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述說離散身分：林玉玲《季風史》中的語言、遷徙與族裔性

Narrating a Diasporic Identity: Language, Migrancy, and Ethnicity

in Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Monsoon History*

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To my dear parents

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# 述說離散身分：林玉玲《季風史》中的語言、遷徙與族裔性

## 中文摘要

本論文旨在從三個面向：語言、遷徙與族裔性探討詩人林玉玲（Shirley Geok-lin Lim）的詩集《季風史》（*Monsoon History*），並藉由空間中的邊界思考來檢視林的離散身分認同，為林玉玲離散經驗及其如何為亞裔美國文學建立離散詩學之研究。跨界（border-crossing）的概念，無論實質上或精神層面，貫串本論文的每一章以期再現詩人的身分和為其再創造發聲的空間。導論說明離散（diaspora）的概念與綜述通篇論文的理論架構及各章概要。首章探查林玉玲和她寫作之語言選擇的關係，採用德勒茲和瓜達希（Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari）的語言分析和對少數族裔文學的定義來討論詩人寫作的去疆界性（deterritorialization）。次章探索林玉玲本身的遷徙狀態，並引用薩依德（Edward Said）對（身為）流亡者（exile）所做的反思與分類。第三章則集多位理論家及批評家的說法以林玉玲詩中所呈現的族裔認同問題為焦點。末章結論林玉玲的最終身分認同，由於其語言、遷徙和族裔性的疆界重劃（reterritorialization），使其成為亞裔美國人（Asian American）。

## Abstract

This thesis sets out to explore Shirley Geok-lin Lim's poetry collection *Monsoon History* in terms of three aspects: language, migrancy, and ethnicity. It also attempts to examine Shirley Lim's diasporic identity by embracing the border thinking. The notion of border-crossing, either physically or psychologically, passes through each chapter to represent the poet's identity and to re-create a space for herself to articulate. It is a study of Lim's exile experiences and how she establishes the poetics of diaspora for Asian American literature. In the introduction, the concept of diaspora and the theoretical framework will be explicated. The first chapter probes into the relationship between Shirley Lim and her choice of language in writing. I adopt Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's analysis of language and definition of "minor literature" to discuss the deterritorialization of Lim's writing. The second chapter traces Lim's migrant status, in which I resort to Edward Said's "Reflections on Exile" and his different categorizations of exile. The third chapter, appealing to several theorists or critics, such as Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Ling-chi Wang, deals with Lim's problem of ethnic identity displayed in her poetry. The last chapter concludes with an overall argumentation that the destination and dissolution of Lim's identity is an Asian American because of reterritorialization of language, migrancy, and ethnicity.



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## Introduction

### Tracing Route/Root of Home: Shirley Lim's Poetics of Diaspora

The history of Chinese diaspora and emigrants has occupied an immense space in Asian American literature since the nineteenth century. The study on Asian/Chinese American literature has been focused on its social analysis, historical review, and cultural politics of identity. However, we find out that the historicization and contextualization of the neoteric schools of thoughts such as deconstruction, postcolonialism, or cultural studies would be helpful to explore the Asian/Chinese American literature from another perspective. Hence when perusing the contemporary literary works, we oftentimes discover features such as problematic identities, the différance of language, or the discourse of space. Such particularities are prevalent in Third World literature, minority issue, postcolonial and postmodern discourse, as well as Asian/Chinese American literature. To make a comprehensive survey of celebrated contemporary Asian/Chinese American writers, many researchers put much interest in the paradoxical identity and the representation of subjectivity of Asian/Chinese American in the awkward position. In the process of their migration, aphasia, unhousedness, dislocation, and returning "home," the identity and nationality of Asian/Chinese American becomes unstable and keeps shifting. This is why identity politics considered so intriguing in the postmodern context.

The trope of space in contemporary theories, primarily in literary and cultural studies, reflects the modern and postmodern thinking and provides us with a new vision that border and territory are two essential conceptions to construct society, community, and culture. This notion of border thinking arouses literary theorists to pay close attention to theme of space: in the light of inclusion and exclusion that the

borderline could be a hallmark of power relationships; any attempt to cross over, go beyond, revise, or blot out the borderline would derive movement, relocation and destruction. Thereby contemporary literary and cultural field has become the conflux of the theories of space and geography. Here any text/context resembles the space, which is never stable. The political, tactical, and ideological intentions always underpin the space, which the history goes through with. That is to say, the space and the territory are the production of multiple political ideologies. On the other hand, poststructuralism and postmodernism denounce the grand narrative, which is supported by universality, the kernel, and norms, and celebrate the condition of hybridity and diversity of language, nation, gender, class, and race. In short, the conception of grand narrative and structure exhausts and collapses. To combine the two ideas, identity and space, the discussion in this thesis would resort to what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari term “deterritorialization” in poststructuralism as a main trunk to perch on. As a result, the mode of my thesis writing is ineluctably under the influence of “deterritorialization” and the goal is to probe into Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s identity problem in the three aspects: language, migrancy, and ethnicity.

Before this study moves on, a sketch of the central idea of “diaspora” will be given first. The Diaspora first alluded to the Jewish people, who are members descended from the ancient Hebrews and marked by adherence to Judaism. According to the Holy Bible, Moses led the Jews out of Egypt around 1300-1200 B.C.; then Joshua created the country Israel with the Jews in Canaan, the Promised Land, which were the fertile country promised to the Israelites by God. However, the Jews disobeyed God’s doctrines, they thus deserved the punishment from God to suffer from destitution and dispersion from 538 B.C. Based on the historical materials, the early site where the Israelites established their country was found mainly in

Palestine.<sup>1</sup> During the years 609-586 B.C., documented by the Babylonian Chronicle, Judah was under Babylonian suzerainty, which declared the capture and fall of Jerusalem. Until the second half of the fourth century B.C., Palestine was under the converging influence of great empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the territory of Jewish history expanded into wider areas. Then with Alexander the Great's conquest of Palestine in 332 B.C., Jerusalem went under the rule of the Hellenistic civilization and still later, the centralistic government of imperial Rome. When those empires eventually deprived them of national independence, approximately in 586 B.C., the Israelites, i.e., the Jewry, made Palestine "a large center of exile, from which a revitalized nation later emerged" (Ben-Sasson 1994: 3). Henceforth the imagery of wandering Jews and Diaspora become the emblem and trauma for this specific group of people. Until the re-creation of Israel in 1948, the Jewry has lost their country for almost two thousand years. Besides Jewish Diaspora, another substantial knowledge about diaspora will also avail ourselves to apprehend its basic idea: "*diaspeir* is Greek for 'scattering' (*speir*) and was originally employed to explain the botanical phenomenon of seed dispersal" (Mishra 2002: 13). Hereby the "scattering" or "dispersal" of seeds is a conspicuous symbol for us to catch the impression of how diaspora is presented. Nowadays the usage of Diaspora, nonetheless, has been widened and altered to terms like African diaspora, Chinese diaspora, or South Asian diaspora. No matter for political or natural reason, such as the prosperity of civilization, transportation, or pervasion of war, business, many ethnic groups have undergone large-scale migration. As a matter of fact, the massive migration or people flow resulted from a large number of indentured laborers from Africa and Asia during the sixteenth and

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<sup>1</sup> For thorough and explicit historical details, please consult H. H. Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994).

seventeenth century. The idea of “diaspora” thus extends to different cases of racial migration. That massive people flow thereupon formed the global diasporic communities, among which the Chinese diasporic community deserve more attention. The history of Chinese immigration to the United States is significant for the study of diaspora because the spread of Chinese people across the globe has created one of the greatest diasporas in human history. The highlight of this study, principally, is spotted on the phenomenon of Chinese diaspora in Malaysia, and then in the United States, in which Shirley Lim as an example.

This study surveys the position and contribution of the poetry of Shirley Geok-lin Lim, a Malay-born Chinese Asian American, in terms of space within the Asian/Chinese American literature spectrum, in which the three categories of language, migrancy, and ethnicity will be concerned. The poet, born in 1944 in Malaya, was a daughter of a new Chinese immigrant and a native-born Chinese woman. Starting her college education at the University of Malaya, she received the B.A. degree with first class honors in 1967. Then she continued her graduate study at the same university during 1967-69. After that she moved to the United States to carry on her education and career in 1969; she pursued the Ph.D. at Brandeis University until 1973. She is now a Professor in the English Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara; she has taught internationally at many schools such as the University of Malaya, Queens College of the City University of New York, Hostos Community College of the City University of New York, Westchester Community College of the State University of New York, National University of Singapore, and University of Hong Kong. I bring the copious information into discussion because some of them are mentioned in her memoir, which is connected with her poetry.

Growing up in a Chinese family in the British colony, Shirley Lim, whose father

spoke Hokkien while her mother did Malay, was surrounded by a multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic society. Poor but aspiring to western civilization, her father meant to teach the children English as the first language. And Lim also made every effort to get through her gloomy teenage and to attend university out of her fascination with English literature and her zeal for the English language. She eventually changed her status quo to a higher class and got rid of the bondage of family and Malaysian society on the strength of her talent and learning. However, the intonation of her individual inspiring story took an unexpected turn when she flew to America. She looked in the eyes of the American the reflection of herself and she grasped the meaning of that reflection—an alien. Even though she treated herself as a mimic of English, came a long way to stay in the English world, and sought to obliterate her Asian self, she after all was out of tune with the western society. She was nothing but an other. But how did she fight against the powerful ideology imposed on her and how did she solve her knotty diasporic identity problem? We shall find out in the subsequent chapters.

In this thesis, I intend to focus on analyzing and introducing Shirley Lim's critically acclaimed literary work—*Monsoon History*, which is a collection of poems containing *No Man's Grove* (1985, Singapore), *Modern Secrets* (1989, London), and the complete volume of *Crossing the Peninsula* (1980, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia). *Crossing the Peninsula* deserves extra attention because it is the winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1980. Besides, another recent poetry collection, *What the Fortune Teller Didn't Say* (1998, New Mexico), will be taken into consideration in the discourse too. In addition to composing verse, Shirley Lim also writes prose, among her prose works the notable memoir *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands* (1996, New York) will be of crucial reference in this thesis. She is also the author of two books of criticism: *Nationalism*

*and Literature* (1993) and *Writing South/East Asia in English: Against the Grain* (1994); and a novel, *Joss and Gold* (2001). She has served as an editor/co-editor of numerous scholarly works, including *The Forbidden Sitch* (1989), *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's The Woman Warrior* (1991), and *Transnational Asia Pacific* (1999).

Since *Monsoon History* draws the most attention throughout the whole thesis, the need to make a brief introduction of this poetry collection is necessary so that the readers may obtain a convenient access to Lim's creation of poetry. One of the characteristics of Shirley Lim's poetry is that she often uses run-on lines and short sentences. Her brilliant use of verbs and nouns creates fresh symbolism to form the visual, audio, or sensual feelings and impacts. The juxtaposition of many nouns can bring about vivid images and launch reader's rich vision. Here is a stanza of a poem as an example of her writing technique:

The air is wet, soaks  
 Into mattresses, and curls  
 In apparitions of smoke.  
 Like fat white slugs furled  
 Among the timber,  
 Or silver fish tunneling  
 The damp linen covers  
 Of schoolbooks, or walking  
 Quietly like centipedes,  
 The air walking everywhere  
 On its hundred feet  
 Is filled with the glare  
 Of tropical water. ("Monsoon History," Lim 1994: 17)

The tropical weather and environment are embodied by diction like slugs, damp linen, or centipedes and the reader can sense the direct and amazing power of her poetry. So many copious images make reading her poetry a pleasant experience of watching a movie. She even seek to present poems in different varieties. For instance, she tries to adopt the paradigm of “pantoun” in one poem to call the readers’ attention.<sup>2</sup> Since pantoun is a new prosody in English poetry, it to some degree affects the readers’ reaction. Secondly, sometimes the pronouns in her poems are not so identifiable. The obscurity of the pronouns leaves a lot of room to readers’ imagination and interpretation. Taking her personal experiences as a criterion might be an important element and a good way while reading her poetry. Next, English and Malay show her proficiency of languages and the multi-lingual tendency, i.e. multiculturalism and multilingualism, in composing poetry to present cross-cultural savor. Since she chooses English as her only medium of creating, her fabulous command of English language reveals her talent and obsession for it. The reason why she made this choice will be explained later in chapter one. Fourthly, the subject matters in her poetry are quite extensive and wide; any trifles or detailed memories are possible to be blended into her poems. She would even dig more deeply into the same subject to explore and express her feeling and thoughts toward it. The very first time I read her poetry, I felt infatuated with her beautiful and graceful diction. Hence I was ignited to make a research on her and was inspired to write this thesis. Well-crafted, elegant, and often moving, Lim’s works reflect her hybrid background—Chinese Malaysian, English-educated, Asian American—and the conflicts and pleasures of her transnational inheritance.

Poet, novelist, critic, and scholar, Shirley Lim draws academic discourse to

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<sup>2</sup> Pantoun is one form of Malay poem of four lines as a stanza. Each stanza is linked in chain because refrain and repetition of certain lines compose each stanza. Shirley Lim’s “Pantoun for Chinese Women” is an obvious example. Pantoun can also be spelled as “pantun.”

rationally examine her own condition of migrancy and ethnicity. She performs her artistic language to express the secret emotion without any disguise. We find her work has already transcended any fixed category of identity, which means her existence and mobility in the world would make sense to her and to those in identity crisis. Her poetry embraces her memory of childhood/girlhood in Malaya/Malaysia and experience in America. Therefore her works carry potent story, poignant critique, and profound mood behind. The function and motive for writing those memory, experience, story, and mood in her poems might be granting the American readers a better understanding of Asian/Chinese culture, demonstrating the striving history of overseas Chinese in Malaya/Malaysia, and promoting the marginalized status of Chinese female writers under the influence of Malaysians. Despite the acute political intentions, the nature of literature: the story-telling cadence, the luxuriant imagery, and the exquisite metaphors are all ingeniously interwoven in the text. For those who are exposed to the tumult of ethnicity problem, especially people coming across the general phenomenon that circulating in Chinese American and Chinese Malaysian communities, Lim's poetry offers them a good self-introspection channel and reference, and they have the chance to make resonance and response to the problem.

*Monsoon History* rummages every corner of Lim's innermost being of her heart and establishes her a "rightful place in postcolonial Malaysian writing in English," as Laurel Means eulogizes in the foreword to *Monsoon History* (Means 1994: xxii). Means gives a quite detailed introduction to the volume in analyzing a couple of poems. Nevertheless, besides the "rightful place" in postcolonial Malaysian writing in English, Lim also creates space within Asian/Chinese literature canon. As Brinda Bose reviews, this collection of poetry

[...] traces a return to the land of origin, as an adult, with all the adult

burdens of memory and guilt and exhilaration that are born out of the yoking of two worlds. [...] locates her within her “Malay-ness,” an essence that she struggles to retrieve in order that she may evaluate her history. [...] witnesses another crossing, this time to her adopted homeland. Lim poignantly expresses in her poetry the complexities of diasporic identity entwined with her disappointment with the present-day politics of her original homeland. (Bose 1996: 1034)

Bose concisely points out the core of the whole book of poetry. Another reviewer Ruth Hsu also lays bare the truth with one penetrating remark: “Lim is clearly concerned with depicting the sense of loneliness and estrangement from one’s surroundings stemming from having to live in a country that names one alien” (Hsu 1997: 185). I think not only the poet herself pays close attention to the issue of diasporic identity but also many critics and researchers do. So this study is one of those researches in quest of Shirley Lim’s diasporic identity.

Many critics concentrate mostly their commentaries on the poet’s memoir, hence most data found either on-line, in books or in journals are essays regarding *Among the White Moon Faces*. It seems that firsthand materials concerning *Monsoon History* are less in quantity than those of *Among the White Moon Faces*. In my point of view, her poetry is actually another precious resource and gateway to enter into her kaleidoscopic world. Accordingly I have decided to make my own renditions of Lim’s poetry while appealing to theoretical approaches in my study.

The theoretical framework of this thesis resorts to the postcolonial discourse. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, editors of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, have asserted that “post-colonial studies are based in the ‘historical fact’ of European colonialism” and they also use the term “post-colonial” to “represent the continuing process of imperial suppressions and exchanges throughout this diverse

range of societies, in their institutions and their discursive practices” (Ashcroft *et al* 1995: 2-3). Their assertion proves the very importance of postcolonial studies in modern discourse. Since imperialism sprang up in the sixteenth century, much population of this globe has been smothered with colonial atmosphere, affliction, and persecution. The colonized went through the imperial stage of the sixteenth to seventeenth century, colonial period of the eighteenth to nineteenth century, liberation and independence movement near the end of the nineteenth century, to aftermath of the Second World War—the postcolonial period. The understanding of “postcolonialism” is in connection with the conceptions of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Colonialism inaugurates the first phase, before World War II, of colonial relationship of the colonizer and the colonized. The settler colony was under the political and military dominion of the settler’s country. After WWII, decolonization was the imperative move of the ex-colonies to carry out. The ex-colonies, the so-called Third World, however, could not become absolutely independent because of unbalanced economic relationship with the First World. This is the second phase, the neo-colonialism, “named by Marxists” (Williams and Chrisman 1994: 3). The world economic order was controlled by the First World capitalism and this priority situated the First World in the center of world-system while the Third World in periphery. The cultural colonialism, the extension of political, military, and economic colonization, should be the focus of the third phase—postcolonialism—the cultural relationship between the First and the Third World. That is to say, in postcolonialists’ point of view, neither the political independence nor successful economy signifies cultural autonomy of the Third World. All manner of collisions of politics, military, economy, society, culture, race, religion, gender, class, and language hitherto deploy with colonial experience as usual; the sequela of colonialism does not disappear with the independence of ex-colonies. In

short, postcolonialism marks the Western negation of non-Western culture and value.

