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Rememory, Reinscription, Resignification: Strategies of Decolonization in Chinese Canadian Literature

Chinese Canadian literature emerges as one of the major subaltern cultural discourses in Canada. As a searching back into a forbidden past and an exploring into an emancipatory future, it always bespeaks a split or ambivalent subject writing on boundaries. For Chinese Canadian literature, writing on boundaries is an event that results from a liminal or aporetic existence of being caught between two worlds — doomed to the agonizing condition of “neither/nor.” On the one hand, dwelling on the boundary, as a handicapped ghost ceaselessly displaced in the half-life, half-light of cultural hybridity, the subject of the enunciation in Chinese Canadian literature is seen to emerge as a sporadic, discontinuous flow of fragmented memories and images, and of repressed voices and forms of thought. On the other hand, Chinese Canadian literature as a kind of writing on boundaries can be read, in Heideggerian terms, as an exploration into new realms of knowledge. For the “boundary” is that from which something begins its presencing. Boundary is where new ways of writing or thinking emerge; it is a space for ambiguity or ambivalence rich in inexhaustible deconstructive energy. This paper attempts to provide a conceptual grasp of the corpus of work produced by Chinese Canadian writers and a certain framework for analyzing its tropes and interpreting their political resonance. I will discuss how, writing on boundaries, Chinese Canadian writers vindicate

and celebrate cultural hybridity through performing rememory, reinscription, and resignification as three strategies of decolonization. Rememory points to the act of writing back into a forbidden past, an active effort in Chinese Canadian writers to mobilize a repressed memory, to call back and legitimate a disremembered past.¹ Reinscription refers to the effort to negotiate into the present by asserting and describing the liminal existence of the diasporic Chinese and their hybridized ambivalent identity; resignification, counterhegemonically performative in character,² designates a strategy deployed by Chinese Canadian writers in questioning, challenging, and subverting the signifying system of the English language and in turning it into a resignifying system in which the familiar English words and phrases no longer signify their normal or normative meanings. Writing back into the forbidden is constructing a counter-narrative, a counter-history as well as a prehistory of the split subject's present. It anticipates the re-cognition of the self among Chinese Canadian writers in their efforts to negotiate into the present. For the ambivalent, split diasporic subject to negotiate into the

- 1 As is familiar to readers of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, "rememory" used both as a noun and as a verb in the novel is distinguished from "remember," for what is remembered has been forgotten whereas what claims to be rememored has been repressed or pushed to the back of the mind.
- 2 According to both Derrida and Bakhtin, language is an open-ended process of (re)signification or a space for dialogue among its users or individual speech acts. Every time a certain word or term is (re)used in a new context its meaning becomes revised and its altered meaning not only recalls all previous or other contexts in which the word or term has been used, but engages individual language users or speech acts in conscious or unconscious dialogue with other users or speech acts. Roughly speaking, there are two kinds of resignification, the unconscious and the performative. The unconscious resignification is a perpetually and ubiquitously recurrent event as long as language is used; the performative resignification involves and derives from acts of deliberate, contestatory negotiation with a certain hegemony or dominant force. Resignification can be thus turned into a counterhegemonic act of resistance to ideological manipulations or to political repression or oppression, for each time resignification happens, a new site of contestatory negotiation opens up between self and other, margin and center, or between colonizer and colonized. Resignification of the identity of sign or subject is a much discussed topic, especially in the writings of Judith Butler.

present is to assert itself as a locus of crisis, a hybrid, a non-identity, a doubling, or a third term. Writing on boundaries can be thus read as an effective counterhegemonic strategy of the subaltern to strive for self-vindication and self-fulfilment via challenging, undermining, and dismantling dominant culture. It turns cultural hybridity and indeterminacy into a fountainhead counterhegemonic agency, dwelling both in and outside the colonizer's syntax.

