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Struggling Productions:
Ying Chen and the Representation of Cultural Identity in Quebec, 1992-1999

Roy Fu

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2000

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ABSTRACT

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Roy Fu

In this thesis I explore the definition of cultural identity as ‘representation’, that identities don’t exist as forms of fixed, absolute, and/or natural essence; instead, they are merely conceptual constructs, definitions of culture and cultural difference, produced in accordance with evolving historical situations and political intentions. I therefore examine a body of texts that constitutes representation of identity, in a specific historical—namely, ‘diaspora’—context: the four novels published by Ying Chen, and the various critical and artistic responses inspired by these novels in Quebec. I argue that Chen’s literary representations of identity are primarily characterized by a progressive conceptual trajectory towards anti-essentialist definitions. Meanwhile, the various secondary texts tend to re-inscribe the author and her

works according to the metaphors of 'Chinese writer' and 'immigrant writer'. In the process, they inhibit key articulations in Chen's works from effective circulation in the Quebecois cultural milieu. These circumstances, I argue, reflect the confrontation of two historically distinct and opposing discourses of identity, and indicate a broader historical struggle for power in the social realm.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Credit for the completion of this thesis is owed to many. They include my supervisor, Marty Allor, whose guidance and insightful feedback helped keep my thinking on track and my confidence levels up, throughout the course of this project. Many other faculty members in the Department also contributed much appreciated assistance and encouragement along the way: including Lorna Roth, Bill Buxton, Monika Kin Gagnon, and Dennis Murphy.

I would like to thank Professor Lucie Lequin of the *Études françaises* and Women's Studies departments and Nicole Renaud for generously providing me access to their work. Thanks also to Sonia Poisson for copy editing.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their understanding and support over the past two years. Credit is particularly due to my wife and partner, Yoko, whose love, strength, and unwavering faith in me propped me up for all this time.

A toast then, to all, in thanks for the lessons learned and the chapters to follow.

Dedicated to the memory of my grandfather

Xi Yun Fu
1904 - 1997

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Chapter 1

Homing in: Framing Representation, Discourse, and Diaspora Identity

The principal question that motivates this thesis is a conceptual one. It concerns the definition of cultural identity, and stems from a set of personal and historically-specific circumstances: Namely, how do we conceptualize, theorize, and define identity in the context of ‘diaspora’?

What originally prompted me to ask such a question was a very personal predicament of cultural identity. More precisely, my background is that of a first-generation Chinese immigrant, who moved to Canada at an early age. This personal history has meant that I have never been able to define my cultural identity in clear and certain terms. For instance, because I spent my early formative years in Toronto, I do not identify with many ‘Chinese’ cultural perspectives or values. Hence I do not regard myself as a ‘Chinese’. Meanwhile, I do not fully identify myself as a ‘Canadian’ or ‘Québécois’ (my present place of residence) either, first of all, because of my connections to a very different past, through memory, family history, and language. Moreover, historical racial constructions prevent me from being identified as such: to put it bluntly, I am not regarded as a full-fledged ‘Canadian’/’Québécois’ primarily because I don’t look like one. And finally, hyphenated notions such as ‘Chinese-Canadian’,

aside from vague racial associations, lack both cultural coherence and concrete definition, especially given the diverse backgrounds and settlement histories of Chinese immigrants in Canada. Such cultural *displacements* have subsequently left me with a series of personal questions about identity: *What is my cultural identity? How would I go about defining or determining it?*

What propelled me to pursue such questions in an academic context was the realization of their broader historical relevance, that they are consistent with an emergent historical problem of ‘diaspora identity’.¹ The notion of ‘diaspora’ has prevailed as a key concept amongst recent interventions, in various denotative capacities, signifying an array of different yet related ideas. One of the most widely circulated definitions asserts ‘diaspora’ as a particular class of social formation, summarized by Ien Ang as:

transnational, spatially and temporally sprawling sociocultural formations of people, creating imagined communities whose blurred and fluctuating boundaries are sustained by real and/or symbolic ties to some original ‘homeland’ (Ang, 1994, p. 5).

But because this particular definition has been subjected to critique and contestation over the method and motives behind its formulation (see for example Ang, 1994; Chow, 1993), and because the very project of this

¹ As will be elaborated shortly, I am using ‘diaspora’ here to modify ‘identity’ instead of the more conventional ‘diasporic’, because I want to deliberately distinguish my usage of the term from certain conventional definitions.

discussion is to reconsider the definition of cultural identities, the term here is not used to refer to any specific social formation. Instead, its function is to inscribe a specific set of socio-historical circumstances. In particular, it points to a *problem* of identity, faced by certain populations (mostly from the South) who have been part of the recent, massive global migration influx (mostly to the North): due to a variety of circumstances, these people from various backgrounds have had their families uprooted and resettled in another part of the world. The geographic displacements have consequently been responsible for placing them in predicaments of cultural identity, of not knowing where they *belong*, of where they can call 'home'. 'Diaspora' has, in turn, served as the operative signifier, through which such historical circumstances are acknowledged, and subsequently problematized. Stuart Hall, for example, in his discussion of 'diaspora' identity, uses the term to forward such a problematic, (as opposed to using it to refer to any specific social formation):

...the millions of displaced peoples and dislocated cultures and fractured communities of the 'South', who have been moved from their 'settled communities', their 'actual lived relations', their 'placeable feelings', their 'whole ways of life'. They have had to learn other skills, other lessons. They are the products of the new diasporas which are forming across the world... They bear the traces of particular cultures, traditions, languages, systems of belief, texts and histories which have shaped them. But they are also obliged to come to terms with and to make something new of the cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them. They are not and will never be unified culturally in the old sense, ...belonging at the same time to several 'homes'—and thus to no one particular home (Hall, 1993, pp. 361-362).

As alluded to by Hall's reference to people of the 'South', on top of geographic displacements, I will assert that the other key facet of the diaspora condition/problem entails being subjected to racist cultural practices that prevent non-white peoples from ever becoming accepted, or, 'belonging' to white-dominant societies. Such a postulation is based on the various critiques of 'diaspora-as-social-formation', which not only frame these practices as an integral part of the diaspora problematic; they also reveal that the notion of 'diaspora' itself is used in certain instances to maintain such cultural segregation/subjugation. Ang, for instance, characterizes these definitions of 'diaspora' identity as '(self)ethnicization',

which is in itself a confirmation of minority status in white, western culture, can paradoxically serve as an alibi for what Rey Chow has called 'prescribed "otherness"', a sign of not-belonging, a declaration of actually belonging somewhere else. If this happens, the discursive conditions are established for the credentials of this diasporic identification with being 'Chinese' to be routed back to essentialist and absolute notions of 'Chineseness' (1994, p. 11).

Consequently, Ang concludes that:

from such a perspective, the politics of diaspora serves as a ploy to keep non-white, non-western elements from fully entering, and therefore contaminating, the centre of white, western culture. That is, no matter how long Chinese people have lived in the West, they can only become *westernized*, never pure and simply 'western' (1994, p. 15).

In light of the historical and personal dimensions of this thesis' originating problematic, I have elected to address it by drawing upon a recently-

emergent, anti-essentialist discursive framework. In particular, the formulation of the latter discourse posits that cultures are not absolute, fixed, and/or naturally occurring objects. It instead defines identities as historical constructs, fabricated concepts about culture and cultural difference. Moreover, it maintains that identities are historically specific, in that their meanings are always mediated by, and contingent upon the particular historical context in which they are formulated; so as historical circumstances change, so do definitions of particular identities. As Stuart Hall puts it:

cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark... It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within discourses of history and culture (Hall, 1990, p. 226).

The latter discursive approach has been chosen, first of all, because of my frustrations—noted earlier, with traditional, fixed schemas of culture in my personal dealings with identity; I thus decided to opt for a different conceptual framework in thinking through related problems. Moreover, because cultural-historically, the formulation of an ‘anti-essentialist’ discourse is very much rooted in texts that have specifically addressed the problem of ‘diaspora identity’, I thought such a discourse would provide an apt alternative. More precisely on the latter point, while considering the problem of ‘diaspora

identity', a significant body of works has critiqued historical, essentialist cultural differentiations, and subsequently rejected them on the basis of their conceptual inadequacies and political effects and affects. At the same time, they have attempted to (re)define various historical identities, using an alternative formula, based on the constructivist definitions summarized earlier (see for example Chow, 1993; Gilroy, 1993). What consequently emerged as a result of such efforts was a new set of conceptual rules for defining cultural identity, one that is markedly different from previous conceptual regulations; in other words, a new discursive formation materialized. In fact, many writers have used 'diaspora' in their attempts to articulate this very discursive shift. Ang, for instance, argues that given its *transnational* connotations, the term 'diaspora' can provide the conceptual basis to debunk older, 'essentialist and totalizing conceptions of "national culture" or "national identity" and to disrupt their presumption of static roots in geography and history' (Ang 1994, p. 16; for examples of similar assertions, see Hall, 1990, p. 235; or Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996, p. 165).

In accordance with the chosen discursive strategy, the emphasis of this thesis will be placed on the *representation* of identity, that is, the processes through which concepts about culture and cultural difference are articulated into concrete forms—such as film, music, or cultural theory, and subsequently circulated in the social sphere. Structurally speaking, representation is of

paramount importance to the understanding of identities because as cultural constructs, all identities undergo this process; moreover, as historically evolving objects—in that they embody no inherent, essential, or historically stable meanings, identities are constantly being produced and reproduced in accordance to changing historical contexts; hence the significance of representation never fades within the process of identity formation. As Hall aptly suggests:

perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within representation (1990, p. 222).

Hall in turn concludes in a later intervention that in seeking to understand cultural identities, ‘it is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are’ (1996b, p. 473).

As suggested by Hall’s notions of ‘who we are’ and ‘how we are constituted’, cultural representations are important to the understanding of identity not simply as isolated acts of signification; they are relevant precisely because of their placement and interaction within the social sphere, as a series of actions that constitute and impact actual lived experiences; specifically, they play both a socially revealing and determining role. Hence, from a critical/analytical standpoint, cultural representations of identity provide an

opportune 'window' that might allow us to gauge and posit identity as forms of social experience. First of all, representations in general, as in those not necessarily concerning identity, reside within the social domain because the processes that constitute them entail real social actions, i.e. the production and circulation of meaning. As Raymond Williams puts it, such cultural processes are social actions because 'our ways of seeing is literally our ways of living', and 'the process of communication is in fact the process of community' (Williams qtd. in Hall, 1993, p. 352). Moreover, given that acts of representation take place in a larger framework of social relations, it is inevitable that social patterns—the way life is experienced—permeates and translates into cultural forms—the way culture is expressed. Consequently, representations are reflective in nature, in that their characteristics, such as their form and their content, embody (and consequently disclose) the characteristics of the social milieu in which they exist.

More importantly for the focus of this discussion, aside from the general tendency to reflect corresponding forms of social life, representations of identity constitute another, more active process within the social sphere, namely, the institution of social relations and subsequently, of political power. This assertion is based on the recognition that the meanings produced through representations of identities play a significant role in both effecting and affecting social experience and relations. As Hall puts it:

how things are represented and the ‘machineries and regimes of representation in a culture do play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation—subjectivity, identity, politics—a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life (1996a, p. 443).

Hall argues elsewhere that identity entails a process of ‘positioning’, where people define a certain order of social relations, and then attempt to realize, or, *effect* this order through cultural representations. The author points to various historic examples of this, one of them being Jamaicans’ redefinition of their identity as ‘black’ and ‘African’ in the 1970’s. He argues that rather than being a rediscovery of essential African qualities in Caribbean culture—something that had been historically present all along, this redefinition was really an attempt to re-assert power in light of the post-colonialist movement ongoing at that time; essentially it was the ‘retelling’ of an African past through ‘politics, memory and desire’ (Hall, 1990, p. 232).

On the other hand, representations of identity also *affect* social relations and experience, in that the meanings they produce are often internalized and translated into forms of lived experience. Hall reveals this socio-cultural mechanism when he discusses the internalization of racist Eurocentric notions of identity by blacks. Following in Fanon’s theoretical footsteps, he argues that dominant representations of ‘blacks’ affected this latter group not only by marginalizing them in the minds of dominant society; domination through

representation was made more effective precisely because the meanings produced were accepted and internalized by black people themselves:

The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation. Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as 'Other'. Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, 'power/knowledge' (Hall, 1990, pp. 225-226).