Insofar as the negation of non-western culture functions in postcolonialism, the cultural displacement or migrancy, geographically speaking, plays a key role in studying postcolonialism. Cultural migrancy, consequently, is used to inquire essentialized knowledge such as ethnic identity. As such, the thought of diaspora opposes every immutable identity. For Stuart Hall, "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 1990: 235). Moreover, Homi K. Bhabha's "interstitial perspective" has endowed diaspora with another level of meaning that "the 'unhomely' is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly [...] in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites" (Bhabha 1994: 3; 9). In this case, the cultural migrancy is construed by Bhabha as the politics of "unhomeliness," which echoes what Edward Said terms the exiled, unhoused intelligentsia that lies in-between home and the worlds. Ali Behdad explains that "exile," in response to the unhomely site, is a form of "cultural resistance," and too, "diaspora identity is celebrated as a heterogeneous concept that is constantly recreating and refashioning itself" (Behdad 2000: 399-400). The in-between subjects with the emergence of the "interstices" thus become an embodiment of revision and reconstruction, which takes the most advantageous ideological location to confront colonialism and postcolonialism.

In the process of colonization, the migration of settler already resulted in cultural hybridity and anxiety of both sides. The Euro-centered West could not exempt from counter-narrative addressed by the colonized. The West with "civilizing mission" and "pedagogical narrative" in the postcolonial period is likely to be "Otherized" because the immigration of the colonized to the West makes hybridity of the West and

the Rest possible. At this point the West Center's outbound journey of colonization encounters postcolonial inward travel. The postcolonial travel takes the pedagogical narrative as a weapon to write back to the center of the West. In this sense, colonialism receives the rebound of nationalism. As Simon During observes, "The post-colonial desire is the desire of decolonized communities for an identity. [...] Obviously it is closely connected to nationalism, for those communities are often, though not always, nations" (During 1995: 125). The thinking of nationalism is disseminated through colonial pedagogical institutions so the colonized is enlightened to strike back. As we know from Benedict Anderson and Ernst Gellner, nationalism and nationness were invented in the eighteenth-century Europe. Both Anderson and Gellner defend for nationalism as the political form suitable for contemporary world and society. Nationalism, according to Anderson, is a product of "print-capitalism." When nationalism was spread with print-languages, the colonized subject recognized his identity as certain imagined community. Yet the languages are involved in another problem: "For the post-colonial to speak or write in the imperial tongues is to call forth a problem of identity, to be thrown into mimicry and ambivalence. The question of language for post-colonialism is political, cultural and literary [...] in the material sense that a choice of language is choice of identity" (During 1995: 125-26). The complexity of language and identity then would be displayed as follows.

This thesis is divided into three chapters except introduction and conclusion. In Chapter One, I will begin argumentation from the perspective of language, which Shirley Lim values beyond all things. The reason why the poet bears the language problem in mind can be cast back to her childhood upbringing. She was affected by the English language to an extreme degree since she was a little girl. Thereupon we will have a quick look at her family background and the environment she grew up in. Under the postcolonial social atmosphere and circumstance, which is a multiethnic,

multicultural, and multilingual society, language naturally becomes a political tool to distinguish identities. In order to choose a “potential international identity” for the children, Lim’s father chose English as her first language. Thus English turns into a part of her body—tongue—throughout her lifetime. She describes the feeling, process, and experience of learning English via poetry over and over again. Here I adopt Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s formulation of language to explain the choice of language of Lim’s father, which later becomes hers. In talking about what a minor literature is, Deleuze and Guattari in the meantime analyze the four functions of language: vehicular, vernacular, referential, mythic. Her father’s wish to send the children to the world’s stage by English conforms to the what Deleuze and Guattari term “vehicular” language. Yet things were not as simple as people like Lim’s father thought. English is the colonizer’s language; it is manipulated by the Caucasians to include/exclude the colonized. Unavoidably colonizers would have a sense of white superiority. Besides, English was starting to decline in the postcolonial era of Malaysia. The development of language in a postcolonial nation could be classified as three stages, according to Lim. The literature of the colonized tends to be imitative of the colonizer’s in the first stage; then writers free themselves from the shadow of colonizers and seek for national themes showing patriotism. The postcolonial Malaysia was in the middle of stepping from stage one to two. Because of national consciousness, the elevation of Malay driven by Malaysian government was imperative. Judging by the situation at that time, everything under that kind of social aura was involved with politics, and literature was without exception. Based upon Deleuze and Guattari’s definitions of minor literature, the postcolonial Malaysian literature in English language undoubtedly could be deemed as a minor literature. Shirley Lim was one of the writers of minor literature brewed that time. Writers of English language also made efforts to incorporate “vernacular” language to

make sure their position and to show their concern for national identity. The displacement of colonist language, however, was inescapable and English-language writers in Malaysia were bound to be marginalized. Having English as her mother tongue, Lim came across unprecedented anti-English pressure and wave. The pros and cons of legitimacy of English in Malaysia became a hot subject of debate. As a consequence, Chinese Malaysian writers in English were faced with the ambivalent situation and harsh accusation. Lim benefited from English, fell in love with English, but she felt betrayed in the end. She virtually was both a sacrifice and a banished of national politics. So if she had stayed longer in Malaysia, she surely had to give up her favorite. When she was in struggle, meanwhile, the terrible May 13 riots broke out. She thus chose to leave her homeland for America to be a “voluntary exile.” Yet even if she came to America, nostalgia kept haunting her. She was psychically crossing over the borderline between Asia and West. To expound this condition, I will use Deleuze and Guattari’s “nomad” notion. In other words, we will view how a writer and language in exile resolve this nomad problem.

Chapter Two focuses on Shirley Lim’s migrancy, which leads to the shift of her identity. I begin the discussion with the history of Chinese migration, to Malaya in chief, which has much to do with the poet’s background. Her ancestral migration from China and her own experience of moving in Malaya result in the inevitability of diaspora. And because the disharmony between Chinese and Malaysians was inveterate, once Malay people took hold of the government, the administrators decreed to resist more Chinese immigrant population. The tension between Chinese and Malaysians was inflammable and then the May 13 riots erupted. The act of violence has severely smashed up Chinese’s dream of a complete national future and many Chinese people had no choice but to leave this heartbroken place. In order to explicitly illustrate the status of those migrated Chinese people, one of whom was the

poet, I consider Edward Said's classification of people in exile very detailed and accurate: refugee, exile, expatriate, émigré. As for the expatriate, I even take Lim's elaborate self-explanation of expats and expatriates to make the whole argumentation more solid. In short, the exiled people could roughly be separated into two types: involuntary exile and voluntary exile. The poet herself belongs to both sets, in my exposition, and we will have a better understanding of the poet's belonging in depth. Like every traveler residing in a strange land, Lim's nostalgia took her to and fro on the map of her mind. Consequently, many poems were written to show her mindset. She gives an account that her unaccommodation led to nostalgia, and nostalgia caused nomadism, which can be seen as a chained reaction. The process of consenting to or dissenting from her particular identity was really a torment. Since there is no fixed identity suitable for Lim, I borrow Aihwa Ong's "flexible citizenship" to describe this condition and make it as a key to solve the problem. In addition, I also have recourse to Caren Kaplan's explication and application of Deleuze and Guattari's "rhizome" in picturing Lim's case. The poet in the end finds out the solution to define home and to make oneself at home. I will lay out the resolution in the second chapter as well.

The attention of Chapter Three is extended to the intriguing problem of ethnicity. I would launch this chapter with two anthropologists' theories as a back-up in discussing ethnicity. In the history of development of ethnicity, both of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner are oftentimes compared for they play an influential role in the field of nationalism. I insist on discussing Anderson and Gellner because ethnicity has something to do with nationalism: nationalism originates from ethnicity/nation. So Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Gellner's *Nationals and Nationalism* are valuable references in nation study. Besides, I would quote Thomas Hylland Eriksen's ethnicity research to decipher its beginning and subsequence.

After probing into the originality of ethnicity and nation, I then adduce David Brown's clarification of two sorts of nation theories: primordialism and situationalism. I compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of both primordialist and situationalist approaches and find out the two ought to be complementary. Next, I integrate all of the discourse mentioned above to be a good joint of theories and the poems. Inasmuch as ethnicity is the core in the third chapter, the significant historical event—the May 13 riots—deserve a further and deeper depiction than the previous two chapters. That atrocity might result from Malay people's willing to die for their own nation. The Malays wanted to expel the Chinese, who competed for the land with them. Taking James Clifford's notion, hereby I make a comparison of the heterogeneity and homogeneity of the diasporist (Chinese) and autochthonist (Malays). Malaysians were influenced a lot because of the violence and trauma brought by the May 13 event, and so was Shirley Lim. She was forced to leave that environment of unrest but she could not cut off her umbilical cord after stepping on a foreign land. Her life in America inevitably took her thought wandering between Asia and America. Here I invoke Ling-chi Wang's analysis of various Chinese identities: the concept of "gen (root)." I come up with a judgment that Lim was at first the type of "shigen (uprooted)" then the "luodi shenggen (accommodation)" when she was in America. In the process from "shigen" to "luodi shenggen," nonetheless, Lim still suffered from the spatial anxiety of the American. For instance, she encountered many difficulties in daily life, such as naturalization test, job application, or in academia. But finally she has figured out a way to tackle it: writing to form her literary ethnicity.

Reading Lim's story and poetry is like reading modern Asian history of (post)colonialization. This book of poetry collection, *Monsoon History*, faithfully records her continual migrancy and how she traces out the "home." Her

transnational identity and sense of displacement, seen in her poetry, stem from the fluidity of cross-cultural ex/change, either geographically or psychologically. We also will see how Lim deconstructs the power relationships and the borderland of the West and Asia, and what is going on with the re-acting and re-visioning of Asian/Chinese American literature and the re-shaping and re-mapping of the territory as well. As a matter of fact, many contemporary Asian American writers have immigrated more than once. Especially after the 1960s, the second immigration even increases the mobility of immigrants and instability of borderlines. Owing to the locus of home varying easily, the idea of home has converted into impossibility. The impossibility of home and the history of Asian immigrants, particularly Chinese immigrants, are closely related to Western colonialism, modern Chinese history, and the rise of ASEAN nationalism. The poet Shirley Lim is exactly the representative of Asian/Chinese American writer shuttling among different locales. We have to read her in the grain of poetics of diaspora so that we could understand how the poet takes care of themes like language, immigrants, diasporic identity, ethnicity, culture, Chineseness, and home. This thesis is based upon the poetics of diaspora to read Lim's poetry, and it attempts to build up a framework of poetics of diaspora for researches on Asian/Chinese American literature.

## Chapter I

### Disclosing the Modern Secrets: On Shirley Lim and Her Language in Exile

With the complicated ethnic background, Shirley Geok-lin Lim is an entangled yarn roll for us to unravel. Her grandfather was one of those males who had gone to Malaya to be a labor immigrant, with no education and social rank, from southern part of China at the beginning of the twentieth century. The life of Lim's grandfather, in her words, "repeats the myth of immigrant Chinese heroes" (Lim 1997: 18). Her father grew up in an environment of Chinese education and Confucianism but was attracted by Western culture;<sup>3</sup> her mother was a *nonya*, a Malaya-born Chinese woman.<sup>4</sup> Her father spoke mainly in Hokkien while her mother's language was *baba* Malay—the Malay spoken by assimilated Chinese.<sup>5</sup> Owing to the fact that the land and the history had been invaded by many different races, people living in Malaysia must be confronted with intermingled cultures. Before Malaysia gained its independence, it went through all the vicissitudes and went under various influences of imperial colonizers such as Portuguese, Dutch, British, and Japanese.

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<sup>3</sup> Shirley Lim once observes her father's unique personal conduct in family upbringing: "Baba grew up as an irresponsible child, loving Western popular culture, within a Confucianist-gated community" (Lim 1997: 36). She also recalls, "When I study the few photographs I have of him as a young man, it becomes clear how differently he saw himself from his older Chinese-educated brothers" (Lim 1997: 20). "Father's imagination was possessed by Western images," she portrays her father as such (Lim 1997: 21).

<sup>4</sup> The *peranakan*, which means native Malayan Chinese speaking in Malay, has assimilated into Malay culture. Female *peranakan* is called *nonya* and male *baba*. Hence the *peranakan* is diverse from recent Chinese immigrants. The majority of the *peranakan* usually cannot speak Chinese, though they still preserve the Chinese ancestral customs, manners, or religions, and they still deem themselves as Chinese posterity. Shirley Lim informs us that "the term 'peranakan' is used widely in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia to refer to groups of immigrant origin who have settled for at least three generations in these countries and who have become acculturated in a predominantly Malay society. [...] group of ethnic Chinese first established in Malacca, then spreading to Singapore and Penang, with a specific ethnic identity expressed through an integration of Chinese religious practices with the Malay language, Malay dress and Malay food styles" (Lim 1985: 51). Since the *peranakan* community in Indonesia has differed gradually from that in Malaysia and Singapore, the term should be assumed of Malaysian or Singaporean property throughout my argumentation.

<sup>5</sup> Hokkien is "the Min dialect from the Fujien Province" (Lim 1997: 11) in southern part of Mainland China.

In this postcolonial situation, language is one of the obvious flags to indicate one's ethnicity. In other words, within this multilingual milieu, language symbolizes the distinctive boundary to demarcate the territory for different ethnic groups. What makes Lim a complicated figure, however, is that she avoids speaking Hokkien and *baba* Malay, spoken by her father and mother; instead, her first language is—English.<sup>6</sup> This seems to be weird but according to what she says in one of the essays in her book *Writing S.E./Asia in English*:

Chinese Malaysians, rejecting both Malay and Chinese cultural nationalisms based on paradigms of racial descent, assent to an international language that opens the future for themselves and their children. These Malaysians, in choosing the future over the past, [...] are choosing a potential international identity formation over national identity politics that reinscribe ancient tribal feuds and territorial imperatives. They are choosing the potential open border of immigration over the already closed boundary of the nation-state. (47)

Hence it is understandable that as a Chinese Malaysian, all Lim's father wishes is a promising future and a respectable identity of his children despite his heritage bond. Speaking English as the first language, Lim represents herself differently from Chinese, Malayan, and other peoples; she might gain the opportunity to be integrated

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<sup>6</sup> Shirley Lim has ever explained her antipathy toward Hokkien and the reason for not continuing to speak Hokkien and *baba* Malay at the age of five or six in her memoir: "I heard Hokkien as an infant and resisted it, because my mother did not speak it to me. This language of the South Chinese people will always be an ambivalent language for me, calling into question the notion of a mother tongue tied to a racial origin. [...] Instead, when I speak Hokkien, it is at the level of a five-year-old. [...] It [Hokkien] remains at a more powerful level a language of exclusion, the speech act which disowns me in my very place of birth. Chinese-speaking Malaysians called me a "Kelangia-kwei,"—or a Malay devil—because I *could not* or *would not* speak Hokkien. Instead I spoke Malay, my mother's language. My *peranakan* mother had nursed me in Malay. [...] And once I was six and in a British school, I would speak chiefly English, in which I became "fluent," like a drop of rain returning to a river, or a fish thrown back into a sea. Hokkien had never been a language of familiarity, affection, and home for me (Lim 1997: 11)." Her confession thus reveals in full why she discarded Hokkien and *baba* Malay and then that English serves as her first language at the very early age.

into the English society. So the first step her father took when Lim was born is to name her after a blonde child—Shirley, a Hollywood child actress’s name.<sup>7</sup> After having the child getting on the “vehicle” of English language, Lim’s father expects that

momentum of vocabularies (could)  
 carry the child  
 to foreign countries,  
 to families of strangers. (“Learning English,” Lim 1994: xxiii)

Once this child gets on the “vehicle,” she is infatuated with it. Lim makes her wonderful experience of learning English parallel to that of learning to drive, as if the “car” could take her anywhere. As a matter of fact, this is what she imagines in her mind and how firmly she believes in learning this language in her infancy, even nowadays as a grown-up:

It was like learning  
 to let go and to hold on:  
 a slow braking, shifting  
 gears, an engine  
 of desire on a downhill  
 slope.

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<sup>7</sup> Lim vividly tells the story about her name at the very beginning of her memoir: “Shirley, after Shirley Temple. Because we both had dimples. Because Baba had loved her in the movies in the 1930s. I knew the story of my name. ‘It’s your dimples,’ Baba told me from the beginning. ‘You just look like Shirley Temple.’ I thought Shirley Temple was an untidy child, burnt brown, with straight black hair, a Hollywood star whose fame ensures my own as a Chinese girl. The first time I saw the child actress in the 1934 movie ‘Bright Eyes,’ [...] I know the details now: golden hair, blue eyes, [...]. It remains a mystery to me what strange racial yearnings moved Baba to name me after a blond child. I’d like to think he was not tied to the fixities of race and class, that this presumption was less colonized mimicry than bold experiment. [...] he never called me anything but Shirley, a Hollywood name for a daughter for whom he wished, despite everything his heritage dictated, a life freer than his own. [...] It was the name Baba had given me out of his fantasy of the West, what he saw when he saw me for the first time, his only daughter, with dimples, in a Hollywood halo” (Lim 1997: 2-4). She gives a very detailed account for the origin of her name—Shirley. So, “Shirley” stands for not only a Western name, the language of the West, but also a magnificent dream and future that a Chinese father entrusted to.

In her memory, Lim acts like a fairly natural driver at the sight of her “car.” The “desire” inside her totally manifests itself on learning the two things, the language and driving, which are essentially the same in her eyes. Thus this can also prove that how much her father has given thought to the matter—to put his babe in the baby walker of English language, the carriage, to take her to “technologies of empire” someday in the future (Lim 1994: xxiii). And she seems to control it very well.

