

**A Liberating Inheritance: Chinese Canadian and
Japanese Canadian Literature in English, 1970s-2000s**

by

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Abstract:

Initiated with the first communal collaboration, *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology*, published in 1979, Asian Canadian literature has been growing rapidly ever since. Now, two generations of writers and critics have become established and an emerging generation is on the rise. This thesis presents an analytical account of the establishment of a relatively new cultural enterprise, tracing its various stages of development in relation to prevailing socio-historical conditions and discussing the constructive forces that have helped and supported its growth.

This thesis claims the Eaton sisters as the grandmothers of Asian Canadian literature because later authors have inherited, adapted and enriched the themes they defined in their works and the techniques they devised. This thesis traces parallel developments in two major groups within the Asian Canadian literary community, Japanese Canadians and Chinese Canadians, by choosing one author from each group to represent each stage of development. Identifying six of the most influential writers who have contributed to the shaping of contemporary Asian Canadian literature, this thesis presents a relatively comprehensive literary historical account. The chosen authors are Chinese Canadian novelists SKY Lee, Wayson Choy and Larissa Lai; and Japanese Canadian writers Joy Kogawa, Terry Watada and Hiromi Goto. This thesis argues that the Asian Canadian literary enterprise is defined above all by its balancing of continuity (inheritance) with development (liberation). Cultural and literary inheritances offer useful tools for Asian Canadian writers to negotiate with mainstream society while innovative writing techniques are indispensable if they are to continue pioneering and opening more space for future development of the literature. The second major argument is that one of the most distinctive elements of Asian Canadian literature is that it has arisen and grown as a result of conscious effort, an effort informed by social activism and nurtured by literary and communal organisations.

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A Liberating Inheritance: Chinese Canadian and Japanese Canadian Literature, 1970s-2000s

INTRODUCTION: A Tradition of Liberation

Just months before the completion of this thesis, Chinese Canadian writer Larissa Lai published her first literary critical book *Slanting I, Imagining We: Asian Canadian Literary Production in the 1980s and 1990s* (2014). In her preface, Lai says explicitly that her book has, at its centre, the question “How do I (or We) make (or remake) things/events/texts/selves in order to be free?”(x). Indeed, I observe that the question of “How to be free?” is at the core of Japanese Canadian and Chinese Canadian literature. This thesis argues that the Asian Canadian literary enterprise is defined above all by its balancing of continuity (inheritance) with development (liberation). Cultural and literary inheritances offer useful tools for Asian Canadian writers to negotiate with mainstream society, while innovative writing techniques are indispensable if they are to continue pioneering and opening more space for future development of the literature. The second major argument is that one of the most distinctive elements of Asian Canadian literature is that it has arisen and grown as a result of conscious effort, an effort informed by social activism and nurtured by literary and communal organisations.

In this thesis I aim to present both a literary investigation and a cultural history. I trace parallel developments in two major groups within the Asian Canadian literary community, Japanese Canadians and Chinese Canadians, by selecting one author from each group to represent each stage of development. The chosen authors, who are among the most influential of their respective generations, are Chinese Canadian novelists SKY Lee, Wayson Choy and Larissa Lai; and Japanese Canadian writers Joy Kogawa, Terry Watada and Hiromi Goto. Alongside my close readings of these authors, I offer an analytical account of the establishment of a relatively new cultural enterprise, tracing its various stages of development in relation to prevailing socio-historical conditions and discussing the constructive forces that have helped and supported its growth.

The earliest examples of this literature were written by the sisters Edith and Winnifred Eaton, who explored different ways of negotiating an existence as mixed race women at the turn of the twentieth century, living on the boundary between two cultures. Not only they are the earliest Asian Canadian writers that were published in mainstream North American market, their works identified many themes that later generations of writers continue to explore.¹ Their seemingly conflicting identity politics, like two poles, provide structure and space for my analysis of contemporary writers. The themes of freedom and identity, explored in the work of the Eaton sisters, are taken up in each of the texts that I discuss in this thesis. In Chinese Canadian writer SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990), the heroine Kae exclaims: "after three generations of struggle, the daughters are free!" (209). The novel is, to some extent, the story of three generations of women in the Wong family gradually gaining power and freedom. In Japanese Canadian poet and novelist Joy

¹ In this thesis, I refer to "mainstream Canadian society", as distinct from ethnic minority communities; "mainstream publishing", that is, commercial rather than small press publishing; and "the academic mainstream", by which I mean, the canon of primarily white-authored Canadian literature and the traditional modes of Canadianist criticism found in universities. At the same time, I am fully aware of the diversity that underlies all these constructs. In particular, Canadian "whiteness" subsumes a range of identities and origins, and the white population is made up of immigrants and their descendants from multiple European countries as well as from the US. For discussion, see for instance Daniel Coleman's *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (2006). Referring to J. S. Woodsworth's notorious *Strangers within Our Gates, or Coming Canadians* (1909), Coleman comments: "The book's chapter list...becomes...a vertical mosaic, descending in preference from British, Americans, Scandinavians, Germans, and French to South Eastern Europeans, Austria-Hungarians, Balkans, Hebrews, and Italians, before it reaches the cut-off at the White borders of Europe, so that Levantines, Orientals, Negroes, and Indians (both 'Hindus' and Amerindians) are considered incompatible with the national project of building a British-based civility. This descending taxonomy of peoples alerts us to the structural contradiction of civility itself, with its vigilant policing of the borders, even when those borders are being conscientiously expanded and liberalized. It also reminds us of how consistently the borders of Canadian civility have been drawn along those of whiteness" (22).

Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), Naomi gradually frees herself from childhood trauma and moves towards healing by participating in the recovery process of the community. In Chinese Canadian Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* (1995), the second-generation children push against the boundary of their living space within the ghettoised Chinatown and try to liberate themselves from the traditional Chinese values and social rules imposed on them. In Japanese Canadian Terry Watada's *Kuroshio: The Blood of Foxes* (2008), Yoshiko, who comes to Canada in pursuit of a typical North American dream—freedom and prosperity—is punished for reaching too high, since she is restrained by the rigid social system within both the ethnic community and the broader Canadian society. Second-generation writers Japanese Canadian Hiromi Goto and Chinese Canadian Larissa Lai explore more contemporary racial and identity politics, experimenting with writing strategies and creating more distinct culturally hybrid subjectivities in current times.

Indeed, I observe that each Asian Canadian writer sets out to answer in their own way the question: How to be free? In doing that, they tackle two constitutive questions: How to achieve authenticity while being culturally hybrid? And how to position oneself in relation to a group (both an ethnic community and the wider Canadian society)? Of course, they do not produce clear-cut answers to these questions. And in fact, finding out the answers is not what this thesis sets out to do. This thesis, however, aims to explore the complicated and shifting mechanism of how Japanese Canadian and Chinese Canadian writers strive to attain a relatively comfortable balance for themselves in between two mutually dependent yet conflicting poles: inheritance and liberation. As the title “a liberating inheritance” indicates, I will not isolate the two concepts from one another but remain aware of their mutually transformational effects.

The word “inheriting” is generally used in a passive sense to indicate the receipt of a legacy. I use it in an active sense. I observe that the writers empower themselves through the inter-dependent and mutually transformative processes of inheriting and liberating. In “The Vanishing American” Walter Benn Michaels, drawing on Edward Sapir's 1924 article “Culture, Genuine and Spurious”, argues:

a culture is something that (unlike the genes you happen to have and the things you happen to do) can be lost. Which is why, although it must be

inherited, it can never just be inherited: it is “never a passively accepted heritage from the past, but implies the creative participation of the members of the community.” If then, as an inheritance, culture is unlike the citizenship of the melting pot because it cannot simply be achieved, it is also unlike race and environment in that it cannot simply be inherited. The distinctive mark of culture is that it must be both achieved and inherited. (231)

Growing up in a culture that differs from the culture of their domestic environment, Asian Canadians often consciously and deliberately select what to absorb and perform from the mixed cultural inheritances available, and these choices influence how they define and present themselves. In this process, agency must be claimed as they deal with the conflicts between how they understand the composition of their identity (in terms of culture and nationality) and how people perceive them as racialized other. This process is visible on many levels in Asian Canadian cultures. In the specific context of literary production, I define a liberating inheritance as a set of strategies deployed by Japanese Canadian and Chinese Canadian writers to gain freedom and space for the development of their literature. It is, first of all, a consciously selective process: choosing to receive what is nourishing and empowering in both cultures while rejecting out-dated and uncongenial traditions, such as the patriarchal order that continues to prevail in more traditional Asian societies, or the hegemonic perspectives in a democratic country such as Canada.

This thesis will explore the distinctive tradition of striving for liberation in Japanese Canadian and Chinese Canadian literature. I argue that successive generations of writers pass on a tradition of pursuing freedom in their writings. Perhaps out of an “inherited” frustration with being subjugated and restrained while living as ethnic minorities in Canada, many writers manifest a need to write in order to break free. Meanwhile, Japanese and Chinese Canadian writers’ strategies for liberating the self are closely associated with the contemplation of cultural inheritance. Inheriting cultural legacies, often in the form of traditional folklores and stories, is generally considered as a conservative process, because tradition as a set of accepted social norms is often seen as restrictive and even oppressive. However, claiming ancestral cultural heritage is one way for ethnic minority subjects to liberate themselves from the social expectation of assimilation into mainstream society. The writers are conscious of the double bind that they are subject to and strive to find a

balance between inheriting what is traditional (in a liberating spirit) and recreating cultural inheritance to better suit their localised experience.

The authors I have chosen are “local writers” in the sense that they are very aware of their physical locality, such as Canada, Vancouver, Chinatown and so on. Asian Canadian writers inherit the tradition of a conscious attention to defining and forming one kind of unique “Canadianness” as well as presenting an Asian Canadian experience in their texts. All the contemporary writers I discuss were born and/or raised in Canada. For them, Canada is their only homeland and English is their mother tongue and their works show their effort to legitimise their identity as Asian Canadians, by means of careful choices regarding cultural contents, translation techniques, literary forms and political positions. I observe a perpetual dynamic in the liberating strategies that they devise for their characters that are simultaneously empowered and framed by the sometimes porous, sometimes rigid cultural borders. I am especially interested in observing the energy and strength obtained and released through the struggle of the culturally in-between, as they try to break free from the restrictions imposed by the experience of being racialised, by the expectation that they assimilate, or by the way that their ethnic community tries to claim them.²

Meanwhile, the current corpus of Asian Canadian literature originates from the Asian Canadian activism of the 1970s. In this thesis, I trace the lineage of this “main strand” of Asian Canadian literature while understanding the diversity and complexity in this canon. We can see that Canadian literature, as a canon, has been challenged and enlarged over the years. One of the notable changes is Asian Canadian literature has become a constitutive part of it. Currently, more types of literatures are entering the Asian Canadian canon, such as books by Asian Canadian writers that do not deal with ethnicity, overseas students’ writings, newer immigrants’ works and writing by refugees.

² Racialisation is a key word in Asian Canadian studies, meaning differentiation based on “race” or skin colour rather than emphasising commonalities induced by nationality or citizenship. For example, Japanese Canadians were interned during and after Second World War because they were seen as “of the Japanese race” disregarding their Canadian citizenship.

Moreover, I believe that writings produced by various sub-groups should be dealt with separately, because a failure to discriminate between works produced by first-generation immigrant writers and those by authors of later generations risks negligence of the subtle and complicated features in both types of writing. For example, first-generation immigrant writers of Chinese origin who came to Canada after the opening up of China in the 1980s often manifest an interest in presenting comparative views on China and Canada, or writing stories that are set in China. The early works of francophone writer Ying Chen provide one example.³ Writers, on the other hand, who are of the second and later generations of immigrants often concentrate on the Canadian situation and are more attentive to hybrid identities, which are often described as culturally in-between. The writers that I choose to work on were born and raised in Canada (except Hiromi Goto who moved with her parents to Canada when she was two years old). None of them are really fluent in Japanese or Chinese or have spent time living in Japan or China. Their transcultural perspectives are generated from within, usually resulting from a constant struggle to gain recognition and space, which together constitute the contemporary understanding of freedom. For these writers, the practice of inheriting includes understanding Asian cultures, often through an active engagement, and using this understanding as a means to dismantle the perceived cultural homogeneity of mainstream society. However, this also means that, to a certain extent, all the writers are Orientalist by default because they are not Asian.

My use of the word “community” and its adjectival form “communal” refers to the concept coined by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), as communities that are constructed by social interests and shared ideals as opposed to actual, physical communities. In particular, Anderson proposes that media, such as newspapers and magazines, can create imagined communities by disseminating contents to which the audience can relate. I argue that communal publications, by which I mean

³ Her novels that are set in China include: *La Mémoire de l'Eau* (1992) and *L'Ingratitude* (1995). *Les Lettres Chinoises* (1992) presents a comparative view, composed of letters exchanged between a person who has just arrived in Canada and her friend in China. Her more recent works, however, show her turning her attention to more localised themes.

publications organised by ethnic minority communities, such as magazines and anthologies, have had an important role in building up the collective Asian Canadian identity. Through this process, a literary enterprise that is jointly constructed by writers, critics and readers has come into being. Meanwhile, in the Asian Canadian case, imagined communities sometimes overlap or coincide with physical communities, such as Asian Canadian associations or organisations. The Asian Canadian literary community is also both imaginary and concrete, as in its largest sense, all readers, critics and writers are components of the community while various literary organisations, such as the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop and many others, are still very active in promoting its writers and organising cultural events.

This thesis will explore the following questions: How does a literary community become established? How do writers adopt or invent writing techniques in order to convey efficiently their cultural elements without compromising the artistic "value" or readability of their works in English? What are the salient themes in the developing corpus of Chinese and Japanese Canadian literature, and how do these shift over time? To what extent do East Asian Canadian writers use or adapt mainstream techniques of narrative and translation, and to what extent do they invent new ones? What are the most suitable critical frames of analysis for reading this literature? In the specific context of East Asian Canadian literature, what are the differences between different generations of immigrants, writers and critics?

Historical Contexts for Asian Canadian Fiction

Both Chinese and Japanese people made their way to what is now Canada as early as the late eighteenth century. British Columbia was the common destination for both peoples and has remained the primary site for East Asian settlers. As Laurie Ricou argues: "the story of Canada's East Asian connections has frequently, and most noticeably, been a West Coast story, [making] ties to China and Japan one of the defining features of the province's identity" (89). Both Japanese Canadian and Chinese Canadian histories are distinctive in Canada, marked by the Chinatown "paper relatives" and bachelor society, the "picture bride" system in the Japanese Canadian community and the forced uprooting and relocating of Japanese Canadians

during the Second World War (all of which I will outline below). To a large extent, these unique features in the two communities came about due to Canada's unfair racial policies, as various discriminatory policies targeted both peoples during the settlement period, aiming to restrain them from entering Canada.

The protests of these marginalised communities were usually suppressed or ignored by the Canadian authorities, and both communities were forced to invent methods to cope with the harsh policies and to ensure the survival of individuals and of the group. They relied on their internal resources, and came up with counter strategies, such as the "paper relative" scheme and the "picture bride" system. In the Chinese Canadian community, people traded birth certificates and other identity papers to enable more Chinese to enter Canada. Picture brides were Japanese women who immigrated to North America to marry men whom they did not know in person, having only exchanged photos prior to the actual meeting. These somewhat questionable and insidious dealings also led to a process of self-silencing, as the communities tried to protect their secrets from the judgemental gaze of outsiders. However, during the "breaking the silence" movement among ethnic minority groups in the 1970s and 1980s, writers re-evaluated their ancestors' historical situation and their resilient efforts in surviving and preserving the communities. For example, Terry Watada explores one picture bride's life in his novel *Kuroshio: the Blood of Foxes* which is based on real community stories and people. And Wayson Choy depicts the bachelor society in Vancouver Chinatown, which was typical of early Chinese communities in being mainly composed of male labourers, few of whom were able to bring their wives to Canada due to punitive immigration regulations. I will discuss these two novels in Chapter Three.

It can be argued that contemporary Asian Canadian literature was very much shaped by the Redress campaign of the Japanese Canadian community, since Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, the earliest and best received novel, was an initiative to open up that silenced history. Following the attack on Pearl Harbour by Imperial Japan, Japanese Canadians, most of whom lived in BC, were unfairly interned and forced to

disperse in 1942 by the government of Mackenzie King.⁴ In “Interpreting Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadian Women” Pamela Sugiman explains:

Along with the uprooting, Japanese Canadians were subject to a dusk-to-dawn curfew and had their homes searched by officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Over time, thousands were herded into the stench-filled live-stock buildings of Hastings Park in Vancouver, a “clearing site” for those who would later be dispersed to isolated parts of the province. The majority of Japanese Canadians (approximately 12,000) were eventually sent to “internment camps”, where they were forced to live in hastily prepared shacks or rundown hotels. These “settlements” were situated in various parts of the B.C. interior. [...] Another small group (about 4,000) were sent to perform gruelling labour in family units on the beet farms of Alberta and Manitoba. [...] With the defeat of Japan in 1945, all cleared Japanese Americans were permitted to return to the coast. However, Japanese Canadians, by then interned for three years, faced a “second uprooting”. At this time, the Department of Labour announced two policies: dispersal and “repatriation”. People of Japanese ancestry were forced to leave BC by either dispersing east of the Rockies (Ontario or Quebec) or “repatriating” to Japan. (54-5)

Many Japanese Canadians were subjected to internment, relocation, deportation, loss of property and citizenry rights during and after the Second World War. This painful past is documented in *Obasan*. Arnold Davidson argues: “to forge an articulate story out of a largely silenced history requires, first, a heeding of the history on which the text is based. The novel, in short, cannot be conventionally fictional, merely a made-up story” (24-5). Indeed, I observe accuracy in Kogawa’s plot with regards to historical facts. In the novel, Naomi’s maternal grandmother is interned in Hasting’s Park which was one of the most notorious detention centres due to its harsh conditions. Naomi’s paternal uncle and aunt, whose house and fishing boat are confiscated, take Naomi and her brother to Slocan, BC and are then forced to move again to Granton, Alberta. Naomi’s father is separated from the family and does hard labour. During this time, he is infected with tuberculosis and dies soon after. Naomi’s mother, who is on a visit to her family in Nagasaki, Japan, is not allowed to come back to Canada though she is a naturalised Canadian citizen. She is then disfigured in the atomic bombing in Nagasaki and chooses to die in Japan.

⁴ For Japanese Canadian history during the Second World War, see Ken Adachi (1976), Barry Broadfoot (1977), Ann Gomer Sunhara (1981) and Toyo Takata (1983).

The history of the Chinese Canadian community is marked by the head tax policy of the Canadian government.⁵ In 1885, the federal government began to impose a discriminatory head tax of 50 dollars per person on Chinese immigrants, most of whom contributed to the completion of Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). The amount escalated rapidly, reaching 500 dollars in 1903. In 1923, the Parliament of Canada passed the Chinese Immigration Act, known in the Chinese community as the Chinese Exclusion Act, which aimed to put a stop to Chinese immigration. In *The Triumph of Citizenship* (2007), Patricia E. Roy says: “Because of Chinese migration customs, the head tax imposed on Chinese immigrants between 1886 and 1923, and exclusion from then to 1947, few Chinese established families in Canada” (5). In fact, during the 24 years from 1923 to 1947, theoretically, no new Chinese immigrants should have entered Canada, which should have meant the disappearance of Chinese Canadian community. However, the “paper relative” system was used to circumvent the rules and sustain the community through continued immigration. Nevertheless, the ghettoised Chinese communities were mainly composed of male labourers.⁶ The novels of both SKY Lee and Wayson Choy represent a Chinatown with these distinctive features.

Until 1947, both peoples were prohibited from holding public office, voting, and entering many institutions of higher learning, such as law or medical studies. Chinese Canadians had “Resident Alien” as their status and were not allowed to naturalise; while Japanese Canadians were forced to register as “Enemy Aliens” under the War Measures Act during World War Two. They were not allowed

⁵ For Chinese Canadian history, see Timothy J. Stanley (2011), Lisa Rose Mar (2010), Kwok-Bun Chan (1991) and De-Zhong Gao and Daciana Andrada Muntean (2012).

⁶ Reliable factual information on early immigration from China can be found on the website *A Brief Chronology of Chinese Canadian History*, produced at the David Lam Centre at Simon Fraser University. The *Asia-Canada* website is another reliable source for this historical information.

naturalisation until 1947, with the passing of the 1946 Canadian Citizenship Act, which came into effect on 1 January 1947.⁷ Roy says:

British Columbia repealed most of its discriminatory laws and practices affecting the Chinese by 1947; [...] however, [...] Japanese Canadians, [...] had to wait until 1949 to return freely to the coast and enjoy basic civil rights such as the franchise. [...] By then Asians within Canada had the same civil and political rights as other Canadians except in matters of immigration. (7)

Moreover, with many bills and acts that advanced the democratic system and better ensured equality and freedom in Canada, such as the 1960 Bill of Rights, the 1977 Canadian Human Rights Act, and the 1982 repatriation of the Constitution from Britain, which then produced the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the socio-political environment improved greatly for Asian Canadians. Notably, the 1977 Canadian Human Rights Act ensured equal opportunities to individuals who may be victims of discriminatory practices. The 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms is of great importance, and is seen as a symbol of Canada's multi-culturalism, and of its status as a progressive society emerging from colonialism.

With the amelioration in political conditions, both communities carried out redress campaigns. In "Redress for old wounds", Edwards and Calhoun states: "The formal process of redress began in 1984, as the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) launched their campaign to win redress from the Canadian Government. However, their efforts were stifled until 2005 when the redress became an electoral campaign issue" (78). On 22 June 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered an official apology and individual compensation, \$20,000, to surviving head tax payers or their spouses. Also, a fund for Chinese-Canadian history projects was established. Japanese Canadians started organising the campaign for Redress as early as 1977, celebrating the centenary of the arrival of the first Japanese in Canada. The agreement reached between the government and the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) provided for individual payments of \$21,000 to persons affected, as well as payments to community organisations and funding for the

⁷ It should be noted that men who fought for Canada, volunteering as soldiers in World War One were allowed naturalisation, though even they were not exempt from the internment in World War Two.

Canadian Race Relations Foundation. With the achievement of Redress in 1988, the Japanese Canadians received an official apology and compensations from the government and their community, here more in the sense of imagined than physical (no Japantown to speak of), has been to a certain degree revived and re-established.⁸

For example, organisations such as NAJC, The National Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association (JCCA), and Central Vancouver Island Japanese Canadian Society have been active in promoting Japanese Canadian culture. The Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre and the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre were established after the Redress. Especially, The JCCA, which had formed in 1947 to represent the welfare of the Japanese community, changed its name in 1980 to National Association of Japanese Canadians. The NAJC became the representative of the Japanese Canadian community for negotiating with the government on terms of Redress, which by then, had become a community project on the national scale. On September 22, 1988 Art Miki, President of NAJC and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney signed the Redress Agreement.

Importantly, during the political campaigns and movements through the 1970s to 1980s, a literary enterprise was gradually established. Following debates on human rights after the Second World War, ethnic minority groups mobilised to protest social injustices, such as lack of enfranchisement, and discriminatory restrictions on career pathways at that time. Japanese Canadian writer and critic Roy Miki observes in *Redress* (2004): “The barriers formed a dense web of exclusionary policies intended to prevent Japanese Canadians from claiming any part of mainstream public space” (17). A heated discussion about why and how to “break the silence”, a term often employed at that time, referring to the need to speak up to the mainstream society and negotiate for equal rights, were hosted in communal periodicals, such as newspapers and magazines. Miki mentioned that during the initial stage of the campaign of the Japanese Canadian community in the late 1970s,

⁸ In *Redress*, Miki quotes the definition of the word “Redress” from a pamphlet: “What is Redress? In general terms, redress is defined as ‘an act of setting right a wrong’. For Japanese Canadians, ‘redress’ means that all members of our community who were unjustly treated during the war years should now receive some forms of compensation. –Japanese Canadian Centennial Project (JCCP), Redress Committee” (139).

“the Toronto-published Japanese Canadian community newspapers, *the Canadian Times* and *the New Canadian*, became the outlets for vociferous attacks” (*Redress* 163). Concurrently, there appeared many progressive newspapers and magazines in the Chinese Canadian communities, and I will discuss one exemplary magazine, *The Asianadian: An Asian Canadian Magazine* in Chapter One.

In the 1980s, many activists then took to writing, telling about their community, family and their own stories in detail, in their own way and in English, since that is often the only language they are fluent in. Many activists then became writers as they realised that in order to validate and consolidate their existence and affirm equal rights, they needed to formalise their history and “break the silence” effectively. These writers often started their careers by writing stories or poetry for the many communal publications that began to appear, and they then got noticed by mainstream publishers who were actively seeking material relating to the heated discussion of multiculturalism that was ongoing in the 1980s. With many important writers, such as Joy Kogawa, SKY Lee, Wayson Choy, Terry Watada, Denise Chong, Judy Fong Bates, publishing their first or major works from the 1980s to 1995, the “breaking the silence” movement effectively fostered the first generation writers and a new literature.

With various historical disputes and differences in culture to separate them, Japanese Canadians and Chinese Canadians kept to themselves for many years, even though in their main population centre of Vancouver they had settled in adjacent areas. Historically, the Japanese community in Vancouver was based at Powell Street, next to Pender Street which is the core of China Town. It was not until the third generation of immigrants rose to prominence that the two communities, together with other Asian Canadian communities, started engaging in more public debate on issues of identity and Canada’s racial politics. They then began to identify each other as fellow ethnic minorities and allies in the fight against injustice and discrimination. In the 1970s, young people in Japanese Canadian and Chinese Canadian communities collaborated in publishing an anthology, which marks the birth of Asian Canadian literature. Together they fought for Redress for the internment of Japanese Canadians and the head tax levied on Chinese Canadians. Now under the wider and more inclusive rubric of “Asian Canadian”, Japanese

Canadians and Chinese Canadians, though still retaining the cultural legacies and features of their respective communities, recognise more of the commonality in their life experience in the Canadian context.

Terminology

Before I embark on my analysis, I want to take a moment to explain the terminology that I employ throughout this thesis. There has been a debate about terminology in the field of Asian Canadian criticism. By selecting, contemplating and then affirming or changing the terms used, the group have defined and negotiated their identity and presence with the wider society. I observe a tradition of using and in fact refashioning English words to suit the specific content or situation.

Choosing English terms and redefining them, the Japanese Canadians worked their way through the process and “claimed” and refashioned more words to convey their message to the wider society accurately and confidently. For example, in *Redress*, Miki points out that the government’s use of “evacuation” of the Japanese Canadians during the war time is not appropriate since the word suggests a temporary removal of people from a particular place for safety reasons. However, the forced evacuation did not take the interests of the “evacuees” into consideration at all (50-55). Miki then denounced the use of the word since it was “[an] euphemism coined by the government” (50). “Forced relocation and dispersal” were then chosen to refer to what happened. Therefore, the establishment of a terminology in Asian Canadian studies is the process of self-definition and also refashioning of received images. No longer content with being designated by terms chosen by outsiders with limited understanding of their experience, Asian Canadians actively define and fashion themselves on their own terms.

Meanwhile, deciding on self-referential terms was also critical at the stage when a collective consciousness began to form in the late 1970s. “Asian Canadian”, “Japanese Canadian” and “Chinese Canadian” were the terms chosen for the first collaborative anthology, *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* (1979), and have been approved by members of these communities. Though the terms are still to some extent ambiguous and over-generalizing,

Asian/Japanese/Chinese Canadian—without a hyphen—are best received by members of this group.

Interestingly, “hyphenated writer” remains a useful term.⁹ Though the hyphen has been dropped physically, after discussions within Asian Canadian society, “hyphenated writer” is still in wide use. Those who advocated dropping the hyphen think that by doing so the subjects thus defined gain liberation from connection to the “old culture”, which they themselves may or may not self-identify with. It also transforms what was between two countries into what is inside Canada. The modifier, in this case, only suggests a cultural background. However, some writers—Fred Wah, for instance—prefer to be called “hyphenated writers” as they think the hyphen can amplify the tension and create a noise that allow a conspicuous entry into the two worlds that they move between: “The idea of an exterior/interior being connected or separated privileges the extremities; I want that ‘noisy hyphen’ of a door clanging and rattling the measure of such movement” (Wah 104). Wah advocates “noisily” drawing attention to hybridity and difference, rather than silently glossing over them. For him the hyphen not only provides an identifier for his unique hybrid identity and subjectivity, but also materialises the invisible tension that a cultural in-betweeners feels.

⁹ In “Interrogating the Hyphen-Nation: Canadian Multicultural Policy and ‘Mixed Race’ Identities”, Mahtani observes of the use of hyphens in ethnic minority identities in the general context of multicultural Canada: “Since the inauguration of multicultural policy in Canada in 1971, the notion of the hyphen, employed to articulate the marriage of ethnic and national identity, and witnessed through identifications like ‘Italian-Canadian’, ‘Japanese-Canadian’ or ‘Somalian-Canadian’, has taken on a particular political, and, at the same time, paradoxical, salience in Canada. For some, the hyphen is seen as a by-product of the implementation of multiculturalism in Canada, a policy that aimed to acknowledge every Canadian’s right to identify with the cultural tradition of their choice while retaining Canadian citizenship. For others, however, the hyphen is understood as a union of contradictions, each word symbolising the inversion of the ‘other’, marking places of both ambiguity and multiplicity” (n.p.).

I often use “Asian Canadians” to refer to Chinese Canadians and Japanese Canadians.¹⁰ In doing so I am following a tradition, as the editors of *Inalienable Rice* explain: “we will use the term Asian Canadian to mean Chinese and Japanese Canadians. This is for convenience rather than an attempt to define the work or exclude other groups for any ideological reason” (Chu et al. viii). This tradition of using “Asian Canadian” to refer to East Asian Canadian or Chinese Canadian and Japanese Canadian cultures exists both in academic circles and in social practice. For example, the first special issue of *Canadian Literature* about Chinese Canadian literature and Japanese Canadian literature was titled “East Asian-Canadian Connections” (1994), while two other relevant special issues, titled respectively “Asian Canadian Literature” and “Asian Canadian Studies”, were also devoted to Chinese Canadian and Japanese Canadian literatures. Two changes can be observed: the disappearance of both “East” and the hyphen.¹¹ The dropping of “east” is because in practice, India and Sri Lanka are now referred to as South Asia. “Asia” now signifies, increasingly, countries that used to be classified as East Asia or the Far East, such as China and Japan. But we do also observe the development of a pan-Asia consciousness.

Alongside this tradition of using “Asian Canadian” to refer to the two major constitutive communities, a pan-Asian perspective and a co-ordinated effort to include more Asian cultures developed in the 1970s. The founder of the magazine *The Asianadian*, Tony Chan, defines the term “Asian Canadian” in his article “The Chinese Community in Canada: Background and Teaching Resources”:

Asian Canadians should be referred to as peoples whose cultural heritage originated in East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Macao), Southeast

¹⁰ There are also terms derived from the ethnic languages that are used widely within the communities. Japanese Canadians often refer to themselves as Nikkei Kanadajin. Nikkei means “of Japanese origin”. The use of such an equivalent term in Chinese ethnic community, however, is more complicated, as people may originate from the mainland or from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and so on. One grouping term is “Hua Ren”, literally, “people of Hua”, with Hua suggesting Chinese culture.

¹¹ Issue 132 of *Canadian Literature* in Spring 1992, titled “South Asian Connections”, was devoted to the discussion of work by writers who were originally from India and Sri Lanka.

Asia (Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam), and South Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) and now make their homes in Canada. (13)

In this thesis, I deploy “Asian Canadian” while only focusing on Japanese Canadian and Chinese Canadian literatures, though I am well aware of the implications of this practice. I argue that these two important constitutive parts of Asian Canadian literature are both individually distinctive yet, at the same time, have a certain representative status, since they exhibit some features which can also be found in the literatures of groups originating in other parts of Asia. A more diverse and complete presentation is not possible within the scope of this thesis, especially since I aim to carry out a relatively in-depth and culturally-specific study.

The terms “Chinese Canadian” and “Japanese Canadian” are also problematic. Take “Chinese Canadian” for example: this term denotes simultaneously Canadian Born Chinese (CBC), racially mixed people of both Asian and Caucasian parentage (also referred to as “Eurasian”), and second or later generation immigrants to Canada from China. Strictly speaking, first generation immigrants, especially Chinese immigrants who obtained Canadian citizenship in their adulthood, should be referred to as Canadian Chinese, yet, in practice, they are also called Chinese Canadians.

Though the current terminology is still problematic it has already undergone conscious development. There was a time when discriminatory terms, such as “Japs”, “Chinks”, “Asiatic”, “Oriental” and so on, were in wide use in Canadian society. Chan explains:

Asian Canadians should never be referred to as “Oriental” Canadians because the term was originally coined and used (and still used) by non-Asians to describe Asian peoples. While the term is not as racist as “chink”, “jap”, or “flip”, its use is still extremely offensive. Asians in Canada, not ashamed of their cultural heritage, prefer to be called Asian Canadians, not “Oriental” Canadians or even “Far Eastern” Canadians. Many young Japanese Canadians, Filipino Canadians, Chinese Canadians, etc. prefer to be called Asian Canadians without reference to a specific cultural heritage. Some even call themselves ASIANADIANS. This is the best term because it describes a person with an Asian and Western sensibility. It is not a blend but an *amalgamation* of Asian and Western cultures. (T. Chan 13)

One of the goals of *The Asianadian* magazine was to promote the usage of “Asianadian” as an agreed grouping term coined from within the community. Apparently, this has not been achieved. However, the pan-Asia scope has been retained and accepted.

The word Asia itself remains problematic, since it is not necessarily understood as an innocent geographical term but can denote a cultural other and often an inferior one that is unassimilable to Western society. Some ethnic minority people, including some writers, such as Evelyn Lau, protest against using a marker in their national identity besides “simply” Canadian. They think, by flagging the difference, the marker alienates and marginalises them. However, taking off the marker also entails a compromise of visibility.

Another often deployed term, “ethnic minority”, also has some implications. Firstly, the usage of “ethnic” is problematic and, in some contexts, inaccurate. The use of ethnicity instead of race downplays the tension to some degree, yet it also exposes a lack of understanding and knowledge. As we know, “Chinese” and “Japanese” are adjectives derived from proper nouns naming countries rather than ethnicities. This over-generalised term disregards the complexities in the origins of the people. For example, the Chinese diaspora in Canada is mainly composed of people from villages in Guangzhou province. They actually represent a southern Chinese sensibility with distinctive qualities that are quite different from other parts of China.

Meanwhile, the word “minority” provokes social tension, as Miki observes:

Produced by the nation-state, “minority” subjects, in discursive terms, at least, are ostensibly situated on its social and cultural margins, but this spatial fiction, reifying as it does a centre-margin binary, belies their more internal connections to the nation’s identity as the constituting difference through which the same—the coherence of “the people” as unified—is enabled. In what is perhaps more appropriate terms, these marked subjects come to appearance in the interstitial sites of its body politic. (*Influx* 126)

By defining the racial other as a minority, mainstream society is able to occupy the central position and claim its legitimacy by so doing. Also, an unstated “majority rule” is in play, seeking to justify the compromise or sacrifice of the minority in the interests of the majority—for example, using the current pretext—for the sake of

national security. Simultaneously, the use of the word “minority” is also criticised for marginalising, disempowering and excluding “people of colour”—another much disliked term among those it designates—from the empowered centre. However, this term is sometimes useful precisely because it raises these issues, and also serves as a shorthand for several groups together to save repetition.

I deploy the term “diaspora” in this thesis. However, this term has slightly different connotations depending on the context. Faye Hammill’s definition indicates the way that the term is generally used in Canadian studies:

Derived from the ancient Greek *speiro*, to sow, and *dia*, over, term for migration for purposes of colonisation. It later came to refer to the collective expulsion of ethnic or racial groups, who subsequently maintained some form of community or cultural unity while in exile. Used primarily in relation to the Jews, diaspora is now also applied to other banished and dispersed peoples. In Canada, important diasporic populations include South Asian, Scandinavian, Caribbean, Chinese, Japanese and Ukrainian, among others. (194)

I often use diaspora, in this sense, interchangeably with community: that is, defined from the perspective of the centripetal movement of a population, originating from various places to form a diaspora in Canada. However, this term can also be defined from a centrifugal perspective: referring to people sharing some kind of commonality who have scattered across the world. In “The Rhetoric of Double Allegiance”, Deborah L. Madsen defines diaspora as: “the formation of a transnational network of community relations that are based on cultural nationalism. This is a network actively promoted and sustained by material social practices” (33). From this perspective, the Asian Canadian diaspora is one constitutive part of the global Asian diaspora. Thus Asian Canadian literature not only belongs to Canadian literature but also to world diasporic literature.¹²

In this thesis, although sometimes I use the word “freedom” as if it were broadly synonymous with “liberty”, I choose to employ liberation as one of the

¹² Here, my research might be related to work in transnational connections. Questions surrounding the concept of authenticity, cultural appropriation are similarly explored in this field, notably by critics such as Koichi Iwabuchi in *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (2002).

major themes (the other being inheritance).¹³ This is because firstly, I intend to deploy the political connotation that is in the common usage of the word liberation, whereas freedom has a range of more abstract, less politically charged meanings, alongside its more political ones. Secondly, the collocation of “self-liberation from” emphasises resistance to oppression whilst the nominal phrase “freedom to” denotes having access to a range of choices, or being able to exercise independent judgement. Thirdly, liberation often denotes a process whereas freedom indicates a state of being. Therefore, I deploy liberation throughout the thesis, intending to emphasise process and active self-determination.

Various Levels of Generation

As I have demonstrated, the idea of “generation” in Asian Canadian literature works on many levels: the generation of immigrants that the writers themselves belong to, the generation within the family that the characters in their works belong to, and the generation of writers.¹⁴ It is important to note that an author may, for instance, be categorised as a first-generation writer whilst being a third-generation immigrant.

About 140 years have elapsed since the first Japanese and Chinese settlers came to Canada. Theoretically, some of the oldest families should have now reached the fifth or sixth generation. In fact, generational differences are so marked that a special terminology has been generated within Japanese Canadians: *issei* (first generation), *nisei* (second generation), *sansei* (third generation), *yonsei* (fourth

¹³ It seems freedom and liberty are more interchangeable in practice, even in the philosophical field, as no agreement on the definitions and distinctions of the two concepts has been reached. In many European languages, there is only one term for the concept, as in French, there is only the word “la liberté”. See MacCallum’s article “Negative and Positive Freedom” for further discussion of Isaiah Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty”.

¹⁴ “Generation” is a complicated term to define. Sociologist Karl Mannheim, for example, succeeded in the sense that he outlined the many facets that should be taken into consideration when we form the idea of generation: “we shall therefore speak of a *generation as an actuality* only where a concrete bond is created between members of a generation by their being exposed to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic de-stabilization” (303).

generation) and *gosei* (fifth generation). These generational groupings have become a distinctive and significant part of Japanese Canadians' identity. Tensions between these generations can be observed in all the three Japanese Canadian writers' works that I have chosen to work on. I discuss the writers' different attitudes to the *issei* at various points, especially in Chapter Three in the section devoted to Terry Watada.

According to my observation, there are currently three generations of Japanese and Chinese Canadian writers. I have devised this generational model because I have found that works produced by each group of writers, working during three consecutive periods of Asian Canadian literary history, manifest distinctive features in terms of content, form and politics. This thesis will only concentrate on the first two generations of contemporary Asian Canadian writers. Among the six writers that I will read closely, Terry Watada, SKY Lee, Wayson Choy and Joy Kogawa belong to the first generation, as they are among the founders of this literature and their works have shaped the forms that it took. These first-generation writers were inspired by social events in the 1970s and started to produce literary works in the following decade and they are mostly now in their sixties. Mobilised in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, they seized the opportunity and stepped up to speak up for their respective communities. Most of them had other occupations before or while they were writing; for example, SKY Lee worked as a nurse and Jim Wong-Chu was employed by Canada Post until he retired in 2014. The leading figures in the second generation of writers, including Hiromi Goto, Larissa Lai, Kerri Sakamoto, Sally Ito, Madeleine Thien, Vincent Lam and Rita Wong, are mostly professional writers. They graduated from university in the 1990s, from degrees in English studies or creative writing, and took to writing for a living. They are now in their late forties. Many of the third-generation writers, who started publishing after 2000, are still at an emerging stage. Doretta Lau, Nancy Lee, Kevin Chong and Tom Cho are among the names to check out on the future Asian Canadian literary map.

The first-generation writings often present a critical retrospective on community and family history. Rumours, legends and historical events within the community are reprocessed and re-evaluated. The writers explore a past that they have not personally experienced, recognising the value and significance of

preserving the “true stories” of their ancestors in their writings. We see, therefore, first-generation writers documenting histories of their communities at various points: Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan and Emily Kato* deal respectively with the internment and the postwar activism leading to the Redress, which unfolded between 1972 and 1988; SKY Lee sets her family saga in Chinatown from 1892 to 1987; Wayson Choy has his child narrators tell stories about their lives during the 1930s and 1940s; and Terry Watada traces a picture bride’s life both in Japan and Canada, from 1905 to 1940. In fact, when the first-generation writers began writing, the early community’s history was fast fading with the “old-timers” passing away. For example, Kogawa’s protagonist Naomi goes back to Granton to rediscover her personal history and the community’s past after the death of her uncle, and I argue that one of her motivations for this quest is her realisation that her community and people are fast disappearing, without leaving traces of their presence in recorded histories:

We are the scholarly and the illiterate, the envied and the ugly, the fierce and the docile. We are those pioneers who cleared the bush and the forest with our hands, the gardeners tending and attending the soil with our tenderness, the fishermen who are flung from the sea to flounder in the dust of the prairies. We are the Issei and the Nisei and the Sansei, the Japanese Canadians. We disappear into the future undemanding as dew. (*Obasan* 132)

This urgency to document communal and family histories before they disappear, as described by Kogawa is similar to the one within the Asian Canadian activist movement, which led some of them to decide to take to writing. Kogawa’s Naomi realises that she has a duty towards the community and, in the sequel novel, *Emily Kato* (2005), she takes part in the community’s Redress campaign.

The second-generation writers turn their attention from the past to contemporary times. The heated debate generated by multiculturalism in the period from the 1970s through to the 1990s helped ethnic minorities to join the national conversation but often only through offering “testimonials” about past injustice or inequality they experienced elsewhere, such as in their ghettoised ethnic communities or countries of origin. As a result, most first-generation writers deploy a retrospective view and tend to celebrate a much better, freer present in Canada. Leading second-generation writers, such as Lai and Goto, however, point out that the social injustice and restraints forced upon ethnic minorities have not disappeared but

have only gone “underground”, and continue to be perpetrated in much subtler and more insidious ways. Lai and Goto, who started publishing in the 1990s, are prominent among the second-generation writers, who grew up in the post-war years and came of age during the era of activism. They turn their attention to “post-generation” experiences. In her “The Diasporic Inheritance of Post-memory and Immigrant Shame in the Novels of Larissa Lai”, Malissa Phung defines post-generations of a diaspora as those who “no longer speak the racial language of the homeland, nor have they directly experienced a traumatic catastrophe that resulted in their dispersal from an ancestral land” (1). I find this term especially useful in discussing Lai and Goto’s works since they are preoccupied with characters that are removed from the traumatic experience such as the internment. Lai explains:

As a young writer, I was interested in narrating the aftermath of violence (which of course, has its own violence), to explore the psychic territory of those who missed the historically acknowledged events, and yet are still living through an ongoing history of colonization that has not (yet) been monumentalized. Our generation is a haunted generation. We are also a generation with the power to change things. (Afterword 254)

Indeed, in order to capture the ongoing but much subtler expressions of colonisation, Lai and Goto experiment with innovative ways to empower and set free their Asian Canadian protagonists so that they can make actual changes in society. Charlotte Sturgess argues: “Lai’s and Goto’s fiction both contribute to the problematizing of how literature does not merely reflect the state of the nation at a given time in history, but articulates the possibility of rethinking the terms on which the nation becomes” (“Questions” 194). Indeed, they engage more closely with Canadian society, speaking from a position of presumed equality while also demanding urgent change. They also focus more on the present time and on current Asian Canadian subjectivities instead looking back to the early history of immigration or to the ancestors. Their protagonists are young Asian Canadian women who feel distanced from historical events and from the community.

Moreover, I also argue that critics can be categorised by generations too. In a sense, Asian Canadian criticism, in the form of grass roots discussion, was born before the literature in activist magazines which contributed to clarifying a unique Asian Canadian sensibility. Shortly after the inception of contemporary Asian

Canadian literature in the 1980s, the first generation of professional Asian Canadian critics started publishing. Some well-known names are Donald Goellnicht, Lien Chao, Roy Miki and Fred Wah. They are the central ones as they have shaped Asian Canadian literary criticism into what it is today. They pay close attention to literary merit, political agendas and the historical and cultural references that the works invoke. Moreover, they established another tradition in Asian Canadian literary criticism: they are also writers themselves. The second generation of Asian Canadian critics, myself included, are those who “rediscover” the Asian Canadian literary tradition and write in the new century. Some notable names are Chris Lee and Eleanor Ty. Moreover, by this stage, many critics who are not Asian Canadian themselves, such as Christl Verduyn, Robyn Morris, Charlotte Sturgess and Rocío G. Davis, have begun to participate in the analysis of this literature, bringing interests in minority literature, diasporic literature, multicultural literature, ethnographical literature, queer literature, Canadian contemporary literature, and so forth. After thirty years of development, the current situation, in which critics of diverse backgrounds and research interests work on this literature, marks the actual establishment of Asian Canadian literature as a distinct, independent sector in the Canadian literary field.

Asian Canadian Activism

Asian Canadian literature grew from Asian Canadian activism. In *Voices Rising: Asian Canadian Cultural Activism* (2007), Xiaoping Li argues:

The [Asian Canadian] awareness started on the campus of the University of British Columbia. In 1970 Ron Tanaka, an Asian American activist who was teaching in the English Department, introduced Asian American activism to his Chinese and Japanese Canadian students, who went to form two groups: the Wakayama and the Ga Hing. The students organized the “Asian Canadian Experience” event on campus, which featured photos of Japanese and Chinese history in Canada as well as poetry readings on being Asian Canadian. This event, with its assertion of a pan-Asian identity and its articulation of this social-political identity through cultural means, marked the beginning of a radical Asian Canadian cultural production. (18)

Clearly, Asian American activism had an impact on the Asian Canadian movement. Although Larissa Lai cautions against “the implication that Ron Tanaka is the sole source”, she nevertheless finds it interesting and useful that Li articulates the recognition that both Asian American and Asian Canadian are politicized, coalitional terms (*Slanting I* 111). By coalitional, Lai means the “pan-Asian” scope that Asian Canadian activism has claimed since the very beginning. However, I argue that there was at one time, much communication across the US-Canadian border. For example in the initial issues of *Ricepaper*, a communal literary and cultural magazine which I will discuss in my next chapter, sections such as “Asian North American Bulletin” and “Regional Reports”, include information about activism and publication in Edmonton, Calgary and Toronto as well as in New York, Los Angeles and Seattle.

Not only did Asian American scholars, such as Ron Tanaka, come to Canada and inspire Asian Canadian activism, but also Canadian writers and critics have contributed to Asian American studies, especially with the “tradition” of including Canadian cultural production in the category of “American” in American studies. For example, in Bella Adams’ *Asian American Literature* (2008), published by Edinburgh University in a series of critical guides, Canadian writers, such as Joy Kogawa, SKY Lee, Evelyn Lau, Hiromi Goto and Denise Chong, are treated alongside Asian American writers. I, however, follow the tradition both in Canadian studies and Asian Canadian studies and make a distinction when I quote from American critics, as a way of resisting the merging of Canadian culture into a pan-America schema. In fact, Asian American and Asian Canadian conditions (historical, economic and political) are very different, though sometimes the results of research can be applied to both fields. Especially, I argue that Asian Canadian studies has taken on unique features and developed independently after the race talk of the 1990s quietened down in North America. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Asian Canadian studies has relied more on its inner resources, supplied mainly by various forms of communal support, rather than on cross-border exchange or governmental funds.

Li outlines the political agenda of the Asian Canadian movement:

In the past three decades a politically charged cultural discourse has evolved, expanded, and shifted, yet somehow maintained its original mandate: that is,

to enhance community through cultural and artistic development, to foster a collective Asian Canadian identity, and to intervene in nation-building by pushing for both structural and discursive changes in the cultural sphere in order to realize the ultimate goal of racial equality and social justice. (11)

According to Li, Asian Canadian activism has gone through three historical stages: the 1970s to mid-1980s, the mid-1980s to the 1990s, and the 2000s onwards (6). Asian Canadian literature in the narrow sense came into being close to the end of the first stage; the publication of the *Inalienable Rice* anthology in 1979 is seen as marking the inception of Asian Canadian literature. In fact this anthology, as I will discuss in Chapter One, is not very literary as it is composed of many social study research papers, political articles, interviews and so on. It was the fruit of the first stage of activism. The first-generation Asian Canadian writers constituted the main force in second-stage activism whilst the second generation formed part of the third stage in the new millennium. Asian Canadian literature is therefore born out of, and remains an effective aspect of, political activism.

Because most of the members of the editorial board of *Inalienable Rice* belong to the third generation of immigrants, the Asian Canadian movement in the late seventies is also called a third-generation phenomenon. Inspired by many social activist movements, such as the ongoing black rights protests, second-wave feminism and the struggles for independence in formerly colonised countries, Asian Canadian activists explored and examined many themes, such as identity politics, racial equality, cultural or imagined community, and so on. Young people in different ethnic minority communities realised that they needed to unite to develop the Asian Canadian sensibility within the Canadian context. As Li argues: “the idea of creating ‘genuine Asian Canadian expressions’ as the precondition of Asian Canadian liberation was a central pillar of the new consciousness that emerged among young Asian Canadians in the early 1970s” (18). Inspired by the decolonisation movement, Asian Canadian young people demanded a change to their marginalised status. They claimed a common heritage in terms of their lived experience in Canada, and came into possession of a new identity that they created: Asian Canadians.

The forging and naming of a collective identity, such as “Asian Canadian”, is in many ways significant. It is not only an inheriting act of claiming ancestral cultural heritage by emphasising the Asian aspect of the identity, but also a liberating

act on the part of the third generation. Embracing democratic idealism, they initiated a series of activist interventions both within the community and in the larger society. Within their communities they worked to overcome long-established barriers between different groups, and to see themselves in a new light as fellow ethnic minorities that are marginalised within the Canadian context. Beyond the Asian communities they demanded full recognition as Canadians. Asian Canadian activism has, at its core, an urgent demand for the recognition of citizenship rights.

The Asian Canadian community was mobilised to gain social equality and to claim their rightful place in Canadian society. Li observes that the social activists chose to work with culture as a “vehicle of social change”:

The activists’ different journeys into the sphere of culture converged into a collective trajectory: that is, upon recognising the existence of inequalities, and upon recognizing culture’s controlling and liberating power, many resorted to their creative agency in order to carve out a terrain in which a discursive battle could be waged. In assuming, either consciously or unconsciously, the role of social activists, these individuals and groups have reaffirmed culture as a vehicle of social change. Their articulations have had social implications: consciousness has been raised; communities have been formed and mobilized; and a vigorous Asian Canadian cultural production has gradually come into being. (2)

Asian Canadian Literature, as part of the Asian Canadian cultural production has therefore been created during this process. And as I argued, this literature has taken on the activist consciousness as one of its most distinctive features since its conception. These young activists, many of them college students, were able to see that the tension between their communities and the mainstream was, firstly, due to a mutual mistrust stemming from a lack of communication and understanding. They then explored many forms of cultural and art production, aiming to improve mutual understanding. Joy Kogawa’s canon-making novel *Obasan* was the summit of the Asian Canadian communities’ urge to “break the silence”.

Realising it was time to claim agency in speaking for their communities that had remained mute and invisible in Canadian society, Asian Canadian cultural workers explored many methods of self-expression simultaneously. Various communal newspapers and magazines were started in major cities where there was a substantial Asian Canadian population, such as Vancouver, Victoria, Toronto,

Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Edmonton. A radio program, “Pender Guy”, set up by Chinese Canadians in Vancouver was on air from 1976 to 1981. It preserved many precious oral histories as interviews with many first-generation people were recorded. Japanese Canadian writer Terry Watada is also an activist musician whose albums once boosted morale in the Japanese Canadian Redress campaign. In 1977 Tamio Wakayama put on a photographic exhibition in Vancouver, which then became a book with the same title: *A Dream of Riches: The Japanese Canadians, 1877 to 1977* (1978). The photographs revealed the history of the internment. Asian Canadian theatre also started to emerge in the seventies, with plays such as R.A. Shiomi’s *Yellow Fever* (1982) which was set in Japantown in Vancouver in the 1970s. Marty Chan’s *Mom, Dad, I’m Living with a White Girl* was first staged in Vancouver in 1996 and toured across Canada. Asian Canadian activism has been expressed through various media and at many levels. Film-making in the Japanese Canadian context (which bloomed especially from 1998 on the anniversary of the Redress when funding was made available) has been prolific, including films broadcast on CBC.

A Craving for Freedom

Living in a democratic country such as Canada, Asian Canadians enjoy to a certain extent what Isaiah Berlin defined as “negative liberty”.¹⁵ Their positive liberty, the one that is defined in relation to others, is compromised as they are themselves “othered” both by the mainstream and sometimes also in their community. The hybrid identity is in a way trapped in between, not belonging to either side. This in-

¹⁵ In an article “Positive and Negative Liberty” on the website of *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, these terms are defined as follows: “Negative liberty is the absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints. One has negative liberty to the extent that actions are available to one in this negative sense. Positive liberty is the possibility of acting — or the fact of acting—in such a way as to take control of one’s life and realize one’s fundamental purposes. While negative liberty is usually attributed to individual agents, positive liberty is sometimes attributed to collectivities, or to individuals considered primarily as members of given collectivities” (Carter n.p.).

betweenness must be an unpleasant experience, as we see generations of Asian Canadian writers searching for ways to achieve freedom and release. The first-generation writers that I choose to work on offer an “either/or” opposition, as we see Lee’s character Kae moving away from her family and community to Hong Kong to pursue her personal desires, while Kogawa’s Naomi comes out from seclusion and joins the communal campaign. The second-generation authors, however, propose a “both/and” approach as their characters remain indefinable and fluid, open, and able to draw power and resources from both cultures.

For example, Japanese Canadian activism was started primarily by third-generation groups who were initially ignorant of what had happened to their families during the internment. The Japanese Canadians, mostly *issei* or *nisei*, who lived through the internment had a saying, “*shikataganai*”—it cannot be helped, which the third generations find incomprehensible and irritating. As a *nisei* Japanese Canadian activist, painter and poet, Roy Kiyooka, says in a poem:

i’ll be damned if i’ll let the word ‘shikataganai’ fall from my lips again
i thought, thinking of all the hostages of other malevolences... (283, lower case in the original).

The *issei* reconcile themselves in their own way with the social injustice they suffered by resorting to cultural ideals, such as *shikataganai*: if it cannot be helped, then why struggle? One is better off restoring one’s inner peace and being free from disturbance and turmoil by doing nothing about it. After all, what is most important is to preserve harmony, both within the self and in the community and the larger society. Indeed, as Kogawa faithfully captures in her novel *Emily Kato*, the Redress campaign divided the community at one point, and even split the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), with the more traditional group accusing the newer members of being greedy in demanding financial compensation for individuals. As Julie McGonegal observes:

The problematic interplay between cultural values of co-operation and harmony, racial affect such as fear and shame, and nationalist discourses of multicultural diversity and tolerance, becomes more and more evident as Naomi’s account of the redress struggle becomes more detailed, more focused on the internal rivalries that constituted that struggle. (70)

In the novel, the *nisei* activist Emily Kato says: “The Issei, without question, suffered the most [...]. They lost every, every thing. They were betrayed by everyone” (235). In a sense, some *issei* were betrayed even by those who spoke and fought on their behalf, since they felt they had reconciled themselves with the past in their own way. In Chapter Two, I will give a transcultural reading of Joy Kogawa’s novels, discussing the significance of cultural appreciation in reaching mutual understanding.

The *sansei*, the well-acculturated third generation, could not comprehend the aspect of Asian culture which seems to demand that people suffer without complaining.¹⁶ It is because this seemingly passive attitude is not appreciated in Canada. The individualist society endorses self-assertiveness and an active attitude toward defending one’s rights. The disengaged attitude of Asian Canadian groups, however, comes across as insincere and even non-cooperative. The newer generations, well-immersed in Canadian cultures and values, reflect on their community’s past and tell the stories from the inside out, making transcultural understandings possible. It could be argued that cultural workers, such as in the Japanese Canadian group, Kogawa, along with film makers Linda Ohama and Mieko Ouchi and many others have made it possible through their works for more and more people to appreciate some seemingly strange cultural values and differences in quite sophisticated and nuanced ways.

Miki, for example, criticises the “it cannot be helped” philosophy as being destructive of the Japanese Canadian society: “it conjures a process of passage, of a wilful absence of wilfulness, of a resignation to a flowing, what some would call a negative stage” (*Broken Entries* 30). Indeed, many Japanese Canadian artists and critics are quite annoyed with this *shikataganai* syndrome and the advocacy of it. Lived experience of alienation and marginalisation renders the writers acutely conscious of social injustice and oppression in Canada. It is however the belief that they have been deprived of what should be due to them—the recognition of their equal citizenship—that has motivated them to take action and express themselves. In *Narratives of Citizenship* (2011), the editors explain: “Persons from diasporic and Indigenous groups are often engaged in protracted struggles to define which of the

¹⁶ Saying this, I am also aware that there is a significant minority of the *sansei* who were born prior to the war, so that they could understand.

most basic of human rights should be accorded them by countries that demand their assimilation while insisting upon their separation and, in extreme cases, interment or expulsion” (Fleischmann and Styvendale xx-xxi). I will argue, however, that to some extent, Asian Canadian literature, though it can be seen as an independent literary canon, is also an integral part of Canadian culture and consciousness, continuing to remind the country of its less than honourable past. The writers self-identify with Canada’s democratic values and actively contribute to making the democratic system more inclusive and fair.

In early Asian Canadian works, there is a tendency towards reconciliation which is often conveyed by post-generations speaking for the victimised early generations, who “cannot speak” and “will not speak” (*Obasan* 1). The positioning of the self or group as victim can actually be connected to patterns which critics such as Atwood have identified in mainstream Canadian literature.¹⁷ Indeed, I observe, for example, that in Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, a pervasive film of silence envelops the *issei*’s pain and struggle. However, I argue that Asian Canadian writers see assuming the victim identity as limiting and restrictive and they have been determined to break away from it. In fact, Japanese Canadian writers not only have to deal with the overshadowing success of Kogawa but also the norm her *Obasan* has set, and Canadian readers have accepted. Asian Canadian writers endeavour to further their pursuit of freedom: not only speaking about the injustice their community has suffered in the past, but also the discrimination they are facing now; not only pointing out that it is wrong to oppress and victimise people because of racial difference, but also demanding respect and recognition.

Moreover, Asian Canadian writers are especially keen to experiment with ways to express their craving for freedom. For example, I argue the use of trickster characters has a particular meaning in Asian Canadian literature, which differs from that of the tricksters in aboriginal writings. In Asian Canadian literature, typical trickster characters, such as the fox spirit (in Terry Watada’s *Kuroshio*, Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony* and Larissa Lai’s *When Fox Is a Thousand*), the *kappa* (the

¹⁷ In *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), Margaret Atwood argues that there is a peculiar interest in victims in Canadian literature and proposes four “Basic Victim Positions”.

Japanese water spirit in Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child*), and so on, are the materialisation of this desire for freedom: since freedom is not attainable for mortals, only those supernatural forms of life can access it, because they can transform in shape and enjoy mobility and immortality. At the same time, these tricksters often have indefinable characters: they can be kind or evil, gentle or violent, helpful or mischievous. I argue that this ambiguity in the tricksters in fact reflects uncertain feelings towards the idea of freedom, because in Asian cultures, it can be seen as "dangerous", "wrong" or "bad" to crave personal freedom, since this often entails cutting loose from tradition and community.

The concept of freedom has multiple connotations. Asian Canadian literature, as an identity-based literature, emphasises concrete expressions of freedom in terms of recognition, such as citizenship, national right and economic interests. However, the abstract connotation of freedom, as a spirit, I argue, is also salient in Asian Canadian literature. Oppressed by both racial discrimination in mainstream society and by the patriarchal hierarchy that is often inherent in Asian cultures, Asian Canadians find themselves caught in the struggle between two often oppositional forces. For them, real freedom does not mean changing or reversing the existing power system, but channelling their resistant power and making it circulate, thus creating a more open and nourishing space for themselves. The inheritance of the liberating spirit is especially significant for recent generations of writers: with their citizenship now recognised and confirmed, this marker may become the feature that distinguishes them as Asian Canadian writers. Meanwhile, notions and expressions of freedom are among the most dynamic elements in Asian Canadian literature. The continuous discussion and exploration of this concept in the literature gives it vitality.

Liberation from Binaries: A Liberating Inheritance

Asian Canadian literature differentiates itself via a distinctive awareness of a power struggle with the mainstream, by which I mean both academic and popular readerships. In fact, to a certain extent it is the seemingly unbreakable binary value system, the either/or, that has been keeping ethnic minority subjects at the margins.

Fred Wah says the ethnic minority space is: “a site that is continually being magnetized” (90). As if functioning under the influence of polar energies, Asian Canadian subjects constantly position themselves and are positioned in relation and often opposition to the mainstream. In an untitled poem he published in *Inalienable Rice*, Roy Miki outlines a tension:

In a circle,
anyone who moves away from the centre,
moves into an apposition
to centrality
otherwise impossible. (73)

This tension is caused by oppositional differences: white culture endorses a fixed idea of the “normal”, the “good”, the “right”; all that is different is then placed in an oppositional position and becomes the other, the alienated, and the wrong. This explains that ethnic minority writers are political before anything since they need to position themselves in relation to the centre and therefore either contest the designated role as the “other” or comply with the mainstream social expectation. The latter is often due to an internalised social pressure in ethnic minority subjects to assimilate, which is defined by Miki as self-appropriation.

Canadian critic Smaro Kamboureli argues in the introduction to the anthology *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (1996):

Multicultural writing is not minority writing, for it does not raise issues that are of minor interest to Canadians. Nor is it, by any standard, of lesser quality than the established literary tradition. Its thematic concerns are of such a diverse range that they show the binary structure of “centre” and “margins;” which has for so long informed discussions of Canadian literature, to be a paradigm of the history of political and cultural affairs in Canada. (3)

Indeed, Asian Canadian literature, with its special interest in liberty and equality, constitutes one of the most sensitive sites of awareness about social justice, something which is important to the development of Canadian society. Also, I observe Asian Canadian writers actively avoiding engaging with the “centre” and “margins” binary structure, as they are cautious about falling into the trap of the “magnetised field” (Wah 90) and becoming the marginalised, the subjugated and the other. As Miki observes: “a one-dimensional oppositional positioning is hardly an

adequate basis for new cultural forms which can represent the localized subjectivities of writers of colour” (*Broken Entries* 107). Their strategy is to unsettle the existing social order by pointing out the inadequacy and injustice it contains, or by suggesting alternatives. I will pay special attention to these liberating strategies in my fourth chapter, discussing novels by Hiromi Goto and Larissa Lai.

Hiromi Goto introduces a third party to break the force of the binary system. In her young adult book *Half World* (2010), Goto invents a fluid, interconnecting world that consists of three Realms:

The Three Realms—the Realm of Spirit, the Realm of Flesh, and Half World—are meant to be connected. We should move from one to the other, in due time, as each individual lives, dies, half lives, then becomes Spirit. But someone or something divided the sacred cycle, dooming our Realms to an ungenerative deterioration. I don’t know why! I don’t know how! I only know that we are very close to complete disintegration. (*Half World* 100)

Goto suggests that hybrid subjectivities are in fact the link that connects and channels the polar energies. A real celebration of hybrid subjectivities is happening here as they are seen not as inferior or as victims but as important, indispensable for the harmonious and sustainable development of society.

Goto presents the painful experience of hybrid subjectivities as being caught between two opposing worlds:

Child, you cannot understand the endless repeating lives we must endure in this place. For eons upon eons we are caught in our Half Lives, repeating our moments of greatest trauma. Over the years some of the stronger ones have managed to extend their patterns, and make small changes, and in this way we have built societies and cities, occupations and some kind of purpose. But always we are yanked back to the Spirit-breaking moment, to begin the cycle once more. Some have never been able to break their pattern. They die and return and die like we breathe in and out the air. (*Half World* 100-101)

Being trapped in an isolated sphere, these people cannot move out of their tragic life pattern but are forced to relive their trauma repeatedly. I argue that this harsh description of life in the half-world parodies that of Asian Canadian subjects. It suggests that being isolated between two cultures, generations of ethnic minority subjects relive past pain and suffering (such as the Japanese Canadian internment) repeatedly, not able to move on out of the pattern.

Indeed, pain or suffering is another traditional motif in Asian Canadian literature. One of the legacies of Asian Canadian literature is a pain, an actual, acute, often suppressed pain that is not shared by people who are not of the same “category”. Legacies to Asian Canadians are therefore not always pleasant and empowering, but, on the contrary, often denote negative elements: pain, shame, trauma memory, and hatred. Miki argues that Asian Canadian writers are responsible for inheriting these negative legacies in productive ways:

For Chinese and Japanese Canadians and Natives, these would include the legacy of systematic racism imposed through the historic absence of rights [...]. These are the issues that cannot simply be wished away, but become an integral part of the responsibility of language, texts, and theoretical underpinnings of writers and cultural workers of colour. (*Broken Entries* 118)

We see Asian Canadian writers explore possibilities for taking on these legacies in a liberating way, through acts of owning up to shameful histories, reconstructing fragmented or disrupted family stories, articulating and validating pains and so on.

