

Chapter 4

Home and Host Topoi: Imagined and Imaged

Nostalgia for the absent topos has been listed by diaspora theorists as one of the major characteristic features of any diaspora. The love that the diasporans have for the home land while in the new space, the cultural symbols made use of by the diasporans to recreate the absent land in the new terrain and their longing to return to the home land have been lauded by theorists as indicative of the non-resident's yearning for an ideal land. This form of intense love may be true in the case of certain non-residents. Nonetheless, such patterns found in the works are also capable of setting up a hermeneutics of suspicion regarding the loyalty of the diasporans towards both the lands as theorists tend to make crass generalisations in attributing certain features to the diaspora without taking into account individual differences.

Instances of nostalgia abound in the works. The texts also project cultural symbols that are used to recreate China in the host land. Preparation and eating of Chinese food very often figure in the texts and serve as a metaphor for the absent land. But even as all these may be credited to demonstrate the diasporan's dual loyalty for the 'absent' and the 'present' topoi, an alternate reading may also be possible as at some points in the texts, the characters that indulge in nostalgia themselves tend to find fault with both the home and the host nations, which makes one surprised at the swiftness with which their love for the terrains vanish. The works also evince a portrayal of the sufferings of the migrant generations in the host land and tend to register the complaints of the migrants regarding the troubles in Canada/ America, which makes the professed

love of the host land suspect. But even as the characters complain about the host land thus, they are not blind to the blemishes in China and the behaviour of the Chinese, evidencing that a deep-rooted love for China that makes one blind to faults is also absent. This makes one doubt if the diasporans are not being mawkish and evince maladjustment with both the lands, exaggerating their problems and exacerbating the tension between the nations. Further, the authenticity of portrayal of China by the writers has been interrogated by critics, making one wonder the driving force behind such portrayals.

Diaspora theorists contend that diasporans believe in their sojourner status while at the host land. This is present to a great extent in *Brave Orchid* in *The Woman Warrior*. She longs to go back to China where there are Han people everywhere. When Moon Orchid makes the actual travel from China to America, it is said that Brave Orchid has already been waiting at the airport, her mind already with her sister in the course from China to America. In the course of this section, Brave Orchid in her mind travels from America to China and back. Brave Orchid, while in America, is also nostalgic about the lands she had left behind. Kingston writes, "In America my mother has eyes as strong as boulders, never once skittering off a face, but she has not learned to place decorations and phonograph needles, nor has she stopped seeing land on the other side of the oceans" (WW 59). Though Kingston's mother does not believe in ghosts, she tells her children that their grandmother in China is sending them candy when they feel their spit tasting like sugar.

Further instances of nostalgia can be found in the texts under examination. Fa Mu Lan, the legendary woman warrior in Brave Orchid's talk-

story to Kingston, and the one who looms large in Kingston's imagination, under the guidance of the old man and the old woman, experiences nostalgia in an alien land.

The diasporans are also said to make use of certain cultural symbols to sustain the longing for and memory of the home land. This "construction of commemorative monuments, sanctuaries, monasteries and other symbolic (and sometimes functional) places is an essential means, for the members of a diaspora, of a re-rooting in the host country" (Bruneau 48). Kingston speaks of the practices of ancestor worship in her American home. Kingston herself remarks, "On the shelf of the roll top desk, like a mantel under the grandparents' photos, there were bowls of plastic tangerines and oranges, crepe-paper flowers, plastic vases filled with sand and incense sticks" (WW 123). Even the ABC is said to experience the odour of China through the medical diploma of Brave Orchid. In the words of Kingston:

. . . my mother brings out the metal tube that holds her medical diploma . . . When I open it, the smell of China flies out, a thousand-year-old bat flying heavy-headed out of the Chinese caverns where bats are as white as dust, a smell that comes from long ago, far back in the brain. Crates from Canton, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan have that smell too, only stronger because they are more recently come from the Chinese (WW 57).

In addition to the above-mentioned symbols, mothers of Chinese ancestry in America are shown as preparing and serving Chinese food as an attempt at recreating China in America. On the day of Moon Orchid's arrival,

Brave Orchid prepares Chinese delicacies. Kingston narrates, “All day long the outside stove cooked peelings and gristle into chicken feed. It horrified the children when they caught her throwing scraps of chicken into the chicken feed” (WW 123-124). Thus food serves here again as a metaphor for the lost land. Brave Orchid also sends Chinese meals for her husband who would be in the laundry. She even gives specific instructions as to how the food should be served. Thus:

She put her husband’s breakfast into the food container that she had bought in Chinatown, one dish in each tier of the sack. Some mornings Brave Orchid brought the food to the laundry, on other days she sent it with one of the children, but the children let the soup slosh out when they rode over bumps on their bikes. They dangled the tiers from one handle bar and the rice kettle from the other . . . “Be sure you heat everything up before serving it to your father”, she yelled after her son. “And make him coffee after breakfast . . .” (WW 135).

Kingston records about her mother’s cooking: “My mother has cooked for us: raccoons, skunks, hanks, city pigeons, wild ducks, wild geese, black-skinned bantams, snakes, garden snails, turtles that crawled about the pantry floor and sometimes escaped under refrigerator or stove, catfish that swam in the bathtub” (WW 90). However, Brave Orchid never offers any explanation as to why a particular dish is prepared, and “From the configurations of food my mother set out, we kids had to infer the holidays” (WW 185). Also, in Fa Mu Lan’s remarks while she stays away from her home and lives with her teachers:

“I faded into dreams about the meat meals my mother used to cook, my monk’s food forgotten,” (WW 25) food acts as the objective correlative of the lost land.

The longing for the home land can come in for criticism when one finds that this love does not very often linger in the characters, once they are back in China. The stance of some such characters while thinking about China is highly critical.

The nostalgia for China becomes suspect when one comes across the portrayal of China and the Chinese by the characters. The works under consideration evince that the Chinese themselves are not innocuous in their behaviour while in the host land, thereby making one doubt if the nostalgia that is said to be experienced by the characters is genuine or not.

On reading *The Woman Warrior*, one may feel that the whites alone cannot be put to blame for their hostile attitude towards the Chinese, for the Chinese themselves are not portrayed as blameless. Even when America shows lenience by urging “wetbacks and stowaways, anybody here on fake papers, to come to the city and get their files straightened out,” (WW 184) the Chinese migrants, who are generalised by the writer, fear it for a trap and fear that they will be deported. Hence they decide that it would be better to:

Lie to Americans. Tell them you were born during the San Francisco earthquake. Tell them your birth certificates and your parents were burned up in the fire. Don’t report crimes; tell them we have no crimes and no poverty. Give a new name every time you get arrested; the ghosts won’t recognize you. Pay the new immigrants twenty-five cents an hour and say we have no

unemployment. . . tell them we're against Communism. Ghosts have no memory . . . and poor eyesight (WW 184-185).

They even warn the America born Chinese who are unaware of immigration secrets not to tell any. But even some of the ABCs are not completely guileless, for, as a child, Kingston thinks of ways by which Americans can be tricked and Chinese let in. Kingston thinks of flying signal kites, "expensive kites, the sky splendid in Chinese colours, distracting ghost eyes while the new people sneak in" (WW 184). They are thus portrayed as secretive and cunning, not even telling the ABCs about the reality of the situation. In the words of Kingston: "They would not tell us children because we had been born among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were ourselves ghost-like" (WW 183).

The migrants, further are bandits according to Kingston, inflicting violence on their hosts. In the words of the writer, "Immigrants nowadays were bandits, beating up store owners and stealing from them rather than working. It must've been the Communists who taught them those habits" (WW 127).

Certain migrants also nurture unfounded fears about the hosts. Moon Orchid blurts out: "Hide these. When they find me, I don't want them to trace the rest of the family. They use photographs to trace you" (WW 158).

