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Dystopic Here, Utopic There: Spatial Dialectics in SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*

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ABSTRACT

In what ways has mobility transfigured and de-homogenized Chinese Canadian identity formation in the new millennium? This paper focuses on how racialized and sexualized spaces are redefined by parameters of displacement in SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990). Ethno-sexual discourses in Lee's novel bring alternative sexualities into dialogue in the form of a "spatial dialectics": the characters' deterritorialization between China and Canada, between here and there, between the inside and the outside, and between the private and the public. The spatial dialectics and alternative sexualities defined by mobility and immobility hold a dual symbolic significance of revolt against the singular nation-state and against any fixture of locations. Lee's novel thus puts home, homeland, homing, and homosexuality in a permanently dialogical redefinition, and through the spatial dialectics, the displacement becomes a rethinking of home(land) across multiple identity formations and a renegotiation of numerous locations "out here, over there" or "out there, over here" in new Chinese Canadian narratives.

Keywords : displacement, spatial dialectics, alternative sexualities, sexual transgression, Chinese Canadian Literature, SKY Lee, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*

此地逃花源，彼地桃花源：《殘月樓》中的空間辯證

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摘　要

空間的流動性在新的紀元中如何改變華裔加拿大的身份認同及主體？本文主要探討移置／質／殖如何重新界定李群英小說《殘月樓》中的族別及性別化空間。族裔性別論述將另類性相議題以「空間辯證」的形式帶入小說裡的敘述空間：小說人物游移於中國與加拿大，此地與彼地，外面與裡面，私有空間與公共空間。職是，由移動性和固定性所定義的空間辯證和另類性相含有雙重的象徵意義：瓦解單一國家概念以及鬆動固定方位。李氏的小說因而將家園、歸家、同性情誼在不斷的對話中界定新義。空間辯證以性別逾越爲軸，重劃家園／源的認知地圖，並且重組華加女性的新主體性。

關鍵詞：移置，空間辯證，另類性相，性別逾越，華裔加拿大文學，李群英，《殘月樓》

Dystopic Here, Utopic There: Spatial Dialectics in SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*

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SKY Lee's novel *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990) traces the histories of four generations of a Chinese family in Vancouver. This multi-generational family saga illuminates the history of the Chinese in Canada from 1892 to 1986, during which time the narrative chronicles the growth of Vancouver's Chinatown with both historical facts and literary magic realism. The novel acknowledges the historical oppression, subordination, and subalternity of Chinese women while powerfully asserting the potential of female agency and bonding. To date, critical investigations of Lee's novel either acclaim *Disappearing Moon Cafe* as a political paradigm of Chinese Canadian collective identity (Chao, *Beyond Silence* 17-28; see also 88-89) or denounce it as an Orientalist reproduction of the writer's self-exoticization (Ng 163). Lien Chao argues that the novel constructs "the collective self" incarnated in the narrator(s) "to redress the biases of Canadian history and to reclaim their community history" (*Beyond Silence* 25), whereas Maria N. Ng calls the novel "proof of the lingering power of stereotyping in ethnic characterization and setting" (163). Such readings, however, not only bestow on the novel an essentialist, homogenizing view of Chinese Canadian identity, history, and culture—a view Lee's novel does not advocate—but also downplay the implications of gender and sexual politics in Lee's writing. Diverging from this general critical tendency to focus on the historical construction of Chineseness in Lee's novel (see Chao; Conde; and Ng), this essay accentuates how racialized and sexualized spaces are redefined by parameters of displacement in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. The trope of displacement involves a dialectical form of re-presenting ethnographic writing. In other words, ethno-sexual discourses in Lee's novel bring alternative sexualities into dialogue in the form of a "spatial dialectics," a term I will elaborate in this paper.

I start with Guy Beauregard's central concern in the important essay on Asian Canadian literature, where he poses the question as a departing point for critical inquiries in the field: "Does Asian Canadian literature and its

voices of dissent 'disturb the calculation' of Canadian nationalism? Or does it function as a regulated transgression given prominence precisely in order to reinscribe the putative 'openness' of Canada's 'multicultural' identity?" ("The Emergence of 'Asian Canadian Literature'" 59). Picking up a thread from Beauregard's question pertaining to transgression, this paper examines the significance of diasporic female bodies performing in various locations and scrutinizes how these locations transfigure alternative sexualities. The diasporic practices imbedded in the transgressive sexual discourses in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, I argue, challenge the Western construction of homogenized Chineseness and of stereotyped Chinese womanhood. Lee creates a genealogy of female characters that transgress normality and traverse hyphenated spaces by subverting established patriarchal laws to claim their subjectivities. These women re-appropriate their locations in racialized and gendered representations within a specific urban space, Vancouver's Chinatown, as well as in their displacements abroad. Given my interest in how the transgressive bodies in Lee's novel function as discursive sites, I want to both counter and complicate what Chao calls the "collective self"[1] by appealing to various discourses on sexuality and ethnicity.

