

SPACE AND IDENTITY: HYBRIDIZATION AND BOUNDARY CROSSING IN SUI SIN FAR'S POETICS OF DIASPORA¹

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274 *Diaspora* initially meant “dispersion”, or “being scattered”, and referred to an ethnic group of people leaving their homeland but still carried on or ensued the development of their cultural tradition in a foreign country. *Diaspora* involves the sense of place, homing and unhomeliness, as well as the spiritual entanglement of certain ethnic traditions or cultural roots. Homi Bhabha, in his essay “The World and the Home,” notes that in literature, there exists the deep stirring of the “unhomely” and this kind of literature “captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place” (141). According to Bhabha, “unhomeliness” is inherent in the rite of “extra-territorial” initiation (141); unhomeliness is related to boundary crossing, politics of space and international themes such as migration and assimilation. At the core of diasporic literature, as Bhabha has suggested, space is always the sites of the most intricate invasions because in “the displacement the border between home and world becomes confused...and the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (141). Displacement causes identity problems so that hybridization and assimilation occur. Although modernist literature tends to celebrate solitude and alienation, modern diasporic literature manifests more the themes of migration, exile and estrangement of the individual from the place he was familiar with. Hence the lived experience of the border zone not only signifies cultural encounter but also redefines the zone of difference.

In different phases of human history, migration, either because of economic or political reasons, involves spatial imagination, psychic experience and abilities to conceptualize alternatives. Migration constructs a cognitive mapping, which allows the migrants to be aware of their positions in the environment and to give people the resources to resist and to make their own history (Keith 3). Benedict Anderson argues

that all communities are imagined, and communities tend to be distinguished by “the style in which they are imagined” (15). For someone who crosses the border and witnesses the heterogeneity found in the place he steps across, strangeness, distance, or even alienation are experienced. Cultural representation of diaspora is thus seen to be involved with locality, and space identity can be defined as an interpretation of self that environment means to symbolize or situate (Hummon 348). Encountering different cultures by means of immigration, travel and marriage involves the construction of a new identity, or anxiety that invades the body and mind of the stranded self. Recent criticism concerning space and identity shows that culture constructs identity and hybridity initiates unstable identity, since the individual who stands on the boundary might become involved with estrangement, mimicry, and cultural policies of inclusion and exclusion.

This paper will focus on a collection of short stories written by Edith Maude Eaton (Sui Sin Far), the first writer of Asian descent who developed herself in North America. Eaton has a Chinese mother and an English father. Born in Macclesfield, Sui Sin Far with her family got settled in New York and then moved to Montreal, where Eaton developed her career in Montreal as a Chinese-Canadian and then as a Chinese-American writer when she moved to California. Eaton has been claimed as one of the first early Chinese Canadian writers and one of the earliest Chinese American writers; however, her travel experience and sense of places embedded her as a writer tackling with various cultural issues. *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, a collection of short stories, is a foundation not only for Asian North American literature but also for a multicultural understanding of Canada and the United States (Ling 5). In these short stories, Sui Sin Far represents the lives of people from the middle and low classes, the ways they are assimilated to the white world, those who find difficulties being naturalized and those who endeavor with their lives to cross the border between Canada and the United States in order to become illegal aliens. In these stories, furthermore, there are not only the possible homology between culture, place and the people moving in; Sui Sin Far also questions a series of problems that are involved with the concept of “home” and “strange land,” the west and the Orient, as well as the dualities concerning the center and the margin. The study of Sui Sin Far’s Chinese diaspora is a study of the spatial-cultural habits of mind of the people “within” and “without.” Just as Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg note, the repressive and negative style of response of the people within tend to construct the hierarchical dualities of center / margin and the power relations as well as the continued hegemony of the center over the margins tend to be neglected (3). Sui Sin Far’s stories provide a microcosm of the immigrants during the early twentieth century. Her sense of hybridity and her representation of place, multicultural experience and ethnocentrism help to decode a part of the memories of those who experience acculturation, double consciousness and diasporas of marginal groups. This paper will focus on three stories with the themes of migration written by Sui Sin Far. Migration suggests a discontinuous identity, a reconstruction of the individual concept of self; her description of

275

border-crossing also denotes inescapable journey to a new place which involves with encountering with new cultures, self-displacement and the possible destabilization of the relationship between self and others.

