

Gold Mountain 金山 and Maple Leaf 楓葉: Identity and Landscape in Chinese Canadian Literature

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ABSTRACT

The last quarter century has witnessed a tremendous production of Chinese Canadian writings, among which about a dozen titles have won national awards and thus attracted a wide readership and considerable academic interest. The primary purpose of this paper is to contextualize local-born and immigrant writings and to examine the configuration of Chinese identity and Canadian landscape. While some local-born writers construct their Canadian identity and Chinese culture from Tangshan legends in China and from the injustices suffered by their ancestors in Canada's Gold Mountain, the immigrant authors draw upon their Chinese cultural and literary traditions to configure a component of Canadian identity by appropriating the maple leaf as the literary symbol of the adopted country. The local-born authors' search for their roots and the immigrants' construction of a new identity means a blending of two cultural traditions, drawing from a Chinese ancestry and a Canadian life experience to create a hybrid Chinese-Canadian literary culture.

KEY WORDS

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The last quarter century has witnessed a tremendous production of Chinese Canadian writings, among which about a dozen titles have won national awards and thus attracted a wide readership and considerable academic interest.¹ Lien Chao's *Beyond Silence* places Chinese Canadian writings in English in an historical context and makes a strong case for these works to be included in the Canadian literary canon (xiii). Maria Ng argues that Chinese Canadian literature is still dominated by the collective memory and the "limited cultural landscape" of the Chinatowns of the early immigrants, the railroad, laundry, and domestic workers whose immigration history and experience are as alien to general readers as they are to the newer immigrants who arrived in Canada after the late 1960s ("Chop Suey" 172). In their analyses of Chinese Canadian literature, neither Chao nor Ng includes authors writing in Chinese—the newer immigrants who entered Canada as highly educated professionals, businessmen and independently wealthy people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland China, and Southeast Asia.

I argue that these immigrant writings should be counted as Chinese Canadian literature, in order to observe the full diversity of the Chinese literary experience in Canada and to open up a dialogue between the *tusheng* 土生 or local-born writers and the *huaqiao* 華僑 or immigrant authors. The primary purpose of this paper is to contextualize some local-born and immigrant writings and to examine their configuration of Chinese identity and Canadian landscape. The space limitations of this article do not allow for a comprehensive survey, which accounts for the omission of some authors.² The local-born authors in this study are descendants of sojourners and immigrants; although some may be minimally functional in a spoken

Chinese dialect, they write in English (Paul Yee, Sky Lee, Denise Chong, Fred Wah, Wayson Choy, Evelyn Lau, Larissa Lai). Of the immigrant writers who arrived after the late 1960s, most write in Chinese (Chu Hsiao-yen 朱小燕, Lu Zhaoling 盧昭靈, Liang Hsi-hua 梁錫華, Ma Sen 馬森, Tung-fang Pai 東方白), but several work in their acquired English (Yuen-Fong Woon, Ye Ting-xing, Lien Chao) or French (Ying Chen).³ This study shows that many local-born writers construct their Canadian identity and Chinese culture centering around their ancestors' Gold Mountain 金山 injustices in Canada and Tangshan 唐山 legends in China. The immigrant authors draw upon their Chinese cultural and literary traditions to configure an additional Canadian identity by appropriating the maple leaf as the literary symbol of the adopted country. The local-born authors' search for their roots and the immigrants' construction of a new identity means a blending of two cultural traditions, drawing from a Chinese ancestry and a Canadian life experience to create a hybrid Chinese-Canadian literary culture. In this paper I use the term hybridity to refer to the process of blending elements of language, cultures, and literary traditions through the interaction of the authors' Chinese descent and their current life in Canada. I concur with but do not limit myself to Homi Bhabha's and Rey Chow's conceptualization of hybridity as an in-between or "third space," as cited by Ien Ang, who states: "As a concept, hybridity always implies a blurring or at least a problematizing of boundaries, and as a result, an unsettling of identities" (Ang 2, 16).

Local-Born Authors Writing Gold Mountain (Canada) in English

In terms of subject matter, the local-born authors may be divided into two groups, with the larger group writing about their ancestors' past and the smaller group writing about their own present world. For the former group, reclaiming the history of their family and community and addressing this omission in mainstream Canadian history texts are crucial for constructing Canadian identity across the genres, as in Paul Yee's children's fiction, Sky Lee's novel, Fred

Wah's prose, and Wayson Choy's memoir. These writers are the descendants of the first generations of immigrants to Canada who brought into Gold Mountain the peasant culture and dialects of two county groupings (*Sanyi* 三邑 and *Siyi* 四邑) from south China's Guangdong province. Paul Yee could well be speaking on behalf of these writers when he recently credited his inspiration and motivation to his cultural affiliation as a Chinese Canadian author; it was this that enabled him to "'give voice' to a people who have lived a unique experience in Canada without leaving books or insights about themselves behind" (Huggan and Siemerling 103).

These voices recall Gold Mountain, a Canada of the past, and Tangshan, a China of the past, both experienced by the local-born authors only through the tales told by their parents or grandparents in a Chinese dialect that they do or did not fully understand. By digging into the past through historical documents and photographs, their search for roots reveals a Gold Mountain tarnished by injustice and discrimination against their ancestors. To discourage Chinese immigration, in the late 19th century Canada imposed a "head tax" on new Chinese arrivals; the initial charge of \$50 in 1885 increased to \$100 in 1900 and \$500 in 1903. From 1923 to 1946 the Chinese Immigration Act banned Chinese immigration altogether until it was repealed in 1947, after which Chinese Canadians were permitted to vote and enter careers in law, engineering, and medicine (Li 47, Jay 312). The local-born writers have been excited to find records confirming the participation of the early Chinese arrivals and their descendants in nation-building activities, such as working on the railroad, their contributions to the economy and Canada's war efforts during the two world wars. In Paul Yee's *Breakaway*, Kwok, living on a vegetable farm in depression-ridden Vancouver in the 1930s, decides to manage the family farm instead of going to university—his declared reason being his wish that vegetable farms, not just restaurants and laundries, may mark the productivity of the Chinese and their contribution to the Canadian economy (143).

