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Asian-Indigenous Relationalities

Literary Gestures of Respect and Gratitude

Sister texts *Disappearing Moon Cafe* by SKY Lee and "Yin Chin" by Lee Maracle have initiated an important conversation in Asian Canadian studies about the impact of racial discrimination and colonial oppression on Asian-Indigenous relations, a discussion that typically privileges the relations and tensions of marginalized communities with white settlers rather than with each other. The intertextual dialogue between these stories is made clear by the title of Maracle's short story, a morphed transliteration of the derogatory slang "injun" drawn from the first encounter in Lee's novel between the Chinese patriarch and Kelora, a mixed-race Indigenous woman.[1] While "Yin Chin" follows an Indigenous woman's college experiences with Chinese Canadian allies, framed by a haunting childhood memory of internalized xenophobic attitudes in her community, the melancholic force behind *Disappearing Moon Cafe* lies in a series of nostalgic flashbacks in which Gwei Chang, the elderly family patriarch, mourns his abandonment of Kelora, the greatest love of his life, out of colonial shame and classist denigration. Narrating the effects of racial and colonial discourses on Sino-Indigenous relations,[2] the texts by Lee and Maracle both call forth damaging stereotypes as part of a creative exercise in self-scrutiny, demonstrating the ways in which the imposition and internalization of racist and colonial discourses divide and conquer both communities and prevent them from cultivating mutual relations of respect. As Larissa Lai points out, "[b]oth Lee's novel and Maracle's short story are instances of respect in action, a self-reflexive respect that acknowledges the other, that gestures towards taking responsibility for oneself—both personally and historically—in the face of larger social forces" ("Epistemologies" 104). Within the narrative bounds of the texts, the characters

in "Yin Chin" and *Disappearing Moon Cafe* feel indebted to individuals they have wronged in the past, individuals with whom they have shared kinship and affinity. However, read allegorically beyond the text, the Chinese and Indigenous characters embody a framework for acknowledging and honouring Asian-Indigenous relations and historical indebtedness more broadly in the contemporary moment, a decolonial framework that has become a prominent mode of critique in Asian Canadian studies over the past decade.[3]

Situated within a settler of colour critique, this article extends these intertextual conversations about the impact of racism and colonialism on Sino-Indigenous relations to consider the ways in which contemporary Asian Canadian settler citizens, migrants, and refugees inherit not only the legacies of white supremacy, global capital, and settler colonialism, but also the historical relations of Sino-Indigenous indebtedness. Sino-Indigenous relations of kinship, friendship, and hospitality constitute my primary archive, as well as relations depicted in historical accounts of early Chinese settlement in Canada,[4] or in recent historical fiction such as David H. T. Wong's *Escape to Gold Mountain* and Paul Yee's *A Superior Man*.[5] However, I aim to project the decolonial aspirations of this Chinese Canadian archive onto other Asian Canadian communities, whether they come from post-1967 refugee or economic migrant genealogies.[6] Presenting an allegorical reading of Asian-Indigenous relations through scenes of settler/migrant/refugee indebtedness and gratitude represented in several Chinese Canadian literary texts, as well in *Ru* by Vietnamese Canadian writer Kim Thúy, I argue that the literary tradition of Asian-Indigenous indebtedness has the capacity to generate a sense of mutuality and self-critique amongst all Asian Canadians who need to consider their roles and responsibilities within the structures of settler colonialism. This is particularly important within Asian migrant and refugee communities shaped by an enduring sense of gratitude towards the state for being granted a new life on colonized lands. I propose that this literary tradition has the potential to inspire the cultivation of decolonial epistemologies and solidarities amongst Asian Canadian communities divided by differences often considered too insurmountable to overcome.