276 Sui Sin Far's Mrs. Spring Fragrance is a character successfully assimilated into the American community in Seattle. According to the short story, she was unacquainted with even one word of the American language. Her husband was a young curio merchant. Although conservatively Chinese in many respects, he was considered "Americanized," but Mrs. Spring Fragrance was even more "Americanized" (17). Mrs. Spring Fragrance is a woman who dares to mimic, enjoys her hybrid culture and embraces assimilation policy. Mrs. Spring Fragrance was able to talk about poetry with her American neighbors, and was capable of participating into activities held by the communities. According to the narrator of this story, Mrs. Spring Fragrance was proud of being an American and was confident that she had already crossed the boundary of ethnicity. However, the commentaries given by her next-door neighbor bespeaks the subtle concept of real or "authentic" Americanness. The conversation between Mr. Spring Fragrance and the young man Carmen started with the absence of Mrs. Spring Fragrance. Mr. Spring Fragrance proceeded to give the commentary that "Everything is 'high-class' in America." Immediately the young neighbor showed his chauvinistic attitude by indicating that: "Sure!...Haven't you ever heard that all Americans are princes and princesses, and just as soon as a foreigner puts his foot upon our shores, he also becomes of the nobility—I mean the royal family" (23). However, when Mr. Fragrance tried to relate this commentary to his own brother who was under temporary custody, the neighbor replied, "But, understood, old fellow, we that are real Americans are up against that—even more than you. It is against our principles" (23). The dialogue between these two characters manifests two different perspectives about the identity of the Americans. Both Will Carman and Mr. Spring Fragrance were immigrants; however, from the perspective of the young Euro-American, some people who intend to cross the border should be discreetly examined. In a sense, the Euro-American neighbor had his own hierarchical values on the identities of immigrants from another part of the world. Although Mr. Spring Fragrance reified racial and cultural boundaries between the Chinese and the American, his training of western culture did not qualify him as the "authentic" and was still a downgraded citizen. His neighbor Carmen obviously demonstrated his cultural consciousness and sociopolitical perspective towards the people moving in. In the dialogue between the two, Carmen emerged as a speaking subject whose viewpoints about an outsider manifested his authenticity and legal position as a real American. Although there is no ground for Mr. Spring Fragrance to indicate stratification and the power relations as involved with the dominance and subordination, Mr. Spring Fragrance seemed to internalize the "differences" pointed out by Carmen. He became demurred and became detached from the culture that his wife was eager to assimilate with.

The story of "The Inferior Woman" repeats a similar theme about racial and cultural authenticity. In the story the compassionate Chinese woman, Mrs. Spring Fragrance, undertook herself a task of matchmaking for Laura (Mei Kwei Far) and Kai Tzu. At the same time, she worried that her neighbor Carmen was in love with a capable woman whom his mother took as the Inferior. Just as Alice complained, "Your mother regards me beneath you...Will not be your wife unless your mother welcomes me with pride and pleasure" (32). Just as Carmen's mother had expressed, "She is not only uneducated in the ordinary sense, but her environment, from childhood up, has been sordid and demoralizing one of extreme poverty and ignorance." Mrs. Carmen's prejudice holds that

This girl, Alice, entered a law office at the age of fourteen, supposedly to do the work of an office boy. Now, after seven year in business, through the friendship and influence of men far above socially, she holds the position of private secretary to the most influential man in Washington—a position which the rights belongs only to a well-educated young woman of good family. (35)

277

Mrs. Carmen's equivalence of Alice to the Inferior class signifies that within the prosperous Seattle City, there exists an internal colony where the Irish-American Mrs. Carmen, despises the Bohemian Alice. Internal colony usually refers to "a structured relationship of domination and subordination which are defined along ethnic and/or racial lines when the relationship is established or maintained to serve the interests of all or part of the dominant group" (Hechter 5). Although it seems that Mrs. Carmen, having lived in China, did not extend her prejudice to the Chinese, the internal colony that Mrs. Carmen manifests indeed reveals the fact that some immigrants have difficulties in finding a real home or getting respected from those who tend to stereotype the others.