In re-telling these tales in English with a modern twist and a sensitivity to social issues, the local-born authors reflect hybrid

identities and cultures in their writings. In *Ghost Train*, which won the Governor-General's award in children's literature, Paul Yee blends the current awareness of gender and disability issues in Canada with a fragmentary understanding of Chinese funeral rituals. A gifted teenage artist, born with only one arm, arrives in Gold Mountain's Vancouver to join her father, but is told that he already died while working on the Canadian Pacific Railway. She has a dream sequence where she rides on a phantom train and listens to deceased railway workers talking about the families left behind in Tangshan. Unable to carry out her father's instruction to ship their bones home to China, she paints the railway with the Chinese men in it, then burns the painting and scatters the ashes into the Pacific Ocean, so all the ashes and last wishes, symbolically represented in the painting, could flow home to Tangshan. This burial rite is an imaginative hybrid alternative to the Chinese tradition of returning the bones to the ancestral homeland for burial.

The adult narratives portray a harsher Gold Mountain by serving up the dark side of Vancouver's Chinatown, a community enclosed by legislated injustice and reeking of vice, gambling, prostitution, the sale of children, purchase of birth certificates, and child abuse. Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is set in Vancouver's Chinatown and tells an engrossing tale of a Chinese immigrant family, whose assimilation spanned six generations from the 1890s to 1987. Canadian events such as the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885 and the 1924 murder of a white woman are blended into this narrative of familial tensions, male progeny, adultery, incest, and upward social and economic mobility. Denise Chong's family history of four generations revolving around Vancouver's Chinatown focuses on the tumultuous life of her maternal grandmother who came to Canada as a concubine, took lovers, and supported her family members in Canada and China on what she could make as a waitress and prostitute, as well as occasional gambling windfalls.

These local-born Chinese authors' Canadian identity may be anchored in their forefathers' presence in Canadian history, but their own mastery of the English language in which they communicate their

narratives is an important component of both their Canadian identity and culture. Because their first language is a spoken Cantonese dialect, hybridities of language are created in the texts of the local-born Chinese, as indicated by the scattered appearance of dialect terms. Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* contains a child's literally translated Taishanese, as in "go die, stinky bitch," "dead girl bag," and "how many times ten years" (24, 70). In Denise Chong's family history, we see confusion in the translation, as when "*jook gee Hing*" is translated as "fast enough to catch a pig," when the intended meaning is "Hing, who is gullible and stupid like a pig" (110). Fred Wah's native Kaiping dialect, sprinkled with Chinook jargon, refreshingly gives us two original terms: "*high muckamucka*" for putting on airs, and "*You mucka high*" for a crude Cantonese swear phrase (*Diamond* 68).

It is this hybrid or deficient grasp of the Chinese language that has drawn ridicule to the local-born Chinese, making them appear as *zhuxin*, "hollow bamboo" or "hollow" in Chinese culture. Sky Lee remarks that Hong Kong Chinese similarly look down on the local-born Chinese because the latter's Chineseness derives from peasant families, reflecting low-brow culture and low-class practices (Go 64). But to the local-born writers, not just in Canada but elsewhere, the ability to speak Chinese is not a defining criterion of Chineseness. In fact, Chinese identity is more complex and continues to subtly change its configurations. As Ien Ang puts it: "In short, if I am inescapably Chinese by *descent*, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*. When and how is a matter of politics" (36).

In Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill*, a "biotext" as he calls it of his mixed-race family, Chinese identity is not generated by race and ethnicity but by exclusion from the majority society and by culture. With a half-Chinese, half Scot-Irish father and a Scandinavian mother, Fred is only one-quarter Chinese but grew up, blond and blue-eyed, in his father's Chinese community and cafes (5, 13, 89). His father was born in Canada but his grandfather's Confucian duty sent him back to his first wife in China; when he returned to Canada he was treated as a Chinese and worked in restaurants because the Canadian government's exclusionist policies limited his career options. Fred's

Scot-Irish grandmother, coping with her husband's womanizing and gambling, persevered to bring Fred's father and aunt home from China after seventeen years of separation. Although a white woman, she was in fact a long-suffering concubine like Denise Chong's grandmother, but the latter did not succeed in bringing her children home from the first wife (Chong). The ordeal of these two women shows that their shared gender and motherhood experience transcended race. Fred and his siblings, who could pass for white, and his white grandmother and mother could not escape the racial discrimination directed at this inter-racial family because of his Chinese grandfather's race and his father's occupation as a cafe worker and owner. However, the Wah family were also outsiders among the Chinese, who felt uneasy in their presence. *Diamond Grill* thus adds a racial dimension to the Chinese community and the first-generation Chinese working in mines, laundries, and restaurants, on farms and railroads; whites who married into Chinese families as well as their inter-racial children similarly suffered under the racist, exclusionist laws.