The Chinese are at times presented as belligerent. The attack of the pregnant No-name aunt's house by villagers illustrates this. The villagers get roused and slaughter the animals and provide a gory scene which has been described thus: "The villagers broke in the front and the back doors at the same time," even though the door had not been locked against them (WW 4). With knives dripping with the blood of animals, blood is smeared on the doors and

walls of Kingston's paternal house. Further, "One woman swung a chicken, whose throat she had slit, splattering the blood in red arcs about her" (WW 4). The Chinese seem to be fierce and also stone Crazy Lady, a woman whom they suspect to be a spy.

Brave Orchid's picture of China makes the ABCs feel that China is a land where monkey feasts are held. The exotic portrayal of the monkey feast runs thus:

The eaters sit around a thick wood table ... Boys bring in the monkey at the end of a pole . . . Its hands are tied behind it. They clamp the monkey into the table ... Using a surgeon's saw, the cooks cut . . . the top of its head ... they tap with a tiny hammer and wedge here and there . . . an old woman . . . lifts off the lid of the skull. The eaters spoon out the brains (WW 91-92).

The Chinese are presented as selfish and law breakers. Their sponsors themselves are shown as tricked and chased away by the Chinese. Fear of losing their due, drives them to all extremes. Thus Brave Orchid's first sister-in-law, after having come to America with the help of her husband's second wife, is found to chase "the Little Wife out of the house" (WW 130) making her husband build another house for the second wife. The neglect of the law is manifested when Brave Orchid tells Moon Orchid that "The law doesn't matter" (WW 144).

The Chinese are also portrayed as cunning. In a talk with Kingston, Brave Orchid speaks about the new Chinese migrants, "They're Chinese, and Chinese are mischievous. No, I'm too old to keep up with them. They'd be too

clever for me. I've lost my cunning, having grown accustomed to food, you see” (WW 107).

The relatives in China are presented as greedy. In their attempt to overreach themselves, they do not even think about others. Chinese culture is presented as self-contradictory and causing confusion. Thus many of the pictures of China that we get from the memoir itself are demolished by Brave Orchid herself when she tells Kingston, “who said we could sell you? We can't sell people. Can't you take a joke?” (WW 202) when earlier she had said in the context of buying the slave girl, “Eight-year-olds were about twenty dollars. Five-year-olds were ten dollars and up. Two-year-olds were about five dollars. Babies were free” (WW 83).

The writers, who are often classed as diaspora writers, make not only characters from the migrant generation make such portrayals about China, but those from the America born Chinese generation as well. Maxine Hong Kingston presents the Chinese as people of duplicity. Kingston observes, “The emigrants confused the gods by diverting their curses, misleading them with crooked streets and false names” (WW 5). The Chinese are a lot who address their babies as pigbabies and piglets, “fooling the ghosts on the lookout for a new birth” (WW 85). Perhaps due to their cultural cringe and eagerness at identifying with the whites, the Chinese are even found to hide their real names. In the memoir, Kingston opines, “The Chinese I know hide their real names; sojourners take new names when their lives change and guard their real names with silence” (WW 5).

The host land born generations are shown to be refused acceptance by the “real Chinese” (Begum 280) causing even the former to feel that the Chinese are cheats and gamblers. When Kingston’s teacher mistakenly writes “farmer” as the occupation of her father, Kingston wants to correct that, but stops half way as her father had been a gambler (WW 183). Fa Mu Lan, with whom Kingston identifies, looks into a water gourd and finds five peasants hitting from behind, a young fighter saluting his opponents, with scythes and hammers. She breaks out into a cry, “How am I going to win against cheaters” (sic) (WW 30).

Kingston reiterates the superstitious nature of the Chinese by mentioning the belief of the villagers regarding the No-name aunt who committed suicide that she would go hungry. In Kingston’s words: “Always hungry, always needing, she would have to beg food from other ghosts, snatch and steal it from those whose living descendants gave them gifts” (WW 16). Further the Chinese do not like a doctor visiting them on the first days of the year (WW 84).

The feeling of the generation that underwent migration that the Chinese are not only superstitious, but greedy as well is shared by the host land born generation. Kingston fears that she would some day inherit a green address book full of names, and she may have to send money.

Chinese, as in the case of the migrant generation are depicted by the ABC also as polygamous. Kingston, while mentioning an ape man hints at her grandfather’s third wife (WW 85).

Sun-Yat-Sen stepped down in China in 1949 and the communist take over took place in the same year. However, the communist government has not been delineated as free of defects. In America, the letters that Kingston’s family

get are full of the atrocities of the communists. Kingston writes about the cruelties of the communists towards the landowner class, “The . . . letters said that my uncles were made to kneel on broken glass during their trials and had confessed to being land-owners. They were all executed, and the aunt whose thumbs were twisted off drowned herself. Other aunts, mothers-in-law, and cousins disappeared . . .” (WW 50). This is further elaborated by Kingston when she speaks of fourth aunt’s and uncle’s house taken by the revolutionaries who attacked the house, killed the grandfather and oldest daughter, made the others beg and were finally trapped by the communists and killed (WW 50-51). Again, Kingston notes that “As long as the aunts kept disappearing and the uncles dying after unspeakable tortures,” her parents “prolonged their Gold Mountain stay” (WW 190). Thus the stories of communist atrocities are shown to change the migrant generation of Kingston family from expatriate status to that of immigrants, thereby also evidencing that it is not love for the host land that causes the diaspora to stay back.

China is presented as a land smitten by bandits. On reading the memoir, one gets an impression that bandit attacks are frequent in China. While the Kingston family lives in China, when the grandmother orders the entire family to go to the theatre, they fear as “the bandits would make raids on households thinned out during performances” (WW 207). The family actually has to confront a bandit attack not at home, but at the theatre.

Kingston also sees the emigrant villagers as rambunctious. Her feeling about them is the same as the one nurtured by the speaker in Ama Ata Aidoo’s poem “Motherhood and the Number’s Game.” When to the speaker in this

poem, the voice texture of her mother and Eggeifi seems to be that of cows in an abattoir, Kingston says about the emigrant villagers, “How strange that the emigrant villagers are shouters, hollering face to face” (WW 171). At times, Kingston views Chinese culture itself just as a sham. “She presents Chinese culture as a conglomeration of diverse, multiple, often contradictory values that she does not attempt to unify into an easy explanation” (Schueller 270 – 271). She effects an upturning of the cultural elegance of China when she opines about the Chinese, “I don’t see how they kept up a continuous culture for five thousand years. May be they didn’t; may be everyone makes it up as they go along” (WW 185).

The presentation of Chinatowns in the memoir makes one suspect if the writers are not acting as cultural brokers selling ‘Chineseness’ to the readers. Chinatown looms large in the memoir *The Woman Warrior*. Though at first, there is a favourable reference to Chinatown when it is said, “Immigrants also work in canneries, where it’s so noisy it doesn’t matter if they speak Chinese or what. The easiest way to find a job, is to work in Chinatown.” (WW 127) it is found that the Orientalist ideology of the west is operative here also. Chinatown is presented as a place full of old stories and sayings. Kingston herself remarks: “I refuse to shy my way anymore through the Chinatown, which tasks me with the old sayings and the stories” (WW 53). A full length picture of the Chinatown is provided later on in the memoir. The women in Chinatown are found to come up with strange ideas when they listen to Moon Orchid’s plight. At the restaurant, “The large proprietress in a butcher’s apron came out of the kitchen lugging tubs full of more black gelatin” (WW 138). The customers are offered

“black weed gelatin” and “Karo syrup” (WW 138). Even the waving of fans by the Chinese women “like rich women in China with nothing to do” (WW 139) has been delineated in great detail. Chinatown is also portrayed as a gambling centre and a self-sufficient unit containing vegetable, fish and meat markets, though “not as abundant as in Canton, the carp not as red, the turtles not as old” (WW 139). The Chinatown in the memoir contains the cigar and seed shop and provides Moon Orchid with “carrot candy, melon candy, and sheets of beef jerky” (WW 139). It is also delineated as a space where men come to smoke and talk. Benevolent associations are also referred to (WW 183). The writer positions her family safely away from this exotica when she says that Brave Orchid’s laundry is outside Chinatown (WW 193).

