

REACHING GOLD MOUNTAIN

REACHING GOLD MOUNTAIN: DIASPORIC LABOUR NARRATIVES
IN CHINESE CANADIAN LITERATURE AND FILM

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LAY ABSTRACT

This project examines representations of Chinese labour and Asian-Indigenous relations in Chinese Canadian literature and film. By focusing on how Chinese Canadian writers and artists honour and remember the nation-building contributions and sacrifices of Chinese labourers in stories set in Canada during the period of anti-Chinese legislation policies such as the Chinese Head Tax and the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act, this thesis provides a critical look at the values and ideologies that these narratives may draw upon. It asks whether it is possible for writers and artists to commemorate Chinese labour stories without also extending the colonization of Indigenous peoples, forgetting the history of Asian-Indigenous relationships, or promoting work ethic values that may hinder community building with Indigenous peoples and respecting Indigenous ways of living and working off the land. This study explores questions of history, memory, national belonging, social justice, decolonization, and relationship building.

ABSTRACT

This project provides a coalitional reading of Chinese Canadian literature, film, and history based on an allegorical framework of Asian-Indigenous relationalities. It tracks how Chinese labour stories set during the period of Chinese exclusion can not only leverage national belonging for Chinese settlers but also be reread for a different sense of belonging that remains attentive to other exclusions made natural by settler colonial discourses and institutional structures, that is, the disavowal of Indigenous presence and claims to sovereignty and autochthony. It contributes to important discussions about the experiences of racism and oppression that typically privilege the relations and tensions of diasporic and Indigenous communities but hardly with each other. What is more, this study aligns with a recent surge of interest in investigating Asian-Indigenous relations in Asian Canadian, Asian American, and Asian diaspora studies.

The political investments driving this project show a deep commitment to anti-racist and decolonial advocacy. By examining how Chinese cultural workers in Canada have tried to do justice to the Head Tax generation's experiences of racial exclusion and intersectional oppressions in fiction, non-fiction, graphic non-fiction, and documentaries, it asks whether there are ways to ethically assert an excluded and marginalized Chinese presence in the context of the settler colonial state. By doing justice to the exclusion of Chinese settlers in the national imaginary, do Chinese cultural workers as a result perform an injustice to the originary presence of Indigenous peoples? This thesis re-examines the anti-racist imperative that frames Chinese labour stories set during the period of Chinese exclusion in Canada: by exploring whether social justice projects by racially marginalized

communities can simultaneously re-assert an excluded racialized presence and honour their treaty rights and responsibilities, it works to apprehend the colonial positionality of the Chinese diaspora within the Canadian settler state.

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INTRODUCTION

This Is Not Our Land: All We Have Are Labour Stories

It happened at a meeting between an community in northwest British Columbia and some government officials. The officials claimed the land for the government. The natives were astonished by the claim. They couldn't understand what those relative newcomers were talking about. Finally one of the elders put what was bothering them in the form of a question. "If this is your land," he asked, "where are your stories?" He spoke in English, but then he moved into Gitksan, the Tsimshian language of his people—and told a story.

—J. Edward Chamberlin's *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?: Finding Common Ground*

The is indigenous and therefore does not have the psychological burden of establishing his or her right to the land in the deep emotional sense of knowing that he or she belongs there.

—Vine Deloria Jr.'s *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*

Where Are Our Stories?

The Gitksan elder's poignant question frames J. Edward Chamberlin's entire book, an exploration of what stories settlers have since they lack creation stories and traditional knowledge about the land.¹ The way in which Chamberlin approaches answering the Gitksan elder's question, however, takes an unexpected turn. Rather than acknowledging the discomfiting premise underlying the elder's question—that settlers

¹ Chamberlin's work demonstrates a breadth and range of knowledge acquired not only during his scholarly career but also from his tenure as a Senior Research Associate with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, as well as from the knowledge gained from his work on native land claims around the world. For example, the book traverses a wide range of cultural contexts and literary texts with relative ease: "from Australian Aboriginal resistance oratory to African praise songs, cowboy lyrics to blues laments, creation stories to constitutions, nursery rhymes to national anthems, and modern Western canonical poetry to ancient and contemporary riddles and charms" (Gingell 2).

lack autochthonous stories about the land—and engaging in a compelling discussion on the legacies of settler colonialism, Chamberlin stakes a universalizing claim instead: that settlers have stories too, even if their stories fail to provide them with cultural and spiritual origins as well as an Indigenous sense of belonging to these lands. According to Chamberlin, since settlers have inherited their stories from Western European knowledge systems, settler “stories” have been used to delegitimize and undermine the stories that Indigenous peoples have about the land.² What follows this opening describing a politically charged interaction between a Gitksan elder and Canadian government officials is a universalizing defence of story, an unravelling of the entrenched binaries dividing reality from the imagination, storytelling from the sciences, mutually exclusive categories that he claims have created violent and oppressive divisions between “Us and Them,” when “we” are apparently more similar than history has led “us” to believe.

Chamberlin’s imagined audience, the “Us” in his book-length response to the Gitksan elder’s question, invokes a universal audience, particularly when he asks, “[c]an one land ever really be home to more than one people? To native and newcomer, for instance? Or to Arab and Jew, Hutu and Tutsi, Albanian and Kosovar, Turk and Kurd” (4)? However, his invocation of a universal “Us” is only made possible by flattening out the differences between all “newcomers.” When read in the context of settler colonial societies structured by institutional histories of colonialism and white supremacy, his

² Following Indigenous scholars, I use the terms Indigenous and Native interchangeably to refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, except when a more specific reference to a nation, tribe, or community is necessary. I also use the plural peoples to signal the vast geographical and diverse cultures that these terms attempt to designate, a term identified by scholars such as Emma LaRocque (Plains Cree Métis) as resisting “massive depersonalization to which *Ai-see-nowuk* (‘the people’ in Cree) have been subjected” (7).

constructed “Us” glosses over the varying degrees of power that white settlers and settlers of colour access in multicultural settler societies like Canada. Indeed, not only are all settlers presumed to be equal in his book, but settlers of colour are also rendered irrelevant to the question posed by the Gitksan elder.³ Had settlers of colour such as those of Chinese descent been invited to participate in this discussion, they might have said upon arrival that “we” never belonged here; that all “we” have are labour stories.

At the risk of repeating Chamberlin’s universalizing move, I invoke “we” to join this important discussion initiated by the unnamed Gitksan elder and thus engage with the elder’s discomfiting claim that Chamberlin largely bypasses yet draws his book’s title and organizing thesis from. To answer the elder’s question, I first invoke “we” to refer to the multiple genealogies of Chinese migrants and descendants who have been settling and living on these lands since 1788. The first Chinese settlers, fifty Chinese artisans who arrived on a ship with Captain Meares to build a trading post that would foster fur trading between merchants in Canton and the Nuuchah-nulth (Nootka Sound) peoples on Vancouver Island, were left behind due to Meares’s clashes with competing Spanish traders. Though largely suppressed in official Canadian history, there is historical documentation of these stranded Chinese settlers having sought refuge and integrating with the Nuuchah-nulth peoples (Chan 33). My invocation of this early history thus stakes not a nationalistic claim of origin and belonging for Chinese migrants, settlers and

³ As a Comparative Literature scholar, Chamberlin discusses a breadth and range of Indigenous literature and culture from different continents, yet his discussion of non-Indigenous artists only extends to white settler canonical and popular culture producers. Thus, his supposedly universalist categories of “Us” and “Them” only include Indigenous and white settler communities.

their descendants but a provocative framing for my project's political investments in honouring and privileging the history of Asian-Indigenous relations over the legitimacy of the Canadian settler state. Rather than beginning my study with the Chinese diaspora's first exclusionary encounters with the settler state, I begin with the Chinese diaspora's historical relations with Indigenous communities since "we" as a diasporic community did not come into existence thanks to the benevolence of the postwar Canadian state. "We" have been arriving in Indigenous lands, lands that have been inhabited by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. Thus, "we" as a Chinese Canadian community must reckon with these originary relations and acknowledge their historical legacies even when "our" heterogeneous migrant/settler genealogies fail to converge.⁴

My project then explores how a "we" can be constructed from a coalition-based reading of Chinese Canadian literature, film, and history. It tracks how Chinese labour stories set during the period of Chinese exclusion can not only leverage national belonging for Chinese settlers but also be reread for a different sense of belonging.⁵

⁴ I use the terms Chinese settler, migrant, sojourner, diaspora, and Chinese Canadian interchangeably throughout the dissertation not because I understand them to be synonymous but because I find them to be inadequate stand-alone categories for tracking the full complexity of what it means to be part of a Chinese migration that has been settling on these lands since at least 1788. For people of Chinese descent have moved in and out of these categories depending upon the time of arrival and other factors intersecting with their process of racialization such as class, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, generation, education, degree of cultural and linguistic assimilation, and membership in diasporic communities. I must acknowledge and thank my good friend and colleague Jessie Forsyth for helping me to articulate why I keep returning to all of these terms, for certain terms perform the conceptual-historical work that other terms gloss over.

⁵ The period of Chinese exclusion (1886-1947) refers to anti-Chinese legislation that regulated Chinese immigration and citizenship in Canada. In 1886, Chinese immigrants had to pay a \$10 Head Tax to enter Canada, which increased to \$50 in 1896, \$100 in 1900, and \$500 in 1904 (Chan 11-12). By 1923, the government abolished the Chinese Head Tax to allow entry to desirable Chinese immigrants who have been exempt from the Head Tax all along: Chinese diplomats, merchants, students, and children born in Canada (Cho 74-75). These amendments remained in effect until the repeal of the policy in 1947.

Essentially, the history of Chinese exclusion that informs the political response of Chinese cultural workers to demand national inclusion and recognition through the memorialization of Chinese labour stories structures the scope of my project. My dissertation focuses on the representation of Chinese labour set during the period of Chinese exclusion, but it also remains attentive to other exclusions made natural by settler colonial discourses and institutional structures: namely, the disavowal of Indigenous presence and claims to sovereignty and autochthony. To be sure, the political investments driving this dissertation show a deep commitment to anti-racist and decolonial advocacy. By examining how Chinese cultural workers have tried to do justice to the Head Tax generation's experiences of racial exclusion and intersectional oppressions in literary and documentary texts, I ask if there are ways to ethically assert an excluded and marginalized Chinese presence in the context of the settler colonial state. By doing justice to the exclusion of Chinese settlers in the national imaginary, do Chinese cultural workers as a result perform an injustice to the originary presence of Indigenous peoples? As anti-racist artists, writers, and academics memorialize the Head Tax generation in their cultural production, I question whether it is possible to commemorate these labour stories without also reiterating nationalistic articulations of settler belonging that erase Indigenous autochthony or forget the historical legacies of Asian-Indigenous relations. This project re-examines the anti-racist imperative that frames Chinese labour stories set during the period of Chinese exclusion in Canada: by exploring whether social justice projects by racially marginalized communities can simultaneously re-assert an excluded racialized presence and honour their treaty rights and responsibilities, it works

to apprehend the colonial positionality of the Chinese diaspora within the Canadian settler state.

Even though Chinese Canadians have been granted enfranchisement and organized as a community for the state's repeal of anti-Chinese legislation policies in the late 1940s,⁶ there has been a persistent commitment on the part of Chinese cultural workers to commemorate the experiences of the Head Tax Generation and their labour contributions even after multiculturalism became an official state policy in 1988.⁷ As the history of the emancipation and enfranchisement of other marginalized groups and communities in multicultural settler societies such as Canada and the US demonstrates, the official removal of institutional policies that deny human rights and civil liberties to oppressed classes does not magically transform heterosexist, white supremacist societies overnight. For example, the repeal of exclusionary Chinese immigration laws did not remove racial barriers from Canada's immigration patterns: in fact, Canada's postwar humanitarian gestures remained colour-coded.⁸ It was not until the introduction of the points system in 1967 that Canada's immigration policy removed the last vestiges of its

⁶ Though Chinese immigrants were never officially barred from naturalization, the process of naturalization was subject to racial bias, especially after 1923: "[b]etween 1915 and 1930, for example, only 349 Chinese were naturalized, and after 1931 an order-in-council required that those applying for Canadian citizenship obtain consent from the Ministry of the Interior in China" (Li 31).

⁷ The protection of civil rights and equality in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms failed to placate the political mobilization of different ethnic and Indigenous communities during the 1980s, a period of political unrest that moved the Trudeau government to put together a state policy that would appease the public's demands. For more on multiculturalism as a liberal policy designed to manage and regulate a culturally fractious period in Canadian history, see Eva Mackey's *The House of Difference*.

⁸ In the postwar period, the Canadian embrace of large numbers of refugees and displaced peoples from Europe is often noted as Canada's significant humanitarian gesture; however, a greater number of refugees or displaced peoples in Asian countries, from Indonesia to the Philippines and China were purposefully excluded (Price 312), that is, until images of the boat people stirred the compassion of the state and its citizens to sponsor 60,000 refugees fleeing the Vietnam war.

explicitly racial discrimination policies: only then did Asian immigration to Canada begin to increase substantially, especially during the 1980s and 1990s.⁹ With these institutional changes, pre- and post-1967 Chinese settlers can finally vote, exert their political rights, strengthen as a community, and reunify with family members who have been historically barred from immigrating to Canada due to the Head Tax or the restrictions amended to the Chinese Immigration Act in 1923. However, as Larissa Lai's account (in *Slanting I, Imagining We*) of the history of anti-racist cultural activism during the 1980s and 1990s reveals, the persistence of racial discrimination and exclusion from Canadian cultural life continued to mobilize marginalized communities to work in coalition with other racialized and Indigenous communities for equal rights and cultural belonging (introd.). This history of late twentieth-century cultural activism by marginalized communities in Canada demonstrates that organizing for social justice remains imperative, for state legislated promises of civil rights and equality often comes only with symbolic guarantees.

In *Slanting I, Imagining We*, Lai historicizes the genealogical formation of Asian Canadian literature as a deeply politicized, social justice and coalition-oriented community struggle. Though Asian Canadian literature as an academic field of study has failed to gain the institutional standing that its American cousin has enjoyed as an interdisciplinary field for the past forty years,¹⁰ as a concept and category, Asian

⁹ As Daiva Stasiulus and Radha Jhappan remark, "[i]t is significant that of those 1.24 million immigrants who came to Canada between 1981 and 1991, 6 of the 10 top source countries were Asian, with Hong Kong and China in the top 3 reported countries of birth" (118).

¹⁰ Fifteen years ago, Donald Goellnicht asked why the field of Asian Canadian studies has taken twenty to twenty-five years to be born, a delayed development attributable to several historical, political, and

Canadian literature emerged beyond the confines of the academy during the 1980s and 1990s, a rupture that “coincided with Asian Canadian community-based activism and community-based activism in other marginalized communities” (Lai, introd.).¹¹

Ultimately a porous container for Lai, Asian Canadian and Asian Canadian literature are “genealogically produced and deeply relational” terms that have overlapped with other racial categories, genres, and organizational forms (Lai, introd.). What is more, “[t]here was much crossover and dialogue through these communities, which were often as activist as they were creative and critical” (Lai, introd.). Thus, Lai’s account of the activist, coalitional underpinnings of Asian Canadian literature further contextualizes this project’s invocation of “we” and all the historical legacies and political responsibilities that come with invoking such a term.

Though it is important to remember the activist, coalition-based context from which Asian Canadian as a literary and political movement emerged, it is just as important to acknowledge and learn from the ways in which the critical analyses, demands, and goals for equality and social justice employed at the time (and arguably to this day) were not always commensurate with those of Indigenous communities. I place this project in conversation with the genealogical formation of Asian Canadian literature and community activism as outlined by Lai because of the important insights that this

institutional differences, particularly the absence of (non-white) ethnic studies programs in Canadian universities (“Long Labour”), a prescient argument since it has only begun to be offered as a minor program in the past few years in two Canadian universities.

¹¹ As Lai recounts, the formation of Asian Canadian literature is “profoundly relational, built in coalition with broader movements in the arts, involving people who variously articulate the building movements as anti-racist, of colour, Black, First Nations, South Asian, Caribbean, queer, feminist, Japanese Canadian, Chinese Canadian, Korean Canadian, GLBTQ, working class, disability, and more” (Lai, introd.).

empowering and fraught history of coalition-building provides. Cultural workers and scholars committed to doing justice to the experience of Chinese exclusion will often confront anti-racist and nationalistic frameworks embedded in the literary, cultural, and historical archive of Chinese exclusion, frameworks that call on the state and dominant society to acknowledge the oppressive experiences of the Head Tax generation and grant political recognition and national inclusion to all Chinese migrants, settlers, and descendants who have ever been impacted by anti-Chinese legislation and discrimination. Racist discourses that depict the early Chinese sojourners as an undesirable migrant class typically invite a nationalistic response from anti-racist cultural workers to demand political recognition of the Head Tax generation due to their indispensable nation-building contributions.¹² However, similar to the strategies deployed by the Asian Canadian literary and community activist movements of the 1980s and 1990s, such responses remain predicated upon acknowledging and securing the legitimacy of the settler nation state.¹³ Racially marginalized communities committed to social justice and struggling for national inclusion must also question what other originary injustices remain foundational to supporting a settler nation state in the first place: it is important to question just what it is that we wish to belong to. As Lai explains it, mobilizing for

¹² For instance, in her analysis of the Chinese Canadian redress movement and Asian Canadian critical discourse surrounding Chinese Head Tax racism, Lily Cho points out that critics and activists have sought to combat stereotypical images of the Chinese immigrant “by highlighting the importance of Chinese labour to Canada. In this response, Asian Canadian critics and activists have been anxious to prove the desirability of Chinese immigrants to the nation by insisting on their role as nation builders” (Cho 64).

¹³ Modeled after the old democratic European nation state, the Canadian state has since morphed into various international neoliberal forms under global capitalism, creating challenges for activist movements committed to interrogating the state for infringing upon human and civil rights; thus we “would do better to attend to the palimpsest of states that still occupy us—neoliberal, liberal democratic, multicultural, bicultural, vertical mosaic, and white settler—and the interactions among them” (Lai introd.).

justice and inclusion within the old bounds of the democratic nation state made sense at the time, for

many racialized Canadian cultural workers did perceive national belonging as something to be desired and striven for, even if the path was always fraught, contradictory, and problematic. We believed in the possibility of democratic equality within the bounds of the Canadian state. However, for writers with commitments to social justice, the recognition that the Canadian state is a colonial state actively engaged in the disenfranchisement and oppression of Indigenous peoples would be an excellent reason not to want national belonging. (Lai, introd.)

While we cannot completely reject the citizenship rights and protections that the settler nation state ostensibly guarantees all settlers, we cannot continue to fight for and enjoy such rights and benefits without also considering that such settler privileges proffered by the state stem from treaty rights and the displacement of Indigenous peoples from unceded territories.

Epistemological Origins

Out of intellectual necessity, this project engages with several academic areas of study that have only begun to grapple with the colonial positionality of settlers of colour over the past ten to fifteen years. The way in which I have envisioned the parameters of this project has been shaped by several fields of study: namely, settler colonial studies, postcolonial studies, diaspora studies, Indigenous studies, Asian American studies, and Asian Canadian studies. When I first began to conceive this project, I became aware of settler colonial studies as it was theorized by literary and cultural studies scholars working in the field of postcolonial literary studies, scholars such as Alan Lawson, Terry Goldie, and the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*. However, disappointed with the absence of settlers of colour from their analyses, I turned to a ground-breaking 2000

special issue in *Amerasia Journal* edited by Asian American studies scholars Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura that looked at Asian settler colonialism in the context of Hawai‘i. Later published in 2008 as *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai‘i*, the essays in the 2000 *Amerasia Journal* issue helped me understand the intersecting racial and colonial complexities of Asian migrant genealogies—how it is that Asian migrants and their descendants can inherit both the oppressive legacies of racial marginalization and Asian settler colonialism.¹⁴ But mapping the concerns of these essays onto the theoretical framework of my project proved difficult as Asian settlers occupy a substantially different balance of power in Hawai‘i than they do in Canada: albeit settlers imported as exploited and racially marginalized labour in both contexts, Asian migrants and their descendants have come to exert a hegemonic influence in Hawaiian state politics.¹⁵ Fortunately, the important 2005 article by Bonita Lawrence (Mi’kmaw) and Enakshi Dua provided a critical framework and a set of ethical protocols for analyzing the colonial positionality of settlers of colour in social justice projects situated in the context of postcolonial studies, Indigenous studies, and Canadian anti-racism.

In “Decolonizing Anti-Racism,” Lawrence and Dua emphatically contend that

¹⁴ According to Haunani Kay-Trask (Kānaka Maoli), Asian settlers in Hawai‘i have produced a settler indigenizing ideology that “tells a familiar, and false tale of success: Asians came as poor plantation workers and triumphed decades later as the new, democratically-elected ruling class. Not coincidentally, the responsibility for continued Hawaiian dispossession falls to imperialist *haole* and incapacitated Natives, that is, not to Asians. Thus do these settlers deny their ascendancy was made possible by the continued national oppression of Hawaiians, particularly the theft of our lands and the crushing of our independence” (4).

¹⁵ More specifically, Japanese settlers have gained control over Hawai‘ian lands and waters through state channels, a hegemonic influence that has been politically threatened by the Native sovereignty movement in Hawai‘i (Trask 11).

people of colour, in settler colonial societies such as Canada, are settlers: despite their marginal positionality, they are also beneficiaries of settler colonial structures (134).¹⁶ Whether people of colour have historically carried or currently carry the balance of power to subjugate and oppress Indigenous peoples or not is beside the point since the “[o]ngoing settlement of Indigenous lands, whether by white people or people of color, remains part of Canada’s nation-building project and is premised on displacing Indigenous peoples” (Lawrence and Dua 135-136). Therefore, if people of colour “live on land that is appropriated and contested, where Aboriginal peoples are denied nationhood and access to their own lands,” then people of colour most certainly participate in or are at least complicit in the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples (Lawrence and Dua 134). Being historically colonized elsewhere and subsequently marginalized here does not excuse settlers of colour from bearing some complicity and responsibility in the ongoing colonization and displacement of Indigenous peoples.

In a similar vein, Sunera Thobani makes a forceful claim in *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*, her intersectional 2007 work on racial and colonial relations in Canada: while the status of racialized immigrants in the settler colony remains ambivalent and fraught due to the global economic structures that have propelled their migration and their experiences of dehumanization and exploitation

¹⁶ Presenting a counter-argument to Lawrence and Dua, Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright suggest instead that decolonial projects work towards reclaiming the global commons by opening borders for all. They contend that adopting a more inclusive notion of “global commoners” instead of the Indigenous/migrant divide avoids reiterating the oppressive structures of post-colonial nation states, a position that problematically assumes all Indigenous models of nationhood are equally oppressive to its guests.

prior to and even following migration, Thobani contends that while “the suffering of immigrants cannot be minimized neither can their participating in (and benefiting from) the ongoing cultural and material domination of Aboriginal peoples” (17). Somewhat similar to Lawrence and Dua, Thobani conceptualizes a complex triangulated framework of racial and colonial relations in Canada that recognizes that the racialized migrant ranks lower than the Euro-Canadian settler in the racial hierarchy but simultaneously higher than the Aboriginal in the colonial structure (17). She argues that

[c]itizenship was instituted in a triangulated formation: the Aboriginal, marked for physical and cultural extinction, deserving of citizenship only upon abdication of indigeneity; the ‘preferred race’ settler and future national, exalted as worthy of citizenship *and* membership in the nation; and the ‘non-preferred race’ immigrant, marked as stranger and sojourner, an unwelcome intruder whose lack of Christian faith, inherent deviant tendencies, and unchecked fecundity threatened the nation’s survival. (75)

Understandably, this argument has been met with some resistance from people of colour but scholars like Thobani, as well as Lawrence and Dua, are not making the case to simply acknowledge that people of colour are colonial settlers; they offer theoretical frameworks that effectively challenge binary discussions of settlers of colour organized around Judeo-Christian based juridical concepts of guilt and innocence or victims and oppressors, asking us to consider that victims may also be oppressors, and that colonial intent is not the only condition required to establish colonial complicity. If anything, their frameworks point to acknowledging and also responding to a larger structural schema of historical, political, and ethical relations and accountability between settlers and Indigenous peoples. This is not a morally righteous and polemical exercise in shaming and blaming settlers of colour; it advocates a productive rather than negative response to

acknowledging our colonial complicities. It is a call to settlers of colour to learn from Indigenous peoples about how we can be allies and build stronger political alliances, cultivating a practice of solidarity that demands settlers of colour to—according to Harsha Walia—take leadership by “being humble and [...] take] initiative for self-education about the specific histories of the lands we reside upon, organizing support with the clear consent and guidance of an Indigenous community or group, building long-term relationships of accountability and never assuming or taking for granted the personal and political trust that non-natives may earn from Indigenous peoples over time” (par. 6).

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that people of colour are also colonial beneficiaries. In their review of international critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and theories of nationalism, Lawrence and Dua criticize scholars for ignoring the role of people of colour in the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples in the Americas. In failing to make Indigenous presence and colonization foundational in their analyses of race and racism, such scholars first and foremost erase Indigenous existence; second, they fail to acknowledge that diasporic identities are situated in multiple projects of colonization and settlement on Indigenous lands; third, they overlook other histories of colonization by focusing only on histories of African slavery; fourth, they problematically equate decolonization politics with anti-racist politics, placing decolonization and anti-racism within a liberal-pluralistic framework, which decentres decolonization; and finally, by criticizing theories of nationalism, they contribute to the ongoing delegitimization of Indigenous nationhood and render Indigenous nationhood unviable

(Lawrence and Dua 27-28; 131).¹⁷ What is more, Lawrence and Dua argue that this refusal to address settler colonialism and Indigenous decolonization has also been reproduced in Canadian antiracism theory: they claim that the epistemological framework of ignoring Indigenous presence presents a perspective of “Canadian history [that] is replete with white settler racism against immigrants of color. If Aboriginal peoples are mentioned at all, it is at the point of contact, and then only as generic ‘First Nations’ [... Thus, the] ‘vanishing Indian’ is as alive in antiracism scholarship as it is in mainstream Canada” (132-133).

There is nothing unique about the disavowal of Indigenous peoples in critical race and postcolonial studies scholarship. The erasure of Indigenous presence has structured the storytelling patterns of Euro-American and Canadian literary canons as well. In his 2006 study of the colonial storytelling traditions in Euro-American literature, *Muting White Noise: Native American and European Novel Traditions*, James H. Cox notes that all the various plot devices and patterns used in non-Native constructions of Native characters and communities work towards the same goal: to write Native presence out of the national landscape. Working from the critical writings of Native American intellectuals and artists, Cox observes the ways in which Euro-American literary texts

¹⁷ Their literature review includes scholarship by Aijaz Ahmad, Ian Chambers, Lidia Curti, Ruth Frankenburg and Lata Mani, Anne McClintock, Benita Parry, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and James Clifford. However, having published the article fifteen years ago, they cannot have addressed scholarship published since then or in other areas of study that do emphasize Indigenous presence: for example, the work on Asian diaspora and Aboriginal relations recently in Asian Canadian studies (Rita Wong, Marie Lo, Larissa Lai, Henry Yu), Asian settler hegemony in Hawai‘i (Haunani Kay-Trask, Candice Fujikane, Dean Itsuji Saranillio), or diaspora-Indigenous relations in diaspora studies (Lisa Lowe “Intimacies,” Celia Haig-Brown, Gaurav Desai, Petra Faschinger, Daniel Coleman, and more recent work by James Clifford).

tend to promise or culminate in the disappearance of Indigenous peoples and thus constitute textual acts of settler domination. Whether Indigenous disappearance is the narrative plot result of military conquest, cultural assimilation, outright extinction, or a trope used to critique European aggression and expansion in America, that Native absence is repeatedly told in Euro-American literature as an inevitable outcome of Indigenous and settler contact demonstrates the racist ideology that underpins settler colonialism.

Since the nineteenth-century, white settler Canadian authors have doomed Indigenous nations and communities to extinction as well, sharing the perspective of their southern counterparts that the disappearance and erosion of Indigenous peoples and cultural traditions since the arrival of the superior European race was inevitable.¹⁸ In the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, Euro-Canadian poets, novelists, and playwrights began to address the white settler's role in what they perceived to be the destruction and disappearance of Indigenous peoples and their traditional ways of life; however, the way in which they address the Euro-Canadian colonization of Indigenous peoples in their cultural and historical production also serves settler colonial interests. These narrative patterns make use of a vanishing race discourse in their representation of Native "disappearance" in order to romanticize and mourn an Indigenous ancestral past, a glorified vision of a lost Indigeneity that serves to provide the Euro-Canadian settler

¹⁸ Known for his literary works and assimilation policies as deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott believed in the inevitability of Native disappearance. In his view, since the original spirit of Indigenous traditions was long dead, to "allow" Indigenous peoples to practice their traditions would only slow the assimilation process (qtd. in Monkman 70-74). To live, Indigenous peoples had to culturally and racially disappear.

culture with Indigenous origins, a sense of moral absolution and direction, or motivation to maintain the growth and evolution of Euro-Canadian civilization. In short, these narrative patterns erase Native presence and endow the Euro-Canadian settler culture with cultural and ethical roots in the national imaginary. These representative practices end up affirming Native absence instead of addressing the ethical issues raised by the historical and cultural losses of Indigenous nations and communities—seeing only Native “disappearance,” they fail to see a viable Native present and future. Whether they exhibit heroic virtues or ideal standards of living harmoniously with the environment, and whether they were once barbarous forces to be feared and exterminated, the literary “Indian” in Canadian cultural production is almost always represented as savage and dying out. As Thomas King has pointed out, “[t]hese three visions of the Indian, these masks—the dissipated savage, the barbarous savage, and the heroic savage—should be familiar to any contemporary reader, for they represent the full but limited range of characters in literature” (8)

To date, the scholarly criticism on the colonial storytelling traditions in American and Canadian literature has remained focused on understanding white settler domination and white settler-Indigenous relations; for the most part, settlers of colour and their literary and cultural productions are excluded from these discussions.¹⁹ Though the

¹⁹ In the American context, scholars such as Leslie Fiedler (*Return of the Vanishing American* 1968), Richard Slotkin (*Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* 1973), Reginald Horsman (*Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Anglo-Saxonism* 1981), Lucy Maddox (*Removals: Nineteenth-century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs* 1991), and David R. Sewell (“‘So Unstable and Like Mad Men They Were’: Language and Interpretation in American Captivity Narratives” 1993), “analyze narrative strategies in the stories many European Americans produce to plot the colonization of North America and to help ensure colonial domination” (Cox 16). Similar work has been

colonial position of settlers of colour has begun to receive more attention in settler colonial studies and critical race studies over the past decade,²⁰ I have found it difficult to translate these theoretical approaches into an adequate reading methodology for a project on the literary and cultural production of Chinese Canadian settlers. In previous drafts of this project, I attempted to draw on the methodology of “red reading” as outlined by Cox in *Muting White Noise*,²¹ an anti-colonial critical reading practice that privileges Native contexts and epistemologies that he has gleaned from the ways in which late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Native American intellectuals and creative authors such as Gerald Vizenor (Anishnaabe), Thomas King (Cherokee), and Sherman Alexie (Spokane) critique colonial storytelling traditions in Euro-American canonical and popular literature. Essentially, if Native writers focus on the present and Native presence, on Native survival and resistance—what Vizenor calls “survivance”—then a red reading generated from the perspective of Native writers focuses on the ways in which “non-Native authors foreclose on a Native future and imagine an inevitable Native absence from that landscape” (Cox

produced in the Canadian context by scholars such as Leslie Monkman (1981) and Terry Goldie (1989), but more recently, Canadian studies scholars such as Jennifer Henderson (2003) and Daniel Coleman (2006) have contributed important insights to the field of critical whiteness studies that considers the intersections of race, gender, and empire building.

²⁰ Since the publication of Lawrence and Dua’s “Decolonizing Anti-Racism,” settlers of colour and diasporas have begun to figure more prominently in settler colonial, critical race, and ethnic studies scholarship: such as Andrea Smith’s widely cited 2006 article, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy”; Sunera Thobani’s 2007 study *Exalted Subjects*; Celia Haig-Brown’s 2009 critical pedagogy essay, “Decolonizing Diaspora: Whose Traditional Land Are We On?”; Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence’s 2009 article “Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?”; the edited collections of *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity* (2011), *Narratives of Citizenship: Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples Unsettle the Nation-State* (2011), and *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora, and Indigeneity in Canada* (2012). For more on this topic, see also Desai Gaurav, Maya Mikdashi, Petra Fachinger, and Daniel Coleman (2015).

²¹ Red reading is a term that Cox borrows from the Anishnaabe actor, writer, and playwright Jill Carter (259).

12). In other words, red readings simultaneously search for and assert Indigenous presence in settler texts that erase Indigeneity or assume Indigenous disappearance. What is more, red readings, according to Cox, can even be applied to texts that fail to mention and acknowledge Indigenous autochthony.

While I remain deeply committed to the ethical project of red reading, as a reading methodology, it does not apply so readily to cultural texts produced by Chinese settlers. Though the narration of Indigenous absence as an inevitable or already naturalized outcome does crop up in Chinese Canadian cultural production, there still remains a great range of Indigenous presence being narrated, even if these presences are sometimes tokenistic, romanticized, and problematic. How does one go about reading the representation of Indigeneity, or lack thereof, in stories about racially marginalized settlers that do not necessarily promise or culminate in Indigenous conquest or disappearance? And how does one attend to such presences and absences in light of originary Asian-Indigenous relations dating back to 1788? To clarify, I am not pitching for an exalted place of ethical belonging for the Chinese diaspora in Canada's settler colonial track record. Instead, I am suggesting that examining the colonial role of Chinese settlers and their cultural production requires a different framework, a framework inspired by the decolonial commitments of the practice of red reading that also moves away from the framework of white settler-Indigenous relations.²² To put it simply, this

²² There has been a perspectival shift in settler colonial studies to move past the body of the white settler and understand how non-white bodies have supported the colonization of Indigenous peoples, a shift that has occurred in Indigenous studies as well. In Chadwick Allen's *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Literary Studies* (2012) and Alice Te Punga Somerville's *Once Were Pacific: Maori Connections to Oceania* (2012), they espouse the importance of cultivating Indigenous-to-Indigenous dialogue since

project demands an anti-racist and decolonial reading methodology drawn from the depiction of Asian-Indigenous relations in Asian Canadian cultural production rather than an Indigenous centred approach such as red reading. Building on the influential scholarship of Asian Canadian writers such as Larissa Lai and Rita Wong on this subject, I propose that SKY Lee's 1990 novel *Disappearing Moon Café* can provide the creative and critical content to build such a methodology as such a framework presents a more specific focus on the complex history of Asian-Indigenous relations in Canada.

Disappearing Moon Café: An Allegorical Framework

An important early Asian Canadian text, SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* revolves around a fifth generation Wong descendant, Kae Ying Woo, and her process of uncovering her ancestors' shameful past, which has been kept secret for propriety's sake.²³ The family saga is told in mostly third person narrative fragments from each family member's perspective, a story that Kae has managed to extract from her mother after much resistance: the novel is essentially a compilation of multiple perspectives pieced together by Kae, the family archivist/storyteller, who occasionally interrupts the narrative with some editorial commentary. But what bookends the melodramatic family saga is the prologue and epilogue's depiction of the Wong male ancestor's relationship with a mixed-race Indigenous woman, Kelora Chen, with whom he fathers a secret love

"dialogue between subaltern groups can be skewed if it is always commandeered by having to address the white nation and its official canons" (Coleman, "Indigenous Place" 3).

²³ Though Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* are often celebrated as the first Anglo Asian Canadian literary texts, several novels were written before by South Asian Canadian authors during the 1970s, such as Harold Sonny Ladoo, Saros Cowasjee, Bharati Mukherjee, Stephen Gill, Michael Ondaatje, and Reshard Gool ("Long Labour" 13).

child, Ting An.²⁴ Gwei Chang, the Wong family's first-generation patriarch, abandons his ideal and fulfilling life with Kelora in a profound moment of class and racial dissociation, leaving her and her people to return himself to a "civilized" life in Vancouver's urban Chinatown, that is, to start a "proper" family and successful business with a "real wife from China" (312). Closeted from his family, his intimate relationship with the late Kelora spurs a series of tragic conflicts and turmoil for the Wong family—incest, kin disownment, and suicide, just to name a few.

Upon publication, *Disappearing Moon Café* elicited strong reactions from the mainstream reading public, an overwhelming reception that has not always been that favourable. Though the book—adorned with glowing reviews from major media outlets across North America and well-known feminist writers such as Joy Harjo (Muskogee Creek) and Audre Lorde—won the 1990 City of Vancouver Book Award and was a finalist for the 1990 Governor General's Award, its negative criticism provides a different account of its initial reception that is illuminating for the important questions that they raise about the reading frameworks that Lee's complex novel demands from its readers and critics.²⁵ Early ethnic literary texts like *Disappearing Moon Café* have the unfortunate fate of eliciting sharp reactions from readers and critics due to the lack of public exposure to and scholarly criticism on ethnic texts and unconventional storytelling

²⁴ Bennett Lee has described the novel as a reinvention of the past as "domestic melodrama, borrowing elements from the Chinese popular oral tradition and weaving in incidents from local history to tell a story of the Wong family which is part soap opera, part Cantonese opera and wholly Chinese Canadian" (4).

²⁵ For the range of reception to the novel, see Marke Andrews; Denise Chong "Rev."; Sheldon Goldfarb; Maria Ng "Representing Chinatown"; and Wong "Rev."

techniques by ethnic writers at the time.²⁶ There really has not been a book written like *Disappearing Moon Café* let alone any historical fiction about Chinese settlers that has reached the mainstream success that it did at the time. So while it is clearly not the first text ever written by a writer of Chinese descent in Canada,²⁷ *Disappearing Moon Café* remains an important forerunner in the literary representation of the early Chinese settler experience.

In the past twenty five years, secondary criticism on the novel has focused on its historical and juridical context (Beauregard; Calder; Goellnicht “Bones”; MacDonald); genealogical plot and romance form (Gordon; Huggan); queer and/or feminist subjectivities (Chalykoff; Chao “As Agents”; Fu); generational conflict between mothers and daughters (Gunderson “Representing Motherhood”; Peepre); trope of Chinatown (Martin; Ng); bones (Beauregard; Chao *Beyond Silence*; Goellnicht “Bones”); and Indigeneity (Lai “Epistemologies”; Lo; McKenzie; Wong “Decolonizasian”). A review of the critical scholarship written on the text reveals an interesting conundrum regarding a key figure in the text: as Marie Lo astutely points out, “[t]here is no consensus on Kelora’s ancestry [...] Whether Kelora is part Chinese or part white, it is the Wong family’s Native ancestry that remains silenced” (111). While I am inclined to agree with

²⁶ A similar backlash can be observed in the public and critical reception of Maxine Hong Kingston’s genre bending 1976 memoir *The Woman Warrior*. Lauded by feminists yet excoriated by Asian American cultural nationalists for pandering to the exotic and political interests of a white audience, Hong Kingston’s text generated a polarizing debate on issues of cultural authenticity, intersections of race and gender, and genre boundaries in Asian American studies. For more on this discussion, see King-Kok Cheung’s “The Woman Warrior versus The Chinaman Pacific.”

²⁷ The Eaton sisters, for example, were writing news articles and romance novels in the first half of the twentieth-century. Of British and Chinese descent, Edith Eaton (born in Macclesfield, England) and Winnifred Eaton (born in Montreal, Canada) wrote under the pen names Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna on both sides of the Canadian-US border.

Lo's conclusion on this conundrum, the divergent ways in which Kelora has been positioned, emphasized, and disavowed in the criticism is still worth examining, for these varied approaches to reading the narrative function of Kelora expose racial and colonial assumptions regarding white settler, Chinese settler, and Indigenous relations that I will reframe for a coalition-based allegorical reading framework that structures the methodology of this dissertation.

For the most part, critics have characterized Kelora as Indigenous in the most bewildering fashion: she has been identified as native (Calder 21; Chao *Beyond Silence* 96; Gunderson "Representing Motherhood" 218), Native (Huggan 37), Native Canadian (Condé 96), Canadian Aboriginal and First Nations (MacDonald 39), indigenous (Fu 76), and a 'savage' trope (McKenzie 154). Though Rita Wong initially reads Kelora as "an woman adopted by Chen Gwok Fai" in her 1990 review of the novel (136), she eventually changed her mind and joined other scholars who have chosen to read Kelora as Chinese-Indigenous instead (Beauregard 63; Goellnicht "Bones" 313-14; Lo 104; Wong, "Decolonizasian" 161). Interestingly enough, Larissa Lai reads Kelora as simply "a mixed-race Indigenous wife," refusing to claim her as either part Chinese or part white (Lai "Epistemologies"). Departing from all of these scholars, however, Neta Gordon contends that

Kelora's actual father is a 'white man [who was] dying of a festering gunshot wound' when Chen first arrived at the cabin; Chen's role in Kelora's life is settled by her mother's family who refer to him as 'Father of Little Kelora.' His appearance out of the network of Chinese 'uncles' who live in the region is as indiscriminate as the role Kelora's female relatives play in her upbringing. (173)

Moreover, Gordon provides a convincing case for reading the fictional genealogical roots given to Kelora as evidence of Lee's interest in the way that "conservative genealogical maps overwrite the complicated dynamics of a family narrative, as well as the lengths to which those with an exclusionary agenda will go to uphold such a map's fiction of stability" (173).

I am curious as to why Kelora's ancestry has been so difficult to pin down. Though Lee's description of her ancestry is certainly ambiguous—for instance, the line "[s]he had a daughter" could mean that Kelora's mother had a daughter previously with the white settler or that she had given birth to Chen Gwok Fai's daughter (7)—the novel's family tree seems to confirm Gwok Fai as her father, a patrilineal structure that Gordon otherwise claims that the novel challenges. These divergent characterizations of Kelora's Indigeneity reveal a lot about our desires to lay claim to a pivotal figure in the text whose "hyper-conspicuous absence [...] makes possible the novel's plot" (Wong, "Decolonizasian" 164-65).²⁸ Does it really matter whether critics come to a definitive conclusion regarding Kelora's racial background? Or is that the whole point behind Lee's conjuring such a racially ambiguous trope in the first place? What appears to matter more are the assumptions behind our readings of her lineage rather than the racial truth behind her genealogy. How we minimize or gloss her whiteness, Chineseness, or Indigeneity shows the racial and colonial frameworks that we wish to privilege in our

²⁸ Disavowing the presence of Kelora, Alison Calder and Tanis MacDonald emphasize the figure of Janet Smith instead, a historical white woman whose murder, allegedly by a Chinese domestic male servant, sparked moral and racial tensions between white settlers and Chinese settlers in 1920s Vancouver. While drawing important historical connections from the Janet Smith case, they overlook the importance of Kelora to the novel's plot and privilege white settler and Chinese settler relations instead.

presencing of the Chinese settler community in the national imaginary.²⁹ To claim Kelora as part Chinese can be derived from a political investment in acknowledging the history of Chinese-Indigenous relations and intimacies that has been suppressed in official history. However, Kelora does not have to be ethnically Chinese for us to honour this history of Asian-Indigenous relationalities. Whether Kelora is part Chinese or part white, it is important to acknowledge that Kelora and the community who claims her are depicted by a non-Indigenous writer as a community that follows Indigenous ways of living off the land—with all the colonial risks of romanticism and racial essentialism that this acknowledgement entails. Lee’s depiction of Kelora and the fictional Shi’atko clan registers them as Indigenous not merely because the author might claim that they are but because their ways of living and being bear striking similarities to Indigenous conceptions of “sacred ecologies” and “Place-Thought” which I will expand upon below. I read Kelora as a fictional Indigenous woman with mixed ancestry because I understand Indigeneity not as a racial category but as a relational, place-based ontological position. Recognizing Kelora’s Indigeneity is important to understanding her narrative function within and beyond the novel, which in turn forms the basis for my project’s allegorical framework.

Kelora reads as Indigenous not simply because she is described as such but because of the novel’s depiction of her cultural and spiritual responsibilities and kinship

²⁹ For instance, no mention of Kelora or her Indigeneity appears in the scholarly articles of Tim Acton, Lisa Chalykoff, Lien Chao, Daniel Martin, Maria Ng, and Mari Peepre; nor is she or the subject of Asian-Indigenous relations discussed in the book reviews of Denise Chong, Sheldon Goldfarb, Denise K. Lee, Joshua Mostow, and Constance Rooke.

to the land and community.³⁰ In particular, she appears to have invaluable abilities and traditional ecological knowledge that help her and her adopted/birth father Chen Gwok Fai survive: “though Old Man Chen wasn’t a very good provider for himself, he survived very well, because Kelora was more than a good provider—she was a healer and a retriever of lost souls” (Lee 10). Her spiritual prowess provides her with an uncanny insight that disturbs Gwei Chang: while assisting him on his bone repatriation project, “she had a peculiar intuition for locating gravesites whose markers had long ago deteriorated. More than once, she wandered ahead of him [... and] would be pointing at the site where he was to dig” (18-19). Besides knowing the Indigenous names and functions of herbal medicine that grows in the forest, knowledge passed down to her by her community, she also teaches Gwei Chang the importance of land stewardship and maintaining ecological balance: as she points out to Gwei Chang,

‘[l]ook, a yellow cedar tree! If I need to gather cedar, then I have to say a few words to the tree, to thank the tree for giving part of itself up to me. I take only a small part too, but not today. Look, the path is worn and smooth. Many women have come here to gather what they need. When we walk in the forest, we say ‘we walk with our grandmothers.’” (18)

I must clarify that I am not citing these textual instances so as to provide bona fide evidence of Kelora’s Indigeneity. We must remember that the depiction of Kelora’s Indigeneity is still an interpretation of Indigeneity by a non-Indigenous author (one that has been read as an unrealistic or romanticized depiction by critics like Goldfarb and

³⁰ Jeff Cornassel (Cherokee) writes that “[b]eing Indigenous today means struggling to reclaim and regenerate one’s relational, place-based existence by challenging the ongoing, destructive forces of colonization. Whether through ceremony or through other ways that Indigenous peoples (re)connect to the natural world, processes of resurgence are often contentious and reflect the spiritual, cultural, economic, social and political scope of the struggle” (88).

McKenzie).³¹ But there is a definite desire in the text to render Kelora and her peoples' ways of living off the land as Indigenous, a desire that can perhaps be read instead as an intertextual citation that aims to respect, acknowledge, and learn from the manifold ways in which Indigenous peoples practice their self-determination as distinct peoples who are connected to the land and all of its human and non-human inhabitants.

From what I have learned from engaging with the critical work of Indigenous studies scholars, one is not Indigenous merely because one can trace biological lines to Indigenous ancestry.³² A lifelong, ongoing process, one becomes Indigenous from the continual ties that one must cultivate in order to remain connected to one's kin, community, and place of origin. Bearing genealogical ties to Indigenous ancestry is only one part of the equation. Indigenous individuals must also be claimed by their home communities, and that claiming comes with a whole host of ongoing duties and responsibilities to respectfully coexist with all the sentient and non-sentient inhabitants residing in their place of origin. In their chapter "The Concept of Indigenous Heritage Rights," Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaw) and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson (Chickasaw) explain this notion of ongoing duty and responsibility to place, community,

³¹ Whereas Goldfarb dismisses the novel's portrayal of "the goodness of Mother Earth" as mawkish (par. 2), McKenzie reads Lee's representation of Kelora and the Canadian wilderness as emblematic of pejorative tropes of Indigenous peoples as savage, dark skinned, wild Indians (153-54).

³² I must acknowledge and thank in particular my dear friends and mentors Jennifer Adese (Métis) and Chris Andersen (Métis) for all the illuminating conversations I have had with them on this subject. They have both written on the colonizing effects of mixed race discourses in regards to Métis peoplehood as the increasing claims to being Métis (that is, métis) by individuals who can trace their Indigenous ancestry but not their ongoing connections to any Métis community discounts the fact that "[a]s a *people*, Métis are woven together by shared language, kinship ties, stories, cultural practices, and worldviews" (Adese 49; italics in original). For more on this topic, see Andersen's important 2014 work, *"Metis": Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*.

and kinship as one of the five major legal corollaries in Indigenous conceptions of sacred ecologies, which dictates that

every individual human and non-human in the ecosystem bears reciprocal personal responsibilities for the maintenance of their relationships. Knowledge of the ecosystem is, to this extent, essentially legal knowledge, and the people who acquire this information bear especially heavy burdens of responsibility for teaching others and for mediating conflicts between humans and other species.

What is more, another corollary behind Indigenous notions of sacred ecologies requires that this traditional knowledge be transmitted amongst kin, a lineal and territorial precept that makes ecological sense “because it has to do with the responsibilities of a particular lineage or clan to its territory”: since Indigenous knowledge is tied to a particular place and its peoples, this knowledge cannot be taught to just anyone or apply to any ecosystem elsewhere (Battiste and Henderson “Concept of Indigenous Heritage Rights”).

As I understand it, being Indigenous entails cultivating ongoing relationships with the land and its human and non-human inhabitants; accordingly, people who live Indigenously belong to the land and strive to not own or exert dominance over it.³³ As the Anishnaabe writer Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm emphatically declares, “[t]he Native peoples of this land [...] *are fundamentally different from anyone else in the land, fundamentally different from Canadians. The basis of the difference is the land, our passion for it and our understanding with it. We belong to this land. The land does not belong to us [...] We believe that this land recognizes us and knows us*” (84; italics in

³³ Marie Battiste (Mi’kmaw) asserts that Indigenous knowledge “embodies a web of relationships within a specific ecological context; contains linguistic categories, rules, and relationships unique to each knowledge system; has localized content and meaning; has established customs with respect to acquiring and sharing knowledge (not all Indigenous peoples equally recognize their responsibilities)” (8).

original). The agency and intentionality that Akiwenzie-Damm attributes to a non-sentient being such as the earth may be difficult for non-Indigenous readers schooled in Eurocentric systems of knowledge to understand. A non-Indigenous reader may even wonder whether these principles are merely alternative myths and stories about the land, essentialist abstractions and symbols from which Indigenous peoples derive cultural meanings.