The inter-racial Wah family, like other Chinese families growing up in Canada, enjoyed Canadian sports: hockey and basketball games for Fred, fishing for his father in between *fan-tan* and *mah-jong* gambling games. The cafe also participated in a piece of Canadian history when the ice cream craze hit the town of Nelson and Fred's father quickly began serving ice cream (145). But the dominant culture identified in Fred's father's happy "mixed-grill" of a family is Chinese, and the major component of this Chineseness is home-cooked food—not the restaurant dishes. *Foong-cheng*, or Chinese sausage, seems to be the favorite, and Fred's brother Donnie, who looks the fairest and is the best cook among the siblings, craves it so much that he could eat it cold (9). And now, with the parents and grandparents gone, Fred's tie to Chineseness is still the Chinese food of his childhood and youth: *juk* soup from left-over turkey, *lo bak* and steamed pork with bean curd paste on rice and bitter vegetables (167, 67, 91). No one now wants to eat the eyes of the deep-fried rock cod but this dish remains a glowing symbol of Chineseness in the family

reunions of the now predominantly white Wah family.

Although not specifically mentioned, Fred's father also "ate bitterness" (*chiku* 吃苦) as he endured a life of rejection in both China and Gold Mountain, discriminated against by both Chinese and white communities. Indeed, eating bitterness is a significant component of Chinese culture, as reflected in the life of the forefathers in many local-born writers' works (Ng, "Chop Suey," 182). In Vancouver's Chinatown from the 1930s to 1940s, the culture of eating bitterness can be observed in both the adults and children. Indeed, as noted by Wayson Choy, suicide and dead bodies were not uncommon in the bachelor society, where the men were lonely and the few women hardly lived a happier life as child brides, servants, concubines, and prostitutes (73). Some Chinatown children with the "darkest personal histories" were sexually abused, beaten, and starved (98). Child abuse can be observed particularly in the practice of "paper children," whose parents or guardians bought the birth certificates and registration papers belonging to children born to Chinese men living in Canada. The children who entered Canada with these false papers faced a difficult future in Canada, as did Choy's mother and Chong's grandmother, who arrived as brides and who were put to work straight away. Those whose birth certificates were sold and who remained in China suffered no less from permanent separation from their families, like Denise Chong's two aunts who never returned to Canada, the place where they were born. Sold and adopted by kind parents at a time when boys fetched ten times the price of girls, Wayson Choy escaped the fate of other Chinatown children who "ate bitterness" and suffered physical and sexual abuse (282, 263).

Choy was relatively happy as a child, accompanied by a dog and surrounded by fictitious "paper" and adoptive uncles and aunts. The memory of this childhood and Chinese identity is engraved in the physical landscape of Chinatown and Vancouver as constructed by street names (Pender Gai), addresses (447 Dunlevy), permanent landmarks (Stanley Park), and flashes of the past, as in recalling that during World War II, Vancouver streetcars had headlights taped up at night so the light flowed like "slit eyes" (23). Typical of the local-born

writers, Wayson Choy as a child shows little interest in the physical beauty of the Canadian landscape: "I wished we didn't live in a city surrounded by stupid ocean and useless mountains" (82). But his childhood was also subjected to the friction caused by the long absences of his father at work and his mother's *mah-jong* games. In 1950, at the age of eleven, Choy moved to Bellevue, Ontario with his mother to help his father run a restaurant. The marriage was saved and his parents stayed together, and only after they had passed away did Choy discover what was an open secret in Chinatown: that as an infant he had been sold and adopted (325).

Local-Born Writers Writing the Present in English

The local-born writers discussed above are all directly related to the early Chinese immigrants, who came to Canada through the head tax or by means of false papers, and survived institutional racism and exclusionist policies in Chinatown. Having uncovered their family and community history they want their records to be read as (a marginalized but important) Chinese-Canadian history (Lee, "Engaging," 19). The immigrants who arrived in Canada after the late 1960s were better educated and, unlike the earlier arrivals, were not restricted to menial occupations. Many have become upwardly-mobile, successful professionals, living in a world very distant from the closed space of pre - 1950s Chinatown residents (Li 120). The other group of local-born writers are mostly the children of these newer immigrants, who are mainly Cantonese although there are also some Mandarin speakers from Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Not directly connected to the earliest immigrants, their Canadian identity and Chinese culture are not primarily products of the history and language of the "bitterness-eating" first-generation immigrants, or of their rustic customs and village dialects. Their writings are anchored in the present and they delve into the complexities of modern life within contemporary Canadian social and political contexts.

Maria Ng is right to encourage writers such as Wayson Choy and Sky Lee to move beyond the Chinatown of the 1930s and 1950s and

integrate their writing experience with the newer immigrants' world so as to contextualize the entire Chinese immigrant experience ("Chop Suey"). In "Daisy the Sojourner" Sky Lee seems to do just that when the Chinese narrator ignores her father's "ol chinese-stick-together" guidance: "So I veered over a few city blocks, from Chinatown to Commercial Drive, or 'from race to gender,' as I saw it" (*Bellydancer* 117, 112). Roles are now reversed from the Gold Mountain of a century ago: the destitute sojourner now comes to Vancouver from Quebec, not China. The sojourner, a bisexual single mother on welfare, wants to marry the Chinese dentist from Hong Kong who might improve her economic and social status, but he turns out to be already married.

