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Reading Wayson Choy Through Homi Bhabha: Mimcry, Hybridity and Agency  
Recontextualized

by

Brooke Taylor

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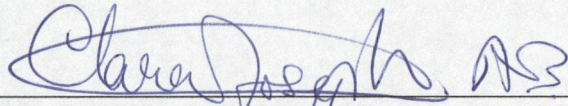
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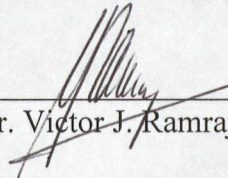
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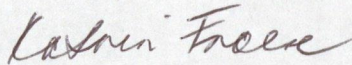
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Reading Wayson Choy Through Homi Bhabha: Mimicry, Hybridity and Agency Recontextualized" submitted by Brooke Taylor in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.



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## **Abstract**

This thesis argues that the theories and academic field of postcolonial studies must be reconsidered and redefined in order to reflect how diasporic literature such as Chinese-Canadian author Wayson Choy's novels and memoir recontextualizes postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity and agency. Choy localizes and in a sense appropriates Bhabha's theories to show how they alter and become increasingly complex according to multicultural dynamics and intercultural exchange, in which there may be multiple colonizing influences upon the figure of the colonized or the diasporic Chinese-Canadian subject. Choy's literature contends with pressing postcolonial concerns and critiques as raised by Bhabha's critics. In doing so, Choy reinvigorates and advances the debate on postcolonialism's breadth, applicability, and relevance to modern diasporic, ethnic, subaltern or colonized peoples and literature.



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**For My Family**

Jeanne, Brian and Glen,

who consistently inspire, prompt and support

and

my grandmother and late grandfather,

whose encouragement and belief in me has never failed

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## Introduction

Homi K. Bhabha's literary theories on mimicry, hybridity and agency, together with the novels and memoir of Chinese-Canadian author Wayson Choy, challenge, complicate, and make relevant the field of postcolonial studies in an entirely new context, that of diaspora in Canada. Diasporas, peoples voluntarily or forcibly moved from their homelands to new regions, historically included European colonialists, Africans forced into slavery, and indentured labourers from poor countries such as India or China (Ashcroft et al. 68-69). Contemporary diaspora include migrants relocating due to warfare or opportunities for a better life abroad. Within present-day postcolonial studies, the literary study of colonization's effect on cultures and societies, there exist a contentious debate and discourse surrounding the field's breadth, purpose, relevance and applicability to modern times and varied locations. Wayson Choy's two novels, *The Jade Peony* (1995) and its sequel *All That Matters* (2004), together with his memoir, *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Memoir* (1999), raise and address the following notable postcolonial themes: the dynamics, reciprocal exchange and influence of intercultural or multicultural relations; the perceived victimization or powerlessness of subaltern, diasporic, minority or colonized peoples; and the strategies employed by such peoples to resist oppression and affect some measure of independence, authority and self-determination on their own. The instances of characters exercising a partial agency through double mimicry and hybridity in Choy's writing, which is diasporic rather than conventionally postcolonial, modify and expand upon Bhabha's theories. This in turn prompts a reconsideration of what constitutes postcolonial studies as defined by Bhabha.



Diasporic groups in Canada are often overlooked by postcolonial studies within academic discourse, publications and institutions. Postcolonialism typically concentrates on traditional subaltern groups from recently independent countries liberated from colonial rule or First Nations Peoples. This project argues for the inclusion of diasporic migrant communities into the rubric of postcolonial studies, based on Wayson Choy's recontextualization of Homi Bhabha's theories on the following: the irrepressibility of history and origins ("Interrogating" 90); the impossibility of maintaining cultural binaries, purity or authenticity ("Signs" 159); and the importance of rewriting history from multiple, formerly ignored or repressed voices (Introduction 13). The literature of Chinese-Canadians in diaspora is not identical to other postcolonial writings; therefore, such an inclusion changes, develops, and challenges the theories and field of postcolonialism as theorized by Bhabha.

The postcolonial theories and issues addressed by Bhabha permeate the writing of Chinese-Canadian author Wayson Choy and demand a recognition and acknowledgement on historiographical and postcolonial terms. Historiographic fiction, or literature that addresses historical events, periods and concerns, attempts to make the past "knowable" today (Hutcheon 47). Choy's novels and memoir, while not explicitly historical in nature, clearly and deliberately gesture towards the importance of Chinese people in Canada during the last century. Such a re-positing of the historical aspects of Choy's writing supports the classification of diasporic Chinese-Canadian immigrant groups as quasi-postcolonial, or affected by postcolonial issues and concerns. Further, the emphasis on the historiographical nature of Choy's writing endorses the application of postcolonial theories to such a group.

Choy's themes of agency, language, borders, and history are pressing postcolonial concerns. His literary characters create a hybridized "Chinglish" language, traverse physical borders of Chinatown that contain and exclude, and tell their own stories of their historical experience of living and working in Canada during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Diasporic writing shows that postcolonialism, far from being an exhausted field of study, can be expanded to include Chinese diaspora in Canada. Immigrant writing proves the continued relevance of postcolonialism, long after European colonization is no longer a political reality. Issues of colonization and colonialism remain present in Canada and within Choy's writing and are only changed according to new specificities and locations. A recontextualization of what constitutes postcolonial studies is now necessary.

Since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1994), critics have focused on "natives" to reclaim marginalized voices. In response to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's query, "Can the subaltern speak?" (271), postcolonial critics have increasingly focused their attention and critical analysis on creative writing that highlights the un-appropriated voices of colonized people who claim agency for themselves and refuse to be represented by the colonizers. The literary depictions of diasporic migrant communities and their descendants, who are imaginatively represented as marginalized and othered, comprise an important field that merits further exploration. Postcolonial inquiry must acknowledge the alternate modes of resistance to multiple discourses employed by these people against ideologies and figures of authority that attempt to control and administer them. Choy as both the creator of his memoir and a character within it, as well as the literary characters in his fictional writing, resists this marginalization by speaking back and asserting

Chinese-Canadians' presence in history as peoples who are not entirely limited or determined by the circumstances of their birth.

Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and hybridity can elucidate how struggles for agency as represented in literature have been shaped, compromised, and partially determined by the ideology of the dominant culture. Specifically, Choy's fiction investigates mimicry, an exaggerated copying with difference and mockery (Huddart 57) and the process of hybridization, a mixing that occurs in-between cultures (Huddart 7). Mimicry and hybridization are apt theories for an analysis of diasporic cultures. Since these themes abound in Choy's writing, Bhabha's theories, particularly as they appear in *The Location of Culture* (1994), can be productively applied to the literary works of Choy. The literary characters in Choy's two novels, and Choy himself as a child in his memoir, concurrently succumb to and challenge assimilation and authoritative power structures both within the contained community of Vancouver's Chinatown and beyond. This simultaneous attraction and repulsion to conflicting cultural values prompts the children to mimic certain aspects of both Chinese and Canadian ideologies and the result is a hybridization that is neither purely one nor the other, but a mixture of both. In this manner, they resist polarization or categorization by authority figures of both cultures and are able to command some measure of agency or self-determination.

The Chinese-Canadians of which Choy writes may be posited in the role of the colonial subject or the colonized (Roy 101), which relocates the issues of postcolonialism to a new time and place in 20<sup>th</sup> century Canada. It is important to note, however, that theories cannot be broadly applied or used to generalize or make blanket statements (Eagleton 125). Instead, it is imperative to examine how theories, ideas, values and

beliefs change and adapt according to context. Literary depictions of Chinese-Canadians in Choy's works are not identical to colonized peoples in other postcolonial situations, but as minority peoples in diaspora their positioning is comparable to that of other subaltern peoples, and thus, Bhabha's theories are applicable.

Choy's interpretation and application of mimicry, hybridity and agency are not identical to Bhabha's original concepts. Bhabha applies these terms to examples of subaltern or colonized peoples in India in 1817 or Africans in 1902 as in his analysis of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1983) ("Signs" 145, 148). For Bhabha mimicry, as imitation with mockery, denotes the colonized repeating with exaggeration certain traits, beliefs and values of the colonizer (Huddart 57); importantly, this allows colonized peoples to *appear* similar to the colonizer, while in actuality they are able to maintain an element of their own cultural difference. For second-generation Chinese-Canadians in Choy's writing, however, postcolonial issues and concerns become increasingly complex and varied: they engage in mimicry of two competing cultures and their corresponding ideologies which seek to "colonize," that is, to shape and constitute them as subjects. Rather than a singular colonizer or colonizing discourse, the children in Choy's literature are subjected to the ideology of the traditional Chinese culture with which the elder generation seeks to indoctrinate them, and to the temptation to assimilate to white Western standards as imparted by the popular culture of television, comic books and Hollywood movies. The categorizations as either exclusively Chinese or exclusively Canadian prove both unsatisfying and stifling, and the literary characters imitate and mock each. In doing so, they are able to maintain their difference in relation to the "other" (which fluctuates depending on their temporary and ever-changing positioning as

either Chinese or Canadian), and thus manage their ambivalence towards elements of both cultures to which they are both attracted and repulsed. Mimicry in Choy's writing is thus doubled and involves the added element of multiple colonizing forces, which differs from Bhabha's conceptualization.

Choy shows how mimicry results in Chinese-Canadians being hybridized in a space between not only the "colonizer" and the "colonized," but between multiple sources, which leaves them even more ambivalent than the hybridized figures of which Bhabha speaks. The ability to dissolve or the very least the ability to render permeable certain boundaries, polarities or categories, is important to the concept of hybridity. This allows the hybridized individual to elude classification as subaltern, othered, and oppressed. Benita Parry upholds oppositions as necessary for colonial rebellion and liberation, but Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which is important to Choy's portrayal of Chinese-Canadians, seeks to create a third space of negotiation that is in-between the seemingly opposed positions of colonizer and colonized. Choy's writing witnesses the time, and social and political climate of Vancouver's Chinatown in the 1930s and 1940s. This writing reveals that the younger generations of Chinese-Canadians who were raised in this place and time were hybridized not only between figures of a singular colonizer and a singular colonized, but amongst multiple cultural authorities which sought to contain them: the elder traditional Chinese generation, Canadian popular culture as represented in movies, comic books and television, and other multicultural, ethnic minority groups. Thus, Choy engages with hybridity as theorized by Bhabha and critiqued by others, while further modifying it to explore how it functions differently according to a different postcolonial location.

Bhabha theorizes that postcolonial agency may be located in instances of mimicry and hybridity, as well as in the textual and the discursive. Literary critics and theorists debate the existence and nature of postcolonial agency, which simply defined, refers to the ability to make choices and act independently without being determined or limited by an oppressive, controlling authority. Undeniably, the figure of the colonized or the minority in diaspora is subjected to the ideology, or the consciously and unconsciously held beliefs and values of the colonizer or authority figure. Yet even under the surveillance and pressure to conform and assimilate, colonized people are able to exercise a partial agency, that is, they are able to negotiate multicultural influences in order to be at least somewhat self-determining and to situate themselves in-between different forces which attempt to control them. Choy addresses this same idea with his concept of “interculturalism,” which he explains as reciprocal exchange between cultures that allows each to integrate yet maintain their cultural differences (Davis, “Interweaving” 279; Deer 36). The colonized subject possesses agency in their ability to resist total determination by external authority (Coombes and Brah 11). As Choy suggests, they are survivors not victims (Deer 41).

Choy modifies Bhabha’s conceptualization of agency by emphasizing the colonized, postcolonial, subaltern, diasporic, or minority subject as an active agent who is not merely a literary subject constructed by ideologies and subjected by an oppressive colonizer. Agency as recontextualized by Choy, in his two novels and especially in his experience-based memoir, involves the material, social reality of the human individual as an active agent, which is an element of agency stressed by Benita Parry. Choy’s writing shows how Chinese-Canadian children, as subjects with even less ability to actively or



directly resist domination or oppression than colonized adults, use the sly strategies of resistance of mimicry and hybridity as suggested by Bhabha to exercise some measure of agency. Yet Choy does not solely locate the agency of the diasporic subject here in the discursive or the textual as does Bhabha; instead, he also emphasizes the diasporic subject as an agent by insisting on the historicity and social and material reality of the inhabitants of Vancouver's Chinatown. In his memoir, Choy speaks of himself as a child, as a human or an individual (not a fictional or literary creation) who negotiates with multiple ideologies to create the terms and conditions of his own existence. Further, as an adult and an author, he possesses a certain agency as he recreates and re-determines the value and meaning of his personal history by re-writing the story of his past.

In effect, this thesis contends that Wayson Choy's writing is postcolonial, and as such, it re-interprets and re-applies Homi Bhabha's theories to a specific group of people, location and time period: Chinese-Canadian children in Vancouver's Chinatown during the 1930s and 1940s. This thesis does not seek to merely "blanket" these theories with broad applications or generalizations; rather, it argues that the examples of mimicry and hybridity in Choy's writing are modified to his specific purpose and show how they vary and become more complex according to the situation. This thesis uses Bhabha's theories as a methodological framework with which to begin an analysis of Choy's literary exploration of Chinese-Canadians and then proceeds to include and respond to issues raised by critics such as Benita Parry, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Smaro Kamboreli. It does not side with either Bhabha or his critics, but instead, shows how topics and themes raised by Choy complicate and recontextualize the theories, critiques and issues of both Bhabha and others. Choy's use of Bhabha's theories involves "repetition with

difference,” to borrow from Bhabha’s own concept of hybridity; hence, Choy’s literary projects cannot be considered only for their literary value or for their worth as testament to the lived experiences of a “subaltern” or colonized subject. His novels and memoir are an important contribution to postcolonialism for their insights on the appropriation and subtle alterations of key concepts. Similar to the colonial relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the interaction between Choy’s writing and postcolonial literature and theory is reciprocal and involves mutual exchange: Choy’s literary projects are influenced by literary conventions and theories, but importantly, postcolonialism is in turn influenced by Choy’s perceptions and contributions. His adaptation and expansion of Bhabha’s concepts shows how postcolonial studies, together with its literature and theories, is continually expanding, transforming, and becoming recontextualized.

The four following chapters will examine how Wayson Choy’s novels and memoir contend with several important postcolonial key concepts as discussed by Bhabha and critiqued by others. The first chapter provides an overview of the current academic debate on the state of postcolonial studies today in the context of this project, and then moves to introduce and theorize the concepts of mimicry, hybridity and agency. The second chapter provides a further explanation of mimicry and relates it specifically to literary examples of mimesis and imitation in *The Jade Peony* to show how mimicry functions differently in the context of young Chinese-Canadian children in diaspora in Vancouver, British Columbia during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The third chapter on hybridity argues that Choy’s conceptualization of the term as explored via the adolescent protagonist in *All That Matters* resists Bhabha’s critics who call for the maintenance of separate categories and binary opposites (such as colonizer versus colonized). This

chapter also shows how Bhabha's theory of hybridity is expanded up on and complicated by Chinese-Canadians situated amongst multiple cultural authorities and ideologies. The fourth and final chapter examines the highly debated concept of postcolonial agency in *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Memoir*, using the following ideas: Bhabha's hypothesis of mimicry and hybridity as strategies of resistance; the figure of the colonized, immigrant or minority as either a subject or an agent; the importance of textuality or discourse versus the social and material reality of subaltern or colonized peoples; and authorship as self-representation and self-determination. The division of Choy's writing and the postcolonial terms may to some extent be artificial, meaning that examples of mimicry, hybridity and agency do overlap and occur in all three pieces of Choy's writing; however, certain predominant literary and thematic aspects related to these terms privilege the proposed structure of this project.

## I

**Postcolonialism in Contemporaneity**

In current literary, academic and postcolonial groups, there exists today a contentious discourse surrounding the definition, application, legitimacy and continued existence of postcolonial theory and its (mis)use. Critics such as Aijaz Ahmad, Anne McClintock, and Ella Shohat criticize postcolonialism for sacrificing cultural and historical specificity in favour of abstract, transhistorical theory (Ahmad 31, McClintock 88, and Shohat 99). Shohat specifically criticizes postcolonialism for its theoretical ambiguities, its multiple positionalities, and its ahistorical and universalizing tendencies (Shohat 99). Other critics question the validity of applying postcolonial theories to varied contexts. Laura Moss notes Canadian literature is omitted from postcolonial discussions on the charge that its history, relation to imperialism and globalization, and socio-political environment are too different to warrant comparison to conventional postcolonial contexts (2). Postcolonial studies came to prominence in the 1970s when theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha began investigating colonization's cultural effects as represented in literature. Since then, copious amounts of critical inquiry, research and theoretical application have been done in the field. Today there remains no clear definition or common understanding of what constitutes postcolonialism or what its place should be within contemporary academic programs. Graham Huggan notes that critiques of postcolonial studies have intensified, its definitions are varied and vague, and the field itself contains many inconsistencies (1). It is important, then, to begin with a definition.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin define the term “postcolonial” as signifying “the political, linguistic and cultural experiences of societies that were former European colonies” (186). This quote suggests that postcolonial refers to the effect of decolonization on a liberated people’s politics, language and culture, but limits the categorization of such peoples to regions of the world such as India, Africa, and the Caribbean, societies that were former European colonies. However, postcolonialism could also suggest a state of one previously excluded, repressed or mistreated culture negotiating and redefining its place within a larger cultural context, and might, therefore, include Chinese in diaspora within Canada. Laura Moss suggests “maybe” certain peoples are postcolonial in Canada: First Nations, recent immigrants, immigrants from other postcolonial locations, non-whites, minorities, or marginalized peoples (8).

On the other side of the argument, Terry Eagleton strongly critiques postcolonialism and questions its validity, application, and usefulness for alleviating power imbalances and reversing negative representations of peoples liberated from colonization. Eagleton proclaims his “doubts” and “embarrassments” with the term postcolonialism, its theoretical and ideological agenda, and what he calls its “blanket nature” (125). He further writes, “so much of this theory has become stuck in the tedious groove of stereotyping” (Eagleton 126), and argues that it often seems to support rather than dismantle the political power imbalances of postcolonial situations. However, Bhabha refutes this charge in his rejection of stereotyping by looking at particular cultural details and specific historical contexts, and actually demythologizes the power of the stereotype by revealing the underlying anxieties that disrupt a stereotype’s stability (Huddart 35). Furthermore, Bhabha’s theory of hybridity seeks to dismantle the binary

oppositions of power imbalances by creating a third in-between space situated between the colonizer and the colonized, a location that is neither oppressive nor powerless.

Reacting perhaps to Bhabha or at the very least to the proliferation of postcolonial studies in recent years, Eagleton continues to attack postcolonialism for belonging to what he terms a “rampant left culturalism, by which I mean an implausibly excessive emphasis on what is constructed or conventional or differentially constituted about human animals, rather than on what they have in common as, in the first place, natural material creatures” (126). Eagleton believes left culturalism pays undue attention to differences and humans’ constructed nature, and favours instead human commonality, universalism, and similarities. This is in direct contradiction to Bhabha’s insistence on “a right to difference in equality” (Preface xxv), which gestures towards the possibilities of difference without valuation. Bhabha further explains this concept of difference with the creation of a space that is “between fixed identifications [and that] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Introduction 5). This Third Space is positioned between two “originary” cultures: importantly, it allows the inhabitant to maintain differences without judgment or relative valuation. This is something Choy supports in his novels, insisting that cultural difference can and should be maintained and celebrated, not erased or ignored; however, we must be wary of a multiculturalism that appears to uphold difference but in actuality, uses difference to contain and manage other cultural groups. To argue against Terry Eagleton, difference and race cannot be erased or ignored at the cost of human commonality and universalism. This in itself would be a “blanketing” which Eagleton so greatly abhors that would erase differences in order to make



generalizations about humankind. Human commonality and universalism is worthy and Choy recognizes this in his writing, insisting on people's humanity and the possibility for cross-cultural relationships, regardless of race. A balance must be negotiated between maintaining difference and recognizing sameness; one cannot come at the cost of the other.

In contrast to critiques and arguments put forth by Eagleton and other aforementioned critics, some endorse postcolonial studies and go further to suggest it can encompass groups of people who do not come from a conventionally "postcolonial" context. Anindyo Roy justifies the application of postcolonial theory to peoples in diaspora, writing, "the position of the 'colonial' subject, refigured as the new diasporic inhabiting the new transnational world of global markets, presents challenging questions about the historical nature and function of migrant identity" (101). Such a perception argues for the rethinking of what constitutes a "postcolonial" subject or condition, and suggests that postcolonial theories can be reapplied and rethought in terms of immigrant experiences abroad. Roy also notes that diasporic identity is connected to postcolonial issues of home and location, which are heightened by transnationality and neocolonialism (101). Certainly, the importing of diasporic peoples as cheap labour sources for national projects like the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, while not explicitly post-colonial, (meaning after colonialism), raises issues of relocation, home, belonging and place, as shown in Choy's writing.

Laura Moss, in the preface to *Is Canada Postcolonial?* (2003), recognizes, "Whereas in the past, the focus of postcolonial discussions in Canada has been directed outward in a comparative context (Canadian culture compared to cultures in other

locations), it is now more often concentrated inward to look at the complexities within Canada itself" (3). This suggests that postcolonial discourse is finally acknowledging and encompassing varied Canadian cultural contexts. However, in looking within Canada, the scope of this book is limited to Mennonites, Italian Canadians, Francophone people in Quebec, and First Nations peoples; it does not address Chinese diaspora in Canada. Within Moss's collection of essays, Jim Zuccherro ponders the question, "Is Canada Postcolonial?" by reframing it in the context of immigrant writing: he asks, "How is Canada postcolonial for immigrants whose experiences of colonialism might be quite distinct and varied?" (252). While Zuccherro examines Italian-Canadian immigrants exclusively, if Chinese-Canadians are substituted, the question remains the same and deserves investigation.

Zuccherro further writes, "Theories of hybridity and ambivalence emerging out of current postcolonial studies provide useful models and methods for examining the liminal features of [...] immigrant experience[s], and for rethinking Canadian narratives of immigration by reorienting us to ideas about diaspora, cultural identity and cultural belonging" (253). Liminality refers to a threshold or an interstitial in-between space of movement and interchange where cultural transformation occurs (Ashcroft et al. 130), and is thus important to immigrant negotiation of selfhood and place in a Canadian context. The Canadian master narrative or grand story of the country's history and peoples is rewritten and modified by the interruption of liminal voices from the margins. These voices force a reconsideration of what constitutes both Canadian and Chinese culture and identity, and what it means to belong to either one or both. Clearly, there is an ongoing debate and continued interest in postcolonial studies and diaspora. Bhabha's

theories of hybridity and mimicry are situated within this context along with the writing of a Chinese-Canadian author who addresses the very issues at the centre of the debate on postcolonialism's place in contemporary Canada.

A term such as postcolonialism must be provisional and subject to constant revision and modification; it is only through the borrowing and application of such a theory to new contexts and specific localities (such as a Chinatown within Vancouver) that the discipline will continue to prove relevant, necessary, and indispensable to literary and cultural studies. Theory requires constant recontextualization in order to prove its applicability and continued relevance to current issues. A repositing or reapplication of postcolonial studies in a Chinese-Canadian context forces the West to reimagine and acknowledge its repressed colonial origins and prevents countries such as Canada from happily deeming colonialism a thing of the past (Huddart 3, 2). Graham Huggan is less interested in postcolonialism's definition than its usefulness and function, or what it can *do* (1). Without a consensus on the term's definition, it may be more useful to take as a starting point Huggan's suggestion that critics question how postcolonial theories can be fruitfully applied to specific contexts, historical periods, and cultural groups. Bhabha's theories of mimicry, hybridity and agency, when applied to literary representations of Chinese living in diaspora in Vancouver's Chinatown and their second generation children born in Canada, explore how postcolonialism elucidates and contends with issues prominent in Chinatown familial relations. These postcolonial theories may be used to read the history of Chinese-Canadian diaspora as literarily depicted by Choy, and to argue that postcolonial studies needs to be recontextualized and reapplied to remain relevant today. Canada and other former European colonies are not post-post-colonial,

meaning beyond or finished with the aftermath of colonialism; issues of postcolonialism remain, located in perhaps unlikely locations, cultural groups, and situations.

Theory proves its relevance and pertinence not by remaining pure and isolated to academic circles, but rather through its application to real-life situations. Bhabha emphasizes the importance of the specificity of time and place, arguing against Benedict Anderson's "'imagined community' rooted in a 'homogeneous empty time' of modernity and progress" (Introduction 8). Generalizations merely erase differences (cultural, local, individual) to homogenize peoples that are not all the same or even comparable. To say that diaspora of Chinese descent in Canada struggle with issues of hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry and an in-between Third Space is not to automatically compare or conflate their experiences with other colonized groups of peoples. Choy struggles with this notion of difference in his novels; it is never finally resolved to an easy synthesis, but as Bhabha shows, this conflict and crisis is a positive state of being, for it preserves the post-colonial demand for agency and recognition.

