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# Model Minorities, Models of Resistance: Native Figures in Asian Canadian Literature

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# Model Minorities, Models of Resistance

## Native Figures in Asian Canadian Literature

In the special *Amerasia* issue titled “Pacific Canada: Beyond the 49th Parallel,” editor Henry Yu notes that despite similar thematic concerns in Asian Canadian and Asian American cultural production, works by Asian Canadian artists are also “entangled in broader cultural and political formations that speak to the importance of First Nations struggles” (xviii). The centrality of First Nations struggles in the Canadian political and cultural landscape is reflected in the representation of Native culture in Asian Canadian texts. Though these representations vary, Native presence in works such as Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* and its sequel, *Itsuka*, SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Kevin Chong’s *Baroque-a-Nova*, Fred Wah’s *Diamond Grill*, Helen Lee’s short film *Prey*, and the recently published Chinese Canadian and Native anthology *Eating Stories*, edited by Brandy Lien Worrall, signals an important avenue of comparative analysis for Asian Canadian studies. Current comparative Asian Canadian scholarship focuses primarily on the relationship between Asian Canadian and Asian American experiences, often situating these analyses within a transnational or a diasporic framework. Given both countries’ similar Asian immigration history and the growing interest on Asian diasporas and transnational circuitries, a comparative Asian North American literature seems to be an obvious field of study.<sup>1</sup> Addressing the many references to Native peoples in Asian Canadian writing, however, reconfigures Asian immigration within a colonial settler history and illuminates the particularities of Asian Canadian racial formation within a transnational US-Canadian framework.

This article examines how the representation of First Nations in Asian Canadian literature highlights the particularities of Canadian racial

formations that are not reducible to US racial formations, but yet cannot be understood independently of them. To reject US racial paradigms by insisting on Canadian specificity ignores US hegemony and the effect of US racial politics on Canadian racial discourse. One needs only to remember the protest and violence that erupted in Toronto when the Los Angeles police officers accused of beating Rodney King were acquitted. Asian Canadian representations of Aboriginal people, instead of revealing something about the experiences of Aboriginal people, reflect Asian Canadian negotiations of a racial formation that is shaped by US racial paradigms and reconfigured by Canadian racial politics. The term “Asian Canadian,” by virtue of its belated emergence in relation to Asian American Studies, suggests a “deferential” and derivative relationship to its more established southern counterpart.<sup>2</sup> As many scholars have noted, how Asian Americans have been racialized impacts how Asian Canadians are racialized.<sup>3</sup> Asian Canadians, like Asian Americans, are often perceived as either perpetual foreigners (the yellow peril, the enemy alien) or as exemplars of successful assimilation, capital accumulation, and traditional Asian family values (the model minority). Whether as a threat to the national fabric or as an affirmation of national inclusiveness, the marginalization of Asians in North America is bound up with the racialization of capital and citizenship.

Through examining the work of prominent Asian Canadian writers, Joy Kogawa, and SKY Lee, I demonstrate how Native characters and culture are figured to contest the particular formations of Asian Canadian marginalization. The aboriginal status of First Nations, their struggle for self-determination and sovereignty, as well as the dominant culture’s romanticization of Native culture as ancient and outside the history of capitalism, are reflected in Kogawa’s and Lee’s presentation of Native characters as models of anti-racist resistance and as enabling figures of social-political critique. Furthermore, interracial romance between Native and Asian Canadian characters reshapes the model minority’s traditional Asian family into a hybridized Native Asian one, thereby authenticating Asian Canadian claims to belonging. This modeling of Asian Canadian identity on First Nation political resistance *and* dominant representations of First Nations posits Native characters as the “model minority” that Asian Canadians need to emulate. Because of the term’s codification with compliance, my use of “model minority” highlights an ambivalence that is foundational to Asian Canadian claims of belonging but is often elided—Asian Canadian status as settlers in stolen lands. “Model minority” in this instance gestures towards

the models of intelligibility, both of containment and resistance, available to minoritized and racialized groups within a hegemony that persistently frames racial discourse in terms of binary relations. Thus, my reference to “the Native” as a kind of model minority does not refer to actual peoples but rather points out the ideological work of fictionalized Native peoples in the elaboration of Asian Canadian racial formation.