In “Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!),” Vanessa Watts (Anishnaabe/Haudenosaunee) argues that such ways of knowing actually come from Indigenous conceptions of the world that function as more than myth or lore, for Indigenous cosmologies recounting how powerful figures such as Sky Woman (Haudenosaunee) and First Woman (Anishnaabe) came to create the earth are understood by Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe peoples as historically *real* events that mandate ethical guidelines and protocols for inter-species engagements and responsibilities. The cosmological frameworks behind these Creation stories, or Creation histories, “are not an abstraction but rather a literal and animate extension of Sky Woman’s and First Woman’s thoughts” (Watts 22). That is how place and all the human and non-human inhabitants residing in place come to be animate, thus “full of thought, desire, contemplation and will. It is the literal embodiment of the feminine, of First Woman, by which many Indigenous origin stories find their inception” (Watts 23). Understandably, these notions of Place-Thought structuring Indigenous ways of relating to the land may sound off essentialist warning bells in the minds of non-Indigenous folks educated in Euro-Western

systems of thought, the very same discursive systems of thought that have been responsible for the deadly results of biological essentialist thinking in the past.

Anticipating this anxious line of thinking, Watts concedes that

some Indigenous female writers have been accused of being reactionary or gynocentric, implying they edge on a dangerous essentialism. However, essentializing categories of Indigenous cosmologies should not be measured against the products of Euro-Western mistakes. Nor should Indigenous peoples be the inheritors of these mistakes. Rather, to decolonize or access the pre-colonial mind, our histories (not our lore) should be understood as they were intended for us to be truly agent beings. To disengage with essentialism means we run the risk of disengaging from the land. (31-32)

Therefore, Indigenous peoples avoid disengaging from the land by treating its human and non-human inhabitants as agential beings, a mode of communicating with the land and maintaining relationships with the world that can be recognized in Kelora's characterization in *Disappearing Moon Café*.

I realize that it may be strange to draw on an Anishnaabe and Anishnaabe/Haudenosaunee thinker to discuss Indigenous epistemologies of relating to the land in *Disappearing Moon Café*, as though to provide an authenticity stamp to my claims. Had I wanted to justify my claims regarding Kelora's Indigeneity, I could have also incorporated Nlaka'pamux thinkers on their traditional ecological knowledge and cosmologies instead, for Stephanie McKenzie has usefully connected Kelora to the specific history and cultural landscape of the meeting point of the Fraser and Thompson Rivers, where Gwei Chang first meets Kelora, which is the ancient capital of the Nlaka'pamux world, also known today for the Nlaka'pamux and St'at'imc protests

against the logging ventures of the Stein valley during the 1970s.³⁴ But I am not interested in definitively proving that Kelora is Indigenous or that she hails from the Nlaka’pamux people. Like many Indigenous peoples today, Kelora comes from a mixed ancestry; she might also be part Chinese. What interests me more is that despite the ambiguity surrounding her racial background, the figure of Kelora invites a reading of her Indigeneity through the community who claims her and the land-based knowledge and responsibilities that she practices, a reading that has not been given the attention it deserves in the scholarly criticism to date. I here suggest that we avoid dismissing the Indigenous place-thought epistemologies and practices of ecological stewardship in the text and acknowledge Kelora’s modelling of Indigeneity, a risky interpretative endeavour given that Lee is not Indigenous.

Why does it matter that Kelora be read as Indigenous? Can such a claiming entail an allegorical move of “settler indigenization” on the part of a historically excluded group to assert their place in Canada that Guy Beauregard questions in his reading of the novel via Terry Goldie (63)? That is one way of reading Kelora’s Indigeneity, for the narrative function of Indigenous characters in Canadian literature has served “to act as a foil for the rugged yet civilizing individual, to authenticate the settlers’ connection to the New World, or [to manifest] as the vanishing figure of nationalist nostalgia” (Lo 98). But how

³⁴ According to McKenzie, in 1978, roughly the same time period as the beginning of Lee’s novel, “the Nlaka’pamux began their campaign to protect the sacred valley by establishing a new council to deal with growing concerns over land rights. Lytton is also the place where, on 8 May 1883, only nine years before Gwei Chang’s arrival, a group of white men attacked a camp of Chinese construction workers, burning their dwellings, beating a large number of Chinese people, and killing one man. This event was described at the time by Chief Justice Begbie as ‘one of the most brutal massacres that had ever taken place on the coast’” (qtd. in McKenzie 158).

we read the narrative function of Kelora and her Indigeneity also depends on the epistemological and historical relationships that we can recognize and privilege in reading and memorializing the presence of Chinese settlers on these lands. If we overlook Kelora as an Indigenous figure as some of the scholarship does, then we risk ignoring or dismissing Indigenous notions of Place-Thought that appear to frame Kelora's ways of relating to the land—hence my move to draw on Akiwenzie-Damm and Watts, not to prove that Kelora is Indigenous but to respect, acknowledge, and make Indigenous land-based epistemologies and relationalities more visible in Asian Canadian and Asian diaspora studies. Thus, Kelora's absence from the rest of the novel performs a powerful allegorical role that can be extrapolated to the socio-political realms that Chinese Canadian settlers navigate to this day. To overlook the importance of Kelora's narrative function, much like how the Wong family abandons and disavows their Indigenous kin in the novel, results in several erasures, both allegorical and historical; that is, the forgetting of the history of Asian-Indigenous relationships, the forgetting of traditional ecological knowledge that was once shared with the early Chinese settlers who intermarried with the Nuuchahnulth (Nootka Sound) community, the forgetting of the debts that those early Chinese settlers accrued in being saved and adopted by Indigenous peoples, and most importantly, the dismissal of Indigenous conceptions of sacred ecologies and Place-Thought that guide Indigenous ways of living off the land and prevent the continued colonization and degradation of these lands which impacts both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Though the novel attempts to demonstrate Indigenous Place-Thought epistemologies through the traditional ecological knowledge that Kelora models and imparts to Gwei Chang, readers, like Gwei Chang, may end up forgetting or resisting the lessons she has to offer. When Gwei Chang asks how Kelora can intuitively locate the unmarked graves of Chinese labourers, she tells him that he must first listen to himself sing, for “[e]very soul has its own voice” (19). Fascinated by her cryptic advice,

he began to press his ear against the ground too. He followed her everywhere, even as she went about her woman’s work. She taught him to love the same mother earth and to see her sloping curves in the mountains. He forgot that he had once thought of them as barriers. He learned how to cling onto her against a raging river, or bury into her away from the pelting rain. Or he could be somewhere, anywhere, cold and bone-tired, but he would stare at the consummate beauty of a bare branch trembling in the breeze. He would watch red buds bloom into freshly peeled blossoms. Clouds tinted pink-gold, slanting over the mirror of an alpine lake; this beautiful mother filled his heart and soul. (19)

In this passage, Gwei Chang only begins to perceive and revere the land as an agential and intentional being. It is an animist driven understanding of the land as feminine and all powerful that Gwei Chang eventually forgets, a way of knowing that may be overlooked depending on how Kelora’s Indigeneity is interpreted.

Given that Lee is not Indigenous, readers trained in postcolonial, critical race, and feminist critical theory may treat Lee’s depiction of Kelora’s Indigeneity with a healthy measure of circumspection. But what if we read the figure of Kelora as an allegory rather than a stereotype? What if Kelora’s seemingly stereotypical features and the Wong family’s disavowal of their Indigenous kin were read as an allegory constructed by Lee that aims to understand and restore Asian-Indigenous relations beyond the text? Allegory, to be sure, has a long, complex, and traceable cultural history of ancient

philosophical, scriptural, and literary traditions and ideological transformations (Copeland and Struck 10-11). Allegory's long complex tradition accounts for the fact that "[w]hat one reader means by allegory is not necessarily shared by the next reader" (Madsen 2). Bearing similarity to popular definitions of allegory ("that allegory 'means one thing and says another'") is its classical usage, in which allegory "referred to a style of interpretation that imported to a text some external and extrinsic meaning," often philosophical discourse (Madsen 2-3). For the purposes of my project's investments in anti-racist and decolonial advocacy, I have found Gary Johnson's treatment of the subject in *The Vitality of Allegory* most illuminating, for he proposes "that we define allegory as that class of works that fulfills its rhetorical purpose (whatever that purpose might be) by means of the transformation of some phenomenon into a figural narrative" (Johnson 8). Thus, governing the principle of allegory is the author's rhetorical purpose and allegory's metamorphosing "a real (possibly historical) phenomenon into a narrative structure" (Johnson 8; 10).

Kelora's wild traits perform a cross-racial narrative function that many scholars have also addressed in the novel's secondary criticism.³⁵ Like Chinese and Indigenous communities beyond the text, both Kelora and Gwei Chang have inherited and learned to resist, for the most part, the racist, classist, and colonial discourses that divide and prevent

³⁵ Scholars such as Graham Huggan, Larissa Lai, Marie Lo, and Rita Wong have read the narrative function of Gwei Chang and Kelora's initial encounter as exposing the racist and colonial assumptions that Chinese and Indigenous communities have inherited from the white supremacist settler colonial society in which these two communities have experienced oppression and marginalization. It is a reading that these scholars highlight and position alongside what has come to be known as *Disappearing Moon Café*'s sister text, Lee Maracle's (Stó:lō) short story "Yin Chin," which provides a similar account of cross-racial discrimination but from an Indigenous woman's point of view.

their communities from forming intimacies and solidarities with each other. Their initial encounter demands that the reader attend to the way in which these figures initially dehumanize and eventually accept each other. Lost and starved on his hopeless bone repatriation journey in the interior wilderness of British Columbia, Gwei Chang stops dead in his tracks when Kelora creeps up behind him to exclaim in his language: “[I]ook, a chinaman” (3)! Though she can speak Chinese, from his perspective, “[s]he was an girl, dressed in coarse brown clothing that made her invisible in the forest” (3). In response to his incredulity that she is Chinese, Kelora pulls back her “dark, round eyes” into slants and claims, “[m]y father is a chinaman, like you. His eyes are slits like yours. He speaks like you” (4). Yet Gwei Chang remains shocked, calling her a “wild injun,” which is meaningless to her because “[i]n chinese, the words mocked, slanglike, ‘yin-chin’” (4). Rather than taking offence at being called a “wild injun,” Kelora generously offers him some food because he looks hungry to her and according to her father, “‘chinamen are always hungry’” (4).

If hunger is what initially drives Gwei Chang to become acquainted with Kelora, then hunger is also what finally drives him away. The story of their love, a love that “only comes around once in ten lifetimes” (314-15), unfolds in the novel’s prologue, but the reason that Gwei Chang ends up abandoning his life with her is not depicted until near the end of the novel, in the epilogue, in which Gwei Chang lies on his deathbed, remembering and mourning the past. As he thinks back to their last summer together, Gwei Chang remembers helping Kelora and her people smoke salmon at their fish camp: it was “the happiest, most elaborate harvest he’d ever been to; [to his mind] those Indians

had a rich life” (313). At the time, Gwei Chang was excited by the sight of abundant food; in fact, “[i]t made him feel good to learn the ways, because they made him think that he might never starve like a chinaman again” (313). However, Kelora reminds him that in spite of all this seeming abundance, her people still face the possibility of famine since the harvests have not been as plentiful as they used to be (313-14). Up until now, Gwei Chang happily identifies with Kelora and her people’s “ways”; he contentedly lives and works alongside them under the assumption that he will never go hungry again. But when Kelora corrects his assumption, he turns away from her, repulsed, disassociating from the risk of starvation and economic poverty that she and her people represent:

Gwei Chang had often looked into the sallow face of famine. He could see how famine was the one link that Kelora and he had in common, but for that instant, it made him recoil from her as surely as if he had touched a beggar’s sore. The memory of hunger flung him back to that other world again, where his mother’s wretchedness plucked at his sleeve and gnawed through his stomach. (314)

Faced with the prospect of starving in an otherwise fulfilling and sustaining life that cultivates non-economic forms of wealth, Gwei Chang rejects Kelora; he chooses instead to pursue the Gold Mountain labour narrative that promises economic wealth and fortune to the Chinese sojourner, giving up a life of spiritual and communal wealth as well as “a [priceless] love beyond death ... [a kind of love that you] could spend the rest of your reincarnated lives searching for” (315).

Disappearing Moon Café is certainly not the only early Asian Canadian text to depict a romanticized and allegorical interracial relationship between an Asian character and an Indigenous character. In her article “Model Minorities, Models of Resistance: Native Figures in Asian Canadian Literature,” Marie Lo notes how in *Itsuka*—Joy

Kogawa's 1992 sequel to *Obasan*—the idealized romance between Naomi and Father Cedric, a French Canadian Métis priest, functions to align Japanese Canadian experiences of dispossession alongside that of Indigenous communities by problematically invoking romantic tropes of nature and Indigeneity in the name of restoring Naomi's broken sense of family cohesion, national belonging, and political empowerment (102-104). For Lo, such representations of Indigenous characters and Asian-Indigenous relations "reflect Asian Canadian negotiations of a racial formation that is shaped by US racial paradigms and reconfigured by Canadian racial politics" (97). Much as Asian American cultural nationalists like Frank Chin modelled Asian American political consciousness after black power political discourses, Asian Canadian cultural producers like Kogawa and Lee look to Indigenous peoples to formulate exemplary Native figures that inspire anti-racist resistance and social-political critique in their texts (97). However, according to Lo, such inspired borrowings become problematic when they reify romantic, colonial tropes that reduce Indigenous peoples to being synonymous with nature. For instance, Lo takes particular issue with the way in which Kogawa encodes Father Cedric's romanticized conflation with nature as central to his role as a guide who helps Naomi return to a prelapsarian wholeness and childhood innocence in which "Japanese Canadians are Canadians and not 'enemy aliens' and the government remains a benevolent parental presence" (103).

Iyko Day reads the narrative function of Indigenous characters in Japanese internment texts differently. Writing about Japanese-Indigenous relations in a transnational framework that compares the racist and colonial policies of Japanese

internment and Indigenous dispossession in the historical context and creative works of Japanese cultural producers in Canada (Kogawa's novel *Obasan*), the US (Emiko Omori's memoir-documentary *Rabbit in the Moon*), and Australia (Lucy Dann and Mayu Kanamori's multimedia slide show *The Heart of the Journey*), Day tracks the ways in which bureaucratic measures of instituting and managing the removal, dispossession, internment, and post-war repatriation of Japanese immigrants and their settler-born descendants extend and intersect with colonial policies and institutions that initiated and managed the material dispossession and cultural assimilation of Indigenous nations and communities. As 'alien enemies' within, Japanese settlers and Indigenous peoples were often conflated and managed by the same colonial bureaucracies; for instance, many Japanese internment camps were often set up near or on Indigenous reservation lands. The point of her work is not to equate these histories of displacement and dispossession but rather to emphasize their transcolonial narratives. In her analysis of these Japanese Canadian, American, and Australian internment texts, Day argues that the transcoloniality of anti-Japanese sentiment across white Pacific nations reveals an "index of race, gender, and sexual property logics of white settler colonialism" (109).

Day's study of transcolonial Japanese internment narratives also reveals an intriguingly provocative motif to be considered in any study of Asian-Indigenous relationalities: all three texts contain moments of cross-racial identification in which the Japanese figures identify with Indigenous figures or they ascribe Indigenous phenotypical

or cultural traits to their Japanese kin.³⁶ Obviously, there are problematic implications to these scenes of cross-racial identification: namely, that, as Day points out via Marie Lo, “these modes of Native identification also seek to *naturalize* Japanese Canadians as indigenous *to* the national landscape” and risk reproducing the white colonial practice that Shari Huhndorf calls “‘going native,’ in which the romantic identification with Native people serves as a foundational script for regenerative conceptualizations of whiteness” (qtd. in Day 112; italics in original). However, Day contends that a “magnitude of loss—of dispossession—structures these scenes of cross-racial identification,” thus constituting “a transnational thematic of internment” (115-16). Thus, the loss that structures moments of cross-racial identification in these internment narratives “demonstrates the mutual constitution of affective and material dimensions of property—of owning property and of being in possession of oneself [...] As a structure of feeling, loss mediated the relationship the Japanese had with both the right to land and industry” (116).

Indigenous characters carry a different yet related narrative function in Japanese and Chinese settler cultural production. While these two Asian settler communities share a similar yet distinctive history of racial discrimination, exclusion, and dispossession in white settler Pacific nations like Canada,³⁷ the trope of Indigeneity in Chinese and

³⁶ I have also noticed this trope in Perry Miyake’s 2002 novel *21st Century Manzanar*, a dystopian novel set in a post-9/11 future in which Japanese Americans are interned again as a result of a global economic war with Japan. Every month the internees receive a visit from a Navajo tribe on “fry bread day,” which one of the characters anticipates because “[every time they came, he thought he saw someone he knew. Someone in the Tribe who looked Nisei. Except for the necklaces or bracelets or decorations in their hair, they dressed like Nisei, golf shirts and polyester pants, cotton dresses from the Sears catalog. They really did look Nisei, except some of the guys had braids. But facially, he could swear, and nearly called out more than once to someone who looked like family” (136).

³⁷ While Chinese settlers still remaining in Canada during the period of Chinese exclusion may have never been stripped of their material possessions or have had their communities similarly dispersed and

Japanese cultural production performs an important allegorical function, linking the material and ontological dispossession of Asian settlers and Indigenous peoples in Canada. Whereas an affective desire to project and mediate material and familial losses structures Japanese internment narratives, the threat and memory of economic impoverishment and destitution structures Gold Mountain narratives such as *Disappearing Moon Café*. Japanese internment narratives may carry an affective and political longing for cross-racial association and kinship with Indigenous communities, but Gold Mountain narratives contain a range of cross-racial associations with and disassociations from Indigenous peoples, a tropic variation which stems from a historical mutuality of racial oppression and dispossession that is either remembered or disavowed on account of the threat of poverty and hunger that has shaped the presence of the early Chinese settler communities in Canada. In short, I read the threat of famine that propels Gwei Chang towards and away from Kelora as a narrative trope of Asian-Indigenous disavowal that can be read allegorically across other Gold Mountain narratives, providing a more textured understanding of the settler colonial participation of Chinese Canadians today.

Scholars have treated the Wong family's disavowal of the mutuality of Indigenous and Chinese migrant experiences under racist hierarchies of power as the root cause of the family's downfall: by forgetting this mutuality and opting to maintain racial purity and

effectively destroyed as what happened to Japanese settlers, exclusionary immigration and labour regulations restricted the growth of Chinese settler communities as well as their ability to accrue property and wealth.

superiority over their Indigenous kin, the Wong characters suffer karmic consequences for generations to come (Goellnicht “Bones”; Lai “Epistemologies”; Lo; Wong “Decolonizasian”). Both Rita Wong and Larissa Lai push this interpretation even further, providing an allegorical reading that I wish to model in this project. Considering the personal and social significance behind Gwei Chang’s abandonment and betrayal of Kelora that Wong also attributes to “the role of cheap Chinese labour in facilitating the appropriation of indigenous land by the Canadian government” (Wong, “Decolonizasian” 162), Lai makes an ethical case for reading Gwei Chang’s act of disavowal on an extra-diegetic level. As Gwei Chang lies on his deathbed mourning over the memory of Kelora and the life they could have shared (as his life with his “proper” wife from China turned out to be materially rich but full of turmoil), he expresses grief over the loss of Kelora, a grief—according to Lai via Wong—of ingratitude that “belong[s] also to the likes of her, me, and the author SKY Lee” (Lai “Epistemologies”). Thus, Gwei Chang’s debt may be specific to the plot of Lee’s novel, but both Lai and Wong read his debt beyond the confines of the novel as

allegorical for the condition of Chinese Canadians within the Canadian state. In other words, we Chinese Canadians are indebted to the Indigenous peoples of the country some people call Canada. The early Chinese in Canada were exploited by the Canadian state and Canadian companies, yet they also participated in the colonial nation-building project that disenfranchised Indigenous peoples. (Lai “Epistemologies”)

In the chapters that follow, how Chinese Canadian literary and cultural texts work to acknowledge or disavow these historical debts and mutualities forms the investigative thrust of my dissertation. In this project, I read both the absence and presence of

Indigeneity in Chinese Canadian literary and documentary texts through the politics of disavowal, the politics of disavowing Asian-Indigenous relationships as imagined in *Disappearing Moon Café* and the politics of disavowing Chinese settler debts and responsibilities to Indigenous communities as read allegorically by Lai and Wong.

My textual archive may seem unconventional for an Asian Canadian studies dissertation. The first two chapters examine fiction and non-fiction texts such as the 1995 classic memoir *The Concubine's Children* by Denise Chong, the short stories “Prairie Night 1939” by Paul Yee and “Eat Bitter” by Judy Fong Bates, as well as the recently published 2012 graphic novel *Escape to Gold Mountain: A Graphic History of the Chinese in North America* by David H.T. Wong. The third chapter focuses on two very different documentaries, namely, Richard Fung’s quasi-documentary classic *Dirty Laundry* (1994) and Karen Cho’s NFB documentary *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain* (2004). Hence, my archive spans a range of genres not typically covered in a single scholarly study nor have these texts received much attention in literary and film studies scholarship,³⁸ with the exception of Chong’s memoir and Fung’s film.³⁹ Regardless, I move freely across literary and visual genres to analyze the Chinese labour narratives that these texts produce, labour narratives that also crop up in historical writings on the early

³⁸ For example, though Fong Bates has enjoyed mainstream success in the Canadian publishing industry, to this day very little has been written on her work—neither has anything been written on Cho’s documentary. As for Paul Yee, since he is a prolific and successful writer of children’s and young adult literature, critics have focused primarily on his juvenile fiction instead. And the lack of criticism on Wong’s graphic novel can be attributed to its medium as a popular cultural text and its being published more recently.

³⁹ Though much has been written on *The Concubine's Children*, nothing has been written on the memoir in almost a decade.

Chinese sojourners. As a result, these texts blur the boundary between fiction and non-fiction, between imagining the material and ontological dispossession of the Head Tax generation and honouring the historical facts of their political exclusion. I also follow Donald Goellnicht's call in his essay "Blurring Boundaries" to read cultural texts by Asian North Americans as "theoretically informed and informing rather than transparently referential human documents over which we place a grid of sophisticated Euro-American theory in order to extract meaning" (340). To my mind, reading these fiction, non-fiction, graphic fiction, and documentary texts together provides an illuminating account of all the ways in which both popular and canonized Chinese Canadian cultural producers construct and re-envision history, memory, belonging, social justice, and relation-building for the various audiences that constitute the Chinese diaspora in Canada.

Moreover, these texts have been included in this study because they all engage with and contribute to the archive of Chinese exclusion in Canada. Set during the period of anti-Chinese immigration legislation, they focus on the early Chinese settlers and their labour contributions to building the settler nation. Thus, they function as origin stories for today's Chinese settlers since they memorialize the presence of the Chinese sojourners as indispensable nation builders. As such, these texts serve to assert a Chinese presence in the national imaginary that displaces or disavows the presence of Indigeneity via the myth of Gold Mountain and settler indigenizing labour narratives. However, by drawing on Gwei Chang's "grief of ingratitude" in *Disappearing Moon Café* as an allegorical

framework for reading this textual archive,⁴⁰ I read the trope of Indigeneity and disavowal of Asian-Indigenous relations across these texts as linked to a historical mutuality of racial oppression and destitution that is remembered or disavowed in the archive. By attributing both the absence and presence of Indigeneity in this archive to the threat and memory of famine and privation that structured the presence of the Head Tax generation, I aim to provide a textured understanding of the complicity of Gold Mountain labourers in the Canadian settler state, one which recognizes their position as a marginalized diasporic community who still stood to benefit from the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples.⁴¹

In chapter one, I examine the myth of Gold Mountain as a colonial trope that erases the presence of Indigeneity from the land and supplants that presence with an exploitative relationship with the land. I begin by surveying the semantic and historical origins of the myth, a myth linked to the North American gold rush economies that exacerbated the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, particularly from

⁴⁰ I borrow this phrase from Lai in “Epistemologies.”

⁴¹ Through this project, I hope to provide a more layered understanding of settlers of colour that moves beyond the terminology debate. For instance, the term settler of colour signifies the racially marginalized position that Chinese settlers occupy in relation to white settlers in white supremacist societies but it leaves little room for the Chinese diaspora’s responses to dislocation or their investments in maintaining and cultivating political and cultural ties to a homeland to which they can no longer return. On the other hand, theorizations of diaspora often fail to account for the Indigenous territories and peoples that migrant dispersions have wittingly or unwittingly encroached upon and displaced since their arrival. Alternatively, Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) has proposed the concept of “arrivant colonialism” to refer to ethnic groups who have been forcibly brought into the settler state to labour as “hold[ing] identities through which settler colonial power works affectively” (qtd. in Jackson 3). Yet, given the complexity of Chinese migrant genealogies, any one of these terms, situated across various historical junctures and referenced across different disciplines under different categories, cannot fully articulate the multiply textured experience and position of being racially marginalized migrants on Indigenous lands. But perhaps attending to diasporic origin stories situated on Indigenous lands will provide a fuller picture.

the Fraser River Valley and the San Francisco Bay, areas on the North American west coast that have become home to a substantial Chinese population. Though stories about the early Chinese diaspora typically reveal the Gold Mountain myth to have been a false hope for wealth and opportunities bitterly denied to the Chinese diaspora, I argue that the myth is far from harmless in that it still shapes the desires and actions of Chinese settlers and thus contributes to the colonization of Indigenous peoples, regardless of the marginalized status of Chinese settlers as an unwanted foreign presence in Canada. Furthermore, the myth of Gold Mountain needs to be examined for the way that it represents a Chinese diasporic relationship to the land as hostile white territory and obstructed source of wealth. Equating the land with an inhospitable and threatening sense of whiteness and racial hostility, this particular Gold Mountain trope reductively shapes the presence of the Chinese diaspora in relation to a white majority, when other important cross-racial relations existed and need to be remembered and honoured. Thus the trope invites a moral argument asserting a place of rightful belonging and property ownership for the Chinese diaspora that requires further scrutiny.

In chapter two, my analysis shifts to labour as a presencing act. Whereas the previous chapter unpacks the Chinese settler's relationship to the land via the trope of Gold Mountain in the works of Denise Chong, David H.T. Wong, Judy Fong Bates, and Paul Yee, reviewing the same set of texts, this chapter examines the ways in which they memorialize the figure of the Chinese sojourner through his or her labour contributions. As labour narratives, *Escape to Gold Mountain*, *The Concubine's Children*, "Eat Bitter," and "Prairie Night 1939" focus on the contradictory nature of Chinese labour,

simultaneously indispensable to nation-building yet exploited and disavowed by the nation. Attending to the intersections of race, gender, and class, I compare and contrast the labour stories of Chinese matriarchs and patriarchs in Chinese Canadian fiction and non-fiction texts to gain a textured understanding of the ways in which Chinese settlers have worked as indispensable nation-builders, yet remain complicitous, subordinated, marginalized settler subjects. Framed by a Confucian work ethic, diasporic labour narratives of Gold Mountain migrants invite a moral argument that lays claim to settler citizenship benefits and resources that have been denied to the Chinese sojourners, a claim for justice and equity that is complicated by the way in which Gold Mountain stories both naturalize a settler colonial relationship to the land and produce a trope of Indigeneity that offers a trajectory other than the pursuit of bourgeois respectability, cultural assimilation, and the preservation of Confucian patriarchal values. Returning to Gwei Chang's relationship with Kelora as an allegorical origin story for the Chinese diaspora, this chapter concludes by exploring a viable way of life that turns away from the migrant drive to achieve upward mobility and foster settler capitalist values of labour and relations with the land.

Finally, in chapter three, I concentrate on the way in which Richard Fung and Karen Cho present the history of Chinese exclusion in their documentaries. Contributing to a longstanding Asian Canadian “public pedagogy of activism,”⁴² their films work to

⁴² I borrow this term from Roland Sintos Coloma who draws attention to the many decades of political activism and grassroots organizing by Asian Canadian communities—what he calls a “public pedagogy of activism” that has yet to be taught and studied in Canadian school and university curriculum (123). Though Asian Canadians constitute the largest visible minority community in Canada, they still remain peripheral in scholarly, policy, and educational discussions (Coloma 119).

memorialize the contributions of the Head Tax generation, voices and memories that have been excluded from official Canadian history and public discourses.⁴³ Both are anti-racist projects invested in re-reading the national archive and bringing voice to those who have been silenced and excluded not only from the national imaginary but also from the Chinese diaspora's community archive. Yet each presents a different approach to interpreting and asserting the presence of the Chinese settler: whereas Cho links the exclusion of the Head Tax generation to Islamophobic policies and discourses impacting the lives of Muslim Canadians, Fung demonstrates a more "multiply-stranded" approach that considers race, class, gender, and sexuality in its critique of the white supremacist and heteropatriarchal systems of oppression that determine which voices and bodies tend to be included in any archive;⁴⁴ moreover, he aligns the exclusion of Chinese immigrants alongside the societal denigration and state subjugation of African American slaves and the Métis nation during the Riel Rebellion in Canada. Reading these two documentaries together is instructive for the way that they demonstrate important lessons on interpreting and deploying diasporic histories of oppression for the advocacy of social justice.

What follows then is a study of the origins of Gold Mountain as an organizing myth, symbol, and trope in stories commemorating the lives and labour sacrifices of the

⁴³ In Cho's 2004 documentary, she explains that she felt compelled to make her documentary because of the lack of discussion and awareness over the Chinese Head Tax and 1923 Chinese Immigration Act in Canadian public discourse and school curricula. As I am about the same age as Cho, thus of the last generation to remember what life was like before the internet, I concur with her claim that, at least until Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2006 Head Tax apology, the history of Chinese exclusion has not received widespread attention or concern.

⁴⁴ My usage of the term "multiply-stranded" through the dissertation is inspired by Richard Fung's refusal to tell what he calls "single-stranded" narratives (Francis, *Creative Subversions* 179).

Head Tax generation. This study wishes to honour and remember these labour stories but in a way that remains attentive to the ideological discourses that memorial projects of marginalized communities often uncritically celebrate. The following chapter examines the myth of Gold Mountain as a colonial imaginative structure undoubtedly complicated by the history of Chinese exclusion. It aims to demonstrate the ways in which diasporic labour narratives of Chinese settlers reaching Gold Mountain, pursuing hopeful dreams and fantasies of wealth and fortune, are hardly innocent or benign. For Gold Mountain is not a new world full of boundless resources to be discovered and plundered. Gold Mountain is an imaginative construct, a myth that only makes ethical sense by perceiving the land as unused and no longer inhabited by Indigenous societies.

CHAPTER ONE

Migrant Dreams for Yellow Rock: The Myth of Gold Mountain

At a moment of tremendous opportunity,
They all come—happiness, prosperity, longevity,
and peace.
Treasures from mother nature are rewards for one's
good deeds;
Once wealth and nobility arrive, the success story is
complete.
With fast-expanding wealth,
I'll turn around and go back to Canton by sea.
No need to wait for luck in the pick-six exacta;
I'll just take nature's endless bounty as it flows.
—*Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown*

Introduction

The front cover of David H.T. Wong's graphic novel *Escape to Gold Mountain* features a Chinese settler in monochromatic grey seemingly lifted from the black and white shaded pages inside the text. Plainly adorned in grey and white peasant clothing and black cloth shoes, the Chinese settler jumps upward from the middle of the cover with his fist raised over the rocky boulders lining a gushing riverbank. The lush, verdant, tree-lined Rocky Mountain range layers over a distant orange glowing horizon comprised of several more shades of orange, presumably emitting the glow of the bright yellow sun positioned within the word *Gold* in the cover's title. What is more, the letters for *Escape* are inscribed in black and the rest of the words in the title are orange except for *Gold*, the only word that touches the sun. Here, *Gold* lightens as a result of having made contact with the golden yellow orb positioned high in the cover's bright orange hued sky.

The graphic novel's cover design depicts the Chinese settler's relationship to the land. Here, the land is more than a natural resource for building and sustaining a new way of life. The cover projects the humble plight of the male Chinese settler reaching for a better life. Unlike the rest of the cover image, the Chinese settler lacks colour, yet he manages to spring across this colourful landscape with hope, vigour, and perseverance: his fist—positioned in the foreground below the sun yet nearly surpassing the height of the green Rocky Mountain range in the background—still aims to reach the sun, the source of the cover's orange warm glow, a seemingly unreachable point of intense colour saturation in the sky.

From this cover alone, a narrative of the Gold Mountain myth emerges. It is a narrative of Chinese diasporic progress, upward mobility, and self-improvement; it tells the story of the Chinese diaspora working hard to achieve economic gain, stability, and patrilineal posterity—and most certainly survival. The land figures heavily in the myth of Gold Mountain, taking on a metaphorical quality of fortune and opportunity. The land is not identified with any Indigenous presence. Instead, it is presented as a “new” world emptied of Indigenous peoples, a profitable wilderness full of natural resources to be excavated, cultivated for agricultural development, and penetrated and manipulated for the advancement of travel and industrial development (as noted by the presence of the wooden railway scaffolding on the front cover) for the settler nation. Relating to the land in this way conceives of the land as a means to an end. Land becomes merely a resource for gain: a resource to be developed and laboured upon for profit and wages, no matter how exploitative the wages may be. Despite the myriad challenges to achieving all the

promises of the Gold Mountain myth, success and wealth seem within reach in this bounteous “new” world.

This chapter critically examines the Chinese diaspora’s relationship to the “new” land via the myth of Gold Mountain on several fronts. First, though the term stems from the nineteenth-century Chinese diaspora’s name for North America,¹ it constitutes a colonial act of remapping the land even if limited by the marginalized position of power that the diaspora occupied at the time. Chinese settlers may not have enjoyed the same benefits and privileges as white settlers, but renaming the land still extends an exploitative and domineering relation to the land, no matter how little of the colonial power and profits Chinese settlers stood to gain. Second, the myth of Gold Mountain erases the presence of Indigeneity from the land. Besides displacing Indigenous creation stories, the Gold Mountain myth conceives of the land as “empty” and “new” even if Indigenous figures do appear in texts like Wong’s graphic novel. The presence of Indigenous characters in a Gold Mountain text like *Escape to Gold Mountain* still remains disconnected from the land, especially when the land is represented as a source of wealth awaiting discovery and industrial development, thus naturalizing the structure of settler colonialism. Third, it is standard for literary and historical treatments of the Chinese diaspora in North America to reveal Gold Mountain as a false myth for the early Chinese settlers, yet such myths are hardly inconsequential: they still produce real desires for

¹ During the nineteenth century, Chinese migrants referred to many settler societies as Gold Mountain. As James Ng explains, “America was called ‘Gim Shan’ or ‘Fah Kee’ (‘Gold Mountain’ or ‘Flowery Flag’) and Australia, ‘Thin Gim Shan’ (‘New Gold Mountain’). New Zealand was merely included in either gold name” (“Sojourner Experience” 6).

wealth that shape Chinese settler relations to the land and its Indigenous peoples. Consequently, this chapter explores the multiple ways in which the myth of Gold Mountain shapes the Chinese settler's relationship to the land, a colonial relationship of entitlement, discovery, and profit obstructed by racial, class, and gender discrimination. Indeed, the myth of Gold Mountain, a colonial imaginative structure, is complicated by the experience of Chinese exclusion. A mythologized source of wealth and fortune, the landscape in texts like Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children*, Judy Fong Bates' "Eat Bitter," and Paul Yee's "Prairie Night 1939" is presented as hostile, inhospitable, white territory, thereby flipping the settler colonial script of barbarity onto white settlers as constraining the Chinese settler's sense of belonging. Moreover, the Gold Mountain myth privileges relations with white settlers instead of addressing Asian-Indigenous relations, reductively shaping how we come to understand the presence of the Chinese diaspora in Canada. While this chapter unpacks the Chinese settler's relationship to the land via the trope of Gold Mountain in Chinese Canadian fiction and non-fiction, the next chapter, reviewing the same set of texts, examines representations of Chinese labour for their settler indigenizing function.

Gum San: The Land of Yellow Rock

Before the contemporary Chinese terms for Canada (*jia na da* or 加拿大) and America (*mei guo* or 美國) came into common use, the early Chinese diaspora referred to either settler nation indiscriminately as Gold Mountain (*Gum San* in Cantonese, *Gin Shan* in Mandarin), for "[t]he distinction between Canada and the United States was not always

recognized; a Vancouver cannery worker writing to his peasant family in Taishan would not refer to Canada but to Gold Mountain, just as another family in the same district might hear from their relatives in San Francisco who would talk of Gold Mountain but not about *Meiguo* (America)” (Chan 122). The elasticity of the term stems from the discovery of gold on both sides of the border, first in 1848 in Sutter’s Mill, California, which attracted the first major wave of Chinese immigration to the US in the following year, and then in 1858 in the Fraser River Valley, which drew Chinese miners up north, after the exhaustion of the California gold fields, as well as new migrants from China.² Pushed by domestic factors such as war, natural disasters, and political turmoil in Guangdong, the southern province of China, early Chinese migrants were lured by the image of a “New World” that promised streets paved with gold (Cassel 4). These exaggerated tales of sudden wealth originated from news of a handful of miners striking it rich in the California gold fields, news that spread quickly, inflated the number of lucky miners, and exaggerated the fortune they earned: “America [and later Canada] became known as Gold Mountain (*gumshan*) and was synonymous with hope, prosperity and stability” (Chan 32).

This renaming of the “New World” as Gold Mountain suggests not only a figurative but also a literal translation in the minds of the nineteenth-century gold seeking migrants. The Chinese character for the word gold, 金 (pronounced *Gum* in Cantonese,

² For example, between 1848 and 1852, “[u]p to 25,000 immigrants from the Pearl River delta region converged onto the American gold fields”; and by January 1860, nearly 1200 Chinese gold hunters passed through Victoria, British Columbia on their way towards the Fraser River gold fields (Chan 32; 49).

Jin in Mandarin) contains two grains or nuggets of gold in the character itself (denoted by the two diagonal strokes at the bottom of the character). Etymologically speaking, the pictographic meaning behind the main strokes in the character gold is quite literal: the main combination of strokes (土) denotes the multiple layers of earth; the two diagonal strokes, the grains or nuggets of gold, suggest their location being embedded in the lower layers of earth since, according to Chinese geology, such metals are “born of the earth”: originally, “the old character was composed of four nuggets, of horizontal lines denoting the stratification of the metalliferous layer, and lastly of a cover which meant that the whole was concealed under the earth” (Wieger 49). Even in translation, Gold Mountain operates under a colonial discursive logic that understands Indigenous territories as a “New World” full of natural resources awaiting extraction for capital accumulation: pictographically, Gold Mountain denotes precious metals embedded within multiple layers of earth waiting to be excavated.

The figurative translation is made apparent in *Escape to Gold Mountain*, particularly in its account of how gold was discovered in Sutter’s Mill. In Wong’s version of how the Chinese diaspora came to conceive of North America as Gold Mountain, the land of fortune and opportunity, one of the fictional Wong ancestors in the text, Wong Ah Gin, finds little flakes of gold while clearing the land with a Kanaka labourer, Kawika, who becomes his lifelong friend (57-58).³ Not knowing what he has found, Ah Gin shows the gold flakes to James Marshall, the land clearance supervisor,

³ Wong employs the term Kanaka which was “used for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for Pacific Island workers, but was originally used to describe native Hawaiians” (228).

who excitedly informs John Sutter—the Swiss expatriate entrepreneur who failed at creating a personal empire in Sacramento valley—that gold has been discovered at the mill (58). The origins of the California gold rush become exaggerated and altered like the game of Telephone,⁴ resulting in two competing versions of the story. In the version that circulates widely in history books, the credit of California’s gold discovery is given to the white settlers John Sutter and James Marshall, whose capital and leadership made the find possible in the first place. Wong, the graphic novelist, expands upon this version and includes two frames of white settlers excited over news of this new find, with white settlers (national origins not provided) in one frame happily announcing that they are going to America because gold was discovered in California (59). But a Chinese diasporic version of this story follows the frames of this historically established account of the California gold rush. Ah Gin’s kinsmen in China find out that he has discovered gold flakes, and when news spreads from his excited kinsmen to the rest of southern China, the gold flakes increase in size with every telling: from handfuls of gold, to chunks of gold, to a heap of gold, and finally, a mountain of gold (59). In the final frame, a Chinese peasant villager stands with his arms outstretched, reaching for the top of a golden mountain with the Chinese characters for Gold Mountain etched into the face of the mountain, which shines and glows above the darkness (59).

⁴ Growing up in Alberta, I always knew this game as Telephone, which is also—as Nadine Attewell has pointed out to me—known as Chinese Whispers. Curious about the possible Sinophobic origins of this classic children’s game, I have learned that the game’s rationale of spreading confusion and incomprehensibility can be traced to European views of Chinese language, culture, and worldview as being inscrutable and impossible to understand. For more on this subject, see Roger T. Ames’ “Language and Interpretive Contexts” and Rosalind Ballaster’s *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England, 1662-1785*.

These two competing versions of the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill depict America as a land made of gold, literally and figuratively. That gold can be so easily discovered by happenstance suggests that settlers from any class background can easily acquire a fortune as long as they find the means to travel to California to work the mining fields. But on a figurative level, in the Chinese settler version of the story, America (old Gold Mountain) and later Canada (new Gold Mountain) signify more than just land where gold has been discovered. From little gold flakes to a mountain of gold, North America becomes a mythological symbol for plenitude, limitless growth, boundless opportunity, as well as migrant dreams and fantasies of achieving upward mobility.

The myth of Gold Mountain becomes less benign when interpreted from the historical context of Indigenous displacement and dispossession due to wars and treaty conflicts over resource extraction and territory control. Consider the conflict that led to the Battle of the Little Bighorn during the 1870s, a violent clash originally generated by rumours of gold in the Black Hills, land that had been officially reserved for the Lakota and Cheyenne people in what is now eastern Montana: the relentless influx of gold-seekers disregarded government treaties, which led to outright warfare. Consider also the disastrous effects of the Georgia Gold Rush, the first major gold rush in the US, which preceded the more commonly cited California Gold Rush in historical accounts of the Chinese diaspora in North America: the Georgia gold fever eventually gave way to the Trail of Tears, the horrific and oppressive eviction of the Cherokee people from their

homeland in Dahlenega, the Cherokee word for yellow rock.⁵ Discussed in the context of these violent gold rush histories, the hope for fortune and luck engendered by the myth of Gold Mountain only applies to the Chinese diaspora—not to Indigenous peoples of the deep American south or western coasts of North America. It does not matter whether Chinese settlers played an insignificant role in these military ventures to violently evict Indigenous peoples from their homelands: all settlers stood to gain from the economies that arose as a result of the gold rush eras even if unequally.⁶ Therefore, any discussion of the racial violence and oppression that the Chinese diaspora faced while working in the gold mining operations on the North American west coast also requires acknowledging the violent displacements and dispossessions of Indigenous peoples that the eras of the North American gold fever initiated. That Chinese settlers were unfairly denied and obstructed from gaining the gold and fortune as promised by the myth of Gold Mountain takes on a different moral charge when contextualized within these preceding gold rush histories, histories that were also driven by settler desires for wealth of mythical proportions. Clearly, when mining for gold no longer became a viable route to achieving upward mobility for white settlers and Chinese settlers alike, “gold” fever raged on

⁵ I must acknowledge and thank my good friend and colleague, Sandra Muse Isaacs, a Cherokee Native literary studies scholar, for teaching me this Cherokee term for gold that originally inspired my reading of the Gold Mountain myth in relation to the colonial history of the Gold Rush eras in North America.

⁶ California as we know it unfolded from “the overwhelmingly unstoppable drive toward resource extraction, epitomized by the Gold Rush that accompanied—indeed propelled—statehood” and the institutionalization of white supremacy, which was experienced as genocide by “the native peoples of the Sierra Nevada and North Coast, whose aboriginal territories lay exactly within the Gold Rush zone (and later the most important zones of timber extraction)” (Field, Leventhal, and Cambra 298). Chinese settlers who experienced marginalization and racial violence at the time still remain implicated within these broader colonial processes that made way for their exploited labour.

unabated—Chinese settlers continued to chase after those “rumours of gold” through other means.

Myths like Gold Mountain reproduce an exploitative “land relation” shaped by a never-ending search for wealth.⁷ They emphasize the reduction of earth into commodity resources, a perspective that undermines Indigenous epistemologies and traditional ecological knowledges. Even if the rumours of gold evoked by the myth of Gold Mountain turn out to be exaggerated tales of fortune, the desire for that wealth does not go away. Reaching Gold Mountain, that is, achieving the wealth and upward mobility as promised by the myth, becomes forever deferred as a goal, a carrot never rewarded yet always seemingly within reach. In other words, if there is no gold to be found, then there must be “gold” to be earned. The myth of Gold Mountain drives Chinese diasporic labourers to work hard, to accept low wages and tough working conditions. If they are not directly employed in natural resource extraction economies, then they support these industries by supplying laundry and hospitality services. Regardless of how Chinese settlers ended up earning their “gold,” ascribing to the myth of Gold Mountain reproduces an exploitative land relation that only sees the land as a source of wealth to be extracted through labour. The land becomes an object, worthy only as property or economic wealth—a land relation that heavily depends upon the discursive and material erasure of Indigenous presence and autochthony.

⁷ I borrow this term, “land relation,” from Shona Jackson’s discussion of L.E. Braithwaite’s poem, “Gold,” that “offers an image of a *land relation* that has been shaped and marred by ... [a] search for wealth [emphasis added]” (138).

In Gold Mountain narratives, the migrant's first impression of the "New World" typically projects this land relation. In *Escape to Gold Mountain*, the fictional Wong patriarch's first sight of Gold Mountain, "the beautiful new country of America," is depicted in a long shot view of the rolling fields and pastoral settlements bordering the harbour of San Francisco (formerly Yerba Buena), where he meets John Sutter who explains that Sutter's settlement New Helvetica, that is, New Switzerland, is named after Sutter's homeland (55-57). Clearly, captains of industry become the source of colonial knowledge of the land, so this text may only be demonstrating the ways in which Chinese settlers were indoctrinated by colonial discourses that served settlers in power. But a powerful absence structuring Wong's depiction of the changing landscape demands our attention: that we observe and acknowledge the historical processes of re-mapping the land that erase the presence and history of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, the Indigenous peoples of the San Francisco Bay area, only to fill that absence with colonial presences instead.⁸ This form of "nominative cartography" carries "the power to erase and also

⁸ After the American conquest of California (1846-47), Indian rancherias established on rancho lands in the East Bay formed into several Muwekma communities during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century (Muwekma Ohlone Tribe 15). In 1905, when the Northern Association for California Indians discovered eighteen unratified California Indian Treaties that had been negotiated between 1851 and 1852, Charles E. Kelsey was appointed Special Indian Agent to California by the Indian Service Bureau to conduct a census that would identify all of the landless and homeless tribes and bands residing in south central and north California (Muwekma Ohlone Tribe 16). This census provided Congress with the necessary information to pass several Appropriation Acts from 1906 to 1937 "for the purpose of purchasing 'home sites' for the many intact California Indian tribes and lands" (Muwekma Ohlone Tribe 16). Though the Muwekma people received federal recognition as a landless band in 1906, land was never purchased and set aside for them; in fact, as a result of the 1927 report written by Sacramento Superintendent Colonel Lafayette A. Dorrington, the Muwekma Ohlones, along with 135 federally recognized tribal bands, lost federal recognition without due process or consultation with their leaders and thus were considered ineligible to organize under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (Muwekma Ohlone Tribe 18). To this day, the Muwekma Ohlones are still fighting to restore their federal status through the bureaucratic channels of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the federal district court system (Muwekma Ohlone Tribe 23-38).

implant, to disappear but also to substantiate, and to displace and replace in the service of colonial projects” (Field, Leventhal, and Cambra 288). But it can also be redeployed as a decolonial practice of re-naming if it serves to trace “the changing map of Ohlone home territories in Central California as they were transformed by and during Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. colonial regimes” (Field, Leventhal, and Cambra 287)—that is, to defamiliarize and no longer render natural the erasure of the Muwekma Ohlones via the Hispanicization and subsequent Americanization of the geography and place-names that mark the landscape.⁹

Far from offering a prescriptive reading, I suggest instead that settler depictions of San Francisco in texts like *Escape to Gold Mountain* cannot be read innocently. Chinese settlers arrived and benefited from the successive waves of Spanish, Mexican, and American colonization in California. And when they were pushed out of the California gold fields as a result of anti-Chinese sentiment, they migrated northward upon news of gold discovery in the Fraser River, thus benefiting from the displacement of the Nlaka’pamux (Salish) peoples from the region.¹⁰ This history of settler colonialism is

⁹ Anyone who has travelled to California has noticed the preponderance of Hispanic place names across the state, “particularly (and unsurprisingly) in the zone where missionization took place between the current Mexico-California boundary in the south to the northernmost extent of mission activity in what is now Sonoma County. By contrast, there are very few native place-names in this region, and the few that exist—Malibu, Lompoc, and Port Hueneme in the south, Petaluma in the north, for example—are not understood by the vast majority of people in California as native in origin or linked to the contemporary presence and activities of native peoples” (Field, Leventhal, and Cambra 290).

¹⁰ When news of the discovery of gold at Fraser River spread, thousands of gold-seekers descended upon the river, an invasion of Nlaka’pamux (Salish) territory which outraged Chief Spintlum and his warriors to confront the settlers: “the ensuing ‘Fraser River War’ was reported by a hysterical press in Victoria as a massacre of miners; the actual tally was 30 Amerindians and two non-Native killed” (Dickason 229). What is more, the sudden influx of settlers and mining operations (such as the building of roads for the transport of equipment and supplies) drastically devastated the subsistence base of the Nlaka’pamux peoples: “[p]roceeding with all possible haste and no consideration for the damage to the Aboriginal hunting-and-

also erased from another migrant's first impression of the land. In Denise Chong's family memoir *The Concubine's Children*, the author imagines her grandmother's first view of Gold Mountain, which unfolds in the third person: "[a]fter eighteen days at sea, the ship steamed into the port of Vancouver. Mountains and sea seemed to diminish man's efforts at fashioning this young cityscape [...] The fertile farmland of the Fraser Valley just outside Vancouver was dotted with Chinese laboring in the fields for white farmers" (11-12). Here Chong presents her grandmother's initial perception of the land as a young new world, that is, young compared to the antiquity of China's civilization. Framed from a new immigrant's point of view, Gold Mountain appears to be a pastoral scene of Chinese labouring for white property owners; devoid of any Indigenous presence or mention of Indigenous dispossession and displacement, it is a peaceful scene of Chinese labour and settler industry. Such innocent representations need to be critically examined for the way that they serve hegemonic discourses that naturalize the history of settler colonization and industrial development as peaceful events and processes under which Chinese settlers have simply arrived to earn a living.