### **Bhabha's Relevance for Choy**

Critical studies must always adapt and localize postcolonial theories to explore how they change depending on different situations. Bhabha advocates this idea with his notion of iteration, the repeatability of an idea, which is not simply reproduced but which reappears in different contexts (Huddart 16). Bhabha speaks against fixity and emphasizes process instead (Huddart 17): postcolonial theories, like other ideas, cannot remain stable and closed but are subject to endless reinterpretation and reapplication. For example, when diaspora emigrate from a third world country such as China to a first world country such as Canada, the direction of human migration associated with

colonization is merely reversed, with the “colonized” moving into the territory of the “colonizer.” The issues associated with colonization and colonialism such as ambivalence, hybridity, mimicry, and agency are similar, only changed according to new specificities and contexts. Choy’s creative writing negotiates with these “postcolonial” concerns, which validates the adaptation and appropriation of this theory and discourse to a new locality and context and redefines what postcolonialism can mean in contemporary Canada.

Postcolonial concerns of cultural difference and the separation, integration or assimilation of minorities are closely related to issues of multiculturalism. Multicultural acts and performances that portray differences often reinforce reductive stereotypes of ethnic minorities, exoticizing them at the cost of their humanity, which justifies their subsequent marginalization (Bissoondath n. pag.). Canada, as a nation, prefers to self-identify as multicultural, inclusive, and accepting of cultural difference; yet the harsher side of Canada’s history that includes the discriminatory treatment of minorities and migrants cannot be willingly forgotten or erased. Examples include the internment of Japanese-Canadians during World War II, the Canadian government’s dislocation of First Nations peoples onto reserves and the subsequent administration of “Indian Affairs,” and the discriminatory, racist treatment of many Chinese immigrants (see Kogawa, Highway, Choy). Specifically, Choy’s novels and memoir include references to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act, a \$500 Head Tax for immigrants, racial segregation in hospitals and cemeteries and Chinatowns, substandard working conditions and wages for Chinese working to build the Canadian Pacific Railway, the disenfranchisement of Chinese-

Canadians as “resident aliens,” and the constant fear of immigration officials and deportation.

Bhabha is wary of constructing theories that override specific histories and produce easy dialectical synthesis (Huddart 25). Postcolonial theories do not seek to resolve all contradictions, erase troubling histories, or create a containable, cohesive version of the past. Rather, disruptive or contested histories create a positive space for reimagining a past that is inclusive and representative of various peoples. Choy’s writing forces the reader to learn and remember the histories and experiences of Chinese in Vancouver, and how they continue to affect current generations of Chinese-Canadians, including himself. Choy apprehends contemporary Canadian culture by forcing all readers, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, to examine and acknowledge the injustices of the past; yet his writing goes beyond this, to suggest how the historical events continue to influence the present. Bhabha suggests that writing is an important method of reconstructing the past to comprehend the present: he writes, “it is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (“Interrogating” 90). Using Bhabha’s theories as a methodological framework, this thesis examines how the specific context and histories of Chinese diaspora in Vancouver during the latter 20th century are imaginatively represented in the literary works of Choy.

### **Why Choy?**

Wayson Choy is a second-generation son of Chinese immigrants; only at the age of fifty-six after the publication of his first novel, which he said revealed many of the dangerous secrets of Vancouver’s Chinatown, did he discover he was adopted (Davis,



“Interweaving” 272). This revelation prompted him to explore his parentage and further reflect on the nature of truth, silence, secrets and subjectivity. These themes are addressed in his memoir *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood*; others include the irrepressibility of the past, and the telling of personal histories as palimpsestic revisionism. Choy recognizes that his memoir is a “work of creative non-fiction” (Author’s Note) and agrees that *The Jade Peony* and its sequel *All That Matters* by extension contain autobiographical influences (Davis, “Interweaving” 27). He has received considerable acclamation for his writing: *The Jade Peony* won the 1995 Trillium Book Award and 1996 City of Vancouver Book Award; *All That Matters* also won the 2004 Trillium and was shortlisted for the 2005 Giller Prize; and *Paper Shadows* won the 2000 Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction and was also nominated for the 1999 Governor General’s Award.

Early in his writing career Choy attended the University of British Columbia, where he internalized oppression, which left him feeling voiceless with nothing to say (Deer 40, Lorre 79, Ying 20). He now teaches creative writing at Humber College in Toronto where he encourages his students to resist homogenization, to become aware of the stories of their families, and to understand their history (Deer 44). Choy’s own writing reflects this insistence on stories, the plurality of voices, and the addition of marginalized minority experiences to the narrative of history. Critical academic scholarship on Choy’s writing addresses the topics of language, storytelling, healing narratives, secrets, “Chineseness,” historiography, ambivalence, ethnic space, and the misrepresentation and reinforcement of stereotypes about Chinese-Canadians (see Lorre, Baena, Lee, Vautier, Hartley, Davis, and Ng), none of which, it must be noted, explicitly

recognizes the relevance of Bhabha's theories for Choy's works. Choy's writing invokes paradigms of the oral tradition, memories, ghosts, the danger of tempting the gods, and the myth of return. These paradigms are captured in their narratives so that informed readers can examine these in the context of Canadian immigrant diaspora experiences. Critics have considered these paradigms in different contexts; however, they remain important to this thesis due to their relevance for postcolonial studies.

Choy's semi-autobiographical novels reflect Chinese-Canadian culture and history; the novels' literary characters negotiate within Canadian culture by "writing back" from the margins or a Third Space. Bhabha's Third Space is a place of hybridity and the deferral of meaning. This means that a culture's difference is ambivalent, ever changing, and open to the possibility of continued interpretation (Ashcroft et al. 61). Choy's novels and subjective, semi-fictional memoir all stand as testimonials to the relevancy of Bhabha's theories which challenge the allegation that the issues of postcolonialism have long been explored and resolved. David Huddart says that Bhabha "rethinks the present moment, when colonialism seems a thing of the past" (2). Choy's writing illustrates many of Bhabha's points about how hybridity, mimicry and an in-between, conflicted Third Space still operate in modern, first-world countries. There is no easy assimilation or outright rejection and cultural isolation; instead, the characters in Choy's novels, and indeed Choy himself as a boy in his memoir, struggle with cultural expectations, rigid roles and confusion over which culturally appropriate popular icons to emulate. This turmoil involving identity and mimicry shows how issues of postcolonialism continue to operate in ethnicized spaces in a Canadian Chinatown,

demanding a re-examination of postcolonial theory. All of these arguments, in turn, point to the importance of Choy for this project.

### **Mimicry: Repetition, Difference and Partiality**

Bhabha's concept of mimicry is an issue that can be reapplied to a different "postcolonial" situation such as Chinese immigrants in Canada. This unusual application shows how the effects of colonization continue to influence migrant peoples even after most colonized countries have gained their independence when discussions of colonialism in contemporary times may seem anachronistic. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define mimicry as follows:

When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that is quite threatening. That is because mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. (139)

Mimicry is the mocking imitation, which on the surface appears like assimilation, but underneath contains a threatening element of difference and rejection; the colonized do not actually *want* to be completely like the colonizer. Although appearing to replicate the original, mimicry actually replaces it with a parodic double that disrupts the colonizer's sense of security and righteousness as an authority entitled to govern the colonized. Conscious or otherwise, mimicry irreverently dismisses the colonizer as worthy of complete emulation and thus partially evades their dominance and control. This theory of mimicry pertains directly to Choy's writing: he shows how the three younger Chinese-

Canadian siblings in *The Jade Peony* attempt to copy icons from North American culture yet maintain and realize their own difference.

Mimicry has been defined as the exaggeration and repetition of language, culture and manners with difference (Huddart 57). This difference, obvious and not easily denied, is significant in that it mocks and undermines what it appears to emulate. Difference asserts the inferiority of colonized people and justifies their need to be governed and subjugated; however, the colonizers are also anxious about the similarity of the colonized, for if they are alike or equal, there is no justification for colonial domination or control. Huddart writes, “the tension between the illusion of difference and the reality of sameness leads to anxiety” (6). Colonial powers such as the Canadian government prefer to think of colonized peoples such as Chinese-Canadians as different and therefore lesser. This allows the colonizers to withhold certain rights and freedoms and to segregate the colonized. For example, Choy relates how the Canadian government denied Chinese people the right to vote, equal wages, and quality housing. Through their inaction (by not providing integrated or subsidized housing), the government subtly encouraged new Chinese immigrants to establish separate Chinatowns<sup>1</sup>. However, the colonizers realize that the colonized are human, and their similarity creates anxiety about resistance and rebellion. Anxiety is positive in that it allows for the possibility of action, change, and agency on the part of the colonized.

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<sup>1</sup> New immigrants could often only afford cheap residences in undesirable, damp, noisy and polluted industrial neighbourhoods, where they would not be subject to racism prominent in mixed communities (*All* 12-13).

Bhabha himself defines mimicry as a “form of difference that is [...] *almost the same but not quite*,” and later as, “*almost the same but not white*” (“Mimicry” 127-28). Mimicry is similarity or resemblance with difference; importantly, it is never a perfect copy, and herein lies its power, that is, the power to create anxiety on the part of the colonized. Bhabha further terms mimicry a “*partial presence*” or a “*metonymy of presence*” (“Mimicry” 126, 128). This suggests that mimicry is not complete; by mimicking something, the colonized attempts to become *almost* like the colonizer, but retains a percentage of difference. Colonized peoples inhabit dual roles or positions simultaneously to position themselves in the role of both colonized and (partially, incompletely) the colonizer. The following paragraphs address this idea of imperfect imitation and partiality.

In relation to mimicry, Bhabha speaks of a “flawed colonial mimesis,” which differentiates between being Anglicized and being English (“Mimicry” 125). This can be extrapolated upon in terms of immigrant diasporic communities: to be Canadianized is not to be Canadian or “white.” Bhabha writes, “What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable” (“Mimicry” 125). This writing is a self-representation that refuses to be presented by another or in another’s image. Such a representation commands agency; it will not be spoken for, but instead negotiates its own stories and positions. As an ethnic minority, Choy represents literary figures whose presence and experiences write back to Canadian history, which previously marginalized the role of Chinese-Canadians. This writing rejects the assimilationist idea that Chinese-Canadians would want to deny their

difference and become like other “white” Canadians, and diffuses the power of imitation. Mimesis or imitation is necessarily incomplete, but this in itself contains a power: it is a rejection of the colonizer’s claim to authority, originality and superiority.

Colonial subjects, in Choy’s case only children who unknowingly or perhaps without purpose or intent, pose a threat to the unity and authority of a multicultural Canada that seeks to control and represent immigrants. The young children of diasporic migrants envision themselves as miming or imitating popular iconic white figures, yet also realize their undeniable difference; their double/partial presence, as imitators yet not, is uncontainable and therefore troubling to immigration authorities who struggle to resolve the problem of “resident aliens” in Canada (Choy, *Jade* 196).

Although the colonizer views partiality as lack or imperfection, it actually empowers colonized people for they refuse to be completely appropriated, and they maintain at least some of their cultural difference. The true worth of partiality is revealed in the following statement: “‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence” (Bhabha, “Mimicry” 127). Hence, mimicry disproves the myth of inherent superiority, the original, or the essence, which differentiates and devalues the migrant. Rather than victimization, postcolonial studies locates agency and choice within the situation of the colonized. Bhabha further writes, “mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically” (“Mimicry” 128). Although the children in Choy’s novels profess to want to perfectly imitate movie stars, singers, dancers and sports figures, they realize their difference through their ambivalent feelings towards their own culture. Michelle



Hartley uses Bhabha's theory of mimicry as camouflage to explain how children become mottled or harmonizes with images of popular icons to cope with vulnerability to criticism of ineptitude (70). Importantly, mimicry is not a lack, but an excess: children are partially imitating figures from white popular culture, but they also emulate and respect traditional mythical figures from Chinese culture.

David Huddart explains that for Bhabha, "although fixed identities may seem to offer stability and certainty, in fact they merely produce an idealization with which we can never be identical, and so in fact they introduce alienation into our sense of self" (29). Choy's characters are doubly alienated from both the images of themselves that the grandmother wishes to project upon them and from images from pop culture that they are unable to successfully mimic. They are situated in-between as incomplete versions contaminated with influences of both. Bhabha prefers mixedness, contradictions and complications, because universalization and idealization seek to invalidate race as secondary and inessential (Huddart 30): Bhabha insists that race and ethnicity cannot be denied. Specifics of race, time and location always matter, and to ignore these factors limits us to a partial understanding of the world.

Bhabha claims that mimicry is a "part-object that radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history" ("Mimicry" 130). Thus, the examples of mimicry in Choy's texts highlight the potential threat, power and continued relevance of postcolonial theory for diasporic immigrant communities in Canada. Choy speaks of mimicry in his own life, when as a child he entered what he terms a "banana stage" where he tried to deny his difference and be like everyone else (Davis, "Interweaving" 277, Deer 40). Choy's mimetic fictional characters disrupt the

authoritative, governmental, “official” history of Chinese in Canada and inscribe their difference or their almost-but-not-quite state of being, which resists easy assimilation or outright fetishization. They refuse to be returned to China, confined to racialized spaces like Chinatown, or amicably incorporated into a version of history that erases their discriminatory treatment. Choy’s writing deauthorizes official history or scientific, rational documents: his characters struggle with the desire to be modern and Canadian, yet their stories ultimately add another layer to the palimpsest that contains many histories, neither valued differently nor deemed more truthful.

### **Hybridity and Diaspora: In-Between Peoples, In-Between Cultures**

Another important postcolonial key term of Bhabha’s that is closely related to mimicry is hybridity, which refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft et al. 118). These cross or inter-cultural transformations can be cultural, racial, and linguistic; Choy explores all three in his depiction of Chinese-Canadian children negotiating their constantly shifting positions between these two cultures. Bhabha employs the term hybridity to emphasize the interdependence and mutually constructed subjectivities of both colonizer and colonized (Ashcroft et al. 118). This means that colonized peoples, in negotiating their multiple, temporary and ever-changing positions between cultures, also affect the positioning of the colonizers. Important elements of hybridity include: ambivalence, difference, margins, and the erasure of binaries or polarities (the myth of purity or originals). The following paragraphs discuss these important elements in explaining the importance of hybridity for Choy’s writing.

Bhabha also discusses racist stereotypes, which “ambivalently fix identity as the fantasy of difference” (“Signs” 153). On the one hand, difference can be used to discriminate: colonial authority relies on “the production of differentiations, individuations, identity effects” (“Signs” 158) to justify prejudicial and differential treatment. However, the denial of difference, that is, complete assimilation, constitutes an erasure and a loss of the identity and culture of the colonized peoples. Bhabha’s proposed answer to this predicament is *hybridization*, or a “strategy of disavowal” (“Signs” 158); such a theory resists the easy categorization of difference as positive or negative, and instead exists in-between ambivalently.

This strategy is explained through discrimination between a pure and bastardized culture, self and double: “the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different*—a mutation, a hybrid” (Bhabha “Signs” 159). The children in Choy’s novels are unable to completely deny their Chineseness or ethnic identity (Lee 18); when they try to repress it in order to fit in with other “white” children, it simply resurfaces, subtly altered, a combination of their experiences that mark them as different from both the greater Canadian society and their Chinese elders. Bhabha explains that the “colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (“Signs” 153). The colonized (and diasporic immigrants by extension) are also ambivalent, torn between their desire to mimic the colonized and present as a copy of the original, and their conflicting need to assert their difference and unique culture as not inferior or deviant.

Hybridity disavows the notion of pure, original, authoritative identities, and revalues the importance of limited categories and binaries. Further, hybridity is

subversive in that it reverses the process of subjectification by unsettling authorities' security in their own positions. Bhabha suggests that hybridity forces a "re-cognition" of authority: here lies the power and importance of postcolonial studies for multicultural issues in Canada. Diasporic immigrant communities such as Chinese-Canadians, existing as they do on the peripheries yet in-between cultures, with their very presence and positioning force government and the rest of society to examine their own identities and roles as relative, not fixed, normative, or automatically entitled to the power to rule.

By refusing to conform to the "rules of recognition," (Bhabha, "Signs" 160), colonized people refuse to accept an externally imposed false image of themselves. They refuse to be identified as inferior, and by rejecting this label, liberate themselves from the restrictive, mutually dependent relationship of colonizer-colonized. Hybridity does not resolve tension between two cultures; rather, it creates a crisis, and for Bhabha this is positive, for it disallows for complacency, assumptions, and racist stereotypes. Bhabha celebrates anxiety, for it means everyone must be self-aware, questioning, and constantly negotiating his or her own identity and position within society. Hybridized figures both "challeng[e] the boundaries of discourse and subtly chang[e] its terms by setting up another specifically colonial space of negotiations under colonial authority" (Bhabha, "Signs" 169). Thus, hybridization is not a disavowal or a refusal to engage with colonial discourse, but rather a critical engagement and writing back that negotiates new possibilities of resistance and existence for the colonized.

Hybridity and intercultural mixedness are important concerns for Choy: he speaks of integration while maintaining essential cultural differences (Davis, "Interweaving" 279), and the subversive power of hybridized language (Deer 36). Choy understands

hybridity as intercultural exchange that does not seek to erase the differences of both cultures; rather, they mutually influence and alter one another. Literary characters often employ language as a method of hybridization with which to negotiate between cultures. “Chinglish” or the hybridization of Chinese and English permits speakers to mediate between both cultures (Hartley 72). This allows them to resist negative aspects while creating a “third space” that allows for positive reimaginings.

Choy’s fictional characters struggle with ambivalence, a simultaneous attraction and repulsion that embody both complicity and resistance (Ashcroft et al. 12). These literary representations depict a conflicted desire to both imitate and reject larger Canadian society and culture. The protagonist in *All That Matters*, Kiam, is the child most conflicted and torn by ambivalence, and as a result, his position is more hybridized than the other siblings. As the eldest son and as the only child in the Chen family not born in Canada, Kiam is subjected to more pressure from his grandmother to retain the “old China ways,” and also to pressure from his father to “be modern” and assimilate to become a model Canadian. Choy uses the character of Kiam as a site of cultural clashing, of polarities (Chinese versus Canadian) coming together and creating a new, hybridized third identity, Chinese-Canadian.

Bhabha writes, “The margin of hybridity, where cultural differences ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience. It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups [...] as homogeneous polarized political consciousnesses” (“Newness” 296). This passage marks the importance of anxiety (panic) to hybridity: when differences confront one another and collide, they transform the hybrid site of the margins or borders that the

colonized inhabit. This transformation is positive, in that it allows for a negotiation of differences and self-determination. Hybridization erases binary opposites and polarities, creating something new, which is in-between the two formerly distinct cultural groups.

### **Agency: Individual Action, Free Will and Resistance**

Mimicry and hybridity are both related to the concept of agency, which can be defined as “the ability to act or perform an action” (Ashcroft et al. 8). Agency is the capacity to make choices and impose them on the world; this concept is also linked to free will, the philosophy that choices are not causal but undetermined (Wikipedia n. pag.). This means that human beings are active, self-determining agents who have a measure of control over their existence in the world, and who possess the capacity to change their circumstances. By emphasizing the undetermined nature of free will, agency argues that a person’s ethnicity, class, political affiliation or other circumstances of their birth do not predetermine or limit his or her destiny.

Bhabha stresses intentionality, purpose, and the “elements of social ‘consciousness’ imperative for agency—deliberative, individuated action” (“Bread” 284, “Postcolonial” 265) when defining the term. He further emphasizes the individual human capacity to make choices and affect these changes in the world. Colonized figures, or Chinese-Canadian diaspora as this thesis argues, do not passively allow themselves to be stagnated or fixed as stereotypical representations of their “originary” culture. Nor do they succumb to pressures to assimilate, deny their differences, and become homogeneous with the surrounding dominant culture. Rather, they possess agency in their ability to negotiate their positioning as minority figures within Canada, resisting external determination that seeks to control and manage them. Bhabha’s writing stresses

the active agency of the colonized (Huddart 2); hence, agency is a key term important to the study of how members of the Chinese diaspora negotiate their place, representation and history within Canada.

Agency questions whether individuals can “freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some ways determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed” (Ashcroft et al. 8). Certainly, external conditions influence the opportunities available to a person; however, they cannot entirely dictate and control what choices a person makes or the courses of action he or she takes. Choy’s literary depiction of Chinese-Canadians utilizing mimicry and hybridity as strategies of resistance to the colonizing ideologies of both Chinese and Canadian cultures argues against determinism, which fixes individuals, limits their possibility for change, and supports the idea of predestination and passivity. Agency rejects total determinism by emphasizing human action, resistance and the possibility of escaping limited roles and binaries that seek to manage and contain people.

In the face of seemingly impossible, insurmountable obstacles to freedom, equality and self-determination, minorities are able to create agency by inhabiting “‘incommensurable’ (not simply multiple) positions” (Bhabha, “Newness” 331). This strategic positioning, which allows the colonized to act in the role of themselves, someone like the colonized, and yet someone different, lends them a different type of agency not afforded to the colonizer. Instead of acting, speaking or writing themselves singularly, minorities, diaspora or the colonized are able to perform their agency on many levels, slyly, playing off the colonizers’ anxiety. According to Bhabha, this agency emerges “in a specifically postcolonial performance of reinscription” (“Newness” 331).

Before, where critics may not have recognized or acknowledged agency, it actually already existed. The colonized reenact or perform their agency in-between the obstacles that sought to oppress them, from the margins, and from a place of hybridity.

Annie Coombes and Avtar Brah neatly summarize postcolonial critics Benita Parry, Gayatri Spivak and Dipesh Chakrabarty's argument for agency, saying postcolonial studies must "recognize agency as a conscious choice and as a means of rescuing the colonial subject from perpetual victimhood by acknowledging their ability to act as progenitors of resistance against the violence of colonialism in different ways" (11). These critics attribute agency, not passivity or the inability to act, to the colonized (and arguably to diaspora by extension), and emphasize the need to acknowledge their resistance and strength instead of only pitying them for enduring the hardships of colonization or relocation and discrimination. Agency is also important to Choy, who insists, "Chinatown was not a community of victims," and is adamant that his books are about "survivors" (Deer 41). Choy resists passivity and stresses the agency of his adopted mother, father and other extended caregivers from his childhood by rewriting Chinese-Canadians as active participants in their own history in Canada. These characters, although semi-fictionalized and subjectively rendered by Choy, are based on his experiences and acquaintances growing up in Vancouver's Chinatown (Davis, "Interweaving" 274).

Bhabha speaks of agency as "the right to signify" ("Newness" 331), that is, the right to self-determination and self-representation through action. Admittedly, agency was not a basic human right afforded to many immigrants. Nonetheless, critics must resist the temptation to view agency as something external. Agency is internal and



intrinsic, an ability to act possessed by all people regardless of their situation, oppression or other hindering factors. Agency can be limited, and partially controlled, but never completely denied or erased. One way in which marginalized peoples may command agency is through self-presentation or self-representation--in other words, how they exist in the world or how they narrate their existence. Memoir is a literary form of writing that recognizes the agency of the author: writing the story of oneself is an act of creation, of signifying oneself and determining the meaning of the author's existence.

Through literature, Choy claims agency for Chinese-Canadians by imaginatively representing his adopted family whose immediate and extended members resist marginalization and compartmentalization by greater Canadian society. Choy himself commands agency in his memoir *Paper Shadows*, as he relates accounts of his boyhood; further, he resists the control of colonialism (or Canadian culture and history) through the very act of writing his memoir. Writing is an act of agency, as is Choy speaking his story and that of other Chinese-Canadians within his limited circle.<sup>2</sup> As an author, Choy uses writing to resist the possibility of Chinese-Canadian's presence and experiences being sidelined or forgotten. His writing is an act that commands agency; he *speaks*, which is itself a powerful example of resistance and action. In interviews, Choy speaks of his progression from feeling as though he had nothing important to say and while he remained silent and voiceless, to his recognition of the importance of exploring family history and taking action by speaking his story and the story of others in Vancouver's Chinatown (Davis, "Interweaving" 270, Deer 44).

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<sup>2</sup> Choy does not presume to speak for *all* Chinese-Canadians (Davis, "Interweaving" 271).

The recognition of agency can also be retroactive; literature allows for this reaching back into the past to retrieve and acknowledge instances of how migrants and minorities worked actively in order to change the circumstances of their lives. John Kraniauskas writes, “in so far as it ‘impels’ and ‘projects’ the past through the speaking subject, the hybridizing time of postcolonial agency would seem to take the form of memory. It is not, however, a question of conscious memorization, but rather--as we have seen-- an unmediated force that brings the past to bear on the present *unconsciously*” (244). This categorization of agency as memory corresponds with Choy’s application of the term as he employs it in his writing about Chinese-Canadians from the time of his childhood. Memory as agency--actively speaking out about how Chinese-Canadians lived their lives as active agents--takes place on two levels: first, with fictional literary characters revitalizing the past through stories of first-wave immigration, relocation and work experiences; and second, through Choy’s very act of writing.