"Home," for Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, stands for a safe place, where there is no need to explain oneself to outsiders; it stands for community and a sense of belonging. Wendy Webster examines the idea of home in Britain between 1945 and 1964. According to Belinda Straight, Webster's portrayals of home are almost portrayals of the result of exclusions and the basis of exclusion includes race, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and class. Straight is right when she points out that at the close of British imperialism, the discourse as related to British home was constructed in a way that helped to effect its exclusions as on-the-ground reality (7). Similarly the idea of home in the United States did not allow for the inclusion of Japanese Americans at the period of the Second World War:

If the white Euro-American version of home has implied stability both as a fixed point in space and as an emotionally safe pivot for individual and collective memories, that very stability has been denied to marginalized groups. Individuals in such groups have found themselves literally and figurative pushed to the margins of safe home... colonial and post-colonial geopolitics have translated into the massive displacement of people at and on the edge while simultaneously Euro-American understandings of home have been imagined to exclude...their Others. (7)

Fortunately, Sui Sin Far's story about the inferior woman was not, however, alienated by the people in the company she worked in. Alice was respected, moreover, by quite a few people around her. As Mrs. Spring Fragrance said, Alice "has made herself" as an immigrant who supports her family by her self. Mr. Spring Fragrance, likewise, "had made money, saved money, and sent money home. Through his efforts, trade between his native town and the port city in which he lived had greatly increased. Even a school in Canton was being built in part with funds furnished by him, and a railway syndicate was under the process of formation" (33).

278 The dream of home is a constant motif in Sui Sin Far. In her stories Sui Sin Far has represented some examples of some immigrants whose difficulties in fitting into the new community result from his / her nostalgia. David Harvey claims that the identity of a place is necessarily unfixed since place-identities are constructed through the experience or the interactions of the people who live in the place. For a lot of people crossing the borders, the human chain or the bond that embodies the promise of protection seems to be more important than any other things in the world. "The Wisdom of the New," for example, portrays a young man who worked hard to improve his business in the United States and he saved money to send for his wife in China, but it turned out to be a cultural shock for her. The ethnical problems and cultural differences as represented in this short story, however, are complicated. "The Wisdom of the New" records the struggle of a young man who worked "beyond the sea," and was assimilated into the foreign environment by learning to be tough and amiable. Without letting his parents know about his situation, he began his life in the United States as a laundryman. Americanized in his language and social skills, but still buried in his traditional and chauvinistic way of thinking, he sent for his wife to the United States with a sense of duty. Wou Sankwei did not provide an Americanized family life for his wife. He enjoyed the advantages of becoming westernized while his wife could not tolerate their son's using the language of the western women. She could not bear to see that her son's queue was cut off when her husband took him to the barber's. The conflicts within the family widened the gap between Sankwei and his wife and caused the eventual death of their seven-year-old son. Sankwei's wife was not alone in feeling estranged in the United States. In the Chinatown area, as the story develops, it is revealed that an old Chinese couple's son married a white woman and his children passed their granddame on the street with recognition (48). An old woman met her violent death and the rumors spread out her death might be involved with the fact that her son was baptized a religion. Furthermore, a neighbor shared her feeling with Sankwei's wife that "'tis a mad place in which to bring up a child" (49). Misunderstanding together with culture shock brought up tragedies in the story. The people who cross border always bring with them from the old home to the new something that represents the link between future and past. As Simone Weil suggests, people are a part of their community. A community constitutes "grounding," which means the knowledge or cognition that they are a part of the community. When they migrate, they cannot help bring with them the past memories or "the sense of a

community that grounds them in history through generations future and past" (90). Sankwei's wife could not accept the hybridization of her son who was arranged to receive both westernized and Chinese education. Sankwei's wife could not accept the hybridization of her husband. The friendship between her husband and his woman friend was beyond her imagination. Sankwei's wife even regarded the death of her second child as because of a spell cast by the white woman because the woman artist took a picture of her son. With the voice of a witness, Sui Sin Far criticized the Chinese custom which reserved education only for the boys. However, the outside world Sui Sin Far depicted was threatening. Eventually her failure to construct her identity in a foreign land and her rejection of hybridization reinforced her anxiety and her rationale to poison little Yen, her own seven-year-old son. Throughout the whole story, the tension inherent in her search for a common ground across the differences of culture erupted in her melancholy and depression. To Sankwei's wife Pau Lin, San Francisco was a place that would deconstruct the bonds she tried hard to sustain, and it was a territory she could never succeed fitting in.