Whereas US racial discourse is persistently framed in terms of black-white binaries, in Canada it is the experience of indigenous peoples that have become synonymous with racial oppression. Margaret Atwood in *Survival*, her oft-cited 1972 book on what is “Canadian” about Canadian literature, espouses a common perception: “the Indian emerges in Canadian literature as the ultimate victim of social oppression and deprivation. The blacks fill this unenviable role in American literature” (97). By reducing Canadian racial discourse to a Native-white binary, Atwood’s essentialization of Native peoples as the prototypical victim of Canada’s colonial history and institutionalized racism neatly relegates racism and colonization to features of the Canadian past in much the same way that the myth of the Vanishing Indian affirmed US frontier expansion. However, this is not the only form of Native otherness. Margery Fee, Terry Goldie, and Leslie Monkman have argued that the representations of Native peoples in works by white Canadian writers often say less about the experiences of Native peoples and more about white settlers’ fraught relationship to a harsh landscape. Their unease and fragmented sense of national identity signify a desire for a prelapsarian wholeness and innocence, embodied by the figure of the Native. Because of the functional importance of the Native in defining Canadian literature—to act as a foil for the rugged yet civilizing individual, to authenticate the settlers’ connection to the New World, or as the vanishing figure of nationalist nostalgia—works *by* Aboriginal writers are often displaced and eclipsed by works *about* them.

Though First Nations have been stereotyped as the ubiquitous victim of racial oppression, within minority communities they are often seen as models of resistance. In the late 1970s, Native organizations such as the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB—later reorganized as the Assembly of First Nations), the Native Council of Canada (NCC), and the Inuit Committee on National Issues (ICNI) succeeded in bringing Aboriginal rights and land claim issues into the national spotlight and participated in constitutional reform debates, which had been initiated mainly to address Quebec’s demand for sovereignty. Despite the collapse of the negotiations, the lessons

drawn from these debates led to better coordinated efforts to fight for self-government and land rights. Their legal challenges as well as their vocal resistance, argues Kwame Dawes, should be an example for other minorities in Canada:

Native Canadian Nations are especially well-positioned at the moment to bring about systemic change to Canadian policy towards them and they are acting. It is hoped that their gains will be understood by themselves, and by all society as models for the re-evaluation of the values and systems of governing that have existed in this country for a very long time. It is hoped that other non-white groups who have participated in the fight for fundamental change will be able to participate in the reorganization of the society's attitude to race relations during this period. (12)

Though the struggle for Aboriginal rights and self-government is ongoing, such struggle is often perceived as the example or model which other minorities striving to enter the legal and political process should follow. In the context of Canadian debates and negotiations on multiculturalism, sovereignty rights and national identity, First Nations people are viewed as emblems of resistance for people of colour, an implicitly Canadian "model minority."

Despite First Nations' politicization as a model for other minorities to emulate, the model minority thesis is usually invoked in relation to Asians in North America. Most explicitly aligned with the US racial discourse of the 1960s, the model minority thesis remains a powerful index of Asian containment in the United States and Canada. According to Keith Osajima, it emerged during a time of great urban upheaval, when the Civil Rights Movement, the rise of black militancy, and urban rioting seemed to contrast sharply with the upward mobility and successful assimilation of Asian Americans. The putative success of Asian Americans was attributed to Asian cultural family values, which emphasize education and a strong work ethic. Their success affirmed that the United States was the land of opportunity, and disproved "the black militant's claim that America was fundamentally a racist society, structured to keep minorities in a subordinate position" (450). Model minority discourse, therefore, is essentially a discourse of containment in which the economic success of Asian Americans is not only invoked to police other minorities, but also renders Asians and Asian Americans as intelligible only in terms of capitalist accumulation, as opposed to political participation or social activism. Because model minority discourse prescribes and inscribes economic success as the sign of having "made it," upward mobility becomes the central teleology of Asian presence in North America. Asian North Americans struggling to make ends meet and/or

who do not fit this stereotype are either invisible or simply model minorities in gestational form; their success is assumed to be inevitable since it is a function of traditional Asian family values. The emphasis on family values delineates assimilation as viable only through the domestic sphere of the nuclear family, shifting obstacles to assimilation and belonging away from structural inequities and institutionalized racism to the personal, and thus incidental, domain of the domestic. The essentialization of Asian culture, which underwrites the model minority thesis, also gives the stereotype of mobility across borders. Essentializing Asian domesticity makes national specificity irrelevant. In other words, domesticating the narrative of assimilation obfuscates the centrality of national borders in enforcing proper national subjects. And thus, while model minority discourse emerged out of a particular racial history in the United States, its logic of containment is transnational, in effect, upholding a “transnational discourse of whiteness” against which a homogenous Asian identity is defined (Dua et al. 3).