The feeling that one is to return to one’s homeland some day finds expression in the section ‘Shaman’ in *The Woman Warrior*. But this also offers another reading. The feeling that they are just sojourners who must leave the host land may reduce the diasporans’ loyalty for the host topos. This is evident when Kingston’s mother is found to tell her children: “. . . Someday, very soon, we’re going home where there are Han people everywhere. We’ll buy furniture then, real tables and chairs. You children will smell flowers for the first time” (WW 98).

The preoccupation with China, presented as one of the characteristics of Chinese diaspora, is also brought out when the women characters in *The Joy Luck Club* talk about the trip to China of the Jongs. The members of the Joy Luck Club always try to keep abreast of the happenings in China and are shown to be concerned about their relatives. The loyalty of the overseas Chinese

towards China finds mention when An-mei Hsu is found to stock clothes for her relatives in China. The preoccupation with China of the diaspora is also shown when the Joy Luck aunties tell Jing-mei Woo of the concern that Suyuan has for the other daughters who have been left behind in China. “She loved you very much, more than her own life. And that’s why you can understand why a mother like this could never forget her other daughters. She knew they were alive, and before she died she wanted to find her daughters in China” (JLC 39). In the first section of second narrative by An-mei Hsu, titled ‘Scar,’ the narrator harps back on China and thinks of her mother. Her narrative begins with the statement, “When I was a young girl in China, my grandmother told me my mother was a ghost” (JLC 42).

Concern for the land that has been left behind is there in Suyuan Woo, a character in *The Joy Luck Club*. Even though she is oceans away from her home topos, she exchanges letters to friends in China, for it is said, “When letters could be openly exchanged between China and the United States, she wrote immediately to friends in Shanghai and Kweilin” (285). The drive behind this appears to be just the hope of reunion with the daughters in China.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the four Chinese mothers who are there in America, in spite of differences, stand up for each other and help Jing mei June Woo when her mother dies. But the work, as stated earlier, also gives the impression of a generalising tendency where each mother sees in Jing-mei, her own daughter who is ignorant of Chinese customs. This prompts one to think if the generosity of the Joy Luck aunties is more due to their zest to maintain ‘the Chinese tradition’ in which they are comfortable.

The diasporic subjects are said to be not only bothered about their past in China, but are concerned about the present and future of China as well. However, the actions of certain characters may prompt one to believe that this concern is prompted very often by selfish motives. A defining of essences by diaspora theorists may cause the readers to generalise and consider all diaspora as propelled by such vested interests.

In the novel *The Joy Luck Club* the installation of Joy Luck Club itself is presented as an attempt to re-create China in America. The Joy Luck Club is presented as a gathering of four women who could play mah-jong. Parties are hosted to raise money and raise the spirits of the diasporans and delicious Chinese food-- a reminder of the erstwhile joys in China-- is also served. The attachment of the Chinese diaspora towards China is projected in Suyuan Woo's carrying of two Chinese silk dresses in the course of her emigration.

The absence of longing as Ying-ying harps back upon her life in China, tends to be an indicator of the liminal status foisted on her as a victim in China. The picture of her mother as voiceless is presented at the beginning of Ying-Ying's narrative through which the migrant mothers are shown as finding fault not only with the host land, but with their own children as well, trying to put the blame on everything and everyone other than themselves. The readers are given a glimpse at Ying-Ying's life back in China, which is full of suffering, about which she never talks to her daughter, but is reported to Lena by her father. This again puts China in a bad light. As a result of Lena's father's intervention, Ying-Ying gets a new name and becomes a 'Dragon' instead of a 'Tiger'. In Lena St. Clair's words:

My mother never talked about her life in China, but my father said he saved her from a terrible life there ... My father proudly named her in her immigration papers: Betty St. Clair, crossing out her given name of Gu Ying-ying. And then he put down the wrong birth year, 1916 instead of 1914. So ... my mother lost her name and became a Dragon instead of a Tiger (JLC 104).

However, Ying-Ying at one point declares how even her daughter is unable to hear her:

For all these years I kept my mouth closed so selfish desires would not fall out. And because I remained quiet for so long now my daughter does not hear me. She sits by her fancy swimming pool and hears only her Sony Walkman, her cordless phone, her big, important husband asking her why they have charcoal and no lighter fluid (JLC 67).

She elaborates on her bad marriage. Thus though the writer presents a picture of China as well as America, China is not presented as a place which is full of glories. Ying-ying is found to suffer greatly while in China, having aborted her first husband's baby, an unwanted child, spent ten years in a cousin's house, "a still-married woman with no husband" (EW 249) which makes her plight comparable to that of the grass widow described in *The Excluded Wife*.

The presentation of China is as a land of suffering and persecution. The first generation migrants complain of having a harsh life in China. All the four migrant mothers are depicted as victims. This tendency is evident when Suyuan

Woo tells Jing-Mei about An-mei's decision at first to go to the consulate and ask for papers for her brother, but desisting later for fear that she may "get her brother in bad trouble in China" (JLC 30). Thus by making their characters take the trail of false fears, the writers are actually exacerbating the tension between the two nations. The communist take over in China is presented in a light-hearted manner, "That person said FBI will put her on a list and give her trouble in the U.S. the rest of her life. That person said, You ask for a house loan and they say no loan, because your brother is a communist" (JLC 30).

The hardships that Lindo Jong's family had to undergo in China are enumerated in *The Joy Luck Club* and these give the impression that China is not always a safe country to live in. *The Joy Luck Club* says that during summer, when Lindo was twelve, "The fen river which ran through the middle of my family's lands flooded the plains. It destroyed all the wheat my family had planted that year and made the land useless for years to come" (JLC 53). This incident forces Lindo who is twelve, to get separated from her parents and go to the Huangs.

The sufferings of Lindo Jong in the Huang household is also detailed with no reception with red banners given and the child being led to the kitchen where family children usually don't go, which makes Lindo know "her standing" (JLC 55). Her fiancé, a year younger to her, also proves to be a sadist, because in Lindo's own words "he made special efforts to make me cry" (JLC 55). Lindo Jong observes: "He complained the soup was not hot enough and then spilled the bowl as if it were an accident. He waited until I had sat down to eat and then would demand another bowl of rice. He asked why I had such an

unpleasant face when looking at him” (JLC 55). Lindo Jong is made to work so hard that this imposition by the patriarchal society later on makes her see suffering itself as a virtue. She begins to consider that it was not so terrible a life and she muses that after a while, “I hurt so much I didn’t feel any difference” (JLC 56). She compares herself to one of “those ladies you see on American TV these days, the ones who are so happy they have washed out a stain so the clothes look better than new” (JLC 56).

Being a member of the diaspora, Lindo does not praise China fully on account of her hardships there. However, she doesn’t present herself as too poor. As Lindo puts it:

Why do you always tell your friends that I arrived in the United States on a slow boat from China? This is not true. I was not that poor. I took a plane. I had saved the money my first husband’s family gave me when they sent me away. And I had saved money from my twelve years’ work as a telephone operator. But it is true I did not take the fastest plane (JLC 259).

Jing Mei Woo is told by her mother that “The man who was my husband brought me and our two babies to Kweilin so that we would be safe. He was an officer with the Kuomintang . . .” (JLC 22). The Japanese attack, and the sufferings Suyuan has to undergo while in Kweilin are brought out. The exaggerated picture of suffering in both the lands makes the readers doubt if their professed love for any of these lands is genuine.