Settler of Colour Critique

Explorations of Asian-Indigenous relations are by no means isolated within histories of early Chinese settlement in Canada or the field of Asian Canadian studies. A parallel tradition of acknowledging Japanese-Indigenous relations of kinship, friendship, or even unfriendly and shameful

intimacies has been traced in literary and cultural texts produced on both sides of the Canada/US border: novels such as Joy Kogawa's *Itsuka*; Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child*; Leslie Marmon Silko's (Laguna Pueblo) *Ceremony*; Perry Miyake's *21st Century Manzanar*; and the film *Village of Widows* (1999), a Lindum Films documentary on Sahtu Dene travelling to Japan to apologize to World War II survivors for unknowingly mining uranium on Sahtu land at Great Bear Lake that was used in the making of the atomic bombs that decimated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Marie Clements (Métis) has also explored this history of Dene-Japanese proximities in her play *Burning Vision*, a time-bending confluence of multiple narratives and characters that depicts an intimate history of radioactive colonialism shared by Dene people, Japanese Americans, and Japanese people. As a result of such compelling inter-cultural narratives, scholarly interest in uncovering and theorizing Asian-Indigenous relations has surged over the past decade in the fields of Asian American, Asian North American, and Asian Pacific and Islander studies, producing a vibrant transnational body of research that speaks to a commitment on the part of social justice-oriented scholars to work towards decolonizing established knowledge systems that have previously rendered these inter-community relations politically invisible or irrelevant for academic study.[7]

Certainly, the earlier scholarly gap was shaped by the way in which colonial and settler colonial studies were conducted on Indigenous societies across the Pacific and Atlantic worlds. Once dominated by white, non-Indigenous scholars, this body of work focused primarily on the histories of contact and post-contact dynamics between European, white settler, and Indigenous societies. Consequently, it has been the necessary task of Indigenous academics to produce Indigenous-centered scholarship to rework and critique the problematic research that has been produced about their people, cultures, and histories. However, a paradigmatic shift similar to that in Asian North American and Asian Pacific and Islander studies has also emerged in settler colonial and Indigenous studies: a commitment to study what Paul Lai and Lindsey Claire Smith have termed "alternative contact" (407-408), that is, a move to look past the body of the white settler and focus instead on contact and dialogue between and amongst non-white and Indigenous communities. White colonial structures, knowledges, and perspectives have occupied the centre of scholarly discussions on historical issues that impact Indigenous peoples for far too long.[8] This perspectival shift towards examining non-white communities and Indigenous peoples in a settler colonial framework has also engaged Canadian and American

scholars working in critical race studies, critical ethnic studies, diaspora studies, and postcolonial studies,[9] and has been felt more recently in Canadian literary and cultural studies.[10]

While considerable interest in examining the relations of racialized and Indigenous communities has emerged, there has not been much consensus over determining the settler colonial status of non-Indigenous communities of colour. To date, much of the literature remains divided over the settler categorization of racialized communities, particularly those of racialized migrant, diasporic, and refugee backgrounds. While some scholars would suggest that a racialized community's settler status depends upon the degree to which their migration was voluntary, others would unequivocally define non-Indigenous communities of colour as settlers regardless of whether their dispersal occurred by choice or force.[11] Proposing that we move past the settler-Indigenous binary, Iyko Day claims that folding these communities "into a generalized settler position through voluntaristic assumptions constrains our ability to understand how their racialized vulnerability and disposability supports a settler colonial project" (*Alien Capital* 21). As such, she presents a triangulated theory of settler colonialism in North America that distinguishes the alien (that is, black slaves and Asian migrants) from the Native and the settler due to the role that their racialized labour plays in the production of settler capitalism, which in turn determines the degree of their territorial entitlement. Day concedes that acknowledging these voluntaristic distinctions hardly absolves any community of colour from being willing or unwitting participants in a settler colonial structure meant to eliminate Indigenous peoples. She asserts that "for slaves and racialized migrants, the degree of forced or voluntary migration or level of complicity with the settler state is ultimately secondary to their subordination under a settler colonial mode of production driven by the proprietorial logics of whiteness" (*Alien Capital* 24).

For the most part, I am on board with Day's argument. Her work offers a comprehensive model for conceptualizing the racial formation of white settler, diasporic, and Indigenous communities under the framework of settler colonialism.[12] Unlike older critical race models, her approach addresses both Indigenous land and racialized labour without also collapsing the racialization of Asian migrant genealogies with that of the Black Atlantic diaspora. What is more, her model usefully outlines how the logic of exclusion responds to the way in which the racialization of each positionality becomes an aid or obstacle to the consolidation and expansion of the settler colonial project.[13] However, as much as nuancing our critical race models is