The father’s wish fits in with one model of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari invoke the linguistic study of Henri Gobard, who designates four language models, in their innovative reading of Kafka.<sup>8</sup> This tetralinguistic model is delineated by function, in which the vehicular language operates within the urban, governmental or commercial realms.<sup>9</sup> Counting upon its disseminating and permeating ability, the English language unrestrainedly passes to and fro the domain of businesses, commerce, bureaucracy, government, urbanization, and civilization, by that Deleuze and Guattari argue “a language of the first sort of deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 23). Within the spatiotemporal frames of the languages, the “vehicular language” is said to be “*everywhere*” by Deleuze and Guattari. The evidence of being “everywhere” lies in that “English has become the worldwide vehicular language for today’s world” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 24). This is to

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<sup>8</sup> In their discussion of language models, Deleuze and Guattari mention Henri Gobard’s proposition of tetralinguistic model. Actually, that proposition of language models grounds itself on Ferguson and Gumperz’s research, which is the study of the functions of language across different languages. Thereupon Deleuze and Guattari rely on the study of the functions of varied languages to demonstrate “social factors, relations of force, diverse centers of power” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 23).

<sup>9</sup> The tetralinguistic model contains four functions of language: vernacular, vehicular, referential, and mythic. As Deleuze and Guattari expound, “vernacular” language is “maternal, or territorial language, used in rural communities or rural in its origins;” “vehicular” language is “urban, governmental, even worldwide language, a language of businesses, commercial exchange, bureaucratic transmission, and so on;” “referential” language is “language of sense and of culture, entailing a cultural reterritorialization;” “mythic” language is “on the horizon of cultures, caught up in a spiritual or religious reterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 23). They also further illustrate the spatiotemporal distribution of these languages: “vernacular language is *here*; vehicular language is *everywhere*; referential language is *over there*; mythic language is *beyond*.” At this juncture, the distribution of the English language, determined by historical, cultural, and national location, and also its universal usage and passage, falls into the pattern of vehicular language.

say, learning English is like holding a boarding pass of the “vehicle” to the Western world.

But is it really that simple as Lim and her father think about? Is it possible that it could be a unilateral willingness toward their preference, English, without any interference? By all means the English language of Caucasians indeed affects some Chinese Malaysian’s notion that this language is a crucial demarcation of inclusion/exclusion by the Caucasians, and Lim’s father is one of them under this influence. On the other hand, the British colonizers have affirmatively claimed that English language is their exclusive language. Lim tries to elucidate the colonizer’s sense of white superiority, which has kept cautioning the colonized that:

We had grown up in a compulsory language system, but, as if to strip us of all language, we were constantly reminded that this language did not belong to us. [...] that English was only on loan, a borrowed tongue which we could only garble. (Lim 1997: 121)

This case lays out that the colonizer is anxious and arrogant to display his dominant power and to distinguish the linguistic, cultural and political terrain via language. The colonized thus is similar to Caliban, a subhuman monster of mimicry in Shakespeare’s famous play *The Tempest*, that he is compelled to learn Prospero’s language, the master language, to make himself understood and acceptable. This sample marks out the colonizer’s contradictory complex. The colonizer depends on the language to dominate and incorporate the colonized while he knows well that once the colonized learns his language, the colonized is bound to manipulate the tool to “curse” him, the colonizer. Caliban, in rebelling against his master, gives the seditious speech that “You taught me language; and my profit on’t / Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!” (Shakespeare 1968: I. ii. 363-65). Such imprecation turns out to be what Rudyard Kipling called

“the white men’s burden,” for the empire has come to know the evil consequence of its “civilizing mission” (Lee 2004: 3). The “burden” just derived from the prevalence of social Darwinism in nineteenth century, which is also the ground sill of imperialism’s aggrandizement. Not only English language but also English literature is considered by the English people as their own property and instrument. To borrow from Shirley Lim’s own experience, the discrimination of the British and the discrepancy between the colonizers and the colonized is pretty perceptible. Her teachers coming from Cambridge and Oxford had warned the students, of whom Lim is one, against studying English literature. They said something like this: “You haven’t grown up in the British Isles—it’s impossible for you to get the idioms of the Lake District to appreciate Wordsworth. Or Scottish dialect to understand Burns. Midlands speech for Hardy. British history for Shakespeare. English gentility for Austen” (Lim 1994a: 5). The snobbishness and insolence of white men thus is self-evident.

Nevertheless, this situation takes a sudden turn since the declaration of Malayan independence in 1957. The influence of the English language, i.e., the colonist language which had been used for hundreds of years in the administration, begins to decline with the strengthening and expansion of the use of Malay. During the process of nationalization, the development of modern Malaysian culture accelerates rapidly. English speakers and people who speak the indigenous languages apparently live under two divergent atmospheres and bear distinct treatments from then.<sup>10</sup> In her discussion of Singaporean literature in English,<sup>11</sup> Lim adopts those

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<sup>10</sup> Here the indigenous languages stand for baba Malay, Tamil, and Mandarin, which are spoken by the three main groups of people in Malaysia.

<sup>11</sup> “Singapore shares a common literary history with Malaysia until 1965 when it separated from Malaysia to form an independent state” (Lim 1989: 30). So that is why Singaporean and Malaysian literature and their use of language are often placed on a par when critics discuss the two countries’ phases of development of language and literature. I also take this perspective in the whole thesis.

postcolonial literature critics' theory and proves that Singapore has undergone a process of advancement that similar to Australia, Canada, and the West Indies. There are three stages of the evolution of a postcolonial nation in chief. The first stage is precisely expounded in the previous paragraph: the literature of the colonized tends to be imitative of the mother colony's literature. The established practice and rules of the colonist's literature cannot be disposed of and the colonized is bound to write in the shadow of the big tree of the colonizers. Perhaps the writers in the colony can never catch sight of the subtlety and mystery of the trunk, or even the leaves, of the proper English literature for their entire life, because in the light of the accustomed pomposity of the westerners, what those subaltern write is without an appeal to refined taste and is unpresentable at all.

Here comes the second stage—when writers enthusiastically turn to local color and nationalistic themes. After the 1969 racial riots,<sup>12</sup> an embarrassing and doleful event in Malaysia, the consciousness of Malaysian's national identity swells. The Malaysian government begins to introspect and to formulate several national policies aimed to further strengthen racial solidarity. For example, the government decrees that Bahasa Malaysia<sup>13</sup> should be used as the main medium of instruction in all universities.<sup>14</sup> The social and political background must be noted because of its

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<sup>12</sup> On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1969, the native Malaysians organized a parade against Chinese Malaysians in Kuala Lumpur. Unfortunately, the parade turned out to be an outbreak of violence. Many Chinese were killed. The direct cause of this event might be the long-term unbalanced and unresolved problems of language, education, and culture between the two ethnic groups in Malaysia. The riot ignited the capital Kuala Lumpur and the surrounding state of Selangor, but except minor disturbances in Melaka (Malacca) the rest of the country was spared. A nationwide state of emergency and accompanying curfew were declared on May 16, but the curfew was rescinded even in central Kuala Lumpur within a week. This incident also led to the elevation of the Malay language above others: while English was the main language of instruction in schools before, Malay replaced it gradually over time. The excuse for this was to promote national unity under one language, but this decision led to repercussions of its own and eventually in 2002 the government decided to return English as the pedagogical medium for Science and Mathematics. Thereupon, Tee Kim Tong points out: "The impact or political aftermath of the 1969 riots, so far the most serious one, on the nation and society is greater than expected. It is a watershed in the development of Malaysia" (Tee 1999: 4).

<sup>13</sup> Bahasa means "language" in Malay. So Bahasa Malaysia refers to the Malay language.

<sup>14</sup> With regard to the Malaysian government legislation to ensure the Malay language's high official

impact on writers, on the language they use, and on the readers. Generally, Malaysian authors were educated either in Bahasa Malaysia or English or both in the transition stage in the 1950s and 1960s. Their choice of language is a key factor of how the writers can survive, which means their choice is indicative of their actual readers, or more accurately, the readers that they expect. Such decision could be regarded as taking measures to local circumstances and current political situation. In this case, the change of writing strategy is the thoroughly political nature of a “minor literature,” which is one of the definitions offered by Deleuze and Guattari: the second characteristic of a “minor literature,” according to Deleuze and Guattari, is its political nature. “Everything in them is political,” they explain. The individual is inextricable from the social milieu; the subject is linked to the political arena: “Its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating in it” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 17). In other words, writers would see how the wind blows and steer their ships to the right direction—the Malaysian national consciousness, in this regard, to associate with the whole milieu. Then what do the writers take the initiative to evolve, to form a new postcolonial writing environment, and to call attention to local audiences?

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position, Tee has ever displayed the explicit history of how the affair developed. “When Malaya achieved independence in 1957, it set as its goal to make Malay as the sole national language ten years from then. So in 1967, the National Language Bill was passed in the Dewan Rakyat. With the enforcement of this law, the use of English as a pedagogical medium was limited and the date of its termination was set. Moreover, the 1971 National Culture Congress has announced the official policy of making literature written in Bahasa, the national language of the country, the sole candidate of National Literature, denouncing literatures in other languages used in different communities as sectional or communal literatures, and depriving Malaysian writers using other languages their right of being nominated *Sasterawan Negara/National Writer*” (Tee 1999: 7). Besides, when discussing Malaysian national literature and its audience, Anwar Ridhwan also delivers a crucial time division to understand this postcolonial phenomenon: “During the process of nationalization, the period between 1969 to 1983 is the most important period in the development of modern Malaysian culture. [...] 1983 was important because from that year onwards, all universities in Malaysia used Bahasa Malaysia as their medium of instruction, thus completing the National Education Policy that gives priority to Bahasa Malaysia from the lowest level to the university. [...] After 1983, we can conclude that the number of citizens skilled in Bahasa Malaysia exceeded those who master the English language” (Ridhwan 1994: 69).

Incorporating the mother tongue, particularly Bahasa Malaysia, into their works would be the English-language Malaysian writers' tactic to be faced with the current situation and to demonstrate their nationalistic ideology toward the country. Despite the political feature mentioned, what does matter for the writers is to declare their positions, native writers with absolute "local color."<sup>15</sup> For such "native writers" in English, there makes no difference from other writers in Malaysia except the choice of language. The local English-language writing closely reflects the sociopolitical and material reality. Besides, they use local references and images as many as possible; details are drawn from acute observations of Malayan life. They seek to posit themselves and their texts within the Malayan context, using the everyday Malay speech in the poetic diction to add variety to English writing. So far as the English-language writers in the postcolonial Malaysia are concerned, they all grew up in the complicated upbringing interwoven by social, political, historical, and cultural elements, and one of whom is Shirley Lim indeed. The approach those native writers take appropriately conforms to another function of the tetralinguistic model. Their attempt to include the "vernacular language" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 23) in their texts is a territorialized act because the vernacular language also refers to the maternal or territorial language, and functions within the rural realm, say, the vernacular language is a language of territorialization. They anticipate themselves to be accepted by the Malay readers through the action of including the vernacular language. They do all these because they still identify themselves with the native

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<sup>15</sup> The emphasis on local color is seen as a counter-tradition against the orientation toward "Western ideals aesthetic and grammatical standards, stylistic and formal achievement derived wholly from the canon and traditions of British and American literature" (Lim 1989a: 534). "This counter-tradition is seen in the attempt to use English in its local varieties (the three varieties of "Singlish" based on Chinese, Malay, and Indian idiolects—and code mixing), often with an emphasis on local color, social observations, and socio-political comments or criticism," Lim further explains. She also gives a few examples of which writers deliberately form the counter-tradition: "A few writers clearly write from the counter-tradition—the young Wang Gungwu and Ee Tian Hong, Catherine Lim, and dramatists such as Robert Yeo and Stella Kon." Writers mentioned above are tied up with "local color" to create their Malayan identity by making Malayanized English varieties.

land. The most obvious distinction, in short, is determined by the language presented to the readers.

Certainly, Malaysian literature written in English has been brought closely together with the concern for national identity over the decades of, especially, post-independence Malaysia. The complexity involved is intensified by the fact that English is an acquired second language, rather than the first language, of the writers themselves. Choosing a colonial and non-native tongue to write is fraught with difficulties and struggles within a multicultural and pluralistic social context of rich national consciousness. As with the withdrawal of colonialism and the shaping of marginalized communities, Malaysian writers in English were shouldering a significant task of creating a place for themselves. Otherwise, the space for them to articulate surely will shrink until they disappear with the rising national consciousness. English, once the predominant language of administration, is now no longer hegemonic enough because people who speak the local and national language—Malay—feel greater ease and more liberty than they do English. As we can see, Malaysia resembles any postcolonial, post-independent country that goes through the loss and recovery of indigenous cultures and language. By the same token, the displacement of colonialist language is an inexorable trend in other postcolonial countries. “In many Third World countries, the replacement of a post-colonial foreign tongue with a reviving native voice signifies the rise of nativism” (Tee 1999: 3). People’s receptivity of English or Malaysian literature written in English would not be compelled because of British authoritative colonial intervention. The move downward from common administrative language to a language used by an urban minority has meant that users and writers of English have become increasingly marginalized; furthermore, English might stand alongside other local vernaculars like Tamil or Chinese as *lingua franca*.

However, many, though not all, of the English speakers in Malaysia are non-Malays and non-white, Chinese for example, who may have little access to their own mother tongues. Most of them probably prefer instead the internationality of English as a means of effective communication, although they are to a degree familiar with Malay as the medium of communication locally. And Shirley Lim is exactly one of the residents in this complex language environment among Chinese Malaysians in the first half of her life. Chinese Malaysian doubtlessly would incur more identity and language problems than pure Malaysians. As a Chinese Malaysian, Lim is expected to speak Chinese (or Chinese vernacular—Hokkien), but she doesn't. She is able to speak her mother tongue baba Malay; however, she wouldn't. She gives her reason:

If Bahasa is seen as an instrument for empowering one racial group and consequently for disempowering the Chinese Malaysians, the language itself may rouse strong feelings of disaffiliation, to be used only when necessary. The same Chinese Malaysians may turn to the language of descent to express their resistance to a national formation that appears to erase their identity. (Lim 1994a: 46-47)

Such an arduous problem, embodied in the discourse of national language, dogs the immigrant communities of Chinese descents in Malaya/Malaysia from time to time.

Those who resort to English are of course unfavorably regarded by Malaysians that they have no sense of rootedness in this land. The fact is that such Chinese Malaysians have never resolved the problem their migrant fathers or mothers encountered earlier. Estrangement and alienation thus propagate between Chinese and Malaysians. English thereupon serves quite well to carry the ideas and metaphors of alienation and exclusion occurring in the migrant Chinese community. For the Chinese Malaysian writers in English, the ideas of isolation are amplified in the content of the writing itself, which is usually to do with the migrant consciousness struggling

for integration and authenticity. Writing from the fringe of the arena of languages, the Malaysian English-language Chinese writers have finally come to realization and insight of their location, as well as English's, in the Malaysian setting. There are always binary opinions to form a tug of war: one questions the legitimate usage of English as a writing medium in Malaysia; the other defends for the propriety and convenience of English and even the worship of English. Lim has ever mentioned in one of her essays about Wang Gungwu that he could be an epitome and representative for the Chinese Malay(si)an writers in English:<sup>16</sup>

Wang was proficient in Mandarin, Malay, and English. When he talked about language choice, he meant an actual choice among languages. He could have [...] chosen to write poetry in Malay or Mandarin. But he wrote English-language poems because he believed the English language was the most *appropriate* choice for a society in a hurry to form a new national consciousness, and probably for all the same reasons given today: that it is a bridge language, a neutral language, an international language, and so forth. (Lim 1989: 35; emphasis mine)

But during that era of booming national identity, the climate of public voice was almost overwhelmingly supportive of de-Englishization. Writers may assemble together in a conference to proclaim out loud that:

To write in English is to be drawn into the English tradition; and thus away from the Malayan context (leading to) a problem of alienation and that to write in English is to write in a borrowed tongue, and this inhibits

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<sup>16</sup> Wang Gungwu, whose collection of poems—*Pulse*—appeared in 1950, was one of the chief figures of the first generation English-language poets in Singapore. Oliver Seet and Lim Thean Soon were also known for their poems at that time. These three poets all attended the University of Malaya in Singapore in 1949, the year the school was established. In fact, Wang played a principal and an active role in the English literary community in Malaya because “English literature in Malaya since Wang Gungwu had attempted to manifest a cultural nationalism by representing images of local landscape and choosing diction of local color” (Tee 1999: 7-8).

the vigorous growth of Malayan writing.

The tragedy of second-tongue poets — is that they need always to be excused for their linguistic miscegenation. (Lim 1989: 35)

Facing such a serious indictment, the Chinese Malay(si)an English-language writers are caught in an ambivalent situation. For them, their concern for native themes has long remained obsessively in their mind. Their writing has based itself on the resources of Malayan tradition except the language. So writers like Wang Gungwu or Ee Tian Hong, according to Lim's analysis, sought after a compromising way to "deliberately use Malayan images and Malayan subjects," i.e., to make a "synthetic invention of a poetic diction incorporating words and phrases from Malay and Chinese in Malayanized English variety" in order to "create a Malayan consciousness" (Lim 1989a: 525, 534). So for the Chinese-ethnic English-language writers in Malaysia, "the *peranakan* identity" would be the better "paradigm" to define themselves (Lim 1985: 51). But as we all know, the serious language problem still can even cause so severe accusation against English-language writers that the poetics of English would never possibly replace those of Malay.

In spite of the complicated political significance of learning English, the Chinese Malaysians have "invested their desire for country affiliation in their children's English education" and they seem "adapted to colonial education with a ferocious ease" (Lim 1997: 87). It is under this kind of circumstance that Lim benefits from the colonial education and parents' expectations in the postcolonial period. She begins to write poems in English in her early age, to learn "'Englit'—Britain's canon of great English works" although "there could be no easy future in the context of postcolonial politics" (Lim 1997: 121). From then, she has kept making every effort to present herself as a Chinese Malay(si)an writer in English. Her perseverance is fairly astonishing that she shows high loyalty to English from beginning to end. She

devotes all her life to English as if “English” were her lifelong lover. “Her sense of pride in her mastery of the English-language” and her passion for English, however, were just the very contrast of the flourishing anti-English political aura in Malaysia during the sixties (Tee 1999: 6; 2003: 202). Her fidelity for English, like a soldier pledges allegiance to his country, has resulted in the last outcome she wants to see. She feels she was betrayed by her beloved mate in her poem “Lament”:

I have been faithful  
 To you, my language,  
 Language of my dreams,  
 My sex, my laughter, my curses. [...]  
 How often have you  
 Betrayed me, faithless! [...]