Disappearing Moon Cafe inscribes a feminist genealogy through its narration of how four generations of Wong women negotiate their lives in a "woman-hating world" (145). Lee thereby produces a narrative that represents familial conflicts and sexual apparatuses; these "historical contents," in Foucault's words, "allow us to rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle" (*Power/Knowledge* 82), effects that emancipate historical knowledge through genealogical excavation. As Leslie Bow argues, the unveiling of family history via "feminist empowerment" engenders such ruptural effects that frame the narrative of the novel (76).

Moreover, the female bodies in Lee's novel, coded with and as different signs, align a lived interiority (immobility within the confines of Chinatown) with a sociopolitical exteriority (mobility outside Chinatown and overseas). In other words, the migratory ethno-sexualized subjects in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* negotiate various locations to re-member and dis-member identities precisely as female subjectivities are dispersed across

[1] "The collective self," according to Chao, "epitomizes a process of transforming the historical silence and marginality of the community to a narrative voice of resistance" ("The Collective Self" 238).

time and space. Throughout the novel, this dispersion acquires a distinct vocabulary I wish to call "spatial dialectics," by which I mean a spatial dialogue between fixation and mobility and between "there" and "here." As Donald Goellnicht argues, viewed in inter-national and inter-ethnic frames, a notion of "home" that turns "there" to "here" (and vice versa) is "a site of threat, danger, violence, dislocation and depression" for diasporic Chinese subjects to negotiate between what he calls "home" and "un-home" ("Forays into Acts of Transformation").[2] Within the parameters of these spatial dialectics, Lee empowers her heroines to reconstruct their hybrid subjectivities and alternative sexualities. Taking up the Foucauldian notion of the ruptural effects of transgression in (en)gendering sexual politics, I will situate transgression within these dialectics by first examining the spatial construction of the Disappearing Moon Cafe in Vancouver's Chinatown.

Gendering Chinatown: The Exotic/Erotic Spatial Construction of Chinatown

Elizabeth Grosz argues that space is the condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, and discursively produced (104). Space in this context is a crucial factor in the social production of sexed corporeality: the built environment provides the context and the coordinates for contemporary forms of the body. A space such as Vancouver's Chinatown, imbued with historical and contemporary meanings, provides the order and organization that link otherwise unrelated bodies.

In her book-length study on the construction of Vancouver's Chinatown, Kay Anderson conceptualizes Vancouver's Chinatown not only as "a launching point in the assimilation of Chinese settlers, as an urban village pitted against encroaching land uses, and as a Chinese architectural form" (9), but also as "a political projection through which a divisive system of racial classification was being structured and reproduced" (*Vancouver's Chinatown* 92). In a later essay "Engendering Race Research: Unsettling the self-Other Dichotomy," Anderson maps Vancouver's Chinatown in a racialized and gendered space. Within this space historically "denaturalized"

[2] See Donald Goellnicht's essay "'Forays into Acts of Transformation': Queering Chinese Canadian Diasporic Fictions," in which he examines the queer desire and the instability of belonging in Chinese Canadian women's narratives. I am grateful for Professor Goellnicht's generosity in sending me his essay when I was writing this essay.

by Canadian white culture, the interplay of race and sexuality has constructed Chinese men as the sexual aberrant and Chinese women as hyper-feminine China dolls (207-08). Building on the research of Anderson and others (including, for example, Bolaria and Li), Alison Calder points out that Vancouver's Chinatown has been historically constructed by spatial practices that "sanctioned the performance of 'Chinese-ness' only in a particular geographic area" (7). The café itself, a microcosm of Vancouver's Chinatown, epitomizes an exoticized locale of orientalism that both the Chinese inhabitants and Vancouver's white residents construct:

> On the walls, long silk scrolls of calligraphy sang out to those patrons who could read them. It was a nostalgic replica of an old-fashioned chinese [lowercase original] teahouse, which accounted for its popularity not only amongst its homesick chinese clientele but also outsiders who came looking for oriental exotica… And except for the customers, [Choy Fuk's] mother, and perhaps the cacti, there was nothing chinese about it. (32)

This space immediately demarcates Self and Other and questions the notion of authenticity. Lisa Lowe warns us that, in the case of Orientalism, the misapprehension and unquestioning of uniformity prohibit a consideration of the plural and inconstant referents of both terms, Occident (Self) and Orient (Other). Lowe proposes the Foucauldian notion of "heterotopic spaces" from which "new practices are generated at the intersections of unevenly produced categories of otherness, in the junctions, overlaps, and confluences of incommensurable apparatuses which are not primarily linguistic but practical and material" (24).

The Disappearing Moon Cafe in Vancouver's Chinatown, in this precise sense, becomes a "heterotopic space" based on a series of mixtures, languages, and (intra)communities of people. Furthermore, Lee uses self-exoticization to critique the utopian promise that Canada failed to fulfill for new immigrants. In the new dystopic Canada, where the atrocious Head Tax and Exclusion Act created family tragedies and cultural isolations, the Wong women and men, both Chinese born and Canadian born, become the victims of Chinese patriarchal clan culture and white racist Canadian hegemonic exclusion. In the marginalized space designated as Chinatown, "these overseas Chinese were like derelicts, neither here nor there, not tolerated anywhere" (77). The dystopic implication counterpoints Northrop

Frye's well-known statement that Canada is characterized by a "garrison mentality," that is, by an image of a beleaguered space.[3] However, this garrison in Canada is a "white" space, defined as much by the absence of racialized minorities. As white patriarchal gender constructions have been instrumental in denying women of color access to the "garrison," the displaced Chinese women, placed in the dystopic garrison within the utopic garrison, have created new subject positionings and alternatives from which to refigure their identities.

Canada's utopic vision becomes a dystopic nightmare for all Wong women. Mui Lan lands in the Gold Mountains, "full of warmth and hope," but her "fervent hope turn[s] into the worst nightmare" (26). Mui Lan's frustration stems from Fong Mei's inability to produce a boy "who [should come] from her son, who came from her husband, who also came lineally from that golden chain of male to male" (31). For Fong Mei, the paper bride, Canada is a foreign land "which had done nothing except disqualify her" (164) since, without a male offspring, she can only be a voiceless daughter unaccredited with a position in the family (57). In the alien(ated) land, Fong Mei laments her predicament as a woman without essence: "There I was in Chinatown, a lovely young female with a body that hungered beyond my control, surrounded by the restless ocean of male virility lapping at my fertile shores[. . . .] How I hated my woman's body; encasing it in so much disgust, I went around blind, deaf, senseless, unable to touch or feel" (188). Even for Canadian-born Beatrice, Fong Mei's daughter, racial prejudice in Canada has disconnected her "from the larger community outside of Chinatown" (164). In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, these female characters are "ungrounded women, living with displaced chinamen, and everyone trapped by circumstances" (145).

Lily Cho argues that the anti-Chinese sentiments in turn-of-the-century public discourse "have often been located in the desire of the white Canadian population to maintain Canada as a white man's country" (63). The discourse of miscegenation in Chinese Canadian history in Vancouver

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[3] In his conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, Northrop Frye argues that Canadian preoccupation with asserting and defending socio-cultural values creates in Canadian literary imagination a "garrison mentality" (830)—a mentality engendered from a desire for protection from external peril. In the context here, I see the (yellow) peril as a threatening Other in a white beleaguered space. For an extend discussion of "Where is Here?" in contemporary Canadian literature, see Godard.

reveals what Nicolas Thomas calls "colonialism's culture" that pronounces cultural domination by race and sexuality. In colonialism's culture in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Canada, racism often drew on gendered meanings.[4] Starting from the turn of the century, a period of intense immigration from Asia to North America, both Canada and the United States considered these newcomers to be members of more "primitive" races and cultures, incompatible with white North American residents, and the two countries produced legislation not only to restrict the entry of the Other, but also to prevent miscegenation from contaminating the racial purity of the white residents.[5]