As mentioned above, agency is linked to action and resistance. Bhabha also locates agency within hybridity and mimicry by recognizing them as tactics for active opposition to colonial domination. He suggests that these alternate courses of action to assimilation (erasing difference and promoting similarities) or segregation (using difference to discriminate) resist colonial domination and governance. Further, hybridity and mimicry locate the possibility for self-determination within a hybrid third space of enunciation. As strategies of resistance, mimicry and hybridity allow for the creation of an identity separate from the colonizer; that is, they contribute to the formation of a self-determined agent. Bhabha writes, “my contention, elaborated in my writings on postcolonial discourse in terms of mimicry, hybridity, sly civility, is that this liminal

moment of identification—eluding resemblance—produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative ‘unpicking’ and incommensurable, insurgent relinking” (“Postcolonial” 265). Bhabha locates agency in the very act of resisting pressure to assimilate: it is a powerful act to maintain and assert one’s difference when authorities, ideologies and discourses unite to coerce minorities to try to be the same. The unpicking and relinking of which Bhabha speaks is a process that rejects the desire to engage in the following: colonial mimesis; mimicry, or parodying that which it appears to copy; and hybridization, or the adoption and adaptation of traits from both the originary culture and that of the colonizer. There is agency in identity formation, or the making of the self, and the subsequent actions of that hybridized self.

Bhabha locates the possibility for agency of the colonized in the anxiety produced by the gap in colonial discourse (Huddart 6). This gap is between the “illusion of difference and the reality of sameness” (Huddart 6), which creates anxiety for the colonizer and the possibility for agency for the colonized. Importantly, if the colonized did not represent a threat to the colonizer, then the colonized could easily and uneventfully be absorbed into the other culture and society; however, their undeniable difference sets them apart and marks them as a “problem” that must be separated, addressed and resolved. Within Choy’s writing there are many examples of Chinese-Canadians being segregated because they cause the Canadian government great anxiety: there are separate schools to educate the children in religious and linguistic matters, partitioned hospital wards, and isolated cemeteries. These all gesture to a cultural anxiety

behind the sign “For Chinese Only” (Choy, *Paper* 153), which immediately conjures its opposite, “For Whites Only.”

Bhabha shows how anxiety opens a space for agency; likewise, so does mimicry. Mimicry opens a space (the slippages or gaps between imitation and the original) that allows the colonized to resist colonial discourse (Huddart 57). The slight difference that is maintained in mimicry is uncontrollable by the colonizer; it is exactly here that agency of the colonized is located (Huddart 59). Huddart ponders the question of free will or choice as it relates to agency, asking whether the colonized deliberately adopt mimicry as a strategy of resistance (61). Whether or not it is conscious or deliberate, the effect or outcome of mimicry, that is, the realization of difference, ends the passive emulation of the colonizer. Mimicry prompts the colonized to establish their own identity as *something else besides* and thereby claim agency and self-determination for themselves. Colonized people in fact *do* possess agency, whether they possess intention to use mimicry as a strategy of resistance or not. Their actions speak for them.

The following chapter will elucidate how Bhabha’s concept of mimicry is an important strategy of resistance in Choy’s novel *The Jade Peony*. Within this novel specifically, the fictional characters of the three younger children of the Chen family engage in various forms of mimicry. They are subjected to internal and external pressures to copy and assimilate to ideals of Western popular icons and are simultaneously pressured to conform to Old China ways. Through the use of fictionalized characters, Choy shows how mimicry continues to function in a context similar to yet not quite the same as colonial situations. The following themes abound in Choy’s writing: repetition, or the attempt to copy or reproduce seemingly ‘desirable’

traits from people not of Chinese ancestry; partiality, or the realization that imitation is always incomplete and lacking; and difference, or Chineseness itself. Mimicry operates on the level of culture, language, mannerisms, beliefs and ideologies in *The Jade Peony*. The next chapter will explore these aspects of mimicry with an examination of the three child-narrators: Jook-Liang, Only Sister; Jung-Sum, Second Brother; and Sek-Lung, Third Brother.

## II

### Mimicry Recontextualized:

#### Doubling, Difference and Ambivalence in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*

As noted in the previous chapter, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define mimicry as a blurred, mocking, exaggerated reproduction:

When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that is quite threatening. That is because mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. (139)

Bhabha himself defines mimicry as a "form of difference that is [...] *almost the same but not quite*," and later, "*almost the same but not white*" ("Mimicry" 127-128). The children Jook-Liang, Jung-Sum and Sek-Lung in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* all attempt to imitate figures from both Chinese and Canadian (or more broadly, North American) cultures, but their mimesis or imitation contains an element of difference that marks them as undeniably not quite the same. Unlike mimicry in the colonial sense, which is limited to the colonized mimicking "white" people, in the case of Choy's imaginative representations of the interstitially situated children of diaspora, mimicry involves a double identification through negation: these children are not quite *white* or Canadian, but they are also not quite Chinese.

Mimicry is both a resemblance and a menace (Bhabha, "Mimicry" 126), in that it looks like the original that it copies, but also contains a threatening element of difference

that refuses to be erased and through its very existence threatens the colonizer's right to ideological domination and control. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain, "The copying of the colonizing culture, behaviour, manners and values by the colonized contains both mockery and a certain 'menace'" (140). The children in Choy's *The Jade Peony* copy the mannerisms and traits of those they seek to emulate and attempt to physically resemble their icons; however, their efforts are exaggerated and they become caricatures of the originals. The children internalize the beliefs, values and ideas of both the Chinese and the Canadian cultures, which at times exist in contradiction to one another. Through mimicry, they are able to resist these conflicting ideologies.

### **Why Mimicry?**

While it may seem unjustified to apply a postcolonial reading to Wayson Choy's writing, the following examples warrant such an analysis: characters struggle and negotiate with issues of race and minority status; and they resist and manipulate the ideologies of external forces which seek to control them. Evidence of discrimination such as starvation, unemployment, and segregation in Chinatowns as well as internally imposed restrictions and containment within the Chinese community are opposing forces that act upon the children in *The Jade Peony*. Like colonialism, "race thinking" implies that an individual's mental and moral behaviour, personality and ideas are linked to racial origin, and is used to justify the dominance of that racial group (Ashcroft et al. 198). Although often not directly affected by racial discrimination, the children in *The Jade Peony* are nonetheless aware of the discriminatory treatment of their elders which influences their social conditioning and determination to resist racial categorization, as either Chinese or Canadian, by mimicking elements of both groups.

For Chinese families in Canada during the 1930s and 1940s, mere inaccuracies with immigration documents or inconsistencies with familial relationships could cause deportation. Implicitly, direct resistance would be subject to equal or harsher sanctions. Choy's novel *The Jade Peony* shows how mimicry offers the possibility of sly resistance. Power and control exerted upon the children from both Chinese and Canadian (or North American) sources prompt them to engage in resistance. As children they are unable to overtly rebel, and Choy narrates how they instead resist domination through mimicry. Mimicry is recontextualized in Choy's writing: it is doubled, involving imitation and mockery of both cultures, which necessitates a re-examination, redefinition and reapplication of postcolonial key concepts and theory.

Bhabha's concept of mimicry is a principal component of the larger strategy of opposing external ideologies and discourses that seek to define and contain the colonized. Choy's writing promotes this same strategy of opposition or resistance. He uses literary representations of children doubly marginalized by their ethnicity and lack of access to adult forms of resistance to show how mimicry operates at the level of imagination to resist the colonizing Canadian and Chinese discourses that contain and dictate ideological messages and expectations. Mimicry may be "nebulous, non-intentional, [and] unconscious" (Huddart 68). As such, it is a sly method of resistance to colonial discourse, and because it does not visibly posit itself as overt opposition, mimicry resists retaliation. David Huddart argues that mimicry is an "unconscious strategy [...] the best or only possible mode of resistance to colonial discourse" (68). Like literary representations of subaltern peoples or colonized peoples, the protagonists/narrators in Choy's *The Jade Peony* are covertly coerced to imitate the dominant sector of society, and must



continually decide, on an individual level, whether to comply with or partially reject this pressure. Mimicry allows these children to critically negotiate with conflicting coercive ideologies.

Choy's writing highlights the following themes: repetition, or the attempt to copy or reproduce seemingly 'desirable' traits from people not of Chinese ancestry; partiality, or the realization that imitation is always incomplete and lacking; and difference, also referred to as ethnicity or Chineseness (see Lee 19, Ng 182). Mimicry operates on the level of culture, language, mannerisms, beliefs and ideologies in *The Jade Peony*; this section on Choy's appropriation of Bhabha's theories will explore these aspects of mimicry through an examination of the three child-narrators: Jook-Liang, Only Sister; Jung-Sum, Second Brother; and Sek-Lung, Third Brother. Mimicry, as conceptualized in *The Jade Peony*, is different for children than it is in usual postcolonial situations for the colonized.

Within *The Jade Peony*, the fictional characters of the three younger children of the Chen family engage in mimicry as they are subjected to internal and external pressures to copy and assimilate to ideals of Western popular icons while simultaneously being pressured to conform to Old China ways. Christopher Lee writes, "Those interpellated as Chinese are expected to act in ways defined by the discourse of Chineseness, which was hegemonically controlled by the community leadership. But the process of ethnic subject formation was complicated through interaction with Canadian society and culture" (19). The children are hailed as Chinese by their community and outsiders (other non-Chinese students and teachers), but this externally imposed image of selfhood is not entirely representative or true as it is complicated by the children's

mimicry of elements of both cultures. Jook-Liang, Jung-Sum and Sek-Lung both idolize and mimic famous Western legends that exist alongside traditional myths and religious figures from the Chinese culture. This analysis will focus on Choy's literary representations of Chinese immigrant's children's attempt to reconcile two often-conflicting, inclusive and paradoxically exclusionary cultures by imitating and mocking elements of both.

### **Mimicry in *The Jade Peony***

The second-generation Chinese-Canadian children who are classified as resident aliens in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* use mimicry to resist fetishization or assimilation to either Chinese or Canadian cultural groups. These hyphenated subjects cannot deny their difference in relation to either their Chinese elders or friends and schoolmates of other ethnicities. The children's use of mimicry allows them to critically engage with both cultures without being subsumed by either. They refuse the limited options presented: being returned to China, being confined to the racialized space of Chinatown, or being historically erased through the disavowal of their contributions and discriminatory treatment in Canada. Instead, Choy shows through writing the possibility of creating a new mode of existence for the descendants of Chinese diaspora. Whether strategic or unconscious, the use of mimicry changes the terms of cultural interpellation for "colonized" figures and allows them to mime, mock, and partially accept or reject elements of two cultures vying for their exclusive membership.

*The Jade Peony* portrays the fictional Chen family settling in Vancouver in the 1930s and 1940s and is narrated by three children: the only daughter Jook-Liang, the adopted middle son Jung-Sum, and the youngest boy Sek-Lung. These three characters

(unlike the eldest son Kiam who emigrated from China) are born in Canada and are considered resident aliens, and as such, are neither authentically or completely Chinese nor Canadian. The children, who narrate the story of the same time period and events from different points of view, each use mimicry to engage with both Chinese and Canadian cultures. Jook-Liang's narrative centers on her relationships with three key characters: the grandmother Poh-Poh; her elderly friend Wong Suk, an elderly bachelor man formerly employed by the Canadian Pacific Railway; and her imaginative friendship with the singer and dancer Shirley Temple. Jung-Sum tells the story of his parents' murder-suicide and his subsequent adoption by the Chen family. Jung-Sum's life is centered on his friendship with an older Chinese boy named Frank Yuen and the sport of boxing as represented by Joe Louis. Finally, Sek-Lung's narration of these same events initially concentrates on his relationship with Poh-Poh, then briefly fixates on the stepmother's friend Chen Suling (who paradoxically represents the essence and mastery of Chinese and English languages and cultures), and finally becomes obsessed with war games.

Choy shows how mimicry for these children is often invoked through the imaginative, projection of the self as another and role-playing. Jook-Liang "becomes" the companion of Chinese legend Monkey Man, fantasizes about being Shirley Temple's friend, and then imaginatively assumes the singer's identity for herself. Jung-Sum only explores his attraction to Frank Yuen on a mental level instead of acting on it, and pretends to be the famous boxer Joe Louis, while Sek-Lung role-plays as a Canadian fighter pilot. The three siblings are unstable subjects unsure of their realities and

identities as either Chinese or Canadian; mimicry allows for an imaginative escape from the confusing, conflicted messages they receive both within the home and beyond.

### **Mimicry as Recontextualized by Choy**

In traditional postcolonial studies and theory, mimicry involves the colonized partially imitating yet mocking the colonizer. As employed in Wayson Choy's writing, however, mimicry operates differently. The children in *The Jade Peony* are not traditional "colonized" figures, yet they do have an affinity with this group. Choy fictionalizes representations of the "modern Chinese subject who, both in China and in diaspora, exists in cultural spaces mediated by contact with Western culture, often within quasi-colonial relationships" (Lee 24). These quasi-colonial relationships posit the children of Chinese immigrants as colonized figures in relation to both their own community within Chinatown, and greater Vancouver society. The first generation immigrants composed of the grandmother Poh-Poh, the father, the first son Kiam who was born in China, and the large extended group of "aunties" and "uncles" are more like a traditional "colonized" group. At the same time, they also represent a culture that the younger generation of children born in Canada tries to emulate. The three youngest siblings are not born with an intrinsic Chinese culture or identity. It is something they must learn, through stories, examples, and imitation. The younger children also engage in mimicry of certain aspects of Canadian and North American culture, as represented by film stars, singers, professional boxers, and military personnel in World War II. Hence, mimicry is complicated in this diasporic situation: it is doubled, different, and twice as ambivalent.

Bhabha's concept of mimicry depends on the idea of two separate cultural groups, the colonizer and the colonized. While Bhabha acknowledges that cultures are never pure or originary, his analysis still requires the establishment of binaries and polarities to arrive at his process of hybridization, that is, a cultural mixing. For example, Bhabha does not advocate the idea of "an original [or essentialist] cultural or group identity" (Preface xvii), yet he still relies on the categories of colonizer/colonized, the English/the natives, or self/other (see "Signs" 159, 168). Choy in some ways goes further than Bhabha to establish that Chinese people in diaspora are already hybridized prior to intermixing with other cultures; the relocation itself unsettles many cultural practices and ideologies, making them difficult or impossible to perform and maintain. Children born to this diasporic group are necessarily positioned outside the culture of their parents or their "roots" and are already marked as different by the circumstances of their birth. Through mimicry they must learn about Chinese culture, language, spirituality, doctrines and ideology, all of which are equally as foreign as Canadian culture. The following analysis will explain how mimicry is recontextualized in Choy's writing as ambivalently amplified toward multiple references. (That is, mimicry confusedly oscillates between attraction and repulsion).

For the children in Choy's *The Jade Peony* mimicry was not a simple matter of the figure of the "colonized" (diaspora) imitating yet partially mocking the figure of the "colonizer" (other Canadians). Rather, for the confused, conflicted and ambivalent children of these early immigrant characters, two models presented themselves for emulation: members of the close-knit traditional Chinatown, and Canadian or North American society as represented by non-Chinese friends and the media. The children

respond by first engaging in an uncritical, sincere mimesis, the “imitation of another person’s words, mannerisms, actions, etc.” (OED) that quickly turns to mimicry, a mocking, parodying repetition with difference. These children, positioned on the periphery or in-between two cultures, first mime then mimic both the Chinese culture of their parents, grandparents, extended family and neighbours, and North American culture as exposed through schooling, friendships, popular singers, dancers, sports figures, and air-force personnel.

Through the use of fictionalized characters, Choy shows how mimicry functions within a Canadian Chinatown, in a context similar to, yet not quite the same, as colonial situations. Children of the Chinese diaspora, and Choy presents these realistically as based on his own experiences growing up in Vancouver’s Chinatown, are both like and unlike other Chinese and other Canadians. Existing as they do between cultures, they are almost-but-not-quite on two levels, and as such, they engage in simultaneous, partial mimicry of both cultures, exhibiting both attraction (a desire to be like) and repulsion (a rejection or desire to be different) for elements of both. Choy’s writing complicates mimicry by showing how Chinese Canadians can never be completely or authentically Chinese or Canadian, for the other will always intrude. Choy transforms and expands Bhabha’s postcolonial key term mimicry to show how it operates differently in a different locality, with similar effects that are almost the same but not quite. In *The Jade Peony* mimicry is used as a strategy of resistance by the hybridized figures of Chinese-Canadian children, but it is against the two cultural authorities of both Chinese and Canadian ideologies.

Unlike Bhabha's straightforward mimicry in colonial situations in which colonized people imitate and mock the colonizer, the mimicry that Chinese-Canadian children in *The Jade Peony* engage in is two-fold. In postcolonial studies, usually a single discourse of colonialism encourages the colonized subject to mimic the colonizer by becoming a "reformed, recognizable Other, [...] *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha, "Mimicry" 122). Colonial discourse hopes to assimilate the colonized and form them in the image of the colonizer, but is wary and anxious that the colonized will become too much alike or identical, and threaten colonial authority. However, in *The Jade Peony*, the children of Chinese immigrants complicate Bhabha's notion of mimicry, imitating yet rejecting both Chinese and Canadian cultures and their ideological authority. The children do not completely align themselves with their Chinese families or with their non-Chinese "Canadian" schoolmates and friends: instead, the children do not identify completely with either group and rebel against both. This argues for the erasure of separate binaries, as these Chinese-Canadian children are no more "authentically" or "originally" Chinese than they are Canadian. Born and raised in Vancouver's Chinatown, the children must learn and identify with both the "Old China" and the North American ways in their process of self-determination and self-identification.

*The Jade Peony* imaginatively represents Choy's experiences of the pressure Chinese-Canadians felt to engage in mimesis. At first they attempt to integrate and be Canadian, but later realize this is not wholly possible or fulfilling, and their mimesis turns to mockery as they reject and parody certain elements of being Canadian. Choy speaks of his belief, also accepted by his community, that "you had to integrate right away. You

couldn't go back to China" (Davis, "Interweaving" 270). As a result, he says, his generation realized that "they needed to integrate, they needed to be more Canadian than ever" (Davis, "Interweaving" 270). In *The Jade Peony*, Choy shows how Chinese-Canadian subjects are presented with a limited option of conforming, either to Chinese or Canadian customs and expectations, but ultimately resist the pressure to assimilate and create a third option by mimicking and mocking both cultures.

Choy shows the subtlety of ideological coercion: within *The Jade Peony* there are few examples of "white" people "pressuring" the Chinese children to assimilate. It is just the contrary: the eldest brother Kiam's best friend is of Irish descent, and Sek-Lung's schoolteachers are tolerant, supportive of ethnic difference, and insistent on the importance of learning and pronouncing "difficult-sounding" names (*Jade* 154, 175). However, Choy shows how assimilation and mimesis operate insidiously on multiple levels and how Chinese-Canadian children internalize and negotiate this coercion. Speaking through the character of Poh-Poh, Choy critiques the children's mimicry: "*This useless only-granddaughter wants to be Shirlee Tem-po-lah; the useless Second Grandson wants to be cow-boy-lah. The First Grandson wants to be Charlie Chan. All stupid foolish!*" (*Jade* 40).

The use of child narrators allows Choy to present the attraction and repulsion of mimicry that Bhabha defines as ambivalent, partial, and inconsistent (Huddart 60). The children in *The Jade Peony* are less fixed in their identities, beliefs and values than their Chinese elders and oscillate between sympathy and attraction versus lack of interest and rejection, for the surrounding Chinese and Canadian influences. Michelle Hartley calls attention to the "inevitable simultaneity of cultural influences on the hyphenated subject



in Canada: the ambivalence of the child of immigrants who is pulled between Hollywood fantasy and Chinatown family” (61-62). For hyphenated Chinese-Canadian children who are caught between two worlds, fantasy and imagination present a way to interact with, apprehend and critique the Canadian and Chinese cultures to which they are exposed (by partially conforming to yet maintaining an element of difference). Indeed, mimicry as recontextualized by Choy involves a simultaneous, doubled yet partial imitation and rejection of elements of both North American popular culture and the traditional Chinese culture as represented by the extended community of Chinatown.

### **Jook-Liang: Canadianized Chinese Bandit-Princess, Chinese Shirley Temple**

Using the literary character of Jook-Liang, Choy shows how mimicry operates in the following manners: as repetition (imitation of the qualities which are being copied); lack (not quite the original); and excess (a copy of the original plus the difference of the specificities of being Chinese in Canada). Jook-Liang’s repetition is physical (involving dance and performance), as well as oral and imaginative (involving storytelling, pretending and role-playing). This repetition always betrays a lack. Jook-Liang is never completely alike or the same as what she imitates: she is, as Bhabha notes, almost the same but not quite. However, while she is less-than what she mimics, she is also, in another sense, more-than: Jook-Liang is similar to the “original” that she copies, plus a difference that cannot be erased or denied. She is like a Chinese bandit-princess plus her Canadian experiences, identity and status, and also, like Shirley Temple with the addition of her Chineseness.

Jook-Liang’s mimicry is marked as different from instances of mimicry in colonial or postcolonial situations by its dual nature. Through this fictional character,

Choy recontextualizes mimicry as a tool to critique and negotiate both Canadian and Chinese ideologies that seek to shape the children as subjects in their image. Choy complicates Bhabha's analysis of relations between the colonizer and the colonized and adds another dimension to this postcolonial discussion. Jook-Liang engages in a double mimicry: she attempts to imitate figures from both Chinese and Canadian cultures. First, she imagines herself as the bandit-princess from her grandmother Poh-Poh's stories about Monkey King or Monkey Man in Old China; she also fuses this figure with the Tarzan/Cheetah movie. Later, Jook-Liang idolizes Shirley Temple and her mimesis moves beyond the realm of the imaginative when she attempts to physically resemble or embody the star.

Jook-Liang first mimics a Chinese figure that she learns of through her grandmother and the elderly former railroad-worker Wong-Suk. Importantly, this mimicry attempts to repeat or embody the essence of a traditional Chinese myth and reveals through its lack and excess a difference that refuses to be appropriated by Poh-Poh's authority. Poh-Poh tells stories of disguises to Jook-Liang, who uses myth and mystery to apprehend her conflicting worlds and order her reality. She believes Wong Suk is Monkey King, a figure from Chinese myth who takes on disguises such as a lost boatman who is attended by an accomplice (*Jade* 21). This model later allows Jook-Liang to imagine herself as Monkey-King's companion. Together they engage in mimicry of this Chinese myth. Michelle Hartley says, "Liang and Wong Suk must struggle with language and Canadian neocolonialism, but they resist the negative aspects of these forces through imaginative play" (72). This Canadian neocolonialism posits the Chinese as colonized figures amidst the colonizing society of greater Vancouver and

prompts Jook-Liang to engage in mimicry and fantasy in order to resist feelings of inadequacy as “less than Canadian” and “less than traditionally Chinese.” While Michelle Hartley’s suggestion that neocolonialism comes from Canadian culture, it must be recognized that the Chinese culture similarly seeks to control the ideological formation of its subjects. The children use mimicry to resist “colonial” or colonizing domination and control from two fronts.

Disguise is an important part of mimicry that allows for camouflage and trickery in situations where colonialism often disallows overt displays of difference and resistance. Jook-Liang recognizes or misidentifies Wong Suk as “the Monkey King of Poh-Poh’s stories, disguised as an old man bent over two canes” (*Jade* 23). Jook-Liang’s ability to engage in mimicry, imaginative daydreams and fantasy depends on the believability of Wong Suk’s dual identity as Monkey King. If she were unable to uphold this fantasy, Jook-Liang would be unable to imagine herself as his companion and mimic this Chinese myth as related by her grandmother. Wong Suk goes along with this fantasy, proclaiming Jook-Liang his “*chak neuhi gung-jyu*, his bandit princess” (*Jade* 33). Jook-Liang also complicates Wong Suk by identifying him as Cheetah from the Tarzan movie (*Jade* 27). She calls him Tarzan monkey, and pulls at his disfigured face to prove that he is not wearing a mask (*Jade* 28): Jook-Liang is skeptical and demands proof of his authenticity.

In this manner, Jook-Liang borrows from both Eastern and Western cultures to explain the unexplainable; conflating two mythical figures into one being allows her to contextualize both historical myths within her contemporary experience. Play-acting with her two older brothers who enact the roles of Tarzan and Cheetah, Jook-Liang resents

being forced into the role of Jane who is inactive and passive. Jook-Liang says, “I got to be Jane, doing nothing” (*Jade* 20). Jook-Liang refuses to engage in mimesis of this Hollywood character, for this role is not culturally appealing to her; hence, her mimicry is deliberate and selective, not a mere unquestioning or uncritical copying of the dominant culture. Jook-Liang also imaginatively self-identifies as the “bandit-princess Marian” who is the counterpart to Wong Suk’s Robin Hood (*Jade* 33). The immediacy of Western storybooks and movies allows Jook-Liang to take possession of these stories and characters in a way that Poh-Poh’s myths, the originals that she attempts to mimic, are not available.