I have been faithful  
 Only to you,  
 My language. I choose you  
 Before country, [...]  
 Although everyone knows  
 You are not mine. (Lim 1994: 56-7)

“You are not mine” simply brings the thought of the speaker, which implies a mistress, to the public that it is unlikely to have a formal marriage with the one she is deeply in love. Lim compares herself to the mistress speaker that she is now caught in an embarrassing predicament. Although she chooses “him” before “country,” before “lover and husband,” “he” [English] still

Disowned me [her] – a woman  
 You could never marry,

Whom you have tired

Of long ago.

The mistress finally realized the truth “till fools have called me [her] / fool” because “they wink knowingly / at my [her] stupidity —.” With full-hearted adoration toward her lover, what she does at the end are all in vain, no wonder she would “lament.” Tee has ever asserted that the English language of white men no longer glistens with the arrival of Malaysia independence and the end of colonial era. Those Malaysians in reign know very well that decolonization and enhancing Malayan culture are the chief important jobs, which means political correctness matters more than the ideal of multiculturalism, even if English still plays a role in Malaysian society, and many of them are the actual beneficiaries of English education.

Making Bahasa Malaysia as the major and official language is the symbol of and the key to revive Malayan nationalism. A Malay slogan “bahasa jiwa bangsa” can even reveal how much the Malaysian government and people pay attention to the issue of language.<sup>17</sup> As we clearly know, the mistress that Lim speaks behind is nothing but a metaphor. Her real purpose is to declare that English is going to fall out of this nation. It is not “English” which forsakes her but the trend and policy of the nation. She, as well as other Chinese Malay(si)an writers in English, turns out to be the victim of national politics. She is not only a victim, but also a banished. Until then, those native Chinese Malaysians have all become foreigners from China, the scapegoats. They are not welcome in the land. That is why Lim sighs:

I stranger, foreigner,

Claiming rights to

What I have no right –

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<sup>17</sup> “Language is the soul of a nation.” (Tee 2003a: 6)

## Sacrifice, tongue

Broken by fear. ("Lament," Lim 1994: 57)

Hence she is considered a foreigner and she has to renounce what she originally claimed right to, i.e., to sacrifice her Malaysian citizenship as an English speaker because of strong sociopolitical pressure and wave that time. What she sacrifices is her favorite, English, as if she is losing possession of land. The loss of land might be the most miserable thing for a person who looks for stability and settling down. And worst of all, a person without home should also have her tongue broken by fear at the same time. A person without tongue surely cannot speak. If the country announced the legitimacy of Bahasa Malaysia, it appears people like Lim would be mute because they had their tongue cut. The tongue-cutting fear derives from indigenous Malaysian people's hostility, which led to the serious May 13 riots in 1969. On the other hand, Lim was also afraid of the second betrayal of her favorite—English. After all, once bitten by a snake, one shies at a coiled rope for the next ten years, in terms of a noted Chinese proverb. The sense of deprivation had already spread among English-language Chinese writers in Malaysia. Therefore, she chose to leave this heartbroken/tonguebroken place for the United States at the same year, with the trauma brought by the May 13 riots.

Yet the similar language identity still haunted Shirley Lim even she flew to America. Lim went to America for her postgraduate studies and gained a Ph.D. degree. After graduation, she was facing the dilemma of returning to her hometown or staying in America. She made a decision, which might be of the most influence in her life, to be a voluntary exile. By a voluntary exile she means to stay away from the once motherland, which is now so alienated to her. The motherland does not protect her anymore or any other non-Malays. She is made completely a stranger if she goes back to the country. Besides, Lim loves English, and the main language of

communication generally for most of the people in the United States is no other than English. Living in an English-speaking country is all she aspires since the independence of Malaysia. She would feel just like fish back in water if she were surrounded by English language. Most important of all, living in an English environment, speaking in English, listening to English, writing in English, or doing whatever things in English are crucial steps for her to identify herself with the foreign land and make herself recognized by people. So she explains her determination: “Claiming English as my own was my first step out of the iron cage and into a voice, and who is to say it is not my language and not my voice?” (Lim 1994a: 6).

Her determination, however, did not seem to work out the resolution of the problem that kept obsessing her for so long. Though she wished to do everything in English, things tended to get the opposite of what she wanted. Even though she intended to merge into the American society, she still could not get rid of the fact that she is a Chinese Malaysian. She simply could not break the blood bond of Chinese or Malaysian ancestry. She blabs a load on her mind to show the embarrassing “modern secrets”: “Last night I dreamt in *Chinese*” (“Modern Secrets,” Lim 1994: 45; emphasis mine). But the very next day when “I” wake up, “I” find myself: “Eating Yankee shredded wheat / I said in *English*.” Indeed, “I” am still living in the real world—the English world but the dream obviously affects the fictional “I” a lot. “I” cannot deny my ancestral relations so the dream keeps bothering me and takes me to the early age of “I.” All of the past memories of “I,” when “I” was still a little child, come back to me distinctly. “I” see scenes on the screen of dream/mind show:

The sallow child

Ate rice from its ricebowl

And hides still in the cupboard

With the china and tea-leaves. (Lim 1994: 45)

Every image from the dream associates itself with China style. This is certainly an ironical dream because “I,” as a Chinese descendant but cannot speak Chinese, eat cereal and speak English everyday and “I” had forgot my Chinese identity as time passes. The remaining memories “I” have and the repeated images appearing in the dream are those signifiers such as a sallow child, rice(bowl), and the china and tea-leaves in the cupboard. For many years, the secrets had been hidden in the cupboard/mind of “I” in order to assimilate myself into the English culture. As a matter of fact, all diasporic Chinese share the same “modern secrets” because the secrets perplex them constantly. Every time they dream or somebody inquires them about their origin, the secrets seem to follow them like the shadow and keep reminding them of their differences from the westerners.

Another poem represents a similar plight that diasporic Chinese suffer from. In “To Li Po,” “I” admit that “I read you in a *stranger’s tongue* / Brother whose eyes were slanted also” (Lim 1994: 43; emphasis mine). Li Po, a reputable and talented Chinese poet in Tang dynasty in the eighth century, and “I” are of the same race—Chinese, so people would assume that it is a piece of cake for “I” to read Li Po. But Li Po has “never left to live among / Foreign devils,” it is “I” did. Moreover, “I” eat “Yankee shredded wheat” while Li Po does “the rice grow / In your [his] own backyard.” The difference can explain why “I” can only read Li Po in a stranger’s tongue. Therefore, “I” sigh with emotion:

I cannot speak your *tongue* with ease,  
 No longer from China. Your stories  
 Stir griefs of dispersion and find  
 Me in simplicity of kin.

This condition triggers “my” distress of displacement that even they are “in simplicity of kin,” they are actually not of the same “kind” except the color of skin. “I” live in

a totally different world from Li Po so that “I” can only read him through translation to “travel east, north, south, and west” and to sense his “observation of field / And family.” In other words, even “I” dream “in Chinese,” “I” would still “say it in English”; “I” could not even read Li Po in Chinese or “speak his tongue with ease” because “I” have been completely converted into a foreigner (in opposition to Chinese and Malaysian). “I” let out evidently the “secrets” in both of “my” poems and his. “I” is the genuine representative of all Chinese in diaspora who cannot speak Chinese. In the long run, “I” grasp the insight of the philosophy of Li Po’s poetry that:

All men were guests  
 To one who knew traditions, the best  
 Of race. Country man, you believed to be Chinese  
 No more than a condition of human history. (Lim 1994: 43)

“I” absorb the conception of Li Po’s philosophy, or, say, the Chinese philosophy and wisdom, that all human beings are nothing but travelers who temporarily rest on the Universe (the tavern). This is “my” understanding of the condition of human history.

The Chinese attitude toward human condition in the universe is just compatible to the idea of nomad, which are groups of people rove all over the earth. In elucidating the notion of nomad, Ien Ang once says: it [nomadology] “serves to decontextualize and flatten out ‘difference,’ as if ‘we’ were all in fundamentally similar ways always-already travellers in the same postmodern universe, the only difference residing in the different itineraries we undertake” (Ang 2001: 24). These nomads have the unsolved question of language identity for sure, and Lim is one of the nomads. In “Tongue and Root: Language in Exile,” Lim claims that “as a free-floating individual, with my tongue still intact although my roots are cut, I can lament and record” (Lim 1994: 169). Her tongue is intact thanks to her choice of

leaving motherland but it is in exile right now, from the perspective of a Chinese Malaysian nomad. In facing such a rootless situation, Lim implies her ultimate choice and anticipation:

To remain faithful to my [Chinese/Malaysian] origins, I must be unfaithful to my present. To be constant to my Malaysian identity, I must continue in the United States to be a stranger in a strange land. Still, I have a language in my hand. To me, it is a language where the idea of freedom is broader and stronger than it is in any country. (Lim 1994: 173)

True, she still has a language in her mouth—English—perfectly. English thus serves more a strong political support than a global communicational language to Lim. Now that since her favorite language is in exile, she would incumbently follow its step until one day she writes back to her homeland.

Yet writing back home in English may suffer from certain dilemma that it could not be recognized by the native Malaysians in favor of nationalism. What Lim needs to break through the predicament thus is to single out and to unfold her characteristics and talent in writing in English. She asserts that “English is to much a part of my identity, confused as it already is ethnically, racially and culturally, that I cannot abandon it for any overriding purpose” (Lim 1994: 171). Therefore, the impracticability of writing other than English is for exiled writers in English an opportunity to establish their territoriality. They resemble “an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 16). The source of power of the exiled writers in English does not come from anywhere but the language in use. In accordance with Deleuze and Guattari’s statement:

A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a *major language*. But the first

characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization. (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 16; emphasis mine)

Discussing the first element of a “minor literature,” Deleuze and Guattari explain that it does not arise from a literature written in a “minor” language, or in a formerly colonized language. Rather, a “minor literature” is written in a major language, or as in the case of formerly colonized countries, the colonizers’ language. This definition not only excellently corresponds to Kafka’s process of creative writing but Shirley Lim’s.<sup>18</sup> Both of them are minority speaking and writing through a *major language* that their productions could be called minor literature. In Lim’s case, English in Malaysia after 1957 has been castrated due to the promotion of Malaysian nationalism. For this reason English did not own the throne of major language in Malaysia. However, using English in America makes Lim more space to base herself upon. More importantly, English in America is undeniably a major language. Then Lim’s English writing in America conforms to the criteria of minor literature.

This minor literature thus functions as deterritorialization to agitate the rigid domain of major and minor languages. In this way, Lim’s writings in English the major language carry formidable force to deterritorialize and to obviate the chasm between English and her mother tongue baba Malay. Consequently, she has more legitimacy to articulate from English and in English. As long as she has found the position to articulate, she is no longer the marginalized part of native Malaysian literature or English literature. Although her writing is considered minor literature, it is located in the center of postcolonial discourse, which receiving much more attention than before. Roy Miki has once adopted Deleuze and Guattari’s term

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<sup>18</sup> Kafka is a Prague Jewish writer “whose first language was Czech but who had to write in the language of the majority, German” (Miki 1998: 117).

“deterritorialization” to “describe the baffled textual screen characteristic of minority writing in its interface with dominant society”:

By “deterritorialization,” they point to a disturbed use of language that foregrounds its surface as a conflicted *space*. Minority writers, because of their subordinate position, must work in a language that disrupts the social stability of conventional discourse and communication. (Miki 1998: 117; emphasis mine)

This passage definitely represents the technical and artistic dilemmas faced by writers of color in historical, political, social, and cultural contexts of colonization, marginalization, and discrimination. Therefore, the act of “deterritorialization” through writing is a practicable method for resisting assimilation, for challenging the hegemonizing and homogenizing political systems, for undermining possibilities in style of writing, for re-creating aesthetic norms, and for articulating subjectivities which emerge from periphery. In this sense, “the English language is no longer a colonial intrusion but a postcolonial free-for-all” (Lim 1997: 187), and it is “a global language serving more than the needs of empire” (Lim 1994: 172). And Lim intends to carry out “deterritorialization” by “the incorporation of selected non-English words and phrases” in her works (Lim 2000: 15). As the poet figures out and tells us, these “first language intrusion” would urge the reader to pay attention to “the cross-ethnic communications” (Lim 1987: 55) and her efforts on reconstructing the cross-cultural poetics. By “deterritorialization” she, as well as other Chinese writers in English, has crossed the borderline of narrow-sensed Chinese immigrant posterity writing and entered into the domain of new English literatures, Commonwealth literature, Chinese American literature, Asian American literature, or postcolonial English literature. Thus, writing in English, as Tee notes, is actually Lim’s way of returning home after she establishes herself as a writer. Like many exile writers, she endeavors to

represent her real hometown by writing back in English (Tee 1999: 8; 2003: 205).  
Lim does succeed in taking the manipulation of language as a tactic and identification  
banner to claim her identity and positionality.

## Chapter II

### Writing Migrancy/Migrant Writing: Forming a Transnational Identity

To discuss Shirley Lim's experience of migrancy we have to overview the history of Chinese communities in Malaya. The history of Chinese settling in Malaya can be dated back to the fifteenth century. Owing to lots of calamities for years running in China, much population along the southeast coast of mainland emigrated to Southeast Asia. They moved overseas in order to earn a living there, basically trading and working as coolies were most common. Also there were some people transferred to the uncultivated periphery area, from the perspective of Chinese emperors, for the reason of political clash or committing crimes. No matter what types of emigration, those Chinese emigrants were banned from returning to the homeland. Therefore, dispersed groups of Chinese disseminated in the Southeast Asian archipelagos.

The members of Chinese communities in Malaya are considerably multiple, Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, and so forth included. These Chinese Malaysians in substance could be divided into two categories: one is Peranakan Chinese, i.e. native Malaya-born Chinese, including baba or Malay-aculturated Chinese, and the other purebred recent immigrant Chinese. Baba culture formed in the early age of Chinese Malaysian history, even earlier than the coming and colonizing of the British. Due to the cause that many of Chinese immigrants settled in Malaya for a long time, the language, culture, and customs had already been gradually assimilated to the Malaysians. Baba in these Malay communities often became the close ally, marriage and business partner of local inhabitants. The baba Malay language in particular served as an effective vehicle of both trading lingua franca and the regional language among the Peranakan Chinese communities. This situation lasted until the

nineteenth century when another immigratory tide fashioned. The new comers of Chinese immigrants in Malaya were called “sinkheh” by baba to distinguish from each other, though they shared the same kinship of Chinese. As the brief introduction of Lim’s background mentioned in the previous chapter, we are aware of the fact that she is a Chinese descent because her grandfather migrated from mainland China to Malaya, specifically, Malacca. Thus her grandfather was one of “sinkhehs” at that time. Sinkhehs preserved the language, culture, and tradition, and their society was neatly like an overseas small town of China. In many aspects they came as bearers of a sophisticated and prestigious cultural heritage. Sinkheh still held the Chinese Nationalism that their political position was inclined to China while baba showed more predilection of identification with Malay.<sup>19</sup> Either baba or sinkheh belonged to Chinese Malayan/Malaysian on account of migration from China to Malaya although the purebred Chinese, who eugenically only married Chinese, occupied a very small proportion of immigrant Chinese in Malaya.<sup>20</sup>

Judging from the above, one man’s identity changes when he migrates. In this case, the identity of Lim’s grandfather transfers from Chinese to Chinese in Malaya, which leads to Lim’s birth as a destined Chinese Malayan/Malaysian despite her maternal and paternal background are different, a nonya and a sinkheh respectively.

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<sup>19</sup> Chinese Nationalism comes close to Sinicism. Nationalism is capitalized to be differentiated from nationalism, which prevailed in the twentieth century around the world and stressed the devotion to interests and culture of a particular nation and aspired for national independence. The nineteenth century Chinese sinkheh still considered China the ultimate home and root of culture and they were under the regime of China Emperor even if they were abroad. They supposed their journey to and stay in Southeast Asia was temporary. Considering themselves as “the bearers of a cultural heritage handed down from their ancestors,” sinkheh could just tell their conviction from baba’s. “Such primordial sentiments,” mentions David Yen-ho Wu in his essay discussing the construction of Chinese and non-Chinese identities, “were very common among Chinese in the peripheral areas, especially among those living in the frontier lands, but also among the overseas Chinese, who were forced to intermingle with non-Chinese” (Wu 1994: 149).

<sup>20</sup> Even after Malaya’s declaration of independence in 1957, the communities of baba and sinkheh still exist. Until 1963, when the Federation of Malaya, Sarawak, and Singapore integrated as a political entity—Malaysia, a new kind of identity, Malaysian, thus appeared. Ethnically Chinese Malayan could be also called Chinese Malaysian in a political way. As a result, Chinese Malayan/Malaysian refers to both baba and sinkheh.

In addition, always in transit her whole life, Lim's identity is foredoomed to vary constantly. She and her family moved from one house to another because of poverty, which resulted from her father's unsuccessful business. When she was about to go to school, she was even sent to the convent school. From the general idea of Lim's childhood and puberty we can tell that her complicated history of ancestral migration and her own experience of displacement fit in well to be representation of Chinese Malayan/Malaysian with multiple diasporic experiences.

