cantonese, Taishanese has more significance in their life. As Chun states, “Chineseness has been traditionally shaped by the authority of a sinocentric core”, and differences in sinocentrism from the authority of Poh-Poh with Taishanese and the school with Mandarin and Cantonese point at separated trajectories of what "Chineseness" should be ("Fuck Chineseness" 125).

Moreover, by repeatedly saying it is "expression" and "discourse" of Chineseness that *The Jade Peony* critiques, C. Lee is suggesting that Chineseness, as an ethnic identity, is always constructed within language and discourse through webs of power. If any discourse of identity is less about the fact of who one is than about the perception of those facts, what can our conclusions from *The Jade Peony* say about the way "Chineseness" has been unquestioningly posited as one universal category that belongs to China?

Even though *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* illustrate that "Chineseness" is constructed through a language based on structures of power in the community and elsewhere, it is interesting that the authors themselves capitulate to hegemonic understandings of "Chineseness". In channelling the frustrations towards Hong Kong immigrants in Canada, Lee authenticates what it means to be Chinese:

After taking Chinese 100 at university, I went to China at the age of nineteen with three friends - a radical step in 1972 when there was next to no information available on China. That was probably when my biggest identity problem resolved itself. I realized that, hey, here are all these Hong Kong people trying to pass themselves off as being *real* Chinese, but they're no more Chinese than I am. In fact, their thinking is more colonized than my thinking. The only *real* Chinese left in this world are the Chinese in China. (*Jin Guo* 95)

Lee's issue with the superiority of Hong Kong immigrants towards descendants of the Chinese sojourners is justified. I agree that just because Hong Kong immigrants may have literacy in Cantonese, they cannot claim to have a more "authentic" Chinese identity than descendants of Chinese sojourners. Lee is also very critical about the Canadian state's racism towards Hong Kong immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s as it is reported that "[she] sees little difference between the racism against the Chinese at the turn of the century, when immigrants were beaten on the streets, and that which is directed toward the wealthier Honk

[sic] Kong arrivals today” (Andrews). However, to invalidate the Hong Kong immigrants' claims to authentic Chineseness, Lee relies on making China, as in the country controlled by the People's Republic of China (PRC) since 1949, the source of authority on Chineseness. Lee's position should be viewed with heavy skepticism. From a historical point of view, the PRC's relationship with Chineseness can be seen as mercurial and fraught, especially in the Cultural Revolution when the PRC purged Chinese traditional arts and ideas, attacking Confucianism. In recent decades, Confucius has become a symbol of Chinese culture, prompting the trademark of "Confucius Institute" that is a state sanctioned organization promoting Chinese language and culture. The notion that China is the only source of real ethnic Chinese identity has also become highly unfavourable for many Chinese subjects living overseas outside of China who do not want to be associated with nationalism attached with the label. On top of this issue, the perception that Chineseness is only rooted and fixed in China overlooks that Chinese culture is fluid and adaptive to new circumstances. The same argument is often used to deride anything Chinese American or Chinese Canadian as being "inauthentic" and inferior just because they originated in North America while ignoring that they are created by *real* Chinese immigrants for Chinese people. In making China the authority of Chinese identity, Lee's statements about the fluidity of Canadian culture becomes quite contradictory: “‘culture is fluid, you know.’ And you would know, because our communication would be a clear example of that fluidity. You watch my lips, and I read your gaze” (Lee, “Telling It” 178). It seems interesting that Canadianness can be constructed and fluid while Chineseness is not.

For Wayson Choy, identifying as "Chinese" is an act of strategic essentialism for Chinese Canadians who see themselves sharing a common racial identity. In his 1999 essay "Banana Thoughts", Choy states that he is proud to call himself a "banana", and he writes, "I might even suggest that all surviving Chinatown citizens eventually became bananas" (91).

By using "banana", Choy asserts that even though he, like many other Chinese immigrants, is Canadian, he is still Chinese because of his race. The biggest problem in this essay is not that Choy is engaging with a very pejorative word, but it is Choy's sweeping statement at the end of his essay where he states, "I know another truth: in immigrant North America, we are all Chinese" (Choy, "Banana Thoughts" 92). His claim to "we are all Chinese" is based on his historical observation:

Canadian and American Chinatowns set aside their family tong differences and encouraged each other to fight injustice. There were no borders, 'After all,' they affirmed, '*Daaih ga tohng yahn*...We are all Chinese!' (Choy, "Banana Thoughts" 91).

Unfortunately, to strategically essentialize through English language, Choy misses the fact the identity of "*tohng yahn*" or Tang People that old Chinese sojourners asserted does not neatly correspond to the English word "Chinese" with its pluralistic semantics.

The Transition of Tang People 唐人 to Laowahkiu 老華橋⁵⁰⁵¹

"*Tohng yahn*" or Tang People is 唐人 in Chinese. 唐人 shares a history and word with the Tang Dynasty 唐朝 (*tong⁴ziu⁴*), and the link between the identity marker and the historical period comes from language and migration. During the Tang dynasty in the eighth century, Cantonese emerged as a recognisable language from the An Lushan Rebellion and several other conflicts in northern China, and masses of Han Chinese refugees flooded from the north to the southern Guangdong and Guangxi region (Hsu 194). From the perspective of the north, Guangdong province and its capital Canton were colonized, inhabitants of southern

⁵⁰ 唐人 is *tong⁴ jan⁴* in jyutping and *tángrén* in pinyin. For 老華橋, it is *lou5waa4kiu4* in jyutping and *Lǎo huá qiáo* in pinyin.

⁵¹ Though "Tang" 唐 may sound like "Tong" in Cantonese, which can be a more phonetically faithful transliteration, the expression "tongs" in the two novels or in most historical texts about Chinatowns in North America really refers to Chinese associations. In Chinese, "tong" comes from 堂, and the full expression and phrase is 善堂, which is translated to "benevolent association". There is a need to distinguish "tong" and "tang" in Chinese Canadian literature because critics get confused. In Maria N. Ng's "Chop Suey Writing: Sui Sin Far, Wayson Choy, and Judy Fong Bates", she erroneously remarks that "Chinese associations, more commonly and mistakenly known as 'tongs'" (172). Ng completely disregards that "tongs" or "tong" is an English transliteration of the Chinese word for associations.

China were seen as “savages”, and the province became the place where disgraced officials from the northern capital were sent (Chan 20). As such, a new common, local identity emerged among these new migrants. From the Tang dynasty until the end of the Qing dynasty, Guangdong was considered at the “margins of Chinese cultural system” geographically, linguistically, and culturally speaking (Con et al. 8). During the Qing dynasty, the Canton province became more tainted because the inhabitants were heavily involved in trade (Chan 21). The Manchus, who were northerners, wanted to reap the profits from the foreign trade, yet they did not want to be tainted by any foreignness (Chan 22). Guangdong was chosen as the only port to receive foreign goods because it had long been associated with foreign trade, it was distant from the northern capital of the dynasty, and the Qing dynasty could keep it under control (Chan 23; Con et al. 8). Because of the historical tensions between the north and the south, most Cantonese speakers and/or inhabitants of Guangdong province had a different understanding of their identity until the toppling of the Qing dynasty, and they preferred 唐 as the representative word for "Chinese", and 唐人 as the term for “Chinese people”. This term of identification was brought over from China to North America during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century as almost all Chinese sojourners came from the Guangdong region. As Con et al.’s *From China to Canada*, Chinese sojourners regarded themselves as the “people of the Tang” in contrast to the more typical term for Chinese, “people of the Han.” (Chun, "Forget Chineseness" 198; Con et al. 8).

In the two novels, the term does not appear to many English-speaking readers explicitly because Lee and Choy use different English transliterations and/or translations to represent it. Transliterations of the word retain more aspects of the original Chinese language be it semantics or phonetics whereas the translation refers to the word as “Chinese”, making it harder to catch. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Lee uses a phonetic and semantic approach to transliterate and translate 唐人 into English. When Mui Lan talks to her son, Choy Fuk, about

her frustration with white Canadians, she tells him, “selling us tang people the left-over ice for full price” (Lee 63). “Tang” is a transliteration since it is phonetically similar to the first character 唐, and Lee’s refusal to translate it further is likely due to the solipsistic nature of the word “Tang”. The second character of 唐人 is translated, however, as it refers to “people”. Choy, on the other hand, employs a more phonetic approach in his translation of the term, though he also translates the word fully into English and italicizes it. In the third part of the novel, when Sek-Lung asks Poh-Poh (whom he calls grandmama) and his parents about his identity. When Poh-Poh prescribes Sek-Lung's identity for him, she reveals how she self-identifies. Choy writes: “‘*Tohan yahn,*’ Grandmama said, collapsing in her rocking chair and setting her grocery bags down on the floor. ‘*Chinese*’” (Choy 149). Choy’s first transliteration retains more of the linguistic sound of Cantonese than Lee’s, but his second translation of the word as “Chinese” relates to ethnic and cultural meanings of Chineseness rather than a nationalistic one. In both novels, Tang People 唐人 is used to reflect how the Chinese sojourners' identification engaged with a non-nationalistic understanding of Chineseness. In *Forget Chineseness*, Chun explains why this is:

The concept of Chineseness at the time was not one invoked now by the politically neutral term *huaren* (being culturally Chinese). Southern Chinese at the time referred to themselves as *tangren* (people of the Tang dynasty) who spoke *tanghua* (Tang language), which to them just meant "Chinese," when in fact they were regional groups speaking local dialect. There was less a notion of overseas Chinese here than just a notion of Chinese living overseas. The nationalistic term *huaqiao* to denote "overseas Chinese" as a group did not appear until the late nineteenth century. (198)

Though Chun uses the Mandarin version “*tangren*” of Tang People 唐人, Chun’s explanation of the term indicates that to Chinese sojourners, this term did not distinguish them as any less Chinese even though it is a term only used by southern Chinese sojourners, and the term has

very little nationalistic undertones about it. Tang People 唐人 was a common identity category for southern Chinese people living in Canton province.

The two novels use Tang People 唐人 not only as a way to pay homage to the way Chinese sojourners historically identified themselves, but the term also documents the first generation overseas Chinese's discursive constructions of Chineseness to strategically essentialize a common Chinese identity that is not based on any nationalistic understanding of Chineseness; the term comes from the political necessity to unify against the racism from a non-Chinese government. As shown by the previous quote, in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Mui Lan uses "tang people" in her conversation with her son to distinguish a strong racial, ethnic and cultural difference between the identity of "us" as in Tang People and "them" as in white Canadians (Lee 63). In another scene, the interrogation of Wong Foon Sing in the Janet Smith case shows that the strategic essentialism of Tang People, which draws a boundary between Chinese and non-Chinese, is highly fraught. Though restrictive, the collective identity is also spurred by the racist Canadian hegemony. Lee writes, "If there was misconduct on the part of the Wong boy, then the whole community faced repercussions" (93). Since the actions of one Chinese sojourner can affect the whole community, the whole community automatically polices its own members to ensure their survival. Similarly, in *The Jade Peony*, Poh-Poh tells Sek-Lung that his identity is *tohng yahn* only in response to his question of whether he is Chinese or Canadian (Choy 149). For Poh-Poh, to be Canadian is to be non-Chinese, which is unthinkable, so she tells Sek-Lung that he is *tohng yahn* that is ethnically and culturally Chinese.