Model minority discourse’s racialization of Asians in North America figures belonging in terms of capitalist accumulation, but only so much; the reanimation of the yellow peril in the stories of Asian economic competition and domination demonstrates how being too successful can also be a threat.<sup>4</sup> One example of the intersection of capital, citizenship, and the discourse of the yellow peril is the protest against “monster houses” in Vancouver, British Columbia. During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the surge of anti-Chinese sentiment centred on the influx of wealthy recent immigrants, who were perceived as not only driving up real estate prices, but also responsible for destroying the neighbourhood aesthetic with architecturally invasive monstrosities.<sup>5</sup> According to Peter Li, monster houses were viewed as, “architecturally unpleasant and environmentally destructive . . . they were seen as being built by greedy developers to appeal to the poor taste of wealthy Chinese immigrants, mainly from Hong Kong” (148). Described as destroying pastoral anglophone neighborhoods, Chinese immigrants were characterized as materialistic, bearers of a crass capitalism who were incapable of political consciousness, patriotism, or respect for the environment.

As Gary Okihiro has pointed out, the model minority and the yellow peril are not polar opposites, but rather two sides of the same coin. Both figure Asians in terms of capitalist accumulation and highlight the tenuousness of Asian claims to citizenship, rights, and belonging. The representation of the Native as a model minority for Asian Canadians is also informed by the characterization of Asians and capital. Here, Native characters are exemplary

figures of resistance and alternative models to capitalist accumulation. Just as Asian American cultural nationalists such as Frank Chin modeled Asian American political consciousness after African American oppositional politics, Asian Canadian modeling of Native resistance locates Asian Canadian racialization within the particularities of Canadian racial discourse.<sup>6</sup> And just as Chin's admiration of African American resistance was expressed in terms that potentially reinforced dominant cultural assumptions about black masculinity and violence, the representation of First Nations in Asian Canadian literature, at times, also produces similarly ambivalent effects. One example of this idealization of the Native as an enabling figure of Asian Canadian social and political awakening is the representation of Father Cedric in Joy Kogawa's *Itsuka*. Whereas *Obasan* traces Naomi's personal healing and reconciliation with the past, *Itsuka* addresses communal healing through chronicling the politicization of Naomi and her participation in the ultimately successful Japanese Canadian redress movement. What is significant to note, however, is the extent to which the trajectory of her political awakening parallels that of her sexual awakening and her relationship to Father Cedric, a French Canadian Métis priest. At a meeting where Japanese Canadians debate whether or not to push forward with redress, Naomi thinks to herself, "I wouldn't dare admit it right now, but I'm not a true believer in redress. I'm not a true believer in anything much. . . . I may not know what I believe but I know whom I follow. I'm here mostly because Cedric is" (154). Later, as she becomes more passionate about redress, she sees love as inseparable from justice. In wondering what others think of her participation, Naomi muses, it "isn't money that drew me [to become involved in the Japanese Canadian community]. What would Nikki think if she knew I'd only become involved because of Cedric? . . . It's probably true that it's love, not money, that makes the world go round" (221). In *Obasan*, Aunt Emily's words—her activism, petitions, and archival collections on internment and injustice—"do not touch" Naomi and the rest of the family in Alberta because they "are not made flesh" (226). In *Itsuka*, it might be said that the words *are* made flesh through the relationship between Naomi and Father Cedric. It is her love for Father Cedric, what Naomi calls, "the fact of flesh" (208), and not any desire for compensation, that ultimately brings her out of isolation and into a politicized consciousness founded on community and justice.