As Bennett Lee succinctly points out, one of the recurring themes in Chinese Canadian literature "is the question of identity, which in turn leads to an inquiry into the past, both private and collective" (3). This inquiry, however, took many years to come. For, as Kae, the narrator of Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, realizes, the edicts from within the Chinese community and without forbid the telling of the past. Thus, to address the history of early Chinese Canadian experience is to trace back to a forbidden past, to violate "a secret code." This is because history revisited will incur a sense of shame both on the Chinese Canadian community and on Canadian society in general. It is about one hundred and fifty years since the first immigrants landed in Canada from China. Unlike the indigenous peoples in Asia or Africa who, colonized in their own lands, remained rooted in their native soil and culture while being displaced from their original loci of cultural signification, and unlike the British convicts exiled to Australia in the nineteenth century, who, though stigmatized as black sheep of the population and forbidden to return to homeland, were nonetheless granted the privilege of access to the dominant language and culture, the Chinese labourers, mostly recruited as manpower for building the Canadian Pacific Railway, were shipped to Canada to be colonized in a foreign land, uprooted from their native culture and stigmatized as "alien," "inferior," and "debased and uncivilized" (Chan 17). They were paid at the lowest rate, homeless, friendless, isolated, and marginalized, separated from their families who were not allowed to enter Canada unless able to pay a huge amount of money for head tax (\$50 in 1896; \$100 in 1900; \$500 in 1904).

The most excruciating law enacted against Chinese Canadians was the exclusion act of 1923, which specifically barred Chinese from entering Canada. Not until the 1950s were the Chinese granted the right to vote. "The popular literature," Anthony Chan notes, "repeatedly portrayed Chinese society as characterized by widespread poverty, loathsome disease, cruel vanities and low regard for life" (16). The area inhabited by the Chinese community in every Canadian city was often depicted as "a dark and

sinister' place" (qtd. in Chan 19). The xenophobic frenzy against "the yellow and brown hordes of China and Japan" (qtd. in Chan 17) came to a head at the beginning of the twentieth century. In newspapers and literature, Chinese Canadians are represented as "outlaw-criminals, foreigners and pariahs. Linked to criminal elements, they were a threat ... to 'a free Canadian society'" (Chan 18). While cut off from their homeland by the Pacific Ocean, the Chinese PCR labourers were rejected by the mainstream culture of Canada, living and dying "in its confines" (qtd. in Chan 8). This is the truth of that forbidden past, the pre-history of the on-going Chinese writing on boundaries. It is this repressed or disremembered history of Chinese Canadians that cries for rememory. "[T]hese overseas Chinese were like derelicts," says the narrator of Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, "neither here nor there, not tolerated anywhere; an outlaw band of men united by common bonds of helpless rage" (77). These people work ceaselessly underneath the "shadow of loneliness and isolation that hover over them" (11). Loneliness becomes a frightening tangible ghost that sucks the Chinese pale and soulless: "Mui Lan's nightmare was loneliness. She arrived and found only silence. A stone silence had tripped her up when she tried to reach out. Gold Mountain men we like stone.... Without her society of women, Mui Lan lost substance. Over the years, she became soulless" (26). Lee's novel, in a sense, can be read as an allegory of the overseas Chinese community. Stone silence, nightmarish loneliness, languageless agony, isolation, incestuous marriages, these were what the Chinamen had to endure till they became broken and "lost substance" (26). Indeed, the most horrifying part of the diminished and violated Chinese experience is to be read in the following: "Since 1923 the Chinese Exclusion Act had taken its heavy toll. The rapidly diminishing Chinese Canadian community had withdrawn into itself, ripe for incest" (Lee 147).

This is part of the forbidden story of Chinese Canadian life, diminished and dehumanized. The country the Chinese immigrants came to serve seemed never willing to accept them as Paul Yee says in "Prairie Night 1939": "the landscape and people seemed tinged with an alien scent and a menacing glow. No wonder they treat us like dog-shit in Canada" (53). The relationship between the Chinese community and the mainstream Canadian society in this story is portrayed through the lens of the protagonist Gordon's situation in Canada: "Gordon had never been invited to any home or community gathering. They complimented his cooking and nodded to him on the back street, but that was all. Gordon sensed his isolation acutely" (55).