Given that Vancouver's Chinatown was created as a spatialized locale where the Chinese were segregated from white communities and where the denaturalized Chinese race was crosscut by gendered misrepresentation, the Janet Smith murder incident represented in the novel highlights the gendered awareness of the discursive processes at work in Canadian nation-building and exposes colonialism's culture of white male supremacy over its racialized Others. The Janet Smith's murder incident is a case in which the United Council of Scottish Societies argued that 22-year-old Janet Smith was murdered by the Chinese houseboy.[6] The incident highlights the interconnectedness of miscegenation and sexuality, and the message reveals the troubling relations between Chinese men and white women during the Exclusion Era, in which "White women—passive at the hands of the inscrutable Oriental—are induced to commit 'amoralities'" (Anderson, "Engendering Race Research" 207). In the narrator's words, "Those white who hated yellow people never needed an excuse to spit on chinese. So the idea of a young, lone, yellow-skinned male standing over the inert body of a white-skinned female would send them into a bloodthirsty frenzy" (70). Proximity of "races" within the private sphere could thus be construed as perilous; the implications of "the yellow peril" of interracial liaisons are evident to Lee's characters.

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[4] A similar argument in the British context is articulated in Barnor Hesse's "White Governmentality: Urbanism, Nationalism, Racism," where Hesse points out that "the emergence of 'white society' is a discursive attempt to represent the nation as a closed system of differences" (97).

[5] These juridical exclusions include, for example, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act (USA); the 1885 Head Tax (Canada); the 1923 Immigration Exclusion Act (Canada); and the 1924 Reed Johnson Immigration Act (USA).

[6] For the historical facts of the Janet Smith Case, see Cader; Kerwin; and MacDonald.

In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, one of the characters Morgan Wong, another product of such interracial liaisons, epitomizes the relationship between race (yellow) and fear (peril). According to historian Roger Daniels, the yellow peril can be defined as an "irrational fear of Oriental conquest, with its racist and sex fantasy overtones" (29).[7] The anti-Chinese sentiment intrinsic to the yellow peril places anyone with the "Oriental" blood as an unassimilable alien, alleged to be "self-disqualified from full [North] American membership by materialistic motives, questionable political allegiance, and, above all, outlandish, overripe, 'Oriental' cultures" (Wong 6). In Morgan's eyes, the entire murder incident becomes a justifiable vent for both racists and classists: "The story had something for every kind of righteousness. For those who hated chinese [lowercase original] and thought they were depraved and drug-infested. And for those who hated the rich and thought they were depraved and drug-infested" (68).

Morgan's remark concurrently criticizes the fact that Canadian laws such as Head Tax and Anti-Miscegenation had created the disruption of Chinese families. The novel concentrates on the murder's effects on the Chinese community. Tanis MacDonald argues that "the Janet Smith case galvanized racial, sexual, and class tensions in Vancouver, and the public outcry that followed her death precipitated more than one attempt to insulate the city's population from moral turpitude and miscegenation" (36). The result of this disruption due to both Canadian and Chinese obsession with racial purity has produced insidious effects: a bachelor society, incestuous illegitimacy, intergenerational conflicts, and same-sex relations.

In contrast to most critics who emphasize the ethnographic denaturalization of the Chinese (see Cho; MacDonald), I contend that SKY Lee, instead of *critiquing* the white cultural hegemony of miscegenation, *celebrates* racial hybridity and sexual promiscuity. This strategy resonates with what Foucault calls "reverse discourse"—in demanding legitimacy "in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was [culturally and historically] disqualified" (*The History of Sexuality* 101). I further

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[7] The origin of the fear towards the Oriental in the Caucasian imagination can be traced back to the war between Greeks and Persians in the 5th century B.C. and to the hordes of the Mongolian solders who assaulted the Eastern Europe in the 13th century A.D. For the detailed historic account of the yellow peril discourse transformed into North American historical and literary representations, see Daniels, *Concentration Camp: North America, Japanese in the United States and Canada during World War II*.