Another cultural figure that Jook-Liang imitates is Poh-Poh, who represents the essence of Chineseness (*Jade* 14). Learning from the grandmother’s stories, Jook-Liang seeks to emulate the elder’s experiences and insists that she too needs a girl-baby to be her slave, recalling stories of enslavement in China (*Jade* 15). Later, this mimesis or imitation turns to mockery, as Jook-Liang rejects the Old One and her traditional Chinese ways due to resentment at being called “*mo yung*—useless” (*Jade* 32). When Poh-Poh attempts to separate the old man and the young girl, Jook-Liang rebels against her authority, saying, “*He’s mine!* Something old sprang from me, something struggled to defy even Poh-Poh” (*Jade* 30). Poh-Poh’s condemnation of the female sex and limited opportunities prompts Jook-Liang to no longer want to emulate or respect the old woman. As a result, Jook-Liang’s desire for mimesis turns to a partial rejection, and is replaced by her need to assert her own difference from the Chinese culture that the grandmother represents.

In addition to mimicking elements of the Chinese culture, Jook-Liang also emulates North American icon Shirley Temple. Jook-Liang idolizes and seeks to embody the singer/dancer by wearing a second-hand stained dress, curling her hair into ringlets, and putting on tap-dance performances for her friend Monkey King (*Jade* 41-46). Jook-Liang's mimicry is studied and deliberate: she reads books about Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and follows the fold-out pages stamped with shoe prints to learn the tap steps (*Jade* 44). Jook-Liang physically imitates Shirley Temple by posing, bright-eyed, "with her hands tucked under her chin" (*Jade* 36), but also imaginatively in the realm of fantasy. When role-playing as Shirley Temple, Jook-Liang sings "*not* one of Grandmother's riverboat songs [...] *but* my tapdance song (*Jade* 37 my emphasis). Jook-Liang rejects Poh-Poh's traditional Chinese culture and desperately tries to claim ownership of the North American song and popular icon. Jook-Liang's impersonation of Shirley Temple is physical, vocal, auditory and mental or imaginative. She acknowledges, "I imitated the movie shows [...] just like Shirley did" (*Jade* 44). This is imitation without mimicry or mockery. It is simulation without critique, parody or irony. In Bhabha's terms, Jook-Liang is *almost, but not quite* like Shirley Temple. The father participates in his daughter's daydreams, buying her a white dress with a stain that he advises her to ignore: "If you don't look for it [...] you won't notice it" (*Jade* 44). The stain, like a marker of difference, their social and economic standing, is an imperfection, a flaw. Significantly, Jook-Liang does *not* look for this variation; rather, she denies her difference and desperately tries to assimilate to the cultural norm.

Although Jook-Liang professes that she is only play-acting for Wong Suk, she recognizes her self delusion: "I also play-acted for myself, imagining a world where I

belonged, dressed perfectly, behaved beyond reproach, and was loved, always loved, and was not, no, not at all, *mo yung*” (*Jade* 40). Poh-Poh indulges her granddaughter’s fantasy despite her own disapproval: “Aiiiyaah! How one China girl be Shir-lee Tempo-lah?” (*Jade* 34). Poh-Poh aids in transforming Jook-Liang’s fantasy into a physical reality, or as close a mock imitation as they can create. Poh-Poh ties red ribbon into intricate flowers for Jook-Liang’s shoes; the girl desperately wants to learn this cultural tradition but cannot ask for fear of rejection. Poh-Poh refuses to perpetuate the fear and violence that was inflicted on her as a servant-girl learning knot tying; Jook-Liang internalizes this trepidation and becomes consumed with ambivalence towards this old custom. She is attracted to this skill, but fears failure or denunciation. Jook-Liang is caught between worlds: she believes Poh-Poh who says she is too spoiled to deserve a traditional education. Jook-Liang mourns this loss: “all her womanly skills she would keep away from me, keep to herself until she died: ‘Job too good for *mo yung* girl!’” (*Jade* 35). Poh-Poh repeatedly tells Liang, “A girl child is *mo yung*—useless” (*Jade* 32). Fantasy, imagination and mimicry allow Jook-Liang to reject the identity of a *mo yung* Chinese girl in favour of Shirley Temple who represents a North American accepted cultural icon that Jook-Liang can easily and successfully imitate.

Jook-Liang can fantasize and imagine herself as a white girl whom everybody loves only so long as she is not confronted with the physical proof of her difference. When Jook-Liang looks in the mirror, desperately seeking Shirley Temple’s dimples and “perfect white-skin features,” she is confronted with her own “broad sallow moon with slit dark eyes,” and too-slim limbs (*Jade* 43). This episode recalls Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage, where the infant gazes at a reflection and mis-identifies with it. Jook-Liang

desires this, but is unable to maintain the illusion. Her disappointment reveals her lack, as less than, un-whole and incomplete. Whiteness is seen as perfection, and her body betrays her as evidence that she is other. Lacan argues that the mirror stage produces an unstable illusion of selfhood: the infant identifies with its image in the mirror, but the reflection is never identical to the original, so unity is inaccessible and impossible (159, 227, 241).

Jook-Liang further invokes Lacan's mirror stage, "in Frantz Fanon's sense, with her apprehended lack of wholeness after looking in the mirror, identifying with the dominant culture and expecting to see a white child rather than herself" (Hartley 70). Frantz Fanon discusses nonwhite subjects interpellated into Western culture who undergo a process of misrecognition similar to Lacan's misidentification in the mirror stage (147-48). These child subjects construct themselves through comic-book images as white, but this image is later violently disrupted. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon says that black subjects subjectively and intellectually conduct themselves as white but later learn of their blackness when they go to Europe and are confronted with their own difference (147-48). In Choy's *The Jade Peony*, Jook-Liang similarly constructs herself in the image of a popular white icon, but is traumatically and undeniably confronted with her own difference when faced with a reflection she did not expect.

Lacan says, "The effect of mimicry is camouflage... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled" (99). Thus, mimicry is not a denial of difference on the part of the colonized in order to become identical to the colonizer, but instead, is the maintenance of complexity, impurity and variance against or beside that which is likewise not pure, originary or

uniform. Bhabha agrees with Lacan, saying, “mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends its presence by displaying it in part, metonymically” (“Mimicry” 128). Mimicry maintains difference: it resembles or is *like* that which it imitates, but not identical. As Bhabha suggests, “colonized” peoples preserve an element of themselves separate from the colonizers whom they imitate by merely re-producing and displaying certain aspects of the colonizers’ beliefs, values and ideas.

Bhabha uses the term camouflage, a blending in with a background that is not fully present, to show how “mimicry performs and exceeds colonial authority” (Huddart 68). To explain, Jook-Liang’s mimicry allows her to blend in with two cultures. In each case, she imitates a mythic or iconic figure and performs or subsumes its authority, and also exceeds it by being almost the same plus the sum of her difference. Her mimicry is metonymic, as per Bhabha’s definition: she displays, in part, her similarities: the dress, the hair, and the shoes. However, Jook-Liang is not a complete replica of Shirley Temple. Jook-Liang is like Shirley Temple plus the sum of her Chineseness. She is also similar to the figures from the Monkey King myth and the Tarzan movies plus the sum of her Canadianness. Michelle Hartley recognizes, “Jook-Liang’s mimicry of Shirley Temple is her way ‘of becoming mottled’; it is a coping strategy that enables Liang to be present yet disguise her vulnerability to her grandmother’s insults and the constraints of her community” (70-71). Jook-Liang is both a mottled Shirley Temple and a mottled Chinese girl from Poh-Poh’s stories of Old China and Monkey King.

Poh-Poh advises that girl-children do not have “a place in this world,” to which Jook-Liang desperately wants to retort, “This is Canada [...] not Old China” (*Jade* 31).



Jook-Liang is caught between worlds; she resists one at the expense of the other. She is unwilling to accept the role of a traditional Chinese woman (as exemplified by Poh-Poh) but cannot completely deny the biological fact that she is Chinese. Jook-Liang must negotiate a position and an identity for herself. She has no predecessor whom she can emulate, for both her mother and grandmother were born in China. As a first-generation Canadian-born Chinese person, she must chart territory unfamiliar to all the women in her family and reconcile two often-conflicting cultures.

Jook-Liang's relationship with Poh-Poh and her old customs and traditions is highly ambivalent. She says, "I hated the Old One: Grandmother never let me get on with my movie-star daydreams" (*Jade* 37). Of course, this is not true: Poh-Poh protectively fosters her dreams, but understands the danger and ambivalence of pleasure as well as the fear of broken hopes. Poh-Poh makes it evident that in China girls do not have leisure time for play-acting. Jook-Liang feels displaced and unsettled in her position as a girl in Canada and so she retreats to the realm of the imaginative to seek a sense of belonging (*Jade* 40). Poh-Poh is right in implying that there *is* no place where Jook-Liang belongs: she belongs in both yet neither and must shape an imaginary and compromised place for herself. In a child's world, this is often the realm of fantasy. Hurt and filled with resentment, Jook-Liang rejects the past, saying, "If Poh-Poh was going to launch into the story of 'the old days, the old ways,' I wanted to escape" (*Jade* 40). Jook-Liang posits Poh-Poh who is the "arbitrator of the old ways" (*Jade* 14) as a direct challenge, opposition or threat to her ability to emulate North American culture. Jook-Liang says, "I hated the Old One: Grandmother never let me get on with my movie-star daydreams," (*Jade* 37). Thus, Jook-Liang's desire to imitate one culture puts her at odds

with the other; mimicry in this sense is subversive on two levels, in that it desires and mimics yet disdains and rejects the contradictory, irreconcilable elements of “Chineseness” and Canadianness (Lee 18, Ng 182).

Jook-Liang does not accept all of Poh-Poh’s advice unquestioningly; as she grows older she struggles to reconcile her grandmother’s wisdom with her own situation growing up in Canada. Poh-Poh views the world in dichotomous terms: she pronounces, “*You not Canada, Liang [...] you China*” (*Jade* 37). Poh-Poh actually conflates the girl’s identity with a country and dictates where her national loyalties should lie for the elderly woman does not believe in the possibility of a hybridized or hyphenated identity such as Chinese-Canadian. The girl refuses to accept an externally imposed, limited and ultimately unsatisfying identity: she rejects this false image of herself as China. (This is not to suggest that an image of herself as Canada would be any more true or accurate; it is precisely such a polarization that Bhabha cautions against). When Poh-Poh insistently repeats, “*You China*,” Jook-Liang sings louder and refuses to hear or believe her. Jook-Liang’s mental liberation precedes any change in her political or physical surroundings.

Jook-Liang looks in the mirror expectantly hoping to see her white icon’s image reflected back to her. She seeks “Shirley Temple with her dimpled smile and perfect white-skin features” (*Jade* 43). Instead, Jook-Liang is bluntly confronted with characteristics such as a wide face, dark narrow eyes and straight back hair instead of white freckled skin, blue eyes and red hair. She is forced to see and acknowledge her undeniable difference; the realization frightens her (something cold clutches her stomach and makes her swallow) for she can no longer maintain this illusion and fantasy. Yet despite this identity crisis, Jook-Liang does not reject Shirley Temple. Determinedly, she

continues to dance. It is at this point that Jook-Liang's performance evolves from mimesis--imitation--to mimicry, or repetition with difference (Huddart 57). Her mimicry defies both the North American culture represented by Shirley Temple and the Chinese culture as represented by Poh-Poh, who degrades her as brainless, useless and inauthentic. Jook-Liang moves from the desire to imitate (mimesis) when she first attempts to become Shirley Temple to the empowering realization that her difference is not a shameful thing to be denied. At the conclusion of her narrative, Jook-Liang says that Chinese people should try to not be so different outside of Chinatown (*Jade* 124), which suggests that their difference is something white people cannot know or understand. Significantly, if others are not aware of their difference, it remains a powerful, unknown tool that can be used to resist assimilation and erasure.

### **Jung-Sum: Marginalized Ethnic Homosexual, Chinese Brown Bomber**

The literary character of Jung-Sum also engages in an ambivalent double mimicry of both an elder Chinese boy and the boxer Joe Louis. Choy says that Jung-Sum has an “outsider's” view—and attempts to adjust or accept his differences” (Davis, “Interweaving” 275). Jung-Sum first attempts to deny or erase these differences by imitating others. It is only later when he realizes the impossibility of complete mimesis and his own lack and excesses that mimesis turns to mimicry and he is forced to acknowledge his differences. After Jung-Sum's abusive father murders his mother then commits suicide, he becomes the adopted son of the Chen family. Jung-Sum is triply marked by difference, otherness and alterity: first, by his adopted status within the family; second, by his sexuality and femininity; and third, by his Chinese ethnicity that

marks him as a minority. Alternating between denial and acceptance, he attempts to negotiate these differences through mimicry.

The Chinese elders compare Jung-Sum to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, but this reference is not meaningful to Jung-sum who is more impressed with his coat's *Genuine British* label (*Jade* 102). Jung-Sum is proud to dress himself in a refashioned British coat because it presents an image of acculturation and assimilation to the greater Canadian or "white" society. In this way, he literally dresses in the cultural trappings of Canadian culture, and differentiates himself from traditional Chinese presentation. However, Jung-Sum is not completely satisfied with either the Chinese cultural reference or the British. He wants to look "like a champion or an army captain" (*Jade* 94) and is only satisfied when it is shortened, narrowed, steamed, and adorned with brass buttons. Comparable to the raspberry stain on Jook-Liang's dress, Jung-Sum's coat has the "smallest outline of a stain" on one sleeve (*Jade* 102). The physical trappings of mimicry contain a small, barely noticeable flaw that marks the wearer as different and lacking in perfection. These elements are also in excess and represent the sum of what he strives to imitate plus the difference of his Chineseness.

Jung-Sum idolizes and wants to earn the respect of Frank Yuen (a tough young man who endured his father's abuse) because "he was someone to admire, a survivor" (*Jade* 109, 115). This idolization suddenly changes during a fight when Jung-Sum grabs Frank's knife and tries to kill him: Jung-Sum's mimicry hinges, turns, and develops a violent element of resistance. He no longer desires simple mimesis, but is aware that he is different or greater than Frank. Jung-Sum is further marked as different by the sudden realization of his sexual attraction to Frank (*Jade* 117). As the voice of authority, Poh-

Poh pronounces Jung-Sum “different” and “*Inside* unusual, not ordinary” (*Jade* 81). In order to fit in or belong Jung-Sum must engage in mimesis to become like the other family members. Jung-Sum is compared to the moon, which represents the yin principle or the female (*Jade* 82). Later, his sexual awakening is accompanied by the shame that he must hide his homosexual desires (*Jade* 117), which only serve to highlight his difference and alterity. Although Frank Yuen is a member of the Chinese community, he is also marked by alterity: people are offended by his violent “hoodlum” ways (*Jade* 112). As someone partially outside accepted Chinese society, Frank does not stifle or contain Jung-Sum. In fact, he is affiliated in Jung-Sum’s mind with the boxing culture: Frank fights like the Brown Bomber (*Jade* 111). In summation, Frank’s relationship with Jung-Sum increases his sense of otherness and difference and serves to further relegate him to the margins of the social, ethnic and sexual groups to which he belongs.

Similar to the other children who are attracted to cultural icons, Jung-Sum is captivated with the sport of boxing and is inspired by champion Joe Louis the Brown Bomber. Although marked by his ethnicity and clearly not “white,” Joe Louis uses his popularity to traverse the race barrier and enter popular culture. Thus, Jung-Sum’s mimicry is nevertheless an example of a minority emulating a North American iconic figure. Reminiscent of the character of Jook-Liang, Jung-Sum’s mimicry involves an element of performance: he has a daily routine of shadow boxing for an audience of family and friends. He stages his performances by positioning a lamp “as if it were a spotlight” on the floor to cast a shadow of his punches so that he too can observe his own image and envision himself as his hero Joe Louis (*Jade* 81). Not unlike the professional boxer who maintains the “illusion of weightlessness” (*Jade* 81), Jung-Sum hopes to

create a similar illusion by subscribing to a habitual physical ritual. Jung-Sum recalls his sister's mimicry of Shirley Temple: he dons a costume (shorts, gloves) and "dances" to physically embody another and "show off" (*Jade* 81) to an audience that he depends for validation of his identity as his hero.

A more immediate reference for imitation than Joe Louis presents itself in Max, a "lanky Negro" boxer at Hastings Gym who hypnotizes Jung-Sum (*Jade* 92). Max teaches Jung-Sum and his friends "how to hold their fists, how to swing and fake a punch, how to pull back and lunge forward, how to shadow box" (*Jade* 92). Max serves as a channel for knowledge and practice of the sport of boxing and enables Jung-Sum to physically mime the defining movements of his hero Joe Louis. Jung-Sum's imitation is studied and deliberate. He joins a junior boxing section, pays for lessons, and attends Max's boxing matches while illogically fantasizing that he will see the name Joe Louis on the ticket (*Jade* 93). This mimicry, which has already been shown to be physical, is also mental and imaginative. Jung-Sum pretends to be his hero while playing with his friend Bobby Steinberg: "We took turns playing the announcer, took turns being Joe Louis" (*Jade* 111).

Frank calls Jung-Sum the "Champion Yellow Bomber" (*Jade* 120), invoking the name of Joe Louis even as he inscribes Jung-Sum's difference: as Chinese he is yellow, not brown like the original. Jung-Sum's desire for mimesis of his hero Joe Louis turns to mimicry as Jung-Sum proudly accepts the name bestowed upon him from his other hero, Frank. Jung-Sum recognizes and accepts that he is partial and lacking (not brown) and also in excess (comparable to Joe Louis but also Chinese). His ethnicity is an excess: he is like the famous boxer, plus the sum of his difference.

Jung-Sum's dual mimicry of elements of both Chinese and North American cultures renders him even more ambivalent than colonized figures from traditional postcolonial situations. He mimics and later mocks or at least partially rejects the "originals" to which he was first attracted because he is unable or unwilling to conform to their beliefs, values, or modes of existence. Jung-Sum's double ambivalence, toward both Chinese and Canadian ideologies disrupts the "colonial" authority and domination of each because he refuses to obey the rules of either. Simple mimesis, or the desire to copy the original, becomes mimicry and contains an element of parody, mockery or rejection. This leaves the "colonizer" figure ambivalent about his or her right to authority, domination and control of social discourse of the "colonized." The "colonizing" discourses of the adult Chinese and Vancouver communities seek to create Jung-Sum in each of their own images as a subject who will reproduce their assumptions, habits and values (Ashcroft et al. 13). Jung-Sum's partial mimesis and mimicry of each resists these discourses of domination and his ambivalence affords him the possibility and ability for self-determination.

### **Sek-Lung: Model (Chinese) English Student, Ambivalent Air Force Pilot**

Reminiscent of the other siblings, Sek-Lung mimes and partially rejects figures and elements of both Chinese and Canadian culture. The stepmother's friend Chen Suling is upheld as a model for Sek-Lung. He is both attracted to and repulsed by her and alternates between attempting to emulate and surpass her skills and rejecting her outright. Sek-Lung also imitates Royal Canadian Air Force pilots and internalizes the World War II racial hatred for Japanese. However, his first-hand experiences lead him to question these feelings and he is ultimately uncertain about whether all Japanese are the

enemy and whether Canada and her British and American allies are justified in killing Japanese in Hong Kong and Pearl Harbor. Like his other siblings, Sek-Lung also imitates and identifies with famous English celebrities. He likes to pretend he is a fighter with the Allied troops in World War II, a cowboy, or Charlie Chan (*Jade* 19). Interestingly, he tries to emulate and identify with an example of Chinese ethnicity, albeit one who has gained considerable fame and acceptance in popular culture. These multiple instances of imitation render Sek-Lung confused and ambivalent. He is only empowered when his mimesis turns to mimicry and he is able to partially reject elements that he originally sought to emulate.

Sek-Lung's first instance of mimicry involves his mother's friend in China, a missionary who contradictorily represents the essence and abilities of both Chinese and "English" identities. The stepmother calls Sek-Lung "*mo no*" or no brain and labels him as less-than-complete or lacking (*Jade* 129). She invokes her friend in China, Chen Suling, to teach Sek-Lung the "right way to be Chinese" (*Jade* 133) and mastery of the English language. Chen-Suling serves a disciplinary function although she is constituted through discourse in letters and comments (Lee 22). Sek-Lung alternates ambivalently between hatred and rejection of Chen-Suling as a model for imitation versus attraction and respect for her (*Jade* 130). Christopher Lee suggests that Sek-Lung vows to become "better than Chen (again, the borders between resistance and identification are blurred)" (23). Sek-Lung's mimesis, which was ambivalent from the beginning, turns easily to mimicry and mockery as he is determined to not merely match or equal the original but to replicate it with excess. Upon Chen Suling's death, Sek-Lung discovers her grammatical



errors in English, which demythologizes and neutralizes her as a model and as a competitor (Lee 23).

After this early and brief attraction, rejection and defeat of a figure who embodies “proper” Chineseness, Sek-Lung comes completely consumed with Royal Canadian Air Force pilots as figures of Canadian (and British by extension) culture. He is subjected to ideological conditioning through media reports of British and Canadian warfare with the Japanese who are demonized in the press for their dreams of colonial expansion in China. He internalizes these racist sentiments and mimics or reenacts the violence of war by playing with toy fighter-jets. Sek-Lung accompanies his babysitter Meiying as she traverses the borders of Chinatown to meet her forbidden Japanese boyfriend. He calls the park where they watch Meiying’s boyfriend Kazuo play baseball “Little Tokyo—Japtown—enemy territory!” (*Jade* 209).

Sek-Lung completely internalizes the racist ideology of the air force, and desires only mimesis at first. He wants to become a “good guy,” which he defines in opposition to the enemy. Finding himself in unfamiliar territory surrounded by “enemy” Japanese, Sek-Lung palms a knife and identifies himself as “soldier standing guard, fists ready” (*Jade* 210). He finds the bravery and protective element of warfare appealing, and embodies the stance. The crowd of Japanese people seems ordinary but he must remind himself they are the enemy (*Jade* 211). This designation of Japanese as the enemy is a constructed and artificial trapping of Sek-Lung’s mimicry of Royal Canadian Air Force pilots who hate the Japanese. Sek-Lung does not intrinsically hate the Japanese; rather, he adopts this sentiment through his mimicry. He is confused by Kazuo: “He looked like a Chinese movie soldier, a Good Guy, in one of those films we saw at the Chinese War

Effort Fund Drive. But he was *Japanese*” (*Jade* 211). Admiration of the Japanese baseball team leads Sek-Lung to forget he is watching the enemy (*Jade* 211). Such a forgetting is positive, for it allows him to question his learned hatred. He is both thrilled and dazzled by this experience that allows him to “become a soldier” (*Jade* 214).

Sek-Lung is confronted by the racial hatred for Japanese people that he has internalized. By interacting with Kazuo as a human being and not merely a stereotype, Sek-Lung starts to question and critically engage with the ideology of the Canadian air force, which begins to mark him as different. Sek-Lung is emboldened by the visit: he feels “relieved. Uplifted even. Powerful” (*Jade* 214). He still thinks as a soldier, deems Meiying a traitor and feels powerful with his secret knowledge that he could betray or report her. He imagines himself as a spy, trapping Meiying and Kazuo and turning them in to the Tong Association or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (*Jade* 215). Finally, he is forced to acknowledge his own involvement and complicity: “If she was a traitor, what was I?” he ponders (*Jade* 216). He later keeps his silence when others call Kazuo a “dirty Jap,” but he imagines his soldiers firing away (*Jade* 218). His silence is a refusal to speak the hatred of those he mimics (Canadian air-force pilots), although his mimicry persists at the imaginative level. Interestingly, Meiying uses war terminology to get Sek-Lung on her side, speaking of alliances and allies (*Jade* 218). On the other hand, Sek-Lung proclaims his identity through negation, wearing a button that says, “I AM CHINESE” to deny that he is Japanese (*Jade* 219). Sek-Lung’s friendship with Meiying leads him to question his racial hatred for the Japanese: he worries that she will be cursed and publicly shamed for her treachery and imagines the violent demonstrations he has seen in Chinese propaganda movies (*Jade* 220).

Sek-Lung realizes Kazuo's human commonality despite his racial differences, which are not valid grounds for discrimination. This marks the beginning of his self-assertion against the ideology perpetuated by the air force (as communicated on television, in war games, and in parental discussions). Sek-Lung's hatred finally dissipates. He pretends to fight with Kazuo, who responds by twirling him around in the air; they end up "laughing and rolling around on the ground" (*Jade* 223). Sek-Lung questions his family, "Are all Japs our enemy, even the ones born in Canada?" (*Jade* 224). The father says yes; the stepmother disagrees; and Eldest Brother Kiam surmises that Japanese born in Canada are only "*half enemies*" (*Jade* 225). The last time Sek-Lung seeks Kazuo, Sek-Lung mouths "*Jap*" to another Japanese boy, who in response mouths "*Chink*" (*Jade* 232). Sek-Lung turns to give Kazuo a dirty look as well, but is shocked to see him crying (*Jade* 233). Sek-Lung views Kazuo as completely human for the first time, that is, someone capable of possessing emotion and compassion. Sek-Lung refuses to speak his hatred; he mouths a racial slur at another Japanese boy, but his silence is indicative of his confusion and reluctance. It must be noted that he does not completely abandon his feelings of resentment towards the Japanese; however, the mere act of questioning this racism differentiates him from the Royal Canadian Air Force pilots that he mimics and idolizes.