279 Angelica Bammer, in her "Mother Tongues and Other Strangers: Writing 'Family' Across Cultural Divides," stresses that immigrants, refugees, people living in exile attest to the crises of displacement (99). According to Bammer, family is a vital nexus between the outer social world and the inner world of the individual psyche; the experience of cultural displacement, moreover, constitutes a significant disturbance in the relationship between a family and its social environment (99). Pau Lin's San Francisco was an imagined geography; her diaspora is almost an invocation of communal space which is simultaneously both inside and outside the West. Just as Michael Keith and Steve Pile suggest, the spatiality of diaspora as represented in lots of tragic endings is the ground on which momentary and ever-shifting lines are drawn between inside and outside, unfamiliarity and conflicts, the same and the other (18). San Francisco, a place that hybridized the immigrants represented a code that Pau Lin could not interpret.

Sui Sin Far's immigrants to the United States of America and the mixed- blood second generation are always identified as strangers and they are subjected to the politics of exclusion. As immigrants and mestizos, Sui Sin Far's characters are always on the threshold of two different realms and two different cultures. From one perspective, they are removed from their homeland and cultural essence, and their self-same existence is denied, and from the other perspective, they are easily termed the other since some misconstrued symbolic and historic representations are easily imposed by those who claim themselves the legacy bearers of a certain territory. In a sense, the intrinsic essence of the characters of Sui Sin Far is always at the margin of the cultural value, and the margin is the very site where differences are negotiated and competed. It is through the experiences of the immigrants who transport, exile, are displaced, and differentiated from the local Americans, Sui Sin Far represents her immigrants on borderland with her poetics of diaspora.

Sui Sin Far grew up as a Eurasian child. Although she was born into a wealthy family, she was able to witness the painful history of Chinese emigration into the so-called Promised Land of America and the widespread Sinophobia at the turn of the twentieth century. In her autobiographic chapter of "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," Sui Sin Far retells of her experience in her childhood and as she develops herself as an adult, the nostalgia into the past and her mother's land forever ringing in her works:

When I look back over the years I see myself, a little child of scarcely four years of age, walking in front of my nurse, in a green English lane, and listening to her tell another of her kind that my mother is Chinese. "Oh Lord!" exclaims the informed. She turns around and scans me curiously from head to foot. Then the two women whisper together. Tho the word "Chinese" conveys very little meaning to my mind, I feel that they are talking about my father and my mother and my heart swells with indignation. (219)

280 Sui Sin Far's story about herself and the stories she creates are basically integrated with the racial encounters between Chinese and European Americans and questions concerning Chinese-American identity. From her question "Why is my mother's race despised?" to her recognition of her Chinese identity, Sui Sin Far reveals her anxieties and her representation of cultural conflicts reminds of the tension and the problems of immigrants' assimilation.

"The Wisdom of the New" is one of the stories manifesting the tragic disintegration and tension of a Chinese-American family. The center of the story is a Chinese woman, Pau Lin, who joins her merchant husband, but out of her expectation, her husband Wou Sankwei has been fully Americanized. As Xiao-Hung Yin notes, while her husband worships American values, Pau Lin thinks they threaten the survival of Chinese legacy (63). The estrangement of her self from the unfamiliar American environment is the core of her predicament. Sankwei's further decision is to send their son to a local school to get the son quickly immersed in the American culture. Her marginalized territory in her mind becomes a trauma that drives her towards some kind of hysteria and she poisons her son for defending Chinese heritage and for preserving her son's identity as a Chinese. The anguishes and anxieties that Pau Lin has experienced shock some readers of Sui Sin Far. However, Pau Lin's hysteric action is only a signifier that suggests layers of meanings involved with the topography of difference. Pau Lin is not able to find a home in the United States; she is like many other characters, being estranged from Anglo-America, always feeling to be dispossessed by their cultural heritage. In another story with the theme of assimilation, "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu," the devoted and sensitive Chinese woman Pau Tsu marries an Asian-American husband who wants his dear wife to learn English and to be assimilated into the American community in a short period of time. Eventually Pau Tsu abandons her husband, self-exiling and leaving her husband in distress. Sui Sin Far's representation of diaspora is involves with not only the history of collective identity but also the sense of nostalgia and melancholia. Rey Chow suggests that the

anxiety of stepping into another culture can be understood in part through Sigmund Freud's analysis of melancholia. Chow notes:

The melancholic is a person who cannot get over the loss of a precious, loved object and who ultimately introjects this loss into his ego. What Freud emphasizes... is that he exhibits the symptoms of a delusional belittling of himself. Because the nature of the loss remains unconscious to the patient, the loss is directed inward, so that he becomes convinced of his own worth-lessness as if he has been unjustly abandoned. (3)

Rey Chow, examining the cultural politics of Asian-American literature, tries to approach the sense of diaspora through the so-called "melancholic disorder." In the two stories discussed above, however, both women characters are not able to develop their sense of place in the new environment; the new environment needs them to vouch their sense of belonging and their husband are the safeguards of the politics of purification and assimilation. In this kind of early twentieth century environment represented by Sui Sin Far, neither Pao Tsu nor Pau Lin feels it is easy to cross the cultural boundaries. Viet Thanh Nguyen, in his *Race and Resistance*, provides the basic context of cultural environment perceived by Sui Sin Far: Chinese immigrants provides a clear example of a domestic minority that is also a colonized minority, imported by the dominant population for labor and segregation in housing and employment, excluded from political participation and enfranchisement, and relegated to exceptional treatment under the law (37). Although there is not much elaboration on the economical situation of the two families, the ethnographic gaze of the West is the key reason for the Chinese men to impose more requirements and set more boundaries for the identity formation of their wives. Cultural hybridity seems to be a spectacle, not encouraged from the perspectives of the people on the border. Homi Bhabha's understanding about hybridity refers to the colonial territory where Naipaul's mimic men and Macaulay's Indian interpreters are the authorized voices. In Sui Sin Far, although Sankwei and Pau Tsu's husband are practical immigrants who nourish prospect for future, Pau Tsu and Pau Lin are the two women who resist the inner colonial system, and to them any kind of hybridity does not have its positive position on the foreign land.

Bakhtin elaborates the meaning of hybridization as a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance (358). To Bakhtin, "hybridization is an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor" (358). Recent post-colonial understanding of hybridity, however, suggests diverse forms of purity encompassed within essentialist theories. Homi Bhabha, for example, notices the contradictions inherent in the colonial discourse since the position of the colonizer can be ambivalent while the colonized other can be targets for assimilation. Bhabha stresses that colonial power establishes sophisticated strategies of control and dominance, and under the colonial control, the mimicry

or camouflage experienced by the colonized breeds hybridity and therefore, hybridity becomes an integral part of the identities of the colonized space. In the case of Sui Sin Far, hybridity connotes sophisticated concept of relationship between place and self when an immigrant involves with a new environment. However, hybridity can connote a passive meaning when it transforms itself into Foucault's heterotopias. Foucault has suggested, "we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space....the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the place that claws and knaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space" (23). Such a heterotopic site, with its heterogeneous characteristics, presupposes a system of opening and closing. In Foucault's words, its "entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications" (27). It is through the purification, some kind of hybridity or misgenation is barred away and the politics of exclusion is constructed by the people who are included and who eager to be assimilated.