Though politically necessary, the first-generation Chinese sojourners' discursive strategy to essentialize all Chinese as Tang People 唐人 becomes dominant, and as a result, those with hegemonic power often use the identity marker as a tool to enforce order and silence alternative views. The sense that this identification of Chineseness is

unquestionable is apparent in *The Jade Peony* when Sek-Lung observes the conversation between Mrs. Lim and Poh-Poh: “‘*We are all Chinese,*’ Mrs. Lim said. ‘*Daaih ga tohng yahn.*’ Grandmama nodded agreement, for to think anything else was betrayal” (Choy 151). Since it is “betrayal” to say otherwise, Tang People is a term representing a sense of loyalty to the collective identity and the collective community. This unquestionable restrictiveness of collective identity becomes disadvantageous to those without power in the community. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, after Mui Lan cruelly berates her daughter-in-law Fong Mei for not producing a child, she attempts to justify her cruelty as benevolence by appealing to Fong Mei’s unquestionable acceptance that they are both Tang People in Canada who are dealing with the true antagonists: white Canadians. She tells Fong Mei, “‘here, we are living on the frontier with barbarians’”, and later she tells Fong Mei “‘living in a land with foreign devils makes it very difficult for tang people’” (Lee 74). By positioning their collective identity, the Tang People, as the more civilized victims of the white barbarians, Mui Lan is implying to Fong Mei that despite her cruelty, because they are both Chinese, Fong Mei’s compliance with Mui Lan’s wishes for another woman to bear Choy Fuk’s child is in Fong Mei’s best interests.

Like Mui Lan, Poh-Poh in *The Jade Peony* uses Tang People as a blanket term to brush aside the real difference in the community. During a conversation where Kiam and Liang argue with Father about how they do not want to speak Mandarin as they are Cantonese speakers, Poh-Poh tries to resolve these issues by using the term: “‘*daaih ga tohng yahn,*’ Grandmama said. “‘We are all Chinese.’” Her firm tone implied that this troubling talk about old and new ways should stop” (Choy 167). Poh-Poh uses the collective identity of Tang People to silence any contentions between Mandarin and Cantonese, masking the real felt cultural differences of Kiam and Liang. Even though Poh-Poh may say “we are all Chinese”, the novel also shows that this is far from the truth. Not all Chinese inhabitants are

perceived as the same, and Poh-Poh does not treat all Chinese inhabitants the same. As a person with hegemonic power in the community and in the family, Poh-Poh uses her power to enforce the inferior status of the Stepmother in the family.

The novels show that the Chinese identity undergoes transformation because of the national hegemony in China, and the names that express Chinese identity in the community become more nationalistic. This shift in identity is symbolized by how the Chinese words for "Chinatown" changed. Just as Chinese sojourners identified as Tang People 唐人, they named their settlements (what we know as Chinatowns) Tang People's Street 唐人街. Tang People 唐人 lacks the nationalistic meaning of "Chinatown". However, in the paratext of *The Jade Peony*, Choy includes an excerpt of Chinese-American Wing Tek Lum's poem "Translation" to show the change in words:

Tòhng Yàhn Gaai was what
we once called
where we lived: "China-People-
Street." Later, we mimicked
Demon talk
and wrote down only
Wàh Fauh—"China-Town."
The difference
is obvious: the people
disappeared. (qtd in Choy 12)

As the poem indicates, the English word "Chinatown" is not a direct translation of the original Chinese name for the settlement, which was *Tòhng Yàhn Gaai* 唐人街 (Tang People's Street). "Chinatown" was conceived by North Americans in English, which Lum refers to as "Demon talk". Much like "Chinamen", North Americans put "China" in

"Chinatown" to essentialize the identity of the Chinese community as one that is nationally and racially different than the mainstream society (Chao, "As Agents and as Perspective" 219). Language and restrictive covenants until the late 1930s prevented Chinese Canadians from purchasing property outside of designated areas in Canada; this ghettoized Chinese Canadians (Johnson 360). In spite of the racial history of "Chinatown", the poem suggests that the Chinese inhabitants became more nationalistic as they name the Chinese word for "Chinatown" to *Wàh Fauh 華埠* (China-Town). *Wàh Fauh 華埠* is a phrase with a heightened sense of nationalism, which was developed and popularized by Sun Yat-Sen between the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. "Wàh" 華 means China, and this word is embedded in words like "overseas Chinese" 華僑 and "Chinese race", which is 中華民族 (*zhōnghuá mínzú*). Choy uses the epigraph to frame and to foreshadow the events in *The Jade Peony*. Nationalistic sentiments for China eventually drive the Chinese community to turn against Japanese Canadians. The sense of Chinese nationalism supplanted the original kinship-based identity and structure of Chinese Canadians, which ironically corresponded to the old racist ideologies of North Americans.

Disappearing Moon Cafe demonstrates that the Chinese Canadians' thorough assimilation to a Chinese national identity is the result of racism against Chinese Canadians. Acts of assimilation before the 1911 Chinese Revolution were strategic essentialism. When the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Victoria (CCBA) was organized in March 1884, the organization wrote to the Chinese consul-general, Huang Cunxian in San Francisco to ask for support in building the association because of the new discriminatory legislation in B.C. legislature (Con et al. 37). The members of the CCBA sought support from the Qing dynasty government only because it was useful to their cause. It was only in the twentieth century when the Chinese Canadian identity and political consciousness underwent significant changes. As Lee delineates after the Janet Smith Bill incident in 1924:

By the time the houseboy was kidnapped again and finally charged with murder, a whole new set of China-town leaders had stepped in. They were statesmen, smooth liars in good English. The white press loved their boldness. They wrote letters, said the correct phrases. Even the new Chinese consul worked better with them. (Lee 268-269)

Because the new generation of the community replaces the old Chinese sojourners, the community's clan-based politics disappears. To mark this change, Lee uses "China-town" instead of "Tang People Street". Lee's hyphen in "China-town" and diction of "statesmen" underlines the advent of the new Chinese Canadian leaders with nationalistic identities. The assimilation to a Chinese national identity appeals to both national hegemonies of China and Canada as it pleases both the "white press" and the "Chinese consul". This indicates that this form of identity is not only in the interests of the two hegemonies who can better control them but also satisfies the two hegemonic powers' ideas of Chineseness.

Since overseas Chinese have money and foreign influence, Chinese patriotism of Chinese Canadians benefits the national hegemony of China. Even as early as the Qing dynasty, Chinese diplomats overlooked the racist undertones of "Chinatown" and saw the English word as evidence of the Qing Dynasty's growing foreign influence and territorialization. Chinese diplomats and writers from the Qing dynasty, the Republic of China, and the People's Republic of China wanted to transliterate the English "Chinatown" back to Chinese to mean 中國城 as in "China-city" rather than Tang People Street 唐人街 (Zhong). Taiwanese writer Ou-Fan Lee argues that the Chinese name should be changed to reflect the English "Chinatown" appropriately (Zhong). Naming is a way to take advantage of the growing Chinese settlements. Even though some Chinatowns in Canada and the United States are named "Tang People Street", the growing Chinese nationalism has led to the disappearance of the Tang People 唐人 identity.

Apart from "Chinatown", Lee and Choy's inclusion of *lao wah-kiu* 老華橋, which is a change from Tang People 唐人, underscores the growing influence of nationalism on Chinese Canadians. While *lao wah-kiu* 老華橋 refers to any member of the older generation, the Chinese phrase includes the ethnonational term *wah* 華 for "China". The discursive construction seems to be maintained by newer generations with newfound hegemonic power looking back at the previous generation. The term is commonly known as "old overseas Chinese", The shift in their identities as "old" means their power in the community has dwindled even though it is often a term of respect. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, the term *lao wah-kiu* 老華橋 is translated to readers as "old-timers" in the Janet Smith bill incident:

Wong Gwei Chang knew differently. He realized that the old ways in Chinatown were fast disappearing. He played a so-called prominent role in the associations now, because the old-timers had agreed to give him big face. In the old days, they'd had to band together to survive. (Lee 130)

As one of the "old-timers" who banded together with the other sojourners in the past and a prominent business owner in the community, Wong Gwei Chang has power in the associations. However, the "old ways" of isolation and survival are disappearing, and the community needs more political power and representation. As the novel shifts to the 1980s of the narrator Kae, the identity of the *lao wah-kiu* 老華橋 is only presented in their sayings and stories, as she notes, "I guess if one translates literally, what the old-timers called the telephone in their village dialect is "crying line" (Lee 196). In *The Jade Peony*, the *lao wah-kiu* 老華橋 is also portrayed as fast disappearing: "the *lao wah-kiu* - the old-timers who came overseas from Old China - hid their actual life histories within those fortress walls. Only paper histories remained, histories blended with talk-story" (Choy 51). Like Kae's observations, the only histories of *lao wah-kiu* 老華橋 remain in "talk-story" and "paper

histories”. Rather than using the first-person perspective of a *lao wah-kiu* 老華橋 to show how their power has dwindled, Choy portrays the Father’s attitude to Poh-Poh to show how even knowledge of *lao wah-kiu* 老華橋 is seen as obsolete:

Just old poetry,” Father said, when Kiam asked him about the tears. There was an old story about that saying, but Father could not remember all the details, except something about the teas of gods falling to earth and turning into precious jewels (Choy 117).

Poh-Poh’s legacy is now relegated to fragments of remembered stories. Whereas once Poh-Poh’s discourse held power in the family and the community, the newer generation, represented by the Father, has the power to brand it as “old”.

Imposition of Identity

While the discursive constructions of Chinese identity using Tang People and *lao wah-kiu* 老華橋 stipulate the evolving Chinese identity in terms of what it *is*, the two novels also provide significant illustrations of how conceptualizations of “Chinese” are also based on what it is *not*. Those with hegemonic power can construct boundaries that separate what is Chinese and what is non-Chinese at the detriment of those who fall outside of these boundaries. These boundaries can be seen in the names used to address those who do not align with these set expectations and boundaries.

In the two novels, the first expectation of being Chinese that is maintained by the older generations involve knowledge of Chinese culture and language. Since the newer generations grow up in Canada, they do not easily identify as “Chinese”. In *The Jade Peony*, Mrs. Lim asks Sek-Lung who he is and asks him, “are you *tohng yahn*?” (Choy 152). Choy shows through depicting Sek-Lung’s stream of consciousness that this cultural identity is foreign to new generations in the Chinese community:

“Canada!” I said, thinking of the ten days of school I had attended before the doctor sent me home, remembering how each of those mornings I had saluted the Union Jack, had my hands inspected for cleanliness, and prayed to *Father-Art-in-Heaven*. (152)

The social and cultural practices in Canadian schools that the new generation is immersed in are mostly British, but these children like Sek-Lung know them as Canadian. The older generation sees this attitude as a threat to Chinese identity and constructs names to highlight this lack of Chinese knowledge. In Choy’s novel, the older generation uses terms like *juk-sing* 竹繩 (hollowed-out bamboo) and *mo no* 無腦 (no brain) to construct the identities of newer generation around the idea of lack of Chineseness. In the first part where Liang asks how old she is, Poh-Poh replies, “you *juk-sing* years, [...] You Canada years” (Choy 79). For Poh-Poh, being born in Canada means to be lacking in Chinese knowledge. For the newer generations like Sek-Lung and Liang, they see their Canadianness as inseparable from their Chinese identity, and they want to be officially identified as such. As Sek-Lung realizes, “we were Canadians now, *Chinese Canadians*, a hyphenated reality that our parents could never accept. So it seemed, for different reasons, we were all holding our breath, waiting for *something*” (Choy 162). With a typographical emphasis on "something", Choy notes that second-generation Chinese Canadians are only vaguely conscious about their desire and anticipation for a resolution that reconciles their Canadian identity with their Chinese heritage. The same feeling is shown in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* when Kae states, “so, having swallowed the pill, here I am, still waiting. For enlightenment. Disappointed, yet eternally optimistic!” (Lee 24). Like Sek-Lung, Kae is "waiting". Newer generations are waiting for answers about their identity and whether the hyphenated identity of Chinese Canadian that is fraught with tensions can ever be resolved.