Although much of Hall's explicit postulation of 'identity as representation' is forwarded with the historical specificity of black cultural politics in mind, other writers have demonstrated that such a formula is also in large part applicable in characterizing other historical contexts. For instance, in exposing the production of 'Asian' identities in the West—a context that is much closer in historical proximity to the forthcoming analysis, writers such as Chow, Ang, and Lisa Lowe argue that representations of identities constitute key instruments of cultural and political oppression, and at the same time, of resistance to oppression; they also posit various affects of such cultural practices on actual relations in the social sphere (see for example, Ang 1994; Chow, 1993, chapter II in particular; Lowe, 1996).²

² The exact bearings of such a contextualization on the pending exposition will be specified later on in this chapter.

In summary, I will proceed to address the question of: ‘how do we define identity?’, by considering the question of: ‘how is identity represented?’. Consequently, the pending discussion will be anchored on a specific set of representations in a diaspora context: namely, the four novels by Shanghai-born, Montreal-based author Ying Chen, and the various texts—i.e. critical discussions and artistic productions, that have been inspired by the novels, in Quebec. The basis for such a selection is multi-faceted. First of all, it is because the problem of ‘diaspora identity’ figures centrally in both the texts and the historical context of Chen’s writing. Textually speaking, Chen’s novels themselves constitute representations of diaspora identity because as a recent immigrant from China, the author uses her writing to explore questions of identity that were directly generated by her migration in 1989. As she puts it herself:

Je me trouve à mi-chemin entre mes origines et mon ailleurs. Ma destinée est cassée en morceaux. Je suis et je ne suis pas... Alors j’invente des histoires sur et pour ce pays. Ses histoires sont mes histoires, son malheur, le mien. On écrit parce qu’on souffre. Je rêve du jour où je n’aurai plus à écrire’ (Chen, 1995b, p. 62).

As a consequence of such a creative context (which I will further detail in Chapter 2), Chen’s texts significantly address—through their literary construction, questions of diaspora identity, exploring and articulating various definitions and positions in each of the novels.

Within the historical context on which I will focus,³ the problem of diaspora identity also figures prominently, in several respects. First of all, in the contemporary Quebecois cultural milieu, it is produced by the convergence of two different historical factors. In recent decades, the province has seen a significant influx of immigrants from non-European, non-white countries, which have significantly altered its demographic composition. Over roughly the same period of time, the representation of a certain ('Québécois') identity has become a dominant factor in determining the development of social and cultural life in the province. As Martin Allor and Michelle Gagnon argue, since the Quiet Revolution, the production of identity—as 'new forms of knowledge about *le peuple québécois*, and hence new articulations of social difference within the population'—has constituted one of the core elements of the cultural field in Quebec (Allor & Gagnon, 1994, p. 26). Moreover, because this production of *l'identitaire québécois* has been a primary source of legitimization for government action and social power, it has become deeply embedded, or, 'articulated' into the structures that constitute the cultural milieu, both in institutional and discursive terms. Allor and Gagnon thus argue that such cultural productions in fact represent a *dispositive*, 'the historically contingent

³ Aside from Quebec, Chen's novels have also been simultaneously published in France and received critical acclaim there.

linkages of discursive and non-discursive materials (institution, representations, laws, formations of intellectuals, popular media, etc.) which articulate the relations of knowing and acting in particular relations of governance' (Allor & Gagnon, 1994, p. 33). They go on to state that:

this dispositif includes ministries and government agencies: for example, Radio-Québec, SOGIC (la Société générale des industries culturelles)..., relevant laws and cultural policy documents, museal institutions and architectures, and ministerial speeches and government advertising. In addition, the dispositif encompasses the organizations and formations of specific intellectuals in the cultural field: for example, film directors, actors, critics...; Moreover, the texts and para-texts of Quebec public culture are also part of the elaboration of the cultural dispositif (Allor & Gagnon, 1994, pp. 33-34).

The ongoing convergence of the latter historical conditions has consequently produced a series pressing problematics—both practical and academic—related to the definition of diaspora/immigrant identity: for instance, how does the immigrant define and represent his/her identity, in light of the actual cultural establishment? And, how has this cultural establishment responded to the socio-cultural demands posed by the arrival of the immigrants? With respect to Chen's representations: how does this context affect her expressive efforts vis-à-vis her novels?

Secondly, another set of questions relating to diaspora identity is raised by Chen's particular cultural situation, as a person of Chinese origin living and writing in North America. This is because prevalent within, but not exclusive to

the latter context are Orientalist and racist discursive practices that produce 'China' and 'Chineseness' as the 'Other', thereby marginalizing those who are framed as such. As illustrated by Chow, such practices vary in form and context; they range from Bernardo Bertolucci's filmic imaging of China as the feminine (Chow, 1991, p. 12), to critical discussions that uphold China as the ideal egalitarian model—what Chow frames as 'Maoism' (Chow, 1993, p. 10), to the marginalization of modern Chinese literature, in favour of classics within the realm of Asian literary studies (Chow, 1993, p. 124). Yet despite the diversity of such practices, all share a common discursive tendency that produces a fixed definition of 'China', which in turn objectifies it as some form of authentic and/or exotic 'Other'. Chow refers to this latter process as the production of the 'native':

As such, the 'native' is turned into an absolute entity in the form of an image (the 'empty' Japanese ritual or 'Chinese loam'), whose silence becomes the occasion for *our* speech... Whether positive or negative, the construction of the native remains at the level of image-identification, a process in which 'our' own identity is measured in terms of the degrees to which we resemble her and to which she resembles us (1993, p. 34).

Henceforth, Chen's situation as someone of Chinese background living and writing in Quebec raises questions about whether such racist/nativist cultural practices manifest at this specific conjuncture; and if so, how do they affect the author's representation of identity?

A final reason for basing the analysis on Chen's case is its potential to illuminate the very personal questions that originally prompted this thesis. This potential stems from the significant historical-conjunctural coincidences between the context of Chen's articulations and that of my own present situation. Exposing the historical forces that affect Chen's representations may thus potentially bring to bare the discursive and non-discursive factors that have impacted my personal experiences of identity, and thus advancing the appreciation of my own identity according to an anti-essentialist discursive framework. Aside from the self-serving motives, I hope such personal introspection will also help reveal the implications of the latter discourse on the level of individual experience.

In terms of the particular analytical strategy with the aforementioned texts, I will not seek to specify a historical social formation based on the structural characteristics of the representations, in the likes of Gilroy (1993)—a worthwhile project, yet nonetheless beyond the scope of this discussion. Instead, recognizing the social functions of identity representation, I intend to use the analysis of texts related to Chen to expose some of the mechanisms and structures—both discursive and non-discursive, that bear upon the production of identity—particularly, diaspora identity—at the corresponding historical conjuncture. Consequently, as already indicated by my choice of terminology, discourse analysis, as devised by Michel Foucault, will be adopted as the main

analytical mode. This approach suits the aforementioned strategy because it allows us to foreground, from individual articulations, both the operation of cultural-historical—i.e. discursive—mechanisms that impact the representation of identity, and the social and political—i.e. non-discursive—conditions and relations on which discursive formations are dependent. More precisely, according to Foucault's model of discourse analysis, discourses are historical objects—'monuments', that govern the formulation of ideas and concepts (Foucault, 1991, p. 60). Those such as 'medicine' and 'economics' are individual and autonomous spaces, within which rules are set, rules that govern the formation of 'all' of the ideas, concepts and theoretical systems within the discourse. The difference between discourses, and changes within a discourse are thus not measured by the divergence of ideas, but by the differences between the rules governing their formation. Moreover, discourses are entangled in a 'polymorphous interweaving of correlations' (Foucault, 1991, p. 58), with other discourses and non-discursive elements in the social realm, whose mutual interactions perpetually produce historical change. As Foucault puts it, discourse

consists of a whole group of regulated practices which do not merely involve giving a visible outward embodiment to the agile inwardness of thought... (it is) something formed, according to clearly definable rules; in short, that alongside everything a society can produce (alongside: that is to say, in a determinate relationship with) there is the formation and transformation of 'things said' (1991, p. 63).

For Foucault, discourse analysis consequently provides the means with which one can discern the various interactions between objects and operations within a discourse, between different discourses, and between discourses and non-discursive practices, respectively referred to as 'intra-discursive', 'inter-discursive', and 'extra-discursive' dependencies (Foucault, 1991, p.58). In speaking specifically about his own discursive-analytical intentions, Foucault writes:

I would like to put the analysis of discourse itself in its conditions of formation, in its serial modification, and in the play of dependencies and correlations. Discourses would thus be seen in a describable relationship with a set of other practices (1991, p. 64).

Procedurally, discourse analysis involves examining specific articulations (the particular 'things said'), in order to determine the discursive regularities in operation, and to postulate the various inter-discursive and extra-discursive correlations of such regularities at the corresponding historical conjuncture.

In attempting the latter feat, I will examine the various texts related to Chen, first of all, to ascertain the key definitions, positions, and/or theories of identity forwarded by their formulation; based on such analysis, I will then posit the discursive formations that apparently govern such representations, and subsequently characterize the correlation of such discourses of identity to each other, and to broader socio-political projects of identity. As a point of emphasis, in conjunction with both my own analytical objectives and the

methodological stipulations of a discourse analysis, the exposition in this thesis will be *conjunctural*, in that it will not prescribe or seek to elucidate a universal, historical theory, under which the production of all identities, or even diaspora identities can be schematized; instead it will attempt to make apparent the particular discursive and social relations, or, the *episteme*—‘an open and doubtless indefinitely describable field of relationships’, ‘a simultaneous play of specific remanences’—that characterize the specific circumstances of identity representation in question (Foucault, 1991, p. 55). Foucault differentiates the latter approaches as the difference between a ‘global history’ and ‘general history’, respectively. In reference to his own conjunctural approach to historical analysis, Foucault writes:

it is not a matter of composing a *global history*— which would regroup all its elements around one principle or one form—but rather of opening out a field of *general history*—within which one could describe the singularity of practices, the play of their relations, the form of their dependencies (1991, p. 64).

Adherence to a conjunctural analytical approach means that I will engage in a descriptive analysis of the discursive practices that are associated with Chen’s novels and related texts; subsequent historical inferences will in turn be based on such analysis, and confined to the corresponding circumstances.

Accordingly, the following chapters will be structured as such: In chapter two, I will outline the key positions on cultural identity articulated in Chen’s four novels, by examining their various literary formulations. In chapter three, I will

attempt to determine how these positions are re-inscribed and thus circulated in the Quebecois context, by looking at the various secondary representations that respond in one form or another to Chen's original works. Based on such revelations, I will then in the final chapter place the exposition in clearer historical perspective, by identifying the various discursive formations in operation and postulating their inter-discursive and extra-discursive correlations. In closing I will reflect on the significance of such findings to the thesis' original problematic.

Chapter 2

Facets of Journey: Translations and Transformations in Ying Chen's Representations of Identity

Albeit a familiar literary metaphor, the notion of 'journeying' is of paramount importance to Chen's writing—in terms of both creative process and text. What prompted the author to write in the first place was her immigration from Shanghai to Montreal in 1989. As indicated by her own admission, one of the main objectives of her writing is to resolve questions about her identity stemming from her migration (see qt. in Chapter 1, p. 10). In more figurative terms, the resulting writing process itself represents another kind of journey, one from death to rebirth. This is because the author posits her writing as an integral part of her own processes of cultural regeneration, which she characterizes as a journey from death to rebirth. In particular, the 'death' refers to her departure—both geographical and cultural—from her birth place, and the rebirth, to the subsequent cultural regeneration and founding of a new home. As Chen writes,

La civilisation chinoise a atteint son sommet il y a environ mille ans, puis elle n'a cessé de se dégrader, de descendre la pente, de s'anéantir. Aujourd'hui elle n'est plus devant moi qu'un tas de ruines nostalgiques... Je suis donc à la recherche d'un présent, depuis le jour où j'ai compris que ma culture est une culture

d'outre-tombe et que sa résurrection sera aussi lente que son déclin. Je deviens une feuille solitaire qui rêve de se replanter ailleurs. Mes ancêtres disaient que les feuilles mortes devaient rejoindre leurs racines. Mais je me refuse à un sort aussi naturel et aussi banal. Par un coup de vent capricieux, je me suis laissée emporter jusqu'à l'Occident. Je me glisse dans une autre langue et espère y renaître (Chen, 1995b, p. 60).

As much as the imagery of death from the above passage represents Chen's take on the fate of the Chinese civilization, it is also an expression of her own cultural situation/predicament: In her new surroundings, her cultural past is fading ('dégrader', 's'anéantir', 'n'est plus que... ruines nostalgiques'); therefore she needs to discover a new cultural identity that is adequate for her actual location ('à la recherche d'un présent'), and subsequently allow her to be 'reborn'.