The Chinese becoming aware of their victimisation and their attempt to resist it is symbolically represented with the mention of tired peasants all over

from China gathering in the fields standing up and saying “Enough of this suffering and silence” (JLC 241).

The members of the Joy Luck Club are always very much conscious as to the happenings in China. Auntie Lin comments:

Everybody has TVs in China now. . . Our family there has all TV sets – not just black-and-white, but color and remote! They have everything. So when we asked them what we should buy them, they said nothing, it was enough that we would come to visit them. But we bought them different things anyway, VCR and Sony Walkman for the kids. They said, No, don’t give it to us, but I think they liked it (JLC 35).

However, here one may find a covert presentation of the Chinese relatives as greedy.

As adduced by *The Joy Luck Club*, the re-presentation of China as exotic must be resultant from the attempt of the author to appeal to the Western reader rather than a real pride for the land and its customs. In the novel, the family wears dress having exotic symbols:

Baba was in a new brown-colored gown, which while plain was of an obviously fine-quality silk weave and workmanship. Mama had on a jacket and skirt with colors that were the reverse of mine: black silk with yellow bands. My half-sisters wore rose colored tunics and so did their mothers, my father’s concubines. My older brother had a blue jacket on embroidered with shapes resembling Buddha scepters for long life (JLC 73).

The Chinese people are also shown as indulging in polygamous relationships, with a man having one wife and a large number of concubines. This is evidenced in the story of An-mei's mother.

The text shows that the Chinese themselves are oppressors. Suyuan's treatment of her tenants is an example in point: "Two years ago, she had tried to evict them on the pretext that relatives from China are coming to live there. But the couple saw through her ruse to get around rent control" (JLC 199).

As in the other works, there is a presentation of the Chinese and the characters of Chinese ancestry in an unfavourable light. Chinese mothers are presented as superstitious. Lena St. Clair says that her mother has the mysterious ability to see things before they happen.

The work *The Joy Luck Club* provides a description of San Francisco's Chinatown which is also far from glory. Waverly says: "Like most of the other Chinese children who played in the back alleys of restaurants and curio shops, I didn't think we were poor," (JLC 89) thus giving a bleak picture of Chinatown suggested again by the fact that she lives away from Chinatown. The playground, the medicinal herb shop, the printer's press, the Ping Yuen Fish Market, the butcher's, all form part of Chinatown of Lindo Jong's time.

Most of the Americans are interested in what is exotic in Chinatown. The readers feel that the writers try to cater to the needs of the Western readership. A caucasian man with a big camera marks Waverly and her playmates in front of the restaurant, having "had us move to the side of the picture-window so the photo would capture the roasted duck with its head dangling from a juice-covered rope" (JLC 91)

The works offer themselves to an alternate reading that the obstinacy in not letting go of the fragmented memory of the customs prevalent in the primary space long time back and their peevishness prevent the migrants from accepting the change that has taken place in the old topos. Certain migrants remain more Chinese than the real Chinese in American soil. The mothers exhibiting this tendency while in America is made evident when Jing-Mei speaks of her mother and auntie An-mei dressing up in funny Chinese clothes while in America. Even while in America, they attire themselves in “dresses with stiff stand-up collars and blooming branches of embroidered silk sewn over their breasts,” “too fancy for the Chinese people” (JLC 28).

The oft repeated statements of the theorists that diasporic decontextualisation pushes its citizen into a liminal state and that home is only imaginary and a sense of belonging only momentary for the diasporans appear to be exaggerated. On reading the works, one is made to doubt if the writers are only leveraging the readers into believing that the diasporan is anguished by despair and repentance and suffers from existential weariness.

The writers, thus, have made their own portrayals of America, China and Canada. Nonetheless, critics doubt the authenticity of their portrayals causing the readers also to interrogate the politics behind their depiction of diaspora in such a manner endorsed by the diaspora theorists. Critics say that the glosses to the Chinese words provided by Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan are not accurate and that the details provided by them are not correct. Sau ling Cynthia Wong in her essay “Sugar Sisterhood” opines about the discrepancies in the

work *The Joy Luck Club* citing their deviations from the actual Chinese practices thus:

Lindo Jong's first husband in Taiyuan is described as yanking off her red veil at the wedding ceremony ... – a suspiciously Western practice, since traditionally the bride's red veil is removed only in...the wedding chamber, before the consummation of the marriage; in Ying-Ying St. Clair's childhood reminiscences, the customs that are allegedly part of Moon Festival celebrations. . . – actually belong to the *Duanwu* or "Dragon-Boat" Festival. . . ; the . . . version of the Moon Lady-Hou Yi story witnessed by Ying-Ying includes a detail from another legend about another festival (182).

Further, she finds fault with certain of the Chinese usages found in the book. However, a pronouncement as to the correctness of such a criticism can be made only by one who knows Chinese. Sau ling Cynthia Wong lashes Amy Tan thus:

the mother-in-law's rebuke to the young bride Lindo, "*Shemma bende ren!*" rendered in English as "What kind of fool are you!"... , sounds like a concoction by some first-year Chinese student and necessitates a quiet emendation by the Chinese translator of *The Joy Luck Club* (Tan, *Xifuhui*, 46); the warning Rose Hsu Jordan remembers from her mother, shortly before her younger brother's drowning, likewise sounds gratingly unidiomatic in Chinese – "*Dangsyng tamende shenti,*" translated by Tan as "Watch out for their bodies" ...; except for the first

one, the characters used for the Chinese version of McDonald's name, *mai dong lou*, are not what Lindo Jong says they are, "wheat," "east", and "building" ... (182).

Leon Leong is one of the characters in the novel *Bone* whom the writer attempts to portray as greatly attached to China. Even while in America, Leon is obsessed with the thought of sending Grandpa Leong's bones back to China. He subscribes to the statement that Chinese diaspora, once in the new land are found to make friends with the other Chinese (I-shu 449). Leon and You Thin meet on the ship S.S. Lincoln in which they come to America as paper sons and after they reach Angel Island, they slap each other's backs and call the other 'Brother' which theorists contend as a characteristic trait of Chinese diaspora (*Bone* 9).

The delineation of the Chinese in *Bone* by the writer is as an ethnic group which is not devoid of any blemishes. They are presented as people who migrate on false papers. In Ng's words, "Grandpa Leong was Leon's father only on paper; he sponsored Leon's entry into the country by claiming him as his own son" (*Bone* 50). Leon is presented as cunning; one that could buy the name Leong like a "black-market passport" and memorise the history of another man "to pass the interrogation on Angel Island" (*Bone* 57).

Larceny is also shown to be rampant among the Chinese. Nina, daughter of Leon, gets "caught shoplifting" at Woolworth's and Leon, rather than correcting Nina's behaviour is found to support her, saying, "What's the big deal? It's only lipstick. No big deal". He even calls the manager names, "White devil, Crooked-Nose, Liar" (*Bone* 139). Chinese are also presented as licentious.

Mah, Leon's wife has extramarital relations with Tommie Hom, which is hinted overtly and covertly in the novel.

Chinese are also presented as superstitious. When Mah and Leon curse Nina, they use expressions like "She'd die in a gutter without rice in her belly, and her spirit - - if she had one- - wouldn't be fed" (*Bone* 25). At the instance of death of Ona, Chinatown funeral houses were shut down "because it was unlucky to touch death so close to the beginning of a new year" (*Bone* 153). At grandpa Leong's death, fake money with the words "HELL BANK NOTES" printed on it is scattered on the chest. After a death has occurred in the family, the Chinese buy and eat candy "to bring the sweetness back" to their lives (*Bone* 84). Leon believes that the forgotten bones of grandpa Leong were "bad luck that stirred Ona's destiny" (*Bone* 88). Mah's friends are worried about attending Ona's funeral for fear that "death might follow them into the New Year" (*Bone* 107).