In Asian Canadian literature, by “liberation” I mean a tendency among writers to experiment with progressive identity and racial politics to invent new writing techniques and strategies, and challenge English writing traditions and norms. By progress, I do not mean any perceived linear development in quality. Of course, any such account of Asian Canadian literature as an immature entity progressing towards maturity has an element of oversimplification. But the Asian Canadian cultural workers themselves, including writers, critics and so on often comment on their perception of the progress that has happened, both in terms of the amount of writing produced and in terms of political and theoretical advancement.

Miki borrows the term “deterritorialisation” from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who describe it as:

a disturbed use of language that foregrounds its surface as a conflicted space. Minority writers, because of their subordinate position, must work in a language that disrupts the social stability of conventional discourse and communication, by setting in opposition “a purely intensive usage of language to all symbolic or even significant or simply signifying usages of it”. (Deleuze and Guattari, qtd. in *Broken Entries* 117-8)

Miki has identified the liberating force of deterritorialisation: “The act of ‘deterritorialization’ through writing is perhaps a viable method for resisting assimilation, for exploring variations in form that undermine aesthetic norms, for challenging homogenizing political systems, and for articulating subjectivities that emerge from beleaguered communities” (*Broken Entries* 118). By unsettling and transgressing cultural and linguistic borders between the mainstream and ethnic minority groups, deterritorialisation defamiliarises the literary field and makes space for minority writings. By actively disturbing and attacking English writing traditions, ethnic minority writers are able to affirm the legitimacy of their creations.

By “inheritance”, the other key term that defines my project, I mean a conscious effort by Asian Canadian writers to preserve literary resources by using myth, stories, linguistic elements, and writing techniques from both traditions. In a way, inheriting cultural traditions for Asian Canadian writers has a double effect: it is liberating since it facilitates deterritorialisation. At the same time, writers may find it restricting, feeling obligated to fulfil the expectation of being native informants, rather than being recognised for their creative talents; or having to tell stories about their communities, rather than being able to choose their content freely. The solution, or the balancing point, it seems, lies in what Miki proposes:

What is important for a culture to thrive is a renewed belief in the viability of agency, so that writers from a diversity of subject-positions can develop the conditions in which social justice can be achieved through a language free from the tyranny of hegemonies of all kinds. It may be an impossible end, but the movement towards that “across cultural” end can initiate those heterogeneous and indeterminate spaces (potentialities) where writers of colour, including Asian Canadian writers, can negotiate their (non-totalizable) specificities—without looking over their shoulders for the coercive gaze of homogenizing discourses. (*Broken Entries* 123)

Indeed, with agency, Asian Canadian writers are able to develop and articulate subjectivities on their own terms. Moreover, I argue that liberation and inheritance are not two opposing concepts that exclude and nullify each other, but that they can nourish and inform each other. In this thesis, I explore the interaction and mutual transformation of these two tendencies in Asian Canadian literature. Not making any judgement about the relative value of these two concepts allows me to have an open

and flexible framework for my interpretation, making possible sensitive and appreciative readings.

In fact, for the writers, adopting with a liberating spirit is a productive approach with regard to the mixed (positive and negative) legacies. The selective inheritance of cultural legacies is also a liberating strategy for Asian Canadians more generally, enabling them to negotiate their identities within both their ethnic minority communities and the broader Canadian population. Meanwhile, in Asian Canadian literature we see authors designing different approaches and pathways for their characters to achieve liberty. The liberating process can also be unsettling, as it is destructive to existing forms and norms which, though restricting, are simultaneously “reassuring”. A totally liberating act—or complete rejection of inheritance—will often lead to self-alienation. Meanwhile, a total acceptance, that is, without differentiation and re-creation will alienate the subject from the here and now, therefore secluding and isolating the self.

These three approaches are best demonstrated in Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* with the mother, grandmother and daughter choosing different ways: the mother enforces an extreme policy of assimilation by rejecting anything related to Japanese culture, including basic elements such as language and food. The grandmother resists her daughter’s policy, speaking only Japanese and eating only Japanese food, sent by her brother from Japan. The granddaughter, after having learnt the skill of storytelling from her grandmother, begins a process of active and creative inheritance. She learns the Japanese language and tells new stories as she translates between the two languages.

Asian Canadian Literature

In Issue 3.2 of *The Asianadian*, guest editors Paul Yee and Sean Gunn presented a special edition of Asian Canadian writing that was a continuation of the *Inalienable Rice* anthology. In the editorial, Yee and Gunn observe:

Writing, perhaps, is the most forward-looking aspect of visions for Asian-Canada. Currently, the Chinese and Japanese Canadians of Vancouver have been able to define their communities culturally and politically, in terms of organizations, protests and festivals. But there is a need to articulate the

human contexts that exist at the base of all Asian-Canadian activity. It is the frustration and the love, the hatreds and the humour of the emotional and personal commitments that truly define our community and sensibility. (2)

Literature has reached the largest audience and has the longest-lasting effects; it also allows for in-depth explorations of nuances and complexities that other forms of expression fail to fully convey. Many communal journals and magazines appeared during the first stage of activism. However, they have hardly ever reached beyond their own community or academic circle. Literature, on the other hand, though often less direct in its political engagement, has been accepted by readers in Canada and abroad.

Asian Canadian literature also inherits ideas and strategies from other resistance literatures, such as black, feminist, aboriginal and queer literature. Some of the writing techniques that are effective in resistance causes can be observed across the range of literature. For example, code-switching, the usage of trickster characters, normalisation, reworking of mythical stories, biblical parody and so on, can be seen as resistance writing techniques as they all unsettle the existing social order under which their subjects are marginalised and alienated. However, mainstream literary study tends to categorise all these techniques and features using an overarching term: postmodern, thus making their political intentions indistinct.¹⁸ In “Canadian Postmodernism: Misreadings and Non-readings”, Frank Davey notes:

There is no necessary connection between identity politics, racial community writing, gay and lesbian writing, and the epistemological radicality of literary postmodernisms. Much of that writing may reflect aspects of postmodernity but may not be among the postmodernisms itself. Much of it has subverted critiques or refusals of transcendent meaning. There may be chronological, cultural, or aesthetic relationships between that writing and kinds of postmodernist writing, but these are not necessarily necessary relationships. (16)

¹⁸ Linda Hutcheon argues: “the generic label ‘postmodern’ threatened to totally engulf the interventionist oppositional agendas of feminism and postcolonialism. This threatened absorption of agency was made possible by the fact that postcolonial and feminist art shared with the postmodern a wide range of rhetorical and aesthetic strategies (from irony and parody to historicized self-reflexivity)” (“The Glories of Hindsight” 44).

Indeed, some writing techniques in Asian Canadian literature do have affinities with postmodernism, since they likewise seek to negate grand narratives by proposing alternative temporal and spatial perspectives. However, as Lai comments during an interview with Robyn Morris:

I probably do have alliances with postmodernism as an artistic movement but I don't really think about my work in those terms. Certainly when I was beginning, I thought about postmodernism as a Euro-centric movement that I didn't particularly want to be allied with. Whose modernity was it that we were supposedly "post"? [...] I am interested in the notion of truth as a construction. Is that an idea that belongs to postmodernism? Or could it be equally well belong to liberatory movements from the margins? (Morris 24-5)

Lai expresses her reluctance to be merged with a lineage of writing that she does not identify with, as she writes from a different stance than that adopted by mainstream authors. Also, it is indeed worth asking whether certain forms and techniques belong only to postmodernism. Can they be considered as effective tools used in resistant causes? Lai points out the key to the problem: "The thing is, in the end, there aren't separate discourses" (Morris 25).

Therefore, should Asian Canadian critics take as their mission the design of a separate glossary for analysing this literature? Miki points to an "urgent [...] need for terminology and theoretical speculations that avoid the pitfall of simply re-circulating the old systems of power" (*Broken Entries* 107). Black literature and feminist literary criticism seem to have developed relatively independent critical systems, which on the one hand ensure the agency of the literature, but on the other, may have restrictive effects on the accessibility of the literary field to critics and readers. Personally, I think at this early stage of development of Asian Canadian literature, the field should be more inviting and open rather than discouraging and intimidating. However, I sometimes encounter articles where a work by an Asian Canadian writer is dissected to suit a particular theoretical framework, with some bits of the texts excerpted in order to illustrate the theoretical point being made. I feel concerned because the context of the works, such as the text's political agenda, is disregarded. I argue that this practice will damage the corpus of Asian Canadian literature as a whole. By refusing to recognise the integrity of the work, the critic severs limbs from a body of literature to suit a different structure of discourse, thus

revoking the agency of the writer. I argue that Asian Canadian critics should be both culturally and politically sensitive, acquiring a sense of responsibility for the literary community.

Asian Canadian literature, though not often recognised as a new literature, has a rather short history that spans less than forty years. It is a conscious literature, by which I mean not only that this literature was created to serve a purpose but also that there has been a self-conscious tradition of writers and critics reflecting together on their politics and strategies, and often changing them as a result. For example, in his “The Emergence of ‘Asian Canadian Literature’: CanLit’s Obscene Supplement?” Guy Beauregard cautions against the celebratory tone in the “coming to voice” narrative of Asian Canadian literature as he thinks it may in fact blind Asian Canadian writers to the potential containment of cultural difference in Canada’s “multicultural” context (56). Writers and critics work together to stay alert to possible signs that Asian Canadians’ rights and liberties are being compromised. Asian Canadian literature therefore grows in a political soil. It is, to some extent, “a literature with a cause”.

Moreover, Chinese Canadian poet Fred Wah says: “To write (or live) ethnically is also to write (or live) ethically, in pursuit of right value, right place, right home, right otherness” (Wah 58). Sensitive to power relations and social justice, Asian Canadian writers often write with a sense of responsibility. Lai explains her personal ethics which includes:

a sense of responsibility to participate in the re-making of contemporary culture, hopefully for the better, but without denying the forces of mutation and unpredictability. This sense of responsibility also necessitates an active imagining of the nation to address the injustices of the past and the possibilities of the present, in order to produce the future differently. (“How to do ‘You’” 11-12)

This sense of responsibility, I argue, constitutes an important force that motivates the emergence, organisation and development of the literary community.

Meanwhile, Asian Canadian literature adopts a humanitarian goal and aligns itself with various minority groups. Asian Canadian writers not only expose racial discrimination in mainstream society but also reveal inter-ethnic animosity, including racial bias against white Canadians from within ethnic minority communities.

Moreover, writers also speak for non-heterosexual groups and aboriginal people. Miki argues: “The more effective [Asian Canadian texts] are as creative critical forms that make us more conscious of differential relations of power and representation, the more they can make us aware of our responsibilities in generating the desire, not for commodities, but for justice” (“Belief” 47). The consciousness-raising function of Asian Canadian literature is not only about gaining freedom and demanding justice for certain groups, but is more about making the society a better place. In her introduction to *Critical Collaborations* (2014) Smaro Kamboureli argues: “the study of literature has a role to play in shaping and articulating our engagement with Canada and the world” (4). Asian Canadian literature serves as a means both to negotiate with Canada and to characterise Canada as a modern nation in the world.

To some extent, Asian Canadian literature is a cultural enterprise built up by cultural workers who imagined it and sought to bring it about. I argue that this conscious effort to establish a cultural entity and to assert and confirm its existence and development is analogous to that undertaken on behalf of Canadian literature itself, in a slightly earlier period. The establishing of the Canadian literary canon through joint efforts of writers, critics, publishers, funding organisations and readers effectively creates and defines Canadian culture and national identity. Faye Hammill explains:

The 1960s and 1970s were strongly marked by cultural nationalism [...]. Literary critics produced survey studies of the national literature and celebrated works which they thought displayed typically Canadian preoccupations, an approach known as thematic criticism. The government promoted Canadian culture by establishing prizes and fellowships for artists and writers, and also encouraged Canadian studies abroad. (11)

In its search for an independent cultural identity, Canada focused on an inward reflection on its local reality. In *Keepers of the Code: English-Canadian Literary Anthologies and the Representation of the Nation* (2013), Robert Lecker points out: “The pursuit of this all-encompassing idea of ‘native culture’ creates a myth of nation that is paradoxically exclusionary” (243). However, while the centralisation of national culture was intensifying, an urge for recognition from the periphery had been accumulating momentum. The centrifugal forces generated their own opposites:

a demand for recognition from those groups that the developing national culture had been relegated to the margins.

It seems that “timing” has been one of the important factors in the development of Asian Canadian literature as the level of productivity and success fluctuates in accordance with variations in public attention or in policies that affect funding and publishing opportunities. Since its inception at the end of 1970s, this literature accumulated momentum until 1985 when the forces seemed to be at their strongest, with many Asian Canadian writers publishing their major works. Then the talk of ethnicity and multiculturalism quietened down, as public attention shifted elsewhere. For example, *The Asianadian*, a very successful communal magazine stopped publishing in 1986, as its editorial board believed that the moment for such a magazine had passed. I will discuss this magazine in detail in Chapter One. However, towards the end of the 1990s, a revival of race-based talk was discernible, as Coleman and Goellnicht argue:

We argue that the “return of race” to Canadian cultural discourse at the start of the new millennium is a return with a difference because it has been pivotal in establishing new and complex institutions that have introduced new means of production—from presses and film studios to anthologies and curricula—that can enhance relationship between communication and community. (23)

The second generation of writers, such as Larissa Lai and Hiromi Goto published their first works in the middle of 1990s. However, with return of public attention, they both got their first books reprinted: Lai’s *When Fox Is a Thousand*, first published in 1993, was reprinted in 2004. Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*, first published in 1994, was reprinted in 1997. Notably, in 2014, NeWest Press published a twentieth anniversary edition of the book. Lai and Goto published their second books respectively in 2002 and 2001. In the second edition of *Chorus of Mushrooms*, a notice appears: “Newest Press acknowledges the support of the Canada Council [...]. We also acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP) for our publishing activities” (endpapers). This demonstrates the influence of the political climate, since this edition appeared in 1997, at a moment when the Liberal Party was in power and public support for the arts was generous. Meanwhile, by this point, with

independent organisations, such as the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop, endeavouring to build up and promote Asian Canadian literature, its development became more independent, relatively less directly affected by the fluctuating and shifting of national or international political and social attention.

In the 1970s, which saw heated discussions about the politics of difference, Canada advocated that the ethnic diversity of its population could be understood as a resource, or an advantage, in cultural terms. Increasingly, it accommodated different voices coming into the national discourse. Although, as many critics observe, Canada's multiculturalism is far from being the ultimate solution to conflicts based on ethnic or racial difference, the state policy has nonetheless provided space and support to previously silenced minority groups.¹⁹ As Kamboureli argues: "Indeed, at a time when 'mainstream' literature can include texts that range from chick lit²⁰ to nature writing, from indigenous literature to diasporic voices, we can no longer speak of CanLit as a singular construct; operating more as a historical sign of Canadian

¹⁹ In *Canadian Literature* (2007), Hammill explains: "In 1998 the Act for the Preservation and Enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada was passed. It emphasises the racial diversity of Canadian society, and its objectives include fostering appreciation of minority cultures and preserving languages other than English and French. Proponents of multiculturalism have constructed a narrative of progressive nationhood in which Canada increasingly recognises the rights of every component of its 'mosaic' society (this image, evoking unique parts fitting together into a coherent whole, is preferred to the American 'melting pot'). One of the dangers of this approach, though, is that it presents racial discrimination as a thing of the past, denying its persistence in modern-day Canada. Multiculturalism has also been criticised, in Canada and worldwide, for being a divisive force which reduces national unity and encourages ghettoisation and stereotyping; for tacitly consenting to the discrimination against women which occurs in some minority cultures; and for propounding a concept of human identity as wholly determined by race or ethnicity. Yet despite these various critiques of multiculturalism, its core values of respect and tolerance are, on the whole, widely accepted in Canada" (27-8).

²⁰ The term, "Chick lit", was coined by Cris Mazza and Jeffrey Deshell in 1995, when they co-edited an anthology: *Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction*. Mazza explains that the term was intended "not to embrace an old frivolous or coquettish image of women but to take responsibility for our part in the damaging, lingering stereotype" (18).

literature's formation, CanLit has now become CanLits" (*Critical Collaborations* 4). Indeed, the CanLit canon has enlarged to include what were once considered "subaltern genres", and indeed, the novels that I analyse in this thesis are now often considered as "typically Canadian". But there is still the risk for Asian Canadian literature of being tokenised: one or two texts by iconic writers or a couple of articles on some prominent works are put together in a small section with other multicultural or diasporic texts, and usually placed at the end of an anthology or a book on Canadian literary criticism.

Many Asian Canadian writers have received funding or grants from the Canadian government. In the introduction to *Producing Canadian Literature*, co-editor Kit Dobson explains:

One of the most important things about the culture industries in Canada is that they are supported by the state to a considerable extent [...]. The Canada Council for the Arts, founded in 1957, disburses millions of dollars to different facets of the culture industries. Beyond funding individual artists in a variety of disciplines, it also funds festivals, literary readings, writer residencies, arts organizations, and publishers. The arts in Canada would look very, very different if the Canada Council did not exist. (5-6)²¹

Recognising the agency and autonomy of the Asian Canadian community and its writers, I also observe an active effort on the part of the Canadian mainstream in making space (for instance, in the form of special issues of scholarly journals), providing support (through grant and prizes) and generally being relatively accommodating and tolerant. To some extent, the fact that Asian Canadian literature has been able to establish itself in such a short time, with many writers getting published, is partly due to a certain level of national support, which began as multiculturalism policies were implemented in Canada.

Saying this, I am also aware that the funding, publishing and prize-awarding process in Canada is not totally fair, since like other such public organisations, cultural institutions often have what they perceive as national interests to serve. In *Prizing Literature* (2011), Gillian Roberts draws upon M. Nourbese Philip's views:

²¹ For example, Wayson Choy acknowledges in his *Paper Shadows: A Memoir of a Past Lost and Found* (1999): "the Canada Council for their research and travel grant [and] the Writer's Trust of Canada for a lecture grant" ("Author's Note").

As Dionne Brand and M. Nourbese Philip have argued, the apparatuses of the state that work to support the production and dissemination of Canadian literature often exclude writers from the host position. Philip's essays frequently expose and interrogate the racism of the Canadian arts funding and publishing system, which is more hospitable to the aesthetic experiments of white writers than to writers of colour who challenge our received ideas of literature. (25-6)

Indeed, decision-making on funding and publishing is very much influenced by the interest (in both senses) of the mainstream. In the late 1970s, Asian Canadian literature seized an opportune moment and began to flourish within a short period of time. In subsequent decades, national support and attention gradually diminished and switched to other areas. However, at present, the community continues to commit itself to its literary project, locating and bringing on a new generation of writers. Various forms of communal support in terms of grants and awards have been created. For example the National Association of Japanese Canadians Endowment Fund gives "financial assistance in the form of grants for Japanese Canadian Cultural programs and activities, and was funded by an initial grant of \$350,000 received from the Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation" ("Recipients"). Also the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop established an "Emerging Writer Award" in 1999. I argue that a more independent stance in relation to national mainstream cultural organisations, such as the Canada Council, may in fact ensure the autonomy of Asian Canadian writers.

Asian Canadian Criticism

Asian Canadian literature falls into the category of ethnic or diasporic writings, a sub-category in narratives of Canadian literary history, which is partly why many of its writers do not want to associate themselves with the label "Asian Canadian". A famous example is Evelyn Lau, who boycotted the Writing Thru Race conference that was organised by ethnic minority writers and critics, such as Larissa Lai and Roy Miki, in 1994 in Vancouver. The conference caused a social uproar as it specified that the conference was exclusively for writers of colour. Lau stated her reasons for not attending in *Ricepaper*: "My wish for the coming year is those of us who are

minorities will want to be given opportunities based on talent, not race and that those who are in positions of power will give us that dignity” (7). Lau considers being put in a tokenistic position and be entitled to privileges because of one’s race is unfair, even though her works deal with Asian Canadian female characters who struggle at the margin of society.

In the next issue of *Ricepaper* (1.3), both Sally Ito and SKY Lee responded to Evelyn Lau’s open letter in the same “Open Mic” section. Ito argued in “A Response to Evelyn Lau’s ‘A Wish for the Coming Year’” : “Lau’s argument rests on the age old Romantic and Liberal notion of the artist as supreme individual who should succeed on merits of his/her talent alone. If only it were that simple! Her comment begs the question ‘But *who* is to determine *what* talent *is* in this country?’” (7). This is indeed a question that is worth pondering over. The debate over Lau’s decision reveals the complicated situation that Asian Canadian writers are in: claiming a minority identity and position means placing oneself in a subaltern position. At the same time, English literary norms are formed as part of western tradition, and in many ways are incapable of accommodating different cultures and traditions.

Moreover, questions in the same line as Ito’s should be probed: who sets the norms for literary value? Are these norms universal or biased? Are these the only valid norms? Are mainstream literary works also valued for their cultural, historical and political content? I also suspect, what is often left unsaid, but is the “real” reason for the doubting of the value of diasporic literature, is the writing style. Eva Darias Beautell observes the current mainstream’s unjust attitude towards ethnic minority writings:

despite some official and non-official efforts to the contrary, the incipient Canadian literary canon has not successfully managed to include cultural, ethnic and racial diversity. Instead, it has implicitly produced two literary categories, as it were: on the one hand, there is ‘mainstream’ Canadian literature, “the real one”; on the other, there is “multicultural” literature, the colourful and folkloric, and therefore the less ‘literary.’ Each of these categories has in turn produced a completely different set of expectations, as well as different criteria and tools of analysis. (14-5)

I will take some time to examine this viewpoint. It is true that despite the emergence of many nationally and even internationally acclaimed writers, Asian Canadian literature in a way remains a subaltern realm compared to mainstream white writings.

It is implied that this literature can only be appreciated in a special category, such as “multicultural literature”, where its historical, political and cultural elements become sources of value that may “compensate” for inadequate literary value. When talking about ethnic minority literature, there is often an implication of inferior quality or divergence from the norm, and a hint that these works are published because of the ethnic elements contained in them rather than their literary merits.

On a deeper level, the issue arises due to the complex relationship between content and form: if the special cultural content requires a different form, should we measure the value of an ethnic minority text by its content or its form? Miki remembers that in the 1950s and 1960s “there weren’t non-Anglo writers who were getting any attention. If they were, they just fell into narrow ethnic categories, and a lot of the stuff they were writing maybe wasn’t that interesting, because they were working only with content” (*Broken Entries* 73). Asian Canadian writers ever since the Eaton sisters have been experimenting with different strategies of writing that can somehow retain literary merits from two or more cultures. They explore ways of expressing many seemingly incompatible cultural elements within English writing norms. For example, almost all the writers I work on experiment with decentred narratives, juxtaposing these with the linear plot lines which dominate in traditional English-language fiction. Similarly, Western writers often exhibit a preference for conciseness and simplicity over supposedly “excessive” decoration—but such decoration is often encouraged in Chinese writings: repetition, for example, is a much used rhetorical device for emphasising.

Meanwhile, ethnic minority literature is also criticised for not using English literary techniques. In *Oppositional Aesthetics: Reading from a Hyphenated Space* (1994), Indian Canadian critic Arun Mukherjee criticises the “universalist criteria” in Western literary criticism (17). She points out that the “the ‘universal’ masks the refusal to see the unfamiliar and, perhaps, the uncomfortable” (21). Works written in English but not conforming to English writing traditions are not appreciated as something new but are deemed as something not well-written. Moreover, Larissa Lai argues effectively against the notion of “whiteness as universal” in “Sites of Articulation”:

I think the most primary and effective way it works is by declaring itself to be universal when it is not. It uses the power of the universal as a cloak of invisibility to parade around in. This cloak allows whiteness to say that whatever works for whiteness should work for everyone, and if it doesn't, it is because of the deficiency of the other. (28)

The Western forms which are suitable for white subjectivities to express their cultural values and experiences may not always work as efficiently for Asian Canadian content. However, as Lai points out, as a result of not adopting recognisable mainstream writing techniques ethnic minority writings are seen as of lesser quality.

Produced within a mainstream publishing system and usually in the dominant language—English—Asian Canadian literature is inevitably valued against mainstream literary norms. Asian Canadian writers, especially the second-generation writers who are themselves thoroughly conversant with Western literary theories, invent new writing strategies that challenge existing English writing norms. Joseph Pivato argues:

In general, ethnic minority writing was reduced to the oral history of immigrants or to the sociology of new settlement in ethnic neighbourhoods. I have always taken this dismissive criticism and turned it around. It is precisely because of this attention to the realistic representation of the immigrant story that the works [...] are valuable both as literature and as story. [...] To me this biographical dimension increases rather than diminishes the literary value of their work. (158)

I agree that the documentary function of some works should be seen as of great historical value. However, though Pivato argues persuasively, the fact is that only those Asian Canadian works that have distinctive postmodernist features are widely read and discussed. Larissa Lai and Hiromi Goto are very successful examples of writers who incorporate cultural elements using postmodernist writing techniques. However, I argue that since Asian Canadian writers have a resistant mission, they cannot afford to deconstruct social relations totally in their works. As a result, they will need to construct certain links, though those may be loose and unconventional. For example, Goto presents telepathic communication across generations and species while Lai invents a “collective unconscious” for her city loners.

Moreover, some second generation writers, especially Lai and Goto open up binaries still more by tapping into the queer world. Both writers have Asian Canadian homosexual females as protagonists. Using the highly subversive queer tactics, such as the creation of a society of homosexual women, remaking creation stories so that women take the role of the creator instead of a male God, and situating their protagonists at the centre (instead of the margin) of social settings, both writers effectively open up alternative spaces for their characters, so that they are not subject to the existing binaries any more. This will be explored in detail in Chapter Four.

Mukherjee notes that the “innovations and experimentations of these writers have often gone unnoticed. Their use of parabolic structures, indigenous storytelling conventions, folk tales, parodies of Western and indigenous forms and rituals, have not attracted adequate attention due to the critics’ obsession with Western categories” (26). One of the priorities of this thesis is a consistent attention to the special writing techniques that the writers devise to suit their cultural content. In order to convey cross-cultural themes, writers adopt various approaches for transliteration, translation and the introduction of cultural knowledge.

To some extent, we can see Asian Canadian writers’ techniques for combining Eastern and Western cultural contents more “organically” as progressive. For example, in order to present the “real” life of Chinese diasporic populations in North America, Edith Eaton transcribed the names of people who lived in Seattle’s Chinatown in her novels. She inserts Chinese mythical stories into her texts, and deploys many expressions that she has translated directly from the Chinese language. However, critics who were unfamiliar with Chinese cultural or linguistic features criticised her writing style. Edith and her works remained obscure during her lifetime while her younger sister, Winnifred, who catered to the taste for the exotic in the literary marketplace at that time, became the most successful Asian North American writer of her era. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter One. In *Disappearing Moon Café*, first-generation writer SKY Lee deploys many narrative techniques and verbal patterns reminiscent of traditional Chinese novels. Her style is very fluent though the content is rich in Chinese cultural elements. Larissa Lai, a second-generation writer, experiments more widely and intensively with ways of mixing Asian cultural elements, philosophical ideals and writing techniques with English

ones. Similar progress can also be observed down the lineage of Japanese Canadian writers. Generations of writers contribute to enrich the Asian Canadian writers' "tool box", as Fred Wah calls it, and invent approaches that not only preserve the literary merits of writings in English, but are also more effective in articulating Asian Canadian subjectivities.

Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993) is the first Asian North American literary critical monograph. I call it Asian North American, as opposed to Asian American, as suggested by the book's title, because Wong includes Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* in her analysis. In justifying her approach, Wong says: "perhaps the subsumption of 'Asian Canadian' under 'Asian American' is a matter of temporary, strategic alliance-forging—a coalition, to use our earlier term again—since the Asian American (U.S.) corpus has so far been more substantial than the Asian Canadian and its critical study more established" (16). Indeed, Asian Canadian literature had its beginnings in the late 1970s, some ten years later than Asian American literature. At the early stages of development, Asian American literary study blossomed rapidly, as Wong explains: "since about 1986 a number of book-length studies by Asian American critics have appeared or are forthcoming" (3). Notably Rey Choy and Lisa Lowe have contributed to the studies on diaspora and immigrant literatures.²² Four years later, Asian Canadian writer and critic Lien Chao published *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English* (1997), the earliest Asian Canadian literary critical monograph. Since then, many established critics have rapidly established and enlarged the critical canon.

Already, several critical collections have been published that have Asian Canadian literature as their main or entire theme, such as *Literary Pluralities* (1998), edited by Christl Verduyn; *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography* (2008), edited by Eleanor Ty and Verduyn; *China Fictions, English Language* (2008) (which also includes Asian American and Asian British literature), edited by Robert Lee and *Critical Collaborations* (2014), edited by Kamboureli and Verduyn. There

²² See Lowe's *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), and Chow's *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (1993).

are also some monographs on Asian Canadian literature: Roy Miki's two iconic essay collections: *Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity and Writing* (1998) and *In Flux: Transnational Shifts in Asian Canadian Writing* (2011); Larissa Lai's *Slanting I, Imagining We: Asian Canadian Literary Production in the 1980s and 1990s* (2014), and Pilar Cuder-Domínquez, Belén Martín-Lucas and Sonia Villegas-López's *Transnational Poetics: Asian Canadian Women's Fiction of the 1990s* (2011). Almost all the monographs are arranged thematically, covering a part of Asian Canadian literary history.

Within the space that a doctoral thesis allows, my thesis traces the literature's early stage expressions and moving on to its official birth and subsequent fast growth. I argue that it was mainly thanks to the continuous and conscious struggles of the ethnic minority groups that this literature could develop so fast as to secure recognition and status as part of Canadian's national canon. This thesis is the first that studies the communal publications, magazines and anthologies, in relative depth. I demonstrate the important role these enterprises play in constructing a new literature and literary community by providing publication opportunities, organising literary and cultural activities and granting awards and funding. This thesis is also the first that reads Chinese Canadian alongside Japanese Canadian literature. Though this approach risks privileging the two largest (in terms of population and numbers of writers) ethnic groups within Asian Canadian literature, it offers an opportunity to examine interethnic relationships as well as explore the transcultural apparatuses that are deployed by writers of different groups. Lastly, by having liberty and inheritance as two foci of my analysis, this thesis achieves a balance between historical and thematic study.

Structure of the Thesis

My thesis is designed to bring Chinese and Japanese Canadian literatures together in order to present commonalities and differences between them. This is an approach that has not been taken in any of the existing Asian Canadian literary criticism. I am aware that by taking this approach I will risk "mainstreaming" Chinese and Japanese Canadian literatures and therefore marginalising other Asian Canadian literatures. I

will argue that the many commonalities between these two groups, in terms of immigration history, experiences in Canada, and cultural affinity, justify my choice to undertake a comparative study, and that it is more balanced than it would have been if I had included other groups. Japanese and Chinese Canadian literatures in English started in similar times and situations and have developed very much neck and neck in the last forty years, each producing prominent writers and important works. As demonstrated by the first Asian Canadian anthology, *Inalienable Rice*, there have been many collaborations and considerable mutual support between the two groups. The Asian Canadian coalition was also initiated and developed by the two groups in communal magazines in the 1970s. However, by restricting myself to Chinese and Japanese Canadian groups, I am not undermining the wider Asian Canadian coalition, as like the authors I work on, I concentrate on local Canadian conditions, rather than on knowledge and histories that are specific to the overseas cultures of China and Japan themselves. I argue that my project should be seen as part of Asian Canadian literary history, tracing the development of it by dealing with the two earliest constitutive groups.

Meanwhile, I also acknowledge the over-dependence on Chinese Canadians in my first chapter, which discusses the Eaton sisters and communal publications. The asymmetry or indeed, inequality, in this chapter is mainly caused by what is there (there are no Japanese Canadian counterparts to the Eaton sisters, but interestingly, the sisters chose to perform both Japanese and Chinese as their ethnical identities) and what is available to me: a future project on Japanese Canadian communal magazines, such as *Rikka: A National Quarterly Magazine*, will be valuable. Meanwhile, I argue that *The Asianadian*, one of the magazines I discuss in this thesis, itself adopted a pan-Asian perspective, as did many Asian Canadian activist magazines of the time. Moreover, Chapter One serves both as a framework and as a historical background that anticipate the detailed discussion of works in a balanced structure in the following chapters.

In Chapters Two, Three and Four, I pair a Chinese Canadian with a Japanese Canadian writer. Inevitably, this has imposed limitations on my choice of writers, because I needed to discover thematic or formal linkages between each pair. At the same time, I wish to provide in-depth close readings of each of the texts I include. I

have therefore restricted myself to six contemporary writers, discussing these in three chronologically ordered chapters. The authors, Joy Kogawa, SKY Lee, Wayson Choy, Terry Watada, Larissa Lai and Hiromi Goto, have been chosen to exemplify some of the key themes and preoccupations of Asian Canadian literature, as well as to present a diversity of writing styles. As well, they are representative of successive generations of Asian Canadian authors, and of their different approaches to questions of inheritance and liberation.

Other choices would have been valid: novels such as Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children* (1995), Judy Fong Bates' *China Dog and Other Tales from A Chinese Laundry* (1997), *Midnight at the Dragon Café* (2004), Kerri Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field* (1998), Sally Ito's *Floating Shore* (1998) and so on engage with similar subjects and problems to those explored by my six selected writers. I have excluded them primarily for reasons of space and in order to avoid repetitive discussion of the same themes. I also acknowledge that other critical perspectives could open up fresh discussions about auto-ethnographical and auto-biographical works by Asian Canadians: psychoanalytic criticism, for instance, or a sustained focus on communal lives. I made a decision to discuss only fiction rather than poetry, drama or a mixture of genres. Many of the writers that I chose to work on are polyvalent. For example, Joy Kogawa and Terry Watada published poetry collections before they published their first novels. Watada also wrote plays. However, much more space would be required for such a multi-genre project, which is beyond the scope of a PhD thesis. In addition, a focus on fiction allows for more direct and sustained comparisons among all the writers discussed, in terms of their prose narrative techniques.²³

A special feature of my project is the inclusion of a detailed discussion of the Eaton sisters, as precursors of modern Asian Canadian writing. Although many critics, Larissa Lai among them, have acknowledged the Eaton sisters as the earliest Asian Canadian writers that were published in the mainstream, they usually only mention them in passing, rather than offering readings of their works. However, I observe important historic links between the sisters and contemporary Asian

²³ I also chose not to include the two Francophone writers, Ying Chen and Aki Shimazaki, because they are both first-generation immigrants.

Canadian writers. By discussing the very different writing techniques and identity policies that the sisters invented at the turn of the twentieth century, I then observe that the contemporary writers “inherit” the two seemingly conflicting approaches, by adopting authenticity and fakery. I argue that rather than simply seeking authenticity or, alternatively, playing with the possibilities of fakery, these authors meditate upon the resources that these techniques can open up. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, by presenting and validating hybrid identities, contemporary writers, especially Larissa Lai, take the discussion of fakery and authenticity further, pointing out that fakery can have a kind of authenticity and authenticity can be fake. They therefore challenge the fixed value judgements attached to these binary concepts and re-evaluate them and by doing this, unsettle the existing social order.

Positioning the Eaton sisters, who wrote at the turn of the century, at the beginning of my project, I then work towards writers who have been published more recently. I prioritise a different theme in each section of my reading in order to avoid being repetitive as I often observe that Asian Canadian writers tend to cover many themes in each of their works, which is perhaps due to the ethical consciousness they hold. For example, taking Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* as an example, Goto explores the self-segregation of the Japanese Canadians and the destruction of the community, generational conflicts, loss and regaining of cultural heritage in the forms of food and language, the silence imposed and self-imposed on ethnic minorities and women, and ongoing social discrimination on the basis of race, gender or sexual orientation. She also mentions Japan’s invasion of China in the 1930s and the Vietnamese refugees who started to arrive in Canada in 1978. Faced with the thematic richness of texts such as this, I have devised a keyword strategy which allows me to focus on one aspect at a time. The keywords used in my chapters include transculturality, community writing, authenticity and fakery, and translation. I give sustained attention to these key terms throughout my analysis.

Although I concentrate primarily on racial and identity politics, topics like gender and sexualities are also given considerable attention in my discussion. To a large extent, Asian Canadian literature, just like Canadian literature, manifests a

slight predominance of women writers (having more foremothers than forefathers).²⁴ I have one chapter devoted to male authors to draw attention to issues of masculinity. Although these two authors, Wayson Choy and Terry Watada, are also allies of the feminist cause as they both portray liberal-minded girl or woman characters in their works, their main characters are male. In fact, I suggest that there may be an under-representation of masculinity in Asian Canadian literature, as apart from Choy and Watada, all the other authors I include in my thesis choose female characters as protagonists. I am therefore very pleased to include two novels that explore questions of masculinity, in order to restore some balance to my consideration of gender in this literary community.

In Chapter One, “Inheriting A Tradition of Liberation”, I will offer an overview of the Asian Canadian community’s efforts in nurturing a literature into being and then maturity by looking at a selection of communal publications, demonstrating that it takes a joint effort of writers, critics and readers to “raise up” a cultural enterprise. The chapter is divided into three parts: “Asian North American Pioneer Writers: Edith and Winnifred Eaton”, “Communal Publication Part I: Magazines and Group Commitment” and “Communal Publication Part II: Anthologies and the ‘Symphony of Noises’”. Although the Eaton sisters do not belong to the contemporary period that I focus on primarily, I find an analysis of them to be very useful and effective for modelling my approaches and establishing a thematic framework for analysing Asian Canadian literature. I will then discuss publications in contemporary Asian Canadian communities, such as magazines and anthologies, with the aim of outlining the special communal effort that has supported and nourished and, more importantly, constantly shaped and formed this literature.

Chapter Two, “Canon-making”, features “Get Ready to Mingle—SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café*” and “A Transcultural Reading of Silence in Joy Kogawa’s Novels”. In this chapter, I examine the two works that are both earliest in time and taken to be most representative of contemporary writing in their respective communities. As will be demonstrated in Chapter One, creative writings began to appear at the peak of Asian Canadian activism, with an urge to “break the silence”.

²⁴ See Lorraine McMullen’s *Re(dis)covering our Foremothers: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Writers* (1990).

In the works that I discuss in this chapter, third- and fourth-generation protagonists reconstruct their family and community histories by speaking for or putting words into their ancestors. Through the liberating effect of reconstructing history, the literature unsettles the national grand narrative.

Both works are richly informed by communal histories. Lee focuses her plot upon the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Janet Smith Bill; Kogawa's novels, especially *Obasan* were the first texts to bring mainstream attention to the issue of injustice that Japanese Canadians suffered during and after the Second World War. Both writers' works are considered as milestones in Asian Canadian literature. However, *Disappearing Moon Café* focuses on how a postgeneration character, the narrator Kae, sorts out the "legacy" of Chinatown history and how by reconstructing this history she comes to the decision to cut loose and liberate herself, refusing to subjugate herself to the lingering historic violence. Kogawa's Naomi experiences historical events much more closely as she engages directly with the community's trauma and struggles. These works open their respective communities to the wider society by deploying transcultural perspectives. They have attracted wide interest among mainstream literary critics and are both included in many Canadian anthologies and school syllabuses.

Chapter Three presents another pair of first-generation writers, Terry Watada and Wayson Choy. This chapter, "Gut History", focuses on "who gets to speak". It consists of "Aren't We All at War?", my reading of Chinese Canadian writer Choy's *The Jade Peony*, together with "Stories of Real People: The *issei* Japanese Canadians in Watada's *Kuroshio: The Blood of Foxes*". Both male writers choose to write about formerly ghettoized communities. Contesting the "muted" community and stoic image of first generation immigrants, both texts describe a vibrant and lively communal life. Watada's first fictional text fills a historical gap by exploring first-generation Japanese Canadian community life, featuring an image of Japanese Canadians who differ sharply from model citizens. Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* features three Canadian-born siblings of an immigrant family, offering a vivid description of Chinatown life during the Second World War. Underneath the calm surface of communal life, the tension of war permeates every level and aspect of the children's lives. Another reason for studying the two authors together is that both of

them base their fiction on the stories of real people in their communities. Although often criticised or overlooked by critics, because of their ethnographic nature, I argue, that these books are valuable not only because of their realistic presentations of history but also because they give agency to early generation immigrants who are often spoken for and therefore risk being appropriated by later writers. In addition, since both texts focus primarily on the underrepresented subject of Asian Canadian masculinities, I take the opportunity to discuss male sexuality in both texts.

In Chapter Four, “The Hybrid Flowers”, I discuss Larissa Lai’s and Hiromi Goto’s novels, using “Liberation in Fakery” and “Translating the Differences” as the respective themes. In the section about Lai I will discuss the concepts of “fakery” and “authenticity” and present the ways hybrid flowers liberate themselves by embracing the idea of fakery in contemporary times. In the second section I will focus on the different approaches that Goto employs in order to translate culture, language, emotions, and so on. I argue that hybridity has now become a notion not to lament over as Edith Eaton did, but to celebrate and embrace. Moreover, both writers emphasise that the hybridity in today’s world is in fact a mixing of already mixed forms, or as Yoshitaka Mori calls “hybridity-as-origin” (215). The imagined “pure” or “authentic” origins in Asian or Western cultures have never existed but are already processed and mediated. And this knowledge liberated both authors to rework folklores, fairy tales and Hollywood movies to create characters who have “a more fluid, floating, complicated, and mixed-sense of identity and political agency” (Mori 216). I will argue that hybridity is not an end to achieve but an on-going process that enables writers continue drawing resources and energy from the flows of transnational engagement, cultural interaction and interpersonal contact.

Both writers actively engage with racial, gender and queer issues in their writing. Their liberating acts, such as inventing strategies to challenge and unsettle literary norms, are very effective and have earned them wide critical attention. I see Lai and Goto as second-generation writers in terms of Asian Canadian literary history not only because they are younger than the first generation and published slightly later than them, but more importantly, because their works open up a new era in Asian Canadian literature. In this chapter, I recap two of the salient topics in Asian Canadian literature: authenticity and fakery. My analysis will demonstrate how Lai

refuses to accept the idea that there is a lack of authenticity in Asian Canadian cultures. Goto, by emphasising the process of translation, shows the fluidity and potential of trans-ideas. Dual cultural legacies are not treated as “traps” but opportunities to explore transculture, translation, and transgender, transsexual or transnational identities that can turn the current order upside down and release the power in “transcreation”, a term coined by Goto. The “trans” prefix, I argue, does not simply indicate “crossing” or passing from one side to the other, but demonstrates the interactions and mutual transformation of two seemingly polarised powers. Through this process, the dead-end trajectories may be opened up, by taking a slightly different route each time, and in the end a wider territory for transcreation may be generated.

I aim to trace both how this relatively new literature came into existence and developed and the historical or generational lineage that connects the writers, while being aware that the link is historically constructed rather than actual. An overview of the continuous efforts of generations of writers reveals the trajectory of changes in the ways that they understand, express, and define their Asian Canadian experience and sensibilities. I pay special attention to changes in social, economic and political contexts, such as the adoption of multiculturalism as a state policy, the globalisation trend and the increasing level of transnational exchange in contemporary times, because this literary enterprise was created and has been developing under all these conditions. I am also especially interested in observing the many writing and translation techniques that the writers devised to articulate more accurately and subtly what is to them as Asian Canadian.

I chose to work on the time span from the 1970s to the 2000s, which covers the period from the inception of this literature through two generations of development. I observe a distinct continuity across the first two generations of Asian Canadian literature. The third generation writers are still emerging and it will take some time for them to move onto the centre stage and to develop and demonstrate their unique features. In a 1990 interview with Linda Hutcheon, Joy Kogawa was asked: “Will the policy of multiculturalism keep the Yonsei (fourth Generation) aware of themselves as a separate and distinct group? Should it?” (Hutcheon, *Other Solitudes* 100). She answered:

It's likely that there aren't going to be any Japanese Canadians. They'll just be all mixed up. I've seen grandchildren of Niseis...You can't see any Japanese-ness in their physical features at all. I imagine that's the way it's going to be in the future. There'll be the story of a people; something happened once, and it'll be part of their background. But I think that will be part of a new gathering of people with a growing identity. I think the Canadian identity is evolving. (100)

Indeed, the legacy of Asian Canadian literature is in flux, with its subject matter, perspectives and aesthetic values constantly shifting, under the influence of both Canadian and world eco-political developments. With two generations of writers established in Canada and in the world, critics may now look for the emergence of a new, less strictly defined Asian Canadian literature. This possibility, I argue, makes my project of tracing back to the "origins" of this literature all the more significant.

Chapter One

Inheriting a Tradition of Liberation

In his article “A Long Labour, the Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature” (2000), Donald Goellnicht laments the belated arrival of Asian Canadian literature, especially compared to Asian American literature. In her book *Voices Rising: Asian Canadian Cultural Activism*, Xiaoping Li argues that Goellnicht “unfortunately constructs a history that virtually negates the long public presentation of political and cultural activities carried out under the collective identity of ‘Asian Canadian’” (3). Indeed, born out of Asian Canadian activism in the 1970s, Asian Canadian literature is an integral part of activism today. The presentation of political and cultural activities, in the forms of photo exhibitions, theatre, music, symposia and activist magazines have informed, nourished and provided guidance to literary creativity. A broad, inclusive definition of the literary production of a community would include a variety of types of text—not only novels, poetry and drama, but also pamphlets, song lyrics, and conference papers. However, academic criticism tends to assume that only “artistic” or “creative texts”, as opposed to political or factual writing, count as “literature” and are worthy of critical analysis.

A related problem is that, in current Asian Canadian criticism, the political agenda of an author is often downplayed or even neglected because it is deemed more productive to analyse an ethnic minority text in the framework of Western literary theories which privilege language and form, such as poststructuralism or postmodernism. As a result, political ideas which are made explicit in literary texts are seen as reducing the texts’ aesthetic value: since if a text has a distinct political agenda, it is likely to be written in a clear and accessible manner, rather than in the subtle, complex and allusive style that would appeal to postmodernists. For example, Joy Kogawa’s other books which deal more directly with the Redress have never reached the same level of acclaim as her renowned *Obasan*.

Moreover, a newly established literature requires “space” to grow and develop. I argue that Asian Canadian literature was kindled in communal publications, as they provided publication opportunities to writers and means of

communication through which both Asian Canadian communities and literary communities began to form. As Lai argues in *Slanting I, Imagining We*:

the recognition of collectivity is of tantamount importance in the 1980s and 1990s. The forms it takes are often oppositional, but they are also profoundly coalitional. As much as anthologies and special issues nurtured writers, so too did a vast array of events and gatherings across a range of disciplinary boundaries, and also between institutions and other organizational structures—often temporary and with fluctuating memberships. (137)

Indeed, the community plays an important role in the forming and development of Asian Canadian literature. In her book, Lai discusses how anthologies and special issues of scholarly magazines, such as *Canadian Literature* and *Westcoast Line*, help to establish and reform the canon. In this section, I will look into this often neglected or avoided issue in Asian Canadian literary criticism, and argue that knowledge of Asian Canadian communal activism is indispensable for critics and that they should respect ethnic minority writers' voices by acknowledging their political activities, especially in cases where political demands are a writer's primary motivation in her creative work.

Before I address contemporary Asian Canadian literature in English, however, I will take some time to offer an overview of two Eurasian sisters who are considered as the earliest published Asian Canadian writers. Both sisters engaged with ethnicity and their works, especially Edith Eaton's Chinatown stories, represent ethnic minority communities. Indeed, creative writing is one of the ways for a group to establish itself by affirming its own existence, considering issues of identity and depicting its culture and life. About half a century later, Asian Canadian writers broke the silence, and refashioned and reconstructed their community through writing about its past, present and future. Through the effort of generations of writers, the Asian Canadian identity is outlined and explored. This legacy started to be accumulated by the sisters and this is also the link that I make between them and contemporary writers.

The Eaton sisters, who are considered by far the earliest Asian Canadian writers, have left mixed legacies which have been inherited by later generations. For the sisters, living in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, having Chinese lineage was a burden to their personal development, to the point that Edith saw

herself as a martyr, acting as a “connecting link” (Far, “Leaves” n.p.) between the two cultures, while Winnifred hid her Chinese identity and claimed to be Japanese. Both sisters fought against racial discrimination, directly or indirectly, in their works. I argue, furthermore, that Edith’s legacy can be observed in the first generation’s endeavours, that is, to break the silence and write about lives in detail. Winnifred’s legacy in her somewhat questionable identity fashioning can be seen as sharing similarities with the second-generation writers’ strategies of creating new energies and strength in the idea of “fakery”, a theme I take up in my discussion of Lai and Goto in Chapter Four.

About half a century later, the subdued ethnic minority communities began to assert their existence and demand social equality. Contemporary Asian Canadian literature began to form through Asian Canadian activism. A conscious communal effort nurtured the literature into being: communal magazines formed and fortified the Asian Canadian identity which unified different Asian ethnic groups; anthologies announced the birth of Asian Canadian literature and began to shape the canon. The flame of liberation that was kindled by the Eaton sisters has been passed down through the generations of contemporary Asian Canadian writers.

1.1 Asian North American Pioneer Writers: Edith and Winnifred Eaton

Fundamentally, I muse, people are all the same. My mother’s race is as prejudiced as my father’s. Only when the whole world becomes as one family will human beings be able to see clearly and hear distinctively. I believe that some day a great part of the world will be Eurasian. I cheer myself with the thought that I am but a pioneer. A pioneer should glory in suffering.

Sui Sin Far (Edith Eaton), “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian”

The Eaton sisters, Edith (1865-1914) and Winnifred (1875-1954), were as writers not just acclaimed but also “claimed”. Because they grew up and were first published in Quebec but went to the United States for better career opportunities, both the U.S. and Canada have claimed them as their own. At present, it seems, critics have settled on the label “Asian North American” for these writers. However, the sisters are hardly studied, or even associated together due to their different approaches to issues

of ethnicity: Edith chose to speak for her mother's people, the overseas Chinese in North America, while Winnifred fashioned and performed a Japanese ethnicity and achieved some initial fame with her Japanese romances. The Chinese community in North America established a tombstone for Edith, on which they inscribed “义不忘华”, praising her for not forgetting her Chinese heritage and duties.²⁵ Winnifred was rediscovered in the 1970s, initially by critics in Japan who thought she was the earliest Japanese North American writer who wrote in English and broke into mainstream publications.²⁶ Winnifred obscured her ethnic identity even more by writing a novel, *The Diary of Delia* (1907), with an Irish American maid as the central character. Later, her prairie novel *Cattle* (1924) led to speculations that she was half Scottish. Winnifred's granddaughter, Diana Birchall observes: “Winnifred managed in one fell swoop to claim English, Japanese, Chinese, Scottish, and Irish blood, covering all possible and impossible bases and giving herself carte blanche to write in the vernacular of almost any nationality she should choose” (98).

Unlike many tentative critics who hesitate to place the Eaton sisters within the context of ethnic minority literary studies, I claim the sisters as the earliest Asian Canadian writers and use their works as the starting point of my project. By positioning them at the beginning of the scroll of Asian Canadian literature and beginning this thesis with a discussion of them I can achieve many goals simultaneously. Firstly, because I will be exploring the ideas of liberation and inheritance in Asian Canadian writings, a discussion of Edith's inheriting action with regard to Chinese cultural heritage, and Winnifred's liberating action, in refusing to commit to a single heritage, will serve as an effective introduction to these themes.

²⁵ There are various translations for this epitaph. For example, Diana Birchall has it as “it is right and good that we should remember China” (113). In Amy Ling's paper “Winnifred Eaton: Ethnic Chameleon and Popular Success”, this was translated as “righteousness does not forget country” (6). Also, in this thesis, I use Chinese characters directly as the phonetic symbols in Roman letters do not make any more sense to non-Chinese speakers.

²⁶ In the introduction (2012) to *Marion, The Story of an Artist Model*, the editor Karen Skinazi reveals that: “Academic work on Eaton began, enthusiastically, in 1964, when Katsuhiko Takeda published ‘Onoto Watanna: A Forgotten Writer’ in the Japanese journal *Orient/West*. Winnifred was believed to be ‘one of the greatest writers in Japan’” (xxv).

Secondly, by discussing the opposing views of earlier generations of critics on the Eaton sisters, I demonstrate the limiting effect of the binary approach. Thirdly, since it has been roughly a hundred years since the sisters' publications first appeared, a survey of critical voices speaking at different points in the last century will demonstrate the impact of the concept of "generations", a critical term in the study of Asian Canadian literature. Lastly, but very importantly, an introduction to the unique Asian Canadian (Asian North American) subjectivity that started to take shape in the Eaton sisters' writings will anticipate my arguments in later parts of this thesis while offering a useful historical point of comparison. It will become clear that the history of Asian Canadian literature is to some extent the history of the ongoing process of liberating Asian Canadian subjectivities from fixed minority positions, and of the continuous search for ways to inherit cultural legacies. In my analysis, I will introduce the key words: transcultural, community writing, authenticity and fakery, and translation, which will serve as the thematic framework for this thesis.

The sisters' father, Edward Eaton, was an English gentleman merchant. On one of his trips to China he met Grace Trefusis who had been adopted by an English missionary. Edward subsequently brought Grace to England where their betrothal was met with strong objection from his family. They later emigrated to America and eventually settled in Quebec. Edith was born in Macclesfield, England, as the fourth child and eldest daughter of what was a large family of 14 surviving children. Winnifred was the tenth child and was born in Quebec. From a young age Edith wrote for local journals, such as the *Montreal Star* and the *Daily Witness*, to support the poverty-stricken family.

Under the *nom de plume* of Sui Sin Far she wrote numerous stories about the emigrant Chinese in North America, many of which were published in a short story collection, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* (1909). Mary Chapman of the University of British Columbia is currently undertaking a project to rediscover many of Edith Eaton's works, and has discovered 89 lost works, including fiction, travel writing, children's stories, poetry, and journalism ("Dr Chapman's Story"). In "Finding Edith Eaton", Chapman explains:

Like the Gothic thrillers located by Madeleine B. Stern that completely transformed our understanding of Louisa May Alcott in the late 1970s, these

newly discovered works challenge many of our ideas about Eaton's cultural position, authorship, oeuvre, politics, and popularity. For example, the prevailing assumption that Eaton did not know Chinese is dispelled by texts documenting that by 1909 she was studying Chinese, interviewing people in Chinatown in Chinese, and publishing "translations" of Chinese folktales. (265)

This means our knowledge and understanding of Edith Eaton will be challenged and transformed as new material becomes accessible.

Winnifred is perhaps still the most prolific and successful Asian North American writer, having published 16 novels between 1898 and 1925, as well as numerous short stories, most of which appeared in American popular journals and magazines. She is controversially known for her Japanese romances, for which she invented a Japanese background, claiming falsely that her mother was from a noble Japanese family in Nagasaki. Later in her career Winnifred also tried other themes and was at one point a successful screen writer in Hollywood. Winnifred appears to write honestly in her semi-biographical novels based on her own life story and her sister Sarah's—*Me: A Book of Remembrance* (1915) and *Marion: The Story of an Artist's Model* (1916).²⁷ She published these books anonymously for fear of blowing her cover. In "Newly Recovered Works by Onoto Watanna (Winnifred Eaton): A Prospectus and Checklist", Jean Lee Cole makes an extended list of Winnifred's works. Titles like "The Canadian Spirit in Our Literature" published in the *Calgary Daily Herald* in 1923 and "Royal and Titled Ranches in Alberta" in the *Montreal Daily Star* in 1924 show that Winnifred not only focused on ethnicity but also explored questions of regional and national belonging.

Both sisters wrote under pen names that emphasise the ethnic minority identities they claimed. Edith preferred to be called, even in real life, Sui Sin Far, which can be literally translated as "water-born flower", a nickname for narcissus in Cantonese. Xiao-huang Yin observes: "Sui's pseudonym reflected her affection for her mother's race. The full extent of her intention to select the name comes home when one finds that 'narcissus' in Chinese culture, unlike the Western legend,

²⁷ However, for fear of being caught telling lies, Winnifred was vague about her ethnicity and refers to it as "dark" and "foreign". She also subtracts two years from her age in the record of her adventures.

symbolizes dignity, elegance, and love for homeland” (89). Narcissus in Chinese culture is seen as “the gentleman in water” which stands for virtue and purity, and is to be admired at a distance. It especially denotes self-seclusion, keeping away from all the worldly concerns and pursuits, such as money and fame.

Winnifred wrote as Onoto Watanna for her Japanese romances. This name, supposedly taken from an alternative spelling of the name of the city Nagasaki, is in fact not recognisably Japanese at all. Amy Ling notes that Winnifred attempted to publish her novel *The Diary of Delia*, with the Irish maid Delia as the central character, under the name Winnifred Mooney, which could pass for an Irish name, but *Saturday Post* still published it as by “Onoto Watanna” (“Ethnic Chameleon” 7). For Winnifred, it seems that her authorial identity was part of the attraction of her works for readers or consumers. In *Edith and Winnifred Eaton: Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances* Dominika Ferens observes: “the path to Winnifred’s success was anything but a familiar formulaic tale; it was a do-or-die enterprise involving her whole being, during which she took not only a new name but also a new identity, a new age, even a fake ethnicity” (xv). Success, for Winnifred, as a writer, is associated closely with financial reward. Taking commercial fiction as her main genre, she learned from the consumer culture of 1920s America, and attempted to cater to her readers’ tastes as closely as possible.

Moreover, Ferens suggests that Edith and Winnifred inherited ethnographical writing traditions from, respectively, nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries’ accounts of their experience in China and the writings of American lay travellers to Japan (21). This partly explains why the sisters would want to fashion an ethnic identity for themselves as it seems that having accountable sources of information was an important criterion for the value of their ethnographic writings.

Both sisters employed ethnicity as a major theme in their writing. However, in the 1970s Edith began to be recognised as the “good” sister who had not only asserted her ethnicity openly and strongly, but had also volunteered to be a spokesperson for the otherwise muted Chinese communities in North America. Winnifred, however, was a more controversial figure. She was celebrated for many best-selling novels during her lifetime, but when her fake identity was discovered by critics in the 1970s she was criticised for being an impostor. Birchall observes:

“Winnifred has been taken to task by some scholars and academics who disapprove of her elaborate deception in her bid to succeed and who approvingly embrace her older sister. It is true that she did not display a sense of morality and altruism as strongly as Edith did” (xvii). Meanwhile, Edith was recognised as the first Asian North American writer and an inspiration for later Chinese North American writers. This critical privileging of “authenticity” as more important even than aesthetic quality may be due to the increased social attention to “authenticity” stimulated by the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Many critics found it hard to reconcile themselves to Winnifred’s betrayal of her “true identity”, especially when identity-based discussion was gaining momentum through the 1970s and 80s, reaching its peak in the 1990s.

In a 1986 article, Amy Ling proposes a historically sensitive approach to reading earlier writings from a late-twentieth century viewpoint:

Our privilege and duty, then, as scholars and members of that community—feminist, ethnic or both—is to re-examine the past through our own angle of vision. Our purpose is not to apply modernist standards of evaluation to earlier writers to see who measures up and who does not, but to re-evaluate forgotten or neglected writers in the socio-political context of their time and in light of the contributions they have made to our cause. Our purpose is to discover those who have fought the same fight before us and to give recognition where it is due. (“Writers with a Cause” 412)

Accordingly, critics in the eighties, influenced by the heated discussion of ethnicity and multiculturalism at the time, claimed Edith as a forerunner and representative for their own cause. Many “muted” ethnic minority communities began to assert their existence, contribution to the country and equal rights. It is therefore understandable that Asian North American critics were very disappointed and indignant about Winnifred’s perceived betrayal and her use of ethnicity as a marketing tool.

However, as Amy Ling observes in her “Revelation and Mask: Autobiographies of the Eaton Sisters”: “Edith’s response to racism was frontal assault, direct and confrontational. Winnifred’s response, however, was indirect, covert, and subversive—like the Trojan Horse, an ambush from within the walls [...] what Edith in her writing asserted—the Chinese are human and assailable—Winnifred in her life demonstrated” (50). Certainly, we can’t always justify a means by its end, as it appears that Winnifred did conceal her Chinese ethnicity in order to

avoid jeopardising her personal benefits and fame. Yet, she too attacked racism in her writing, adopting a subversive strategy. For example, in *Me*, the protagonist Nora is at first appalled by the appearance of black people in Jamaica where she works as a reporter. She describes her disgust at being kissed by a black person and her strong reaction to it, abruptly leaving Jamaica as a result of the incident. However, she subsequently discovers that the white person who helps her to escape to Richmond in America has indecent intentions towards her. A black maid takes her under her wing and assists her in escaping once again. On leaving, she kisses the maid: “I left the note with Mandy, whom I kissed goodbye, something I had never dreamed I could do, kiss a black girl!” (Eaton, *Me* 93). Nora’s gradual change educates her “kind”—that is, white people who hold racial prejudices—not by lectures, but by example.

Even now there still seems to be a power struggle inherent within studies of the two sisters: praise of one sister seems to put the other one in an unfavourable position; while criticism of one sister somehow endorses the other. This tension, caused by the binary value system, is very limiting and even destructive, as Ferens says: “yet when criticism indulges in the ‘good sister-bad sister’ paradigm, both Winnifred’s subtle antiracist interventions and the muted orientalism of Edith’s work go unnoticed” (2). Indeed, the essentialist view inevitably limits the productivity and the depth of a comparative study, highlighting only aspects that are in direct opposition. Also, when the sisters are read in a way that defines them as opposites, their commonalities are ignored. Critics who adopt the binary approach often focus only on the ethnic content of their works, ignoring, for example, Winnifred’s semi-biographical works, Edith’s anti-patriarchal plots, their common theme of the independent working girl and so on.

It could be argued that Edith found writing stories about her mother’s people in North America meaningful and inspiring, while Winnifred continued on this path and further developed strategies of ethnographical writings. Ferens argues that Winnifred chose to “decouple culture from race” (151), as she experimented with other ethnicities and rendered ethnic writings more productive and liberal. Winnifred creates a fluid identity for herself that allows her to have deep and meaningful interactions with other ethnicities, such as Irish, Japanese, and Scottish, within the larger context of North America. This initiative breaks the “periphery to centre”

lateral interaction and shifts the focus to horizontal relationship between different ethnic cultures. By passing swiftly across different ethnicities, Winnifred demonstrates how ethnicity can be a rich source of creativity and mobility. Moreover, the fact that both sisters could “pass” as white in appearance but chose to take on ethnic minority identities as writers also hints that the sisters consciously used “colour” as cultural capital – that is, as a selling point for their books.

A recent wave of rediscovery and reassessment of Winnifred’s work has seen the publication of books, such as Diana Birchall’s *Onoto Watanna: The Story of Winnifred Eaton* (2001), Jean Lee Cole’s *The Literary Voices of Winnifred Eaton: Redefining Ethnicity and Authenticity* (2002) and Dominika Ferens’s *Edith and Winnifred Eaton: Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances* (2002). These critics see Winnifred’s self-fashioning as liberating, and praise her for her ability to invent a visionary fluid cultural identity. In her introduction to Winnifred’s novel *Marion*, Karen Skinazi observes: “This fluid, ambiguous, and ambivalent representation is all the more powerful because Eaton’s contemporaries, even those, like her sister Edith, who wrote in support of a non-white race, ultimately recapitulated racist ideology” (lxxviii). Meanwhile, the superficial “good sister, bad sister” binary judgment on the two women is rejected in recent critical discussion. Instead, more in-depth readings of their works have appeared. An international research community on these authors has gradually established itself. Due to these efforts, some of Winnifred and Edith’s early works have become accessible again.

Moreover, historian Jun Zubillaga-Pow makes a point while reviewing an exhibition in Manchester by Singaporean artist Ming Wong: “This trans-national and trans-cultural ‘blurring’ or ‘passing’ of visual aesthetics provides both western and Asian viewers common leverage in grasping and eradicating cultural and political differences inherent within the reception of the artwork” (n.p.). I find this comment equally applicable to the current global research collaboration on the sisters and argue that they also “‘pass’ to become a part of another national culture via the trope of ‘ethnic passing’” (Zubillaga-Pow n.p.) and made themselves indeed inter-(trans-) national. In this light, the sisters set an example for contemporary writers and their cultural content should be seen not only as means of subversion but an opportunity for transnational exchange.

The sisters deployed different ethnic policies and writing strategies: Winnifred was good at capturing subtle cultural expressions and explaining them in a graceful and intelligible way, thereby allowing her readers imaginative access to the unfamiliar cultures she represented. Edith, however, almost stubbornly preserved a wide range of traditional cultural features in her stories, such as Chinese expressions, idioms, and customs—to the point where she left her readers bewildered. This unaccommodating strategy, however, also asserts a claim to equality. By not explaining and justifying, Edith refused to compromise with her white readers, and this strategy has been inherited by many recent Asian Canadian writers.

Winnifred's forged Japanese ethnicity brought her early fame and success but also caused her embarrassment and regret. She expressed her chagrin in *Me*:

I realized that what as an ignorant little girl I had thought was fame was something very different. What then I ardently believed to be the divine sparks of genius, I now perceived to be nothing but a mediocre talent that could never carry me far. My success was founded upon a cheap and popular device, and that jumble of sentimental moonshine that they called my play seemed to me the pathetic stamp of my inefficiency. Oh, I had sold my birth right for a mess of potage! (154-5)

By the time Winnifred wrote *Me* she had moved on from her Japanese-themed novels and had become established as one of the most popular and successful women writers; someone who saw the “the name of a play of [hers] flashed in electric letters on Broadway, and the city papered with great posters of the play” (*Me* 154). Winnifred then began to realise that her questionable marketing strategy, while very efficient, might in the long term bring her shame. However, I argue that her need to devise a false identity for herself in order to sell her work was partly due to the limitations of her readers at that time, who insisted on identifying authors with the characters or communities they wrote about.