Not surprisingly, given the prominent roles of various journeys in the author's creative pursuits, the 'journeying' metaphor is featured as a pivotal literary motif in her texts. In this chapter, I will foreground the various manifestations of this motif in Chen's novels, in an effort to expose the inter-textual framework that facilitates her literary discussion of identity, and as a way of revealing the key positions articulated by such a discussion.

One notable rendition of the 'journeying' motif appears as the underlying meta-narrative that binds the four works into a larger literary entity. This meta-narrative becomes apparent when the novels' stories are placed adjacent to each other, in the order of their creation. The successive plight of

the individual narrators render a meta-scenario that essentially matches the aforementioned figurative journey from death to rebirth: the meta-protagonist, composed of different characters from each work, embarks on a journey into exile, which in turn brings about her/his death and subsequent reincarnation. Specifically, the meta-narrative takes the following course as it weaves its way from story to story: In the first novel, *La Mémoire de l'eau*, Lie-Fei's granddaughter, the narrator, sets off on her own exile, after reflecting on the history of past exiles in her family. In the following work, *Les Lettres Chinoises*, the meta-story picks up where the previous novel left off: one ends with the main character departing for a North American city, whereas the other begins with a similar figure, Yuan, landing in Montreal. As he settles into his new city, Yuan finds himself becoming increasingly estranged from his cultural past. This eventually brings about a certain death, albeit a symbolic one—the loss of his fiancée. Subsequently in the third novel, *L'Ingratitude*, the meta-protagonist (who appears as Yan-zi) narrates from beyond the grave, engaging in a post-mortem reflection on the circumstances around her death and the consequent severance from her past. In the latest installment, *Immobile*, as the unnamed narrator, the meta-protagonist is reincarnated in a different world, whence she attempts to adapt to her new surroundings and deal with the memories from her past world.

In terms of conveying the novels' representational framework, the significance of the aforementioned meta-narrative is twofold. First of all, the intricate weaving of the death/rebirth metaphor within the texts, affirms the fact that the significance and signification of the novels in question extend well beyond the literary. The correspondence of life metaphor and those in the literary suggests that the novels are in fact deeply implicated within the author's discursive processes, that they constitute efforts by Chen to engage with, and introduce concepts into the social-cultural realm—i.e. represent identity. The meta-narrative is also important because it highlights both the collective and progressive nature of the discussion in question. It renders not only significant inter-textual connections amongst the novels, thereby marking a uniform discursive platform through which the author presents her positions on cultural identity; the meta-narrative also suggests, in its own linear progression, the progressive nature of Chen's discussion/representations. That is, as we move from one novel to the next, each work builds on and/or modifies definitions forwarded by ones preceding it.

Another variation of the journeying motif appears as actual voyages and migrations in the narrative. In fact, in all of the novels, the journey occupies a significant place within the narrative configuration. For instance, both *La Mémoire de l'eau* and *Les Lettres Chinoises* feature geographical migration as a pivotal narrative component: the first novel recounts of the story of Lie-Fei

and her family, whose lives are affected by repeated migrations, and historical ruptures. In *Les Lettres Chinoises*, Yuan's immigration to Montreal leads him to rethink his own cultural values; this eventually precipitates his alienation from his fiancée Sassa. In Chen's later novels, the journey is equally prominent in the narrative, although it takes on less literal, more figurative forms: Yanzi in *L'Ingratitude* journeys from life to death, as her way of finally resolving her familial problems. Meanwhile the unnamed narrator/protagonist in *Immobile* travels through time in search of her former lover. With respect to the novels' representation of identity, as I will further detail later on in the chapter, the prominence of actual physical journeys within the narratives situates the literary discussion within the specific socio-historical context of migrations and displacements.

From the analytical perspective of this chapter, the most significant manifestation of the 'journeying' motif is as one of the central concepts articulated within the aforementioned discursive framework. More precisely, the novels present and explore the notion of a 'cultural journey', as a metaphor for defining immigrant identity. In the remainder of this chapter, I will trace the progressive articulations of such a metaphor in Chen's novels, and then discuss the definition of cultural identity that emerges as a consequence of such representations.

In addressing the problem of identity, one of Chen's main representational strategies entails formulating definitions of immigrant culture through narrative construction. Given the progressive nature of her representational efforts, such conceptual developments unfold gradually over the course of the four novels; an initial definition is established, followed by subsequent revision and re-conceptualization. Yet despite the evolutionary nature of such a process, the metaphor of 'the journey' figures prominently throughout. This is because Chen's eventual schematization of culture culminates from the substantiation and the subsequent dissolution of the 'cultural journey' metaphor, as a concept for defining immigrant identity.

The 'journeying' definition of identity is termed as such because within the various texts it is primarily articulated by the narrative motif of the 'cultural journey'. In *Les Lettres Chinoises* for example, the cultural voyage manifests as Yuan's *translation* from his Chinese past to his Occidental present: After arrival in Montreal from Shanghai, Yuan begins to slowly change his cultural habits and perspectives, in accordance with his new environment. By the end of the novel, it is evident that he has transformed into this culturally hybrid figure. Both his words and deeds reflect a mixture of Chinese and Western sensibilities. At times he proudly asserts his duality, expressing a viewpoint that is both 'Chinese' and 'American' (Chen, 1993, p. 154). At other times, he is

torn between his embrace of the modern, and his emotional bond to the past:

In using Nicolas as a reference point for Western values, Yuan writes,

Je sais que je suis en train de vivre une métamorphose qui peut-être ne me mène nulle part. Ce n'est pas mauvais, mais pas du tout, de vivre comme Nicolas. Seulement, je n'ai pas vécu en vain toutes ces années à Shanghai. Je suis marqué pour la vie. Dans ce cas-là, si je ne reste pas fermement moi-même, si je n'essaie pas de rester Chinois, plus Chinois que tante Louise, je ne serai rien du tout (p. 164).

Yuan's cultural mutations constitute a *translation*, because they occur within an oppositional cultural framework. That is to say, the clear cultural oppositions that demarcate Yuan's transformations render such changes with a strong sense of spatial movement—i.e. a sense of voyaging. On the one end of this oppositional framework is the 'Chinese' culture, characterized by piety, duty, and tradition; on the other end is the 'Occidental' culture, distinguished by its modernity, liberty, and individuality. As Yuan gradually evolves into his hybrid identity, he is seen as moving from one end of the cultural scale to the other.

The incident that most poignantly reveals such cultural oppositions—and Yuan's own movement within, is the eventual estrangement between Yuan and his fiancée Sassa. Metaphorically speaking, Sassa represents Yuan's past: 'C'est une fille du vieux temp' (p. 149); 'Il (Yuan) voit en elle son passé, sa jeunesse, ses valeurs et son pays' (p. 90). Hence the ending of their relationship and her suggested demise symbolizes Yuan's abandonment of his cultural past. Taken more literally, the couple's breakup—and the adulterous affair that

apparently prompted it—reveals an actual departure in Yuan's values.

Underscoring the sense of 'departure' again is the demarcation of two distinctly opposite cultural poles, which in this case appears as the dichotomy of relationship/sexual values: on one side of the boundary are 'Chinese' principles of fidelity and monogamy, and on the other, Occidental precepts of freedom and individual gratification. Such distinctions are effectively established through the characters' own discussion on the subject. Sassa for instance, in commenting on the reasons for Yuan's alleged adultery, writes:

À Montréal comme dans les autres villes occidentales, je crois, on ne s'aime pas de la même façon que chez nous... Je comprends alors pourquoi l'ami de Da Li n'a pas pu rester fidèle à sa fiancée au loin. Il fait l'amour à Montréal et envoie des lettres à Shanghai, car il vit dans deux mondes et il aime de deux façons (Chen, 1993, pp. 160-161).

Elsewhere, Yuan's father, in advising his son to stay faithful, reminds him that he should do so because he should not deviate from his 'Chinese' values:

Mais toi, tu es malgré tout Chinois. Tu ne deviendras jamais comme ces jeunes garçons qui, d'après ce qu'on raconte, changent de fille comme de vêtement. Tu resteras fidèle à ton amour (p. 150).

In the end, Yuan's cultural shift is effectively marked by his identification with values on both sides of the cultural divide, indicated in the following passage by his appreciation of both Western (Nicolas and Marguerite) and Chinese (father) points of view. In correspondence with his father, Yuan writes:

Bien que je sois incertain de la nature de l'amour et que j'hésite à le considérer comme un contrat céleste plutôt que comme un jeu capricieux du sort, je suis convaincu qu'une relation stable fait du bien à tous. Je l'ai appris non seulement de vous, mon père, mais aussi de Nicolas et de Marguerite. Eux, ils veulent une vie remplie d'amours intenses et de douleurs aiguës. Leur relation ne durerait pas s'ils étaient trop fidèles l'un à l'autre (p. 151).

Finally, reinforcing the connection between cultural change and voyage are passages that associate Yuan with the idea of flight. At one point, he expresses his affinity for birds:

J'admire ces oiseaux qui voyagent à travers l'espace et le temps, construisant partout leurs nids pour chanter leurs chansons. Pour s'envoler, il faut qu'ils sachent se déposséder, surtout de leur origine. Ils ne considèrent pas leurs nids comme leur propriété ni comme leur raison d'être... Ils s'envolent vers un avenir inconnu, les ailes chargées des poussières du temps et la tête pleine de chansons éternelles (pp. 53-54).

In the end, to mark his departure from his cultural past, Yuan consequently describes himself as flying off like a kite (p. 170).

As articulated by Yuan's story, in signification, the notion of the 'cultural journey' posits that immigrant culture is constituted through a process of translation between two cultures. In the case of the individual immigrant, this translation manifests as the transformation of his/her values and way of life, from one culture to another. And as also exemplified by Yuan's case, since the journeying/transformation is never fully realized, the migrant arrives at a cultural space in between, thus forming a hybrid identity.

The centrality of the ‘cultural journey’ concept amongst Chen’s ongoing representation of identity is marked by the fact that it is prominently and consistently articulated throughout the various texts. In works subsequent to *Les Lettres Chinoises*,¹ it is similarly foregrounded by the novels’ narratives. In *L’Ingratitude*, the voyage appears as Yanzi’s death, around which the story revolves. On the surface, this death is explicitly depicted as a voyage by the narrator/protagonist herself. Recounting her own death after the fact, she states, ‘j’ai franchi une frontière défendue aux jeunes... la frontière entre la vie et la mort... Je suis en exil maintenant. Le retour est impossible’ (Chen, 1995a, pp. 10-11). The portrayal of death as departure is further accentuated by Yanzi’s symbolic visit to the train station, the night before her intended suicide. Carrying suitcases and thinking about her pending death, she says to the restaurant owner, ‘j’irai très très loin cette fois-ci, lui dis-je. Et je ne reviendrai plus jamais’ (p. 114).

More significantly though, given the circumstances surrounding this death, it also constitutes a *cultural* journey. This is because for Yanzi, death is a means of reaching another world, a different cultural realm. In her life, she is at odds with her mother over her own development and growth. On the one

¹ Although facets of journeying and questions of identity are both prominent in *La Mémoire de l’eau*, the metaphor of the ‘cultural journey’ is not integrally articulated until the second novel.

hand, her mother demands her to be a filial, duty-bound daughter; on the other hand Yanzi desires to be free. The daughter subsequently realizes that she cannot achieve freedom in her present world because of the restrictions placed by her mother. She thus elects death as a means of delivering herself into the next world. In noting her mother's dominance, and her own suicidal strategy in overcoming it, Yanzi writes,

Ma vie devait égaler sa vie. Je ne devais vivre qu'à travers elle. Elle cherchait à s'incarner en moi, de peur de mourir. J'étais chargée de porter en moi l'esprit de maman dont le corps pourrirait tôt ou tard. J'étais censée devenir la reproduction la plus exacte possible de ma mère. J'étais sa fille. Il fallait donc détruire cette reproduction à tout prix. Il fallait tuer sa fille. Il n'y avait pas d'autres moyens de la rendre plus sage. Je ne pouvais pas être moi autrement (Chen, 1995a, 96-97).

Further reverberating the association between death and cultural departure is Yanzi's symbolic death, which precedes her actual demise. This incident entails her brief love affair with Bi, a symbolic gesture that asserts her independence from her mother. After the act, she is subsequently overcome by feelings of death and departure:

Mon âme étant déjà dans la mer du néant, mon corps cherchait encore à s'accrocher quelque part. Bi était pour moi une branche d'arbre flottant à la surface de l'eau (p. 83).