necessary to fully understand both our roles and vulnerabilities under the structures of white settler capitalism, I still hold that the settler of colour critique be retained in our discussions for solidarity-building reasons. Conceptually imperfect as the term may be for its historical reference to European immigrants and their descendants who have stood to benefit from the military and juridical apparatuses of the French and British empires, holding onto the settler category in our contemporary moment becomes at the very least a gesture of respect and solidarity. Despite the scholarly attempts to nuance or revise the term—for example, settler of colour, arrivant (Jodi Byrd), or alien (Iyko Day)—it carries more social impact if settler allies reorient it beyond the academy to acknowledge our colonial complicities and responsibilities. More importantly, it becomes a solidarity project, a mode of self-critique, a process of self-identification that can be reconfigured intersectionally, depending on one's positionalities and migrant genealogies. To build and improve upon Asian-Indigenous relations, today's Asian Canadians must confront and acknowledge their roles and responsibilities in the ongoing structure of settler colonialism, even if they or their ancestors do not benefit from the same privilege systems as many white settlers. Even if Asian North American labour has been made historically alien and continually subject to suspicion and deportation, as Day suggests, for Asian Canadians born or arriving after 1967, I contend that as long as we pay taxes to the Canadian state, own or rent Crown property, and enjoy the social benefits and institutional privileges of Canadian citizenship, we are, without question, settlers too.

Like Dean Itsuji Saranillio, I see great political and pedagogical value in the settler of colour framework as it has the potential "to open one's visual world to the material consequences of aligning oneself with the settler state" (282).[14] Whether communities of colour come from alien or settler migrations, the settler state still provides social, political, legal, and economic dividends to every migrant, diasporic, and refugee community and their descendants, even as race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, able-bodiedness, ethno-national origins, and generation (time of immigration) intersect to downgrade and/or uplift settlers to varying degrees. Of course, retaining the settler category does not mean that we are only settlers all the time. Retaining the settler of colour critique accounts for only one of many genealogies that shape the everyday lives and memories of racialized settlers, migrants, and refugees. Claiming settlerhood and the responsibilities of a settler ally is a political endeavour: as a historical and ongoing relation of indebtedness, it ensures

that we respect, honour, and never lose sight of Indigenous claims to land rights and sovereignty. As for Asian Canadian studies, retaining the settler of colour critique already fits within an established literary and cultural tradition. As I will discuss next, it constitutes a mode of cultivating mutual respect and self-reflexivity in the Indigenous and Asian Canadian imaginary.

Relations of Indebtedness in Chinese Canadian Historical Fiction

A tradition of acknowledging and restoring Asian-Indigenous relations exists in Asian Canadian studies, one initiated by Indigenous and Asian Canadian writers like Lee Maracle, SKY Lee, Marie Clements, and Joy Kogawa. In Chinese Canadian historical fiction more specifically, depictions of these inter-community relations range from stories of friendship, kinship, hospitality, and care, to distrust, disavowal, and cross-racial denigration. Instances of positive and compassionate relations and intimacies crop up, for example, in David H. T. Wong's graphic novel, *Escape to Gold Mountain*. When Ah-Foo, a Chinese male ancestor, is presumed dead by his railway crew after falling off a steep mountain cliff during a blasting expedition, he is saved and nursed back to health by an Indigenous community, only to return to his crew a year later wearing a cedar hat: "a gift from the Native people who saved my life . . . to remind me that all peoples are brothers" (139).[15] While Indigenous characters welcome, befriend, host, and start families with Chinese characters in Wong's graphic novel, in Paul Yee's *A Superior Man* they are sometimes deemed to be untrustworthy, less civilized, and a source of shame for Chinese bachelors. In Yee's novel, the protagonist Hok Yang receives an ill-timed visit from his former lover Mary, a Nlaka'pamux woman. When he is about to ship home with his life's savings to fulfill his filial duties, Mary tracks him down in Victoria to surprise him with their son Peter. She asks Hok for financial support—a pretense, as she quietly leaves Peter behind, trumping Hok's escape plan instead. Intent on returning to China to marry a Chinese woman and avoid shaming his family with a mixed-race child born out of wedlock, Hok enlists the help of Sam Bing Lew, a mixed-race Indigenous guide, to track down Mary near Lytton and return Peter to her and her community. Spliced with Hok's memories of hard labour and racial violence while building the railway, the novel follows the struggles of Hok and Peter together with Sam, who saves Hok's life on multiple occasions. Hok and his lineage end up owing Sam a lifetime of favours, forging a life-long relation of indebtedness that Hok ends up disavowing as soon as they part ways.