Winnifred did pay dearly for her “mistake”—she had to publish the two semi-(auto)biographical novels anonymously. Skinazi observes a more damaging and lasting side-effect of Winnifred's writing under a Japanese identity:

The screen that obscured Eaton's biological identity, allowing her to be Japanese, and French Canadian, and unidentifiable, obscured her significance. She ended up being seen as just another writer of Japonisme, not the first one and not the best one. No one recognized her as the first Chinese

North American novelist or looked to her writing for examples of complicated, nuanced, narrated performances of racial ambiguity or Chinese heritage. (xxiv-v)

Indeed, though Edith is known as the first Chinese North American novelist, it is in fact Winnifred who should have been credited as such, since her *Miss Numè of Japan* was published as early as 1898. Critics have tried to interpret the motivations behind Winnifred's posing as Japanese, such as that the Japanese were less numerous than the Chinese in North America, and therefore may have seemed more mysterious. There was also the possible influence of Japonisme that was prevalent in Europe at the turn of century. Although Ferens reasons that: "it was not much of a shift: to her white audience, after all, Chinese and Japanese were much the same" (xvii), I believe Winnifred opted for the prominence a Japanese aristocratic background could provide. During her era, Japan was on the way to becoming the pre-eminent power in Asia, defeating the Qing (China's last dynasty) in 1895 and then Russia in 1905.

However, I will argue that researchers should no longer feel any obligation to apologise for Winnifred's adopting fake ethnic identities as part of her marketing decisions. Thirty years after Amy Ling's time, the more complicated and hybrid identity politics of today reveal Winnifred's self-determination and self-fashioning as ahead of its time. Her refusal to conform to her "true" racial identity and adoption of another one can be seen, in today's light, as an act of self-liberation from internalised, fixed racial identities. About a hundred years later, a newer generation of ethnic minority writers—such as Fred Wah and Larissa Lai—resort to "fakery" as a mode of liberation and empowerment, and both articulate the importance of "faking" legitimacy for the ethnic minorities.

Moreover, this fluid identity demonstrates that cultural heritage can be claimed by learning and observing. Winnifred's Irish novel and Japanese series show how a writer can make use of cultural resources. By not confining oneself to the cultural heritage that one inherits by birthright, one can in a way "inherit" other cultures which can be seen as a common asset for humanity. A fixed cultural identity is to some extent fictional, limiting and burdensome. A more flexible approach is actually advocated through many works of various generations of Asian Canadian writers, which I will discuss in detail later in this thesis.

Winnifred's most characteristic tool is the mimicking of various pidgin forms of English speech. Amy Ling considers this attempt a failure, quoting an example from *Miss Numè of Japan* when Miss Numè talks to Sinclair for the first time "Me? I lig' you. You are big—and thad you nod lig' poor liddle Japanese womens—still I lig' you just same" (Watanna 87). Ling observes that "this sounds more like someone speaking with a cold in her nose than with a Japanese accent, not to mention the fact that such a bold remark would have been very unseemly for a young Japanese woman" ("Winnifred" 7). However, I argue that though Winnifred seemed not to be able to master this tool, inventing a flawed form of speech for her heroines is nonetheless a useful strategy. Her women characters are very expressive and articulate, despite their apparently defective speech. Moreover, their feminist assertiveness is at the same time moderated and made endearing by this speech deficiency. To some extent, Winnifred tried to come out of her battle against gender and racial discrimination gracefully, with her cunning strategy to avoid head-on engagement.

As well as being a non-provocative feminist, Winnifred was also an indirect fighter against racial discrimination: in her Japanese romances, the American white male character invariably falls in love with the Japanese girl at the point when he has learned to regard her as an equal and listen to what she is actually saying rather than just her accent. In *Marion*, Winnifred revealed the reason behind her special design: after Marion quotes Kipling's poem "L'Envoi" to her white lover Bonnat, he exclaims:

"Bully!" cried Bonnat. "Your dramatic training was not lost. Only one thing—"
 "What?"
 He put his two hands on my shoulders, and gave me a friendly little shake and hug:
 "you—lithp!" (lisp) he said.
 Before I could protest at that deadly insult he took my hands and squeezed them hard, and he said:
 "I believe we speak the same language after all. We *think* it, anyway, don't we?" (275-6)

Winnifred tried to educate her readers to perceive the underlying sameness, that unites humanity beneath the apparent, superficial differences. Marion is able to gain

love, respect and success despite her racial hybridity and lisp. Winnifred conveys the message that universal factors, such as love and talent, can transcend differences. As Ferens says: “in representing successful ‘couplings’ across race and in showing culture to be a product of nurture rather than nature, Winnifred attempted to assuage the fears of ‘coupling’ with nonwhites” (152). Though the novel risks falling into the Orientalist trap as a result of the perceived foreignness or exoticism of Marion’s features, which increase her appeal as an artist’s model, Winnifred’s effort to transcend difference by asserting universal values is progressive, albeit slightly over-optimistic.

When Edith was rediscovered she was praised for her courage in adhering to her true ethnicity and in speaking for her “own people”, in spite of the risk to her career which being known as half-Chinese would entail. Ling calls Edith a “cause writer”: “cause writers [...] write not for personal fame and recognition but for the good of their community or group” (“Writers with a Cause” 412). Edith was not the first to write about the Chinese in North America, but she was the first who wrote for them. Consciously forgoing a large potential readership, Edith wrote for an emerging group: Chinese North Americans who were becoming literate in English. Edith chose to write about the overseas Chinese in North America, whom, by visiting and doing volunteering work in Seattle’s Chinatown, she came to know in real life. Edith explained that she was consciously “designing” her career against some advice of what she called “funny people”:

I also meet some funny people who advise me to “trade” upon my nationality. They tell me that if I wish to succeed in literature in America I should dress in Chinese costume, carry a fan in my hand, wear a pair of scarlet beaded slippers, live in New York, and come of high birth. Instead of making myself familiar with the Chinese Americans around me, I should discourse on my spirit acquaintance with Chinese ancestors and quote in between the “Good mornings” and “How d’ye dos” [...], “*Confucius, Confucius, how great is Confucius, Before Confucius, there never was Confucius. After Confucius, there never came Confucius*”, etc., etc., etc., or something like that, both illuminating and obscuring. (“Leaves” n.p.)

Following the practice of her era, Edith uses the term “nationality” to designate race or ethnicity, and so implies that racial difference was equivalent to foreignness. Her refusal to adopt the trappings of Chinese identity was both a refusal to retreat into an

imagined past (the past of her “ancestors”) and an effort to claim her place in the modern American world and demonstrate her familiarity with it. In a sense, we can say that Edith is the originator of Asian North American literature as she started the tradition of focusing on the “here and now”. She created precious records of the lives of the early overseas Chinese in Seattle, half a century before their descendants were able to write and publish in the mainstream. Edith refused to “trade upon her ethnicity” by objectifying and commodifying her culture and people. She insisted on being sincere in both the content and the intent of her writing, determined to function as a connection between the East and the West.

Edith’s *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* is composed of tales about Chinese characters who come to work and live in North America. In trying to create a shape for her Asian North American content, Edith adopted the short story cycle. However, I perceive an inadequacy in her narrative that renders her characters inarticulate, due to a lack of interiority. For example, in “The Smuggling of Tie Co”, the girl, Tie Co, disguises herself as a man to be smuggled by Jack Fabian to America through the Canadian border. It is implied that Tie Co is in love with Jack and that she approaches him for his benefit rather than hers. Upon being discovered by border guards, Tie Co drowns herself so that Jack will not be arrested for smuggling of persons. Edith does not try to explain the girl’s motive and her feelings for Jack. Readers are then invited to feel for the characters and ponder over their seemingly very odd behaviour. Edith’s short stories are fable-like, but with the moral not stated but left to be deduced and savoured by readers. I also argue that Edith’s Chinatown tales are to some extent modelled on Chinese novel writing traditions, notably those of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, where the narrator concentrates on the plotline and actions in a story without much description of the characters’ inner thoughts. Therefore what is often perceived as a lack of agency in the characters is probably a function of Edith’s mimicry of Chinese writing styles.

In “Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton: First Chinese-American Fictionist”, published in 1981, Solberg observes:

I would argue that Edith Eaton as Sui Sin Far did manage to dip into those deeper currents beneath the surface colour, but no matter what she saw and understood, there was no acceptable form to shape it to. Had she been

physically stronger and had a more sophisticated literary apprenticeship, she might have been able to create that new form. (33)

I disagree with Solberg's view, as this "unshaped" form is actually the very form of Asian North American literature. He perceives it as not "acceptable" because it does not conform to Western literary norms. Moreover, his use of "sophisticated" is coercive: he requires the writers on whom he passes judgment to conform to a way of writing which can only be learned in Western milieux or universities, and does not appreciate a different aesthetic, which seems to him too "simple". The lack of shape and indefinability of this literature are generated by a complex and ambiguous subjectivity. Edith observes a displacement in her memoir "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" (1890): So I roam backward and forward across the continent. When I am East, my heart is West. When I am West, my heart is East". What Edith described is still typical in today's Asian North American subjectivities.

Solberg also criticises Edith's writing style:

While Eaton wrote well, she never acquired the control of style necessary to deal with her subjects in depth or at length. What she wrote were chiefly sketches, vignettes. The task she had set herself was nearly impossible at that time. Trapped in the stylistic conventions of the time, including dialogue in a forced and artificial dialect, she could only try, by selection of her story material, to tell about the real Chinese-Americans she knew. (35)

This comment is, in some respects, very true, not only regarding Edith's writing, but also that of many later Asian Canadian writers. Many of them exhibit a preference for narratives which capture only moments and vignettes, rather than adhering to the formal conventions of the Western realist novel: Wayson Choy's Chinatown stories are good examples. With a "home culture" (culture at home, within the family) that is distinctively different from the local culture they are currently immersed in, ethnic minority subjects tend to have disjointed memories and multifaceted subjectivities. And this point of view engenders the seemingly inefficient style described by Solberg, which, in fact, is the most suitable one.

Edith's "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" only contains some 5,500 words. It is, however, both a condensed biography and a mental patient's file. The patient in question, Sui Sin Far, a Eurasian, relates her painful experience of being mixed race and tries to address her problem—feeling depressed. The document

is straightforward and unreserved. It starts from the narrator's childhood: "When I look back over the years I see myself, a little child of scarcely four years of age, walking in front of my nurse, in a green English lane, and listening to her tell another of her kind that my mother is Chinese" ("Leaves" n.p.). Little Sui is indignant, but she tries in vain to tell her mother about this incident: "I am a young child. I fail to make myself intelligible. My mother does not understand, and when the nurse declares to her, 'Little Miss Sui is a story-teller,' my mother slaps me" (n.p.).

In "Leaves", the narrator confesses her sorrow and attempts to analyse it herself: "I have come from a race on my mother's side which is said to be the most stolid and insensible to feeling of all races, yet I look back over the years and see myself so keenly alive to every shade of sorrow and suffering that it is almost a pain to live" (n.p.). This anxiety can be explained in part using Freud's concept of melancholic disorder, although this had not yet been formulated at the time when Edith's text was written. Melancholia is associated with "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (Freud 243). Moreover, Freud argues that the patient who suffers from melancholia "cannot consciously perceive what he has lost" (245) and, as a result, the patient is absorbed by the loss entirely, to the extent that he generates "an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale" (246). In "Leaves" the narrator recounts moments that she thinks relate to the source of her sorrows. The reminiscence is rather fragmented and dispersed. It is as if the speaker is so perplexed and troubled that she cannot articulate herself in full. She is saddened by a feeling of estrangement, and non-belonging. She imagines that she is the link between the two peoples and two cultures that do not accept her entirely, leaving her stuck in-between, dangerously, as the tension may destroy her: "I give my right hand to the Occidentals and my left to the Orientals, hoping that between them they will not utterly destroy the insignificant 'connecting link'" (n.p.). In a way, this narrative is only half-articulated, leaving gaps for people from both cultures to feel for and understand her melancholia.

More importantly, in "Leaves" Edith, possibly for the first time in literary history, declares an independent, unique Asian North American subjectivity, as the narrator says: "I do not confide in my father and my mother. They would not

understand. How could they? He is English, she is Chinese. I am different to both of them—a stranger, though their own child. ‘What are we?’ I ask my brother. ‘It doesn’t matter, sissy,’ he responds. But it does” (n.p.). The question that the brother fails to answer and sees as unimportant is very significant to the narrator: without a clear answer, she feels troubled and confused. The pain of being in-between, misunderstood by people who do not share the same experience, makes her perplexed, troubled and dejected. Later generations of Asian North American writers continue to observe this unique hybrid subjectivity, searching for ways to define and celebrate the evolution and enhancement of their identity.

The narrator recounts one memorable encounter with one of her fellow “patients” who suffered the same pain: “I learn that he has an American wife and several children. I am very much interested in these children, and when I meet them my heart throbs in sympathetic tune with the tales they relate of their experience as Eurasians. ‘Why did papa and mamma born us?’ ask one. ‘Why?’” (n.p.). Sui realises that her own people are neither her father’s family nor her mother’s, but people like herself, Eurasians: people with mixed heritage who feel trapped in-between.

It is most revealing to read some early criticism on Edith’s writings, dating from about 35 years ago, since it shows up the gap between English literary critical traditions and ethnic cultural content:

As a Chinese-American writer, [...] Sui Sin Far had to find a mode that would enable her to deal with her own experience (as the classic editorial injunction has it), but to do that meant to fall outside the boundaries of any of the “maincurrents” of American writing. She was not a regionalist nor nationalist. If anything, she was an internationalist, but hardly of the Henry James School, though some of what is interesting in her work lies in the subtleties that are apt to be lost on the untrained casual reader. She is not naturalist or local colorist, and her essays at humour, which tend to fall short of the mark in any case, can hardly be looked upon as falling in the Mr. Dooley or Mark Twain “native American” styles. She was trapped by experience and inclination into working within a sub-genre of American prose: what, for lack of a better term, we might call Chinatown Tales. (Solberg 32)

Without effective critical tools or pertinent literary theory, Solberg finds it difficult to relate Edith’s work to any of the existing literary trends or categorise it under any

schools. Soberg comes up with the idea of calling her internationalist, meaning that she writes from an American's viewpoint about the "Chinese". Almost apologetic, after failing to categorise her under naturalist or local colourist writings, Solberg, nevertheless, attempted to pigeonhole her works under "Chinatown stories", not realising that what Edith was doing was ground-breaking and that her work, rather than failing to conform to existing literary genres, was in fact transcending them.

Interestingly, Solberg instinctively feels that "some of what is interesting in her work lies in the subtleties that are apt to be lost on the untrained casual reader" (32). Critics currently working in the field do carry out research on cultural, linguistic and writing traditions to inform their readings. For example, in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, there are many places where Goto leaves Japanese sentences untranslated. Several critics have provided translations in the course of their discussion of these paragraphs. With cultural knowledge becoming more accessible in addition to a general increase in mutual understanding, culturally embedded content in Asian Canadian writing now generates academic interest rather than being disregarded—as it was in Edith Eaton's or Solberg's time.

However, Solberg was right in observing the existence of cultural subtleties, although they were not fully perceivable to him, in Edith's writings. For example, I note that Edith sometimes borrows Chinese story plot lines and plants them in the soil of North America. In "A Chinese Ishmael" (1897), Edith opens her story with: "In the light of night, on the detached rocks near the Cliff House, the sea-lions are clambering and growling; the waters of the Pacific are foaming around them, and their young, in the clefts of the rookeries, are drifting into dreamland on lullabies sung by the waves" (Far 44). It is a typical yet complicated tragic love story, in which a servant girl Ku Yum falls in love with a young man, Leih Tseih. With the help of a neighbour, A-Chuen, they are able to meet each other and get engaged. Nevertheless, the young man has a rival who also happens to want to marry this girl. In the end Leih Tseih has to flee as his rival accidentally kills himself with a knife and he is the only witness and would easily be assumed to be the murderer. The girl begs Leih Tseih to let her flee with him. In the end, "their bodies were never found; but in that part of San Francisco called the City of the Chinese it is whispered from lip to ear that the spirits of Leih Tseih and Ku Yum have passed into a pair of

beautiful sea-lions who wander in moonlight over the rocks, meditating on life and love and sorrow” (49-50). Readers who are knowledgeable about Chinese culture can easily recognise that this story incorporates the classic Chinese love story “Butterfly Lovers”. In the story, the two lovers, fighting against the girl’s family’s disapproval, die (the man of illness, while the girl takes her own life) and then become a pair of butterflies.

At the sentence level, Edith deploys many Chinese idioms such as “if a man will not enter a tiger’s lair, how can he obtain her whelps?” (Far, “A Chinese Ishmael” 44). This roughly means one has to take some risk in trying to gain something valuable. And there are many literally translated sentences which still bear distinctive Chinese linguistic features: “it is dollars and dollars, and before many moons go by I fear I shall be obliged to be his” (45). “Many moons” can be easily deduced from the context to mean many months. The Chinese word for “moon” is the same as the word for “month”, although they are used with different syntax. “Dollars and dollars” is another linguistic indicator of the story’s Chinese origin, as this usage of repetition to emphasise a large amount is quite characteristic of Asian cultures. In evoking these linguistic particularities of the Chinese language, Edith leaves traces of the original source of her story, striving for an “authentic” Chinese story written in English. In the thesis, I will pay close attention to how later writers incorporate cultural expressions in their writings and the effect of their different approaches.

Edith explored suitable writing forms and techniques for this literature. For example, she positions Chinatown life centre-stage, free from any condescending gaze from the outside and from any awareness of the discriminatory opinions of the dominant society. This allows Edith to recreate a Chinatown in a “natural” state, with its people functioning according to its own social order. As White-Parks observes: “In Sui Sin Far’s fiction, stories are told primarily from the points-of-view of Chinese-American characters, and Chinese-American lives are the centres of action. This results in a reversal of the protagonist-antagonist relationship previously seen in Chinatown literature and also alters the conventional hegemonic order pertaining to race” (22). A reversal of power relations engendered by this strategy allows Edith to present an understandable, familiar yet unfamiliar Chinatown, without the

sensational distortion of speculation or imagined disorder. This strategy is later deployed by contemporary Asian Canadian writers. For example, Larissa Lai explains that she “situates” her Asian Canadian female homosexual characters in a space where they are the norm rather than the designated other within the white society (“Sites of Articulation” 26).

In conclusion, the Eaton sisters took different paths in their strategies of identity, evoking many questions in Asian North American studies about ways of inheriting culture, modes of liberation for ethnic minority writers, and methods of incorporating cultural elements into English writing. These questions continue to be explored by various contemporary Asian North American writers. In fact, a singular or definitive answer is not expected, as abundance and diversity are now the keywords for the development of Asian North American literature. We recognise both sisters as pioneers in Asian North American literature, who, despite the different strategies they devised, both contributed to the fighting against racial discrimination and patriarchy as new independent women at the turn of the century.²⁸ About half a century after the sisters’ time, contemporary Asian Canadian literature was conceived by collaborative communal effort. In the rest of my thesis, I will use many themes that I developed in this introductory section to inform and structure my analysis. I will pay attention to themes of liberation, fakery and passing, while analysing formal techniques of translation, fragmentation and so on.

1.2 Communal Publication Part I: Magazines and Group Commitment

Ever since its inception in 1979, Asian Canadian literature has developed rapidly and robustly. Many favourable elements contributed to this effect in the early eighties,

²⁸ Amy Ling says: “Edith Eaton was an independent woman at a time when independent women were unusual; she was a courageous, creative writer who chose to focus on the Chinese half of her background when Chinese were considered strange and inferior; she was honest enough to show both the weakness and strengths of her mother’s people. By her courage, her strength, her honesty, her unrelenting personal efforts, and her deeply-felt writing, she contributed to American literature and to greater human understanding” (“Pioneer” 298).

such as the state multiculturalism that had begun to be implemented by the government, the active efforts of some publishers, especially Vancouver-based Douglas & McIntyre, to seek out publications by ethnic minority writers and a growth of interest in Asian Canadian writings among general readers. However, these external factors have been constantly changing: heated debates about multiculturalism have given way to broad acceptance, publishers have changed their strategies to cater to fluctuating market demands, and finally, public attention has moved or been directed towards different areas. I argue that it is not in fact external support but continuous and unwavering communal effort that has been the main driver for the creation and development of Asian Canadian literature as an enterprise over the years. In this section, I will look at communal publications, such as magazines and anthologies, and argue that it is largely due to resourcefulness of the community that Asian Canadian literature has been able to establish itself firmly and develop robustly in the past forty years.

Communal publications, by which I mean publications organised by ethnic minority communities, such as newspapers and magazines, have been prevalent since the early settlements of Asian diasporic groups in Canada. Periodicals in their native languages have been a means for first-generation Asian immigrants to maintain communication within their community and with their home countries. The earliest recorded example was the *China Reform Gazette*, which was established by the Chinese Canadian community in Vancouver and lasted from 1903 to 1911. In the following decades, in major cities that have large Chinese Canadian populations, such as Vancouver, Toronto, Edmonton, Montreal, Ottawa, and Victoria, many communal newspapers bloomed. According to the website *Chinese-Canadian Genealogy*, about ninety newspapers have appeared at various times. These newspapers record life and social events. The website itself was created to help Chinese descendants find missing information in their family genealogy by tracking birth and death information contained in early communal newsletters.

With the emergence of the second generation who grew up speaking English, communal publications in English became popular. In 1939 Japanese Canadians set up their first English language journal, *The New Canadian: Voices of the Nisei*, which lasted for 46 years, until 1985. It was the only Japanese Canadian newspaper

allowed during World War Two. The other main publications, such as *The Continental Times*, a bilingual newspaper which started in 1907, were forced to stop in 1937 when Japan invaded China. *The Bulletin: a Journal of Japanese Canadian Community, History and Culture*, a bilingual communal magazine was started in 1950 and continues to publish monthly. The Asian Canadian communal publications which began to appear after the 1970s played an important role in the first stage of activism. Discussions held in these activist publications contributed towards community building and constructing the new Asian Canadian collective consciousness. For example, *Rikka: A National Quarterly Magazine* was the first activist magazine, and lasted for fourteen years, from 1973 to 1987. It was started as a Japanese Canadian magazine but developed a pan-Asia perspective. Li argues that: “Periodicals such as *Rikka* [...] were vital to forming a nationwide community of activists” (45)

When Asian American activism was introduced to Canada in the early 1970s, the awakened young people, mainly third-generation members of Asian Canadian communities, became mobilised. These young Japanese Canadians and Chinese Canadians initiated newspapers or magazines in English, their native language, such as the Japanese Canadian *Powell Street Revue* and *Gum San Po*, its Chinese Canadian counterpart. Magazines in English become an ideal space for them to engage with social and racial issues and hold forums. The open space provided by these magazines or newsletters allowed heated discussion within the community, and views on questions, such as what Asian Canadian identity is, how the hybrid sensibility can be appreciated, and why racial discrimination exists, were presented and debated.

More importantly, with the national distribution of these magazines, various dispersed populations across Canada became able to communicate with, inspire and support one another. Li observes that in the initial stage of Asian Canadian Activism, “important periodicals such as *The Asianadian: An Asian Canadian Magazine* and *Rikka*, photo exhibitions, and cultural festivals helped establish and maintain nationwide networks of cultural activists” (6). With the help of progressive publications, barriers between and within different minority communities across Canada were transcended, and so, at times, was the national border with the US. For

example, *The Asianadian* invited contributors to the *Inalienable Rice* anthology to host a special issue named “Vancouver” (3.2) which provided a kind of a sequel to the anthology. In addition, though established by three Chinese Canadians, the magazine has proclaimed a pan-Asian perspective from the very beginning: contributors of Vietnamese, Filipino, and Indian cultural backgrounds have voiced their concerns in *The Asianadian*. One of the goals of *The Asianadian* is to educate its readers to reach out and understand other ethnic minority communities, rejecting stereotypes and mistrust.

In their study of Canadian mainstream magazines the early to mid-twentieth-century, Hammill and Smith suggest a way into periodical studies: “Reading the magazine as a multi-authored, multi-genre collage foregrounds the ways in which different types of material (visual and textual, commercial and editorial) compete for readers’ attention and work together to generate meaning” (4). Indeed, magazines with their open frameworks and collective rather than individual perspectives, offer rich resources for exploring cultural history. In the following analysis of Asian Canadian magazines, I also endeavour to present them as cultural products. Moreover, William Atkinson observes:

Having been brought together in one place by an organizing intelligence, the various objects take on a unity in diversity. A written magazine achieves the same effect by showing a degree of consistency from article to article and form month to month or week to week. The texts come from a variety of people, but there is editorial continuity—continuity of taste and political attitude—and once they are physically bound together, the unity of the publication takes precedence over its diversity (370).

Indeed, a magazine does take on a “character”, shaped by its editorial strategies, the readers it targets, the purpose it serves and so on. I argue that Asian Canadian magazines especially take on a function of presenting the current state of the community. In this light, different Asian Canadian magazines represent various aspects of the community.

In this section, I look at two of the most influential communal magazines, *The Asianadian: An Asian Canadian Magazine* and *Ricepaper: Asian Canadian Arts and Culture*. I have selected these two magazines because, although quite different in terms of target audience and editorial strategy, both magazines are seminal

communal publications that had a lasting impact on Asian Canadian literature. Both magazines have informed Asian Canadian literature and provided spaces for its writers to develop. Terry Watada, Joy Kogawa, Larissa Lai and many others had been interviewed in the magazines before the publication of their major works. *The Asianadian*, though discontinued after six years, identified literary themes and raised political issues that provided the frame for Asian Canadian literature. Through its progressive political agenda, a collective Asian Canadian identity began to be articulated and strengthened. *Ricepaper*, which was launched in 1994, 19 years later than *The Asianadian*, has focused on supporting Asian Canadian arts, culture and especially literature. The funding organisation, Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop, runs training sessions, holds symposia and readings, and provides advice for writers about working with publishers. Therefore, the communal magazines are not simply loci for publication but institutions of literary culture.

The Asianadian, a quarterly magazine, was started by The Asianadian Resource Workshop with three founding members: Tony Chan, Cheuk Kwan and Lau Bo, all based in Toronto. In a 1978 article, Tony Chan explains the coinage of Asianadian as a new identity: “[Asianadian] is the best term because it describes a person with an Asian and Western sensibility. It is not a blend but an *amalgamation* of Asian and Western cultures” (13). One of the goals of the magazine was to promote the word. In the editorial of Issue 3.4, the editor in chief Momoye Sugiman proclaims: “We created this magazine three years ago with an aim to provide a forum for Asian Canadians to voice their opinions, to express their talents, and to use it as a means to build up a common understanding among themselves” (2).²⁹ Therefore, the magazine was designed as a space where Asian Canadians could talk and exchange thoughts with others freely and openly. The creation of such an accessible venue is very important as discussions generated from this forum mobilised social activism. And during the process many activists took to writing in order to explore profound and complex issues and to reach the widest possible audience. The second function is

²⁹ Momoye Sugiman goes under various pseudonyms: Ami Chiyo Hori, Dawn Kikoye. The Sugimans are also an important family in Japanese Canadian studies. Pamela Sugiman is now one of the most important oral historians of the internment.

especially important for the creation of Asian Canadian literature since many writers began their careers by writing for such communal magazines.

In the process of building up a common understanding among themselves, Asian Canadian literature was established. The Asian Canadians then realised that to explore issues about identity and immigrant history, writing in longer forms was needed. Indeed, “break the silence” not only means loud and emphatic speech for political mobilisation but also stories told in an unrushed way and in detail, allowing for nuanced and complicated presentations. Many communal magazines sensed the importance of literary expression, especially in terms of its ability to reach outside the community. Many communal magazines started to make space for literary content in the eighties. For example, *The Asianadian* had an issue devoted to poetry (Issue 3.3 1981) and they also invited the literary community in Vancouver (Issue 3.2 1980) to compile a special issue in which many poems and stories were published. Longing to know more accurately what had happened in the past, and to enable the wider society to understand them, Asian Canadians established and nourished their literature with high expectations.

Sugiman records in her editorial for Issue 4.1:

By the Autumn of 1979 we had amassed almost 300 subscribers from all over the world. Some of our articles were being reprinted in other periodicals. High Schools were inviting us to speak to students about Asianadian history. *The Globe and Mail* called us up for a front page “quote of the day”. Our little post office box was packed with letters, subscription orders and press releases every week. By the Spring of 1980 we had clearly established the magazine as a respected, progressive Asian Canadian voice. (2)

The Asianadian was very proactive and sensitive in capturing what is important to Asian Canadian society. *The Asianadian* was thus considered to be a reliable and visionary source of information and perspectives.

The magazine witnessed, and contributed towards advancing, some of the social activism that happened during its publishing run, such as the Anti W5 Movement, which was the first time that all diasporic Chinese groups within Canada united in activism against racial discrimination, the Japanese Canadian Redress Movement and the fight against the Ku Klux Klan. In September 1979, CTV’s W5 aired a TV programme, “Campus Giveaway”, featuring many Chinese students on a

university campus. The programme suggested that “foreign students” had been taking away opportunities from “Canadian” students to receive higher education. Because no distinction was made between overseas Chinese students and Canadian students of Chinese heritage, the Asian Canadian communities mobilised quickly to protest against the TV station for airing such discriminatory content that had no respect for Chinese Canadians’ national rights. They were most indignant that a national media would endorse and disseminate the idea that Asian physical appearance equals foreignness. *The Asianadian* followed the progress of this protest movement closely in issues 2.3 and 2.4 and celebrated its success: “CTV’s apology to the Chinese Canadians represented a turning point in this country’s minority rights. For the first time in history, a major network has openly apologised to an ethnic community. For the first time in history, the politically docile Chinese community fought back for its equal right [sic]” (13). In Issue 5.1, *The Asianadian* published a detailed account of the internment of Japanese Canadians and the Redress movement in Shin Imai’s “The Silence Broken: Japanese Canadians and Redress”. In Issue 5.4, Bobby Siu wrote “Community Organisation: How to Do It” in which he shared his experience of organising communal activism, using a successful example of how he and his group kicked the Ku Klux Klan out of the Riverdale district of Toronto.

The Asianadian set an excellent example for communal magazines with its high-quality articles and effective organisation of its contents. Many sections in the magazine were maintained for the larger part of its existence. For example, in the section “Face to Face”, many influential figures in the community were interviewed; in the section “Dubious Award” *The Asianadian* nominated the most obviously prejudiced content in the mainstream media; “Community News” contained reportage on many social movements carried out by various ethnic minority communities; “On the Firing Line” vigorously attacked social injustices; “Heritage Returns”, called for attention to fast fading histories in the community, such as a detailed account of the detention pen for Chinese immigrants, otherwise known as the Immigrant Building. The writer discovered what may be the earliest writing of Chinese immigrants in the form of poetry on the wall. “International Forum” communicated cultural, political or art developments beyond Canada, notably about

Asian American activism or social movements in various Asian countries, while “Letters” contained correspondence (often quite critical) sent in by readers. Though *The Asianadian* only existed for six years, it had such an impact on Asian Canadian communities that, to this day, many still credit the magazine with being revolutionary, visionary and educative.

The Asianadian has remained in many Asian Canadians’ memories for its revolutionary aspect. In the section “On the Firing Line”, *The Asianadian* attacked appropriation and invisible discrimination. Through various articles, structured social oppression was rendered obvious. These articles demonstrated that only when social problems and their causes are clearly revealed can revolutionary acts be incited. For example, in “The Struggle of South Asian Canadians”, M.L. Handa analyses the pattern of racism in Canada and comes up with a tripartite “Racist Structure” in Issue 2.3:

1. Racism is institutionalized. This means that because of the way the political selection process works, the way the labour market works, the way the Immigration policy works, the way the educational system works and the way the law enforcement agencies work (the police and the courts), the ethnic and racial minorities become discriminated against. It is important to understand that the workings of the system in producing racially and ethnically discriminatory effects are in the context of a “democratic” system. The “democratic” system provides *formal* freedom and equality for an individual but in *reality* that freedom and equality is interrupted by institutionalized mechanisms.
2. Not only do we have “Racist Social Structures” which maintain social and ethnic discrimination, we also have “Racist Consciousness”—a mind-set to look at social reality.
3. Superimposed on the two realities is the “Liberal Mythology” which maintains that the system provides equal opportunity for all (and those who do not make it are themselves to blame). (9 italics in original)

Such clear insight into the structured pattern of racism gives theoretical support to Asian Canadian studies and criticism. Well-informed about identity and racial politics, Asian Canadian writers are conscious of the risks of misrepresenting their group or appropriating themselves according to Western values. In this heated discussion about racial discrimination it becomes clear that the long established social order is not justified but could and should be overturned.

Again, in “Out of the Shadows”, Issue 2.1, Gerald Chan analyses the psychological reasoning behind racial oppression and its mechanism:

Oppression is often a two-way affair. For example, stemming out of ignorance, some white folks needed to act out their prejudice to safeguard their own interests. On the other hand, the insecurity which arose from language problems and cultural differences has made some members of ethnic groups retreat into their own ghettos, accompanied by strong resentment against their “oppressors”. This interplay of oppression, both inflicted by other and ourselves, underlies the relationships between racial groups, as well as the relationships between men and women, the mainstream and the “deviants”. (10)

Such discussion of the nature, structure and mental mechanism of racial discrimination rendered its invalidity and unjustifiability clear, and urged social transformation. In the magazine, critical examination of the existing social order is coupled with self-reflexive exploration of the community. Such clear insight into the structured pattern of racism gives theoretical support to Asian Canadian studies and criticism. Readers, especially Asian Canadians were then provided with theoretical tools to reflect upon their living conditions.

The Asianadian was regarded as being visionary in that it often foresaw future developments in art forms and social movements. For example, it talked about Vietnamese refugees and their experience in Canada in 1978 before the “boat people” became a major concern in the 1980s. It also introduced discussion of homosexuality in Asian communities before sexuality became a safe and comfortable topic in the public domain. Moreover, it also led the discussion about the contemporary art scene that was beginning to materialise in the late 1970s. In issue 5.1 (1983) Fred Wei-Han Honn in “Asian American Art” envisages the formation of a distinctive Asian North American artistic practice:

We should be proud of these roots and not pit contemporary western forms against the traditional Asian ones. This would only serve to divide our people and exacerbate our differences. As artists we can be unifiers, exponents of a new context, providing a vision of what could be. The traditional culture is part of our experience. We should not deny or feel ashamed of it. At the same time, experimentation, utilizing contemporary western forms is not being less “Asian” and more American. We should encourage an attitude of mutual respect, collectively and learning from all the traditions and develop our work

to be artistically powerful and politically progressive. Art, politics, and community are not separate. (22)

This encouragement to inherit cultural legacies whilst simultaneously adopting contemporary Western techniques liberates the artists from the feeling of being “stuck in-between”, having to make choices between two seemingly conflicting courses. By providing such explicit policies, *The Asianadian* contributed to the establishment of an Asian North American artistic canon.

In Issue 1.3, titled “Women”, Sugiman’s editorial lays out the progressive agenda for Asian Canadian women:

Before we can expect to raise the consciousness levels of other Canadians vis-à-vis Asianadian women, we must first heighten our own awareness of ourselves and erase any traces of the geisha girl mentality. We have to begin to challenge the sexist division of labour, the political distribution of personality traits—and our “place” in this male-centred society. We have to examine the various ways in which the rigid cultural traditions of our ancestors continue to stultify and subjugate us. (2)

Asian Canadian women are faced with double marginalisation due to racism and sexism. In order to break free from this, Sugiman calls on Asian Canadian women to empower themselves by erasing the geisha girl mentality, which is to say, refusing to trade one’s ethnicity or gender features for attention. Then, they will also need to be aware of oppression both in the larger society, embedded in the social structure, and within their own community, induced by “the rigid cultural traditions”. In this sense, *The Asianadian* was educative: it took on the task of disseminating progressive ideas to help ethnic minority subjects to become liberated from the racial and cultural oppressions that previously bound them to fixed social positions.

By providing a forum that allowed an exchange of views on topics which were previously considered private and personal, *The Asianadian* successfully created a collective consciousness, and provided guidance through its editorials and carefully selected themes and articles. For example, Gerald Baba in “The Best of Both Worlds” observes his own process of coming to terms with his identity, and emphasises that having a dual identity should be seen as advantageous. And Tony Chan’s “The Chinese Community in Canada: Background and Teaching Resources”

clarifies a series of questions (relating to classification, semantics and resources) that are central to Asian Canadian studies. Chan says:

The history of the Chinese experience is usually written by non-Chinese. Where is the Chinese view of their own experience in Canada? Where are the Chinese Canadian poets, artists, musicians, and film-makers whose experience in Canada provides a truer picture of their contribution? Works emphasizing calligraphy and bird paintings neither show Chinese Canadian sensibilities nor demonstrate their contribution to Canadian culture. The multicultural programme only serves to aggravate the split personality of many Chinese in Canada. (14)

Chan explains that neither traditional crafts nor presentations by people who are not of Chinese heritage can represent truly and fully the Chinese Canadian sensibility. It is, therefore, Chinese Canadians' mission to tell their own history and create cultural products that can reflect both their ethnic cultural inheritance and their Canadian experience.

Despite its many progressive features and important achievements, *The Asianadian* only survived six years and even during this period its existence was constantly under threat. In the inaugural issue, the editors identified several risks for *The Asianadian*: "The pitfalls are many—a lack of money, a scarcity of dedicated workers, and an uncertain readership" (1). Indeed, many communal publications are self-funded, relying on sponsorship from local businesses, donations, subscriptions, and very often, cash out of the pockets of the staff who already work unpaid. Not able to secure benefits for their staff, these communal publishing projects are often under pressure. The responsibility for production, quality control, and administrative management usually falls on a limited number of people. In the issue with the theme "Media" (1980), *The Asianadian* carried out an interview with George Yamada, the founder of *Rikka* (1973-1987), which was a similar type of magazine. Yamada explains: "*Rikka* operates without government subsidies. The paper and [printing] plates are paid for by sales but all the rest is "a labour of love" ("Asian Press Highlights" 14). Yamada also specifies a need for help with proofreading, marketing and distribution.

Another challenge for these communal publications is that, although already a minority group, the potential readership is in fact very much divided and it is difficult for the magazines to achieve any influence over readers who are

uninterested: “I’d like to reach those people who are not aware of certain issues but there is a natural selection: people like that won’t come across or read the magazine” (14). Throughout its existence, *The Asianadian* struggled with the problem of how to enlarge its readership and reach those who were still to be “converted”. A reader wrote to *The Asianadian*:

An ethnic magazine will continue to place itself out of the reach of more and more readers as it grows in sophistication and complexity of language and content. Whether intended or not, the invisible class line is distinctly drawn. The concerned writer’s shrill cries of racial consciousness are heard only by those like him who already understand the problems. Those who need consciousness raising most are condemned to a life of Charlie’s Angels, and a vision of the white Anglo-Saxon world through the tainted lenses of Playboy magazine. (J. Wong 36)

The reader proposed that the reason for the magazine’s failure to reach a wider readership is it engages only with the educated middle class who represent just a small proportion of Asian Canadians. Indeed, *The Asianadian* tried, by adjusting its tone and style, to cater to a wider population. The editorial board endeavoured to adjust without compromising the magazine’s liberating, educative features. Indeed, as Lee Justin observes: “Being Korean-Canadian, I share the same love-hate relationship with Asian-Canadian magazines. I genuinely want to support them, but like any magazine, the editorial must be engaging, well-written and informative. Sadly for most Asian-Canadian magazines, aiming for a large readership means degrading overall editorial quality” (n.p.). Maintaining the balance between marketing strategies and quality control is therefore a difficulty that all Asian Canadian magazines face.

Financial worries were a major concern for *The Asianadian*. The founders and staff, most of whom were college students, were not seeking to make money through their effort: indeed, they were actually losing money as Bareng explains in *The Asianadian* web blog, which was put online in 2007: “Unlike companies, the [Asianadian Resources Workshop] had no interest in making profit. Much of the money required to run the magazine came out of the staff’s pockets” (n.p.). Marian Tseng in a post titled “Leadership Control” explains that *The Asianadian* avoided seeking funding either from business advertisement or the government, not wanting to compromise its revolutionary nature and liberationist voice: “They did not want to

encourage the rampant materialism that was so prevalent in mainstream media. Instead, they wanted to market to readers that were more activist, academic and literary” (Tseng n.p.). Yet, near the end of its run, *The Asianadian* did secure one year’s funding from the government of Canada, which allowed it to employ full time staff and rent an office. Therefore, though lack of funding has been a constant concern, it was not the main reason for the demise of the magazine.

A shortage of personnel turned out to be the direct cause of the collapse. Bareng explains:

By 1985 however, the staff was burnt out from working issue to issue. Most of the key members had families and those concerns took priority to the magazine. It was also difficult to run the magazine on the budget that it was receiving. Momoye Sugiman, one of the later staff members also believed that the political fervor of the 70’s had died across the United States, taking *Asianadian* along with it. (n.p.)

Being overly reliant on its core staff, *The Asianadian* lacked the stability that a full-time team consisting of well-qualified professionals could have provided.

Moreover, a worry about “timing” seems to have been constantly on the editorial group’s mind. In the editorial for issue 4.1 (1982) Sugiman was already regretting: “Or perhaps our timing was off. If only the original members had accidentally met a decade earlier, during the less apathetic days of student revolts, maybe the magazine could have created a stronger impact on young Asian Canadians and established itself more securely” (2). Witnessing the social and civil movements at their height, the staff were reluctant to tone down their style to cater to the newer generation whose life experiences had largely unfolded in the multicultural era when racial conflicts had been ameliorated considerably and social movements quietened down. As Sugiman states:

Some people have suggested that we go even further to totally erasing our anger and including more popular, safe items such as family recipes and fashion shows. We have been warned that we will never widen our readership and get those coveted government grants as long as we continue to shake up the status quo. But, shaking up the status quo is implicit in our goals. I am afraid that by toning down our anger we would be compromising ourselves out of existence. (2)

To some extent, *The Asianadian* was a product of its time and could only serve the early stage of Asian Canadian activism. In the context of the socioeconomic shift that followed, its type of organisation (collective rather than corporate), its politically engaged approach, and its niche readership (“progressive Asian Canadians”) all contributed to making its position untenable. Although the magazine appealed to a loyal crowd, it failed to reach deeper into the community. However, by consciously preserving and asserting its revolutionary features, it became one of the kind, and was indeed successful in being authentic and coherent to its missions. *The Asianadian* was proud of its many articles of quality. Through many in-depth research articles and clearly articulated reports, a theoretical framework was created that can still inform today’s racial politics.

However, many Asian Canadians felt disturbed that *The Asianadian* would want the community to take an oppositional position to the mainstream—or what they referred to as “rock the boat”. In a moment of consciousness-raising, such as the initial stage of Asian Canadian activism, an oppositional perspective could help to expose and investigate social injustice. But when the civil rights movement had quietened down in the eighties, taking such an oppositional position was seen as biased and radical. In Issue 3.1 a reader’s letter was published:³⁰

Dear Editor:

No thank you—I do not wish to renew my subscription to *The Asianadian*. I feel that your magazine should be careful that it does not become a vehicle for perpetuating its own brand of racism. [...] Just as two wrongs do not make a right, ANGER against them probably constitutes the WORST way of trying to correct wrongdoers.

L. A. Burns (31)

³⁰ In her “A ‘Legitimate Beef’ or ‘Raw Meat’? Civility, Multiculturalism, and Letters to the Editor”, Karin Wahl-Jorgensen writes about letters to the editor as “a key institution of the public sphere’ in which ‘regular citizens’ are empowered to enter into ‘public democratic debate’” (90-1). At the same time, other media historians point out that the letters page is often heavily manipulated by editors, who are very selective about what they include, and may put in cut-down or even fake letters in order to shape the way their periodical is seen. For a discussion of reader letters as historical, see Azoulay, especially 9–12.

The Asianadian had known its limits but made a conscious editorial decision to preserve its progressive nature even if this alienated some readers.

In addition, there was an idealistic vision of a unified community within *The Asianadian*'s editorial group. Sugiman restates in the editorial to issue 4.1 what Tony Chan, one of the founders of the magazine, had claimed: "the concept of the Asianadian person is a new one in much the same way as the Asianadian culture. It transcends specific ethnic affiliations such as 'being Chinese' or 'being East Indian'. It also transcends Asian racism [and] class lines" (1). In fact, the common front that was constructed in fighting against racial discrimination could not transcend all kinds of differences, notably social class and political affiliation. For example, *The Asianadian* published a reader's letter written in response to an article:

A major problem with T. T. Mao's article 'Asianadian and the Anglo left' which appeared in the winter 1979/80 edition of *the Asianadian*, is its lack of a coherent theory of racism [...] Ultimately he comes to the conclusion that skin colour is the major dividing force. [...] This conclusion leads him to discard the possibility of alliances with the white working class, feminists, gays and Canadian left groups. He adopts an essentially isolationist policy and argues 'if support is to come, it must come from within'. Although no one would deny the need for an autonomous, self-directed movement of Asians to fight against the racism they experience, unity among all oppressed groups would appear to be crucial. (Holbik 31)

In promoting the Asian Canadian identity and its progressiveness, *The Asianadian* was successful in uniting Asian Canadian communities and, to some extent, transcended the boundaries between different ethnic groups. However, an individual's identity is complicated and contains many layers. The oppositional position proved to be very limiting in terms of recognising allies outside ethnic minority communities and of respecting individual differences within the community. In a way, this "one-sidedness" would have led to a voluntary isolation of the community, which was in fact against the liberating spirit that the magazine had advocated. In the 1980s, "inclusion" and "diversity" became the keywords of social activism, which also meant that an oppositional strategy was no longer suitable.

Throughout its life-span, *The Asianadian* was criticised for being too academic, elitist, and radical. Several shifts in the magazine's editorial direction can be observed. The first few issues each had a central theme. These were: "A New

Canadian Sensitivity”, “Our History”, “Women”, “Work”, “Sexuality”, “Children”, “Political Movements”, “Quebec”, “Media” and “Vancouver”. These ten first issues are the best examples of *The Asianadian*, exhibiting its fearless liberating spirit, taking shape as young grassroots activists, mostly college students, began to realise that their effort could help to change the social order and make Canada a better society. These issues also formed the scope of themes in Asian Canadian studies, with each of its articles better clarifying the so-called Asian Canadian identity and the community’s political priorities.

The Asianadian made the first notable editorial shift in its 3.3 (1980) issue, in order to reach a larger readership and reach further into the community. Instead of a theme, this issue was titled “Poetry”. In the editorial, the editor explains: “For the first time in *Asianadian* history, this issue does not have a thematic format. The reasons behind such a move are that the thematic format is too academic, appeals only to a restricted audience, and makes the issue generally dull as it is too specialized” (2). A notable change is that, from this issue onwards, more literary contents, such as poetry and short stories, and fewer political articles were published. There was still at least one research-based article in each issue. The stories and poetry still contained a discernible engagement with identity politics. For example, the next issue (3.4) contained Margaret Chang’s introduction to the history of Chinese people in Newfoundland in which she recounts the story of Fong Choy, who was claimed to be the territory’s earliest Chinese inhabitant. Three poems by Japanese Canadian activist, poet and critic Roy Miki also appeared, together with Chinese Canadian gay activist Richard Fung’s “An Onion amid Strawberries: Coping with the Curious”, an account of his trip to Latin America where racial segregation was still prevalent.

A second shift in editorial direction can be observed from issue 5.2, the point when *The Asianadian* obtained a grant from the Canadian government which allowed the magazines to hire full-time staff. There is an obvious revival of the revolutionary spirit, and a development in quality can be easily observed. The writing style became more approachable as less academic jargon was used. In addition, although good quality academic research papers reappeared, we can see that the editors were keen to add in content that was more informative and practical for community members.

For example, in “A Cultural Enrichment Program for Japanese Preschools and Their Families” (5.2), Edy Goto shares ideas for teaching Canadian-born children Japanese at home, using various simple family activities, until the children are old enough to attend Japanese-language school.

The last period of the *Asianadian*'s short life, however, is a sad one. Maybe due to the shortage of personnel, the quality of the magazine dropped noticeably in its last year. The magazine had by this time become more loosely organised and the writing style had slackened. The long established sections disappeared and the content seemed to scatter. Even the standard of graphic design and printing declined noticeably: the hand-drawn pictures are child-like, the photos are blurry and there are many typographical and formatting errors. All this shows that *The Asianadian* was in trouble and it discontinued publication after volume 6, in 1985.

Though the prospects for communal publications have often looked bleak, many magazines like *Typhoon Magazine* (1995), *Banana: Asian Canadian Lifestyle and Culture Magazine* (2002), *Jasmine* (2003), a magazine for Asian Canadian women, and *Ricepaper*, among many others, took on the challenge. The aforementioned magazines were short lived except *Ricepaper* which remains in good health. Learning from other communal publications' difficulties, *Ricepaper* has employed professional editorial teams for most of its history. Having just celebrated its twentieth anniversary with issue 20.3 in 2015, *Ricepaper* has proved the most enduring of the Asian Canadian magazines. On its official website, *Ricepaper* is described as “a quarterly magazine [...] distributed coast-to-coast, publishing the new voices coming out of the Asian Canadian arts and literary community. *Ricepaper* continues to be the only Canadian literary magazine of its kind with an Asian Canadian perspective” (“About”). It is, therefore, the best example of a magazine that offers continuous support for its community of writers.

Ricepaper is published by the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop (ACWW). It was initially a newsletter for internal communication amongst ACWW members (many of whom are writers), and was used for sharing information on workshops, publishing, and cultural events. The first few issues of *Ricepaper* were particularly basic, composed of eight pages that were stapled together. On the front page of its inaugural issue, Jim Wong-Chu claimed in ‘A Brief History of the ACWW’:

Our mandate is simple: to assist our members to publish or showcase their work and talent. We aim to provide a supportive and culturally sensitive environment for writers from a common Pacific Rim Asian heritage, a place for more established writers to guide emerging writers through the difficulties of the publishing field. We are committed to the accessing of new performing and publishing venues and relevant information on behalf of our writers. All those who contact us and show a desire to share and learn become part of us. (1)

From its inception *Ricepaper* took providing support for writers and promoting Asian Canadian literature as its mission. It is not as political or revolutionary as *The Asianadian* but it plays an important role in sustaining progress in Asian Canadian literature, especially when governmental support and social attention switch to other areas.

In its early issues, the newsletter gave updates on the status of members in relation to their writing career, such as: “Wayson Choy finally resigned from Cahoots Theatre’s board to work on his novel” (“Members at Large” 11) or “Vancouver writer (and this issue’s guest contributor) Evelyn Lau (*Fresh Girls and Other Stories*) is working on her first novel, working title: *Other Women* which will be released sometime this fall” (“Asian North American Bulletin” 6). A close network of writers was thus established, allowing personal exchange and support between its members. More importantly, *Ricepaper* shared publishing information, focusing on the publishers who were seeking multicultural contents in the nineties. Here is an example:

SECOND STORY PRESS is a feminist publisher in Toronto looking for quality prose writing by Canadian women writers. Contact: Jim Wong-Chu
 CACANANADADA Press is seeking works of fiction and poetry. Contact: Jim Wong-Chu
 Groundwood/Douglas & MacIntyre Children’s Books who is Paul Yee’s publisher is actively seeking Children and young adult historical based fiction
 Contact: Jim Wong-Chu
 PUBLISHERS SEEKING WRITERS Arsenal Pulp Press is looking for writers to work on developing cookbook concepts for publication. They are also looking for new book ideas for their highly successful ‘Little Book’ series of quotation books [...]. Contact: Jim Wong-Chu (‘Calendar’ 12)

When the book publication scene was at its height in the 1990s, *Ricepaper* shared with its members reliable information about getting published.

Recent issues of *Ricepaper* continue to hold talks with well-established writers and publish works by emerging writers. Issues concerning Asian Canadian literature, such as who should be writing, what to write about and how to write, are constantly discussed. For example, in its 2014 winter issue, which is devoted to the theme of activism, Hiromi Goto calls out: “If you are a writer (or a dreamer) from people, a community, a history that has been long-marginalized, silenced, or misrepresented, we so desperately need to hear your story in your voice, in your own grammar of perception and articulation” (“A Bending Light” 12). A sense of duty is indeed shared by many Asian Canadian writers. The actual need for more voices from within the group translates into a sense of duty to continue building and enlarging the literary community. And in “Revisiting Writing Thru Race”, Hanako Masutani, a young scholar at the time when the conference Writing Thru Race was held in 1994, remembers that she took the opportunity to ask writers such as Roy Miki, Dionne Brand and Hiromi Goto about her confusion in her own creative writing. At the end, she said: “So, when I write my novel do I now drop my all-white protagonist? Do I drop her all-white world? You bet that I do” (24). The writers’ advice for Masutani was to write accurately and with confidence, not feeling obliged to explain (more than necessary) or justify to the readers.

To this day ACWW is still very proactive in supporting Asian Canadian cultural workers: it holds cultural activities every year, such as Asian Heritage Month in May and Liter Asian: A Festival of Pacific Rim Asian Canadian Writing in October (2015 is the festival’s second edition). ACWW has published three Chinese Canadian anthologies, and its “Emerging Writer’s Award” was created in 1997. Its many activities through the years have helped to sustain Asian Canadian literature as a collective effort. This community-based effort has a very important role in the formation of a literary community, not only providing practical support such as publishing resources but also offering political and theoretical guidance by communicating the results of research and promoting new works.

These magazines, by providing publishing opportunities or information about publishers, contribute to the launching and support of writers’ careers and of networks within the literary and artistic communities. During the period when the Asian Canadian literary community has been establishing itself, external support, in

terms of government grants and academic interest, has played a very important role. However, internal nourishment has been of still greater significance. The united communal effort is a distinctive feature of Asian Canadian literature, and is most clearly visible in the histories of the magazines that are produced by this community.

1.3 Communal Publication Part II: Anthologies and the “Symphony of Noises”

By widely disseminating a vetted selection of texts, they popularize editorial judgement as well as authorial invention. (B. Benedict 3)

From the perspective of writers of colour who are aligned through a shared history, ancestry, and culture, the anthology as mode of publication can be an empowering process and an opportunity for exchange, as general reading matter but also as educational texts that may penetrate the reading lists of institutions, such as in schools and universities. (Miki, *Broken Entries* 119)

“Anthology”, from the Greek word “anthologia”, derives its meaning from the idea of flower-gathering. An anthology is a collection of “representative works” organised in a certain pattern, often under a specific theme. Western anthologies are often selections of writings produced within a certain time period by a broad selection of eminent writers. They are effective tools for canon-making. For example, in *The Routledge Concise History of Canadian Literature* (2011), Richard J. Lane argues that Edward Hartley Dewart’s *Selections from Canadian Poets* (1864) marked the beginning of the Canadian canon (29).³¹ Robert Lecker, in his *Keepers of the Code* (2013), argues: “The anthologist was a national gatekeeper whose process of literary selection had political and cultural ends: the anthologist’s responsibility was to reinforce and stabilize the connection between literature and nation” (29). According to Lecker, the nation-building function of anthologies is made possible by the purposeful selections of the anthologist, whose acts of inclusion and exclusion are equally important.

The lack of representation of Asian Canadian writers in many of Canada’s national anthologies before the 1990s, and their tokenised presentation at the end of other volumes, reflected and reinforced the marginalised position of ethnic minority

³¹ Robert Lecker observes: “Dewart’s anthology was a concrete symbol of Canada’s rising currency, especially in light of the impending Confederation” (31).

communities. It has been, therefore, especially significant for Asian Canadian communities to publish their own anthologies since the 1980s, in order to consolidate and document their development of an alternative canon in Canadian literature. Moreover, in *Scandalous Bodies*, Smaro Kamboureli observes that:

the many ethnic anthologies that appeared between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s marks the first such concentrated unfolding of ethnic writing in Canada. As it emerges from the Other side of Canadian literature's cultural syntax, this writing brings into play what was previously disregarded. It makes present what rendered it absent; it brings into relief the boundaries that separated it from the mainstream tradition. (131-2)

Indeed, by providing a collective form for Asian Canadian writings, an anthology makes a formal introduction of an often-neglected element of Canadian literature. The embodiment of a new literature also challenges long-standing ideas about what counts as Canadian literature. In this section, I will introduce Asian Canadian anthologies and describe their significant impact on the development of Chinese Canadian literature in particular. I will argue that Asian Canadian anthologies have a different agenda than the mainstream ones, since they are in a way anti-canonical: their mission is not to present a unified image of Asian Canadian society, but a diversified, heterogeneous, and "noisy" community.

It is generally agreed that the first Asian Canadian anthology, *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* (1979), announced the birth of Asian Canadian literature. This first anthology was a joint venture of a Japanese Canadian community literary organisation, Powell Street Revue, and the Chinese Canadian Writers' Workshop.³² Since the first collaborative anthology, four more major anthologies have appeared, but each has focused on only one of the communities. In 1981, *Paper Doors: an Anthology of Japanese-Canadian Poetry* was published, and this was followed by *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians* (1991), *Swallowing Clouds: An Anthology of Chinese-Canadian Poetry* (1999) and *Strike the Wok: An Anthology of*

³² During the interview that is included in *Voices Rising* with Xiaoping Li, Sean Gunn explains: "The late Garrick Chu, Jim Wong-chu, and myself formed the Chinese Canadian Writers' Workshop in about 1976. Later we changed the name to the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop" (147).

Contemporary Chinese Canadian Fiction (2003). Given the dominance of writers of Chinese extraction in the production of anthologies, the term “Asian Canadian anthologies” as used in my chapter does map approximately onto “Chinese Canadian anthologies”.

Although it was the Japanese Canadian community that initiated the collaboration on the first Asian Canadian anthology, they seem to have withdrawn at an early stage from participation in anthology-making, though none of the critics who discuss these collections have been able to suggest a clear reason for this. My speculation is as *Paper Doors* appeared at the same time as *Obasan*, it is possible that the Japanese Canadian community found themselves more effectively represented by individual celebrity authors, and by full-length works of fiction, than by anthologies or poetry. I also suspect that the community may have a rather critical view towards anthology-making as there seem to be different views on the functions of anthologies.

Lai, for example, sees *Many-Mouthed Birds* as “a push toward the mainstreaming of Chinese Canadian writing” (*Slanting I* 113). She questions the making of communal anthologies of the Chinese Canadian group while discussing the first Chinese Canadian anthology:

The framing of *Many-Mouthed Birds* matters for this reason. It is hard to be clear why Bennett Lee and Jim Wong-Chu decided to work with a Chinese Canadian frame instead of an Asian Canadian one, since they leave the Chinese Canadian framing of the anthology as self-evident. Did they do this because they felt that the Chinese Canadian writing community had reached a critical mass, and so did not need other Asian Canadian writers any more? Are there nationalist feelings that linger, perhaps connected to feelings of resentment against Japanese imperialism on the Asian continent, in spite of the fact that both Chinese Canadians and Japanese Canadians have suffered at the hands of the Canadian government here? Or is there a more complicated problem at work in the fact that Korean Canadians, Filipino Canadians, and South Asian Canadians also belong within the designation “Asian Canadian”—a designation that has always been problematic for placing Chinese Canadians and Japanese Canadians at the centre? (113)

Lai’s questions open up the unsettling aspect of communal formations, which is often unmentioned by critics so as not to disintegrate the common efforts or undermine the harmonious image of the Asian Canadian literary community. It is perhaps because as a marginalised group, members of the community feel the need to defend the

solidarity of the group as there is a perceived threat to their existence, because they have to gain space for survival vis-à-vis the mainstream publication industry. However, it is inevitable that there should be differences in opinion and approach. I also argue for the need to “mainstream” so that a canon, the contours of which could be later enlarged and modified, can be established in the first place. Anthology-making, as an efficient tool of canon-making, indeed seems to involve deploying the same kind of power that mainstream literature has been using. However, I argue that more diversified, nuanced and specific expressions from the group are also efficient tools for attacking homogenisation and simplification of their works. The anthologies are also subversive in this regard as they become more specific in content (literary and non-literary) and genre, making it more obvious that Asian Canadian literature could never be contained in just one book. Moreover, these anthologies, though partial in their presentation, serve as monuments in Asian Canadian literary history.

In this section, I will analyse three of these anthologies. In accordance with my focus on fiction in this thesis, I have chosen the anthologies that are oriented towards prose writing: *Inalienable Rice*, *Many-Mouthed Birds* and *Strike the Wok*. These were also the most influential among the anthologies, in terms of the development of writers’ careers. An additional reason for choosing them is that they were published at twelve-year intervals, and so provide conveniently spaced entry-points into a developing trajectory of Asian Canadian literary history. I will discuss the unique features of Asian Canadian anthologies, exploring the ways in which they draw on the Chinese literary anthology tradition, and pointing to how they differ from mainstream Canadian anthologies. I will argue that Asian Canadian literary anthologies, instead of aiming to present a uniform or harmonious image of their community, celebrate and document the multifaceted Canadian experience lived by people of Asian ancestry.

Writer and anthologist Lien Chao argues: “the fact that *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* were both published and introduced by writers from the Chinese Canadian Writers’ Workshop illustrates the strength of a community-based minority literature” (“Anthologizing” 50). This shows again that, as I discussed in the previous section, the Asian Canadian writers’ community has been making a conscious effort to bring together and support its members. An ethnic minority

anthology provides an ideal space for minorities to engage with the mainstream. In an Asian Canadian anthology, the broader Canadian society is always in the background, not alongside, where it can be referred to or compared with. Empowered by the surrounding context of the anthology, the individual voice will not have to define itself in relation to the mainstream “out there”, but can express itself without any need to supply additional or background information. Also, the fact that the anthologies are created by the minority communities ensures that the communities’ voices are not compromised or misrepresented. However, this does not ensure that their self-representation is always free from misrepresentation or self-appropriation, as I will discuss presently.

Contrary to mainstream Canadian anthologists, who, according to Robert Lecker, are code-keepers endeavouring to establish, shape and defend a national canon, Asian Canadian anthologists are more like orchestra conductors, who try to symphonise different voices or sounds into various movements at certain moments of Asian Canadian literary history. The Asian Canadian anthologists do not follow a Western anthological tradition, as they are conscious that their “music” is not in tune with the dominant key of the mainstream and is sometimes regarded as “noise”. Yet a symphony of noises is what they mean to compose—to announce an arrival, make an entrance and celebrate communal achievement.

As I explained earlier, Asian Canadian cultural workers do not seek to promote a uniform or harmonised image of the Asian Canadian community, since there is no such thing, or, if there is, it exists only as cliché and should be banished rather than reinscribed. An Asian Canadian anthologist’s task is to conduct a symphony of noises that presents people and places, historical and literary values, self-reflection within the community and consciousness of an external gaze, the will to assimilate and the determination to stay authentic. The writers’ different voices are interwoven: defiance or compliance, welcoming of the new or clinging to the old, regret for cultural loss or rejoicing at new opportunities. The anthologists, acutely aware of these dilemmas, juxtapose these seemingly conflicting values and departure points instead of setting them against each other or picking one side. Conscious of the risks of being appropriated by the mainstream’s imagination and expectations, the anthologists avoid enforcing self-censorship on the community’s voices.

However, as Kamboureli observes about ethnic anthologies published in the 1970s:

the heterogeneity of these ethnic anthologies is one of the reasons why their potential to revise the canon has remained largely unrealized. Although intended to reach a group of readers that has stubbornly ignored ethnic writing, they were published by small if not obscure presses, and hardly reviewed at all; thus their readership was actually very small. (*Scandalous Bodies* 134)

I argue that though sales figures are usually a good way of evaluating the impact of books, in this special case, however, what is more critical is that these early ethnic minority anthologies are published in book form and can be preserved as such. In addition, due to the limited resources in the communities at that time, and the fact that discussion around ethnic minorities had only recently started to be heard, it is certainly understandable that the books did not make an instant impact.

Meanwhile, anthologists need to identify a readership or a target market before they set out to compile any collections. Lecker points out an inner structure in anthologies: “Binary structures are implicit in every anthology, because the very act of editorial selection implies an editor-reader dichotomy. The editor must obtain a certain level of identity” (166-7). With regard to Asian Canadian anthologies, this aspect is even more complicated as their anthologists have a triangle to balance. English-Canadian, or indeed French-Canadian anthologists, address a readership which is relatively unified and easy to identify, that is, people who are interested in Canadian literature.³³ In *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1991), Frank Chin writes in “Fifty years of Our Whole Voice”:

The minority writer works in a literary environment of which the white writer has no knowledge or understanding. The white writer can get away with writing for himself, knowing full well he lives in a world run by people like himself. At some point the minority writer is asked for whom he is writing, and in answering that question must decide who he is. (xxxv)

³³ While of course people outside Canada read anthologies of Canadian or Asian Canadian literature, for example in foreign universities, the audience for both types of anthology is overwhelmingly found within the country, and they serve a nationalist purpose.

Indeed, Asian Canadian anthologies have a divided readership: the insiders, people within the Asian Canadian communities; and the outsiders, the rest of Canada's population. For the insiders, the anthologies forge a sense of community, to treasure the past and their ancestors and, where possible, engender a pride in being a part of the community and a will to contribute. With regard to these readers, the anthologists design an internal documentation to preserve what is considered good for future generations in order to generate a sense of belonging and self-identification. The anthologist, with an insight into communal life and a frustration about its long-term neglect by mainstream Canadian society, consciously ensures an equal representation of its different groups of members within the anthology. Therefore, we see that all the anthologies pay attention to the personal background of their contributors: generation, place of residence, parentage, etc. Furthermore, Asian Canadian anthologists endeavour to include multiple perspectives on diversified experiences and varied descriptions of a multifaceted Canadian life.

As for the "outsiders", the anthologies promote knowledge of Asian Canadian culture, showcase its literary achievement and enable understanding of the evolving community amongst the wider Canadian population. The editors recognise that an anthology is not only a chance for them to present some of the best "flowers" from amongst the available literature, but also a chance to present, on their own terms, their own community and people as they are, without feeling obliged to justify themselves or offer too much explanation of how they differ from the wider population.