Land Relations

When stories of Gold Mountain work to include the presence of Indigeneity, such as the Indigenous figures that appear in *Escape to Gold Mountain*, such depictions render the structure of settler colonialism to be natural and capable of producing peaceful and wholesome co-operation between settlers and Indigenous peoples. Of course, friendships,

gathering economy, the invaders interfered with Native salmon weirs, raided villages, and even looted graves" (Dickason 229-230).

intimacies, and alliances between settlers, settlers of colour, and Indigenous peoples certainly existed, especially when they worked in close proximity to one another in nation-building projects. In her study of cross-racial encounters between Indigenous peoples, European colonists, Chinese migrants, and mixed-race populations in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British Columbia, Renisa Mawani asserts that these cross-racial encounters and physical proximities in the labour camps and urban locales created “new opportunities for friendships, political alliances, and intimacies of other kinds” (8). In *Escape to Gold Mountain*, Wong speaks to the possibilities of such relationalities when he portrays the inter-racial make-up of the salmon cannery plants on the west coast of British Columbia or the land clearance projects to develop agricultural farming in California. As previously mentioned, one of the Wong ancestors, Ah-Gin, works alongside Kanaka Maoli labourers to clear the land and ends up befriending one of the labourers, Kawika, a complicated Indigenous presence as an uninvited guest on Muwekma Ohlone territory. To be sure, such close proximities engendered cross-racial socializing and “forged a variety of intimate and political relations during the work day and nonworking hours” (Mawani 15). But Wong’s portrayal of these close proximities does not explore the unequal nature of these relationships. His depiction of these friendly and close relations still ends up disavowing the colonial and racialized hierarchy that structures Asian settler and Indigenous relations. That the friendships are depicted only as positive, peaceful, co-operative, and mutually beneficial also risks glossing over the colonial complicity of Asian settlers and their colonial relationship to the land.

In yet another Chinese settler's first impression of Gold Mountain, the Wong ancestor in *Escape to Gold Mountain* comes to relate to the land as a source of wealth and opportunity, but this time, his land relation is derived from an Indigenous figure who serves to legitimate his settlement on Indigenous territory. When it becomes too hostile and dangerous for Ah-Gin to continue living along the American west coast due to the rise in anti-Chinese violence at the hands of white settlers, he arrives at the shores of Hawai'i only to receive the following greeting from a Kanaka Maoli quite literally with open arms: "Welcome to the kingdom of Hawai'i" (101)! As it turns out, the Kanaka Maoli who welcomes him is his old friend Kawika. Introducing Ah-Gin to the racial harmony of Hawai'i's ethnically diverse plantation system, Kawika explains, "[i]n Hawai'i many people work together. Allow me to introduce you to my Chinese friends. The Chinese are encouraged to marry and start families here. Plantation bosses believe men with wives and kids are more responsible" (102). This portrait of the racial dynamics of Hawai'i's plantation system presents a sanitized understanding of a racial and colonial hierarchy that places Native Hawaiians at the bottom and Asian settlers above them.¹¹ Here, a narrative of inter-racial friendship, cooperation, and marriage benefiting the productivity and efficiency of the plantation system is celebrated without considering the negative associations that the plantation system also engenders: for the

¹¹ The structure of Asian settler colonialism in Hawai'i differs substantially from that in Canada or in the mainland US, for "Hawai'i has become a white and Asian settler colony in which Asian settlers, particularly Japanese settlers, now dominate state institutions and apparatuses" (Fujikane xvi). Wong's account of the racial harmony of the plantation system in Hawai'i overlooks the contemporary reality of Hawaiians remaining "a politically subordinated group suffering all the legacies of conquest, landlessness, disastrous health, diaspora, institutionalization in the military and prisons, poor educational attainment, and confinement to the service sector of employment" (Trask 3).

sugar cane plantation system is just one settler colonial institution of capitalist accumulation that works to introduce non-Indigenous forms of agriculture and economy that displace Indigenous ecological species that have traditionally sustained the physical health and spiritual practices of the Kanaka Maoli.¹² The US occupation and control of Hawaiian land and sovereignty, combined with the introduction of the sugar cane industry and the mass importation of unhealthy processed foods from the mainland US, has been linked with the devastating health statistics of Native Hawaiians from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.¹³ Therefore, this fictional account of the racial harmony and productivity of Hawaiian plantation labourers is hardly a progressive or mutually beneficial account of Asian-Indigenous relations. Wong presents Asian settlement and Asian-Indigenous relations in Hawai‘i as simply harmonious and beneficial to the

¹² The introduction of non-Indigenous agricultural farming has nearly devastated traditional food systems in Hawai‘i: “Kalo (taro) is a sacred plant and is considered an elder sibling to the Kanaka Maoli people. Prior to European invasion, lo‘i kalo fields covered at least 20,000 acres (90 square kilometres) over six islands in the Hawaiian archipelago. Today, after more than 100 years of U.S. occupation, less than 400 acres (1.6 square kilometres) of lo‘i kalo remain” (Corntassel 96). In response, Native Hawaiian teachers and students at the Hālau Kū Māna public charter school have initiated land-based projects to rebuild Indigenous Hawaiian and educational systems through taro plantings and harvests, acts of Indigenous resurgence that will restore Indigenous health and spiritual and cultural practices that have been interrupted by US colonization (Corntassel 96). According to Joseph Keawe‘aimoku Kaholokula (Kanaka Maoli), a clinical health psychologist and behavioural scientist who has studied the effects of acculturation and discrimination on the health of Native Hawaiians, “[h]ealthy islander ways of living have been pushed aside to make way for the artificial, processed, and manufactured world. For instance, pa‘i ‘ai (pounded taro) and ‘ulu (breadfruit) have been replaced by white rice and bread. Fresh fish has been replaced by Spam. Lū‘au (kalo leaves) and ‘uala (sweet potato) have been replaced with macaroni salad and French fries. ‘Awa has been replaced with alcohol and tobacco. The kapu system, which was essentially a public health system, has been replaced with laws promoting individualism and allowing wasteful consumption. The foods we consume are no longer the kino lau (physical representations) of our Akua (Gods). They are not fit for ho‘okupu (sacred offerings), so why should they be fit to put in our bodies?” (260-61).

¹³ Though Native Hawaiians make up nearly 25 percent of the population in Hawai‘i, they do not enjoy the same social and health status as other major ethnic groups such as Caucasians and Japanese (Kaholokula 256): in Hawai‘i, Native Hawaiians, as well as Pacific Islanders and Filipinos, “are more likely to be undereducated, to be working in low paying jobs, to be incarcerated, and to be living in poorer conditions than other ethnic groups. They are also the highest-ranking ethnic groups in terms of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers” (Kaholokula 256).

plantation labour system, thus overlooking the history of US colonization of Hawai‘i as well as the contemporary complexity of Asian settler hegemony in Hawai‘i altogether.

The Rush for Mythic Gold

There are two parts to the myth of Gold Mountain that come with every Gold Mountain story: the inflated fantasy that drives migrant hope and excitement for wealth and opportunity and the false promise that leaves the Chinese settler feeling cheated and embittered. In texts like *The Concubine’s Children*, Gold Mountain is revealed to be a myth in the false sense of the word. Auntie, the woman who originally bought Chong’s grandmother May-ying to work as her servant in China, regales May-ying in exaggerated tales of the wealth and fortune waiting for her future life in Gold Mountain. Before May-ying agrees to being sold as a concubine to a Gold Mountain man, Auntie placates her with the following assurances: her future husband, Chan Sam, “has been living in *Gum San* for some years. People living in *Gum San* have wealth and riches; they have to push the gold from their feet to find the road” (9). But what actually awaits her in Gold Mountain is a lifetime of destitution and struggle working as a teahouse waitress in the skid-row districts of Vancouver’s Chinatown. Thus, the myth of Gold Mountain is revealed to be a cruel promise for the Chinese matriarch, an unattainable dream of prosperity and upward mobility.

Likewise in *Escape to Gold Mountain*, exaggerated tropes of wealth and fortune shape the migrant dream and fantasy of upward mobility that drive Chinese migration to Gold Mountain. When the two Wong brothers discuss their desires to start a family during precarious times of starvation and war in the homeland, they turn to the myth of

Gold Mountain as a solution to all of their problems (71-72). One brother says, “I hear there is a land of great wealth” (72). The other brother replies, “It’s called Gam Saan. Gold can be picked up off the ground” (72)! Whether these rumours are true or not, the brothers find a way to ship off to America through a labour broker who recruits them to work as railroad labourers on the Central Pacific Railway. Their three month journey across the Pacific—represented in a cloud shaped frame with mountains and trees in the background and the brothers smiling with their eyes closed, claiming they can see Gam Saan in their dreams—ends with a series of harsh and more realistic Gold Mountain frames featuring white settlers racially denigrating Chinese arrivals, the death of one of the Wong brothers due to a horrible railway tunnel cave-in, and widespread anti-Chinese riots, lynchings, and attacks driving the Chinese settlers out of mining and railroad settlements along the west coast in California and British Columbia. These anti-Chinese hostilities force Chinese settlers like Sam, the surviving Wong brother, and Ah-Gin, who ends up adopting Sam as a son, to relocate northward to other Gold Mountain settlements along the west coast of North America that offered labour opportunities for Chinese settlers and were willing to tolerate their presence. The trope of Gold Mountain, therefore, operates as a symbol, a myth, and a dream. In Chinese diasporic stories of economic hardship and racial oppression, Gold Mountain is experienced as a false myth that has unfairly deluded Chinese settlers into believing in the possibility of attaining upward mobility, that one day they can reach Gold Mountain—that they can reap the benefits and privileges of labouring in Gold Mountain. Instead, Gold Mountain is bitterly

exposed as having reduced Chinese settlers to function as “living machines” subject to social exclusion and systemic racism.¹⁴

Though the myth of Gold Mountain has turned out to be a set of false rumours and exaggerated tales of wealth and fortune, the Gold Mountain myth is still real in the sense that it has the capacity to shape settler desires and behaviour. When the Wong men in *Escape to Gold Mountain* encounter extreme hardship and struggle, not once do they consider returning to the homeland. Clearly a desire for profit cannot be the only structure of feeling driving Chinese settlers to stay in such racially hostile and economically exploitative host societies. In many Gold Mountain stories, an improved social status in the eyes of family and community in the homeland also complements the Chinese settler’s desire for wealth. In the face of privation and false hope, Gold Mountain migrants stay because their desire for wealth is both material and cultural. They may not be wealthy in Gold Mountain, but their families and communities in the homeland certainly view them as such. Thus, the Gold Mountain myth continues to shape settler desires no matter how false and exaggerated it may be.

Indeed, myths have more often than not been relegated to the realm of the “fictional, mythical, unreal, outside or opposite to history, but desire is real, especially desire for wealth; a desire for wealth leads to real, material changes in behaviour and

¹⁴ According to the 1885 Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, the Chinese migrant, while an unwanted foreign presence, amounted to a necessary infrastructural investment to be tolerated in order to advance the industrial and economic development of Canada: in British Columbia, the Chinese were seen as “living machines differing from artificial and inanimate machinery in this, that while working and conducing to the same end with the latter, they are consuming the productions and manufacturers of the country, contributing to its revenue and trade, and at the same time expanding and developing its resources” (LXX).

actions” (Jackson 118). I am greatly indebted to Shona Jackson’s thoughts on the supposed divide between myth and reality via Sylvia Winter, for “it was wealth that could transform the fifteenth century social class position of those who were not royalty, clergy, or gentry, hence Columbus’s own desire to be rewarded with a title (Admiral of the Ocean Seas) that he could pass on to his children” (Jackson 118). Consequently, this desire for wealth has continued to structure the present, shaping how settler and diasporic communities relate to the land and to the ways in which Indigenous peoples struggle to regain land title and maintain traditional ways of living Indigenously that resist the expansion of capitalism’s empire of private property.

Mythologizing the land as a source of economic wealth and profit is also linked to the transnational development of the gold standard, an international trading system that increased the wealth of imperial nations by extracting wealth from colonized territories. While gold may signify good luck and social status in Chinese diasporic culture, a talisman that generates future prosperity and wards off evil spirits, gold has also functioned for the Chinese diaspora as an asset, a stable investment or reliable resource that can be sold during times of economic precarity. After several dynasties of imperial rule and a rigid social order in China, and after China’s defeat in the Opium War with England, which initiated a series of clashes and unfair treaties with foreign powers that infringed upon the territorial and economic integrity of China (Li 13), gold became a stable and reliable source of wealth for Chinese sojourners during waves of economic, political, and cultural instability in China leading up to and during the Communist Revolution. Moreover, the history of gold fever in settler colonies such as Canada and

the US coincided with a global increase in the adoption of the gold standard as a unit of currency with which to fix price stability and boost international trade.¹⁵ The height of the gold standard lasted from 1880 to 1914, a remarkable period in world economic history “characterized by rapid economic growth, the free flow of labor and capital across political borders, virtually free trade and, in general, world peace” (Bordo 7).¹⁶ These economic conditions, aided by the adoption of the gold standard, rendered a higher return on capital in developing countries such as the US, Canada, and Australia, more so than in European countries such as the UK and France; “[a]s a consequence, British investors, for example, invested heavily in American industries and utilities by purchasing long-term securities” (Bordo 5).

As it turns out, there was wealth and fortune to be made in Gold Mountain after all. Though Chinese settlement was increasingly curtailed by anti-Chinese legislation and discrimination in North America, the history of Chinese sojourners finding ways to improve their livelihoods overseas has only begun to receive scholarly treatment by historians such as Madeline Y. Hsu.¹⁷ That nineteenth-century Chinese migrants returning from California, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand stopped first in Hong

¹⁵ Adopting the gold standard provided states with “a mechanism to ensure long-run price level stability both for individual countries and groups of countries” (Bordo 3). From 1821 to 1880, the gold standard expanded as more countries switched from using silver to gold, a switch which “reflected both changes in the relative supplies of the two precious metals resulting from the gold discoveries of the 1840s and ‘50s and a growing preference for the more precious metal as world real income rose” (Bordo 7).

¹⁶ It was during this period that the US, for example, was able to maintain the price of gold at \$20.67 per ounce (Bordo 2).

¹⁷ Hsu’s study *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* provides a rich account of resilient Taishanese migrants finding ways to sustain their families in Taishan and thrive economically and socially even during extreme economic hardship and US Exclusion laws.

Kong to take advantage of its absence of customs and immigration control—exchanging enormous amounts of gold which they sold for silver, China’s currency at the time (Sinn 241)—has been overlooked in the commonly accepted historical narrative of the Chinese sojourners.¹⁸ In other words, while the myth of Gold Mountain was certainly a cruel and false promise, the myth was still real in the sense that it significantly shaped the desires and improved the livelihoods of Chinese migrants nonetheless.

“a foreign land of white ghosts”

Not only does the land relation presented in Gold Mountain narratives disavow the presence of Indigeneity but it also conflates the land with an overwhelming sense of whiteness, a wholly white territory that is hostile and inhospitable to the Chinese settler. A land relation of wealth obstructed by threatening white settlers is evocative to consider in relation to the literary and visual traditions of white cultural producers in Pacific settler societies that have depicted the land and its Indigenous peoples as wild, terrifying, or barbaric elements of nature since contact. Thus, by inverting the script of barbarity typically mapped onto Indigenous peoples yet also naturalizing the absence of Indigeneity, Gold Mountain stories present a complicated anti-racist narrative that inevitably performs a settler indigenizing function for the Chinese diaspora. From the Gold Mountain migrant’s perspective of the “New World,” the barbarous people are the white settlers and the Chinese settlers are their victims.

¹⁸ Even when Chinese migrants remitted money to China, most of it passed first through Hong Kong, “where it was more convenient to sell foreign currencies for Chinese *yuan* and at a better price”; thus, gold coins would be regularly sold to jewelry shops in Hong Kong and “the small exchange shops would be jammed with people selling and buying currencies and precious metals. It was claimed that one shipload of returning Chinese in the 1930s might bring in anywhere from a few thousand to \$50,000” (Sinn 242).

In *The Concubine's Children*, Chong imagines her grandmother balking at the news of having to migrate to Gold Mountain to marry her grandfather, for Gold Mountain in the eyes of her grandmother was “another continent, a foreign land of white ghosts” (8). Chong’s usage of the term “white ghosts” may be read as a translation of the Cantonese slang *gwei lo*, foreign ghost or devil, that many southern Chinese speakers used to refer to western foreigners and the invasive, barbaric threat that their presence represented in China.¹⁹ In the diaspora, the term’s anti-colonial and xenophobic register takes on a complicated racial and colonial charge when applied to white settlers from the perspective of the Chinese migrant having settled on Indigenous lands. It is ironic that May-ying refers to white settlers as the foreign barbaric threat since Yellow Peril discourses reposition her as the threatening foreign presence in Canada. The phrase may even be read as ironically accurate since the western ghosts/devils have invaded not only China but the Indigenous territories of North America. In other Chinese diasporic texts like Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony* and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, “white ghosts” or “foreign devils” signifies a Chinese diasporic and white settler relationship of distrust, fear, and conflict: the white settler ghosts are feared more for their power to oppress than for their purportedly uncivilized, barbaric ways. Likewise, Chong’s grandmother remains convinced that Gold Mountain is a hostile landscape devoid of Indigeneity and ruled by malevolent, uncivilized (white) foreigners.

¹⁹ Similarly, the Mandarin equivalent to *gwei lo* is *lao wai*, which translates into alien.

White ghosts have not been the only hostile barbaric force in settler representations of the land. Conflict with Indigenous tribes and nations have dominated the national imaginary of Pacific settler culture even in white settler texts that feature little to no Indigenous presence. If there is a lack of literal embodiment of settler-Indigenous antagonism in cultural texts, then the threat and barbarism typically associated with the presence of Indigeneity becomes subsumed and displaced onto nature.²⁰ In the literary and visual production of white settler artists and writers in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the US, the presence of Indigeneity has either been erased from the landscape (either rendered entirely absent or nearly obsolete as a result of contact and war) or appropriated to function as settler nationalistic emblems and tropes. In either case, such representations serve to displace Indigenous peoples from the land and replace their autochthonous presence with that of white settlers, a colonial narrative of settler indigenization that is far from totalizing. In Nicholas Thomas' study on European engagements with indigenous art and the presence of indigenous art in the contemporary art world, he points to a "basic, multifaceted ambivalence around the denial and affirmation of the indigenous presence, around the virtue and illegitimacy of colonial settlement [...that] is foundational in settler culture" (34). Though settler artists have had

²⁰ In Northrop Frye's survey of the myths that have preoccupied the Canadian imagination, he discerns "a tone of deep terror in regard to nature" (227). Whereas American literature and history has been riddled with bloody "Indian" wars, he claims problematically that "Canada has not had, strictly speaking, an Indian war" (Frye 226). Therefore, the conquest narrative, according to Frye, has involved mainly "unconscious forces of nature, personified" (226-27). Thus, Frye points to the influence of the Canadian environment on the nation's (white) poets, for "[t]he environment, in nineteenth-century Canada, is terrifyingly cold, empty and vast," which manifests in "such episodes as shipwreck, Indian massacres, human sacrifices, lumbermen mangled in log-jams, mountain climbers crippled on glaciers, animals screaming in traps, the agonies of starvation and solitude" (245).

to contend with the real presence of Indigeneity in Australia and New Zealand by imagining their disappearance from the landscape, “[c]onflict was continually experienced yet, it would seem, denied; [thus] the reality of Aboriginal resistance was in rhetoric eclipsed by a sort of innocence whose violation occasioned settler guilt” (Thomas 38).

The Gold Mountain narratives selected for this study also depict Indigenous presence to varying degrees. Whereas a substantial Indigenous presence surfaces in *Escape to Gold Mountain* and *Disappearing Moon Café*, little to no Indigenous presence can be found in *The Concubine’s Children*, “Eat Bitter,” and “Prairie Night 1939.” While the Indigenous characters that do emerge in these texts lack the dissipated, barbarous, and noble traits of the literary savage trope in white settler colonial representations, the minimalization of Indigenous presence still demands critical attention, particularly when the presence of Indigeneity is replaced with the hostile and barbarous presence of white settlers. On the one hand, the focus on hostile white settler and Chinese settler relations in Gold Mountain stories can be read as historically based. The history of Chinese exclusion has documented countless instances of when anti-Chinese sentiment erupted in intense violence against Chinese immigrants. On the other hand, the racial violence and discrimination that the Gold Mountain migrants experienced cannot be ethically read in isolation from the originary violence and displacements experienced by Indigenous peoples.

But I wonder if it is possible to recuperate the anti-colonial charge behind the Chinese xenophobic term for barbarous foreigners: can Chinese diasporic representations

of hostile “white ghosts” be read in solidarity with the ongoing dispossession and displacement experienced by Indigenous peoples? Set in a small lumber town in northern Ontario, Judy Fong Bates’s short story “Eat Bitter” presents a new immigrant’s first impressions of the land as hostile “*lo fon*” territory.²¹ Hua Fan finds it difficult adjusting to a land so cold and inhospitable. The *lo fon* customers at his paper uncle’s hand laundry disrespect him and call him Charlie, yet he must wash the shit and arm pit stains from their clothing to earn his living. Every time he walks into town, the town boys hurl objects and racist slurs at him. Once he is hit in the face with an icy snowball: looking up, he sees “a pair of blue eyes, as cold as the surroundings, menacing in their clarity” (41-42). Another time, while he and Elder Uncle are gathering water cress from a river bed, the local boys stone them, laughing and exclaiming, “[l]ook! The chinks eat grass” (55)! Narrated in the third person, the story portrays an overwhelmingly white and hostile wintry landscape laden with descriptions of the town surrounding the protagonist as “draped in white” (41), where “[t]he whiteness of the landscape felt eternal” to him (41); and in this “sea of white faces, theirs were the only brown ones” (46). These motifs of whiteness circulate throughout the story as being threatening, never-ending, and bitterly cold, thus emphasizing the Chinese diaspora’s excluded and vulnerable status in a white oppressive society. Whiteness surrounds the Gold Mountain labourer; whiteness

²¹ In her short story collection *China Dog and Other Tales from a Chinese Laundry* and novel *Midnight at the Dragon Café*, Fong Bates uses the term *lo-fon* to refer to western characters in a disparaging tone. I have never encountered this term before as Fong Bates grew up fluent in the near-extinct Four Counties (Sze Yup) dialect of her ancestral village in Kaiping County, Guangzhou (Jessop). Somewhat similar to *gwei lo* or *lao wai*, the Cantonese and Mandarin terms for westerners or foreigners, *lo-fon* is a broader category as it also applies to Chinese who have assimilated western cultural habits and values, that is, according to Fong Bates, Chinese who are no longer culturally Chinese. See *Midnight at the Dragon Café*.

has no beginning or end. In Fong Bates's story, whiteness engulfs and dominates the land, rendering the land both thermally and socially inhospitable to Chinese settlers like Hua Fan.

Chinese diasporic terms like *lo-fon* and white ghosts position white settlers as foreign, barbaric threats; they function as xenophobic slurs directed at white settlers in Gold Mountain texts that remain complicated by the settler status of Chinese immigrants. That texts like Chong's *The Concubine's Children* and Fong Bates' "Eat Bitter" disavow the presence of Indigeneity in their representation of Gold Mountain suggests that their works contribute to naturalizing the absence of Indigeneity that settler colonial structures thrive upon. But can this problem of disavowing Indigeneity be acknowledged alongside a productive re-reading of the "white ghosts" that dominate and oppress Gold Mountain migrants? Can the anti-colonial origins behind the slur for non-Chinese invaders link the experience of colonization shared by Chinese settlers and Indigenous peoples at different times and different places?

Positioning white settlers as foreign barbaric invaders flips the colonial script of Emma LaRocque's reading of a civilized/savage dichotomy that structures Canadian history and culture.²² Rather than perpetuating this racist, colonial logic, Gold Mountain stories invert the dichotomy, undermining the legitimacy of white colonial figures for being uncivilized and morally inferior. However, this inversion may also be read as

²² LaRocque's civilization/savagery dichotomy refers to the dehumanizing stereotypes that associate white settlers on the side of the civilized (that is, "settlement, private property, cultivation of land and intellect, industry, monotheism, literacy, coded law and order, Judeo-Christian morality, and metal-based technology") and Indigenous peoples on the side of the savage ("wild, nomadic, warlike, uncultivating and uncultivated, aimless, superstitious, disorganized, illiterate, immoral, and technologically backwards") (41).

extending the trope of survival and victimhood claimed by Margaret Atwood in *Survival* to be the central symbols structuring the thematic dimensions of Canadian literature. In the preface written for the 2003 edition, she asserts that “Nature as Monster—a trope that preoccupied the writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [...]—is still with us” (“Survival: A Demi-Memoir”). A multi-faceted and adaptable idea, survival, that is, surviving the various incarnations of the Nature as Monster trope, has been a long concern in Canadian literature, for

[/]*a survivance* had long been an overt theme in Québec political life, manifesting itself in the latter half of the twentieth century as anxiety about the survival of French. In the rest of Canada, the anxiety was more free-floating, and ranged from the fear of being squashed by trees or destroyed by icebergs to the feeling of being stifled by the society around you. (“Survival: A Demi-Memoir”)

If the types of landscape that have prevailed in Canadian literature have represented nature and its sentient and non-sentient elements as hostile and life threatening to white settlers, it is a land relation that continues to shape Canadian stories and poems about surviving or barely surviving a whole range of antagonistic forces, whether it be extreme weather conditions; Indigenous “tormentors,” vast, overwhelming, unknown territories; women; or wild, uncontrollable nature (Atwood “Nature as Monster”). In Gold Mountain stories, white settler ghosts, the hostile *lo-fons*, take up the position of Atwood’s Nature as Monster trope and Chinese settlers join the ranks of the superabundance of victims that she has tracked in her survey of Canadian literature. Unfortunately, without any mention of Asian-Indigenous relations, the inversion of the colonial narrative in these Gold Mountain narratives risks repeating another colonial script: the myth of the Vanishing Indian.

A product of its time, Atwood's reading of the trope of Canadian victimhood is problematic for the way that it equalizes racial and colonial differences between white settlers, settlers of colour, and Indigenous peoples. While she concedes that "the emerges in Canadian literature as the ultimate victim of social oppression and deprivation" ("Nature as Monster"), the way in which she links the dispossession and marginalization of Indigenous peoples to that of French Canadians or Canada as an exploited British colony conveniently glosses over the colonial power and sovereign authority that Canada, and to some extent Quebec, wields over Indigenous peoples and their right to sovereignty. If every group in Canada is a victim, then who will be held accountable for all the victimizing? According to Eva Mackey in "'Death by Landscape': Race, Nature, and Gender in Canadian Nationalist Mythology," the multitude of victims that Atwood identifies in *Survival* draws on discourses of marginalization and victimization that can be formulated as "nationalist resistance to the universalizing features of colonialism and imperialism," but such discourses erase and appropriate the colonized status and perspective of Indigenous peoples all the while serving members of the settler nation who continue to benefit from the appropriation of Indigenous lands (129). It is one thing to generate empathetic connections between victims, but it is quite another to assign colonial oppressors the role of victimhood without also seriously addressing the ongoing ramifications of their colonial oppressing in the first place. Consequently, the framing of white settlers as barbarous white ghosts, while provocative for its anti-racist and anti-colonial implications, risks equalizing racial and colonial differences between Chinese

settlers and Indigenous peoples, particularly when the landscape is emptied of Indigenous presence and peopled instead with a hostile, threatening sense of white domination.

While Gold Mountain stories adhere to literary and visual conventions in settler culture that represent the landscape as a vast and empty wilderness devoid of Indigenous presence, they do deviate from these patterns. Rather than presenting the land as an “impenetrable, uncontrollable, and ‘ignoble’” wilderness as the Group of Seven painters once did in their landscape paintings (“‘Death by Landscape’” 127), Gold Mountain stories replace the wild and “ignoble” traits typically assigned to nature and Indigenous peoples with a hostile, threatening white landscape instead, which ends up mitigating the anti-colonial critique promised by their inversion of the white settler colonial script of barbarity. Given the politics of universalizing victimhood, the settler colonial status of Chinese settlers in Gold Mountain cannot be overlooked even if they have also been victims of white supremacy, class oppression, and Western imperialism. When read within the colonial aesthetic traditions of peopling or unpeopling the landscape in Pacific settler culture, Gold Mountain stories, politically radical for their potential to resist colonial discourses of barbarity and generate a politics of solidarity with Indigenous peoples, still remain implicated in colonial storytelling patterns when they uncritically assert the presence and political belonging of Chinese settlers in Canada’s national imaginary.

Sojourning the Earth for Property and Personhood

The myth of Gold Mountain privileges relations with white settlers over relations with Indigenous peoples, a cross-racial disavowal that can be traced back to *Disappearing*

Moon Café's treatment of the racial and class structures that divide and prevent Chinese and Indigenous communities from cultivating good relations. According to the myth, Chinese sojourners, driven by hunger and poverty, arrive in Gold Mountain to earn enough money to return home one day rich. Though Chinese sojourners never conceived of themselves as settlers, most eventually become settlers, often by force rather than choice. However, whether Chinese sojourners do return to China with the wealth they envisioned they would acquire or not, the myth of Gold Mountain as it circulates in narratives about the Chinese sojourners still presents an exploitative land relation that undermines Indigenous concepts of place-thought epistemologies and sacred ecologies. Myths that represent the land as sources of untapped wealth awaiting extraction, development, and privatization for individual profit turn "earth into property."²³ Turning earth into property transforms relations to the land and regards the land as a mere object to be exploited and commodified for individual gain and profit with little regard for the sentient and non-sentient beings that inhabit the land. As exemplified by exploitative myths such as El Dorado or Gold Mountain, the expansion of "capitalism's empire of private property" can extend even further into the "new frontiers of privatization through the commodification of expanding orbits of mind, matter, and relationship" (Hall, *Earth into Property* 9). Consequently, it is important to understand how such myths reproduce such everlasting exploitative land relations. Myths that transform the land into "a place for extraction rather than development of economic and social wealth" (Jackson 112)

²³ I borrow this turn of phrase from Anthony J. Hall's recent study on the colonial roots of global capitalism, *Earth into Property: Colonization, Decolonization, and Capitalism*.

reproduce a settler capitalist land relation of subjugation and profit to be gained from one's individual labour. More importantly, developing collective forms of social wealth with Indigenous peoples simply does not become a priority.

Set in small Ontario and Saskatchewan towns, Gold Mountain stories like Judy Fong Bates' "Eat Bitter" and Paul Yee's "Prairie Night 1939" may only disavow the presence of Indigeneity because the history of Chinese and Indigenous relations in small Canadian towns may not be as prevalent or established as they have been in British Columbia. If the towns depicted in "Eat Bitter" and "Prairie Night 1939" seem predominantly white, they simply reflect the historical lack of racial diversity of small Canadian towns. Of course, stories of Chinese immigrants struggling with racial violence and exclusion in hostile and unwelcoming white dominant towns need to be told. They provide an intimate experiential account of Chinese exclusion from the perspective of the early Chinese diaspora, whose material experiences of marginalization have been disavowed from the national imaginary. However, as represented in Gold Mountain texts, the Chinese settler's failure to engage with the land and build relations with surrounding Indigenous community members due to the experience of racial discrimination and social ostracization does not mitigate the Chinese diaspora's complicitous role but rather extends the structures of settler colonialism if only in a disaffected way.

In "Eat Bitter," the new immigrant Hua Fan repeatedly encounters racial violence and feels powerless and embittered. The only Chinese immigrants in Sydney, Ontario, Hua Fan and his adopted uncle have no legal recourse to seek social justice as racial

violence against Chinese immigrants appears to be the norm. Enraged and humiliated by the racial and class denigration that he must stoically endure if he is to remain in Gold Mountain to earn a living, Hua Fan resorts to rejecting any claim of belonging to the land. After the first attack by the town boys, Hua Fan returns home to cut off his queue in a frenzied attempt at acculturation, only to realize that he cannot change his phenotypical features to fit in (42). As a result, he stolidly wraps and stows his braid away in his bamboo suitcase, assuring himself with the following mantra: that “[t]his cold distant country was not his home. One day he would return to China. And he would return rich” (42). By rejecting Gold Mountain as his home, Hua Fan finds solace in the possibility of returning to China one day to retire in comfort and wealth, a promise of future redemption generated by the myth of Gold Mountain. His determination to remain and endure racial humiliation in Gold Mountain presents a land relation that hyper-emphasizes the land as exploitable property, a land relation shaped by the experience of white racism to be sure but a land relation that leaves him disconnected from the land and its sentient and non-sentient beings.

In an attempt to placate Hua Fan’s rage after their second run-in with the vicious town boys, Elder Uncle teaches Hua Fan a harsh lesson tempered by the Gold Mountain promise of future redemption: “‘Hua Fan, stop thinking of those devil boys. Remember, this is not our home. One day we will leave and go back to China’” (56). Elder Uncle knows full well that their “brown faces” will never be fully accepted in Gold Mountain. But Elder Uncle treats this racial injustice as part of the price for having the opportunity to provide for future generations (56). According to Elder Uncle, Gold Mountain

labourers, much like “coolies,” must eat bitterness.²⁴ They must stoically endure racial humiliation and social exclusion in Gold Mountain since working on this white hostile land can still sustain them and their families in China. Whereas all that Hua Fan sees surrounding him is a hostile, unwelcoming whiteness, Elder Uncle treats the land as a source of financial and diasporic wealth. It is Elder Uncle who notices the watercress growing wild in the river bank for them to pick for their traditional Chinese dishes (54-55). It is Elder Uncle who manages to practice the Chinese method of gardening to cultivate “beds of *bak choy*, *toy tchlem*, mustard greens, and snow peas” (53). To Elder Uncle, the land is more than just hostile white territory. That it can feed and sustain Gold Mountain labourers and their descendants presents a land relation capable of seeing past the economic value of the land even if Elder Uncle sets his sights on retiring someday in China. Though Elder Uncle can appreciate the other non-economic forms of wealth that the land provides, like many sojourners, he chases after the Gold Mountain promise of future redemption, which renders staying to build Asian-Indigenous relationalities and learning how to be respectful guests on Indigenous territories all the more invisible and unlikely.

The new immigrant in Yee’s “Prairie Night 1939” takes a rather chilling instrumental approach to reconciling his inferior status in Gold Mountain. A Chinese

²⁴ The etymology of coolie has been traced to its Tamil (*kuli* meaning wages), Urdu (*quli* meaning hireling), and Chinese (*kuli* meaning bitter strength) origins, but recently “Mae Ngai has traced the word’s origins to a European neologism that was first employed by sixteenth-century Portuguese to describe common native workers on the Indian subcontinent” (Chang 37). By the mid-nineteenth century, the term began to apply specifically to indentured labourers from China and India contracted to work on colonial plantations in Southeast Asia and the Americas, a shift in meaning “inextricably bound up with the abolition of slavery and deepening Euro-American imperial incursions into the Asia-Pacific world” (Chang 37).

restaurant owner in Wilding, Saskatchewan, Gordon depends on the white townspeople for his livelihood, so he “no longer resents the whites. They were masters of this country, he conceded, and the Chinese presence here depended entirely on their needs and generosity. Especially when one was alone in a town a hundred miles away from the nearest Chinese” (54). In Gordon’s view, Gold Mountain is clearly white territory, and the white property owners are his benefactors. Unlike Elder Uncle in “Eat Bitter,” Gordon can hardly see past the financial value of the land, for he views his relation to the town as an economic trade-off:

[t]o Gordon, living alongside the whites was a transaction not unlike the operation of a café. You served the customers what they ordered, and they paid your wages. The townspeople wanted doughnuts and a quiet Chinaman, and Gordon needed remittance money and peace. If Gordon wanted to enrage himself or sacrifice his health, he could point to the hypocrisy of the whites. Gordon had read their Bible, and come away amazed and bemused. (54)

Being a “quiet Chinaman,” that is, stolidly accepting racial discrimination and exclusion, makes good business sense to Gordon. His desire for profit making renders the tolerance of white racism a necessary requirement of his job, which isolates him even further from engaging with the community. Of course, why would Gordon wish to build relations with members of an overwhelmingly white community that does not fully accept him? But the absence of Indigenous peoples in this text makes me wonder why Gordon would not also try searching for and forging relations with non-white members outside of this unwelcoming community. Surrounded by an inhospitable whiteness much like Hua Fan and Elder Uncle, Gordon fails to see other forms of non-economic value that Gold

Mountain may have, a failed vision that can be explained by his failure to establish relations with any nearby Indigenous community.²⁵

Gordon finds solace in earning a profit in Gold Mountain: being a “quiet Chinaman” generates a high return on his investment. Since the Depression, work opportunities have been disappearing, especially for Gold Mountain labourers who do not receive job protections like unionized white labourers in British Columbia.²⁶ In fact, Gordon feels grateful to have any work at all, let alone this fortunate opportunity to start his own business and be his own boss. He moved to Wilding to escape the anti-Chinese hostilities in Vancouver, where he first learned the trade by working at his uncle’s restaurant full-time, “speaking English, learning cooking craft, and discovering how to skimp in the kitchen and still give customers their twenty cents’ worth. With quiet exhilaration he had watched the figures in his bank book accumulate, while the steady routine of work sealed him off blissfully from friends and dreams” (52). Gordon knows his place in this white dominant society and has therefore resigned to dutifully performing the role of the town’s “quiet Chinaman” since doing so at the very least grants him wealth and autonomy as a businessman. By feeding and sustaining his white patrons, Gordon

²⁵ I must clarify that as Fong Bates does not include any presence of Indigeneity in her fiction, I am offering a more speculative reading of this absence that pushes beyond the confines of the text.

²⁶ In fact, from the 1870s to the Great Depression, the Canadian labour movement actively organized against Chinese immigration, insisting that “a restrictive and racially discriminatory immigration policy was essential for protecting both the standards of living of Canadian workers and the social, moral, and medical vitality of Canadian communities” (Goutor 4). Labour reformers commonly argued that since the Chinese were inherently less civilized, subhuman working machines content with a lower standard of living, they presented an unfair advantage over white labourers who would experience a “Mongolization,” or degradation, of their living standards (Goutor 39).

and his family in China are in turn fed and sustained by them, a mutually beneficial relationship that satisfies Gordon's desire for wealth.

Having worked in close proximity with his white benefactors in his café over the years, Gordon can "count the names of all the Wilding men on his fingers, list their wives and children, and even estimate the acreage each held" (54): the white male settlers whom he admires from a distance all own property in Wilding and thus have built a history of belonging to the land through their agricultural and reproductive labour. Observing the white patriarchs from a distance, Gordon dares not cross the unspoken social boundary that has been erected between them. Their conversations must remain superficial, for "[h]e was Chinese and they were white. Gordon could not start a conversation or begin to ask questions, for such moves would instantly destroy the unspoken premise on which Wilding accepted him" (50). Playing the "quiet Chinaman" may provide Gordon wealth and stability, moderately so in Gold Mountain but exponentially so in the eyes of his village back home, but he still feels a strong desire to be included, to be a part of the white community that excludes him, as

Gordon had never been invited to any home of community gathering. They complimented his cooking and nodded to him on the back street [of the town], but that was all. Listening to their family and farm talk, Gordon sensed his isolation acutely. It was not the physical distance that hurt, but the very closeness of that exclusive social circle just outside his door. (54-55)

Knowing full well that he may never be treated as an equal, Gordon still wants to belong to this white community that will tolerate his presence but only from a distance. Unlike Hua Fan and Elder Uncle, Gordon does not feel compelled to reject Gold Mountain as a home; he rejects instead the Gold Mountain promise of future redemption. He wants to

stay in Gold Mountain, raise a son in Gold Mountain, and never return to China. Having acculturated, Gordon wishes to stand on equal footing with the white patriarchs of the town, a dream that he envisions can only be possible if he can obtain full possession of himself as a man in Gold Mountain.

Framed by the drive to pursue upward mobility and (white) personhood, Gold Mountain narratives evince a dissociation from connecting with Indigenous peoples, if not in an explicit dramatized scene such as that in *Disappearing Moon Café*, then in texts absent of Indigeneity and full of self-repudiation and immigrant shame as demonstrated by the male patriarch in Yee's "Prairie Night 1939." The timeline of the story unfolds in a single evening in 1939, thus harkening back to the period of Chinese exclusion. In that single evening, Gordon reflects on his life in Gold Mountain as he debates over a decision to return to China to fulfill his Confucian duty and once again attempt conceiving a child with his wife, as their past attempts have failed. Though he will never forget his experiences of racial humiliation and discrimination in Gold Mountain, he has come to feel content and grateful for the successful life and business that he has built in this small Saskatchewan town. While the Depression drove other Chinese settlers back to China, Gordon felt compelled to stay: "[w]alking on Vancouver's concrete sidewalks, Gordon had marvelled at the street lights, the gaudy neon signs, and the street cars that rumbled through the city" (51). He has grown to feel at home in this "mountain of opportunity and activity" (51), as opposed to his actual homeland where

Gordon felt himself a sullen outsider. The landscape and people seemed tinged with an alien scent and a menacing glow. No wonder they treat us like dog-shit in Canada, he had thought. We live like dogs here. Too many people fighting for

the same smelly plots of land. Beggars clawing at passengers at the train station, and barefoot children hawking tea in caked enamel cups. And the vigilance over money exhausted him: it had to be concealed from the eyes of preying officials and guarded from the smiles of greedy relatives. (53)

Having lived abroad for most of his adult working life, Gordon has come to identify with the narrative of progress and modernity that Canada has to offer.²⁷ Compared to life in the urban and rural landscapes of Canada, China appears to be stuck in a primitive, backward, and uncivilized past where his people are poor; the land overcrowded and worthless; the children destitute; and the family relatives greedy for overseas remittance money and too lazy to work. Failing to acknowledge that he is fortunate to have migrated before the increased restrictions on Chinese immigration, Gordon feels annoyed with his family's idleness in China, for "[t]hese cousins disdained the fields, claiming that the work paid too low a return. Better to live off the remittances and wait for the laws of *Gum Sahn* to change, they said" (53).²⁸ If he returns to China and succeeds in conceiving a child with his wife, then he will have to accept the possibility of leaving his child "running naked and brown in the infested paddies [of a backward and primitive China]" (55). Instead, he wishes to have his child grow up in Canada and enjoy all the benefits of

²⁷ As Stuart Hall has once argued in "The West and the Rest," a discursive concept of the West has created a powerful set of binaries that has endured to this day, exalting Western societies with all the positive associations of modernity (progressive, urban, developed) and denigrating non-Western societies as backward, traditional, rural, under-developed). Yee's characterization of Gordon demonstrates the hegemonic power of the discourse of western modernity.

²⁸ As Yee presents a complicated portrait of a Chinese patriarch who undergoes a painful process of acculturation that leads him to denigrate aspects about his Chinese origins, the reader is meant to criticize Gordon's polarizing views on his homeland and hostland. For example, Gordon's harsh denouncement of his lazy cousins who refuse to work the fields back in China serves to emphasize Gordon's amnesia of the harsh feudal and agricultural labour conditions that still led to widespread hunger and famine in China. Having cultivated a strong work ethic which is economically rewarded in Gold Mountain, Gordon forgets to understand why his cousins would opt out of agricultural labour since he is expected to support them by sending remittances home.

modernity and civilization that the West has to offer. More importantly, he wants to raise his child in Canada so he himself could “take his son’s hand and walk down the street together as Martinsen and his boy did” (55). For Gordon, it is essential that his patriarchal status be established on Canadian soil so that he may project a more masculine self and possibly garner more acceptance and respect from his white neighbours.

Unlike Elder Uncle in Fong Bates’ story, Gordon is not satisfied with delaying the cultivation of his personhood in China. He wants to experience full manhood in Canada. He desires what the other white fathers in Wilding so easily possess: full possession of themselves. Their sense of self-ownership is tied to a white settler heterosexist privilege system derived from owning and working the land—being fathers, white settlers pass down their wealth and status to their progeny, thus constituting a process of settler indigenization. If there is a common beneficiary who stands to gain from Indigenous displacement and dispossession, Japanese internment, Chinese exclusion, African enslavement, and other forms of racialized indentured labour across the Pacific nations, it is the white settler: white settlers stand to benefit from this transcolonial system of territorial accumulation of property and self-ownership.²⁹ According to Cheryl Harris,

[s]lavery linked the privilege of whites to the subordination of Blacks through a legal regime that attempted the conversion of Blacks into objects of property. Similarly, the settlement and seizure of Native American land supported white privilege through a system of property rights in which the ‘race’ of the Native Americans rendered their first possession rights invisible and justified conquest. (1721)

²⁹ For example, the Declaration of Independence rested on the logic that the equality and freedom from the British empire sought by white men and supposedly extendable to women and slaves was actually founded upon “[c]hattel slavery, the expropriation of Indian and Mexican land, and the repressive use and exclusion of Chinese and Mexican American labor” (Rogin 15-16).

In white supremacist, settler colonial societies like the U.S., the legal definition of property and who has the right to own property has become conflated with a notion of whiteness, for the right to possess can only be derived from the cultural practices of whites: “[t]his definition laid the foundation for the idea that whiteness—that which whites alone possess—is valuable and is property” (1721). Anyone not white lacks worth and henceforth the inherent right to property and self-ownership. Anyone not white is therefore not in full possession of themselves, a racial denigration that Gordon not only comes to understand but also applies to himself and his people, who have become dispossessed to varying degrees in China and Canada. Thus, as demonstrated by Gold Mountain narratives, the Chinese settler’s desire for upward mobility and (white) personhood, when lived, turns out to be a self-defeating aspiration for settlers of colour to chase after.

In this chapter, I have tracked the Chinese diaspora’s relationship to the “new” land, an unconventional approach to reading diasporic culture since stories of migration frequently focus on (home)lands elsewhere. If diasporic narratives turn to the land, they mostly grapple with the migrant politics of not belonging, of being unwanted, undesirable settlers of colour—even then, the land remains conspicuously absent, or deeply distrusted. As demonstrated in Gold Mountain stories, the Canadian landscape does not figure that prominently; but when it does, it becomes positioned as property unfairly denied to the Chinese sojourner who has worked so hard and sacrificed so much to reach Gold Mountain. In my reading of a myth so central to Chinese diasporic culture, I keep

returning to the landscape, a space supposedly emptied and devoid of Indigenous peoples, to enact an awareness of Indigenous presence that has always existed and continues to exist not only in the here and now but also in the historical record of Chinese settlement in North America. The Chinese diaspora's land relation needs to figure more prominently in our origin stories. How can writing about our origins on these lands so grossly overlook the very ground upon which we have made our new home?

The disavowal of Indigenous territory in diasporic cultural production is shaped by migrant genealogies of uprootedness, dispossession, and unhomeliness that can also be experienced by subsequent generations living in settler societies. For Black Atlantic writers like Dionne Brand, the diasporic experience of land has amounted to “long histories of harm, of enslavement on lands to which they could never belong” (“Indigenous Place” 2), whereas for other migrants in diaspora, there may never be a homeland to claim or return to. As Maxine Hong Kingston once tried to convey to her Chinese immigrant mother, “[w]e don't belong anywhere since the Revolution. The old China has disappeared while we've been away” (184). In her 2005 novel, *What We All Long For*, Brand provides an honest take that attributes—yet does not justify—this myopic land relation to *tkaronto*, *kanadorio* (Toronto, Ontario) to a willful blindness occasioned by diasporic traumas of dislocation and dispossession that migrants have already experienced elsewhere before coming here:

[t]here are Italian neighbourhoods and Vietnamese neighbourhoods in this city; there are Chinese ones and Ukrainian ones and Pakistani ones and Korean ones and African ones. Name a region on the planet and there's someone from there, here. All of them sit on Ojibway land, but hardly any of them know it or care because that genealogy is wilfully untraceable except in the name of the city itself.

They'd only have to look, though, but it could be that what they know hurts them already, and what if they found out something even more damaging? These are people who are used to the earth beneath them shifting, and they all want it to stop—and if that means they must pretend to know nothing, well, that's the sacrifice they make.³⁰ (chap. one)

Such diasporic oversight can also be explained by the divergent demands for justice that preoccupy the political and creative projects of diasporic and Indigenous peoples.

Seemingly linked through colonial genealogies of displacement and dispossession, diasporic and Indigenous cultural politics have long been segregated from one another. In his reading of the poetic works of Dionne Brand and Jeannette Armstrong (Syilix) along with critical theory on diaspora and Indigenous culture, Daniel Coleman attributes this cultural and intellectual separatism to their distinct epistemologies and relationships with the settler nation state: whereas refugees and migrants excluded from national citizenship or exploited by the circuits of global capital engage in a politics of inclusion that sometimes claims a resistant stance of unbelonging under intersectional forms of exclusion and oppression, “the project for Indigenous peoples, engulfed by corporate extraction of resources from traditional lands and by unwanted assimilation into settler colonial systems of governance, has often expressed itself in a politics of separatism and sovereignty” (2). To be included or not, to be excluded as separate sovereigns, diasporic and Indigenous peoples may share incommensurate political goals, but they still live together on colonized lands often by choice as much as by force. Empire, global

³⁰ To be clear, while Toronto sits on Ojibway lands (that is, of the Mississaugas of the New Credit), the Indigenous origins of the word Toronto comes from *tkaronto*, the Kanien'kehake (Mohawk) word for “where there are trees standing in the water.”

capitalism, climate change, and ecological degradation induced by resource extraction impacts the lives of Indigenous peoples and settlers of colour. While the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples should be respected, diasporic and Indigenous political organizing cannot be disengaged from one another—not if we wish to live and work together on the same land.

Yet when it comes to determining who most rightfully belongs to this land, Indigenous and Asian diasporic communities may share more commonalities than they realize. As depicted in white settler storytelling traditions, the figure of the white settler labourer garners a sense of entitlement and belonging to the land generated not only from improving and cultivating the land for industry but also from overlooking or removing any evidence of Indigenous and diasporic labour. Even if Indigenous and diasporic labourers do crop up in such stories, they are rendered idle, lazy, or indolent (hence not deserving of the land's resources) or they circulate as subhuman work machines (hence a competitive threat to white settler livelihoods). In the next chapter, I analyze the politics of these competing labour narratives via the figure of the Chinese labourer, a figure fascinating for the range of labour values that simultaneously exalt and demonize the figure for its extreme work ethic. I explore the ideological and discursive origins of this labour phenomenon so as to uncover the ways in which memorializing how hard the Head Tax generation worked can often celebrate ways of living and working off the land that are far from liberatory or sustainable, especially when Indigenous proximities reveal more viable ontologies to pursue.