This is a truthful picture of most early Chinese immigrants in Canada, whose service was well enjoyed, yet whose cultural existence and dignity was never accepted. No one ever describes such twilight, marginal existence more disturbingly and powerfully than Fred Wah:

Alone and on the edge of their world, far from the centre, no women, no family. This kind of edge in race we only half suspect as edge. A gap, really. Hollow....The voices from up there or behind the curtain are hot-tempered, powerful, challenging, aggressive, bickering, accusatory, demeaning, bravado, superstitious, bluffing, gossipy, serious, goading, letting off steam, ticked off, fed up, hot under the collar, hungry for company, hungry for language, hungry for luck, edgy. (1996, 111)

The whole Chinese Canadian experience can be best summarised in the two words “edgy” and “hollow,” which portray an amorphous, diminished, and marginalized existence. This is a world of debased, distorted, helpless subhumans lost in the darkness of meaninglessness. “Yet languageless, mouth always a gauze, words locked behind tongue, stopped in and out, what’s she saying, what’s she want, why’s she mad, this woman — silence stuck, stuck, stopped there and back, English and Chinese churning ocean, her languages caught in their loving angry rip tide of children and coercive tradition and authority. Yet” (1996, 5). What one sees here is a handicapped soul perpetually displaced and perpetually writhing in languageless anguish. The gaps, hollows, and languageless silences in Wah’s poetry remind one of the figure of death in Walter Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, which signifies at once a gaping lack of meaning and the source of meaning. They point to the hollowed, gapped, and languageless half-life, ghost-like existence endured by early Chinese Canadians; they also serve to investigate the lacunae and muted areas in the Anglocentric narrative of Canadian history. They are the lost, locked, and forbidden spaces of the Canadian past, the unclaimed ghosts of the early Chinese immigrants. In constructing a rememory of those forbidden spaces, Chinese Canadian writers trace out the prehistory of their own doubling, split present and, to borrow terms from Lien Chao, “construct the community’s unrecorded history in English, in the language that originally ordered the silencing” (30).

When Chinese Canadian writers start negotiating into the present, they outspokenly open themselves up as cultural interstices or hybrids, reinscribing themselves as “born ‘neither this nor that,’ nether Chinese nor

Canadian" (Choy 135), or a "criminal-like man with no culture / very difficult to find true identity" (Gunn 28). "[M]ired in another language," "[y]our eyes plead approval / of each uttered word // and even my warmest smile cannot dispel the shamed muscles / from your face" (Wong-Chu 17). Or, as Evelyn Lau asserts in "You Are Not What You Claim": you are "an enigma of human flesh," "hanging" "from the edges of the sky" (45). The same dilemma portrays Skekky's situation in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*: "English words seemed more forthright to me, blunt like road signs. Chinese words were awkward and messy, like quicksand. I preferred English but there are no English words to match the Chinese complexities" (134). If the hyphenated Canadians can be regarded as the internal colonized, then what Homi Bhabha writes of the colonial subject applies to them as well: "In occupying two places at once — or three in Fanon's case — the depersonalized, dislocated, colonial subject can become an incalculable object, quite literally difficult to place" (62). The issue of duality as such underwrites, for example, much of Lydia Kwa's writing. In her "Paranakan," the speaker's identity outgrows any names imposed upon her. After all the doubts and confusions, she comes to terms with herself — a mixed breed. Evidence of crossed borders" (111). One of the unrelenting questions for the persona is "if I label myself one race or another, does that fix my identity?" (111). In Kwa's "Father: Mother: Tongue," the speaker laments that she has no access to her mother's or father's language, and the only language she uses is "English, the language of foreigners, of colonialism" (38). She wonders if everything she thinks and writes truly belongs to her (38). Since the speaker is denied easy access to her mother's or father's tongue, her only medium of communication is English; yet, ironically, "English, my adopted language, charg[es] me out of one prison, into another" (39). The ceaseless displacement from bondage to bondage can be best conceived as the Lacanian split subject: I think where I am not; I am not where I think. She is imprisoned in time instead of space, for she is doomed to thinking without language. She is squeezed in "a borrowed language, becoming mine, yet never mine ... to write, to make room with words, is to decolonize, to lead the woman-child out of the labyrinth where she had been lost for lack of tongues" (39). The crisis of her life is not caused by the lack of a language, but that the language(s) she uses do(es) not accommodate her liminal, interstitial experience. She realizes that she has to disengage herself from that agonizing double-bind of hybridity. To make room with words is to decolonize, for opening spaces with revalorized words is not only to give

form to amorphous, repressed feelings and sensibilities, but more importantly, it is to break out of the prison-house of the colonizer's language, to negotiate and reinscribe the hybridized identity of the diasporic.