Ethnic minority writing often takes on a role of education for a larger readership. In the introduction to *Many-Mouthed Birds*, Bennett Lee explains the significance of reading ethnic minority literature for Canadians and even for a wider general readership:

There may well be a growing and more receptive audience for this kind of fare, but not simply because it is "multicultural" and injects some adrenaline into the body of the Canadian literary tradition. We read to experience alternate realities and perceptions and to be entertained. If the writing is true, it strikes a common chord in all of us, and we gain a deeper satisfaction because it stimulates our imagination and challenges our moral judgment. Otherwise, it will not endure, and no amount of novelty or exotic ornament can preserve it. (B. Lee 7)

By experiencing “alternate realities and perceptions” through “true” writings, readers are promised “a deeper satisfaction” as they would be able to gain some knowledge about a different set of social codes and values, and get a glimpse of a “parallel reality” which is both similar yet distinctly different from theirs. Readers are thus able to enlarge their own world view and enrich their life experience.

There is an obvious emphasis on documenting historical events in Asian Canadian anthologies. For example, the bachelor society and the paper kinship system are revisited by different writers from different angles in *Many-Mouthed Birds*. To some extent, the historical value of some anthologised pieces compensates for the quality of the writing and renders the writings indispensable, as these “true voices” attest to lesser known aspects of Canadian history. Asian Canadian anthologies are necessarily political due to the racially-based self-identification of the communities producing them and they are very likely to remain political. Written by writers grouped by the criterion of having, or self-identifying with, Chinese heritage, the entries in the anthology are inevitably read in a political—even polemical—context. Chao observes: “While the power of English is appropriated by Chinese Canadian writings, the anthology form is politicised; its traditional hegemony, founded on supposedly pure literary merits, is contested” (“Anthologizing” 50). The first two anthologies, which give primacy to racial politics, are noticeably assertive in comparison with the English Canadian anthological tradition, in which political messages permeate more subtly. Also, presenting a different image of Chinese Canadian society from that featured in the mainstream media is one of the most salient missions that the anthologists take upon themselves. In the context of an Asian Canadian anthology, even an entry that does not touch on any racial or gender politics takes on a political mission: to offer a testimony of a life experience different from the imagination of the Canadian media.

Another feature shared by Asian Canadian anthologies is that items are not organised alphabetically by the names of contributors, nor by the birth dates of the authors, but by an internal logic. By not conforming to the Western tradition, Asian Canadian anthologies downplay the focus on authors and foreground a shared experience and a collective memory. The lack of order is in itself a protest against the enforced or expected acculturation of ethnic minorities into an existing cultural

and social framework. The continuity evident across the successive anthologies reveals a communal effort to shape a literary inheritance, preserve collective memories, and discover new literary territory.

Meanwhile, the titles for these anthologies play with literary puns (inalienable rights and inalienable rice) and distinct cultural references: many-mouthed birds, wok, paper doors, swallowing cloud (a soup-based dish). Humorous intentions can be seen in the range of titles of Asian Canadian cultural products, such as the aforementioned magazines and anthologies. I argue that this could be perceived as the community showing their resilience and optimism, and their confidence in using English speaking to the mainstream, since most of them are third-generation immigrants. However, the Asian Canadian cultural workers may also have employed playfulness as a tactic, in order not to collide with the mainstream public as they would have done by adopting an accusing or critical tone during their early encounters with the mainstream. Instead, they adopted humour, making light of oppositional and resentful attitudes, and using self-mockery as a subversive strategy. This playfulness, however, becomes a distinct feature in Asian Canadian cultural products. For instance, I discuss Goto's use of black humour in Chapter Four.

The continuity and conscious inheritance in the successive anthologies show that they resulted from a deliberate communal effort to preserve a collective memory and discover new territory. Chao says explicitly introducing the *Striking the Wok*: "We present this anthology to continue the tradition set by the previous anthologies and thus as a new chapter in the field of Chinese Canadian literature" (Introduction x-xi). An anthology as a print product presents the best works of many writers organised with a certain purpose or theme at the time of its publication. A systematic study of a series of anthologies, however, can illustrate the development of a certain literature and provide new perspectives in the light of a historical overview.

In the following part, I will look at three anthologies that were produced by these communities. It is generally agreed that Asian Canadian literary history is born out of and recorded through these anthologies. In contrast to English-Canadian anthologies which disseminate a national ideal, Asian Canadian anthologies celebrate personal values and individual experiences. Cries of labourers who talk in lost dialects or Pidgin English, of angry protest against discrimination and social

injustice, of demands for the government to apologise, of childhood in a ghettoised Chinatown—all are combined into a symphony. The first movement, *Inalienable Rice* and *Paper Doors*, announces the existence of the Asian Canadian community; the second movement, *Many-Mouthed Birds*, makes an attempt to provide a larger framework for defining a Chinese Canadian sensibility; the third movement, *Swallowing Clouds* and *Strike the Wok*, adds in some forceful clanks to demand new recognition and to invite others from outside the group to join the communal celebration.

The first anthology, *Inalienable Rice*, is now out of print and only six hundred copies were produced. It seems that Asian Canadian literature was born into a very humble abode: the double-column format, limited print run, and mixed genres all indicate a lack of resources. Mainstream anthologies would often be devoted to fiction or poetry, and would not include interviews or other miscellaneous texts, as this one did. As the editors explain:

Because we wanted the book to have a broad appeal, we included personal opinions and emotions as well as research and analysis. The result has been the creation of a thematic flow in which poem and essay, interview and proposal, visual and literary image have been mixed so that related ideas, feelings and points could be communicated on many levels. (Chu et al. viii)

This multi-levelled communication is an ideal strategy for a silenced society to make its entrance into mainstream literary culture for the first time. At the time of *Inalienable Rice*, some of the now renowned writers had not yet published anything, or were in the middle of producing their first work.

A discernible priority was given to various political issues which continue to provide a framework for Chinese Canadian literature, as Lien Chao observes: “the anthology best advances the political cause embedded in the idea of a Chinese Canadian literature” (“Anthologizing” 35). For example, Nagano Glen’s poem “To Our Own” provides a historical overview of Asian immigrants and explores generational difference; “China and the Chinese Canadians” discusses the relationship between the overseas Chinese and China; “Japan from a Sansei Perspective” presents some young Japanese Canadians’ views on Japan after visiting the country; “Early Casualties, or How to Lose Out to the History Books: The Chinese in British Columbia” records the institutional racial discrimination lived

through by Chinese Canadians; “Stranger than Fiction: Some Wartime Inconsistencies” protests against the injustice suffered by Japanese Canadians during World War Two, and there are two interviews, one with a typical Chinatown sojourner, Lee Wei, and the other with Japanese artist and writer Roy Kiyooka. In this sense, the first anthology is hardly literary, since up to that point, a tradition of creative writing in English had not yet been nurtured. The editors explain in the introduction: “the anthology stimulated more writing and became more of a beginning than a culmination” (Chu et al. viii). What is most promising—even prophetic—is that the anthology ends with an excerpt from Joy Kogawa’s then work-in-progress which was later known as *Obasan*.

This informed, realistic and appreciative presentation is very significant to the development of Asian Canadian communities. The editors observe:

what we have found striking in the writings of Asian Canadians is the sense of empathy rather than sympathy, of epic struggles rather than unfortunate mistakes, of the central importance of the Asian Canadian experience to a realistic understanding of Canada, rather than its designation as a footnote to Canadian history, of a concern for the future of our communities rather than pat conclusions like “model minority” or “well assimilated”. (Chu et al. viii viii)

Indeed, the first anthology identified and amassed the first writers in the community, establishing the first landmark in Asian Canadian literary history. More importantly, it sets the tone for the future development of the literature. The same epic struggles that brought Asian Canadian literature to life have been sustained by generations of cultural workers at various sites in Canada, who continue their pioneering work to develop this literature.

The title “Inalienable Rice” invites many interpretations. “Inalienable” is a very forceful adjective as it is usually used in “inalienable rights”. This term asserts equal rights for Asian Canadian citizens. Rice as basic nourishment for Asian people represents a distinctive element of Asian culture. Moreover, the replacement of an abstract concept such as “right” with the concrete term “rice” also symbolises a process of commodification, and through this move, the ethnic minority groups signal their protest against being objectified. Simultaneously, the concrete substance manifests an undeniable existence, hence “inalienable”.

The front cover (see figure 1) shows a rice sack that features a bowl in the centre with a knife and fork on the left and a pair of chopsticks on the right inside a circle. The weight of this sack of rice is marked on both sides, with “50 lbs” beside the Western cutlery set and “22.68 kg” at the side of the chopsticks. Lien Chao interprets this design: “Whereas the choice between chopsticks and knife and fork, or between the British weight measure system and the International System, is available for Chinese Canadians, a sense of double cultural identity is indicated as a sign of reterritorialization, especially in the birth of Chinese Canadian literature marked by the publication of this anthology” (“Anthologizing” 48). This interpretation is obviously based on the assumption that the consumers of this sack of rice were Asian Canadians. I, however, suggest that this sack of rice is meant for both Chinese Canadians and mainstream Canada. In this perspective, whatever the measurement or tools used to process the rice, the content is the same. This message will instil confidence in younger generations of Asian Canadians. However, the self-projected image as commodity, such as a sack of rice, is problematic in the light of recent Asian Canadian literary criticism.

Moreover, on the top of the rice sack, the words 新品种, new species and “extra fancy” are specific references to California-grown rice, and will be particularly meaningful to older generations of Asian Canadians. “Extra fancy” refers to the way the rice is processed, not just the quality of the grains. At one time it was coated in talc to preserve dryness, hence the need to wash the rice, but the California rice does not need to be washed. This “new crop” of rice was also more expensive. Using the rice sack as the book cover, the editors hint that the content of the anthology is American-based and made, just like the rice which has been grown locally and processed with new technology that will change the traditional way of cooking rice in Asia, such as removing the need to wash and rinse.

In many ways the first anthology puts down roots for the Asian Canadian literary tradition, a very open tradition that tolerates and encourages diverse forms of self-expression. As the editors state: “The material that was accepted did not fall in orderly slots to create an even wall of ethnically correct statements, but the differences could still be placed within a total context of an Asian Canadian perspective” (Chu et al. viii). Probably out of annoyance at being stereotyped and

pigeonholed, the anthologists did not seek uniformity in the contributors' understanding of what was Asian but set out to find new representations that contest old impressions. They presented complex and diversified perspectives. The third-generation editors consciously nurtured an Asian Canadian hybrid subjectivity that was not a combination of half Chinese and half Canadian. Rather, it was a new subjectivity that was informed by both cultures and functions as a new entity, as is written on the cover page in Chinese 新品种, new species.

To some extent, loss and gain is the central theme for the first anthology, a theme which also gives a structure to the text. An awareness of loss accompanies an attention to gains. In the introduction, the editors realise that there is a sense of nostalgia in the third generation: not for their "home country" which they never set foot in, but for a quasi-imagined Asian Canada:

What has characterized our experience growing up Asian Canadian has been a sense of separation from all things Asian Canadian. We learned little about our ancestors, the pioneers who had made this land grow [...]. Our school books didn't deal with the Vancouver racial riots of 1887 and 1907, or the World War Two expulsion, incarceration and later dispersal of the Japanese Canadians, or the disenfranchisement of both peoples until the late 1940's. (Chu et al. viii)

Realising they are fast losing their Asian Canadian heritage and memory, the third-generation editors try to preserve vivid oral histories of those who came to Canada as labourers, who will disappear without a trace if their voices are not recorded. For example, in "Interview with Lee Wei", a Chinatown sojourner "unleashed a torrent of vivid and angry memories" (Pender Guy 28): "Rough? You don't know anything about it? People were crying in the streets. Fuck! This is gold mountain? Fuck, it was better at home. You had a share in the See Ooh Hong Guck. At home you had something" (30).

Following the example of *Inalienable Rice, Many-Mouthed Birds*, continued to feature flexibility in its selection criteria. This second anthology sees self-definition as its mission: "We were curious as to whether or not the results would reflect a sensibility which was identifiably 'Chinese Canadian,' but imposed no such condition on the subject matter" (B. Lee 1). Setting out to locate a Chinese Canadian

sensibility, the editors “cast their nets wide”, lest they miss out any component of the big picture.

As Lee, one of the co-editor observes: “Finding the writers turned out to be the difficult part. Once this was accomplished, mainly through the perseverance of Jim Wong-Chu, the cream rose quickly to the top” (B. Lee 1). During my interview with him, Jim Wong-Chu explains his special way of locating writers in the community. The Canada Council was looking to award a grant to someone in the Chinese Canadian community for the purpose of publishing a communal anthology. At the same time, Douglas & McIntyre, the publisher, showed interest:

So my job was to find the writers. At that time, I thought there were only a handful of us that were writing. So I went down to UBC to the library. Those days the libraries were deeply in the dungeon, six floors down. I went there and looked through every magazine, every literary journal I can find to look for any Chinese names. (Personal Interview)

With Wong-Chu’s persistent effort, Lee says, “over time we read hundreds of submissions, most by writers we did not know about before we started” (B. Lee 1). This again shows the indispensable impact of collaborative effort in the shaping of Chinese Canadian literature. Indeed, many writers started their careers with this anthology as they were later approached by various publishers, who were seeking more voices from ethnic minority communities, influenced by the then heated debate surrounding multicultural issues.

In this collection, part of SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café* is included in *Many-Mouthed Birds*. SKY Lee’s family saga about four generations of the Wangs in Chinatown tells of a fourth-generation woman’s liberation from the double snare of racial discrimination and patriarchal order. By reorganising the historical fragments, an inter-generational effort on the part of the female members of the family is rendered clear and connected. Denise Chong was working on her first novel, *The Concubine’s Children*, at the time when the anthology was being compiled, and has a part of it included in the form of a short story. Likewise, Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony* entered the collection as a short story and was developed into an award winning book in 1995. *Many-Mouthed Birds* encouraged, promoted and facilitated publishing for many Chinese Canadian writers.

Chao recognised the continuous growth that the successive anthologies represent: “Although it was hardly noticed outside of the community, the publication of *Inalienable Rice* marks the birth of the community-based literature; *Many-Mouthed Birds* enters Canadian literature as a new landmark, signifying its continuous growth” (“Anthologizing” 33). By the point when *Swallowing Clouds* and *Strike the Wok* appeared, making an anthology had become a communal festival, with two generations of writers presenting their works and emerging writers gradually entering the circle. A growing list of influential writers both within the community and in the larger Canadian literary scene had emerged: Larissa Lai, SKY Lee, Lien Chao, Paul Yee, Fred Wah, Wayson Choy, Judy Fong Bates, Madeleine Thien, Linda Kwa and many more.

However, it seems the fact that the community could now present themselves did not guarantee that the products were free from racial appropriation as a result of internalised social pressure and values. In order to explore this, I will now pay some attention to both the title and the visual presentation—the cover design—of the anthology. On the flyleaf, the title is explained by the editors: “The title of this collection, *Many-Mouthed Birds*, comes from a Chinese expression used to describe someone who disturbs the peace, who talks out of turn, who is indiscreet. The writers here are ‘Many-Mouthed Birds’ because they are speaking up, breaking a long and often self-imposed silence. They offer songs straight from the heart” (Lee and Chu n.p.). In his “Asiancy: Making Space for Asian Canadian Writing”, Roy Miki questioned the title and the explanation given, arguing: “Self-imposed, given the history of discrimination against Chinese Canadians throughout the century? Who is speaking here?” (*Broken Entries* 120). Annoyed by an overly self-critical tendency in ethnic minority groups, Miki attacked the self-abasement in the title for its counteraction of the ongoing protest against racial discrimination and social injustice. I do, however, also understand the editors’ intention to unsettle the existing social impression by assuming the seemingly abasing term which they have redefined and reevaluated: here they claim that they are many-mouthed birds with pride and they are not afraid to speak up or out of turn.

Miki also criticised the choice of photo for the cover of *Many-Mouthed Birds* (see figure 2): “this photo by Chinese Canadian artist Chick Rice is part of a series

on Tommy Wong shown in the exhibit, ‘Yellow Peril Reconsidered’ but is here isolated and commodified for this anthology” (*Broken Entries* 120). The cover features an Asian person, who on first sight, looks very feminine but on closer inspection turn out to be a man. The gender ambiguity suggests an equally “cross border” cultural identity such as Asian Canadian. Moreover, the design plays with the idea of something one thinks one knows, but actually does not, therefore still needs to learn. However, it cannot be denied that this picture falls into the somehow orientalist stereotype of a Madame Butterfly kind of beauty.

However, I do understand Miki’s regret over and caution against unintended damage to the joint effort of ethnic minorities against further objectification, disempowerment and alienation. As Miki explains:

I am not denying or downplaying the empowering agenda of the anthology, the cultural objective of its editors to open a venue for writers of Chinese ancestry, but the framing process itself, the anthology as commodity, cannot be ignored as one aspect of the public space within which texts by writers of colour are represented, received, codified, and racialized. (120)

Indeed, presenting a collection of works based on and organised by ethnic identity is itself a process of racialisation. Making an anthology can still, nevertheless, be an empowering act on the part of the community and allow it to present itself on its own terms and in its own fashion. But Miki’s critique is a reminder that caution is necessary, to avoid possible self-appropriation.

The third anthology I will discuss in detail is *Strike the Wok*. The title indicates that this is an anthology of fiction. The genre of fiction represents a breakthrough in Chinese Canadian literature as ethnic minority literature was formerly associated more with auto-ethnographic writing. Moreover, the 29 short stories and excerpts from novels which feature in the anthology are all written by different contributors, whereas the first two anthologies allowed more than one entry from the same contributor. Both the quantity and quality of its items convey the message effectively: the Chinese Canadian literary community has been continuously blossoming and is now part of Canada’s national literature.

Strike the Wok was published 12 years after *Many-Mouthed Birds*. In the introduction, Lien Chao explains the editors’ strategy in composing this anthology: “Our approach links sociohistorical milieus with aesthetic merits, in other words,

culture with literature, emphasizing an important element in reading minority literature” (Introduction xi). *Strike the Wok* demonstrates a reading method for minority literature which involves attention to both literature and culture. Rather than an apologetic acknowledgement of the ethnographical nature of some of the entries, the editorial assertion suggests a redefinition of minority literature and a more suitable way of processing it as a reader. The editors demonstrate confidence in the literature they are presenting.

A quick look at the cover (see figure 3) reveals a distinct difference from *Many-Mouthed Birds*: instead of a mournful dark tone, *Strike the Wok* is light and cheerful. The cover design features an open Chinese paper parasol. There are some Chinese traditional brush paintings on the white, semi-transparent rice paper. The wooden handle positioned close to the spine of the book separates the whole parasol into two sides that spread over the front and back covers. The left sphere of the parasol, which is on the front cover, features two butterflies: one black and one red, in different styles. Golden sunshine comes from behind the parasol and casts the shadow of leaves on the paper. The left side of the parasol is decorated with plum blossoms. For the first time Canada is projected into the picture, in the shadows of maple leaves on the Chinese parasol. The image portrays a harmonious interaction between the cultures: as sunshine permeates the thin paper, shapes of maple leaves are a pattern added onto the parasol. The whole presentation suggests a designed, layered framework for the growth of the Chinese Canadian literary community. The spine and branches of the parasol, made of light bamboo, are structured to support the whole apparatus and are tied together by red threads. This layered structure of a support system reminds people of the joint effort of many generations of Chinese Canadians. The two butterflies show their beauty from different angles. As for the plum blossoms, they often indicate a better period after a severe time, as suggested in “梅花香自苦寒来”—plum blossoms are fragrant because they have been through the bitter winter.³⁴

Unlike the serenity and harmony captured on the cover, the title rings with a metallic sound. Chao explains: “Why ‘Strike the Wok?’ The title of this anthology

³⁴ I offer this reading because Chao immigrated to Canada as an adult, therefore is possibly more familiar with Chinese culture.

derives from the desire we have always had—to make our voices heard, and to make noise to celebrate the talents in the community. ‘Wok’ here partly functions as ‘gong,’ a traditional Chinese musical instrument” (Introduction viii). But non-Chinese readers would more easily associate a wok than a gong with China. The action of striking the wok refers to a metallic clink of a cooking utensil against the wok in order to attract attention for people to come to share the hot food in the wok. It is with a typical Chinese hospitality and pride that the anthologists present the chop suey³⁵ that they have prepared with a range of carefully chosen ingredients:

This anthology has gathered two generations of Chinese Canadian writers, including winners of the Governor General’s Literary Award, the Trillium Book Award, and other literary awards, as well as new writers; it includes writers who were born in Canada and those born abroad, writers currently living in Canada and those residing elsewhere. (Chao, Introduction xiii-xiv)

Strike the Wok is especially proud to include Chinese Canadian writers who are not only acclaimed within the community but also recognised in mainstream literary society. Therefore, there is a definite celebration in the strike—it suggests that there is no longer any need to hush up, to suppress a cry of joy and celebration. The Chinese Canadian literary community now feels at ease to perform a celebratory ceremony according to their custom and is not afraid to produce a noise that is not in tune with mainstream music.

At the end of the introduction, Chao says: “Jim Wong-Chu and I are proud to present this collection to readers. We hope that you will enjoy these stories and find in them whatever inspiration you are looking for, and that they will help to banish the stereotypes of the past” (xiv). For the first time, this “you” is addressing a unified readership, unlike the first two anthologies which have to deal with a divided one.

³⁵ A typical dish in North American Chinese cuisine: chop suey is basically a Chinese dish with many different ingredients stir fried together. Andrew Coe (2009) explains: “To American diners of a century ago, chop suey was the food of the moment, both sophisticated and enjoyed by everyman. They liked chop suey because it was cheap, filling, and exotic, but there was something more. Chop suey satisfied, not just filling stomachs but giving a deeper feeling of gratification. This links it to an important part of the western culinary tradition” (175-6). Also see Lily Cho’s *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada* (2010).

With a growth in localised experience and the amelioration of racial policies, the newer generations of Asian Canadian writers share a similar experience to the rest of Canadians in multicultural Canada. Chao says: “We hope this anthology gives Chinese Canadian writers a proud place in which to belong, a place not only in the area of Chinese Canadian literature, but also in the national literature of Canada” (xi). The past of Asian Canadians is now seen as a common asset for all Canadians to understand, treasure, and reevaluate. I have some reservations about the overly celebratory tone of the introduction, but the sincerity of the editors’ aims is clear.

In conclusion, communal publications as literary vehicles have been very important in this early phase of establishment of the literature. The magazines, by providing publishing opportunities or information about publishers, contribute to the launching and support of writers’ careers and of networks within the literary and artistic communities. The anthologies have announced the birth, recorded the growth of the literature and more importantly consolidated its identity. During the period when the Asian Canadian literary community has been establishing itself, external support, in terms of government grants and academic interest, has played a very important role. However, internal nourishment has been of still greater significance. Communal support is a distinctive feature of Asian Canadian literature, and is most clearly visible in the histories of the magazines that are produced by this community.

In this chapter, I discussed the Eaton sisters’ differing literary trajectories, which are closely aligned with their strategies in relation to cultural legacies. Claiming them as the foremothers of Asian Canadian literature, I argue for a historical connection: they were the pioneers who experimented with writing strategies, shaped identity politics and explored different forms to accommodate their cultural content within English linguistic and literary norms. Edith Eaton spoke for her mother’s people by telling their stories to the Anglo society which once tried to actively to circumscribe and ideally eradicate a Chinese diaspora in North America. Winnifred Eaton adopted racial politics that were considered as deceitful, since she changed her ethnic identities in promoting her books, yet are also perceived as liberating in recent times.

I observe that contemporary Asian Canadian writers have taken both approaches. Some of them focus on inventing suitable writing techniques in order to convey cultural aesthetics and improve transcultural understanding. Others show more interest in liberating themselves from fixed identities, exploring universal values and human conditions.

The Asian Canadian community, especially the literary community, has nourished and supported its writers. I argue that this communal support is a distinctive feature of Asian Canadian literature, which also largely explains the rapid progress that this literature has made in the last 40 years. Anthologies and periodicals as literary vehicles have been very important in this early phase of establishment of the literature. In fact, it seems many cultural enterprises have been established in similar ways: born in periodicals and consolidated into a distinctive canon with various anthologies. For example, parallels can be drawn between the development of Asian Canadian literature and of Canada's national literature. Canadian literature had its beginnings around the mid-nineteenth century, with magazines such as the *Victoria Magazine* (1847—1849) and the *Literary Garland* (1838—1851). Early Canadian anthologies were crucial in establishing it as separate from “English literature”, but as part of a wider notion of “literature in English”. I also observe an ongoing conscious effort on the part of the Canadian literary community, including writers, teachers and critics, to form, reflect upon, and then reform the canon, while also contemplating the approaches they are adopting.

However, it would be naïve to expect any group to be always harmonious. Differences in opinions are inevitable and natural. Masutani reflects on Writing Thru Race. The conference was memorable in many ways: its discriminatory attendance policy (white writers were excluded) led to the withdrawal of funding from the government; the number of participants (“180 First Nations writers and writers of colour”) and richness in its programmes (“up to four panels run concurrently, to a total of 67”) showed the success of the organisation; and the educational experience for the communal cultural workers. But, as Masutani observes: “Writing Thru Race’s final plenary session was a disaster” (22). This referred to the discussion in which the writers failed to reach agreement while trying to create a list of recommendations. As a newly established literary community at that time, the members were inexperienced

in dealing with differences and conflicts. Masutani realised: “Writing Thru Race brought together writers who were united by experiences of racialization but who, in many other ways, were different from each other, complex, and split” (22). Having a common cause does not guarantee the solidarity of a group in all aspects.

Lai, as one of the organisers, also commented:

At the time, the dissolution felt to me to be one drenched in despair and disillusion. In reading the cultural productivity that followed, however, I suggest that in many it opened the floodgates to the possibility of not one synthesis, but many. These ‘synthetic’ solutions remain open-ended, but are also full of all kinds of (admittedly imperfect) possibilities. Perhaps indeed, their imperfection is to be celebrated rather than mourned, since hard pushes to idealized states lead only to fascism. (*Slanting I* 225)

Indeed, as Lai said, differences within the group, while causing the despairing realisation that absolute solidarity is impossible, also bring possibilities. Fighting against the often violent subjugation of various minority groups by mainstream society, Asian Canadian writers are very conscious of not using the same power themselves in the way that the mainstream have been doing. I observe, that to achieve democracy and transparency, they try to be very honest and open in presenting and discussing “dissonance” in the community. The dissonance was documented in Joy Kogawa’s *Emily Kato* when the Japanese Canadian community was negotiating with the Canadian government on the terms of Redress. And it is also captured in the communal magazines and in the different views on the significance of making anthologies.

I observe two complete generations of Asian Canadian writers who inherit the liberating spirit from Asian Canadian activism and continue working on what the Eaton sisters started at the turn of twentieth century. In the following chapters I will look at some representative writers from the two established generations in the Asian Canadian literary community.

Chapter Two

Canon-Making: SKY Lee and Joy Kogawa

SKY Lee and Joy Kogawa are unquestionably two iconic figures in Asian Canadian literature: not only do their works represent some of the most admired literary achievements by Asian Canadians, but they also laid the foundation for what would become a new literary canon. Their novels explore some of the most enduring and distinctive themes and demonstrate several innovative writing techniques that they designed to suit their Asian Canadian subject matter. SKY Lee and Joy Kogawa achieve a balance between style and content. Rocío G. Davis argues in her *Transcultural Reinventions*: “many critics, myself included, believe that one of the most important contributions of [Asian North American] literature lies in form, in the narrative stances and strategies employed by these writers” (1-2). Indeed, both the writers I examine in this chapter, traversing two cultures with ease and style, present a way of writing that claims to be distinctively Asian Canadian. Both writers have contributed to the Asian Canadian literary “tool box” techniques such as formal disruption, fragmented narrative, cultural reference (the use of cultural myth, folklore stories, for instance), and so on.

The protagonists in Kogawa’s and Lee’s major works—the third-generation Naomi of *Obasan* and the fourth-generation Kae of *Disappearing Moon Café*—both look back at their families’ histories with a critical perspective, seeking to reconstruct their community’s past, in order to understand their current situation and to move on with their own lives, struggling against being tied down to the family’s (and community’s) past. However, the first generations in both authors’ work are spoken for, still not given a voice of their own. In my next chapter, I choose two novels in which the early generations are protagonists with their own voices (Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony* and Terry Watada’s *Kuroshio: The Blood of Foxes*).

The newer generations’ access to both ethnic and mainstream cultures, together with their transcultural perspective, render the family secrets, personal struggles and the underlying mechanisms of concealment, visible to readers. Both

Kogawa's and Lee's protagonists protest against racial discrimination and social injustice in mainstream society, whilst reflecting on the ethnic minority's voluntary muteness in the face of social injustice. The self-reflexive consciousness, critical exploration of power structures in society, and re-creation (or re-organisation) of personal and collective histories, I argue, are the most prominent features in Asian Canadian literature, as exemplified in the work of Kogawa and Lee.

Meanwhile, the two iconic works, especially *Obasan*, have become in a way the accepted "norm" of Asian Canadian literature, to the extent that "post-*Obasan*" Japanese Canadian writers find themselves having to break out from the shadow of *Obasan* in order to gain visibility. For example, as my next chapter will demonstrate, Terry Watada presents a different pre-internment Japanese Canadian society where his protagonists enjoy agency, as opposed to Joy Kogawa's passive, powerless and muted first-generation immigrants. Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* to some extent is a writing-back to *Obasan*, as Goto demonstrates that the government's official apology, the gaining of citizenship and state multiculturalism do not make everything alright for contemporary Asian Canadians, at all. Also the characters in *Chorus of Mushrooms* actively refuse to align themselves with the model image of minority or victim. Nonetheless, the literary legacies bequeathed by the first-generation writers remain valuable, since they established the literature as a distinctive entity and paved the way for future generations of writers, who would be able to explore more complex situations.

2.1 Get Ready to Mingle— SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*

SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* is the Wong family saga of four generations that spans almost a century from 1892 to 1987.³⁶ The novel has a very complex plot

³⁶ SKY Lee was born in Port Alberni, British Columbia in 1952. Her first name SKY in capitals is in fact an acronym of her three given names, English and Chinese—Sharon Kun Ying. Lee began her career in the world of books by drawing illustrations for Paul Yee's children's book *Teach Me to Fly, Skyfighter!* (1983). Her main literary works include the novel *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990) and a short story collection *Bellydancer* (1994). *Disappearing Moon Café* won the City of Vancouver Book Award and has attracted much

and it will be necessary to rehearse it before I proceed to analyse it (See Figure 4). Kae, from the fourth generation, is the narrator who uncovers and reveals the family secret. Her great-grandfather and the family patriarch, Gwei Chang Wong, starts his life in Canada by collecting the bones of dead Chinese coolies on the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway). On one particularly perilous expedition searching for bones, Gwei Chang meets an aboriginal girl Kelora and marries her. After staying for three years with Kelora's tribe, sharing their rather Utopian lifestyle, Gwei Chang returns to Vancouver's Chinatown finish off his mission of sending the bones to China. However, Gwei Chang then remains in Chinatown to establish his business—Disappearing Moon Café—without ever returning to the tribe except to bring his son Ting An to Chinatown after the death of Kelora. It transpires that, all this time, Gwei Chang had a wife, Mui Lan and another son, Choy Fuk, in China. He brings them over to Canada, and later sends for a wife, Fong Mei, for Choy Fuk so that she can provide male heirs to inherit the family fortune and continue the Wong lineage.

However, after five years Fong Mei is still not pregnant. Not even suspecting that Choy Fuk is in fact impotent, Mui Lan intimidates Fong Mei into allowing her husband to have a mistress whom Mui Lan selects— Song Ang, the waitress in the café. Meanwhile Fong Mei has an affair with Ting An. The mistress produces a son—Keeman, very likely with a Chinatown labourer, Woo, while Fong Mei gives birth to a daughter, Beatrice, at a similar time. After that Mui Lan's plan of taking Keeman into the family is foiled by Fong Mei, who has gained more power in the family since becoming a mother. Fong Mei subsequently gives birth to a son, John, and another daughter, Suzanne, with Ting An. Meanwhile, with the Chinese Exclusion Act preventing new immigrants from entering Canada, Chinatown, with its traditional resistance to mixed-race marriages, is “ripe for incest” (*DMC* 147). Beatrice falls in love with, and marries, Keeman who is her half-brother in theory but not in blood. The real incest however, happens when Suzanne gets pregnant by

mainstream literary attention. As a self-proclaimed lesbian, Lee participated in a conference about experiences of racism and homophobia lived by marginalised aboriginal, non-heterosexual and Asian Canadian women. She then contributed to the collaborative book by the participants called *Telling It: Women and Language across Cultures* (1990).

Morgan—son of Ting An with his French Canadian wife. Suzanne commits suicide, as a result of the family drama. Beatrice and Keeman have a daughter, Kae.

Kae, the narrator, finds abnormality in her mother's excessively anxious and meticulous examination of her newborn baby Robert. The family secret then gets revealed to Kae right after she gives birth. Meanwhile, Kae's information also comes from Morgan with whom she almost develops an incestuous relationship. The plot of *Disappearing Moon Café* is exceedingly intricate and complicated yet with the help of the genealogy on the page before the table of contents, the relationships are made clear. In the genealogy, there is an entry about Suzanne and Morgan's child: "last Wong male dead at birth 1950" (*DMC* n.p.). Therefore, according to "the law of patrilineal descent" (Huggan 41), the history of the Wong family should end there—a once prosperous and dignified family collapses and disintegrates. However, the novel suggests other possible futures, though different from what is conventionally considered as an entry in a family genealogy. Kae has a female friend, with whom, the novel suggests, she will develop an intimate friendship.

The novel suggests that with all the differences between the first-generation Chinese immigrants and mainstream white Canadians, they do hold one thing in common, which is a strong wish to maintain racial purity. As a result, this critical point in common consolidates the isolation and self-enclosure of Chinatown in Vancouver. Graham Huggan says in "The Latitudes of Romance" that incest "is a reaction to intolerable outside pressures; it spreads within a marginalized community that is forced back on its own resources" (40). In Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*, however, the Chinese immigrants' determination not to mix with other cultures and races is severely criticised as it leads to incest. Incest, a universal social taboo that results from the combination of external exclusion from the mainstream society and the internal will to keep to themselves, is in fact an impasse constructed by these two oppositional forces. I will argue that *Disappearing Moon Café* hints at a new stage of development of the Chinese community, from a closed group protecting their secrets towards a more open and more accessible Chinese Canadian space. Lee negotiates the legitimacy of hybridity both for her characters and for her own literary creation: a Chinese Canadian novel.

In this section, I will firstly examine Lee's writing style and linguistic strategies and argue that her novel should be recognised for its merit in inventing ways of presenting Chinese cultural elements in English which contribute to increasing readability. I will then endeavour to trace the process of the opening up of Chinatown depicted in the novel, suggesting that Lee presents the Chinese community as undergoing a gradual process of acculturation, moving from a group which it is impossible to assimilate towards one which "gets ready to mingle" with the wider Canadian population. This process, taking four generations, advances the process of liberation of ethnic minority female subjectivities while destroying the old social order in Chinatown, embodied by the Wong family. SKY Lee's Chinatown stories, like those of Wayson Choy (to be discussed in my next chapter) can be seen as development of a subgenre initiated by Edith Eaton. Edith's "Mrs Spring Fragrance" claims to present an unbiased view of Chinatown but in fact purposefully glosses over many less respectable aspects of Chinatown life, such as gambling, prostitution, and gangster rackets. Lee's work, by contrast, uncovers some of the hidden or less familiar aspects of Chinatown life, and Choy's writing is even more revealing. This is not only due to the contemporary authors' closer experience and understanding of Chinatown but also to the improvement in tolerance towards ethnic minority people, which has allowed them to write about the histories of their communities without fearing that it will make them vulnerable.

Kay J. Anderson in her *Vancouver Chinatown* quotes Dominion Royal Commissioners' findings about Chinese labourers in British Columbia in 1902:

They come from southern China...with customs, habits and modes of life fixed and unalterable, resulting from an ancient and effete civilization. They form, on their arrival, a community within a community, separate and apart, a foreign substance within but not of our body politic, with no love for our laws or institutions; a people that cannot assimilate and become an integral part of our race and nation. With their habits of overcrowding, and an utter disregard for all sanitary laws, they are a continual menace to health. From a moral and social point of view, living as they do without home life, schools or churches, and so nearly approaching a servile class, their effect upon the rest of the community is bad...Upon this point there was entire unanimity. (73)

Chinese immigrants, then, were once perceived by white Canadians as so entirely foreign in their beliefs and habits that it was impossible for them to assimilate into

North American life. Indeed, as Anderson points out, Chinatown as an ethnic space seemed to embody an unmistakable “‘Chineseness’—some pre-existing, unalterable, and ultimately foreign essence” (164). The perceived difference seemed to justify discriminatory policies. Moreover, the community’s keeping to itself, most notably by forming a physical diaspora in the shape of Chinatown seemed to be unpardonable as it represents “a foreign substance” within the body of the city. Also with the differences in ways of life, they seem to be not contributing to the existing Canadian community at all. Indeed this rigid view on ethnic diasporas has relaxed greatly over time. Deborah L. Madsen points out: “the very concept of diaspora is a dynamic one, signifying movement and change as constitutive qualities of cultural experience. The process of removing from the homeland to a migrant space implies the construction of a future cultural identity that is the product of cross-cultural contacts, creolization, and hybridization” (106). *Disappearing Moon Café* shows a gradual yet inevitable process of acculturation of the Chinese diaspora.

One of the special features of this novel is its linguistic hybridity. Milan V. Dimić observes that Lee “inserts a number of syntactic alterations of current English, as well as some phonetic and morphemic translations of Chinese words and metaphors, certain of which with cultural connotations that escape a non-Chinese reader” (97). I, however, will argue firstly that these Chinese language elements are not as Dimić says “inserted” into an otherwise pure English novel but are part of the hybridised discourse of a Chinese Canadian writer. Furthermore, I will propose another perspective from which to evaluate the effect of these embedded Chinese elements. I believe that rather than introducing difficulty for non-Chinese readers, some translated Chinese sayings will enrich rather than corrupt the English language, just as any language undergoes a continuous process of change as a result of contact with other languages. One example I can readily give is the current English usage “long time no see”, which was brought into English by early Chinese coolies from the Chinese greeting: “好久不见”.³⁷

In *Disappearing Moon Café*, there are many literal Chinese translations. For example, when Gwei Chang and Kelora stand together at the edge of a cliff to enjoy a breath-taking view, Gwei Chang’s mind is filled with a sensation that is best

³⁷ “Hao Jiu Bu Jian” in the Chinese Mandarin.

described as: “As the Chinese say, ‘mountain and water’: the delirious heights and bottomless depths flung him out into the clarity of the sky” (*DMC* 10). “[M]ountain and water”, or 山水 brings an evocative image to a Chinese mind’s eye—denoting not only the actual landscape but also a sensation of humbleness and awe in view of great immensity and beauty. Kelora, however, sums up the view differently, describing: “a view like a soaring eagle’s” (10). She claims a more powerful autonomous position as a viewer. Kelora’s identification with the eagle may come from her aboriginal upbringing, since native tribal culture emphasises the affinity between humans and wild animals, such as birds. Another example is when Mui Lan confronts Fong Mei, saying: “no one can accuse the Wong family of having ‘a wolf’s heart and a dog’s lung’” (61). This translation can be easily processed into English as “no one can accuse the Wong family of being heartless and cruel”. However, the use of literal translation makes Lee’s language more lively and distinctive with Chinese cultural and linguistic features conserved.

Xiaobo Xie observes that the featuring of first-generation Chinese immigrants using ungrammatical, “distorted” English in Asian Canadian novels portrays “the subject of cultural hybridity, postcolonial, diasporic, and migrant in nature, refusing to be contained by the hierarchical syntax of Anglocentric cultural hegemony” (359). Indeed, the first-generation immigrants from China are portrayed as proud of their cultural knowledge and linguistic abilities, something which is more fully presented in Wayson Choy’s stories. These immigrants are nonetheless ridiculed within the Canadian context, for apparently lacking language skills in English and cultural knowledge of Canada.

Since few of the first-generation immigrants were literate in English, they were, in effect, spoken for by later generations. Their presentation in writing by their descendants is therefore sometimes problematic, as writers appropriate them with an understanding that is mediated by Western culture and social expectations about ethnic minorities, so that they are portrayed often as benign, law-abiding and reticent. Indeed, I argue that Asian Canadian literature does not always represent the whole strata of ethnic minority society. For instance, there is little effort to represent middle-class, urban, university-educated Asian Canadians, a group which has existed since the 1980s. The two writers I am exploring in this chapter did not give first-

generation immigrants a voice of their own and they are mostly silenced. However, in my next chapter, we will see examples of novels in which they do have a voice and agency, and I will explore the difference this makes.

Moreover, Chinese as an ideograph-based language is hardly containable in or compatible with a phonetically-based language such as English. In Lee's novel, however, a command of English and knowledge of Western culture are seen as admirable within the Vancouver Chinese community. We can observe a distinctive change of style in the discourses of the first and later generations. Choy Fuk, who came to Canada in his teens, is depicted as a typical first generation with "no candoo" (*DMC* 34) kind of Chinglish.³⁸ Ting An is respected and trusted because he can negotiate with white Canadians in English. From the third generation—Beatrice, Morgan, Keeman and Suzanne—onwards, all the characters speak fluent, correct English.

Notably, Kae is conversant with Western cultural allusions; for instance, she comments: "Morgan wasn't going to come charging through the dungeon walls on his white steed" (*DMC* 199). And in another passage she refers to characters from American westerns: "every Tonto has to have his Lone Ranger" (131). Reflecting on her own exploration of her family's past, Kae adapts a quotation from Elizabeth Barrett Browning: "How many ways are there to tell stories? Let me count the ways!" (185). Lee's quoting of Browning in a Chinese Canadian story creates a special dissonance whilst raising awareness of the universality of human experience across national and cultural borders. As a fourth-generation, Kae is equipped with both Chinese and English language reference systems. This cross-coding demonstrates the effect of the cultural interaction that gives birth to a transcultural imagination. Moreover, Kae and her friend Hermia meet each other in the Beijing Language Institute. The choice to come to Beijing in mainland China for her higher education indicates Kae's wish to know more about her ancestors' culture and language. Kae's digging up of the family secrets and reconstruction of the family history are also actions that enable her to reclaim the Chinese half of her identity, along with her rightful share of a cultural heritage from which female descendants risk being excluded.

³⁸ Pidgin English used by people whose first language is Chinese.

Dimić observes that writers of Chinese ancestry are faced with the “additional difficulty of rendering Chinese dialects and idiolects [...] and the inevitable cultural connotations embedded in any use of words” (95). Indeed, the choice of a strategy of cultural and linguistic translation may cause some extra work for ethnic minority writers compared to mainstream writers. Lee adopts a rather straightforward strategy in relation to Chinese names and titles as she translates them phonetically rather than explaining the meanings of the various Chinese appellations. This makes her text more engaging and less confusing for non-Chinese readers. For example, in a conversation during a musical rehearsal, the director addresses one fellow member “A Low Lee-ah, three clangs of the cymbals like this!” (*DMC* 105). “A” pronounced as “ah” in English is an appellation of endearment commonly used in southern China. Low is similar to the sound of the Chinese word old and Lee is the surname of that person. This contrasts with the approach of some other Chinese Canadian writers: Wayson Choy, for instance, would translate this kind of Chinese appellation into Old Lee, as he translated “Wong Bak” (Uncle Wong) to “Old Wong” in his *The Jade Peony* (8). Lee’s choice of translation strategy mimics the real conversation exchanged in ethnic minority communities and gives non-Chinese speaking readers a chance to place themselves in a cultural atmosphere. However, as we see, this effect is created by substituting an English word “low”, which Anglophone readers can easily pronounce, for the Chinese phonetic spelling “lao”. The embedded syntactic meaning and cultural significance are thus compromised.

On the cover page of the book (see Figure 5), right between the words “Moon” and “Café” in the English title, are inserted three Chinese ideographs “残月楼” written vertically in the traditional way. However, *Disappearing Moon Café* is still not the exact literal translation of 残月楼 as 楼 in Chinese primarily means building and is commonly used in a name for restaurants; Café is a culturally appropriated translation to render it legible in the target language. In fact the Wongs’ business is the biggest and grandest restaurant in Chinatown; therefore the naming of it as “Café” is misleading. This hints that a seemingly prosperous and respectable family may not be as happy and decent as it looks. Concurrently, this also demonstrates how more subtle aspects of identity can be misinterpreted and misperceived in another culture. *Disappearing moon*, though not quite as specific as 残月, conveys both the meaning

and the beauty from the source language. 残月 indicates the eighth and last lunar phase—Balsamic—when the moon is about to finish its circle of phases and come back to the first one—new moon. If we observe the moon in the Balsamic phase in the northern hemisphere where both China and Canada are located, the waning crescent appears in the eastern sky briefly before dawn as a thin silver hook (as the Chinese metaphor goes) that threatens to disappear imminently. In addition, the Chinese character 残 in itself means being damaged, or refers to the remains of what is destroyed, which, if it can be translated fully into English, would foretell the tragic story of the Wong family. In the novel, the Disappearing Moon Café is the central location of the story that connects all its primary characters as well as the generations of the Wong family.

Meanwhile, disappearing moon also indicates a time to let go of the past and welcome a new era as the moon is about to start a new circle. This deeper layer of meaning in the trope foreshadows the fate of the Wong family and Chinatown. The Wong family collapses with the end of the patriarchal lineage while the female one gradually takes over as Kae recounts her female-centred family saga. The centre of power in Chinatown, at the end of the novel, is seen being shifted from the coolie generation represented by Gwei Chang to the waiters' generation: "Yet, with words, [Gwei Chang] swept away the coolie generals, himself included. The back tables were given over to waiters who sat and smoked and gossiped while folding napkins" (*DMC* 227). Tanis MacDonald, however, has another interpretation of the book title, basing on its English translation. In her article "'Dead Girl-Bag': The Janet Smith Case³⁹ as Contaminant in Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*", MacDonald argues:

³⁹ Janet Kennedy Smith was found dead in the basement of the house where she worked as a housemaid on 26 July 1924. Janet had a bullet through her temple and a revolver was found near her outstretched hand. The suspect was a Chinese man called Wong Fong Sing as he was the only person in the house when the shooting allegedly occurred. The case was initially decided to be suicide. However, the Scottish Societies demanded that the case be reopened. On 20 March 1925 a group of men dressed in Ku Klux Klan robes abducted Wong Fong Sing. When released after six weeks of torture, Wong Fong Sing was immediately arrested for the murder of Janet Smith. However, Wong was released again in October due to lack of evidence and he returned to China. In the entry for Janet Smith, the *Dictionary of*

“For the non-Chinese reader, the ‘disappearing moon’ of the title remains a ghostly metaphor for both female shame and haunting” (44) as the image of a disappearing moon is associated with the frail beauty of the female characters. We see, therefore, that Lee’s title teems with interpretive possibilities, accessible through both Western and Eastern imaginations. The name of the book is carefully calculated and loaded with meaning. Since it also names the family property (the restaurant), it implies a decline in the family’s fortunes, whilst simultaneously suggesting that new perspectives are being conceived as the descent takes place. Specifically, the women are moving centre stage, refashioning and articulating the history of their family.

Apart from the special design of the book title that successfully combines Eastern and Western imagery, Lee also adopts traditional Chinese narrative techniques and styles simultaneously with those of English fiction. *ABC Bookworld*, an on-line site providing information on books and authors relating to British Columbia, quotes Gary Draper’s review of *Disappearing Moon Café*: “Hardly a noun walks free of a trail of adjectives” (“SKY Lee”). However, I will argue that this “over-earnestness” is an effect of Lee’s Chinese-influenced writing style. In Chinese prose writing having several modifiers with a noun is encouraged—simplicity is not as sought-after as it is in English writing. Indeed, as a Chinese myself, I can discern many traces of Chinese writing styles in Lee’s work. Some of her endings of sections show the influence of the novels of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) Dynasties. For example, in a section titled “STORY 1926”, Lee ends:

Poor Fong Mei! For her, it was very poetic and very true that
 Yesterday’s dreams are empty drawers,
 Littered with mice turds! (137)

Novels from the Ming and Qing dynasties developed a very distinct formula, opening a story with a topic-related poem and ending the story with an exclamation or comments presented from a bystander’s point of view, to engage with readers

Canadian Biography Online concludes: “The death of Janet Smith, whether by suicide or murder, remains significant because of the public debate that surrounded it. Popular narratives of the incident speak volumes about the concepts of race, class, gender, and law and order dominant in the British Columbia of the 1920s” (“Smith, Janet Kennedy” n.p.). See below for my discussion of the relevance of this to the novel.

directly. This ending usually consists of moral preaching or calls for sympathy for the characters and is normally written in a catchy rhythm and a patronising tone. Moreover, the sad destiny of Fong Mei, and of the novel's characters in general, derives from one prevalent theme in Chinese novels—the unsympathetic world.

The prologue of the book is devoted to the story of Gwei Chang and Kelora's encounter and life in the aboriginal tribe, whilst the epilogue recounts Gwei Chang's remembering and confession to Kelora. However, this story is logically unknown to Kae as she has been told nothing of Ting An's mother except that she was an aboriginal woman. The prologue and epilogue can be read either as supplementary information provided by the omnipotent creator—the author of the book—or as the romanticising imagination of Kae. This combination of imagination and memory, romance and documentation, is another aspect of the hybridity of the novel. Moreover, my own experience of reading traditional Chinese novels leads me to argue that there is a preference for “completeness” which means that each and every character's fate is accounted for. For Anglophone readers, this quasi-fabulous style may appear to be obsolete and over-complicated.

Meanwhile Lee employs contemporary Western writing techniques. As Mary Van Horne observes, Lee “draw[s] upon techniques of postmodern historiographic *métafiction*, such as the incorporation of ghosts, multiple storytellers, meta art and oral storytelling” (84). Indeed, I will argue below that *Disappearing Moon Café* bears distinctive features of postmodern writing, such as a decentred narrative, a fragmented timeline and multi-voiced narration. We can thus say that *Disappearing Moon Café* is a hybrid of Eastern and Western imagery, and of traditional and contemporary writing techniques.

Not only is the writing in itself a mix of Eastern and Western writing styles, but Lee also contrasts voices and views from the past with recent Canadian ones by having her characters interrogate the past and interact directly with the past. Chinese Canadian writer-critic Lien Chao argues that the episodic narrative mode brings “past, present and future onto one platform, individual and collective into ongoing dialogues” (“The Collective Self” 250). For example, Kae rearranges her family stories from a critical, Western perspective. Kae's narration is broken into many small sections, each headed by the name of a person and sometimes also a year.

Narratives of the past interweave with the contemporary timeline throughout the novel. Kae observes the development of the story through its various participants from a third-person viewpoint. All the women are connected through Kae's imagination. She also interferences intermittently to give her point of view as a modern Canadian. For example, when Mui Lan consults her husband on the matter of bringing another wife for their son from China as Fong Mei is not pregnant, Kae interjects: "My dumb great-granny! I don't know why she wasn't asking more relevant questions, like where does one go for comfort and relief from such a barren life? But there probably were no halfway houses for women, no places to hide out from a rocky marriage" (*DMC* 31). Being able to understand that Mui Lan's persecution of her daughter-in-law results from her own sense of powerlessness and her unsatisfied craving for love and companionship. Kae sympathises with both Mui Lan and Fong Mei and understands that both of them are victims of a patriarchal order that deploys women relentlessly without supplying them with any recognition and love.

Lee uses third person narration when recounting the experience lived by one of the characters, as observed by Kae. Kae has a first-person voice whenever she narrates her life in the present. However, I notice that there is one exception to this pattern: Suzanne also uses first-person narration. Moreover, Kae is also connected to her aunt Suzanne through Morgan. Kae is therefore to some extent a double for Suzanne. Xie observes: "For the ambivalent, split diasporic subject to negotiate into the present is to assert itself as a locus of crisis, a hybrid, a non-identity, a doubling, or a third term" (352-3). As both girls are non-conformists, rebelling against the traditional order, Suzanne's tragic fate thus looms over Kae's life. In fact, all the female characters are linked by the pain of self-deprivation. Mui Lan refrains from asking for love and affection from her husband whose heart is devoted to Kelora; Fong Mei loves Ting An but doesn't elope with him for fear of losing all her material comforts; Suzanne demonstrates courage in pursuing happiness with Morgan but is destined to be the scapegoat of the family's secret dealings. Madsen argues that Suzanne's death is not only caused by her ethnic connections but by larger social pressures as well:

Suzanne's disintegration is the consequence of inherited patriarchal and nationalistic prejudices imported imperfectly to the diasporic space that is North America. In Canada, these practices of cultural and subjective formation break down into a chaotic confusion, generating the family tragedy that claims Suzanne as its most obvious victim. (106)

Suzanne, full of life, free-spirited and innocent is sacrificed by other traditional-minded, secretive, even cheating women, such as Fong Mei, and the unsupportive society whose Chinese Exclusion policy has doomed her fate.

Kae understands that it is her mission to liberate herself: "'Don't you see?' I gesticulate emphatically. 'I'm the fourth generation. My actual life, and what I do in it, is the real resolution to this story. The onus is entirely on me'" (*DMC* 210). At the beginning of the novel Kae is still confined by a social ideal imposed on her by the patriarchal order and social expectations: "I get tricked because I want to be so damned perfect all the time" (20). Kae's final decision to join Hermia in Hong Kong suggests that she rejects the old oriental values of self-sacrifice and adopts a more straightforward western-style pursuit of happiness. Hermia asks Kae in her telegram: "WOULD YOU RATHER LIVE A GREAT NOVEL OR WRITE ONE stop" to which the answer is a prompt "I'd rather live one" (216). Chinese culture, especially traditional popular culture, instils a preference for self-deprivation in its values. Self-fulfilment is seen sometimes as selfish and arrogant, doomed to fail in the end. Instead of feeding more material into this tragic and intricate family saga, Kae realises she must untangle the family story: "My private life is what I find confusing. At home, I must work at unravelling knots—knots in my hair, knots in my stomach. Knots of guilt; knots of indecision. Knots in our dainty gold chains" (123).

The knots are also untangled also with the increasing mobility of contemporary women. Kae meets Hermia in Beijing and they are both from Canada. They plan to live in Hong Kong, an international city, which at that time (before 1997) was a British colony where they can hope to enjoy the freedom of a fresh start and yet a familiar cultural and social environment. Unlike her great grandmother and grandmother who were brought to Canada by their husbands and could not leave on their own, Kae's ability to choose her own place to live and enjoy international mobility make it possible for her to break loose and enjoy an autonomous life.

Slowly but persistently, Kae determines to “pick, trace, coax and cajole each knot out” (123) by revealing and reconstructing the family secrets and relationships. Through analysing the entanglements and restraints that enslave her female ancestors, Kae untangles her life from the family knot by liberating herself and no longer submitting to the patriarchal order. Kae devises and realises her own prophecy: “after three generations of struggle, the daughters are free!” (209). Thus we see Chinese immigrants’ traditional values gradually giving way to modern Western ones, signifying the inevitable opening up of Chinatown to the larger Canadian society.

However, Kae faces a double snare that comes from her hyphenated identity as she still has to deal with the patriarchal order and intolerance of transgressive sexuality in mainstream North America. Hermia urges her to further liberate the self: “Try harder, Kae! Imagine, nothing to explain; no need to justify! Genitalia coming together because it feels good. If you think real hard about it, how could something that quintessential have gotten so screwed up in people’s minds?” (187). Rejecting her imaginary and imposed obligations to justify and explain, Kae pursues her own freedom and happiness. Meanwhile, Madsen, suggests that Lee’s novel raises “issues of both Chinese and Western patriarchal control of women’s lives, issues that mirror the racial problematic of the control of Chinese lives through the hegemonic construction of Chinese subjectivity and which are put into question by the experience of diaspora” (101). Racial and gender politics reinforce each other. Indeed, raising gender issues to demonstrate racial problems is a common strategy employed by many ethnic minority writers.

With the decentred narration, there is no real protagonist in *Disappearing Moon Café*. Male characters are marginalised as much as female ones, and are just as fallible. They appear to be inadequate in resources and paralysed by self-pity. Gwei Chang abandons Kelora disloyally; Ting An does not leave Chinatown where racial and social discrimination drains him, though it is suggested that he could easily make a living outside Chinatown with his professional and linguistic skills; Morgan is unable to save Suzanne and their son’s lives. The Wong family saga begins with the establishment of Gwei Chang as a successful business owner. Contemplating the Janet Smith case, Gwei Chang ponders the prohibition on intermarriage:

Whenever Gwei Chang thought of the dead, blonde demoness, he used to remember that August Moon Festival story about the spinner and the cowherder. [...] Except Gwei Chang changed their professions to be the nursemaid and the houseboy. The nursemaid was from heaven, and the houseboy a mere earth-bound mortal. Then, they met and fell deeply in love. The gods or the powers above were very displeased with this liaison between unequals. Worse still, the young lovers' pining after each other adversely affected their work. So, the powers-that-be split them apart and created a racial chasm between them, as impossible to cross as the heavens themselves. (*DMC* 223)

By invoking a supreme power that does not tolerate miscegenation and will actually interfere in such cases, Gwei Chang expresses his own regrets about having abandoned Kelora. However, in the Chinese tale, the cowherder, carrying his children with him, follows to the heaven and is content to meet his wife once a year over the bridge, built temporarily by magpies, that crosses the Milky Way (the origin of Chinese Valentine's Day). Gwei Chang, by contrast, remains voluntarily in Chinatown without any actual interference that prevents him from living with Kelora and their son Ting An. It is the internalisation of social values that prohibits him from accepting Kelora as his real wife and Ting An as his real son.

Another contrast between the traditional story and Gwei Chang's experience is that the fairy spinner in the story and the white nursemaid are considered superior to the male character's status while Kelora, being a Native Canadian, is regarded as inferior. And this perceived racial inferiority in Chinatown towards first nation people is the real reason that Gwei Chang abandons Kelora. On the other hand, white racial superiority is accepted in the value system of Gwei Chang and the other Chinese settlers. And that is why Gwei Chang compares Janet to the nursemaid from the heaven. Consequently, a self-inflicted inferiority is in fact at work in the Chinese community's voluntary separation from, and invisibility to, white society.

For Fong Sing, colleague and suspected murderer of Janet Smith, oppressive authority is embodied by the intolerance of Chinese-Caucasian intermarriage in Vancouver. Fong Sing's case is more shocking because he transgresses both racial and social boundaries. Fong Sing is subject to dual oppressions both outside and inside Chinatown. On the one hand, he is in a low position in Chinatown's social hierarchy with his young age and lack of fortune: "Sometimes, he felt flattened like an insect on the limited horizons of Chinatown" (222); on the other hand, Fong Sing

is disappointed with his life in Canada working as a houseboy: “what he must have found utterly sickening was how much of his life and dreams he had had to give up! [...] Not even the most modest dreams of happiness could come true for the houseboy” (222). Chinese men are disempowered, subjected to racial discrimination and obliged to take on menial jobs that are often considered as women’s work (such as waitressing or laundry). In the end, Fong Sing is killed by Chinatown men, who fear that his conduct could endanger the whole community, if the government uses the case as a pretext to tear down Chinatown. In fact, the fear is not baseless as this one individual case imperils the whole Chinese community via a threatening Janet Smith Bill that forbids Chinese men to work alongside white females. Fong Sing is sacrificed by the Canadian legal system which did not procure valid evidence against him yet willingly took him as the number one suspect, passed a bill to prevent such cases from happening, and did not try to protect him or raise any issue after his death. His own people also sacrificed him, executing him without a trial. The violence that he has submitted to from both Canadian society and Chinatown is of one nature: racial discrimination. His death symbolises the blood-thirsty state machinery of injustice.

Gwei Chang, somehow, understands that for Fong Sing, the white nursemaid Janet Smith inspires more than merely sexual craving, but a mixture of both lust and hatred:

Did he fall in love with her? There was no way for him not to be obsessed with her and all she represented. If that were so, did he come to hate her? Yes... well, that was more the essential question, wasn't it? A white woman would remind him of his alienation, her neatness exposing the raw intensity of his desperation. In the dehumanized structure of his life, murder might even have made sense. (222-3)

This lust to possess the white female body for the racial superiority it represents mixes with the equally intense hatred, or self-hatred that leads him to destroy the woman. However, Lee suggests the murder is not an inexplicable case, but the direct result of double racial pressure from within and outside the ethnic minority space. In “Dead Girl Bag”, Tanis MacDonald observes: “Lee charts the contradiction in the European fetishization of the gendered ethnic body: a process which allows the desired ‘other’ to be seen simultaneously *as the carrier of a disease*” (n.p.). Janet is

blamed for endangering the whole Chinese community as the Chinatown residents think the government has been trying to erase them from Canada and would not hesitate to use any excuse to do it. Janet, as the victim of murder, does not get sympathy from the Chinese community because of her whiteness, while the fact that she is an Irish immigrant and works as a maid, and therefore has many things in common with them in terms of life experience and social status, were not taken into account at all. The Janet Smith case, in a sense, is a catalyst for the transformation of Chinatown as it breaks down the fortress from within.

The Janet Smith case proves to be a turning point in the development of Chinatown as the Chinese begin to gaze back at mainstream Canadian society: “For the first time, chinamen had to keep an eye on white people. Before, the old ones were too embittered by the injustice and saw only what they wanted to see. They were surprised to find how much alike chinamen and white people were” (*DMC* 223). With the progress of the Janet Smith case, the Chinatown youth, many of them belonging to the second generation, begin to rise to power and take over authority from the first coolie generation. With their linguistic capability and cultural understanding about Canadian society, the waiters’ generation mobilise a protest movement: “‘how come they stand up so well for themselves? How come we don’t stand up for ourselves?’” (225). By learning to get heard through official protests, they make Chinatown more open and transparent.

Women in Chinatown, though powerless in the patriarchal order, are empowered through their reproductive ability. With the passing of Chinese Exclusion Act, women and the fertility they represented become increasingly important for the survival of their community. Also in this section Fong Mei confesses:

Imagine, I could have run away with any one of those lonely Gold Mountain men, all without mothers-in-law. This was a land of fresh starts; I could have lived in the mountains like an Indian woman legend. If men didn’t make me happy enough, then I could have moved on. Imagine, I could have had children all over me—on my shoulders, in my arms, at my breasts, in my belly, I was good at childbirth. And in turn, they could have chosen whomever and how many times they fancied, and I would have had hundreds of pretty grandchildren. I wouldn’t have died of loneliness. (*DMC* 188)

The new world of Canada is supposed to offer every immigrant a fresh start. In Kae’s imagination, Fong Mei liberates herself from the patriarchal order by going to the

wilderness and joining the Canadian pioneers. As Addante argues, Fong Mei “dreams of establishing a dissident community in which women are not the objects of exchange, but subjects articulating their desire and claiming rights to their bodies, to their (re)productive labour, and to their children” (207). By imagining herself as a queen bee, Fong Mei envisages a matriarchal social order which will empower women as well as emancipate them from oppression and bondage.

In the highly creative section “Feeding the Dead 1986” Kae feeds words into the mouth of her female ancestors. By an act of imagination, Kae usurps the patriarchal lineage and replaces it with a matriarchal one. She makes her female ancestors chant:

Mui Lan lived a lie, so Fong Mei got sly.
 Suzie slipped away; Beatrice made to stay,
 Kae to tell the story,
 All that’s left of
 Vainglory. (*DMC* 188)

The family saga is told now through the matriarchal lineage. The family tragedy is reinterpreted by the actions of its female participants who are traditionally not included in the family genealogy. However, it must be admitted that due to a lack of experience, the women perform poorly on their family’s historical stage. Their mutual mistrust, exploitation and abuse turn them against each other and result in the fall of the whole family.

Kae readily admits the fact that her female ancestors all contributed to the downfall of the family, yet still tries to be sympathetic:

Funny how I can still get protective of the women in my family, how I can give them all sorts of excuses for their littering. In the telling of their stories, I get sucked into criticizing their actions, but how can I allow my grandmother and great-grandmother to stay maligned? Perhaps, as Hermia suggested, they were ungrounded women, living with displaced chinamen, and everyone trapped by circumstances. I prefer to romanticize them as a lineage of women with passion and fierceness in their veins. In each of their woman-hating worlds, each did what she could. If there is simple truth beneath their survival stories, then it must be that women’s lives, being what they are, are linked together. [...] and together, we may be able to form a bridge over the abyss. (*DMC* 145-6)

It is the struggle that each of these women go through that links them together. Thrown into a vast and hostile environment, they have to rely on untrustworthy men who are preoccupied with their own self-pity. Subjected to a patriarchal order that turns them against each other, they are blind to the fact that they should be each other's ally and protector. Instead, each harbouring an unspeakable secret, Mui Lan, Fong Mei and Suzanne suffer alone and take what seem to be the only paths available to them: Mui Lan forces Fong Mei to accept her husband having a mistress; Fong Mei commits adultery with Ting An; Beatrice remains silent over the family secret; and Suzanne annihilates herself giving birth to an incest-tainted son out of wedlock.

Moreover, the three model figures that appear to be liberated and clear-headed happen to be "half-breed" females with "less than righteous family connections" (41). The first one is Kelora, Chinese-Native. The second one is Hermia—"misplaced bastard daughter of a gangster and his moll" (41). The third one is Chi—a Malaya Chinese adopted by a Hindu family—and Beatrice's loyal friend who acts like a guardian to both Beatrice and Kae. Kae initially holds some misgivings towards a non-pure lineage and problematic family backgrounds: "I would be afraid of an identity like that" (41). But through finding out more about these people with hybrid identities, Kae is able to come to terms with her own illegitimate identity. She therefore forgoes her searching for purity or authenticity and realises that this is to "swallow in petty detail and ignore the essence" (41). This liberation from a set of frame of mind and values foretells a new era in ethnic diasporas when cultural and racial hybridity become an inevitable part of an ethnic minority's identity.