CHAPTER TWO

Working to Belong: Confucian and Protestant Settlers in Chinese Canadian Literature

All of a sudden, my luck is piping hot:
I've found treasures, filled in several pots.
In no time I've become a young man of wealth;
I turn around, and I'm no longer a part of that
 miserable lot.
I am a millionaire—
Right now I can open a bank.
What can be more delightful than having unexpected
 wealth?
I will buy land, build a house, and get myself a
 concubine.
—*Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown*

Ah, the Chinese. Ever resourceful, ever industrious and doing ever so well.
Especially here in *Guam Sann* (Golden Mountain) now that the top of the
mountain is in view.
—*Maclean's* (1977)¹

Introduction

The previous chapter unpacked several colonial and racial tropes that have shaped the myth of Gold Mountain. It demonstrated that Gold Mountain stories contain an exploitative land relation that erases and disavows the presence of Indigeneity and Asian-Indigenous relations. Focusing on the land and colonial re-inscriptions upon the land honours and remembers these originary presences and relations, a reading approach animated by the Wong family's denigration and disavowal of their Indigenous relations in

¹ See Robert Miller's "Unhyphenated Canadians" in the *Maclean's* April 18, 1977 issue (42p).

Disappearing Moon Café. Drawing on the same set of fiction and non-fiction texts, this chapter turns to the figure of the Chinese labourer, for stories about settler labour perform a settler indigenizing function. Such narratives circulate as origin stories for settler communities: they erase Indigenous presence from the land only to assert and root a settler presence through their nation-building contributions. However, Gold Mountain stories complicate this settler colonial storytelling tradition, for literary and discursive representations of the Chinese labourer reveal the contradictory ways in which Chinese labour has been excluded, marginalized, and exalted by the nation. Stories of settler labour evoke powerful feelings that shape our actions and relation-building. The ways in which settler labour narratives are remembered and read demand our critical attention. Though the story of Chinese labour in Canada presents an account of racial exclusion and oppression that compels commemoration,² it is complicated by capitalist work ethic values and hegemonic structures of race, gender, class, sexuality, and settler colonialism. Examining the labour narratives of Confucian patriarchs and matriarchs in the works of Denise Chong, Judy Fong Bates, David H.T. Wong, and Paul Yee, this chapter provides the following two-tiered analysis of the Chinese labourer. Within Gold Mountain texts, the Chinese settler labours for upward mobility and Confucian and Protestant values; yet beyond these texts, the literary figure is made to labour, by the reader and critic, for

² Christopher Lee has written on the act of commemoration as crucial to Asian Canadian critical practice. Honouring anniversaries of historical events that significantly impacted the lives of Asian Canadians “is both commemorative (it forges a specific relationship between those in the present and the past) and activist (its activities are driven by an anti-racist agenda attentive to inequalities in the present); in other words, it takes the occasion of commemoration as an opportunity to reimagine how we might understand nationhood and citizenship” (121).

political recognition, national belonging, social justice, and settler indigenization.³ Like chapter one, chapter two claims that the presence and absence of Indigeneity informs and structures Gold Mountain stories, providing alternative, non-hegemonic trajectories and provocative traces of Asian-Indigenous relations that have been forgotten or disavowed in the national imaginary.

Settler Labour Narratives

When we talk about Chinese labour in the west, the figure that most readily comes to mind is the Chinese railroad builder. As the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) has been commonly heralded in Canadian historiography as central to the building of the nation, many scholars and community activists have rightly criticized the racist contradictions behind the myth's claims of securing national unity. In his treatment of the mythology behind the CPR, Daniel Francis observes that nearly every book written about the railway has conflated the building of the CPR with the building of the nation, an argument first put forth by R.G. Macbeth in 1924 in the following refrain: “the country and the railway must stand or fall together” (qtd. in Francis 17). The contradiction behind such a claim arises from the fact that the labour contributions of the Chinese railroad workers, especially on the most dangerous stretch of track through the mountains, have been rendered conspicuously absent in official Canadian historiography; for “[t]he

³ Shona Jackson's thoughts on the literary and philosophical scholarship on the figure of Caliban have been influential to my separation of the Chinese labourer proper and the Chinese labourer as literary trope. In her view, the critical work on Caliban reveals a crucial emphasis on the dual forms of labour: “the value that labor has for the subject *and* those charged with excavating, reiterating, and in some ways re-inscribing the subjectivity granted in the text” (88-89). For Jackson, this only becomes a problem when the value placed on labour becomes a requirement of social being for blacks (89).

railway was built chiefly on the backs of Chinese coolie labour, using land obtained for almost nothing from the Indians and capital raised for the most part in Britain,” yet “it has become over the years a great ‘Canadian’ achievement and a symbol of the bonds which unite us as a people” (Francis 15). Thus, without the cheap productive labour of the Chinese diaspora on appropriated Indigenous territories, Canada as we know it would not be united from sea to sea.⁴

In historical accounts of the Head Tax generation, the figure of the Chinese railroad builder usefully demonstrates the ideological value of settler labour narratives. Whereas the figure of the white settler has served to narrate a supposedly peaceful displacement of Indigeneity from the national landscape, the figure of the Chinese labourer as commonly imagined tends to perform a moralizing function, shamefully reminding the nation of having exploited and forgotten the indispensable labour sacrifices of the Chinese diaspora. Narratives of white settler pioneers and farmers working the land contain textual strategies that enable “a narrative of ethical indigenization in which the ‘settler’ simply assumed the place of the disappearing indigene” (Johnston and Lawson 364).

In her study of local histories from southern New England, Jean M. O’Brien (White Earth Ojibwe) notes the narrative strategies used by local New England historians to assert the extinction of Indigenous peoples and the indigeneity of white settlers through a rhetoric of “firsting” and “lasting”: they construct “an origin myth that assigns primacy

⁴ Indeed, as commonly noted in Canadian history, without the completion of the CPR on the west coast, British Columbia as we know it would have seceded from the rest of Canada.

to non-Indians who ‘settled’ the region in a benign process involving righteous relations with Indians and just property transactions that led to an inevitable and [...] lamentable extinction,” thus making the ‘first’ New Englanders disappear by declaring that the ‘last’ of them has passed (xv). What is more, such historical accounts construct the colonial regime as the ‘first’ to bring ‘civilization,’ modernity, and hence authentic history to the region (O’Brien xv). Accounts of first settlers to have founded New England communities thus emphasize the modern institutions and structures that they introduced to Indigenous territories supposedly lacking signs of civilization and modernity in the first place. Consequently, accounts of settler contributions to building state projects such as the CPR figure more prominently in official histories of the nation since they signify an inauguration of progress, industry, and modernity, noteworthy qualities and achievements—presumed to be lacking within Indigenous peoples—that are tied to Eurocentric notions of what counts as labour. Simultaneously bolstering and unravelling these colonial storytelling traditions, the figure of the Chinese labourer performs a dual function, recasting settler origin myths such as the building of the CPR as a racist, exclusionary account of history and also indigenizing the Chinese settler as another ‘first’ presence that deserves to be memorialized in the national imaginary.

Obviously, the Chinese railroad worker is not the only figure to be exalted in settler labour narratives of the Chinese diaspora: other figures included in this study are the houseboy, restaurant owner/worker, laundry owner/worker, teahouse waitress, and unwaged domestic labourer. Derived from migrant conditions of exclusion, discrimination, and poverty, these literary figures are analyzed for the role that they play

in memorializing the Chinese diaspora's origins in this country, even if such representations appear to rely on what Maria Ng deems to be unchanging stereotypes of Chinese Canadians "forever chained to laundromats, restaurants, sweatshops, and herbal medicine shops in variations of Chinatowns" ("Chop Suey Writing" 171). Yet stories of Chinese labourers toiling in Chinese restaurants and laundries such as those featured in Fong Bates's *China Dogs and Other Tales in a Chinese Laundry* constitute "the ongoing effort of visible minorities to write themselves into Canadian cultural history, to participate in self-definition and auto-ethnography, and to challenge easy assumptions about ethnic identity and racial difference" (Ty, "Re-inscribing Difference" 158). Rather than reading these Chinatown workers reductively as stereotypes, Eleanor Ty suggests reading them "as bearing witness to Asian Canadians and Asian Americans in the history and nation-building of Canada and America" ("Re-inscribing Difference" 159), a memorial project that I fully support and deem important. However, I will show that memorializing these literary figures as exemplary nation-builders risks reproducing hegemonic discourses that subtend the structures of settler colonialism, global capitalism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and liberal multiculturalism. Commemorating the early Chinese diaspora as indispensable labourers during the period of Chinese exclusion does more than demand political acknowledgment and inclusion as exemplary pioneers within the national imaginary. Set within a nationalistic framework, such narrative commemorations work to reproduce work ethic values that intersect with the model minority myth as well as normative notions of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

Work Ethic Ideologies

Why is a critique of work ethic necessary? Is there anything wrong with the desire to work hard and be productive with our time?⁵ Of course not. But when it comes to reading and writing about settler labour narratives, structures of race, gender, class, capitalism, and colonialism shape how we understand the value and meaning of labour, particularly in creative projects that memorialize the labour contributions of a marginalized and excluded racial class such as the early Chinese diaspora in Canada. Thus, exalting labour by memorializing a settler community's propensity to work hard and thus be deserving of national belonging and settler privileges is politically fraught and deserves further scrutiny.

Studies of the work ethic originate with Max Weber's *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber first observed that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, "the period preceding the large-scale development of rational bourgeois capitalism, there was a strong moral climate of Protestant ethic, the nature of which was very favorable to the development of the 'spirit of capitalism,' a spirit or a 'state of mind' designed to fit the functional characteristics of the capitalist economy" (Yang xv).

Central to the Protestant ethic was the Calvinist expectation of answering a vocational

⁵ However, Jean Baudrillard has put forth a compelling critique of productivism that he sees being fetishized in historical materialism, for Marxism has become complicit in normalizing labour as unhindered productivity (qtd. in Weeks 81). What is more, in this normative ideal of labour, Baudrillard finds "an allegiance to the values of worldly asceticism in which the richness, spontaneity, and plurality of social practices and relations are subordinated to the instrumental and rational logic of productivity, with its exaltation of activities centred on controlling nature in the service of strictly utilitarian ends. What Baudrillard identifies as Marxism's commitment to productivism, its inability to break from the work values that have developed alongside and in support of Western capitalist social formations, represents a failure of both critical analysis and utopian imagination" (qtd. in Weeks 81-82).

calling—that is, fulfilling one’s religious duty through constant productive labour that gave rise to the modern secular work ethic in the West as we know it (*Protestant* 158). That labour must be tireless and constant, efficient and systematic, useful and profitable can be traced to this Puritan notion that labourers have a duty to perform God’s work, and in so doing, they secure the salvation of their souls after death. This precept provided the internal disciplining force that resulted in an epochal shift in the motivation to labour: a shift that came to place great value and psychological sanction on the ethic of working hard and incessantly,⁶ thus espousing industrious, rational, useful, and profitable approaches to labour, an ethical conduct that sought to achieve tangible results and maximal profits germane to the development of Western capitalism. To further prove his thesis, Weber explored in *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* whether the development of rational bourgeois capitalism failed in China because of the absence of a religious ethic comparable to that in the West (Yang xiv). Though Weber noted many favourable social factors for the development of capitalism, he concludes that the supremacy of Confucian ethics and the ruling elite’s lack of engagement with economic production enterprise obstructed China’s socioeconomic innovation towards the course of Western capitalism (Yang xxxvi).

Though Weber attributed the lack of a religious ethic to bolster the development of rational bourgeois capitalism in China, at the time of his writing he failed to envision

⁶ Of course, the Protestant work ethic espoused a weekly day of rest, the Sabbath, but it is a day for purposeful rest—not hedonistic leisure—a day of spiritual labour to renew and reflect upon one’s devotion and connection to God.

how Confucian values in diaspora, under global capital and empire, could be adapted to the development of Confucian capitalism overseas. As he saw it,

[t]he typical Confucian used his own and his family's savings in order to acquire a literary education and to have himself trained for the examinations. Thus he gained the basis for a cultured status position. The typical Puritan [however] earned plenty, spent little, and reinvested his income as capital in rational capitalist enterprise out of an asceticist compulsion to save. (*Religion* 247)

Whereas both ethics exalt the practice of rationalism, only the Puritan ethic aims to bring economic rationalism to its consistent conclusion (*Religion* 247-48). In other words, the motive to labour and accumulate wealth in the Confucian ethic requires modelling one's moral and educational training in the Confucian classics for the here and now; whereas the profit motive behind the Protestant ethic requires endlessly securing God's approval for the hereafter (*Religion* 144).

This chapter relies quite heavily on Western scholars such as Weber not to provide a definitive account of the transnational development of Confucian capitalism but to explore how a notion of a Confucian work ethic may have been powerfully shaped by Weberian theory and Orientalist discourses in writings situated not only in the west but also amongst the Chinese diaspora in Pacific settler societies.⁷ What remains theoretically useful about Weber's comparative study of Protestant and Confucian capitalism are his theories on the productivist relationship to labour that many studies on Confucianism do not criticize in relation to the socio-economic inequities of capitalism.⁸

⁷ In my research on the academic literature on Protestant and Confucian work values, I have failed to find (English written or translated) scholarship situated or concerned with the development of Confucian capitalism in the East that provides a capitalist critique of productivist ideologies.

⁸ I acknowledge the lack of a capitalist critique in this scholarship with the exception of some good work on the case of Singapore and other Tiger economies included in this study. I am also familiar with *The*

Through Weber, I study the discursive origins and transformations of the Yellow Peril discourse and Model Minority myth in regards to the figure of the Chinese labourer, and how persistently recurrent these labour discourses tend to be. I also examine the degree to which these discourses may also be hegemonic and self-imposed, a development to be tracked by analyzing Gold Mountain labour narratives written by Chinese settlers educated and situated in Canada.

Chinese sojourners migrated to Gold Mountain to find wealth and opportunities that were absent in China. Hailing mostly from southern China, they were typically poor peasants who could not save money or time to receive an education in the Confucian classics, which could be a costly and lifelong pursuit, in order to write the civil service examinations.⁹ While Confucius advocated that education be accessible to all (men), in practice much of the Chinese population were peasants living close to subsistence and so could not spare their sons to pursue a bureaucratic profession (Gardner 19). So if farming or training to be a learned government bureaucrat, which offered great prestige and economic rewards, became futile, Chinese migrants—having inculcated Confucian teachings through ritual practices of ancestor worship, “in the everyday life of the family,

Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism in which Rey Chow builds a rigorous critique of all the ambivalent and confusing ways in which notions of ethnicity, particularly ethnic histories in the US, are made to labour for social justice in both the “real” and aesthetic world, as though ethnic narratives can resist the logics of commodification and being implicated within the exploitative systems they aim to protest. But her study focuses more on questions of aesthetics and modernist conceptions of violence and counter-violence, which do not fit under my dissertation’s purview.

⁹ Unlike other religions, Confucianism does not worship a deity but is based on rules of moral conduct: “[i]ts dominance came about because it provided the philosophical basis for the filial piety which supported the family structures and in turn the state itself. It was the basis of a gentleman’s education, a prerequisite for a career in government, and the eventual source of control for society at large. It was the main contributor to the making of a highly integrated society in which the elite and the peasantry shared the same world-view via a common literary culture” (Redding 47).

in the moral education of peasants and elite alike, and in the administration of the state” (Gardner 7; 87)—migrated overseas, carrying these values with them.

In my reading of historical and creative accounts of Gold Mountain labourers, I observe that many Chinese migrants cultivate a profit motive overseas that intersects with the Protestant work ethic, engendering a ‘spirit’ of Confucian capitalism that Weber failed to envision. Of course, I am not claiming that a profit motive failed to exist for Chinese people prior to migration. But as many of these scholars and writers are educated in North America, it is compelling to note the development of a Confucian work ethic in their labour stories that resonates well with the Protestant work ethic; for the figure of the Chinese labourer also undergoes an internal disciplining force that inspires him or her to work hard and endlessly towards achieving a return home one day, that is, a future of retiring as wealthy landowners with a legacy to leave behind. Gold Mountain narratives depict Confucian migrants sojourning overseas to labour and save enough money, however marginal, to send their families remittances and return home someday. For migrants too poor to study and pass the civil service examinations, like the patriarchs in Denise Chong’s family memoir or Paul Yee and Judy Fong Bates’s short stories, Gold Mountain migrants aspire to elevate their class status overseas instead as they are hard pressed to pursue the life-long training of a *junxi*, Confucius’s concept of the morally superior man,¹⁰ while struggling to sustain themselves and their families in China. For

¹⁰ Certainly radical for undermining the feudal hierarchy system of his time, Confucius’s concept of the *junxi* is supposedly available to all men since the cultured status can be self-cultivated and does not depend on birth or rank (Gardner 18). But as the moral and philosophical training of a *junxi* required a life-long education and thought, impoverished Chinese peasants, for example, could not continue their education

diasporic migrants reared in Confucian ideology, the *junxi* ideal in Gold Mountain narratives appears to transform into the elevated status of a Gold Mountain gentleman, an overseas patriarch deemed wealthy and worldly by his kinfolk and neighbours as he can keep his household fed and comfortable even if he must scrimp and save overseas to maintain appearances.

Interestingly enough, there is no concept of a work ethic written in *The Book of Analects*, yet so much has been written in the West on the notion of a Confucian work ethic as a compelling causal factor for the success of overseas Chinese. Much of this writing comes from Western observations on Chinese labour that have come to inform discourses of the Yellow Peril and the model minority myth that will be provided with further historical context in the following section. In the meantime, what is important to note is the way in which a discursive concept of the Confucian work ethic has become aligned with the Protestant work ethic in the West, particularly in North America. For example, cultural traits—such as “hard work, thrift, family cohesion, deference to authority”—attributed to the Asian Americans during the civil rights era “were explained by pointing to an undifferentiated, essentialized, notion of ‘Asian culture’ [...that was deemed as] highly compatible with Anglo-American values, especially the Protestant Work Ethic” (Kim 267n5). Thus, the notion of a Confucian or Asian immigrant work ethic, somehow drawn from East Asian cultures that have come to adopt the philosophy

once they reached an age old enough to work and support their families. Books, writing materials, and tutoring were also too expensive for many peasants living on subsistence.

of Confucianism wholesale, has generated a global discourse about Asian labour and success that has been imposed from within and without Asian diasporic communities.

In the context of Singapore specifically and East Asian economies more generally, Souchow Yao argues that a contemporary discourse of Confucian capitalism circulating in East Asian economic and knowledge circuits stems less from ancient philosophic principles and more from contemporary geopolitical anxieties, state capitalist ideologies, and desires to rewrite a Chinese cultural self-identity. For example, the contemporary discourse of Confucian capitalism espouses a myth about East Asian work ethic values that overlooks the exploitative nature of transnational capital and capitalist structures:

what enables Confucian capitalism to arrive at its homogenous and unifying vision of ‘Chinese’ business is a specific notion of a culture derived from a conservative reading of the ancient philosophic text. This culturalist reading reveals Confucian capitalism for what it is: a rendering of the classic capitalist myth about just and justifiable returns of individual effort and strive. It is a rendering [...] which draws its succour from the movement of post-Cold War transnational capital just as it rehearses, more generally, the anxious concerns of business activities in an increasingly competitive and volatile environment. (Yao 4)

So while the financial and economic performance of East Asian economies is idealized and attributed to Confucian values of discipline, collectivism, and social humanism, this portrait of the successful Confucian capitalist business model leaves out the global as well as the local inequalities that global capitalism trades upon (Yao 4-5). Indeed, the positive cultural qualities that supposedly explain away successful Chinese entrepreneurial performance can be deployed to benefit both the state as well as the individual: on the one hand, endorsing a state ideology that buttresses East Asian economies as a competitive business model that western economies should and have

begun to model themselves after, and on the other hand, rewriting the abysmal labour conditions of many of these idealized Chinese entrepreneurs as merely an admirable ability to endure self-sacrifice and temporary hardship (Yao 10; 39). This business of exoticizing Chinese industry and enterprise is as old as the discourse of the Yellow Peril, but Yao presents a fascinating reading of these narrative strategies of representing the Chinese work ethic: while these celebrations of the management magic of the Chinese enterprise could be informed by a fear of the rise of the Asia, “it would be too easy [...] to cast all the blame on the West for the fetishistic portrait of Chinese enterprise [... since] such a construct is also the product of ethnic Chinese themselves” (8). As imposing as these work ethic discourses may be, Chinese entrepreneurs have also been invested in fulfilling and perpetuating these discourses of the model Confucian work ethic. A complex interplay of state ideological interests, global capitalist relations, and immigrant desires and communal myths, depictions of the hegemonic Confucian work ethic reveal more about those who author and imagine these narratives than they do about the actual religious and philosophical principles that they supposedly draw upon.

So are these the only options for the figure of the Chinese labourer in the West, to be denigrated for supposedly exhibiting a mechanistic work ethic or to take pride in being exalted as an exemplary labourer? Or is there room for cultivating non-work values in anti-racist arguments as the basis of our humanity?¹¹ As already demonstrated,

¹¹ I borrow the concept of non-work, or the refusal to work, from autonomous Marxist principles originally inspired by the Italian social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Providing a critique of work, autonomous Marxists struggle for a liberation from work, “securing not only better work, but also the time and money necessary to have a life outside of work,” to imagine and build a life separate from work (Weeks 13).

celebrations of the Confucian work ethic can be easily redeployed to further capitalist ideologies that overwrite labour exploitation and global inequities. In the context of the settler colony, the Confucian work ethic can be praised or vilified to include or exclude the Chinese settler from national belonging: Chinese settlers have held the contradictory position of being exalted as indispensable nation-builders and denigrated for being inassimilable threats to the nation's racial and moral purity. Moreover, the work ethic in general can also be redeployed to provide moral justification for dispossessing and displacing those who supposedly produce useless labour or exist outside of capital. In Canada, white settler labour narratives remain imbricated with the labour narratives of settlers of colour and Indigenous peoples: if labour can assist in the settler project of building industry and modernity but not dispossess the white settler, then that labour is fit to be exalted. Otherwise, Chinese settlers and Indigenous peoples are excluded and marginalized for supposedly labouring too much or not labouring at all; and rhetorical moves to rectify these labour stereotypes only reify productivist ideologies and a constraining notion of a Confucian work ethic that serves capitalist structures and fails to guarantee sustainable or equitable livelihoods.

Model Minorities, Model Nation Builders: Rewriting Yellow Perilism

David H.T. Wong's *Escape to Gold Mountain* depicts the experience of Chinese migration and settlement in North America through the story of a fictional Wong family. It circulates as a primer that contextualizes the history of Chinese migration and settlement in North America for a young adult audience. Told in a historically linear progressive form, the text outlines the racial, economic, and political struggles that

Chinese settlers faced in *Gold Mountain*, struggles for social justice that improve over time as anti-Chinese legislation changes and more Asians become politically organized and eventually enter important positions of power. But there is more being offered here than a historical fiction account of Chinese migration and settlement during the era of anti-Chinese legislation and exclusion in the US and Canada. The text also tells a nationalistic and productivist narrative about Chinese labour that presents the early Chinese settlers as indispensable nation-builders. While the graphic novel performs important pedagogical work representing the experience of anti-Chinese hostilities and murderous violence, structural racism and xenophobic attitudes obstructing upward mobility, and familial separation under Chinese immigration laws, its pedagogy becomes problematically entwined with a model minority discourse in its representation of Chinese labour. Given that this is historical fiction aimed at a young adult audience, Wong takes creative licence and quite literally positions the early Chinese settlers as being directly indispensable to several settler state building projects. By memorializing the Chinese diaspora as exemplary labourers indispensable to the building of the settler state, *Escape to Gold Mountain* indigenizes the figure of the Chinese labourer and stakes a claim for its national inclusion and recognition.

In the west, the figure of the Chinese labourer has always been exalted for his or her extraordinary propensity to labour.¹² Though typically positioned as carriers of

¹² As former Toronto mayor Rob Ford once stated in defense of his remarks about Asian advances in business, “[t]hose Oriental people work like dogs ... they sleep beside their machines [...] they’re taking over ... they’re hard, hard workers” (qtd. in Vincent par 3).

pollution, foreign disease, and immoral vices that infect and degrade the physical and moral health of the settler population, the Chinese figure has also been cast as a superior labour machine when compared to white settlers. During the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, Canadian newspapers, union trade publications, and government reports constructed the Chinese labourer as a mechanistic labour machine willing to work for next to nothing.¹³ Chinese immigrants were seen as subhuman labourers living a primitive existence of self-preservation; interested only in enjoying the bare necessities of life, they lived a low animal existence with a few coarse enjoyments (Ward 5). The dehumanizing traits ascribed to the Chinese figure stem from the discourse of the Yellow Peril, which originated with Napoleon's warning of the sleeping giant of the East and has since occupied European thought with the twin themes of race war and Asian inundation (Ward 6; 13-14). The discourse of the Yellow Peril has thus informed white settler Canadian impressions of Chinese migrants, denigrating impressions that stressed their economic threat as well as their inassimilable nature (Ward 6; 13-14).

On some level, Wong's graphic novel attempts to undermine the Yellow Peril discourse that circulated in white settler Pacific nations during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Wong presents the Chinese labourer in a more positive light, highlighting the productivist and utilitarian nature of Chinese labour. In one of the sequences that portrays the height of anti-Chinese sentiment and violence on the

¹³ Much of the trade union rhetoric at the time articulated an abject fear of industrial labour and working conditions being degraded into "Mongolian" standards of living and working conditions. Chinese immigrants were presented in these discourses as a "type of inherently degraded labour that industrial capitalism would prefer" due to the profitability of their "slave labour" to employers (Goutor 54).

American west coast, Wong includes a portion from Mark Twain's *Roughing It* to encapsulate the minority white settler opinion regarding the Chinese problem at the time:

Twain writes,

Chinamen make good house servants, being quick, obedient, patient, quick to learn and tirelessly industrious. They do not need to be taught a thing twice. They are a kindly disposed, well-meaning race, and are respected and well treated by the upper classes, all over the Pacific Coast. No California gentleman or lady ever abuses or oppresses a Chinaman...only the scum of the population do it, they and their children! (89)

Compared with the explicitly racist and denigrating depictions of Chinese settlers at the time, this seemingly “positive” portrayal of the Chinese servant can only exist in the form of a subservient role. Twain's portrait of “racist love” (to borrow from Frank Chin and Jeffrey Chan) for the Chinese labourer washes over the fact that Chinese labourers were only favoured because they were compelled to work for low wages in the first place, a fact of racial inequality and economic exploitation that Wong does carefully emphasize but a fact that still becomes extolled and memorialized as an exemplary labour trait.¹⁴

While this “loving” depiction of the indispensable Chinese nation builder works to rewrite the more negative aspects of the Yellow Peril discourse, the work ethic of the Chinese labourer remains intact and exalted under a settler nationalist framework.¹⁵

¹⁴ Chinese domestic labourers were highly regarded by employers in British Columbia due to “[h]igh wage rates, a shortage of labour, and relative absence of women [which] had made domestic help scarce; [plus] Chinese men were often willing to accept housework and therefore it was they who invariably met the demand” (Ward 26).

¹⁵ Any positive assessment regarding Chinese labour at the time needs to be contextualized within capital's demand for low wages. Often pitted against Indigenous labourers, Chinese labourers were constructed as a more disciplined, industrious, and reliable workforce, “a tactic to ensure that the Chinese would be admitted and that the overall labour force would be large enough to keep wages down” (Lutz 39). However, the exemplary work ethic of the Chinese and the so-called laziness of Indigenous workers stems from landless and destitute Chinese settlers having to rely on marginally paid work and Indigenous workers choosing yet not depending on waged labour to supplement their subsistence economy (Lutz 9; 38-39).

In an attempt to undermine the Yellow Peril discourse, Wong's graphic novel reproduces the model minority myth in its recasting of the fictional Wong patriarchs as admirable heroes who were indispensable to building both Canada and the US during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. When Wong Ah-Gin's strong English-speaking skills land him a job as a houseboy with Charles Crocker, the American railway executive views Wong Ah-Gin as a confidante with valuable entrepreneurial advice to offer. After serving Crocker for a couple of years, there is a scene in which the two men discuss China's rise and fall as a formerly great imperial nation (63-65). As Ah-Gin recounts China's greatest accomplishments such as the building of the Great Wall and the use of the Grand Canal to connect "north to south...large cities to markets...towns to fertile farmlands," Crocker receives an epiphany and realizes that the US can also be a great industrial giant like China once was if it also develops a transportation line that could travel long distances to connect America from east to west (65-66). But once Crocker puts his dream project into motion, he faces elevating costs and slow progress due to the slow, unreliable white settler railway workers, only to be bailed out once again by the indispensable Wong Ah-Gin, who advises that Crocker hire Chinese workers to build the railway instead. When Crocker initially doubts with amusement that Chinese labourers can build the railway due to their diminutive size, Wong Ah-Gin admonishes Crocker in his response: "Boss Crocker, respectfully, sir, it's the Chinese who are now clearing waterways, swamp land, and debris to create the new fertile farmlands of California" (67-69)!

The author takes creative liberties with Crocker, the historical figure, representing the Wong ancestor to be as integral to building the nation as Crocker himself. In the graphic novel, Chinese settlers did not just physically build the Central Pacific railway; they and their once great civilization also inspired the idea behind building such a transportation line in the first place. In his footnotes, Wong supplements this Sino-American parallel by noting that Crocker makes a reference to the Great Wall of China in *They Made America: From the Steam Engine to the Search Engine: Two Centuries of Innovators* (228). In his afterword, the author also admits to taking some artistic licence in his portrayal of Crocker and Wong Ah-Gin's story for the purpose of inspiring more interest in Crocker as a historical entrepreneurial figure for his young adult audience, thus inducting youths into capitalist ideology (225). I argue that this storytelling strategy ends up reproducing the model minority myth that stems from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourses of the Yellow Peril.

Discussions of the model minority myth are usually traced back to 1960s civil rights struggles, when reports on the perceived success of all Asian Americans, for whom successful Chinese and Japanese Americans were made to fill in, were used in public discourses to delegitimize the claims of African American activists working to challenge institutional racism (Kim 267n5). During the civil rights movement, the figure of the Asian model minority was originally exalted as a model of success to castigate other minorities for being unruly and underachieving (Kim 267n5). However, Colleen Lye and Eric Hayot have usefully traced the genealogy of the racial form of both the Yellow Peril and the model minority to US geopolitical imperial interests and struggles in East Asia as

articulated and re-envisioned in nineteenth-century American naturalist literature and speculative fiction. Lye, for instance, argues that the “yellow peril and model minority are best understood as two aspects of the same long-running form, a form whose most salient feature, whether it has been made the basis for exclusion or assimilation, is the trope of economic efficiency” (7). Indeed, that the Asiatic racial form can easily change places as friend or enemy to the US reflects the historical pattern of a modernizing China and Japan, whose economic and military strength alternated from being perceived as either a threat or ally to US security (Lye 10).

Canada’s relationship to this genealogy of the Yellow Peril and model minority discourse cannot be extricated from British and US imperial interests in East Asia. The Canadian government’s desires to limit Japanese and South Asian immigration to Canada through the implementation of the Lemieux-Hayashi Agreement and the Continuous Journey Act were shaped by a reluctant adherence to and gradual subversion of the British alliance with Japan, which was an impediment to Anglo-American unity (Price 23). At this time, the Canadian government shifted into a newly imagined role “as an honest broker between the ‘motherland’ and its American cousins” (Price 23). The way in which Canada conducted its diplomatic relations eventually leaned towards a strategic geopolitical alignment with US imperial designs on East Asia. Canada’s post-WWII diplomatic ventures on the global stage, for example, reflected a strong support for the US agenda in the Pacific as “Japan and Asia were within the US sphere of influence, an imperial concept that still held sway”; moreover, “Canada had only limited interests or resources in Asia and regarded its continental ties with the United States—economic,

military, and political—as strategic” (Price 191-92). The integration of this ‘middle power’ broker into a US-led coalition against the Soviet Union and its potential red allies in Asia was not so much coerced as it was met with enthusiastic consent (Price 192-93). For this transatlantic partnership meant a renewal of Canada’s ties to the North Atlantic triangle of the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, that is, “Atlanticism,” the informal global network linking the American and British empires that sought to establish a global Anglo-Saxon unity amongst white “Atlantic men” first imagined by Prime Minister Mackenzie King and President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1908 (Price 26).

Though specific to the American context, the model minority myth has held political currency throughout the white settler societies in the British Commonwealth that have been preoccupied with the geopolitical threat of an Asiatic invasion. The way in which narratives of model minorities in today’s liberal multicultural settler societies can receive an admirable or baleful spin depending on the economic and political benefit derived simply reiterates the way in which the Yellow Peril discourse has also been mitigated or exacerbated to suit the geopolitical context at the time. Moreover, the Asiatic race has been deemed both perilous for its lack of humanity and exemplary because it lacks humanity. That is how the Yellow Peril can paradoxically circulate as model alien or alien invader. Since the enforced “opening” of China’s doors by the West, the productive and reproductive capacity of the Chinese population has rendered a Janus figure of the Chinese labourer: Chinese labourers become model labourers if, like China, they can serve as quiet servants and allies, but they will quickly transform into barbaric invaders if they breach containment and control.

Much has been written on the racist and imperial origins of the Yellow Peril and model minority myth, but not as much has been written on how these tropes have been reproduced by minorities themselves. In Wong's graphic novel, for example, he critiques anti-Chinese legislation and discrimination in North America, linking these policies and racist attitudes to Yellow Peril discourses that perpetuate fears of an Asian invasion, a critical move that also perpetuates labour tropes of efficiency, productivity, and sacrifice that remain central to the model minority myth. In the case of both the Central Pacific Rail Road and the Canadian Pacific Railway, the graphic novel exalts the Chinese labourer's economic and labour contributions, celebrating their importance to saving the railway corporations and the state a significant portion of money and time that would quickly and profitably advance the travel, industrial, and land development of both nations. In the American example, the text includes a scene from a Central Pacific Rail Road company board meeting where board members gleefully celebrate the economic opportunities that the rail road provides to American entrepreneurs such as themselves. Presented with perhaps a tinge of irony but still indoctrinating the young reader into capitalist ideology, one board member remarks, "I say chaps, there's a lot of land we've opened up with rail"; and in the following frame, the other board members jump up to make the following exclamations—"This transcontinental is a boon to land speculation!"—"Let's make more money" (85)! This section of the graphic novel continues to explain the drastic improvements to the migration of settlers and goods from east to west due to the completion of the rail road, improvements integral to furthering development of the nation's economy only made possible through the contributions of the

Chinese labourers (85-86).

In the Canadian example, the Chinese labourer's contributions to building the Canadian Pacific Railway likewise saved the Canadian state a significant portion of money and time, but the text shifts its ironic tone, criticizing Canadian corporate and government officials for the crass exploitation of Chinese labour. In the chapter "Profiting from Racism," the text narrates the logic and rationale behind instituting the 1885 Head Tax fee after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway as a way to both control the Chinese railway labourers who remained and curb further Chinese immigration to Canada. The frames represent the officials debating a way to reduce Chinese immigration to more tolerable numbers since the Chinese are still valued for being cheap and indispensable workers, particularly in the domestic workforce (131-135). Not only did the implementation of the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act expect that new Chinese settlers would have to pay a head tax of fifty dollars upon entry, only one Chinese settler could be admitted per fifty tons of a ship's weight (134). In the final two frames of the chapter, the text calculates the total that Chinese settlers would have paid in Head Tax fees and makes the following analogies to emphasize to the young adult reader the enormous significance behind both the Chinese settler's labour and economic contributions to building the nation. In the second last frame, a drawing of an archival Chinese Head Tax certificate dominates the panel, with text explaining that "Canada's Head Tax was very profitable! It was a big source of revenue...before income taxes were imposed" (135). Furthermore, speech bubbles jutting out from various parts of an actual Head Tax certificate, including the head shot of the Chinese Head Tax Payer himself,

Wong Doo Nam, offer the following observations: “Nearly \$24 million was collected!”—“Americans bought Alaska from the Russians for \$7.2 million! The Head Tax collected could have bought three Alaskas!”—“The CPR cost approximately \$24 million...the Head Tax effectively paid for the railroad” (135)! The text accompanying this frame compares the collective economic contributions of the early Chinese diaspora to significant state actors who effectively paid the price of purchasing Indigenous territory from another colonial state. Likewise, in the final frame, an image of Victoria’s legislature building offers a final analogy: the frame notes that the magnificent building was built between 1893 and 1898, obviously after the implementation of the 1885 Head Tax, and that the building cost almost a million dollars to build—ergo, the total of Chinese Head Tax paid “could have bought 24 provincial capital buildings” (135)!

My critique of this text does not aim to dispute or belittle the enormous significance behind the Chinese Head Tax fees collected by the state, for \$24 million is an exorbitant sum during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. That amount of money could indeed purchase multiple Indigenous territories and build several state buildings. But I question the state expansion analogies made here as part of the text’s efforts to educate and raise awareness about the history of Chinese exclusion and exploitation to a young adult audience. That the racial and economic injustice faced by the early Chinese settlers be made equivalent to purchasing contested territories and building state edifices on contested lands makes for troubling settler colonial pedagogy. Depicting the enormous significance behind the labour and economic contributions of the early Chinese settlers to a young adult audience need not rely upon or promote a

nationalistic and settler colonial framework. Relying on these state expansion analogies only further entrenches, naturalizes, and politically neutralizes the expansion and progress of settler colonialism and capitalist development.

Confucian Patriarchy, Hegemonic Masculinities “Be a Gum Saan Man!”

A class and gender formation endemic to the migration story of the Chinese sojourner at the turn of the century emerges in Gold Mountain narratives written by contemporary Chinese diasporic cultural producers. Upon arrival, the Chinese sojourner labours to become a Gold Mountain man. But how does he come to ascribe to such a subjectivity in the first place? The previous chapter established that while the myth of Gold Mountain generates false, exaggerated tales of fortune and opportunity, remittance money is real; remittance money has the capacity to sustain entire families in China and hence uplift the social status of the Chinese sojourner. In these labour narratives, Gold Mountain men do not live a grand life of luxury abroad. But given the value differential between the currencies of China, America, and Canada at the time, relatives back home imagine otherwise. Hence, the myth of Gold Mountain continues to circulate across the globe, pulling sojourners across the Pacific, interpellating them through a capitalist ideology of upward mobility, self-improvement, and wealth through hard work and access to labour opportunities scarcely found in China. Therefore, becoming a Gold Mountain man comes out of a very specific class and gender formation during a significant transnational shift in global economic and power relations between China and

the west.¹⁶ Gold Mountain men, however marginalized and exploited in Gold Mountain, still benefit from this geopolitical shift which makes it possible for their meagre remittances to sustain their families back home, thus strengthening and cementing their Confucian patriarchal status abroad.

In Judy Fong Bates' short story "Eat Bitter," Hua Fan receives an opportunity to become a Gold Mountain man. A poor youth, Hua Fan is sponsored by Elder Uncle, a Gold Mountain man from his village, to migrate to Canada as a paper son. If Hua Fan agrees to work at Elder Uncle's hand laundry, then Elder Uncle will pay for Hua Fan's \$500 Head Tax and boat passage costs up front, exorbitant fees that Hua Fan must pay off over the years via his labour. Yet before Hua Fan receives this fortunate offer, he anticipates the challenges that he will face in Gold Mountain. Though the work is arduous and backbreaking, according to the stories and rumours that he has heard, at least Gold Mountain sojourners can still look forward to returning home to a life of comfort and prestige.

Moreover, in his home village in Hoi Ping county, Hua Fan is already familiar with the life of hard labour. At the teahouse, where he was often whipped and beaten in his youth and his shoulders would blister from carrying heavy pails of water on the ends

¹⁶ For more on how Chinese transnationalism developed culturally, economically, and ideologically across the Pacific Rim, see Madeline Y. Hsu's study of Taishanese sojourners in *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*. For more on the transnational turn in studies of Chinese migration in Asian American and Asian Canadian studies, see Shirley Lim et al.'s *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits*, Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nonini's *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, Sau-ling C. Wong's "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads," and Henry Yu's "The Intermittent Rhythms of the Cantonese Pacific."

of a bamboo pole, Hua Fan hears “the waiters tell the cooks stories about *Gam Sun*, the Gold Mountain, about how even the poorest man could become rich” (43). Even though he has “heard from the men who returned from *Gam Sun* that life there could be gruelling and lonely,” when derided by a cook for even dreaming of trying his luck in Gold Mountain given Hua Fan’s diminutive size, Hua Fan convinces himself that nothing could be worse than labouring as a teahouse servant (43). At least upward mobility is achievable for hard labourers in Gold Mountain. Besides, he “saw how the ‘guests’ from the Gold Mountain behaved when they returned. People were always gathered around them. Their pockets were never empty. The waiters, with grins fixed on their faces, smiled about like ants, attending to every need” (43).

Before making his sojourn, Hua Fan remains convinced that a life of hard labour overseas will pay off in the future for poor servants like him. If he works hard, he too can attain a prosperous life like that of the boat uncle he meets on his passage to Canada. As the two men ride the train across Canada together, the boat uncle boasts about “his life in China, his wife and concubine, his servants, his mansion, his property. About his big business in *Gam Sun*, his big restaurant [in Winnipeg, Manitoba], [his] many workers, [and most of all, his] big money” (45). As the boat uncle disembarks, he assures Hua Fan that if he ever needs a job, the boat uncle will always have work available for him (45). This business tycoon is the first model of Gold Mountain success whom Hua Fan meets in Canada, for “[t]he boat uncle was dressed in a fine wool suit like the ones worn by the *lo fons*. He wore his hair cut in the Western style. But Hua Fan noticed that although the cut of the coat was refined and elegant, his hands were thick and calloused” (45).

Apparently, a future life of prosperity and prestige is only possible for male sojourners willing to sacrifice physical comfort and contentment while living in Gold Mountain. Such a good life is only accessible to those willing to “eat bitter,” to stoically endure a lifetime of hard physical labour.

Whereas Fong Bates depicts the Gold Mountain narrative of a new immigrant who has yet to experience what a lifetime of eating bitterness actually entails, Gordon, the Chinese immigrant in Paul Yee’s short story “Prairie Night 1939,” has already acclimatized to eating bitterness in Gold Mountain. Gordon knows full well that achieving the promises of Gold Mountain demands a lifetime of sacrifice, loneliness, and hard labour, as well as recurrent bouts of class and racial denigration. Both Gordon and Hua Fan undergo harsh experiences of racial discrimination and humiliation at the hands of white settlers in Gold Mountain. While Hua Fan has yet to enjoy the fruits of his sacrifices, Gordon witnesses a glimmer of the life of prosperity and prestige promised to Gold Mountain labourers who have resigned to a lifetime of eating bitterness. On a return trip home to marry a village girl, he experiences a social elevation in the eyes of his people from simply being a male sojourner:

he encountered a strange new reflection of himself. He proudly accepted the respect heaped upon a man building up the lineage’s prestige. He wandered happily through his former playgrounds His heart and mind lightened at the sound of chattering village women come to marvel at him. He was a son welcomed home, belonging and fitting in the order and flow of life. (52-53)

At his wedding, the dispensing of gifts and cakes, the display of bride-money, the noisy carousing of the wedding banquet, the grubby but plump children, and the toothless matriarchs cackling gaily and heartily all signify to Gordon an elevated social wealth that

he deserves for all his hard labour and sacrifices (53). It is a social wealth and status that accrues if not in Gold Mountain then definitely in China, for “[t]he overseas servitude, Gordon had realized, no matter how degrading or humiliating, bore its fruits here. A sense of accomplishment coursed through him like a warm rich wine” (53). Though Gordon is only a common restaurant worker in Gold Mountain, rendering him not a good enough suitor for the daughters of Chinese merchants in Gold Mountain, mothers in China leap “at the opportunity to marry a daughter to a sojourner in *Gum Sahn*” (52-53). Despite being treated as second class citizens in Gold Mountain, in China male sojourners remain elevated as a prestigious and wealthy class, however symbolically.

Aside from acquiring a significantly new class status, Gold Mountain men ascribe to a set of hypermasculine expectations as well. When Wong’s graphic novel turns to narrate the history of one of Canada’s most significant nation-building projects, the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the frames depict a discussion in a parliamentary boardroom regarding the hiring of Chinese labourers to build the railway since they were cheap and integral to completing the Central Pacific Rail Road in the US. Then Wong includes a set of frames depicting the recruitment of more Chinese labourers for the Canadian Pacific Railway. At first, two Chinese men in southern China discuss the CPR recruitment for Chinese labourers to Gold Mountain:

Man #1: “Gam Saan is looking for iron road workers again! ...We must not miss this opportunity!”

Man #2: “But...old uncle told me the Chinese were mistreated by the red hairs.”

Man #1: “Hell with the old fart. He only wants to keep the good stuff for himself.”

Man #2: “Yeah. Old sausage face is trying to scare us away from Gam Saan work!” (109)

The final frame of this sequence takes up nearly half the page, with CPR painted in large letters and four smaller Chinese characters for Gold Mountain Rail Road (金山鐵路) painted vertically in the background.¹⁷ A Chinese man stands in front of these painted signs with his hands on his hips, head slightly tilted to the side and tossing back, with ease and merriment, the following exclamations in speech bubbles: “Good paying jobs! Be a Gam Saan man! Good pay! Hurry...sign up” (109)!

This set of frames depicts the hegemonic power of becoming a Gold Mountain man. That the Chinese man who initially has reservations about migrating to Gold Mountain to work is so easily persuaded by the other man that his uncle’s Gold Mountain experiences of racism are unfounded and really just a way of hoarding the opportunity for himself seems to suggest that Chinese settlers migrated mainly out of a hungry lust for monetary gain. Aside from this obvious profit motivation, I suggest that becoming a Gold Mountain labourer also entails living up to a set of hypermasculine ideals. Class ascendancy certainly secures and stabilizes patriarchal power especially for a Chinese diaspora that ascribes to Confucian ideals and values that generate gender norms for Chinese men to be stable domestic providers not only for their current families but for future generations. However, to migrate to Gold Mountain even after word has spread back to the homeland of Gold Mountain being a false myth due to the experiences of hardship and racism suggests that becoming a Gold Mountain man also requires putting one’s masculine strength and fortitude to the test. To be a Gold Mountain man is to be a

¹⁷ I must thank Daniel Jia Cheng Liou for helping me translate these characters in an online discussion on Facebook on April 30, 2015.

hypermasculine labourer: to be adventurous, brave, heroic, strong, willing, and able to work hard and not give up. To be a Gold Mountain man is to be a model man, a model labourer, a model productive contributor to both the diasporic family in the homeland and the settler nation state.

The structures of capitalism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy inculcate hegemonic values and work ethic ideologies that privilege and constrain settlers to varying degrees. First theorized by R.W. Connell, the concept of hegemonic masculinity usefully demonstrates the ways in which subjects vie for gender privilege from differentiated social positions, a hegemonic power structure that can also be extended to beneficiaries of settler colonialism. Hegemonic masculinity upholds exemplars of masculinity as normative identities for men, even if not all men or women equally benefit from adhering to gender normativity (Connell and Messerschmidt 832-33; 846). Just as hegemonic masculinity dominates a hierarchy that includes and acknowledges non-hegemonic, complicitous, and subordinated masculinities, settler colonialism divides and accrues social, political, legal, and economic dividends to settlers: while they both operate as differentiating systems of power and privilege, settler colonialism draws its force and legitimacy from the removal and displacement of Indigenous autochthony from the land. Race, gender, class, able-bodiedness, and generation (time of emigration) intersect to segregate and uplift settlers within and across settler communities. If the “gender organization of labour concentrates benefits in one direction, economic losses in another,” thus producing minor and major beneficiaries or losers of gender privilege amongst and between men and women (Connell 105), then a

hierarchy of complicitous and subordinated settler subjects also exists, providing different levels of dividends, however reduced in the case of Chinese settlers, from the colonial exploitation of Indigenous peoples and lands.

“making a mountain by accumulating the sand”

There is no better settler labour story that demonstrates the hegemonic power of Gold Mountain masculinity than that of Denise Chong’s grandfather, Chan Sam, the family patriarch in her family memoir *The Concubine’s Children*. The son of a Gold Mountain man himself, Chan Sam has big shoes to fill. Having migrated to the US before the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Chan Sam’s father manages to uplift his status and family line from that of a poor peasant class to a middle-class one.

According to Chong’s third-person account of his diasporic labour narrative, “Chan Sam’s father was grateful that his years abroad had been fat. He had made ten times what he might have had he not gone, enough to buy some thirty *mau tin*” of land in China, an expansion of his property that, while “stretched among three inheriting sons, ... might have been enough to keep alive a father’s wish that the next generation would escape impoverishment” (14-15; 18). According to his father, working abroad simply provides an opportunity to ensure that future descendants escape impoverishment: for “[t]iles over one’s head, and soil under one’s feet’ was the peasant’s lifelong dream” (17). But Chan Sam desires more: he perceives Gold Mountain as the land of opportunity to increase one’s material enrichment and status in the homeland, whereas his father treats Gold Mountain pragmatically, for “[t]he house of Chan Sam’s family gave no indication of his father’s Gold Mountain success. The squat, two-room abode ... was like any other in

Chang Gar Bin” (17). Chan Sam, on the other hand, dreams of building a monument to memorialize his status as a Gold Mountain man for generations to come.

Chan Sam plans on building a grand house in Chang Gar Bin for his family, a fine structure to stand as a material testament to his and his father’s labour contributions in Gold Mountain. Whereas many Gold Mountain men, after a lifetime of labouring overseas, often returned home saving only enough money to build their own coffins, in “Chan Sam’s mind danced images of large, tall mansions that he had seen in the south of China, whose flourishes of western architecture identified like pins on a map the husbands and fathers who had proven their worth and more by going abroad” (66). To achieve this plan, the patriarch explains to his concubine at the beginning of their marriage why they must sacrifice a life of comfort in Gold Mountain in order to enjoy a comfortable life back home in China in their old age. By living frugally, remitting most of their wages, and saving whatever funds remained, he is ““making a mountain by accumulating the sand”” (33). It is unclear whether this phrase is an old Chinese proverb or an idiosyncratic phrasing of Chan Sam himself, but the metaphoric power of the phrase proves useful in my analysis of the hegemonic symbolism behind Chan Sam’s Gold Mountain dream house. Making a mountain out of sand requires diligence, patience, and fortitude, but a mountain built of sand, however majestic, like hegemonic masculinity, is still a tenuous monument under constant threat of collapse.

What is more, where does this sand come from? Two generations of Gold Mountain men sojourn to North America in pursuit of labour opportunities, men marginalized and subordinated by the structures of white supremacy, global capitalism,

western imperialism, and heteropatriarchy, but men who remain complicit in receiving the dividends of capitalism and settler colonialism, no matter how delimited and constrained they are. Thus, Chan Sam's labour narrative ascribes to hegemonic ideals of Confucian patriarchy that conscript men to exploit women since the gender system operates through patrilineage and primogeniture: exerting dominance and control over women's productive and reproductive labour, Confucian patriarchy also requires the consent and participation of women, ensuring the passing of land and property from fathers to sons in China.