Such sense of displacement did not defeat Chinese or hinder the developments of life and culture in Malaya; on the contrary, Chinese in Malaya survived well and succeeded in making a living. In spite of the difference of baba or sinkheh, they were still regarded as Chinese, another people coming from outside, invading the land, and living with the native and aboriginal Malay. It is the act of intrusion that incurred Malays' feeling of resent and animosity, which became the blasting fuse of the violent incidents afterwards. In 1957, Malaya broke away from British governance and established the Federation of Malaya; then it changed its name to Malaysia in 1963, opening a new page of independence in its history. Nevertheless, as the rein of government transferred to the Malay people, the relationship between Chinese and native Malaysians varied delicately. Politically former Chinese residents in Malaysia, including baba and sinkheh, ought to be legal Malaysian citizens except those new comers from mainland China. Nevertheless, determined to maintain its own ascendancy, the Malaysian government had started some policies against Chinese immigrants; for instance, the government began to resist accepting the Chinese population into the new state as citizens. The new Chinese immigrants had to go through inextricable procedures and waited a long time for their new

Malaysian identity.<sup>21</sup> With Malaysian ID card their loyalty to Malaysia thus came into effect. Unfortunately, the laws still could not protect Chinese with Malaysian ID card, let alone those without ID card. To “indigenous” Malaysians, all Chinese look the same. Until 1969, the violent event of anti-Chinese, the May 13 riots, burst out; at the same year Shirley Lim was studying at the University of Malaya.<sup>22</sup>

The May 13 riots derived from the long-term feud between Chinese and Malay(si)an. This incident made an impact on all Chinese Malaysians to a great degree, and Shirley Lim and her family were of no exception. The whole event had turned into a bloody revolution. Lim represents the sanguinary scene by recounting a story the elders had told her:

The massacres came:

Women, children, seized by hair, slathered,

Running everywhere into blood and death, the same

Dark men with metal arms killing, killing, the dead

Like rags too beggared for burying. (“Sugar-Cane,” Lim 1994: 13)

The ideal of establishing a multicultural society was destroyed by the disaster, and the Chinese people in Malaysia also reached an impasse because of the misfortune. Judging from the situation, the Chinese Malaysians were victims of racial discrimination doubtlessly. At that time they were “suffering the cowed paranoia of the defeated,” and

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<sup>21</sup> “It was 1954; the British had just negotiated with the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) for independence for the Federation of Malaya in 1957. [...] Legislation controlling citizenship for Chinese residents was enacted, and suddenly millions of Chinese were legally enmeshed, their loyalties and identities suspended until certain forms, government stamps, notarized certificates, and fees were collected” (Lim 1997: 52).

<sup>22</sup> The fate of Malaysia and Shirley Lim made a radical change because of the racial riots occurring in May 13<sup>th</sup> 1969. In 1969, the opposition party organized by Chinese Malaysians won the election campaign. The victory unavoidably caused Malaysian’s loathing and triggered the May 13 incident. This event of racial hatred to date still gets the Malaysian society entangled charismatically (Pin-chia Feng 2003: 40). For more details, please consult Shirley Lim’s memoir *Among the White Moon Faces* pp. 134-38.

It seemed easy then to walk away from a violated dream of a national future which included people like me [her; Lim]—people not tied to race-based ideology, who were looking to form a brave new nation. Hundreds of thousands Malaysians have also emigrated to Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Britain, Canada, and the United States.<sup>23</sup> (Lim 1997: 136)

Being an innocent victim of the conflicts between races, and what is more, due to the somber British postcolonialism and Malaysian nationalism like “down-pour-/ing rain” (Lim 1994: 18), Shirley Lim was forced to “cross the peninsula” like “monsoon climate” in “the migrating season” (Lim 1994: 20) and to leave her country for the United States. Before Lim went to America, she had just finished her graduate studies and got the master degree. In this sense, she could be called “a member of postcolonial intelligentsia,” compared to Stuart Hall’s claiming himself as “a member of a colonial intelligentsia” (Chen 1996: 487). Both receiving British-oriented education, Stuart Hall and Shirley Lim learned English history, English colony history, and English literature. In addition, Hall and Lim had gone abroad, off to England, and the United States respectively, to study. So they shared similar experience of being exile intelligentsia, say, intelligentsia emigrating to another foreign country.

The political turmoil was obviously an annoying factor that many Chinese had

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<sup>23</sup> Not only Chinese but also other racial people besides autochthonous Malaysians were persecuted. Yet here we would like to stress on the oppressed and dispersed Chinese Malaysians. Chinese Malaysians chose to move to Britain, Canada, Australia or New Zealand could be regarded as a postcolonial phenomenon; to Hong Kong, Singapore or Taiwan because these are places where many overseas/diasporic Chinese congregate; to the United States because of its political, social, economic, and international policies and status after World War II: it was theoretically and practically a multicultural host country which might accept large population of immigrants from all over the world. Tee Kim Tong has called this emigrant wave of considerable quantities to Commonwealth countries and the United States a “global diaspora” (Tee 1999: 6). One of those emigrants, for instance, was Ee Tian Hong, a Malaysian poet of the English-language like Shirley Lim, and he migrated to Australia in 1975. Since the conditions of destinations are different, the diasporic Chinese would encounter different destinies, whether accepting or resisting assimilation. Here of course the emphasis should be put on the Chinese in America, of whom Shirley Lim is one.

no choice but to depart from Malaysia in a flurry to seek for shelter. But for those Chinese who were born in Malaya and stayed in the locality for their whole life, their migration out of this country exactly is “the second emigration” (Tee 2003a: 196). They did not have the first time because they had already been inscribed the sign of immigrant by their ancestors. In other words, their leaving from the native place is a collective behavior and idea. Since they had immigrant forefathers, they needed to be prepared for the next migration. This political phenomenon of Chinese’s second emigration, to borrow Edward Said’s reflections on exile, can be referred to as “refugee, a creation of the twentieth-century state.” Said explains, “The word ‘refugee’ has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas ‘exile’ carries with it, [...] a touch of solitude and spirituality” (Said 1990: 362). Shirley Lim definitely was one of the refugees, the innocent people with a sense of dread and solitude. Since the word “refugee,” considered by Said, is a political one, it implies the power of politics behind the refugees. It is the political dynamics compels and edges out the innocent people. Here, being a refugee reveals Lim’s status of involuntary exile for the sake of political reasons, which predominantly include the factor that the laws of the nation could not protect Chinese people and even discriminate against them. This mode of emigration factually corresponds to the manner of Lim’s exile.

When touching upon the exile, Said also offers his opinion: “Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider” (Said 1990: 362). Though she was not truly banished by the Malaysian government, Lim was indirectly expelled by the racial enmity and political upheaval. She is quite an outsider for the Malaysian government and its Malaysian people. In Tee’s explanation we can find out that

“involuntary exile” certainly correlates with “political banishment [...] by the authorities of the state,” which leads to “the collectively displaced movement of certain communities and races” (Tee 1999: 1). In short, the “involuntary exile” takes place all because of “impersonal causes.” As a result, her exile is an involuntary matter as Said also notes: “Exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you” (Said 1990: 365). Or like what Stuart Hall has reminded in his interview: “But remember, the diaspora came to me” (Chen 1996: 501). I think that elucidates the improbability of making personal choice to leave. The leaving, or the exile, arises from the extrinsic factors.

Lim’s walking away from her homeland, however, can also be a choice of free will, that is, the voluntary self-exile, which connotes the estrangement of the individual from an original community, to complete her studies and pursue her dreams. Said also defines another two sorts of voluntary exile, as opposed to the two kinds discussed above—“exile” and “refugees.” He says, “Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. Hemingway and Fitzgerald were not forced to live in France. Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions” (Said 1990: 362-63). Just as Said categorizes, Shirley Lim, in some sense, resembles Hemingway or Fitzgerald that they leave his or her home country out of personal excuses. Expatriates may undergo alienation in the foreign country but their life is usually less terrible and miserable than that of refugees or exile.

Besides, the poet herself also gives a more detailed explanation of expatriation to express her position. She basically agrees that “expatriation is grounded in the paradox of *voluntary* physical movement away from and simultaneous psychic fixity in an original homeland” (Lim 1994-95: 1; emphasis mine). In other words, she also consents to the critic’s opinion that she is classified as an expatriate writer, a voluntary

exile, although at the very beginning she was quite surprised at the evaluation.<sup>24</sup> She thought she always wrote from the third-world position/perspective but the critic, Anne Brewster, marks her as an expatriate. Expatriates, however, can be divided into “expats” and “expatriate” on the basis of the first world and the third world. To Lim, “the word ‘expat,’ redolent of the remote, powerful, and exotic Western Other, was always a raced, gendered and classed term, denoting foreign, white, male, Christian and privileged” (Lim 1994-95: 1). Lim considers “expats” highly associated with the Western ascendancy and “always already embedded in a national identity” as well (Lim 1994-95: 2). The “national identity” of course refers to the identification with first-world nations. To call for further analysis, the national identity within the first-world expats suggests that they are, in Brewster’s words, “the immigrant, the cosmopolite, the exile, and the returned exile” (Brewster 1982: 46). Though the first-world expatriate writers are in exile, home, for them, “is not only always possible but has never been abandoned” (Lim 1994-95: 3). That is to say, their expatriation is personal decision and returning is out of their own choice too. Voluntary exile, counter to involuntary exile, is very appropriate to the first-world expats. Lim also tries to interpret Martin Stoddard’s limited definition of expatriates, which focuses on white male British and American artists as:

romantics suffering familial discontent, reacting against narrow nationalism, who merge with a native colonial type for a time to gain their identity, whose travels release them from smothering domesticity, who achieve mature detachment which allows them to see their own kind with “self-liberating antipathy,” and whose goal is “*personal, transnational self-realization.*” (Lim 1994-95: 2; emphasis mine)

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<sup>24</sup> “The first time I saw myself identified as an expatriate writer, in a 1982 essay by Anne Brewster, I was stunned, for although I was writing out of the country, I had still then chiefly marked myself as a Malaysian and third-world writer” (Lim 1994-95: 1).

Despite the factual condition that Lim is a non-white female, the rest of conditions offered by Said and Stoddard conform to Shirley Lim's case, although the limitation is white male. The other only variation resides in the fact that Shirley Lim expatriated from the third-world country rather than the first world.

Lim prefers placing herself within the framework of a third-world expatriate writer. What she classifies an expatriate writer in a third-world frame responds to what I call "a member of postcolonial intelligentsia," and also, what Tee terms "literary exile." While adapting Saidian category of "modern intellectual exile," Tee suggests that "literary exile" embraces "a taste of voluntary exile for those who are non-conformists of the dominant literary system, linguistic exile is an inescapable fate for those who write in the English language in Malaysia" (Tee 1999: 6-7). Lim has ever made a declaration to defend herself as either "a third-world expatriate writer," "a member of postcolonial intelligentsia," "a modern intellectual exile," or "a literary exile":

Writers like myself who live and write outside their "homelands" call to question the categories of literary identity given to national literatures. Posing the problematical relation between literature and nation, the third-world expatriate writer, unlike the first-world "expat," constitutes an ironic figure of the once-colonized subject now positioned as a post-independence agent circulating in the global market. (Lim 1994-95: 10)

In this regard, she does more than identifying herself with a third-world expatriate writer. She marks out her position not only as a third-world expatriate writer but "a post-independence agent" in the global coordinate axis.

Said gives an annotation to *émigré*, the fourth category in his discussion. "Technically, an *émigré* is anyone who emigrates to a new country. Choice in the

matter is certainly a possibility. Colonial officials, missionaries, technical experts, mercenaries and military advisers on loan may in a sense live in exile, but they have not been banished” (Said 1990: 363). To call for attention to the key word “choice,” it is very crucial and conspicuous that émigrés focus on the importance of making free-will choice that no one else could control. As we realize from her own migrating experiences, Shirley Lim is also qualified for this category.

After understanding Edward Said’s discussion of different forms of expatriation, there is absolutely one truth: whether her movement is voluntary or involuntary, Lim is in exile beyond any dispute. The poet herself has once inferred the exilic experience as “the condition of voluntary or involuntary separation from one’s place of birth; this physical separation is offset by continued bonds to the lost homeland” (Lim 1997: 296). Likewise, Ien Ang has also stated the significance of diaspora, simply like a delicate counterpart of Lim’s annotation:

the condition of a “people” dispersed throughout the world, by force or choice. Diasporas are transnational, spatially and temporally sprawling sociocultural formations of people, creating imagined communities whose blurred and fluctuating boundaries are sustained by real and/or symbolic ties to some original “homeland.” (Ang 2001: 25)

The formulations brought up by Lim, Ang, and Said intactly match for each other. In other words, any possible terms or titles, e.g. refugee, exile, expat/expatriate, émigré, or diaspora, having to do with choice or force, would make sense to Lim in analyzing her extraordinary experiences.

When Lim first stepped on America and lived in New York, she found that place a totally unfamiliar locality and she wondered, “Manhattan, how shall I love thee?” (Lim 1997: 182) Being new to a place inevitably makes her nostalgic, and her thought naturally wanders and travels back and forth between the homeland and

foreign land like a nomad. In her poem “Immigrant,” Lim demonstrates this sense of unaccommodation:

An immigrant, she’s  
 afraid of traveling,  
 [.....]  
 The landscape  
 of newness nauseates.  
 In her sleep she’s lost,  
 wakes up, five,  
 Under another moon. (Lim 1998: 38)

The poet describes her nostalgic feeling when she wakes up at five in the morning “under another moon,” which makes her feel disgusting. Such yearning for her hometown could also be found in another poem, “Christmas in Exile”:

Christmas is coming and I think of home:  
 A colonial Christmas and second-hand nostalgia  
 As simple as home-made cottonwool snow,  
 Paste holly and a cheap plastic conifer.  
 Where Christ is born in odd conditions,  
 To customary churches and celebration.  
 O silent, holy night, we sing, beneath  
 The clear hot equatorial sky. (Lim 1994: 27)

Why does the “clear hot equatorial sky” have something to do with the Christmas season? For a second thinking, it is the best display of how a child living in tropical area spent her Christmas holiday. The poet conveys her dense nostalgia through bringing back her memory of Christmas when she was still a kid; for example, the “home-made cottonwool snow,” “paste holly,” and “cheap plastic conifer.”

Nonetheless, her feeling toward the homeland contains not only nostalgia but also fear.

She has ever mentioned that:

I am afraid to study  
 Any more the past,  
 Breathing slowly along  
 The nervous edge of crying.  
 All things bring me back  
 To this small place  
 Of pity and terror  
 Which so circles me  
 I cannot run. Seeing  
 There is no place,  
 It is best perhaps,  
 Entirely, to disappear. (“Fear,” Lim 1994: 28)

As an exile in the alien land, she would really hate to think of those “nauseating” past she had just left behind. She spent much effort getting out of that place which had brought her “pity and terror”—what a tragic place. But now “the past of pity and terror” keeps haunting her; she was trapped by the annoying past and she cannot get rid of it. Consequently, in “The Chinese Painter,” she attempts to voice through the Chinese painter to reinscribe and to exorcize the phantasmagoric past:

Of a backward ancient country  
 I dream.  
 [.....]  
 Rising, I paint the scene  
 Swirling palely; leave

Transparent paper showing in  
 White reflection of my eyes:  
 That is, spontaneous sight!  
 Such chill sorrowing ghosts  
 Move among us in the night. (Lim 1994: 12)

The Chinese painter exemplifies all diasporic Chinese, who cannot eradicate the unbearable past and is annoyed by the “ghosts,” even though the painter has left them behind in the “backward ancient country.” The “sorrowing ghosts” show in “white reflection of my [the painter’s; the poet’s] eyes,” “swirling palely.” Such “spontaneous sight” transpires a horrible “chill” among readers, not to mention it keeps moving among the diasporic Chinese in the night. Reading this poem is like watching a thriller. In order to manifest the poignant agony, Lim does achieve an appalling effect by her wording technique. This is why she wishes the ghost-like past to disappear. The ambivalent love-hate emotions are naturally and accurately interwoven in these poems. The homeland and the past with her love-hate emotions continuously become the motif of her poem because “whether situated in the centre or marginal, the nation is an essential site for imagination,” as she expounds (Lim 1994-95: 13).

The “nauseating newness” of the new landscape usually would trigger nostalgia and nostalgia would further launch the status of nomadism. Thereupon this might be seen as a kind of chained reaction. According to Tim Cresswell, the nomad is “one whose home is on the move, who has no *place* in which meaning and identity can rest” (Cresswell 1997: 362). The nomadic subject symbolizes displacement and dispersion. The salient instance of Bedouin that Caren Kaplan gives could truly depict such mindset of an exile. Lim acutely describes her similar mentality: “The person who enters the country as a registered alien is neither here nor there. Without

family, house, or society, she views herself through the eyes of citizens: guest, stranger, outsider, misfit, beggar” (Lim 1997: 160). The poet roams like a solitary walker and “her bodily presence is a wraith” (Lim 1997: 160). The two desires for going back and staying, like two strands of powers, drag her hard and she manages to survive in-between. Lim uses the car driving metaphor to describe the dragging forces:

It was like learning  
to let go and to hold on:  
a slow braking, shifting  
gears, an engine  
of desire on a down hill  
slope. (Lim 1994: xxiii)

A stranger on the unfamiliar land, indeed, according to Lim, is supposed to learn “to let go” the “desire” and “to hold on” the “desire” too. The “desire” surely stands for the complicated mind status of getting rid of the past or allowing it of perplexing and irritating the exile constantly. That action of “letting go” and “holding on” could also bear a resemblance to what the “dulang-washer”<sup>25</sup> does in the “rhythm of search and discarding” (Lim 1994: 9). That is, in the stranger’s “memory of movement,” he must endure the “monotonous” (Lim 1994: 9) bombardment of accepting or rejecting some identity on his head.

Furthermore, it seemed that Malacca and New York were incompatible that even if Lim was “buried in the details of an American career, [her] life as a non-American persists” (Lim 1997: 9), and “for over a decade, [she] did an emotional shuttle run between Asia and the United States, voluntarily displaced” (Lim 1997: 169). This

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<sup>25</sup> A dulang-washer is a person, normally a female, who pans for tin in the river in Malaya. Dulang is supposed to be a kind of wooden platter, which functions as a container for “searching and discarding” the “false gold”—tin.

“emotional shuttle run” between her homeland and the alien land often emerges in her dream. She has dreamt about the old house she and her family lived in:

Something of China remains,  
Although ancestral family is gone.

I dream of the old house.