From the opening pages of the novel, Father Cedric is presented heroically, simultaneously an adventurer and a sage, and connected to the land. To Naomi, he seems larger-than-life, a "free-roaming, French Canadian,

post-modern priest . . . a Buck Rogers from another galaxy” (5).<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere he is described variously as ageless (5), intimately connected to a primordial or ancient landscape (159), and a wise spiritual guide (117). Though he is part French as well, it is his Native heritage from his mother’s side that he identifies with and which sustains his connections to the ancestral landscape. He tells Naomi on one of their outings to the forest, “The place of my great-great grandmother . . . You see these high cheekbones? They come from here. When I go back in my mind, it isn’t to France. It’s here. I begin here” (159). Margery Fee argues that Native peoples have a particular symbolic currency because of their perceived “autochthonous claim to the land” (18), which trumps anglo-colonial claims. Nationalism, Fee continues, “is the major ideological drive in the use of the Indian in contemporary English Canadian literature” (17). The romance between Naomi and Father Cedric, I would suggest, needs to be understood within this history of representations, in which the alignment between Asian Canadian and Native experiences poses a particular nationalist claim, despite its critique of Canadian nationalism. Early in their relationship, Father Cedric gives Naomi a Haida rattle, which he describes as an emblem of the kindness and shelter the Haida provided the Japanese Canadian men who fled to the remote Queen Charlotte Islands during the round up of World War II. “For you, Naomi,” Father Cedric tells her. “Maybe it will help us communicate?” (134). Symbolic transfers of ownership are sometimes represented in what Fee calls a “totem transfer” whereby a Native “voluntarily hands a totem (often an animal) over to a newcomer, thereby validating the white’s land claim and blessing the relationship between old land and new landowner” (21). Though this is not necessarily strictly a transfer of ownership, the hybridized rattle can be seen as the totem through which the relationship between Father Cedric and Naomi and, by extension, Native and Japanese Canadians is symbolically bridged and affirmed. Furthermore, the rattle is the only gift that connects Father Cedric to his own father, a parish priest who was sent away for falling in love and impregnating a young novitiate, his mother. “My mother always loved him,” Father Cedric tells Naomi, “This rattle told her sad stories about children who lose their fathers. It was made by a man who left his child” (108). This rattle, which had connected Father Cedric to his own lost father, connects Naomi to Father Cedric. The resonance of lost or broken families invoked by the rattle also suggests that their experiences of loss—the fragmentation and dispersal of the Nakane-Kato family during World War II—are parallel.



If the rattle can be read as a totem and the symbol of mutual recognition, then Father Cedric might be understood as the substitute for Naomi's loss. He is simultaneously father and mother, and it is through him that she is able to reclaim a primordial connection to the land that precedes national inscription. Not only does Naomi have trouble dropping the title "Father" as they become more intimate, but he "is as soothing as friendship. He cradles me as a mother holds her child, with care and confidence" (252). In her allusions to the fairy tale Cinderella, Father Cedric is both the prince and her "fairy god mother priest" (137). As many have argued, the fragmentation of the Nakane-Kato family and the absence of Naomi's parents can be read as a breakdown of the national family and the betrayal by one's own fatherland.<sup>8</sup> Given the history of racialized citizenship and belonging, the union of Father Cedric and Naomi suggests a return to the natural world, a contrast to institutional inscriptions of national identity and citizenship. Through Father Cedric, belonging for Naomi is a visceral experience, and the boundaries between bodies and the elements blur:

The bodies that we are inhabiting are light specks—infinitesimal coloured things in a golden road, in a blip of time, dreaming we live and breathe and have our being. We are gliding into the world by rainlight, down the highways of the mind, the backwoods, the trailways, by word, by flesh. We are here to tread this dreaming earth, its surfaces, its winding private ways, by foot, by limbs, by eyes, by touch. . . . And with fingertip and tongue and tangled hair, through the falling air, through starlight, into stone, into stone become flesh, into the ancient myths of birth and rebirth and the joyful rhythms of earth, we are journeying home. (252)

The exploration of the body is indistinguishable from the exploration of different kinds of paths—highways, backwoods, trailways, private ways—that etch the psyche as well as the earth. The absence of differentiation, in which bodies are figured as ephemeral as light specks, enables the journey home. For Naomi and the Japanese Canadian community, their racialization and differentiation led to internment. In this moment, homecoming is figured as a return to a prelapsarian innocence where difference does not register

The return to wholeness and completion is a return to the childhood sense of security, where Japanese Canadians are Canadians and not "enemy aliens" and the government remains a benevolent parental presence. However, such parallels, which refigure Japanese Canadian redress as a restoration of familial ties, naturalizes the family as the ontological source and sign of wholeness through encoding the Native as synonymous with "nature." Such romanticization of the Native to authorize a humanist inclusion overlooks the ideological sedimentation of "nature" as prelapsarian and primordial which,

in turn, dehistoricizes Native cultures as essentially ancient and outside the socio-political institutions that characterize “Canadian” culture (Davey 105). This concurrent elaboration of political and romantic awakening reworks the redress campaign and the critique of institutionalized racism into a narrative of multiracial family reunion, whereby members previously deemed to be outside of the family are recognized and embraced into the fold.