Moreover, Chan Sam's Gold Mountain wish to "ensure his stature as Chang Gar Bin's most prominent peasant" is only made possible due to the Canadian dollar's exchange rate and May-ying's waged labour (84). After May-ying and Chan Sam's first and only return trip to China together, Chan Sam fails to find work during the depression in Canada. But due to the high Chinese male to female ratio in Vancouver's Chinatown, which creates high demand for Chinese waitresses, May-ying secures stable employment even if her job denigrates her social status in Chinatown. It is during this economic downturn that Chan Sam decides to return to Chang Gar Bin without May-ying to build his dream house, relying solely upon her waitressing wages. Though he clearly ascribes to hegemonic values of gender and labour, he has no qualms about depending on May-ying's labour to finance his dream house. He still sees himself as an exemplary sojourner since Confucian patriarchy exalts men's status and power in the family, community, and state. Women's waged and unwaged labour remain invisible in patriarchal systems, making it possible for Confucian patriarchs like Chan Sam to regard himself as a superior

subject. Though most peasants of his class have failed to do well enough to support their families, by cultivating an exemplary moral conduct and work ethic, his return home to build a grand house with his concubine's wages still earns him face and proves that he has "the good moral character to worry and care for his family left behind" (75). What is more, when he runs out of money to pay for its labour and building materials, Chan Sam patiently waits for more of May-ying's wages to arrive; for if he abandons the project, "he would have been liable to the damning charge of 'no concern for face,' and proper social behaviour was to preserve what face one's family had" (84). Indeed, following the Chinese social decorum of "saving face" is more important to Chan Sam than scaling back his fanciful dream house and helping May-ying sustain his Canadian and Chinese family, a responsibility shouldered heavily by his concubine while he is unemployed. Building this dream house is tantamount to ensuring that Chan Sam, and not May-ying, achieves upward mobility in the estimation of his village for generations to come.

Critical judgment of Chan Sam's materialistic drive to memorialize his Gold Mountain status surfaces in Chong's family memoir, at least from the Canadian side of the family. Indeed, the text invites moral castigation of this Confucian patriarch for spending beyond his means in order to build a lavish display of wealth, especially since May-ying financed his overly ambitious project yet was excoriated by most of the family for being an unruly, abrasive wife. By the time Chong and her mother visit the Chinese side of the family for the first time, an exalted version of Chan Sam's labour narrative remains intact regardless of the truth. As Chong explains it,

[o]ur Chinese relatives were not interested in what Mother could add about what

had happened in Canada. It seemed the last word on the family history was comprised of my grandfather's words from Canada... Our Chinese relatives could not mention my grandfather's name without reverence and admiration. To them, what elevated my grandfather to heroic proportions was the tragedy of his hard life in Canada. They cried for the anguish my grandmother caused him, and the separation he had to endure from his wife and family in China. (288-89)

According to Hing's brother, Chan Sam "“was a model father and husband”" (289).

In the Chinese family's side of the story, there is no room for the truth behind this veneer glossing over Chan Sam's trials and tribulations as a model Gold Mountain father and husband. It is certainly not an easy truth for Hing to share with her siblings at their reunion. In the face of strong devotion to her father's memory, Hing cannot tell them "“that the house they cherished as a monument to her father had been built on her mother's back, on the wages and wits of waitressing and the life that came with it”" (289). It remains evident that Chan Sam's labour narrative "“had sustained the Chinese family through hard and trying times ... [and] had given them reason to carry on”" (290). Despite having been subjected to a hard life in Gold Mountain with an insufferable concubine, Chan Sam's labour narrative still has the power to inspire and motivate the family to leave China and pursue the myth of Gold Mountain. Forced to outwardly ascribe to Communist values after suffering the consequences of being lumped in with exploitative feudal landlords, the Chinese side of the family feels short changed by the forces of history. Had the nation remained under the Kuomintang's control and not given over to the People's Republic of China, then Chan Sam's efforts to achieve upward mobility and

property ownership for this family would not have been stigmatized and disciplined.¹⁸ During the fanatical height of Mao Zedong's radical land reform policies, Chan Sam's majestic Gold Mountain house and the foreign commodities brought home to symbolize his newly elevated class status were stripped and looted by the Red Guards for displaying bourgeois excessiveness; after the house was declared too big for one family by Communist officials, it was divided into three separate units and new families moved in (216). Even though all that is left of Chan Sam's Gold Mountain monument is a faded two-story house in need of repair, Yuen, the oldest son, is determined to restore his father's Gold Mountain status by gaining property ownership of the entire house again after the Communist government reintroduced land ownership policies: as he puts it, "I am scrimping and saving for the pride of my father" (289).

In an otherwise fair portrait of complicated ancestors who struggled as poor Chinese migrants during the period of anti-Chinese legislation and sentiment in Canada, *The Concubine's Children* invites a harsh feminist critique of the family patriarch and his bourgeois aspirations that depends on the reader's ideological and geopolitical position. Like many other sojourners, Chan Sam's settler labour narrative is driven by necessity—to escape poverty and sustain his family in China. But as Chong puts it, "the truth

¹⁸ As many households in southern Guangdong were forced to rent out the land due to the lack of able-bodied men travelling overseas to work, these Gold Mountain families presented a political conundrum for the PRC as they were supporters of the new party who also constituted "a class of nouveaux riches distinguished by their foreign dress, their foreign-style houses, their self-segregation in exclusive villages, and their reputation for lavish outlays on weddings, funerals, and other forms of conspicuous consumption" (Poy 128). During land reform, the Red Guards failed to distinguish Gold Mountain families from the real landlords who deliberately profited from the feudal system, subjecting both classes to land expropriation and severe punishments (Poy 128).

[behind his labour narrative] was that his penchant for showiness had brought the family members persecution, had left them victims of a regime driven by vindictiveness” (295). I am interested in repositioning this Confucian patriarch’s “penchant for showiness” along a different line of critique than what is emphasized in the text: that Chan Sam’s practices of conspicuous consumption are looked down upon as wasteful indulgences of a vain Confucian patriarch. At the family reunion, Chong and her mother are invited to note the grandeur of Chan Sam’s Gold Mountain house: the room intended to entertain guests, “[t]o Mother and me, ... looked to be a storeroom, its inventory only junk: a tall, rusted metal crib with broken springs, crockery topped with split cords, an RCA Victor phonograph that had probably been silent for decades” (2). These foreign commodities, brought all the way from Gold Mountain, are supposed to serve no other purpose than to display Chan Sam’s elevated status in China. As Thorstein Veblen puts it in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*, the key to transforming wealth into status is social performance, for status can only be derived by the ways in which others judge one’s position, and one’s position in society is established by the display of one’s wealth (qtd. in Trigg 101). As a contemporary reader of this Gold Mountain patriarch’s bourgeois aspirations, I wonder if critiquing Chan Sam’s practices of conspicuous consumption can also be elitist. Is a denigration of this Gold Mountain migrant’s desire to display his conspicuous consumption any different from the way that the elite achieve class distinction and cultivate a superior aesthetic taste by criticizing and deviating from cultural practices consumed by the lower classes, practices henceforth rendered foolishly wasteful and garish by those with higher cultural capital? Are we not looking down on an immigrant

consumer for lacking cultural capital that can only be derived from an educational training and a social upbringing available to those educated and socialized in western modernity, like Hing and Chong, the second and third generation Chinese settler women in the text? As Pierre Bourdieu puts it, “[t]he naïve exhibition of ‘conspicuous consumption,’ which seeks distinction in the crude display of ill-mastered luxury, is nothing compared to the unique capacity of the pure gaze, a quasi-creative power which sets the aesthete apart from the common herd by a radical difference which seems to be inscribed in ‘persons’” (qtd. in Trigg 105). The text invites both an elitist and feminist gaze directed at Chan Sam’s Gold Mountain house: from Hing and Chong’s perspective, the house is seen as a crude display of wealth thanklessly appropriated from the invisible labour of an excoriated matriarch, even if these so-called luxury goods speak more to an extant unevenness in the way goods are distributed globally. This Gold Mountain house is a display of wealth, however delusional, driven by hegemonic ideologies of capitalism, settler colonialism, and Confucian patriarchy.

Model Settlers, Unruly Women: Bearing Diaspora and the Settler Nation Model Dream House

The daughter of a Gold Mountain man, Hing aspires to belong as a model settler. Raised and educated in Canada, Hing assimilates Protestant values and beliefs that complement her Confucian upbringing. But unlike her parents, Hing is not committed to a lifetime of eating bitterness in order to retire comfortably in China, for Canada is where

she claims to be home, Canada is where she and her descendants belong.¹⁹ Hing's labour narrative may diverge from her parents,' yet her class aspirations still resemble her father's in that her drive to achieve upward mobility is likewise inspired by a status symbol of wealth and bourgeois respectability. After Chan Sam leaves for China to build his Gold Mountain dream house, Hing gazes in a store window at "a Chinese home in miniature, built of bright red, blue, yellow, and green blocks. Behind high walls was a house of many doors, with gold-trimmed pagoda roof ends, and behind the house, a garden with curved bridges" (101). From a second generation child's perspective, this model home represents what her immigrant home in Chinatown will never be, an ethnic display of class and gender normativity. Hing conspires with a friend to purchase and co-own the home: Hing steals twenty-five cents from her mother and her friend finds fifteen cents from hers, and when Hing brings the pieces of the model home, she tells her mother that the "white people's Santa Claus' gave them to her" (101). This toy home resonates with the mountain of sand that her father dreams of building; it symbolizes the material and social markers of upper class family values that Hing also learns to desire. Like her father, she is just as determined to build her own opulent dream house, only Hing will build this home in Canada: through hard work and sacrifice, she will become a property owner and attain full personhood by becoming a model contributor to the settler nation.

This gift from the "white people's Santa Claus" evokes several unrequited

¹⁹ On their first trip to China, Chong's curiosity about the photographs of her mother's sisters in China compels her to convince her mother to travel to Chang Gar Bin for some unnameable feeling: as she puts it, it was "[a] feeling that I had to stand on the same soil [that] dogged me. It was not a sense of 'Chineseness' I was after; I had stopped trying to contrive any such feeling following Mother's early advice—"You're Canadian, not Chinese. Stop trying to feel something" (272).

dreams for Hing. That she fetishizes the toy house during her father's absence, temporally marked by his letters requesting more money, suggests that the model home evokes a desire for a normative nuclear family life in Canada that her family fails to provide. Instead of staying in Canada to maintain their settler home life, Chan Sam builds a majestic home for them in China that they will never be able to enjoy. And when May-ying and Chan Sam eventually separate after his return from completing the house in China, Hing's mother repeatedly leaves Hing to board in different homes run by model guardians and figures of disrepute. When she stays with old lady Lee Yen and her husband, "[f]or a few brief months, Hing had a taste of what Canadian soldiers, including some enlisting Chinese, were going to war to protect: home and family" (168). These model immigrants offer Hing a sense of domestic comfort, middle-class respectability, and normative family values that the toy home supposedly represents: for "[s]o desirable and reputable was their place—a husband and wife who were always around, who were kind and soft-spoken, neither drank or gambled—that the waitresses were practically lining up to get their children in there" (168-69).

The model home represents the material, cultural, and economic markers of upward mobility and middle-class respectability that maternal figures like May-ying and Mrs. Lo fail to provide their children. During her stay with Mrs. Lo, Hing becomes ashamed of her guardian in the same way that she learns to feel ashamed of her mother: these women transgress the bounds of monogamous marriage and fail to model idealized maternal attributes; their unorthodox sexual and economic practices defy the status quo and render them unruly subjects of both the Chinese diaspora and settler nation. When

Mrs. Lo is not running the Pender Cafe, of which she owns a half-share, like May-ying, Mrs. Lo “concluded whatever socializing she did after that in the gambling dens or playing mah-jongg” (169). Avoiding the company of Mrs. Lo’s daughter, Beatrice, who often goes to see movies outside of Chinatown, Hing makes use of her spare time by reading books on self-improvement (170). Her disdain for Beatrice’s leisure activities extends even further to Mrs. Lo: “Hing could see herself that Beatrice’s mother was too busy lacquering her nails, doing her hair and juggling boyfriends to worry about the teenaged girls in her care” (170). For Hing, the more demoralizing aspect about her guardian is her wanton use of leisure time, a trait that May-ying exhibits as well—both her mother and Mrs. Lo cultivate intimate extramarital relationships and exploit these intimacies to provide for their dependents. When Hing overhears Mrs. Lo asking one of her lovers for money to buy Hing a winter coat, she feels tarnished and tainted: “Hing’s cheeks flushed. She felt like she had been used to get money from a man, and the images flashed before her mind of her mother currying favors with men in Nanaimo” (170-171). Hing is as much affronted by Mrs. Lo’s philandering as she is by Mrs. Lo’s non-normative usage of leisure time: though Mrs. Lo is expected to be at home, caring for her charges and ensuring that they are adequately fed, clothed, and monitored, she engages in leisure activities like beauty care and juggles various extramarital partners instead, thus calling on one of these partners to financially assist her in providing for her young boarder. Had the man who purchased her coat been Mrs. Lo’s husband, Hing may have accepted the coat without feeling so scandalized.

The parallels drawn between Hing’s perception of her mother and Mrs. Lo as

disreputable maternal figures reveal a sense of immigrant shame that drives Hing to achieve upward mobility at all costs. Related to yet different from internalized racism, this concept of immigrant shame refers to the experience of being read as an immigrant or the child of immigrants, producing a racialized sense of shame that cuts across differences of race, gender, culture, class, and settlerhood simultaneously. Hing herself may be a Canadian-born Chinese settler, but she cannot escape from having her phenotypical features read as a Chinese immigrant by the settler nation. Since her ghettoized immigrant family lacks all the idealized social, cultural, and material markers of success and bourgeois respectability that she has projected onto the Chinese toy home, Hing compels herself to cultivate a productivist work ethic to improve the self. As a second generation settler, Hing acquires a Canadian education in the Protestant work ethic and bourgeois middle-class family values that shape her perception of her parents as non-normative immigrants who apparently fail at becoming model citizens for the settler nation since they can barely maintain their poor immigrant home. What is more, her mother's apparent failures as a maternal figure become a source of abject shame that Hing hopes to rise above, a reading evident from her reaction to her godmother castigating her mother's repeated refusal to marry a man who will provide a stable home for her; in this moment, Chong includes a scene of Hing reciting her nightly prayer: "[d]ear God, I hope my life will be better. I hope someday I will have a good life, a good family of my own, and someone who will care for me" (176). Clearly, Hing's prayer also reflects an interpellation into patriarchal Christian gendered ideologies. Her abject mother inspires her to be a "better" wife, mother, and model contributor to the settler nation.

With no prodding or threat of discipline from her parents to make her excel in her education, Hing pushes herself to succeed like a “tiger mother.”²⁰ She studies hard to be at the top of her class in her Chinese and Canadian schools, collecting “enough certificates of achievement and recognition to wallpaper the wall on her side of the bed at the rooming house” (139-40). If her mother disciplines her social conduct as a girl, Hing simply reapplies this discipline to her academic performance:

she was disappointed with any score short of 100 percent. On nights that she had to study for tests in both Chinese and English, she tied one end of a string to her hair and the other end to the light bulb fixture overhead. It was a scene borrowed from a Chinese classic; if she happened to nod off, the tug on her hair would wake her. She was studying Latin at school and in her spare time, for she had indeed set her sights on becoming a doctor. (180-81)

Hing cultivates an extreme work ethic to elevate her class and citizen status even if she is denied access to enfranchisement like her parents. As a child, she participates in a contest to prove she can be a model woman settler if the nation accepts her: “in the third grade, she knit 112 cotton washcloths for the Red Cross to send to Canadian soldiers fighting in the Second World War, enough to win the competition at her public school” (131).

Though the text celebrates her work ethic and labour contributions to the nation, it also takes great care to emphasize that all of her efforts at self-improvement still fail to guarantee her an unfettered social mobility. Hing grows up in a racially segregated society that restricts enfranchisement and white-collar career options to white settlers. At

²⁰ The concept of the tiger mother who rears musical child prodigies and Ivy League educated professionals through a strict Asian immigrant parenting style has been recently popularized in Amy Chua’s controversial 2011 book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Obviously Chong’s memoir was published much earlier than Chua’s treatise on how to raise ethnic success stories “the Asian way”; however, the Confucian values of hard work, discipline, and avoidance of wasteful leisure activities that do not cultivate highly valued academic and cultural skills frames the labour narratives in both texts in remarkably similar ways.

one point, Hing finally recognizes that all her efforts at self-improvement appear to be futile, for “[u]ntil now, she had thought, naively that nothing could get in the way of finishing her education. She saw now that life could throw up one hurdle after another. For the first time, Hing questioned her devotion to getting the highest grades, to getting to the top of the class” (190). Finally questioning the narrative of upward mobility to which she clings so closely, Hing lowers her ambitions for secretarial school instead of university despite her excellent grades and letters from her mentors recognizing her exemplary character and academic performance, indicating her instrumentalist approach to obtaining an education as a means of elevating her class status. Thus, when she applies for a psychiatric nursing school program that only requires a minimum grade ten standing, she is accepted as the only non-white student, but her enrolment, unlike that of her fourteen white colleagues, has to be approved by the psychiatric hospital’s board of directors before she can attend classes (195). Interestingly enough, this is also the moment in the text that Chong begins to refer to her mother as Winnie, since it is the first time that Hing publicly presents herself to an institution as Winnie, an English name she chose for herself. In spite of all odds, Hing/Winnie has finally managed to climb the social ladder and enter a medical profession, even if only a gendered form of medical labour, a medical industry nonetheless mostly barred to other Chinese Canadians at the time. However, “despite her consistently high scores in class and on the wards, she was the first suspect if anything questionable happened”; and while her classmates passed their three-month probation, Hing’s probation is extended for another three months (196). Racial discrimination and being culturally misunderstood on her psychological exam

explain her differential treatment: “[t]o questions about her home life and whether her parents were happily married, she had spilled the truth. To a question about whether she was happy being a girl, she answered according to how her mother felt, that she would have made everybody happier had she been born a boy” (196). And when asked about her performance in school, she replies with “characteristic Chinese modesty” that she “did all right”—non-normative answers informed by her class and ethnic upbringing which suggest to white Canadian medical officials that she is a “mixed-up, disturbed person” whose candidacy as a nursing student requires strict scrutiny (196).

Despite the careful emphasis on the systemic oppression that adversely impacts Hing in her drive to achieve upward mobility, the unjust material realities of labouring for the settler nation as racialized minorities become subsumed by the cultural assimilation of Protestant and Confucian work ethic values that are celebrated in the text. Though it is evident that adopting productivism fails to guarantee model minorities the same class trajectory that rewards productive white settlers, Hing’s ability to achieve upward mobility and raise her children to become ethnic success stories still exalts her status as an exemplary mother and settler citizen despite all odds. Though she has only one year left before graduating from nursing school, she accepts her husband’s marriage proposal (which is more of an ultimatum to trade economic independence for unwaged domestic labour), leaving her nursing career to be a stay-at-home mother. With strong encouragement and financial assistance from her father for the down payment, Hing buys a house, becoming the first Canadian property owner in her family. But her family’s domestic life improves substantially when they move away from Vancouver’s Chinatown

to Prince George: where in the fresh wintry air and expansive playgrounds of the idyllic north, Chong and her siblings have country lanes to ride their bicycles on, snowbanks piled like mountain ranges to frolic in, and a backyard flooded in winter for them to skate on (251). Though they do not escape racist taunts—such as “‘Chinky Chinky Chinaman, sitting on a fence, trying to make a dollar out of fifteen cents’”—after they follow Hing’s advice to feign deafness and the white parents receive a stern talk from their parents that they will not stand for this abuse, gradually racism disappears, for “[a]cceptance and friendship soon followed, and we ourselves forgot that we were any different from our white playmates” (251). What is more, in Prince George, Hing ensures that her children culturally assimilate by cooking Chinese food infrequently, for she “felt that her children ought to eat to be as robust as their playmates [...] and instead put roasts on the table, enriched the milk in our glasses with extra cream and introduced cheese into her cooking [...] Lasagna, along with cinnamon buns, pound cake and apple pie, became her specialties” (257).

Interestingly enough, it is only during May-ying’s visits that Chong and her siblings are reminded of their Chinese background. It is during her visits that the family eat Chinese food and witness with horror a chicken being slaughtered in the home and spattering blood all over the kitchen when a poultry man typically slaughters, plucks, and cleans the chicken for them (258). Evidently, May-ying’s immigrant cultural practices engender a sense of immigrant shame in the third generation, for she has failed to adopt the modern, middle-class food practices of white normative Canadian families: she butchers live animals when middle-class assimilated families pay someone to perform

such brutal work. The mere presence of May-ying, who still engages in traditional Chinese food practices and lives in derelict Chinatown rooming houses inhabited by poor old-timers without any family to care for them, disturbs the family's idyllic pastoral Canadian assimilated life, thus engendering in Chong the same sense of immigrant shame that her mother felt growing up in Vancouver's Chinatown: for when Chong's friend notices May-ying and her inability to speak English, she asks Chong for the first time about her family's origins, to which Chong lies and maintains that her grandmother was born in Canada (258).

Indeed, from the third generation child's perspective, May-ying embodies all the illicit, abject, and frightening connotations of Chinatown.²¹ Their visits to see her in the squalid, communal makeup of Chinatown and its residents unsettle Chong as a child since their living and social conditions differ dramatically from those of Chong's middle-class Canadian assimilated nuclear family: for "it was the rooming houses and the *Baks* in them that I found unnerving... [the] old-timers in the communal kitchen. They sat there straddling chairs turned backwards, asking us questions that seemed to test our ability in Chinese. They asked our names, ages and the name of the village Father's side of the family came from" (256). Besides being subject to an interrogation of the children's ethnic origins by these strange old-timers when the children have been accepted as no

²¹ Mita Banerjee has come down hard on Chong for re-inscribing racist self-sanitizing medical discourses in her portrayal of Chineseness, Chinatown, and May-ying. She essentially argues that this portrayal is necessary for descendants like Hing/Winnie and Denise to climb up the social ladder of respectability and gain access to citizenship and normativity that their elders and ancestors were denied. See also Kay Anderson for a historical account of the racialized construction of Chinatown and its residents as a cesspool of immorality, filth, lawlessness, and pestilence.

different than their white Canadian peers, these Chinatown visits to a racialized space already discursively associated with vice, squalor, and disease generate feelings of anxiety and shame for the entire family. Struggling with alcohol addiction, May-ying takes on the persona of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Every time they visit May-ying, a “drunk and reproachful voice” may answer the door, signalling to them that they have to wait for her to dry out first, for “[w]hen we did try again, there was no telling what was going to happen. If my grandmother was at her worst, morose and hectoring, guilt and recrimination swarmed over all present. If she was at her best, alert and animated, her girlish laughter chasing her lightning-quick wit, we invited her to join us on outings” (255). After one too many dread-inducing visits at her rooming-house, filled with relief and remorse, they stop calling on her after an especially bad incident with May-ying recovering from a hang-over. Similar to the Yellow Peril discourses that construct Chinatown as a squalid space of illegal immorality, May-ying comes to represent the unsavoury, impoverished, and aberrant aspects of the family’s immigrant origins.

Matriarchal Abjection

The problem with the model is that it cannot exist without a failure. Though Chong’s text attempts to recuperate the labour narrative of the family matriarch, when juxtaposed with the ethnic uplift stories of Hing and her children, May-ying’s labour narrative draws moral castigation from the rest of the family. Chong, of course, takes great care to contextualize May-ying’s failures at being a model woman settler and

Confucian matriarch.²² Attuned to the social and cultural pressures her grandmother experienced as a racialized, gendered, and impoverished subject, Chong points out that teahouse waitresses like May-ying can never fulfill the Confucian gender roles and moral conduct expected of them in diaspora since most of these working-class women “were brought to North America solely for the profit of their work” (31). Even if they were to fulfill traditional Confucian gender roles and live respectably, since these women work in close proximity with men and traverse public spheres unaccompanied by a male guardian, Confucian patriarchal society would still confine them to the abject position of fallen women. Chong claims that according to the Chinese way of thinking, a *kay-toi-neu*, or stand-at-table-girl, like May-ying “was considered to be almost the same as a prostitute, someone who wooed men to spend money” (28-29). Had May-ying followed the highest standards of propriety as a teahouse waitress, she would still be considered a figure of disrepute.

Confucian ethics of filial piety, ancestor worship, and social harmony serve heteropatriarchal systems of dominance. Of foundational importance to *The Analects* is the family, the locus of moral-ethical assimilation in Chinese society, for it is in the family that “the individual learns to be ‘Chinese,’ that he is introduced [...] to the

²² Literary scholars have discussed the feminist politics in the text. Whereas Ellen Quigley reads the memoir as developing “a feminist post-Confucian community of matrilineal genealogy” (242), Michèle Gunderson has written on the feminist renegotiation of motherhood ideals (“Representing Motherhood”), contextualizing the shame expressed in the text towards May-ying’s failures as a mother and wife within economic inequities intersecting with discourses of race and gender within and beyond Chinatown (“Managing Diversity”). In “Writing Historiographic Autoethnography,” Eleanor Ty argues that in writing the memoir, Chong reclaims and recuperates her grandmother from Orientalist, Confucian, and patriarchal discourses in order to vindicate the maternal ancestor’s scandalous life on behalf of Chong’s mother.

normative hierarchy of society: that senior generations are superior to junior ones; that older people are superior to younger ones; and that males are superior to females” (Gardner 100). The patrilineal structure of the family elevates the importance of men for their duty in continuing the family line.²³ Women, of course, can accrue and exert substantial power and authority from their proximity to powerful men, even more so if they bear sons, but women in Confucian society are still expected to perform unwaged labour within the home and remain deferential insubordinates in all areas of life for the greater good of maintaining social harmony in the household, community, and state.

An unruly force to be reckoned with, May-ying conforms to and resists Confucian gender norms. When she first learns of having been sold to Chan Sam as a concubine, “May-ying knew it would be taken as a mark against herself. No decent girl became a concubine, married without wedding or ceremony” (9). Though Auntie, her mistress, tries to placate her, claiming she is only ensuring that May-ying has *on lock cha fan*, “a life of contentment, a life never short of rice or wine” (9), she remains unconvinced that a life of concubinage in Gold Mountain will improve her social status, for it is men who gain prestige from the number of concubines they acquire. To help soften their tensions and prepare her for her overseas trip, Auntie continues to feed May-ying more Gold Mountain promises: “Auntie reveled in repeating tales of Chinese men going to Gold Mountain and harvesting the money trees and coming back home rich men with prestige”;

²³ Unlike monotheistic societies in the west, Confucian societies lack an overarching belief in a creator deity, so the patrilineal biological line “accounted for one’s existence and deserved the gratitude and praise of the individual” (Gardner 102).

she imagines May-ying returning to China, “living in one of the large houses of the wealthy, where the rooftops are all that is visible over the wall around the compound,” and being part of a harmonious household, where the man’s first wife instead of being jealous will favour May-ying over the other concubines to serve her and occupy the master’s bed to produce the sons (10-11). In other words, becoming a Gold Mountain concubine is supposed to improve May-ying’s matriarchal status in the patrilineal household in China.

From May-ying’s perspective, however, her social status will remain low whereas her husband will gain all the prestige that Gold Mountain has to offer. Since her Gold Mountain husband is not actually a wealthy bourgeois gentleman as the trope suggests, upon arrival, May-ying must work outside the domestic sphere in a teahouse to both pay off her immigration costs and sustain the patrilineal households in China and Canada. As the concubine of a poor Gold Mountain man, May-ying undergoes class, gender, and racial subjugation. The exploitation of her labour parallels that of women’s bodies in the transition to capitalism in medieval Europe. According to Silvia Federici, the female body has functioned much like how the factory has functioned as the primary ground of exploitation and resistance for the male waged worker: only women’s bodies have also “been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor” (16). Both the exclusion of women from the waged labour force and the devaluation of women’s labour within and outside the home made it impossible for women to be financially independent, thus creating “the material conditions for their subjugation to men and the appropriation of their labor by male

workers” (Federici 94; 98). However, in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chinatown society in Canada, anti-Chinese immigration legislation policies created an uneven Chinese male to female ratio, making the demand for Chinese women’s labour higher than that of Chinese men in the hospitality sector, particularly during the Depression. In May-ying’s case, her gendered labour outside the home may be economically more valued than Chan Sam’s, but it is still exploitable property that belongs to her Confucian husband.

Chong clearly attempts to show both the admirable and questionable aspects of her grandmother’s labour narrative, to get at the historical truth of her ancestors’ lives that the Chinese side of the family will never accept. I understand the need in non-fiction writing to present the journalistic truth and thus avoid sanitizing the hard realities that poor Chinese diasporic women living in such constricting conditions faced. But I wonder at the compulsion in the text to present the family matriarch’s failures in ascribing to Protestant and Confucian ethics that subtend the structure of capitalism, settler colonialism, and heteropatriarchy. Though May-ying fails to perform as a model contributor to the Chinese diaspora and settler nation, she is not presented as a lazy worker. Far from it, her work ethic and performance as a waitress are presented as above reproach (62). Since Chan Sam cannot afford to pay for her passage and landing fees to migrate to Canada, May-ying works under contract at the Pekin tea house in Vancouver to pay off her immigration costs, which takes her nearly two years (28). At the Pekin, she works six to seven days a week in nine hour shifts and receives nothing but a marginal portion of her wages (29); even though she receives nothing but her tips, she turns them

over to Chan Sam, keeping only a small portion for the herbalist and to make money offerings to the effigy god at her temple (32). As a concubine forced into a marital and economic arrangement that affords her little respect and social acceptance in Chinatown society, she is depicted in the text as having cultivated an exceptional work ethic and her contributions to sustaining the Canadian and Chinese sides of the family are rendered visible and invaluable. However, her hedonistic use of leisure time and traditional cultural practices and beliefs are still framed in the text as the root of her downfall. Indeed, May-ying's labour narrative appears to suggest that if the matriarch had made better use of her leisure time, time that working-class immigrant women barely have to enjoy, she may not have had such a hard and destitute life.

Chong writes a third-person account of May-ying's labour narrative that attempts to mitigate the family's denigrating memory of her grandmother's life. The family matriarch's hedonistic use of leisure time does become contextualized within the class and gender constraints that support Confucian patriarchy. From the first wife's perspective, May-ying lacks worth as a concubine and a woman: she does not adhere to her inferior position within the Confucian household and acts more like a man than a woman, especially given her penchant for gambling (82). When Chan Sam returns to China for the second time alone to build his Gold Mountain house, "May-ying began to behave during her husband's absence in ways that were at odds with the proper and decorous conduct expected of a Chinese wife" (85). May-ying's 'improper' behaviour according to Confucian gender norms includes excessive drinking, smoking, and gambling, as well as engaging in several extra-marital affairs to supplement her meagre

household income during her husband's absence and unemployment. Chong takes great care to emphasize that her grandmother's "motive in these casual liaisons was mainly to ease her financial problems, yet it was not prostitution in the strict sense of a simple quick exchange of sexual acts for money. The men would generously pay a gambling debt here or there or give her money to 'buy herself something'" (89). More than a pursuit of hedonistic pleasure, May-ying steps outside the bounds of monogamous marriage—a Confucian polygamous marriage system that expects only female partners to remain monogamous for the purpose of extending patrilineage and patrimony—not to replace Chan Sam with another male provider but to cultivate an ongoing series of relationships with male providers in exchange for her emotional and sexual companionship. Since her waged and unwaged labour is thanklessly exploited and marginalized within the Confucian household and Chinatown society, cultivating a series of intimate relations with other men simply maximizes the amount of financial support she can receive for the unwaged labour that she performs at home. Thus, Confucian gender norms dictate that she perform unpaid and undervalued labour while remaining her husband's submissive dependent.

Despite Chong's attempts to recuperate May-ying's moral transgressions as valuable forms of gendered labour, Hing's memories and experiences, paired with Chong's childhood memories of a drunk, unpredictable Chinatown grandmother, still shape the memoir's portrait of the family matriarch. Narrated mostly in the third person point of view, the text contains scenes from the family's worst and best memories of May-ying. Though the text never judges her actions, it does make it difficult, but not

impossible, for the reader to empathize with its depiction of an unruly, abject matriarch. In particular, when narrated from Hing's perspective, May-ying appears to fail at fulfilling hegemonic gender roles that promise upward mobility to those who ascribe to settler capitalist and nationalistic ideologies. For instance, Hing repeatedly denigrates her mother for failing as a mother and immigrant citizen. When May-ying attempts to provide Hing with a reliable sense of home life by making aesthetic improvements to their home and establishing a consistent family dinner routine, "Hing was still not satisfied. What more she wanted her mother could not deliver. May-ying still had the same frailties; there were still the same aches and pains. She used the same pickle jars to store her medicinal potions. Though she had curbed her drinking [...] she continued to gamble" (173-75). From Hing's point of view, May-ying's maternal efforts fall short of what Hing expects of a model mother and immigrant citizen.

In the eyes of the state and Chinatown's Confucian society, May-ying's hedonistic activities render her a non-normative and economically inefficient woman settler. Drinking incapacitates her health, weakening her capacity to labour and thus eventually shouldering the role of the family breadwinner onto Hing herself. But gambling is her worst transgression—from a productivist standpoint—as it is not only an illegal pastime but also an economically wasteful and morally egregious activity for an impoverished migrant to enjoy. When Hing and some neighbourhood children witness May-ying being arrested during a police raid of a Chinatown gambling den, "cheeks flushing at the sight of her mother," Hing denies that the only woman being arrested among the men is her mother (175). May-ying's masculine penchant for gambling becomes a frequent sore

spot for both Hing and Chan Sam, the ultimate models of productivist logic and bourgeois family values in the text. From their ideologically driven views, May-ying's economically risky use of leisure time flies in the face of the family's drive for upward mobility. It is her inefficient approach to leisure time that Chan Sam and Hing abhor as much as May-ying's gender transgressions and failings as a Confucian immigrant wife and mother, for it keeps the family in a precarious and impoverished state, living beyond her means and forever struggling to subsist on credit and debt.²⁴

Furthermore, the logic of the Protestant work ethic dictates that labourers can only enjoy the fruits of their labours if they have worked at maximizing their energies to produce a profit. Therefore, leisure time and economic resources must be spent in productive practices. The Protestant work ethic promotes a way of life that must be productive in ways that accrue monetary savings that can be used to invest in property and cultivate a domestic life of comfort. May-ying clearly resists this productivist logic. When she acquires a sudden cash windfall of two thousand dollars from a week-long mah-jongg tournament, against the encouragement of her friends, she decides to take her children on vacation to San Francisco instead of purchasing a house (186). Her 'waste' of funds that can be used as property investment stands in the text as yet another instance of May-ying's failure as an economically efficient subject. She opts for a hedonistic use of her surplus capital rather than the more rational economic route. Her approach to time

²⁴ It must also be noted that her failure as a productivist settler is not unusual or unique, for May-ying has simply adjusted to living "according to the rhythm of the life of most people in Chinatown—within a cycle of spending, debt and borrowing" (85-86). Moreover, Protestant work ethic ideologies commonly deem settlers of any racial or ethnic origin to be unworthy for showing lapses in moral character: for engaging in hedonistic, hence unproductive, uses of leisure time such as gambling, alcoholism, or sexual infidelity.

and capital diverges ideologically from that of Chan Sam and Hing. While she labours throughout her marriage to Chan Sam to help pay off her Gold Mountain passage and build their home in China, she gradually disengages from the productivist approach to labour to which her ex-husband and daughter ascribe, opting for hedonistic uses of her time instead.

Compared to Chan Sam and Hing, May-ying lacks settler capitalist aspirations to plan for the family's economic future: she only devotes her time and resources to the prospect of receiving elder and spirit care from a male descendant. Her spiritual and economic practices do not guarantee any progress towards achieving upward mobility for herself or her family in the present. She engages in precarious economic modes and practices that rely upon notions of luck and fortune rather than Confucian and Protestant values of being a productive worker, living frugally to save money, and abstaining from economically wasteful and hedonistic vices. For example, deeply superstitious, May-ying wears gold and jade jewellery to ward off bad luck and evil spirits since, according to Chinese beliefs, not only do "danger and evil spirits lurk everywhere," but "jade and gold are the only talismans, and the more they are handed down, the more power they have to bestow good luck" (11). Given this traditional cultural belief, she never sells but repeatedly offers up her jewellery as collateral at the pawnshop on a monthly basis to leverage a temporary loan until she can reclaim her jewellery with her gambling winnings, an unproductive habit of establishing a monthly credit at incremental losses since she only ever receives a fraction of the value of her jewelry with the added cost of

paying interest on the loan (138-139).²⁵ Her propensity to gamble and incur other debts through borrowing renders her an unproductive member of her family and the Chinese settler society: but from May-ying's perspective, gambling becomes a way of life for her, a profession rather than a pastime—to be expected from a woman whose life as a Gold Mountain concubine has been a gamble of huge risks and no guarantees (175). At one point, during her relationship with Chow Guen, a professional gambler, May-ying has a gentleman's suit made in her size to validate her newfound profession and make the following statement: “she was taking her rightful place in a man's world; that a woman who made her own living, who didn't depend on a man for support, should be respected” (133).²⁶ Like Chow Guen, May-ying dresses the part of her professional calling, aiming for a more masculine and respected status. But I would argue that had she pursued any other respectable profession that demands a secularized form of the Protestant work ethic, she would still risk a life of precarity: under capitalism, cultivating a good work ethic does not always guarantee financial security.

When May-ying is not gambling or working as a waitress, which often entails drinking with male customers during or after her shifts, she practices her faith by

²⁵ Of course, the practice of pawning makes economic sense for low income working-class people, but the scene in which May-ying forces Hing to accompany her and translate for her at the pawn shop positions this practice as a source of racial and class shame in the family. After one particularly gut wrenching incident at the pawn shop, the text goes on to state that “Hing's escape from the misery of her life was school” (139); and when May-ying dies in a car accident, Hing wants nothing to do with her jewellery as it conjures unpleasant memories of visiting the pawn shop with her mother (267).

²⁶ See Teresa Zackodnik for her discussion on the use of photography by marginalized women like May-ying as an act of performative autobiography that exceeds the limits of the text, for the self-styled portraits of May-ying as male gambler or as a nuclear family unit with Gok-leng and Chan Guen, her adopted son and part-time male partner, effect “an interiority or self that she has been denied as a woman, a Chinese immigrant, a concubine, and a waitress” (58).

worshipping gods and goddesses at the temple where she seeks moral and spiritual guidance and honours them by lighting incense and making offerings of money, fruit, and biscuits, for “[s]he was just as religious in her appeals to the world of the supernatural to take care of her in this world and the next” (32-33; 118). Ultimately, May-ying prays and longs most for a secure future that includes elder and spirit care after death, rather than achieving upward mobility in her lifetime:

she held their life in Canada as temporary, and so she accepted its sparseness. In the cycle of her life and her afterlife, she expected to be repaid for her wifely sacrifices by being looked after in her own old age by the sons of the household and, in death, by having her tomb swept and her ancestral spirit worshiped. (34)

However, when May-ying and Chan Sam separate for good, concerned over her future status and access to spirit and elder care, she appeals to one of her long term partners, Chow Guen, to ensure her future security by financially helping her adopt a Chinese baby son; and with his help, she acquires a paper son, Gok-leng/Leonard Chan, who is expected, according to Confucian custom, to grow up and take care of her in her old age and worship her spirit after death (124-127). Her labour narrative thus demonstrates a capitalist trajectory unlike that of the rest of the family. Subverting Confucian gender norms, she produces a son outside the bounds of a patriarchal household.

May-ying’s labour narrative as an unruly immigrant woman settler may be a product of exploitative gender and racial structures that obstruct her from achieving upward mobility and enjoying the cultural and economic benefits that come with pursuing capitalist trajectories like Chan Sam and Hing’s. But her labour narrative, especially in the context of Nanaimo’s Chinatown, projects a provocative turn away from the pursuit of

bourgeois respectability, white cultural assimilation, Confucian patriarchal values, and productivist approaches to time and labour. May-ying may fail at achieving upward mobility and Confucian femininity but, much like her complicated decision to drink and her resulting alcoholism, her failure at being a model Chinese woman settler is as much a choice as it is a constraining force—can failure not also be a choice, a rejection of productivism and impossible standards of normativity?²⁷ Aside from her alcohol addiction, May-ying presents an alternative trajectory to the ethnic success routes exalted by Hing and Chan Sam, a potential alternative that emerges in the context of Nanaimo's Chinatown where the presence of Indigeneity becomes curiously visible and proximal in the text.

Asian-Indigenous Proximities **“catch[ing] fish like the Indians did”**

The ethnic success stories of Hing and her children do not present the only viable labour trajectory depicted in the text. There are other sustaining and affirming forms of alternative economies to cultivate, ways of life that bear a subtle but curious association with Indigenous peoples that raises compelling connections harkening back to the historical record of the first Chinese settlers marrying into Nuuchah-nulth (Nootka Sound) communities, as well as the affirming yet disavowed relations allegorized in *Disappearing Moon Café*. In a text that hardly features the presence of Indigeneity, it is significant that such a minor presence of Indigeneity emerges only when the family

²⁷ For more on the utopian possibilities of embracing failure as an alternative approach to success (in heteronormative, capitalist society), knowledge production, and resistance movements, see Judith Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*.

moves to the collectivist and anti-capitalist social structure of Nanaimo's Chinatown, a cross-racial proximity that raises some provocative Asian-Indigenous connections to consider.

Upon their return from China at her request so she can bear their third child in Gold Mountain, a child predicted to be a son by the village soothsayer, May-ying and Chan Sam face many disappointments that severely constrain their relationship. First, their third child turns out to be a girl (Hing), which only reinforces May-ying's lowly status in the family as a concubine. Second, since Chan Sam has sold his portion of a dry goods merchant business to finance their return trip to China, he has no collateral left to start a business; he therefore loses his social status as a merchant businessman yet still enjoys authoritative control over May-ying, the family breadwinner. Third, the depressed economic climate makes work impossible to find for Chan Sam, so both sides of the family rely solely on May-ying's wages, which also depreciate during the Depression. Shouldering much of the family responsibilities yet blamed for the family's separation and economic woes, May-ying pities her situation: "[s]he was the less-favoured wife and the mother of two absent daughters, with the bad fortune to have had a third. Wondering again what the gods were asking her to atone for, she clung ever more stubbornly to the worship of them" (54). It is during this bleak moment in their lives that May-ying hears of a welcoming respite from her economic and gender pressures: Nanaimo, "where the Chinese, among the poorest abroad, lived happily with less" (57). So one day, she walks out on her family without a word, forcing Chan Sam to trail after her to Nanaimo.

Nanaimo offers a "simplicity of life" that suits May-ying more than her husband

with the Gold Mountain aspirations. Its relaxed social hierarchy and simple pace and style of living make Chan Sam extremely uncomfortable, for Chan Sam “longed for other dimensions of respect. He thought it beneath him to be consigned to the company of idle men, unemployed like him, who came to Nanaimo ... [since] he hankered for the respect and admiration he had from Huangbo and the villagers of Chang Gar Bin” (63). In Nanaimo, Chan Sam must face the common and overwhelming sight of Chinese male unemployment and idleness, an externalized reminder of his impoverished class status that undermines the Gold Mountain status he has already established back home. Moreover, his discomfort with the abundance of free time in Nanaimo’s diasporic community speaks to a fear of idleness that has been shaped by work ethic values inherent to capitalist production (Weeks 13). Productivist logic makes us fear non-productive uses of time: we tend to feel bad or guilty for not working since capitalist work ethic values have come to dominate every aspect of our lives, making it impossible to imagine a different relationship to work, to view non-work and free time in more positive terms.²⁸

The drive for self-cultivation through labour and upward mobility rules Chan Sam’s sense of happiness and purpose in life, a drive hampered by the collectivist, non-competitive, non-work structure of Nanaimo’s Chinatown. In Nanaimo, Chinatown residents assist each other regardless of their county of origin. But in Vancouver, poor Chinatown residents either fend for themselves or can only seek aid from the benevolent

²⁸ Even the synonyms that we have for non-work connote demoralizing meanings. Those who refuse to work are deemed idle, lazy, indolent, slothful, shiftless, or lackadaisical.

associations that serve the people of the counties they originate from, which also explains why Chan Sam feels so out of place in Nanaimo: he became accustomed to only befriending other sojourners from his clan society as “he did not have the graciousness to extend friendship to strangers” (63). In Nanaimo, the residents pitch in for the collective welfare of the community. When facing bankruptcy, the residents and merchants work together to raise funds, thus appealing to other Chinese across Canada to help “save their Chinatown from extinction” (60). This sense of conviviality and collective interdependence extends to all aspects of the Chinese diasporic community so that the “possibility of disappearing off the map had brought everybody closer together; everybody appreciated that they depended on everyone else for survival. Even the poor and unemployed who came here had a sense of contributing to the community... It was this very characteristic of togetherness that put May-ying at ease, and left Chan Sam uncomfortable” (60).

Chan Sam may feel unsettled by the collectivist structure and languid pace of living in Nanaimo’s Chinatown, for it brings him nothing but “unshakeable boredom” (63); however, its lack of hierarchy and labour pressures offer a viable way of life for both May-ying and Hing. Lacking the rigid social hierarchy of more developed Chinatowns like Vancouver’s, Nanaimo provides a sense of community for all families, regardless of their class backgrounds: in Nanaimo, “[c]hildren could play on the street without fear of cars, and though merchants’ wives would not socialize with waitresses, they didn’t mind if their children were friends” (62). Moreover, hunger is one less basic need that its Chinatown residents have to worry about, for here “[n]o one was ever going

to have to beg for their next meal, for food was plentiful and fresh. There was a garden behind every store and family home. Two pig farmers lived down the back lanes—cured pork was available every day of the week, fresh pork twice a week and barbequed pork on Sundays” (62). This way of life may not accrue much capital or social status for its residents, but it is a simple living that fulfills basic needs no matter how poor the migrant. Even though a majority of the residents are unemployed, they still contribute to the vitality of the community through non-work uses of their time, which are just as valuable as waged labour even if we, like Chan Sam, have become accustomed to negatively read such forms of non-work as indicating a lapse in moral character.

At least for Hing and May-ying, Nanaimo provides an idealized sense of home without the pressures of having to cultivate materialistic markers of social status: its idyllic pastoral landscape, lack of a rigid class hierarchy, abundant leisure time, and collective concern for everyone’s well-being sustains and fulfills the entire community regardless of one’s social status. Nanaimo’s Chinatown stands in stark contrast to that of Vancouver, where “life at the bottom of the larger, class-conscious community” divided its residents from socializing with each other and offering support during times of need (129). If her parents had stayed in Nanaimo, perhaps Hing would not have grown up with the social stigma of being raised by a teahouse waitress in a rooming-house in Vancouver’s Chinatown, where she learns that “[r]ooming houses, filled mostly with single men, were not proper homes in anybody’s eyes; no child ventured into one except those who live there” (129).

More importantly, this utopian communal structure of Nanaimo’s Chinatown also

includes the only mention of any cross-racial association with Indigenous peoples in the text. As children, Hing and her best friend have free reign of the Nanaimo landscape—a playground consisting of pig farms, streams, backyard apple and cherry trees, and railway tracks leading “downtown to the ‘white man’s town,’” as well as docks from which they can “dangle a string off a stick and try to catch fish like the Indians did” (111). Clearly a racially segregated colonial landscape, Nanaimo restricts the children from roaming “‘white man’s town,’” one restricted play area in the otherwise vast pastoral landscape that fuels their imagination and enriches their childhood memories. In a text that hardly focuses on any Asian-Indigenous proximities, this very brief and minor cross-racial identification presents too significant a connection to ignore in a scholarly analysis of the hegemonic structures that shape Chinese labour narratives.

The only other mention of the family associating with Indigenous peoples also emerges in Nanaimo, where the “local Cowichan Indians came into Chinatown and laid out fresh shiners and rock cod, alongside hand-knit sweaters, right on the sidewalk in front of the gambling joints” (62-63). That these minor references to an Asian-Indigenous cross-racial association only emerge in subtle moments in the text’s idealization of Nanaimo’s alternative mode of life for its Chinese residents raises some provocative connections worth unpacking. First of all, it is not my intention to claim that these Asian-Indigenous proximities somehow reflect the cultural connections that Indigenous and poor Chinese diasporic peoples share. Reading such cross-racial associations as a reflection of sharing communal values and structures of non-competition and interdependence with all Indigenous societies not only over-generalizes but also

reduces Indigenous cultures to value only harmony with nature and collectivism. Instead, I am merely suggesting that this cross-racial proximity be read as a utopian desire on the part of the Chinese migrant for a viable way of life that turns away from the drive to achieve upward mobility, a drive that demands ascribing to capitalist values of labour and colonial relations with the land and Indigenous peoples.

It is significant that Asian-Indigenous proximities, however minor, emerge in the collectivist and non-work structure of Nanaimo's Chinatown. These conditions suggest that when Chinese migrants have the opportunity to live in a migrant settler society in which basic needs are met, when Chinese migrants no longer have to stave off the haunting memory of hunger and destitution, when they no longer experience immigrant shame, that is, the pressure of having to "turn white or disappear,"²⁹ suddenly community building becomes possible, building solidarities across race, class, and gender becomes imaginable. Indigenous proximities and alternative modes of living and working off the land become visible, desirable—undoubtedly romanticized—but at the very least possible. The confluence of Asian-Indigenous proximities, guarantee of basic needs, lack of a rigid social structure, and availability of non-work time suggest an alternative trajectory to the drive to achieve upward mobility so often celebrated in Gold Mountain narratives.

²⁹ In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon raises the following alternative to the racial quandary faced by black people struggling to exist as autonomous beings in a white dominant world: "the black man should no longer be confronted by the dilemma, turn white or disappear; but he should be able to take cognizance of a possibility of existence" (75).

This chapter has analyzed the different ways in which Chinese Canadian historical fiction and non-fiction commemorate the figure of the Chinese labourer. These stories depict Chinese literary figures who labour for survival, upward mobility, gender privilege, and national belonging, thus demonstrating how hegemonic discourses and work ethic values shape the meaning of their labour contributions beyond the text. As history has shown, not all labour narratives are created equal. Stories of white settler labour have been assigned the highest value, providing historical, political, and cultural material for the indigenization of white settler communities. Chinese settler labour narratives complicate this colonial storytelling tradition. By memorializing the labour contributions of the Head Tax generation, Canadian authors of Chinese descent interrogate the national imaginary for excluding such a pivotal presence from the building of this nation.