A narrative plotline that circles around fears of miscegenation, the disavowal of unwanted kin, and Sino-Indigenous indebtedness also surfaces in SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe.* Like Hok, Gwei Chang does not know that he has fathered a child with his Indigenous lover, but he manages to return home and bring back a Chinese wife to start a Gold Mountain family. Rita Wong and Larissa Lai offer an allegorical interpretation of Gwei Chang's decision to abandon his life with Kelora and her people, a reading that presents a compelling settler of colour critique for Asian Canadian studies. Lai suggests via Wong that Gwei Chang's grief over abandoning Kelora, a woman who found him lost, starving, and unfriendly towards her in the wilderness yet who proceeded to help him complete his ill-equipped bone repatriation project, constitutes "a grief of ingratitude" that can be extended to Chinese Canadians today ("Epistemologies" 103). Building on "Wong [who] suggests that that grief and that ingratitude belong also to the likes of her, me, and the author SKY Lee," Lai writes that

> [a]t the extra-diegetic level, Lee's gesture of respect is her recognition of the wrongs committed by Chinese immigrants against the Indigenous people who helped them. It is also, as Wong notes, a gesture of solidarity in that it recognizes an Asian/Indigenous relationship that includes desire and emotional connection, as well as (differential) subjugation to the same colonial and economic forces and (differential) connection to the land. ("Epistemologies" 103)

At a personal level, early Chinese settlers like Ah-Foo, Hok, and Gwei Chang may remain indebted to the Indigenous communities who assisted them; but on a broader scale, they, along with the early Chinese railway workers, have accrued a historical debt in that "they also participated in the colonial nation-building project that disenfranchised Indigenous peoples" ("Epistemologies" 103). This is a historical debt that scholars like Wong and Lai have claimed for today's Chinese Canadians that extends beyond the personal: if acknowledged and honoured, it becomes a socio-political debt that shapes how communities relate to one another.

Yet, I wonder how the contemporary inheritance of this historical debt could work when not all Chinese Canadians have genealogical ties to the Head Tax generation. The majority of today's Chinese Canadians constitute a post-1967 immigrant demographic vastly different from the early Chinese settlers in class, culture, language, spiritual beliefs, ethno-national origins, diasporic affiliations, and political ideologies. Could solidarity calls to such a heterogeneous community to claim these historical Asian-Indigenous relations of indebtedness supersede internal differences often thought to be too insurmountable to overcome? Along with these decolonial aspirations, is coalition building within the community even possible?

The challenges of building community solidarities are perhaps best illustrated in the ongoing "Monster Homes" controversy in Vancouver that began in the late 1980s, a case of enduring racial and class resentment towards wealthy Chinese migrants and investors for transforming both the aesthetic qualities of Vancouver's affluent neighbourhoods and the affordability of the real estate market till this day. This controversy tends to be cited as contemporary evidence of Canadian xenophobia towards Chinese Canadians, a repeat of the Yellow Peril discourse that agitated anti-Chinese sentiment and racial violence in BC at the turn of the twentieth century. However, Laura Madokoro has argued that compared to earlier Chinese Canadian battles to save Vancouver's Chinatown from a massive gentrification/slum clearance project, the Monster Homes controversy revealed a general lack of solidarity and diasporic cohesiveness within the community. While community members and Chinatown business representatives banded together to preserve Chinatown as a historic site, they expressed little interest in supporting the wealthy Chinese arrivals in their housing battle against the xenophobic attitudes held by so-called "long-time residents" of the exclusive Kerrisdale and Shaughnessy neighbourhoods (Madokoro 20-21). Consequently, Vancouver's history of these housing and residential struggles uncovers profound implications for today's Chinese Canadian community, for it proved that political and historical differences may be too difficult for members of the community to accept and overlook.