Accordingly, at the end of both the actual and the symbolic death/journey, Yanzi arrives at a markedly different world, one that is free and disconnected

from the inhibitions of her previous life. In reflecting on her newfound post-mortem state, Yanzi says to herself:

Si légère, cette fille! Cette fille qui n'était pas à elle. Cette légèreté qui n'était pas à elle. Cet abandon de l'esprit et du corps... Figure-toi que tu n'as plus à vivre avec tes parents. Leur existence ne te concerne pas. Tu n'appartiens plus à personne. Personne. Tu es seule, très seule. Tes mains sont libres... Tu es le vent. Tu n'es rien d'autre que le vent. Tu viens de nulle part et ne vas nulle part... Tu côtoies l'Histoire mais tu n'as pas d'histoire. Tout ça parce que tu n'as plus de parents (p. 89).

Likewise in *Immobile*, the 'cultural journey' is prominently featured in the narrative formulation. First of all, the 'journey' is the pretext from which the main story emerges: the unnamed narrator/protagonist arrives in the modern era, after having traveled from a previous life, from a markedly different bygone era. The story's conflicts materialize as she struggles to reconcile the cultures of her past and present worlds. On the one hand she faces tremendous pressure from her husband, A..., to adapt to the modern world and break away the past:

Il croit être témoin d'un conflit entre les siècles. Il craint que la force de ma mémoire ne soit susceptible d'entraîner la déchéance du corps et de l'esprit. Il se met en lutte contre elle. Il essaie de me retenir, de m'adapter à l'air du temps, de me faire oublier mes hommes morts, de m'apprendre à être sa femme et de m'enfermer dans ce rôle exclusif (Chen, 1998, p. 11).

On the other hand, despite her own efforts and willingness, she cannot let go of her memories from her past life:

Ma mort ne suffit pas à faire couler le temps. Le passé continue à me posséder, à me tirer du haut de la précieuse certitude à laquelle j'ai cru atteindre le jour de ma renaissance. Je suis de nouveau dans le trouble, tâtonnant non seulement dans les ténèbres, mais aussi dans la lumière du jour (p. 14).

As suggested in the above passage by the notion of 'groping along' (tâtonner), shortly after her arrival, the narrator finds that despite her long and arduous travels, her journey is not over. She must still continue onwards so that she may close the cultural gap between herself and her husband, so that she may enter his, the present world: 'je souhaite m'approcher un peu de lui' (p. 14). She thus concludes:

Il m'oblige en quelque sorte à reculer sur la piste qui m'amène jusqu'ici, presque à regretter le chemin parcouru. J'ai l'impression qu'à peine arrivée je me retrouve à un nouveau point de départ, sans force ni destination (p. 13).

Although in works following *Les Lettres Chinoises*, the cultural journey story is presented in different historical contexts and dimensions of travel, conceptually, its representation of identity remains consistent with that of the former novel. This conceptual continuity is first of all evidenced by passages that establish the two later works as an allegorical discussion of the 'immigrant identity' problematic. In *Les Lettres* for example, Da Li, lays down the allegorical framework for the following novel when she reveals that her principal reason for leaving her homeland was to escape the confines of her mother:

J'ai quitté ma ville natale surtout pour quitter ma mère et abandonner les <armes> qu'elle m'a léguées. Ce que je supporte

le moins chez ma mère, c'est son implacable sagesse. Je ne l'ai jamais vue faire preuve d'enthousiasme ni se mettre en colère pour quoi que ce soit (Chen, 1993, p. 71).

Elsewhere in the same story, Yuan equates spatial-cultural differences with temporal-cultural ones, thereby establishing the allegorical groundwork for the fourth novel:

Je suis différent en cela de Nicolas et de Marguerite, non pas parce que je suis Chinois, ...mais parce que je suis démodé. Je le sais par une amie chinoise qui m'a dit: <Au fond tu n'es qu'un homme du vieux style> (p. 152).

More importantly though, the conceptual uniformity of the various 'journeying' narratives is substantiated by the common ideas that they express. In Foucauldian terms, the stories can be characterized as *discursively* uniform because they define culture according to a common set of conceptual rules. This is evidenced by the similar renderings of cultural landscapes. More precisely, each story is based upon a similar kind of cultural division and differentiation, where spaces within are marked by distinct boundaries. In *Les Lettres Chinoises*, the latter lies between the Chinese world and the Occidental one; in *L'Ingratitude*, it is between life and death, and between dictates of tradition and freedom; and in *Immobile*, between past and present, the ancient and the modern.

The discursive singularity of the 'journeying' narratives also entails their common reference to a specific historical context. As noted earlier, the

prominence of the journey itself situates the discussion within the context of migrations and exiles. Moreover, the pattern of travel that emerges from the stories further specifies the historio-discursive context: despite the vastly differing narrative circumstances, each journey tends to move from traditional confinement to a modern liberty. Such a coincidence suggests that the journeying idea formulated within the discussion is in direct reference to immigrants who make a comparable geographic journey: i.e. from the 'South' to the 'North'.

Despite the consistent *re*-presentations of the 'cultural journey' definition of identity, its primary function within the ongoing discussion is not as a static signifier foregrounding a singular set of ideas, but rather as a working, and thus evolving concept whose transformations both reflect and effect the novels' conceptual realizations. Ironically the most significant of these transformations entails the gradual disintegration of the very concept itself. That is to say, over the course of novels the authority of the 'cultural journey' motif in defining immigrant identity diminishes, to the point where it is outright deconstructed and discarded. Such a development consequently propels Chen's representation of identity towards formulating a set of new definitions and new metaphors.

Consistent with its original formulation, the dissolution of the 'journeying' definition of culture is also articulated by the narrative. In the earlier stories, this conceptual demise is foreshadowed by the growing discord

that result from the journeys themselves; despite the characters' aspirations, their voyages not only fail to deliver resolutions to apparent conflicts, but in fact compound them. In *Les Lettres Chinoises* for instance, although Yuan is generally positive towards his personal transformations, he expresses a certain ambivalence towards his journey. He is both uncertain about his future and reluctant to let go of his past, feelings which are compounded at the end of the novel by his separation from Sassa.

In subsequent stories, the failures of travel become more apparent. In *L'Ingratitude*, after going from life to death, Yanzi realizes her departure from her mother's world was a mistake, because the latter figure provided a vital and irreplaceable sense of shelter and guidance. After her death, Yanzi notes:

Je comprends maintenant que notre mère est notre destin. On ne peut se détourner de sa mère sans se détourner de soi-même. En perdant sa mère, on perd sa force et son abri, on est livré à l'effrayante fraîcheur de l'inconnu et ses projets éclatent en mille morceaux dans les accidents. J'ai voulu attaquer mama, n'est-ce pas, alors mes os se sont brisés contre ses os et mon âme devient un chien sans maître. Les feuilles tombées retournent à leur racine... Mais les traîtres à leur mère continueront, morts comme vivants, à vagabonder, à se voir exclus du cycle de la vie, à être partout et nulle part. À ne pas être (Chen, 1995a, p. 129).

Having erred in her course, Yanzi herself becomes this vagabond on a lost and confused voyage: 'Je ne reconnais plus la gauche ni la droite, plus le haut ni le bas. Plus de direction' (p. 130).

In *Immobile*, the journey's ill-fate comes to a halting climax. Aside from also being tired and lost, the narrator is driven to the brink of insanity by her temporal travels and her efforts to deal with their consequences:

Mon effort pour oublier n'étant pas tout à fait encouragé par A..., ma mémoire devient incontrôlable. Une cellule maigne. Elle me rend la vie difficile, ronge notre relation à viv allure. Dès que mon intelligence se réveille un peu, les odeurs et les voix confuses de l'autre monde envahissent mon corps, se confondent face les réelles. Je réagis avec maladresse, j'ai souvent l'air ridicule (Chen, 1998, p. 16).

While the shortcomings of the 'journeying' definition of culture are hinted at in earlier works, it is not until *Immobile* that it is explicitly deconstructed and representationally abandoned. More precisely, through the story of the narrator, the novel posits that the journeying idea of culture is untenable because the boundaries that supposedly demarcate cultures are not tangible objects; this is because cultures in actual fact cannot be clearly differentiated from one another, and the boundaries that do exist are artificially created by people. Such deconstruction of the 'cultural journey' is expressed through the protagonist's parallel realizations about her own journey. At the onset of the story, she has a clear sense of her travels and the different spaces between which she moves. She is particularly influenced by her husband, who appears to be absolutely concrete in his demarcation of cultural spaces:

il aime la précision: chaque chose à sa place, les êtres sont ceci ou cela. Lui-même est d'une espèce très exacte, très pure... Il possède un livret généalogique de sa famille, papier jauni et fragile... De

cette façon malgré la difficulté à préciser l'origine de certaines arrière-grands-mères, on n'aura à éprouver nulle gêne lorsqu'il s'agira d'évoquer l'histoire de la famille et la pureté de son sang (Chen, 1998, p. 9).

However, as the story progresses, she discovers that her husband's apparent certainty is but a constructed facade (p. 129). Moreover, she realizes that accounts of her own journey were ill-conceived; in particular, the difference and distance between her past and present are not as great as imagined:

J'ai du mal à croire, en rouvrant les yeux, que j'ai été morte pendant si longtemps, qu'il m'a fallu tant de siècles pour revenir, que la distance entre A...et moi est si grande, et que S... restera à jamais introuvable. Hormis quelques changements apparents qui ne touchent pas le moi profond..., j'ai l'impression de n'avoir rien perdu ni rien gagné sur le chemin de mon retour (pp. 123-124).

And she also discovers that the distinctions between her different worlds are but cultural fabrications, 'fiction', a lie ('mensonge'):

J'ai perçu le grand mensonge que fabrique la machine de l'histoire, L'illusion collective. Les quelque siècles de vicissitudes racontées dans d'innombrables livres égalent le néant que j'ai traversé en un clin d'oeil. Personne ne veut l'avouer. C'est pourtant facile à constater. On aime tant la fiction. On ignore le vide (p. 124).

In conjunction with such deconstruction, the novel in fact entirely discards the 'cultural journey' as a feasible metaphor for defining identity. This conceptual rejection is most poignantly indicated by the termination of the journeying narrative, in other words, the demise of the very representational device that originally forwarded and sustained the 'journeying' definition of

culture. At the onset of the story, the narrator is evidently still traveling, even though she is already longing for the journey to stop:

Fatiguée de cette nouvelle vie mais incapable de retourner en arrière, je ne sais trop où aller. Je suis un navire troué, je dois accoster à tout prix, sans dignité, en hâte. J'aurais aimé m'asseoir dans un petit coin, lasse et immobile (p. 12).

However, as the story progresses, she becomes more and more aware of her journey's misguided nature. Thus at the end of the novel, she elects to end it and adopt a very different strategy in her search for her own home: that of stillness, or *immobilité*. This change of course is asserted in the final scene of the book:

Je ne bouge pas, appuyée contre le fenêtre, contre le bruit de la marée. Je l'entends frapper les rochers. Les rochers stériles, réduits au silence, dans une solitude qu'aucun désir ne peut troubler, lavés de toute empreinte du temps, parfaitement lisses, unis et insensibles, devenu un instant magnifiques parce que soumis. Le malheur vient du moment où l'on aspire à devenir autre que ce qu'on est. À chacun son coin de ciel. Je crains qu'en courant vers A... je ne dérive davantage... Alors je reste là, immobile et sans défense. Comme un rocher (p. 155).

Inasmuch as the narrative of *Immobile* disintegrates one particular definition of identity, it also articulates an alternative one. In the text, this conceptual transition is rendered somewhat seamless by the fact that the new definition is founded upon the exact tenets that deconstructed the previous 'journeying' motif: Namely, cultures cannot be clearly differentiated from one another; and, the differentiations that do exist are but socio-cultural constructs.

The centrality of the latter positions in the novel is marked by their repeated assertion—again, through the narrator’s own observations and conclusions. She for instance is regularly reminded of the similarities between her present and past worlds (see for example pp. 9, 84, 99), to the point where she wonders out loud if her two lovers, symbolizing the two different epochs, were not the same person. She too constantly reiterates her realization that cultural definitions are but historically produced objects. In one passage for example, she notes:

Quand on parle des traces d’une époque ou d’une civilisation, on comprend bien qu’il ne s’agit que du destin de quelques élus. On saute d’une pierre à l’autre qu’on expose dans les musées. Les courants qui façonnent ces pierres sont trop difficiles à saisir, leur caractère est tout à fait capricieux et leur apparence, trop banale, on n’en tient donc pas compte. Car si l’on voulait tout mettre dans les livres, le résultat serait fâcheux... La mémoire ne suffit donc pas. Les impressions non plus. On invente. On explique ce qu’on invente. La cohérence existe. Moi aussi j’y participe (p. 132).

What reifies the above positions as emergent new ideas, rather than merely a deconstruction of the old, is the fact that they appear in conjunction with a new narrative motif: ‘stillness’ (‘immobilité’), whose symbolic significance in the story is underscored by its inclusion in the title.