I will now briefly explore the generational evolvement of Chinese Canadians in Canada. As Japanese Canadian critic Roy Miki observes:

The first Asian Canadian novels to receive institutional approval, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) and SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990), adopted a genealogical form that mirrored the nation's generational history, while going further to expose the anti-Asian policies and assumptions that framed Chinese and Japanese Canadians as alien-others. (*Influx* 230)

A generational perspective will show how a systematic and profound discrimination impacts on individual ethnic minorities' lives; in this case, a family. In the novel, the

first generation survived harsh conditions of life on the CPR and were ghettoised in Chinatown. The second generation were also subjected to this isolation, enforced by discrimination coming from both within and outside Chinatown: “Racial prejudice helped disconnect Beatrice from the larger community outside Chinatown. Then, the old Chinamen added their two cents’ worth by sneering at the Canada-born: ‘Not quite three, not quite four, nowhere’. Everyone had a hand at drawing circles around Beatrice and telling her to stay in” (*DMC* 164). Lee here explains why the local-born generation still keep to themselves like early settlers.

The pejorative saying—“not quite three, not quite four, nowhere”—is used by the older generation as a definition of the CBCs (Canada-born-Chinese). More than a factual description of a status of cultural hybridity, this saying denotes a very strong rejection of things that lack authenticity and purity. This prejudice in Chinatown subjugates Beatrice further by reinforcing her sense of inferiority. Yu-Hsiang Bennett Fu, in her “Dystopic Here, Utopic There”, expounds on racial segregation by alluding to the typical Canadian garrison mentality suggested by Northrop Frye:

However, this garrison in Canada is a “white” space, defined as much by the absence of racialized minorities. As white patriarchal gender constructions have been instrumental in denying women of colour access to the “garrison”, the displaced Chinese women, placed in the dystopic garrison within the utopic garrison, have created new subject positionings and alternatives from which to refigure their identities. (67)

Racial, gender and social discriminations all contribute towards ensuring that the CBCs keep to themselves, even more than the first generation did:

But what Fong Mei did not understand about Beatrice was how fiercely loyal she was to the little circle of local-born friends left to her. Friends growing up in Chinatown were allies, necessary for survival; for those times they ventured out of “their place”, and came back fractured. They nursed each other, offered each other protection, their comminuted humiliation not easily forgotten; their bonds against it sinewy and strong. (*DMC* 164-5)

Here Lee explains that, contrary to what mainstream Canada had believed, it is not because of a genetic trait that the Chinese keep themselves apart. Rather, it is due to a lack of mutual understanding that Chinatown residents feel forced to seclude themselves, which, in turn, confirms the larger outside community’s belief that the Chinese are secretive, inflexible and unassimilable. This completes the vicious circle.

In fact, Lee presents her first-generation immigrants as showing some inclination to Westernisation, though only at the level of appearance. For example, “[Choy Fuk] himself was amazingly quick to shed his bumpkin ways in favor of a more cocky Western style, complete with sennit straw hats, narrow-shouldered jackets and starched high-collared shirts. These, he felt, were more appropriate for his position as the heir of a well-to-do businessman” (*DMC* 33). And Disappearing Moon Café is described as having an area that is decorated in the local Canadian style: “Choy Fuk liked the more modern counter-and booth section better. He loved the highly polished chrome and brightly lit glass, the checkerboard tiles on the floor, the marble countertop. And except for the customers, his mother, and perhaps the cacti, there was nothing Chinese about it” (32). The Western style is thus shown to be adopted and liked by a weak-minded, simple-headed character whose taste is not to be admired but mocked. The second generation begin to have English names and be able to speak good English, yet they are still confined to Chinatown. The novel suggests that this situation does not improve until the 1980s with the fourth and further generations coming onto the Chinese Canadian historical stage.

Kae, fourth generation of the family, who self-identifies more with Western ideologies and values, is able to cast a critical eye onto her own family and the development of Chinatown. By examining the pains and restrictions suffered by her female ancestors, Kae understands to what extent she is liberated and how much remains for her to liberate herself from. By reimagining and reconstructing her family’s story, Kae realises that the family tragedy is part of her life story while simultaneously herself being part of the family’s story:

Do you mean that individuals must gather their identity from all the generations that touch them—past and future, no matter how slightly? Do you mean that an individual is not an individual at all, but a series of individuals—some of whom come before her, some after her? Do you mean that this story isn’t a story of several generations, but of one individual thinking collectively? (*DMC* 189)

Kae reclaims her Chinese heritage by affirming these collective Chinese diasporic subjectivities, “the collective self”, according to Chao, “epitomizes a process of transforming the historical silence and marginality of the community to a narrative voice of resistance” (“The Collective Self” 238). With her Canadian upbringing that

enables her to “violate a secret code”, Kae ventures to break down “the great wall of silence and invisibility we have built around us” (*DMC* 180). Through Kae’s gaze, a gaze with understanding and sympathy as well as a degree of objectivity and distance, Lee reveals a misunderstood Chinatown through a family history, which, albeit dark and infamous, provides a path for Canadians to understand the present Chinese Canadian community.

2.2 A Transcultural Reading of Silence in Joy Kogawa’s Novels

There is a silence that cannot speak.
There is a silence that will not speak.

Obasan 1

Joy Kogawa’s personal experience during the Canadian government’s internment of people of Japanese descent during World War Two was the source of her creativity in her award-winning *Obasan* (1981) and *Emily Kato* (2005).⁴⁰ *Emily Kato* continues the plotline begun in *Obasan* with Naomi and Aunt Emily as main characters, recording the Japanese Canadian community’s fight for Redress of the injustice they suffered from the Canadian government. *Emily Kato* is Kogawa’s earlier novel *Itsuka* (1992) rewritten, restructured and reimagined, as Glenn Deer says: “a further significant revision of the language, characterizations, and activist elements of the predecessor” (“Revising” 46). Kogawa’s painful struggle to come to terms with the scandal surrounding her father’s paedophilia forms the subject of *The Rain Ascends* (1995), which, according to her, is her most important work. *Gently to Nagasaki*, a work in progress, seeks the reconciliation of the historical animosity between China and Japan.

In all these fictions there is one pervasive motif that Kogawa, through constant revisiting, develops and processes from many angles: silence. In Kogawa’s novels there are various kinds of silence: the culturally cultivated silence; the silence

⁴⁰ Poet and prose writer Joy Nozomi Kogawa (née Nakayama), second-generation Japanese Canadian, was born in Vancouver on 6 June 1935.

of self-censorship; the silence imposed by a dominant culture; the silence that stifles the voice of truth; the silence over unspeakable secrets and so on. In this section I will engage with the notion of silence in Kogawa's fictions within the framework of transcultural theory. Breaking the silence was the primary theme of Asian Canadian activism. It refers not only to telling what had happened (especially what had been kept secret) but telling these stories on Asian Canadian people's own terms. I will argue that Kogawa's perspectives on silence are demonstrations of transcultural awareness and that the process of breaking the silence embodies the process of transculturation of the Japanese Canadian community and the larger Canadian society.

Kogawa earned worldwide recognition, success and awards for *Obasan*.⁴¹ It is one of the most popular Asian Canadian novels ever, well-received both within and outside ethnic minority communities. In fact, *Obasan* is regarded as an important landmark in the contemporary Canadian literary canon as it contributes a representation of the multicultural spirit of which Canada has been so proud. Coral Ann Howells observes:

Writing as a Japanese Canadian, Kogawa with her first novel marks the entry of racial minority women's fiction into the Canadian mainstream, challenging traditional white definitions of Canadianness and official history by transgressing the barrier of a forty-year silence on the internment and dispersal of Japanese Canadians after Pearl Harbour. (204)

For the Canadian mainstream, *Obasan* served as a timely and much needed reminder of social injustice at the time when addressing past social injustice was becoming a pressing imperative. The book has even greater significance for ethnic minority groups, as following its appearance, many other ethnic minority authors and critics

⁴¹ Sheena Wilson, editor of *Joy Kogawa, Essays on her Works*, presents an exhaustive list of the awards that *Obasan* has won: "It won the Books in Canada First Novel Award (1981), the Canadian Authors Association Book of the Year Award (1981), the Periodical Distributors of Canada Best Paperback Fiction Award, and the American Book Award (Before Columbus Foundation) (1983), and was an American Library Association's Notable Book (1982). *Obasan* also won the One Book One Community Award in Medicine Hat, Alberta (2004) and the One Book One Vancouver award in 2005. That same year, November 1 was declared 'Obasan Cherry Tree Day' in Vancouver" (353).

began to emerge: *Obasan*, in effect, paved the way to mainstream publication for these writers. More importantly, the novel is the archetype for the construction of Asian Canadian writings. For example, the use of cultural mythology (the story of Momotaro), the subtle explanations of cultural behaviours, a cyclical time line and fragmented narration have been employed by many other Asian Canadian writers in the period since *Obasan*'s publication.

If *Obasan* unfolds many layers of silences, its sequel, *Emily Kato*, is primarily devoted to the process of breaking these silences: the campaign for Redress for the Japanese Canadian community. The process begins in *Obasan* as Aunt Emily tries to get Naomi to understand and then get involved in the campaign for Redress. It is not only a process of breaking the many layers of silences that Naomi inherits from her traditional Japanese upbringing but also a process allowing her to finalise her transculturation and claim her identity as a Japanese Canadian citizen. *Obasan* was much more positively received than Kogawa's two subsequent novels. Even the rewritten and recreated *Emily Kato* remains in obscurity. One of the reasons is that the manifold silence in *Obasan* creates an attractive, mysterious atmosphere that appears oriental, and which its Western readers find elegant, poetic and, I might add, exotic. However, the two subsequent novels which deal with the process of the Redress cannot be otherwise but politically eloquent and clear. This is shown in my analysis too as I resort to *Emily Kato* many times when talking about *Obasan*. This is because, to some extent, *Emily Kato* contains Kogawa's own annotations, making explicit all that is unsaid in *Obasan*.

With the immediate success that *Obasan* makes, Kogawa continued to tell the other half of the story, which should be more exciting, as it is about the actual process of how the silence has been broken and the community achieved a hearing from the government and society. In the rewritten novel, *Emily Kato*, Kogawa retains her Redress content as she sees it as her mission to document this important moment in the Japanese Canadian community. The community demands Redress for the unjust internment that the Canadian government forced onto people of Japanese extraction. The once dispersed Japanese Canadians were mobilised to take part in the campaign, by adopting Western approaches to protest, such as organising public rallies, making TV appearances and publishing activist newspapers. Kogawa

suggests that traditional Asian values tend to require that people endure without complaining. The silence thus had to be broken in the Redress-related novels. *Emily Kato* records the Japanese Canadian community in transit from being self-enclosed to actively engaging in talks and negotiations with the government.

However, it seems that readers were not ready for such “advance”. *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato* are doomed to fall short of the reader’s expectation of something beautiful *à la oriental*—that vagueness, evasiveness and uncertainty in *Obasan*. Kogawa took to heart one particularly harsh review of *Itsuka* by Stan Persky: “when *Itsuka* came out in hardcover [in 1993], I was killed by a single review in *The Globe and Mail*. He said it was unpublishable, full of pages and pages of painfully embarrassing writing. It killed me as a writer for years. I took it to heart, even though I didn’t know what was embarrassing about it” (Posner n.p.). In his review, Persky mentioned the absence of “luminous silences” and attacked *Itsuka* for its rather pedagogical approach: “The rhetoric of Community Studies 101 is laid on with a trowel in Kogawa’s earnest, well-meaning, ultimately lifeless documentary-a-clef” (n.p.). Persky evidently wanted the same silence that he was fond of in *Obasan* to be preserved in its sequel. However, *Itsuka* demonstrates that the silence should be broken as it is in fact unhealthy and restricts the personal growth of Naomi who has been hiding behind the veil of silence for too long as it is. She refuses to grow up and come of age as a woman because of the traumas that she goes through at a young age. In the second book, Naomi moves to Toronto and attends many Redress meetings with her aunt Emily; she also meets a man and starts the healing by making it right with the present. Apparently, Persky did not recognise the importance of communal activism both to the growth of the main character and to Kogawa as an Asian Canadian writer.

Glenn Deer in “Revising the Activist Figure in the Novels of Joy Kogawa” counters Persky’s criticism by explaining that he: “was unable to see that the novel was not just a continuation of the discourse of *Obasan*, but an important stage in the personal and psychological growth of Joy Kogawa” (48). Kogawa explores both the world in reality and her inner world at the same time while she ploughs through the past. Her trajectory in her writing is also her journey of self-liberation from victimisation, from life traumas and from restraints on her voicing of truth.

Meanwhile, the fact that the more explicitly political texts by Kogawa met with a cold reception reveals that the mainstream market is still not very receptive to such literature, and prefers more affirmative writings from ethnic minority writers.

Rather than documenting dramas on a personal level, *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato* move to the group level. Kogawa's faithful and detailed observation of the maturation of a once invisible and unheard community is in itself a valuable document in Japanese Canadian history. The plot lines in *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato* are therefore more intricate and the characters more complicated than those in *Obasan*, as Kogawa aims to emphasise the collective, not the individual. We see that Naomi, still quiet and sensitive in nature, is the best observer of what is going on in the community and of its people. In revising *Itsuka*, Kogawa condenses and clarifies the plot line, reducing the number of major characters. However, though Kogawa amended the form of her text in order to increase its appeal to mainstream readers, I argue that she still encountered a lack of interest in her theme, which was the real reason that the readers were not as zealous as they were about *Obasan*. This is also what often troubles first-generation Asian Canadian writers: the true stories of real people in their community—the ones that both they and their groups deem most valuable—will not attract mainstream readers, yet their success is measured in terms of the book's reception by the mainstream readership. The two writers that I will discuss in my next chapter, for example, have not attracted much mainstream critical attention, but are regarded very important within their respective communities.

Reading Kogawa's works, especially *Obasan*—which has attracted extensive discussion since its first publication thirty years ago—I hope to make a new contribution with the help of recently developed interdisciplinary methods. Nora Tunkel's *Transcultural Imaginaries* (2012) outlines a promising approach to contemporary Canadian literature, namely a transcultural reading. Tunkel points out: "Increasingly, in the light of globalizing forces that have had an impact on so many spheres of life, it has become insufficient to talk about present-day literature in terms of postmodernism or postcolonialism only—at least not in the same way it was practiced in theoretical discussions between approximately the 1970s and 1990s" (11). Tunkel argues that a transcultural perspective better suits Canada's present

situation and therefore should be increasingly adopted in its literary and cultural studies. According to Tunkel:

the process leading to transculture [...] necessitates the transgression of one's own culture, the accessing of another culture that in return accesses one's own. This process opens up a circle of 'becoming' in which each individual discovers the 'Other' that is not opposed to the self, but rather defines that part of identity that was not yet known. (109-110)

Contrary to the term "acculturation" which implies a movement in one direction—to transform the self in order to become alike and blend into the dominant culture—transculturation denotes a two-way process, a dynamic interaction and interchange between two cultures.

In *Obasan*, for example, we see Naomi growing up under the influence of two aunts who are distinctly different: the silent Aya Obasan, the title character, stands for traditional Japanese values, while the outspoken Aunt Emily embodies a contemporary Canadian citizen. Naomi grows up appreciating her mother and Aya Obasan's care and grace—which are mostly expressed in non-verbal gestures. Unfortunately, she withdraws further into her own world because of her childhood traumas—the disappearance of her parents, the confusion of dislocation (from Vancouver to Slocan, BC and then to Granton, Alberta) and the experience of being molested by a white neighbour. As a silent but extremely attentive and sensitive child, Naomi constantly observes and interprets the codes in both traditional Japanese and contemporary Canadian cultures. In *Emily Kato*, Naomi is initially reluctant to participate in the movement for Redress in which her Aunt Emily is fervently active, and her eventual involvement indicates that the inner silence which prevents her engagement with the outside world is beginning to break down. This also indicates that the "silence spell" upon the Japanese Canadian society has caused damage and disintegration. Gradually Naomi becomes actively involved in the Redress movement and speaks up for the rights of Canadian citizens while still maintaining her Japanese *yasashi* temperament (gentle, kind). Kogawa thus offers a possible transcultural model of an individual who grows to be able to incorporate and harmonise cultural clashes.

Silence has been a salient theme in previous critical discussions of Kogawa's *Obasan*. Numerous papers and monographs, such as Arnold E. Davidson's *Writing*

Against the Silence: Joy Kogawa's Obasan (1993) and *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston and Joy Kogawa* (1993) by King-Kok Cheung, are primarily devoted to this keyword. Many critics have come to the conclusion that silence is both a recurring motif and a mystifying tone that Kogawa sets for the whole novel. I too agree that silence is both an image and a theme, employed in multiple ways by Kogawa as she presents layers of meaning that are often unarticulated, unperceived and unappreciated. I likewise choose to focus my reading on silence as I endeavour to present the canon-making process of Asian Canadian literature. Finding Cheung's conceptualisation of different kinds of silence especially useful, I deploy her definition of various types of silences. But my readings will be focusing on the transcultural aspect of the novels. While Cheung focuses on *Obasan*, I will form my own reading across the range of Kogawa's novels. I will also expand the categories based on Cheung's framework and observe two other kinds of silences.

Kogawa chooses an ordinary cultural element—silence—and shows how it is perceived differently in Japanese culture and Western culture. Chinese American critic King-Kok Cheung explains that:

Whereas in English “silence” is often the opposite of “speech”, the most common Chinese and Japanese ideogram for “silence”, 静 is synonymous with “serenity” and antonymous with “sound”, “noise”, “motion”, and “commotion”. In the United States silence is generally looked upon as passive; in China and Japan it traditionally signals pensiveness, vigilance, or grace. (127)

The delicate subtleties of the Japanese and Chinese “silence” cannot find an ideal translation in English. Silence in Asian cultures is regarded as a positive and desirable characteristic in a person or a person's state of mind. It indicates that this person is serene (not quarrelsome), humble (not boastful), forbearing (not prone to fussing) and even wise (not stupid) in nature. However, as Teruyo Ueki observes: “In Western cultures which favour openness or directness in speech and behaviour, this subtle act of concealing or hinting at one's feelings would be regarded as a sign of evasiveness, indifference, or in an extreme case, rejection or abandonment, more often than not inviting misunderstanding or mistrust” (5-6). The same quality is thus valued very differently in the two cultures. Furthermore, in Asian culture, there exists a mistrust of speech: what is unsaid is “truer” than what is spoken. For example, in

many Japanese or Chinese stories, silent suffering is seen as a virtue that will be rewarded with understanding and appreciation in the dénouement, contrary to typical Western fairy tales which usually portray silent suffering as a weakness.

Indeed, in Western cultures, speech is generally valued over silence. This logocentric tradition has made outspokenness equal to being open and frank, and an ability to articulate equal to general intelligence. Most of all, Western authors have dismissed the unspoken as non-felt or non-existent. The logocentric practice “obscures the fact that silence, too, can speak many tongues, varying from culture to culture” (Cheung 1). In *Obasan*, however, we can discern that Kogawa has made a conscious effort to bridge the cultural gap between the reticent Japanese Canadian community and the mainstream Canadian society by her reflective observations of one culture from the perspective of the other. As a *nisei* herself, being “bicultural” enables Kogawa to value and revalue silence with Japanese appreciation and Western reflection. She explains during her interview with Cherry Clayton: “value differences need to be constantly described and explained to prevent misunderstanding” (108). Kogawa indeed demonstrates her conscious efforts in making transcultural communication.

Moreover, this silence sets up a special atmosphere that envelops the whole of *Obasan*. A film of opacity, then, is created by unspoken and unexplained inner emotions, giving the reader a glimpse of the beauty of the ambiguity that is often perceived as typical in Asian culture. This ambiguous or blurred presentation can be observed in Japanese and Chinese paintings where emotion is foregrounded by lines and shapes which are rendered vague and evasive. Naomi’s silent suffering, can be imagined by the reader. And this silent suffering accumulates strength and tension underneath the opaque, emotionless surface. Simultaneously, a discontinuous rather than a fluent narrative enables the reader to understand that there are gaps and holes in the memories of Japanese Canadian children which cannot be repaired, since they were not told or they intend to avoid thinking about the confusions and traumas that they lived through.

Although silence is often considered as being simple, singular and flat, some ethnic minority writers argue that it is in fact multi-layered and complicated.

Vietnamese-American writer and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha explains the multiplicity of silence in ethnic writers' works:

Working with silence is also very much linked to the notion of multiplicity of meaning, which has become a commonplace in contemporary thinking. [...] Since marginalized people are always socialized to understand things from more than their own point of view, to see both sides of the matter, and to say *at least* two things at the same time, they can never really afford to speak in the singular. (Morelli 8)

According to Trinh, Asian Canadian writers' use of silence is an effective way to explore multiplicity of meaning, something which is typical in contemporary thinking. In this way, the study of marginalised experience takes on more universal significance. Indeed, Naomi has observed and interpreted many kinds of silences. As Cheung observes in *Articulate Silences*: "I believe Kogawa distinguishes among (and regards with varying attitudes) protective, stoic, and attentive silence. She also deplores silencing through censorship and enforced invisibility" (128). Next, I will discuss these three kinds of silence and two other kinds of silence that I observe in the novels.

The protective silence is a silence kept over the unfair treatment experienced by the *issei*, during and after the Second World War, who wished to protect their children from the knowledge of their parents' suffering. Naomi observes: "the memories were drowned in a whirlpool of protective silence. Everywhere I could hear the adults whispering, 'Kodomo no tame. For the sake of the children...' Calmness was maintained" (*Obasan* 26). The much younger Naomi is bewildered and hurt by the changes to her life, especially by the disappearance of her mother: "Why did my mother not return? [...] I was consumed by the question. Devoured alive" (*Obasan* 31). The fact that her mother is at Nagasaki when the atomic bomb explodes, and is disfigured and dies shortly after, is kept a secret according to the mother's specific request until after the death of her uncle, when Naomi is 38 years old. "For the sake of the children", Naomi's parents and substitute parents try to swallow up the ordeal they went through and seal the past with silence. Naomi understands deeply this "strange faith"—"By not communicating, Mother believed, she spared her children pain" (*Emily Kato* 114). However, Naomi realises that being cut off from communication has a destructive effect on her: "gentle Mother, we were

lost together in our silences. Our wordlessness was our mutual destruction” (*Obasan* 291). Naomi learns that to reconnect with her past and with her mother, and to engage with the present, this paradoxical silence which simultaneously protects and victimises her must be broken: “There is in life, I have learned, a speech that will not be hidden, a word that will be heard” (*Emily Kato* 114).

This protective silence derives from a mistrust of the larger environment as the immigrants do not expect that their children can be equal with white Canadian children who are better protected or more privileged. Though justified by the need to protect children from danger, the mistrust of the outer environment sometimes prohibits the new generation from trusting their own country, which makes them feel anxious and out of place growing up. As the young Naomi observes: “It isn’t true, of course, that I never speak as a child. Inside the house in Vancouver there is confidence and laughter, music and mealtimes, games and storytelling. But outside, even in the backyard, there is an infinitely unpredictable, unknown, and often dangerous world. Speech hides within me, watchful and afraid” (*Obasan* 69). The closeness of the pre-World War Two Japanese immigrant community provides a zone of support and comfort for them. However, the mistrust between this community and the wider Canadian society causes mutual misunderstanding and prevents effective communication and exchange from happening between the cultures. That is why some Japanese Canadians, in retrospect, see their forced relocation and dispersal during the war as a disguised blessing that accelerates their acculturation into the Canadian society. This “disguised blessing” was later overtly promoted by the mainstream media in an attempt to evade responsibility for Canada’s internment of Japanese Canadians during World War Two. Nevertheless, the enculturated Japanese Canadians then understood the ways to engage with society and make a better future for themselves for their children and also for people who suffered in the past. They see breaking the silence and speaking for the community as the first step towards that.

Attentive silence is in fact, a nonverbal expression of love and understanding that is rooted deep down in the Japanese cultural legacy. Naomi reflects that:

To travel with confidence down this route the most reliable map I am given is the example of my mother’s and Grandma’s alert and accurate knowing.

When I am hungry, and before I can ask, there is food. If I am weary, every place is a bed. No food that is distasteful must be eaten and there is neither praise nor blame for the body's natural functions. A need to urinate is to be heeded whether in public or visiting friends. A sweater covers me before there is any chill and if there is pain there is care simultaneously. If Grandma shifts uncomfortably, I bring her a cushion. (*Obasan* 68)

This passage demonstrates what Cheung defines as “attentive silence”. Kogawa explains that the ability to interpret other people's needs without them having to be articulated is much appreciated in Japanese culture. However, this attentiveness is designed to function on the basis of reciprocity: Grandma's attending to Naomi's every need without her having to make requests which may be embarrassing or appear too demanding is answered by Naomi's sensitivity about Grandma's needs in return. In other words, this attentive silence requires sensitivity, gratitude and above all, a caring action in return to function. Kogawa implies that a cause of the *issei*'s tragedy is their one-sided devotion and sacrifice to their new adoptive country which neither perceives nor appreciates their sensitivity and self-sacrifices.

There is an example that illustrates this attentive silence. In the story of Momotaro—Naomi's favourite bedtime story—the grandparents who raise Momotaro, the boy born out of a peach, have to prepare for his leaving in order for him to make his way in the outer world: “There are no tears and no touch. Grandfather and grandmother are careful, as he goes, not to weight his pack with their sorrow” (*Obasan* 67). Naomi understands that unspoken affections are sometimes stronger and deeper. This is evident by the effort required to contain these feelings in order to avoid burdening or saddening the loved person. Naomi reflects: “We must always honour the wishes of others before our own. We will make the way smooth by restraining emotion” (*Obasan* 151). This special nonverbal and restrained expression of love is appreciated and valued over simply letting out emotions without considering other people's feelings. The free expression of emotions, which is usually encouraged in Western societies, is considered to be selfish in Japanese culture—“to try to meet one's own needs in spite of the wishes of others is to be ‘wagamama’—selfish and inconsiderate. *Obasan* teaches me not to be wagamama by always heeding everyone's needs” (*Obasan* 151). Therefore, Naomi understands that this kind of silence is much valued in traditional Japanese culture and she submits herself to it voluntarily.

However, in the adoptive country which practices different methods of expression, one of the most apparent ways to break this silence is to “do as the Canadians do”. As Naomi observes: “our passion is to have an open democratic process in which information is shared and many points of view are considered and debated” (*Emily Kato* 174). Though Naomi finds it difficult to face the past, to reveal her emotional scars and most importantly, to use words as weapons in the fight for the Redress, she understands the necessity of breaking this silence. In order to transculturate with Canadian culture, she will have to speak the same language, that is, verbal language, to start with. The trust—a trust that ethnic minority immigrants feel that their adoptive country will understand, appreciate and protect them without them having to articulate their needs—was eventually betrayed by Canada’s decision to intern Japanese Canadians. This was educational for the Japanese Canadians as they learnt to stand up for themselves against the government. In this sense, the breaking of silence is a significant step that the Japanese Canadians have taken towards modernising their community.

The third type that Cheung defines is a “stoic silence” (128), which means to bear with sufferings without showing it. “It’s in the heat of fire where the angel is found”, Obasan tells Naomi’s brother, Stephen, who is bullied in school because of his Japanese ancestry. “She also tells him that the best samurai swords are tempered over and over again in the hottest flames and people too are made strong and excellent when they go through life’s difficulties” (*Obasan* 155). Therefore, according to the *issei*’s values, the trials of life are seen as blessings in disguise that are meant to make the person stronger. With this special worldview, some Japanese, especially the *issei*, reconcile themselves to the social injustice they suffered and say: “*shikataganai*”—it cannot be helped.

For example, In *Emily Kato*, Naomi observes the *issei*:

How well I know the Issei, who will politely refuse gifts many times before accepting. And they do not complain. They will never, ever complain. They endure all things. It’s their code of honour requiring them to gaman, to bear trials without flinching. From infancy they have witnessed the poverty of fellow villagers who suffered in silence, for the love of parents, for the honour of ancestors, for the harmony of the whole. (*Emily Kato* 181-2)

Here Kogawa attributes not complaining to the *issei* who came to Canada as pioneers. They have internalised this social code and see it as a virtue to preserve carefully. It therefore requires transcultural understandings to appreciate what is underneath this stoic silence. Kogawa believes that the *issei* are the only generation that maintains this stoic silence, as this kind of silence derives from the depth of Japanese traditions and values. The stoic *issei* are seen as the most suffering of them all: “I can see now that the *issei* are the generation of sacrifice. They came to the new land and were sacrificed in the culture clash, their values scorned, their stories ignored” (*Emily Kato* 235). Meanwhile, Kogawa also suggests that the *issei*’s reluctance to talk about their past not only derives from their belief in taking sufferings honourably but also from their gratitude—despite any unjust sufferings enforced by the government. As Naomi observes: “their arigatai, their gratitude, the underground stream that nourished their deepest roots. With gratitude, they have endured for the sake of the long-term good, for the well-being of the whole. They have endured for a future that only the children will know. What they offer to the future are their keys to the safekeeping of the soul” (235). Always thankful for what they get even when it is meagre compared to what they have invested, the *issei* are seen as at peace and content with their situations. This portrait of the *issei*, however, differs greatly from Terry Watada’s, which I will explore and compare in the next chapter.

However, Naomi is also aware of the fact that Western people who do not understand Japanese culture would wrong the stoic *issei* bitterly because of their different behavioural codes: “Pastor Jim must have thought they were imbeciles, with their pidgin English, their averted eyes. I knew, however, that they were acutely sensitive. Their feelings were all the more intense for being contained” (*Emily Kato* 49). The *issei* are not understood by cultural outsiders, and it takes a sensitive “go-between” or a cultural translator, such as Naomi, to explain. However, the *issei* were doubtless more lively in each other’s company and not as mute and motionless as described here. Therefore, their agency is nullified not only by people, such as Paster Jim, but also by later generations removed from the *issei*’s time.

Kogawa is very successful in portraying generational differences. The *nisei* as presented by Aunt Emily, are pictured as everything opposite to the *issei* — “headstrong, outspoken” (*Emily Kato* 5) with their political vociferousness and their

belief in a democratic Canada. The *sansei*, to which Naomi belongs, are “amphibious”, achieving a coalition of the two cultures. Naomi seems to go through a certain crisis of cultural identity: “What are the differences, I’m wondering, between apathy, timidity, politeness, and sensitivity? Are we who are raised in cultures of silence drowned out in cultures of speech? Perhaps we are evolving at this very moment, and becoming amphibious. Perhaps we are exercising our gills at this gathering” (*Emily Kato* 176). This passage suggests that the daunting generational conflicts between the *issei* and *nisei* are like those between species in the sea and those on land. However, the third generation evolved to become amphibious so that they can live both in water and on land. Kogawa has entrusted the future of the community to the third generation who are able to appreciate the *issei*’s cultural reservations and also can follow the lead of the assertive *nisei*, without compromising either generations’ will.

In *Emily Kato*, a negative form of silence persists throughout the book. An impenetrable silence is maintained by Naomi’s brother Stephen, who refuses to have any connection with the Japanese community. Naomi is acutely hurt because Stephen cuts her off from his life: “There’s such a thing as too much reticence. Why doesn’t he call? Silence can be as devastatingly wounding as the most cutting remark” (*Emily Kato* 14). Internalising the social pressure against the racially other, some ethnic minority individuals—represented in the novel by Stephen—generate a self-hatred that makes them to want to cut themselves off from their ethnic community to achieve a “total integration” with the mainstream. This creates yet another obstacle to communication within the group.

Another type of silence in *Obasan*, which has less frequently been noted by critics, is the silence enforced by the Asian type of patriarchal system on those who are female or young. Uncle often observes that the vociferous Aunt Emily is: “Not like woman. [...] Like that there can be no marriage” (*Obasan* 43). Uncle also withholds important information, such as the death of their mother, from Naomi and Stephen, thinking they are too young to know the truth. Then the women of the family all obey and keep the secret. Breaking the silence is also a process enabling the Japanese community to embrace modern ideas, such as feminism and democracy. The more traditional *issei* have to learn to accept what is often seen as improper

according to the Japanese traditional values, such as assertiveness for women and making explicit demands of one's government.

Naomi is not only sensitive to the meanings of the silence of her fellow Japanese Canadians but also acutely aware of the small town mentality that she perceives as typically Canadian: "I couldn't guess how smart he was. In Granton, the smarter you were, the more you hid it. Anyone idiotic enough to 'talk fancy' got done in by the swinging lariat of small-town small talk" (*Emily Kato* 65). Here, Naomi shows the education she has received from the right side of the hyphen—the Canadian part of her identity. This strange small-town mentality—the preference for self-denial, as Ronald Sutherland explains in his "A Literary Perspective: The Development of a National Consciousness", gives birth to a new type of Canadian hero, "more self-effacing, 'struggling within himself to find an accommodation of some sort'" (413). According to this model of national identity, Canadians have a preference for reticence that contrasts with the perceived outspokenness of the American people. This Canadian national consciousness has a double impact on the forming of the reticent character of Naomi. The preference for modesty is, interestingly, where Japanese culture converges with Canadian culture as in Japanese culture too, there is a social norm of *enryō*—"Enryo. Reticence. The politeness of holding back. One did not boast unless one was a fool" (*Emily Kato* 80). Here we can also observe that for the Canadians, boastful behaviour is to "talk fancy", whereas in the Japanese language, sometimes to talk at all is considered boastful behaviour.

To a large extent, *Obasan* is regarded as a typical Canadian novel because of its conscious effort to connect the minority culture with that of Canada. Its awareness-raising is not entirely designed as a form of forceful protest, and is not at all an attempt to seize power, and hence reverse the situation. Rather, Kogawa is primarily interested in juxtaposing two cultural perspectives in order to let them meet and interact. There are risks with this approach as Kogawa is criticised by Roy Miki for being unclear in politics which in a way renders the Japanese Canadians more vulnerable to stereotyping and disempowerment. Miki argues: "The critical treatment of *Obasan* [is a reminder] of the need for reading approaches that respect and account for the contextual specificities of language, history, and narrative forms in texts by Asian Canadians and other writers of colour" (*Broken Entries* 121) Indeed,

while the silence in Kogawa's book has an obvious artistic function, it also avoids direct confrontation with Canadian social injustice. In this respect, Kogawa adopted Winnifred Eaton's Trojan horse strategy.

I also notice that Kogawa's victims fall clearly into Margaret Atwood's "Basic Victim Positions", devised in her famous thematic study *Survival* (1972):

Position One: To deny the fact that you are a victim; Position Two: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of Fate, the Will of God, the dictates of Biology, (in the case of women, for instance), the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea; Position Three: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable; Position Four: To be a creative non-victim. (Atwood 46-9)

We can easily identify that the *issei*, including Obasan and Uncle, take Position One as they have only gratefulness towards their adoptive country—Obasan chants "Arigatai. Gratitude only" (*Obasan* 50) while Uncle asserts: "In the world, there is no better place. [...] This country is the best. There is food. There is medicine. There is pension money. Gratitude. Gratitude" (50). Some *issei* take Position Two: "Sensei, our minister, said solemnly, 'shikataganai.' It can't be helped. Shizuka—quiet—was best" (*Emily Kato* 20). Naomi, meanwhile, can fit into Position Three with her reluctance to identify herself as a victim—"People who talk a lot about their victimization make me uncomfortable. It's as if they use their suffering as weapons or badges of some kind" (*Obasan* 41). Aunt Emily is a perfect model for the creative non-victim.

It is telling that Kogawa's characters fit into Atwood's Canadian victim analysis and this offers another possible way to read the novel in relation to Canadian literary traditions. In "Shikata Ga Nai: Mapping Japanese Canadian Melancholy in the Field of National and Literary Trauma", Lucia Lorenzi argues:

Atwood's theoretical framework has elucidated many facets of Canadian literary and cultural affect, and in the present context, her approach effectively amalgamates affective and experiential tropes into a broad framework that essentially denies and delegitimizes the traumatic experiences of racialized Canadians by romanticizing victimization and survival as necessary—even desirable—components of being and feeling Canadian. This uncomfortable inclusivity, while it permits and encourages the articulation of

Japanese Canadian narratives of suffering as part of the Canadian community, tentatively patches over the national fissures and fractures that are historically bound to contemporary “multicultural” Canada. (103)

Although Kogawa is from a Japanese ethnic background, her childhood and life in Canada have allowed Canadian values and perceptions to permeate her subjectivity at least as much as her Japanese heritage has done. Her political limitation, however, also results from being contained in Canadian society as an ethnic minority subject. I will argue that *Obasan* is the very first contemporary Asian Canadian novel and should be seen as an early milestone in Asian Canadian literary history. It then takes many writers and theorist to work together to define effective political positioning and ways to define and articulate racial politics more accurately and clearly.

In the novel, Naomi constantly looks for her mother and waits for her to return. This searching for home and parents can be understood as Kogawa hinting about the fact that ethnic minorities never feel at home with a white government whose temperament is crude and unfeeling. Canada as an adoptive parent is not helping its lost children home. For example, Naomi contemplates the signature “B. Good” at the end of the official reply to Aunt Emily’s query about a family estate: “Be good, my undesirable, my illegitimate children, be obedient, be servile, above all don’t send me any letters of inquiry about your homes, while I stand on guard (over your property) in the true north strong, though you are not free. B. Good” (*Obasan* 45).⁴² The use of “illegitimate children” emphasise the “otherness” of the visible minority identities. However, at the end of *Emily Kato*, when the Redress campaign is finally successful, the adult Naomi finally feels at home: “We’ve all said it over the years. ‘no, no, I’m Canadian. I am a Canadian’. Sometimes it’s been a defiant statement, a proclamation of a right. And today, finally, though we can hardly believe it, to be Canadian means what it hasn’t meant before. Reconciliation. Belongingness. Home” (*Emily Kato* 269). In a way, Naomi’s persistent yet helpless search for her mother is also the search for the country’s recognition of her. Her

⁴² Kogawa refers to the Canadian national anthem: “O Canada! Our home and native land! / True patriot love in all thy sons command. / With glowing hearts we see thee rise, / The True North strong and free! ”

feeling of being at home implies that she has found a place where there is no need to justify her existence or explain the perceived differences.

To reveal the truth is the purpose of Kogawa's fourth novel—*The Rain Ascends*—"a scream for mercy" ("Interstitiality" 327).⁴³ The novel is set in a household of Canadians of British descent. This choice is made ostensibly for the purpose of protecting the author's privacy and also for cultural reasons. I think, as Kogawa would find it less easy to fit a-daughter-tells-on-her-father scenario into an Asian household where filial duties come before all. The novel portrays the disquieting story of Millicent Shelby who finds out to her dismay that her own father, the reverend Doctor Charles Barnabas Shelby, has molested hundreds of boys, taking advantage of his post as an Anglican clergyman. After an extremely painful process of inner struggle Millicent decides to reveal this family scandal to the public by talking to the bishop (a decision Kogawa took in reality when she was fourteen years old). For Millicent, the dutiful daughter who loves and admires her father immensely, it is extremely painful to speak the truth: "truth is unspeakable. The truth is a knife that slays" (*The Rain Ascends* 9). Yet Kogawa believes that the truth should still be revealed, and must be revealed, as she reflects during an interview with Sheena Wilson: "I had believed that the worst thing that my dad did was hiding. If he could have admitted the truth, and if people could have thrown their stones at him, I could have loved him, stood by him, honoured him, and accepted him as a deviant and perverted human being" ("Interstitiality" 303). What kept Kogawa from speaking the truth at first is not only a daughter's love but also the cultural conflicts within her:

It seems to me that for the Japanese, sanity on the outside matters more than insanity on the inside, because through safeguarding the outside you safeguard society. [...] Harmony first. Harmony above all. But I was raised with Western stories, Christian stories. Truth first, truth above all. So although I am deeply Japanese, I am deeply Western. I don't know which is deeper, but I now think I understand something of what my dad was struggling under. It came from the Eastern culture in a Western world. (303-4)

⁴³ Kogawa explained during her interview with Wilson that the title comes from Millicent's meditation in the novel: "through the prism of prayer the rain ascends" (Wilson, "Interstitiality" 335).

The Eastern “harmony above all” set against the Western “truth above all” represents the clash of two value systems. At a personal level, Kogawa eventually chooses the one she grows to believe in rather than the one she inherited: “I am concerned for the family but I no longer believe, after these experiences, that keeping silent about my father will protect them” (307). This act of writing the novel to reveal the truth unites Kogawa’s two conflicting worlds, giving her strength: “And I felt freedom. I thought, I have told the truth. I am well. I am at home. [...] So that is why that book is the most important book for me. It changed my life!” (305). This also demonstrates a painful and less peaceful aspect of transculturation—the replacing the old and taken-for-granted values with new ones which requires breaking the old mind-set and entrusting oneself to the frightening, unfamiliar one.

Kogawa also revisits the theme of innocence in *The Rain Ascends*. As the daughter of a loving yet criminal father, Millicent faces a dilemma similar to that which the Japanese Canadians faced during World War Two. Millicent is innocent yet “cannot” remain uncontaminated by her father’s crimes because of the blood relationship—just as the innocent Japanese Canadians took punishment for Japan’s acts during World War Two. In *The Rain Ascends*, Kogawa finally lets out her cry of blame which she couldn’t express towards her country of ancestry: “Who is to pay the impossible debt my parent has incurred? Unto the third and fourth generation, I am told, the children’s children are in chains. Behold your legacy, Father. You have sold us into bondage” (201). Many Japanese Canadian critics and activists observe a self-loathing and self-censorship in Japanese Canadians. Kogawa, after her personal experience of the internment and family crisis, sees through the fallacy of this logic: “Those who practise *Sippenhaft*—that is, the punishing of whole families for crimes committed by one member—are continuing a Nazi practice. Japanese Canadians were punished because we were related to a war mongering country. But we were innocent” (Wilson, “Interstitiality” 307). This, I guess, is the answer she has been searching for to her own puzzle: “we are both the enemy and not the enemy” (*Obasan* 84).

Simultaneously, Kogawa successfully envisions a solution—a way out of the dilemma of hatred and love, forgiving and being forgiven—a way towards abundance. In the interview with Cherry Clayton, Kogawa explains:

The last line of *The Rain Ascends* reads: “The journey will lead into the abundant way”. Because the journey had started with the dream that the goddess of mercy and the goddess of abundance were the same, that somehow one could not come to a state of mercy unless there was a great deal of abundance in one’s life. Mercy was not expected of the poor person, only of the king. (116)

Kogawa imagines that abundance goes hand in hand with mercy which will be the ultimate solution for the reconciliation between the victimised and the victimiser. Once the victimised can live in abundance, they will be able to reconcile themselves to past sufferings. After *The Rain Ascends*, Kogawa is now working on her fifth novel, *Gently to Nagasaki*, in which she writes: “goddess of Nanking, trust is the only safety zone I know. Whether in the quicksand or in your apartment, I am not released from the task as assigned. I will keep trusting. And I must be on my way to Nagasaki” (“Excerpt” 358). Here, Kogawa carries her revealing-of-the-truth mission to the next level—telling the truth about the Rape of Nanking (a massacre of the Chinese in Nanking by the Japanese army during World War Two). Kogawa, having departed on a journey as an individual and as a member of a group searching for home and voice, is seen opening her writing up to discussions on a higher level and larger scale. Transculturation in her novels is not restricted to an interaction between two cultures, but becomes a mode of understanding of the world as a whole.

In this chapter, I have examined two canonical Asian Canadian writers who have negotiated a way into mainstream publication and begun to establish the canon of what mainstream audiences understand as Asian Canadian literature. I have argued that both writers demonstrate ways for Asian Canadian subjects to inherit their cultural legacies, as we see the later generations actively looking back at their community’s early life, in an effort to build a bridge between the past and the present, thus making peace with the past. More importantly, their works show how individuals learn to reject damaging legacies and liberate themselves from the ties to their community’s past, thus becoming able to develop into autonomous individuals.

Both Lee and Kogawa represent individuals embarking on a journey away from the collective, which although offering support and consolation, also burdens them with counterproductive legacies, such as secrets, shame, silence, patriarchal oppression and so on. Both writers think the way for their protagonists to achieve this begins with sorting out their past, even if that means a painful process of facing the cruel, violent facts, such as when Kae discovers her own incest-tainted family history and Naomi finds out what has happened to her mother. For an Asian Canadian individual, it seems, as demonstrated in Lee and Kogawa's novels, that the way to personal growth is through the community's past. It is only after they have fulfilled their responsibility towards their community, by restoring the truth of the past, they can move on to embrace their present and develop more fully into their personal futures. In Lee's novel, Kae realises enough sacrifice has been made by the female members of the Wong family and decides to pursue her own happiness by accepting a homosexual relationship. And Kogawa's Naomi is able to develop a romantic relationship with a man in *Emily Kato*, as her search for the mother finally comes to an end and she is able to resume the process of individual development which was arrested with her mother's disappearance.

In fact, the theme of transculturation is, naturally enough, the most salient one in all Asian Canadian literature. I chose to discuss it with reference to Kogawa's books not only because her works exemplify the notion of transculturation particularly well, but also because she even advances beyond the original model of transgressing one's own culture, accessing another culture and in return accessing one's own in a new way. In Kogawa's works, the return to one's own culture is made possible because the other culture has actually been impacted upon in the engagement. Her novel not only galvanised the Redress Movement, but it also told a story that was compelling to a wide audience across Canada. The impact of this extended beyond the Japanese Canadian community, since the Human Rights Commission was set up as a result of Redress, and is understood by some as the apex of Canadian multiculturalism. The book helped to give Canada a new way to narrate itself and think of itself. This takes transculturation to a new level: it is no longer simply based in the subject, but binds together a whole range of interest groups and individuals to create new subjectivities.

Moreover, it is with this transcultural perspective that Asian Canadian writers establish themselves as Canadian authors. In *Writing against the Silence*, Arnold Davidson argues:

By brilliantly conjoining both sides of Japanese-Canadian experience, *Obasan* demonstrates a way to escape from what E.D. Blodgett has identified as the bind of binarism. This assumption that two cultures, two languages, and two literatures divide one country leaves little room for anything else, and necessarily discourages ethnic writers. *Obasan*, however, conclusively attests that Japanese Canadians—as well as Canadians of any stripe, break, or hyphen whatever—have a place in the country and a place in the country's literature. (15-6)

Indeed, I argue that Kogawa and Lee have shaped the Asian Canadian canon with the innovative transcultural perceptions in their novels. They try to overcome the “hyphen”, not by re-asserting East and West, but by imagining Canada's potential in terms of new forms of exchange and mixing, and even new narratives of origin.

In the novels discussed in this section, third-generation Naomi and fourth-generation Kae are privileged with a first-person voice, with which they are able to critically reflect on the community's past. They are then able to reconcile themselves in the end with the legacies, both positive and negative, that they then realise they can inherit selectively. By reconstructing the community's past, they are able to heal themselves from past doubts, hurt, and even traumas and fulfil their share of responsibility as community members. However, the first-generation characters represented in these novels lack agency and interiority, especially in Kogawa's case, since her *issei* are stereotyped and flattened. In my next chapter, I will discuss two texts which have first-generation and second-generation protagonists who are endowed with agency.

Chapter Three

Gut History: Terry Watada and Wayson Choy

More than a century elapsed between the first wave of immigration from East Asia to Canada and the publication of the first novels in the Asian Canadian community. Up to that point, Asian subjects as represented in Western mainstream culture had been distorted and mystified, as in the example of the infamous Dr. Fu Manchu.⁴⁴ When Asian Canadians decided to break the silence that had been imposed and self-imposed on and in the community, they began to reclaim their voice and history. A history written from within by the members of the ghettoised group is in itself valuable as it preserves a collective memory. This shared memory and experience has the potential to be the basis of imagined communities. Externally, by exhibiting the complexity of life within ethnic minority communities, historical writing demystifies the “other” and makes ethnic minority subjects fully fleshed-out protagonists, as opposed to exotic symbols.

In Chapter Two I discussed two prominent first-generation writers whose works have shaped the canon of Asian Canadian literature, in the sense that they are seen as “typical” but “appealing” to a wide readership. The working formula seems to be contemporary Asian Canadian subjects looking back at and also actively reconstructing the community’s and/or family’s history with a critical and reflective view. The warm acceptance of this formula may be due to the preferences encouraged by theorists of Canadian postmodernism, such as Linda Huchon, whose definition of historiographic metafiction in her *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) has been highly influential. However, amongst the first-generation writers, many adopt the more conventional, therefore less “successful” approach, namely, (auto)ethnographical writing. A large amount of auto or semi-autobiographical novels appeared in the 1980s and 1990s. In this Chapter, I will discuss two

⁴⁴ Dr. Fu Manchu is a Chinese character created by British author Sax Rohmer in the early twentieth century. He is portrayed as a criminal genius.

seemingly conventional novels, which are not always acknowledged in broader Canadian literary historical narratives but are important within Asian Canadian literature.

In Asian Canadian literature, some of the primary questions are: who speaks and to whom? In this chapter, I will try to tackle the first question. I argue that the “who speaks” issue is an important one in ethnic minority literature. For example, first-person narrative is employed by almost all of the authors I have chosen for this project, sometimes over the course of a whole narrative, such as Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony*, but more often only in selected sections, where passages in italics denote the thoughts or the direct narration of the characters. The fragmented narration that is typical in Asian Canadian literature, I argue, is partly there because the authors want to insert multi-vocality into their narration, so that the characters all get their own voice, to the extent that even Hiromi Goto’s *kappa* (a Japanese water spirit) and Larissa Lai’s fox spirit each enjoy a separate story line and voice. Given that they are claiming their own voice and agency in literary creation, Asian Canadian writers evidently do not want to compromise their characters by having them spoken for. In addition, a diversity of perspectives also challenges the supposed unification within the communities.

In Issue 1.2 of *The Asianadian*, the editorial defines a “gut history”:

A new version of this history—history that talks from the inside out—with guts. An Asian gut history [is] written either by people who lived through it or those who are living it today. We struggle for more than getting a pat on the head from “ethnic” historians or similar “objective” people. Their style of history presents only half of the story. Many people want to hear platitudes; they say that to talk about the bad past or today’s problems is too negative. But gut history makes the invisible visible. (2)

Writing a history from the inside out is one of the ways that ethnic minorities gain liberty. By reconnecting to their own history, and coming to terms with the methods they or their ancestors have devised to cope with social injustices (such as the selling and buying of identities in the case of the so-called paper relatives in Chinatown and the picture brides in Japantown), Asian Canadian writers validate the struggles that the community have gone through and legitimise their own existence in Canada. By reconciling themselves with history and understanding that these acts by their

forebears were due to the socioeconomic and political conditions that they were once subject to, this history becomes a history of survival and resistance.

Once the silence has been broken, another question became increasingly relevant: Who speaks? Within the Asian Canadian community activism was, in Jim Wong-Chu's words, a third-generation phenomena. (Personal Interview) In literary works, as Chapter Two has shown, earlier generations, are often presented by later generation characters, which is to say, that they are spoken for rather than speaking for themselves. One of the primary reasons is that their English is not of a standard to enable them to articulate their own stories in that language. Also, a number of novels use plots in which members of later generations reflect on or research the histories of their ancestors in the family or in the community. This can be both productive and also problematic. Kogawa, to some extent, renders the *issei* mute, while Lee's Kae often put words in the mouths of her great-grandmother and grandmother while reconstructing the family history according to her understanding and imagination. However, in this chapter, I focus on two writers, Terry Watada and Wayson Choy, who write about the lives of their communities in the period before the Second World War, an event which had a significant impact on both communities. In their Chinatown and Little Tokyo stories, the first-generation immigrants speak freely and exercise their powers over their fellow community members. This is distinctly different from the design of Kogawa and Lee.

Meanwhile, it does take "guts" to reveal what has happened, especially the unfair treatment received by East Asian immigrants in Canada. Recounting the injustice that Asian Canadians suffered is unsettling for some community members, since it exposes vulnerability. And it is also an act of betrayal in some sense, since this literature written in English reveals secrets and opened their community to the view of outsiders. However, writers such as Wayson Choy and Terry Watada deem writing a "gut history" an empowering process, which enables the communities to heal and to learn to reconcile themselves with, and even to appreciate their past as a history of survivors in Canada.

3.1 Stories of Real People: The Issei Japanese Canadians in Terry Watada's *Kuroshio: The Blood of Foxes*

In a 1997 interview with Kuan Foo, editor of *Ricepaper*, Watada talks about his intention of writing a novel. At that time, he had just published his short story collection *Daruma Days*.⁴⁵

I have something in mind based on an incident that happened in Vancouver pre-war where a woman who is bitter about her daughter, takes on a lover and then is caught by the daughter and so the woman kills the daughter and puts her body in a furnace... this actually happened, I learned about it while I was doing research for *Daruma Days* and I can see it becoming a wonderful novel. (Foo 25)

Watada did carry out this literary project and the result was *Kuroshio: The Blood of Foxes*. During my interview with him, Watada said that two sequel novels, which are in the process of being published, will be dealing with the internment and post-internment times in the Japanese Canadian community.

In the interview with *Ricepaper*, Watada explains: "I felt it was maybe part of my duty to tell these stories, because that's what third and fourth generation Japanese Canadians always talk about: the fact that they don't know anything about those days" (Foo 21). "Those days" refers to the early period of Japanese settlement in Canada. Watada's stories are about the *issei* who endured racial discrimination in Canada and lived in tightly-knit diasporic communities for protection and support.

⁴⁵ A representative third-generation Japanese Canadian activist, Terry Watada (born in 1951) is one of the iconic figures of the community. As a very versatile writer, he is known as a poet, columnist, novelist, playwright, historian and also as a musician and composer. Watada was also an influential activist during the Redress campaign undertaken by the Japanese Canadian community, and personally joined the rallies where he and his band played activist songs to boost morale. Watada has published many works in different genres, including: poetry collections *Ten Thousand Views of Rain* (2001), *Obon: the Festival of the Dead* (2006) and *A Thousand Homes* (1995); a children's biography, *Seeing the Invisible* (1998); a short fiction collection, *Daruma Days* (1997); and a history book, *Bukkyo Tozen: a History of Buddhism in Canada* (1996). *Kuroshio: The Blood of Foxes* is Watada's most recent work and first novel.

With the first-generation people passing away (any who are still alive will be about 100 years old now), and with the second generation's deliberate reticence as a result of their experiences of wartime internment, writers such as Watada and Kogawa sensed a danger of loss, that their history would disappear if they did not write about it. They therefore took upon themselves the task of writing for their community. However, I argue that they differ very much in the way they portray early generations.

In *Stone Voices: Wartime Writings of Japanese Canadian Issei* (1991), which is composed of diaries written by *issei* during the period of internment. We see some *issei* showing strong concern about the outcome of the war and wishing for the victory of Japan as they naturally associate their own fate in Canada with it. Kogawa reflects in the foreword she wrote for *Stone Voices*: "As a passionately Canadian Nisei, I never did want to believe that Japanese Canadians were anything but totally Canadian in their identity. This was unreasonable. How could I expect people to feel no connection to the land of their birth?" (6). Indeed, the *issei* recorded in *Stone Voices* exhibit full agency and show strong emotions such as indignation, protest and hatred. The publication of this first-hand record, which could have caused disturbance if published at an earlier time, shows the ethnic minority's growing confidence in a multicultural Canada which aims to tolerate, and indeed value, different voices from within its population. The self-appropriation of ethnic minority writers may, in a way, originate from a distrust of the country's claimed tolerance. In *Obasan*, for example, self-censorship and self-appropriation work together to create the artificial silence of the *issei*. In a way, by rendering the *issei* "conveniently" silent, Kogawa avoids confrontation with mainstream Canadian society. However, by doing so, she nullifies the *issei*'s agency, giving them a uniform and coded language that is silence. They are stereotyped and flattened as they join the passive, unidentifiable muted group.

Not only does Kogawa appropriate the *issei* to be "perfect victims" during the internment, her *issei* are also "model citizens" according to government ideals: hardworking, practical, and uncomplaining. By contrast, in Terry Watada's *Kuroshio: The Blood of Foxes*, the *issei* are depicted with full agency: they can be bitter, cunning and violent as they fight for survival in an unfriendly country whose mistrust

they reciprocate readily. In *Obasan* Joy Kogawa created the reticent *issei* uncle and aunt, who are effectively Naomi's adoptive parents after her biological parents die during the Second World War. The *issei* uncle has his fishing boat and house confiscated by the government but is still full of gratitude for his life in Canada. Obasan remains graceful and silent about what has befallen the family and brings Naomi up with inarticulate care and love. Recognising all the significant literary and historical value that *Obasan* contains, I observe, however, a tendency among readers and critics to oversimplify the experience of the *issei*, as presented in the novel. *Obasan* implies that all the *issei* suffered the internment passively and accepted their fate uniformly. I argue that the silence in the novel provides an opacity that covers the self-assertion and protest of individual *issei*. The *issei* in *Obasan*, presented as perfect victims, were to some extent, a result of the author's self-appropriation. Contextualised by her life experience and knowledge, and also due to the internalised social pressure that resulted from an accelerated assimilation process in post-war Japanese Canadian society, Kogawa appropriates her *issei* according to social expectations. Watada's *Kuroshio*, however, presents a totally different kind of *issei*, who, in contrast with those passive, muted, non-responsive ones, are passionate, lively and assertive. Watada's fiction fills a gap in the literary history of the Japanese Canadian community as it focuses on the lesser-known first-generation immigrants' experience from 1905 to 1940. However, Watada has received far less critical attention than Kogawa, and there has been little discussion of this novel.

Kuroshio traces Yoshiko Miyamoto's (née Hayashi) and Etsuji Morii's parallel lives. Yoshiko embarks on a trip to join her husband Jinsaburo Miyamoto in 1920 as one of the picture brides:

It was the height of the Yoboyose Jidai, the "Summoning of Relatives Period" or "Restricted Immigration Period" (1908-1924), and everyone was caught up in its spirit of adventure. Very few brides were fortunate enough to meet their suitors beforehand. Some of them married successful men who had returned to Japan to select wives for themselves; most, however, married through the picture-bride system. (*Kuroshio* 48)

The majority of *issei* women arrived in Canada as picture brides between 1908 and 1924, following the first wave of Japanese labour immigration to the North American

continent from 1885.⁴⁶ The “Gentlemen’s Agreement” allowed only 400 Japanese males to enter Canada per year. However, there was no specification as to females. Therefore, the picture bride system was a way of getting around Canada’s discriminatory immigration policies. The first Japanese immigration wave ended with the Canadian Immigration Act of 1924 that defined people of Asian origin as aliens who were ineligible for citizenship. Miki explains: “The ‘picture bride’ system resulted in a large influx of Japanese women, which in turn led to the formation of local communities and a Canadian-born generation, the *nisei*. They were educated in Canadian schools and came to believe in the democratic values underpinning the nation, particularly the right to vote” (*Redress* 23). Therefore, the picture brides were crucial to the survival and continuance of the Japanese Canadian community. This special picture bride system marks one of the most distinctive features in Japanese Canadian immigrant history.

Etsuji Morii is based on a real person who is legendary in Vancouver’s Little Tokyo. Many Japanese Canadians mentioned to me their personal or family contacts with him. Miki describes him as “a notorious figure in the community, known for providing the RCMP with Judo instructions and, along with fellow *issei* Arthur Nishiguchi and Mitsujiro Noguchi, assisting the RCMP during the registration of all Japanese Canadians from March to August 1941” (*Redress* 44). In the novel, Morii is sent to Vancouver’s Japanese community in 1905 by a Japanese mafia society—“Black Dragon”, based in San Francisco—in order to expand its influence and business. Morii, the big boss—referred to as “oyabun” (the Japanese word for patriarch, but mostly used in reference to gang bosses)—fares well in Canada as he opens up many commercial operations, including gambling and prostitution, under a disguise of legitimate business. Morii’s many crimes, including several murders, are covered up by an RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) constable Benjamin Gill who takes bribes from him. With this insider contact in the police, Morii expands his influence even more as he effectively decides which Japanese can enter Canada. He charges a high price for opening the channel to those who want to bring a wife to Canada.

⁴⁶ On the women’s movement in Meiji to Taishō (1812-1923) Japan, see Sharon A. Minichiello (1998), Gail Lee Bernstein (1991) and Barbara Molony (2008).

Yoshiko finds herself gravely deceived by her husband, Jinsaburo Miyamoto. Firstly, he is much older than she is led to believe. More importantly, not only does he not own a boarding house as he claims, but Jinsaburo is also deep in debt to the Oyabun Morii for bringing Yoshiko over. The lives of Morii and Yoshiko then come into conjunction: Morii facilitates Yoshiko's coming over to Canada but, then, on suspecting that Jinsaburo has been gambling in Chinatown instead of at his place, expels both Jinsaburo and Yoshiko from Vancouver. Working as a cook for pioneer teams at the frontier, Yoshiko saves enough money to move back to the Little Tokyo in Vancouver with her daughter Mariko. Determined to have what she was promised, Yoshiko runs a boarding house with success. However, her fatal encounter with a womaniser—Koji Okihara—constitutes Yoshiko's downfall. Koji disappears just after Yoshiko has killed firstly her daughter who happens to see them in bed, and then Jinsaburo. Yoshiko then turns to the Oyabun, begging him to bring Koji back to her, which is the opening scene of the book.

Based on the story of the murder of Mariko Miyamoto in 1940, the novel dramatises an infamous episode in the history of Vancouver's Japanese Canadian community. Watada attaches an epilogue to the novel which seems to be a news clipping taken from the April 30, 1940 issue of *The Daily Province*. In the epilogue, the police state that the gambler father Jin (Jinsaburo) Miyamoto is the suspected murderer and that he himself has been killed and decapitated by his creditors. However, the novel suggests that Mariko is accidentally killed by her mother Yoshiko who may have pushed her down the stairs. Yoshiko and her lover then conspire to murder and decapitate Jinsaburo. Watada's narrative appears to conflict with the "facts" offered in the newspaper clipping, and this calls the validity and objectivity of official versions of history into doubt. The novel raises questions about the extent to which the agents of state power (press, police and government) know or understand ethnic minorities.

Yoshiko's Canadian story is a sad one as she was disillusioned. At the beginning of the book, Yoshiko is a very spirited, passionate young Japanese girl who develops revolutionary ideas under the influence of Meiji reforms: "Okasan (mother) has got to learn, she reasoned, that times have changed. The Emperor had

said so” (*Kuroshio* 17).⁴⁷ During the Meiji Restoration, the government advocated *wakon yōsai*, which translates as “Japanese spirit, Western technique/skill”. From the Meiji period, especially from 1870 through to World War Two, there was a great curiosity about, and welcoming of, foreign people, and particularly those from certain western countries. It is in this context that Yoshiko’s fascination with the promise of North America develops. Unwilling to succumb to a typically tyrannical mother-in-law (ironically, Yoshiko suffers for a year at the hands of her eldest sister-in-law before she is able to make the trip to Canada), Yoshiko wishes to marry to a man who can promise her a new, affluent and free life. She imagines her future husband in vivid terms:

The man I marry will be adventurous and have the strength of ten men. His eyes will be clear and black like coal. His hair too, long and dark like fertile earth. He’ll stand tall, proud of his accomplishments as seen in his straight back and great flexed muscles. He’ll have lived in the land of white devils and ghost women and will be their master. And I will be his wife. (Kuroshio 26)

Adventurous and somewhat boisterous, Yoshiko envisions a match for her own spirit. Though refusing to submit to the strict Japanese social order, Yoshiko’s imagination still reeks of Japaneseness, since physical strength is much admired and black eyes and long black hair are considered beautiful in a man. But this is understandable and genuine since she grows up in Japan and has never been abroad. Unlike a traditional Japanese woman who would submit to her husband as a superior without questioning, Yoshiko is imaginative, courageous and romantic. She is led to believe that her dream of achieving freedom and dignity as a woman could be realised in the new land where she will be able to start over, away from the suffocating patriarchal structure that subjugates her in Japan. However, Yoshiko faces even more layers of oppression in Canada: the same patriarchal order within the ghettoised community, a hierarchy based on economic affluence that is enforced by the Japanese community, and racial and class discrimination that are practised by the larger Canadian society.

⁴⁷ For further reading about Japanese studies, please see Andrew Gordon’s *A Modern History of Japan* (2003), Elise K. Tipton’s *Modern Japan: A Social and Political History* (2008) and Joy Hendry’s *Understanding Japanese Society* (1987).

Being promised a young and rich husband who owns a large boarding house in Canada, Yoshiko cannot help but feel proud and optimistic about her new life. On the ship across the Pacific: “She began filling up with the realization that she was about to lead a life of wealth and privilege. Pride settled in her breast as she took a deep breath and grew into her new role” (*Kuroshio* 51). For Yoshiko, the new land promises wealth and privilege that she somehow believes she deserves. Sadly in her imagination she has structured the new social order within the frame of her existing knowledge, viewing Japanese people as the dominant race. This leaves her ill-prepared for the discovery that she, along with her people, is marginalised and alienated in Canada, with the dominant group being of white European descent. Both the man she marries and the country she comes to have let her down gravely.

As soon as she arrives in Canada she finds unpleasant differences from her imagined version: “What she didn’t like was the sight of so many white men. Rough-hewn, unsightly noses, booming voices, and a rainbow of different hair colours, they seemed more like beasts of burden toiling in the field than human beings. *Rise above it*, she told herself. *Ignore these animals*” (*Kuroshio* 88). Still unable to see beyond her inherited world-view, Yoshiko regards the “foreigners” as lesser beings. Indeed, it may be natural for a person who has never been exposed to foreignness to feel uncomfortable, even repelled, when placed suddenly amongst “the others”. Also in this period, at the start of the twentieth century, myopic views about other races were widely held by the Japanese. Due to the pride instilled in her by her culture, Yoshiko experiences a real shock when she discovers the low estimation in which Japanese people are held in North America. Yoshiko’s mother tries to warn her daughter against her wish to go to America: “America? There’s nothing there but devil men and ghost women” (*Kuroshio* 16). Her mother suggests that tolerating co-existence with the foreign people is difficult enough. But Yoshiko, when she is in Canada, has to accept a much harsher reality: those she considers inferior turn out to be placed high above her race in Canada. And she herself, and her people, along with other ethnic minorities, turn out to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy. She is therefore destined to experience a series of disillusionments and mental adjustments.