Race is also a boundary in both novels that leads to stigmatization of individuals who are deemed as non-Chinese in the community. Discursive constructions that determine what

Chinese is often result in arbitrary racial boundaries. In *The Jade Peony*, the racial purity of Chineseness is maintained by the community through discourse. In one scene, Choy writes, “mixed blood,” many of the Chinese ladies told their children, quoting an old saying, “mix trouble” (105). In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Lee questions these very racial boundaries of Chineseness by the two characters Ting An and Morgan, who are culturally Chinese but are ostracized by the Chinese community. Using Fong Mei’s point of view toward Ting An, racial ideas of Chineseness is a matter of perception: “People used to say that he was half-indian - his mother a savage. Before, Fong Mei used to search his face for traces of this, but she only saw a chiselled face, gracefully masculine, like a chinese from the north” (Lee 65). Fong Mei, who is affected by the community’s discourse about Ting An’s racial heritage and savagery, only sees him racially as Chinese. In fact, Ting An is only non-Chineseness because he is not claimed by his Chinese father. The problem of Ting An’s race gets passed on to his son, Morgan. Ironically, it is Kae who doubts Morgan’s Chineseness even though he is more knowledgeable about Chinese history and culture than she is. Kae states how “Chineseness made [her] uncomfortable”, and that “[she] didn’t ever go down to Chinatown except for the very occasional family banquet” (Lee 80-81). Although it is Morgan who teaches her the Chinese community history, Kae is still largely ignorant of his identity and sees him as a non-Chinese racially. This can be seen when Morgan explains the Janet Smith case scandal to her and asserts his Chinese identity as a source of authority: “because...ah, because she and the chinese houseboy were actually friends. And we’re chinese too, you see” (Lee 84). Kae responds by telling Morgan, “your mother’s not. She’s french-canadian” (84). In suggesting that Morgan is not Chinese because of his race, Kae reveals her racial assumptions of Chineseness based on purity. This is also seen in her attitude towards Chi, her caretaker. Kae tells readers, “In a way, [Chi] wasn’t even pure chinese (as if that were important), and she had learned her chineseness from my mother, which added tremendously

to my confusion” (154). Chi and Morgan are stigmatized in the Chinese community because they are not seen as racially Chinese, but they hold more knowledge about Chinese culture and language than Kae. I do not suggest they are more Chinese than Kae, but they certainly disrupt the idea that Chineseness is race-based.

Discourse constitutes a part of the unspoken process of Chinese identity. In the two novels, the Chinese community has been restructuring and reinterpreting themselves to assign new meanings to being Chinese. The emergence of new hegemonic power comes with new constructions of identity. Because these constructions carry with them rhetorical power, it significantly affects those who are marginalized in the community and those on the periphery, who have ambiguous identities. Even though some evidence suggests that Lee personally believes that Chineseness authentically comes from China while Canadianness is fluid, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* challenges this by presenting the ever-changing constructions of Chinese identity. The same can be said for Choy who states that “we are all Chinese”, yet the many discursive constructions of Chineseness in *The Jade Peony* suggest that the definition of “Chinese” is always changing and that there are considerable differences among the members of the community. As diasporic texts, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* demonstrate an evolving discursive construction of “Chinese”, and these constructions illuminate that the rise of the race-based nationalism in China is not only imagined but is also restrictive. From the Chinese state’s ideology and practice in enforcing the concept of Chineseness, history and ethnicity about “Chinese race” are mostly imagined constructions of the state to define their identity and ethos in order to enforce a homogeneous national identity when those inside are neither racially, ethnically, linguistically, or culturally homogeneous.

Chapter Three: Languages and Identities

As I have addressed in the previous two chapters, concerns about identity pertain to issues of defining it, disparaging identities on grounds of authenticity, and the competing discursive constructions of identity. What is also of concern, when it comes to identity, is the *means* to identify and assert a self. Language mediates this process of identification.

However, language is paradoxical; it is what Roy Miki refers to as a “vehicle of power” and “a contaminated site” (*Broken Entries* 117). The contamination or the loaded nature of language causes the lived experiences of ethnic communities to be silenced by both the Canadian hegemony and the hegemony of the community through the process of double reification. In Himani Bannerji’s essay “A Question of Silence: Reflection on Violence Against Women in Communities of Colour” from her book *The Dark Side of the Nation*, Bannerji addresses why South Asian Canadian women often suffer violence in silence by peeling apart the layers of complexity that is the twofold hegemony:

We have here a situation of mini-hegemonies confronting and conforming to a national ideological hegemony. Form and content of communities reflect this, and we continue to be constructed and excluded by the same overarching hegemony. (157)

For Bannerji, Canadian hegemony works well with the mini-hegemony of ethnic communities to create closed sociocultural spaces and fragmented political agency for minorities since the excluded ethnic community living on the margins of white Canadian society creates more boundaries and exclusions for its members. The Canadian hegemony and the mini-hegemonies converge in purpose, as they both keep ethnic minorities within rigid boundaries. Bannerji names this convergence as “double reification” and “[combines] communitization from above (state and dominant ideology or hegemonic common sense) and from below (from the subject populations themselves)” (*Dark Side of the Nation* 162).

Ideas and practices of language constitute this “double reification”: language (as in discourse) reinforces boundaries and exclusions of individuals, and what becomes categorized and segregated are also natural languages associated with these individuals. Bannerji’s earlier essay “The Sound Barrier: Translating Ourselves in Language and Experience” details the way “double reification” of language work against individuals of ethnic communities in Canada:

Even for those of us who are fluent in English or our children who grew up in Canada - the problem is a pressing one. To the extent that these children are products of our homes, modulated by our everyday life inflections (though not well-versed in the languages we bring with us) they suffer from the possibility of “otherization.” This is done by the historical separations of our worlds, understood in the context of values and practices produced by colonialism, imperialism and immediately palpable racism. All telling then, self-expression and self-reification get more and more closely integrated. (*Thinking Through* 165)

As Bannerji notes, mainstream Canadian society and ethnic community may exclude “these children” - the younger generations of ethnic communities - whether they speak English or their heritage language because the twofold hegemonies constrain self-expression by reifying values about all languages.

Reflecting the same concerns as Bannerji’s two essays, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* depict the way the twofold hegemonies of Canadian society and the Chinese community reify values about languages because of the unspoken boundaries around certain identities. Working with both fact and fiction, Sky Lee and Wayson Choy argue that there is a limit to Chinese Canadian individuals’ freedom to construct their identities and assert political autonomy through language because of the twofold hegemonies. Language expression is constrained by the twofold hegemonies on the employment of language because

these hegemonic ideologies load English and Chinese languages with values and identities, affecting perception. Just as Bannerji warns of the potential “otherization” that younger generations face from the way the two hegemonies have bestowed perceptions and values onto the heritage languages and the dominant English language, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* mark how the two hegemonies govern *who* can speak these languages and what values and identities these languages may communicate about the speaker.

In both novels, the double reification comes down to the symbiotic relationship of language and identity. While I show in my second chapter that language in discursive constructions constrains individuals through ideas of Chinese identity, this chapter demonstrates how the twofold hegemonies’ ideas of natural languages such as English, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Taishanese constrict identities. and I am interested in how identities of speakers are related to identities of language. What I mean by identities of language is the same as linguistic determinism’s definition, which sees that language inherently possesses thought, but the identity of language is formed when identity markers and values of language speakers are transferred onto languages. In the two novels, the twofold hegemonies maintain that the identity of whiteness and political-cultural capital are associated with the English language. Chinese languages, similarly, are respectively loaded with different values and identities, and because of this, they are not all equal.

Though literary critics have acknowledged the use of Chinese in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, these essays merely argue that Chinese reflects the diverse linguistic realities of Chinese Canadians in the past with varying degrees of appreciation.⁵²

⁵² As noted in the introduction, Lien Chao’s 1997 *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English* talks about the use of Chinese in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* in creating a collective history that breaks the silence. Maria N. Ng’s 1998 article “Chop Suey Writing: Sui Sin Far, Wayson Choy and Judy Fong Bates” argues that *The Jade Peony*’s use of Chinese exoticizes the text. Ng’s 1999 article “Representing Chinatown: Dr. Fu-Manchu at the *Disappearing Moon Cafe*” asserts that the use of Chinese also fuels the negative stereotypes of Chinese. Glenn Deer’s 1999 article “An Interview with Wayson Choy” asks Choy about the Chinese languages in *The Jade Peony*. Susanne Hilf’s 2000 book *Writing the Hyphen: The Articulation of Interculturalism in Contemporary Chinese-Canadian Literature* discusses the use of language in both texts; Hilf uses the examples of Chinese and translations to show how *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is more intercultural than *The Jade Peony*.

There is an absence of critical discourse that sensitively unravels the nuances of the two novels' Chinese languages in such a way that acknowledges the linguistic differences and their significance. Lee and Choy's insights about language and identity for Chinese immigrants still has resonance in the twenty-first century. Added with the complexity of the dominance of English in Canada which threatens the heritage languages, the issues of language and identity still confront Chinese diasporic communities, and these issues have been more pronounced in social sciences rather than in Canadian literary studies. For Chinese immigrants, many of their language and identity issues have simply migrated from their host countries like China and Hong Kong to their new host country Canada, fanning tensions among sub-groups. Meanwhile, the Canadian state has exacerbated these tensions and problems by being unsupportive of heritage languages, and it also unduly gives legitimacy to certain Chinese languages like Mandarin that have official status in China as a form of economic and political appeasements. What Lee and Choy's novels reveal about the present, therefore, is that the issues of language and identity are complicated by the twofold hegemonies. These problems have morphed yet persist. By engaging with how the twofold hegemonies control language and identity, the two novels imply there are limits to self-expression in our "free" society.

The Dilemma of English

At first glance, English might have seemed like the ideal, neutral, and universal language for Chinese immigrants in the past to have power over their identities in Canada. Since English had political-cultural capital in Canada, it would logically follow that Chinese immigrants could gain power and autonomy once they learn English. To a certain extent, Chinese sojourners saw English as an important skill to advance in Canadian society. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, sojourner, Mui Lan tells her son Choy Fuk, "there's that little Italian iceman. He can supply all of us if you make a special deal. You go talk English to

him!” (Lee 41). The English language is presented as a lingua franca with economic currency in Canada. To bypass the unjust prices set by the white English business owners, Mui Lan needs English to connect with other immigrant businesses. English is seen as an economic investment, and this is seen when Mui Lan makes Choy Fuk feel guilty for not taking English seriously, “we’ve spent a lot of money to send you to learn good english” (Lee 42). Investing in formal English education is equally important in *The Jade Peony*. In the third part, Sek-Lung says, “no one laughed at my efforts to learn English. Education, in whatever language, was respected” (Choy 157). Like Mui Lan, Sek-Lung’s relatives see the importance of English and education.