The subject of cultural difference in Chinese Canadian literature is from time to time portrayed as a hybridized existence between two worlds and two cultures, yet accepted on neither side. In Fred Wah's biotext *Diamond Grill*, the quarter-Chinese narrator laments that although he does not look Chinese, and cannot even speak Chinese, he is nonetheless called a Chink or Chinaman, forbidden to date a white girl. However, he is not accepted as a Chinese, either: people in China "conveniently" think of him as a "Canadian, white, Euro. But not Chinese" (1996, 53). In "Elite 3," Wah's anguished persona cries helplessly, "[T]he Chinese didn't trust you and the English didn't trust you. You were a half-breed, Eurasian.... In North America white is still the standard and you were not white enough. But you weren't pure enough for the Chinese either. You never knew the full comradeship of an ethnic community" (Wah 1985, 62). The very space of identification for Wah, to borrow terms from Bhabha again, "is a space of splitting" (Bhabha 44), but Anglocentric Canada never accepted doubling identity as a legitimate presence. "No matter what, you're what your father is, was, forever.... Sameness is purity. Not the same anything, when you are half Swede, quarter Chinese, and quarter Ontario Wasp" (1996, 36). This passage is charged with a double-edged sarcasm: It at once parodies and undermines white-supremacist rhetoric. Another example of such sarcastic irony occurs in the definition of "Chinese": And the "comic books and movies confirm that the Chinese are yellow (meaning cowardly), not-to-be trusted, heathens, devils, slant-eyed, dirty, and talk incomprehensible gobblydee-gook. Thus gook: n. Slang. 1. A dirty, sludgy substance. 2. An Oriental. An offensive term used derogatorily.... Sticks and stones might break my bones, but names will never hurt me" (1996, 98). The passage fills the reader with an acute sense of the speaker's indignation at the stupid, ridiculous, absurd stereotyping of the Chinese.

Perhaps no one has given a better historical narrative of Chinese Canadian experience in a single short poem than Laiwan does in his "The Imperialism of Syntax." This poem speaks to a plural "you," who are forced to leave their own country by war, opium, and poverty, "to be subject to another's language, / another's *syntax*" (58). The plural reference of the "you" raises the poem to the collective level of the ethnic community allegory. Apparently, the poem thematizing socio-political oppression of

Chinese Canadians seems only to describe their repression and violation in language — to be subjected to another language, another syntax, through the forced forgetting of themselves. Yet, on closer examination, the syntactic repression can be read as a figure *par excellence* for socio-political oppression. At this moment, one would have to go back to the title “The Imperialism of Syntax”: imperialism inscribed in and legitimized by syntax, which is loci and tracks of Anglocentric culture. If so, one can read the title backward: the syntax of imperialism. So something apparently innocent is made to show its guilty nature: if the imperialism of syntax is more descriptive, then the syntax of imperialism becomes more discursive and more politically consequent. The immigrants become despised and stigmatized for their faulty pronunciations of English, and to prove them assimilable, they have to repress their seething anguish as well as their native language. Ironically, part of their identity is repressed and lost, and part of it is never recognized — “the invisibility of yourself” (58).

When the ambivalent, split subaltern become fully aware of the continuity between syntax of imperialism and imperialism of syntax, they are ready to charge out of the syntax of imperialism, transforming the indeterminate, ambivalent, sporadic, fragmented text of the diasporic into a fountainhead of counter-hegemonic agency. This is the moment of writing on boundaries when the transgressive writing collapses linguistics which holds on to grammar, syntax, and logic, hence turning the English language into a resignifying system. Let’s take a look at a passage from Wah again:

in the face of the father the son the holy ticket safety-pinned to his lapel — the
 pileup of twisted curtains intimate ink pious pages partial pronouns translated
 letters shore-to-shore Pacific jetsam pretending love forgotten history braided
 gender half-breed loneliness naive voices degraded miscourse racist myths
 talking gods fact and fiction remembered faces different brothers sisters fathers
 tucked margins whisper zero crisscross noisy mothers absent fathers high
 muckamuck husbands competing wives bilingual I’s their unheard sighs, their yet
 still-floating lives. (1996, 6-7)