The picture of the Chinatown is also exotic. There are "spidery writing on store signs, . . . dressed up street lamps with their pagoda tops" with "oddly matched colours: red with green, green with aqua blue, yellow with pink" (*Bone* 144). The very presentation of Chinatown as an exotica and as a construct to give pleasure to the eyes of the tourists is underscored when Lei says, "this is what Chinatown looks like from inside those dark Greyhound buses; this slow view, these strange color combinations, these narrow streets, this is what tourists come to see" (*Bone* 145).

Instances of the migrant characters remaining more Chinese than deskbound Chinese are seen in *Bone* as well. When Lei in *Bone* takes Mah to

Hong Kong, “She wanted to take old clothes for the relatives (*Bone* 92). Lei has to remind her that “old things might have been all right thirty years ago, but now people wanted everything new,” forcing her to accept the reality which many diasporans are not willing to acknowledge (*Bone* 92).

We see in Leon a member of the Chinese diaspora who has a feeling that the host land is not for him and nurtures the hope of going back to China one day. In *Bone*, though the migrant characters do not speak much for themselves, from Leon’s curses and Mah’s silence and anger reproduced by her daughter, the characters do not seem to be very much satisfied with America as well; Leon’s ‘outward tendency’ -- his urge to travel always -- is also indicative of this. Lei narrates about Leon: “He went to his variation on three or four themes: Going back to China, only a bowl of bitterness to show for his life as a coolie. No one grateful. No one compassionate” (*Bone* 148). Even when not exactly spoken by the migrants themselves, very often the narration projects how the host land born generations think of their migrant parents as a lot dissatisfied with what the host land has given them. Lei muses the ideas that Mah may have to share to the people of Hong-King on her first return trip evidencing the suffering of the first generation in America:

Twenty-five years in the land of gold and good fortune, and then she returned to tell her story: the years spent in sweatshops, the prince of the Golden Mountain turned into a toad, and three daughters: one unmarried, another who-cares-where, one dead (*Bone* 24).

The only comfort Mah has is the visit of the sewing ladies who bring in sponge cake, special dumplings and boo soup, thus recreating China in America. Fae Myenne Ng rightly remarks: “Bringing the right foods was as delicate as saying the right words” (*Bone* 105).

In *Bone* a verbal picture of the buildings and the essential meaning of their names are provided. Leila points out that next to Edith Eaton school in Chinatown is “the Nam Ping Yuen, the last of the four housing projects built in Chinatown” (*Bone* 14). The meaning of *Nam Ping Yuen* has been given as “peaceful gardens,” the correctness of which requires verification.

Chan Sam, one of the central characters in *The Concubine’s Children* longs to see his first wife and to stand on the soil of his village while he is in Canada, which is an indicator of nostalgia in the book. Bridging the distance between oneself and the village is shown to be one of the concerns of many members of the Chinese diaspora including Chan Sam who always enquires in his letters to his wife about “his kinsfolk, about the house, about the security of the drastic village” (CC 38). Mental crossings to the homeland are said to be common among the diasporans and Chan Sam is one to show this tendency, for his “queries helped to transport him, in spirit at least, back to the village” (CC 38). Chan Sam, like many other Chinese diasporans, keeps abreast of the political situation of China and envisions a bright future for his home land.

Chan Sam, like many overseas Chinese, is said to have the future of China in his mind and is shown to be bothered about stability in China. Thus

The future that preoccupied Chan Sam was China's; he cared only about developments at home that might affect his house, his *mau tin* and his kin left behind.

Like other overseas Chinese he hoped most for stability in the homeland (CC 61).

However, this makes it evident that Chan Sam's concern for China is largely due to the fact that his family is residing there. The traits defined as common to all members of the diaspora make us view all diasporans as victims.

The role of memory is said by theorists as being very important in the case of members of any diaspora. In *The Concubine's Children*, as testified by Lien Chao, "The oral tradition, which preserves bits and pieces of personal memories through 'vivid accounts of conversations' . . . , is carried on, by and large, by women in the community" (107). Families get separated from each other due to exclusion or other adverse circumstances. However the bond with family members remains intact in the case of many members of the Chinese diaspora. This is very much so in the case of May-ying who prepares "things to send to China" (CC 59) so that her daughters Ping and Nan, separated from her, can use them. Here also, the loyalty, to a great extent, is towards the family than the country.

The portrait of Chinese offered by the writer Denise Chong is not glossy again showing how the writers do not hesitate to find fault with the terrain that has nurtured them. Chinese in Canada are delineated as fraudulent. Chinese are presented as gamblers, concubines, drunkards, cunning and as superstitious. This conforms to the image of China as imagined by the West.

The portrayal of the Chinese also shows that the loyalty for China is just a sham. Chan Sam is presented as a gambler. He is shown as owning a gambling centre. May-ying is presented as a gambler, waitress and a concubine. She is even taken by the police for gambling. The Chinese are presented as cunning, for, not only do May-ying and two other Chinese women (who pass for Ping and Nan) migrate on false papers, but the above said women manage to answer satisfactorily why the two sisters spoke different dialects. Further, when under pressure, Chan Sam and Yuen write contradictory letters so that they would not provide the “evidence” to victimise Chan Sam’s family. Hing hears from other people that her mother is a drunkard. Leonard, the adopted son of Winnie turns out to be a thief. China is presented as a famished land where Ping and Yuen have to sell the presents they got from Canada to sustain themselves. The Chinese are also presented as superstitious. The readers find Huangbo putting an altar table inside the central entrance of their new house, where she makes offerings to seek contrition from the gods for her son’s deformity. Nan’s violent death as an unmarried girl is considered a tragedy and Huangbo fears that she might become a ghost. The dead Nan is being married off to another dead man in the same village, lest her unmarried spirit should turn into a ghost. Such portrayals indulge in a dialogue with the readers that causes them to suspect the love of the diasporan for any of the lands.

In depicting Chinese people, the relatives in China of the Chinese Canadians are presented as greedy and not loyal to their relatives. In the words of Denise Chong:

It was a well-known travellers' tale that poorer Chinese relations cared less about blood ties than about foreign-made color television, the VCR, may be even a washing machine or refrigerator that their "rich" overseas relations could bring in as a part of their special duty free exemptions. The bigger the gift, the more money it cost, the happier were the Chinese relations (CC 240).

The writer Denise Chong speaks of the Japanese attack of the Chinese and the fear that due to this, China's ports may be closed. In the course of the memoir, there is mention of how Mao Ze Dong becomes chairman of the new People's Republic of China. Chan Sam shows his allegiance to Chiang Kai Shek. Chan Sam is also worried that the communists may win and that he is already 'blacklisted' as a bourgeoisie, that his family would surely suffer reprisals and that he will lose what he has sacrificed all his life for. Mao Ze Dong's plan to confiscate land held by landlords to give to landless peasants finds mention in the memoir. It is said that some landlords were sentenced to death and their lands confiscated. Mao Ze Dong's people are shown as torturing Huangbo. There is also a depiction of Chan Sam's property being confiscated, projecting China as preying on the hard-earned riches of overseas Chinese. The soldiers cause the overseas remittances to be routed through the new government's Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission. Denise Chong also observes in the memoir that Mao Ze Dong's land reform proved to be a failure.

The Toi-shaan government's attempt to dismantle the stretch of the San-Ning railway and the motor roads that pass through their village to keep the

Japanese away and the failure of this, which causes the entry of the Japanese in 1941 is mentioned in the course of narration. The Japanese taking control over Hong Kong and the prevention of the use of Hong Kong currency in Toi-shaan eventually leads to a hike in the price of rice, projecting life in China as difficult.