Going further than Sky Lee in shredding the race cover are Evelyn Lau and Larissa Lai, both children of the newer immigrants who arrived after the late 1960s. Like Sky Lee they write mostly about Vancouver but are not interested in reclaiming Chinese Canadian history from the Gold Mountain sojourners; rather, they write about contemporary society and delve into themes that intertwine more extensively with the broader Canadian community. To Evelyn Lau, who had poetry published in mainstream journals as a young teen, Chineseness is a set of oppressive patriarchal family obligations imposed on her at an early age because of the absence of sons in the family; as the older daughter she was given the additional role of serving as an shining academic and moral example to her younger sister. Although a straight-A student and very capable of fulfilling these expectations, Lau rejected them and her Chinese identity at the age of fourteen, running away from her home in Richmond, B.C. to live in a community of writers. But soon she found herself plunged into a brutal world of prostitution and drugs, not in Chinatown but in the white majority society. Social workers and psychiatrists from the majority community tried in vain to help her and her parents to put her/their life in order, but only through her writing could she preserve her sanity in the midst of ongoing identity and cultural confusions. Writing allowed her to cope in a complex world where the harsh lifestyle of an addict and prostitute in the white society clashed with

her family's conservative Chinese values.

Lau considers herself a mainstream writer and poet, and absolutely refuses to identify herself as a Chinese ethnic author. She finds little of redeeming value in her immigrant family's home; she blames her strong-willed mother for causing her weak but well-intentioned father's unhappiness, and more importantly for a lack of support and encouragement for her promising writing career. Her *Runaway*, published when she was seventeen, is a candid diary of her life as a runaway, a prostitute, and a drug addict. The negative portrayal of her Chinese family and the explicit sex so enraged her parents that they disowned her in a public declaration in a Vancouver Chinese newspaper. Her writing widened the gulf between her and her family and divorced her from Chinese culture, but in the world of prostitution world her Chineseness returns and defines her when her clients identify her as a Chinese prostitute.

Her other writings—poems, short stories and novels—are highly charged with eroticism, sexuality, and depression, with feelings based on personal experience and reflecting her selective memories of Chinese culture during her first fourteen years living in her “Chinese home.” Certainly Chineseness is not present in the plots or language of her short story collection, *Choose Me*, which explores the troubled worlds of men and women and younger woman/older man relationships. One story is based on her affair with the prominent Canadian writer W. P. Kinsella, who sued her for violating his rights by writing about him (*Inside Out* 127–89). Lau's Canadian identity is ambivalent and heavily based on her sexual experience to the exclusion or absence of other cultural components such as food and festival traditions. Having given up her Chineseness when she left her Chinese family life, her reconfiguration of identity is not derived from blending Chinese and Canadian culture and language in her writings, but seems to be a replacement of her former Chinese youth by her life in a community of writers and in the worlds they create through writing.

In contrast, Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand* is full of hybridities in culture, identity, and language, its plot rich with

intersections between the world of the past in China's ninth-century capital of Xian and the world of the present in Canada's Vancouver. Schooled in both Chinese and western culture at university and at home, the author appropriates "fox tales" and historical events from China and weaves a multi-layered tale based on the allegorical and shifting voices of a fox that transforms itself into a ninth-century Chinese poetess and, alternatively, into a modern Chinese-Canadian woman in the 1980s and 1990s. A narrative of racial, misogynist and homophobic violence is tempered with philosophical musings: "The more you run away from the old world, the more it catches up with you" (41).

In this "new fox tale," Lai juxtaposed patriarchal, heterosexual Chinese historical records and myths to create a Canadian novel in which the lesbian theme permeates the narrative and where homophobic violence endangers both the Asian and larger Canadian communities. The novel opens with the fox advising a young wife in China, whose husband took a concubine; following her advice the wife makes herself attractive but runs off with the concubine, and the fox moves to the west coast of Canada. In another transformation, the fox becomes the poetess Yu Hsuan-Chi, a ninth-century poetess who sold herself to the teahouse out of filial piety and to overcome poverty. Lu Ch'iao, a woman disguised as a scholar, becomes Yu's lover, then arranges to have Yu bought out as her husband's concubine so the two can continue their lesbian love affair. But when Lu initiates another affair with a female acrobat, Yu beats her to death and is executed for the murder. Chinese legal history, however, records a different version: the murder and execution are factual, but Yu committed the murder because Lu had stolen her male lover.

In still another narrative voice of the "fox," Ming Lee, a contemporary Chinese-Canadian woman whose father had a factory in China that was burned down, ends up murdered in Stanley Park, likely due to homophobic violence; her tattoos and short hair suggest that she might have been mistaken for a gay man. A digression on five other murders of Asian women reveals the prevalence of racial and homophobic hatred as well as the broadened geographical base and

superior educational background of the newer Asian immigrants to Vancouver (216). One victim was an engineering student, the daughter of a forklift driver who had been a doctor in Vietnam but could not resume her previous occupation because of licensing restrictions. While walking in Stanley Park, she was murdered by four young men with shaved heads (“skinheads”) who yelled that Asians were taking over the city. The second murder victim was a Chinese girl with short hair like a boy. While walking with her father, a chemistry professor, she was called a faggot and her skull was crushed. The third girl was a business student from Hong Kong with a rich aunt in Richmond who had sponsored her immigration to Canada. Some young men extorted money from her, forced her to drive to Stanley Park, and beat her to death with a crowbar. A conductor and an opera singer were the divorced parents of the fourth murder victim, who also had an unhappy marriage and was killed for her money. The last murdered girl was a married waitress who supported her husband at school. When she was attracted by a female dancer, it was enough to drive her brother to beat her to death with a hockey stick. In all these murder stories Lai skillfully appropriates Chinese culture and history to create a bleak depiction of Vancouver in the 1990s, where the anti-Chinese racism has now expanded to become violence and hatred against other East Asians as well as Chinese, against women and homosexuals.