While *Itsuka* situates Japanese Canadian redress within the framework of a multicultural family headed by a Métis parental figure, this liberal humanist coalition potentially also displaces decolonization struggles. The conflation of anti-racist politics with decolonization politics, as Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua argue, potentially de-centres analyses of the continued colonization of Aboriginal people by co-opting decolonization struggles into a liberal-pluralist framework (131). Whereas *Itsuka* can be read as potentially rehearsing dominant representations of the Native in the portrayal of a Japanese Canadian political consciousness, SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe* can be read as a cautionary tale on the dangers of a belief in racial purity and of Chinese Canadian internalization of the terms of Canadian assimilation. Set against the anti-miscegenation and anti-Chinese immigration laws, the concern over family, bloodlines, and progeny is crystallized through the Wong family’s Native roots. Mary Condé argues that the fall of the Wong family could have been avoided had Gwei Chang not deserted Kelora, the half Chinese-half Shi’atko woman who rescues him, and had he recognized their son Ting An as his own.<sup>9</sup> According to Condé, “It is [Kelora] rather than [Wong Gwei Chang] who is the first Chinese Canadian of the family. She is the daughter of Chen Gwok Fai and a Native Canadian woman of a ‘very wealthy, old and well-respected’ family. . . . It is to Kelora, if anyone, that the Canadian land spiritually belongs” (179). The Wong family and its successful business are founded not only on the disavowal of its Native family members, but also on a disavowal of how Native peoples helped the Chinese survive.<sup>10</sup> Kelora, for example, not only saves Gwei Chang from exposure and hunger, but she salvages his flagging quest by guiding him to the bones of their Chinese predecessors. She had “peculiar intuition for locating gravesites whose markers had long ago deteriorated” (14). Kelora, described as possessing an intimate knowledge of the terrain and environment, is the bridge between him and those who came before him. Gwei Chang’s betrayal and return to China for a “real wife,” therefore, unmoors the family from its history and sets into motion the eventual end of the Wong family (in patrilineal terms) in Canada.

Condé's suggestion that Kelora is the "spiritual" owner of Canada is reinforced by her abilities to blend into the "natural" world. When they come upon each other, the incongruity of Kelora furthers Gwei Chang's sense of confusion. To him, she is "an Indian girl, dressed in coarse brown clothing that made her invisible in the forest. Her mouth did not smile, but her eyes were friendly—a deer's soft gaze" (3). Their meeting is unreal to him, an effect of hunger's hallucinogenic power and her other-worldliness: "In this dream-like state, he thought maybe he had died and she was another spirit here to guide him over to the other side" (2). Indeed, the other side that Kelora guides him to is not death, but life where humans exist in harmony with nature, a contrast to the enmity between humans and the landscape from where he had just been rescued.

Life out in the wilderness is described in terms of an equal economy of exchange, which seems to mirror ecological balance. As they explore the forest, Kelora explains to Gwei Chang, "If I need to gather cedar, then I have to say a few words to the tree, to thank the tree for giving part of itself up to me. I take only a small part too, but not today. . . . Many women have come here to gather what they need. When we walk in the forest, we say 'we walk with our grandmothers'" (13-14). Need, and not want, governs the limits of harvesting. Whereas in the earlier passage, Kelora is described as deer-like, here the forest is humanized as part of one's extended family. Even the location of the house that Kelora and her father Chen Gwok Fai live in reflects this delicate ecological balance. Their house is situated "on a very strategic spot" (9), at the nexus of wilderness, human civilization, and commerce. Their "home and vegetable garden [are] snuggled into the edge of a pine forest that crept in from the windward side of the mountain. And it made a welcome respite for the Indians who traveled up and down this busy avenue of exchange—'grease trail' they called it, naming it after the much sought-after fish oil they ate" (9). Not only does the garden, cultivated by human hands, exist intimately with that which tests the limits of human survival, but this blurred space is also bisected by an avenue of commerce. The representation of harmony with nature includes the equity of exchange. Located at such a strategic intersection, they give shelter to those who pass by, and in turn these travellers often leave tokens of thanks: "The exchange was fluid though, flowed both ways, depending on the seasons. Often enough Kelora and her father would share their food with a load of impoverished guests. Either way, it made a good life for them" (9-10). Here, the economy of exchange produces no surplus value, and the delicate balance of ecology

and economy are here intertwined, such that the rise and fall of trade is inseparable from the cycles of nature.