However, rather than exalting the labour narrative of the Head Tax generation for their nation-building contributions, this project has been invested in aligning Chinese presence alongside an Indigenous presence, even when such cross-racial proximities have been rendered invisible or barely present. As such, I argue that Chinese labour stories must be read in relation to settler projects of Indigenous displacement to resist the trope of firsting as conceptualized by Jean M. O'Brien and discussed earlier in this chapter. Thus, such cross-racial realignments reveal surprising connections, for it is not a coincidence that the oppression and dispossession of Chinese settlers and Indigenous peoples is also deeply connected in the way that their work ethic has been hyperbolized or

rendered irrelevant to provide the moral force of empire. On the one hand, Chinese labourers have been constructed as subhuman aliens who work too hard: an invasive, barbaric threat, they must be regulated or excluded, as demonstrated above in the discussion on discourses of the Yellow Peril and the model minority.³⁰

On the other hand, Indigenous peoples supposedly exist outside of labour and capital. Often contrasted with Chinese immigrants, who were supposedly more industrious, in nineteenth-century public discourses in British Columbia, Indigenous peoples were constructed as lazy and indolent, which provided religious or philosophic justification for occupying Indigenous territories and displacing Indigenous peoples (Lutz 34; 38).³¹ According to the European labour theory of value as theorized by John Locke, when one mixes natural resources with labour, those resources immediately become property, for “it is the taking of any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state Nature leaves it in, which begins the property, without which the common is of no use” (116). Thus, shaped by Eurocentric notions of labour and value, European colonists

³⁰ For instance, nineteenth-century American labour movement pamphlets, science fiction writing, and nineteenth-century discourses about Chinese people in general were endlessly fascinated with the Chinese labourer’s physical abilities to endure pain, survive on a near starvation diet, and perform degrading work: literature on the Chinese body was simply articulating economic anxieties engendered by the age of industrial modernity. As Eric Hayot argues via Colleen Lye, the Asiatic body made modernization visible because it “represented to (white) America the newly created subject of modern technology and modern labor, born to endure processes occurring on scales extreme enough to exceed the measure of ‘humanity’” (169).

³¹ Indigenous peoples were often portrayed by explorers and fur traders as lazy despite abundant evidence of them being productively occupied; furthermore, they were seen by fur traders as indolent “because they had little need for European goods (and so chose not to hunt furs extensively) and because they enjoyed long periods of leisure between food and gathering season” (Lutz 34-35). The myth of the lazy or indolent Indian stems from this Eurocentric ignorance of subsistence economies that required leisure time for maintaining important economic relationships, an alternative labour system that made many Indigenous communities independent and not dependent on trade or waged labour.

conveniently overlooked the “different agriculture, mariculture, and silviculture practices of indigenous peoples to characterize the non-European world as ‘in a state of nature.’ They also had to characterize the productive activities of indigenous civilizations as ‘not labour’ in order to declare America ‘unowned’ and available for the taking” (Lutz 34). Though the Northwest Coast peoples, for example, participated in wealth accumulation, their labour, much like the labour of Indigenous peoples across the British Commonwealth, was interpreted by white colonists as non-work, or irrelevant to capitalist production, a colonial stereotype that exists to this day (34-35).³²

In my reading of the ways in which the figure of the Chinese labourer becomes memorialized in Gold mountain stories, I have been building a critique of work ethic values that Chinese labour narratives uncritically celebrate. Must anti-racist scholarship and storytelling always exalt the productive output of the Chinese sojourners? To acquire value and meaning, must labour always be productive or utilitarian? In honouring the Head Tax generation as indispensable nation builders, we may also be unwittingly reproducing hegemonic work ethic values and gender norms. Though the Chinese figure has been historically conflated with industrial modernity and held up as exemplars of productivism, I wished to carve out a space for Chinese models of non-work, Chinese figures who refuse to work, acquire property, achieve upward mobility, and uphold normative family values. It is in these spaces that I discovered other desires, other viable

³² See also Sarah Carter’s work on the problem that evidence of Indigenous agriculture presented to the colonial enterprise in western Canada, for the solution required recasting Indigenous farmers “as the antithesis of agriculturalists—as hunters, incapable and ignorant of farming, and thus having no concept of true land ownership” to further justify Indigenous dispossession and displacement (Carter 15).

and affirming ways of relating to time, labour, sociality, and the land.

Therefore, labour stories matter. How we read and commemorate labour contributions matter. Oftentimes, the way we read and approach settler labour narratives directs the efforts of solidarity building, anti-racist knowledge production, and archiving original stories—the subject of my next chapter. If this chapter focused on the ways in which the figure of the Chinese settler has been made to labour for national belonging, the next chapter uncovers the problems involved with arguing for a place of belonging in the nation in the first place. Chinese settler labour narratives will still be my main concern but I will be shifting my attention to analyze how two documentary filmmakers frame the labour stories of the Head Tax generation to formulate their anti-racist projects and whether a settler colonial critique can be drawn from their films.

CHAPTER THREE

Re-Reading the Archive of Chinese Exclusion in Richard Fung's *Dirty Laundry* and Karen Cho's *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain*

We're the new generation
The children of those who built this nation
And we can make the sacrifice
And we're willing to pay the price

Twenty million in money Head Tax
We demand that you give it all back
Now we want what is our dues
We want redress for the Head Tax blues
We want redress for the Head Tax blues
—Sean Gunn “Head Tax Blues”

There could never really be justice on stolen land.
—KRS-One “Sound of Da Police”

Introduction

In this chapter, I compare the documentary treatment of Chinese labour and exclusion in Richard Fung's *Dirty Laundry* (1996) and Karen Cho's *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain* (2004). Released eight years apart, these films draw on the archive of Chinese exclusion and function as public pedagogical texts that aim to raise the political consciousness of their viewers and acknowledge the ways in which Chinese migrants have experienced systemic oppression, labour exploitation, outright historical erasure, and “political death” in Canada.¹ Both documentaries aim to recuperate a Chinese presence

¹ In Renisa Mawani's comparative treatment of the racial subjugation of Indigenous peoples and Chinese migrants in late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century British Columbia, she argues that while Indigenous

that has been disavowed from the national and historical imaginary. Their approaches to interpreting and asserting the presence of the nineteenth-century Chinese settler via the archive of Chinese exclusion articulate an anti-oppressive stance against the nation state and historical archives that aims to be intersectional and inclusive of other systemic oppressions. Yet each documentary presents a different approach to interpreting and asserting the presence of the Chinese settler: whereas Fung demonstrates a multiply-stranded approach that considers race, class, gender, and sexuality in its critique of the white supremacist and heteropatriarchal systems of oppression that determine which voices and bodies tend to be included in any archive, Cho only links the exclusion of the Head Tax generation to Islamophobic policies and discourses impacting the lives of Muslim Canadians.² Furthermore, while Cho fails to acknowledge the presence of Indigeneity and Sino-Indigenous relations in the archive of Chinese exclusion, Fung aligns the exclusion of Chinese immigrants with the societal denigration and state subjugation of the Métis nation during the Riel Rebellion as well as African American slaves in Canada. Reading these two documentaries together is instructive for the way

peoples were required to accept and incorporate a “*cultural death*” in order to be included and recognized as modern state citizens, Chinese settlers “were increasingly subjected to a *political death* through restriction, deportation, and exclusion” (29; italics in original). Arguably, Indigenous peoples underwent a range of death beyond the cultural, such as the thousands who have died in residential schools and jails or those who were denied access to legal representation or Indigenous citizenship.

² Asian American studies has moved from recovering previously unacknowledged and disavowed histories of Asian immigration, settlement, labour exploitation, racialization, and exclusion in the US to linking the presence of Asian Americans in America to US imperialist and expansionist designs throughout the Pacific (Lowe 229-230). Since then, critics have sought to theorize and reframe the field within the contemporary post-9/11 moment, “one in which Asian Americans are becoming a significant minority community in the USA, and when the US national security state has shifted its projection of the racial enemy from East Asia to the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia” (Lowe 230). Asian Canadian literary and cultural studies has yet to incorporate the impact of post-9/11 discourses on Muslim Canadians and the militaristic intensification of Canada’s domestic and international role in the global war on terror.

that they demonstrate important lessons on the politics of interpreting and deploying diasporic histories of oppression for the advocacy of social justice on Indigenous lands.

I discuss documentary treatments of the archive of Chinese exclusion to explore how Chinese Canadian cultural producers approach reading and constructing the archive. In the process of interpreting and being incorporated into the archive, these texts reveal a set of progressive political investments that aim to be inclusive of other systemic oppressions but fail to turn their gaze onto the role of Chinese Canadians in the structure of Canadian settler colonialism.³ For quite some time now Indigenous studies scholars, and settler colonial studies scholars and social activist movements (such as Idle No More, No One Is Illegal, or Black Lives Matter) in the last ten to fifteen years, have been addressing the complexities of settler colonialism in their political analyses; but rather than examining these recent projects, I turn to Cho and Fung's films to explore whether their works articulate a language of anti-racism that also begins to address the problem of settler colonialism before such a critique has come to gain such prominence in Canadian public discourse over the past decade. As discussed in the introductory chapter, Larissa Lai and Lily Cho have observed that when Chinese cultural workers and activists mobilized during the 1980s and 1990s to combat racial discrimination, they did so on a belief in social equality within the bounds of the nation state, an anti-racist struggle that

³ The failure to address the role of settler colonialism or the presence of Indigenous peoples in political analyses has been the overarching settler colonial critique that scholars such as Bonita Lawrence, Enakshi Dua, James Cox, and Jodi Byrd have standardized in Indigenous, critical race, and settler colonial studies. Though Cho and Fung's films appear to fail in this kind of settler colonial critique, as creative texts produced before such a critique reached mainstream Canadian discourse, I wonder if they already cultivate such a critique but in a different language.

no longer makes ethical sense once the Canadian state is recognized as a colonial structure engaged in the disempowerment and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Consequently, I have two goals for comparing Fung and Cho's videos: first, I aim to examine the degree to which their films resist or comply with the nation-state framework in their arguments for social justice; and second, I wish to explore whether their anti-racist projects express a different settler colonial critique that settler colonial studies scholars and activists committed to decolonization can draw upon.

In short, I believe Cho and Fung's documentaries reveal important lessons about the politics of anti-racist discourses. As both documentaries were produced well before the major shift in public discourse on the legacies of settler colonialism, a shift that gained more momentum in Canada from the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission over the last seven years, I analyze the ways in which their films respond to the exclusion of Chinese settlers but not to their complicity in colonial structures, how they aim to recuperate and honour a Chinese presence that has been disavowed not only in the national-historical imaginary but also in the archive of Chinese exclusion compiled and constructed by Asian Canadian studies scholars, activists, and community members. Essentially, my primary concern in this chapter is to discover whether these films model a more ethical and inclusive way to assert an excluded and marginalized diasporic presence in the context of the settler nation-state. Can assertions of a Chinese settler presence ever be adequately linked alongside Indigenous exclusions and displacements so as to not equate these historical oppressions but to further understand how these oppressions depend upon each other in the building of the settler nation-state? Also, what does it

mean when scholars and activists desire that these texts be more inclusive of other oppressions? Does the task of scholarship entail providing prescriptive analyses to suit the political investments of critical scholars? Or can the “failures” of cultural texts, if we can call them that, better serve to teach readers to explore why such gaps and omissions occur in the first place?⁴

I begin this chapter with a discussion of Cho and Fung’s approaches to documenting the history of Chinese exclusion. How they interpret and frame this history reveals the political investments that they bring to the archive. Their efforts to recuperate and re-assert a Chinese presence that has been excluded materially, economically, discursively, and culturally inevitably draws on labour narratives of the Chinese settler heavily tied to the period of western expansion and settler nation-building projects in nineteenth- and early twentieth- century Canada. Moreover, both documentaries make use of the iconic Canadian imagery of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) as well as archival documentary footage of train travel across the Canadian landscape to tell their stories. The texts re-assert a Chinese settler presence within the visual and symbolic space of the CPR, a historically fraught space for its multiple layers of historical oppression. In my reading of how these anti-racist projects interpret the archive of Chinese exclusion, I uncover the ethics involved in asserting and memorializing the Chinese diaspora’s presence in the national imaginary and whether these films articulate

⁴ My dear friend and colleague Kenneth Huynh once helped me refine my argument by asking me how I will approach reading Asian Canadian texts that “fail” at acknowledging and centring Indigeneity. It is too easy and perhaps even reductive to simply admonish a text and its author for disavowing Indigenous autochthony. However, asking why texts “fail” may reveal instead what structures our ways of knowing that render such disavowals and erasures unquestioned, unnoticed, and *not* unusual.

their own settler colonial critique.

Narrative Impulse in *Dirty Laundry* (1994)

The fictional narrative plot and quasi-documentary form in *Dirty Laundry* raises meta-historical questions about how we approach reading and interpreting history, why we read and interpret history in the ways that we do, and what re-imaginings and re-readings of commonly established accounts of history can do for marginalized diasporic communities. The film's fictional protagonist, Roger Kwong, sets out on a train trip across western Canada to research and write about the immigrant history of the Chinese Canadian community. A writer for a Canadian magazine, Roger has been tasked to write what the magazine calls a "new immigrant" story about the Chinese in Canada.⁵ As he attempts to complete his research and writing assignment on the train, he experiences a profound shift in his understanding about the history of the Chinese immigrant community, a shift aided by his interactions with a queer Chinese male attendant and a queer female Asian passenger, but principally initiated by his discovery of a photograph of his great-grandfather holding hands with another Chinese male immigrant, a photograph which has been hidden for the past three generations behind the framed photograph of his great-grandfather, the revered family patriarch. These two photographs—the photograph of the lone family patriarch and the previously unknown photograph of the patriarch holding hands with another man—bookend Fung's fictional

⁵ It is unclear what the fictional magazine means by "new immigrant." Perhaps compared to white settlers, Chinese settlers are considered by the magazine (and hence mainstream society) to be newer immigrants despite having migrated to Canada since the late nineteenth-century.

plot set in contemporary Canada.

These two images open and close the documentary, suggesting an interpretive framework for reading the history of Chinese exclusion that moves away from a heteronormative to a queer reading of the early Chinese immigrant community's homosocial relations. What makes this film still a documentary are the conventional documentary elements and historical clips that Fung inserts throughout Roger's narrative, such as voice-overs and talking head interviews with Asian North American historians and writers; archival photographs and video footage; historical re-enactments of anti-Chinese agitation and legislation; and the experiences of racial and gender discrimination of Chinese male and female immigrants upon entering Canada. That Fung combines traditional elements of the documentary form with non-conventional elements, such as video performance pieces on queer Asian desire and a fictional plot centred on the process of reading and writing about a community's historical past, raises compelling questions about the politics of historiography. Combining these elements models a process of reading along and beyond the archive of Chinese exclusion in order to recuperate or render legible a queer potentiality that has been largely disavowed in established and mainstream accounts of the period of Chinese exclusion.

While documentaries certainly stimulate epistophilia, a desire to know, in their audiences by conveying "an informing logic, a persuasive rhetoric, and a moving poetics that promises information and knowledge, insight and awareness" (Nichols 40), documentaries also raise compelling questions about the epistemological divisions that typically maintain the separation of fact from fiction and history from narrative. Every

documentary tells a story. Every documentary produces a compelling narrative to hook the interest of the audience. In that case, what makes documentaries different from narrative cinema, especially feature films based on true stories or historical figures and events? Given the story of the fictional protagonist, Roger Kwong, discovering his closeted great-grandfather in *Dirty Laundry*, what makes Fung's film not a narrative film?

Fung's use of a meta-historiographical narrative plot points the audience to reflect on one's relationship to history and what drives people to recover, recuperate, and relate that history to their political concerns and positionalities. Fung may deploy a fictional plot about a queer Chinese male journalist to both achieve and dramatize this political objective, but his project is not just a revisionist one that aims to rewrite the history of the early Chinese settlers. Blurring the line between history and fiction, *Dirty Laundry* makes use of the documentary form to ask us to consider the possibility of queer homosocial relations in the early Chinese settler community even as it stages a fictional great-grandfather's queer relationship with another Chinese male settler. That Fung still makes use of the documentary form instead of narrative cinema is a significant aesthetic choice. Somewhat similar to Cho's documentary, *Dirty Laundry* interprets and represents the archive of Chinese exclusion, but its reading of the archive goes against common interpretations and representations of the early Chinese settlers under exclusion. It constitutes a creative re-envisioning of the past made possible by epistemological shifts in understanding objectivity, truth, and history in the arts and humanities.

From its inception, the documentary form has defied a coherent and consistently agreed upon definition by documentary filmmakers and theorists alike. Films such as

Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) are widely regarded as one of the first examples of the documentary form,⁶ which influenced the documentary's first major critic, John Grierson, to famously theorize the documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality," existing in "the crease between life and lived life as narrativised" (Winston 4-7). Though more literal interpretations of the documentary as actual captured reality persisted, documentary filmmakers and critics had to contend with technical aspects such as the challenges of on-site sync shooting which required that filmmakers create or fully reconstruct events to fill in gaps and satisfy the demands of the documentary's narrative. As a result, documentary filmmakers ended up deploying the same film techniques as their narrative cinema practitioners, which led to an increasing acknowledgement of the role of mediation and postmodern ways of narrative construction in documentaries such as Fung's produced during the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, postmodern films, much like postmodern literature, utilise meta-historical and/or meta-fictional narrative strategies, storytelling techniques that render approaches to memory and narrative more transparent. As Linda Hutcheon has pointed out, contrary to what critics like Terry Eagleton or Fredric Jameson have argued about postmodernism, "historiographic metafiction, like postmodernist architecture and painting, is [not ahistorical but] overtly and resolutely historical—though, admittedly, in an ironic and problematic way that acknowledges that history is not the transparent record of any sure 'truth'" (10). A film such as *Dirty*

⁶ Considered to be one of the first and most controversial documentaries ever made, *Nanook of the North* purportedly documented the everyday life of the Inuit in northern Quebec through the story of Allakariallak, renamed Nanook in the film, and his two wives. Flaherty restaged and reconstructed everyday Inuit life as he envisioned Inuit people would live, providing a nostalgic anthropological portrait of Inuit life before European contact and influence. For more, see Brian Winston.

Laundry may present a fictional narrative and cast of characters, but the film engages in a search for a “truth” about the lives of queer Chinese immigrants during the exclusion era that has been rendered illegible in historical accounts of the Chinese in Canada.

Therefore, *Dirty Laundry* is a documentary not only because it looks and feels like a documentary by way of its incorporation of conventional documentary elements; it is also a documentary, especially a postmodern documentary, because it models the historiographic process of a queer and gendered Chinese Canadian subject searching for what remains of the archive, that is, for queer and gendered stories and experiences of the early Chinese settlers that have been hidden, erased, or excluded from official archival accounts of the past. Subjects longing for these stories and experiences precisely because they have not yet been told may welcome Fung’s documentary as a truthful speculation and gesture towards the past, even if he needs to supplement the documentary with a fictional narrative plot to render possible a queer and gendered potentiality within the archival remains of the early Chinese settler community. Making use of postmodern understandings of history and the archive as narrativised and mediated forms of producing knowledge about the past, Fung chooses the documentary form in order to re-read and lay bare the racist, gendered, and heteronormative meta-narratives of the Chinese diaspora and the nation-state.

Pedagogical Imperative: *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain* (2004)

Cho’s documentary explores the stories and experiences of Chinese Canadian elders and families who were directly impacted by the Chinese Head Tax and the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act. The film features talking head interviews with surviving

Chinese Head Tax payers and their family members. There are no institutional experts or historians in the film. Cho relies mostly on the testimony of these Chinese elders and their surviving family members; she supplements their personal accounts with government documents, newspaper headlines, political speeches, and minutes recorded of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century debates on the ‘Chinese problem’ performed in British inflected voice-overs to depict the historical period; she also incorporates archival photographs, video footage, poetry, and letters thematically and historically related to Chinese immigration and labour during the Head Tax and Chinese exclusion era. Representing the history and experience of Chinese exclusion in Canada, the documentary functions as both a pedagogical textbook and memorial project. In a voice-over before the film’s opening credits, Cho explains that she set out to make this documentary to learn more about an account of Canadian history that was excluded from her education, a history that will be narrated by a generation of Chinese Canadians who experienced it. Through this documentary, Cho suggests that the Chinese exclusion years, the “dark years,” have not been adequately represented or widely discussed on a national level or in Chinese communities across Canada; that it is a shameful and racist period in Canada’s past that should be brought to light and incorporated into the viewer’s civic education.

Cho’s documentary contains a pedagogical and rhetorical function. It persuades the viewer to learn more about the history of Chinese exclusion; and in learning about this history, the viewer will develop a critical stance towards the state and its racist citizens for its past exclusion of and discrimination against Chinese immigrants. The

documentary's arc of persuasion relies on a number of assumptions: that the viewer knows little or nothing about this history of Chinese exclusion; that the viewer, upon discovering that the state once passed racist legislation against Chinese immigrants, will want to learn more about this historical period and also become politically invested in this issue; and crucially, that the viewer may be shocked by this knowledge about the racist and deplorable treatment of Chinese immigrants in a liberal multicultural nation such as Canada. Functioning rhetorically and pedagogically, the film is framed by a political exigency to respond to the general lack of awareness and understanding of Chinese exclusion in Canadian society. This response on the part of the viewer can take any number of forms: from educating others about this history, joining or supporting the Head Tax movement at the time the documentary was first released,⁷ refusing to uncritically accept and maintain state discourses of nationalism and liberal multiculturalism, or memorializing this history of exclusion and the Chinese immigrant labourers who were directly impacted by the racist legislation. In order to elicit these politicized and affective responses to the period of Chinese exclusion, the documentary depends on a lack of knowledge about Chinese exclusion and a feeling of shock on the part of the viewer over the fact that Chinese exclusion happened in Canada.

According to Bill Nichols, understanding a documentary entails attending to the ways in which a documentary's story intertwines with the story of the filmmaker and the

⁷ During the time of the documentary's production and release, former PM Stephen Harper had not yet made his formal public government apology for Canada's past anti-Chinese legislation, which occurred in 2008.

audience in a symbiotic relationship of meaning (94). It is, therefore, the task of critical analysis and the focus of film history and criticism to “concentrate on what the film reveals about the relation between filmmaker and subject and what, for documentary, the film reveals about the world we occupy” (Nichols 96). Cho does not present herself as an expert in the documentary. She presents herself as a learner and a listener: a substantial portion of the film’s voice-over commentary comes from the Head Tax payers interviewed in the documentary. Voice-overs by period actors and occasional off-screen voice-overs from Cho herself comprise the rest of the film’s verbal commentary. And Cho only appears twice: at the beginning and end of the film. The way in which she structures and limits her physical and verbal presence provides the overall interpretive framework in the film: it offers an invitation to learn more about Chinese exclusion, as she does in the unfolding of the film. For example, when Cho emerges on-screen for the first time, she is seen on a moving train, entering a train car through a sliding door. After she sits down, the shot focuses on her from the neck up, looking out the window at a moving Canadian landscape; the camera cuts to an even closer shot of her side profile while looking out the window, never at the camera. With a pensive and reflective expression in her voice-over she says, “I wanted to learn more about this version of Canadian history that was left out of my school books, so I set out on a cross-country journey to uncover the stories of those who lived through the dark years.”

Cho’s reference to the nation’s “dark years” frames the moral and political interpretive framework of the documentary. In the opening sequence, older grainy video footage of Canada Day celebrations on Ottawa’s Parliament grounds is edited with voice-

over narration and talking head interview clips exposing a widely unknown racist history behind the founding of the nation. July 1st commemorates not only the founding of Canada as a state but also the passage of the 1923 Immigration Act, a fact revealed to the viewer by a former Head Tax payer. The way in which this oppressive fact is revealed in an opening sequence that pairs various shots of Asian families attending the Canada Day celebrations with talking head interviews of Head Tax payers aims to elicit shock from the viewer, thus framing a moral and political critique of Canadian nationalism and inviting the viewer to question uncritically patriotic understandings of Canada's liberal multicultural values. Following this opening sequence, Cho presents herself as a Head Tax descendant embarking on an educational journey across the country. The shot of her sitting on the train peering out the window, watching the passing Canadian railway landscape, an iconic national image reframed here to be associated with the early Chinese labourer, sets the interpretative stage for her viewer: the history and experience of Chinese settlement in Canada has a racially exclusionary side that has not been adequately discussed or recognized. Therefore, this documentary aims to educate and inform the viewer, discussing the impact of anti-Chinese legislation on the early Chinese settler, the Chinese settler family, and the Chinese settler community. This pedagogical journey will end with a consideration of the Chinese Redress movement and a moral castigation of the Canadian government for refusing, at the time of the film's making, to apologize or to offer reparations to the Head Tax payers and their surviving members. The overall structure of the documentary encourages the viewer to engage with and respond to this history in political, pedagogical, and commemorative ways. In a nutshell,

the film's overall message argues that the history and material legacies of Chinese exclusion should not and will not be forgotten.

Postmemory of Chinese Exclusion

In Cho's film, there is a framing shot of her sitting on a moving train travelling over the Canadian Pacific Railway that constitutes a powerful act of remembrance. This image does more than illustrate Cho's method of travel in her, as she puts it, "cross-country journey to uncover the stories of those who lived through the dark years." Travelling over these rails in the context of recovering a historical experience of exclusion performs a powerful historical symbolism and affective reconnection. To travel over the rails that Chinese labourers once built harkens back to a period of Chinese exclusion and exploited Chinese labour, entailing more than just revisiting and understanding the past; it constitutes a visual and affective tribute to a period in history and the people who survived it. And for the descendants of the Head Tax generation and the Chinese settlers who came long after this period, those who now have the opportunity to gain socio-economic and political mobility with more ease and accessibility than was once possible for the early Chinese settler, there emerges a possibility to access this period and activate an affective, living connection to those who experienced the racial oppression and denigration of the time.

I draw this notion of cultivating an affective, living connection between the Head Tax generation who lived through the period of Chinese exclusion and the postgeneration who came after from Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory. Hirsch discusses postmemory in the context of cultural production on the Holocaust but expressed from the

perspective of second generation artists articulating their relationship to traumatic experiences that preceded their births. Whether these second generation cultural producers experienced these historical traumas or not, what they attempt through their work is not a reproduction of the previous generation's memories of that traumatic past but their own living and ongoing connection to that traumatic past, a connection transmitted directly or indirectly from one generation to another, one generation's trauma activating and evoking another generation's creative investments in their parents' trauma. Hirsch contends that the production of postmemory via creative production does not actually constitute memory recall of the previous generation's traumatic memories (109). As she puts it, the work of postmemory

describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (106-107; italics in original)

Rather than reproducing or reclaiming the memories of the previous generation as their own, second generation artists and writers produce cultural work that "strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures" (Hirsch 111; italics in original). Hence, these postmemory projects are more invested in constructing versions of the past that serve the affective and psychic needs and desires of the second generation and they do so by "reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression" (Hirsch 111).

Cho's documentary constitutes a postmemorial text on the era of Chinese

exclusion but her project neither reflects the perspective of the second generation nor does it construct postmemory via her family's individual narrative. A fifth generation mixed race Chinese Canadian, Cho learns of her family's experience of exclusion from her Chinese grandmother, a narrative curiously minimized and excluded from the documentary. What makes Cho's postgenerational work different from the ones Hirsch theorizes is the way that it draws on the memories and recollections of different Chinese Canadian families in order to collectivize and render more widely accessible the memorial structure of Chinese exclusion, making it possible for Chinese Canadian viewers to inherit this knowledge and experience regardless of whether they descend from ancestors who lived through the era of Chinese exclusion. My conceptualization of the process and generation of postmemory in Cho's documentary diverges slightly from Hirsch's theorization. According to Hirsch, the generations who come long after the original generation who experienced the historical trauma, generations who often have no direct link to the first generation due to the ruptures of war, exile, migration, or refugeehood, produce a different kind of postmemory that often draws on the postmemorial work of the second generation. She distinguishes familial postmemory from affiliative postmemory: whereas familial postmemory involves the intergenerational vertical identification and transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience between child and parent, affiliative postmemory entails an intra-generational horizontal identification and transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience from one child to that child's contemporaries (114-115). In other words, affiliative postmemories can result from a "generational connection with the literal second generation combined with

structures of mediation that would be broadly appropriable, available, and indeed, compelling enough to encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission” (Hirsch 115). Thus, under Hirsch’s framework, the postgeneration builds and sustains postmemories of the past through the second generation’s postmemorial productions.

That familial structures of mediation and representation facilitate the affiliative acts of the postgeneration is a key point in Hirsch’s theorization of postmemory that I wish to expand upon (115); like Hirsch, I strongly agree that the “idiom of family can become an accessible lingua franca easing identification and projections across distance and difference” (115). But I differ from Hirsch in my contention that the postgeneration can build and sustain affiliative postmemories through family accounts not their own and without mediation from the second generation. As I mentioned, Cho is not a second generation filmmaker. While she may be a direct descendant of Chinese Head Tax payers who lived under the Chinese Immigration Act, she does not interview her family or incorporate their photographs or Chinese Head Tax certificates in the documentary: her direct lineage to this history is placed in the background of the documentary’s focus. Instead, she interviews other Chinese Canadian families and privileges their photographs and Chinese Head Tax certificates. What makes their stories open and accessible for the transmission of affiliative postmemory to postgeneration subjects of Chinese descent like Cho or the Chinese Canadian viewer is an open-ended memorial structure of family and kinship that frames their narratives and most importantly a cinematic representation of the transmission of familial postmemory (which I will discuss further below) that does not require genealogical links from either Cho or the viewer. Of course, Cho can neither

control the demographic of her audience nor exclude non-Chinese viewers from identifying with the stories of exclusion: her documentary is open to all viewers. However, given the racially legislated disruption to Chinese immigration and family reunification in Canada, I argue that the film can transmit the experiences of the Head Tax generation to post-1967 Chinese immigrants and their descendants who have no direct ties or lineage to the Chinese exclusion era. Providing this channel to identify with these stories through an open-ended memorial structure of family and kinship, Cho's documentary has the capacity to elicit community building and ethnic solidarity from not only any viewer but also a heterogeneous post-war Chinese Canadian audience otherwise divided by class, ethnicity, national citizenship, language, religion, political affiliation, and time of emigration.⁸

Elders occupy a significant role in Cho's documentary, often imparting invaluable knowledge and experience to the postgeneration. In Cho's case, her grandmother, not her parent, becomes the source of her family's experience under Chinese exclusion. The primacy of the elder bearing knowledge and experience also foregrounds an intimate educational family scene between James Wing, one of the elders interviewed in the documentary, and his son and granddaughter. In this scene's establishing shot, Wing and

⁸ Given the important role that elders play in Cho's documentary, Cho's film has the potential to circulate as a source of postmemory for its Chinese Canadian viewership. I derive this idea from the social custom in Chinese culture which stipulates that one uses the same honorific terms for older family friends and community members. For example, if I were to exchange words with a Chinese elderly man who spoke Cantonese on the street, I would greet him as Ah-Gong. This linguistic custom of greeting strangers as one would greet one's family members suggests to me that the use of elders in Cho's documentary may provide an honorary genealogical connection that depends less on blood lines and more on elder respect and community building.

his son and granddaughter sit on a couch in a living room to look through a family photo album. In the next shot, Wing's son and granddaughter look at the Head Tax certificate in Wing's hand as he points to it and tells them the story of how he first immigrated to Canada:

Wing: That's a Head Tax certificate. When you pay \$500, then they give you this certificate with your picture on it. So that's my only like come to Canada.

Wing's son: Even a child would have to pay \$500?

Wing: Everybody.

Wing's son: *Ye Ye* was young then, hey? How old were you, *Ye Ye*, when you came to Canada?

Wing: About 9 or 10.

Presumably, Wing's granddaughter is also nine or ten years old in this scene: it is at this point that the camera pans right to Wing's head, then pans back to his granddaughter who exclaims, "wow," expressing wonder and shock over the image of her nine-year-old grandfather having to pay a discriminatory fee to enter Canada.

This intimate family scene of an elder imparting the knowledge and historical experience of racial exclusion and discrimination to a younger generation constitutes a transmission of familial postmemory. But I am more interested in what scenes like this do for Chinese Canadian postgeneration subjects who do not have a surviving elder or *Ye Ye* (Cantonese honorific term for paternal grandfather) like James Wing to transmit the familial postmemory of Chinese exclusion in Canada to them. For the Chinese Canadian postgeneration subject who lacks access to familial memories of Chinese exclusion, postmemorial texts like Cho's documentary perform an important community- and solidarity- building function: one does not need a direct genealogical link to this era of exclusion in order to inherit its historical impact and connect with the Chinese diasporic

experience of exclusion. Cho's documentary can be read as a collective memorial structure for Chinese Canadian postgeneration subjects to draw upon and foster an affective connection with the past. The way in which Cho combines public and private knowledge, national archival material and several individual family stories, serves to open up the structure of familial postmemory to any Chinese Canadian postgeneration subject searching to learn more about the origins of the Chinese diasporic community in Canada. Supplemented by archival materials, elder testimonies provide a pedagogical resource for the postgeneration. Even for Chinese immigrants who have settled elsewhere (for example, in Vietnam, the Philippines, or South Africa) before arriving in Canada, affiliative identification remains possible for a heterogeneous Chinese immigrant population that will still be primarily racialized as Chinese. Given that Cho does not interview her family or include her grandmother's account of living through the Chinese exclusion era, the documentary is less about her family's experience of exclusion and more about the perspectives and experiences of multiple Chinese Canadian families. That several elders are interviewed in the documentary aims to resonate with a heterogeneous Chinese Canadian community being envisioned within and beyond the text. Since the knowledge and experience that elders have to offer is so valuable, the stories and accounts that these elders have to share do not belong only to their families: incorporated into this publicly funded documentary, they function as a cultural and archival resource, a community archive, for their communities and most importantly for future generations.

In time, more of the remaining Head Tax elders, like those Cho interviewed in her documentary, will pass away, as will the genealogical connections transmitting familial

postmemories of Chinese exclusion to the next generation. In a later section of the documentary that discusses the development of the Head Tax Redress movement in Vancouver, Cho expresses the exigency of ensuring that the stories and experiences of the Head Tax generation will be passed down to future generations and never be forgotten. She articulates this message through a particular montage sequence that begins with a shot of Chinese Canadians (presumably all Head Tax payers or their descendants) waiting in a school gymnasium already shown in the previous section on the origins of the Head Tax Redress movement in Vancouver. Cho first introduces this shot of a crowded school gymnasium of Chinese Canadians in conjunction with a talking head interview of Hansan Lau, a well-known Chinese Canadian radio broadcaster who once produced and hosted the radio show Overseas Chinese Voice (Chow). As he explains in his interview, in the early 1980s he first invited the Vancouver community's MP, Margaret Mitchell, to his show to discuss Mr. Dak Leon Mark's attempt via Mitchell to lobby for a refund from the federal government of the \$500 Head Tax he had paid to enter Canada. Realizing that there could be many more Head Tax payers like Mr. Mark, Lau invited his listeners to arrive at the station the following weekend to register their Head Tax certificates so he could forward their requests to Mitchell, who would help them lobby for compensation from the government as well. Surprisingly, when four hundred Chinese Canadians arrived and lined up at the station with their original Head Tax certificates, Lau invited more of his listeners to register their certificates at the station: as he describes the beginnings of the Head Tax Redress movement, "we did it for three Saturdays in a row, and we got close to 1200 people registered. So that was the beginning of the Head Tax

movement for redress in Vancouver.”

Used in conjunction with the origin story of the Head Tax Redress movement, this shot of a crowded gymnasium of Chinese Canadian elders and family members stands in for the Head Tax generation who originally lined up outside of Lau’s radio station to register their Head Tax certificates and join the movement for redress. Cho uses this image again near the end of the documentary in a montage sequence to craft a melancholic tone that can elicit a powerful response from the viewer. As the camera pans in slow motion across the gymnasium, a male voice off-screen says, “we’re waiting for that promise to be fulfilled” (a voice presumably drawn from a speech at The Last Spike campaign in Montreal organized to raise awareness and political support for the Head Tax Redress movement that was featured in the preceding section of the documentary). Then, in a voice-over, Cho intones, “[i]n the same school where hundreds of Head Tax payers rallied for redress and have since passed away, their stories will live on with the next generation.” At this point, the crowded gymnasium shot is superimposed over a shot of a single Head Tax payer (Gim Wong) dressed in his military uniform and walking towards the camera until he walks out of view. This ominous sequence of the Head Tax payers rallying for justice and fading away, only to be replaced by a single remaining Head Tax payer, points out that at the time this film was made, many of the elders who experienced Chinese exclusion had passed away before they could receive justice; sooner or later, no more Head Tax payers will remain. This melancholic montage sequence is followed by a scene of Gim Wong still dressed in his military uniform in an elementary schoolroom standing and talking about Chinese exclusion to children seated on the floor; he then

kneels down to answer a question from a child and shows a framed photograph to the children seated around him. In this final shot, the children sit and crowd around him; but only his arms are visible, indicating his point of view as the camera pans and focuses on the framed photo being passed to the children who continue to examine the photo and stare at him in wonder.

Following the previous melancholic montage sequences, this pedagogical scene of an elder imparting knowledge and experience to the next generation may strike the viewer as optimistic and hopeful: through elder visits to schools such as this one and through the production and circulation of films like Cho's documentary, the stories of the era of Chinese exclusion will "live on." However, like the Head Tax payers who came before him, Gim Wong, 81 at the time the film was made, will soon pass away as well.⁹ Every time Cho introduces an elder, the elder's age accompanies his or her name on the screen.¹⁰ Akin to experts introduced with their professional and educational credentials in traditional documentaries, the listing of the age and name of the elders and whether they themselves had paid the Head Tax or whether they are the spouse or child of a Head Tax payer serves to legitimate their knowledge and testimony within the film. On the one hand, their age and experience provide them the necessary credentials to stand as experts

⁹ During the writing and research that I have been doing for this chapter, I must add that Gim Wong passed away at the age of 90 on July 29, 2013. I only became aware of his passing on October 24, 2013, while watching a free public screening in Toronto of a new documentary on Chinese exclusion, Kenda Gee and Tom Radford's *Lost Years*, which featured an extensive interview with Gim Wong before he died.

¹⁰ To add to my earlier point regarding the Chinese custom of using honorific terms when addressing one's elders, that Cho includes the age of the elders when they are introduced to the audience provides her Chinese Canadian viewers with an important reference point. That way, even elders watching the film would know whether to refer to the elders as elder or younger brother or sister.

in Cho's documentary. But on the other hand, their ages, besides one son of a Head Tax payer, range from the early 80s to late 90s, which implies, sadly, that they, along with their invaluable knowledge and experience of Chinese exclusion, will not remain for long in this world. While Cho's film serves an important and necessary function of archiving their stories for future generations to access, her film also points to an impending absence that requires political vigilance from the postgeneration to ensure that the postmemory of Chinese exclusion be passed down to future generations and that the elders who provide the source of this postmemory be memorialized. Cho's documentary may function as a community archive, providing a source for affiliative postmemory for the postgeneration, but simply watching her documentary is not enough: how will the viewer contribute and ensure that their stories and memories will continue to "live on"?

Reclaiming (Queer) Intimacy in the Archive of Chinese Exclusion

Besides the impending loss of the Head Tax generation, there is yet another loss being mourned in Cho's documentary: that of the Chinese Canadian family. The next section of her film features home video footage of her father's family, that is, different shots of Chinese children playing and sitting uncomfortably still on a couch, presumably forced to remain still for the camera. These shots represent everyday domestic scenes from Cho's family archive as well as the archive of Chinese exclusion. During this sequence of shots, Cho explains in a voice-over off-screen:

[t]hese movies of my father's family in Canada are extremely rare. Due to the exclusion, there is little footage or photographs of Chinese-Canadian families growing up together, prior to 1947, when the Act was repealed. Of the five generations of my family to live in Canada, I am the first born in an era without discriminatory policies specifically targeting the Chinese.

To counteract the material absence of the Chinese Canadian family in public and private archives, Cho includes rare home video footage of her father's family. Framing this material as rare footage of normative Chinese family life that resulted from the period of exclusion, however, leaves little room for the homosocial intimacies and non-normative family structures, such as "paper families," alluded to in Fung's documentary. Cho's documentary projects the presence of the Chinese Canadian family as a way of filling in an absence of normative Chinese Canadian life, an absence once legislated by the state and deemed necessary by xenophobic white settler communities. Whereas the absence of family provides the frame of reference for Cho to position the Chinatown bachelor societies as lacking familial fulfillment and national belonging, the absence of female spouses and children provides Fung the imaginative capacity to posit the potentiality of queer male and female relations in early Chinese migrant communities, thus carving out room for queer intimacies and non-normative family life in this early history.

Creative representations and historical accounts of the history of Chinese exclusion generally centre on the impact of racially discriminatory immigration policies on the Chinese immigrant family, or the consequential lack thereof. Chinese settler communities were not like any other settler community. Not only were they predominantly male but they have also been primarily understood in historical and creative representations as unmarried men—indeed, no other settler community has been as overwhelmingly referred to as a bachelor community in the same way as the early

Chinese immigrants.¹¹ Even if they were married and had left wives behind in China, these married migrants still circulate as part of a bachelor constituency in historical and creative treatments of Chinese exclusion: they might as well have been unmarried since they have been predominantly understood to have lived like lonely celibate men.

In her important critique, Jennifer Ting argues that the way in which scholars discuss and frame the early Chinese male migrants as a bachelor society in Asian American historiography has relied on a set of heteronormative assumptions about Chinese male sexual practices, which has then contributed to the construction of a bachelor society trope that serves to reify gender and sexuality norms in the name of critiquing the oppressive structures of race and capitalism. As Ting puts it, once Chinese exclusion has been removed, then the conditions creating the “deviant heterosexuality” of the bachelor community becomes a historical oppression now overcome, thus paving the way for a “normal” heterosexuality to flourish, “normal” heterosexuality becoming not only a marker of assimilation achieved but a means to assimilation (278). Thus, according to the historical scholarship that Ting analyzes, bachelor societies existed as a result of racial oppression, leaving no room for choice or desire on the part of the Chinese male bachelor to have wanted to live amongst other Chinese men and thrive in homosocial alternative family structures.

Demographic statistics show that overwhelmingly male communities of Chinese

¹¹ Though the phenomenon of “batching it” existed amongst white settler communities, white bachelors living in the same squalid, disorderly, and homosocial living conditions as their Chinese counterparts did not elicit the same moral panic and charges of sexual perversity as the Chinese bachelors did (Francis 193-94). For more on the double standards placed on Chinese bachelorhood, see Margot Francis, “*Dirty Laundry*.”

settlers living in Canada without spouses and family dependents existed. As Peter Li has observed, in “1911, the ratio of Chinese men to 100 Chinese women was 2,790, while the corresponding sex ratio for all of Canada was 113 men to 100 women” (60). This unbalanced gender ratio can be attributed to anti-Chinese immigration policies such as the Chinese Head Tax or the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act that made it both legally and financially difficult, if not impossible, for Chinese settlers to sponsor their family members to migrate to Canada. Such a correlation, of course, is not being disputed here. What deserves questioning instead is the predominant heteronormative framing of the Chinese bachelor society in cultural and scholarly production on the early Chinese settler community during the era of exclusion. Ting’s critique of the reading of the Chinese bachelor society as heterosexually deviant proves useful in my comparison of the way in which Cho and Fung interpret and represent the Chinese bachelor community in their documentaries. The ways in which these filmmakers recuperate and frame the presence of the Chinese bachelor community carry different political ends but inevitably rely on the structure of the settler nation state. Given that nation-building discourses are inextricably linked to heteronormative discourses of gender and sexuality, Cho’s representation of the Chinese bachelor community, while providing an anti-racist frame, serves and legitimates the logic of the nation state, whereas Fung’s depiction, offering a queer re-reading of the early Chinese settler community, propagates a settler homonationalist discourse instead.

A substantial portion of Cho’s documentary focuses on the familial impact of immigration policies like the Chinese Head Tax and the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act.

Many of the elders interviewed in her documentary discuss the painful effects of the policies on their families: they either had to leave their family behind or they were simply denied the opportunity to start a family in Canada. One elder, Yew Lee, tells the story of his father being separated from his wife and children for eighteen years before they could be reunited: his father would have to sell a business or borrow money to finance his return trips to China. Another elder, James Wing, tells the story of migrating to Canada and meeting his father for the first time: even though he knew the stranger was his father, he could not even address him as Papa or Daddy; his throat would painfully constrict every time he tried to utter the words. These narratives paint a picture of separated and broken families that were families in name but not in practice, families constrained by distance and immigration policies that restricted family reunions if the migrant father figure could afford to return home.¹² It is no wonder that much of the creative and scholarly literature on the era of Chinese exclusion has predominantly focused on the negative impact that these discriminatory policies had on heteronormative Chinese families: the era of Chinese exclusion essentially amounted to a systematic exclusion of the Chinese Canadian family.¹³

As a cumulative result of the various Head Tax policies and Chinese Immigration Act, Chinatowns across Canada became bachelor societies. Denigrated and marginalized

¹² While paying the Head Tax granted Chinese migrants entrance to live and work in Canada, they would lose their residency status if they stayed outside the country for more than two years. The two elders in the film, Charlie Quan and James Wing, reference this regulation in their testimonies.

¹³ Of course, this pattern of analysis is increasingly changing as demonstrated by scholarly works like Madeline Y. Hsu's "Unwrapping Orientalist Constraints" and Nayan Shah's *Stranger Intimacy*. For more on queer homosocial Chinese bachelor relations on the creative front, see also Winston Christopher Kam's play *Bachelor-Man* and Donald Goellnicht's article on Kam's play, "Kai-Dai."

by the state and surrounding white settler communities, many of these Chinatown societies have been overwhelmingly depicted as undergoing social death and literal extinction along with the aging bachelors. In *Chinatown: Towns within Cities in Canada*, for example, David Chuenyan Lai tracks the developmental lifespan of Chinatowns alongside the rate of migration, settlement, birth, and death of its Chinese inhabitants. According to Lai, Chinatowns move through a linear development model. In the “budding stage,” a Chinatown has few Chinese residents, predominantly male (5). In the “blooming stage,” the Chinese population, as well as the size of the Chinatown businesses, organizations, and associations, increases due to the in-migration of predominantly male labourers as well as increases in the number of married couples (5-7). And in the “withering stage,” a Chinatown decreases in size along with the decline of its Chinese population and economy, only to enter the final stage of “extinction: “[i]f a withering Chinatown is not revitalized, it will be wiped out or reduced in size by fire, relocation, gentrification (or inner-city revitalization), and other factors” (7-8). Again, that exclusionary policies and structures of racial discrimination played a determining role in the population and economic growth and vitality of Chinatown societies is not being disputed. What deserves more careful examination are the metaphors and assumptions that scholars and artists use in framing the sociality of these predominantly male Chinese bachelor societies. Treatments of the Chinese bachelor society like Cho and Lai’s are overwhelmingly driven by a heteronormative understanding. Since many of these bachelors were not only poor but also subjected to the Head Tax or 1923 Chinese Immigration Act, heteronormative readings of the Chinese bachelor society assume that

these men remain sad lonely bachelors regardless of their marital status or sexual orientation. It is assumed that either they left their wives and immediate families back home or they migrated to Canada before they could marry and start a family; and so without normative family life, these settlers must have lived a tragic, isolated existence.

Of course, not all historical and creative portraits of the Chinatown bachelor society present a melancholic bachelor existence filled with nothing but exploited and alienated labour.¹⁴ But given the skewed gender ratio of Chinese communities under anti-Chinese immigration legislation in North America, the impulse to interpret this history within this framework remains commonly compelling in public discourse. More often than not, historical accounts of the Chinese in Canada stress that the bachelors had no spouse or children to share their lives in Canada, yet they continued to stay in Canada even after the passage of the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act since they still had families back home depending on their remittances. And while these bachelors would have lived in destitute conditions in the skid row districts of Chinatowns, what extra money they could spare to send remittances home would go a long way due to the Canadian exchange rate and China's struggling economy. Stories of the solitary, alienated Chinese bachelor abound in the archive of Chinese exclusion. In Cho's documentary, for example, elders reflect on the melancholic absence of normative family life in the bachelor community, an

¹⁴ For more on historical and creative accounts of Chinatown bachelors who did not suffer melancholic, lonely lives, see Elise Chenier's "Sex, Intimacy, and Desire among Men of Chinese Heritage and Women of Non-Asian Heritage," which discusses the range of inter-racial relationships between Chinese men and non-Chinese women in early twentieth-century Toronto; Christopher Kam's play *Bachelor Man*, which includes some characters who enjoyed their homosocial relationships; or Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, which features a Chinese patriarch who prefers his New York Chinatown life over his domestic life with his wife in China.

absence created not by choice but by force. As one elder, James Wing, recalls his childhood days of growing up in a Chinatown bachelor society,

[a]t home I have a mother to take care. Now in Canada, no mother anymore. I live with the workers in the restaurant. The people work long hours. Why they work long hours? They don't care. Why? They have no family. If they don't work, where they go? So they don't care too much--they have no home, no wife. All they have to go back to, where they sleep, that's it.

Views such as Wing's are quite common in readings of the Chinese bachelor society.

Denied the right to build and live with a heteronormative nuclear family unit, working class Chinatown bachelors lived a despondent, empty life without family or intimacy.

Cho pairs this heteronormative understanding of Chinese bachelor sociality with black and white archival photographs representing everyday scenes of Chinatown bachelor life. Wing's account of the Chinatown bachelor is framed by these homosocial images that follow his testimony: Chinese men playing cards, sitting around a fireplace and in a restaurant, standing on sidewalks and streets in front of storefronts, and finally, bed sharing.¹⁵ Shown in isolation, these photographs of male homosocial Chinatown life would not necessarily evoke sadness or melancholia. Just because they lack heteronormative nuclear family units does not mean that they did not generate alternative family structures. However, since this section of Cho's documentary focuses on the absence of women and children, the scenes of homosocial bachelor life are being interpreted for the viewer as lacking social and meaningful fulfilment. In other words,

¹⁵ As Denise Chong recounts in her family memoir, her grandfather Chan Sam cut costs by returning to Chinatown during his time off from work to share the rent on a bunk at a tenement complex: "[t]o cram in more bunks, rooms were crudely partitioned, windowless and no bigger than six feet by eight, with makeshift bunks three deep on each side. Like a game of musical beds, there were more bachelor men sharing the monthly rent than there were bunks" (21-22).

the absence of wives and children equates to an absence of both normative and homosocial desire and intimacy.