In summary, the evolving conceptual positions forwarded by the development (and subsequent dissolution) of the ‘cultural journey’ narrative motif can be characterized as the gradual consolidation of an anti-essentialist representation of identity. Although the postulations of the motif itself are

based on a fixed spatialization of culture—i.e. voyage equals the translation from one cultural space to another, the extensive interrogation to which it is subjected and its eventual dissolution indicate that Chen's representations first of all question and then dismiss essentialist definitions of culture. Emergent from such a process are indications of a more dynamic, constructivist, trans-cultural model of culture, signified by a new metaphor.

Moreover, although the articulation of the 'cultural journey' narrative motif represents only one facet out of the novels' many literary constructs, its emergent representation of identity as outlined above is representative of the overall conceptual/discursive trajectory that characterizes Chen's writing. Aside from the fact that the narrative occupies a critical role in the constitution of the novel form, such representativeness is evidenced by similar positions expressed by the novels' more peripheral elements. For example, the rendering of the stories' cultural-historical settings tends to grow more and more ambiguous as the novels progress, to the point where in *Immobile*, the story's situation makes no reference at all to any specific historical time or place. This tendency concurs with Chen's growing interrogation of the boundaries that supposedly demarcate different cultural spaces. In particular, it is part of the author's concerted effort to disrupt the conceptual boundaries between China and the West. As I will further expose in the following chapter, such interventions are in direct response to the reaction of various critics that interpret her work.

Furthermore, although the adoption of an anti-essentialist framework of identity only consolidates in the fourth novel, excerpts that explicitly interrogate the fixity and absoluteness of cultures are already readily present in the earlier novels (again, this will be further detailed in the next chapter). In fact, their encounter with the ‘cultural journey’ narrative is what exposes the conceptual inadequacies of the latter motif, eventually leading to its demise.

Given the admittedly ongoing nature of Chen’s literary discussion of identity, an analysis of her representations can never be a *complete* affair. This however in no way hinders our project at hand, since what we seek is not a comprehensive or definitive understanding of the author’s intellectual positions, but rather the meanings produced within a given set of texts. In Foucauldian terms it constitutes a descriptive analysis of ‘things said’. Having established—what in my view is—the central conceptual trajectory of her representation of identity, I will proceed in the next chapter to examine the subsequent re-articulation and thus the circulation of such concepts in the broader socio-cultural context.

Chapter 3

Chinese, Immigrant, and Hard Going: the Discursive Foreclosure of Chen's Representation of Identity amongst Quebecois Discussions

Having exposed one of the central conceptual trajectories represented amongst Chen's own writings, I will now direct the discussion towards the secondary representations that circumscribe the latter texts in the Quebecois context, works that attempt to recount, critique, and/or interpret, in essence re-inscribe the novels in one form or another. The objective will in turn be to examine how Chen's expressions—particularly those pertaining to questions of identity, are re-articulated and consequently circulated within the given cultural milieu. In particular, I will argue that amongst Quebecois discussions, Chen and her works are framed according to two predominant metaphors: namely, 'Chinese writer' and 'immigrant writer'. Moreover, the assertion of these frameworks forecloses Chen's own representations of identity; that is, it effectively precludes some of the author's key expressions on 'identity' from further discussion/representation in the discursive field. In the forthcoming analysis I will thus precise the theoretical formulations behind each metaphor and identify their articulation across various texts. I will then discuss the

effectivity of these metaphors in invoking discursive foreclosure, and point to evidence of such foreclosure amongst the various representations.

‘Chinese writer’ and ‘immigrant writer’ represent the two principal signifiers used to frame not only Chen’s socio-cultural background, but also the literary significance of her works. Despite being similar in outward appearance and at times articulated together within a single text, the two concepts diverge significantly in their representational contexts and formulations. The notion of ‘Chinese writer’, for instance, frames Chen as a writer from a very different, outside world—i.e. China—who merely happens to be writing in Quebec; moreover, it posits that the main cultural significance of her novels is the insight they provide into the realities of that world. In terms of actual representations, such ideas about Chen and her writing are forwarded by a variety of interventions. In the realm of popular press, where the notion of ‘Chinese writer’ is most distinctly articulated, Chen is portrayed as a ‘Chinese writer’ in part by biographical sketches, sketches that emphasize her ‘Chineseness’ by detailing her past life in China: her job as a translator, her life under a Maoist regime, her studies of many languages, and her decision to move to Montreal. Such background information is routinely mentioned both in works that specifically profile the author, and those that discuss her writing (See for example Robitaille, 1997, p. 80; Soulie, 1996, p. A10, Cayouette, 1993, p. D11). Within the same representational milieu, discussions that attribute

Chen's creative inspiration to her Chinese past (as opposed to her Quebecois present) further realize the representation of the author as a 'Chinese writer'. Micheline Lachance (1995) for instance, forwards such ideas in her profile of Chen, fittingly entitled 'Des vies à l'encre de Chine: Ying Chen écrit à Montréal des romans bouleversants qui se passent à Shanghai'. In particular, she identifies Chen's links to her past as the main motivation for writing her first book. Referring to the Beijing Tiananmen incident in 1989, Lachance writes,

Nostalgique, la jeune étudiante de McGill (Chen) s'est souvent demandé, dans les mois qui ont suivi, pourquoi elle était ici et non là-bas... Ce déchirant questionnement l'a amenée à écrire *La Mémoire de l'eau*. <C'est l'histoire de la Chine contemporaine vue par des yeux de femmes de plusieurs générations>, dit Ying Chen, qui a recours à des images fortes pour retracer les bouleversements sociaux qu'a connus la Chine, en particulier la violence faite aux femmes (1995, p. 89).

In another similar portrayal, Robert Chartrand implicitly asserts that the source of Chen's creativity is rooted in China, by prefacing the literary synopsis of Chen's first three novels—themselves characterized as 'connected with her roots'—with a biographic description of her 'Chinese origins':

<Notre> première écrivaine d'origine chinoise s'est établie au Québec en 1989—elle avait alors 28 ans—, venue de Shanghai où elle avait déjà appris les rudiments de la langue française. Les trois romans qu'elle a fait paraître presque coup sur coup constituent déjà une oeuvre singulière, au parcours sinueux comme les méandres d'une rivière. L'eau, source de vie et métaphore des caprices de l'existence, est un des thèmes centraux, mais fort cohérent, de l'oeuvre de Chen qui explore sur des registres divers la question de l'attachement et de *l'arrachement* aux racines familiales et culturelles (Chartrand, 1998, p. 11).

Because the metaphor of ‘Chinese writer’ consists of substantial literary postulations, it is also prescribed to characterize Chen’s writing. In particular, the various literary discussions that assert this metaphor forward her writing as ‘Chinese’ stories, interpreting them as authoritative expositions of, and/or commentary on modern and traditional Chinese societies. Commenting on her first three novels for instance, Francine Bordeleau writes in *Lettres Québécoises*, ‘Ses livres dépeignent une Chine à la fois moderne et lourde de traditions, qui n’est peut-être pas très éloignée de celle décrite aujourd’hui par ses compatriotes’ (Bordeleau, 1998, p. 9). Elsewhere, in reviewing *L’Ingratitude*, Julie Sergent writes: ‘Que l’auteure soit Chinoise y est pour beaucoup, sans doute, dans l’étonnant mélange de retenue et de violence des sentiments qui composent son troisième roman’ (Sergent, 1996, p. 18). Later she adds in the same article that the book ‘montre en seulement cent trente pages toute la douleur du personnage principal, ébauchant en parallèle celle de tout un peuple’ (p. 18). In another instance, in attempting to single out a more specific facet of Chen’s social commentary on China, Réginald Martel notes in *La Presse*:

D’une certaine manière, *l’Ingratitude* est une dénonciation de l’infériorisation des femmes chinoises. Des échos de l’actuelle Conférence des Nations unies sur la situation des femmes, qui a lieu à Pékin, donnent à comprendre que l’égalité des sexes n’existe ni en Chine ni ailleurs (Martel, 1995, p. B3).

Alongside the metaphor of ‘Chinese writer’, the notion of ‘immigrant writer’ also appears prominently amongst various representations that discuss

Chen. In the profile cited earlier for instance, just prior to portraying the author's 'Chineseness', Chartrand also describes her as an 'immigrant writer':

L'écrivain immigrant apporte dans ses bagages son histoire personnelle et sa culture d'origine, qui apparaîtront plus ou moins explicitement dans son oeuvre... Mais il est certain que, pour quiconque, le départ de son pays d'origine—obligé ou volontaire—est d'abord un exil, un déracinement pour peu qu'il ait eu quelque attachement à ses proches et à sa culture. L'émigration donne ainsi à la question des origines—centrale dans le champ romanesque —une acuité et une complexité particulières, que les écrivains migrants se posent tous dans leur oeuvre. L'oeuvre de Ying Chen est à cet égard à la fois exemplaire et unique (Chartrand, 1998, p. 11).

Despite their similarity in appearance and their juxtaposition in cases such as the one above, the framing of Chen as an 'immigrant writer' differs significantly from that of the 'Chinese writer', in its representational context, and in its conceptual formulations. First of all, because the 'immigrant' framework is primarily articulated in the realm of academic literary criticism, its formulation tends to be more extensive in its historical schematization than its 'Chinese' counterpart. Moreover, whereas the former framework acknowledges the significance Chen's contemporary cultural context—i.e. Quebec—as part of her cultural composition, the latter completely ignores it. (This latter dissimilarity is also indicative of differences in the political sensibilities that inform the two notions.) Lastly, rather than being a concept devoted exclusively to identifying Chen, the notion of 'immigrant writer' constitutes a broader, comprehensive

theoretical framework that inscribes an entire class of writers, a class within which Chen is placed.

In theory, ‘immigrant writer’ identifies Chen as being part of a recent and pivotal shift in Quebec social and cultural history, whose emergence is pinned to the beginning of the 1980’s. Socio-historically speaking, this shift in part entailed the sudden influx of immigrants into the province, and in part entailed ‘native’ Quebecois (de ‘souches’), confronted by post-modern and post-colonialist thought, beginning to rethink their own identity. In terms of culture, these latter developments consequently disrupted (‘déranger’) the homeostasis that previously existed in Quebec. On the one hand, immigrants in attempting to figure their contemporary cultural situation, produced works—in particular literary ones—that posed questions about their identity in a new environment. As Lucie Lequin notes:

Arrivée dans son nouveau pays, l’immigrée doit se placer, se rétablir. La traversée des frontières (le voyage, si l’on veut, est à peine amorcée. Dans son effort de reterritorialisation, l’auteur-e apprendra à se déplacer dans l’espace intermédiaire entre la (les) culture(s) d’origine et la culture du nouveau pays, donc à apprivoiser le brouillage culturel (Lequin, 1996b, p. 49)

In a separate article, Lequin further points out that,

Les questions inattendues que les écrivains de l’exil posent dérangent le légendaire culturel québécois; le lectorat, une partie à tout le moins, reprend conscience de son propre métissage, de sa dérive et (ré)apprend à lire (Lequin, 1996a, p. 48).

On the other hand, in light of their own rethinking, 'Québécois' people no longer accepted 'homogeneity' as a workable framework, and began to consider other more heterogeneous models of culture:

Durant les années soixante, par exemple, le lectorat cherchait souvent dans la lecture des oeuvres de fiction des certitudes rassurantes, tel que le caractère homogène de la culture québécoise que des penseurs voulaient immuable. C'était l'époque de la quête d'un pays certain et d'une identité précise... Depuis le début de la dernière décennie, le lectorat, sous le signe du changement—la pensée postmoderne, la mise en doute de l'hégémonie occidentale, la démographie changeante, entre autres—est plutôt sensible au mouvement, au <hors lieu>; il trouve stimulant l'incertitude, la mobilité et la quête d'un redéploiement identitaire... C'est maintenant le moment du constat de l'hétérogénéité culturelle du Québec (Lequin, 1996b, p. 48).

The theory of 'immigrant writer' further posits that one of the key developments to emerge from the above cultural-historical conjuncture was the generation of 'immigrant writing', which consequently spawned new cultural formations, in terms of literary expression and in terms of socio-cultural experience. The latter developments materialized as writers of immigrant origin synthesized old and new cultural sensibilities to produce hybrid works ('œuvres métissées'). This in turn not only sent reverberations across the Quebecois literary landscape: 'Dans les marges, des interrogations similaires et différentes se posent; plusieurs cultures se rencontrent, se confrontent et donnent naissance à des expressions littéraires originales' (Lequin, 1996a, p. 49); it also

deeply informed and hence altered the overall course of Quebec culture, for instance, through the questions it posed about Quebecois identity:

La définition du Québécois par le nom ou par le lieu n'a plus cours; le mythe de l'homogène est ébranlé par le dynamisme de l'hétérogène disent des littéraires... Dans cet aire d'intersections, de mouvance, de mise en doute, mise en place, comment définir la nation? Que représente le <nous> québécois? ... Quelles oeuvres la composent? ... Les questions d'origine, d'ethnicité, d'indentité, etc. posées par les auteur-e-s migrant-e-s se posent en même temps aux <pure laine> (Lequin, 1996a, p. 50).