However, as the two novels reveal, many Chinese immigrants, even after learning English, cannot escape their racial identity. Under the racist logic of Canadian hegemony, speakers could only utilize the political-cultural capital of the English language if they had the essentialized identity markers associated with English such as whiteness. In *The Jade Peony*, Choy articulates the futility in the Chinese sojourners’ efforts to structurally assimilate:

Around me were ‘uncles’ who had gone to universities in the 1920s and ‘30s but remained unemployable because only Canadian citizens could qualify as professionals. For if you were Chinese, even if you were born in Canada, you were an educated *alien* - never to be a citizen, never a Canadian with the right to vote - ‘an educated fool’ in the words of some old China men. (Choy 157-158)

The oxymoronic “educated fool” underscores the frustrations of Chinese immigrants and the absurd way Canadian society ostracizes Chinese immigrants on the basis of race. In a similar way, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* illustrates how Beatrice is rejected by the University of British Columbia in 1950. In order to give a plausible reason for rejecting Beatrice, the administrators unreasonably say that “her english marks were not good enough” even though

Beatrice is brought up in Canada (Lee 239). The problem is not Beatrice's inability: "the head of the department couldn't even look at [Beatrice] without hate oozing from every pore. Pure envy and jealousy that a mere girl, and Chinese to boot, should be so gifted" (Lee 239). By providing the head of the department's subjective perspective, Lee demonstrates that it is "hate" towards Chinese ethnic identity that prevents Chinese immigrants to utilize English and Canadian knowledge resources for self-actualization.

Ostracization from the English Canadian society fuels the isolation of Chinese communities, so the first-generation Chinese sojourners continue to associate English with the identity of whiteness. Lee and Choy contend that these views of the Chinese community and the Canadian state ideology converge in racializing English, and it is this convergence that deters the younger generations to embrace English freely. This convergence, as Bannerji's essay specifies, is when the twofold hegemonies work together through "double reification, combining communitization from above (state and dominant ideology or hegemonic common sense) and from below (from the subject populations themselves)" (*Thinking Through* 162). While Lee and Choy give sympathetic portrayals of how earlier generations of the Chinese community are still affected by racism despite learning English, the earlier generations begin to form a rigid, dominant ideology of English, which excludes younger generations and silences their alternative views in the community. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, there is a scene where old Chinese sojourners and the newer generation discuss the "Janet Smith" bill in the legislature. In response to suggestions by the younger generation, Lee Chong scolds them, "what do you know about what it was like in the old days? Sure, you think you know a bit of their devil tongue, and you start to think like them. You younger ones have no idea of the odds against us" (Lee 266). By using the English translation "devil tongue" for the Cantonese 鬼話 as opposed to alternative translations like "English" or "ghost talk", Lee emphasizes the Chinese sojourners' distrustful attitude towards English, and "devil

tongue” suggests English is a language that corrupts morally and physically.⁵³ Because of the colonial history of the Cantonese phrase 鬼話, there is an insinuation that Lee Chong and older generations are fearful and reluctant of any interaction with white Canadians because of historical trauma and past betrayals. These beliefs cause tensions between the older generation and the younger generation, as the older generation re-enforce a rigid boundary of languages and identities. In *The Jade Peony*, the first generation sojourners become fearful that younger generations absorb too much English and fail to maintain an essentialized Chinese identity: “all the Chinatown adults were worried over those of us recently born in Canada, born ‘neither this nor that,’ neither Chinese nor Canadian, born without understanding the boundaries, born *mo no* - no brain” (Choy 152). Earlier generations believe that in absorbing English, younger generations begin to suffer the condition of a failure to belong. The “neither this nor that” exemplify the liminality and the lack of belonging.

It is important to consider that this condition of the younger generation’s liminality is an identity that older generations impose rather than what younger generations actually feel. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Lee pronounces more explicitly how constricting this imposition is: “racial prejudice helped disconnect Beatrice from the larger community outside of Chinatown. Then, the old chinamen added their two cents’ worth by sneering at the canadian-born: ‘Not quite three, not quite four, nowhere’” (Lee 196). Because Beatrice is Canadian-born and speaks English, she triggers the anxiety within older generations that the newer generations of Chinese Canadians are losing their Chinese identity and adopting an identity that does not belong to them. Similar to Choy’s “neither this nor that”, Lee’s “not quite three, not quite four”, which is a translation of the Cantonese 唔三唔四, is a reference to someone or something that is ambiguous, improper, and liminal.⁵⁴ Much like the Canadian

⁵³ 鬼話 is *gwai²waa⁶* in jyutping, and the pinyin is *guǐhuà*.

⁵⁴ 唔三唔四 *m² saam² m² sei²*

hegemony that bars her from receiving an education, the ethnic community that prevents Beatrice from constructing her own identity with English.

Nonetheless, Lee and Choy are attentive about the ramifications of learning English in Canada. For younger generations, they undergo linguistic assimilation to English as well as cultural assimilation. For Lee and Choy, English in Canada has attachments to hegemonic Canadian culture, so it is loaded with cultural ideologies. As the two novels show, individuals cannot learn English neutrally and free from the hegemonic culture, which affects the younger generations' perceptions of their heritage language and culture. In the third part of *The Jade Peony*, Sek-Lung is most affected by the way hegemonic Canadian culture inordinately associates English with notions of superiority.

I was sent to my room and grew even more to hate the Chinky Language that made such a fool of me. I hated the Toisan words, the complex of village dialects that would trip up my tongue. I wished I were someone else, someone like Freddy Bartholomew, who was rich and lived in a grand house and did not have to know a single Chinese word. (Choy 158)

Sek-Lung's hatred of Chinese and the desire to be white is telling of the frustrations with learning English within the two-fold hegemonies, but Sek-Lung's derogatory words "Chinky Language" reflect that he has adopted the attitudes of hegemonic Canadian culture towards ethnic communities. Choy suggests that Sek-Lung's sense of superiority is the result of the Canadian hegemonic culture that values English. A postman praises Sek-Lung saying "you're a smart young fella", for being able to speak English (Choy 159). Sek-Lung's attitude is also the result of his family's forceful imposition of the Chinese language and identity on him. Though not as denigratory as Sek-Lung's attitude towards Chinese language and not even specifically engaging with Chinese, *Disappearing Moon Cafe's* Beatrice still absorbs a sense of superiority because of the westernized cultural landscape she grows up in and her

economic class. Beatrice is characterized by her ideology of romantic liberalism. In imagining how her mother Beatrice would react, Kae envisions Beatrice's judgment of Mui Lan:

'Love is the most fundamental and at the same time the most exalted purpose we have in this life. You' - probably meaning Mui Lan - 'can't ignore that noble principle, to breed men and women like they were cattle or pigs.' Then she'd go back to her grand piano. (Lee 221)

For Beatrice, the notion of love is the ultimate image of truth and authenticity of one's self and emotions, and she perceives Mui Lan, as part of the older generation, as unable to grasp love as a project of self-realization. This is related to romantic liberalism, where a life of authentic and dedicated self-expression and realization is the best way to gain individuality. Lee's characterization of Beatrice as a rich heiress in comparison to Mui Lan's impoverished background shrouds Beatrice's judgment with heavy irony because Beatrice's individuality and sense of authenticity based on Canadian hegemonic notions of liberalism and choice. Beatrice is also able to have some semblance of individuality because of the new freedoms given to Chinese Canadians after World War II. Though the text suggests that Kae speaks Chinese, as a fourth-generation Chinese Canadian, she feels more disconnected from her Chinese culture than her mother, Beatrice, and grandmother, Fong Mei, and she is aware of her westernized gaze towards Chinese culture.

As *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* suggest, the twofold hegemonies make it difficult for Chinese Canadians to construct their identity using English because English, while a political-cultural capital, is fixed with a racial identity of non-Chineseness. From a hegemonic Chinese cultural perspective, English demonstrates non-Chineseness. For the Canadian hegemony, speaking English is not sufficient to grant structural participation in society.

Hegemonic powers create the illusion that English and heritage language are mutually exclusive. Many Chinese Canadians often feel like they must choose between English and Chinese, so learning English becomes fraught. Jia et al.'s 2014 study of 94 Chinese immigrant students in Waterloo and Toronto outlines this dilemma:

Immigrants arrive in Canada hoping to master English literacy to achieve their academic and career goals and therefore enjoy the same lifestyle as members of the dominant group. On the other hand, they hope to retain their heritage language, traditions, and practices. (257)

As Jia et al. shows, Chinese Canadians feel like they must choose between learning English or maintaining their heritage languages. This dilemma is because there is scant funding in helping immigrants retain their heritage languages through initiatives like language schools. The learning of English in Canada also disseminates more than just linguistic symbols, which threatens heritage language and culture. In Rosalie K.S. Hilde's 2018 *Making Critical Sense of Immigrant Experience*, she includes a Hong Kong Chinese Canadian man's account of learning English: "I learned how they communicate; how they use certain terms to describe things; some local Canadian ways of doing things; how they make small talk. Slowly I learned how to act like a Canadian" (87). Much like how Choy's Sek-Lung man absorbs the colonial culture, this man shows that learning English in Canada means you are absorbing more than just words; you have to assimilate to the mannerisms and cultural practices. This absorption of cultural practices may override existing heritage culture. English has political-cultural capital and economic currency, but it may affect the heritage language.

Many Chinese Canadians feel they have to choose between English and their heritage language because English is often equated with modernity and progress, whereas heritage language is associated with a traditional identity. The correlation between English and structural participation in Canadian society, which the two novels point to, was more strongly

emphasized after the policy of multiculturalism was adopted. Many critics were worried that the policy of multiculturalism would prevent the modernization of Canada because the policy entails federal support for heritage culture and language (Elliot 168). In 1975, sociologist Warren Kalbach wrote:

Successful retention of language and culture on the part of minority ethnic populations may impede social change by preventing their members from acquiring the skills they need to effectively compete in the ongoing industrial and technological revolution. (qtd. in Elliot 168)

Kalbach saw the retention of ethnic languages and cultures as "emotional gratification", whereas English is posited as a promising language that grants modernity to society and knowledge to immigrants (Elliot 168). Considering the way Chinese Canadians are barred from structural participation in *The Jade Peony* and *Disappearing Moon Cafe* despite being English speakers, Kalbach's argument for adopting English seems hollow.

Views like Kalbach's gives empty promises to Chinese Canadians about the "benefits" of linguistic assimilation, which *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* expose. Many Chinese Canadians still face the expectation for linguistic assimilation. In Hilde's book, she investigates the experiences of racism that Hong Kong Chinese immigrants face in Canada in the twenty-first century. Despite having proficiency in English, many Hong Kong Chinese immigrants whom Hilde interviewed were baffled as to why their English and professional knowledge were being discounted. Citing one participant, Hilde writes, "She couldn't make sense of her Canadian experience. Why were her highly valued skills and abilities not recognized in the Canadian workplace?" (114). Similar to the absurd logic captured in Lee and Choy's novels, the term "Canadian experience" is now used to discount English language abilities by hegemonic Canadian culture. This shows that for immigrants who are not white, speaking English does not fully assure they can structurally participate in Canadian society.