Choy says that compared to the other children Sek-Lung most successfully "'bridges' all the worlds, because he is in-between changing, conflicting cultures" (Davis, "Interweaving" 275). As the youngest member of the family, Sek-Lung perhaps represents the possibility and optimism for "postcolonial" diasporic communities. Sek-Lung has fewer ties to "Old China" and although still consumed by ambivalence like his

siblings, he is perhaps more open to the continual renegotiation of identity through mimicry of various aspects of both cultures, which allows him to participate fully in the process of hybridization that Bhabha so advocates. Dual mimicry allows Sek-Lung to “bridge” both worlds while maintaining his relative differences in each.

## Conclusion

The instances of mimicry in *The Jade Peony* are left ambiguous: Sek-Lung does not renounce the air force although he questions the racism towards Japanese that is a driving factor justifying the war. Similarly, Jung-Sum does not reject his dream of becoming a boxer, nor does Jook-Liang surrender her fantasy of transforming into Shirley Temple. These three Canadian-born Chinese children characters do not unquestioningly accept and replicate what they see in Canadian culture. Importantly, they repeat it, but with a difference. They realize that they cannot and do not desire to be identical to the “original” that they emulate and imitate, for that would necessitate rejecting the Chinese ethnicity that is also a part of their heritage and identity. Likewise, Choy demonstrates through the use of these same fictional literary characters how mimicry in this quasi-colonial context (comparing the children of immigrants and diaspora to colonized peoples) is also used to resist Chinese culture to a certain extent. The children do not repeat, identically, what they are exposed to in Chinatown. Rather, their imitation borders on parody or partial rejection because they infuse their imitation with difference.

This element of difference, whether asserted by choice in direct defiance of assimilation and straightforward mimesis, or whether already present as an undeniable, predetermined factor that is *something else besides* suggests an agency in mimicry. The

children in *The Jade Peony* are different whether they intentionally assert their difference or not. The outcome is the same: they are “almost the same *but not quite*,” and this ambivalence creates uncertainty (Bhabha, “Mimicry” 123) for the “colonial” discourses of Chinese and Canadian ideologies. Difference creates uncertainty and anxiety and enables the children as “colonized” figures to elusively escape the discourse and ideology of the Canadian and Chinese cultures, which seek to administer, control, and form them as “reformed, recognizable Other[s]” who are similar but not the same (Bhabha, “Mimicry” 122). David Huddart cannot resolve the issue of whether mimicry involves a “question of being conscious, or of *intending* to do anything” (67). Nonetheless, it is an act of resistance that changes the circumstances and situation for the colonized that affords them a measure of agency in determining their relations with the colonizers.

Colonial domination seeks to administer and control; Choy’s novel shows how the strategic, innocent, questioning or critical use of mimicry allows the children of immigrants who are positioned in-between cultures to resist the fixity and stasis of identity that both Chinese and Canadian (or more broadly North American) ideologies try to impose by interpellating the children as subjects. Bhabha notes that colonial domination uses stereotypes (negative, racist images) to assert the inferiority of the colonized and justify their domination; but in fact, stereotypes are unstable and create an underlying anxiety for the colonizer (Huddart 35). Choy shows how identity types (images of the quintessential, model Chinese or Canadian person) are not necessarily negative but function similarly to the stereotype: they are false images externally imposed upon subjects that do not match their reality. These images appear fixed and stable on the outside but are actually unrealistic and unsteady. Chinese and Canadian cultures

attempt to impose these “stereotypes” upon the children in *The Jade Peony*, but the children are able to exploit the anxiety of both cultures through mimicry in order to resist these false images.

The process of mimicry or the active, ongoing and continual negotiation emphasized by Bhabha impedes the ability of each culture to contain and control the children as members. Choy’s literary characters are incomplete members of both Chinese and Canadian cultures, and will not allow the ideologies of each to dictate their actions. This partial membership is a virtue that allows for non-exclusive access to both groups, which the children may enter, selectively choose elements to emulate, mimic and critique, then leave at will. Partiality or incompleteness empowers the children in *The Jade Peony* as “colonized” peoples by allowing them access to Chinese and Canadian cultures and their ideologies without the restrictions that a full, exclusive membership would entail. Herein lies the possibility for agency, resistance, and self-determined action.

Bhabha argues, “the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (“Mimicry” 122). Choy’s writing shows how the children of diaspora engage in an ambivalent double mimicry of two cultures and negotiate both attraction and repulsion while maintaining an element of difference that eludes the “colonial” authority of both “Chineseness” and “Canadianness.” In this instance of the reapplication of a postcolonial concept to a non-postcolonial context, mimicry is an effective mode of resistance to ideological control that justifies the recontextualization and reapplication of postcolonial theory to a different locality, intercultural situation, and historical period.

The following chapter will examine the process of hybridization, which is another key postcolonial concept linked to mimicry. *The Jade Peony* illustrates how mimicry operates as partiality, excess and difference in relation to both Chinese and Canadian cultures; its sequel, *All That Matters*, shows how this ambivalent double act of imitating, mimicking, and parodying while maintaining difference renders the “colonized” subject hybridized. This hybridized hyphenated Chinese-Canadian subject partially rejects both the Chinese and the Canadian ideologies through the act of mimicry and is able to construct a third alternative, what Bhabha terms a Third Space.

### III

#### **Relocating Hybridity in Wayson Choy's *All That Matters***

Hybridity, as theorized by Bhabha, refers to the “creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft et al. 118). Choy adapts this definition in his literary representation of the intercultural and trans-cultural relations amongst Chinese in diaspora, other ethnic immigrants, and Canadians. The contact zone in Choy's writing is multiple and not necessarily postcolonial, yet it functions similarly to disavow the ideology of multiple discourses that seek to contain or shape the “colonized” subject. In Choy's writing, hybridization occurs but it is not identical to the process that occurs in colonial situations. In multicultural situations such as experienced by immigrants in Vancouver during the 1930s and the 1940s as represented in *All That Matters*, the process of hybridization is not only between the “colonizer” and the “colonized,” but amongst different, multiple cultural groups.

Bhabha speaks of *hybridization* or a “strategy of disavowal” (“Signs” 158) that resists categorization or valuation, and allows hybridized subjects to instead exist on the margins of various groups and discourses that seek to “colonize,” shape or form them. This “strategy of disavowal” suggests that hybridity serves two important functions: first, it discredits the authority of original identities by partially rejecting authoritative models; and second, it devalues categories and binaries by creating a space for an in-between existence. Choy raises these themes in his writing and recontextualizes Bhabha's original theory in a different kind of “postcolonial” situation. Choy complicates Bhabha's term hybridity and refutes the charges of passivity levied by some of Bhabha's critics by emphasizing the active agency of the hybridized subjects.



Choy explores the tensions and contradictions inherent in the fragmented identity informed by multiple discourses of a hybridized Chinese-Canadian protagonist in Vancouver in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in his novel *All That Matters*, the sequel to *The Jade Peony*. The main characters inhabit an ambivalent third space as they negotiate within Chinese and Canadian cultures to forge new identities and spaces to inhabit. Choy explores several aspects of diasporic constitution and identity: how Chinese-Canadians represent themselves; how others attempt to impose identities, characteristics and attributes upon them; and finally, how these often contradictory elements are either reconciled or remain unresolved in an uneasy discord. Bhabha's postcolonial theories and ideas interrogate, uphold, and challenge themes and issues raised in Choy's writing. This chapter will explore the ways in which various self-identifying processes play an essential role in what it means to be marginalized, part of various minority groups, and situated as hybrid citizens of a Canadian ethnicity. Choy repeatedly and temporarily repositions the characters as they are formulated as either/both Chinese and "Canadian," (considering that the latter term cannot be merely defined as "white" but must be recognized as multicultural and varied).

The protagonist in Choy's novel *All That Matters*, Kiam, is simultaneously interpellated or hailed by name, identified, and given a sense of belonging (see Althusser 174) by many discourses that resist the cultural hegemony of Chinese, Canadian and other ethnic cultures, which leaves him in a very hybridized position. This fictional character challenges the dominant hegemony by inhabiting "heterogeneous sites and circuits of power which, though momentarily 'fixed' in the authoritative alignment of subjects, must continually be re-presented" (Bhabha, "Signs" 116). This means that

Kiam as a “colonized” figure is temporarily positioned beside different “colonizing” groups but resists being defined or controlled by their ideologies by continually moving amongst, between, away from and back within these groups. Using Kiam as a literary example, Choy shows how hybridized “colonized” figures can access power and agency by entering and reentering various “colonial” sites of power without completely aligning themselves with one exclusively. In *All That Matters*, Kiam interacts and negotiates with various cultures: the traditional Old Ways of the Chinese culture as represented by the grandmother Poh-Poh; Canadian modernity as espoused by the father; “white” North American popular culture as explored with the neighbouring Irish boy Jack O’Connor; and other multicultural groups Kiam is exposed to through school, sports and gangs.

Bhabha says that the maintenance of cultural authority relies on “discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different*—a mutation, a hybrid” (“Signs” 159). The process of hybridization, as illustrated in Choy’s writing, challenges and breaks down the authority and myth of purity and originality of both Chinese and Canadian cultures. As hyphenated Chinese-Canadian subjects, the children of the Chen family represent what Bhabha terms “bastards” who symbolize impure cultural mixedness. The second-generation immigrant children are not and cannot be original or authentic Chinese subjects, despite elder generations’ efforts to instill traditional values in their foreign-born descendants. Within Chinatown some people “struggle for continuity and association within the group,” voluntarily isolate themselves, and refuse to assimilate with a larger Canadian culture (Davis, “Backdair” 85-6). The grandmother Poh-Poh in particular is concerned with imparting a respect for the “old

ways” of China into her grandchildren through storytelling, language, and making traditional crafts such as windchimes. However, the children are unable to completely identify with the culture of their elders. These children represent a bastardization of Chinese and Canadian cultures. When they are young, they have more interest and attention for Poh-Poh’s legends and myths; but as they grow older and are exposed to a Canadian culture through English school they become more ambivalent and hybridized.

The process of hybridization often involves a conscious choice and agency and is not entirely predetermined, fated or destined. Maria Ng’s argument that “all Chinese Canadian writing is inevitably hybrid” (174) discredits the agency of the “colonized” Chinese people who play an active role in negotiating and determining their positioning between cultures and imaginatively represent this hybridization in literature. This inevitability also denies the effort that goes into resisting separation and the maintenance of boundaries and oppositions. Choy’s novel demonstrates how a minority ethnic group may attempt to resist hybridization: the Chinatown elders seek to contain the younger members who are tempted to form cross-cultural friendships and simultaneously exclude non-Chinese peoples who might bridge the boundaries of Chinatown’s solidarity. In this sense, hybridity is not a predetermined condition of the diasporic subject; it would be easier to remain in one’s “own” cultural group, which involves less risk of betrayal, pain or violence. Examples in *All That Matters* include the protagonist Kiam’s betrayal by his girlfriend Jenny’s cross-cultural affair with his best friend, Irish-Canadian Jack, and the violent fight between the Italian Mafia boys and Kiam and Jack over infringing on another racial group’s territory. Entering into the process of hybridization resists determinism, which seeks to contain through categorization. Consequently, Bhabha’s

theory of hybridity is essential to an analysis of postcolonial or diasporic writing in Canada.

Choy's novel *All That Matters* combines elements of Bhabha's theory of hybridity with the theories of another important postcolonial critic, Benita Parry. When considered conjunctively the theories of these two critics can be used as a method with which to read Choy's creative writing in a new manner to show how postcolonial theories change according to different localities and situations. Parry responds to Bhabha's theories and raises two ideas that are important for an analysis of hybridity in Choy's writing: boundaries versus the erasure of boundaries, and the lived experiences of human colonized subjects versus textuality and discourse.

Bhabha's theoretical process to enabling colonial emancipation is in direct opposition to Parry's: he suggests the power of hybridity to demolish boundaries and liberate the colonized peoples from colonial oppression, whereas she declares that violence, opposition, clear boundaries and a defined enemy to fight against are necessary for colonial rebellion and freedom. Maria Ng highlights the necessity and value of hybridity for disrupting binaries: "Fiction that provides a hybrid representation of ethnicity and cultural identities can help to destabilize this oppositional mode of thinking" (172). Parry further differs from Bhabha by emphasizing the real, lived experiences of colonial peoples and criticizes Bhabha for his emphasis on discourse and textuality. While Choy's writing is literary and fictional rather than an anthropological or sociological study of Chinese-Canadians' experiences in Canada during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is nonetheless informed by his own experience of growing up in Chinatown. As such, it is closer to the type of "evidence" of the material and social reality that Parry deems

crucial to the self-representation and liberation of the colonized. This chapter brings together Bhabha's theory of hybridity with Choy's fictional (yet personally informed and experience-based) literature to show how postcolonial studies and theories are evolving and becoming more complicated, responding to critiques and shortcomings noted by earlier critics. Specifically, Parry deems binary oppositions essential to an analysis of colonial relations, while Bhabha rejects such simplifications in favour of mixedness and hybridity. Choy explores through literature how Chinese in diaspora are already multiply positioned in a way that does not allow them to be easily categorized, which further demands a re-consideration of postcolonial relations.

### **Benita Parry's Critique**

As previously noted, the issue of binary oppositions continues to be important to the analysis of current postcolonial relation, and creative writing and literature complicate the ideas and hypotheses of critics and academics. Parry deems the "conflictual self-other colonial relationship" ("Problems" 14) necessary for the liberation of the colonized. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak critiques the "binary opposition of colonizer/colonized" and prefers instead to critically examine "the heterogeneity of 'colonial power' and to disclose the complicity of the two poles of that opposition" (qtd. in Parry, "Problems" 14). In Choy's writing, Kiam, who represents the second-generation descendants of Chinese in diaspora, is similar but not identical to a "colonized" figure. Various forces such as the elder Chinese generation, other "white" and "non-white" Canadians, and North American popular culture act as "colonizers."

This reconsideration of colonial positions and relations complicates the binary opposition of which Parry and Spivak speak. In Choy's literary examples, there is the

self and others (plural), or the colonized/ colonizers (plural). Kiam is complicit through hybridization and cross-cultural exchange with various sources of “colonial” power and discourse that influence, and in turn are influenced by, the figure of the colonized. For example, Kiam is shaped by multiple forces that seek to educate and mold him: the ideology of his grandmother seeks to keep him traditionally Chinese; the ambivalent principles of his father both respect and reject the old ways of China and paradoxically advocate the logic, rationalism and modernity of Canadian culture; and other youth from ethnic groups such as Irish, Italian and Japanese promote their own the beliefs and values to influence Kiam. In accordance with Spivak’s premises, Choy’s writing examines the heterogeneity of relations between the “colonized” and other figures of “colonial” power. Rather than polarities or opposition, Choy imaginatively explores the interconnected, simultaneous relationships of multiple cultural influences, all of which heighten the ambivalence of “colonized” subjects and leave them multiply hybridized.

On the other hand, Parry summarizes Bhabha’s agenda as follows: he seeks to dismantle colonialist knowledge by rejecting the notion of “the colonial relationship as a symmetrical antagonism,” instead noting the ambivalent colonial relations which are “interdependent, conjunct and intimate” (“Problems” 14). This means that colonized peoples do not have access to the same power and resources as the colonizers. Instead the colonized through sly complicity (involving hybridization and mimicry) can infiltrate the domain of the colonizers (physically and ideologically) and partially disarm their power. Bhabha’s idea has important implications for historiographical postcolonial writing such as Choy’s, which posits seemingly disempowered peoples “colonized” by the ideologies of competing authorities not as victims but as an ambivalent, tricky,

flattering yet slightly threatening force to be contended with. This relates directly to Choy's novel, which shows the subtlety of intercultural and intracultural interactions, which shape the "colonized" subject who is ambivalently positioned amongst multiple groups and able to access many groups yet not completely belonging to any.

Parry disapproves of Bhabha as a discourse-based critic who seeks to "dissolve the binary opposition of colonial self/colonized other" that enables colonial domination ("Problems" 15). She instead advocates Frantz Fanon a libertarian who maintains the dichotomy to provide a "dialect of conflict and a call to arms" ("Problems" 15). She critiques Bhabha for ignoring the material realities of colonial subjects by emphasizing textual paradigms, ideologies and discourses, which in turn disables colonial resistance ("Problems" 17). Parry prefers instead Fanon who focuses on the "black man" or the native as a specific (Algerian) historical subject empowered to violent revolt. However, in contemporary multicultural situations such as the Chinese in Vancouver there are no simple, clear-cut distinctions to be made. The colonizer and the colonized have blurred, melded, multiplied, and hybridized, so that Fanon's assertion of native difference (like Aimé Césaire's concept of *negritude*) is nostalgic and unrealistic. Choy's imaginative fiction that is personally informed by the author's lived experiences offers a realistic compromise between Parry's insistence on the real lived experiences of historical subjects and Bhabha's theoretical, critical examination of discourse, ideology and writing.

Parry charges Bhabha's theories with "act[ing] to constrain the development of a radical anti-colonial critique in which resistance is privileged" ("Problems" 19). She suggests that an emphasis on discourse and the text obscures any attempt at real, physical,

conflictual resistance or armed revolt against the colonizers. She further critiques Bhabha's theses for not admitting to the possibility of opposition outside of discourse, which she says limits his project to placing "incendiary devices within the dominant structures of representation" ("Problems" 26). Parry disagrees with those who work within colonialist ideologies and power structures instead of acknowledging the actual efforts at opposition and rebellion by real (not hypothetical or literary) colonized peoples. Admittedly, Bhabha's emphasis on textuality and discourse does not and cannot address these concerns. However, writing such as Choy's narrates the experiences of resistance and opposition to various "colonizing" forces by fictional characters that are based on real, "authentic" experiences of living and growing up Chinese in Vancouver's Chinatown in the 1930s and 1940s. Notably, Choy's writing forces readers to engage with the narrative representations and issues in a manner closer to that described by Parry than Bhabha. Thus, Parry's insistence on binaries and the material, social reality of colonized subjects is illuminating for Choy's writing on the hybridization of Chinese-Canadians.

### **Hybridity in Choy**

Despite Parry's critique, Bhabha's theory of hybridization per se remains particularly relevant for Choy's writing, which recontextualizes this postcolonial concept in a new setting and cultural situation where the figure of the "colonized" is influenced by interactions with multiple "colonizing" ideas, ideologies and groups. Michelle Hartley notes, in her essay on Chinese-Canadians in Choy's *The Jade Peony*, how "conflicting cultural desires" signify an "inevitable simultaneity of cultural influences on the hyphenated subject in Canada" (61). These conflicting cultural desires, the



ambivalence or push-pull attraction and repulsion of hybridization also act upon the characters in *All That Matters*. Through literature, Choy explores how the traditional Chinese culture of first-generation immigrants seeks to control and contain the next generation who resist the limited category of “Chineseness” and become hybridized through their contact with outside influences. For example, the grandmother and various “uncles” (Chinatown bachelor men) discourage interracial friendships, try to instill respect for the Chinese heritage, and disapprove of Kiam becoming more Canadian and forgetting Chinese customs and beliefs (*All* 33, 61, 112, 267). In addition, the discourse of modernity and “Canadianness,” (ironically espoused by the father, another member of the elder Chinese generation who advises assimilation rather than separation) seeks to shape “colonized” subjects who respond ambivalently because they are consumed with both attraction and repulsion for elements of both Chinese and Canadian ideologies. This hybridization is further complicated by intercultural, border-crossing and category-defying relationships with other cultural groups such as Irish, Italian and Japanese immigrants.

Choy suggests, “being Chinese Canadian is about negotiating cultures in ways that may privilege one over the other at any given point” (Davis, “Backdair” 94). This recognizes that Chinese-Canadians have access to and belong to multiple groups simultaneously and are able to fluidly move back and forth along the continuum between these categories through a process of hybridization. They are not fixed in any one location or category, as Bhabha emphasizes. They are rather able to exercise or perform in various arenas that highlight different aspects of their identities. Choy believes that Canada has gone beyond multiculturalism, in which cultural mosaics “coexist but do not

interpenetrate (Davis, “Backdair” 85) to an “intercultural state” of exchange in which different ethnic peoples “integrate while retaining essentials from [their] separate cultures” (Davis, “Interweaving” 279). Choy’s notions of interpenetration, exchange and integration while maintaining differences correspond with Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, which can be usefully applied to Choy’s novel *All That Matters*.

Taking the example of a hybrid from agriculture, in which specimens from two species of plants are grafted together to produce a new shoot that is a combination of the originals but different, Choy provides an example of resistance to cultural hybridization in the Chen family. The adults try to simplify racial dynamics for young Kiam: the grandmother Poh-Poh and Third Uncle advise, “White come from white tree [...] Chinese come from Chinese tree [...] White belong to white tree [...] Chinese belong Chinese” (*All* 34). These analogies try to deny the possibility of any hybridity: they say that it is impossible to graft a Chinese branch to a White tree, or vice versa to produce a botanical or cultural hybrid. Choy continues this nature analogy with the trope of bamboo tree trunks: Poh-Poh worries that Kiam and other Chinese-Canadian children will become “*juk-sing*, bamboo stumps, who were sturdy outside but held a hollow emptiness within” (*All* 70-71). Choy recognizes that Kiam is different with this observation that he does not represent a whole or complete bamboo tree; by extension, he is not wholly or completely Chinese. Although the grandmother deems Kiam hollow, in actuality he is filled with elements of the Canadian culture. Kiam is neither a bamboo tree nor some other species that might represent Canada such as a Sitka spruce; a more fitting analogy would be a hybrid offshoot.

### **Between Old China and the Modernity of Canada**

The early chapters of *All That Matters* address the ambivalent response of a young immigrant subjected to conflicting ideologies, one which demands he remain loyal to the doctrines and values of Old China which he can barely remember, and another which advises he forget the old ways and try to become modern and Canadian. Kiam is caught between the opposing forces of the father versus Poh-Poh, who upholds the values of Imperial China and wants him to respect the Old ways, believe in feng shui, luck and fate. Kiam wants to be more like his father, who believes that “in Canada, everything was scientific and modern” (*All* 202-203). Kiam is also positioned between childhood and adulthood and between his younger siblings and the older generation composed of his parents and extended family. Consequently, his experience of hybridization, as creatively imagined by Choy, is different from what it would be for younger children (which is more imaginative as demonstrated in *The Jade Peony*) or for adults. Choy’s use of fictional characters shows the unexpected and changing, unlikely forms that ideological and discursive pressures can come from: the father, although Chinese himself, exerts more pressure on the children to become Canadian and “modern” than any explicit coercion from Canadian authorities.

When the Chen family, composed of Kiam, the father and the grandmother, immigrates to Canada in 1926, Poh-Poh, who represents the old ways (*Jade* 14), challenges the cultural authority of the father who prefers modernity and tries to assimilate to Canadian customs, by telling Kiam that “the *foih-chai*, the trains” are actually dragons (*All* 3). Poh-Poh tells a three-year old Kiam that Canadian Pacific Railway freight trains change into lucky iron dragons at night, to protect him from white

demons. Poh-Poh uses myth and stories to comfort and make the world comprehensible for a young child; however, the father insists otherwise, preferring a logical, rational explanation (*All* 13-14). Kiam is caught between the two irreconcilable worlds and is subjected to pressure to choose one over the other. Undeniably, this categorization of the father as representing Canadian ideology and the grandmother the Chinese is at least somewhat artificial. The father is ambivalent and fluctuates between advocating first Canadian then Chinese customs and values and the grandmother is unable to remain “pure” and is influenced, despite her desire otherwise, by her interaction with other members of Canadian society (she learns a few English words, and is exposed to popular culture through her grandchildren’s games). However, these two important figures of the father and grandmother perform as representatives of Chinese and Canadian ideologies respectively, and seek to educate, construct and shape Kiam in accordance with their values. As such, they can be considered similar to “colonizing” forces acting upon the figure of the “colonized,” Kiam.

The grandmother resists assimilation, intermixing or collaboration with white Canadians and prefers instead racial solidarity and purity; she advises her grandson to do the same. Poh-Poh barely acknowledges the existence of “outsiders” like the neighbours, the O’Connors: “To her Old China eyes, they were all the same: white barbarian ghosts”(*All* 33). She discourages Kiam from playing with their white neighbour Jack O’Connor and suggests that he play with other Chinese children instead (*All* 41). Poh-Poh prefers to remain isolated and avoids contact with her white neighbours whom she considers outsiders (*All* 33). Keefer Street is the boundary between “ghettoed Chinatown” (*All* 33) and the adjacent community that is composed of more desirable

“white” immigrants. Poh-Poh refuses to talk to “white people” whom she resents for selling opium and confiscating territory in China. She tries to pass this history onto Kiam but he is unable to internalize this resentment and hatred for he cannot reconcile his friendships with other white children to this hatred for an entire race. These contradictory feelings leave Kiam ambivalent and confused about what is right or wrong and who are enemies or friends.