Yoshiko soon realises that she is rendered even more powerless in the new country than when she is in Japan. When she is quarantined in the Immigration

Building, Yoshiko is indignant about having to go through the same procedure along with the other immigrants: “Wasn’t she better than most of these immigrants? She was a Miyamoto! Where was her husband? Her husband of consequence? Is he really so powerless to help?” (*Kuroshio* 91). In *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures*, Sheng-mei Ma observes a schizophrenia common in Asian immigrants: “the irreconcilably split personality associated with past glory and present shabbiness [explains] their incomprehensible actions and patterns of thought” (41). The huge rift between imagination and reality and the sharp contrast between the past and present unsettle diasporic subjectivities and may account for the seemingly inexplicable radical changes in their actions. Indeed, in Watada’s novel, almost all the Japanese Canadian characters are somewhat “abnormal”, with fierce and sometimes rather crazy demeanours.

Watada introduces a supernatural dimension into the novel as it is hinted that Yoshiko is possessed by some spirits in the form of a Japanese fox spirit, an Irish hanged girl’s ghost and the *Kuroshio*: the black tide. Yoshiko is cursed when she lets vanity take possession of her. It seems that they all conspire to counteract Yoshiko’s wishes for a better life and punish her for reaching too high. The ghostly figures take advantage of weakness in people to do mischief to them. Pursuing an American dream of wealth and freedom is an accepted ambition in the West. However, according to the Buddhist decree, aspiration and desire are seen as sins and should be banished and punished. Watada, by introducing the supernatural spirits, adds a dimension of fantasy to his novel and also shows how Japanese culture, a secular culture but deeply influenced by Buddhism, impacts on Japanese immigrants in Canada.

One link between Japanese and Chinese cultures is the fox spirit. Both the writers considered in this chapter deploy it: Choy’s Jung, when a child, thinks the grandmother is a fox spirit and wants to catch her tail while Yoshiko’s favourite bedtime story is about the fox spirit who takes advantage of people’s greed and then punish them for it. Also, in my next chapter, the fox spirit has an important role in Lai’s *When Fox Is a Thousand*. The fox spirit appears in Chinese and Japanese folklore, mythology, and religious teachings. In China, the fox spirit often appears in Taoist stories: it gains human knowledge and can transform into human shape, often

that of a beautiful female, and seduce male scholars who study intensively in isolation. By obtaining “male juice” from the man, the fox can increase its own magical powers. However, in many stories, such as those collected in Pu Songling’s *Strange Stories of Liaozhai* (1679), the fox develops “real” human feelings and relents in the end by not taking the scholar’s life. In Japan the fox spirit is also popular: for example, Terry Watada tells the story called *Fox and the Jewel Maiden*, about a fox spirit that transforms into a beautiful maiden at court, and causes the illness of the emperor. (*Kuroshio* 61-2). They also appear in Shinto rites, in the form of a protective deity one encounters in front of shrines. In both cultures people have mixed feelings towards the fox spirit who can be mischievous and also friendly.⁴⁸

This fantastic dimension can also be considered as Watada’s attempt to explain the incomprehensible, drastic change in Yoshiko’s personality. As if possessed, Yoshiko inflicts both verbal and physical abuse on her daughter Mariko. After having murdered both her daughter and husband, Yoshiko appears to be unconcerned and untroubled. It seems the only plausible explanation of such a transformation in personality is that Yoshiko is possessed by the fox spirit who does not have any compassion for humans and is determined to do evil things. The hanged girl foreshadows the fate of Mariko. The fox spirit and the *Kuroshio* can be interpreted as fragments of the subjectivity of Yoshiko, which splits into an aspect of bitterness and a connection to the past whilst retaining an element of her former humanity. The structural transformation of her subjectivity explains her drastic actions: she is as if “possessed”. The early Japanese Canadian community seems to be full of violence, darkness and hardened people. However, people have gone through drastic changes in their lives and experience constant terror and worry as they are not protected by laws and government. Watada, by adding to his historical narrative mysterious supernatural powers, renders the invisible dangers visible.

Yoshiko believes that her hard life in Canada is outrageous: “*I’ve been robbed of my proper fate*” (*Kuroshio* 226). She blames herself too: “the reality of the situation pressing upon her, she began to accept her fate. The price she had to pay for

⁴⁸ For more detail about the fox spirit in Japanese and Chinese cultures, see Xiaofei Kang’s *The Cult of the Fox* (2006).

reaching so high” (114). Growing up in Meiji Japan, when the government undertook a series of revolutionary social reforms, and the country became rich and powerful quickly, Yoshiko believes firmly in dignity and honour. During this period, the confidence of Japanese people was boosted with the rapid development of their country. Yoshiko’s displaced subjectivity causes part of her misery in Canada. However, it is beyond her comprehension to realise that her host country, Canada, with its discriminatory and intolerant policies towards Asian immigrants, is also to blame for her tragic life. The systematic and institutional discrimination alienates and exploits all the diasporic subjectivities, man and woman alike. Without the restriction of entry to Canada, the picture bride system, might not have existed or expanded to such a scale. In this sense, a personal tragedy is also a part of a community’s history just as the predicaments a community suffers will inevitably affect the fate of each of its members.

Yoshiko is oppressed as a Japanese woman in Canada. However, her husband has been exploited and damaged even more, as he undergoes a process of emasculation.⁴⁹ The first-born son of a Japanese family, Jinsaburo foregoes, unwillingly, the right to inherit the family’s fortune, and goes to Canada with the wish to “make it” in order to prove his abilities to his strict father. As he confesses to Yoshiko on their wedding night: “I could’ve stayed in Japan and gotten all my otosan’s [father] wealth. I am the only son, you know. Yeah, but my otosan. My otosan, that son of a bitch, he made me feel like that I should strike out on my own. Make something of myself. Like him! Ha! Like I could on my own in this country” (*Kuroshio* 114). Jinsaburo suffers from unfulfilled ambition. His situation is even more deplorable than Yoshiko’s: being a man, he is expected to succeed in any circumstances and bring honour to the family, while Yoshiko as a woman is expected to be dependent on the husband.

Jinsaburo is not only economically exploited and socially oppressed in North America, he is also “racially castrated”, as defined by David L.Eng in *Racial*

⁴⁹Or demasculinisation, reduced masculinity. Richard Fung argues: “The contemporary construction of race and sex [...] has endowed black people, both men and women, with a threatening hypersexuality. Asians, on the other hand, are collectively seen as undersexed” (146)

Castration (2001). Jinsaburo is portrayed as deceitful, violent and wayward. Being the first son and entitled to the family heritage, he enjoys wealth and social status in Japan. But in Canada, he is rendered a nobody, not only losing social recognition but being bullied and despised in the community. He loses his right as a male heir and is deprived of his manhood in Canada, where he is seen as a racially other. Eng argues: “In our contemporary context, we cannot think of race as a fixed or singular essence; instead, we must view it as a constitutive formation in which multiple social contradictions converge to organize a socially dominant view of Asian American male identities” (18-9). Indeed, Jinsaburo has undergone disintegration and is destroyed structurally. Moreover, he is disfigured as his nose is broken by a member of Morii’s gang as part of the debt he is made to pay. I argue that the injury signifies the destruction of his manhood and that the gangster does it specifically to humiliate him, breaking his manhood and making this visible on his face.

When Yoshiko is about to kill him, she sees him for what he is: “*He was her husband, a man caught in the vortex of pride and failure, separated from family by an ocean, self-pity, and self-deception*” (*Kuroshio* 253). In “Chinese, Japanese and Global Masculine Identities”, Kam Louie observes that: “For Chinese and Japanese men, the experience of living as a man in the West can be so negative that it can be characterised as ‘racial castration’” (2). Forced into a powerless and marginalised position in Western society, Asian masculinity goes through extreme trials. In the novel, having neither the proficiency in English nor the professional skills which were in demand in North America, the male *issei* have to take on menial jobs that they despised. For example, to pay back his debt to Morii, Jinsaburo works at various jobs such as house cleaning and cooking for pioneers at the frontier. In fact he hates what he does so much that he becomes a drunkard. He is not the only character in the novel to have this fate. Watada describes the Japanese overseas students in Canada:

Many Japanese students in fact had come to this alien land to evade possible government persecution or prosecution. Unfortunately in pursuit of an education, they quickly ran out of money, becoming idle and destitute. In desperation, they gave up their lofty goals and took jobs as servants, waiters, or cleaners, embarrassing not only themselves but the Japanese government as well. To the local Consulate officials, these once honourable *shosei* became known as *dekasegi mono*, menial labourers. (*Kuroshio* 30)

The harsh reality created a huge rift between the Japanese overseas students' ego and reality. Many of them resorted to gambling and drinking to pass the time. The Western press criticised early Asian immigrants for intemperance and for visiting prostitutes, without taking into consideration the racial politics of that time which meant that the immigrants worked extremely hard but could never make it in Canadian society. Watada's novel does not try to cover this history up or embellish it. Rather, the novel draws on factual material and the stories of real people in order to bring this episode of Japanese Canadian history into clearer view, and explore its implications.

The Oyabun Morii, on the other hand, seems to be the only winner, enjoying fame, power and wealth: "In effect, Morii was well on his way to becoming the most powerful man in the Japanese community, if not the province" (*Kuroshio* 170). Watada depicts how Buddhism influences Morii and how he can associate Buddhism with gangsterism:

Morii especially saw the rich and the greedy as the worst in shirking responsibility for the welfare of their fellow Japanese in Canada. *The Buddha Dharma tells us desire causes suffering*. He saw it as his duty to exploit their weaknesses, whether it be money, women or whatever, for the good of the people. In return, he expected loyalty from those he benefited, achieved one way or another. (79)

As a self-appointed protector of the Japanese in Canada, Morii empowers himself to be like a Buddha who judges and punishes. However, as a mortal, he exercises his power, limitless as it seems, to his own worldly benefit, such as extracting money from his clients who have turned to him for help. To some extent, Morii is like the fox spirit, plotting to control people by using their lust and desires.

In 1944 American anthropologist Ruth Benedict was commissioned by the American government to conduct research on Japanese culture and people in order to get answers to questions like whether they should abolish the monarchy system in Japan as part of their management of the country, which was about to be defeated in the Second World War. The title of her monograph, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, deploys a pair of contradictory symbols that represent Japanese culture:

All these contradictions, however, are the warp and woof of books on Japan. They are true. Both the sword and the chrysanthemum are a part of the

picture. The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways. They are terribly concerned about what people will think of their behaviour, and they are also overcome by guilt when other people know nothing of their misstep. Their soldiers are disciplined to the hilt but are also insubordinate. (Benedict 2)

Through her research and observation, Benedict learned to comprehend the mechanism of the apparent contradictions that exist in Japanese culture:

Certainly I found that once I had seen where my occidental assumptions did not fit into their view of life and had got some idea of the categories and symbols they used, many contradictions Westerners are accustomed to see in Japanese behaviour were no longer contradictions. I began to see how it was that the Japanese themselves saw certain violent swings of behaviour as integral parts of a system consistent within itself. (13)

This anthropological approach is an example of writing from “outside in”. Without intending to criticise anthropological study, I argue that putting a society under the microscope and seeking explanations for contradictions and apparent inconsistency is in itself a subjugating process. In a way, Benedict’s project was an intellectual colonisation, as it requires another culture to “make sense” and be translated into Western logic and language.⁵⁰ However, by not trying to justify the contradictions in his characters, Watada creates a “natural environment” for the re-enactment of history in his literary laboratory. In Watada’s novel the *issei* are protagonists who act in their own right rather than objects that need to be explained and accounted for. Presenting the *issei* as full Canadian citizens, Watada rescues a gut history which would be buried and forgotten otherwise.

However, this non-explanatory approach may be one of the reasons that this novel does not attract much critical attention. It seems that the novel was primarily written for Japanese Canadians: Watada explains in the interview with Foo that he wrote the novel so that later generations could know and understand their past. Meanwhile, the novel is not very accessible to readers from outside the minority

⁵⁰ For commentary on problems with Benedict’s methods, see Sonia Ryang’s “Chrysanthemum’s Strange Life: Ruth Benedict in Postwar Japan”.

community: there is a glossary provided at the end of the book, but many of the untranslated Japanese words and expressions are not listed there. During my interview with him, Watada explains: “the reason I did that was because I believe there is a Japanese Canadian lexicon, syntax or unique words that have been invented by Japanese Canadians. So, to preserve that, I use those terms in there. In Japan, people never heard of them or they would say: ‘man, that’s old fashioned. Don’t use those’” (Personal Interview). Watada’s novel therefore takes on a historical value by conserving the special linguistic features of the community at an earlier time. In addition, by not facilitating understanding, Watada expresses resistance to the arrogant attitude of monolingual English readers, who have got used to having everything translated and processed so that all can be readily understood, without them having to put in any effort to research unfamiliar concepts or learn new words. For example, when the police arrest Morii as a suspect for the murder of Jinsaburo, they say: “You’re under arrest, Morry, for the murder of Gin Miyamoto” (*Kuroshio* 109). Morii in Japanese pronunciation sounds like “molee”, but is mispronounced according to English phonetic practice as Morry. Moreover, Jinsaburo is shortened and then mispronounced to Gin. In the epilogue, the name of Jinsaburo appears in the newspaper as Jin Miyamoto. Such a shortened form denies recognition of the deceased and reveals a neglectful attitude towards ethnic minorities. The generally dismissive attitude of mainstream society reduces any ethnic minority individual to a faceless member of a designated category.

Watada sheds light on the social mechanism in early Japanese Canadian society. His central character Morii draws power from the Japanese social concept of *giri* or obligation.⁵¹ In the novel, Morii emphasizes *giri* every time he offers help or protection to his fellow people:

⁵¹In *Understanding Japanese Society* (1987), Joy Hendry explains that “*Giri* may be loosely translated as ‘duty’ and it refers to the various expectations which exist between particular sets of relations...An important characteristic of this type of duty, however, is that the person to whom it is owed has no right to demand that it be fulfilled. A failure to fulfil such a duty would incur great loss of face, and this is usually sufficient incentive, but it would involve equal loss of face were the potential recipient to point this out” (194).

“Well, we’ve set up an obligation here, haven’t we?” the *oyabun* said, almost under his breath. [...] Yoshiko shuddered and wondered how and if she would ever be free of such an obligation—of such *giri*. (*Kuroshio* 9-10)

A *giri*, in the context here, is somewhat like a contract that binds the bearer to repay a debt. For Morii, setting up *giri* and holding people in his debt is more than just an effective way of collecting material benefits from his debtors, as he explains in his answer to his right hand man’s question:

“So did you get money or what?”
 “I told you no”, he replied with irritation in his voice. “I didn’t want any money”.
 “No?”
 “No”.
 “Then why bother?”
 “I got something better than money”.
 “What’s that?”
 “Obligation”. (*Kuroshio* 36)

Giri in Japanese culture denotes a moral obligation on the part of the person who receives a favour to both duly return the favour and remain thankful and obligated to the benefactor. Morii employs this cultural concept for material gain and also to increase his influence and power: “create an obligation and all would fall into place” (*Kuroshio* 171). However, rather than leaving the debtor to repay on their own terms, Morii dictates what is due to him: “You are obligated...to me. Consider how to fulfil that obligation. [...] You will sign over this house to me as a token of your gratitude” (219). However, Hendry explains that with *giri*, “such a relationship is supposed to be based on feelings of affection, and the value of the relationship itself is supposedly greater than any of the actual duties by which it is marked” (194) Clearly, Morii only makes use of the element of duty and disregards the affection that composes a large part of the Japanese *giri* system. By deploying *giri* Morii makes himself a god that can take sacrifice from people who gives “willingly”, with power he draws from deciding on who can enter Canada and taking control of community security and economic resources. Morii’s expansion of power, however, derives from the powerlessness of his fellow Japanese Canadians. Without any support or protection from the Canadian government, the Japanese immigrants are left to their own devices.

However, Morii's self-deceiving righteousness does not fool his fellow Japanese for long, as they, now in Canada, begin to see the underhand manoeuvre behind the pretext of *giri*. Yoshiko realises: "Everyone owes that bastard something. The oyabun, with his smooth tongue offering favours in his generous way and then cutting down the spirit like the sword master that he is. Like a devil giving with one hand and taking with the other" (*Kuroshio* 256). A Faustian devil masquerading as a protecting Buddha, Morii reconciles his own greediness with his belief in righteousness by deploying the feudal Japanese *giri* system and turning it into a kind of usury.

In the book, Yoshiko and Morii come to the same conclusion: "Never talk about your past, where you come from. Only the present is important. The past is a curse" (*Kuroshio* 38). The *issei* characters, experiencing a huge rift in their inner world, cannot reconcile past belief, memory and knowledge with their present reality. Thus for them, the past is indeed a curse that will trouble their subjectivities. Their acute sense of honour makes them refrain from complaining or telling the truth to their families back home. Therefore, without access to accurate information about life in Canada, more and more Japanese embark on a one-way trip and, upon arrival, find themselves shamefully powerless and forced to endure disgraceful living conditions. Past dreams, glories, and belief in dignity are thus buried, not to be mentioned again. In the novel, the curse of the past is made visible in the fox spirit, who swears revenge against people who are greedy, who dare to reach high. Yoshiko realises eventually that coming to the land where "Only *Gaijin* live" (*Gaijin* is the Japanese word for foreign people, literally translated as "other people"), she becomes foreign and ghostly too, alienated and marginalised. However, by owning up to this shameful, distressing part of Japanese Canadian history, Watada reconnects the past to the present, channelling resources and power to the community's here and now, since although some of the deeds of the *issei* are questionable, they are the survivors in a difficult time. And it is because of their suffering and forbearance that the Japanese *nisei*, *sansei*, and *yonsei* could move forward.

In conclusion, Watada's *Kuroshio: Blood of Foxes* re-enacts a nearly buried history of Japanese Canadian society which renders the first-generation Japanese immigrants active agents in a reconstructed historical time and space. Watada gives

speech to the silenced *issei* whose voices have been ignored both by the mainstream and the Japanese Canadian communities. During the interview with me, Watada explains that he did a great deal of research for this novel, such as reading self-published books, doing archive work with local newspapers and talking with the *issei*. Therefore a part of the community's history is preserved in this novel, which constitutes the special value of the book. As well as recording this history, Watada also offers ways of interpreting it as he sometimes interrupts the storyline with critical reflection or explanation of historical background. By inserting a fox spirit, Kuroshio and the hanged white girl as unsettling, transgressive elements in the historical narrative, Watada emphasizes that history can only ever be partly knowable since there remain elements of mystery.

3.2 “Aren’t We All at War?”—Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony*

On 15 October 2012 on the Southeast corner of the intersection of Pender and Gore streets, Project Bookmark Canada⁵² and Wayson Choy unveiled two plaques (one in English and one in Chinese), called “bookmarks”, to commemorate the Chinatown that Choy captured vividly in *The Jade Peony* (1995).⁵³ Although fictional, *The Jade Peony* recounts numerous historical facts and events, and includes many realistic details, giving the book a documentary quality. Readers are invited to touch the texture of Chinatown life during 1930s and 1940s when the Depression and the Second World War constituted the social backdrop.

Choy’s award-winning *The Jade Peony* was named, together with Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, as one of the top hundred most important books in Canadian history by the *Literary Review of Canada* in 2006. Unlike *Obasan*, however, *The Jade Peony* did not attract extensive critical attention, though it is widely agreed that

⁵² Project Bookmark Canada is a national charity that marks (by placing a ceramic plaque, or “bookmark”) the physical places where literary scenarios are set.

⁵³ The author, Chinese Canadian fictionist Wayson Choy, second generation, was born in Vancouver in 1939. He currently teaches at Humber College in Toronto. According to his autobiography *Paper Shadows*, Choy was born and raised in Chinatown in Vancouver before the family moved to Ontario where they ran a fish and chip restaurant.

the novel laid the foundation stone of Chinese Canadian literature. In the “acknowledgements” to his book, Choy mentions the Toronto Arts Council for the award of a writer’s grant.⁵⁴ He benefited, therefore, from the confluence of two government policies which held sway in the 1990s: multiculturalism, and generous state support for the arts.

The Jade Peony is composed of three independent yet interrelated stories. It is therefore sometimes described as a novel, sometimes as a short-story cycle, and sometimes as a novella cycle. Rocío G. Davis reads *The Jade Peony* alongside other Canadian examples of the short-story cycle. In her introduction to *Tricks with a Glass: Writing Ethnicity in Canada*, Davis argues that: “a short-story cycle [...] is particularly suited to reflecting the fragmentation of postcolonial and immigrant lives, serving as a metonym for the liminality and multiplicity of lives and for the halting, episodic progress towards self-identification” (xviii). Indeed, short-story cycles seem to be especially appropriate for the presentation of a shared life experience, such as that existing within ghettoised ethnic minority communities. Characters located in the same physical space may express different sentiments about, and perspectives on, a shared living experience. More importantly, this form actually foregrounds individual difference and makes each of the main characters distinct from the group. Like members of a choir, each takes their turn to step forward for a solo and then steps back to join the rest for an ensemble piece. Meanwhile, the overlapping narratives emphasise important issues through repetition and gradual reinforcement. For example, in *The Jade Peony*, each child talks about why they call their father’s wife Stepmother, even when she is the biological mother of two of them. Each time more information is revealed and, as readers get to understand the very strange arrangement, they also start to realise the cultural, historical and social distinctiveness of Chinatown in Vancouver in the 1930s.

In the sequel, *All that Matters* (2004), Choy explains that the Chen family came to Vancouver, known as Gold Mountain or Salt Water City among the Chinese, in 1926 because of famine and civil wars in China. China, formerly a prosperous land with a long history and developed civilisation, had quickly deteriorated in the

⁵⁴ *The Jade Peony* shared Ontario’s 1996 Trillium Prize with Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace*. It also won the 1995 City of Vancouver Book Award.

latter half of the nineteenth century as it went through various wars with Western imperialist countries, such as the Opium Wars with Britain (1839-1842 and 1856-1860). As a result, the Qing government was forced to agree to a series of unequal treaties, such as opening trading ports, agreeing on colonisation in its various regions and making a large number of compensation payments. The south of China suffered severely with droughts, famine and the Boxer Rebellion.⁵⁵ Meanwhile in Canada, British Columbia agreed to join the Confederation in 1871 provided that the Dominion government build a railway linking BC with eastern Canada within ten years. Sir John A. Macdonald, the first prime minister, insisted on employing Chinese to build the railway, saying: “If you wish to have the railway finished within any reasonable time, there must be no such step against Chinese labour. At present, it is simply a question of alternative—either you must have this labour or you cannot have the railway” (qtd. in “1881 Railway Construction” n.p.). In 1880, a total of 5,000 indentured labourers were recruited from the southern part of Canton province in China. The early immigrants took with them to Canada not only dietary habits and language, but also a set of ideologies. Alena Chercover observes: “Disenfranchised, ostracized, and exploited by the host nation, early Chinese settlers clustered in the less desirable periphery of Vancouver. This space then became known as ‘Chinatown’” (6). Now Chinatown is adjacent to the city centre and has become one of Vancouver’s most distinctive places of interest.

In terms of his choice of a tripartite narrative structure for *The Jade Peony*, Choy explained during his interview with Rocío G. Davis that his strategy was to “have three visions of the same childhood time” (“Interweaving Stories” 273). Choy goes on to explain: “The idea of the hologram works here, where you have the three main characters interacting, and in the middle of their interaction you create a fourth character which is Chinatown itself” (273). The only sister, Jook-Liang (abbreviated to Liang), starts her story aged five and ends when she is turning nine years old, spanning the period from 1933 to 1937. The story of Jung-Sum (Jung), the second

⁵⁵ The Boxer Rebellion (also Boxer Uprising and Yihequan Movement), which happened between 1899 and 1901, was an uprising in China against foreign invasion and western influence.

brother, starts from when he is four years old, covering his childhood and adolescence, probably from 1931 to 1940. His stories are more sporadic and are not in chronological order. His part ends with him reaching 13 when the neighbour's son Frank Yuen, with whom he is secretly in love, is "going to Seattle to sign up with the U.S. Marines" (*Jade* 134). Sek-Lung (Sekky)'s narration starts from when he is six years old, in 1939, and ends in 1941 with the Pearl Harbor bombing.

In her article "Canadian Fiction Meets History and Historiography", Marie Vautier argues: "It is possible, however, that, in going beyond the need to set up definitive boundaries between fiction, history and myth, novels such as *The Jade Peony* are in fact offering their readers a new cognitive tool: an acceptance of the indeterminacy of the past, transmitted through the conflation of genres in (his)stories of the past" (29). Indeed, the conflation of genres bends and splits the imagined linear and singular temporality, and therefore blurs the distinction between the past and the present as well as between myth and reality. Moreover, cultural elements contained in the stories overflow from the disjunctive timelines and cultural spaces, and converge in the present location, making Chinatown a porous space for cultural interactions. For example, *The Jade Peony* alludes to Chinese fantastic stories such as *Journey to the West* (Liang imagines Wong Suk to be the Monkey King), the folklore stories about the fox spirit (Jung thinks Poh-Poh is the fox spirit in disguise) and Western pop culture in the 1930s, such as Tarzan, Shirley Temple, and the famous boxer Joe Louis who inspires Jung. Weaving mythological and popular cultural references into his narrative, Choy offers an alternative perspective on the history of 1930s Canada.

In the novel, *Meiying*, the youngest brother Sekky's babysitter is asked why she knows so much about the war, to which Meiying answers: "Aren't we all at war?" (*Jade* 261). Indeed, Choy suggests that though no fighting took place on Canadian territory during the Second World War, people in Chinatown during the period were at war on different fronts, as patriarchal oppression, racial discrimination, and cultural conflict turned people against each other. In order to survive, the Chinatown residents, represented in the book by the Chen family, constantly form and reform alliances, permanent or temporary, against enemies. At the same time, "enemy" is itself a floating category with shifting boundaries. This section will examine the three

siblings' narratives and analyse the underlying tension and conflicts contained in seemingly peaceful early twentieth-century Canada. I will pay special attention to the distinctive cultural heritages preserved in the Chinatown stories, which I argue, challenge and enrich Canada's national history.

I have chosen to focus my reading on the idea of being at war, and especially on the forming of alliances, because the historical period presented in Choy's story seems to have been a time when the lines between enemy and ally were very distinct, and when social, political and racial conflicts were especially intense. These conflicts were often understood in more simplified, black and white terms than was the case in later decades. For example, in the story, Liang describes different reactions from the audience towards the newsreel that is shown after movies:

Wong Suk and I stayed late to catch the newsreel. China was at war, fighting the Japanese invaders. Wong Suk liked to start the clapping whenever Chiang Kai-shek appeared on the screen. Then we would all hiss the enemy if they showed up, especially if General Tojo marched into view, or if we saw the western-dressed Japanese going in and out of the White House, chattering away with the Americans. If enough Chinatown people were there, the hissing was as loud as the clapping. Grown-up white people clapped every time they saw President Roosevelt, Chinatown people booed every time they saw the Japanese, and children cheered every time Mighty Mouse showed up. I always looked forward to the Petunia Pig cartoons and *Only the Shadow Knows* mystery serial. (*Jade* 45)

With the war as the backdrop of their daily life, the tensions between people of different races and nationalities are manifested directly and openly. It is interesting to note that people who share the same physical space, such as the cinema hall, identify different allies from the screen, but do not seek connection with those with whom they share the actual place and time. Chiang Kai-shek, the then president of China, who spoke Cantonese, was clearly supported by the first-generation labourers. And the Chinese immigrants do not try to hide their anti-Japanese feelings. White Canadians also express their affinity with America by clapping at the appearance of President Roosevelt. The deciding factor in the different countries' choice of allies is common interest rather than justice. For instance, it was after Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941 that the US declared war on Japan. In the stories, the father is

excited to hear the news on the radio: “‘The tide has turned’, Father said. ‘America is going to be China’s ally!’” (*Jade* 264). In the logic of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”, China did become America’s ally, but they became enemies again during the Cold War that followed. In comparison, the children’s world seems more innocent. Kids, regardless of their background, like cartoons. Liang, the Chinatown girl, learns to appreciate American-made cartoons in English as she grows up in Canada.⁵⁶ The boundaries between people begin to be transcended with the second generation. In the novel, we see the children push against many kinds of boundaries and Chinatown starts an internal transformation from a ghettoised space to an open community.

In addition, I argue that, though the novel is written from the perspective of children, it is hardly a children’s book. In *The Presence of the Past: Memory, Heritage, and Childhood in Postwar Britain*, Valerie Krips explains how books about children reflect an adult world: “children are imagined and imaged by adults, and what is thereby revealed is a profoundly important insight into the culture’s (literal) self-understanding” (6). Apart from the fact that the novel talks about many complicated issues, such as the Depression, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923, the Second World War, and suicide, I argue that the children’s world is in fact an analogy of the adults’ reality. People of Chinese ancestry were not recognised as citizens in Canada until 1947 when the Canadian government repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act and granted them the right to vote in federal elections. Choy’s novel recaptures a Chinatown, which, in the view of white Canadian society, led a conspicuously vexatious and unruly existence. With their rights unrecognised and their existence often ignored, Chinese Canadians felt deeply humiliated because they were treated as lesser beings in Canadian society. Chinatown residents called July 1, 1923, the day when the Chinese Exclusion Act came into effect, “Humiliation Day”. The irony of this name is clear: July 1 was also Dominion Day (now “Canada Day”) and marks the anniversary of Confederation. In her article “The Healing Effects of

⁵⁶ Cartoons can also be politically charged, and are not always innocent. Among those that Choy’s Liang enjoys, *Petunia Pig* is relatively uncontroversial, but *Mighty Mouse*, an American superhero, was shown in wartime films fighting enemies that clearly represent the Nazis. Cartoons can also be racist, as in the case of the *Fu Manchu* comic strips, one of the spin-offs from Sax Rohmer’s original novels.

Childhood Narrative in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*" Christine Lorre argues: "The narration allows the intellectualisation of the conclusion, and occasionally the pain, of childhood experience, which reflects, sometimes faithfully, sometimes in a distorted way, the confusion and pain of the adult world that surrounds it" (72). In the book, the children are at times frustrated with the adults who either ignore them or antagonise them by calling them useless or brainless, which, I argue, is in fact a projection of the frustration of the adult community.

For example, in the first Part, Liang observes the embarrassing situation that many Chinese adults find themselves in:

In the city dump on False Creek Flats, living in makeshift huts, thirty-two Old China bachelor-men tried to shelter themselves; dozens more were dying of neglect in the over-crowded rooms of Pender Street. There were no Depression jobs for such men. They had been deserted by the railroad companies and betrayed by the many labour contractors who had gone back to China, wealthy and forgetful. There was a local Vancouver by-law against begging for food, a federal law against stealing food, but no law in any court against starving to death for lack of food. The few churches that served the Chinatown area were running out of funds. Soup kitchens could no longer safely manage the numbers lining up for nourishment, fighting each other. China men [sic] were shoved aside, threatened, forgotten. (*Jade* 10)

This explains the reason behind the Chinatown residents' much criticised act of sticking closely together since they had to rely entirely upon the community's inner resources to survive in difficult times, such as during the Great Depression. In "Does Shirley Temple Eat Chicken Feet?", Michelle Hartley argues: "The deprivation of rights and freedoms that the Chinese faced resulted in a close-knit, insular community for the remaining residents, a community that both took care of its own and closely watched its boundaries" (64). What isolated Chinatown was a double layer of barriers constructed upon its physical borders—a layer of self-isolation from within, intending to screen off the judgemental white gaze, and a layer of forced exclusion from the mainstream society that actively ignored its existence.

The stories depict a society organised by Confucian beliefs and located in Vancouver's Chinatown.⁵⁷ At that time, this district was mainly inhabited by first

⁵⁷ Confucianism greatly influenced traditional Chinese culture. It has effectively supported a patriarchal system. In fact, during Confucius' own time, about 2,500 years ago, his teachings

generation immigrants, and was isolated by a distinctive culture and social organisation that differed from Canadian norms. For example, as the family at the centre of Choy's novel is not very affluent and both the parents need to work hard to support the relatively large family (of seven members), readers may wonder why they still seek to adopt a son and also why the character known as Stepmother sees it as an obligation to give birth to more children. It is, in fact, a Confucian decree that a proper family should increase its numbers to ensure and honour the ancestral lineage. Another example is the burial ceremony and the custom of bringing the bones back to where the person was born. In the novel, traces of Confucian idealism pervade Choy's depiction of the society in Chinatown. However, because the narrators are second-generation CBC children, cultural explanations of this kind are beyond their comprehension and knowledge.

The family that the stories revolve around is a typical Chinese family in Chinatown but abnormal by Canadian standards. The widowed father goes to Canada with his first son and his grandmother, as paper relatives to a man whom the children would later call Third Uncle. The Uncle also arranges for a wife procured from China to come to join the family. This second wife gives birth to a daughter, Jook-Liang. Then the family adopt a recently orphaned boy, Jung-Sun. Meanwhile the second wife, whom all the children, including the two biological ones, call Stepmother, gives birth to another boy, Sek-Lung. She is only relieved of the duty of reproduction with a miscarriage.

In the first story, Liang tells of her special friendship with a Chinatown old timer who is of an age to be her grandfather. This special friendship is defined in Chinese as “忘年交”—literally, a relationship that forgets about ages, which in Chinese culture often denotes a pure and enviable friendship. At the end of the story this man takes leave of Liang to go back to China on a mission to transport the bones

were not widely accepted. However, in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE—220 CE), the first emperor declared China a Confucian state and other ideologies were banned because the government saw the potential of Confucianism for maintaining order, thus facilitating its sovereignty. Since then, Confucianism has become the state-endorsed ideology and has filtered into Chinese and many other Asian countries' cultures.

of deceased Chinese and bury them there. The second story is narrated by Jung, the second brother, who is adopted after a family tragedy in which both of his parents die. Jung soon integrates into his adoptive family and becomes robust and tough as he takes to boxing in a local club. Part Three, which takes up half the length of the book, is told from the perspective of Sekky, the youngest child of the family. This part is developed most fully in terms of both the central persona and the uncoiling of the plotline. The story of the first brother Kiam-Kim (Kiam for short) and how the family—including Father, and Poh-Poh (grandmother in Cantonese) came to Canada—is elaborated in *All that Matters*.

Confucianism, by enforcing the patriarchal system, has oppressed women gravely. Confucius (551–479 BC) said 女子无才便是德 (the lack of talents in women is their virtue, my translation). Chercover argues:

Gender constrictions, like the bounds of ethnicity and class, related to cultural and institutional sexism both within the Chinese diaspora and within the sociopolitical framework of the host nation. Both structures erect barriers that deny Chinese women access to knowledge, power, wealth, public space, and even physical wellness. (8)

In the novel, Poh-Poh, the grandmother, with her age and superiority in cultural capital (language ability and cultural know-how), is dominant within the family. As Sekky observes: “Because of her age, the wiry ancient lady was the one person Father would never permit any of us to defy” (*Jade* 147). But somehow she is de-sexed, as Father calls her the Old One, emphasising her age and downplaying the fact that she is female. Liang, because she carries the family name, comes second within the women’s hierarchy. Stepmother, who remains nameless and seldom speaks in the novel, is put at the bottom of the family order.

Liang observes her mother, in a rather detached tone:

Stepmother was a young woman when she came to Canada, barely twenty and a dozen years younger than Father. She came with no education, with a village dialect as poor as she was. Girls were often left to fend for themselves in the streets, so she was lucky to have any family interested in her fate. Though my face was round like father’s, I had her eyes and delicate mouth, her high forehead but not her high cheekbones. (*Jade* 5)

As Liang is only a child, her knowledge and understanding of the adult world is influenced by other adults' teachings. Here she judges her mother inferior because of her lack of education and poor command of language. And it seems Liang thinks that "her family" is kind enough to take the mother in as "girls are often left to fend for themselves in the streets" (5). Liang feels superior to her mother, as she belongs with the family more than Stepmother does, and this belonging is made visible through her resemblance to her father. Though she also takes after her mother, she obviously does not feel much related to her. Liang explains: "She was brought over to help take care of Poh-Poh and to keep father appropriate wifely company; but soon the young woman became more a wife than a concubine to Father, more a stepdaughter than a house servant to Grandmother" (6). The fact that Stepmother is brought over to Canada initially as a concubine and a house servant to the family ensures that she remains inferior and insignificant, though the family is generous enough to "promote" her to be Stepmother to the children.

Poh-Poh, having internalised patriarchal beliefs, becomes a faithful defender of the system, despite having herself been oppressed by its injustice. She actively subordinates the other female members. Therefore, in the book, the women's army—Stepmother, Poh-Poh and Liang—are turned against each other. Liang observes shrewdly:

Poh-Poh, being one of the few elder women left in Vancouver, took pleasure in her status and became the arbitrator of the old ways. Poh-Poh insisted we simplify our kinship terms in Canada, so my mother became "stepmother". That is what the two boys always called her, for Kiam was the First Son of Father's First Wife who had died mysteriously in China; and Jung, the Second Son, had been adopted into our family. What the sons called my mother, my mother became. The name "Stepmother" kept things simple, orderly, as Poh-Poh had determined. Father did not protest. Nor did the slim, pretty woman that was my mother seem to protest, though she must have cast a glance at the Old One and decided to bide her time. That was the order of things in China. (6)

The patriarchal oppression of Stepmother is exposed here as she is effectively alienated in the context of the family. With the pretext of "simplifying" things in Canada, Stepmother is deprived of her natural title of mother to her two biological

offspring. However, as Liang accurately points out, the simplification is made on account of the two older boys. In fact, the usage of the term “stepmother” is to remind Stepmother of her inferior position. Stepmother does not articulate any protest against the Old One, her mother-in-law because, at present, she sees no hope of changing things, but that she thinks her opportunity will come when the Old One dies.

At the same time, there seem to be ongoing wars between Poh-Poh and Liang, as Poh-Poh endeavours to make her grand-daughter recognise and accept her own inferiority: “‘Jook-Liang, if you want a place in this world’, Grandmother’s voice had that exasperating let-me-remind-you tone, ‘do not be born a girl-child’” (27). Liang observes: “Whenever she was alone with me, the Old One snapped at what she saw as my lack of humility” (30). By purposely antagonising her grand-daughter, Poh-Poh means to keep Liang realistic and tough, in preparation for the hard reality for girls in the world. Therefore Poh-Poh repeats her admonishment, determined to make an impression on Liang:

“Mo yung girl!” She said, as if I would never learn a thing, however much I wanted to be taught. “Too much spoil!” [...]
 “Too fussy”, Poh-Poh said, her back to me. “Useless!” (33)

Literally, “Mo yung” means “no use”. This accusation of being useless, paradoxically, seems to be a mixture of reproach and a blessing that Poh-Poh gives to her grand-daughter. For example, Poh-Poh refuses to teach Liang any of her skills: “But all her womanly skills she would keep away from me, keep to herself until she died: ‘Job too good for *mo yung* girl!’”(32). Exploited in Old China as a slave girl, Poh-Poh acquires her domestic abilities not for self-fulfilment but to be used cruelly by others. Although she expresses her concern and love in a rough manner, her calling Liang “mo yung”, to some extent, is a disguised blessing, suggesting Liang will not be used as her grandmother has been.

However, as a result of her education in Canada, Liang will not submit without putting up a fight:

“I am not *mo yung*. Poh-Poh”, I protested, “even though I am a girl!”
 “Aiiiyahhh—a girl!” Grandmother shook her head. “Too late then!” [...]

My chin lifted, that stubborn voice of mine charged ahead: “Father says after the war is over, things will change for everybody, even girls”. (33)

The father, an activist reporter for a communal newspaper *China Times*, is able to foresee changes in notions of social justice that are likely to happen after the war in Canada. However, the old timer Poh-Poh believes things won’t change in Chinatown, since they are Chinese and will remain Chinese:

“There’s no war in Canada”, I said. “This is Canada”.
 Poh-Poh sighed deeply, gave me a condescending look.
 “You not Canada, Liang”, she said, majestically, “you China. Always war in China.” (34)

Emphasising that Liang is China, Poh-Poh believes in the existence of a tie that will bind a Chinese to her country under any circumstances. China has been engaged in a series of wars, and therefore all of the Chinese, even the Canadian-born Liang, must be associated with the outcome of the war.

Frustrated about being undervalued and unrecognised, Liang seeks affirmation and affection from outside the family. Her relationship with Wong Suk, who comes to Canada as an indentured CPR worker, is empowering to both of them. They form an alliance: “I was happy. I knew our adopted relationship was a true one: Wong Suk would otherwise have been only one of the many discarded bachelor-men of Chinatown—and I, barely tolerated by Poh-Poh, would merely be a useless girl-child” (36). Strengthened by this friendship, Liang is able to defy Poh-Poh and gain resources outside the family, which is determined to restrain the development of her subjectivity. Liang’s part of the narrative ends with her waiting for Wong Suk to come to see her perform as Shirley Temple, the famous Depression child star. Being reminded by Poh-Poh that all her effort is vain and wasteful, she answered: “‘Well,’ I said, with my best sense of dignity, mustering up the Toisanese words, ‘I’m only play-acting for Wong Suk.’ This was a lie: I also play-acted for myself, imagining a world where I belonged, dressed perfectly, behaved beyond reproach, and was loved, always loved, and was not, no, not at all, *mo yung*” (38). In “The Politics of Recognition”, Charles Taylor develops the theory of sociologist George Herbert Mead on “significant others” (people who matter to self-identity, as opposed to

“generalised others”, indicating those who do not): “We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us” (Taylor 32-3). Indeed, we see Liang, struggling against Poh-Poh, as her “self” is in danger of being damaged or repressed. However, Christine Lorre sees a healing effect in Liang’s narration of her friendship with Wong: “through telling the story of her friendship with Wong, Liang makes peace with her grandmother. She comes to a better understanding, as an adult, of what her grandmother’s history had been and why she behaved as she did” (74). I also note that Liang’s narration mixes adult and child perspectives, unlike the other two parts: Jung maintains an adolescent tone, while Sekky’s childish narrative is relatively consistent. This may result from the usual opinion that girls mature more quickly than boys, being more apt and shrewd in observing and comprehending.

Liang’s external resources for support and sustenance are from Wong Suk who supplies affirmation, and affection and Shirley Temple, with whom Liang imagines developing a friendship: “It was a fact that we were both nearly nine years old” (*Jade* 46). However, Liang is not the only child in the family to identify herself with a Western role model. She imagines her grandmother’s disappointment at witnessing the children’s fantasies: “*This useless only-granddaughter wants to be Shir-lee Tem-polah; the useless Second Grandson wants to be cow-boy-lah. The First Grandson wants to be Charlie Chan. All stupid foolish!*” (37). The CBC children start to internalise social and cultural influences from their environment, which is perfectly normal, as according to Mead’s theory of the social self, the self has two phases: “Me” and “I”.⁵⁸ In his *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviourist*, Mead explains the formation of the “self” as a result of adjusting to one’s social background:

The “me” and the “I” lie in the process of thinking and they indicate the give-and-take which characterizes it. [...] We are individuals born into a certain nationality, located at a certain spot geographically, with such and such family relations, and such and such political relations. [...] The self is not

⁵⁸ Mead defines: “The ‘I’ is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others: the ‘me’ is the organised set of attitudes of others which the one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized ‘me’, and then one reacts toward that as an ‘I’” (175).

something that exists first and then enters into relationship with others, but it is, so to speak, an eddy in the social current and so still a part of the current. It is a process in which the individual is continually adjusting himself in advance to the situation to which he belongs, and reacting back on it. (182)

However, for the Chinatown children, the forming of a self is more complicated as what they self-identify with does not reflect what they are, or at least look like:

I looked again into the hall mirror, seeking Shirley Temple with her dimpled smile and perfect white-skin features. Bluntly reflected back at me was a broad sallow moon with slit dark eyes, topped by a helmet of black hair. I looked down. Jutting out from a too-large taffeta dress were two spindly legs matched by a pair of bony arms. Something cold clutched at my stomach, made me swallow. (*Jade* 41)

Growing up in a country whose mainstream culture is different from their family culture, the Chinatown children, especially those local-born, are “at war” within themselves, trying to come to terms with their self-image and identity. This is not always easy as the prevalent values and aesthetics do not recognise their “kind”, since they are not reflected positively in mainstream images. Taylor explains: “Equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it. [...] The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized” (36). Liang describes her own image in the mirror as featuring a “sallow moon” face and “slit dark eyes”, using the Western terminology usually applied to describe Asian facial features at that time. She not only uses the terms, but also internalises the values attached to them: that they meant “ugly”, as she realises with dismay.

In the second part of the novel, Jung relates several stories that influence the forming of his self, such as believing in ghosts, luck, and physical strength. In this section, I will concentrate on his sexual awakening and coming to terms with his homosexuality. According to Jung, the male part of the family is also divided as Father and First Son Kiam are allies who believe in the new ways while Jung and Sekky are closer to the women’s camp. June observes:

Ever since Kiam had come to Canada, Third Uncle always told him that, as First Son, he had to behave more like a man than a boy, Father agreed, and together, he and Third Uncle taught Kiam as much as possible how to behave responsibly. Of course, he was expected to stay away from the influence of the women. Kiam belonged more and more to Father, to Third Uncle, to the men of Chinatown who knew the worth of a well-trained and well-mannered First Son [...] Kiam made Father proud. (*Jade* 107-8)

Kiam, as First Son, the future head of the family, is supposed to rule over the family, including the older women. Therefore in order to have absolute power and authority, he is taught to stay away from the influence of women. Meanwhile, there is another factor that divides the male camp, as Sekky observes: “I knew if I had said, ‘Grandmama told me, *old way, best way*’, the family would laugh at me. Father and Kiam had been saying how we must all change, be modern, move forward, throw away the old” (185). Interestingly, the first generation immigrants seem, at this point in the narrative, more open and progressive than the CBCs. It may be because the CBCs grow up in Chinatown and the reality for them at an early age is entirely formed by those they become close to, their carers, such as Wong Suk, Poh-Poh and Stepmother, who represent traditional values.

Moreover, I argue that Jung’s alliance with Poh-Poh is fortified by the fact it is Poh-Poh who helps Jung to come to terms with his sexual orientation. Although she continually reproaches Liang, Poh-Poh’s attitude towards her adopted grandson is affirmative: “After eight years of living with her, since I was four, she never stopped appraising me with her faded eyes; her glance, still watchful, searching” (87). The reason for that seems to be that Poh-Poh thinks Jung is different, in a good way:

“Jung-Sum is different”, I overheard her say to Mrs. Lim one day when I was waiting for a chance to do my daily round of showdown boxing. [...]

“Of course”, Mrs. Lim responded, always blunt. “He has different blood. More handsome than your own two grandsons”.

“No, no, not looks”, Poh-Poh protested. “Inside unusual, not ordinary”.

“Very ordinary to me”, Mrs. Lim chimed back. “All Jung wants to do is to fight all the other boys. All boys the same!”

“Different –that’s all I say!”[...]

The Old One put down her embroidery and turned back to Mrs. Lim and started an old saying, “Sun and moon both round...”

“—yet”, Mrs. Lim finished the saying, “Sun and moon different”.

“I’m the sun”, I said, cheerfully, puffing away, breaking into their conversational dance. “I’m the champion!”

“Jung-Sum is the moon”, Poh-Poh said. [...]

“The moon?” Mrs. Lim blurted. “Impossible!”

Mrs. Lim knew the moon was the *yin* principle, the *female*. Mrs Lim studied me as I went through my paces, jabbing away at the air.

“Impossible!” she said.

The Old One slowly lifted her teacup and gently focused on me, her gaze full of knowing mystery. (87-8)

Jung is perplexed by Poh-Poh’s announcement that he is the moon, the *yin* sign for female, darkness (or shadow) and softness; instead of being the sun, the symbol for the *yang*, male, the light and the powerful, as he obviously takes to activities which build physical strength. Poh-Poh seems to be able to see the underlying nature of Jung, that he “is” *yin* though he manifests many *yang* features. The essentialist view contradicts the prevalent thinking which proposes that one’s conscious choice of actions, rather than some inner essence, defines the self. However, the traditional Chinese thinking actually creates a space for Jung to face his homosexuality, since Poh-Poh, the “standard-bearer” of the old ways, can appreciate his nature, thinking the transgression in his sexuality extraordinary rather than abnormal.

Later in his stories, Jung comes to realise that he has real affection towards another boy, Frank Yuen: “*Frank Yuen is the sun*, I remembered thinking. [...] Yes, I said to myself, [...], *I am the moon*” (*Jade* 132-3). As Jung is not a very expressive character, this development in sexuality is not fully articulated. Concurrently, Jung does not accept his sexuality completely, believing his sexual preference is due to gender transgression—that he is at some level female. Though this transgression is justified and allowed by the Chinese belief in predestined nature—to be born as *yin* or *yang*—Jung is perfectly aware that his sexuality should be kept to himself and away from the prying eyes of the Chinatown community. The assertion that Jung is *yin* by Poh-Poh, an authority on Chinese culture helps Jung to gradually accept his sexuality. Yet his desire continues to contradict the mind-set he has formed in the close-knit Chinatown community. And since Jung is not an outwardly expressive character, his inner turmoil is all the more acute.

The third part has the youngest, Sekky, as the protagonist and narrator. Davis conjures a very vivid metaphor: “[Sekky] lives in the no-man’s land whose

boundaries are two conflicting racial and cultural realities: Chinatown and Canada” (“Chinatown” 131). Being sickly with lung infections since birth, Sekky has not been able to go to English school or Chinese school until two years after the usual age for beginning. Staying home with Poh-Poh, Sekky develops a deep bond with his grandmother and the old Chinese ways. At the beginning of this story, Sekky complains about the family calling him—“*mo no*” (brainless in Cantonese)—simply because he cannot address a Chinatown adult correctly. Christopher Lee explains in his article “Engaging Chineseness”:

This shortcoming is significant because naming a relative simultaneously establishes the speaker’s position in relation to the person named. Thus to misname “third uncle” as “great uncle”, for example, not only represents a misidentification of that uncle, but, more importantly, of the self. Misrecognizing one’s place (as determined by age, status of parents and so on) constitutes a challenge to the hierarchical nature of family. (20)

Indeed, the Chineseness within Chinatown is an artificial construct that is made true by the reinforcement of each of its participants. Sekky’s seemingly trivial mistake is intolerable because he is in effect poking holes in the bubble created by the authority of the community, which may endanger the existing social order.

Sekky explains that the second-generation children who were born in Canada are considered as brainless and are mistrusted: “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” (*Jade* 152). Therefore, being brainless or *mo no* does not refer to a person’s intelligence but is closely associated with one’s ability to walk within social boundaries. Taking for granted the traditional ways and values, the elders do not realise that their own perceptions and views were acquired through life experience in Chinese society. They then think of the two generations who were born and raised in Canada as stupid, not knowing better. Moreover, it seems that calling the second-generation children *mo no* is a strategy that the elders use to instil a sense of inferiority in them, so that they will remain humble and respectful towards the old order. By taking advantage of the new generations’ lack of life experience and linguistic proficiency, the elders or the authorities in Canada construct purposefully a

false “reality”—that the local born children are “*mo no*”. They enforce this concept by constantly reprimanding and humiliating them with this disparaging term whenever they make any mistakes due to insufficient knowledge or lack of instruction. Sekky, as we see, mistakenly takes out his anger against Chineseness—which he is not “good” at being.

In Sekky’s little six-year-old heart, he feels it is unfair of the family to be so “focussed on the way I stumbled over calling my adopted Gim Sam Gons (Gold Mountain uncles) their proper titles” (145). It seems to him that Chinatown family life is to some extent more difficult to cope with than life in the English world. Being a less experienced Chinatown resident, Sekky is bewildered not only by the overwhelming addressing system in Chinese based on the addressee’s gender, age, status and kinship to the addresser, but also by the importance of addressing people correctly. However, addressing a person by his or her proper title is a very important part of Chinese social custom, since it maintains the order of patriarchal hierarchy, upon which basis Confucian society functions. As Sekky observes: “Every Chinese person, it seemed to me, had an enigmatic status, an order of power and respect, mysteriously attached to him or her” (147). Christopher Lee explains: “Misnaming is therefore an act that suggests a potentially rebellious refusal to submit to the community’s social standards. Wittingly or not, Sekky casts himself as a dissenting subject who needs to be disciplined and molded until he partakes (and consents) fully in the discourse of Chineseness” (20). This seemingly trivial mistake is intolerable because Sekky is in fact meddling with the existing order, which may potentially cause chaos to it.

Sekky also explains that the English-speaking second generation are potential “traitors”, that they may betray Chinatown people to the white society:

Mo nos went to English school and mixed with Demon outsiders, and even like *them*. Wanted to invite *them* home. Sometimes a *mo no* might say one careless word too may, and the Immigration Demons would pounce. 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, bang on the family door, demand a show of pile of documents with red embossed stamps. Then the Immigration Demons would separate family members and ask trick questions. Then certain “family” members would

disappear. Households would be broken up. Jobs would be lost. Jail and shame and suicides would follow. (*Jade* 152-3)

This situation turns the English-speaking Chinatown children into potential traitors to the Chinese community as children tend to misplace their trust and be careless with the disclosure of information. Chinatown parents purposely withhold some information from children. Children, therefore, are excluded from the centre of Chinatown life and sensitive secrets are kept away from them. Davis observes: “the secrets of the Chinatown inhabitants become another effective border that separates the insiders from the mainstream world on the outside, as well as generations within Chinatown from each other” (“Chinatown” 125). With the Chinese Exclusion Act and discriminatory head tax removed, immigrants of Chinese origin no longer needed to acquire fake identities to gain access to Canada. The concealed crimes of buying and selling identification papers are now seen as pardonable. Choy shows how discriminatory policies in Canada not only segregated Chinatown from the rest of Canada but also divided Chinese Canadian people within Chinatown.

Choy complicates the old and new paradigms. In his book, it is not simply that the new wins over the old or the old gives way to the modern. For him, both the old and the new are valued. In Sekky’s stories, he becomes Poh-Poh’s ally in preparation for her own death as they would go on scavenging trips in search of glittering objects in garbage bins. They conceal their trips from the other family members as they think scavenging brings shames on them. Poh-Poh makes wind chimes with the glittering objects, usually broken glass, as central pieces. After Poh-Poh’s death, Sekky attests that he can see Poh-Poh’s ghost in the household. Eventually, the father is persuaded by Third Uncle to *bai sen*—a pagan ritual ceremony to pay tribute to the dead of the family: “‘The fact is,’ Third Uncle said to Father, ‘you haven’t paid your respects properly to your dead mother. You must *bai sen*, you must *bow*. Pay your respects! All this political talk you talk, one world, one citizenship! You forget you Chinese!?!’” (*Jade* 188). The Confucian decree on *li* (etiquette or rites) dictates proper rituals for many ceremonies, including death, which is called *bai sen* in Cantonese. As Park and Chelsa explains, “Li also represents the possibility of immortality through family ritual, as one is remembered and honored with ritual ceremony after one’s death” (301). More importantly, the

ritual is not only ceremonial: people have to be sincere. As in the book, the father has to arrange a second *bai sen* for Poh-Poh. After the second *bai sen*, the family is no longer disturbed and also Sekky's lung infection is cured instantly. This part of the narrative mystifies Chinatown life since its superstition is proved to be not entirely baseless. It seems that the old does win over the new but I argue that Choy includes this in order to emphasise the importance of cultural legacy. Meanwhile, just as Watada's novel does, Choy's also indicates that histories can never be fully knowable or certain.

After Poh-Poh's death, the family arrange for the neighbour's adoptive daughter, Meiyong, to babysit Sekky. However, it turns out Meiyong uses this arrangement to her advantage as she is in love with a Japanese Canadian boy, Kazuo, and so she can use Sekky as a pretext to go to Japantown to visit her boyfriend. Meiyong wins Sekky over to be her ally with her knowledge of how the war is going, and he promises her to never tell on her. However, the whole time Sekky understands the graveness of the matter: "Everyone knew the unspoken law: *Never betray your own kind*. Meiyong was Chinese, like me; we were our own kind. [...] She was a *traitor*. Her boyfriend was a Jap, a monster, one of the enemy waiting in the dark to destroy all of us [...] *I, Sek-Lung, could turn her in*" (*Jade* 247-8). Having internalised the foremost teaching about Chinatown: "'You remember: we Chinese,' all of the Old China men drilled into my brothers and me, between their sips of tea and hacking up the bad waters, 'never forget, *we together Chinese*'" (232). Sekky understands that Meiyong's seeing a Japanese boy is a betrayal of her own people, which would be judged by her community as morally and ethically wrong. The children's world view is purposely shaped by adults, who instil hatred into the children's minds. This serves to bind the child more closely to the group, thus ensuring the solidarity of the community.

Sekky imagines that Meiyong will be subject to severe punishment without mercy if she is found out, since she breaks a social taboo:

If her widowed mother, with her deep village loyalties and Old China superstitions, found out about Kazuo, she would spit at Meiyong, tear out her own hair, and be the second mother to disown her. If Chinatown found out, Meiyong would be cursed and shamed publicly as a traitor; she would surely

be beaten up, perhaps branded with a red-hot iron until her flesh smoked and flamed. In the Chinese propaganda movies that Stepmother sometimes took me to see, there were violent demonstrations of what happened to traitors. (*Jade* 255)

The imagined behaviour of Meiyong's adoptive mother shows that Sekky understands she is not Meiyong's real ally as she will disdain and disown Meiyong in order to attest her own loyalty to the community. The mother is a widow and lives on the community's benevolence. The community's persecution of Meiyong (as imagined by Sekky) not only reflects their intolerance of disloyalty but also their hatred towards Japanese people at that time: to the point of causing maximum pain to their own kind. Meiyong transgresses social, ethnic and physical borders by getting impregnated by a Japanese boy. She dies on attempting a self-abortion because the boy is forced to relocate shortly after Canada declares war against Japan. Her death portrays a serious physical consequence resulting from breaking social taboos.

As Sekky learns to like Meiyong's boyfriend, who plays baseball well and with whom he shares pleasant memories, a question becomes inevitable:

I asked Father, "Are all Japs our enemy, even the ones in Canada?"
Stepmother sat stiffly; her set of four knitting needles stopped clicking.
Father shuffled his newspapers with authority.
"Yes", he said, with great finality. He looked sternly across at Stepmother.
"All Japs are potential enemies...even if Stepmother doesn't realize that". [...]
Then, in an effort to lessen the tension, he said, "The ones who are born here are only half enemies". (*Jade* 260)

It is hinted that Stepmother is Meiyong's ally as they share many private talks, probably about the Japanese Canadian boyfriend. Father's essentialist point of view, which positions all Japanese, even those who were born in Canada, as enemies represents the stance of early Chinatown residents. Unrecognised by the Canadian government as citizens, they inevitably consider themselves to be only Chinese, and therefore the Japanese in Canada are invariably enemies. Hartley argues that Choy captures facets of the attitudes towards the internment of Japanese Canadians at that historical moment:

yet his interest in the novel lies in depicting the effects of these facts on the identity constructions of the child narrators: how tragedies cannot be denied, yet how characters produce meaning and resist despair despite them. This being so, the novel, as it dramatizes conflicts, critiques Canadian society for its intolerance and its various communities for mirroring that intolerance; its individual narrators do not judge other individuals for their failures of the imagination in submitting to its pressures. (66-7)

During the war, Japanese Canadians suffered forced uprooting and relocation and were categorised as “enemy aliens” by the Canadian government; there was no attempt, on the part of the Chinese as “resident aliens” to form any alliance with their fellow immigrants to request their civil rights from the government.

In conclusion, in *The Jade Peony* Choy chronicles a period of history when Chinatown was on the verge of modernisation, transformation and assimilation. Though the elders attempt to preserve and enforce the old order within the boundaries of Chinatown, new ways and Canadian culture are seen to be filtering gradually into Chinatown life. As Davis argues: “the plural interworkings of history and imagination, personal contingencies and cultural choices results in a complex representation of a cultural space in the process of modification and transformation” (“Backdair” 97). By re-enacting Chinatown’s daily life through three children’s experience, Choy constructs a distinctive, multiple, and to some extent defamiliarised vision of Chinatown at a crucial historical moment.

The physical boundaries that mark the contours of Chinatown, where the early Chinese immigrants lived and worked, are still visible in today’s Vancouver. Following Canada’s multiculturalism policy, which came into effect in 1971, the Vancouver government renovated and refurbished this area in the spirit of promoting ethnic minority culture. Anderson in her *Vancouver Chinatown* observes the change:

Chinatown had become a symbol for the new “multicultural Canada”. For European Canada and its urban planners (and for their counterparts in Australia), Chinatown’s essential “Chineseness” had become its very asset, and that premise continued to shape policies that remade both the vision and the reality of an enclave and a people apart through the 1970s. (230)

The present Chinatown, though built on the same site as the old one, is an open and integral part of a multicultural Canadian city. The old, ghettoised Chinatown,

together with its secrets and sufferings, its hatred and hostility, is preserved in Choy's *The Jade Peony*.

In this chapter "Gut History", I have examined Watada's and Choy's literary works which are based on stories preserved in their respective communities. Taking it upon themselves to heal and strengthen their communities from within, they seek to reconnect with their ancestors, forge bonds between generations, and reconcile their people to past sufferings and humiliation. By doing so, these writers release a liberating energy from within. By writing about the "true stories" of "real people", Watada and Choy credit ancestors in their community for their hard work and life struggle, and for their role in legitimating the later generations' existence and development.

Moreover, Watada and Choy also consciously preserve the linguistic legacies in their respective communities. During an interview with Glenn Deer in 1999, Wayson Choy explains:

what was interesting to me was what I discovered when I spoke to a Chinese-language expert about the Chinatown voices I hear in my head, voices that were recalled from my childhood. I would say certain sounds, certain phrases, and not only their voices, but the faces of some of the people would come back to me. She, and another knowledgeable person I consulted, identified about a dozen dialects that are in my head. [Wayson Choy noted later that the *Sam Yup* and *Sze Yup* village dialects dominated Vancouver's Chinatown, but the population also included those who spoke *Tui San*, *Ha Kai*, *Hoi Ping*, *Sung Duck*, *Nam Hoi* and *Fook Sang*.] (Deer 34-5)

Choy, by recording the sounds of these dialects, literally preserves a linguistic legacy in his novels. His transliteration technique, however, is quite personal. As he asserts in the author's note to *The Jade Peony*: "I am also responsible for any rendering of Chinese phrase and complex kinship terms into English equivalents, and for the adaptation of the different sets of rules for the spelling of Chinese words" (vii). Inventing an English phonetic system based on transliteration Choy wills this legacy to the Chinese Canadians. Meanwhile, Watada also traces archaic Japanese usages

that the *issei* brought with them to Japan, which are not in use in Japan any more. He provides a rough glossary at the back of his novel, giving explanations only for those words that have disappeared in modern Japanese language.

Both Watada's *issei* and Choy's second generation children live in Vancouver's city centre. Little Tokyo on Powell Street and Chinatown on Pender Street are very close to each other. Watada's gangster characters often venture into Chinatown to persuade Japanese gamblers to gamble their money away in Little Tokyo. In *The Jade Peony*, Sekky observes that Little Tokyo (also known as Japantown) is much cleaner and tidier than Chinatown. Michelle Hartley point out that in Choy's book:

the line between Chinatown and Japantown is more firmly drawn. Despite the neutral territory of the library and the schoolyard, and their shared status of minority cultures in Vancouver, Choy carefully outlines the historical circumstances of Chinatown's relative poverty and Japan's imperialist aggression, which divide the two communities. (78)

I argue that faithful description of the hostility between the two communities in history is meaningful as it reminds the ethnic minority communities of their own racial prejudice, which is less widely perceived and acknowledged than that of the white mainstream towards them.

In this chapter, I discussed two texts by two male authors, Terry Watada and Wayson Choy. Though equally well known and important within the Asian Canadian community, they have attracted less critical attention outside the community and in academic studies than the two women writers I discussed in my first chapter. One major reason for this, I would argue, is that Choy's and Watada's are considered "traditional" or more "conventional" in style and approach. To some extent, these two texts that relate closely with ethnic communities can be considered as "ethnography". In the introduction to *Asian Canadian Writing: Beyond Autoethnography*, Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn outline typical topics that preoccupied earlier ethnic minority authors, which also happen to be those covered by Watada and Choy: "immigration, the moment of arrival, issues of assimilation, and conflicts between the first and second generation" (Introduction 3). However, I argue that there is an ongoing need to revisit these themes in the light of more recent

thinking about migration, diaspora, and collective histories. In fact, Watada and Choy, far from using themes that are outdated, are actually enacting their own kind of “transculturation”: the valuing of both old and new, traditional and modern that they are reasserting the value of history, memory and archive, and the importance of retaining, reassessing and indeed, respecting the legacies of earlier generations.

Joseph Pivato argues in his “Representation of Ethnicity as a Problem”: “In recent years the works of ethnic minority writers have been criticized in the context of contemporary theory. These works are often seen as stuck in the conventions of literary realism and not as experimental in their exploration of new norms of representing the subject” (158). There are only about ten published papers on Wayson Choy’s Chinatown stories, and none can be found on Terry Watada’s novel. Recent critical books on Asian Canadian literature usually do not even contain discussions of these or of many other apparently “conventional” writers. However, as I argued, these realistic writings, especially those that are based on factual material and real figures from early communities, are highly important, both in historical and literary terms. In addition, I would suggest that the categorising of these works as “ethnography” leads critics to underestimate the subtle forms of narrative experimentation which they do undertake. For example, Terry Watada deploys a circular rather than linear plot line and Wayson Choy creatively deploys the short story cycle, a relatively recent Western literary form. The under-analysis and especially the undervaluing of these works, then, distorts critical understanding of the community’s voices, leaving a significant gap in the literary history of Asian Canadian literature.

Ty and Verduyn’s edited collection *Asian Canadian Writing: Beyond Autoethnography* contains several articles about second-generation writers Larissa Lai and Hiromi Goto, indicating these two, among many others, represent what is beyond autoethnography, which is considered by critics as a form of progression. In my next chapter, I will concentrate my discussion on these two writers and explore many of their innovative writing techniques.