282 Sui Sin Far's disintegrated relationship also refers to the love affair between Carson and Pan in another short story "Its Wavering Image". Carson is an American journalist and Pan is a woman of Chinese and white parentage, residing in the mysterious Chinatown. Carson finds it hard to understand why Pan sticks to Chinese heritage while she appears like a white woman. He demands that Pan choose an identity and Pan chooses not to betray Chinatown, the place that she is familiar with. Eventually Carson betrays the relationship with Pan and publishes the secrets embedded in Chinatown, and such kind of secrets might aggravate the tensions in Chinese-American society. According to Sean McCann's analysis, at the turn of the twentieth century, Progressive-era journalists tended to provide sensational evidence of the secretive and authoritarian nature of a Chinese culture they presumed to be fundamentally at odds with the democratic principles of American society (74). From the perspective of a journalist, his mission is to disclose social factors that American public and government might be interested in, especially anything that is related to the economical upheaval. However, such kinds of disclosed information cause definite damages to the image and welfare of the Chinese-American society. McCann classifies Carson as one characterized with his democratic pretense to nativist hysteria and a person who would sacrifice everything to a "democratic" society based on one kind of identity or the monolithic identity (74). Pan chooses not to mimic; hybridity to her is not a privilege. During the era when the United States of America strives for industrial expansion, hybrid race does not escape the complicated connotations of the marginal, under-developed and the similar word, miscegenation signifies more contempt and scorn. The locality of Chinatown reveals her concept about a legacy that she intends to hold on to. Pat in "Its Wavering Image" is more like Sui Sin Far herself, who would like to choose her own cultural identity between a suspicious white society and a Chinese-American community that does not necessarily provide her with safety although she shares this collective identity. White people as intruding forces appear in the story "A Chinese Boy-Girl" and the story

"Pat and Pan". In the former story, a young child, Ku Yum, is almost removed from parent custody when a white missionary teacher teaches the child's father how to discipline a girl how to behave. However, this young child turns out to be a boy whose father uses the way of travesty to prevent some kind of evil omens. In the latter story, a white woman put her baby boy Pat under the custody of a good Chinese friend when she was dying. The Chinese man and his wife raise this child together with his own daughter Pan. However, the child Pat is taken away to an orphanage because an American missionary teacher, Anna Harrison, out of her racial hierarchy, finds the little adopted boy needs Western way of training. In this story, the reversed assimilation of a white boy in a Chinese community is devalued and any level of hybridity for a white child is negated and is regarded as abnormal. Pat is sent to an orphanage because the place of orphanage manifests a space that cultivates Western values. Pat is young and he is not able to tell the differences between parental love and the importance of choosing a white identity. At the end of the story, Pat rejects Pan, the girl from his previous adopt family. Sui Sin Far's another short story "Her Chinese Husband" is about a white woman who marries a Chinese husband and chooses to identify with her Chinese husband's virtues. The white woman was deserted by her white husband James Carson, whose "cold anger and contempt" were exhibited occasionally. Carson did not have a regular job and was not willing to support his wife and daughter financially. As compared with James Carson, Liu Kanghi held a sort of elegant simplicity. He as a youth attended a school in Hong Kong and then developed himself as a business man. A half-breed child was born to them and the woman narrator wept over the newborn baby while Liu commented, "Oh shame....What is there weeping about? The child is beautiful! The feeling heart, the understanding mind is his, and we will bring him up to be proud that he is of Chinese blood; he will fear none and after him, the name of half-breed will no longer be one of contempt" (82). When James Carson requested a reunion with his former wife, condemning her to be the Chinese man's woman, she fought back by retorting whether it would be considered as a disgrace (76). Liu Kanghi, however, was shot through his head by those who were opposed to "progress," leaving his wife in everlasting sorrow (83). The early twentieth century was a period when immigrants crowded to cross the border. However, it was not until 1967 when the US Supreme Court dramatically changed race relations with its *Loving v. Virginia*, which at the same time "struck down remaining anti-miscegenation laws", by "lifting the political and legal prohibitions placed upon mixed-race partnering" (Wright 3). Before this time, miscegenation was condemned and the half-breed children were considered abnormal and were not accepted by the community. According to the research by Wright, mixed-race couples must make decisions about family life that take into account public responses while also upholding their own personal and private needs, desires, and values (22). The meanings of bodies seem to be especially significant from the perspective of sociology because on one hand, the half-breed were without any privileges and on the other, geographical placement of bodies reflects constrains and anxieties in choosing a neighborhood

milieu. In the Chinese-American community portrayed by Sui Sin Far, the sense of diaspora is easily disrupted by the white gaze and hybridity is not allowed because of the misconception of different cultures and the monolithic concept of identity.