The grandmother imparts knowledge of old Chinese customs, values and history on to her grandson through storytelling to expose him to the ideology of Old China. Kiam reacts ambivalently to Poh-Poh’s “talk-story” of ancient dragons and talking monkeys who ruled Old China” (*All* 122-23). Poh-Poh hopes this will make Kiam more Chinese and prevent him from forgetting his cultural heritage and becoming too Canadian. Kiam says, “only Grandmother kept all the stories of our family, and only the Old One decided which were to be told” (*All* 115). Some things are better left unsaid. The elders agree: “some things could never possibly be told” (*All* 116). The father says that he depends on Poh-Poh to be the “family storyteller” because he is too exhausted from work, and the stepmother protests that she only knows Christian tales so she should not be held responsible for educating Kiam about traditional Chinese customs and stories (*All* 121). Kiam is mixed and ambivalent: he says that when he was ten years old, he “stood with one foot deep in the rippling waves of Poh-Poh’s storytelling while [his] other foot stood firmly on dry ground” (*All* 121).

Faced with the pressure and expectations of becoming a good Chinese boy, and presented with ideal models he cannot hope to emulate, Kiam feels both his lack as less than Chinese and excess as partially Chinese but also Canadian. Kiam’s Italian

schoolmates mock and degrade Chinese myths; in turn, he loses his faith and rejects Poh-Poh's beliefs: "the Kitchen God—*just a piece of paper!*" (*All* 77). He is torn between the fantastical, mythical world of Poh-Poh's ancient Chinese myths and the logical, rational and modern Canadian world. This temporarily turns to repulsion for the old and an attraction to the new. Choy later reveals this categorization to be an oversimplification and false construction. Kiam discovers the logic and rationalism in traditional Confucian doctrines, and myth and fantasy in Canadian movies and popular culture. He forgets his heritage: he says, "By the end of Grade 2, I knew more about British Columbia than I could ever remember about China" (*All* 70). Poh-Poh reprimands Kiam at age eight, saying, "You not *Tohng-Yahn* like before [...] You not *Chinese* like before. Now you just a *mo no* boy, a no-brain boy!" (*All* 61). Kiam understands this to mean that he does not have "the right kind" of brain (*All* 61). He has changed and become contaminated with Canadian thinking, and turned into a hybridized subject. Although Kiam perhaps never becomes fully aware of his own hybridized state, he is nonetheless cognizant of his ambivalence toward both Chinese and Canadian cultures from early in his childhood when he first becomes aware of being subjected to the push-pull of opposing ideologies. Hybridization, as Bhabha notes, is a process, not a stagnated, fixed state of being; Kiam is in constant flux, moving back and forth along the continuum between these two cultures.

Some measure of hybridization is unavoidable in the situation Choy describes. In such close contact with Canadian culture, it is almost impossible to maintain linguistic, racial, cultural or ideological purity. Poh-Poh urges Kiam's teacher, "Keep my grandson Chinese," which the teacher knows is "against futility" (*All* 237). Kiam can read the

universal images in “China-made comics” but is unable to decipher the Chinese writing (*All* 79). Kiam learns to speak English sentences by attending a kindergarten class in a church basement (*All* 32). He later speaks “half-Chinese, half-English sentences,” or more “Chinglish than Chinese” (*All* 70-71). Michelle Hartley says this invokes hybridity and Bhabha’s third space of enunciation because these languages and those who speak them “cannot maintain an illusion of purity or authenticity once they have come into contact” (72). She further suggests that this hybridization of language “resists the larger worlds of Chinatown and Canadian society” by incorporating the influences of both worlds and transforming them through language (Hartley 72). Language is used to create a new imaginative space between these two worlds that allows and accepts the very hybridity and contamination discouraged by the others.

In direct opposition to the ideology of the grandmother, the father additionally perplexes an already confused Kiam by advising that he assimilate and try to become more Canadian, scientifically minded and logical. The father also implies that Kiam must let go of Poh-Poh’s Chinese traditions, beliefs and myths. The father again warns him not to believe the Old China stories (*All* 137, 140). Kiam’s father tells the “real story” about the death of Poh-Poh’s mistress in China and suggests a rational explanation such as a burst appendix or poison to refute Poh-Poh’s suggestion of magic (*All* 139). The father “scientifically” explains away the grandmother’s superstitious myths (such as Tsao Chung the kitchen god) because he prefers that Kiam not believe Old China stories (*All* 76).

The messages Kiam receives from his father are inconsistent, ambivalent and confusing. He advises Poh-Poh to teach a young Kiam her village stories (*All* 31) but

later wants him to forget these stories and be more modern. The father says, “never forget, *ney hai Tohng-Yahn*, [...] you are Chinese” (*All* 53). Conversely, he prompts Kiam to be modern and Canadian, but the father also cautions against complete assimilation and the erasure or forgetting of his Chinese heritage. When a confused Kiam fails to live up to his father’s expectations, the father admonishes him, saying that in China, “a First Son cheerfully fulfills his filial duty” (*All* 65). Kiam retorts, “*Vancouver is not China!*” (*All* 65). His ambivalence momentarily turns to resentment and rejection as he aligns himself with Canada, against China. He tells himself that he is “more Gold Mountain than Old China” (*All* 349). Ultimately, his ambivalence remains: Kiam cannot deny that he is like his father.

Choy shows how hybridization is complicated and changes according to new contexts such as Chinese in diaspora in Canada. The figure of the father acts as a colonizing force upon Kiam (in the sense that he seeks to educate, indoctrinate and control). The father is internally divided, ambivalent, fraught with paradoxes, and inconsistent in his messages. Thus, the father is a complex “colonizer” because he alternately seeks to multiply construct Kiam as first Canadian and then Chinese. While the father represents modernity and assimilation, he paradoxically also imparts knowledge and a sense of pride about Chinese culture to Kiam, which further heightens his ambivalence. The father teaches by example a sense of ethnic pride and loyalty. Kiam finds this element of Chineseness attractive. Antagonism leads to solidarity amongst the Chinese: Kiam says, “In a hostile country like Canada, anyone having the same last name was enough: *we Chinese together*” (*All* 112). The father also subjects Kiam to the ideology of Chinese nationalism and patriotism when Kiam accompanies his



father around Chinatown to ask for donations to the New China Relief Fund to support soldiers and starving children in China (*All* 196).

What neither the grandmother nor the father acknowledges or realizes is that Kiam is not either Chinese or Canadian; he is both. These parental figures act as opposing forces on Kiam. Each tries to form or maintain him as a member of a pure or authentic category, which is impossible. Kiam is pushed and pulled between these two binaries. He is attracted to and repulsed by elements of both and ultimately remains in-between, hybridized and ambivalent. The grandmother and father attempt to maintain the binary oppositions or categories (of the colonized versus the colonizer) that Bhabha rejects with his theory of hybridization and that Parry advocates as necessary for revolt and liberation. Choy complicates the arguments of both these theorists to instead suggest the complexity and variations of a different postcolonial context in which unsuspected, surprising sources may act as colonizing forces. The figure of the colonized resists external ideological control through the process of hybridization. This hybridization itself is also varied and complex, and may be used to resist multiple kinds of constraints.

### **Bridging the Boundary of the Family**

Much of the hybridization in *All That Matters* is familial, spatial and racial. Choy recognizes that categories are only useful in a limited sense and must be traversed. He says, “We have to look at human life as more dynamic than any category. Categories can only be temporary” (Davis, “Interweaving” 280). Choy shows in his literature that categories are often unsatisfying and stifling and must be rejected through hybridization. Characters in *All That Matters* struggle to move within and beyond the Chen family, which seeks to include its members and exclude others. Chinatown represents a

macrocosm of the family and also demarks boundaries that include and exclude. Finally, race or ethnicity acts as a category or grouping that characters challenge through their process of hybridization to bridge the social codes that discourage or forbid interracial relationships. Bhabha speaks of a “right to difference-in-equality [that] can be articulated from the perspective of both national minorities and global migrants; and in each case such a right represents a desire to revise the customary components of citizenship” (Preface xvii). Choy shows how hybridity resists the ideological domination of two authorities (Chinese and Canadian) to arrive at this right to difference, which allows for dual, simultaneous and nonexclusive membership of two cultures.

The main character to challenge the Chen’s family boundary is the neighbouring young Irish-Canadian boy, Jack O’Connor, who develops a friendship with Kiam that crosses the barrier of language and race. When Jack and Kiam first meet, they “babbled at each other as if [they] were using the same language” (*All* 413). This relationship is the first instance of Kiam foraying beyond the family. It garners an ambivalent response: the father and stepmother encourage the friendship because they note the benefit of Kiam learning more English words (*All* 231). Conversely, Poh-Poh forbids Jack the “demon boy” from entering the house because he is not Chinese; likewise, other outsiders rarely intruded (*All* 232). Poh-Poh tries to prevent Kiam from befriending Jack by refusing to invite him to family dinners and suggesting Kiam play with Chinese children instead (*All* 41). At ages eleven and twelve, Kiam still plays with Jack, imitating Tarzan, sword fighting, and mimicking Robin Hood or Sinbad the Sailor (*All* 158). Through his association with Jack, Kiam is exposed to elements of Canadian culture such as boxing and baseball (*All* 168).

Kiam does not consistently or unquestioningly accept Jack's culture. At times it only serves to strengthen his solidarity with his own Chinese culture. When Jack says people must be Catholic and be baptized in order to get into Heaven, an irked Kiam counters that people have to be Chinese to get into Chinese Heaven (*All* 212). Like Kiam, Jack is also hybridized and mutually influenced by his interaction with Kiam and the Chinese culture. When Jack swears and curses in Chinese, an amused Frank Yuen responds by jokingly calling him a "Goddamned Chink [...] a fuckin' Irish Chink!" (*All* 274). Frank appropriates the racial slur and uses it in an affectionate manner with someone of another ethnicity. This hybridizes the term and diffuses it of its negative, derogatory power. Bhabha notes that colonial relations are interdependent, ambivalent and conjunct (Parry, "Problems" 14). Choy provides an example of the mutual exchange and influence of intercultural relations to show how the colonizer affects the colonized *and vice versa*, which leaves both hybridized, "contaminated" by contact with the other, and ambivalent. It is evident in Choy's writing that he believes hybridization can contain a playful, positive aspect. With his lighthearted, humorous approach, Choy again posits Chinese-Canadians not as victims but as survivors and bricoleurs who are able to utilize the somewhat limited tools at hand to resist oppression.

As the years go by Kiam and Jack form alliances with their respective cultural groups. Kiam enters "a Chinatown crowd and Jack moved from one gang to another, but mostly with those like himself, white-skinned and sports-minded. Each to his own kind" (*All* 237). The stepmother advises Kiam to befriend "good Chinese sons" instead of non-Chinese boys like Jack; obediently, Kiam begins to spend more time with Joe Sing, Jeff Eng, and Fat Wah Duk, and a tough older boy, Frank Yuen (*All* 262, 266). Ultimately,

Jack and Kiam are able to re-bridge the distance that separates their cultures. The prohibition excluding whites from entering the Chen house is finally raised when Jack O'Connor is finally invited for dinner before leaving for the war (*All* 392). It takes fifteen years for this boundary to be lifted; the invitation is extended at Jack's own request, out of the hope of reconciliation and forgiveness (for Jack's affair with Kiam's girlfriend Jenny). Choy offers the possibility of permeable boundaries that allow for intercultural exchange, the negotiation of forgiving past injustices, and peaceful, intermingling coexistence. Hybridization, a process of making boundaries and categories permeable, is an integral element of *All That Matters*.

### **Spatial Hybridization: Crossing Chinatown's Borders**

In addition to traversing familial boundaries, Kiam also crosses the spatial borders that separate Chinatown from surrounding ethnic communities and greater Vancouver. Although he is forbidden from entering certain spaces (the Japanese quarter) and warned away from others (the dangerous Italian hood), Kiam's curiosity leads him to consider these artificial demarcations of space as permeable or permissive of a two-way flow and flux. Yet Kiam never completely belongs in one space exclusively; there is a sense of excess and lack that prompts him to go beyond the confined space of the family, the home, and Chinatown, to intrude upon other spaces. This intrusion or penetration "challenges the integrity of the community's borders" (Hartley 77); integrity in this sense alludes to purity or homogeneity rather than a moral principle. The challenge that crossing borders poses to this integrity is positive because it allows for hybridization and freedom.

Boundaries are permeable and penetrable, yet they cannot be dissolved or erased. Their existence demarcates a space of difference that includes and protects its members while simultaneously excluding potentially intrusive non-members. Hartley notes, “The deprivation of rights and freedoms that the Chinese faced resulted in a close-knit, insular community for the remaining residents, a community that both took care of its own and closely watched its boundaries” (64). The imagined community in *All That Matters* tries to guard its boundaries to prevent its members from intermingling with outsiders, but Kiam and his non-Chinese friends cross and re-cross the borders of the family units and ethnic neighbourhoods and become hybridized subjects in the process.

Kiam temporarily bridges the borders that surround Chinatown when he plays soccer with Italian, Polish and Chinese boys. Afterwards they would separate into their respective ethnic groups, adhering to oft-repeated advice, “*Stick to your own kind*” (*All* 230). Kiam’s friendship with Jack O’Connor transgresses this rule. Their relationship is not without difficulties: Jack mimics Chinese speech and makes fun of Chinese food, and Poh-Poh forbids him from entering the house (*All* 231-32). Choy does not suggest that integration and cultural mixing is easy and natural; rather, he shows that differences can be maintained yet bridged by understanding and friendship.

The process of hybridization and the dissolution or permeation of boundaries that it entails allows the hybrid figure to evade classification as other and the discrimination that follows. Thus, hybridization is a strategy of evasion; in Choy’s case, it is an elusion of multiple spaces and localities that seek to contain or exclude. Choy writes of how the Canadian government sought to contain Chinese in Canadian Pacific Railway work camps in the mountains or within the limited space of Chinatown, and how it later

worked actively to exclude Chinese by sending those born in Canada to China and forbidding other Chinese from immigrating to Canada. Borders section off Chinatown itself. The children are forbidden from entering the segregated areas of Chinatown populated by Chinese men left unemployed by the Depression (*All* 161). The Canadian government, eager to expunge the Chinese after they had served their purpose in building the Canadian Pacific Railway, offered to fund these men's passage back to China in exchange for a signed contract promising never to return to Canada (*All* 162). Choy's writing, although fictional in nature, contains factual, historiographical references such as this to highlight how Canada sought to maintain "colonial" domination and purity through a kind of ethnic purging. Hybridization represented a threat to this domination by evading compartmentalization as purely Chinese and therefore other and subject to ostracization.

As Kiam becomes more hybridized, the borders surrounding different spaces seem more permeable and less absolute. He views the boundaries demarking Chinatown as ambiguous and subject to renegotiation, and therefore does not understand the transgression—in his grandmother's eyes—of befriending Jack O'Connor. Choy highlights how boundaries are not organic or natural but are rather an artificial, social construct imagined by people. Choy reveals that prior to Chinese immigration, the streets of Chinatown previously housed Irish families or "white people who spoke no English at all" (*All* 34). It is understandable, then, that Kiam does not allow his movement to be hindered by an imaginary, only recently created obstacle. At the same time, Kiam does not feel he possesses absolute freedom and mobility: he considers his life to be "inside the borders of Chinatown, [...] sometimes so far away from the Old China world they all

still lived in” (*All* 220). Thus, Kiam is further distanced from Chinese culture and traditions. Although he feels confined to Chinatown, in actuality he moves beyond this space into other quarters of the city, while his elders nostalgically long for the old country, which represents a space even more remote and inaccessible to Kiam.

Hybridity is not necessarily inevitable for the diasporic subject, as suggested earlier by Maria Ng (174). Choy shows how different cultural groups resist the hybridization of its members (for example, Poh-Poh the grandmother tried to “keep” Kiam Chinese). Therefore, the mere engagement with this process is an act of defiance and resistance to those who seek to maintain the “purity” of their own cultural group. In addition to the grandmother trying to keep Kiam Chinese, Choy provides another example of a different ethnic group struggling to maintain the boundaries of their group in order to exclude non-members. Kiam and Jack trespass the borders of Chinatown into the Italian section of Vancouver, where a gang called the Mafia boys assault Kiam and call him a “*Chink*,” and a “chickenshit China-boy,” and threaten to castrate and kill him (*All* 256, 258, 260). The process of hybridization often involves the crossing and dissolution of boundaries that members of different groups attempt to uphold in an effort to maintain solidarity and exclusivity. The Italian boys who assault Kiam are indignant that their territory has been broached. When their father Mario the barber makes them stop, they indignantly concede, only after they are satisfied that the two Chinese boys have “got the lesson” (*All* 257). Passivity is an easier option than hybridization, involving less risk and violence (see *All* 256). Kiam could have chosen to remain in Chinatown with his family, but instead ventures beyond his safety zone to actively engage with surrounding cultures, peoples and ideas. Hybridity, rather than being

predetermined for people in multicultural contexts, must involve a conscious choice to bridge boundaries and categories.

### **Beyond Racial Categorization**

In addition to familial and spatial boundaries, the fictional characters in *All That Matters* pose a threat to racial boundaries that seek to maintain the purity of the Chinese race by preventing contact or intermixing with Japanese, “white” or other ethnic peoples. Choy notes, “In a country as vast as Canada, people living in a few city blocks were divided from others inhabiting those same streets; divided by their colour and fears, their language and beliefs” (*All* 405). Hybridization, which is defined in Choy’s writing as the contact zone amongst a colonized people and multiple colonizing forces,<sup>3</sup> possesses the power to erase these divisions and fears.

Kiam’s cultural negotiation is unlike that of the younger siblings in *The Jade Peony* who use mimicry and imagination to apprehend the complexities of negotiating between two cultures. Kiam is more grounded in the political and social realities of the time, when Canada was gripped by the propaganda of World War II. Racial intolerance against Japanese intensified; as Chinese, the Chen family is positioned in-between “white” Canadians and the Japanese who are considered potential spies and enemies. In an effort to disassociate themselves from the Japanese, Chinese children wear buttons proclaiming, “I AM CHINESE” (*All* 337).

*All That Matters* represents instances of institutional, governmental or “white” Canadian blatant racism or discrimination rather subtly. Kiam says, “Indians and blacks,



Asians of every variety--all those who were not permitted entry into regular hospital--ended up, if there were any spaces available, at the segregated Home for Chinese, or at St. Joseph's Oriental Hospital, or in the grey-painted basement of St. Paul's" (*All* 362). Choy also refers to the racist attitudes towards the Chinese that heightened during the war. For example, a shortage of "white" employees necessitated hiring from the "cheap labour" source of Chinese people and at movie houses and theatres Kiam and his friends are expected to sit in either the very front or the very back row (*All* 280, 309).

Segregation attempts to prevent intermixing and hybridity: notably, the hybridization that does occur in the novel occurs in spite of opposition and segregation.

The desire to maintain the purity of racial categories is not limited to other racial groups. It also exists within Chinatown. Choy exposes the ironic but common anti-immigrant, low tolerance sentiment of the 1940s: one Chinese girl says, "Why don't people just stick to their own places and be happy? Stick to their own kind [...] Japs stay in Japan. Indians stay in India. Chinese stay in—never mind" (*All* 402). This statement reveals the absurdity of such sentiment: the Chinese people cannot be returned to China—or exiled there in the case of those born in Canada. While they "belong" in Chinatown, they also belong in a larger geographical sense in all of Vancouver, British Columbia, and Canada.

Belonging to a category, while problematic, still remains a safer and more comfortable position than not belonging at all. Hybridization, which renders categories permeable and not absolute, is an uneasy process. Kiam struggles with the question of

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<sup>3</sup> This is an important distinction from the two categories of a singular (not multiple) colonizer and

belonging. As a hybridized figure he does not fit comfortably in either in Old China or in Canada, the country that considers Chinese people resident aliens, denies them citizenship, and prohibits them from joining the army. On birth documents and travel certificates Kiam is labeled a “Resident Alien” (*All* 285). Chinese newspapers reflect the sentiment of many Chinese people who feel like “UNWANTED CHINESE GHOSTS [...] as undesirable as the dead” (*All* 319). The Canadian government denies Chinese people citizenship and a sense of ownership and integration by discouraging and turning them away from signing up for the war due to their “yellow skin” and “slanty eyes” (*All* 285, 312). Chinese elders likewise discourage “Canada-borns” from joining the Canadian forces and instead advise: “Go back to China [...] Fight for China” (*All* 315). Those who do sign up are assigned menial jobs such as being a cook’s assistant on shore (*All* 319). Kiam asks himself, “What world did any of us belong to?” (*All* 281). He does not agree with the elders who believe one day all Chinese will return to their home villages, because he possesses little memory of the old country. Younger children born in Canada cannot be “returned” to China because they are not from there, yet their experiences suggest that they possess few legal rights in Canada.

The ability to move between worlds that hybridity affords renders hybrid subjects ambivalent and self-protective. They must rely on tools and skills other than direct resistance or combat to negotiate this often awkward, delicate in-between positioning. Choy shows how the temptation to resist complexities and mixedness troubles the hybridized “colonial” subject or the literary figure of the descendants of Chinese in

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colonized that more typical postcolonial situations assume.

diaspora. Kiam retreats into a wary, protective silence upon discovering his girlfriend's and best friend's infidelity. He says, "I knew that by not saying too much, or by saying only half of whatever I knew, I could keep things simple" (*All* 252). He is careful not to expose or reveal too much, knowing that his relationships with both his Irish friend Jack and Chinese girlfriend Jenny contain separate bonds that should never cross. Kiam concludes, "somehow, in my silence, I could belong" (*All* 252).

The possibility of revealing or speaking of his knowledge of this disloyalty is accompanied by the danger of losing his relationship with both his girlfriend and best friend. Kiam is protected and guarded because he fears that their shame, if exposed, would prevent them from being able to continue their relationships with him. Partial silence allows him to maintain relationships with people from two ethnic groups. Without this silence, perhaps both would be threatened. This instinct proves correct when Kiam later discovers their sexual liaison and betrayal. The hybridized position is often tenuous, and subject to punishment or retaliation for failing to conform to strictly one group or the other's expectations of exclusivity and loyalty. To this end, Choy demonstrates how hybrid subjects develop and utilize unexpected, unconventional capacities to manage their participation in dual or multiple worlds.

## **Conclusion**

Choy's message, which he explores through hybridization, is about survival (Deer 41). He resists the tendency to view "colonized" peoples as victims, and instead emphasizes their resistance and agency. Kiam learns upon Poh-Poh's death that she "had not only experienced the worst, she had survived, and had even forgiven the abuses committed against her, and had taken responsibility for her own life. The bitterness of

the past had never left her, but her strength was to see that her survival would mean something more to those she loved than it would mean to her” (*All* 368). Choy demonstrates how the mode of survival and self-preservation for the grandmother and other immigrants of her generation often involved racial solidarity with other Chinese. Canada, after all, was not always welcoming or accommodating. For those of Kiam’s generation, survival and growth depend even more on the process of hybridization or cultural interchange because hyphenated Chinese-Canadian children cannot and do not want to remain locked in the past or in a singular, often imaginary, cultural group.

Wayson Choy’s novel *All That Matters* complicates the concept of hybridity as theorized by Homi Bhabha and critiqued by Benita Parry. Choy expands upon Bhabha’s theory of hybridity by illustrating through literary examples the increased confusion of Chinese-Canadian characters negotiating amongst multiple ideologies, cultural groups and expectations that all seek to shape these subjects in one form or another. Choy shows how hybridization varies according to a different postcolonial context and becomes more complex and ambivalent as the designation of who or what constitutes the figure of the colonized and the colonizer changes. Characters and ideologies can no longer be neatly classified as one or the other, but are instead shown to belong to both groups, as in the case of the protagonist’s father. As a minority, the father might be considered a colonized figure, but as someone who attempts to “colonize” or construct Kiam according to both Canadian and Chinese ideologies he also acts as a colonizer. Thus, hybridity is recontextualized by Choy to reflect the differences of postcolonialism as it pertains to Chinese in diaspora in Canada.

Parry criticizes Bhabha's theory of hybridity for being passive and disabling the struggle for colonial liberation by erasing the categories of colonizer and colonized, which she deems necessary for armed rebellion. Choy shows how the figure of the colonized may engage in the process of hybridization as an act of resistance, in keeping with Bhabha's analysis of agency. This will be explored fully in the next chapter. Hybridization allows the colonized subject to resist and disavow the authority of various colonizing forces by refusing both assimilation or objectification and rejection as other. This process, whether the colonized figure is conscious, self-aware, active or engaging in non-action, resists externally imposed ideologies and constructions and allows colonized peoples to negotiate a position, identity and system of beliefs and values for themselves. The following chapter will explore how Choy himself, as a "colonized" figure of a descendant of Chinese in diaspora and as the author of his semi-fictional memoir *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Memoir*, utilizes mimicry and hybridity to command agency.