suggest that Lee's strategy problematizes the very idea of racial purity that both white and Chinese residents of Vancouver attempted to maintain. The deconstruction of "authentic" Chineseness underscores Lee's transgressive agenda of mapping race and sexuality outside defined and confined spaces such as Vancouver's Chinatown. According to Bow, the transgressions of social boundaries in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* are defined by gender, race, and class: "Gwei Chang falls in love with someone of the 'wrong' race, Fong Mei of the 'wrong' class, Morgan of the 'w(r)ong lineage, and, finally, Kae of the 'wrong' gender [and sexuality]" (102). *Over here* in Canada, after the illegitimate encounter with Kelora, Gwei Chang's betrayal of the indigenous woman in favor of an "authentic" wife from China results in a series of familial tragedies and "unproductive" consequences. The adherence to racial purity undermines Mui Lan's and Fong Mei's firm belief in the family's natural and "ecological purity" (31). None of the third- or fourth-generation offspring is racially pure: Ting An (Chinese-Native), Morgan (Chinese-Native-Québécoise), Beatrice (illegitimate Chinese-Native), Kae (Chinese-Native), and Suzie (Chinese-Native), who dies "with the final irony—the last male Wong child" (146). As the first-generation settler, Gwei Chang constructs a Chinese "home" in Canadian territory, but, ironically, nobody belongs "here." By creating a racially hybrid subjectivity from various sexual transgressions, Lee places racial purity and cultural authenticity in a state of flux, always plural and always becoming.

Home/Homing/Homo: Alternative Sexualities *Here* and *There*

Paul Gilroy, in his revision of Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, sees a diaspora framework as "an alternative to the different varieties of absolutism which would confine culture in racial, ethnic, or national essences" (155). Gilroy's theoretical defense attempts to dismantle racial purity and ethnic absolutism but fails, in his absolutist enclosure of argument, to accommodate sexuality (e.g., queerness) in such identity formation. David Eng's important work *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* espouses the diaspora theory with queerness, and particularly places Asian North American queerness in dialogue with its entitlements to a home and a nation-state. He argues that "a new political project of thinking about [contemporary displacement] in Asian American studies today would seem to center around queerness and diaspora—its

rethinking of home and nation-state across multiple identity formations and numerous locations 'out here' and 'over there'" (219). Drawing on the two theoretical groundings, I would like to expound alternative sexualities inherent in migrant movements. In Lee's novel, the spatial dialectics—that is, the female characters' deterritorialization between China and Canada, between here and there, between the inside and the outside, and between the private and the public—and their sexualities defined by the dialectics of mobility and immobility or of home and un-home hold a dual symbolic significance of revolt against the singular nation-state and against any fixture of locations.

For Kae, the migrant experience of retuning to the "motherland" challenges the vision and promises of the New World. Deeply inscribed in immigrant literature, as Patricia Chu contends, is a re-adjustment "from an old world defined as a dystopia of exhausted possibilities and tragic narrative outcomes to the utopia new world, where opportunity and happy endings beckon" (147). In Lee's novel, the returns to China and Hong Kong, countering such wishful re-adjustment, function as promising resolutions for enlightenment that lead to an epistemological awakening for both Kae and Beatrice, who "became illuminated in Hong Kong" (145). Their enlightenment of returning to the motherland reverses the dystopia (old world China) vs. utopia (new world Canada) promise; their immobile mothers otherwise are imprisoned in the nightmarish "woman-hating world" in Vancouver's Chinatown. In contrast with Kae's migratory mobility, Suzie has also been trapped in the dystopic space that leads her to self-annihilation. Kae's and Hermia's escapes, activated by their upward mobility, extend the nation-state through "time, space, and perversion," in Grosz's terms, and their erotic connections also create a transnational queer nation in a globalized landscape. Both their escapes and connections destabilize traditional models of conceiving identity as unified, masculine, and heterosexual. Lee suggests in her writing that both women writers and characters must escape to construct new subjectivities.

I would like to tie Kae's dislocation to the sexual politics and the political struggles that Lee invests in the novel. Kae's initial trip to China and her later plan to meet Hermia in Hong Kong can be read critically as escape/flight against a series of modalities—time, space, language, family, and so forth. Unlike her grandmothers trapped in their "four walls" (23), Kae

violates the filial codes and defies the rigid constructs of Chinese clan culture in Vancouver; she refuses to be like her grandmother "of no substance" trapped in Vancouver's Chinatown. In the dialectics of motherland/tongue and the migratory meanings of displacement and identity, Kae interrogates different ideological structures of locations and eventually frees herself through an erotic connection with Hermia. The first transcultural experience in China is Kae's initiation into a consciousness of various external and internal migrations; her encounter with Hermia at the Peking Language Institute opens up possibilities and explorations of many meanings of being "at-home" and "not-at-home."