‘A language is a dialect with an army and navy’

In the 1940s, Max Weinreich famously wrote his aphorism in Yiddish that “a language is a dialect that has an army and navy” to express the criteria distinguishing between dialects and languages (Edwards 5). Even though sociolinguistics separates a dialect and a language based on mutual intelligibility, social and political conditions have a greater role in influencing social perception on statuses of languages. This means that some languages are classified as dialects because of social conventions, prejudices, and perceived deficiencies. Apart from the arbitrary boundary that separates languages and dialects, pejorative views also lead to the translation of real linguistic differences among a class of languages into a hierarchal structure.

The discussion of the hierarchicalization of language is particularly relevant to Chinese languages. Most Chinese languages like Mandarin, Cantonese, and Taishanese are mutually unintelligible, but according to the Chinese government, Mandarin is a language, and all other are just dialects. The ideal language to express the Chinese identity for the mainland Chinese government is Mandarin Chinese. Mandarin’s national language status was granted by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 to instill cultural and national unity through linguistic unification. Mandarin became an official language not because it was the most popular language; it became an official language because the PRC leaders spoke Mandarin, and it was a language spoken in northern China, a region that traditionally held the political power. Many of its speakers were racially Han Chinese, the ethnic identities that PRC leaders wanted to promote. At the same time, in lieu of the traditional Chinese script that Taiwan and Hong Kong use, the simplified Chinese script was also constructed and disseminated at that time to facilitate the national identity. In the twenty-first century, the ruling Communist Party has tried to weaken regional loyalties through strong linguistic imperialism to dissuade individuals from feeling connected to their local heritage. The aim is

to unify China by the common language Mandarin with a northern heritage by the domination of southern linguistic varieties such as Cantonese, Shanghainese, Hokkien, to name a few, and ethnic languages spoken by Uyghurs, Mongolians, and Tibetans.

In Canada, the Canadian state historically had never been very supportive as far as promotion of immigrant languages like Chinese is concerned. The Canadian state believed and still believes that the ideal Canadian cultural identity and language is English, and in Quebec, French is permissible. Canadian state generally did not want to give any other languages legitimacy, and this can be seen from the evolving multiculturalism policy, which allows for some superficial attempts about the importance of language retention from the 1970s until the 1990s. With regards to Chinese languages, the Canadian state's attitude until the twenty-first century can be described as mercurial. On the one hand, the Canadian state promoted linguistic assimilation in practices such as criticizing Chinese-only signs. On the other hand, the state lauded the diverse languages that Chinese immigrants bring to the Canadian mosaic. The contrasting dichotomy between anglo-conformity and cultural pluralism parallels the state's attitude towards the Chinese immigrants throughout time. Chinese immigrants are either identified by the state as an industrious group of model minorities or a threatening hoard of people. The Canadian state has not always been sensitive to the nuances of Chinese languages and identities either. In 1991 and 1996, Statistics Canada did not distinctively classify the difference between Chinese languages, and the organization homogenized all Chinese into one category of "Chinese" ("Immigrant Languages in Canada"). In 2001, Statistics Canada only distinguished three Chinese languages of Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hakka ("Immigrant Languages in Canada"). Only in 2006 did the organization make distinctions for Taiwanese, Chaochow, Fukien (or Hokkein) and Shanghainese, and even though these categories were maintained in the 2011 Census, these languages are often still classified by language specialists as "dialect" as opposed to

“languages” (“Immigrant Languages in Canada”). In other words, the Canadian state has mostly homogenized the Chinese languages and Chinese immigrants, and this largely works to the advantage of the Chinese state’s interests.

At present, the Canadian hegemony collaborates with Chinese nationalist interests to construct a rigid paragon of Chinese languages. From the rising hegemony of the Mainland Chinese government, along with the wealthy mainland Chinese immigrants in the twenty-first century, the Canadian state is now suddenly very supportive of the promotion of Mandarin in the country. Though I am not suggesting that this promotion should be stopped, I do not think the Canadian state is promoting the language because of the state’s newfound liberal benevolence. Though traditionally unsympathetic to the maintenance of minority languages, the Canadian state now sees the high political-cultural capital and economic currency of Mandarin because the state seeks to benefit from China economically. China is now one of Canada’s biggest trading partners. Many mainland Chinese students pump money into universities and public education. Many Chinese foreign investors set up businesses in Canada. Reflective of this newfound respect towards Chinese language and identity is the government’s allowing of Confucius Institute into different educational institutions in Canada that include universities, secondary and primary schools. Unsurprisingly, the reason why the Canadian state promotes Mandarin Chinese is that the language smooths the path for better economic opportunities with the Chinese state. The consequence of this is that the Canadian state now bestows more legitimacy on Mandarin, China’s official language, than any other Chinese languages.

Many Chinese Canadians do not agree that language maintenance is necessary to identify as “Chinese” is debatable. Aside from deciding whether to maintain heritage language, the question of *which* Chinese language is highly contentious in the Chinese diaspora. Many Mandarin and Cantonese speakers, for example, are vocal about protecting of

their spoken Chinese language variety because they believe that their own brand of language legitimately represents their understanding of Chinese identity. The tensions between Cantonese and Mandarin in the Chinese diasporic community in Canada are growing due to linguistic and cultural differences. Not to diminish the issues of the present, but the language issues that are caused by the two cultural hegemonies have occurred before. As I have illustrated, the inequality of Chinese languages in Canada and China stems from hegemonic ideas about political status, money, ethnic identity, and class.

Lee and Choy's novels represent Taishanese, which is a Chinese language that had not only been marginalized by Canada but also by China. Taishanese is one of the main languages spoken by the Chinese sojourners in the two novels, much like their historical counterparts. Lee and Choy illustrate that many Chinese Canadians in the past spoke Taishanese among themselves to consciously and freely to express one's identity and relations to one another, fostering a sense of collective membership. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, the use of kinship terms can be a conscious expression of a character's identity and relationship with another character in the social structure. An example of this is when Kae continually refers to her paternal grandmother as "Ngen ngen". Though Lee does not explicitly state what Chinese this is, the phrase is distinctively Taishanese. By using "Ngen ngen" and not the English "grandmother" or Cantonese "ma-ma", Lee illustrates Kae's Chinese linguistic and cultural identity. Lee's narrative also gives glimpses of Kae's mother Beatrice and aunt Suzie calling their paternal grandmother "Ngen ngen" to show through the Chinese term for kinship that there is some semblance of cultural identity. In less implicit ways than Lee, Choy inserts a variety of Chinese languages and explicitly names them, and one possible reason for this could be the difference in Choy and Lee's linguistic upbringing. Lee grew up speaking Taishanese and Cantonese at home with her parents ("Sky Lee talks" 384). Choy noted in an interview that "the language memory [he] [has] inherited from

Chinatown has somehow transmuted into the narrative voices in [his] writing", and this "language memory" includes the Sam Yup (Sanyi or Three Counties) dialects and Sze Yup (Siyi or Four Counties) village dialects (Deer 35). Nonetheless, in the first chapter of *The Jade Peony*, Choy, like Lee, provides an illustration of how a shared sense of language and identity fosters collective membership. The Father greets Wong Suk in Cantonese "'*Sihk faahn mai-ahh?* Have you had your rice yet?'" which Jook-Liang states is a "more formal phrase than Stepmother's village *Haeck chan mai-ah!* Greeting - Eat dinner, yet!" (Choy 17). Though these characters seem to know all of these Chinese languages, Taishanese is the preferred language among the characters. Choy writes how Wong Suk replies with "'no, not yet, thank you, so good of you to ask,'" "in a Toisan dialect" to imply the family "needn't be so formal" (Choy 18). Wong Suk's conscious use of Taishanese language in the conversation despite the Father's initiation of Cantonese sends an implicit message of closeness and collective understanding.

Although Taishanese is portrayed as an important language for Chinese sojourners to express their identity, Lee and Choy emphasize in the narrative the way Chinese cultural imperialism limits the legitimate status of Taishanese and other mainly oral languages. Chinese cultural imperialism, whether it was the Qing dynasty or the current Communist party, saw written Chinese as crucial to identity construction; cultural imperialism requires linguistic imperialism. In *The Jade Peony*, Kiam, as a second generation Chinese Canadian, studies the two languages "in the Mission Church basement" even though Kiam's family speaks the Four Counties Dialects (Choy 8). Choy's reference to the Mission Church basement is a historical allusion to how any formal Chinese education in Vancouver in the twentieth century, which varied in quality, still copied traditional Chinese education that was either in Mandarin or Cantonese.

Unlike Cantonese and Mandarin, Taishanese and other Chinese dialects have never corresponded to a writing system, which affects the language's prestige and legitimacy. The status of a language is always tied to issues of illiteracy and poverty. Considering that Chinese sojourners were impoverished and spoke "non-standardized dialects", speakers of Cantonese and Mandarin have always had more political and economic power, which bolstered the two languages' sociopolitical and economic currency compared with any other Chinese languages (Evans 5).⁵⁵ Many Chinese sojourners in the two novels do not get the same opportunity as Kiam, and their illiteracy in dominant Chinese languages leads to issues of identity and power. In *The Jade Peony*, the Stepmother, who has limited Chinese literacy, must rely on her literate friend, Suling, and her written script to gain power over her son Sek-Lung. She asks Sek-Lung to "see how beautiful [Suling's] calligraphy is" as a way to entice Sek-Lung to embrace the Chinese language (Choy 154). Unfortunately, Stepmother can only draw on the written script's aesthetic powers rather than its knowledge, so Sek-Lung, who becomes more literate in English instead, remains unaffected by Stepmother's persuasion. Linguistic power also corresponds to political power. In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, the internal conflict and power struggle within the Chinese associations from the "Janet Smith" bill boils down to the differences in literacy between illiterate first-generation Chinese sojourners and the literate descendants. As Lee portrays, the literate Chinese descendants gain power in these associations because they have English and Chinese literacy to contest the English Canadian government and gain support from the Chinese consul. Lee does not depreciate the first-generation Chinese sojourners, but her portrayal evinces sympathy. Towards the end, the elderly first generation Chinese sojourner Lee Chong tells a dying Gwei Chong, "What were we but ignorant labourers? Couldn't hardly read or write in our own

⁵⁵ A language's prestige depends on political-cultural capital, and arguably, being attached to a written script and being an official language of the state and education praxis can give the language sociopolitical and economic currency. In the case of Cantonese and Mandarin, historically, they had been connected to the written script, and the Chinese formal education in the past and Qing dynasty officials used these two language varieties.

tang language, never mind theirs” (Lee 271). From the interrogative syntax, the collective pronoun, and diction of “ignorant”, Lee expresses the sense of helplessness and shame that first-generation Chinese sojourners Lee Chong and Gwei feel towards their illiteracy. Illiteracy and shame come from being too impoverished to obtain a formal education, be it in China or Canada, in order to gain power, and the fact that many Chinese sojourners could not write themselves in their own language or in English resulted in their silenced history. The lack of legitimacy for their spoken dialect means there is a limit to how freely Chinese sojourners could express or construct their identity.