The dreams leak slowly like sap  
Welling from a wound: I am losing  
Ability to make myself at home.  
Awake, hunting for lost cousins,  
I have dreamed of ruined meaning,

And am glad to find none. (“Visiting Malacca,” Lim 1994: 32)

By portraying the furnishings inside the old house she senses the existence of her home, in dream, of course. But since she is now an exile, she is not able to make herself at home; the only thing she can do is to dream of the old house to make herself feel like at home. The dream, “like sap welling from a wound,” stabs the innermost recess of the heart and thus foretells the “ruined” plausibility of returning home and reuniting with her family. So she simply can only look for consolation in the dreams by visiting Malacca. And because of the dream, she all the more realizes her status as a stranger outside homeland. She even imagines herself as the “grey gull” one time in another dream:

We dream like grey gulls blown inland,  
Or as one-eyed ships, blown, espying  
The bright-shelled peninsula.  
 (“Crossing the Peninsula,” Lim 1994: 20)

The “grey gull” seems not able to fly home and can merely “espy” it afar. The poet

compares herself to the grey gull that spying her homeland in the dream is the best thing she can do when in exile. Such “emotional shuttle run” suggests a form of psychological border crossing, as the poet declares in her poem’s title: “crossing the peninsula.”

In addition to psychological border crossing, the physical movement must also be taken into discourse. It is the to-and-fro movement of the diasporics that makes Aihwa Ong discover the phenomenon of *flexible citizenship*. James Clifford borrows her terminology to explain the status of being in diaspora: “People caught up in transnational movements of capital improvise what Aihwa Ong has termed *flexible citizenship* with striking differences of power and privilege” (Clifford 1994: 312). The point, apparently, lies in the “transnational movement” that “binational citizens” often make. Ong takes the words of a Chinese investor in San Francisco and speaks for diasporas to defend their flexible citizenship: “I can live anywhere in the world, but it must be near an airport” (Ong 1993: 771). This conditional citizenship is decoded by Clifford as the “pseudouniversal cosmopolitan” and it indeed widens the range of *diaspora*. In other words, where Lim has lived, Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, New York, or later California, makes her a cosmopolitan exile. Her citizenship—identity—changes all the time when she moves or crosses the borderland. The flexibility somehow is like the *dulang-washer*’s motion of “exchanging gold-dust” because her identity keeps changing from one to another as long as she makes psychological or physical movement.

Either psychological or physical border crossing destabilizes the original constituent bond between her homeland and the foreign land. Shirley Lim has remarks on the in-between situation of diaspora when she refers to the third-world expatriates, “The third-world expatriate imagination, it is suggested, is webbed by *interstices* falling between citizen and alien, exile and immigrant, traveller and refugee, national

and cosmopolitan” (Lim 1994-95: 3; emphasis mine). The collapse of demarcation between diaspora and fixity deserves much attention. The exile no longer belongs to a certain territory for its own space is the interstice. It is in the interstice that the exile grows like the rhizome. Even after she had expatriated to the United States for years, Lim did not seem to be immutable. She moved from New England, Brooklyn, to California. These sequential dislocations, “from landscape to landscape”, bring about “a meagre drift” and the nomadism geographically and psychologically in her life (“Dulang-Washer,” Lim 1994: 9).

Realizing her marginality in a community college in New York, Lim made up her mind: “[she] needs to find another, more welcoming America in which poetry, Asia, and woman could be accepted in the same body” (Lim 1997: 225). For that reason she chose to live and work in California, “the closest thing possible to moving home for Asian Americans, whose identity [...] is peculiarly American, forged in U.S. history,” and also “a state geographically bound to the islands of Southeast Asia in a restless rim of moving plates enclosing the gorgeous Pacific waters” (Lim 1997: 228). Due to the continual relocations, Lim has become the true cosmopolitan nomad, from Malacca to Kuala Lumpur, from New York to California, and she absolutely is the deep potential force to oscillate “the plates” of anthropology, psychology, ideology, geography, history, culture, and politics of Chinese, Malaysian, and American. She subverts the conventional territory, resets the borderline, and re-maps a new one.

This act of subverting, in accordance with Kaplan, functions as deterritorialization: “In going from ‘one point to another,’ [...] nomads have ‘absolute movement,’ as distinct from migrants, who move in more determined and located ways” (Kaplan 1996: 89). Kaplan makes a further interpretation and borrows Deleuze and Guattari’s botanical metaphor of “rhizome” to decipher: “Like the metaphor of rhizome, nomadism signifies the inverse of dwelling or being and

celebrates the *intermezzo* zone” (Kaplan 1996: 89). Similar to rhizome, Lim says she would rather “choose to walk between water and land,” where she calls “tidal zone” (“No Man’s Grove,” Lim 1994: 37). Lim’s act burrows the cultural and literary territory with an amazing underground might and destabilizes the tranquil surface of existing territory. It really breaks through the conventional fence of the West and the Rest and fragmentizes the imperialist imaginary. The dispersion of rhizome even breeds the simultaneous multicultural sprouts in a considerable scale. Whether nomads, Bedouins, or rhizomes, they all characterize and embody the concept of space and border. They had been located on the peripheries of metropolitan locales in the colonial discourse but now they have been elevated to the opposite, reciprocal, and equal status of Euro-Americans. The “nomad thought,” also a borrowed term from Deleuze and Guattari, has much to do with the question of border. Cresswell has mentioned about Deleuze and Guattari that they “mobilize the nomad as a figure of resistance to the bounded spatiality of modern discipline,” and they also “employ the nomad,” he goes on, “as a figure who resists the rational spatializations of the state” (Cresswell 1997: 365, 367). What is more, Rey Chow brings up her opinion that:

Central to the question of borders is the question of propriety and property. Conceivably, one possible practice of borders is to anticipate and prepare for new proprietorship by destroying, replacing, and expanding existing ones. For this notion of borders—as margins waiting to be incorporated as new properties—to work, the accompanying spatial notion of a field is essential. (Chow 1993: 15)

In short, Kaplan phrases it like this: “Deterritorialization is always reterritorialization, an increase of territory, an imperialization” (Kaplan 1996: 89) to manifest the achievement of nomad. Hence how the nomad works in modern poetics of diaspora

is equivalent to what Clifford calls “subversive crossing” (Clifford 1994: 303), and the nomad’s mobility is referred to “marginality as site of resistance,” as bell hooks addresses (hooks 1990: 341).

Judging from the arguments above, we have gained the knowledge that the exiles, distinct from tourists, or purely immigrants, always suffer from the in-betweenness and long for “home.” In this sense, the concept of the exile is in high connection with that of the nomad. Wandering outside of both centers, i.e. the crossroad of histories and memories, the nomads have to accept their preliminary dispersal and then their subsequent translation into new. Either voluntarily or involuntarily, Lim moved herself from meagerness to comfort, from feebleness to independence, from Asia to the West, from the rim to the core, and she still keeps asking herself this question: “How does one make oneself at home?” (Lim 1997: 155) Lim also laments like a Bedouin that “In walking our own sure space, / Eyes looking out at passers-by, / Gazing at fragile singularity, See everywhere a mirage, distraction” (“Credo: 1,” Lim 1994: 77). In order to prevent “everywhere a mirage” from happening again, the Bedouins, the exile people in the desert, one of whom is the poet, must have a universal yearning that they want a place to stay. After receiving her Ph.D. and because of the death of her parents, she started to travel much often between the United States and Malaysia. She did so because she regarded herself as the homeless and needed to go back to the point of departure, “what is / unchangeable, Say father mother” (Lim 1994: xxiv), to re-trace and re-quests the primordial significance and fountain of being an exile. The poet was making a journey both outward and inward, a journey to origins of country, family, and self. She returned to Malacca to visit her father’s tomb in Bukit China, and she prayed to the spirits to bless her, which remains as a manner for her to perceive the existence of this remote home. When she re-visited the old house she used to live, she surprisingly found

that she is “losing / ability to make [herself] at *home*” (Lim 1994: 32). As a result, for the exile, Lim emphasizes “Country is important, / Is important” (“Bukit China,” Lim 1994: 3) and she also analyzes, “even as she runs away from her first life, this other life that begins to accrue around her remains oddly secondary, unrooted in the sensuality of infancy and the intensities of first memory” (Lim 1997: 10). Iain Chambers has made the assertion of the situation of an exile well: “Cut off from the homelands of tradition, experiencing a constantly challenged identity, the stranger is perpetually required to make herself at *home* in an interminable discussion between a scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present” (Chambers 1994: 6; emphasis mine). His statement is pertinent enough to convey the exile’s embarrassing interstitial position and their aspiration for home.

Indeed, the idea of “home locale” weighs as much as that of territory in the discourse and theory of space. As a matter of fact, “home” is itself a spatialized knowledge; establishing “home” is an act of territorialization. What makes home so important is because it is every human being’s eventual craving. In the “Afterword” of *Homebase*, a novel by Shawn Wong, S. E. Solberg gives the definition of home: “Homebase is where we come from, where we go back to” (Solberg 1991: 99). As an alien in the foreign land, the poet is certain to feel sharply the “instinct on the flood for home / From which all exiled landscapes come” (“Thoughts from Abroad,” Lim 1994: 59), perhaps especially the instinct would become sharper in the Christmas season: “Christmas is coming and I think of home” (Lim 1994: 27).

After experiencing so much as an exile, Lim could not help but lament and carefully re-consider “thought of me as an American,” and “perhaps that was what I was becoming” (Lim 1997: 174). She starts to introspect and is getting aware of her being an American now. She lives the way Americans do, eats what they eat, and watch the same TV channels as they do. Suddenly she comes to realize that the city

she lives in is “a mountain / Also, made of Asia, Europe and Africa. / They call it America” (“Dedicated to Confucius Plaza,” Lim 1994: 41). This is the place where different races all reside in together. To a degree, she is one of the “diasporas of the border,” as Clifford dubs it from Vijay Mishra (Clifford 1994: 308). Diasporas of border, as opposed to diasporas of exclusivism, follow the history of Jewish diaspora communities as a model that shows “selective accommodation with political, cultural, commercial, and everyday life forms of ‘host’ societies” (Clifford 1994: 308). In other words, diasporas of border strategically assimilates into the local and simultaneously maintains its original distinctions. The poet thus comprehends: “It is not hard to be / An Asian-American Chinese” (Lim 1994: 41). Then it comes true: “[She] became an American politically with the birth of [her] child” (Lim 1997: 194). Besides, “[she] marked [herself] as a U.S. citizen, and [she] finally began the process for citizenship” (Lim 1997: 194). The U.S. citizenship ends her undetermined self and she acknowledges that “no longer a traveler, [she] was included in [her] accusations of America” (Lim 1997: 196). With the birth of her son and her own citizenship, Lim successfully transforms herself into the new identity—Chinese/Asian American. As Solberg contends, “It was the search for a homebase led to memory, history, led into a search for the roots that bound the Chinese American to America” (Solberg 1991: 100). Correspondingly, J. Macgregor Wise suggests the importance of making a home in an essay: “The nomad is the continual struggle between spatial forces and identity, the struggle to make a home, to create a space that opens onto other spaces. Nostalgia may be a tool used to create that space, but it is not the heart of home” (Wise 2000: 305). The “struggle to make a home, to create a space that opens onto other spaces” proves that “Lim is a mapmaker herself who decides her own terms of mapping and constructs her ethnic, sexual and literary identities” (Chang 1999: 23). This “home,” mapped out by Lim herself, is not the nostalgic

Malaysia, but the tactical America. The significance of Lim's "home" exists on two levels. First, by making a home, she is able to get rid of nomadism. Second, in creating her own space strategically and politically, she is making herself an equivalent standpoint to other subjects in other spaces. With a firm and equal standpoint, Lim can articulate more confidently and eloquently, like Cathy Song speaks in one of her poems:

When you have finally come *home*,  
having planted two feet into the ground.

Gravestones or roots,  
you will begin from there.

("For A. J.: On Finding She's on Her Boat to China," Song 2000: 65)

### Chapter III

#### **Reknitting the Diasporic Ethnicity: Writing an Unswayable Identity**

With the development of modernization, education, communication, and urbanization, it is believed that people would abandon the parochial, primeval, and tribal ethnic identity and then proceed to a broader sense—the nation. The historical and political development of nation-building history, however, has confirmed that the truth is just the opposite. Modernization facilitates the sprouting and flourishing of the ethnic consciousness. In the first place, in virtue of urbanization, people of ethnic group could make their living by their cultural features in the city. Take the Chinese Americans in early years for example. They started their business in restaurants of Chinese flavor dishes as a cultural characteristic to attract customers. On the other hand, there are much more competition in the city than in the country. When ethnic groups compete for valued collective goods, e.g. opportunities, jobs, and wealth, competition arouses the group consciousness. Owing to the confrontation and competition between ethnic groups, the consciousness of “we” and “they,” i.e. “I” and “other,” comes to shape. Secondly, the availability of education also makes those illiterate able to recognize the importance and to imagine the significance of ethnic group through communicational tools like written and verbal languages. These communicational media thus enhance the ethnic identity and solidarity.

To realize the essence of the ethnic group, we have to resort to Benedict Anderson’s idea of “imagined communities.” Anderson considers that “nation,” as a form of ethnic group, is a modern imagined structure, which originates in the profound change of humankind history and its condition of modernity. What makes the imagination come to real are two crucial historical factors. First of all, since the Middle Ages the way people understand the world has caused a radical change in

epistemology. Anderson points out that the basic structure of two forms of imagining emerged at the early years of eighteenth century in Europe. The two forms of imagining, the novel and the newspaper, “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the *kind* [sic] of imagined community that is the nation” (Anderson 1983: 30). In other words, the “nation,” is an “imagined community” envisioned through print-languages originally in Anderson’s opinion. But this rupture with the traditional epistemology still requires the other societal element to mould a nation. This element is the interaction between “a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communication (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity” (Anderson 1983: 46). The “half-fortuitous, but explosive interaction” brought about the decline of Latin and the rise of print vernacular. The community consisting of the print vernacular, the secular language, serves as the model of the “nation” hereafter.

The epistemological and societal preconditions coin the archetype of ethnic group—the nation and make a stage for modern nations in the later periods. Based on the preconditions as his argumentations, Anderson constructs a paradigm of how the nation and nationalism occur step by step. Before entering into the field of nationalism, let us figure out the relationship and difference between “ethnicity” and “nation.”

According to Werner Sollors’s research, “the word ‘ethnicity’ first saw print in 1941, in a book by W. Lloyd Warner” (Sollors 1989: xiii). Secondly, Thomas Hylland Eriksen indicates that the first usage of “ethnicity” is “attributed to the American sociologist David Riesman in 1953” (Eriksen 1993: 3). Eriksen further states that Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan in 1975 had pointed to “the fact that the word’s [ethnicity] earliest dictionary appearance is in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1972” (3). But the word “ethnic is much older. It is derived from the

Greek *ethnos* (which in turn derived from the word *ethnikos*), which originally meant heathen or pagan,” Eriksen tells us by grounding on Raymon Williams (Eriksen 1993: 3-4). It seems that the etymology of the word ethnicity, the Greek *ethnos*, tends to define ethnicity or ethnic group as minority group or sub-categorical group. This definition, made by majority group, to some extent carries some thoughts of disdain and tolerance. Until the Second World War, “ethnics came to be used in the United States as a polite term referring to Jews, Italians, Irish and other people considered inferior to the dominant group of largely British descent” (Eriksen 1993: 4). Quoting Malcolm Chapman *et al*, Eriksen expands the usage of ethnicity: although “the discourse concerning ethnicity tends to concern itself with subnational units, or minorities of some kind or another, majorities and dominant peoples are no less ‘ethnic’ than minorities” (4). In other words, ethnicity in a broader sense means not only minority but majority group. Any ethnic group with distinctive cultural characteristics and different form of social life could be deemed as ethnicity. Therefore, ethnicity, generally speaking, absolutely has something to do with the “classification of people” and “group relationships” (4).

Since the nation and ethnicity are closely related, how do we distinguish between the nation and ethnicity anyway? Occasionally, the nation and ethnicity could be used interchangeably. But, the nation does not fully equate ethnicity; ethnic consciousness is not necessarily equal to the national consciousness either. Ernest Gellner, the late renowned British social anthropologist, and often compared with Benedict Anderson in the same research field, discusses the idea of a nation in his treatise *Nations and Nationalism*:

[...] Nations can be defined in terms both of will and of culture, and indeed in terms of the convergence of them both with political units. In these conditions, men will to be politically united with all those, and only

those, who share their culture. Polities then will to extend their boundaries to the limits of their culture, and to protect and impose their culture with the boundaries of their power. The fusion of will, culture and polity becomes the norm, and one not easily or frequently defied.”

(Gellner 1983: 55)

What Gellner terms “will” refers to the ethnic consciousness or national consciousness. And the element of “culture” of a nation is also similar to ethnicity of cultural features. Yet Gellner’s interpretation of a nation apparently contains political meaning. He expresses that polities will exert its power within the boundaries of their culture. The polities of power and political cohesion thus form nations. In this regard, the ethnic consciousness, compared to the national consciousness, is more culturally oriented and less political. But if the antithetical group that an ethnic group comes up against is another nation/state, the ethnic consciousness might turn into the national consciousness. For instance, when African Americans are facing white Americans, they might reveal Black consciousness or African consciousness, while they are facing people of other nations/states, they might show their American consciousness. So ethnic consciousness and national consciousness are fluid rather than static. Both would vary with their interests or referential objects, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

There are a few similarities between the two anthropologists: Anderson and Gellner. In addition to the fact that Anderson and Gellner published their book at the same year, their points of view in some measure concur with each other. Anderson comes straight to the point at the very beginning of *Imagined Communities*:

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in minds of each lives the image of their communion [...].

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind [...].

It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm [...].

Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as deep, horizontal comradeship [...]. (Anderson 1983: 15-16)

After scrutinizing Anderson and Gellner's statements about "nation," we discover that their viewpoints run parallel and are not mutually exclusive. The nation as an imagined cultural entity that carries sovereign power is the convergence of people's will. While Anderson proposes that the nation is imagined via print-languages due to the prevalence of print-capitalism, Geller holds that the outset of an industrial society contributes to the dissemination of education and the forming of a nation as well. Only counting on the industrialism can a nation seeking economic growth be able to rapidly pass technology, communication, literacy, education and its pervasive high cultures throughout the world. This is totally different from the historical progress and experiences. Thanks to the print-capitalism, various vernaculars have their own fields to exchange, propagate, cross over, and stand out. Those who speak different languages now could understand each other by means of the print-languages.

In this process, people start to realize and imagine the existence of other people who possibly share the same culture with them. By the print-languages people are connected and they create imagined communities.

As soon as the nations emerge in a large number, many problems, conflicts, and competitions among nations also grow in abundance. Contemporary theories of ethnicity and nation concerns could roughly be divided into two schools of thought: one is “primordialism,” which believes that ethnic identity is human beings’ most primordial emotions and a brand sticking to one person forever; the other is “situationalism,” which views ethnic identity as a tool for gaining the interests of ethnicity and nation, so it might change with the situations. David Brown has made a clarification about the nature of two contemporary nationalist politics. He expounds the primordialist approach to the study of nationalism:

Primordialist approaches depict the nation as based upon a natural, organic community, which defines the identity of its members, who feel an innate and emotionally powerful attachment to it. Natural nations have natural rights to self-determination. (Brown 2000: 6)

While Brown annotates the situationalist approach to the study of nationalism, he says,

Situationalism explains ethnic and national identities, not as natural instinctual ties to organic communities, but rather as resources employed by groups of individuals for the pursuit of their common interests. As the type of threats and opportunities with which people are faced change, so do their options and their responses. Thus, both the utility of ethnicity and nationalism, and the form which they take, will vary in response to changing situations. (Brown 2000: 13)

Brown’s annotations are exactly to the points and basically most scholars present their

argumentations on the basis of the two discourses later on. The primordialists' essential contention is that ethnic identity is inherent and unchangeable. But to situationalists ethnic identity is nothing but a strategic choice of making groups collective interests. As a matter of fact, however, ethnic identity is supposed to incorporate the two levels to make a complete identity structure, in my opinion. The two approaches are the two extremes of one line. The drawbacks of primordialism lie in the ignorance of selective identity in the context. In addition, primordialists neglect also other factors, e.g. language, religion, kinship, history, or culture, which will result in the variation of ethnic identity. Contrary to primordialism, the element of "interests" weighs too much in situationalism. In fact, people do need the emotional attachment to ethnicity, and sometimes this attachment does not necessarily conform to the interests of ethnicity. Take the ethnic groups in America for example. No matter Jewish, Spanish, Italian, or Asian immigrants, they more or less have some unspeakable affection towards their mother countries. Therefore this primordial affection in a sense is an innate cultural identity. It means a lot to people of whatever ethnicity. But this ethnic/cultural identity can also alter from one environment to another for self-interests.

The ultimate goal of either a primordialism-oriented ethnicity/nation or an interests-driven one is building one nation of their own. Industrialism, as Gellner mentions, provides a context of rapid spreading and growth of education and multi-cultures. Under this circumstance a state/nation needs to protect the culture and ethnicity it identifies with. Thus what nationalists popularize the concept of "nation-state" becomes the ideal for every ethnicity/nation. In accordance with Gellner's definition, "Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (Gellner 1983: 1). So the archetype of a nation-state is expected that the boundaries of the political entity and

the national/ethnic unit should be conterminous. If not, the repetition of many oppositions and conflicts would occur within and outside the state either for the sake of protecting the integrity of the nation or defending the interests of the nation. Anderson thus notes that “Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (Anderson 1983: 16).

The struggle between Chinese and Malay/Malaysian is a representative pattern of incongruous combination of political and ethnic unit.<sup>26</sup> After a long period of acculturation into the indigenous Malaysian culture, some Chinese have turned into Malay-speaking Chinese called baba. Speaking Malay, baba attempts to blend into Malays’ life. Nevertheless, the biological features and some cultural characteristics inherited from their Chinese fathers are not likely to be eliminated. In Malayan circumstance, many Chinese immigrants who have acculturated to the indigenous inhabitants are still labeled Chinese. These Chinese immigrants, who were called “Huaqiao” or “Haiwai Huaren” (overseas Chinese) or “Zhongguoren” (Chinese, which carries the connotation of patriotism and nationalism) in the early days, are today referred as “Huaren” (“literally Hua people, that is, Chinese in the ethnic

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<sup>26</sup> It is necessary to distinguish Malay from Malaysian. The Malay, culturally, specifically, and strictly refers to the indigenous people in Malaya without including any other ethnicity or immigrants. As for the Malaysian, it involves more the political meaning in a broader sense. The Malaysian government and every Malaysian citizen held an optimistic expectation toward the new-born country, Malaysia, which was founded on the idea of multiracialism and multiculturalism, at the year of 1963. Shirley Lim also delineates and provides the actual situation for reference: “In 1964, in my first year as an undergraduate, many university students were heady with optimism toward a new kind of human, the Malaysian. Meeting on the common ground of multiracialism and multiculturalism, politicians of all races had seemed to agree the formation of a new political unit, composed of island pieces colonized by Britain in Southeast Asia: the Federation of Malaya, Sarawak, and Singapore” (Lim 1997: 121). In other words, there was no so called “Malaysian” before 1963. The Malaysian may contain other non-natives: Chinese, Indian etc.; the misuse of Malaysian should be avoided unless an adjective is added such as Chinese Malaysian. So when speaking of Malaysian, the reader should be aware of the difference from Malay. Likewise, Malaya stands for a geographical name while Malaysia is a political entity—a country name. Yet throughout the whole thesis, sometimes Malaysian and Malay would too both be incorporated as “Malay/Malaysian” (or “Malay(si)an”) in order to display both of them are associated with the issue regardless of the 1963 establishment of Malaysia.

sense”), analyzes Tan Chee Beng (Tan 2001: 216). For many ethnic Chinese in Malaysia, Southeast Asia, they “cannot take their Chinese identities for granted, especially in contexts where they continue to be perceived as somewhat alien” (Tan 2001: 211). Therefore some fragmentary conflicts and some large-scale events take place from time to time between the two ethnic groups of Chinese and Malays.

We learn of some historical events from Shirley Lim’s poems. The clue of the long-term feud is disclosed in the poem “Sugar-Cane”:

Once, we are told, the massacres came:  
 Women, children, seized by hair, slaughtered,  
 Running everywhere into blood and death, the same  
 Dark men with metal arms killing, killing, the dead  
 Like rags too beggared for burying. And the men,  
 Those who had not run into blood and death, hid  
 In fields under roots of padi,<sup>27</sup> the muddy water  
 Of life shaking, shaking to be rooted out then  
 By the same dark men shearing alike the plant  
 And flesh. (Lim 1994: 13)

As the lines go on, not only the narrator but also the readers, or the audience in a sense, are told by the story teller how the violent incident mattered. The audience is like watching a scary and tragic movie, which brings about people’s fear and pity. The “dark men” implies the “autochthonous” Malaysians and the men killed or chased thus refer to Chinese.<sup>28</sup> The deep-rooted malice compels autochthonous Malaysians to revolt against those who occupy their natal territories, and they mean to “root out”

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<sup>27</sup> i.e. paddy. Rice or rice field in Malay.

<sup>28</sup> According to James Clifford, he makes a difference between formulations of “autochthonous” and “indigenous,” which refer to “natural” and “historical” level respectively (Clifford 1994: 308). Here I would have alternate usages of both to make my interpretations of native ethnic people more complete.

the intruders with “metal arms.” Below the hoes there makes no difference between “the plant and flesh.” Such condition happens to respond to James Clifford’s argument: “Diasporist and autochthonist histories, the aspirations of migrants and natives, do come into direct political antagonism” (Clifford 1994: 309). The cause of the “political antagonism” points to both diasporists and autochthonists “function as ‘minority’ claims against a hegemonic/assimilationist state” (309). Indeed, there are some significant areas of both diasporists and autochthonists histories overlapping. Namely, when autochthonists are deprived of their possessions and dissipated to the periphery, they may share the same experience as diasporists do. So when overlapping happens, “‘tribal’ predicaments, in certain historical circumstances, are diasporic” (309). In other words, “dispersed tribal peoples, those who have been dispossessed of their lands [...] may claim *diasporic* identities” (Clifford 1994: 309). Inasmuch as diasporists share similar historical experiences of dispossession, displacement, decimation, marginality and even profit—the territory with autochthonists, the conflicts between two communities are understandable and expectable. The continuous conflicts and integration between Chinese and Malay keep taking place from the early age of first-generation Chinese immigrants to nowadays. Hence the most noticeable incident of May 13 has become a historical, racial, cultural, and political watershed that locates in the midst of two groups. Until now, the poet and other Chinese fellows in Malaysia are still recalling the brutal events:

Still here today,

We have not forgotten these casual stalks, slender

Saviours on which we have fattened. And the dark men

In their bloody work, who will come yet if we stay,

Or if we run and are running everywhere. (Lim 1994: 13)

As a matter of fact, this poem may not directly accuse the atrocity of the May 13, but through narration the poet attempts to combine two historical sites/sights and make them analogous. Chinese people may have mental state in common in facing the two historical sites/sights and events. Their toughness and special property of soil are symbolized by the paddy and sugar-cane, which is deeply rooted in Malaya/Malaysia. Even they “run and are running everywhere,” they still demonstrate their extraordinary ability of adaptation. But of course “running everywhere” shows the dislocation of diasporic Chinese people.

The May 13 riots meant a lot to Shirley Lim because it provided Lim with a clear insight into the ethnic relationships of Chinese and Malays and it also forced Lim to leave her homeland behind for a foreign land. Many years later when she stepped on the once familiar land again, she knew that she could not cut off the bondage between her and the enormous historical burden imposed on her. The first time she returned to her home was for the sake of her father, she says: “He did not live for my returning. / News came after burial” (“Bukit China,” Lim 1994: 3). For Chinese offspring, it is very grievous that the younger generation cannot make it to see their respectful elders, especially the parents, at the last minute. In order to pay the tribute to her adorable father and grandfathers, she went to Bukit China to mourn over the past.<sup>29</sup>

Bless me, spirits, I am returning.

Stone marking my father’s bones,

I light the joss. A dead land.

On moon steepness smoke ascends

Briefly. Country is important,

Is important. This knowledge I know

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<sup>29</sup> Bukit means mountain in Malay. Bukit China, which refers to San Bao Shan in Chinese, is the cemetery where Chinese in Malaya hold the funerals at Malacca.

If it will rise with smoke, with the dead. (Lim 1994: 3)

Reading these lines, we can sense what Lim was trying to express is more than mourning. What she concerned in more grandeur is the importance of a country; that is why she uses the repetition of the word “important” to stress that a nation/an ethnicity or diasporists do need a state to attach to. She wishes those spirits, no matter those killed in earlier massacres or later in the May 13 riots, would bless her and protect her. And this aspiration would “rise/ascend” with the smoke of joss to the heaven. Lim ingeniously sublimates her personal feeling to an elevated national sentiment. Compared to Lim’s description and elaboration of the mourning, in *Imagined Communities* Anderson has ever also made an issue of tombs that:

No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely because they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, [...] Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings. This is why so many different nations have such tombs without feeling any need to specify the nationality of their absent occupants. (Anderson 1983: 17)

The graveyard Lim depicts could be measured balancedly with the type Anderson commends. Both are filled with “national imaginings,” or, “nationalist *sentiment*,” in Gellner’s words. The nationalist *sentiment*, according to Gellner, “is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfillment” (Gellner 1983: 1). Either those killed or those who killed in the “nationalist *movement*” (1) have their own national imaginings and nationalist sentiment to prove their ethnicity. Therefore visiting the tombs gave Lim an opportunity to introspect and examine the relationships, history, and ethnicity between

Chinese and Malays.

Although there were many conflicts since Chinese settled down on the foreign land, it seems that Chinese show toughness in dealing with difficulties and in accommodating to adversities. As L. A. Peter Gosling observes, “The Chinese in Southeast Asia are flexible, responsive to economic opportunity, and ingenious in their adaptation to change” (Gosling 1983: 12). The word “flexible” just right corresponds to the anthropologist conception discussed above: the situationalist. For smart Chinese, “intermediate identities are less transitional, and more situational, facilitating accommodation to rather than membership in the indigenous culture” (Gosling 1983: 13). That is to say, Chinese by virtue of economic strength bring up their status and class. But what brings the upheaval about might be the cause that the social and economic status of Chinese in Malaya/Malaysia is often higher and better than the indigenous people. And that results in Malays’ discontentedness.

In Malaysian society, the existing norm of identities is stratified by race and religion for a long time. People are dominated by political and historical consciousness deeply. In addition to the opposition between Chinese and Malay, those Westerners are one of the elements to augment the complicated condition in Malaya. For instance, in the University of Malaya, “lecturers were lofty men, chiefly white, to whom we [Asian students] were uninteresting children of the Asian masses” (Lim 1997: 118). Even when she moved to the United States, Lim still underwent the unavoidable white discrimination. These “cultural plays between Chinese and Malay, Asian and Western” all lead to Lim’s “angst,” i.e. anxiety (Lim 1997: 5).

The feeling of animosity between Chinese and Malay has long grown unmanageable in matters of space and territory problem. The spatial anxiety of Malay toward Chinese is precisely presented in one student, Miriam, of Lim’s school,

she said, “We Malays would rather return Malaysia to the jungle than live with Chinese domination. We don’t need the Chinese. We will be happy to sit on the floor if that’s what it means to do without the Chinese!” (Lim 1997: 135) The strong racial tension and antipathy culminated in the May 13 riots. The Chinese were deemed invaders on the property of Malays so that Malays were coerced to abort their family, community, and possessions. This occasion chances to coincide with the analysis of Asia in the psycho-geography of Australian whiteness in Ien Ang’s book. In arguing the case of Asia and Australia, Ang unequivocally indicates that “the anxieties [...] not merely and simply resolve around ‘race,’ but also, significantly, have to do with land, and with territory or more precisely, with *claims* on land and territory” (Ang 2001: 127). Ang’s argument exhibits that one race, here referring to the Malay, on the basis of protectionism and nationalism, displays strong craving and determination for claiming the exclusive propriety of the land. On the ground of pure-blood and in presenting themselves as the rightful proprietor of the land, i.e. announcing themselves the first arrival, the Malays do not want to mix with Chinese and they hold the fantasy that the entire territorial space of Malaysia is supposed to be for one race only.

In this regard, the ethnic enmity becomes the main blasting fuse of violent acts. The ethnicity does play an important part in communication with Chinese and Malayan communities. It also influences the functioning of economic and political policies of Malaysian government. Even though some of the Chinese immigrants have acquired local ways of Malayan life, some even have acculturated to the indigenous cultures deeply, considers Tan Chee Beng, the discrepancy between the two ethnicities does not necessarily reduce. On the contrary, “younger generations of Chinese feel Malaysian in identification but many are unhappy about affirmative action policies in favor of the Malays” (Tan 2001: 215). This partiality denotes a

condition that Chinese have been deprived of the affiliation of the nation. Because Chinese are repressed in many aspects and live under the shadow of violence, many of them choose to emigrate to other countries, “particularly professionals and technicians (or those who have such aspirations), whose departure ultimately impoverishes both the Chinese community and the nation” (Gosling 1983: 13). By that time, “the modern world has also witnessed Chinese remigration, for example, from a Southeast Asian country to the United States or Australia” (Tan 2001: 232). Since Shirley Lim was an outstanding Chinese Malaysian graduate student, who passionately in pursuit of advanced knowledge and higher degree, she naturally was one of the Chinese people who re-migrated from a Southeast Asian country to the United States.

While deciding to leave the homeland and negotiating the territory of home, Shirley Lim was making efforts on rectifying her ethnic identity as well. Since her parents were both born in Malaya, Lim is undoubtedly a Malaysian. She is also a Chinese in terms of her ties of blood. From the perspective of education and language, she is an English woman. Speaking of nationality, she is an American. Although there are so many appellations for her, no one can cover her real identity overall. Especially when she made her first debut in the American society in the early days, her identity recognition swayed with nostalgia. What she saw in the foreign land would solicit her sense of alienation though she came a long way to make her dreams come true. Here one of her poem can convey some of her “thoughts from abroad”:

Late through October the leaves change colour.  
 The season has been around so long most  
 Do not see it go to winter.  
 From our window-height we watch the year close

In the trees. About us, the rural land  
 Reflects the sunlight. Far away,  
 Unglimpsed, the Atlantic makes a band  
 Of mirrors for Massachusetts. Today,  
 The scene is exulting: to air and light  
 Houses, trees and highways seem sensible  
 Moment to moment; till we can quite  
 Imagine this world invisible  
 As instinct on the flood for home  
 From which all exiled landscapes come. (Lim 1994: 59)

In Chinese way of thinking, the leaves and roots have been considered closely related to a sojourner. That is why when the poet watches out the window “the leaves change colour,” her “instinct on the flood for home” takes over her thoughts from abroad. In other words, “watching the year close in the trees,” “all exiled landscapes come” and the scene of hometown “houses, trees and highways” seem so real and touchable at some solitary moments. “The word *gen* (roots),” indicates Professor L. Ling-chi Wang to expound the different types of Chinese identity, “symbolizes the genesis and maintenance of life. At another level, it is used to designate one’s birthplace, ancestral village, or native place, and the source from which one derives one’s personal identity” (Wang 1994: 186).<sup>30</sup> Watching the leaves changing colour and falling to the ground, Lim “watches the year close in the trees,” and she thinks of her birthplace, Malaysia, “far away,” as though the scenery of hometown “seem

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<sup>30</sup> There are five basic types of Chinese American identity proposed by Ling-chi Wang. Wang skillfully employs five familiar Chinese idioms and phrases to interpret different sorts of Chinese identity. Each is associated with a different notion of *gen* (roots). All five can be found among the Chinese in the United States today though each type resulted from a diverse historical setting. One may move from one identity from another because driven by some historical and political dynamic. The five types of identity are listed as: *luoye guigen*: the sojourner mentality, *zhancao-chugen*: total assimilation, *luodi shenggen*: accommodation, *xungen wenzu*: ethnic pride and consciousness, and *shigen qunzu*: the uprooted.

sensible moment to moment.” This “instinct for home” namely is the mood, *luoye guigen*, described by Wang that “characterizes the Chinese abroad as fallen leaves that must eventually, even inevitably, return to their roots in Chinese soil” (Wang 1994: 187). By this definition we can prove that this is an obvious example of primordialist-oriented ethnicity. Although Lim is inclined to take the leaves as a symbol of exile being tinged with nostalgia, she does not have the irresistible urge to return to her home land. She is now a leave floating in the air. So the *luoye guigen* type of identity does not fit for Lim’s case.