If defined in a genealogical/spatial frame, "here" refers to the place that one immigrates to or is born into whereas "there" designates the place where one's ancestor comes from. Such definition then leads one to assume that "utopia" means the realization of one's wishes in terms of cultural, sexual, and ethnic entanglements while "dystopia" connotes the disillusionment of these wishes.[8] Complicated by the dialectics of here-there and utopia-dystopia, the old-world China—the original dystopia but the potential utopia—is ambivalent for the two diasporic daughters. Kae and Hermia return to China with different agendas. To look for more "loyalty" and "purity," Kae returns to "pebbly and jagged" China, where "the traditional values had been turned inside-out in search of radical truths" (40). For Hermia Chow, the "misplaced bastard daughter of a gangster and his moll [in Hong Kong]" (41), she returns to the motherland "not to learn the language surely," but to discover her (il)legitimate "family connections"—to find the "legitimate, traditional and conventional" adjectives to feel less illegitimate (41). The two "impure" (one racially and the other genealogically) overseas Chinese daughters return to seek legitimate and authentic roots only to find illegitimacy and rootlessness. Their searching for authenticity calls into question the notion of "pure" Chineseness. Such sense of ethnic (for Kae) and genealogical (for Hermia) rootlessness may as well indicate that their diasporic efforts bring them out of a dystopia to enter another one.

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[8] I thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing out the complicated relationship between here-there and utopia-dystopia. My reading, however, attempts to disrupt such binary sense by proposing a dialectics among various spatial, cultural and genealogical locations. Such dialectics challenges the stable definition of "here," "there," "utopia," or "dystopia" in their fixation of meaning.

In addition to demystifying racial/cultural authenticity, Lee employs the act of deterritorialization to allow Hermia and Kae to negotiate and circumnavigate a succession of inplacement (belonging) and displacement (being marginalized) in the diasporic formation. In particular, Lee empowers her heroines to disengage themselves from traditional female roles by aligning them with the process of sexual "becomings," a process of entering what Marlene Goldman calls "unfamiliar pathways" that "systematically break down binary oppositions constructed by State-thought" (145). Only in this remote motherland far away from home, the Deleuzian "anonymous territory," can the two "amatory girls" walk "linking arms and snuggling tightly against each other in their space" (40). In their space of being both "home/o" and "un-home" in China (that is, in being *out* there), Kae's and Hermia's defiance runs counters to certain norms called "loyalty" named by Chinese Communist Comrade Zhou: "Being young and strong, Hermia and I both got something out of our re-education-through-labour program, although I'm quite sure it wasn't more loyalty" (139).

Hermia, a minor character usually under-analyzed by most critics, is suspended "abroad" (over there) outside of colonial Hong Kong and of white Canada. Defying a collective pure Chinese identity and attesting to the literal ejection of queers from their homes, Hermia "has no idea how many half-brothers or sisters she had or would have" (39) and constantly migrates among Switzerland, Beijing, and Hong Kong. Like culturally hybrid and liminal Hong Kong, Hermia, a Hong Kong-born Chinese, not only epitomizes genealogical rupture but also embodies the spatial dialectics between multiple *here*s and *there*s. Her mobility and neither-nor ambivalence represent both displacement and hybridity, blurring geographical, racial, and sexual borders in the diasporic formation. Through their sexual liberation, a migrant experience registers both Kae and Hermia into a redefinition of home, an imaginary Chinese community "over there" and the Canadian home(land) "out here," where the ungrounded (grand)mothers, living with displaced Chinamen, are trapped by their defined circumstances.

It is crucial to point out that Lee inserts symbolic Hong Kong, a "between worlds" colonial city-state, in her narrative map. Hong Kong in 1986, still under British control but about to revert to Mainland Chinese rule in 1997, stands at an ambiguous convergence of colonial discourses.[9]

[9] See Rey Chow's detailed analysis of postcolonial Hong Kong, "a third space between the British

Located at the confluence of British and Chinese ideologies, Hong Kong becomes a liminal space for possible cultural and sexual alternatives. As Beauregard has noted, "[t]he possibility of 'return' or 'realignment' in the face of the insecure political future of Hong Kong in the late 1980s makes the utopian aspects of the implied narrative action [in Lee's novel] highly provisional and far from 'settled'" (66). Throughout the narrative, Lee implicitly juxtaposes the two liminal spaces, Hong Kong and Chinese Canada: as the Chinese Canadians are "here" but do not belong to Canadian mainstream culture, so are the Hong Kong Chinese normalized as an overseas population that is in but not of the British Empire. The partial citizenship of Hong Kong Chinese rests on differences "of territoriality, coloniality, and (unmentioned) non-British origins" (Ong 748). Noticeably, Hong Kong as the space of cultural and sexual alternatives in the novel can function as the leeway that opens up the neither-totally-Chinese (i.e., being not-at-home), nor-totally-Canadian (i.e., being at-home) space for Hermia and Kae to consummate their relationship.