This is a Barthesian moment of transgression. In Roland Barthes’ terms, “The sentence is hierarchical: it implies subjections, subordinations, internal reactions” (50). The unpunctuated flow of fragmented, sporadic, discontinuous images of the ghostly history constitutes a powerful instance of politicized formalism. It runs outside of the hegemonic syntactic rule,

forcing its readers to confront its uncanny total flow of ambiguity and fragmentation. The omission of predicate verbs, syntagmatic relations, and conjunctures opens the passage to different readings. This is how Wah turns the English language into a resignifying system in which familiar words no longer mean the same as they do in their normative hierarchical order. The familiar, daily-used words frozen into this ungrammatical space threaten to defy and subvert the hegemonic syntax of the English language. The absence of grammar, syntax and logic does not signify an absence of meaning; rather, it points to a plethora of meaning resignified by the ungrammatically arrayed words. The resignified meaning of the unpunctuated flow of fragmented, sporadic, discontinuous images portray not only the liminal subjectivity of those early CPR builders, and the violence done to them, but also the subject of cultural hybridity, postcolonial, diasporic, and migrant in nature, refusing to be contained by the hierarchical syntax of Anglocentric cultural hegemony.

A more radical moment of resignification is Ismail's poem *Sacred Text*. This poem pushes the uncanny, violated form to the extreme. It is written in English, yet the numerous alien names of people and plants and animals tend to defamiliarize the colonizing English. It plays with the English language, breaks up its words and grammatical rules, redeploying the postmodern strategy of linguistic "play" for the reinscription of the diasporic subject. Most of the characters in the poetic narrative are personified plants, and it is well arguable that the personification in this context has a disturbing tendency to dehumanization, which can be read as an ironic parody of the Master's narrative, which tends to transform the colonized into inhuman beings. Boundaries of identity are questioned and collapsed in the section called "Ratio quality": the half-life, hybridized figure of Asian origin called Yan Ben is taken for anything — Filipino in Hongkong, "generic oriental in Calgary," "western canadian in ottawa," "anglophobe in montreal," "tibetan in vancouver," "commie at the u.s. border" (Ismail 128). When Yan Ben becomes everything his identity dissolves into nothing. This is the truth of the split diasporic subject, which is crisscrossed by overlapping cultural boundaries. And this is the moment when the Derridean antinomy yields unforeseen political resonance: The sign is and is not that ill-named thing (Derrida 17), which can be easily rewritten as the truth of the split subject: The name is and is not that ill-named being. The lack of nameable identity is a lack of social recognition. The passage has a double-edged thrust: it not

only points to the violation of the diasporic subject, but demands the reconceiving of the diasporic identity itself.

Another major feature of Ismail's poem is its syntactic fragmentation. The whole poem reads fragmented, sporadic, and discontinuous, featuring irregular spaces, gaps, encased text, no capitalization, ruptured syntax, musical notes, and split words. What first grips the readers' attention is not the configuration and signification of the correlated words and lines, but the gapped, missing, and ruptured spaces:

4. . mean pause .
 said : menopause .
 said: him . men pause.
 said : me no pause!
 (Ismail 124)

This stanza begins with the concluding word of the preceding stanza, hence the coherence between the two stanzas. However, at the beginning of Stanza 4 is a dangling period, which cuts it off from what goes before. Further, the readers may find themselves lost in the gaps between the irregularly spaced punctuation marks and words and in the lacunae of the repeated "said" in each line which rings like a voice without a head — the violation of the English syntax. The fragmentation does not stop at the syntactic level; even words become split and maimed:

Bassoon
 Transmutes
Analects
 9. XXX
 with the
 help of a
 morning-
 glory in
 kathmandu

3. ardent , flow
 er, of the mil k
wh it e throa t, morning
 glo ry bl oo
m

 sweet art ?
smaller than the purple
how i've not . missed . you

What renders the stanza uncanny is not merely the juxtaposing of the encased text on the left side and the irregularly spaced punctuation marks and words outside it, but the splitting of words themselves as well. The fragmented words impede the readers' attention, violating their reading habits, and forcing them to confront the implications of the mutilated words and gaping spaces.

The writerly text seems to renew protocols between English and its readers. It is no longer merely a matter of challenging poetic conventions, but rupturing the English language. It is English that one reads here, but it is an alienated, estranged form of the language. The split, ambivalent writing subject alternates between two cultures, two languages, and two worlds. It seems to have found its best mode of existence in the fragmented, split forms of writing. The uncanny play with English words discussed above can only come from those who live both inside and outside the language, and are therefore more apt to make sense of spacing. As cited in Stanza 4, the passage from “mean pause” to “men pause” to “me no pause” is made possible in Chinese Pidgin English. “Accumiliate” is a variation of “accumulation,” and the poet turns this difference into a locus of negotiation and reinscription. She magically metamorphoses this word into a combination of “accumulate” and “humiliation”: Isn’t accumulated humiliation the collective Chinese experience in Canada? After spelling out this accumulated history of humiliation, the author turns the Arc de triumf into “agh de triumf,” hence “agh, de triumf” — “Agh, the triumph.” This is the moment marking the author’s sense of triumph over the Master. Ismail’s textual practice precisely recalls what Gyatri Spivak terms the catachrestic strategy of “reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding”