Since Shirley Lim’s type of identity is not *luoye guigen*, then according to the classification of Wang, *shigen* (the uprooted) is a faithful description of Lim’s recent exile to America. Though Wang’s analysis is directly aimed at Chinese immigrants who particularly came from mainland China, I think it still conforms to Chinese in/from Southeast Asian countries. Wang considers that after World War II and the Cold War, more and more

Highly educated Chinese have chosen to abandon their roots in China, Taiwan, and, increasingly, Hong Kong and Singapore. Some came to the United States initially as *liuxuesheng* (foreign students), others as immigrant *zhishifenzi* (intelligentsia). Together they constitute much of the educated elite of their native lands. (Wang 1994: 208)

Following the progress of Lim’s memoir, we are aware that she did come to the United States initially as *liuxuesheng*, and later when she settled down, she also became an immigrant *zhishifenzi*. As a new foreign student, she is different from the earlier students, who fall into the type of *luoye guigen* that eventually would go back and contribute what they have learned in foreign countries. Lim is one of “the vast majority of the latest wave of students who have failed to return to China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or their home countries in Southeast Asia” (Wang 1994: 209). As a result of

failing to return home country and not fully being accepted by the host country, she thus veritably turns into “the uprooted.” She has ever recounted her mental state that time: “For a decade, I did an emotional shuttle run between Asia and the United States, voluntarily displaced” (Lim 1997: 169). In other words, she psychologically crosses the borderline of Asia and the United States to and fro. Under this circumstance of double alienation, Lim therefore loses her roots to the ground and becomes a nomad, a vagrant.

Crossing the borderland might cause the spatial anxiety of Americans by the same token. When foreigners expect to migrate to the United States, they are required to pass various crucible of naturalization tests, comprising language, history, society, or economy, for the access to the country, at least being included in name. In fact, those tests are employed to exclude the aliens and to deny aliens’ identities and access. In addition, Lim gives us another conspicuous instance of the white men’s racial/spatial anxiety on riding a train to California: “The good thing about being Chinese on Amtrack / is no one sits next to you. The bad thing is / you sit alone all the way to Irvine” (Lim 1998: 64). This ridiculous delimitation could possibly happen in any kind of field, area, or space. As a person of colored skin, Lim went through the repression caused by racial discrimination when she applied for a job in the college. She says, “I could only hope to fill the interstices, foreign to all and mutable” (Lim 1997: 169). For the Americans, a colored person appearing in the academe or other fields is bound to threaten their survival and space, not to mention the students she teaches must have been discomforting with the foreign face to teach them English. In her poem “Chinese in Academia,” Lim narrates her teaching career in American academia. She gives it a deeper thought when she was proctoring. While looking at the student taking the exam, she looks back upon her own self as a student:

I am reminded of myself, young girl  
 Facing a two-hour exam, locking  
 Thighs against the wish to urinate  
 While my pen scratches a future.  
 History is crammed with exam fever.  
 I look at the young woman fated  
 To make her fortune. (Lim 1994: 55)

She knows well that “knowledge is security” (Lim 1994: 55), which means that knowledge is a passport for her and for many other minority people to enter in the American society and get into the upper class, regardless of her skin color. “In the United States, as in many other societies,” she notes, “prestige is signified by exclusivity: how few can be admitted, how many of the masses can be excluded” (Lim 1997: 216). So when she was still a young woman like the student now concentrating on her sheets, she reckoned upon the exams to stand out among her fellows. Only counting on this way does she have possibility to replace her ethnic identity with the class identity.

Attempting to avert the complexities and contradictions of her life in Malaysia and America, Lim is dealing with “a way out of the fixedness of race identity” (Lim 1997: 122). She knows profoundly that “someone (like her) who walks between and in and out of national and institutional borders draws attention to the arbitrariness of divisions and to the vested interests of gatekeepers” because “there are gatekeepers everywhere” (Lim 1997: 222-23). Yet she still sees herself as a subject to fight against the hegemonic mode of racial thinking, to blur, to decay, and to obviate the ideological border of ethnicity. Lim makes herself analogous to “water” that it is “unconfined” and it always “looks for boundaries” (“On Water,” Lim 1994: 74). The multiple “boundaries” implies that there is no fixed and immutable border at all and it

could be changed anytime by the will to oscillate: “There is a will resisting resistance; we inhabit / Those spaces given up by ghosts we disinherit” (“The Will,” Lim 1994: 73).

After a decade of mental struggle and shuffle between Asia and the United States, Lim finally found a solution to her identity crisis more than taking a workplace in America. “[She] became an American politically with the birth of [her] child” (Lim 1997: 194). The birth of her son indeed changes her way of thinking. She finally began the procedure for citizenship in order to give her son the most primordial sense of bonding with America. In virtue of the two preconditions, Lim thus confidently declared herself a real American. Lim suits to the type of *luodi shenggen* (accommodation), in Wang’s characterization. He states that:

Accommodation, in this instance, is a survival strategy in an alien setting one is unable to leave, a pragmatic approach widely adopted by Chinese in Southeast Asia. More important, it can take place even if American society continues to show intolerance or hostility toward Chinese Americans. (Wang 1994: 206)

Or we could sum up the type of *luodi shenggen* (accommodation) as the situationalist-oriented identity discussed before because of the survival strategy. *Luodi shenggen*, planting one’s roots in the foreign land, instead of totally assimilating to the host society, hardly means discarding one’s original racial, ethnic, and cultural identity. For Lim this is the best tactic to remain her cultural heritage and also to become an American. Yet the mode of accommodation seems not necessarily suitable for her son. She says, “The myth of assimilation became a pressing reality as soon as I brought my son home. [...] I wanted for him to have a pride of belonging, the sense of identity with a homeland, that which I had possessed as a Chinese Malaysian for a brief time in my youth” (Lim 1997: 197). Obviously

she wanted her child to maintain his infant primacy of American homeland and take his Asian American identity seriously. That is to say, for many immigrant parents like Lim, as Kitano and Daniels note, “although parents may never become full participants, it is their expectation that their children will” (Kitano and Daniels 1988: 33). Being American guarantees them, both parents and children, the economic, political, and social opportunities. “It means justice and equality; it means a full identity. It does not mean second-class citizenship” (Kitano and Daniels 1988: 33). The full identity is completely embodied in Lim’s anticipation: “I want him to be an American son. I don’t want him to be someone who feels torn in his identity” (Wang 1997: 162). Feeling torn in one’s identity is no other than Amy Ling’s remark on the “between-world” phenomenon of residents of Chinese ancestry in America: “Whether recent immigrants or America-born, Chinese in the United States find themselves caught between two worlds. Their facial features proclaim one fact—their Asian ethnicity but by education, choice, or birth they are American” (Ling 1990: 20). This statement perfectly echoes to Lim’s personal experiences, although throughout the journey she had been exposed to countless hardship. But “by education and choice” she could breathe as the Americans do, and so does her child. To follow up Ling’s expression, Lim and other people of Asian ethnicity, either by decision or by predestination, are becoming American.

“Perhaps that [thought of me as an American] was what I was becoming,” Lim writes in her memoir. “I wrote from this space of undetermined self short lyrics that might seize on senses that were rapidly displacing themselves” (Lim 1997: 174). The following lyric faithfully showing her shift of identity:

I live in a small house  
 On top of fifty other houses.  
 Every morning I face the East River

Where the air is cold as  
 On Tung Shen Mountains.  
 The mountains are made of loess  
 Brought down by the Yang-tze.  
 The city is a mountain  
 Also, made of Asia,  
 Europe and Africa.  
 They call it America.  
 Every morning I practice *li*,  
 Perform my wifely duties,  
 Watch colour television,  
 And eat pop, crackle, snap.  
 It is not hard to be  
 An Asian-American Chinese.

(“Dedicated to Confucius Plaza,” Lim 1994: 41)

Though she lives in the country which is the influx of various races, she would recall that remote father land to ensure and remind herself of her Chinese bondage and kinship. She on the one hand practices the traditional Chinese manners, and perform the living way as the Americans do on the other. This is getting her a little bit “confused,” which is a counterpart of “Confucius” appearing at the title. She is dedicating this poem to Confucius to express her confusion of being a Chinese, an Asian, and an American. Eventually, she resolves the embarrassing situation and concludes that by living both ways of life she is becoming “an Asian-American Chinese.” After she had passed the exams to be a citizen of America, she started to feel a kind of contradiction which never comes to her before. Because “no longer a traveler, [she] was included in [her] accusations of America” (Lim 1997: 196). But

the contradiction at the same time proves that she has become a genuine American.

Casting a sentence, “I wrote to know I was still there” (Lim 1997: 214), parallel to Descartes’ famous maxim: “I think therefore I am,” Lim strives to live in the interstices between two worlds and two ideologies. Instead of falling into the pattern which Chambers calls “Third World musicians and artist,” who are “forced to constantly construct their identities on the move between different worlds, and begin to entertain the idea of ‘homelessness’ and migrancy” (Chambers 1994: 82), Lim wishes herself for an orientation. She realizes “what connected the two [worlds] was [herself], and [she] knew [she] would someday write this world down, finding a language that would do justice to it” (Lim 1997: 75). Consequently, in the early stages of her creative writing, she intended to fill her works with spontaneous overflow of native presence of authentic Malayness, rather than “musical and cultural nomadism in the modern world” (Chambers 1994: 80). In this way, Lim knows she is certain to participate in Singaporean/Malaysian writing.

“*I’m* changing. I’ve become more comfortable as an Asian American, and I’ve become much more confident as a citizen of the United States,” Shirley Lim declares with a firm attitude in an interview conducted by Joan Chang (Lim 1999: 5). She reveals her preference of deeming herself as an Asian American writer to a Chinese American at the very beginning of the interview:

I consider myself not so much Chinese American as Asian American. That’s because I’m not just Chinese. The term “Chinese” is always divided. I prefer to use the word “Asian American” because it opens up the word “Chinese” to include a sense of *diasporic Chinese* who have gone to all parts of Asia, to Britain, even to Australia, and here to the United States. (Lim 1999: 1)

Later period of Lim’s staying in America, she also looks forward to keeping abreast

with other Asian American women writers and critics, such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Hisaye Yamamoto, Mitsuye Yamada, Cathy Song, Elaine Kim, and Amy Ling. These female writers and critics “lit up a different *space*, one that promised rather than denied community” (Lim 1997: 227; emphasis mine), to enable Asian literature to be placed side by side with the American literature. Before turning an Asian American, everything she writes concerning Malaysia is nothing but an “exorcism” (Lim 1997: 164), a kind of ritual to remove part of her Asian self. Once her part of Asian self is withdrawn from the American context, she is not going to be agitated by nomadism and troubled by unfixed ethnic identity. In following those female Asian American writers’ steps and keeping pace with the Americans, Lim becomes an Asian American, and she “gives up the struggle for a memorized homeland” (Lim 1997: 231). In other words, she eventually recognizes herself as an American writer. Lim concludes in the end that:

Home is the place where our stories are told.

In California, I am beginning to write stories about America, as well as about Malaysia. Listening, and telling my own stories, I am moving *home*.” (Lim 1997: 232; emphasis mine)

Theodor Adorno has ever claimed that “for a man without a homeland, writing becomes a place to live” (Adorno 1974: 87). From now on, it could be altered as “writing and story-telling become a place to live.” This is the destination and dissolution of Lim’s ethnicity.

## Conclusion

### Shirley Lim as an Asian American:

#### Reterritorialization of Language, Migrancy, and Ethnicity

Growing up in a multiethnic society of Malaysia, studying abroad and then residing in America, Shirley Lim is herself a subject full of complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainties. No single dimension can completely stand for her ethnicity, let alone any one of the following: history of family migration, the place of birth, language, education, culture, religion, location, or nationality. Her own life can be considered as a double transplant, and the psychical/physical/cultural voyage the poet describes is a record of loss and renewal. Lim tries to shape her subjectivity through all manners of border-crossing, border-breaking, and border-resetting in her poetry. Her poetry transcends the merely personal confessional purpose and urges us to reflect on the manifestation of her complex identity and her multicultural self-exploration of roots.

My reading and inspecting of Shirley Lim's poetry collection *Monsoon History* adopts the postcolonial and poststructural point of view, which is focused on the conception of space of border thinking. There are two tentative aims laid out in the process of argumentation, in terms of language, migrancy, and ethnicity respectively. The first one means to deconstruct the geo-historical/political boundary of the three categories, and to embrace the heterogeneity and multiplicity in the multicultural spectrum of literature. By means of analyzing various movement in the text, including exile, diaspora, displacement and nomad, I attempt to figure out the route of the movement politics, in which I find the nomad is the most erosive medium to obliterate territory, in the postmodern field. As we know from the above, reterritorialization equates and follows deterritorialization. The sense of home,

identity, place, and belonging would form after the geographical, textual, and psychological space are deterritorialized and reterritorialized. In this way, the positionality of Lim grows transparent in the new distribution of space. The second one is to affirm the re-membering and recalling of Lim's diasporic experiences, and the re-siting and re-mapping of demarcation of identity as well. Lim's contributions will perfectly remain resonant and embedded in the history and space. Because of the success of revising and re-acting to the new identity and space, Lim admits to herself that she is now "learning to love America":

because it has no pure products

because the Pacific Ocean sweeps along the coastline

[.....]

and because land is better than ocean

[.....]

because I live in California

[.....]

because my senses have caught up with my body

[.....]

because he [Lim's son] is a strong American boy

[.....]

because to have a son is to have a country

because my son will bury me here

because countries are in our blood and we bleed them

because it is late and too late to change my mind

because it is time. ("Learning to Love America," Lim 1998: 74)

Through this assertion of “learning to love America,” Lim has formally transformed herself into a real American in the perspective of language, migrancy, and ethnicity, including especially the birth of her son, on whom she places all wishes. As she recognizes, “land is better than ocean;” she no longer is a nomad shuttling between Asia and America through the ocean. She is aware that someday she will be buried in California, but both countries, Malaysia and America, are in her bone and blood. So if she didn’t change her mind, it would be too late for a new identity. Fortunately, she acknowledges the new identity as an Asian American, rather than Chinese, Malaysian, Chinese Malaysian, Chinese American, though she acquires it with extreme hardship and rigor. The final outcome also claims the re-making of home and that is the ultimate significance Lim has been searching for.

Lim’s greatest contribution would be reinventing the tradition of Asian/Chinese literature, in other words, establishing the poetics of diaspora for Asian/Chinese literature. She did succeed in creating a space for all Asian/Chinese writers in English. Her creative writings honestly reflect the complicated and convoluted mental status of all exiled Asian/Chinese authors away from home. Besides, she also endows writers in exile with resolutions of language use and ethnic predicament. Writers in identity crisis may take Lim’s experience and her poetry as a precious referential object to re-locate themselves. As for the impact of her poetry on the readers, whether the readers’ condition is in exile or not, her poetry always gives them a sense of sympathy, empathy, and epiphany. They cannot help being caught in her real or imaginary circumstances.

In the process of careful reading of Lim’s poems, I endeavor to take different theorists’ approaches, such as Deleuze and Guattari, Edward Said, James Clifford, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Ling-chi Wang, to support me in making profound interpretations. But as the difficult situation all of theories would confront, the

application of theories would never be perfectly compatible to the reality, and neither do the theorists' thoughts I adopt. Only two of the functions cater to the situation of English used by Shirley Lim when I discuss the functions of language. In categorizing various groups of exile people, Edward Said lists four sorts of them. A person could not possibly conform to all of the criteria that the theorist has drawn up. Yet I choose a broader way of interpretation to deem Lim either a voluntary or an involuntary exile. I also draw the theories of the two anthropologists, Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, to take a clear look at the general development of human civilization and rise of nationalism. Not every nation or ethnicity, however, tracks the only one historical line and the general investigation. But still, Anderson and Gellner's formulations share some characteristics that are quite valuable for us to understand the cause and effect of nationalism. Furthermore, Ling-chi Wang's vivid exposition of diverse forms of Chinese diaspora helps us out comprehending the overall spatial-temporal background. It assists me to find out which fits in with Lim's identity springing from the change of time and space, although it is unlikely to apply every form to the poet herself. The conditions mentioned above reveal the obstruction encountered in practicing the theories, and I seek for a moderate or the third way to negotiate the coexistence of theories and actualization.

From Lim's exuberant experiences of her early life, desolated by various kinds of losses and detachment, to the striving moment when she has extricated herself from the debilitating circumstances of dislocation and dispossession, the dialogues she conducts with her present self, past self, and homelands offer readers channels for expanding their own dialogue with transnational experiences. My reflections on her migrant status celebrate the fluidities of relocation and deterritorialization. The border-crossing thinking suggests an intervention between two arenas and creates a space, a contact zone, for Lim to articulate. It is that space where her numerous

stories and her power generate from. I find it useful to describe a literature or a poet that seeks to break away from a single arbitrary identity in terms of deterritorialization. Since this study is tied to the notion of deterritorialization, the ultimate goal is representing Shirley Geok-lin Lim's diasporic identity, political positioning, and her success in becoming an Asian American because of reterritorialization of language, migrancy, and ethnicity.

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