For descendants like Lee and Choy, they feel very self-conscious towards their heritage language. Lee's self-consciousness comes from her parents' illiteracy. In an interview back in 1995, Lee said that she spoke enough Taishanese to get by (“Is there a mind without media anymore?” 384). To account for why her Taishanese is poor, Lee reasons it is because of her parents: “My parents are not very articulate. When you talk about your mother being high-school educated, my parents were illiterate, and of course the same kind of very bleak, morbid, harsh kind of village types. They were not very verbal” (“Is there a mind without media anymore?” 384). Lee felt that her parents' working-class background and education level meant that she was not able to learn the heritage language well. For Choy, his embarrassment and shame are due to the stigma attached to his heritage language:

Ironically, I speak a “Vancouverese,” which is a very elementary Toisanese, mixed Cantonese vocabulary, mixed English grammar, oh a kind of junkyard mix. It surely must pain those who hear me speak any Chinese whatsoever! After I leave the room, I suspect they double over with laughter. (Deer 36)

Because “Vancouverese” does not correspond to a standard and legitimate variety, Choy feels self-conscious about this variety, despite the fact that it existed in the linguistic reality of Chinese sojourners in the 1930s and 1940s Chinatown. Even though these comments from

Lee and Choy reveal their self-conscious judgment of their own language, there is evidence that their embarrassment comes from the external understanding of what constitutes as legitimate Chinese language expression.

The descendants of Chinese sojourners have to deal with the different Chinese cultural imperialisms that new Chinese immigrants brought with them. When the two books were published in the 1990s, there was a wave of Hong Kong immigrants coming to Canada, bringing in their perceptions of correct Chinese language and identity. Unlike the depicted sojourners in the novels and their descendants, most Hong Kong immigrants had the privilege of a bilingual Chinese and English education, economic clout, and a geographical territory to claim their identity as Chinese and British. Since Lee was brought up by Chinese sojourners who spoke Taishanese, her accent became looked down upon by Hong Kong immigrants, who spoke only Cantonese:

I realized that none of my Hong Kong friends spoke Toisanese. In fact, they laughed at my accent, right? They're very class conscious, people from Hong Kong (laugh). I guess I shouldn't stereotype, but I found that they were prejudiced against Canadian-born - even more so than whites. That's why there's such a big rift between Canadian-born and new immigrants. (*Jin Guo* 95)

When these Hong Kong immigrants receive Lee's Taishanese and Chinese accent with derision, they communicate their prejudice towards the oral languages of the old diaspora. These Hong Kong immigrants had the liberty to assert legitimacy in their Cantonese language and Hong Kong culture because their origin, though in a separate geographical locale, is Hong Kong with Cantonese as a standardized lingua franca in government, education, and other public institutions and their culture could thrive in a semi-autonomous state.

Like the problematic way that Lee's Taishanese accent is met with derision by Hong Kong immigrants, the two novels critically question why Chinese languages are used to

support an inequitable social structure in the Chinese sojourner society. In the two novels, the first generation of Chinese immigrants or Chinese sojourners (also known as *laowahkiu*), who hail from the Canton province, are very conscious of one another's clan affiliation and social standing. As Choy indicates, Chinese sojourners attached values to certain clans: "[the sojourners] would suggest that so-and-so from that little village was 'that kind'" (Deer 36). Their judgments are affected by the past Chinese cultural norms, and language became a way to reinforce these constructions of identities. Choy writes, "when [the Chinese sojourners] said 'that kind' [they] would say it in a dialect that had a classier or lower intonation or status, depending upon [their] meaning" (Deer 36). In *The Jade Peony*, Choy explicitly details Poh-Poh's code-switching, which determines not only the hierarchy of languages but also identities. In the first part of the novel, Jook-Liang tells readers, "Poh-Poh spoke her *Sze-yup*, Four County village dialect, to me and Jung, but not always to Kiam, the First Son. With him, she spoke Cantonese and a little Mandarin" (Choy 8). To construct a hierarchy of identities in the familial social structure, Poh-Poh uses Cantonese and Mandarin, languages that are associated with prestige, to associate with the higher ranking member such as the First Son Kiam, who is descended from the first wife, while using lower varieties *Sze-yup* with the daughter, Jook-Liang, and the adopted son, Jung. Alternatively, speaking the Four Counties dialect to Jook-Liang and Jung may indicate Poh-Poh's social identification with the two children, as this language is her most instinctive language. Still, the use of language to construct social hierarchy becomes more oppressive when it comes to Poh-Poh's treatment of the "Stepmother" in *The Jade Peony*. At the detriment of the Stepmother and her relationship with her biological children, Poh-Poh names her "Stepmother" to negotiate the old customs of China that sees second wives as inferior with the new ways of Canada, which frowns upon concubines. Poh-Poh also utilizes code-switching as a tool to mark the Stepmother's social standing. As Jook-Liang reveals, "Whenever Stepmother was around, Poh-Poh used another

but similar village dialect, in a more clipped fashion, as many adults do when they think you might be the village fool, too worthless or too young, or not from their district.” (Choy 8). By speaking a dialect more “clipped” with the mother, Poh-Poh discloses her perception of the Stepmother as a social inferior.

Certain Chinese languages are perceived as lowly because their speakers occupy a lower status in the social structure. While Poh-Poh’s attitude towards Stepmother may point to issues of traditional patriarchal Chinese cultural norms where the mother-in-law wields higher power than the wife, Choy’s portrayal of Stepmother reveals a larger issue in language and identity: the social inferiority of the language speakers affects the status of the language. The unjust treatment of the Stepmother comes from the lack of status Stepmother had before arriving in Canada. In the narrative, Jook-Liang tells readers that Stepmother “[was] sold into Father’s Canton merchant family” (Choy 6). Since the Stepmother is sold to the family, the Stepmother is not in control of her language and identity. In the eyes of the children, Stepmother’s language and identity are inextricable from her poverty: “she came with no education, with a village dialect as poor as she was” (Choy 5). The inseparability of language and identity is more aesthetically illustrated in the third part when Sek-Lung narrates how “Stepmother’s *Sun Wei* village accent, blunt and final *burned* into [his] ears while she sizzled the late night stir-fry” (Choy 156; emphasis added). The fiery imagery of the stir-fry and the diction of “burned” constructs an oppressive heat that is emblematic of Stepmother’s circumstances in the household, where her voice is mostly unheeded, and she does not have a choice about her domestic duties. The synesthesia of “burned” bridges the oppressive sense of her circumstances with her language and voice. Being the narrator of this moment, Sek-Lung perceives Stepmother’s accent with discomfort, which can be attributed to her circumstances or the way he is tainted by the cultural norms of the house. Therefore, when it comes to my earlier reference that Stepmother’s “*Haeck chan mai-ah!* Greeting - Eat dinner,

yet!” is portrayed as less formal than the father’s Cantonese greeting, Choy is not saying that Stepmother’s dialect is inherently inferior, but Jook-Liang *perceives* it as so because she has absorbed the cultural hegemony set by Poh-Poh (Choy 17). Because Poh-Poh exerts control over the familial, social structure in placing the Stepmother’s identity as the most inferior, the children, who absorb these conscious and unconscious rules, view Stepmother’s language as the most informal.

While Stepmother’s language and identity have been controlled by Poh-Poh and her brand of Chinese cultural imperialism, Choy’s characterization of Poh-Poh provides a cause for her enforcement of Chinese cultural imperialism, and this not only humanizes Chinese sojourners but also show how these attitudes are recycled. In an interview, Choy stipulates how the Chinese sojourners came to learn so many dialects:

Many of the Chinese were sojourners then and, in their villages, the Chinese children were often bought and sold and put in different households in a sort of slave/servant situation. So they learned other dialects (Choy, “Intercultural” 279).

In the narrative, Poh-Poh’s linguistic knowledge and her knowledge of the language’s associated values are the results of her upbringing. Jook-Liang’s biography of Poh-Poh in the first chapter explains this: “the Chins were refugees from Manchuria after the Japanese seized the territory. [...] the women of the rich Chin family who ‘owned’ Poh-Poh were used to wielding the whip and bamboo rods as freely on their fourteen servants as on the oxen and pigs” (Choy 7). Like Stepmother, Poh-Poh is sold to a family at a young age, but Poh-Poh internalizes the oppression that she faces, and she enforces the cultural imperialism, which sees certain languages and identities as inferior, at the detriment of Stepmother.

Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe* also engages with the issues of class and language, albeit in a different manner. Much like the way Choy’s Poh-Poh enforces her notions of language and identity, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*’s Mui Lan and Fong Mei constitute Lee’s

criticism of how economic success in the new cultural landscape can allow the once oppressed Chinese sojourners to use their new status to hegemonize other social groups in the community. In the text, Mui Lan gets rid of her lower clan status in China because her husband Gwei Chang is in the merchant class. People in Chinatown are disdainful of Mui Lan because “she had done very well for an ignorant village woman, and under the same circumstances in which a lot of people had not done very well at all” (Lee 29). Mui Lan does not have to live under the burden of her “village woman” status because she reaps the riches of managing a restaurant, and it annoys patrons that she still carries “chronic pain on her face” as if she still suffers the poverty of other people in Chinatown (29). Mui Lan’s Cantonese phrase, “Ahh go die!”, while crass, is an affectionate phrase that presents Mui Lan as the patrons’ social equal (Lee 30). Mui Lan’s use of language, in its crassness and self-effacing humility, seeks to appeal to her patrons as she remarks loudly to patrons, “we’re almost broke! These old, overseas chinese are so tightfisted they can’t even afford a cup of hot water, never mind a restaurant meal” (Lee 29). Mui Lan constructs a closer relationship with the patrons by appearing just as destitute as them. Despite being a “village woman” in the past, Mui Lan justifies her oppressive actions towards other women using the old logic of the customs. Because Mui Lan seeks a child to cure the loneliness she feels in Gold Mountain, she persuades Fong Mei to accept Song An as a surrogate. To do so, Mui Lan resorts to old customs of the village and tells Fong Mei, ““if we were in the village, not even your father would dare to say a thing. Who else would have patience and virtue to keep a big-eating cow?”” (Lee 72). The old customs and beliefs also play a role in the justification to hire Song An as the surrogate because Song An is a Hakka woman who is a waitress and previously married and thus “cheap and easily available” (Lee 112).

Unlike Mui Lan, who rises just within the social structure of Chinatown, Fong Mei’s growth is more significant. At first, the novel shows Fong Mei’s humble beginnings from

“the southern cantonese village of O Saan, in Hoy Saan district” (Lee 49). Fong Mei shreds the cultural baggage of her accent and her identity and resorts to using the same logic of the customs that once oppressed her. Fong Mei views Song An’s identity as a single, working Hakka woman from the lens of patriarchy: “[T]he waitress belonged to that other class of women - the one without male patronage, barely existing, mute in their misery” (Lee 112). As Fong Mei bears more children to fulfil her duty, Fong Mei rises in social status in the family structure and the community. Because of her new economic clout, Fong Mei casts off any self-consciousness of her village origins that differentiate her from her father-in-law. In the fourth chapter “Ties to the Land - A Ticket Out”, Fong Mei does not feel inferior to Gwei Chang’s elder sister who lives in Hong Kong, and this implies that the patrilineal extended family that both Mui Lan and Fong Mei marry into is mainly Cantonese speaking. Lee writes, “by then Fong Mei had money and a very fine sense of herself; listening to her talk, anyone of the great Shanghai banking or textile ‘hundred surnames’ would have done. So what if they didn’t speak the same village dialect!” (167). Because of Fong Mei’s money, “village dialect[s]” no longer matter. Fong Mei's wealth trumps her village origins and her dialect. Fong Mei’s wealth also means her identity is no longer an issue with English authorities, and she becomes a respected individual in the eyes of the state despite her language. This respect is shown when Fong Mei gets Morgan incarcerated for socializing with Suzie. Lee highlights the obsequious attitude of the chief of police in her narration: “Madame Wong this, Madam Wong that, Madame Wong what a laugh! She sold him a downtown eastside tenement building. Sure, found him a chinaman bossboy to collect the rent too, made it real easy for him” (Lee 235). Fong Mei’s economic power makes her language less defined as a village woman's or of an undesirable immigrant's; instead, her language now has rhetorical power to manipulate the Canadian justice system.