284 Stuart Hall notes identity is formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture" (44). Hall's "unspeakable stories" suggest roots, traditions and cognition as well as experience in a different culture. For Walter Benjamin, identity and location were inseparable, and knowing oneself was an exercise in mapping where one stands (26). However, identity emerges through difference; just as Derrida suggests, there is no solid identity for each individual because each social location that individual experiences manifests a multi-dimensional experience. Hence the constitution of a social identity is an act of power. Sui Sin Far's short stories "The Smuggling of Tie Co," "Tian Shan's Kindred Spirit," "The Children of Peace," and "The Land of Free" all manifest the process of identity construction and the difficulties of border-crossing. Sui Sin Far's short story "In the The Land of the Free" exemplifies another aspect of diaspora of the immigrants. Hom Hing in this short story welcomed the arrival of his wife and his two-year-old son. However, the immigrant officer detained the boy because the child without a certificate of admission was visiting America for the first time. No matter how the couple pleaded for their son, they had to yield the child to the officer and since then they were caught with sorrow and waiting. Several months passed; they went up to a designated place to pick up their son. According to the description, "the room was filled with children—most of them were tots but none so wee as her own" (101). When the wife tried to embrace her beloved son, the child rejected the approach of his mother by bidding "Go'way, go'way" (101). Sui Sin Far sets the story in San Francisco where the "waterfront was lined with ships and steamers, while other craft, large and small, including a couple of white transports from the Philippines, lay at anchor here and there off shore" (93). However, the seemingly pleasant paradise for immigrants turns out to be an embodiment of cultural displacement. Homi Bhabha notes that the unhomely is a paradigmatic post-colonial experience (142). In this short story, however, it is the social sphere, material and empirical reality that cause the alienation of the newly immigrants. The unhomely situation involves not only traumatic experiences of the couple but also the unavoidable identity confusion of the child. Sui Sin Far's representation of diaspora often manifests physical endurance, misunderstanding of a new culture, and identity crisis. It seems that "diaspora consciousness" has gone beyond the capacity of some people who crossed the border. Eventually the bonds of self-definition and cultural identification urge them to preserve the language and tradition of their forefathers. In another short story, "A Chinese Boy-Girl," a man who lost one of his sons every year disciplined his son as a girl according to traditional Chinese superstition that the daemon would not grasp the souls of girls. Eventually the boy-girl transformed himself into a cross-dresser who did not show any traces of a boy. The imposition of the superstition upon the child only manifests the man's illusory shadows of his "homeland" and his "cultural interpretation" of his

situation. "The Smuggling of Tie Co," however, demonstrates the tragedy of a young woman who intended to cross the border of Canada into the realm of America. The currents of the river, however, bore her body away before she developed her diasporic feeling or unstemmable repression of her identity in a "new-found land".

The environment of cultivating a monolithic concept of identity refers back to the nineteenth century codification of racially-based immigration policy. The increase of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe prompts the concern of racial problems caused by immigrants. The Chinese Exclusion Act, enforced in 1882, banned Chinese residents from naturalization, while in 1790, the Congress enacted that "free white persons" can be naturalized. The Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited Chinese men and women, except for diplomats, students, teachers, merchants and tourists, from entering the United States. The law was extended in 1902 and was not repealed until 1943. It is understandable that the Chinese immigrants and their descendants became more visible and they were easily the targets of discrimination. The environment of exclusion policy parallels Sui Sin Far's own experiences. As a child born to her English father and Chinese mother, Sui Sin Far does not tell much about her English grandparents, and Amy Ling even speculates that Sui Sin Far's English grandparents disapprove of their son's marriage. What Sui Sin Far, a hybrid race writer, could perceive at the turn of the twentieth century was therefore the environment permeated by hegemonic essentialist racism. For the immigrant characters created by Sui Sin Far, the United States of America is a place that provides economic opportunities but it signifies alienation and repression. Foucault defines politics of space by indicating that one kind of heterotopias is that "we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded" (27). Foucault elaborates the house in Brazil and somewhere in South America. According to him, the guest will find the entry door does not lead to the central room where the family lived, and the visitor finds himself absolutely the guest in transit. In this sense, the immigrants, instead of finding a home, find themselves in exile and oftentimes in the mood of diaspora.