Kae's trips to Hong Kong to meet Hermia point to a possible resolution to be achieved through migratory erotic connections. The metaphoric journey, the diasporic mobility, creates a shifting space for alternative sexualities that resist both white racism and Chinese imperatives to extend the patriarchal line. As Vancouver's Chinatown is a reminder of Canada's repressed history of economic exploitation, racism, and indifference toward the Chinese, earlier Chinese women in Chinatown could not escape or deny the legacy that "intimately haunt[ed] their subjectivity and their collective and political identity" (Ho 74). Lee's novel thereby challenges the representations of Vancouver's Chinatown and gives the daughter-narrator(s) the freedom to flee from its confines. The peregrinations allow the daughters to create distinct spaces beyond patriarchal and national structures and to enact various strategies for creative resistance.

Between Dystopia and Utopia: The Resolution of Spatial Dialectics

This essay has so far argued that the narrative in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* aims to create a space beyond national borders and heterosexual

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colonizer and the dominant native culture" (157) in the chapter "Between Colonizers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s" in her collection of essays, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory, Culture, Ethnicity, Reading*.

exchange. Reading Lee's novel seems to point to the conclusion that home(land), homecoming, and homosexuality must perpetually exist in a dialectical space, a space that resonates loosely with what Thomas Waugh calls "homoscape" in ethnic and queer diasporas: "the transnational scene of sexual spaces, commodities, communications, and identity performance" (68).[10] In Lee's novel, this space, held essentially by lesbian desire articulated in Kae and Hermia's same-sex relationship, is a "utopic site," a term Annamarie Jagose uses to locate lesbianism beyond "patriarchal nomination" and "heterosexual exchange."[11]

This transgressive discourse is pronounced affirmatively by Hermia, who illuminates Kae and encourages her to "LIVE A GREAT NOVEL" (216). The letter from Hermia is crucial for Kae's breaking silence to unearth the family secret and to seek a utopic site outside of dystopic Canada: "Try harder, Kae! Imagine, nothing to explain; no need to justify! Genitalia coming together because it feels good. If you think real hard about it, how could something that quintessential have gotten so screwed up in people's minds?" (187). The transgression and transformation of Kae's life underpin "the real resolution to this story" (210)—that "[a]fter three generations of struggle, the daughters are free" (209). At the end of the novel, Lee proposes a positive lesbian alternative that could reconcile the disruptions of racial, heterosexual, and patriarchal oppression: what Bow calls "an alternative feminist genealogy precisely in its lesbian resolution" (101). Kae in Canada will join Hermia in Hong Kong to live in their utopic space—the "liberation" proposed in Kae's letter to Hermia in 1987:

> How many people realize how we stagger about in life? Either emotionally overdoing, or emotionally half-baked. Shrinking

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[10] In interpreting one of Richard Fung's videos, *Steam Clean* (1990), Thomas Waugh uses the sauna in the video as a "homoscape" that moves across national and sexual boundaries. The homoscape is inhabited by the coded rituals and within the homoscape, the hybrid shifting space of the migrant is always anchored in a strong sense of locality and rootedness. I appropriate this term in that homoscape articulates rootedness in the metropolitan, dynamic places not only of hybridity but also of coalition and intervention.

[11] "The characteristics of this utopic site—its excess of cultural legislation, its alterity and exteriority—are frequently credited to the category 'lesbian.' The transgressive potential of this category proceeds logically from its alleged location beyond culture and discourse; its triumphant excess of prohibitive laws…. The spaces of alterity that mark utopic figurations of 'lesbian' are various—the space beyond representation, patriarchal nomination, heterosexual exchange, binary—yet, given the utopic site's disavowed dependency on those very economies from which it distinguishes itself, all these spaces converge in the impossible dream of exteriority" (Jagose 2).