Immigrant Authors Writing In Chinese⁴

Anyone who has lived in Vancouver cannot forget the all-winter rainfalls, the smell of salt water from the ocean and the backdrop of high snow-capped mountains, so it may come as a surprise that the city’s stunning physical setting is not emphasized by the local-born writers. Although the familiar streets, restaurants, and landmarks such as Stanley Park make frequent appearances in their work, Vancouver’s physical beauty, climate and seasonal changes are strikingly absent. Could it be that local-born authors, so deeply committed to reclaiming the history of their forefathers and in reconfiguring their Chinese and

Canadian identities in the cultural landscape of Canada, hardly notice the sweeping physical landscape and maple leaves that so impress the immigrant writers? It may be that being born in Canada and not having lived in China, these writers are not affected by the different landscapes in their forefathers' stories of Tangshan and Gold Mountain. In contrast the immigrant authors, whether writing in their native Chinese or in acquired English or French, forge their Canadian identity on the physical landscape and on the national symbols of Canada, especially the maple leaf.⁵ The maple leaf does not even appear in any of the local-born writings that I have come across, perhaps in part because most of the local-born writers live on the west coast where maple trees lack the spectacular display of autumn colors found in Ontario and Quebec. Also, the maple leaf was emblazoned on the Canadian flag only in 1965, too late to make an impression as an emblem of Gold Mountain for the immigrants who arrived before then; however, it became a powerful symbol of Canada for the highly-educated immigrants who entered Canada after 1967 as "independents."

After a period of adjustment, a number of these post-1967 immigrants became lawyers, engineers, accountants or doctors, while the poorer and less-educated immigrants remained in menial jobs in restaurants and factories. Among the immigrants with a higher education about two dozen have turned to writing, with most publishing their works in their native Chinese and several publishing in acquired English or French. Unlike the local-born authors who engage in the history of Chinese Canadians and in the reconfigurations of Chineseness, the immigrant authors are not particularly interested in the early immigrants. After all, they have no ambivalence about their own Chinese culture and identity, which they retain in Canada, but they are preoccupied with constructing a Canadian identity by appropriating the maple leaf and other icons of Canadian nationhood in their writings.

The production of immigrant authors writing in their native Chinese about their experience in Canada can be claimed as part of *huawen wenxue* 華文文學 [Chinese Diaspora Literature in Chinese].

Although the setting is Canadian, the writing style and literary traditions remain Chinese, so that the works can also be classified as Chinese literature. The Chinese-Canadian hybridization of language and cultural traditions seen in the local-born writers is not often seen in these immigrant authors, who were schooled in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Mainland China and had initiated their writing careers before they immigrated to Canada. In addition to writing novels and short stories, these writers publish newspaper columns and essays that are later bound in collected volumes. While the other authors writing in English have a Canada-wide readership, immigrant writings in Chinese are popular in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China but readership in Canada is limited to immigrants who are able to read Chinese.

Among the immigrant writers, Chu Hsiao-yen is the most directly involved in the Chinese community and Canadian society in both her personal experience and writing. Already an established journalist and novelist in Taiwan before immigrating to Canada, she retrained as an accountant but launched a second writing career that has produced several novels and essay collections. The essays are characterized by realism, social justice, quick wit and infectious cheer as she pokes fun at her own life as an immigrant. Indeed her writings since 1987 incorporate her experience as an immigrant, tax accountant and auditor, her community service, and her insights into Canadian life, society, and politics.

To demonstrate the participation and integration of Chinese immigrants in Canadian cities, Chu draws stories from actual news stories about prison riots, embezzlement, and divorce statistics. The characters in her fiction take up professions such as accounting, law, politics, medicine, education, and business, an indication that the integration of Chinese immigrants into the Canadian middle class has accelerated despite the continued existence of racial prejudice. They delve into every aspect of Canadian life, including the prison and taxation systems. In *Zhuizhu [In Pursuit]*, an accountant and an architect living in Edmonton, both Chinese and married, have an intense relationship that ends with an abortion. The relationship

becomes complicated by the parole of the accountant's husband, a disbarred lawyer who was imprisoned for embezzling funds.

The professional and cultural integration of immigrants has had only limited success, as symbolized by the sharp contrast between the Canadian landscape and the home country. The landscape symbolizes the immigrants' "difference," turning points and hope, as Chu remembers her first visit to Stanley Park's Prospect Point in the 1970s, where she had noted that the snow was bending tree branches (*Zhuzai* 16). The sadness of leaving Vancouver, after eleven years' residence, is alleviated by taking to Alberta a bottle of water from the Pacific Ocean and a bottle of sand from the beach. In *Zhuizhu*, a novel written later in Alberta, Chu notes that "the sun sets too early in the winters of the northern country," where the north wind and cold snow signal the need to recharge car batteries and cover the face (7). The northern country is also known by newer immigrants as the "*fengye zhibang*" or land of the maple leaf, whose seasonal displays sadly signal the coming of winter. *Zhuizhu's* book cover depicts a maple leaf, and in the poem expressing the lovers' parting exchange, the red bean from Asia and the maple leaf from Canada are contrasted (234); the book ends with memories of maple leaves and pine cones found in Edmonton's river valley parks (310).

Another journalist before immigrating to Canada is Lu Zhaoling, who since 1973 has become the Chinese-Canadian columnist of exile and immigrant life. Delving into Canadian society and taking the advice that "when in Rome do as the Romans do," he strips naked and reads philosophy at Wreck Beach, the nudist beach off the University of British Columbia campus (164). Distressed by the remarks of Mila Mulrone, a former prime minister's wife who had mistakenly stated that maple trees grew only in Canada, he argues that China already had maple trees in the eighth century (180). As evidence he cites a well-known poem from China's eighth-century poet Zhang Ji 張繼:

Moon setting, crows cawing, frost filling the sky
 through river maples, fishermen's flares confront my uneasy
 eyes.