Indeed, if building lines of Chinese Canadian solidarity in a case like this was difficult, if not near impossible, then building decolonial solidarities amongst Chinese Canadians and Asian Canadians (already loose umbrella designations in terms of the heterogeneity mentioned above) presents overwhelming challenges as well. However, building solidarity and community affiliations is always hard work even amongst community members who share many political and ideological similarities. Problems like these present an excellent opportunity to turn to the political power of storytelling to imagine otherwise. In "Decolonizasian," Rita Wong looks to representations of Asian-Indigenous relations as having the imaginative potential to decolonize Asian settler epistemologies and relations with Indigenous peoples and the land. While for Wong, "[a]ffective bonds" do not necessarily translate into political solidarity,

> effective solidarity is also less likely to happen without a deeply felt understanding of each other's perspectives and the ways in which oppression is both common and different for people racialized as "First Nations" and "Asian." Fiction offers a speculative space and challenges us to imagine the ways in which dialogue and interaction could spark deeper understanding of our interrelatedness. (166)

Therefore, I stand by Rita Wong's and Larissa Lai's call for contemporary Chinese Canadians to claim this history of Sino-Indigenous indebtedness, a decolonial project that is politically feasible through the mobilizing power of literature. This project requires a settler of colour critique that is already rooted in a literary tradition set forth by Indigenous and Chinese Canadian writers to honour a relation of historical indebtedness, to re-establish mutual respect for each other's communities, and to practice a mode of self-critique that is politically urgent and applicable to all Chinese Canadians and East Asian, Southeast Asian, and South Asian Canadians.

Migrant and Refugee Gratitude

If acknowledging relations of indebtedness constitutes a literary tradition in Asian Canadian writing, then a parallel tradition of expressing migrant and refugee gratitude has also emerged. Denise Chong's family memoir *The Concubine's Children* and Kim Thúy's *Ru,* for example, express gratitude towards individuals who have made migrant and refugee lives of success and settlement in Canada possible. In Chong's memoir, she and her mother come to appreciate the immigrant sacrifices of Chong's grandparents. Chong's family, an ethnic success story, has enjoyed democratic freedoms and economic privileges under a liberal capitalist settler society made possible by the privilege of being born and raised overseas. Chong's mother gains an acute sense of her Gold Mountain privilege when she visits her older sisters who were left behind in China. Due to birth order, poverty, and anti-Chinese immigration legislation, Chong's aunts have been arbitrarily relegated to the "peasant's lot" under a Communist regime, whereas Chong's side of the family has acquired the wealth promised by the Gold Mountain myth, an economic and political liberation that Chong claims was only made possible by her grandparents' act of immigration and labour sacrifices (295). *Ru* is composed of vignettes that flash between Nguyễn An Tịnh's memories of growing up in Vietnam and her family's experiences of living in the refugee camp in Malaysia and resettling in Canada. Part of Saigon's bourgeois class, An Tịnh's family secretly leaves amid mounting fears of being branded as anti-Communists. Written by the narrator who becomes a writer, many of the reflective vignettes centre around family members, teachers, refugee sponsors, employers, friends, and lovers, producing what Vinh Nguyen has theorized to be an archival act of cataloguing gratitude towards those who have helped give the refugee a second start at life, an act of writing that makes a refugee (inter)subjectivity tenable and livable (29-30).

I align these narratives of migrant and refugee gratitude not to conflate their genealogies of loss and exile, but to carve out a decolonial space between them that creates room for acknowledging the histories of Indigenous displacement and dispossession that make settler capitalist accumulation possible in the first place. Granted, it is difficult to ask migrants and refugees to be mindful of the Indigenous nations and communities to which we all remain indebted when the structure of settler colonialism often makes Indigenous claims to sovereignty invisible and irrelevant under the capitalist system. It is also difficult to make this request without coming across as morally righteous and elitist, particularly when the state's liberal "gift of freedom," according to Mimi Thi Nguyen, forever binds the refugee to the giver in an enduring economy of indebtedness, obligation, and recompense (6-11).[16] Moreover, I do not wish to discount or disregard refugee expressions of gratitude and celebrations of success. As Vinh Nguyen reminds us, refugee narratives of success and gratitude "are integral to the intertwined processes of survival and subject formation for those who have experienced intense struggle, loss, and trauma": they constitute necessary life-writing tools for regenerating refugee self-existence, livelihood, being, and identity out of ontological oblivion (18; 23-24). Yet expressions of both migrant and refugee gratitude for such liberal democratic privileges and benefits must also consider the structures that have helped make Canada a safe and prosperous settler society, comparatively speaking, for Asian migrants and refugees. Decolonial allies must join these conversations respectfully and reveal the ways in which Canada's benevolence remains contested by other agents whose role in the act of giving has been masked, that is, Indigenous nations and communities who have been forced to welcome both migrants and refugees as well as the ecologies that sustain them.