Chapter Four

Hybrid Flowers: Larissa Lai and Hiromi Goto

In her story “Chan Hen Yen, a Chinese Student” (1912), Edith Eaton (Sui Sin Far) used the phrase “hybrid flower”, to refer to children from mixed racial backgrounds: “The flowers of the fields and of the woods and dales! Those of a kind come up together. The sister violet companions her brother. Only through some mistake in the seeding is it otherwise. And the hybrid flower, though beautiful, is the saddest flower of all” (Far 464-5). Apparently the social oppression of mixed-race people of Asian origin in the early twentieth century in North America had rendered Edith Eaton pessimistic about the fate of the hybrid flowers—the in-betweeners who do not belong to any established group. Edith claims that a hybrid flower is created due to an unfortunate mistake and it is “the saddest flower of all”.

About a century later, Larissa Lai, during an email interview with Ashok Mathur in July 1998, explained: “In my fiction writing of recent years I have been focussing on trying to create a sort of historical launch pad for hybrid flowers like myself”. In her work, Lai means to “rediscover a selfhood that does not rely on either white and/or patriarchal expectations of what I/we should be” (n.p.) . Indeed, Lai and also Hiromi Goto create alternative lineages for their communities, which aim to legitimate and empower Asian Canadian non-heterosexual women. Informed and fortified by liberating thinking, they target accurately and attack effectively existing social injustice against minorities, such as non-heterosexuals and the racially other. Goto and Lai present Asian Canadians with various modes of connection with their ethnic cultures. They adopt a liberating view on cultural heritage, turning inescapable bonds into accessible resources for hybrid subjects.

I title my fourth chapter “Hybrid Flowers” firstly because both Lai and Goto, as leading second-generation writers, present some of the best works in Asian Canadian literature. The seeds of Asian Canadian literature, first sown by the Eaton sisters in the 1900s, and later—more extensively—by the communal activists in the 1970s, have now flourished, with more and more writers becoming established in the Canadian and world literary landscape. Secondly, I will argue that “hybrid flowers”

is a suitable term for post-generation diasporic subjectivities. “Hybrid flowers”, as both writers suggest, are organic amalgamations of two or more cultures and they are in a way a more “advanced” species because they stand for possibilities and resourcefulness. In both authors’ writings, ethnic minority subjects enjoy great mobility in an increasingly complicated socio-political environment (multicultural, capitalist and urban Canada). The concept of post-generation that I introduced in the Introduction becomes important in this section as Lai and Goto were themselves born after the historical events that have defined and shaped the communities. Meanwhile, they write about newer generations like themselves who do not directly experience the events but live in the aftermath of them.

In this chapter, I explore distinctive features in the works of second-generation Asian Canadian writers. By actively speaking for Asian Canadian subjects, they take on the next stage of a mission which was begun by the first-generation writers. Lai explains:

Writers of my parents’ generation, including Joy Kogawa, SKY Lee, Jim Wong-Chu, Maxine Hong Kingston, Frank Chin, Betty Bao Lord and many others understood the necessity of telling those seemingly unspeakable stories. They have brilliantly narrated histories of externalized and internalized racism. They have written about histories of immigration, settlement, and assimilation. They have written about the Head Tax, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Japanese-Canadian Internment during WWII. Other elders, who also talk about these concretely and overtly “political” histories, have paved the way for a kind of writing that is more fragmented, cracked open, non-linear and unresolved. I think especially of Roy Miki, Fred Wah and jam.ismail. The work I do here would not have been possible without the groundwork laid by earlier generations. (Afterword 254)

Indeed, since the first-generation writers documented the history of early immigrants’ lives, the second generation are able to move beyond the mission of preserving histories, breaking silences, and asserting identities. They are thus able to expand beyond auto-ethnographic writing, and explore all sorts of possibilities in their narrative techniques. Both Lai and Goto come from an academic background, and use many contemporary writing techniques. Their writings exhibit distinctive postmodern features, though Lai expresses a reluctance to have her work classified as postmodern.

Moreover, writers of Lai and Goto's generation also consciously move on from "identity-based work", as Lai puts it:

Identity-based work was at once liberating and debilitating because it required the use of the language of oppression in order to undo oppression. There was always an element of reproduction embedded in the act of liberation. Many of us were aware of this, but it seemed at the time as though there was no other way to begin freeing ourselves from the uncomfortable conditions we were born into. (Afterword 254-5)

Instead, Lai and Goto place characters from frequently marginalised groups centrally in their novels, and normalise their identities. Their protagonists are often Asian Canadian "women identified women",⁵⁹ and as Lai says "all characters are Asian unless otherwise specified" (Mathur n.p.). I argue that this is an especially liberating strategy, since the artificial alternative reality created in the fiction unsettles the accepted order effectively. It seems that, sometimes, the act of protesting against inequality might itself be restricting, since it often requires the subordinated to remain where they are, away from the power centre and resources, in order to legitimise their status as the marginalised. The authors demonstrate the liberating force in "being instantly free" by situating oneself in a claimed or newly created space as opposed to "struggling to become free", having to negotiate with the mainstream, while being tied down to the designated margin.

Moreover, both writers challenge the general idea that racial problems ceased to exist in Canada during the 1990s. They keep their readers on their toes rather than letting them sit comfortably with fixed ideas and expectations. Goto says: "I don't want to have complacent and relaxed-almost-falling-asleep readers. I want my readers to feel unsettled" ("Cross-Cultural Creatures" 17). Lai expresses a similar wish: "I hope that *When Fox is a Thousand* will continue to needle its readers into a thoughtful discomfort with the world as it is, and into imagining how it might be different" (Afterword 259). Goto exposes the social injustice of the here and now and its negative effect on Asian Canadian subjects, as it leads to division and isolation in the family depicted in *Chorus of Mushrooms* and self-hatred and self-alienation, as

⁵⁹ In "Political Animals and the Body of History", Lai explains: "I eschew the term 'lesbian' because of its Eurocentric roots, and because it does not necessarily connote community or social interdependence" (149).

seen in *The Kappa Child*. Lai unsettles the relationship between authenticity and fakery and challenges the accepted values attached to this pair of notions, legitimating strategies of fakery by showing that they can be helpful in negotiating a hybrid existence.

4.1 Larissa Lai: “Liberation in Fakery”

Larissa Lai’s proximity to the academic field may explain the fact that her work engages intensively with critical thinking on many current and heated issues across Asian Canadian literary studies.⁶⁰ Lai is one of the most self-conscious Asian Canadian writers who actively endeavours to form and reform the Asian Canadian canon. Larissa Lai’s primary works include two novels, a poem collection, *Sybil Unrest* (2008), co-authored with Rita Wong, and a critical monograph *Slanting I, Imagining We* (2014). In this section I will concentrate on her two fictions: *When Fox Is a Thousand* (1995) and *Salt Fish Girl* (2002). My analysis will focus on the ideas of fakery and authenticity, which are the final keywords I have chosen for this project. In doing so, I will develop my discussion about binarism. In her novels, Lai explores the contemporary conditions under which Asian Canadian subjectivities form and develop. She raises questions about authenticity, which is believed to be the precondition for “deserving” freedom. Relevant questions are put forward: is it only an “authentic” subjectivity that can liberate itself and enjoy freedom? Who determines what is authentic? Who deserves to be free? Are the fake, the clone, the hybrid destined to be unfree? If not, how do they attain freedom?

In 2004, nine years after being first published by the independent feminist publisher, PressGang, Lai’s first novel was reprinted by Arsenal Pulp Press. For this edition, Lai added an afterword, in which she explains:

⁶⁰ Larissa Lai, novelist, poet and cultural activist, is indisputably one of the leading representatives of second-generation Chinese Canadian writers. Born in 1967 in California, she obtained a BA, an MA and a PhD in Canada and now teaches creative writing at the University of Calgary, having previously taught at the University of British Columbia. In her online CV, under “Teaching and Research Interests”, she has entered “Canadian Literature, Critical Theory, Contemporary Poetics, Speculative Fiction”.

Within the processes of race and racialization in the country there is a tendency to look to those with bodies like mine—dark-haired, dark-skinned and dark-eyed—as carriers of a certain kind of authenticity, or to put it another way, as a kind of native informant on an exotic and distant culture. So let me be very clear, I got this story from library books. I don't read Chinese. I read it in English translation. And I am fine with that. I have very little interest in those old colonial tropes of the “authentic” because they are invested in the production of an exotic other in order to maintain the centrality of the white European subject. I like the idea of quoting anthropological texts back at the anthropologists, infusing it with my own social and political interests quite explicitly before passing the parcel on. It amuses me, because those texts themselves are so infused with the ideological interests of their producers, even as they pretend objectivity. (Afterword 257)

Lai defies the expectation that ethnic minority authors should have “authentic” sources for their writing, as if that were the primary basis on which their work is valued. Looking backwards, this assumption is what compelled Winnifred Eaton to adopt a fake identity to write. A century later, Lai is able to liberate herself from this expectation as she sees the power scheme at play underneath. Moreover, Lai reprocesses the supposedly objective anthropological texts before tossing them back to those who theorised about other peoples and cultures, mocking their authority and their fruitless search for authenticity. I argue that by demonstrating the process of making forgeries, Lai establishes her strategy of attacking the source that subjugates her instead of submitting to it as Winnifred Eaton did. In her novels, Lai foregrounds many kinds of fakery in contemporary times in order to question fixed essentialist understandings of authenticity.

It is therefore important to examine the notion of authenticity. In the authentic/fake binary, the authentic defines the fake (and vice versa). This binary then enforces a value system: what is authentic is valuable, right, normal and good while fakes are unvalued, wrong, abnormal and bad. Meanwhile, I would argue that, there are two different applications of this word: subject (human) and object (things). Though often used without differentiation, the application of the notion of authenticity in the two domains entails a completely different range of reference. “A person lives authentically”, as Marina Oshana summarises in the article “Autonomy and the Question of Authenticity”, “when she is true to herself, and she is true to herself when she develops her life on the basis of what is of value to her” (1).

Authenticity as an evaluative term for objects often privileges artefacts from the past, and the desire for these has led to private collecting, museum building and eventually, colonialism. The ambiguity or misuse of this term can be very problematic. For example, when authenticity in the second sense is applied to the racially other, it leads to the commodification, eroticisation and exploitation of people.

The craving to possess what is authentic, especially things that are hard to attain, from other times, places or cultures, has caused despicable or cruel actions. For example, in *When Fox Is a Thousand* (hereafter *Fox*), Lai has her contemporary characters view a Byzantine collection, which was seized by violence, robbery and massacre: “In the year 1071, ten thousand men wearing chainmail and wielding crosses sacked the fabled city of Byzantium. They raped women. They burned houses. They took small children by the legs, whirled them around and smacked their heads into stone walls, shattering their tiny craniums like eggs” (*Fox* 16). The museums, as a concept in its initial design, is a materialisation of the legacy of Enlightenment, and covers up the historical crimes committed in the acquisition of its displays.⁶¹ Meanwhile, James Clifford in his *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) argues:

While the object systems of art and anthropology are institutionalized and powerful, they are not immutable. The categories of the beautiful, the cultural, and the authentic have changed and are changing. Thus it is important to resist the tendency of collections to be self-sufficient, to suppress their own historical, economic, and political processes of production. [...] Ideally the history of its own collection and display should be a visible aspect of any exhibition. (229)

To some extent, people can be seen as items on display, moving in a social museum. I am not trying to undermine the significance of museums and I argue that they are useful for educative purposes. However, as Lai tries to remind people, the museum is not a natural or neutral space as the narrative is designed by acquisitions. For example, the cruelty of the Roman invasion of Byzantium is not mentioned in the

⁶¹ Of course, nowadays, museums have changed dramatically. Many contemporary museums do not deploy grand narratives any more. The emphasis on activity, interactivity, events, community, digital technology, and so on are all attempts to complicate traditional ideas of objectivity, authentic value, and meaning transmission.

exhibition. Lai's account of how the display came to Seattle suggests that museums are not only educational institutions but also theatres of cruelty and crime. And from this perspective, the notion of "authenticity" is tainted with cruelty and greed, in contrast with the usual unquestionable or positive values that it often evokes.

Another way in which authenticity is put into question is related to changes in modes of production. Is authenticity at all attainable or indeed still desirable in the mass-production era? In his famous piece "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1934) Walter Benjamin argues:

In the case of the art object, a most sensitive nucleus—namely, its authenticity—is interfered with whereas no natural object is vulnerable on that score. The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. (1169)

The authenticity of objects, as Benjamin argues, is jeopardised by mass production. Indeed, almost a century later, capitalism and one of its expressions, mass production, has expanded greatly. Lai, especially in *Salt Fish Girl*, tends to specify brands of product: "the old Nikon" (camera) (*Salt* 12), "my brother's ancient Honda" (81), "a slate-grey Volvo" (153), and so on. A product could be "real", such as a real pair of Nike trainers, as opposed to counterfeits. However, a mass-produced item only enjoys a reduced sense of authenticity, in comparison with "one of a kind" artefacts, as it is not unique and is therefore easily replaceable.

Under postmodern conditions, the use of parody—a deliberate literary fakery—has been a popular technique. Linda Hutcheon in her *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) explains:

Parody also contests our humanist assumptions about artistic originality and uniqueness and our capitalist notions of ownership and property. With parody—as with any form of reproduction—the notion of the original as rare, single, and valuable (in aesthetic or commercial terms) is called into question. This does not mean that art has lost its meaning and purpose, but that it will inevitably have a new and different significance. (89-90)

Lai's texts can be seen as containing many layers of parody. *Fox* often "grafts" Western fairy tales on to a Chinese folklore story, and sometimes, vice versa. Her second novel *Salt Fish Girl* is a parody of Western creation stories as well as of "The Little Mermaid", and the movie *Blade Runner*. I will explore below the ways in which these strategies of parodic writing allow Lai to demonstrate the resourcefulness and adaptability of post-generation Asian Canadians.

In her novels, Lai suggests that the concept of authenticity is no longer valid in contemporary times, and that this is not problematic, if one chooses to face it and use this as a mode of liberation. In the 1982 movie *Blade Runner*, which Lai draws from for both of her novels, the character Gaff shouts: "it's too bad she won't live! But then again, who will?" Lai's novels seem to echo that sentence, almost as if they shouted in their turn: "It's too bad she is not real! But then again, who is?" Lai suggests that people, especially Asian Canadians should stop looking for—or lamenting over the loss of—authenticity, but instead liberate themselves by channelling the empowering forces of fakery. In this section, I argue that Larissa Lai uses deceit and distortion as literary strategies in her fictions and that her works gain strength from the act of faking. I will then argue that by faking it, Larissa Lai invents a method for Asian Canadian subjects to come into possession of seemingly incompatible cultural legacies from the East and the West.

When Fox Is a Thousand adopts a multi-voiced narrative with three ideograms—the head of a fox, an ancient Chinese paper lantern and an open book that respectively denote the lifetime of the ageless Fox, ninth-century China and contemporary Vancouver. A fox that lives for a thousand years haunts, and then animates (after her death) a Chinese poetess Yu Hsuan-chi, who lives in the Tang Dynasty in ninth-century China. It then comes to Vancouver to haunt Artemis Wong, an adoptive child of white parents with her biological parents originally from China. With the three story lines developing in parallel, readers are taken travelling through time and space with their perspective constantly shifting every time they come to one of the ideograms. This design gives the novel a sense of fracture, uncertainty and discontinuity.

In the afterword, Lai states explicitly:

I am trying to produce a consciously artificial history for those of us who come from histories that are broken, fragmented and discontinuous, histories that exist in multiple languages and that have survived multiple traumas and multiple acts of forgetting. In the words of poet and essayist Fred Wah, I am “faking it”. I see a kind of liberation in fakery and its acknowledgement, especially in contradistinction to notions of pureness and authenticity, which in the end produce only fascism and violence. (257)

Lai is referring to Wah’s essay collection: *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity* (2000). In the title piece, Wah ponders the idea of “faking it”: dramatising, giving false but seemingly plausible explanations, bluffing and improvising as he talks about his own experience with jazz: “Except for jazz, where dissonance and unpredictability are welcomed, where the contrived, the flash, is valued” (15). Wah suggests that “faking it” is a strategy for contemporary hybrid writers. As he explains: “the more I wrote the more I discovered that faking it is a continual theatre of necessity. No other way to be in language, but to bluff your way through it, stalling for more time” (Wah 16). By boldly claiming or faking ownership of Western and Chinese inheritance, Lai puts together a “historical launch pad for hybrid flowers” (Mathur n.p.).

The book opens with Artemis Wong and her classmate Mercy visiting the Museum of History in Seattle, preparing for their course in Classics at the University of British Columbia. Theoretically, a museum is a place where only authentic items are on display and the displays are especially valuable when the cultures they come from have disappeared. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people believed that native cultures would soon disappear in Canada, and this belief was used to justify the rich acquisition of aboriginal artefacts in, for example, the Royal BC Museum in Victoria. Having her usually objectified Asian Canadian character gazing upon another culture and time, Lai questions the Western Enlightenment legacy effectively, asking: does a culture’s meaning lie only in the documentation of it? Culture is never static, and the concentrated effort involved in capturing particular moments in history, through surviving and treasured artefacts, may obscure histories that were happening concurrently. Lai points out, too, that current social injustices also deserve attention. Thus, by deconstructing the idea of authenticity and the value attached to it, Lai presents alternative realities, temporalities and social constructions, which empower and centrally locate people who are often disempowered and marginalised.

In the book, Artemis is attracted by a silver box in the museum shop:

“May I look at that silver box?” She pointed to a well-crafted little container less than three inches wide, encrusted with authentic-looking jewels of coloured glass.

“A replica of one of the boxes said to contain pieces of the True Cross”, said the woman. “They’re very well made. Painstakingly copied from the real thing by a professional craftsman. I think his name is on the card there”. (*Fox* 18)

Artemis steals one of the replicas without thinking as she is driven by “what could be described only as greed” (*Fox* 18). The notions of authenticity and fakery are intertwined here. The artefact in question is a “well-crafted little container” decorated with “coloured glass”. The value of the box therefore should be moderate as the item is small in size and the material is not very precious. However, the salesperson tries to talk the value up by associating it with some degree of authenticity. She points out that the box is a replica of the original box said to contain pieces of True Cross: that is, the one on which Jesus was crucified. This association with an historical event renders the box meaningful by giving it an accountable origin. She then emphasises that the box is authentic in the sense that it is one of the products of a recognised craftsman, and a card with the maker’s name is provided to prove it.

Lai also complicates the concept of authenticity by probing the monetary values of things that are allegedly authentic. The value of authentic objects varies, often measured against attainability. Some unique items in the museum, such as the box that is claimed to have contained pieces of True Cross, are priceless and is outside the trading system. Lai also presents another situation where the authentic items are still tradable:

In the next case, on a rosewood platform, stood the carved ivory figure of a woman, not six inches high. The hair had been exquisitely executed. It seemed to turn and billow in an imaginary breeze. It cost a hundred dollars. It was a genuine antique. Still, it didn’t make sense to spend so much money on something she didn’t need, particularly after her little heist. (*Fox* 18)

Artemis hesitates about buying the genuine antique thinking she does not need it, after stealing the replica box with “a longing she could not have later described, let alone explained” (18). By having her character express a preference for the fake, Lai

purposefully unsettles the accepted order, which prescribes that the authentic should be preferred over the imitation. It then also raises the question: must the authentic be possessed? Artemis' hesitation over buying a real antique and pondering over the use of it to her raises another question: if there were no such craving to possess the authentic, would the authentic still be valued as such?

Another revealing scene that questions the definition of authenticity happens during a conversation between Artemis and her female friend and lover, Claude, Artemis asks:

“Do you have a normal family?”

“What's normal? My dad's a crotchety old bugger who works as a mechanic. My mum owns a little French restaurant”.

“French? Why not Chinese?”

“Because French makes more money. But the food isn't very good, except the foie-gras”.

“How can you say that?”

“Easy. It's true. Want some goose liver?” (*Fox* 151)

Here, again, several kinds of authenticity are presented and interrogated. Because Claude has an “authentic” Chinese look—“a long black braid whipped up beside the face” (91)—Artemis asked “why” her family should not make Chinese food instead, as it is “obvious” that their French cuisine will not be authentic. Claude's answer moves the subject onto a more worldly level: running a “French restaurant” is more lucrative and the food should only be judged by its actual taste. Also the change of term from foie gras to goose liver invites the reader to think about the “true” content of a rather fetishised French dish.

The relationships amongst the female characters are interwoven but it seems no “real” bond has been created. Artemis is fond of Diane; Diane is at first in a relationship with Claude; Artemis then finds that Diane is in love with her classmate Mercy. Artemis then breaks up with Claude because of the fox's meddling, and Claude develops a new relationship with Rachel. Since the characters are not clearly distinguished and their inner lives are not rendered through the narrative, they seem to be doppelgängers of one another. As Artemis says to Diane:

“I was just thinking that you have the same kind of hair as me. And the same kind of eyes”.

“Like we could almost be family?”

“Yeah. Well, no, not really. I mean, you’re tall. I’m short. You have freckles. I don’t. Your face is long, mine is kind of round. We couldn’t really be family, but it’s kind of nice, you know, having the same kind of hair”. (*Fox* 67)

Artemis hints that though individually they are quite different, as they are of Chinese descent (with similar eyes and hair colour and texture), they “could almost be family”. Having been adopted by white parents, Artemis has a sense of discomfort since she is not connected to “her people” by a genetic relation. She therefore seeks a closer bond with her “own kind”, that is, other girls of Chinese ancestry. In a way, the girls approach each other looking for the self, or the projection of themselves.

Therefore the girls are like reflections of one another, since their interactions are superficial and lack substance. This is described in the scene where Artemis dreams of seeing Claude:

And with those eyes she saw Claude moving towards her without ever coming closer. It was Claude and it was not Claude. The woman so identically reflected her own image she was no longer sure whether she was walking towards a woman sitting in her kitchen, or sitting in her kitchen watching a woman walk towards her. The woman recognized her too and was also puzzled and confused. They were both drawn to each other and terrified of each other at the same time. The forward motion continued, but they never got any closer. (*Fox* 193)

Devoid of subjective authenticity, the characters seek their own reflections but can never get close enough to reach each other as they are mirror images of one another. Lai explains: “I was particularly interested in the disconnections among young people. I wanted to explore the difficult landscapes of weakness, betrayal, sorrow and longing. I was interested in my own generation’s relationship to history, myth and spirituality, precisely because these were things that we’d been cut off from” (Afterword 253). The contemporary generation who grow up in the increasingly globalised world, are exposed to a consumerist popular culture that is erasing history, myth and cultural difference. The seemingly nonchalant, laissez-faire manner of contemporary post-generation diasporic subjects seems to be culturally less “authentic” under such influence. However, Lai suggests that they have their unique mode of communication and their effective ways of inheriting cultural legacies.

More importantly, Lai explains that there is not much lacking in the contemporary post-generation Asian Canadian subjectivities. This emerges in a conversation between Artemis and her friend Diane Wong:

“Don’t you wonder about where you came from, who your...people were?”
 “I know who my people are. My mother and father, Eden, you, my friend Mercy, I suppose, even if she drives me crazy sometimes”.
 “I mean the people who know your history. The people who will care about you even if they don’t know you”. [...]
 “Things move and change a lot from generation to generation. I am no less who I am for where I’ve ended up”. (*Fox* 101)

Here Lai challenges the assumption that diasporic subjects inevitably experience a sense of loss in terms of the cultural legacies of their ancestral country of origin. Diane wants to ask about Artemis’ biological—real parents. However, Artemis refuses to acknowledge such a lack in her life by pointing out she has family members and friends. Diane then explains that “your people” are not only biological relatives but more importantly a community that knows her history (therefore justifying her existence) and who will support her unconditionally because she belongs to this group. Artemis, however, does not see the necessity for such a connection, feeling that she cannot lose what she has never had. Conversations such as this in *Fox* suggest that the much-assimilated post-generations are not any less authentic than earlier generations. They enjoy autonomy, manifested by the mobility, fluidity and transformability of the characters. Meanwhile such a comparison is neither fair nor sensible as time and conditions have changed.

In the novel, all the Asian Canadian characters have English names, which are strongly infused with Western cultural references. One is named for Diana, goddess of the hunt and virginity, and another for her counterpart in Greek mythology, Artemis. Mercy, who is murdered in a park possibly because she is lesbian, changes her name to Ming after a trip to China. The white character, Eden, whose name is biblical, eventually embraces his homosexuality in the novel. I argue that by having both her Asian Canadian and her white characters adopt names that are heavily loaded in terms of western culture, Lai plays with the idea that the western culture is never singular (the Greek and Roman versions), pure in blood (white) or heterosexual. Ming changes her name and claims it suits her better: it is a

character in Chinese that is composed of the signifiers for the sun and for the moon, which means the combination of *yin* and *yang*. The ideogram has a meaning of brightness on its own. Mercy, on the other hand, evokes the Divine Mercy image of Jesus⁶² with water and blood streaming from his heart, giving a blessing. The two images converge to present a harmonious and peaceful idea and yet clash in the contrasting imagery deriving from different cultural sources. Ming, by choosing to rename herself in the Chinese language, shows both her wish to present herself more accurately as an Asian Canadian and her ability to redefine herself.

Lai's strategy in *Fox* is one of empowering the ethnic minority subject by creating a new historical view. She presents a shared subjectivity, incarnated by the fox, at the centre while history, instead of extending linearly from past to present and future, spreads out in a circle around it. The distant and recent in history, for example, the ninth century Chang' An (*Fox* 6) and Tiananmen Square event (88) in 1988, are placed at a similar distance (in terms of clarity and impact) from the subject. Moreover, the creation of the fox that moves across space and time adds a dimension of freewill or agency. As Fu explains: "Larissa Lai inscribes the three representational voices as agency. This agency re-mediate an authorial practice of textual manipulation and transgression, not to privilege intentionality but to situate marginalized women as agents of ultimately political acts" (Fu 87). Indeed, the fox haunts and inhabits both Yu and Artemis, forming a "lesbian solidarity" (Fu 86). As the fox in the novel travels from China to Canada, from ancient times to present times and from the Chinese jurisdiction of the underworld to the Library of the Western Heavens, the post-generation, though losing some "authenticity" (as it is conventionally defined), enjoys a larger than ever set of cultural resources. This innovative historical view is especially adapted to the hybrid subjectivity, thus transforming the usually victimised identity into a liberated, advanced, even superior subjectivity.

Moreover, Lai centralises and normalises her female Asian Canadian homosexual characters. Indeed, unless otherwise specified, all her characters are Asian Canadian homosexuals. Lai explains:

⁶² The depiction of Jesus based on the devotion initiated by Saint Faustina Kowalska.

My strategy in recent years has been to make a project of constructing a consciously artificial history for myself and others like me—a history with women identified women of Chinese descent living in the West at its center. [...] It must be artificial because our history is so disparate, and also because it has been so historically rare for women to have control over the means of recording and dissemination. (“Political Animals” 149)

By doing so, Lai creates an exclusive yet porous space for her characters, thus avoiding battling for space with the existing mainstream. Talking about her own approach, Lai says: “*Fox* was written as sort of experiment to find another strategy. It wasn’t meant to be instructive. It was meant to be productive. It was meant to open up a sort of imaginative geography that could be inhabited as opposed to articulated” (Morris 23). This imaginative geography, positioned on top of the “real” situation, liberates Lai from the restraining conditions that Asian Canadians are often subject to. She explains in an interview with Robyn Morris: “I don’t reject the division because I see that as a surefire way to bring it back stronger than ever. To react is to reproduce” (Morris 21). Indeed, trying to adopt an opposing position will lead to acknowledging, locating and repeating historical and present injustices, which, in a way, adds fuel to the oppositional force rather than weakening it.

Apart from inventing these distinct racial and sexual politics, Lai also experiments with ways of expressing her mixed cultural heritage. Reading and writing in English, Lai carries out vigorous research for her translated versions of Chinese stories.⁶³ She draws, for instance, on *Strange Tales of Liao Zhai* and poetry by the female author Yu Hsuan-Chi.⁶⁴ Her creative reprocessing of cultural material,

⁶³ See Fu, *Transgressive Transcripts* (2012) for a list of the stories and the possible origins of them (76).

⁶⁴ Lai uses Yu Hsuan-Chi (in the Cantonese phonetic system) in most of the novel but also occasionally Yu Chanji (in the Mandarin phonetic system). Lai explains in her interview with Mathur: “There is also the more pragmatic problem of transliteration in its most literal sense—some records adopt the Wades-Giles system which is a remnant of the British Imperial era, while other, usually more recent documents will use the Pinyin system which is supposed to reflect more accurately the official mandarin speech currently in use, more or less uniformly (and in addition to local dialects, of course) throughout China. In the parts of the novel where I’ve used these transliterations of Chinese words, I’ve left the transliterations as I’ve found them, treating them, I suppose, as artefacts of my research

I argue, demonstrates a productive way of inheriting cultural resources. Lai explains to her interviewer Ashok Mathur about her research on Yu Hsuan-Chi, the infamous prostitute-nun-poetess, who lived during the Tang Dynasty:

How can I know her when my resources tell me that because she had more than one lover she was therefore capable of murder? The implication of cause, being that because she was not chaste she was immoral, and thus capable of any immoral action. But it makes no sense, you know what I mean? On the other hand, the utter stupidity of that kind of thinking did free me up to think, whatever I make up can be no more false or idiotic than what is already there! So you see how I have had to come in the back door in order to access my own history, and how there is never any real knowing of that history, only the trail of ideologically determined stories left by a trail of ideologically motivated historians and translators, whose agendas and ways of storing and telling have also changed over time. (Mathur n.p.)

Liberated from searching for “truth” in histories, Lai is at ease accessing the “back door” and reinvents stories by drawing on both sides of her cultural heritage. Meanwhile, although her Western readers may not be familiar with the many reprocessed Chinese folklore stories, Lai, by juxtaposing two stories (her tales are normally half Western fairy tale and half Chinese myth or folklore story), hints to her readers that the two stories are similar in cultural importance and popularity. The effect of her parodies is therefore not weakened but enforced with this organic fusion of familiarity and unfamiliarity.

For example, one of the many stories is a Chinese version of “Little Red Riding Hood”. A Buddhist nun in red robes encounters the wolf—a female fox in Lai’s story—on her way to visit in a temple. The fox then runs to the temple, scares away the nuns in it and turns herself into a novice. When they meet again in the temple they have the following conversation which sounds very familiar:

“What long hair you have”, said the nun. “you should shave it, if you want to stay here”.

“The better to charm you with”, said the Fox.

“And what delicate skin you have”, said the nun.

“The better to please you”, said the Fox.

process, culturally determined and historically situated just as the stories themselves are” (n.p.).

“What tender lips you have”, said the nun, and kissed the fox spirit before she could speak again. And so they fell in love and lived happily ever after in the temple, even after the gwei lo came from overseas and tried to convert them to Christianity. (*Fox* 219)

Lai firstly adds a homosexual dimension to this story. And then she further challenges the conventional narrative by the mention of conversion. However, the use of the Chinese appellation “*gwei lo*”—demon or ghost in translation, which is an appellation used among the Chinese to refer to foreign people in general—ironises the idea of “alien”: from the position of the fox spirit, a foreigner is even more alien than it is.

I am especially interested in how Lai endeavours to preserve not only the content, but also the form of Chinese literary legacies. There is a scene where the fox meets a “woman” scholar and has a traditional couplet game with her. This couplet has been a popular writing exercise for Chinese scholars for over a thousand years and still exists in contemporary Chinese culture. The basic mechanism is that one will start with a sentence and the one who “answers” it will need to come up with a rhyming sentence in the same amount of words with each element either corresponding to or opposing the original ones. The couplets can be very long or very short, so long as they are “tidy”, meaning that each component of the first half is “answered” in the later half. In the novel, the woman scholar gives the first half:

*The order of nature is never fixed
The west is moving, the east cannot be still. (Fox 110)*

The fox answers with the following:

*The nature of order is never still
It moves not with the wind but with the will. (110)*

Lai successfully transcends the differences between English and Chinese languages and presents the merit and spirit of the Chinese couplets, though it is impossible for her to preserve the intonation pattern of the couplets which should also follow strict rules in Chinese. “The order of nature” and “the nature of order” are two things that are closely related yet different, and “never fixed” and “never still” are similar in meaning. “The west is moving, the east cannot be still” conveys a relativity in movement, which is the central meaning of the first half. There is an element of

opposition in the second couplet since it emphasises human agency in the creation of order, which has to work against the forces of “nature”. The comment of the woman scholar on the fox’s response reminds us that the language in use is Chinese: “‘very good,’ said she, ‘although that end rhyme smacks suspiciously of Western influence’” (*Fox* 111). With the fluidity of Lai’s English prose, readers may forget that they are reading a text that is set in ancient China. By constantly reminding readers that they are engaging with a space and culture that are different and unfamiliar, Lai keeps them from applying their usual knowledge and understanding to her texts.

The next example is equally intriguing, as the woman scholar writes:

A strange guest visits the walled city

To which the Fox answers:

Ordinary ghosts roam the streets. (Fox 111)

Here, “a” (singular) contrasts with “many” (which is contained in the plural form of ghosts); “strange” contrasts with “ordinary”; “guest” (traveller/person) contrasts with “ghost”; “visits” and “roams” are similar in meaning; the walled city (enclosed) contrasts with “the streets” (open). The two contrasting sets of images created in the couplet, though appearing to be random, provide a “complete” picture of existence (the living and the dead) and foreground different perspectives on space (private and public or secured and unsafe). In addition, the couplet also summaries the current situation in the book, as both of them have questionable reasons to come to a male scholar’s house. The fox’s answer reveals her “true” identity as being non-human.

Comparing this text to earlier examples of Asian Canadian writing, we can observe an evolution in style in that different cultural elements are implemented more naturally both on level of content and form. Edith Eaton’s Chinatown stories are criticised and have fallen into obscurity because of her “awkward” way of inserting Chinese idioms and folk stories into English texts. Her strategy, though ground-breaking and politically progressive, compromised the readability. SKY Lee’s Chinatown story is infused with both Chinese and English references and her third-generation narrator maintains cultural distance from her own family and is able

to break free. However, Lee's novel is still to some extent conventional, based on a typical Chinese family saga story. Lai deploys writing strategies and approaches from feminist, queer and postmodernist literature and theories. There is a progression in two senses. Firstly, the style is more fluent and the texts are more accessible for monolingual English readers. Secondly, the style is more "natural" in the sense that the mixing of cultural references becomes more "organic" (for example, Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* is both the little mermaid and the Chinese Goddess Nu Wa) rather than "mechanic", such as Edith Eaton's somewhat "crude" translation of Chinese stories in the setting of North America.

As I observed earlier, Lai's female Asian Canadian community seems to be only loosely connected. However, she writes with a very distinct political agenda for the racially other and non-heterosexuals. I will now look into two of the strategies that Lai invented for asserting her politics: the accentuation of the olfactory and the invention of cultural or collective memory. Both strategies are invented in *Fox* and then developed in her second novel *Salt Fish Girl*.

In *Fox*, Artemis' biological parents leave her a trunk which contains a quilt and clothes reeking of mothballs, which "she looks into only reluctantly" (*Fox* 21). Artemis is also taken by her adoptive mother to the Chinese market where she is uneasy, thinking the odd smell of dry goods relates somehow to her. In *Salt Fish Girl*, this smell motif is fully developed. I argue that by accentuating the usually under-represented sense of smell, Lai challenges the predominant role of seeing in society where differences detected by sight, such as colour, gender, age and so on, are emphasised disproportionately, and become sources of conflict and prejudices.

The other special device is that of collective memory. This also originates in *Fox*, when Artemis meditates on the protest organised in Chinatown against the Tiananmen Square event:

Not that something so disastrous couldn't occur, only it might not happen here the way it does in China. Was that where the melancholy she sometimes felt came from? The possibility that she might not recognize an act of repression when it struck? Or did it come from tapping into a collective memory of all the deaths, abandonments, and slow stresses of war that have gone unspoken through the generations? Perhaps the precise stories and politics had been lost, but the emotional memory moves from one generation to the next as surely as any genetic trait. (*Fox* 88-9)

“Real” or material connections are lost from one generation to another, but they are linked by a loose connection, an involuntary inheritance, which is nevertheless visceral, almost tangible. Lai explains: “But I do believe that there is such a thing as cultural memory. I don’t know where it comes from, whether it is genetic or what, but I do think it exists, that it bubbles to the surface at certain times and that there are those intense moments of recognition when history does stretch though the ether and touch you” (Mathur n.p.). “Cultural history”, as defined by Lai, seems to be the link that connects post-generations to their “home” culture, a loose but tangible bond that generates a sense of duty or desire to learn their family and community’s history. Lai then calls it, using Jungian terms, “collective unconsciousness” (*Salt* 34), “Emotional memory” (*Fox* 89) and “collective memory” (*Fox* 32). I will develop my discussion with the reading of the second book presently.

Lai’s creative work enjoys the imaginative and structural space that the English writing tradition provides and in drawing on a double resource from both cultures, it constructs a subjectivity that is not confined by either kind of cultural formation. However, both her novels are Canada-based, or, to be exact, Vancouver-based. In “Troubling the Mosaic” Christine Kim compares Larissa Lai’s *When Fox Is a Thousand* and Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* and explains: “*Fox* positions itself primarily within the parameters of the Canadian nation and is therefore less likely to receive critical attention from institutions outside Canada” (166). I, however, am convinced that many Asian Canadian writers, like Lai, consider their Canadian identity to be just as important as their Asian heritage. For them, to emphasise the “here and now” is important, since this is part of their identity.

Lai’s second novel, *Salt Fish Girl*, again employs a multi-part structure. The table of contents shows that in the book the chapters alternate between two major characters, Nu Wa and Miranda Ching. In fact, Nu Wa the Chinese goddess, both appears as the Creator in the beginning of the novel and later, in another life, lives as a Chinese girl born in the late nineteenth century in South China. Moreover, Miranda is in fact a reincarnation of Nu Wa. The oriental fatalism, in believing in reincarnation, creates a circle of life where the soul of the person remains constant and eternal. In her essay “Future Asians” Lai explains:

I wanted to create a myth of origins for girls that travel, girls who come from many places at once. [...] It seemed to me that to write a founding myth about travel and dislocation could be a liberating thing because it denies racial purity and denies the primacy of the citizen tied to the land. (173-4)

Indeed, Nu Wa, after becoming a human woman, elopes with the Salt Fish Girl to Canton, the big city, then is lured away by a white woman Edwina. She follows Edwina to the Island of Mist and Forgetfulness where as an immigrant worker, she also moves around, trying to make a life there. Moreover, Nu Wa not only travels through space, but also through time. She was born in a southern village 150 years before the narrative present. However, when she and the Salt Fish Girl live in Canton, the latter finds a job in a sweat shop, working under hard conditions on production lines. When Nu Wa comes to the Island of Mist and Forgetfulness, she works first in a hotel and later as a “telemarketer” (*Salt* 132). The economic conditions of the backdrop develop fast, outlining shifts in modern social history.

When Nu Wa is reincarnated as Miranda, she lives in the future time of 2044 in “Serendipity, a walled city on the west coast of North America” (*Salt* 11). In *Transnational Poetics* (2011), the authors note: “Lai [...] is conscious of this process of denationalization in favour of globalization and capitalism that is invading Canadian society, and thus depicts Serendipity in the twenty-first century as dominated by corporations like Pallas Shoes that are actually replacing the nation state” (Cuder-Domínguez et al. 75). Indeed, the corporate compounds all have independent taxation and currency systems, which have taken over national government administration. Race is no longer a big issue in the future society depicted by Lai since in the corporate compounds, what is at stake is not identity but material interest. Racial difference has been replaced by species difference as a way of bringing racism into clearer view by translating it into a more rigid system of difference.

Salt Fish Girl opens with “in the beginning there was just me. I was lonely. [...] It was a murkier sort of solitude, silent with the wet sleep of the unformed world. The materials of life still lay dormant, not yet understanding their profound relationship to one another. There was no order, nothing had a clear relationship to anything else” (1). This resonates distinctly with the opening of the Gospel of St John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. [...] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John 1:1 14)

Using biblical parody, Lai interweaves Western and Chinese cultures and traditions (religious and secular) to create a dystopian fantasy. Meanwhile, in the Bible, in the beginning, as in Chinese Taoist cosmogony (混沌 literally translated as muddled confusion), there is no life form, but an undistinguished mass of matter, from which no individuals had yet been separated out. Then life, the flesh, comes into existence, and evolves.

The name of Miranda is another example that shows Lai's proficiency in both Chinese and Western cultures. By naming her main character Miranda from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Lai hints that her Miranda is also about to discover her past and history. In *The Tempest*, when Trinculo creeps under the "monster's [Caliban's] gabardine" in the storm, he says Caliban smells odd and asks if he is a man or a fish. Caliban belongs to a primitive realm in which man and "fish" are not clearly distinguished, and Miranda's lover Salt Fish Girl is a clone with "point zero three percent" (*Salt* 158) genes from a giant fresh water carp in her contemporary lifetime. Another connection between Lai's Miranda and Shakespeare's lies in the fact that both fathers imagine themselves to be the king of a colonised place. Lai's Miranda's father sees himself as head of their isolated ethnic family in the otherwise white community and makes decisions for Miranda without consulting other family members. Thus, Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*, with many references and connections to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, can be seen as a creative fakery in a modern Asian Canadian version.

A more subtly embedded parody can be found in Lai's employment of distinctive imagery taken from French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. One of the most famous passages from Sartre reads:

Nothingness if it is supported by being, vanishes *qua nothingness*, and we fall back upon being. Nothingness can be nihilated only on the foundation of being; if nothingness can be given, it is neither before nor after being, nor in a

general way outside of being. Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being—like a worm. (21)

Later in the novel, as Nu Wa goes through trials and is punished to death, she made herself a worm inhabiting a durian fruit: “I made myself as small as a worm, crawled through the tiny aperture of a barely opened bud, and coiled myself round and round its small black heart” (Fox 208). Interestingly, in archaic English, the verb to fake also means to coil (OED).⁶⁵ By repeating Sartre’s famous image, Lai evokes the assertions of existentialism, such as ultimate aloneness, the meaninglessness of life, and so on.⁶⁶ The text that Lai evokes is a discussion about the relationship between being and nothingness, where Sartre explains that these two seemingly opposing notions are not mutually exclusive but interdependent and mutually transformative.⁶⁷ Lai indicates that artificially polarised concepts, such as the East and the West, male and female, or human and non-human, also deploy this mechanism.

Lai even hints that humans are imperfect fakes. By deploying a Chinese creation story, Lai also addresses the contemporary malaise arising from mass production methods. Contrary to the Book of Genesis, in which initially God only makes a man and a woman, the Chinese genesis is a mass production from the very beginning: Nu Wa makes a human from mud in the yellow river and when she is fatigued, she uses a rope to spray drops of mud on to the bank of the river and these also become human, although less refined. Also Nu Wa gives people two legs instead of a snake tail like she has. Out of exasperation and anger, she says: “I laid my thumb into a little indent beneath the waist, and, in a fury, pressed until the tail split in two”

⁶⁵ The OED gives definitions of “fake” including: “to lay (a rope) in fakes or coils; to coil”. Examples are given from 1860 and 1874.

⁶⁶ For example, in his published lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (1946), Sartre explains: “Life has no meaning *a priori*. Life itself is nothing until it is lived, it is we who give it meaning, and value is nothing more than the meaning that we give it. You can see, then, that it is possible to create a human community” (51).

⁶⁷ Sartre concludes after citing the famous example where he makes an appointment with Pierre in a café: “This example is sufficient to show that non-being does not come to things by a negative judgment; it is the negative judgement, on the contrary, which is conditioned and supported by non-being” (*Being and Nothingness* 11).

(*Salt* 3). Therefore as imperfect duplicates of the original, human beings are all, in a way, inauthentic. And Nu Wa is described (I notice Lai's careful phrasing), as "woman from waist up and snake from waist down" but not as "half-woman and half-snake", because it is in fact humans who are imperfect replicas of the original, as they are only "half Nu Wa". However, in normal circumstances, Nu Wa will be referred to as non-human, in a negating sense, just as mixed race and culturally hybrid people are seen as not pure or authentic as they do not belong entirely to one kind. Lai here suggests that definitive words could be more accurate and neutral and less judgemental.

At the same time, *Salt Fish Girl* is rich in references to southern Chinese customs. These include: the worship of Nu Wa for the protection of fishermen and also for obtaining fertility; the "spinsterhood ceremony" (*Salt* 54) where women, mostly for religious reasons, can pay a fee to the local administration in order to stay unmarried for life; the pig basket punishment (put a person inside a pig basket and sink the person into a river or a pond), used in old China for immoral women, especially those who cheat on their husbands; and the funeral ritual where a pearl or a piece of jade is put in the mouth of the deceased, which is still in use. Lai links the ritual with her story and gives it a nice explanation:

Who knew what human being dreamt of my secret first? It's a funeral ritual now. When someone dies, they place a stone in the mouth—jade, a pearl, something cool and precious to lay in the cavity from which speech comes. The dark and empty rooting place of language. A pearl, a seed, how little space it takes to record all that is essential to know about life. (206)

Nu Wa has a pearl at the back of her mouth since in exchange for legs, she gives up her language in Lai's remixed "Little Mermaid" story. In the fairy tale, the little mermaid sacrifices her voice for a pair of human legs, as Lai describes in the first section of her book, titled "Bifurcation". I argue that Lai evokes the underlying symbolic and feminist re-reading of the story: that the little mermaid gives her voice, which symbolises a woman's voice/right, in exchange for sexual maturation. This also demonstrates how Asian Canadian writing can talk back to the original, enriching it through reinterpretation.

Not only does she explore the past and offer new readings of tradition and cultural legacies, Lai also ventures into the future, as she invokes cyborgs. I argue

that Lai's use of cyborgs questions the line of distinction between human and non-human. When Miranda, the reincarnated Nu Wa meets Salt Fish Girl again in the 2040s, she is a cyborg called Evie:

“I'm not human”.

I recoiled slightly.

“My genes are point zero three per cent *Cyprinus Carpio*—fresh water carp. I'm a patented new fucking life form”. (*Salt* 158)

Previously, in *Fox*, Lai had referred to the 1982 film *Blade Runner*, in which cyborgs come back to Earth to find their makers, asking for a longer life-span. However, in *Salt Fish Girl* she further develops the idea.

Pris, “a basic pleasure model”, quotes in *Blade Runner*, ironically but precisely, “I think, therefore I am”, and indeed, the cyborgs seem to enjoy full autonomy. They form a society of sisterhood and can reproduce by eating the durian fruit. They are, therefore, not humans but autonomic beings, not lesser humans but not of the same kind (or, by analogy, “race”). I argue that Lai's strategy here is to argue for the extreme case, and, if the case can be brought for the cyborgs being in no way inferior to humans, then, all marginalised peoples are legitimised.

In conclusion, Lai targets, exposes and attacks deceptive aspects of the notion of authenticity. Meanwhile, Lai puts forward many kinds of fakery, by means of deploying literary parodies, suggesting alternative social realities, and proposing a circular view of history. In doing so, she effectively breaks the authenticity/fakery binary, as she does not put the two notions in opposition, but demonstrates the interaction between them, from which a new energy flows. Lai dethrones the absolute value of authenticity and restores a kingdom of fakery, which, as she demonstrates, has a liberating power. Her works touches upon a wide range of social issues and contemporary thinking, presenting, as she says, an Asian Canadian work that is “as complex and multi-layered as we can make it” (Afterword 254). No longer submitting to Edith Eaton's melancholia or Winnifred Eaton's regret about having forged a fake ethnicity for herself, Lai celebrates the enormous potential that hybrid identities bring about: the mobility gains from transgressions, transcultural, transnational, transsexual and indeed, the future-oriented sense of agency and creativity of the hybrid flowers.

4.2 Translating the Differences in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*

In her essay “Translating the Self: Moving Between Cultures”, Goto shares her thoughts about translation: “as a woman of colour, a feminist, an (in)visibly visible immigrant in a colonized country, the act of translation is imposed upon my very existence, daily, intellectually, theoretically, psychologically, perpetually” (111).⁶⁸ I argue that in her *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*, Goto exhibits the process of translation, and demonstrates many kinds of translation that ethnic minority subjects need to carry out. It seems Goto is very conscious about the issue of translation. As early as 2008, in an email interview that she and another writer Geoff Ryman, she wrote:

P.S.: I didn't read the Japanese translation of *Was*. I read only rudimentary Japanese. Don't you wonder about translation? I always figure it's just a toss into the wind in terms of how it will be done. I feel like it's a giant crap shoot and try to disengage myself from what the book might become. If you could get a universal language translator chip or a Babel fish would you take it? (n.p.)

⁶⁸ Japanese Canadian writer Hiromi Goto is another leading figure among second-generation Asian Canadian writers. She was born in Chiba-ken, Japan in 1966 and moved to Canada with her family when she was three years old. They lived in British Columbia for eight years before moving to Nanton, Alberta. Her works include prize-winning novels and young adult literature. *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994) was the winner of the 1995 Commonwealth Writers' Prize Best First Book. *The Kappa Child* (2001) won the James Tiptree Jr. Memorial Award for Science Fiction and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for 2001. Her other work includes a short story collection, *Hopeful Monsters* (2004); a children's book, *The Water of Possibility* (2002); *Half World* (2010), a novel for young adults; and its sequel, *Darkest Light* (2012). Goto also writes poetry that has been published in numerous journals and in one poetry anthology which she co-edited, *The Skin on Our Tongues* (1993).

Goto was quite intrigued by the effect of translation on a literary text as it provides uncertainty and possibilities. In her novels, she experiments with different translation techniques and explores the process of translation.

Goto's definition of translation expands considerably on its literal, conventional meaning: "To change into another language retaining the sense" (OED), in order to include many other activities, such as writing. As Goto explains "Writing can be seen as an act of translation in itself. From oral sound to physical markings, from what something is perceived/experienced as to what it becomes in written form, and translated yet again in how it is read, and even further, what is written about it. So many layers" ("Translating" 111). In *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*, Goto exemplifies translations of culture, life experiences and ethnic minority subjectivities in the context of Canadian discourse. Goto experiments with different approaches to translating differences in culture, language, personal experiences, and ways of life (especially sexuality). Goto also underscores unbridgeable gaps in understanding by giving examples of situations where an equivalent translation cannot be found or does not exist. In doing so, she demands more understanding and more conscious awareness of differences in society.

Goto defines good and failed translations: "Translation aspires to make known what is not and would be considered a failure if it could not" ("Translating" 111). Goto's definition of "translation" therefore differs from its usual meaning, which implies an independent project undertaken by the translator. Translation, as she understands it, aims at "making people know", a process which requires the reader's participation. McCullough says: "In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, narrative is revealed as an encounter in which teller and listener are mutually at risk, and where trust is responsible for the unique experience of each and for the relations between words and worlds" (151). A distinct awareness of the receiver—reader, listener, audience—can be observed in both Goto's novels, as I will explore below. Also during the translation process the departing object may need to undergo a series of changes, including a change of forms, and might become unrecognisable. Goto defines this translation as transcreation: "I say transcreated, because in my mind, translation is never a balanced equation. How can one language ever replace another? Translation can be a quick fix, a false solution, so easily served without the *sekinin*,

the pure work involved, we only see the end results” (“Translating” 111).⁶⁹ Goto expounds the process of translation, drawing attention to its different stages. In her novels, in effect, each of her Japanese Canadian characters translates their unique experience in Canada to make the readers understand what they did not know.

Chorus of Mushrooms has five parts and multiple narrative voices. The grandmother—Obachan—Naoe Kiyokawa, who immigrated with her daughter Keiko and her husband to Canada twenty years earlier, decides to break free from the confinement of the house in the small town of Nanton and hit the road. The disappearance of the grandmother has a great impact on the family: the mother has a psychological breakdown and Muriel, the granddaughter (named Murasaki by Naoe), heals the family by cooking Japanese food. Muriel also takes over the role of story teller from her grandmother and moves away from the small town when she is ready—or “arrived”—as she claims in the novel. Muriel has a narrative presence, marked in italics, mostly in scenes with her unnamed Japanese lover. Both Naoe and Muriel have a first-person voice in the narrative. Naoe tells Muriel reprocessed Japanese folklore stories while she grows up. However, because Keiko wishes the family, especially the child Muriel, to integrate fully into Canadian society, she never teaches Muriel Japanese or allows Japanese food in the house. The value of the stories is thus contested among the different characters. Meanwhile, the power of creativity and imagination is accentuated.

The title invites many interpretations. Goto compares the Japanese Canadians to mushrooms: “I must be a mushroom/ Everyone keeps us in the dark/ And feeds me horseshit” (*Mushrooms* 103), but at the same time, a “chorus” of mushrooms suggests the discovery of a voice on the part of the Japanese Canadian community. In the novel, Naoe leaves home and goes to the mushroom factory first. She lies down naked on the mushrooms, touches herself and gets to orgasm with “the unheard chorus of mushrooms” (86). How to be free? Goto suggests here “just be it”. It seems that being free relies on a spontaneous decision rather than planned out actions. Constrained by social norms and physicality (she is eighty and frail), Naoe sets herself free, instantly. The grandmother herself embodies cultural heritage, and her transformation (leaving home at night during a blizzard, her awakening sexuality,

⁶⁹ Sekinin, 责任, means responsibility.

becoming a bull rider), all signify an internal change in the localised cultural heritage and the infinite possibilities of its transformation.

Goto dramatises the relationship between the translator and the “receiver” as is shown by the mother and daughter—Naoe and Keiko—who refuse to communicate in a common language: “I speak my words in Japanese and my daughter will not hear them. The words that come from our ears, our mouths, they collide in the space between us” (*Mushrooms* 4). A real gap in communication is created by different racial politics. Naoe understands the mechanism of their stand-off: “We are locked together perfectly, each pushing against the other and nothing moves. Stubborn we are and will remain, no doubt” (13). This situation demonstrates what Goto explains as the failure of translation, that no “knowing” is reached at the end of it. Naoe reflects on Keiko’s choice: “the language she forms on her tongue is there for the wrong reasons. You cannot move to a foreign land and call that place home because you parrot the words around you. Find your home inside yourself first, I say. Let your home words grow out from the inside, not the outside in” (48). Keiko cannot translate herself as she cuts herself off from the inner resources, and, for want of a departing point, she can never arrive. This standoff can also be interpreted as what often happens with ethnic minority writers who cannot establish clear lines of communication with their readers, who bring their own kinds of knowledge and prejudice to their reading of the texts. Indeed, I observe a conscious strategy, in Goto’s text, of engaging and even educating readers by means of explicit examples, reminders and so on.

For example, at the beginning of the book, Muriel talks with her Japanese lover. Although the texts are written in English, readers are reminded that the discourse is in fact in Japanese, and therefore already a result of translation. Muriel demands a promise from her listener to be attentive, non-interruptive and respectful: “*Can you listen before you hear?*” (*Mushrooms* 2). This also emphasises a gap, a time lapse, between the acts of listening and hearing: the process of internal translation on the reader’s part. To ensure the success of her translation, Goto requires co-operation from her readers to complete the process. As Naoe asks Muriel: “Do you hear what I say or only what you want? [...] Will you listen with an open ear and close your eyes to thought?” (20). Muriel demonstrates the “proper” way to

listen: “I snuggled close, curled my legs and stopped pretending to understand. Only listened. And listened. Then my mouth opened of its own accord and words fell from my tongue like treasure” (20-1). This then becomes a ritual that transfers the power of story-telling to Muriel, as later in the book the exact passage reappears when Muriel starts to tell her story. In this way, Goto imparts the message to her readers that they are actively involved in the process of translation.

Goto demonstrates the way that translation works with many reprocessed traditional Japanese tales. For example, in the story about “Uba-Sute Yama” that Naoe tells at the request of Muriel, a transcreation of the story that old people get abandoned when they reach 60 years old, Goto retains traces of the translation from Japanese to English. For example upon seeing her sister, who comes to visit just before turning 60, the younger sister says: “Older sister! Why it’s such a long walk to *wasa wasa* come and see me. Please sit down. In the sun where it’s warm and I’ll go and put on some hot water for us” (*Mushrooms* 65). There are many cultural elements contained in this passage: the specific appellation, older sister, contrasting with the Western custom of addressing a sibling simply as “sister” or by their first name, is a distinct Japanese social practice; “*wasa wasa*” is a special kind of adverb, meaning “taking so much trouble to come [and see me]” in the Japanese language. The younger sister imploring her old sister to sit where it is warm in the sun is also a considerate thought typical in Japanese culture. Goto is consciously tracking a translation process in her texts by keeping a distinct Japanese “tone”. As Sally Ito explains in “Issues for the Writer of Colour”:

I often have Japanese characters in my story; it logically follows that they think in Japanese. In fact, I hear them thinking in Japanese. But my stories are written in English. What I often have to do is try to “translate” my characters’ thoughts and words into English. Mere translation, however, is not the only issue; one must maintain the tone of the characters’ thoughts and speech. (173)

By retaining Japanese sentence structures and cultural expressions, Goto shows her readers not the result of translation, but the process of translation, presenting it as an integration of two cultures.

Goto is conscious that she is attempting to translate the untranslatable:

I posit that sometimes, some things cannot be known, will never be known, and should be respected as such. In the writing of my novel, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, I embed the text with Japanese words, written in both the Roman alphabet, and in Nihongo. I do not footnote or provide a glossary of words or necessarily make the meaning of the words apparent through context. (“Translating” 111-2)

In what appears to be a section from a newspaper, *The Herald*, under the title of “The Multicultural Voices of Alberta, Part 4: Japanese Canadians Today”, Keiko and Murasaki give their controversial points of view on living in multicultural Canada. Naoe speaks last, in Japanese and then in English: “Kiyokawa Naoe wa iru. Mukashi mo ita. Korekara nochi mo iru. Canada wa hiroi. Jitto mimi o sumashite kiite goran, ironna koe ga kikoeru kara. Kokoro no-mimi o mottetara ne. Do you know your neighbour? Do you even want to? Will you ever? If you leave your home and start walking this road, I’ll meet you somewhere” (*Mushrooms* 190). I translate the Japanese part as: “Kiyokawa Naoe does exist. She existed in the past. She will exist in the future. Canada is vast. Listen for something patiently. Try and listen closely; because you will hear many voices. That is if you hold it with the ears of your heart”. Readers could simply assume that the English part of the passage is a translation of the Japanese part, and not realise that they are missing a part of the message where Naoe gives her heartfelt advice. Wendy Gay Person suggests in “‘Whatever That Is’: Hiromi Goto’s Body Politics”, that Goto designs an educational experience for her reader: “the inability to comprehend forces the reader to confront the experience of incomprehension itself and to refuse his authoritative position as the audience for whom translation must occur, for whom comprehension is a right” (84). By setting up language barriers in a text written in English, Goto challenges the monopoly of the English language and de-familiarises and unsettles monolingual Anglophone readers in their own domain, that is, in a novel written in English.

Goto, however, has a bigger vision in her design, as she explains:

Yes. I also integrate Japanese words for my Japanese Canadian characters who are bilingual. This is the language I speak with my sisters and bilingual friends. Much of it remains untranslated in my texts because, although books often make transparent the translation for narrative purposes, language in everyday life doesn't work that way. We don't live with universal translators. If you don't know the word, meaning is not always accessible. What then? You ask someone or you look it up. Or you don't bother and you never know.

I'm not interested in writing novels that ultimately narrow down into a "We're actually all alike" kind of mentality. Very real differences exist across all spectrums of human interaction. I'm interested in making language "real," not smoothing over the difficult terrain. (Grant n.p.)

Goto is not only contemplating the intercultural or transnational parameters in the process of translation, but also "across all spectrums of human interactions". Goto thinks universal understanding is impossible, therefore "fake". Her kind of "real" language and "real" stories are those that do not deny the discrepancies in understanding, existence of differences and disjunctions in people's perspectives. Her novels do not provide clear cut solutions to all kinds of violence, or try to tell "an immigrant Story with a happy Ending" (*Mushrooms* 211), but encourage people to face the "real" and deal with the differences. This should happen, not through translating the differences into sameness, but through acquiring knowledge of the process of translation, or becoming equipped with the "Kokoro no mimi" (190), ears of heart, to hear, understand and appreciate difference.

However, Charlotte Sturgess suggests in her *Redefining the Subject: Sites of Play in Canadian Women's Writing*:

Yet, such juxtaposition of Japanese and English sites of speech—the displacing from one linguistic system to another—not only underlines difference but establishes "a bridge", a relationship between two distinct systems which could be seen as a revisionary possibility. This hybridity combines two distinct cultural discourses and histories and thus creates a third possibility. (29)

Indeed, the mixing of languages and of stories from different cultures within one literary work generates a hybrid narrative, suitable for representing hybrid subjectivities. And this positions the two cultures as equivalent, making a critical exchange possible. Nevertheless, Goto's strategy is intended to erect barriers as well as bridges for her monolingual English-speaking readers:

Being "Canadian", as a Canadian citizen, I am colonizer/colonized. Text is also a place of colonization. And I wanted to highlight that difference exists, all cannot be understood. Language could and can be a barrier. This is based on my assumption that most of my readers are English-speaking and do not understand Japanese. This is the audience the book is mainly speaking to, my assumptions while translating myself. ("Translating"112)

Empowered in her own colony, that is her novel, *Goto*, by locating the parts that cannot be translated through language, points to the gaps of communication and indicates that incompleteness in understanding will always exist but should not be feared. Goto's insertion of Japanese passages into a text in English is a practice called code switching. Fred Wah explains code switching in his *Faking It* as:

the movement between two languages, usually the intentional insertion into the master language of foreign or colloquial terms and phrases that represents “the power to own but not be owned by the dominant language. Aesthetically, code-switching can be a source of great verbal subtlety and grace as speech dances fluidly and strategically back and forth between two languages and two cultural systems”. (Wah 82, quoting Pratt 177)

Indeed, I notice an aesthetic effect of code switching in Goto's novel, with the use of Japanese onomatopoeia throughout the novel: “*Sa! Sa! Sa!*” —the sound of walking (*Mushrooms* 64); “*bata bata*” of bare feet on hard wood floors (41); “*che*”, the sound to express contempt (48); “*para para para*” of petals of flowers falling off on the table (57); “*Pichi pichi, chappu chappu*”, the sound of the rain (6). Goto leaves these untranslated, according to Ito, “because the reader, without necessarily knowing the language, will simply recognize the code because of its universality. The point is to emphasize similarities in codes and create points of cross-cultural connection between the reader and the text” (“Issues” 174). The onomatopoeia produces a special musicality in the novel, like soft background music. At the same time, the Orientalist gimmicks actually work to disturb any notion of essentialised cultural identities. The untranslatable creates a space for cross-cultural translation.

Muna Shafiq in her essay on linguistic hybridity proposes other explications for the use of code switching and non-translation strategy:

[It is] an interaction between dominant languages and untranslated other languages on the periphery of a dominant culture allows writers to stabilize and subvert the identity of protagonists who travel between languages as a way to explore hybrid representations of identity. [...] In doing so, [the writers] demonstrate their reluctance to privilege one language over another. Moreover, they invite readers to explore the different possibilities of meaning that are elicited by such an encounter. (4)

In *Chorus of Mushroom*, the conversations are carried out in English and Japanese according to the interlocutors: for example, Muriel uses Japanese with her Japanese

lover but English with her parents. Within the English text, the Japanese phrases that readers encounter occasionally remind them of the bicultural and bilingual content, and, indeed, demonstrate that the other has “the power to own but not be owned by the dominant language” (Pratt quoted in Wah 82).

Goto is cautious about her strategy of using literary creativity to reverse power relations: “Language, the site of colonization, becomes an instrument I use to try to dismantle it. It’s very difficult. This negotiation between freeing from oppression with that which oppresses. I must be cautious” (“Translating” 112). Targeting language as the instrument used by the coloniser to oppress the subordinate other, Goto fights back with the same tool. In one of the stories told in Goto’s novel, old women perceived as a burden are abandoned by their families. But Muriel turns the term “abandonment” around and frees herself with it:

“Are you scared *Onē-san*?”

“Of what?”

“Of *Uba Sute Yama*?” the younger sister said, with a small shudder.

“Not at all”, the grandmother said, smacking her chocolate.

“Why not?”

“Because what we call something governs the scope and breadth of what it’ll be”. The grandmother sat up and clasped her arms around her knees.

“What do you mean?” her younger sister sat up beside her.

“It’s a place where people are abandoned. It’s a place of abandonment!” The grandmother flung wide her arms and flopped backward onto the moss. (*Mushrooms* 67-8)

Indeed, by playing with the English words “abandon” and “abandonment”, Muriel diffuses liberating spirits into a traditional tale where helpless and “useless” old people are abandoned as unwanted burdens. She changes it into a story where full-spirited elderly women free themselves from the confinement of household duties and seek fun. As Larissa Lai observes: “[Goto] does not attempt to ‘set the record straight’, but rather is consciously invested in the playing out of new subjectivities that do not deny historical oppression, but at the same time, refuse to be stuck in it, or defined by it” (*Slanting I, Imagining We* 138). In this way, new subjectivities flow out of the containment of traditional frameworks and become alive again. This recreation of old tales, feeding contemporary empowering spirits back into what is old and obsolete, is also a demonstration of a liberating inheritance.

In a way, Naoe's Tengu and Muriel's nameless lover are both imaginative creations, since they shift and change as Naoe and Muriel re-imagine them. When Naoe first meets Tengu on the streets, Tengu is nameless, driving a truck with no specific destination and talking in a cowboy accent: "Musta froze right thru yer sense, walkin' 'bout on a night like this. Worryin' yer folks 'n such. T'aint my bizness, just say so" (*Mushrooms* 109). Goto's readers must translate from the thick accent into standard English, trying to make sense of the talk. However, Tengu soon loses his accent, to the confusion of Naoe:

"Ara?"