For instance, two dramatized scenes framed by normative family structures follow Wing's personal account of the lonely bachelors he grew up with and the archival photographs of Chinatown bachelor life. The first scene opens with a medium long shot of a Chinese temple garden. A solitary Chinese elder, Charlie Quan, who is also interviewed in Cho's documentary, sits on a bench: the soundtrack has switched to a traditional Chinese instrumental composition.¹⁶ Then the scene switches back and forth between Charlie Quan sitting and quietly reflecting in the Chinese temple garden and James Wing walking up and down the streets of a modern day Chinatown. As the shot switches back and forth between these two settings, a male actor performs the following voice-over off-screen:

[m]y beloved wife, it has been several autumns now since your dull husband left you for a far, remote, alien land. Yesterday, I received another of your letters. I could not keep the tears from running down my cheeks, when thinking back to the time of our separation. Because of our destitution I went out to try to make a living. I am detained in the secluded corner of a strange land. My beauty, you are implicated in an endless misfortune. I wish this paper would console you a little. This is all I can do for now.

At the end of the voice-over, a black and white image of a Chinese man painting Chinese calligraphy comes on screen with the following inter-title: "Unfinished Letter, Date unknown." Complementing the perspective of the Chinatown bachelor separated from his spouse and family is the perspective of a wife stranded in China and separated from

¹⁶ The film's soundtrack features original music composed by Janet Lumb and Dino Giancola.

her Gold Mountain husband. Cho transitions to this perspective after including a brief scene from James Wing's family discussing his distant family arrangement: a typical Gold Mountain family arrangement in which the father goes back home to China to start a family but leaves that family behind to return to Canada. Then a series of archival photographs of an aging Gold Mountain mother and son over the years in China ensues as a female actress performs the lines of a Toishan folk song in a voice-over off-screen using Chinese inflected English:

[w]e had been wed for only a few nights, then you left me for Gold Mountain.
For 20 years, you haven't returned. For this, I embrace only resentment in my
bedroom, heaving a sigh for the faraway sojourner, who hasn't come home.
Endless longing for you leads only to streams of falling tears.

This voice-over performance concludes with a close-medium shot of a female elder also interviewed in the documentary, Chow Quen Lee, staring out a window pane as rain drops trickle down. This moving sentimental sequence has been set up to accompany her painful story of being separated from her Gold Mountain husband for eighteen years before reuniting with him.

These heteronormative melancholic love scenes dramatizing separated Gold Mountain spouses and families and the previous sequence on Chinatown bachelor societies have been edited to suggest a heteronormative and biopolitical reading of the period of Chinese exclusion.¹⁷ This order of sequences suggests that the exclusionary

¹⁷ I invoke the concept of biopolitics from Michel Foucault's theorization in his lecture series *Society Must be Defended*. I understand biopolitics to mean a technology of state of power concerned with making segments of a human population live and letting other segments die, a modern rule of state sovereignty that shifted in the eighteenth and nineteenth century from a previous state rule that would only exercise its power to either take away the right of life or let subjects live. Under this new rule of biopower, the state becomes concerned with the management of life, taking measures to control various life processes such as

nature of policies like the Chinese Head Tax and Chinese Immigration Act entailed more than just racial gate keeping: they were an attempt at reducing and eliminating the Chinese Canadian family and hence population altogether. Cho is right to include a period actor performing in a voice-over off-screen the following quote taken from the minutes of a House of Commons meeting in 1924 by an MP, A.W. Neill, on the goal behind instituting the Chinese Immigration Act: “the result might well be that the birthrate will hardly keep up with the death rate. And in time, we may look to their gradual elimination.” Considering that the gendered labour demands from settler nation building industries result in the imbalanced sex ratio of Chinese male immigrants to Chinese female immigrants, it does make sense to read census statistics of Chinese immigrants alongside these state policies as the state’s biopolitical attempt to contain and eradicate the Chinese population in Canada. Since it was assumed at the time that the Chinese were inassimilable foreigners, preventing any further Chinese immigration was deemed a sufficient measure to protect the nation’s racial purity,¹⁸ as it was unthinkable that Chinese migrants could possibly assimilate into the mainstream white settler culture and inter-marry, a process more typical of other white European migrants in settler societies.¹⁹ Therefore, the state grants them the right to remain and “live”—that is, since

“the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population” by making such processes objects of knowledge and targets of control and regulation (Foucault 243).

¹⁸ Of course, intermarriage did take place amongst white settlers, Asian settlers, and Indigenous peoples, so Chinatowns were never quite so monoracial as they have been depicted historically. As Chenier’s account of inter-racial intimacies between Chinese men and non-Chinese women indicates, such relationships were often policed and subject to criminalization. For more, see Renisa Mawani’s *Colonial Proximities*, Mary Lui’s *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery*, and Dorothy Fujita-Rony’s “Crossings and Connections.”

¹⁹ However, racist legislation was passed to ensure that the racial assimilation of Chinese settlers would be avoided. Several anti-miscegenation laws were passed that directly and indirectly targeted racial mixing

they have already been systematically denigrated and rendered unfit for civic and family life, denied the opportunity to sponsor their spouses and family members to migrate to Canada, it is expected that they were to stay, then they would only stay behind to die.

However, a biopolitical and heteronormative reading of Canada's anti-Chinese legislation and its impact on Chinatown communities is just one way of framing the intimate lives of the early Chinese immigrants. Fung's documentary demonstrates that what can be read as an absence of family and intimacy can be re-read as a possibility for non-normative homosocial family structures and desires.²⁰ For example, compare Cho's approach to framing archival material to Fung's approach, particularly the use of literary material produced during the period of Chinese exclusion. Whereas Cho presents a heteronormative reading of a Toishan folk song and an unfinished letter from a Chinese husband with dramatized melancholic scenes of unrequited love, Fung multiply re-stages and reframes the gender and sexual relations of the lines from a poem "My Wife's Admonishment," written by an anonymous author, that had been written on one of the

with Chinese settlers. In British Columbia, for example, "The Women's and Girls' Protection Act of 1923 specified that no one should employ a white or Indian woman or girl in places where morals might be in question" (Li 28). But there was also provincial legislation passed that disallowed the employment of white women in restaurants and other businesses kept or managed by Chinese settlers in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Ontario (Li 29).

²⁰ During the period of anti-Chinese legislation in Canada and the US, "paper sons" and "paper daughters" still managed to immigrate to North America, creating "paper families." This clandestine form of immigration (a term I have borrowed from Cynthia Wright) allowed Chinese migrants to enter the country as the apparent children of Chinese settlers and merchants; such identities and documents were either bought or exchanged in an agreement that would require that the paper son or daughter live with and assist the sponsor in their migrant business to pay off their travel fare and immigration costs. But paper families are also families even if they do not resemble a nuclear family unit: "[t]he phenomenon of 'paper sons' seems to arise from a securely heterosexual, all-male system of economic exchange and resistance to oppression, based on kinship and community alliances. Yet it is also a kind of reproduction, which generates new meanings about kinship and sexuality" (Ting 277).

cell walls in Victoria's immigration detention centre:

[w]ho will braid your hair?
Who will cook your rice?
Who will wash your clothes?
Who will warm your bed?
Not a cup of rice can be scooped from the pot
All our things are broken
Your gambling has driven us to poverty.

In the first staging, the actor playing the character of Roger Kwong appears as an early Chinese settler, quite possibly Kwong's grandfather, in a side profile on-screen in a hazy room lit with an orange glow, representing a warm and loving domestic scene. With a traditional Chinese instrument playing in the background,²¹ a Chinese woman braids the Chinese settler's long hair while a woman actor performs the lines from "My Wife's Admonishment" in a Toishan voice-over. Fung pairs this scene with a talking head interview of Dora Nipp (a historian, lawyer, and community activist) discussing Chinese women villagers who were married to Gold Mountain men and who were used to cultivating long distance relationships with their husbands overseas. Similar to Cho's heteronormative reading of the early Chinese settlers, Fung's first staging of "My Wife's Admonishment" engages with and represents the experience of separated Gold Mountain husbands and wives commonly discussed in the history of Chinese Canadian migrants, but he still raises other possibilities of reading this history.

To set up the film's second staging of the poem, Fung introduces a queer Asian Canadian history and sexual affair between Roger, a culturally assimilated Chinese

²¹ The traditional Chinese instrumental music in the film is composed by the contemporary Chinese Canadian artist Lee Pui Ming (Francis, *Creative Subversions* 81-82).

Canadian “guppy” who cannot speak Chinese, and a porter, a recent Chinese immigrant, on the train.²² It is significant that the story of the film’s queer Chinese Canadian protagonist immediately follows the heteronormative staging of the poem. In this scene, Roger sits alone in a train compartment and falls asleep while reading the history of the early Chinese settlers; when he falls asleep, he knocks over and breaks the glass frame of the photograph of his great-grandfather, only to discover the hidden photograph of his great-grandfather holding hands with another Chinese man, played by the same actor who plays the porter in the present-day story. It is at this point that the train attendant begins to overtly flirt with Roger. As they interact, Roger shows him both photographs and tells him that he does not know how to read the second photograph, to which the train attendant remarks, as he places his hand on Roger’s, that it is normal for men to hold hands in China. As Margot Francis and Gina Marchetti point out in their readings of *Dirty Laundry*, this observation by the train steward may only refer to homosocial practices of male friendship and platonic affection that are, in turn, being read as queer in a contemporary and Western sense by Roger and the viewer, a sense of queerness that would have registered differently in a past Chinese culture (Marchetti 83; Francis 191). Furthermore, as Marchetti argues in her re-reading of the historical construction of the lonely bachelor, “going to Gold Mountain appears for some Chinese immigrant men to be less a burden of separation from hearth and home and more a liberation from arranged

²² A “guppy” is basically a gay version of the “yuppy” or present-day bougie, shortened term for bourgeois—a gay, upwardly mobile professional—a characterization provided in Margot Francis and Gina Marchetti’s readings of *Dirty Laundry*.

marriages and heterosexual norms” (82). However, this scene is not primarily concerned with locating or authenticating queer subjectivity in a traditional Chinese past. The porter’s observation suggests that space for homosocial intimacy and sexual desire between men was considered normative and perhaps even preferable in China, which constitutes a subversive statement on two registers. Firstly, it may be the porter’s way of affirming Chinese male intimate relations and speaking against orientalist stereotypes such as Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan that gendered and sexualized Chinese men as effeminate and morally aberrant. Secondly, it reverses and challenges common understandings of the West as a liberal, enlightened, and progressive site for gender and sexual relations and the East as backward, primitive, traditional, and always already extremely homophobic towards queer subjects when, as Foucault has theorized in *The History of Sexuality*, non-normative sexual practices were discursively produced, disciplined, and made into “abnormal” subjects of knowledge and subjectivities in the West in the first place.²³

It is politically significant that the new Chinese immigrant porter introduces this Chinese notion of normative homosocial intimacies to Roger, the Western educated assimilated Chinese guppy, and that as men of colour, as queer Asian men, they end up having hot gay sex in the film: indeed, desire is political.²⁴ According to Marchetti,

²³ In the first volume to *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault notes a significant shift at the beginning of the eighteenth century that changed the way in which diverse sexual practices and desires became understood and policed in society. There was an increasing political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex, “to speak of it as a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all [...] Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered” (23-24).

²⁴ Thomas Waugh points out that sexual representation, particularly queer sexual performance, performs an

Fung's use of the porter challenges racist and classist stereotypes about Chinese Canadians that run rampant not only in the dominant white settler Canadian society but also within Asian communities: as she puts it,

[b]ecause of his class standing and recent immigrant status, the porter should be tied to the past, to a 'purer' Chinese tradition, subordinate to the more prosperous, Western-educated Roger. [...] the porter takes the lead in bed as well as acting as cultural guide. [...] Erudite, far from passive, and assertive, the Chinese immigrant emerges as more than a relic of a past when possibly gay Chinese labourers built the railroad. Rather, he becomes a vital part of Roger's (and Canada's and Greater China's) present understanding of the Chinese queerscape. (87-88)

To add to Marchetti's point, the porter can be read as a "FOB" (a pejorative term for new immigrants that stands for Fresh Off the Boat) by not only xenophobic non-immigrant whites but also assimilated Chinese Canadians like Roger. It is a form of internalized racism that shapes how Chinese Canadians relate to and identify with other Chinese who resemble them phenotypically but remind them in terms of class, culture, and language why assimilated Chinese will never be read as fully "Canadian," no matter how hard they perform as model minorities. This intra-racial phenomenon of xenophobia is compounded even further for Asians navigating gay communities that are overwhelmingly white. As Fung has insightfully written in his influential classic, "Looking for My Penis," queer Asian men have frequently been rendered illegible in the racial hierarchy in gay communities and gay erotic cultural productions; if queer Asian

important queer politics in Fung's films; and this sexual element in Fung's films is a common element in a body of hybrid documentaries that were made in the 1990s—for example, Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Tied* (1991)—films that represented, according to Laura Marks, "the 'engaging [of] desire,' the 'reclaiming of sexual pleasure on their own terms'" (qtd. in Waugh 166). But I would add that Fung's decision to include a racialized sexual performance scene between two Asian queer men from different class and cultural backgrounds is just as politically significant in his project's overall engagement with and reclamation of queer sexual desire.

men are to be desired at all, they circulate as feminized, passive, and subservient figures for the white male colonial gaze. Unfortunately, given the strong potential for internalizing this racial hierarchy of desire, it could adversely impact the ability of Asian men like Roger living in the West to sexually desire “fobby” men like the porter let alone identify them with progressive and affirming queer values and politics. If a new Chinese immigrant like the porter has the potential to raise these racial, class, gender, ethnic, and sexual complexities, then the relationship between a Chinese settler descendant like Roger and his family’s origins would prove to be even more complex and politically fraught. But Fung addresses and reframes these complexities through the story of the porter and Roger, who in the course of the film’s narrative shifts from desiring and identifying with white gay Canadian men to identifying with and desiring not only Asian Canadian men but specifically Asian “fobby” men, a shift in desire that also culminates in a politicized Asian queer consciousness “based on a rediscovered history of Chinese Canadian homosexuality” (Marchetti 83).

It is during the film’s discussion of homophobic discourses and Roger’s erotic exchange with the train attendant that Fung introduces the second staging of “My Wife’s Admonishment.” In this version of the poem, the actor playing the train attendant replaces the wife of the early Chinese settler in the previous version; as he braids the long hair of the Gold Mountain husband, a male actor performs the first four lines from the poem in a Toishan voice-over. But this re-staging of the poem is not the last re-reading of the intimate lives of the early Chinese settler community that Fung offers. He also includes a silent performance of two Asian women positioned in the soft orange glow

scene—this time, a South Asian woman braiding the hair of the actor who plays the Chinese queer woman passenger in the fictional narrative of the film—thus, making room for queer love between Asian women settlers. This queer female version of the domestic scene from “My Wife’s Admonishment” accompanies the documentary section of historians discussing the gendered and sexually exploited experiences of the early Chinese women settlers and their non-normative family arrangements during the period of exclusion, a historical account that tends to get overlooked and overshadowed by stories and experiences of Chinese women from more reputable middle class bourgeois families.²⁵ In Fung’s treatment of the intimate lives of the early Chinese settler community, the loved one receiving or delivering “My Wife’s Admonishment” does not have to be a heteronormative Chinese male patriarch or matriarch. As the historian Nayan Shah points out in the documentary, historical archives are never complete and the lives and experiences of the marginalized and excluded members of society do not always receive commemoration or acknowledgement from state agents, archivists, or scholars: any materials relating to their lives would not be deemed legitimate or important enough to be preserved and archived by the state.²⁶ Therefore, with what historical traces of

²⁵ In her preface, Denise Chong discusses the initial discomfort that people in her community had over the publication of *The Concubine’s Children*. As she puts it, “*The Concubine’s Children* was perhaps the first book-length, non-fiction narrative published of those early Chinatowns in Canada. While those who cooperated with me in my research were generous and many, there were a very few others who were uneasy at, even affronted by, the book’s publication, the transgression of ‘going public’ made worse by the main subject’s lowly stature—my grandmother as a tea house waitress” (xv).

²⁶ Take, for example, the Chinese poetry carved by Chinese immigrant detainees into the walls of the former immigration building in Victoria. While some of the poems have been photographed and incorporated in the national archives of Canada, the building itself, once an immigration processing centre for not only Chinese but also Japanese, Russian, Dutch, Italian, Greek, and Hungarian immigrants, was demolished in 1977; it had remained empty since its closure in 1958 (Bell par 7). Due to the efforts of a real estate developer, all that remains of this important historic building that first opened in 1907 and

homosocial intimacies that Fung has managed to find from the archive of Chinese exclusion, he presents historical and fictional material in this metahistorical and metafictional way to not only imagine otherwise but to also rediscover, recuperate, and render legible the homosocial desires and non-normative living arrangements of the early Chinese male and female settlers, an airing of a community's dirty laundry that has been hidden and disavowed.

Fung's documentary incorporates an intersectional anti-racist perspective on multiple levels. Viewers familiar with Fung's oeuvre would know that questions of race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and diaspora consistently frame his creative projects. Viewers unfamiliar with the themes he typically incorporates in his films would at least pick-up on his political involvement in the queer AIDS and Asian Canadian queer and anti-racist activist movement from the dedication at the end of *Dirty Laundry* to several gay Asian pioneers (Siong-huat Chua, Kirby Hsu, Pei Lim, Lloyd Wong), who were lost in the battle with AIDS.²⁷ But the most compelling narrative strategy in Fung's

detained primarily Chinese immigrants (at times housing up to 200 people in triple-decker bunk beds as they awaited the processing of their immigration applications) is a large spruce tree and monkey puzzle tree planted by the first immigration agent as well as the building's original concrete and wrought-iron fence around the perimeter (Bell par 2-4). A brief ceremony was organized on-site by Three Point Properties on October 31, 2006 to announce their plans to contribute a memorial plaque honouring the historical significance of the site and to donate \$2,500 to the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria and the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society, community organizations that assist new immigrants today. The historical significance given to the former site differs substantially from that shown towards Pier 21 in Halifax, which served as an immigration centre for European migrants from 1928 to 1971 and then sat idle until it was transformed into Canada's Museum of Immigration in 1999.

²⁷ Community activism, and especially AIDS activism, has been central to Fung and his works. He and his partner, Tim McCaskell, played a key role in founding the AIDS coalition in Toronto (ACT) and internationally. Since 1985, he has been making films that have been essential to building the anti-racist and queer Chinese Canadian movement, films ranging from increasing community awareness about safe

documentary is his refusal to tell a “single-stranded” historical narrative.²⁸ His documentary does not simply re-invent the history of the excluded Chinese bachelor. While he does suggest that a range of homosocial intimacies existed and were perhaps preferable amongst the early Chinese bachelors, Fung is not simply replacing a heteronormative bachelor community with a homonormative version. He links the history of the early Chinese bachelors with another “dirty” and “shameful” strand of Chinese Canadian history that tends to be disavowed and overlooked by more “respectable” accounts of Chinese Canadian history: that is, the Chinese “prostitute.” The early Chinese sex worker becomes an unwieldy historical figure to analyze due to the way this figure was categorized by government officials. As pointed out by Nayan Shah in *Dirty Laundry*, if Chinese female immigrants arrived as unmarried independents in Canada, they were either listed as “prostitutes” or self-registered as seamstresses since their labour contract entailed that they perform tailor work by day and sex work by night. Therefore, whether these early Chinese female settlers were sex workers or not, they were automatically positioned as sexually available for men’s pleasure. Early Chinese “bachelors” and “bachelorettes” faced a confluence of intersecting oppressions: positioned outside the private domestic sphere, these figures circulated as criminalized sites of moral perversion. Chinese bachelors were read as “sodomites” whereas Chinese bachelorettes were read as “prostitutes.”²⁹

sex to the intersecting challenges that queer Asians face in their ethnic communities to rendering queer Asians and queer Asian desire legible on film.

²⁸ Just to recap, “single-stranded” is Fung’s term (Francis, *Creative Subversions* 179).

²⁹ According to Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, in “Racist Love,” a discourse of white supremacy creates both negative and positive stereotypes of racialized minorities. Negative stereotypes such as the

Fung's pairing of the denigrated Chinese bachelor with the marginalized Chinese sex worker sets up an intersection that tends to get overlooked in the scholarship on Chinese exclusion in Canada: racist and Orientalist constructions of the Chinese settler, as well as heteronormative readings of the Chinese settler under exclusion, have contributed to the overall erasure and disavowal of non-normative forms of intimacy and family arrangements in the early Chinese settler community. As Ting argues in her review of Asian American historiography produced up until the 1990s, "[i]t is quite striking that this history writing insists on both the absence of Chinese women in the U.S. and the exclusive heterosexuality of Chinese immigrant men" (Ting 277). Indeed, the early Asian American settler community can only exist on heteronormative terms in these scholarly accounts: any non-normative manifestation equated only to racial injustice and sexual melancholy. In Canadian scholarship, the historiography on Chinese Canadian settlers and immigrants demonstrates a striking parallel. For instance, Fung's documentary places the scene of Roger's discovery about his great-grandfather alongside the history of homophobic legislation and discourses that specifically targeted Chinese men in Canada. This history of criminalized homosexuality correlated with disenfranchising, excluding, and labelling Chinese "bachelors" as "sodomites," homophobic allegations that have yet to be substantially analyzed by Canadian historians (Francis 196), but an invisibility that

feared Fu Manchu figure originate from a racist hate for Asians, whereas positive stereotypes such as the Charlie Chan figure constitute a form of racist love for Asians (65). Charlie Chan, the portly intelligent detective who cleverly outwits villains and solves crimes is lovable because he is hardly a racial and masculine threat. Chin and Chan are right to argue against the way in which racist love effeminizes Asian men, but as King-Kok Cheung points out, if "'racist love' denies 'manhood' to Asian men, it endows Asian women with an excess of 'womanhood'" (236).

at least has begun to be examined by Asian Canadian studies scholars and Asian artists in Canada.³⁰ Whereas heteronormative accounts of Chinese exclusion tend to focus on the absence of and exclusion from cultivating normative family structures as being the one of the most egregious injustices enacted upon the early Chinese settlers, Fung chooses to link the history of anti-Chinese immigration legislation with the history of sodomy laws that criminalized sexual activity between men at the same time to suggest that homosocial and homosexual forms of intimacy and family structures could have existed amongst the early Chinese settlers and that these histories of criminalization often intersected to keep the nation racially pure and heteronormative.

Multiple Absences Haunting the CPR

A haunting absence overshadows Cho's documentary: the absence of the Head Tax generation excluded from the nation, the absence of the generation who sacrificed their bodies to build the railway and provide cheap labour to resource extraction industries and its shadow economies. To counteract this absence, an absence from school books across Canada, Chinese Head Tax certificates crop up throughout the documentary: as do black and white archival photographs of Chinese labourers panning for gold, shirtless Chinese men staring directly at the camera, and countless other scenes of everyday life during the Gold Rush. This Head Tax generation may be long gone but

³⁰ Francis does not know of any other Canadian artists to have "dealt with the possibilities or allegations of same-sex sexual practices among early 'bachelor' settlers of any race" (198n7). Aside from Fung's *Dirty Laundry*, I would say that his collaborative film project *Rex vs. Singh* (2008) with Ali Kazimi and John Greysen would constitute such a treatment of this under-examined history of criminalizing and sexualizing the early Asian "bachelor" in Canada. See also Nayan Shah's *Stranger Intimacy*, Winston Christopher Kam's *Bachelor-Man*, and Goellnicht's "Kai-Dai."

their experiences evoked by this archival imagery still have the power to incite profound feelings in the viewer. Combined with the talking head interviews of Head Tax payers and their surviving family members, these Head Tax certificates and photographs of deceased Chinese labourers and families living under an era of exclusion and discrimination have the capacity to elicit a response of melancholic grief from the viewer. The response can take the form of memorializing these generations: finding ways to honour their experiences and to never forget the effects of legislative exclusion on their lives.

In the section of *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain* that introduces the viewer to the history of the Gold Rush precipitating the immigration of Chinese as miners and other hard labourers, as well as the socio-political context surrounding the implementation of discriminatory immigration policies levelled at regulating the influx of more Chinese immigrants, Cho features a talking head interview of a Head Tax elder, Gim Wong. In the context of the increases to the Chinese Head Tax as a method of obstructing Chinese immigration, Wong tells the audience, “[t]o me I think it was a terrible insult. The kids that put their heart into helping build the railroad, which was the lifeline of Canada.” Then the shot switches to a sequence of black and white video footage of a train moving across the Canadian landscape: there is a train moving through different prairie landscapes; there are different angles of the train while in motion; there is footage from the train’s point of view, passing by a white woman and children at a railway station; then there is a long shot of a train moving across a mountain landscape that includes two mountain ranges and a forest background with smoke rising from the train. This final

shot is superimposed with the following lines from a poem by F.R. Scott, “All the Spikes But the Last,” published in 1966:

[w]here are the coolies in your poem, Ned?
Where are the thousands from China who swung
their picks with bare hands at 40 below?
Between the first and the million other spikes
they drove and the dressed-up act of
Donald Smith,³¹ who has sung their story?
Did they fare so well in the land they helped to
unite? Did they get one of the 25, 000 CPR acres?
Is all Canada has to say to them written in the Chinese
Immigration Act? (64)

Meanwhile, the movement of the train across the mountainous forest landscape is still visible: the train smoke can be seen moving across the page of the poem.

In Wong’s talking head interview, he recites this poem from memory as a response to the history of Chinese exclusion. He sets up Scott’s poem by reminding the viewer that this poem was Scott’s response to a long poem written by E.J. Pratt, *Towards the Last Spike*, that was published in 1952. As he recites this poem, the superimposed poem and train imagery are gradually replaced by another black and white train video sequence of a spike being hammered into a piece of track and a head-on low angle shot of a train coming towards the camera’s point of view. With a dramatic increase of pacing, this sequence switches back and forth between the spike being hammered and the train coming, with the train eventually running over the camera’s point of view. Since the shot switches to the perspective of being run over by the train, in the context of Wong’s

³¹ Donald Smith was a financier for the CPR who posed in a famous ceremonial photograph that marked the completion of the CPR’s construction in 1885 (November 7, 1885, 4 months after the first Head Tax policy was instituted). Cho uses this photograph but critiques its celebratory message for excluding the Chinese CPR labourer.

performance of the poem, the sequence also implies that the train is running roughshod over an unseen Chinese labourer installing a piece of track, an implication drawn from the next shot featuring the iconic photo-op of Donald Smith presumably hammering in the last spike of the CPR with white railway labourers. Altogether, Cho brings together the intertextual message behind Scott's poem, Scott's poem being performed by a Head Tax elder, black and white shots of a train moving across a Canadian landscape, and the sequence of, presumably, an unseen labourer being run over by the train to convey the following message: the Chinese labourer has been erased and disavowed in our national imaginary. Texts like Scott's poem ask its audience to uncover and pay tribute to a forgotten yet integral agent in the building of Canada.

The question—"Where are all the coolies [...]?"—is a question that Scott's speaker asks, a question directed specifically at Pratt for writing a long poem dramatizing the turbulent national politics leading up to the construction and eventual completion of the CPR, a project crucial to Canada's confederation from coast from coast.³² It is a significant presence of labour and sacrifice that should not be erased and should be privileged in the national imaginary, according to the speaker in Scott's poem, when the speaker interrogates Pratt and asks, "who has sung their story?"—the story of the 81 000 Chinese labourers who entered Canada as second class, disenfranchised migrants, the 81

³² Approximately 17,000 Chinese labourers were recruited to work for Andrew Onderdonk to build the most dangerous stretch of the railway in British Columbia (*Chao Beyond Silence* 6). Underpaid, they worked without safety devices, medical attendance, and a fresh food supply: consequently, many died from accidents and diseases though the exact number has been a subject of debate, for Onderdonk's conservative estimate cited that 600 Chinese died during the construction whereas a community resource claims that 4,000 died instead (*Chao Beyond Silence* 6).

000 Chinese settlers who paid a total of \$23 million in Head Tax money, a curious amount since the CPR that the Chinese labourers helped to build cost the Canadian government \$25 million to build.³³

Here we have a poem by Scott that tries to honour and pay tribute to the Chinese migrant labourer. Then in Cho's documentary, we have the son of a Head Tax Payer, Gim Wong, expressing his dismay over the Head Tax being implemented after the Chinese labourers helped build the CPR—he then brackets his dismay by recalling and reciting this poem by Scott, imbuing this poem with great rhetorical power as he is the son of a Head Tax Payer. Texts like Scott's poem and this scene from Cho's documentary interrogate accounts of the nation's past framed by a nationalist narrative that celebrates the labour contributions of Euro-Canadian male settlers. However, by privileging and asserting the absent presence of the Chinese labourer, texts such as Cho's also contribute to naturalizing a nationalist settler colonial logic even as they upend patriotic sentiments by pointing to the nation's shamefully racist past.

But the film ends on an ambivalent note: near the end, there is a curious repudiation of the nation, an unsettled ambivalence expressed towards national identity and inclusion that complicates the film's final gesture to correct and reclaim the nation's unsavoury past. In a film that sets out to both expose the nation's ugly racist past and memorialize the disavowed Chinese labourer, the call for national inclusion and recognition is hardly that simple or straightforward. It is not simply an argument to move

³³ I have drawn these monetary figures from Cho's documentary.

on now that the ugly truth behind Dominion Day has been revealed. Cho incorporates a fascinating sequence rife with both nationalistic sentiment and scrutiny, involving again the elder Gim Wong. The sequence draws on an earlier episode of Wong interacting with schoolchildren, but this time, it features him singing the Canadian anthem in front of the classroom, with the children also standing and singing along with him. Then the shot switches to a front view of Gim Wong riding his motorcycle in a residential back alley; as he slowly approaches the camera and comes to a complete stop, there is a sign on the front of his motorcycle written in the same colour and font used on Molson Canadian beer products that says, “Am I Canadian?” At this point, Wong turns to the viewer and says, “[a]ll through my life, I’ve asked myself that: ‘Am I Canadian?’ All though my life, I’ve asked that question.” The scene ends with a close-up shot of Wong’s motorcycle sign.

On the one hand, Wong’s self-scrutiny of national inclusion and belonging can be read as an unfortunate effect of state racism: even after acquiring equality and civil rights, racialized Canadians like Wong who have lived through the era of exclusion may never feel like they will ever truly belong here. Yet, on the other hand, Wong’s moment of self-scrutiny can be read as a resistant stance undermining the nationalistic framing of the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada. Before the federal government passed an act creating the NFB on May 2, 1939, just one year prior, government officials hired the British documentary pioneer John Grierson to review their previous motion picture department, “which he argued needed a tune-up in order for Canada to sell itself for commerce and tourism overseas” (Waugh and Winton 138). Its mandate in 1950, originally set forth in the *National Film Act*, aimed “to produce and distribute and to

promote the production and distribution of films designed to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations (“Mandate”).”³⁴ Since its creation, the NFB has sought to fulfill its original mandate with “the documentary vocations of propaganda, nation-building, civic education, entertainment, art and advocacy to a degree unmatched elsewhere” (Waugh and Winton 138). However, as the NFB funded and included more voices and perspectives from marginalized populations in Canada since the 1970s, such as the stories and experiences of female, Indigenous, racialized minority, LGBTQ, and poor and working class communities, the NFB has also provided space for critiquing as well as building the nation, thus laying “the groundwork for what would become a national cinema and [...] a political bellwether [acting...] more or less efficiently as a kind of political conscience for the nation” (Waugh and Winton 142).

This paradoxical impulse embedded in the NFB’s mandate and extensive output, to both critique and strengthen the nation’s cohesion by acting as its “political conscience,” shows through in Cho’s documentary. In the final closing sequence, there is a close-up shot of a metal fence gate; the camera switches its focus to a background view of the CN train and grassy landscape, blurring the focus of the gate in the foreground. Then there is a tracking shot of a faraway body of water through beams of a bridge, and Cho’s closing voice-over begins: “[b]y sharing their stories with me, the survivors of the Head Tax and exclusion years helped me discover my roots in this country. I now know

³⁴ Having undergone several revisions since its original mandate, the mission of the NFB now aims to “reflect Canada, and matters of interest to Canadians, to Canada and the rest of the world through creating and distributing innovative and distinctive audiovisual works based on Canadian points of view and values (“Mandate”).”

that with every mile of track laid, and every dollar of Head Tax paid, I am Canadian. And as a Canadian, I'm taking back that day of humiliation, and calling July 1st my own." Cho's positive affirmation and acceptance of a history of Chinese exclusion can be read as a nationalistic re-claiming of Canadian identity and heritage. If anything, this history of nation building and being excluded from the nation makes descendants like her Canadian par excellence. It is an origin story for Chinese Canadian settlers and their descendants. It provides a moral charge that lays powerful claims to national belonging and inclusion. So yes, the previous sequence of Wong questioning his Canadianness can be read under a nationalistic framework: will racialized Canadians ever belong and feel included in the nation? Or the previous sequence might be allowing room for placing the nation under constant scrutiny, asking yet a slightly different question: will the nation ever stop excluding and discriminating against difference? Despite this ambivalence levelled against the nation in Cho's documentary, there still remains the problem of wanting to be included as part of a settler nation in the first place.

This reflection on the place of the Chinese settler within the settler state disavows another long forgotten absence haunting the history of the CPR: the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous nations and communities across the western prairies. What would happen to the moral charge embedded in historical and creative accounts of the exploited and excluded Chinese labourer if they also considered the land and colonial histories on which the CPR was built? Would the anti-racist lens that frames such accounts require an epistemological retooling? And what would that retooling look like? In British Columbia, for example, the Canadians for Reconciliation Society (CFRS) has

organized a project that positions the history of Chinese exploited labour on unceded West Coast Salishan territory. Bill Chu, the founder of the CFRS, provides historical tours along the Fraser Canyon up to Lytton, Lilloet, and Mount Currie that aim “to educate Canadians on the ‘real’ shared history of Indigenous and Chinese people in British Columbia—a province built, as Chu says, on ‘free land, with half-price labour’” (Mittelstedt par 5). To acknowledge that exploited Chinese labour took place on free (that is, appropriated) Indigenous land is not to equate these oppressions; it recognizes instead that the history of Chinese exclusion is historically embedded in multiple layers of exclusion and divestment. To emphasize that half-price Chinese labour took place on appropriated Indigenous land is to move away from settler nationalist readings of the excluded Chinese labourer as a significant contributor who deserves to be memorialized and recognized by the settler nation state. Focusing only on the exclusion and exploitation of the CPR Chinese labourer without taking the settler encroachment of Indigenous territory into account maintains a narrow perspective concerned only with advancing settler social justice.

Historical and creative accounts of the Chinese CPR labourer rarely consider the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples upon which the CPR was built. It is more common to acknowledge the labour contributions of the Chinese CPR labourer as central to the building of the nation state. Any scholarly and historical treatment of the Chinese labourer’s contribution to the building of the CPR must also take into account that the CPR was a significant factor in the dispossession, displacement, and military subjugation of Indigenous nations and communities across the prairies. Lawrence and

Dua have argued that Chinese exclusion policies such as the Head Tax and other legislation policies that restricted non-European immigration to Western Canada cannot be separated from the suppression of the Cree and Blackfoot peoples after the 1885 Rebellion (135), a link that Fung at least includes in his documentary but receives no mention in Cho's.³⁵ Instead, Cho references the Dominions Lands Act that provided preferential treatment to her British ancestors and not her Chinese ancestors, failing to mention whose land and culture was being appropriated and disrupted to provide cheap "free" land for the resettlement of her ancestors in the first place. Since the building of the railway served to increase non-Indigenous settlement across the West, the CPR required help from the Dominion government to advance western settlement so current and future settlers would actually use the CPR as a means of transportation; so the CPR received 10 million hectares of land between Ontario and the Rocky Mountains from the government for building the railway, plus \$25 million and other concessions, decisions made without consulting the Indigenous nations and communities living on the land upon which the CPR was to be built (Francis, *National Dreams* 22-23). The corporation was expected to finance the railroad by way of selling this "free" land to new settlers and immigrants (Francis, *National Dreams* 23). But before this land became "free" new land for non-Indigenous and non-European settlement, Blackfoot, Cree, and Métis peoples

³⁵ Just some examples of the exclusion and subjugation of Cree and Blackfoot peoples include the implementation of pass laws, policing of reserves, outlawing of spiritual ceremonies, increasing the power and discretion of the Indian Agent, levelling charges of treason and starvation policies against 28 Cree bands, imprisoning "50 other Crees that accompanied the hanging of Louis Riel and the crushing of the Metis" and "the denial of matrimonial rights and labelling of Aboriginal women as prostitutes in efforts to drive Native women out of white settlements" (Lawrence and Dua 139-140n13).

were forced to relocate. Some were asked to move to reserves set aside for them through a treaty-making process with the Dominion government, a process considered by the state to be peaceful, fair, and complete when the agreement reached between the Métis and the federal government in 1870, for example, had not guaranteed the protection of Native and Métis land rights as had been expected, a major factor that led to the 1885 Rebellion (Reid 14). In fact, the Canadian government did not have to confront its “own problem with the politicized mobility of western First Nations people, and its still-incomplete knowledge and control over western spaces”—that is, not until the onset of the North West Rebellion (McManus 65). In historical and creative accounts of the Chinese railway labourers during the period of Chinese exclusion, Indigenous accounts of military force and dishonoured treaties on the western prairies are rarely acknowledged with the exception of Fung’s documentary.

Thus, any history of the oppressive legacies of the CPR would not be complete without an account of its crucial role in the military suppression of the 1885 Rebellion. When the Métis resistance led by Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont in Saskatchewan declared a provisional government and routed a party of Mounted Police, thus “raising the spectre of an all-out frontier war,” “[t]he CPR offered its partially-completed line to move a force of almost 3000 soldiers quickly westward from Ontario to quell the insurrection” (Francis, *National Dreams* 22). Without the help of the CPR, the Rebellion would have turned out very differently as “it was the railway, rather than the military, that tipped the balance of power with Indigenous peoples and made the outcome of the struggle for the western territories inevitable” (Francis, *Creative Subversions* 66-67). Moreover, with the

over-hunting of bison by the settlers, the building of the CPR furthered the loss of wild game and caused damage to ecosystems that Indigenous nations and communities on the prairies relied upon for their traditional and economic livelihood and sustenance (Francis, *Creative Subversions* 66; Reid 15; Tovias 24). With the disappearance of the bison, First Nations communities like the Blackfoot lost their basic mode of subsistence (Tovias 24). Métis and other Indigenous nations and communities knew that the railway would negatively impact their independence and continued livelihood: in fact, “the CPR was, in part, responsible for the disastrous loss of game that sustained Indigenous peoples’ livelihood as well as for the prairie fires that destroyed Indigenous land while damaging grazing lands and livestock” (Francis, *Creative Subversions* 66). As Chief Foremost Man (Nekaneet) once powerfully described the negative impact of the CPR on the lives of Indigenous peoples in an eloquent speech,

[l]et them [Euro-Canadians] take back the blankets and return the buffalo robes. Let them send the buffalo back, and take their own people to the reserve where they came from. Give us the prairies again and we won’t ask for food. But it is too late. The iron road has frightened the game away and the talking wire stretches from sunrise to sunset. It is too late; it is too late. (qtd. in Francis, *Creative Subversions* 67)

Acknowledging that the exclusion and discrimination of Chinese settlers took place on appropriated Indigenous territories forces the anti-racist scholar to reframe his or her arguments for settler social justice. The experience of exclusion almost always precipitates a desire for belonging, a desire for a home. But what happens when we re-read these desires as dispossessive? What happens when we question the feeling of at-home-ness that we so desire? As Scott Lauria Morgensen asks,

[w]hat does it mean for non-Natives, located differently as they are by race and nationality, to study their formation in a settler society: knowing one's home is not one's own; knowing one feels at home only to the degree that others remain dispossessed; being accountable to histories of Native displacement by questioning one's sense of place? (122)

Thus far in my study I have attempted to re-read the history of Chinese exclusion in ways that do not produce or reproduce the absence of Indigeneity that settler sovereignty depends upon, ways that do not reify and naturalize the settler colonial state as inevitable and invariable. Such an approach to re-reading the history of Chinese exclusion needs to interrogate the iconic imagery of the CPR railway and western landscape seen from the view of a moving rail car. Both Cho and Fung incorporate this iconic imagery in their documentaries but with a major difference: they project Asian bodies against this backdrop as a way of complicating Canada's nation building metanarrative by reminding the viewer that this railway was once built by the Head Tax generation for extremely low wages. Depending on the framework deployed not only by the filmmaker but also the critic, these video sequences of Asian bodies projected against the iconic imagery of the CPR may render single-stranded or multiply-stranded readings of the historical absences that overlay the CPR. In Thomas Waugh's reading of *Dirty Laundry*, for example, he discusses the image of transcontinental locomotion as

a traditional Canadian cultural and historical motif, the Canadian Pacific Railroad construction of the eighteen-hundreds allowing the British colonies to defensively and reactively cement their precarious confederation against American imperial designs. The railway set in motion a literary and cinematic procession over the next century of East-West rail passengers, claiming or reclaiming, discovering or rediscovering national trajectories, bonds and fissures through moving over the land. Fung thus turns a nation-building myth inside-out into a subversive vehicle of alternative national history. (173-74)

Waugh also goes on to read Fung's insertion of the Chinese laundress/prostitute/seamstress staring up at the Rockies as subverting "a pastoral cliché of our national white settler mythology" (174). Waugh's reading of the iconic mythology embedded within the building of the railroad and its transcontinental travel reveals the Canadian railway's multiple competing layers of history: the dominion of Canada, Canadian settler resistance to American imperialism, and an excluded Chinese presence. The queer and gendered Chinese settler subjects in *Dirty Laundry* have steamy train sex and stare back at the nation, as represented by the iconic western mountain Canadian setting peeping through the rail car window: their insertion subverts the status quo and calls attention to the historical exclusion and construction of the early Chinese settlers as non-normative subjects.

But Waugh's reading of the Asian bodies projected against the myth of the nation-building railway completely overlooks the displacements and dispossessions of Indigenous peoples upon which these video subversions take place. To read this queer racialized presence as a subversive alternative reclaiming of national history risks staking a settler homonationalist claim for the national inclusion and belonging of Chinese queers. Morgensen's reworking of Jasbir Puar's concept of homonationalism within Indigenous studies is a useful framework to consider in order to avoid cultivating settler homonationalist readings of the archive of Chinese exclusion. Building on Puar's theorization of how racialized sexuality and national terror interact in order to exalt heteronormative whiteness as well as white liberal queerness, Morgensen repositions the biopolitics of modern sexuality within processes of colonization to put forth his concept

of settler homonationalism. As he puts it, settler definitions of modern sexuality became hegemonic for all settlers as well as for Indigenous people; while queer movements formed on normatively white and national terms by the middle of the twentieth century in the US, non-Indigenous queers of colour remained marginal to these projects or critiqued them: however,

over time non-Natives [that is, non-Indigenous white queers and queers of colour] were able to form shared identities and movements to claim modern sexual citizenship in the settler state. Under such conditions, queer movements can naturalize settlement and assume a homonormative and national form that may be read specifically as settler homonationalism. (106)

Morgensen's account of how white queers as well as queers of colour have eventually been incorporated by the state as a result of minority struggles for sexual citizenship in the US is instructive on two levels. First, his account demonstrates a central problem that minority struggle movements face: unless they incorporate intersectional approaches in their organizing efforts, they risk occluding other intersecting oppressions, thus reifying larger structural oppressions within their community struggles for political recognition and inclusion within and from the nation-state. Second, even if these struggles became more intersectional and were inclusive of a multitude of marginalizations, as demonstrated by the coalitional shift in the queer movement to include the voices of queers of colour, as long as they disavow their relationality to settler colonialism, they will naturalize colonial settlement and their struggles will end up exalting a settler nationalism that is inclusive of all except Indigenous communities, tribes, and nations.

While I find Morgensen's conceptualization of settler homonationalism via Puar to provide an important settler colonial critique, I also wonder whether Fung's *Dirty*

Laundry already articulates a queer position that advocates turning away from the seductive logic of settler homonationalism. *Dirty Laundry*'s central thesis asks us to pay attention to the ways in which we approach the past, and how we make meaning of the past shapes how we imagine building the future. It is an imaginative project that attempts to reclaim the homosocial desires and intimacies of the early Chinese settlers, but is it a simple queering of the settler nation? Waugh offers a settler homonationalist reading of *Dirty Laundry* that is not entirely clear or present in Fung's imagining and treatment of Chinese exclusion. For Waugh, "in the corridors and discreet compartments of its expansive studio-constructed train, Chinese diasporas repeatedly come together with the queer nation" (170). While Fung's usage of the iconic transcontinental locomotion motif does invite a settler homonationalist reading such as Waugh's, the film does not begin or end on this angle. What frames the film are the two photographs of the Chinese patriarch posing in a constructed bourgeois photography studio set with orientalist props and furniture, which suggest a complicated engagement with queering the nation that also takes place visually beyond the nation and highlights the constructed and mediated relationship that we have with the past. As Marchetti argues, in Fung's "rewriting of history, the traditional Chinese patriarch becomes the queer sojourner, and his existence serves as a critique of nationalism, ethnocentrism, and phallocentrism as well as homophobia throughout the Chinese diaspora" (88). I build on Marchetti to suggest that *Dirty Laundry* models an alternative queer politics to settler homonationalism: it offers a multiply-stranded way of approaching the history and memory of exclusion that generates a sense of belonging beyond the structure of the settler nation state.

Decolonial Lessons from the Archive of Chinese Exclusion

Coming out of different Asian Canadian political movements and periods, Cho and Fung's documentaries articulate an anti-racist perspective that aims to inform its viewers of the history of Chinese exclusion, a history that they also try to bridge with historical oppressions of other communities who have also faced exclusion and denigration on the basis of race. In rallying support for and spreading awareness about the Redress movement, for example, Cho also links the racist legislation and exclusion of the Chinese Head Tax with the post-9/11 state of Islamophobia in Canada. Concerned that state and societal racism still targets Asian immigrant communities in Canada, Cho's documentary features a Head Tax descendant, Yew Lee, reflecting on the relevance of the period of Chinese exclusion to contemporary racial politics in Canada. Yew Lee stands in front of the Parliament building and raises the following concerns:

[i]t's hard to say what we're learning from this. And my question is: have we learned from it? Let's look at how we treat people today. How are we treating the people we fear? How are we treating people from the Middle East? How are we treating Muslims in this country? I think the challenge is not just to view this as something of the past. It's living history with us still today.

The Head Tax descendant's remarks challenge the viewer to remain vigilant of Canadian society's xenophobic treatment of non-white Canadians, a historical pattern of anti-Asian discrimination that began with Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian communities but since 9/11 has predominantly targeted racialized Canadian communities from the Middle East, as well as South Asian communities visibly, culturally, and linguistically marked as Muslim.

While Cho leaves room for linking Islamophobia alongside the history of Chinese

exclusion, so as to demand vigilance against ongoing discrimination against Muslims and West Asians, thus aiming to build solidarity with Muslim Canadians from her viewers, there still has not been any mention of the colonial history of Indigenous peoples in Canada throughout the entire film—aside from a brief visual from an old newsreel clip. In the section on Chinese families separated as a result of anti-Chinese immigration legislation, Cho incorporates a short black and white video clip of a Dominion Day parade replete with RCMP Mounties atop horses, throngs of spectators lining up to watch the parade, and various pageant floats, one of which features western frontier prairie life with “Indian” chiefs. As the only reference to Indigenous presence in the film, the film’s use of the archival footage of a Dominion Day parade engages the trope of the Vanishing Indian, naturalizing such colonial representations of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Produced in 2004, well before a settler colonial critique or awareness of the residential school system became common parlance in Canada, the film glosses over the colonial history upon which the nationalistic narrative of Dominion Day was built. As a result, Cho’s documentary can only envision social equality for all immigrants and settlers, overlooking their complicity within the state structures of settler colonialism.

All the more striking for a 1994 film, Fung’s multiply-stranded approach to presenting Chinese exclusion presents an alternative approach to naturalizing settler colonialism and reifying the legitimacy of the nation-state. In a talking head interview with the historian Nayan Shah, Fung supplements Shah’s discussion of whiteness with archival black and white footage of a nationalistic parade. However, rather than incorporating nationalistic archival footage without critical commentary as Cho does in

her documentary, Fung juxtaposes Shah in front of background video footage of white settlers in military pomp marching in a parade, driving and walking the streets, video edited with a soundtrack of a piano accompaniment of “Maple Leaf Canada.” Then a frozen screen shot of white settlers, minus Shah, has the following text imposed over the image: “Southern blacks flee to the West in the Exodus of 1879”; “Indians and Metis rebel in the Canadian Northwest in 1885.” By supplementing Shah’s discussion of the historical development of 19th century white supremacy emerging in contradistinction with the presence of other non-white racial groups in Canada, Fung creates a comparative anti-racist lens for understanding the history of Chinese exclusion. It is a multiply-stranded approach to thinking about racial exclusion, an intersectional and parallel approach that aligns the different positionalities of Chinese settlers with those of other racialized and colonized subjects who have faced historical and on-going oppression under state racist discursive structures and global colonial processes. While the film does not reflect on the colonial positionality of Chinese settlers, a common strategy of self-scrutiny in scholarly and academic social justice analyses committed to the project of decolonization, it positions anti-Chinese discrimination in a transnational and transcolonial frame that eschews nationalistic commemorations of the Chinese diaspora.

Furthermore, *Dirty Laundry* also makes several references to the history of Asian-Indigenous relations in Canada. In a talking head interview with Asian Canadian historian Anthony Chan at the beginning of the film, Chan discusses the history of the first Chinese settlers to have arrived in Canada in 1788 who intermarried and settled with the Nuuchah-nulth communities in Nootka Sound. In an intertextual reference, Fung has

Roger reading SKY Lee's novel, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, which also references this early Chinese-Indigenous history, alongside other historical books on Chinese Canadian history as part of Roger's research for his magazine article on the Chinese immigrant community. While the role of the Chinese settler in the structure of settler colonialism remains absent in his film, a conceptual absence also reflected in the anti-racist organizing at the time of its release, Fung still acknowledges the historical presence of Indigenous peoples in Canada: an acknowledgement quite evident in his multiply-stranded approach to understanding the history of Chinese exclusion that also aims to memorialize and emphasize the forgotten and widely unacknowledged history of Asian-Indigenous relations as part of the history of Chinese settlement in Canada.