(Watson 280).

Liang Hsi-hua chose to return (*huiliu* 回流) to Hong Kong in 1976, but fourteen years later his nostalgia for Canada had become a self-professed *huaixiang* 懷鄉, “nostalgia for home,” homesickness. His essays reminisce about his travels to Canada’s Northwest Territories and his varied work experience—from janitor in Vancouver to educator in Nova Scotia. Driving through Ontario in October, he stopped in a maple forest with its shades ranging from “drunken crimson” to “fiery red” and marveled at how fitting it was that this country of snow and ice should sing praise to the maple leaf instead of a national flower (51–52).

Ma Sen is another *huiliu* author who re-settled in Taiwan after studying, teaching, and writing at universities in Victoria, Vancouver, and Edmonton. Two short stories, written in 1977 and set in two different cities, contrast the landscapes of Canada and China and recall the overwhelming loneliness of modern man in a transformed homeland. In “Xuedi youyu” [Melancholy of Snow], a student from Hong Kong helps a Taiwanese student who has slipped on an icy road in Edmonton’s freezing (minus 30 to minus 40 degree Celsius) winter. Although his ulcers need medical attention, how could he forget even for a moment his obligation to bring his family to Canada, when the snow constantly reminds him of his father’s white hair? (85–95). In “Yazi” [Duck] Vancouver’s autumn brings forth rain and scatters the yellow and red leaves. A thirty-year old history graduate student who listens to the CBC, Canada’s national radio station, goes to Stanley Park to feed the ducks, feeling lost and as cold as the water in the pond (Ma 49–66). Autumn is also described through its maple leaves by a prolific immigrant author from Taiwan, Tung-fang Pai, in his “Shahe yu wo” [Saskatchewan River and Me]. Tung-fang observes that the maple trees, “with many sorrows and sentiments, cried their eyes red, shedding tears all over the ground” (21).

These writings in Chinese show that despite living in Canada and delving into the majority society, the Chinese identity and culture of the immigrants remain intact and they seem to be able to move back to the home country easily, as did the *huiliu* authors mentioned above. The maple leaf and the Canadian landscape are used to

contrive and reinforce a Canadian identity, but it seems to be more a symbol and idea to convey nostalgia than a hybrid identity with substance. Little interaction exists between these writers writing in Chinese and the local-born writers writing in English or French: with few of the immigrants' works translated into English, local-born writers cannot read them and a real dialogue between immigrant and local-born writing cannot be developed.

Immigrant Writers Writing in Acquired English or French

The immigrant writers writing in English are in the best position to communicate with both the local-born writers and the immigrant writers using Chinese. Among them, Yuen-Fong Woon, a post-1967 immigrant from Hong Kong and a sociologist specializing in the ancestral counties of the early Chinese arrivals, has the deepest insight into both groups. Her *Excluded Wife* combines the local-born writers' commitment to early Chinese Canadian history and the immigrant writers' depiction of post-1967 immigrant life. The novel contains the same narrative of railroad and restaurant workers, exclusionist injustices and eat-bitterness episodes found in the works of local-born writers, but the author's direct access to Chinese language and culture provides a more balanced context by telling the narrative from the perspective of the wives and children left behind in China when the husbands sailed to Gold Mountain.

The narrative of Wong Sau-Ping traces her life from the age of thirteen to seventy, during which time she married in China, fled to Hong Kong with her purchased son and biological daughter, then arrived in Canada in 1955 and gave birth to another daughter and son. In Canada she survived the ordeals of hard work, her husband's death, and a long lawsuit complicated by false papers. After all her children had settled down with professional jobs, financial security and a secure family life, she returns to Taishan with her daughter Pauline. While she makes arrangements for the bones of her husband, her father-in-law and his brother to be shipped back to China for reburial, a brother-in-law approaches her; he is seeking a Gold Mountain

bachelor of any age to marry his fifteen-year-old granddaughter. Pauline, shocked at this marriage proposal, one which is repeated by many relatives and acquaintances, reflects: "Send live girls to Vancouver and dead bones to China. What an exchange" (282). In the fifty-eight years since the days spent in her maiden house in Taishan, Sau-Ping has experienced marriage and separation, the tumultuous changes of civil war and communist revolution in China, a harsh refugee life in Hong Kong, and almost half a lifetime in Canada: during this time she saw racism change into a gentler multiculturalism that encouraged her white son-in-law to speak Mandarin and play *mah-jong* with her. She decides not to live with her sons and daughters, whose kitchens are full of unfamiliar utensils and food; instead she resides in a senior project located at walking distance from Chinatown, where she feels comfortable with her Chinese language, food, and culture. The Canadian identity is represented by the children born in Canada, who picked up English in school and Canadian culture from living and working in Canadian society. Affirming their connection to the Chinese identity of their forefathers through Sau-Ping's experience, they have no need of the maple leaf to shape their Canadian identity, and indeed the maple leaf and physical landscape of Canada do not appear in the novel.

But in Ye Ting-xing's *A Leaf in the Bitter Wind*, the image of the maple leaf appears on every other page as a marker of new sections. In this memoir of the author's life during the turbulence of Mainland China's recent history, only several pages mention Canada. Even though the author's last name "Ye" means leaf, this excessive use of the leaf to claim a Canadian identity is tenuous at best. Strangely, the appendix contains six pages of illegal, forged documents used to obtain her student visa so that she could join her married boyfriend in Canada in 1987. A more effective affirmation of the maple leaf as Canadian identity is observed at the conclusion of Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence*, where the light filtering through the "red and golden leaves" offers optimism and hope, after the protagonist has resolved the doubts posed by her father's suicide and her lesbian orientation (212).