The Chinatown in *The Concubine's Children* is a centre where people indulge in all sorts of vices like gambling and prostitution. The memoir not only depicts the affairs in China, but those in Chinatown too. It is hinted in the memoir that clan associations helped the Chinese get jobs. Chan Sam, like the other Chinese in Canada, registers with an employment agency in Chinatown that placed workers with interested white employers for a cut of the wages. Lien Chao hints at the lack of privacy and the neglect of growing children in Chinatowns (115). It is said that the well-off Chinese preferred life out of these ghettos. The facilities in Chinatown were also sparse with no money for improvement.

In *The Concubine's Children*, the writer even apparently vindicates the overseas Chinese's loyalty to *gee gay yun*, to one's own people. To Denise Chong, such a loyalty exists because "In the new world, where connections are spread more thinly, a man's demonstrable loyalties were to an extended family--to men not only from his own clan, but to men from the same locale in China" (CC 19).

Chan Sam in *The Concubine's Children* is presented as a diasporan who crosses terrains mentally. However, the portrayal makes one feel that this love arises due to the bitter experiences in Canada. In the case of Chan Sam:

Fighting loneliness, worry and homesickness, he lay awake nights wondering if his wife, Huangbo, and other villagers were still alive . . . He pondered a way to ease the pain of his solitary life: he decided to take another wife (CC 22).

Chan Sam's wish to visit home and build a house there is projected as revealing his intense love for his home land. However he does this by taking advantage of the benefits of the host land which he harshly criticises.

The practice among the Chinese diaspora to take children home to be educated in the motherland is seen as part of the diaspora's clinging to the homeland and their wish that the children, even when they imbibe the host land's culture may not be ignorant of their home country's systems and practices. However, this can be read in an alternate manner. The diasporan's loyalty to China lies only in that he believes it will bequeath his identity with a meaning and does not arise out of his acceptance of China for what it is. Very often, in many cases, migration itself wouldn't have resulted if the person could accept China as it is. Chan Sam's wish to visit home and build a house there is an instance of his attitude of cashing in on the benefits of the host land just to make himself comfortable in the home land.

By taking Ping and Nan to China to be educated there, Chan Sam also subscribes to "the custom among Chinese sojourners abroad of taking children home to be educated in the motherland" (CC 1). On reading the works, one doubts if the mental travails are not resultant from selfish motives

Further another question surfaces: would anyone who has experienced being prey to the throes of migration want their children to suffer in a like

manner? This prompts one to think that migration is not without its benefits, but the traits attributed to the diaspora tend to make the readers blind to these.

The liminal position of not belonging either in the home land or the host land, assigned to the characters by the writers, can be doubted to arise mostly due to their fervent belief that their status in host land is that of sojourners. This shows, to a great extent, that the characters are prejudiced and are unwilling to come to terms with reality. The diasporans are thus shown to have a tendency to reap the benefits of the host land only to make life in the home land more comfortable. One may feel that they are not being loyal to their land of adoption. Nor are they being loyal to the homeland, because on the face of hardship or in search of greener pastures they had made a move out of the host land. Such diasporic characters, whom the theorists celebrate, thus seem to be simply indulging in excoriating flagellations of the two topoi, without being loyal to both. This is exemplified when May-ying, like Chan-Sam, is said to hold “their life in Canada as temporary” (CC 31).

While at Gold Mountain, Fong Mei in *Disappearing Moon Café* remembers the little girls’ house where she stayed with her sister, her school days, her master Chui and Toy Saan city.

Disappearing Moon Café (the restaurant) itself talks of the two different cultures between which Mui Lan and Fong Mei profess to find themselves caught, with the dining room serving as a nostalgic replica of an old-fashioned Chinese teahouse, popular among the homesick Chinese as well as outsiders who come looking for oriental exotica and the modern counter-and-booth section built after the fashion of the city. However, the marginality of diasporans

set up by theorists by projecting them as feeling guilty for not being able to live in their native space (Kumar 100) vanishes when the characters are seen to whiplash China, thereby invalidating such tendencies defined by diaspora theorists.

The narration in *Disappearing Moon Café* makes one doubt if the feeling of coethnicity of the Chinese diaspora with other Chinese which the theorists celebrate is not just a sham. Sky Lee tells us in *Disappearing Moon Café* how in adhering to rites, chinamen even neglect the safety of their fellow chinamen thereby projecting them as self-centred in tune with the expectations of many western readers. When Gwei Chang decides to transport the bones of chinamen by taking them on canoes, the other chinamen are concerned not with their safety, but with what may happen to the bones. The chinamen are found to tell Gwei Chang, “If you capsize and spill your cracked brains, that’s O.K. by us, but if you lose any bones, you’re condemning human spirits to ten thousand years of aimless wandering” (DMC 17).

The nostalgia experienced by the characters can be said to arise only because the emigrants from China to Canada feel that they are victimised in Canada. Thus the diasporans present Canada as a dystopic space. Sky Lee’s attributing of victim status to Chinamen in Canada is made evident when Lee writes: “Under the strain of bigotry, they were outlaws. Chinamen didn’t make the law of the land, so they would always live outside of it. In fact, it was a crime for them just to be here” (DMC 221). This is also made evident from the kind of racism practised against Choy Fuk. The sufferings of migrants in alien lands are brought forth through Wong Gwei Chang in *Disappearing Moon Café*

thus evidencing the tendency of the writers to present themselves as victimised to ensure literary reception even at the cost of the honour of the host land that has given them abode. Thus, as per the narration:

. . . he was worn out from fighting the wind . . . He was bone-tired from all this walking, watching the land dry out and the trees thin out . . . His feet ached relentlessly, throbbing cold from wading through ditches and icy creeks. Already, holes in the thinned soles of his borrowed boots (DMC 1).

The conversation that takes place between Mui Lan and the women who come to the restaurant tends to portray the members of the migrant generation to be suffering in the host land and shows the host land as cruel. One woman is found to tell Mui Lan: “We’re almost broke! These old, overseas Chinese are so tightfisted that they can’t even afford a cup of hot water, never mind a restaurant meal” and Mui Lan is found to answer them with the false statement “Ahh, this restaurant business! . . . Can’t even make money if we sold twenty banquet tables every night! That’s the honest – to – goodness truth!” (DMC 24).

Some of the problems that Mui Lan has to face, being a first generation woman migrant in Canada are presented. The land is projected as causing a change in her character for the worse and Mui Lan becomes noisy and demanding. Sky Lee writes:

. . . Mui Lan’s nightmare was loneliness. She arrived and found only silence . . . Gold Mountain men were like stone. She looked around for women to tell her what was happening, but there were none. By herself, she lacked the means to know what to do next.

Without her society of women, Mui Lan lost substance. Over the years, she became . . . soulless, and the only way she could come back was by being noisy and demanding (DMC 26).

The pattern of the first generation migrants not adjusting with the hostland initially and complaining about the same gets repeated in *Disappearing Moon Café*. To put it in Fong Mei's words: "First of all, I along with my travelling companions were detained in prison for days. We were interrogated by white-devil immigration officers. I was terrorized. They looked so hateful and cunning" (DMC 43). But Fong Mei's troubles are not to end there. She is told stories of hapless women who are raped by the immigration officials.

Mental crossings figure in *The Excluded Wife* as well. After the death of Yik-man, while in Canada, on seeing a dream in which Yik-Man figures, Sau-Ping in *The Excluded Wife* wishes to go back to China. Longing for the absent land again figures in *The Excluded Wife*. When Yik-Kwong and Yik-Nang, Yik-Man's childhood friends come to visit Sau-Ping in Hong Kong, she is concerned about the village in Toi-Shaan and her brother-in-law.