## IV

**Partial Agency in Wayson Choy's *Paper Shadows***

Human agency is the ability to initiate one's actions and to be self-governing, autonomous, and able to exercise one's own power and authority by determining and enforcing the rules that governs one's life (Buss n. pag). This chapter does not contend that colonized, subaltern, minority or diasporic peoples possess absolute or complete agency. Systems of oppression and domination must be acknowledged as having a considerable influence on shaping the lives and opportunities of these people; conversely, they cannot be viewed as powerless victims without the potential to change their own circumstances. Instead, colonized peoples possess a partial agency: they negotiate their own actions and positioning under the surveillance of multiple "colonizing" discourses and ideologies, which attempt to control and administer, and are able to slyly affect some measure of agency and self-determination. One critic suggests the "emphasis on agency is Bhabha's originality, as his close readings seek out moments when the colonized resisted the colonizer, despite structures of violence and domination" (Huddart 6). Uniquely, Bhabha redefines agency as a mode of resistance that does not entail violent opposition and revolt against the colonizer, but may be located in more subversive, sly strategies of evasion, imitation, and self-location.

Bhabha's conceptualization of agency, which he locates in discourse, textuality and instances of mimicry and hybridity, offers the possibility of acknowledging a different kind of agency available to colonized peoples, one which does not resemble the more obvious subaltern agency of direct violence or opposition. Benita Parry criticizes Homi Bhabha's emphasis on textuality and the enunciative (or spoken) for ignoring the

social reality and physical rebellion of the colonized, which she, as a Marxist, views as the main or only source of agency. This debate gestures towards the need for a reconsideration of how the term agency changes according to various contexts such as Wayson Choy's experience of growing up in Vancouver's Chinatown during the 1930s and 1940s. His work of "creative non-fiction" (Author's Note), *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Memoir* relates many examples of Choy's own agency as enacted through mimicry, hybridity, and writing itself. This is agency as Bhabha conceptualizes it: Choy's agency does not involve physical combat or armed revolt, yet it is active and resistant to external control nonetheless. Agency is the power to change one's own circumstances: Choy's memoir stands as testimony to his ability to negotiate his circumstances as a child, and later to revisit, reinterpret and revalue these circumstances retroactively as an adult and as an author.

Choy modifies Bhabha's definition and theorization of agency in a manner more in keeping with Parry's emphasis on the lived experiences and social reality of human agents. Whereas Bhabha refers to colonized subjects who exercise agency (in purely a textual, discourse-based sense), Parry advocates colonial agents as social beings. *Paper Shadows* presents an historical (albeit personal and subjective) account of real humans as agents (rather than subjects) and recounts their social reality and material circumstances, while also highlighting how agency can be achieved using the strategies of mimicry and hybridity. By combining the two most important elements of Bhabha's and Parry's theories, Choy recontextualizes and redefines the meaning of postcolonial agency as relevant to a different locality and historical period.

Another definition of agency relevant to memoir as an act of self-actualization suggested by one critic is as follows: “an attempt to realize subjectivity as an effect of an authentic act of self-representation that one can call one’s own” (Radhakrishnan 163). Choy’s memoir is an example of self-representation, both retroactively of his childhood and in the present as an author revisiting his past upon discovery of his adoption. In this way, his act of writing is evidence of his agency. In this context, agency’s working definition is modified to suggest the act of representing the self through the act of writing, by resisting externally imposed ideologies which seek to manipulate and administer, and is in itself an act which demonstrates agency. Speaking of ethnic minority writing, Rocio Davis suggests “the text seeks to establish its validity of the voice speaking and the ‘truth’ of the hi(story) recounted” (Introduction xxi). He further notes that an “autobiographical impulse—autobiography understood in its widest sense as the desire to name experience and to create identity” marks ethnic writing (Davis, Introduction xxi); this act of writing experience and self-identity is an act of agency.

An important distinction should be made between the genres of autobiography and memoir, which are related forms of writing that may differ in focus, structure and purpose (Beckson and Ganz 15, Bruss 7-12, Wikipedia n. pag.). Choy says his memoir attempts to “recreate past times and personalities” and is about “the people and stories” as he remembers them from his own life (Author’s Note). Memoir refers to an “account of a person’s life and experiences written by himself. Where the autobiography is concerned primarily with the writer, his personal experiences, and the delineation of his character, the memoir centers more on the world in which he has lived” (Beckson and Ganz 119). It has also been suggested that an autobiography is an account of the



author's life, whereas a memoir is an account of the times the author witnessed (Barnet et al. 22). Thus, Choy's *Paper Shadows* endeavors to reclaim an agency not only for the writer, but also for the entire community of Vancouver's Chinatown. It is a personal testimony, but also a testament to the place, time and social and political climate in which Choy was raised.

Choy's writing incorporates both elements of agency emphasized by postcolonial theorists Homi Bhabha and Benita Parry. Bhabha locates agency in the discursive, as well as in instances of mimicry and hybridity, whereas Parry argues for the agency of human, social, material reality. The genres of memoir or autobiography, although the two are not identical, lend themselves well to an investigation of textual or discursive agency. As Bhabha explains with his concept of the time-lag, agency may be present but not recognized during certain historical time periods or situations of minority oppression, and it also may be delayed, that is, recognized and claimed at a later time ("Postcolonial" 263). Choy's *Paper Shadows* does just this, writing back to an earlier time period and validating the agency of his family and other members of Vancouver's Chinatown during his youth, and also highlighting through literature examples of his own agency enacted in his childhood.

Bhabha's "revolutionary" method of validating the moments of resistance, action and self-determination of colonized peoples makes his theories important to postcolonial studies and minority writing such as Choy's. Choy chooses not to write about victims, but rather about survivors, active human agents who resist oppression, pressure and coercion, who negotiate a place for themselves in an occasionally hostile new land, on their own terms. This chapter will explore Bhabha's term agency, and what it means for

Wayson Choy's Chinatown childhood and for the author himself as a contemporary Chinese-Canadian writer who claims agency for himself and for other Chinese-Canadians.

### **Bhabha's Definition of Agency**

Several concepts important to Bhabha's definition of agency are: mimicry and hybridity; the enunciative or textuality; time-lag; and negotiation or maneuverability. The following sections explain agency in Bhabha's own words and those of critic David Huddart, relate the importance of this term to Choy's memoir, *Paper Shadows*, and summarize postcolonial critics Parry's and Smaro Kamboureli's responses and critiques. To begin, it is important to consider how colonized peoples possess agency by using mimicry and hybridity as strategies of resistance to the ambivalent colonial desire to form the colonized in colonizers' images and thus control and administer them. Bhabha explains the agency of the colonized by revealing the anxiety of the colonizer created by the mimicry of the colonized, which opens "a space for the colonizer to *resist* colonial discourse" (Huddart 57). These strategies put forth by Bhabha are especially important for Choy's examination of how a child, unable to access or exercise adult modes of resistance, can mimic and exist in-between two cultures in order to resist ideological interpellation.

Bhabha explains, "My contention, elaborated in my writings on postcolonial discourse in terms of mimicry, hybridity, sly civility, is that the liminal moment of identification—eluding resemblance—produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative 'unpicking' and incommensurable, insurgent relinking" ("Postcolonial" 265). Thus, in Choy's memoir,

the instances of mimicry and hybridity—imitating Chinese Opera figures and Western Cowboys—in which Choy is “*almost the same but not quite*” (“Mimicry” 127), allow him to evade both the Chinese and the Canadian, or more broadly North American, discourses which seek to construct him as a subject. This evasion is in itself an act of resistance, and as such, is evidence of his agency. Choy writes identity roles on his own terms, unpicking the rules of what constitutes a cowboy or opera star and then rethinking and reconstructing himself as a hybridized Chinese-Canadian cowboy-opera character.

Bhabha locates the space for agency in mimicry, explaining that the “the repetition of a *partial presence*, which is the basis of mimicry” actually disturbs and reverses “in part” colonial authority, appropriation and domination (“Mimicry” 126). Thus, mimicry does not allow for complete agency, nor does it disavow the reality of power imbalances, but it does provide a mode of resistance to oppression and external administration or control. David Huddart says, “the question of the colonized’s agency or free will cannot be clearly resolved” (61). He also recognizes that the colonized may not actually choose to adopt mimicry as a deliberate strategy of resistance, but the outcome of this mimicry causes anxiety for the colonizer (Huddart 61) that colonized peoples may exploit to their benefit.

Bhabha asserts, “‘small differences’ and slight alternations and displacements are often the most significant elements in a process of subversion or transformation” (“Translator” n. pag.). The mockery and slight difference that is maintained during mimicry, as explained in chapter two, challenges colonial discourse, if even only in a small way, while slyly appearing to flatter the colonizer through imitation. This challenge is an act that contains agency. Parry reads Bhabha’s theories of mimicry and

hybridity to suggest that Bhabha is not arguing that the colonized possess colonial power, but rather, they fracture, rearticulate, and pervert the meaning and message of colonial authority which makes the colonizer's exercise of absolute power impossible ("Problems" 25). This thwarting of colonial authority which Bhabha terms "moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance" ("Signs" 172) is evidence of the agency of the colonized. Huddart concludes, "Mimicry implicitly offers an opening for agency, and even a model for agency" (76). Mimicry offers the possibility for agency in circumstances where the consequences of direct resistance or rebellion (such as the deportation of "illegal" immigrants back to China) prevent the colonized from overtly possessing or exercising their agency.

The hybridity that results from engaging in mimicry of two cultures, positioning colonized subjects outside yet paradoxically allowing them access to both, also allows for the command of agency. This interstitial nature of hybridity, that is, being situated in the gaps, cracks or space between two culture or authorities, allows colonized peoples to challenge colonial authority by refusing to conform, thus forcing the colonizer to enter into negotiation. This negotiation (for the cultural authority, independence and self-determination of colonized peoples) is not between equals—hybridity does acknowledge the power imbalance in colonial relations—but colonized people do in fact possess alternate strategies of resistance such as evasion, deliberate ambiguousness, ambivalence, imitation with mockery, etc., which allow them to challenge the authority and domination of the colonizer. Bhabha's term hybridity describes "the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity. The hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is *unequal* but its articulation may

be *equivocal*. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an ‘interstitial’ agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism” (“Culture’s” 212). The ability of hybridized colonial subjects to negotiate gives them the power to refuse assimilation to either the Chinese or the Canadian cultures that entice them to be “more Chinese” or “more Canadian.” Bhabha acknowledges that there is a power imbalance, but also that the partially disenfranchised colonized peoples can slyly, equivocally maneuver between cultures to resist fixity or determination (as either like the colonized or as completely othered by their difference), which affords them an interstitial agency, an agency located in the gaps or cracks between the colonizer and the colonized.

Again, relevant to the discussion of agency and resistance, as it relates to hybridity, is the notion of splitting or exploiting the gaps in meaning, contradictions and ambivalence, which Bhabha elucidates in an interview with W.J.T. Mitchell. Speaking of splitting and the third space between the colonizer and the colonized inhabited by the hybridized subaltern subject who negotiates within an oppressive society, Mitchell questions Bhabha about his notion of “a coping strategy, perhaps even a strategy of resistance, or of managing the everyday” (“Translator” n. pag.). Bhabha responds by explaining that splitting allows “the native or the subaltern or the colonized the strategy of attempting to disarticulate the voice of authority [...] it’s much more the idea of survival/surviving in a strong sense—dealing with or living with and through contradiction and then using that process for social agency” (“Translator” n. pag.). By disarticulating the voice of authority, disenfranchised peoples have the chance to

articulate their own authority, which allows them not only to survive, but also to become strengthened and empowered.

Also of particular relevance to Bhabha's discussion on agency as it relates to Choy's memoir are the ideas of the enunciative and textuality. The enunciative that Bhabha emphasizes enacts the agency of the colonized, who speak themselves and their stories into existence and into history. Bhabha explains, "My purpose in specifying the enunciative present in the articulation of culture is to provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their own history and experience" ("Postcolonial" 255). This process is at work in Choy's memoir *Paper Shadows*: minorities re-command and rearticulate multiple cultures, and refuse to be objectified, othered or represented as passive victims. Instead they participate as active agents in their own negotiation of dominant and minority (Canadian and Chinese) cultures.

Huddart says that Bhabha's work "emphasizes the active *agency* of the colonized" through an investigation of "points of textual anxiety [that] mark moments in which the colonizer was less powerful than was apparent, moments when the colonized were able to resist the dominance exercised over them" (2). These points of textual anxiety are evident in Choy's memoir when he recalls how as a child he would resist the discourses of both Chinese and Canadian cultures by engaging in only partial imitation while maintaining an element of difference. Choy highlights the anxiety of both cultures which seek to constitute him ideologically: his family is distressed that he is *mo no* or brainless, therefore not a perfect Chinese boy. Conversely, neither is he a perfect cowboy: Choy realizes to his dismay that he does not have blonde hair or light eyes. By calling attention to textual or discursive agency, Bhabha differentiates his anti-colonial agency from

revolutionary agency (Huddart 2, 151) proposed by critics such as Parry or Fanon. Bhabha speaks further of an “enunciatory present as a liberatory discursive strategy” (“Postcolonial” 256), which suggests that writing in the present can liberate histories of oppressed peoples to regain at least a partial agency that was formerly unspoken and unrecognized. It is critical not to devalue the historical oppression and injustices suffered by previously colonized peoples: the power imbalance in colonial relations must be acknowledged, as must the influence of colonial authority and ideology in forming and limiting the colonial subject. Thus, the agency claimed by the colonial subject is not absolute or complete. Instead, postcolonial agency is partial and validates the strategies of resistance and self-determination exercised by colonized peoples while acknowledging their unequal access to power compared to the colonizer.

Bhabha also recognizes that agency can be claimed retroactively in his discussion of a “*time-lag*—a contingent moment” (“Postcolonial” 263). Time-lag implies that the agency of the colonized may be dependent on a future that is as yet unknown to those in the historical colonial situation, and will be recognized and validated in retrospect when colonized people are able to look back to the past with the benefit of time, distance and perspective with which to analyze their actions and positioning under colonization. Over time, beliefs and values change: time-lag allows the colonized to repeal, revalue and challenge the authority, power and oppressive ideologies of the former colonizers. Therefore, time-lag acts as yet another strategy of resistance.

Bhabha further notes that the temporal staggering between an event and “its discursive eventuality (writing aloud) exemplifies a process where intentionality is negotiated retrospectively” (“Postcolonial” 263). Hence the intent and purpose of

agency, even if not recognized as present during the original event, can still be claimed and recognized after the fact by someone such as Choy who writes and speaks about the events of his personal and familial history. Bhabha repeats, “There is the more complex possibility of negotiating meaning and agency through the time-lag in-between the sign [...] and its initiation of a discourse or narrative (“Postcolonial” 263). This is precisely what Choy does in his memoir: he negotiates agency with the benefit of hindsight through the medium of narrative, locating agency in the discursive (like Bhabha) but also in the actual lived, material, human experiences (as demanded by Parry). Bhabha concludes that the “discursive temporality, or time-lag, which is crucial to the process by which this turning around—of tropes, ideologies, concept metaphors—comes to be textualized and specified in postcolonial agency” (“Postcolonial” 264). If the social climate of the times (in Vancouver’s Chinatown in the 1930s and 1940s, for example) does not allow subaltern, colonized or minority peoples to overtly engage in resistance due to explicit or implicit threats of retaliation and punishment (such as deportation by immigration officials), agency may still be recovered at a later time and textualized in postcolonial, minority or diasporic narratives.

Bhabha says that agency requires grounding, but also “movement and manoeuvre” (“Postcolonial” 265). The human subject as agent cannot be fixed or stagnated in identity or meaning (as either assimilated to become like the colonizer or othered and ostracized by their difference). Instead, the human agent must be allowed to negotiate its terms of existence, to be part of the process of hybridization rather than a product. Agency must also be conceptualized in terms of temporal fluidity to recognize that earlier colonized, subaltern or minority peoples actually possessed agency. Bhabha



says, “the agent emerges as a form of retroactivity” (“Postcolonial” 265). Referring to Bhabha’s discussion of agency, Parry explains, “subaltern as well as postcolonial agency is discovered in interrogative, contestatory, catachrestic procedures performed on the prior text through relocation and reinscription” (“Signs” 66). One way in which subaltern, colonized or minority subjects may recover a measure of agency might be through relocating, reinterpreting and revaluing the prior “text” of their own history. Choy does just this in his memoir by revisiting the historical period of his childhood. He locates agency there by re-inscribing or rewriting the past in a manner that emphasizes mimicry, hybridity and subtle methods of resistance.

### **Responses & Critiques: Parry and Kamboureli on Bhabha’s Agency**

Benita Parry critiques Bhabha’s notion of agency as mimicry, hybridity and negotiation for ignoring the material reality of “rebel agency” which involves armed struggle and forcible military repression. She writes, “The effect of moving agency from the subject-as-insurgent-actor to textual performance is to defuse resistance as practice directed at undermining and defeating an oppressive opponent” (Parry, “Signs” 66). However, oppression (or ideological influence and persuasion) as related by Choy is more insidious and subtle, and often is not visible, seemingly forceful or negative enough to permit, warrant or demand outright rebellion. Bhabha’s “sly” techniques of resistance, mimicry and hybridity are more appropriate methods of resisting discourses that seek to form and control the minority subject. In Choy’s memoir, when the author as a child engages in instances of mimicry of both the Chinese and Canadian cultures which leaves him hybridized, he exercises agency by self-determining his own identity, beliefs and

actions. The literary product, the physical book, is a reflection of that agency: Choy's voice continues to speak, also an act of self-representation and determination.

Parry prefers Edward Said's culture of resistance and opposition in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that she says attends to "written and remembered stories of insubordination and revolt," acts which recuperate "agency as performed by conscious human subjects" ("Signs" 66). Writing such as Choy's autobiographical testimony of intercultural experiences shows how agency can be derived from a situation in which there is no clear "colonial" oppressor to oppose; however, as a hybridized, in-between-cultures figure, the figure of Choy in *Paper Shadows*, as well as Choy as author, is still a conscious human subject. Instead of using armed combat or outright rebellion, Choy both as a child and later as an adult resists categories and ideologies that might possibly contain or restrain him by using mimicry and hybridity to determine his own multiple positioning in his life. In this semi-fictionalized memoir (in which Choy acknowledges his own subjectivity and creativity in rendering his version of events), literature or discourse cannot be separated from material reality: Choy is both a writer and a self-determining human subject. Both Bhabha's postcolonial theories and Parry's insistence on the "realities of colonial power" ("Signs" 67) apply.

Canadian postcolonial critic Smaro Kamboureli's conceptualization of agency is more in line with Bhabha's ideas than those of Parry. Kamboureli, like Bhabha, is interested in the process of hybridization, the maintenance of differences in multicultural situations, and the agency of minority or diasporic subjects. Kamboureli critiques theories of authenticity and difference-blind liberalism (see Charles Taylor 71-71, 194), which she argues promotes universalism that "at once value[s] difference and relegate[s]

it to a self-contained place,” in turn advocating assimilation (Kamboureli 129). Choy’s memoir of his own experiences of mimicry and the process of hybridization also argues against notions of purity, authenticity, or cultural binaries. His writing and his lived experiences refuse to posit Chinese-Canadians as minority subjects defined solely by their difference—they are at once similar (almost the same but not quite) and different (as those who imitate to excess). Kamboureli further critiques postcolonial studies for failing to “return to them [minority subjects] any of their appropriated subjectivity and agency” (129). Choy’s act of refusing to be confined to Chinatown or to a limited category or identity commands agency. Whether other critics recognize it, agency is not something to be “returned” or bestowed upon a passive minority subject. Agency is active and self-determining, as shown by Choy’s memoir.

Kamboureli situates minority agency in the intercultural exchange that both Bhabha and Choy explore. In accordance with Bhabha’s idea of locating agency in the process of hybridization, Kamboureli calls for a “Dialogue that would suspend oppositions, that would eliminate the centre-margin dialectic, would prevent assimilation” (129). Choy’s memoir, a writing directed at both the Chinese and larger Canadian cultures, is such an engagement. The hybridization of boundaries and groups is a process that affords agency to those who negotiate limiting categories to forge a new self-defined identity and position. Kamboureli further explains, “the agency of the ethnic subject is always located within a dense web of relations” (134). In *Paper Shadows*, Choy explores the relations between multiple groups (Chinese, Canadians, Chinese-Canadians), and commands agency through this negotiation (an active exploring and self-determination) and subsequent hybridization.

The topics of difference and choice, so important to Bhabha's discussion of hybridization and agency, are also of concern to Kambourelli. She makes a distinction between "being ethnicized within a hegemonic structure and affirming one's own ethnic difference by choice" (Kambourelli 143). In the first instance difference is appropriated whereas in the second the ethnic subject's "own agency is at work" (Kambourelli 143). Choice implies agency and promotes the idea of free will by arguing against determinism. When Choy chooses to affirm his own ethnic difference, whether this is highlighting his Chineseness compared to other Canadians or emphasizing his Canadianness in relation to his Chinese family and friends, or more prominently, of stressing his identity as Chinese-Canadian, his own agency is also at work.

In Kambourelli's analysis of another literary text, she says an ethnic minority "display[s] her agency in showing that her racial and gender otherness must not be understood as the only characteristics by which she is defined" (157); likewise, Choy displays his agency in resisting limited, unsatisfying categories that seek to normalize him as heterosexual, or as Chinese, or as Canadian. His writing is a self-defining act that insists upon determining his position within his family, within the community of Chinatown, and as a citizen in Canada, on his own terms, not those imposed by others.

### **Agency in Choy's Ambivalent Childhood Mimicry**

Choy acknowledges that he did not always possess the same extent of agency: as a child caught between Chinese and English cultures, he was confused and ambivalent about his identity. A confused Choy asks his grandfather why he looks "different from most of the boys playing at MacLean Park," to which his grandfather replies, "*nay-hei tong-yung—you're Chinese*" (*Paper* 136). Choy is exposed to racism at an early age: a

young boy mocks his “slanted eyes” when he “pulled back the corners of his eyes and made gibberish sounds” (*Paper* 167). This racism leads Choy to feel ambivalent about both the Chinese and the Canadian cultures: he is both attracted to and repulsed by elements of both, which are contained within himself. This ambivalence later causes him to believe that he does not possess agency, and that he has nothing to say; it is only through the act of writing that he begins to recover the agency that was always partially present, simply unrecognized.

The ambivalence of Choy’s interstitial positioning at first leads him to want to reject one culture or the other to be able to wholly and comfortably identify with or belong to a group. When a girl asks Choy if he wants to be Chinese, Choy reflects that because he cannot read or write the language he cannot be Chinese; he gives up and identifies as Canadian (*Paper* 238). Responding to allegations that he is *mo no* or brainless, Choy thinks, “I no longer felt I was a failure, because I was no longer going to be Chinese” (*Paper* 239). One of the elder Chinese “aunties” says, “What do you expect? Sonny lives in Canada, not just Chinatown” (*Paper* 241). Only later, after mimicking both cultures and becoming hybridized, does Choy realize the impossibility of denying either part of his identity, and is empowered by this hybridization. His transition is from confusion and ambivalence to at least partial agency. While his childhood experiences were heavily informed and influenced by the “facts” of his birth (being born as Chinese, adopted, raised in Vancouver’s Chinatown), they did not completely determine the course of his personal history. As retroactive re-engagement with his past Choy’s memoir is itself an act of agency that actively participates in the story, retelling and understanding of his life.

One method employed by the colonized to affect agency is mimicry which, as discussed in a previous chapter, creates anxiety on the part of the colonizer, who is threatened by the colonized who maintains a partial difference, copies, exaggerates, and mocks the colonizer. The colonized, who is *almost the same, but not quite* (Bhabha, “Mimicry” 122), threatens and undermines the authority of the colonizer. By maintaining a slight difference, colonized peoples are able to evade colonial domination and control, which affords them an agency “implied by the slippages in meaning” (Huddart 59). Purposeful ambivalence surrounding meanings, definitions and identifications allow colonized peoples to *appear* to conform to colonial ideology and domination while they actually function and self-identify at least partially on their own terms.

Similar to the fictional children in *The Jade Peony*, as a child Choy engages in mimicry of both Chinese and Canadian (or North American) cultures by partially or incompletely imitating Chinese opera stars and Western cowboys; however, he resists the authority of each ideology by refusing to completely comply with the rules of identification. Thus Choy’s instances of mimicry are examples of his agency. Rosalía Baena notes, “selfhood implies a negotiation with transcultural influences” (79), while Bhabha understands that this negotiation itself is an act of agency. Choy constitutes his selfhood retrospectively using the genre of memoir to highlight instances of his childhood negotiation of two cultures to show that he in fact did possess some measure of agency, whether or not his mimicry was conscious and deliberate.