"What's the matter?" he asks, jerks his head up to glance quickly at my face. His foot instinctively lifts from the accelerator.

"What happened to your accent?" I am amazed. And confused.

"What accent?" he says, his brow puckered up.

"Your cowboy western drawl accent".

"I never had an accent. At least not one I noticed", he grins. [...]

"I feel so strangely. Here I was, listening to you with an accent in my ears, only there might not have been one on your lips. And it makes me wonder what else we filter through our ears. And how can anyone be sure if what they hear is what is said?" (119-20)

Goto demonstrates again that in the colonised space (the text), the dominant power (the writer) can reverse and erase what has happened (the truth); on the other hand, Goto problematises the idea of reality in her novel, through many layers of revision of stories, so that what is true is not important any more. Eleanor Ty observes: "The various inserted discourses about stories, the truth, and the past reveal Goto's concern not so much with accuracy, but with representation and the power of representation. Whose version of the truth gets told is more important than the question of what is truth" (158). Indeed, Goto states explicitly: "what I think is the crux of translation is who is translating and for whom?" ("Translating" 111). Therefore in a way, Goto liberates Asian Canadian writing further, suggesting a switch of attention from "truth recovering" to gaining the power of representation and imagination.

In many places a nameless third person narrator recounts what is happening, right after Naoe and/or Muriel's narration, in a supposedly objective way. This fills some gaps in the narrative line and offers another perspective. It is nonetheless a repetition. But the reason that repetition is given prominence in the novel is in order

to challenge the dominant linear temporality typical in English-speaking cultures. In a way, all recreated and retold stories are a conscious repetition of history, which is an important way of inheriting cultural legacy. Goto explains:

There isn't a time line. It's not a linear equation. You start in the middle and unfold outward from there. It's not a flat surface that you walk back and forth on. It's like being inside a ball that isn't exactly a ball, but is really made up of thousands and thousands of small panels. And on each panel, there is a mirror; but each mirror reflects something different. And from where you crouch, if you turn your head up or around or down or sideways, you can see something new, something old, or something you've forgotten. (Mushrooms 132)

The world, instead of extending itself, like a path, from past to the future, extends from all sides and becomes a ball. The many panels provide points of view, and from each position the perspective is different. Therefore a person should not only move in one direction, but explore all around. Goto successfully translates this special world view with multi-voiced narratives, multiplicity of perspectives and a seemingly repetitive structure. The plotline of her book spirals and coils and this question appears many times throughout the novel: “When does one thing end and another begin? Can you separate the two?” (213).

Naoe refuses to call her granddaughter Muriel (a version of Mary in English), a name given by Keiko who is suggested to be Catholic. Instead, Naoe calls Muriel Murasaki, which means purple. It is also the name of the first novelist in Japan, Murasaki Shikibu, who lived in the eleventh century. Her *Tale of Genji* is not only a world classic, but more importantly, it is by a woman, and this emphasises the significance of Muriel's transformation into Murasaki—a story teller. Naoe renames herself “Purple” when she becomes a bull rider. As Naoe explains: “The words are different, but in translation, they come together” (*Mushrooms* 174). Therefore despite the many differences, Naoe and Muriel come together: “*Two women take up two different roads, two different journeys at different times. They are not travelling with a specific destination in mind but the women are walking toward the same place. Whether they meet or not is not relevant*” (*Mushrooms* 200). In *Transnational Poetics*, the editors observe: “translation allows for metamorphosis, change, and progress, resulting in a fluid, unfixed subjectivity” (Cuder-Domínguez et al. 139). Goto, by translating the apparent differences into sameness, stresses the importance

of creatively inheriting cultural legacies, just as the grandmother Naoe teaches Muriel to tell and recreate old stories.

In her second novel, *The Kappa Child*, Goto undertakes a more nuanced and complicated translation of her racial politics. She complicates ethnic minority subjectivity as she demonstrates that racial identity is only one facet of a person (there are also sexual, class and other identities) and that victim/oppressor positions are unstable too. Set in the year 2000, the novel draws attention to the current racial situation in Canada, which is less obviously prejudiced than it was in earlier periods, but which remains harmful to the wholeness of ethnic minority subjects, not least through its failure to address injustices in the past. In this novel, Goto expands her focus on the racialised other to include other oppressed minorities, such as non-heterosexuals, women and children who suffer domestic abuse, single mothers and so on.

In the novel, the nameless narrator grows up in a Japanese Canadian family which is constantly under threat from the violently abusive father. The father decides to move the whole family from British Columbia to Alberta to grow Japanese rice on the prairie. The childhood memory continues to traumatise her and her three sisters' adult lives, as the narrator says:

I've always hoped that childhood could be a book, a sequence of pages that I could flip through, or close. A book that could be put away on a shelf. Even boxed and locked into storage should the need arise. But, of course not. Childhood isn't a book and it doesn't end. My childhood spills into my adult life despite all my attempts at otherwise and the saturation of the past with the present is an ongoing story. (*Kappa* 215)

Goto is hinting that the traumatic memory for the Japanese Canadian community is like childhood memory for a person. If the person does not put the past behind her and fully engage with the present and make changes, then she will continue to live in the aftermath of the trauma and let it repeat the harm it did her.

On the night of the last visible total lunar eclipse of the twentieth century, the narrator had an unusual encounter with "Stranger" who may have impregnated her by performing Japanese-style wrestling—*sumo tori*—with her naked under the moon. The narrator is then pregnant with a *kappa* child—the Japanese water spirit (see figure 5), described in folklore as a childlike (seven or eight years old) green

creature with a turtle-like back, a dish-shaped head (with water in it, which is essential for its survival) and webbed fingers and toes. In Japanese folklore tales, a *kappa* is sometimes mischievous or vicious, but can also be kind and helpful to humankind.⁷⁰ In her essay “Alien Texts, Alien Seduction: The Context of Colour Full Writing”, Goto explains her writing interests, strategies and racial politics, which seem to be particularly pertinent to *The Kappa Child*. She says that she has been “seduced by the concept of aliens, not the aliens themselves” as she thinks there must be “a hypothetically plausible reason for alien portrayal, some small chance that this story could be *true*. Not simple, this desire, and not necessarily innocent” (263). Goto hints that there seems to be a need to create aliens. Kim Toffoletti argues in “Catastrophic Subjects” that “the monster functions both as Other to the normalized self, and as a third state or hybrid entity that disrupts subject constitution understood in terms of hierarchical binary dualisms” (n.p.). This desire for something alien is generated by a need to normalise and stabilise one’s understanding of the self. However, Goto relates the notion of alien presence to race: “I have not been abducted by aliens but I live well aware of race, the alien space I inhabit in a colonized country. If you want out of alien space, you must pretend not to notice daily references to the fact that you are an alien” (“Alien” 264). Ethnic minorities are marginalised and are constructed as the opposite of the “normal” in the “alien space” which, it though overlaps with public space, is distinct and separate.

The idea of public space is complicated when different cultures interact there, and in the book, the narrator thinks: “Or maybe, when humans are gone, our myths will come alive, wander over the remnants of our uncivilization. Kappa, water dragons, yama-uba, oni, selkie, golem, lorelei, xuan wu. The creatures we carry will be born from our demise and the world will dream a new existence” (*Kappa* 223). Because the public sphere is seen as neutralised and normal, and belongs to the mainstream, ethnic minorities are somehow rendered invisible. The narrator, who has a job as a collector of abandoned shopping carts, is constantly walking and driving in

⁷⁰ This idea of a woman pregnant with an alien dramatises Michael Taussig’s concept in his *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993) that “the maternal womb is the mimetic organ par excellence, mysteriously underscoring in the submerged and constant body of the mother the dual meaning of reproduction as birthing and reproduction as replication” (35).

the city, wearing pyjamas in day time and pushing shining and clicking shopping carts. However, it seems she is not a very conspicuous presence in the urban places at all as she has no interaction with the people she passes. Jun Zubillaga-Pow argues: “Like their heteronormative counterparts, queer objects would also have to gain homonormative legibility: Otherwise, they would be censored from mainstream visibility” (np.) Indeed, the narrator remains nameless and transparent, roaming unseen in the city. It seems by giving up her hopes for a better life and submitting to the force that causes her disintegration, she achieves an illusion of liberty.

In this book, Goto deploys a multi-voiced narrative and a double-helix timeline. Apart from the nameless narrator’s first person voice, the *kappa* child also occasionally has a voice, marked by italics. Two time lines progress intermittently: one starts about a year before the narrative present with a disastrous Easter family dinner which ends with the father overturning the dinner table and the youngest sister running away. The other starts from shortly before the family moves to the prairie and recounts the narrator’s memories of how they came to the small town they live in, bought the house and land and settled down. There are two subordinate strands woven into the narrative: one telling of the *kappa* child’s growing and another, in the form of flashback, revealing how the narrator becomes pregnant. The multiple plotlines present the complex mechanics of memory, which does not advance in a single line but instead whirls around the subject in circles that are at varying distances from the centre of consciousness. A person’s subjectivity is thus shaped and reshaped by layers of old and new memories. This process also blurs the border between the past and present, as memories are constantly shifting and being recreated. In this way, the line between what is real and unreal is also unsettled. Another reason why Goto develops different timelines in parallel is to show the way that the main character tries to keep her family life, work and friends separate. Drifting from one realm of life to another, the narrator never fully engages in any of the realms to integrate her subjectivities into something complete. Instead she actively marginalises and fragments her subjectivity.

Goto again deploys code switching in this book. It is suggested that the parents speak Japanese at home and the children speak both Japanese and English. What is new in this book is that Goto has sentences where “Japanese and English

combine and collide” (Huber 136). Examples are especially easy to find in the mother’s soft reprimanding of the second-generation children for using crude English words:

“Easter ni sucks te yuwanaino” (*Kappa* 26). (Please do not say suck at Easter.)

“Fuck te Easter ni yuwanaino” (93). (Please do not say fuck at Easter.)

“Shut up te yuwanaino” (131). (Please do not say shut up, my translations)

Having to repeat the English words to specify the misdoing, the mother juxtaposes the different effect of the two languages. In this way, rude English words are filtered through the Japanese sentence structure, dismantling the dominant power of the English language as the Japanese words negate and erase the English words. For readers who have no knowledge of Japanese, familiar English elements, such as “Easter” and “suck”, are estranged in a Japanese context, giving them an uncertain idea of what is going on, which also replicates the situation of many first-generation immigrants’ experiences with language barriers. However, instead of a reversed power relationship, we see the mother’s words are feeble and unable to contain the violence in the English language, as her reprimand does not have the effect of making the child repent or correct her ways.

Goto complicates the victim-victimiser position and suggests that the roles are constantly shifting rather than static. In this way, she foregrounds the importance of her question: “who is translating and for whom?” (“Translating” 111). However, in this novel, Goto questions the legitimacy of the power that comes from the authority of the translator—the one who gets to explain. At the beginning of the book, the narrator “baptises” her sisters with nicknames according to the zoological signs of their birth years, on the pretext that white people will not be able to pronounce their real names in Japanese. Her elder sister who is a year older than her was born in the year of the snake and is named “Slither”. “Mice” is the name given to her younger sister born in the year of the rat. “PG”, short for Pig Girl, was born in the year of the boar. These names are, however, disparaging and strange ones that are not fit to use in public but are confined to the household. In fact, it seems only the narrator uses these nicknames for her sisters. Her act of renaming is a form of mocking of systematic social oppression. By actively reproducing oppression,

minority subjects can normalise the injustice they experience and can reach a temporary reconciliation with it. Feeling stronger and wiser than her sisters, the narrator is acting arrogantly and unfairly: she does not name herself using the same logic, so she becomes nameless yet not powerless as she becomes “I”, the norm and the authority.

Goto exposes the arbitrary nature of the existing social order by having the narrator re-enact the biblical scene of Adam, the first man who names all the animals on earth: “‘you,’ I blessed the top of her head, ‘shall so be named Pig Girl!’” (*Kappa* 16). Thus she names her baby sister who is not yet able to speak and therefore cannot protest. Her naming of her elder sister, however, is more revealing. She performs a Western ritual, which is associated with the authority of the Christian church, to make a childish prank official and undisputable: “I anoint thee, from henceforth to be called Slither!” (16). The scene of Slither making futile protest is very symbolic:

“No, that’s just awful! It’s so gross! Can’t it be something nicer? Please?”
 “Sorry”, I shrugged, my turtle shoulders heaving, “the Name Master has spoken”. [...] I locked the door with the small hook that dropped into the tiny loop. Even Slither could have pushed the door in if she wanted to, but the sound of the cheap metal hook slipping into place shut out my sister more than if I had hung up a sign. (17)

Unsatisfied with the disparaging nickname, the older sister begs the younger sister to retract it. The narrator, who claims authority and power from the self-claimed role as the Name Master, enforces the power she invented for herself, through language. The fact that Slither could have forced through and overruled the act, but is stopped by an insignificant sign of prohibition, illustrates how the oppressed other becomes subject to social injustices.

The narrator, though sometimes acting as an oppressor, nevertheless believes herself to be disadvantaged and outcast. Having internalised social expectations of a model Asian woman, the narrator sees herself “a short, ugly Asian with bad attitude” (*Kappa* 84). She identifies herself as a social outcast, denying any possibilities of betterment in her life. This gesture, though it may look liberating on the surface, in fact shows how restrained the narrator is by social expectations, as she resigns herself to the social margins and actively alienates herself. In “The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse”, Homi K. Bhabha explains the alien and

grotesque presence in novels by hyphenated writers: “the disavowal of difference turns the colonial subject into a misfit—a grotesque mimicry or ‘doubling’ that threatens to split the soul and whole, undifferentiated skin of the ego” (27). This is shown by the narrator’s wearing of pyjamas all the time. Although the idea that pyjamas should be worn only at bed time and in private spaces is another arbitrary norm, her choice of not conforming to it further marginalises her. Goto explains: “Systemic racism dictates that an alien, no matter how genial or easy-going, no matter how self-effacing and self-erasing will always be recognized as such” (“Alien” 264). The narrator does not recognise the structured oppression of her family and of herself but blames them for not conforming to the “normal” Canadian life style.

Goto translates the pioneering dream of the North American west into a Japanese Canadian dream. The narrator is deeply attracted by Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie* (1935) and hopes to re-enact its stories with herself as the heroine. However, with an abusive and unpractical father who is not comparable to Laura Ingalls’s gentle and capable Pa, the narrator realises that the stories only give her false hope since they are inapplicable in her reality. Martín-Lucas observes in her “Burning Down the Little House on the Prairie: Asian Pioneers in Contemporary North America” that in both *The Kappa Child* and *Stealing Buddha’s Dinner* (2007), a novel by Vietnamese American Bich Minh Nguyen: “The girl narrators are fascinated by American author Laura Ingalls Wilder’s narrative of continuous displacement and re-settlement, *Little House on the Prairie*, and they both become equally disillusioned by the racial and ethnic gaps that make it impossible for them to become true Laura Ingalls in their respective environments” (27). Growing up with the father’s crude notions of education, the narrator finds herself far from becoming someone like the warm-hearted and well-loved Laura, but grows bitter and isolated.

In addition, Laura Ingalls makes a return to explain to the narrator: “they changed the book you know. [...] They did! They got it all wrong. [...] why do they do that? Oh, I know what they said. ‘The book is for children! Children need happy stories!’ Damn them all to hell!” (*Kappa* 252). Laura’s confession finally reconciles the different experiences of pioneer life on the prairie, denouncing the concealment of historical facts. The pain and struggle she owns up to unite her with Goto’s narrator in the role of (literal or metaphorical) daughters of pioneers. Also, it

demonstrates again that the question of “who is translating and for whom” is important: in this instance, because children are thought to be unable or unfit to deal with harsh realities, historical facts are twisted.

Another translated Western story mentioned in the book is the horror novel (and film) *The Shining* (1980). In *The Kappa Child*, it is suggested that the house that the family bought, where the deceased Mr and Mrs Rodney lived, is a haunted place. It is hinted that Mrs Rodney is murdered by her husband who kills himself shortly after. PG, on entering the house, reacts: “But she was rigid. Hands fisted. Her left eye roved madly, looking for escape, and the right eye stared direct at face of the house. Muttered something over and over” (*Kappa* 128). Moreover, at the end of the book, the father reveals to the narrator that PG chases him with an axe in her hand in the field. All these details enact an Asian version of *The Shining*. All these details enact an Asian version of *The Shining*, and set up a comic juxtaposition of Japanese myth with American popular culture.

Goto exposes the lasting effect of “white denial” on ethnic minority subjects: “The systemic disbelief that racism is historically structured and maintained within all aspects of society in a colonized country: its politics, law, education (nothing higher about this institution), administration, mass media, and yes, even its art. ‘White denial’ is the conscious and unconscious perpetration of systemic oppression” (“Alien” 265). Writing for (or to) white readers, Goto consciously educates them by unsettling their sense of familiarity on her “ground”. The purpose is to make them sense injustice in the existing social order and reflect on their own racial politics, as they may simply not realise they hold racial prejudices which affect their decision-making. In a story Goto tells within her essay “Alien Texts”, the character Sharon meets an alien in her bed and it begs for water: “*Now water! Why not just move right in? Sharon stomped out the door to the washroom down the hall. She hadn’t brought her own mug, but used the tan stained plastic tumbler with the slimy bottom. Someone brought it up from the cafeteria, and no one ever used it unless they were shit-faced*” (265). It is not because the alien is asking too much or unreasonably that Sharon reacts this way. It is a belief that as an other, the alien does not deserve equal treatment that makes her feel that she is acting rationally and within reason. In the novel a character observes: “Many people don’t even think. They enact their lives

without understanding the consequences of their choices” (*Kappa* 187). Goto endeavours to raise awareness in people about “unintentional” bias, showing that there will be consequences as a result of their unconscious acts.

The narrator understands that her family are oppressed, but she does not see this as wrong on the part of the society, as its values and practices are normalised by systematic enforcement. As a result, the narrator has mixed feelings towards the violent father who makes the women members of the family live in constant terror and fear. To some extent, she rationalises the father’s violence as something which is required to make the girls tough enough to survive in a hostile environment. However, she is not fully convinced, and questions:

“You spoil them”, Dad spit. [...] “If they aren’t tough, they won’t make it in this world”.

Make What? I thought. Whose World? (*Kappa* 130)

The narrator comes close to realising that she and her sisters naturally enjoy rights and privileges as Canadian citizens and should not have to do anything to earn those, as it is their world too. The father, however, of an earlier generation and still adopting an oppositional point of view, complicates things unnecessarily by trying to make the girls tough, using crude methods.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator portrays an Asian Canadian woman who seems to have control over her life. It seems the rest of the women family members are troublesome: the mother is too weak and deep in self-pity to protect or help her daughters; Slither, the beautiful one, is almost too delicate to survive her tough childhood; PG has a rolling eye and is susceptible because she can perceive supernatural presences; Mice cannot speak at age four and can only make dog-like noises. However, while the narrator is resigned to the situation, her family members change and evolve: the mother is said to be a survivor of abduction by aliens and leaves with their female neighbour Janice on a trip to give supporting lectures to other immigrant survivors; PG “is doing some travel writing for a feminist magazine in the States” (*Kappa* 245); and Mice becomes an university academic, giving conference papers on topics such as “Intelligence with a capital ‘I’” (243); Slither seeks professional help by taking counselling sessions and is able to move on with her life. She suggests to the narrator that she stop hating the father: “if you don’t

let the hatred go, he continues to oppress your life, just like if you were still living in his house” (266). The narrator then realises that being tough does not mean depriving herself of the good things in life or accepting things as they are. A Chinese academic, Jules, who appears only once in the novel, gives the narrator very valuable life advice: “If you want to believe badly enough, you make your need real. A physical articulation. And live your life accordingly. The results of your choice will affect everyone you come into contact with” (186). By believing that she, as an Asian Canadian, has equal rights and should enjoy social resources, the narrator is then able to reach out to actively change her life. She goes for a haircut, which suggests she is taking care of her personal and social image. She also goes to night school which may result in a better career path involving more than driving a van in the city looking for abandoned shopping carts. She keeps the pyjamas though, as she thinks that they fit her physical form best and she is more comfortable in pyjamas. More importantly, wearing pyjamas in public is also a visual protest, not conforming to the existing social order but making the borderlines more conspicuous. Also, by then, what she wears or performs does not define her strictly any more, since she is able to accept what she is, as changeable, complex, and undefinable as any subjectivity should be, and lives authentically. Indeed, since translation goes both ways, sometimes, an equation can work backwards. Therefore, a long-standing social order could be instantly changed if the subjugated characters are willing to move out their positions and exercise their power.

Goto’s translation can be seen as crossing over in both directions and during the process new ideas and aesthetics are created in the series of “transings”. In her works, there are transgressions of public or mainstream spaces, transgenerational connections, transsexual and transgender love, transcultural understanding and transcreated stories which all contribute to transnational receptions of her novels. Moreover, Goto makes the constant “transings” that her characters make in the books obvious, so that readers will become aware of the actual existence of those borders, constructed by social prejudice and discrimination.

In *The Kappa Child* Goto continues her exploration of the cultural heritage of hybrid people which she began in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, only this time, the cultural legacies are largely negative: ugliness, hatred, mistrust, and pain. The narrator

compares her childhood memories and cultural inheritance to luggage: “We drag around the baggage of our lives together. Even when we live apart. Baggage carried, with nowhere to check it in” (*Kappa* 192). This expresses the narrator’s mixed feelings towards her cultural heritage—it is a burden and at the same time a valuable possession that cannot be disposed of. Sandra Almeida argues: “The repeated reference to the baggage that has to be carried and cannot be checked in because home as one knows it no longer exists is a common trope in diasporic narratives. It refers to the condition of displacement experienced by migrant subjects in their experience of transit” (53). In the end, the *kappa* child was born out of the narrator, symbolising a liberating process, that ancient cultural legacies come back to life within the body of what is new and contemporary. The recreated and nurtured cultural legacy will then grow and “walk” on its own, thus no longer appearing as a piece of baggage that has to be dragged around.

The second generation writers, as shown in my analysis above, took up the rallying call of the first-generation writers and led Asian Canadian literature to a new level. They open up new possibilities in terms of genre, writing techniques, and temporalities. They challenge effectively the “scripted given and [the] expected and accepted conclusion” (“Alien” 264) by having *kappa* and a fox spirit walk in Canada. Having these aliens walk amongst people conspicuously, Lai and Goto invite their readers to reconsider public places or “shared” space from unfamiliar viewpoints.

I argue, that the use of tricksters, which is more familiar to students of Canadian literature in the context of aboriginal writings, has its own significance and features in Asian Canadian literature. The tricksters in these texts are all from deep in Asian cultures: incarnations of culture and history from a faraway place and time. The mobility of the trickster figures, suggests an active way of inheriting cultural legacies. As Ammons insightfully argues: “because [the] trickster won’t be contained, trickster strategies and tales provide a way of pulling together conflicting world views and sets of values into coherent, new identity. This identity is turbulent,

shape-changing, contradictory, ‘bad,’ culturally central, liminal, powerful, power-interrogating” (Ammons xi). For example, the fox is a typical trickster character as she is a social delinquent and can walk outside the borders of morality and mortality. As a figure which has accumulated meanings over a very long period, the fox is an embodiment of history and culture. Moreover, the fox can animate dead bodies to perform tricks, symbolising giving new life to cultural legacies by employing them creatively. By having their monsters cross borders between human and non-human, sensible and senile, trustworthy and mischievous, Asian Canadian authors make these borders porous and ambivalent. However, as the monsters are not accepted by both spheres, they also become the embodiment of the in-betweeners, those who inhabit the liminal space.

Both Lai and Goto draw resources from their ethnic cultural inheritance, in the form of folklores, myths and tales. Lai explains: “I want to be firm that the idea of the traditional itself is highly constructed and highly ideological. This version is one among many. There is no original, only endless multiple trails that point into the past. We can never grasp the past. These stories are always about the present” (Afterword 257). They both reprocess this material by combining it in an organic way with Western material, such as fairy tales. In Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the Japanese stories told by the grandmother Naoe and the granddaughter Murasaki are started in a Japanese style but are often ended in an unexpected way, as conventionally restrained characters suddenly cut loose with a rebellious and imaginative spirit. In *The Kappa Child*, Goto has the Japanese water spirit, the *kappa*, come to the Canadian prairie to teach the narrator a lesson about self-love. By realising the social injustice and patriarchal oppression that she herself has suffered, the narrator learns to liberate herself from her internalised social pressure and love herself for what she is. Lai’s novels are characterised by many reprocessed stories as she often starts with a traditional Chinese tale and then gives it feminist or homosexual twists.

Interestingly, in Asian American literature, there was a debate about ‘fakery’ versus authenticity in the 1980s. Critic and writer Frank Chin initiated the famous conflict with Maxine Hong Kingston with his “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and Fake” which was included as the first article in *The Big*

Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature (1991) (a sequel to *Aiiieeee: An Anthology of Asian American Writers*). Chin criticised writers who told “fake stories” – that is, reprocessed and reinvented folklore stories – in the American context:

Kingston, Huang, and Tan are the first writers of any race, and certainly the first writers of Asian ancestry, to so boldly fake the best-known works from the most universally known body of Asian literature and lore in history. And, to legitimize their faking, they have to fake all of Asian American history and literature, and argue that the immigrants who settled and established Chinese America lost touch with Chinese culture, and that a faulty memory combined with new experience produced new versions of these traditional stories. This version of history is their contribution to the stereotype. (3)

The editors decided not to include the “fake works” in the anthology: “the more popularly known writers such as Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang, Amy Tan, and Lin Yutang are not represented here. Their work is not hard to find” (*The Big Aiiieeee* xv). I argue that Chin did not realise that reinventing ancient works and creating new traditions are the liberating strategies that hyphenated writers devised on purpose, not only to claim possession of cultural legacies, but also to gain power and autonomy through not being tied down to designated identities and positions. It seems, as this article appeared in the anthology in 1991 and then was reprinted in part in *A Companion to Asian American Studies* in 2005, that this rigid view is endorsed or at least tolerated in Asian American studies. However, in contemporary Asian Canadian literature, the tradition of using “fakery” has been affirmed and encouraged from the very beginning. Lee, Kogawa, Watada and Choy all have reprocessed hybrid cultural elements for their own purposes. Lai and Goto employ the fakery to a new level as they purposefully celebrate the fake while questioning the authentic or the original.

Both Lai and Goto deploy black humour as highly subversive strategies in their works. Their many recreated cultural stories shed light on the atrocities and seriousness of traditional folklore. For example, in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Goto includes as an inter-text the Japanese story “Uba-Sute Yama”, about old people being abandoned on a mountain to die alone. A woman who is turning sixty decides that a place of abandonment is in fact a place of abandon, meaning she does not need to render service to the family any more but can be free and have fun: “The

grandmother flung wide her arms and flopped backward onto the moss” (*Mushrooms* 68). Goto also includes another Japanese legend about a girl and a boy, Izanami and Izanagi, who—as two gods—create the world by pronouncing the words out loud (30). However, in Goto’s version, the girl makes the rules of the game of creation and forces the boy to take back his only contribution “Let there be light!”, which echoes the biblical creation story. Playfully, Goto subverts western master narratives, creating an alternative order, thus breaking up the binaries.

Moreover, I have used many quotations from Lai and Goto’s interviews and critical essays while interpreting their works. I argue that in a way they are cultivating a special reader-author relationship. By providing reflections on, and explanation of the politics and strategies in their works, Goto and Lai “educate” their readers by actively engaging in discussion with them. The second generation writers, Lai, Goto, Rita Wong and so on, are versatile and take on many roles, as they are at the same time novelists, poets, critics, teachers and activists. By actively engaging with readers, academics and their respective communities, they advance the enterprise of Asian Canadian literature, in a sustainable and resourceful manner.

CONCLUSIONS: Asian Canadian Literature—Continue Pioneering**How Does a Single Blade of Grass Thank the Sun?**

I borrow this subtitle from the emerging Chinese Canadian writer Doretta Liu's short story collection that was published in 2014. I received a signed copy from Jim Wong-Chu, the person who has been working selflessly behind the scenes for the Asian Canadian literary community for the past forty years. Doing this project in the UK where Asian Canadian literature has been insufficiently studied and taught, I started my research as if in uncharted waters. Through my research, however, I started to sense that this cultural enterprise has been accumulating momentum and has developed rapidly. I was privileged to be able to interview Jim in Vancouver in June 2014. Through Jim's introduction, I came to know Allan Cho, who is the current president of Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop (ACWW). Allan passed on to me the complete electronic copy of *The Asianadian*. Jim took me to the headquarters of *Ricepaper* magazine and opened the storage room, saying: "help yourself to your heart's content". Often feeling frustrated in the UK, due to a lack of support and resources for my project, I am very grateful to the Asian Canadian literary community. Through researching the communal magazines and anthologies, I realised that the subject of my PhD thesis was in fact born and grown through conscious and continuous communal efforts.

In this thesis, I have mapped out how Asian Canadian literature, a relatively recent cultural enterprise, has been established. However, I have restricted the scope of my research in order to trace a particular strand within this literature, originating from Asian Canadian Activism in the 1970s and taken forward by a group of Chinese and Japanese Canadian cultural activists who see themselves as part of a distinct literary community. I argue that these writers actively sought to construct a kind of "lineage" in order to give structure and continuity to the emerging canon of Asian Canadian literature. I am not, however, insinuating that there has been only a single lineage. Indeed, the Asian Canadian literary scene is varied and diverse, and has been changing considerably, just as the broader Canadian literary scene has changed. The contours and boundaries of Asian Canadian literature have been constantly redrawn,

challenged, opened up, and temporarily settled again. At present, overseas students' writing, refugee literature, works by new immigrants and books produced by Asian Canadian writers that do not contain ethnic cultural details are entering the Asian Canadian canon.

In fact, I consider the parts of my work that deal with the “origins” of the literary canon to represent a particularly valuable research contribution. Many critics wish to see the progress of the literature, and we can sense that eagerness from titles such as *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English* and *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*. An impulse towards pushing forward, away from simply covering ground and towards something more exciting and valuable, can be discerned from the use of “beyond”. Soon after beginning this project, I began to be very impressed with the achievement of Asian Canadian literature, in terms of establishing—over a relatively short period—a rich literary corpus and a large writers' community. I was also impressed with the ongoing vigorous effort to produce more literature and bring on more writers. I decided that, while other critics were focused on discerning new trends in Asian Canadian literature and pushing towards the next stage of development, my own project would be to go upstream and find its origin. I have claimed the Eaton sisters as foremothers, documented the communal activism of the 1970s, discussed anthologies which announced the birth of Asian Canadian literature and encompassed analysis of the first two generations of writers. During my research trip in May 2014 to Toronto and Vancouver where I met Larissa Lai, Terry Watada, Jim Wong-Chu and Roy Miki, I began to have real and meaningful contact with the literary community, which I can see has been very dynamic. I then began to develop a sense of belonging as I found my place in the community and a sense of responsibility towards the development of this literature. I hope that this thesis will serve as a stepping stone for researchers in the UK to make their way into the Asian Canadian literary community, while providing culturally sensitive and informative analysis of this literature.

I also see my approach of discussing Japanese Canadian literature together with Chinese Canadian as an original contribution. This approach allows me to move away from the centre-periphery paradigm and focus instead on inter-ethnic relationships. Although, due to limitations of space, I could not include discussions

of works by other Asian Canadian groups, such as South Asian Canadian, Filipino Canadian and so on, my “pairing up” design has allowed me to explore the intimate connections and cooperation between two groups that I have chosen.

I have identified two major motifs that define Asian Canadian writing: Freedom and Inheritance. A constant struggle for freedom has been articulated and mapped out throughout my thesis. Cultural inheritance, to a certain extent, is a way for Asian Canadian writers to gain freedom, as the cultural elements and Asian writing techniques disturb English writing styles and traditions. However, it can be burdensome at times, since these cultural elements can be very different, to the point of conflicting with English writing styles, modes of narrative and values. I also discussed throughout the thesis how each writer devises different strategies to integrate these seemingly incompatible cultural elements into their narratives in English. I argue that this inheritance, however, is in flux. Not only does each writer have her own strategy and attitude towards how to integrate cultural inheritance, but also the content of the Asian Canadian literary legacy has been changing and transforming with time, from generation to generation. With two generations of writers now well established, Asian Canadian literature enjoys a rich and mature inheritance. It has evolved from its early stage of ethnographical writing, such as Chinatown laundry or café stories and Japanese internment histories, towards direct exchange with the mainstream, and then to what resembles a “self-reflection” from a Canadian citizen’s point of view.

Generations of writers continue speaking for marginalised minorities because racial discrimination is still a lived experience. They realise the need to unite as a community to expose the violence of racial stereotyping and, more importantly, to demolish the existing social framework which was built on many sorts of essentialised binaries. Writing from the in-between space of a binary—we/they, centre/margin, majority/minority, white/coloured, heterosexual/non-heterosexual, privileged/underprivileged—Asian Canadian authors reflect upon and mediate the power struggle inherent in a binary relationship. The authors often demonstrate the lasting influence of these power struggles on their characters’ subjectivity. They endeavour to open the liminal space, making it a more productive, resourceful and inclusive place.

In Asian Canadian literature, as an identity-based literature, it is important to ask who is speaking for whom. In my analysis I have emphasised both. My second chapter discussed reconstructed family stories. However, while accentuating the empowerment of later generations, authors such as Kogawa and Lee tend to simplify the lives of early generations of immigrants, and downplay their agency. My third chapter features two male authors Watada and Choy, endeavouring to tell “true” stories of “real” people by making characters from the first and second generations of Asians in Canada the protagonists of the stories. My last chapter deals with two post-generational writers, Lai and Goto, who are leading forces among the second generation of Asian Canadian writers. They also concentrate on current issues of the present time. Lai’s characters have loose connections with, and vague ideas about their community and past. Lai uses fakery as a liberating strategy for hybrid subjects, arguing that their voices are as “true” as those of any other group. Goto, by looking into the process of translation, probes from various angles her own question, “who is translating for whom?” (“Translation” 111). Realising the shifting power relations between translator and audience, Goto channels the power in transcreation.

The discussion about fakery and authenticity seem to be an embedded topic in Asian Canadian literature. The Eaton sisters demonstrated this by adopting strategies of racial identification and self-presentation. For Edith, who believed “The way of sincerity is the way of heaven” (“Leaves” n.p.), writing for her mother’s people whom she knew through working as a volunteer in Seattle’s Chinatown is her way of being authentic. Winnifred forged many identities that “supported” her ethnic writings, which opened many literary terrains and genres to her. She is still, by far, the most prolific and “successful” (in terms of sales) Asian Canadian writer. Various generations of critics have different attitudes towards their writing strategies. I argue that one of the rich and complicated “legacies” left by the sisters is the opened ground demarcated by the two polar policies. Contemporary writers then simultaneously explore what is “real” while liberating themselves with strategies of “fakery”. Following that, I argued that Lee and Kogawa effectively break the silence of the community and reveal painful histories. Meanwhile, their works are rich in transcultural and transnational perspectives. Watada and Choy, as well as giving agency to early generation immigrant characters in auto-ethnographic and

autobiographical works, are able to move beyond realist or documentary narrative and add a mythical dimension to their works. Lai and Goto, moving still further away from realism and conventional narrative structure, also push the fakery to a new level, as their works are multi-layered with transgressions of many kinds: transcultural, transnational, transsexual, translation, transgender and so on. They both challenge the idea that there is an origin of any kind at all in cultures. Meanwhile, they establish new truths by affirming differences and argue for legitimacy of the hybrid, as well as constructing hybridity itself as a mixing of already mixed cultural formations.

Indeed, North American culture is to some extent “fake” by nature: as societies established primarily through immigration (and partial erasure of earlier Native cultures), neither America nor Canada has a singular origin to speak of. In the texts I have studied, we see very diverse elements of westernised cultures: for example, the Irish maid in Winnifred’s *The Diary of Delia*, the rodeo described in Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the Roman and Greek myths that Larissa Lai alludes to in the characters’ names in *When Fox Is a Thousand*. However, by looking deeper, we see that Irish people are one among many immigrant groups from the European continent, rodeo culture is to some extent an exercise borrowed from aboriginal people, and Greek and Roman mythologies, which are considered as the origin of Western culture, in themselves represent a process of adaptation, transformation and transculturation (from Greece to the Roman Empire).

Then, indeed, it rings somewhat true when Aunt Emily tells Naomi in *Obasan* “Momotaro is a Canadian story. We’re Canadian, aren’t we? Everything a Canadian does is Canadian” (68). If hybridity and “fakery” are what really defines North American culture, then ethnic minority writers seem to be only following a tradition. However, this is not entirely true, as the entrance into mainstream culture is controlled by complicated socio-political and economic factors. Wah reflects: “But the more I wrote the more I discovered that faking it is a continual theatre of necessity. No other way to be in language, but to bluff your way through it, stalling for more time” (16). Therefore, here, faking it means claiming the ground, “pretending” confidence and demanding ownership of cultural capital, as the writers

wait for the day when Asian Canadian literature becomes familiar to all Canadian readers.

Then, if that happens, the writers will write themselves out of existence as there will be no need for Asian Canadian literature as a category any more. Indeed, to some extent, there is a built-in obsolescence in the Asian Canadian canon, as it was established with a desire for its own disappearance, if that means that the Asian no longer has to have an activist agenda. Indeed, how does a single blade of grass thank the sun? I ask myself as a critic of this literature. And obviously writers such as Doretta Lau also ask themselves this question. In *Redress*, Miki evokes Derrida's gift:

While [the Japanese Canadian] enjoyed the euphoria of their achievement, the nation, represented by the prime minister and the House of Commons, was symbolically redeemed by its acceptance of redress. In this interchange, the "Japanese Canadian" identity that was constituted by a history of injustices at the hands of the nation was given up as a gift to the nation and therefore ceased to exist in the conditions of its desire for a resolved future. (323)

Miki sees a way to dissolve violence peacefully with the concept of gift giving. I argue that the possible disappearance of Asian Canadian literature as it merges into Canadian literature, should that ever happen, may also be seen as a gift to Canada. By handing in the political mark, "Asian", the community obtains in return inclusion and recognition.

A Progressive Plan

I argue that the most consistent element in the Asian Canadian legacy that passes down through the generations of writers has been a desire for greater freedom. Human history has been a history of people trying to be free: the gradual abolition of slave-holding and feudal social system attests to that, as do countless revolutions. It is generally believed that freedom is the very condition upon which other desirable human conditions, such as happiness and self-esteem are built. People fight back when they feel that their freedom is violated or compromised. However, it is in this process that a sense of identity becomes established and fortified. In this sense, Asian Canadian subjects are endowed with a special strength, because they have had to

fight to assert their right to be recognised as what they choose to be. Inhabiting the liminal space, Asian Canadian subjects have a natural cause to fight for—to break away from designated positions and gain more freedom and space for their subjectivities to develop.

In the Eaton sisters' time, admitting to their Chinese ancestry was a serious matter, and it had a decisive effect on their publishing careers. Even Edith Eaton, the brave sister who chose to speak for Asian North Americans, has been observed to be "selective" in her content. In "Chop Suey Writing", Maria Noelle Ng argues: "Sui Sin Far's happy anecdotes, though they give a more positive impression of Chinese immigrant life in North America, also gloss over many of the unsavoury, confrontational, and violent episodes in the historical encounters between white North Americans and Chinese immigrants" (178). Indeed, although more direct in her political assertions than her younger sister Winnifred, Edith Eaton considered it more appropriate to concentrate on presenting the harmonious society that the Chinese immigrants in North America inhabited. Her Chinese characters, under close and friendly scrutiny, appear to be just as sensitive, decent and knowledgeable as white Americans, contrary to the popular thinking that they are inscrutable, deceiving and ignorant.

In contemporary Japanese Canadian literature, Joy Kogawa broke the silence about the injustice that the Japanese Canadians suffered during and after the Second World War. Her *Obasan* is the first contemporary Asian Canadian novel that entered the mainstream and remains the most influential and best received novel of the canon. By weaving into her English-language narrative elements borrowed from Japanese aesthetics, Kogawa reminds her readers of the gaps in their understanding of society and especially of others. A transcultural awareness, as she demonstrates in her novels, can enable people to access their own culture better, after having observed and gained knowledge about other cultures. Terry Watada, also a first-generation activist, revived the suppressed past, owning up to a less than glorious history in which the community's ancestors were neither perfect model citizens nor straightforward victims. Hiromi Goto, a second-generation Japanese Canadian writer, continues to expose the racial discrimination that is happening at various levels in Canadian society and reveals the impact of it on contemporary Asian Canadian

subjects. This reveals, on the one hand, that Asian Canadian writers now enjoy greater agency in choosing their subject matter; and on the other, that they are becoming increasingly conscious of the need to avoid self-appropriation, freeing themselves from feeling obligated to mould their characters to be perfect victims or model citizens.

I argue that it is not coincidental that the writers discussed in my second chapter, Kogawa and SKY Lee write, in their earlier work, from the perspective of a later-generation person observing the life of earlier generations of immigrants. For the characters, making peace with the past is in fact making peace with their present. By reconstructing a plausible and reasonable past, the post-generations can refuse to subject themselves to an ongoing victimisation which demands that they comply and sacrifice their freedom. Seeking freedom is not only a demand articulated by the Asian Canadian characters and directed toward the larger Canadian society, but also an internal process. By connecting to their ancestry and history, Asian Canadian individuals can start to understand their position in life and move on with their own personal lives.

The fiction by male writers that I discussed in the third chapter retains a retrospective viewpoint, with both Watada and Choy looking back at the early history of their diasporic communities. However, by this point, the earlier generations have become the protagonists themselves. The liberating force comes from the act of re-enacting: by giving the early generations agency and voice, the authors also free themselves from feeling obligated to whitewash a shameful history or to muffle protest.

In the last chapter, I showed that Hiromi Goto and Larissa Lai deliberately push further the liberating agenda by experimenting with the writing forms and techniques. Their characters do not wait for social changes to take place as they decide to be instantly free right where they are. Goto and Lai's empowering strategies bring the focus from the past to the present moment, and argue that the residue of racism still exist and continues to damage Asian Canadian young people. Their works also explore homosexuality, gender equality and future-oriented topics.

Asian Canadian Literature: A Model or an “Accident”?

This brings me to address the special local conditions of Asian Canadian literature’s development. Both the Japanese and the Chinese groups first came to Canada in the second half of the nineteenth century. Their survival in Canada for the past 150 years has accumulated rich resources for its literature. Meanwhile, the many immigration restrictions imposed on these two peoples resulted in a relatively continuous and consistent community culture in Canada. To some extent, Canada has implemented, by accident, the historical conditions required for the creation of a new diasporic literature. Moreover, in the context of global diasporas, Asian Canadian, Chinese Canadian, Japanese Canadian and so on, in their specificities, combine to form something that is Canadian and also global.

As I argued at the beginning of the thesis, Asian Canadian literature is created, informed and nurtured by a communal activist consciousness. The conscious communal effort, in terms of supplying both support in publication and progressive ideals, is the most distinctive feature of Asian Canadian literature, in comparison with other Asian diasporic writings in countries such as the UK, America, or Australia. In Britain, for example, although several novels have been published by British Chinese, the writers are mostly first-generation immigrants whose works tend to present a comparative view or focus on China. *The Life of a Banana* (2014), by P. P. Wong, is the first novel written by a second-generation British Chinese. Diana Yeh explains: “While concerns have long been raised over categories such as ‘Asian American’ or ‘Chinese Canadian’ literature, the critical debate on ‘British Chinese’ writing has barely begun. [...] Few were published in Britain before this time and even fewer have attracted any sustained scholarly interest” (300). Wenche Ommundsen, editor of a special edition of the literary journal *Otherland*, explains in the introduction: “the critical history is short: one might date the beginning of Chinese-Australian creative writing in English to the arrival of Ee Tiang Hong from Malaysia in 1975, or to the publication of Brian Castro’s *Birds of Passage* in 1983” (3). It seems that, due to a lack of organisation, the development of Asian diasporic literature in countries like Britain and Australia has been uneven and sporadic, and

thus it has been difficult for these writers to have much influence or impact on their respective national literatures.

Arguably, Asian Canadian literature has advanced considerably beyond the Asian diasporic literatures of other Anglophone countries, in terms of the size of its literary corpus, the number of established and emerging writers, and the development of its political agenda. One possible project for the future would be a comparative study of Asian diasporic literatures in immigrant countries, such as the United States, Australia and New Zealand. A focus on how Asian diasporic literature has become established in each country and a discussion of their modes of development relative to one another would be a valuable contribution to the study of world diasporic literature.

Another possible project would be a comparative study of Asian Canadian literature with other ethnic minority literatures. For example, established in 1980s, South Asian Canadian literature has also developed quickly, producing a considerable body of texts and a writers' community. In the introduction to the special issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature*, titled *South Asian Canadian Literature: A Centennial Journey*, Mariam Pirahai explains: "Several papers in this collection substantially reenergize discussions of the South Asian Canadian 'Canon,' represented here by novelists Anita Rau Badami, Rohinton Mistry, Michael Ondaatje and Shyam Selvadurai" (17). A comparative study could draw attention to the commonalities as well as differences in literary presentations of experiences of ethnic minority groups.

What is also favourable for the development of Asian Canadian literature is the country's commitment to multiculturalism. Yeh explains: "There may have been few English language 'Chinese' writers in Britain, but among those, even fewer have been remembered due to a lack of critics, scholars and publishing houses recognising their activities" (300). In Canada, however, in spite of its various implications and imperfections, the state policy has provided a relatively tolerant and open space for Asian Canadian literature to develop and has implemented institutional support for it to flourish fast since the late 1980s. Asian Canadian literature, therefore, has succeeded due to a combination of internal effort and social support.

Moreover, I argue that in Canada, there is an established tradition of community and nation-building via the development of a national literature: writers, critics and cultural institutions have worked in unison to stimulate the growth of their literature. Canadian literature, then, has set an example of a conscious, institutionally supported building of a literary culture. Asian Canadian literature, as a part of the national literature, has also been shaped by political and institutional interventions.

Terry Watada points out the responsibility of critics in an interview with *Ricepaper*:

This is not to deny that victimhood though...I mean for example, through three generations now, the Japanese Canadian community has been affected by the internment. But let's hope we can rise above it. And it's more than just the writers, it's the critics as well. If we can develop Asian Canadian critics writing about Asian Canadian literature, I think that it would go a long way to changing the perspectives of mainstream readers. (Foo 24)

In time I came to realise that as a critic, I am also part of the project. By reiterating, interpreting and emphasising what generations of Asian Canadian writers and critics have been asserting, I endeavour to contribute to the progressive plan of this literature. The community may continue producing writers but critics, especially international critics, are also necessary, to introduce Asian Canadian literature to audiences beyond Canada and to participate in the development of it.

The Future: Pioneering to Be Continued

Jim Wong-Chu and Terry Watada decided to donate their personal archives to the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre at the University of British Columbia. On 27th November 2014, as part of the ceremony, Glen Deer held an interview with both of them. During the interview, Jim Wong-Chu said to the current and future generations of Asian Canadian writers:

Even in this new generation, twenty years after, we are still pioneering, because there is this whole new generation of new writers out there, writing completely different things. [...] This is the very first time that you actually see the emergence of a true literature that is not just confessional, not about the past, not about ourselves personally, but about things, about what we look at, and how we see ourselves. So I think it's unique, and from here we will

need to transform it much further now. We need to encourage this generation of people, to not only get involved with writing their own material, but to try put themselves into the situation to help the rest of the community. [...] We don't like the reality and we want to change it. And by doing so, we reshape the whole Canadian literacy. Now you can go to a library, and there is an Asian Canadian literary section that is not there twenty years ago. You have to create your own reality. You have to think yourself as a pioneer. Everything you do is new. You got to break new ground. What we don't want you to do is cover the ground that we have covered already. (Deer, "Asian Canadian Studies" n.p.)

Newer generations are encouraged to continue pioneering by enlarging the Asian Canadian literary space and contributing to fresh developments within this cultural enterprise. This consciousness of the need to continue pioneering, I argue, is one of the most distinctive features in the Asian Canadian literary community. It is also the dynamism that keeps the literature moving forward.

In the same interview, Asian Canadian critic Chris Lee asked:

Can we argue that the Asian Canadian community doesn't allow recognising this kind of diversity, because we assume certain kinds of pattern in behaviour. [...] What I am asking is "Asian Canadian big enough to envelop all these sorts of stories without trying to move us towards the settlement question, or is there a moment we have to say that the Asian Canadian is not the right story any more, Asian Canadian is not the right narrative any more" so I am asking you to consider the limit to the rich history that you are outlining. (n.p.)

Looking back at the first writer that I discuss in the thesis, Edith Eaton, it is now clear that though there is a distinctive tendency towards inheritance and continuity in the Asian Canadian literary community, many shifts and transformations have nevertheless taken place. For example, Edith claimed she was willing to be the "insignificant linkage" between the East and the West, whilst her descendants in contemporary times refuse that role. Hiromi Goto, for example, when asked by Gavin J. Grant: "Do you feel with your books that you are building bridges between Canada and Japan?" answered:

Hmmm. Not exactly. [...] Ultimately, my two recent novels have very little to do with Japan, physically. The narratives are written from a distinctly Canadian standpoint. If there have been bridge-building tendencies, perhaps they would be between the conceptual gulf that exists between of-colour

North Americans and white North Americans who self-identify as “not having a culture”. (Grant n.p.)

Therefore, recent Asian Canadian writers are already on a divergent road from early authors, and are writing for a different cause. Now at home in North America, Asian Canadian writers work to alter and shape the mainstream society, rather than performing as communicating agents between their host country and their country of origin. In fact, these two concepts of place (home and adopted home) have become one for these authors, since they were born and/or raised in Canada. In my introduction, I quoted Joy Kogawa as she expressed her concern that with intermarriage to white Canadians, there would not be Japanese Canadians any more after several generations. However, Kogawa also shows confidence: “But I think that will be part of a new gathering of people with a growing identity. I think the Canadian identity is evolving” (*Other Solitudes* 100). Indeed, I argue this new Asian Canadian identity keeps evolving and enlarging, encompassing various forms of expression.

In the interview, Jim Wong-Chu answered as follows:

I think the word Asian Canadian has to be all encompassing. [...] You have to see it as an overseas diasporic experience. You know the new immigrants that arrive here are not different from the immigrants who arrived in the past at other places. The first generation is into survival, they have already made certain decisions and sacrifices to come here. [...] But by the third generation they will have the old problem all over again, as that generation will be English speaking and probably have never gone back to their homeland. So that identity thing happens all over again. [...] And yes, I understand that the new immigrants do not see things like we do. But even among ourselves, we do not agree on everything, you know, only because we are community workers and activist, we fight amongst ourselves. There is never a total harmony. But here is a direction and there is a possibility for things to change for the better. And that’s what we look for, a better tomorrow. (Deer, “Asian Canadian Studies” n.p.)

The Asian Canadian legacy therefore has some significance to other former colonial or imperialist countries which are hosts to many ethnic minority diasporas. Diasporic writing is a world phenomenon, but has been developed unevenly. It seems that each diasporic community, if it has a chance to develop a distinctive cultural enterprise, has to go through the same process all over again: publication within the community, relatively small-scale publication in the mainstream with ethnographic writings about

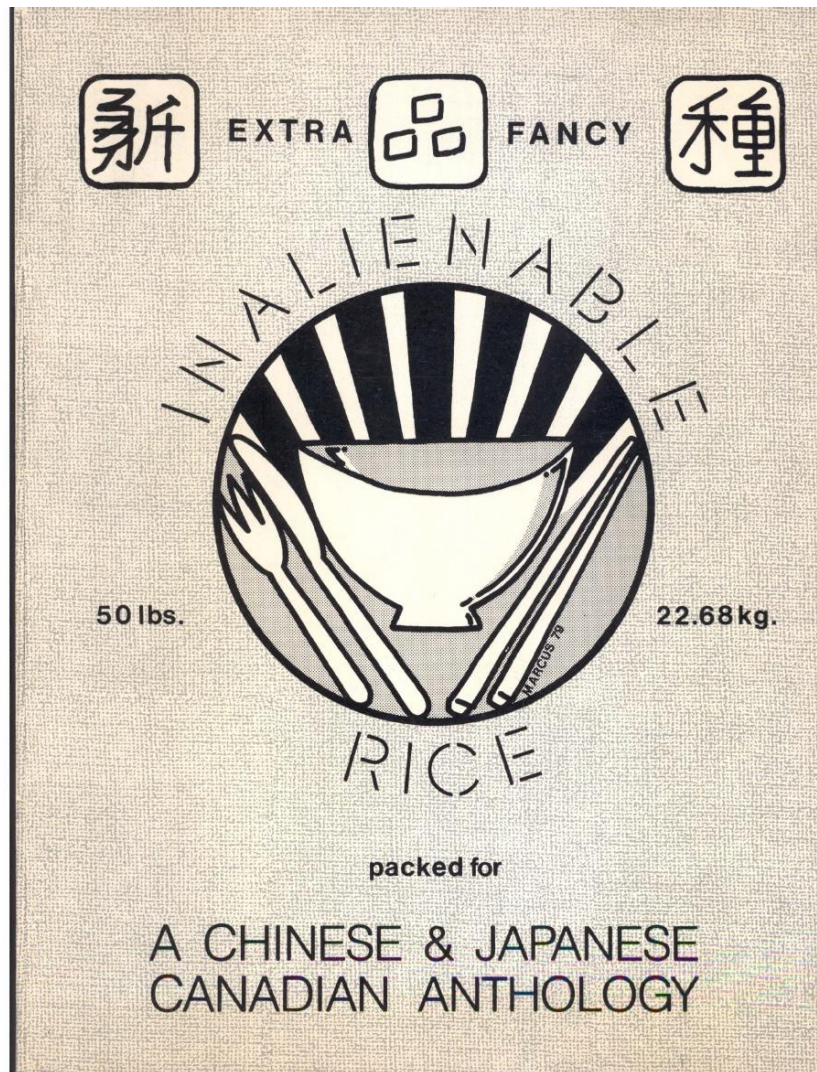
settlement, generational conflicts and so on. In this sense, Asian Canadian literature is also a pioneer force in the context of world diasporic writings. Its unique local conditions have ensured a continuous and vigorous growth. Therefore, the Asian Canadian literary community, including writers, critics and readers, has a duty to continue pioneering and lead world diasporic writings to new stages of development, offering them direction and resources.

Moreover, to ensure this continuous pioneering and to remain progressive, the liberating consciousness also has to be maintained and developed. I will quote Fred Wah's words again as I did in the introduction: "To write (or live) ethnically is also to write (or live) ethically, in pursuit of right value, right place, right home, right otherness" (Wah 58). I have demonstrated that Asian Canadian literature is a highly ethically committed literature, especially with regard to the political agenda shared with other minority groups, which is focused on gaining recognition. Writing out of an urgency to rectify social injustices that happened and are happening to their community and themselves, Asian Canadian writers are naturally sensitive and sympathetic to other causes of various resistant groups, just as Simone de Beauvoir famously argued: "Wanting freedom for oneself means wanting freedom for everyone."⁷¹ The Asian Canadian literary community has been an ally or core force in the feminist and queer movements, and in speaking for refugees and aboriginal peoples in Canada. The way to freedom is also the way of fairness and equality. The liberating force in Asian Canadian literature is therefore also a leading force in humanitarian causes.

⁷¹ "Se vouloir libre, c'est aussi vouloir les autres libres" (Beauvoir 92).

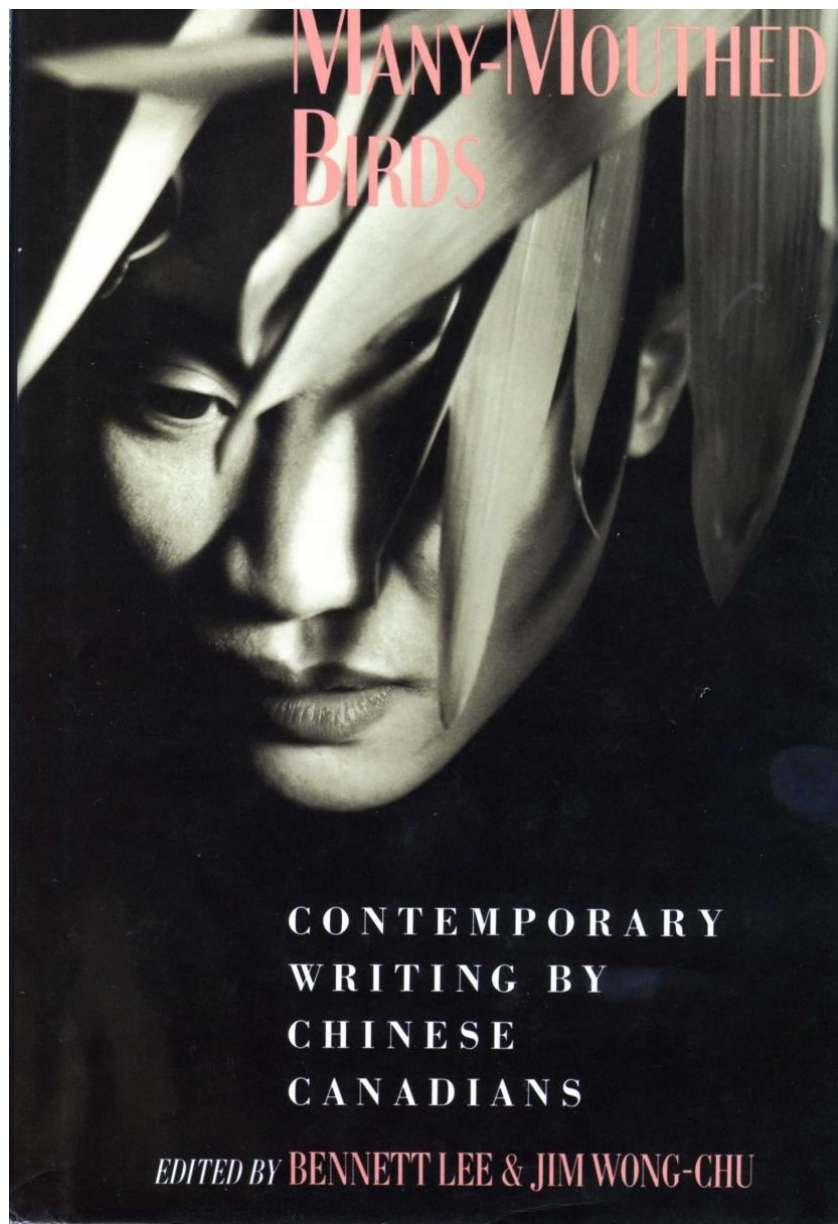
Appendix: Figures

Fig. 1



Front Cover of *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* (1979)

Fig. 2



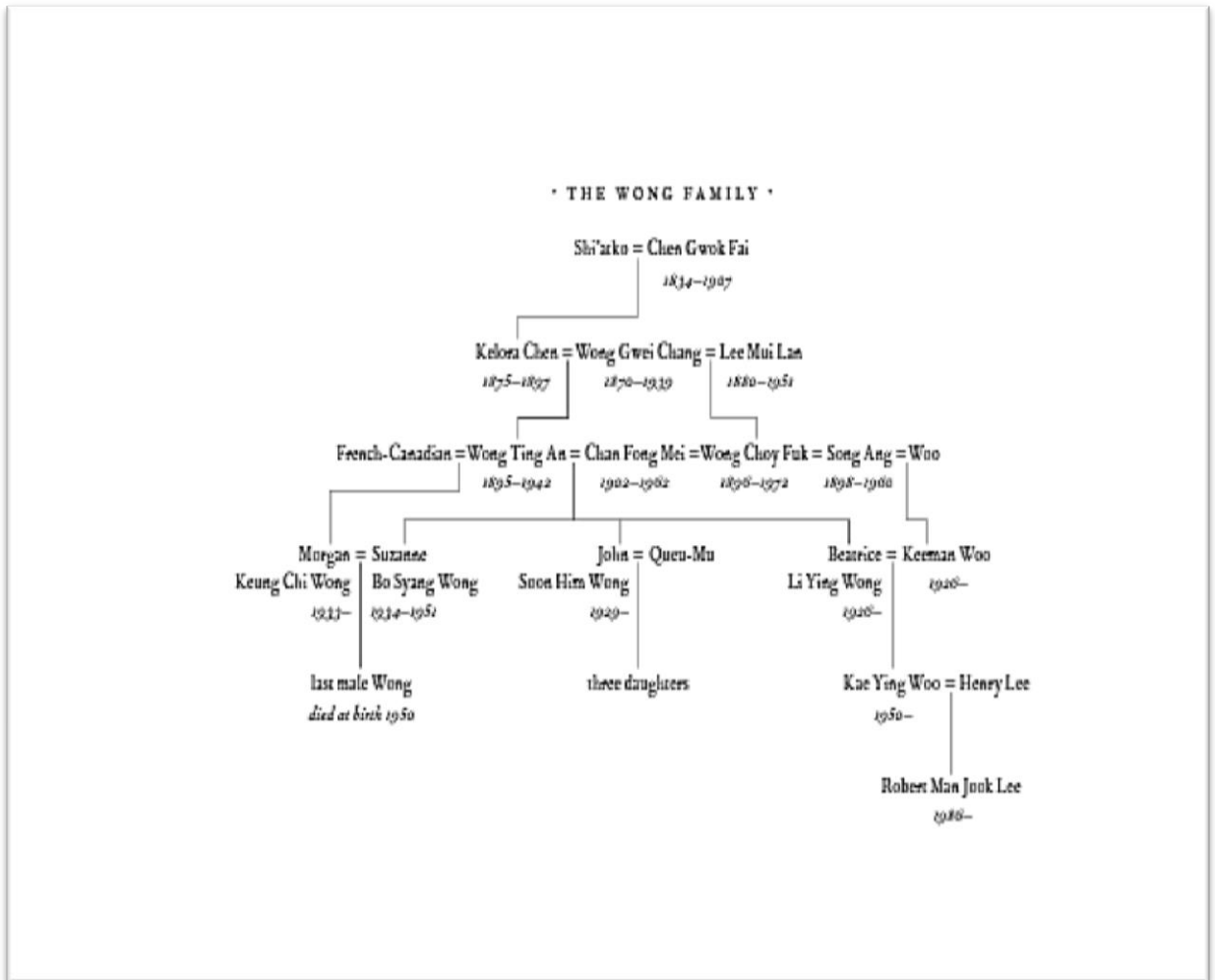
Front Cover of *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians* (1991)

Fig. 3



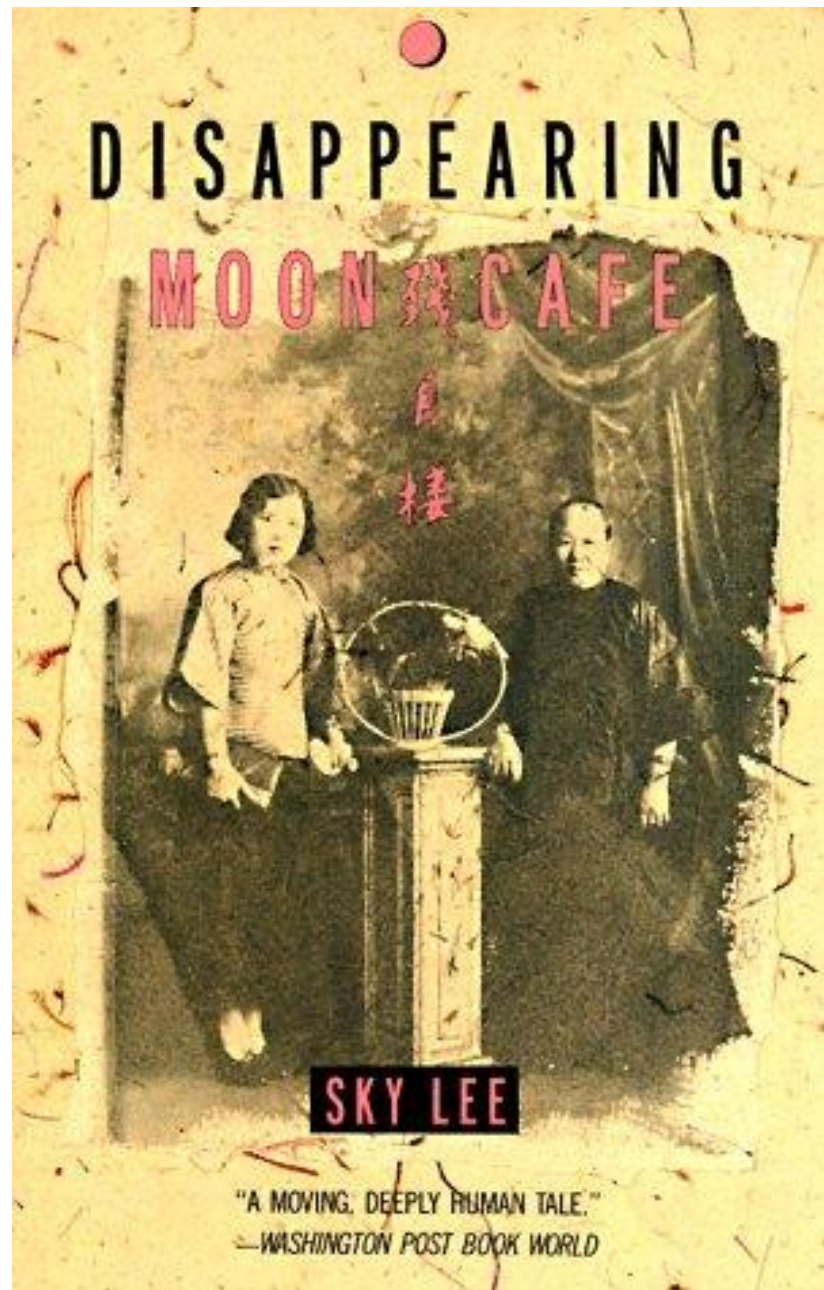
Covers of *Strike the Wok: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Canadian Fiction* (2003)

Fig. 4



The Family Tree of the Wong Family

Fig. 5



Front Cover of *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990)

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