Lien Chao's *Maples and the Stream*, inspired by Ma Peng's painting of maple leaves partitioned by a stream, makes another convincing case for Canadian identity with the maple leaf motif as symbol. The bilingual narrative poems, spread evenly between Chinese and Canadian spaces, are poignant recollections of a life moving from birth and youth through marriage and divorce, against the backdrop of China's unstable politics, and into the continuing process of forging a new life and identity as a Chinese-Canadian academic. The "landscape" of this free verse collection is the reassuring presence of the maple tree, together with its seasonal changes, and the stream; these accompany her pursuit of dreams from China to Canada.

Living in Toronto since 1984, Chao is challenged by the barriers to assimilation in a new country where Canadian geese and Chinatown icons intersect and pull her towards different centers of gravity. In "Canada Geese" she wants "to belong" to the majority community (*Maples* 97), but she finds this community associates her with the Chinatown landscape (105, 117). But in a Chinatown and a Chinese-Canadian history dominated by Cantonese culture and dialects, Chao's Mandarin-speaking background makes her an outsider just like her "white friend" because "The truth is, I don't understand a word in Cantonese" (117). Chao and her editor made a decision to use unsimplified characters in the Chinese versions of the poems, perhaps hoping to attract a larger readership from the Chinese community. Surprisingly, the Chinese text is full of errors: simplified and unsimplified characters are used interchangeably or wrong characters are derived due to ignorance of Cantonese pronunciation. The *jupi ya* ["chrysanthemum skin duck"] hanging in the Chinatown barbecue shops makes no sense in Chinese cuisine unless it refers to *cuiji ya* ["crispy skin duck"] (114)! The confusion of characters in the Chinese version may well reflect the confused landscape of the poet's now hybrid identity, where she risks losing her native voice and script.

Ying Chen, another immigrant writer from Shanghai, experiments with hybridity more effectively in the four novels that she has written in French since her arrival in Montreal in 1989. Her work

has been acclaimed in Quebec francophone circles but only with *L'ingratitude* [*Ingratitude*] translated into English, Spanish, Italian, and Polish, has she been discussed as a Chinese-Canadian author whose work is indicative of the need for redefining Chinese-Canadian literature (Ng "Representing" 193). The narrator of *L'ingratitude* is a dead twenty-five year old Chinese woman who, as she is being prepared for cremation, reflects on her controlling mother and the oppressive rules in China which prescribed the restrictive behavior and culture that culminated in her suicide (9). Hybridity permeates Chen's writings, particularly in modifying Chinese cultural and literary concepts in the creation of an original text in an acquired language that appeals to a francophone and international readership. The proverbial sayings are reworked; for example: "two people together in a single bed did not tell each other their dreams"; "sitting under a tree and waiting for one's rabbit" (*Les lettres* 82). Wit and hybridity can be observed in a young girl's response to her tutor's instructions: "that a son should obey his father," "that the father should obey his superior," "and that the superior should obey the king." She asks whom she should obey, since she is excluded from the list. The tutor replies that she must obey all four. "Good!" she cried with joy. "I don't have to listen to my mother any more!" (*La mémoire* 12).

Chen's *Les lettres chinoises* is a discourse on love, immigrant experience and friendship told through through several narrative voices and the exchange of letters between Sassa, who remained in Shanghai, and, her fiancé, Yuan, who moved to Montreal to study and work. Yuan is soon joined in Montreal by their mutual friend, Da Li, with whom Sassa also corresponds. In the space of a year, while their letters traverse the ocean, Sassa's health deteriorates in Yuan's absence, and the love between Sassa and Yuan dies as Yuan and Da Li begin and end their affair. But the real reason for the collapse of the relationship is the widening difference in perception of home and exile between Sassa and Yuan, as expressed through the sharp contrast in culture, climate, and physical landscape between Canada's Montreal and China's Shanghai. Yuan left in January, when there was snow in

Montreal; when the writing of letters stopped, it was the end of the year and the first snowfall had fallen. The cultural gap between Sassa and Yuan can soon be detected through the memories and festivals that are no longer shared experiences. Yuan forgets Chinese New Year, otherwise known as Spring Festival, because it is minus 28 degrees Celsius in Montreal in the dead of winter (11). Da Li writes about a stand-up comedy festival whose jokes even she and Yuan could not understand, let alone Sassa (94). But Mid-Autumn Festival, during which families and friends get together, is meaningful to Da Li: she confides to Sassa that it was on that day when she and Yuan, whom she does not identify by name, consummated their relationship (104).

A most poignant image of leaves occurs in the text to signify the death of the love between Sassa and Yuan. In autumn Yuan tells Sassa that Montreal is covered with gorgeous crimson leaves, presumably from maple trees, which, carried by the wind, fall everywhere. He sends her the leaf that landed at his window, and intends the gesture to symbolize the beautiful Canada that she will be part of once she leaves China (112). But Sassa sees blood and sacrifice in the redness of the leaf and conjures up the image of the blood of sacrifice in China's five-star red flag, before which she and Yuan had together sung a patriotic song during China's war with Vietnam in 1979 (113). She tells Yuan that the yellow leaves of Si Nan Road [thinking of the south, or Shanghai, or China], where they used to take their romantic walks, have also begun to disengage and fall. She hears the sound of crushing leaves under her feet and under the feet of the passersby, and she imagines herself being treaded on, and the leaves calling to her in despair: "Sassa! Sassa!" Chinese names are used for the meaning, but in this case Ying Chen has devised the onomatopoeic name of Sassa to resemble the sound of human feet treading on dry leaves (*sa-sa*).