By living and negotiating with cultural influences during his Chinatown childhood alone, Choy possesses agency. As a boy, Choy is first very attracted to Chinese opera, and identifies with the actors whom he relates to the clowns he knows in

Canada: “From the beginning, I was enchanted. I fell in love with the dramatic colours, and the clowning, for I believed the whole opera was a clown show: didn’t clowns paint their faces and jump about?” (*Paper* 47). However, this fascination soon turns to ambivalence: he becomes bored and sings “Old Macdonald” to distract and entertain himself (50). Later, the enchantment returns: Choy says sometimes he “wanted to become what I saw before me: the General, the warriors, and the frightened guard” in the Chinese operas (*Paper* 52). He plays with opera dolls, “puppet-like miniatures” which he describes as “fierce-looking dolls, dressed in embroidered robes, [who] gripped tiny swords and tridents or painted fans and wore jeweled headdresses” (*Paper* 61).

Choy performs and mimics the Chinese opera, play-acting, slashing his cheeks with lipstick, rouging his face, and drawing a soot beard, all of which anger his father who is concerned with what others think (*Paper* 62-63). His mimicry contains a threatening element of difference that garners others’ curiosity, amusement and anger. Choy performs and attempts to partially resemble the opera actors, but this repetition is incomplete and also to excess: his father deems it “clownish.” In this way, he resists the Chinese culture by subtly altering it and only accepting it on his own terms. This altering, the process of hybridization of which Bhabha speaks, possesses agency. Speaking of Choy’s relation to the role and meaning of Chinese opera, Rosalía Baena claims, “Choy negotiates the boundaries and formulations of his transcultural position and process” (85). His mimicry is both intercultural and transcultural: he is situated between Chinese and Canadian cultures, but also possesses the mobility to traverse across these cultural groups and bring back with him traces of the other to “contaminate” the

“purity” of each, thereby creating a hybridized space that allows him to create an identity of the self on his own terms as Chinese-Canadian.

Confronted with familial pressure to remain ethnically pure and loyal as Chinese, Choy substitutes mimicry of figures from Canadian popular culture for the former Chinese models. He confesses, “I quickly dropped my obsession with opera and raced to my new addiction” (*Paper* 82). He refuses to attend the operas, which he now deems ridiculous (*Paper* 82). He also becomes obsessed with other English figures, including Robin Hood, Tarzan and Cheetah. He rejects the Chinese language and culture in favour of a hybridization of the two cultures: when his mother asserts, “You Chinese [...] You speak Chinese,” Choy retorts, “No! [...] I speak *Chinglish*” (*Paper* 83). He is Chinese and English, Chinglish, a bastardization that better represents his “in-between soul” (*Paper* 234) than either category could separately. Choy says, “Soon, Chinatown began to fade, like a ghost. I was turning into a banana: yellow on the outside and white on the inside” (*Paper* 84). He confronts this racist stereotype (a banana) and appropriates it to show his ambivalence and hybridization as Chinese-Canadian.

As Choy’s interest in Chinese opera wanes, he becomes obsessed with cowboys instead. Baena argues that Choy as a child “rejects the models of Chinese opera and racial identification to relearn standards of goodness and beauty from his new heroes” (87). Choy’s own words support this: after watching cowboy movies, he says, “I began to wish I did not look like a Chinese boy. Good and Evil became crayon strokes: Good Guys were handsome and Bad Guys were ugly” (*Paper* 80). In these cowboy movies, the “Good Guys” are white, while the “Bad Guys” are ethnicized and obviously racially



“other” (Indians) comparable to his own Chinese ethnicity; Choy internalizes this racial discrimination and wishes he were white.

Choy desires the physical trappings that would allow him to emulate his cowboy heroes: guns, knives, comics, badges, boots, hats, and suspenders; the availability makes his mimicry easy and feasible. As an element of camouflage, his costume allows him to imaginatively fulfill his desire to mimic the culture of Western films. He says, “The cowboy-and-Indian world was infinitely superior, because it was infinitely available” (*Paper* 81). *Paper Shadows* contains photos of Choy as a boy, wearing a Western outfit, cowboy hat, and riding a horse at the Pacific National Exhibition (*Paper* 65, 85). He says, “I now worshipped: c-o-w-b-o-y-s” (*Paper* 69). He stares at the “rough, unshaven men” who inhabit the Hastings Street hotels whom he believes are authentic cowboy heroes, and he becomes driven by an “instinct to take in everything cowboy-and-Indian,” saying, “I wanted to be a cowboy, too” (*Paper* 70-71). Choy writes, “I wanted to be a cowboy. All the boys in Chinatown wanted to be cowboys” (*Paper* 81). He imagines himself as a Good Guy, “fair-haired, pale-skinned, grey-eyed” (*Paper* 81), notably *not* Chinese. However, it is only in his imagination that Choy resembles his heroes; in reality his mimicry is incomplete (lacking these attributes) and also to excess (he is a Chinese cowboy, an imitator that must be qualified by his ethnicity). Thus, he resists being completely assimilated to this boyhood culture of cowboys. Although Choy’s unsuccessful imitation is against his desire, nevertheless, his unwilling maintenance of difference is evidence of unconscious resistance.

Choy learns to modify his behaviour depending on the situation and context, adjusting his table manners to fit in or camouflage himself so as to evade parental

chastisement. In reference to the Chinese custom of slurping soups and drinks, Choy says, “The habits of East and West all depended upon who you were with and what the circumstances were. And how, if you didn’t tell Father anything, you could still get away with it” (*Paper* 78). This example of camouflage and behaviour modification shows Choy’s agency as a child: he is able to navigate and manipulate the social customs of both Eastern and Western cultures, and slyly realizes that by being discrete or secretive, he can dictate his own actions.

Along with the Chinese Opera and Western Cowboys, Choy writes of a third factor that influenced his childhood and subject formation, his Christian Protestant kindergarten, which combined religion and language to shape Choy. Choy is frightened at first, but quickly adapts to the familiar storytelling and singing, using humour to show imitation without comprehension. He sings, “*Gee-sus luv mee, yet I no, four dee by-bull till me sew...*” (*Paper* 114). He learns to “read” from memory, illustrations and imagination, repeating plot summaries in storybooks. Choy says he “*gong-wah, talked-picture,*” half-singing in “broken Toisanese and fragmented English” (*Paper* 131). As an older child Choy outgrows both Chinese operas and Western cowboys; he enrolls in an English school and develops a love of reading and stories, and reluctantly attends Chinese school, which he hates (*Paper* 225).

The sections of Choy’s memoir dedicated to his childhood reveal how as a child, Choy felt consumed with ambivalence and did not believe that he possessed agency; nonetheless, he was able to engage in important strategies of resistance and mimicry. These allowed him to resemble yet elude the elements of multiple discourses and ideologies that sought to indoctrinate him with certain beliefs and values and to dictate or

at least influence his actions. Choy's mimicry of both Chinese and Western cultures shows that he was engaging in a negotiation with colonizing forces and was able to modify and resist, nonviolently and without consequential retribution, two competing authorities. This argues for both Bhabha's belief in agency in mimicry and Parry's insistence on acknowledging colonized peoples as historical, social, material human beings as agents. This combination does not accept either Bhabha's location of agency as purely textual (although it is that too), nor Benita Parry's belief that colonial rebellion and revolution need be violent and directed against a clearly defined enemy: instead, Choy modifies, reinterprets and makes relevant the discussion of postcolonial agency for Chinese in Canada.

### **Retrospective Agency: Choy as Self-Determining Author**

*Paper Shadows* shows Wayson Choy's transition from an ambivalent child narrator engaging in mimicry as a way to resist unsatisfying cultural categories (thereby exercising at least a limited, partial agency) to an adult subject as agent who is finally able, after years of internalizing oppression and believing he had "nothing to say," to possess and demonstrate his own agency as an author who self-determines his position (both historically and in the present). Early in his literary and academic career Choy felt that he internalized oppression, which left him feeling voiceless with nothing to say (Deer 40, Lorre 79, Ying 20). It is only through writing, a laboured process (his first novel, *The Jade Peony*, took eighteen years to write), that Choy begins to realize his power and agency as a self-determining human subject.

Speaking of passivity, voicelessness and agency, Lien Chao argues that Chinese Canadians experienced a transition from "a collective silence to a voice in the official

discourse” (17). This is not to say that silence connotes a complete lack of agency, as Ferdinand Lopez recognizes: “voluntary silence [...] can signify resistance and insubordination” (93) by eluding the power of authorities who seek to know, control and administer minorities. However, Choy’s transition from silence to voice does signify the evolution from his feeling of powerlessness or passivity to agency, self-determination, and action. Choy speaks of how he and his mother would “outwit [a] stranger with silence” (*Paper* 21) when immigration officials would ask questions threatening deportation; this speaks to an agency in silence. The very act of non-action, a kind of non-violence advocated by Gandhi, is an act of resistance. As a creative writer, and especially in his memoir, Choy clearly has “something to say.”

As an author, Choy commands agency through writing: he exposes the “secrets of Chinatown” and upon his discovery of his adoption, engages in historiographical revisionism, writing from the present back to the past to address historical injustices (such as viewing early generations of Chinese-Canadians as victims without agency). He says, “The past, as I knew it, began to shift” (*Paper* 5). Choy’s determination at creating the course of his own personal history is fueled by the knowledge that the Chinese were unwanted in Canada: as a child he heard, “Canada no want you” and “Go home, chinky Chinaman!” (*Paper* 31). Choy explains, “no Chinese, even those born in Canada, like me, were given citizenship: I was a *Resident Alien*, forbidden to vote or enter any profession” (*Paper* 74). The Canadian government and law sought to control and determine his status and profession and thereby limit his agency (as well as that of other

Chinese people)<sup>4</sup>. Thus, Choy had to find alternate ways of commanding agency, subtly through mimicry and hybridity, and much later in life (at age 57), through writing, revisiting memories, and re-determining his familial past.

In regards to ethnic writing, Kamboureli argues, “In these texts, the ‘death of the author’ announced by poststructuralism is annulled. The ethnic specificity of the author’s name comes to signify authority and authenticity [...] characters and personae reflect their authors’ politics of self-location” (158). Here Kamboureli raises a very important idea of the author as agent, which is very relevant to Choy’s possession of agency as a minority person who creates meaning through writing and through the process of locating and defining the self. Wayson Choy’s English name was Sonny (*Paper* 10) but his Chinese name Way Sun, meaning to rehabilitate, is a political motto promising to “reform old ways through peaceful means” (*Paper* 16). His name, even as author, can be taken for an analogy for his agency, which involves nonviolent (opposed to the ideology promoted by Parry or Fanon) narration of his personal history and familial identity.

In addition to childhood memories, a great deal of *Paper Shadows* is devoted to Choy’s quest to learn about his biological parents. Choy learns of his adoption in a phone call from a stranger named Hazel (who knew his biological parents); she vaguely suggests his father was a member of the Cantonese Opera Company (*Paper* 281) and his mother was possibly married or had too many children. Upon Hazel’s revelation of Choy’s adoption, he confronts his aunts who confirm the truth (*Paper* 278). Choy’s discovery of his familial history prompts him to “negotiate body and place not only in

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<sup>4</sup> Government Policies only later bestowed citizenship, as well as the right to vote and enter any profession,

racial, but in family terms in order to, in a sense, reinhabit them” (Baena 85). Choy’s past begins to shift, and he must revise the story of his own life; in doing so, he possesses an uncertain, hesitant agency. Choy says, “One single phone call had shifted all the pieces; I felt trapped between fact and fiction [...] nothing of my family, of home, seemed solid and specific” (*Paper* 280). He says he “did nothing at first,” but admits that he had questions (*Paper* 280). This process of destabilization and the recreation of significance is exactly what Bhabha refers to in his statement of unpicking and relinking that negotiates subaltern agency (“Postcolonial” 265).

Choy is forced to revise the story of his childhood and confront the ambiguity and fear of not knowing the “truth.” Baena argues, “As his unquestioned beliefs about his family origins are invalidated, his narrative performance becomes an intense revisionary project: he looks back through the stories, memories and photographs with a new uncertainty” (85). Hazel continues to revise her story and admits that Choy’s mother passed away, his father was a member of the Cantonese Opera company, and that Hazel’s own family refuses to speak to Choy or reveal names, secrets or promises, believing that they should “let old days rest” (*Paper* 280-282). Hazel concludes that Choy does not “need to know any more” because “those days [are] long gone” (*Paper* 282). Choy understands that other Chinese elders in Chinatown “knew the truth and kept their silence,” and accepts the partial truth and veiled secrets: “There was nothing more to know” (*Paper* 283). Two years later, his aunts tell him about his adopted family’s lineage, which allows him to further revise his history (*Paper* 284). Christine Lorre notes

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upon Chinese-Canadians and other hyphenated minority groups.

that Choy does not become obsessed with learning the truth of his origins (82); rather, he surmises in the memoir's epilogue that he has learned "as much as I needed to know" (*Paper* 333) and refuses another friend's offer to search for information. While the original circumstances of his birth were undeniably beyond his control, Choy's decision and subsequent action (or rather the choice not to pursue further action) show his agency.

By highlighting the writerly aspect of *Paper Shadows*, Choy emphasizes the textuality that Bhabha discusses, but also modifies Bhabha's theorization of agency with the idea of subject as agent. As a minority figure, a descendant of Chinese in diaspora, and an author, Choy is both a subject and subjected, or constructed by multiple ideologies, as well as an individual, or a human agent. Choy discovers additional agency in writing, prompted by the destabilizing discovery of his adoption, which prompts him to recreate meaning for his personal and familial history. As Kamboureli suggests, Choy is an agent as author, and as the protagonist and creator of a memoir, he figures doubly as an agent in his own life and the creator and interpreter of meaning through writing. This is yet another way in which Choy complicates, adds to and extends the discussion on postcolonialism's relevance in a different location, historical period, and context.

## **Conclusion**

Homi Bhabha's concept of subaltern or anti-colonial agency, opposed to the revolutionary and violent agency proposed by critics such as Benita Parry and Frantz Fanon, when applied to Wayson Choy's literary memoir *Paper Shadows*, shows the possibility of subtle resistance and the perseverance of self-determination. As a child, Choy actualizes his own self-determination and identity using mimicry and hybridity to resist complete identification with either the traditional Chinese culture of his parents or

the popular culture of Canadian cowboy movies. This refusal to deny his difference (as either too Chinese or too Canadian when confronted with the opposing culture) is evidence of Choy's limited childhood agency. Later, as an adult writer, Choy rewrites his personal history, when his knowledge of the past begins to shift, recognizing and validating the agency of earlier generations of Chinese-Canadians.

The realm of the discursive cannot be separated completely from the human social reality of ethnic minorities or others. Memoirs or semi-fictional autobiographies such as Choy's reflect the lived experiences of the authors in such a way that reality enters into or is reflected by the discursive. The distinction that Bhabha and others such as Parry or Fanon make between textuality and the actual experiences of human subjects is challenged and blurred by Choy's *Paper Shadows*. Choy acts as both witness or subject, and critic and academic; these are yet more boundaries that he traverses, in addition to cultural distinctions, ethnicized spaces, and languages. Rocio Davis writes: "The situation of the ethnic writer, conscious of a between-worlds position, involves an intense re-working of issues such as oppositionality, marginality, displacement, alienation and authenticity: a process rather than a structure, requiring constant variation and review" (Introduction xvi). Similar to Bhabha, Rocio Davis emphasizes process over product; this process itself is evidence of postcolonial agency, which shows action, determination, and engagement. Choy obviously possesses will or power to determine, as he acts, writes and creates the story of his life, *Paper Shadows*.

Choy's memoir shows that agency in fact can be located in textuality or the enunciative that Bhabha argues for in his analysis of the discursive. *Paper Shadows*, an example of self-representation through writing, combines the lived, material reality of a



human subject as agent, with the act of speaking and writing as self-determination. Choy rewrites his past upon the discovery of his adoption, which prompts him to re-examine, revalue and re-determine the meaning and “truth” of his personal history and that of his family. Agency, whether termed postcolonial, subaltern, diasporic or minority, is present in Wayson Choy’s writing, and demands that postcolonial studies consider the figure of the “colonized” person not as a powerless, disenfranchised victim who cannot speak or act, but rather as an elusive, sly, determined agent with the ability to negotiate his or her position in changing contexts of the postcolonial world.

### Conclusion

Wayson Choy's writing, perhaps unintentionally, reinterprets and reapplies the concepts of mimicry, hybridity and agency as hypothesized by Homi Bhabha. In doing so, Choy re-conceptualizes what constitutes contemporary postcolonial studies. Bhabha proposes that colonized peoples mimic the colonizer by imitating yet slightly mocking them through repetition of the colonizer's beliefs, ideas and values while, importantly, maintaining a slight element of difference. Choy's writing complicates Bhabha's analysis of colonial relations by showing the heightened ambivalence and complexity of literary characters (who are informed by real human subjects) in a position similar to that of the colonized, children of Chinese-Canadians in diaspora. These fictional children and Choy as a youth in his memoir mimic the authority and ideologies of both the popular culture of Western society that they are exposed to through Hollywood movies and interaction with other white children as well as the traditional Chinese culture of their parents and grandparents.

Perhaps predictably, or at least similar to other postcolonial examples, the children as "colonized" figures struggle with a desire to become like icons of Western, North American or Canadian culture, through physical imitation, actions and demonstration of their beliefs and values, and the realization that they are not and can never be identical. In addition, mimicry in this instance also involves an attraction and repulsion of the children towards the Chinese culture (and the ambivalent desire of the Chinese elders to interpellate, educate and instill respect for their tradition versus the temptation to reject the children as too Canadian and unworthy of their Chinese identity). Difference, Choy shows, is relative to one's positioning in relation to another, and traces

of this difference remain despite attempts to sublimate it in an attempt to become something else. Mimicry as reexamined and redefined by Choy is doubled, directed at two cultural forces which seek to “colonize” the children in terms of influencing their beliefs, values, aspirations and actions.

The hybridity that Bhabha hypothesizes is also of great importance to Choy’s examination of intercultural exchange. While Bhabha confines his analysis to sites of colonization and literary examples from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Choy localizes the theory for a different situation, geographic place and group of people, Chinese-Canadian children in Vancouver’s Chinatown in the 1930s and 1940s. Choy shows how the concept of hybridity is transforming and becoming more complex for ethnic minorities similarly situated compared to other “colonized” peoples but who must contend with not one but multiple colonizing authorities. Thus, while Bhabha locates the hybrid figure between the figure of the subaltern (as representative of pre-contact purity or originality, which must be recognized as a myth) and the colonizer, Choy shows the hybrid Chinese-Canadian figure positioned in-between or amongst representatives of the “original” Chinese culture, the Western or Canadian popular culture, and other immigrant or ethnic communities, all of which seek to resist this hybridization and maintain the borders by completely containing or excluding the hybrid and attempting to maintain distinct categories, binaries and oppositions.

One of Bhabha’s main critics, Benita Parry, suggests that his theory of hybridization disenfranchises colonized peoples by stagnating them and allowing them to forget the actual oppression and injustices executed by the colonizer; instead, she calls for the maintenance of oppositions and the necessity of overt, violent rebellion. Choy proves

that Bhabha's suggestion of hybridization as an alternate means of resistance is still relevant and valid, and it is actually empowering, as Bhabha claims, in that it allows colonized peoples, diasporic or minority subjects to negotiate their own positioning relative to other figures of authority which attempt to control them. Choy, like Bhabha, argues against unrealistic categories of separate or distinct positions or cultures and instead explores the sly methods of maneuverability and self-determination that hybridity affords. Hybrid figures are able to traverse boundaries and groups and critically accept, reject and modify the beliefs and values of different colonizing influences, which allows for the resistance of stereotyping or the stifling imposition of an unsatisfying ethnic or social identity. Choy's literature argues against Parry and in support of Bhabha regarding the debate of the maintenance or dissolution of binary opposites, showing that this major issue in postcolonialism is still relevant to diasporic groups today.

The final and most important postcolonial concept that Choy interrogates and modifies is agency, which both mimicry and hybridization gesture towards. Choy uses the idea of agency to re-consider and re-posit the colonized, minority or diasporic figure not as a victim but rather as a survivor and as an agent, who utilizes sly tools of resistance to multiple sources of "colonial" authority and oppression. Like Bhabha, Choy demonstrates how mimicry and hybridity demonstrate agency by resisting colonizing ideologies and authority figures that attempt to either assimilate (erase cultural differences and incorporate into the dominant discourse) or other (ostracize and define as deviant and inferior) the minority. Beyond this, Choy's conceptualization of agency differs from Bhabha's: Choy's writing suggests that Chinese-Canadian minorities (real people in his memoir and fictional characters in his creative projects) possess a partial

agency. Choy is careful not to equate or compare those in the position of the colonized with those acting as colonizers, or to suggest that they have equal access to power and freedom. Instead, he includes historical references to the injustices borne by Chinese-Canadians, and explores how these people were able to command a measure of agency despite others' efforts to control, limit or manage them.

Choy further distances his conceptualization of agency from Bhabha's by positing the figure of the Chinese-Canadian not only in textual terms, but also as a material, social human being. Choy's Chinese-Canadians are closer but not identical to Parry's rebellious subaltern agents; at the same time, they move away from Bhabha's colonized subjects. In effect, Choy combines elements of both these critics' ideas, and locates Chinese-Canadian minorities in the position of being subjected to colonizing ideologies while simultaneously being able to affect a certain amount of agency, not in violent terms as Parry suggests, but in sly, evasive acts of resistance as Bhabha suggests. Choy's exploration of agency as it relates to himself as an author, especially in his memoir where he discusses the process of writing and revising his past, draws on Bhabha's ideas of textuality and Parry's insistence on validating the experiences and reality of real people in colonial situations. Instead of merely reproducing or reapplying the theories of either critic, Choy demonstrates how they are subtly altered and complicated in an analysis of a different location, historical period, and group of people.

The study of postcolonial theory and literature must emphasize process over product. Any one analysis, such as a reading of Wayson Choy's literature on Chinese-Canadians in diaspora using the theories of Homi Bhabha, is not definitive and cannot provide an ultimate truth or answer. While Choy's writing complicates and modifies

Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity, agency, and indeed the genre of postcolonial literature itself, these important theories cannot remain in stasis for long. Other creative writers continue to address these same issues in Chinese-Canadian fiction and memoirs, and other theorists will continue to assess critically and advance the ideas proposed by Bhabha and critiqued by others.

This thesis has attempted to analyze Choy's appropriation and adaptation of the major postcolonial key concepts discussed by Bhabha: mimicry, hybridity and agency. These concepts are by no means Bhabha's originally; he read and interpreted these ideas from several sources: psychoanalytic theory, specifically the ideas of imitation and mockery that form the basis of mimicry as camouflage made popular by Jacques Lacan (Bhabha, "Mimicry" 121); conceptualizations of binary oppositions, polarities, categorizations and racial solidarity proposed by Frantz Fanon and supported by Benita Parry (Bhabha, "Postcolonial" 278; Parry, "Problems" 14)), which Bhabha argues against with his theory of hybridity ("Signs" 158-66); and agency as it relates to the ideas of writing aloud, voice and ideology as theorized by Roland Barthes, Slavoj Zizek and Jacques Lacan (Bhabha, "Postcolonial" 264-265).

In turn, other critics responded to Bhabha's use or perceived misuse of these theories. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Smaro Kamboureli, Terry Eagleton, and especially Benita Parry responded strongly to Bhabha's interpretation of key concepts and theories of postcolonial studies. Choy's writing answers to and expands upon some of the issues raised by these critics, notably, the importance and effect of mimicry and hybridity as it relates to agency. Choy's personally informed writing, both fictional and semi-autobiographical as explored in his memoir, raises the idea of subject as agent: he

acknowledges that ideological interpellation is an important part of constituting a person's subjecthood, as shown with the competing influences of authorities from both Chinese and Canadian cultures which seek to instill certain beliefs and values in Chinese-Canadian children. However, Choy resists the idea of determinism, which says that people are limited by the race, class, social standing, or physical location into which they are born. Instead, Choy's creative works suggest he recognizes that people are both subjects in the sense that they are socially, politically and ideologically subjected to certain authorities, and agents, in that they possess agency to resist those same authorities which seek to control and administer over them. Choy is not idealistic or overly sentimental with his suggestion of agency: he does not imply that Chinese-Canadians, as ethnic minorities historically subjected to oppression, possess total or unconditional agency. He acknowledges the hardships endured by these people, while at the same time maintaining that they possessed a partial agency, affected through the use of sly strategies of resistance as suggested by Bhabha, of resemblance, elusiveness, mockery, slight rejection, and the ability to resist polarization or categorization with the process of hybridization.

In summary, Choy's writing engages firmly with the issues at the forefront of contemporary postcolonial debate. It must be stressed Choy's literary contributions are merely an engagement, and do not provide definitive answers or conclusions. There remains ample room for further creative reflections on the importance of postcolonial theory for diasporic people of varied ethnicities. There is also the need for critical intervention with the following important postcolonial concerns: the localization of theories to understand how they adapt according to specific historical, geographical,

racial and social specificities; possible forms of postcolonial resistance, and the human's construction as both subject and agent, particularly for ethnic minorities who are subjected to increased ideological coercion and who appear to have less recourse to action and self-determination. These and other concerns must be taken up by other literary critics; postcolonial studies will be continuously recontextualized by changes in global immigration, increasingly complex intercultural exchange, and surprising appropriations of literary theory from unexpected sources.



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