Moreover, the new hybrid forms also impacted Quebec's cultural-structural configurations, most notably the use of language:

Ces attitudes diverses indiquent plutôt un réaménagement culturel et langagier encore confus, une reconfiguration multidirectionnelle en cours et souvent conflictuelle: la langue véhiculaire, ici le français, s'imprègne d'une pensée autre, de cultures autres, venant à la fois de pays européens et des pays du Sud et de l'Orient; elle se colore d'images d'ailleurs, emprunte des mots et se transforme lentement. Avec ce mouvement de mutation encore trop actuel pour pouvoir bien le cerner, la culture change également et les rapports entre les gens et les langues se modifient (Lequin, 1996b, p. 54).

Similar to that of 'Chinese writer', the representation of Chen as an 'immigrant writer' also appears in a variety of forms. On the one hand, it is asserted by biographical portrayals that explicitly depict the writer in such historical terms. Lequin for instance, in her literary exposition of *Les Lettres Chinoises*, frames the work along with its author within the context of 'immigrant writer' (1997). Elsewhere, in her discussion of Chen and her first two novels, Betty McLane-Iles also prescribes a similar framework, placing

particular emphasis on the novelist's 'cultural contribution' to her new cultural environment as an 'immigrant writer':

North Americans, as Chen illustrates inherit the memories, history, and spiritual strength of countless generations of women such as Lie-Fei, Sassa, Da Li (sic) and Tante Louise. Their survival and experience with diaspora give us greater comprehension of our place in history... Opportunity and change are given to the immigrants crowding our shores. The immigrant returns a lost sense of permanence, cultural identity, and spiritual humility to the younger generation... The author has eloquently explored the ecstasy and inner darkness of the emigrant's experience and reminded us of the immense wisdom contained in the historical memories the emigrant brings to the New World. Each is a legacy, fusing us together in comradeship and bringing us back closer to a comprehension of eternity and truth (McLane-Iles, 1997, pp. 227-228).

In addition to works devoted exclusively to exposing Chen, biographical depiction of the author as 'immigrant writer' is also implicitly rendered by texts that use her personal circumstances to substantiate the corresponding theory (see for example Lequin, 1995). That is to say, Chen's prominent role in such theoretical explication—albeit involuntary, reinforces her identity as an 'immigrant writer'. Moreover, similar to the articulation of 'Chinese writer', various literary discussions also prescribe the 'immigrant writer' metaphor in their interpretation of Chen's writing. In particular they highlight the literary themes that are associated with 'immigrant writing', such as 'cultural hybridity', 'exile', and 'struggles with identity'. Lequin for instance in her discussion of *Les Lettres Chinoises*, writes:

Dans ce deuxième roman Ying Chen expose la vie d'un jeune immigrant qui, sans jamais ni se replier sur son ethnicité ni y renoncer, découvre, observe et analyse son nouveau pays. Pour vivre un exil fécond, Ying Chen propose donc de prendre racine à même le déracinement tout en sachant la marque des origines indélébile. Inquiétude et espoir se conjuguent dans le présent de Yuan malgré son avenir incertain. Ne cherchait-il pas avant son expatriation une zone d'incertitude, une zone de possibilités, une zone de flou...entre la mémoire et l'oubli, dans une zone incertaine (Lequin, 1997, p. 205).

In another instance, in reference to Chen's first two novels McLane-Iles forwards a similar literary conjecture, by emphasizing the 'immigrant' themes:

Her published novels form a continuum of transposed experience with uprootal and reintegration. In her writing, historical memory conveys powerfully the spiritual strength and survival of past and present generations of Chinese women in diaspora. The memories of displacement and migration in her narration span from the beginning of this century to the present day and link the social and political repression of the old Asian world with that of modern day North American society (McLane-Iles, 1997, p. 221).

The predominance of the two above-mentioned metaphors in framing Chen amongst Quebecois discussions is evidenced by their pervasive assertion amongst various representations across the entire discursive field; it is further indicated by the apparent lack of any other expressed motif/framework that operate in a similar capacity. In documentary film for instance, director George Dufaux (1997) incorporates significant elements of both metaphors into his filmic portrayal of Chen, entitled *Voyage Illusoire*. On the one hand, the film presents the author as an 'immigrant writer' in its narrative. In particular, the story features Chen—who is poignantly introduced as an 'immigrant writer' in

the opening scene¹—embarking on a journey back to her homeland China, over the course of which she makes various realizations about her role as a writer, and about her personal cultural identity. On the other hand, the same film also presents the author as a ‘Chinese writer’, with its montage of scenes that demonstrates the ‘Chineseness’ of Chen’s imagination. The latter images stem from the director’s explicit efforts at documenting the Chinese influences on Chen’s formation as an artist, as noted by Chen herself in the film, in somewhat of an objecting tone:

Georges par gentillesse voulait filmer les endroits qui
influenceraient mon imaginaire, ignorant à quel point les endroits
en général me laissent indifférente, ne pouvait pas vraiment
m’émouvoir, ni ce qui a été construit, ni ce qui a été détruit dans
ma vie natale (Chen qtd. in Dufaux, 1997).

In particular, the images that render Chen as ‘Chinese writer’ include the scenes that i) depict the writer in a Chinese setting—scenes of Chen walking through Chinese streets and markets, ii) document the influences of her formative years—visits to a primary school, a university classroom, and the house of

¹ This scene features Chen walking in the streets of Montreal, while a passage from her second novel is read by a female voice-over, a passage where Sassa, from *Les Lettres Chinoises*, reflects on questions related to immigrant experience. Such a juxtaposition consequently not only show Chen living in an immigrant context, but also suggests that the themes of her writing are based on, and therefore reflects her own experience as an immigrant, thereby making her an ‘immigrant writer’.

Chen's French teacher, and iii) explicitly depict her working in a Chinese context—Chen writing in a traditional teahouse, and by the pier in Shanghai.

In yet another very different medium, the ideas of 'Chinese writer' and 'immigrant writer' also figure prominently in *Les Fiancés de Shanghai* (1999), Nicole Renaud's theatrical/dance adaptation of *Les Lettres Chinoises*. In particular, Renaud renders her reconstruction of the novel largely according to the combined literary postulations of both metaphors: namely, that the key themes articulated by the novel directly reflect the author's own socio-cultural experience—as 'Chinese' and 'immigrant'. In her reformulation of the original work, Renaud thus highlights on the one hand, the themes related to immigration, by featuring the immigrant story of the novel—Yuan's arrival and subsequent cultural struggles in his adopted home—as the primary narrative structure for the performance piece; and by presenting excerpts from the novel that address immigrant problematics, in accompanying voice-over narration. On the other hand, Renaud also underscores the story's 'Chinese' significations by the use of various visual devices, such as costuming, make-up, and choreography. What is particularly remarkable about the latter aspects of the production is the addition of various choreographic scenes that have no basis in the original work, which are nonetheless effective in enhancing the 'Chinese' signification of the story. These elements include a five-to-ten minute scene of Peking opera in full costume, allusions to foot-binding in choreography and in

narration, plus choreography of stylized tai chi movements and Chinese tea ceremony.

Aside from their pervasive and varied articulation throughout the discursive field, the predominance of the two metaphors in question is also evidenced by certain cases of metaphoric over-determination. That is to say, in particular instances, the metaphors are asserted with such vigor that actual circumstances, be it biographical or literary, are disregarded in favour of metaphorical prescription. In the case of 'Chinese writer' for example, such over-determination is apparent in discussions where biographers continue to assert Chen's 'Chineseness', despite the fact that at the time of their publication she had settled in Quebec and had received recognition from its artistic establishment. In an article written ten years and four novels after her arrival, Chartrand still situates Chen's literary imagination in China:

La dissidence de Ying Chen a donc été plus morale ou culturelle que politique. Elle se dit d'ailleurs, sans amertume, une *enfant de Mao*, à qui elle reconnaît le mérite d'avoir fait entrer la Chine dans la modernité et permis aux femmes de travailler. Émigrante par choix personnel, Ying Chen est devenue Québécoise par hasard: c'est une université montréalaise qui, la première, a répondu favorablement à sa demande de bourse d'études (Chartrand, 1999, p. E6).

Elsewhere, a similar over-determination also appears in book reviews that fail to see any relevance in Chen's writing except for its 'Chineseness', even when the actual work makes no literal reference to China at all. Such was the case

with various reviews that responded to *Immobile*. Despite overtly and deliberately constructing cultural settings that are unspecified and ambiguous in their reference to actual historical periods and places, the novel was still read by several book reviewers as somehow set in China. Josée Lapointe notes in *Le Soleil* that, 'La narratrice, dont on ne sait pas le nom, vit dans la Chine actuelle et est mariée à un archéologue' (Lapointe, 1998, p. B14). In another review, Gilles Marcotte remarks the novel's evocation of Chinese images and sounds in the following way:

Dans l'ancienne vie, qui n'est pas sans évoquer le beau film chinois *Épouses et Concubines*, elle fut abandonnée par sa mère, devint chanteuse d'opéra... Une partie de son charme, pour moi, vient de ce que derrière la langue française se fait entendre en sourdine une autre langue qui serait peut-être la langue première, la chinoise (Marcotte, 1998, pp. 139-140).

Within the cultural-historical context under discussion, the representation of the two metaphors exposed thus far is effective in foreclosing Chen's own representations. This foreclosure materializes because first of all, as I noted earlier, the literary interpretations prescribed by each framework are largely confined to the discussion of the auto-biographical; that is, they interpret the novels primarily as reflections of the author's own socio-cultural composition. The narrowness of such auto-biographical schematization of the literary, typical to both frameworks, combined with the discursive predominance of these very same frameworks consequently produces a very

restrictive literary discursive realm, in the sense that only the expressed ideas that conform to the operative schemas are acknowledged, while those that don't are overlooked and thus prevented from further consideration in the discursive field.

In terms of actual representations, such foreclosure is evidenced not only from the pervasive assertion of the aforesaid metaphors; it is also revealed by the significant omissions amongst the various secondary discussions. That is, the latter discussions collectively fail to acknowledge key elements of Chen's literary expression despite their prominent articulation. In particular, these elements consist of Chen's inter-textually persistent interrogation of essentialist, fixed notions of cultural identity, as outlined in the preceding chapter. In the case of *Les Lettres Chinoises* for example, while identifying the 'Chinese' and 'immigrant' themes in the novel, the various secondary texts all overlook an oppositional, yet equally prominent discussion forwarded by the book's literary construct: namely, the problematization of cultural definitions upon which the notions of 'Chinese' and 'immigrant' in the novel are based. Such interrogation is overtly forwarded by various facets of the novel, such as the construction of characters and settings. For example, the various 'Chinese' characters—both inside and outside China—are presented as trans-cultural in their thoughts and their actions; they use French for all their written correspondence (explicitly noted in Chen, 1993, p. 46), and draw upon French proverbs in their discussion

of social and cultural matters (pp. 14, 46). Such trans-cultural manifestations of the characters consequently demonstrate that people and cultures exist interactively, dynamically, and despite various attempts (within the novel), they cannot be confined to fixed spaces. The dynamic nature of culture is further underlined by numerous accounts in the novel of how China itself is undergoing significant modernization—becoming more like the West (see for example pp. 47, 109). In describing the various changes in Shanghai, Sassa notes in one letter:

Les gens commencent à sortir plus souvent dans la rue, avec leur valise d'affaire ou leur panier de bambou. Tout le monde a la tête basse et le pas pressé. On est pressé de remplir son portefeuille et ensuite son panier de bambou. Maintenant que tu fais tes courses dans les beaux supermarchés (on a commencé à en construire un dans notre ville)...(p. 43).

Another key element in the book that challenges essentialist notions of culture is forwarded by the novel's epistolary form. More precisely, the various correspondence amongst the characters exposes the tendency that identities are culturally constructed according to people's personal interests, and they may not in fact correspond to social realities. Nowhere is this point made more clear than in the discussion surrounding romantic/sexual relationships. All of the characters assert some point in the novel that fidelity and monogamy as a 'Chinese' quality, and that infidelity is a very 'Western' idea/way of life (Da Li on p. 140; Sassa on p. 107; father on p. 150). Yet such assertions prove to be

unfounded in the social world, as elsewhere in the novel it is revealed that actual values in China are also changing, becoming Westernized. Sassa writes Yuan at one point,

Dans notre ville, les amours meurent à une fréquence qui égalera bientôt celle de Montréal. Nous, les citoyens d'un pays arriéré, nous nous modernisons malgré nous, avec le reste du monde (p. 161).