Sassa mourns the fate of the leaves when she imagines that they are burned in public view in Canada, without the dignity, discretion, and privacy given to the cremation of human beings. She thinks that the leaves are treated better in China, and wonders if the leaves in Montreal are burned or thrown into garbage bins where they rot in the

stench of waste (114). In creating this poignant image of the burning leaves, I would suggest that Ying Chen, schooled in Chinese, French, and Canadian literatures, has appropriated and combined two scenes from China's best-known classical novel, *Honglouloumeng* 紅樓夢 [*Dream of the Red Chamber*], in order to compare the sadness of Sassa to the grief of the classic novel's female protagonist, Lin Daiyu. In one scene Lin Daiyu sobs as she mourns and buries the fallen flowers at the end of spring:

Let others laugh flower-burial to see:
Another year who will be burying me? (Hawkes, Vol. 2: 39)

In another memorable scene, Lin discovers that her beloved is marrying someone else, and although bedridden and close to death, she burns her poems to symbolize the end of her foolish love affair (Hawkes, Vol. 4: 352). Ying Chen has thus depicted Sassa's utter hopelessness, her realization of the impossibility of ever recovering the love that she and Yuan had shared, through a skillful allusion to the Chinese literary canon in order to create a hybrid text—first by adopting the image of the maple leaf as a symbol of Canadian identity for Yuan, Sassa's former lover, and then by using *Honglouloumeng's* flower-burial and poem-burning scenes to demonstrate Sassa's rejection of Canada and of a possible life with Yuan in Montreal.

This paper has attempted to provide a context for examining the main trends in the themes and techniques of Chinese-Canadian literature since the late 1970s. I have argued that there exists a marked difference regarding motivation and content between the local-born and immigrant authors. By seeking their Chinese roots in the Gold Mountain of their forefathers, a number of local-born writers have hoped to reclaim the history of the early Chinese Canadians and their Gold Mountain's Chinatown ghetto, and to incorporate it into mainstream Canadian history. Other local-born writers, although equally conscious of their Chinese descent, have written about their current life within the broader Canadian society. The absence of the Canadian physical landscape and maple leaf images in their writings

can perhaps be explained by the fact that being born in Canada and having spent their entire life there, they do not need national symbols such as the maple leaf, the snow, and Vancouver's rain to confirm or (re)configure their Canadian identities. The immigrant writers, on the other hand, came to Canada as adults and they retain both the memory and the practice of Chinese language, culture, and literary traditions, even as they add Canadian components to form a new Chinese-Canadian identity. Their settlement in the new country is fraught with uncertainties as they adjust to changes in the climate and in their professions, housing, family expectations and parenting challenges. Thus, the embracing of the Canadian cultural landscape is accompanied by a powerful sense of adaptation to the physical landscape, the cold and rain, and the maple leaf is often adopted as the symbol of this process. The symbolic power and emotional force of the crimson, falling maple leaves in immigrant writings is heightened by these writers' drawing upon a Chinese literary tradition known as *beiqiu* 悲秋 [grieving over the arrival of autumn], a device not familiar to local-born writers schooled in Canadian literature and culture. Perhaps, however, the immigrant writers could to a degree overcome the problems they face in parenting and communicating with their children, and in becoming more fully assimilated into Canadian society, if they could or would read the local-born authors in English or through translations, for in this way they might better understand the perplexities the local-born authors have experienced in crossing (in both directions) the boundaries between an ancient Chinese ancestry and contemporary Canadian life.

NOTES

¹ For example, Ying Chen's *L'ingratitude* won the Quebec-Paris Prize and Grand Reader's Prize of *Elle Quebec*; Fred Wah's *Waiting for Saskatchewan* (Winnipeg: Turnstone P, 1985) won the 1986 Governor-General's Award for poetry; Paul Yee's *Ghost Train* won the 1997 Governor-General's Award for children's fiction. Evelyn Lau was voted by the Canadian Authors' Association as the most promising writer of 1988, a

year before her *Runaway* was published. That Chinese-Canadian literature has attracted international attention is shown by the large number of translations into European languages, for example, Sky Lee's *Bellydancer* and Lydia Kwa's *The Colors of Heroines* (Toronto: Women's P, 1994) into German; Evelyn Lau's *Runaway* into German, French, and Spanish; Ying Chen's *L'ingratitude* into English, Spanish, Italian, and Polish.

² Among the authors not discussed here because their writings do not quite fit into this paper's focus on the themes of gold mountain and the maple leaf are Kevin Chong, *Baroque-a-nova* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2001); Yan Li, *Daughters of the Red Land* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1995); Madeleine Thien, *Simple Recipes* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2001), and Terry Woo, *Banana Boys* (Toronto: Riverbank P, 2000).

³ Chinese characters are given for the names of authors who write in Chinese. Authors writing in English or French usually do not provide their Chinese names; for instance I have inquired about the Chinese characters for Ying Chen but without success. I generally use *pinyin* romanization for Chinese names and terms, with the exception of some authors who are known by names that employ other romanization systems.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

⁵ The use of the maple leaf as the emblem of Canada was already common by 1700. In 1867–68, the Quebec and Ontario coats of arms were decorated with a sprig of three maple leaves. In 1965 the maple leaf was designated as the official emblem for the Canadian flag. Thus the Chinese immigrants who arrived before the 1960s did not so clearly identify Canada as the country of maple leaves.

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