Life in the city, in contrast, is much different, where mobility is marked by the racialization of labour, gender, and capital. Mui Lan can only enter the country as a merchant's wife and only after paying the five hundred dollar Chinese head tax. Similarly, Fong Mei refuses to leave her husband Choy Fuk for Ting An for fear of becoming a waitress, which was perceived as equivalent to being a prostitute. If financial security and independence are precarious for women, then producing an heir, preferably male, becomes the privileged mode of production for them within the Confucian order. Their part in the consolidation of the family name becomes synonymous with the expansion of the family fortune. The following juxtaposition highlights this relationship: "Fong Mei produced only a girl, who tiny as she was, gave her mother enough omnipotence to vie for power and launch a full-fledged mutiny. . . . First, Fong Mei learned to drive a car; next she took her share in the family business and turned it into the most lucrative one of all—real estate" (134). Bearing a child initiates her entry as an agent in the capitalist economy, leading her to discover a talent in making a profit off property. What began as a family business, simply a means of maintaining livelihood, eventually expands into a capitalist venture through the commodification of land.

The link between reproduction and property acquisition reflects one of the central anxieties expressed by the yellow peril discourse. When the waitress Song An gives birth to Keeman, the white midwife translates her stoicism as evidence of the Chinese as a "capital breed" (133). Given the anxieties surrounding invasion by Chinese hordes, the phrase "capital breed" reinforces belief in the "innate" abilities of the Chinese to accumulate capital through labour, both reproductive and manual. The threat of Asian reproductive labour is reinforced by the threat of the invasion of an Asian labour force that will not only crowd out white workers, but eventually take property away from them. In this way, "capital breed" situates Asian model minority and yellow peril discourse in the language of biological and cultural essentialism, linking the relationship between capital accumulation, labour, and the family unit as the sign and source of Asian success and potential invasion.

However, just as the laws were implemented to preserve racial purity and "keep Canada white," Mui Lan's desire to perpetuate the family is based on a similar logic of racial purity and authenticity. The failure of her son Choy Fuk and daughter-in-law Fong Mei to have children is a source of endless bitterness and shame for Mui Lan. She imagines others saying, "What good

is all that Wong money when their family name can't even be assured?" (36). It is important to note, however, that Mui Lan's obsession with reproduction cannot be necessarily and simply reduced to Confucian values, but as Donald Goellnicht points out, her obsession is also a product of the exclusionary immigration laws aimed at curtailing Chinese immigration and containing the growth of Chinese communities ("Of Bones and Suicide" 304). From her great-granddaughter's perspective many years later, her motivations are thus characterized: "From her husband's side, Mui Lan would certainly claim a share of that eternal life which came with each new generation of babies. What could be more natural, more ecologically pure?" (31). The logic of racial purity, naturalized in ecological terms, leads to the failure to produce an heir; the last male child is the product of incest and dies in infancy. The dominant culture's fear of miscegenation and Chinese economic competition deprive the Wong family the ability to generate itself. This fear also informs the Wong family decisions on who is a "legitimate" heir to the family and who counts as a "real" spouse. As long as the heir is a "real" Chinese, Mui Lan doesn't care if the child is born out of wedlock. For Gwei Chang, his betrayal of Kelora, his inability to acknowledge Ting An as his own, and his subsequent attempts to dissuade Ting An from marrying a French Canadian woman by enticing him with a "real wife from China" (233), reflect his inability to reconcile his concept of legitimate heirs with anyone not deemed authentically Chinese. His ideas of racial purity are therefore no different from the fears of miscegenation that haunt white Canada.