Despite such prominent problematization of fixed definitions of identity, no secondary discussion produced to date has recognized or re-articulated such themes in any shape or form. Moreover, while such omissions are pronounced in the specific case cited above, they are in no way limited to discussions particular to that novel. In fact, the re-inscriptions of the all the other novels are characterized by a similar omission. Furthermore, because Chen's interrogation of essentialism gradually intensifies from novel to novel—as her own postulations evolves, the degree of omission in relation to the overall expression of each novel also increases. (The consequent increasing representational disparity between the original novels and the interpretive discussions may very well account for misinterpretation/misrepresentation cited earlier in the case of *Immobile*.)

Aside from the interpretive tendencies that mark the various secondary discussions, the discursive foreclosure of Chen's representation of identity is also evidenced by the author's own testimony. That is, Chen herself repeatedly

indicates her awareness of the foreclosure in question, albeit she interprets it in a slightly different light. In particular, she attributes the cause of the foreclosure primarily to the imposition of the 'Chinese' metaphor, namely that because her works are interpreted as 'Chinese', her other expressed ideas go unacknowledged amongst the various secondary discussions. In Dufaux's film for instance, in commenting on the critical reception of her first novel, she states that:

En écrivant *Les Mémoires dans l'eau*, je n'ai pas hésité à situer l'histoire en Chine avec justement la spontanéité que tu cherche en moi. Je voulais peindre une sorte de condition humaine qui était chinoise, main qui ne devait pas paraître étranger aux –vous dites des "Occidentaux". Or, après la parition, à ma grande surprise on n'a parlé sans beaucoup de nuance que d'horrible condition féminine chinoise, ce qui n'est qu'une petite réalité de mon livre. Si une réalité répété dix fois, vingt fois, cent fois, elle peut paraître totale et exclue toutes autres parties de la réalité' (Chen qtd. in Dufaux, 1997).

As apparent from such an intervention, Chen's recognition of foreclosure—which frequently appears in various texts—not only acknowledges its existence, but also attempts to intervene against such inhibitive discursive practices by stating that the works consist more than just 'Chinese' elements, that the latter are but 'a minor aspect of the book's reality'. In other examples, Chen is much more adamant in expressing such a view; she in fact often attempts to completely disassociate her writing from 'China'. In a feature profile in *L'Actualité*, she is quoted as saying:

Je veux être écrivain, point final, dit-elle. Écrivain, peu importe mes origines. Être chinoise ou québécoise, ce n'est pas important pour moi. Mais on m'identifie toujours à la Chine. Je suis trop visible. J'ai envie de disparaître et je n'y arrive pas (Chen qtd. in Lachance, 1995, p. 90).

In another article, Chen makes a similar attempt to break free from the 'Chinese' label, this time by making reference to the signification of her novels:

Mes premiers romans se passaient en Chine, mais l'histoire aurait pu se dérouler n'importe où, le sujet était universel. D'ailleurs, celui que je suis en train d'écrire se situe ailleurs (Chen qtd in Robitaille, 1997, p. 80).

While in such cases Chen may be overstating the universality of the novels' thematic appeal—a fact contradicted by the specificity of her novels in addressing immigrant identity, they are a concrete indication that Chen is not only aware of the existence and effects of discursive foreclosure; she also attempts to contravene against the latter by re-inscribing herself and the signification of her novels, albeit in an overly-compensatory manner. One of the most striking examples of such contraventions is in fact found in Dufaux's film. What makes them so effective in this work is the fact that they are contrasted against a backdrop of images—alluded to earlier, that continue to portray her as 'Chinese'. On the one hand, Dufaux is persistent in attempting forward the author as 'Chinese' (and 'immigrant'). On the other hand, Chen's own narration in the film repeatedly attempts to distance herself from such depiction. The latter is expressed by her initial reluctance to participate in the

film given its motivating premises (see earlier qt. on p. 11), and by her continued attempt throughout the film to distance herself from her homeland.

She at one point says:

Alors que je commence aujourd'hui à m'attacher à un autre paysage... Je ne sens plus chinoise là-bas. En véritable foyer est là où je deviens ce que je voulais être. Aujourd'hui j'ai l'impression de n'être pas vraiment née, de n'avoir jamais vraiment vécu avant 28 ans (Chen qtd. in Dufaux, 1997).

While the above examples express a subtle form of objection to the film's documentary project, Chen's opposition becomes overt towards the end of the movie. In a closing passage, she explicitly protests against the way that the film has framed her through its montage, making specific reference to the individual scenes. Chen says,

La tâche est évidemment plus facile pour notre réalisateur (que pour moi). Un Occidental une fois rendu en Orient trouve toujours des choses à faire. Les plans de notre film sont nombreux. Ville nouvelle Pudong qui s'est élevée depuis une dizaine d'années en face de Shanghai, et où je n'ai jamais mis les pieds. Les travailleurs dans les chantiers, les agriculteurs dans les champs, les salons de thé que je ne fréquente jamais. J'ai horreur d'écrire dans les endroits publics. Le petit appartement, il compris la cuisine de mon ancien professeur, à qui il a du déménager pour le bien-être de ses enfants, usine de vêtements, le marché, la folle dans la gare et dans la rue, etc. Les éléments exotiques ne manquent pas... Je préfère donc que la caméra fasse ses explorations sans moi. Il devrait se dépêcher car à force d'être utilisé les éléments exotiques, bientôt ils n'en resteront plus. C'est pour cela en effet que je rêve de ne plus être une personnalité exotique, ou soit disons bonne entre des cultures. J'espère que mes lecteurs me lisent non pas pour connaître mon pays natal, mais se connaître eux-même (Chen qtd. in Dufaux, 1997).

Much like the analysis in the previous chapter, given the ongoing nature of the representations in question, an exposition of the secondary discussions that encompass Chen's works can never be a conclusive affair. Even within the analytical parameters of this discussion, I have not sought to provide an exhaustive account of the given texts. Instead I have attempted to identify some of the outstanding representational tendencies that characterize the latter works. In particular, I noted first of all that the notions of 'Chinese writer' and 'immigrant writer' are predominant metaphors used to frame the author and her works. I also pointed out that given their predominance and the fact that they prescribe restrictive literary interpretations, these metaphors are effective in foreclosing Chen's own representations of identity. Such an inference of foreclosure has not harboured on determining whether or not the various secondary texts have interpreted Chen's novels correctly or accurately; instead it is a characterization of the discursive productivities that circumscribe Chen's novels, an empirical description of what was said, and subsequently what was repeated and/or not repeated. (On the account of this objective, I have not spent great lengths at differentiating the various secondary texts, based on the intention of the author or on the formal specificities of each work.) In particular, this foreclosure has entailed the omission of key elements in Chen's representations, elements that express the complexities and tensions within identity formation. Moreover, also emergent from our analysis is that fact that

more than mere instances of individual and/or collective enunciations, Chen's case also reveals a process of dialogue. Most apparent in Dufaux's film, this dialogue consists of Chen's attempt to respond to the re-articulations of her work by her contemporaries. (In the same work, the dialogue is also evidenced by Dufaux's decision to include such interventions, an indication that Chen's interventions in the film do not completely fall on deaf ears.) At the same time, this dialogue also represents a struggle, a struggle over the signification of the novels between the author and those who interpret her work. In the concluding chapter I will thus further develop this notion of 'struggle' and subsequently present the above analysis in more precise historio-discursive terms.

Chapter 4

Reflections on and of Struggles: Concluding Thoughts

In the preceding discussion of works by and about novelist Ying Chen, I argued that Chen's literary expressions evolve over the course of her novels, towards the consolidation of more dynamic, non-absolute, and constructivist representations of cultural identity. At the same time, various secondary texts re-inscribe the author and her works predominantly according to the metaphors of 'Chinese' and 'immigrant' writer; in doing so, they effectively foreclose Chen's aforementioned expressions. In order to frame such analysis in more precise historical terms, I will argue in this concluding chapter that the exposed representations of identity primarily materialize from the concurrent articulation and subsequent confrontation of two opposing discourses of identity, and that such a discursive context consequently indicates various manifestations of power in the social sphere.

The previously exposed representational configurations constitute the concurrent articulation of two different discourses because the various expressed positions and definitions of cultural identity are apparently formed according to two conceptually and historically distinct regularities, each operating within certain textual parameters.

On the one hand, as detailed in chapter two, although they evolve from work to work, the novels' expressions gradually embrace a trans-cultural, anti-essentialist definition of culture. Such formulations in turn overtly indicate the articulation—albeit an emergent one—of an anti-essentialist discourse of identity, whose conceptual boundaries and historical materialization I alluded to in the introductory chapter.

On the other hand, the secondary representations are formulated according to an entirely different—in fact oppositional discourse. More precisely, the latter derives from the convergence of two historically distinct, but conceptually related formations. First of all, representations of 'immigrant writer' indicate the regulation of a discursive formation that originates from the production of *l'identitaire québécoise*. More precisely, as Louise Fontaine and Yuki Shoise (1991) illustrate, a key facet in the production of 'Québécois' identity has entailed the definition of 'immigrant' identity as the 'Other', where the former notion is defined in opposition to the latter: a 'Québécois' is the opposite of an 'immigrant'. In the same intervention, the authors expose some of the specific historical circumstances through which such discursive practices became institutionalized: namely, the formulation and articulations of 'communautés culturelles' as a key instrument of policy discourse and state action. In referring to the latter processes, the authors write:

Les acteurs centraux de la gouverne politique québécoise constuissent progressivement une citoyenneté québécoise moins par rétrécissement territorial de la citoyenneté canadienne que par la projection dans l'ordre juridique d'une nationalité québécoise. La mobilisation politique de la nation québécoise par opposition à <l'autre> se fait selon deux axes: 1/Est un national, le descendant né au Québec de l'immigrant métropolitain de la colonisation française d'Ancien Régime; 2/N'est pas partie intégrale de cette nation, celui qui a immigré avant ou après la colonisation royale dans le territoire québécois (Fontaine & Shiose, 1991, p. 438).

They consequently conjecture that,

La nation québécoise est le support d'une communauté politique québécoise qui ne regroupe plus l'ensemble des citoyens canadiens vivant sur le territoire québécois, ni même l'ensemble des citoyens francophones. Elle regroupe tous ceux qui ne sont pas autres (p. 438).

As Allor and Gagnon further point out, such discursive practices can be mapped as part of a more general discursive formation—named 'une convergence de cultures', where Quebecois culture is defined in terms of 'its authenticity, its longevity and its continuity in times and space' (Allor & Gagnon, 1994, p. 39); and where such definitions entail certain levels of fabrication, or, 'abstraction':

similarity and homology (is) set up between these various characteristics and...the difference within Québec—historical discontinuities, linguistic and ethnic divergences, and territorial diversity—(is) shifted, absorbed or, straight out obviated (Allor & Gagnon, 1994, p. 40).

The representation of Chen and her writing as 'immigrant writer/writing' constitutes the articulation of such a discursive formation because their

definition of 'immigrant' is largely based on an 'us versus them/Other' opposition. For instance, despite striving to redress the historical, 'marginal' status of immigrant writers (Lequin, 1995) and developing an inclusive Quebecois literary theory that would encompass immigrants (Lequin, 1996b), Lequin's notion of 'immigrant writer' is substantially defined according to an unproblematic cultural distinction between those who are considered 'native' Quebecois (*de souches*), and those who are not (immigrant). The consistent and unwavering assertion of such a dichotomous definition is apparent throughout Lequin's various postulations on the theory of 'immigrant writer' (see for example Lequin, 1996b; Lequin, 1995). In the following example, the us/them dichotomy is foregrounded when Lequin reflects on possible cultural strategies, in light of recent historical developments associated with immigrant writing:

Pour les uns (les <de souche> , les <pure laine>), il s'agit de s'égarer, de perdre la carte de leur culture, de leur territoire, de leur identité connue et pré-définie, pour se trouver à nouveau; il leur faut briser le bloc familial pour entrer dans le fragmentaire perçu comme fécond; après avoir écrit pendant des décennies le récit mythique de l'homogène, c'est maintenant le récit, peut-être tout aussi fictif, de l'hétérogène qu'ils écrivent. Pour les autres, (les immigrés, les migrants, les ethniques, les membres des communautés culturelles...), il s'agit plutôt de trouver un point d'intersection entre la culture d'origine et la culture québécoise (Lequin, 1997, p. 199).