(69). It also recalls what Mary Louise Pratt terms “code-switching.”³ By code-switching, Ismail plays with English “fluidity and strategically,” refusing to be owned by the dominant language. Her fragmented, discontinuous text performs a double job of reproducing the historical scenes of the diasporic subject’s “mouthless anger,” languageless fragmentation, and of dismantling, violating and at the same time decolonizing the dominant syntax of culture.

What is happening in the Ismail poem is not signification, but resignification, for the meaning of the uncanny-looking punctuation, words and their alignment is not something normalized, expected or cited by the signifying system of the English language. The resignification moments bespeak the poet’s distrust of the hegemonic signifying order in which the diasporic Chinese are denied dignified places. In her efforts to vindicate the violated, marginalized diasporic subject, Ismail seems to be turning the tables on that hegemonic order. What emerges from the resignifying English words and gaping spaces in the poem is a powerful style of writing, an unforeseen counterhegemonic strategy, and a rigorous identity politics as well as a rememored historical past and a reinscribed present situation, hence the resignifying collective image/name of Chinese Canadians. Through those performative acts of resignification, Ismail wrenches the English language from the master’s or colonizer’s hands, dislocating the language from its previous loci of meaning. Resignification deployed as a counterhegemonic strategy is nothing new or unique to diasporic Chinese writing. It is advocated by every counter-hegemonic group. Every emerging discourse has to challenge and question the prevailing signifying order, rewriting instituted concepts and revalorizing overtaxed words to secure a discursive language for a new mode of thinking that the existing hegemonic signifying order is unable and unwilling to accommodate. This strategy of subverting the dominant system from within is especially true of what Edward Said termed

3 According to Mary Louise Pratt, “code-switching” enables the speakers to “switch spontaneously and fluidly between two languages ... code-switching lays claim to a form of cultural power: the power to own but not be owned by the dominant language. Aesthetically, code-switching can be a source of great verbal subtlety and grace as speech dances fluidly and strategically back and forth between two languages and two cultural systems. Code-switching is a rich source of wit, humour, puns, word, play, and games of rhythm and rhyme” (177).

the postcolonial “voyage in,” which “enter[s] into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories” (216).

Shame, crisis, and transgression, these are the three interrelated moments of the split subject that writes and is written in Chinese Canadian literature. It is not only historically situated on boundaries, but comes to self-understanding and self-reinvention through writing on boundaries. It is shamefaced and agonized by its ambivalent doubling before undertaking to negotiate its hybridity into the present. It has no choice but emerges discontinuous, sporadic, and fragmented, triumphantly celebrating the mode of sporadic fragmentation as the mode of existence of counter-hegemonic agency. Chinese Canadians’ century-long solitude of living on the cultural boundary eventually breaks out of the forbidden history, when the time is ripe for repressed marginalities to turn the syntax of the Anglocentric hegemony against itself. Their resistance to the colonizing cultural and social order recalls what Michel de Certeau has written about undoing colonization from within in a different context: they subvert the system “not by rejecting or altering [its language], but by using [it] with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept. They were *other* within the very colonization that outwardly assimilated them; their use of the dominant social order deflected its power” (xiii). Negotiating from a forbidden past into the present through deploying rememory, reinscription, and resignification as effective strategies of decolonization, Chinese Canadian literature has indeed been evolving, one can argue, both inside and outside the syntax of hegemonic mainstream culture. In foregrounding and thematizing experiences, sensibilities, and structures of feeling peculiar to Chinese Canadians, Chinese Canadian writing with its enabling strategies of decolonization broadens the horizon of Canadian cultural consciousness, opening up new spaces of socio-cultural reinscription and negotiation. It is in this sense that one may have to agree that Chinese Canadian writing, to borrow terms from Linda Hutcheon, “is a dismantling but also constructive political enterprise insofar as it implies a theory of agency and social change” (183).

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