Sui Sin Far's space of immigrants is a contested space and most of her stories are set against metropolises such as New York and San Francisco. Some of the characters, such as Mrs. Fragrance, Wang Hon Hing and Wou Sanwei did find a way to adjust themselves into the White world; however, quite a few characters portrayed by Sui Sin Far seemed secluded and estranged from the environment that they were living in. Their anxieties, nostalgia and desires manifest the material and fetish part of life could never resolve into a substantial living style. Their energy of existence in the face of overwhelming social forces was drained away; there was no way to mould the city and there was no way to shape their own individuality; the sense of displacement trapped them in the maze of memory. Just as Neil Gerlach and Sheryl N. Hamilton commented, life in the metropolis is never easy (124) because defensive behaviors and a withdrawal of emotional responses from their interactions with other people might develop into the feeling of nostalgia. The primary emotional attachment to the past and the weight of difference reproduced social and emotional distance and

eventually they would never find a "home."

286

Throughout Sui Sin Far's short stories, Mrs. Spring Fragrance is the most special figure. She is not only a mediator among her friends but also a representative of the hybrid who produces ambivalence by destabilizing the status of the subject through her "aspirations to assimilate, premised upon the contradictory other knowledge" (Nguyen 52). Mrs. Fragrance embraces the new culture; however, in any metropolis there is an interior colony in which some are aliens, willingly or unwillingly. Gerlach notes, a stranger can be a member of a system in a spatial sense but not be a member in a social sense. According to Gerlach, an individual's social networks set limits on the individual's action; a stranger, relatively free of the networks, can more easily deviate from the norms of the system (126). However, the stranger also sees the system in a different perspective and this distanced perspective may be more objective (126). Nguyen thus notes, the mimic's instability—her ability to move between the roles of Chinese representative and user of American English discourse—further complicates the authority of colonial/majority discourse by mimicry's "partial" incomplete nature (52). Nguyen's commentary is true when he suggests that Mrs. Spring Fragrance returns the gaze of authority and ethnography when she decides to write a book about Americans. The construction of the American identity in Mrs. Spring Fragrance turns out to be comical and problematic, and the image that she constructs for herself is regarded with suspicion, a site of hybrid and duplicity, instead of being original:

Many American women wrote books. Why should not a Chinese? She would write a book about Americans for her Chinese women friends. The American people were so interesting and mysterious. Something of pride and pleasure crept into Mrs. Spring Fragrance's heart as she pictured Fei and Sie and Mai Gwi Far listening to Lae-Choo reading her illuminating paragraphs. (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance* 22)

Discussing identity/nation, Don Mitchell relates, "Like Algerians in France, Hispanics in the United States, Hong Kong Chinese in Canada, or Japanese in Australia, Caribbean people in Britain have made it impossible to speak easily of a homogeneous "Britishness" (49). In the post-modern understanding, "the fixed, fast-frozen relations" that seemed to define life have been torn down: "Not that the immigration of people of color into Britain was necessary to indicate just how heterogeneous Britain was. The very "Britishness" is problematic, as it already effaces deep and deeply held divisions between English, Welsh, Scots, Irish and other people thrown together in the "United Kingdom" (49).

Mrs. Spring Fragrance may represent a group of immigrants satisfied with assimilation, the other characters like Pao-Tsu, Pan and Pau Lin that are discussed above represent the ones that are entrapped with nostalgia. In the alienated city they are not able to map either their own positions or figure out the cultural meanings of their environment. In the case of Pan especially, Chinatown, the place that she chooses

to stay in, becomes the space and spatiality that make her a member of the Chinese race. Chinatown is an apartheid, meaning apartness, or being separated from the mainstream of cultural discourses. Hybrid or not is not a problem, what remains important is the politics of exclusion and inclusion that are intertwined with the sense of diaspora. Spatial identity and social identity of these characters have more or less caused their sense of dislocation. Although Mrs. Spring Fragrance as portrayed by Sui Sin Far has offered a possibility for exceeding her social role by mapping the urban totality and tuning herself in her environment, there are still many others who continued to weave their diasporic experience by shaping their visions for the future.

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287

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ENDNOTE

1. This paper was read at the 2004 Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, Hong Kong.