Secondly, also pronounced amongst the secondary representations is the discourse of cultural identity that produces nativist/Orientalist images of

'China' and 'Chinese', outlined earlier in the introductory chapter. The operation of this discourse is revealed not by the mere fact that Chen is depicted as a 'Chinese', but by the specific manner in which her 'Chineseness' is framed. In particular, as revealed in chapter three, there exists a strong tendency amongst the reviews, profiles, et cetera to culturally fix Chen as an authentic and even exotic 'Other'. This fixing is in part produced, again, by the 'us versus them' cultural distinction that is implied in the various definitions of 'Chinese'. Such implicit cultural differentiations establish a key conceptual premise in the representation of Chen as an exotic Chinese 'Other'; moreover, they become explicit in passages where reviewers attempt to render the relevance of the novels' supposedly 'Chinese' content for their readers. They remark that despite the fact they are about 'them' over there, the stories also hold significance for 'us', the readers here. Martel for instance, expresses such a point of view when reviewing *Les Lettres Chinoises*:

Le deuxième roman de Mme Ying Chen ne fera pas oublier *la Mémoire de l'eau*, œuvre absolument séduisante. Il s'y ajoutera plutôt et nous aimerons entendre encore cette voix venue d'ailleurs qui a su emprunter, pour nous dire des choses de partout, les mots de chez nous (Martel, 1993, p. B5).

In another instance, Martel reiterates a similar conjecture, when reviewing the following novel, *L'Ingratitude*:

Mais il y a dans ce roman, plus que l'exotisme attendu, la description d'une situation sans doute universelle, qui en tout cas n'est pas étrangère à notre propre culture (Martel, 1995, p. B3).

The fixing of Chen as an authentic 'Chinese' is further rendered by the imposition of various stereotypical, and often unrelated/irrelevant 'Chinese' images onto the depiction of Chen (see for example, Dufaux, 1997), and onto the re-inscription of her texts (see Renaud, 1999), at times to the point where all significations beyond the 'Chinese' are obscured (see Lapoint, 1998; Marcotte, 1998).

Although divergent in their historical-productive origins, the two discursive formations that regulate the secondary representations do not operate independent of each other. In fact, because of their congruent conceptual rules governing the definition of identity, their coinciding articulation represents a discursive convergence, where two historically distinct formations merge to form a uniform discourse. This uniformity is evidenced by the fact that not only do representations of 'Chinese writer' and 'immigrant writer' uncontradictorily coexist in a single text; they actually compliment each other's formulation. In Dufaux's film for example, the depiction of Chen as 'Chinese' reinforces the simultaneous portrayal of the author as an 'immigrant', and vice versa. Similarly, Renaud's theatrical reconstruction of the exile narrative, and her various choreographic, 'Chinese' ornamentations mutually strengthen each other's artistic credibility.

Furthermore, by contrast, the latter discourse of identity that regulates the secondary representations is radically different from—even oppositional

to—the discursive formation governing Chen’s articulations, because the conceptual rules that demarcate each formation are diametrically opposed: one discourse adheres to fixed, absolute notions of identity, while the other discourse seeks to challenge these very assumptions.

Given the active nature of discourses—in that they regulate the formation of concepts, and given the oppositional relationship between the discursive formations in question, the latter’s intersection amongst related texts results in more than benign coexistence. This intersection in fact produces a discursive confrontation or struggle, where two opposing discourses attempt to assert its own discursive regularities upon a common representational domain. As revealed in Chapter 3, such a struggle primarily takes place over the signification of Chen’s novels. At one end, Chen’s novels forward certain representations of identity based on one set of discursive practices; at the other end, the various secondary discussions re-inscribe the signification of the novels according to its own discursive regularities. In the process they reiterate ideas that conform to the corresponding conceptual rules and leave out those that don’t. Consequently, they foreclose Chen’s expressions. Back at the other end, well aware of the foreclosing tendencies, Chen attempts to counter them by reasserting the significations of her writing, through various interviews and her participation in Dufaux’s film. Although in the latter work there are certain signs of dialogue, this back-and-forth struggle over meaning is far from

resolved. The continuation of the struggle is evidenced by the fact that despite being prominently articulated in *Voyage Illusoire*, Chen's protests about the reception of her novels go unacknowledged in subsequent reviews of the film. In fact, the latter texts once again re-inscribe Chen's expressions according to the metaphors of 'immigrant' and 'Chinese' writer. For example, in her review of the film, Odile Tremblay describes Chen using idioms closely associated with the latter metaphor:

Troqué son Shanghai natal pour Montréal où, depuis 1989, elle a imposé sa griffe dans notre littérature en lui apportant une dimension d'altérité. *La Mémoire de l'eau*, *Lettres chinoises*, *L'Ingratitude* nous ont fait pénétrer l'âme chinoise, le déracinement et les affres de l'amour (Tremblay, 1998, p. B4).

Similarly, in another review, Carlo Mandolini seems perplexed by Chen's interventions in the film:

Le film aborde tant de thèmes complexes, parfois même contradictoires, que le spectateur—noyé dans un océan de mots prononcés sans passion—ne sait pas vraiment comment aborder ce film (Mandolini, 1998, p. 35).

Mandolini later concludes that the key to the movie is exposed only when Chen's true colours—her 'Chineseness'—is exposed:

Le seul plan où Ying Chen s'illumine, c'est lorsqu'après une scène où la jeune femme termine la lecture de son journal de voyage, Dufaux—en off—lui demande: <As-tu hâte de rentrer à Montréal?> Alors le regard de Ying Chen s'éclaire d'un sourire émouvant. <Oui>, dit-elle! Tout le film est là: dans cet extraordinaire sourire d'une Chinoise, en Chine, qui s'épanouit à l'idée de retourner dans l'espace de son exil (p. 35).

In light of their discursive context, the exposed representational configurations also constitute manifestations of power in the social sphere. This is because, as Foucault stipulates in the elaboration of his discourse theory, the production of discourse is substantially implicated in the exercise of power, playing an effective, instrumental role:

In a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth (Foucault, 1980, p. 93).

As implicitly asserted by the above passage, Foucault's definition of 'power' first of all rejects 'power as oppression' or 'power as individual or sovereign right'; instead, it posits 'power' as the implementation of a certain dominant order over another, effected not by the sole intentional actions of an individual or group, but by the materialization of complex social and cultural mechanisms, within which people figure as agents. 'Power' subsequently at once refers to the processes that effect domination—the 'techniques and tactics', and the material form of specific processes—as in the 'inflections' of power (Foucault, 1980, p. 102). As Foucault notes in the previous passage, power thus both 'constitutes'

and ‘characterizes’ the social body. In elaborating on his definition, Foucault writes,

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application (1980, p. 98).

With respect to the specific representations in question, they constitute materializations of power because the discourses employed—as with all discourses, are historically embedded within specific power configurations. Consequently, their articulation at the particular conjuncture in question represents specific instances of power assertion and power struggle. More precisely, by eventually articulating an anti-essentialist discourse of identity in the Quebecois context, Chen’s writing effectively challenges the dominant power structures operative at that particular conjuncture, not only because she forwards discursive practices that interrogate the dominant formations; since the production of the latter discourses plays an integral role in the development and maintenance of social relations and institutions in Quebec, Chen’s articulations also threaten to disrupt the dominant social order. At the same time, the various secondary representations constitute an assertion of power in

that they attempt to maintain the existing power structure, by discursively regulating Chen's interventions so that the incongruous elements are obscured and their potential socio-political effect diminished. Power manifests in this instance not only as the reproduction of a certain dominant discourse, but also as the productive structures that facilitate its proliferation: the foreclosure of Chen's representations can be in part attributed to the overwhelming number of works that assert the dominant discourse. Moreover, the latter interactions can be characterized as a 'power struggle', not because there exists mounting evidence that it is the authors' explicit intention to forward a particular political position—as I may have implied by the earlier inclusion of quotes from Chen that reveal her own awareness of the tensions between her novels and the various critical responses (see p. 60). Instead, in concurrence with the Foucauldian analytical framework prescribed throughout this thesis, the conjecture of 'struggle' constitutes a historical interpretation of the exposed representations, or, 'things said', based on the latter's correlation to various historio-discursive formations, and by extension, socio-historical, power structures. More precisely, the representational circumstances that circumscribe Chen constitute a power struggle because the author's own articulations progress towards certain discursive practices, which are historically situated on one end of power configurations, while the discursive regularities of the secondary representations are situated on the other end.

Furthermore, the inference of ‘struggle’ does not seek to posit a fixed conceptual polarization of the works and/or authors in question, as may have been suggested earlier by the structuring of the chapters: i.e. Chen’s works solely represent ideas on one side of the discursive opposition and the secondary texts represent the other. In fact, in my textual analysis, I have exposed an opposite tendency: that the representational and discursive processes in question remain open-ended, sometimes dialogic, but always dynamic; consequently works by a single author is subjected to change, and thus also internal conceptual complexities and tensions. Nowhere was this more apparent than within Chen’s own expressions, where her formulations gradually evolved from fixed definitions of cultural identity—as embodied in the ‘cultural journey’ narrative, towards more anti-essentialist, constructivist conceptual models. Henceforth, what the concept of ‘struggle’ attempts to characterize is not a fixed division that separates Chen’s writing and the various critical and artistic responses; instead it points to some of the discursive and political tensions that arise between the two bodies of work, in part as a result of the transformations in Chen’s own articulations.

Lastly, to reiterate a theme that has repeatedly surfaced in this discussion, the analysis presented here remains open-ended, subjected to further inquiry, partly because of the admittedly ongoing nature of Chen’s expressions, but also because the conjecture of ‘struggle’ implies a certain collective social process.

All I have done thus far is look at the expressions of one writer. In order for such an inference to stand up on its own, further analysis needs to be done on whether similar discursive tendencies and tensions manifest amongst representations by other artists/writers contemporary to Chen, in Quebec.

Although this discussion remains open-ended and incomplete in many respects, it has nonetheless been effective in addressing the exploratory questions that originally prompted its formulation, on several different fronts. First of all, conceptually, this thesis has contributed to the substantiation of an anti-essentialist/constructivist definition of identity, not only through its prescription and subsequently formulation of a congruent discursive framework; through its exposition of Chen's representations, it has also in fact actualized a specific historical instance where cultural identity manifests as processes of cultural construction and political struggle. Although such analysis has primarily been academic in form, the extent of its impact has not been limited to that realm. On a more personal-practical level, it has helped me realize my own identity according to an anti-essentialist framework. More precisely, my extensive engagement with an anti-essentialist discourse has radically altered the epistemology with which I conceptualize and problematize my own identity: Aware of the historically dynamic nature of culture, I no longer think of identity as fixed spaces; I have in turn abandoned my quest for a uniform 'culture' to which I belong, recognizing that even such notions of

belonging are also a product of cultural fabrication. Instead, I regard my cultural composition and my relation to my socio-cultural environment as a product of complex, interwoven historical processes—discursive and otherwise. Therefore, in seeking knowledge about myself, rather than wondering: ‘what am I made up of?’, I now ask: ‘what representations, discourses, and power structures have shaped my own experiences of identity?’ Moreover, as anticipated in the introductory chapter, because of the coincidences between the historical conjuncture which I analyzed and my own background, the exposition of Chen’s representations has also afforded specific insight about my own cultural constitution. For instance, I learned about the various essentialist and racist cultural practices that are associated with the identification of ‘Chinese’, and subsequently recognized their impact on my own thoughts and actions, particularly in the form of internalized racism; I also became aware of the particular discursive and socio-political mechanisms that affect the representation, and thus, the experience of identity in my present historical context, in Quebec. Furthermore, given the fact that anti-essentialist models of identity posit the representation and production of identity as also being an integral part of the identity experience, the process of this thesis has also helped *realize* identity in a more concrete sense. That is, it has facilitated an actual instance of identity representation, where I not only forwarded particular conceptual formulations—by asserting an anti-essentialist discursive

framework, but also actively participated in the processes of cultural production and power struggle that bear upon Chen's representations of identity—by saying: she has articulated some relevant positions on the definition of diaspora identity, but thus far they have gone largely unacknowledged. And finally, on a more meta-theoretical level, the personal revelations facilitated by this thesis process has demonstrated that: a) an anti-essentialist framework of cultural identity is feasible on the level of individual, psychic experience, and b) adopting such a conceptual approach entails more than just making an epistemological shift from essentialist models of identity; it also involves a fundamental ontological shift in the way identity is experienced: identity is no longer merely about discovering and defining cultural essences, but about acquiring and constructing socio-historical knowledge and asserting that knowledge in cultural discussions and political struggles, reverberating once again Foucault's inextricable couplet of knowledge/power. Such (inter)actions are precisely what this thesis process has represented for me.

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