Yik-Man follows Chinese religious practices even while in Vancouver, for, the novel says:

Behind the counter (cashier's counter), in the corner, a little shrine for the Door God sat on the floor. Further up the wall, just behind the cash register, was a shelf supporting a little statue of Kwaan – Kung, the god of loyalty. Both the Door God shrine and the Kwaan-Kung's statue protected the restaurant from evil spirits that might try to sneak in and cause damage. On both sides

of the Kwaan-Kung's statue were red couplets that proclaimed "May Business be Prosperous" and "Ten Thousand Returns for Investment Capital" (EW 197).

In the last section of the book, Ping harps back upon her relatives whom she had left behind in China and Hong Kong while travelling to Canada from Hong Kong. Even the ship's movements seem to her like the sounds of her relatives in Hong Kong:

Sometimes the waves were subdued, like the groans of her mother-in-law just before she died, or the weeping of her brother when he brought her the news that her parents had been killed by stray bullets, or Fei-Yin's sobbing at the pier when they parted. Sometimes they were so forceful that she thought she heard Mei-Kuen screaming as she was raped by the bandits (EW 187).

Even while she undergoes her journey to Vancouver, Ping yearns for Fei-Yin, Sau-Ha, Mei-Kuen and Lai-Sheung.

The 'diaspora's preoccupation with China and their concern for the relatives in China' is revealed when Ping requests Yik-Man to mail some parcels to Yik-Mo and his wife, whose family "must be suffering in this famine much more than other peasants in the village" (EW 210). Here also the loyalty may appear to be greatly towards the immediate family members in China.

The recurrent trope of bones being sent to China and the preoccupation with China for selfish ends continues in *The Excluded Wife*. Yik-Man, who is sick wants Sau-Ping to return to Sai-Fok to meet his brother Yik-Mo as the cultural revolution ends, to retrieve the *yeung-lau*, to take "Father's, Uncle's,

and my bones back home for reburial” and to bury his mother again if her grave has been disturbed by the Red Guards (EW 240).

The alleged characteristic of the Chinese diaspora to be concerned about each others’ affairs and the happenings in China is also brought out in *The Excluded Wife* when some uncles known to Sau-Ping, in a day in 1959, share with Ping, the news of Communist China that they had read in *The Communist China*.

Ping’s thoughts go back to the idea of ‘home’ which she had left behind in Hong Kong, when she feels she is ill treated by Yik-Man in Canada, but realises that home does not exist for her any longer as she does not want to be a burden on Sau-Ha or Fei-yin and moreover, she had no house and land in Toi-shaan anymore and “would be arrested as a former landlord and class enemy” if she returns to China (EW 206), thus finding fault with both the nations.

The hardships that the Chinese face in their own home town is presented by Yuen-fong Woon in *The Excluded Wife*. China is presented as a land where bandits loot the house of Gold Mountain guests, as a result of which Yik-Man has to make an early return to Canada. Yik-Man and Sau-Ping are presented as illiterate. The Chinese are presented as cruel and Sau-Ping has to witness the killing of a young boy who had stolen food from a rich family.

The superstitious nature of the Chinese is revealed when Woon gives an account of the ‘Wai-Heung day’ when ghosts, demons, goblins and monsters would emerge and cause havoc on earth and the Yue Laan festival meant for the dead and wandering ghosts. The trouble that the Gold Mountain guests face in China is also mentioned, for

Most Gold Mountain guests had been abroad for too long to know their way home. As a result, some were robbed or swindled by thieves posing as porters. Others were kidnapped by bandits once they got off the bus or the boat. They were held for ransom until their families paid up. Once they were home, returned Gold Mountain guests faced more trouble. Plain clothes police from the Police Department at Shaan-Tai market sometimes extorted money from them, charging them with possession or use of foreign currency. Not only were their foreign dollars confiscated but their family had to pay huge sums for their release (EW 96-97).

Trouble in China with the rise of the Communists to power is also elaborated. To Yuen-fong Woon, “Communists were like bandits, but they claimed to be attacking for the sake of the people, not out of greed” (EW 97). There was fear of conscription in the “war pitting Chinese against Chinese” (EW 98). The Communist Party in China decides to “make both private landlords and lineage managers pay for the exploitation of landless peasants” (EW 108). Through the family saga of Ping, the writer drives home the cruelty of the communists in China, projecting the kind of governance in China as flawed. Villagers are forced to attend the meetings where the ‘landlords’ are tortured by the Communists. Sau-Ping is forced to contribute to the People’s Government in the war between China and Canada to help Korea. The mental agony that Ping and Yik-Mo have to undergo as members of the family of Gold Mountain guests are expressed in their thoughts:

What would Yik-Man, Father and Paternal Uncle in Vancouver think if they knew that their hard-earned savings had been contributed to fund a war between China and Canada? Would this war affect their position in Vancouver? Would Canada define them, the Vancouver Chinese, as new enemies of the country? (EW 119).

With the Communists turning against the Overseas Chinese and with the whole village divided into groupings, Sau-Ping's family is grouped among the small rentier class. With the trial continuing and Yik-Mo beaten up, not yielding to the demands to "sign a statement promising to ask the Gold Mountain guests in his family to send three hundred Canadian dollars every month to the Land Reform Work Team at Shaan-Tai market," (EW 130) he is sentenced to five years' hard labour in a camp on the border of Toi-Shaan and Yan-Ping counties (EW 130). Evicted out of her *yeung-lau*, Sau-Ping has no option but to go to Hong-Kong along with Yik-Kwong and family. Thus the writer has been able to project that sometimes the brutality in China is to such a great extent that people there are forced to flee from the land for fear of persecution. The insecurity of the family members in China of a Gold Mountain Guest is delineated by Ping in clear terms:

Kin-Pong is home. He was dismissed from the boarding school in Toi-Shaan City as a landlord's son. His spirit is shattered. Poor son! What future could he have here? And Fei-Yin. I fear for her. I have heard that one cannot be punished for raping a landlord's daughter (EW 131).

The thoughts of Sau Ping while in Hong Kong also underlines this: “Sau-Ping thought with pain of her brother-in-law, who had been trussed like an animal for slaughter and delivered to a Communist labour camp” (EW 139). Thus China is presented as a land which punishes the innocuous families of overseas Chinese, but promotes rapists and bandits who loot the properties and riches earned by the sweat of the overseas Chinese. Woon does not present us with a charismatic picture of her own home land. She makes Yik-Mo say:

There was not enough food, and we were very cold in winter. It was difficult and if you became ill the guards just let you die. . . After five years of hard labour, we were sent back to Sai-Fok where we were to perform ‘hard labour under supervision’. We were often given heavy assignments that made it impossible to sleep, our backs and arms ached so badly, and then we were told to donate our earnings to the production team (EW 229).

The trauma faced by such ‘landlords’ during the political campaign of the communists is also heartrending. Yik-Mo says:

Every time there was some kind of political campaign, I and other ‘bad types’... were dragged on stage to be beaten up. They made us wear ... plaques and paraded us... Fellow villagers would throw stones, pig shit, and cow dung at us. I was beaten so badly that my left leg was broken (EW 229).

People are shown to be indicted of having Overseas Chinese connections and persecuted in China. Yik-Hung is beaten brutally during the Cultural Revolution as his father who had abandoned the son at an age of twelve was a Malaysian

Chinese (EW 279). But later the author tries to give the impression that China has progressed from being a backward place to a country of political stability with “no more bandit attacks or lineage feuds or warlords and soldiers roaming around, or cruel Japanese invaders or Red Guards” (EW 283).

The Chinese are also not shown in a favourable light, when Sau-Ping makes a travel back to China, for they are projected as maneuvering the situation to their own benefit, for, the ancestral halls have been transformed, but ritual activities are preserved in Sai-Fok school, because “Overseas Chinese returning home for visits would be deeply disappointed if they could not pay homage to their lineage founders” (EW 223). Money still flows to China from Overseas Chinese though the communists had considered them feudal lords. Thus the writers also project the Chinese as playing up to the diasporic Chinese for their own benefits.