By juxtaposing narratives of Asian-Indigenous indebtedness alongside expressions of Asian migrant and refugee gratitude, I suggest that gratitude and indebtedness can be made the basis of Asian-Indigenous relations more broadly. While migrant and refugee gratitude may be structured as a coercive relation of obligation towards the state, expressions of gratitude that acknowledge the history of Asian-Indigenous indebtedness can take on a different register. When Asian-Indigenous relations are built on gratitude and indebtedness, interactions that arise out of such relations entail more than a repayment of a specific amount of debt: this process of relation-building inaugurates an ongoing, future-oriented relation of social return, requiring a continual maintenance of inter-community relations and a constant renewal of trust and solidarity.[17] Of course, decolonial relations of

indebtedness should entail territorial reparations, among other treaty obligations, lest decolonization, as Eve Tuck (Unangan) and K. Wayne Yang assert, only take place in the settler mind (19). But when Asian-Indigenous relations are shaped by a historical and ongoing relation of indebtedness, the conversation of decolonizing Asian-Indigenous relations moves away from prioritizing settler colonial guilt and sorrow, seeking absolution for that (liberal) guilt, and transforming colonial complicity into an actionable project that attempts to decolonize and improve relations. Certainly, prioritizing colonial guilt situates Asian-Indigenous relations within a Eurocentric structure of liberal modes of governance, justice, and sociality that inevitably becomes more about seeking colonial absolution than about addressing the wrongs inflicted upon Indigenous communities, effectively displacing Indigenous peoples and their material experiences. As Deena Rymhs argues, configured under this epistemological framework, "reconciliation, paradoxically, can displace the wronged party" (116). I claim that if settler allies focus instead on relations of indebtedness, then the emphasis shifts towards finding out how Asian Canadians can express gratitude towards a wide range of colonial debts such as the acts of kindness, compassion, and hospitality that Indigenous communities such as the Nuu-chah-nulth and Nlaka'pamux peoples have historically shown to Chinese settlers.

"How Does a Single Blade of Grass Thank the Sun?"

If today's social justice-oriented Asian Canadians wish to claim the historical injustices levelled against Asian Canadian settlers, migrants, and refugees, they must also claim the relations of Asian-Indigenous indebtedness. There is a compelling short story in a recent collection by a new Chinese Canadian author that envisions how contemporary Chinese Canadian youth might acknowledge and honour this historical indebtedness. The title story in Doretta Lau's *How Does a Single Blade of Grass Thank the Sun?* demonstrates that expressions of Asian Canadian gratitude and indebtedness can also be articulated outside the frame of historical fiction, revealing an exciting shift in the storytelling patterns of emerging Asian Canadian cultural producers. It signals a significant turn that grapples with the historical debts that Chinese settlers and their descendants inherit upon migration, and confronts both the discursive erasures of Indigeneity and the legacies of settler colonialism in a contemporary context. The story also offers insights on mutuality and self-critique that may be useful for the challenges of generating a decolonial activist movement within today's Asian Canadian communities.

Above all, Lau's text challenges Asian Canadians to build inter- and intra-community solidarities in the face of genealogical differences that may divide and conquer us. In Lau's story, an unlikely bond develops between five Chinese Canadian youth despite their differences in class, gender, ethno-national origins, and political ideologies. Calling themselves the Dragoons, their individual nicknames also highlight important differences in their migration stories and add a transnational context to their decolonial politics. While Suzie Wrong is a second-generation Chinese female, Yellow Peril is a Taiwanese young woman who believes "with occidental-eyed earnestness that someday Taiwan would 'liberate China from Communism'" (109). As for the young men, Riceboy and Sick Man's families come from Hong Kong, and Chairman obviously hails from mainland China. The care that Lau takes to distinguish the characters' heterogeneous Chinese origins makes visible the historical grievances and seemingly insurmountable differences that these characters would have had to overcome in order to become a tight-knit group. Despite having been differentially impacted by competing empires, wars, regime changes, and the inequities of transnational capital, the gang live in Canada now and so must band together to fight their common foes, namely: orientalism, Yellow Perilism, cultural appropriation, cultural assimilation, the model minority myth, and white supremacy.