Apart from the relationship between Chinese languages and class, Chinese languages and race is another issue that Lee and Choy explore. *Disappearing Moon Cafe* challenges the assumption that Chinese speakers must be of a certain race. In depicting the first generation of Chinese sojourners, Lee illustrates a fluidity in Chinese languages and racial identity. The characterization of Kelora as an Indigenous woman who speaks Chinese is an example of this. Even though in reality, language and racial identity are fluid, certain identities are still blocked from integrating with the Chinese community. Kelora is brought up by Old Chen, an old Chinese sojourner, Kelora destabilizes Gwei Chong's assumption that Chinese must be spoken by a person of Chinese ethnicity. When Gwei Chong notices Kelora speaking his language, he is displeased: "'You speak Chinese,' he said, indignant, unwilling to believe what he saw before him" (Lee 3). By characterizing Kelora as an Indigenous woman who speaks Chinese, Lee disrupts the assumption that language easily identifies a person's race. Apart from Kelora, Ting An and Morgan are also characters who use Chinese to distinguish their Chineseness. Kae overhears Morgan speaking to her mother in her village dialect: "I distinctly heard Morgan speak to my mother in our own village dialect. He said ominously, 'You think just because you have money to buy people, you don't have to face your crimes!'" (Lee 106). While Lee does not indicate what village dialect is used, Morgan, who has been isolated by the Chinese community because of his whiteness, uses Chinese to claim the cultural identity he is denied. However, he is still not considered Chinese by many characters in the story. While Kelora, Ting An, and Morgan are not accepted as Chinese despite speaking the language, Nellie Yip in *The Jade Peony* is included in the Chinese community despite being white. There is ample description of Nellie's linguistic prowess:

There were Yip Gong and his wife, Nellie, a white woman who had been educated in both China and the United States, lived in New York, and fluently spoke five Chinese dialects, spoke them better than those born into the language. With her perfect

unerring district accents, Mrs. Nellie Yip would berate any Chinaman who dared to cross her path or dared to match wits with her. Like Poh-Poh, she could criss-cross into a variety of dialects - pidgins, formal or informal - and snap out, a hundred sayings, enough to slaughter any peasant or mandarin attempt at a comeback. (Choy 105-106)

Nellie is characterized as the exception in the community as someone who is accepted and respected even though she is a white woman: “Nellie Yip was also one of the midwives most trusted to help with the delivery of Chinatown babies” (Choy 106). Rather than elicit disgust and disbelief from people, Nellie gets respect for her linguistic proficiency. The difference between the greater respect towards Nellie than towards the non-Chinese characters in Lee’s novel is not because she has more language ability, but because she is married to a Chinese man; she is granted the legitimate status that Kelora, Ting An, and Morgan lack. The legitimate status, added to her whiteness and education, assures that her Chinese language is potent enough to assert her identity and belonging

As Disappearing Moon Cafe and *The Jade Peony* illustrate, Chinese cultural imperialism and Canadian hegemony construct barriers for Chinese Canadians to freely claim an identity through using English and/or Chinese. I have attempted to show how Lee and Choy’s critique resonates with Chinese immigrants’ issues of language and identity in Canada today. My conclusions about language and identity highlight that language is one of the constituent elements of diasporic subjectivity and that the past, which is fictionalized by Lee and Choy, is inscribed in the present. Chinese Canadians, like many ethnic groups, have not escaped the history of Canada and China despite achieving greater economic and social progress. As Smaro Kamboureli’s *Scandalous Bodies* notes, “progress does not necessarily transform history” (23). In the same way that Larissa Lai’s *Slanting the I, Imagining We* is skeptical about a linear view of Asian Canadian history and literature, Kamboureli writes:

Envisaging a progressivist ‘end’ to today’s cultural and social malaise may sound like a worthwhile and heroic project. Nevertheless, it is the kind of project that, I believe, attempts to transgress the coercion of historical paradigms, to exit from history instead of employing history against itself; it forfeits the reality of contamination and the perils implicit in emancipatory discourses. (24)

Disappearing Moon Cafe and *The Jade Peony* avoid “progressivist ‘end’” representing the unresolved tension among languages.⁵⁶ The hopes of emancipation or progress from possessing English and/or Chinese is limited because natural languages like English, Mandarin, and Cantonese are associated with conflicting cultural and class perspectives and ethnolinguistic loyalties, and these problems constitute what Kamboureli sees as “the reality of contamination” and the “perils implicit in emancipatory discourses” (24).

My suggestion is not that Chinese Canadians have no political agency, or that there is little potentiality to construct an identity using language. There is always a limit for diasporic subjectivity because of language, which is not easily resolved, and this is something Roy Miki has observed when he states that Asian Canadian authors speak “out of the finitude of their subjectivities” (*Broken Entries* 117). As diasporic subjects, Lee and Choy know that their high command of the English language came at the cost of their heritage language. As Choy states in one interview that “[his] generation didn’t speak very good Chinese but knew a lot of English” because, as he explains in another interview, “[he] had unrestricted and encouraging access to English, but not to Chinese” (Choy, “Intercultural” 272; Deer 37). Similarly, Lee notes:

⁵⁶ There are also other ways to consider how the two texts avoid a progressivist end. *Disappearing Moon Cafe* structurally has a cyclical narrative plot structure and plot quips like the scene where Kae tells Chi that she wants “a real resolution” to her story (Lee 248-249). *The Jade Peony* has a more linear plot structure, but it shows in the denouement that even though Chinese sojourners face racism from the Canadian state and society, they, affected by Chinese nationalistic anti-Japanese rhetoric, are racist towards Japanese Canadians, facilitating the social silence that put them in internment camps.

Our generation is the first generation to regain a voice. Our original cultural voice was lost in the process of being displaced from China to Canada. That move takes several generations. I'm often ashamed to say that my voice is in my colonizer's language, in English. I am not fluent or literate in my heritage language. (Andrews)

Language is both powerful and contaminated: while English allows writers like Lee and Choy to "regain a voice", the language may affect their knowledge of their heritage language as well as mark the finitude of their subjectivities. However, it is not enough to acknowledge or ignore the limit. Bannerji's "The Sound Barrier" suggests that diasporic subjects navigate through the twofold hegemonies' imposed limits on self-expression by developing self-reflexivity that breaks through self-reification, "moving towards a fragmented whole" (*Thinking Through* 179). Kamboureli calls this "negative pedagogy" where subjects practice responsibility and accountability by "[thematizing] not only the object of knowledge, but also the method of learning and unlearning inherit truths" (25). Lee and Choy's novels reflect Bannerji and Kamboureli's respective notions of self-reflexivity and unlearning by challenging Chinese and Canadian hegemonic powers as well as the perceptions attached to natural languages.

Conclusion

The history of immigration to Canada is riddled with racism from the Canadian state and larger society even though newcomers were (and still are) indispensable to Canada because of their economic, cultural, and social contributions. Deplorably, this history of racism and recurrence of racism were hidden from public consciousness so when Chinese Canadian writers like Sky Lee and Wayson Choy along with other Asian Canadian writers and activists “broke the silence” in the twentieth century, what shattered was the silence about long-suppressed historical injustices as well as returning discrimination. Yet, as I have shown in my thesis, aspects of this silence have not been adequately explored. There have been critical failure to interrogate these ideas that are embedded in literature.

For one thing, my thesis illustrates that the Canadian state is not solely responsible for maintaining the silence that still confronts many Chinese Canadians. While it cannot be denied that the hegemonic Canadian state silenced Chinese Canadian subjects in the past, the internal cultural hegemony within the Chinese Canadian communities has always played a role in upholding this silence. Because of the racist way the Canadian state shirked responsibility for the Chinese community and denied Chinese diasporic citizenry any comprehensive civic participation, these communities reacted through strategic essentialism and closed off their communities further for survival. As I have stressed in all of my chapters, the Canadian state and the Chinese community form what Himani Bannerji refers to as the “twofold hegemonies”. Not only are Chinese Canadians doubly silenced because of the twofold hegemonies, but the twofold hegemonies also generate and uphold generic constructions of identity, hindering the ability for individuals and groups to define their identity. In chapter one, I show that the myth of authenticity is symptomatic of the politics of the twofold hegemonies that affects literary production and literary reception. While universalism and ethnocentrism may seem oppositional forces, they are two sides of

the same coin that dictates what languages and cultural identities are permissible and/or authentic. Literary production for Chinese Canadian authors like Lee and Choy becomes a fraught process; they may struggle with the choice of using English or Chinese. At the same time, literary reception seems to ignore the inherent paradox and dilemma, and critics are often quick to evaluate Lee and Choy's works based on a flawed perception of cultural authenticity rather than engaging with how their novels function as an alternative critical mode. In response, I unravel the ways that the names bypass the myth of authenticity because of the way they cross the phonetic and semantic borders which separate English and Chinese. Besides the myth of authenticity, the generic notions of the Chinese identity are also the result of the twofold hegemonies. In chapter two, I suggest that many Chinese names for "Chinese" are always changing, yet every new power structure within the Chinese community, as depicted in the two novels, maintains that their idea of "Chineseness" has always existed as well as is always fixed and rigid. The twofold hegemonies view of "Chinese" harmonize in homogenizing the Chinese identity. Apart from identity, my third chapter discusses how ideologies of the twofold hegemonies come together in their ideas of natural languages in the two novels. Because natural languages are loaded with ideologies and identities, the means by which Chinese Canadians construct their identity can become misconstrued and work against their interests. The twofold hegemonies maintain the perception that the English language does not belong to Chinese Canadians. Though Mandarin, Cantonese, and Taishanese are respective *languages*, the twofold hegemonies want to homogenize the idea of Chinese languages by designating all of them as simply "Chinese" or subsumed under the superior official language of Mandarin. The twofold hegemonies, as I suggest, are highlighted in Lee and Choy's novels, which expose the many ramifications of their existence. These ideologies work in concert to deter or sanitize dissenting voices in the Chinese community, to silence the continuous injustice in the

enclosed community, and to impede how freely individuals can express and maintain their language and identity.

In upholding generic ideas of authenticity, identity, and language, what the twofold hegemonies silence is the actual reality of the Chinese Canadian experience. Throughout my thesis, I have suggested that the notion of identity, whether it is individual or collective, is complex, contradictory, and multifaceted; it is dynamic across time and place. What is “Chineseness” then? It must be considered as an evolving multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual entity much like the Canadian identity. Like Rey Chow in her essay “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem”, I find there is a danger in not being critical of how ethnic identity is constructed. Chow warns us about locking individuals and groups through labels that are seen as immutable in origin, “an emphasis on cultural differentials [leads] to a situation in which ‘culture’ itself and the aggressive racist conduct that is adopted to fortify cultural boundaries [...] become naturalized” (7). In my first chapter, my discussion about how the names in the Chinese Canadian community such “Gold Mountain”, “pigs”, and “ghosts” go through phonetic and semantics changes exemplifies the mutability of language, and therefore, identity. Chapter two, on the other hand, illustrates the way the Chinese words or names for “Chinese” have gone through drastic changes in the community. Similarly, chapter three shows how Chinese languages shift in their positions in the hierarchy, which demonstrates that their status in the community is determined by the status and power of the speakers. Even as I conclude using the novels as sources that “Chineseness” as an identity formed from aspects like ethnicity, language, race, and culture is not, in actuality, fixed and homogeneous, I note, in chapter two, that the authors make claims outside of the novels that point to essentialists view of “Chineseness”. Though I contend that the authors’ intentions are innocuous, I find their comments ironic seeing as the two novels show how the same essentialist logic used to understand the “Chinese” identity leads to

violence whether it is towards members of the Chinese community or non-Chinese individuals like Japanese Canadians.