> from things or expanding: Like love makes us expand in our relationship to life, and to each other. An extreme case of how we shrink would be suicide. Let's face it, Suzie went splat in a big way! But the young make beautifully tragic corpses. (215)

The novel's dual denouement in two timeframes carries two possibilities for reunion: Kae flees from Canada and leaves her husband and son to live with Hermia, and Gwei Chang declares his eternal love for Kelora Chen in the Epilogue. Goellnicht sees the dual ending as an articulation of multiple possibilities for a heterogeneous Chinese Canadian identity, "which can be feminist, diasporic, lesbian, and socialist, as well as immigrant, heterosexual, racially mixed, patriarchal, and capitalist" ("Of Bones and Suicide" 315).[12]

Furthermore, the dual ending, as Goellnicht suggests, might be read either as an optimistic vision of women's liberation into a lesbian relationship between Kae and Hermia or as a heterosexual triumph over a homosexual possibility with the intimate reunion between Gwei Chang and Kelora ("Of Bones and Suicide" 322). However, I would like to emphasize Lee's activist gender politics that is legible either in the final possible lesbian relationship or in the interracial reconnection. Both interpretations demonstrate Lee's contestation of homogenizing and authenticating Chinese Canadianness (or Canadian Chineseness) within a patriarchal, heterosexual definition, and both scenarios picture an escape from the dystopic space. Goellnicht writes that the interracial harmony in the Epilogue exists only in a "surrealistic," freeing space: "[n]udging and pressing against the stars, he soaring, she soaring" (236). Only with Kelora, Gwei Chang melts into her "like molten gold, like sunset" leaving "other fires tended by other women [his family?] glowed and murmured in the distance" (236). Although the final surrealistic ending embraces a dialogical fusion of the two concepts (Gwei Chang's Chinese roots and Kelora's indigeneity), the magic realism of this scene brings the reader beyond a physical, empirically perceived experience. In this sense, the reunion of Gwei Chang and Kelora can be as well perceived as a challenge or refutation to racial purity.[13] The celebratory interracial

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[12] See Lisa Lowe's well-known essay on "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity" to construct new Asian American subjectivities. In an interview, SKY Lee herself also points out that Chinese Canadian identity can not be singular and its complexity can not be defined in a simplistic manner since all Chinese Canadians are new immigrants "sucked in by these colonial in-group versus out-group values" (*Jin Guo* 97).

[13] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for pinpointing the significance of their reunion as a

hybridity, however, is not pursued or represented here in a materialized manner. By contrast, the other interpretation of the narrator's lesbian manifestation in Hermia's final telegram to Kae—that "STOP WE COULD LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER TOGETHER"—points to Lee's tangible, realistic lesbian utopic site: a conceptual, representational, and feminine site. Kae and Hermia resignify and centralize women's affiliations and alliances with each other rather than simply recovering the heterosexual relationships and identities that are constructed within patriarchal and imperialist frames.

Through *Disappearing Moon Cafe*'s spatial dialectics, Lee places Chinese Canadian women's sexuality and subjectivity in conjunction with multiple global and local sites and hybrid identities.[14] Their sexuality as agency works to dislodge any smooth alignment of a singular home, and the spatial dialectics that thematizes sexual transgression as a cognitive remapping becomes a rethinking of home(land), homecoming, and homosexuality across complicated identity formations and a renegotiation of numerous locations in Chinese Canadian women's new subjectivities. I would like to conclude by responding to Beauregard's recent call to rethink the complexity in Asian Canadian studies.[15] The spatial dialectics I have introduced in this essay serves as a point of departure (not yet *arrival*) for scholars to continue undertaking "unfinished" Asian Canadian studies projects and theorizing the multifariousness of this discipline. Such concept, in the era of globalization, challenges any restrictive nationalism or the deceptive open "multiculturalism" in national terms. Reconceptualizing displacement through the lens of sexuality and beyond national borders allows us to redefine home(land), and displaced sexuality or sexualized displacement, in this sense, becomes an important agent to rethink and reconstruct Chinese Canadian subjectivities in the new millennium.

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challenge/refutation of racial purity.

[14] This paper locates the spatial dialectics in feminist discourse mainly because of the explicit message about female agency and (im)mobility addressed in SKY Lee's novel. Such reading is also applicable to other Chinese Canadian literary works on Chinese men's diaspora such as Andy Quan's *Calendar Boy* (2001).

[15] See Beauregard's unpublished paper presented on a panel on "Asian Canadian Studies: Pasts and Futures" at the Association for Asian American Studies, San Francisco, 8 May 2003. Here I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Guy Beauregard, whose critical reading and hard-nosed editing have strengthened the essay's clarity and coherence.

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