In the context of the harsh immigration laws designed to maintain a white Canada and the failure of the Wong family to produce a male heir, hybridized identities like those of Kelora and Ting An seem uniquely able to survive and navigate life in Vancouver, if only those in the Chinese community could recognize this. Ting An, for example, is described as particularly adept in dealing with outsiders, the "ghostly" whites, an ability attributed to his birth. According to Choy Fuk, "A Ting is native-born. He knows how to deal better with ghosts" (35). Of course, the double-meaning of "native-born"—racial ancestry and birth-place—is instrumental to Ting An's ability to move beyond the confines of Chinatown:

People remarked that he spoke English like a native speaker; he behaved much like a ghost too, never very visible. He drove the horse and wagon around town a lot . . . There were a lot of others who could get by in English, but Ting An got along really well with the devils. He had a way about him, and he was the reliable type who didn't shoot off his mouth. People readily accepted that he was a loner, more at home in the stables than with his own kind. (113)

Ting An, like his mother, is portrayed as more comfortable with animals than with people. And like his mother, there is something insubstantial about him—a ghostliness that marks him as different from others and renders him invisible in both Chinatown and outside; his multiracial heritage is unintelligible or ghostly in these communities that adhere to strict codes of authenticity and racial purity. However, like the countless other Chinese “orphan-men” at the work camps, Ting An is also an orphan, cut off from his mother and Native heritage. It is this sense of dislocation and dispossession that connects him to all the lonely Chinese immigrants he meets: “When he had come to Tang People’s Street to stay, Ting An couldn’t help but feel a camaraderie with the orphan-men there; it was like a contract between faces, so to speak. People who had suffered the same hardships understood each other” (115). Here the experiences of Chinese dislocation and dispossession are situated in the broader history of Aboriginal dispossession and dislocation. Able to share in the loneliness of these early immigrants and yet able to deal with outsiders, Ting An is presented as a kind of ambassadorial figure who bridges the mutual distrust between Chinatown insiders and the outside world.

In posing a silenced Chinese Canadian genealogy that is bound up with First Nations people, however, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, like *Itsuka*, also risks rehearsing what Terry Goldie describes as the nationalist narratives of “indigenization,” whereby white writers in Commonwealth countries grapple with their colonial settler status. But, as Guy Beauregard writes, what does it mean for “members of an excluded group to use the trope of indigenization to assert a place in Canada” (63)? Or put differently, what does such a representational strategy reveal about contemporary racial discourse such that these are the tropes of belonging that have currency? Lee’s representation of Kelora and Ting An powers her critique of the essentialization of “Chineseness” that both girds anti-Chinese immigration laws *and* the insularity and xenophobia of the Wong family. By rejecting its Native roots, the Wong family is unable to sustain a patrilineage in Canada. Kelora and Ting An are both figured as pivotal to the survival of the Wong family in Canada, and their abandonment by the family, therefore, is instrumental to its downfall.

The representation of First Nations in Asian Canadian literature locates Asian Canadian formation within a hemispheric Asian diasporic framework at the same time that it grounds these formations within a colonial settler history. More importantly, these representations situate Asian Canadian racial formation within the ongoing decolonizing struggles of First Nations peoples and demonstrate the necessity of connecting Asian Canadian

anti-racism to indigenous decolonization struggles. Though Asian Canadian struggles are not comparable or equivalent to Indigenous struggles, both are simultaneous and relational. As Rita Wong has noted, “For those of us who are first, second, third, fourth, fifth generation migrants to this land, our survival and liberation is [sic] intimately connected to that of aboriginal people” (110). It could be argued that the vision offered in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is one that presents the interconnection of migrant experience and Aboriginal experiences. Forgetting that mutuality, as the Wong family does, is to inhabit a partial history that in the end proves the unsustainability of the family.

In postulating a Native “model minority,” I am not suggesting that Asian North American experiences of racism and displacement are comparable to Native experiences nor do I want to reclaim the term “model minority” by reinvesting it with “positive” connotations; the dominant assumption about the model minority stereotype has been that it is “complimentary” and should be flattering to Asians. Rather, I am interested in the invocations *about* comparability instead of making a case *for* comparability. It is by raising questions about how certain minorities are figured as “models”—by whom and for whom, under what conditions and contexts—that we can trace the discursive formations that give rise to certain models of racial intelligibility and belonging. More specifically, by viewing “modeling” as a citational process that is indexical of contemporary racial formations under colonization, we can consider how Asian Canadian identity emerges out of complex multiracial relations and is mobilized against whiteness but not defined oppositionally by it.