What has also been silenced about *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* is that identity constructs and is constructed by language. In the first chapter, I argue that the idea of authenticity, which has a preconceived notion of authentic Canadian identity and/or Chinese identity is, maintained through ideas about translation and monolingualism. On the one hand, despite Canada's "multiculturalism", some Canadian critics do not think that Canadian texts should contain non-English languages. On the other hand, nativists find fault in the way non-English languages and/or words in literary texts are polluted by Western ideas of hegemony. The concern about cultural authenticity draws rigid boundaries and presumes stable understandings about identity and culture that are far from historically accurate as I show through the words that the community history of Chinese Canadians cannot be classified under one culture or one language. The assertions about the cultural authenticity of the two novels often operate for the interests of the twofold hegemonies and not for the voices that are trying to break the silence. The concern about authenticity often results in losses and silences as well as insensitive translations/transliterations which serve the hegemony, not the community or the individual. What I show, moreover, is that Lee and Choy are not just using language, the Chinese words, to reflect community history as they also use these words to make critical reflections on the issues within the community that have long been silenced. Another dimension of language that plays an active part in the construction of identity is discourse. In chapter two, I suggest that the "Chinese" identity has always been a matter of discursive construction. Since it has always depended on the imagination and power of the hegemony to construct and enforce boundaries using discourse, the "Chinese" identity never ceases to adopt new meanings, something the twofold hegemonies would have us believe otherwise.

Language as in names and discourse constructs identity, which can be restrictive or illuminating, but language is also affected by identity. This is because natural languages are affected by the status of their speakers in such a way that the natural language comes with a set of perceived ideologies. In my third chapter, I investigate how identity constructs language since the perception of natural languages affects these languages' status and power in a given society. The two novels reveal how different Chinese languages have varying levels of prestige, an issue that still affects the Chinese diasporic community in Canada. This adds another layer of complexity into the process of self-identification and self-construction. How can we freely construct an identity with language if language itself is loaded? My discussion focuses on how natural languages have a perceived identity in the two novels, and the ideologies of language govern which identity has a right to this language and which identities the speakers themselves have.

Throughout the thesis, my critical approach has been to use language as a critical mode of engagement with issues of identity and language. There are, however, some limitations to my approach when it comes to some aspects of the relationship between language and identity that I do not address. In my second and third chapter, in considering how language constructs identity and vice versa in the two novels, I did not mention linguistic determinism in the two novels as in whether there is an inherent identity within the language to structure and limit human knowledge and thought. Linguistic determinism is about how different mother tongues have different thought processes, but what the novels suggest more strongly is not that linguistic differences determine the tension in the Chinese community but the differences in power and social structures. I have also not considered the weaker version of the linguistic determinism of linguistic relativity based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, where the structure of a language affects its speaker's world view. Even though I

have suggested that *Disappearing Moon Cafe*'s Beatrice and *The Jade Peony*'s Sek-lung do not simply adopt English but also British colonial ideas, the two novels suggest that it is the social environment which influences thoughts and decisions of the second-generation Canadians.

Nevertheless, my critical approach towards heritage languages in studying its multitudinous dimensions and its engagement with issues of identity can be used as a framework to study literary texts other than *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*. Lee and Choy are by no means the first authors or the only authors using non-English names and terms in Chinese Canadian literature. In an excerpt of "scenes from the mon sheong home for the aged" from Jim Wong-Chu's 1986 poetry collection *Chinatown Ghosts*, the speaker of the poem uses "pig" and "ghosts" as he vividly describes how Chinese sojourners were unjustly treated:

he remembers the road building accident in 1910

his body among the rubble

blood of dead men ran

thick as pig

so thick

he had to lift his head

to breath

the *gwai low* engineer

gave the wrong instruction

with the dynamite (qtd in Chao, "*Dialogue as a Discursive Strategy*" 6-7).

As a text preceding *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony*, the poem demonstrates that terms like “pigs” and “ghosts” are predominant in Chinese Canadian literature. These words are also in Chinese American literature. Marlon K. Hom's 1987 *Songs of Gold Mountain*, which focuses on Cantonese rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown, captures many of the same phrases mentioned in this thesis. Tales and poetry about Chinese sojourners were also published in the Canton region, and these stories were also disseminated orally from one generation to the next. Although my thesis demonstrates the importance of understanding how language encodes the past especially when it comes to trauma, colonialism, and identity, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* are not the first to use these terms. Therefore, it would be necessary to include a bigger corpus of Chinese Canadian literary texts to trace more intensively how these names operate in the development of Chinese Canadian literature.

Moreover, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* are not the only Asian Canadian, and/or diasporic texts that incorporate heritage languages to disrupt the fallacies about identity that twofold hegemonies construct. Many Indian-English novels like Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, for example, incorporate Indian languages explicitly and implicitly to self-reflexively examine issues of Indian society and India's nationalism while going against Western hegemonic ideas about literature and English because the text transforms English to become an important part of constructing Indian cultural and literary identity.

Another dimension of identity that diasporic Indian-English fiction touch upon is religious identity. Though *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* briefly speak of Christianity and Daoism, I have not examined how language relates to issues of religion in the Chinese Canadian community. It means that there is potential for future literary research

into the different ways writers have incorporated heritage languages into their texts and the relationship between language and other dimensions of identity

My thesis demonstrates the need for continued vigilance in recognizing how hegemonic practices and forces of the Canadian state along with heritage cultural politics, affect the privilege of individuals to exercise their language and identity. Literary criticism can avoid complicity in upholding the silence by reconsidering their methodology and political ideology. Even though I am critical of the way *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Jade Peony* have been misread, I avoid the pitfalls of reterritorializing Chinese Canadian and/or Asian Canadian literature by reconsidering what it means to define Chinese Canadian identity or literature that works not just for the interests of Chinese Canadians but also for other members of Canadian society. Chinese identity is the strongest example of the fallacy of hegemonic practices. In recent years, critics, have not, as Chow suggested a decade ago rethought, “the use of the label ‘Chinese’” (“On Chineseness” 7). In the meantime, China has emerged as a world power and has justified their oppression of Uyghurs, Tibetans, and Mongolians through a policy of sinocentrism. These acts of injustice, which should be seen as nothing short of cultural genocide, are justified because the Chinese state imagines a homogeneous and fixed populace that possess the desired “Chineseness” of Han Chinese ethnicity, Mandarin language, and unquestioning Confucian filial piety (obedience) towards the national leaders.

The Chinese nationalistic immutable notion of “Chineseness” has influenced the twofold hegemonies because now leaders of many Chinese Canadian communities and individuals adhere to the rigid patriotic and nationalistic definitions of “Chineseness” that the CCP disseminates. Consequently, issues of language and identity still continue to be contentious among those in the Chinese Canadian community in the twenty-first century. While it is likely that many Chinese immigrants and their progeny are going to be assimilated

into hegemonic Canadian culture, many Chinese immigrants are in disagreement about the kind of Chinese language and identity that should be maintained, much like those in the two novels. They debate on what is “authentic” Chinese identity, Chinese food, and Chinese language. Many Hong Kong Canadians do not see themselves as “Chinese” nationally speaking, and they contend that Cantonese is a legitimate language variety. Many Hong Kong Canadians (especially new generations) see themselves as culturally different from Mainland Chinese subjects, so they are strongly against the way the CCP has tried to blanket them discursively with the homogenized Chinese national identity. While Taiwanese Canadians speak Mandarin and not Cantonese, many of them strongly see Taiwan as an independent nation and not, like the CCP has argued, a part of China. For Mainland Chinese individuals, many of them have immigrated to Canada because of the violence and injustice of the CCP, but they are now often denounced as “spies” by the Canadian government and by other members of the Chinese diaspora.

It is unfortunate that silence towards these issues is likely to grow louder in the future. Voicing these contentions about language and identity in the Canadian public sphere is no longer an issue about alienation, exoticization, or Orientalism; breaking the silence is now dangerous. There is swift retribution waiting for Chinese subjects who speak out, and these punishments range from verbal harassment to kidnapping. Those who speak out may risk the safety and livelihood of their family members residing back in China, and they may also face the consequences in Canada. Silence in the Chinese Canadian community is no longer maintained by an unspoken Chinese cultural notion of keeping private matters secret. Silence is now maintained by the unspoken yet shared sense of fear among the community. The fear towards Chinese political forces in Canada and the members of the Chinese diaspora who are co-opted to work for Chinese political interests means any of these consequences:

strategically aligning to Chinese national interests, be apolitical, or be silent about their opinions.

Fear is prevalent because there is no way to tell who works for Chinese political interest. Similar to how the CCP has hired locals in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet, and in many other countries to spread the good word of China internationally, those working for Chinese nationalism in Canada are not all Mainland Chinese, so there is no identity marker to spot. At any given moment, Chinese Canadians, Chinese diasporic subjects, and other Canadians are susceptible to changing their political ideology to become more supportive of Chinese ethnonationalism due to avarice or persuasion from the considerable work that the Chinese government has done through the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and the United Front. For Chinese Canadians and Chinese diasporic subjects, the hegemonic Canadian culture that otherizes them play a large role in pushing them to Chinese ethnonationalism and strategic essentialism since racism makes their heritage culture seem more inclusive. At the same time, Chinese ethnonationalism works for the Canadian hegemonic state. The Canadian state wants a political and economic alliance with China, and it panders to Chinese national interests. Criticisms of China also work in the interests of the Canadian hegemony because these criticisms come co-opted to push forth racist agendas to exclude Chinese Canadians from Canadian society. Canada has an unpleasant history of racism and exclusionary policies, so Canadian state actors who want to denounce the political infiltration of China must walk a thin line between resuscitating old racism and upholding justice.

The fallacy of hegemonic practice is to construct identities as the natural order of everyday life while masking the way it maintains its power and influence in the life of the individual through these constructions. Hegemonic practices have fallaciously constructed and officiated the Chinese identity as the artless “Han Chinese” race. The phrase most repeated about Chinese culture by Chinese and non-Chinese people is that it has “five

thousand years of history” as a way to assert the long-standing survival of the Chinese identity and language and assume that there has been no significant evolution in these five thousand years. In truth, identity and language have evolved over time, and with new power structures such as government (or dynasty), there are new contrived ideas of “Chineseness” according to the ruling family’s identity and whatever ideas can naturally maintain the most power in the long-run. Even though Han Chinese culture, race, language, and ethnicity remains the most dominant, this group assimilated various non-Chinese ethnic groups, languages, and cultures over the centuries, and in fact, the Han Chinese identity and language is still absorbing ethnic groups in China with the same violence it did centuries before (Djao 187).

By being alert to the various forms of hegemony, literary criticism may be better equipped to envision something beyond the limits of the current state ideology and to facilitate the construction of identities in literary works that challenge hegemony rather than perpetuate it.

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