The national allegiances and political ideologies that should divide the group end up being rechanneled in diaspora: subjects of empire and capital, the Dragoons distrust authority and thus resist ascribing to the status quo. Observing the gang, Sick Man muses to himself, "[w]e had so much potential, but sometimes it seemed as if we . . . needed a little structure in our lives. We needed to achieve a goal of some sort" (115). Putting their heads together, the crew finally decide to vandalize a local mural, a project they have had their minds set on for months, for "[t]he mural depicted the joys of colonial life, roughing it in the wilderness, and the triumph of the settlers over the natives [sic]" (115). The story ends with the five figures gazing at where the mural once had been: now a beige wall, the painted-over mural commands their quiet and undivided attention. According to Sick Man, it is an evocative moment of political awakening and social fulfillment for the gang. To be sure, it is unclear whether Lau's characters conceive of this act as an acknowledgement of Asian-Indigenous indebtedness. By painting over a mural that inaccurately depicts the story of colonialism as a gift of modernity and civilization to Indigenous peoples, what political goals do the Dragoons accomplish? Read literally, the blank space on the wall is a whitewashing of history, a willful act

of forgetting that is still problematic no matter how inaccurate or racist that history was portrayed in the mural. Read generously, however, this act of vandalism, no matter how juvenile or politically ineffective it may be, is at best a symbolic gesture. It is a politically inspiring gesture for the Dragoons, a historical achievement or Great Wall monument of their own that could potentially signify a shared connection and solidarity with Indigenous peoples. A gesture of respect and solidarity on the imperfect terms that they know, it is still likely an acknowledgement of colonial interrelatedness—not an equation of colonial oppression but an acknowledgement of kinship across difference, of distinctive yet linked colonial injustices that matter even in the absence of embodied relations.[18] As an expression of gratitude, it can never repay—not fully, not ever—but as a gesture of respect and acknowledgment of Asian-Indigenous relations and indebtedness, it has the potential to inspire future generations of Asian Canadians to reflect upon and ask Indigenous communities how their relations might be restored, how we can all attempt to rebalance past and ongoing historical indebtedness.

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NOTES

1 Bewildered that Kelora, who looks like an Indian to Gwei Chang, can speak Chinese, he insults her, calling her a "'wild injun,'" but she only hears "'yin-chin'" instead (Lee 4).
2 Throughout this paper, I deploy the terms Sino-Indigenous and Asian-Indigenous to reference historical relations between Indigenous communities and Chinese settlers dating back to 1788 and contemporary relations amongst Indigenous peoples and Asian Canadians, respectively.
3 For foundational research by Asian Canadian studies scholars on this topic, see Henry Yu; Rita Wong; Marie Lo; Renisa Mawani; and Lai ("Epistemologies").
4 Not widely known is the history of the first Chinese settlers who arrived in 1788 with Captain Meares to build a trading post that would foster fur trading between merchants in Canton and the the Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka Sound) peoples on Vancouver Island. Left behind due to Meares' clashes with competing Spanish traders, these fifty artisans sought refuge and integrated with the Nuu-chah-nulth peoples (Chan 33). More community members, local historians, and researchers have begun to archive such relations in monographs, documentaries, and historic sites. See Diana E. Leung and Kamala Todd; Justine Hunter; and the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC.
5 These relations are also portrayed in Ling Zhang's *Gold Mountain Blues*. See Larissa Lai

(*Slanting*) for an insightful discussion of the novel's controversy and whether Chinese Canadian history, literature, and culture constitutes intellectual property that can be appropriated by a Chinese Canadian author who immigrated to Canada in the 1980s but lacks personal ties to the communities that she writes about.

6 Though the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act was repealed in 1947, the last vestiges of its explicitly racial discrimination policies were not removed until 1967. Only then did Asian immigration to Canada increase substantially, especially during the 1980s and 1990s (Stasiulus and Jhappan 118).