Since *Dirty Laundry*, Fung's body of work has developed an increasing engagement with the land and Indigenous artists. In 2008, he created three video projections for a solo show, *Landscapes*, at the McMaster Museum of Art, "seamlessly morphing recent footage from contemporary Ontario terrains of Hamilton, Warkworth and Scarborough, with 19th century engravings and paintings by J.M.W. Turner" (McMaster Museum). His fascination with geography and colonial representations of the land comes to the fore in these video installations; as he explains his inspiration for the exhibit, "[b]eing of Chinese heritage in the Caribbean and now in Canada I am sensitive to issues of location. Spatial politics are at the spine of my work [...] In *Landscapes*, I use visual puns in the hope of 'making strange' the landscapes that we take for granted, pointing to the histories of their transformation" (McMaster Museum). His more recent

work also features substantive collaborations with Indigenous artists.³⁶ At a retrospective on his body of work organized by the Asian institute in Toronto, Fung discussed his current project on diasporic foods, which involves studying how they interact with Indigenous grains, a project he is working on with several Indigenous artists.³⁷ Having lived in two different settings located across the British Commonwealth, Fung demonstrates in his work an acute awareness of the multiply entangled histories of colonization and migration that divide and connect diasporic and Indigenous peoples.

In this chapter, I have explored the degree to which two anti-racist projects, invested in memorializing the disavowed and forgotten voices of the Head Tax generation, resist or comply with the logic of the nation-state in their arguments for social justice. I have shown that while Cho's documentary remains critical of the nation-state, it still naturalizes the structure of settler colonialism and fails to acknowledge Indigenous presence in its comparative anti-racist framework. As for *Dirty Laundry*, I have shown that Fung models a multiply-stranded approach to interpreting and presenting the history of Chinese exclusion in a transnational and transcolonial frame. While his film does not use the language of settler colonialism in its critique, it articulates an intersectional and comparative analytic shaped by Fung's lived experiences as a Chinese diasporic subject,

³⁶ In his role as an artistic mentor in the past, he has played a formative role in developing events—such as the Development Education Centre Film and Video distribution collective and the first anti-racism film festival in Toronto, Colour Positive—that aimed to open access to film and video production for emerging Indigenous artists and artists and colour (Gagnon 14).

³⁷ ReOrientations: A Retrospective on the Works of Richard Fung. University of Toronto, Toronto. 25-26. Oct. 2013.

first in Trinidad and then in Canada. Thus, over the course of his career, he has become increasingly attuned to the politics of Indigenous land and space in his creative works. But as his film was produced well before the critique of settler colonialism gained widespread prominence in activist and scholarly circles, I wonder if *Dirty Laundry* can also be read as a decolonial project.

In their important article “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang lay out several caveats that settler scholars, activists, and cultural producers committed to building solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty struggles may find critically useful. They contend that unless decolonization projects take seriously the actual repatriation of land to Indigenous nations and tribes, the goal of decolonization only becomes a metaphor that inevitably serves to further cement and justify settler sovereignty. For example, projects that aim to decolonize settler education and use decolonial methodologies may achieve important work by decentring and delegitimizing settler knowledges and epistemologies. However, without a serious commitment to land repatriation and Indigenous sovereignty, such projects hybridize Indigenous critical thought with Western critical traditions, with the effect of uplifting the moral and critical superiority of the settler intellectual above Native intellectuals and continental theorists (Tuck and Yang 16), thus cultivating a critical consciousness, a pursuit of social justice through a critical enlightenment that actually represents “settler moves to innocence—diversions, distractions, which relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility, and conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege” (Tuck and Yang 21). While cognitive imperialism is very much embedded in the structure of settler colonialism, a

process that negatively impacts both Indigenous peoples and settlers, the desire to incorporate decolonization in scholarly projects and methodologies without confronting settler complicity with maintaining and building the settler state renders decolonization a convenient metaphor that primarily benefits settlers. As Tuck and Yang assert,

[t]he easy adoption of decolonization as a metaphor (and nothing else) is a form of this anxiety, because it is a premature attempt at reconciliation. The absorption of decolonization by settler social justice frameworks is one way the settler, disturbed by her own settler status, tries to escape or contain the unbearable searching of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one's self. The desire to reconcile is just as relentless as the desire to disappear the Native; it is a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore. (Tuck and Yang 9)

According to Tuck and Yang, decolonization should serve to eliminate settler property rights and settler sovereignty, thus requiring the abolition of land as property and upholding the sovereignty of Native land and people (26). To decolonize the Americas would result in rendering all settlers landless (27), an uncomfortable position that settlers committed to decolonization need to reflect upon.

According to Tuck and Yang, an anti-racist work such as *Dirty Laundry* may stand in political solidarity with Indigenous peoples on the grounds of sharing a parallel and intersecting history of racial and class subjugation. But as a social justice project, it may also exhibit “an ethic of incommensurability” with decolonial projects that needs to be respected, an ethic “which recognizes what is distinct, what is sovereign for project(s) of decolonization in relation to human and civil rights based social justice projects”; for there will be “portions of these projects that simply cannot speak to one another, cannot be aligned or allied” (28). Yet for Tuck and Yang, coalition-building still remains possible as “opportunities for solidarity lie in what is incommensurable rather than what

is common across these efforts” (28). For settlers who desire to know what decolonization requires of them, the answers will not emerge from friendly understanding and will “indeed require a dangerous understanding of uncommonality that un-coalesces coalition politics—moves that may feel very unfriendly” (Tuck and Yang 35).

Consequently, Fung’s intersectional and multiply-stranded anti-racist politics may fail at advancing any real commitments to decolonization on Tuck and Yang’s grounds, but I do not believe that an ethic of incommensurability always explains this or makes this failure inevitable. Perhaps it has taken this long for anti-racist and decolonial projects to be in respectful conversation with each other because, as Tuck and Yang claim, their goals have long been invisible to each other. Indeed, I agree with Tuck and Yang that opportunities for coalition-building still lie in what is incommensurate across these movements; however, I see affinities between their ethic of incommensurability and Larissa Lai’s concept of constructing kinship across difference as discussed in my introductory chapter. If we look at the bigger historical picture, the structures that divide us can bring us together considering that we, that is, settlers, migrants, and refugees, were all once Indigenous elsewhere—we were once uprooted back home.³⁸ Even if these projects remain incommensurate with Indigenous sovereignty struggles because of what decolonization inevitably demands of settlers, idly waiting until the repatriation of land takes full effect is not a viable option either. In the meantime, decolonial work in our

³⁸ See Derek Rasmussen’s “Qallunology 101” where he connects the privatization of the commons and the exploitation of labour to the de-indigenization of Europeans. As Rasmussen put it, European settlers migrated overseas to escape homelessness and precarity, only to reproduce the same conditions for Indigenous peoples, “the same anti-social arrangements in their new homelands as had existed in the Europe that had evicted them. Thus, the enclosure of Europe led to the enclosure of the Americas” (par 11).

intellectual, creative, and cultural ways of relating to one another still needs to happen before a broad movement of repatriation can be achieved. If decolonizing Eurocentric epistemologies and knowledge systems, especially colonial relations to the land and its sentient and non-sentient beings, risks turning decolonization into a metaphor, it is an ethical risk that I am willing to take, a risk informed by historical and ongoing indebtedness and respect that Chinese diasporic artists like Fung have come to increasingly incorporate into their origin-making.

CONCLUSION

Asian-Indigenous Relationalities: Literary Gestures of Respect and Indebtedness

she is tough,
she is verbose,
she has lived a thousand lives

she is sweet,
she is not,
she is blossoming
and dying every moment

a flower
unsweetened by rain
untarnished by simpering
uncuckolded by men
not coquettish enough
for say the gals
who make a career of shopping
at the Pacific Centre Mall

PACIFIC CENTRE, my gawd
do North Americans never tire
of claiming the centre
of the universe, the pacific and
everywhere else . . .

I am weary
of North Americans
so I listen to SKY.
—Lee Maracle (Stó:lō) “Yin Chin”

Epistemology of Respect and Gratitude

In the preface to her story “Yin Chin,” a piece dedicated to SKY Lee and Jim Wong-Chu, Lee Maracle attaches a poem (included in this chapter’s epigraph) about

‘she,’ an unnamed woman who is tough, verbose, and not sweet, a woman who has lived a thousand lives and yet remained uncuckolded by men. Reading the poem without having read *Disappearing Moon Café* might lead one to attribute the unnamed woman to SKY Lee herself, given Maracle’s dedication to Lee. However, reading the poem alongside *Disappearing Moon Café* reveals that the poem’s speaker is making an intertextual reference to the mercenary matriarchs in Lee’s novel. The so-called ‘real’ wives from China are also tough, verbose, vengeful women who resist being cuckolded while ascribing to the Confucian structure of patrilineage. They do whatever it takes to keep their husbands’ illegitimate children from challenging their children’s lives, and therefore their own matriarchal status, even if it involves cuckolding their husbands.

That Maracle opens her short story with this intertextual poem referencing the fierce Chinese women in a classic Chinese Canadian novel that touches on Sino-Indigenous relations speaks to a tradition of cross-racial respect and indebtedness in Indigenous and Asian Canadian literature and culture. Sister texts, “Yin Chin” and *Disappearing Moon Café* have initiated an important conversation on the impact of racism and colonialism on Chinese and Indigenous communities, a discussion about the experiences of racial discrimination and oppression that typically privileges the relations and tensions of marginalized communities with white settlers but hardly with each other. This intertextual dialogue is made clear by the title of Maracle’s short story, drawn from the Chinese patriarch’s first encounter with a mixed-race Indigenous woman in Lee’s novel. Bewildered that Kelora Chen, an “Indian” subsisting in the wilderness, can speak Chinese, Gwei Chang insults her, calling her a “wild injun”; unperturbed by his

immigrant pronunciation of the insult, Kelora hears “yin-chin” instead (Lee 4). Flipping the colonial script, “Yin Chin” follows an Indigenous woman’s college experiences with Chinese Canadian allies that draws the haunting childhood memory of internalizing xenophobic attitudes to the surface of the narrator’s conscience. Though her college experience leaves her feeling excluded and politically ineffective since she is usually the only Native at a table of Asians and together they were only interested in belittling white people and hence placing whites at the front and centre of their communication, the narrator returns fifteen years later to a table-load of Asians and Natives, a table full of writers of colour who now stand front and centre in the conversation and see themselves as part of larger decolonization and anti-racist movements around the world (156-57).

This promising moment of cross-racial alliance and solidarity is undermined for the narrator, however, by a flashback she experiences while coming to the aid of an elderly Chinese woman in Vancouver’s Chinatown. After beating off a Native man accosting the Chinese elder, the narrator sits with the woman, quietly listening to her complaining of the countless Chinese men who walked by and failed to assist her. Then the narrator remembers a haunting scene from her childhood in the discount grocery store of Mad Sam, a Chinese man who was close and good to her family. Having been told by her elders—“‘don’t wander off or the ol’ chinamen will get you and eat you’”—the narrator as a child screams when she imagines such a cannibalistic chinaman suddenly appearing in the view of the grocery store’s windowpane (159-60). Drawing the attention of Sam and her mother, she reluctantly points out, “[t]he Chinaman was looking at me,” imprinting shame on her mother’s cheeks and hurt on Sam’s face, not a physical hurt but

“the kind of hurt you can sometimes see in the eyes of people who have been cheated” (160).

The depictions of cross-racial denigration, distrust, and disavowal in “Yin Chin” and *Disappearing Moon Café* constitute literary gestures of respect and indebtedness that inspire the remembrance and restoration of Sino-Indigenous relations dating back to 1788. Both texts call forth damaging stereotypes as part of a creative exercise of self-scrutiny, thus acknowledging the ways in which the imposition and internalization of racist and colonial discourses divide and conquer both communities from cultivating relations of respect with each other. As Larissa Lai points out, “[b]oth Lee’s novel and Maracle’s short story are instances of respect in action, a self-reflexive respect that acknowledges the other, that gestures towards taking responsibility for oneself—both personally and historically—in the face of larger social forces” (Lai “Epistemologies”). Within the narrative bounds of the text, the characters in “Yin Chin” and *Disappearing Moon Café* feel indebted to people they have wronged in the past, people with whom they have shared kinship and affinity. However, read allegorically beyond the text, the characters provide a framework for acknowledging historical debts and restoring Sino-Indigenous relations in the contemporary moment.

Given that settlers of colour occupy a complicated role in the structures of global capital, European imperialism, Canadian state racism, and ongoing settler colonialism even if they build solidarities and political alliances with Indigenous peoples in anti-racist and decolonization movements, Lai wonders if “a poetics and politics of relation between Asians like [...herself] and the Indigenous peoples of the land we call Canada can be

enacted, at this late hour, under these imperfect conditions” (Lai “Epistemologies”). Rather than looking to the historical Asian-Indigenous relations existing prior to the formation of the Canadian state, a strategy that has been suggested by Henry Yu as offering such possibilities for restoring today’s Asian-Indigenous relations,¹ she turns to the Indigenous concepts of respect and acknowledgement as theorized by Marie Battiste (Mi’kmaq) and Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) to put forth an epistemology of respect that can guide Chinese Canadians in how they engage with and remain implicated in settler culture, navigate their contradictory positionality as both settler and formerly colonized subject, and restore balance in their relations with sentient and non-sentient beings.

According to Battiste, respect in the Mi’kmaq tradition involves taking into account all the things and beings one can see, touch, become aware of, which requires developing ““a special consciousness that discourages the careless treatment of things,”” recognizing “life forces as well as active movement towards the balance of life forces,” and actively engaging with Indigenous epistemologies and ways of being with the human, animal, vegetable, and elemental worlds (qtd. in Lai “Epistemologies”). Kinship, for Justice, requires constant engagement and renewal to maintain the historical continuity and contemporaneity of Indigenous peoples; it remains important to acknowledge and build kinship across a politics of difference due to the historical debts engendered by the

¹ As Lai puts it, she fears that looking to this early historical record, however significant and disavowed in official Canadian history, risks conducting a recuperative project that insists on Chinese presence in Canada and may “not always recognize how our actions reinforce the (relatively recent) state and capital in ways that deepen their colonial and neo-colonial relationship with Indigenous peoples” (Lai “Epistemologies”

complicated relations among Indigenous nations impacted to different degrees by these nations' encounters with European conquest due to their geographical location (qtd. in Lai "Epistemologies").² Just as Indigenous nations have undergone differential treatment at the hand of colonizers, according to Lai, Asian settlers have been affected by the same colonial and neo-colonial forces that also impact Indigenous peoples—these shared yet distinctive colonial histories call for a respect and acknowledgement of our relations even in the absence of sameness and likeness: "[i]n fact, the challenges of relation arise precisely through difference and disagreement" (Lai "Epistemologies").

This doctoral project has concerned itself with acknowledging colonial relations of kinship and complicity with the settler project in the literary and cultural production of Chinese Canadian authors and artists. Taking its cue from texts like "Yin Chin" and *Disappearing Moon Café*, it has worked to address the complexities of Chinese exclusion and settler colonialism in representations about Chinese labour (which may or may not include the presence of Indigeneity) for two reasons: to show how Chinese labour narratives may ascribe to the settler indigenizing elements of white settler labour narratives, which always amount to the erasure of Indigenous presence, and to tease apart the hegemonic work ethic values and anti-racist demands that such narratives may uncritically celebrate. Of course, for a project concerned with anti-racist and anti-colonial

² In his response to the fractious debates amongst Indigenous thinkers over the authenticity of New England tribes, a supposed lack of phenotypical "Indianness" that has everything to do with histories of contact, Justice asserts that since the Eastern US Indigenous tribes acted as a 'buffer' for Western nations such as the Oglala Sioux, thus shielding them from the worst of European genocidal activity, relations and continuities exist amongst nations even if they result in differences that bear the colonial marks of history due to contact (qtd. in Lai "Epistemologies").

advocacy and solidarity building between settlers of colour and Indigenous peoples, it may have been easier to focus primarily on texts like “Yin Chin” and *Disappearing Moon Café* that figure cross-racial relations and tensions more prominently than the texts selected for this project’s archive. But absence is political. Even if the absence of Indigeneity in a settler text contains no explicit ill will or malicious intent to dominate and eradicate Indigenous peoples, absence is still a creative choice. It is not a choice on the part of the settler imagination that I am interested in shaming artists into correcting, but it is a choice nonetheless and it still has everything to do with envisioning Asian-Indigenous relationality.

As my analysis of this textual archive has demonstrated, Chinese labour narratives reveal ways of relating to the land and Indigenous peoples, even if these relationalities may not seem that obvious. The myth of Gold Mountain ultimately frames many of these stories. Drawn from the historical experiences of the early Chinese diaspora, the myth of Gold Mountain exaggerated the opportunities of wealth and plenitude that the British Commonwealth societies supposedly offered to all settlers, tall tales of easy fortune and upward mobility driven by gold rush economies and the rise of the gold standard during the nineteenth century. Even without any mention of Indigeneity, the Gold Mountain myth still constructs an Asian-Indigenous relationality that contributes to the discursive dispossession and displacement of Indigenous presence and autochthony because the land has been understood as a source of untapped wealth for everyone since it was supposedly uninhabited or was left in a state of nature—the Vanishing Indian myth and the invisibility of Indigenous labour render this trope ethically possible in the first place.

Thus, the analysis of settler labour narratives is important to any anti-racist and decolonial project. Stories of how we labour and contribute to nation-building are deeply tied to our sense of belonging. The next step is finding ways to acknowledge these narrative displacements and to restore relations of kinship and intimacy, gestures of respect and indebtedness that can be drawn from the imaginary.

According to Lai, engaging in an epistemology of respect requires acknowledging the historical debts that have arisen from the distinctive histories of colonization shared by Indigenous and Asian diasporic communities. The language of debt may be tricky in the settler colonial context. How exactly does one begin repaying for contributing to another community's ongoing displacement and dispossession, a structure of colonialism that began hundreds of years before one's arrival? In her and Rita Wong's reading of *Disappearing Moon Café*, they provide an allegorical reading of Chinese Canadian indebtedness through the figure of Gwei Chang: namely, his decision to abandon his life with Kelora Chen and her people to fulfill his filial duty to marry a 'real' wife from China, a decision that he comes to lament on his deathbed. Lai and Wong suggest that his grief constitutes "a grief of ingratitude" that extends to Sino-Canadians today:

Wong suggests that that grief and that ingratitude belong also to the likes of her, me, and the author SKY Lee. At the extra-diegetic level, Lee's gesture of respect is her recognition of the wrongs committed by Chinese immigrants against the Indigenous people who helped them. It is also, as Wong notes, a gesture of solidarity in that it recognizes an Asian/Indigenous relationship that includes desire and emotional connection, as well as (differential) subjugation to the same colonial and economic forces and (differential) connection to the land. (Lai "Epistemologies")

Therefore, the language of debt is not complete without the acknowledgement of

historical wrongs and respectful gestures of solidarity that aim to restore relations of kinship across difference between Chinese and Indigenous communities.

Literary Gestures of Indebtedness

Literary gestures of respect and acknowledgments of indebtedness contain a language of gratitude that can be extended to the contemporary social moment. They function as pedagogical lessons for today's Chinese settlers who may be unaware of historical relations and intimacies of the past. David H.T. Wong's *Escape to Gold Mountain* acts as such a primer in its representation of Sino-Indigenous relations. However, some of its narrative choices in depicting this history reveals that expressions of gratitude and acknowledgment of these relations are not without their problems. Unlike "Yin Chin" and *Disappearing Moon Café*, Wong's representation only focuses on positive relations as a result of friendship, indebtedness, and love. Curiously enough, rather than acknowledging the historical inter-racial marriages between the first Chinese arrivals and Nuuchah-nulth (Nootka Sound) communities, the text indirectly references this history through one of the Wong descendants becoming engaged to Heather, a Nuuchah-nulth (Nootka Sound) woman. What is more, historical references to the first Chinese arrivals emphasize instead that they were the first settlers to build a non-Indigenous sailing vessel in the Pacific North West (23).

A language of gratitude certainly informs the graphic novel, a gesture of respect and acknowledgement of indebtedness for having been recipients of Indigenous care and hospitality. When another Wong ancestor, Ah-Foo, disappears after his railway gang's attempt to blast the face of the mountain along the Fraser Canyon, he is presumed to be

dead by his crew members until he rejoins them the following year. The previous four frames show his body being found by an Indigenous community and nursed back to health so he can return to his people (Wong 128). Though Wong explains in a footnote that “Native Americans saving character Ah-Foo [was] based on stories the author heard while growing up and a story told to the author by people from the Salish Nation near Lillooet, BC, in 2011” (230), the frames depicting Ah-Foo’s return minimize his rescue narrative and fail to mention which Indigenous nation healed the wounds he suffered from falling off the side of a mountain into the Fraser River. It is only later in the text that Ah-Foo mentions in passing to Sam, who admires his cedar hat, that “it’s a gift from the Native people who saved my life...to remind me that all peoples are brothers” (139).

These instances of positive Asian-Indigenous relations and intimacies stand in the text as brief mentions in passing. Indigenous characters serve to welcome, befriend, and save Asian characters in the text, yet Asian settler reciprocity and gratitude receive minor mention. When Ah-Foo and Sam travel to stay with Ah-Foo’s mother and sister, surprising them since they also assumed he had died while building the Canadian rail road, Ah-Foo tells his mother not to cry as he was saved by Native people, to which she responds, “The Native Americans are good people! I am so happy” (142)! On the one hand, Wong’s representation of this type of Asian-Indigenous relationality in which Asian settlers depended on Indigenous communities for survival has not been crucially emphasized in historical accounts of Chinese settlement in and migration to Canada. Therefore, Wong’s graphic novel carries great pedagogical value in its ability to educate his young adult audience of this historical relationship, thus encouraging his young

readers to explore how these originary relations shape contemporary relations between Asian settlers and Indigenous peoples. But on the other hand, Wong's depiction of this dependant Asian-Indigenous relationship downplays the sense of migrant gratitude and reciprocity that should accompany such acts of generosity and kindness that ensured the survival of Chinese settlers. As a historical primer on Asian-Indigenous relations, what do Wong's young readers learn from this portrait? If Indigenous peoples are "good people" who teach Asian settlers like Ah-Foo that "all people are brothers," then how exactly shall Asian settlers carry out this notion of extended kinship? How shall Asian settlers express gratitude for these historical acts of Indigenous care and hospitality?

When read allegorically, this Chinese character's indebtedness to the Indigenous community who saves him certainly constitutes a gesture of respect and gratitude that acknowledges the Sino Canadian indebtedness that Larissa Lai and Rita Wong have claimed for today's Chinese Canadians via the figure of Gwei Chang. However, such gestures of respect and gratitude come with no guarantees. As it stands, the graphic novel privileges restoring better relations and forgiveness between Asian settlers, white settlers, and the settler nation state instead. Indeed, reconciling the Chinese settler community's relations with white settlers and the settler nation state takes political precedence and substantial narrative coverage over acknowledging the Chinese settler community's historical indebtedness to the Indigenous communities they have also displaced.

This reading is evident from the two apology scenes illustrated in the text: Stephen Harper's 2006 apology that Grandma Wong has waited eighty-eight years to arrive, which leaves her kneeling aggrieved in the final frame of the graphic novel at her

family plot at the Harling Point Cemetery in Victoria BC, and a private apology between a Chinese and a German Canadian patriarch. Rather than narrating the inter-racial union of a Nuuchah-nulth (Nootka Sound) family with the Wong family, the text emphasizes another inter-racial marriage that brings the Wong family closer to a white settler family. When the two prospective fathers-in-law rejoice over the news of their children's engagement, thus remarking on how labour prospects have improved for Chinese settlers now that they can "live the lives that were stolen from our youth," the men realize with heavy emotion that they have fought on opposite sides in Normandy during WWII (219). In an exchange of sorrow and gratitude, the men, glad that they have both survived the war, are ready to put the white supremacist war behind them since they are now family (220-21). Here, inter-racial marriage has the capacity to reconcile histories of oppression and humanize agents of white supremacy, a bridging of difference and reconciliation of racial inequities and conflicts between white and Chinese settlers that takes symbolic precedence in the text.

Ultimately, I am not interested in constructing a prescriptive and moralizing reading of Gold Mountain narratives. I am not in the business of shaming writers and artists or telling them how to imagine the Chinese diaspora's sense of belonging to this land. I am, however, questioning the desire to restore the Chinese settler's labour contributions and sacrifices in the Canadian imaginary, a desire that is evident in Chinese labour narratives like *Escape to Gold Mountain*. Rita Wong has noted that "[o]ne way of reading the class mobility for immigrants within the Canadian nation-state has been through the filter of racialized categories rather than through the lens of immigrants'

relations to indigenous land” (Wong, “Decolonizasian” 164). So even when a text like David H.T Wong’s graphic novel includes positive representations of Asian-Indigenous relations, imagining social justice still remains narrowly centred on removing racial barriers to achieve upward mobility. The desire for upward mobility is never questioned or explored in relation to Indigenous epistemologies and ways of relating to the land and its sentient and non-sentient inhabitants. What we have instead are Chinese labour narratives representing racial injustices of the past that invite a moralizing argument to acknowledge the Chinese settler’s indispensable nation-building contributions. These narratives memorialize the early Chinese settlers and honour the “lives that were stolen” from them, overlooking the fact that colonial institutions have been stealing lives and homes from Indigenous communities within their presence, thefts that continue to carry socioeconomic and cultural effects for Indigenous peoples.

If the textual archive of Sino-Indigenous relations reveals an allegorical indebtedness to Indigenous peoples, then how can Chinese settlers acknowledge that historical debt beyond the text? More importantly, how can they begin to pay back that debt? As I agreed with Tuck and Yang in my third chapter, any commitment to decolonization struggles must also seriously consider the repatriation of land, lest decolonization only take place in the settler mind. In the meantime, settler allies can also begin to express gratitude for this debt by learning how we can be allies on colonized territories, and as allies, we must acknowledge and respect all the inhabitants living on these lands. In “Decolonizasian,” Rita Wong looks to representations of Asian-Indigenous relationalities in Asian Canadian literature as having the imaginative potential

to decolonize Asian settler epistemologies and relations with Indigenous peoples and the land. So while “affective bonds” do not, for her, necessarily translate into political solidarity,

effective solidarity is also less likely to happen without a deeply felt understanding of each other’s perspectives and the ways in which oppression is both common and different for people racialized as ‘First Nations’ and ‘Asian.’ Fiction offers a speculative space and challenges us to imagine the ways in which dialogue and interaction could spark deeper understanding of our interrelatedness. (166)

The instances of Asian-Indigenous friendship, marriage, and extended kinship in David H.T. Wong’s graphic novel certainly have the capacity to initiate in its young adult audience a deeper understanding of the interrelatedness of Asian settlers and Indigenous peoples. However, the decolonial project that Rita Wong envisions for Asian Canadian settlers also has to go beyond the inter-personal or inter-community level, for understanding these relations of interrelatedness also involves examining Asian migrant complicity in the colonization of the land, that is, their complicity in adopting, upon migration and settlement, not only Eurocentric and colonial notions of land ownership and property but also unsustainable and ecologically destructive practices and economies that threaten Indigenous epistemologies, as described by Loretta Todd, that are centred on the values of land stewardship instead of conquest and the interdependence of humans, animals, non-sentient beings, communities, and nations (qtd. in Rita Wong 159).

It has been my goal throughout this project to examine the ways in which Chinese Canadians narrate their historical presence in Canada and hence imagine Asian-Indigenous relationalities. I look to these narratives to understand how relations between

Asian settlers and Indigenous peoples can be re-balanced and respectful. I also ask if there is a way in which affirming accounts of these relationalities can be simultaneously informed by complicit accounts. Should we also not remain vigilant of the ways in which multicultural discourses incorporate and commodify positive and cooperative instances of racial and cultural differences, fusions, and proximities as celebratory evidence of Canada's peaceful benevolence, racial harmony, and functional diversity? And the most difficult question to ask—can the desires of Asian settlers to represent and research Asian-Indigenous relationalities reflect a self-serving political agenda that aims to mitigate the colonial complicity of Asian settlers? In light of the recent context of Indigenous activism gaining widespread momentum and solidarity as a result of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, the Idle No More movement, and the increase in academic scholarship and digital media on settler of colour and Indigenous relationalities and solidarities, the move to include, privilege, and attend to the presence of Indigeneity in a text may be construed as serve-serving, a political strategy to present the history of Asian Canadian settlement in a better ethical light.

I raise these questions to enact a practice of self-critique and humility that I believe an epistemology of respect also requires. If there is no outside to capitalist structures as Marxist critics repeatedly claim, then there is also no escape from colonial complicities and systems of oppression driven by global capital. However, at the very least, as demonstrated in my second chapter, stories of Asian-Indigenous relationalities can reveal alternative trajectories that do not commodify or colonize land, labour, and relations—at minimum, they imagine and hope for possibilities of an outside to colonial

relationalities. When read through an epistemology of respect, such stories demand ongoing gratitude and acknowledgment of historical debts—they imagine and cultivate respect and kinship across difference. But I also wonder if these stories of Sino-Indigenous relationalities can inspire an awareness of indebtedness and gratitude amongst contemporary Asian Canadian migrants and refugees: must a diasporic community have direct historical ties dating back to 1788 in order to cultivate an epistemology of respect and gratitude? Rather than expressing gratitude towards the nation state, can such stories inspire Asian Canadian migrants, refugees, and settler descendants to articulate a sense of indebtedness to the Indigenous nations and communities they have indirectly displaced?

Migrant/Refugee Gratitude: “the best gift of all”

When given the opportunity to improve one’s way of life, a sense of gratitude generally ensues, especially towards individuals, communities, and state structures that render life improvements for the migrant possible in the first place. Expressions of migrant gratitude come in the form of acknowledging all the agents who have helped to provide migrants a second chance at starting over, especially if those migrants become ethnic success stories. Near the end of Denise Chong’s family memoir, *The Concubine’s Children*, Chong’s mother, Hing, finally acquires a sense of peace and gratitude towards her parents who not only neglected her as a child but also demanded filial obligations that she could not provide: while her father, Chan Sam, requests that she continue sending remittances to the family in China after he dies or can no longer afford to do so, her mother, May-ying, asks if she can take in her adopted brother, Gok-leng, after Hing marries (in a rare moment of solidarity, Chan Sam and May-ying end up filing a lawsuit

against Hing for all the money they have loaned her, mostly for a down payment for a house that was originally a gift from her father). The shame, hurt, and resentment that has plagued Hing her entire life suddenly lifts during their family reunion in China. Realizing that “she had ended up the luckier of her siblings,” Hing gains a profound insight into her family’s past (295). Hearing from her siblings about how hard life has been in Communist China no longer makes her feel embittered, for

it lifted the burden of her shame. Her father had come to Canada to throw off the cloak of poverty at home, but the truth was that his penchant for showiness had brought the family members persecution [by the Communist regime]...For Mother, who had lived her childhood in a shadow of sacrifice for the Chinese side of the family, her parents’ act of immigration to the new world and her mother’s determination in pregnancy to chance the journey by sea had been her liberation, the best gift of all. (295)

Ethnic success stories, Hing and her five university-educated children enjoy democratic freedoms and economic privileges under a liberal capitalist society made possible not only by a strong immigrant work ethic and the eventual repeal of anti-Chinese legislation but also from the privilege of being born and raised overseas. Hing gains an acute sense of her Gold Mountain privilege as her older sisters were also born in Gold Mountain but left behind after the family’s first and final return trip to China. Due to birth order, poverty, and anti-Chinese immigration legislation, Hing’s siblings have been arbitrarily relegated to the “peasant’s lot” whereas Hing and her children have indeed in the eyes of her siblings acquired the wealth once promised by the myth of Gold Mountain (295).

Expressions of migrant gratitude are complicated in a settler society such as Canada. Aside from the Korean war, Canada’s military role in the migration and displacement of Asian diasporas and Southeast Asian refugees has not been as direct as,

say, the imperial involvement of England, France, the Netherlands, and the US in China, Japan, the subcontinent, and Southeast Asia. Unlike those other imperial powers, Canada has not been ethically obligated to take in Asian migrants and refugees since Canada has only been “over there” as peacekeepers under the banner of the UN although Canada was, for example, a significant producer of munitions in the Vietnam War. That Canada began in the 1970s to accept Asian migrants and refugees dislocated from war and political upheavals across post- and neo-colonial contexts in which the state did not bear any direct colonial culpability has rendered this “middle” power all the more benevolent, inclusive, and exemplary as a liberal multicultural democratic nation-state despite its shameful past of excluding and exploiting migrants of colour to protect white personhood and serve capital. Therefore, as the defender of peacekeeping “over there,” who has also been supposedly innocent of colonization “over here,”³ the nation’s humanitarian offerings of peace, political stability, labour opportunities, and liberal-democratic rights and freedoms are desperately sought after and aptly appreciated by Asian economic migrants as well as Asian refugees fleeing from the abuses and atrocities of totalitarian Communist regimes. Indeed, for many migrants and refugees who have experienced the push and pull of global capital and the traumas and dislocations of war, being provided the opportunity to start over in Canada is truly “the best gift of all.”

³ At the 2009 G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, former PM Stephen Harper extolled Canada’s economic performance after the 2008 recession, claiming, and thus problematically rewriting our national history, that Canada has no history of colonialism. He goes on to cite among other reasons for our success that “we have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers but none of the things that threaten or bother them [...] Canada is big enough to make a difference but not big enough to threaten anybody. And that’s a huge asset if properly used” (Ljunggren par. 11-12).

Yet, on the other hand, expressions of migrant and refugee gratitude for such liberal democratic privileges and benefits need to be positioned against the structures and histories of imperialism and colonialism that have helped make Canada so safe and prosperous in the first place.⁴ While Canada appears to have only provided peacekeeping support in the violent Cold War clashes for imperial control over decolonization struggles in Asia, the so-called “middle” power state certainly aided and abetted its Atlanticist brethren—“the historical Anglo-American alliance and new postwar alliances”—to “contain” and defeat the development of Communist sovereignty movements throughout South East Asia, thus contributing to the exacerbation of civil war conflicts that often started as legitimate self-determination struggles against colonial powers (Price 283; 314-15).⁵ Without a doubt, Canada is not an uncontested super power with a global military presence like its southern Atlantic sibling, but the peace and prosperity that it enjoys to this day comes from its collaborative role and support, and that of other NATO allies, in the ascension and consolidation of the American empire. I am inclined to agree with John Price that the manifestation of the US empire as we know it has hardly been a case of individual state exceptionalism: as he puts it, “it is erroneous to suggest that successive US administrations were acting unilaterally in projecting a powerful presence across the

⁴ As the Harper government’s plans to build a monument to memorialize the victims of Communism demonstrates, Canada’s liberal democratic reputation for peace, order, and freedom is often positioned against Communist and religious fundamentalist forms of instability and unfreedom in order to obscure its own role in the hot wars of East Asia and the Middle East.

⁵ Though Canada refused to officially recognize the French-established Associated States of Indochina due to the widespread recognition of the Viet Minh, when pressed by France for military and diplomatic support, Canada “provided armaments to the French government—armaments that were being funnelled to French forces in Vietnam, where the fighting was becoming intense and brutal” (Price 283; 208). Shockingly, Canada also produced napalm and Agent Orange for the US; the Canadian military even helped the US test the uses of Agent Orange at the Gagetown Army base in New Brunswick.

Pacific. Atlanticism [...] worked collectively towards maintaining a powerful US presence in East Asia” (Price 314-15). In other words, thanks to these Atlanticist alliances and anti-communist and Anglo-Saxon solidarities, Canada, a NATO partner, will remain a safe, protected, and prosperous first world nation-state for as long as the current world order remains intact.

I must stress that I do not wish to disrespect or undermine expressions of migrant and refugee gratitude as being somehow naïve or misplaced. Migrants and refugees who have lived through incredible loss and suffering have every reason to feel grateful towards the state for granting them the gift of refuge and citizenship. Though narratives of migrant and refugee gratitude have the potential to be appropriated by liberal multicultural societies as evidence of their benevolent, progressive, and tolerant democratic values, as memory projects, such narratives also serve a life-affirming, transformative function for migrants and refugees. In particular, as Vinh Nguyen poignantly argues, narratives of refugee success and gratitude “are integral to the intertwined processes of survival and subject formation for those who have experienced intense struggle, loss and trauma” (par. 4). Thus, to disregard narratives of refugee success and their concomitant expressions of gratitude “as automatically and uncomplicatedly playing into nationalistic, multicultural, and assimilationist agendas—that is, to accept the common perception that success breeds compliant, normative ‘good’ subjects, and vice versa”—fails to make room for the ways in which expressions of refugee gratitude become necessary life-writing tools for regenerating refugee self-existence, livelihood, being, and identity out of ontological oblivion (par. 6). Through the

archival act of cataloging gratitude towards those who have helped give the refugee a second start at life, a refugee (inter)subjectivity becomes tenable and livable. As Nguyen puts it, “writing generates the self through the citation of others” (par. 28).

Of course, as Mimi Thi Nguyen has illustrated in *The Gift of Freedom*, expressions of refugee gratitude borne out of liberal empire still remain complicated. Drawing on Derrida, Nguyen asserts that the “gift of freedom” extended to the Vietnamese refugee forever binds the recipient to the giver in an enduring economy of indebtedness; as for the freedom proffered, invoking Foucault, she critiques liberalism for “produc[ing] freedom as a property of its modern art of government...and ceaselessly subject[ing] it to review, to regulation”—for as Foucault once stated, “[f]reedom is never anything other [...] than an actual relation between governors and governed” (*Gift of Freedom* 6-10). As a result, the refugee remains forever bound to repay the freedom given, a liberal gift that structures the refugee’s relation to US empire as one of enduring obligation and recompense: for how can one ever fully repay such a gift to such an awesome power equipped to bequeath such gifts in the first place? To be sure, Nguyen’s theorization of the gift of liberal governance does not map that readily onto the context of Canada. Though Canada’s role in the hot wars throughout Asia during the Cold War was less direct and active than that of the US, positioning the refugee’s expression of gratitude towards Canada on a different register of state benevolence, an enduring relation of indebtedness between recipient and giver remains. For the refugee’s relation to Canada is not similarly structured by the contradiction that rests at the heart of liberal empire: that “the gift of freedom is not simply a ruse for liberal war but its core proposition” (*Gift of*

Freedom xii). In short, the refugee may remain indebted to Canada but the nature of that debt is different since Canada did not categorically create the refugee's need for freedom and liberation in the first place. What is more, Canada's benevolent role remains contested by other agents whose role in the act of giving has been masked: that is, Indigenous nations and communities who have (been forced) to welcome both migrants and refugees as well as the ecologies that sustain them.

So far, this conclusion has covered great historical range, bringing together multiple empires and successive waves of Asian migrations across the world. I also realize that this project has mainly concerned itself with the intersection of racial exclusion, heteropatriarchy, hegemonic work ethic values, settler colonialism, and the politics of commemoration via Chinese settler labour narratives. But I find it necessary to make these unexpected connections because I do not see rigid boundaries between the categories that supposedly divide us. Boundaries shift upon migration. If Indigenous peoples become guests on other Indigenous territories, then migrants and refugees can become settlers as well. But living as racialized settler beneficiaries with differential histories of colonization, displacement, and dispossession, migrants and refugees never stop being or feeling like migrants and refugees—nor do their descendants. Given the slipperiness of these categories, bringing together the politics of migrant and refugee gratitude matters. It matters that the state's imposition of the gift of freedom and opportunity be teased apart. But it also matters that the gratitude that migrants and refugees express and feel towards the state be extended also to the other agents and beings whose displacement, dispossession, and exploitation have also made “the best gift

of all” possible. Without discounting or disregarding the migrant and refugee’s expressions of gratitude towards all the agents and actors who have given them a second chance at life, I wonder if expressions of migrant and refugee gratitude can be more capacious. While it may be that the historical record reveals a Sino-Canadian indebtedness to Indigenous peoples for welcoming the first Chinese settlers into Nuuchah-nulth (Nootka Sound) communities or saving them from the harsh weather and dangerous work conditions of building the railroad, I ask whether Sino-Indigenous indebtedness can be extended to successive waves of Chinese and other Asian migrations? Can today’s Asian migrants and refugees be inspired by Chinese Canadian stories and archival accounts of historical indebtedness upon being gifted a new life on lands appropriated by a benevolent settler state?

I ask these questions out of personal motivations. I ask because I want to know where my people fit in this history. My family’s migration story deeply informs the thrust of my project. Migrating to Canada was not our first attempt at resettlement. Ethnically Chinese, everyone on both sides of my family was born in Vietnam—except my maternal grandfather, who was born in a village somewhere in Guangzhou. The details of our Chinese origins got lost over the generations; our Vietnamese-inflected Cantonese is all that remains of that first migration. Then, sometime after the fall of Saigon, both sides of my family survived the boat crossing to Hong Kong, where they were granted temporary asylum. My maternal great-aunt resettled in Red Deer, Alberta (my birthplace) under the auspices of the Canadian private sponsorship program that played a significant role in the acceptance of six hundred thousand refugees impacted by

the War in Viet Nam. And the rest of my mother's side joined her whereas my father's side resettled in Los Angeles, California.

The details of my family's Sino-Vietnamese migration story seem to suggest that we were refugees upon our arrival. But since there were hardly any inter-racial marriages in the family, biologically and politically speaking, we were also already settler beneficiaries on a different and complicated scale in Vietnam. Though we were allowed to accumulate wealth as a settler colonial intermediary class, our rights and privileges as Chinese settlers (born in Vietnam) were precarious and ultimately revoked leading up to and after the country's transition to a Communist state.⁶ So in my family's case, to whom shall we express our gratitude? Shall we remain thankful to the land and inhabitants of Vietnam who hosted us for several generations before the structures of race, class, and empire made our welcome expire? Shall we feel thankful instead to Hong Kong for hosting us but not wanting us? Or shall we show gratitude to the Canadian state that finally accepted us, a final welcoming in our migration story made possible by Atlanticist ties, competing empires, settler colonialism, humanitarian compassion, and of course, the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples?

Clearly, not all historical debts are created equal. Nor are all relations structured by indebtedness necessarily oppressive.⁷ Feelings of gratitude and indebtedness have the

⁶ For example, my father's oldest sister has recently returned to Vietnam to invest in property that only her ethnically Vietnamese husband can legally own. If they divorce, she cannot claim any entitlement to the property even though the funds came from their savings that they accumulated together during their marriage and prior resettlement in London, England.

⁷ Expressing gratitude in Vietnamese, *Cám Ơn*, means to carry debt. By thanking a person, you acknowledge that you owe the person a debt that you will repay in the future. This is more than repaying the same favour or gesture; it is also an acknowledgement of social indebtedness that promises a future

capacity to generate affirming and ongoing relations of kinship, solidarity, and intimacy, but the process of generating such relationalities across difference is hardly easy or straightforward. I also understand that it may be unfairly burdensome to expect migrant and refugee awareness and knowledge of these historical debts upon resettlement when the majority of Canadian settlers are only beginning to learn and grasp the full extent of Canada's colonial treatment of Indigenous children, a public pedagogy of colonial oppression recently rendered material, concrete, and urgent thanks to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's public inquiries into the residential school experience. But as migrants and refugees re-settle to start new lives and make new families, the challenges of regenerating life and subjectivity out of the traumas of dispossession and dislocation may one day become less challenging, however temporally or conditionally: at some point, acknowledgments of migrant and refugee gratitude towards Canada's historical debts to Indigenous peoples can become visible. For migrants and refugees and their descendants committed to expressing their gratitude, shall citations of gratitude be restricted to biological ancestors and the opening of state borders? Who else do migrants and refugees remain indebted to?

Perhaps it takes time, distance, or several generations before acknowledging all of the historical debts that precede us and respecting the histories of colonization that divide and link us becomes possible. I was not born in Vietnam and my family has never talked about growing up in Vietnam and having to leave the only home they knew. So while I

meeting, a future opportunity to renew your relations. I must acknowledge the many conversations I have had with my dear friend and colleague Vinh Nguyen on this topic.

understand the anti-Communist feelings of many migrants and refugees in the Vietnamese diaspora, I do not necessarily share them. As Vietnamese was my one and only language before I was sent to English school, I have never identified as Vietnamese or Chinese or Canadian but Sino-Vietnamese.⁸ Living as a settler in Canada as my family once did in Vietnam, I feel a sense of kinship and indebtedness to Vietnamese migrants and refugees living in diaspora: not because our families had to flee the Vietnamese Communist regime but because we once lived, thrived, and shared the same culture and spoke the same language in a multiply colonized place that can no longer be home. Therefore, cultivating an epistemology of respect and practicing the acknowledgement kinship across differential yet interrelated scales of colonization experienced by Asian diasporas and Indigenous peoples is an important and necessary project if we wish to restore and maintain all of our relations and express gratitude towards all of the historical debts that have made it possible for us to be here.

“How Does a Single Blade of Grass Thank the Sun?”

To bring my study to a close, I will discuss a compelling short story in a recent collection by a new Chinese Canadian author that envisions how future generations of Chinese migrants and settlers might express acknowledgment of historical indebtedness and gratitude towards Indigenous peoples and ecologies that Larissa Lai and Rita Wong have claimed for today’s Chinese Canadians. The title story in Doretta Lau’s *How Does*

⁸ I do not have an extensive Vietnamese vocabulary but I do have a strong *bắc kỳ* accent. Not many Sino-Vietnamese would impart such an accent to their children: most pass down Chinese instead. Separately, *bắc kỳ* means northern and weird. Together, it is a pejorative term, meaning Northern Vietnamese dog.

a Single Blade of Grass Thank the Sun? demonstrates that expressions of migrant gratitude and indebtedness can also be powerfully articulated outside the frame of historical fiction, thus indicating a shift in the storytelling patterns of today's Chinese Canadian cultural producers. It is a significant turn that grapples with the historical debts that Chinese settlers and their descendants inherit upon migration; it confronts the discursive erasures of Indigeneity and the legacies of settler colonialism in a contemporary context.

Complementing the anti-model minority protagonists in the rest of the collection, the young gang of social misfits in “How Does a Single Blade of Grass Thank the Sun?” are conscientious bullies. Having achieved political consciousness, the Dragoons regularly spread their knowledge and influence through a “re-education program for the neighbourhood youths, which consisted primarily of lectures and rigorous beatings” (108). They do nothing but cause trouble and express righteous anger towards all the social injustices that they consider to be under their purview. As the young narrator explains it, “[m]y Dragoons and I were gathered to discuss our plans for neighborhood domination. Yellow Peril, The Chinaman, Suzie Wrong, Riceboy and I, the Sick Man of Asia, converged every Friday night to chop suey like a group of triad bosses. Chingers, all of us. Slanty-eyed teenage disappointments” (108). In an outrageous tone of voice, Lau satirizes racial discourses and stereotypes with acerbic wit. Her gang of “Chingers” live to stir trouble in the name of a higher cause: decolonizing young minds and knocking the colonizer down a peg or two.

The nicknames that the young characters have chosen for themselves highlight important differences in their migration stories and add a transnational context to their decolonial politics. Though what binds them are their phenotypical features and experiences of racial discrimination in Canada, their Chinese origins are quite heterogeneous. While Suzie Wrong is a second-generation Chinese, Yellow Peril is Taiwanese and believes “with occidental-eyed earnestness that someday Taiwan would ‘liberate China from Communism’” (109). As for the young men, Riceboy and Sick Man’s families come from Hong Kong, and Chairman, obviously, hails from mainland China. The care that Lau takes to distinguish the characters’ heterogeneous Chinese origins makes visible the historical grievances and insurmountable differences that these youths had to overcome in order to become a tight-knit group of friends. For Sick Man, acknowledging their kinship across difference is a pragmatic affair, a strategic choice rather than a pacifist maneuver: for “[o]ur views on the Motherland differed, but we lived in Lotusland, so that was the tit we had to suck on. No use in raging over petty details and ideologies, especially since the Chairman believed that Riceboy and I were colonized dogs who were resistant to the Chinese voice of reason” (111). Despite having been differentially impacted by competing empires, war, regime changes, and the inequities of transnational capital, the Dragoons live in Canada now and so they must band together to face their common foes: namely, orientalism, Yellow Perilism, cultural appropriation, cultural assimilation, the model minority myth, and white supremacy.

The national allegiances and political ideologies that should divide the youths end up being rechanneled in diaspora: subjects of empire and capital, the Dragoons distrust

authority and thus resist ascribing to the status quo. Observing the gang, Sick Man muses to himself, “[w]e had so much potential, but sometimes it seemed as if we needed a little structure in our lives. We needed to achieve a goal of some sort” (115). Putting their heads together, the crew decide to vandalize a local mural once and for all, a project they have had their minds set on for months, for “[t]he mural depicted the joys of colonial life, roughing it in the wilderness, and the triumph of the settlers over the natives. We wanted to remove the near-naked depictions of First Nations people (the region was far too cold for the skimpy traditional clothes pictured, of this I was almost sure) and paint moustaches on all the settlers” (115). The story ends with the youths gazing at where the mural once had been: now a beige wall, the painted over mural commands their quiet and undivided attention. According to Sick Man, it is an evocative moment of political awakening and social fulfillment for the gang: “[a]lthough it’s said that the Great Wall of China is the only manmade thing visible from space, at that moment it felt as if anyone looking down upon the Earth would have seen that expanse of beige wall, and us, sleeping giants shaking off a long slumber, presiding over it” (115). To be sure, it is unclear as to whether the youths conceive of this act as an acknowledgement of Sino-Indigenous indebtedness. By painting over a mural that inaccurately depicts the story of colonialism as a gift of modernity and civilization to Indigenous peoples, what political goals do the Dragoons accomplish? Read literally, the blank space on the wall is a whitewashing of history, a willful act of forgetting that is still problematic no matter how inaccurate or racist that history was portrayed in the mural. Read generously, however, this act of vandalism, no matter how juvenile or politically ineffective it may be, is at best

a symbolic gesture. It is a gesture that the youths aggrandize to be their historical achievement, a Great Wall monument of their own that signifies a shared connection and solidarity with Indigenous peoples. A gesture of respect and solidarity on the imperfect terms that they know, it is an acknowledgement of colonial interrelatedness, not an equation of colonial oppression but an acknowledgement of kinship across difference, of distinctive yet linked colonial injustices that matter even in the absence of embodied relations. As an expression of gratitude, it can never repay, not fully, not ever, but it is a gesture of respect and acknowledgment of Sino-Indigenous relations and indebtedness that this next generation of Chinese Canadians attempts to restore, a gesture that works towards rebalancing past and ongoing historical debts.

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