The representations of Natives in Asian Canadian works necessitate further inquiry into a more collaborative comparative work than what I have laid out here. This collaborative comparative work raises important questions for Asian Canadian and Asian American studies as well as for coalitional politics more broadly. Scholarship on Asian Canadian and First Nations struggles can expand the transnational framework that currently informs comparative Asian Canadian and Asian American studies to include the complex relations between migration, settlement, and indigenous sovereignty. “In articulating Asian American and/or Pacific/Asian Canadian Studies,” writes Russell Leong, “we must . . . pay attention to indigenous and interdiasporic relationships across borders and within native nations and territories themselves” (ix). Without examining the complex relationships between Asian immigration and indigenous struggles for land, rights, and sovereignty, Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua warn, anti-racism projects

can potentially reproduce colonial relationships with Aboriginal peoples, de-centring anti-colonial resistance so that anti-racism becomes equivalent to or substitutable for decolonization (134).

In her story, “Yin Chin,” which is dedicated to SKY Lee, Lee Maracle writes about a young Aboriginal child who has internalized the racism around her. The title, “Yin Chin” refers to the first meeting between Gwei Chang and Kelora. Gwei Chang is surprised that she speaks Chinese. “‘But you’re a wild injun,’ he says, but in Chinese, it sounds like ‘yin-chin’” (3). Kelora in turn calls him a “chinaman.” Both have internalized racist stereotypes of the other. In Maracle’s story, the narrator, now an adult, looks back on the child that she was and is pained by her ignorance of and role in perpetuating racism. Ashamed of her behavior to a kindly Chinese merchant, she thinks, “how unkind of the world to school us in ignorance” (161). Reading Maracle’s text alongside Lee’s as well as Kogawa’s is a reminder of how both communities of colour and Aboriginals have internalized dominant assumptions about each other. It also reminds us how such internalizations have both segregated the history of Asian Canadian migration and settlement from the history of Aboriginal displacement and dispossession and rendered anti-racism struggles separate from decolonization struggles.

## NOTES

I would like to thank Elisabeth Ceppi, Dorothy Wang, the anonymous readers, and the careful eye of the editors for their help and insight in strengthening this article.

- 1 With the exception of Tseen-Ling Khoo’s *Banana Bending*, which examines Asian Canadian and Asian Australian literature, most focus on comparative Asian North American works. Comparative Asian North American works include Eleanor Ty’s *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* and *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*, edited by Eleanor Ty and Donald Goellnicht.
- 2 See Beauregard’s “What’s at Stake in Comparative Analyses of Asian Canadian and Asian American Literary Studies?” The developmental and temporal lag of Asian Canadian Studies in relation to Asian American Studies is also explored in Donald Goellnicht’s “A Long Labor” and Chris Lee’s “The Lateness of Asian Canadian Studies.”
- 3 See for example, Anthony Chan’s “Born Again Asian” in which the racist stereotypes he identifies come from US popular culture.
- 4 As Gary Okihiro has pointed out, the model minority and the yellow peril are not polar opposites but, in fact, “form a circular relationship that moves in either direction. . . . Moving in one direction along the circle, the model minority mitigates the alleged danger of the yellow peril, whereas reversing direction, the model minority, if taken too far, can become the yellow peril” (143).
- 5 See Richard Cavell’s “The Race of Space” for an analysis of the racialization of the aesthetics of these “monster houses.”



- 6 In “Back-Talk,” Frank Chin decries the emasculation of Asian culture in mainstream representations: “We are characterized as lacking daring, originality, aggressiveness, assertiveness, vitality and living art and culture.” This emasculation is part and parcel of a larger US racial discourse in which “We have not been black. We have not caused trouble. We have not been men” (556).
- 7 Curiously, the original Buck Rogers, who appeared in a short story, “Armageddon—2419 A.D.” in the August 1928 issue of *Amazing Stories*, was a former air force pilot turned surveyor who is transported to the future and becomes a leader in the fight against the “Mongol hordes” who are a threat to the civilized world.
- 8 See, for example, Goellnicht’s “Father Land and/or Mother Tongue.”
- 9 There is no consensus on Kelora’s ancestry, however. Diverging from many scholars who have read Kelora as the biological daughter of Gwei Chang, a recent article by Neta Gordon persuasively argues for the dying white man that Gwei Chang encounters in the cabin as her father. Whether Kelora is part Chinese or part white, it is the Wong family’s Native ancestry that remains silenced.
- 10 The first Chinese arrived in what was later to become British Columbia in 1788. About fifty Chinese artisans settled in Nootka Sound and became a part of the Native community, raising families with Native women. See Chan’s *Gold Mountain*.

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