Vancouver’s Chinatown of the 1950s, which resembled Toi-Shaanese markets, also finds mention in *The Excluded Wife*. This helps in presenting Chinatown as an exotic region. The writers thus malign Chinatowns which offer many of the overseas Chinese a home away from home and jobs that would sustain them.

There were narrow streets crowded with Chinese customers. Fruits, vegetable and dried seafood stands covered by canvas canopies extended into the streets. There were signs bearing Chinese symbols and pictures for restaurants, herbal stores, pawnshops, association halls, and grocery stores (EW 192).

Changes that take place in Chinatown are also brought to the notice of the reader. In the early 1950s, “the only non-Chinese on the streets were drunks, gamblers, dope pushers and prostitutes” (EW 249). But by 1949, it changes to tourists, Caucasian visitors, Chinese from smaller towns in British Columbia, new migrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, South-east Asia, and even Peru.

Despite Ping’s longing for China while in Canada, it is seen that while in China, Ping thinks fondly of Canada, amply evidencing the apparent tendency of the diasporans not to adjust with any land, but be nostalgic about the absent topos

Some of the characters in *The Concubine’s Children* and *The Excluded Wife*, who actually travel back to China are found to think about Canada while in China. According to the theorists, despite the nostalgia for the home topos while in the host land, the diasporan finds that he is unable to repossess the lost home, for this exists only in his reminiscence of the past, which itself is faulty. The writers, in tune with the views popularised by diaspora theorists, portray the migrants as realising that their view of the homeland as a refuge from their unendurable conditions was only a mirage.

Pauline and Ping fly back to Hong Kong, in 1987 where they are warmly received by Tak-Kan, Sau-Ha’s son. Changes in Hong Kong are taken note of and the counter immigration from Hong Kong to China is also mentioned. Even while in Hong Kong with her sister, Toi-shaan looms large in Ping’s imagination. Nevertheless, Ping notices that the China that she sees now is not the China she has left, for, she sees a bride wearing pink wedding gown, with “No red veil over her face, no sedan chair, no wailing songs” (EW 266). Ping

also notices that the practice where parents arrange for the wedding of the children has also disappeared and the choice is left to the groom. As is true with the members of the diaspora as claimed by the critics, China in Ping's mind in *The Excluded Wife* is different from the real China, for it has been years after she had left it. The only permanence in China is change and Ping finds that the Shaan Tai market, Tuen-Fan Junior High School and even the paddy fields have changed so much so that when Pauline asks her, "This is where you lived," though Ping nods in agreement, "she should almost imagine that the driver had played a joke on them and dropped her off at the wrong village" (EW 268). This actually reveals only the disinclination on the part of the migrants to accept reality. To Ping:

None of the houses inside the gate fit the landscape she held in her memory. In place of the low-lying baked-mud homes there now stood tall buildings of three and four storeys whose outer walls were decorated in multicolour ceramic tiles, with verandahs extending handsomely from the doors (EW 268).

Ping, in *The Excluded Wife* who had been to Canada is also shown to understand China only through the rituals. Finding the ancestral tablets of Yik-Man's parents, paternal uncle Kwok-Ko and Yik-Man, she makes her daughter also take part in the rituals: "Unable to say anymore, she took the incense sticks handed to her by Yik-Mo's daughter-in-law. Pauline and Sau-Ping lit incense and kowtowed, in front of the ancestral altar" (EW 278).

The loyalty of the characters created by the writers for the lands become suspect when Ping in *The Excluded Wife* says that back in China, she does not

feel any intimacy for Yik-Mo who had lived in the village all his life. She finds that memories have become unsound and that they offer no solutions. Traditions have changed and she now finds people using a husking machine instead of doing the work manually. This feeling gets strengthened when she sees the big banyan tree that shaded the main ancestral hall: “For years she had thought of this tree when she was troubled by the dispersal of her family and used it to reassure herself that drooping branches would root again in new ground” (EW 272).

The maladjustment with the home land on return makes one construe that the diasporan’s loyalty for the lands is just a make-belief. This also forces one to doubt if the writers are not making the credulous readers marionettes, while furthering their own ends of ensuring reception even while making libellous statements against both home and host lands. Ping of *The Excluded Wife* speaks about her feelings for Yik-Mo:

. . . she felt the impenetrable wall of years that separated this day from the day she had gripped a little piece of field dirt in her hand and fled Sai-Fok with her children. The man before her was no longer an intimate. Their years of companionship was gone (EW 269).

With the counter-emigration to China, Ping finds that China has changed, but also notes that the overseas people remain more Chinese than sedentary Chinese.

A critique of the United States of wartime is provided by Yuen-fong Woon in *The Excluded Wife* when she makes Sau-Ha tell her sister: “When there

are wars, some of the stronger countries like the United States close the gate to Hong Kong and Chinese goods. When the gates close, my husband has no work” (EW 147).

Actually, it appears that the writers make migrant characters’ feeling of loss to be exacerbated by contending that their view of the homeland as a safe haven that would soothe the trauma they experience in the host land always would prove false. Through diasporic writings, which according to Stuart Hall constitute “a narrative of displacement,” the writers seem to dramatise the apparent maladjustment and the obdurate nature of the diaspora by vouching that they are re-creating the incessant desire to return to ‘lost origins’ (245). The feeling that one has is that the diasporans are just being malcontents, doing nothing worthwhile to help themselves by fine-tuning themselves to the situation, but aggravating their situation by being loquacious about injustices, thereby amplifying the breach between nations.

The pattern of the ‘suffering migrant’ complaining about the host land recurs in *The Excluded Wife*, making the loyalty of the character for the lands suspect. Yik-Man’s narration about the real life in Canada projects Yik-Man, the migrant as a sufferer. This also shows his unwillingness to adjust to the land which sustains his family even though he has to toil hard there:

Every day in Gold Mountain, we work in the restaurant. We purchase groceries, put on our aprons, cook, and serve the customers. We do everything. When there are lots of customers, we run on the slippery floors between the tables, hoping we

won't fall . . . This is the only free time for me since . . . There was one day, I was thirteen, we went to the waterfront" (EW 33).

Yikman warns Ping not to believe in everything that is heard about the Gold Mountain and mentions to her that in Vancouver, "it is only slightly better than making a living at home" (EW 33).

The migrants' complaints against their adopted land recur in *The Excluded Wife*. Ping feels that Canada has been cruel to her, with her husband beating the infant Pauline:

Sau-Ping began to wail. She cried into the frozen Vancouver darkness, she cried against the hard electric lights. This land had cut her belly apart as if she were a melon! This land had transformed her husband into a machine who was all speed at work: a machine without a heart (EW 206).

Sau-Ping suffers the pangs of being in the wrong place with a husband who has got part 'Canadianised' and who will not understand her sufferings:

What kind of a companionship could she find with Yik-Man? Having lived in Canada since the age of ten, he could understand some English. He was at home in Chinatown and had long-term friends. He socialized and played mahjonn with them at the Toi-Shaan Association Hall or the Chinese Benevolent Association whenever he had some time off from the restaurant. He never took her anywhere. He must be ashamed of her because she was a village bumpkin (EW 206).

The diasporic writers often show a tendency to oscillate between the home and host topos, imagining and imaging the two lands to which they aver they cannot belong and never will belong. Nostalgia pervades the mindscape which gets translated into the landscape of all diasporic literatures.

It is true that mental crossings may occur in different migrants to varying extents and that some of them may be maudlin and obdurate at some point of time. But the theorists' attempts to equate the state with one of 'post-death' and 'existential angst' in the case of all diasporans, often are hyperboles that may catapult the writers to glory. The tendency of the theorists to generalise these characteristics as the common traits of all diasporans is to be viewed with suspicion, as some migrants, after initial culture shock, may find themselves at ease with both the terrains, and lead the 'good life' warranted by multiculturalism.