7 For major works published on this topic, see Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura (2000; 2008); Cari M. Carpenter and K. Hyoejin Yoon; Karen Leong and Myla Vicenti Carpio; Lisa Lowe (2006; 2015); and Iyko Day (2010; 2016).

8 For more on this paradigm shift in Indigenous and settler colonial studies, see Chadwick Allen; Alice Te Punga Somerville (Maori); and Shona Jackson.

9 Far from exhaustive, the list of key scholars who have written on this topic from across various fields include Bonita Lawrence (Mi'kmaw) and Enakshi Dua; Sunera Thobani; Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright; Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence; Celia Haig-Brown; Harsha Walia; and Daniel Coleman. See also the edited collections *Alliances* and *Cultivating Canada.*

10 For instance, see *Narratives of Citizenship*; *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora, and Indigeneity in Canada*; and *Critical Collaborations.*

11 Some scholars take exception to the settler of colour critique, claiming that the concept reinforces power binaries, lacks historical specificity, confuses immigration with colonialism, or fails to account for the involuntary conditions of migration for some communities: for example, see Adam J. Barker; Jodi Byrd; Day; Lorenzo Veracini; Sharma and Wright; Dana Y. Takagi; and Patrick Wolfe. Meanwhile, scholars who have taken a more unequivocal stance include Fujikane and Okamura; Haig-Brown; Lawrence and Dua; Dean Itsuji Saranillio; Thobani; and Haunani-Kay Trask. For a more comprehensive literature review and analysis of this debate, see Day; and Saranillio.

12 Beyond the scope of her study, Day's work does raise the question: do Latino/a and Chicano/a communities count as alien migrations as well? Communities that can trace genealogical origins to the western coastal and southwestern regions of the US before the successive waves of Spanish and American colonization add further complexity to our critical race and settler colonial theorizing.

13 As I understand Day's overall argument, Asian migrants and black diasporas have been imported respectively as excludable and exclusive labour forces in order to expand and reproduce white settler entitlement to land and property, but what differentiates their exclusion (for example, via state-sanctioned violence or immigration controls) is the degree to which emancipated black labour and the presence of Asian labour and capital contaminates white supremacy or threatens to replace and dispossess white livelihoods.

14 In a parallel context, *pakeha*, the Maori word for the descendants of European colonizing settlers, came to invoke a particular form of politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand, one which emerged from a revisionist conception of New Zealand's colonial history, and recognized Maori claims to sovereignty and institutional racism within New Zealand's society. For more on the concept of settlerhood as ally politics, see Wendy Larner and Paul Spoonley.

15 There is historical basis for such an account. In a footnote, Wong, the author, explains that he was inspired by similar stories he heard while growing up, particularly "a story told to the author by people from the Salish Nation near Lillooet, BC, in 2011" (230).

16 To be sure, Nguyen's theorization of the US empire's gift of liberal governance may not

map that easily onto the Canadian context. Canada's role in the hot wars throughout Asia during the Cold War was less direct and active than that of the US, which positions the refugee's expression of gratitude on a different register of state benevolence. However, while Canada is not an uncontested super power with a global military presence like the US, the peace and prosperity that it enjoys to this day comes from its collaborative role and support, along with that of other NATO allies, in the ascension and consolidation of the American empire (Price 314-15).

17 For instance, expressing gratitude in Vietnamese, *Cám Ơn*, means to carry debt. By thanking a person, you acknowledge that you owe the person a debt that you will repay in the future. This is more than repaying the same favour or gesture; it is also an acknowledgement of social indebtedness that promises a future meeting, a future opportunity to renew your relations. I must acknowledge the many conversations I have had with Vinh Nguyen on this topic.

18 My writing on this subject has been immensely influenced by Lai's "Epistemologies of Respect." Lai turns to Indigenous concepts of respect and acknowledgment as theorized by Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaq) and Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) to put forth an epistemological frame that can guide Chinese Canadians in how they engage with and remain implicated in settler culture, navigate their contradictory positionality as both settler and formerly colonized subjects, and restore balance in their relations with human and non-human beings. Just as how eastern and western US tribal nations have undergone differential treatment at the hand of colonizers, Asian Canadians have been affected by the same colonial and neo-colonial forces that also impact Indigenous peoples, calling for our respect and acknowledgement even in the absence of sameness and likeness.

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